



## Oman 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Cyber; Religious Terrorism; Riots/Civil Unrest; Floods; Natural Disasters; Maritime; Surveillance; Drug Trafficking

Near East > Oman; Near East > Oman > Muscat

2/18/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Oman is lauded as a popular tourist destination that draws a significant presence of Western tourists.

Post Crime Rating: Medium

### Crime Threats

The Post Crime Rating was changed from “low” to “medium” in fall of 2014 based on data gathered by the Regional Security Office that shows that, while violent crime remains a rarity, property (non-violent) crime rates throughout Oman exceed the rate for similar crimes occurring in U.S. metropolitan areas. The global decline in oil prices could result in unemployment and displacement of third country national workers, which could cause an increase in opportunistic financially-motivated crime over the next year.

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Generally speaking, crime is limited to crimes of opportunity and petty theft. High-value items that can be easily transported (small electronics, cash, jewelry), remain the most common items stolen. Vehicle theft is also prevalent, especially when drivers leave their keys in the car when they run into a store to purchase items. Violent crimes including assaults, rapes, and murder, are rare.

Traditionally, residential break-ins throughout Muscat have been isolated in the Medinat Qaboos (MQ) area, which is populated primarily by the expatriate community. From late 2010 to present, seven U.S. Embassy residences have been burglarized in the MQ area but none since 2013. Break-ins have also occurred near U.S. Embassy residences including an apartment building occupied by several U.S. Embassy employees. In addition, numerous allegations of suspicious activities occurring in the MQ area have been reported.

## Cyber

Cyber crime remains limited to common scams requesting money upfront for promised services or chances to obtain more money with a down payment. There have been reports of ATM/credit card fraud.

## Other Areas of Concern

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U.S. citizens should avoid Oman's border areas with Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In December 2013, the Embassy published Consular Messages advising U.S. citizens that non-essential travel by Embassy personnel to the Dhofar region, near the border with Yemen, was temporarily suspended until January 1, 2014, because of threat reporting. This was followed by a message on February 20, 2014, advising U.S. citizens to consider deferring non-essential travel to the Dhofar region in Oman because of continuing instability and terrorist activity in neighboring Yemen.

## **Transportation-Safety Situation**

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions, lighting, and traffic safety in cities and on major highways in populated areas are good. The condition of rural roads varies from good to poor. Travel between cities, especially at night, may be dangerous because of poor/no lighting, weather conditions (rains can wash out roadways), wandering livestock, pedestrians crossing highways, slow-moving cargo vehicles, and speeding drivers.

The use of European-style traffic circles is prevalent; however, the driver on the inside lane generally has priority. A driver flashing his/her high beams is generally asking for a chance to pass.

Traffic laws are generally enforced, and the consequences for violating them may be severe by U.S. standards. For example, running a red light results in a mandatory, non-bailable

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detention for 48 hours, followed by confiscation of one's driver's license, vehicle registration, and car registration plate until the Omani judicial process is concluded, which may take several months. Other common traffic violations that carry strict penalties, up to and including jail sentences, fines, and/or deportation, include: driving without a license, driving under the influence of alcohol, failure to wear a seat belt, talking on cellular telephones (other than using hands-free technology) while driving, speeding excessively, overtaking (passing) a vehicle from the right lane, screeching a car's tires, or failing to keep one's car clean. Turning right on a red traffic signal is prohibited. In the event of a traffic violation/fine, drivers should cooperate with police officers, remaining respectful at all times, and should not attempt to pay or negotiate payment at the time of the traffic stop.

Those considering driving are advised to familiarize themselves with the Royal Oman Police's (ROP) procedures for handling road and traffic accidents (RTA) to reduce traffic jams, which are available on the ROP web site under "Minor Road Traffic Accidents." Minor RTAs are accidents causing minor damage to one or more vehicles that do not result in injuries, deaths, or material damage to public/private property. Parties involved in such accidents should immediately move their vehicles to the side of the road. Those involved in accidents outside the Muscat area are advised not to move their vehicles from the accident location until the ROP gives them permission; moving a vehicle may be interpreted as an admission of guilt.

Visitors should not drive without a valid license. Short-term visitors in possession of a valid U.S. driver's license may drive rental vehicles, but residents must have an Omani driver's license. Residents may insure their vehicles outside the Sultanate; however, third party liability insurance must be purchased locally. Remember to lock your vehicle doors and keep the windows rolled up anytime you leave your car unattended.

## Public Transportation Conditions

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The safety of public transportation is generally good. Many women avoid public shared vans. Taxis, mini vans, and small buses may swerve suddenly without signaling to the side of the road to pick up passengers with little regard for other vehicles. Many persons utilizing taxis negotiate rates for transportation prior to embarking to avoid disagreements for payment at conclusion of the trip.

#### Aviation/Airport Conditions

All airports in Oman adhere to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) guidelines on safety and security.

#### Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

#### Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Oman is an important regional counterterrorism partner and works actively to prevent terrorists from conducting attacks within Oman and from using the country for safe haven or

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transport of weapons/materiel. There are no indigenous terrorist groups known to be operating in Oman.

There have been no instances in which U.S. citizens or facilities have been subject to terrorist attacks. However, in August 2013, Embassy Muscat, along with over 20 other Embassies and Consulates throughout the Middle East and North Africa, suspended operations for 10 days because of concerns of a large terrorist attack emanating from al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) based in Yemen.

The most recent Message for U.S. Citizens regarding the potential for acts of terrorism in Oman was published on October 30, 2014, and informed the American community of a recent anonymous posting on an extremist website that encouraged attacks against American and other Western teachers in the Middle East. The message highlighted the need to remain vigilant and practice sound personal security habits.

The Department of State remains concerned about the possibility of terrorist attacks against U.S. citizens and interests throughout the region by known terrorist groups or "lone wolf" attacks by individuals sympathetic to terrorist causes. U.S. citizens in Oman are continuously urged to maintain a high level of security awareness.

## **Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence**

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

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## Civil Unrest

Spontaneous/planned public demonstrations can take place in response to world events or local developments. Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful have the potential to escalate into violence. Remain attuned to readily available English and/or Arabic-language media outlets and avoid public demonstrations. There were no large protests or demonstrations in 2015.

## Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

Severe weather conditions (cyclones, flash floods) average one or two occurrences per year. Infrequent inclement weather, including rain and sand storms, can cause traffic delays and accidents. In 2015, the Embassy disseminated information concerning Tropical Cyclones Ashobaa (June 10, 2015) and Chapala (October 30, 2015).

Oman's approximately 1,300 kilometer eastern coastline borders the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. Tidal currents between the calmer Sea of Oman and the larger, more turbulent Arabian Sea, cause strong rip tides, and undertows make swimming in open water dangerous. Public beaches in naturally occurring alcoves along Oman's coast tend to offer

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safer swimming conditions than areas with direct exposure to the Arabian Sea. Oman does not post lifeguards nor does it post signs warning of dangerous sea conditions.

### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Omani critical infrastructure is fairly well developed. All telecommunications can be shut down should the government deem it necessary for national security.

### Privacy Concerns

Oman security agencies maintain a robust ability to control and remotely monitor mobile phones and the Internet. Several websites that the government views as inappropriate (including pornographic sites) are actively blocked by Omani telecommunications agencies. While many individuals chose to utilize Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to circumvent restrictions, these too occasionally encounter interference. Visitors and residents should be aware of privacy concerns if transmitting business confidential or intellectual property information via telecommunications.

Additionally, items subject to confiscation at the airport because the content is considered culturally inappropriate include, but are not limited to, compact discs, digital video discs, and mobile phones. Any items that may be construed as intelligence gathering equipment, military gear, or electronics that are not off the shelf commercial items, run the risk of being confiscated. In all cases, the items were eventually released to their owners.

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Separately, individuals should be cognizant of protecting their passport and keeping it in a safe, secure location. If a passport is lost or stolen, the government of Oman requires the victim to advertise in local newspapers the loss of a passport before it will issue a replacement visa.

## Drug-related Crimes

Drugs are illegal. Drug use and crimes continue to be an issue. To better combat illegal narcotics, the ROP upgraded their counter-narcotics section from a Directorate to a General Directorate, which makes more resources available to ROP counter-narcotics enforcement. Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines.

## Police Response

The ROP is a capable, well equipped police force. Due to the generally safe environment, the ROP is more reactive than proactive in its law enforcement activities, and it generally does not act with the sense of urgency that many may be accustomed to in the U.S. The ROP rarely provides the U.S. Embassy specific details regarding local criminal or investigative matters unless it is directly related to the U.S. Embassy.

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## How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

While some countries will automatically notify the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate if a U.S. citizen is detained or arrested, that might not always be the case in Oman. To ensure that the U.S. is aware of your circumstances, request that Omani police and prison officials notify the U.S. Embassy as soon as you are arrested or detained. Anyone arrested may have limited opportunities to contact the U.S. Embassy for assistance and it should not be considered an “automatic” process. For Consular assistance, call +968 2464-3400 or email [ConsularMuscat@state.gov](mailto:ConsularMuscat@state.gov).

## Crime Victim Assistance

Please see our “Information on Victims of Crime” including possible victim compensation programs in the U.S.

## Police/Security Agencies

American companies may find it difficult to vet or otherwise verify personnel backgrounds for purposes of employment because of strict privacy laws and lengthy bureaucratic processes.

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## Medical Emergencies

Ambulance service is generally adequate with varying response times and operates throughout most of the country. It is recommended that you go to the nearest hospital or clinic yourself, when possible. For all traffic-related emergencies, call the Royal Oman Police at "9999."

Many hospitals may not accept international travel insurance and will require payment up front. Most major hospitals accept common credit cards.

### Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

The four main medical facilities in Oman are Khoula Hospital, Royal Hospital, Starcare Hospital, and Muscat Private Hospital. For treatment of major life-threatening emergencies, patients should be sent to Royal Hospital. Patients with major trauma (road accidents), serious bleeding, or burns should go to The Khoula Hospital and Trauma Center (located on Al Sultan Qaboos Street, the main highway through Muscat). All motor vehicle accident victims are to be taken to Khoula Hospital.

For pediatric and OB/GYN non-traumatic medical emergencies, go to Muscat Private Hospital in Ghubra.

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For non-life threatening emergencies or routine consultations, there are several private medical centers and medical providers available. It is strongly advised that all personnel identify and select a primary care physician and a pediatrician if required. Making this selection will enable you to establish a comfortable working relationship with a doctor before a true emergency arises.

The most updated information regarding medical care in Oman can be found [here](#).

#### Recommended Air Ambulance Services

American Jets, Inc Phone Work: +1-772-380-4167

Europ Assistance, Phone Work: +1-240-330-1523

Euro-Flite Finland, Phone Work: +358-20510-1900

International SOS, Phone Work: +971-4-601-8777

Medical Rescue International, Phone Work: +44 0 1962 735955

Tyrol Air Ambulance, Phone Work: +43 512 224 22 100

#### Recommended Insurance Posture

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All travelers should carry international travel insurance, including medevac.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:  
[http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/oman?s\\_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-double-001](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/oman?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-double-001).

## **OSAC Country Council Information**

The U.S. Embassy has a Country Council. To request more information regarding the Muscat OSAC Country Council, please e-mail [MuscatOSAC@state.gov](mailto:MuscatOSAC@state.gov). To reach OSAC's Near East team, please email [OSACNEA@state.gov](mailto:OSACNEA@state.gov).

## **U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information**

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

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## U.S. Embassy Muscat

Jamiat A'Duwal Al Arabiya Street,

Al Khuwair Area (Shatti Al-Qurum), in the capital city of Muscat.

Mailing address: PO Box 202, Medinat Al Sultan Qaboos 115, Sultanate of Oman,

Routine American Citizens Services are available by appointment every Saturday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. The U.S. Embassy is closed on Omani and U.S. holidays and Fridays and Saturdays. Open from Sunday to Thursday 08:00-17:00

## Embassy Contact Numbers

Telephone: (968) 2464-3400

In the event of an emergency outside of normal office hours, U.S. citizens may call this number for assistance. A duty officer is available 24 hours a day.

Facsimile: (968) 2464-3535

Website: <http://oman.usembassy.gov/>

## Embassy Guidance

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If you are going to live in or visit Oman, please take the time to tell our Embassy about your trip. If you enroll with STEP, we can keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements. It will also help your friends and family get in touch with you in an emergency. Here's the link to the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program.

## **Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

The following practical recommendations are aimed at enhancing your personal security when traveling throughout Oman.

Be alert, and immediately report any suspicious person or activity by dialing 9999 on any phone.

The State Department suggests that all U.S. citizens in Oman maintain an unpredictable schedule and vary travel routes and times whenever possible. Make yourself a hard target by avoiding a routine schedule. Unpredictability is one of your best defenses. This is one of the most effective deterrents to criminals and terrorists because they often conduct surveillance on an intended target for a long time before acting.

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Identify safe havens (places to go in an emergency) in areas where you frequently travel, e.g., police stations, hospitals, friendly embassies, etc. When in your vehicle, if threatened or an attack is attempted, take control and keep moving – do not stop. Leave the area immediately and try to reach one of your chosen safe havens.

Although Oman is a relatively safe environment, it is advised that women not travel alone during hours of darkness.

U.S. citizens are also urged to treat mail or packages from unfamiliar sources with suspicion. Unusual mail or packages should be left unopened and reported to local authorities.

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