Manama now more affordable for foreign workers: Mercer report

- On top of the list is the notoriously expensive Ashgabat of Turkmenistan, and closely following is Hong Kong
- Beirut is the costliest city in the Middle East

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's capital city Manama has become much more affordable for international employees to live in despite the economic repercussions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, says the latest Mercer Cost of living City report.

In 2020, Manama was 52nd compared to the cost of living of 206 cities around the globe.

Come 2021, and things had changed a lot.

The city is now ranked 71st on the same index, or 19 points below the previous ranking.

"Cost of living has always been a factor for international mobility planning, but the pandemic has added a whole new layer of complexity, as well as long-term implications related to health and safety of employees, remote working and flexibility policies, among other considerations," said Ilya Bonic, Career President and Head of Mercer Strategy. "As organisations rethink their talent and mobility strategies, accurate and transparent data is essential to compensate employees fairly for all types of assignments."

On top of the list is the notoriously expensive Ashgabat of Turkmenistan, and closely following is Hong Kong at the number 2 spot. At the lowest end of the ranking is Bishkek of Kyrgyzstan.

Mercer 2021 Cost of Living City Ranking

Rank 2020	Rank 2021	City	Location	Rank change
31	29	Riyadh	Saudi Arabia	2
23	42	Dubai	United Arab Emirates	-19
39	56	Abu Dhabi	United Arab Emirates	-17
52	71	Manama	Bahrain	-19
104	94	Jeddah	Saudi Arabia	10
96	108	Muscat	Oman	-12
113	115	Kuwait City	Kuwait	-2

Riyadh expensive, Jeddah cheaper

The list also covers several cities in the Gulf Cooperation Council nations.

Riyadh, which lies 471 kilometres away from Bahrain, is ranked more expensive than Manama by Mercer.

Riyadh had climbed two spots from the previous rank of 31 to reach the 29th spot this year. While Jeddah, which is at a distance of 1,414.2 km from Manama, is cheaper to live in than Manama. Jeddah, on the Mercer report, is now ranked 94th. However, in the prior year, the city was further affordable at 104th rank.

Dubai, Abu Dhabi

Mercer also has two UAE cities, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, on its cost of living index.

Obviously, both the cities are expensive when compared to Manama. However, both of them had become much more affordable than a year ago. Mercer attributes this to UAE's continued economic diversification policies, pushing its GDP away from the oil industry.

With this ongoing process, there has been negative price movement in both cities. Dubai is at 42nd rank, Abu Dhabi also making it above Manama at 56th rank.

Kuwait city

The ranking has only one city from Kuwait on it, which is Kuwait City, the capital. And it is rated less expensive to live than Manama at the 115th slot. The prior year, Kuwait City held the 113th rank.

Other cities on the Mercer Cost of living City are Muscut of Oman at 108th rank (previously 96), Doha of Qatar at 130 (109).

Beirut costliest city in the Middle East?

Mercer says Beirut is the costliest city in the Middle East for international employees, jumping 42 positions to third in the ranking.

N'Djamena (13), Lagos (19) and Libreville (20) are the first, second and third costliest cities in Africa for international employees.

Lusaka ranked 208 as the least expensive city in Africa.

Ashgabat is super expensive!

The ranking found Ashgabat the most expensive city for international employees, pushing Hong Kong to second place.

Beirut ranked third, climbing 42 positions up, owing to a severe and extensive economic depression, COVID-19 and the Port of Beirut explosion in 2020. Tokyo and Zurich each dropped one spot from third and fourth respectively to fourth and fifth positions, and Shanghai ranked sixth, up a place from last year. Singapore moved from fifth place to seventh.

Other cities appearing in the top 10 cities for international employees are Geneva (8), Beijing (9), and Bern (10). The least expensive cities for international employees are Tbilisi (207), Lusaka (208), and Bishkek.

US cities drop

US cities fell in this year's ranking mostly because of currency fluctuations, and despite rising inflation, according to Mercer.

New York dropped eight spots but was the most expensive in the country at number 14.

Two other Chinese cities are among the most expensive in the world for expatriates: Shanghai climbed one spot to number six while Beijing rose to ninth.

From India, Mumbai is at 78th rank (down 18 points from 60 a year ago), New Delhi at 117 (101), Chennai at 158 (143), Bengaluru at 170 (171) and Kolkata at 181st rank (earlier 185).

Alba wins RoSPA Gold Medal award

Alba's CEO, Ali Al Baqali

- The accolade marks Alba's outstanding safety and health performance from 01 January 2020 to 31 December 2020

TDT | Manama

Aluminium Bahrain, the world's largest aluminium smelter ex-China and a leader in Employee's Safety, is the winner of the 2021 Gold Medal Award from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) for the eighth consecutive year.

The accolade marks Alba's outstanding safety and health performance from 01 January 2020 to 31 December 2020.

Commenting, Alba's Chief Executive Officer Ali Al Baqali said: "Winning this award for 8-years in a row is a true reflection of our continuous journey in our pursuit of Safety Excellence. This year, the RoSPA Award is all the more remarkable as it commended the intensive efforts by our employees and contractors' personnel for maintaining safety a priority despite the Pandemic challenges. I thank everyone for never giving safety a day-off."

RoSPA is a UK-based organisation that has been recognising Health and Safety success for companies around the world for more than 50 years. Alba will be awarded at the 2021 RoSPA Health and Safety Award ceremony held virtually on 09 September 2021.

TAMCON elects Al Hammadi as board chairman

TDT | Manama

Tamcon, a leading Bahrain-based grade AA civil and building construction company, announced naming Mohammed Al Hammadi as the Chairman of its Board of Directors.

Al Hammadi joins Tamcon with a diversified and distinguished background and track record of success.

Al Hammadi has over 35 years of experience across several financial institutions, national organizations and fast-growing companies in the Kingdom of Bahrain. He currently serves as a Board member on Investment Dar Bank BSC(c) as well as a senior advisor to Sinoma CDI-Engineering.

Abdulla Al Alabbasi

Mohammed Al Hammadi

"By aligning hard work, diligence, and perseverance, with systematically set goals and coordinated effort across the Group, we will see our collective work resulting in the highest of achievements; bringing Tamcon onto greater platforms of success," said Commenting, Al Hammadi.

CEO of Tamcon, Abdulla Al Alabbasi, said, "On behalf of the executive team, we look forward to working closely with our newly elected Board of Directors to usher in a new era for Tamcon."

Tamcon is a subsidiary of Al Khaleej Development Co. (Tameer) Group.

OPEC+ discusses further cuts

Dubai

OPEC+ is discussing a further easing of oil output cuts from August as oil prices rise on demand recovery, but no decision had been taken yet on the exact volume to bring back to the market, two OPEC+ sources said yesterday.

The Organisation is returning 2.1 million barrels per day (bpd) to the market from May through July as part of a plan.

Gaza Pepsi factory shuts down, owners blame Israeli restrictions

Reuters | Gaza

Gaza's Pepsi bottling company was forced to halt operations this week due to Israeli import restrictions that were tightened during an 11-day conflict between Israel and Palestinian militants last month, the company's owners say.

With a truce between Israel and Gaza's Hamas largely holding, Israel on Monday allowed a limited resumption of exports from the enclave.

But it has kept in place tightened measures on raw material imports, including carbon dioxide gas and syrup that the bottling company's factory needs to produce Pepsi, 7UP and Mirinda soda, said Pepsi Gaza's Hamam al-Yazeji.

"Yesterday, we completely ran out of raw materials, and unfortunately we had to shut down the factory, sending home 250 workers," Yazeji said. Before the May fighting, he said, Pepsi Gaza was generally allowed to import needed materials.

Asked for comment, COGAT, a branch of Israel's defence ministry, said: "Due to the security situation, the import of industrial raw materials from the State of Israel into the Gaza Strip is not possible." COGAT said Israel was allowing other imports into Gaza, including fuel, food, medicine and medical equipment.

> Yesterday, we completely ran out of raw materials, and unfortunately we had to shut down the factory, sending home 250 workers
>
> PALESTINIAN HAMAM AL-YAZEJI, A DIRECTOR OF GAZA PEPSI FACTORY

Israel and neighbouring Egypt keep tight control over Gaza's borders, and say the restrictions are necessary to stop weapons reaching Hamas and prevent them from being produced locally.

Shutdowns could also occur in other Gaza factories if Israeli restrictions are kept up, analysts say. Manufacturing makes up around 10 percent of Gaza's service sector-dominated economy, according to UN data.

Pepsi Gaza's factory has operated continuously since 1961, when the Gaza-based Yazeji Soft Drinks Company acquired rights to produce 7UP and other types of soda in the enclave.

Worth about $15 million, the owners say, the factory's products are distributed locally. A separate branch operates in the occupied West Bank, worth about $30 million, which serves the territory as well as East Jerusalem.

Company officials had made plans to celebrate 60 years of operations before the shutdown on Sunday.

Yazeji had tears in his eyes as he walked through his empty factory on Monday. The shutdown was "catastrophic", he said. "This year should have been exceptional, celebrating 60 years since we began production.

"We are deprived of marking this anniversary."