

# Countries of the Middle East

## Some interesting things about the Middle East that you might not know!

**Afghanistan**-Poetry is an important part of Afghan culture, and the famous Persian poet Rumi was believed to have been born in what was Persia and is now Northern Afghanistan.

**Bahrain**- Bahrain is an island nation in the Persian Gulf. It was the first country in the Gulf to discover oil, and it is estimated that its oil reserves will run out in ten to fifteen years.

**Lebanon**-Lebanon has a special government system called confessionalism. The President must be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of the Parliament a Shi'a Muslim.

**Egypt**- Egypt is famous for its ancient civilizations and landmarks, like the Giza pyramids and Great Sphinx. Although it is a large country (about the size of Texas and California combined) most of it is 76 million people live on only about 5.5% of its land- the land along the Nile river.

**Iran**-Known as Persia until 1935, Iran is about the size of Alaska.

**Iraq**-One of the original wonders of the world, The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, is located near present day Al-Hillah in Iraq.

**Israel**- Israel is the only predominately Jewish state in the world. It was founded in 1948 and is about the size of New Jersey.

**Jordan**- The Dead Sea is a salt lake which borders Jordan. Its shores are the lowest point on the surface of the Earth.

**Kuwait**-Kuwait is a rich country due to its oil reserves. But before oil was discovered, many of the locals made their living from "pearling" (harvesting and selling pearls).

**Oman**-Oman is the only country in the Middle East ruled by a Sultan.

**Pakistan**- More than 60 languages are spoken in Pakistan. Urdu is the national and official language and Punjabi is the most commonly spoken language. English is the lingua franca (language used between people who don't share a "mother tongue") and language often used in business transactions and in government.

### *Did You Know...?*

*Several countries in the Middle East and Asia end with the suffix "stan" such as Pakistan or Afghanistan. In the Ancient Persian or Farsi languages, "stan" means "land of" or "place of", so Pakistan means "land of the Pakis" or literally "land of the pure"*

**Qatar**- Pronounced "cutter", Qatar occupies the Qatari Peninsula, which juts 100 miles into the Persian Gulf. Foreigners with temporary residency status make up about three-fourths of the total population of about 1.5 million.

**Saudi Arabia**- Saudi Arabia is the world's leading oil exporter, and also contains the holiest places in Islam- the cities of Mecca and Medina.

**Syria**- Syria contains the ruins of the ancient city of Palmyra (known as Tadmor in ancient times), which is mentioned in the Bible in several places, notably as a city built by King Solomon.

**Turkey**- Northwest Turkey contains the ruins of the ancient city of Troy, where the famous Trojan War was thought to have been fought sometime between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century BC.

**United Arab Emirates**- Though normally associated with oil and gas exports, the UAE is becoming a tourist attraction featuring among other things the Dubai mall, the largest shopping mall in the world, and Dubailand (currently under construction), which will be the largest collection of theme parks in the world.

**Yemen**- Socotra is a small group of four islands, located in the Indian Ocean, that belong to Yemen. Due to their geographic isolation, these islands have a very unique biodiversity. It is thought that about one-third of the islands 800 or so plants are unique to the islands and do not exist anywhere else.

*See if you can find each country on a map!*

