

RELOCATING TO **BAHRAIN**

HELPFUL ADVICE
AND KEY INFORMATION



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Cover image: Al Riffa fort built by the Portuguese, Bahrain.

1.0 Overview



1.1 Map of Bahrain



Bahrain

Population: 698,585

Area: 665 km²

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Established: 15th August, 1971 (independence from UK)

Capital: Manama

2.0 Why move to Bahrain?



2.0 Why move to Bahrain?

Bahrain is a country that boasts a modern infrastructure with a long cultural Persian Gulf history. Bahrain is located midway between the tip of the Qatar Peninsula and the Saudi Arabian mainland. The island group includes six primary islands which are Bahrain, Muharraq, Sitrah, Umm al Nassan, Jidda and Nabi Salih.

Bahrain's history as a successful trading and business nation goes back more than 4,000 years, when the Dilmun civilisation lay at the heart of the world's trade routes.

Bahrain boasts a number of advantages for modern day businesses, with its strategic location at the heart of the Arabian Gulf. Coupled with a highly favourable tax environment, with no corporate, personal or value-added tax, a modern high standard of living, and a mature legal and administrative infrastructure, it has long been an attractive location within the Middle East.

With its unique accessibility to the rest of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) by road, air and sea, modern-day Bahrain acts as an important gateway to the rest of the Gulf. The King Fahad Causeway provides a 45-minute road link to Saudi Arabia and the rest of the region, while another causeway to Qatar is planned.

2.1 The Economy

Unlike other countries in the region, Bahrain's prosperity has been less dependent on its oil reserves, and diversified significantly earlier, becoming known for its financial institutions as early as the 1970s. In addition to this, huge construction and development projects, is evidence of one of the fastest growing and freest economies in the Arab world. Bahrain has a strong established base of leading international companies and financial institutions. They have been attracted by buoyant economic growth, positive political developments, its commitment to high international standards and best practices, a pro-business culture and world-class infrastructure, an independent judicial system, and a friendly cosmopolitan lifestyle.

It is also home to many pan-regional financial, commercial and industrial institutions and joint projects, and is also one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Middle East with over two million tourists a year. Most of the visitors are from the Arab and Persian Gulf states but there is an increasing number of tourists from outside the region. This is thanks to a growing awareness of the Kingdom's rich heritage and the higher profile gained by Bahrain's Formula One status.

3.0 Life in Bahrain



3.0 Life in Bahrain

Bahrain is generally regarded as one of the most cosmopolitan and Westernised countries within the Middle Eastern region. While Islam is the main religion, Bahrainis have been known for their tolerance, and alongside mosques, churches, a Hindu temple, a Sikh Gurudwara and a Jewish synagogue can be found. While Arabic is the official language, English is widely spoken.

One of the major differences in Bahrain is the restriction of alcohol. Generally, only hotels have licenses to sell alcohol, so you are likely to find that the majority of bars, restaurants and clubs aimed at Westerners will be attached to hotels. It is possible to buy alcohol for personal consumption, however it is significantly more expensive than buying alcohol in the UK.

The month of Ramadan is a feature of life in the Middle East. During this month of fasting, eating, drinking and smoking are not permitted in public, from sunrise to sunset. This is strictly adhered to, and even as a non-Muslim it is unacceptable to partake in any of the above in view of anyone who is observing Ramadan.

3.1 Climate

Bahrain has an arid desert climate characterized by very hot summers with high humidity, while winters are relatively cooler. The average winter temperature range is 14° to 20°C in January. The average summer range is 29° to 38°C in August.

3.2 Potential earnings and savings

One of the great attractions of working in Bahrain is that there is no personal taxation. The only way to truly appreciate the quality of your offer is to analyse your package by factoring in cost of living.

Specifically geared towards the Middle East, the table below illustrates how net earnings in the UK compare to gross earnings in Bahrain.

What you earn – and save every month:

	UK Gross – Before Tax	UK Net – After Tax	Bahrain gross – Tax saving
£30,000	£2,500	£1,825	£2,500 (+27%)
£36,000	£3,000	£2,196	£3,000 (+26.8%)
£50,000	£4,166	£2,886	£4,166 (+30.7%)
£48,000	£4,000	£2,788	£4,000 (+30.3%)
£60,000	£5,000	£3,378	£5,000 (+ 32%)
£72,000	£6,000	£3,968	£6,000 (+33%)
£100,000	£8,333	£5,345	£8,300 (+35%)

Notes:

1. All calculations are based on monthly earnings.
2. The right hand column shows a % increase between the net and gross.

3.0 Life in Bahrain



3.3 Money

The currency in Bahrain is the Bahraini Dinar (BD), which is divided into 1000 Fils. As of 20 February 2008, the relevant exchange rates were:

1 GBP = 0.7333 BD

1 EUR = 0.5539 BD

1 USD = 0.3765 BD

Banks

Several of the world's leading banks or their subsidiaries have branches in Bahrain. Foreign banks including the British Bank of the Middle East, Citibank, and Standard Chartered.

Setting up an account is easy, as is transferring money to the UK. You'll be given a cash point card to withdraw money from ATM machines. Credit cards are widely accepted.

3.4 Accommodation

Until recently, expats only had the option to rent in Bahrain, with ownership being restricted to Bahraini nationals. However, over the last two years expats (resident or not) can now freely buy property, rent it out or live in it in certain areas. These areas are currently Ahmed Al-Fateh, Hooraa, Bu Ghazal, Seef, and Northern Manama, which are all in the capital city, Manama, and Durrat Al-Bahrain, the Amwaj Islands, and Dannat Hawar, all reclaimed areas earmarked for tourist developments. In the rental market a variety of accommodation is available, from unfurnished apartments to fully furnished villas, inside or outside compounds. Many new executive apartments provide additional amenities such as a swimming pool, tennis court, gym, sauna, maintenance, cleaning etc.

Flats and houses can be rented for a day, week, month and year. The longer your rental period, the better your deal. Most apartments and villas are let unfurnished, although partly furnished or fully furnished accommodation can be found. With a constant turnover of expats, secondhand furniture is easy to find at good prices.

Villas and apartments can be found through real estate agents, adverts in the local newspapers, word of mouth and by visiting suitable areas. It is usual for your company to provide help and support in finding suitable accommodation. Rental costs and property prices vary widely depending on location and standards. One-bedroom apartments usually start from 280 BD. 2 and 3 bedroom apartments start from 370 BD up to 560 BD. Villas also vary widely in price, some have pools and small gardens. They start from 680 BD up to 850 BD.

3.5 Travel and transport

Bahrain International airport is located on Al Muharraq, an island on the northern tip of Bahrain, north of the capital, Manama. Airlines such as Gulf Air, British Airways, Emirates, Lufthansa and KLM regularly fly in and out of Bahrain.

Expats usually purchase cars for the duration of their stay in Bahrain. Most of the models will include air-conditioning and tend to be automatic. Cars are substantially cheaper than in the UK, and many expats opt for a 4-wheel drive vehicle for off-road and desert driving. For those who are reluctant to buy, long-term leases are also available. The low cost of petrol is also a factor when considering your ideal car, especially for those expats who have lived in the UK previously.

3.0 Life in Bahrain



3.5 Travel and transport (continued)

Alternative transportation is essentially limited to taxis, which are metered and numerous. Bus services are not generally used by expats, and as yet there is no rail system in place.

3.6 Education

There is an excellent range of primary and secondary private schools in Bahrain catering especially for the expat community. The majority are managed by and run for English-speaking Westerners and offer an American curriculum plus a UK or international syllabus. In general, standards at private schools are high, with small class sizes and modern facilities. Enrolment in private schools usually involves an interview with the parent and child and an examination to assess the correct class for the child.

3.7 Shopping

Bahrain is a shopper's paradise with excellent malls, department stores and supermarkets which sell a huge variety of goods. There are plenty of smart, modern shops selling everything from DVD players to designer clothes, with the benefit of no sales tax.

3.8 Food and drink

Every type of food can be purchased in Bahrain. There are plenty of fresh fruit, vegetable and fish markets all worth visiting. Bahrain also has a large variety of restaurants serving European and oriental cuisine. Most types of food and takeaway can be found in the major towns, from small independent to large international chains.

3.9 Communications

All mail in Bahrain is addressed to post office boxes. Although a PO Box can be rented, most residents use their company address for private mail. There are a number of telephone networks available in Bahrain, and international calls can be made easily from a landline using either a local service or one of the international internet call back companies. The international dial code for Bahrain is +973.

3.10 Recreation

Bahrain has a wealth of recreational activities. For the sports lover, there is fishing, horse riding, golf and a variety of water sports, as well as a national love of Formula One racing.

Desert driving is also popular; take a 4-wheel drive vehicle across the sand dunes and camp in the desert. Alternatively, relax around the pool at one of the several social clubs popular with expats.

In the evening, there is a choice of numerous restaurants serving Arabic, European, American and Asian cuisine throughout the cities of Bahrain. Bars and nightclubs are numerous and often attached to hotels, but can stay open until 3.00 am. There are plenty of cinemas showing the latest movies and live bands from the UK or America.

4.0 Working in Bahrain



4.1 Passports and visas

Your visa will be organised by your employer once you have secured a job offer from them. For the duration of your stay in the Middle East they act as your sponsor, and all documents such as driving licence, bank account, health cards etc are reliant on you being in possession of a Residence Visa, which will be organised by your employer.

4.2 Health regulations

There are no compulsory regulations for entry to Bahrain.

4.3 The Bahrain workplace

Smart, conservative clothing is expected, despite the soaring heat outside and the fiercely efficient air conditioning inside.

When greeting Arab women do not offer to shake their hand unless the woman extends hers first. The terms 'Sayed' (Mr) or 'Sayeda' (Mrs), followed by the first name, should be used in greeting, to ensure politeness. It is also very important for visitors never to sit with their feet pointing directly at someone else, as this causes offence. Be careful when criticising a colleague or client, as causing someone to lose face is considered bad manners. Any criticism of colleagues should be kept for private discussions afterwards.

Friday is the main day of prayer, so meetings should not be scheduled for this day. Calls to Arab colleagues or clients should also be avoided on this day. Depending on the company, the other day of the weekend will be Thursday or Saturday.

4.4 Working hours

Office hours are usually from 8.30 or 9.00 am to 5.30 or 6.00 pm. In the month of Ramadan, the working day is reduced to six hours for Muslims, who fast during daylight hours.

4.5 Employment prospects

The market is booming in Bahrain, and excellent opportunities exist for the right candidates who possess the required skills.

The government strongly encourages employers to use the local labour force where possible. Local graduates are being particularly encouraged to take up employment and employers are strongly urged to recruit Bahraini graduates. UK graduates are likely to have particular difficulty securing a position unless they have substantial relevant work experience, or are already employed by a UK firm who transfers them to Bahrain. Having made major investments in education and social welfare, Bahrain aims to ultimately become as self sufficient as possible in terms of labour.

In general, for a candidate to be employed from overseas they must have experience and skills that cannot be found locally. Taking into consideration the current popularity of tax-free destinations like Bahrain, and the number of people wanting to relocate, this does not necessarily make finding a job a foregone conclusion or a quick process. As a general rule, candidates will need to have at least four years' post qualification experience to be considered as viable.

4.0 Working in Bahrain



4.5 Employment prospects *continued...*

Often, lower to middle level jobs are not advertised, instead recruiting and man power contracting agents are used to hire back in their native country.

So many of these jobs never appear in a public forum. Even if they did, the salary packages would be too low for most candidates who have previously lived and worked in the West to consider and survive on.

However, for those candidates with skills in demand the tax-free lifestyle and booming market can be a great career move. Generally the remuneration packages and the lifestyle that can be achieved are more favourable than equivalent roles in the UK, and the quality of life and experience of working in such a vibrant economy are experiences not to be missed for many.

5.0 General information



5.1 Useful links

www.justlanded.com/english/bahrain

www.escapeartist.com/bahrain/bahrain.html

www.bahrain.alloexpat.com

www.bahrainguide.org

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