

**Tell me more about the UTMB event. What impact has this form of adventure tourism had on the local area and on Oman in general?**

Oman by UTMB is a complex trail race in a remote environment. In 2018, the first event was staged across a 137km course through challenging mountainous terrain. Runners complete the course over a number of hours - the winners in 2018 won the race in twenty hours - stopping off at 21 checkpoints along the way.

It took about ten months to plan the race and covered a wide range of departments with a delivery team of 287 people:

Event marketing/sales planning

Volunteer recruitment and training

Route design/trail work

Detailed emergency and medical planning

Event operations and logistics

International hosted media programme

Travel and accommodation planning

Elite athlete recruitment

Event staffing

This took a lot of work but none of it was wasted on the event alone - a lot of this work helps promote further tourism in Oman in the future. For example the event required over 100km of trail to be built or improved to facilitate the race.



**What impact did the 2018 event have on local people and local towns?**

The event started at Birkat Al Mouz and finished at Al Hamra and along its route 174 volunteers were recruited—they saw it as quite a privilege to be involved as nothing like this had happened in Oman before. Al Hamra sports club, Nizwa university and numerous community groups were targeted for this recruitment and they were trained in a whole range of skills so that the event would run smoothly. We worked with the sports club to develop part of their club to house the event command centre. Feedback has shown us that this event has kick-started sport in the wider area and more people are focussed on tourism there. It has inspired future generations as to what may be possible through participation in an active lifestyle.

Following the successful delivery of the event, we staged a team building night and thank you dinner for all volunteers at Oman by UTMB. Over 200 people attended the night and participated in the activities.

The UTMB required significant financial investment by the organisers and local communities and businesses were targeted to receive a proportion of that investment. For example, more than 500 hotel room nights, meals for event staff, local drivers and a whole array of food and drink supplies were needed from the local area. It is estimated that this totalled 15000 OMR. However, through the multiplier effect, this investment is far larger. 326 entrants flew in from more than 52 different countries. Many stayed in Oman before and after the race and required extra accommodation and entertainment. The event



also served as a fantastic piece of marketing and publicity for future tourism to Oman—for example, National Geographic featured the event in their journal and profiled the Al Hajar mountains as a 'must-do' for trail runners. Therefore the total economic benefit is likely to be closer to 2.4 million OMR.

Local doctors and medical professionals were asked to support the event at first aid stations as well as at hospitals should the runners require them. This involved some upskilling of local knowledge as well as the sharing of good practice amongst medical teams whom might otherwise have not had that opportunity.

### Were there any negative impacts?

As expected with the first event of its kind, there was a lack of event management experience in the local Omani people. However, this provided a good opportunity to engage volunteers with the process and build these skills in people. Hotel accommodation was spread out around the local area which meant extra efforts were needed to shuttle entrants to and from the start and finish lines.

There was limited mobile phone network access in the more remote areas so a satellite radio network had to be installed with satellite phones distributed around personnel. Three checkpoints were only accessible via foot or helicopter so we had to plan carefully for any eventuality, including running out of supplies in these areas.

### The Middle East is known for being quite traditional - did the UTMB event create any conflict?

There was no outward conflict experienced throughout the race weekend itself, in large part due to a long process of consultation with the local communities in the months leading up to the event. There was a widespread programme to educate locals on the work we were doing and the benefits it would bring to the communities in the short, medium and long term. It was important that the event was respectful of the traditional villages in the area and a lot of cultural understanding was gained from the Walis (local governors). The result was that local people felt they owned the event and were proud to host it. For example, the finish line was very close to the Al Hamra mosque. During prayer times we reduced the music volume to an acceptable level. The mosque then supported the event by helping to recruit volunteers, as well as staging a 1.5km children's race.



### What is the positive legacy of the UTMB?

The race will now be an annual event and there are plans for other similar events to take place, such as the Haute Route Mountain Road cycling race. The same expertise and infrastructure can be used without the need to retrain volunteers and have the same outlay of money. The same supply chains and accommodation options can also be used.

100km of trails through the mountains have been improved, both for recreation and for day to day use by local people. We

are working with the Ministry of Tourism to put signage along key routes so that they can be used more easily by tourists. There are plans for additional accommodation options to be built and local farmers and villagers are diversifying into bed and breakfast businesses as a result of the UTMB. Omantel are increasing the internet coverage in the area which will aid these new businesses reaching a 'global' audience.

In the 2018 event, eighteen local people ran in the event, and represented their country. Multiple distances will be added to future events, encouraging a more active lifestyle in Omanis and growing the sport in the country.

