

Visit to an anchient mosque in the town of Nizwa

In a former quarter of the town of Nizwa we visited an anchient mosque (aprox. 15th century). Today the area is totally abandoned and one can only observe the still remaining ruins of some houses and the mosque. The mosque itself shows Persian influence and design. No serious restauration has been done and it is likely that even local people do not know the former mosque. A probable explanation for the abandonment of the mosque and the area is that Omani people may do not like “old things”, but prefer “modern things”. Interestingly, the whole place is showered with old broken pottery.

During the visit one could also observe a dwell right next to another mosque. An interesting explanation was that women could do the their washing and still be able to go to pray without going long distances.

Between the mosque and the city-centre of Nizwa peri-urban agriculture is practiced, mainly managed by Pakistani labour. During this time of the year various kinds of agricultural production was observed. Production of alfalfa as animal fodder and vegetables, such as egg-plants, potatoes, onions and pumkins for human consumption. People also grow sugarcane for both human (stalks) and animal (upper part) consumption.

Afternoon drive to Saiq (Al-Jabal-Al-Akhdar region)

The area around Saiq of the Al-Jabal-Al-Akhdar region was not accessible to public until recently due to a military base in the past. During an excursion in the 1990s spectacular terrace agriculture sytems were found. Three years ago the university of Kassel started to observe and do research within the four oases (Al'Ayn, Ash Sharayjah, Al'Qasha, Masayrat ar Ruwajah) and three altitude ranges (until 1000 masl, between 1000 to1500 masl and between 1500 and 2000 masl). Due to the height differences of the four oases crop production systems vary as well:

1. Between 1500-2000 masl: Production of some wheat, barley, alfafa, pomegranate, roses (for the production of rose water)
2. Between 1000-1500 masl: no roses, dates, citrus trees
3. Up to 1000 masl: only dates, like in Balad Seed

The university of Kassel is currently conducting socio-economic research of 16 families in the four oases. Families produce crops and animals, however there is a need of non-agricultural activities to make a living. Alarmingly, young people do not want to work in agriculture anymore. As a result the youngest farmer of these oases is 45 years old.

Research has also find out that it is most likely that global climate change has reached Oman. At the Al-Jabal-Al-Akhdar region it was used to be much more green and there were much more juniper and olive trees. Also fruit trees such as apricots and almonds were more ample. Problems of production maybe due to temperature change, since

there are certain chilling requirements for trees. These requirements are the overall chilling hours over 7.2 °C during one year. Over the last 15 years chilling hours have declined to 10 hours only. Hypothesis: the decline is one of the first effects of global warming in Oman. However, there are hardly any long term temperature records of the area and it is therefore still difficult to judge.

But one has to bear in mind that changes of weather and therefore of agricultural production may occur in the near future. But will farmers change their production in that region, taking into account that young farmers do not want to work in agriculture anymore? What are the alternatives for these people? May tourism be a source of income? When yes, what kind of tourism?