

Intro

The Kingdom of Bahrain is a place of culture, tradition, and a history that goes back to the time of the Dilmun civilization, an ancient independent kingdom that flourished circa 2,000 B.C. The kingdom's history and culture include the civilizations of Babylon, Mesopotamia, Rome, Persia, Dilmun, and the Arabs. These inhabitants left behind settlements and temples and thousands of burial mounds. Bahrain is considered today the cultural capital of the world.

The word "Bahrain" is Arabic for two waters, which are surrounding this small island. Bahrain is known as the island of one million palm trees and was the first Arab country to discover oil back in 1932. It is a must-visit for those who love history, exploring, luxury, and fun in the sun.

The museums are wonders of modern architecture, with designs that reflect ancient Dilmun as well as Islam. The Bahrain National Museum features a series of exhibition halls with unique artifacts, taking you back in time, from 3,000 BC to the present day.

Ancient forts were built by different civilizations and empires. The Arad Fort, situated in Muharraq city, was in the past the site for fierce battles and was built on the site of an existing Portuguese fort by Oman's ruler Sultan bin Ahmed after his invasion and capture of Bahrain in 1800. The oldest fort on the island is Qala'at Al Bahrain, or Bahrain Fort, which was built in several stages between the 15th and 17th centuries. Today, it has been restored to its former grandeur, with turrets, courtyards, secret passages, and ramparts making it an important site to visit.

The elegant Bahrain mosques are the most beautiful. The Al-Khamis Mosque, whose foundations were laid at the end of the eighth century, is one of the world's most ancient mosques. It is in one of the oldest Islamic communities in Bahrain, called Balad Al-Qadim, Arabic for old country. Al Fateh Grand Mosque is one of the largest mosques in the world. It offers programs to help people understand Islam and the Holy Qur'an. The mosque can take over 7,000 people at a time. Visitors and tourists are allowed inside when prayers are not taking place.

Ancient burial mounds add a unique feature to Bahrain. Most of them are empty chambers, while others are filled with burials and artifacts. Some date back to the time of the great hero Gilgamesh, who traveled to Dilmun searching for immortality. The epic of Gilgamesh is one of the first poems written down, as they describe the king diving into sea in search of a magical piece. It is believed that this 5,000-year-old story describes the search for one of Bahrain's most prized treasures: the pearls.

Bahrain Fort

Qal'at al-Bahrain or Bahrain Fort is the most important archaeological site of the Bahrain archipelago. It is generally considered by researchers and archaeologists as one of the most ancient and the largest of all archaeological tells, not only in Bahrain, but in all over the Gulf region. The site is important for being a symbol for the nation of Bahrain and is linked to the construction of national identity. It testifies to the essential role played by Bahrain as a center for trade (export & import) and cultural exchange between Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley since ancient times until the present. In addition, the interaction between the cultural components of the site (various levels of ancient archaeological occupation and City Wall, succeeding fortresses, natural access channel and moorage area found offshore, etc.), and its natural components

(surrounding Palm-groves, traditional modes of cultivation and irrigation systems, rich ecosystem, and biodiversity) clearly add to its unique universal value. The site's importance and universal value makes it significant not only for Bahrainis and for Bahrain but for the whole region as well. Qal'at al-Bahrain is a testament to the role played by Bahrain as a center for trade (export & import) and cultural regional exchange since the Early Bronze Age period until the present. The ancient "cities" at the foot of the Fort (Central Archaeological Area) had provided ample evidence (e.g., through pottery from Early, Middle, and Late Dilmun phases, cuneiform clay tablets referred to Iraq (Mesopotamia), terracotta figurines in the shape of humans and animals, Islamic coins, Chinese coins, Islamic glazed ware, and Chinese celadon & Ming, etc.) that ancient Bahraini merchants worked to transform Bahrain into a center for trade between Mesopotamia, South Arabia, Persia and India. Ivory, pearls, semi-precious stones, lapis lazuli, costly woods, copper, and many other goods were traded back and forth. The site is considered the most ancient and the largest site of Dilmun culture and civilization not only in Bahrain but in the Arabian Peninsula in general. It is obvious that the site exhibits an important interchange of human values over a span of 4500 years within a certain cultural area of the World -The Arabian Gulf.

It bears a unique and exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition (Dilmun culture and beyond). The site also represents an outstanding example of traditional land and sea uses and full interaction with the environment. Some local Bahrainis have added that the site in general is also very significant to them for being their "First Capital." As a fact, the Danish archaeologist P.V. Glob interpreted the tell as Bahrain's ancient capital, and from there, the Bahraini's capital moved south to the village of Al-Khamis, and finally moved to Manama City more recently. So, the site's significance is extended to be linked with the whole broader history of the country as well. Beyond Bahrain and its local history, the remarkable archaeological stratigraphy (4500 years of history) displayed at the same locale makes the site of Qal'at al-Bahrain is one of the rarest archaeological and historical reference sites in all the Gulf Region with universal outstanding values and significance.

The Portuguese Empire

The Portuguese controlled the islands of Bahrain from the middle of the 16th century until the early 17th century. At that time, the Portuguese dominated the trade in the Persian Gulf. The remains of Qal'at Al-Bahrain or Portuguese Fort lies on the northern coast of the island. The fort consists of three huge strongholds and the remnants of two towers in the middle and full walls linking the three strongholds together. It is surrounded by a trench.

The Portuguese Fort or (Bahrain Fort) is on the UNESCO World Heritage list since 2005. The site has been excavated revealing structures of different types: residential, public, commercial, religious, and military. The fort has been considered an important trading port, over the centuries. The site was the capital of the Dilmun, one of most important ancient civilizations of the region. In 1514, the fleet of Pero de Albuquerque reach the island of Bahrain. In the Persian Gulf, the Portuguese were successful. They build their fortress on Hormuz which became their main base. Through that base, the Portuguese attempted to control access to the trading routes over land between the Indian Ocean and Europe via Basra, Bagdad, Aleppo and Tripoli and to the easter

Mediterranean.

Bahrain was considered a key strategic point on the route between Hormuz and Basra, and trade along the Persian Gulf could be monitored and controlled. The Khalifa royal family has ruled since 1783 and the Portuguese constructed a huge fort with towers joined by a fortified wall. They occupied an Arab fort in 1521 which consisted of three huge strongholds and two towers joined by a wall linking them together and surrounded by a trench. It was enlarged in 1559.

In 1538, the Ottoman Empire captured the port city of Basra, gaining access to the Persian Gulf, and thus encountering the Portuguese. In 1552 the Lahsa Eyalet was established. Its governor, Mustafa Pasha intended to capture Bahrain and its famed pearl fishing that was developed there. To this effect, he collected two galleys and 70 transport boats to ferry some 800 to 1200 men from Qatif over to Bahrain. The Siege of Bahrain of 1559 occurred when forces of the Ottoman Empire, commanded by the governor of the Lahsa Eyalet Mustafa Pasha, attempted to seize Bahrain to get control of the island and its famed pearl trade from the Portuguese Empire. The siege was unsuccessful, and the Portuguese defeated the Turks when reinforcements were dispatched by sea from the fortress of Hormuz. The siege of Bahrain of 1559 marked the end of the Ottoman attempts to challenge Portuguese hegemony in the Persian Gulf.

According to the UNIESCO, Qal'at Al- Bahrain is considered an ancient harbour and the capital of Dilmun. It is an archaeological site comprising of four main elements: an archaeological tell, a sea tower, a sea channel, and palm-groves. The sea tower, an ancient lighthouse, which is unique in the region, is an example of ancient maritime architecture and the sea channel demonstrates the importance of this city in maritime trade routes. The Bahrain fort was the center of commercial activities linking the traditional agriculture of land with maritime trade between the Indus Valley and Mesopotamia in the early period (from 3rd millennium BC to the 1st millennium BC) and with China and the Mediterranean in the later period (from the 3rd to the 16th century AD). It had a very active commercial and political presence across the entire Persian Gulf region, acting as the hub for economic exchange. The Portuguese were expelled by Shah Abbas of the Safavid dynasty of the Persian empire in 1602.

The local village and community adjacent to the site, called the Palm tree groves or "Bustans" in Arabic; nearby communities living in the traditional villages of Karbabad and Karranah, and distinctive shoreline that extends for miles with traditional fishing activities, and movement of migrant birds are all closely associated with the fort's site.

The Persian–Portuguese war took place from 1507 to 1622. It involved the Portuguese Empire and the Kingdom of Ormus, its vassal, on one side, and the Safavid Persia (Iran) with the help of the Kingdom of England on the other side. During this era, Portugal established its rule for about more than a century in Ormuz and more than 80 years in Bahrain, capturing some other islands and ports such as Qeshm and Bandar Abbas in the Persian Gulf. The conflict came to an end when the Persian Shah (Emperor), Abbas the Great, conquered the Portuguese Bahrain forcing them to war.

In September 1507, the Portuguese Afonso de Albuquerque landed on the Hormoz. Portugal occupied Ormuz from 1515 to 1622. As a vassal of the Portuguese state, the Kingdom of Ormus jointly participated in the 1521 invasion of Bahrain that ended Jabrid or Banu Jabr tribe rule of the

Persian Gulf archipelago.

After the Portuguese made several abortive attempts to seize control of Basra, the Pasha asked for protection against the Safavid ruler Abbas I. Afterwards, the Portuguese stayed in the city and region as traders with a factory (feitoria) and as protector allied army. Later in 1622, the Safavid conquered Ormus with the help of the English and tried to expel the Portuguese from the rest of the Persian Gulf, except for the Oman gulf. The Portuguese were there for the next decades as allies of Afrasiyab, the Pasha of Basra, against the Persians who failed several times to conquer the city of Basra.

By the order of Abbas I in 1602, the Persian army under the command of Imam-Quli Khan, managed to expel the Portuguese from Bahrain. In 1612, the Portuguese Empire took the city of Gamrun and transliterated the name to Comorão. Almost two years later (in 1615), Comorão was taken by Abbas the Great after a naval battle with the Portuguese and renamed it Bandar Abbas or "Port of Abbas". In 1622, with the help of four English ships, Abbas retook Hormuz from the Portuguese. At that time, the Portuguese Empire was one of the largest and most powerful empires in the world.

The Museum

Qala'at Al-Bahrain Site Museum is situated across from the historic Qala'at Al-Bahrain. Since 2008, the site museum display area consists of 5 exhibition halls organized around a massive Tell Wall. With 500 artefacts showcased, the long settlement history of the site is evoked to the unique backdrop of the wall, which recreates the different archaeological layers uncovered at the site. The seaside café of the museum offers a stunning view over the fort and the surrounding palm groves. The Visitor Center (Site Museum) is situated on the beach to the north-east of the main Fort. It is placed on a podium, which functions as a jetty towards the sea. It is expected that this will facilitate future access by tour boats from Manama.

The museum's collection showcases five different historical periods which are arranged chronologically, each within its own separate gallery. The three-dimensional design concept of Qala'at Al-Bahrain Site Museum covers two floors and reflects a strong continuation between its interior and exterior spaces. The design also allows its rear sea-facing façade to open a direct path from the heart of the village to the shoreline. The museum also contains a main courtyard leading to a café which overlooks the coastline opposite the fort, as well as a lecture hall and gift shop.