OMAN in Perspective
An Orientation Guide

Technology Integration Division
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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.\(^4\)

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

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4 Rebecca L. Torrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2009), 4.
iron oxide. The desert around Jiddat al-Harasis in central Oman is a stonier gravel desert. 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.

Mountains cover about 15% of the landscape and are found mostly in the northern and southern regions of Oman. 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). 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. 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).

Coastal plains occupy the remaining 5% of the land. 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,
the Strait of Hormuz, and the Arabian Sea. Much of the central coast includes sandy low hills and wastelands. In the south, the coastal plain is ringed by lush vegetation including coconut groves.

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. Along the coast, it is hot and humid. Summer temperatures in the capital city of Muscat average a cooler 33°C (91°F). 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).

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. 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.

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.

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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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{32}

**Bodies of Water**

The country has no permanent freshwater lakes or rivers. Seasonal storms occasionally cause flooding, which creates short-lived streams.\textsuperscript{33} But in the southern region of Dhofar, rainfall is sufficient to allow small streams to run constantly.\textsuperscript{34} The Arabian Sea forms Oman’s eastern and southern border, and is part of the Indian Ocean.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{36}

OMAN in Perspective

Major Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muscat</td>
<td>775,878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salalah</td>
<td>147,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sohar</td>
<td>128,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rustaq</td>
<td>67,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nizwa</td>
<td>45,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibi</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

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

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

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. The city is home to the Royal Oman Police Academy.

Ibri

Ibri, famous for its oilfields at Fahud and the ancient tombs of Bat, is well-known for its black-and-red striped goat hair 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.

Environmental Concerns

Oman is an active partner in environmental protection and party to a number of international agreements. Its environmental ministry is the first among the Arab states, and environmental protection laws have been in place since 1974. 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.

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. 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

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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

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

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. 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. 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. The sultans of Oman extended their influence down the eastern coast of Africa to areas north of Mozambique in the 19th century. Factional fighting eventually cost Oman its African territories in 1862. Although the sultans continued to rule Zanzibar, they did so under the British. Oman was plagued through the 1970s by civil unrest that was fueled by power struggles. The discovery of oil in 1964 did not end its isolation or help develop the country until 1970. 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. 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.

Today, Oman is the only country in the world with a majority of Ibadi Muslims. Its location and history of isolationism have created the most distinctive culture in the region.

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The 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

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

diminished the influence of the tribal system on the country. 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.

**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. 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.

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. 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. 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. Majan flourished until about 2000 B.C.E., when it stopped trading with Mesopotamia.

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

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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.
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

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

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

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

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

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.
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. 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.\(^{143}\)

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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. \(^{146}\)

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

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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.\(^ {161}\)

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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.\textsuperscript{162, 163} His harsh, autocratic rule and his xenophobic policies created dissatisfaction and left Oman underdeveloped.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{166}

Civil war again broke out in the Dhofar region.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{168, 169} Although the rebels were defeated, the war lasted until the early 1970s.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{171, 172}

\textbf{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.\textsuperscript{173, 174}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The Sultanate of Oman, “Sultan Qaboos bin Said,” n.d., http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm
\item The Sultanate of Oman, “Sultan Qaboos bin Said,” n.d., http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm
\item The Sultanate of Oman, “Sultan Qaboos bin Said,” n.d., http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm
\item The Sultanate of Oman, “Sultan Qaboos bin Said,” n.d., http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm
\item The Sultanate of Oman, “Sultan Qaboos bin Said,” n.d., http://www.sultanaatoman.nl/id27.htm
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
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

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

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

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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.\(^{186, 187}\)


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. When Sultan Qaboos bin Said came to power in 1970, he began building the foundations of a modern economy based largely on oil. 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. 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.

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.

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

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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.\textsuperscript{198}

**Agriculture**

With rainfall averaging only 10 cm (4 in) rainfall a year, only a small area of Oman is suitable for cultivation.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{202, 203, 204} Oman must import most grains and farm products to meet national demand.\textsuperscript{205} But it now supplies approximately half of its vegetables, 71\% of its fruits, 24\% of its poultry, and 52\% of its eggs.\textsuperscript{206}

Fish and livestock are also expanding. Commercial fish production began in 2003 and is an increasingly important part of agricultural efforts.\textsuperscript{207} Fish farms are being built and existing infrastructure improved.\textsuperscript{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.


\textsuperscript{206} \textit{Oman Daily Observer}, “Oman’s Agriculture on a Rapid Growth Trajectory,” 8 January 2011, \url{http://omanobserver.om/node/36175}

\textsuperscript{207} Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, “Oman: Sector Performance,” 2012, \url{http://www.fao.org/fishery/countrysector/naso_oman/en}


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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{211} The manufacturing sector, currently accounting for over 12% of the national economy, is targeted for growth.\textsuperscript{212} Development and expansion efforts are focusing on information technology, telecommunications, household goods, and other light industry.\textsuperscript{213, 214}

Most of the heavy industries are located in Sohar, with smaller concentrations in Sur, Salalah, Nizwa, and Buraimi.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{216}

Several important infrastructure projects to promote development are underway. Seaports are being modernized to accommodate supertankers for the transport of natural gas.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{218}


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%). 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. 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.

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.

Oman’s natural gas reserves were estimated in 2009 to be more than 840 billion cu m (30 trillion cu ft). The Petroleum Development Company dominates the gas market, accounting for almost 100% of natural gas production. Nearly two-thirds of Omani natural gas exports go to South Korea while the remainder go to Japan, India, Taiwan, and Spain. 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).

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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

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

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mineral products were the most significant non-oil exports. Nearly 44% of these products in 2010 were destined for the United Arab Emirates, India, and Saudi Arabia. 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.

Tourism

The development of the tourism sector is a high priority and is expected to play a significant future economic role. In 2009, approximately 945,000 international tourists visited Oman. 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. Several efforts to promote short-term tourism and stop-over visits are ongoing. These include visa price reductions and an easing of restrictions. The number of hotel 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. The government was less interested in budget travelers out of fear they would be more likely to

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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/6a904800435cc92fb0f6fbcac65cfb36c/Oman_Hotels_Information_Eng.pdf?MOD=AIPHERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=6a904800435cc92fb0f6fbcac65cfb36c
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

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/8594c580487245448905fbfde0cebc90/WTD+MOT+brochure+eng.pdf?MOD=APPERES+CONVERT+TO=url&CACHEID=8594c580487245448905fbfde0cebc90
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/8594c580487245448905fbfde0cebc90/WTD+MOT+brochure+eng.pdf?MOD=APPERES+CONVERT+TO=url&CACHEID=8594c580487245448905fbfde0cebc90
259 Pegging means that the value of the rial is fixed against the value of the dollar.
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.\(^{264}\)

**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 Omancis currently in the private sector.\(^{267, 268}\)

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

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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

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. 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.

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.

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.

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. They are fiercely proud of their national heritage and enjoy sharing it with others. Omanis are known for their friendly, welcoming, and hospitable nature. 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.

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.

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. Minorities enjoy full citizenship rights. The government has overrepresented them in parliament in

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290 Jenny Walker et al., Oman, UAE, and Arabian Peninsula (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2010), 177.
order to bring minority groups into mainstream Omani society.\textsuperscript{294, 295}

The official language of Oman is an Arabic that is close to Modern Standard Arabic.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{298} Other languages spoken by various ethnic groups include Urdu, Baluchi, Swahili, Luwati, and various Indian dialects.\textsuperscript{299, 300}

**Baluchi**

The Baluchi, the largest non-Arab people and roughly 12\% of the population, have been in Oman for many centuries.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{303, 304, 305}

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. 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. Many from this group work in the national oil company, the Ministry of Defense, and the Internal Security Service. 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.


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


**Hindus and Indians**

Oman’s Indian Hindus are largely members of the merchant class. 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 Muscat 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.

Two other Indian communities can be found in Muscat 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.

**Lawatiyya (Khojas)**

The Luwati-speaking Lawatiyya arrived in Oman 300 to 400 years ago from the Sindh area of India. This is the largest of the Omani Shi’ite Muslim groups. They originally populated the Muscat 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.

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Religion

The official state religion is Islam; the Omani form, Ibadi, is quite conservative and traditional. 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. The majority Ibadi have historically been tolerant toward Christians and Jews and allowed them to practice their religions.

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. Vestiges of traditional superstitions, fetishism, animism, and Semitic beliefs remain in modern religious practice in Oman.

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.

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.

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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

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

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

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

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\(^{347}\) Social Institutions and Gender Index, “Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Oman,” n.d., [http://genderindex.org/country/oman](http://genderindex.org/country/oman)
more traditional, and women are largely wives and mothers expected to stay at home.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{354}

Arts

Music

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

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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

358 Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 144–146.
360 Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 147.
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.
367 Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 149.
catching them.\textsuperscript{369, 370} The \textit{Razha al-Kabira} is used in modern Oman primarily as a celebration of Sultan Qaboos bin Said. In the southern region of Dhofar, the \textit{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.\textsuperscript{371}

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

\section*{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{375} The sport now includes special race tracks and special training programs.\textsuperscript{376}

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.\textsuperscript{377} Show jumping and dressage competitions are held every winter.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{380, 381} Omanis are

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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.  

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 Ibadi 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

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

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

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.\(^ {399}\)

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\(^{392}\) 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](http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/oman-iran-foreign-relations)


\(^{395}\) 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](http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/oman-iran-foreign-relations)


\(^{398}\) 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](http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/oman-iran-foreign-relations)

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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. Another agreement, signed in 2009, defends against smuggling across the Gulf of Oman. 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.

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. 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. 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.

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.

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

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Riyadh established a border trade zone. Since then, trade between the two has increased. 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.

**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.

**Yemen**

Relations between Yemen and Oman were once unreservedly hostile. 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. 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. 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. 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.

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,

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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

**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

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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.\textsuperscript{427, 428}

The over 6,000-member Royal Guard is responsible for protecting the sultan, his household, and property, along with visiting dignitaries.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{430}

A paramilitary force of armed Dhofari tribesmen operates as a kind of paid home guard. These tribesmen are referred to as \textit{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.\textsuperscript{431, 432}

\section*{Issues Affecting Stability}

\subsection*{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{435} And it is not clear that the relatively progressive policies of the current ruler will be continued.\textsuperscript{436}

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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. Current quotas affecting six private-sector industries require Omani nationals to represent between 35%–60% of the workforce.

Water Security

Although monsoonal rains restore the groundwater, Oman receives minimal rainfall, making it extremely arid. One assessment service rates water security risk for Oman as extreme. 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. 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.
Outlook

Oman has secure borders, a stable body politic, and a prosperous economy. Based on the 2011 Failed States Index, Oman’s score of 41 indicates that the country is stable. A credit rating company gives the country a tier 3 rating that indicates a moderate risk of instability. 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. There are no reports of terrorist threats or attacks in the nation, and the overall terrorist risk is negligible.

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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

   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
FURTHER READING


