

ASIA · HISTORY · CULTURE · FOOD · NIGHTLIFE · CITY BREAKS

 Bahrain

More than 4,000 years of history crowd onto an island you can drive across in under an hour: the UNESCO-listed tell of Qal'at al-Bahrain, the Dilmun burial mounds and Muharraq's Pearling Path through restored merchants' houses. Add Gulf seafood, a sociable dining scene and the Formula 1 weekend, and it makes a rewarding two-to-four-day stop between longer Gulf trips.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Bahrain and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 8 October 2026.

 CAPITAL Manama	 CURRENCY Bahraini dinar (BHD) £1 ≈ BHD 0.50	 LANGUAGE Arabic, English	 BEST TIME Nov–Mar
 DAILY BUDGET £60–£280 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type G 230V · UK plugs fit	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 6h 30m direct ~£450–£850 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+3 standard time

Bahrain is a low, flat archipelago in the Gulf, its main island joined to Saudi Arabia by the 25 km King Fahd Causeway and to Muharraq by short bridges. This was the heart of Dilmun, a Bronze Age trading power, and later the Gulf's great pearling centre before oil was struck in 1932. A first visit usually means a base in Manama, with short trips west to Qal'at al-Bahrain and the Saar settlement, across to Muharraq's restored pearling houses, through the burial mounds of A'ali, and south into the desert around Sakhir for the Tree of Life and the Formula 1 circuit.

Distances are tiny, so the pace is set by the heat rather than logistics: from May to September, sightseeing shrinks to early mornings and evenings. The dinar is strong and hotels are pricey, though shawarma stands and old-souq cafés stay cheap. Bahrain is noticeably more relaxed than its larger neighbour: alcohol is served in licensed hotels and restaurants, and Adliya and Juffair fill at weekends with visitors who have driven over the causeway. It suits stopover travellers, history enthusiasts and F1 fans, and many are surprised by how green the date-palm villages along the north coast remain.

Top 5 highlights

-  HISTORY

Qal'at al-Bahrain

A 12 m-high tell built up over more than 4,000 years of occupation and crowned by a 16th-century Portuguese fort; the site museum explains Dilmun's trading empire, and the walls glow at sunset.
-  HISTORY

Pearling Path, Muharraq

A 3.5 km trail through Muharraq linking restored merchants' houses, a mosque and the shore where the pearling fleets once set out; Siyadi House, a pearl merchant's home, is the highlight. UNESCO-listed since 2012.

3

HISTORY

Dilmun Burial Mounds

Thousands of Bronze Age tombs once covered the centre of the island; the most impressive survivors are the giant 'royal mounds' at A'ali, part of a UNESCO site recognised in 2019 for the Dilmun civilisation.

4

SACRED SITE

Al Fateh Grand Mosque

One of the world's largest mosques, holding more than 7,000 worshippers under a vast fibreglass dome; free guided tours outside prayer times introduce Islam to visitors, and women are lent abayas and headscarves.

5

NATURE

Tree of Life

A lone mesquite tree, roughly 400 years old, thriving on a sandy rise in the southern desert with no obvious water source; visit near sunset and combine it with nearby Jebel Dukhan, Bahrain's highest point.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Manama

≈ 330,000 people

The capital holds the Bahrain National Museum, Bab al-Bahrain's gateway into the old souq and Al Fateh Grand Mosque within a compact core; most visitors base themselves here.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Muharraq

≈ 180,000 people

The old pearling town across the water from Manama, now home to the UNESCO Pearling Path and Showaiter's famous halwa shop; allow at least half a day.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Riffa

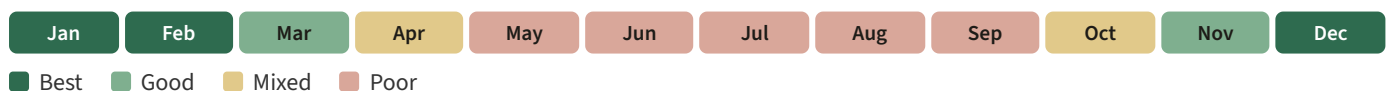
≈ 115,000 people

A largely residential city in the centre of the island, worth a short stop for Riffa Fort's views over the Hunainiyah valley on the way south to the desert.

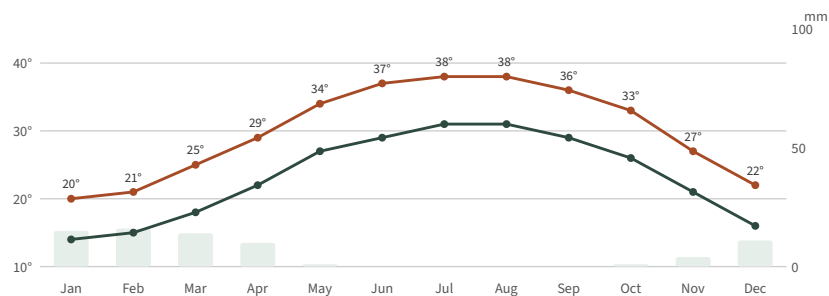
Figures are rounded city estimates from around the 2010 census. Built-up areas run together across the north of the island, and Hamad Town, a planned residential town, may now be as large as Riffa.

When to go to Bahrain

Best time: **Nov–Mar**.

**Average climate in Manama**

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Mar–Apr	Bahrain Grand Prix Formula 1's floodlit race at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir, usually in March or April; hotel prices spike, so book well ahead or avoid that weekend.
Mar–Apr	Spring of Culture Bahrain's spring arts festival, usually running through March and April (sometimes from late February), with concerts, dance, theatre and talks at the Bahrain National Theatre and restored Muharraq houses.
Dec	National Day Celebrated on 16–17 December with fireworks over Manama, flags on every building and heritage events in Muharraq and around the capital.

How much does Bahrain cost?

SHOESTRING £60 per person / day ≈ BHD 30.15 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £130 per person / day ≈ BHD 65.32 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £280 per person / day ≈ BHD 141 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Machboos The national dish: spiced rice cooked with chicken, lamb or fish and scented with loomi (dried black lime), cardamom and saffron, served at almost every family gathering.	Muhammar Sweet rice cooked with date syrup or sugar and cardamom, traditionally eaten with grilled or fried fish such as safi (rabbitfish).	Halwa Bahraini A glossy, gelatinous sweet of cornflour, sugar, saffron, rosewater and nuts, sold warm from Muharraq workshops and served with cardamom-spiced Arabic coffee.
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Getting around

Most visitors rely on taxis, Uber and hire cars: distances are short and roads good, though rush-hour traffic around Manama and Seef can crawl. Public buses link Manama, Muharraq, Riffa and the airport cheaply but are infrequent on many routes. There are no trains. Driving across the King Fahd Causeway into Saudi Arabia is possible with the right documents and insurance, but expect long queues at weekends.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  G 230V — UK plugs fit	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Telephone: 999 (ambulance, fire, police) Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +973	TIME ZONE UTC+3 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Varies — bottled or filtered is safer

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

A service charge is often added in hotels and restaurants; otherwise leave around 10%. Round up taxi fares and give porters a small tip.

ETIQUETTE

Dress modestly away from beaches and pools, covering shoulders and knees, especially in souqs and mosques. During Ramadan avoid eating, drinking or smoking in public in daylight hours.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Bahrain International Airport (BAH), Muharraq

Visas & entry for Bahrain

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to visit Bahrain.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Hepatitis B

Rabies

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Bahrain

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Wed 16 Dec 2026	National Day
Thu 17 Dec 2026	National Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day

Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Thu 11 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Tue 18 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Sun 6 Jun 2027	Islamic New Year (date may shift)
Mon 14 Jun 2027	Ashura (date may shift)
Tue 15 Jun 2027	Ashura (date may shift)
Sat 14 Aug 2027	Prophet's Birthday (date may shift)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Arabic

ENGLISH	ARABIC	SAY IT
Hello	مرحبا	<i>MAR-ha-ba</i>
Thank you	شكراً	<i>SHOOK-ran</i>
Please	من فضلك	<i>min FAD-lak</i>
Excuse me	لو سمحت	<i>law sa-MAHT</i>
How much is this?	بكم هذا؟	<i>bi-KAM HAA-tha</i>

Know before you go

- Prices with three decimal places are normal: the dinar divides into 1,000 fils, so 1.500 means one and a half dinars, roughly £3.
- The weekend runs Friday–Saturday, and Saudi visitors pour over the causeway from Thursday evening; book weekend restaurant tables and hotels in advance.
- From May to September daytime highs pass 35°C, so see Qal'at al-Bahrain and the Tree of Life early or late, and spend midday in museums.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.