

Global Recruitment

Guide to Qatar

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scott 

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Introduction to Qatar

Like its neighbours in the UAE, Qatar signed treaties with the British in the early 20th century. Originally it protected the Kingdom from attacks by sea, and some support over land, in exchange for limitations on which Qatar associates with. This was extended in 1934 to include land invasions. These deals allowed for autonomy of this small nation while opening ties to the west. Not too long after the extension of protection, oil fields were discovered and plans for prospecting began. Unfortunately the Second World War stalled this production until after the war.

Qatar then began large scale projects to develop the oil infrastructure required to build wealth. This has been a continual process and the majority expat population is telling. What was once a small population has reached roughly 2 million people, mostly expats, who contribute to this incredibly wealthy nation.

The Legal Market

A vibrant, lucrative, and exciting peninsula bordering the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar is an absolute monarchy with a pro-investment and opulent atmosphere. With the highest income per capita in the world in 2013, those who live here are not only comfortable, but reap the benefits of watching the explosion of commercial, real-estate, and energy markets. Coupled with one of the lowest tax rates in the world (no income tax!) and an unemployment rate of 0.1%, people don't flock here in droves for nothing. Noticeable portions of the population are classed as millionaires, but there is a sizable unskilled worker population, much like Dubai, coming from Asia & Southeast Asia. This is to bolster the numerous projects across the country. Previously relying heavily on oil production, peak levels have already been achieved, with production slowing down to depletion by 2023. Despite this Qatar still has 25 trillion cubic metres of natural gas deposits off its northeast coast! With expansion projects in the energy sector underway the demand for expert legal counsel and services is greater than ever. The question is not "is the market doing well?" rather it should be "how can we grow in a stable way?" The opportunities are truly abundant and the capital city of Doha is constantly evolving to suit the needs of much needed foreign expertise.

Immigration

Entry Requirements

Qatar has a proscribed list of 33 countries that may enter on a tourist visa with a nominal payment upon arrival. The visa lasts for 2 weeks, or 1 month for joint tourist visa if you apply before arrival. Refer to the Ministry of Interior for further details. Those from GCC states will enjoy more flexibility with entry and exit requirements.

Employer Sponsorship

While you could get a 2 week visa to shop around for jobs in Qatar, we do not endorse this option. The majority of expats will secure their position within a company and will get sponsored by their employer. Considering there are many administrative issues to be addressed, it is best to streamline the process through your sponsor. For instance, you may not bring your family with you if you do not make at least 10 000 QAR (1600 GBP) a month, if you have a significant other you could not live with that person unless you were married, and lastly your visa must be renewed annually.

Non-Exempt Nations

For those countries not on the aforementioned list of on arrival visas, you should seek further advice and assistance from either the Ministry of Interior or an immigration specialist.

Entry Limitations

If you have an Israeli stamp on your passport you will not be able to gain entry without special permission arranged ahead of time with the government.

Exit Requirements

You may not exit the country without the permission of your sponsor. This means that any time you wish to visit somewhere or perhaps go to your home country, you will require express consent from your employer. Some higher level employees arrange multi-entry/exit visas so they can come and go as they please, however we recommend speaking with your sponsor regarding acceptable terms for this issue.

If you have any outstanding debt or criminal charges you will not be allowed to leave the country until they are settled.

Culture & Law

Alcohol:

Good news! Alcohol is legal here, but there is quite a bit of red-tape you'll have to get through until you enjoy that cold beer to beat the heat. First, you must attain permission from your sponsor (i.e. your employer) to apply for an alcohol licence. Once you have the licence you may use it to consume alcohol at specific venues that are permitted to do so, for example, luxury hotels. You may also purchase spirits from the Qatar Distribution Company which is the only body in Qatar that imports alcohol and recently pork. You are further capped at spending no more than 10% of your income on alcohol. With your licence you may purchase either item (as long as you are not a Muslim) for personal consumption at home. Do note that this allowance does not permit you to carry these items publically, and it goes without saying that you shouldn't consume either outside of your home. Public intoxication will get you in a lot of trouble, so please do know your limit and drink accordingly. Lastly, do not under any circumstances drive after consuming any amount of alcohol. There is a zero tolerance policy towards drinking and driving, even having one beer will at the very least result in a heavy fine or jail time coupled with deportation. Rules and attitudes are relaxing as the government wishes to attract more tourists and western workers. In the build up to the 2022 FIFA World Cup there has been discussion of creating 'fan zones' to accommodate the scores of people who will be visiting from every corner of the world.

Religion:

Despite the rapid accommodation of westerners in to the daily living and lifestyle of Doha, this is still a fairly conservative Muslim environment. Most of the Qatari citizens are Sunni Muslim, particularly following the Wahhabi tradition which reflects the cultural similarities to those in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. There is a minority of Shia alongside smaller groups of Christians and other faiths. While efforts have been made to be more culturally accepting of expat populations, the monarchy has been concerned about the diminishing Qatari identity in the larger context of foreign influences- especially considering the citizenry are a minority population. Consequently, expats have freedom to practice their religion, but must be aware as to their regular conduct within a predominantly Sharia influenced legal and political system. Conversely, considering the time period in which this strong Bedouin identity has allowed or even facilitated changes, the country is quite understanding and accepting of outside influences in particular contexts. As long as you show respect and an effort to assimilate to your surroundings, you should have little issue with the wonderful locals.

Ramadan: During this period most shops and restaurants will be closed until sundown when Muslims break their fast. Most bars, clubs, restaurants etc. will be closed during the daytime. Although expats have options, the majority of the cities will be abstaining from business (during certain times) or non-religious celebration. Please familiarize yourself with the local customs and

practices as this is a holy period for prayer and reflection. Ramadan lasts about one month and concludes with Eid.

Regular Dress:

Do be wary that dressing inappropriately is a violation of decency laws. The general rule for most is do not expose too much skin, meaning wearing short shorts, a bikini, or displaying yourself in a sexualized or provocative manner. Do not wear tight fitting or see-through clothing. This is the official stance but is reflected in the attitudes of the local populace. Since there is such a large ex-pat population, there appears to be some leeway for these rules, but have been known to be used in certain altercations. Ultimately, the populace may turn a blind eye to some of your clothing choices, but you should avoid conflict with anyone who points out their discomfort with your attire. The police may get involved and you could be charged with public indecency. You should be sensitive to a complainant's concern and offer to remedy your outfit. Recently the government has released a dress code decree to remind tourists about the modesty rules in an effort to preserve Qatari values.

Local Customs & Courtesies:

Language: Although Qataris speak Arabic, English is widely spoken so there is little to worry about in this regard.

Etiquette: reflecting on the discussion on religion, remember that your manners must conform to religious attitudes as well. Additionally, foul language/gestures, are not only rude but could get you into hot water with the law. When a woman meets a man she should not extend her hand for a handshake unless initiated by a man. To clarify the position on some general issues, here is a list of prohibited activities: possession of drugs, cohabitation –especially with the opposite sex, sex outside of marriage, having a baby out of marriage (pregnancy is enough for a charge), and adultery. Homosexuality is also a criminal offence so please do not do anything that would arouse suspicion to the authorities. These can result in a heavy fine or even imprisonment, and almost certainly deportation.

The rules differ for conducting business. This is very specific and if followed correctly will endear you to Qataris. Greetings are generally between those of the same sex which is followed by conversation (it may last a while) about all kinds of things, for instance, your health. There is a relaxed culture towards time and relationships therefore do not worry as much about being late as being attentive and genuine in conversing with the person.

Lifestyle

Shopping:

Qatar has only recently started to increase its offerings, for instance IKEA opened a store there to cater to western tastes. However, you should not discount the local souqs as they have much to offer in the way of unique items. Essentially large open air bazaars, the souqs are a haze of enticing smells, sounds, and wares.

Falcon Souq: Perhaps not exactly what you're looking for, but just a small example of the variety. As a Bedouin culture, falconry is popular and a time honoured tradition.

Gold Souq: Jewellery shops line the road with beautiful and ornamental gold. A place where bargaining and browsing is the norm, truly a shopping enthusiast's paradise.

Travel:

Air traffic between GCC nations is extensive, as the oil and real estate boom has created a relaxed cross border culture. Many people travel within the Gulf area to enjoy the wonderful historical landmarks and fare offered by the bustling cities.

Accommodation costs can vary depending on where you go, but generally is a greater expense. Hostels in this part of the world are virtually unheard of, further, if you are looking to enjoy a short period in the UAE, Bahrain etc. you will soon find yourself spending relatively more than you would for other destinations. Ultimately, how much you wish to spend is up to you.

Among your options are: the UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, and Egypt. You'll find that Egypt is relatively cheaper than the other Gulf States, but do be wary of the political climate before visiting.

Once you've arrived local travel can vary in price depending on where you are. However, considering the large oil subsidies in places like the UAE, a taxi ride is not at an unreasonable cost. Although you might save on flights, one should not underestimate the higher cost of enjoying the GCC region- arguably well worth it.

Leisure & Local Attractions:

There is plenty to do with many clubs on offer for children and adults alike.

Guides, Scouts, Brownies, Cubs: many of the prevalent youth groups from the UK and US are here offering the next generation all they need to be successful leaders.

Country Groups: Many expats join social clubs with people from their home country, they typically hold events together to get a taste of home. Some include: Canadians in Qatar, French in Qatar, Indian Business and Professional Network, Qatar Irish Society, Swedish Association of Qatar, and Doha Scottish Country Dancing Club.

Sport is popular in Qatar and there are some leagues you can join: Doha Rugby Football Club, Doha Sub Aqua Club, and Qatar Sports League.

Local cultural clubs and events are also impressive including: Qatar Natural history Group, Doha Community Orchestra, Middle East Film and Comic Con, Katara Cultural Village, the Katara Opera House, and the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra.

Dunebashing: A local pastime, many saddle up their 4x4's and head into the desert, driving over dunes for an exciting and breath-taking outing.

Museum of Islamic Art: As one of the bigger players in buying art, Qatar is home to a vast array of both Islamic and other pieces. This museum is a stunning structure, to avoid the clutter of other buildings, it sits on the water and covers 260,000 metres squared.

Quality of life & Costs

Oddly enough, as expensive as Doha can be, in a side by side comparison with London, Qatar is much, much cheaper.

Alcohol: As is the case with a good deal of GCC countries, alcohol has heavy duties imposed on it. This will be a large expense if you choose to indulge.

Internet: Although the quality is good, internet can cost you more than twice what you would pay in London. Still, this one high cost is well offset by the savings opportunities in other areas.

Luxury Items/Services: Sport and leisure activities can be quite expensive as there are entire industries built around high end living.

Healthcare:

The healthcare system is good and rivals western countries insofar as quality. Due to the massive number of expats who would use the system, Qatar is beginning to institute new reforms in the hopes of creating a sustainable universal service. This has yet to materialize and most expats use private hospitals, the costs of which are either covered by their contract with an employer, or by paying out of pocket.

Property and Residence:

Car: Many people drive in Qatar, but it might not be what you are used to- we'll discuss this later. For now, let's assume you've made the decision to buy, how do you go about it? First, you should keep a close eye on the warranties offered by any dealer, used or new, as the sandy ecosystem will likely punish the vehicle in ways you might not see. Also take careful note of the interest rate so you are not burdened by high payments. This is especially important when it comes to your purchase as debt does not work the same way here. If you miss payments or fall into debt it can become serious, not to mention that you will be barred from leaving the country until the issue is settled. In essence, don't buy above your means or without cautiously looking at all the details.

Regardless of this, resale value is fairly good, but insurance is less costly the longer you have the car. The rules peg your annual premium to the value of the car so as time goes on your cost for insurance will drop, however maintenance can become more cumbersome due to the more limited coverage over time. Insurance that covers you completely is reserved for new cars only.

Driving: This is a digression but an important one in respect to your vehicle needs. If you wish to drive you will need an international driving permit valid for 6 months. Once permanent residence is acquired you can apply for a Qatari driving licence. This usually involves a written and road test, few countries are exempt from this requirement. Your sponsor will also have to provide a letter along with a copy of their ID card; this is compounded with an eye exam.

Collisions: Driving in Qatar can be a new and jarring experience for westerners. Accidents are

common and you should be aware of what to do in case. If no one agrees to whose fault it is, leave the vehicles as they are and wait for the police. If you do agree, it is a minor collision, and you are blocking traffic, then you can pull your car aside. In most cases, waiting for the police is the most prudent action as repairs cannot be conducted by any mechanic until they see a police report clearing your car for service. When an officer arrives on scene they will ask for your licence, registration, and insurance documents. Once the situation has been assessed you will be issued a red or green ticket indicating culpability, and further instructed as to when you can retrieve your police report. When you go to the station, bring someone who speaks Arabic to avoid confusion, do not sign anything you do not understand. Always be cordial and patient with the process- getting upset won't help. The smallest damage must be reported, even if you don't know who did it!

Home: Qatar enjoys a high quality of life but at the same time requires considerable expense. Out of all GCC states it has the highest cost of living and this translates to the housing market as well. Most expats rent as they are either on contract or simply do not wish to make such a large investment. However, unlike many GCC states, foreigners can buy and invest in real-estate, although it is in high demand and limited supply. Many new developments have been popping up in the past few years to fill in the gaps. Average rent for a two-bedroom apartment is roughly 13,000 QAR a month, but in addition there may be real-estate agent fees around the 5% mark.

Education:

Qatar hired RAND (research and development think-tank) to develop its education offerings and as a result the quality of schooling in this country is exceptional. There are local and international schools offering a variety of qualifications including the International Baccalaureate degree. The cost can be quite high as the British school charges roughly 30,000 QAR (4800 GBP) to 51,000 (8200 GBP), registration and application fees are additional. Expats will often negotiate allowances to cover some of these costs if not all.

Your biggest concern will be securing a place for your child as the schools are constantly trying to keep up with the influx of expat families. Luckily, you won't have to wait long as turnover is high. Still, do register during the correct period or as early as possible as you are likely to be put on a waiting list.

Taxes:

For the most part there are no taxes in Qatar. Expenses for expats will be limited to hotel service taxes of about 7% and a few import costs. Otherwise your concern should be how your earnings are transferred to non-Qatari accounts. Depending on your home country, you may be subject to taxation on assets brought back. For example, although returning to the UK with income is not typically taxed, depending on the vehicle you use to move your assets, you may be subject to capital gains tax in the UK. Prudence, insofar as referring to a financial specialist, is

highly recommended.

Americans: For US expats and their spouses the laws for taxation in the US have recently changed and affect your income while working abroad. It is far too detailed to discuss here, but we insist that you check with a tax specialist before making any decisions.

Safety:

Criminal behaviour is not commonplace and the cities are mostly safe. Women should take extra care at night and are encouraged to use a trusted taxi service home. Be wary of the changing winds in the wake of the Arab Spring, although there is no immediate threat, you should be aware of daily news which can affect local sensitivities.

Utilities:

Qatar has exceptional infrastructure for electricity and water services. They have a state website called Hukoomi on which you can pay for or alter your services and much more. See: <http://portal.www.gov.qa/wps/portal/homepage>

The electricity runs at 240V with the British triple prong. In order to have a phone landline or similar services you must have a residence permit, telecom prices vary so do shop around. Water is clean and safe to drink but many expats prefer bottled water and have it delivered to their homes. Internet is of good quality but does vary on connection type and is roughly 300 QAR for a 2Mb connection. A basic mobile plan goes for about 40 QAR a month. If you purchase collective services from one provider you can get bundle deals to make it cheaper. However, we do advise that although you can save here and there, Qatar is expensive and you should not expect immediate savings; those who stay longer reap the rewards.

Public Transport:

The bus system is fairly new and developing within the small country, incidentally many opt to either use taxis, rent cars or purchase vehicles of their own. However, do be aware that accidents are common as they have only just started acting strictly against traffic violations.

Climate:

The summers get exceptionally hot, sometimes higher than 50 degrees Celsius! This is why many of the expat population vacation elsewhere or move for the hottest months of summer. Winter is milder with temperatures below 20 degrees, but watch out for the sandstorms as they reduce visibility considerably.

Pets:

Since the temperatures can get quite high you should take a decision to bring a pet with health considerations in mind. This is especially true if you wish to bring a dog, you will find that taking your pet for a walk is not only taxing on the animal, but you may be restricted to certain areas. Regardless, if you absolutely cannot do without (they're family after all!) you will need to do a considerable amount of preparation and paperwork. All pets have to have a health certificate detailing that they have been cleared for many common ailments and has been vaccinated which is provided by your home country. You must further arrange to have your sponsor obtain an import permit on your behalf. The rules can be restrictive as certain breeds of dogs are not allowed.

The Little Things:

With so much to consider it is easy to forget the little things. These are far too many to list so do be thorough in your research! This guide is a great starting point and if you do choose to work with Douglas Scott, we'll make sure that you've got all your bases covered. Otherwise, we wish you luck on this new and exciting journey!



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