

walk through the isolated hill-top villages around Manakha. First we visit Hajjarah, an almost perfect fortified mountain village just a short, easy walk away. For a glimpse into medieval times we have a steep 300-metre climb to a cluster of houses atop a spur of rock, the village of al-Kahal. Continuing by al-Djbal, we eventually descend to the Ismaili sanctuary of al-Hoteib, a centre of pilgrimage for Ismailis from all over the world. Tonight we make the most of this overwhelming landscape by camping beside fields of qat and coffee, with stunning views out over the mountains. *Camping - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 15. To Kawkabani

This morning we drive on rough gravel roads across the mountains of Mahawit to at-Tawla. The town is dwarfed by a large rocky outcrop of weathered sandstone whose peaks are surmounted with fortifications and whose lower slopes are littered with a jumble of giant boulders. In some cases houses have been partially excavated from solid rock - all of which creates a picturesque, highly photogenic effect. We continue to the cliff-top settlement of Kawkabani. Dawn and dusk are particularly impressive from this lofty viewpoint, and the remaining large stone-built houses interspersed with patches of rubble make for an unusually atmospheric overnight stop. The funduq in which we stay is one of these large traditional houses. *Funduq (communal sleeping with limited facilities) - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 16. Sana'a

The hour-long walk down the steep rocky path from Kawkabani to its twin town, Shibam makes a pleasant start to the day. After a brief look at Shibam we drive to medieval Thulla, another town built out of the very rock which dominates it. Our final stop is in Wadi Dhar at the famous Dar al-Hajar Palace - topping a sheer-sided rocky pinnacle and creating the definitive image of Yemeni architecture (it is the single most photographed building). Arriving back at our funduq in Sana'a in the afternoon, there may be some time to explore the old town, or shop for mementos of our visit. *Hotel - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 17. Wednesday. Tour ends Sana'a

Tour ends in Sana'a. (B)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

CLIMATE: Along the coast it is invariably humid and hot (av. daytime temp. 40°C in summer, low 30's °C in winter). There are two wet seasons: heavy rains occur Jul-Sep, whereas Mar-Apr has lighter rainfall. In the desert it is dry and hot (mid 30's °C in winter). In the mountains winter is warm and dry but cooler than the coast and it can rain at any time (av. daytime temp's mid-20's °C, but it can be cold in the evening).

BAGGAGE: • One main piece - soft bag rather than a hard suitcase as it can be easily stowed on the vehicle

roofrack and does not take up much room in a tent. Pack light as space is restricted (max. 12 kg). • A daysac (to carry camera, waterbottle, lunch etc.). **CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR:** • Robust cotton clothing is the most practical in the heat. As in any Moslem country tight, skimpy clothing should be avoided out of respect for local customs. Shorts are generally not acceptable. For women, a headscarf is useful (local custom). • Windproof/waterproof outer shell (i.e. lightweight jacket/lagouf). • Sweatshirt for cool early mornings and evenings in the mountains. • Lightweight walking/trail boots with good tread. • Trainers/sandals for relaxing (flip-flops or plastic sandals are handy for bathrooms). • Swimming gear for Indian Ocean and Red Sea (no bikinis etc...).

EQUIPMENT: • Sleeping bag (3-season). • Sleeping mat. • Torch. • Waterbottle. • Sunglasses, high factor sunscreen and lipsalve. • Insect repellent. • Dustproof plastic bags for valuable items like cameras. • First aid kit.

VISAS AND PERMITS: Holders of UK, USA, CAN, AUS, NZ, IRL passports require a visa and a TOGL, Tour Operators Guarantee Letter (which we will provide). Entry will be refused to anyone with an Israeli stamp in their passport (allow plenty of time if you need to apply for a new passport). However, since visa requirements can change, we advise you to check with the relevant consulate.

VACCINATIONS: Recommended: Hepatitis A, Polio, Typhoid, Malaria. NB: Yellow Fever vaccination compulsory if travelling via an infected country. Vaccination requirements change so please check with a specialised travel clinic for up-to-date information before you depart.

LOCAL COSTS: 16 breakfasts and 16 evening meals are included on this trip, you must pay for all other meals yourself (you can eat quite well for £15 per day). Approximate average costs are given for guidance only, and may vary widely according to location and type of establishment.

Coffee/tea	UK£0.15-0.30
Soft drink	0.50-0.75
Medium beer (non-alcoholic)	0.80-1.30
Local snack lunch	2.00-4.00
3-course dinner	7.00-13.00

*reasonable mid-range tourist class restaurant

CURRENCY: Yemeni rial. Although sterling can be changed in major towns, US dollars in cash (in a variety of denominations) are more practical (US\$100 notes attract a slightly higher rate). NB: Ensure all US dollar notes are issued after 1979 and are neither marked nor torn as they may be refused. Travellers cheques can only be changed in Sana'a, and opportunities to change any money are very limited elsewhere. Credit cards can only be used in big international hotels. There is little security risk but you should keep valuables in your possession at all times.

TIPPING: This is an accepted part of everyday life here. Please allow approximately £1.20 per day (US\$1.80) for tipping local staff (i.e. porters, guides, drivers etc.).

TRAVELBAG

in
Adventures

Trip Dossier

Yemen - The Incense Route. Reference YE 17 days Land Only (18 days from London)

Valid for 1998/99 brochure. Issued 30 November 1997.

The Yemen stands astride an ancient trade route along which gold and incense from the east passed to Egypt. Travelling by rugged 4WD vehicles, we trace that route from Sana'a in the highlands, back to the Queen of Sheba's capital, Marib, where a massive dam transformed arid desert into fertile garden. Like the early caravans, we cross the great 'Empty Quarter', camping under desert skies and, in Wadi Hadramaut, witness a primitive "Manhattan" a remote city of mud-brick skyscrapers. White sand beaches and magical sunsets welcome us to the Indian Ocean before we return to the mountains, where age-old terraces adorn precipitous slopes. Finally we reach the spectacular fortified hill-top villages around Manakha.

Grading: Anyone who is reasonably active should be able to take part, although conditions in the desert and elsewhere are quite basic. We undertake occasional 'moderate' walks - with the odd steep sector. We camp, or stay in simple funduqs (Yemeni guesthouses) where sleeping may be communal.

NB: Although it is our intention to operate the itinerary as printed in the brochure and detailed below, it may be necessary to make minor changes as a result of alterations to flight schedules, wind or other climatic conditions, limited infrastructure in terms of accommodation, or other operational factors. As a consequence, the order or location of overnight stops may vary from those outlined.

Included meals are indicated in the daily itinerary i.e. BLD = Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.

For travellers taking our group flight(s) from/to London.

Depart: Sunday from London to arrive in Sana'a the next day. Transfer to hotel.

NB: You will be met by your Group Leader on arrival at your destination (not in London).

Return: Transfer to Sana'a airport on Wednesday (Day 17) to arrive in London the same day.

20 Dec. 17:30 - Gatwick, Yemenia
17:43 - Arrive Sana'a 05:30
17:42, Arrive Gatwick 15:55
on 6 Jan.

Day 1 Monday. Join tour Sana'a

Arrive at hotel and check in. One of the oldest inhabited cities in the world, Sana'a is now a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site. Our *funduq* (traditional hotel) is one of thousands of tower-houses which make up this fascinating walled town. In the afternoon, we explore this concentration of extraordinary architecture - a maze of narrow streets and alleyways lead to the *Suq al-Mith* (salt market), full of colour and bustle. Nearby stands the Great Mosque - the oldest in Yemen and apparently built at the behest of Mohammed himself.
Hotel - 2 nights. (D)

Day 2. Sana'a

Today has been left free for personal explorations of this fascinating city. Our Group Leader will advise us on what we can do and see to make the most out of our stay. Depending on our interests, we can visit the National Museum, which started life as a palace of the ruling imams, later became a prison, and now houses a collection of artefacts from Yemen's long history. We can walk around the old town and meet the local people. It's a great place to relax in a tea-house and soak up the atmosphere. (BD)

Day 3. Marib

Departing early, we follow the tarmac road eastward across a plain covered with plantations of grapes and *qat* - the mild stimulant whose leaves are still chewed on a daily basis by many men and women. From Naqil al-Fardiha pass we have extensive views out over the *Rub al-Khali* (Empty Quarter) as we descend to the edge of the desert. The imposing ruins of *Baraqish* briefly the capital of the Minaean kingdom around 400 BC - stand atop a low hill from which it controlled the trade route. We stop to wander through the old town, before continuing to the ancient Sabaeen city of *Marib*, its position, at a point through which several routes passed, brought in wealth, allowing the construction of a great dam. By irrigating and cultivating the desert floor, the Kingdom of Saba (Sheba) obtained a virtual monopoly of the trade in incense and gold as its well-watered, fertile oasis became a popular stopping place. We'll visit the old dam, which eventually fell into disrepair as trade declined, and the new dam which replaced it hundreds of years later. *Hotel - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 4. Crossing the 'Empty Quarter'

Marib's earliest recorded history is intertwined with legendary *Bilquis*, the Queen of Sheba, whose meeting with King Solomon is described in both Bible and Koran. This morning we visit the two ancient temples which take their names from *Bilquis*, before leaving civilisation behind to drive into the desert. The *Rub al-Khali* is known locally as the *Ramlat as-*

Sabatayn (Sand of the Two Sabas), attesting to the importance of the Kingdom of Saba. We head through low sand dunes and across flat, hard plains overlooked by volcanic hills. The ancient routes used by camel caravans ran further to the south as they had to stay close to the mountains for water. Late in the afternoon we find a spot to bivouac and, as the sun goes down, can only marvel at the extraordinary beauty of this desert wilderness and wonder how early travellers coped with such harsh conditions. We pass a memorable night in total isolation under a star-encrusted desert sky. *Camping (2 people per easily erected 3-man dome tent) - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 5. Wadi Hadramaut

This morning we emerge in the Wadi Hadramaut, a huge, fertile depression which drains towards the east and is fed by a complex system of smaller wadis. After the desolation of the desert, it seems strange to see intensely cultivated fields shaded by laden palm trees and tended largely by women wearing curiously tall straw hats. The Hadramaut has been inhabited since the earliest times - indeed tradition associates it with the biblical book of Genesis. Its early fortunes were bound up with the development and ultimate decline of the gold and incense trade. In the afternoon, we stop to marvel at *Shibam* another UNESCO World Heritage site. Its distinctive mud-brick architecture comprises tower-houses of anything up to nine stories high - possibly the very first skyscrapers - built on stone foundations. Many are two or three hundred years old, but some date back almost five hundred years! We carry on to *Seiyun* or *Tarim* we may stay in either. *Hotel - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 6. Mukalla

While *Seiyun* is the administrative capital of the area, *Tarim* is its religious centre - this morning we visit both. When trade started to die, *Tarim* became a centre of the Sunni branch of Islam and an important seat of religious teaching - somewhat surprisingly for such an out-of-the-way place. *Al-Kaf* library houses a valuable collection of Islamic books - located in its compact centre, along with a small *suq* and the once grandiose merchant mansions built by the *al-Kaf* family. *Seiyun's* major attraction is the dazzling white palace of the sultan, now a museum with a fascinating collection of exhibits illustrating Hadramaut life. Later we cross the high plateau of the *Djol*, before dropping sharply down to the Indian Ocean to the provincial capital, *Mukalla*. *Hotel - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 7. Along the Indian Ocean

Mukalla's old town sits on a promontory guarded by four ruined watchtowers high on the cliff-top. During our early morning walk, we shall head into the quarter where tall merchants' houses line the streets. At the turn of the century, these would have been full of dried shark (bound for China), indigo, sesame oil,

henna, gum, cured hides, dried fruit from Muscat, coffee from *Aden* and a variety of goods from India. Here on the coast there's more colour and life than in the interior - the fishing port is always a hive of activity. We drive along a magnificent stretch of coastline - passing the odd fishing village and beaches where turtles come ashore - to reach *Bir Ali*, formerly the *Hadramaut's* main port but now little more than a village. We spend the afternoon relaxing on the endless white sand beach where we camp. Tonight, after dining on fresh fish we can bathe in the luminous phosphorescent waters of the Indian Ocean and watch the stars. *Camping - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 8. Yashbum

If prepared to rise early this morning, we may have time to climb the great, dark volcanic hill of *Husn al-Ghurab* (Crow Fortress) whose fortifications dominate the best natural harbour on the southern coast of the Yemen. This explains why *Qana* (as *Bir Ali* was originally called) was of such importance - the major port at the start of the overland camel route through to the Mediterranean. After following the coast through a mixture of volcanic landscape and occasional patches of sand dune, we turn inland to climb through *Wadi Mayfa'a* and pass over a wide plain to reach *ar-Rawda*, where it may be possible to visit a weaving factory. We pause for a while before heading onto *Habban*, another town with more fantastic examples of tall tower-houses constructed from mud. Tonight we aim to camp at *Yashbum*. *Camping - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 9. Mukayras

After the contrasts of desert and coast, we are back in an area similar to *Wadi Hadramaut*. This morning we walk through the picturesque canyon-like *Wadi Yashbum*. The villages here were established in the third century when the inhabitants of the trading city of *Shabwa* were driven out by the Sabaeans of *Marib*. The incense trade was already in decline at that time, so there are no large towns here - although the scenery is dramatic. From the wide plain of *Lawdar*, the road climbs dizzily up the escarpment in a series of tight hairpin bends - giving dramatic aerial views of *Lawdar* below. Continuing past the towns of *Mukayras* and *al-Bayda* we arrive at our highland campsite. *Camping - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 10. Ibb

On the drive to *Rada*, we cross dusty, volcanic countryside with the odd small, roadside village. Our final approach to the town takes us through huge *qat* plantations - where tiny watchtowers stand as sentinels over the fields, a reminder of the importance and value of the crop. Later we cross the spectacular *Sumara Pass* (2,706 metres) with spectacular views out over mountains and valleys covered with verdant terraces. Its warm, sunny disposition and plentiful

rainfall allow as many as four harvests to take place each year! This afternoon we arrive in the provincial capital of *Ibb*, with enough time to wander the steep, narrow streets of its old town. *Hotel - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 11. Taiz

The historic nearby town of *Jibla* is another former capital, this time of the *Sulayhid* dynasty. Towards the end of the 11th century, *Queen Arwa* moved the capital of her invalid husband here from *Sana'a*, in order to escape the warring intentions of the northern tribes. This remarkable and much-loved woman ruled wisely for over 50 years until she was 90. We can walk up the narrow track which leads to *Queen Arwa's* mosque and the old town, where a medieval atmosphere lingers to this day. After lunch back in *Ibb* we cross *Naqil as-Sayyari* pass, guarded by an Ottoman fort. On arrival in *Taiz* we drive around the city and visit both the extensive *suq* and *al-Ashrafiya* mosque. *Hotel - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 12. Taiz/Red Sea coast

The highlight of our stay in *Taiz* is a visit to the National Museum, housed in the palace which was the residence of *Imam Ahmed*. Quite unlike any other museum, it gives a curiously personal insight into the lives of the despotic rulers who tried so hard to prevent Yemen from entering the ways of the 20th century. Towards the end of the morning we depart along the *Wadi al-Dhabab* and stop to visit one of the holiest shrines in Yemen, a fine 16th century mosque dedicated to local saint *Ahmed bin Alwan*. Before the end of the afternoon, we should arrive at the *Red Sea*, where we can relax on the beach near *Al-Khawkhah*. Tonight we sleep in the traditional beds of the region - made of fibre rope, woven over a wooden frame. *Camping (rustic huts with minimal communal facilities) - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 13. Manakha

The *Tihama* is the name given to the sultry coastal plain whose rich soils generate over half of Yemen's agricultural output. We start the day at *Zabid*, where *al-Asha'ria* mosque is the site of the oldest university in the world. Founded in the 9th century, it was renowned for its teaching of religion, law, history, poetry, grammar and mathematics, and had some 5,000 students. After admiring the mosque and impressive citadel, we continue northward to *Bait al-Faqih* and ascend into the cool *Heraz* mountains to *Manakha* (2,250 metres). *Funduq (communal sleeping with limited facilities) - 1 night. (BD)*

Day 14. Walking in the mountains

Manakha's importance stems from its strategic importance as a staging post on the trade route from *Sana'a* to the coast. An abundance of clear, fresh air and its wonderful mountain vistas - make it an ideal place to walk. We stretch our legs with an exhilarating

Seiyun
 Tarim
 Al-Kaf
 Shibam
 Subayhi
 Sana'a
 Mukalla
 Al-Hajrah
 Ibb
 Taiz
 Manakha