

ASIA · HISTORY · ARCHITECTURE · CULTURE · ISLANDS · OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Yemen

Yemen holds some of the Arab world's most extraordinary architecture — the gingerbread-like tower houses of Sana'a's old city and the mudbrick high-rises of Shibam — plus, offshore, Socotra's dragon's blood trees and white dunes. Since civil war broke out in 2014, most visitors have gone only to Socotra; check the FCDO travel advice very closely before considering any trip.

**The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to Yemen.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 31 July 2026.

 CAPITAL Sana'a	 CURRENCY Yemeni rial (YER) £1 ≈ YER 315	 LANGUAGE Arabic, Soqotri	 BEST TIME Feb–Mar, Oct–Nov
 DAILY BUDGET £60–£250 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type A, D, G 230V · UK plugs fit	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 10h via Cairo or Amman ~£700–£1,200 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+3 standard time

Yemen's mountains catch enough monsoon rain to have supported terraced farming and towns for millennia, and its architecture is like nowhere else: Sana'a's multi-storey tower houses trimmed with white gypsum friezes, the cliff-top villages of the Haraz range, Zabid's whitewashed lanes on the Tihama plain and Shibam's mudbrick towers in Wadi Hadramawt. Historically, travellers combined Sana'a, the Haraz mountains, the Red Sea coast, Taiz and Aden, adding a flight east to the Hadramawt. Socotra, an archipelago in the Arabian Sea that lies closer to the Horn of Africa than to mainland Yemen, is a world apart: over a third of its plant species grow nowhere else.

For now, travel here is not something to improvise. The few tourists who visit Socotra generally go on organised tours that bundle flights, permits, a driver-guide and camping, at prices well above what the basic facilities suggest. Days are spent hiking to dragon's blood forests, swimming in Detwah Lagoon and sleeping under the stars on empty beaches. Yemenis are famously hospitable, and afternoon qat-chewing sessions, when business slows and conversation flows, remain central to social life. Anyone considering the mainland should take specialist advice, check that their insurance will cover them and read the FCDO advice first.

Top 5 highlights

1

ARCHITECTURE

Old City of Sana'a

A UNESCO-listed maze of more than 6,000 tower houses built of rammed earth and fired brick, their façades picked out in white gypsum, wrapped around the Souq al-Milh and the Bab al-Yemen gate.

2

NATURE

Socotra

Umbrella-shaped dragon's blood trees on the Dixam plateau, swollen bottle trees, white dunes and the turquoise Detwah Lagoon make this UNESCO-listed island one of the most biologically distinctive places on Earth.

3

ARCHITECTURE

Shibam

Dubbed the 'Manhattan of the desert', this walled 16th-century town of some 500 mudbrick tower houses, up to about 30 metres tall, rises from the floor of Wadi Hadramawt.

4

HISTORY

Zabid

Capital of Yemen from the 13th to the 15th centuries and a celebrated centre of Islamic learning, this Tihama town of whitewashed courtyard houses and mosques is on UNESCO's World Heritage in Danger list.

5

NATURE

Haraz Mountains and Al-Hajjarah

West of Sana'a, terraced slopes planted with coffee and qat climb to fortified stone villages such as Al-Hajjarah, whose tower houses line a precipice near Manakhah; for decades the classic Yemeni trek.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Sana'a

≈ 3.3 million people

Inhabited for more than 2,500 years, the capital's UNESCO-listed old city of tower houses, souqs and mosques sits at around 2,250 metres in the highlands.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Aden

≈ 1.1 million people

The southern port spreads around an extinct volcano; the old Crater district holds the ancient Tawila water tanks, and since 2015 the city has been the internationally recognised government's temporary capital.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Taiz

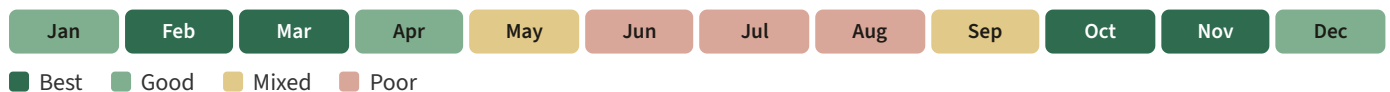
≈ 940,000 people

Yemen's self-styled cultural capital lies below the 3,000-metre Jabal Sabir, overlooked by the hilltop Cairo Castle and home to the Rasulid-era Al-Ashrafiya Mosque.

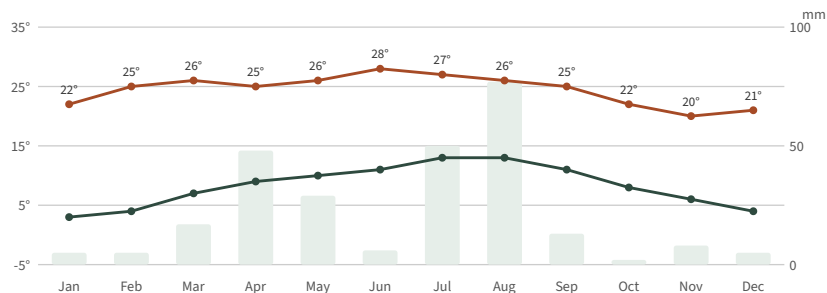
Population figures are recent estimates rather than census counts — Yemen's last census was in 2004 — and sources differ widely, especially on the relative size of Aden and Taiz.

When to go to Yemen

Best time: **Feb–Mar, Oct–Nov.**

**Average climate in Sana'a**

— High °C
 — Low °C
 ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb–Mar	Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr The holy month moves about 11 days earlier each year and currently falls in February–March; days are quiet, evenings bring iftar feasts, and Eid al-Fitr ends it with family celebrations.
Apr–May	Eid al-Adha The Feast of the Sacrifice, at the end of the Hajj pilgrimage, currently falls in late spring; families slaughter sheep or goats and share the meat, and much of the country shuts for several days.

How much does Yemen cost?

SHOESTRING £60 per person / day ≈ YER 18,908 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £130 per person / day ≈ YER 40,966 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £250 per person / day ≈ YER 78,782 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Saltah The national dish: a bubbling stew of meat broth, vegetables and spices served in a stone pot, topped with frothy fenugreek (hulba) and scooped up with flatbread.	Mandi Hadramawt's slow-cooked lamb or chicken, roasted in a sealed underground pit oven over spiced rice that catches the dripping juices.	Bint al-sahn 'Daughter of the plate': thin layers of buttery dough baked into a soft round loaf, drenched in Yemeni honey and scattered with black seeds.
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Getting around

Getting around Yemen is not straightforward: flights are few and liable to change, roads are punctuated by checkpoints, and different authorities control different regions. Visitors to Socotra generally travel on tour-operator packages that include flights and a 4x4 with driver on the island. Any mainland travel needs a licensed local operator and a careful read of the FCDO advice first.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE    A D G 230V — UK plugs fit	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 191 Fire: 191 Police: 199 or 194 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +967	TIME ZONE UTC+3 (standard time)
TAP WATER Not safe — drink bottled or treated water	DRIVING On the right

TIPPING

Tip drivers, guides and camp cooks at the end of a tour, ideally in US dollars or rial as agreed with your operator; round up in cafés.

ETIQUETTE

Dress conservatively — long sleeves and trousers for men, loose clothing and a headscarf for women — ask before photographing anyone, especially women, and accept tea or a qat invitation graciously, even if you decline.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Aden International Airport (ADE), Aden; Socotra Airport (SCT), Hadibu

Visas & entry for Yemen

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to enter Yemen.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Dengue

Hepatitis B

Measles

Polio

Rabies

Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

Malaria risk in some areas

- There is a risk of malaria in Yemen below 2,000m: antimalarial tablets recommended.
- There is very low risk of malaria on Socotra Island: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.
- There is no risk of malaria above 2,000m including Sana'a city: bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Yemen

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Mon 30 Nov 2026	Evacuation Day
Mon 8 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)

Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Thu 11 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Sat 15 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Tue 18 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Wed 19 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Sat 22 May 2027	Unity Day
Sun 6 Jun 2027	Islamic New Year Day (date may shift)
Sun 26 Sep 2027	Revolution Day
Thu 14 Oct 2027	Liberation Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Arabic

ENGLISH	ARABIC	SAY IT
Hello	السلام عليكم	<i>as-sa-LAAM a-LAY-kum</i>
Thank you	شكراً	<i>SHUK-ran</i>
Please	من فضلك	<i>min FAD-lak</i>
Excuse me	لو سمحت	<i>law sa-MAHT</i>
How much is this?	بكم هذا؟	<i>bi-KAM HAA-tha</i>

Know before you go

- Read the FCDO travel advice before planning anything, and confirm in writing that your travel insurance covers Yemen — many standard policies exclude it.
- Socotra has very limited card acceptance and few ATMs, so bring enough US dollars in clean, recent notes for tips, extras and emergencies.
- Never take plants, seeds or animals from Socotra: removing its endemic species is prohibited, and luggage may be checked on departure.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.