

## Muscat → Doha

### A lifeline road deep in the mountains of Oman.

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The first day of the Drive Project in Oman, we headed for a dry riverbed, called wadi in Arabic. Many people come here from urban Muscat for leisure and recreation. The highway was clean and high grade, even compared with ones in Japan. We went from the highway to an unpaved road that took us into the mountains. When locals can't see around an upcoming curve, they honk their horn to make sure another car isn't coming around the bend. Magnificent scenery unfolded the farther into the mountains we drove. Hiroshi Yoshimi of the Tahara Plant Quality Control Division, who was on his first trip overseas, was surprised that people

lived in this severe environment.

*"For them, this road is their lifeline. It was sobering to know that and then see an old Hilux parked in front of a house. On the highway it was the small things I noticed, like the sound of the wind whistling and the car's vibration, but when you're on this unpaved road, the basic car functions become so much more important. A breakdown would be the worst scenario out here. Driving along hugging a cliff, rocks could come falling down at any time. It made me really think how, more than anything, we have to make cars that don't cause people to worry."*

Water was flowing from a spring at the lowest part of the wadi, which people used to grow dates and other crops. Barefoot children were playing

soccer by the side of the road, while a goat was climbing up the rocks in jumps. Yoshimi felt a fierce pride in being a part of making cars that could handle this tough environment.

Learning that cars are used in inconceivable ways.

### Beyond imagination Car Usage

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We headed south from the rugged rocky region to the seashore. The rocks turned into fine sand, and we saw fishermen use a Hilux to haul their boat filled with fish out of the water. The sand continued to the base of the mountains, where it turned into a desert. Tomohiko Hayayama, who works in the same Tahara Plant Quality Control Division







and got stuck the first time he drove in the desert, learned firsthand how the locals use their cars in ways inconceivable to him. A Fortuner built with the engine he works on at the Tahara Plant got buried in the sand.

*“My first thought was ‘What? This is all it takes to make a car stop?’ I think there are definitely times when people need to use maximum acceleration too. Driving situations we typically call going past the red zone are also situations that could happen here. We often fall into the*

*trap of thinking that customers don’t use their cars well, but I realized that it’s us who are at fault for not being able to picture how people use their cars.”*

What the two members from the Tahara Plant both learned was how much trust people put in the Toyota vehicles they drive. It was worth going deep into the mountains of Oman just to find this out.

Local member Lavin Kaveriappa goes driving in the desert for fun almost every week. He comments,

*“The desert always teaches you something new.”* The Drive Project members experienced the significance of his words firsthand.

### **Oman’s diverse environment requires attention to detail.**

We left the desert and headed to the highest peak in Oman. We were climbing up a mountain over 2,300m above sea level in off-road conditions. While we were driving slowly with safety uppermost in mind, a school bus came barreling up from behind and passed us. This road is another lifeline road. Oman’s topography is diverse, and it’s easy to understand why people here need cars that can handle any kind of terrain, meaning the Land Cruiser. Toshiyuki Sekiya of the Advanced Technical Skills Institute, who has participated in every Continent, is proud at how the Land Cruiser and the Prado are widely





accepted, but also found things to improve that would make them ever better cars.

*“I’m a little concerned about brake and accelerator control at low speeds. There are a lot of speed bumps, and driving on mountain roads with a lot of curves you can’t see around really made me realize it. Seeing how the locals drive too, they seem daring behind the wheel but they’re actually performing a delicate dance between the accelerator and the brake when driving. So instead of*

*asking what the Middle East needs, if we pursue the commitment to detail that is Toyota’s vision, customers here will surely come to admire our cars even more.”*

After coming down from the mountain, we returned to Muscat on the beautiful highway, whose condition shows little wear thanks to the little rainfall the region receives. Local member Nitin Fernandes says with a laugh, *“You’ve still only seen five percent of Oman.”* We headed to our next destination of Qatar with some regret at having to move on.



Distance: 1,341km  
Duration: February 24-28, 2019  
Days: 5 days  
Vehicles: Land Cruiser 200, Fortuner, Prado, Hilux, Lexus LX570

