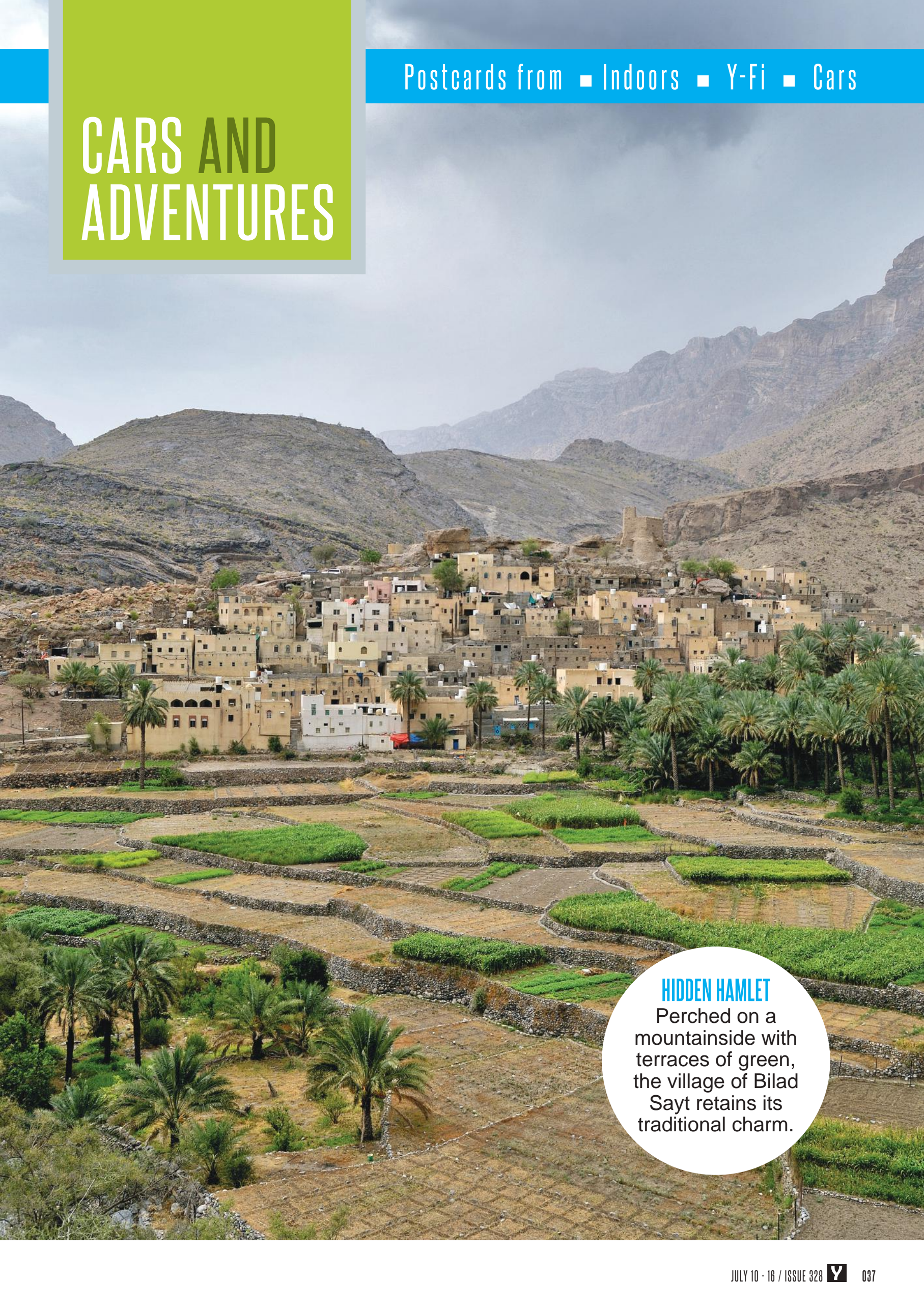


CARS AND ADVENTURES



HIDDEN HAMLET

Perched on a mountainside with terraces of green, the village of Bilad Sayt retains its traditional charm.



Destination



BILAD SAYT

Take a trip to a spectacular **hidden village** nestled on the **slopes of the mountains**. It's a hair-raising drive, but worth it, says Jerzy Wierzbicki



As my car inched up the steep track, the view from my window was a sharp drop into the wadi that meandered through the terrain below me.

Not for the first time on this trip, I wondered whether coming back to Bilad Sayt was such a good idea.

The last time I came to this charming mountain hamlet, tucked in the protective embrace of the rugged Hajar Mountains, it was unforgettable – not necessarily for good reasons.

It was during winter about seven years ago, only a few months after I had moved to Oman. I was driving a small and not particularly good 4x4 model and was a newcomer to the Sultanate's unique land. During the journey, dark clouds suddenly descended to cover the mountains and heavy rain began to lash down, ripping up the gravel track ahead of me. I was very lucky to make it back to the main road with just a broken bumper and fear driving me on.

The experience stayed engraved in my mind and I have subconsciously avoided any trip there again.

But time heals all wounds, as the saying goes, and a week ago, I decided to return to Bilad Sayt and take on this remote location again.

I was drawn back by the prospect of visiting a place that retains its traditions and sense of rural solitude, along with unspoilt beauty.

There's another reason why I chose the mountains to visit. The heat in the desert is unbearable at the moment, making any trip there completely pointless.

I discovered that many things have changed since my first trip to Bilad Sayt.

Several kilometres of the road in Wadi Bani Awf are now asphalted and the old gravel track begins deeper in the valley.

The weather was on my side, too. The merciless sun was hidden behind clouds and in the valley, I found more shadows and cooler temperatures, with the humidity completely gone. Still, I took my time and drove slowly to the highest part of the mountains. This track is only for 4x4s. Not only is it a bumpy ride, it's steep and can be very narrow in places, skirting the precipitous edge.

After about 20 kilometres, I took a break. The sky was covered in a fluffy blanket of clouds and a light wind blew softly. I watched the clouds and tried to weigh up the chances of rain. I didn't want my second trip to be spoiled by the weather again. This time, however,

I was much better prepared for any difficulties.

The route to Bilad Sayt is fully off road. By afternoon, I finally reached the point directly opposite the village. It's a wonderful panoramic view. A settlement of stone-and-mud dwellings clusters on a small dark hill, connected by a labyrinth of narrow pathways, with a verdant swathe of date plants and a patchwork of terraced fields bringing a splash of colour to the scene.

Wandering around the village, I took some great photographs of the old-world homes with colourful doors and a square tower, now in poignant ruin, which stands on top of the hill overlooking Bilad Sayt. The village enjoys moderate temperatures even in summer, while the rest of the Interior region sizzles.

The main source of life here is the lush green terraces. Small fields, separated by stony walls, create a symmetrical and regular shape from a distance. The colour was so intense and vivid. Sometimes, you will see farmers tending their crops of alfalfa as the women return from the mountain springs with pots of fresh water balanced on their heads. It is these crystal streams of water from high in the peaks that feed the village's two main aflaj and nurture this little oasis of fields, gardens and farms.

Speaking of water, I noticed a drop of rain as I left the village and headed back to the main road. After several kilometres, the rain became stronger and I could hear thunder crashing around the sky. Visibility was good and the temperature again dropped to about 30°C as the wind became stronger. I stopped a few times on the way back to take some photographs. The rain only came in a short burst, nothing dangerous, and helped to wash away the dust from my car.

For a taste of authentic Oman, untouched by modernity, Bilad Sayt should be on your bucket list. Now that I have conquered the village, I will definitely be back again soon. ■

HOW TO GET THERE

The route to Bilad Sayt is simple. Go to Barka and take the road that leads to Rustaq. In the small town of Al Awabi, refuel your car and then go on for another 10 kilometres. You'll see a road sign on the right to Wadi Bani Awf. Turn there and continue for about 25km through the wadi until you come to an intersection. The road to Bilad Sayt is well indicated. The track goes through rugged terrain, so take care. Drive carefully as it is steep in places and can be dangerous. It is only accessible by 4x4 vehicles.

GPS location of the turn to Wadi Bani Awf:

23°20'31.62"N
57°29'35.68"E

GPS location of Bilad Sayt

23°11'27.40"N
57°23'17.58"E

TRAVEL GUIDE

