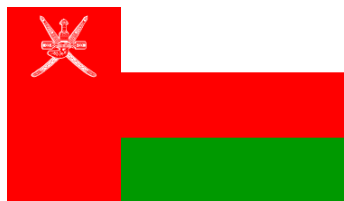




THE SULTANATE OF OMAN



COUNTRY INSIGHT



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GENERAL FACTS

AREA : 309 500 km²

CAPITAL : Mascate

POPULATION : 2,8 millions inhabitants

POLITICAL SYSTEM : Absolute Monarchy

RULER : His Majesty Sultan Qabous Bin Saïd Al Bu Saidi
(photo ci-contre)

RELIGION : Islam (mainly Ibadhi Muslims)

LANGUAGE : Arabic

CURRENCY : Omani Rial (OMR)

GEOGRAPHY

The Sultanate of Oman has border with Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arabin Emirates. It has 1700km coast line along the Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman. The Musandam Peninsula forms the Ormuz straight together with Iran.

MUSCAT

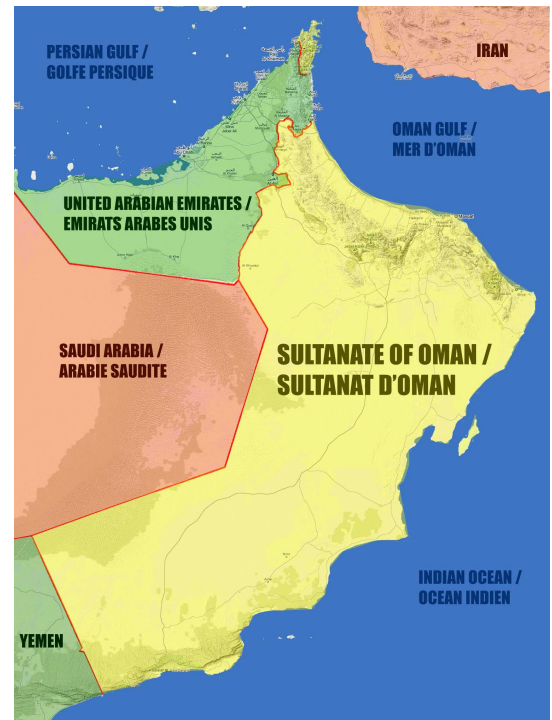
Muscat's region the the more populated one. Even though, as for a capital, it remains quite a small city. Surrounded by mountains on the east and south, the city grew up toward the west along a narrow costal plain. If we consider Muscat itself without its suburb, it is the smallest capital of the world with an area of only 3 km² .

WESTERN HAJAR

Jebel Shams, the higher peak of the country reaching 3009 m, is in this mountain range.

On the northern side, long and uneven valleys flow toward the sea : Wadi Mistal, Wadi Bani Kharus, Wadi Bani Awf, Wadi Sahtan. These valley host many mountain oases, nested at the bottom of the valleys as well as hanging on the cliffs.

On the southern side, the most oriental part of the range is the Jebel Akhdhar's "plateau", quite a wide high area with an altitude varying from 1800 to 2400m. The cooler weather allows the growing of fruits and vegetables of temperated countries. The wild vegetation is of a dry mediteranean type and more abundant : wild olive trees, juniper trees, etc...



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Quite long canyons flow down on the southern side (Wadi Muaydeen, Wadi Tanuf, Wadi Kamah).

In the central part of the range the southern side is made of sloping limestone slabs cut by narrow though short canyons.

The highest peak is located at the far east of the range. Jebel Shams (3009m) overlooks Wadi Sahtan on the north and Wadi Nakhr on the south. Wadi Nakhr is better known as "Arabia's Grand Canyon" and its depth at some places reaches 1500m.

SAMAIL GAP

It is a low hilly and rocky area located between the West Hajar and the Eastern Hajar. It has always been the main way to cross the mountain range; now the highway from Nizwa to Muscat also follows it.

EASTERN HAJAR

The western part of this range has a very uneven relief and hosts Wadi Dayqah, the wadi with the biggest flow in all Oman. It's also in this area that we can find the last remaining Arabian Thors, animals which look like wild goats.

The rest of the range is a wide plateau with its highest point around 2400m. It is a very dry place and it houses a very sparse population of Bedouin shepherds. However, many of the valleys flowing from there are splendid canyons blessed with a lot of water flowing all year long making them green and luxuriant. On the northern side, the canyons arrive to the sea: Wadi Shab and Wadi Tiwi. On the southern side, water flows toward the Wahiba Sands like in Wadi Bakhid where we can swim or do canyoning just a few steps from the desert.

THE SEA OF OMAN

The coast west of Muscat is a coastal plain approximately 40km wide. The water flowing from the mountains trickles into it and can be drawn lower down for agricultural purposes. It's a densely populated area.

East of Muscat, along about 50 km, mountains dip into the sea and form a wonderful landscape made of numerous secluded coves.



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Further east, the sea is dominated by the high plateau of the Eastern Hajar and the coastline consists in smaller shelves punctuated by sandy or rocky beaches. It leads to Ras Al Had, the cape located at the limit between the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean.



CENTRAL OMAN

Between the northern mountains and the mountains of Dhfar, a wide deserts area, mostly drear, offers in some places spectacular and unexpected landscapes.



The Wahiba Sands start on foot of the Eastern Hajar and stretches along the Indian Ocean for 300km.

The Rub Al Khali (Empty Quarter) is the well known wide desert of Arabia, the most arid and inhospitable of the world. Mainly located in Saudi Arabia, it goes beyond the Omani border.



A salt desert, Umm As Samim, lies not far from the border with the United Arabian Emirates.

The coast of the Indian Ocean is very wild and offers diverse landscapes : sometimes rocky, sometimes unendable beaches, and even white sand dunes dipping into the sea...

DHOFAR

Dhofar is a particular region in Oman : it has a different climate, fauna, and flora. This region is blessed by the monsoon's tails which are blocked by dhofari mountains from July to September. The weather becomes at that period tropical humid. The mountains become all green, and we can see cows and camels pasture on together in abundant prairies...



Known in the Antiquity as "Arabia Felix" (The Lucky Arabia), Dhofar was part, together with the kingdom of Hadramaut (in actual Yemen), of the main frankincense production area, which was at that time more valued than gold. This resin brought wealth and prosperity to the region.



MUSANDAM

This omani enclave in the United Arabian Emirates forms the Ormuz straight on the arabic side. It's a strategic area that makes Oman the guardian of the Gulf. It's also a wonderful place known as the "Arabic Norway", because of its uneven coastline where mountains higher than 2000m dip in the sea and create landscapes which remind of the norwegian fjords.



FAUNA & FLORA

The Sultanate of Oman is a desertic country which host fully adapted to aridity. There are more than 100 species acacias, agaves, et and many bush with succulent or tough leaves. After the rains a carpet of sparse grass covers soil. In high places giant juniper trees and wild olive tree replaces the acacias.



Despite the little available water, thanks to the irrigation system called "falaj", thought to have been brought more than 3000 years ago by the Persians, the agriculture is widespread and diverse in Oman. The difference of altitudes and thus of weather allows the growing of many fruits: dates, oranges, limes, bananas, mangoes, papayas, melons, watermelons, apricots, peaches, pomegranates, walnuts, etc...



Dhofar with its different climate, has many endemic plants. Boswellia Sacra (Frankincense tree), Dragon Blood trees, Baobabs are some of the most unexpected species.

In the northern mountains, we find quite a lot of Arabian fauna: jackals, scorpions, snakes, partridges, predatory birds, and gazels. Arabian Tahrs are not many and confined to so secluded and difficult to reach areas. Some Arabian leopards and wolves are also still living in Dhofar. In the central region there is a sanctuary of the Arabian oryx.



Oman has waters incredibly well stocked with fishes. The aquatic fauna is very diverse: many multicolored tropical fish and numerous marine turtles which swim next to the coast and come to lay eggs.

Marine birds are also plenty, above all next to the lagoons and along the coast of the Indian Ocean. In the mountains, you also see often predatory birds (Egyptian vultures, black vultures, and eagles). Some colorful birds can also be seen in the palm gardens, like the Indian rollers or the bee-eaters.



HISTORY

ANTIQUITY

During the antiquity, Dhofar was a very rich kingdom. It was at that time closer to the kingdom of Hadramout (in actuality Yemen) than to the northern Oman. Production and trade of Frankincense, as well as a particular climate allowing breeding livestock easily, gave it wealth and fame. It was described by Roman and Greek travellers under the mythical name of "Arabia Felix"



The northern mountains were then known as the Kingdom of Majan. It was linked with the more advanced civilizations of Mesopotamia, and it is thought to have been an important provider of copper.

PERSIAN OCCUPATION

In its whole history, Oman hasn't been subjected to a lot of foreign occupation. Nevertheless, the Persians deeply influenced Oman with successive occupations. They are said to have built many ways in the mountains, and above all have brought the irrigation system called "falaj" which is a key element of Omani culture.



ISLAMIC PERIOD

Omanis are proud to have been one of the first people to adopt Islam peacefully. It was also the beginning of a prosperous period.

Blessed with a 1700km long coastline, guardian of the Strait of Hormuz, opened toward Asia as well as Africa, Oman naturally developed outside. With trading posts to India, Pakistan, and East Africa, Omani sailors quickly took control together with the Yemenis and the Egyptians, of maritime trade on the Indian Ocean: they used to use monsoon winds to navigate, following an annual cycle leading them to India, Africa, and then back to Oman.

THE PORTUGUESE

At the beginning of the XVIth centuries, the Portuguese came through the Cape of Good Hope and reached the east African coast. The legend says that Ibn Majid, the most famous Omani sailor, guided the Portuguese to India. Some years later, they came back, with the knowledge they learned from Arab sailors and European boats which were better armed than Arab ones. They quickly dominated the trade on the Indian Ocean. They took advantage of the divisions among Omani tribes to quickly triumph over Omanis. Even though their influence on Oman was limited: as they were only interested in controlling trade, they just occupied the main ports of the country and never settled inside.



THE RECONQUEST

After one century of Portuguese domination, under the impetus of Imam Bin Saif Al Ya'aruba who managed uniting the tribes, Omanis drove the Portuguese out. It was the starting point of a new period of prosperity for the country.

Quickly Omanis took back their former possessions in India, Pakistan and East Africa, and again dominated the trade routes in the Indian Ocean. The Empire of Oman reached its climax at the beginning of the XIX century when they introduced the growing of cloves in Zanzibar.

THE BRITISH INFLUENCE

The arrival in XIX century in the Indian Ocean of the British and the Dutch, who by then started their industrial revolution, marked the end of Oman's prosperity. The country lost step by step all its possession and the British imposed an economical domination over Oman.

The Sultan at several times received the help of the British to maintain the unity of the country and put down rebellions. It happened especially during the "Jebel Akhdhar's War", against a background of oil rush.

OMANI REVIVAL

1970 Sultan Said bin Taimour Al Bu Saidi, rather conservative, was toppled by its son, His Majesty Sultan Qabous Bin Said Al Bu Saidi, actual ruler of Oman.

It coincided with the first incomes from oil and marked a turning point in the history of Oman.

Sultan Qaboos quickly established peace in the country, putting a stop to the communist rebellion in Dhofar and granting amnesty to the former rebels.

In opposition to neighboring countries racing for modernity, Oman chose a more balanced development which we could qualify of "sustainable" . Sultan opened his country, to provide it with modern facilities, but ensured that it keeps its traditions. He particularly worked out to develop all the regions to avoid a depopulation of the country side. He supports traditional agriculture. He also and above all developed a good network of public services (hospitals and schools) reaching even rural and isolated areas. The development of road infrastructure follows the same vein : highways are built to link the bigger cities of the country, as well as smaller roads and tracks to serve up to the smaller hamlet.



سعيد بن سعيد 1071 1080 م



سعيد بن سلطان 1004 1056 م



سعيد بن سعيد 1913 1932 م



سعيد بن سعيد 1888 1913 م



قابوس بن سعيد 1972 - ... م



سعيد بن تيمور 1932 1970 م



PEOPLE & SOCIETY

PEOPLE

Population density is very low in Oman (14 inhabitants/km²). People now mostly live in cities, although the cities are quite small and look more like an aggregation of villages. A many Omanis live in Muscat because they work there, they remain very attached to their village and come back there every week-end.

Omanis have a tribal society. The surname in Oman is name of the tribe and all tribes' names have a meaning. In every village, wilaya, or town, there is a majority tribe. The tribe is something important for Omanis : they often know the story of their tribe and when 2 people meet the tribe is one of the first subject they talk about.

Oman has many different ethnical groups. The main ethnical groups are :

- . Arabs : They are said to have originally come from Yemen and Mesopotamia a very long time ago. Among arabs, there are also different groups like for example bedouins (people living near sand desert) and chawawis (people from the mountains). They have much in common but also many cultural differences like clothes, dialects, and customs.

- . Dhofaris : They live in Dhofar and are also Semitic people. Those living on the coast have been mixed with African blood. They are mainly Sunni, and have their own dialect.

- . Baloochis : They come from Baloochistan, former British colony that now belongs to Pakistan. They talk Baloochi language of Persian origin.

- . Omanis from Africa : They come from former colonies and trading posts, mainly from Zanzibar.

There are also more recent immigrants, mainly Indian (many coming from Kerala), Bengalis, Pakistanis, and Malays, Indonesians, Yemenis, Egyptians, Sudanis, and Africans. They represent about 20% of total population. They are often employed for difficult and not well paid jobs in construction or restoration sectors, but many have a good management jobs in private companies.

RELIGION

Oman is a strongly Muslim country. Most Muslims are Shia Ibadhis. Ibadhi Islam is said to be rigorous, because it



very close to Coran's Writing. That's why also it is a very tolerant religion : Ibadis for example always refused to fight other muslims and have much respect for "People of the Book" (Jews and Christians) who pray the same God. Some Christians and Hindous (all of them foreigners) also live in Oman and can practice their religion freely ; the Ministry of Religious Affairs even helped to build Churches in Muscat.

Because Oman is an Islamic state, alcohol is not freely sold in the country. Non-muslim expatriates can ask for licence to buy alcohol in one shop in Muscat. Otherwise, alcohol can be consumed in hotels and bars having a licence to serve it. It is obviously forbidden to drink in public places.

On Fridays all businesses (even restaurants) are closed during the collective Firday Pray.

During Ramadan, restaurants are closed during the day, bars and hotels don't sell any alcohol (even at night), and it is forbidden to drink, eat or smoke in public.

LANGUAGES

Arabic is the official language. Many dialects (all with an arabic base) are talked in each region. The language for business though is English.

HOLIDAYS

- . Eid Al Fitr starts at the end of the month of Ramadan ; it marks the end of fasting (10th September, in 2010)
- . Eid Al Adhah (Eid Al Kibir) celebrates the sacrifice of Abraham (28th November, in 2010)
- . Eid Miloud celebrates the birth of Prophet Mohamed
- . Awal Muharram is the Muslim New Year
- . 18th November : National Day (Birthday of Sultan Qaboos)
- . 23rd July celebrates the day when Sultan Qaboos got the rulership

ECONOMICAL AND SOCIAL SITUATION

Oman is quite a rich country.

Incomes from oil exploitation allowed the country to quickly develop since 1970. His Majesty Sultan Qabous is very careful with his people and don't want any Omani to be poor. Nobody is hungry in Oman and public services (school,



hospitals and roads), are free for all Omanis and reach even secluded and difficult to reach places. Access to water and electricity is also free, but only the poorer people don't pay for their consumption.

School system is quite performant, and above all of an easy access : school is not mandatory but free as well as schoolbus ; that's why close to 100% of the children (girls as well as boys) go to school. On the other hand, there is a limited number of places in public university, and they are given to the best students. so, young Omanis have a good cultural background but many don't have any specialized qualifications.

When Sulatn Qaboos came to power, there was no administration in the coutry. And the the income from oil industry had to be quickly redistributed so that the people can increase its standard of living. That's why many civil servants were employed. To prepare the post-petrol era, a politic of "Employment omanisation" was impulsed to reduce the number of civil servant and increase the number of nationals working in the private sector.

Main natural resources are oil(stocks should last 20 more years) and gaz (stocks for more than 80 years). To prepare the country redeveloppment, the government is building first-class road equipments and industrial centers to attract companies and stimulate private sector.



CLIMATE

Omanis always talk about 2 seasons : the "hot" and the "cold"

The "hot" season starts in April and lasts in October. Temperatures are at that time always above 35 / 40 degrees during the day. During the hottest days of summer, temperature can reach 50 or more degrees during the day and more than 30 during the night.

The "cold" season is in winter, from November to March. Temperatures are then very pleasant. It can even sometimes be cool even in low-lands. Average temperatures are around 25 degrees during the day and 15 during the night. In high altitude it is then cold (over 2000 m, the temperatures drop down 0 during the night).

Northern Oman is influenced by the Mediterranean depression system. Rainfalls are unregular and can occur any time during the year, even if they are more likely to happen in Winter and at season changes. There can also be convection thunderstorms in the mountains.

Dhofar has a completely different weather : a dry season and a rainy season. The Monsoon's winds hit the mountains of Dhofar and the region is then foggy and all green. After the rainy season all the greenery dries and the leaves of trees fall.



FOOD & BEVRAGES

FOOD

Omani breakfast is rather salty (bean, broad beans, eggs with omani bread). The national breakfast drink is milk tea. In the restaurants we find also Indian breakfasts : Dal (lentils Kima (mince, tomato, and peas

Lunch is the most important meal. It is always made of rice cooked in many different ways but always delicious : Mand Kabsa, Maqboos, Kabuli, Biryani, etc... And it comes with meat, chicken or fish.

Dinner is usually lighter than lunch : meat or vegetables with bread.

Fish is abundant, diverse, and very cheap ; delightful

We find in Oman many types of bread : Omani bread, lebnat tannoor, Chapathis, Barotas, etc...

Some special dishes :

- Laham Shua : Goat, mutton, or beef meat braised and cooked inside a big hole for many hours
- Laham Maqli : Fried meat cooked with garlic and spices
- Brochettes

Quelques typical dishes :

- Harris : chicken and wheat
- Arsia : rice paste and chicken or meat
- Thiridh : meat or fish cooked with water and vegetables mixed with omani bread
- Halwa : a very typical confectionary to be eaten together with omani coffee (qahwa)
- Midloul : date paste with butter to be eaten together with omani coffee (qahwa)
- Awal : dried shark

BEVRAGES

"Qahwa" is the national drink. It's a quite light cardamom-flavored drink. We usually eat fruits, then dates or halwa before drinking coffee. It is served always in 3 cups, whatever the



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number of guests : each one drinks after the other one. It is never sweetened.

Tea is usually served with sugar and milk. It is called "Chai".

We find in Oman delicious and quite cheap fresh fruit juices. Don't be afraid to try them : there is no problem with water in Oman!

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