

BRITISH SCHOOL SALALAH
New Staff Information Handbook

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Introduction

We are delighted you are joining British School Salalah! The enclosed information has been compiled from your colleagues' experiences living in Salalah, various publications, and information available locally. We hope that you will find this helpful in your transition to Salalah, Oman. Our goal is that you love living and working here as much as we do!

General Information

Oman, or officially the Sultanate of Oman, is one of the most prosperous countries in the world, and it is also quite massive. It is strategically located on the Straits of Ormuz, the country is very diverse, and you definitely won't feel out of place.

The capital is Muscat which is also the country's expat hotspot with over 1.3 million residents in the metropolitan area. Besides the capital, Salalah is the biggest city and attracts a large workforce due to its free zone and its cargo port. Given the size of the nation, certain areas have a diverse range in geography. Salalah is one such place. Since Oman is located in the Middle East, most of it is primarily sandy or rocky desert. Salalah however, can contain sprawling green land in certain areas.

Sultan Qaboos is Oman's ruler and came to power in 1970 making him the Arab world's longest-serving ruler. Salalah is also where the present Sultan was born, and therefore attracts a lot of visitors during special seasons.

The official language is Arabic although English, Hindi, Urdu are widely spoken. Arabic and English are the official business languages. If you are greeted with 'AS-SALAAM ALAIKOM' (Peace be with you), it is polite to answer with "WA ALAKOM ASALAM" (and Peace be with you).

The official weekend is Friday and Saturday. A working week at BSS is between 30-35 hours and runs from Sunday to Thursday, leaving Friday and Saturday as the weekend. This is largely due to Friday being a holy Islamic day when Jumu'ah prayers take place. Oman's working week is also largely observed in neighbouring countries Saudi Arabia and Yemen as well as Qatar. Government offices are open from 07h30 to 13h30 (Sunday to Thursday).

Oman's currency is the Rial (divided into 1000 baisa). An Omani Rial (OMR) is equivalent to roughly 2 British Pound Sterling (GBP).

Cultural Heritage

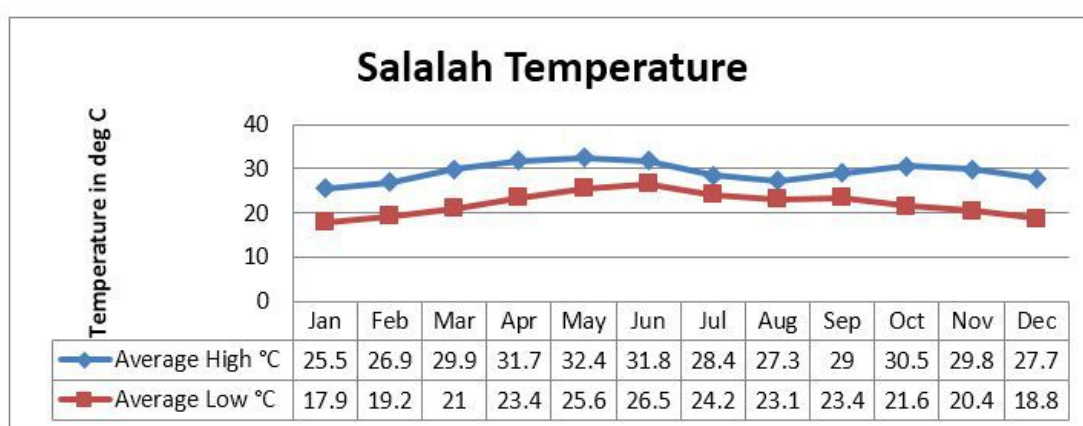
Oman's culture is firmly rooted in the traditions of Islam. Traditional dress is still worn among many local citizens and many Arabic cultural activities and sports are still practiced. Visitors are expected to exercise discretion with regard to dress code. Be aware of what could be offensive to the local population. Even though the Oman is a very relaxed place to live, always respect your hosts and abide by local regulations.

<http://www.omansultanate.com/culture.htm> - Essential things you need to know about the history and culture of Oman.

Weather

Salalah has serene and calm environment, which offers very pleasant and mild weather in the middle of a mostly desert terrain of the Gulf. Salalah's weather is best in the gulf region and open air activities can be done throughout the year.

The temperature is moderate throughout the year except in summer period when there is a drop in the temperature. The following table shows the Average temperatures in Salalah from January to December for both high and low temperatures.



Salalah Temperature

This indicates that there is a dip in the temperatures from the period June to September, when the temperature is soaring in the other Middle Eastern cities. This is one of the reason why significant number of tourists from the Gulf countries arrive in Salalah in this period.

Expatriate Community

45% of Oman's population are expatriates. Oman's success is based on the vision and commitment of its leadership along with the contribution and experience of over 200 nationalities. The streets, shopping malls and business areas are alive with numerous languages and cultures. **Do keep in mind that you will probably meet many people with different values and opinions.**

Public Holidays

Most of Oman's national holidays and festivals are based on the sighting of the moon rather than having fixed dates. You are entitled to all Omani public holidays and exact dates will be confirmed to you nearer the time subject to approval by the relevant Education Authority. However please be aware this can be frustrating at times as often Public Holidays are only confirmed very near the time which can make it difficult to make plans!!!

Important phone numbers

<http://www.dm.gov.om/ImportantNumbers.aspx?MID=37>

Salalah Police 23290099 | General Emergencies 999

Getting to Salalah

PLEASE READ THIS PART CAREFULLY

Required Documents

1. A copy of your Curriculum Vitae with your current address. This will be used to send you the Ministry of Education documents. The document will need to be completed and sent back to our PRO by post so we can start processing your work visa before you arrive.
2. **Passport:**
 - If yours is nearly full, get a new one now, the Omani Residence Visa takes up a whole page. You will almost certainly go abroad while living in Oman, which means two more Omani stamps, and for many destinations another full page visa plus entry and exit stamps.
 - Your passport must have a minimum of six months' validity in May; if not, you will need to renew your passport now before leaving home.

- If you decide on a new passport, please tell us immediately and we will not apply for your employment visa under the old passport details. We will need the new details as soon as possible. If your passport changes after the application has gone in, the whole process has to start again, **at your expense!**
2. **Degrees and qualifications:** copy of the highest degree or professional degree certificate and copy of your teaching qualification certificate duly apostilled (e.g. PGCE or BEd) if you are unsure on what needs to be apostilled (<https://www.gov.uk/get-document-legalised>) – contact the PRO now or;
 3. **Photos:** Photos must have a **white** background; this is a requirement for obtaining your Residence Visa. Ladies' shoulders must be covered for any photographs.
 4. **An official criminal clearance or certificate of good conduct** from your previous country of residence, dated within 6 months of arrival in Oman (<https://www.gov.uk/request-copy-criminal-record>).
 5. Business Email addresses for **2 Professional References**. For teachers one must be your current or most recent Principal or Head teacher.
 6. **Family related documents:** Marriage Certificate (need to be duly apostilled), Birth Certificates for children, Adoption documentation. You should be aware that for visa purposes Oman only recognizes formal marriages, and not cohabitation or civil law partnerships. You will be unable therefore to sponsor your partner for residency if you cannot provide an apostilled marriage certificate.
 7. **Nearest International Airport** in home country.

All the above information is essential for the application of your visa and for you to be formally registered with the relevant Ministry of Education. If you are unable to provide this information your visa application will be delayed and this can have serious implications on your employment.

Flights and Accommodation

Please continue to check your email frequently prior to departure. At this time you will be provided a plane ticket purchased by BSS. Please note that flights are booked for you only.

Airports in Salalah is very modern and usually relatively hassle free! Passport control can sometimes, however, take a long time.

When you enter Oman, please make sure that your passport and your work visa print-out are both stamped by the government official. If we have not finalised your employment visa, you will be issued with a return ticket and will enter Oman on a tourist visa. Please do not be concerned, this is a common practice.

We recommend that you purchase a “pay-as-you-go” Omani SIM Card as you exit from arrivals from the Ooredoo or Omantel sales stand so that you can make your first call home.

Once you arrive, a member of the Senior Leadership Team and Admin team will be at the airport to meet and greet you, and you will be taken directly to your apartment to settle in. **As you are unable to organise your first month's stay in Salalah the school will organise this for you and debit the amount from your accommodation allowance from your first salary only.**

The school will do its best to assist you with finding a property to rent. There are many vacant buildings around the city and outside. It's important to note that some landlords will require a month's rent and deposit upfront. **If you have any questions regarding accommodation please contact the school.**

There will be some basic food, bread, tea, coffee, etc. for you at your school-provided accommodation when you arrive. We will also help you find essentials, like shops to equip your accommodation and make sure that you get a ride to school for the first two weeks until your own transportation is organised.

When you arrive, you will obviously need access to cash and local currency. **You will receive your baggage allowance in cash shortly after arrival.** British Pound Sterling or US Dollars are easily changed to Omani currency. Teller machines are readily available using your home credit card. If you intend to use this facility, please ensure that you inform your Credit Card Company or Bank in advance. This is a security precaution and takes just a few minutes to confirm. Many people have had problems using credit cards until they have informed their banks back home that they have moved and would be purchasing items in another country.

Although your accommodation is furnished, you will need to stock up on food and general household supplies. It is unlikely that you will be able to survive until pay day which is the last working day of the month – please make sure you bring or have access to adequate money for this period.

What to Bring

To a large extent this has to be your own choice—you could travel light and buy what you need when you get here, or you could freight all your worldly goods by sea or air, but remember that there is only a limited baggage allowance, as stated in your offer letter. Your accommodation will have air conditioning, stove, fridge, washing machine (not a dryer), basic furniture including easy chairs, curtains, dining table and chairs, beds and bedside tables, and adequate storage in the kitchen. Your new linens will be provided. Should you choose to bring linens from home, keep in mind that Oman uses

metrics for its linens so other sizes (e.g. American) will not necessarily fit the bed.

If you wish to ship your personal goods, please ensure your shipment gets here a few weeks after your arrival as you will need a Residence Visa to receive the shipment, the School cannot take delivery of your goods and there are no facilities to store them. Expect Customs to open a few boxes, but they will re-seal them. They may show an interest in books and may retain DVDs for a week or two for inspection. Locked cases and trunks are likely to be opened for inspection. Your cargo agent will put you in touch with a handling agent in Oman who will handle the matter for you. Check carefully with your agent and get a written quote. You can then collect it yourself, or pay extra to have it delivered. Make sure that you have the Bill of Lading number (sea freight) or Airway Bill number (air freight).

It is wise to bring digital scans/photos (4x6 cm) and other copies of your passport, work visa, etc.

You may like to bring with you a supply of your favourite toiletries, however brand names are readily available here in supermarkets, department stores, and shopping malls. They can be slightly more expensive than at home. Keep in mind there are a lot of medicines that are ILLEGAL to bring into Oman e.g. codeine. Please check that if you are on any medication that it is not an illegal drug. In addition, any prescribed medications should be accompanied by your doctor's letter explaining that they are prescribed and why.

Electrical and electronic goods of all kinds are available in abundance. The voltage here is 220/240, 50 hz utilizing 13 amp sockets with 3 square pin plugs. This is the same as the UK which means that electrical goods from the UK will work absolutely fine with no adaptor needed however anything from the US with a plug can be either inoperable or challenging.

Pets are not encouraged in company provided accommodation. Most tenancy agreements specifically state no pets but the buildings often turn a blind eye. If the pets are well behaved and no neighbours complain then you should be fine although some apartments won't allow dogs in to the apartment building so smuggling dogs in and out of building can be difficult. If there is a complaint then the landlord will say the tenant is in breach of contract. You will find that Oman is not a pet friendly country with dogs banned from beaches and public areas. It is very different from home.

Vaccinations

It is a good idea to get these up to date, not so much for living in Oman but rather for the places you may visit during your time here. Many African countries, for example, require a valid Yellow Fever certificate. Check with your own doctor. There are no obligatory vaccinations required for your entry

and residency in Oman. Clinics here are able to provide all the necessary vaccinations that you may require in the future at your expense.

Mail address and telephone codes

Your mail can be sent to you directly at the school. This is a very common practice as there is no mail delivery system, unless you particularly want your own box number. All postal mail is delivered to the School P.O. Box number, one of our drivers visits the postal authority.

You will be allocated a work email address here at school when you arrive to work.

The country telephone code in Oman is +968

First weeks in Salalah

Residence Visa & Oman ID card

The Visa is granted by the concerned authority at its discretion, and at the request of a local sponsor. For the employee's children: Their age must not be above 21 calendar years. (Note: Their residence permit expires when they reach this age)

In order to start the residency process and receive the Oman ID card employees must enclose the following documents:

- Two photographs size (4X6) cm.
- Copy of the passport, provided it is valid for a period not less than six months.
- Copy of your family passport/s if they are joining you.
- A proof of the family relationship must be enclosed (e.g. Birth Certificates for children).
- For the spouse, an original conformed copy of the marriage certificate must be enclosed. **The document must be apostiled by her country's embassy.**
- A medical fitness and screening certificate issued by a local medical practice and police station. Our PRO will manage appointments. The screenings include fingerprinting of all ten fingers, an eye scan/digital photograph, a chest x-ray, and a blood draw. The blood test is done to check for any transmissible diseases such as HIV/Aids, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C, Syphilis, Leprosy while x-ray of chest area is done to check for Tuberculosis (TB), those with previous scars of TB or any of the mentioned diseases are not eligible to get their Omani Residence visas. Therefore, if you think you are suffering from any communicable disease, it is advised to review it first in your home country.

Approximately 10-14 days after you have received your residence visa you should receive your Omani ID card. You will be contacted and notified that it is available for pick-up.

Visit, Employment and Residence Visas – What’s the Difference?

Employment Visa – this temporary visa is the first step to obtaining residency, and is what you will have to enter Oman in August.

Residence Visa – after you enter Oman, BSS will apply on your behalf for a Residence Visa. This is the permanent visa that is put in your passport and is valid for two years. After the two years it is renewable. Once you have the Residence Visa in your passport, you may go ahead and start the process for sponsoring your spouse/child(ren) if applicable.

Tourist/Visit Visa – Visitors to Oman from the UK, US, Australia and many other countries can enter the country, and will automatically be issued with a 30 day Visit Visa to travel around Oman. If your Employment Visa is not ready for you upon arrival into Oman, you will be notified, and you will have to enter on a Tourist/Visit Visa. Should a visa trip out of Oman to update your entry stamp be necessary this will be arranged and paid for by the School.

Forms and Documents

You are moving to a foreign country. That means there is a fair amount of government documentation that needs to take place. You will spend time standing in line for licenses, etc. but there is no point in getting stressed about this. Always be courteous, and do not show your frustration or get angry. Take a book to read, resign yourself to a lost morning and you may be pleasantly surprised at how quickly you are through! The entire process can be quite frustrating and time consuming, but is essential, so, just take a deep breath and for your own sanity take a calm and philosophical approach to the entire process.

At various stages you will need the following – copies of your employment contract, copies of your passport (the details page and, when you have it, the Omani Residence Visa page), and assorted letters that may be obtained from BSS. You also need plenty of passport photographs. It is a good idea to carry all the above with you when applying for something.

Please remember that until your residency is finalised, you will not be able to:

- Buy a car (car rental or longer term leasing may be necessary for up to four months)
- Obtain a Omani driving licence (you can drive in Oman with your US/ UK/South African license only if you are on a tourist/visit visa, if you enter Oman on employment visa, please don't drive without a Omani license!

- Purchase a monthly billed “post-paid” mobile phone
- Acquire a liquor licence
- Open bank accounts

Driver’s license & transportation

If you are a national of the UK, US or many other countries (please see the link below for the full list of countries) and have a valid license from that country (bring the original with you!) you can obtain a Omani license without undergoing anything except an eye test and gathering of paperwork. Our PRO will support you with this process.

In Salalah the license can be obtained from **Dhofar Traffic Police** Dhofar Governorate. Phone: +968 23 27 96 98/+968 23 23 40 20

DRIVE SAFE AND WE RECOMMEND TO FASTEN YOUR SEATBELT AT ALL TIMES! TO TALK ON MOBILE PHONES WHILE DRIVING IS DANGEROUS AND ILLEGAL.

Taxis are at times difficult to get hold of but are good value while you are waiting for your licence. The number for Salalah Taxi is: 99143222, <http://salahahtaxi.com>

Public transportation in Salalah can at time be unreliable. For this reason, most of our staff have either rented or purchased cars or hired a personal driver. The cost of a small rental car per month starts at roughly 150 OMR.

Telephones, TV and Internet

The local telephone company is Ooredoo Oman (<https://www.ooredoo.om>). Provided you have all the documents, the process is straightforward, just line up at various desks in turn.

Ooredoo Oman can be reached on (+968) 95011500 from a Ooredoo number when you are travelling outside Oman and by dialling 1500 locally.

Omantel can be reached on (+968) 24242424.

Utilities

All utilities in your rented accommodation will have been connected prior to your arrival. You don’t need to do anything about electricity and water (except pay for it!). Teachers are responsible for paying their own utility bills. The water is treated and drinkable, but not to everybody’s taste. Bottled water (local) is readily available. Further information on this will be shared by the letting agent. Some landlords will provide utility charges as part of the contract.

Banks

Salaries are only payable in Omani Rial and direct-deposited into a Omani bank account.

To open an account, you will need to complete the current account opening process by personally visiting a bank branch or Customer Service Center, with the following documents:

- Original passport
- Valid residence visa
- Original Omani ID (OR the printed, completed application)
- Proof of Omani residence in the form of employment letter

The good life in Salalah

A few months on and most of the seemingly onerous obstacles are now cleared out of the way. With familiarity comes the appreciation that Salalah is a fantastic place to live. The accommodation is good, and often includes gym and pool and the city itself is colourful with a great variety of things to see and do. People are invariably friendly and whilst you must not be overly careless, it is still a secure and safe place to live.

Nightlife & Events

Given that Oman is a very conservative and traditional country, the nightlife is quite subtle and very low-key. Despite that, there are a few pubs and clubs where you can enjoy a good night out on your weekend. Alcoholic establishments are pretty much exclusively located at the many hotels and resorts that are scattered throughout the region. Although Salalah might not be as notorious as Dubai, there's much beauty to be seen, and the nightlife also contains many charms.

There are a varieties of events that occur throughout the year in Salalah including the Salalah Half Marathon. The biggest event however is the Salalah Tourism Festival. The festival is part of Khareef (monsoon) that extends from the end of July until the beginning of September.

Sun, sand and sea

As well as its lush green pastures, Salalah is renowned for its stunning collection of beaches, which feel almost Caribbean with their coconut trees and relaxed vibe. Salalah has excellent hotels, beaches & spa resorts for those who like to spoil and indulge themselves. There are numerous private beach clubs with 5* resorts that you can join.

There are plenty of public beaches in Salalah as well! - <http://www.beautifulsalalah.com/stunning-white-sand-salalah-beaches/>.

Wildlife

Salalah have vast areas of wildlife to explore, what with the *wadis*, mountains, and the deserts stretching out for miles around. *Wadis* are dry riverbeds following the course of seasonal streams and rivers through rocky valleys naturally carved out by flood waters.

The wide range of wildlife includes the spinner dolphins and rich variety of whales that frolic off the coast, and ospreys, terns, steppe eagles and crested honey buzzards that can be seen in the mountains around Salalah. Oman is also home to several endangered species, many of which are protected by reserves established by royal decree.

Shopping, Eating and Drinking

Shopping malls and supermarkets are generally located close to residential areas. The major mall in Salalah is Salalah Gardens Mall (https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g298419-d5790546-Reviews-Salalah_Gardens_Mall-Salalah_Dhofar_Governorate.html).

Al-Husn Souk – The souq, spread over a number of alleyways next to the sultan’s palace, flaps with colourful cotton headdresses, smoke with aromatic frankincense and sparkle with imitation jewellery. This is a good place to see how the Omani hats are made.

The main chains of supermarkets are Carrefour and Lulu. They are open daily from 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m. On Fridays most supermarkets are open all day, and the shopping malls are open from 10:00 a.m. till midnight.

Living in an Islamic country

Although many religions make their home in Oman, the majority of our residents are Muslim.

Dress and general deportment is worth a mention—while it is not easy to quote specific rules it is nevertheless unwise and discourteous to dress or behave in a way that might give offence to the devout. Scanty clothing (except on the private hotel beaches) is best avoided. Omani locals tend to dress conservatively with men generally wearing an ankle length collarless gown called a dishdasha and women a long black dress called an abaya. Oman’s shopping centres generally have signs clearly placed around them warning of the dress code expected.

The following website is highly recommended reading. It provides some dos and don'ts that will help you to integrate seamlessly into Oman life:

<http://www.atanahotels.com/blog/10/omani-cultural-do-s-and-don-ts> -
Essential DOs and DONTs in Oman.

You probably won't remember half of this information but don't worry – just ask any staff member or expat for help/advice. We are all pleased to help you and believe it or not, you will start finding your way around and soon become familiar with landmarks, roads and shops.

We look forward to meeting you!