

TimeOut

Bahrain

KNOW YOUR CITY
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WIN!
A family
break in
Dubai

LOCATION REPORT

Find the best place to live
at the right price

Plus
RAMADAN
Essential Iftar & shisha café guides
EID ESCAPES
The best travel deals revealed!

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW Quentin Tarantino
Bahrain football + Lost Paradise movie nights

RIFFA **BD800**

BAHRAIN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT 

CHANGE 

SAAR **BD1,500**

MUNICIPALITY TAX  **PAY BD300**

SEEF **BD900**

A'ALI
BD900

MINISTRY OF ELECTRICITY & WATER
PAY BD100 DEPOSIT

ADLIYA
BD650

COMMUNITY CHEST


JUFFAIR
BD750

COLLECT BD500 DEPOSIT AS YOU PASS
GO


Location

REPORT

Deciding where to live in Bahrain depends on your way of life – there are spots ideal for singles looking for fun, families searching for a large villa close to schools, and serviced apartments with easy access to the financial centres. Which areas best serve your needs? Where do you get the best deals? And should you buy or rent? We have spoken with estate agents, lawyers and of course Bahrain's residents to answer your questions. Words *Christina Fernandes*

Traditional feel

1 A'ali

What's the area like? It's an older, quite local area, but some expats like the freestanding villas for their low prices.

Amenities The pottery workshops are a great place to buy decorations for your home or gifts for friends, as well as a place to take visitors. The burial mounds are another cultural site. There are some cold stores and small restaurants.

Best for... Families who are happy to live in freestanding villas, as there are no compounds.

Pros Easy access to the highway toward Manama and Saudi, as well as low rents.

Cons If you want to eat out, go shopping or pretty much anything else, you need to drive quite far.

Prices BD900-2,500 monthly rent for a villa, or BD200,000+ purchase price.



Thanks to Yana Labizina, marketing director of Impact Estate (17 535 111; www.impact-estate.com)

Taste of Bahrain

2 Adliya (including Um Al Hassam, Mahooz & Zinj)

What's the area like? Most buildings are older, so you get better value for money. This is Bahrain's restaurant area, so it's busy. There are a few green spaces and parks, and depending where in the area you are, this can be a very pleasant place to live.

Amenities Some of the country's best restaurants, a few bars, supermarkets, healthcare facilities and schools. It is close to Manama and Juffair, but getting around can be slow due to traffic.

Best for... Eating out and value for money living.

Pros Easy access to fine dining and all daily requirements; relatively low-cost.

Cons Traffic is heavy and it's cramped in certain areas, and buildings tend to be older.

Prices About BD650+ monthly rent for a two-bedroom flat, and BD700-1,500 per month for a villa.



Money saver 3 Isa Town

What's the area like? It's busy and bustling. There are few western expats here; it's mostly locals and some non-western expats.

Amenities If you fancy some French culture, Alliance Francaise is located here. In the education department, you've got the University of Bahrain and the Indian School. For shopping, there's the Jawad Centre, a Friday market and the Manazil home and garden store.

Cafés and fast food restaurants are available.

Best for... Non-western expat and local families looking for freestanding villas.

Pros Many amenities and low prices.

Cons Heavy traffic.

Prices About BD300+ monthly rent for a two-bedroom flat and BD500+ monthly rent for villas.

Keeping it local 4 Hamad Town



What's the area like? Very local. It was set up in 1984 as a place where the government provided council housing to those who could not afford increasing property prices elsewhere in the country. In 2001, the government gave the council houses to the residents free of charge.

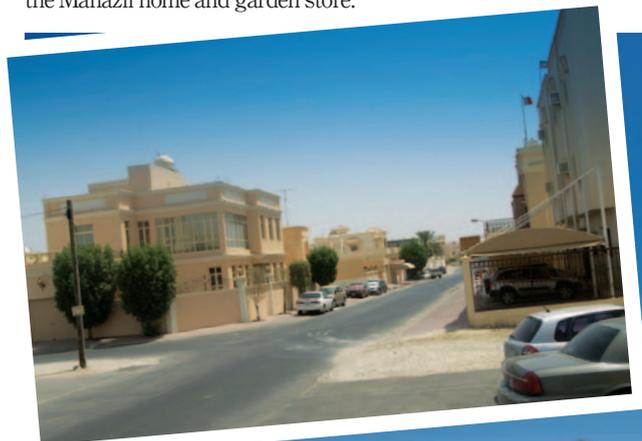
Amenities There's a market as well as some restaurants and cold stores.

Best for... Locals who are looking for villas (there are no flats).

Pros Low cost.

Cons Lots of traffic, few amenities.

Prices BD135,000+ purchase price for villas.



Party lifestyle 5 Juffair

What's the area like? Busy, busy, busy. Juffair has shot up with such lightning speed that it's hard to believe most of its reclaimed land didn't exist 15 years ago. It's packed with restaurants, bars and clubs, as well as supermarkets and the US Naval Base. Look out if there's an empty plot next to the building you're considering living in – construction noise and dirt next door could make your life miserable.

Amenities Cafés, bars, clubs and restaurants aplenty. There are a couple of supermarkets, the

Bahrain Specialist Hospital, as well as access to the Al Fateh Corniche.

Best for... Young people who like to go out.

Pros You can find everything to satisfy your daily needs and prices are competitive.

Cons Traffic is heavy and the place is cramped.

Prices About BD550-800 monthly rent or BD65,000+ (unfinished)/BD90,000+ (finished) purchase price for a two-bedroom flat. Villas run from BD1,000-2,500 monthly rent.

My life in... Juffair

Ben Millington is a journalist. He lives in a three-bedroom flat with two housemates. He has been staying here for eight months.

I like about living here... that I have easy access to shops and restaurants, as well as the American Alley [a road with lots of cafés and restaurants near the American base]. The facilities in my apartment block are excellent, it's almost like living in a hotel.

I don't like about living here... that the cost of rent is quite high and the traffic from Seef, where I work, is heavy. Construction noise can also be a bother.

In the area I can... go to the supermarket, which is just down the street. I can also eat out, go to the pub and use the excellent gym at my building.

I need to go elsewhere... to watch a movie, go to the market or souk, malls and my work.

I would recommend this place to... any kind of expat who is new to Bahrain or staying short-term. The fact that the apartments are furnished is very practical, and it's easy to make friends in your apartment building. In essence, you're in the area where all the action is.



My life in... Manama



Cheryl Rodrigues is a housewife. She lives in a one-bedroom flat on Exhibition Road with her husband

and their cat. They have been staying here for a year.

I like about living here... that it's a bustling place. I used to live in Mumbai, so I like a busy environment.

I don't like about living here... that the traffic is crazy, particularly on weekends, and there seem to be no rules or respect for the fact that it's also a residential area.

In the area, I can... walk over to Al Fateh Corniche on the waterfront, stroll, eat out at small restaurants and buy groceries.

I need to go elsewhere... to watch a film at the cinema, enjoy fine dining and browse the mall.

I would recommend this place to... young singles or couples without children.

The centre of it all 6 Manama



What's the area like? In the island's capital, the buildings are mostly old and poor quality, so western expats tend to stay away. However, some expats from other parts of the world and locals are attracted by the low prices.

Amenities The souk, restaurants and cafés, Moda Mall and the Sheraton Complex, as well as fine dining outlets in the hotels, such as the

Golden Tulip and the Gulf Hotel Bahrain.

Best for... People on a low budget who can handle the chaos.

Pros Close to the kingdom's financial area, plus lots of restaurants and shops to choose from.

Cons Heavy traffic, and the buildings are mostly poor quality and offer few facilities.

Prices Can be very low, but it's not easy to find real estate agents who deal with this area.

On the fly 7 Muharraq



What's the area like? Muharraq used to be the capital, it's older, and the small lanes in its interior make it quite congested. Most expats live in Hidd or Busaiteen where rent is low, but buildings have few facilities.

Amenities The airport is located here. There's also the souk, cold stores, the French School and fast food restaurants, as well as some fine dining at the Mövenpick Hotel.

Best for... People who work at the airport and can't afford to live in Amwaj.

Pros Prices are low and there are several recently refurbished corniches where you can take walks. Three bridges provide access to Manama.

Cons You have to get over to Manama to do most things, and noise from the airport can be a problem in some areas. Traffic can be heavy.

Prices BD450-700 monthly rent for a two-bedroom villa and BD200,000+ purchase price for a villa.



A royal touch 8 Riffa

What's the area like? As in Hamad Town, it's mostly locals who live here, although there are a few compounds. The most significant landmark is the Royal Court as well as the Sheikh Salman Bin Ahmed Al Fateh Fort (often just called Riffa Fort).

Amenities There are plenty of small shops, cold stores, a Lulu Hypermarket and restaurants, as well as hospitals.

Best for... Local and GCC families.

Pros It's very affordable.

Cons Traffic can be heavy.

Prices About BD200-400 monthly for a two-bedroom flat and BD700+ monthly for villas. Purchase price for villas BD225,000+.



Family friendly 9 Saar (including Budaiya, Janabiya, Jassra and the villages)



What's the area like? This area will appeal to those looking for something beyond sand and concrete. Saar is mostly made up of older but well maintained as well new compounds. This is a family place, and although it's considered to be 'out of town', Manama can be easily reached

via the highway. The Saudi Causeway is just around the corner.

Amenities Shopping includes Al Osra and Al Jazira supermarkets, as well as Country Mall and the Jawad Dome. There are several schools, including St Christopher's and the British School, plus the International Hospital. For leisure, there is Saar Cinema, the corniches in Barbar, Diraz and Budaiya, as well as Sheikh Mohammed Gardens with its camel farm. The Al Jassra House and Handicraft Centre, Barbar Temple and Saar Archaeological site provide a bit of culture.

Best for... Children's schools and family life.
Pros Easy access to restaurants, supermarkets, Seef, Manama and the Saudi Causeway. There is lots of greenery, as well as beaches and corniches, although they have been suffering badly from Bahrain's building boom.

Cons Traffic can be heavy on Budaiya Highway and other main roads in the area. Prices generally can also be quite high.

Prices Depending on the type of compound, rent varies greatly, from about BD750-5,000 per month. Only GCC citizens can buy property in this area, however, with prices ranging from BD150,000-400,000 for a villa.

My life in... Saar



Katja Smith is a housewife. She lives in a five-bedroom villa at a compound with her husband and their daughter. They have been staying here for three years.

I like about living here... that everything is close by – highway access to Manama,

supermarkets, healthcare facilities, schools and everything else I need.

I don't like about living here... that traffic is quite busy at peak times on certain roads.

In the area, I can... go shopping, take my daughter to swimming, go to the cinema, have a coffee and more.

I need to go elsewhere... for major malls and parks.

I would recommend this place to... families.



Shop 'til you drop 10 Seef

What's the area like? Modern. Luxury apartments and commercial buildings are mingling with malls. Although there are several access points to the main highway into Manama and towards Saudi Arabia, infrastructure can be sketchy in some areas where buildings have mushroomed but roadwork hasn't caught up.

Amenities The malls (Seef, Dana, A'ali Complex and City Centre) provide not only highstreet wares but hypermarkets Lulu, Géant and Carrefour as well as numerous cinemas, restaurants and cafés. For fine dining there are outlets in Seef's hotels (such as the Ritz-Carlton

and L'Hotel). Some dental and healthcare facilities as well as the Bahrain Fort with its museum are also located here.

Best for... In a word, shopping. Probably better suited to young professionals than families.

Pros The traffic is comparatively light because of the easy access to the highway, so you can get out and to other areas of Bahrain quickly.

All daily requirements are available.

Cons Prices are high in this area, whether you buy or rent. Also, it's almost impossible to walk around Seef, and there are no parks or outdoor areas.

Prices About BD700-900 monthly rent or BD80,000-100,000+ purchase price for a two-bedroom flat.



Residential projects

Outside Bahrain's traditional residential areas, more self-contained developments are popping up. Here are the main projects and what they have to offer



Durrat Al Bahrain



Al Areen

Surrounded by plenty of desert, Al Areen is to be its own self-contained city. It's a pretty long drive to Manama and Seef, but the development will have its own malls, hospitals and offices. The Bahrain International Circuit, Banyan Tree resort, Al Areen Wildlife Park and Lost Paradise of Dilmun water park are all around the corner. Al Jazair public beach and the Yacht Club are also close by.

TO BUY Prices vary, but in general it's slightly cheaper than Riffa Views (see below).

Amwaj Islands

This group of man-made islands off the Muharraq coast has seen more people moving in of late. Its lagoons and canals give Amwaj a Venice-like feel, and villas with or without direct access to the waterfront as well as apartments are available on a freehold basis. The Lagoon area will feature restaurants and shopping outlets.

TO BUY BD85,000+ for a two-bedroom flat; BD250,000-400,000 for a villa.

TO RENT Around BD750-900 a month for a two-bedroom flat in Tala Island and around BD1,500-2,000 for a villa with water access.

Bahrain Bay

Located off the coast of downtown Manama, this is another man-made island. It will consist of commercial, retail and residential buildings. Many homes have private boat accommodation and direct access to the marina. The project is scheduled for completion in 2012.

TO BUY Cost depends on the project. For example, prices in Raffles City, one key development, are BD1,350 per square metre.

Bahrain Financial Harbour

This commercial project is located on reclaimed land directly across from downtown Manama, on the opposite side of King Faisal Highway. It's a financial city with office towers, retail outlets and residential buildings. The residences here are mostly under construction.

TO BUY Costs vary depending on location and type of property.

Diyar Muharraq

This land-reclamation project is located off the northern coast of Muharraq. Beaches, shopping and dining outlets, medical facilities and schools will all be included.

TO BUY The project has not been released for individual sale yet.

Durrat Al Bahrain

It's tough to find good beaches in the kingdom, but at Durrat there are plenty. Located off the southern coast, its 13 manmade islands contain more than 2,000 villas and 3,000 apartments. Many will use these as weekend getaways rather than permanent homes.

TO BUY Expect to pay about BD350,000 for a four-bedroom villa.

Reef Island

Reef is going the natural route, with 50 per cent of its area to consist of green spaces. The island even has its

own nursery for trees. It is located close to the city, within easy reach of Seef and downtown Manama. Different projects are run by different developers, so completion dates vary. There will be beaches, a mall and other facilities.

TO BUY Around BD120,000-150,000 for a two-bedroom flat. Villa prices vary.

Riffa Views

This fully integrated development is built around its golf course. Residential properties from townhouses to villas are available in three distinct areas: the Lagoons, Park and Oasis Estates. Its school has been open for a year, the Royal Golf Club began operating earlier this year, and some villas have been handed over. The development is family and outdoor oriented, with walkways, tennis courts, parks and other leisure facilities.

TO BUY Four-bedroom villas run for about BD250,000-300,000.

TO RENT BD1,000+ for townhouses/villas.

It's the law

It's not always easy to find out what is and isn't allowed with regards to property in Bahrain. Hamid Abdulrahman Al Mahmood, a consultant and litigation specialist at Legal 500 law firm Hatim S Zu'bi & Partners answers our questions about buying and renting in the kingdom.

Is it legal to sublet a flat or villa you are renting in Bahrain?

It depends on your agreement with the landlord. If there is no restriction in the contract, there is nothing in the law to stop a tenant subletting. Landlords will probably have a clause in the contract that requires the tenant to obtain written permission from them in order to sublet, however.

Is it legal to share a flat or villa with someone you are not married to?

Again, it depends on your rent contract. The law does not prohibit tenants from sharing, but the landlord may.

By how much can a landlord legally increase your rent? Is there a cap on this?

This varies according to area. In Muharraq and Manama, a rental contract is automatically extended if the tenant wishes to do so, and the landlord cannot evict the tenant without proper cause. In these two areas, landlords are allowed to increase rent by 10 per cent once during the contract period, but only if improvements have been made to the property that increase its value. Everywhere else in the kingdom, landlords can increase the rent by as much as they wish after the rental contract has expired.

What are the legalities expats should be aware of when buying a property?

Some people may not be aware that signing a contract of sale is not enough to transfer ownership of a property to you. You must also register the property in your name with the Survey and Land Registration Bureau.

When buying a property, should you involve a lawyer or is it enough to deal directly with the seller of the property?

There is nothing in the law that requires you to involve legal representation. But if you are a foreigner who is unfamiliar with the system, it's best to seek a lawyer's advice.

In which areas can expats buy? Are there any restrictions to where they can rent?

There are no restrictions for renting. In the past, there were restrictions as to the areas in which expats were allowed to own property, but this is no longer the case. Foreigners can now buy anywhere in the kingdom, but the property has to fall into Category A, B or C specified in the property law. The definition of these categories is quite complex – a lawyer will guide you.

What advice would you give to prospective property buyers?

Check the property you intend to buy is allowed to be owned by a foreigner. Also check that the price is in line with other properties in the same area. Finally, declare the purpose you are buying the property for to ensure you can use it the way you intend.