

Oman

Country name	Oman
State title	Sultanate of Oman
Name of citizen	Omani
Official language	Arabic (<i>ara</i>) ¹
Country name in official language	عمان = 'Umān ²
State title in official language	سلطنة عمان = <i>Salṭanat 'Umān</i>
Script	Arabic
Romanization System	BGN/PCGN Arabic Romanization System
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	OM/OMN
Capital (Conventional name)	Muscat
Capital in official language	مسقط = <i>Masqaṭ</i>

Introduction

Oman is a country in the Middle East, which forms the eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Much of the country consists of desert, including both lowlands and high mountains. Oman has a long coastline on the Arabian Sea (part of the Indian Ocean), plus land borders with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Yemen and Saudi Arabia. The boundary with the UAE is complex, as Oman includes the detached Musandam peninsula and the exclave of Maḍḥā', itself containing An Naḥwah, a village which forms an exclave of UAE.

Until 1970, the full name was usually 'Muscat and Oman', where Muscat referred to the northern coastal area (not just the city of Muscat) and Oman only to the interior mountainous region whose capital was Nizwá. This area (called '*Umān al Wusṭá*' in Arabic, meaning Central Oman but also translated as "Oman proper") was an autonomous Imamate (i.e. it was ruled by an *Imām*, rather than the coastal *Sulṭān*) from 1920 (the Treaty of Seeb) up until 1959, when a rebellion against Muscat was defeated and the last Imam was exiled.

Until 1971, 'Trucial Oman' (in full: Trucial States of the Coast of Oman) was a name for the country now called the United Arab Emirates.

¹ ISO 639 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

² In Arabic script, the short vowels are often left unwritten. Consequently, in unvocalised Arabic, the name عمان '*Umān* (Oman) is written identically to '*Ammān*, the capital of Jordan, the difference being the short vowel on the first character being either 'u' or 'a' and the *shaddah* symbol on the 'm' of '*Ammān*, indicating the doubling of this letter.

Geographical names policy

Official geographical names in Oman are written in Arabic, which is the country's official language. Where possible, Arabic-script names should be taken from official Omani sources and romanized according to the BGN/PCGN 1956 Romanization System for Arabic³. Mapping and geographical names are the responsibility of Oman's National Survey Authority (NSA) (Arabic: *Al Hay'ah al Waṭaniyah lil Masāḥah*) abbreviated to NSA or NSAO. The NSA employs a romanization system very similar but not identical to the BGN/PCGN Romanization System. The differences are listed below.

Arabic Script Character	BGN/PCGN Romanization	NSA Romanization
ح	ḥ	<u>h</u>
ص	ṣ	<u>s</u>
ض	ḍ	<u>d</u>
ط	ṭ	<u>t</u>
ظ	ẓ	<u>z</u>

It should be noted that Roman-script spellings may be encountered (e.g., on road signs or unofficial mapping), which differ from those arising from the application of the NSA or the BGN/PCGN Romanization Systems. Some of the common spelling variations that may be encountered in Roman-script spellings of place names on road signs and elsewhere are listed below:

- The definite article '**Al**' is sometimes omitted. The assimilated pronunciation, when the definite article precedes a word beginning with one of the so-called "sun letters" (t, th, d, dh, r, z, s, sh, ṣ, ḍ, ṭ, ẓ, l, or n)⁴ is not usually represented in the written form, although assimilation is sometimes indicated by writing it **A**'. The definite article 'al' is often written in lower-case, even initially and sometimes joined to the word it modifies with a hyphen. Examples include A'Sharqiyah or al-Sharqiyyah versus BGN/PCGN form Ash Sharqīyah.
- Diacritics are often omitted, with **ee** and **oo** or **ou** being used instead of long vowel signs ī and ū, e.g. Seeb.
- Final **-ah** is occasionally reduced to **-a**, e.g. Salala instead of Salalah.
- **E**, **ei** or **ai** may be used instead of **ay**.
- **G** may be used instead of Q or instead of J.

The NSA system, road signs and maps may also sometimes translate the generic part of a name into English in Roman-script names, e.g. As Sultan Qaboos Mosque, Mitan Airstrip, Wadi Ahin Dam.

There are conventional English-language names in common use for some places in Oman which may be used in English-language text and should be shown in brackets after the romanized-Arabic name on cartographic products, for example Masqaṭ (Muscat), Zūfār (Dhofar), Juzur al Ḥallāniyāt (Kuria Muria Islands), Ar Rub' al Khālī (Empty Quarter). PCGN would also recommend using conventional names for international features, e.g. Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea.

Languages

Arabic (*ara*), the official language of Oman, is spoken by the majority of its citizens. Official Omani place names are those in the Arabic language. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is used for official written purposes. Arabic dialects and the indigenous Modern South Arabian Languages (MSAL) have influenced the place names. While the official Arabic name may differ significantly from the MSAL name, in many cases, the official Arabic name of a place is an Arabised version of an MSAL name. For example, Ṣalālah (Mehri (*gdq*): Ṣlōlat), Zūfār (Mehri: Śafōr), Ḍalqūt (Mehri: Śawkūt). The

³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/858000/ROMANIZATION_OF_ARABIC.pdf

⁴ See Special Rule 1 of the BGN/PCGN Romanization for Arabic for further details.

influence of MSAL can be seen in place names ending in -t or containing consonant clusters that would not usually occur in Arabic.

Arabic is a Semitic language. It is written from right to left in Arabic script. The short vowels are not usually written. The spoken language differs from the standard written language (MSA). There are various dialects of Arabic spoken in Oman. These include Omani Arabic (*acx*), also known as Hadari Arabic, used in the mountainous interior, e.g. the towns of Nizwá and 'Ibrī, and Dhofari Arabic (*adf*), spoken in the main towns of Dhofar, in particular Ṣalālah. Gulf Arabic (*afb*), or a variety thereof is also spoken in some areas. Other dialects of Arabic include Baharna⁵ (*abv*), spoken by more recent immigrants from Bahrain, and Shiḥḥī (*ssh*), spoken by the Shiḥūḥ people who live in the Musandam Peninsula, a detached exclave of Oman, by the Straits of Hormuz.

Expatriates form up to 45% of the total population of Oman⁶. One such community of long standing are the Baluchi people, who originate in Baluchistan of south-east Iran and south-west Pakistan. The Baluchi language is related to both Persian and Urdu but has no official status in Oman.

Dhofar in southern Oman retains up to five Modern South Arabian Languages (MSAL), two of which are also spoken in adjacent Yemen. The MSAL are Semitic languages but are not closely related to Arabic, and are not mutually intelligible. These languages do not have official status and do not have a standardised written form. MSAL speakers may write them down using either Arabic or Roman scripts. There are some movements to promote these languages and establish a standardised orthography. The main MSAL spoken in Oman are Shehri (*shv*), also known as Jibbali or Shehret, spoken in the hills parallel to the coast in southern Oman; and Mehri (*gdq*) (Mahri) used further inland, and also spoken across the border in Yemen. The distinct Dhofari dialect of Arabic, as used in Salalah and adjacent villages of the coastal plain, is influenced by Shehri. Hobyot (*hoh*) is spoken in a small area along the Yemen/Dhofar border, Bathari (*bhm*) speakers inhabit a small area around Sharbithāt, on the southern coast of Oman and Harsusi (*hss*) is spoken in the area of Jiddat al Ḥarāsīs. Hobyot, Bathari and Harsusi are all close to extinction.

The Kumzari people live in and around the village of Kumzar on the Musandam Peninsula, which is surrounded by mountains and the sea, so can only be reached by sea or air. The people speak their own unique Kumzari language (*zum*), which is a product of its geography. It is a mixed language containing elements from Arabic, Persian and South Arabian languages.

Kumzari and all the MSALs are classified as endangered by UNESCO.

⁵ From *Baḥārīnah*, the Arabic plural of *Baḥrānī*, which means “Bahraini”.

⁶ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/oman/>

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings⁷):

The BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script⁸:

Romanization (upper case)	Unicode encoding	Romanization (lower case)	Unicode encoding
‘	2018 or 02BB	’	2019 or 02BC
Á	00C1	á	00E1
Ā	0100	ā	0101
Ī	012A	ī	012B
Ḑ	1E10	ḑ	1E11
Ḥ	1E28	ḥ	1E29
Ş	015E	ş	015F
Ṭ	0162	ṭ	0163
Ū	016A	ū	016B
Ẓ	005A+0327*	ẓ	007A+0327*

*Note, the z + cedilla is not available as a single encoding.

Administrative structure

Since 2011, Oman has been divided into eleven governorates (Arabic: *muḥāfazah*⁹) at first-order administrative level (ADM1). Prior to 2011, there were nine ADM1s but two regions (Minṭaqat al Bāṭinah and Minṭaqat ash Sharqīyah) were then each split into two new governorates, North (Shamāl) and South (Janūb). The governorates are subdivided into 61 provinces (Arabic: *wilāyah*) at second-order (ADM2) level. A map of the governorates can be found here: <https://fm.gov.om/about-oman/state/oman-by-region/>. Details of each governorate are listed below¹⁰.

1. Ad Dākhilīyah (22° 30' 00" N, 057° 20' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	الداخلية
Long form name	Muḥāfazat ad Dākhilīyah
Long form name in Arabic Script	محافظة الداخلية
ISO 3166-2 code	OM-DA
Variant Name(s)	Al-Dakhiliyya, al-Dahilia, A'Dakhiliya
Centre	Nizwá (22° 56' 00" N, 057° 32' 00" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	نزوى

⁷ See www.unicode.org

⁸ Characters can be manually input into Microsoft Word documents by typing in these character codes and then holding down the ALT key and pressing /x/. The code will change to the required character. The letter can be copied and pasted into other programmes if required. Alternatively, the ‘Insert – Symbol’ command can be used; the code can be entered into the ‘Character code’ box which will show the corresponding letter.

A GeoNames Soft-Copy Keyboard can be downloaded from the NGA website and used to enter the required letter-diacritic combinations for a particular region: <https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/services.html>.

⁹ Arabic generic terms ending in tā’ marbūṭah (ة) are romanized -ah in isolation and -at when joined to another word in an Iḍāfah construction, which reflects the pronunciation of this character e.g. *Muḥāfazah* but *Muḥāfazat ad Dākhilīyah* (see row 30, table 1 and note 4 in the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic).

¹⁰ <https://www.moi.gov.om/ar-om>

Variant Name(s) of Centre	Nizwa
Consists of 8 ADM2s	Adam, Al Ḥamrā', Bahlā', Bidbid, Izkī, Manaḥ, Nizwā, Samā'il

2. Al Buraymī (24° 13' 00" N, 056° 07' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	البريمي
Long form name	Muḥāfazat al Buraymī
Long form name in Arabic Script	محافظة البريمي
ISO 3166-2 code	OM-BU
Centre	Al Buraymī (24° 15' 40" N, 055° 47' 25" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	البريمي
Variant Name(s) of Governorate and Centre	Al Buraimi, al-Buraymi, Al Bureimi, Buraimi
Consists of 3 ADM2s	Al Buraymī, As Sanīnah, Maḥḍah

3. Al Wustá (20° 10' 00" N, 056° 37' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	الوسطى
Long form name	Muḥāfazat al Wustá
Long form name in Arabic Script	محافظة الوسطى
ISO 3166-2 code	OM-WU
Variant Name(s)	Wusta
Centre	Haymā' (19° 56' 00" N, 056° 19' 00" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	هيماء
Variant Name(s) of Centre	Haymā, Haima, هيماء
Consists of 4 ADM2s	Haymā', Muḥūt, Ad Duqm, Al Jāzir

4. Az Zāhirah (22° 54' 00" N, 055° 57' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	الظاهرة
Long form name	Muḥāfazat az Zāhirah
Long form name in Arabic Script	محافظة الظاهرة
ISO 3166-2 code	OM-ZA
Variant Name(s)	A'Dhahirah, al-Dhahira, Dahriya
Centre	'Ibrī (23° 13' 57" N, 056° 29' 50" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	عبري
Consists of 3 ADM2s	'Ibrī, Yanqul, Ḍank

5. Janūb al Bāṭinah (23° 27' 00" N, 057° 42' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	الباطنة
Long form name	Muḥāfazat Janūb al Bāṭinah
Long form name in Arabic Script	جنوب الباطنة
ISO 3166-2 code	OM-BJ
Variant Name(s)	Al-Batinah South, South Batinah
Centre	Ar Rustāq (23° 23' 27" N, 057° 25' 28" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	الrustaq
Variant Name(s) of Centre	Rostak, Rustaq
Consists of 6 ADM2s	Ar Rustāq, Al Muṣan'ah, Nakhal, Wādī al Ma'āwil, Barkā', Al 'Awābī

6. Janūb ash Sharqīyah (21° 39' 00" N, 059° 06' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	جنوب الشرقية
Long form name	Muḥāfazat Janūb ash Sharqīyah
Long form name in Arabic Script	محافظة جنوب الشرقية

ISO 3166-2 code	OM-SJ
Variant Name(s)	A'Sharqiyah South, South Sharkiya, South Sharqiya, Ash Sharqiyya South
Centre	Şūr (22° 34' 00" N, 059° 31' 44" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	صور
Variant Name(s) of Centre	As Sūr, Şūr
Consists of 5 ADM2s	Şūr, Al Kāmil wa al Wāfī, Ja'lān Banī Bū Ḥasan, Ja'lān Banī Bū 'Alī, Maşīrah

7. Masqaṭ (Muscat) (23° 19' 00" N, 058° 40' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	مسقط
Long form name	Muḥāfazat Masqaṭ
Long form name in Arabic Script	محافظة مسقط
ISO 3166-2 code	OM-MA
Centre	Masqaṭ (23° 36' 50" N, 058° 35' 32" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	مسقط
Variant Name(s) of Governorate/Centre	Mascat, Muskat, Masquat
Website	http://gom.gov.om/index.php
Consists of 6 ADM2s	Masqaṭ, Maṭraḥ, As Sīb, Bawshar, Qurayyāt, Al 'Āmirāt

8. Musandam (26° 02' 00" N, 056° 18' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	مسندم
Long form name	Muḥāfazat Musandam
Long form name in Arabic Script	محافظة مسندم
ISO 3166-2 code	OM-MU
Centre	Khaṣab (26° 10' 48" N, 056° 14' 52" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	خصب
Variant Name(s) of Centre	Al Khaṣab
Consists of 4 ADM2s	Khaṣab, Dabā, Bukhā', Madḥā

9. Shamāl al Bāṭinah (24° 00' 00" N, 056° 45' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	شمال الباطنة
Long form name	Muḥāfazat Shamāl al Bāṭinah
Long form name in Arabic Script	محافظة شمال الباطنة
ISO 3166-2 code	OM-BS
Variant Name(s)	Shimāl al Bāṭinah, Al-Batinah South, South Batinah
Centre	Şuḥār (24° 21' 51" N, 056° 44' 49" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	صحار
Variant Name(s) of Centre	Al Sohar, As Sohār, Aş Şuḥār, Sohār
Consists of 6 ADM2s	Şuḥār, Shināş, Liwá, Şaḥam, Al Khābūrah, As Suwayq

10. Shamāl ash Sharqīyah (22° 06' 00" N, 058° 26' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	شمال الشرقية
Long form name	Muḥāfazat Shamāl ash Sharqīyah
Long form name in Arabic Script	محافظة شمال الشرقية
ISO 3166-2 code	OM-SS
Variant Name(s)	Shimāl ash Sharqīyah, A'Sharqiyah North, North Sharkiya, North Sharqiya, Ash Sharqiyya North

Centre	Ibrā' (22° 41' 26" N, 058° 32' 00" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	إبراء
Variant Name(s) of Centre	Bira, Ibrā
Consists of 6 ADM2s	Ibrā', Bidīyah, Al Qābil, Damā' wa Aṭ Ṭā'iyīn, Wādī Banī Khālid, Al Muḍaybī

11. Zufār (Dhofar) (18° 29' 00" N, 054° 11' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	ظفار
Long form name	Muḥāfazat Zufār
Long form name in Arabic Script	محافظة ظفار
ISO 3166-2 code	OM-ZU
Variant Name(s)	Zofar, Dofar,
Centre	Ṣalālah (17° 00' 54" N, 054° 05' 33" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	صلالة
Variant Name(s) of Centre	Salala, Aṣ Ṣalālah, As Salala
Consists of 10 ADM2s	Ṣalālah, Ṭāqah, Mirbāṭ, Rakhyūt, Thumrayt, Ḍalkūt, Al Mazyūnah, Muqshin, Shalīm wa Juzur al Ḥallānīyāt, Sadḥ

Other Significant Locations

PCGN Approved Name	Name in Arabic Script (Romanized)	Conventional Name (if applicable)	Variant Names/Spellings	Location	Feature Type
Juzur al Ḥallānīyāt	جزر الحلايب (Juzur al Ḥallānīyāt)	Kuria Muria Islands	Jazā'ir Khurīyā Murīyā; Khorya Morya Islands	17°30'23"N 56°01'26"E	Island group
Ar Rub' al Khālī (Empty Quarter)	الربع الخالي (Ar Rub' al Khālī)	Empty Quarter	Rub al-Khali	20° 0' 0" N 50° 0' 0" E	Desert region
Gulf of Oman ¹¹	خليج عمان (Khalīj 'Umān)	Gulf of Oman	بحر عمان (Sea of Oman); دريای عمان (Daryā-ye Omān)	25° 0' 0" N, 58° 0' 0" E	Gulf
Strait of Hormuz	مضيق هرمز (Maḍīq Hurmuz)	Strait of Hormuz	تنگه هرمز (Tangeh-ye Hormoz); Bāb-e Hormoz	26°37'00"N 56°30'00"E	Strait
Al Ḥajar al Gharbī	الحجر الغربي (Al Ḥajar al Gharbī)	Western Hajar	Al Hajar Mountains	23°42'13"N 56°40'19"E	Mountain range
Al Ḥajar ash Sharqī	الحجر الشرقي (Al Ḥajar ash Sharqī)	Eastern Hajar	Al Hajar Mountains	22°56'02"N 58°46'57"E	Mountain range
Arabian Sea	البحر العربي (Al Baḥr al 'Arabī)	Arabian Sea	Bahr al 'Arab; Daryā-ye 'Arab	20°00'00"N 65°00'00"E	Sea
Al Jabal al Akhdar	الجبل الأخضر (Al Jabal al Akhdar)	-	Jabal Al Akhdhar, Green Mountains	23°16'11"N 57°09'43"E	Mountain range
Jazīrat Maṣīrah	جزيرة مصيرة (Jazīrat Maṣīrah)	-	Masira, Al Masira, Mesirah	20°25'13"N 58°47'22"E	Island
Kumzār	كمزار (Kumzār)	-	Kumzar, Kamzar	26°20'14"N 56°24'37"E	Populated place
Dabā al Bay'ah	دبا البيعة (Dabā al Bay'ah)	-	Dabā, Daba al Bayaah, Diba, Dibā al Bay'ah, Bayah, Al Bayah	25°37'43"N 56°16'01"E	Populated place

¹¹ Although Oman prefers the name Sea of Oman, PCGN recommends using the recognised English conventional name Gulf of Oman for this international feature.

Useful references

BBC Oman Country Profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14654150>

BGN/PCGN Arabic Romanization System:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/858000/ROMANIZATION_OF_ARABIC.pdf

CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/oman/>

Foreign Ministry of Oman: <https://fm.gov.om/about-oman/state/oman-by-region/>

International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org

ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#home>

Maps of Oman (NSA): <https://www.mod.gov.om/ar-OM/NSA/Pages/Catering-Maps.aspx>

National Survey Authority (NSA): <https://www.mod.gov.om/ar-OM/NSA/>

Omniplot: www.omniplot.com (for information on languages and scripts)

PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>

Unicode: www.unicode.org

US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server:

<https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/index.html>

Compiled by PCGN

info@pcgn.org.uk

www.gov.uk/pcgn

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