

Discover Oman

Sea Dunes Sailing's Raymond Sabbah describes his MacGregor voyage to Musandam.

February is the ideal time for sailing in the Gulf. With a three-day weekend at our disposal and a craving to explore the Musandam Peninsula, my friend and I found ourselves at DOSC at 8 am to collect the MacGregor for our trip. Pulling her onto its trailer is child's play, a three-step ladder on the front of it helps boarding, and guides allow the pilot to simply drive fully onto the trailer and winch position. Bringing the mast down is equally simple, allowing the whole procedure to be completed in less than an hour. With food, water and fuel provisions loaded onboard we were then ready to head for the port of Dibba on the Indian Ocean.

At 11 am, we arrived. The wind was blowing strong, at 25 to 30 knots, and we decided to raise the mast ready for launch, then take lunch, hoping the wind would decrease as forecasted. Dibba is an interesting place to visit, with fishermen off-loading their catch on the pier, and an impressive row of sharks soon covered the ground. At 3 pm the situation remained unchanged, and the sea had become extremely choppy. With no hope of launching that afternoon, we locked the boat on its trailer and left for a tour of Dibba and its sister town namesake in Oman. There we witnessed an auction of fish held straight off the dock, an incredible array of colours and shapes from beneath the sea. At sunset, the weather situation was still blustery, so we decided to camp aboard the boat, which had remained safe on its trailer. After a late dinner we were rocked to sleep by a pushy wind on the hull and the whistling in the shrouds.

Dawn broke and we were able to launch, setting off at 8 am and heading north-west; the wind having dropped to 15 knots and blowing in the right direction for a fast sail. The Omani shoreline possesses dramatic beauty – rocky mountains falling sheer into the sea, small creeks ending in strips of white sand, and ripped headlands cutting the horizon. The sea below us was a deep blue, with the only noises being the wind in our ears and the water lapping against the hull. Flying fish caught us by surprise in their fervent flight above the surface. We sailed for six hours, navigating small sheltered inlets for possible anchoring spots, using waypoints with the assistance of our GPS. We even laid out a fishing line with hope of catching an indigenous dinner.

By mid-afternoon we entered a magnificent wide and well-protected cove. At its far end, a superb beach of white sand dotted with wild palm trees drew a postcard such that we expected Robinson Crusoe to appear. The water was translucent, and the air so silent and impressive that the slightest noise



of lapping water was repeated by a soothing echo around the surrounding mountains; causing our normal tone of voice to become a mere whisper. The three-metre tidal forecast allowed us to anchor the boat very near the beach, so that she could settle gently on the seabed at low tide.

Going ashore for a mountain hike to take in the flora and fauna was tempting for both of us, and we decided to follow a twisting path that got more inspiring the higher it climbed. Below us blue egrets retook possession of the now unoccupied beach as we contemplated their ballet from the heights, while the boat suddenly appeared so tiny and fragile down in the cove against the enormity of this massive panorama. Our exploration lasted until the evening, when we returned to the shoreline for a campfire and a carefully-executed barbecue on the beach. Having tidied away our human footprint, we finally returned to the now floating MacGregor, to spend the night in an alarming silence. The night was of a deep black, not the slightest light polluting a sky full of twinkling stars that seemed almost close enough to reach. Such sensations are rare, almost disturbing, as we're no longer used to this type of environmental purity. Not a smell; not the slightest noise; not a single light of human existence. Nature in all its magnificence and splendour reduced us to immobility and awe of its silence.

The next day, following our quiet night, we pursued our coastal investigation before turning about, returning to our 'antmen' routines again and getting busy with the responsibilities of modern life. A pod of playful dolphins wished us a roguish farewell; a tortoise crossed our wake without paying us the time of day, and standstill cormorants stared at us from their rocky perches. Loading the boat onto the trailer and heading back to Dubai was like returning from the moon. It was hard to believe that a few hours before we were sailing on a savage planet, visiting places that were probably unchanged for thousands of years, where it seemed nobody had ever before set foot. The MacGregor's ease of being able to launch from the trailer had made this escape possible, maximising our time in this natural wilderness.

