

OMAN in Perspective

An Orientation Guide



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CHAPTER 1: GEOGRAPHY

Introduction

The Middle Eastern nation of Oman, strategically located on the Strait of Hormuz, lies directly across from Iran. Although slightly smaller than the state of Kansas, Oman is the largest country in the region after Yemen and Saudi Arabia.^{1, 2} The country shares land borders with the United Arab Emirates on the northwest, Saudi Arabia to the west, and Yemen to the southwest.³ The Ru'us al-Jibal region on the northern tip of the Musandam Peninsula is physically separated from the rest of the nation by 81 km (50 mi) of land belonging to the United Arab Emirates.⁴



© Prasad Pillai
Oman's varied landscape

Oman's stunning and varied landscape ranges from high mountain peaks and canyons to monsoon forests. Great sand deserts dotted with high dunes occupy much of the land. Extending along three seas, the coast is lined with high cliffs and speckled with fjords.^{5, 6} The landscape is the foundation of Oman's tourism industry and, along with diverse wildlife, represents both a source of employment and pride for its people.⁷

Geography and Topography

Oman has three geographic areas: desert plains, mountains, and coast.⁸ Sand and gravel deserts cover approximately 80% of the nation.⁹ The largest is the central desert stretching from the southern foothills of the al-Hajar Mountains in the north to the Dhofar Mountains. It extends to the vast sandy "Empty Quarter" (Rub al-Khali) in the west and to the Ramlat Wahibah region in the east. The Ramlat Wahibah desert sands have a distinctive red hue caused by high levels of

¹ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 12.

² Central Intelligence Agency, "Oman: Geography," in *The World Factbook*, 11 January 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

³ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 12.

⁴ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2009), 4.

⁵ Environment Society of Oman, "Oman: Terrestrial," 2009, <http://www.environment.org.om/index/list.php?categoryId=304>

⁶ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, "Governorates of Sultanate of Oman," 2011, <http://www.omanet.om/english/regions/oman.asp?cat=reg>

⁷ Environment Society of Oman, "Oman: Terrestrial," 2009, <http://www.environment.org.om/index/list.php?categoryId=304>

⁸ *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations*, "Oman: Topography," Encyclopedia.com, 2007, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Oman.aspx#1>

⁹ Fareed Mohamedi, "Oman: Geography, Climate, and Population," in *Persian Gulf States: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1993, <http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/45.htm>

iron oxide.¹⁰ The desert around Jiddat al-Harasis in central Oman is a stonier gravel desert.¹¹ The “Empty Quarter,” the largest sand sea in the world, extends from Oman to Yemen and into portions of Saudi Arabia. Few people manage to live in this climate, one of the hottest and driest in the world.¹²



© Oliver Roux
Rocky desert

Mountains cover about 15% of the landscape and are found mostly in the northern and southern regions of Oman.¹³ The al-Hajar Mountains in the north extend from the Musandam Peninsula to the al-Sharqiyah South Governorate. The range is divided into eastern and western ranges by the Wadi Samail. The country’s largest mountain and the largest on the Arabian Peninsula, Jabal Shams (Sun Mountain), rises here to 3,009 meters (9,872 ft).¹⁴ In this range is Green Mountain, Jabal al-Akhdar, with an elevation of 2,980 meters (9,776 ft). This mountain, with its Mediterranean climate, is home to many villages that grow a variety of fruits and nuts on terraced farms, with winter temperatures can fall below freezing.¹⁵ The southern mountains in Dhofar extend east to west, and the highest mountain in this range, Jabal al-Qamar (Moon Mountain), reaches 2,500 meters (8,202 ft).¹⁶

Coastal plains occupy the remaining 5% of the land.^{17, 18} Lined by jagged cliffs in the north, the Omani coast extends 1,700 kilometers (1,056 mi) along three bodies of water: the Persian Gulf,

¹⁰ Shahina A. Ghazanfar, “Biology of the Central Desert of Oman,” *Turkish Journal of Botany* 28 (2004): 65, <http://journals.tubitak.gov.tr/botany/issues/bot-04-28-1-2/bot-28-1-2-6-0208-5.pdf>

¹¹ Environment Society of Oman, “Oman: Terrestrial,” 2009, <http://www.environment.org.om/index/list.php?categoryId=304>

¹² Donovan Webster, “Empty Quarter: Exploring Arabia’s Legendary Sea of Sand,” *National Geographic*, February 2005, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0502/feature1/index.html>

¹³ Fareed Mohamedi, “Oman: Geography, Climate and Population,” in *Persian Gulf States: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1993, <http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/45.htm>

¹⁴ Ministry of Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, “Beauty Has an Address: Oman,” 2012, <http://www.omantourism.gov.om/wps/portal/mot/tourism/oman/home/experiences/nature/mountains>

¹⁵ Ministry of Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, “Al Jabal Al Akhdar (Green Mountain),” 2012, http://www.omantourism.gov.om/wps/portal/mot/tourism/oman/details!/ut/p/c5/jY_NjoIwFEafZR5g6NeWtrAErPwKaiUqG4JmMiEZ0IXR-PaCrmW8d3lyvuSQigzfn9f2t7m0p775IztSydpNITYMEkXmK8SmjKgJfR4mcuB7WQehF9kqA-CnAeJU9INX1B49BO7WK_MPNC2wPkYbKPyshQaYPwfOyFVe-is27GzYDEmHMkVF3Ad9yIvxxhZy3yeLfwMonAohgFnIY0JOBimuc2meSFefCp-5FN5I8eb80Dy6NT9kHNX7u4mbuNv7-sBLkcT9A!!/d13/d3/L2dJQSEvUUt3QS9ZQnZ3LzZfOU53RVMyMDYwTzU3MTBJU1BRMEtFTDFHUDc!/?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/wps/wcm/connect/mot_english_lib/mot/experience/nature/mountains/aljabal+alokdar

¹⁶ Ministry of Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, “Beauty Has an Address: Oman,” 2012, <http://www.omantourism.gov.om/wps/portal/mot/tourism/oman/home/experiences/nature/mountains>

¹⁷ Fareed Mohamedi, “Oman: Geography, Climate and Population,” in *Persian Gulf States: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1993, <http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/45.htm>

¹⁸ Environmental Society of Oman, “Oman: Terrestrial,” 2009, <http://www.environment.org.om/index/list.php?categoryId=304>

the Strait of Hormuz, and the Arabian Sea.¹⁹ Much of the central coast includes sandy low hills and wastelands.²⁰ In the south, the coastal plain is ringed by lush vegetation including coconut groves.²¹

Climate

Although there are regional variations, Oman's climate is characteristically hot and dry. Interior summer temperatures (April through September) are hot, often rising to 50°C (122°F). Relative humidity in the al-Batinah plain often reaches 90% despite its low elevations and lower temperatures.²² Along the coast, it is hot and humid.^{23, 24} Summer temperatures in the capital city of Muscat average a cooler 33°C (91°F).²⁵ The strong summer winds blowing from the Rub al-Khali can elevate temperatures on the Gulf of Oman by as much as 6°C to 10°C (11°F to 18°F).²⁶



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Oasis in the hot desert

The more moderate winter temperatures (October through March) range between 15°C and 23°C (59°F and 73°F) but bring more rain to the al-Hajar mountain range.²⁷ The highest peaks can see temperatures below freezing with occasional snow. Between October and March, occasional violent thunderstorms can drop enough rain to cause the wadis to flood, especially in the northern regions.^{28, 29}

The southern Dhofar region, dominated by the monsoonal flow (*khareef*), has a unique microclimate. Along the region's coastal band, temperatures hover around 26°C (79°F) with fog

¹⁹ Oman Information Center, "Oman Geographical Information," n.d.,

<http://www.omainfo.com/oman/geography.asp>

²⁰ Fareed Mohamedi, "Oman: Geography, Climate and Population," in *Persian Gulf States: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1993, <http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/45.htm>

²¹ Travel City, "Oman: Geography," 2009, <http://www.travelpoint-oman.com/OmanGeography.aspx>

²² Fareed Mohamedi, "Oman: Geography, Climate and Population," in *Persian Gulf States: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1993, <http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/45.htm>

²³ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 3.

²⁴ Environment Society of Oman, "Oman: Terrestrial," 2009, <http://www.environment.org.om/index/list.php?categoryId=304>

²⁵ Environment Society of Oman, "Oman: Terrestrial," 2009, <http://www.environment.org.om/index/list.php?categoryId=304>

²⁶ Fareed Mohamedi, "Oman: Geography, Climate and Population," in *Persian Gulf States: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1993, <http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/45.htm>

²⁷ Environment Society of Oman, "Oman: Terrestrial," 2009, <http://www.environment.org.om/index/list.php?categoryId=304>

²⁸ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 4.

²⁹ Environment Society of Oman, "Oman: Terrestrial," 2009, <http://www.environment.org.om/index/list.php?categoryId=304>

and rain between mid-June and mid-September. The increased moisture creates a lush green landscape, making this the most fertile area in the country.^{30, 31}

Rainfall is scarce and most of it falls during the middle to late winter months. Along the coast, precipitation averages between 2 and 10 cm (0.8 and 4 in) while in the mountains as much as 70 cm (28 in) can fall.³²

Bodies of Water

The country has no permanent freshwater lakes or rivers. Seasonal storms occasionally cause flooding, which creates short-lived streams.³³ But in the southern region of Dhofar, rainfall is sufficient to allow small streams to run constantly.³⁴ The Arabian Sea forms Oman's eastern and southern border, and is part of the Indian Ocean.³⁵ The Gulf of Oman, on the nation's northeast coast, is home to many smaller port cities. Fishing does take place in the Gulf, but it is mainly significant as a major shipping route for Persian Gulf oil. The Gulf of Oman is the entry point from the Arabian Sea to the Persian Gulf (via the Strait of Hormuz), generating international security concerns.³⁶



© Bryn Pinzgauer
Gulf of Oman

³⁰ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 4.

³¹ Environment Society of Oman, "Oman: Terrestrial," 2009, <http://www.environment.org.om/index/list.php?categoryId=304>

³² Fareed Mohamedi, "Oman: Geography, Climate and Population," in *Persian Gulf States: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1993, <http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/45.htm>

³³ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Oman: Drainage," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/428217/Oman#toc257067>

³⁴ Fareed Mohamedi, "Oman: Geography, Climate and Population," in *Persian Gulf States: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1993, <http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/45.htm>

³⁵ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Arabian Sea," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/31653/Arabian-Sea>

³⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Gulf of Oman," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/428244/Gulf-of-Oman>

Major Cities

City	Population ³⁷
Muscat	775,878
Salalah	147,400
Sohar	128,500
Rustaq	67,641 ³⁸
Nizwa	45,500
Ibri	25,000

Muscat

Muscat, the nation's capital, lies on the coast of the Gulf of Oman and is surrounded by volcanic mountains. The city was a major trading center and naval base for the Portuguese, who controlled the city until 1650.³⁹ Today, Muscat is the center of government, industry, and commerce. Its diverse population includes a substantial number of expats.⁴⁰ Some of the best universities in the country are in Muscat, including Sultan Qaboos University.⁴¹ All buildings in the city are required to have either a dome or an arabesque window. The clean, progressive city is a cruise ship destination and was recently named the Arab Culture Capital.⁴²



© toyohara / flickr.com
City of Muscat

Salalah

Salalah, the capital of the Dhofar region, is a port along the Arabian Sea in southern Oman.^{43, 44} Because of monsoonal weather patterns, the area is lush and green in the summer months. Visitors are drawn to its coconut-lined beaches with influences from the former colony of Zanzibar, Africa.⁴⁵ Once an important and prosperous trade center, the city has declined in wealth and importance over the centuries, and was not brought under the control of the sultans until the 19th century. After the Dhofar war ended in 1975, Salalah was the site of major

³⁷ Population estimates for all cities except Rustaq are from the following source: City Population, "Oman," 12 December 2010, <http://www.citypopulation.de/Oman.html>

³⁸ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, "Al Batinah North and South Governorate: Wilayat Al Rustaq," 2011, <http://www.omanet.om/english/regions/bathina1.asp?cat=reg#Wilayat%20ASeeb>

³⁹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Muscat," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/398530/Muscat>

⁴⁰ Angie Turner, "Muscat," in *Cities of the Middle East and North Africa: A Historical Encyclopedia*, eds. Michael Dumper and Bruce E. Stanley (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2007), 264.

⁴¹ 4 International Colleges and Universities, "Universities in Oman by 2012 University Web Ranking," 2012, <http://www.4icu.org/om/>

⁴² Lonely Planet, "Introducing Muscat," 25 September 2008, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/oman/muscat>

⁴³ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 244.

⁴⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Salalah," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/518868/Salalah>

⁴⁵ Lonely Planet, "Introducing Salalah," 24 March 2009, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/oman/dhofar/salalah>

government redevelopment efforts. The city is a major agricultural trading center for cities around the coast, and in 2006 a free-trade zone was established in the city.⁴⁶

Sohar (Suhar)

Sohar is a port city on the Gulf of Oman northwest of the capital. It was an early outpost for Islam but developed into a prosperous port city in the 10th century and possibly the largest and most important Arab city in the world.^{47, 48} At the eastern entrance to Sohar today, ancient city gates shaped like a line of boats with raised sails pay homage to the importance of ships to the city and its economy.⁴⁹ It served as the capital of the country until 1749 when the capital was moved to Muscat.⁵⁰ Subsequent invasions by the Persians and the Portuguese ultimately led to the city's decline, and today its harbor is silted and nearly gone. It retains its importance as one of the only east-west passes across the al-Hajar Mountains.^{51, 52}

Rustaq

Rustaq, once the capital of Oman, still functions as a major administrative center. Because of its strategic location near a wadi on the coastal side of the al-Hajar Mountains, it is a gateway to other small towns in the region. The city is surrounded by date palms and contains an important date-packing plant.^{53, 54} The city is perhaps best known for its ancient hot springs, Ain al-Kasfah, attracting visitors who want to “take the cure” in the waters.

Nizwa

The Omani capital in the sixth and seventh centuries, Nizwa is an oasis city surrounded by some of the highest mountains in the country. As a gateway to other historical sites in the region, it is the country's second-largest tourist destination. Sometimes referred to as the “Pearl of Islam,” Nizwa was once controlled by conservative imams and is regarded as the religious capital of the nation. It remains a conservative city, expecting visitors to act accordingly.^{55, 56, 57} Several



© Bart & Co / flickr.com
City of Nizwa

⁴⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Salalah,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/518868/Salalah>

⁴⁷ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Suhar,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/572056/Suhar>

⁴⁸ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, “Al Batinah North and South Governorate: Wilayat Al Sohar,” 2011, <http://www.omanet.om/english/regions/bathina1.asp?cat=reg#Wilayat%20ASeeb>

⁴⁹ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, “Al Batinah North and South Governorate: Wilayat Al Sohar,” 2011, <http://www.omanet.om/english/regions/bathina1.asp?cat=reg#Wilayat%20ASeeb>

⁵⁰ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 128.

⁵¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Suhar,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/572056/Suhar>

⁵² Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 128.

⁵³ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, “Al Batinah North and South Governorate: Wilayat Al Rustaq,” 2011, <http://www.omanet.om/english/regions/bathina1.asp?cat=reg#Wilayat%20ASeeb>

⁵⁴ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 141–144.

⁵⁵ Lonely Planet, “Introducing Nizwa,” 17 February 2009, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/oman/al-dakhiliyah-region/nizwa>

⁵⁶ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 187–188.

major wadis criss-cross it. A groundwater recharge dam was built in 1989 across the Wadi Tanuf and another across the Wadi al Mu'aidin in 2002.⁵⁸ The city is home to the Royal Oman Police Academy.⁵⁹

Ibri

Ibri, famous for its oilfields at Fahud and the ancient tombs of Bat, is well-known for its black-and-red striped goathair rugs, and for traditional dances performed at different celebrations. At the city center stands one of the largest mosques in Oman, behind fortified walls. A road and border crossing are slated to be built to allow easier access for pilgrims crossing into Mecca, Saudi Arabia during the *hajj*.⁶⁰

Environmental Concerns

Oman is an active partner in environmental protection and party to a number of international agreements.⁶¹ Its environmental ministry is the first among the Arab states, and environmental protection laws have been in place since 1974.⁶² Although the government is working to protect the environment and wildlife, four main problems still confront the nation: groundwater shortages, rising salinity levels in the soil, desertification, and pollution of beaches by oil spills.^{63, 64, 65}

Oman struggles to maintain an adequate water supply for domestic and agricultural use. Periodic drought and an average rainfall of only 10 cm (4 in) add to the problem.⁶⁶ Because of increasing agriculture, seawater has intruded into the groundwater and raised the level of salinity in the soil. In some areas, such as the Batinah region along the northern coast, this salinization may be irreversible. To forestall further problems, the



© fchmksfkcb / flickr.com
Ancient aqueduct

⁵⁷ Wonders of Arabia, "Highlights of Muscat and Nizwa, Oman," 1 November 2011, <http://wondersofarabia.com/index.php/middle-east-news-channels/travel/item/147086-.html>

⁵⁸ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, "The Dakhiliyah Governorate: Wilayat Nizwa," 2011, <http://www.omanet.om/english/regions/dakhiliyah1.asp?cat=reg#Wilayat%20Nizwa>

⁵⁹ Royal Oman Police, Sultanate of Oman, "Introduction," 2012, <http://www.rop.gov.om/english/organization.asp>

⁶⁰ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 168–169.

⁶¹ Environment Society of Oman, *Progress Report: October 2007–December 2009*, 2010, 1, http://www.environment.org.om/UserFiles/files/Progress%20Report_ESO_Oct07-Dec09%20%20En%28Summarised%20version%29.pdf

⁶² Explorer Publishing, "Oman: Environmental Issues," 2012, <http://www.liveworkexplore.com/oman/general-information/environment-environmental-issues>

⁶³ Central Intelligence Agency, "Oman: Geography," in *The World Factbook*, 11 January 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

⁶⁴ Explorer Publishing, "Oman: Environmental Issues," 2012, <http://www.liveworkexplore.com/oman/general-information/environment-environmental-issues>

⁶⁵ Environment Society of Oman, "Oman: Environment," 2009, <http://www.environment.org.om/index/list2.php?categoryId=320&Extension=gif>

⁶⁶ Mohammed Salim Abdullah Al-Mashakhi and El-Hag Bakhit Ahmed Koll, "Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles: Oman," Food and Agriculture Organization, April 2007, <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/oman/oman.htm>

government has placed controls on digging new wells and mandated more modern irrigation strategies and techniques.⁶⁷

Heavy oil tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz threatens beaches and coastal waters with pollution by spillage or the release of ballast water.^{68, 69} Contingency plans protecting the coastal areas in the event of oil spills are under development by experts at the Sultan Qaboos University.⁷⁰

Desertification is another significant issue; drifting sands and advancing sand dunes are hazardous for roads and nearby installations. The government has a number of plans underway to combat the problem.⁷¹

Natural Hazards

The main natural hazards in Oman are earthquakes, flooding, and dust storms. Oman sits atop the Arabian Plate, placing it at risk for earthquakes. The northern region experiences moderate to high levels of seismic activity while the activity in the southern region is quite low.⁷² Cyclones pose another natural hazard because their torrential rains can cause flooding. In 2007, Cyclone Gonu killed 49 people and caused extensive damage.⁷³ Summer often brings strong



© Pedronet / flickr.com
Flooded road

⁶⁷ A. Naifer, S.A. Al-Rawahy, and S. Zekri, "Economic Impact of Salinity: The Case of Al-Batinah in Oman," *International Journal of Agricultural Research* 6 (2011), <http://scialert.net/fulltext/?doi=ijar.2011.134.142&org=10>

⁶⁸ *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations*, "Oman: Environment," Encyclopedia.com, 2007, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Oman.aspx#1>

⁶⁹ Nasser Al Hashar et al., "Prevention of Oil Spill Pollution in Seawater Using Locally Available Materials," (report, Caledonian College of Engineering, Sultanate of Oman, n.d.), 2, http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=10&ved=0CGsQFjAJ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.environmental-expert.com%2Ffiles%2F0%2Farticles%2F2981%2FPREVENTIONOFOILSPILLPOLLUTIONINSEAWATERUSING.doc&ei=zml1T_ihKISxiQKizNmiCg&usq=AFQjCNFUPGd6fm1pDaBl-6QZVZoJQ7hGHQ&sig2=F_G9ISWfqbzEou2te6rq6Q

⁷⁰ UNESCO, "Environment and Development in Coastal Regions and in Small Islands: National Status and Needs; Oman," n.d., <http://www.unesco.org/csi/act/other/oil4.htm>

⁷¹ United Nations, "National Report on the –UNCCD Implementation" (report to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, n.d.), 7–10, <http://www.unccd.int/cop/reports/asia/national/2000/oman-eng.pdf>

⁷² Sultan Z. al-Shaqsi, "Emergency Management in the Arabian Peninsula: A Case Study for the Sultanate of Oman," 3–4, n.d., http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=10&ved=0CHUQFjAJ&url=http%3A%2F%2Ftraining.fema.gov%2FEMIWeb%2Fedu%2FComparative%2520EM%2520Book%2520-%2520EM%2520in%2520Oman.doc&ei=BWs1T7_ZAeaiQLo3qmiCg&usq=AFQjCNHUcBUUR63Grrqh00JchNEuvXg1Hg&sig2=xCh6AbeYyAr7EVsthKIGYA

⁷³ Sultan Z. al-Shaqsi, "Emergency Management in the Arabian Peninsula: A Case Study for the Sultanate of Oman," 6–9, n.d., http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=10&ved=0CHUQFjAJ&url=http%3A%2F%2Ftraining.fema.gov%2FEMIWeb%2Fedu%2FComparative%2520EM%2520Book%2520-%2520EM%2520in%2520Oman.doc&ei=BWs1T7_ZAeaiQLo3qmiCg&usq=AFQjCNHUcBUUR63Grrqh00JchNEuvXg1Hg&sig2=xCh6AbeYyAr7EVsthKIGYA

winds that carry dust from the desert.⁷⁴ These storms can create walls of dust more than 500 km (311 mi) wide.⁷⁵ Such storms, which contribute to desertification, can cause respiratory damage, crop damage, and disruptions in communication and transportation.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, "Oman: Geography," in *The World Factbook*, 11 January 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

⁷⁵ National Aeronautic and Space Administration, "Arabian Sand Storm," 26–27 March 2011, <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/NaturalHazards/view.php?id=49892>

⁷⁶ D. Mustaffa, "Oman," in *World and Its Peoples: Arabian Peninsula; Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 19.

Chapter 1 Assessment

1. Deserts cover more than three-quarters of Oman's landscape.

True

The chief feature of the landscape, sand and gravel deserts of the plains make up 80% of the nation.

2. The longest permanent river in the country is the Dhofar.

False

The country has no permanent freshwater lakes or rivers. Seasonal storms occasionally cause flooding, which creates short-lived streams. But in the southern region of Dhofar, rainfall feeds small streams that run constantly.

3. The capital city of Muscat is a port city in the south.

False

Muscat, the nation's capital, lies on the Gulf of Oman coast and is surrounded by volcanic mountains.

4. Seawater has intruded into the groundwater increasing the salinity of the soil.

True

Seawater has intruded into the groundwater and raised the soil's salinity. In some areas, such as the Batinah region along the northern coast, salinization may be irreversible.

5. Huge dust storms occur during the winter months.

False

Summer often brings strong winds carrying dust from the desert. Dust particles can cause respiratory damage and contribute to desertification. Crop damage and disruptions to communication and transportation are common results.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY

Introduction

The Sultanate of Oman is the oldest independent Arab state.^{77, 78} For over 5,000 years, the people in Oman were navigators, sailors, and merchant traders because of their strategic location on the major sea lanes between east and west.⁷⁹ The prosperity of the early cities along with Oman's natural resources made it a target of many empires who wished to control it, including the Macedonians (led by Alexander the Great), Persians, Turks, Portuguese, Iranians, and Arab tribes.⁸⁰ The sultans of Oman extended their influence down the eastern coast of Africa to areas north of Mozambique in the 19th century.⁸¹ Factional fighting eventually cost Oman its African territories in 1862. Although the sultans continued to rule Zanzibar, they did so under the British.⁸² Oman was plagued through the 1970s by civil unrest that was fueled by power struggles.⁸³ The discovery of oil in 1964 did not end its isolation or help develop the country until 1970.^{84, 85} In that year, the current sultan, Qaboos bin Said, came to power when he deposed his father in a coup. He immediately began to open the country, and launched modernization programs and national development plans.⁸⁶ The forward-looking sultan has worked hard to create a sense of national identity among his people, which has helped the country avoid the kind of militant violence that has plagued the region.^{87, 88}



© PhareannaH / flickr.com
Historic boat on Oman's coast

Today, Oman is the only country in the world with a majority of Ibadi Muslims.⁸⁹ Its location and history of isolationism have created the most distinctive culture in the region.^{90, 91, 92} The

⁷⁷ *BBC News*, "Oman Profile," 16 January 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14654150>

⁷⁸ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 4.

⁷⁹ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 5.

⁸⁰ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 17–21.

⁸¹ History World, "History of Oman," n.d., <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad54>

⁸² Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 20.

⁸³ History World, "History of Oman," n.d., <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad54>

⁸⁴ *BBC News*, "Oman Profile," 16 January 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14654150>

⁸⁵ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 48–49.

⁸⁶ *BBC News*, "Oman Profile," 16 January 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14654150>

⁸⁷ Bertelsmann Stiftung, "BTI 2010: Oman Country Report," 2010, <http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/1398.0.html>

⁸⁸ *BBC News*, "Oman Profile," 16 January 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14654150>

⁸⁹ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Oman," 5 January 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35834.htm>

country continues to follow a separate path from the other countries in the region. As it assumes a leadership role in regional diplomacy and foreign relations, Oman has emerged as a relatively stable, forward looking society.^{93, 94}

Tribalism in Oman

Today there are approximately 100 tribes in Oman that belong to either of two tribal confederations: the Ghafiriyah or the Hinawiyal. This separation into two confederations has its roots in the 18th century, when differences about the selection of the imam polarized the tribes. In general, the Hinawi tribes originated in the south whereas the Ghariris are northern Arabic in origin.⁹⁵



© oh contraire / flickr.com
Bedouin tribe people

Omani tribes are composed of clans that are descended from a common ancestor and linked by obligations. The family is the most basic unit. Families unite to form clans, which then link to form tribes. The system is patrilineal and leaders are elected. Historically, such tribes exerted their power through councils and religious courts, acting autonomously of the other tribes.⁹⁶

Different tribes united with tribes of nearby areas to form confederations. The organization of these confederations often determined the historical balance of power in the country. The Said tribe established the current ruling dynasty in 1744, and the current sultan is descended from it.⁹⁷

In Oman's early history, the imam was elected by a council of chiefs, in accordance with Ibadi tradition. The tribes united under the authority of the Imamate, or later, under the secular sultanate. National stability depended on a balance of power between the tribes and the national rulers. The country has progressed from a confederacy of semi-autonomous tribes to a strong central government. Contemporary Oman still rests on tribes, but this transformation has

⁹⁰ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 4.

⁹¹ Helen Chapin Metz, ed., "Introduction," in *A Country Study: Oman*, 3rd ed., Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstty:@field%28DOCID+om0004%29>

⁹² *BBC News*, "Oman Profile," 16 January 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14654150>

⁹³ Rand Corporation, "Oman: A Unique Foreign Policy," 16 September 2010, http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB2501/index1.html

⁹⁴ Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, "Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism: Sultanate of Oman" (report adopted by the MENAFATF Plenary 4 May 2011), 19, <http://www.fiu.gov.om/files/Evaluation.pdf>

⁹⁵ J.E. Peterson, "Oman: al-Ghafiriyah and al-Hinwiyah Tribal Confederations" (Arabian Peninsula Background Note, no. APBN-001, 2003), 1, 3–5, http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/apbn-001_oman_ghafiriyah-hinawiyah.pdf

⁹⁶ Corien Hoek, "Oman: State, Tribes, and Revolution," *Closer*, 31 March 2011, <http://religionresearch.org/martijn/2011/03/31/oman-state-tribes-and-revolution/>

⁹⁷ Corien Hoek, "Oman: State, Tribes, and Revolution," *Closer*, 31 March 2011, <http://religionresearch.org/martijn/2011/03/31/oman-state-tribes-and-revolution/>

diminished the influence of the tribal system on the country.⁹⁸ In the 1980s, tribes appointed representatives to the Consultative Council, but by 1991, these representatives were elected by the people. Although tribal affiliation is still a source of identity within Oman, personal status is achieved through individual merit, apart from the tribe.⁹⁹

Ancient Oman

Oman has been inhabited since at least the fifth century B.C.E., making it one of the oldest continuously inhabited regions in the world.^{100, 101} These early Omanis were hunters who lived in the mountain valleys. Examples of their stone weaponry and tools show that they had advanced skills. Later, people settled in towns and villages along water sources and built stone houses. Archaeological evidence shows that Omanis were well traveled and had a good network of roads linking several cities to the coastal areas.¹⁰²

Historical records suggest extensive contact between Oman and Iraq, Persia, and India. There is also evidence of significant trade among Persia, India, Mesopotamia, and a state called Majan, or present-day Oman.¹⁰³ The inhabitants of Majan were among the first to sail the Gulf. Ancient documents suggest that the people of this seafaring nation helped to develop the ancient sea routes, and they recorded long trade voyages.¹⁰⁴ Majan was prosperous because of its strategic location and large reserves of copper. Some of the oldest copper mines date to the third century B.C.E. Wood, frankincense, and precious stones were traded.^{105, 106, 107} Majan flourished until about 2000 B.C.E., when it stopped trading with Mesopotamia.



© Ali Almosawi
Frankincense being sorted

The strategic location of the Gulf continued to interest other powers and, in 325 B.C.E., Alexander the Great had outposts in the region. The Macedonians were dispossessed around 250

⁹⁸ Corien Hoek, "Oman: State, Tribes, and Revolution," Closer, 31 March 2011, <http://religionresearch.org/martijn/2011/03/31/oman-state-tribes-and-revolution/>

⁹⁹ Corien Hoek, "Oman: State, Tribes, and Revolution," Closer, 31 March 2011, <http://religionresearch.org/martijn/2011/03/31/oman-state-tribes-and-revolution/>

¹⁰⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sultanate of Oman, "Ancient History," 2010, <http://www.mofa.gov.om/mofanew/index.asp?id=39>

¹⁰¹ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 17.

¹⁰² Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 15–16.

¹⁰³ Majan was a seafaring state that included not only Oman but the entire Gulf coast. Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 16–17.

¹⁰⁴ Isam al-Rawas, *Oman in Early Islamic History* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2000), 27.

¹⁰⁵ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 15–16.

¹⁰⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sultanate of Oman, "Ancient History," 2010, <http://www.mofa.gov.om/mofanew/index.asp?id=39>

¹⁰⁷ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 5.

B.C.E. by the Persian Parthians, who gained control of most of the Gulf, including present-day Oman. The Parthians controlled the area until Islam was introduced around 632 C.E.¹⁰⁸

The Early Arabs

Arab tribes have lived in Oman for thousands of years. Around the eighth century B.C.E., the Yarub tribe in southwest Arabia governed Oman. By the middle of the sixth century B.C.E., Cyrus the Great from Persia seized control of coastal Oman. Northern Oman remained under the control of various Persian dynasties until around 800 C.E. But most of the Arab tribes of interior Oman remained self-governing.^{109, 110}



© dynamosquito / flickr.com
Palace of Cyrus the Great³

The large and powerful Azd tribe that originated in Yemen had also been in Oman for years, but a second great migration may have occurred around the end of the sixth century C.E., after a huge flood caused by the failure of the Marib Dam. Once in Oman, the Azd were refused permission from the Persian governor to settle in the region. War ensued, the Persians were defeated, and Malik bin Fahm, head of the Azd, became the first ruler of the Jalandi dynasty.^{111, 112, 113}

Early Islam (630–1507)

Islam arrived in Oman around 630 C.E. and was quickly adopted.^{114, 115} Islam's rapid spread was aided by the Prophet Muhammad's promise to keep al-Jalandi in power. Islam's popularity was further enhanced by the decision to distribute Omani tax money locally rather than sending it to the capital of Islam, al-Medina al-Munawwarah (present-day Saudi Arabia).¹¹⁶ Oman became a leading cultural center and played an important role in spreading Islam throughout Africa, especially the Maghreb (North Africa).¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁸ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 18.

¹⁰⁹ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 20–21.

¹¹⁰ Isam al-Rawas, *Oman in Early Islamic History* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2000), 29–30.

¹¹¹ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 22–23.

¹¹² Isam al-Rawas, *Oman in Early Islamic History* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2000), 29–30.

¹¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sultanate of Oman, "Oman During Islam," 2010,

<http://www.mofa.gov.om/mofanew/index.asp?id=40>

¹¹⁴ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 24.

¹¹⁵ Isam al-Rawas, *Oman in Early Islamic History* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2000), 35–41.

¹¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sultanate of Oman, "Oman During Islam," 2010,

<http://www.mofa.gov.om/mofanew/index.asp?id=40>

¹¹⁷ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 28.

Oman's Golden Age occurred under the rule of the Jalandi dynasty. During this time, sea trade flourished with Iraq, India, and China. The port city of Sohar was one of the most important in the Gulf and its merchants among the world's richest.¹¹⁸

By the eighth century, Oman had adopted Ibadi Islam, distinct from the Sunni and Shi'a sects. Oman remains the only country with a majority Ibadi population.¹¹⁹ Ibadism's predominance caused tensions with the Umayyad Caliphate in Syria. When the Caliphate fell in 750 C.E., Omanis in the interior established an independent state, the Imamate of Oman.¹²⁰

From 751, Muscat and Oman elected imams as spiritual leaders and the Imamate endured for nearly 400 years.¹²¹ Under the Imamate, the port of Sohar flourished. Merchant seamen plied the oceans between Oman and Africa, Madagascar, China, and the Far East. The city and its port became a major maritime and mercantile power, and by some accounts, the Omanis were the rulers of the Indian Ocean.¹²²



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Open ocean off Oman's coast

The Persians wanted to control Oman's wealth, and in 971 they sent a fleet to Sohar that ravaged the town and killed the last Jalandi king. They ruled only for one century before being routed by the Seljuk Turks, who occupied Oman until 1064. After the ouster of the Turks, Oman was attacked by several armies and pirates, including those from Basrah, Khurasan, and Persia.¹²³

The Banu Nabhan tribe came to power in 1154 and proclaimed their independence from the Imamate of Oman. They instituted a hereditary monarchy plagued by divisions between the elected Ibadi imams and the hereditary kings. This division continued to cause power struggles until the 17th century.^{124, 125}

Imams and Sultans

Tribal organization in Oman, as elsewhere in the Middle East, was an obstacle to achieving a sense of national unity. For the tribes, the idea of rule from a city far removed from them was

¹¹⁸ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 28–30.

¹¹⁹ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Oman," 5 January 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35834.htm>

¹²⁰ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 30–31.

¹²¹ History World, "History of Oman," n.d., <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad54>

¹²² Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 32–33.

¹²³ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 33–34.

¹²⁴ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 34–36.

¹²⁵ History World, "History of Oman," n.d., <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad54>

unthinkable. The Omani solution to this was to create the Imamate. Muslims in Oman are predominantly Ibadi and believe that their spiritual leader, the imam, should be elected and temporal. The imam provides both religious and secular leadership to his community. Although any man could be elected, most imams came from a few influential tribes. Throughout Oman's history, the Imamate frequently devolved into hereditary dynasties, and so prompted civil wars.¹²⁶

By the middle of the 18th century, after the Persians' ouster, the new imam and his family moved the capital to the coastal city of Muscat. The imam's major concern was economic, so he worked to reestablish Oman's maritime trade and other overseas ventures. Over time, the family abandoned their claim to rule as imams, adopting instead the title of sultan. The last elected imam was Sayyid Said bin Ahmed in 1744. After that, the position of sultan became hereditary, abandoning the Ibadi tradition of elected leaders.^{127, 128}



© Ryan Lackey
Present-day Muscat

The actions of the new sultan were unpopular in the more conservative interior, and the tribes attempted to recreate the institution of the Imamate. Tribal forces attempted to install a new imam, distantly related to the ruling sultan's family, but he reigned only 3 years before being killed. At that time, the sultan's family regained power. What emerged was a dual system with the sultan ruling Muscat and the coast, while the Imamate controlled the interior. The tensions between the Imamate and the sultans waxed and waned, sometimes culminating in civil wars and rebellions. By 1970, tensions between the two institutions had eased.^{129, 130} Today, Oman's religious leader and highest religious official is Grand Mufti Sheikh Ahmed Al-Khalili.¹³¹

The Portuguese and the Yarubi Imamate (1507–1749)

Europeans first came to Oman between 1507 and 1508 when the Portuguese successfully conquered parts of the Omani coast. Although it remained in the country for about 150 years, Portugal was interested only in the coastal areas and did not venture into the interior. The Yarubid dynasty finally defeated the Portuguese in 1650.^{132, 133, 134}

¹²⁶ J.E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (London: SAQI, 2007), 35.

¹²⁷ J.E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (London: SAQI, 2007), 35.

¹²⁸ The Sultanate of Oman, "Sultan Qaboos bin Sai'd," n.d., <http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm>

¹²⁹ J.E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (London: SAQI, 2007), 35–36.

¹³⁰ Joseph A. Kechichian, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1995), 32.

¹³¹ Stephanie Dahle, "Women and Elections in the Gulf," *Forbes*, 5 September 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/stephaniedahle/2011/05/09/women-elections-in-the-gulf/>

¹³² Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Oman," 5 January 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35834.htm>

¹³³ Sultanate of Oman, "The Portuguese in Oman," Sultan's Armed Forces Museum, 2010–2011, <http://safmuseum.gov.om/eng3.html>

¹³⁴ History World, "History of Oman," n.d., <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad54>

Nasser bin Murshid, the first Yarubi Imam, assumed power in 1614. The Portuguese, aware of his popularity and influence, negotiated a treaty. The Imam signed the treaty but went ahead to liberate some areas from Portuguese control in his attempt to reunify the country. His successor, Sultan bin Saif, drove the Portuguese out in 1650, effectively liberating Oman.¹³⁵

The sultan then started to forge relations with other foreign powers. Emissaries were sent to India, Iran, Yemen, and Iraq, and trade once again grew in the region. Upon Imam Sultan's death, a rivalry between his two sons divided the country. Saif bin Sultan eventually gained control and ruled until 1711. But in 1718, civil war broke out. The tribal chieftains supported Imam Sultan's son, Sultan bin Saif II, as the rightful heir of the hereditary monarchy. The religious leaders, on the other hand, wanted to elect the Imam.



© Brian Harrington Spier
Portuguese Fort Mirani

The war raged until 1743 when war broke out between the Persians, who supported Saif, and the Omani supporters of Ahmed bin Said, Saif's commander. By 1749, the Persians had been driven out by Imam Ahmed bin Said, founder of the al bu Said dynasty that rules today.^{136, 137}

The al-Bu Said Dynasty Begins (1749–1862)

Under Ahmed bin Said, the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman gained international power. Said bin Ahmed assumed power upon his father's death but was widely unpopular and eventually displaced by his son, Hamed. But with the son living in Muscat and his father living in Rustaq, the temporal and religious aspects of the Sultan and the Imam were divided. When Hamed died in 1792, his brother, Sayed Sultan, assumed power. Regional wars wracked the nation into the early 19th century.^{138, 139, 140}

Meanwhile, the Wahhabis were gaining power and expanding their influence. They sought to unify Arab regional tribes and create the first Saudi state. They launched numerous attacks against the Omani sultans.¹⁴¹ At the same time, another faction, the Qawasim, was based in Oman.¹⁴² Although they had helped the al-bu Saids defeat the Persians tribal unity was short-lived. In 1787, the Qawasim supported a rebellion against the sultan but soon fell out of favor.¹⁴³

¹³⁵ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 36–38.

¹³⁶ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 5.

¹³⁷ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 39–41.

¹³⁸ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 41–44.

¹³⁹ History World, "History of Oman," n.d.,

<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad54>

¹⁴⁰ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, "The Al Bu Said Dynasty," 2002,

<http://www.omanet.om/english/history/dynasty.asp>

¹⁴¹ Hussein Ghubash, *Oman: The Islamic Democratic Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 83–84.

¹⁴² Stephen Luscombe, "Trucial Oman," n.d., <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/trucialoman.htm>

¹⁴³ Hussein Ghubash, *Oman: The Islamic Democratic Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 88–90.

Both the Qawasim and Wahhabis were defeated in 1804. The chaos following Sultan Hamed's death in 1792 ended when Sayed Said bin Sultan bin Ahmed took control, ruling for more than 50 years (1804–1856).¹⁴⁴

Sayed Said built close relations with the British that lasted until his death. He extended Omani influence into Africa and India, making the sultanate the most powerful Arabian state. At its peak, the Omani empire controlled the entire Gulf region, southern Iran, and Baluchistan. Oman ruled more than 3,000 km (1,864 mi) along the East African coast including Mombasa and Dar es Salaam. Zanzibar became the capital of Oman's African territories and the sultan's eventual home.¹⁴⁵ Gwadar, the last of the Omani possessions, was sold in 1958 to Pakistan.¹⁴⁶



© wetlandsofpakistan / flickr.com
Gwadar, once owned by Oman

Sayed Said's son Majid assumed control in 1856 after his father died. Another son, Thuyani, contested his brother's rule by declaring himself the rightful sultan. A British arbitration agreement gave Thuyani control of Oman proper and the African territories to Majid. Each of the two sultanates were recognized by Britain and France in 1862.^{147, 148} Omani sultans continued to rule Zanzibar until its independence in 1963.¹⁴⁹

Rise of the Slave Trade

By the end of the 17th century Oman was a major trading nation and had extended its rule to Zanzibar. Because Islam prohibits Muslim slaves and Oman needed more agricultural workers, the sultan chose to use Africans to fill this role. Approximately 5,000 African slaves were in Oman by the beginning of the 18th century. The British and Omani governments had signed an agreement in 1798 in which Oman pledged to serve British interests in exchange for British support against the Persians. In keeping with Europe's antislavery movement, the British began pressuring the sultan to end the slave trade. An 1822 treaty prohibited slave transport through some routes but still allowed slaves to be transported between Oman and Zanzibar. The sultan continued to use large numbers of slaves on his



© Tim Brauhn
Present-day Zanzibar

¹⁴⁴ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 44–45.

¹⁴⁵ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 45–46.

¹⁴⁶ J.E. Petersen, "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 1 (winter 2004): 35, http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

¹⁴⁷ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 47.

¹⁴⁸ History World, "History of Oman," n.d., <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad54>

¹⁴⁹ Lonely Planet, "Zanzibar Archipelago History," 2011, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/tanzania/zanzibar-archipelago/history>

Zanzibari clove plantations. Slave trade expanded until the mid-1840s; increased demand pushed Arab slavers over 800 km (497 mi) inland from Zanzibar.¹⁵⁰ By the 1850s, nearly 15,000 slaves a year passed through Zanzibar, netting the sultan huge revenues. Yet in 1862, the British again pressured the sultan of the African territories to end slavery. But slavery flourished covertly until 1873 when a treaty with Britain closed the slave markets.^{151, 152}

The sultan of the African territories, under increasing pressure to end slavery once and for all, agreed to abolish slavery in 1889. In 1890 a proclamation ending all slavery was finalized.^{153, 154} But slavery was not completely abolished in Oman until 1970.¹⁵⁵

Civil Unrest and a Palace Coup (1862–1970)

The territorial division of Oman led to its decline. Tensions between the conservative interior imams and the government spilled over into civil unrest. Finally, in 1920 Sultan Taimour bin Faisal ended the conflict with the imams by signing a treaty. Although recognizing the interior region's independence, the treaty did not grant sovereignty.^{156, 157, 158}

Said bin Taimour took over when his father abdicated in 1932.¹⁵⁹ The imams of the interior, determined to become independent, sought help from Saudi Arabia in sporadic fighting through the 1950s. With aid from the British, the rebellion was suppressed and by 1959, the Imamate supporters had surrendered.¹⁶⁰

In 1958, the sultan moved to Dhofar, where he married several wives who gave him two daughters and a son, Qaboos bin Said. The Sultan kept his son isolated. The British finally persuaded the sultan to send his son to England in 1958 for further education. In 1960, Qaboos bin Said entered Sandhurst Military Academy. After graduating, he served several months with British troops in Germany.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁰ Chris McIntyre and Susan McIntyre, *Zanzibar: Bradt Travel Guide*, 7th ed. (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2009), 9–10.

¹⁵¹ Chris McIntyre and Susan McIntyre, *Zanzibar: Bradt Travel Guide*, 7th ed. (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2009), 11–16.

¹⁵² Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy in Africa, "Tanzania: Omani Conquest (1698–1884)," September 2005, <http://www.eisa.org.za/WEP/tanoverview4.htm>

¹⁵³ Chris McIntyre and Susan McIntyre, *Zanzibar: Bradt Travel Guide*, 7th ed. (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2009), 16–23.

¹⁵⁴ Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy in Africa, "Tanzania: Omani Conquest (1698–1884)," September 2005, <http://www.eisa.org.za/WEP/tanoverview4.htm>

¹⁵⁵ Peter Hinks and John McKivigan, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Antislavery and Abolition, Vol 2: J–Z* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 628.

¹⁵⁶ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 47–49.

¹⁵⁷ History World, "History of Oman," n.d., <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad54>

¹⁵⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Oman: History: Periodic Civil Unrest," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/428217/Oman>

¹⁵⁹ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 48.

¹⁶⁰ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Oman: History," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/428217/Oman>

¹⁶¹ The Sultanate of Oman, "Sultan Qaboos bin Said," n.d., <http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm>

Although Sultan Said bin Taimur did stabilize the worsening economy through a series of unpopular austerity measures, he continued to allow slavery and public executions.^{162, 163} His harsh, autocratic rule and his xenophobic policies created dissatisfaction and left Oman underdeveloped.^{164, 165} The discovery of oil in 1964 did not immediately strengthen the economy but did result in a maritime agreement with Britain that recognized Oman's independence.¹⁶⁶



© thew...g / flickr.com
The Sultan's Palace

Civil war again broke out in the Dhofar region.¹⁶⁷ By the late 1960s, the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (later the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman, PFLO) controlled the rebellion. The PFLO enlisted the aid of the China, the Soviet Union, Iraq, and the Marxist South Yemen group.^{168, 169} Although the rebels were defeated, the war lasted until the early 1970s.¹⁷⁰

Suspicious of his son, Taimour recalled him in 1964, again enforcing virtual house arrest. Years abroad had given Qaboos a more cosmopolitan worldview than his father. Finding his views inconsistent with his father's, Qaboos bin Said overthrew his father in 1970 with the help of British advisors.^{171, 172}

Sultan Qaboos bin Said (1970–2012)

The new sultan inherited an illiterate and poverty-ridden country, and continuing rebellion in the south. Qaboos bin Said immediately overturned many of his father's policies, launched modern reforms, set about developing the nation's infrastructure, and abandoned the policy of isolationism.^{173, 174}

¹⁶² Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 47–49.

¹⁶³ The Sultanate of Oman, "Sultan Qaboos bin Said," n.d., <http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm>

¹⁶⁴ *BBC News*, "Oman Profile," 16 January 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14654150>

¹⁶⁵ The Sultanate of Oman, "Sultan Qaboos bin Said," n.d., <http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm>

¹⁶⁶ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 48.

¹⁶⁷ The Sultanate of Oman, "Sultan Qaboos bin Said," n.d., <http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm>

¹⁶⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Oman: History," 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/428217/Oman>

¹⁶⁹ J.E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (London: SAQI, 2007), 217–226.

¹⁷⁰ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 13 January 2012, 15, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21534.pdf>

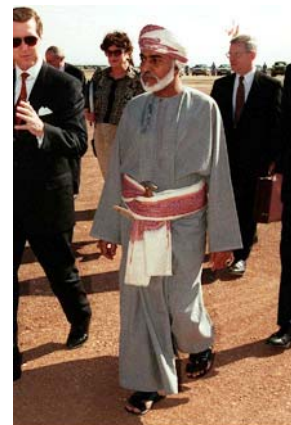
¹⁷¹ The Sultanate of Oman, "Sultan Qaboos bin Said," n.d., <http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm>

¹⁷² J.E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (London: SAQI, 2007), 238–241.

¹⁷³ The Sultanate of Oman, "Sultan Qaboos bin Said," n.d., <http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm>

¹⁷⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Oman: History," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/428217/Oman>

One of the new sultan's first actions was to recall his father's stepbrother, Tariq bin Taimour, from German exile. Sultan Qaboos and his uncle Tariq immediately found themselves at odds over the structure of the government. Tariq wanted a constitutional monarchy—a plan in direct opposition to the wishes of Qaboos. The conflict eventually led to Tariq's departure from government. In 1976, Qaboos married his cousin, Tariq's daughter, but the marriage ended quickly in divorce and produced no heirs.¹⁷⁵



DoD Image / Helene C. Stikkel
Sultan Qaboos bin Said

In 1971, Oman joined the Arab League and the United Nations. But it is not a member of OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). Oman and five other nations were founding members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981. In 2000, Oman became a member of the World Trade Organization in attempts to open its markets and achieve greater economic status in the global community.¹⁷⁶

Since Tariq's death in 1980, no member of the small ruling family has emerged as a likely successor to Qaboos al Said. Among the most likely are his two uncles, three cousins, or Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, the son of the former prime minister. Although Qaboos clearly outlined the rules of succession in the Basic Law, it is not certain that his replacement will inspire the confidence that he has achieved or whether the current liberal and forward-thinking policies will be continued.^{177, 178}

Recent Events

Qaboos bin Said immediately began modernizing Oman. His broad achievements in nearly all spheres of Omani life earned Oman the honor of being named one of the top ten countries in the world for development in health, education, and income in the last four decades. These economic advances have not solved all social problems. Nearly one-third of all Omanis between 15 and 17 are not enrolled in school, and 38% of the unemployed are young people. Nearly 75% of women remain unemployed.¹⁷⁹



Courtesy of Wikimedia
Voting in Oman

The sultan has implemented more inclusive policies to increase participation in political life. In 1997, he allowed women to stand for election in the Majlis al-Shura, Oman's Consultative

¹⁷⁵ The Sultanate of Oman, "Sultan Qaboos bin Said," n.d., <http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm>

¹⁷⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Oman: History," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/428217/Oman>

¹⁷⁷ The Sultanate of Oman, "Sultan Qaboos bin Said," n.d., <http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm>

¹⁷⁸ Economic Development Council of Canada, "Oman," August 2011, <http://www.edc.ca/EN/Country-Info/Documents/Oman.pdf>

¹⁷⁹ Said Sultan al Hashimi, "The Omani Spring: Towards the Break of a New Dawn?" *Jadaliyya* (Arab Studies Institute, Georgetown University), 22 January 2012, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3902/the-omani-spring-towards-the-break-of-a-new-dawn>

Council. In 2002, all Omanis over the age of 21 received the right to vote and, in 2003, voted in their first election. The government's progressive views toward women led to the appointment of the first female finance minister in 2004; in 2011, Oman's first female pilot was commissioned.^{180, 181}

Although Oman has escaped much of the violence of the "Arab Spring" uprisings, there are pockets of discontent. In 2010, a petition for greater political and social freedoms was presented to the sultan. Further requests included the formation of a national council and the creation of a national constitution. Demonstrations protested working conditions and low wages for teachers.¹⁸²

The sultan responded by issuing more than 40 decrees demonstrating an awareness of the problems and a desire to address them. Chief among these were the granting of more powers to the Council of Oman, reformulation of his Cabinet, and appointments of new ministers and Shura council members.¹⁸³ The sultan further promised 50,000 new jobs, an increase in the private-sector minimum wage, and consumer protections.¹⁸⁴

Not all government responses were positive. Violence against protestors included kidnapping, torture, arbitrary firings from work, blocking of social media including internet sites and chat forums, beatings of detainees, and even firing into crowds, which caused the deaths of at least two protestors.¹⁸⁵ Despite this, Oman remains relatively stable and the sultan remains popular.^{186, 187}

¹⁸⁰ *BBC News*, "Oman Profile," 16 January 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14654492>

¹⁸¹ Thuraia bint Humood Al Aisaria, "1st Lt. Fatima Al-Manthariah, First Omani Airwoman," *Al-Ain Assahira* (Royal Oman Police magazine), 127 (November 2011): 17.

¹⁸² Said Sultan al Hashimi, "The Oman Spring: Toward the Break of a New Dawn" (Arab Reform Brief, November 2011), 2–5, <http://www.arab-reform.net/IMG/pdf/Omanenglish.pdf>

¹⁸³ Said Sultan al Hashimi, "The Oman Spring: Toward the Break of a New Dawn" (Arab Reform Brief, November 2011), 5, <http://www.arab-reform.net/IMG/pdf/Omanenglish.pdf>

¹⁸⁴ Said Sultan al Hashimi, "The Oman Spring: Toward the Break of a New Dawn" (Arab Reform Brief, November 2011), 5–6, <http://www.arab-reform.net/IMG/pdf/Omanenglish.pdf>

¹⁸⁵ Said Sultan al Hashimi, "The Oman Spring: Toward the Break of a New Dawn" (Arab Reform Brief, November 2011), 8–9, <http://www.arab-reform.net/IMG/pdf/Omanenglish.pdf>

¹⁸⁶ Fergus Nicoll, "Oman: Sultan Qaboos Still Popular Despite Discontent," *BBC News*, 3 March 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12639699>

¹⁸⁷ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 13 January 2012, 2, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21534.pdf>

Chapter 2 Assessment

1. Oman is the newest independent Arab state.
False
 The Sultanate of Oman is the oldest independent Arab state.
2. Although ruled by many empires, no European nation has controlled Oman.
False
 The Portuguese successfully conquered parts of the Omani coast and ruled between 1508 and 1650. Portugal was interested only in the coastal areas and did not venture into the interior.
3. Oman once controlled territories in what are now Iran, Pakistan, and Africa.
True
 At its height, the Omani empire controlled the entire Gulf region, southern Iran, and Baluchistan. Oman ruled more than 3,000 km (1,864 mi) along the East African coast including Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, and Zanzibar.
4. Oman's tribal chiefs appoint members to the Consultative Council known as the *Majlis al-Shura*.
False
 In the 1980s, tribes appointed representatives to the Consultative Council, but by 1991, these representatives were elected by the citizens.
5. Oman remained isolated and underdeveloped until 1970.
True
 In 1970, Sultan Qaboos bin Said inherited an illiterate and poverty-ridden country, but immediately overturned many of his father's policies, launched modern reforms, set about developing the nation's infrastructure, and joined the modern world.

CHAPTER 3: ECONOMY

Introduction

Maritime trade defined Oman's economy until the discovery of oil in 1964.¹⁸⁸ When Sultan Qaboos bin Said came to power in 1970, he began building the foundations of a modern economy based largely on oil.¹⁸⁹ Although crucial for recent modernization and economic prosperity, oil cannot continue as the economic mainstay. Oman does not have large oil reserves, so serious efforts to diversify the economy are underway. The "Vision 2020" development plan hopes to reduce dependence on oil to only 9% of GDP by 2020.^{190, 191, 192} Oman has rapidly privatized its economy with greater success than the other Gulf States. These efforts have created a friendly investment environment that has increased economic expansion and development.¹⁹³



© Henry Burrows
Barr Al Jissah Resort

Major efforts are ongoing to give tourism a more important economic role. Domestic and international investors are building new resorts to accommodate the anticipated influx of visitors. The government is also seeking international investment to develop its mining and manufacturing segments.^{194, 195}

Human resource development and the high number of foreign workers, most of whom are employed in low-paying jobs, pose additional significant challenges.¹⁹⁶ In 2010, foreigners made up 84% of the Omani labor force, mostly in the private sector.¹⁹⁷ With nearly 30,000 Omani

¹⁸⁸ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 54.

¹⁸⁹ Meir Javandanfar, "Oman: The Arab World's Emerging Economy," Middle East Economic and Political Analysis Company, 2005, <http://www.meepas.com/Omanemergingeeconomy.htm>

¹⁹⁰ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 54.

¹⁹¹ Meir Javandanfar, "Oman: The Arab World's Emerging Economy," Middle East Economic and Political Analysis Company, 2005, <http://www.meepas.com/Omanemergingeeconomy.htm>

¹⁹² Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Oman," 5 January 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35834.htm>

¹⁹³ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Oman: Economy," 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/428217/Oman/45163/Economy>

¹⁹⁴ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 54–57.

¹⁹⁵ Meir Javandanfar, "Oman: The Arab World's Emerging Economy," Middle East Economic and Political Analysis Company, 2005, <http://www.meepas.com/Omanemergingeeconomy.htm>

¹⁹⁶ Nilambari Gokhale and Kailash Chandra Das, "Localization of Labor and International Migration: A Case Study of the Sultanate of Oman" (paper presented at the European Population Conference, Vienna, 1–4 September 2010), 7, <http://epc2010.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=100160>

¹⁹⁷ Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 23, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

secondary students completing their education each year, the government must address the challenge of finding jobs for these students in order to achieve greater self-reliance.¹⁹⁸

Agriculture

With rainfall averaging only 10 cm (4 in) rainfall a year, only a small area of Oman is suitable for cultivation.¹⁹⁹

Agriculture accounts for only 1.5% of GDP, but in 2009 accounted for 37% of all non-oil exports and employed 60% of the population.^{200, 201}

The most heavily cultivated areas are the al-Batinah plain (just north of the capital to the UAE border) and the southern Dhofar region. The main export crops are dates and limes.

Important domestic crops include bananas, vegetables, camels, cattle, and fish.^{202, 203, 204}

Oman must import most grains and farm products to meet national demand.²⁰⁵ But it now supplies approximately half of its vegetables, 71% of its fruits, 24% of its poultry, and 52% of its eggs.²⁰⁶



© thetravelguru / flickr.com
Date palm orchard

Fish and livestock are also expanding. Commercial fish production began in 2003 and is an increasingly important part of agricultural efforts.²⁰⁷ Fish farms are being built and existing infrastructure improved.^{208, 209} Most livestock is owned by small farmers. Goats are the most popular animal, followed by sheep and cattle with a significantly smaller number of camels.

¹⁹⁸ Nilambari Gokhale and Kailash Chandra Das, "Localization of Labor and International Migration: A Case Study of the Sultanate of Oman" (paper presented at the European Population Conference, Vienna, 1–4 September 2010), 5, <http://epc2010.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=100160>

¹⁹⁹ Mohammed Salim Abdullah Al-Mashakhi and El-Hag Bakhit Ahmed Koll, "Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles: Oman" (report to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2007), <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/oman/oman.htm>

²⁰⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, "Oman: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 11 January 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

²⁰¹ Ravindra Nath, "Oman Will Develop Agriculture Sector," *Khaleej Times Online* (United Arab Emirates), 3 November 2009, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.aspx?xfile=data/middleeast/2009/November/middleeast_November61.xml§ion=middleeast&col=

²⁰² Central Intelligence Agency, "Oman: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 11 January 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

²⁰³ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, "Economy: Agriculture," 2012, <http://www.omanet.om/english/commerce/econ8.asp?cat=comm>

²⁰⁴ Mohammed Salim Abdullah Al-Mashakhi and El-Hag Bakhit Ahmed Koll, "Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles: Oman" (report to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2007), <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/oman/oman.htm>

²⁰⁵ Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 17, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²⁰⁶ *Oman Daily Observer*, "Oman's Agriculture on a Rapid Growth Trajectory," 8 January 2011, <http://omanobserver.om/node/36175>

²⁰⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, "Oman: Sector Performance," 2012, http://www.fao.org/fishery/countrysector/naso_oman/en

²⁰⁸ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, "Economy: Agriculture," 2012, <http://www.omanet.om/english/commerce/econ8.asp?cat=comm>

²⁰⁹ Globserver (China), "Oman: Agriculture," 2011, <http://www.globserver.com/en/oman/agriculture>

Many of these animals are raised by nomadic herders but a significant number are owned by settled farmers, who rely on existing pasturelands to feed the animals.²¹⁰

Industry

In 2011, industry contributed about 51% of GDP, including its oil and gas industries. Petroleum production and refining dominate the sector, but other industries include liquefied natural gas, construction, cement, copper, steel, and chemicals.²¹¹ The manufacturing sector, currently accounting for over 12% of the national economy, is targeted for growth.²¹² Development and expansion efforts are focusing on information technology, telecommunications, household goods, and other light industry.^{213, 214}



© Ryan Lackey
Cement factory under construction

Most of the heavy industries are located in Sohar, with smaller concentrations in Sur, Salalah, Nizwa, and Buraimi.²¹⁵ Major industrial projects underway include a large petrochemical complex, fertilizer and methanol plants, aluminum smelters, and two cement plants. The centers for light industry are Rusayl and Sohar. The marble, limestone, copper, and gypsum sectors seem most promising.²¹⁶

Several important infrastructure projects to promote development are underway. Seaports are being modernized to accommodate supertankers for the transport of natural gas.²¹⁷ A major port and dry dock are being constructed in Duqm to facilitate its development into an industrial center. Another major project is the joint construction of a 2,000-km (1,243-mi) railway running from Kuwait to southern Oman, with a possible expansion into Yemen. The railway is expected to dramatically reduce transportation costs and encourage economic development.²¹⁸

²¹⁰ Mohammed Salim Abdullah Al-Mashakhi and El-Hag Bakhit Ahmed Koll, “Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles: Oman” (report to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2007),

<http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/oman/oman.htm>

²¹¹ Central Intelligence Agency, “Oman: Economy,” in *The World Factbook*, 11 January 2012,

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

²¹² Tyler Philip Eldridge McWilliam, “Made in Oman: Promoting Manufacturing and Export in the Sultanate of Oman” (report to the School for International Training, Spring 2011), 3,

http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2031&context=isp_collection

²¹³ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, “Economy: Industry,” 2012,

<http://www.omanet.om/english/commerce/econ6.asp?cat=comm&subcat=comm2>

²¹⁴ Middle East Economic and Political Analysis Company, “Oman: The Arab World’s Emerging Economy,” n.d.,

<http://www.meepas.com/Omanemergingconomy.htm>

²¹⁵ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, “Economy: Industry,” 2012,

<http://www.omanet.om/english/commerce/econ6.asp?cat=comm&subcat=comm2>

²¹⁶ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Oman,” 5 January 2012,

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35834.htm>

²¹⁷ Meir Javendanfar, “Oman: The Arab World’s Emerging Economy,” Middle East Economic and Political Analysis Company, 2005, <http://www.meepas.com/Omanemergingconomy.htm>

²¹⁸ Tyler Philip Eldridge McWilliam, “Made in Oman: Promoting Manufacturing and Export in the Sultanate of Oman” (report to the School for International Training, Spring 2011), 15,

http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2031&context=isp_collection

Energy

The Petroleum Development Company accounts for over 70% of crude oil production. The company is jointly owned; the two largest owners are the government of Oman (60%) and Royal Dutch Shell (34%).²¹⁹ Oman's daily production is only about 10% of the other Gulf States. With proven reserves around 4.8 billion barrels, oil may be depleted by 2022.^{220,}

^{221, 222, 223} Nevertheless, oil production has increased each of the last three years. This increase is mainly because of the discovery of new fields by international companies and enhanced recovery techniques. The newly discovered reserves at al-Ghubar South, Malaan West, and Taliah could extend the diminishing reserves.²²⁴



© Ryan Lackey
Oil refinery and storage tanks

Crude oil refining is done by two companies: the state-owned Mina al-Fahal in the capital Muscat, and Sohar, which is jointly owned by the Ministry of Finance (75%) and the Oman Oil Company (25%). The two refineries are linked by a pipeline.^{225, 226}

Oman's natural gas reserves were estimated in 2009 to be more than 840 billion cu m (30 trillion cu ft).²²⁷ The Petroleum Development Company dominates the gas market, accounting for almost 100% of natural gas production.²²⁸ Nearly two-thirds of Omani natural gas exports go to South Korea while the remainder go to Japan, India, Taiwan, and Spain.²²⁹ Two of the country's three production trains are operated by Oman LNG. Qalhat LNG, run by a consortium that includes the government, operates the third train. Oman Gas Company controls the domestic pipeline, which spans about 1,770 kilometers (1,110 mi).²³⁰

²¹⁹ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, "Economy: The Oil Sectors," 2012,

<http://www.omanet.om/english/commerce/econ5.asp?cat=comm>

²²⁰ Meir Javendanfar, "Oman: The Arab World's Emerging Economy," Middle East Economic and Political Analysis Company, 2005, <http://www.meepas.com/Omanemergingconomy.htm>

²²¹ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Oman," 5 January 2012,

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35834.htm>

²²² Oil and Gas Directory Middle East, "The Sultanate of Oman," 2011, 1045,

<http://www.oilandgasdirectory.com/research/Oman.pdf>

²²³ Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 37, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²²⁴ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Oman," February 2011,

<http://205.254.135.7/countries/cab.cfm?fips=MU>

²²⁵ Oil and Gas Directory Middle East, "The Sultanate of Oman," 2011, 1045,

<http://www.oilandgasdirectory.com/research/Oman.pdf>

²²⁶ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Oman," February 2011,

<http://205.254.135.7/countries/cab.cfm?fips=MU>

²²⁷ Oil and Gas Directory Middle East, "The Sultanate of Oman," 2011, 1045,

<http://www.oilandgasdirectory.com/research/Oman.pdf>

²²⁸ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, "Economy: The Oil Sectors," 2012,

<http://www.omanet.om/english/commerce/econ5.asp?cat=comm>

²²⁹ Oil and Gas Directory Middle East, "The Sultanate of Oman," 2011, 1046,

<http://www.oilandgasdirectory.com/research/Oman.pdf>

²³⁰ Oil and Gas Directory Middle East, "The Sultanate of Oman," 2011, 1047,

<http://www.oilandgasdirectory.com/research/Oman.pdf>

The country does not have sufficient gas to meet its increasing domestic needs and export demands. The Ministry of Oil announced plans to increase gas reserves by 28 billion cu m (1 trillion cu ft) per year for the next 20 years in order to meet demand. The current shortfall has caused electrical power outages during peak usage. The Gulf Council is building a power grid, which means that it may be possible for Oman to import electricity from other states to reduce demand and strain on its gas reserves.²³¹

Natural Resources

Oman has significant mineral resources including zinc, copper, gold, cobalt, and iron.²³² Building supplies, limestone, chromite, marble, iron, gypsum, and quartz were the 2010 mining sector's most significant products.²³³ The main copper reserves are located along the al-Batinah coast near the city of Sohar.²³⁴ More than 150 mining and quarrying activities are ongoing. The majority of them are related to chromite and marble. In southern Oman, the demand for cement has increased interest in gypsum reserves. Rich deposits of silica in the north, south, and central regions have positioned the nation to become a major silica exporter. International interest in the mineral deposits have increased investments and raised the value of this sector.²³⁵



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Oman's mineral deposits

Trade

The economy remains strong, and Oman enjoys a trade surplus largely based on its petroleum exports.²³⁶ In 2010, oil and natural gas accounted for over 80% of exports.²³⁷ Most oil was bound for China, followed by India, Japan, and Thailand. Other major export destinations include South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore.^{238, 239} Chemicals, plastic and rubber, and



© Klaus Ottes
Cargo ship at port in Oman

²³¹ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Oman," February 2011, <http://205.254.135.7/countries/cab.cfm?fips=MU>

²³² Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, "Economy: Mineral Resources," 2012, <http://www.omanet.om/english/commerce/econ9.asp?cat=comm>

²³³ Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 39, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²³⁴ Mawarid Mining, Sultanate of Oman, "Mining," 2011, http://www.mawaridmining.com/operations_miningomancopper.shtml

²³⁵ *Oman Daily Observer*, "Oman's Mining Sector in for Quantum Leap," 28 January 2012, <http://main.omanobserver.om/node/81047>

²³⁶ Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 92–93, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²³⁷ Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 8, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²³⁸ Oil and Gas Directory Middle East, "The Sultanate of Oman," 2011, 1045, <http://www.oilandgasdirectory.com/research/Oman.pdf>

mineral products were the most significant non-oil exports.²⁴⁰ Nearly 44% of these products in 2010 were destined for the United Arab Emirates, India, and Saudi Arabia.²⁴¹ Machinery and transport equipment along with manufactured goods composed 63% of Oman's imports. Live animals and food represented another 10%. Oman's top three import partners in 2010 were the United Arab Emirates, Japan, and the United States.²⁴²

Tourism

The development of the tourism sector is a high priority and is expected to play a significant future economic role.²⁴³ In 2009, approximately 945,000 international tourists visited Oman.²⁴⁴ In 2010, approximately 2 million visitors came predominantly from India and the United Arab Emirates. Most remaining visitors came from Europe and the other Gulf countries.²⁴⁵ Several efforts to promote short-term tourism and stop-over visits are ongoing. These include visa price reductions and an easing of restrictions.²⁴⁶ The number of hotel



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Tourist boat

rooms has increased, especially along the coast near the capital. The tourism industry initially focused on high-end luxury travelers by building four- and five-star luxury facilities.^{247, 248, 249}

The government was less interested in budget travelers out of fear they would be more likely to

²³⁹ Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 93–94, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²⁴⁰ Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 37, 96, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²⁴¹ Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 94, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²⁴² Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 95, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²⁴³ Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 19, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²⁴⁴ Jennifer Blanke and The Chiesa, "The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2011" (report for the World Economic Forum, Geneva, 2011), 298,

http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TravelTourismCompetitiveness_Report_2011.pdf

²⁴⁵ Ministry of Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, "Tourism Linking Cultures" (official brochure, Ministry of Tourism of Oman, 27 September 2011),

http://www.omantourism.gov.om/wps/wcm/connect/8594c580487245448905fbfde0ccbc90/WTD+MOT+brochure+eng.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=8594c580487245448905fbfde0ccbc90

²⁴⁶ M. Najamuz Zafar, "Short Term Visa Fee Cut From RO20 to RO5," Muscat Daily, 15 February 2012, <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Oman/Short-term-visa-fee-cut-from-RO20-to-RO5>

²⁴⁷ Oman Info, "Oman Enjoying a Boom in Tourist Traffic," n.d., <http://www.omaninfo.com/tourism-and-travel-experiences/oman-enjoying-boom-tourist-traffic.asp>

²⁴⁸ Christopher C. Hoch, "Trade and Tourism in Oman," *TED (Trade & Environment Database) Case Studies* 8, no. 1 (January 1998), <http://www1.american.edu/TED/OMANTOUR.HTM>

²⁴⁹ Deloitte, "Oman Hotel Information" (report by the Ministry of Tourism in Oman, June 2008), 2–7, 9–10, http://www.omantourism.gov.om/wps/wcm/connect/6a904800435cc92fb0f6fbac65cfb36c/Oman_Hotels_Information_En.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=6a904800435cc92fb0f6fbac65cfb36c

disrespect conservative cultural traditions. This view has changed somewhat and, as a result, the number of two- and three-star hotels has increased.^{250, 251}

Tourism efforts emphasize cultural values and understanding in addition to the natural beauty of Oman's landscape.^{252, 253} The industry must carefully balance an influx of tourists with its environmental protection measures and the challenges posed by the increased mixing of Westerners with traditionally conservative Muslims of Oman.²⁵⁴ Tourism throughout the country has been advanced by joint ventures for niche visitors, construction of the new Convention and Exhibition Center, and adventure tourism.^{255, 256, 257}

Banking and Finance

Oman's national currency, the rial (OMR), is pegged to the U.S. dollar (USD) at an exchange rate of USD 1 = OMR .384 (or 1 OMR = USD 2.60).^{258, 259} This policy has been controversial among the Gulf States because of the declining dollar value against other currencies, which raises the risk of inflation. Although concerned, the Omani government continues to have faith in the USD and is not yet willing to change its current policy.²⁶⁰

The Central Bank of Oman is responsible for setting monetary policy and ensuring monetary and financial stability.²⁶¹ The Central Bank oversees commercial banks, specialized banks, non-bank finance and leasing companies, and money-exchange institutions. Each commercial bank is privately owned although the government does possess minority interest in several. Foreigners

²⁵⁰ Christopher C. Hoch, "Trade and Tourism in Oman," *TED (Trade & Environment Database) Case Studies* 8, no. 1 (January 1998), <http://www1.american.edu/TED/OMANTOUR.HTM>

²⁵¹ Philip Paul, "Number of Hotel Rooms in Muscat Expected to Grow by 21% pa over Next Five Years," Cluttons, n.d., <http://www.oman.cluttons.com/news/cluttons-in-oman-number-of-hotel-rooms-in-muscat-expected-to-grow-by-up-to-21-per-annum-over-the-next-five-years>

²⁵² Ministry of Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, "Tourism Linking Cultures" (official brochure from the Ministry of Tourism of Oman, 27 September 2011), http://www.omantourism.gov.om/wps/wcm/connect/8594c580487245448905fbfde0ccbc90/WTD+MOT+brochure+eng.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=8594c580487245448905fbfde0ccbc90

²⁵³ Euromonitor International, "Travel and Tourism in Oman: Executive Summary," 2011, <http://www.euromonitor.com/travel-and-tourism-in-oman/report>

²⁵⁴ Christopher C. Hoch, "Trade and Tourism in Oman," *TED (Trade & Environment Database) Case Studies* 8, no. 1 (January 1998), <http://www1.american.edu/TED/OMANTOUR.HTM>

²⁵⁵ Ministry of Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, "Tourism Linking Cultures" (official brochure from the Ministry of Tourism of Oman, 27 September 2011), http://www.omantourism.gov.om/wps/wcm/connect/8594c580487245448905fbfde0ccbc90/WTD+MOT+brochure+eng.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=8594c580487245448905fbfde0ccbc90

²⁵⁶ Euromonitor International, "Travel and Tourism in Oman: Executive Summary," 2011, <http://www.euromonitor.com/travel-and-tourism-in-oman/report>

²⁵⁷ Euromonitor International, "Travel and Tourism in Oman: Executive Summary," 2011, <http://www.euromonitor.com/travel-and-tourism-in-oman/report>

²⁵⁸ Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 63, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²⁵⁹ Pegging means that the value of the rial is fixed against the value of the dollar.

²⁶⁰ Eman El-Shenawi, "Gulf Currency Trade: To Peg or Not to Peg? Financial Analysis by Eman El-Shenawi," *Al Arabiya News*, 26 June 2011, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/06/26/154917.html>

²⁶¹ Central Bank of Oman, "Annual Report 2010" (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 62, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

are allowed to own banks but their equity share cannot exceed 70%. Most of the assets, credits, and deposits are held by three banks.²⁶²

There is a growing trend toward Islamic banking. The Central Bank has almost completed guidelines for such institutions. Two Islamic banks were approved in 2011. Changes to the banking law to allow for lenders that ban interest in line with Islamic law should be completed. When the new services become available, the Central Bank officials estimate that Islamic banks will account for as much as 10% of total bank assets.²⁶³

In 1997, the Oman Development Bank was established to provide loans for entrepreneurs outside the oil industry. This bank seems more likely than traditional banks to finance relatively risky ventures, thereby increasing development.²⁶⁴



© Mary Paulose
National Bank of Oman

Standard of Living

Oman is a middle-income country with a per capita GDP of USD 26,200.²⁶⁵ The United Nations Development Index ranks Oman 89th in terms of standard of living in the world (health, schooling, income).²⁶⁶ In order to reduce the wage differences between the private and public sectors, the government raised the private-sector minimum wages by 43% to USD 520 in 2011. The increase is not effective for foreign employees but only for the 177,000 Omanis currently in the private sector.^{267, 268}



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Taking a break to play cards

Healthcare is free for Omani nationals and, according to the World Health Organization, Oman ranked first in healthcare delivery in 2000.^{269, 270} Nearly all hospitals are government-run, and

²⁶² Central Bank of Oman, “Annual Report 2010” (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 60, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²⁶³ Dana El Baltaji, “Oman’s Zadjali Says Islamic Banks’ Guidelines Draft Almost Ready,” Bloomberg, 8 February 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-02-08/oman-s-zadjali-says-islamic-banks-guidelines-draft-almost-ready.html>

²⁶⁴ Tyler Philip Eldridge McWilliam, “Made in Oman: Promoting Manufacturing and Export in the Sultanate of Oman,” (report to the School for International Training, Spring 2011), 12, http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2031&context=isp_collection

²⁶⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, “Oman: Economy,” in *The World Factbook*, 11 January 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

²⁶⁶ United Nations Development Programme, “Oman: Country Profile; Human Development Indicators,” 2011, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/OMN.html>

²⁶⁷ Central Bank of Oman, “Annual Report 2010” (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 23, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²⁶⁸ Claire Ferris-Lay, “Oman Hikes Minimum Wage to \$520 for Nationals,” Arabian Business, 17 February 2011, <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/oman-hikes-minimum-wage--520-for-nationals-381382.html>

²⁶⁹ Oman Info, “New Challenges to the Healthcare System in Oman,” n.d., <http://www.omaninfo.com/health/new-challenges-healthcare-system-oman.asp>

78% of doctors and 93% of nurses work in government-run facilities.²⁷¹ The availability of and advances in healthcare have raised the average life expectancy to just over 74 years.²⁷²

Employment Trends

Oman has a significant number of foreigners working in the economy despite having the highest unemployment rate (15%) in the Gulf.^{273, 274} Young Omanis in particular complain about the lack of jobs and training.²⁷⁵ In partial response to these concerns, the government implemented an “Omanization” policy, aimed at reducing the number of foreign employees in order to provide jobs for Omani citizens.²⁷⁶ These efforts have been somewhat successful. In 2010, 85.6% of the public sector was Omani, but private-sector employment was overwhelmingly foreigners (84.3%). The government hopes to fill as much as 60% of some industries—banking, hotel, and oil and gas—with Omanis.^{277, 278} To help make this possible, new programs focused on improving the skills of the workforce and increasing the coordination between employers and training institutions have been implemented.²⁷⁹ The nation’s high birth rate and growing number of working-aged people have pressured the government to evict illegal workers and institute penalties on companies for hiring them.²⁸⁰



© Adam Houlston
Foreign workers

²⁷⁰ Basu Ghosh, “Health Systems Profile: Oman” (report for Eastern Mediterranean Regional Health System Observatory, 8 November 2006), 36–37,

<http://gis.emro.who.int/HealthSystemObservatory/PDF/Oman/Full%20Profile.pdf>

²⁷¹ Basu Ghosh, “Health Systems Profile: Oman” (report for Eastern Mediterranean Regional Health System Observatory, 8 November 2006), 24,

<http://gis.emro.who.int/HealthSystemObservatory/PDF/Oman/Full%20Profile.pdf>

²⁷² Central Intelligence Agency, “Oman: People and Society,” in *The World Factbook*, 11 January 2012,

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

²⁷³ Central Bank of Oman, “Annual Report 2010” (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 23, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²⁷⁴ Elizabeth Broomhall, “Bahrain and Oman have Highest Gulf Unemployment Rates,” *Arabian Business*, 7 July 2011, <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/bahrain-oman-have-highest-gulf-unemployment-rates-409116.html>

²⁷⁵ Sara Hamdan, “Oman Offers Some Lessons to a Region Embroiled in Protest,” *New York Times*, 6 April 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/07/world/middleeast/07iht-m07-oman.html?pagewanted=all>

²⁷⁶ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Oman,” 5 January 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35834.htm>

²⁷⁷ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Oman,” 5 January 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35834.htm>

²⁷⁸ Central Bank of Oman, “Annual Report 2010” (report to the Sultan of Oman, June 2011), 23, http://www.cbo-oman.org/annual/annual_report_2010.pdf

²⁷⁹ Tyler Philip Eldridge McWilliam, “Made in Oman: Promoting Manufacturing and Export in the Sultanate of Oman,” (report to the School for International Training, Spring 2011), 13,

http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2031&context=isp_collection

²⁸⁰ Naomi Collette, “Oman,” in *Middle East Review 2003/2004*, 27th ed., ed. Kogan Page (Los Angeles: Walden Publishing, 2003), 143.

Outlook

The outlook for economic growth is positive and will likely expand in the near term. In 2012, the country should see a 5% increase in GDP.^{281, 282} Increased government spending is expected to create 30,000 jobs for recent graduates and another 50,000 jobs for those on the waiting list, with the largest increase in the public sector. One challenge is the dominance of low-wage foreign workers preferred by the private sector. In December 2011, their numbers were estimated to be just over 1 million.²⁸³

Inflation rates are falling and inflationary pressures remain low. Any changes in oil prices could affect the economy, but there are no indications that prices will drop significantly. In 2011, oil accounted for 72% of government revenue, up only slightly from the previous year.²⁸⁴

For the near term, revenues will remain largely dependent on petroleum. This puts the nation at risk if prices spike. Other potential risks are likely to come from pro-democracy demonstrators whose activities might scare away international investors.²⁸⁵



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Omani coppersmith

²⁸¹ Asma Alsharif, Reuters, "Oman Economy Likely to Grow 5%," *Arab News*, 29 June 2011, <http://arabnews.com/economy/article464193.ece>

²⁸² Oxford Business Group, "Oman: Economy on the Rise," 19 December 2011, http://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/economic_updates/oman-economy-rise

²⁸³ Oxford Business Group, "Oman: Economy on the Rise," 19 December 2011, http://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/economic_updates/oman-economy-rise

²⁸⁴ Oxford Business Group, "Oman: Economy on the Rise," 19 December 2011, http://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/economic_updates/oman-economy-rise

²⁸⁵ Market Research, "Oman Business Forecast Report Q1 2012," Business Monitor International, 20 December 2011, <http://www.marketresearch.com/Business-Monitor-International-v304/Oman-Business-Forecast-Q1-6738672/>

Chapter 3 Assessment

1. The majority of the Omani workforce is made of foreign workers.

True

One challenge faced by the government is the large number of foreign workers. In 2010, foreign workers made up 84% of the Omani labor force, mostly in the private sector.

2. Few Omanis are employed in agriculture.

False

Agriculture accounts for only 1.5% of GDP, but in 2009, agricultural products accounted for 37% of all non-oil exports and employed 60% of the population.

3. Oman's oil reserves are relatively low and cannot sustain the economy in the long term.

True

Oman's proven oil reserves stand at around 4.8 billion barrels, and some experts suggest that the nation's reserves will be depleted by 2022.

4. Oman has sufficient natural gas reserves to meet domestic and foreign demand.

False

The country does not have sufficient supplies to meet increasing domestic need and export demand. The current shortfall has caused electrical power outages during peak usage.

5. Most Omanis are employed in the private sector.

False

In 2010, 85.6% of public sector employees were Omani, but private-sector employees were overwhelmingly foreigners (84.3%).

CHAPTER 4: SOCIETY

Introduction

The people of Oman are aware of their national history and tribal history, which significantly shape individual identity.²⁸⁶ They are fiercely proud of their national heritage and enjoy sharing it with others. Omanis are known for their friendly, welcoming, and hospitable nature.²⁸⁷ Despite their friendly and welcoming attitudes, Omanis are a conservative people with a respect for privacy. The nation has struggled to find a balance with modernity while maintaining tribal relationships and customs, preserving traditional arts, and respecting historical monuments. Among their most important values are religion, family honor, and personal honor.^{288, 289, 290}



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Friendly Omanis

Not long ago, Omanis lived somewhat isolated even from other regions of the country, yet they have a cosmopolitan outlook as a result of many migrations that came to and through Oman. The efforts of the present sultan have created a more unified people who express their culture in social customs rather than historical tribal rivalries.²⁹¹

Ethnic Groups and Languages

Oman is a nation of 3 million people including approximately 577,000 expatriates living and working in the nation. The majority of Omanis (73%) are Arab; other ethnic groups include Indians, Pakistanis (mostly Baluchi), and Egyptians, plus smaller groups including Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, and Africans.²⁹² Minorities enjoy full citizenship rights. The government has overrepresented them in parliament in



© Mary Paulose
Omani and Emirati Arabs

²⁸⁶ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 15.

²⁸⁷ Communicaid, “Challenges of Doing Business in Oman,” 2010, <http://blog.communicaid.com/cross-cultural-training/challenges-of-doing-business-in-oman/>

²⁸⁸ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 58–59.

²⁸⁹ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 16–17.

²⁹⁰ Jenny Walker et al., *Oman, UAE, and Arabian Peninsula* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2010), 177.

²⁹¹ Tor Eigeland, “Oman: The People,” *Saudi Aramco World* 34, no. 3 (May/June 1983),

<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/198303/oman-the.people.htm>

²⁹² Central Intelligence Agency, “Oman: People and Society,” in *The World Factbook*, 11 January 2012,

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

²⁹³ Population Statistics, “Oman: Ethnic Composition, Language, and Religion,” 3 January 2004,

<http://www.populstat.info/Asia/omang.htm>

order to bring minority groups into mainstream Omani society.^{294, 295}

The official language of Oman is an Arabic that is close to Modern Standard Arabic.^{296, 297} Along the coast, dialects use loanwords from Baluchi, Persian, Urdu, Gujarati, and Portuguese. People in the mountains of Dhofar and small groups of desert nomads between Dhofar and northern Oman speak a variety of unique South Arabian languages, which Modern Arabic speakers cannot understand.²⁹⁸ Other languages spoken by various ethnic groups include Urdu, Baluchi, Swahili, Luwati, and various Indian dialects.^{299, 300}

Baluchi

The Baluchi, the largest non-Arab people and roughly 12% of the population, have been in Oman for many centuries.³⁰¹ Most trace their origins to the Pakistani Baluchi tribes because the original immigrants are believed to have come from Gwadar in Pakistan. But others identify with the Makrani Baluchi tribes from Oman, and a few more identify with the Iranian Baluchi. They speak their own languages and are members of the Sunni sect of Islam.³⁰² Most are concentrated along the al-Batinah coast in the capital Muscat and in Matrah. This ethnic group has long served in the military, and the first modern army unit in Oman was entirely Baluchi. They typically work in low-paying jobs or the civil service. Because Baluchis are the majority in the lower-income groups, many of the younger Baluchi feel alienated as victims of discrimination.^{303, 304, 305}

²⁹⁴ J.E. Peterson, "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 50, http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

²⁹⁵ Nora Ann Colton, "Social Stratification in the Gulf Cooperation Council States" (research paper, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, January 2011), 34, <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=11&ved=0CCEQFjAAOAO&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.lse.ac.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fresearch%2Fresgroups%2Fkuwait%2Fdocuments%2FColton%2520paper.pdf&ei=D986T9-nMuiXiAKi-6mSDA&usg=AFQjCNGVhCrjAh7c2-VkmErCr81mUWFJQQ&sig2=5kL2Vv7s4BwcPD-HXTP5PQ>

²⁹⁶ Thomson Gale, "Oman," *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2007), <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Oman.aspx#1>

²⁹⁷ Dawn Chatty and J.E. Peterson, "Oman: Linguistic Affiliation," in *Countries and their Cultures*, vol. 3, eds. Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2011), 1681, http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Countries_and_Cultures.pdf

²⁹⁸ Dawn Chatty and J.E. Peterson, "Oman: Linguistic Affiliation," in *Countries and their Cultures*, vol. 3, eds. Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2011), 1681, http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Countries_and_Cultures.pdf

²⁹⁹ Thomson Gale, "Oman," *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2007), <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Oman.aspx#1>

³⁰⁰ M. Paul Lewis, ed., "Languages of Oman," in *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2009), http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=OM

³⁰¹ Nora Ann Colton, "Social Stratification in the Gulf Cooperation Council States" (research paper, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, January 2011), 36, <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=11&ved=0CCEQFjAAOAO&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.lse.ac.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fresearch%2Fresgroups%2Fkuwait%2Fdocuments%2FColton%2520paper.pdf&ei=D986T9-nMuiXiAKi-6mSDA&usg=AFQjCNGVhCrjAh7c2-VkmErCr81mUWFJQQ&sig2=5kL2Vv7s4BwcPD-HXTP5PQ>

³⁰² J.E. Peterson, *Historical Muscat: An Illustrated Guide and Gazetteer* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007), 79.

³⁰³ J.E. Peterson, "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 35–37, 51, http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

Africans and Swahili Speakers

Oman has a centuries-old connection with East Africa. In the 17th century, after defeating the Portuguese, Omanis took over Portugal's East African territories. The sultan eventually moved to Zanzibar (1840) where his descendants continued to rule until 1964.^{306, 307} Persons of East African descent are known as "Zanzibari" in Oman, but they reflect different racial origins. Some Zanzibari who came to Oman around 1964 had African bloodlines, but many were pure Omani descended from the sultan's family. Although their native language was Swahili, the people were welcomed because of their skills and education, including their command of English.³⁰⁸ Many from this group work in the national oil company, the Ministry of Defense, and the Internal Security Service.^{309, 310} Although welcomed at first in high-level government positions, recent hostility has limited African access to positions of power. Omanis believe Zanzibaris are truly African, and their alleged poor mastery of Arabic lowers their status. The children of the original Zanzibaris speak fluent Arabic, yet they remain distant from Omani nationals because of a more liberal culture and disconnectedness from Omani tribes. Other Africans are descended from slaves brought to Oman as recently as 1960, before slavery was outlawed in Oman in 1970.^{311, 312}

³⁰⁴ Nora Ann Colton, "Social Stratification in the Gulf Cooperation Council States" (research paper, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, January 2011), 36, <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=11&ved=0CCEQFjAAOAO&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.lse.ac.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fresearch%2Fresgroups%2Fkuwait%2Fdocuments%2FColton%2520paper.pdf&ei=D986T9-nMuiXiAKi-6mSDA&usg=AFQjCNGVhCrjAh7c2-VkmErCr81mUWFJQQ&sig2=5kL2Vv7s4BwcPD-HXTP5PQ>

³⁰⁵ Malcolm C. Peck, *Historical Dictionary of the Gulf Arab States*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 46.

³⁰⁶ Chris McIntyre and Susan McIntyre, *Zanzibar* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2009), 3, 8, 13–16.

³⁰⁷ Malcolm C. Peck, *Historical Dictionary of the Gulf Arab States*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 321.

³⁰⁸ J.E. Peterson, "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 45–48, http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

³⁰⁹ J.E. Peterson, "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 45–48, http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

³¹⁰ Nora Ann Colton, "Social Stratification in the Gulf Cooperation Council States" (research paper, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, January 2011), 37, <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=11&ved=0CCEQFjAAOAO&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.lse.ac.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fresearch%2Fresgroups%2Fkuwait%2Fdocuments%2FColton%2520paper.pdf&ei=D986T9-nMuiXiAKi-6mSDA&usg=AFQjCNGVhCrjAh7c2-VkmErCr81mUWFJQQ&sig2=5kL2Vv7s4BwcPD-HXTP5PQ>

³¹¹ J.E. Peterson, "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 45–48, http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

³¹² Junius P. Rodriguez, *Slavery in the Modern World: A History of Political, Social, and Economic Oppression* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 410.

Hindus and Indians

Oman's Indian Hindus are largely members of the merchant class.³¹³ Many came from Sindh and Gujarat provinces and forged strong trading relations during the Portuguese occupation (1507–1650). Near the end of the 20th century, *Ibadi* (Omani Muslim) hostilities toward Hindus caused many to leave the country. The few remaining families trace their origins to Gujarat and speak Kutchi. Most Hindus live within Matrah or in new quarters in Muscat because the traditional Hindu areas were destroyed. Because of language and religious differences, Hindus have not assimilated into the Omani population as much as some other groups.³¹⁴



© Anirvan / flickr.com
Hindu temple, Muscat

Two other Indian communities can be found in Matrah in the Kumbar quarter. The Kimbhars were traditionally potters whereas the Sonabara were silver- and goldsmiths. Many of the Sonabara continue working in these crafts today and have adopted the last name al-Sayigh (jeweler). Although originally Hindu, the Kimbhars and the Sonabara have converted to Islam.³¹⁵

Lawatiyya (Khojas)

The Luwati-speaking Lawatiyya arrived in Oman 300 to 400 years ago from the Sindh area of India.³¹⁶ This is the largest of the Omani Shi'ite Muslim groups. They originally populated the Matrah neighborhood known as Sur al-Lawatiyya, but most contemporary residents have moved out of the Sur and into the suburbs of Muscat. The area contains the principal Shi'ite mosque, which is shared with Oman's two other Shi'ite groups. Today, there are Lawatiyya concentrations in the al-Batinah region, particularly in the towns of Saham, Barka, al-Masnaa, and al-Khabura. The group has been successful in business but plays a relatively minor role in politics. Some Omanis still view the Lawatiyya as foreigners, feel jealous over their relative prosperity, and notice sectarian differences.^{317, 318}

³¹³ Nora Ann Colton, "Social Stratification in the Gulf Cooperation Council States" (research paper, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, January 2011), 37, <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=11&ved=0CCEQFjAAOAo&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.lse.ac.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fresearch%2Fgroups%2Fkuwait%2Fdocuments%2FColton%2520paper.pdf&ei=D986T9-nMUiXiAKi-6mSDA&usq=AFQjCNGVhCrjAh7c2-VkmErCr81mUWFJQQ&sig2=5kL2Vv7s4BwcPD-HXTP5PQ>

³¹⁴ J.E. Peterson, "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 38–40, http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

³¹⁵ J.E. Peterson, "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 40, http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

³¹⁶ C. Carpenter, "Peoples of the Arabian Peninsula," *World and its Peoples: Arabian Peninsula: Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 30.

³¹⁷ J.E. Peterson, "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 41–43, http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

³¹⁸ Amel Salman and Nafla Kharusi, "Consonantal Phonemes in the Lawatiyya Language," *European Journal of Scientific Research* 55, no. 2 (2011): 430–431, http://www.eurojournals.com/EJSR_55_3_12.pdf

Religion

The official state religion is Islam; the Omani form, Ibadi, is quite conservative and traditional.^{319, 320}

Approximately 75% of the Omani count themselves as Ibadi Muslims. The remaining fraction comprises other Islamic sects and Hinduism. Adherents of other Islamic sects include the Sunni, located primarily around Dhofar, and the Shi'a, who live along the al-Batinah coast in the Muscat-Matrah area. The Hindus are a small group.^{321, 322, 323, 324} The majority Ibadi have historically been tolerant toward Christians and Jews and allowed them to practice their religions.³²⁵



© Jhong Dizon
Zawawi Mosque, Muscat

Omani Muslims follow the five pillars of the faith. These include the profession of faith (*shahada*), ritual prayers (*salat*), fasting (*sawm*), charity (*zakat*), and the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca.³²⁶ Vestiges of traditional superstitions, fetishism, animism, and Semitic beliefs remain in modern religious practice in Oman.³²⁷

The Ibadi sect differs from Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims in several fundamental ways. First, the Ibadi do not believe in the inherited right to succession by a caliph, nor do they believe that they will see Allah on judgment day. Unlike the Sunni, who believe that hell is only temporary, the Ibadi believe those in hell will remain there forever. Further, the Ibadi believe that Allah created the Quran at a specific time, whereas Sunnis believe the Quran, as the words and mind of God, has always existed. But the greatest difference lies in the Ibadi practice of dissociating themselves from (i.e., not accepting) non-believers and sinners.^{328, 329}

Magic and superstition are important parts of Omani spiritual life. The “evil eye” is regarded as a real threat, and people may wear amulets to protect themselves.³³⁰

³¹⁹ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 18–19.

³²⁰ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, “Culture: Overview,” 2002, <http://www.omanet.om/english/culture/overview.asp?cat=cult>

³²¹ Central Intelligence Agency, “Oman: People and Society,” in *The World Factbook*, 11 January 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

³²² The Institute for National Security Studies (Israel), “Oman,” 14 April 2011, 2, <http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291302774167.pdf>

³²³ The Institute for National Security Studies (Israel), “Oman,” 14 April 2011, 2, <http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291302774167.pdf>

³²⁴ Fareed Mohamedi, “Oman: Society,” in *Persian Gulf States: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1993, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field%28DOCID+om0030%29>

³²⁵ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 19.

³²⁶ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 18–19.

³²⁷ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 19.

³²⁸ Valerie J. Hoffman, “Ibadi Islam: An Introduction,” *Islam and Islamic Study Resources*, 1997–2008, <http://islam.uga.edu/ibadis.html>

³²⁹ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 19.

³³⁰ Jenny Walker et al., *Oman, UAE, and Arabian Peninsula* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2010), 180.

Cuisine

Because Oman is a crossroads in the Middle East, the cuisine and its regional variations reflect a variety of tastes and influences from the Middle East, Africa, and the Far East. Typical dishes include chicken, mutton, and fish. The food is flavored with traditional regional spices such as cinnamon, saffron, turmeric, and cardamom, but “hot” spices are generally omitted. Rice is typically the main ingredient and is accompanied by cooked meat, fish, or vegetables. Breakfast frequently comprises *rukhal* (a thin round bread baked over a fire), honey, *laban* (a yogurt drink), and *saywaia* (a type of sweetened vermicelli noodle). The midday meal is the heaviest of the day and the evening meal tends to be light. Oman does not have a true national dish, but typical main courses include *magbous* (saffron-spiced rice with spicy meats) or *mashuai* (a spit-roasted kingfish served alongside lemon rice). Kebabs and curries are other common favorites. Following Islamic law, alcohol and pork are forbidden.^{331, 332, 333}



© erkan.pinar / flickr.com
Typical Omani dish

Traditional Dress

Many Omani wear traditional regional dress although the cut is different and the colors are brighter than in other Gulf States. The long *dishdasha* (robe) topped with a *farakha* (tassel), along with a *massar* (embroidered skull cap), is typical male attire.³³⁴ Dishdasha colors provide clues about the region men come from. Desert dwellers prefer solid white, blue, or yellow, while those from the mountains or coast prefer a more colorful, sarong-like garment.³³⁵ On formal occasions, men add a silver belt with a *khunjar* (dagger).³³⁶ A long cloak, or *busht*, that covers the dishdasha is worn on formal occasions. The *assa*, a stick traditionally used to control camels, is now a decorative accessory for men. Shoes are usually leather sandals.³³⁷



© Nicole Grant
Traditional dress

Traditional village attire for women includes embroidered trousers, *sirwal*, worn under a knee-length *dishdasha*. An embroidered headdress, known as a *lihaff*, completes the look. Such

³³¹ D. Mustafa, “Oman,” in *World and Its Peoples: Arabian Peninsula; Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 53.

³³² Visual Geography, “Oman: Food,” 2012, <http://www.visualgeography.com/categories/oman/food.html>

³³³ Dawn Chatty and J.E. Peterson, “Oman: Food and Economy,” *Countries and their Cultures*, 2012, <http://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Oman.html>

³³⁴ D. Mustafa, “Oman,” in *World and Its Peoples: Arabian Peninsula; Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 53.

³³⁵ Tor Eigeland, “Oman: The People,” *Saudi Aramco World* 34, no. 3 (May/June 1983), <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/198303/oman-the.people.htm>

³³⁶ D. Mustafa, “Oman,” in *World and Its Peoples: Arabian Peninsula; Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 53.

³³⁷ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 20.

costumes are becoming less common and are often reserved for special occasions.³³⁸ Today, most women wear the ankle-length robe known as the *abaya*. Rural women may wear the traditional costume described above under the *abaya*.³³⁹ Traditional rural women often wear a veil covering their entire face, while younger, less conservative women tend to wear a *shayla*, a scarf that covers the hair but not the face.³⁴⁰ Bedouin women traditionally wear the *burka*, a long gown with a veil covering their head and face.³⁴¹ In the cities, women are opting for modest Western-style clothing and the *shayla* for office attire.³⁴²

Foreigners are expected to respect local conservative dress codes.³⁴³ Women should wear loose-fitting clothes and cover their upper arms and shoulders. Skirts should fall below the knee while pants should be long. It is wise to carry a shawl for those occasions where even more modesty is appropriate (e.g., in rural towns). Foreign women who do not dress appropriately can be deported.³⁴⁴ Long pants with a shirt are worn by men. Men can wear shorts that come below the knee, but men wearing shorts on a Friday in rural areas might be barred from the village. Sandals are generally allowed, although some restaurants do not permit them.³⁴⁵

Gender Issues

Sultan Qaboos bin Said believes that all citizens have something to contribute to the development of the nation, and he has worked hard to advance women.³⁴⁶ The Omani constitution guarantees equality between the sexes.³⁴⁷ As a result, Omani women receive better treatment and greater equality than their counterparts in other Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia. They have equal opportunities in work and education, can be members of the *Majlis al-Shura*, and occupy senior government positions.^{348, 349} Attitudes in rural Oman are



© Tanenhaus / flickr.com
Omani Bedouin Family

³³⁸ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 69.

³³⁹ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 21–21.

³⁴⁰ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 68.

³⁴¹ D. Mustafa, “Oman,” in *World and Its Peoples: Arabian Peninsula; Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 53.

³⁴² Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 68.

³⁴³ D. Mustafa, “Oman,” in *World and Its Peoples: Arabian Peninsula; Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 53.

³⁴⁴ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 88–89.

³⁴⁵ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 88–89.

³⁴⁶ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 17.

³⁴⁷ Social Institutions and Gender Index, “Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Oman,” n.d., <http://genderindex.org/country/oman>

³⁴⁸ Diana Darke and Sandra Shields, *Oman: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 17.

more traditional, and women are largely wives and mothers expected to stay at home.³⁵⁰ Regardless of where they live, women must uphold family honor by remaining virgins until they marry and behaving conservatively. Female behavior is more vigilantly protected than that of boys.³⁵¹

Although there are some legal protections for women, gender inequality remains a concern. The lives of women remain largely prescribed by the Quran. Women face discrimination in family matters under a Personal Status Law. Under shari'a law, mothers have physical custody of children without legal status. In the case of divorce, custody normally goes to men after children reach a certain age. Inheritance rules grant women a lesser share than men. Further, women are typically restricted in their movements, which require permission from male relatives. It is rare to see women out in public alone without a male family member. Polygamy, which allows up to four wives, is legal in the country, but financial considerations often limit a man to two wives.^{352, 353}

Violence against women is another issue. Domestic abuse is believed to be common though rarely reported. Female genital mutilation is practiced in some communities, especially in the Dhofar region.³⁵⁴

Arts

Music

Music has a long and important history in Oman and was probably first used to accompany poets.³⁵⁵ Instruments such as the *oud* (a short-stringed instrument) and the *tanbura* (a stringed instrument strummed like a harp) often accompany traditional folk songs.³⁵⁶ During special celebrations, men dance, making adaptations for particular events.³⁵⁷ Early nomad performers were accompanied by the *rababa*, a one-stringed fiddle. Early poetry fell into three broad categories: *al-hinji* (camel riders' music), *al-'arda* (warrior songs), and *al-samiri* (love songs). These poems/songs have been passed down for generations with each singer improvising and

³⁴⁹ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 66–68.

³⁵⁰ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 67.

³⁵¹ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 67.

³⁵² Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 67–68.

³⁵³ Social Institutions and Gender Index, “Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Oman,” n.d., <http://genderindex.org/country/oman>

³⁵⁴ Social Institutions and Gender Index, “Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Oman,” n.d., <http://genderindex.org/country/oman>

³⁵⁵ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 110–112.

³⁵⁶ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, “Melodic Instruments,” 2002, Oman Centre for Traditional Music, http://www.octm-folk.gov.om/meng/instrument_mel02.asp

³⁵⁷ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 110–112.

changing the original.^{358, 359} Along the coast, each ship had a singer, the *nahham*, whose songs served as both encouragement to load the ships quickly and nightly entertainment. The working songs were short and rhythmic while the longer evening songs were based on legends.³⁶⁰

The descendants of African slaves in Oman added another form of music that is still performed by their descendants. *Lewa* groups use canisters and *musundu* drums to beat a rhythm, along with conch trumpets and a *mismar* (a double-reed woodwind instrument) for melody. Songs in Swahili and Arabic tell about life on the sea. Sometimes, the rhythmic cadence puts dancers into a trance.^{361, 362, 363}

Women's music has an important tradition in the Gulf States. Women, waiting for their men to return, gathered on the shore to sing their own songs of lamentation that asked for their husbands' safe return. Women, like men, had songs for specific tasks, such as cooking.³⁶⁴ Many professional female singers perform folk music and perform at weddings for all-female audiences. In Sohar, all the professional female musicians are the descendants of African slaves.³⁶⁵ In an attempt to preserve such traditional folk music, the sultan commissioned the Oman Center for Traditional Music.^{366, 367, 368}

Dance

Traditional dance has been an important but largely male exercise. Many of the dances are related to war. In Oman, the *al-'ayyala* dance is performed by two rows of men carrying sticks or swords, moving toward each other and then retreating. This type of dance is often reserved for celebrations where songs of bravery and male honor accompany the dance. Males performing the *razha* leap into the air, throwing their swords and then



© Sophie Jonasson
Dancing men

³⁵⁸ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 144–146.

³⁵⁹ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, “Culture: Folk Songs and Dances,” 2002, http://www.omanet.om/english/culture/folk_song.asp?cat=cult

³⁶⁰ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 147.

³⁶¹ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 144, 147–148.

³⁶² Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, “Melodic Instruments,” 2002, Oman Centre for Traditional Music, http://www.octm-folk.gov.om/meng/instrument_mel03.asp

³⁶³ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, “Rhythm,” 2002, <http://www.octm-folk.gov.om/meng/rhythm.asp>

³⁶⁴ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 147.

³⁶⁵ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 149–150.

³⁶⁶ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 112.

³⁶⁷ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 149.

³⁶⁸ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, “Introduction,” 2002, Oman Centre for Traditional Music, <http://www.octm-folk.gov.om/meng/introduction.asp>

catching them.^{369, 370} The *Razha al-Kabira* is used in modern Oman primarily as a celebration of Sultan Qaboos bin Said. In the southern region of Dhofar, the *bar'aa* is a dance in which two men, each armed with a dagger, advance and retreat while jumping in the air on one foot.³⁷¹

There are dances for women, including the *al-murada*, a line dance. Another common dance is the *raqs al-nissa*, performed by two women winding through other women who remain seated. In Ibri, women perform the *al-wailah* by placing their right hand on the shoulder of the woman next to them, moving as one, and shaking a rattle.^{372, 373}

Sports and Recreation

Camels are fundamental to life in the desert and play a key role in Omani daily life. Camel racing is a popular sport, especially from September to April and on public holidays.³⁷⁴ Breeding camels for racing has become an economic enterprise for many, and in some regions camels are bred as thoroughbreds and are highly prized.³⁷⁵ The sport now includes special race tracks and special training programs.³⁷⁶



© Tsutomu Takasu
Oman vs. Japan, Muscat

Oman has a long history of horse racing and is famous for its Arabian horses. The sport's popularity has surged in recent years, and the sultan is a strong supporter and patron of the sport.³⁷⁷ Show jumping and dressage competitions are held every winter.^{378, 379}

Football (soccer) is especially popular among young males. A win by the national team, which was formed in 1978, results in jubilant celebrations throughout the country.^{380, 381} Omanis are

³⁶⁹ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, "Culture: Folk Songs and Dances," 2002, http://www.omanet.om/english/culture/folk_song.asp?cat=cult

³⁷⁰ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 151–153.

³⁷¹ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 151–153.

³⁷² Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 154.

³⁷³ Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, "Culture: Folk Songs and Dances," 2002, http://www.omanet.om/english/culture/folk_song.asp?cat=cult

³⁷⁴ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 116.

³⁷⁵ Oman Explorer, "Camel Racing," n.d., nizwa.net, <http://www.nizwa.net/oman/explorer/events/camelrace/camelrace.html>

³⁷⁶ Ministry of Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, "Camel Racing," 2012, <http://www.omantourism.gov.om/wps/portal/mot/tourism/oman/home/experiences/activities/camel>

³⁷⁷ Hussein Shehadeh, "Oman Celebrates Royal Horse Race Festival with Peak Performance," Middle East Online, 5 January 2012, <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=49841>

³⁷⁸ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 116.

³⁷⁹ Ministry of Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, "Horse Riding and Racing," 2012, <http://www.omantourism.gov.om/wps/portal/mot/tourism/oman/home/experiences/activities/horse>

also fond of water sports including swimming, diving, and snorkeling. In partial testimony to the popularity of water sports, Oman was the site of the 2010 Asian Beach Games.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 116.

³⁸¹ ITN Source, “Oman: Soccer/Football; Jubilant Omani Fans Celebrate Penalty Kick Victory over Saudi Arabia to Win their First Ever Gulf Cup,” 19 January 2009, <http://www.itnsource.com/shotlist/RTV/2009/01/19/RTV113609/?v=1>

³⁸² Simone Nowell, *Oman—Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture* (New York: Random House, 2009), 116–117.

Chapter 4 Assessment

1. Nearly three-quarters of the Omani population is Arabic.

True

The majority of Omanis (73%) are Arab, but significant numbers of other ethnic groups live in the nation including Indians, Pakistanis (mostly Baluchi), and Egyptians, plus smaller groups including Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, and Africans.

2. Most Omanis are Sunni Muslims.

False

The official religion is Islam; the Omani form, Ibadi, is quite conservative and traditional. Approximately 75% of the Omani count themselves as Ibadi Muslims, and the remaining 25% comprises mainly Sunni Muslims, Shi'a Muslims, and Hindus.

3. In Oman, the traditional male attire, the *dishdasha*, is more colorful than that of other Gulf States.

True

Many Omani wear the *dishdasha* although the colors are brighter than in other Gulf States. Desert dwellers prefer solid white, blue, or yellow, while men from the mountains or coast prefer a more colorful, sarong-like garment.

4. Women in Oman must wear a veil.

False

Omani women typically wear the ankle-length robe known as the *abaya*. Traditional rural women often wear a veil that covers the face, but younger, less conservative women prefer the *shayla*, a scarf that covers the hair but not the face.

5. Women in Oman generally have greater freedom than other women in the region.

True

The Omani constitution guarantees equality between the sexes. As a result, Omani women receive better treatment and greater equality than women in other Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia.

CHAPTER 5: SECURITY

Introduction

Oman is less driven by ideology and short-term gains than its Middle Eastern neighbors and it has steered its own course in foreign policy. For over 40 years, Sultan Qaboos bin Said has steadily moved his country from isolation to leadership in global diplomacy. The pillars of his foreign policy include respect for international law, a principle of nonintervention, and strict adherence to nonalignment. The nation is a recognized global player in foreign relations. Oman deftly manages national, regional, and global interests, making friends of opposing sides. Sultan Qaboos summed up his approach by citing the Ibadī principles of tolerance and forward thinking. His stated aim is to achieve national security and prosperity through nonviolence. Some observers see pragmatism, rather than nonviolence, as his defining philosophy.³⁸³



DoD Image / Jerry Morrison
Sultan Qaboos bin Said

United States–Oman Relations

The United States and Oman enjoy a strong relationship even though Oman does not always agree with U.S. regional policies. Oman sent a strong signal of support for the United States when it did not reject the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty in 1979. Further support for the United States came when Oman granted access to its facilities during the Iran crisis in 1979–1980. Since then, it has consistently renewed access agreements. The most recent was signed in 2010. The U.S. Air Force currently stores some of its equipment and munitions at Omani airfields. During Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, U.S. troops and aircraft were stationed in the country, but only a handful remained by early 2012.^{384, 385}



© DoD Image / Jerry Morrison
U.S. – Oman relations

Oman receives relatively modest financial aid from the United States compared to other Gulf States. The Omani government received approximately USD 20 million to help purchase U.S.-made military equipment.³⁸⁶ An additional USD 69 million was authorized to expand the military facilities at Musnanah in 2010.³⁸⁷ But the U.S. has thus far not designated Oman a “major non-NATO ally,” though it has done so for Bahrain and Kuwait.³⁸⁸

³⁸³ Rand Corporation, “Oman: A Unique Foreign Policy,” 16 September 2010, http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB2501/index1.html

³⁸⁴ Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, “External Affairs, Oman,” 11 January 2012.

³⁸⁵ Kenneth Katzman, “Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy,” Congressional Research Service, 13 January 2012, 8–9, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21534.pdf>

³⁸⁶ Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, “External Affairs, Oman,” 11 January 2012.

³⁸⁷ Kenneth Katzman, “Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy,” Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2011, 6–7, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/155044.pdf>

³⁸⁸ Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, “External Affairs, Oman,” 11 January 2012.

Oman has been proactive in combating terrorism and cooperates with the other Gulf States to prohibit cross-border transit of terrorist groups. It has partnered with the United States in anti-terrorism efforts. U.S.-bound cargo from Oman's ports is screened for illegal nuclear materials and terrorists.³⁸⁹ Despite the strong relationship between the two nations, the United States is concerned about Oman's human rights record.³⁹⁰

Trade relations between the two countries are strong and in 2009, the amount of trade was nearly USD 2 billion. Military and oil drilling equipment are the main exports from the United States. Crude oil is Oman's primary export to the United States.³⁹¹

Relations with Neighbors

Iran

Oman, unlike other Gulf States, continues to maintain good relations with Iran.³⁹² The Omani government is critical of U.S. attempts to isolate Iran but has publicly supported U.S. policies in the region.³⁹³ However, it has publicly opposed the idea of a U.S. attack on Iranian nuclear facilities.^{394, 395} Oman is a significant Iranian trading partner, yet its balancing act with Iran and the United States has complicated trade relations with Tehran. Since 2008, trade between Tehran and Muscat has totaled more than USD 1 billion.³⁹⁶ The two governments are engaged in talks to secure investments for the development of Iranian offshore natural gas fields that adjoin Oman's West Bukha oil and gas field in the Strait of Hormuz.^{397, 398} Natural gas is scheduled to flow from Iran to Oman via an undersea pipeline in March 2012.³⁹⁹



© Bevan Koopman
Strait of Hormuz

³⁸⁹ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2011, 8–9, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/155044.pdf>

³⁹⁰ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "External Affairs, Oman," 11 January 2012.

³⁹¹ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 13 January 2012, 16, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21534.pdf>

³⁹² Will Fulton and Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Oman-Iran Foreign Relations," American Enterprise Institute Iran Tracker, 21 July 2011, <http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/oman-iran-foreign-relations>

³⁹³ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "External Affairs, Oman," 11 January 2012.

³⁹⁴ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2011, 13, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/155044.pdf>

³⁹⁵ Will Fulton and Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Oman-Iran Foreign Relations," American Enterprise Institute Iran Tracker, 21 July 2011, <http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/oman-iran-foreign-relations>

³⁹⁶ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "External Affairs, Oman," 11 January 2012.

³⁹⁷ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2011, 13, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/155044.pdf>

³⁹⁸ Will Fulton and Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Oman-Iran Foreign Relations," American Enterprise Institute Iran Tracker, 21 July 2011, <http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/oman-iran-foreign-relations>

³⁹⁹ Will Fulton and Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Oman-Iran Foreign Relations," American Enterprise Institute Iran Tracker, 21 July 2011, <http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/oman-iran-foreign-relations>

Both sides signed a mutual security agreement in 2010. In 2011, both sides stated the need for closer military cooperation and announced additional military exercises and war games.⁴⁰⁰ Another agreement, signed in 2009, defends against smuggling across the Gulf of Oman.^{401, 402} Oman believes that Iran has the right to possess peaceful nuclear technology and has been an important force in moderating the concern expressed by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) regarding Iran's nuclear program.⁴⁰³

Iraq

Omani relations with Iraq are similar to those of the other GCC states. Oman has not yet appointed an ambassador to Baghdad because of security concerns.⁴⁰⁴ After the Gulf War (1990–1991), Oman strengthened its ties with Baghdad when it was the first GCC state to open a dialogue with the Iraqi government. Oman contributed funds to Iraq's redevelopment, although the amount was lower than that of other Gulf States.⁴⁰⁵ In 2002, the two signed a free trade agreement. In 2006, Oman was one of the first Arab countries to welcome the new Iraqi government. Several visits between their respective leaders have focused on deepening economic and trade relations.⁴⁰⁶

Israel

Oman was the only Gulf State to maintain relations with Egypt after the peace accord with Israel in 1979. It denounced the Arab boycott of Israel and, in 1994, was the first Gulf State to officially receive an Israeli prime minister (Yitzhak Rabin). Even though Muscat hosted another Israeli prime minister in 1996, it did not try to establish formal diplomatic ties. In 1995, mutual trade offices opened, but they were closed after the Palestinian uprisings in 2000. Oman has remained open to renewing trade ties. But it insists that there must be progress in Israeli-Palestinian relations before proceeding. Oman sees the current prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, as an obstacle to progress in the region. But Oman has continued to hold unofficial talks and to host Israeli delegations.⁴⁰⁷

Saudi Arabia

Today's relations between Saudi Arabia and Oman are strong, which is a departure from their past tensions. Relations began to improve after the Saudis recognized Qaboos bin Said's new government in 1971. The formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council improved relations between the two member nations. In 1995, they finally resolved a border dispute. In 2009, Muscat and

⁴⁰⁰ Will Fulton and Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Oman-Iran Foreign Relations," American Enterprise Institute Iran Tracker, 21 July 2011, <http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/oman-iran-foreign-relations>

⁴⁰¹ Will Fulton and Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Oman-Iran Foreign Relations," American Enterprise Institute Iran Tracker, 21 July 2011, <http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/oman-iran-foreign-relations>

⁴⁰² Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2011, 13, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/155044.pdf>

⁴⁰³ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "External Affairs, Oman," 11 January 2012.

⁴⁰⁴ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2011, 13–14, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/155044.pdf>

⁴⁰⁵ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2011, 11, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/155044.pdf>

⁴⁰⁶ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "External Affairs, Oman," 11 January 2012.

⁴⁰⁷ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2011, 11, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/155044.pdf>

Riyadh established a border trade zone. Since then, trade between the two has increased.⁴⁰⁸ A major road project in progress will provide the only land border crossing between the two countries. Scheduled to open in 2012, the crossing will be known as Rub al-Khali on the Saudi side and Ramlat Khaliya on the Omani side.^{409, 410}

United Arab Emirates

In 2008, a longstanding border dispute between Oman and the United Arab Emirates was finally resolved. But Oman's continued good relations with Iran have created tensions with the UAE. Oman does not trust the more liberal Emirati government, and the Emirati are suspicious of Omani influence on their northern emirates. Yet neither wishes to see tensions flare, and regular visits between government officials are keeping relations positive and stable.⁴¹¹

Yemen

Relations between Yemen and Oman were once unreservedly hostile.⁴¹² The government of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen provided aid to the insurgents in Oman's Dhofar region in their unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the sultan.⁴¹³ After the end of the conflict, tensions eased somewhat and, in 1983, Oman established formal diplomatic relations with South Yemen. In 1987, Oman appointed its first ambassador to South Yemen and opened its embassy in Aden. Relations warmed even further in 1992–1993 when the unified Republic of Yemen and Oman resolved their border dispute.⁴¹⁴ In 1994, civil war erupted in Yemen. Despite Oman's support for a unified Yemeni state, the Omani government offered asylum to southern leaders at the end of the war.⁴¹⁵ In 2009, the Omani government withdrew the Omani citizenship of the southern Yemeni politician Al Salim al Bidh, who was suspected of fanning separatist sentiment in Yemen. This signaled support for the current Yemeni government and eased bilateral tensions.⁴¹⁶



© Kremlin.ru
Yemeni ex-President Saleh

Today, Yemen is one of Oman's top trade partners in non-oil products and is interested in pursuing economic and political relations with wealthier Oman. Trade and cooperation between the two are increasing, aided by the opening of a new border crossing from al-Ghayda, Yemen to Shihan, Oman. The two nations cooperate on issues related to technology, farming,

⁴⁰⁸ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "External Affairs, Oman," 11 January 2012.

⁴⁰⁹ P.K. AbdulGhafour, "750 km Saudi-Oman Road Construction Gathers Pace," *Arab News*, 25 December 2010, <http://arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/article223182.ece>

⁴¹⁰ Free Zone Company, "Oman-Saudi Border Almost Ready," 21 February 2011, <http://www.free-zone-company.com/dubai-uae/content/oman-saudi-border-almost-ready>

⁴¹¹ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "External Affairs, Oman," 11 January 2012.

⁴¹² Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "External Affairs, Oman," 11 January 2012.

⁴¹³ Fred Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen, 1967–1987* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1990), 145.

⁴¹⁴ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Oman," 5 January 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35834.htm>

⁴¹⁵ Joseph Kechichian, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1995), 255, http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR680.html

⁴¹⁶ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 20 January 2010, 15, http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RS21534_20100120.pdf

transportation, trade, and anti-piracy efforts. In 2009, both governments signed agreements promising greater cooperation in the future. Oman fully backed Yemen's application for membership in the GCC in 1996. Oman supported the Yemeni government against the Huthi rebels in 2009 and provided USD 3 million to relief agencies assisting displaced Yemeni nationals.^{417, 418}

Police

The main agency for law and order in the country is the Royal Oman Police (ROP) force, which currently has approximately 6,000 officers. Women are allowed to serve and they occupy high posts in several divisions.^{419,}

⁴²⁰ The ROP was established by the current sultan in 1974 in an effort to develop modern law enforcement.⁴²¹

The agency is responsible for customs and immigration duties as well as typical police work. In addition, they operate a coast guard, a civil defense organization, and Omani prisons. When necessary, the ROP become

involved in domestic security and riot control. They are under the direct command of the inspector general of police and customs, who reports to the sultan, the supreme commander.⁴²²



© moaksey / flickr.com
Royal Oman Police on camels

Military

Based on GDP, Oman allocates more money to its military than any other Gulf State.^{423, 424} Its 43,000 troops make Oman's armed forces the third-largest among the GCC.⁴²⁵ The military comprises three branches: the army, air force, and navy. The army is the largest unit (31,400) compared to the relatively small air force (between 3,500 and 4,100) and navy (approximately 4,200).⁴²⁶ Although not well-equipped, the forces are considered the best-trained in the region. The armed forces have had significant success in



© MilborneOne / Wikimedia.com
Hercules airplane of the Royal Air Force

⁴¹⁷ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "External Affairs, Oman," 11 January 2012.

⁴¹⁸ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2011, 15, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/155044.pdf>

⁴¹⁹ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "Security and Foreign Forces," 11 April 2011.

⁴²⁰ Thuraia bint Humood Al Aisaria, "1st Lt. Fatima Al-Manthariah, First Omani Airwoman," *Al-Ain Assahira* (ROP magazine) 127 (November 2011): 17.

⁴²¹ Royal Oman Police, Sultanate of Oman, "ROP History Events," n.d., <http://www.rop.gov.om/english/rophiistoryevents.asp>

⁴²² Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "Security and Foreign Forces," 11 April 2011.

⁴²³ Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. al-Rodhan, *Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars*, vol. 1 (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 124.

⁴²⁴ Laura S. Etheredge, ed., *Persian Gulf States: Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates* (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2011), 148.

⁴²⁵ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2012, 9, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/183732.pdf>

⁴²⁶ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "Armed Forces, Oman," 1 July 2011.

dealing with internal security problems in the last 30 years. Despite its somewhat small numbers, the military is believed to be capable of deterring a major foreign attack and dealing with any insurgency. The government of Oman is modernizing its forces with purchases of materiel such as fighter aircraft, equipment, anti-tank systems, armored personnel carriers, and patrol boats.⁴²⁷
428

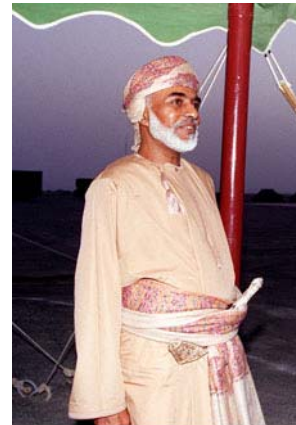
The over 6,000-member Royal Guard is responsible for protecting the sultan, his household, and property, along with visiting dignitaries.⁴²⁹ There is no independent border guard. A Special Forces unit performs limited border security and anti-smuggling efforts. But the ROP has primary responsibility for land and sea entry points.⁴³⁰

A paramilitary force of armed Dhofari tribesmen operates as a kind of paid home guard. These tribesmen are referred to as *Firqats*. They usually carry only light arms but do have some armored personnel carriers. They are in units from 50 to 100, and their total force strength is estimated at about 4,000 members.^{431, 432}

Issues Affecting Stability

Political Succession

Sultan Qaboos bin Said's brief marriage produced no heirs. The rules of succession, which are outlined in the Basic Law, call for a committee of the ruling family (approximately 50 male members) to determine a successor after the death of the sultan. Should the family be unable to reach consensus, the heir would be the person named in a succession letter written by the sultan.^{433, 434} It is uncertain whether the process or the next sultan will inspire confidence. The procedure has been further complicated by reports that the sultan has written multiple letters naming different persons.⁴³⁵ And it is not clear that the relatively progressive policies of the current ruler will be continued.⁴³⁶



DoD Image / Helene C Stikkel
Sultan Qaboos bin Said

⁴²⁷ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2012, 9, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/183732.pdf>

⁴²⁸ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "Armed Forces, Oman," 1 July 2011.

⁴²⁹ Jane's World Armies, "World Armies, Oman," 16 November 2011.

⁴³⁰ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "Security and Foreign Forces," 11 April 2011.

⁴³¹ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—The Gulf States, "Security and Foreign Forces," 11 April 2011.

⁴³² Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. al-Rodhan, *Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars*, vol. 1 (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 137.

⁴³³ Economic Development Council of Canada, "Oman," August 2011, <http://www.edc.ca/EN/Country-Info/Documents/Oman.pdf>

⁴³⁴ Kenneth Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2011, 1, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/155044.pdf>

⁴³⁵ Dominic Dudley, "Reflecting on 40 Years of Sultan Qaboos' Rule," *MEED Insight*, 23–29 July 2010, <http://www.meed.com/sectors/economy/government/reflecting-on-40-years-of-sultan-qaboos-rule/3008038.article>

⁴³⁶ Economic Development Council of Canada, "Oman," August 2011, <http://www.edc.ca/EN/Country-Info/Documents/Oman.pdf>

Unemployment

The high birthrate and increasing number of young people eligible for the workforce present a risk to long-term stability unless the government is able to create a sufficient number of jobs.⁴³⁷ The government's response included quotas for foreign workers. Current quotas affecting six private-sector industries require Omani nationals to represent between 35%–60% of the workforce.⁴³⁸

Water Security

Although monsoonal rains restore the groundwater, Oman receives minimal rainfall, making it extremely arid.⁴³⁹ One assessment service rates water security risk for Oman as extreme.⁴⁴⁰ Water scarcity has not yet affected the stability of the region, but analysts suggest it could fuel tensions in the future. One focal point of concern is the lift-water needed to force oil from wells.

If water supplies and water pressure become insufficient, oil prices could spike and there could be disruptions in supply. A lack of water could raise the prices for agricultural goods and food, which are a current source of tension.^{441, 442, 443} Although agriculture accounts for only about 2% of GDP, it accounts for approximately 90% of the water used in Oman. Diminishing supplies of water could have serious long-term consequences for productivity and raise the cost of water to industries. Oman's groundwater is already being invaded by saltwater. Oman's push to expand tourism and its rapid urban growth are producing significant stress on the water system.^{444, 445}



© Henry Burrows
Water used for tourism

⁴³⁷ Naomi Collette, "Oman," in *Middle East Review 2003/2004*, 27th ed., ed. Kogan Page (Los Angeles: Walden Publishing, 2003), 143.

⁴³⁸ Economic Development Council of Canada, "Oman," August 2011, <http://www.edc.ca/EN/Country-Info/Documents/Oman.pdf>

⁴³⁹ Zaher bin Kahlid al sulaimani, "Water Resources Management in Sultanate of Oman" (report from the Director General of Water Resources, Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment and Water Resources, Iran, n.d.), 1–2, <http://www.rcuwm.org.ir/En/Events/Documents/Workshops/Articles/3/2.pdf>

⁴⁴⁰ Maplecroft, "Oil Producing Middle East and North African Countries Dominate Maplecroft Water Security Risk List," 22 March 2011, http://maplecroft.com/about/news/water_security.html

⁴⁴¹ Kieran Ball, "Water Shortages in Middle East Could Mean Further Hikes," *Earth Times*, 22 March 2011, <http://www.earthtimes.org/energy/water-shortages-in-middle-east-could-mean-further-oil-hikes/554/>

⁴⁴² David Rosenberg, "Mideast is World's Riskiest Region for Water Security," *Jerusalem Post*, 22 March 2011, <http://www.jpost.com/ArtsAndCulture/Entertainment/Article.aspx?id=213322>

⁴⁴³ Emirates 24 News, "UAE, Kuwait, Oman Face Acute Water Scarcity," 22 March 2011, <http://www.emirates247.com/news/emirates/uae-kuwait-oman-face-acute-water-scarcity-2011-03-22-1.371589>

⁴⁴⁴ *Muscat Daily*, "Dropping Ground Water Levels Could Hit Omani Agricultural Productivity," 26 March 2011, <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Stories-Files/Dropping-ground-water-levels-could-hit-Omani-agricultural-productivity>

⁴⁴⁵ Zaher bin Kahlid al sulaimani, "Water Resources Management in Sultanate of Oman" (report from the Director General of Water Resources, Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment and Water Resources, Iran, n.d.), 4, <http://www.rcuwm.org.ir/En/Events/Documents/Workshops/Articles/3/2.pdf>

Outlook

Oman has secure borders, a stable body politic, and a prosperous economy.⁴⁴⁶ Based on the 2011 Failed States Index, Oman's score of 41 indicates that the country is stable.⁴⁴⁷ A credit rating company gives the country a tier 3 rating that indicates a moderate risk of instability.⁴⁴⁸ Oman has been less affected than neighboring states by the current instability and violence in the region. Violence in the region has tempered enthusiasm for foreign investment, although rising oil prices may offset the economic risks. Calls for political reform in Oman have been relatively mild, but uncertainty surrounding the succession of the aging sultan raises the specter of political instability upon his death.⁴⁴⁹ There are no reports of terrorist threats or attacks in the nation, and the overall terrorist risk is negligible.⁴⁵⁰



© Bilal Sarwar
Wadi Kabeer Mountains, Muscat

⁴⁴⁶ Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, "Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism: Sultanate of Oman" (report adopted by the MENAFATF Plenary, 4 May 2011), 19, <http://www.fiu.gov.om/files/Evaluation.pdf>

⁴⁴⁷ *Foreign Policy*, "The Failed States Index 2011," 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/17/2011_failed_states_index_interactive_map_and_rankings

⁴⁴⁸ A.M. Best, "AMB Country Risk Report: Oman," 28 September 2011, 1, <http://www3.ambest.com/ratings/cr/reports/Oman.pdf>

⁴⁴⁹ A.M. Best, "AMB Country Risk Report: Oman," 28 September 2011, 2–3, <http://www3.ambest.com/ratings/cr/reports/Oman.pdf>

⁴⁵⁰ Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, "Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism: Sultanate of Oman" (report adopted by the MENAFATF Plenary, 4 May 2011), 19, <http://www.fiu.gov.om/files/Evaluation.pdf>

Chapter 5 Assessment

1. Nonintervention is a key component of Omani foreign policy.

True

The pillars of Oman's foreign policy include respect for international law, a principle of nonintervention, and strict adherence to nonalignment.

2. Oman's relations with the United States are lukewarm.

False

The United States and Oman enjoy a strong relationship. Oman granted the United States access to its bases during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The two countries cooperate in anti-terrorism efforts.

3. Oman has good relations with Iran.

True

Oman continues to maintain good relations with Iran, and Oman is a significant Iranian trading partner. The two signed a mutual security agreement because both sides expressed the need for closer military cooperation, and another agreement to combat smuggling.

4. The Omani military is a well-equipped fighting force.

False

Oman has the third-largest armed forces, 43,000 personnel, among the Gulf Cooperation States (GCC). Although not well-equipped, the forces are considered the best-trained in the region.

5. The scarcity of water in Oman could raise fuel prices in the future.

True

Water scarcity has not yet affected the stability of the region, but it could create tensions in the future. One concern is the lift-water needed to force oil from wells. If water supplies and water pressure drop, oil prices could spike and cause supply disruptions.

FINAL ASSESSMENT

1. The climate is predominantly hot and humid.
True / False
2. Monsoonal flow in the south creates a unique microclimate.
True / False
3. The southern region of Dhofar is at greatest risk for earthquakes.
True / False
4. The release of ballast water from oil tankers creates a pollution threat to Oman's beaches and water supply.
True / False
5. Nizwa is one of the most conservative cities in the nation.
True / False
6. Many of Oman's civil disorders have resulted from disagreements over whether the ruler should be elected.
True / False
7. Oman has few mineral resource deposits.
True / False
8. Ancient Omanis were prosperous seafarers who developed the sea routes between east and west.
True / False
9. Oman played a significant role in spreading Islam to Africa.
True / False
10. Oman was separated into two sultanates, including present-day Oman, in 1862.
True / False
11. The first discoveries of oil helped to deliver economic prosperity and development to Oman.
True / False
12. Tourism is an important segment of the Oman economy.
True / False
13. Oman has a strong trade surplus.
True / False
14. Oman is one of the wealthiest countries in the world.
True / False

15. The “Omanization policy” refers to government attempts to reduce foreign employees in order to provide work for Omani citizens.
True / False
16. The largest Shi’a group in the country is the *Lawatiyya* from India.
True / False
17. The largest non-Arab group is the Indians.
True / False
18. Foreign women who do not wear modest dress may be expelled from the country.
True / False
19. Omanis of East African descent are known as Zanzibaris.
True / False
20. Slavery became illegal in Oman in 1920.
True / False
21. Oman’s foreign policy mirrors those of the other Gulf Cooperation Council States.
True / False
22. Oman opposed peace initiatives with Israel.
True / False
23. Historical tensions with Saudi Arabia have eased and the two now enjoy strong relations.
True / False
24. The *Firqats* are a Special Forces unit of the Royal Oman Police.
True / False
25. The procedures for naming an heir to the present sultan are outlined.
True / False

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