

# Lulu Exchange backs AFA

New partnership boosts youth football

- AFA names LuLu Exchange as partner
- Bahrain branch joins campaign
- Fans to win match prizes

**Mahir Haneef**  
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's leading remittance brand has stepped onto the global football pitch. LuLu International Exchange Bahrain is now a Regional Fintech Partner of the Argentine Football Association (AFA), aligning its financial services with the passion and prestige of the reigning world champions. The partnership marks a bold branding move by LuLu Exchange Bahrain, which operates 17 branches across the Kingdom. As part of a wider sponsorship agreement covering India, the Middle East, and



the Asia-Pacific region, the Bahrain branch will play an active role in connecting customers with football's biggest stage.

**Stronger together**

Announced at a high-profile event in Dubai, the agreement brings together LuLu Financial Holdings and AFA in a partner-

ship that will run until mid-2026. Argentina's World Cup-winning coach Lionel Scaloni was present at the launch, alongside senior executives from LuLu and AFA officials. Through this collaboration, Bahrain's LuLu Exchange customers will gain access to a wave of fan engagement activities, in-

cluding contests, AFA merchandise, match tickets, and even opportunities to meet players. "This partnership is a celebration of the shared spirit of resilience, hope, and joy that defines both our customers and the Argentine team," said Adeeb Ahamed, Founder and Managing Director of LuLu Financial Holdings.

**Gulf meets glory**

The move signals a deeper emotional strategy for LuLu Exchange Bahrain. With Argentina's football legacy commanding deep loyalty among Bahraini expats, the brand is now positioned not just as a remittance provider, but as a cultural connector. The partnership opens a unique space where financial services meet football glory. AFA President Claudio Tapia called the partnership a strategic step in strengthening Argentina's ties with international fans. "We share the same values and the importance of teamwork," he said. Leandro Petersen, AFA's Commercial and Marketing Director, added that the deal helps build visibility in regions with strong support for the Argentine national team. Countdown to 2026 With the next FIFA World Cup on the horizon, the timing of the partnership is critical. The agreement covers Argentina's run-up to the tournament, offering Bahraini fans and customers



**LuLu International Exchange Bahrain, with 17 branches across the Kingdom, has become Regional Fintech Partner of the Argentine Football Association as part of a global sponsorship campaign running until mid-2026.**

front-row access to the excitement through LuLu Exchange's 380-plus regional branches. The partnership is expected to create high visibility for both brands, blending the emotional intensity of global football with everyday financial journeys.

# Bahrain gains visa-free entry to China in global mobility shift

Visa-free entry now extended

- China grants visa waiver
- GCC countries climb index
- Bahrain joins strategic list

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Bahrain has been added to China's visa-free list in a move that strengthens the Kingdom's global mobility and reflects broader gains by Gulf passports. The announcement was made in the latest Henley Passport Index report, which highlights growing international openness and strategic diplomacy shaping the future of travel. Bahrain joins its GCC neighbours, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, on the list of countries whose citizens can now enter China without a prior visa. The development means that all six Gulf Cooperation Council countries now enjoy visa-free access to the world's second-largest economy. **Gulf gains** The July 2025 report underscores a broader shift in the



Picture for representation only

global mobility landscape. Asian nations now dominate the top of the index, with Singapore, Japan, and South Korea leading the way. At the same time, Gulf countries are strengthening their global reach through reciprocal visa agreements and growing diplomatic engagement. Bahrain's inclusion in China's visa-free list reflects this rising Gulf momentum. The development comes as part of a broader regional pattern in which countries within the GCC are actively negotiating new mobility corridors and benefiting from deeper

international cooperation. Saudi Arabia made the largest gain in visa-free access among GCC countries in 2025, adding four new destinations and rising four places on the index to reach 54th. This progress reflects Riyadh's push to broaden international partnerships and diversify its global footprint. The UAE remains a standout, having climbed 34 positions over the past decade. It moved from 42nd to 8th place, making it the only major riser to break into the index's top 10. This long-term leap is attributed to sustained

visa diplomacy and rapid international outreach. **Diplomatic dividends** The visa waiver is part of China's broader openness strategy, which has expanded visa-free access from fewer than 20 countries five years ago to 75 nations in 2025. Analysts say China's decision to open its borders to GCC countries reflects growing economic and political alignment with the Gulf. While Bahrain's exact ranking was not disclosed in the report, its inclusion in China's visa-free

policy marks a strategic milestone for the Kingdom. The expansion of visa-free corridors is increasingly seen as a measure of a nation's diplomatic weight and international relevance. Bahrain's growing access to major markets like China offers new opportunities for business, tourism, and cultural exchange. It marks a positive step in the Kingdom's international engagement.

**Top rankings shift**

According to the index, Singapore now holds the world's most powerful passport, with visa-free access to 193 destinations. Japan and South Korea follow in joint second place, each granting access to 190 destinations. A strong European contingent shares third place, including France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Finland, and Ireland, all with access to 189 destinations. The UK and US continue their long-term decline. The UK is now ranked sixth with access to 186 countries, while the US has dropped to tenth place with 182 destinations. The report notes that the US is on the verge of exiting the top ten for the first time in the index's 20-year history. India recorded the largest jump over the past six months, rising eight places from 85th



**Bahrain was added to China's visa-free list in 2025, making it one of the few countries newly granted access under China's expanded openness strategy.**

to 77th. China, meanwhile, has climbed 34 ranks over the past decade to reach 60th, driven by its growing visa reciprocity and global connectivity strategy.

**Asia-Pacific surges**

The Asia-Pacific region continues to power global mobility trends. Alongside Singapore's rise to the top, China's expanding openness and regional partnerships are fuelling higher rankings across the continent. This momentum, combined with the steady climb of Gulf nations, reflects a shift in global mobility where proactive diplomacy and regional cooperation increasingly shape access and influence.