

OMAN

YOUNG

A new Omani generation



Photos: Umberto Coa, Nicolò Panzeri, Vanessa Vettorello, Serena Vittorini

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Sur. Al Hassan Salah Al Mokhaini, aged 17, rides his family's horse. A student of Islamic History, he also loves to ride.

Everybody loves the moon. We love it for its splendour, its beauty and how it climbs high in the sky. So, I'd like my nation to rise up high and shine just like the moon. And for everyone to come to love Oman like we do.

Maisa Al Hooti, 30, underwater photographer

On 10 January 2020 Qaboos bin Said Al Said died in Oman. Qaboos is recognised as the enlightened Sultan who, exactly fifty years ago, began the country's journey towards modernisation, rapidly transforming it into a developed, geopolitically neutral nation that is open to the West. And this year, in 2020, the country will commemorate this fiftieth anniversary.

In 1970 Qaboos bin Said Al Said overthrew his father and began a process of reforming Oman through substantial investments in healthcare and education. One of the key results of this development can be seen today in the demographic data: 65% of Omanis are younger than 25 years of age. But what are their lives like? What do they think? What are their dreams?

This portrait of the nation is the work of four young photographers who explored the country, following different itineraries with a view to telling the story of a nation balanced between the past and the future. They did so through the stories and experiences of the new generation, the engine of this change: from the creative and digitalised youth of Muscat to the youngsters of the rural areas involved in family businesses, from successful athletes to professionals in the tourism sector. All of them have a forward-looking outlook, as well as great respect for the traditions of their country.

The project was produced in collaboration with the Oman Ministry of Tourism.



Nizwa Souk. Oman's most popular souk, famous for its Friday cattle market and for its array of spices, silver, copper, dates and handicrafts.



The traditional Omani greeting.



Al Ayjah.



Muscat, Gutech University. A workshop on Infrastructure Engineering. Students laugh during a team building activity related to environmental engineering: a model bridge made of spaghetti has just collapsed.



Muscat, Boshar.



Muscat, Grand Hyatt. Areej Al Balushi (32), influencer and blogger. Since 2015, her Instagram profile has accumulated almost 250,000 followers. At the beginning it was just a private account she used to share content related to beauty and fashion, then it became a second job – by day she works full time in a bank – which gave her the opportunity to travel frequently. “A positive aspect of social media is that they are able to break down barriers and make the world smaller and within reach.”



Muscat. Firas Al Bakri (27), music producer. "I came back from Dubai, after studying there (film making and PR), and I asked myself: is there a possibility to create a music scene in Oman? I went to a concert of my current partner (Omani singer) Akram Masruri and thought 'I want to work with him'. Together we decided to film a documentary while making our music. We wanted to show people what it means to create an English language album in the Middle East from scratch."



Birkat Al Mouz. Picking dates in a palm grove. There are more than 100 varieties of Omani dates; the most prized variety are the *halas*.



Muscat. Ali Al Sharji, photographer.



Muscat. Students at Gutech University: Nada (19), Dana (18), Sara (18), Laura (18) and Fatma (18). Nada says that her family is very open when it comes to religion. For her family her education is very important, but at the same time she is completely free and independent. With respect to the future she believes that she will become an important figure and sees herself as a leader, someone who can inspire new generations and help them.



Sur, Khor Al Batah.



Sinkhole. Amer Hammed Al Sulamani and Qusai Khamis Algazali.



Sur. Daya Said Al Daoodi, aged 19, comes from a poor family that received state assistance. He now works as a taxi driver and likes his job very much because it allows him to meet different people from different countries every day.



Bahla Fort.



Muscat. A pupil of a girls' school in her uniform.



Muscat. Ossama Mohamed Khedir (25), has lived in Egypt and Oman. "I'm waiting to get Omani citizenship, it takes a long time because there are many people waiting. With Omani citizenship, things are going to change a lot: you have lots of privileges, you get a plot of land where you can build a house or you can work for the government." He says that Oman is a respectful country where the rule of law is paramount. "There's no violence at all. Young people are happy."



Muscat. The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque is open to non-Muslim visitors from Sunday to Thursday, 9 – 11 am.



Wadi Tiwi. Mubark Said Mubark, aged 25, comes from a poor family and is now a tour guide. He studied until the age of 14 then decided to stop in order to concentrate on working with animals. Less tied to traditions, he rarely wears the traditional Omani dress.



Muscat, Fishmarket. Health Inspectors Haitham, 36, Zakareya, 31, and Balaes Mohammed, 25.



Muscat. Sabrina Busaidi, aged 28, is a young Omani artist and co-founder of "The Community", a platform that sponsors young artists in Oman. "Omani artists have so much potential, they should be supported so they can work better and get the recognition they deserve. Oman could become a important centre for art." Sabrina studied fine art in Malaysia.



Sur, Khor Al Batah.



Al Hamra. Mohammed Saif Alabri (25), studied Engineering in Muscat where he now works in an oil refining company. His great-grandfather was the head of the village and his house was abandoned in 1996. Today that same house, which is 400 years-old, has become a museum thanks to a renovation project started by Mohammed's family. He tells me how many old houses are now being turned into tourist accommodation thanks to the initiative of young locals.



Muscat. A PE class in a girls' school in the centre of Muscat. This public school has approximately 1000 students and 100 teachers.



Nadhira Alharthy, aged 41, is the first Omani woman to have climbed Everest and is the director of the Citizenship Department at the Ministry of Education. The day Nadhira scaled Everest was her 40th birthday: she had wanted to do something different as a gift to herself. It was very hard, she stayed in the mountains for 2 months to get used to the lack of oxygen. It was cold, everything was different, she was not a professional climber: she just had a dream.



Birkat Al Mouz. Harvested dates in a palm grove. There are more than 100 varieties of Omani dates; the most prized variety are the *halas*.



Al Ayn village. Abdullah Bin Mohamed al Riyami, 35, works for the Ministry of Defence. In his spare time he takes care of the fields that belong to his family, situated at an altitude of 2000m in the Jebel Akhdar region. Electricity arrived here in 1997 and in 2003 he and his family were the last Omanis to leave the village. Abdullah really loves and respects nature. To protect his plants from parasites he uses organic products that the Government provides to farmers.



Muscat. Hamed Al-Mahrooqi, aged 36, is an auditor in Quality Management, HR at the Ministry of Education and a runner in his free time. Hamed usually wakes up at 4.30 am to run, then he works till 3.30 pm; then goes running again, spends time with friends, and after a healthy dinner, reads and goes sleep. He joined a big group called "Muscat Road Runners", composed of Omanis and expats. He likes multiculturalism and spending time with people from different backgrounds.

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