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Route 10: Yemen – Soqotra : culture / nature (Variant 2)

Day 1

Early morning arrival in Sana'a; flight to Soqotra, arriving mid-morning to be met by the local guide. Short drive to the capital, Hadibo, to buy provisions in the souq and visit the island museum.. Drive to Di Hamri, on the north coast. Overnight camp.

Day 2

Drive along the north-east coast. 3-hour walk up to a cave in the coral reef. Drive to Al Harr and walk around the town. Overnight camp by a stream near the sea.

Day 3

Drive to Dixsam, in the interior. Lunch under a dragon's-blood tree. Hike through the wadi, amongst the unique flora, and the opportunity to bathe in a stream.

Overnight camp in Dixsam on a plateau with a splendid view over the impressive landscape.

Day 4

Drive to Qalansiyah on the north-west coast, with lunch in a palm grove in Qaysoh. Swimming from a sandbank on the island's most beautiful beach. Overnight camp.

Day 5

Early morning drive to the airport; flight to Mukalla for lunch, shopping in the souq, visit to the museum, with exhibits from the sultans' era. Overnight stay in the Hadramaut Hotel.

Day 6

Drive from Mukalla over the vast stony Djol plateau; lunch, then walk from the Djol down to Al Khoreiba at the top of the Wadi Dawan valley. Drive through the Wadi Dawan to Busan; overnight stay in the Palace Hotel.

Day 7

Busan – Al Hajjarein – Shibam – Sayun

After breakfast, walking tour in the Wadi Dawan, with its multi-storey houses built close to the cliff walls. Visit to the little town of Al Hajjarein, and (if desired) to the excavations in Raybun at the end of the valley. Drive into the Hadramaut, to Shibam, for a walk through the narrow alleyways between houses up to eight storeys high; built of clay bricks made with straw, pressed into forms and dried in the sun, they have weathered the centuries. On to Sayun, and overnight stay in the Alaghaf Hotel.

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Day 8

Sayun – Tarim – Aynat – Sayun

The Hadramaut is a broad fertile valley in central Yemen, widening and flattening westwards between imposing limestone cliffs to the desert. It has always been an important and wealthy trading place. The main towns are Tarim, Sayun and Shibam/Hadramaut. In Tarim, we view the collection of rare manuscripts and the town centre with its huge clay-built palaces, many of which are in a derelict state. Visits to the old Muslim cemetery and mausoleums in Aynat and the museum in the central Kathiri Palace in Sayun. Overnight stay in the Alaghaf Hotel.

Day 9

Sayun – Marib

Drive westwards via Shibam, the best-known town in Yemen after Sana'a. Lunch in al-Qatn, then on across the Rub Al-Khali (the Empty Quarter) desert – a journey of some six hours – to Marib, on the western edge. The desert landscape is full of variety, with interesting stone, sand, dune and mountain formations. Overnight stay in the Bilqis hotel in Marib.

Day 10

Marib – Sana'a

In Marib, the capital city of the legendary Bilqis, Queen of Sheba, one can visit the following historic sites: north and south sluice-gates of the Sabaeen dam, the moon temple of Bilqis, the Almaqa temple with 8m-high monoliths, and Old Marib, the now almost deserted mediaeval settlement outside the new town. On to Sana'a by the north route, over high passes and extensive qat plantations. Overnight stay in the Felix Arabia Hotel in Sana'a.

Day 11

Sana'a – Al-Janad – Jiblah – Ibb

Drive southwards into the "green Yemen", a varied hilly landscape richly fertile during the travel months. We visit the three main towns: a walk through the almost completely preserved old town of Jiblah to the building complex (burial mosque, palace, courtyard) of Queen Arwa bint Ahmed, who reigned in the 11th century; the great courtyard mosque of Al-Janad, the oldest in Yemen; and a stroll through the narrow, winding lanes of the old town of Ibb, with its typical façades. Overnight stay in a hotel in Ibb.

Day 12

Ibb – Burra

Drive on winding, unmetalled roads through Yemen's loveliest mountain landscapes to the Burra, a dolomite-like massif with splendid stone buildings on the summits, terraced plantations with the finest varieties of coffee, fields of qat and grassland all the way to the tropical wadis. Overnight camp in the Burra.



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Day 13

Burra – Manakha – Sana'a

Drive northwards to the magnificent Harraz mountains. Here, too, the steep slopes are terraced and cultivated up to 3,000 metres. Manakha, the main town of the region, is situated at an altitude of 2,250 metres. We take a short walk through apricot and qat plantations to the village of Kahel, with its typical blue ornamentation on doors and windows. Visit to the completely preserved fortress town of Al Hajjarah, which can be entered only through the single town gate. Spectacular mountains form a dramatic background. Below Hajjarah lies Al-Hotaib, a place of pilgrimage for the Ishmaelite Bohra sect, which has its largest following in India. Many pilgrims gather here on the 16th day of the first month of the Islamic year. Drive to Sana'a; overnight stay in the Felix Arabia Hotel.

Day 14

Sana'a – Wadi Dahr – Sana'a - departure

Morning drive to the Wadi Dahr, 16 km north-west of Sana'a, to visit the most popular photo motif in Yemen, the fantastic "Dar Imam Yahya" or "Dar-al-Hajjar" rock palace, built for the Imam Yahya. Special features are its sophisticated cooling and ventilation system, and the spring which rises inside the building. Return to Sana'a for lunch and a walk round the town. In the oldest souq in Arabia, you can buy presents typical of the region – frankincense and myrrh, a wonderful selection of spices and beauty products, all kinds of raisins, old silver and coral jewellery, or a djambia (traditional curved knife).

Transfer to the airport.