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Quick view

Doha – a brief overview

Looking at Doha's glittering skyscrapers and luxury malls, it's hard to believe that Qatar was among the poorest of the Gulf states until the mid-1950s. But with oil came unimaginable wealth and it's not hard to see where much of it has been spent. Recent years have seen a building boom, with antique structures giving way to towers made from steel and glass.

Nevertheless, traces of Doha past do remain, not least in the ever-engaging Souq Waqif and the nearby Al Koot Fort. Quieter spots such as the Corniche are worth searching out, although it's hard not to get swept up in Doha's moneyed brand of glamour.



Qatar

General Information

Country overview

The eyes of the world are on Qatar right now. In just forty years, this small Gulf state has been catapulted from one of the poorest countries in the region, to the richest (per capita) in the world.

The German Foreign Office, das Auswärtige Amt, publishes regularly updated general and country-specific travel information on its website (auswaertiges-amt.de). Here, you will also find safety advice and information about particular risks and travel warnings, in other words, the department's urgent appeals not to travel to a country or a certain region of a country at all if it can be avoided.

Geography

Qatar is an oil-rich peninsula jutting out into the Gulf between Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, with just one border, at the south of the country, with Saudi Arabia. The peninsula is just 160 km (100 miles) north-south, and apart from the capital, Doha, most of the towns are oil-company compounds. The coastline stretches for 563 km (350 miles), with a scattering of sandy beaches – the best of which are in the north and west.

Much of the country consists of sand dunes and salt flats across a low, barren plain, although towards the north of the peninsula there is scattered vegetation. There is also a small range of hills in the north-west, the highest of which is Qurayn Abu al Bawl, which reaches just over 100m (328ft) and is part of the Jebel Dukhan range.

The country's most distinctive geographical feature is in the south of the country close to the border with Saudi Arabia; a wide area of rippling dunes surrounding an inlet of water from the Persian Gulf, Known as Khor al-Adaid, it is a favourite spot for jeep safaris and day trips from Doha.

General knowledge

Key facts

Population: 2042444

Population Density (per sq km): 179

Capital: Doha.

Language

Arabic is the official language. English is widely spoken.

Currency

Qatari Riyal (QAR; symbol QR)= 100 dirhams. Notes are in denominations of QR500, 100, 50, 10, 5 and 1. Coins are in denominations of 50 and 25 dirhams. The Qatari Riyal is tied to the US Dollar.

Electricity

240 volts AC, 50Hz. British-style plugs with three square pins are used.

General business opening hours

Sat-Thurs 0800-1200 and 1600-1900. Government office hours are Sat-Wed 0700-1400. Some are open on Thursday mornings too.

Public holidays

Below are listed Public Holidays for the January 2019 – December 2020 period.

Note

Muslim festivals are timed according to local sightings of various phases of the moon and the dates given below are approximations. During the lunar month of Ramadan that precedes Eid al-Fitr, Muslims fast during the day and feast at night and normal business patterns may be interrupted. Some disruption may continue into Eid al-Fitr itself. Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha may last up to several days, depending on the region.

2019

Sports Day: 12 February 2019

Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan): 5 – 7 June 2019

Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice): 12 – 14 August 2019

Independence and National Day: 18 December 2019

2020

Sports Day: 11 February 2020

Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan): 24 – 26 May 2020

Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice): 31 July – 2 August 2020

Independence and National Day: 18 December 2020

All information subject to change.

**Travel etiquette**
How to fit in**Social Conventions**

Beneath the surface of consumerism and western images, Qatar is an extremely traditional country and it's important to observe some local courtesies. Outside western hotels, it's respectful for women to cover knees and shoulders, while men should generally wear a shirt and trousers. When Arab men meet they usually exchange a handshake, and while this is extended to western men, it is rare for an Arab man to shake hands with a western woman. When taking photographs, seek permission before taking photos of people and be cautious taking pictures in public.

At business and social functions, traditional Qatari coffee is served as part of the ritual welcome.

Guests are served in order of seniority - a few drops are poured before topping up the cups of the remaining party. Cups must be held in the right hand: accept two cups - taking only one cup will embarrass the host; taking more than three will embarrass everybody else. Never pass or receive items with the left hand.



Health Health

Food & Drink

Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice from hotels and public facilities in Doha is generally safe to drink. In other areas, bottled water is a sensible precaution. In general, food hygiene standards are good and it's fine to eat from markets and street food stalls. Use common sense and only eat well-cooked meat and fish; in the summer months, inadequate storage in the heat can cause problems.

Other Risks

Vaccinations against tuberculosis and hepatitis B are sometimes recommended. In the summer, temperatures can easily hit 35°C (95°F) and it is easy to get sunstroke or become dehydrated. Simple measures such as covering the head, keeping out of the midday sun and regularly sipping water help avoid this. Respiratory problems can also be an issue due to the dust and sand in the air, particularly in the summer months.



Phone calls & Internet Phone calls & Internet

Telephone/Mobile Telephone

Dialing code: +974

Telephone

There are no area codes.

Mobile Telephone

Roaming agreements exist with most international mobile phone operators. Mobile phone use is pretty much a national addiction; coverage is excellent.

Internet

There are plenty of internet cafes in Doha.



Top 10 sights Top 10 sights in Doha

Katara

Just outside the city centre, Katara is a purpose-built cultural village that combines restaurants serving up traditional Qatari fare with galleries and shops showcasing the work of local artists and designers.

Katara Street
Doha
Qatar

Opening times:
Daily 1000-0000

Tel: +974 4408 0000

www.katara.net

Souq Waqif

Once a shabby warren of centuries-old alleys, Souq Waqif was recently given a Disney-style makeover and now resembles a 19th-century bazaar, although trading continues much as it always has.

Al Souq St
Doha
Qatar

Opening times:
Daily 1000-1200 and 1600-2200

Al Shaqab Stud

Home to Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Ali Al Thani's prized collection of purebred Arabian horses, Al Shaqab runs tours which include a spin around the stud's lavish stables and a close encounter with some of the bloodstock.

Al Shaqab Street
Doha
Qatar

Opening times:
By appointment

www.alshaqab.com

Sheikh Faisal Bin Qassim Al Thani Museum

Housed within a huge 19th-century fort, this museum contains more than 2,000 eclectic artefacts collected by founder Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim Al Thani, a billionaire businessman, over the last half century.

Al Rayyan
Ad Dawhah
Qatar

Opening times:
Sat-Thu 0900-1800

www.fbqmuseum.org

The Pearl

Doha's answer to Dubai's Palm, the Pearl is a manmade island built on the site of a former pearl diving site. Porto Arabia, with its harbour promenade and packed with upmarket shops and restaurants, is a popular lunch spot.

Corniche St
Doha
Qatar

www.thepearlqatar.com

Tel: +974 4495 3888

Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art

Another museum with a local potentate to thank for its existence, Mathaf is home to the vast Arabic art collection built up by Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed bin Ali Al Thani.

Education City
Qatar Foundation Gate 14
Al-Luqta Street
Doha

Opening times:
Tue-Thu and Sat-Sun 1100-1800
Fri 1500-2100

Qatar

www.mathaf.org.qa

Al Koot Fort

One of the few 19th-century buildings to survive Qatar's recent building boom, the Fort, a towering pile of honey-coloured stone decorated with elaborate arabesques, now houses a modest museum.

Ukaz St

Opening times:

Doha

Sun-Thu 0900-1200 and 1600-1900

Qatar

Fri-Sat 0900-1200

Al-Corniche

A peaceful crescent-shaped stretch running from Ras Abu Abboud Street to the Sheraton Doha Hotel, the Corniche boasts striking sea views and a network of shaded paths and cycling trails.

Al-Corniche

Doha

Qatar

Heritage House Museum

A picturesque 1930s villa, the Heritage House was once the Ethnographic Museum but has now been restored to its former glory and offers a snapshot of Qatari life, albeit of the upmarket kind, in the years running up to WWII.

Grand Hamad Street

Opening times:

Doha

Sun-Thu 0900-1200

Qatar

Fri 1500-1800

National Museum of Qatar

The new National Museum of Qatar was opened in 2019. It is organized into three "chapters": Beginnings, Life in Qatar and The Modern History of Qatar, and each theme is presented across 11 individual galleries. The spectacular museum building was designed by French star architect Jean Nouvel. The low buildings extend around one and a half kilometers along the coast, its curved disks overlapping like the petals of the bizarrely sculpted mineral formation the desert rose.

Museum Park

Opening times: Sat-Thu 0900-1900 Fri

Doha

1330-1900 [www.qm.org.qa/en/project/n](http://www.qm.org.qa/en/project/national-museum-qatar)

Qatar

[ational-museum-qatar](http://www.qm.org.qa/en/project/national-museum-qatar)

Shopping in Doha

Shopping in Doha

Key Areas

Shopping is practically a sport in Doha and is the number one source of entertainment for locals come the weekend. Most head to one of the many mega malls such as the imaginatively named The Mall, where you can find everything

from Armani to Zara as well as Arabic brands such as Oman's Amouage. The main alternative to the malls is Souq Waqif, which is packed with traders flogging a mind-boggling array of wares, including traditional crafts, gems and even soap.

Markets

At Souq Waqif (Al-Souq Street and Grand Hamad Street), you can pick up embroidered Qatari clothing, souvenirs and all manner of pungent spices. Souq Al Asieri (Al Ahmed Street) is the place to go to run your fingers along roll upon roll of beautifully printed (and inexpensive) fabric. Omani Souq, behind the Salwa Central Market, is a mish-mash of smells and sights, where the aromas of dried fish, dates, perfume and incense mingle.

Shopping Centres

The Mall (D Ring Road) is the biggest, but the Landmark Mall (Al Shamal Road) is almost as large and is home to a huge range of shops. The Alfardan Centre (Al Ashat Street) is also worth visiting for upmarket designer shopping.



Restaurants

Restaurants in Doha

Fresh local fish from the Persian Gulf, slow-cooked lamb and broiled camel are all Qatari staples and found on menus across the city. Along with traditional fare and excellent Indian cuisine, Doha also boasts glamorous eating spots overseen by top international chefs.

IDAM

Phillipe Starck interior design and an Alain Ducasse menu combine in this chic eating spot.

Museum of Islamic Art
Doha Port
Doha
Qatar
Price: Expensive

Spice Market

A favourite haunt of the local glitterati, Spice Market does delicately flavoured South Indian food.

W Doha Hotel & Residences, West Bay
Doha
Qatar
Price: Expensive

Layali

Doha's most popular Lebanese restaurant serves up Arabic staples in large portions.

Salwa Rd
Doha
Qatar
Price: Moderate

Elevation Burger

Huge deluxe burgers made from organic, ethically sourced beef.

The Pearl
Ad Dawhah
Doha
Qatar

Price: Moderate

Shake Shack

A cheap and cheerful American chain serving up US classics such as coleslaw and fries.

Villaggio Shopping Mall
Al Waab Street, Al Aziziyah, Doha
Qatar

Price: Cheap



Nightlife

Nightlife in Doha

Doha's nightlife offering has improved markedly in recent years, although much of what's on offer remains clustered in and around the big hotels. Nevertheless, there's plenty of choice.

Habanos

A glamorous Cuban bar in the Ritz-Carlton Hotel jazzed up with opulent décor and neon lighting.

The Ritz Carlton
West Bay Lagoon
Doha
Qatar

Sky View Bar

Perched on the 15th floor of La Cigale Hotel, open-air Sky View does great cocktails.

La Cigale Hotel Doha
60 Suhaim Bin Hamad Street
Doha
Qatar

Wahm

The W Hotel's cocktail lounge is Middle Eastern themed and seriously glamorous.

W Doha Hotel & Residences
West Bay
Doha
Qatar

Jazz Club

Kick back in one of the deep leather armchairs with a whisky from the extensive Scotch menu.

Oryx Rotana Hotel
C Ring Rd
Doha
Qatar

Lava Lounge

A bar during the week, Lava turns into a club featuring international DJs on Thursday and Friday nights.

InterContinental Doha
West Bay
Doha
Qatar



Calendar of events Calendar of events

Souq Waqif Spring Festival

A family festival that brings together street performers, puppet and musical shows, along with African circus performers, magicians and a range of slightly surreal one-off events, including a human cannonball, a seal and penguin show and bungee jumping.

December 2018 – April 2019

Venue: Souq Waqif and other venues

Qatar International Food Festival

The Islamic Art Park becomes an enormous outdoor kitchen for four days every March with food stalls, demonstrations by some of the city's most high profile chefs and the chance to try different recipes from many of Qatar's Middle Eastern neighbours.

March 2019

www.qifoodfestival.com

Venue: Museum of Islamic Art Park

Eid al-Fitr

A flurry of cultural events and shop sales accompanies this religious festival, which is timed to celebrate the end of Ramadan fasting.

4 - 5 June 2019

Venue: Throughout Doha

Eid al-Adha

Also known as the festival of sacrifice, Eid al-Adha follows the annual Islamic pilgrimage and commemorates the trials of the Prophet Abraham. Please note that

most venues do not serve alcohol the night before, and the first day of Eid.

11 - 15 August 2019

Venue: Throughout Doha

Qatar Motor Show

For serious petrolheads, this is one of the most exciting dates in the motoring calendar; a five-day festival in the country where state-of-the-art motors are the top status symbol. There are outdoor driving and motorbike events on the Motor Show's private circuit, exhibitions of classic cars and futuristic designs and all aspects of the motor industry are covered.

October 2019

www.qatarmotorshow.gov.qa

Venue: Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC)



Hotels

Hotels in Doha

It might not go for the gold taps and bling beloved of other Gulf states such as the UAE, but there's no shortage of luxury where Doha's hotels are concerned. Along with the big-name chains, the city has a smattering of decent budget sleeping spots.

La Cigale

Neon-lit and glass-fronted, La Cigale is one of the most glamorously luxurious hotels in Doha.

60 Suhaim Bin Hamad Street Category: Expensive
Doha
Qatar

W Doha

Like all W hotels, the Doha branch specialises in (relatively) low-key luxury.

West Bay Category: Expensive
Doha
Qatar

Mercure Grand Hotel

Just around the corner from Souq Waqif, the Mercure Grand Hotel is stylish and comfortable.

Wadi Musheirib St Category: Moderate
Doha 7566
Qatar

Al Madina Suites

Centrally located and very convenient, Al Madina has big rooms with all the mod cons.

Al Nada St
Doha
Qatar

Category: Moderate