

Gulf English School

مدرسة الخليج الإنجليزية



About Kuwait

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Geography

Kuwait is a small country of only 17,818 sq. km located at the northern tip of the Arabian Gulf sandwiched between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The coastline stretches 290 km with 9 islands, the largest being Failaka, Bubyah and Warba.

It is a small, independent Arab state that is immensely proud of its heritage and national identity. The official language is Arabic, but English is widely spoken and political links with the world are very good. The capital and commercial center is Kuwait City located on Kuwait Bay. It is the only substantial town, and the vast majority of the population lives in or around it. It is a bustling, cosmopolitan metropolis in contrast to the rest of the country which is largely barren, stony desert.

Kuwait is a very stable country politically and part of the 6 countries of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council or GCC states. It, therefore, has close ties and links to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE and Oman in terms of culture and development. The only notable areas of higher ground are Muttla Ridge and the Ahmadi Range.

History

The key to Kuwait's existence has always been trade. Archeological finds dating back as far as 2000 BC suggest that Failaka Island was a trading station with links to the Dilmun trading empire and the ancient Greeks to whom it was known as Ikarus named after a Greek Island in the Aegean. During the mid-18th century the Utub, a clan within the Anizah tribe, settled in Kuwait, probably to escape the ravages of a drought that was sweeping the Arabian peninsula. They chose Sabah Bin Jaber to be their leader in 1756 and his dynasty has ruled the country ever since. The country grew through trade, fishing, shipbuilding and pearl diving to be one of the most prosperous in the region, blessed with a natural harbour, water and a strategic position.

In 1899, Sheikh Mubarak the Great signed an agreement with the British which led to the recognition of Kuwait's independence with British responsibility for defence and foreign relations. Oil was discovered in 1938 but was not exported until 1946 because of the Second World War. Subsequent oil finds have made the country a major world producer with estimated recoverable reserves sufficient to take Kuwait well into the 21st Century. Since those days Kuwait has built itself into a modern state with a welfare system which is the envy of the world. In 1961 Kuwait became a State in its own right and joined the Arab League. Kuwait joined the United Nations in 1963 and was instrumental in the creation of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981.

On 2 August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait unleashing a seven-month occupation which horrified the world. Kuwaiti forces put up a valiant fight but were heavily outnumbered. Many brave Kuwaitis refused to be intimidated and established an effective resistance, which operated with success despite Iraqi reprisals. Kuwait was liberated on 26 February 1991 by a mighty coalition of 35 allied countries under the auspices of the United Nations. Today, Kuwait and its people can be proud of the great strides that have been taken in an astonishingly short time to repair the structural and environmental damage, to re-establish an infrastructure which was systematically dismantled, and to restore a shattered economy.

Climate

The winter season is normally from November to February, when temperatures generally vary between 0°C and 25°C, which can often feel surprisingly cool and will require warmer clothing. From June to September, it is hotter and the typical range is 26°C to 50°C, with very minimal humidity in August and September. New staff arriving at the start of the academic year may, therefore, find the first 4 weeks hot and a little humid, although air-conditioning makes all homes, cars and buildings comfortable. During summer, it is advisable to wear natural fabrics e.g. cotton/linen, as opposed to man-made fabrics. From October to April the climate is generally pleasant and rainfall is there and infrequent, often being limited to just a handful of days each year.

Expatriate Life

Out of a total population of just over 4.4 million, Kuwait nationals make up only 30.39%, with expatriates of various nationalities making up the rest (www.paci.gov.kw).

Social life focuses on the home and family but there are a large number of clubs, societies and organisations catering for a huge range of interests (e.g. rugby, cricket, sub-aqua, amateur dramatics, sailing, golf, various family clubs, hotel swimming pools and health clubs etc.) Weekend visits to the beach (Kuwait is surrounded by long and beautiful beaches), the sand dunes and fishing trips are also popular. Restaurants are plentiful and eating out is very much part of the lifestyle and culture. The quality of food and service is very high and there are a huge variety of cuisines from all over the world. The cost is usually very reasonable too. Shopping is very varied, to cater for the wide mix of nationalities and disposable incomes.

Several Western style hypermarkets and department stores mean there is very little that cannot be purchased locally. Western retail chains with outlets in Kuwait include but not limited to; BHS, Next, Marks & Spencer, Debenhams, Boots, Mothercare, Virgin, Carrefour, Starbucks, Mango, GAP, Benneton, WH Smith etc. US-style fast food restaurants are also well represented.

Outside of the ultra-modern malls there are other, more traditional areas of Kuwait that have other shopping attractions to offer. In downtown Kuwait, is Souq which sells everything you could possibly think of in a far more traditional Arabic setting. There is also the Gold Souq and numerous other specialist markets, all with a character of their own.

Many people use periods of local leave to visit other parts of the Gulf Region as well as the rest of the world. Dubai, Bahrain and Abu Dhabi are all just a short flight away and flights are very reasonable too.

Economy

The principal factor in Kuwait's economy is, of course, oil, which represents about 70 % of the gross domestic product, 90 % of government revenue and about 95 % of foreign exchange earnings. Kuwait is estimated to be the fourth largest oil producer in the Middle East and OPEC and the seventh largest in the world with reserves sufficient for 70 to 100 years' further exploitation. It has been a policy to deliberately limit oil production in order to conserve reserves and to maintain prices. A large quantity of natural gas is also produced. Although some industry is connected with these natural resources, there is a policy to actively pursue more diversified sources of employment. This broadening of the country's industrial base is centered on the Shuaiba Industrial Area. Non-petroleum based employment includes large-scale building and construction projects and the expansion of the shipping sector. Prior to the occupation, Kuwaitis were, in terms of per capita GNP, the richest people in the world, and the country's relatively small size and the population had contributed towards its comparatively mature economy. The invasion interrupted Kuwait's industrial development, but the underlying strengths remain unchanged.

Religion

Kuwait is an Islamic state, and mosques of varying size and importance are to be found throughout the country. The largest is the Great Mosque opposite the Seif Palace. For most newcomers, their first awareness of Islam will come as the dawn prayer rings out across the city in the small hours, the first of five calls to prayer each day.

There are five pillars of Islam basic beliefs common to all Muslims. The first is the profession of faith: "There is no other god but God, and Mohammed is the messenger of God". The second is prayer and the third is fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. The fourth is the giving of alms, and the fifth is the pilgrimage or Hajj to Mecca, which all believers should attempt to make during their lifetime. Islam has a separate calendar with 12 months all of which are timed to the phases of the moon.

The holy month of Ramadan is important as a time when all Muslims fast completely from dawn to sundown. They abstain from eating, drinking and smoking, and to every other "bodily indulgence" including malicious gossip and spite. Nightfall is marked by the breaking of the fast, and the whole month is a time of celebration and family togetherness.

It is important to note that during Ramadan non-Muslims are also forbidden to eat, drink or smoke in public areas and that this is upheld by law. During Ramadan business hours are usually adopted. Public holidays are usually associated with the Islamic religion and are a time for celebration. Islam forbids the consumption of alcohol and pork products of any kind and these commodities are therefore illegal in Kuwait.

The practice of other religions:

Unlike other Middle Eastern countries, Kuwait has a written Constitution. Article 35 states “Freedom of belief is absolute. The State protects the freedom of practicing religion in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals”.

Churches

- National Evangelical Church, Kuwait City
- Roman Catholic Church, Kuwait City
- Coptic Orthodox Church, Hawalli
- Roman Catholic Church, Salmiya

Local Bureaucracy:

Residence Permit: All expatriates require a Residence Permit (RP) and Civil ID to live and work in Kuwait. One of the first steps after your arrival is to convert your entry visa to an RP. The School provides staff with assistance in obtaining this and support in your first few days in order to complete the various steps required. In order to make this happen, please make sure to complete the Procedures mentioned in the On-Boarding email forwarded by your On Boarding Officer from TES. This Civil ID card is then the key to most other services and official entitlements in Kuwait and it should be carried at all times. It is required for accommodation contracts (opted out to stay from the Company Provided Accommodation), utility bills, including telephone and TV packages and it is also required for a Kuwaiti Driving license.

Note: To obtain your Residence Permit, the HR submits your documents to the Government Departments. It can take up to a month or more (depending on the process and completion of the necessary documents from your side) before the permit is issued and the stamping in the passport. We would expect all permits to be issued and stamping the RP in the Passport at the earliest and therefore we recommend not booking any future travel arrangements until the process is completed.

Local Services:

Banking:

The school banks mainly with the Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and National Bank of Kuwait (NBK). We are able to offer you the opportunity to open an account with the bank once you arrive in Kuwait. Banking operates in an international way in Kuwait in terms of over the counter services but it is also possible to do all your banking online with them as well and sending money back to your home country is straightforward with an IBAN number. Also, you have many Money Exchange centers available for overseas transfer facilities.

Health Care:

State-run medical facilities are of a high standard (facilities and medicines are heavily subsidized), and are available to expats residents as well. The school also provides a good discount for our own group Hospital. This gives staff access to the hospital where it is possible to walk in and see a specialist doctor almost immediately.

Electricity:

Supply is reliable. The system is the same voltage and type of plugs and sockets as the International.

Landline and Mobile Telephone/Internet/Television Packages:

There are a number of Telephone operators in Kuwait which include international operators. You can easily approach them for getting the initial prepaid connection with a monthly data subscription. There are always multiple offers and data is very reasonable and most common in Kuwait.

Post:

There are a number of international operators available for the postal/courier services at a reasonable rate. Staff can receive mail to the company's postal address at: P O Box 33106 Al Rumaithiya codes 25562 Kuwait.

Emergencies:

For the emergency services in Kuwait, it is the same as international. Dial 112 for any Emergency Assistance.