

# *The beauty of* **BAHRAIN**

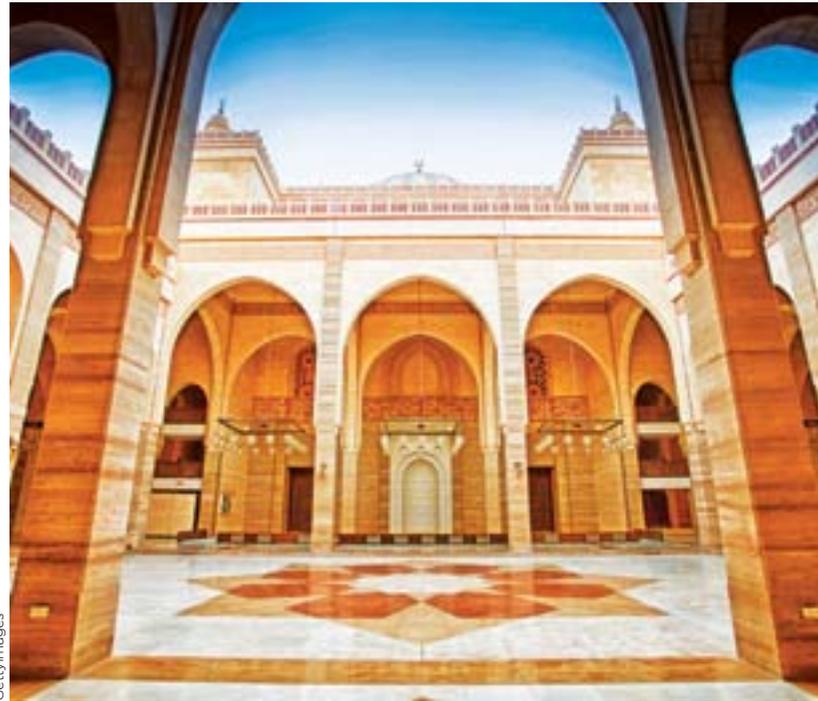
A charming confluence of tradition and modernity,  
the kingdom's capital Manama is full of colourful markets  
and stunning natural landscapes

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A trading empire of the ancient world, the kingdom of Bahrain today is an amalgamation of the traditions of the Gulf regions and the contemporary way of life. From historic forts and places of worship, which date back to hundreds of years, to traditional crafts and souqs for shopping, this dynamic and diverse country has much to offer its visitors. Manama, its capital, is a delightfully cosmopolitan city dotted with sprawling air conditioned shopping arcades and stunning sky scrapers. But it is the city's warm and welcoming soul that attracts tourists and travellers from far and wide.

When in Manama, it is imperative visit is the Al Fateh (Fatih) Mosque, considered to be the largest of its kind in Bahrain. Built in 1987, the mosque is named after Shaikh Ahmed Al Fateh. It is believed that the marble used in the construction was bought from Italy, the glass from Austria and



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teak from India, which was carved by Bahraini craftsmen. The worship area can accommodate almost 7,000 devotees.

To get a feel of the country's history, culture and art, a visit to the Bahrain National Museum is a must. The museum, housed in a post-modern building, displays a stellar collection of objects and artefacts that document almost 6,000 years of the nation's development. The exhibition complex consists of four halls: one devoted to archaeological finds from the ancient civilisation of Dilmun, two halls displaying the culture and lifestyle of Bahrain's pre-industrial past, and the fourth showcases natural history, focussing on the natural environment and featuring specimens of Bahrain's flora and fauna.

Located at a stone's throw away is another jewel in the crown of the city - the Bahrain National Theatre. The building, which houses the theatre,

**Opening page:** The stunning city skyline; **Opposite page top:** The Al Fateh (Fatih) Mosque; **Opposite page bottom:** Light display in the Al Fateh (Fatih) Mosque; **This page left:** Bahrain World Trade Centre; **This page right:** The Pearl Monument, a landmark in the city



is a marvellous work of architecture. Spread over almost 12,000 sq ft, this theatre is said to be the third largest of its kind in the Middle East. What's more interesting about this space is its number of seats - 1001, a homage to *One Thousand and One Nights*, the popular collection of Middle Eastern folk tales (also called the *Arabian Nights*).

A popular tourist site in Manama is the Qal'at al-Bahrain (or Bahrain Fort), a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the. It is an artificial mound, on top of which is located a remarkable Portuguese fort. If history is to be believed, this site was the capital of Dilmun, considered to be one of the most important ancient civilisations

**This page top:** A display at the Bahrain National Museum; **This page bottom:** Tourists at the Al Khalifa Stables; **Opposite page:** A tourist in Manama

## The Qal'at al-Bahrain is a UNESCO World Heritage Site



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### WHAT TO EAT

For an authentic Bahraini culinary experience, a meal at the Haji Gahwa in Manama is a must. Authentic Bahraini home cooked food such as machbous and meat grills, with sides of salads and fruits can be had here.

Those craving Japanese food can check out Kei. From an eclectic variety of maki rolls, teppanyaki and sushi preparations, this restaurant has been serving authentic Japanese cuisine in Bahrain since 1981.

To be in Manama and not try fish would be a crying shame. Head to the popular Fish House restaurant, where the menu boasts different fish preparations each day, based on the day's fresh catch.

of the region. The Manama Souq, located in the heart of the city, is any traveller's (and every local's) best bet to buy a wide variety of local products including spices, fabrics, kaftans, handicraft products, souvenirs, dry fruits, nuts and many more similar commodities. The entrance to the souq is a popular tourist attraction in itself. The Bab Al Bahrain, also called the 'Gate of Bahrain', is said to have been built by the British in the 1940s. One can also visit the Manama Central Market, which is famous for fresh fruits and vegetables.

Another not-to-be-missed attraction near Manama is the Tree of Life. A natural marvel, this mesquite tree is believed to be 400 years old and looks quite impressive, standing in the middle of a desert-like landscape against a clear blue sky.

What's baffling, however, is the tree's water source as no aquifers are known to exist around or near the tree's location. How the tree replenishes itself in that arid landscape is a mystery!

If you are an adventurer at heart and are looking for an adrenalin rush, check out the Gravity Indoor Skydiving experience, which is offered in collaboration with the Bahrain Air Sports Federation.

In fact, the Third FAI World Cup of Indoor Skydiving 2018, will be organised at Gravity, Bahrain from October 25-28 this year. Some of the best skydivers from across the world is expected participate at this sporting event, which will host four different disciplines in body flight: 4-way FS (formation skydiving), 4-way VFS and freestyle. 