

YEMEN



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Legend

Surface: 555.000 km2

Inhabitants: 23,000,000 (2008 estimate)

Density: 41 inhabitants per km2

Form of government: Republic

Capital: Sana'a

Neighbouring countries: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (North), Sultanate of Oman (East)

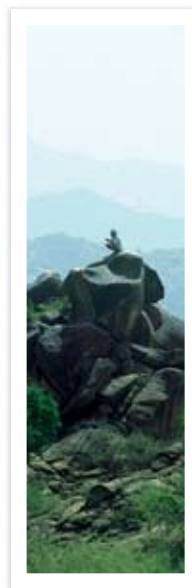
The Republic of Yemen is situated at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula and, benefits from a privileged geographical position with more than 2,000 kilometres of coast line stretching from the Red Sea in the West along the Gulf of Aden to the South and to the Arabian Sea in the East. The favourable location of Yemen, which is the only country on the Arabian Peninsula to experience regular and significant rainfall, distinguishes it from other countries in the region for the variety of its outstanding natural heritage and diverse environments. Its strategic position has for millennia also placed it at the heart of trade and cultural exchange between East and West. Yemen has embraced democracy and every Yemeni has the right to vote. The present Head of State is President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Yemeni law guarantees the constitutional and human rights of all its citizens, as well as giving equal opportunities to all political parties to perform their political, cultural and social roles in society.



Ancient Civilizations

Stretching back to the Stone Age, there is evidence of early civilizations in Yemen dating back 3,000 years. The population experienced a long period of prosperity and progress as a result of the sustained commercial activities along the ancient trade routes. The Romans called these ancient civilizations Arabia Felix ("Happy Arabia") in contrast to the less fertile Arabia Deserta ("Desert Arabia"). Over the centuries many civilizations emerged, of which the most powerful and legendary dynasties were those of Saba, Awsan and Himhyar; visitors can still admire their rich architectural heritage. There have been many unsuccessful attempts to invade and occupy Yemen; the Roman Empire tried to invade in 24 BCE, but was defeated just outside the walls of Marib. More than five centuries later the Ethiopians with the support of the Byzantine Emperor managed to occupy Arabia Felix, but this lasted for only about fifty years; the Persians ruled until the beginning of the call to Islam in the Seventh Century CE. Following the beginning of the Islamic era, Yemen underwent a period of prosperity and development with the creation of important cities and fortifications.

With the weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad, Yemen saw the emergence of several small independent states, including the Ziadi Dynasty in Zabid, the state of Ya'afuri in the Shibam-Kawkaban area, Zeidi in Sad'a, the state of Sulaihi in Sana'a and Jibla and the state of Rasutid in Taiz. The first Ottoman occupation began in 1538, lasting for nearly a century until 1635, when it was repelled by the proud Yemeni population. The second Ottoman occupation began in 1872, while in the south of Yemen the British Empire had occupied the City of Aden from 1839. The Ottomans were expelled in 1918 and the British withdrew in 1967; since then no foreign invader has displaced the ancient heritage of this extraordinary land. North and South Yemen united in 1990 under the leadership of President Ali Abdullah Saleh.





Unique Heritage

Alluring Yemen with its ancient and diverse cultural heritage and pre-Islamic influences that even now distinguish the independent spirit and traditions of the Yemeni people is full of natural beauty from the desert of AL-Rub Al-Khali to the green valleys of the Rasyan region, from the Socotra archipelago – Yemen's newest UNESCO World Heritage Site and considered the most important natural heritage site in the Middle East - to the central plateaus that reach over 3,000 metres. Yemen already had three cities on UNESCO's World Heritage List: Sana'a, Shibam Hadhramaut and Zabid - great open air museums, their architecture and nature preserved over centuries in the typical markets and in ancient temples. This marvellous and fascinating country offer opportunities to even to the most adventurous traveller to live a unique and incredible experience that bridges the present and the past. Cities and archaeological sites in Yemen are numerous and situated throughout the country. Below are some key sites that can be included in leading tour operators' itineraries:

Sana'a: The protected city

The capital of the Republic of Yemen is situated 2,200 metres above sea level in the middle of the Yemeni plain close to the Al-Surated mountains and on the west side of the Noqum Mountain.

Sana'a is considered a living open air museum, a place that has preserved its ancient architectural style which has made it famous all over the world. The Old City of Sana'a, which is included on UNESCO's World Heritage List, is one of the most ancient cities in the Arab world and is distinguished by its unique and ancient buildings. The buildings indeed represent an incredible combination of Yemeni styles, often built with dark stones of basalt, bricks and mud. The windows of the external walls are decorated with alabaster 'glass', elaborated friezes and plastered with white gypsum. The most prestigious houses are towers of five or six floors, each with a different home function. The historical value of the city shows itself through well over 14,000 buildings, many of which date back to 1000 CE, all gathered in one astounding site. It is said that Sana'a was founded by Noah's son Shem after the Flood subsided.

From the city centre, a traveller can walk half a kilometre in any direction without seeing a single modern building, discovering a labyrinth of streets and districts still largely separated according to trade. In the old town's great Souk, one can find everything, beautiful jewels, shining clothes, fragrant incense and a wide variety of aromatic spices, not forgetting the legendary Jambiya, the curved dagger, symbol of honour and virility for every Yemeni man. Sana'a, the old city, with more than 50 mosques, minarets, luxurious gardens, hammams and its unique market, is the first jewel of Yemen and starting point for an incredible trip in this legendary land.





Shibam Hadhramaut

Shibam, capital of the Hadhramaut region from the fall of the Queen of Sheba in the 3rd Century CE, is a city that exceeds all visitors' expectations. The city, often called the "Manhattan of the Desert" and surrounded by fortified walls built in the 16th Century CE, preserves nearly 500 buildings of between five to seven floors in less than half a square kilometre. It stands at the frontier between the Sultanates of Al Qatn and Sieyun, which disputed the control of the City till the arrival of the British in the 19th Century CE. The builders of Shibam perfected the tower architecture, which was adopted afterwards all over the country. At the city doors, one can visit the factories of mud bricks still functioning today. Walking in this marvellous city, travellers can admire along the narrow streets splendid inlaid doors and from the close palm grove they will experience the ancient atmosphere of poetry and tranquillity.

Shibam-Kawkaban

Shibam is historically mentioned in some of the Sabeen inscriptions as Shibam Aqyan. It was an important centre for what is historically known as "Sama'l Triad" during the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE. The ancient town is now in ruins. The present village dates to the Yafurid dynasty (829-1001 CE). It was the capital of the Yafurids in the 9th Century CE. It was named Shibam after a Hemyrite king. It was mentioned in ancient inscriptions as Washibam ya'fur. The town is 2,300 metres above sea level. Perhaps its most notable landmark is the Grand Mosque, built by Mohamed Ibn Yafur in the 9th Century CE, the old Souk and the town gate.

Zabid

Zabid is about 100 kilometres south of Hodeidah in the Tihama region, which skirts the Red Sea, and is amongst Yemen's most ancient cities. Zabid, the original 'City of Culture' has an important history with numerous libraries. It's in Zabid that, at Al-Ashair University in 819 CE a mathematical system "Al Jabar" was created by the Islamic scholar al-Jalahdi and this is the basis of modern algebra. During its greatest period, the City boasted 236 mosques, although many of these have now disappeared. The houses of Zabid are richly decorated inside and contrast unexpectedly with the simple external walls; the architects in the past developed a peculiar style aimed at hiding the wealth of the owner. Because of its incredible charm, Zabid was also chosen in the early 1970s as the location for an Italian version of "A Thousand and One Nights" (Il fiore delle mille e una notte) by the world known Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini. In Zabid the visitor gets the strong sensation of finding himself in a place totally removed from the Modern World.

Kawkaban

An ancient historical centre and fortified citadel about 2,800 metres above sea level, it was the capital of Bani Sharaf Al-Deen in the 15th Century CE. It is characterised by beautiful architectural designs. Most of its houses were destroyed in the past, but rebuilt. It was reputed as a school of music. It is said that it was named so because it had two palaces decorated with precious stones. Each of them was called "a star" (literally planet), so it is Kawkaban (two stars) attributed to these two palaces.





SHIHARA

One of the most famous fortified villages in Yemen. Situated on the top of the Shihara Mountain at 2,600 metres, the village played an important role in the resistance against the Ottomans. It is also famous by its Stone Bridge.



SA'ADA:

Yemen's most northerly province, Sa'ada was the birth of Zaydism, the most important school of Yemeni Islamic philosophy.



HODEIDAH:

A modern city overlooking the Red Sea. The most important attraction is the fishing port, south of the city where visitors can admire the arrival of the traditional Yemeni boats and appreciate the variety of fish, sharks and rays on sale in the market.



MANAKHA:

Situated on the Haraz Mountains, 90 kilometres from the capital, Manakha is an important town situated in the centre of a terraced countryside at 2,200 metres and offers a beautiful panorama of the surrounding mountains.



TAIZ:

One of the most ancient capitals of Yemen, Taiz is famous for its traditional districts and mosques dating from the Rasulid times and for its lively market. JIB LA: An ancient town situated in a splendid position on a hilt between two seasonal rivers (Wadi) that meet at the bottom, Jibla is famous for the Mosque of the Queen Arwa and its Quranic school.



MARIB:

Situated East of Sana'a, Marib is the capital of ancient Sheba. Marib is located where the caravans transporting incense crossed between the Red Sea and the entire region. Marib is one of the most important archaeological sites in Yemen. Very interesting to visit are the Temple of the Moon God, Throne of Bilquis and the Cyclopean dam, from which the Kingdom of Sheba drew its power.

BAIT AL-FAQIH:

37 kilometres from Zabid, this town hosts one of the most famous markets in Yemen. It was founded in the 18th Century CE as a central point in the coffee trade, offers the visitor the chance to plunge into the intense atmosphere of Yemeni products, from ceramics and clothes to baskets and camels

AL MUKALLA:

A flourishing port on the Indian Ocean, Al-Mukalla is an important fishing centre famous for its mosques and for its museum, which hosts archaeological finds from all over the country. ADEN: The most important port of Yemen as well as being one of the most ancient ports in history, Aden is famous for its cisterns, which is probably built by Himyaritis in the 1st Century BCE.



Socotra, the uncontaminated island

Socotra, perhaps the most extraordinary and least damaged island in the Indian Ocean, covers an area of 3,600 km² and is situated 500 kilometres from the Yemeni coast in the Arabian Sea. Socotra is a unique island, which has only recently become open to visitors. The island offers a surprising variety of natural beauties: mountains overlooking the sea, plains covered with palm trees and cane-brakes, beaches, limestone plateaux and deep ravines. On the island, visitors can find unique animal and vegetable species that give Socotra a primordial look. More than 800 species of plants have been classified. The most famous is the Dragon's Blood Tree, whose name is derived from the fact that a red resin from pour out from a cut in its trunk; according to ancient belief, this is the blood of a dragon. More than 140 bird species have been recorded and every year the list grows. The whole archipelago is under the protection of the Yemeni Conservation and Development Authority, which has declared the islands a Protected Area and, in collaboration with the Yemeni Tourism Promotion Board, produces a guide on ecotourism. The friendly and hospitable inhabitants of Socotra number about 35,000 and have their own language and culture. The coastal areas are populated by fishermen, mainly of African origin. The Island of Socotra is a real Eden for sea lovers. In the deep water more than 800 different species of coral have been classified, along with thousands of fish and shellfish species. Incredibly colourful coral can be found at depths of between 3.5 and 25 metres. These waters are also suitable for snorkelling, due to the numerous fish and corals in clear shallow water.

Amazing diving in the Red Sea and Arab Sea and trekking on the Yemeni mountains. The Red Sea and the Arabian Sea are considered by many to be the best sites for diving in the world. The most beautiful coral reefs are located in the south of the Red Sea, precisely in front of Yemen. The many islands along the Yemeni coast offer some of the most spectacular diversities of marine life in the world. Cruising around Yemen in the Red and Arabian Seas allows travellers to enjoy the warm waters and fresh tasty seafood. More than 20 different sites offer diving enthusiasts the chance to immerse themselves in these waters and see a great abundance and variety of rays, morays, octopus, gigantic squid, lobster and sharks, fish and dolphins.

Yemen is also a great place for trekking. In particular the Haraz Mountains and al Al-Mawit are perfect with many welcoming but rarely visited mountain villages and ancient songs and legends.





Travel Information

PASSPORT AND VISA

Visas are required for all visitors to Yemen and can be obtained on arrival at any Yemeni port of entry (land, sea or air). In the case of citizens from the European Union, Norway, USA, Japan, Canada, Russian Federation, Switzerland, South Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand and Australia, visas can also be obtained in advance from any Yemeni Embassy .

TIME

GMT + 3

ELECTRICITY

110/220 volts. It is advised to bring an American model adapter.

CURRENCY

US Dollars (USD) and Euros (EUR) can be exchanged everywhere, whilst English Pounds (GBP) are also widely accepted. There are very few ATM machines, but credit cards can be used in most hotels and in an increasing number of shops and restaurants.

The local currency is the Yemeni Riyal (YER)

USD 1 = YER 202*

EUR 1 = YER 259*

GBP 1 = YER 291* (Scottish and Northern Irish notes are not accepted)

[* 23 February 2009]

SEASON AND CLIMATES

In Yemen the climate is subtropical with marginal effects from the summer monsoon. On the Northern plateau the temperature is mild, even in the Summer season: the temperature range is high and afternoon rains are frequent from June to September. In the South the temperature is high in the summer season. In this zone the climate is extremely dry; while on the coast the humidity rate is high. The ideal season to visit Yemen is from October until April.

LANGUAGE

Arabic is the official language of the country with English being the most widely used second language.

CLOTHES

Light weight clothes, jumpers for the evenings. Comfortable shoes for excursions.

AIRLINES

Yemenia Yemen Airways, national carrier of Yemen offers twice-weekly direct flights from London and also from a number of other European hubs. For more information about Yemenia's flight schedule and service, please consult their website www.yemenia.com.

Felix Airways provides an extensive network of domestic services on the Middle East's youngest aircraft fleet. Further information is available at www.felixairways.com.





TOURS

Operators offer a wide range of tours in four wheel drive vehicles. A wide range of reliable and welcoming hotels are available, ranging from luxury to basic. Many tour operators propose Yemen with a variety of itineraries from a week (north of the country) to two weeks (north, south and east of the country). Typical 10-11 night itineraries involve a few days in Sana'a and a week touring the country with an optional week's extension to Socotra.

TELECOMMUNICATION

All the Yemeni Land is covered by a modern telecommunication network that provides worldwide direct access telephone, fax and internet services.

MOBILES / CELL PHONES There are two types of service: GSM & CDMA. If your phone has either service, you should be able to use it in most Yemeni cities. The GSM/CDMA network currently covers more than half of the country.

Local SIM cards are widely and cheaply available.

