



HotellerieSuisse | Switzerland.



Swiss Hospitality for Guests from the Gulf States



Imprint

Publisher

HotellerieSuisse, Berne, and
Switzerland Tourism, Zurich

Layout

www.bloomidentity.ch

Photos

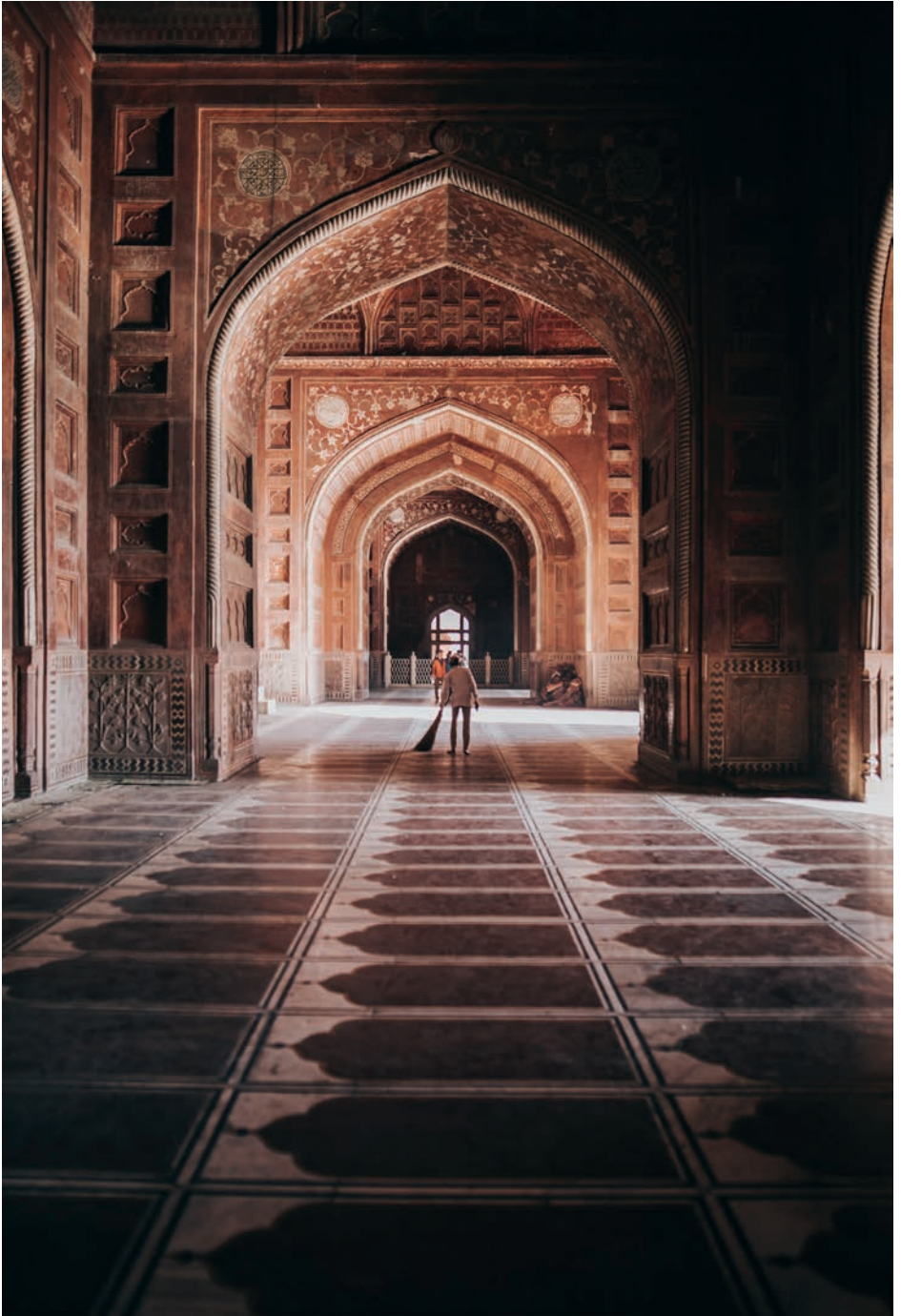
Switzerland Tourism
Nikkol Rot, cover; Ivo Scholz p. 16;
Mattias Nutt p. 13
unsplash.com: p. 2, 4, 7, 10, 19, 23
iStockphoto.com: p. 15

Languages

German, French, English

Berne, June 2019

- 2 Foreword**
- 4 General information about the Gulf States**
Historical summary, economy, education
- 8 Characteristics of the culture and religion**
Islam, ritual cleansing, prayer times, holidays and celebrations, dress codes, family, language, interesting facts about Islam
- 12 Questions for Rania Younes**
Radio presenter at Star FM, Abu Dhabi
- 14 Business practices and customs**
The Arabic trader, hierarchy, public relations, Arabic business partners, give-aways
- 16 Arabic guests on holiday**
A strong increase in trips abroad, profile of Arabic guests, guests who love to spend, tips
- 18 Questions for Matthias Albrecht**
Switzerland Tourism, Director GCC
- 21 Swiss hospitality for Arabic guests**
Guests with high expectations
- 21 Leisure activities**
Excursions, sports activities
- 22 Eating and drinking habits**
Tips
- 25 Contact details**



Foreword

First of all choose a travel companion and only then choose where to go.

Arabic proverb



1 Claude Meier
2 Martin Nydegger

As a hotelier, having guests from both near and far is nothing new for you. However, when guests come from foreign cultures, it really does help if you have knowledge of your visitor's traditions and practices. This helps to ensure that misunderstandings are

avoided and makes the stay as smooth and pleasant as possible for both you and your guests. This is where the brochure "Swiss Hospitality for Guests from the Gulf States" really comes into its own!

During the years 2012 to 2018, the number of overnight stays by guests from the Gulf States in Switzerland increased by 82 per cent. And for the next 20 years or so, it is anticipated that there will be a continuous increase in the number of guests coming

to stay here from the Gulf region. The very high temperatures which many of these guests experience in their own countries, often lead those who can afford it to travel abroad in search of a cooler climate for a few months. With its pleasant climatic conditions, its scenery and its high standard of living, Switzerland is often considered to be an appealing travel destination. Switzerland's reputation as being a clean, orderly and safe country which opens its arms to people from all sorts of cultural backgrounds, supports that ever-growing demand.

Those guests visiting from the Gulf States spend far more money on average than all other tourists who come here. Luxury, the latest technology and excellent services are run-of-the-mill expectations for such guests. Therefore, as they travel through Switzerland, they have very high expectations in respect of hospitality.

In this brochure, which has been newly revised by HotellerieSuisse and Switzerland Tourism, you will learn how best to make your guests from the Gulf region feel welcome. In addition to containing interesting information about the culture, religion and outlook of these guests, this brochure contains many useful tips and much practical advice for your day-to-day business as a host.

We wish you most enjoyable reading and exciting encounters with your guests from both near and far!



Claude Meier
Director of HotellerieSuisse



Martin Nydegger
Director of Switzerland Tourism





General information about the Gulf States

Historical summary

When we talk about the Gulf States, we are referring to the following six neighbouring countries in the Persian Gulf: Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Apart from the KSA, the Gulf States were all British colonies. The UAE were the last state to finally achieve independence in 1971. In 1981, the six states established the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), in order to shield themselves from the impact of the Islamic revolution in Iran (1979) and the outbreak of the first Gulf War (1980). The GCC endeavours to promote collaboration in the areas of foreign policy and security, and seeks the promotion of economic and social relations. All six countries have a relatively high level of prosperity.

Foundation

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), 25 May 1981

Registered office

Riyadh (KSA)

Official language

Arabic

Gulf States

Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, KSA and UAE

Bahrain

Capital city: Manama

Form of government: constitutional monarchy

Area: 750 km²

Population: 1.6 million

Qatar

Capital city: Doha

Form of government: emirate

Area: 11606 km²

Population: 2.7 million

Kuwait

Capital city: Kuwait-City

Form of government: constitutional hereditary monarchy

Area: 17818 km²

Population: 4.2 million

Oman

Capital city: Muscat

Form of government: absolute monarchy (sultanate)

Area: 309500 km²

Population: 4.8 million

KSA

Capital city: Riyadh

Form of government: absolute monarchy

Area: 2149690 km²

Population: 33.6 million

UAE

Capital city: Abu Dhabi

Form of government: constitutional monarchy

Area: 83600 km²

Population: 9.5 million

Economy

The GCC is the main trading partner of the European Union in the Arabic world. It accounts for around half of the total trade with the Arabic states, and about 5 per cent of the overall export of the European Union to third countries. The GCC is an important export market for Switzerland which has the potential to grow even further, thanks to the free trade agreement. Measured in terms of trade volume, the GCC countries are Switzerland's third largest trading partner, after the European Union and Japan. Switzerland exports mainly machinery, watches, pharmaceutical products as well as precious stones and jewellery. Due to its enormous oil wealth and its population of about 33 million, the KSA is the heavyweight within the GCC. The other Gulf States are considerably smaller when considered from a territorial and market-size point of view. Thanks to their oil and gas reserves and an internationally oriented tourism sector, however, they still enjoy economic importance.

A large proportion of the population in the GCC countries is young or comes in the form of migrant workers from abroad.



Education

Literacy in the Gulf States amongst youths amounts to between 99 and 100 per cent. These countries have discovered education to be an important raw material in respect of the economic future and invest in a broad range of continued and further education programmes as well as in research. At the same time, foreign knowledge is also imported. For example, large investments have been made in tertiary education in the KSA (King Abdullah University Jeddah), Qatar (through the Qatar Foundation) and in the UAE.

Key economic indicators and demography 2018

	KSA	UAE	Oman	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain
GDP (billion USD)	769.9	432.6	81.7	144.5	188.3	39.3
GDP per capita (USD)	23200	41500	19200	31900	67800	26500
Population (million)	33.6	9.5	4.8	4.2	2.7	1.6
of which <14 years (in %)	25.7	14.4	30.1	24.8	12.7	18.9
of which >65 years (in %)	3.3	1.5	3.6	2.6	1.1	3.1
of which foreigners (in %)	10.0	88.4	44.1	69.6	88.4	54.0
Population growth (in %)	1.6	1.4	2.0	1.4	2.0	2.2
Life expectancy (rounded)	75.7	78.7	75.9	78.3	79	79.1

Source: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database (October 2018), www.cia.gov, www.worldpopulationreview.com



Characteristics of the culture and religion

Prayer Time

Fajr – dawn

Dhuhr – noon

Asr – afternoon

Maghrib – sunset

Isha – night

Other rules apply for those who are travelling: Fajr, Dhuhr and Asr can be bracketed together in one single prayer, as can Maghrib and Isha. In such cases there are two prayers per day.

Islamic holidays

2019 / 2020

Ramadan (the beginning of the month of fasting):
6. 5. 2019 – 4. 6. 2019
24. 4. 2020 – 23. 5. 2020
The Ramadan Festival
Eid al-Fitr (Festival of Breaking the Fast):
5. 6. 2019 / 24. 5. 2020

Eid al-Adha
(The Festival of the Sacrifice):
12. 8. 2019 / 31. 7. 2020
Islamic New Year:
31. 8. 2019 / 20. 8. 2020
Ashura:
10. 9. 2019 / 30. 8. 2020
Mevlid / Milad / Mawlid an-Nabi (birthday of the prophet Mohammed):
10. 11. 2019 / 29. 10. 2020

Please kindly note that some holidays may vary by one day, based upon differing calculation factors.

Islam

The element which binds the entire Gulf region together is Islam. In order to enjoy good relationships with your guests and understand their customs and traditions, it is absolutely necessary to have a basic knowledge of their religion. Islam is more than just a religion. In the GCC countries, a clear separation between society, politics and religion, as we know it in the western world, simply does not exist. The degree to which Islam is interpreted in the social and political order of things, varies from country to country within the Gulf States. For example, there is a large cultural difference between the KSA – where Islam regulates almost everything – and the other GCC states.

Prayer times, the ritual cleansing and eating habits are important elements in the life of a practicing Muslim, which he cannot do without even when travelling.

Ritual cleansing

In order to be allowed to perform the ritual prayer (salat), a ritual cleansing ceremony, known as Wudu, has to be performed. The Muslim believer washes his hands, face, neck, his arms up to the elbows and his feet up to the ankles.

Prayer times

Islam prescribes set prayer times. These are dependent on the position of the sun, which is why the times themselves shift daily. The prayers themselves take a few minutes of the day and are undertaken on clean surfaces or prayer mats facing in the direction of Mecca. It is generally the case that a prayer is to be said between two set prayer times.

Holidays and celebrations

Islamic festivals are calculated according to the lunar calendar. The festival of the sacrifice at the time of the pilgrimage to Mecca is an especially important event for Muslims, just as is the festival of Eid al-Fitr at the conclusion of the month of Ramadan. The holidays in the Islamic lunar calendar move ten to eleven days each year and are held throughout all seasons of the year. The beginning of the month is determined by the first sighting of the new moon. This means that the dates listed may actually differ in reality by a day.

Dress codes

Viewed from an outward appearance, the traditional Arabic-Islamic lifestyle expresses itself in the almost uniform clothing of both men and women. A long white dress called the dishdasha or thawb, is

usually worn by men from the Gulf States in the summertime. In winter, this is replaced by cream, brown and grey colours. On top of the thawb comes the abaya or besht which is thick in winter and thin in summer. Men wear head-coverings known as ghutrah or shemagh. This may be white (mostly in the Emirates and Qatar), white/red or white/black (mostly in Saudi Arabia) and white/gold (mostly in Oman). This headscarf is often secured by use of the agal, a black rope circlet. However, Arabs from the Gulf States also wear European and trendy clothes when they are abroad.

Apart from in the KSA, there are basically no dress codes for women. Muslim women are noticeable in the western world through wearing their scarves (hijab) or by partially hiding their faces (by wearing a niqab). Women from the Gulf States often wear an abaya, which is a long, black robe worn either with or without a niqab. A veiled woman can indicate that she has a close relationship to the Islamic faith, but many women from the Gulf States wear their abaya to conform to social expectations and standards. This can be seen, for example, when only a part of the head is hidden. There are also women who go out without wearing a headdress.

Arabs are proud of their literature and respond very emotionally when quotes and recitations from their literature are made.

Name and origin largely determine the hierarchical classification in society.

Family

The family is an important part of Arab life. The man is the head of the family. Older people are always shown great respect. Children also enjoy high status within Arabic society. Social and family background dominate the fabric of Arabic society.

Language

The Arabic language is one of the six official languages of the United Nations. Over 422 million persons speak it in 22 Arabic countries, and numerous countries in Asia and Africa speak it too. As the fifth largest language in the world and the language of Islam, Arabic has become a universal language. Typical of the Arabic script is the way in which it is written from right to left.

Welcome	Ahlan wa sahlān
Good day	As-salamu aleykum
Good morning	Sabah al khayr
Good evening	Masa'a al khayr
Good night	Tusbih ala khayr
Thank you very much	Shukran
Please, excuse me	Afwan
Goodbye	Ma'a salamah
Allow me, permit me	Law samaht
A pleasant stay	Iqama saida
OK, agreed, readily	Hader!
Just a minute!	Daqiqq!

In your conversations, address both the man and the woman. Veiled women speak often for themselves, without the intervention of their male companion.



Interesting facts about Islam

The Koran

The Islamic sacred book consists of the revelations of Muhammad. Not only does it contain spiritual aspects, but also regulates the day-to-day duties and responsibilities of Muslims.

The official "Sunday" is the Friday. Almost everyone is off work on that day and the travel agencies are closed. It is a must for all believers to come together for the midday prayer.

Please avoid making critical or unsympathetic comments about Islam, the prophet Muhammad, the Koran or Sharia law.

The five basic obligations of Muslims

- Profession of faith (shahadah): "There is no God except Allah, Muhammad is the one sent by Allah."
- Ritual prayer (salat): said in the early hours of the morning, at noon, in the afternoon, at sunset and after nightfall.
- Charity (zakat): alms-giving for the poor and needy.
- The fasting month of Ramadan (sawm): eating and drinking is prohibited from dawn till dusk. At the end of the month of fasting, the big feast of Eid al-Fitr is celebrated.
- Pilgrimage (hajj) to the holy city of Mecca (KSA), which must be undertaken by every Muslim at least once in his life.

All obligations are valid for both men and women. However, there are very many exceptions to these obligations, especially for older people, those suffering with health problems, Muslims who are travelling, etc.

Sharia

The term sharia refers to Islamic law. It contains all the laws which are to be observed and kept in an Islamic society (wealth laws, family and succession law, criminal law, etc.). The sharia is based on the Koran and upon the traditions of Muhammad which were handed-down from the 7th century.

“People in Switzerland are unique and very proud of their country.”



Rania Younes,
Radio presenter
at Star FM, Abu Dhabi
www.adradio.ae

What are the values which particularly distinguish Arabic culture?

RY: Hospitality, solicitude, privacy.

What would Arabic guests like to experience when they travel to Switzerland?

RY: Nature, lovely weather, mountains, lakes, touristic old towns, hotels with a beautiful and peaceful background setting. Some love to go shopping, especially when there are great bargains to be had (such as in outlets, for example).

Have you ever had a holiday in Switzerland yourself?

RY: Yes, more than once. And I love this country.

Is there anything which has particularly stayed with you from your time in Switzerland?

RY: I travel to Switzerland every year and I always return home filled with wonderful memories. When I first read this question, I immediately thought about the “Grand Tour of Switzerland” which involves travelling from place to place and experiencing all four seasons in one single day. Nature here is extraordinary, the hotels are beautiful, the people in Switzerland are unique and very proud of their country. They take care of every little detail and explain to you everything about where they live. The magnificent nature experienced in Switzerland exerts a powerful attraction. Whether travelling by train or by car, everything is perfectly organised, and visitors can find their way around easily.

What do you think about Swiss hospitality?

RY: I have enjoyed amazing experiences here. I have stayed in many hotels and I cannot think of a single time when we did not enjoy ourselves. There are those hosts who show you so much special care and attention that you build up a personal relationship with them. And there are others who make sure that you enjoy your own privacy. Both variations have their plus points. Personally speaking I like it when I meet people, because it helps me to emotionally connect to the place and I am always ready to return there the next time to enjoy what is on offer.

Have you got any tips for us about how Swiss hotels can improve yet further when looking after guests from the Gulf States?

RY: When you have an overview of the hotels available in the region, that helps to show the special features of each hotel, for example; the location, the area, restaurants and other special attractions, etc. And Switzerland Tourism certainly does its very best to make this possible.

"I travel to Switzerland every year and I always return home filled with wonderful memories."

Rania Younes



Business practices and customs

The Arabic trader

Arabs are natural-born traders and as such, they are well trained in the art of “reading a person”. It is therefore recommended that you show no trace of weakness, impatience or other kind of emotion when dealing with them. They expect you to be well prepared when it comes to doing business together. As traders, Arabs are risk-takers. This willingness to take risks, however, is restricted to business life.

Hierarchy

Arabic society has a hierarchical structure and differences in the social order are readily accepted. Whether a person is status-conscious or not is dependent upon their family, their relationship to the state or an organisation as well as to their knowledge or financial situation. The business world is predominantly a man’s world. A very important concept for Arabs is the matter of face-saving, whether that is in business or in private life. It is therefore advisable to avoid expressing criticism in public.

Public relations

Arabs are less individualistic than Europeans and feel at home when they are in a group. Nevertheless, when it comes to doing business, people are often more important than the firm. A good business relationship is only possible when a good personal relationship exists. Arabs view time-keeping more casually than Europeans, which can prove challenging in business relationships. Patience is the key to success.

Cultural dialogue

Arab communication is characterised by nuances and indirect speech. It is based on rhetoric, exaggeration and repetitions. Many Arabs use the tactic of hiding behind a higher authority and therefore give no clear and definitive answer: such as a supervisor, the family, the country, or for example, even God by use of the expression “Inshallah” (by the will of God). It is sometimes even the case that you may receive no reaction at all from them in your business dealings. However, this is neither positive nor negative.

Arabic business partners

In doing business with Arabs, it is recommended that you find out whether your business partner is legally authorised to handle the transaction. It is also good to find out who the real decision-maker is. This is not necessarily the main contact person or the chief negotiator. In the Arabic world, middlemen have an important

Do not be disturbed if your conversations are interrupted by other people.

function. They are influential key people who represent other people, open doors and solve problems.

When making a gift, it is not appropriate to offer alcoholic beverages, sexually explicit images and statues, or presents which could damage a person's sense of national pride.

Give-aways

Arabs love to receive presents. It is customary for business partners to exchange gifts. Gifts should always be valuable and have a positive meaning. There is no taboo in relation to colours, shapes or content, as long as the gifts are compatible with the rules of Islam. Honey and typical Swiss souvenirs are extremely popular.



Arabic guests on holiday



Their naturally tough environment and their religious principles make the Arabs very hospitable people. Likewise, they also expect a high degree of hospitality when they travel to other countries.

A strong increase in trips abroad

Between 2012 and 2018, the number of overnight stays by guests from the Gulf States increased by 82 per cent. The very high temperatures in their own country are taken as an opportunity to travel to cooler regions for a few months. The summer months (May to September) are therefore the most popular travel times. The guest from the Gulf States is usually very well off. He is used to being taken care of and to buying for himself certain freedoms using considerable sums of money. Luxury, state-of-the-art technology and excellent service are a basic expectation. Together with high quality and well-equipped hotels, the Arabic guest expects above all that respect be shown for Islam and its customs and habits. Switzerland's reputation as a clean, tidy and above all safe and hospitable country, lends support to these expectations.

Guests from the Gulf States appreciate warm smiles, friendly welcome greetings, tolerance toward children and patience.

Arabic tourists from the Gulf are rather young. In Switzerland, some 57 per cent of the tourists from the Gulf States are between 16 and 35 years of age.

Average daily expenditure by overnight tourists in Switzerland

Country	CHF
Gulf States	420
China	380
India	310
Japan	300
USA	280
Russia	250
Korea	210
Switzerland	140
Germany	130

Source: Switzerland Tourism Monitor, 2017

Profile of Arabic guests

The majority of Arab guests travel together with the extended family on their holidays. Depending upon the importance of the family, this can mean groups of up to 60 persons travelling together on occasion. Nannies, secretaries, cooks and drivers all come along. In addition to relaxation, sightseeing tours and business, guests also come to Switzerland for medical treatment. This is usually connected with the family holiday. For some years now, a trend has been developing for Arabs to spend their honeymoon in Switzerland. Middle-class families are also increasingly travelling to Switzerland – with less purchasing power than the traditional Arabic guests, but having the same high expectations in respect of hospitality. Individuals travelling alone and business people are still a minority, although the second group continues to increase. These are almost always exclusively men.

About 86 per cent of travellers from the Gulf States prefer round trips within Switzerland. The most popular activities include visits to natural attractions, shopping, excursions on the mountain railways and boat trips as well as paying a visit to discos and casinos. These latter activities go to show that it is in fact quite possible for guests from the Gulf to lead a western lifestyle despite their traditional clothing. This also includes the use of alcohol, but rarely in public.

Guests who love to spend

Guests from the Gulf States leave all other tourists behind when it comes to their average daily outgoings. When they travel, it is not just about excursions, but also about extensive shopping trips. Typical Swiss craftsmanship, chocolate and souvenirs all make beloved gifts and souvenirs for family and friends. Of great interest are luxury and prestige articles such as designer clothing, handbags, shoes, jewellery and watches. And things for babies and children as well as toys and electronic devices are hugely popular.

Source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office (HESTA 2018)

Overnight stays by guests from the Gulf States in Switzerland (2012–2018)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Arrivals	175 204	216 341	266 066	331 024	340 129	336 575	356 958
Overnight stays	518 842	623 205	770 725	929 799	959 467	919 968	946 259

“The best kind of marketing is by word of mouth.”



Matthias Albrecht,
Switzerland Tourism,
Director GCC

What is it that makes Switzerland such an attractive place for guests coming from the Gulf States?

Matthias Albrecht: Green hills, forests, meadows and parks, blue lakes, wild streams, flowing water... and all to be enjoyed in such a pleasant climate: nature is clearly the main reason why Arabic guests travel to Switzerland. Furthermore, Switzerland offers Arabs the opportunity of enjoying excellent accommodation of a very high standard, and it is also a very safe and pleasant country.

Is Switzerland going to remain an attractive country for travellers coming from the Gulf States?

MA: Yes, absolutely. Switzerland has an excellent reputation. We assume that there will be a steady continuous growth. The population in the Gulf States continues to grow and is also very young. One decisive factor is the price of oil. When the price is up – then those countries have more money available and the wages of the government employees grow too. And they are happy to spend their money on holidays.

What should Swiss hosts pay attention to in respect of marketing, in order to appeal to those guests coming from the Gulf States?

MA: The best kind of marketing is by word of mouth – and that applies to the Arabs too. Moreover, Arabs are incredibly digitally-oriented, with everyone having two or three mobile phones. Therefore, we need to give them the possibility of sharing their hotel pictures and their experiences in Switzerland with their friends by means of a hashtag like #YourHotel. Having social media available helps too. Also, the website really needs to be available for use on the mobile phone: 90 per cent of all internet usage by the Arabs runs across their mobile phones and only a tiny proportion goes across their desktop PC. Naturally having your website in Arabic would be very helpful, but it is not an absolute must. A WhatsApp account is also very good for reservations. Such availability is certainly appreciated and serves to create further business opportunities.

Is there anything at all which the Swiss host particularly needs to pay attention to when looking after travellers coming from the Gulf States?

MA: If any problems arise with the children, then it would be best to not reprimand them directly, but rather to seek to talk with the parents instead, preferably the father. In conservative Arabic families it is advisable to talk first with the man, particularly as a man. However, many women speak better English than their husbands and so it may be the case that she then takes over. Also,



“Saying the Arabic greeting ‘As-salamu aleykum’ helps to get things off to a good start!”

Matthias Albrecht

when greeting women it is best to wait until they offer you their hand first before you shake hands with them. In cases where the woman does not offer you her hand, then it is best to not force the matter.

Is there anything that a hotelier can say or do – any little gesture which would help the guests coming from the Gulf States to remember Switzerland in a favourable light?

MA: Well, saying the Arabic greeting “As-salamu aleykum” helps to get things off to a good start! Also, providing honey and fruit in the room as gifts is greatly appreciated. When they check-in, you can ask them whether they would like to have a carpet, a compass and a copy of the Koran in their room. And they really enjoy a large selection of fruit juices, for example, “Lemon and Mint”. This drink is very popular amongst the population in the GCC countries. It is also very helpful if you highlight which of the selection available at the breakfast buffet or on the menu card consists of pork. Arabs particularly appreciate having Arabic elements available at the breakfast buffet, such as hummus or ful medames (a simple dish of cooked fava beans).

Tips – travelling and modes of behaviour

Guests from the Gulf States tend to book their big holidays in the summer via the traditional means of booking, particularly as this method allows them to reserve rooms next to each other, on the same floor etc. Increasingly, however, short trips tend to be booked online via the mobile phone.

Personal recommendations made throughout the extended family network within an Arabic family are of great importance.

Women play an essential role in the selection of the vacation destination, accommodation and activities.

The staff travels along with the family. Please take note of the hierarchical relationships at the time of booking.

It is not usual to look directly into the eyes of a person of the opposite sex.

Most Arabic guests have good English language skills. Arabs make use of a wide range of gestures and are generally loud.

Since Arabic tourists are rarely under time pressure, their plans can change spontaneously and in many cases the departure date remains open. As a rule, the Arabic guest is generally ready for a longer stay.

When greeting a member of the opposite sex, please wait for the other person to first stretch out their hand.

Do not reprimand a child directly, but rather seek dialogue with the father or an older member of the family and in an indirect way, informally mention the house rules and the behaviour of the children.

Arabic guests rarely organise fringe events or excursions ahead of time. Additional offers from the hotel or the local tourist office are much appreciated.

Swiss hospitality for Arabic guests

With its natural scenery, pleasant climatic conditions as well as its well-known luxury and branded goods and producers, Switzerland is considered to be an appealing travel destination.

Regularly ask your guests if they are happy with everything.

Guests with high expectations

Guests from the Gulf States expect a top class performance from their hosts. At the same time, they often formulate their wishes in a demanding or didactic way. Receiving a no for an answer to a request is considered rude. A request should therefore never be directly dismissed. Arabs only wait reluctantly. Tell your guests that they will be served soon. Greatly appreciated is the respect shown by the host to their culture and religion. To that end, various gestures can help. For example, by providing TV programmes in Arabic for the children, prayer mats with a built-in compass, additional bath towels for ritual washing as well as the addresses of Islamic prayer houses, halal businesses and restaurants. If you are entertaining a large group of guests who are practising believers, then it is recommended that you provide a room for communal prayer and that you offer halal dishes.

Leisure activities

Excursions

Sightseeing tours are the main reason guests from the Gulf States travel. Excursions with their children to amusement parks are extremely popular. Arabs from the Gulf are interested in seeing authentic cities and are also very happy to undertake excursions into nature. Guests from the Gulf region are excited when confronted with a wide variety of outdoor activities, the lakes and the mountain scenery, the cool, refreshing mountain air in Switzerland as well as the many parks and walks available. Some of the guests also really like visiting casinos and nightclubs.

“Arabs get excited about thrilling activities which are not too tiring. Paragliding, rope parks and summer sledge runs are among such activities.”

Matthias Albrecht, Switzerland Tourism, Director GCC

Make sure that only female staff members enter the pool and spa areas to attend to the needs of the female guests from the Gulf States.

Sports activities

Sporting events meet with great interest. Especially popular in the Arab world are horse riding, football and motor racing. In some cases, Muslim guests have difficulties with the western sports culture. Younger Arabs, including women, more and more often try out soft adventure sports (paragliding, water sports). Sporting activities such as swimming, are undertaken with strict gender separation in the Arab culture. Having "Ladies-only" sessions in the swimming pool area is to be recommended. Many female guests enter the pool area with leggings and a T-shirt and are usually veiled.

Eating and drinking habits

Serve tea or fresh fruit juices as a welcome drink for guests from the Arabic region.

"Lemon and Mint"
¾ of a cup of lemon juice from 8 lemons
¼ of a beaker of granulated sugar
1½ teaspoons of orange blossom water
¼ of a cup of fresh mint, finely chopped
8 cups of cold water, with crushed ice according to taste.

During the fasting month of Ramadan, Ramadan-friendly hotels can offer their guests a special service, with halal foods and mealtimes offered during the night.

Catering for Arabic guests provides certain challenges for the host. In some cases, food is flown in and prepared in the rooms. In very traditional families, men and women eat separately from one another.

Pork is generally an absolute taboo for the majority of Arabic guests. Muslims generally eat halal foodstuffs. This means that food and drinks must be free of blood, pork, pork fat as well as alcohol, and that the slaughtering of animals has taken place in accordance with traditional Islamic methods. If no halal meat is available, Muslims eat fish or vegetarian meals. Quite often they will enquire about the suppliers – and these should be in possession of a halal certificate. Additionally, guests from the Gulf States are also interested in trying out local specialities, providing they are halal.

They mostly eat in silence. Buffet presentations are especially appreciated, since the guest from the Gulf States can choose for him- or herself from among the dishes on offer. They especially like different vegetable and meat dishes served with rice. Lamb, poultry and fish are always welcome. Gulf cuisine is often similar to Mediterranean cuisine.

Rarely do Arabs use their hand to eat when in Europe. After the main course, dessert, coffee and tea are served in rapid succession. After the last swallow, Arabs usually arise and leave the table.

"A typical Arabic drink is that of 'Lemon & Mint'. Here in the Gulf States they drink it everywhere."

Matthias Albrecht, Switzerland Tourism, Director GCC



Tips – food and beverage

Many Arabic guests eat non-halal meat in Switzerland (especially chicken, but also veal or beef), just providing it is not pork. However, kindly do offer your guests halal food, seafood or vegetarian options.

Enrich the international breakfast buffet with fruits and juices and clearly mark meats and sliced meats which contain pork.

Drinks are usually ordered during or after the meal. Therefore, it is advisable to provide water without being asked.

Water is served in normal glasses and not in wine glasses. It is usual to drink water without carbon dioxide. Make sure to offer a well-stocked range of non-alcoholic beverages, including fruit juices.

Tea is the most popular drink. Tea or freshly pressed fruit juice is to be recommended as a welcome drink. The tea is generally taken as a very sweet drink. Black tea can be served with fresh peppermint leaves.

Coffee is usually prepared in the Gulf States using cardamom. This is why they also often bring it along with them. When they drink Arabic coffee, it is normally with a lot of sugar. When they drink European coffee, then they prefer cappuccino and espresso.

Desserts: dates should always be available. They also often bring dates with them, because there are many varieties from the Gulf States which are unknown in Switzerland. The most popular desserts include sweet and heavy products with ingredients such as hazelnuts and walnuts, almonds, pistachios and honey. Chocolate (without alcohol) is also good, and they really like ice cream in the summer.

Arabs eat an above-average amount of bread, especially flat bread.

Breakfast is taken between 10 am and 12 (noon), the evening meal between 9 and 11 pm. It is recommended that you schedule enough staff, because they appreciate a fast service. The children should be served first. Left-overs are often taken from the plates after the meal is finished. Ask your guests if they would like this.

Many Arabs are likewise happy to drink a beer or a glass of wine here and there in Switzerland. They appreciate the freedom we enjoy here in our country, and the possibility of enjoying an alcoholic beverage.

Contact details

For more information, advice or training as to how best to welcome guests from the Gulf States, or as to how best to work the Arabic market, please contact one of the following addresses:

HotellerieSuisse

Communication
Monbijoustrasse 130
3001 Berne
T +41 31 370 41 40
kommunikation@hotelleriesuisse.ch
www.hotelleriesuisse.ch

Switzerland Tourism

Tödistrasse 7
8008 Zurich
T +41 44 288 11 11
info@myswitzerland.com
www.myswitzerland.com

Switzerland Tourism – Dubai

P.O. Box 309059, Dubai,
United Arab Emirates
Jumeirah lake towers,
Swiss Tower – office 3602
Office: +971 4 4334 355
gcc@switzerland.com

Useful websites

www.myswitzerland.com/ar

www.islam.ch

For information on Islam and Muslims in Switzerland

www.halal.ch

Consumer information service from The Islamological Consumer Institute, a registered voluntary association

www.islamicfinder.org

Prayer times

www.swissmoschee.ch

Mosques in Switzerland

www.global-blue.com

For information about the refund of value added tax (VAT)

www.swissinfo.ch/ara

Swiss information platform in Arabic

