



## ABOUT THE AREA

YOU may have read or heard about the unrest occurring in such countries as Egypt and Syria recently, where clashes between government forces and the people have arisen. Mention of Jordan as a possible honeymoon destination for the recently married royals, Prince William and Catherine Middleton, has also been revealed in the media. As part of our World Whereabouts tour, we thought we would travel to the northern hemisphere to visit the Middle East and learn more about its history, its people and the special places that are found in the area where Africa, Asia and Europe meet. Opinions vary as to what countries make up the region known as the Middle

East but based on modern economic and political trends and for the purpose of our trip, we will stopover in Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. (The Gaza Strip and West Bank are territories within the Middle East controlled by the Palestinian National Authority.)

## AN ANCIENT AND MODERN HISTORY

THE ancient lands of the Middle East have been documented as early as 6000 years ago when the Sumerian civilisation urbanised the area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers known as Mesopotamia. The Egyptian, Babylonian, Hittite and the last of the great ancient Middle Eastern empires the Persians, all were thriving cultures that developed the area. Later, the Byzantine, the Sassanid and the Arab empires reigned.

The most recent was the Ottoman Empire which controlled the region for approximately six centuries. European intervention in the politics of the Middle East reached its height after World War 1 when Britain and France, as part of the League of Nations mandate system took control. A few Middle Eastern states (Iran, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia) achieved independence in the 1920s and 1930s while the remainder gained their autonomy between 1944 and 1971.

Since then, political stability in the region has been affected by internal and external factors with coups, civil wars, revolutions and intervention by foreign powers complicating life.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

COUNTRY	CAPITAL	POPULATION	CURRENCY	OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	GOVERNMENT
Bahrain	Manama	656,397	Bahraini Dinar	Arabic	Constitutional monarchy
Cyprus	Nicosia	792,604	Euro/ Turkish lira	Greek / Turkish	Presidential Republic
Egypt	Cairo	77,498,000	Egyptian Pound	Arabic	Semi-Presidential Republic
Iran	Tehran	71,208,000	Iranian Rial	Persian	Islamic Republic
Iraq	Baghdad	31,001,816	Iraqi Dinar	Arabic, Assyrian, Kurdish	Parliamentary Republic
Israel – -Gaza Strip -West Bank	Jerusalem Gaza Ramallah	7,465,000 1,376,289 2,500,000	Israeli new sheqel	Hebrew/ Arabic	Parliamentary democracy/ Palestinian National Authority
Jordan	Amman	6,407,085	Jordanian Dollar	Arabic	Constitutional monarchy
Kuwait	Kuwait City	3,100,000	Kuwaiti dinar	Arabic	Constitutional monarchy
Lebanon	Beirut	4,224,000	Lebanese pound	Arabic	Republic
Oman	Muscat	3,200,000	Omani Rial	Arabic	Absolute monarchy
Qatar	Doha	793,341	Qatari riyal	Arabic	Constitutional monarchy
Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	23,513,330	Riyal	Arabic	Absolute monarchy
Syria	Damascus	22,505,000	Syrian pound	Arabic	Presidential republic
Turkey	Ankara	73,914,000	Turkish Lira	Turkish	Parliamentary democracy
United Arab Emirates	Abu Dhabi	5,432,746	UAE dirham	Arabic	Federal Constitutional monarchy
Yemen	Sanaá	18,701,257	Yemen Riyal	Arabic	Semi-presidential republic

## THE LANDSCAPE

THE seven million sq kmh of physical landscape in the Middle East is varied. Vast areas of desert with a low average rainfall of around 11cm a year, contrasts the long coastlines and large river systems that support many communities. From the snow capped mountain ranges with peaks up to 5 700m, to the Mediterranean, Caspian and Black Seas, to the rich agricultural rivers of the Tigris, Euphrates, Jordan and Nile river systems, the Middle East abounds with a diversity that is both harsh and beautiful.

## THE PEOPLE

THE 350 million people living in the Middle East and can be differentiated by of ethnicity, religion and national identity. They follow a variety of customs, practice different beliefs and speak diverse languages.

## TRAVEL

SOME areas in the Middle East carry travel warnings and bans due to unrest however most countries are quite safe, friendly and welcoming. There are many interesting destinations to visit. Ancient cities and historic buildings mark the passage of time from ancient worlds to modern civilisations. You can trek through the desert dunes by camel, snorkel the coral gardens of the Red Sea, cruise down the, float in the Dead Sea, or stand among ancient ruins or a lush oasis. Visitors who choose to travel there have a most rewarding experience.

## LET'S TALK

DEMANDS by citizens for greater participation in the running of their countries has led to civil unrest in some places in the Middle East. The response from the rulers of these countries has been intense and there has been foreign intervention. How do the media portray these events? Should outside forces get involved?



**NEXT WEEK: MATHS MIND**