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CHAPTER 1: PROFILE

Introduction

Kuwait is a small country at the northwest tip of the Persian Gulf; it is bordered by Iraq to the north and west and by Saudi Arabia to the south. Although tiny, it has numerous ethnic groups whose members work in all levels of the economy and government. Kuwait has a bustling oil-based economy but lacks the climate to facilitate large-scale agriculture. Void of rivers and lakes, the country utilizes desalinization facilities to provide fresh water and imports additional water. Nearly 100% of the people live in the urban area in and around Kuwait City, on the southern shore of Kuwait Bay.



© Cajetan Barretto
Kuwaiti nightline

Geography

Area

Located at the head of the Persian Gulf, Kuwait has a total area of 17,820 sq km (6,880 sq mi), making it slightly smaller than New Jersey. Its border with Iraq runs for 240 km (149 mi) along its northern and western sides. Saudi Arabia borders Kuwait to the south for 222 km (138 mi). The eastern border is 499 km (310 mi) of Persian Gulf coastline, including Kuwait Bay.¹



© Ghassan Tabet / flickr.com
Aerial view of Kuwait

Climate

Kuwait has a desert climate. Intense heat prevails in summer, which lasts from May to October. Temperatures average 42° to 49°C (108° to 120°F), occasionally approaching 54°C (129°F). Heavy winds blow frequently in the summer. In June and July, sandstorms caused by northwesterly winds, or *shamal*, blow across the desert. Winter lasts from November to April, with temperatures averaging 10° to 30°C (50° to 86°F). Rainfall is marginal, averaging 2.5–18 cm (1–7 in). When enough rain falls, the desert scrub vegetation turns green, and water briefly collects in the wadis—dry valleys and depressions—before it seeps into the soil or evaporates.^{2, 3, 4, 5}

¹ Central Intelligence Agency, “Kuwait,” in *The World Factbook*, 16 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html#top>

² *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Kuwait: Land,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/325644/Kuwait/45142/Relief>

³ Central Intelligence Agency, “Kuwait,” in *The World Factbook*, 16 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html#top>

⁴ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Kuwait,” 7 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35876.htm>

⁵ Kuwait Info, “State of Kuwait: Geography: Climate,” 2010, http://www.kuwait-info.com/a_state_of_kuwait/state_kuwait_gclimate.asp

Topography

Kuwait's mostly flat desert terrain undulates as it spreads from east to west. Hills, low rises, and wadis mark the terrain as it gently elevates toward the western border. The southeastern region has only one landform: the Ahmadi Ridge. Rising 125 m (410 ft), the ridge begins south of Kuwait Bay and runs roughly south by southeast for about 50 km (31 mi), skirting the Persian Gulf coast.⁶



© Adam Lynch
Kuwait's desert topography

The Jal al-Liyah Ridge is in north-central Kuwait. It trends east-northeast for about 50 km (31 mi). The western end of the ridge reaches 138 m (453 ft) in elevation and forms a low plateau. The eastern end rises 70 m (230 ft). A gravel ridge juts east from the northeastern Jal al-Liyah Ridge, connecting it to the Jal al-Zor Escarpment, which runs parallel to the northern coast of Kuwait Bay for 60 km (35 mi).^{7, 8} Rising 145 m (476 ft), the escarpment overlooks the muddy shores of the bay. Jal al-Zor has sharply vertical inclines that are prone to mudslides during winter rains.⁹

Wadi al-Batin is a major topographical feature. A large valley 7–10 km (4–6 mi) wide, Wadi al-Batin runs northeastward from Saudi Arabia into Kuwait, forming 75 km (47 mi) of its border with Iraq. Loose gravel and sand make up the wadi, which is steep-sided in the upper valley areas and shallower in the southwest.¹⁰

The highest named point in Kuwait is al-Shaqaya, which rises 290 m (951 ft) and is in the extreme western corner where the borders of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq meet.^{11, 12}

Islands

Nine islands lie in the Persian Gulf along Kuwait's eastern coast. The largest is Bubiyan Island, which measures 863 sq km (333 sq mi) and is in the extreme northwest of the Gulf, where the borders of Iraq and Kuwait meet. Uninhabited, it is connected to the mainland by a steel bridge over a narrow channel. Its terrain varies little. A few wadis lie in the interior, and the coastline is mostly salt marsh with swampland in the northwest.¹³ Construction of a new deep-water shipping port began in 2011 on the northeast coast of Bubiyan. The project has raised tensions between Iraq and Kuwait. The Iraqi government has claimed ownership of the island for decades and contests the building of the port, which it says will curtail shipping across the Khor Abdullah

⁶ Timothy M. Kusky, *Encyclopedia of Earth Science* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 242–43.

⁷ Timothy M. Kusky, *Encyclopedia of Earth Science* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 242–43.

⁸ George J. Carman, "Structural Elements of Onshore Kuwait," *GeoArabia* 1, no. 2 (1996): 239–66, http://www.q8geologist.com/koko/StructuralElementsofOnshoreKuwait_small.pdf

⁹ M. A. al-Sarawi, "Surface Geomorphology of Kuwait," *GeoJournal* 35, no. 4 (1995): 497–98, doi:10.1007/BF00824363

¹⁰ Timothy M. Kusky, *Encyclopedia of Earth Science* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 242–43.

¹¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Kuwait: Land," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/325644/Kuwait/45142/Relief>

¹² Kuwaiti-Slovak Archaeological Mission, "Kuwait Geography," 2010, <http://www.kuwaitarchaeology.org/kuwait-geography.html>

¹³ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Bubiyan," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/82709/Bubiyan>

Waterway to and from Iraq's Faw Peninsula, east of the island. Scheduled for completion in 2016, the port is expected to be one of the largest in the Gulf.^{14, 15, 16}

Warbah Island lies about 1 km (0.6 mi) north of Bubiyan Island. Also uninhabited, Kuwait's third-largest island has an area of 37 sq km (14 sq mi). Sandy soil and clay coasts typify the terrain. The island lies only 1 km (0.6 mi) south of the Iraqi mainland. The Iraqi government contests ownership of this strategic island and tried to wrest possession from Kuwait in 1990.¹⁷

At the mouth of Kuwait Bay are three islands: Miskan, Faylakah, and Auhah. Faylakah, at 39 sq km (15 sq mi), is the largest of the three and Kuwait's second-largest island. Inhabited since around 2500 B.C.E., the island has a prominent village, al-Zor, on the northwest shore—mainly a community of fishermen and laborers for archaeological digs.¹⁸ Once an outpost of Alexander the Great, the island has Greek ruins and temples, mostly in coastal areas.¹⁹ Faylakah receives no more than 5 cm (2 in) of rain each year.



© Dosio Dosev
Faylaka Island

Desertification is a threat, although the southwestern end of the island has permanent freshwater wells.²⁰

Umm al-Namil is a tiny island 600 m (1,969 ft) from the mainland in the southwest corner of Kuwait Bay. The island is only 800 m (2,625 ft) long. Its eastern side is 300 m (984 ft) across, and narrows to 75 m (246 ft) along its southwestern point.²¹ Numerous archaeological sites dot the small island.^{22, 23}

¹⁴ Nicole Stracke, "Kuwaiti Port on Bubiyan Island: Playing with Fire," *Arab News*, 23 May 2011, <http://www.arabnews.com/opinion/columns/article424781.ece>

¹⁵ Voice of America, "Iraq Urges Kuwait to Stop Port Building," 27 July 2011, <http://blogs.voanews.com/breaking-news/2011/07/27/iraq-urges-kuwait-to-stop-port-building/>

¹⁶ Iraq Directory, "Kuwaiti Sources: Port of Mubarak al-Kabeer an Internal Matter," 23 May 2011, <http://www.iraqdirectory.com/DisplayNews.aspx?id=15738>

¹⁷ Kuwait Government Online, "Topography of Kuwait: Warbah Island," n.d., http://www.e.gov.kw/sites/kgoenglish/portal/Pages/Visitors/AboutKuwait/KuwaitAtaGlance_Topography.aspx

¹⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Faylakah," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/202982/Faylakah>

¹⁹ Neil Arun, "Alexander's Gulf Outpost Uncovered," *BBC News*, 7 August 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6930285.stm>

²⁰ Kuwaiti-Slovak Archaeological Mission, "Failaka Geography," 2010, <http://www.kuwaitarchaeology.org/failaka-geography.html>

²¹ Abdalla al-Zamel, Mohammad al-Sarawi, and Sawsan Khader, "Coastal Geomorphology, Hydrodynamics, and Biolithofacies in the Intertidal and Subtidal Areas of Umm al-Namil Island, Kuwait Bay, Kuwait," *Journal of Coastal Research* 23, no. 2 (March 2007): 501, <http://www.jstor.org/pss/4494218>

²² Eco-Environmental Consultants, "Kuwait Hosts an Advanced Reef Rescue Effort," 21 April 2009, <http://www.ecoconsultants.biz/associates-NAUI.htm>

²³ Kuwait Government Online, "Topography of Kuwait: Umm al-Namil Island," n.d., http://www.e.gov.kw/sites/kgoenglish/portal/Pages/Visitors/AboutKuwait/KuwaitAtaGlance_Topography.aspx

Bodies of Water

Kuwait's most conspicuous feature is Kuwait Bay. Extending inland 40 km (25 mi) from the Persian Gulf, the bay is spotted with marshes and lagoons. Its shores have high levels of silt and clay. Northern Kuwait Bay, with its sandy beaches and mudflats, averages depths of less than 5 m (16 ft). The southern shore, where most of the population lives, is deeper, facilitating Kuwait's main commercial port, Shuwaikh.^{24, 25}



© Cajetan Barretto
Sunset over Kuwait Bay

Also vital to Kuwait is the Persian Gulf. Lying between the Arabian Peninsula and southwestern Iran, this shallow gulf measures about 241,000 sq km (93,000 sq mi), extending inland about 990 km (615 mi). Oil shipping from Kuwait and other Gulf nations produces heavy traffic. Numerous international borders cross the Gulf, creating narrow shipping lanes for some countries, such as Iraq. Offshore oil facilities and high traffic create hazardous conditions for the large tankers that ply the waters.²⁶ The Strait of Hormuz, between Oman and Iran, connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.²⁷

History

Early Modern Era

The region that is now Kuwait has fallen under the rule of many dynasties through the centuries. The area was originally home to nomadic Bedouin who remained mostly in the interior. The region fell under the sway of the Persian Buyid dynasty in the 10th century, the Seljuk Turks in the 11th century, the Mongols in the 14th century, and the Ottoman Turks in the 17th century.²⁸ In the early 18th century, the Bedouin migrated to the Kuwait Bay area, forced from the Arabian Peninsula interior by drought. Known as the Bani Utub, they settled under the protection of the Bani Khalid, who wrested southern Kuwait Bay from the Ottoman Turks in 1680 and built a fort. Known as *al-Kuwayt* ("little fort"), the settlement has endured, giving its name to the modern nation and its capital, Kuwait City.^{29, 30}



© Mink / flickr.com
Traditional Bedouin weaving

Influential families appointed the al-Sabah family to run the settlement. The al-Sabah family became responsible for maintaining security and overseeing diplomatic relations with the many

²⁴ Timothy M. Kusky, *Encyclopedia of Earth Science* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 242–43.

²⁵ International Shipping Agency Co. Ltd., "Kuwait Information: Shuwaikh Port," 2007, <http://www.isakwi.com/kwtinfo.html#shuwaikhPort>

²⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Persian Gulf," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/452764/Persian-Gulf>

²⁷ World Atlas, "Persian Gulf," n.d., <http://www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/infopage/persianguft.htm>

²⁸ John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford History of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42–43, 54.

²⁹ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 23–24.

³⁰ Michael S. Casey, *The History of Kuwait* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 29.

tribes who traded in the area.³¹ The head of the family, Sheikh Sabah I bin Jabir, became Kuwait's first ruler. During his rule Kuwait was an outpost of the Ottoman Empire, which allowed self-rule under the protection of the Bani Khalid. Sabah I's son, Abdullah I, assumed power around 1766, but Kuwait's autonomy came under attack from the Wahhabis, fundamentalist Muslims under the command of their religious leader, Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab.³²

Al-Wahhab advocated a radical interpretation of Islam that outlawed all luxury, tobacco, and even music and dancing. The Wahhabis defeated the Bani Khalid, forcing Abdullah I into a protectorate relationship with the Ottoman Turks. In 1775 Abdullah I also formed a relationship with the British, who were trading in the region, to secure greater protection from outside threats.^{33, 34}

Modern Era

From the 1770s until the end of the 19th century, Kuwait's rulers maintained relationships with the British and the Ottoman Turks. In 1896 a member of the al-Sabah family, Mubarak, fearing that close ties with the Turks threatened Kuwait's autonomy, murdered his two brothers and took control of the country. Sheikh Mubarak I—known as Mubarak the Great—forged a protectorate relationship with England, agreeing to remain loyal to Britain in exchange for protection. This arrangement favored the British, who influenced Kuwait's foreign relations and used its strategic location to protect their interests in the region. Britain maintained its protectorate position until Kuwait became an independent nation on 19 June 1961.^{35, 36, 37}



© Pedro DashT
View of Kuwait City at night

Road to Independence

The al-Sabah family ruled Kuwait, but they worked in consultation with other influential families from the merchant class. The al-Sabah family, as administrators of Kuwait, depended upon the taxes of the merchant class.³⁸ This reliance ended in the early 20th century. In 1938 the British- and American-owned Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) struck oil in the Burgan oil field south of

³¹ Paul Salem, "Kuwait: Politics in a Participatory Emirate" (Carnegie Papers no. 3, Carnegie Middle East Center, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2007), 2–3, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cmec3_salem_kuwait_final1.pdf

³² Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 26–27.

³³ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 26–27.

³⁴ Michael S. Casey, *The History of Kuwait* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 37–38.

³⁵ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 27–29.

³⁶ Michael S. Casey, *The History of Kuwait* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 41–46.

³⁷ Mary Ann Tétreault, "Kuwait," in *Encyclopedia of the Developing World*, vol. 2, ed. Thomas M. Leonard (New York: Routledge, 2006), 925.

³⁸ Paul Salem, "Kuwait: Politics in a Participatory Emirate" (Carnegie Papers no. 3, Carnegie Middle East Center, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2007), 2, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cmec3_salem_kuwait_final1.pdf

Kuwait Bay. Stalled by the outbreak of World War II, oil production began in earnest in 1946. Soon after, Kuwait began to export oil, producing about 16.2 million barrels per year.^{39, 40, 41}

Oil helped pull the nation out of an economic depression caused in part by the collapse of the pearl industry. The al-Sabah family exploited the enormous oil fields in Kuwait, which created great wealth for them and the country. Their wealth helped them create a strong, unified force in negotiations with Western oil companies. In 1960 Kuwait became a founding member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), a consortium of oil-producing countries that regulates the world's supply of oil. Despite its newfound wealth, Kuwait had to meet the infrastructure demands of a burgeoning country. Housing had to be built for thousands of oil-industry workers. Roads for shipping as well as ports had to be built. Kuwait's ruler at the time—Abdullah III—split oil revenues between his family and the Kuwaiti people, establishing a welfare state.^{42, 43, 44}

Post-Independence

In June 1961 Kuwait won its independence from Britain. The *Majlis* (National Assembly) was elected and tasked with drafting a constitution. Although Kuwait did not become a true constitutional democracy, the new constitution gave Kuwaitis substantial influence in the government while limiting the powers of the emir. The constitution provided for the sovereignty of the Kuwaiti people, who were represented in the freely elected National Assembly. Heirs to the throne were to be nominated by the emir, with final approval resting in the National Assembly. Legislative authority had to be shared by the emir and the Assembly. But internal conflict in the government resulted in power struggles. In 1976 the emir, Sabah III al-Salem al-Sabah (1967–1977), suspended the constitution and dissolved the Assembly. His successor, Jaber III al-Ahmad al-Sabah (1977–2006), restored the constitution and the Assembly in 1981, only to suspend the constitution and dissolve the legislature for another 4 years beginning in 1986.^{45, 46, 47} In August 1990 Iraq, claiming territorial rights, invaded Kuwait. Iraq



© Mink / flickr.com
Election pamphlets

³⁹ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 30.

⁴⁰ Michael S. Casey, *The History of Kuwait* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 59.

⁴¹ Mary Ann Tétreault, "Kuwait," in *Encyclopedia of the Developing World*, vol. 2, ed. Thomas M. Leonard (New York: Routledge, 2006), 925.

⁴² Michael S. Casey, *The History of Kuwait* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007),

⁴³ James C. Riley, *Low Income, Social Growth, and Good Health: A History of Twelve Countries* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 123.

⁴⁴ Mary Ann Tétreault, "Kuwait," in *Encyclopedia of the Developing World*, vol. 2, ed. Thomas M. Leonard (New York: Routledge, 2006), 925.

⁴⁵ Paul Salem, "Kuwait: Politics in a Participatory Emirate" (Carnegie Papers no. 3, Carnegie Middle East Center, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2007), 4,

http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cmec3_salem_kuwait_finall.pdf

⁴⁶ Fred H. Lawson, "Kuwait," in *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, 2nd ed., eds. Joël Krieger et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 480–81.

⁴⁷ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 32–37.

occupied Kuwait for 7 months, until a U.S.-led coalition expelled the Iraqi army.^{48, 49} The ruling family and government officials, who had fled to Saudi Arabia before the invasion, returned to rebuild from the extensive damage caused by the invasion. The emir reinstated the constitution and the National Assembly. Since the Gulf War in 1990–1991, National Assembly members and their constituents have gained greater political influence. In 2005 the first female minister was appointed, and in 2009 four women were elected to the National Assembly. Since 2010, numerous groups have demanded a voice in government. Stateless Bidoon (a group of people without national citizenship) have demanded citizen rights, activists have demanded accountability for government corruption, and others have called for the expulsion of the prime minister.^{50, 51}

Government

Kuwait is a constitutional emirate. The head of state is the emir (prince), a hereditary position reserved for members of the al-Sabah family, who have ruled since the mid-18th century. The emir appoints a prime minister—and his deputy prime ministers—to act as the head of government. The prime minister appoints the emir’s cabinet members, subject to the emir’s approval. Kuwait’s legislature is the freely elected, 50-seat unicameral National Assembly (*Majlis al-Umma*).



© Cajetan Barretto
Kuwait National Assembly

Members serve 4-year terms and work with the emir, reviewing his decisions. The National Assembly has the power to overturn decisions, but the emir’s cabinet members function as voters in the National Assembly. The emir has the authority to dissolve the National Assembly.^{52, 53, 54}

The National Assembly plays a nominal role in choosing the crown prince—the al-Sabah family member chosen to succeed the emir. Kuwait has no formal or legally recognized political parties, although *de facto* political blocs exist. The first parliamentary elections in which women ran as candidates and were allowed to vote took place in June 2006.^{55, 56, 57}

⁴⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, “Kuwait,” in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011,

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

⁴⁹ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Kuwait,” 7 March 2011,

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35876.htm#history>

⁵⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, “Kuwait,” in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011,

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

⁵¹ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Kuwait,” 7 March 2011,

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35876.htm#history>

⁵² Central Intelligence Agency, “Kuwait,” in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011,

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

⁵³ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Kuwait,” 7 March 2011,

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35876.htm>

⁵⁴ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 32–37.

⁵⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, “Kuwait,” in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011,

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

⁵⁶ Global Edge, Michigan State University, “Kuwait: Government,” 2011,

<http://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/kuwait/government/>

Media

Media infrastructure is well-developed in its small urbanized zone on the southern shore of Kuwait Bay. The state owns and operates nine radio stations and five TV stations. Privately owned and operated newspapers abound; 14 Arabic and 3 English-language dailies are in circulation. There are 16 privately owned TV stations, and satellite dishes are common.^{58, 59, 60}



© Steve & Jemma Copley
Kuwaiti satellite station

Numerous international media outlets have bureaus in Kuwait. The Ministry of Information screens all imported media for morally offensive content and controls the publication and distribution of materials classified as informational. The constitution grants freedom of speech and the press, but these rights are conditional. Newspaper outlets must acquire an operating license from the Ministry of Information; it can be revoked for violating the conditions of freedom of speech and the press. Before 2006, press offenses were criminal and could result in jail terms. Since 2006, most press offenses carry stiff fines. Still, members of the press can—and are—jailed for these offenses: insulting God, Islam, or the prophets; criticizing the emir; disclosing secret or private information; and sedition. In the past the Ministry of Information has revoked newspaper operating licenses for criticisms against government officials.^{61, 62, 63}

The government imposes similar controls on people who use the internet, about 37% of the population. Through the Ministry of Communication, the government openly monitors internet use to circumvent defamation and security threats and to block websites that “incite terrorism and instability.” Internet service providers must block websites at the government’s discretion, and internet cafes must collect the names and identification numbers of customers for the Ministry of Communication.^{64, 65}

⁵⁷ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Kuwait,” 7 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35876.htm>

⁵⁸ BBC News, “Kuwait Country Profile,” 9 March 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/791053.stm#media

⁵⁹ Reporters Without Borders, “Kuwait,” 2010, <http://en.rsf.org/report-kuwait.156.html>

⁶⁰ Freedom House, “Freedom of the Press: Kuwait (2010),” 2010, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2010&country=7855> G

⁶¹ Freedom House, “Freedom of the Press: Kuwait (2010),” 2010, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2010&country=7855>

⁶² Reporters Without Borders, “Kuwait,” 2010, <http://en.rsf.org/report-kuwait.156.html>

⁶³ BBC News, “Kuwait Country Profile,” 9 March 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/791053.stm#media

⁶⁴ Freedom House, “Freedom of the Press: Kuwait (2010),” 2010, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2010&country=7855>

⁶⁵ BBC News, “Kuwait Country Profile,” 9 March 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/791053.stm#media

Important Elements of the Economy

Oil

Oil is of primary importance to Kuwait's economy. First discovered and exploited in 1938, Kuwait has acquired great wealth through oil production. The country produces about 2.5 million barrels of oil per day (bpd) and lays claim to approximately 102 billion barrels in reserve, about 9% of the world's oil reserves. The most productive oil field is Burgan, in the south of the country. Southern Kuwait produces the largest amount of oil, but the Raudhatain oil field in the north is the second-largest oil production area in the nation.^{66, 67}

Oil accounts for nearly half the nation's GDP and about 95% of the government's income. The government owns 100% of all oil and controls the industry through government-run companies that manage the sector at all levels. Headed by the prime minister—a member of the al-Sabah family—the Kuwait Petroleum Company (KPC) manages foreign and domestic oil investments, while the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) and the Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) control export operations. Kuwait exports about 1.8 million bpd. The Asia-Pacific sector receives 1.4 million bpd, the United States 196,000 bpd, and Europe 100,000 bpd.^{68, 69, 70}



© Ken Doerr
Oil refinery in Kuwait

Mina al-Ahmadi on the Gulf coast is Kuwait's main seaport for oil exports. The seaports of Nina Abdulla, Shuaibah, and Mina al-Zoud also export large amounts of oil. In May 2011 construction began on Mubarak al-Kabir port on Bubiyan Island. The mega port, scheduled to be completed in 2016, will be one of the largest shipping ports in the region, with 60 deep-water berths to facilitate large tankers. The Iraqi government fiercely opposes the new port, claiming it will redirect commercial traffic from its ports and possibly cause a 60% decrease in business.^{71, 72}

⁶⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, "Kuwait," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

⁶⁷ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis: Kuwait," July 2011, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=KU>

⁶⁸ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis: Kuwait," July 2011, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=KU>

⁶⁹ Faisal Hasan and Talal S. al-Gharaballi, "Kuwait Economy," Global Research, April 2011, http://www.arabbankers.org/download/123321_U127360_747260/Global%20-%20Kuwait%20Economic%20Overview%20April%202011

⁷⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, "Kuwait," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

⁷¹ *Hellenic Shipping News*, "Mubarak al-Kabeer Port's Enlargement to Turn Kuwait into Global Hub," 3 January 2011, http://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1071:mubarak-al-kabeer-ports-enlargement-to-turn-kuwait-into-global-hub&catid=5:port-news&Itemid=69

⁷² Brian Murphy and Rebecca Santana, Associated Press, "Kuwait Port Plans Raise Tension with Iraq," *Air Force Times*, 24 August 2011, <http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2011/08/ap-kuwait-port-plans-raise-tension-with-iraq-082411/>

Energy

Rapid, aggressive oil industrial development has placed severe energy demands on Kuwait. The country uses its natural gas reserves to power electricity plants, which are necessary for oil development and production. Owned by the government, natural gas reserves are proved at 1.78 trillion cubic m (63 trillion cubic ft). The country shares ownership with Saudi Arabia of natural gas reserves in the Partitioned Neutral Zone, but its greatest and most lucrative concentrations are in northern Kuwait. Current production is 33.13 million cubic m (1.17 billion cubic ft) per day. Still, the demand for natural gas far outweighs what Kuwait can supply. Kuwait imports natural gas from Yemen and Oman and receives natural gas shipments from Shell and Vitol at the Mina al-Ahmadi GasPort.^{73, 74}

Natural gas feeds the electricity production industry. Because Kuwait cannot meet its natural gas demands, electric outages and blackouts occur regularly, especially in summer when demand is higher. Electricity-dependent industries divert energy resources from other domestic areas to maintain production levels. Kuwait currently operates five power plants: al-Subiya on the northeast edge of Kuwait Bay, Doha East and Doha West to the west of Kuwait City, Shuaiba North on the Gulf coast near al-Ahmadi, and al-Zour in the southeast at Mina Su'ud. Despite development, Kuwait remains "perpetually in a state of electricity supply shortage."⁷⁵



© Ryan Lackey
Kuwaiti power station

To offset shortages, the government plans to allow privatization, a politically divisive idea because it reduces government control. Since June 2011, General Electric has operated a power plant at al-Subiya. Five more plants are currently in development. The government is also exploring nuclear power options. The Kuwait Nuclear Energy Committee is working with the French Atomic Energy Commission to develop four nuclear power plants. The government is also discussing a nuclear agreement with the United States, promising full cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency.^{76, 77, 78}

⁷³ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis: Kuwait," July 2011, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=KU>

⁷⁴ Malini Hariharan, "The Middle East Gulf Nations Are Wrestling with Persistent Natural Gas Shortages," ICIS, 7 October 2009, <http://www.icis.com/Articles/2009/10/12/9253206/The-Middle-East-is-feeling-effects-of-persistent-natural-gas.html>

⁷⁵ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis: Kuwait," July 2011, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=KU>

⁷⁶ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis: Kuwait," July 2011, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=KU>

⁷⁷ Jumana al-Tamimi, "Kuwait Economy Faces Pressing Need to Diversify," *Gulf News*, 28 February 2011, <http://gulfnews.com/business/opinion/kuwait-economy-faces-pressing-need-to-diversify-1.768762>

⁷⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Kuwait: Economy," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/325644/Kuwait/45149/Agriculture-and-fishing>

Ethnic Groups

Bedouin groups originally made up the Kuwaiti population, but modern Kuwait has people of many ethnicities, mostly expatriate workers from Asia and the Arab world.

Kuwaiti

A minority in their own country, Kuwaitis make up about 45% of the population.⁷⁹ Originally part of the Bedouin confederation of tribes, Kuwaitis are descended from the settlers of what is now Kuwait City and those who developed its infrastructure and its place in global trade and oil production. Citizen rights allow for a variety of social benefits. The government provides education at all levels and guarantees state employment. It subsidizes housing and essential services, such as water and electricity, and provides healthcare. The state supports the elderly, the widowed, and the disabled, and provides payments to the dependents of those imprisoned.^{80, 81} The majority of Kuwaitis are Sunni Muslim and make up 45% of the Muslim population in Kuwait. The ruling family and influential officials are Sunni.⁸²



© kuwait kites team / flickr.com
Young Kuwaiti boys

Arab (non-Kuwaiti)

Arabs constitute 35% of the population, making them the second-largest ethnic group in Kuwait.⁸³ This heterogeneous group contains people from several countries. When Kuwait gained independence from Britain in 1961, Palestinians—most holding Jordanian nationality—made up the largest non-Kuwaiti Arab group. During the Iraq invasion in 1990, many Palestinians who supported Iraq fled the country or were deported. After the U.S.-led coalition ousted the Iraqi army, Palestinians were not allowed to reenter Kuwait. Jordanians, Iraqis, Yemenis, and Sudanese were also denied entrance for a time.^{84, 85}

Today, each of these nationalities constitutes part of the Arab ethnic group. The Arabs have strong representation from Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. These peoples migrate to Kuwait primarily for employment, working at all levels of the economy. They are strictly regulated and are prohibited from fully integrating into Kuwaiti society. They cannot obtain Kuwaiti citizenship and are denied its benefits.^{86, 87}

⁷⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, “Kuwait: People,” in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

⁸⁰ Victor Morris, “Kuwait: Daily Life,” in *World and Its Peoples: Iraq, Kuwait, Syria*, vol. 2, eds. Clive Carpenter and Felicity Crowe (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2007), 246.

⁸¹ Nazih Ayubi, “Arab Bureaucracies,” in *The Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 132, 135–39.

⁸² Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 62–63.

⁸³ Central Intelligence Agency, “Kuwait: People,” in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

⁸⁴ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 65–67.

⁸⁵ Nasra M. Shah, “Migration to Kuwait: Trends, Patterns and Policies” (paper, Migration and Refugee Movements in the Middle East and North Africa, The Forced Migration & Refugee Studies Program, American University in Cairo, 23–25 October 2007), 4, http://www.aucegypt.edu/GAPP/cmrs/reports/Documents/Nasra_Shah.pdf

⁸⁶ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 65–67.

South/Southeast Asian

Since the end of Gulf War in 1991, the number of foreign workers from South and Southeast Asia has risen sharply. Many come from India (the largest Asian ethnic group), Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. They work primarily in the service and construction industries. Women from these countries have been migrating to Kuwait in ever-larger numbers. Totalling around 700,000, they represent about one-third of the migrant population in Kuwait.^{88, 89} Many females work as domestic servants, an industry rife with accusations of mistreatment, false imprisonment, sexual abuse, and forced prostitution.^{90, 91}



© Mink / flickr.com
Domestic workers from Asia

Iranian

Iranians have lived in the area of present-day Kuwait for centuries and today account for 4% of the population.^{92, 93} Iranians are not Arabs and are often classified as Asian in demographics. They are Muslim people who practice Shi'a Islam. Although many expatriate Iranians maintain ties with Iran, they tend to be loyal to Kuwait. Still, the Sunni Muslim government remains suspicious of Shi'ites, which creates political tension between the two religious groups.^{94, 95}

Bidoon

The Arabic word *Bidoon* means “without.” It is short for *bidoon jinsiya* (“without citizenship”) and describes the condition of statelessness that the Bidoon endure. The Bidoon are not a single ethnic group, but the majority are Bedouin from the interior. The Kuwaiti government denies the roughly 100,000 Bidoon the basic rights of citizenship, such as subsidized housing and healthcare, education, travel documents, and identity cards. They cannot vote, and even the

⁸⁷ Nasra M. Shah, “Migration to Kuwait: Trends, Patterns and Policies” (paper, Migration and Refugee Movements in the Middle East and North Africa, The Forced Migration & Refugee Studies Program, American University in Cairo, 23–25 October 2007), 4, http://www.aucegypt.edu/GAPP/cmrs/reports/Documents/Nasra_Shah.pdf

⁸⁸ Lisa Conrad, “Migrant Workers’ Rights Should Be Urgently Addressed,” *Kuwait Times*, 21 July 2011, http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=OTMwNTAwMDQzMw

⁸⁹ International Organization for Migration, “Kuwait: Facts and Figures,” June 2011, <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/kuwait>

⁹⁰ Lisa Conrad, “Migrant Workers’ Rights Should Be Urgently Addressed,” *Kuwait Times*, 21 July 2011, http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=OTMwNTAwMDQzMw

⁹¹ Embassy of the United States, Kuwait, “2011 TIP Report Kuwait,” 2011, <http://kuwait.usembassy.gov/policy-news/tip-reports.html>

⁹² Central Intelligence Agency, “Kuwait: People,” in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

⁹³ Maria O’Shea and Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Kuwait*, 2nd ed. (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2010), 64.

⁹⁴ Maria O’Shea and Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Kuwait*, 2nd ed. (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2010), 64.

⁹⁵ Laura S. Etheredge, ed., *Middle East Region in Transition: Persian Gulf States: Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates* (New York: Rosen Educational Services, 2011), 33–34.

police and military jobs they have traditionally held are being denied them. Early in 2011, Bidoon began protests to win Kuwaiti citizenship.^{96, 97, 98}

⁹⁶ Simon Atkinson, “Kuwait’s Stateless Bidun Demand Greater Rights,” *BBC News*, 18 July 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-14185365>

⁹⁷ Refugees International, Open Society Foundations, “Without Citizenship: Statelessness, Discrimination, and Repression in Kuwait,” 12 May 2011, http://www.refugeesinternational.org/sites/default/files/120511_Kuwait_With_Citizenship_0.pdf

⁹⁸ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 63–65.

Chapter 1 Assessment

1. Kuwait has a temperate climate.

False

Kuwait has a desert climate with little rainfall and high temperatures.

2. Kuwaiti territory includes a number of islands in the Persian Gulf.

True

Along Kuwait's eastern coast in the Persian Gulf lie nine islands.

3. Shipping is important to Kuwait's infrastructure.

True

The southern shore of Kuwait Bay—where the majority of the population lives—is deep, facilitating Kuwait's main commercial port, Shuwaikh.

4. Kuwait was founded when the Bedouin took control of the area from the Turks.

True

The Bedouin wrested southern Kuwait Bay from the Ottoman Turks in 1680 and built a small fort for protection, remaining in the settlement ever since.

5. Kuwait's emir is chosen by popular election.

False

Kuwait is a constitutional emirate. The head of state is the emir, a hereditary position reserved exclusively for members of the al-Sabah family.

CHAPTER 2: RELIGION

Overview of Major Religions

Islam dominates the religious landscape of Kuwait. Of Kuwait's 3.4 million people, 85% are Muslim. Of these, 70% belong to the Sunni branch of Islam, while the remaining 30% are Shi'ites. Most Kuwaiti citizens, important government figures, and the ruling al-Sabah family are Sunni Muslims, although since 2006 the prime minister has appointed two Shi'ite ministers to each cabinet. Small constituencies of Shi'ites believe they are underrepresented in the government and discriminated against by the Sunni majority.^{99, 100, 101}



© Bashir Al-Ba'noon
Kuwait mosque at night

Christians form the largest non-Muslim group in Kuwait. Numbering about 450,000, they are divided among seven officially recognized denominations. Catholics make up the largest group (300,000), followed by Coptic Orthodox (75,000) and Protestants (40,000). Armenian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, and Anglicans represent small numbers. These groups worship freely in their own churches. An Islamic Christian Relations Council (ICRC) was formed in 2009 to strengthen ties between Christians and Muslims.^{102, 103}

Among the remaining religious groups are Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Bahai. Hindus number about 300,000; Buddhists about 100,000. Around 10,000 Sikhs and 400 Bahai also worship freely in Kuwait. Because the Quran does not sanction these groups, the government does not officially recognize them. Unable to establish places of worship, they practice their religion only at home or in recognized churches.^{104, 105, 106}

⁹⁹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Kuwait," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148828.htm>

¹⁰⁰ Angel M. Rabasa et al., *The Muslim World after 9/11* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2004), 72.

¹⁰¹ L. Carl Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 15–18.

¹⁰² Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Kuwait," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148828.htm>

¹⁰³ Nihal Sharaf, "Christians Enjoy Religious Freedom: Church-State Ties Excellent," *Arab Times*, 10 March 2011, <http://www.arabtimesonline.com/NewsDetails/tabid/96/smld/414/ArticleID/147658/t/%E2%80%9998Christians-enjoy-religious-freedom%E2%80%9999/Default.aspx>

¹⁰⁴ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Kuwait," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148828.htm>

Role of Religion in Government

Religion and Government

Kuwait's government is ruled by shari'a law. Based on Islamic texts, shari'a directs Muslims along the "correct path," to ensure acceptable conduct in every aspect of life, public and private. Shari'a provides the framework for all legislation. According to the constitution, Islam sets the standards for religious, social, economic, and political stability. Shari'a also provides for *shura* (consultation), a Muslim process based on securing expert opinion about governance of the country. Discussions in *shura* are not binding in legislation. They give lawmakers access to opinions that can help them legislate in accordance with Islamic law. Kuwait maintains the Higher Advisory Committee on Completion of the Application of Islamic Shari'a Provisions, tasked with the implementation of Islamic laws across the spectrum of life in Kuwait. For example, a 1980 law prohibits non-Muslims from gaining citizenship.^{107, 108, 109}



© Cajetan Barretto
Qurans in Kuwait's Grand Mosque

Freedom of Religion

Kuwait's constitution provides for freedom of religion, but this right is provisional. Religious practice must adhere to public policy and morals. The government involves itself in Sunni affairs: appointing imams, monitoring sermons, and financing mosques. Some Shi'ite groups say they have difficulty getting official permission to build mosques. Currently, Kuwait recognizes only seven religious denominations. They must work with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and other ministries to obtain building permits, visas for clergy, and security for their places of worship. Although non-Muslims worship freely in Kuwait, laws against blasphemy and proselytization bind them. Behavior or speech deemed blasphemous against Islam is a serious crime. Non-Muslims are forbidden from proselytizing to Muslims, although Sunni proselytizing

¹⁰⁵ Haya al-Mughni, "Kuwait," in *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress amid Resistance*, eds. Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 229.

¹⁰⁶ Kenneth Katzman, "Kuwait: Security, Reform, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 26 September 2011, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21513.pdf>

¹⁰⁷ Kuwait Government Online, "Official Religion of Kuwait," n.d., <http://www.e.gov.kw/sites/kgoenglish/portal/Pages/Visitors/AboutKuwait/CultureAndHeritage/ReligiousPractices.aspx>

¹⁰⁸ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Kuwait," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148828.htm>

¹⁰⁹ L. Carl Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 24–25.

is encouraged. Anti-apostasy legislation makes it a crime for Muslims to convert to a non-Muslim faith.^{110, 111, 112, 113}

Religion and the Press

The government protects Islam by imposing sanctions on news outlets that violate the 2006 Press and Publications Law. The law requires jail sentences for journalists who denigrate Islam, including the Prophet Muhammad and other religious figures. The law extends to speech that incites hatred or compels people to commit crimes. Journalists and academics who criticize Islam also violate the law. Any Kuwaiti citizen who believes a journalist or academic has violated the law can bring formal charges against that person. The result has been self-censorship in academia and the press. The Ministry of Information oversees the media and publications and can censor books, films, and publications that violate Kuwait's shari'a-based morality laws.^{114, 115, 116}

Influence of Religion on Daily Life

Islam governs the daily lives of Kuwaitis. Muslim citizens must observe the five pillars of Islam. They must perform the shahada (affirmation of faith) daily. They must perform salat (prayer) five times a day. Zakat requires them to give alms to the poor. Zakat takes the form of a 2.5% religious tax on income, with the money going to prescribed charities. Sawm (ritual fasting) is required. This fast is usually observed during the holy month of Ramadan. Muslims observe the fast from sunrise to sunset. During this time, they are forbidden to eat, drink, smoke, chew gum, or engage in sexual intercourse. Hajj is the pilgrimage to Mecca. All Muslims are strongly

¹¹⁰ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Kuwait," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148828.htm>

¹¹¹ Kuwait Government Online, "Official Religion of Kuwait," n.d., <http://www.e.gov.kw/sites/kgoenglish/portal/Pages/Visitors/AboutKuwait/CultureAndHeritage/ReligiousPractices.aspx>

¹¹² The Institute on Religion & Public Policy, "Institute on Religion and Public Policy Report: Religious Freedom in Kuwait," n.d., http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session8/KW/IRPP_UPR_KUW_S08_2010_InstituteonReligionandPublicPolicy.pdf

¹¹³ Kuwait Info, "Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Awqaf)," n.d., http://www.kuwait-info.com/a_state_system/ministry_awqaf.asp

¹¹⁴ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Kuwait," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148828.htm>

¹¹⁵ The Institute on Religion & Public Policy, "Institute on Religion and Public Policy Report: Religious Freedom in Kuwait," n.d., http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session8/KW/IRPP_UPR_KUW_S08_2010_InstituteonReligionandPublicPolicy.pdf

¹¹⁶ Freedom House, "Freedom of the Press 2008: Kuwait," Refworld, UNHCR, 29 April 2008, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4871f612c.html>

encouraged to make this trip at least once during their lifetime, unless they are physically or financially unable to do so.^{117, 118, 119}

Influence of Islam on Society

Kuwaitis observe Friday as a holy day. Businesses often close and people attend sermons at their mosques. Women are allowed to worship in the mosque (separated from the men), but many pray at home. Islam restrains Kuwaiti Muslims, forbidding celibacy in marriage, eating pork, consuming or handling drugs and alcohol, and extramarital sex and pornography (both of which are criminalized).



© Mink / flickr.com
Woman in traditional abaya

Behaviors and practices prohibited by Islam are called *haram*. Muslims consider them harmful to the mind, body, spirit, and society. Behaviors and practices permitted by Islam are called *halal*. Muslims consider them beneficial to individuals and society and encourage them. They include tolerance toward other religions and the acquisition of knowledge.^{120, 121}

Influence of Islam on Women

Islam in Kuwait encourages family unity and strength. Kuwaitis value their extended families, which include their friends, neighbors, and tribe. Islam favors men, and differing interpretations of Islam present conflicting views on women's place in public life. Conservatives believe that Islam assigns women the role of homemaker, with subservience to husbands. Liberals believe women should have an equal role in public life. These conflicting views are reflected in the lives of Kuwaiti women. They enjoy freedoms denied women in the other Gulf states. Women can drive, wear Western clothing, work outside the home, travel without a male escort, and divorce their husbands. But their testimony in court carries only half the weight of male testimony. They are allowed only half the inheritance of males. They must have their father's permission to marry and may not marry non-Muslim men. Kuwaiti women won the right to vote in 2005. They voted for the first time in 2006, in municipal and parliamentary elections.^{122, 123, 124, 125}

¹¹⁷ PBS Frontline Teacher Center, "Beliefs and Daily Lives of Muslims," 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/muslims/beliefs.html>

¹¹⁸ Kwintessential, "Kuwait: Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette," n.d., <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/kuwait-country-profile.html>

¹¹⁹ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 51–52.

¹²⁰ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 53–54.

¹²¹ PBS Frontline Teacher Center, "Beliefs and Daily Lives of Muslims," 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/muslims/beliefs.html>

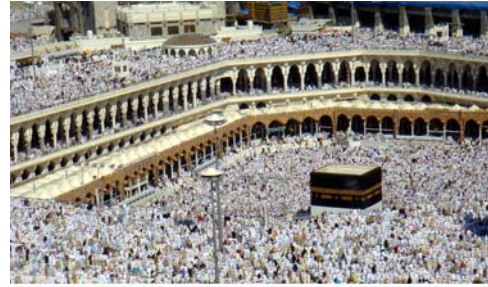
¹²² Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 53–54.

¹²³ PBS Frontline Teacher Center, "Beliefs and Daily Lives of Muslims," 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/muslims/beliefs.html>

¹²⁴ International Museum of Women, "Kuwaiti Women's 1st Election Day," in *Women, Power and Politics* (online exhibition), 2011, <http://www.imow.org/wpp/stories/viewStory?storyId=1621>

Religious Events

The two most important religious events in Kuwait are Ramadan and the Hajj. Ramadan, the holy month of fasting, takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The holy month is a period of reflection, when Muslims devote themselves to God and to self-control. Unable to eat, drink, smoke, or indulge other appetites between dawn and sunset each day, Muslims study the Quran, pray, and distribute charity. Families gather in the evening to break the fast. They eat and celebrate, starting the fast again at dawn.



© Al Jazeera English / flickr.com
Pilgrimage in Mecca

Fasting is mandatory for all Muslims during Ramadan, although there are exceptions. Children and the insane are exempted. The elderly and ill are exempted if the fast becomes too strenuous, but they must feed at least one person for each day they miss. Travelers and pregnant and nursing women may defer their fast, but they must make it up at a later time.^{126, 127, 128}

The Hajj is the holy pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The fifth pillar of Islam, it is required of all Muslims at least once in their lives. Occurring annually in the 12th and final month of the Islamic lunar calendar, the Hajj commemorates the blessing on Abraham as he searched for water in the desert. The Prophet Muhammad led the first official Hajj to Mecca in 630 C.E. Completing the pilgrimage shows supreme faith in God and creates Muslim unity. It helps Muslims define and understand their relationship to God. When Muslims properly perform the Hajj rituals, they are absolved from sin. During the five-day pilgrimage, participants visit required sites and perform rituals. Muslims may be exempted from the Hajj under certain conditions. Islam dictates that Muslims care for their families first, so those without financial means to make the trip are excused. Muslims physically unable to endure the pilgrimage are also excused: Islam exempts believers from duties that will harm them or their families.^{129, 130}

¹²⁵ Jamie Etheridge, "Historic First: Kuwaiti Women Vote, Run," *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 April 2006, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0405/p07s02-wome.html>

¹²⁶ Rania El Gamal, "Celebrating Ramadan Away from Home," *Kuwait Times*, 16 September 2007, http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=MTQ1MzM1MzMzMy

¹²⁷ Muslim Student Association, Colorado State University, "Islamic Holidays and Observances," n.d., <http://www.colostate.edu/orgs/MSA/events/Ramadan.html>

¹²⁸ Ishaq Zahid, "Ramadan Rules and Regulations," *Islam for Today*, n.d., <http://www.islamfortoday.com/ramadan01.htm>

¹²⁹ Alyssa Fetini, "A Brief History of the Hajj," *Time*, 25 November 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1864624,00.html>

¹³⁰ Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, "Issues: Hajj," 2011, <http://www.saudiembassy.net/issues/hajj/>

Religious Holidays

Eid al-Fitr

Kuwaitis acknowledge many religious holidays. One of the most important is Eid al-Fitr. Beginning the day after Ramadan, this “festival of fast-breaking” celebrates the end of Ramadan and lasts for three days. Ministries and other government offices close. People wear new clothes, pray as a community, and visit with friends and relatives. They invite neighbors for meals and donate money and food to mosques for charity. Restaurants, cafes, and bakeries see an upsurge in business as people flock to them for celebratory meals.^{131, 132}



© Cajetan Barretto
Cannon firing for Ramadan

Eid al-Adha

Eid al-Adha follows the Day of Arafat—a ritual on the Hajj that commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son to God. The 4-day holiday begins with families attending public prayer in their best clothing. Families visit with friends and neighbors, exchanging gifts and feasting. Those who can afford to do so sacrifice a sheep. They give a third of the meat to the poor and divide the remainder among family and friends. Charity is obligatory on Eid al-Adha so that the poor can join the festivities.^{133, 134}

Laylat al-Miraj

Laylat al-Miraj, “The Night of the Ascension,” is another important religious holiday in Kuwait. According to Muslim belief, two archangels visited the Prophet Muhammad while he slept in the Kaaba (stone building) in Mecca. They urged him to fly on the winged horse al-Buraq to the mosque in Jerusalem. From there he ascended into heaven and met God, who told him that Muslims must pray five times a day—the second pillar of Islam, or salat. Muslims celebrate Laylat al-Miraj on the 27th day of the 7th month each year. They attend special prayers at the mosque and read the tale of Muhammad to their children.^{135, 136}

¹³¹ Nawara Fattahova, “No Eid al-Fitr Holiday for Municipality Inspectors,” *Kuwait Times*, 29 August 2011, http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=OTYxMzUxNzM2

¹³² Global Post, “Saudi Arabia Announces Tuesday Start of Eid al-Fitr Holiday,” 29 August 2011, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/culture-lifestyle/world-religion/110829/eid-al-fitr-2011-uae-dubai-mubarak-egypt-ramadan-ends>

¹³³ Muslim Students Association, Middle Tennessee State University, “What Is Eid al-Adha?” 24 March 2004, <http://frank.mtsu.edu/~msa/aladha.htm>

¹³⁴ BBC, “Eid-ul-Adha: 6th Nov 2011,” n.d., http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/islam/eid_haj.shtml

¹³⁵ BBC, Religions, “Lailat al Miraj,” 9 July 2009, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/holydays/lailatalmiraj.shtml>

¹³⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Mi‘rāj,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/384897/Miraj?anchor=ref75576>

Mawlid

Occurring on the 12th day of the 3rd month of the Islamic lunar calendar, Mawlid celebrates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims gather to hear a sermon in honor of the Prophet. They decorate their homes and the mosque, hold processions, have feasts, and distribute charity. It is also customary for families to read the story of Muhammad's life to their children. In some communities, children recite Mawlid poems. Although Mawlid is widely practiced by Sunnis and Shi'a across the Muslim world, some Muslims consider it idolatrous.^{137, 138, 139}

Buildings of Worship

Mosques

Many mosques operate in Kuwait, all facing Mecca as required by Islamic custom. Some are small neighborhood mosques that can accommodate about 1,000 worshippers at a time. Large modern mosques are also common. Dominating urban landscapes, they can accommodate thousands of worshippers. Mosques are not only places of worship. They are also centers for social and political functions. Kuwaiti mosques were traditionally built without domes and with short minarets. As Kuwait's wealth grew in the 20th century, so did its mosques. Builders use modern architectural designs and techniques to construct "grand mosques." Kuwaitis are particularly proud of al-Masjid al-Kabir, popularly called The Grand Mosque. It houses a major library, a massive reading room, a conference hall, and reception center. It can accommodate 10,500 male and 950 female worshippers at a time.^{140, 141}



© Cajetan Barretto
Unique mosque in Kuwait

Churches

Among the Gulf states, Kuwait practices the greatest religious freedom. But buildings of worship are only permitted for state-recognized religions. These religions—Christianity and Judaism—are referred to as the "people of the book" because in the Quran they are not openly hostile to Islam. Kuwait recognizes the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Greek Catholic (Melkite), and National Evangelical Churches, each of which has at least one building of worship in the country. Roman Catholics make up the largest Christian community. Three Catholic churches operate in Kuwait, and the government has strong diplomatic ties with

¹³⁷ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Mawlid," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/370339/mawlid>

¹³⁸ Muhammad Abduh Yamani, "The Mawlid: A Time to Celebrate," Masud, n.d., <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/misc/mawlid.htm>

¹³⁹ University of Kansas Medical Center, "Mawlid al-Nabi or Ma'uled al-Nabi (Islamic, Moslem, Muslim)," Diversity Calendar, 2009, http://www3.kumc.edu/diversity/ethnic_relig_mawlid.html

¹⁴⁰ Mohammad Khalid A. al-Jassar, "Constancy and Change in Contemporary Kuwait City: The Socio-Cultural Dimensions of the Kuwaiti Courtyard and *Diwaniyya*" (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 2009), 120.

¹⁴¹ Maria O'Shea and Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Kuwait*, 2nd ed. (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2010), 93.

the Vatican. Christians can build and run churches as long as they have the proper documentation. They are allowed to worship freely if they do not violate Kuwait's anti-proselytizing laws. Churches cannot visibly display the symbols of their religion.^{142, 143, 144, 145}

Behavior in Places of Worship

Non-Muslims may be welcome to visit mosques in Kuwait, but they must be Jewish or Christian.

Exchange 1: May I enter the Mosque?

Visitor:	May I enter the Mosque?	mumkin anee adKhil il-mas-yid?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

Strict rules of etiquette apply to Muslims and non-Muslims in Kuwaiti mosques. Visitors must remove their shoes before entering a mosque and avoid displaying the soles of their feet when sitting. Only the right hand should be used to receive or offer anything. Visitors should wear modest clothing. Legs and arms should be covered, and clothing must not have pictures of animals or offensive objects. Women should avoid showing their neckline. They are required to cover their hair, and head coverings are recommended for men.



© anitaconchita / flickr.com
Dressed to enter the mosque

Exchange 2: Do I need to wear a head covering?

Visitor (Female):	Do I need to wear a head covering?	laazim aghaTee Raasee?
Local:	Yes	ey

Visitors should ask permission to take a photograph in a mosque, and it is unwise to take photographs of women. They have their own rooms in the mosque so that the men will not see them. It is best to avoid visiting mosques during prayers.^{146, 147, 148}

¹⁴² Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 35–36.

¹⁴³ Betty Jane Bailey and J. Martin Bailey, *Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 180–183.

¹⁴⁴ *Kuwait: Justice System and National Police Handbook: Criminal Justice System and Procedures*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: International Business Publications, USA, 2011), 34.

¹⁴⁵ Jenny Walker, Stuart Butler, and Andrea Schulte-Peevers, *Lonely Planet: Oman, UAE & Arabian Peninsula* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2010), 144.

¹⁴⁶ Maria O'Shea and Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Kuwait*, 2nd ed. (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2010), 92.

¹⁴⁷ Jenny Walker, Stuart Butler, and Andrea Schulte-Peevers, *Lonely Planet: Oman, UAE & Arabian Peninsula* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2010), 144.

Exchange 3: May I take photographs inside the mosque?

Visitor:	May I take photographs inside the mosque?	mumkin aSawiR daaKhil il-mas-yid?
Local:	Yes.	ey

¹⁴⁸ This Way Guides, *Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen* (Lausanne, Switzerland: JPM Publications, 2000), 119.

Chapter 2 Assessment

1. Kuwait practices separation of religion and government.

False

Kuwait's government is ruled by shari'a law. Based on Islamic text, shari'a governs Muslims in all aspects of their lives, public and private.

2. Kuwait's constitution provides for freedom of religion.

True

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and religious thought, but this right is provisional.

3. Kuwaiti women enjoy freedoms denied women in other Gulf countries.

True

Women can drive, wear Western clothing, work outside the home, travel without a male escort, and divorce their husbands.

4. Ramadan is one of the most important religious events in Kuwait.

True

An Islamic custom, Ramadan—the holy month of fasting—is a period of reflection, when Muslims devote themselves to Allah and to self-control.

5. Kuwaiti mosques are open to all.

False

Non-Muslims are welcome to visit mosques in Kuwait, but they must be Jewish or Christian.

CHAPTER 3: TRADITIONS

Introduction

Kuwaiti traditions center on opportunities to gain respect and honor for oneself and, by extension, one's family, clan, tribe, and nation. A Kuwaiti's standing in the community is increased by respecting others with grace and patience, and by showing hospitality to visitors, compassion toward the needy, and generosity to all.

Kuwaitis have a high regard for family and tribal affiliation. Because they prefer to conduct business with people they know and trust, Kuwaitis consider nepotism virtuous. One of the most liberal of the Gulf states, Kuwait honors its traditions and way of life as it develops its economy and standing in the world.



© Khalid Almasoud
A friendly smile

Honor and Values

Kuwaiti honor and values sprang from the need for survival in a harsh desert climate. Scarce resources demanded that tribal and family groups work together to protect water and grazing land. For Kuwaitis today, the centrality of family remains key to their identity and ethos. Kuwaiti custom dictates family reliance and the obligation of male members to protect and care for their families. Failure to do so shames the entire extended family.^{149, 150}



© Yusuf Maimoon
A university in Kuwait

Reputation holds great value for Kuwaitis. People exercise patience with one another and carefully avoid embarrassing encounters, especially in public. Loud displays of temper show disrespect, and Kuwaitis treat this violation of their reputations seriously. Kuwaitis gain respect for themselves and their families through these virtues: hospitality, generosity, loyalty, and self-reliance.¹⁵¹

An educated citizenry is highly prized. Many young adults earn university degrees abroad, but their Kuwaiti identity is well formed in their childhood education. The educational plan of the country instills Kuwaiti values in children. They are taught obedience to political, religious, and

¹⁴⁹ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 131.

¹⁵⁰ Solomon A. Isiorho, *Modern World Nations: Kuwait* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 58–59.

¹⁵¹ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 53.

social authority. They are also taught that inequalities in the social system are natural and promote compassion, generosity, and loyalty.^{152, 153}

Formulaic Codes of Politeness

Kuwaiti politeness reflects the virtue of hospitality. Kuwaitis who follow the customs of greeting and friendly interaction build trust and elevate their reputations. Greetings in Kuwait are formulaic and occur most often between members of the same sex. Men exchange handshakes—with their right hands only—and may kiss on the cheek if their relationship is close. Men of high status who are close may rub noses.^{154, 155, 156}



© Mink / flickr.com
Friendly interaction

Greetings are given by order of seniority and take time.

Kuwaitis engage in small talk, inquiring generally after each other's health and family and discussing topics such as the weather. It is taboo to make specific inquiries into a man's private life, especially concerning the women in his family.^{157, 158}

Exchange 4: I really appreciate your hospitality.

Guest:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	aana mamnoon kaRamkum
Host:	It's my pleasure.	afa 'alaych haaTha waajibee

Greetings usually close with offers of coffee or tea. Guests and visitors are offered refreshments at least three times. Foreign visitors often feel uncomfortable during greetings because Kuwaitis stand quite close to those they are greeting. They frequently touch one another, which is a sign of

¹⁵² Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 131.

¹⁵³ Abdulkarim al-Dekhayel, *Kuwait: Oil, State and Political Legitimation* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 2000), 76–78.

¹⁵⁴ Kwintessential, "Kuwait: Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette: Etiquette and Customs in Kuwait," n.d., <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/kuwait-country-profile.html>

¹⁵⁵ Culture Crossing, "Kuwait: Greetings," n.d., http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=111

¹⁵⁶ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 133–34.

¹⁵⁷ Etiquette Scholar, "Kuwait," 2011, http://www.etiquettescholar.com/dining_etiquette/table-etiquette/mideast_dinner_etiquette/kuwaiti.html

¹⁵⁸ U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, "TRADOC DCSINT Handbook no. 2: Arab Cultural Awareness: 58 Factsheets," January 2006, <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/army/arabculture.pdf>

acceptance, friendship, and trust. But men avoid bodily contact with women. They usually nod a greeting to females unless the female initiates a handshake and conversation.^{159, 160}

Exchange 5: How are you?

Visitor:	How are you?	shlonik?
Local:	Fine, very well.	b-KhayR

Male/Female Interaction

Kuwait is a patriarchal society. Yet Kuwaiti law provides for equality between men and women. Still, Islam discourages unregulated interaction between females and males, and men dominate in the social sphere. The upper classes exercise more freedom of interaction between the sexes, especially in professional life. Modern Kuwaiti women have greater access to education, professional lives, and society, which puts them in contact with men more often than in the past.^{161, 162} Despite modernization, men and



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Neighbors chatting

women remain segregated in many spheres of public life. For example, they are segregated in internet cafes, fast food restaurants, waiting rooms, library study rooms, and at weddings.¹⁶³

In domestic life, women are expected to be mothers and homemakers. The head of the family must provide a safe environment for the academic and spiritual education of his family, including the female members of his household.¹⁶⁴ Kuwaiti households are often large because they frequently include extended family. In some traditional homes, the family head may have more than one wife, which is accepted under Islamic law. Children are often raised in segregated

¹⁵⁹ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 133–34.

¹⁶⁰ U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, “TRADOC DCSINT Handbook no. 2: Arab Cultural Awareness: 58 Factsheets,” January 2006, <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/army/arabculture.pdf>

¹⁶¹ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 133–34.

Nicholas S. Hopkins and Saad Eddin Ibrahim, eds., *Class, Gender, Power, and Development*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2006), 411.

¹⁶² Amer Alsaleh, “Kuwait,” in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Children’s Issues Worldwide: North Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 4, eds. Irving Epstein and Ghada Hashem Talhami (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 114.

¹⁶³ Deborah Wheeler, “New Technologies, Old Culture: A Look at Women, Gender, and the Internet in Kuwait,” in *Culture, Technology, Communication: Towards an Intercultural Global Village*, ed. Charles Ess (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 191.

¹⁶⁴ Amer Alsaleh, “Kuwait,” in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Children’s Issues Worldwide: North Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 4, eds. Irving Epstein and Ghada Hashem Talhami (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 113.

homes so that boys and girls can be socialized by gender. Boys have more freedom to play and socialize. Girls have less freedom and learn at a young age how to take care of a household. Kuwaitis entertain frequently at home, with men and women entertaining separately.^{165, 166}

Gift-Giving

Like much in Kuwait, gift-giving is a private affair. Family members and close friends exchange gifts during holiday seasons, such as Ramadan, Eid al-Adha, and the Hajj. Visitors, guests, and business people usually do not participate in gift-giving with Kuwaitis. Occasionally, visitors may be invited to a Kuwaiti home. It is appropriate to bring a small houseplant, a box of chocolates, or something that represents the visitor's home country. In business relationships, giving small, standard business gifts is appropriate on both sides. But it is inappropriate for males to give females gifts. If they do, they present the gift with the statement that it is from a mother, wife, sister, or other female relative. Kuwaitis normally open gifts privately. Visitors receiving gifts from Kuwaitis should follow suit, unless asked to open the gift by the person presenting it. Kuwaiti custom dictates that people send thank-you notes after receiving gifts.¹⁶⁷



© Najwa Marafie
Sweets make good gifts

Eating Habits and Food

For Kuwaitis, meals are more than sustenance. They are social affairs, punctuated by ritualized behavior on the part of guests and hosts, that affirm status and virtue. Breakfast is a light meal of olives and dairy products eaten at home. Lunch, the largest meal of the day, consists of meat and rice with bread, salad, and vegetables. Many Kuwaitis prefer to eat lunch at home with their families, but the fast pace of modern life leaves little time. Instead, many people eat lunch in cafeterias or restaurants. Suppers are usually small meals at home and consist of a variety of meat, dairy products, and vegetables, unless the family is celebrating a special occasion or holiday.^{168, 169}



© Pinot Dita
Less traditional modern lunch

¹⁶⁵ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 54–56.

¹⁶⁶ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 111–31.

¹⁶⁷ Culture Crossing, “Kuwait: Business: Gift Giving,” n.d., http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=23&CID=111

¹⁶⁸ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 88–90.

¹⁶⁹ Kwintessential, “Kuwait: Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette,” n.d., <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/kuwait-country-profile.html>

Exchange 6: The food tastes so good.

Guest:	The food tastes so good.	il-akil waayid Tayib
Host:	Thanks for the compliment.	mashkooR 'ala il-mujaamala

Although most meals are with family and friends, Kuwaitis like to entertain guests and business contacts. Kuwaitis are reticent to do business with people they do not know well, so this lets them establish personal relationships before conducting business.¹⁷⁰ These are usually family style, with the food served from oldest to youngest. Guests receive the choicest foods. It is customary for the host to provide guests with more than they can eat and drink. If guests empty their plates, it is a sign that they want more food.^{171, 172}

Exchange 7: What is the name of this dish?

Guest:	What is the name of this dish?	wa-shitsamoon aT-TabKha haaThee?
Host:	This is <i>Machboos</i>	haaThee machboos

Because Kuwait is desert, the country produces little food, importing close to 98% of its food products.¹⁷³ But its location on the Persian Gulf does ensure a steady diet of fish and seafood.¹⁷⁴ In the past, meat and dairy products from Bedouin herd animals—goats, sheep, and camels—provided the bulk of the Kuwaiti diet. Today, imported fruits and vegetables have become regular features in Kuwaiti cuisine. Still, the diet consists substantially of fish, lamb and mutton, cheese and yogurt, and spices.¹⁷⁵ This rich diet contributes to



© Mink / flickr.com
Traditional Kuwaiti dish

¹⁷⁰ Kwintessential, "Kuwait: Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette," n.d., <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/kuwait-country-profile.html>

¹⁷¹ Kwintessential, "Kuwait: Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette," n.d., <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/kuwait-country-profile.html>

¹⁷² Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 94.

¹⁷³ International Business Publications, *Kuwait: Starting Business, Incorporating in Kuwait Guide: Strategic Information and Regulations*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: International Business Publications, USA, 2011), 34.

¹⁷⁴ Terri Morrison and Wayne A. Conaway, *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: The Bestselling Guide to Doing Business in More Than 60 Countries*, 2nd ed. (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2006), 288.

¹⁷⁵ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 89–93.

obesity. The rate of obesity-related diseases, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease, is on the rise.^{176, 177}

Exchange 8: What ingredients are used to make *Machboos*?

Guest:	What ingredients are used to make <i>Machboos</i> ?	shinoo mukawanaat il-machboos?
Host:	Mutton, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, onion, rice, saffron.	laHm KhaRoof, daaRSeen, mismaaR, hayl, buSal, 'aysh, wa-za'afaRaana

Dress Codes

Climate and religion have influenced the development of Kuwaiti dress codes for men and women. Desert heat calls for loose, flowing clothing, and Islamic custom dictates modesty, especially for women.

Men

Even though Kuwait is a modern country and liberal compared to other Gulf states, men prefer to wear traditional Kuwaiti clothing. They wear a *dishdasha*—a white or cream-colored floor-length robe. Standard footwear is the leather sandal. The signature article of clothing is the *gutra*, a large square of material folded to form a triangle and draped over the head. The corners of the *gutra* cover the sides of the face and fall over the shoulders. Men wear a *gahfiyah*, or skullcap, under the *gutra*. An *ogal*—two black, twisted cords—holds the headdress in place. Kuwaiti men wear *gutras* in different ways to suit the occasion and their personalities. The time of year influences the color: in summer, men wear white; in winter, *gutras* are red-and-white checked.^{178, 179, 180}



© Mink / flickr.com
Men in traditional clothing

Women

Kuwaiti women wear a wider variety of clothes than men. Women frequently wear Western clothing, such as jeans and slacks. Still, Islamic custom demands modest attire, so women do not wear outlandish or revealing clothes. In public, some women cover Western clothing with an

¹⁷⁶ “Serious Diseases Linked to Bad Eating Habits in Kuwait,” *Arab Times*, 23 August 2010, <http://www.arabtimesonline.com/NewsDetails/tabid/96/smId/414/ArticleId/158642/ren/r/Default.aspx>

¹⁷⁷ Habib Toumi, “Kuwaitis Must Change Eating Habits to Fight Widespread Obesity,” Habib Toumi (blog), 23 August 2010, <http://www.habibtoumi.com/2010/08/23/kuwaitis-must-change-eating-habits-to-fight-widespread-obesity/>

¹⁷⁸ State of Kuwait: Kuwait Today, “The People and the Culture,” 2003, http://embassyofkuwait.ca/Kwt/people_culture.htm

¹⁷⁹ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 72–73.

¹⁸⁰ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 102–5.

abaya—a long black robe draped over the head to cover the entire body, including the feet, which according to Muslim law must be covered when standing or praying. The *hijab*, a head scarf pinned under the chin, is another common article of clothing. Women wear the *hijab* out of modesty; Islamic culture considers a woman's hair, neck, and shoulders sexually provocative.^{181, 182}

Exchange 9: Is this acceptable to wear?

Visitor:	Is this acceptable to wear?	zayn ilbas chiThee?
Local:	Yes.	ey

The most conservative women in Kuwait—often Bedouin—wear the *burqa* or the *niqab*. The *niqab*, a face veil worn with a head scarf, exposes only the eyes.¹⁸³ Wearing a *niqab* signifies a woman's adherence to conservative Islamic practice.¹⁸⁴ The *burqa* also signifies conservative Islamic values and practices. It covers the face, leaving only a slit for the eyes, and has a stiff piece over the nose to support the material. In extreme cases, the eye slits (which must cover the eyebrows as well) are covered with a gauze-like material to shield even the eyes from view.¹⁸⁵

Nonreligious Celebrations

National Day

Each February 25, Kuwaitis celebrate National Day. This day marks Kuwait's independence from the British protectorate on 19 June 1961. Although the anniversary falls in June, Kuwaitis celebrate on February 25 in honor of Sheikh Abdullah al-Salem al-Sabah, who ascended the throne on 25 February 1950 and who helped forge the path to independence. On National Day, Kuwaitis proudly wear their national dress. They attend public gatherings and fireworks displays.^{186, 187}



© Mink / flickr.com
Kuwaiti flags for National Day

¹⁸¹ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 95.

¹⁸² Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 72.

¹⁸³ Jennifer Hargreaves, "Sport, Exercise, and the Female Muslim Body: Negotiating Islam, Politics, and Male Power," in *Physical Culture, Power, and the Body*, eds. Jennifer Hargreaves and Patricia Vertinsky (New York: Routledge, 2007), 96.

¹⁸⁴ Deborah L. Wheeler, *The Internet in the Middle East: Global Expectations and Local Imaginations in Kuwait* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 98.

¹⁸⁵ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 100–101.

¹⁸⁶ Kuwait Info, "National Day," n.d., http://www.kuwait-info.com/a_culture/culture_events_national_day.asp

¹⁸⁷ Official Website: State of Kuwait, "History of Kuwait Independence: 25 February," 2011, http://www.da.gov.kw/eng/articles/Artile_on_Kuwait_Liberation_Day.php

Liberation Day

Kuwaitis celebrate their liberation from Iraqi occupation by U.S.-led coalition forces on 26 February 1991. Each year, Kuwaitis raise their flag at public gatherings and hold festivities, including parades to honor the coalition forces who risked their lives to liberate Kuwait. Liberation Day celebrations also honor the Kuwaiti martyrs who died during the Iraqi occupation and the 605 Kuwaiti POWs, of whom 378 were never found.^{188, 189, 190}

Other

Tribal Relations

Kuwaitis are a tribal people. Each of the 40–50 tribes in Kuwait traces its ancestry to an ancestor whose name identifies the tribe. Tribes are divided into clans, which are conglomerations of families. A powerful family leads each clan and tribe, but it must rule by consensus with other influential families. The political structure of contemporary Kuwait mirrors the tribal structure of early Kuwait. The al-Sabah family rules the country, and the emir's heirs come from the paternal line. Government appointments follow the tribal preference for nepotism. Ministers are first appointed from the al-Sabah family; leading members of families that support the emir are appointed next.



© miskn / flickr.com
A friendly gesture

Further distinctions are made between *asil* and non-*asil* tribes. *Asil* tribes trace their ancestry to early tribes who were camel breeders, the so-called “pure” tribes. Non-*asil* tribes trace their ancestry to shepherders, a subordinate occupation lacking prestige. *Asil* tribes tend to be wealthier, better educated, and more powerful and influential. Kuwait also recognizes *khadir*, a non-tribal class of Sunni Muslims who represent different backgrounds. Because *khadir* claim no tribal ancestry, they have negligible influence in Kuwaiti politics. But tribal dress and language are disappearing in Kuwait’s modern, urban landscape. Tribal groups still have the ability to challenge the power structure. That is one reason why citizenship is restricted in Kuwait. Outside groups could disrupt the tribal ascendancy of the al-Sabah family and its supporters.

Gestures

Some gestures common in the United States and other Western countries may be obscene in Kuwait. For example, directing the “OK” sign to an individual is the sign of the evil eye. Striking an open left hand with the right fist—used in some cultures to emphasize a point—is obscene and communicates contempt for the person spoken to. Pointing at people is rude and is seen as

¹⁸⁸ Kuwait Info, “Liberation Day,” n.d., http://www.kuwait-info.com/a_culture/culture_events_liberation_day.asp

¹⁸⁹ James Calderwood, “Kuwait Remembers Liberation Day on 20th Anniversary of Defeat of Saddam,” *National*, 28 January 2011, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/middle-east/kuwait-remembers-liberation-day-on-20th-anniversary-of-defeat-of-saddam>

¹⁹⁰ Donna Miles, “Desert Storm Veterans Join Liberation Day Celebration,” American Forces Press Service, 26 February 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=62952>

threatening. Kuwaitis nod in the direction to which they are referring. When using a hand gesture to call someone to you, never use only your index finger or your whole hand with the palm facing up. This gesture is used only for animals. Call someone to you by extending your hand with the palm facing down and pulling your fingers rapidly to your palm.^{191, 192, 193}

Dos and Don'ts

Do

- Do accept offers of hospitality—*chai* (tea), coffee, food.
- Do shake hands with everyone of the same gender when visiting or conducting business.
- Do exchange business cards when conducting business. Have Arabic-English business cards printed, and present the card with the Arabic side facing the person.
- Do greet elders first.
- Do dress conservatively.
- Do greet someone by inquiring in a general way about the person's health and family and about mutual friends.
- Do use a person's title when addressing him or her, unless you are invited to do otherwise.

Don't

- Do not offer to shake hands with someone of the opposite gender unless the person initiates a handshake.
- Do not (especially if you are a woman) wear revealing clothing or clothing with potentially insulting images.
- Do not engage in loud conversation.
- Do not embarrass anyone publicly.
- Do not turn down offers of hospitality.
- Do not eat with the left hand.
- Do not take or offer anything with the left hand.
- Do not discuss religion, Israel, or politics.
- Do not ask a man directly about his wife, female children, or other female family members.

¹⁹¹ Culture Crossing, "Kuwait: Basics: Gestures," n.d., http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=13&CID=111

¹⁹² Belly Dance UK, "Gestures," n.d., <http://www.bellydanceuk.co.uk/pagegestures.html>

¹⁹³ U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, "TRADOC DCSINT Handbook no. 2: Arab Cultural Awareness: 58 Factsheets: Body Language, Part 3," Intelligence Resource Program, 10 March 2006, 22, <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/army/arabculture.pdf>

Chapter 3 Assessment

1. Practicing certain virtues garners respect for Kuwaitis and their families.

True

Kuwaitis gain respect for themselves and their families through these virtues: hospitality, generosity, loyalty, and self-reliance.

2. Interaction between sexes is more open among the upper classes.

True

The upper classes exercise a much greater freedom of interaction between the sexes, especially in professional life.

3. Politeness is not valued in Kuwaiti society.

False

Kuwaiti politeness reflects their virtue of hospitality. Kuwaitis who follow the customs of greeting and friendly interaction build trust and elevate their reputations.

4. Meals in Kuwait are simple affairs that have little to do with tradition.

False

Meals are social affairs, punctuated by ritualized behavior on the part of guests and hosts, that affirm status and virtue.

5. Kuwaiti women frequently dress in Western-style clothing.

True

Women frequently wear Western clothing such as jeans or slacks. Still, Islamic custom dictates modest attire, so women do not wear outlandish or revealing clothes.

CHAPTER 4: URBAN LIFE

Introduction

Ninety-eight percent of Kuwait's population is urban.¹⁹⁴ Infrastructure is modern and well maintained, and people have full access to the amenities of modern life. Society is more liberal than in some of the other Gulf countries, with large numbers of women in the workforce and in high-ranking government positions. Kuwaitis also enjoy one of the highest per capita incomes in the region.



© Ghassan Tabet / flickr.com
Bustling urban night life

But Kuwait has a number of problems. Outnumbered by a foreign workforce, Kuwaitis see the need to diversify the economic base beyond oil. Restrictive residency and citizenship policies have created discord among many people, who are petitioning the government for relief and even openly protesting against the government. Allegations of human trafficking and human rights abuses have reached the international community. Kuwait's government is seeking ways to tip the balance of the population in favor of those who hold citizenship.

Work Problems and Urbanization Issues

Workforce Demands

The mainstay of Kuwait's economy is the oil industry. Nearly half of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) comes from oil, and oil revenues generate 95% of government income. The 2008 global economic downturn threatened Kuwait and encouraged the nation to begin diversifying its economic base.¹⁹⁵ In the 1960s, Kuwait did not have the workforce to supply the rapidly growing oil industry. Foreign workers began entering Kuwait. Today, Kuwaitis are a minority in their own country. Around 60% of the labor force is foreign.¹⁹⁶

Expatriate Workers

Restrictive labor laws in Kuwait have spawned numerous problems, especially among the expatriate labor force. Expatriates need Kuwaiti sponsorship to enter the country and work legally, a situation that exposes workers to abuse. Passports are often confiscated, so workers are unable to petition for their rights or leave objectionable circumstances. Some Kuwaitis create "front" companies that import foreign workers. These companies earn high recruitment fees but

¹⁹⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, "Kuwait: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 27 September 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

¹⁹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, "Kuwait: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 27 September 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

¹⁹⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, "Kuwait: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 27 September 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

have no jobs for the workers they bring in.¹⁹⁷ Some of these imported workers are forced into prostitution. Female domestic workers fare the worst. Brought from countries such as Bangladesh and the Philippines, they are often forced to work long hours in poor conditions. In some cases, they cannot leave the homes where they work and are denied pay for long periods. Reports of severe physical and sexual abuse are common. Kuwait is designated a Tier 3 (poorest ranking) country for human trafficking.^{198, 199} Kuwait recently passed laws to give expatriate workers more rights and to protect them from abuse, but parliament failed to rescind sponsorship requirements, effectively maintaining the status quo.^{200, 201, 202}

Urban Crowding

Although Kuwait is a wealthy country with a well-developed and maintained infrastructure, it is home to more than 2 million expatriate workers, around 3% of whom live in poverty.²⁰³ Urban areas have districts where foreign laborers live. Living conditions are poor, and crime in these neighborhoods is high. Areas such as Jaleeb al-Shuyukh, Hasawi, Farwaniyah, and the Jahra district have numerous impoverished laborers, mostly male. To supplement their low incomes they often engage in illegal activities, such as alcohol home-brewing and robbery.²⁰⁴



© Bob McCaffrey
Crowded urban area

¹⁹⁷ AsiaNews, “Half a Million Foreign Workers in Danger of Expulsion,” 1 July 2009, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Half-a-million-foreign-workers-in-danger-of-expulsion-15660.html>

¹⁹⁸ Andy Sambidge, “Kuwait Set to Get Tough on Foreign Worker Abuse,” ArabianBusiness, 4 February 2009, <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/kuwait-set-get-tough-on-foreign-worker-abuse-80374.html>

¹⁹⁹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “Trafficking in Persons Report 2011: Kuwait,” June 2011, 220–22, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/164455.pdf>

²⁰⁰ Embassy of the United States, Kuwait, “Investment Climate: Labor,” n.d., http://kuwait.usembassy.gov/investment_climate.html

²⁰¹ Human Rights Watch, “Kuwait: Bring Domestic Workers Under Labor Law’s Mantle,” 5 December 2009, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2009/12/05/kuwait-bring-domestic-workers-under-labor-law-s-mantle>

²⁰² Kuwait News Agency, “Protecting Foreign Workers’ Rights ‘A Vital Issue,’” *Kuwait Times*, 29 September 2011, http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=OTAYNjgzNDkxMg

²⁰³ Manal El-Batran, “Chapter 3: Urbanization,” in *Arab Environment: Future Challenges*, eds. Mostafa K. Tolba and Najib W. Saab (report, Arab Forum for Environment and Development, Beirut, Lebanon, 2008), 40, <http://www.afedonline.org/afedreport/Full%20English%20Report.pdf>

²⁰⁴ Ricky Laxa, “Poverty, Overcrowding Driving Factors Behind Crime,” *Alwatan Daily*, 17 February 2010, 4, <http://alwatandaily.kuwait.tt/resources/pdf/635/4.pdf>

Healthcare Services

The healthcare system in Kuwait is among the best in the Gulf region. More than 70 healthcare centers operate in the country. In urban areas, everyone has access to healthcare services.^{205, 206} These services are comparable to care in Europe and the United States. Public and private hospitals operate in Kuwait, and there is at least one hospital in every city or major town. Private hospitals, which can be as luxurious as five-star hotels, primarily serve wealthy patients. Public hospitals serve the public. Kuwaiti nationals receive free or low-cost healthcare; expatriate workers and guests must carry insurance to offset medical costs to the government.^{207, 208, 209, 210}



© Mink / flickr.com
The Royale Hayat Hospital

Exchange 10: Is there a hospital nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a hospital nearby?	fee mustashfa jaReeb min ih-nee?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	ey, fee maRkaz il-madeeena

Ambulance services are not readily available. They are controlled by state-run hospitals or by local police, who use ambulances to assist with evacuations at traffic accidents. Ambulance services operate far below Western standards. Vehicles are slow to arrive at the scene and are rarely operated by trained medical staff. Police customarily herd injured victims into private vehicles to be taken to hospital. The Kuwaiti government suggests that individuals who require immediate medical attention call a taxi or use their own vehicles.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ GlobalSurance, "Kuwait: Healthcare System," 2011, <http://www.globalsurance.com/resources/kuwait/>

²⁰⁶ World Health Organization, Eastern Mediterranean Regional Health System Observatory, "Health Service Delivery," in *Health Systems Profile: Kuwait*, 2006, <http://gis.emro.who.int/HealthSystemObservatory/PDF/Kuwait/Health%20service%20delivery.pdf>

²⁰⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Health Information for Travelers to Kuwait," 23 June 2011, <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/kuwait.htm>

²⁰⁸ KuwaitSamachar, "Kuwait Information: Health," n.d., <http://www.kuwaitssamachar.com/online/ksinfo/health.html>

²⁰⁹ GlobalSurance, "Kuwait: Healthcare System," 2011, <http://www.globalsurance.com/resources/kuwait/>

²¹⁰ World Health Organization, Eastern Mediterranean Regional Health System Observatory, "Health Service Delivery," in *Health System Profile: Kuwait*, 2006, <http://gis.emro.who.int/HealthSystemObservatory/PDF/Kuwait/Full%20Profile.pdf>

²¹¹ KuwaitSamachar, "Kuwait Information: Health," n.d., <http://www.kuwaitssamachar.com/online/ksinfo/health.html>

Exchange 11: Is Dr. al-Fahad in, Sir?

Visitor:	Is Dr. al-Fahad in, Sir?	Taal 'umRik id-daktoR il-fahad mawjood?
Local:	No.	laa

The Ministry of Health regulates the pharmaceutical industry in Kuwait. Medications are regulated differently than in Western countries. Some over-the-counter medications require prescriptions in Kuwait, while some prescription medicines can be purchased over the counter. The Ministry of Health has banned some medications regularly prescribed in the West, such as tranquilizers, antidepressants, and various sleeping pills. Visitors and expatriate workers need a doctor's prescription to bring medications into the country. Kuwaiti pharmacists are not authorized to fill some foreign prescriptions.²¹²



© Mariam Alsaraji
Ministry of Health

Exchange 12: I have pain, Doctor. Can you help me?

Patient:	I have pain, Doctor. Can you help me?	yaa diktoR 'indee wija'. tigdaR tisaa'idnee?
Doctor:	Yes, I can help you.	ey, agdaR asaa'dich

Education*History of Education in Kuwait*

Before 1939, Kuwait had few schools. Mostly Quranic, they also taught basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. After 1939, the government took control of education and had established nearly 20 public schools by the end of World War II. Oil wealth enabled the government to expand education to the point where it became compulsory for all Kuwaiti citizens. Today, nearly 500,000 Kuwaiti citizens attend public schools and private schools in each of the six governorates. The school year is from September–June, and students attend Saturday–Wednesday from 7:45 a.m.–2 p.m.^{213, 214}



© Steve & Jemma Copley
Children in the classroom

²¹² KuwaitSamachar, "Kuwait Information: Health," n.d., <http://www.kuwaitsamachar.com/online/ksinfo/health.html>

²¹³ Embassy of the State of Kuwait, Australia-New Zealand, "Education," June 2009, <http://www.kuwaitemb-australia.com/education.html>

²¹⁴ Kuwait Info, "Education: Overview," n.d., http://www.kuwait-info.com/a_education/education_overview.asp

School Structure

Public and private schools have three levels, each lasting 4 years. Children begin elementary school at age 6. They attend intermediate school from ages 10–13. After intermediate school, education is no longer compulsory. But because of the importance Kuwaitis place on education, most children go to secondary school, which lasts from ages 14–17. Schools in Kuwait are segregated by gender beginning in elementary school. Segregation continues through university. Foreign-run private schools are coeducational.

The government fully funds public schools. It maintains modern facilities that offer a wealth of educational materials and technologies. The government created a program called “Education Net” that connects all public school libraries to telecommunications networks to help students and teachers stay current. Private schools are also funded by the government. It provides funds to meet such budget demands as the purchase of textbooks and property for schools facilities.^{215, 216, 217}

Exchange 13: Do your children go to school?

Official:	Do your children go to school?	yah-haalik yiRooHoon il-madRasa?
Local:	Yes.	ey

Special Circumstances

The Ministry of Education strives to foster an effective, safe learning environment. But violence by and against children is increasing in public schools. Nearly 30,000 cases of school violence have been registered. The ministry has set up a special center to help alleviate school violence and to provide aid to victims. It also provides aid to children with special needs. Special learning centers for these children abound, and many mainstream schools have special needs programs.^{218, 219}



© Steve & Jemma Copley
Kuwaiti classroom

Higher Education

Kuwait University was established in 1966. Kuwait’s only public university, it offers programs in medicine, business administration, engineering, and education. The state also operates the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, a 2-year college for technical and

²¹⁵ Embassy of the State of Kuwait, Australia-New Zealand, “Education,” June 2009, <http://www.kuwaitemb-australia.com/education.html>

²¹⁶ Kuwait Info, “Education: Overview,” n.d., http://www.kuwait-info.com/a_education/education_overview.asp

²¹⁷ Kuwait Cultural Office, “Today’s Education in Kuwait,” 2006, <http://www.kuwaitculture.com/About%20Us/today.htm>

²¹⁸ Habib Toumi, “Kuwait’s Education Ministry Takes Steps to Tackle School Violence,” *Gulf News*, 11 April 2011, <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwait-s-education-ministry-takes-steps-to-tackle-school-violence-1.790573>

²¹⁹ Explorer, “Kuwait: Special Needs Education,” 2010, <http://www.liveworkexplore.com/kuwait/residents/education/special-needs-education>

vocational training. Seven private universities operate in Kuwait. But many students use family wealth or government grants to study abroad, usually attending universities in the United States, Canada, Australia, or the United Kingdom.^{220, 221, 222}

Restaurants

Although it is common for Kuwaitis to eat traditional meals at home, they are dining out more and more. Kuwaiti cities offer global cuisines, a reflection of the huge foreign population. Kuwaiti social life revolves around food. Restaurants, diners, fast food places, coffee shops, and cafes abound for every class and represent more than 100 varieties of ethnic cuisine. Fast food is readily available, and most fast-food companies make home deliveries.^{223, 224}



© Dosio Dosev
A restaurant in Salmiya,
Kuwait

Exchange 14: Are you still serving breakfast?

Customer:	Are you still serving breakfast?	lil-Heen itsawoon il-fuTooR?
Waiter:	Yes.	ey

Dining is strongly influenced by Western culture. American, British, French, and Italian foods are common, along with a variety of South Asian and Arabic foods. Kuwaitis dine out more frequently on the weekends, and young people eat out more than older people do. Kuwaitis usually eat late in the evening. Turkish-style coffee is a favorite beverage, and alcohol is prohibited. Tipping is not practiced regularly, although a 15% service charge is added to restaurant bills in major hotels.^{225, 226, 227, 228}

²²⁰ Kuwait Info, "Education: Overview," n.d., http://www.kuwait-info.com/a_education/education_overview.asp

²²¹ Embassy of the State of Kuwait, Australia-New Zealand, "Education," June 2009, <http://www.kuwaitemb-australia.com/education.html>

²²² United Placement Services, "Kuwait Education Market," 2011, http://www.upskuwait.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=77&Itemid=94

²²³ Embassy of the State of Kuwait, Australia-New Zealand, "Education," June 2009, <http://www.kuwaitemb-australia.com/education.html>

²²⁴ Kuwait Info, "Education: Overview," n.d., http://www.kuwait-info.com/a_education/education_overview.asp

²²⁵ Embassy of the State of Kuwait, Australia-New Zealand, "Education," June 2009, <http://www.kuwaitemb-australia.com/education.html>

²²⁶ Kuwait Info, "Education: Overview," n.d., http://www.kuwait-info.com/a_education/education_overview.asp

²²⁷ Explorer, "Kuwait: Food & Drink," 2010, http://www.liveworkexplore.com/kuwait/general-information/culture_and_lifestyle/food_and_drink

²²⁸ Hasher.net, "Kuwait, Kuwait: Location Report for Kuwait: Dining Out," 21 June 2007, <http://www.hasher.net/Kuwait/kuwaitreport.htm>

Exchange 15: I would like coffee or tea.

Customer:	I would like coffee or tea.	abee gah-wa o chaay
Waiter:	Sure.	akeed

Marketplace and Vendors

The *suq* is the traditional marketplace in Kuwait. High-walled and meandering, *suqs* contain numerous stalls that sell necessities and luxury items, such as food, cosmetics, rugs, clothing, and cooking utensils. Traditionally near waterfronts—for ease of moving trade goods—*suqs* have in many places moved inland. Several have become specialized centers featuring fish, meat, spices, gold, and other sought-after goods.²²⁹

Exchange 16: Is the Souk nearby?

Visitor:	Is the Souk nearby?	as-soog jaReeb min ih-nee?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	ey, ih-naak 'ala al-yameen

Oil wealth has allowed Kuwaitis to expand and modernize the *suqs*, and many now have roofs and wind tunnels to combat high desert temperatures. Despite the development of shopping malls, *suqs* remain a feature of the urban landscape. Some, like the Sharq Market, have modernized. They include cinemas, restaurants, recreational activities, and boutique shops. The *suq* is as much a social venue as a place to shop. Contemporary Kuwaitis also shop at boutique shops and socialize in air-conditioned malls. Some malls pay homage to the *suq* by including *suq*-like areas that cater to tourists. Still, the *suq* remains a solid feature of Kuwaiti society.^{230, 231, 232}



© Mink / flickr.com
Food stop at a market

In modern shopping areas, bargaining is not acceptable. Prices are established, as in Western countries. But bargaining is expected in *suqs*. Because many *suqs* specialize in specific goods, shoppers can bargain among vendors to lower prices. To avoid insulting vendors, shoppers must bargain respectfully.^{233, 234}

²²⁹ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 68, 75–76, 90.

²³⁰ Lonely Planet, “Kuwait City: Sights: Old Souq,” 2011, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/kuwait/kuwait-city/sights/organic/old-souq>

²³¹ Sharq Market Waterfront, “About Us,” n.d., <http://www.souksharq.com/default.aspx?tabid=53>

²³² Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 68, 75–76, 90.

²³³ Kuwait Pocket Guide, “Living in Kuwait,” 2003, <http://www.kuwaitpocketguide.com/livinginkwt.asp>

²³⁴ Hasher.net, “Kuwait, Kuwait: Location Report for Kuwait: Shopping,” 21 June 2007, <http://www.hasher.net/Kuwait/kuwaitreport.htm>

Exchange 17: Do you have any more of these?

Buyer:	Do you have any more of these?	'indik ba'id?
Seller:	No.	laa

Urban Traffic and Transportation*Driving*

Kuwait is a wealthy country with a modern infrastructure, but driving in Kuwait poses severe risks. Accidents occur often on primary and secondary roads, and the fatality rate is high. Kuwaitis ignore traffic regulations with impunity, paying no heed to other drivers and traffic signals. Cellular phone use while driving is legal, distracting drivers even more on congested roads. Kuwaitis drive at excessively high speeds. Camels and other livestock along highways add to the dangers. It is illegal to move a vehicle that has been in an accident until the police arrive and write a report. Non-Kuwaiti drivers must be aware that Kuwaitis receive preferential treatment from police.^{235, 236, 237}



© Nibaq / flickr.com
Car accidents are common

Exchange 18: Is there a gas station nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a gas station nearby?	fee maHaTat banzeen jaReeba?
Local:	Yes.	ey

Public Transportation

The Kuwait Public Transportation Company (KPTC) is government-owned and has 50 bus routes in Kuwait City. Mostly used by expatriate workers, KPTC provides inexpensive transportation to most places in the city.²³⁸ It also operates a fleet of private buses used by government and private industry to transport people countrywide. KPTC provides private-tour

²³⁵ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Kuwait: Country Specific Information," 10 June 2010,

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_944.html#traffic_safety

²³⁶ Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Kuwait 2010 Crime & Safety Report," 1 March 2010,

<https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=9044>

²³⁷ Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, "Travel Report: Kuwait," 31 August 2011, http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/report_rapport-eng.asp?id=155000

²³⁸ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Kuwait: Country Specific Information," 10 June 2010,

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_944.html#traffic_safety

transportation on its fleet of ferryboats that service Faylakah and other Kuwaiti islands.²³⁹ Public transportation is generally safe. Bus drivers and passengers have only occasionally been assaulted, but these incidents are increasing.^{240, 241}

Exchange 19: Will the bus be here soon?

Visitor:	Will the bus be here soon?	il-baaS jaay ba'd shway?
Local:	Yes.	ey

Taxis are readily available in Kuwait. All major hotels have taxi stations, and taxi companies offer pick-up services, but customers should call well in advance. It can be dangerous, especially for unaccompanied women, to hail taxis from the road because not all taxi companies are reputable. Taxis are metered, although drivers prefer to negotiate rates. Passengers should negotiate rates before leaving for a destination.^{242, 243, 244}



© Mink / flickr.com
Kuwaiti traffic jam

Exchange 20: Can you take me there?

Visitor:	Can you take me there?	tigdaR tiwaSilnee ih-naak?
Local:	Yes, I can.	ey, adgaR

Females and Transportation

Female drivers and travelers should exercise caution. Male drivers often try to force lone female drivers off the road to ask for dates or telephone numbers. Some men intimidate women into complying by telling them they are police officers or military officials. These instances have been on the rise. Police can cite traffic violations while in civilian clothing in their own vehicles. They are required to present identification—written in Arabic and English—upon request.

²³⁹ Kuwait Public Transport Company, “Services,” 2010, <http://www.kptc.com.kw/newenglish/services.html>

²⁴⁰ Khaled Aljenfawi, “Tackle ‘Violence’ on Kuwait Buses: More Firms Should Open Up,” *Arab Times*, 11 October 2011, <http://www.arabtimesonline.com/NewsDetails/tabid/96/smld/414/ArticleID/169572/reftab/69/Default.aspx>

²⁴¹ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Kuwait: Country Specific Information,” 10 June 2010, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_944.html#traffic_safety

²⁴² Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Kuwait: Country Specific Information,” 10 June 2010, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_944.html#traffic_safety

²⁴³ Smarttraveller, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “Travel Advice: Kuwait,” 3 October 2011, <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Kuwait>

²⁴⁴ British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Kuwait,” 29 September 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/middle-east-north-africa/kuwait>

Females are discouraged from driving alone. If they do, they should exercise extreme caution and carry cellular phones to contact family or friends if someone claiming to be the police stops them. Unaccompanied females should not hail taxis, especially after dark. They should use reputable taxi services or travel with another person to reduce the risk of harassment or assault. When traveling by bus, women should be aware of their surroundings. They should always leave an itinerary with a friend or family member and carry a cellular phone.^{245, 246, 247}

Crime, Unrest, and Terrorism

Violent Crime

Crime in Kuwait is generally low. Each district in each governorate maintains a full police station. Police presence is high in cities, with both uniformed police and officers in civilian attire patrolling the streets.²⁴⁸ Violent crimes still occur from time to time. The highest rates occur in urban districts that house foreign manual laborers. Security reports identify the Jahra district as particularly dangerous. Because of reports of firearms use, this district is off-limits to U.S. Embassy personnel.

The town of Jaleeb al-Shuyukh, near Kuwait

International Airport, has large numbers of South Asian, Syrian, and Egyptian laborers who have rioted in recent years.^{249, 250}



© miskan / flickr.com
Security forces investigate a crime scene

²⁴⁵ British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Kuwait,” 29 September 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/middle-east-north-africa/kuwait>

²⁴⁶ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Kuwait: Country Specific Information,” 10 June 2010, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_944.html#traffic_safety

²⁴⁷ Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, “Kuwait 2010 Crime & Safety Report,” 1 March 2010, <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=9044>

²⁴⁸ Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, “Kuwait 2010 Crime & Safety Report,” 1 March 2010, <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=9044>

²⁴⁹ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Kuwait: Country Specific Information,” 10 June 2010, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_944.html#traffic_safety

²⁵⁰ British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Kuwait,” 29 September 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/middle-east-north-africa/kuwait>

Petty, Residential, and Property Crime

Petty, residential, and property crime is low in Kuwait, but instances occur occasionally. Foreign residents and visitors should take the same precautions they would at home: lock doors in residences or at hotels, keep valuables locked away, and not leave valuables in plain sight in locked vehicles. While shopping in public areas and *souqs*, be aware of suspicious individuals and keep money, valuables, and identification hidden from view.²⁵¹

Women

Women should exercise particular vigilance in Kuwait. Western women are frequently subjected to verbal and physical harassment on the streets. Women should avoid walking alone, especially at night. According to security reports, since 2007 three Australian women have reported attempted sexual assaults in Kuwait City. Western women have also reported sexual assaults by men posing as police officers.^{252, 253}

Demonstrations

Ethnic, political, religious, and socioeconomic groups frequently stage public demonstrations in Kuwait. Non-Kuwaitis—especially Westerners—should avoid public demonstrations at all costs. They can turn violent without warning, and demonstrators may target Westerners. Security forces may quell demonstrations violently, inadvertently including Westerners. In addition, there is the risk of being detained for taking part in an anti-government demonstration.^{254, 255}



© iDip / flickr.com
Demonstration

Terrorism

Terrorism is the greatest threat to U.S. citizens and other Westerners. Officials receive frequent threats from terrorist groups warning of planned attacks against American and Western interests in Kuwait. Because of heightened security for government and military institutions—which are also highly threatened—terrorists focus on “soft targets.” According to Western government sources, potential targets for such attacks are residential areas and apartment complexes, shopping areas, tourist attractions, buildings of worship, public transportation, and schools.

²⁵¹ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Kuwait: Country Specific Information,” 10 June 2010,

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_944.html#traffic_safety

²⁵² Smarttraveller, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “Travel Advice: Kuwait,” 3 October 2011, <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Kuwait>

²⁵³ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Kuwait: Country Specific Information,” 10 June 2010,

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_944.html#traffic_safety

²⁵⁴ Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, “Travel Report: Kuwait,” 31 August 2011, http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/report_rapport-eng.asp?id=155000

²⁵⁵ Smarttraveller, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “Travel Advice: Kuwait,” 3 October 2011, <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Kuwait>

Vigilance is required to avoid possible kidnapping, bombing, hijacking, hostage-taking, or assassination.^{256, 257, 258, 259}

²⁵⁶ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Kuwait: Country Specific Information,” 10 June 2010,

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_944.html#traffic_safety

²⁵⁷ Smarttraveller, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “Travel Advice: Kuwait,” 3 October 2011, <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Kuwait>

²⁵⁸ Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, “Travel Report: Kuwait,” 31 August 2011, http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/report_rapport-eng.asp?id=155000

²⁵⁹ British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Kuwait,” 29 September 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/middle-east-north-africa/kuwait>

Chapter 4 Assessment

1. Kuwait sponsored many foreign workers to help build its oil infrastructure.

True

Kuwaitis are a minority in their country. Around 60% of Kuwait's labor force is foreign.

2. Despite its wealth and well-developed infrastructure, conditions for immigrant workers can be grim.

True

Congested, impoverished areas for foreign workers suffer from crime.

3. Kuwait has a poorly developed healthcare system.

False

The healthcare system in Kuwait is among the best in the Gulf region, and all those with citizenship have access to healthcare services.

4. Food for dining out in Kuwait has strong Western influences.

True

American, British, French, and Italian foods are common, along with a wide variety of South Asian and Arabic foods.

5. Driving in Kuwait is safe.

False

Driving in Kuwait poses severe risks. Accidents on both primary and secondary roads happen often, and the fatality rate is high.

CHAPTER 5: RURAL LIFE

Introduction

Only 2% of Kuwait's population is rural, approximately 45,000 people.^{260, 261} Since independence in 1961, the government has developed the oil infrastructure, bypassing other economic endeavors. Rural development is on an extremely small scale. The harsh desert climate limits agriculture. Animal husbandry has made minor, albeit negligible, advances. Rural life is fast disappearing as people seek opportunities in modern, urban Kuwait. Even nomadic Bedouin have migrated to urban areas, abandoning their traditional way of life to exploit educational and professional opportunities for their children.



© Aziz J Hayat
Camels in rural Kuwait

Land Distribution and Ownership

The Kuwaiti government owns about 90% of the land. The largest landowner in Kuwait, the ruling al-Sabah family, privately holds 607,000 hectares (1.5 million acres). Inheritance, based on shari'a law, ensures that the property will remain in the ruling family.^{262, 263}

Shari'a law encourages private ownership as long as the owner and society benefit from the holdings.²⁶⁴

The al-Sabah family and the government act as stewards of the land, through which the nation has prospered. Oil wealth allows the government to dispense income to all Kuwaiti citizens, effectively creating a welfare state.²⁶⁵



© Ken Doerr
Government development

²⁶⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, "Kuwait: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 18 October 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

²⁶¹ The World Bank, "Kuwait: Rural Population," 2011,

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL/countries/KW?display=graph>

²⁶² Oxford Business Group, "Outside Looking In: Market Stability May Depend on Foreign Investment," in *The Report: Kuwait 2008*, 2008, 147.

²⁶³ Kevin Cahill and Rob McMahon, *Who Owns the World: The Surprising Truth About Every Piece of Land on the Planet* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2010).

²⁶⁴ International Business Publications, *Land Ownership and Agricultural Laws Handbook*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: International Business Publications, USA, 2011), 32.

²⁶⁵ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 31–32, 62–69.

Exchange 21: Do you own this land?

Official:	Do you own this land?	haaThee aRDik?
Local:	Yes.	ey

Rural Economy

Agriculture makes up a small portion of the rural economy. Only 0.84% of the land is arable, with 0.17% maintaining permanent crops. Few people remain in rural areas because of the harsh conditions and lack of modern amenities. Only 10,000 people worked in agriculture in the late 1980s. Agricultural production halted from 1990–1991 because of the Iraqi invasion. The devastation brought on by the war has been rehabilitated in Wafra in the south and Abdali in the north, where agricultural production has resumed.^{266, 267}

The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research has developed programs to increase agricultural production and to introduce sustainable agriculture. Utilizing greenhouses and hydroponic technology, researchers and agriculturalists hope to provide more high-quality food and diversify the economic base.^{268, 269} Tomatoes and cucumbers constitute about 90% of all food production. Dried onions, dates, melons, and eggplants make up the remainder.²⁷⁰ But agriculture will never be a major industry because of harsh conditions. Kuwait imports about 98% of its food products.²⁷¹



© James Sullivan
Rural camel herder

²⁶⁶ Jill Crystal, "Chapter 2: Kuwait: Economy: Agriculture and Fishing," in *Persian Gulf States: Country Studies*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field%28DOCID+kw0033%29>

²⁶⁷ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Agriculture and Fishing," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/325644/Kuwait/45149/Agriculture-and-fishing>

²⁶⁸ Afaf Y. al-Nasser and N.R. Bhat, "Protected Agriculture in the State of Kuwait," in *Protected Agriculture in the Arabian Peninsula*, eds. Ahmed T. Moustafa et al. (Dubai, UAE: Arabian Peninsula Regional Program, International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas, 2002), 17–23, http://www.icarda.cgiar.org/aprp/PDF/PAinAp_Kuwait.pdf

²⁶⁹ Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, "Food Resources & Marine Sciences," 2008, <http://www.kisr.edu.kw/Default.aspx?pageId=491>

²⁷⁰ Jill Crystal, "Chapter 2: Kuwait: Economy: Agriculture and Fishing," in *Persian Gulf States: Country Studies*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field%28DOCID+kw0033%29>

²⁷¹ Embassy of the State of Kuwait, Australia-New Zealand, "Import and Export: Export Subsidies Policies," n.d., <http://www.kuwaitemb-australia.com/importexport.html>

Exchange 22: What crops do you grow?

Official:	What crops do you grow?	ish-tizRa'oon?
Local:	I grow Tomatoes.	TamaaT

Because most of the rural population is Bedouin, herding plays a major role in the rural economy. Herders are divided into two groups. Camel herders hold high status: camels symbolize wealth and Bedouin mobility and strength. Camel herders travel long distances to find grazing land and water for their herds. Shepherd and goatherds are less prestigious; their animals remain localized. Camels are used for transportation, but their main use is for food and byproducts. Kuwaitis drink camel milk and make cheese products from it. Camels are usually only slaughtered for meat on special occasions. Their hair and skin is used for clothing and tents. Men, who are responsible for herding, teach their sons to live and herd in the desert. Not all herders are Bedouin. Unskilled laborers from South Asia care for the camel herds of wealthy Kuwaitis.^{272, 273, 274, 275} During the 7-month Iraqi occupation, more than 80% of the livestock in Kuwait died of various causes. The government operates livestock reinstatement programs in the governorates of Ahmadi and Jahra. Although sheep, cattle, and goat populations exceed pre-invasion levels, camel populations have not rebounded successfully.²⁷⁶

Rural Transportation

Kuwait's rural road system is modern and well maintained, although the number of roadways is limited. Some roads stretch from Kuwait City and its suburbs to remote areas where oil operations are located. Other roads, such as Atrah Road (Highway 70) and King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz Road (Highway 40), provide direct access to Saudi Arabia. Jahra Road (Highway 80) swings north to link with Iraq. Secondary roads or unimproved dirt roads access other locations in



© Austin King
Main road in Camp Boehring

²⁷² R. Yagil, "Chapter VI: Camel Products Other Than Milk," in *Camels and Camel Milk* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization, UN, 1982),

<http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/003/X6528E/X6528E06.htm#chVI>

²⁷³ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Bedouin," 2011,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/58173/Bedouin>

²⁷⁴ Every Culture, "Bedu: Employment," 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Rwanda-to-Syria/Bedu.html>

²⁷⁵ Tony Perry, "Securing the 'No-Camel' Zone," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 February 2003,

<http://articles.latimes.com/2003/feb/13/world/fg-camels13>

²⁷⁶ David Bourn, *Livestock Dynamics in the Arabian Peninsula*, Environmental Research Group Oxford, January 2003,

<http://ergodd.zoo.ox.ac.uk/download/reports/Livestock%20Dynamics%20in%20the%20Arabian%20Peninsula.pdf>

rural Kuwait.^{277, 278} The Kuwait Public Transport Company (KPTC) operates full-service bus lines in all the governorates. Routes are concentrated in urban areas, but service to different regions of the country is available through domestic transport leasing services. Some herders still ride camels to watering and grazing locations. Those who can afford it use off-road vehicles to bring their herds to water.²⁷⁹

Healthcare

Because Kuwait is 98% urban, a rural-urban healthcare gap does not exist.^{280, 281} All Kuwaitis have access to local healthcare, although figures only represent Kuwaiti citizens.²⁸² Kuwait is home to an estimated 80,000–120,000 Bidoon, residents who do not hold Kuwaiti citizenship. Ineligible to receive government benefits, the Bidoon are not figured into vital statistics.²⁸³ Kuwait has one of the best medical systems in the Gulf region. The Ministry of Health applies stringent regulations to maintain a high level of care. Herbal medicines are strictly regulated and sold at pharmacies as over-the-counter medications or herbal-dietary supplements. Although these folk remedies are readily available, Kuwait prohibits the practice of traditional (herbal) medicine.^{284, 285}



© Ahmed Al-Hilali
Cities have better healthcare

²⁷⁷ National Geographic Education, “MapMaker Interactive: Kuwait,” 2011, <http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/mapping/interactive-map/>

²⁷⁸ Michael Russell Rip and James M. Hasik, *The Precision Revolution: GPS and the Future of Aerial Warfare* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2002), 126–31.

²⁷⁹ Tony Perry, “Securing the ‘No-Camel’ Zone,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 February 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/feb/13/world/fg-camels13>

²⁸⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, “Kuwait: People and Society,” in *The World Factbook*, 18 October 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

²⁸¹ World Health Organization, Eastern Mediterranean Regional Health Systems Observatory, *Health System Profile: Kuwait*, 2006, <http://gis.emro.who.int/HealthSystemObservatory/PDF/Kuwait/Full%20Profile.pdf>

²⁸² World Health Organization, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, “Country Profiles: Kuwait,” 2010, <http://www.emro.who.int/emrinfo/index.aspx?Ctry=kuw>

²⁸³ Marc Sorel, “Statelessness in Kuwait: Kuwait’s Bidoon,” *Foreign Policy Digest*, 1 June 2010, <http://www.foreignpolicydigest.org/2010/06/01/statelessness-in-kuwait-kuwaits-bidoon/>

²⁸⁴ World Health Organization, “Kuwait,” in *Legal Status of Traditional Medicine and Complementary/Alternative Medicine: A Worldwide Review*, 2001, 77–78, <http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/pdf/h2943e/h2943e.pdf>

²⁸⁵ World Health Organization, *National Policy on Traditional Medicine and Regulation of Herbal Medicines*, May 2005, <http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/pdf/s7916e/s7916e.pdf>

Exchange 23: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Official:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	fee mustawSaf gaReeb?
Local:	Yes, over there.	ey, ih-naak

Exchange 24: Do you know what is wrong?

Local:	Do you know what is wrong?	tadRoosh feek?
Visitor:	No.	laa

Large-scale immunization programs have greatly reduced cases of major communicable diseases. Infrequent instances of measles, mumps, rubella, and whooping cough are documented each year.²⁸⁶ Travelers to rural areas in Kuwait are susceptible to hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and typhoid. Immunization is recommended as a precaution.²⁸⁷

Education

The Kuwaiti constitution stipulates free, compulsory education for all citizens. According to the constitution, education is a right for all citizens, with the goals of eliminating illiteracy and attending to the physical, moral, and mental development of youth.²⁸⁸ Children must attend school from the ages of 6–14. Failure to send one's children to school is a criminal offense punishable by fines or incarceration. The government subsidizes private schools for immigrant children. These subsidies provide land for facilities, textbooks, and operating funds. Private schools are not free; parents must pay tuition. Private schools are sponsored by foreign countries, and the curriculum typically conforms to that of the sponsoring country.²⁸⁹



© Steve & Jemma Copley
Classroom

Exchange 25: Is there a school nearby?

Official:	Is there a school nearby?	fee madRasa gaReeba?
Local:	Yes.	ey

²⁸⁶ World Health Organization, "Immunization Profile: Kuwait," 3 October 2011, http://apps.who.int/immunization_monitoring/en/globalsummary/countryprofileresult.cfm?C=kw

²⁸⁷ Direct Travel Insurance, "Kuwait," 2011, <http://www.direct-travel.co.uk/kuwait/health-information.aspx>

²⁸⁸ Kuwaiti Diwan of His Highness the Prime Minister, "The Kuwaiti Constitution: Article 40," 2011, <http://www.pm.gov.kw/constitution.asp>

²⁸⁹ Amer Alsaleh, "Kuwait," in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Children's Issues Worldwide: North Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 4, eds. Irving Epstein and Ghada Hashem Talhami (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 110.

The constitution delineates the rights of Kuwaiti citizens, but excludes the Bidoon. Although many Bidoon can trace generations of residency in Kuwait, they are denied citizenship and many rights afforded citizens, including public education. The Bidoon hold a unique place in Kuwaiti society. They are not immigrant workers with visas that provide legal status, nor are they Kuwaiti citizens. They are stateless, undocumented people who are allowed to remain in Kuwait. Poverty in Bidoon communities is high, so most Bidoon cannot send their children to private schools. Even if they could, the government pressures private schools to reject children without residency permits. The Bidoon cannot seek education abroad because they are denied passports.²⁹⁰

Village Life

A leader called a sheikh governs a village. Chosen from among family groups in the village, the sheikh governs alongside other prominent villagers, ruling by consensus rather than independently.^{291, 292}

Tribes are made up of subtribes—collections of extended families who share a common patrilineal head going back at least five generations. Blood ties are crucial to tribal life and influence the lives of all Kuwaitis. For rural people, loyalty begins with the family and then extends outward to the tribe.^{293, 294}



© miskal / flickr.com
Bedouin man

Exchange 26: Does your Sheik live here?

Official:	Does your Sheik live here?	shayKh-kum saakin ih-nee?
Local:	Yes.	ey

For example, marriages are arranged between members of tribes with similar social status and power. Even in national politics, tribal status holds great sway. The tribes of the merchant classes, because they have higher status, outmaneuver members of the more numerous outer Bedouin tribes.^{295, 296} The merchant classes have monopolized government, filling positions with

²⁹⁰ Aziz Abu-Hamad, *The Bedoons of Kuwait: "Citizens without Citizenship"* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), 20.

²⁹¹ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 49–50.

²⁹² Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 50–52.

²⁹³ Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 50–52.

²⁹⁴ Shafeeq Ghabra, "Kuwait and the Dynamics of Socio-Economic Change," in *Crises in the Contemporary Persian Gulf*, ed. Barry Rubin (New York: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), 115.

²⁹⁵ Shafeeq Ghabra, "Kuwait and the Dynamics of Socio-Economic Change," in *Crises in the Contemporary Persian Gulf*, ed. Barry Rubin (New York: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), 115–19.

members of their families and tribes. The emir—a member of the ruling merchant class—has the constitutional authority to suspend the National Assembly whenever his power is threatened.^{297,}
298

Exchange 27: Will you take me to your Sheik?

Official:	Will you take me to your Sheik?	mumkin taaKhiThnee lish-shayKh?
Local:	Yes.	akeed

Exchange 28: Respected Sheik we need your help.

Official:	Respected Sheik, we need your help / advice / opinion.	Taal 'umRik shayKh, iHna muHtaajeen misaa'ad-tik wa-naSeeHtik wa-Raayik
Local leader:	Okay.	tamaam

Border Crossings and Checkpoints

Kuwait shares land borders with Iraq to the north and west and Saudi Arabia to the south. It abuts the Persian Gulf to the east. Numerous border crossings exist between Kuwait and Iraq. Because of instability in Iraq, these crossings are militarily controlled. Tourists are forbidden to cross at these checkpoints. Only authorized personnel with appropriate permission and documentation may cross.



© DoD Image
A border crossing in Kuwait

Exchange 29: Show us the car registration.

Guard:	Show us the car registration.	Khalee nshoof daftaR as-sayaaRa
Driver:	Okay.	SaaR

The best-known border crossing is the Abdali-Safwan crossing. Located at Abdali in north-central Kuwait, it provides access to Safwan, Iraq, and the Rumaila oil fields.^{299, 300, 301}

²⁹⁶ Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 50–52.

²⁹⁷ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Kuwait,” 7 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35876.htm>

²⁹⁸ Debra A. Miller, *Kuwait* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 32–37.

²⁹⁹ Lonely Planet, “Kuwait: Getting There & Away,” 2011, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/kuwait/transport/getting-there-away>

³⁰⁰ Iraq Business News, “Kuwait Gives Initial Approval for Oil Border Crossing,” 20 July 2010, <http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/2010/07/20/kuwait-gives-initial-approval-for-oil-border-crossing/>

³⁰¹ Global Security, “Camp Navistar,” 2011, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/camp-navistar.htm>

Exchange 30: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Official:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	wayn agRab nuqTat taftesh?
Local:	Two kilometers from here.	keelomitRayn min huna

The al-Salmi border crossing in the southwestern corner of the country links Kuwait to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Located on the al-Salmi road, this checkpoint and customs station allows two-way access to the interiors of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and is in proximity to southeastern Iraq.^{302, 303, 304}

Exchange 31: Is this all the ID you have?

Guard:	Is this all the ID you have?	haaTha il-ithbaat ilee tabee?
Driver:	Yes.	ey

Al-Nuwaysib border crossing lies on Highway 40 in the extreme southeastern corner of the country. A direct route to Dammam, Saudi Arabia, this border crossing and police post is heavily used.³⁰⁵

Exchange 32: Are you carrying any guns?

Guard:	Are you carrying any guns?	ma'aak islaaH?
Driver:	No.	laa

Sea travel is common in Kuwait. Kuwait Public Transport Company (KPTC) and other transportation companies offer ferry and speedboat service to Kuwaiti islands, Iran, and Bahrain.³⁰⁶ Kuwait's maritime boundaries are disputed in the north around Bubiyan and Warbah Islands. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are negotiating a maritime boundary with Iran. Inspections of vessels in the Gulf are common because of a lack of demarcation. Maritime travelers should exercise extreme



© Nibaq / flickr.com
the Kuwait - Saudi border

³⁰² Scott Bernard Nelson, *Boston Globe*, "Arab Troops in Place to Protect Kuwaitis," SunSentinel.com, 5 March 2003, http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2003-03-05/news/0303050207_1_kuwait-city-border-troops

³⁰³ Geographical Names, "Al-Salmi Border: Kuwait," 2010, http://geographic.org/geographic_names/name.php?uni=-1137891&fid=3570&c=kuwait

³⁰⁴ Munaif Nayef, Nawaf al-Hamlan, and Shebli al-Rashed, "Assault Rifles, Sniper Gun, Bullets Found with Man at al-Salmi Border," *Arab Times*, 25 October 2011, <http://www.arabtimesonline.com/NewsDetails/tabid/96/smld/414/ArticleID/144748/t/Assault-rifles,-sniper-gun,-bullets-found-with-man-at-Al-Salmi-border/Default.aspx>

³⁰⁵ Lonely Planet, "Kuwait: Getting There & Away," 2011, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/kuwait/transport/getting-there-away>

³⁰⁶ Kuwait Public Transport Company, "Marina Services," 2010, <http://www.kptc.com.kw/newenglish/marina.html>

caution in Gulf waters.^{307, 308} Points of entry for vessels are the ports at Doha, Shuwaikh, Mina al-Shuaiba, Kuwait City, Mina al-Abdullah, Mina al-Ahmadi, and al-Zour.^{309, 310, 311}

Land Mines

Land mines and cluster munitions were placed in urban, desert, and coastal areas of Kuwait during the 1990–1991 Gulf War. Foreign contractors conducted widespread clearance operations, but mines are still found in rural areas, mainly in the north near the border with Iraq. Submunitions and explosive remnants of war (ERWs) are found periodically. Discoveries occurred in 2010 south of Kuwait City and in 2011 in the north near Iraq.³¹²

Exchange 33: Is this area mined?

Visitor:	Is this area mined?	fee alghaam bil-manTaqa haaThee?
Local:	No.	laa

Since 2007 Kuwait has been party to the Mine Ban Treaty, but has not acceded to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. In 2008 Kuwaiti officials reported a stockpile of nearly 100,000 antipersonnel mines. Although they claim to have destroyed the stockpile, their report contains conflicting information and gaps. Kuwait neither produces nor exports antipersonnel mines. The Ministry of Defense delegates demining through the Engineering Corps of the Land Forces and the Ministry of the Interior.³¹³



© DoD Image / Kathryn Whittenberger
Ordnance removal

³⁰⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, “Kuwait,” in *The World Factbook*, 18 October 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>

³⁰⁸ United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Travel & Living Abroad: Kuwait,” 29 September 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/middle-east-north-africa/kuwait>

³⁰⁹ Kuwait Ports Authority, “About KPA,” 2006, <http://www.kpa.gov.kw/NR/exeres/4F69AF5A-A835-46BF-8475-F5282348AB1C.htm>

³¹⁰ Global Security, “Mina Al Ahmadi, Kuwait,” 2011, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/mina-al-ahmadi.htm>

³¹¹ International Shipping Agency, “Kuwait Information,” 2007, <http://www.isakwi.com/kwtinfo.html>

³¹² Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, “Kuwait: Mine Ban Policy,” 19 June 2010, http://www.the-monitor.org/custom/index.php/region_profiles/print_profile/303#_ftnref2

³¹³ Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, “Kuwait: Mine Ban Policy,” 19 June 2010, http://www.the-monitor.org/custom/index.php/region_profiles/print_profile/303#_ftnref2

Chapter 5 Assessment

1. Kuwait has a large rural population.

False

Only 2% of Kuwait's population is rural, a total of approximately 45,000 people.

2. Agriculture makes up a large portion of Kuwait's economy.

False

Agricultural production makes up a small portion of the rural economy. Only 0.84% of land is arable, with 0.17% maintaining permanent crops.

3. Kuwait is home to many stateless people.

True

Called the Bidoon, they are ineligible to receive benefits from the government and are not figured into vital statistics.

4. Rural healthcare is inferior in Kuwait.

False

Because Kuwait is 98% urban, no rural-urban healthcare gap exists. A full 100% of Kuwaitis have access to local healthcare, although that applies only to Kuwaiti citizens.

5. Village leaders rule alongside other influential members of the community.

True

Villages are governed by a leader called a sheikh, who governs alongside other prominent members of the village, ruling by consensus rather than independently.

CHAPTER 6: FAMILY LIFE

Typical Household and Family Structure

Family is the center of Kuwaiti life and the foundation of society.³¹⁴ Joint families—in which family members from three or more generations live in one home—have traditionally been the norm. Families are patriarchal, and the husband or oldest male in the home sets the rules, maintains order, disciplines children, and makes decisions concerning the family.³¹⁵



© Najwa Marafie
Children prepare for celebration

Exchange 34: How many people live in this house?

Official:	How many people live in this house?	kam nafaR 'indakum fee il-bayt?
Local:	10.	'ashaRa

Modernization has changed family structure over the past few decades. Although joint families are still the norm, nuclear families are on the rise. In the past, a young woman moved into her husband's home, living with him and his family. Today, some young people start families on their own, although they often stay in proximity to their families.^{316, 317}

Exchange 35: Are these people part of your family?

Official:	Are these people part of your family?	haTheylee min ah-lak?
Local:	Yes.	ey

Male-Female Interactions in the Family

Islamic law prevails in Kuwait and dictates how males and females interact in the family. Husbands are head of the family, and women must submit to their authority. But submission is not absolute. For example, men cannot forbid their wives from working outside the home, unless

³¹⁴ Solomon A. Isiorho, *Modern World Nations: Kuwait* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 60.

³¹⁵ Fawzyiah Hadi and Ghenaïm al-Fayez, "Islamic Arabic Youth and Family Development: An Example from Kuwait," in *Handbook of Applied Developmental Science: Promoting Positive Youth and Family Development: Community Systems, Citizenship, and Civil Society*, vol. 3, eds. Richard M. Lerner, Francine Jacobs, and Donald Wertlieb (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 457–65.

³¹⁶ Fahad al-Naser, "Kuwait's Families," in *Handbook of World Families*, eds. Bert N. Adams and Jan Trost (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 512–16.

³¹⁷ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 111.

the work impacts the family negatively. Yet married women must have their husbands' permission to obtain a passport. Young, unmarried women must obtain permission from male family members or guardians to marry, travel abroad, and socialize after dark. Husbands are required by law to support their wives and families.^{318, 319}

Gender segregation takes place in the home. Women have their own quarters where they entertain female guests. The only males allowed in these areas are husbands and sons. Men also have their own quarters, which women are forbidden to access.³²⁰

Status of Elders and Adolescents

Elders

Elders are highly respected in Kuwait. Kuwaitis revere them as tradition bearers, and they hold substantial power and prestige in society. Elders participate in the lives of their families and communities in many ways. In traditional families, they make many familial decisions. They research prospective mates for their children and grandchildren and arrange marriages. In tribal settings, they determine political leaders. Because of their importance in society, elders often hold unquestioned authority.^{321, 322}

Adolescents

In Kuwait, adolescence lasts from approximately 11–20 years of age. Parents and society are concerned with preparing young people for adulthood by teaching appropriate gender roles. Boys and girls are mostly segregated. Boys learn mental toughness and decision-making while girls are taught domestic skills and tenderness. Kuwaiti families strictly monitor girls' behavior and interactions, but boys are given



© Mink / flickr.com
Man and woman walking



© Khalid Almasoud
Young Kuwaiti man

³¹⁸ Freedom House, "Kuwait: Autonomy, Security, and Freedom of the Person," n.d., <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=175>

³¹⁹ Development Centre, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Kuwait," 3 April 2009, <http://genderindex.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/KWT.pdf>

³²⁰ Richard F. Nyrop et al., *Area Handbook for the Persian Gulf States* (Rockville, MD: Wildside Press, 2008), 70.

³²¹ U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, "TRADOC DCSINT Handbook no. 2: Arab Cultural Awareness: 58 Factsheets," January 2006, <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/army/arabculture.pdf>

³²² Hussain al-Qatari, *Kuwait Times*, "The Invisible Problem of Child Molestation in Kuwait," Q8NRI, 9 July 2011, <http://www.q8nri.com/home/2011/07/09/the-invisible-problem-of-child-molestation-in-kuwait/>

more liberty to socialize without supervision.³²³

Married Life, Birth, Divorce

Married Life

Since marriage has traditionally been a social contract between families, Kuwaitis prefer endogamous unions, or marriage within one's group or tribe. This helps girls—who are required to live with their husbands' families—feel more secure being away from their own homes. In addition, the bride price (*mahr*) remains with interconnected families. Traditional marriages are arranged. Family members closely scrutinize the potential spouse's family and history. Elder male relatives make the final decision on mate pairing.^{324, 325, 326}

Islam also plays a role in the married life of Kuwaitis. Islam teaches that the family is the basis for the betterment of society. Husbands must follow the Prophet's example by helping their wives with domestic duties. Woman's proper role is homemaker and child caretaker, even though women have the freedom to work outside the home. Parents spend quality time with their children. They play with them in the home and instill morality. Islam instructs parents to treat their children equally to alleviate sibling rivalries and enmity.

The Kuwaiti home is a private entity designed to foster peace and tranquility.³²⁷



© Mink / flickr.com
Couple out for a walk

Contemporary Kuwaitis retain traditional marriage, but other forms of marriage are on the rise. Some young Kuwaitis prefer to choose their own mates, although they still consult their families about their choices. Young people view love matches as preferable to arranged matches. And because many young Kuwaiti men study abroad, marriages to foreigners are increasing. A Kuwaiti man can transfer his citizenship to his wife and children. Young women are strongly

³²³ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, ed., *International Encyclopedia of Adolescence*, vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 2007), 563.

³²⁴ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 121–23.

³²⁵ Fahad al-Naser, "Kuwait's Families," in *Handbook of World Families*, eds. Bert N. Adams and Jan Trost (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 516–21.

³²⁶ Richard F. Nyrop et al., *Area Handbook for the Persian Gulf States* (Rockville, MD: Wildside Press, 2008), 69–70.

³²⁷ Fawzyiah Hadi and Ghenaim al-Fayez, "Islamic Arabic Youth and Family Development: An Example from Kuwait," in *Handbook of Applied Developmental Science: Promoting Positive Youth and Family Development: Community Systems, Citizenship, and Civil Society*, vol. 3, eds. Richard M. Lerner, Francine Jacobs, and Donald Wertlieb (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 457–63.

discouraged from marrying non-Kuwaitis. They must have family permission to marry, and they cannot transfer their citizenship to their non-Kuwaiti husbands or children.^{328, 329}

Birth

Kuwaitis fervently celebrate the birth of a child, especially if the child is a boy. Celebrations begin as soon as the father learns of the birth. Men do not attend the birth because of rules of female modesty.³³⁰ Often, an animal is slaughtered and special meals are prepared. Gifts are given to the mother and child. According to an old Kuwaiti belief, the mother and child are susceptible to evil spirits after birth. Amulets are given to them for protection.³³¹

On the seventh day after birth, parents name their children. The names of Muslim saints are popular as well as names that suggest traits parents wish for their children. Sometimes parents give a male child a female name. This is usually because the parents lost a male child; the female name wards off evil spirits that may want to take the infant.³³²

Kuwaitis circumcise their male children. Circumcision was traditionally performed by the local barber when the boy was between the ages 2 to 14. Many Kuwaitis now have their children circumcised by medical professionals in hospitals within a few days of birth. Kuwaitis do not circumcise female children. But the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) occurs in Kuwait in some immigrant communities.^{333, 334}



© Steve & Jemma Copley
A newborn at rest

³²⁸ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 121–23.

³²⁹ Fahad al-Naser, “Kuwait’s Families,” in *Handbook of World Families*, eds. Bert N. Adams and Jan Trost (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 516–21.

³³⁰ Adnan Hammad et al., “Guide to Arab Culture: Health Care Delivery to Arab American Community,” ACCESS, April 1999, http://www.accesscommunity.org/site/DocServer/health_and_research_cente_21.pdf?docID=381

³³¹ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 33–34.

³³² Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 33–34.

³³³ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 33–34.

³³⁴ World Health Organization, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, “Gender in Health and Development: Kuwait,” n.d., http://www.emro.who.int/ghd/gender_profiles_kuwait.htm

Divorce

Kuwait has one of the highest divorce rates in the world.³³⁵ Divorce law favors men. A man may divorce his wife for any reason. Although the legal system is set up to administer the conditions of divorce, shari'a law provides for the *talaq*. This means that a man can dissolve his marriage by saying "I divorce you" three times in front of witnesses. Provisions in Kuwaiti law make *talaq* ineffective when spoken by a person who is "insane, feeble, under coercion, intoxicated, mistaken, disoriented, or enraged."³³⁶ But once a man records a divorce in court, it is final and binding.³³⁷

Since a woman must have the permission of her husband to petition for divorce, women can only divorce their husbands for cause, a lengthy and difficult process. Divorces are usually only granted to women as a last resort. A woman may initiate divorce proceedings for "mental or physical impairment of the husband, abuse, lack of performance of marital obligations, non-payment of financial maintenance, or desertion."³³⁸ In some instances, women can petition for *khula*—dissolving the marriage by returning the bride price (*mahr*) or a portion of it. *Khula* must be agreed upon by the husband and wife. Coercion of the woman invalidates the man's ability to take back the *mahr*.³³⁹

Family Social Events

Weddings

For Kuwaitis, marriage is serious. It is a contract that in the past strengthened ties between families and tribes. Families traditionally arranged marriages. After the families agreed on the conditions, the girl's father represented her in a meeting with the groom and his family, during which a "proclamation of contract" was given as the girl listened from behind a partition.^{340, 341}



© boulanger.IE / flickr.com
Traditional wedding dance

³³⁵ Habib Toumi, "Lawyers Call for Revision of Kuwait Divorce Laws," *Gulf News*, 30 May 2010, <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/lawyers-call-for-revision-of-kuwait-divorce-laws-1.634401>

³³⁶ Law School, Emory University, "Kuwait, State of: Legal Table," n.d., <http://www.law.emory.edu/ifl/legal/kuwait.htm>

³³⁷ Embassy of the United States, Kuwait, "Family Law in Kuwait: Divorce," n.d., http://kuwait.usembassy.gov/region_specific_information/family-law-in-kuwait.html

³³⁸ Embassy of the United States, Kuwait, "Family Law in Kuwait: Divorce," n.d., http://kuwait.usembassy.gov/region_specific_information/family-law-in-kuwait.html

³³⁹ Jamal J. Ahmad Nasir, *The Status of Women Under Islamic Law and Modern Islamic Legislation*, 3rd ed. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2009), 129–32.

³⁴⁰ Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 123.

³⁴¹ Kuwait Government Online, "Customs and Traditions in Kuwait: Marriage," n.d., <http://www.e.gov.kw/sites/kgenglish/portal/Pages/Visitors/AboutKuwait/CultureAndHeritageCustomsAndTraditions.aspx>

Exchange 36: Congratulations on your Marriage!

Visitor:	Congratulations on your Marriage!	mabRook az-zawaaj!
Local:	We are honored to have you here.	lina il-faKhR inach hinee

Contemporary Kuwaitis do not consider a marriage complete until the couple has had a wedding celebration. Because of the wealth of many Kuwaitis, wedding celebrations are lavish. Families spend large sums of money to host hundreds of guests from among the bride's and groom's extended families, friends, and colleagues. Guests expect to be treated to an extravagant celebration in a luxurious club or hotel. Separate parties are customary. Men gather to congratulate the groom. The bride and her female guests gather to showcase their clothing and jewelry. They sing, dance, and celebrate. The feasts feature dishes from around the world, and—in keeping with Kuwaiti notions of hospitality and displays of wealth—there is more food than guests can possibly eat.^{342, 343, 344}

Funerals

Funerals, which follow Islamic custom, are ritualized and somber. Custom dictates that the dead be buried quickly, preferably before sunset on the day a person dies. The family must prepare the body for burial. It is washed at least three times, then perfumed with rose oil, camphor, and aloe wood. The family shrouds the body with white cotton cloth and carries it to the mosque to perform the ritual funeral prayers (*salaat-ul janaazah*), sometimes with the entire community. After the prayers, the body is carried to the cemetery where it is interred, situated to face Mecca. Funerals are gender segregated. Women may attend funerals, but they are forbidden to mix with men. They cannot wear makeup and adornments.³⁴⁵

Exchange 37: I offer my condolences to you and your family.

Visitor:	I offer my condolences to you and your family.	ta'aazeena lik wa-lil-ahil
Local:	Thank you for being with us.	shookRan 'ala wujoodich ma'aana

³⁴² Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 121–25.

³⁴³ Kuwait Government Online, “Customs and Traditions in Kuwait: Marriage,” n.d., <http://www.e.gov.kw/sites/kgoenglish/portal/Pages/Visitors/AboutKuwait/CultureAndHeritageCustomsAndTraditions.aspx>

³⁴⁴ Sahar Moussa, “In Food We Trust,” *Kuwait Times*, 29 July 2011, http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=NjMwMTMyODYzNg

³⁴⁵ Kuwait Government Online, “Customs and Traditions in Kuwait: Funeral and Condolence Traditions,” n.d., <http://www.e.gov.kw/sites/kgoenglish/portal/Pages/Visitors/AboutKuwait/CultureAndHeritageCustomsAndTraditions.aspx>

Islamic strictures prevent family members from excessive displays of mourning. Because Allah predetermines death, excessive mourning is seen as objecting to his will. During the mourning period, the family receives condolences from friends, family, and the community. For widows, mourning is called *idda* and lasts for 4 months and 10 days. This period allows time to determine if the widow is pregnant. During *idda*, the widow cannot look at or speak to any male except those she could not legally marry. She is forbidden to wear makeup, perfume, or adornments. After *idda*, the widow ritually bathes in the sea and becomes eligible to remarry.³⁴⁶

Naming Conventions

Kuwaiti names show a person's lineage and have four parts: personal name, father's name, grandfather's name, tribal name. A personal name is written and spoken without a prefix or suffix. The remaining names each take the prefix *al-*. The name Sabah al-Ahmed al-Jaber al-Sabah shows that Sabah is the son of Ahmed, the grandson of Jaber, and from the Sabah tribe. Kuwaitis frequently name boys after prominent Muslim figures and girls after characteristics that denote feminine qualities. When a woman marries, she does not take her husband's name but retains her family name.^{347, 348, 349}



© delayed gratification / flickr.com
Baby holding the Kuwait flag

³⁴⁶ Kuwait Government Online, "Customs and Traditions in Kuwait: Funeral and Condolence Traditions," n.d.,

<http://www.e.gov.kw/sites/kgoenglish/portal/Pages/Visitors/AboutKuwait/CultureAndHeritageCustomsAndTraditions.aspx>

³⁴⁷ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Financial and Banking Information Infrastructure Committee, "A Guide to Names and Naming Practices," March 2006,

http://www.fbiic.gov/public/2008/nov/Naming_practice_guide_UK_2006.pdf

³⁴⁸ James Richards, "Know Your Customer—Naming Conventions for Arabic, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Western African, and Hispanic Cultures," Bankers Online, 14 January 2002, 1–5,

<http://www.bankersonline.com/tools/namingconventions.pdf>

³⁴⁹ Kwintessential, "Kuwait: Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette: Naming Conventions," n.d., <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/kuwait-country-profile.html>

Chapter 6 Assessment

1. Kuwaiti women have total freedom within the home.

False

Husbands are the heads of their families, and women must submit to their authority. But submission is not absolute.

2. Gender segregation takes place regularly within Kuwaiti homes.

True

Women and men have their own spaces within the home. Husbands and sons are the only males allowed into the women's quarters; women are forbidden access to the men's quarters.

3. Both adolescent females and males have freedom.

False

Kuwaiti girls are monitored heavily by family, but boys are given greater liberty to socialize with friends unsupervised.

4. Marriage in Kuwait is influenced by Islam.

True

Islam teaches that the family is the foundation for the betterment of society.

5. The birth of a boy is celebrated more than the birth of a girl.

True

Kuwaitis celebrate the birth of a child with fervor, especially if the child is a boy.

FINAL ASSESSMENT

1. Kuwait's terrain is flat and nearly featureless.
True / False
2. Kuwait has no access to water.
True / False
3. Kuwait was settled in ancient times by the Bedouin.
True / False
4. Kuwait's oil reserves are minimal.
True / False
5. Kuwaiti citizens are a minority in their own country.
True / False
6. Kuwait is a Muslim country of predominantly Sunni Muslims.
True / False
7. Kuwait has a liberal media with complete press freedoms.
True / False
8. Kuwait citizens live secular lives.
True / False
9. Non-Muslim places of worship exist in Kuwait.
True / False
10. Christians can practice their religion freely in Kuwait.
True / False
11. The education system helps form Kuwaiti identity in children.
True / False
12. Meals help Kuwaitis to facilitate business.
True / False
13. Kuwaiti males and females can interact with each other freely.
True / False
14. Kuwaiti men mostly dress in Western-style clothing.
True / False

15. Many Kuwaiti women cover their hair with a *hijab*.
True / False
16. Kuwait has a statistically small urban population.
True / False
17. Abuse of foreign workers occurs frequently.
True / False
18. Emergency services are well developed in Kuwait.
True / False
19. Education is not compulsory for Kuwaiti children.
True / False
20. Females are at low risk of harassment while they are driving.
True / False
21. Rural Kuwaitis own the land where they live.
True / False
22. Kuwait maintains an extensive, well-developed rural road network.
True / False
23. A large portion of Kuwait's rural economy consists of herding.
True / False
24. Traditional medicine is common in Kuwait.
True / False
25. Explosive remnants of war remain from the 1990–1991 Gulf War.
True / False
26. Joint families are the norm in Kuwait.
True / False
27. Elders are held in little regard in Kuwaiti families.
True / False
28. Kuwaiti women often marry non-Kuwaiti men.
True / False
29. Divorce is rare in Kuwait.
True / False

30. Kuwaiti funerals are highly ritualized.
True / False

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