

A GREATER SENSE OF ARABIA

Welcome to the [our] book selection for Arabia. We have researched a wide range of books chosen to cater for all tastes and aspects of your journey. Guide books and short histories to help you arrive well informed. Gain a travel writer's perspective through their journals and other writing. Delve into the art, culture, and cuisine of your destination. And if you want to escape between the pages of some great fiction, we have chosen books set in the area - classic literature, local authors and great action adventure.

One thing all these books have in common is their commitment to giving you a greater sense of place!

P.S. the enclosed list is far from comprehensive and if you feel there are glaring omissions, please feel free to email us at info@ultimatelibrary.co.uk

[The Ultimate Librarian]

History and Background

Roman Arabia – G.W. Bowersock

Roman Arabia encompassed most of the modern Middle East from the fourth century B.C.E. until the age of Constantine. While the focus of this book is the relationship between the Arabs and the Romans, Arabia's relationship with its more immediate neighbours is also examined.

Arabia and the Arabs: The Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam - Robert Hoyland

Long before Muhammed and the teachings of Islam, Arabia played a crucial role in world history. Both prolific merchants and brave warriors, Arabian life and Arabs are thoroughly explored in this rich survey of the region and its peoples as their society developed into modern Arabia .

King Hussein: A Life On The Edge – Roland Dallas

A dramatic biography of the late King of Jordan; this gripping book also serves as a swift and useful political history of the Middle East.

History Of The Arab Peoples – Albert Hourani

A comprehensive single-volume history, this book begins with Islam's rise in the seventh century and continues until the 1980's. Oxford historian Hourani focuses on the Ottoman Empire and the European colonialism that followed, and also briefly tackles the resurgence of modern Islam.

A History Of The Crusades – Steven Runciman

A classic trilogy, this series examines the crusades as a central fact in medieval history. This is an astute academic study but entertaining enough to engross laypeople as well.

A Oman And Its Renaissance – Sir Donald Hawley

Written by Britain's first ambassador to Oman, this famous book describes the present in the context of his past. A beautifully illustrated overview of the culture, history and geography of the region.

History Of The Middle East – Peter Mansfield

This is an examination of the Middle East as a place of conflict for over four thousand years, including the turmoil that has sprung from its current strategic position and oil-based economic strength. The book includes a detailed description of Israel's role in preceding the reassertion of the Islamic consciousness in the region, compounding the stormy situation and making it one of the most insoluble of our times.

The Middle East – Bernard Lewis

One of the foremost academic experts on the Middle East in the world, Lewis examines the political, economic, social and cultural development of the Middle East chronologically, giving the reader a more acute understanding of its current situation.

Modern History Of Oman: Formation Of The State Since 1920 - Francis Owtram

Based on state documents from Europe, the US, and Japan, this work highlights the British influence on Oman, starting in the 1800's through to today's Western geopolitical policies.

Culture and Cuisine

Nine Parts Of Desire: The Hidden World Of Islamic Women – Geraldine Brooks

Former foreign correspondent Geraldine Brooks lifts the veil on what life is really like for women in the Middle East. This book traces the practices of today back to the lore of Mohammed's era and examines the day-to-day contradictions that so often rule Islamic women's lives.

The Crusades Through Arab Eyes - Amin Maalouf

Clearly setting out his intentions not to write a history, Maalouf presents instead a quite astonishing piece of narrative journalism. This is not just a remarkable retelling of contemporary accounts of the people of the crusades, but also an incredible insight into the origins of cultural attitudes of ancient and modern Islam.

Arabesque - Claudia Roden

Claudia Roden revolutionised Western attitudes about the food of the Middle East back in the late sixties and her writing here demonstrates why. These are amazing photographs and gorgeous recipes from the Middle East. Not a merely a cookery writer but also, according to Simon Schama, a '...memorialist, historian, ethnographer, anthropologist, essayist, poet...'

Sandstorms, Days and Nights in Arabia - Peter Theroux

Peter (Paul's brother) writes a humorous and enticing account of his time spent in Arabia, ostensibly searching for Imam Sadr, leader of Lebanon's Shia Muslims. With its revealing anecdotes about people and places, this is a stylish and culturally rooted memoir.

Lawrence Of Arabia: Mirage Of A Desert War - Adrian Greaves

The author of numerous books on Colonial War in Africa, Greaves offers a new biography of Lawrence which is not only highly readable but also a concise and honest depiction of T.E. Lawrence's wildly varied life and the culture in which he thrived. "Poseur, con-man and compulsive show-off he may have been but Lawrence was also brave, brilliant and far-sighted" *Sunday Telegraph*

Muhammad; A Biography Of The Prophet - **Karen Armstrong**

No view of the modern world is complete without an understanding of Islam, and this comprehensive introduction to the prophet's life and teachings is a novel way to access this ancient belief system.

The Arabian Nights - **Husain Haddawy**

Haddawy grew up hearing his Grandmother and her friends retell these tales on winter nights in Baghdad. Haddawy's powerful love of these stories echoes through his translation of Muhsin Mahdi's original Thirteenth century Arabic manuscripts.

Behind The Veil In Arabia: Women In Oman – **Unni Wikan**

Based on two field studies completed in the 1970's, this book explores the roles of women in Oman, particularly their function within marriage and the family.

The Arabs - **David Lamb**

"The best effort to examine the Middle East using a mixture of anecdote, description and analysis to bring the region to life" *LA Times*.

Travel Writing

Seven Pillars Of Wisdom: A Triumph – **T.E. Lawrence**

The true story of Lawrence of Arabia as recounted by himself, this book tells of how he helped to unite Arab factions against the Turkish army. Not only a consummate military historian, Lawrence also shows his touch as a colourful and brilliant novelist. Reading this will leave you feeling the sand in your boots.

Sultan in Oman - **Jan Morris**

In 1955 Jan Morris accompanied Sultan Said bin Taimur across the Omani desert on what would be the first crossing in a motorcar. This journey inspired Morris to write her seminal imperial history, the Pax Britannica trilogy.

"A minor literary masterpiece" *New Statesman*

Dhow of the Monsoon: Zanzibar to Oman In the Wake of Sindbad –**W.M. Holden**

A fantastic book for armchair adventurers, Holden combines elements of geographical writing, mariners tales, adventure and travel journal to make a thrillingly readable account of his accidental passage across Africa in an ancient sailing vessel.

A Winter In Arabia – Freya Stark

A rare treasure among travel writers, Stark always writes with remarkable conviction and treats all she meets and everywhere she goes with honest, worldly empathy. This memoir is a beautifully written and delightful representation of the places and spaces of a desert landscape.

Passages From Arabia Deserta - Charles M. Doughty

Doughty travelled, almost penniless, through Arabia for two years in the nineteenth century. This is an extremely shrewd account of Arabian life and Doughty, without being mawkish, demonstrates real fondness for the area and its people.

With Lawrence In Arabia – Lowell Thomas

First published in 1925, this is the book that inspired the film 'Lawrence Of Arabia'. Lowell's account of the brilliant Colonel T. E Lawrence is both absorbing and exhilarating.

Arabian Sands – Wilfred Thesiger

Though British, Thesiger was born in Addis Ababa and was disgusted by the 'softness' of civilized Western life. Thus he spent five years wandering the Empty Quarter, the desert that covers much of the Arabian peninsula. The result is this spectacular book.

Arabia, A Journey Through The Labyrinth - Jonathan Raban

A record of an astonishing journey through Bahrain, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Yemen, Egypt and Jordan. Criss-crossing the landscape, Raban presents the Arabian desert in vivid and delightful tones whilst introducing some remarkable characters along the way.

Adventures of Ibn Battuta – Rose E. Dunn

A remarkable man. Ibn Battuta was a traveler in the 14th century who journeyed the length and breadth of the Arab world and beyond. He managed, over 27 years to visit the lands of every Muslim leader of his time. Dunn's retelling of his tales is an accessible and breathtaking account of one of the world's most astounding explorers.

Literary Fiction

Eight Months On Ghazwah Street – Hilary Mantel

The story of an expatriate wife in Saudi Arabia as she struggles to understand the culture that surrounds her and her new position as a woman in an Islamic society.

Minaret – Leila Aboulela

Minaret is a moving, deeply felt portrait of a woman given a second chance at life, and a unique look at the life of a devout Muslim woman in England.

Damascus Gate – Robert Stone

Damascus Gate is a passionate, humorous and wise book about the search for God, power, salvation and apocalypse in the Middle East.

My Desert Kingdom – Jill Koolmees

A personal and timely portrait of a region under the international spotlight, *My Desert Kingdom* offers an extremely current and rare insight into a hidden world ‘poised on the edge of a sharpened Scimitar’ *Northern Rivers Echo*

Fatma: A Novel of Arabia - Raja Alem; Tom McDonough

A fabulous piece of literature in its first English translation from an Arabian writer well deserving of all his praise. A complex and absorbing tale of a young girl’s journey into the unknown in mid nineteenth century Saudi Arabia, Alem’s languid prose and vivid descriptions make for an exploration of a dreamlike and distinctly feminine Arabia.

The Saddlebag - Bahiyih Nakhjavani

The tale of nine travellers who journey between Mecca and Medina in the nineteenth century, what is in the Saddlebag? Why does it have such a profound impact upon those who carry it? The roads of Arabia unfold beneath them as each of the characters as the bag changes each of their lives in turn.

“Nakhjavani displays a love of storytelling almost for its own sake” *Literary Review*

Voices of Change: Short Stories by Saudi Arabian Women Writers - Abubaker Bagader (Editor, Translator), Ava M. Heinrichsdorff (Editor, Translator), D.S. Akers (Editor, Translator)

A selection of works in translation which offer a strong sense of place, history and culture throughout. Great stories from talented writers across the region.

Salmon Fishing In The Yemen – Paul Torday

The stoic and uninteresting fisherman, Dr Jones, finds himself reluctantly involved in a project to bring salmon fishing to the Highlands of the Yemen changing the course of not only his life but also British politics forever. “A brilliant satire, leavened by genuine passion for its protagonist and his sport” *Observer*

Crime & Thrillers

The 8.55 To Baghdad – Andrew Eames

A journey from London to Baghdad by train, following the route of the old Orient Express and the itinerary of an identical journey made by Agatha Christie in 1928.

Motoring with Mohammed; Journeys to Yemen and the Red Sea - Eric Hansen

A decade after his shipwreck in the Red Sea, when he was rescued by Eritrean goat smugglers, Hansen returns to try and find a journal he buried in the sand. Highly entertaining, superbly written and consistently informative writing.

The Walking Dead – Gerald Seymour

One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter; a suicide bomber on a journey from Saudi Arabia and a policeman from London come to realise that their choices are far from clear cut. A suspense laden thriller about the world in which we live, Seymour captures the everyday struggles of daily life and sets them neatly against the far reaching and difficult decisions we can be forced to make.

The Blinding Absence Of Light – Tahar Ben Jelloun

A magnificent piece of fiction, this Impac winning novel tells a grim tale of torture and deprivation that is nonetheless an gripping read. Lucid, bare prose lays open the horrific conditions and the remarkable survival of 38 Moroccan soldiers in solitary confinement buried deep in the Tazmamart desert.

“Remarkable ... belongs in the annals of prison fiction along with Solzhenitsyn's One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich” *Scotsman*

Sandstorm - James Rollins

An archeological thriller set in Oman, answers to the mystery of an explosion in London lie buried in an ancient lost city deep beneath the sands of the Arabian desert.

Guides, Companions and Photography

Guides can be a very personal choice and in our experience it is always best to find what fits you rather than the other way around. However, here are a few of our wholly subjective choices:

Some Broad Overviews

Lonely Planet Arabian Peninsula 2004

Bradt Guide Oman 2006 - Diana Darke & Sandra Shields

The Heritage of Oman: A Celebration in Photographs - Ozzie Newcombe

For Flora and Fauna

A Photographic Guide To The Birds of Israel and the Middle East (Field Guide)
- Richard Porter & David Cottridge

Reef Fishes; UAE & Gulf of Oman - Richard Field

Underwater Eden - Rotman (Abrams) illustrated selection

The Best Maps and Geography

Geoprojects Arabia Map 1: 3,500,000

Atlas of the Islamic World Since 1500 – Francis Robinson