

BAHRAIN SOCIETY VISIT TO BAHRAIN

APRIL 25 TO MAY 1ST 2023

By Lynn Collins

Group Leader and visit Organiser

After almost 3 years of on/off arrangements due to Covid restrictions, we were at last on our way, all 36 of us, headed up by our Chairman Heather Harper MBE. Working closely with the Bahrain Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Bahrain Embassy in London we arranged a full programme for our 5 days .

Using the Journeys in Style travel agency, we were able to travel to and from airports, on airlines as well as on dates of our choice. It was a huge relief to me personally not to have to deal with all this detail having gone through the process on two previous occasions which were ultimately cancelled.

On arrival, we were all very impressed by the magnificent, brand spanking new, Muharraq Airport, remarkably larger than the one room building with one ceiling fan I remember arriving in on a very hot Summer night in 1951!

We were met at the airport by the smiling Ali Hassan of MOFA and taken to the Gulf Hotel in a very large red coach. Once there we checked in to our splendid Deluxe Rooms.

DAY 1

Started quite gently after Breakfast when Adnan, our bus driver manoeuvred the big red coach skilfully around the Manama Souq to within walking distance of the Synagogue, our first stop. None of us

had ever been in the Synagogue although most of us knew of its existence. We were shown a fascinating film telling the story of the Jewish community's history in Bahrain. Our next stop was the Hindu Temple in the Souq which, again was a revelation to many of us. Adnan, our driver, was not able to return to meet us in the souq so suggested that he meet us near the Bab al Bahrain. This was a step too far for some (me) so my solution was to flag down a driver and ask him to take me to the Bab al Bahrain in his car. This he did thereby solving my (lack of) mobility problem!

When I was asked if I would do that in England, I said "certainly not" but I felt perfectly safe to do so in the Manama Souq where I had been very comfortable shopping with my friends since I was a young girl.

Once back aboard our bus, we were taken to an amazing fish restaurant in Adhari and were served various types of fish with fresh baked bread and wonderful salads, delicious.

Our group assembled for pre-dinner drinks and canapes in the Pearl Lounge on the top floor of the hotel, compliments of Gulf Hotel Management. This became an evening event which gave us an ideal opportunity to get to know our fellow travellers and discuss the events of the day!

Day 2

A morning tour of the Grand Mosque with excellent and knowledgeable guides.

We were invited to afternoon tea by British Ambassador, Roddy Drummond, at his residence. We arrived at 3pm and were served drinks in the garden by the pool. A warm day with a light breeze, just perfect. On entering the residence, we found tables set for afternoon tea and were served traditional fare of sandwiches, scones with jam and cream as well as the most delicious selection of homemade cakes. Such a treat!

Back to the hotel for a quick freshen up then off to Muharraq to a concert of local Music.

Quite a late night after a busy day.

Day 3

Morning visit to the new Monument Museum which was breathtaking and too much to see in a morning – note for next trip!!

This was followed by a visit and showround of the Royal Golf Club followed by a splendid lunch.

A quieter day and an opportunity to catch up with friends in Bahrain etc.

Day 4

A visit to Awali, courtesy of Bapco was next on our agenda. Our first stop was the new Catholic Cathedral, Our Lady of Arabia, which was dedicated by his excellency the Papal See recently. I understand, when visiting the Pope in the Vatican, King Hamad, gifted a piece of land to the Catholic Church where they were able to build this magnificent Cathedral. Lots of photo opportunities to be had!

We visited a typical home of the 1940s to 1960s where Bapco employees and their families lived. The house was furnished with furniture of the time and made a few of us a bit emotional as it reminded us of our childhood days living in Awali.

We were then hosted by Bapco Management to a “special” lunch in the Bapco Club where we were shown a promotional film on the future expansion plans for Awali.

A tour of beautiful Princess Sabeeka Gardens was another highlight of the day before we returned to the hotel.

DAY 5

We were invited by the Ministry of Information to Bahrain Communication village and were privileged to be shown round the brand new television studios.

The Bahrain British Business Forum pre-coronation lunch celebration in the Diplomat Radisson Blu Hotel was a very special occasion to which we were invited. British Ambassador Roddy Drummond, Our Chairman, Heather Harper MBE and Lynn Collins were speakers at the event.

After lunch a few of us did some last minute “souk shopping” before going back to “pack up our tents” and head for home after yet another wonderful Bahrain Society visit “home”.

Special thanks to all who worked so hard to make this a very special return to Bahrain.