

# RELOCATING TO OMAN

HELPFUL ADVICE  
AND KEY INFORMATION



# Contents



## 1.0 Overview

### 1.1 Map of Oman

## 2.0 Why move to Oman?

### 2.1 The Economy

## 3.0 Life in Oman

### 3.1 Climate

### 3.2 Potential earnings and savings

### 3.3 Money

### 3.4 Accommodation

### 3.5 Travel and transport

### 3.6 Education

### 3.7 Shopping

### 3.8 Food and drink

### 3.9 Communications

### 3.10 Recreation

## 4.0 Working in Oman

### 4.1 Passports and visas

### 4.2 Health regulations

### 4.3 The Oman workplace

### 4.4 Working hours

### 4.5 Employment prospects

## 5.0 General information

### 5.1 Useful links



Cover image: Nizwa Fort and mosque, Oman.

## Relocating to Oman

Helpful advice and key information

# 1.0 Overview



## 1.1 Map of Oman



### Oman

Population: 2,567,000

Area: 309,500 km<sup>2</sup>

Government: Absolute monarchy

Established: 1651, expulsion of the Portuguese

Capital: Muscat

## 2.0 Why move to Oman?



### 2.0 Why move to Oman?

The Sultanate of Oman is on the south-east coast of the Arabian Peninsula. It borders the United Arab Emirates in the northwest, Saudi Arabia in the west, and Yemen in the southwest. Oman is a country of dramatic mountains and long unspoilt beaches. It is a safe, secure, stable, clean and environmentally aware country, currently going through an impressive period of growth and modernisation.

Prior to 1970, Oman was a very underdeveloped nation. Since that time, education, public works and tourism have taken off throughout the country, although outside of the capital Muscat there are many regions which still remain close to their Bedouin origins.

The government is cautiously encouraging more tourism, and making it easier for people to visit, with the current estimate of tourist arrivals over 50,000 per year. Expatriates have been coming in large numbers ever since 1970, but Oman remains one of the most traditional countries in the Gulf.

Recent numbers suggest that up to a third of the population of Oman are expats, spread across every level of the community. Coupled with improved healthcare, Oman has one of the highest population growth rates in the world, with more than half of all Omanis under the age of 20. Because of this, the government now encourages employers to employ locally where possible, using expats to fill the skill gaps in the labour market.

### 2.1 The Economy

The Omani economy has undergone a dramatic transformation over the last forty years. Until oil went into production in 1967, the economy consisted of trading in dates, limes and skins, and was otherwise at a subsistence level. Many Omanis had to work in other Gulf countries in order to survive with a reasonable standard of living. All that changed however, after the accession of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos in 1970. Emphasis was immediately placed on the path to a rapid modernisation, with transportation, commerce and industry developed almost from scratch.

Although the economy is still mainly oil-based, there has been a concerted effort to diversify the economy as much as possible. This is both to protect the country against the effects of fluctuating world oil prices, and because the oil reserves are limited compared to other Gulf countries. The private sector has been heavily involved in this diversification, with modern industrial estates throughout the country now producing a range of products complementing the many agricultural exports.

Oman is also home to many pan-regional, commercial and industrial institutions and joint projects, and is becoming a popular tourist destination in the Middle East. Most of the visitors are from the Arab, Persian Gulf states but there is an increasing number of tourists from outside the region thanks to a growing awareness of Oman's varied geography and many natural tourist attractions.

## 3.0 Life in Oman



### 3.0 Life in Oman

Oman is generally regarded as a modern country within the Middle Eastern region, however Western influences are quite restricted. About 75% of Oman is Muslim, and the Ibadi form of Islam is conservative, similar to Sunni Islam and Shi'a Islam.

While Arabic is the official language, English is widely spoken.

One of the major differences in Oman is the restriction of alcohol. Generally only hotels have licenses to sell alcohol, so you are likely to find that the majority of bars, restaurants and clubs aimed at Westerners will be attached to hotels. It is possible to buy alcohol for personal consumption, however it is significantly more expensive than buying alcohol in the UK.

The month of Ramadan is a feature of life in the Middle East. During this month of fasting, eating, drinking and smoking are not permitted in public, from sunrise to sunset. This is strictly adhered to, and even as a non-Muslim it is unacceptable to take part in any of the above in view of anyone who is observing Ramadan.

### 3.1 Climate

Oman has a climate characterised by very hot summers with high humidity while winters are relatively cooler. The average winter temperature range is 10° to 20°C in January. The average summer range is 29° to 42°C in August.

### 3.2 Potential earnings and savings

One of the great attractions of working in Oman is that there is no personal taxation. The only way to truly appreciate the quality of your offer is to analyse your package by factoring in cost of living.

Specifically geared towards the Middle East, the table below illustrates how net earnings in the UK compare to gross earnings in Oman.

What you earn – and save every month:

	<b>UK Gross – Before Tax</b>	<b>UK Net – After Tax</b>	<b>Oman gross – Tax saving</b>
£30,000	£2,500	£1,825	£2,500 (+27%)
£36,000	£3,000	£2,196	£3,000 (+26.8%)
£50,000	£4,166	£2,886	£4,166 (+30.7%)
£48,000	£4,000	£2,788	£4,000 (+30.3%)
£60,000	£5,000	£3,378	£5,000 (+ 32%)
£72,000	£6,000	£3,968	£6,000 (+33%)
£100,000	£8,333	£5,345	£8,300 (+35%)

Notes:

1. All calculations are based on monthly earnings.
2. The right hand column shows a % increase between the net and gross.

### 3.0 Life in Oman



#### 3.3 Money

The currency in Oman is the Omani Riyal (OMR), which is divided into 1000 Baiza (or Baisa). As of 20 February 2008, the relevant exchange rates were:

1 GBP = 0.7499 OMR

1 EUR = 0.5665 OMR

1 USD = 0.3850 OMR

#### Banks

Several of the world's leading banks, or their subsidiaries have branches in Oman. Foreign banks include the British Bank of the Middle East, Citibank, and Standard Chartered.

Setting up an account is easy, as is transferring money to the UK. You'll be given a cash point card to withdraw money from ATM machines. Credit cards are widely accepted.

#### 3.4 Accommodation

Until recently, expats only had the option to rent in Oman, with ownership being restricted to Omani nationals. However, over the last six months plans have been outlined for expats (resident or not) to buy property and rent it out or live in it in certain areas. The details and restrictions are currently vague, but the relevant areas will be those earmarked for tourist developments.

In the rental market a variety of accommodation is available, from unfurnished apartments to fully furnished villas, inside or outside compounds. Many new executive apartments provide additional amenities such as a swimming pool, tennis court, gym, sauna, maintenance, cleaning etc.

Flats and houses can be rented for a day, week, month and year. The longer your rental period, the better your deal. Most apartments and villas are let unfurnished, although partly furnished or fully furnished accommodation can be found. With a constant turnover of expats, second hand furniture is easy to find at good prices.

Villas and apartments can be found through real estate agents, adverts in the local newspapers, word of mouth and by visiting suitable areas. It is usual for your usual company to provide help and support in finding suitable accommodation.

Rental costs and property prices vary widely depending on location and standards. One-bedroom apartments usually start from 280 OMR. 2 and 3 bedroom apartments start from 385 OMR up to 700 OMR. Villas also vary widely in price. Many have pools and small gardens. These start from 700 OMR up to 870+ OMR.

#### 3.5 Travel and transport

Oman's main International airport is Seeb International Airport, based in Muscat. Airlines such as Oman Air, Gulf Air, British Airways, Emirates and Lufthansa regularly fly in and out of Oman.

Most expats purchase a car for the duration of their stay in Oman. The majority of the models will include air-conditioning and tend to be automatic. Cars are substantially cheaper than in the UK, and many expats opt for a 4-wheel drive vehicle for off-road and desert driving. For those who are reluctant to buy, long-term leases are also available.

### 3.0 Life in Oman



#### 3.5 Travel and transport (continued)

The low cost of petrol is also a factor when considering your ideal car, especially for those expats who have lived in the UK previously.

Alternative transportation is essentially limited to taxis, which are metered and numerous. Bus services are not generally used by expats, and as yet there is no rail system in place.

#### 3.6 Education

There is an excellent range of primary and secondary private schools in Oman catering especially for the expat community. The majority are managed by and run for English-speaking Westerners, and offer an American curriculum plus a UK or international syllabus. In general, standards at private schools are high, with small class sizes and modern facilities. Enrolment in private schools usually involves an interview with the parent and child, and an examination to assess the correct class for the child.

#### 3.7 Shopping

Oman has come a long way in recent years, with a number of large modern malls opening and supplementing the traditional souks. New modern complexes are opening up regularly, and the larger Omani cities are rapidly catching up with the traditional Middle East shopper's paradises such as Dubai. There is no sales tax.

#### 3.8 Food and drink

Most types of food can be purchased in Oman. There are fresh fruit, vegetable and fish markets well worth visiting. There are also a large variety of restaurants serving

European and oriental cuisine. Most types of food and takeaway can be found in the major cities, from small independents to large international chains.

#### 3.9 Communications

All mail in Oman is addressed to post office boxes. Although a PO Box can be rented, most residents use their company address for private mail. There are a number of telephone networks available in Oman, and international calls can be made easily from a landline using either a local service or one of the international internet call back companies. The international dial code for Oman is +968.

#### 3.10 Recreation

Oman has a wealth of recreational activities. For the sports lover, there is fishing, horse riding, golf and a variety of water sports.

Desert driving is also popular; take a 4-wheel drive vehicle across the sand dunes and camp in the desert. Alternatively, relax around the pool at one of the several social clubs popular with expats.

In the evening, there is a choice of restaurants serving Arabic, European, American and Asian cuisine throughout the cities of Oman. The numbers of bars and nightclubs are increasingly rapidly, providing much more choice for those in search of nightlife.

# 4.0 Working in Oman



## 4.1 Passports and visas

Your visa will be organised by your employer once you have secured a job offer from them. For the duration of your stay in the Middle East they act as your sponsor, and all documents such as driving licence, bank account, health cards etc are reliant on you being in possession of a Residence Visa, which will be organised by your employer.

## 4.2 Health regulations

There are no compulsory regulations for entry to Oman.

## 4.3 The Oman workplace

Smart, conservative clothing is expected, despite the soaring heat outside and the fiercely efficient air conditioning inside.

When greeting Arab women do not offer to shake their hand unless the woman extends hers first. The terms 'Sayed' (Mr) or 'Sayeda' (Mrs), followed by the first name, should be used in greeting, to ensure politeness. It is also very important for visitors never to sit with their feet pointing directly at someone else, as this causes offence. Be careful when criticising a colleague or client, as causing someone to lose face is considered bad manners. Any criticism of colleagues should be kept for private discussions afterwards.

Friday is the main day of prayer, so meetings should not be scheduled for this day. Calls to Arab colleagues or clients should also be avoided on this day. Depending on the company, the other day of the weekend will be Thursday or Saturday.

## 4.4 Working hours

Office hours are usually from 8.30 or 9.00 am to 5.30 or 6.00 pm. In the month of Ramadan, the working day is reduced to six hours for Muslims, who fast during daylight hours.

## 4.5 Employment prospects

The market is strong in Oman, and excellent opportunities exist for the right candidates who possess the required skills.

The government strongly encourages employers to use the local labour force where possible. Local graduates are being encouraged to take up employment and employers are strongly urged to recruit Omani graduates. UK graduates are likely to have particular difficulty securing a position unless they have substantial relevant work experience, or are already employed by a UK firm who transfers them to Oman.

Having made major investments in education and social welfare, Oman aims to ultimately become as self sufficient as possible in terms of labour.

In general, for a candidate to be employed from overseas they must have experience and skills that cannot be found locally. Taking into consideration the current popularity of tax-free destinations like Oman, and the number of people wanting to relocate, this does not necessarily make finding a job a foregone conclusion or a quick process. As a general rule, candidates will need to have at least four years' post qualification experience to be considered as viable.

# 4.0 Working in Oman



## 4.5 Employment prospects (continued)

Often, lower to middle level jobs are not advertised, instead recruiting and man power contracting agents are used to hire back in their native country. So many of these jobs never appear in a public forum. Even if they did, the salary packages would be too low for most candidates who have previously lived and worked in the West to consider and survive on. However, for those candidates with skills in demand the tax-free lifestyle and booming market can be a great career move. Generally the remuneration packages and the lifestyle that can be achieved are more favourable than equivalent roles in the UK, and the quality of life and experience of working in such a vibrant economy are experiences not to be missed for many.

## **5.0 General information**



### **5.1 Useful links**

[www.justlanded.com/english/oman](http://www.justlanded.com/english/oman)

[www.oman.alloexpat.com](http://www.oman.alloexpat.com)

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