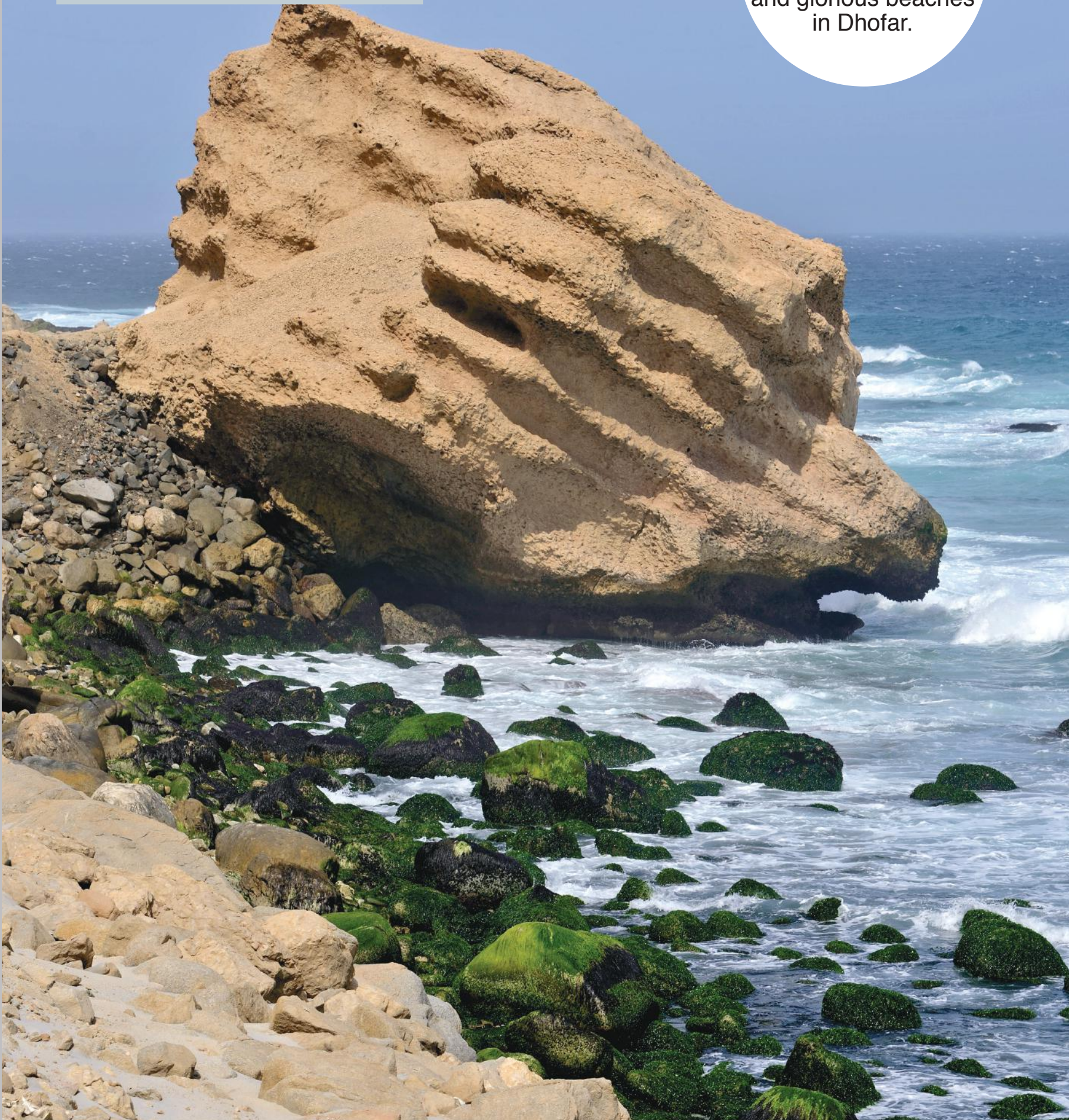


CARS AND ADVENTURES

ROAD TO HEAVEN

Take the less travelled route and find shimmering seas and glorious beaches in Dhofar.





Destination



From Sadh to Hasik

Explore the coastal routes of Dhofar
for panoramic vistas of stunning
shorelines and lagoons teeming with
birdlife, says Jerzy Wierzbicki

With a camera in my hand and a couple of different lenses, I stood on the edge of a beautiful blue lagoon in the Dhofar region, gazing at the wildlife. This was just one of the stops I made recently on a trip along one of the most breathtaking stretches of road in the Sultanate.

Near Jebel Samhan Nature Reserve, the area between the small settlements of Sadh and Hasik is a staggeringly beautiful sweep of coastline.

Sadly it's often overlooked by travellers on their way to the better-known destinations but is a shining example of wind-blustered beaches and dramatic panoramas. Far from being monotonous flat sands, it's a bouquet of wavy oceans and high mountains punching up into the shoreline sky.

I first fell in love with this area when I visited last August and since then, so great has the attraction been, that in the relatively short time between now and then, I've visited five times.

The magical tour starts just after the southern coastal town of Sadh, which can be found heading from Salalah in an easterly direction.

The coastal road twists and turns through dark black rocks as you find fluid seas rolling on your right in stark contrast to the still and firm rock inland. To me the sea appeared restless, as though in a futile attempt to force the land to retreat.

It was 30km along the route that I found my small shallow lagoon, a veritable paradise for the many species of birds that gather there. It was the ideal place to gather some more shots for my growing

collection of wildlife pictures.

I managed to capture an osprey atop her nest, greedily tearing into a fish she had just caught. I also came across a flock of flamingos as a small group of them came into land, their legs almost cycling as they anticipated coming to earth.

Just behind this lagoon and away from the cawing of the birds is a perfect spot for camping. The wind and sand have conspired to create a huge white dune which spreads between the lagoon and the shore. I have been back to this campsite each time I have visited the area.

For those budding photographers interested in landscape, the relatively simple feature of the dune offers some interesting opportunities. There's the contrast of the soft undulating sand as it circles around harsh rocks. Then there are the different plains of view, with blue waves or rough, brown mountains making up the background.

If you do have a wide-angle lens then make sure it's packed in your camera bag as it comes in useful for taking sweeping scenes from the crest of the dune.

After a few hours of photography and resting in the area, I clambered back in to my trusty Toyota and hit the road, heading for the small settlement of Hadbeen.

Located half way between Sadah and Hasik, it's a small, sleepy fishing village with just a few shops and a restaurant serving simple food. Our wandering takes us past this little settlement and continues up the coast towards Hasik. The route is fantastic. Smooth tarmac snakes along by the sea where the rocky beaches are punctuated by white sandy expanses.

Strong gusts can blow in off the



water. Where the wind meets the coast and suddenly strikes the shore, it's as though the gusts are turned back by the land and sent screaming into the oncoming waves. Their form is confused, as they power on to the coastline but encounter resistance from the returning winds.

Standing on the beach, there is a distinctive smell of the ocean as the salty breeze rolls off the sea. But it is the huge rocky outcrop that reaches down the coast towards Hasik that really grabbed my attention when I was there. From where I was standing, the wind and waves over thousands of years had shaped a rock, which appeared to be the outline of a dog's head, staring down into the water.

It was near here I once spotted a school of dolphins playing in the shallows, just a few hundred metres off the beach.

The wonderful thing about this stretch is also the pristine nature of the beaches, which remain relatively clean and free from the litter that blights many other beauty spots in the Sultanate. They make perfect places to grab some rest or to make camp for the night.

At the end of the route, once you reach Hasik, there's one last major attraction – a cliff that looks as though it's a huge sponge from which water is leaking out of it



into the surroundings. The cool and freshly filtered liquid creates interesting forms on the rock and the outflow collects in a large pool at the bottom. It's a popular tourist sight and when I was last there I saw many people enjoying this spot.

It's a great landmark which crowns a beautiful journey along one of the most stunning stretches of Oman's shoreline. ■



HOW TO GET THERE

TRAVEL GUIDE

The route from Sadh to Hasik is approximately 70km. It's an incredibly picturesque journey that is open to all as a 4x4 isn't

required. The route starts 60km east of Mirbat in the village of Sadh and then proceeds along the Dhofari coast north on

Road 49.

GPS location of the rocky beach near Hasik

17°21'42.77"N
55°17'36.67"E