

## Contents

President Masoud Barzani	2
Fast facts about the Kurdistan Region of Iraq	3
Overview of the Kurdistan Region	4
Key historical events through the 19th century	9
Modern history	11
The Peshmerga	13
Religious freedom and tolerance	14
The Newroz Festival	15
The Presidency of the Kurdistan Region	16
Structure of the KRG	17
Foreign representation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq	20
Kurdistan Region - an emerging democracy	21
Focus on improving human rights	23
Developing the Region's Energy Potential	24
Kurdistan Region Investment Law	25
Tremendous investment opportunities beckon	26
Tourism potential: domestic, cultural, heritage and adventure tourism	28
National holidays observed by KRG Council of Ministers	30
Practical information for visitors to the Kurdistan Region	31



## President Masoud Barzani



"The Kurdistan Region of Iraq has made significant progress since the liberation of 2003. Through determination and hard work, our Region has truly become a peaceful and prosperous oasis in an often violent and unstable part of the world. Our future has not always looked so bright. Under the previous regime our people suffered attempted genocide. We were militarily attacked, and politically and economically sidelined.

In 1991 our Region achieved a measure of autonomy when we repelled Saddam Hussein's ground forces, and the international community established the no-fly zone to protect our airspace.

However, we truly freed ourselves from the threat of totalitarianism in 2003. We in the Kurdistan Region are proud to have fought side by side with coalition forces to liberate Iraq. The removal of Saddam Hussein was welcomed all over the country, but nowhere more so than in the Kurdistan Region.

Since our liberation we have avoided many of the problems experienced in the rest of the country. Our political parties have formed a regional government of unity and are focused on cooperation and development; our private sector attracts good foreign direct investment; and our Region is free from sectarian violence. Above all, our people are tolerant and patient. In the past we have been victims of the worst kind of oppression and violence. So we fully understand the dangers of sectarian and ethnic violence, and we will not allow such behaviour to take root in the Region.

We are committed to being an active member of a federal, democratic, pluralistic Iraq, but we prize the high degree of autonomy we have achieved.

Our people benefit from a democratically elected Parliament and Ministries that oversee every aspect of the Region's internal activities.

We understand that the private sector is the key to long-term development. Our role is to create an environment which will attract investment, and enable it to flourish. In July 2006 the Kurdistan Parliament passed the Investment Law. This provides significant incentives to foreign businesses working in our Region. And in August 2007 the Kurdistan Region Oil & Gas Law was passed. This will ensure the best international energy companies will invest in our Region and that the shared resources will be used for the benefit of the people of the Kurdistan Region, and indeed the rest of Iraq.

We have made rapid progress on many fronts but there remains much to do. Peace, freedom, democracy and prosperity are simple words for goals that are difficult to achieve. We are undeterred by this difficulty. Past hardship has steeled us for the task ahead. We are moving towards a bright future. We hope you will come and share it with us."

**President Masoud Barzani**, Inaugural Speech - 14 June, 2005

## Fast facts about the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

- With a rapidly increasing estimated population of more than 4.5 million people under the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) administration, the three governorates of Duhok, Erbil and Suleimaniah cover more than 80,000 square kilometres - eight times the area of Lebanon and larger than that of the Netherlands.
- The Region is geographically diverse, from hot plains to cooler mountainous areas blessed with natural springs where snow falls in the winter.
- As of mid-2009 Erbil International Airport (EIA) handles over 80 passenger flights a week and Suleimaniah International Airport handles more than 60 passenger flights weekly.
- The capital and seat of the Kurdistan Regional Government is Erbil, a city known locally as Hawler.
- The Citadel in Erbil is said to be the longest continually inhabited place in the world.
- The Kurdistan Regional Government exercises executive authority according to the Kurdistan Region's laws as enacted by the democratically elected Kurdistan Parliament.
- Iraq's Constitution recognises the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Kurdistan Parliament as legitimate governmental bodies and the Peshmerga forces as legitimate Regional Guards.



Ancient Citadel of Erbil



Suleimaniah by night

- The current coalition Government consists of several political parties that reflect the diversity of the Region's people living together in harmony and tolerance.
- Kurdish is a distinct language belonging to the Indo-European family of languages which includes Persian and Pashto. There are two main dialects, Sorani and Kurmanji.
- The Kurdistan Region has seven universities, including the English language University of Kurdistan-Hawler in Erbil, and the American University of Iraq in Suleimaniah. ■

# Overview of the Kurdistan Region

## Geography and Climate

The Kurdistan Region is an autonomous region in Federal Iraq. It borders Syria to the west, Iran to the east and Turkey to the north, where fertile plains meet the Zagros mountains. The Region is traversed by the Tigris, Greater Zab and Lesser Zab rivers.

The Kurdistan Region currently comprises the three governorates of Erbil, Suleimaniah and Duhok.

The mountains of the Kurdistan Region have an average height of about 2,400 metres, rising to 3,000-3,300 metres in places. The highest peak, Halgurd, is near the border with Iran and measures just under 4,000 metres. The highest mountain ridges contain the only forestland in the Region.

The climate of the Kurdistan Region is semi-arid continental: very hot and dry in summer and cold and wet in winter.

Spring is the most beautiful season in the Kurdistan Region and the time when Kurds celebrate Newroz, the Kurdish New Year, on the Spring or Vernal Equinox. Mean high temperatures range from 13-18°C (55-64°F) in March to 27-32°C (80-89°F) in May.

The summer months from June to September are hot and dry. In July and August mean highs are 39-43°C (102-109°F), and often reach 50°C (122°F).



Autumn is dry and mild, and like spring is an ideal time of year to travel in the Region. Average temperatures are 24-29°C (75-84°F) in October, cooling slightly in November.

Winters are mild, except in the high mountains. Mean winter high temperatures are 7-13°C (44-55°F), and mean lows are 2-7°C (35-44°F).

On the craggy slopes of the Kurdistan Region, you will find trees, birds and wild goats. On the mountain ridges grow small oaks, junipers and mountain herbs. Poplars grow in the stream valleys and eucalyptus can be found in watered areas on the plains. A wide variety of rare birds can be seen year round in many areas of the Kurdistan Region.



# Overview of the Kurdistan Region



# Overview of the Kurdistan Region

## People

The people living in the Kurdistan Region are predominately Kurds, but also include Arabs, Armenians, Chaldean Assyrian, Syriacs and Turkmen.

The Region has a young and growing population, with 36% aged 0-14 years, and only 4% aged over 63. The median age in Kurdistan is just over 20.

The Kurdistan Region's demography has changed considerably in the last few decades mainly due to migration enforced by the previous Iraqi regime, resulting in movement from the countryside to towns and cities. By 2001, hundreds of thousands of people had been internally displaced. This included more than 100,000 people expelled from Kirkuk by the Iraqi Government in November 1991 alone. According to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) survey, 66% of people living in Duhok province have been forced to change their residence due to war at some point in their lives, while the figures in Suleimaniah and Erbil are 31% and 7%, respectively.

Traditionally, the majority of people in the Kurdistan Region lived in villages. They subsisted on farming and animal husbandry, mainly sheep and goats - thanks to the land's fertile soil. The Region was known as the bread basket of Iraq. Today this has changed, with the majority living and working in the three cities of Erbil, Duhok and Suleimaniah and working in construction or trade sectors.



“Spring is the most beautiful season in the Kurdistan Region and the time when Kurds celebrate Newroz, the Kurdish New Year.”

# Overview of the Kurdistan Region

## The Kurdish language

Kurdish, the most widely spoken language in the Kurdistan Region, is in the Indo-European family of languages.

The Kurdistan Region's official languages for government purposes are Kurdish and Arabic.

The two most widely spoken dialects of Kurdish are Sorani and Kurmanji. Other dialects spoken by smaller numbers are Hawrami and Zaza.

Sorani is spoken in the cities of Erbil and Suleimaniah, while Kurmanji is spoken in Duhok. As the Region's Kurdish-language media has developed and the population has moved, today nearly all people in the Kurdistan Region can speak or understand both of the major dialects. The Kurdistan Regional Government's policy is to promote the two main dialects in the education system and the media.

Arabic is also an official language and is widely spoken or understood. Chaldean-Assyrian-Syriac communities speak Neo-Aramaic while the Turkmen population speaks Turkmani.

The Kurdistan Regional Government promotes linguistic diversity and rights, and schools have been established that teach mainly in Assyrian Neo-Aramaic, Chaldean Neo-Aramaic, Turkmen and Arabic. In addition, English language studies are growing dramatically and increasing numbers of Kurds are speaking basic English.



Lake Dukon and surrounds

English	Sorani Kurdish
How are you?	Choni?
Welcome	Bakher Beyt
Good day	Roj Bash
Good morning	Bayani Bash
Good afternoon	Ewara Bash
Good evening	Shaw Bash
Good night	Shaw shad
Please	Tkaya Bey-zahmet
Thank you	Spas
Thank you very much	Zor spas
You're welcome	Shayani niya
Yes	Bale
No	Na / Nakher
Excuse me	Ba yarmateet
How much is this?	Ama ba chanda?
Mr Ahmed	Kak Ahmed (honorific term for men)
Miss/Mrs Sayran	Sayran Khan (honorific term for women)
With pleasure	Sar chaw
Do you speak English	Inglizi dazani?
I don't speak Kurdish	Kurdi nazanm
Tea without sugar	Chai bey shakr

# Overview of the Kurdistan Region

## Kurdish cuisine

Fresh herbs are the essence of Kurdish cuisine. People also love to cook with an abundance of vegetables. Lamb and chicken are the primary meats.

A typical Kurdish breakfast is flat or raised bread with honey, delicious sheep or buffalo yoghurt and a glass of sweetened black tea.

Savoury dishes are usually served with rice or flat bread. Lamb and vegetables are simmered in a tomato sauce to make a delicate stew that is usually served with rice. In the spring and summer, salads and fresh herbs are often on the dinner table. Kurds also make many types of kofta and kubba, dumplings filled with meat.

During Newroz, Kurds celebrate by dressing in their finest clothes and setting off to the countryside for picnics and traditional folk dancing, often taking a large pot of yaprakh. Also known throughout the Mediterranean as dolma, yaprakh is a dish of freshly picked vine leaves stuffed with rice, vegetables, meat, herbs and garlic, and then simmered in a large pot.

The Kurdistan Region has fertile soil and a hot summer climate ideal for growing grapes and orchards such as pomegranate, fig and walnut. The Region's honey has a clear light taste and is often sold with the honeycomb. Kurdistan also produces excellent sheep, goat and buffalo dairy products. ■





# Key historical events through the 19th century

**60-80,000 years ago:** Evidence of Neanderthal people living in Shanidar Caves near the Big Zab River in Erbil Province.

**30-300,000 years ago:** Evidence of Old Stone Age (Middle Paleolithic) people living in six caves near the village of Hazar Merd, south-west of Suleimaniah.

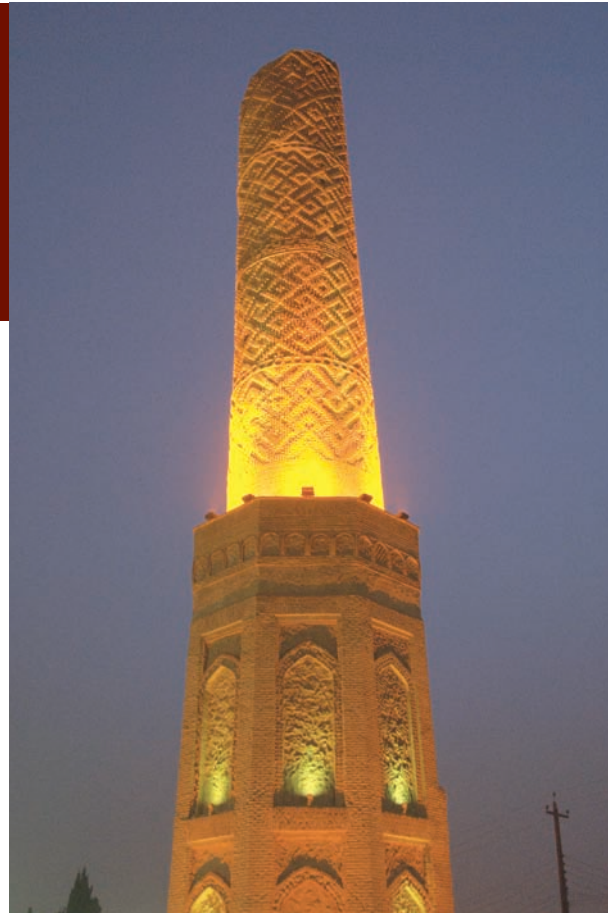
**9,000 BC:** At Karim Shahir near Chemchemical, the earliest evidence of wild wheat and barley cultivation and domesticated dogs and sheep.

**6,750 BC:** At Jarmo village near Chemchemical, evidence of the oldest known permanent farmed settlement of mud houses, with wheat grown from seed and herds of goats, sheep and pigs.

**4,000 BC:** Evidence that Arbela was settled, making it one of the oldest, continuously inhabited sites in the world. Excavation is difficult because the modern city lies on top of the ancient town.

**612 BC:** After the Babylonians destroyed the Assyrian capitals of Ashur and Nineveh, the Assyrian empire city of Arbela, becomes part of the Babylonian empire.

**539 BC:** After Persian leader Cyrus the Great takes over Babylon, Arbela joins the vast Achaemenid or ancient Persian empire.



Ancient Minaret - Erbil

**331 BC:** Alexander the Great and Darius III of Persia fight the Battle of Gaugamela, also known as the Battle of Arbela, about 75 kilometres north-west of Erbil. In the aftermath, Darius is murdered by his kinsmen and Alexander goes on to conquer the Persian Empire including Babylon and extends his empire to the Punjab.

**6-700 AD:** Arabs conquer Kurdistan Region and convert many to Islam.

# Key historical events through the 19th century

**1100s – 1800s:** In this period the Kurdistan Region was ruled by several semi-independent principalities, the Ardalán, Botan, Badinan, Baban and Soran.

**Early 1500s:** The Kurdistan Region becomes the main focus of the rivalries between the Ottoman and Persian empires.

**1514:** After Turkish Sultan Selim I defeats the Shah of Persia, Kurdish scholar Idriss Bitlissi persuades the Sultan to give back to the Kurdish Princes their former rights and privileges in exchange for their commitment to guard the border between the two empires. The principalities in the Kurdistan region enjoyed wide autonomy until the early 19th century.

**1784:** The city of Suleimaniah is founded by Prince Ibrahim Pasha Baban when he decides to transfer the Baban emirate's capital from Qala Chwalan.

**1847:** Collapse of Botan, the last independent Kurdish principality, which included the towns of Amadiya and Akra. ■



Archeological site in the Kurdistan Region

## Modern history

**1918:** Sheikh Mahmoud Barzinji becomes governor of Suleimaniah under British rule. He and other Kurdish leaders who want Kurdistan to be ruled independently of Baghdad rebel against the British. He is defeated a year later.

**1923:** The Treaty of Lausanne between Turkey and the allied powers invalidates the Treaty of Sevres, which had provided for the creation of a Kurdish state.

**1925:** After sending a fact-finding committee to Mosul province, the League of Nations decides that it will be part of Iraq, on condition that the UK hold the mandate for Iraq for another 25 years to assure the autonomy of the Kurdish population. The following year Turkey and Britain signed a treaty in line with the League of Nation's decision.

**1946-1947:** The Republic of Mahabad which was officially known as the Republic of Kurdistan was established in Iran. While short lived, it was the only time that Kurds had truly established their own independent state.

**1970:** The Kurdistan Democratic Party, lead by Mustafa Barzani, reaches an agreement with Baghdad on autonomy for the Kurdistan region and political representation in the Baghdad Government. By 1974, key parts of the agreement are not fulfilled, leading to disputes.

**1971-1980:** The Iraqi Government expels more than 200,000 Faili (Shia) Kurds from Iraq.



Kurds recover bodies of Anfal victims

**1975:** The Iraqi Government signs the Algiers Agreement with Iran, in which they settle land disputes in exchange for Iran ending its support of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and other concessions.

**1983:** 8,000 boys and men from the Barzani clan disappear under the Iraq Government. In 2005, 500 of them are found in mass graves near Iraq's border with Saudi Arabia, hundreds of kilometres from the Kurdistan Region. The discovery of the remains of the Barzani Kurds is chronicled in the award-winning documentary "Saddam's Road to Hell."

**1987-1989:** The Iraqi Government carries out the genocidal Anfal campaign against Kurdish civilians, including mass summary executions and disappearances, widespread use of chemical weapons, destruction of some 4,500 villages and of the rural economy and infrastructure. Residents are forcibly removed to collective towns. An estimated 200,000 are killed in the campaign.

On 16 and 17 March 1988, Iraqi Government aeroplanes drop chemical weapons on the town of Halabja. Between 4,000 and 5,000 people, almost all civilians, are killed.

## Modern history

**1991:** The people in the Kurdistan Region rise up against the Iraqi Government days after the Gulf War ends. Within weeks the Iraqi military and helicopters suppress the uprising. Tens of thousands of people flee to the mountains, causing a humanitarian crisis. The US, UK and France declare a no-fly zone at the 36th parallel. The establishment of a safe haven prompts the return of refugees. Months later, Saddam Hussein withdraws the Iraqi Army and his administration and imposes an internal blockade on Kurdistan. The KRG begins to rebuild the villages destroyed during the Anfal campaign.

**1992:** The Iraqi Kurdistan Front, an alliance of political parties, holds parliamentary and presidential elections and establishes the Kurdistan Regional Government.

**1994:** Power-sharing arrangements between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) fall apart, leading to conflict and two separate administrations in Erbil and Sulaimaniah respectively.

**1998:** The PUK and KDP sign the Washington Agreement, ending the conflict.

**2003:** The Peshmerga, Kurdistan's official armed forces, fight alongside the coalition to liberate Iraq from Saddam Hussein's rule.

**2006:** At the start of the year, the PUK and KDP agree to unify the two administrations. On 7 May, Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani announces a new unified cabinet. ■



“Securing a bright future within a realistic framework of expectations is the right of our people. Our government encourages and supports citizens to play effective and constructive roles in society.”

Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani



# The Peshmerga

The Peshmerga forces are the official Regional Guard of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Under the 2005 Iraqi constitution, the Peshmerga are officially recognised as a legitimate regional military force in Iraq, to serve and protect all areas administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government. When called upon, they have also served in the Iraqi military, including tours of duty in Baghdad.

In 2003, the Peshmerga fought side by side with coalition troops to liberate Iraq from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. They are among the most effective and disciplined soldiers in all of Iraq and have helped to keep the Kurdistan Region free from the violence and bloodshed which affected the rest of Iraq after the liberation of 2003.

The foundations of the modern-day Peshmerga forces were legendary warriors who fought to protect their people and homeland. The Peshmerga trace their roots back to the late 1800's and are steeped in tradition. When translated, Peshmerga literally means "those who face death."

From the mid 20th Century, men from all walks of society volunteered as Peshmerga fighters to resist repression by Iraq's former dictators, above all against Saddam Hussein. Throughout their struggle and under the guidance of wise leaders, the Peshmerga never resorted to terrorism and treated Iraqi army soldiers as prisoners of war.



Throughout, the Peshmerga fighters were supported by the public as defenders of their rights.

They are renowned for their organisation, unyielding courage and determination, and have been steadfast in protecting the people of the Kurdistan Region. Current and former Peshmerga members are respected in Kurdish society, and many of today's political and business leaders served in the Peshmerga to fight repression by previous dictatorships. ■

## Religious freedom and tolerance

People of different ethnicities and religions live side by side peacefully in the Kurdistan Region. This culture of tolerance is promoted by the KRG and the Region's other institutions, which protect the religious, linguistic and cultural rights of all groups. Kurdistan's ability to live in peaceful coexistence with an ethnically and religiously diverse constituency is a great strength.

The KRG believes it can safeguard Kurdistan's historical and cultural heritage while embracing concepts of modern society and freedom. At the same time they respect the religious commitments of those who worship differently.

The majority of people in the Kurdistan Region are Sunni Muslims, mainly of the Shafi'i school. Some Muslims in the Region follow Sufi orders.

There are also several Christian sects practising freely, many of whom have found the Kurdistan Region to be a safe haven after suffering from persecution and sectarian violence in other parts of Iraq. A religion that is practised only in the Kurdistan Region is Yazidism, which has several thousand adherents.

Religious tolerance is the symbol of all civilised and successful societies. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasises that all nations and countries must support religious freedom and respect the rights of all people to select their religion and worship.



The KRG committed itself to the creation of a federal, democratic, pluralistic Iraq. KRG officials believe that citizens are all responsible for respecting the rights of ethnic minorities throughout the nation. In the Region, the reality on the ground demonstrates respect for diversity and commitment to human rights. Today, the Kurdistan Region is an example of successful religious and ethnic coexistence. ■

# The Newroz Festival

Newroz is a traditional celebration in Kurdish culture. Although many cultures in this part of the world have a spring-time holiday, Newroz holds a special meaning for the Kurdish people. It marks the Kurdish New Year at the Spring Equinox starting 20 March, and is now a three day holiday of unity, hope and renewal in the Region.

The 'Newroz fire' is the traditional Kurdish symbol of victory. The Newroz myth recounts the Kurdish struggle against an evil ruler. When the Kurdish forces defeated the tyrant, they lit fires to transmit the good news to the people throughout the Region. The fire has therefore come to represent initiative and success, to symbolise freedom from oppression and to signify growth and revitalisation.

The holiday is a celebration of nature and triumph of good over evil. Kurdish people wear colourful, traditional clothing and enjoy the natural beauty of their surroundings. Singing, dancing and picnics are particularly popular activities for rich, poor, young and old alike. ■



Newroz celebration - Abdulrahman Park

# The Presidency of the Kurdistan Region

The President of the Kurdistan Region has the highest executive authority in the land. He or she is elected by secret ballot in a popular vote every four years and can stand for election for a second term.

On 31 January 2005, the Kurdistan Parliament elected Mr Masoud Barzani as Kurdistan Region's first president. Subsequent presidential elections will be by secret popular ballot by the people of the Kurdistan Region.

The Presidency of the Kurdistan Region as a political, administrative, and legal institution was promulgated by the Kurdistan Parliament in 2005 under Law 1, Article 1.

At national and international levels, the president represents the people of the Kurdistan Region, oversees relations between the Region and the Iraqi federal authorities, and represents the Region at Iraq's Political Council for National Security, which includes the Iraqi President, the two Vice Presidents, the Iraqi Prime Minister, and the Speaker of Iraqi Council of Representatives.

To secure the rights of the people of the Kurdistan Region in the Iraqi Constitution, the President represents the Region when conducting negotiations and consultations with other parties in Iraq and will oversee coordination between the Kurdistan Regional authorities and the Iraqi federal authorities.

The President approves the Prime Minister's applications for special appointments and promotions. Any laws passed



President Masoud Barzani and Kurdistan Region Vice President Kosrat Rasul Ali

by the Kurdistan Parliament must be ratified by the President before they are enacted. The President has the power to return any law passed by parliament for further debate. This must be done within ten days of the passage of the law. The decision of the parliament after the referral is final.

According to the Law of the Presidency, the President of the Region has a Deputy. Through a session of the Kurdistan Parliament, Mr Kosrat Rasul Ali was elected as the Deputy President of the Kurdistan Region. The Deputy President assists the President in his or her duties and in the President's absence is the acting President. The President also has the right to delegate some of his powers to the Deputy.

The President's administration is called the Diwan, and is headed by the Chief of Staff who has ministerial rank.

For more information and news please visit the Presidency website, [www.krp.org](http://www.krp.org) ■



# Structure of the KRG

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) exercises executive power according to the Kurdistan Region's laws, as enacted by the democratically elected Kurdistan Parliament.

The Government coalition consists of several political parties. The coalition reflects the ethnic and religious diversity of the Region's people.

Until the unification agreement of 21 January 2006, the governorate of Suleimaniah was governed by a Patriotic Union of Kurdistan-led (PUK) administration, while the governorates of Erbil and Dohuk were governed by a Kurdistan Democratic Party-led (KDP) administration.

In line with the wishes of the people and their own desire for a more efficient and united government, the political parties of the Region signed the historic Unification Agreement.

## The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region serves as the head of the regional government. Since the unification of the two administrations, Nechirvan Barzani has filled this role. Prime Minister Barzani has emphasised a number of strategic objectives and social reforms, both in terms of domestic activity and relations with the international community. In April 2009 Imad Ahmad Sayfour was approved by Parliament as the Deputy Prime Minister. Achievements over the last few years include:

- Enhanced relationship with the Republic of Turkey
- Greater cooperation with members of the international



KRG Council of Ministers Building

community in terms of trade and foreign direct investment

- Infrastructure development throughout the Region, and greater delivery of public services
- Capacity building and human resource training across a variety of sectors
- Concentration on human rights, particularly the rights of women and children
- Formation of an independent judicial body as an equal branch of government
- Establishment of a programme to enhance good governance and transparency in the KRG

The coalition government consists of 27 ministries and nine ministers without portfolio. Female ministers and ministers from religious minorities and smaller political parties ensure the character of a truly representative government. The government is based in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region.

## The Kurdistan Parliament

The Kurdistan Parliament is the Kurdistan Region's democratically elected parliament. The Kurdistan Parliament consists of one elected chamber comprising 111 members.

# Structure of the KRG



## Functions of the Kurdistan Parliament

- to examine proposals for new laws;
- to scrutinise government policy and administration;
- to debate the major issues of the day.

## Founding principles

The founding principles of the Parliament are liberty, pluralism, accountability, openness and the representation of all peoples in the Kurdistan Region.

By 15 July 1992, the Kurdistan Parliament had promulgated Law No. 1, the first law passed by the assembly, establishing it as the Region's legislature.

## Elections

Elections for the Kurdistan Parliament are held at least every four calendar years, (as stipulated in Article 8 of the Kurdistan Electoral Law).

The last Assembly election was on 30 January 2005, and the next Assembly election is to be held on 25 July 2009.

Anyone aged 18 or over who is a citizen of the Kurdistan Region and is on the electoral register is eligible to vote in a direct, universal and secret ballot. Elections for the Parliament are based on a party-list proportional representation system. Electors vote for a party's list of candidates, rather than for an individual candidate. After the election results are announced, each party is allocated seats in proportion to the number of votes it has received,

using the ranking order of candidates on its list. To ensure representation of all groups, one seat is allocated for an Armenian representative, five seats for Chaldean-Assyrian-Syriacs and five seats for Turkmen.

## Structure of the Kurdistan Parliament

There are 111 seats in the Assembly (as stipulated in Law No. 1 passed by the Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA) in 1992). There is also a legal requirement that at least 30% of the parliamentarians must be women. The Speaker of the Parliament is Adnan al- Mufti.

## Committees

The Kurdistan Parliament has a number of committees which work on the following areas:

- Legal affairs
- Finance and economic affairs
- Internal affairs
- Agriculture and irrigation
- General and higher education
- Health and social affairs
- Culture
- Religious endowments and affairs

# Structure of the KRG

- Transport, communication and municipalities
- Industry, energy and minerals
- Peshmerga
- Human rights
- Housing and reconstruction
- Women's rights
- Kurdistan Constitution

The Parliament shares legislative power with the federal authorities in these areas, but priority is given to the Kurdistan Parliament laws in the following areas:

- Customs
- Electric energy and its distribution
- General planning
- Internal water resources

In addition, under Article 121 of the Iraqi federal constitution the Parliament has the right to amend the application of Iraq-wide legislation that falls outside of the federal authorities' exclusive powers.

## Landmark legislation passed by the Kurdistan Parliament

The Parliament has passed several laws that have contributed to the Region's social and economic progress. These include:

- Passing a modern and open investment law;
- Passing a progressive hydrocarbons (oil and gas) law for the Kurdistan Region;



Prime Minister Barzani at the inauguration of the Judicial Council building

- Significantly increasing prison sentences for those committing so-called honour killings (offenders were previously given minimum sentences.)

## Judicial Council

The Judicial Council is the independent judicial authority of the Kurdistan Region. The Council is autonomous, with both administrative and budgetary autonomy. The KRG has emphasised the need for highly-trained, capable officials to administer justice transparently, fairly, and with constant attention to the letter and spirit of the law.

The Judicial Council operates under the leadership of the Chief Justice of the highest court in the Kurdistan Region - the Court of Cassation. The Council is responsible for applying and reviewing new laws, in coordination with courts throughout the three governorates. The Court of Cassation has the competence to hear judicial appeals.

The recent establishment of the Judicial Council was a major achievement for the Kurdistan Region. A primary focus now will be to provide necessary training and capacity-building programmes to ensure that this branch of government can be as effective as possible. ■

# Foreign representation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The Kurdistan Region places a high priority on developing and maintaining ties to foreign governments and international bodies within the Constitutional structure of a Federal Iraq. As of June 2009, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq hosts 16 consulates and trade offices operating in Erbil. The list appears below, beginning with the first diplomatic office to open.

- Commercial Section - Embassy Office, Republic of Austria
- Regional Reconstruction Team, United States of America
- Embassy Office, Republic of Korea
- Trade Embassy Liaison Office, Italian Republic
- Embassy Office, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Consulate General, Federal Republic of Germany
- Trade Embassy Liaison Office, Czech Republic
- Consulate General, Russian Federation
- Consulate General, Islamic Republic of Iran
- Consulate General, Republic of France
- Honorary Consul, Kingdom of the Netherlands
- Honorary Consul, Kingdom of Spain
- Honorary Consul, Japan



Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir with Lebanon's  
Trade Minister Mohammad Safadi

**“The KRG values its strong relations with foreign governments and international firms. Ensuring that we continue to develop and strengthen friendships is an important priority.”**

Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir,  
Head of the Department of Foreign Relations

- Economic and Cultural Section – Embassy Office, Hellenic Republic of Greece
- Honorary Consul, Kingdom of Denmark
- Honorary Consul, Kingdom of Sweden



# Kurdistan Region - an emerging democracy

The Kurdish people have constituted a distinct ethnic group in the Middle East for almost two millennia with their own language and deeply-rooted cultural traditions. They are proud people with strong traditions and are an excellent example of self governance in difficult times.

Their history of fierce defiance against overwhelming odds has been one of struggle and endurance, and one which has often evoked the cry over the centuries that the Kurds have no friends but the mountains.

Kurdish communities, lived in isolation for much of their history. The people of the Kurdistan Region have taken full advantage of the freedom and economic opportunity achieved by the 2003 liberation from the previous regime. KRG Officials consider their region as a model for the rest of Iraq. It has functioning democratic institutions, with secular government and a rapidly expanding economy.

Stability has been a result of the smooth functioning of the KRG, a reconciliation between the two primary Kurdish political parties, cooperation with the Government in Baghdad, improved economic conditions and minimal foreign interference.

High-ranking Kurds serve in the Federal Government in Baghdad, including - President Jalal Talabani, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih and Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari.



Kurdistan National Assembly

Another crucial contribution to stability has been the understanding that Kurds have a future in Iraq as a distinct nationality. This is enshrined in article 117 of the 2005 Iraqi constitution, which recognises the KRG as a principal component of a Federal Iraqi state, with two official languages, Arabic and Kurdish.

## Kurdistan Region - an emerging democracy

The autonomous Kurdistan Region is seen as a model for the rest of the country with respect to the administration's culture of tolerance and commitment to good governance.

The KRG is unwavering in its support for federalism and the Iraqi constitutional process - the best guarantor of safety and security for Kurds and other minorities.

KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani is steadfast in his government's commitment to a democratic Iraq that is at peace with its neighbours, and to the development of an Iraqi state that abides by its constitution, based on a federal model with clearly delineated powers for its regions. He has stressed that his government's endeavours will remain within the framework of Kurdistan's constitutional rights.

The Prime Minister emphasises that a strict compliance with the country's constitution is following international examples. "We in the KRG pride ourselves on our culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. This is a feature of our success and we hope that all parts of Iraq will one day be able to assure its people of peace, security and a prosperous future regardless of ethnicity or religion." ■



Prime Minister Barzani and Germany's  
Foreign Minister Steinmeier  
open Germany's General Consulate

“We in the KRG pride ourselves on our culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. This is a feature of our success and we hope that all parts of Iraq will one day be able to assure its people of peace, security and a prosperous future regardless of ethnicity or religion.”

## Focus on improving human rights

In 1948, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to promote universal rights and freedoms, and stated that the UN would spare no effort to implement the Articles of this Declaration.

However, in the Kurdistan Region's modern history and after the proclamation of the Declaration, Kurds were denied many basic rights and suffered severe human rights abuses including genocide. This has made the Kurdistan Regional Government all the more determined to improve, promote, practice and respect the implementation of this historic document.

The people of the Kurdistan Region remember their painful history and use it to consolidate and strengthen support for the protection of human rights, and protection of the oppressed.

The Kurdistan Regional Government has taken concrete steps to better implement the relevant laws in this area and to protect the rights of women and children, and human rights in general in the Kurdistan Region. Beyond legislative amendments and the issuance of new laws, the KRG has also tried to include the principles of human rights, a culture of tolerance, and respect for others in its education curricula.

The KRG is committed to actively working, through the relevant ministries, to promote gender equality and



prevent violence against women by emphasising its commitment to the rule of law. The KRG believes everyone has the right to live under a fair, impartial, and equal legal system.

The society of the Kurdistan Region is a bright example for the rest of the country - a country in which all individuals can live in dignity, with security and universal acceptance and protection of their ethnic identities and religious rights. This is in accordance with the Constitution of Iraq, which has enshrined democracy and plurality as cornerstones for the well being of Iraqi citizens. ■

# Developing the region's energy potential

The Kurdistan Region has significant proven petroleum and gas reserves which offer considerable benefits to the whole country. In 2007, the Kurdistan Parliament passed the Kurdistan Oil and Gas Law, granting the KRG Ministry of Natural Resources the authority to negotiate and agree to long-term oil contracts. Over 35 companies from 20 different countries have signed exploration and development contracts with the KRG.

Exports of crude oil from the Kurdistan Region commenced on 1 June 2009. The export from the fields in Tawke (operated by Norway's DNO) and Taq Taq (operated by Turkey's Genel Enerji and Canada's Addax Petroleum) represents a landmark accomplishment for the Kurdistan Region that will bring in much needed revenues for the people of Iraq.

The addition of exports from the Kurdistan Region will increase Iraq's total oil exports by 100,000 barrels per day. By the end of 2010 it is expected that oil exports from the Kurdistan Region alone will reach 450,000 barrels per day.

Creating a commercial and legal environment and providing logistic support in order to maximize the benefit of oil and gas resources is an essential task of the KRG and the Federal Government.

Oil and gas companies that sign agreements with the KRG are rewarded for spending less and achieving more. The



President Jalal Talabani and  
Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani

investor gets a gross profit share after cost recovery of around 10-12%.

In addition to overall revenues from oil and gas, local communities benefit from the presence of oil and gas companies. These companies help provide power generation, new refineries, skills training, transfer of technology and new jobs. The firms also help to build new roads and schools, support local health care institutions and provide other needed infrastructure projects.

For example, Talisman Energy, a leading Canadian oil and gas company, made a capacity building contribution of \$220 million US dollars to the KRG that will be used to rebuild critical infrastructure in the vicinity of Talisman Energy operations.

Increased oil revenues will provide much-needed revenue to all the people of Iraq and serve as a source of prosperity and stability. The Kurdistan Region has provided a successful example for the rest of Iraq, proving that market-driven policies are crucial in the country's recovery. ■



# Kurdistan Region Investment Law

- Total ownership of project land is allowed, though investors may not own land containing oil, gas or mineral resources.
- Does not explicitly prohibit investment in these areas, but the Supreme Council for Investments may allow investment in any sector it chooses other than those explicitly listed in the law's categories (eg. hotels, transportation and services).
- Full repatriation of project investment and profits are allowed.
- Project income is tax exempt for ten years from date production commences or offer of services; no provision for extension of income tax exemption.
- Import of spare parts is tax exempt up to 15% of project costs.
- Hotels, hospitals, universities, schools and tourist institutions are granted tax-exempt import of linens, carpets, furniture and other renovation items every three years.
- Employment of foreign workers is allowed, provided no capable Iraqis available; foreign workers may repatriate earnings.
- Vehicles, equipment, instruments, etc. are tax exempt from duties, taxes and import licenses, provided they are imported within two years of approval granted by Investment Commission Chairman.



- Foreign investors and capital are treated on an equal footing with national investors and capital.
- KRG will provide services (water, electricity, sewage, public road, telecommunications, etc.) to the boundary of the project.
- Import of raw materials for production is tax exempt from custom duties for five years.
- Additional incentives for projects in "less developed areas" and "joint projects" between Kurds and foreigners.
- Foreign and/or domestic insurance of project allowed.
- Supremacy of Kurdistan Law (Art. 115 of Iraq's Constitution): "If there is any contradiction (between this law and "other relevant laws"), the provision of this law shall be applicable."

# Tremendous investment opportunities beckon

The Kurdistan Regional Government has continued to be a regional business leader, largely due to its commitment to a classic Singapore-style open investment climate.

The KRG passed a generous investment law in 2006 that exempts foreign companies from tax and import duties for 10 years and allows them to repatriate their profits, bring in their own workers and own land. This is in contrast with the rest of Iraq, where land can only be leased.

The business-friendly environment is proving highly successful, attracting entrepreneurs who can sense long-term potential. According to the Kurdistan Region Board of Investment, private sector investments in a wide range of sectors throughout the Kurdistan Region now total more than \$16 billion US dollars.

Growth forecasts of the Region's economy have stimulated increased interest. Stability, security and governmental support for investors through tax relief and other incentives have further catalyzed commercial activity.

The development of banking and financial services, executive grade accommodation and the new Erbil International Airport are further encouragement to the establishment of new businesses and support services.

An \$85 million US dollar housing complex known as English Village has been completed in Erbil. Many international companies working in the KRG have located offices there and other similar projects are coming to fruition.



New Erbil International Airport

Signs of success are clearly visible. In Erbil, three-quarters of the buildings in the city are new or recently renovated, such as hotels, residences, offices and government buildings. They have transformed the city into a vibrant commercial centre.

Some \$2 billion US dollars of construction work alone has been carried out from 2003 to 2007. Around 1,200 companies have been active in building and renovating airports, roads, schools and universities.

The Government has established the Kurdistan Region Investment Board to provide support for firms participating in the reconstruction of the Region.

Under-utilised land resources are also available for the development of agriculture and agro-industries. The KRG region has substantial reserves of copper and gold and other exploitable minerals, enough to elicit the attention of UK/Australian resources giant Rio Tinto.

The Kurdistan Region is being used as a launching pad by several investors and firms. By creating an operational base in the Region, they are well placed to expand to the rest of Iraq when security conditions permit. Non-Kurdish Iraqi investors enjoy the security of the Region as they establish their business operations

# Tremendous investment opportunities beckon

Herish Muharam Mohammed, Head of Kurdistan's Investment Board advises companies to make a base in the KRG area and then invest in the rest of Iraq. More than half of the 5,000 companies registered in the region are non-Iraqi.

KRG officials maintain that the terms of their investment law have been accepted by the Federal Government. Hayder Mustafa Saaed, Director General of the KRG Board of Investment, "according to the federal Constitution, the Region has the right to make its own laws - so long as they do not contradict Iraqi national laws. The Investment Board enjoys a friendly relationship with the Supreme Investment Board of Iraq."

The Kurdistan Region has witnessed phenomenal expansion and rejuvenation as a result of rising Iraqi and foreign private sector investment, notably from Turkey as well as from Lebanon and the Gulf States.

There is increasing interest as the Kurdistan Region becomes a focus of international investment. France, Germany, Iran and the Russian Federation have all established full consulates in Erbil. Several other countries have representation in the Region and the diplomatic presence in the Region continues to increase.

The Grand Rotana and Le Royale hotel developments in Erbil are among the prestigious projects currently underway. The CEO of Rotana Hotel "the company is proud to have been chosen to manage the spectacular new



five-star property. The hotel management team is very excited about the opportunity."

The first stage of Dubai real estate developer Bonyan's Suleimaniah City development is expected to start next year. The mega real estate project comprising residential and commercial towers, villas, shopping malls and two hotels will be developed over an area of one million square metres.

Bonyan also has plans for additional projects in the Region and is examining further investment opportunities in Erbil and Dohuk.

The British company Anglo-Kurdistan is set up to exploit energy projects and also plans to build 25,000 houses across the Suleimaniah governorate.

Throughout the Region there is evidence of accelerating economic growth and development. Vast potential and valuable opportunities for investors remain. Companies can depend on a favourable business environment and will be supported by a government dedicated to the renovation of infrastructure, expansion of business and industry, the creation of an environment conducive to enterprise and entrepreneurship. ■

## Tourism potential: domestic, cultural, heritage and adventure tourism

With its rich and varied heritage of ancient sites and spectacular scenery, the Kurdistan Regional Government is eager to scale-up the capacity of its tourism sector:

The rugged mountains that make up much of the Region are already a popular destination for Iraqis seeking to escape the intense summer heat. Thousands of Iraqis travelled north to the Kurdistan Region for vacation last summer:

The aim now is to also accommodate a wider range of international visitors apart from those travelling to the Region for business purposes. Stability and improved infrastructure have led American, British and French companies to begin organising and promoting tours to the Kurdistan Region.

Some of the most important areas for development include the region's archaeological sites, including Babylonian era ruins as well as rare forms of Islamic architecture and early Christian churches.

The footprints of history are everywhere to be found. Archaeologists believe that the Citadel of Erbil is the longest continually inhabited place on earth. It is a unique, living piece of history in the heart of the city. Outside of Erbil is the site of the famous battle, Gaugamela, fought between Alexander the Great of Macedonia and King Darius of Persia.

Many civilisations have come here and left their mark on the region. The KRG is working to identify these sites and make them more accessible and attractive to visitors.



The KRG is therefore collaborating with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to draw up a comprehensive database of archaeological remains in the Region.

The KRG has invested in upgrading the quality of city life throughout the Region, particularly by allocating land for parks and athletic fields. For example Sami Abdulrahman Park, named after the late Kurdish politician Sam Abdulrahman, is a sprawling oasis of trees and flowers situated across the street from the Parliament and Council of Ministers.

Scenic and leisure tourism is also on the agenda. Haj Omaran can be developed into a ski resort. Gali Ali Bag is the highest waterfall in the Middle East. Lebanon's Khatiband Alami engineering consultancy has already prepared a masterplan to develop the 20-square kilometre Mount Sefin area near Shaqlawa and is looking for developers to help create the resort.

The KRG realises that the hospitality industry is a sector that carries tremendous potential for economic development. So far the Board of Investment has granted licences to some 34 visitor related projects with a potential value of \$6.8 billion US dollars.



## Tourism potential: domestic, cultural, heritage and adventure tourism

Tourism Minister Nimrud Baito Youkhana believes that rebuilding roads and securing electricity supplies must be the priority in order to facilitate more investments. He is confident that tourism will be a mainstream priority within four to five years.

### Air Travel to and from the Kurdistan Region

- A new airport in Erbil is expected to open by the end of 2009, capable of handling 2.75 million passengers per year
- The new runway will be the fifth longest in the world and be able to accomodate long-range wide body airliners such as the A380

Austrian Airlines, Royal Jordanian, Iraqi Airways, Atlas Jet and numerous charter airlines connect Erbil and Suleimaniah to locations throughout the Region and the world.

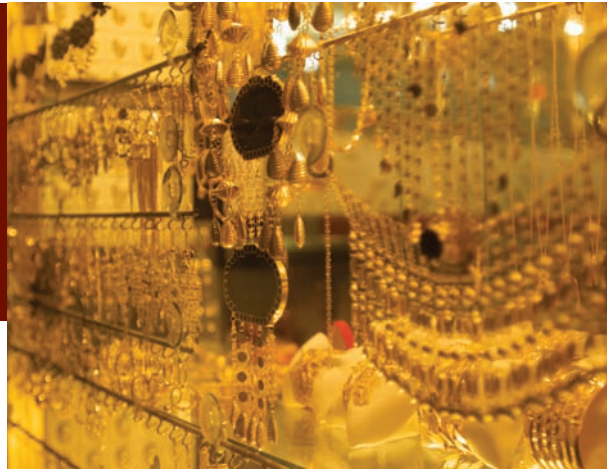
To find more information regarding Erbil or Suleimaniah airports, visit:

[www.sulairport.com](http://www.sulairport.com)

[www.erbilairport.net](http://www.erbilairport.net)

### Conventions and Conferences in the Kurdistan Region

- The Kurdistan Region has many facilities for hosting international conferences and conventions
- The Martyr Saad Palace for Conferences and Meetings in Erbil has over 200,00 squares metres of space, equipped with state-of-the art facilities
- A new conference centre in Suleimaniah is expected to open soon



To find more information regarding conference centres, visit:

[www.saadpalace.com](http://www.saadpalace.com)

[www.sulygov.com](http://www.sulygov.com)

# National Holidays observed by KRG Council of Ministers



Ministries and government offices are closed. Businesses may also be closed.

**1 January:**

International New Year's Day

**6 January:**

Iraqi Army Day

**5 March:**

Uprising Day (Liberation of Ranya City)

**11 March:**

Commemoration of the Autonomy Agreement of 1970

**14 March:**

Mullah Mustafa Barzani's Birthday

**21 - 23 March:**

Newroz - Kurdish New Year

**9 April:**

Baghdad Liberation Day (fall of Ba'ath regime)

**1 May:**

Labour Day

Eid-al-Fitr (end of Holy month of Ramadan) \*

Eid al-Adha Feast (Islamic New Year) \*

Ashura (Prophet Mohammad's Birthday)\*

Al-Arbaeyniat al Hussein (commemoration of the death of Hussein)\*

\* These holidays follow the Muslim calendar

## Other important dates

**1 March:**

Commemoration of Mustafa Barzani's Death (1979)

**8 March:**

Women's Day

**16 March:**

Halabja Day, commemoration of chemical weapons bombardment of Halabja (1988)

**20 March:**

Liberation of Kirkuk City (1991)

**1 April:**

Assyrian New Year

**14 April:**

Commemoration of Anfal genocide against the Kurds (1988)

**14 July:**

Republic Day – End of Iraqi monarchy (1958)

**3 October:**

Iraqi Independence Day – independence from British rule (1932) ■

# Practical information for visitors to the Kurdistan Region

## Security

The security situation in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq is very different from the rest of Iraq. There are only some 200 US soldiers stationed in the Kurdistan Region and not a single coalition soldier has been killed in the Region since the start of the 2003 conflict.

The official Regional guard, the Peshmerga forces, are highly trained and experienced in providing security. To maintain the level of peace in the Kurdistan Region, there are checkpoints on the borders and city perimeters.

Some visitors use private foreign or local security firms, some prefer to be accompanied only by their local contacts, and some prefer to use taxis and walk.

Separate advice must be sought for travel outside of the Kurdistan Region.

## Flights to the Kurdistan Region in Iraq

International and domestic flights operate to and from Erbil International Airport and Suleimaniah International Airport. Most flights operating from Europe and the Middle East fly directly to the Kurdistan Region, without travelling via Baghdad. In addition to flights from Vienna to Erbil operated by Austrian Airlines, several charter operators also fly to the Region. Regular direct flights to and from Dubai, Istanbul, Amman, Beirut, and Vienna currently guarantee easy access to the Kurdistan Region.



## General information about travelling to the Kurdistan Region

Please see the Travel Fact Sheet on [www.krg.org](http://www.krg.org), which includes information about flights, hotels, travel insurance, organised tour operators, overland entry, assistance for journalists, and sights of interest.

## Doing business in the Kurdistan Region

Please see the Doing Business in the Kurdistan Region Fact Sheet on the government website, [www.krg.org](http://www.krg.org), for information about the Kurdistan chambers of commerce, applying for investment licences, registering a company or a branch, organised trade missions to the Kurdistan Region, and trade exhibitions.

## Currency

The local currency is the Iraqi Dinar. The Kurdistan Region as well as the rest of Iraq is still very much a cash society. Credit cards are hardly ever accepted, and there are

# Practical information for visitors to the Kurdistan Region

almost no ATMs. Please bring enough cash to cover your expenses. US Dollars are accepted in most places, and can be converted into Iraqi Dinars at most hotels.

## **Internet connection and mobile phones**

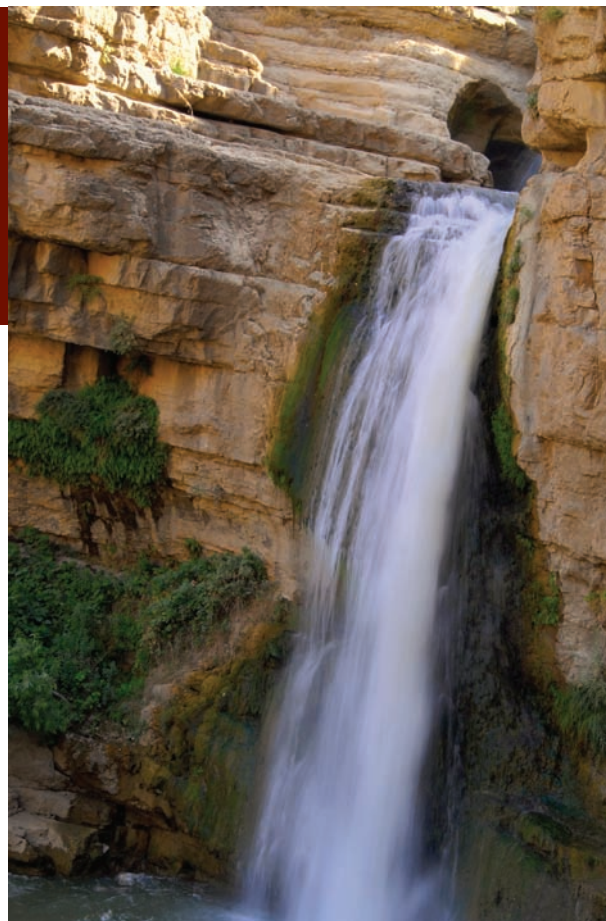
Many hotels in the Kurdistan Region offer internet connection in the rooms and/or in their business centres, and a few also offer wireless.

Several local Internet service providers offer internet connection to offices and homes for a monthly fee. The speed is slower than normally experienced, but connections are fairly reliable.

As many international mobile operators have roaming agreements with Kurdistan Region's operators, foreign mobile phones work. Please check with your mobile operator for call and text charges. It is advisable to buy a local SIM card (if you wish to save on local call charges) and insert it into an unlocked handset, and buy mobile credit top-up cards.

## **Social and working customs**

Greetings and farewells are important rituals for people in the Region, and are carried out formally. It is expected for individuals to take time to introduce themselves and exchange pleasantries, and at the end of a meeting take time to say farewell and shake hands.



## **Dress**

Kurds tend to dress smartly and conservatively, and it is advisable for visitors to do the same. Skirts should fall below the knee and shoulders should be covered, and suits or smart dress should be worn at business meetings. There is no need for women to wear headscarves, and many Kurdish women do not. Men are advised not to wear shorts or vests. ■