

# THE LUXURY COLLECTION®

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IN CONVERSATION WITH  
CHITRANGDA SINGH  
AT FAIRMONT, JAIPUR

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF  
AMSTERDAM

GREAT EXPECTATIONS-  
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THE IMPERIAL -  
AN ART TOUR OF THE  
COLONIAL HOTEL

the magazine for the connoisseur of luxury



# BEAUTIFUL BAHRAIN

“Bahrain offers everything that one  
needs for a short break”

- By Aruna Rathod

I am curious about Bahrain as I walk out of the airport. Our van from Uranus Travels is waiting, with polite staff who greet us warmly. As we drive out and head towards one of the three bridges that take us to Manama, Alfred Lobo, the assistant manager of Uranus, informs me that Bahrain is a cluster of 33 islands, and Manama, the capital, itself is an island. As we head towards the bridge, the bright blue clear waters lend a holiday feel to Bahrain, with a couple of Dhows in the water and fishermen's boats that are waiting patiently for their next trip into the deep. I am excited to explore Bahrain.

Manama has its share of high-rise buildings, but they do not overpower. Three buildings catch my attention - one with twin towers, which Alfred explains are Bahrain's Twin Towers and its unique design incorporates the wind turbine at three levels, and the other one is an elongated 'H' etched into the sky, which houses the Four Seasons Hotel; the round structure of Wyndham Grand Manama.

We reach our hotel, the InterContinental Regency Bahrain, I am impressed with its majestic lobby and the superb location - just a five-minute walk from the Manama souk.



## The Spirit of Bahrain

Just outside the hotel, a few metres away is the historic structure, which marked the gateway to Bahrain years ago. Called Bab Al Bahrain, the structure houses the police station and the post office. As we enter the souk, I notice a huge decoration with gold tassels made to resemble bridal finery. Gold is very popular in Bahrain and its purity is one of the highest in the world. The path inside has small colourful stores that sell souvenirs, hanging lamps, spices, garments, abayas, head gear, the black limes used to make the Maqboos - Bahraini biryani, huge sticks of cinnamon, Arabic coffee and the sweet sticky Bahraini halwa in bright green and orange. One can spend hours just exploring these winding lanes that form into cross lanes at every interval. We had lunch at Naseef, in an air-conditioned souk and rounded the lunch off with Karak chai – tea with milk, like we have in India!

Besides stores, the souk is dotted with coffee shops that serve lunch and dinner too for locals to relax and catch up with each other, and their prominent fixture is a high wooden bench with a back rest that can seat three to five people, placed at right angles to make interaction with each other more convenient.



## Meals in Bahrain

Next morning, it's time to explore the famous Bahrain breakfast. Haji's is a local eating house that opens quite early. Patrons can watch the busy kitchen with staff that bakes kuboos (Arabic bread) at lightning speed. Locals as well as tourists frequent the place from early in the morning to start with the Karak or/and saffron milk. Breakfast is brought perched on a huge aluminium thali by the waiters with one hand – omelettes, egg bhurji (scrambled with tomato and spice), chicken curry, red kidney beans, dal fry, salad, grated cheese – served with Kuboos. It seems like a lot, but does get over in a matter of minutes once you begin!

Another small but must-eat-at outlet is Saffron by Jena, which is located in the restoration project district Muharraq. It has a rustic yet sophisticated feel to it. A date factory adds character to the outside and Saffron has the decor of a local home with woven curtains, woven cushion covers with tassels and the benches for seating.

Lunch at the Four Seasons Bahrain is a must and it's a grand affair with a view to match. Some of the most exclusive places to dine are the ART Rotana Hotel, Rasoi (Gulf Hotel) by Michelin starred Chef Vineet Bhatia, while Villa Mama's is a contemporary eatery, with a European-like feel that serves authentic Bahraini cuisine.

## Adventures in the Sea



For pearl diving, we drove to the Amwaj Islands. The jetty had some yachts and motor boats standing neatly in a row, in the crystal clear blue waters. We board our motor boat and head quickly towards the Coast Guard office to get a permit from the authorities, (make sure to carry your passport) and then proceed into the middle of the sea. The crew consists of three people – the captain, the rescuer and the diver. The diver asked a few questions preparing the divers for the activity. Then he wore his wet suit, took the basket to collect oysters and dived down smoothly.

Similarly the guest divers on the boat can follow, once you have sufficient oysters, you can come up and with help from the team, learn to pry open the oysters and begin your search for pearls. Make sure you pry the oyster meat around gently, in case it's a small pearl that's hiding in the meat.

With so much of exertion underwater, the boat staff make sure you are hydrated with a variety of soft drinks and cheese croissants alongwith fruit salad. If you don't find pearls, you can down the oysters!





## Pottery Trail

A'ali is a small town about 15 minutes away from the main city centre. Make it a point to visit Jaffar Mohammed Al Shughul Pottery and Delmon Pottery to indulge in a unique art form of Arabian ceramics. The colours, forms and inscriptions in Urdu are fascinating. Some wall pieces have verses from the Quran inscribed on them.

## Modern times – racing and adrenaline rush sports

Located in the heart of the Sakhir desert, Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) is a unique and contemporary facility that is synonymous with the highest levels of global motorsport. Featuring five different track layouts, it is the first-ever track in the Middle East to host the Formula 1 World Championship. BIC is a 20-minute drive from Manama.

You can choose from various activities, one of them being a Land Rover ride. Strap yourself up for churning your insides with off-road exploring on different terrains such as sand, rock, hill, and water landscapes, and a steep fall that was like a roller coaster ride – in all there are 32 natural and man-made obstacles!



If you want to try your hand at Karting, the Bahrain International Karting Circuit allows you to test your speed and driving skills. Or just book yourself for the Formula 1 racing season.

## Places to see

A visit to the Bahrain fort is testimony to the history of the country and its various rulers. The Dilmun (old name for Bahrain) civilisation has played a predominant role in Bahrain's history. The ancient burial mounds dot a part of the highway and a testimony to the Dilmun civilisation who were buried along with their belongings.

Muharraq is an interesting area, where the old quarters are being restored to showcase Bahraini culture. The National Museum of Bahrain too is a modern architectural wonder that houses plenty of information about the past. A drive on the King Fahd Causeway connecting Saudi Arabia and Bahrain is a must. The pace, the people and panoramic views make Bahrain a great place for a break.

