

**In This Issue****Oman****The People**

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The Omanis are a proud people, but their pride is devoid of the arrogance frequently associated with awakening nationalism. They are also unaffectedly friendly towards strangers, despite their isolation of recent years — all of which adds up to the unique mixture called Omani.

The people of Oman are surprisingly cosmopolitan: a mixture of Arab clans swept together by the cross currents of migration, ancient and modern, and spiced with descendants of quite different peoples — Indian, Baluchi and African — from across the sea. Today, though, they are all Omanis, all speaking Arabic and all Muslims.

Although Arabic has long been their first language and Islam their main unifying force, there were, until recently, several quite different types of Omanis: those of coastal Muscat, those of interior Oman, those of southern Dhofar, and those of northern Musandam — diverse groups loosely held together by, and frequently at odds with, the sultan.

Oman's present ruler, Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id, has proved, however, that Oman can be unified, and, helped by vastly improved communications, is succeeding in persuading his people to set aside age-old differences and, for the first time, look upon themselves as one.

Today, as a result, differences in Oman are less marked than in the past. Although every Omani is still keenly aware of his lineage, and though marriages between cousins are still common, regional differences are characterized not by tribal rivalries but by custom and clothes.

The plain white, or solid blue or yellow, ankle-length dishdasha, for example, distinguishes the men of the desert and the towns from those of the mountains and shore, who prefer the colorful, sarong-type uzar. With women, too, their garments — the all-enveloping, black aba, or gay, silk dress and baggy pantaloons — show where they make their home. Two types of male headgear are found, however, throughout Oman: the white or colorfully-embroidered turban, and the eyleted kumma or skull cap.

Other varieties of dress suggest — in a different way — what is happening in Oman today. In the desert, for example, there are Omanis wearing the dungarees and safety helmets of the country's new — and vital — petroleum industry, while aboard patrol boats in the Strait of Hormuz (See page 36) there are Omanis wearing the berets and blue uniforms of its new navy, and in Muscat young women confidently direct busy traffic in the smart black-and-white uniform of Oman's mixed police force — all symbols of the country's re-emergence in a modern world.

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