

= Bahrain =

Bahrain (/ b??re?n / ; Arabic : ?????? al @-@ Ba?rayn) , officially the Kingdom of Bahrain (Arabic : ????? ?????? Mamlakat al @-@ Ba?rayn) , is an island country situated near the western shores of the Persian Gulf in the Middle East . It is an archipelago with Bahrain Island , the largest land mass , at 55 km (34 mi) long by 18 km (11 mi) wide . Saudi Arabia lies to the west and is connected to Bahrain by the King Fahd Causeway while Iran lies 200 km (124 mi) to the north across the Persian Gulf . The peninsula of Qatar is to the southeast across the Gulf of Bahrain . The population in 2010 stood at 1 @, @ 234 @, @ 571 , including 666 @, @ 172 non @-@ nationals .

Bahrain is the site of the ancient Dilmun civilisation . It has been famed since antiquity for its pearl fisheries , which were considered the best in the world into the 19th century . Bahrain was one of the earliest areas to convert to Islam (AD 628) . Following a period of Arab rule , Bahrain was occupied by the Portuguese in 1521 , who in turn were expelled in 1602 by Shah Abbas I of the Safavid dynasty under the Persian Empire . In 1783 , the Bani Utbah clan captured Bahrain from Nasr Al @-@ Madhkur and it has since been ruled by the Al Khalifa royal family , with Ahmed al Fateh as Bahrain 's first hakim . In the late 1800s , following successive treaties with the British , Bahrain became a protectorate of the United Kingdom . In 1971 , Bahrain declared independence . Formerly a state , Bahrain was declared a Kingdom in 2002 . In 2011 , the country experienced protests inspired by the regional Arab Spring .

Bahrain had the first post @-@ oil economy in the Persian Gulf . Since the late 20th century , Bahrain has invested in the banking and tourism sectors . The country 's capital , Manama , is home to many large financial structures . Bahrain has a high Human Development Index and was recognised by the World Bank as a high income economy .

= = Etymology = =

In Arabic , Bahrayn is the dual form of bahr (" sea ") , so al @-@ Bahrayn means " the two seas " , although which two seas were originally intended remains in dispute . The term appears five times in the Quran , but does not refer to the modern island ? originally known to the Arabs as Awal ? but rather to all of Eastern Arabia (most notably al @-@ Katif and al @-@ Hasa) .

Today , Bahrain 's " two seas " are instead generally taken to be the bay east and west of the island , the seas north and south of the island , or the salt and fresh water present above and below the ground . In addition to wells , there are areas of the sea north of Bahrain where fresh water bubbles up in the middle of the salt water as noted by visitors since antiquity . An alternate theory with regard to Bahrain 's toponymy is offered by the al @-@ Ahsa region , which suggests that the two seas were the Great Green Ocean (the Persian Gulf) and a peaceful lake on the Arabian mainland . Another supposition by al @-@ Jawahari suggests that the more formal name Bahri (lit . " belonging to the sea ") would have been misunderstood and so was opted against .

Until the late Middle Ages , " Bahrain " referred to the region of Eastern Arabia that included Southern Iraq , Kuwait , Al @-@ Hasa , Qatif and Bahrain . The region stretched from Basra in Iraq to the Strait of Hormuz in Oman . This was Iql?m al @-@ Bahrayn 's " Bahrayn Province " . The exact date at which the term " Bahrain " began to refer solely to the Awal archipelago is unknown . The entire coastal strip of Eastern Arabia was known as " Bahrain " for a millennium . The island and kingdom were also commonly spelled Bahrein into the 1950s .

= = History = =

= = = Antiquity = = =

Bahrain was home to the Dilmun civilization , an important Bronze Age trade centre linking Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley . Bahrain was later ruled by the Assyrians and Babylonians .

From the 6th to 3rd century BC , Bahrain was part of the Persian Empire ruled by the Achaemenian dynasty . By about 250 BC , Parthia brought the Persian Gulf under its control and extended its influence as far as Oman . The Parthians established garrisons along the southern coast of the Persian Gulf to control trade routes .

During the classical era , Bahrain was referred to by the ancient Greeks as Tylos , the centre of pearl trading , when the Greek admiral Nearchus serving under Alexander the Great landed on Bahrain . Nearchus is believed to have been the first of Alexander 's commanders to visit the island , and he found a verdant land that was part of a wide trading network ; he recorded : ? That on the island of Tylos , situated in the Persian Gulf , are large plantations of cotton trees , from which are manufactured clothes called sindones , of strongly differing degrees of value , some being costly , others less expensive . The use of these is not confined to India , but extends to Arabia . ? The Greek historian , Theophrastus , states that much of Bahrain was covered by these cotton trees and that Bahrain was famous for exporting walking canes engraved with emblems that were customarily carried in Babylon .

Alexander had planned to settle Greek colonists on Bahrain , and although it is not clear that this happened on the scale he envisaged , Bahrain became very much part of the Hellenised world : the language of the upper classes was Greek (although Aramaic was in everyday use) , while Zeus was worshipped in the form of the Arabian sun @-@ god Shams . Bahrain even became the site of Greek athletic contests .

The Greek historian Strabo believed the Phoenicians originate from Bahrain . Herodotus also believed that the homeland of the Phoenicians was Bahrain . This theory was accepted by the 19th @-@ century German classicist Arnold Heeren who said that : " In the Greek geographers , for instance , we read of two islands , named Tyrus or Tylos , and Arad , Bahrain , which boasted that they were the mother country of the Phoenicians , and exhibited relics of Phoenician temples . " The people of Tyre in particular have long maintained Persian Gulf origins , and the similarity in the words " Tylos " and " Tyre " has been commented upon . However , there is little evidence of any human settlement at all on Bahrain during the time when such migration had supposedly taken place .

The name Tylos is thought to be a Hellenisation of the Semitic , Tilmun (from Dilmun) . The term Tylos was commonly used for the islands until Ptolemy ? s Geographia when the inhabitants are referred to as ' Thilouanoi ' . Some place names on Bahrain go back to the Tylos era ; for instance the name of Arad , a residential suburb of Muharraq , is believed to originate from " Arados " , the ancient Greek name for Muharraq .

In the 3rd century , Ardashir I , the first ruler of the Sassanid dynasty , marched on Oman and Bahrain , where he defeated Sanatruq the ruler of Bahrain . At this time , Bahrain was known as Mishmahig (which in Middle @-@ Persian / Pahlavi means " ewe @-@ fish ") .

Bahrain was also the site of worship of a shark deity called Awal . Worshipers built a large statue to Awal in Muharraq , although it has now been lost . For many centuries after Tylos , Bahrain was known as Awal . By the 5th century , Bahrain became the centre for Nestorian Christianity , with the village Samahij as the seat of bishops . In 410 , according to the Oriental Syriac Church synodal records , a bishop named Batai was excommunicated from the church in Bahrain . As a sect , the Nestorians were often persecuted as heretics by the Byzantine Empire , but Bahrain was outside the Empire 's control offering some safety . The names of several Muharraq villages today reflect Bahrain 's Christian legacy , with Al Dair meaning ? the monastery ? .

Bahrain 's pre @-@ Islamic population consisted of Christian Arabs (mostly Abd al @-@ Qays) , Persians (Zoroastrians) , Jews and Aramaic @-@ speaking agriculturalists . According to Robert Bertram Serjeant , the Baharna may be the Arabized " descendants of converts from the original population of Christians (Aramaeans) , Jews and Persians inhabiting the island and cultivated coastal provinces of Eastern Arabia at the time of the Muslim conquest " . The sedentary people of pre @-@ Islamic Bahrain were Aramaic speakers and to some degree Persian speakers , while Syriac functioned as a liturgical language .

= = = Time of Muhammad = = =

Muhammad 's first interaction with the people of Bahrain was the Al Kudr Invasion . Muhammad ordered a surprise attack on the Banu Salim tribe for allegedly plotting to attack Medina . He had gotten news that some tribes were assembling an army on Bahrain and preparing to attack the mainland . But the tribesmen retreated when they learned Muhammad was leading an army to do battle with them .

Traditional Islamic accounts state that Al @-@ ?Al?? Al @-@ Ha?rami was sent as an envoy during the Expedition of Zaid ibn Haritha (Hisma) to the Bahrain region by the prophet Muhammad in AD 628 and that Munzir ibn @-@ Sawa al @-@ Tamimi , the local ruler , responded to his mission and converted the entire area .

= = = Middle Ages = = =

In AD 899 , the Qarmatians , a millenarian Ismaili Muslim sect seized Bahrain , seeking to create a utopian society based on reason and redistribution of property among initiates . Thereafter , the Qarmatians demanded tribute from the caliph in Baghdad , and in AD 930 sacked Mecca and Medina , bringing the sacred Black Stone back to their base in Ahsa , in medieval Bahrain , for ransom . According to historian Al @-@ Juwayni , the stone was returned 22 years later in 951 under mysterious circumstances . Wrapped in a sack , it was thrown into the Great Mosque of Kufa in Iraq , accompanied by a note saying " By command we took it , and by command we have brought it back . " The theft and removal of the Black Stone caused it to break into seven pieces .

Following their AD 976 defeat by the Abbasids , the Qarmatians were overthrown by the Arab Uyunid dynasty of al @-@ Hasa , who took over the entire Bahrain region in 1076 . The Uyunids controlled Bahrain until 1235 , when the archipelago was briefly occupied by the Persian ruler of Fars . In 1253 , the Bedouin Usfurids brought down the Uyunid dynasty , thereby gaining control over eastern Arabia , including the islands of Bahrain . In 1330 , the archipelago became a tributary state of the rulers of Hormuz , though locally the islands were controlled by the Shi 'ite Jarwanid dynasty of Qatif . In the mid @-@ 15th century , the archipelago came under the rule of the Jabrids , a Bedouin dynasty also based in Al @-@ Ahsa that ruled most of eastern Arabia .

= = = Early @-@ modern era = = =

In 1521 , the Portuguese allied with Hormuz and seized Bahrain from the Jabrid ruler Migrin ibn Zamil , who was killed during the takeover . Portuguese rule lasted for around 80 years , during which time they depended mainly on Sunni Persian governors . The Portuguese were expelled from the islands in 1602 by Abbas I of the Safavid dynasty of Persia , which gave impetus to Shia Islam . For the next two centuries , Persian rulers retained control of the archipelago , interrupted by the 1717 and 1738 invasions of the Ibadhis of Oman . During most of this period , they resorted to governing Bahrain indirectly , either through the city of Bushehr or through immigrant Sunni Arab clans . The latter were tribes returning to the Arabian side of the Persian Gulf from Persian territories in the north who were known as Huwala (literally : those that have changed or moved) . In 1753 , the Huwala clan of Nasr Al @-@ Madhkur invaded Bahrain on behalf of the Iranian Zand leader Karim Khan Zand and restored direct Iranian rule .

In 1783 , Al @-@ Madhkur lost the islands of Bahrain following his defeat by the Bani Utbah tribe at the 1782 Battle of Zubarah . Bahrain was not new territory to the Bani Utbah ; they had been a presence there since the 17th century . During that time , they started purchasing date palm gardens in Bahrain ; a document shows that 81 years before arrival of the Al @-@ Khalifa , one of the shaikhs of the Al Bin Ali tribe (an offshoot of the Bani Utbah) had bought a palm garden from Mariam bint Ahmed Al Sanadi in Sitra island .

The Al Bin Ali were the dominant group controlling the town of Zubarah on the Qatar peninsula , originally the center of power of the Bani Utbah . After the Bani Utbah gained control of Bahrain , the Al Bin Ali had a practically independent status there as a self @-@ governing tribe . They used a flag with four red and three white stripes , called the Al @-@ Sulami flag in Bahrain , Qatar , Kuwait ,

and the Eastern province of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia . Later , different Arab family clans and tribes from Qatar moved to Bahrain to settle after the fall of Nasr Al Maadhkur of Bushehr . These families included the Al Khalifa , Al Ma'awdah , Al Fadhil , Al Mannai , Al Noaimi , Al Sulaiti , Al Sadah , Al Thawadi and other families and tribes .

The Al Khalifa family moved from Qatar to Bahrain in 1799 . Originally , their ancestors were expelled from Umm Qasr in central Arabia by the Ottomans due to their predatory habits of preying on caravans in Basra and trading ships in Shatt al Arab waterway until Turks expelled them to Kuwait in 1716 where they remained until 1766 .

Around the 1760s , the Al Jalahma and Al Khalifa clans , both belonging to the Utub federation , migrated to Zubarah in modern day Qatar , leaving Al Sabah as the sole proprietors of Kuwait .

== 19th century and later ==

In the early 19th century , Bahrain was invaded by both the Omanis and the Al Sauds . In 1802 it was governed by a twelve year old child , when the Omani ruler Sayyid Sultan installed his son , Salim , as Governor in the Arad Fort . In 1816 , the British political resident in the Gulf , William Bruce , received a letter from the Sheikh of Bahrain who was concerned about a rumour that Britain would support an attack on the island by the Imam of Muscat . He sailed to Bahrain to reassure the Sheikh that this was not the case and drew up an informal agreement assuring the Sheikh that Britain would remain a neutral party .

In 1820 , the Al Khalifa tribe were recognised by Great Britain as the rulers (" Al Hakim " in Arabic) of Bahrain after signing a treaty relationship . However , ten years later they were forced to pay yearly tributes to Egypt despite seeking Persian and British protection .

In 1860 , the Al Khalifas used the same tactic when the British tried to overpower Bahrain . Writing letters to the Persians and Ottomans , Al Khalifas agreed to place Bahrain under the latter 's protection in March due to offering better conditions . Eventually the Government of British India overpowered Bahrain when the Persians refused to protect it . Colonel Pelly signed a new treaty with Al Khalifas placing Bahrain under British rule and protection .

Following the Qatari ? Bahraini War in 1868 , British representatives signed another agreement with the Al Khalifas . It specified that the ruler could not dispose of any of his territory except to the United Kingdom and could not enter into relationships with any foreign government without British consent . In return the British promised to protect Bahrain from all aggression by sea and to lend support in case of land attack . More importantly the British promised to support the rule of the Al Khalifa in Bahrain , securing its unstable position as rulers of the country . Other agreements in 1880 and 1892 sealed the protectorate status of Bahrain to the British .

Unrest amongst the people of Bahrain began when Britain officially established complete dominance over the territory in 1892 . The first revolt and widespread uprising took place in March 1895 against Sheikh Issa bin Ali , then ruler of Bahrain . Sheikh Issa was the first of the Al Khalifa to rule without Persian relations . Sir Arnold Wilson , Britain 's representative in the Persian Gulf and author of The Persian Gulf , arrived in Bahrain from Muscat at this time . The uprising developed further with some protesters killed by British forces .

Before the development of petroleum , the island was largely devoted to pearl fisheries and , as late as the 19th century , was considered to be the finest in the world . In 1903 , German explorer , Hermann Burchardt , visited Bahrain and took many photographs of historical sites , including the old Qasr es Sheikh , photos now stored at the Ethnological Museum of Berlin . Prior to the First World War , there were about 400 vessels hunting pearls and an annual export of more than £ 30 ,000 .

In 1911 , a group of Bahraini merchants demanded restrictions on the British influence in the country . The group 's leaders were subsequently arrested and exiled to India . In 1923 , the British introduced administrative reforms and replaced Sheikh Issa bin Ali with his son . Some clerical opponents and families such as al Dossari left or were exiled to Saudi Arabia and Iran . Three years later the British placed the country under the de facto rule of Charles Belgrave who operated as an

adviser to the ruler until 1957 . Belgrave brought a number of reforms such as establishment of the country 's first modern school in 1919 , the Persian Gulf 's first girls school in 1928 and the abolition of slavery in 1937 . At the same time , the pearl diving industry developed at a rapid pace .

In 1927 , Reza Shah , then Shah of Iran , demanded sovereignty over Bahrain in a letter to the League of Nations , a move that prompted Belgrave to undertake harsh measures including encouraging conflicts between Shia and Sunni Muslims in order to bring down the uprisings and limit the Iranian influence . Belgrave even went further by suggesting to rename the Persian Gulf to the " Arabian Gulf " ; however , the proposal was refused by the British government . Britain 's interest in Bahrain 's development was motivated by concerns over Saudi and Iranian ambitions in the region .

The Bahrain Petroleum Company (Bapco) , a subsidiary of the Standard Oil Company of California (Socal) , discovered oil in 1931 and production began the following year . This was to bring rapid modernisation to Bahrain . Relations with the United Kingdom became closer , as evidenced by the British Royal Navy moving its entire Middle Eastern command from Bushehr in Iran to Bahrain in 1935 .

In the early 1930s Bahrain Airport was developed . Imperial Airways flew there , including the Handley Page HP42 aircraft . Later in the same decade the Bahrain Maritime Airport was established , for flying @-@ boats and seaplanes .

Bahrain participated in the Second World War on the Allied side , joining on 10 September 1939 . On 19 October 1940 , four Italian SM.82s bombers bombed Bahrain alongside Dhahran oilfields in Saudi Arabia , targeting Allied @-@ operated oil refineries . Although minimal damage was caused in both locations , the attack forced the Allies to upgrade Bahrain 's defences , an action which further stretched Allied military resources .

After World War II , increasing anti @-@ British sentiment spread throughout the Arab World and led to riots in Bahrain . The riots focused on the Jewish community . In 1948 , following rising hostilities and looting , most members of Bahrain 's Jewish community abandoned their properties and evacuated to Bombay , later settling in Israel (Pardes Hanna @-@ Karkur) and the United Kingdom . As of 2008 , 37 Jews remained in the country . In the 1950s , the National Union Committee , formed by reformists following sectarian clashes , demanded an elected popular assembly , removal of Belgrave and carried out a number of protests and general strikes . In 1965 a month @-@ long uprising broke out after hundreds of workers at the Bahrain Petroleum Company were laid off .

= = = Independence = = =

On 15 August 1971 , Bahrain declared independence and signed a new treaty of friendship with the United Kingdom . Bahrain joined the United Nations and the Arab League later in the year . The oil boom of the 1970s benefited Bahrain greatly , although the subsequent downturn hurt the economy . The country had already begun diversification of its economy and benefited further from the Lebanese Civil War in the 1970s and 1980s , when Bahrain replaced Beirut as the Middle East 's financial hub after Lebanon 's large banking sector was driven out of the country by the war .

Following the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran , in 1981 Bahraini Sh? 'a fundamentalists orchestrated a failed coup attempt under the auspices of a front organisation , the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain . The coup would have installed a Sh? 'a cleric exiled in Iran , Hujjatu l @-@ Isl?m H?d? al @-@ Mudarris? , as supreme leader heading a theocratic government . In December 1994 , a group of youths threw stones at female runners during an international marathon for running bare @-@ legged . The resulting clash with police soon grew into civil unrest .

A popular uprising occurred between 1994 and 2000 in which leftists , liberals and Islamists joined forces . The event resulted in approximately forty deaths and ended after Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa became the Emir of Bahrain in 1999 . He instituted elections for parliament , gave women the right to vote , and released all political prisoners . A referendum on 14 ? 15 February 2001 massively supported the National Action Charter . As part of the adoption of the National Action Charter on 14 February 2002 , Bahrain changed its formal name from the State (dawla) of Bahrain to the Kingdom of Bahrain .

The country participated in military action against the Taliban in October 2001 by deploying a frigate in the Arabian Sea for rescue and humanitarian operations . As a result , in November of that year , US president George W. Bush 's administration designated Bahrain as a " major non @-@ NATO ally " . Bahrain opposed the invasion of Iraq and had offered Saddam Hussein asylum in the days prior to the invasion . Relations improved with neighbouring Qatar after the border dispute over the Hawar Islands was resolved by the International Court of Justice in The Hague in 2001 . Following the political liberalisation of the country , Bahrain negotiated a free trade agreement with the United States in 2004 .

= = = Bahraini uprising = = =

Inspired by the regional Arab Spring , Bahrain 's Shia majority started large protests against its Sunni rulers in early 2011 . The government initially allowed protests following a pre @-@ dawn raid on protesters camped in Pearl Roundabout . A month later it requested security assistance from Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries and declared a three @-@ month state of emergency . The government then launched a crackdown on the opposition that included conducting thousands of arrests and systematic torture . Almost daily clashes between protesters and security forces led to dozens of deaths . Protests , sometimes staged by opposition parties , are ongoing . More than 80 civilians and 13 policemen have been killed as of March 2014 . The lack of coverage by Arab media in the Persian Gulf , as compared to other Arab Spring uprisings , has sparked several controversies .

= = Geography = =

Bahrain is a generally flat and arid archipelago in the Persian Gulf , east of Saudi Arabia . It consists of a low desert plain rising gently to a low central escarpment with the highest point the 134 m (440 ft) Mountain of Smoke (Jabal ad Dukhan) . Bahrain had a total area of 665 km² (257 sq mi) but due to land reclamation , the area increased to 765 km² (295 sq mi) , which is slightly larger than Hamburg or the Isle of Man .

Often described as an archipelago of 33 islands , extensive land reclamation projects have changed this ; by August 2008 the number of islands and island groups had increased to 84 . Bahrain does not share a land boundary with another country but does have a 161 km (100 mi) coastline . The country also claims a further 22 km (12 nmi) of territorial sea and a 44 km (24 nmi) contiguous zone . Bahrain 's largest islands are Bahrain Island , the Hawar Islands , Muharraq Island , Umm an Nasan , and Sitra . Bahrain has mild winters and very hot , humid summers . The country 's natural resources include large quantities of oil and natural gas as well as fish in the offshore waters . Arable land constitutes only 2 @-@ 82 % of the total area .

Though 92 % of Bahrain is desert with periodic droughts and dust storms , the main natural hazards for Bahrainis . Environmental issues facing Bahrain include desertification resulting from the degradation of limited arable land , coastal degradation (damage to coastlines , coral reefs , and sea vegetation) resulting from oil spills and other discharges from large tankers , oil refineries , distribution stations , and illegal land reclamation at places such as Tubli Bay . The agricultural and domestic sectors ' over @-@ utilisation of the Dammam Aquifer , the principal aquifer in Bahrain , has led to its salinisation by adjacent brackish and saline water bodies . A hydrochemical study identified the locations of the sources of aquifer salinisation and delineated their areas of influence . The investigation indicates that the aquifer water quality is significantly modified as groundwater flows from the northwestern parts of Bahrain , where the aquifer receives its water by lateral underflow from eastern Saudi Arabia , to the southern and southeastern parts . Four types of salinisation of the aquifer are identified : brackish @-@ water up @-@ flow from the underlying brackish @-@ water zones in north @-@ central , western , and eastern regions ; seawater intrusion in the eastern region ; intrusion of sabkha water in the southwestern region ; and irrigation return flow in a local area in the western region . Four alternatives for the management of groundwater quality that are available to the water authorities in Bahrain are discussed and their

priority areas are proposed , based on the type and extent of each salinisation source , in addition to groundwater use in that area .

= = = Climate = = =

The Zagros Mountains across the Persian Gulf in Iran cause low level winds to be directed toward Bahrain . Dust storms from Iraq and Saudi Arabia transported by northwesterly winds , locally called shamal wind , cause reduced visibility in the months of June and July .

Summers are very hot . The seas around Bahrain are very shallow , heating up quickly in the summer to produce high humidity , especially at night . Summer temperatures may reach up to 50 ° C (122 ° F) under the right conditions . Rainfall in Bahrain is minimal and irregular . Rainfalls mostly occur in winter , with a recorded maximum of 71 @. @ 8 mm (2 @. @ 83 in) .

= = = Biodiversity = = =

More than 330 species of birds were recorded in the Bahrain archipelago , 26 species of which breed in the country . Millions of migratory birds pass through the Persian Gulf region in the winter and autumn months . One globally endangered species , *Chlamydotis undulata* , is a regular migrant in the autumn . The many islands and shallow seas of Bahrain are globally important for the breeding of the Socotra cormorant ; up to 100 @, @ 000 pairs of these birds were recorded over the Hawar islands .

Only 18 species of mammals are found in Bahrain , animals such as gazelles , desert rabbits and hedgehogs are common in the wild but the Arabian oryx was hunted to extinction on the island . 25 species of amphibians and reptiles were recorded as well as 21 species of butterflies and 307 species of flora . The marine biotopes are diverse and include extensive sea grass beds and mudflats , patchy coral reefs as well as offshore islands . Sea grass beds are important foraging grounds for some threatened species such as dugongs and the green turtle . In 2003 , Bahrain banned the capture of sea cows , marine turtles and dolphins within its territorial waters .

The Hawar Islands Protected Area provides valuable feeding and breeding grounds for a variety of migratory seabirds , it is an internationally recognised site for bird migration . The breeding colony of Socotra cormorant on Hawar Islands is the largest in the world , and the dugongs foraging around the archipelago form the second largest dugong aggregation after Australia .

Bahrain has five designated protected areas , four of which are marine environments . They are :

Hawar Islands

Mashtan Island , off the coast of Bahrain .

Arad bay , in Muharraq .

Tubli Bay

Al Areen Wildlife Park , which is a zoo and a breeding centre for endangered animals , is the only protected area on land and also the only protected area which is managed on a day @- @ to @- @ day basis .

= = Politics = =

Bahrain under the Al @- @ Khalifa regime is a constitutional monarchy headed by the King , Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa . King Hamad enjoys wide executive authorities which include appointing the Prime Minister and his ministers , commanding the army , chairing the Higher Judicial Council , appointing the parliament 's upper half and dissolving its elected lower half . The head of government is the unelected Prime Minister , Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa , the uncle of the current king who has served in this position since 1971 , making him the longest serving prime minister in the world . In 2010 , about half of the government was composed of the Al Khalifa family .

Bahrain has a bicameral National Assembly (al @- @ Jam 'iyyah al @- @ Watani) consisting of the Shura Council (Majlis Al @- @ Shura) with 40 seats and the Council of Representatives (Majlis Al

@-@ Nuwab) with 40 seats . The 40 members of the Shura are appointed by the king . In the Council of Representatives , 40 members are elected by absolute majority vote in single @-@ member constituencies to serve 4 @-@ year terms . The appointed council " exercises a de facto veto " over the elected , because draft acts must be approved so they may pass into law . After approval , the king may ratify and issue the act or return it within six months to the National Assembly where it may only pass into law if approved by two thirds of both councils .

In 1973 , the country held its first parliamentary elections ; however , two years later , the late emir dissolved the parliament and suspended the constitution after parliament rejected the State Security Law . The period between 2002 and 2010 saw three parliamentary elections . The first , held in 2002 was boycotted by the opposition , Al Wefaq , which won a majority in the second in 2006 and third in 2010 . The 2011 by @-@ election was held to replace 18 members of Al Wefaq who resigned in protest against government crackdown .

The opening up of politics saw big gains for both Sh'a and Sunn? Islamists in elections , which gave them a parliamentary platform to pursue their policies . It gave a new prominence to clerics within the political system , with the most senior Shia religious leader , Sheikh Isa Qassim , playing a vital role . This was especially evident when in 2005 the government called off the Shia branch of the " Family law " after over 100 @,@ 000 Shia took to the streets . Islamists opposed the law because " neither elected MPs nor the government has the authority to change the law because these institutions could misinterpret the word of God " . The law was supported by women activists who said they were " suffering in silence " . They managed to organise a rally attended by 500 participants . Ghada Jamsheer , a leading woman activist said the government was using the law as a " bargaining tool with opposition Islamic groups " .

Analysts of democratisation in the Middle East cite the Islamists ' references to respect human rights in their justification for these programmes as evidence that these groups can serve as a progressive force in the region . Some Islamist parties have been particularly critical of the government 's readiness to sign international treaties such as the United Nations ' International Convention on Civil and Political Rights . At a parliamentary session in June 2006 to discuss ratification of the Convention , Sheikh Adel Mouwda , the former leader of salafist party , Asalah , explained the party 's objections : " The convention has been tailored by our enemies , God kill them all , to serve their needs and protect their interests rather than ours . This why we have eyes from the American Embassy watching us during our sessions , to ensure things are swinging their way " .

= = = Human rights = = =

The period between 1975 and 1999 known as the " State Security Law Era " , saw wide range of human rights violations including arbitrary arrests , detention without trial , torture and forced exile . After the Emir Hamad Al Khalifa (now king) succeeded his father Isa Al Khalifa in 1999 , he introduced wide reforms and human rights improved significantly . These moves were described by Amnesty International as representing a " historic period of human rights " .

Human rights conditions started to decline by 2007 when torture began to be employed again . In 2011 , Human Rights Watch described the country 's human rights situation as " dismal " . Due to this , Bahrain lost some of the high International rankings it had gained before .

In 2011 , Bahrain was criticised for its crackdown on the Arab spring uprising . In September , a government appointed commission confirmed reports of grave human rights violations including systematic torture . The government promised to introduce reforms and avoid repeating the " painful events " . However , reports by human rights organisations Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch issued in April 2012 said the same violations were still happening .

The documentary TV film Bahrain : Shouting in the Dark which was produced by the Qatari channel Al Jazeera , talks about the Bahraini protests during 2011 . This TV film showed all the violations that have been taken against the rights of Bahraini citizens during the uprising . It also caused some problems between the Bahraini and the Qatari governments . Relations between Bahrain and Qatar improved following a meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council in November 2014 in which it was announced Bahrain diplomats would return to Qatar .

Amnesty International 's 2015 / 6 report on the country points to continued suppression of dissent , restricted freedom of expression , unjust imprisonment , and frequent torture and other ill @-@ treatment of its citizens .

= = = Women 's rights = = =

Women 's political rights in Bahrain saw an important step forward when women were granted the right to vote and stand in national elections for the first time in the 2002 election . However , no women were elected to office in that year 's polls . In response to the failure of women candidates , six were appointed to the Shura Council , which also includes representatives of the Kingdom 's indigenous Jewish and Christian communities . Dr. Nada Haffadh became the country 's first female cabinet minister on her appointment as Minister of Health in 2004 . The quasi @-@ governmental women 's group , the Supreme Council for Women , trained female candidates to take part in the 2006 general election . When Bahrain was elected to head the United Nations General Assembly in 2006 it appointed lawyer and women 's rights activist Haya bint Rashid Al Khalifa President of the United Nations General Assembly , only the third woman in history to head the world body . Female activist Ghada Jamsheer said " The government used women 's rights as a decorative tool on the international level . " She referred to the reforms as " artificial and marginal " and accused the government of " hinder [ing] non @-@ governmental women societies " .

In 2006 , Lateefa Al Gaood became the first female MP after winning by default . The number rose to four after the 2011 by @-@ elections . In 2008 , Houda Nonoo was appointed ambassador to the United States making her the first Jewish ambassador of any Arab country . In 2011 , Alice Samaan , a Christian woman was appointed ambassador to the UK .

= = = Media = = =

Bahraini journalists risk prosecution for offences which include " undermining " the government and religion . Self @-@ censorship is widespread . Journalists were targeted by officials during anti @-@ government protests in 2011 . Three editors from opposition daily Al @-@ Wasat (Bahraini newspaper) were sacked and later fined for publishing " false " news . Several foreign correspondents were expelled .

Most domestic broadcasters are state @-@ run . An independent commission , set up to look into the unrest , found that state media coverage was at times inflammatory . It said opposition groups suffered from lack of access to mainstream media , and recommended that the government " consider relaxing censorship " . Bahrain will host the Saudi @-@ financed Alarab News Channel , expected to launch in December 2012 . It will be based at a planned " Media City " . An opposition satellite station , Lualua TV , operates from London but has found its signals blocked .

By June 2012 , Bahrain had 961 @,@ 000 internet users . The platform " provides a welcome free space for journalists , although one that is increasingly monitored " , according to Reporters Without Borders . Rigorous filtering targets political , human rights , religious material and content deemed obscene . Bloggers and other netizens were among those detained during protests in 2011 .

= = = Military = = =

The kingdom has a small but well equipped military called the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) , numbering around 13 @,@ 000 personnel . The supreme commander of the Bahraini military is King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and the deputy supreme commander is the Crown Prince , Salman bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa .

The BDF is primarily equipped with United States equipment , such as the F16 Fighting Falcon , F5 Freedom Fighter , UH60 Blackhawk , M60A3 tanks , and the ex @-@ USS Jack Williams , an Oliver Hazard Perry class frigate renamed the RBNS Sabha .

The Government of Bahrain has close relations with the United States , having signed a cooperative agreement with the United States Military and has provided the United States a base in

Juffair since the early 1990s , although a US naval presence existed since 1948 . This is the home of the headquarters for Commander , United States Naval Forces Central Command (COMUSNAVCENT) / United States Fifth Fleet (COMFIFTHFLT) , and around 6 @, @ 000 United States military personnel .

Bahrain participates in Saudi Arabian @-@ led intervention in Yemen against the Shia Houthis and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh , who was deposed in the 2011 Arab Spring uprising .

= = = Foreign relations = = =

Bahrain established bilateral relations with 190 countries worldwide . As of 2012 , Bahrain maintains a network of 25 embassies , 3 consulates and 4 permanent missions to the Arab League , United Nations and European Union respectively . Bahrain also hosts 36 embassies . Bahrain plays a modest , moderating role in regional politics and adheres to the views of the Arab League on Middle East peace and Palestinian rights by supporting the two state solution . Bahrain is also one of the founding members of the Gulf Cooperation Council . Relations with Iran tend to be tense as a result of a failed coup in 1981 which Bahrain blames Iran for and occasional claims of Iranian sovereignty over Bahrain by ultra @-@ conservative elements in the Iranian public .

Saudi Arabian troops were sent into Bahrain to crush a pro @-@ democracy protests in 2011 .

= = = Governorates = = =

The first municipality in Bahrain was the 8 @-@ member Manama municipality which was established in July 1919 . Members of the municipality were elected annually ; the municipality was said to have been the first municipality to be established in the Arab world . The municipality was in charge of cleaning roads and renting buildings to tenants and shops . By 1929 , it undertook road expansions as well as opening markets and slaughterhouses . In 1958 , the municipality started water purification projects . In 1960 , Bahrain comprised four municipalities including Manama , Hidd , Al Muharraq , and Riffa . Over the next 30 years , the 4 municipalities were divided into 12 municipalities as settlements such as Hamad Town and Isa Town grew . These municipalities were administered from Manama under a central municipal council whose members are appointed by the king .

The first municipal elections to be held in Bahrain after independence in 1971 , was in 2002 . The most recent was in 2010 . The municipalities are listed below :

After 3 July 2002 , Bahrain was split into five administrative governorates , each of which has its own governor . These governorates are :

The Central Governorate was abolished in September 2014 , its territory divided between the Northern Governorate , Southern Governorate , and Capital Governorate .

The United States designated Bahrain a major non @-@ NATO ally in 2001 . As of October 2014 , Bahrain is ruled by an " authoritarian regime " and is rated as " Not Free " by the U.S.-based non @-@ governmental Freedom House .

= = Economy = =

According to a January 2006 report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia , Bahrain has the fastest growing economy in the Arab world . Bahrain also has the freest economy in the Middle East and is twelfth freest overall in the world based on the 2011 Index of Economic Freedom published by the Heritage Foundation / Wall Street Journal .

In 2008 , Bahrain was named the world 's fastest growing financial center by the City of London 's Global Financial Centres Index . Bahrain 's banking and financial services sector , particularly Islamic banking , have benefited from the regional boom driven by demand for oil . Petroleum production and processing is Bahrain 's most exported product , accounting for 60 % of export receipts , 70 % of government revenues , and 11 % of GDP . Aluminium production is the second

most exported product , followed by finance and construction materials .

Economic conditions have fluctuated with the changing price 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 a number of multinational firms and construction proceeds on several major industrial projects . A large share of exports consist of petroleum products made from imported crude oil , which accounted for 51 % of the country 's imports in 2007 . Bahrain depends heavily on food imports to feed its growing population ; it relies heavily on meat imports from Australia and also imports 75 % of its total fruit consumption needs . Since only 2 @. @ 9 % of the country 's land is arable , agriculture contributes to 0 @. @ 5 % of Bahrain 's GDP . In 2004 , Bahrain signed the US @- @ Bahrain Free Trade Agreement , which will reduce certain trade barriers between the two nations . Due to the combination of the global financial crisis and the recent unrest , the growth rate decreased to 2 @. @ 2 % which is the lowest growth rate since 1994 .

Unemployment , especially among the young , and the depletion of both oil and underground water resources are major long @- @ term economic problems . In 2008 , the jobless figure was at 4 % , with women over represented at 85 % of the total . In 2007 Bahrain became the first Arab country to institute unemployment benefits as part of a series of labour reforms instigated under Minister of Labour , Dr. Majeed Al Alawi .

= = = Tourism = = =

As a tourist destination , Bahrain received over eight million visitors in 2008 though the exact number varies yearly . Most of these are from the surrounding Arab states although an increasing number hail from outside the region due to growing awareness of the kingdom 's heritage and its higher profile as a result of the Bahrain International F1 Circuit .

The kingdom combines modern Arab culture and the archaeological legacy of five thousand years of civilisation . The island is home to forts including Qalat Al Bahrain which has been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site . The Bahrain National Museum has artefacts from the country 's history dating back to the island 's first human inhabitants some 9000 years ago and the Beit Al Quran (Arabic : ??? ????? , meaning : the House of Qur 'an) is a museum that holds Islamic artefacts of the Qur 'an . Some of the popular historical tourist attractions in the kingdom are the Al Khamis Mosque , which is the one of the oldest mosques in the region , the Arad fort in Muharraq , Barbar temple , which is an ancient temple from the Dilmunite period of Bahrain , as well as the A 'ali Burial Mounds and the Saar temple . The Tree of Life , a 400 @- @ year @- @ old tree that grows in the Sakhir desert with no nearby water , is also a popular tourist attraction .

Bird watching (primarily in the Hawar Islands) , scuba diving and horse riding are popular tourist activities in Bahrain . Many tourists from nearby Saudi Arabia and across the region visit Manama primarily for the shopping malls in the capital Manama , such as the Bahrain City Centre and Seef Mall in the Seef district of Manama . The Manama Souq and Gold Souq in the old district of Manama are also popular with tourists .

Since 2005 , Bahrain annually hosts a festival in March , titled Spring of Culture , which features internationally renowned musicians and artists performing in concerts . Manama was named the Arab Capital of Culture for 2012 and Capital of Arab Tourism for 2013 by the Arab League . The 2012 festival featured concerts starring Andrea Bocelli , Julio Iglesias and other musicians .

= = Infrastructure = =

Bahrain has one main international airport , the Bahrain International Airport (BIA) which is located on the island of Muharraq , in the north @- @ east . The airport handled more than 100 @, @ 000 flights and more than 8 million passengers in 2010 . Bahrain 's national carrier , Gulf Air operates and bases itself in the BIA .

Bahrain has a well @- @ developed road network , particularly in Manama . The discovery of oil in the early 1930s accelerated the creation of multiple roads and highways in Bahrain , connecting several isolated villages , such as Budaiya , to Manama .

To the east , a bridge connected Manama to Muharraq since 1929 , a new causeway was built in 1941 which replaced the old wooden bridge . Currently there are three modern bridges connecting the two locations . Transits between the two islands peaked after the construction of the Bahrain International Airport in 1932 . Ring roads and highways were later built to connect Manama to the villages of the Northern Governorate and towards towns in central and southern Bahrain .

The four main islands and all the towns and villages are linked by well @-@ constructed roads . There were 3 @, @ 164 km (1 @, @ 966 mi) of roadways in 2002 , of which 2 @, @ 433 km (1 @, @ 512 mi) were paved . A causeway stretching over 2 @. @ 8 km (2 mi) , connect Manama with Muharraq Island , and another bridge joins Sitra to the main island . The King Fahd Causeway , measuring 24 km (15 mi) , links Bahrain with the Saudi Arabian mainland via the island of Umm an @- @ Nasan . It was completed in December 1986 , and financed by Saudi Arabia . In 2008 , there were 17 @, @ 743 @, @ 495 passengers transiting through the causeway .

Bahrain 's port of Mina Salman is the main seaport of the country and consists of 15 berths . In 2001 , Bahrain had a merchant fleet of eight ships of 1 @, @ 000 GRT or over , totaling 270 @, @ 784 GRT . Private vehicles and taxis are the primary means of transportation in the city .

= = = Telecommunications = = =

The telecommunications sector in Bahrain officially started in 1981 with the establishment of Bahrain 's first telecommunications company , Batelco and until 2004 , it monopolised the sector . In 1981 , there were more than 45 @, @ 000 telephones in use in the country . By 1999 , Batelco had more than 100 @, @ 000 mobile contracts . In 2002 , under pressure from international bodies , Bahrain implemented its telecommunications law which included the establishment of an independent Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) . In 2004 , Zain (a rebranded version of MTC Vodafone) started operations in Bahrain and in 2010 VIVA (owned by STC Group) became the third company to provide mobile services .

Bahrain has been connected to the internet since 1995 with the country 's domain suffix is ' .bh ' . The country 's connectivity score (a statistic which measures both Internet access and fixed and mobile telephone lines) is 210 @. @ 4 percent per person , while the regional average in Arab States of the Persian Gulf is 135 @. @ 37 percent . The number of Bahraini internet users has risen from 40 @, @ 000 in 2000 to 250 @, @ 000 in 2008 , or from 5 @. @ 95 to 33 percent of the population . As of August 2013 , the TRA has licensed 22 Internet Service Providers .

= = Demographics = =

In 2010 , Bahrain 's population grew to 1 @. @ 2 million , of which 568 @, @ 399 were Bahraini and 666 @, @ 172 were non @- @ nationals . It had risen from 1 @. @ 05 million (517 @, @ 368 non @- @ nationals) in 2007 , the year when Bahrain 's population crossed the one million mark . Though a majority of the population is Middle Eastern , a sizeable number of people from South Asia live in the country . In 2008 , approximately 290 @, @ 000 Indian nationals lived in Bahrain , making them the single largest expatriate community in the country . Bahrain is the fourth most densely populated sovereign state in the world with a population density of 1 @, @ 646 people per km2 in 2010 . The only sovereign states with larger population densities are city states . Much of this population is concentrated in the north of the country with the Southern Governorate being the least densely populated part . The north of the country is so urbanised that it is considered by some to be one large metropolitan area .

= = = Ethnic groups = = =

Bahraini people are ethnically diverse . Shia Bahrainis are divided into two main ethnic groups : Baharna and Ajam . Most Shia Bahrainis are ethnic Baharna . The Ajam are ethnic Persian Shias . Shia Persians form large communities in Manama and Muharraq . A tiny minority of Shia Bahrainis are ethnic Hasawis from Al @- @ Hasa .

Sunni Bahrainis are mainly divided into two main ethnic groups : Arabs (al Arab) and Huwala . Sunni Arabs are the most influential ethnic group in Bahrain , they hold most government positions and the Bahraini monarchy are Sunni Arabs . Sunni Arabs have traditionally lived in areas such as Zallaq , Muharraq , Riffa and Hawar islands . The Huwala are descendants of Sunni Iranians ; some of them are Sunni Persians , while others Sunni Arabs . There are also Sunnis of Baloch origin . Most Bahrainis of African origin come from east Africa and have traditionally lived in Muharraq Island and Riffa .

= = = Religion = = =

The state religion of Bahrain is Islam and most Bahraini citizens are Muslim . There are no official figures for the proportion of Shia and Sunni among the Muslims of Bahrain , but approximately 65 ? 75 % percent of Bahraini Muslims are Shia .

There is a native Christian community in Bahrain . Non @-@ Muslim Bahraini residents numbered 367 @,@ 683 per the 2010 census , most of whom are Christians . Expatriate Christians make up the majority of Christians in Bahrain , while native Christian Bahrainis (who hold Bahraini citizenship) make up a smaller community . Alees Samaan , a former Bahraini ambassador to the United Kingdom is a native Christian . Bahrain also has a native Jewish community numbering thirty @-@ seven Bahraini citizens . Various sources cite Bahrain 's native Jewish community as being from 36 to 50 people .

Due to an influx of immigrants and guest workers from southern Asian countries , such as India , the Philippines and Sri Lanka , the overall percentage of Muslims in the country has declined in recent years . According to the 2001 census , 81 @.@ 2 % of Bahrain 's population was Muslim , 10 % were Christian , and 9 @.@ 8 % practised Hinduism or other religions . The 2010 census records that the Muslim proportion had fallen to 70 @.@ 2 % (the 2010 census did not differentiate between the non @-@ Muslim religions) . Bahrain government officials rejected reports from Bahraini opposition that the administration was trying to alter the country 's demographics by naturalizing Sunni Syrians . Baha 'is constitute approximately 1 % of Bahrain 's total population .

= = = Languages = = =

Arabic is the official language of Bahrain , though English is widely used . Bahraini Arabic is the most widely spoken dialect of the Arabic language , though it differs widely from standard Arabic , like all Arabic dialects . Arabic plays an important role in political life , as , according to article 57 (c) of Bahrain 's constitution , an MP must be fluent in Arabic to stand for parliament . Among the Bahraini and non @-@ Bahraini population , many people speak Persian , the official language of Iran , or Urdu , the official language of Pakistan . Nepali is also widely spoken in the Nepalese workers and Gurkha Soldiers community . Malayalam , Tamil and Hindi are spoken among significant Indian communities . All commercial institutions and road signs are bilingual , displaying both English and Arabic .

= = = Education = = =

Education is compulsory for children between the ages of 6 and 14 . Education is free for Bahraini citizens in public schools , with the Bahraini Ministry of Education providing free textbooks . Coeducation is not used in public schools , with boys and girls segregated into separate schools .

At the beginning of the 20th century , Qur 'anic schools (Kuttab) were the only form of education in Bahrain . They were traditional schools aimed at teaching children and youth the reading of the Qur 'an . After World War I , Bahrain became open to western influences , and a demand for modern educational institutions appeared . 1919 marked the beginning of modern public school system in Bahrain when the Al @-@ Hidayat Al @-@ Khalifa School for boys opened in Muharraq . In 1926 , the Education Committee opened the second public school for boys in Manama , and in 1928 the first public school for girls was opened in Muharraq . As of 2011 , there are a total of 126 @,@ 981

students studying in public schools .

In 2004 , King Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa introduced the " King Hamad Schools of Future " project that uses Information Communication Technology to support K ? 12 education in Bahrain . The project 's objective is to connect all schools within the kingdom with the Internet . In addition to British intermediate schools , the island is served by the Bahrain School (BS) . The BS is a United States Department of Defense school that provides a K @-@ 12 curriculum including International Baccalaureate offerings . There are also private schools that offer either the IB Diploma Programme or United Kingdom 's A @-@ Levels .

Bahrain also encourages institutions of higher learning , drawing on expatriate talent and the increasing pool of Bahrain nationals returning from abroad with advanced degrees . The University of Bahrain was established for standard undergraduate and graduate study , and the King Abdulaziz University College of Health Sciences , operating under the direction of the Ministry of Health , trains physicians , nurses , pharmacists , and paramedics . The 2001 National Action Charter paved the way for the formation of private universities such as the Ahlia University in Manama and University College of Bahrain in Saar . The Royal University for Women (RUW) , established in 2005 , was the first private , purpose @-@ built , international University in Bahrain dedicated solely to educating women . The University of London External has appointed MCG (Management Consultancy Group) as the regional representative office in Bahrain for distance learning programmes . MCG is one of the oldest private institutes in the country . Institutes have also opened which educate South Asian students , such as the Pakistan Urdu School , Bahrain and the Indian School , Bahrain . A few prominent institutions are DePaul University , Bentley University , the Ernst & Young Training Institute , NYIT and the Birla Institute of Technology International Centre . In 2004 , the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) set up a constituent medical university in the country . In addition to the Arabian Gulf University , AMA International University and the College of Health Sciences , these are the only medical schools in Bahrain .

= = = Health = = =

Bahrain has a universal health care system , dating back to 1960 . Government @-@ provided health care is free to Bahraini citizens and heavily subsidised for non @-@ Bahrainis . Healthcare expenditure accounted for 4 @.@ 5 % of Bahrain 's GDP , according to the World Health Organisation . Bahraini physicians and nurses form a majority of the country 's workforce in the health sector , unlike neighbouring Gulf states . The first hospital in Bahrain was the American Mission Hospital , which opened in 1893 as a dispensary . The first public hospital , and also tertiary hospital , to open in Bahrain was the Salmaniya Medical Complex , in the Salmaniya district of Manama , in 1957 . Private hospitals are also present throughout the country , such as the International Hospital of Bahrain .

The life expectancy in Bahrain is 73 for males and 76 for females . Compared to many countries in the region , the prevalence of AIDS and HIV is relatively low . Malaria and tuberculosis (TB) do not constitute major problems in Bahrain as neither disease is indigenous to the country . As a result , cases of malaria and TB have declined in recent decades with cases of contractions amongst Bahraini nationals becoming rare . The Ministry of Health sponsors regular vaccination campaigns against TB and other diseases such as hepatitis B.

Bahrain is currently suffering from an obesity epidemic as 28 @.@ 9 % of all males and 38 @.@ 2 % of all females are classified as obese . Bahrain also has one of the highest prevalence of diabetes in the world (5th place) , with more than 15 % of the Bahraini population suffering from the disease , and accounting for 5 % of deaths in the country . Cardiovascular diseases account for 32 % of all deaths in Bahrain , being the number one cause of death in the country (the second being cancer) . Sick cell anaemia and thalassaemia are prevalent in the country , with a study concluding that 18 % of Bahrainis are carriers of sickle cell anaemia while 24 % are carriers of thalassaemia .

= = Culture = =

Islam is the main religion , and Bahrainis are known for their tolerance towards the practice of other faiths . Intermarriages between Bahrainis and Expatriates are not uncommon , there are many Filipino @-@ Bahrainis like that of Filipino child actress Mona Marbella Al @-@ Alawi

Rules regarding female attire are generally relaxed compared to regional neighbours ; the traditional attire of women usually include the hijab or the abaya . Although the traditional male attire is the thobe which also includes traditional headdresses such as the keffiyeh , ghutra and agal , Western clothing is common in the country .

Although Bahrain legalized homosexuality in 1976 , many homosexuals have since been arrested .

= = = Art = = =

The modern art movement in the country officially emerged in the 1950s , culminating in the establishment of an art society . Expressionism and surrealism , as well as calligraphic art are the popular forms of art in the country . Abstract expressionism has gained popularity in recent decades . Pottery @-@ making and textile weaving are also popular products that were widely made in Bahraini villages . Arabic calligraphy grew in popularity as the Bahraini government was an active patron in Islamic art , culminating in the establishment of an Islamic museum , Beit Al Quran . The Bahrain national museum houses a permanent contemporary art exhibition . The architecture of Bahrain is similar to that of its neighbours in the Persian Gulf . The wind tower , which generates natural ventilation in a house , is a common sight on old buildings , particularly in the old districts of Manama and Muharraq .

= = = Literature = = =

Literature retains a strong tradition in the country ; most traditional writers and poets write in the classical Arabic style . In recent years , the number of younger poets influenced by western literature are rising , most writing in free verse and often including political or personal content . Ali Al Shargawi , a decorated longtime poet , was described in 2011 by Al Shorfa as the literary icon of Bahrain .

In literature , Bahrain was the site of the ancient land of Dilmun mentioned in the Epic of Gilgamesh . Legend also states that it was the location of the Garden of Eden .

= = = Music = = =

The music style in Bahrain is similar to that of its neighbours . The Khaliji style of music , which is folk music , is popular in the country . The sawt style of music , which involves a complex form of urban music , performed by an Oud (plucked lute) , a violin and mirwas (a drum) , is also popular in Bahrain . Ali Bahar was one of the most famous singers in Bahrain . He performed his music with his Band Al @-@ Ekhwa (The Brothers) . Bahrain was also the site of the first recording studio amongst the Persian Gulf states .

= = = Sports = = =

Association football is the most popular sport in Bahrain . Bahrain 's national football team has competed multiple times at the Asian Cup , Arab Nations Cup and played in the FIFA World Cup qualifiers , though it has never qualified for the World Cup . Bahrain has its own top @-@ tier domestic professional football league , the Bahraini Premier League . Basketball , Rugby and horse racing are also widely popular in the country .

Bahrain has a Formula One race @-@ track , which hosted the inaugural Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix on 4 April 2004 , the first in an Arab country . This was followed by the Bahrain Grand Prix in 2005 . Bahrain hosted the opening Grand Prix of the 2006 season on 12 March of that year . Both the above races were won by Fernando Alonso of Renault . The race has since been hosted annually , except for 2011 when it was cancelled due to ongoing anti @-@ government protests .

The 2012 race occurred despite concerns of the safety of the teams and the ongoing protests in the country . The decision to hold the race despite ongoing protests and violence has been described as " controversial " by Al Jazeera English , CNN , AFP and Sky News . The Independent named it " one of the most controversial in the history of the sport " .

In 2006 , Bahrain also hosted its inaugural Australian V8 Supercar event dubbed the " Desert 400 " . The V8s returned every November to the Sakhir circuit until 2010 , in which it was the second event of the series . The series has not returned since . The Bahrain International Circuit also features a full @-@ length dragstrip where the Bahrain Drag Racing Club has organised invitational events featuring some of Europe 's top drag racing teams to try to raise the profile of the sport in the Middle East .

= = = Holidays = = =

On 1 September 2006 , Bahrain changed its weekend from being Thursdays and Fridays to Fridays and Saturdays , in order to have a day of the weekend shared with the rest of the world . Notable holidays in the country are listed below :