



**MEET THE GHAZAL MAESTRO PG 40**  
Student Kaustubh Tapal hits the high note with Padma Shri Pankaj Udhas

**TRAVEL** **Going off track** THOSE WHO GO OFF THE BEATEN TRACK, WRITE FOR US.

# Oman crop

Your countrymen play an important role in this Middle Eastern country's coast. Read on to find out what they do



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I drool over *Fatah al Khair*, with its upswept prow and an elegant shape, it is a stunner. This is no handsome Omani, but a restored dhow that was built 70 years ago in Sur, a city in northeastern Oman. Today, the dhow is a showpiece outside a museum. One of the last ocean-going passenger dhows, it is a ghanjah, a fishing vessel that is nearly 300 tonnes heavy and 20 metres long.

Sur is a photogenic town with a name that signifies 'fortified wall' in Arabic, the town is littered with lots of old defence fortifications. My first view of the town is from the top of a steep cliff. It looks like a Mediterranean island with whitewashed stone and clay houses, carved doors, and a 16th century Portuguese lighthouse standing sentinel, juxtaposed against a modern suspension bridge. Boys play football on tidal flats; shaggy goats climb rocky promontories and flamingos wade in the lagoons. The deep silence is broken only by the occasional screech



A gargantuan green turtle

of gulls and the distant prayer call from a muezzin of a mosque.

I have driven along the coast up to Sur from Muscat, the capital of Oman. It's not your traditional holiday destination, but a coastline marked by mountains and green wadis is a trip that you must make.

Not too long ago, Sur was the hub of international trade. Dhows built of teak wood crossed the

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## BREAK AWAY

VAHISHTA MISTRY IN NEW YORK



Vahishta Mistry, a 29-year-old marketing professional, had no reason to dislike his life. He had a car, a house (in Navi Mumbai), a well-paying job, and a close circle of friends. Then, he did something most of us have only dreamed of doing. He sold his possessions and set out to explore the world. In a fortnightly column, he will talk about the places he visits and the dreams he fulfills

# I Heart New York

Older neighbourhoods reveal what lies behind New York's glitz

There are other New Yorks that hide in the five boroughs that make up the geographical area of New York City. Some of these are flamboyant avatars we know from the media. But, as you peel away this city's layers, you tap into a history of vibrant expression, resilience and pain. The public face will always be Manhattan. Nothing else can compete with the chrome, glass and neon (actually LED, now) of Times Square or the manicured serenity of Central Park.

But, the real New Yorkers don't live in Manhattan. As much as the people who live on the 59 sq km island would like to believe that the city (and the world) revolves around them, it's the 'bridge and tunnel people' — the folks who live in the boroughs of the Bronx,

Brooklyn and Queens (also Staten Island) — who lend the city its heart. Its beat, percussive hip-hop.

The story goes that in 1973, an 18-year-old Bronx DJ, Kool Herc wanted to buy new clothes for school, so he threw a party and charged admission. His innovation was to loop the record he was playing, thus allowing break dancers to get their rhythm. The music was a bigger success — hip-hop had just been invented. There are many variants of this story. Walk down Segwick Avenue in the Bronx and you'll see the humble roots of a global movement at No 1520, the house where Herc lived.

Breakdancing, rap and graffiti were already thriving in a New York that was steadily being choked by poverty in the '70s. A YouTube clip



A man on Union Park offers to help, a little

of Notorious B.I.G., age 17, rapping to an audience of street people outside his grocery store in Bedford Stuyvesant still has thousands nodding along and chuckling at the insults he lyrically delivered.

Today's New York contains components of that culture that have evolved beyond belief. There is a

profusion of street art at most places especially in Bushwick and Williamsburg, the new cool neighbourhoods in Brooklyn. About 10 years ago, walking down George Street in Bushwick would have got me shot, mugged or raped (or all three). Today, I get to call it home for a few days. Artists, DJs, writers and musicians moved into houses vacated by gangsters, as these neighbourhoods underwent gentrification. It's their work that adorns the walls of the industrial complexes nearby. Now, their art has gained new followers — the big city crowd. It's not unusual to see Manhattan suit-and-tie types in a working class bar in Bushwick, as locals look on. Sort of like how mill workers' families living in Lower Parel would view teeny boppers hitting Fire 'n' Ice in the late '90s.

Yet, old and new New Yorks meet in the humour of its residents. Everyone seems to be equipped with a rapier wit and the will to use it — cabbies, waiters, the random stranger at Central Park who tells jokes for a dollar. Whatever its source, whether comedy clubs of

the yore, or hip-hop rhyme battles, it's alive and well, delivered with a bright New York smile and a sharp East coast accent. It's almost enough to make me want to transplant some of it home, before I realise what such a potent weapon might do in the hands of a Mumbai cabbie.

### SO, BASICALLY...

- Four myths about NYC that I busted:**
- 1: People are unfriendly/uncaring: Not the 500 people who stopped and gave me directions, put up with my questions and requests for photos and the one nice lady in Central Park who bought me an ice cream because my backpack looked heavy.
  - 2: The subway system and street names are confusing: Only if you can't do logic. It's the most straightforward thing ever.
  - 3: You need a lot of money to live here: This is true only for Manhattan.
  - 4: You've got to be a hustler: The many artists, musicians, writers and actors would disagree. Wall Street is a small part of Manhattan (which is itself less than a fifth of New York City).



Fatah-al-Khair a restored dhow, recovered from Yemen and proudly exhibited in Sur



A view of the Sur skyline

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Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean to Africa, fishing for pearls and transporting slaves. The town used to be filled with merchant houses and markets overflowing with silks and spices.

Today, Malayali craftsmen fill the dhow factory that adjoins the lagoons. Chaotic piles of timber, skeletons of old dhows, saws and electric drills are strewn along the yard, and the smell of sawdust and glue hangs in the air. There are half-built life-sized dhows under rough shelters. Most of the dhow building is done by craftsmen from Kerala's Malabar coast, following methods handed down over centuries. I see them carving replica dhows for souvenirs.

Today's dhows are pleasure crafts with air conditioning, diesel engines and other modern conveniences. Our guide Abdul Rasool tells me that the ruler Sultan Qaboos wants to continue Oman's legacy. Sadly, the demand for traditional dhows — made with Malaysian timber, ropes from coconut fibres threaded into teak and plugged with cotton soaked in fish or coconut oil — has dried up, and many are made of fibreglass.

From Sur, we drive along the palm fringed coast, sleepy villages and deserted beaches to Ras al Jinz. The beaches here are famous for their gigantic green turtles which come ashore to lay their eggs. I pick up turtle trivia, turtles cry to release excess salinity in their bodies, they are hunted for meat, and also to make baby cradles, shoes and glass frames.



Entrance to Sur

On a starry night, we get a biology lesson from our Omani guide with a thick Arabian accent. He tells us about how the mother turtle always returns to the beach of her birth to lay the eggs, governed by some internal GPS. Every year, over 30,000 turtles arrive in this protected area stretching for over 45 kilometres along the coast, to lay their eggs. Once the mother digs a hole and lays her eggs she returns to the sea, never to see her children again. "No parental fears, no nurturing or nourishing", he quips. We watch in wonder as tiny just-hatched baby turtles, emerge after two months of incubation and waddle their way to the waters. Only two or three turtles survive out of a thousand. The rest are meals for predatory foxes, birds and fish.

"They follow the path of the light, so don't confuse them with your flashlight or mobile phones", he warns us.

Slowly we walk behind the tiny ones, as they walk into the waters, completing the circle of life.



A craftsman makes a smaller dhow

## GET THE RESTAY

**GET THERE:** Oman Air, Indigo fly to Muscat.

**VISA:** Apply to the Embassy of Oman in New Delhi. They take two days to process the visa. <http://www.omanembassy.in>  
To visit Sur and Ras al Jinz, tie up with a local travel company like Sama Travels (<http://www.samatraveloman.com>) which can organise accommodation, road travel, permits and a guide. For more information visit <http://www.omantourism.gov.om>.

**EAT:** Try Shuwa, lamb cooked in an underground oven, Omani Halwa and Ummali, a bread pudding. Drink Kahwa, local coffee with cardamom.

**CARRY:** A good hat and scarf, lots of sunscreen.

## INDIA ON INSTAGRAM



PHOTOGRAPH **SOONI TARAPOREVALA**  
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Here's a square slot just for you.

We're looking for strange, fantastic images of our country that reflect a changing India, and photographer Paroma Mukherjee will handpick those that best convey that mood.



Send us your photos — shot on a smartphone and filtered on Instagram — which you'd like to see on print. Mail us at [instagramformirror@gmail.com](mailto:instagramformirror@gmail.com)



A cowherd at Awas beach, Maharashtra, photographed earlier this year

### PAROMA SAYS

Some portraits are delightfully laden with emotion and this one perfectly balances the elements of humour, embrace and ownership