

# Oman Diving

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The Sultanate of Oman lies at the eastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula and at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. Oman has only a small dive industry with three main dive areas: the Daymaniyat Islands (also written Al-Dimaniyat or Dimaaniyat) and Fahal island (Shark island) close to Muscat (also written Masqat), the eastern coast of the Musandam peninsula and the coast of the Indian Ocean of the Dhofar province.

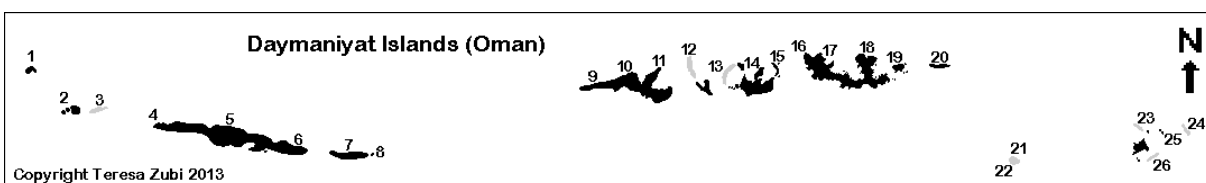
## Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve

I only visited the Daymaniyat Islands which lie about 18km / 40-60 minutes by speed boat from Ras al-Sawadi on the mainland northwest of Muscat (often with dolphins on the way). The Daymaniyat Islands are a string of 9 rocky islands in three groups over about 15km roughly west to east and connected by coral gardens. These islands were declared a Nature Reserve in 1996. The islands look very bare but there are some bird colonies and nesting grounds for sea turtles. Access to the Daymaniyats is restricted, and you're not allowed to land on the islands from the beginning of May until the end of October. Fishing is not permitted around the islands, but we saw some fish cages underwater, discarded nets and some fishing boats in the neighbourhood, but no patrol boats or anything like that.

These islands are well worth a visit. Although visibility here is not that great – lots of plankton around, so we had visibility from around 10m to 20m – the reefs are in excellent shape and there are really a lot of fish around! If it is bad visibility you have a chance to see whalesharks (*Rhincodon typus*) – I was there in October and every other day one or two groups saw one of them, September seems to be even a better month for these huge sharks.

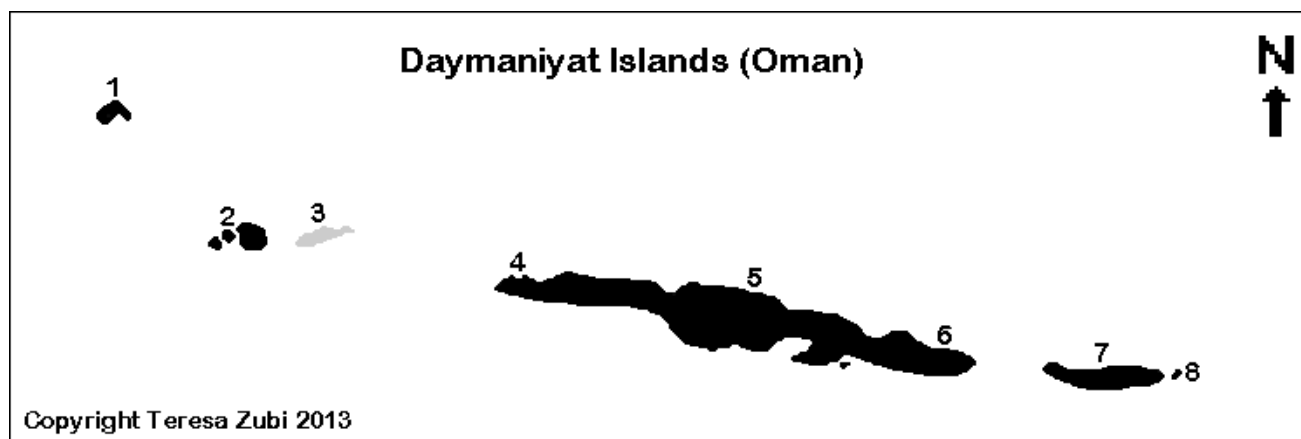
Water temperatures are around 29 to 31 degrees in summer and 20 to 22 degrees in winter. The dive sites all make for easy diving, usually not much currents and depths rarely exceed 25meters. The islands lie on the mainland plateau and depths everywhere are around 20 to 30meters – the Persian Gulf has a maximum depth of 90meters only. A good time to visit is September and October, but diving is possible all year around. I dived with Extra Divers based in the Al Sawadi Resort, because they offer daily dives trips to the Nature Reserve.

## Map of Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve



1. Clive Rock / 2. Sira island / 3. Mousetrap / 4. Junn West Wall / 5. Junn Center Wall / 6. Coral Garden / 7. Walid Junn / 8. Doc's Wall / 9. Garden of Eden / 10. 1000 Rocks / 11. The Loops / 12. Titto's Run / 13. Cyprea Reef / 14. The Blue Route / 15. Black Tip Reef / 16. Guno's Trace / 17. Police Run / 18. Three Sisters / 19. The Noodle / 20. Hayut Run / 21. Aquarium North / 22. Aquarium South / 23. The Rockies / 24. Rocky Ridge / 25. Sam's Reef / 26. Market Garden

## Western Daymaniyat islands (Clive Rock, Sira, Junn)



**1. Clive Rock:** this is an underwater rock some distance northwest of Sira island. We started on the small fingerlike rock jutting out from the main rock and then followed the wall finishing our dive back on the plateau among an extensive coral garden. Schools of fusiliers were swimming in long wavy bands around and above us all the way, sometimes you couldn't see the ground, only fish and more fish! The wall then turns in a slope with sand and some coral blocks. Huge schools of snappers gather here with mackerels chasing them – again so much fish! For our safety stop we turned towards the beautiful coral reef here – tiers and tiers of table corals with the usual butterflyfishes, damselfishes and gobies darting among them.

**2. Sira island:** this was one of my favourite dive sites due to the abundance of fish. It is actually a series of rocks, some underwater and two of the larger ones rising out to form islands. You dive on several walls and depending on how much air you need you can also swim all the way to some of the underwater rocks lying further to the west. The walls are covered beautifully with blue coral bushes and yellow and white black corals between. There are some sharp valleys and where sweetlips and batfishes hide. When I dived here there were quite a lot of jellyfish around – nobody got stung, but the bannerfish and butterflyfish really loved them, gathering around them and biting off junks. Some dozen drifting jellyfish had collected on a hollow patch in the sandy area and a turtle was busy eating them one by one – a real feast for it!

**3. Mousetrap:** This is a shallow reef which lies between Sira and Junn island (also written Al Jawn). You dive along a wall with a cave on 7m. Depths from about 16-18m to 4-5m on top.

**4. Junn West Wall and 5. Junn Center Wall:** I haven't dived these dive sites – obviously it is mostly wall diving.....! But on my third day diving one of the other dive groups saw two whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*) here.

**6. Coral Garden:** The island of Junn is a long and narrow rock and the Coral Garden lies to the northeast corner. An easy dive along a wall covered with large brown soft corals. Somewhere on the way we found a large turtle sitting smack on one of these obviously very comfortable soft corals. Even when we approached quite closely she didn't budge. Somewhere on the sand we found a huge cowtail ray (*Pastinachus sephen*) and some of our dive group saw a leopard shark (*Stegostoma fasciatum*),. A good way to dive this area is heading towards Walid Junn so you finish the dive on the area with lots of table corals that lies between the two islands.

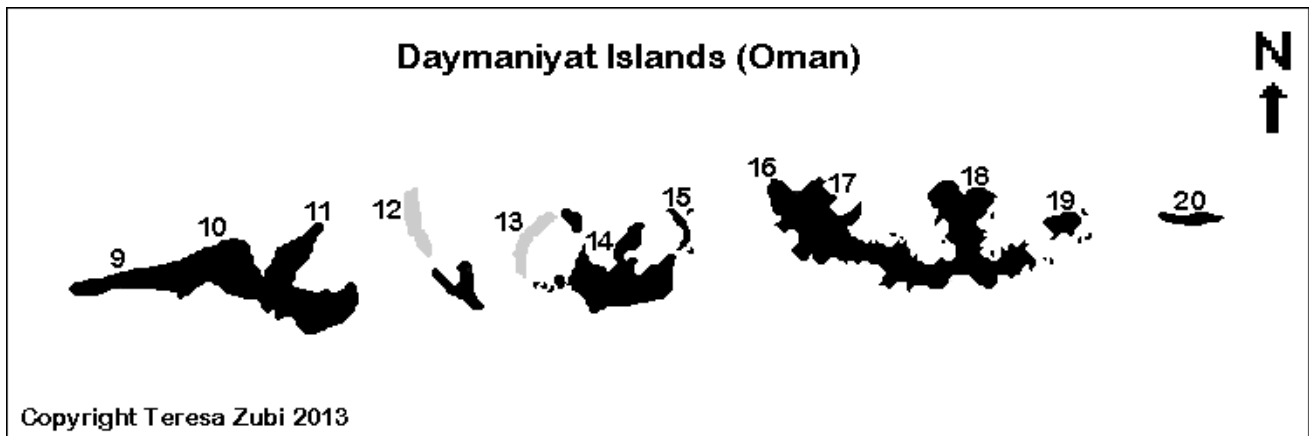
**7. Walid Junn:** You dive along the smaller of the Junn islands. The wall is very craggy with lots of large rocks and sharp cuts. Everything is covered with large schools of fusiliers and snappers, at one point I saw a Jenkins whipray (*Himantura jenkinsii*) but when I pointed it out to my dive buddy he couldn't see it, because so many fusiliers were swimming over it! You end the dive on a beautiful shallow coral garden. Take a look under the table corals, there are two types of sweetlips (the gray *Plectorhinchus flavomaculatus* and the yellow *Plectorhinchus gaterinus*), batfish, cardinalfishes and lots of other fish hiding underneath. This coral garden extends all the way to the larger Junn island.

**8. Doc's Wall:** This dive lies north of the smaller Junn island. You start from Little Junn and dive around a small rock. A shallow dive along a wall. I saw the Arabian hawkfish (*Cirrhichthys calliurus*) you only find in this area and Jayakar's seahorse (*Hippocampus jayakari*), very large, I guess about 15 to 18cm. When you reach the corner of the wall you ascend to a flat plateau of about 10 to 6m depth. Everything is covered with

soft corals with a few large coral blocks between. Very large spotted morey eels (*Gymnothorax favagineus*) live here, sometimes several under one block. We were just about to finish our dive when we saw a large group of squids very close to the ground. We approached and realized they were laying eggs under one of the blocks. There were a dozen or more individuals, the females busy pushing the eggs under the coral and the males flashing colors to discourage other males. On another dive we had very bad visibility, but saw not one but two huge cowtail rays (*Pastinachus sephen*) together with an eagle ray flying above the plateau! Just incredible!

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### Central Daymaniyat islands (Qesmah, Wlad Al Qurfah, Al Qurfah)



**9. Garden of Eden:** this dive site lies on the western tip of Qesmah island (also written Kasmah). We started on the wall in the northern side and finished the dive around the corner on the sandy part there. You dive along a steep wall and between some rocks or boulders and there are 2 small plateaus a bit out on 10 and 12 meters. The sandy part at the end is also interesting with rays lying covered with sand and with only their eyes showing. Our dive guide even found a zebra shark (*Stegostoma fasciatum*), a massive brown shark with spots (also called leopard shark in some countries) lying in the sand – it didn't budge although we approached really closely.

**12. Titto's Run:** This dive site lies north of a small island and is a shallow reef with lots of brown soft corals. Look out for small fish like the colourful boxfish (*Ostracion cyanurus*) which is blue-green (female) or brown (male) with dark dots or the endemic Oman Anemonefish (*Amphiprion omanensis*) which looks a bit like Clarks Anemone fish but has white bands that don't meet on the head.

**15. Black Tip Reef:** This dive site impressed me with the huge coral blocks we saw at the very beginning. Visibility was not so good and they seemed to rise like towers out of the mist and large schools of snappers were gathering around them. We continued to a wall with a large plateau on about 18 meters covered with coral bushes. Somewhere along the way a ray joined our group and swam along us and towards the end we found a huge gray Tahitian Ray (*Himantura jenkinsii*) lying nearly hidden close to the wall. No black tip reef sharks though...!

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### Eastern Daymaniyat islands (Al Jabal Kabeer, Al Qafsiyah, Hycoon)

There is a police station on the island of Al Jabal Kabeer. The island has several nice bays where you can anchor the boat and some white sand beaches on the south.

**17. Police Run:** lies on the western side of the bay. What I especially liked about this dive site are the two swimthroughs on a part of the wall that is jutting out a bit from the wall. They lie on about 16m and are quite narrow, so check your buoyancy, especially since there are always some sea urchins lying on the floor. When

we dived there was also a small ray (*Taeniura meyeni*) lying in the swimthrough and a turtle was taking off from its shelter when the first diver poked his head into the hole...! A nice dive site with lots of large rocks, hard corals and schools of fish.

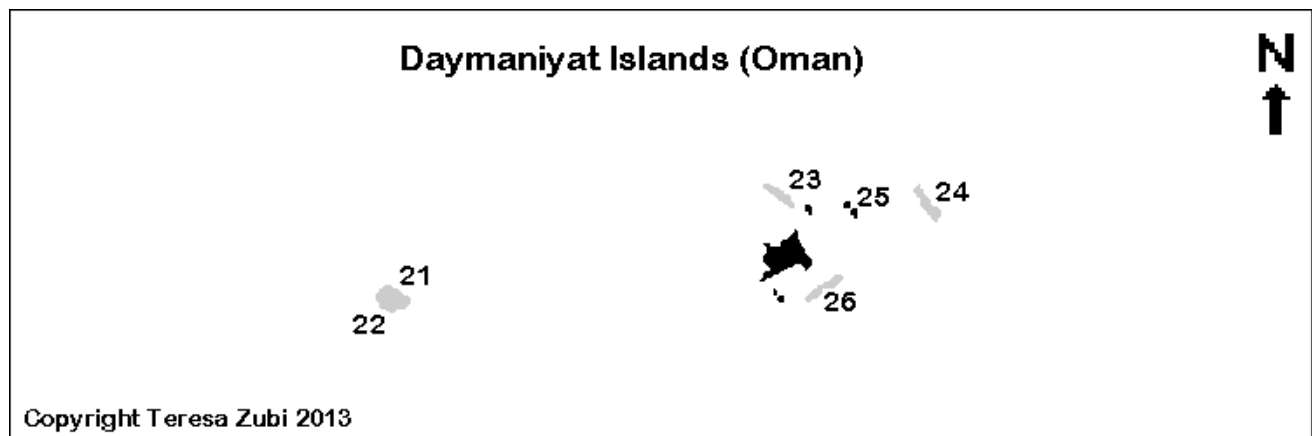
**18. Three Sisters:** lies on the eastern side of the bay. You dive along a wall with lots of large rocks nicely covered with hard and soft corals. On the flatter parts are nice coral gardens with table corals and lots of small reef fish. Don't miss the large cave on about 10m with lots of sweepers in it.

**19. The Noodle:** You dive on the north side of the small island of Al Qafsiyah mostly in shallow water (15 to 18m). I don't know why it is called "noodle", we didn't see any spaghettis underwater! Only a nice coral reef with lots of soft corals, three different species of moreys, among them the rare striped Zebra morey (*Gymnomuraena zebra*) and some grey rays (*Himantura fai*).

**20. Hayut Run:** You dive on the north side of the small island of Hayut (also written Hycoon), one of the few dive sites where the walls go down to 25 to 28m. A nice place with lots of overhangs, so bring your flashlight along. You finish the dive in a soft coral garden around the western corner of the island.

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### The Southeast (Aquarium, Kharabah, Fahal)



**21. Aquarium North:** This is an underwater rock lying about 4km south of the easternmost Daymaniyat island (Hayut) and it lies outside the Nature Reserve. You start on the top (about 7m) where the anchor line is attached and then either swim south or north along the wall. To the north your dive brings you over a sand chute and then along the wall to a small plateau down on about 22 to 24 meters. Around here our dive guide found several large brown Jayakar's seahorses (*Hippocampus jayakari*). On one of our dives two were together and one of the divers was lucky to see them mating. On the wall you often find nudibranchs, there seem to be 4 species common here: *Hypselodoris kanga*, *Ceratosoma gracillimum*, *Jorunna funebris* and *Risbecia pulchella* a nudibranch which is often found tailing each other. Actually most of the other dive sites we didn't see any nudibranchs – so come to the Aquarium, if you are interested in them. This is also a good place to see scorpionfishes – I found a total of 9 on 2 dives, everywhere else they are not so common. The wall and plateau is loosely covered with blue coral bushes, some soft corals and small sponges. Look down to the sand, sometimes there are leopard sharks, lemon sharks or rays. You finish the dive back on the plateau (about 12m) where we saw turtles, and on one dive even a whale shark (*Rhincodon typos*).

**22. Aquarium South:** Starting from the anchor line and turning south you swim along a wall and then over an area of sand and coral blocks. Like everywhere in the Daymaniyat islands you find a lot of morey eels, mostly spotted moreys (*Gymnothorax favagineus*), some of them very huge and rearing up out from underneath the corals in imposing postures and sometimes sharing their lair with other species like the Starry moray (*Gymnothorax nudivomer*) or the shy Geometric moray (*Siderea grisea*). Nearly always there are cleaner fish or cleaner shrimps busy around their mouth, darting in and out among sharp teeth. On the reef are quite a lot of sea urchins – take a close look at them, between their sharp spine reside small striped shrimps (*Stegopontonia commensalis*). We also saw cuttlefish and a group of squids as well as several nudibranchs, mantis shrimps and on our safety stop several large milkfishes (*Chanos chanos*).

## Jazirat Kharabah island

Kharabah (also written Karuba) lies some 6km to the southeast of the Daymaniyat islands and about 40km offshore from Muscat and has a nice white beach and several rocks around it. I actually haven't dived here but I asked and there are 4 different dive sites - **23. The Rockies / 24. Rocky Ridge / 25. Sam's Reef / 26. Market Garden** - all quite shallow dives (18-22m). Since this small island group lies closer to Muscat, the dive operators starting from there more often choose them for diving.

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## More dive areas lying close to Muscat

**Fahal island (Shark island)** lies about 5km northwest offshore from Muscat and about 45km southeast of the Daymaniyat islands. Seems there is a cave with a swim-through at the northeastern tip of the island, the wreck of a tug boat (28-30m) in the northern bay of Fahal and a deep reef (40-42m) where you find sharks, eagle rays and barracudas.

25km to the southeast of Muscat is another dive area called **Bandar Al-Khayran**, a bay with small islands and rocks and a large wreck (Al Munassir) lying on 30m.

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## Dive operators in Oman:

To dive the Daymaniyat Islands you can start from the dive centers of Extra Divers in Al Sawadi (website [www.extradivers-worldwide.com](http://www.extradivers-worldwide.com)) which is the closest to the islands or one of the following dive operators based around Muscat: Global Scuba (website [www.global-scuba.com](http://www.global-scuba.com)), Omanta Scuba Diving Academy (website [www.omantascuba.com](http://www.omantascuba.com)), Euro Divers (website <http://eurodivers.com/de/tauchen-oman/> also liveaboard).

Extra Divers also operates several dive centers in other parts of Oman: Qantab (east of Muscat, diving Fahal island), Zighy Bay and Musandam (Musandam peninsula, Strait of Hormuz), Mirbat and Salalah (Dhofar province, Indian Ocean)

