Mohammed Bin Abdulwahhab Mosque
An advanced and dynamic modern society, Qatar boasts deep cultural roots that provide the foundations of the nation’s life and development. Qataris cherish their country’s proud heritage and aspire to the noble values of their Bedouin ancestors.

Respect for the past shows itself in many ways in modern Qatar, from its world class museums, cultural facilities and dedication to preserving and restoring historical and archaeological sites to a living culture where the time-honored values of hospitality and courtesy still prevail, side by side with 21st century technologies and lifestyles - a juxtaposition that lies at the heart of Qatari society and represents one of its special charms.
A Brief History

Pre-History

Archaeological evidence indicates that human habitation of the Qatar peninsula dates back for 50,000 years, when small groups of Stone Age inhabitants built coastal encampments and sites for working flint.

Other finds include pottery from Mesopotamia and northern Arabia (ca. 5,000 BC), rock carvings, burial mounds and a large town that dates from about 500 BC at Wusail, 20 km north of Doha.

Seafaring Traditions

Throughout history, the peninsula has been used by nomadic tribes, with seasonal encampments around sources of water. However, the harsh, arid conditions of the desert interior ensured that most permanent settlement was in coastal areas, where fishing, pearl diving and dhow trading could support life.

Qatar’s prime position along the age-old route linking east and west through the Gulf brought considerable prosperity as a trading center for a wide range of merchandise, including indigenous products such as pearls, dried fish, textiles and purple dye.

Settlement and Migration

Trading activity exposed Qatar to many outside influences. In particular, the peninsula was affected by the territorial disputes among the powerful tribes from around the Gulf.

Constant power struggles and wars kept the region in a permanent state of flux. Al Zubarah in north west Qatar was settled by merchants from southern Iraq, several Qatari tribes established themselves in Bahrain and many other such migrations were a feature of the times.
Qatar’s strategic location also attracted the attention of seafaring powers from beyond the region, including the Portuguese, who ruled from 1517 to 1538.

The rise of British power in the Gulf and desire to secure safe passage for Britain’s trade with India prompted the 1820 treaty between the East India Company and the sheikhs of the coastal areas, including Qatar.

The expansion of the Ottoman Empire into eastern Arabia led to Qatar accepting Ottoman sovereignty in 1872. Then in 1916 Qatar struck a treaty with Britain, bringing the peninsula into the so-called “trucial” system, alongside Bahrain and the seven emirates of the UAE. This meant that in exchange for military protection, Qatar relinquished its autonomy in foreign affairs.
The collapse of the international pearl trade in the 1920s and global depression of the early 1930s brought hard times to Qatar. However, international interest in the Gulf was soon to intensify with the discovery of oil in the region.

In 1935, a 75-year concession was granted to the Qatar Petroleum Company, and high-quality oil was discovered in 1940 at Dukhan, on the west coast, though production was delayed by World War II and oil exports did not begin until 1949.

The flow of oil exports marked a turning point for Qatar. The 1950s and 60s saw the early development of government structures, public services and infrastructure facilities.

The withdrawal of Britain from its commitments east of Suez paved the way for Qatar officially becoming an autonomous independent state in September 1971.

Qatar’s rapid development in recent years has created an advanced modern society playing a leading international role in areas as diverse as the oil and gas sector, business and finance, international affairs and sport. Future plans are even more ambitious, with Qatar seeking to build on its existing success and secure its place as a worldwide center of economic and social excellence.
Promoting Culture & Preserving the Past

Preserving and building on the nation’s history and traditions are key priorities lying at the heart of the Qatar’s future development plans.

The government, through the Ministry of Culture, Arts & Heritage, is active in boosting all areas of national culture, including establishing new libraries, museums, theaters and arts centers. It supports and organizes cultural festivals and events, forums, exhibitions and conferences bringing together intellectuals, writers and artists.

These activities are all part of an official policy that encourages and supports Qatari and Arab creativity and enhances exchanges with other world cultures while preserving and promoting Qatar’s own traditions and heritage.

Major cultural events take place throughout the year. There is something for every taste, from the popular and all-embracing Doha Cultural Festival in March to events focused on more specialized areas, such as the Qatar Marine Festival, Katara International Kite Festival, Doha International Book Fair, Qatar International Food Festival, the Ajyal Youth Film Festival and the Traditional Dhow Festival.

Details of forthcoming concerts, exhibitions, plays and other events can be found at www.onqatar.qa
Observance of Islam, including praying five times a day, is central to the daily lives of Qataris. The calendar is marked by important milestones such as the holy month of Ramadan and the Eid Al Fitr and Eid Al Adha holidays.

Traditional Qatari society was organized on a tribal basis. Each tribe had its own territory and was headed by a Sheikh capable of winning the respect and loyalty of his people. Within the tribe, the immediate and extended family represented the main building block of society. Tribal and family allegiances continue to be a vital part of Qatari culture.

Important tribal decisions were reached through a process of consultation. Everyone had access to the Sheikh and was entitled to make his opinions heard. This pattern of consultation lives on in the ‘majlis’, a meeting place where people gather to discuss the issues of the day.

Qatar’s legal system has two parallel strands, international law and traditional Sharia Law. This duality is also apparent in the coexistence of Islamic banking and standard international banking, as well as the continued popularity of the souqs side-by-side with modern shopping malls.
Customs & Traditions

**Formality & Respect** Most social interaction among Qatars is marked by courtesy, good manners and often a degree of formality. Every individual is entitled to respect.

**Hospitality** In nomadic Bedouin society, traveling strangers would always be welcomed to share a meal. This tradition of hospitality remains deeply engrained in Qatari life.

**Arabic Coffee** The serving of Arabic coffee to welcome visitors is a symbolic expression of this hospitality. It is considered impolite to refuse of at least one of the tiny cups, which are taken in the right hand.

**Food & Dining** The age-old practice of communal dining is widely followed. The use of the right hand, rather than cutlery, is normal and often meals are taken desert-style, sitting cross-legged on the ground.

**Qatari Names** Usually expressed in three parts: the person’s own name, followed by his (or her) father’s name prefixed by ‘Bin’ (or ‘Bint’), then the family name. Names can be extended to include grandfather, great-grandfather and so on, but limiting it to three elements is the general practice.

**Arab Dress (Men)** Qatars wear the ‘thobe’), an ankle length loose fitting garment, usually made of white cotton, or other colors during winter. The ‘gahfia’, a white skull cap, is worn on the head, covered by the ‘gutra’, a long cloth held in place by the ‘igal’, a black braid doubled around the crown of the head. The ‘bisht’, a flowing cloak trimmed with gold is worn on special occasions.
Arab Dress (Women) Outside the home, Qatari women wear a long-sleeved, full-length black dress called an ‘abaya’ covering their clothing. The hair is covered by the ‘shayla’. ‘Gishwa’ face veils are also sometimes worn, as well as the ‘burqa’.

Marriage Practices Most introductions to potential marriage partners are arranged by the respective families, but the young couple are ultimately free to decide for themselves. Wedding celebrations are major social occasions.
Activities & Pastimes

Dhows & Seafaring Qatar has always looked outward to the sea. Fishing, pearl diving and trading were the staples of life for much of the population for centuries. Traditional wooden dhows, largely unchanged in design over the years, symbolize this noble seafaring tradition and still ply Qatar's waters today.

Camel Racing The purpose-built camel race track at Al Shahaniya, some 20 km west of Doha, attracts large enthusiastic crowds during the winter racing season. Modern technology has increasingly encroached on this ancient sport through the advent of robot jockeys, made of titanium and controlled by radio.

Falconry The 5,000 year old sport of falconry is avidly pursued by many Qatars during the winter hunting season. Much time and care is devoted to training young falcons and creating a close bond between the hunter and his valuable birds.

The Arabian Horse & Horse Racing The world of horse racing owes its origins in large part to Arabian bloodstock. Today, Al Shaqab stud farm is devoted to the perpetuation and preservation of purebred Arabians, while Qatar’s equestrian tradition also flourishes at race meetings held at Doha Racing & Equestrian Club throughout the winter months.

Music & Dance Traditional music featuring bagpipes and drums is still widely played, especially at banquets, celebrations and special events. Male dancers with swords chant and sway with the music.

Arts & Crafts Decoration and design have always been important features of traditional Qatari life, finding expression in the work of craftsmen in everything from jewelry and textiles to dhow building and architecture. Henna painting and Arabic calligraphy also demonstrate the strong creativity and visual traditions.
Heritage Attractions

Qatar Museums Authority

The Qatar Museums Authority is responsible for the development and management of museums and heritage sites (including the Museum of Islamic Art, Al Mathab Museum, Al Zubarah Fort & Archaeological Site and others mentioned below). Its portfolio also covers the Orientalists’ Museum and collections of weaponry, photography, costumes, textiles and jewelry, Islamic coins and natural history.

For details of other important historical and archaeological sites not listed here, please refer to the Authority’s website at http://www.qma.org.qa/en/

The Authority is overseeing the development of the new Qatar National Museum, currently under construction for expected completion in late 2014. To be housed in an iconic landmark building designed by Jean Nouvel, the new complex will incorporate the restored palace home of the former Qatar National Museum on the Corniche.
Museums & Galleries

**Museum of Islamic Art**

This internationally renowned treasure house of the finest Islamic art and artifacts represents an essential highlight of any visit to Doha.

The museum features exhibits from throughout the Islamic world: the Arabian peninsula, Middle East, Iran, Turkey, Central Asia, the Subcontinent, Far East, North Africa and Spain. Based on the meticulously assembled collections of Qatar’s royal Al Thani family, its imaginatively presented displays cover some 14 centuries of Islamic culture and a vast range of subject matter, including art works, ceramics, manuscripts, textiles, metal work, jewelry and much more.

Prominently located on Doha’s Corniche waterfront, the collection is housed in a landmark architectural masterpiece. The museum complex incorporates an education wing, research facilities, 200-seater auditorium, conservation laboratory, gift shop and café.

Admission to the permanent galleries is free, but there is an entry charge to any special exhibitions that may be running. Opening times: Sun/Mon/Wed 10:30 – 17:30; Thu/Sat 12:00 – 20:00; Fri 14:00 – 20:00 (Tue - closed).

**Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art**

Located in a converted school building in Doha’s Education City and opened in 2010, Al Mathaf museum hosts modern and contemporary art exhibits and programs offering an Arab perspective on international art. It also serves as a centre for dialogue and scholarship about modern art in Qatar, the region and the world. Al Mathaf is linked by shuttle bus to the Museum of Islamic Art.
Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim Al Thani Museum

A museum dedicated to the spectacular collections of Sheikh Faisal can be found a 22 km to the west of Doha city at Al Samriya. The traditionally designed 17,000 sq m building houses more than 15,000 exhibits, covering a fascinating spectrum of arts, artifacts and heritage items.

Among the museum’s displays are ancient Islamic manuscripts, archaeological finds, textiles, carpets, embroidery, silver and gold coins, antique furniture, militaria and metal items. It also showcases an extensive collection of vintage cars, including a 19th century steam vehicle.

Visits can be arranged independently or through local tour operators. Allow about four hours, including travel to and from Doha. Opening hours 09:00 – 18:00 (closed Fri).
Art Galleries

There are a number of important art galleries in Doha including:

Al Riwaq Doha
qma.com.qa
+974 4452 5555

Katara Art Center
kataraartcenter.com
+974 4408 0244

Souq Waqif Arts Center
+974 4417 6204

Al Markhiya Gallery
almarkhiyagallery.com
+974 6600 8750
Katara Cultural Village
Katara Cultural Village is a dedicated cultural and recreational zone that brings together a taste of Qatar’s rich traditional heritage with a wide range of regional and international artistic and gastronomic experiences.

Recently opened, Katara acts as a cultural bridge linking Qatar to the world and its emphasis on ensuring the accessibility of classic cultural offerings in the context of modern daily life is proving a winning formula with both visitors and residents.

Located on a 99 hectare site on the West Bay waterfront to the north of Doha’s city centre, Katara is designed in the traditional architectural style of the region.

Its cultural facilities include a spectacular amphitheatre, state-of-the-art theatre and opera house, multi-purpose hall, libraries, museums and academic institutes. These provide a world class venue for performances by the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra and for international concerts, operas and dramatic productions.

Besides its cultural offerings, Katara is a stand-alone entertainment destination in its own right. Its wide range of restaurants and cafes make it a popular dining spot. Among its noteworthy sights are the traditionally-designed bird houses and two mosques, one of ornate Iranian design and the other covered entirely in gold tiles. Major outdoor attractions include the spacious and well maintained public beach, with its water sports facilities, which is ideal for family recreation.
Major Heritage Sites

Souq Waqif

Centrally located in the heart of Doha close to the Corniche, Souq Waqif offers visitors a colorful, lively and exciting taste of the sights, sounds and aromas of a traditional Bedouin market. While the souq’s buildings are new, the faithful use of traditional building methods and materials during its renovation in 2004, together with their architecture and design, ensures an authentic atmosphere of old Arabia.

The souq’s labyrinth of streets and alleys are lined with of small shops offering a diverse range of merchandise from spices, nuts, dried fruits and honey to perfumes, clothing, handicrafts and all types of souvenirs. Popular visitor purchases include brass-studded bridal chests, incense burners, model dhows,
Al Zubarah Fort & Archaeological Site

Located on Qatar’s northwest coast 100 km from Doha, Al Zubarah is a UNESCO World Heritage site of international significance.

The walled coastal town flourished as a pearling and trading centre with links throughout the Gulf and Indian Ocean in the late 18th and early 19th centuries before being destroyed in 1811 and abandoned in the early 1900s.

A layer of sand blown from the desert has protected and preserved the remains of the town’s palaces, mosques, streets, houses, harbor, walls and cemeteries. So far only a small part of the site has been excavated.

The only structure to survive is Al Zubarah Fort, originally built in 1838. It is square-shaped with circular towers at three of its corners and a rectangular tower at the fourth. Used as a coast-guard station and by the military, the fort now serves as a visitor center housing displays of the archaeological work currently being conducted on the site.

Bedouin weaving, rugs and paintings. Amid the shops are an array of restaurants and cafes where the visitor can sample a variety of Qatari and other Middle Eastern dishes and snacks. Other attractions include Souq Waqif Art Center and regular displays folk dancing and traditional music on festive occasions.

Souq Waqif’s opening hours are 10:00 – 12:00 and 16:00 – 22:00, with the evening session offering the liveliest atmosphere.
Other Forts & Structures

With its high towers and thick walls, Al Wajbah Fort is thought to be the oldest in the country. It was the scene of a famous victory over Ottoman forces.

Al Koot Fort, also known as Doha Fort, lies in the Al Bidda district and was built as a military fort to protect the nearby Souq Waqif.

Umm Salal Mohammad Fort, located some 20 km north of Doha, was built during the late 19th century. Nearby, standing 16 m tall is the restored three-storey Barzan Tower, together with its twin east tower.

Located close to Dukhan on the west coast, the Al Zekreet area boasts a number of historic sites including an 18th century fort.