

Mission Atlas Project

Middle East

Oman

Snapshot

Country Name: Sultanate of Oman, *Saltanat Oman*

Country Founded in: 1650

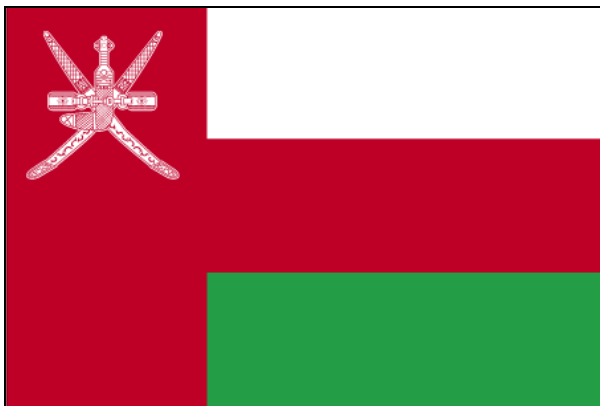
Population: 3,102,229, including 577,293 non-nationals (July 2006 est.)

Government Type: Monarchy

Geography/location in the world: Southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula, in the Middle East. Oman's coastline is bordered by the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, and Persian Gulf. Its neighboring countries are Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Number of people groups: 30

Picture of flag:



Religion Snapshot

Major Religion and % of population:

Ibadi Muslim, 75%

All religions and % for each:

Sunni Muslim & Shi'a Muslim, 17%

Christian, 4%

Hindu, 3%

Buddhist, 1%

Government interaction with religion: Oman is an Islamic state which tolerates (and is mildly supportive of) the religions of its foreign workforce. Islamic Imams are monitored by the State to ensure that their teachings fall within Islamic orthodoxy and that they avoid political topics. The proselytization of Muslims is prohibited.

Oman Profile

Basic Facts

Name: Sultanate of Oman, *Saltanat Oman*

Demographics

Oman has a population of 3,102,229 which includes 577,293 non-nationals (18.7%), who comprise a majority of the workforce.

Approximately 84% of Oman's population lives in an urban environment; the greatest concentrations of population are in the area of Musqat and the Batinah coast (which borders the Gulf of Oman, north of Musqat, including the city of Sohar).

Those in the 15-64 years of age bracket represent 54.7% of the population, while 42.7% are 0-14 years of age and only 2.6% are over the age of 65. Oman's population is growing at 3.28% per year, largely as a result of the birth rate which is 36.24 births per 1,000 Omanis; on average, 5.77 children are born per woman.

The average life expectancy in Oman is 73.37 years.

Ethnically, the population of Oman consists of Arab (75%), South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi—21%), Baluchi (a people ethnically tied to a region which overlaps Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan) and African (4% combined) peoples.

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/mu.html>

http://encarta.msn.com/fact_631504834/Oman_Facts_and_Figures.html

Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations: Asia and Oceania, 10th edition, 442.

Language

The official language of Oman is Arabic, which may be flavored with influences from older South Arabian languages. All students are introduced to English as a second language in primary school. It is common for minority groups to speak their own languages. Other primary languages are Baluchi, Urdu, and a variety of Indian dialects. In the Dhofar governorate, the Semitic language of Bathari is spoken.

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/mu.html>

Society/Culture

Omanis are representative of a larger **Arab culture**. Arabs are known for their strong family ties and their generous hospitality. Relationally dynamic and lively, Arabs tend to speak loudly and expressively, often interrupting each other. They stand closer and touch more frequently than many in Western society. It is more acceptable for member of the same sex to touch publicly than it is for members of the opposite sex to touch. Omani men carry out the public functions necessary for the family life, while Omani women maintain a largely domestic role. Marriages are arranged by the parents of the bride and groom and a dowry is paid to the bride for her use in preparing for marriage and as a form of insurance for the woman should her husband divorce her. Polygamy and divorce are legal in Oman, but both occur infrequently. Omanis commemorate one secular holiday, which is National Day, observed on November 18th. Within their communities, weddings and births are occasions for spirited celebration.

Omani men traditionally wear an ankle-length, white robe and a skull cap or turban. They carry a curved, bamboo staff called a “camel stick” and wear a **khanjar** on their belts. The **khanjar** is the traditional dagger of Oman, featured in the National Emblem of Oman on the Omani flag. The dagger has a double-edged, curved blade and a decorated sheath. Women in Oman wear an ankle-length black robe which covers their clothing while they are in public and many also veil their faces. Under the dark robe, the women wear colorful clothing consisting of a dress worn over loose-fitting pants which gather at the ankles. Omani women generously adorn themselves in jewelry.

One unique feature of Omani culture is the tradition of **painting designs onto palm lined ceilings**. In Oman, as in many Arabian countries, ceilings are commonly constructed from the trunks of palm trees. Above these trunks, palm branches, fronds, earth, and plaster are layered to provide shelter and insulation. This ceiling artwork is no longer common, but it has a long history of decorating Omani homes. The head of the household would choose the pattern for the decoration and commission an artist to complete the work. In some designs, each row would be adorned with its own, unique, geometric pattern. In others, the images on each trunk created an overall motif similar to the weave on a great carpet. Commonly the background of trunks was covered in a reddish-brown wash while the pattern was painted in white. Flowers, animals, birds, triangles, and squares were all common designs. These painted ceilings have been described as a type of “poetry,” which would capture the imagination as one looked up at them and drifted to sleep. It was not uncommon for the ceilings to literally include Qu’ranic verses or other lines of verse, especially those concerning peace, faith, hospitality, courage, blessings, or other Omani values. For example:

“Our house greets all those who visit it.
He who knocks at our door is our equal
And may do here all that he pleases —
Except that which the Creator has forbidden.”



<http://www.omaninfo.com/cgi-bin/journal/DocView.asp?DocumentID=98>

Traditional foods in Oman often include rice, chicken, fish or mutton, and thin, flat bread flavored with a variety of spices. The mid-day meal is the largest of the day. An interesting feature of Omani cooking is the slow cooking of meats in underground ovens. The hospitable Omani host will offer his guests a strong, cardamom flavored coffee accompanied with either dates or a sweet dessert called halwa.

Due to the prevalence of the Muslim faith among Omanis, **Islamic culture** is a major facet of Omani society. Islam was developed in a context of Arab culture in the 7th century and the religion expresses many Arab cultural values in its teachings. In all communities where Islam is dominant, there is to some degree a mixture of Islamic culture and the culture of the society which existed prior to Islamic conversion. The Islamic belief that “There is no god but Allah and Mohammad is his prophet” is inherent to Islam and common to all Muslims in any cultural context. The practice of the five pillars of Islam is also consistent for all Muslims. Omanis celebrate the holidays common to all Muslims. These holidays are based on the lunar calendar and include a celebration at the end of the month of fasting, Ramadan; a feast marking the end of the time of yearly pilgrimage; the Muslim new year; Mohammad’s birthday; and a remembrance of the night of Mohammad’s ascension into heaven.

Prior to 1970, Oman was a country isolated from much of the outside world by the fundamentalist Imams and Sultans who ruled over her. When **Sultan Qabus** forced his father into exile and assumed the Sultanate, he instituted reforms which resulted in dramatic changes in Oman and in the lives of the Omani people. Qabus began producing oil and investing the profits from this industry into development, healthcare, and education. While ardently committed to maintaining and promoting Oman’s Islamic heritage and culture, the Sultan has allowed for increased interaction between Omanis and foreigners and has begun efforts to encourage tourism within Oman. The country is on the path of modernization; the last thirty years have brought electricity, running water, paved roads—which have vastly improved the speed of transportation, cinderblock homes, increases in the availability of education—allowing some Omanis to obtain professional credentials, and overall improvements in quality of life. Today, Omani women enjoy some freedoms which other Muslim countries do not afford their female citizen; Omani women possess the rite to vote and young women may receive free, public education similar to that of male students. It is important to note that the oil revenues which have provided so generously for Omani advancement over the last few decades are of a limited supply; it is

estimated that Oman's reserves will run dry by 2025. Sultan Qabus, in light of current opportunity, is working to diversify Oman's economy and educate his people in order to give Oman a more secure future. Some speculate that the end of oil supplies and revenues may come concurrently with political changes as Qabus ages and power shifts in Oman. Whether Oman will return during that future upheaval to her Islamic fundamentalist roots or continue toward modernization and possibly Westernization remains to be seen.

The Omani **National Anthem** provides an interesting look at how culture meets government as the people sing tribute to their Sultan. The anthem also speaks to the Omanis' perception of themselves as Arabs and Muslims.

“O Lord, protect for us our Majesty the Sultan
And the people in our land,
With honor and peace.
May he live long, strong and supported,
Glorified be his leadership.
For him we shall lay down our lives.
May he live long, strong and supported,
Glorified be his leadership.
For him we shall lay down our lives.
O Oman, since the time of the Prophet
We are a dedicated people amongst the noblest Arabs.
Be happy! Qabus has come
With the blessing of Heaven.
Be cheerful and commend him to the protection of our prayers.”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nashid_as-Salaam_as-Sultani

Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life—Omanis, 595-600.

Government

Oman's system of government is that of a hereditary Sultanate, also known as an absolute monarchy. The Sultan serves as the Head of State and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces; as such, his authority is ultimate and his decree inviolable. By law, every Sultan must be an Omani-born, Muslim, adult, male heir of Sayyid Turki bin Said bin Sultan. Oman's reigning Sultan, Qabus bin Said, is the 14th ruler of the Al Busaidi dynasty. Beginning in the 1970s, Sultan Qabus established Ministries over various areas of government (such as health, commerce, education, etc.), many which he directly oversees, and established an Omani cabinet of limited authority.

A bicameral council, Majlis Oman, was also created to serve an advisory role and as a point of interaction between citizens and the government on planning and developing Oman's future. The State Council, Majlis al Dawla, consists of Sultan-appointed experts in various fields who study and report on issues related to development and the future of Oman; the council holds the power of review over other government ministries and reports directly to the Sultan; notably, five of the 53 council members are female. The Consultative Council, Majlis al-Shura, consists of 82 elected representatives from the 59 regions of Oman; regions with populations of over

30,000 receive extra representation; these individuals review draft legislation, public policy, utilities, and other development plans and voice their opinions on behalf of Oman's citizens; Sultan Qabus sees this council as a means to increase the involvement of citizens in government and improve their awareness regarding public concerns. Though Oman has no constitution, on November 6, 1996, Sultan Qabus established by royal decree the Basic Law of the State, which codified, among other things, the government structure, succession of the sultanate, and the rights and duties of Omani citizens. All Omanis, over age 21, are eligible to vote. No political parties are permitted in Oman. The national religion of Oman is Islam, though, especially among expatriates, other religions affiliations are tolerated; it is illegal, however, to proselytize Omani Muslims. The judicial system and Oman's laws are based in part on Islamic Shariah law; the courts are presided over by religious judges, called Qadis.

Oman is geographically divided into nine administrative regions, consisting of four governorates and five regions, which are:

- 1) Ad Dakhiliyah (a region; capital city: Nizwa)
- 2) Al Batinah (meaning "belly," referring to its location on the coastal side of the Western Hajar Mountains; a region; capital cities: Sohar and Rustaq)
- 3) Al Wusta (meaning "central;" a region; capital city: Haima)
- 4) Ash Sharqiyah (meaning "eastern;" a region; capital city: Sur)
- 5) Az Zahirah (a.k.a. Adh Dhahira, meaning "back," referring to its location inland from the Western Hajar Mountains; a region; capital city: Ibri)
- 6) Al Buraymi (a governorate; capital city: unavailable)
- 7) Masqat (a governorate; capital city: Musqat)
- 8) Musandam (a governorate; capital city: Khasab)
- 9) Zufar (a.k.a. Dhofar; a governorate; capital city: Salalah)

These regions collectively consist of 59 wilayats, or districts, and 12 regional centers. Oman's official website, www.omanet.om, is an excellent source for names and descriptions of each region and wilayat, including points of interest and historical sites.

Oman is politically aligned with a large number of international associations, which include: the Arab League of States, the Nonaligned Movement, the Group of 77 developing nations, and the United Nations.

Oman's current flag was created by Sultan Qabus. The emblem contains two crossed swords overlaid by a traditional dagger and belt. The white of the flag represents peace and prosperity, the red comes from the previous Omani flag, and the green symbolizes Islam and the land's fertility.

<http://www.omanet.om/english/government/overview.asp?cat=gov>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sultan_Qaboos

<http://www.omanet.om/english/government/legal.asp?cat=gov>

<http://www.omanet.om/english/government/hmspage/tribute.asp>

<http://www.omanet.om/english/regions/oman.asp?cat=reg>

<http://www.statoids.com/Ino.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-Aligned_Movement

Economy

For thousands of years, the economy of Oman prospered based on its strategic trade location. As trade routes shifted in the 1800s due to the power of Western Imperialism, Oman was forced to depend on agriculture and fishing for its support. Radical economic change came with the discovery of oil reserves in Oman in the 1960s. By the end of the 1990s, oil production represented as much as 40% of the GDP. Oman's oil reserves are limited, however, and at current production rates the supply is expected to be expended by 2025. Oil revenues in Oman are, in part, being utilized to invest in and diversify the economy.

Oman's most lucrative economic sector, which is Services, comprises 58.7% of the country's Gross Domestic Product. The Industry sector (crude oil production and refining, natural gas production, construction, metals, and chemicals) represents 28.8% of the GDP, while Agriculture (dates, citrus and other fruits, alfalfa, tobacco, winter vegetables, frankincense; goats, sheep, donkeys, camels), forestry and fishing (sardines, mackerel, shrimp, lobsters, crayfish, tuna, barracudas, groupers, and shark) take the remaining 2.6%.

Oman has a labor force of 920,000 people, 38% of whom are engaged in subsistence-level farming. Most of Oman's positions for skilled industrial laborers are filled by foreign workers. A move toward an "Omanization" of the workforce is currently being made, and improvement in educational and vocational training for Omanis will support this end of increasing Oman's "human resources." Sultan Qabus also sees increased growth in the private sector as important to the future of Oman's prosperity. In 2001, the Sultan began a program focused on helping Omanis begin new businesses; this program provides opportunities for training and experience. Oman also encourages foreign investing into its own industrial sector. There is potential for growth in production of natural gas for export, the agricultural sector, and tourism.

The Omani rial is the monetary unit used in Oman; it exchanges at a rate of 0.3845 Omani rials per US dollar. Of all currencies, the Omani rial is the fourth highest in value.

http://encarta.msn.com/fact_631504834/Oman_Facts_and_Figures.html

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/mu.html#Econ>

<http://www.omanet.om/english/hmsq/hmsq1.asp?cat=hmsq>

Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations, Asia & Oceania, 10th ed., 444-45.

Literacy

The literacy rate for Oman is 75.8%, favoring males (83.1%) over females (67.2%) by almost 16%.

Regarding media use, satellites provide means for international communication with Omanis. Radio broadcasting is very limited within Oman and it is television which is more widely accessed.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/omtoc.html> <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/mu.html#People>

Land/Geography

Oman is located in the southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula in the Middle East. It is bordered by Yemen to the southwest, Saudi Arabia to the northwest, and the United Arab

Emirates to the northeast. Oman's coasts border the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Oman, and Persian Gulf, from West to East. A portion of Oman, separated from remainder of the country by the borders of the U.A.E., sits at the strategic entrance to the Persian Gulf, jutting into the Strait of Hormuz. Oman has a land area of 212,460 square kilometers, making it the second largest country in the Arabian Peninsula; comparatively, Oman is slightly smaller than the state of Kansas.

Mountainous regions comprise 15% of Oman's topography while the rest is either gravelly desert plateau or coastal plain. The climate of the interior is hot and dry, the coast is hot and humid, and the Dhofar region is the only area in Oman to receive monsoon rains. Musqat, the capital, receives an average of 4 inches of rain per year. Only ¼ of 1% of Oman's land is useable as either arable land or for permanent crops. Natural fresh water sources are exceedingly limited in Oman; droughts and sandstorms are hazards of this region. Temperatures in the hot season, ranging from May to October, may reach 129°F (54°C).

The regions of Oman which receive the most rainfall, namely Dhofar and the mountain ranges, contain the most vegetation, which includes coconut palms, frankincense, oleander, and acacia. To obtain water in other areas of Oman a system of underground irrigation, called falajs, is used. These man-made aqueducts use gravity to carry water down gently sloping passageways from a spring or well into a village, supplying water for domestic needs and farming. Wildlife in Oman consists of a variety of birds, as well as cheetahs, hyenas, foxes, wolves, and hares.

[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+om0021\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+om0021))

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/mu.html>

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

Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations: Asia and Oceania, 10th edition, 441.

History

Oman has an extensive history of habitation including, as mentioned in Genesis chapter 10, being a migration point for the descendants of Joktan. As early as 3200 B.C. what is now Oman was known to the Sumerians by the name, Magan. The inhabitants prospered from exporting, trade, and seafaring. Frankincense was the most valuable commodity for export as it was used to produce medicine, perfume, and incense; at one time frankincense was more valuable than gold. By 563 B.C the land was a province of the Persian Empire, which later became known as the Sassanian Empire.

The first Arab tribes began to settle here in the first century A.D. and they dominated the region by 632, the year in which Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, died. During the lifetime of Mohammed, Omani conversion to Islam was complete. From 751 until the mid-twentieth century, Oman was led religiously by the Ibadi imamate, an early sect of Islam. Oman has long been a valuable center for trade, and as such, attractive to foreign powers. Portugal held control of the port in Muscat from 1508 to 1650; the Ottomans took control from 1659 until 1741; Persia governed from 1743-1746. From that time to the present day, Oman has been ruled by a succession of sultans.

Oman retains close ties with the United Kingdom, who was a protectorate over the country from 1891-1971. In 1970, Sultan Qabus ibn Sa'id as-Sa'id took control of the country from his father and continues to rule Oman. Though Oman has no formal constitution, Sultan Qabus issued a royal decree in 1996 which provided stipulations for royal succession, a prime minister and bicameral advisory council, and basic civil liberties.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oman>

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/mu.html>

Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life: Volume 3: Asia & Oceania, 595.

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

Christian History

Oman has a limited Christian history. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, tradition speaks of the Apostle Bartholomew bringing Christianity to the Arabian Peninsula, but such 1st Century efforts did not reach as far as Oman.

Sometime between the 1st and 7th Centuries there were Christian bishops and priests present in Oman; there are records of Nestorian bishops from Oman attending 4th and 5th Century church synods, but any gospel presence was completely obliterated by the advent of Islam.

During the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammed, there is an account recorded of a messenger, Amr bin Al A'as, coming from Mohammed to the leaders of Oman (c. 628 AD) with a letter encouraging Omani conversion to Islam. When the messenger arrived, he was informed that many of the people were already converts, including the Christian bishops and priests. In fact, Oman was one of the first areas to completely and willingly submit to Islamic control.

Oman's already established trade routes then served as venues for Islam to spread into additional lands. The Portuguese conquerors of the 16th Century built a church and monastery in Muscat, but these structures served their intended purposes only until the Portuguese were forced out of Oman in 1650.

Today, although radical Islam is opposed in Oman, Christian proselytizing among Muslims is still forbidden; therefore, virtually all of Oman's Christian population is foreign. Since 1973, expatriates have been freely allowed to worship according to their religious affiliations, to build religious communities, and to proselytize among other expatriates.

Some churches and temples at which non-citizens worship were built on land which the Sultan donated for that purpose. It is apparent that this Islamic state does not see Christianity among foreigners as a threat to the Islamic beliefs of its citizens. The *World Christian Encyclopedia* predicts that growth in the Christian population of Oman will come from an increase of Christian foreigners, not from Omani conversions. Even if substantial response to Christianity were to occur among Omanis, the Encyclopedia predicts that this would affect no more than 10-20 percent of the population over the next Century, with the 80% majority remaining under Islamic beliefs.

http://www.omanet.om/english/history/dawn_islam.asp

Operation World, 21st Century edition, 498-99.

Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations: Asia & Oceania, 10th edition, 442.

http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

Religion

Non-Christian:

Ibadi Muslims (75%):

Oman is the only Muslim country dominated by a sect of Islam known as *al-Ibadiyyah*. The Ibadi school, formed early in the history of Islam within 50 years of Mohammed's death, is distinct from Sunni and Shi'a forms of Islam; Ibadis regard Muslims of other sects as "those who deny God's grace" and disassociate themselves from them.

In contrast with mainstream Sunni beliefs, Ibadis believe that Muslims will not see Allah on the Day of Judgment, that there is no escape from hell into Paradise, and that the Qur'an is created.

They also believe that caliphs and imams (religious leaders) should be elected on the basis of Muslim piety. World-wide, there are 1,636,000 Ibadites.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibadi>

Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations: Asia & Oceania, 10th edition, 443.

Sunni and Shi'a Muslims (17%):

These Muslims, though a minority in Oman, are the majority Muslim sects worldwide. Overall, Sunnis represent an estimated 85% percent of the Muslim world, while Shi'as comprise most of the remaining 15%. These percentages are clearly over-estimated to some degree, because they fail to account for Islamic sects, such as the Ibadi. The original split between the followers of Islam occurred because of the debate over who ought to become the Prophet Mohammad's rightful successor. The majority group, those who would become known as Sunni Muslims, supported Abu Bakr, Mohammad's father-in-law, in becoming the first Caliph; conversely, Shi'a Muslims believed that the Caliphate should follow Mohammad's bloodline and they proposed Mohammad's cousin and son-in-law, Ali, as the Prophet's successor. Today, there are concentrated Sunni populations in Dhofar as well as among northern tribes.

Hindu (3%)

The Hindu population of Oman consists primarily of foreign workers, specifically those from India and Sri Lanka. There is, however, a small, indigenous, Hindu population of ethnically Indian Omanis. Hindu merchants first came to Oman early in the 16th Century and some permanently settled there. A population of over 4,000 Hindus resided in Oman in the early 1800s, until the community was attacked and almost completely obliterated by Ibadi Muslims in 1895. Today this community of Hindu Omanis remains small, but stable in their presence; they are the only indigenous Hindu community in the Middle East.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism_in_Arab_states

Buddhist (1%): The Buddhist population of Oman consists of foreign workers, most notably the Sinhalese of Sri Lanka. There are no known Buddhists among native-born Omanis.

Christian Cults and Sects—No known groups exist.

Catholics/Orthodox Churches

Roman Catholic (1%): This expatriate church of 30 congregations and 20,300 adult adherents consists mainly of Filipino migrant laborers.

Orthodox (<1%):

Coptic Orthodox Church: This church of 10 congregations and 4,500 adult adherents consists of Egyptian migrant laborers.

Orthodox Syrian Church of the East: This church of 8 congregations and 1,500 adult adherents consists of South Indians.

Syrian Orthodox Church: This church of 2 congregations and 1,000 adult adherents consists of Indians.

Protestant/Evangelicals/Pentecostals

Anglican (<1%): This church of 3 congregations and 1,000 adult adherents is for citizens of the United Kingdom.

Protestant (<1%):

Evangelical (0.3%):

Protestant Church in Oman: These 20 congregations of 1,300 adult adherents are Presbyterians of the Reformed tradition.

Seventh-day Adventist Church: These 10 congregations of 500 adult adherents are Seventh-day Adventists recognized for their social contributions.

Charismatic (0.2%):

Arab Indigenous Churches: These 3 congregations of 1,070 adult adherents consist of Arab charismatics from Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt.

Bread of Life Church: These 2 congregations of 200 adult adherents consist of Arab charismatics focused on Bible reading and distribution.

Charismatic House Groups: These 20 congregations of 1,210 adult adherents are a network of Arab charismatics.

New Christian Fellowship: These 3 congregations of 100 adult adherents are young Arab charismatics.

Revival Prayer Fellowships: These 5 congregations of 200 adult adherents are Arab Charismatics.

Pentecostals (<0.01%):

Filipino Christian Fellowship: These 4 congregations of 250 adult adherents are Filipino Pentecostals who are employed as migrant workers.

Oman Christian Fellowship: These 5 congregations of 500 adult adherents are Full Gospel Pentecostals from Filipino, Indian, and Sri Lankan backgrounds.

Pentecostal Fellowship: These 5 congregations of 300 adult adherents are Arab Pentecostals.

Independent:

Brethren Assemblies: These 5 congregations of 200 adult adherents are fundamentalist and dispensationalist, consisting mainly of South Indians.

Church of South India: These 4 congregations of 1,300 adherents consist of Indians, particularly Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Malayali, and Gujarati speakers.

Isolated Radio Churches: These 100 congregations of 7,000 adult adherents are isolated groups formed under the influence of Arab radio. The majority of members fall into the age group of 12-25 years.

Mar Thoma Syrian Church: These 4 congregations of 2,300 adult adherents are a reformed orthodox church of Malayali, South Indians.

St. Thomas Evangelical Church: This congregation of 200 adult adherents split from the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. They are also reformed orthodox Malayalis.

Other Independent Churches: These 5 congregations of 3,000 adult adherents represent a variety of Indian church bodies.

Operation World, 21st Century edition, 498.

World Christian Encyclopedia, 2nd edition, Vol. 1: The World by Countries, 568-69.

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/mu.html#People>

Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations: Asia & Oceania, 10th edition, 442.

People Groups

11871

The Baharna Speaking Arabs (14,257),

The Baharna or Bahraini Arabs, are a minority community of Shi'a Arabs in Oman and are distinct from Arab Sunni Muslims in the Gulf country of Bahrain. Like the Luwati (the largest group of Shi'a Muslims in Oman), the Baharna are Ja'fari or Twelvers Shi'as, part of the main school of Shi'a thought which comprises 80% of Shi'as worldwide.

There are no known Christian workers currently engaging this people group in Oman.

http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelvers>

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=100772&rog3=MU>

11873

Shihhi Speaking Arabs (14,257)

The Shihhi Speaking Arabs reside in the Musandam peninsula, which is an enclave of Oman, separated from the main body of Oman by the borders of the U.A.E. Shihhi is the main language of the Shihuh people group, which also resides in the portion of the Musandam peninsula which belongs to the U.A.E. This area is located at a strategic outcropping into the Strait of Hormuz, the entrance to the Persian Gulf. They are a Muslim people and though their language is spoken, not written, some are literate in Arabic.

There are no known native Christians among the Shihuh and no Christian missionaries currently at work among them.

http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=ssh

11893

The Southern Balochi (185,777)

The Southern Balochi people represent a sizable minority in Oman (Joshua Project lists the Balochi population at more than twice the number listed above); they are the largest non-Arab population in Oman. The group originated from a population in Southern Pakistan and Iran and began migrating to Oman and other Middle Eastern countries in large number after the discovery of oil; there have been Balochi in Oman for several centuries, however. They are geographically concentrated in the region surrounding Musqat, but also live in greater dispersion along the eastern areas of Oman from the Musandam peninsula in the north to the area inland from Masirah Island (including the areas of coast belonging to the U.A.E.). They speak a language called Southern Balochi, as distinguished from Eastern or Western Balochi.

The Balochi people support themselves through farming and shepherding, diversifying their crops and flocks to ensure viability. Some of the Balochi settled in Oman after being recruited as soldiers. They are Sunni Muslims, but their beliefs are heavily influenced by animism and folk practices. They adhere to a strict code of honor, "baluchmayar," which emphasizes hospitality, honest dealings, and providing refuge for strangers. There are some Christian believers among this people group, but no indigenous churches have been formed.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=109469&rog3=MU>

http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

11874

The Batahira (1,030),

The Batahira, or Bathari, are a small minority located primarily in the coastal towns of Shuwaymiya and Sharbithat in the Zufar (or Dhofar) governorate of southern Oman. Other members of this language group (Bathari speakers, a language derived, but now separate, from Mahri) also reside in Yemen. The Batahira are nomads and fishermen with a reputation of being negotiators. Their population is declining and the exclusive use of Arabic in education threatens the future of their language. They are a Sunni Muslim people group with no known Christian believers.

http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=bhm

http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Southern_Oman.pdf

46408

The Bengali people (115,360)

The Bengali people in Oman are part of the skilled, foreign work force. Bengali speakers hail from South Asia, living mostly in Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. In their homeland, Bengalis may be Muslim, Hindu, or Christian; however, the majority of Bengalis in Oman are Sunni Muslim.

A variety of resources for reaching Bengalis with the gospel are already available, but there are currently no churches among the Bengali living in Oman.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=101254&rog3=MU>

11872

The Dhofari Arabs (99,804)

The Dhofari Arabs, composed largely of the al-Kathir tribe, are the Arabic-speaking, majority people in Dhofar (or Zufar) and its capital, Salalah. The Dhofari dialect of Arabic is distinguishable from Omani Arabic.

The Dhofari are in many ways culturally distinct from their countrymen in Northern Oman; this is due to the geographical separation from the remainder of the country caused by the Rub' al-Khali desert.

The Dhofari are a Sunni Muslim people group with no Christian missionary presence among them.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=102582&rog3=MU>

http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Southern_Oman.pdf

46409

Egyptian Arabs (43,260)

Egyptian Arabs in Oman are part of the skilled, foreign workforce. They hail from Egypt, speaking an Egyptian dialect of Arabic, and the majority is Sunni Muslim. Some nominal Christian believers are present and many gospel resources are available in their language, but no mission organization is currently working among them.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=102879&rog3=MU>

46410

The Filipino (54,590)

The Filipino in Oman are part of the skilled, foreign workforce. This population of Tagalog speakers is 90% Christian. With an established presence in Oman, this group, if properly trained, could be mobilized for evangelizing Omanis and other foreign workers in Oman.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=109692&rog3=MU>

11876

The Gujarati (5,134)

The Gujarati people in Oman are merchants and skilled laborers from the western Indian state of Gujarat. Their mother tongue is Gujarati. About two thirds of Gujaratis are Hindu, and most of the remaining population is Muslim. The Bible is available in Gujarati and a very limited number of evangelical Christians are part of this people group. In Oman, there are no Gujarati churches nor are there any mission organizations targeting this people group.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=103544&rog3=MU>

11890

The Gulf Arabs (610,446)

This people group is also known as “Levant” Arabs. Broadly, this group includes Arabs who live across Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, and Syria, all of whom descend from the Arabian culture of the original desert nomadic tribes. Islam has been culturally tied to this people group from the religion’s inception. Most Gulf Arabs communicate in either the Arabiya or Mashriqi dialect of Arabic. In Oman, Gulf Arabs live mostly in the coastal areas and near the border of the U.A.E. There are no known believers and no mission agencies among this Sunni Muslim population.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=100427&rog3=MU>

11878

The Harsusi (1,195),

The Harsusi, or al-Harasis, are a small, nomadic, inland-desert tribe located on the edge of Dhofar toward Northern Oman. Their language, Harsusi, is related to Mahri and intelligible to Mahri speakers; many in this group may also speak Arabic. Members of this tribe are employed by and have benefited from the oil industry in Oman. Within the Harsusi people is included a small sub-group known as the Ifar. There are no known believers among this Sunni Muslim group.

http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Southern_Oman.pdf

http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=hss

46411

Hindi (10,393)

The Hindu population of Oman consists primarily of foreign, skilled workers, specifically those from India and Sri Lanka. Their native tongue is Hindi and the majority practice Hinduism.

There is, also, a small, indigenous, Hindu population of ethnically Indian Omanis. Hindu merchants (from Sind and Gujarat, now part of Pakistan and India, respectively) first came to Oman early in the 16th Century and some permanently settled there. They worked as bankers, silversmiths, and importer/exporters, settling mostly in the cities of Musqat and Matrah.

A population of over 4,000 Hindus resided in Oman in the early 1800s, until the community was attacked and almost completely obliterated by Ibadi Muslims in 1895. Today this community of Hindu Omanis remains small, but stable in their presence; they are the only indigenous Hindu community in the Middle East. They continue to maintain strong familial and commercial ties with India and with Indian in East Africa. There is a Hindu temple in Muscat and a crematorium in Suhar.

There is one known church among the Hindi community in Oman (data does not indicate whether this church is comprised of the indigenous community or a church of foreign workers) and a mission agency has committed to work among them, but no churches have been planted in the last two years.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism_in_Arab_states

http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

11879

The Hobyot (118)

The Hobyot are a tribal people residing in the Dhofar governorate on the Omani/Yemeni border. Their language, Hobyot, is a mixture of Mahri and Shahri, and they consider themselves a part of the Mahra people. There are no known believers among this Sunni Muslim group.

http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Southern_Oman.pdf

11880

The Jibbali (35,644)

The Jibbali, also known as Shahari or Qara, take their name from the mountainous region of Dhofar in which they live (Jabal meaning “mountain,” Jabal Qara being one of the mountain ranges of Dhofar). They speak the South Arabian language of Shahri, which is unrelated to Arabic; however, the Jibbali are becoming increasingly bilingual in Shahri and Dhofari Arabic. Sultan Qabus’ mother was from a Jibbali tribe, providing an important political link between Northern and Southern Oman. Traditionally, these tribes have been migrating shepherds, moving between the mountains and the lowlands throughout the year.

There are no known believers and no Christian missionaries among this Sunni Muslim group.

http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=shv

http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Southern_Oman.pdf

46412

The Jordanian Arabs (11,941)

The Jordanian Arabs are also known as “Levant” Arabs. Broadly, this group includes Arabs who live across Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, and Syria, all of whom descend from the Arabian culture of

the original desert nomadic tribes. Islam has been culturally tied to this people group from the religion's inception. Most Levant Arabs communicate in either the Arabiya or Mashriqi dialect of Arabic. The majority of this population is Sunni Muslim. There are Evangelical churches formed among Jordanian Arabs and multiple mission organization have committed to working with them; however, there is no active church planting occurring among Jordanian Arabs in Oman.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=104301&rog3=MU>

11881

The Kumzari (4,276)

The Kumzari live in the Musandam peninsula in Northern Oman, primarily in the coastal town of Kumzar. This isolated area is the only place where Kumzari, a mixture of Persian and Arabic, is spoken; the Kumzari communicate with other Oman tribes using Omani Arabic. The livelihood of this people group is closely tied to the sea; many Kumzari are fishermen, shipbuilders, sailors, and merchants. Other Kumzari shepherd goats and grow date palms. The village of Kumzar is surrounded by mountains on three sides and the ocean on the fourth side, making access to this people group difficult other than by plane or sea. No scripture portions or evangelistic materials are available in their language and most of the Kumzari, who are followers of folk Islam, have had no exposure to the Gospel.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=105404&rog3=MU>

11882

The Luwati (7,129)

The Luwati, also known as Luwathiya or Persians, are the largest Shi'a Muslim group in Oman. They are Ja'fari or Twelvers Shi'as, part of the main school of Shi'a thought which comprises 80% of Shi'as worldwide. It is speculated that this community migrated from Iran to Pakistan, and later to Matrah in Oman by the 1700s. Though known as Persians, much of the community is thought to be ethnically Indian. Many members of this prosperous merchant community live in the suburbs of Musqat; some of the poorer members of the community live in the traditionally Luwati quarter of Matrah, an area still used by all Luwati at times of festivals. The mosque in the Luwati quarter is the principal Shi'a mosque in Oman and is used by the Luwati as well as other Shi'a sects.

There are a handful of Christians among the Luwati, but no active church planting is taking place.

http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelvers>

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php>

11883

Mahra (51,500)

The Mahra are an indigenous, Arab minority, from the Dhofar region. Members of this group reside in both Oman and Yemen, speaking different but mutually intelligible dialects of Mahri. The Mahra are traditionally nomadic camel-herders; today, they are semi-nomadic with part of

the tribe spending winter months grazing their herds and the others living in villages. The Mahra are Sunni Muslim and there are no known believers, or Christian missionaries, among them.

http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Southern_Oman.pdf
<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=106046&rog3=MU>

11884

The Malayali (149,256)

The Malayali are skilled, foreign workers in Oman, speaking Malayalam, the native language of the South Indian, western, coastal state of Kerala. As much as 31% of the Malayali are Christian (though most are not evangelical) and the remaining majority is Hindu, with other Muslim and Jewish minorities also present. Many evangelical tools are available to engage this people group with the gospel and to train them to share the gospel with others; there is no mission agency currently engaging the Malayali in Oman.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=106160&rog3=MU>

11885

The Omani Arabs (1,432,862)

Omani Arabs in Oman comprise 58% of the Omani population. They speak a dialect of Arabic which is unique because of its mixture with original South Arabian languages. Omani Arabs who live in the interior of the country provide for themselves through the farming of date palms, fruit, and grains. Those who live in the eastern, coastal regions fish in the Gulf or grow date palms. Other Omani Arabs are known for their nomadic shepherding of camels, goats, and sheep. Their culture is tied closely to the religion of Islam, which influences the roles which both men and women perform.

Omani Arabs living in cities are not bound as tightly to traditional Omani culture, which means they may be less generous and hospitable when compared to their village counterparts. Most Omani Arabs are Ibadī Muslims; others may belong to other Muslim sects. There are some Christian believers among this people group, but there are no churches comprised of Omani Arabs.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=100431&rog3=MU>

11886

The Persian (45,374)

The Persian population of Oman speaks the language of Farsi, which is the national language of Iran. This group is Shi'a Muslim and contains no known Christian believers. In Oman, Persians live mainly in the coastal areas and are concentrated in the city of Jabroo, near Matrah. It is likely that the Persian women speak only Farsi, as the circle in which they live and work is largely the home; however, Persian men are able to communicate outside the home in Arabic and perhaps other local languages. There are no Christian missions currently working among the Persians of Oman.

http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=pes

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=107987&rog3=MU>

11888

The Punjabi (31,367)

The Punjabi are part of the skilled, foreign workforce in Oman. They speak Punjabi and are native to the Punjab state in Northern India, or perhaps from a related population in Pakistan. In South Asia, the religions of this people group are Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism, but the majority of Punjabis abroad are Sikh (a religion which combines elements of both Hinduism and Islam).

Punjabis are known for their success in running small, family businesses; Sikh Punjabi men are recognized for the turbans they commonly wear wrapped around their long, uncut hair. There is one church of Punjabi believers in Oman and one mission agency committed to working among Punjabis.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=108182&rog3=MU>

11889

The Saudi Arabs (25,665)

Saudi Arabs in Oman reside in the West, near the Omani, Saudi, and Yemeni borders. They speak a dialect of Arabic called Arabiya, or Saudi Arabic. The Saudi Arabs in Oman are nomadic animal herders living on the edge of the desert; men care for the animals and business outside of the home, and women carry out their roles within the tented-household. There are a very few Christian believers among this almost exclusively Sunni Muslim group in Oman.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=100425&rog3=MU>

11891

The Sindhi (612)

The Sindhi population of Oman is quite small and originates from the Sind region of Pakistan. They work as skilled, foreign laborers in Oman. The majority of Sindhi are Shi'a Muslim, but others may be Muslims of a different variety or even Hindu. Some Sindhi may have migrated from, or been forced out of, Pakistan to India during the partition in 1947 and therefore have come to Oman via India. Their location in Oman or extent of evangelization is unreported.

46413

The Sinhalese (23,882)

The Sinhalese serve as skilled, foreign workers in Oman. They originate from Sri Lanka and are largely Buddhist. About 4% of their population is Christian and churches have been formed among them. A mission organization is working among them, but no churches have been planted in the last two years.

46414

The Sudanese Arab (13,135)

The Sudanese Arab are skilled, foreign workers in Oman. They derive ethnically from a background of both Arab and African heritage. Most Sudanese Arabs come from either Sudan or Egypt. Though Sudanese Arab Christians are present in their homelands, there are no known believers among the Sunni Muslim Sudanese in Oman.

11894

The Tamil (10,265)

The Tamil in Oman are skilled, foreign workers. They originate from the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, or possibly Sri Lanka. The majority of the Tamil people are Hindu, but some are also Muslim or Christian. There are Tamil churches in Oman.

11895

The Urdu (48,956)

The Urdu of Oman are skilled foreign workers from Pakistan and India. They are Muslim but otherwise represent a heterogeneous mix of ethnic groups from a large geographical area; the ancestry of many Urdu people traces back to Arab merchants and soldiers who brought Islam with them to the sub-continent. Urdu is a language intelligible to Hindi speakers; however, it borrows from Farsi and Arabic and is written in a script similar to Arabic. There are no known believers among the Urdu of Oman.

11896

The Yemeni Arab (12,974)

The Yemeni Arab are Zaidi Muslims, a Shi'a sect which represents the largest religious group in Yemen. The Yemeni Arab in Oman are part of only a small number of Yemeni who have left their homeland; the reason for their immigration to Oman is unknown. The Yemeni Arab speak a dialect of Arabic known as Taizzi-Adeni. There are no known Christian believers among the Yemeni of Oman.

11897

Zanzibari (34,628)

The Zanzibari, also known as Unguja, are Swahili speaking Sunni Muslims. There are no known Christians among them, nor is there any missionary presence working to reach them. The Bible and evangelist tracts are available in their language. In the early 1800s Oman's influence spread in the form of East African colonization; in particular, the island of Zanzibar became an Omani territory. Economic turmoil within Oman in the mid-1850s led to the migration of Omani families to Zanzibar, which ultimately resulted in the mixing of the African and Arab families.

Though the Zanzibari were considered Arab while in East Africa, upon returning to Oman they were seen by Omani Arabs as Africans. When Sultan Qabus came to power, he called for the better educated Swahili and English-speaking Zanzibari to return to Oman and assist in supporting the enhancement of their homeland. They were placed in many of Oman's professional and high-ranking jobs because of their higher educational achievements and work

skills, which led to a resentment and backlash against them by Omani-born Arabs. This caused a tension between the generations of Omani-born Zanzibari and their African-born parents as the younger Zanzibari tried to find acceptance within the larger Arab culture by seeking to culturally separate from that which was Zanzibari. Even with adjustments, the Zanzibari retain many minority distinctions including the African flare in their food and dance and their more cosmopolitan outlook.

<http://malai.wordpress.com>

http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Oman_Diverse_Society_Northern_Oman.pdf

Joshua Project reports that there are small numbers of westerners in Oman such as Americans (2989) and British (7800) who are working in country, as well as a Korean (897) and Han Chinese (89) presence. Oman is likely not the strategic location in which to engage these people with a missionary presence but they should not be overlooked and efforts to approach them with the Gospel should be seized. Often peoples in new locales are more open to the Message than they have been in their own counties.

Missiological Implications

1. Evangelical Christians and Churches should recognize the entrenched Islam that is in Oman but also the distinct possibility of change among these people. The increased education and growing affluence of the people should provide some openings for evangelism. The upwardly mobile, educated Omanis, as well as those who shepherd flocks and eke out a living from the sandy ground, all need an opportunity to encounter Christ and His good news. Though challenging, it seems God has opened Oman's borders for such an opportunity to build His kingdom.
2. Evangelical Christians and Churches should develop and share with believers in Oman the better means for witnessing to Muslims. The methods will of necessity be contextualized to allow the people to come to conversion without too much social dislocation.
3. Evangelical Christians and Churches should pray for openings among Muslims in Oman through the means of visions and understandings of Christ.
4. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek out people from Oman and share the Gospel with them in vision of their returning to their country as evangelists.
5. Evangelical Christians and Churches should share with the peoples of Oman the possibilities of house churches and other small group methods that would aid in evangelism in difficult places
6. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek business possibilities in Oman and use these as opportunities to share the faith in Christ.
7. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek means of working among and through the Filipino population in Oman.

Oman is at a crucial turning point in its development where change is both possible and necessary. The Oman of the past, isolated and heavily influenced by fundamentalist Imams, is

slipping away as the country struggles to modernize, develop and find its place in the global community. The oil revenues which have been utilized to educate Omanis, improve infrastructure, and diversify the economy since the 1970s will soon be exhausted and it is speculated that even the Al Busaidi dynasty may be preparing to make way for a new form of government in Oman. If Christ is to be a part of the foundation of the future Oman, which is now materializing, then the time has come for Christians to take the gospel to the Omani people in a way which is relevant and hopeful. Oman is more open now to foreign business development and tourism than it has been for generations; Oman is in need of those who would bring education and employment training opportunities to its people in ways which will offer economic stability for the future. Missiologically speaking, the time is ideal for Christians to embody Christ as they invest in the future of the Omani people.

The challenge missionaries will face is to learn from the past. When Islam came to Oman in the 7th Century, Christianity crumbled before it. The Arab culture so identified with the teachings and claims of Mohammed, that they unhesitatingly followed him. Fourteen centuries later, missionaries must find a way to introduce Christ to the Arab heart and mind in ways that they naturally embrace Him.

Links –

<http://www.omanet.om/english/home.asp> This site, published by the Ministry of Information of the Sultanate of Oman, contains a great deal of information about Oman, including a recording of the country's national anthem.

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/mu.html> The CIA's World Factbook profile on Oman.

<http://worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/om.htm>

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/omtoc.html> A Country Study: Oman

http://www.omaninfo.com/cgi-bin/journal/doc_cat_list.asp?CategoryID=12 This links to articles written on Oman, particularly on the topics of culture and heritage.

<http://www.jepeterson.net/> Articles written by an expatriate who spent several decades in Oman. Peterson notably addresses people groups as well as historical evaluations and discussions on Oman's future.

<http://www.peoplegroups.org/MapSearch.aspx?country=Oman>

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/countries.php> Select Oman from the dropdown menu of countries.