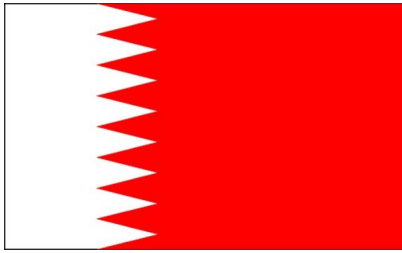


Bahrain Becomes the New Middle East Hot Spot



The small country Bahrain, just east of Saudi Arabia, is becoming the Middle East's top tourist attraction. Tourist spending has been exceeding USD 1 billion almost every year since the turn of the millennium and the tourist industry accounts for almost 20% of the island's total work force.

When Bahrain is mentioned to Europeans or Australians, most of them will think of car racing. Indeed, the Bahrainis were the first to take the Australian V8 supercar race away from Australia. This event brought in over USD 3 million, spent by around 28.000 visitors. Bahrain was similarly the first Middle Eastern nation to stage a Formula 1 Grand Prix at the Bahrain international circuit. The excellent infrastructure, superb climate, sufficient transport facilities and location of Bahrain increase the attraction for motor sport lovers.

For visitors who love to shop, Bahrain also has plenty to offer. The island is covered with large shopping centres where tourists can purchase gold trinkets, precious stones and other kinds of jewellery, unique to Bahrain **and produced locally**. The local government has recently been making efforts to enhance the influx of shoppers into the country by investing into shopping centers whilst reclaiming land around the coast to construct new luxury resorts and theme parks on artificial islands. New liberal visa policy facilitates shopping trips.

Bahrain is also blessed with beautiful nature and friendly people. Coral reefs around the island have been carefully preserved. The locals are known to be some of the friendliest people in the Middle East. Their hospitality has been said to be a major attraction for many tourists.

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