

Mobility in the Middle East



Mobility in the Middle East is a challenging prospect. Long before mechanized vehicles became the norm, people solely relied on walking or animal transport. Hence, domesticated camels have always been an intrinsic part of the Middle Eastern landscape.

Geographically speaking, there are deserts and shifting sand dunes with which to contend in the Middle East. The *qibli* is a particularly strong wind notorious for impairing road builders. The *qibli* carries Sahara desert dust and is capable of reaching hurricane speeds. The European word for this wind is *Sirocco*. There are also other Saharan winds named *Haboob* and *Khamsin*.



The mobility of the ancient people of the Middle East was not restricted by the aridity of the desert. They turned to water ways as a mode of transportation. Using the desert winds to their advantage, they traveled in wind-propelled sailboats, such as the *dhow*. A dhow is a small boat with a triangular or lateen sail. The felucca, a larger sailboat with broad canvas sails, was also common.

Photo: a dhow.



Photo: Water taxis in Dubai are called abras.

Today motorized water taxis are a popular mode of transportation for Middle Eastern cities developed or built near water.



Photo: The Riyadh-Makkah Road in Saudi Arabia.

modern highways. Today, the civil engineers who create highways in the Middle East are cognizant of the desert heat, so they construct resilient highways that reflect the sun's heat.

Modernization and technologic advances in the Middle East helped conquer the desert by road and rail. The camel caravan routes of the Middle East gradually metamorphosed into dusty roads which were eventually paved and asphalted into

Steam locomotives were originally imported into the Middle East from Europe. It took some engineering effort to establish rail lines in the desert. For example, Egypt developed train lines through persistence, but the rails were initially laid on soft soil, thereby making it difficult to carry heavy loads. The tenacious trains succeeded, though, and historically the Egyptian railway system is the oldest in Africa. The first line was opened between Alexandria and Kafer Eassa in 1854.



Photo: The Baghdad Railway crosses a bridge between the Turkish and Syrian border.

Today, there are 3,146 miles of rail line in Egypt and there are several historic train lines in the Middle East. For example, the Hejaz Railway opened in 1908. It was originally built to transport pilgrims from Damascus, Syria to Medina (also spelled Madinah) in Saudi Arabia. The rail line was damaged during the First World War (1914-1918).



Photo: The metro in Cairo, Egypt.

Public mass transit is readily available in the Middle East. Many of the capitals have subway systems.



Although much of the Middle East is desert, some mountainous countries like Lebanon and Iran get snowfall in the winter. During the winter season, snow skiers can ascend to the top slopes aboard a ski lift.

Photo: A gondola ski lift to Tochal Mountain in Tehran, Iran.



Buses are also an integral part of the Middle Eastern cityscape.

Photo: A modern double decker bus on Taksim Square in Istanbul, Turkey.



Photo: Traffic congestion in Tehran, capital of Iran.

As road development increased, connecting the countries of the Middle East, it inevitably caused traffic congestion and pollution. For example, Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates, is overcrowded, experiencing traffic congestion and lack of parking. Other cities, such as Cairo and Tehran face similar traffic problems. Traffic snarls and pollution are an everyday occurrence in the modern capitals of the Middle East.



Photo: Gwadar Port, located on the southwestern coast of Pakistan, is near the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf.

The people of the Middle East have always been engaged in maritime navigation and trade. Despite the desert, many countries are in proximity to water: the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and the Gulf of Oman are examples. Ancient Middle Eastern port cities have grown into modern shipping centers bustling with activity. In the global, ship trading market, where goods are exported and imported, stevedores and shipping cranes stay busy moving cargo.



The Suez Canal is an artificial waterway which opened in 1869. The canal allows ships to travel from Europe to Asia without circumnavigating Africa.

Photo: The Suez Canal in Egypt.



The Middle East is in the midst of an aviation boom. Air traffic is increasing, as planes routinely arrive and depart from modern airports. The skies of the Middle East are filled with domestic and international airline jets.

Photo: Jazeera Airways at Kuwait International Airport.