

Gulf Arabic Programme Guide For Applicants



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1. Introduction

This document is designed for those who are considering attending the Gulf Arabic Programme (GAP) to study Arabic. It is not meant to be an exhaustive source of information. However it is hoped that this will be of some help in guiding the applicant. For information on the institute, the best starting point is the institute web site at <http://www.gapschool.net/>.

The information provided in this document was correct at the time of writing to the best of our knowledge. Prices and details change without warning and the Gulf Arabic Programme cannot be held responsible for any errors or inaccuracies. We strongly recommend that you verify details with the appropriate authorities before making any arrangements.

2. The Institute

2.1 Purpose

The purpose of the Gulf Arabic programme, under the auspices of My Language Institute, is to provide quality Arabic Language teaching to people planning to work in this part of the world. A student who has completed the full course should be proficient to the Advanced Level (ACTFL) in the four language skills, for example he/she will be able to:

Speaking

- Discuss topics of current and personal interest;
- Handle most situations of daily life;
- Narrate and describe in smooth paragraphs;
- Make factual comparisons;
- Handle arrangements regarding study and travel, involving minor complications, e.g. losing documents, missing an appointment *et cetera*.

Listening

- Understand topics of current and personal interest when talking face to face;
- Understand everyday topics, well-known current events, routine matters *et cetera*;
- When listening to two native speakers converse will often be able to understand conversation by comprehension and inference.

Reading

- Read multi-paragraph materials of a factual nature;
- Read articles from popular newspapers on familiar subjects.

Writing

- Correspond with Arabic friends;
- Join sentences in simple discourse of at least several paragraphs on familiar topics;
- Write narratives and descriptions of a factual nature.

In addition the student who has successfully completed the course will be able to continue to learn in all these areas through normal usage. There is also be a cultural component where students will learn about Gulf culture and traditions.

2.2 Location

The programme is located in [Al Buraimi, Oman](#), which is just across the border from the city of [Al Ain, United Arab Emirates](#).

We recommend that students live in Al Buraimi, where rent is much cheaper and language learning opportunities are greater. As the visa and border situation also remain fluid, it is generally to the students' advantage to live in Al Buraimi, Oman.

Al Ain and Al Buraimi are approximately a two-hour car drive from both Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

3. Philosophy

Our philosophy is as follows:

- A primary goal of the programme is oral communication – students are encouraged to get out and speak Arabic as much as possible.
- Attitude of students is paramount. Students need to be motivated, willing to be active learners, and willing to take risks.
- Attitude of teachers is also important. Teachers are encouragers, nurturing yet firm and proactive.
- **Study at GAP is a full-time job and students need 40 hours per week of language work.**
- There are 20 hours of class time and another 20 hours of deliberate language focus outside of class each week.
- The progression to next level of the programme will be contingent on mastery of previous level.
- There is minimal use of English in class.
- For couples, there is an emphasis on both husband and wife learning as much as possible.

This is a serious, full-time language programme, leaving little time for other activities. Language learning is difficult. You will need to come ready for some challenges. We are committed to helping you through this process, and we look forward to meeting you and working with you.

4. Teaching Staff

We only employ native colloquial Gulf Arabic speaking Arabs as teachers to teach colloquial Gulf Arabic. Also our Modern Standard Arabic course is taught by teachers who are native Arabic speakers as well.

5. The Course

5.1 Content

The course focuses on conversational Gulf Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic (for reading and writing). It also includes studies in Arabic culture and history. If you are a Muslim and wish to learn Arabic primarily so that you can understand the Qur'an, our course will not suit your requirements.

The Gulf dialect we teach is based on what is spoken in the UAE and Oman. If you have already learned some Arabic elsewhere, it will be different from what is spoken here so you will need to come with an open mind and be ready for some changes.

We teach classical Arabic (MSA) from the beginning of the course but in conjunction with the spoken Arabic. If you have studied some MSA before we will assess you and suggest options.

More detailed information on the courses can be obtained from our web site.

More advanced students will be tested to allow the possibility of entry into a more advanced class. However, please note that the course contains both Gulf dialect and MSA elements. Students will need to have attained sufficient levels in both of these aspects of the Arabic language in order to qualify for direct entry into a more advanced class. The institute provides intensive programmes in Gulf dialect Arabic for those who may have attained a higher level in MSA but have little or no colloquial Arabic. We often have students arriving with more MSA than colloquial (or vice versa). Please contact us for more details.

5.2 Classes

The maximum number of students in a class is 12 and we will run two classes if there is a larger number of students registered to study. This applies to all levels of our programme.

5.3 Schedule

The first year of our programme consists of two, 18 week semesters with classes being held 5 days a week, (Sunday to Thursday). Students will spend 4 hours in formal classes each morning for a total of 330 hours each semester.

The second year of our programme is also based on two, 18 week semesters with classes being held 4 days a week. An additional study day is included to expand the more advanced students' capacity and opportunities to get out and utilise their spoke Arabic.

In addition to time in class, students are expected to spend 2-4 hours a day in private study, practicing and preparing for classes. As students progress through the programme they will be expected to spend more and more time in 'community learning', spending time with local people, so that by the end of the course a student may visit local friends and neighbours nearly every day. **This is a rigorous full-time programme.**

Once the student has started the programme, acceptance into the next 18-week module is not automatic but is conditional on successful completion of the previous module. A student whose achievement falls

short of the required level will not be offered a place in the next level but may, if they wish, retake the module they have just completed.

New semester intake takes place in February and September each year. Regular, scheduled breaks are made at approximate six week intervals along with a two to three week break between each semester. The summer months are not scheduled for the full-time programme and offer students an excellent time to travel around area as well as practice speaking with a larger group of people.

National holidays will be followed as well as day off for Eid Al Fitr, Eid Al Adha, Easter and Christmas. Please see the [web site](#) for the precise dates for the current academic year.

5.4 Cost

The tuition fee for each 18 week module is 1,070 Omani Rial (OR) and does not include materials. Payment is due the first week of the semester. Students have a two-week period (from the first day of semester) during which they can opt to leave the course and only pay for those lessons they have studied. After that period no refunds will be given. Changing to private class and *applying the remaining balance to those private classes* is considered a refund and will not be allowed after the first two weeks. The institute reserves the right to change the tuition costs and the costs of course materials without prior notice.

5.5 Short-Term courses

The institute offers a short-term intensive course in colloquial Gulf Arabic for beginners every July. Please see the [web site](#) for more details. In addition, we run a number of private classes year round which are tailored to the requirements of various groups of individuals. Please contact us for more details.

Additionally, private and refresher courses can be scheduled subject to resource availability. Details are available on request.

6. Students - Rules and Expectations

A full copy of the rules are available online and both current and prospective students are expected to have read them before proceeding further.

6.1 Academic Expectations

We require no academic qualifications for entry into the programme, however students will need a functioning level of academic English of approximately high intermediate level in order to use our Modern Standard Arabic books which are published in the U.S.

We expect full participation in all parts of the programme. The programme includes games and activities, as well as grammar and reading, writing and translation work and also studying Arab culture and history.

Student absence is disruptive for classes and adversely affects the student's Arabic learning, especially early on in the course. For this reason we ask that you arrive a month before the semester starts in order to have time to be completely settled. In the past, some students have arrived less than a month before the beginning of a semester and have then found that they are still settling in and finding their feet when the semester starts.

You should not organize visits from family and friends during a semester, as this will be a distraction to you and will affect other class members as well. You should not go on holidays, business trips, retreats or conferences during the semester. Your absences also affect other class members.

Students agree not to organise classes with language helpers or teachers from the institute outside of the language programme.

6.2 Dress and Behaviour

Out of courtesy for our hosts, we observe certain standards of dress and personal conduct. In public men should wear long pants and shirts which are buttoned or T-shirts. Clothes for women should cover the elbows and ankles, unless you intend to wear long trousers underneath. Hemlines above the knee, halter necklines and bare shoulders are not acceptable. Further details are outlined in the institute rules.

This is a Muslim country and culturally acceptable behaviour is different from most western countries. It has a family centred way of life, which protects the role of women. Contact between men and women is often controlled and limited.

We do not want offend our hosts or jeopardize our continuing existence by attracting unwanted publicity through our appearance or behaviour.

7. Applying for the Course

We do not guarantee a place in the programme. In order to be considered for enrolment a prospective student must complete an [on-line](#) or hard copy application form no later than one month before the semester starts. If the application is received by the director less than a month before the start of a semester, the application may have to be delayed until the following semester.

If a place is offered, the student must confirm acceptance of this place by delivering a deposit of 110 OMR to the institute before the semester is due to begin. The deposit is nonrefundable but counts towards the first semester's tuition. To ensure these criteria are met, we recommend that you send the deposit using XpressMoney (<http://www.xpressmoney.com/>), Western Union (<http://www.westernunion.com/>) or via bank transfer.

8. Children

8.1 Preschool

The institute does not provide any childcare/crèche facilities. There are various childcare and pre-school options available in Al Buraimi. Additional information available on request.

8.2 School Age

In order to send a child to any school, residency is typically required. If a student does not have a residence visa from a sponsoring company, then home schooling maybe the only option for their children from grade 1 and older. Some exceptions are made and would need to be discussed directly with the school.

9. Visas

9.1 Rules & Guidelines

The first thing to say about visas and the rules governing them is that the only consistent factor is change! Rules and guidelines change regularly and the information given below was true to our knowledge at the time of writing. We cannot guarantee anything and accept no responsibility for inaccuracies. The information given is meant as a guideline for when you approach the Omani embassy in your country, which is something we strongly suggest you do.

It is therefore likely that most students at the Gulf Arabic Programme will initially be studying on visitor's or tourist's visas. Some nationalities can obtain a visa (in reality simply an entry stamp) at the border, others need to apply in advance. Either way students will need to periodically leave the country and re-enter. This can be the same day and such a trip is referred to as a 'visa hop'.

The cost to stamp out of the UAE is AED 35 and the cost to stamp into Oman is 20 OMR.

9.2 Nationalities who do not require a visa in advance

Some nationalities can arrive at the airport and immediately receive permission to remain in the country. Others will need to apply for a visa in advance. It is advisable to contact the Omani Embassy in your home country for more details. Additionally, many nationalities can apply for 12-month, multi-entry visit visas from the Omani Embassy in your home country or through the Online Visa Application Service of the Royal Oman Police prior to departure.

9.3 Visa renewal options for those who do not require a visa in advance

For those who can obtain a visa on the border, you will need to leave Oman every 30 days or renew it at the police station (1 time per visit). Oman visit visas are 20 OMR and are valid for 30 days and can be renewed once for an additional 20 OMR / 30 days. The cost for a 12-month multiple entry visit visa is 50 OMR per person/year.

Driving across a land border is often the cheapest option given our proximity to the Oman/UAE borders. One can simply enter Oman and remain for 30 days [and renew for 30] before having to stamp out and stamp into the UAE.

The Emirati and Omani border posts are in different places so this procedure takes somewhere between one and one-half to two hours. We can help you to learn how to do a visa hop after your arrival. Taxis between the two borders will cost approximately 3-5 OMR and travel time will be +30 minutes one way.

9.4 Residency Visa

For those students who already have residency in the UAE, crossing over into Al Buraimi requires stamping out of the country and applying for an Oman tourist visa. For students who already have residency in Oman, the UAE will require a valid tourist visa to enter Al Ain.

9.5 United Arab Emirates

We recommend that students live in Al Buraimi while studying at GAP. The border arrangements between Oman and the UAE are often highly erratic and unpredictable. Rules and guidelines for entry visas change regularly. The information on this page is for guidance only and should be checked with the Emirati embassy in your home country.

The following nationalities do not need a visa prior to entering the **UAE**:

Andorra, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hong Kong, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Monaco, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Portugal, Qatar, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United States, Vatican,

A 30-day entry stamp will be provided at the airport. Another 30-day stamp can be obtained by leaving and re-entering the country. This procedure is known as the visa hop and it is widely practiced here. For those living in Al Buraimi/Al Ain, the easiest and cheapest visa hop is done by road and takes around two hours.

Visa requirements vary from country to country and change regularly. We advise you to contact the Oman and UAE embassy in your country and us to verify visa rules for your nationality.

9.6 Oman

Even though there is a UAE border post between Al Ain and Al Buraimi, the Oman border post is about a half-hour drive from Al Buraimi toward the city of Sohar. Trips into Oman are desirable for both visa renewal and sight-seeing. Visas are required for entry but the same list above can purchase an Omani visit visa at the border post for 20 OMR (30 days).

10. Medical Issues

Health care is not free in Oman or the UAE. However, the standard of health care is very good, and there are good medical facilities if you get sick.

No inoculations are required for entry into Oman or the UAE. Make sure you are up to date on all the standard inoculations (DPT, Tetanus, *et cetera*). You can get most medicines here. If you are unsure about the availability of any particular medicine, please contact us.

11. Living

11.1 Housing

We recommend that students live in Al Buraimi while studying at the institute. Students can theoretically live in either Al Ain (UAE) or Al Buraimi (Oman). Rent is extremely expensive in Al Ain and a residence visa is required for renting there. On top of that the current visa situations requires stamping out and applying for an Omani tourist visa which is on a daily basis a time and cost consuming procedure.

In Al Buraimi the rent is much lower, by as much as one-fourth to one-sixth the cost, and residence visas are not required. Students who come for shorter periods of time can stay in regular hotels or furnished hotel flats (apartments) in Al Buraimi. Furnished hotel flats are a kind of long-stay hotel. A flat (apartment) might typically consist of one or two bedrooms, a bathroom, a small kitchen and a small living room. Furniture would consist of the basic necessities plus a television. Rooms would be cleaned and linen replaced every two days. The rental for such a flat would be around 20 OMR per night for only a room and bathroom and 30 OMR per night or more for a two bedroom flat with a kitchen, bathroom, and sitting room. There are cheaper, but not very nice options as well. Please contact us for more details.

Students who stay for longer periods of time can live in furnished or unfurnished flats (apartments) or villas (stand alone houses) This will significantly lower the cost of rent as well as provide an opportunity to live in an Arab neighbourhood which is more conducive to learning Arabic. Unfurnished housing is about 150-400 OMR per month, depending on whether you want a two bedroom flat or a three bedroom villa. Housing is normally rented for at least a year and payments 6 months in advance is standard practice. Houses in Al Buraimi are usually unfurnished, though furnished two bedroom flats are sometimes available.

If a property is described as furnished, it usually includes Air Conditioners, beds, large kitchen appliances, washing machine and table. It is a good idea to confirm exactly what is included and covered with regard to furnishings as well as repair and upkeep.

Another reason to live in Al Buraimi rather than Al Ain is the opportunity to meet locals. Omani's tend to be much more approachable than Emirati's plus it is easy to live in Omani neighbourhoods in Al Buraimi. Students will be expected to spend a significant amount of time with locals practicing speaking and listening, this will be much easier to achieve in Al Buraimi.

11.2 Setting up house

The following are some example costs for setting up a house. Please note that this list is not exhaustive but is only intended to give an idea of the prices of a selection of items. Prices are for new items, given in Omani Rial [1 OMR \approx US\$ 2.63] . Items can sometimes be bought second hand.

- Refrigerator 75-150
- Stove/Cooker 80-400
- Countertop Range 40-150
- Large toaster oven 100
- Automatic Washing Machine 75-150

- Air conditioner (one needed per room) 150-300 (per air conditioner)
- Arabic Living Room 130
- Single Bed (with mattress) 100+
- Double Bed 140+
- Kitchen table and 4 chairs 80+

11.3 Monthly Utilities

Monthly utilities cost about 20-50 OMR for electricity, and 10-20 OMR for water. In the summer the electricity bill can triple (or more) due to the Air Conditioners. Housing with air conditioners is not standard in all accommodation.

11.4 Local transport

Taxis are widely used. A typical trip in Al Buraimi is 0.500 OMR (500 Baisa). Living in Al Buraimi and studying at the institute, you can probably get there and back for about 1 OMR (500 Baisa each direction) per day. If you have children it would probably be best to buy a car, though this is only possible with a residence visa. Second hand cars are available from around 1,500 OMR.

11.5 Telephone

Local phone calls are relatively cheap. In Al Buraimi telephone lines can be rented by anyone willing to pay the deposit, but can be difficult to get back at the end of service.

International calls are more expensive. Evening rate to US for example is about 0.400 OMR (400 Baisa) per minute.

Mobile phones are a reasonable option and prepaid service can be purchased even by those on visitor's visas. Every long-term student and most short-term students ends up buying at least one mobile phone while studying here.

11.6 Internet

In Al Buraimi the Internet Service Providers (ISP) are the national telephone company, Omantel and the private Qatari company, Ooredoo. Those without Omani residency/sponsor must usually pay a deposit of 100 OMR (approximately AED 1000) or you can purchase a prepaid card which allows you to only pay for the time you use. High Speed Internet costs vary by the enrolled package. See the above websites for more details.

More recently, many students have opted to use 3G mobile internet service over traditional landline services.

There are internet cafes in both Al Buraimi and Al Ain.

11.7 Food

If you do not eat out you can get by for 250 OR a month for a family with two kids. About 80-90 OMR per adult. If you limit the number of expensive imported items this figure could be reduced further.

However, it is possible to eat out very cheaply, depending on how flexible you are in your restaurant requirements.

11.8 Security

It is quite safe to live here in Al Buraimi. The crime rates are very low. Preventative maintenance (locking doors, shutting windows, leaving a light on *et cetera*) will negate most security problems.

12. Driving

Driving here is not for the faint hearted. They drive on the right hand side of the road and are usually sensible. There are a few curious laws that one needs to be aware of before taking to the road.

To own a car one must have a residence visa. Car rental companies may or may not rent without residency or a license accepted here.

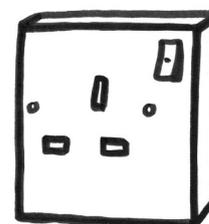
International Driving Licenses are essentially a translation of your home license. Its validity in Oman or the UAE will depend on the governments' acceptance of driving licenses from your home country.

13. General Information

13.1 Electric and Water

The electricity supply is 220-240Volt, 50 Hz. Most outlets are three-prong receptacles like those used in the UK.

Water is available from the city in most locations. A few outlying villas will require water to be hauled in by tanker truck (4 OMR / 2500 litres).



13.2 Money

Local Currency in Oman is the Rial (OMR). The UAE Dirham is also accepted in Al Buraimi.

The Omani Rial is pegged to the dollar at \$1 = 0.380 OMR.

For approximate exchange rates to your home currency, please check online.

Debit and credit cards are accepted in many larger shops and by ATMs. ATM's often charge a service fee and an international currency conversion fee for withdrawals.

14. Some Useful Websites

Here are some helpful hyperlinks that will give you information about the Arabic language, travel plans, and general knowledge about the UAE.

Gap Institute – <http://www.gapschool.net/>

Embassies, foreign departments *et cetera*:

- British Embassy, Abu Dhabi – <http://www.britain-uae.org>
- U.S. Embassy, Abu Dhabi – <http://usembassy.state.gov/uae>
- US State Dept – <http://www.state.gov/travel/>

15. Frequently Asked Questions

15.1 How long has the institute be running?

Our first class started on January 6, 2001.

15.2 Can I hold a job (full-time or part-time) while attending this institute?

No, the programme will be full-time and will take 35-40 hours per week.

15.3 Can I get a visa at the airport?

Contact the Emirati embassy in your country for visa information. However, a number of nationalities can now obtain a visa on entry. The institute may be able to help you with this after you've been accepted.

15.4 Are flats furnished or unfurnished?

Both are available in Al Buraimi. The institute is able to provide some details on prices for different types of furnished/unfurnished residences.

15.5 What kind of visa will I get?

Contact the Omani embassy in your country for more information. If you are with a company or organization, please ask them to contact us.

15.6 Is it possible to obtain a resident's visa?

Yes but it takes time and money. There are work visas and investor visas which can be obtained through free trade zones in the UAE.

If I have a Visitor's or Tourist Visa, will I be able to

15.7 ...buy a car?

No.

15.8 ...drive a car on my home licence?

The legality of driving a car on the license from your home country depends on your nationality.

15.9 ...obtain an Omani/Emirati driving licence?

It is not possible to obtain an Omani/Emirati driving licence without a residence visa.

15.10 ...rent a fixed phone?

In Al Buraimi this is possible but you may need to pay a large deposit.

15.11 ...subscribe to a mobile phone?

Yes, see the relevant section before.

15.12 ...get internet?

Yes, see the relevant section before.

15.13 Could someone register my vehicle under their name?

Yes, if you know someone who is willing to assume the responsibility for the car registration it is possible. However, residents of Abu Dhabi are only allowed to register one car so the only car they could own would be the one you are driving. Residents of Dubai can own two cars and would probably be more willing to do this for you. Residents in Oman can also register another car. Obviously the restrictions regarding driving licences would apply.

15.14 Will I be able to work during the holidays?

It is illegal to work in the Emirates or Oman without an employment visa.

15.15 Can I get around without a car?

Yes, taxis are easily available and fairly inexpensive. Car costs are similar to the USA, however fuel costs are lower.

15.16 I am a Muslim and would like to be able to read the Qur'an in Arabic and learn about

Islam

We concentrate on the spoken Arabic of the gulf area which differs considerably from Qur'anic Arabic. We do study Modern Standard Arabic, which will help in reading the Qur'an but if this is your main goal you would be better off on a course devoted to this. Islam can only be taught by suitably qualified teachers.

