



## Oman's Culture

Oman is at the same time a very traditional and a very modern country, a land with specifically Omani traditions and one with deep connections to other cultures.

Most people in Oman speak Arabic. However, there are others who have come to Oman from other countries to work or to live. (Remember that Oman has always been a trading nation.) There are many people from India and other places in South Asia and many from East Africa, especially Zanzibar. So one can hear Hindi, Swahili, Persian, and other languages too.

In Oman, most people are Muslim and dress conservatively. Women often dress in the typical Gulf Arab style: a long black robe and a veil (which may be black or another color, plain or elaborately decorated). A woman's hair is always covered; the lower half of her face may be (for very conservative women) but doesn't have to be. Typical Omani men's dress is a long one-piece cotton *dishdasha*, with a high neck (no collar) and long sleeves. Professional men always wear a white dishdasha, which may be embroidered with a different color around the neck (a matter of fashion). If they are more casually but still professionally dressed (like our button-down shirt and dress pants), they wear an embroidered round cap on their heads. If they are more formally dressed (like when men in the U.S. wear a tie), they will wear a rounded turban (a style found only in Oman) in a printed fabric of their choice. On very dressy occasions (tuxedos in the U.S.), they would wear a sash around their waist with a traditional dagger in it. To dress casually (like our blue jeans and t-shirts), men will wear a dark-colored dishdasha, maybe brown or blue. The amazing thing is how incredibly clean they keep their clothing – even the white dishdashas!

Women can study, get jobs, and do other things that men do. However, there are often separate spaces for men and women, such as separate study areas in the university library.

Omani culture is famous for sharing resources and ideas. In a land of scarce water (especially in the desert interior), there are traditional ways to ensure that *all* people have equal access to water. Their government values “consensus” over competition, the combination of ideas over the concept of “winner” and “loser.” And because of its long, long history of world trade, Omani society has a tradition of cultural diffusion. For example, people have for centuries eaten food and bought products from India, East Africa, and Iran; today they can also eat at McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, or “Bizza Hut.” Maybe this openness to other people and ideas is what makes Oman such a welcoming and relaxed country!