

Global Recruitment

Guide to Kuwait

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Introduction to Kuwait

Kuwait has a history of extremes with periods of incredible wealth, contrasted with situations of abject poverty and war. Traditionally a powerful trading port, the city began to see problems in the wake of World War One. Since they supported the Ottomans, the British imposed trade blockades which damaged the local economy immensely and was further exacerbated by the great depression. By the 30's Kuwait was a shell of its former self until the discovery of oil which was not exploited until after World War Two. The country became a constitutional monarchy by 1963 and further nationalised the Kuwait Oil Company by the 1970's, bringing all the oil within the control of the government.

For many years the nation prospered and rebuilt what once was with the help of oil exports. The Gulf war in the early 90's brought upheaval once again when Saddam occupied the country until the intervention of US led forces. However, in retaliation, Saddam ordered the destruction or lighting of oil wells in retreat. The estimated loss was 1 billion barrels of oil, not to mention the extensive environmental impact. Many years have passed and such threats no longer exist. Kuwait has done well to recover from so much so quickly, and is looking upward to reach even more greatness.

The Legal Market

With the highest valued currency in the world, it is unsurprising that business is thriving in this part of the world. Their GDP sailing at 167.9 billion USD, Kuwait is the 5th richest country in the world per capita. Although the oil industry has supported the country for decades and pushed it to the forefront of wealth and production, steps have been taken to transition a lot of the capital into sustainable industries and services within the country. However, Kuwait still controls roughly 10% of the world's reserve of oil and is unlikely to do a complete shift. Consequently, investment into infrastructure and long-term projects to improve the economic viability of the country are underway. Even though expats have been here for a long time, the need for skilled workers has not decreased. If anything, the post Iraq-war period has opened new avenues and opportunities in this region.

Immigration

Entry Requirements

For certain countries (refer to the embassy) you may obtain a 30 day visa on arrival, or a 90 day business/visit visa. You can obtain the former on arrival, the latter should be pre-arranged. You will need at least 6 months remaining on your passport however we recommend more than this as you may be delayed when trying to leave Kuwait.

Employer Sponsorship

While you could get a one month visa to shop around for jobs in Kuwait, we do not endorse this option. The majority of expats will secure their position within a company and will get sponsored by their employer. Considering there are many administrative issues to be addressed it is best to streamline the process through your sponsor.

Non-Exempt Nations

Not all nations will enjoy the relatively relaxed entry requirements that some countries like the UK enjoy. Please refer to the Kuwaiti Embassy or immigration expert to ensure your visit is without issue.

Entry Limitations

An Israeli stamp on your passport may stop you from gaining entry.

Culture & Law

Religion:

A predominantly Muslim country, composed of about $\frac{3}{4}$ Sunni and $\frac{1}{4}$ Shia, Kuwait is conservative in many respects. In order to practice your religion officially, it must be recognized by the state and further has to be acknowledged by the Quran. Consequently, Christianity is accepted and there are churches as well as a small native Christian population. Hindus, Sikhs, and Baha'i are not allowed to congregate publically for religious functions. However, there are large populations of the latter faiths and they may adhere to their customs privately. You should be aware that cultural considerations sourced from Islam will take precedence over all else. This means that you should be sensitive to the spiritual and daily attitudes of Muslims in Kuwait. Refrain from expressing any opinion that you think may offend. Lastly, proselytizing is forbidden. Do not attempt to convert anyone from the Muslim faith as you will have to deal with the law.

Ramadan: During this period most shops and restaurants will be closed until sundown when Muslims break their fast. Most bars, clubs, restaurants etc. will also be closed. Although expats have options, the majority of the cities will be abstaining from business (during certain times) or non-religious celebration. Please familiarize yourself with the local customs and practices as this is a holy period for prayer and reflection. Ramadan lasts about one month and concludes with Eid.

Regular Dress:

Do be wary that dressing inappropriately is a violation of decency laws. The general rule for most is do not expose too much skin, meaning wearing short shorts, a bikini, or displaying yourself in a sexualized or provocative manner. Do not wear tight fitting or see-through clothing and it should further cover your shoulders and knees. This is the official stance but is reflected in the attitudes of the local populace. Since there is such a large ex-pat population, there appears to be some leeway for these rules, but have been known to be used in certain altercations. Ultimately, the populace may turn a blind eye to some of your clothing choices, but you should avoid conflict with anyone who points out their discomfort with your attire. The police may get involved and you could be charged with public indecency. You should be sensitive to complainants concerns and offer to remedy your outfit.

Local Customs & Courtesies:

Remember, this is a conservative Muslim country and you must be sensitive to the culture. Interactions between men and women are stringent and you should not attempt any touching of the opposite sex unless a handshake is offered. Kuwaitis are friendly and will greet one another with enthusiasm, even with strangers. If invited to a citizen's home, do bring a small gift and take care to avoid offending your host. Turning food or drink down is not seen as being polite, rather a sign of dissatisfaction. Conversation can get quite personal, i.e. are you married? Religion

may be discussed as well, avoid saying anything that would touch on spiritual sensitivities. Lastly, do not use any foul gestures or words with anyone. Kuwaitis take great pride in their country so always bear in mind that you are a guest, likewise you must be active and thoughtful in your choice of words.

Alcohol:

While many of the other countries in the region allow consumption of alcohol to some degree, it is uncompromisingly illegal in Kuwait. This means that you cannot buy, consume, import, or possess any amount. This is doubly true for drugs. If you are bringing drugs into the country, be sure to bring a copy of your prescription as not all pharmaceuticals are legal there. Needless to say, public intoxication and drink driving have a zero tolerance policy. You can face as little as a heavy fine, to imprisonment and deportation. This might appear strict however Kuwait has so much to offer that you won't even notice the lack of libations. Besides, if you really need a night out with drink, Dubai is a short and cheap flight away for a weekend visit.

Lifestyle

Shopping:

While not as grand as Dubai in comparison, Kuwait has similar offerings to many UK outlets. Shopping locally is also an option instead of the big chain stores, if that is what you're looking for here is a small example of what you can find.

The Avenues Mall: 800 stores covering 7 districts. You can also find all your favourite chains like KFC, McDonald's etc.

Travel:

Air traffic between GCC nations is extensive as the oil and real estate boom has created a relaxed cross border culture. Many people travel within the Gulf area to enjoy the wonderful historical landmarks and fare offered by the bustling cities.

Accommodation costs can vary depending on where you go, but generally is a greater expense. Hostels in this part of the world are virtually unheard of, further, if you are looking to enjoy a short period in the UAE, Bahrain etc. you will soon find yourself spending relatively more than you would for other destinations. Ultimately, how much you wish to spend is up to you.

Among your options are: the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, and Egypt. You'll find that Egypt is relatively cheaper than the other Gulf States, but do be wary of the political climate before visiting.

Once you've arrived local travel can vary in price depending on where you are. However, considering the large oil subsidies in places like the UAE, a taxi ride is not at an unreasonable cost. Although you might save on flights, one should not underestimate the higher cost of enjoying the GCC region- arguably well worth it.

Leisure & Local Attractions:

Grand Mosque: a beautiful Mosque with a capacity of 10,000 worshippers, this marvel also has an Islamic library. Much was invested in the architecture and elegance in this project and is well worth a visit.

Green Island: a man-made island, you can gain entrance for a small price (250 fils) to enjoy the beaches and public parks.

Shaab Leisure Park: an amusement park offering everything from roller coasters to bungee jumping and ice-skating.

Scientific Centre: has a wonderful aquarium and IMAX theatre, a great family outing.

Quality of life & Costs

The general rule is the more western products you want the more expensive your final cost will be. That said Kuwait is more affordable than London in many respects. The main exception is Internet, which can cost you twice what you would pay in London. Still, this one high cost is well offset by the savings opportunities in other areas.

Healthcare:

The quality of care is comparable to Western countries in the public sector which is excellent news in case of emergency. However, most expats use private insurance which gives them access to better facilities, English speaking doctors, and general peace of mind. This can get quite costly so having adequate insurance is imperative, this can usually be negotiated into your contract with your sponsor.

Property and Residence:

Home: Most expats choose to rent, as purchasing property can be problematic. Although you can buy property in certain areas, you may only stay in the country as long as you're employed. This means that if your employment ends, you will be expected to leave the country within a month and your assets within the country will be liquidated without your consent if you go beyond this period. Due to this, investing heavily into your stay should be balanced with the level of commitment and opportunity your employment allows or provides. Expats tend to live in the following areas: Salwa, Fintas, Bneid Al Gar, Salmiya, and Shaab. Also note the maintenance situation where you are renting as there may be an internal caretaker who manages such issues.

Car: Since petrol is so cheap many people buy cars, which incidentally, are also quite reasonably priced. You can haggle a bit with dealerships but prices are fairly standard. Third party insurance is mandated by law and you will have to pick a policy. There are many insurers to choose from and we suggest you shop around.

Buying used is also an attractive option, but be diligent in the inspection of the vehicle. This is a desert environment and not all damage is so easily found. Taking the vehicle to an independent garage is worth the effort, for instance, the car might have been imported and is not retrofitted with components that do well in the desert climate.

Licence: This has recently become far more difficult for expats as you must be a resident for 2 years, possess a university degree, have previously passed a driving test, and make 1400 USD a month minimum. The greatest barrier is arguably the residency requirement, but does not apply to certain professions including legal experts.

Driving: Defensive driving is recommended as accidents are quite common. If you choose to drive you will have to be more vigilant on the roads as you will not enjoy the same level of order and structure found in other countries.

Education:

As there is a large number of expats from many different countries, likewise there are many independent schools with nation specific curricula. The quality of these international schools, used by expats mostly, is set at a standard that allows for your child to enjoy the flexibility of entering into most jurisdictions upon graduation. One caveat to this system is that all schools in Kuwait, including international schools, must teach Arabic and Islamic studies as part of the course, further reflecting the pulse of the community in which you would live. While your child will receive a great education, it will not come cheaply and as such you should negotiate allowances into your contract with your employer.

Taxes:

There are no taxes in Kuwait save for any business related earnings. Hotels do charge a 15% service fee, but this is the one exception. Income, wealth, etc. tax does not exist here.

Otherwise your concern should be how your earnings are transferred to non-Kuwaiti accounts. Depending on your home country, you may be subject to taxation on assets brought back. For example, although returning to the UK with income is not typically taxed, depending on the vehicle you use to move your assets, you may be subject to capital gains tax in the UK. Prudence, insofar as referring to a financial specialist, is highly recommended.

Americans: For US expats and their spouses the laws for taxation in the US have recently changed and affect your income while working abroad. It is far too detailed to discuss here, but we insist that you check with a tax specialist before making any decisions.

Safety:

Kuwait is very safe with low levels of crime and few if any disruptions in daily life. Still, you should take normal precautions such as avoiding unfamiliar areas, less travelled roads, and travelling alone at night (especially for women). Due to the Arab Spring, protests have been held from time to time, but they are mostly peaceful. As long as you avoid large crowds of demonstrators you are unlikely to expose yourself to any danger.

Utilities:

Your employer (including Douglas Scott) will ensure a lot of the legwork is done before you arrive. Typically your sponsor will arrange for your utilities to be connected through the Ministry of Electricity and Water. There is an initial connection fee for expats which depending on your contract, you might even get your sponsor to pay for. Gas is available, but is typically delivered. Electricity runs on 240V and outlets are three pronged plugs.

Mobile phone usage is one of the highest in the world here, so you should have little trouble finding a plan that suits your needs. Kuwait also has international roaming agreements in place with a number of countries allowing for cheaper calling. VoIP is not available.

Public Transport:

An extensive and cheap bus service exists. Expats, however, generally prefer to purchase (or rent) their own vehicle or use taxis. Taxis are a good option as well, but do negotiate your fare with the driver before setting off. There are two kinds of taxis available, the first drives on set routes and will not deviate from them. This is advantageous as you can get frequent service and even share the cab with strangers! The other kind can go anywhere. Refrain from travelling alone at night and use trusted taxi services.

Climate:

Summers are long, dry, and incredibly hot. However, the winter is surprisingly cold with temperatures averaging at 8 degrees Celsius. This rather extreme variation in weather happens with rainfall as well, some years little will fall and others they'll get a lot. Humidity is not as bad as other Gulf countries, but you should still take care when going outside. Also be aware of the Shamal, which results in winds that cause sandstorms.

Pets:

Since the temperatures can get quite high you should take a decision to bring a pet with health considerations in mind. This is especially true if you wish to bring a dog, you will find that taking your pet for a walk is not only taxing on the animal, but you may be restricted to certain areas. Regardless, if you absolutely cannot do without (they're family after all!) you will need to do a considerable amount of preparation and paperwork. All pets have to have a health certificate detailing that they have been cleared for many common ailments and has been vaccinated which is provided by your home country. Your pet will further need to be micro-chipped and brought in with an import permit.

The Little Things:

With so much to consider it is easy to forget the little things. These are far too many to list so do be thorough in your research! This guide is a great starting point and if you do choose to work with Douglas Scott, we'll make sure that you've got all your bases covered. Otherwise, we wish you luck on this new and exciting journey!



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