

Over half the population of Kuwait is non-Kuwaiti. The same situation applies in Qatar, to a lesser extent in Oman and Bahrain, and to a greater extent in the United Arab Emirates, where it is thought that 80 per cent of the population are non-nationals. Major expatriate groups, found at all levels of business, are from Palestine, Egypt, Iran, India and Pakistan.

Religion and Social Customs

All the Gulf States are Muslim, although a large number of Christians are present. During the holy month of Ramadan, which varies from year to year, working hours are reduced. Business activities slacken off, and it is not usually a profitable time to visit on business.

The main social customs for Canadians to be aware of are the following:

1. Muslims are forbidden by their religion to drink alcohol.
2. Traditional-style meals and food should be taken with the right hand.
3. Arabic coffee, or tea, when offered, should be taken and the cup returned with the right hand only. It is considered impolite to refuse the first cup, but additional cups may be refused.
4. Pork should not be eaten in the presence of Muslims.
5. A knowledge of the more common Arabic greetings is useful, especially at preliminary business meetings.

Many women in the Gulf States still wear the veil. It is not customary for wives to accompany their husbands to social functions, although this practice is changing. At institutes of higher learning in the Gulf, women now outnumber men. They are taking their place in the civil service and in business. Canadian businesswomen can come to the Middle East on business, although they need to be sensitive to the former traditional all-male environment.

It is customary to address all government ministers, the president of a chamber of commerce, and other dignitaries as "Your Excellency." The appellation "sheikh" is normally applied exclusively to members