



CULTURAL GUIDE TO OMAN

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CULTURAL GUIDE TO THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

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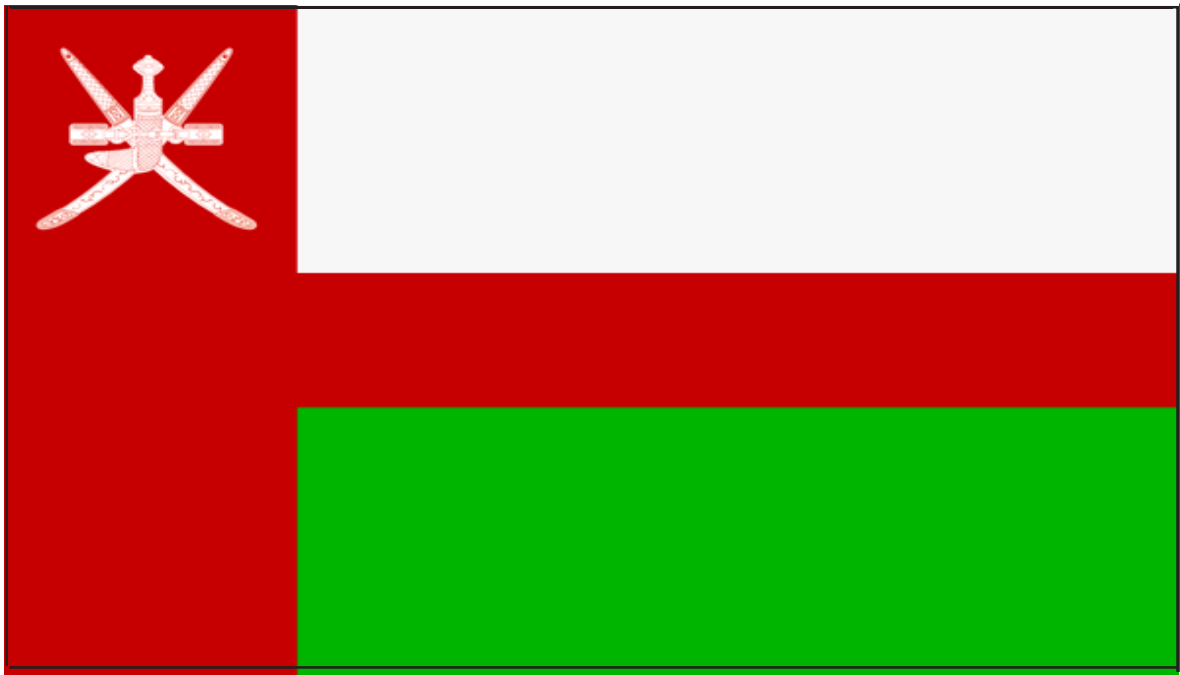
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by Maris E. Imbrie
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Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
OMANI SOCIETY	2
Peoples in Oman	2
Religion	3
Language	4
SOCIAL ROLES	5
Men	5
Women	6
Children	7
Foreigners	7
SOCIAL CUSTOMS	8
Greetings	8
Dress	10
Hospitality	11
Visiting Omani Homes	12
Having Omani Guests	13
SOCIAL VALUES	14
Status	14
Cleanliness	14
Body Language	15
Philosophy of Life	16
Customary Law	17
LIVING AND WORKING	
IN OMAN	17
Working	17
Shopping	18
Restaurants	19
Transportation	20
Barbers and Beauticians	21
Entertainment	21
Toilets	22
Gifts	22
Weddings	23
Funerals	23
Eids	24
Ramadan	24
CONCLUSION	25
GLOSSARY	26



INTRODUCTION

Prior to their first visit to the Middle East Americans often believe that they will be traveling to a land where they find the inhabitants are radically different from themselves. Visitors to Oman who take the opportunity to get to know the Omanis are delightfully surprised to find them possessing a family, and basic values of most Americans. view of life, religion, that is very similar to that



Mosque in Muscat

A comparison of the differences between any kind of cross-easier.. The goal of this reader traveling to about the Omani people, Americans can enjoy meeting, living, and working with them.

various similarities and different cultures makes cultural communication guide is to inform the Oman for the first time their values, and how

OMANI SOCIETY

Peoples in Oman

Oman is emerging very quickly from the dark ages into the modern world. In 1970 Sultan Qaboos encouraged the growth of a modern state from what was previously an undeveloped society. Today old traditions still exist beside modern American and European values. Often this contrast will puzzle the newcomer to Oman who sees an Omani female manager of a government department wear the traditional black *abaya* or cloak when she shops; or an Omani farmer who uses a Japanese pick-up to bring a television to his mud-brick house.

Oman was, until recent times, composed of two separate regions.

The capital area and the coast stretching north toward Abu Dhabi (the Batinah coast) was called "Muscat" and the area inland of the coast was called "Oman." The country is now united, although the people still regard the areas as separate.

Muscat is modern, and Western customs and habits are familiar there, while the *dakiliya*, or interior, as the remainder of the country is called, remains less developed and far more traditional.

Omanis were great seafarers and at one time ruled Zanzibar and the East African coast of what is now Kenya and Tanzania. Many Omanis immigrated to these cooler and more fertile regions and lived there, sometimes for generations, while retaining their Omani identity. Since 1970 many of them have returned to Oman and have regained their Omani citizenship. Today, many of the Omanis whom you

will get to know in the capital area are African or Zanzibari Omanis who have relocated. Almost all of them speak excellent English and many occupy the important managerial positions in government and business. They speak Swahili as a first language, English as a second language, and some only now are learning to speak Arabic.

Omanis are Arabs and, although some were born in Africa, they are proud of their Arab heritage. After the large influx of foreign-born Omanis into Oman in the early 1970s some of the native-born Omanis felt some resentment, although this does not now appear to be a major problem or source of discrimination in Oman.

In the capital area live a group of Omanis who, while they are native-born, are of Indian descent and called

"Lawatis." Many men still return to India, their ancestral homeland, to find brides, and they speak an Al-Lawati dialect, as well as Arabic and often English. The Lawatis have traditionally been merchants in the capital area and, like the African Omanis

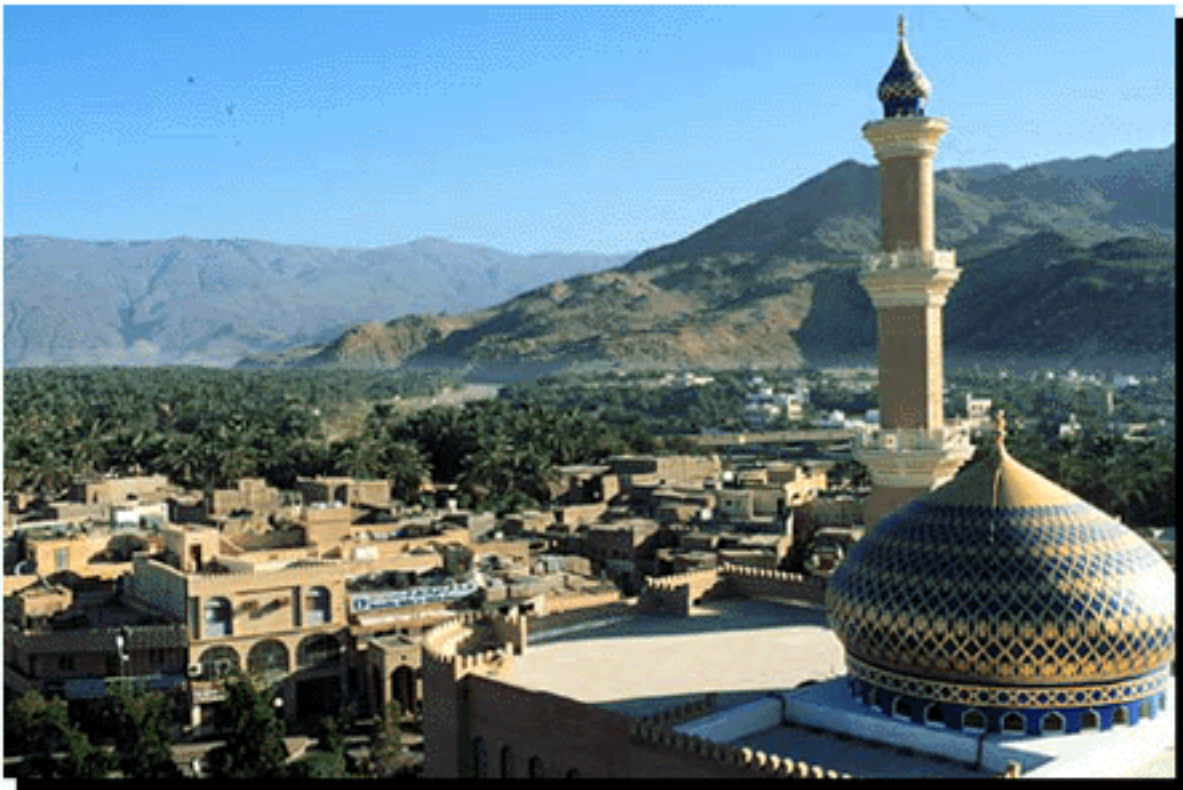


Street scene in Muscat

and Zanzibari Omanis, are full Omani citizens.

Another group of Omanis living in the capital area are called "Balochi." During the 16th century, Balochis from greater Balochistan (in southern Iran and Pakistan) came to Muscat to exchange trade and ultimately settled in the capital area and Quriyat. Since then, Balochis have lived in high populations in Muscat, the Battina region, and the interior eastern part of Oman (Sur).

There are a large number of non-Arabs living in Oman. They are predominantly from Pakistan, India,



Panoramic view of Muscat

Sri Lanka, and Baluchistan (an area in southern Iran and Pakistan). Some are Christian, others Hindu or Muslim. Almost all are in Oman temporarily to work; they constitute almost all of the country's laborers, clerks, and mechanics, and hold many of the technical positions of Omani businesses. In the capital area the visitor will sometimes feel he is in South Asia rather than in Arabia.

Religion

Almost all Omanis are Muslim, members of the religion of Islam (al-Islam). Most are members of the Ibadhi sect of Sunni Muslims, while a minority belong to the Shia sect.

While many Americans feel that Islam is very different from Christianity, you will find that Muslims share the same values as Christians. They believe that Muslims, Christians, and Jews all worship the same God and that Christians and Jews are special people compared to members of other religions. Muslims believe in Jesus as a prophet, and in Mary, Moses,

Abraham and many of the other Old Testament prophets.

Islam is founded on the traditions of Judaism and Christianity, but Muslims feel that Muhammad was the final prophet who revealed the true word of God in its final form. Omanis are interested in learning about Christian traditions and enjoy talking about Islam and Islamic traditions with Westerners.

Muslims believe that the Koran is the direct word of God when written in Arabic and as such is sacred. If you purchase a copy of the Koran or a silver Koran holder with a Koran inside of it, you should treat it with reverence.

Muslims pray five times a day, usually at home, sometimes at a mosque, but also at work or alongside the road when the man who enacts *mu'addin* (calls the prayers) announces the time for prayer. Though a Muslim may pray anywhere, he traditionally goes to pray at a mosque for *al-Jum'a* (the Friday noon prayer).



Page of the Koran

can only fulfill a promise if God permits it. Frequently, non-Muslims will feel that “insa’a allah” is a way of hedging a commitment. Arabs, however, mean to do what is requested when they say “insa’a allah.” Their use of it should not be taken lightly.

There is a Catholic and a Protestant church in Oman, attended by both Westerners and Christians from South Asia. There are also several Hindu temples.

Language

The language of Oman is Arabic. It is the language of the Koran, and Muslims know it as the language of Allah. Thus, they believe it as the best, the perfect language, better than any other. Omanis like to talk; their favorite pastime is talking; and poets, singers, and writers are admired.

There he removes his shoes, washes his hands, feet, and face and prays facing Mecca, either alone or following the lead of a respected Muslim (as there are no priests or ministers in Islam). Women as well as men go to the mosque to pray, although they have a separate mosque.

Westerners may be invited inside a mosque in Oman by Muslims and should follow their lead and instructions.

Muslims use the name of Allah (God) and religious expressions frequently in their speech, always in a reverent fashion. For example, on meeting another person an Omani would say “is-salam ‘alaykum” (peace be upon you) and upon leaving, “fi aman illah” (go in the protection of Allah).

They punctuate any statement about the future with “insa’a allah” (if God wills), for they feel that they

As a result of the British presence in Oman, many Omanis speak English very well; most know a little English. You will have very little difficulty in Oman if you speak no Arabic at all. But the rapport established by the use of Arabic will more than repay the effort required to learn a few basic phrases and a few greetings.

Arabs are delighted when a foreigner tries to speak their language. They will try hard to understand what you are saying and will be overjoyed if you ask them to help you learn another word. If conversation ever lags with an Arab, asking him about his language will start a long conversation.

After the courtesy phrases for “sukran” (thank you) and “afwan” (you are welcome), the best Arabic phrases to use are greetings. Omanis greet each other many times a day, and greetings are standard with a statement and a response.

After Arabic, English is the most frequently used language in Oman. All traffic signs and almost all other signs are written both in English and in Arabic.

The many South Asians in Oman speak South Asian languages, such as Urdu or Hindi. The Omanis from Zanzibar and other parts of East Africa speak Swahili. Other languages spoken by Omanis include Lawati, Balushi, and Persian.

SOCIAL ROLES

Men

The Omani man is primarily shaped by his traditional cultural background and his religion, Islam. He considers himself part of a larger group—family, tribe, quarter, religion, and country—where his loyalties primarily lie.

Unlike the Westerner, work is of secondary importance to him. He places far greater value on personal relationships, i.e., family and friends. He has a strong attachment to his wife and children and strives to be a good provider.

Although his wife may have a strong voice in the decision-making process within the home, he demands a subservient role when they appear in public together. Yet, the Omani man is proud of his wife and likes to give her gifts, particularly gold jewelry.

He expects his wife to take care of all the household duties, which include care of the children and cooking. He expects a large many-course meal to be served when he returns from work.

The Omani man prefers to socialize with other men and will only bring his wife to a social function when the situation demands it. His wife also prefers not to attend functions, unless she knows that other Omani women will be present.

He expects respect and obedience from his children. He enjoys his children and takes a great deal of pleasure and interest in them. The Omani father is very affectionate with his children and will openly show his love for them.

An Omani father takes a more active role in his son's upbringing than that of his daughter. Male children



Omani students

are still awarded a far higher status than females in Omani society. A father will introduce his son to the mosque where they will pray together. He will also teach his son the traditions of manhood that he learned from his father.

As a result of Islam's egalitarianism, the Omani man has a sense of self-destiny and self-worth that transcends his financial situation. Whether he is a laborer or a minister, he believes that he is, above all, a human being who deserves respect.

Women

Omani women differ depending on their upbringing. The majority of those who grew up in Oman remain very traditional and to a great degree uneducated. Until 1970, there was almost no education available for women within the country. Women were taught domestic skills and were expected to marry at a young age (12 years and up), raise a family, and take care of a household. There was no other option for an Omani woman at that time.

This has caused many difficulties, as Omani husbands received varying degrees of education and have come into increasing contact with Westerners through their work. The more traditional wife must now struggle in her encounters with Western women, very few of which speak Arabic. She is now trying to learn to mingle, eat with utensils, and sit next to strange men at meals. She has found this difficult and as a result often chooses to stay home.

There are also a number of women who grew up in Omani colonies abroad, were educated by the British

in Africa, and then went on to university education in Cairo or in England. Life is difficult for these women who have returned to a culture where they are essentially strangers and where they must spend their time with traditional Omani women who have no educational experience.

Many of the educated Omani women now work. The government has encouraged and assisted Omani women to work in both government and private sectors. Education is now available for women as well as for men, and it is expected that women in the future will achieve a similar educational level to that of men. Many Omani women are Undersecretaries and working at the ministerial level.



Conservative Omani dress

Omani women retain their maiden names when they marry. This may confuse an American looking for the wife of Salem al-Foulan when she calls herself Mrs. Anisa Kidtha. The children, however, are given the father's name: the son of Salem al-Foulan would be Tariq bin Salem al-Foulan

meaning Tariq, son of Salem. A female child would also have her father's name as a middle name, i.e., Laila Salem al-Foulan; notably, this lacks the designation "bin" or "child of."

Everything in Omani society continues to favor the married woman over the unmarried one. The few unmarried, educated Omani women have difficulty adjusting to the differing pressures. On the one hand, they are treated on a professional basis as equal to any man or Western women; yet, outside of work they are not allowed to live alone or to date in a Western sense. What complicates this situation even more is the fact that more often than not the woman's family is not educated and does not understand or

take pride in her many academic or professional accomplishments. Rather, they are too often unhappy and ashamed of her for not being married. Caught between two cultures, this modern woman faces difficulties either remaining in Oman or leaving.

It is interesting that all Omani women remain committed to the traditional role of taking care of their children and household. Although an Omani woman may have a relative or a paid servant to assist during the hours that she works, once back in her home she sets aside her professional identity and effortlessly falls into her more traditional role of wife and mother. Unlike some of her Western counterparts, she does not find that the two worlds conflict. In Omani society women are expected to be married and have children. Since the family is most important for both men and women in Oman, government and businesses make special allowances for time off to be at home with sick children, and nursing mothers are given an hour off in the middle of the day to go home and feed their infants. There is a liberal maternity leave policy, and work hours in general are more flexible for working mothers. Oman has a far better grasp of dealing with the working mother than does the United States or Western Europe.

Children

Omani children are usually well behaved and friendly to both their families and to visitors. They are raised to respect older people and as a result do not pester or annoy grown-ups. They are very

much present at all social functions but remain in the background.

Children are valued highly in the culture and are considered a gift from Allah. It is important for the Westerner to remember that an Omani does not mean to be too personal if he asks how many children you have or plan to have.

Unfortunately, many of the problems traditionally associated with the West, such as materialism and lack of discipline, are finding their way into Omani society, especially among the newly rich of the capital area. Often in an attempt to prove that they are modern, they emulate the bad as well as the good.

Dating in the Western sense is non-existent. Many couples still do not meet before they marry. Omani men continue the traditional custom of marrying the daughter of their father's brother, if she is of an appropriate age. This practice is considered normal and moral judgments are not

made as they would be in Western society.

Omani society is based on a very closely knit family structure that extends beyond marriage and the nuclear family. Children are responsible for their parents and grandparents, and they often all live in the same house along with aunts and uncles. They grow up as part of a large extended family.

Foreigners

Probably because they were a seafaring people, Omanis have a great tolerance for foreigners.



Children in traditional garb

They welcome them and their strange ways, and expect in return only that the foreigners respect their culture and religion. For example, the Christian church is permitted in Oman as long as the missionaries do not try to convert Muslims to Christianity.

Omanis view foreign men as similar to Omani men and grant them the same respect and role in society. Western women are considered very different from Omani women, and they are considered to fall into one of two roles: perhaps because of the presence of x-rated movies, Omanis feel that most Western women are of low morals; immodest clothing or actions confirm this impression. On the other hand, if a Western woman dresses and acts modestly and espouses traditional values encompassing children and family, she will be held in the highest regard and will never be the target of improper advances.

Professionally, Western women are treated with complete respect. An American woman will experience less sex discrimination on the job in Oman than she might in the United States.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS

Greetings

Omanis, like other Arabs, take a special joy in *salamat* (greetings). Unlike Americans, they greet each other and will want to greet you each time they meet you throughout the day.

The most common greetings are:

on meeting—“as-salam ‘alaykum” (peace be upon you)

with the response—“wa ‘alaykum as-salam” (and upon you be peace);

“sabah il-kair” (good morning)

with the response “sabah in-nur” (good morning);

“kaif halak” (how are you to a man) or

“kaif halish” (how are you to a woman);



with the response—“zain, al-hamdu lillah, wa, inta?”

(fine, thanks be to God, and how are you?);

on departing you may say “fi aman illah” (go in God’s protection)

with the response “fi aman il-karim” (go in God’s protection also) or “ma’a salama” (go in peace)

with the response “ma’a salama” (go in peace also).

Walking into a store and making a purchase without a greeting, or entering an office without a greeting is simply not understood. A man or woman entering his office should greet every person working there at the beginning of the day. One should greet everyone, from the janitor to the president or company chairman, regardless of the total number of people involved. Often there is almost a reception line in an office building in the morning as the latecomers greet those who have already arrived. Each time an American passes another employee, he should again greet him, though a simple greeting such as “ahlan” (welcome) suffices rather than the



exchange greetings.

Omani offices are often a surprise to Americans. When you enter an official's office, you will often find him at his desk with a number of others, perhaps a half dozen people, sitting in his office, talking or just drinking coffee. Do not be shocked; this is normal, even if you have a fixed appointment. Greet the official, and the others, who like you are there to talk to him. If he is talking, he will wave you to a seat and order up some tea, coffee, or in summer a cold drink. He will get to you in turn, but then expect to carry out your business with no privacy at all.

Greetings between men consist of a handshake and a customary English or a traditional Arabic greeting. An Omani man may continue shaking hands long after you cease feeling comfortable, or may just continue holding your hand. Do not be concerned, and do not be surprised or make the wrong assumption on seeing two men walking down the street holding hands. It is an acceptable display of friendship.

With an acquaintance, you should inquire after his health and the health of his children. It is considered improper for a man to inquire after another's wife by name, even if he knows her. Asking "How is the family?" is a polite way of asking the same question.

Women greeting each other follow the same procedure as men, including the shaking of hands. Omani children, at a very young age, are taught the proper way of greeting and will greet adults politely, even gravely, and then are expected to vanish. American children and their parents are admired when the children greet guests and acquaintances courteously.

more elaborate greeting used at the beginning of the day. When meeting a friend or acquaintance on the street or upon entering a shop an American should

Americans should be very careful about greetings between men and women if the women's husbands are not present. An American man can greet an Omani woman when her husband is present, shake her hand, and carry on a conversation with her. If, however, he meets her when she is unaccompanied, either in public or private, he should be very careful to be somewhat distant in his greetings. For example, if he should happen to meet an Omani woman in a store or on the street, he could greet her, but it would be considered improper and the woman would become uncomfortable if he carried on a conversation with her. If he called at the home of an Omani and found the husband out and his wife at home, he would best leave a message rather than wait at the house.

Western women have a special role in the Omani culture but must also be careful when encountering Omani men alone. Omani men will judge a Western woman either as loose and therefore not deserving of respect, or as morally good and therefore respected. It is important that a Western woman identify into which category she falls. The Omani man will initially be suspect of her character, and to avoid any embarrassing situation, the woman should mention her husband and family and tell the Omani man that she would like to meet his family as well. She will find the best of both worlds once she is considered respectable. The Western woman will be given the respect and honor awarded to Omani women and at the same time is respected as a professional in her work.

It is also important that a Western woman never go alone to visit an Omani man, for this will be misjudged and cause the Omani man to question her moral integrity.

On visiting the home of an Omani, or when an Omani visits your home, the host will add "ahlan wasahlan" to the greeting "ahlan bikum" (welcome, welcome to you). The polite host will repeat the welcome during the evening. Guests who have arrived earlier in the evening and are seated always

rise to greet the newcomer. Even at a large gathering, newcomers circle the room greeting each guest and introducing themselves.

Dress

Omani men wear a long white robe called a *dishdashah* and on their heads wear a piece of cloth wrapped in a particular manner, called a *musar*, or a small embroidered cap, called a *kuma*, and they wear sandals. Though a few Omanis will wear Western clothing from time to time, the *dishdashah* is worn on all occasions. For formal occasions a gold-trimmed robe of black or brown, called a *bisht*, is worn over the *dishdashah*. With few exceptions Omanis all dress similarly. Members of the royal family will wear an intricately and specially embroidered headdress, and especially the people from the interior choose to wear differing colored *dishdashahs* for no other reason than personal taste.

For work or meetings, Western men wear slacks and short-sleeved shirts. Leisure or safari suits are also very suitable. Coat and tie are required for formal evening functions and receptions. Shorts are never considered proper when in the presence of Omanis.

Omani women wear modest attire. The traditional women wear brightly colored pants covered by a knee-length dress. Over this, they wear a large multi-colored piece of cloth that covers the head and is wrapped around the neck and shoulders. Over all of this, they wear an *abaya*, a black cloak that serves as a

sign of modesty and protection for their clothes. The *abaya* is not a sign of oppression.

Omani women in general do not cover their faces, although on occasion one sees a veiled woman in the capital area, usually a more traditional woman from the interior of Oman who will cover herself when in the populated capital area.

The more modern Omani women wear long floor-length dresses usually made of cotton that resemble what we in America associate with evening clothes

for the Caribbean Islands or southern California. This type of dress is worn as an everyday dress whether at work or at home. They also wear skirts, blouses, and trousers. Since it is necessary for Omani women to cover their hair, they will wear a scarf on their heads. Young women and older

women will also wear an *abaya* whenever they are in public or going to and from work.



21st-century Omani girls in traditional costume

It is important for the Westerner to know that the *abaya* is not frightening, ugly, or oppressive to the Omani woman. Rather, it ensures that she will be respected by men in public places, enables her to dress casually and be covered up when she appears in public, and shows respect for the local traditions.

Omanis complain of Western women who are not properly attired. Unlike in Saudi Arabia, women in Oman are not restricted to long-sleeved blouses, but must fully cover the shoulder and upper arm and have a relatively high-cut neckline. Shorter skirts, below the knee, are permissible in the capital area

but inappropriate in the *suq* (marketplace) or when visiting an Omani home.

Many Omanis who have traveled and are accustomed to Western ways have parents living with them and, out of respect, request more traditional attire. The Western women who complain about being called names or who encounter suggestive gestures are usually those who insist on low-cut, sleeveless or bare-backed attire in the *suq* or other public places. Omanis are very respectful of women, all women, provided they seem worthy of respect. Western women should take this into consideration.

In the interior, when visiting a village, attire becomes even more important. Women should wear a long skirt and modest elbow-length shirt or blouse. Pants are permissible but should be loose fitting and are best worn with a blouse over them. Long skirts are really the most comfortable and appropriate since there are rarely chairs in the houses or public restrooms.

Omani male children dress like small copies of adult men and wear the dishdashah and little embroidered cap.

Young Omani girls mirror the dress of their mother. But in school they wear white trousers with a long-sleeved tan tunic and a white scarf on their heads.

Hospitality

The Arab tradition of *karam* (hospitality) continues to be strong in Oman. Coffee or a

soft drink is always offered when visiting a home, office, bank, or even a shop.

Unlike Americans, Omanis do not offer a refreshment immediately upon the arrival of a guest, but prefer to talk for a few minutes and exchange the proper greetings. Usually then the wife, daughters, or a servant brings juice and a sweet, cookies, or perhaps dates. After this is cleared, conversation continues for a period and then a dish or tray of fruits will be brought. After another interval Omani coffee will be served. Omani coffee is served black and with no sugar, but with cardamon, an aromatic spice, in small handleless cups. Traditionally, the son will bring in the coffee pot (now usually a thermos) and three cups. He will pour a tiny amount in each cup. It is expected that each guest will have at least two, but more likely three servings. Signify that you have had enough by shaking the cup. Simply holding it out or handing it to the person serving the coffee will only get you another cup.

When Omanis visit an American home, the ritual need not be identical, but it would be most impolite not to offer refreshments of some kind.

Similarly, on visiting an office, it is always expected that the host will offer refreshments. In the more traditional shops and in the *suq*, shopkeepers will offer tea or coffee to patrons.

Although it sometimes seems to take forever to cash a check in an Omani bank, the customary cup of coffee or tea makes the visit pleasant. Even in the



Early Omani coffee urn

more modern stores, a shopkeeper keeps a stock of cool cans of juice for loyal patrons.

If, after visiting one too many homes, offices or shops, you cannot face drinking one more can of mango juice, it is more polite just to accept it and take a token sip or two than to refuse to accept the offer of hospitality.

In America it is common practice to say in passing to a new acquaintance, "We must get together sometime." Very often this invitation is only a form of courtesy and the invitation is not genuine. Omanis take the tradition of hospitality very seriously, and if they mention that they would like to see you, shortly you will receive an invitation. If you mention that you would like to have them to your house, you should carry out your promise.

Visiting Omani Homes

Omanis are extremely hospitable and once they know you they will want to entertain you in their homes. Omanis from the interior do not eat out, and all entertaining is done at home.

Some people do not have telephones and often you will receive a written invitation for dinner. Once you are considered a close friend, however, you are expected to drop in without invitation and you will find Omanis dropping in on you as well. For a dinner you will usually be invited at 8:00 p.m. Omanis rarely arrive on time, but Omani hosts are beginning to realize that Americans often do.

Dress plays an important role in the evening. Omani women love to dress up and often have a new dress for each occasion. When dining with Westerners, the Omani women will wear an elegant, very formal full-

length dress and much gold jewelry. Western women should wear something long but do not have to dress as formally. Western men can either wear a pair of slacks with an open-necked shirt or a coat and tie. The latter is required only on very rare occasions and almost never in private homes.

It is not necessary to bring a gift. In fact, bringing any type of food or beverage is considered an insult to the hospitality of the host.

When you arrive at the home of an Omani, you should remove your shoes outside the door or immediately inside. You will then proceed to shake hands with the host, his family, and other guests.

Usually, in the capital area, homes will have Western-style furniture, though in many cases Omanis prefer to sit on the floor. You will then be served a beverage, usually juice or soda, in separate places for men and women. A few of the more Westernized Omanis may serve alcohol, but not usually outside ministerial circles.

Eating is an important social occasion for the Omanis in which conversation plays an equal role with food. There are usually numerous courses served with intervals of time both before the meal and between the courses.

You will be expected to eat more than one helping. As there are many courses, it is best to start out with a small amount. Omanis are very proud of their cooking ability and will want to feel that they have been successful hosts.

The time of the meal varies. Usually it begins about 10:00 p.m., although it is not uncommon to be served much later. Following the completion of the meal, coffee will be served, the signal that the evening is finished and guests may leave.



Samplers of Omani

In the interior, the Omani host may still follow the traditional Bedouin custom and not eat with the guests. He may stay and talk while you eat or retire while you are eating. Omani women will always eat separately, although Western women are served with the men.

In many rural areas Omanis eat with their hands, but one must eat and pass food only with the right hand. In the capital area, however, hosts will normally provide some type of utensil for the foreign visitor to use and are increasingly using them as well. This is not the case in the interior villages, where you will be expected to master the traditional art of eating with your hands. Water bowls will be passed around between courses to clean your hands.

Omanis often eat from a main dish or tray placed on the floor in the midst of the guests. You are expected to eat from the section immediately in front of you.

At the end of the meal, you should warmly thank the host for the evening. Written notes are neither necessary nor expected. When departing the house, you should once again shake everyone's hand and say good-bye to each person individually.

Having Omani Guests

Once Omanis have entertained you and consider you a friend, they will expect you to reciprocate and invite them to your home.

Again, a written invitation may be a convenient way of extending an invitation but verbal invitations are completely acceptable. Omanis will probably show up late, which is customary even when they visit other Omanis. Even though you invite their wives, Omani men may come alone, especially on the first visit.

Do not be offended, but keep in mind that Omani women, on the whole, are not comfortable with Westerners and are more likely to come if they know other Omani women have been invited.

It is best to have juice and soft drinks on hand, although it is not improper to offer alcoholic beverages and let the individual decide.

Being Muslims, Omanis will not eat any product from the pig, such as bacon, ham, or pork hot dogs. They eat shrimp, but not usually other varieties of shellfish.

Omanis always provide massive quantities of food for their guests and will expect you to do the same. Offering a number of different dishes is usually the easiest way. It is wisest not to put out portions of food such as six steaks for six people.

You may set a traditional Western-style table, but it is often better to serve buffet-style and sit on the floor as well as on chairs. From time to time, Omani guests will bring other friends or relatives, or not show up at all. Buffet-style cooking helps in dealing with these occasions.



Table spread buffet-style

Omani women tend to be shy among Westerners, particularly if they do not speak English. It is best not to pay too much attention to them but rather let them stay in the background where they will be more comfortable talking to other Omani women.

Coffee is the last thing served and symbolizes the end of the evening. Omanis will shake your hand and thank you when departing and will not send any form of written thank you or thank you verbally again afterwards.

The Western-style cocktail party is usually both inappropriate and unsuccessful in Oman. Omanis always serve some sort of food at social gatherings

and do not understand the Western custom of merely standing around and drinking. Smaller social gatherings such as dinner parties of no more than 10 or 12 are far preferable to cocktail parties.

If you do choose the latter, however, you should provide a selection of food to eat. Again, it is important to offer plenty of soft drinks and juice. It is acceptable to offer alcohol as well, but the choice should be left up to the individual Omani. Muslims are restricted from purchasing alcohol although many ministers and businessmen are able to circumvent the law. While the American host can offer drinks to a Muslim, he should be careful not to supply alcohol to drink elsewhere, which is against the law.

SOCIAL VALUES

Status

Omanis, like most other Arabs, are egalitarians. They believe that all men are equal in the sight of God. As a result Omanis are proud people, and a *farrash* (office boy) will greet a government minister as an equal. The outward signs of status such as cars, high positions, and large houses do not change this feeling of equality. Yet, membership in the al Bu Saidi royal family of Sultan Qaboos does convey some special status to the members of the family.

The presence of large numbers of South Asians in Oman tends to confuse this feeling of egalitarianism, as Indians and Pakistanis still think of themselves, and of all others, in classes. They tend to value highly the outward signs of wealth and status and try to assign a class ranking to each Arab and Westerner. They look down on and tend to treat Omanis in lower-level jobs as inferiors, and Omanis in high-level jobs, and most Westerners, as their superiors.

Cleanliness

Omanis are a very clean people; they wash numerous times a day and value personal

cleanliness. Due to the numerous municipal sanitation crews, Muscat's capital area is one of the cleanest cities in the world. In the interior, however, streets and alleys may be littered with rubbish and discarded building materials.

Omanis invariably want to wash their hands before and often after eating. A hospitable host will show his guests to a sink prior to meals. Arabs consider the right hand alone clean and eat and pass food only with this hand.

Animals, especially dogs and cats, are considered dirty and Omanis cannot understand why Americans allow pets in the house, even pet them, and allow themselves to be licked. It would be appropriate for Americans with pets to keep them apart from Arab guests.

To Arabs, feet are also unclean and should not be prominently exposed. Shoes are not generally worn in the house. You will find a collection of sandals and shoes at the door of almost every house and Americans often adapt the same habits in their homes.



Body Language

There is more touching between people of the same sex and far less between men and women than in America. Men shake each other's hands, hold hands, and sit or walk with their hands on each other's shoulders. Friends or relatives may embrace and sometimes kiss each other on both cheeks, especially after a long separation.

Women express the same signs of friendship and affection. However, between men and women, no physical touching is permissible, except for a brief handshake. It is inappropriate even for a married couple to touch each other in public, and an Omani would consider it improper for an American couple to hold hands or to kiss in public.

Parents and relatives are very warm and touching with children, holding their hands, carrying, and kissing them. A baby will be passed from hand to hand for each person to hold. A child may serve as an icebreaker for an American to get to know Omani neighbors.



The physical distance considered private maintained between people is less for Omanis than for Americans. Omanis will sit closer, stand closer, and crowd more people into a smaller space than is comfortable for Americans.

The left hand is considered unclean, while the right hand is used for greeting, touching, and eating. Americans (especially the left-handed ones) should try to remember not to serve, pass, or eat food with the left hand.

Since feet are also considered unclean, it is impolite to point the sole of your foot at another person or to put your feet up on a table or a desk. Rather than crossing their legs, Omanis usually sit rather formally in chairs and when sitting on the floor sit on their feet, cover them with their “dishdashah,” or point them in a different direction.

As mentioned before, Omani women cover themselves in public and even when wearing Western clothes wear high necklines, longer sleeves and long dresses. Omanis feel very uncomfortable if foreign women wear short skirts, tight pants, plunging necklines, shorts, or halter tops. There are private beaches and clubs in Oman where women can wear bikinis, but such dress would be considered unseemly and probably draw a staring crowd if worn on a public beach.

Omanis may point the chin at you and make a clucking sound with the tongue, which signifies “no,” whereas an American would shake his head back and forth.

Lavishly praising another's child can be considered envying him by some Omanis, especially the more traditional ones. If you want to comment on a child start by saying “ma sha’a allah” (thanks be to God), which will signify that you do not envy the child, but are praising God.

When being introduced or upon the entrance of a newcomer, it is polite to stand.

In general, as a foreigner it usually is wise not to be the first to do something new. Stand back and follow the lead of an Omani in such things as drinking coffee, eating, or being introduced. Do not strike up a conversation first.

Philosophy of Life

Islam advocates enjoyment of life, and Omanis believe that life is not merely to be endured. Thrift is not merely to be endured. Thrift is not a tradition of the culture, and one of its ideals is the tradition of hospitality. A host is required to protect, feed, and care for a guest, even if the host is poor and can scarcely afford to feed his own family. To avoid taking advantage of Omani hospitality, Americans can take care not to arrive uninvited at mealtime. Despite a host's economic status, do not bring any food or gift item that makes it obvious.

In modern homes, hospitality manifests itself by the host providing an impressive spread of food, always more than the guests present can eat. Americans should avoid serving limited amounts of food, but should try to cover the table with plates of various kinds of food.

Traditionally in Oman, men have not worked diligently at jobs for fixed periods of time, but have worked hard when it was necessary and then relaxed, talked, and drunk coffee together. Women's work is separate from men's work and men usually would not be seen helping their wives. They find it strange that American husbands assist their wives in washing, cooking, or other work associated with the upkeep of the home.

This is not to say that Omanis are not excellent, hardworking employees, but that good management and clearly defined goals are required.

Omanis have a very strong feeling of "face." Correctness, honor, and proper behavior are required by both the family and the community. However, in places where they are unknown—such as abroad—they are no longer constrained by societal restraints, leading to stories of strait-laced Arabs whooping it up in pre-war Lebanon, for example.

Muslims believe that man's destiny is subject to the control of God. They are not fatalistic to the point of lacking initiative, but feel that man's best efforts will only succeed with God's help. Expressions



reflecting this belief such as “in sa’a allah” (God willing) or “Ma’a idin illeh” (with the permission of God) abound in the conversation of all Omanis.

Customary Law

Sharia (Islamic Law) is strict in demanding harsh, though just, penalties from criminals. Islamic courts, presided over by *Qadis* (Islamic judges) still dispense justice in Oman. Americans who have appeared in Omani courts have usually felt that justice was fairly applied. Although the death penalty still exists, it is called for only on an occasional basis.

Battles between different tribes, frequent in the past, seemingly no longer occur, though they still exist in the tradition and memories of the people. Other tribal customs are still followed in the interior and among recent arrivals in urban areas. For example, the kin of a killed person can call for the death of a murderer; however, the *Qadis* normally lower the punishment to the payment of “blood money” to the family of the victim.

As an American there is little likelihood that you will come under the direct jurisdiction of an Islamic court unless you have a traffic accident involving an Omani. Constant attention is necessary on the streets; Omanis, especially those from the interior, do not understand the speed of a moving automobile and have a tendency to merely step out into traffic without looking. Under Omani law, the driver is responsible for any injury caused whether or not the driver is at fault. If you have the misfortune of killing an Omani, even accidentally, you may still be subject to a prison term, in addition to the payment of blood money. In many cases, you may also be requested to leave the country once the punishment has been met.

For lesser injuries, you will be allowed to remain in the country and not have to face a prison term, but will still be held financially responsible to make retribution to the victim and his family. Again in this case, the *Qadi* will determine the amount of your punishment and the terms of payment.



Omani jail cell

LIVING AND WORKING IN OMAN

Working

Severely short of labor, the government of Oman has established a vocational and on-the-job training program in addition to college preparatory classes. To date, this has not filled the need for qualified personnel and the government has encouraged the employment of women in both business and government. In addition, many foreigners are employed, from South Asian laborers to American technicians and British secretaries. Western women are employed, both at professional and technical levels. Unlike Saudi Arabia, Oman allows men and women to work in the same office. Qualified Omani women are employed at all levels in the government and are given the respect due their abilities.

Western women have a unique opportunity in the business sector. Provided that they dress modestly, respect the customs of Oman, and are capable in their jobs, they are treated professionally. Through acquaintances developed on the job, a Western woman and her family can meet Omanis of the middle and lower classes and develop close friendships and be invited to their homes.



Several years ago the process of Omanization started in order to slowly replace foreign workers with Omanis in all sectors of society. Today in some government organizations, 70 percent of the employees are Omani.

Although Oman does not have a traditional work ethic, Omanis are excellent workers when well managed. The importance of personal relationships and hospitality in private life continues in the office. All employees greet each other each morning and each time that they meet throughout the day. Coffee, tea, or cold drinks are offered to visitors. A visitor will never get down to business immediately but will chat and inquire about an official's health and family before starting. It is considered rude not to engage a person in conversation.

An Omani employer is expected to take an interest in the family and private life of his employees, entertain, and assist them. Omani employers are much more liberal in understanding and giving leave to employees for family reasons, sickness, and death than are Western employers. It is not unusual for Omani employees to take extended periods of time off.

Omani men usually wear the dishdashah and mussar to the office. Western men go to work in open-neck shirts or safari suits. Sometimes an office will require shirt and tie, rarely a jacket.

Omani women wear long dresses with high necks and long sleeves to work. American women can wear

more Western business attire, providing it is modest by Omani standards.

Shopping

Modern department stores, traditional shops in the suq, and open-air markets all exist in Oman. Visitors enjoy the smells, bustle, and sights of the suq, while residents know that the most interesting and lowest-priced items are often hidden in the hole-in-the-wall shops. Yet, fresh fruits, meats, and Western items are available and can be purchased easily in the modern shops. Even the open-air fish market offers the advantage of access to the freshest native fish. A Westerner living in Oman will shop in each type of store from time to time.

There is a multitude of shopping malls in the capital area. Similar to the United States, they have a variety of shops, stores, restaurants, and coffee shops.

The modern stores differ little from those in the United States. Wares or produce are displayed and prices are fixed. Most of the shopkeepers and clerks are Indian or Pakistani and will invariably speak English. Although most items are available, expect to be shocked at the high prices. Pork products are available in some stores but are kept in special "pork rooms." The items will be priced in these rooms and placed in an unmarked bag before being allowed in the rest of the store.

The largest suqs are in Mutrah and Nizwa, but smaller ones exist in almost every village. Shops hardly larger than closets sell almost everything. Street vendors sell grilled meat or Indian treats. One-room factories make *balawa*, the local sweet. Barbers and blacksmiths without shops work on the ground. Tailors measure and cut and jewelers make and repair jewelry. The smell of spices and sounds of Eastern music from cassette vendors fill the air. Coffee sellers whose only shop is a pot, clink their cups to draw business. Omani women in black abayas shop alongside European tourists, sailors from dhows in the harbor, and Bedu from the interior.

Prices are usually flexible in the suq, though some shopkeepers set prices and keep to them. If you return to the same shop regularly, the owner will remember you and may offer special prices or hold an item he believes you may want. Often he will offer tea, coffee, or a cold drink. Western women will avoid problems in the crowded alleys of the suq by wearing conservative clothes. There are still beggars in the suq, but unlike in other cities in the Middle East, they usually will not pester the Westerner.

There is an open-air fish market on the beach in Mutrah where the fishermen bring their catch each morning. Although highly aromatic, the fish is plentiful and delicious. You may bargain directly with the fishermen for a whole fish or with a host of middlemen who purchase the fish from the fishermen, clean them, and sell them in pieces. *Sabwa* (fresh tuna), *hamrah* (red snapper), and *humur* (grouper) are available among many other varieties. *Kana'ad* (king mackerel) is especially delicious.

Many Americans are surprised when Arabs continuously ask what a specific item cost them and where they purchased it. This is part of the bargaining process, however, and if an American wants to bargain successfully, he should follow the same process that an Arab does when he bargains. If, for example, an Arab wants to purchase a coffee pot, before he goes to a shop he will ask all his friends what they paid for their coffee pots. By this method he will establish the going rate for coffee pots. When he begins bargaining with the shopkeeper, he knows the price the shopkeeper expects. The feigned lack of interest, the ridiculous initial offers, and the discussion of quality are only the trappings of a process designed to arrive agreeably at the same price the purchaser and seller both expect.

Restaurants

There are restaurants in Oman that serve a variety of foods—Indian, Chinese, Lebanese,



Suq, or marketplace



Popular “Western” food

European, American, and even Mexican—almost every kind except Omani. Fast food chains, such as McDonald’s, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut, Wendy’s, and Taco Bell are all also available. The international hotels offer expensive international fare. Lebanese proprietors serve Levantine fare. There is even a Chinese restaurant, though the food tastes faintly of curry since the cooks are Indian. And of course, there are a variety of South Asian restaurants ranging from the elegant to the filthy, serving a variety of food, mostly good, and always very spicy.

An American in Oman need fear no difficulties of strangeness in restaurants. Almost every waiter speaks English and serves in a familiar manner.

Street food is available in the large communities and in the suqs. Many Westerners find it tasty and relatively sanitary, whereas others eat only at restaurant establishments. Varieties include *kebabs* (small pieces of meat grilled on skewers and served in paper-thin bread), *swarmah* (sliced lamb sandwiches), *sambosas* (deep-fried triangular Indian pastries filled with

endless combinations of vegetables or meat), *pakora* (fried pastries), and many others.

Transportation

Transportation in Oman is mainly by automobile. Almost all foreigners and many Omanis own cars, and traffic jams even occur occasionally. Unlike in some of the Middle-Eastern countries, Omanis are quite good, very polite, and law-abiding drivers. There are well-enforced speed limits in residential areas, though there are no speed limits on the rural roads.

The main perils for drivers are pedestrians, both two and four-legged. Many Omanis, especially those from the interior, are not yet accustomed to the dangers of crossing highways and often will step into the roadway without regard for traffic. Four-legged pedestrians, including goats, donkeys, and camels, also have little regard for cars.

If you are unfortunate enough to have an automobile accident, you must stay with the vehicle until the

police arrive. Penalties for killing a pedestrian are quite severe—even if the driver is blameless—sometimes ranging to high fines and long jail sentences.

The public transportation system consists of a very rudimentary bus system that operates in the capital area, and transportation is also available with taxis—private and share.

The taxi system is extensive, inexpensive and used by almost everyone. Rates are fixed and drivers do not expect tips.

Private taxis (“engage” taxis) operate as taxis do in the United States. Taxis can be flagged down on the road, found in front of hotels, at the airport, and at the taxi stands.

Shared taxis (“service” taxis) run between fixed points and are very inexpensive. A passenger can get in at one of the taxi stands and wait until the cab is filled, or he can hail a passing cab with an empty seat. You may ask the cab to drop you at any point on his route. Shared taxis are rarely air conditioned and can be warm and aromatic in the summer. But the savings in expense is worth the minor discomfort. Taxi drivers are invariably of Omani origin, but seem able to understand almost any language.

Barbers and Beauticians

Omani men frequently shave their heads and seem to do so at home, leaving the barber business to South Asians and Europeans. The Pakistani and Indian barbers will cut hair quickly and inexpensively but the results do not always reflect American tastes. Several European and South Asian barbers familiar with Western cuts work in the hotels.

Similarly, there are beauticians in the hotels as well as a few independent shops, most of whom succeed in pleasing their customers. Many Western women, however, find it cooler and more convenient to wear their hair long and tied up.

Entertainment

Since the opening of Al Bustan Palace Hotel and its auditorium, opera, ballet, and various concerts and performances can be enjoyed on occasions. Several amateur theatrical and musical groups recruit volunteers and put on a number of shows each year. They are usually produced under the auspices of a private club but are open to all interested.

Every hotel and several restaurants have live bands, and offer the opportunity to dance.



Omani license

Movies are the most widely available entertainment in Oman. They are shown in English, Arabic, Hindi, and Urdu at clubs and in public theaters. Many clubs offer invitations to Americans and others who are not members. Television broadcasts are in Arabic and English, though the European PAL system is not compatible with the U.S. television sets. You can easily bring your own television set and not have any problems.

Most socializing done in Oman outside the home is in private clubs. The oil company (Petroleum Development Oman, Ltd. or (PDO)), has the club with the most extensive facilities. Though membership is open to non-employees, the waiting list is long. Many private firms have clubs, and many offer memberships to outsiders. There are a few private clubs that offer memberships to anyone, Omani or foreign. Most hotels offer memberships for the use of the hotel facilities, such as tennis, squash, and pools.

There are a number of athletic organizations that are very active in Oman. Far and away the most popular sport is football (soccer) and attending matches can produce wonderful entrees into Omani society. Other sports clubs include rugby and jogging for the hearty, cricket, squash, biking, darts, and tennis. Given the close proximity to the sea, also popular are water sports, such as boating, scuba diving, and swimming. There are also social groups for such diverse sporting or leisure activities as bridge, archeology, photography, and yoga.

Toilets

Hammam (toilets) in houses rented by Americans are invariably Western-style. Omani homes and most public places use Eastern-type toilets (squatters) and visitors to Oman will probably have the occasion to use them. In traveling and in small villages toilets do not exist and you should be prepared to use a convenient bush or to ask your host where the appropriate area for use by men or women is located.



Soccer is a popular pasttime.

Omanis use water rather than toilet paper. You will find in most homes and public toilets a small faucet placed adjacent to the toilet. In traveling, however, you may find it most convenient to carry toilet paper.

Gifts

Omanis give gifts on very few occasions, primarily upon the birth of a baby and to a new bride on the day of the wedding, when they traditionally give money or gold jewelry. They do understand that Westerners have different customs, and it is appropriate for a Westerner to give a more personalized gift, such as an outfit for the baby or a house present for the bride.

Omanis are only now beginning to adopt the Western custom of celebrating birthdays and anniversaries, which includes the exchange of presents on these occasions. In the interior and the capital area, a baby's first year is celebrated with a party called a *boul boul*.

Unlike Americans, the Omanis do not bring food or a beverage with them when invited to dinner at an Omani home. This is considered an insult to the host and his hospitality.

The subject of gifts is most apt to arise when an Omani is traveling abroad and asks if you would like anything from whatever country he is visiting.

Because traditionally few Omanis ever traveled outside the country, it became an expected custom to bring back gifts to friends and family. It is best to thank the traveler for the thought and decline the offer.

Another thing to remember is that hospitality requires Omanis to give away any item they own that is admired by another. It is difficult for the American to remember this particularly since it is customary for an American to express admiration for a particular item or piece of art. Rather than express your admiration for an item, inquire about its origin, where it came from, what it is made of, and the like. The Omani will be happy to answer these questions and yet not be under pressure to actually give you the item(s).

Again on the subject of thank-you notes, Omanis will not expect one from you if they give you a gift, nor should you expect one from them.

Weddings

Omani weddings traditionally involve separate celebrations for the bride and the groom. Unlike the Western ceremony where both the bride and groom are present and together sign a contract, in Oman the actual contract is signed in a mosque between the groom and the bride's father or legal



Gold jewelry is a common gift.

male guardian. The bride herself does not attend the actual wedding service. During a wedding only the men (invitees) go to the mosque for praying and the women (invitees) go to the house of the groom (usually for a *benna* party) because this is where the bride will eventually go to live. Once the traditional Koranic prayers have been read and the contract signed, the marriage is considered legal.

Following the ceremony at the mosque, both the bride's family and the groom's family will give a reception, either at the house of the groom, a recreation center, or a hotel for the official ceremony where they continue partying until the bride and groom leave for their honeymoon. The bride and groom will invite friends and family. Omanis traditionally give money or gold jewelry to the bride as a wedding present. It is not improper as a Westerner to give a more Western-type gift, such as something for the house.

In the capital area, some of the modern women have begun to celebrate together with the men. The more traditional custom, however, is for the groom and his family and friends to arrive at the bride's reception toward the end of the evening and for the groom to take his bride with him to their new home.

Funerals

When an Omani dies, he or she must be buried before the next sunset at the latest. The actual funeral and preparations are handled by the immediate family. Westerners are not invited, nor is it appropriate for them to visit the first day after a person has died.

The traditional mourning period in Oman lasts for three days. During this time, family and friends of the deceased will gather and offer their condolences and listen to intermittent readings of the Koran.

Omanis do not send or consider written condolences appropriate. Friends, including Westerners, are expected to go and personally offer condolences to

the family of the deceased. It is usually best for Westerners to visit on the third day. Women should not wear any makeup and should be dressed in modest attire. The visitor should enter the house and proceed to sit quietly during the reading of the Koran. When there is an appropriate break from the readings, the visitor should go over and offer his or her condolences to each family member. It is then considered appropriate to take leave before the Koranic readings are resumed so as to leave the family their privacy.

Traditionally, upon the loss of her husband, an Omani woman was required to go into mourning for four months and ten days and was not allowed to be seen by any men, other than her father or brother(s), during this period. This custom is no longer rigorously followed except in terms of marriage to another man. Omani women may only remarry after this mourning period has elapsed.

Eids

Omanis, and all Muslims, have two major religious holidays (*Eids*) each year. These are *Eid al Fitr* (the eid of breaking the fast) and *Eid al Adha* (the eid of the sacrifice).

Eid al Fitr, also called the *Eid al Sighir* (the small eid), occurs at the end of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting. After the fast, the Omanis are given time off to rest, eat, and visit loved ones anywhere in the area.

Eid al Adha, also called the *Eid al Kabir* (the large eid), occurs each year at the conclusion of *Haji* (the pilgrimage to Mecca). For those who made the pilgrimage, it is celebrated in Mecca and for others,

it is celebrated at home. This eid includes the sacrifice and cooking of animals, usually goats or sheep. Muslims are required to give a portion of the cooked meat to the poor.

Families usually spend the first day of the eid holiday at home and then the following days visiting family and friends and receiving visitors. This will be a good time for you to visit your Muslim friends.

The eids are a special time for children, who are given presents and new clothes. Each village also sets up a special area, called an *ayood*, for three days for a children's playground.



A henna party is a wedding tradition.

During the eid holidays, Omanis send eid cards much as Westerners do at Christmas. They may also send Christmas cards to their Christian friends and appreciate receiving "eid" cards from them.

During the eid holidays, you should add the phrase to your greetings "id sa'id" (happy eid) or "eid mubarak" (blessed eid). The Omanis will respond "ayamak sa'da"

(May your days be happy, or "allah yubarak fik" (Allah grant you blessings), respectively.

The other holidays celebrated in Oman and throughout the Muslim world are *Eid maulid an-nabiy* (the Birthday of the Prophet) and *Eid ra's as-sana* (the Islamic New Year).

Ramadan

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar and is the holy month of fasting; it is difficult for both Muslims and non-Muslims living in Oman. During that month, all Muslims, with the

exception of pregnant women, children, those who are ill, and travelers, must refrain from the intake of food, beverages, and from smoking from dawn until sunset.

The Islamic calendar is shorter than the Roman calendar and, therefore, the Islamic months fall approximately ten days earlier each year. Ramadan is particularly arduous when it falls during one of the summer months. To help ease the situation, the government and businesses adopt a shorter working day of five hours. While this helps a little, people remain hungry, thirsty, and tired.

During this period, restaurants and food vendors close during daylight hours. International hotels retain some food service only for visitors. The normal office ritual of serving coffee or tea and offering cigarettes is also eliminated during Ramadan.

During the month, Omanis tend to reverse their daily habits to coincide with the restrictions on food and drink. The first meal of the day is called *iftaar* and occurs at sunset. Omanis break the fast with dates and a snack and then pray before eating the first meal.

Omanis will sometimes invite their Western friends to a fitur during Ramadan. This is one time it is absolutely required to arrive on time or a little early. After the juice and snack are served, Western women will be asked to leave the room while the men pray. They will then either be asked to return and join the men for the meal or be invited to eat with the Omani women apart from the men in a separate room. It is a delightful and special honor to have an opportunity to share this meal with a Muslim family.

One and one-half hours after this meal, Omanis go to the mosque for *taramweeb* prayer. Afterwards, the women return to the kitchen to begin preparing the last meal of the day (called *sabur* or dawn) that is served before dawn.

CONCLUSION

Omanis, like most Arabs, value people more than material things. The popular cliché of oil sheiks' inexpensive cars does not properly depict the true values of the majority of Arabs.

The experiences of Americans in the Middle East may vary as they travel and live in Oman. One American who had lived in the area indicated "Arabs were found to be really caring people; they will want to meet you, get to know you, and introduce you to their friends and family."

"Then, when you return to the United States, you will enjoy the towns and cities, separate houses and green lawns, but you will find that you will miss the Middle Eastern environment."

Oman is not as temperate as is Washington; but it is the warmth and friendliness of the Omanis themselves that will make you feel lucky that you lived in Oman.



GLOSSARY

<u>ENGLISH</u>	<u>MODERN STANDARDS</u>	<u>OMANI COLLOQUIAL</u>
woman's cloak	ʿabiya	abaya
interior	dakhiliyya	dakhiliya
Islam	al-Islam	al-Islam
prayer caller	muʿaddin	muʿthin
Friday noon prayer	al-Jumʿa	al-Jumaa
God	Allah	Allah
peace be upon you	as-aslam ʿalaykum	issalam alaikum
go in the protection of Allah	fi amani llah	fee amanillah
God willing	in sha ʿallah	inshallah
blessed holiday	ʿid mubarak	eid mubarak
Allah grant you blessings	ʿAllah yubarik fik	Allah yubarak feek`
Prophet's birthday	Al-ʿd mawlid an-nabiy	il-mawlid in nabi
Islamic law	shari ʿa	shari'a
Islamic judge	qadi	qadi
men's head cover	mussar	mussar
sweet	halwa	halwa
tuna	sahwa	sahwa
Islamic New Year	ʿId ra ʿs as-sana	id ras issana
breakfast	future	fatour
welcome	ʿahlan	ahlan

upon you be peace	wa-'alaykum as-salam	wa alaikum issalam
good morning	sabah al-kayr	sabah il khair
good morning	sabah an-nur	sabah in nour
how are you (masc.)	kayf halak	kaif halak
how are you (fem.)	kayf halik	kaif halish
fine, thanks be to God	zayn, al-hamdu li-llah	zein, il hamdu lillah
and	wa-	wa
go in God's protection	fi 'aman al-karim	fee aman il kareem
go in peace	ma'a s-salama	maa salama
welcome	'ahlan wa-sahlan	ahlan wasahlan
welcome to you	'ahlan bikum	ahlan bikum
men's robe		dishdashah
market place	suq	souk
honor, generosity	karama	karama
office boy	farrash	farrash
thanks be to God	ma sha 'a llah	ma shaa Allah
permission of God	ma 'a 'idni llah	bi ithni-lah
Ramadan first meal	iftaar	iftaar
Ramadan last meal	sahur	sahour
thank you	shukran	shukran
you are welcome	'afwan	afwan
greetings	salamat	salamaat
red snapper	hamra	hamrah`

grouper	humur	hamour
king mackerel	kana ‘ad	kanaad
lamb sandwiches	shawurma	shwarmah
Indian pastries	sambusak	sambosas
Indian fried food		pakora
toilet	hammam	hammam
holiday	‘id	eid
pilgrimage	hajj	haj
happy holiday	‘id sa ‘id	eid sayyid

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