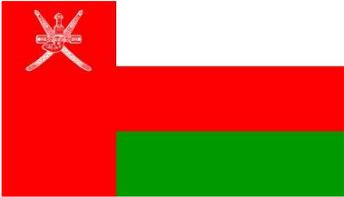


# SULTANATE OF OMAN



## COUNTRY INSIGHTS



# INDEX

- GENERAL FACTS ..... 3
- GEOGRAPHY ..... 3
  - MUSCAT ..... 3
  - WESTERN HAJAR ..... 3
  - SAMAIL GAP ..... 4
  - EASTERN HAJAR ..... 4
  - THE SEA OF OMAN ..... 4
  - CENTRAL OMAN ..... 5
  - DHOFAR ..... 5
  - MUSANDAM ..... 5
- FAUNA UND FLORA ..... 6
- HISTORY ..... 7
  - ANTIQUITY ..... 7
  - PERSIAN OCCUPATION ..... 7
  - ISLAMIC PERIOD ..... 7
  - THE PORTUGUESE ..... 8
  - THE RECONQUEST ..... 8
  - THE BRITISH INFLUENCE ..... 8
  - OMANI RENAISSANCE ..... 9
- PEOPLE AND SOCIETY ..... 10
  - PEOPLE ..... 10
  - RELIGION ..... 11
  - LANGUAGES ..... 11
  - HOLIDAYS ..... 11
  - ECONOMICAL AND SOCIAL SITUATION ..... 12
- CLIMATE ..... 13
- FOOD AND BEVERAGE ..... 14
  - FOOD ..... 14
  - BEVRAGES ..... 14
- BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 16

**GENERAL FACTS**

**AREA:** 309 500 km<sup>2</sup>

**CAPITAL :** Muscat

**POPULATION :** 4.6 millions inhabitants (2019)

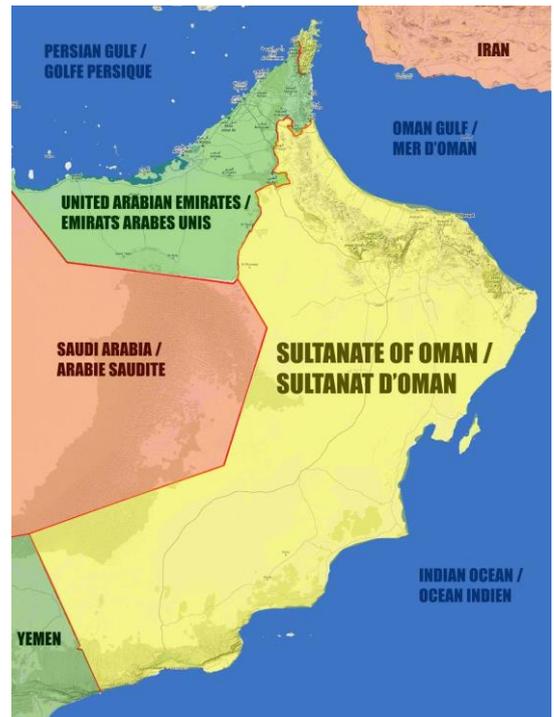
**POLITICAL SYSTEM:** Absolute Monarchy

**RULER:** His Majesty Sultan Haithem Bin Tareq Al Said, succeeding Sultan Qabous Bin Said Al Said

**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 Arab 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 is 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 coastal plain. If we consider Muscat itself (the old city) without its suburb, it is the smallest capital of the world with an area of only 3 km<sup>2</sup>.



**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 valleys 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



## SULTANATE OF OMAN

## COUNTRY INSIGHT

growing of fruits and vegetables of temperate climates. The wild vegetation is of a dry Mediterranean type and more abundant: wild olive trees, juniper trees, etc...

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

In the central part of the range the southern side consists 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 Western 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. It hosts wadi Dayqah, the wadi with the bigger flow in all Oman. It's also in this area that we can find the last remaining Arabian Thars, animals which look like wild goats.



The rest of the range is a wide plateau which highest point is 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 Al Arbeyeen, Wadi Taab, Wadi Shab, and Wadi Tiwi, among others. On the southern side, the water flows toward the Wahiba Sands like in Wadi Bani Khalid 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 mountain trickle 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 wild secluded coves.

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 Dhofar, a wide desertic 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 in several locations.

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 never-ending beaches, and even white sand dunes...



## 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 Dhofar 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 Hadramout (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 UND FLORA**

The Sultanate of Oman is a desertic country which hosts a fully adapted to aridity. There are more than 100 species of acacias, agaves, et and many bushes with succulent or tough leaves. After the rains a carpet of sparse grass covers the soil. In high places giant juniper trees and wild olive trees 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 wide spread and diverse in Oman. The difference of altitudes and thus of weather allows the growing of many fruits: dates, oranges, limes, bananas, mangos, papayas, melons, watermelons, apricots, peaches, pomegranates, walnuts, etc.



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



In the northern mountains, we find quite a lot of Arabian foxes, jackals, scorpions, snakes, partridges, predatory birds, and gazelles. Arabian Tahrs are not many and confined to some 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 is.



Oman has waters incredibly well stocked with fishes. The aquatic fauna is very diverse: many multicolor tropical fishes, 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 mountain, we 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 Antiquity, Oman was in relation with the 3 first great civilizations (Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Indus Valley). Between 2600 and 2000 B.C., a civilization called Umm An Nar develops in Northern Oman. Many remainings are still to be seen from that era, especially the so-called beehive tombs. Some historians think it might be the land of Magan, mentioned in Mesopotamian literature.

Actual Dhofar is sometimes seen as the Land of Punt (meaning « Land of Gods »), mentioned in Egyptian hieroglyphs. Later (VIII B.C. – VI A.D.), Dhofar was part of the so-called south Arabic civilization: several kingdoms sharing many common points, especially the same writing system. This region was probably part of the kingdom of Hadramout. It was described by Greek and Latin travelers as Arabia Felix.



## PERSIAN OCCUPATION

Northern Oman was part of the Persian Empire around 500 B.C. We believe they built many paths (some still visible in the mountain) and introduced the “falaj” system for irrigation.

## ISLAMIC PERIOD

Oman is proud to have entered Islam during the life of the Prophet Mohamed willingly.

In 751, the first Ibadhi Imam was elected in Nizwa. The Ibadhi Imamate is a religious and political system based on election. Its flexible organization allowed it to continue despite times of foreign occupation or dynastic developments.

In the 9th century, the Al Yahmadi tribe played a predominant role.

In the 11th and 12th centuries, Oman was under Seldjouk rule.

In 1154, local Al Nabhani dynasty takes control of Oman and ruled with the title of King almost continuously until 1470. They had their capital in Bahla and are at origin of the actual architecture of the fort.



During this era (and probably also during the antiquity), Omanis, Persians, Yemenis, and Egyptians, take part to the maritime trade in the Indian Ocean: using Monsoon's winds they were following a yearly cycle to Africa, India, and back.



**THE PORTUGUESE**

At the beginning of the 16th centuries, the Portuguese went through the Cape of Good Hope and reached the eastern 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 Arabic 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.



تركي بن سعيد 1071 1080 هـ



سعيد بن سلطان 1004 1056 هـ



سليمان بن سعيد 1913 1932 هـ



سعيد بن تركي 1880 1913 هـ

Quickly Omanis took back the possessions of the Portuguese 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 under the rule of Said Bin Sultan who moved its capital to Zanzibar and introduced the growing of cloves in Zanzibar.

**THE BRITISH INFLUENCE**

The arrival in 19th 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.



فارس بن سعيد 1977 - ... هـ



سعيد بن نجيب 1932 1970 هـ

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 RENAISSANCE

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.

The first revenues from oil arrived at the same time and it 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.

Oman developed the country a way we could now qualify as "sustainable". The 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.

The progress of the country was so stunning that the name of "Renaissance" (in Arabic "Al Nahda") was given to the reign of Sultan Qaboos.

Qaboos Bin Said Al Said passed away in January 2020 and his cousin Sultan Haithem Bin Tareq Al Said succeeded him. He quickly assessed that he will follow the same path for internal affairs as well as for foreign affairs.



PEOPLE AND 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. Also, many Omanis live in Muscat because they work there, but they remain very attached to their village and come back there every weekend.



Omani have a tribal society. The surname in Oman is the 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 ethnies 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 (mostly living near sand desert) and Chawis (people from the mountain). They have much in common but also many cultural differences like clothes, dialects, and customs.



. Dhofaris: They live in Dhofar and are also of Semitic origin. Those living on the coast have been mixed with African blood. They are mainly Sunnites and have their own language called "Jabali".

. Baluchis: They come from Baluchistan, former Omani colony that now belongs to Pakistan. They talk Baluchi, a language of Persian origin.



There are also more recent immigrants, mainly Indians (many coming from Kerala), Bengalis, Pakistanis, and also Malays, Indonesians, Yemenis, Egyptians, Sudanese, and Africans. They represent about 40% of total population. They are often employed for difficult and not well-paid jobs in construction or restauration sectors, but many have also good qualified jobs in private companies, as well as in the private sector.

## RELIGION

Oman is a Muslim country. Muslims here are mostly Ibadhis. Ibadhi Islam is said to be rigorous, because people try to follow as good as possible the rules of the Coran. It is also very tolerant: 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. They are non-violent and give importance to the "Great Jihad" (in opposition to the "Small Jihad, which is armed fight against infidels), better called "Jihad Al Nafs" which is a personal inner fight to become better in terms of virtue.

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 license to buy alcohol in one shop in Muscat. Otherwise, alcohol is available in hotels and bars having a license to serve it. It is obviously forbidden to drink in public places.

On Fridays all businesses (even restaurants) are closed during the collective Friday 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. Some Omanis also talk Baluchi or Swahili. You'll also hear a lot of Hindi / Urdu. The language for business is English.

## HOLIDAYS

. **Eid Al Fitr** starts at the end of the month of Ramadan; it marks the end of fasting

. **Eid Al Adhah** (Eid Al Kibir) celebrates the sacrifice of Abraham



- . **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 **Al Nahda**, 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, and poorer people enjoy social rates.



School system is quite performant, and above all of an easy access: school is not mandatory but free as well as transportation to school; that's why close to 100% of the children (girls as well as boys) go to school. A reform of scholarship in 2011 for superior education allowed a majority of youth to study, which was before reserved to a minority.



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



Main natural resources are oil (reserves should last 20 more years) and gas (reserves for more than 80 years). To prepare the country redevelopment, the government is building first-class roads and industrial centers to attract companies and stimulate private sector. Tourism is seen as another key sector.



The economic crisis due to COVID-19 puts Oman in a difficult economical situation. But the solidity of Oman's development (good educational system, good health system, excellent infrastructures), its young population, and economical perspectives in the Indian Ocean, are good to signs for a prosperous future



## 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, the 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 higher altitude it is then cold (over 2000 m, the temperatures can drop down 0 during the night).



Northern Oman is influenced by the Mediterranean depression system. Rainfalls are unregular and can occur at any time during the year, even if they are more likely to happen in Winter an ant 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 tails hit the mountains of Dhofar between July and September and the region is then foggy and all green. After the rainy season all the greenery dries and the leaves of the trees fall.



## FOOD AND BEVERAGE

### 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: Mandi, 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, lebnani, tannoor, Chapathis, Barotas, etc...

Some special dishes :

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

Some 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)
- **Midlouk:** 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 cardomom-flavored coffee . Omanis drink at any time of the day. We usually eat fruits, then dates or halwa before drinking coffee. It is served always in 3 cups, whatever the 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!

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



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