



Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailed analysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



Oman

Population: 3.22 millions (#136 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 309,500 square km. Occupying the southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula, Oman borders Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. A small enclave in the United Arab Emirates at the tip of the Musandam Peninsula adjacent to the Strait of Hormuz also belongs to Oman. Arid, hot desert covers most of the country; coastal areas have high humidity. In extreme southern Oman, a monsoon occurs and results in tropical climate in the Salalah region. Plains are the dominant terrain feature, with mountains in the far northeast and extreme southwest. Sandstorms and droughts are natural hazards. Environmental issues include increasing soil salinity, oil spills and little available fresh water. Oman is divided into eleven administrative governorates.

Peoples

Arab (Omani native): 55%

Other: 45%

Arabs form the majority of the population. Immigrants constitute a sizable minority (45% of the population). Most immigrant groups or migrant workers come from South Asia, other Middle Eastern nations, or Africa. There are also some Filipinos, Europeans, and Americans who temporarily work in Oman.

Population: 4,613,241 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: 2.03% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 2.82 children born per woman (2017)

Life Expectancy: 73.7 male, 77.7 female (2017)

Languages: Arabic dialects (87%), Indian languages (8%), Balochi (4%), other (1%). Arabic is the official language. Only Arabic dialects have over one million speakers (4.0 million).

Literacy: 93% (2015)

History

Oman has been populated for more than 5,000 years and its people has traded with many areas in the Indian Ocean and Asia. Persians controlled or influenced Oman for several centuries before and after Christ's birth. Islam arrived shortly after its founding and Oman assisted its spread in Asia. The Portuguese ruled for approximately 150 years starting in the early sixteenth century. Omani independence occurred in 1650. Oman began expanding its influence in East Africa for the following two centuries until the empire divided in the mid-nineteenth century. Friendship treaties were signed with the British in the late eighteenth century, resulting in Oman not coming under European rule. A rebellion occurred in the Dhofar Governorate in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1970, the son of the sultan overtook the government and has ruled since. Sultan Qaboos has modernized Oman and maintained close relations with the United Kingdom. Oman has acted more independently than much of the Arab world but has positive relations with all nations in the Middle East.

Culture

Oman has some inherited cultural characteristics but shares cultural similarities with neighboring Arab nations. Islam heavily influences everyday life. Oman is famous for the Khanjar, a curved knife worn on holidays. Men and women continue to wear traditional clothing. Cuisine includes spiced meat, rice, and breads. Cigarette and alcohol consumption rates are very low. Polygamy is practiced by some Muslims.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$45,500 (2017) [76.5% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.796

Corruption Index: 48 (2017)

Oman is one of the less wealthy nations on the Arabian Peninsula mainly due to limited oil reserves. The government has sought to diversify the economy and lessen dependence on oil for revenue. Nevertheless, oil and gas generate between 68-85% of government revenue. Services are the largest economic sector (53%), followed by industry (45%). Foreign workers account for approximately 60% of the workforce. Agriculture is limited due to the dry climate, but common crops include dates, fruit, and alfalfa. Crude oil and natural gas the largest industries and primary exports. Trade partners include China, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States.

Faiths

Muslim: 85.9%

Christian: 6.5%

Hindu: 5.5%

Buddhist: 0.8%

Other: 1.1%

Unaffiliated: 0.2%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Catholic – ~55,000

Latter-day Saints – 82 – 1

Religion

Nearly all Arabs are Muslim. However, unlike other countries on the Arabian Peninsula, Ibadhi Muslims constitute the primary Islamic group rather than Shia or Sunni Muslims. Most foreign workers from other Middle Eastern nations or South Asia are Muslim. Other religious groups include Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Bahai's. Christians are concentrated in the larger cities of Muscat, Sohar, and Salalah and primarily consist of Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants.^[1]

Religious Freedom

The Basic Law allows for freedom to practice religion if it does not interfere with public order and recognizes Islam as the state religion. Shari'a law is in effect and connects Islamic practices with government policy. Discrimination based on religious affiliation is forbidden. Unlike some Middle East nations, conversion from Islam to another religion is not regarded as a crime but does carry potential legal challenges for fathers retaining rights over their children. Non-Muslims must worship at government-approved locations or the privacy of their own homes. Overcrowding at some churches and non-Muslim places of worship has been reported. Public proselytism is illegal. Government prohibits foreigners on tourist visas from preaching, teaching, and leading congregations. Islam is taught in public schools, and non-Muslims may be exempted. Private schools may provide non-Muslim religious instruction. All religious groups must be registered, which is done on a case-by-case basis. There have been no recent reports of societal abuses on religious freedom albeit Muslims who convert to a non-Islamic faith are viewed "extremely negatively within the Muslim community."^[2]

Largest Cities

Urban: 84.5%

Muscat, **As-Sib**, **Salalah**, **Matrah**, **Suhar**, **Al-Buraymi**, **Sur**, **Al-Khaburah**, **Nizwa**, **Al-Amrat**.

Cities listed in **bold** have no LDS congregations.

One of the ten most populous cities has an LDS congregation. Forty-three percent (43%) of the national population resides in the ten most populous cities.

LDS History

In 1988, there was only one active member who would travel to the United Arab Emirates for Church meetings.^[3] The first congregation was likely created between 1990 and 2000.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 82 (2017)

In early 2010, membership in the Oman Branch appeared to number between fifty and one hundred. There were seventy-eight members in 2013. Most members reside in the Muscat metropolitan area. All members with a few possible exceptions are foreigners.

One in 56,259 was LDS as of 2017.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 1 (2017)

In 2000, Oman was assigned to the Europe Central Area. In 2008, the country was transferred to the newly created Middle East/Africa North Area. The Oman Branch holds worship services in English and pertains to the Abu Dhabi Stake. A military group used to operate in Oman for United States military personnel.

Activity and Retention

It is difficult to estimate member activity rates due to the unknown number of inactive foreign members. Member activity seems

high among known membership. As much as 75% of LDS membership in Oman may be active.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Arabic, English, Farsi, Hindi, Tagalog, Urdu.

All LDS scriptures are available in Arabic, English, and Tagalog. Book of Mormon translations have been completed for Farsi, Hindi, and Urdu. Most Church materials are available in Arabic and Tagalog, whereas Urdu and Farsi have more limited Church materials. Gospel Principles and The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith are available in Farsi. The Liahona has twelve issues annually in Tagalog and three issues in Urdu.

Meetinghouses

Meetings for the Oman Branch likely occur in a rented space.

Humanitarian and Development Work

Church members cleaned a section of beach outside Muscat in February 2010. Large-scale humanitarian efforts do not appear to have occurred.

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Oman has one of the most tolerant atmospheres for non-Muslims in the Middle East. The Church can benefit from liberal laws that accommodate the conversion of not just nonnatives but also Omani citizens if they approach the Church on their own initiative. Appointment of government land for a meetinghouse appears likely once membership requires a larger meeting location. Omani law may restrict visiting Church leaders from training and conducting ecclesiastical business. In 2018, the Church published the name of the Oman Branch on its meetinghouse locator website and provided contact information for the branch president. This is the only link for those without local LDS personal contacts to find the Church. Prohibitions on public proselytism prohibits traditional LDS finding approaches.

Cultural Issues

Church meetings are held in Friday, the Muslim day of worship. Tolerance towards non-Muslim religions is higher than most Arab nations, but Oman is heavily influenced by Islam and Arab culture. Conversion from Islam is greatly frowned upon, and in other Arab nations can result in capital punishment if discovered. Low rates of alcohol and tobacco lessen challenges overcoming these substances for prospective converts prior to baptism.

National Outreach

The highly urbanized population reduces the number of outreach centers needed to reach most inhabitants. Membership is most concentrated along the northeastern coast where Oman has the highest population densities. Sparsely populated areas outside the northeastern coast and the Salalah region challenge future outreach.

The national population remains unreached by the Church due to cultural restrictions on proselytism. Only individuals in personal contact with members are able to learn more about the Church. Otherwise, interested individuals must obtain information online. The meetinghouse location is not made public due to the Church's semi-sensitive status.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

The tiny church membership in an Islamic nation with a sensitive Church presence has likely lessened member activity, as many have been unable to find the Church. The quality of teaching received by members and their church attendance habits are most likely consistent with the nations where they joined the Church. Foreign members may experience increased church activity resulting at least in part from the desire for social interaction with fewer members.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The greatest opportunities for member-missionary work are among Christian foreign workers. Cultural restrictions and the lack of Omani Arab membership frustrate greater outreach among Omani Arabs. The diversity among the non-Arab population challenges ethnic integration efforts. Most members in the Oman Branch appear to be Westerners who may have little contact with foreign workers from South Asia and the Philippines.

Language Issues

LDS scriptures and materials are available in most native languages spoken by the Omani population. The language with the most speakers without Church materials is Balochi, which appears unlikely to have forthcoming translations of Church materials. English will likely continued to be used until enough active members and leaders require the creation of language-specific congregations. Language-specific congregations for immigrant workers have previously been created in the Middle East, such as a ward in Doha, Qatar designated for members speaking Filipino languages.

Leadership

In 2018, the president of the Oman Branch was a Westerner. Local leadership appears well trained and developed due to expatriates staffing callings in the branch. Limited leadership outside of Muscat and among non-English speakers may have contributed to only one branch functioning in Oman.

Temple

Oman is assigned to the Frankfurt Germany Temple district. Temple trips likely occur with the Abu Dhabi Stake due to the small size of membership. Due to long distances from temples, a temple may be constructed on the Arabian Peninsula to serve foreign members living in the Middle East, the majority of which are very active and reside in neighboring Arab nations.

Comparative Growth

The Church arrived later to Oman than to most other Arab nations. The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain all have more members. Much of this delayed and limited growth appears due to slower economic growth and fewer expatriate workers. There is still virtually no outreach among the Arab-speaking Omani population, notwithstanding a more favorable environment than in other nations. Christian groups only have established congregations among expatriates. Christian churches have few congregations and limited national outreach.

Future Prospects

Legislation more tolerant than most other Arab nations toward the religious freedom of non-Muslim groups and the sizable foreign worker population provides a positive outlook for future growth through member-missionary efforts. Potential mission outreach opportunities among foreign works have yet to be realized and must be done without infringing on Omani law. Future sustainable growth may occur among the foreign population through member-missionary efforts, creative outreach strategies, social networking, and foreign workers remaining in Oman for extended periods of time.

[1] "Oman," International Religious Freedom Report 2017. Accessed 31 July 2018.
<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=281000#wrapper>

[2] "Oman," International Religious Freedom Report 2017. Accessed 31 July 2018.
<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=281000#wrapper>

[3] Platt, Joseph B. "Our Oasis of Faith," Ensign, Apr 1988, 39.