
Kuwait Information Pack

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Physical Characteristics

Sand, sand and more sand. The uninitiated invariably have this stereotypical image of the land of Kuwait. However, this image is only partially true. Along the seacoast, the land is made up of coastal deposits of a nature less dry and desert-like than the interior, even green and beautiful, if one may say so. These lands are punctuated by medium sized coastal hills from the rest of Kuwait.

Kuwait covers an area of 18,000 sq. km and includes nine offshore islands. The mainland is generally flat, desert landscape with the urban population concentrated in Kuwait City, its suburbs and satellite towns. Much of the desert is studded with oil installations and along the southern border at Wafra there is an extensive market garden area producing vegetables for local shops and markets.

Geography

The State of Kuwait was referred to by the name "Qurain" (or Grane) in the early seventeenth century. The names "Qurain" or Kuwait are diminutive of the Arabic words Qarn and Kout. Qarn is a high hill and Kout is a fortress adjacent to water.

There has always been a strong link between Kuwait and the sea, and it is this which has shaped the distinctive character of today's Kuwaitis. In the past the sea was the main source of income. Today the picture is different, with the urban expansion and rapid modernization. The link with the sea is still a cherished memory of the past.

A small, oil-rich country on the Persian Gulf, Kuwait lies at the northwest corner of the Arabian Gulf, between latitudes 28 and 30 N and longitudes 46 and 48 E. To the north and west it shares a border of 225 km (150 miles) with the Republic of Iraq, and to the south and southwest it shares a border of 250 km (155 miles) with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. To the east of the coast of Kuwait there are nine islands: Failaka, Bubyān, Miskan, Warba, Auhha, Umm Al-Maradim, Umm Al-Nami, Kubbar and Qaruth.

Bubyān is the largest island, located in the northwest of the Arabian Gulf and is linked to the mainland by a prestressed concrete bridge.

Failaka, considered as the most beautiful was a residential island and had a special beach resort comprising a number of chalets and leisure facilities before the Iraqi invasion, it now lies deserted. However Kuwait plans to transform Failaka into a tourist and recreational destination. It will be linked with the mainland by a 30 km long causeway.

Arabic is the official language, although English is widely understood and it's used by most businesses.

Islam is the religion of Kuwait and is practiced by a large majority. There are Catholic and Anglican places of worship in Kuwait also.

Climate

Kuwait enjoys a variable continental climate with considerable differences in temperature. The average daily temperature is approximately 32 degrees C (90 degrees F). The summer season is between May and October, the winter between November to April and the rainy season runs from December to March. The prevailing winds are dry and come from the northwest and so, despite Kuwait's proximity to the sea, humidity is low compared to the other Gulf States. In summer temperature can get over 100 degrees F (38 degrees C), but they drop below 70 degrees F (21 degrees C) in winter.

The almost universal air-conditioning in cars and buildings significantly reduces the impact of variations in weather conditions.

Climate data for Kuwait

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	AVE
Max (D.C)	17	20	24	31	38	42	44	44	41	34	26	19	32
Max (F)	63	68	76	89	100	109	112	111	106	93	79	67	90
Min (D.C)	8	10	14	19	25	29	31	29	26	21	15	10	20
Min (F)	46	50	57	67	77	84	87	85	79	70	59	50	68
Rain (mm)	23	23	28	5	0	0	0	0	0	3	15	28	10
Rain (inches)	0.9	0.9	1.1	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	0.6	1.1	0.4

Government

H.H. The Amir, Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah came to power in February 2006, following the passing of the late Amir, Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah (may he rest in peace). The Crown Prince of Kuwait is H.H. Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah.

Kuwait held a parliamentary election on June 29, 2006. The voters selected the 50 new members of the country's National Assembly .

History

Modern Kuwait began more than 300 years ago when the country emerged as an independent political entity under the rule of the present Al-Sabah family.

Pre-history

The earliest evidence of human presence in Kuwait is the existence of Mesolithic tools, dating from about 8,000 B.C. found in Burgan and Wafra. There are no signs of a later Neolithic culture in Kuwait.

However, excavation on the Kuwaiti island of Failaka strongly suggests that Failaka was part of the Bronze Age Diliium civilization and a center of international trade between 2200 and 1800 B.C.

The Battle of Chains was won by the Muslim warriors Khalid Al-Walid against the Persians in the Name of Islam at Kadhima on the north side of Kuwait Bay in 632. For a thousand years thereafter Kuwait was part of a nameless region. Then the seeds of nationhood were planted when the ancestors of the old Kuwait families arrived to establish their settled community.

Early History of Independence

In the 17th century the Bani Khalid were overloads of Eastern Arabia and their domain stretched from Kuwait down to Qatar. In about 1672, Barrak Bin Ghurair, the Amir of the Bani Khalid, built his Kout (a small house in the shape of a fortress situated near water) in Qurain, a small fishing community. This may have been in the area in Kuwait City known today as Wattiya. The name Kuwait is the diminutive of Kout.

The Utub, a federation of Arab families, were driven out of Al-Aflaj in Central Arabia by the droughts of the middle 17th century. In Qatar, they learned seafaring and then scattered into various Arabian Gulf ports before coming to Kuwait in the early 18th century where they settled with the permission, and under the sovereignty, of the Bani Khalid.

Family disoutes within the ruling Bani Khalid in 1772, gave the Utub in Kuwait a chance to practice some independence and Kuwait began to emerge as a distinct political entity. After 1752, further internal disputes among the Bani Khalid and the rise of the Wahhabis, their bitter enemies in Central Arabia, gave the Utub of Kuwait to defacto independence. In about 1756, they elected Sabah

Bin Jabir Bin Adhbi as Amir of Kuwait to administer justice and the affairs of the town.

As the regional influence of the Bani Khalid waned, Kuwait's lack of protection made the rise of a strong local power necessary. But Al-Sabah rule was not despotic. The Utub had changed from nomads to settlers since their departure from AL-Aflaj and the first Al-Sabah was chosen by the other families as their leader.

Sabah's fifth son Abdallah (1762-1812) was selected to succeed his father. Under his rule Kuwait changed from a small Sheikdom to a prominently prosperous and influential country and entered its first golden age in the latter part of the 18th and early 19th centuries as a major port of call on several international trade routes.

Pearls were Kuwait's only natural resource and each year hundreds of pearling ships made for the lucrative pearl banks to return at the end of summer. Shipbuilding, using imported materials, became an important industry.

Jaber the First (1812-1859) ruled mildly in consultation with the merchants of Kuwait, and managed to maintain good relations with all the major powers of the day. However, as Kuwait prospered throughout the 19th century, its independence came under threat from regional and European powers.

Independence under British protection

To counter growing Turkish ambitions, Sheikh Mubarak the Great (1896-1915) signed a treaty with the British in 1899 which defined Kuwait as "An Independent Country Under British Protection". Britain promised to protect Sheikh Mubarak and his heirs, and in turn the latter agreed to conclude no treaties with other powers, to admit no foreign agents and to cede no part of Kuwait's territory without British consent.

Though Sheikh Mubarak increased taxes, thus making himself unpopular with the local merchants, the country benefited greatly from his rule. Hundreds arrived to settle in Kuwait, attracted by its orderly administration and increasing commercial activity.

But trade declined sharply in Kuwait from the 1920's onwards due to the World Wide Recession. Kuwait's reduced importance as a major link in the 20th century international trade route was because of hostilities from the Ikhwan tribesmen from the interior of Arabia, (who were finally defeated in 1930). Kuwait's pearling industry, which once boasted 800 ships, almost disappeared with the introduction of Japanese cultured pearls and the worldwide fall in demand for luxury goods following the Wall Street Crash of 1929.

Transformation

The first oil concession was granted in 1939 by Sheikh Ahmed (1921-1950), a shrewd negotiator, who obtained terms which were more generous than those obtained by the other less independent states in the region.

Oil was first discovered in Burgan in 1938. Because of the Second World War, exports did not start until 1946. As oil exports increased Ahmadi, named after the Amir, was created near the oil fields as a township for oil company

personnel. In the 1950's and 60's, Kuwait underwent its transition from a small Emirate to an internationally influential modern state.

A modern infrastructure rose from the arid desert as roads, ports, factories, power generating stations, and desalination plants came into being. The boom continued as new mosques, clinics, hospitals, schools, markets, supermarkets, houses and villas were built. The population increased as thousands of foreign technicians, advisors and workers arrived to service the huge development schemes. Many Kuwaitis, members of a privileged minority, found themselves in new roles as importers, contractors, landlords, and government officials.

Government's role in the economy and administration naturally increased under the impact of the new wealth and development. A new administration order was devised as the government expanded. Though Shura (consultation) had always been apart of political life in Kuwait since the reign of the first Al-Sabah the government began developing a new style of constitutional rule.



International Recognition

Though Kuwait had been an independent political entity for more than two centuries, it gained international recognition as a sovereign state when, in June 1961, the Treaty of 1899 with Britain was replaced by a new Treaty of Friendship. A few weeks later Kuwait joined the Arab League. In 1963, the country became a member of the United Nations.

Iraq Invasion and Liberation

The gruesome and unprovoked cruel aggression of Iraq invading Kuwait on August 2nd, 1990 makes an unforgettable event of the recent history of Kuwait. The seventeen month occupation by Iraq brutalized the entire population.

The UN condemned the invasion and authorized the use of force to expel the Iraq's from Kuwait. The USA created an Arabic-Western coalition of 35 countries which freed Kuwait on 26th February 1991. But before liberation more than 70% of the country's souks and shopping malls were looted. Warehouses, factories, hospitals, offices and buildings were stripped, museums and cultural centres were emptied, and the environment was almost destroyed by the Iraqi dictator's last atrocity of firing the oil wells to destroy Kuwait. In 2003, Kuwait was the principal platform for U.S. military operations against Saddam Hussein.

Commercial Hours

The working week, number of hours worked and timing vary considerably. Here are the main commercial hours:

- Government offices / Ministries: Hours vary between Summer and Winter, Summer working hours from April 1 to October 31 are 07.00 to 14.00 (from Saturday's to Wednesdays); whereas Winter working hours from November 1 to March 31 are 07.30 to 14.30 (from Saturday's to Wednesday's).
- Private Organizations: Hours vary but 08.00 to 17.00 or 08.30 to 12.30 and 16.30 to 20.00 are common. Five day weeks are becoming favored though many establishments still work Saturday to Thursday.
- Commercial Banks: 08.00 to 13.00 Saturday to Thursday and again from 16.30 to 20.00 at some branches (Friday's and Saturday's closed)

During the Holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast during daylight hours business life slows measurably and Muslim employees are allowed shorter working hours than normal, this is then followed by Eld-Al-Fitr (normally a three day holiday).

Passports and Visas

All visitors to Kuwait, except other Gulf Cooperation Council nationals, need a visa or entry permit. A visitor can procure a one-month visa by submitting his passport and a letter from his sponsor to a Kuwaiti embassy or consulate, or by having his sponsor arrange one through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kuwait. Hotels can often procure visas for their guests. All visitors should carry a supply of passport-sized photos, required when securing official documents and arranging certain services.

Residency Permit

All expatriates (other than the GCC citizens) are required to obtain a residency visa (also known as Iqama). This permit is issued on account of acceptance of an employment offer from either a private company or government organization. The company/ organization will in turn act as the sponsor during the employee's employment. On arrival and commencement of employment, employers should be able to make allowances and arrangements for the entire residency process to be completed. Some employers may have an official representative or "Mandoop" who should be able to help with the process. The application for the Iqama is made at the Immigration and Passport Department of the Ministry of Interior in Shuwaikh (the Jawazaat/ passport office) and applicants must bring originals and photocopies of the following:

- 1) Medical Certificate** – The employee is required to undergo medical tests, including tests for AIDS & X-rays for TB. Requirements include: (a) passport, (b) copy of NOC (No Objection Certificate), (c) photographs, (d) KD 10

revenue stamp available from post offices and at the centre. Results usually take about 8-12 days to come through and are issued in the form of a certificate from Ministry of Public Health.

- 2) Security Clearance (fingerprint certificate)** - Fingerprint registration is required in order to obtain security clearance. These certificates are issued by the Criminal Evidence Department of the Ministry of Interior. Documentation requirements include: (a) passport; (b) passport copy and; (c) a letter from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. Fingerprint processing usually takes about 8-12 days.
- 3) Health Insurance covering period of residency** – Health Insurance covering the period of residency in Kuwait is mandatory, and without it, residency cannot be attained or renewed. The State insurance premiums at present are around KD 50 insurance yearly for the head of the family, KD 40 for wife and KD 30 for every child under the age of 18. Kuwaiti Law stipulates that the employer pays the premiums for the employees during the period of employment. According to a recent report, the Health Ministry has taken steps to privatize the health insurance scheme currently enforced on expatriates, with the expatriate referred to private clinics and certain hospitals with private health insurance schemes in operation. The premium may be reduced to KD 30 per year.
- 4) Declaration on the prescribed form, completed by the employer/ sponsor**
- 5) Passport & passport photocopy**
- 6) Work Permit or NOC** – NOC (issued prior to entry in Kuwait by the employer) with entry stamp.

Civil Identity cards

Once the Residency Visa has been issued and stamped, the Civil ID application can be initiated at the Public Authority Civil Information (PACI), where all matters concerning Civil ID cards are handled. The process usually takes two weeks provided the following documentation is in order:

- (a) Passport Copy
- (b) Blood Type Certificates
- (c) Sponsor's documents
- (d) Fingerprint report
- (e) 2 Photographs
- (f) Proof of address (e.g. rental agreement, etc.)

The application must be submitted within 30 days of the stamping of the residence permit on the person's passport, otherwise a KD 20 fine will be levied for late submission. Details on the progress of the application can be obtained by calling the PACI phone service on 889988. Renewal of the Civil ID is

necessary when a person's Iqama has been updated or transferred due to change in employment. A change in address also necessitates a new Civil ID.

A maximum of 5 years can be granted. If the sponsor is a government organization, then by law, the employee must bear the cost. If the sponsor is a private company, then the cost is a matter of negotiation between the sponsor and the employee.

Once the residency has been obtained, the male employee may then sponsor his wife and children to live with him in Kuwait. This is also dependent on the resident meeting the minimum salary requirements as stipulated by the Ministry of Interior, which at present is KD 400 per month for all nationalities. A working wife cannot sponsor her husband as a dependent, nor sons over the age of 21. Should the dependents wish to work, then they must transfer to a work visa under Kuwaiti sponsorship. Entry visas for dependents who wish to work must then transfer to a work visa under a Kuwaiti sponsor. Entry visas for dependents are obtained from the Passport Office (Jawzaat) in Shuwaikh and can be processed on receipt of the following documentation:

- (a) Sponsor's salary certificate
- (b) Copy of sponsor's Civil ID
- (c) Copy of the dependent's passport
- (d) Authenticated marriage certificate or child's birth certificate (by the Foreign Affairs of the country of origin)

Once they have entered the country, the formalities for a dependent's visa (art. 22) are similar to those for a work visa. The dependent must be medically tested and fingerprinted. The photographs and documents are the same as shown above except for the work permit. The sponsor's declaration is undertaken by the family supporter that he will maintain the dependent. The residence fees for each dependent (wife or child) are KD 100 in the first year and KD 10 a year thereafter. However the fee for a parent is KD 200 a year. These charges apply to all expatriate sponsors whether they are working in the public or private sectors. Expatriates who are in Kuwait on a visit visa may transfer to a dependent visa without having to leave the country and return.

Taxation

Kuwait is a tax-free country and you will not be required to pay any taxes to the Government.

Social Security

This national/pension scheme for Kuwaiti nationals whereby an amount is deducted from the staff's salary on a monthly basis. This is based on a contractual rate shared between the employee and firm or company. The employee pays 6% and the firm/ company pays 10% to the Public Institute for Social Security.

Newspapers

Classifieds: Kuwait Times, Arab Times, Waseet, ½ week

Furniture and Household Goods

The range of furniture available is vast and caters for all tastes and price ambitions. New furniture, either fully-built or self-assembly, is available in Shuwaikh and in the other main shopping areas. Credit terms can be arranged. Furniture can also be rented.

With a constant turnover of expatriates there is plenty of second-hand furniture around for sale. This is usually advertised by word-of-mouth or in the daily newspapers and weekly periodicals. One particularly useful periodical towards this end is the **AL-WASEET**. Used furniture can also be bought at the Friday open air markets, and during the week at the second-hand market near the nurseries at Al-Rai on the 4th Ring Road.

A wide range of television's, videos, stereo's, refrigerators, micro-waves and other consumer durables are available from all the main Japanese, Korean, American and European manufacturers at reasonable prices.

The best, latest and fastest models of American, German, east European, Japanese, Korean and east-Asian cars are invariably FIRST marketed, sold and available in Kuwait. Every Kuwaiti resident always likes to have the latest car in his garage. Evidently, plenty of brand new showroom as well as second-hand / third-hand cars are always available at any given point in time. Petrol is easily available and notoriously cheap. Since one feels severely handicapped without a car, it seems a good option to get one at the earliest opportunity.

Transportation

Having a car is more or less a necessity in Kuwait, as there is not really a good public transport system.

Driving License

When you first arrive you can drive on an international driving license, but this has to be converted to a Kuwait Driving License once you have completed the Residency formalities.

Certain nationalities can obtain a driving license on the strength of their national license, westerners for instance. Others may be required to apply for a learner's license and sit for a driving test.

Money & Currency

The currency of Kuwait is the Dinar. At the time of publication the rate of free exchange is approximately KD 0.250 to the US Dollar and KD 0.527 to the Pound Sterling. Salaries are paid in Kuwaiti Dinars.

To remit money overseas, you must purchase a Demand Draft through an application form (the bank will supply you with a stock). You can purchase a

demand draft in Sterling, US Dollar or whatever is appropriate. At the time of writing there are no currency restrictions regarding remittance overseas.

The firm's bankers are Bank of Bahrain and Kuwait (BBK). By opening an account with them, direct transfer of salary can be made easily without deduction for transfers and usually preferential treatment can be obtained. An ATM "K-Net" card will enable you to use the 24-hour cashing facilities outside branches of banks and in several supermarkets. (For bank timing's, please check Commercial hours).

Note: Kuwait has seven conventional banks and the employees have the liberty to open bank accounts in the following banks:

Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK)
Burgan Bank
Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK)
Gulf Bank
Bank of Kuwait and the Middle East (BKME)
National Bank of Kuwait (NBK)
Kuwait Finance House, an Islamic Bank (KFH)
Bank of Bahrain and Kuwait (BBK)



Be aware that cheques are not usually accepted as a form of payment of day to day shopping and expenses in Kuwait; a fund of cash is required. This does require planning ahead and having reserve stores.

It is recommended that you have a credit card in case of emergencies. Kuwait is still very much a cash society. Shops and government bodies seldom accept payment in cheque and cheques are used mainly for business transactions.

Major Credit Cards:

The following are accepted at all hotels and high class restaurants and shops:

- Diners Club
- American Express
- Visa
- Master Card

Telephones

Kuwait has an extremely sophisticated and complete range of telecommunication services, all of which are controlled by the Ministry of Communications (MOC). Services are provided partly by the MOC and partly by private bodies regulated by the MOC. The Ministry of Communication has upgraded its local and international networks.

Kuwait's national telephone network is operated by the MOC.

Most apartments already have telephone lines installed. To have a telephone line turned on, you must submit an application form, with a copy of your civil ID and tenancy agreement attached, to your local MOC office.

The cost to a private expatriate subscriber of having a telephone line switched on (without an international dial facility) is KD 65, i.e. KD 30 each for the switch-on cost, annual subscription and deposit, plus KD 5 stamp duty. For an international dial facility, an expatriate must put down a deposit of KD 500, either in cash or in the form of bank guarantee.

Those without an international line are billed once a year for the annual service charge. Subscribers with international lines are billed monthly. If the bill is not paid soon after it is issued the line may be cut off without the warning by the MOC's programmed billing control. If the MOC cuts off the line, they charge both a disconnection fee and a reconnection fee. The amount due on any telephone may be ascertained by dialling the Bills Enquiry Service 123.

The MOC provides a range of sophisticated services for digital telephones, such as conference calling and international call barring, though most of these are available on handsets that can be purchased over the counter in Kuwait. A caller ID service is also available. This has been very successful and MOC certified units are available.

Satellite TV

There are three main satellite services providers and they have channels showing, English, American, Indian, South African and Arab language programs. The prices are much the same as you would find in the United Kingdom.

Social Activities

There are a wide variety of social clubs and sports facilities available in Kuwait. For sea sports enthusiasts, water skiing, sailing, diving, boating, and scuba diving facilities are available. Also there are several cinema complexes showing Western, Hindi and Arabic films and eating out is relatively cheap.

Restaurants

There is a wealth and variety of international restaurants in Kuwait; you can choose cuisine of any nationality and pay any price. Service charges are usually included in the bill except in the low price range of restaurants. There are several restaurants which are worth visiting just for the novelty, such as the revolving restaurant in one of Kuwait Tower's spheres or in a converted Dhow, Al Boom at the SAS hotel.

Public Transportation

Public taxis are widely available and most drivers speak/understand English. Call taxis are radio controlled 24-hour cabs which are booked by telephoning the company's office. Fares, based on distance are cheap, a standard KD 1 for a trip originating and ending within the same area. Fares get progressively more expensive as trips extend across area boundaries.

There are two public transport companies in Kuwait. Kuwait Public Transport Co. (KPTC) and 'Citybus'. All KPTC buses and Citybuses are air conditioned and the fares range from 150 fils to 250 fils.

Sports

Kuwait is a very sports-minded nation. The rule of thumb is that if more than three people are interested in an activity, someone will organize it.

Schools

There are a number of international schools in Kuwait. Today, Kuwait's education system is larger than ever. There are currently close to 500,000 students enrolled in schools, constituting approximately 30 percent of the entire population.

There are three levels of education in Kuwait – elementary, intermediate, and secondary. Each level involves around four years of study. Schooling usually

begins at age four. Pre-school is available for four to six year olds, and students who complete their basic education can continue on to higher education. Students in all Kuwaiti schools study English beginning in the second grade.

Many people choose not to send their children to the government schools, but to private schools instead. There are many private schools in Kuwait, many of which have foreign sponsors and are coed. The Bayan Bilingual School, Camel School, Jabriya Indian School, the American School of Kuwait, the American International School, the British School of Kuwait, and the French School are several of the many prestigious private schools available to the Kuwaiti population.

Private education is generously subsidised. The Kuwaiti government subsidises into private educational facilities in addition to allotting land for school construction and distributing textbooks.

In every school, children are encouraged to strive for, and achieve, their best in work, attitude and personal behaviour. Members of staff are experienced in encouraging positive aspects of a student's efforts, ranging from written approval in workbooks to reward by certificates and other means. School fees ranges from KD 450 and above depending on the grade per semester/ term.

Medical Care

Health care is provided to all foreign residents who are entitled to treatment in Kuwait. There are many general and government hospitals and private clinics. There are many specialist hospitals which provide specific treatments. There are also many dental practices. All expatriates are required to pay at the time of their treatment and then complete a claim form which needs to be submitted to their insurance company. KPMG in Kuwait covers all expatriates on a health insurance policy and details can be obtained from the Human Resources Department.