

LIVING IN KUWAIT



The State of Kuwait is situated along the Arabian Gulf between Republic of Iraq and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It has a total land area slightly smaller than the US State of New Jersey. Its total population as of 2015 was estimated at over 4 million people, which includes a highly diverse non-Kuwaiti immigrant population accounting for more than 69% of residence. Although Arabic is the official language of the country, English is widely spoken by a majority of the population.

As one would expect the summers are hot and dry. The months of May through October tend to be uncomfortably warm. However, from November through April cooler weather prevails. There will be times when a warm jacket will be necessary. All apartments have heat, which can be a welcome relief on cold and windy days in January or February. Rain is infrequent, but bring an umbrella. At least once a year a good thunderstorm is likely.

A large variety of choices present themselves to those involved in the daily life of Kuwait whether it is in shopping, exercising, or socializing. People are often surprised at the vast array of products available and places to go. Perhaps the one thing that Westerners find most difficult is to adjust the weekend to Friday and Saturday rather than Saturday and Sunday. School begins at 7:15 and ends at 2:00 for students. Some shops close in the afternoon until around 4:00 or 5:00 p.m. Most stores stay open until 9:00 or 10:00 in the evening. Traffic can be heavy and congested during peak times in the morning, afternoon, and early evening. During the Holy Month of Ramadan, one of the most important religious events in Islam, school begins at 9:00 and ends at 2:00. Stores also open later but do not close until 11:00 pm. Ramadan ends with EID, a time of celebration and family gathering.

The major source of Western style grocery shopping and products is the Sultan Center, Lulu Hypermarket, and Carrefour. Several of these stores exist throughout the city. You will find a wide variety of American and Western products. Besides the Sultan Centers, several Co-ops are situated in suburban communities for easy access. The Co-ops do not have the variety but they definitely have excel-



lent choices. These shops offer more local items. Most Co-ops are in areas that offer fast food restaurants and a vegetable and fruit market.

The Middle Eastern concept of fruit and vegetable stores, bread shops, and butcher shops are available also. For convenience, every block or two has its own "Baqalla", which is a tiny shop selling a wide variety of goods. The Old Souk in Kuwait City and the open air Friday market offer traditional items in an old world setting. Carpet shops, which sell carpets from many parts of the Middle East, are found everywhere. These carpets vary from the most practical to the highly expensive.

Modern shopping malls abound in Kuwait. These malls include shops such as The Pottery Barn, Debenhams, MAC, H & M, Levis, Victoria's Secret, the Gap, Bath and Body Works, and even Tiffany's just to name a few. True Value, Ace Hardware, Sears, and IKEA and others are also within easy access. There is very little that one cannot buy in Kuwait. If you can't

People are sometimes shocked to discover that Kuwait has over 50 McDonald's plus many Burger Kings, KFC, Pizza Hut, Dominoes, Baskin Robbins, Chili's, Johnny Rockets, Fridays, Fuddruckers as well as local restaurants. A Chinese take-out can be found minutes away no matter where you live. Fish is plentiful and excellent with a local fish market that sells fresh fish every day. For those with a more sophisticated pallet there is a burgeoning culinary arts scene in Kuwait that has developed in recent years.

Movies theaters are plentiful in Kuwait. Several malls have multi-screens and the latest in American films are available. If you aren't a movie buff, there are other options. Some love to travel in the desert picnicking and camping. Others may be found scuba diving and snorkeling, while others are pounding the pavement with their running companions and exercising at a club. There are book clubs to be joined, coffee to be enjoyed at Starbucks or Costas, or a leisure day to be spent sunning by a pool.

A vast array of clothing is worn in Kuwait. Many Arab men wear the traditional dishdashas and many Arab women choose to wear abayas and the hijab (scarf worn to cover hair), but common Western wear also abounds. It is still considered inappropriate to wear shorts or sleeveless blouses, but, other than that, most all type of dress is accepted. It is important to dress respectfully for the culture in which we live.

