

BAHRAIN CUSTOMS

Greetings

Assalam alikum (The peace of *Allah* be upon you) is the most common way to say “Hello. The usual reply is *Alikum essalam*, which means nearly the same thing.

Bahrainis say *Saba al-khair* (Good morning) and respond with *Saba al-nur*; the reply to *Masa al-khair* (Good evening) is *Masa al-nur*.

Handshakes are common and may last the length of the conversation. A handshake or a hand lightly grasping the person’s arm shows friendliness.

It is socially unacceptable for a man to greet a woman, unless the greeting is part of business protocol.

Gestures

Most Bahrainis have become Westernized to the extent that using one’s left hand to pass items or using fingers or hands to point is no longer considered rude.

People beckon one another with four fingers and the palm facing up; Shaking a finger means “no.”

Waving with the palm down is used to assert authority over someone.

Bringing the tips of all fingers together facing up can mean “wait,” “let me finish,” impatience, or exasperation.

It is considered disrespectful to show others the soles of one’s feet.

Smoking is seen as a sign of maturity and many Bahrainis smoke, but it is rude to do so in the presence of elders.

Holidays

The most important holidays include *Eid al Fitr*, a three-day feast at the end of the month of *Ramadan*; *Eid al Adha*, which commemorates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son and also marks the time for the *Hajj*; and the prophet Muhammad’s birthday.

Shi‘i Muslims celebrate *Assura*, a two-day holiday during which they express their beliefs by parading in the streets and reenacting the suffering of the martyr Hussain, the grandson of Muhammad.

Bahrain’s National Day is celebrated on 16 December.

The Christmas season is celebrated as the “festive season”; the religious significance of the holiday is minimal.

EATING\ DIET

Devout Muslims do not eat or drink with the left hand, but others will eat with either hand.