

HOLIDAY IN MUSCAT

28 FEBRUARY 2026

The last day of the month of February – the 28th – started for me at 0300 hrs. MST in the morning with my phone alarm ringing with the “Milky Way” tune. I had gone to sleep early and when the alarm sounded, I was up like a shot ready to get myself organized for my trip to Manchester. This trip was planned in June 2025 for a meeting of a select few of the medical students of the 1965 batch of the prestigious Christian Medical College Vellore, South India.

We were meeting in an old Abbey that had been converted into a Boutique Hotel close to Stoke on Trent. I was full of excitement and enthusiasm for the upcoming trip. I was well prepared for the cold that I was warned would greet me in the Village Abbey in Stoke. I was told to gird my loins with padded wool to protect what remained of my vital possessions. I had been to “the foothills of the Himalayas” and as such cold was not too much of a challenge for me.

Flight QR 0845 of Qatar Air was on time and we took off in a Boeing 777-300 ER JET for DOHA which was 3675 miles away and would take 7hrs 40 min which was 1255 hrs. Doha time. AT Doha I would have a layover for 2hrs and take the next flight QR 23 at 1505 hrs. Doha time for Manchester.

The flight was uneventful until at about 1200 hrs. Doha time when we were given a sandwich snack. As we were enjoying this snack the pilot announced that we were being diverted to Muscat as there was a problem in Doha. At this time the plane was just entering the Gulf of Oman and was just about to enter the Persian

Gulf. We were extremely lucky that we were at this point because we were just close to Muscat in the Principality of Oman. I immediately checked my phone as we had on board WIFI. Teheran had been bombed the joint forces of USA & Israel and missiles were being fired from Iran across the Persian Gulf.' Operation Epic Fury" had begun. The Israeli operation was called "Operation Roaring Lion". The whole of the Persian Gulf was a "No Fly Zone". If we had been about half an hour earlier, we would have been in the NFZ and would have had to land at Doha. Doha airport had been bombed and as such we would have been trapped in a War Zone.

WE landed at 1330 hrs. at Muscat. We were then kept in the plane till 1730 hrs. (4 hrs.). The air conditioner was on in the plane and so was WIFI and entertainment. We were given water to drink but nothing else. The announcement said that we had to wait for the Qatar Airways personnel to arrive before we could deplane.

Eventually at 1730 we were allowed to deplane and we were sent thro customs and immigration. The Muscat airport is a beautiful modern airport – all shinny and gleaming. Clean & nice toilets. As we left immigration we were sent out to a waiting area with a whole fleet of buses waiting for us. It was a quite orderly transfer to the buses and our flight was placed in The Movenpick Hotel. This was a lovely hotel and the rooms that we eventually were given were comfortable and good. The food was excellent and we had no real complains except that our bags were not with us and we did not know when we would get it. We also were not given any other information except to meet the next day at 0930 hrs. in the lobby for a briefing.

The dinner provide was a buffet spread in the dining room and it was very good. I enjoyed the food & drinks provided. It was

Ramdan and as such the dining room was full with the local population also eating with us – the passengers from QR 845. The hotel had told us that there was a bar on the 8th floor where we could have alcoholic beverages BUT as it was Ramdan it was closed. The swimming pool on the 9th floor was also made available to us. But as our bags had not being deplaned with us, all of us just went to the rooms and crashed out. I had a shower and wore the toweling gown to wrap myself up and went to bed. The rooms were very good and spacious with every amenity provided for us.

1st of March dawned early and I made all the phone calls necessary to Malaysia. My insurance agent said that the full payment for disruption of services would be borne by the Qatar Airways so I was not to worry too much. My children, Aarathi & Avin were of course apprehensive about me being alone in Muscat. But I assured them that I would be fine as I felt that the Kingdom of Oman was a safe haven as it did not have any American Military Establishments in it. I called my “Go to Person” for all flight operations Capt. H S Daran or better known as Sashi. He was extremely helpful and kept my spirits up. My next call was to Diana to make sure my credit cards etc. were all good and also to assure her that I was safe. My friends in the UK were informed of what had transpired and that I would see them soon. I had a shower and used the hotel toiletries as my shaving kit etc. were in my luggage. The shaving stick was not too good and I did cut myself a few times resulting in some spilt blood in Muscat. I got into the same clothes and came down for breakfast. After breakfast at about 0930 hrs. the lobby was full of passengers all waiting for information. The hotel staff told us to get ready to check out as we were being sent to the airport. That was good news so we got ready to leave the hotel. At 1200 hrs. we were then told that we were to stay another day and our bags were still stuck in

the airport and most probably on the plane. It was a big letdown and all of us prepared for another day in Muscat. Most of the passengers were directed to the largest mall in Muscat – The Oman Mall. I needed some medication and clothes to wear. This was easily got as the mall was quite modern and had a lot of stores. But it was very empty because of Ramadan & all the restaurants were closed. The taxis were expensive but available. The clothes I bought were reasonably priced and I was prepared for another day in Muscat without my luggage. At dinner in the hotel the passengers made friends with each other and commiserated with one another on our plight. We had to agree that we were much better off than the passengers in Doha, Abu Dhabi or Dubai. All of these airports had been bombed.

2nd of March felt good. The general feeling was that the Qatar Airways would get us to our destinations by bypassing the Persian Gulf. A few of the desperate passengers had manage to buy tickets through different airlines and were making their way to the Airport albeit without their luggage. After breakfast the lobby was full of anxious passengers waiting for information. We were told by the hotel staff that information about bags would be given at 1200 hrs. At 1200 hrs. the Hotel Staff told us that bags could be collected at 1700 hrs. and busses would be provided to take us to the convention center where our bags could be collected. 1700 hrs. came and went and nothing happened.

In the meantime, I had made friends with the tour operator, Ali Rada who had a booth in the hotel. He was a young personable guy and we got on well. He offered to give me a city tour at a “special” rate. I took it and asked a new friend of mine who also was from Malaysia to join me. It so happened that I knew his father who was a Naval Officer and I had had drinks with him at the Officers Mess

at Gurney Road Min Def. during my stint in the Army Medical Corp of the Malaysian Armed Forces. Romuald Marisamy is a Senior Official in the Mobile Phone Company of a Government Linked Organisation and was on his way for the Mobile World Conference in Barcelona. The trip around the city showed us the Grand Mosque, the Palace and a few old forts. All the buildings have to be only 4 stories' high and have to be painted in bland earthy colors to depict Omani culture. The vegetation is only shrubs and some short small trees. The terrain is sandy and barren but in certain key areas there is grass and flowers grown. These flowers are only of 5-6 types. Oman has oil and gets its main source of income from its oilwells. The trip around the city of Muscat was quite enjoyable and I can now confidently say that I have seen the City of Muscat.



We all had dinner and left the lobby area to go to our respective rooms as there was no information pending. As I prepared for bed at about 2200hrs. we were informed that the buses taking us to the convention center to get our luggage was waiting for us. I jumped out of bed and dressed up with the speed of greased lighting and rushed down to the lobby. About 10 Mini Bus were waiting for us Each bus had about 15 seats, but we were instructed to only seat 12 as we had to leave space for the bags. When we reached the Convention Centre, we found the bags all stacked up in rows according to the different airlines that had been forced to land in Muscat. 36 wide bodied planes were stuck in Muscat and so you can imagine the luggage arranged in this gigantic Convention Centre. The Oman Government had done it very well and we were escorted to our luggage without any hitch. All of us collected our luggage without a hitch. At last, our clothes, toiletries and medication were available to each and everyone. There were relief and jubilation in the bus as we returned to the hotel.

The 3rd of March dawned with much expectation. But at breakfast our hopes were dashed to the ground. We still had not seen any Qatar Airways personnel at the Hotel. A few of the passengers that went to the Qatar Airways office in Muscat were told to go away as they did not entertain any passengers from the diverted planes. The office was only to sell new tickets. The QA app was not helpful as it only showed our flight from Muscat to Doha. And we knew that Doha airport was closed due to an air strike on the tarmac. There was a general despondency felt all around by the passengers as we met in the lobby. Few of the passengers were getting notification from the British Embassy regarding rescue flights for UK citizens. The Malaysian Embassy noted that we had registered and that was all. We had our bags but nothing else was there to raise our spirits.

QA officials had not shown up at the hotels to talk to us and to reassure us. We were in the dark as to our onward journey. All my Malaysian contacts were not positive in their assessment of the situation. The discussion in the hotel lobby centered around the getting of a flight out of the 'No Fly Zone' area and flying home to KL. There were many flights from Muscat to India but an Indian Visa was required even for a transit passenger. Muscat to KL flights were all fully booked and of course expensive (RM 9000).

After dinner alone, as most of the passengers were eating at different times and the dining room was full with the locals breaking fast, I was getting a bit sad and depressed. I hung around the lobby watching some You Tube videos on my phone regarding the war and then made my sad way up to my room at 341. It was close to 2200 hrs. when I had a bath and was dressed in the hotel bathrobe, I decided to try to book a flight via the Oman Air App. As I was browsing, I noticed that Oman Air had a flight to KL on the 4th of March @ 1500 hrs. It cost Oman Rials 891.00 which translated to about RM 9000.00. In the mental state I was in, I just booked it with my credit card. As I keyed in the OTP number & when I thought everything was okay the screen lit up with the words "Payment Pending". I thought that there was some problem so I called my Credit Card Bank in Malaysia and I was relieved that the transaction went through. Within a few seconds the email appeared with my ticket issued and confirmed. I then made the relevant phone calls to friends and family to inform them that I was on the way back home. I could not really sleep as many things were going through my mind. One of those was the flight could be cancelled anytime and there were so many variables that were present. I was advised not to check out in case I had to come back if the plane was delayed or cancelled. (The hotel was being paid by

the Omani Government as their Tourist Board was funding all the passengers of the various flights).

4th March dawned early for me and I got ready for a quiet breakfast. I did not tell anyone that I had obtained a ticket and I quietly sat in my usual corner to eat a solid breakfast to sustain me till 1500 hrs. I went up to my room without socializing. I came down with my bag at about 1100 hrs. and straight went to the porch to get a Taxi. I saw one that was waiting there. I just grabbed it. The Taxi cost me 7 Omani Rials to the airport which is just about a mile away. I made it a point not to check out from the Hotel in case I had to come back. When I got into the airport, I saw that it was very crowded. I made my way to the Oman Airlines counter. As I was a priority customer holding a Gold Enrich card, I was given VIP treatment and I was checked in fast. My bags were taken and I was free to go into the airport terminal. It was around 12 noon and my flight was scheduled to leave at 1500 hrs. Checking the departure board I saw a whole slew of cancelled flights. But my flight WY 2823 was on the board and showed a takeoff time 1500 hrs. The gate was not shown and they said that it will be announced at 1400 hrs. I was anxious but not too worried. I kept looking at the board till the gate was announced at 1405 hrs. I then made my way to the gate and the passengers were ushered into the waiting lounge. The plane was a Boeing 737 Max and seemed small. The flight was only half full and I was quite comfortable in my economy isle seat with the other two seats empty. The plane was an hour on the Tarmac before it took off at around 1615 hours. The idea that the flight could be cancelled at any time was always on my mind and it was only when it was airborne that I felt okay.

The flight was unremarkable considering the turmoil of the previous few days. I landed at KLIA on the 5th March 2026 at 0230 hrs. and

was home by 0400 hrs. On reaching home I had a shower and could not really sleep. Sleep only came in fits and starts. It was really good to be home in my familiar surroundings.

I must thank God for my safe return and also all my friends and relatives who supported me when I was in Muscat. Without that emotional anchor I would have been lost.

Thus ended my sojourn in Muscat.

Abel W K Arumugam

March 2026