

Qatar

Living and Working Guide

Version 1.1 (Updated Feb 2012)



Photo: Doha Skyline

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Introduction to Qatar:

Ruled by the Al Thani family as an absolute monarchy since the mid-1800s, Qatar transformed itself from a poor British protectorate into an extremely wealthy independent state with significant oil and natural gas revenues. In 1995, Sheikh HAMAD bin Khalifa Al Thani became the Amir of Qatar by overthrowing his father in a bloodless coup. In 2001, Qatar resolved its longstanding border disputes with both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. As of 2007, oil and natural gas revenues had enabled Qatar to attain the highest per capita income in the world. Today, Qatar is considered politically quite stable and it did not experience any level of unrest or violence seen in other Near Eastern and North African countries in 2010-11, due in part to its immense wealth.

Population: 1.95 Million (2011 est - ranked 147th largest country with respect to population)

Demonym: Qatari(s)

Capital: Doha (population of 1.45 million)

Total Area: 11,586 sq km (ranked 166th largest country with respect to total area)

Terrain: Mostly flat and barren desert covered with loose sand and gravel

Total Land Boundaries: 60km

Border Countries: Saudi Arabia (60km)

Ethnic Groups: Arabs 40%, Indians 18%, Pakistanis 13%, Iranians 10%, others 19%

Religions: Muslims 77.5%, Christians 8.5%, others 14%

Languages: Arabic (official), English commonly used as a second language

Time Difference: UTC + 3hrs

GDP: US\$ 181.7 billion (2011 est - ranked 58th largest country with respect to GDP)

GDP Per Capita: US\$ 102,700 (2011 est - ranked # 1 in the world)

GDP Growth Rate: 18.7% (2011 est - ranked # 1 in the world)

Unemployment Rate: 0.3% (2011 est – ranked # 1 in the world)

Currency: Qatari Riyal (QAR)

Exchange Rate: Fixed peg of 3.64 QAR against 1 US\$.

Economy of Qatar:

Qatar has prospered in the last several years with continued high real GDP growth. Qatari authorities throughout the financial crisis sought to protect the local banking sector with direct investments into domestic banks. GDP rebounded in 2010 largely due to the increase in oil prices and 2011's growth was supported by Qatar's investment in expanding its gas sector. Economic policy is focused on developing Qatar's non-associated natural gas reserves and increasing private and foreign investment in non-energy sectors, but oil and gas still account for more than 50% of GDP, roughly 85% of export earnings, and 70% of government revenues. Oil and gas likely have made Qatar the highest per-capita income country - ahead of Liechtenstein - and the country with the lowest unemployment. Proved oil reserves in excess of 25 billion barrels should enable continued output at current levels for 57 years. Qatar's proved reserves of natural gas exceed 25 trillion cubic meters, more than 13% of the world total and third largest in the world. Qatar's successful 2022 world cup bid will likely accelerate large-scale infrastructure projects such as Qatar's metro system and the Qatar-Bahrain causeway.

Major Industries: liquefied natural gas, crude oil production and refining, ammonia, fertilizers, petrochemicals, steel reinforcing bars, cement, commercial ship repair

Exports: Japan 30.3%, South Korea 13.1%, India 8%, Singapore 7.7%, UK 4.2% (2010 est)

Imports: US 15.5%, Germany 9%, UAE 7.3%, South Korea 6.5%, UK 6.1%, Japan 5.6%, Saudi Arabia 5.4%, Italy 5.3%, France 4.5%, China 4.2% (2010 est)

Housing in Qatar

Housing in Qatar maybe different from that to which you have become accustomed and in most cases you will not be able to replicate your current lifestyle in every sense. Since over 80% of the country's population lives in Doha, finding a suitable accommodation not only requires time but also significant research and patience.

The three main types of residential property available for rent are houses within compounds, apartments within developments and fully serviced apartments or independent villas. Compound villas tend to have three to four bedrooms, whereas independent villas, although not having compound facilities will usually have three to six bedrooms.

Expat families usually prefer properties in compounds where there are other expats and recreation easily available, making it easier for them to settle in. An independent villa is probably better value for money if you would like a larger house as you will not be paying for extra amenities provided on a compound. Singles and couples usually opt for apartments in the city. There are a number of high-rise towers with decent facilities in central areas of the city.

If you're planning to relocate to Qatar with your pets, then moving a pet from a cool or temperate climate is something to be carefully considered since Doha's climate is fairly harsh especially during summers. The landlords of many apartment buildings and compounds will not allow animals so it would be wise to discuss this aspect with the landlord or your relocation advisor before deciding on accommodation. If it is important to you or your family to bring your pet then you should employ a pet import specialist to make the move go smoothly.

Living with Family

Qatar is a family-oriented country where children are welcomed just about everywhere. Families, and especially children, play an important role in Qatari culture. Family outings are very popular and you will see large extended family groups picnicking outside and around the playgrounds, parks and the Corniche area in cooler months. Qatar offers activities for you and your family — the hard part will be deciding which to try first.

Qatar may be a small country, but organised sports are big here. Activities in Doha keep your family active include aikido, aerobics, golf, horseback riding, ice skating, tennis, badminton, baseball, basketball and bowling. Cycling is a favorite pastime and you'll find families peddling around the compounds. Don't forget, Qatar hosts numerous world-class sporting events annually.

All sorts of societies thrive in Qatar, such as American Women's Association, Girl Guides and Boy Scouts. You can join chess and film clubs or take cooking and gardening classes. There are environmental and natural history groups that meet regularly and plan activities as well as photography and science clubs.

The Corniche may be one of the most popular locations for families in Doha. Stretching along Doha Bay, this grassy expanse offers a pedestrian-only area for walking, running and playing. With the Arabian Gulf as a backdrop, families can enjoy a picnic or a stroll. Additionally, many organised activities take place along the Corniche, including parades and fireworks. Boats and ferry rides to surrounding islands usually dock from the Corniche and the fishing harbor is here as well. You can take a voyage on a traditional wooden boat, called a Dhow, to islands located in Doha Bay where you'll find beaches, playgrounds, restaurants and ample palm trees.

Kids have it good in Qatar. Most of the large shopping complexes have entire play areas dedicated for children. These amusement centers offer a variety of games, rides, and other activities such as bowling and ice skating. Most of the shopping centers have cinemas showing some of the latest

blockbuster movie releases, complete with candy, soft drinks and popcorn. Throughout the year, Qatar has many festivals to entertain the entire family. Qatar Summer Wonders, in July, is filled with fun activities, shows and events.

Cost of Living Index

The cost of living for expats in Doha/Qatar is considered high compared to other places. The overall cost of living is determined using the prices for defined quantities of the same goods and services across 10 Expense Groups. In 2012, Doha is ranked 194 overall out of 950 cities globally (rank 1 is most expensive; rank 950 is least expensive). The cost of living rank for each of the 10 Expense Groups is as follows:

Accommodation costs such as house/flat rental, household utilities, local property rates and mortgage etc and are very high compared to other places. Currently Doha is ranked 50 in this expense group.

Alcohol & Tobacco costs are very high compared to other places for items such as alcoholic beverages, alcohol at a bar, beer, whiskey and wine as well as for tobacco products such as cigarettes. Currently Doha is ranked 32 in this expense group.

Clothing costs are relatively low compared to other places for item such as casual clothing, business suits, children clothing and footwear etc. Currently Doha is ranked 759 in this expense group with only 191 places that are less expensive.

Communication costs such as home telephone rental, mobile phone contracts, call charges and internet connectivity are very high compared to other places. Currently Doha is ranked 166 in this expense group.

Education costs such as pre-school fees, primary and high school/college fees are very low compared to other places. Currently Doha is ranked 113 in this expense group.

Grocery costs are low compared to other places for items such as food, non-alcoholic beverages, baked food, canned food, dairy products, cleaning products, baby consumable, fresh fruits and vegetables etc. Currently Doha is ranked 731 in this expense group with only 219 places that are less expensive.

Healthcare costs such as medical insurance, general practitioner consultation fees, hospital wards daily rates and non-prescription medicine etc are high compared to other cities. Currently Doha is ranked 252 in this expense group.

Recreation and Culture costs such as prices of books, cinema tickets, DVDs and CDs, sports goods, outdoor leisure activities are very high compared to other places. Currently Doha is ranked 130 in this expense group.

Restaurants, Meal Outs and Hotel costs are very high compared to other places for items such as take away drinks and snacks (fast food), dining at restaurants (non-fast food) and hotel rates. Currently Doha is ranked 81 in this expense group.

Transport costs such as public transport, vehicle costs, car insurance and maintenance, petrol/diesel prices, and car hire/lease rates are very low compared to other places. Currently Doha is ranked 872 in this expense group with only 78 places that are less expensive.

National Holidays:

- New Year Day, 1 January
- National Sports Day, 14 February
- Eid Al Fitr, End of Ramadan (as per Islamic calendar)
- Eid Al Adha, Feast of sacrifice after Hajj (as per Islamic calendar)
- National Day, 18 December