

Considering Employment with the Middle East District? Life in Oman

OMAN

Oman, officially the Sultanate of Oman, is an Arab country on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Holding a strategically important position at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, the nation is bordered by the United Arab Emirates to the northwest, Saudi Arabia to the west, and Yemen to the southwest, and shares marine borders with Iran and Pakistan. The coast is formed by the Arabian Sea on the southeast and the Gulf of Oman on the northeast. The Madha and Musandam exclaves are surrounded by the UAE on their land borders, with the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman forming Musandam's coastal boundaries.

Oman is considered the “Jewel of Arabia.” There are many opportunities to explore all of its fine treasures -- from camping to scuba diving or golfing to shopping -- there is truly something for everyone in the Sultanate.

HOUSING

- **Furniture:** Household furniture and appliances are provided through the inter-agency furniture pool.
- **Storage:** Most houses have limited storage space. Take that into consideration when deciding how much to pack and take with you to Oman.
- **Housing Assignments:** The Interagency Housing Board assigns all housing. In Muscat, they strive to assign housing about 60 days prior to arrival. Incoming personnel must inform GSO Housing in writing, in advance, of any special housing needs.
- **Temporary Housing:** Although, the goal is to move personnel directly into permanent residence, temporary quarters or a local hotel may be necessary if permanent housing is not available upon arrival.
- **Water:** GSO supplies all State Department personnel with water coolers to use for drinking water. Water is delivered weekly.

SCHOOLS

- **The American International School Muscat (TAISM)**
Ages 3 to 5 years old
Operates 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., Sunday through Thursday
- **American British Academy (ABA)**
Ages accepted: K1 – 3 years, K2 – 4 years, K3 – 5 years
Operates K1 and K2, 7:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., K3, 7:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
- **The British School of Muscat**
Ages accepted: 3 – 5 years
Operates 7:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., Saturday through Wednesday

PRESCHOOLS

- Apple Green Private School: info@applegreenschool.com
- Our Planet International School: info@ourplanet-muscat.com
- Al Shomoukh: info@sis-nursery.com
- Oasis International Kindergarten: oasisintkg@gmail.com
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TRANSPORTATION/VEHICLES

- **Car Insurance:** Collision and Liability Insurance (Comprehensive)
 - Depends on the value of the vehicle and type of vehicle. Normally it is 3% of the current value of the vehicle. Sports v and high-end cars may go to 10% of the value. The basic cost covers 5 seats.
 - Oman follows the depreciated value loss; the insurance company will not pay in full for the parts replaced during an accident repair, but deduct a percentage depending on the age of the vehicle.
 - Companies do not provide comprehensive insurance for vehicles older than 5 years.
 - For US Insurance Companies, always verify Oman coverage when requesting insurance. Oman recommends obtaining transit insurance to cover any damages to your vehicle during shipment.

HEALTH INFORMATION

The Health Unit is located on the basement level of the Embassy, opposite the MEA Cafeteria. It is currently staffed by two Registered Nurses who conduct routine appointment for health briefings, immunizations, and well-baby checks and one Administrative Assistant. The Health Unit staff is supervised by the Management Officer and receives professional guidance from the Regional Medical Officer.

COMMUNICATIONS

- **Telephone and Internet Services:** Residential and personal communications (SIM cards, Landline, Internet services, wireless solutions), newcomers will be provided the proper forms and paperwork required to obtain the service. However, subsequent follow up with the service providers for installation and maintenance will be the responsibility of the user.

PLEASE NOTE: All traffic is censored for political and/or sexual content that would be deemed inappropriate by local culture and laws, and that voice over internet (VOIP) such as Vonage and Skype are blocked.

- **Cellphones:** There are two major cell phone service providers in Oman. For personal cell phones you can choose between Omantel and Ooredoo.
 - Omantel–Information on services, the most current plans and pricing offered from Omantel are available via their website at: <http://www.omantel.net.om/services/default.asp>.
 - Ooredoo –Information on services, the most current plans and pricing offered from Ooredoo are available via their website at: <http://www.ooredoo.om/>.

- **Television**

Multi-system televisions and DVD players are recommended to allow local viewing. Local TV stations use the PAL system. Satellite dishes are available locally and can be installed at residences. Armed Forces Network (AFN) is available with approximately 10 channels. AFN decoders can be issued. There are several satellite services available: Star Plus - with CNN, BBC, the Cartoon channel, MTV and several Indian stations.

- Arab Sat - with CNN International, A&E, VH1 and some Arabic channels.
- Orbit has ESPN, Supermovies, America Plus (U.S. sitcoms), CNN, Hollywood channel and several more.

The cost for Arab Sat and Star Plus combined, is approximately \$600 at start up (hardware and installation costs) and you must purchase at least \$50 of programming each month. Additionally, Showtime (OSN) satellite service is available, consisting of 35 Arabic channels, 12 English channels, and 1 French channel. The 12 English OSN channels are: TV5, TV Land, Movie Channel, BBC, CNN, Paramount, Hallmark, Nickelodeon, Discovery, Style, MTV (Europe), Turner Classic movies and Turner Cartoon Network.

Some people have had success using SlingBox and streaming their favorite shows from the U.S. over the internet. SlingBox also works with DVRs, so programs can be recorded in the states during prime time and watched later here. SlingBox equipment would need to be purchased and set up in the U.S. before arrival.

For more information, please go to OSN's website at <http://www.osn.com/en/home.aspx>.

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AND SOCIAL LIFE/DINING OUT

There appears to be something for everyone in Oman.

- **Boot Camp:** A group that meets three mornings or evenings a week for boot camp style workouts.
- Bowling
- Movie Cinemas
- Dance Class
- Scuba Diving, dolphin watching snorkeling, whale watching
- Sailing and Boating
- Fishing trips
- Rock Climbing
- Hiking
- Golf
- Health Clubs
- History Association of Oman
- Horseback riding/Equestrian School
- Horticulture
- Ice Skating
- Martial Arts training
- Museums and Children's Museum
- Motorcycle Riding Club
- Music Classes
- Running groups
- Rugby
- Sightseeing
- Soccer
- Swimming
- Yoga

DINING OUT

In Oman, there is a wide range of food to please everyone: Indian, Chinese, Lebanese, European, American, and Mexican. There are fast food chains like McDonalds, KFC, Burger King and Pizza Hut. And a variety of South Asian restaurants ranging from the elegant to the common, servicing a variety of food, mostly good and always available spicy.

Street food is available from roadside stands and in the Souqs. This food tends to be tasty and less expensive than a sit down restaurant. The most typical street food *iskababs* (small pieces of meat grilled on skewers and served in paper-thin bread), *shawarma* (sliced lamb or chicken wraps), and *samosas* (deep-fried triangular Indian pastries filled with meat or vegetables).

Grand Mosque - open for public tours Saturday to Thursday from 8:00am to 11:00am only. Long sleeves

are required. Women must be covered to the ankle, pants are OK, also must cover all the hair and the neck with a scarf.

SHOPPING: Shopping hours in Oman are divided into two periods. Saturday-Thursday most shops are open 9:30am to 1:00pm and 4:30pm to 9:00pm. Most shops are closed on Friday morning and only open in the evening from 4:30pm to 9:00pm. Major grocery and department stores don't typically follow this schedule. They will be open every day from 9:30am-9:00pm

- **Muttrah Souq** is a traditional souq, with Omani antiques, silver and gold shops, pottery shops, copper items, fabric and clothing, spices, perfumes, incense and burners, house hold items, and gift shops.
- **City Center Mall** is a large shopping mall with many stores. The anchor store is Carrefour which sells everything from groceries to clothing to appliances. Prices are very reasonable.
- The larger City Center Mall is in Seeb, just past the airport and includes stores like The Gap, Borders, Zara, Adidas, 9 West, Geox, EMax (a large electronics store) and many others. It also hosts a large food court and several restaurants (including Chili's). There are many children's clothing stores as well as a large children's play area.
- The newest location is in Qurum and includes stores such as H&M, Claire's, Stone Cold Creamery, MAC , Early Learning Center, Borders and MotherCare. There is a nice food court and more shops and restaurants opening.
- Frequently shopped stores include:
 - English-Language Bookstores: Borders and Turtles Bookstore
 - Furniture, Carpets, and Souvenirs
 - Cottage Arts and Crafts *and* Handicraft Corner
 - Omani Heritage Gallery includes jewelry, pottery, textiles; a non-profit shop that works closely with Omani artisans to promote their crafts and integrate them into modern designs.
 - Raj Relics, specializes in Indian and Arabian antiques, colonial furniture, antique silver jewelry, copper and brassware.
 - The Souk Muttrah: Variety of souvenirs
 - Village Arts & Crafts
 - Grocery stores: Al Fair, Carrefour, Lulus Hypermarket, Sultan Center
 - A long list of hair and nail salons, spas and other services

PETS: Most houses do not have yards adequate for large animals. Pets do not have any official status or priority when assigning housing and pets are not justification for reassignment.

POTENTIAL HARDSHIPS

- **WEATHER:** The Climate of Oman can be described as subtropical dry, hot desert climate. There is little annual rainfall, with very high temperatures in summer and a big difference between maximum and minimum temperatures, especially in the inland areas. Summer (June to September) is very low rainfall. June is usually the hottest month with an average temperature of 95°F and the coldest is January at 70°F. In June, the average daylight per day is 13 hours. February is the wettest month with an average of 30mm of rain.

CULTURAL/RELIGION DO's and DON'Ts

- The Grand Mosque is open for public tours Saturday to Thursday, 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. only. Long sleeves are required. Women must also be covered to the ankle; pants are ok. Women must also cover all their hair and neck with a scarf.
- Don't walk on a prayer mat or in front of any person at prayer and try not to stare at people who are praying.
- Don't try to enter a mosque without first asking permission. It's unlikely that you will be allowed in.
- Avoid blasphemy, particularly in the presence of Muslims.
- Avoid putting an Arab in a position where he might suffer a 'loss of face' in front of other Arabs. He will appreciate this, if he notices your action.
- Don't beckon to people with a finger, as this is considered particularly impolite. Arabs might use such a gesture to summon a dog.
- Avoid shouting and displays of aggression or drunkenness at all times, as such behaviour is rarely tolerated.
- During Ramadan, don't eat, drink or smoke anywhere where you can be seen by Muslims during the hours of daylight and don't engage in any noisy behaviour or embrace or kiss anyone in public.

POCs FOR MORE INFORMATION

Email: dll-cetam-pao@usace.army.mil

- U.S. State Department <http://oman.usembassy.gov>
- The Geology Society of Oman: www.gso.org.om
- The Historical Association of Oman: www.hao.org.om
- Oman Visitor: www.nizwa.net/oman/omanvis/omanvis6.html
- Agrisouk: www.agrisouk.com/oman/omani.htm
- Ministry of Information: <http://www.omanet.om/english/home.asp>
- Royal Oman Police: <http://www.rop.gov.om/english/index.asp>
- Sultan Qaboos University: <http://www.squ.edu.om>
- Ministry of Tourism: - <http://www.omantourism.gov.om/>

- Desert Discovery – www.desert-discovery.com
www.destinationoman.com
- Oman tours www.citycinemaoman.com