

Arabian Peninsula

UNLEASHED TRAVEL GUIDE

Explore the Region
and Culture

Discover the Physical
and Spiritual Needs

Prepare for your
Unleashed Experience



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Prayer for the Region & Call to Action

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Geography & Landscape

Location

The Arabian Peninsula is located northeast of Africa on the continent of Asia. Although it falls within Western Asia, it is commonly recognized as part of the Middle East. It holds the distinction of being the largest peninsula in the world and is commonly referred to as Arabia. The peninsula is made up of the countries of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (with southern parts of Iraq and Jordan sometimes included).

Landscape

The Arabian Desert makes up about 70% of the entire peninsula, while the remaining landscape includes pastures, valleys, mountains, beaches, and stunning coastal skylines.

◆ The Arabian Peninsula holds the distinction of being the largest peninsula in the world.



◆
During
the summer
months,
temperatures
can reach
around 100
degrees
Fahrenheit.

Climate & Weather

Arabia, while not the hottest place on Earth, typically experiences the highest average monthly temperatures. There are two primary seasons: summer and winter. During the summer months (May through September), temperatures can reach around 100 degrees Fahrenheit. In contrast, low temperatures in January and February may drop down to 50 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit, with average lows hovering around 70 degrees throughout the winter. Mountain ranges and valleys experience much lower temperatures. For instance, Jebel Jais, the highest point in UAE, recorded a temperature of 23 degrees Fahrenheit and snowfall in January 2020.

Desert regions generally receive less than 3 inches of rainfall annually, while the coastal and mountain areas typically receive about 5 to 7 inches per year.

Landmarks & Notable Sites

BURJ KHALIFA

The Burj Khalifa in Dubai has held the title of the tallest structure in the world since it opened in 2010, standing at 2,722 feet.

JEDDAH TOWER

The Jeddah Tower in Saudi Arabia, currently under construction, is projected to be the tallest building in the world upon completion. Construction began in 2013, paused in 2018, and resumed in 2023 after nearly six years of inactivity.

DUBAI MALL

The Dubai Mall became the most visited destination worldwide in 2023, welcoming 105 million visitors.

PALM JUMEIRAH

Palm Jumeirah in Dubai is the largest man-made island in the world. The Palm Jebel Ali, currently under development, will be more than twice the size of Palm Jumeirah upon completion. Initial construction of Palm Jebel Ali began in 2002 with an original opening date in 2008, but development was on hold for over a decade before relaunching in 2023.

The Burj Khalifa in Dubai

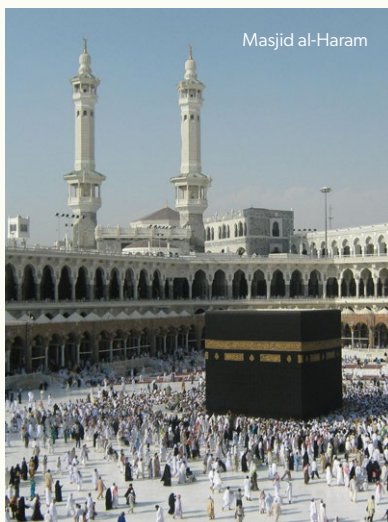


MASJID AL-HARAM

The *Masjid al-Haram* (Great Mosque of Mecca) and the *Kaaba* in Mecca, Saudi Arabia hold significant religious importance as the holiest sites in Islam. The Kaaba is considered by Muslims to be the *Bayt Allah* (House of God).

AL AHSA OASIS

Al Ahsa Oasis in Saudi Arabia is renowned as the largest oasis in the world.



SHEIKH ZAYED GRAND MOSQUE

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi stands as the largest among over 9,000 mosques in the UAE.

MUTTRAH, OMAN

The region of Muttrah, Oman is celebrated for its picturesque coastal views, culinary delights, shopping opportunities, and ancient architecture.



RUB' AL KHALI

The *Rub' al Khali* (Empty Quarter), spanning around 250,000 square miles, is the largest continuous desert in the world. While most of it lies within Saudi Arabia, sections also extend into Oman, Yemen, and the UAE.

SOUQ WAQIF

Souq Waqif in Qatar is a bustling and popular Arab market with local cuisine and diverse shopping options.

The Sheikh Zayed Grand
Mosque in Abu Dhabi

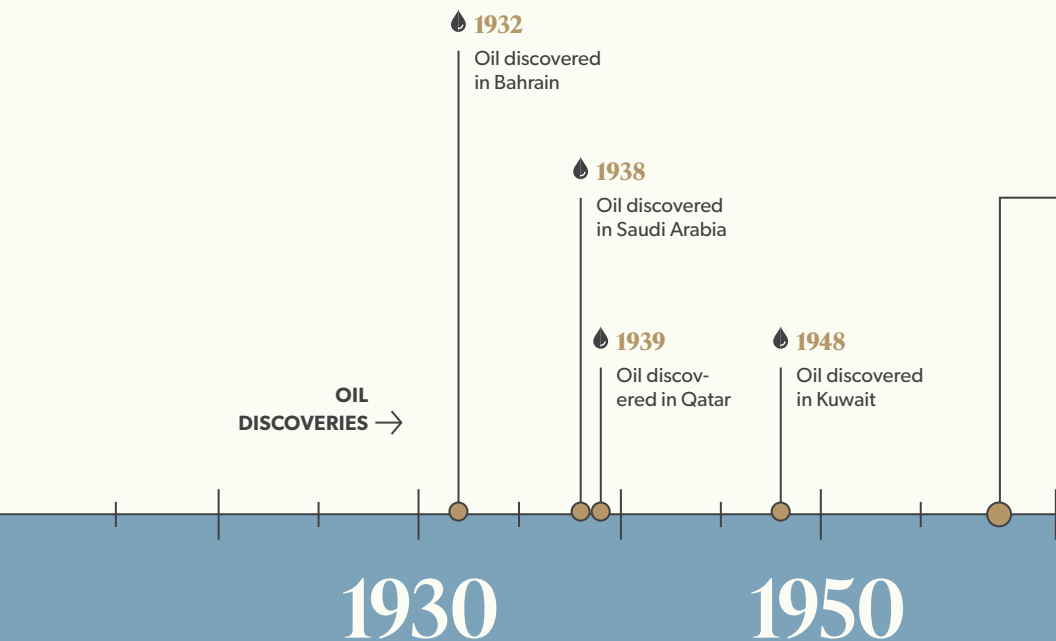


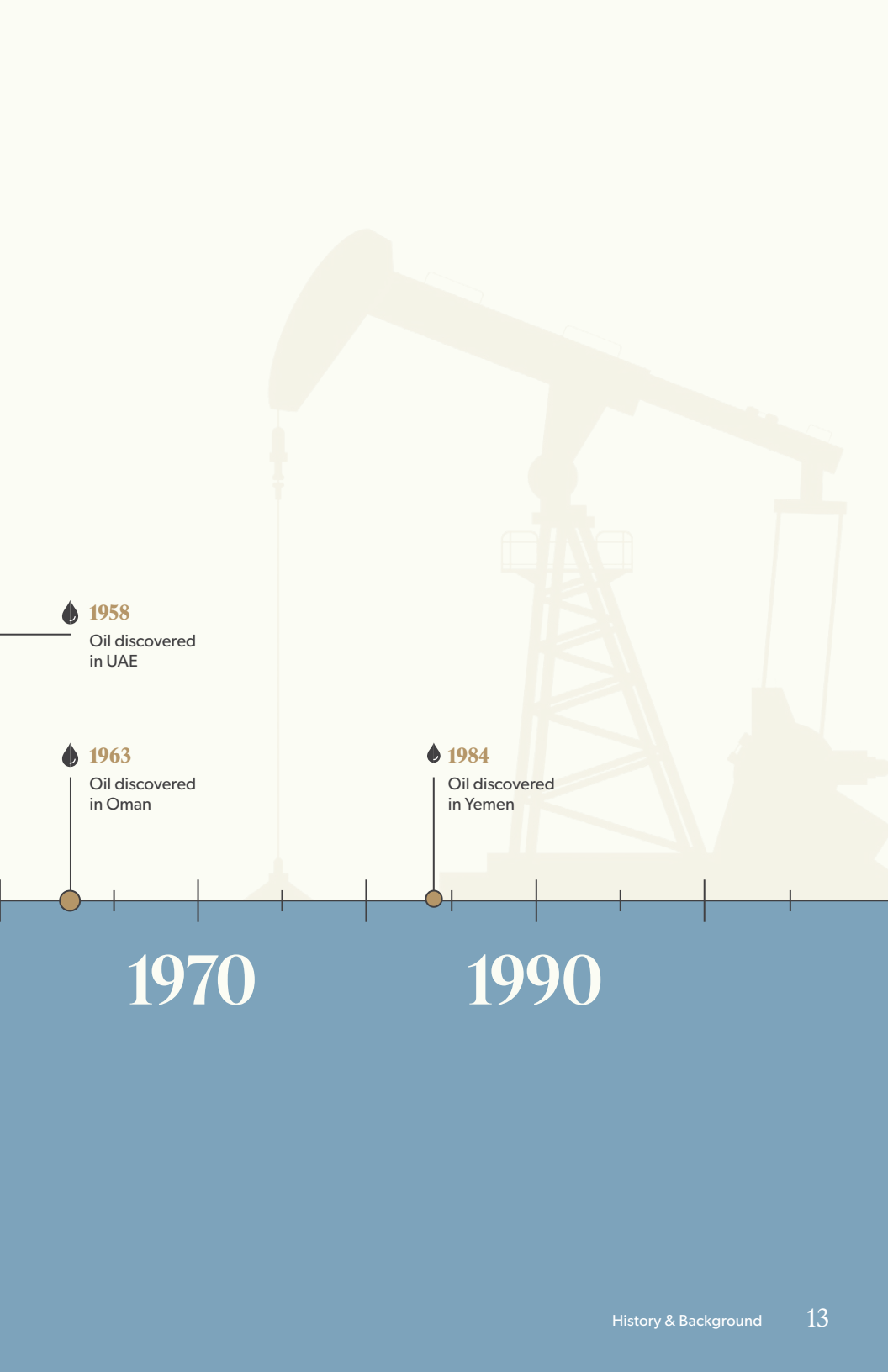


History & Background

Discovery of Oil

Oil discoveries from the 1930s to the 1980s marked significant milestones for each country.





 **1958**
Oil discovered
in UAE

 **1963**
Oil discovered
in Oman

 **1984**
Oil discovered
in Yemen

1970

1990

The Arab Spring

- Every Arabian country (except Qatar) was involved in the **Arab Spring** anti-government movements of 2011-2012. The events varied from minor protests to complete governmental changes. As a consequence, Yemen has been engaged in a civil war since September 2014.

Government & Economy

- **Federal Monarchy:** a federation of states (or emirates) with a monarch as the overall head of the federation. Each emirate within the federation also has its own individual monarchs. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is one of only two federal monarchies globally, alongside Malaysia.
- **Constitutional Monarchy (or Limited Monarchy):** Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar operate under a written constitution and central government body. In this system, the monarch has limited power, and they must rule within the framework of the constitution and laws.
- **Absolute Monarchy:** Saudi Arabia and Oman are governed by monarchs with absolute power over the state and government.
- The government of Yemen has been categorized as a republic since 1990, but due to the ongoing civil war, the government is in transition.
- The **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** is a political and economic union comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. It was established on May 25, 1981.
- The **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** is an organization that unites some oil-exporting countries in the region as a political unit. Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait are the only Arabian countries with OPEC membership and are global leaders in oil exports. Saudi Arabia is the global leader in oil exports, followed closely by UAE and Kuwait.

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- Qatar discovered natural gas in 1972 and is one of the leading global producers.
- While oil and gas are among the largest contributors to the GDP of each country, efforts are being made to diversify economies away from dependence on oil. Industries such as finance, tourism, healthcare, construction, and real estate are thriving as part of this diversification strategy.
 - The **Strait of Hormuz**, located at the northeast tip of the Arabian Peninsula between the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, holds immense strategic importance for global trade. Over 30% of the world's natural gas and oil trade passes through this strait annually.



The Culture

Language

- **Arabic is one of the oldest groups of languages in the world**, with its roots deeply embedded in history. The inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula were among the earliest users of the Arabic language in pre-Islamic times. Today, Arabic holds the status of being the official language in each country of the region, although English is widely spoken across the region.
- In many major cities, English serves as the universal business language, facilitating communication and commerce on an international scale. Street signs commonly feature both Arabic and English.
 - **Gulf Arabic**, also known as *Khaleeji Arabic*, serves as the predominant spoken language along the Arabian Gulf, including UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and parts of Saudi Arabia. Within Gulf Arabic, there are country-specific dialects characterized by variations in vocabulary and pronunciation. Furthermore, within individual countries, dialectal differences may also arise. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, the Hijazi dialect is prevalent along the western coast, the Najdi dialect is prominent in the central and northern regions, while Gulf Arabic is spoken along the Arabian Gulf. There are more than a dozen Arabic dialects across Arabia.
 - There is a standard language called *fus'ha* or **Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)** that is commonly used in news-casts, politics, and textbooks. However, it is not typically used in everyday conversation and is considered less colloquial. While many Arabic speakers can comprehend MSA, spoken language across the Arab world tends to be more informal.
 - **Egyptian Arabic** holds a significant position due to its widespread usage in popular Arabic movies, music, and TV shows. Consequently, it has become the most widely spoken and studied form of Arabic.

Arabic holds the status of being the official language in each country of the region.



- It is important to note the prominence of other languages present in the region due to the large expatriate population. With people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Philippines comprising nearly 70% of the UAE's population, **Hindi, Urdu, Bengali,** and **Tagalog** are widely spoken. Additionally, the proximity of the Gulf countries to southern Iran means that the **Persian** and **Balochi** languages are also common along the Gulf coast.

Culture Type

- **Honor and Shame:** In American culture, we operate within a system of innocence and guilt in terms of what is right and wrong. For example, telling the truth is right and telling lies is wrong. One of the basic foundations of Western culture is the belief in right versus wrong (or good versus bad). In the Middle East, people don't think of lying as being right or wrong, but more from the perspective of "Is this honorable?" If a lie protects the honor of a person or family, then it is perfectly acceptable. If a lie is told for purely selfish reasons, then it is shameful.

- The rule for telling the truth, or not, is bound by honor and shame. If shame can be avoided, or honor obtained, then lying is more honorable, and therefore the “right” thing to do. Conversely, a source of shame in Middle Eastern culture is not doing something wrong, but people *finding out* you did something wrong. Being *guilty* of the act would not be “wrong”, but being *shamed* for it would be.

Holidays

- There are two main holidays celebrated in Islam:



EID AL-FITR

A three-day celebration marking the end of Ramadan in the spring



EID AL-ADHA

A three-day celebration honoring Abraham’s sacrifice of his son as an act of obedience to God in the summer

- **National Days** commemorate the independence or unification of each country.

KUWAIT

FEB. 25

YEMEN

MAY 22

SAUDI ARABIA

SEPT. 23

OMAN

NOV. 18

UAE

DEC. 2

BAHRAIN

DEC. 16

QATAR

DEC. 18



Kabsa, the national dish of Saudi Arabia

Food

DATES AND COFFEE (or *qawah*) are culinary essentials in Arabia.

KABSA, the national dish of Saudi Arabia, is a rice dish with chicken, tomatoes, and spices.

MAJBOOS, the national dish of Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar, is a rice dish cooked with meat or fish, vegetables, and spices (very similar to kabsa).

HAREES is a slow-cooked, porridge made with cracked wheat, meat, and spices.

GHOUZI, the national dish of UAE, is a lamb dish with rice and spices.

SALTAH, the national dish of Yemen, is a chicken or lamb stew with a rich broth, spices, and vegetables.

RIGAG is a bread similar to a crepe often served with eggs or beans or honey.

MANDI is a Yemeni meat and rice dish prepared with a spice blend called hawajj.

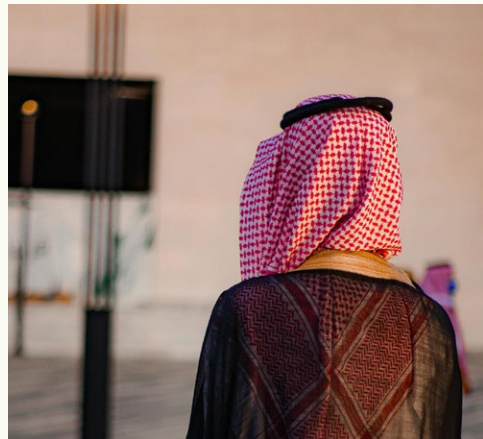
LUQAIMAT is a sweet fried dumpling flavored with cardamom and saffron.

SHUWA, the national dish of Oman, is beef, lamb, or goat covered in oil and spices, wrapped in banana leaves, and smoked underground for 24 hours.

Traditional Clothing

MEN

- A **kandura**, also known as a thawb, tobe, or dishdasha, is the traditional Islamic attire for men. It is a long tunic with full sleeves that varies in color depending on the season. For example, white is generally worn in summer. It can also vary by country with subtle differences in collar, embroidery, or buttons.
- A **ghuttrah**, also known as a keffiyeh or shemagh, is the traditional head-dress worn by men. Colors usually vary by country – it is white in the UAE while a red and white checkered pattern is generally seen in Saudi Arabia. The ghuttrah is held in place by a black, circular rope called an **agal**. The style in which the ghuttrah is worn can range from flowing and casual to starched and formal.
 - In Bedouin (nomadic Arab) culture, the ghuttrah protected the head from sun and sand while the agal was the rope used to hobble a camel to prevent the animal from wandering too far. While the functions of these items have changed, they remain very important in Arab culture.



WOMEN

- The **abaya** is a long, flowing black cloak worn by women. Colors may vary for fashion reasons, but black is the traditional color. It serves as a symbol of modesty and identity while also reflecting Islamic values and cultural pride.
- The **hijab** (Arabic meaning *to cover* or *veil*) is a square scarf covering the head and neck commonly worn by most Arab women in the Gulf region.
- The **shayla** is a similar rectangular scarf.
- A **battoulah**, also known as a Gulf burka, is a mask often worn by older generations of Muslim women. In more conservative Muslim culture, as in Saudi Arabia, women may wear a **niqab** which veils the entire face except for the eyes. In even more conservative cultures, a **burka** covers a woman's entire face with only a mesh area for the eyes.



CLOTHING FOR VISITORS

While visiting the region, the most important question for visitors and expatriates to consider is – what is most respectful?

If visiting reverent historical or religious sites, it is imperative that people dress modestly and more traditionally to show respect. Men would be required to wear sleeves and long pants, and women need to dress modestly, covering their chests, wrists, ankles, and wearing a scarf to cover one's head. This can also be true within the more conservative countries in the region. Modest dress or even wearing traditional abayas and hijabs may be required.

For larger cities or communities with many expatriates – like Dubai or Abu Dhabi, it is much more common to see people dressed more casually and Westernized – like how you and your friends would dress at home.

Overall, a good rule of thumb is to do your research regarding the specific area and sites you will be visiting and to dress in a way that would be perceived as most respectful to that community.

Scent

It will not take long for someone visiting Arabia to notice the rich smell of **oud** - not to be confused with the traditional Arabian instrument of the same name. The fragrance is extremely popular in Arabian culture and comes in various forms.

Many Arab women will apply oud perfume liberally, but oud also comes in the form of saturated wood that is burned like incense. Oud may be burned in homes as a sign of hospitality to guests. A walk through any local mall will offer the opportunity to experience and purchase the memorable scent.

The most important question for visitors and expatriates to consider is – what is most respectful?



Daily Life

Family Life

- For generations, Arab people were divided into tribes called **Bedouin**, which is derived from the Arabic *badawi* meaning “desert-dweller”. The cornerstone of Bedouin life was loyalty to family and pride of ancestry. The family tribe continues to be a pillar of Arab social structure today. Arabs are extremely proud of their family heritage, and it is not uncommon for extended families to all live together, which is contrary to the traditional family that is common in the United States.
- Many cities across Arabia have modern park systems and emphasize the importance of physical activity, so family life can take on much of the same look as what someone may expect in a Western city. Food trucks, outdoor events, and playgrounds can be enjoyed all year long.
 - Dubai, for example, has a ‘Quality of Life Strategy 2033’ dedicated to ensuring the comprehensive well-being of everyone in the community.





Greetings & Manners

- A common greeting across Arabic-speaking countries is **“As-salamu alaykum”** which means “peace be upon you”. This phrase is often used as a general “hello” regardless of context, though *“marhaba”* or *“ahlan”*, also meaning “hello”, are less formal alternatives.
- **Shukran** is Arabic for “thank you”.
- The culture tends to move at a much slower pace compared to what an American may experience. Americans generally prioritize efficiency, productivity, and adherence to schedules, while Arab cultures prioritize spending time together, whether over a meal or engaging in meaningful conversations. Conversations may go well into the morning hours!
- In Arabian culture, **the left hand is considered to be impure**, so actions such as handing or receiving items, shaking hands, and particularly eating with the left hand are considered taboo.

**Shukran is
Arabic for
“thank you”.**



◆
In the UAE,
international
schools are
popular among
expatriates.

Education

- Public schools in Saudi Arabia and UAE, from elementary school to college, are tuition-free for local citizens. However, expatriate children can attend public schools if their parents hold government jobs, among other conditions.
- Most expatriate families utilize homeschooling or private schools due to these restrictions. In the UAE, international schools are popular among expatriates, but they come with expensive tuition fees, sometimes reaching up to \$20,000.

Professional Life

- The work week is Sunday to Thursday with the weekend being only Friday and Saturday. Additionally, people are expected to work an average of 40 to 60 hours per week at their jobs in this region.
- **Exploitation:** The concept of work/life balance, often emphasized in American culture, may not be as much of a focus in Arabian societies. This is more prevalent in lower level jobs, and also serves as an example of the disparity and racism that exists in the culture overall. For instance, individuals from Europe may garner more respect in places like Dubai, while those from the United States are often viewed more favorably due to perceptions of wealth, power, and honor associated with America.



Conversely, individuals from countries like Bangladesh or Pakistan may face discrimination and be deemed inferior, especially when employed in lower-skill positions. Although UAE law expressly prohibits discrimination, forced labor, and human trafficking, authorities rarely prosecute such cases. The hierarchical system based on race and status is undeniable, but it is illegal to speak negatively about the government so the mistreatment is not talked about very much.

- “Wasta” is an Arabic word essentially translates to “favoritism” or “connections.” While this kind of partiality may not be right in the eyes of a Westerner, it is a reality of business life, especially in the UAE.

◆ **It is illegal to speak negatively about the government in the UAE.**

Notable Industries



ENERGY & POWER



REAL ESTATE



FINANCE



TRANSPORTATION & LOGISTICS



CONSTRUCTION



TOURISM



HEALTHCARE



RETAIL

Leisure Activities

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

The cooler months, spanning from October to April, mark camping season across numerous locations in the UAE. Jebel Jais in Ras Al Khaimah, located in the northern UAE, offers a variety of outdoor activities like camping, hiking, and even the world's longest zipline at 9,291 ft.

DUNE BASHING

Dune bashing in trucks, SUVs, or ATVs is a popular activity for outdoor enthusiasts at many desert locations across the peninsula.

SHOPPING

There are dozens of malls across the region which are very popular in the summer when temperatures are consistently over 100 degrees.

ARTS

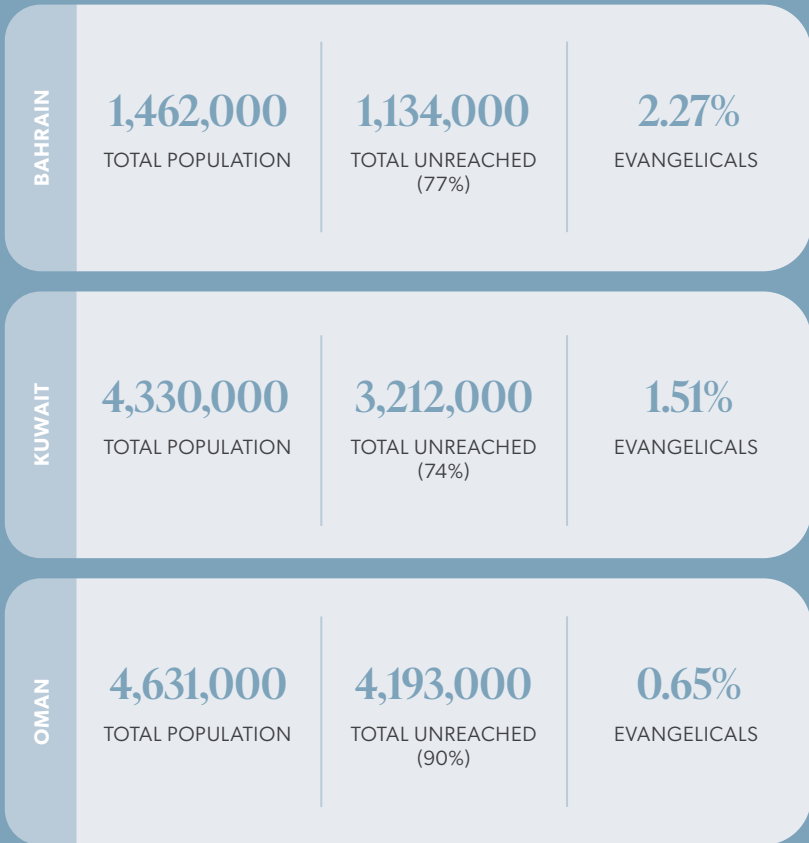
Arabia boasts vibrant arts and culture scenes, showcasing music, dance, and poetry.

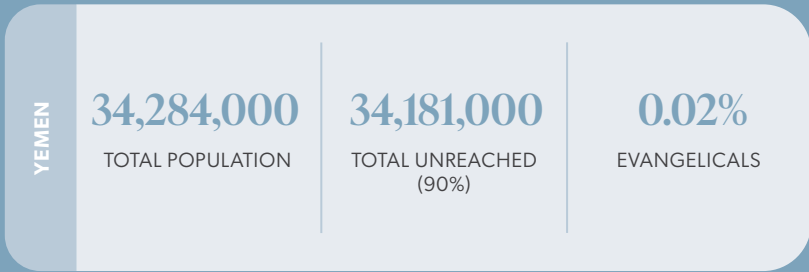
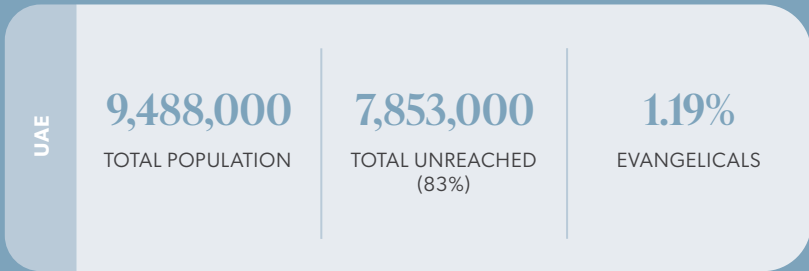
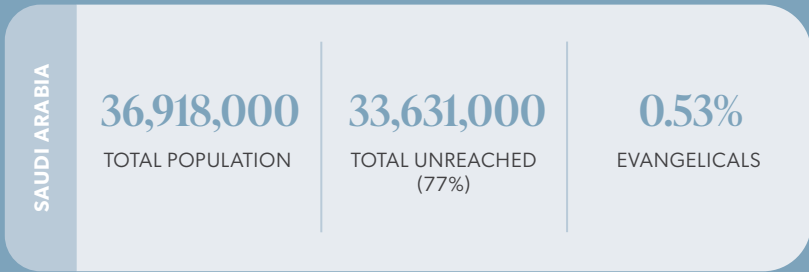
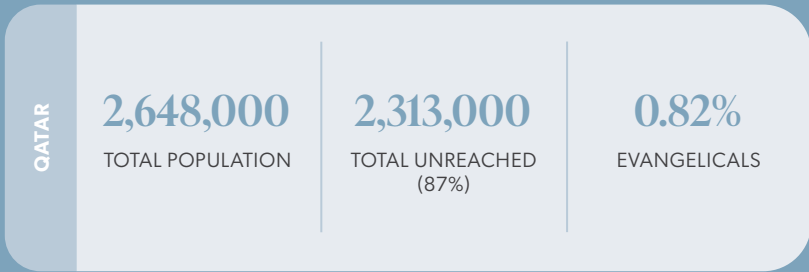
SPORTS

Soccer and cricket dominate the sports scene, with a burgeoning professional baseball league, Baseball United, recently established in Dubai. In 2023, Saudi Arabia financed the creation of the LIV Golf League to rival the PGA Tour as the premiere golf league and signing some of the world's best golfers.



Identifying the Need & Reaching the Lost





UAE (88%), Qatar (79%), and Kuwait (72%) have the top three highest immigrant populations in the world.

Religion & Worldview

- **Islam** is the official religion across the Arabian Peninsula. The word Islam means “submission.” Followers of Islam, known as **Muslims**, believe they are submitting to the will of God (Allah).
- Islam was founded in 610 AD by Muhammad, who was supposedly the final prophet of God, emerging nearly 600 years after Christ. Muhammad claimed to receive revelations from God through the angel Gabriel. Muhammad began preaching these revelations in 613 AD. By the time of his death in 632 AD, Islam had spread throughout much of the Arabian Peninsula. Prior to the advent of Islam, Arabian tribes likely practiced a mix of Christianity, Judaism, and polytheistic idol worship.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

01

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Profession of Faith, also called **Shahada**, is the most fundamental declaration of faith in Islam. It states the belief that “There is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet.”

02

FIVE DAILY PRAYERS

Five Daily Prayers, also called **Salat**, form an integral part of a Muslim’s daily routine. Muslims observe these prayers throughout the day, with the direction of prayer always oriented towards Mecca. The prayer ritual involves several physical movements, including bowing, kneeling, and placing the forehead on the ground or prayer mat, symbolizing reverence and submission to Allah. The call to prayer, known as **adhan**, is recited by a **muezzin** at mosques, transmitted through microphones from minarets. These loud chants can be heard five times per day at mosques throughout the Arab world calling Muslims to fulfill religious duty.

- According to Islamic tradition, several disciples of Muhammad recorded the revelations, marking the beginning of the written text known as the **Quran** (also spelled Qu’ran or Koran). Muslims believe the Quran to be God’s own divine speech, providing a complete code of conduct across all aspects of life.
- Additionally, within Islam, there is the **Hadith** (Arabic for “report” or “account”), which constitutes another written text. This collection comprises sayings and teachings attributed to Muhammad. Unlike the Quran, not all Muslims consider every Hadith account to be divine revelation.
- Islam is founded on tenets that are known as the **Five Pillars of Islam**. These pillars represent five fundamental obligations that every Muslim must satisfy in order to lead a righteous and responsible life according to Islamic teaching.

03

SHARING WEALTH

Sharing wealth, known as Zakat, entails almsgiving to those less fortunate within the Muslim community.

04

FASTING

Fasting, also called **Saum**, is observed during the holy month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. Muslims are expected to fast from dawn to dusk. There are exceptions made for the sick, elderly, and pregnant, but otherwise Muslims are expected to refrain from eating and drinking during daylight hours. The fast is broken at sunset with the iftar meal.

05

ISLAMIC PILGRIMAGE

Islamic pilgrimage, known as **Hajj**, draws about 2 million Muslims from across the world to Mecca annually. Muslims are expected, if physically and financially able, to make the pilgrimage at least once. The gathering is centered on walking around the kaaba seven times.

ISLAM IS BROKEN UP INTO TWO MAIN SECTS: **SUNNI AND SHIA**

SUNNI MUSLIMS

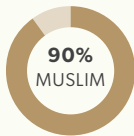
- Sunni Muslims believe Muhammad **did not explicitly declare his successor**.
- Sunni Muslims make up approximately 85-90% of the Muslim population. (percentages vary within each Arab country)

SHIA MUSLIMS

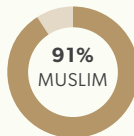
- Shia Muslims believe that Muhammad **publicly designated** his cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, as his successor.
- Shia Muslims make up approximately 10-15% of the Muslim population. (percentages vary within each Arab country)

SHARIA

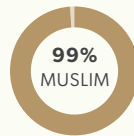
Sharia is Islamic religious law that governs most aspects of Muslim life.



OMAN



SAUDI ARABIA



YEMEN

Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen have the highest percentage of Muslims. The UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar, while still predominantly Muslim, have lower percentages due to significant expatriate worker populations.



Physical Needs

FOOD SCARCITY

In Yemen, 17 million people face severe hunger, which is among the highest in the world. Malnutrition rates for Yemeni women and children are among the highest in the world.

WATER SCARCITY

Every country on the Arabian Peninsula grapples with severe water stress, where over 80% of the renewable water supply is utilized. Water is more scarce in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE than in any other country. While desalination plants have been built to remove salts and minerals from seawater, providing freshwater suitable for drinking and irrigation, scarcity remains high.

Every country on the Arabian Peninsula grapples with severe water stress.



The Evangelical Church

- **Evangelical churches** are allowed in UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait, but proselytizing is illegal. Despite this restriction, the governments have demonstrated some favor towards Christians, resulting in the presence of some strong evangelical churches in these countries. Among the GCC nations, Kuwait and Bahrain are the only ones where citizenship can be held by Christians.
- **Bibles and Christian literature** can be obtained through some resources, but access is very limited. Bible Society UAE as well as bookstores within local churches are some of the only options for obtaining Christian books and Bibles.
- **Persecution** - Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Oman are among the most difficult places in the world for Christians. In Oman, Christianity is illegal and persecution is very high. In Saudi Arabia and Yemen, persecution is extreme and Bibles can only be delivered via covert operations. House churches and/or underground churches are the only means for believers to gather in these countries.

Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Oman are among the most difficult places in the world for Christians.

Prayer for the Region

01

PRAY FOR MUSLIMS

There are more than 70 million Muslims on the Arabian Peninsula, which is more than 80% of the region. Pray that followers of Islam would be radically changed by the gospel. Since Bibles and Christian content on the internet are more difficult to obtain, pray for Jesus to visit Muslims believers through dreams and visions.

02


PRAY FOR GOVERNMENTS

While some Islamic governments are more benevolent, there are some with oppressive authority. Regardless, governments have a lot of control as it relates to Christianity and church buildings. Pray for Muslim leaders to show favor to Christians.

03

PRAY FOR THE CHURCH

Pray for the boldness of believers in existing churches to be a powerful witness to Muslim leaders. Pray for believers in these countries to boldly live their faith in the workplace and community.



What if God created you and your skills to shine a light in this part of the world? If you have questions or want to know more, visit our webpage at www.seunleashed.com/professionals







Arabian Peninsula

WWW.SEUNLEASHED.COM

SOUTHEAST CHRISTIAN CHURCH

To see the digital
version of this
guide, scan here:

