Empty Quarter Expedition – Oman 2014

Applications now open for the Empty Quarter 2014 Gap Year Expedition to Oman!

Cost: £3,600 (8 weeks) or £3,100 (4 weeks) *Excludes flights (approx. £700) & personal kit

Dates: Dates TBC, approx. 5 January – 1 March 2014
Location: Dhofar, Oman
Age Range: 18 - 25 / gap year
Briefing: November 2013, dates and location TBC
Visa: Required for British passport holders
Vaccinations: Some required
Expedition Status: Applications open

Expedition Overview

Dolphins, turtles and rays in the ocean; leopards, hyenas and wolves in the bush; eagles, bats and insects in the sky; lizards, snakes and scorpions in the sands.

The 2014 Empty Quarter Expedition is set to be an epic journey into the wildest parts of Arabia. It will cover 1200km of desert and mountain terrain, lasting eight weeks and undertaking important conservation and scientific projects on the way, above all the Arabian Leopard study. Projects will be carried out jointly between British Exploring and Oman’s Office for Conservation of the Environment (OCE), and we will be working with a group of local OCE rangers for a substantial portion of the expedition.

The expedition will bisect the Arabian Peninsula in all its forms, crossing the desert dunes, the canyons, oases, mountain ranges, pastoral settlements, estuaries, woodlands and crystal waters of the coast. Explorers will then be trained and supported to lead their own mountain treks and their specific projects with autonomy, competence and confidence. Every member of the expedition team will become competent and familiar with the technical skills of a desert/mountain expedition, from mountain route finding to camp cookery.
The final debriefing phase will take place in the fascinating gulf city of Salalah, where explorers and leaders will mingle with the local people, their culture and the enchanting, ancient environment of the harbour market town. Here, participants will present their work and findings to middle-school students in an educational seminar in Salalah.

The expedition now includes an elective module in photography, documentary film making and travel journalism, giving media enthusiasts an opportunity to build experience and qualification in journalistic skills.

**Adventure**

*Be a part of it. Explore and discover wilderness environments unique to the fragile and extraordinary ecosystems of Dhofar, Oman.*

The first phase of the expedition will take place in the Empty Quarter Desert (the world's largest sand desert). Here you will set up the first base camp and undergo basic training for survival, campcraft and navigation skills. You will be camping out under the stars and going for long hikes to explore the dunes. While you are in the desert you will be sure to experience a dramatic and ever-changing palette of colours on the surrounding dunes of red, orange, yellow, gold, brown and silver blue, depending on the time of day. Just before sunset you will start looking for the ideal site to set up camp. You may wish to search for some kindling to start a camp fire as the sun fades. Once you make dinner in your fires, you can prepare for a night under the open skies, gazing up at the abundance of galaxies. Your camp will be the only sign of human life for miles, in the morning it will be gone and your footprints are quickly erased by the wind.

Once you reach Dhofar’s Qamar Mountains you will learn and practice mountaineering skills and you will trek and climb through the mountain range. You will have mountain skills training to complete and there will be extra opportunity for keen climbers and mountaineers to take on challenging peaks and crags in this little known mountain range. The expedition will
require a high technical level in mountain navigation, mountain safety (general), journey preparation and also scientific processes. This phase in the Dhofar Mountains will give Explorers a wide range of opportunity to ascend peaks and explore a wilderness setting with diverse interest.

Following the mountain training phase, groups will then trek self-sufficiently across the range to a rendezvous at Hota, on Dhofar’s coastline. During this period, the team will have the benefits of an exotic base camp in a palm stand at the foot of a mountain escarpment and on the edge of a sandy coastline with the crystalline waters of the Gulf of Aden. You can explore the beautiful shallow coves, where the turquoise waters lap gently along the shore and in which tropical fish of every colour swim. Here, you will camp, trek and climb along white beaches and sea cliffs.

This coastline is characterised by a unique woodland environment, known as cloud forest. The cloud forest is pushed to the edge of Oman and is remnant of a moist vegetation belt, which once spread across the entire Arabian Peninsula. The cloud forest is sustained in this unsuspecting location by the monsoon that sweeps this region between June and September each year. Although monsoons conjure up images of torrential rains and tropical climates, here they take the form of low-lying, white clouds laden with moisture.

**Fieldwork**

*Oman is a rapidly developing nation with unique wilderness environments - Be at the forefront of leading-edge conservation efforts*

The fieldwork projects will vary according to the stage of the expedition:

**The Empty Quarter Desert – 5 days**: Here you will be keeping watch for sand cat tracks, beetles, lizards and scorpions and setting up camera traps along your journey to establish the numbers of particular species in certain areas.
**Dhofar Mountains – 10 days:** Rising 1500m from the Gulf, these mountains are scattered with fossils, caves, canyons, ancient dwellings, unique plants and extraordinary geology. It is home to wolf, gazelle, ibex, fox, caracal and leopard—animals whose tracks appear in the sand around us, as if by magic. Explore and discover this unique environment, while surveying and documenting the mountain wildlife using camera traps and other methods.

**Monsoon Woodland – 3 weeks:** This will be the start of your collaborative study with the Office for Conservation of the Environment’s ranger team. You will assist with the training and fieldwork of the local ranger team, while tracking and surveying the Arabian Leopard and other mammal species, and collecting rare plant specimen. Your fieldwork carried out here will lead to published reports and protective measures for this fragile and extraordinary part of the world.

**Gulf of Aden:** In the final phase of the expedition you will be mapping, studying and documenting the ancient coastal dwellings, settlements, burials and archaeology of the area.

**Community Engagement**

*The friendliness of the Omanis is a recurring theme for everyone who goes to Oman; they delight in being generous hosts.*

You will be presented with exceptional opportunities to experience the local Omani culture and to get to know its people. Your time spent in the monsoon woodlands working together with the tribal people of Dhofar will create an intimate space for you to immerse yourself in the Omani way of life. You will cook, eat and work together, giving both the British Exploring team and the OCE rangers an unprecedented chance to learn about a culture entirely different from your own.

Your journey will take you to visit ancient forts, walk around local villages and barter at vibrant markets. This will be a thrilling experience for anyone hoping to interact with the local community and to learn from a different way of life.

Finally, during your debriefing phase in Salalah, you will have a chance to meet local students at a school and deliver workshops on wildlife conservation, while bringing to light the importance of the projects you have undertaken.
**Film, Photography and Multi-Media**

As you journey across Arabia, you will have the opportunity to record all of your experiences and discoveries by gathering, producing and publishing photos, films, articles and reports. Specifically, you can try your hand at:

- photography and photo editing
- expedition blogging
- interviewing and audio reporting (podcasts)
- adventure film making
- travel writing and expedition reporting

You will be given suitable training from a qualified professional photographer through a series of workshops with appropriate tutor guidance and given assignments during journeys and fieldwork outings. As well as being a lot of fun, this will give you some useful skills to add to your CV:

- completion certificate with criteria assessment and feedback
- professional quality expedition blog and podcast
- expedition films
- freelance style travel pieces to be pitched to magazine/newspaper editors
- portfolio of the best work to be displayed in a gallery

**Fundraising & Bursaries**

**Fundraising** is the first step on the British Exploring journey, and can be an extremely rewarding experience. Explorers are encouraged to make the most of this opportunity, keeping in mind the invaluable benefits that fundraising skills can have for your professional development.

British Exploring is here to offer fundraising and bursary support. Please visit our [Fundraising Page](#) for tips and to download our Fundraising Pack, and see our [Fundraising Blog](#) for inspiring stories from current and past Explorers. We are always keen for more inspiration, so if you’re planning something exciting, please send an email to [info@britishexploring.org](mailto:info@britishexploring.org).

We are fortunate to have the generous support of a number of trusts and foundations, enabling us to offer bursaries of £500 or more to our Explorers. Bursaries will be available to apply for from the 1st May 2013.

**Contact**

For more information and to apply please get in touch at [info@britishexploring.org](mailto:info@britishexploring.org).