

big story



Bahrain is packing a big punch

TDI | Manama

When it comes to setting standards, Bahrain is second to none.

Examples are aplenty in this direction from the about to open underwater theme park to the fast progressing Metro Rail project and several other game changing facilities.

Yes! Bahrain is transforming itself in an unprecedented way to offer something the world has never seen before in terms of heritage, culture, lifestyle, business and events output.

The strategy is leading towards the creation of a hub island destination in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries.

As experts say, Bahrain is slowly packing a heavyweight punch for the world to experience in its 760 square kilometres of the area comprising of 33 islands.

Below is a quick peek into happenings going on both above and below Bahrain powering this transformation.

Underwater theme park

Leading the way in this effort is the Bahrain Tourism & Exhibitions Authority (BTEA) with its innovative projects.

The authority had already made a big statement with the launch of the first phase of its underwater theme park dubbed the world's largest.

The unique dive site, covering an area of 100,000 square meters, now has a 70-meter long decommissioned Boeing 747 as its centrepiece.

Joining it very soon will be a 900-square-meter replica of Bahraini pearl merchant house.

Dubbed 'Bait Alnokhitha' the structure will be a copy of a traditional pearl merchant house magnified to increase the surface area and volume for marine life to thrive.

Installation of sail structures of 4 to 5m heights pointing towards the pearling grounds or 'Hayarat' will further enrich Phase 1.

Phase 2 will enhance the excitement further by submerging decommissioned ships. A sculpture gallery for local, regional and international sculptures to showcase their work, as well as multi-purpose Reef Balls are others in the line.

Starting August, residents and tourists could enjoy all these.

But it doesn't end there as it is just the beginning.

Chinese Trade Expo

In September, Bahrain will host the region's largest Chinese Trade expo with the participation of over 100 firms showcasing their products and services. The expo is being organised on behalf of Silk Road Steps Committee in China by Beijing Sea Level Science and Technology Company.

Convention and Exhibition Expo City in Sakhir

Now comes the next big thing for Bahrain in the form of the planned construction of the Convention and Exhibition Expo City in Sakhir, scheduled to open in mid-2021. Ten times larger than the Bahrain International Exhibition & Convention Centre (BIECC), the \$300 million centre, on a total area of 95,000 square metres, will feature ten halls for exhibitions.

The development will be on a

308,000 square metre site next to the Bahrain International Circuit, with the total built-up area of 149,000 square metres.

The cluster, which includes hotels with a combined capacity of 1,200 rooms, is also closer to the Bahrain International Circuit (BIC).

Airport modernisation

Acting as a springboard to these developments will be the Bahrain International Airport. The capacity increase there is reportedly expected to jump the passenger traffic to 14 million per year, especially with its new Private Jet Terminal. Part-funded by a GCC development grant, the \$1.1bn project is due for completion in 2020.

The Private Jet Terminal, experts say, will act a catalyst in sustaining the success of Bahrain's exhibition industry which currently is attracting over 50,000 visitors.

Second Airport

Bahrain reportedly is also planning to develop a new airport. According to Transportation and Telecommunication Minister Kamal Ahmed, "The current airport (after the modernisation project) has limitations and by 2030, if we succeed in making Bahrain a thriving country, increasing the growth and development, then by 2034 we should be ready with the new airport." "I hope that in 2030 we start construction work on the second airport or at least start the process."

Metro project

The US\$2 billion project is part of the

Kingdom's Public Transport Masterplan 2030. Phase one will see the construction of 30km of track, serving 20 stations. Al Zayani Engineering, KPMG and PwC have been shortlisted to assist in the delivery of the project.

Boom in Banking

Developments in the Banking sector is another part of the diversification efforts spearheaded by the Central Bank of Bahrain. Regulations for open banking, cryptocurrency and Artificial Intelligence are transforming Bahrain's economic landscape like never before. With the introduction of eKYC, the know-your-customer process in banking, Bahrain is all set to lead the FinTech scene in the GCC.

Art and culture

Missing to mention Bahrain's art and culture scene will be a cardinal sin as the sector is booming. In this regard, ArtBab, Bahrain's Contemporary Art Fair, is a big investment in the creative economy. ArtBab 2020 is on a mission to attract leading international galleries to the Kingdom. UNESCO naming Dilmun Burial Mounds as a World Heritage Site is another encouraging move for Bahrain. Once a specific landmark has been picked for the heritage status by the committee, it

becomes automatically protected by international treaties and laws, to preserve it for generations to come.

Joint bid to host U20 World Cup

Above all, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are planning to submit a joint bid to host the FIFA U20 World Cup 2021! If they win the bid, it will be the first time that the U20 FIFA World Cup be hosted by more than one country.

The deadline to submit the bids is the 30th of August, and the FIFA Council will announce the decision on the fourth quarter of 2019.

Yes, Bahrain is busy and is changing fast by opening up new avenues to economic diversification. As Gulf Air says, 'Boutique' is certainly the buzz word here with the developments happening simultaneously and at a quick pace.

As they say, Bahrain is packing a big market punch for the world to experience.