

## Oman in a nutshell

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| continent:           | Asia  |
| frontiers:           | United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, Persian Gulf  |
| proximity            | to Europe (at about 8 hours flying from Paris, London, Frankfurt)   |
| main attractions:    | Muscat, Nizwa, Sur, Wahiba Sands, Ras Al Hadd and Ras Al Jinz, the wadi's   |
| Country              | monarchy  |
| Full name:           | The Sultanate of Oman   |
| Chief of state:      | Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al-Said  |
| Independence:        | 1650 with the expulsion of the Portuguese   |
| Area                 | 312.416 km <sup>2</sup>   |
| Comparison to Europe | France is 1.75 x Oman<br>Germany is 1.15 x Oman<br>Italy is slightly smaller than Oman<br>Spain is 1.6 x Oman<br>Oman is 10.5 x Belgium<br>Oman is 1.28 x The United Kingdom<br>Norway is slightly bigger than Oman   |
| Population:          | 3.1 million   |
| Capital:             | Muscat  |
| Languages:           | Arabic. English is widely spoken in larger cities and touristic areas.<br>Other languages are Baluchchi, Urdu and Swahili   |
| Religion:            | Islam (Ibadhi Muslims 75%, Sunni, Shia) and Hindu   |
| People               | - mostly of Arab descent<br>- Baluchi, South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi), African.   |
| Visa                 | group visa obtained upon arrival at the airport<br>cost: 6 OMR (October 2006)<br>1 OMR = 2.6 USD  |
| Currency             | Omani Rial (OMR) - 1000 Baiza<br>1 OMR = 2.63 US\$ / 1 OMR = 2 Euro<br>Bills: 100 and 200 baizas; ½, 1, 5, 10, 20, 50 Rial;<br>ATM machines are to be found in the cities, but cash money is preferable.<br>Exchange of US\$ and Euro is easy.<br>Visa, Mastercard and other major credit cards are accepted in big restaurants and hotels. |
| Highest point        | 2.980 m – Jabal Shams   |
| Geography            | central desert plains<br>rugged mountains in north and south<br>more than 2.000 km of coastline   |

Climate dry desert; hot, humid along coast; hot, dry interior; strong southwest summer monsoon (May to September) in far south

MUSCAT

|    | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|----|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| °C | 25   | 27   | 30   | 33   | 39  | 41   | 39   | 37   | 36   | 35   | 30   | 26   |

SALALAH

|    | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|----|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| °C | 29   | 28   | 30   | 32   | 33  | 33   | 29   | 29   | 29   | 31   | 33   | 29   |

Local time GMT + 4 hours both summer and winter. No daylight saving time.

National Holidays  
 January 01 New Year's Day  
 November 18 National Day  
 November 19 birthday of Sultan Qaboos (weekend after 18/11 is long weekend from Thursday till Monday)

The holidays of the Islamic calendar depend on the lunar calendar:  
 Eid al-Fitr end of Ramadan (3 days)  
 Eid al-Adha 3 days after the pilgrimage to Mekka  
 Islamic New year  
 Eid al-Mawled Birth of the prophet Mohammed

Weekend Thursday & Friday

Dress code As Oman is an Islamic country, in public places and small villages, people tend to be more traditional. This means trousers or long skirts that cover knees and T-shirts covering the shoulders. For men as well, it is advised not to wear shorts.

Electricity 220 Vol, 3-pin plugs

Kitchen mostly composed by rice, vish and meat and very spicy with cardamom, saffron, curcuma and cloves.

Shuwa : traditional dish – goat meat, well spiced et shimmered on the stove for 8 hours.

Rukhal : basic dish – sort of bread served generally with honey or yoghourt.

Helwa : local dessert – prepared with water, eggs, fat, nuts, cardamon et often rose water. Honey is considered to be the gold of the region.

Fish is very important and cooked in soups and curries.

Indian restaurants are to be found everywhere, serving curries and vegetarian dishes.



Drinks Laban : yoghourt drink – very popular and refreshing  
 Mineral water can be bought everywhere and is of good quality.  
 Alcohol is expensive and is only served in hotels and big restaurants. It is sold in special liquor stores to non Muslims only.

### Daily rhythm

Travelling in Oman happens at the pace and rhythm of the country and its citizens. Banks, sites, museums etc are all open until 13.00 (Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Muscat only till 11h00). Then they close. Between October and March, they reopen again after 16h30. The rest of the year, opening hours are mornings only. Opening hours during the month of Ramadan are different. The programs will be adjusted accordingly.

### Culture and Festivals

The Sultanate of Oman was an almost closed country to foreigners until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This today changed a lot and they country opened its doors widely, but the evolution was moderate and did not have any negative impact on the lifestyle or patrimony.

Education: sine 1970, when Sultan Qaboos came to power, education in primary and secondary schools for boys and girls is free of charge, as is the Sutan Qaboos University.

Art: the traditional art of Oman, like the dance, music and artisan are rich and present in the daily life of the population.

Jewels: Oman is known for the manufacturing of jewels and silver, but today women tend to prefer gold jewelry, coming from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or India.

Society: Apart from the modern quarters of Muscat, the majority of the population remains traditional, marriages happen within the family clan, agriculture is the traditional way and in many villages, water is pumped up from water pits.

There are still several nomadic tribes in the country, especially in the Wahiba Sands.

Every spring, the Sultan makes a tour in the country to the different regions to meet and talk with the people.

On the national day, festivities happen everywhere, and you can attend with an invitation.

The events however are also broadcasted on TV.

Festival of Muscat: after Eid-El Fitr for a whole week. A lot of activities and dance, music and singing performances take place in the city.

A similar festival takes place in the south, during the monsoon season, The Khareef Festival, and runs for 45 days from mid July to end of August.

