



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Center for Middle Eastern Studies

Fun Facts about the Middle East

- The English words for ‘algebra,’ ‘admiral,’ and other words came from Arabic. Further, 4,000 Spanish words – and lots of place names – came from Arabic, making Arabic the 2nd most important influence (after Latin) on the Spanish language.
- People in Iran and much of central Asia celebrate New Year on the first day of spring (March 19 this year because of Leap Year). For those who are among the first to develop a solar calendar, the first day of spring – vernal equinox – is an important symbol of the renewal of life.
- The name ‘Muhammad’ (in all its spellings) is thought to be the most common name in the world, given to 150 million men/boys.
- Morocco has just opened one of the world’s largest solar power plants. When the next two phases are completed, it will be the world’s LARGEST solar power production facility.
- Middle Eastern countries are taking the initiative in dealing with the global water crisis. Morocco also does groundbreaking work in fog harvesting (getting potable water from coastal fog); Israel is an innovator in desalination (transforming salt water to drinking water).
- In 2/3 of Middle Eastern countries, more women than men attend universities.
- Palestinians and Israelis may not agree on politics or religion, but they definitely agree on food. They both love falafel and hummus!
- Turkey, Lebanon, Iran, and Jordan are among the top 10 refugee hosting nations in the world. The U.S. isn’t on the list. Lebanon has the greatest ratio of refugees to total population; Jordan has the second greatest.
- A Jordanian film “Theeb” was nominated for an Academy Award this year for “Best Foreign Language Film.” (An Iranian film, “A Separation,” won that award in 2011.) In other words, the Middle Eastern film industry – in many countries – is thriving.

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