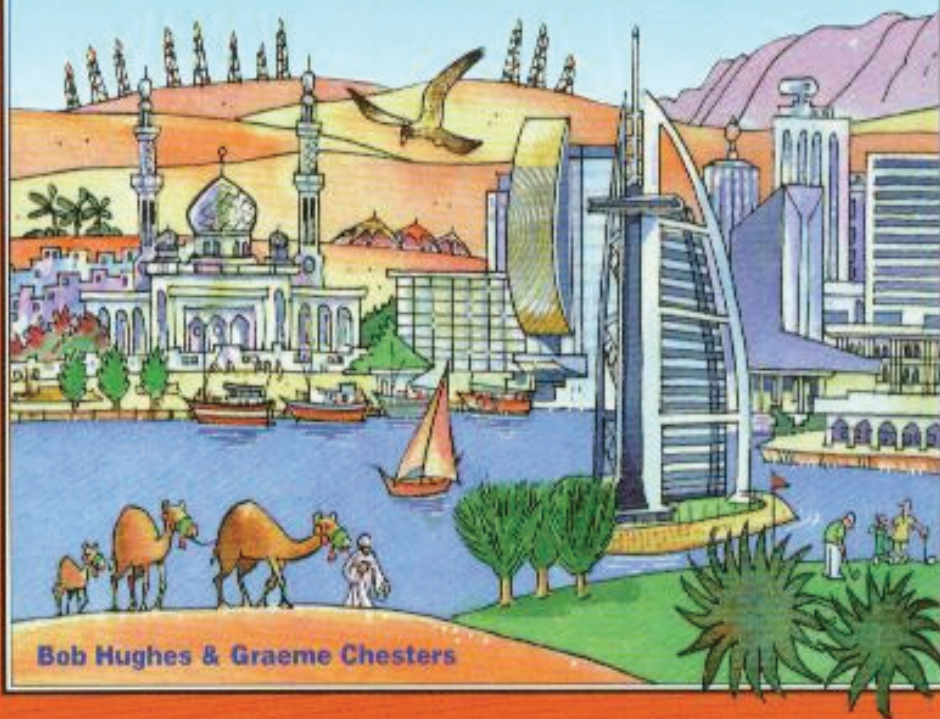


Over 400 Pages  
of Vital Information

# Living and Working in the **GULF STATES** & **SAUDI ARABIA** — A SURVIVAL HANDBOOK —



Bob Hughes & Graeme Chesters

Living and Working  
in the  
*Gulf States*  
&  
*Saudi Arabia*

A Survival Handbook  
by  
Bob Hughes & Graeme Chesters



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# WHAT READERS & REVIEWERS

When you buy a model plane for your child, a video recorder, or some new computer gizmo, you get with it a leaflet or booklet pleading 'Read Me First', or bearing large friendly letters or bold type saying 'IMPORTANT – follow the instructions carefully'. This book should be similarly supplied to all those entering France with anything more durable than a 5-day return ticket. It is worth reading even if you are just visiting briefly, or if you have lived here for years and feel totally knowledgeable and secure. But if you need to find out how France works then it is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions. – Where it is most essential, the book is most up to the minute.

## LIVING FRANCE

We would like to congratulate you on this work: it is really super! We hand it out to our expatriates and they read it with great interest and pleasure.

## ICI (SWITZERLAND) AG

Rarely has a 'survival guide' contained such useful advice. This book dispels doubts for first-time travellers, yet is also useful for seasoned globetrotters – In a word, if you're planning to move to the USA or go there for a long-term stay, then buy this book both for general reading and as a ready-reference.

## AMERICAN CITIZENS ABROAD

It is everything you always wanted to ask but didn't for fear of the contemptuous put down – The best English-language guide – Its pages are stuffed with practical information on everyday subjects and are designed to complement the traditional guidebook.

## SWISS NEWS

A complete revelation to me – I found it both enlightening and interesting, not to mention amusing.

## CAROLE CLARK

Let's say it at once. David Hampshire's *Living and Working in France* is the best handbook ever produced for visitors and foreign residents in this country; indeed, my discussion with locals showed that it has much to teach even those born and bred in l'Hexagone. – It is Hampshire's meticulous detail which lifts his work way beyond the range of other books with similar titles. Often you think of a supplementary question and search for the answer in vain. With Hampshire this is rarely the case. – He writes with great clarity (and gives French equivalents of all key terms), a touch of humour and a ready eye for the odd (and often illuminating) fact. – This book is absolutely indispensable.

## THE RIVIERA REPORTER

# HAVE SAID ABOUT SURVIVAL BOOKS

What a great work, wealth of useful information, well-balanced wording and accuracy in details. My compliments!

**THOMAS MÜLLER**

This handbook has all the practical information one needs to set up home in the UK – The sheer volume of information is almost daunting – Highly recommended for anyone moving to the UK.

**AMERICAN CITIZENS ABROAD**

A very good book which has answered so many questions and even some I hadn't thought of – I would certainly recommend it.

**BRIAN FAIRMAN**

A mine of information – I may have avoided some embarrassments and frights if I had read it prior to my first Swiss encounters – Deserves an honoured place on any newcomer's bookshelf.

**ENGLISH TEACHERS ASSOCIATION, SWITZERLAND**

Covers just about all the things you want to know on the subject – In answer to the desert island question about the one how-to book on France, this book would be it – Almost 500 pages of solid accurate reading – This book is about enjoyment as much as survival.

**THE RECORDER**

It's so funny – I love it and definitely need a copy of my own – Thanks very much for having written such a humorous and helpful book.

**HEIDI GUILIANI**

A must for all foreigners coming to Switzerland.

**ANTOINETTE O'DONOGHUE**

A comprehensive guide to all things French, written in a highly readable and amusing style, for anyone planning to live, work or retire in France.

**THE TIMES**

A concise, thorough account of the DOs and DON'Ts for a foreigner in Switzerland – Crammed with useful information and lightened with humorous quips which make the facts more readable.

**AMERICAN CITIZENS ABROAD**

Covers every conceivable question that may be asked concerning everyday life – I know of no other book that could take the place of this one.

**FRANCE IN PRINT**

Hats off to *Living and Working in Switzerland!*

**RONNIE ALMEIDA**

# THE AUTHORS

This book is a collaboration between Bob Hughes, who provided the detailed information on the region (including valuable input from Trish Dodds), and Graeme Chesters, who composed the text.

**Bob Hughes** has lived and worked in the Gulf region for the past 20 years, based at various times in Bahrain, Dubai, and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. As a senior director of one of the world's leading advertising and marketing agencies, he has gained extensive experience of the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, including their business environment, culture and people.

**Graeme Chesters** was born in the north-west of England in 1963, obtained a degree in philosophy at Bristol University and worked in the City of London for ten years. He has lived in Spain since 1995. He's a columnist for a Spanish newspaper, contributes to British newspapers and magazines, and writes wine, travel and children's books. He's the author of *How to Avoid Holiday and Travel Disasters* and *The Wines of Spain*, both published by Survival Books (see page 416).

# CONTENTS

## **1. FINDING A JOB... 21**

---

Gulf Co-operation Council...	34
Work Force...	34
Employment Prospects...	35
Unemployment...	36
Age Discrimination...	36
Qualifications...	37
Sponsorship...	37
Government Employment Service...	38
Recruitment Agencies...	39
Contract & Freelance Jobs...	40
Seasonal Jobs...	40
Teaching English...	40
Au Pairs...	42
Temporary & Casual Work...	42
Trainees & Work Experience...	43
Voluntary Work...	43
Working Women...	44
Salary...	45
Self-employment...	45
Starting a Business...	46
Working Illegally...	49
Language...	49

## **2. WORKING CONDITIONS... 53**

---

Terms of Employment...	54
Employment Contracts...	60
Employment Conditions...	61

## **3. PERMITS & VISAS... 71**

---

Visas...	73
----------	----

---

## **4. ARRIVAL... 83**

---

Immigration...	84
Customs...	85
Embassy Registration...	88
Finding Help...	88
Checklists...	88

---

## **5. ACCOMMODATION... 93**

---

Temporary Accommodation...	94
Relocation Consultants...	94
Arab Homes...	95
Buying Property...	97
Rented Accommodation...	97
Home Security...	101
Moving House...	101
Electricity...	102
Gas...	105
Water...	106
Sewage...	106
Rubbish Disposal...	107
Air-conditioning...	107
Heating...	108

---

## **6. POST OFFICE SERVICES... 111**

---

Censorship...	112
Business Hours...	112
Delivery & Collection...	113
Parcel Post...	114
Charges...	114
Registered Post...	116
Courier Services...	116

---

## **7. TELEPHONE... 119**

---

Emergency & Service Numbers...	120
--------------------------------	-----

Installation & Registration...	121
Using the Telephone...	122
International Calls...	124
Customised & Optional Services...	125
Call Charges...	125
Bills...	126
Directories...	126
Public Telephones...	127
Mobile Phones...	127
Fax, Telegrams & Telex...	127
Internet...	127

## **8. TELEVISION & RADIO... 131**

---

Television...	132
Radio...	136

## **9. EDUCATION... 139**

---

State or Private School?...	141
Private Schools...	143
Higher Education...	152

## **10. PUBLIC TRANSPORT... 155**

---

Trains...	156
Buses...	156
Taxis...	159
Airline Services & Airports...	162

## **11. MOTORING... 167**

---

Vehicle Import & Export...	169
Buying a Car...	169
Selling a Car...	171
Vehicle Registration...	171
Technical Inspection...	173
Road Tax...	173

Driving Licence...	173
Car Insurance...	175
Rules of the Road...	177
Speed Limits...	180
Traffic Police...	181
Gulf Roads...	181
Off-road Driving...	182
Arab Drivers...	185
Motorcycles...	185
Accidents...	186
Drinking & Driving...	188
Car Theft...	189
Parking...	189
Fuel...	190
Garages & Servicing...	191
Road Maps...	191
Car Rental...	192
Motoring Organisations...	194
Pedestrian Road Rules...	194

## **12. HEALTH... 197**

---

Emergencies...	199
State Health Benefits...	200
Hospitals & Clinics...	202
Doctors...	204
Medicines...	205
Dentists...	206
Opticians...	207
Counselling & Social Services...	207
Smoking...	208
Sexually Transmitted Diseases...	208
Births & Deaths...	209

## **13. INSURANCE... 213**

---

Social Security...	214
--------------------	-----

Pensions...	215
Insurance Companies & Agents...	216
Insurance Contracts...	216
Health Insurance...	217
Dental Insurance...	218
Holiday & Travel Insurance...	218
Household Insurance...	220
Third Party Liability Insurance...	222

---

## **14. FINANCE... 225**

Gulf Currencies...	226
Importing & Exporting Money...	227
Cash & Travellers' Cheques...	229
Banks...	230
Investment...	239
Credit & Charge Cards...	241
Loans, Overdrafts & Mortgages...	242
Income Tax...	243
Commercial Taxation...	244
Other Taxes...	245
Wills...	246
Cost of Living...	246

---

## **15. LEISURE... 251**

Tourist Offices...	258
Hotels...	260
Youth hostels...	266
Self-catering...	266
Caravanning & Camping...	266
Museums & Art Galleries...	267
Other Places of Interest...	269
Cinemas...	277
Theatre, Opera & Ballet...	278
Music...	279
Festivals...	279

Social Clubs...	280
Nightlife...	281
Gambling...	281
Food...	282
Restaurants...	283
Alcohol ...	287
Bars & Cafes...	289
Libraries...	292

## **16. SPORTS... 295**

---

Soccer...	296
Rugby...	297
Cricket...	298
Watersports...	298
Fishing...	299
Swimming...	300
Tennis...	301
Golf...	301
Horse Racing...	302
Camel Racing...	303
Falconry...	303
Wadi Bashing...	304
Athletics...	304
Health Clubs...	305
Other Sports...	305

## **17. SHOPPING... 309**

---

Shopping Hours...	312
Shopping for Food...	313
Buying Alcohol...	318
Markets...	319
Supermarkets & Hypermarkets...	320
Department & Chain Stores...	321
Tobacconists...	322
Clothing...	322

Newspapers, Magazines & Books...	323
Furniture & Household Goods...	325
Shopping Abroad...	326
Internet Shopping...	328
Receipts & Consumer Rights...	328

---

## **18. ODDS & ENDS... 331**

Business Hours...	332
Calendar...	332
Citizenship...	334
Climate...	334
Crime...	337
Culture Shock...	338
Embassy, Consular & Legal Assistance...	338
Geography...	339
Legal System...	341
Marriage & Divorce...	346
National Holidays...	348
Pets...	350
Police...	351
Population...	351
Religion...	352
Ruling Families...	356
Social Customs...	357
Time Difference...	362

---

## **19. THE GULF ARABS... 365**

## **20. MOVING HOUSE... OR LEAVING THE GULF STATES... 371**

Moving House...	372
Leaving the Gulf...	373

---

**APPENDICES... 377**

Appendix A: Useful Addresses... 378

Appendix B: Further Reading... 385

Appendix C: Useful Websites... 390

Appendix D: Weights & Measures... 398

Appendix E: Map... 402

---

**INDEX... 403**

---

**ORDER FORMS... 412**

---

**NOTES... 417**

# IMPORTANT NOTE

**T**he Gulf is, not surprisingly, a strange and alien region for many newcomers, with numerous restrictive rules and regulations (often based on religious law), which it would be foolish or risky to ignore. The rules and regulations concerning expatriates are liable to change at short notice and without warning; it's therefore important to check with an official and reliable source (not always the same) before making any major decisions or undertaking an irreversible course of action. However, don't believe everything you're told or read – even, dare I say it, herein!

To help you obtain further information and verify data with official sources, useful addresses and references to other sources of information have been included in all chapters and in Appendices A to C. Important points have been emphasised throughout the book in **bold** print, some of which it would be expensive or even dangerous to disregard. **Ignore them at your peril or cost!** Unless specifically stated, the reference to any company, organisation, product or publication in this book *doesn't* constitute an endorsement or recommendation. Any reference to any place (real or fictional) or person (living or dead) is purely coincidental.

# AUTHORS' NOTES

- Opinions differ as to whether Saudi Arabia is one of the Gulf states. However, all references to the Gulf states in this book include Saudi Arabia, unless otherwise stated.
- Costs and prices are shown in local currency where appropriate (with US\$ equivalents) and otherwise in US\$ (with GB£ equivalents). They should be taken as guides only, although they were correct at the time of publication.
- Times are shown using the 12-hour clock, e.g. 10am and 10pm.
- His/he/him also means her/she/her (please forgive us ladies). This is done to make life easier for both the reader and (in particular) the authors, and isn't intended to be sexist.
- British English and not American English is used throughout (or should be).
- Warnings and important points are shown in **bold** type.
- Arabic words are shown in *italics*. (Note that the English transliteration of Arabic words varies, although we have attempted to be consistent.)
- The following symbols are used in this book: ☎ (telephone), 📠 (fax), 🌐 (Internet) and ✉ (e-mail).
- Lists of **Useful Addresses**, **Further Reading** and **Useful Websites** are contained in **Appendices A, B and C** respectively.
- For those unfamiliar with the metric system of weights and measures, imperial conversion tables are included in **Appendix D**.
- A map of the Gulf region is shown in **Appendix E**.

# INTRODUCTION

**W**hether you're already living or working in the Gulf or just thinking about it, this is **THE BOOK** for you. *Living and Working in the Gulf States & Saudi Arabia* is designed to meet the needs of anybody who needs to know the essentials of life in the region, including temporary workers, business people, tourists, transferees and even extra-terrestrials. However long your intended stay, you'll find the information in this book invaluable.

General information isn't difficult to find about the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, and a number of guide books are published for tourists and short-stay visitors. However, reliable and up-to-date information in English specifically intended for foreigners living and working in the Gulf isn't so easy to find, least of all in one volume. Our aim in publishing this book was to help fill this void and provide the comprehensive practical information necessary for a relatively trouble-free life. You may have travelled abroad on holiday, but living and working in a foreign country for an extended period is a different matter altogether; adjusting to a different environment, culture and language, and making a home abroad can be a traumatic and stressful experience.

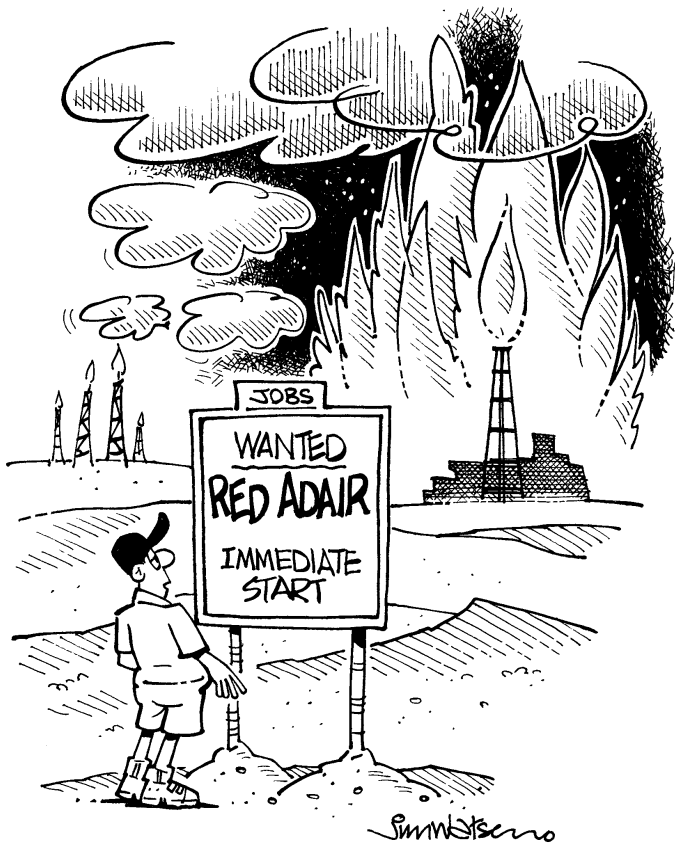
You need to adapt to new customs and traditions and discover the local way of doing things, for example, finding a home, paying bills and obtaining insurance. For most foreigners, overcoming the everyday obstacles of life has previously been a case of pot luck. **But no more!** With a copy of *Living and Working in the Gulf States & Saudi Arabia* to hand, you'll have a wealth of information at your fingertips – information that derives from a variety of sources, both official and unofficial, not least the hard-won personal experiences of the authors and their researchers, families, friends, colleagues and acquaintances. *Living and Working in the Gulf States & Saudi Arabia* is a comprehensive handbook on a wide variety of everyday subjects and represents the most up-to-date source of general information available to anyone planning to live, work or do business in the region.

Adapting to living in a new country is a continuous process and, although this book will help reduce your 'beginner's phase' and minimise the frustrations, it doesn't contain all the answers (most of us don't even know the right questions to ask). What it will do is help you make informed decisions and calculated judgements, instead of uneducated

guesses and costly mistakes. **Most importantly, it will help save you time, trouble and money, and will repay your investment many times over.**

Although you may find some of the information a bit daunting, don't be discouraged. Most problems occur only once and fade into insignificance after a short time (as you face the next half dozen . . .). The majority of foreigners living in the Gulf would agree that, all things considered, they enjoy living there. A period spent in the region is a great way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons and, with any luck, also please your bank manager! I trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of life in the Gulf and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding future in your new home.

**Good luck!**



1.

FINDING A JOB

The countries of the Arabian peninsula – Bahrain, Kuwait, The Sultanate of Oman, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – are among the most affluent in the world and should remain so for many years with large export surpluses from their oil revenue and high per capita incomes (the UAE boasts the highest per capita income in the Arab world). The region's financial resources have funded major expansion and building programmes, and for the past three decades, hundreds of thousands of foreign workers have flocked to the Gulf, where most find that the region offers better opportunities than do their home countries.

It wasn't until the oil boom of the early 1970s that the world's gaze fell on the Gulf. Before then, little was known about the countries sitting on the world's largest oil reserves. Their economies were positively backward by western standards, and their people tribal, insular and sometimes nomadic. The boom meant that the economies of the Gulf states were transformed almost overnight, with massive oil income allowing rapid and major changes to the countries' infrastructures (roads, hospitals, airports, etc.) and major progress in the fields of telecommunications, general industry, construction and health. The Gulf states' small populations and lack of people with professional experience and technical skills in many areas meant that they were unable to service these new businesses. They looked to the west for managerial expertise, to the Indian sub-continent and Far East for manual and semi-skilled workers, and to North Africa for teachers, lawyers and doctors able to speak Arabic. This resulted in an employment boom, which made the region a focus for foreigners seeking well-paid work and an exotic expatriate lifestyle.

Since then, the Gulf states have become thriving centres for a variety of trades and industries, having successfully diversified from their oil base, and now require and attract workers from a wide range of industries, with a variety of skills and experience. Tourism is growing rapidly (with a consequent increase in employment opportunities for hotel and recreation staff) while the welfare sector, telecommunications, personnel, banking and financial services also offer plenty of new jobs. The situation is changing in the early 21st century, with more local people qualified to do some of the jobs that only foreigners had been educated enough to undertake in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the region is affluent and provides countless opportunities for many hundreds of thousands of foreign workers.

Note that, as a foreigner, your only access to living and working in the region is by finding a job, securing a work visa (see **Chapter 3**) and by staying in the area for the duration of your work contract. Except by marrying a native or otherwise under exceptional circumstances, you won't be permitted to become a citizen of any of the Gulf states (see **Citizenship** on page 334).

The Gulf governments allow plenty of foreign workers into the states, but almost exclusively on a temporary basis. Expatriates aren't generally allowed to become part of the permanent population. Foreign workers are dealt with in a fair but controlled way, paid and treated well, and at the end of their time in the region, thanked and rewarded for their efforts. On the other hand, the region's governments are conscious of the need to provide decent jobs with career paths for their own young people, who are increasingly educated and aware of the attractions of the outside world – many attend universities in the USA or UK. Having made major investments in education and social welfare, they hope that eventually the Gulf states will become almost self-sufficient in terms of labour.

A majority of outside observers, however, believe that expatriates will have a substantial role to play for many years to come, and it seems likely that expatriates will continue to be important for the next two or three decades, although there will undoubtedly be changes in the number of people employed and the type of skills required. For example, the vast construction projects currently found throughout the region (e.g. road systems, airports, ports and trading zones) will become less numerous, with a resulting decline in the number of manual workers required. Commercial development, however, will lead to further building programmes as the Gulf economies continue to grow. Managerial, professional and particularly technological experience will still be in strong demand for many years to come. But there will be none of the mass immigration and resulting demands for citizenship that have been experienced in western societies, or the current trend of economic refugees looking for a better way of life. The Gulf states will simply not allow it. Foreigners cannot become citizens or own land and property, although there appears to be some lessening of the restrictions, certainly as regards owning one's own business.

There are other general issues to consider: you're contemplating a move to a culture that's almost certainly different to your own; will the way of life, and particularly the restrictions imposed on you, suit you?

Will the relocation benefit your long-term career prospects? Will your family (especially any children) cope with and benefit from the move? What impact will it have on their education and employment prospects? If you aspire to be your own boss, as many people do, be aware that starting a business in the region can prove difficult and that you will almost always be required to have a local partner who has a majority holding. Is that acceptable to you?

The Middle East has been the scene of considerable conflict and unrest in recent decades, although the Gulf states are generally safe places to live and work (see **Crime** on page 337). **However, before travelling anywhere in the Middle East, it's wise to obtain advice from your country's foreign office.** Note also that homosexuality is regarded as a criminal offence throughout the region.

The following notes may be helpful if you're deciding which of the Gulf states to look for work in. Further information can be found under **Climate** (on page 334), **Legal System** (on page 341) and **Population** (on page 351).

## **Bahrain**

The Kingdom of Bahrain is an absolute monarchy (although its head is an emir) and the only Gulf state with strict primogeniture (the principal by which title or property descends to the eldest son) in the royal family. With a population of around 620,000, Bahrain is the smallest of the Gulf states but has an influence that belies its size. Bahrain was the site of the first discovery of oil on the Arabian peninsula side of the Gulf. This occurred at an opportune time, coinciding with the breakdown of the global pearl market, which was previously a crucial part of Bahrain's economy. Since then, Bahrain has shown foresight by diversifying its economy away from an almost total reliance on oil production. This has been necessary because, in comparison with the other Gulf states, Bahrain has limited oil resources, with an output of around 50,000 barrels per day, although it also receives around three times that amount daily, from coastal offshore fields shared with Saudi Arabia. Oil production now accounts for only 10 to 15 per cent of the gross domestic product, the latter around US\$6 billion annually.

The state controlled companies Bahrain National Oil Company (BANOCO) and Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) located at Awali control the oil resources and have extensive development plans, including the production of refined unleaded fuel. BAPCO at Awali is in

effect a small town, with extensive on-site amenities for its employees and their families. Other energy industries include BANAGAS, which provides gas services.

Aluminium Bahrain (ALBA) is the largest aluminium smelter in the Middle East, although it has a strong competitor from DUBAL, which is based in Dubai. ALBA's Bahraini ownership has Saudi Arabian and German companies as minority partners and it provides a significant portion of Bahrain's non-oil based exports. It has bred many downstream industries, such as a large rolling mill and an aluminium extrusion company, BALEXCO, manufacturing products for industrial and home use, including for export.

The Gulf's largest ship repair yard, Arabian Ship Repair Yard (ASRY), operates at Sitra and employs a large workforce, both national and foreign, to cater for ships using the region's busy oil routes. Bahrain originally aimed to become the centre for service industries in the Gulf, but that crown has been claimed by Dubai (see below). The exception to this is the financial services industry, in which Bahrain reigns supreme, having taken the position that Beirut originally held, before the conflict in the Lebanon. Banks from all over the world have established branches in Bahrain, with retail, investment and off-shore operations. Today, Bahrain has almost 200 international banks and financial institutions, all under the control of the Bahrain Monetary Agency (BMA), which also has also overseen the Bahrain Stock Exchange since it opened in 1989. Banking and finance is now the second-largest sector in the economy, accounting for over a quarter of the GDP, and the service sector is the country's largest employer, followed by general commerce and then government occupations.

The Bahrain Telecommunications Company (BATELCO) is a national company that was formed in 1981 after the take-over of the country's telecommunications system, previously operated by the UK's Cable & Wireless. BATELCO provides first-class satellite telecommunication links and cellular and internet services, advanced telecommunications being a pre-requisite for the operation of Bahrain's financial services. Evidence of BATELCO's efficiency is provided by the fact that many of the world's leading financial institutions choose Bahrain as their regional base. Bahrain also boasts two 'free zones': Mina Sulman and North Sitra.

Tourism is growing rapidly in the Arabian peninsula, and Bahrain is a popular destination. It has long benefited from being at the crossroads of east and west and has been a stopping-off point for international

airlines for many years. This has led to an openness and acceptance of foreigners visiting and working in the country, and might account for the genuine hospitality of the people in this friendly little country. Small it might be, but Bahrain's political influence and goodwill in the region outweigh its size.

Bahrainis have a reputation for being astute and occupy many positions alongside their foreign counterparts in the state's financial institutions. In recent times, more have been reaching positions of power, encouraged by the programme of 'Bahrainisation', which has been designed to encourage the local population to take full-time employment, develop their skills and at the same time reduce the risk of local unemployment.

## **Kuwait**

Kuwait is the third-largest oil producer in the Middle East, after Saudi Arabia and Iraq. It has great wealth and is of tremendous strategic importance, as was shown by the world's response to the Iraqi invasion of 1990/91. The Iraqi invasion had a significant impact on the Kuwaiti economy, both in terms of damage to the oil industry and exports and because of the cost of paying the military forces called in to eject the Iraqis. Kuwait and its people also lost a significant portion of their wealth through its unlawful 'confiscation' by the Iraqis. In spite of this, however, much of the country's assets were safely invested overseas and the government in exile managed to retain control of these vital resources.

Since the war, the economy has gradually recovered, and recent oil price increases are allowing further expansion. (Kuwait's financial assets were greatly, if momentarily, diminished by the decision to compensate its people for losses suffered as a result of the Iraqi conflict.) Foreign investment has increased, largely as a result of a decree of 1999, which approved the 100 per cent foreign ownership of certain companies registered in the country, a significant departure from the original ruling of a maximum equity holding of 49 per cent. These companies will be those that contribute to a more diverse economy and the provision of advanced technology and industry.

Oil production and associated downstream industries, including refining and petrochemicals, account for around 90 per cent of foreign earnings and nearly three quarters of Kuwait's gross domestic product, which is estimated at around \$30 billion annually. Kuwait has