

Doing Business in Qatar | Qatari Social and Business Culture

A Qatari Culture Overview

Fact File

- **Official Name** – State of Qatar
- **Population** – 833,285*
- **Official Languages** – Arabic
- **Currency** – Qatari Riyal
- **Capital City** – Doha
- **GDP** – purchasing power parity \$85.35 billion**
- **GDP Per Capita** – purchasing power parity \$103,500**

Overview



The State of Qatar, with its warm and arid climate, is located along the Persian Gulf and shares a land border with Saudi Arabia in the south. Qatar has a rich historical heritage dating back to the prehistoric period and has been influenced by nomadic tribes as well as regional empires. As a strategic port in the medieval Indian Ocean trade routes, Persia, Oman and the Ottoman Empire fought to control the country. From 1913 until independence in 1971, Qatar was under the ‘protection’ of the United Kingdom. Today, ethnic Qataris are actually a minority within Qatar. Approximately 40% of the population is Qatari and the rest of the population consists of sizeable expatriate communities. Arabic is the state language in Qatar and Islam is the state religion. Islamic faith plays an important role in everyday life in Qatar, as it does in neighbouring countries. Islam as well as key Qatari business and social values must be understood in order to effectively work with Qataris.

Qatari Culture - Key Concepts and Values

Group relations – The family features very highly in Qatar and has a very cherished position within Qatari society. Households tend to be multigenerational with older generations living under the same roof as younger ones. Extended families live in the same vicinity as one another and this grouping is often referred to as a tribe.

Religion - Primarily a Sunni Muslim state, Oman also has a sizeable Shi’ite minority. Islam is the fundamental pillar of Qatari society and governs all aspects of life in the country.

Time – Qataris work between 40 to 48 hours per week. Free time on weekends is very important to Qataris and is often spent with family. When in Qatar, remember that prayers take place five times a day so you may experience interruptions in the working day. During some Islamic holidays such as the holy month of Ramadan many companies in Qatar reduce their working day to eight hours.

Doing Business in Qatar

The petroleum and gas industry is the most important industry in Qatar and accounts for around 80% of all government revenue. In addition, Qatar has a growing tourism industry which has helped the continued economic growth, particularly during the recent global economic downturn. In 2009, Qatar had one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Since independence in 1971, relations between the west and Qatar have been open and mutually fulfilling. Qatar joined the western led allied forces in the 1990-1991 Gulf War and continues to house American military personnel. Understanding how Qatar's economic and political history impacts business and relationships in Qatar is important if you wish to be successful working with Qataris.

Qatari Business Part 1 - Working in Qatar

- **Working practices in Qatar**
 - Qataris have a relaxed approach to time, so making appointments in advance can sometimes prove fruitless. Tardiness is not taken as seriously in Qatar as in Europe or the United States, so do not take it as a sign of disrespect if your Qatari colleague arrives late for a meeting.
 - To work in Qatar as a foreigner, you must have a sponsor who will complete entry administration and act as a guarantor should anything go wrong. Always check with the consulate or embassy ahead of time to ensure you have the right permissions.
 - Arabic is the primary language used for business though English is commonly used. Having a basic knowledge will help break the ice and make negotiations run more smoothly. If taking part in complicated negotiations, it may be worth taking an interpreter so check beforehand whether English will be used.
 - Qataris work from Sunday through Thursday, with Friday and Saturday taken as the weekend. Operational hours for companies in Qatar are usually from 08.00 or 08.30 to 17.30 or 18.00. Shops tend to open around 07.00 and close earlier around 16.00 due to the heat of the Qatari afternoon.
- **Structure and hierarchy in Qatari companies**
 - Organisations in Qatar tend to operate with a hierarchical top-down structure.
 - Authority tends to stay primarily with those at senior levels, with little consultation with those at more junior levels.
 - Status is very important in Qatar, as in much of the Middle East. Titles should be used whenever possible. Always check with someone beforehand so you are sure to use the correct title.

- **Working relationships in Qatar**

- The spoken word carries far more weight in Qatar than in many other countries. If you say you can or will do something, you must be prepared to carry it through.
- Gaining trust is important and necessary for a business relationship with a Qatari can progress. Do not rush things, and always allow time for lengthy and multiple business meetings.
- Qataris might interrupt a meeting on a number of occasions to answer phones or queries from other colleagues. This should not be taken as a sign of disrespect or rudeness.
- When negotiating with Qataris, you should always remain calm and keep your voice to a level that will not offend.

Qatari Business Part 2 - Doing Business in Qatar

- **Business practices in Qatar**

- Businesses are closed on Thursdays and Fridays
- When arranging a business meeting you should always inform your Qatari colleagues whether any women will be attending.
- Be sure to dress conservatively when working in Qatar. This means a suit and tie for men while women should wear trousers and a conservative top to show respect.

Qatari Business Etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)

- ✓ DO take your time when greeting someone. Qataris like the interest and genuineness of this.
- ✓ DO respect a person's status in society. The status system remains very important in Qatar so always try to understand the hierarchy of your Qatari counterparts.
- ✓ DO leave your hair uncovered if you are a foreign woman. Qatar is increasingly liberally in its rules towards women's appearance so wearing a cover over the hair is not necessary as a foreigner unless you visit a mosque.
- ✗ DON'T talk about sex, religion or regional politics or say anything bad about the Prophet Mohammed as this could be offensive.
- ✗ Don't Offer alcoholic beverages to your Qatari colleagues. Drinking alcohol is prohibited in Islam
- ✗ DON'T start a conversation with a woman if she is on her own and if you are a man.

Qatar Culture Quiz - True or False

1. Qataris value a person's word very highly.
2. Women must cover themselves completely at all times.
3. Qataris often use an idiom of kinship or tribalism, referring to compatriots as 'brother', 'sister' or 'cousin'.
4. A Qatari's home is of little importance to him or her.

Qatar Culture Quiz - Answers

1. True. Be careful what you promise as Qatari's will expect you to carry it through.
2. False. Qatar has relaxed rules on this but you should err on the conservative side to begin with.
3. True. This convention is used to signal inclusion to those with whom Qataris have a bond.
4. False. Homes of Qataris are of great importance to them and are very distinct from the residences of foreign workers.

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Source: CIA World Factbook 2009

** Source: CIA World Factbook 2008

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