

Swiss Hospitality for Guests from The Gulf States





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*First of all choose a travel companion
and only then choose where to go.*
(Arabic proverb)

Preface

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 2006 to 2012, the number of overnight stays by guests from the Gulf States in Switzerland increased by 78 per cent. And during the next twenty 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, 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 the 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 entitled "Swiss Hospitality for Guests from The Gulf States", 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!

Jürg Schmid
Director Switzerland Tourism

Dr. Christoph Juen
CEO hotelleriesuisse



General information about the Gulf States

Historical abstract

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 last State (UAE) achieved independence in 1971. In 1981, the six states established the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the



Key data

Foundation: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), 25th 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: 1,2 million.

Qatar: capital city: Doha; form of government: Emirate; area: 11 606 km²; population: 2 million.

Kuwait: capital city: Kuwait-City; form of government: constitutional hereditary monarchy; area: 17 818 km²; population: 3,9 million.

Oman: capital city: Muscat; form of government: absolute monarchy (sultanate); area: 309 500 km²; population: 3,3 million.

KSA: capital city: Riyadh; form of government: absolute monarchy; area: 2 149 690 km²; population: 29,4 million.

UAE: capital city: Abu Dhabi; form of government: constitutional monarchy; area: 83 600 km²; population: 5,7 million.



Economic indicators GCC countries in total

	2012	2013 (E)	2014 (E)	2015 (F)
GDP (USD billions)	1547	1584	1624	1664
GDP/resident (USD)	33 900	33 800	35 200	36 900
Growth rate (in % of GDP)	5,1	4,2	4,5	4,9
Rate of inflation (in %)	2,4	3,2	3,3	4
Proportion of crude oil output (in %) of world demand	18	n/s	n/s	20,2
Proportion of oil export (in %) of total exports	72	72	72	63

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit, The GCC in 2020, 2009; International Monetary Fund IMF, 2013

(E) = Estimate, (F) = Forecast



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.

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. Meas-

ured 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 29 million persons, 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 2012

	GDP (billions USD)	GDP/P (USD)	Growth rate (in % of GDP)	Population (millions)		of which < 15 years (in %)	of which > 65 years (in %)	of which foreigners (in %)	Population growth (in %)	Life expectancy (rounded out)
KSA	746,9	25 400	4,5	29,4		29,0	3,0	25	1,5	74,5
UAE	361,9	63 500	2,8	5,7		20,4	0,9	90	3,0	76,5
Oman	80,7	24 600	5,4	3,3		31,0	3,1	18	2,0	74,5
Kuwait	172,3	44 300	2,8	3,9		25,8	2,0	50	1,8	77,5
Qatar	208,3	108 900	5,4	2,0		21,8	1,5	84	4,9	78,0
Bahrain	31,6	26 900	3,4	1,2		20,5	2,6	19	2,6	78,5

Source: EFG Hermes, GCC: Macroeconomic Outlook, March 2013



Characteristics of the culture and the religion

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 purification ceremony and eating habits are important elements in the life of a practicing Muslim, which he cannot do without even when travelling.

Ritual Purification

In order to be allowed to perform the ritual prayer (Salat), a ritual purification ceremony known as Wudu takes place. 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.

Prayer	Time
Fajr	Daybreak
Dhuhr	Noon
Asr	Afternoon
Maghrib	Sundown
Ischa	Nightfall

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

Interesting facts about Islam

The Koran

The Holy Book is the sum total of the revelations of Mohammed. Not only does it contain spiritual aspects, but also regulates the day-to-day duties and responsibilities of Muslims.

The five basic obligations of Muslims

- Profession of faith (Shahadah): "There is no God except Allah, Mohammed 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 night-fall.
- 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 ul-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.

On Friday, the holy day of the week, work is stopped at noon and the assembly of the faithful consider it a duty to meet for afternoon prayers.

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 Muhammed which were handed-down from the 7th century.

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

Celebrations and festivals

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 ul-Fitr at the conclusion of the month of Ramadan. The festival days 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.



Festive days during 2014

- Mawlid (birthday of the prophet Mohammed; not celebrated everywhere)
12th January
- Ramadan (the beginning of the month of fasting)
28th June
- The Ramadan festival Eid ul-Fitr
28th July
- The festival of the sacrifice (Eid ul-Adha)
4th to 7th October
- Islamic New Year (1436 AH*;
is not celebrated everywhere)
25th October
- Day of Ashura (not celebrated everywhere)
4th November

Festive days during 2015

- Mawlid (birthday of the prophet Mohammed)
3rd January
- Ramadan (the beginning of the month of fasting)
18th June
- The Ramadan festival of Eid ul-Fitr
17th July
- The festival of the sacrifice (Eid ul-Adha)
23rd to 26th September
- Islamic New Year (1437 AH*)
14th October
- Day of Ashura
25th October

* AH: Anno Hegirae, the migration of Mohammed from Mecca to Medina in the year 622.

Dress code in the Gulf States

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 "Dish-dasha" or "Thawb", is usually worn by men from the Gulf States in the summertime. In winter, the white colour is replaced by cream, brown and grey. 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 the so-called "Ghutra" 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.

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

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 as well women who go out without wearing a headdress.

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 dominates 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.

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

Welcome	Ahlan wa Sahlan
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!	Daqiqqa!



Business practices

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. When they are trading, Arabs are risk-takers. This willingness to take risks, however, is restricted only to business life.

Hierarchy

Arabic society has a hierarchical structure and differences in the social order are readily accepted. The status consciousness of a person is dependent upon their family, their relationship to the state, to their business, as well as to their relationships and their financial situation. The business world is predominantly a man’s world. A very important concept for Arabs is the matter of “saving face”, 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: a supervisor, the family, the country, or for example, even God by use of the expression “InschaAllah” (by the will of God). It may sometimes even be the case that you receive no reaction at all from them in your conversations. However, this is neither positive nor negative.

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

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



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.

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.



Arabic guests on holiday

A strong increase in trips abroad

Between 2006 and 2012, the number of overnight stays by guests from the Gulf States increased by 227 414. That represents an increase of 78 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.

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.

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

Overnight stays by guests from the Gulf States in Switzerland (2006–2012)

Gulf States	Arrivals	Overnight stays
2012	175 204	518 842
2011	133 042	418 609
2010	122 958	423 438
2009	102 735	374 737
2008	115 597	403 590
2007	97 161	350 085

Source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office SFSO, 2013

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.

Profile of Arab 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 as well 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. Business people are almost always exclusively men.

Arabic tourists from the Gulf are rather young. In Switzerland, some 58 per cent of the tourists from the Gulf States are between 16 and 35 years of age.

80 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.



Average daily expenditure (CHF) by overnight tourists in Switzerland (not including arrival and departure)

Country	2011
Gulf States	500
Japan	400
China	350
India	300
Korea	250
Russia	250
USA	220
Switzerland	170
Germany	150

Source: Switzerland Tourism Monitor, 2011

Guests from the Gulf States who love to spend

Guests from the Gulf 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.



Good to know

- The guest from the Gulf States is still currently mainly booking through traditional booking channels. In many cases, travel agencies are directly family-owned.
- 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.
- 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.
- Generally speaking, it is not the done thing to look at a person of the opposite sex in the eye. Likewise, please be sure not to make too much direct eye contact with elderly persons.
- 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 personally, 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.
- Arab 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.

Guests with high expectations

Guests from the Gulf States expect 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. Greatly appreciated is the respect shown by the host to their culture and religion.

Arabs only wait reluctantly. Tell your guests that they will be served soon.

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.

Regularly ask your guests if they are happy with everything.





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. Gulf Arabians are interested in historic cities and gladly undertake excursions into nature. The variety of outdoor activities, the lakes and mountain scenery, the cool and fresh mountain air of Switzerland, as well as the many hiking and mountain trails fill the guests from the Gulf region with enthusiasm. Some of the guests also like visiting casinos and nightclubs.

Sports activities

Sporting events meet with great interest. Especially popular in the Arab world are horse riding,

football, golf and motor racing. In some cases, Muslim guests have difficulties with the western sports culture. Younger Arabs however, 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.

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.



Arabic eating and drinking habits

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.

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

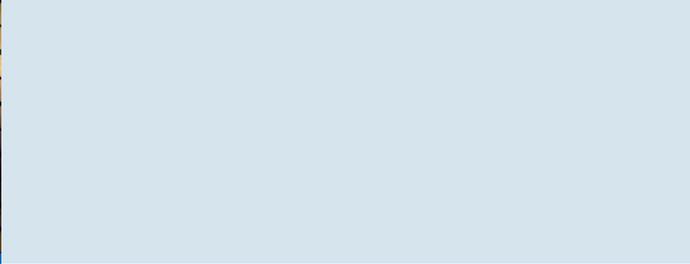
Pork and alcohol are an absolute taboo for most Arabic guests. Muslims generally eat halal foodstuffs. This means that food and drinks must be free of blood, pork, pork fat as well as alcohol, and that the slaughtering of animals has taken place in accordance with traditional Islamic methods. If no halal 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 sometimes 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.

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.





Tips

- In principle, the following applies: no pork, no bloody meat and no serving of alcohol.
- Offer your guests halal, seafood and vegetarian options.
- Arabs eat an above average amount of bread, especially flat bread.
- 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 Turkish 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 is also good (without alcohol), and they really like ice-cream in the summer.
- Breakfast is taken between 10 and 12 in the morning, the evening meal between 21 and 23 hours. Lunch is usually taken in form of a snack. 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.

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:

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Useful websites

www.ar.myswitzerland.com
(Switzerland Tourism, Arabic)

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, Arabic)

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