

Roedl, Meyer-Reumann Middle East Ltd.

A trip to Oman from Nov. 23rd to 26th, 2008 - Allah's ways are wondrous ...

I haven't been to Oman for a long time. Some months ago, with the friendly assistance of the German embassy in Muscat, we made an application for a lawyer's office at the Omani Ministry of Commerce. On the telephone we were promised to receive a "positive reply". I intended to support this goodwill by one-to-one talks and used it as an opportunity to plan my next trip to Oman.

I planned it for November 25th 2008. But that was not possible because on exactly that day the public sector was celebrating the Omani National Day. The reason for the National Day is the take-over of governmental businesses by Sultan Quabus from his father on 23rd July 1970. Though this day is a very worthy occasion for a National Day, the date in midsummer is not really suitable for the soldiers on military parades. Also many potential visitors might prefer to spend this time abroad. Hence Oman rescheduled the National Day to the birthday of Sultan Quabus, November 18th. In the year 2008 this day again was unsuitable for a National Day, because it hardly could be connected to a weekend. Consequently Oman chose Tuesday, November 25th, because Thursday, 26th was closed for public offices anyway. Choosing Tuesday, 25th made it paramount that the day between Wednesday, 26th was declared public holiday to be the bridging day. Against this background it was clear, that it is impossible to get an appointment with the Ministry of Commerce on November, 25th, 2008. I was flexible and rescheduled the meeting date two days earlier, which was worked out very well.

Air Arabia had the best flight connections and that is why on 2008-11-23 I went to Sharjah, where I was amazed by the new, very beautiful terminal building. The flight itself was perfect. Air Arabia brought me on an Airbus plane safe and on time to Muscat.

My first appointment right after arriving was with the Ministry of Commerce. I had brought my GPS device with me and had already marked the Ministry as my destination. So – I thought – nothing could go wrong. I would make it just in time. Also during my ride the GPS guided well; but as I was only some 100 meters away from the Ministry, my GPS changed its mind and told me that I had another 9 kilometers to drive. As I didn't know better, I followed the instruction. Having almost finished the 9 kilometers and believing to have the Ministry of Commerce in front of me, my GPS device again changed its mind and told me that the Ministry was 11 kilometers away.

I couldn't keep my appointment anymore and told the Ministry via mobile and via my office in Dubai that I was indeed in Muscat, but that I was kept busy with touristic exercises. As I

almost finished driving back the 11 kilometers I fooled my GPS device: I stopped in front of a gas station and asked for the Ministry. And you don't believe it: It was only 300 meters away from my position. I left the car and took my "Hand-Mercedes" (my trolley suitcase) and walked the rest of the way. With one hour delay I reached my goal.

My Omani dialog partner at the Ministry met my delay with typical Omani politeness "No problem". After the usual introduction I had the sense that my partner didn't really know, what I was there for. Apparently no one knew anything of an application I had made. The error could be cleared fast though: They thought that I was a new applicant to make a new application. Giving some details they knew immediately of the application I made some months ago. After a short telephone call it took about a minute and someone brought the confirmation of the Omani Cabinet that it had granted its approval of my application for a company for legal consultants. I would have been happy to get a subsidiary. Now I had a real company – perfect!!! The finalization of the formal running battle shouldn't be too time consuming and then as I was the first service provider ever to get such company in Oman. It made me very proud.

The next day I had my first visit with the German ambassador, which of course was glad that a German lawyer's office would like to settle in Muscat. My intended short introduction became a long fruitful discussion and I received valuable details and basics of Oman and much interesting information about the country and its inhabitants. The ambassador felt that Germany is still not present enough in Oman and German companies do not have the share in Oman's economic and business life that they could be able to get. My conclusion was: There is work to do!

The same evening my old good friend Alfred Strolla invited me to a reception he was holding that day at his house. 1989 when I changed from Saudi Arabia to Dubai, Alfred was partner of Coopers & Lybrand and my office-neighbor in the Dubai World Trade Center. Later Alfred moved from Dubai to Abu Dhabi and joined Deloitte & Touche. Soon after I followed him and opened up an office in Abu Dhabi, too. Now, many years after that, I am following him to Muscat again. Alfred had really got from the ground. Within five years he expanded the Deloitte & Touche office in Oman from five to fifty-five certified public accountants. A remarkable achievement in deed!

The reception was a clear mirror of Alfred's position in Muscat. Among the guests were for example the President of the Omani Chamber of Industry and Commerce with his General Manager, the Chairman of the Omani Energy Board with his personal adviser and – behold – the Lord Mayor of Muscat. On my table sat even more notables. Next to the Mayor of Muscat there sat the head of Omantel, the "Omani Telecom Company, the head of the Oman Arab Bank, the chairman of a leading trading house from Muscat, the manager (an Italian) of the Intercontinental Hotel, where I stayed the night, the Italian Ambassador and an advisor of the

Omani Energy Authority. Although I know it was coincidence, I felt like Alfred had organized the reception just for me! He introduced me to everybody as the German miracle of a legal consultant, so I had significant efforts to adjust it at least a little bit. Each of the notables had a certain connection to Germany and I felt that I would have needed years to learn to know all of them, who were sitting at my table at Alfred's reception.

Because the application procedure at the Ministry of Commerce was in its final stage, I intended to introduce myself to the Justice Ministry. There I met the Manager of Public Relations. Though I entered without an appointment we had an almost one hour talk about the Omani legal system, the training of Omani judges and the position of Oman within the GCC. The Heads of the GCC-Countries were just about to meet in the Al Bustan Hotel off-Muscat for the GCC-Summit. A major topic was the development of the GCC into a political union. At the end of the conversation I received my "present": Voluminous documents about the Omani judicial system as well as the compilation of the most important Omani laws, law comparative studies and judgment volumes about criminal law and civil law judgments. Though all is completely written in Arabic, it was a valuable treasure for our library.

My trip had been short but successful. A new chapter in building up the Roedl, Meyer-Reumann ME-Network was opened. Oman presented itself again as a paragon, a "Musterländle", and the Omanis had shown again their open hearts for foreigners and their generous hospitality.

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