



Arab Cultures and Traditions

Arab World includes 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa

- The Arab world is a region that encompasses 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Some of the most well-known countries in this region include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia.
- These countries vary in terms of geography, culture, history, and political systems. Despite these differences, they share common linguistic and cultural ties that are central to Arab identity.



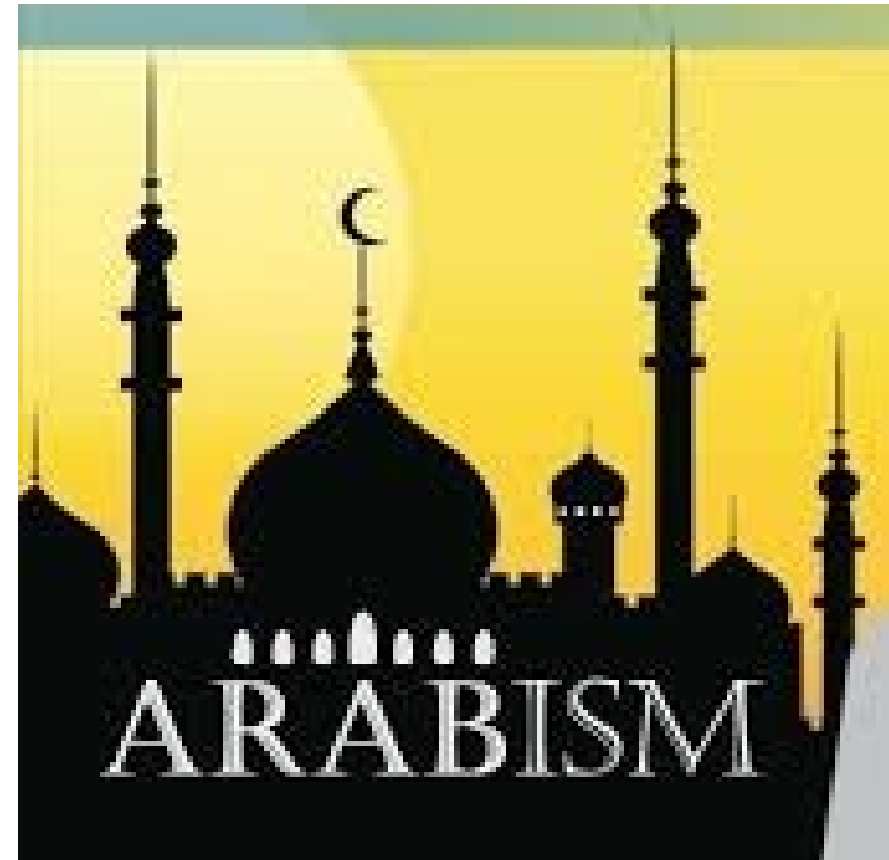
Arabs come from Diverse Ethnic Backgrounds

- Being Arab is a cultural and linguistic trait rather than a racial one. Just as Americans are of mixed race, ethnic and religious backgrounds, so too are Arabs. Though they may be different from our own, it's these cultural traits that define the Arab world's values
- Some of the prominent ethnic groups in the Arab world include Arab Berbers, Assyrians, Kurds, Egyptians, Palestinians, and more.
- These diverse ethnic backgrounds contribute to the rich tapestry of Arab culture and influence various aspects of regional traditions, cuisine, and custom.



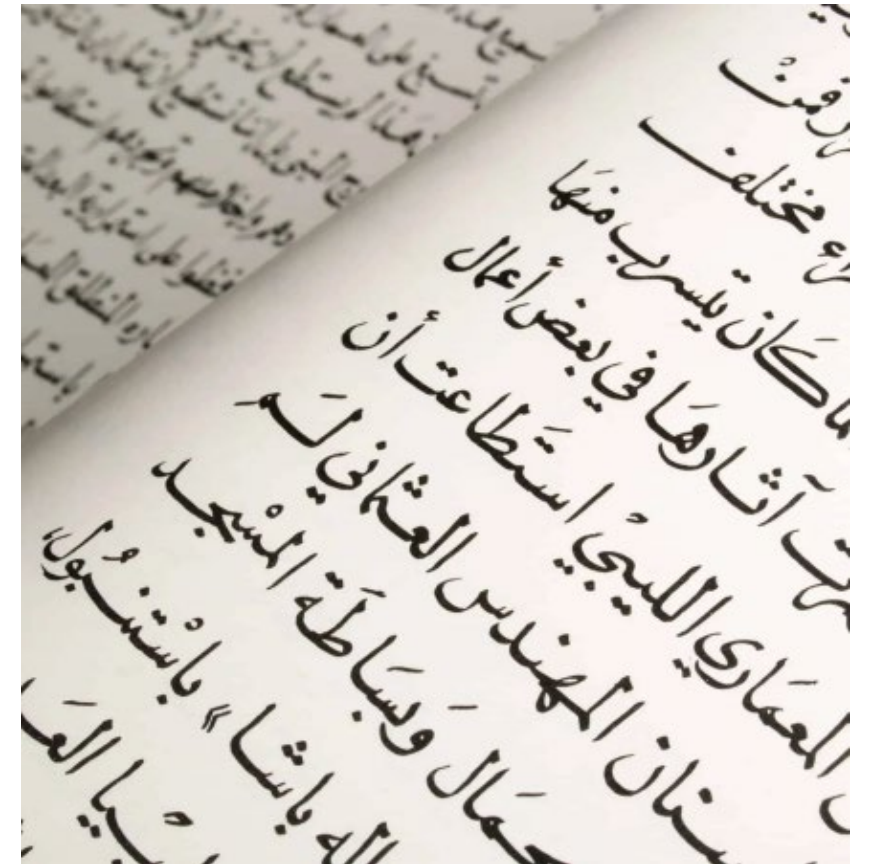
Arab Identity is often based on Language and Culture

- Arab identity is primarily defined by a shared linguistic and cultural heritage. While there is no single Arab ethnicity, people who speak Arabic and identify with Arab culture often consider themselves Arabs.
- Arabic language and script are fundamental components of Arab identity, and Arabic calligraphy is an art form that showcases the beauty of the language.
- This identity is further reinforced by common historical narratives, traditions, and shared experiences.



Arabic Language

- Arabic is a Semitic language with a rich history that dates back centuries. It is the common language spoken by Arabs across the Arab world.
- While Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is used in formal contexts like education and media, there are numerous dialects of Arabic that vary significantly from one region to another. These dialects often differ in pronunciation, vocabulary, and even grammar
- The diversity of dialects can sometimes make communication challenging among Arabs from different regions, but MSA serves as a unifying written form of the language.



Everyday Arabic Traditions

- It is not polite to say “No”. The term “As God wills it” is a nicer way to say “No.”
- It is always best to say “Yes.” Keep in mind that a “Yes” can also mean “Maybe.”
- Never openly refuse a request from a friend.
- If someone does a favor for you, return the favor in some way.
- Arabs are generally very socially-oriented people.
- People who are relaxed and personable enough to establish relationships tend to be more successful.

نتكلم
NaTakallam
(we-speak)

5 WAYS TO SAY
Thank You
IN ARABIC

شكراً
SHUKRAN
Thank you

تسلم / تسلمي
TISLAM/TISLAMI
May you stay safe

ممنونك / ممنونتك
MAMNOUN(T)AK/EK
I am grateful to you

يعطيك العافية
YA'TIK AL-'AFIYA
May [God] give you health

يكثر خيرك
YEKATHER KHAIRAK/EK
I wish [that God] increases your welfare

Greetings and Gestures

- Handshakes are common greetings and farewells.
- Long handshakes, grasped elbows, and walking hand in hand by two males is common place in the Arab world.
- Hugging only occurs between close friends.
- Contact between members of the opposite sex in public is considered out of bounds
- Only use the right hand to eat, touch and present gifts.
- Eye contact during discussions is often long and direct. Long eye contact at women is considered rude.
- It is offensive to ask a man about his wife or female family member.
- Arabs don't have rigid schedules. Appearing to be in a hurry while meeting with an Arab is considered offensive.
- Never point at a person.
- Arabs have a lot less body space than Westerners.

10+ ARABIC GREETINGS

MARHABA - HELLO/HI

SALAMO ALAYKOM - PEACE BE UPON YOU

AWEFE - HEALTHS

YA'TEEK EL 'AFYE - [MAY GOD] GIVE YOU HEALTH

MARAHIB - HELLOS

SALAM - PEACE

SABAHO/SABAH EL KHEIR/SABAH EL NOOR -

MORNING/GOOD MORNING/LIGHT MORNING

KIFAK - HOW ARE YOU?

NAHARAK SA'EED - GOOD DAY

SHO EL AKHBAR - WHAT ARE THE NEWS?



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Family is Important

- There is an old Bedouin saying that is the law of the jungle when it comes to loyalty to family. It says something like “Me and my brothers against our cousins, me and my brothers and cousins against the world!”. This is because family plays a crucial part of Arab culture. Families sustain tribal and clan relationships in many countries and loyalties are very strong. People know and speak proudly of their forebears. Everyone knows how important their individual familial roles are in that family history.
- Besides their faith, family is the second most important element to Arabs. Family loyalty and obligations take precedence over loyalty and obligations to friends or a job and over one’s personal needs.
- Children are considered as “jewels” and that men and women, as well as male and female children have different and distinct roles.
- The family structure is tight-knit and is one of the major determining factors of personal status, followed by individual character and achievement. A person’s honor and dignity come from their family.



Arab Music

- Arab music is known for its diversity and rich history. It encompasses various styles and genres, from classical to contemporary.
- Traditional Arab music often features instruments like the oud (a stringed instrument), qanun (a type of zither), and darbuka (a drum). Vocal music is also an integral part of Arab musical traditions.
- One of the most recognized forms of Arab dance is belly dancing, which involves intricate movements of the hips and torso. Belly dancing is often associated with celebrations and cultural performances.



Arab Literature and Calligraphy

- Arab literature has a rich tradition dating back centuries, with famous poets like Al-Mutanabbi, Al-Ma'arri, and Ibn Arabi. Arabic literature includes poetry, novels, and philosophical works.
- Arabic calligraphy is an art form that has deep cultural and religious significance. It is used to write and decorate the Quran and is also employed in architectural design, decorative arts, and signage.
- The intricate and aesthetically pleasing nature of Arabic calligraphy has made it a celebrated form of visual art.



Religious Beliefs

- Arab culture and the Islamic faith are deeply intertwined. While Islam is the predominant religion, other religious groups are accepted and treated with respect. With over 93% of the Arab population being Muslim, the biggest influence on modern Arab values is the religion of Islam. The principle text of Islam is the Quran, revealed to the Prophet Mohammad by the angel Gabriel. It is not only the foundation of Islamic law (or *Sharia*), it is the basis for all Arab values.
- Most Arabs believe that most of life's events are controlled and orchestrated by God. Man is dependent on the fate as determined by God and is powerless in controlling many of life's events. As a result, religious affiliation is essential to everyone in Arab society.
- Most Arabs believe there should be no separation between religion and state and that religion should be taught to children in school.
- While there are multiple sects of Islam, Islamic law (Sharia) is as important as any other type of law.
- According to Islam, piety is the most admirable characteristic someone can have.
- Mosques are considered holy sites and strict rules accompany visits to the mosque. Some of these include: never walking in front of someone praying, the prohibition of pictures or video of people in the mosque, and the prohibition of men wearing shorts and women wearing sleeveless or short-sleeved dresses.



Hospitality and Visits

Hospitality, friendliness, and generosity to strangers is an expression of sacred duties.

- When sitting, avoid stretching legs in front of or sitting up higher than others.
- Don't lean against walls, slouch in chairs or put hands in your pockets.
- Double meanings are common in conversations.
- Do not talk loudly.
- The meal is usually at the conclusion to an event.
- Middle Easterners consider it impolite to eat everything on one's plate.
- Take off your shoes at the entrance and leave them there before going in.
- Paying respect to the eldest person in a room and greeting them first
- Standing when someone enters a room
- Offering tea and refreshments as pampering guests is considered a sacred act
- The first cup of tea from the pot is offered to the guests
- Not initiating a handshake with a woman is considered disrespectful



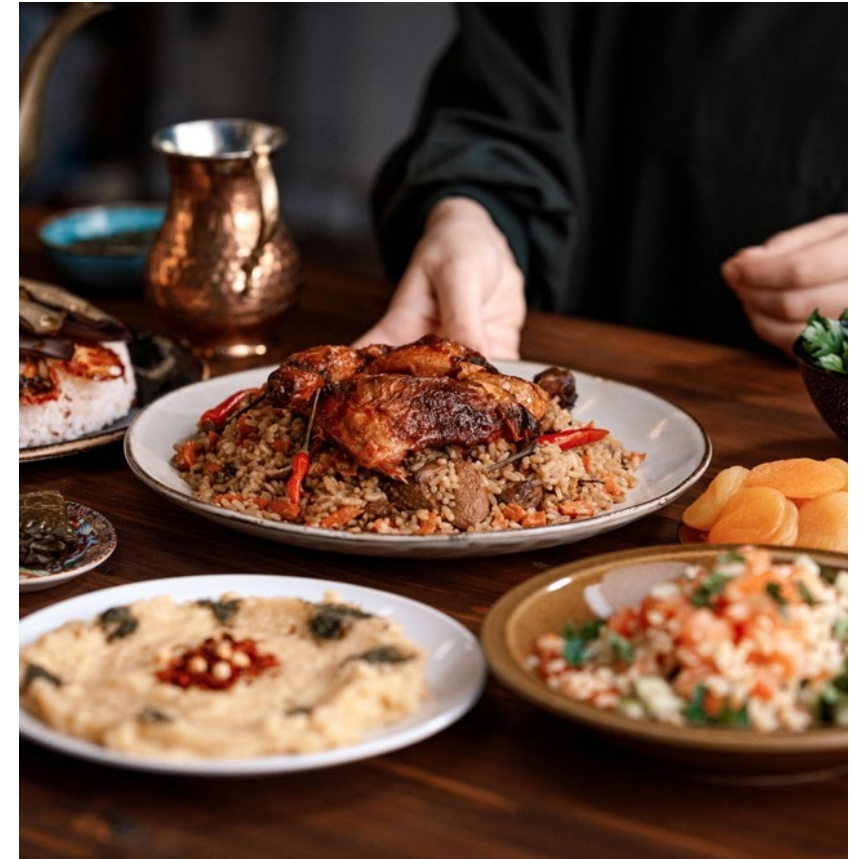
Food in Arab Culture

- Food and hospitality go hand in hand in the Arab culture. First, know that you will be offered the best that you're host has to offer, and the meal will be made with much love, respect, and appreciation for you as their guest. The menu will include a diverse variety of foods such as beef, chicken, lamb or fish (pork is forbidden Islam). For an appetizer, you might get olives, nuts and raisins. Bread is also vital to this culture and refusing to break bread is often considered an insult.
- When invited to eat a meal with Arabs, you will find differences in table etiquette. For instance, if they offer you a snack, decline the first time, then accept (decline two times in Jordan). Never, ever refuse a drink. Use your right hand when eating and drinking, and don't stay too long after you've finished the meal to avoid wearing out your welcome.



Arab Food

- Arab cuisine is renowned for its flavorful and diverse dishes. It reflects the rich history and traditions of the Arab world.
- Falafel, made from ground chickpeas or fava beans, is a popular Arab street food. It's often served in pita bread with tahini sauce and vegetables.
- Hummus is a creamy dip made from mashed chickpeas, tahini, olive oil, lemon juice, and garlic. It's commonly served as an appetizer or side dish.
- Other notable Arab dishes include shawarma (spit-roasted meat), tabbouleh (a parsley salad), and baklava (a sweet pastry made with layers of phyllo dough, nuts, and honey).



Privacy

- In the Arab world, privacy is another highly-prized cultural value. In general, Arabs do not discuss personal matters outside of their family, and speaking poorly about a relative is seriously frowned upon.
- You can see how important privacy is to Arabs even in the ways their homes are built. Often there will be parts of the house specifically designated for visitors, even going so far as to have separate areas where female guests sit with the female hosts by way of a separate entrance, with the men generally meeting in the living room or “*salon*” designated specifically for male guests. In small homes or apartments, the arrival of guests is timed so that they will not see members of the family with whom they have no need to see. If this can’t be arranged, then meetings are often done outside in café’s or other mutually agreeable locations.



Social Customs

- In the Arab culture, it is considered rude to reject an offering. For example, if an Arab offers you refreshments, it's polite to accept them but only with your right hand. Arabs use their right hand for most purposes as the left hand is used for self-cleaning and is regarded as unclean.
- So you should avoid shaking hands with an Arab with your left hand. Also, it is considered impolite to show the sole of your feet/shoes to someone. Keep your feet on the ground.



Zakat/ Charity

- Contrary to popular belief, not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs. However, the Arab culture is predominated by Islam as about 90% of Arabs are followers of Islam.
- The third pillar of the Muslim faith is based on the promotion of charity. It is a religious obligation of donating wealth to the ones who need it.
- Zakat is practised by Arabs as a form of worshipping the Lord and strengthens their belief in helping others in times of need. Zakat is also known as almsgiving by many.



Dressing Customs

- It is commonly known that Arabs are quite conservative about their dressing style. The form of clothing is different for men and women, wherein women are often seen wearing fully covered dresses called Abaya. Women are supposed to keep their hair covered as well with a hijab or niqab. These dressing customs are set to avoid unwanted male attention and apply to foreign women also.
- For men, the commonly worn garment is a throbe a long, loose, fitted robe covering the body until the ankles. Men wearing sleeveless or shorts shows a lack of effort and casual behaviour. Even for corporate workers or businessmen, the standard clothing would be a long-sleeved shirt with a tie and regular fitted trousers.

ARAB DRESS OVER THE YEARS

ثياب عربيه
على مر السنين



Gifting

- Presenting gifts is a common activity in the Arab culture. Arabs are fond of gifting valuable items to their loved ones and also friends. They have a huge heart when it comes to gifting, and thus, it gets a bit difficult to impress an Arab with a gift.
- However, Arabs enjoy high-quality items, it could be a perfume or something thoughtful like personalised items. Keep in mind that you're not gifting items related to appearance to an Arab woman. Your efforts could go in the opposite direction if you do so.



References

- [Arab Culture: 5 Fascinating Customs & Traditions](#)
- [Arab Academy: Arabic Customs and Traditions](#)
- [Have fun with history: Facts about Arabs](#)
- [Kaleela: Arab Culture: A Quick Guide to Arab Traditions and Habits](#)