

# Coming to Bahrain?

## Here are some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)!

This list of questions and answers was developed and is maintained by spouses living in Bahrain. If you have a question not answered here or have additional information to share, please contact the Bahrain Family Readiness Group (FRG) at **BahrainFRG@gmail.com**

### **Identification Requirements for Entry to Bahrain**

Do I need a red and a blue passport?

Yes, you will use your official (red) passport to get on and off the island, and your travel (blue) passport to visit other countries. Prior to arrival, you will need “dependent entry approval” with you – your military member will take care of this. You will also need to get a one-year visa upon entry, as well as a CPR card that will need to be updated every 6 months. This can be done through the passport office on base.

How do I get my CPR card and how often do I need to renew it?

The CPR (ID Card and Population Registry) card (or paper) is similar to the state issued driver’s licenses. One of the first things to do during your first few days in Bahrain is to visit the immigration office on base to get the CPR card process started. Standard renewal is every six months. You will need to have a current CPR card with you for many uses, including for identification in case of a traffic accident or to contract for cell phone service off base.

### **Safety/Security**

Is Bahrain safe?

Yes. The US Embassy and NAVCENT work together to maintain and put out lists of restricted areas and areas to be avoided. It is always advisable to use situational awareness and stay current on demonstration notices.

How do I register to get demonstration notices from the US Embassy?

Visit <http://bahrain.usembassy.gov/demonstration.html> and sign up through the STEP application.

### **Housing**

What types of homes are there?

There are flats (apartments) and villas (townhouses or single family homes). They come unfurnished, semi-furnished, and fully furnished.

Where do people live?

In most parts of the island and in homes and areas approved the Housing Office Security Procedure. Please contact the Housing Office for specific information. <http://www.cnic.navy.mil/Bahrain/FleetAndFamilyReadiness/HousingAndLodging/index.htm>

Is there base housing?

There is no base housing. There are barracks.

What should I bring?

Bring stuff that you don't want to live without. Many recommend bringing your own mattresses, as the mattresses provided are usually very hard. Also, most electronics can be used with a transformer. Some people bring everything. Some only bring the necessities.

How long do I have to find a home?

You are allotted 45 days of TLA. If you can't find a home, there is a process to extend. Visit the housing office for more details.

What can I request from my landlord?

Almost anything! New dishes/utensils, bedding, linens/towels, housekeeping, electronics, internet/satellite upgrades, and furniture are just a few. Things that cannot be asked for: transportation (no cars or bike) or personal use items such as food or toiletries.

What are some things I should consider when looking for a place to live?

*Location*- some areas are restricted or should be avoided. Some are in close proximity to the base, and some are located in areas, such as Amwaj, with lots of amenities.

*Size*- there are a lot of sizes available, depending on your price range, from small to small mansions.

*Furnishings*- if you are bringing your own items, you'll want to find a place that's either semi-furnished or unfurnished. Most landlords are willing to remove furniture.

*Proximity to a mosque*- If you find a place you really like, visit again during prayer time to get an idea of the potential traffic and noise associated with 5 times per day calls to prayer and prayer. Make a list of all of the amenities that you are looking for, and keep track of all of the places that you have visited and the amenities they had. Take pictures, if you can. When you've really started looking at places, they will start to blend together. Use more than one realtor.

How do I pay my landlord?

Most tenants obtain a Cashier's check in US Dollars from the Navy Federal Credit Union located on base then take that check to the Dinar Man (located upstairs in the Freedom Souq on base) who cuts a check for the landlord in local currency. This process is used instead of going through the process of getting a local bank account. Please also note that it is advisable to set up your rent due date on days other than the 1<sup>st</sup> or the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month; lines for the Dinar Man are often long on those days.

## **Childcare**

Is there childcare? Yes. The CDC offers childcare on base, though at this time, space is limited and hourly care is nearly unavailable. There is also the option of hiring a full-time nanny or part-time sitter.

What kinds of sports are available for the kids?

This varies per season and with more families returning, more sports are being offered. It is advisable to check with MWR and the DoDDs School for specifics. Sports options are also included at [www.fabbahrain.com](http://www.fabbahrain.com) (The family a-z Bahrain)

### **School Information**

Is there a pre-school?

Through the DODDS school, no. There are several local schools that use the British curriculum, including The Nadeen School (<http://www.nadeenschool.info/>) and St Christopher's (<http://www.st-chris.net/>). [www.fabBahrain.com](http://www.fabBahrain.com) also includes a lot of information on preschools on the island. There is no government subsidy to assist with the costs of those schools.

### **Transportation**

Can women drive?

Absolutely, yes.

Can we ship more than 1 car?

Only one car can be shipped at the expense of the government.

What gas should I use in my vehicle?

Most vehicles use mumtaz, which is the higher quality gasoline on the island. Gas is cheap, and is called "petrol".

Where can I buy a car?

There are always a variety of cars for sale that are posted on the bulletin board in P911 (Freedom Souq), and at a used car lot near the Grand Mosque. It's advisable to take someone who knows about cars with you, to help discern the maintenance history. If you bring a vehicle with you, there are several dealerships on the island that can provide you with services; sometime services are more expensive than in the US and sometimes they are much less. There are also many local mechanics available.

What is traffic like?

Depending on time of day and day of the week, traffic can be very heavy. Plan ahead and allow plenty of time for your arrival.

Is there public transportation?

Yes, there is local bus transportation.

### **Dress Codes**

Do women need to completely cover up?

No, shoulders and upper thighs must be covered. No spaghetti straps, tank tops, or tube tops. During Ramadan, clothing must fall past elbows and knees. No need for special clothing or female head covering. See FFSC "Ramadan handout" for specific information and examples.

## **Shopping**

Is there a commissary/exchange?

Currently, NSA Bahrain only has a Navy Exchange (NEX). In addition to basic household items like hangars, dishtowels, and cleaning supplies, the NEX does sell a limited selection of fresh, frozen, and canned food, and certain items can be specially ordered through customer service.

Where can I buy groceries?

There are several large chain stores located here- Carrefour, Geant, and Lulu are just a few that carry just about everything. There are 2 food delivery services: efood.com.bh and cart.com.bh. There's also the central market in Manama, where fruits, vegetables, and meat can be purchased for less expense if you buy in bulk. The NEX also offers a limited food selection.

What is the average grocery bill for a family of 4?

That can vary from \$200-300 weekly, depending on how and where you shop. This is just an estimate.

Does COLA cover that?

You do get COLA for a reason! Many have the opinion that their grocery bill is considerably higher here than stateside.

Where can I buy baby items?

The NEX carries a small section of baby items: diapers, wipes, safety items, sippy cups, snacks, food, and bath items as well as a limited selection of clothing. These items are also available locally, although for a slightly higher price and in some cases, a lower quality, depending on what you're looking for. Larger furniture items such as cribs are also available, but again, expensive and may not meet US safety standards. Some items may be ordered through the exchange, given plenty of time to allow for delivery. Amazon and other online stores also ship out here, and, depending on the item(s), delivery is quick.

Where can I buy clothing?

There are several large malls throughout the island with a wide range of fashion and prices. The NEX also offers a limited selection of clothing. There are many tailors on the island who can custom make clothing for a reasonable price as well.

## **Islamic Religious Information**

What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is a Muslim religious holiday. Businesses and restaurants are only open in the evening. You cannot eat or drink water in public during daylight. Women and men are asked to dress much more conservatively and set aside many vices during this time. It is a month long and changes every year, depending on the cycle of the moon.

### **Base Services**

Are there any church services?

There are several types of services offered at the base chapel and out in town. A weekly update of the scheduled services is provided by the Chapel, via email. Contact the Chapel to sign up.

What kinds of social activities are there?

MWR, FFSC, and our own Bahrain FRG host a variety of social activities. There are also other local groups such as Mums in Bahrain, a Moms Group that is run by American moms and hosts weekly play dates, and the American Women's Association that provide a social network as well.

Where can I learn Arabic?

FFSC offers free basic courses and Berlitz has two offices in Bahrain- one in Adliya, and one in Budaiya, though those classes can be costly. The on-base library also offers free use of language materials.

### **Other**

What's the climate like?

During the summer, hot and humid; temperatures average 114°F with 100% humidity. It feels so much hotter, though! Winters are mild and quite pleasant. There are also dust/sand storms and infrequent scattered showers.

Is English widely spoken?

Yes, but it is always helpful to know some basic Arabic phrases.

### **May my spouse and I hold hands in public?**

Public displays of affection are prohibited according to COMUSNAVECEN OPOD 1000-10. However, it is not uncommon to see younger Bahrainis holding hands, etc. out in town.

What is the electricity voltage?

220V. For US/110v appliances, a step-up transformer is needed. For other appliances, outlet adapters are needed; transformer and adapters are widely available.

How safe is the tap water?

It is safe to cook with and bathe with, however it's not recommended for use as drinking water. Most landlords will provide you with a water dispenser. You can have water delivered on schedule, or you can exchange the water bottles at any

cold store (the local convenience store). There are several water companies: Nestle, Al Manhal, and Aquacool are just a few.

Will my DVDs still work there?

Most of the DVD players provided by the landlord will play Region 1 DVDs.

What is the normal workweek?

Sunday through Thursday. Friday is the Muslim religious day. Some businesses may be closed.

What's the exchange rate?

While this can fluctuate, generally 1 Bahraini Dinar equals \$2.67 USD.

Do you ever get to travel to other countries and can your spouse go with you?

Yes, you may travel to many other countries. Your spouse can go with you to most places; command approval may be required to travel within the AOR though.

What are your favorite things to do for fun?

Shopping at the Souqs, taking the children to the indoor water parks, visiting historic homes in Muharraq, volunteering at the Bahrain School, helping with Boy and Girl Scout activities, and participating in FRG events.

What are the restaurants like? Can you get 'American' food?

You can find a wide variety of food here, including American food. You may pay extra for it; remember it must be flown in! Most restaurants also deliver. Just as in the States, there are is a wide variety of types, qualities and prices on food. There really is something for everyone!

Can you buy liquor?

Yes, the base has a Package Store with a wide selection of liquor and other types of alcohol.

Can you have a drink out in town?

At certain restaurants, yes. There are also night clubs and bars.

What are the laws about drinking and driving?

The U.S. 5th Fleet Area of Responsibility's communication on alcohol is "Z-Z-1-3," which means Zero DUIs, Zero Alcohol Incidents, 1 drink an hour, 3 drinks per night limit. GENORD 11-2 states that ALL service members and their families must stop drinking in public at midnight. The blood alcohol level for driving in Bahrain is .000. Drinking and driving is not tolerated by the local law enforcement. Service members, family, DOD civilians and contractors found as possible DUI are turned over to the Navy for disciplinary action.

Can we use our gas grill there?

Yes. You will need to purchase a special attachment from the local gas company to hook it up to the local gas tanks. Attachments and tanks are widely available.

**For more information, please visit:**

**<http://www.cnrc.navy.mil/Bahrain/index.htm>.**

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