

OFFICIAL NAME: Sultanate of Oman
CAPITAL: Muscat
SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT: Absolute Monarchy
AREA: 309,500 Sq Km (119,500 Sq Mi)
ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION: 2,135,300



LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY: Oman is located in the extreme southeastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. It is bound by the United Arab Emirates to the northwest, Saudi Arabia to the north and west, Yemen to the southwest, the Gulf of Oman to the northeast and the Arabian Sea to the southeast and east. The country is divided into seven topographical regions. (1.) The tip of the Musandam Peninsula and the Ras al-Jabal which is a low mountain range. (2.) The fertile coastal plain known as Al Batinah which slopes to the foothills of the Western Hajar. (3.) The Muscat Matrah coastal region which is bound by cliffs. (4.) The Sahara tablelands of central Oman, which includes the Hajar al-Gharbi or Western Hajar and the Hajar al-Sharqi or Eastern Hajar Mountains. (5.) The barren coastline to Dhofar. (6.) The island of Al Masira and (7.) Dhofar province, a lushly vegetated coastal plain which gives rise to the Qara Mountains. A small number of wadis are found in the Hajar Mountains. Major Cities (pop. est.); Muscat 90,000, Nizwa 62,900, Samail 44,700 (1990). Land Use; pastures 5%, agricultural-cultivated 0.5%, desert and other 94.5% (1993).

CLIMATE: Oman has an arid subtropical climate. The coastal areas are hot and humid from April to October while during summer the interior is hot and dry with temperatures as high as 54 degrees Celsius (130 degrees Fahrenheit). Average annual precipitation is 50 mm (2 inches) to 100 mm (4 inches) depending on the region and the prevailing summer wind is the Gharbi which makes the heat more oppressive. Average temperature ranges in Muscat are from 19 degrees Celsius (66 degrees Fahrenheit) to 38 degrees Celsius (100 degrees Fahrenheit) all year.

PEOPLE: Around 73% of the population are Arabs who are divided into two principal groups (1.) the Yamaniyah or Hinawi and (2.) the Nizari or Ghafiri. Non-Arab minority groups include Iranians, Baluchis, Indians, Pakistanis and Black Africans.

DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS: Density; 5 persons per sq km (13 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 11.0% urban, 89.0% rural (1990). Sex Distribution; 53.0% male, 47.0% female (1990). Life Expectancy at Birth; 62.2 years male, 65.8 years female (1990). Age Breakdown; 47% under 15, 24% 15 to 29, 17% 30 to 44, 8% 45 to 59, 3% 60 to 74, 1% 75 and over (1990). Birth Rate; 45.6 per 1,000 (1990). Death Rate; 7.8 per 1,000 (1990). Increase Rate; 37.8 per 1,000 (1990). Infant Mortality Rate; 30.0 per 1,000 live births (1990).

RELIGIONS: The official religion is Islam which accounts for 86% of the population. The majority of Muslims are Ibadhi while there is also a number of Sunni and Shiite Muslims. The largest religious minority are the Hindus which account for 13% of the population.

LANGUAGES: The official language is Arabic with minority languages of Farsi, Urdu and Hindi while English is also widely understood.

EDUCATION: Aged 25 or over and having attained: N/A. Literacy; literate population aged 6 or over 41.0% (1990).

MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993: In 1959 British troops helped Sultan Said bin Taymur defeat the Imam and during the 1960's other groups began a revolt in Dhofar. In 1970 Sultan Taymur who was opposed to modernization, was overthrown by his son Qaboos. Sultan Qaboos ibn Said introduced many socioeconomic programs designed to modernize Oman and gave Omani girls the opportunity to attend school. In 1976 the Sultan reorganized local and regional governments. In 1980 after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan the Sultan agreed to allow the US to improve Omani Air and Naval bases. In 1981 Oman and other states from Eastern Arabia formed the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC). In August 1990 following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait the Sultan immediately opened Oman's Air bases to the Western allied forces. In Jan. 1991 the government announced its fourth five-year plan which confirmed privatization plans and shifted deficit financing methods away from foreign borrowing. In Feb. 1991 the Sultan announced plans for a regional assembly in which each of the 59 regions (wilayat) would nominate three candidates and choose one to represent them in the assembly. In Aug. 1991 France's Club Med signed an agreement to construct a tourist resort near the capital. Also in 1991 Oman initiated dialogue with Iran on trade and political issues. In 1992 Oman and Kuwait signed bilateral defense treaties with the US. On Feb. 8, 1992 the Petroleum Minister, Said ash-Shanfari sign an agreement with the Royal Dutch Shell group for research on exploiting the country's gas reserves. In June 1992 the government signed a venture agreement with the former Soviet republic, Kazakhstan to build a pipeline for oil exports. On Oct. 30, 1992 a border-delineation agreement was signed with Yemen ending their 25 year dispute. On Jan. 28, 1993 British Prime Minister John Major concluded an Omani defense purchase of 18 Challenger II battle tanks and in Feb. 1993 Oman announced plans to purchase French naval vessels. In April 1993 Oman hosted a meeting of Arab aid funds and development banks. In June 1993 India's Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao visited Oman to discuss joint ventures on hydrocarbon projects and fertilizer plants. In the same month Oman and Yemen opened their first border post at Mayouna in Oman province and announced plans to establish a new town and trade-free zone at the border post for businesses from both countries.

CURRENCY: The official currency is the Rial (RO) divided into 1,000 Baiza.

ECONOMY: Gross National Product; USD \$9,631,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; USD \$2,319,000,000 (1993). Imports; USD \$4,739,000,000 (1994). Exports; USD \$4,831,000,000 (1994). Tourism Receipts; USD \$85,000,000 (1992). Balance of Trade; RO 588,000,000 (1994). Economically Active Population; 680,850 or 39.9% of total population (1990). Unemployed; N/A.

MAIN TRADING PARTNERS: Its main trading partners are Japan, South Korea, Europe and the USA.

MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS: Alfalfa, Asbestos, Bananas, Coconuts, Copper, Crude Oil, Dates, Fish, Fruit, Gypsum, Limestone, Marble, Natural Gas, Vegetables, Wheat.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES: Agriculture, Cement, Copper Smelting, Construction, Fishing, Mining, Oil Refining.

MAIN EXPORTS: Crude Oil, Fish, Fruit.

TRANSPORT: Railroads; nil. Roads; length 24,700 km (15,348 mi) (1989). Vehicles; cars 96,599 (1990), trucks and buses 70,231 (1990). Merchant Marine; vessels 27 (1990), deadweight tonnage 11,941 (1990). Air Transport; passenger-km 1,522,000,000 (946,000,000 passenger-mi) (1989), cargo ton-km 40,050,000 (27,430,000 short ton-mi) (1989).

COMMUNICATIONS: Daily Newspapers; total of 4 with a total circulation of 79,000 (1992). Radio; receivers 900,000 (1994). Television; receivers 1,500,000 (1994). Telephones; units 147,800 (1993).

MILITARY: 39,800 (1995) total active duty personnel with 79.2% army, 10.5% navy and 10.3% air force while military expenditure accounts for 15.9% (1994) of the Gross National Product (GNP).