

Yemen – A Journey to Discover

Yemen is one of the last countries in the Arabic world untouched by western influences. The landscapes, the people and their culture are without a doubt a discovery for anyone visiting Yemen. It is a country that offers everything: the world's oldest skyscrapers, spectacular mountaintop villages, pristine coral reefs, desert and stunningly wonderful nature.

Yemen is a country that breathes history through every pore, not only through its ancient ruins and monuments, but also through its traditions and culture which are part of everyday life. In the streets you meet Yemeni people who are very welcoming and warmhearted towards foreigners. They want travellers to feel “at home” and their hospitality is incomparable and make you want to return.



Yemen is the most populous country on the Arabian Peninsula. The great majority of the population is Arab (90%); some are Afro-Arab. Minorities include Indians, Somalis, and Europeans. The language spoken in Yemen is Arabic, but also English is spoken by some, mainly in the cities. Yemeni families are big with an average of more than seven children per family, and often three generations live under the same roof. Practically all Yemenis are Muslims and Islam is the state religion. Shari'a is the source of all legislation.



Yemenis eat cereals, vegetables, rice and beans. This is often accompanied by fish or lamb, chicken, and beef. Yemenis bake bread regularly, in clay ovens – the result is an enormous piece of delicious bread accompanying most dishes. One of the typical Yemeni dishes is salta: lamb or chicken with beans, lentils, coriander and spices, other dishes are stews and soups, and something between the two. Since many people cannot afford meat every day, vegetarian dishes are also widely available. The most common is called ful: brown beans, tomatoes, onions and chili, sometimes made with fried beans.

Traveling across the country is always a journey of discovery. You can enjoy breathtaking views from the

mountains (Jebel) in the North (2,000 – 3,000 metres) over fortress villages with narrow streets and terraced hillsides planted with coffee, millet and qat, houses of beautiful architecture built from ochre sandstone and decorated with wonderful ornaments. You can also experience traditional souqs (commercial quarters) in the cities or an absolutely different vegetation which is rich of banana-, mango-, and papaya-trees towards the Red Sea. On the other hand, the coastal desert plain called the Tihama offers hot, humid and arid climate and only a little vegetation. Another unique experience is Hadramout (with the skyscrapers of Shibam) which is a spectacular lush and fertile spot. It has its own music and its own style of almost everything. Colors are bright and the food is spicy. A visit to the vast Arabian desert known as the Rub' al Khali (Empty Quarter) is also among popular attractions.

Because of the variations in its topography, Yemen has various climates. In the desert, summers are very hot, while in the mountains the climate is much milder. In the coastal area, rain falls sporadically, mostly between late July and September. Higher up, it rains every month, with most rain occurring in July and August. In the North, the climate is drier, and cooler due to the altitude, with possible frost during winter nights. There is a light rainy season in March and April, and a heavier one in August. The east is mostly desert, and as such dry and warm to hot year round.



The island of Socotra belongs to Yemen as well and is located in the Indian Ocean. It measures approximately 130 by 40 km and its population counts about 35,000 inhabitants. They have their own language and culture, but they speak the Arab language of Yemen as well. As Socotra has been isolated for a very long time from the rest of the world, it is one of the most fascinating places on earth today. The coastal areas are inhabited by fishermen of African origin whereas in the wadis and mountains Nomads of Arab origin live. The untouched nature is breathtaking with its unique geology, flora and fauna. You can also discover here several kinds of plants and animals not found anywhere else in the world.

Shibam – The Oldest Skyscraper-city in the World

Shibam with its 7,000 inhabitants is thought to have existed since the 2nd century AD. It owes its fame to its distinct architecture, which is now on UNESCO's World Heritage Site program to safeguard the human cultural heritage. The houses of Shibam are all made out of mud bricks, but about 500 of them are tower houses, which rise 5 to 16 stories high. Shibam is often called "the oldest skyscraper-city in the world", and is the earliest example of urban planning based on the principle of vertical construction.

The city has the tallest mud buildings in the world, with some of them about 40 meters (130 feet) high, thus being the first high-rise (which need to be at least 75 feet or 23 meters) apartment buildings and tower blocks. The tallest building in the city is the mudbrick minaret which stands at about 53 meters (175 feet) tall. Wikipedia.org

Photos: TR, Flickr

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