

OMAN



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LIFE EXPECTANCY
73 (M) 77 (W)



CAPITAL
Muscat



LARGEST CITY
Muscat



NATIONALITY
Omani



RELIGIONS
Islam

OMAN OVERVIEW



CURRENCY
Omani
Riyal (OMR)



POPULATION
4,741,305
(2016)



LANGUAGES
Arabic, English, Swahili,
Baluchi, Urdu,
Indian Dialects



AGRICULTURE
Dates, Limes, Bananas,
Vegetables, Camels, Cattle,
Fish, Frankincense



INDUSTRIES
Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Cement,
Construction, Copper, Steel,
Chemicals, Optic Fiber

OMAN

The oldest independent state in the Arab world, Oman is one of the more traditional countries in the Gulf region and was, until the 1970s, one of the most isolated.

It is strategically placed at the mouth of the Gulf at the south-east corner of the Arabian Peninsula and, in the 19th century, vied with Portugal and Britain for influence in the Gulf and Indian Ocean.

The country has so far been spared the militant Islamist violence that has plagued some of its neighbours.

Oman has not been immune from the groundswell of political dissent in the region, however. Protests in 2011 demanding reforms were dispersed by riot police, and the government began a crackdown on internet criticism the following year.



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GEOGRAPHY

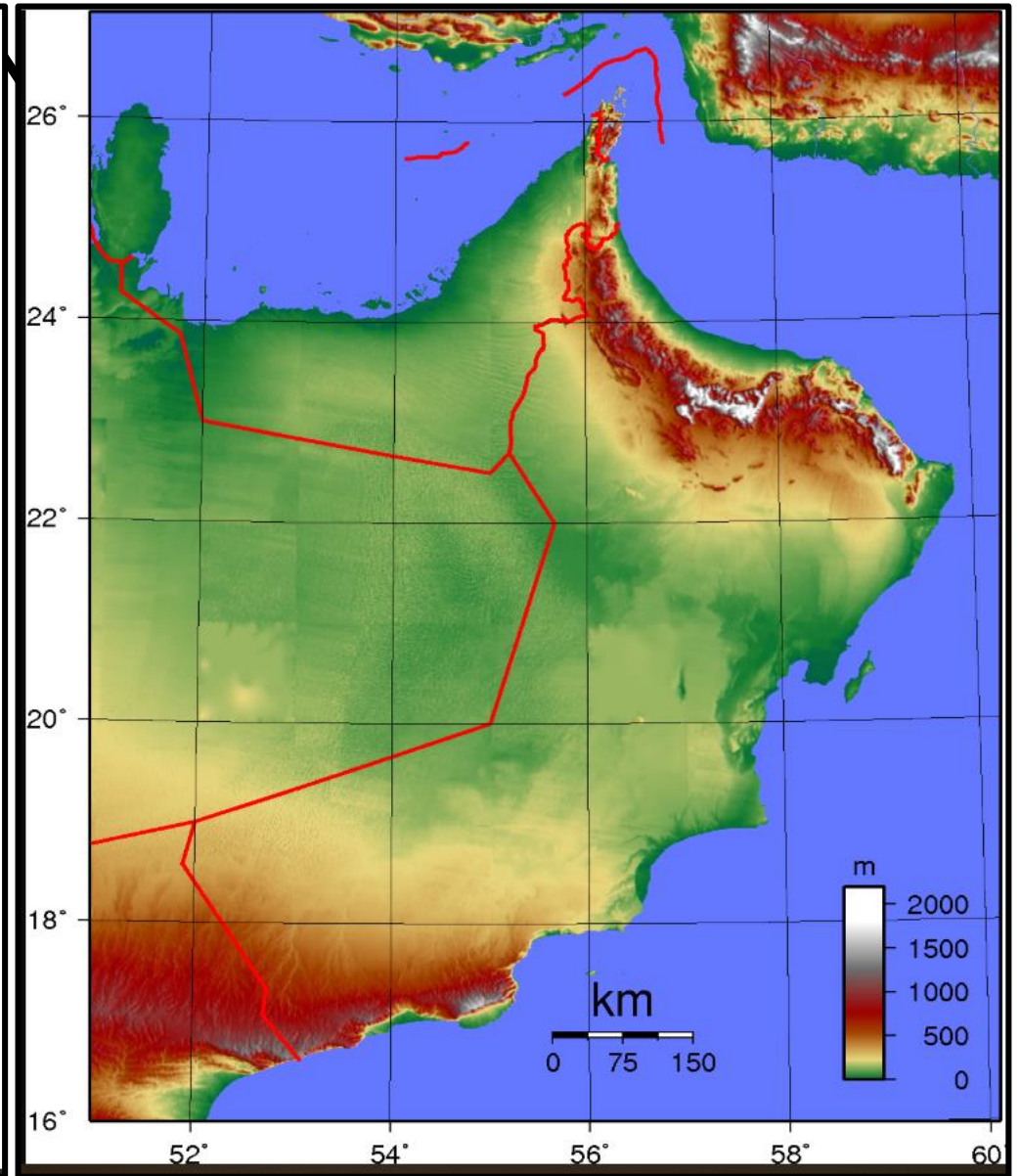
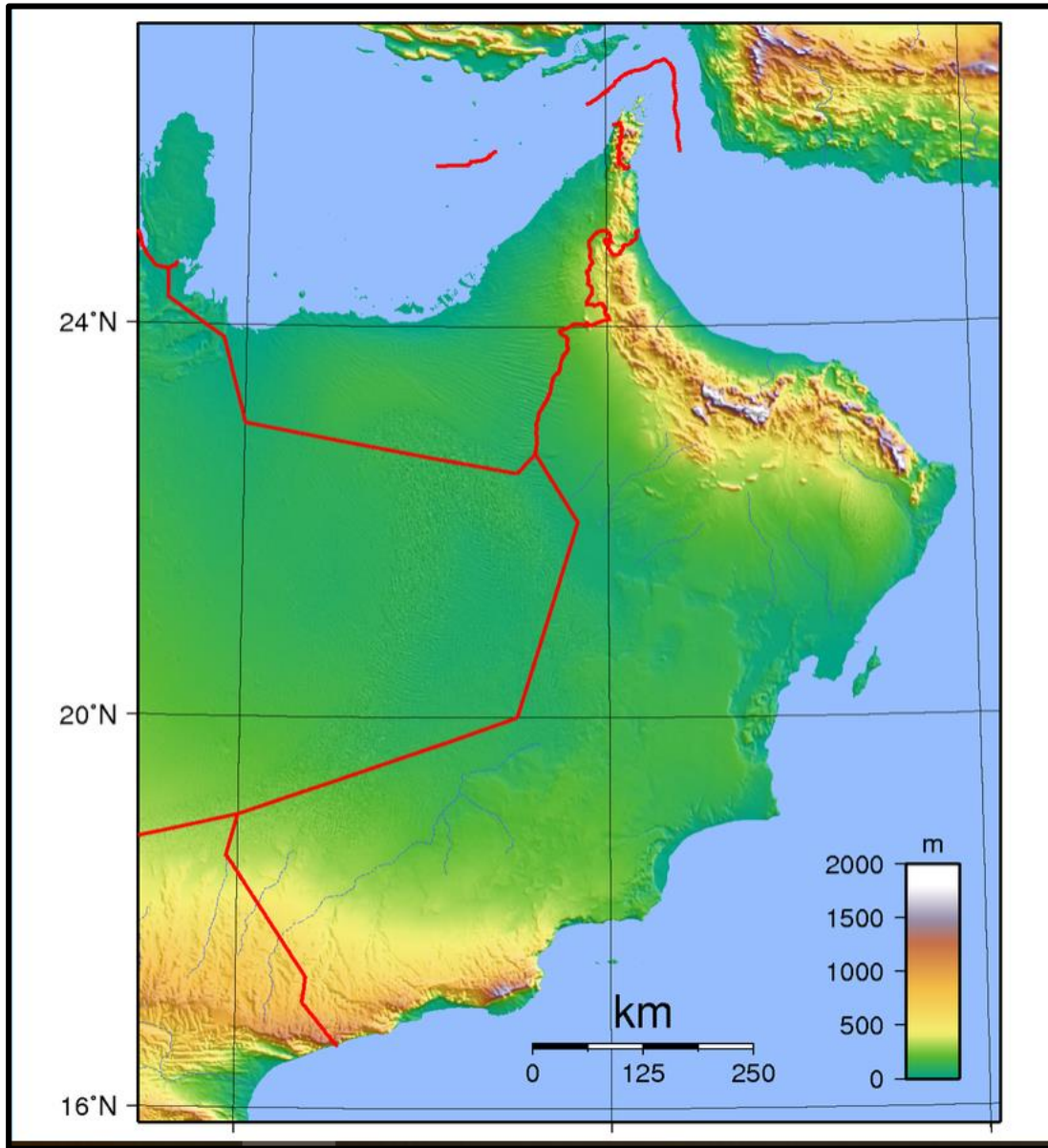
Oman is located in the Middle East on the Arabian Peninsula and has an area of 309,500 square kilometers (or 120,000 square miles). It borders the Arabian Sea, Oman Sea, the Persian Gulf and shares a border with the United Arab Emirates, the Republic of Yemen, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It has a desert climate, which leads to hot, dry conditions in the interior and a hot, humid climate along the coast. Temperatures in the interior of the country during the summer months can reach as high as 127°F. The southern Omani region of Dhofar experiences a monsoon season from May to September, which contributes to the cultivation of Dhofar's fertile soil and verdant landscape. The capital city of Muscat is located along the northwestern coast of Oman between the Arabian Sea and the Hajar mountains. Muscat typically only sees about 10 cm, or 4 inches of rain between December and April, and receives almost no rainfall during the rest of the year. Oman has sandstorms and windstorms in the summer due to high winds and flat terrain. The country has very limited access to fresh water and has utilized desalination plants to help combat this problem.



O M A N

Oman has encountered a string of environmental concerns in the past few years. Pollution from oil spills has hit some of Oman's beaches and this could threaten the operation of some desalination facilities. In response, Oman has begun updating its 1995 National Oil Spill Contingency Plan. The increasing salinity of Oman's soil is also of great concern for the sultanate. As the soil becomes more salty due to low rainfall and high temperatures near the coast, Oman's agricultural sector is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. The Omani government participated in a research project at Sultan Qaboos University, "Management of Salt-Affected Soils and Water for Sustainable Agriculture." This project helped assess the impact of soil salinity on Oman's economy and aimed to develop management guidelines to help reverse the problem. The recommendations have not yet been fully implemented by the Omani government.

Oman has prospered over the last decades because of its strategic position on the Arabian Peninsula at the mouth of the Gulf of Oman and because of its progressive approach towards both the economy and politics under the modernizing and progressive leadership of Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said.



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Soil and groundwater salinity has emerged as the most significant agricultural problem facing the Sultanate of Oman. Scant rainfall, coupled with high temperature, is always conducive to the accumulation of salts in soils. These conditions are predominant in Oman. Secondary soil salinity has increased at a very rapid rate due to the persistent use of saline groundwater, which, over time, has become more concentrated due to increased pumping by farmers in the Batinah region - the country's most important agricultural area.

The balance between total pumping and annual recharge that had existed prior to the 1990s has been greatly disturbed, resulting initially in reduction of crop yields and gradually in the abandonment of lands. Saline seawater intrusions are also present in some areas of the region that are nearer to the sea as the result of over-pumping. Salt-affected lands constitute about 44% of Oman's total geographical area and 70% of the agriculturally suitable area of the country. The annual losses due to salinity have been reported as 7.31 to 13.97 million Omani Rials (2005 data, 1 Omani Rial = 2.58 USD). When salt-affected lands go out of cultivation, their owners become unemployed - engendering a host of socioeconomic problems. Clearly, therefore, soil salinity poses a huge threat to the sustainability of agriculture in Oman, especially in Batinah.

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HISTORY & GOVERNMENT

The area constituted by the modern state of Oman has been inhabited in some capacity for many thousands of years. Some stone tools found in the region date as far back as 125,000 years. These tools resemble those created by ancient peoples in Africa, suggesting a possible migration from Africa to Oman. Oman has a particularly strong history with the Tanzanian island of Zanzibar which left a significant imprint on their mutual cultures and practices. Contact between the peoples has been traced back to the 6th century CE but commercial relationships began to flourish in the 10th century. Coastal Oman played an important role along the Persian Gulf trade routes, and from the 6th century BCE to the 7th century CE Oman changed hands between the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid Persian dynasties.

The Portuguese arrived in Muscat in 1507 and controlled the city after facing strong resistance from the Omani population. In 1624, Imam Nasser bin Murshid assumed power, marking the start of the Ya'rubi rule. Sultan Murshid was able to reduce the Portuguese influence, but it was not until the succession of Imam Sultan bin Saif Al Ya'rubi in 1650 that Muscat was liberated. The Ya'rubi dynasty expanded during this time and the Portuguese completely left Omani territory in 1741.

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In 1744, Imam Ahmed bin Said Al Busaidi married the daughter of the last Ya'rubid ruler, and started the dynasty that remains in power until today. The Al Busaid dynasty drove out all other competing groups and consolidated its hold on the region. This development established the basis of the modern Omani state and with each passing ruler, Oman grew as a nation.

The British came to Muscat through the British East India Company in 1800 and established the foundation for western influence in the Sultanate (McBriety and Al Zubair). British economical influence still continues today. During the 1800s through the early 1900s, the sultanate went through an economic decline due to the changing powers and foreign influences. In 1921, the British brokered the Treaty of Seeb to maintain peace between Sultan Taimur bin Feisal (1913-1932) and the Imam, along with various tribes granting partial autonomy for the interior regions of Oman. Despite this peace treaty, fighting would again break out between the imamate in the interior and the sultanate in Muscat in 1955 and 1957.

When Sultan Taimur bin Feisal died in 1932, his son Sultan Said bin Taimur ascended the throne. Sultan Said secured British recognition of Oman's independence in 1951 and subsequently secured significant oil concessions with many other Western nations.

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Despite the country's new-found oil wealth, Sultan Said invested little into his country's economy and infrastructure. On July 23, 1970, with the support of the British, Sultan Said's son Qaboos deposed his father, declared himself Sultan and immediately began reversing his father's isolationist policies by opening up relations with Arab and Western nations while investing oil dollars into the economy.

Among his many contributions to his country, Sultan Qaboos has focused on his relationship with his people, forming a strong bond between citizen and state. The Basic Law of the State (see below) was developed under the rule of Sultan Qaboos and its first Article declares, "The Sultanate of Oman is an independent, fully sovereign, Arab, Islamic state. Its capital is Muscat." The document stipulates: "The system of government is Sultani (Royal), hereditary through male descendants of Sayyid Turki bin Said bin Sultan; it is that the one who is chosen as successor shall be a Muslim, judicious, of sound mind and a legitimate son of two Omani Muslim parents."

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The first major problem Sultan Qaboos faced upon ascending the throne was an ongoing communist insurgency in his home province of Dhofar. This insurgency was backed by militants crossing the border from the nearby conflict in South Yemen where a civil war had broken out after the British left South Yemen. The Dhofar Rebellion continued until late 1975 when the Omani army, which had welcomed the support of 4,000 Iranian soldiers, finally defeated the rebellion forces. Following the Dhofar Rebellion, Sultan Qaboos continued the country's modernization program of building schools and highways, and invested in Oman's education and healthcare development.

Sultan Qaboos has attempted to keep the country neutral in international conflicts. During the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the early 1990s, Oman maintained its diplomatic relations with Saddam Hussein while sending a contingent of soldiers to support the liberation of Kuwait. Oman has also maintained closer relations with Iran than other Gulf nations, due in part to Iran's support for Oman in the Dhofar Rebellion and because Oman practices a unique form of Islam, Ibadism that has given it a reputation as a neutral country among its more sectarian-minded neighbors.

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The state is organized into structures that consist of the sultan as the head of state, and several councils, institutions and authorities. The Council of Ministers, the most important of such councils, directly assists Sultan Qaboos in drawing up, implementing, and ensuring general state policy. The Council of Oman (Majlis Oman) is divided into the State Council (Majlis al Dawla), whose members are appointed by Sultan Qaboos, and the Consultation Council (Majlis al Shura), whose members are elected by Omani citizens to represent their governorates. The Majlis al Shura is comprised of 84 members. The Shura Council has the power to propose draft legislative and regulatory decisions.

Today, Oman is a member of many regional and international organizations including but not limited to: the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the United Nations, the Islamic Conference Organization, the Non-Aligned Movement, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Economic Cooperation, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF. Diplomatic relations have been established with more than 100 countries.

Oman has overcome many internal and regional struggles throughout its rise, but these challenges have laid a solid foundation for the prosperity enjoyed by its citizens today.

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700s AD - Onset of Arab domination and the introduction of Islam.

1737 - Persians invade and are driven out in 1749, when the Al Bu Said dynasty comes to power, which continues to rule to this day.

1913 - Control of the country splits. The interior is ruled by Ibadite imams and the coastal areas by the sultan. Under a British-brokered agreement in 1920 the sultan recognises the autonomy of the interior. Sultan Said bin Taimur regains control of the interior in 1959.

1964 - Oil reserves are discovered; extraction begins in 1967.

1970 - The sultan is overthrown by his son in a bloodless coup. Sultan Qaboos bin Said begins a liberalisation and modernisation programme.

2002 - Sultan Qaboos extends voting rights to all citizens over the age of 21.

2011 - Protesters demand jobs and political reform. One demonstrator is shot dead by police. Sultan Qaboos reacts by promising jobs and benefits.

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A chronology of key events:

700s AD - Onset of Arab domination and the introduction of Islam.

800s - Ibadiyah Islamic sect begins ruling via a succession of elected and hereditary Ibadite imams.

1507 - Portuguese sack Muscat and capture the Omani coast; they are driven out in 1650.

1800s-1900s - Omani empire expands to include Zanzibar and Mombasa on Africa's east coast and parts of the Indian subcontinent, reflecting Oman's strong maritime heritage.

1737 - Persians invade.



Al Bu Said dynasty

1749 - Persians are driven out. The Al Bu Said dynasty comes to power, and continues to rule to this day.

1913 - Control of the country splits. The interior is ruled by Ibadite imams and the coastal areas by the sultan. Under a British-brokered agreement in 1920 the sultan recognises the autonomy of the interior.

1954 onwards - Clashes resume between imamite forces, seeking an independent state in the interior, and those of the sultan.

1959 - Sultan Said bin Taimur regains control of the interior. His rule is characterised by a feudal and isolationist approach.

1964 - Oil reserves are discovered; extraction begins in 1967.

1965-75 - Rebellion in the southern region of Dhofar in which leftist forces are pitted against government troops. The uprising is finally put down with the help of soldiers from Jordan and Iran.

Coup

1970 - The sultan is overthrown by his son in a bloodless coup. Sultan Qaboos bin Said begins a liberalisation and modernisation programme.

1981 - Oman is a founding member of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council.

1997 - Sultan Qaboos decrees that women can stand for election to - and vote for - the majlis al-shura or Consultative Council. Two women are duly elected to the body.

1999 - Oman and neighbouring United Arab Emirates (UAE) sign a border agreement defining most of their disputed common frontier.

2001 October - Large-scale British-Omani military exercises in the Omani desert coincide with the launch of strikes against the Taleban in Afghanistan.

Rise and fall of the Oryx



Arabian oryx were hunted out in Oman, but reintroduced in 1979

■ 1994 - official sanctuary is

2002 November - Sultan Qaboos extends voting rights to all citizens over the age of 21. Voters were previously chosen from among tribal leaders, intellectuals and businessmen.

2003 October - First elections to the Consultative Council, the majlis al-shura, in which all citizens over the age of 21 can vote. There is little change to the political make-up of the house.

2004 March - Sultan appoints Oman's first female minister with portfolio.

2005 January - Nearly 100 suspected Islamists are arrested; 31 Omanis are subsequently convicted of trying to overthrow the government but are pardoned in June.

2006 January - Oman and the US sign a free trade deal. The agreement is approved by the US Congress and Senate in June and July.

2007 June - Cyclone Gonu, the strongest storm to hit the Gulf for decades, kills more than 50 people and disrupts oil production.

Oman's Arabian Oryx sanctuary becomes the first site to be removed from UNESCO's World Heritage list after the rare species dwindled and the

set up and added to UNESCO's World Heritage list

- Population rises to 450 in 1996 but drops to 65 in 2007
- Park struck off UNESCO list after being opened to oil prospectors

Capital: Muscat



Muscat reveals Arab, Portuguese and African

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2009 June - A cargo vessel is hijacked by suspected Somali pirates off Oman - apparently the first such attack in the area.

2011 February - Protesters demand jobs and political reform. One demonstrator is shot dead by police. Sultan Qaboos reacts by promising jobs and benefits.

2011 October - Elections to the Consultative Council, or Majlis al-Shura. Following unrest inspired by the Arab Spring, Sultan Qaboos grants the council greater powers.

2012 September - Trials begin of activists accused of posting "abusive and provocative" criticism of the government online, amid reports of a crackdown on protests over unemployment and lack of democracy. Six are given jail terms of 12-18 months and fines of about \$2,500 each.

- 1508-1650: Controlled by Portuguese

- Ringed by mountains and overlooked by forts

- Population (metro area): 540,000

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2013 March - Sultan Qaboos pardons around 30 people, including online activists and protesters.

2014 May - Former Omani commerce minister Mohammed al-Khusaibi sentenced to three years in prison for corruption.

2015 October - New consultative Majlis al-Shura is elected. It includes one woman.

2016 September - The national newspaper Azaman is forced to close after publishing an article about alleged pressure on judges from officials. The editor is sentenced to jail.

2017 June - Qatar starts bypassing sea, land and air transport restrictions imposed by its Gulf neighbours by using ports in Oman to carry cargo.

Dhofar: Religion, Rebellion, and Reconstruction

Submitted by [Martin W. Lewis](#) on July 7, 2015 – 9:23 am

3 Comments | [Print](#) [PDF](#)

 Like 4



Darbat Waterfalls in Dhofar During a Good Monsoon

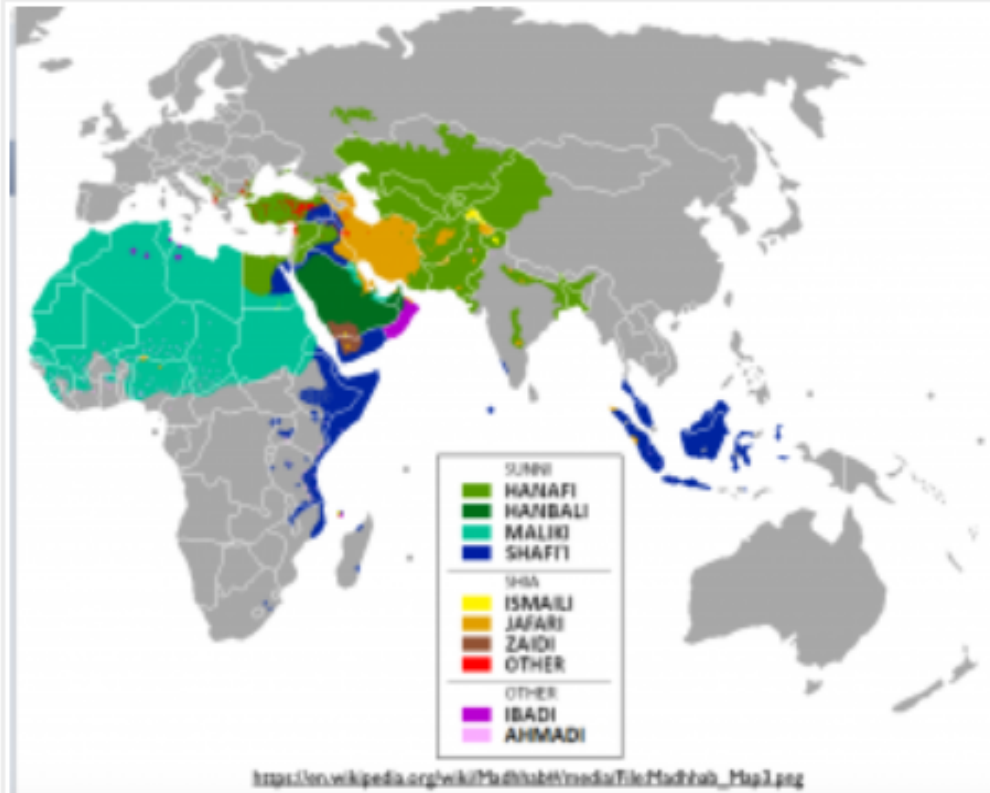
http://dhofarigucci.blogspot.com/2011_11_01_archive.html



As mentioned in the previous post, Oman's Dhofar region is highly distinctive in terms of both language and climate. It is also differentiated from the rest of Oman in regard to religion. Most Omanis follow Ibadi Islam, a branch that is said to predate the Sunni/Shia split, whereas most Dhofaris are Sunni Muslims. Dhofar also has a distinctive political history, and was essentially an imperial possession of Oman until 1970. From the early 1960s until the late 1970s, a major

although largely forgotten Marxist revolution in Dhofar shook the foundations of the Omani state, forcing the country at long last to enter the modern world. Today Dhofar, like the rest of Oman, is generally quiet and peaceful – quite in contrast to the situation in neighboring Yemen. Yet it remains in many ways a land apart; as the [Dhofari feminist blogger Nadia](#) recently put it, “Our society in Dhofar is dismissive of outsiders, be it someone from another part of Oman or someone from another country...” (Nadia's website, Dhofari Gucci, also has the best photo that I have seen of the region's wet conditions during the monsoon season, reproduced here.)

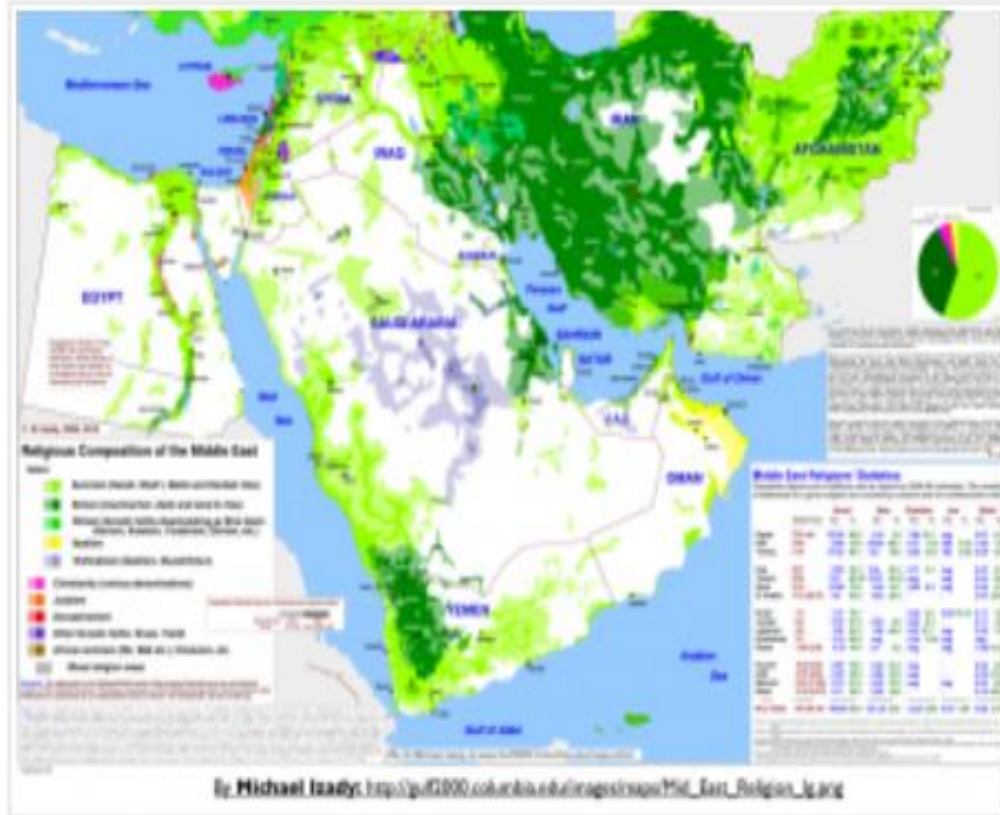
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Most sources claim that roughly 75 percent of the people of Oman follow Ibadī Islam, the faith of the country's ruling establishment, although some state that the figure could be as low as 50 percent. Historically, Ibadīs have often tended to stand apart from other Muslims, as those of Algeria's M'zab oasis still do, but that is not the case in Oman. Most observers stress modern Ibadism's unusual combination of strict orthodoxy and tolerance: as the [Wikipedia article](#) puts it, "Ibadīs have been referred to as tolerant puritans or as

political quietists due to their preference to solve differences through dignity and reason rather than with confrontation, as well as their tolerance for practicing Christians and Jews sharing their

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communities.” Dhofar at one time evidently had a significant Ibadi presence, but the region has long been dominated by Sunni Islam of the Shafi’i school of jurisprudence (*madhhab*), which extends across most of the Indian Ocean realm. The Wikipedia map of Muslim sects and school of jurisprudences posted here, although excellent overall, overlooks the non-Ibadi nature of Dhofar.

Mike Izady’s map, on the other hand, does capture it, although it misses the substantial rural population of the humid upland belt located to the north of Salalah.

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Over the course of the past few centuries, Dhofar has sometimes been independent and sometimes



under the rule of neighboring powers, particularly those based in the Hadhramaut (to the west) or in northern Oman. In the ancient and medieval periods it often enjoyed marked prosperity based on the trade in aromatic resins, as it was, and is, the core area of frankincense production. Dhofar definitely came under Omani rule after 1750, when that sultanate created a remarkably powerful maritime empire. (The map of the Omani Empire posted here, however, exaggerates the extent of this realm in many areas, although it perhaps downplays the reach of Omani power in the Great Lakes region of central Africa). The website *British Empire* provides a useful overview:

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Between the 1750s and the 1850s, Oman re-established its authority over the islands of the Strait of Hormuz, leasing them from the Persians, secured more than 100 miles of the Makran coast of Baluchistan, ***reasserted its claims to Dhofar*** and to the ports of East Africa, and even attempted to take Bahrain. The Mazrui rulers of Mombasa were repeatedly attacked and finally submitted in 1837. The Omani fleet once again became the most powerful local force in the Indian Ocean, if not throughout the East. The architect of this remarkable Omani expansion in the early nineteenth century was the Sultan Seyyid Said, who reigned from 1804 to 1856. He ordered vessels from Indian shipyards, including, for example, the 74-gun Liverpool, launched in 1826, which from 1836 became the Royal Navy Imaum. He possessed in all fifteen western-style warships, as well as a vast fleet of Arab vessels, which could be used for both commercial and military purposes. He could probably embark as many as 20,000 troops. When the Sultan arrived at Zanzibar in East Africa in 1828, his fleet consisted of one 64-gun ship, three frigates of 36 guns, two brigs of 14 guns, and 100 armed transport dhows with about 6,000 soldiers. [Emphasis added regarding Dhofar.]

By the time the Sultan moved his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar in 1840 he had established a highly successful economic system there: an Omani emigrant plantocracy was cultivating cloves, successfully introduced into Zanzibar in 1828, and Indian agents and capitalists, for centuries familiar in Oman and on the East African coast, were capitalising the ivory and slaving caravans which tapped the animal and human resources of the far interior of East Africa.

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After the mid-1800s, however, Omani power withered in the face of British expansion, and Oman itself eventually became a protectorate of the United Kingdom. It did maintain a few odd corners of its empire, however, not relinquishing the [port of Gwadar](#) in what is now Pakistan until 1958. It also held firmly on to Dhofar; Said bin Taimur, sultan from 1923 to 1970, even based his court in Salalah, the main city of Dhofar. But, as [noted in the Wikipedia](#), “Dhofar itself was a dependency of Oman and it was subjected to severe economic exploitation. Moreover, the population of Dhofar ...were subjected to even greater restrictions than other Omanis.”

The restrictions faced by Dhofaris and other residents of Oman were at the time exceptionally harsh, and the country had one of the world’s lowest levels of socio-economic development. As [Chris Kutschera](#), writing in the *Washington Post* in 1970, described Oman of the 1960s:

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Everything, it seemed was forbidden. The inhabitants of the coast were forbidden to travel inland, and those of the inland valleys could not go to the coast, or even from one valley to another. No one was allowed to go to Dhofar, in the extreme southwest.

There were, in all Oman and Dhofar, three primary schools and not a single secondary school. Students who wanted to pursue their studies had to leave their country illegally and start a long life of exile in the Persian Gulf or Kuwait. It was forbidden to build new houses, or to repair the old ones; forbidden to install a lavatory or a gas stove; forbidden to cultivate new land, or to buy a car without the Sultan's permission.

No one could smoke in the streets, go to movies or beat drums; the army used to have a band, but one day the Sultan had the instruments thrown into the sea. A few foreigners opened a club: he had it shut, "probably because it was a place where one could have fun", says one of his former victims. Three hours after sunset, the city gates were closed.

No foreigner was allowed to visit Muscat without the Sultan's personal permission, and sailors on ships anchored at Muscat could not land. Not a single paper was printed in the country. All political life was prohibited and the prisons were full. Sultan Said was surrounded by official slaves in his palace at Salalah, where time was marked in Pavlovian fashion by a bell which rang every four hours.

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1970 saw the deposition of the Sultan by his son Qaboos bin Said Al Said in a British-orchestrated palace coup. With substantial British aid, the new government immediately changed tactics, embarking on a “hearts and minds” campaign to win the support of the Dhofari people. Dhofar itself was transformed into a regular province of Oman, and appeals were made to both Islam and traditional tribal values in order to counter communist ideology. Rebels who surrendered were given cash bonuses, and some were reorganized

into counter-insurgency squadrons. Oman’s newly upgraded air force was also effectively used against rebel positions. Military assistance was provided by Jordan as well as the UK, and in 1974 Iran sent a contingent of some 4000 troops. Oman also recruited troops from Baluchistan in Pakistan. The rebellion was officially defeated in 1976, although skirmishes persisted until 1979.

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Sultan Qaboos did far more than merely defeat the Dhofar rebellion. Using oil money he launched Oman on a crash-course modernization drive, which proved extraordinarily successful. Some Omanis no doubt chafe at their lack of freedom and worry about corruption and absolutist rule, and numerous protests broke out during the Arab Spring of 2011 and subsequently – although most were apparently focused on wages and the cost of living. But Qaboos is widely revered, and great concern surrounds the issue of succession. The sultan is ailing, allegedly from cancer, and he has not named an heir. He has no children and is widely believed to be homosexual. The future of Oman is thus quite uncertain, as is that of the country's monarchy.

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ECONOMY

The Oman economy is vulnerable due to over-dependence on the state-owned oil sector. Oman has prospered over the last several decades because of its strategic position on the Arabian Peninsula at the mouth of the Gulf of Oman, and because of its progressive approach towards both the economy and politics under the modernizing and progressive leadership of Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said.

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SOCIETY

As of 2017, the population of Oman is 4,741,305, reflecting a population increase of 1.87% from 2016. The median age of the population is 29.4 years old, reflecting that though Oman—like many Middle Eastern countries—has a young population, it is still one of the higher median ages of the region.

Sultan Qaboos has made education a high priority in Oman. Oman had only three formal schools prior to 1970, but as of 2012, it has 1,045 public schools, 445 private schools, and 39 international schools. 54,610 teachers and over 523,610 students in the country participate in the education system, keeping Omani citizens well qualified in the age of globalization. (Source: Oman Book 2012-2013)

Some of the well-known schools in Oman include, but are not limited to, the Muscat International School, the Saidyah School in Salalah, the British School of Muscat, and more recently, the Knowledge Gate International School or KGIS (2012).

There are now 28 universities throughout the Sultanate. The first public university in the country, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), was established in 1986. SQU currently enrolls 15,000 students and offers studies in medicine, engineering, science, agriculture, arts, and Islamic studies.

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The education in Oman is an alternative, non-traditional system that was adopted to fit the circumstances of the region. All levels are free for Omani citizens and students are transported to and from school. The Ministry of Education provides free boarding schools for pupils coming from remote areas. Because of Sultan Qaboos' devotion to improving education, the overall literacy rate of Oman is 91.1%.

Since the ascension of Sultan Qaboos to the throne, healthcare has been prioritized. Before the 1970s, there were only a few hospitals and access to healthcare was almost nonexistent. The network of hospitals and healthcare facilities has greatly expanded in the past four decades and all Omani citizens have free access to universal healthcare. As a result of these improvements, the life expectancy is now close to 76 years, up from 68 in 1994 and 55 in 1975.

The "Oman 2020 Vision", a long-term plan that began in 1996 and is set for renewal in 2020, introduced a health industry Five Year Plan that has been renewed nine times since then. The plan aims to improve, modernize, and provide the best health-related establishments and research projects throughout the country. There are currently 59 hospitals, and 897 clinics, dispensaries, and health care facilities.

Oman is currently working to further improve the system by digitizing medical records, creating a referral system of doctors for patients, and training more specialists to treat rare and aggressive diseases. Oman has been ranked 52nd on the Human Development Index.

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Education

Sultan Qaboos's first priority after taking office in 1970 was to fight against illiteracy. At that time there were only three primary schools in the country. He gave clear instructions to teach as many children as possible, "even if only in the shade of a tree."

Within the first 5 months of the reign of Sultan Qaboos 16 public elementary schools were established, and for the first time girls were included for education. In only five years there were 262 educational institutions in the country, including secondary schools and an institute for training teachers. The school and education system has been expanding ever since. Even for children in remote areas, transport to school was ensured -- by helicopter if necessary! Since the 1980's there are also various schools and training centers for people with disabilities.

In 1986 the first university was opened, the Sultan Qaboos University. Until 2000 it was the only university in the country. In the meanwhile, however, private universities have opened their doors in Muscat, Sohar, Nizwa and Salalah. There is also a growing assortment of public and private academies, colleges and other institutions of higher education.

Astonishing is the proportion of women at the technical universities: 40.5% And at the Sultan Qaboos University the proportion of women is even higher at around 50%. It could plausibly be even higher, but for certain courses a quota of seats has been reserved for men!

In addition to the state-run schools, there are 114 Islamic schools and 33 international schools.

In the academic year 2008/2009 there were 31,595 Omanis who studied abroad -- 13,177 of whom were women -- in 40 different countries.

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Omani Society

The long international trading tradition of the Omanis has left unmistakable traces in today's society. Even the skin color of the Omanis varies in all shades from black to white and is thus a meaningful and obvious testimony to the chequered and cosmopolitan past. The descendants of the northern and southern Arab tribes, the Hinawiy and Gahfiry, form the majority of the population. In addition, today there are many Omanis living in the country in whose veins African blood also flows. They are generally called *Zanzibari*, and because of their educational advantage in the early years of the new state, they made up the bulk of the technocrats in the modern state. The East African Bantu language *Swahili* is still maintained and kept alive under the Zanzibaris.

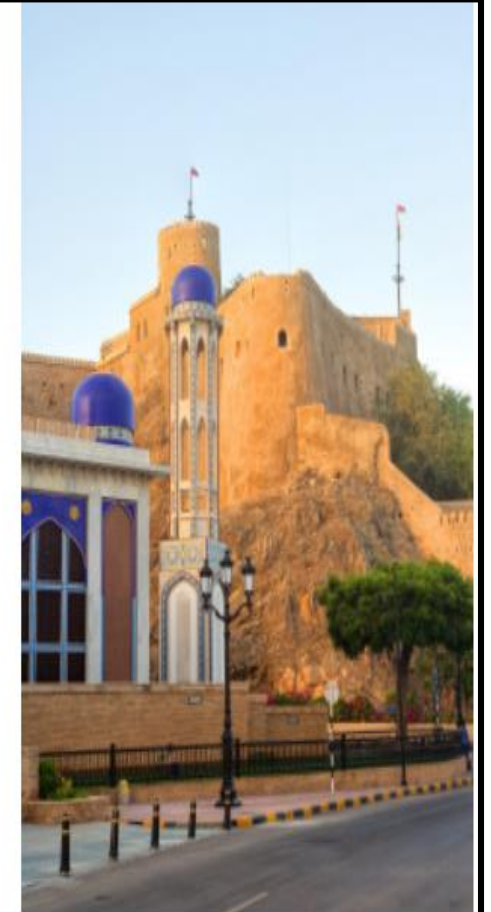
The hill tribes of the south speak the early Semitic *Jabali*, and the Bedouins along the border with Saudi Arabia and Yemen speak *Mahri*. The inhabitants of the small fishing village Kumzar on the Strait of Hormuz -- the *Kumazarah* -- are probably immigrants from Balochistan and speak a Persian dialect: *Kumzari*. Baluchis were well-respected mercenaries in Oman and played an important role in the army until the 1970 power shift. But even as menial workers, they found better earning potential here than in their homeland on the Makran coast of Pakistan. Their descendants speak *Baluchi*. The legion of guest workers from India and Pakistan speaks *Hindi* and *Urdu*.

Many other small Islamic and Hindu communities have found a home in Oman. What unites the many ethnic groups today is the abstract concept of the "Omani citizen," probably the most important foundation for the modern day nation-state.

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RELIGION

The people of modern-day Oman converted to Islam during the 7th century arrival of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad. It is generally believed that the Omanis were one of the first populations to convert voluntarily. Roughly 60 years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, an offshoot of Islam emerged in Oman which differed from both the Sunni and Shia interpretations. Known as Ibadi Islam, this interpretation formed independently of the Sunni and Shia factions after their split following the death of the fourth Caliph Ali in 661. In 751, the Ibadi Muslims established an imamate in Oman that survived into the mid-20th century. With 75% of Oman's population adhering to this tradition, which emphasizes friendship and unity among true believers, the Ibadi denomination remains the dominant one today. Oman is the only country in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation that is neither a Sunni nor a Shia majority state.



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Oman - a modern Islamic state

Of the numerous schools of Islamic belief and law, the majority of Omanis belong to Ibadiyah, a branch of the faith which is marked by its tolerance as well as holding firm to the basic tenets of Islam and, though it goes back to the year 700, could be a model for modern times

Ibadhism, as a politically, philosophically and theologically defined branch of Islam is based on the principle that every theologically trained Muslim believer is a potential candidate for the office of Imam, the religious and administrative head with complete authority to govern. In the eyes of Ibadhis the Imam is the “first among equals”, just as man is God’s creature amongst all God’s creatures. The *umma*, the community of Muslims, elects from within its own ranks an educated believer, whom they think best suited for the office.

On the other hand, Ibadhis do not require that there always be a head of the community – a major difference to the other Sunni schools of thought. If no-one is considered to be fit for the high demands of the office of Imam, then the post remains temporarily unfilled. An elected Imam who fails to live up to expectations can be voted out of office.

Of course not all Omanis are Ibadhis; in the coastal regions there also live many Shi’ites and Sunnis. Although in some places highly decorated new mosques dominate the townscape, life in the country is marked by the fundamental tolerance that is the spirit of the Ibadhis. In Oman you can see Muslims of various persuasions going to pray together in the mosque; fanatics have no place here.

CULTURE



Oman has a unique culture influenced by the various religions and ethnic groups present in the country. Omani society is steeped in Islamic religious beliefs, while the Baluchi and South Asian populations connect the region culturally to central and southern Asia. Furthermore, the African island of Zanzibar was an important place for Oman because of its strategic location on trade routes. In 1698, Zanzibar fell under the control of the Sultanate of Oman; during this period, the spice and slave trades were quite active until the British claimed the area as a protectorate in the early 19th century. East African culture has left a significant cultural imprint on Oman.

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Omanis typically celebrate major Islamic and national holidays. The main Islamic holidays, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, mark important occasions such as the end of the holy month of Ramadan and the end of the Hajj pilgrimage. National holidays include the birthday of Sultan Qaboos, known as National Day, which is celebrated on November 18. July 23 is known as Renaissance Day which marks the first day of the reign of Sultan Qaboos. The Khareef festival, which celebrates the Omani identity and heritage, is unique to the Dhofar region of Oman and features a parade in the streets of Salalah. The festivities for this celebration can last for several weeks during June and July, contemporaneous with the Khareef monsoon season.

Marriages are typically arranged in Oman and inheritance is largely based on the precepts of Sharia law. Tribal connections are critically important, as these tend to dictate relative wealth and access to the highest paying jobs, much like having the right connections in the Western world.

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Oman -- Hub of Cultures in the Indian Ocean

Today's culture in Oman is affected by the past of the country as maritime-trade nation. There are still the traces of all cultural groups found in the sultanate which Oman dealt with during its history.

The isolation policy of the father and predecessor of Sultan Qaboos had many negative effects but also one positive one: The culture of Oman stayed predominantly unaffected by the influences, trends and fads of the Western world till 1970.

The late opening of the country allowed for an analytical and critical view of negative developments in other countries. The administration for national heritage and culture, launched in 1976, took care that despite the economic gains acquired via the petrol trade, no senseless buildings of excessive opulence were erected; instead, historical buildings were restored and new buildings were created which were suitable to the local culture. A loss of cultural identity due to the fast increasing wealth was thus prevented after 1970.

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Food

Omani cuisine has origins from regions throughout the Middle East and Asia, especially India. Many varieties of Omani cuisine feature rice-based dishes with cooked meats and curries. *Qabuli* is a rice dish tinged yellow with saffron and cooked over a spicy red or white meat. A popular meal typically served during local festivals and weddings is called *shuwa*. This dish features meat cooked for up to two days in an underground clay oven and enhanced with herbs and spices such as red pepper, turmeric, coriander, cumin, cardamom, garlic, and vinegar to give it a distinct flavor. Main course dishes can include *marak*, a vegetable curry, and assorted kebabs of grilled beef, chicken, and fish. Omani cuisine also includes a wide variety of vegetable and lentil soups with lamb and chicken.

Clothing

Omani dress resembles that of most nearby Arab Gulf nations but also has its distinct traits. The traditional dress for Omani men is a long collarless robe known as a *dishdasha*, which is also found in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The *dishdasha* is typically white, but men sometimes wear them in black, blue, or brown. Men usually carry a *khanjar*, a curved dagger unique to Oman, but similar to the Yemeni *janbiya*, which is usually worn along a belt at the waist. They are often worn during festivals and special occasions and are an indication of prestige. The *massar*, the male turban-style headdress which features colorful patterns and design, is unique to Oman. Women traditionally wear long, colorful robes with intricate embroidery. Gold or silver jewelry is popular and often displays elaborate patterns and Islamic calligraphy.



Zanzibari biryanai, a dish involving spiced poached chicken, fried onions, a rich gravy and rosewater- and saffron-scented rice. Zanzibar was part of Oman until 1965.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/11/05/454865230/-food-of-oman-serves-up-surprising-cuisine-at-crossroads-of-cultures>



The Jewel of Muscat, a replica of a ninth century Omani trading ship, sails into the harbor of Galle, Sri Lanka, in 2010. The ship was built in a traditional manner that uses coconut fibers (but no nails) to hold the ship together. The ship followed old routes used by Arab traders.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/11/19/365215257/with-hand-sewn-ships-oman-revives-a-glorious-maritime-past>

A medieval stone anchor lies on its side in the Oman Maritime boatyard, which is sprinkled with vessels not unlike those that once plied the "maritime silk route" to Asia, dealing in exotic goods and African slaves.

Master shipwright Babu Sankaran chisels away at a bowsprit, and a pungent, fishy scent rises up as another Omani worker applies shark liver oil, the traditional sealant of choice, to a fishing boat.

Oman invited an American expert on Indian Ocean maritime history, Eric Staples, to be part of its heritage effort. He says the ocean is crucial to understanding Oman, with its thoroughly mixed culture built by waves of migrants from Arab states, Persia, east Africa, India and elsewhere.



An Omani shipwright applies shark liver oil, the traditional sealant of choice, to a wooden boat at the Oman Maritime boatyard. Oman Maritime preserves the country's maritime heritage, rebuilding traditional wooden vessels from the days when Oman was part of a powerful Indian Ocean maritime trading empire.

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Music

Oman has a rich musical tradition with different themes that vary geographically. Along the coastal regions, folk music centers on sea songs which depict the life of voyagers at sea. One such song, "The Song of the Porters," was traditionally sung while loading goods onto ships and praying for a safe voyage. In the interior desert, songs such as "Al Taghrud" were sung while riding camels, to encourage both the camels and their riders. Omani folk music also features the Razha dance, which originated in Muscat. This sword dance is performed while others read poetic verses. Today, these types of songs are typically performed at festivals and cultural ceremonies.

Modern popular music in Oman is typically dominated by the *khaliji* style. This music places a large emphasis on the use of the tabl drum and the stringed *oud*. In recent years, Salah al-Zadjali has started to gain popularity as a fusion artist who mixes the traditional khaliji style with mainstream international musical styles, such as pop. Al Zadjali was featured on the Dubai TV show "Najm Al Khaleej," where he sang "Zidni Ishqan."

Sultan Qaboos is an avid fan of traditional Western classical music. He founded the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra (ROSO) in 1985, and they performed their first concert in July 1987. The orchestra recruits young Omani talent to become orchestra musicians. As there are few musical schools in Oman, the ROSO is one of the best opportunities for musical study in the country. The ROSO plays a wide variety of classical music, but often features selections from Mozart, Sultan Qaboos' favorite composer. The Royal Opera House Muscat, inaugurated in 2011, has quickly become the leading arts and cultural center in the Sultanate and throughout the Middle East. The opera house showcases diverse artistic creations from Oman and beyond.

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Art

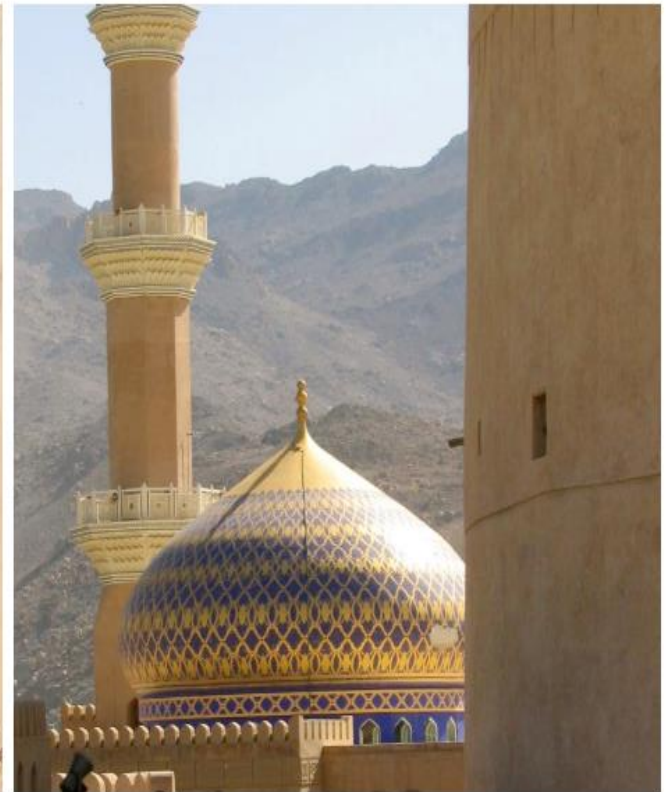
Oman's artistic development has expanded in the last few decades. Much of the academic training for the arts in Oman is concentrated in the Art Education Department at Sultan Qaboos University; various organizations have also developed to showcase Oman's artistic talent. The Muscat International Book Fair brings over 500 authors to the capital city each February and encourages the discovery of new titles.

Painting and craft-making are popular art forms, although calligraphy and, more recently, photography are the most prominent mediums for artistic expression. Works of Islamic calligraphy feature important verses of the Qur'an in beautifully colored and expressive Arabic script. One of the most prominent calligraphers in Oman is Madny Al-Bakry. His work is an example of how Oman is developing modern art in accordance with Islam, also detailed in the documentary referred to below, "Islamic Art in Oman." As for photography, two artists, Yasser bin Nasser and Mohammed bin Hassan, are well-known for their photos that capture the beauty of their most popular subjects, people.

Oman has several museums that showcase Omani heritage and history. The Ministry of Heritage and Culture Museum opened in 1979 and houses traditional silver ornaments, ships and swords among other artifacts. Initially opened in 1978, and relocated in 1988, the National Museum of Oman displayed copper and silver ornaments as well as examples of Omani ships. The museum boasted a letter which is attributed to the prophet Muhammad that invited the people of the region in Oman to convert to Islam. However, an initiative to build a new, original national museum was undertaken. According to local sources:

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Sites



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Oman is home to many unique tourist sites. There are numerous forts, castles, mosques, and archaeological sites that hold significance in Omani culture and history. One prominent fort in the older district of Muscat is the Al-Jalali fort. This building consists of two large towers and several defensive walls that would have been used in defense of the city. Castles are typically seen in the northern part of the country and provide a unique glimpse into the life of wealthy Arabian families. The Bayt Ar-Rudaydah Castle (left), located in the Dakhiliyah Governorate, has been converted into a heritage museum which displays the development of weaponry in Oman.

The largest and most prominent mosque in Oman, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, is located in Muscat. Construction of the mosque was completed in 2001, and it covers an area of nearly 416,000 square meters (4.5 million square feet). The mosque can support a maximum capacity of 20,000 worshipers and houses a vast library of nearly 20,000 books as well as reference volumes in science and Islamic culture. Tours of the mosque are open to all every day (including non-Muslims except on Fridays).

Forts in Oman



Existing forts in Oman offer diverse glimpses of a powerful, wealthy Arabian culture living in turbulent times at the crossroads of Asia and Europe. Largely clustered in the northern one-third of the country, these often-enormous

The dizzying heights of many Omani forts and the complexity and weight of fortifications is a clear reminder that here were not nomadic herders, but some of the finest architects and engineers of their times and ours. Each fort in Oman has distinctive engineering and architectural features that make it a physical challenge and an education to visit today. Be prepared for plenty of climbing up and down steps in your exploration of these enormous structures.

<https://omantourism.gov.om/wps/portal/mot/tourism/oman/home/experiences/culture/forts>

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Sohar Fort

Sohar Fort is considered one of the most important castles and forts in [Al Batinah North Governorate](#) due to its outstanding location and the significant role it played over past centuries. This fort dates back to the end of the thirteenth century and beginning of the fourteenth century. Archaeological excavations carried out fort confirmed that it was completed in the fourteenth century.

Sohar Castle is an eminent historical landmark. The building's current features were built during the rule of the Portuguese. Currently, the fort includes a museum, opened in 1993, that showcases many archaeological and historical aspects of Sohar City as well as other places in the Sultanate of Oman. The museum also highlights the important role played by the copper trade in this city and its relationship with the city of Canton in China, in addition to various artefacts found during archaeological excavations inside the fort and other locations in Oman.



Castles in Oman



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