

## Bahrain

### The Area

706 sq km

### Capital

Manama

### Currency

Bahrain Dinars

### Description

Bahrain, officially the Kingdom of Bahrain, is a borderless island nation in the Persian Gulf (Southwest Asia/Middle East, Asia). Saudi Arabia lies to the west and is connected to Bahrain by the King Fahd Causeway (officially opened on November 25, 1986) and Qatar is to the south across the Persian Gulf. The Qatar–Bahrain Friendship Bridge, currently being planned, will link Bahrain to Qatar as the longest fixed link in the world.

Bahrain is the smallest, in terms of population, Arab nation in the world, and the smallest Arab member of the United Nations. It is also the least populous country in mainland Asia (but not of Asia overall, because Maldives and Brunei are smaller).

Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy with an independent legal and judiciary system and a strong framework of commercial laws. It is a member of the United Nations, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

### The Population

688,000 – Half of these are under 25 years old which is an important factor in the growing urbanisation of the island. The population is still mostly concentrated in the northern third of Bahrain Island and in the southern edge of Muharraq Island. Indigenous Bahrainis are Arabs though many are at least partially of Persian ancestry

### Weather/Climate

It can get extremely hot and humid in Bahrain from June to September, with high temperatures averaging 38°C (100°F) during the day. November to March tends to be much more pleasant, with warm days, cool nights and negligible rainfall

### Politics

Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy headed by the King, Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa; the head of government is the Prime Minister, Shaykh Khalifa bin Salman al Khalifa, who presides over a cabinet of 15 members. Bahrain has a bicameral legislature with a lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, elected by universal suffrage and the upper house, the Shura Council, appointed by the King. Both houses have forty members. The inaugural elections were held in 2002, with parliamentarians serving four year terms; the 2006 general election is to be held on 25 November 2006.

## **Economy**

Bahrain's wealthy capital, Manama

In a region currently experiencing an oil boom of unprecedented proportions, Bahrain is the fastest growing economy in the Arab world, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia found in January 2006. Bahrain also has the freest economy in the Middle East according to the 2006 Index of Economic Freedom published by the Heritage Foundation/Wall Street Journal, and is twenty-fifth freest overall in the world.

In Bahrain, petroleum production and processing account for about 60% of export receipts, 60% of government revenues, and 30% of GDP. Economic conditions have fluctuated with the changing fortunes of oil since 1985, for example, during and following the Persian Gulf crisis of 1990-91. With its highly developed communication and transport facilities, Bahrain is home to numerous multinational firms with business in the Persian Gulf. A large share of exports consists of petroleum products made from imported crude. Construction proceeds on several major industrial projects. Unemployment, especially among the young, and the depletion of both oil and underground water resources are major long-term economic problems.

In 2004, Bahrain signed the US-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement, which will reduce certain barriers to trade between the two nations. In recent years the country has seen an unprecedented amount of growth within the Real estate market. This is perfectly exemplified by the Bahrain Financial Harbor project which will establish Bahrain as the Financial centre of the Middle East

## **Geography**

Bahrain is a generally flat and arid archipelago, comprising of a low desert plain rising gently to a low central escarpment, in the Persian Gulf, east of Saudi Arabia. The highest point is the 122 m Jabal ad Dukhan.

Considered to be one of the fifteen states that comprise the "Cradle of Humanity" in the Middle East, Bahrain has a total area of 688 km<sup>2</sup> (266 mi<sup>2</sup>), which is slightly larger than the Isle of Man, though it is smaller than the nearby King Fahd Airport in Dammam, Saudi Arabia which covers 780 km<sup>2</sup> (301 mi<sup>2</sup>). As an archipelago of 33 islands, Bahrain does not share a land boundary with another country but does have a 161 kilometres (528 mi) coastline and claims a further 12 nautical miles (22 km) of territorial sea and a 24 nautical mile (44 km) contiguous zone. Bahrain enjoys mild winters and endures very hot, humid summers.

## **Cost of Living and Accommodation**

The overall cost of living in Bahrain is similar to that in most European countries, if you're living in the style of the average western expatriate.

But the general lack of taxation has a significant impact on the cost of certain items, e.g. cars. On the other hand, the cost of accommodation is sometimes high, as is that of certain food items, particularly imported foods. If you buy internationally recognised branded foods and household goods, you might pay higher prices than in your home country, but there are usually plenty of cheaper locally and regionally produced alternatives that are of excellent quality. Clothing can also be expensive if you favour designer labels – this isn't peculiar to Bahrain – although there's little need for winter clothing.

The price of wines and spirits, where these are permitted, is slightly lower than in the UK but higher than average European prices. Electronic goods, such as televisions, hi-fis, DVD players, photographic equipment and computer hardware and software, are generally less expensive than in Europe, mainly because of lower import duties.

Utilities, such as electricity, water and gas, are subsidised to some extent by the region's governments, which own the services (except for bottled gas supplies) in order to provide inexpensive electricity and water, mainly for the benefit of the local population. Utilities are therefore cheaper than in most European countries. However, at the height of summer, air-conditioning costs will escalate, rather as the cost of heating increases in winter in colder climates. Newcomers sometimes make the expensive mistake of keeping their air-conditioning on even when they're out, but this is unnecessary, as air-conditioning systems reduce the temperature in your accommodation quickly when activated on your return home.

You should also allow for the cost of international telephone calls, although these are kept low by Bahrain's government, who wants to encourage international business and investment in the region.

Your cost of living will obviously depend on your lifestyle. When you're negotiating a work contract, it's usual for your prospective employer to produce detailed cost of living figures for his country, which are useful in helping you to decide whether the proposed job is financially attractive or not. Average monthly major expenses for a single person, couple and family with two children are shown below (numbers in brackets relate to the notes following the table).

### Monthly Costs (\$/£)

Item	Single	Couple	Couple with 2 Children
Housing (1)	900/600	1,050/700	1,200/800
Food (2)	450/300	750/500	1,050/700
Utilities (3)	225/150	300/200	450/300
Leisure (4)	450/300	450/300	600/400
Transport (5)	75/50	150/100	150/100
Insurance (6)	100/65	150/100	225/150
Clothing (7)	150/100	300/200	450/300
Totals	2,350/1,565	3,150/2,100	4,125/2,750

1. Rental costs for a one-bedroom apartment in a modern block, probably unfurnished, a two-bedroom apartment in a similar block and a two or three-bedroom apartment or a modest villa. Apartments might have air-conditioning included in the rent. Satellite television is probably provided but is unlikely to include all channels. A swimming pool and/or gym are usually provided.
2. Doesn't include luxury food items or alcohol.
3. Includes electricity (and air-conditioning), water (and usually sewage if charged in conjunction with the water, as is normal) and an allowance for telephone charges.
4. Includes entertainment, dining out, sports, newspapers and magazines but not holidays (air fares are often included in work contract terms).

5. Includes running costs for an average family car plus third party insurance, petrol, servicing and repairs, but excludes depreciation and credit purchase costs.
6. Includes private health, travel, car and contents insurance. Note that property is rented, so building insurance is usually unnecessary.
7. Lots of clothing is unnecessary in the region's hot climate. Office wear for men is a shirt and tie, except for formal occasions.

### **Drivers Licence**

Anyone with a valid UK driving license is able to transfer automatically to a Bahraini license. For those candidates who are seeking a role from outside the UK, please liaise with your relevant embassies to clarify this matter.

### **Residence Visas**

Your prospective employer will organise visas to work and live in Bahrain. In some instances they will organise one's spouse and children but this needs to be clarified directly with the employer.

### **Education and Schools**

Education plays a pivotal role in Bahrain's development programmes. The government has been quick to realise the importance of improving the educational infrastructures, and oil has provided the money to do so.

That isn't to say that education had previously been unavailable in Bahrain, but limited resources, an insular attitude and the desire to retain the status quo meant that education had been basic and only the brightest pupils went on to higher education, and then only if their families could afford it.

The vast influx of foreigners into this formerly secluded region emphasised the need to 'catch up'. Bahrain's government realised that there was a need to provide a well-educated, resourceful local workforce for the future, displacing the continual need for expatriates to undertake even basic maintenance of state utilities. Major programmes for building schools and colleges of higher education were undertaken and continue to this day, and standards of education have been raised significantly. Arab students are now found in the world's most prestigious universities, particularly in the UK and USA, where their skills equal those of their counterparts from other countries. The old view of the backward, ill-educated Arab has largely vanished, and the literacy rate in Bahrain is 85 per cent.

There's a fairly wide choice of schools in Bahrain, although state (i.e. government-funded) schools aren't usually an option for foreign children. These are attended by local and expatriate Arabs, who share culture, language and religion. The private sector provides for the expatriate communities, and its schools are generally of a reasonable standard, especially for primary education. However, a child's secondary education is sometimes better provided for in their home country. The Ministry of Education controls standards in the state schools and have some influence over the establishment, legitimacy and running of those in the private sector, in some instances stipulating that school hours and days match those of the state schools.

A key decision for expatriates with school-age children (particularly those at secondary school age) is whether to send them to boarding school in their home country and, if so, at what age? First, do you want to be separated from your child(ren) for months at a time? Do you feel it important that your children are brought up exposed to and aware of their national culture and environment by being educated at home? On the other hand, Bahrain is a wonderful environment

for children, being safe and clean, with plenty of opportunities for exercise and sports, and with sunshine, sea and beautiful beaches; do you want to deprive them of all this by packing them off to boarding school in a country which may lack these advantages? You're advised to listen to advice from other expatriates who have made these difficult decisions.

When deciding on the type of education best suited to your child(ren)'s needs, you should also ask yourself the following questions:

- Are Bahrain's educational system and examination qualifications recognised in your home country, the country in which your child will probably eventually have to make his way?
- When your child returns to your native country, will his education be ahead of or behind that of his peers?
- What is the academic record of the school you propose to select?

Only by fully exploring all the options open to you with regards to education will you reach the right decision. What is right for one family is not right for another and it is up to you to reach the right solution for your own child.