



# QATAR NOW

VIBRANT  
TRADITION





Welcome to *Qatar Now*, your guide to an unforgettable holiday in Qatar, the Arab Tourism Capital of 2023.

With rich cultural history, world-class art and food scenes, spectacular natural wonders and the world's best shopping and wellness destinations to be discovered, Qatar provides the perfect holiday experience.

This special, double-sided edition showcases how heritage meets modern vision in our unique country. On this side of the book, we explore Qatar's Vibrant Tradition. You will meet a new generation of curators, chefs and explorers who are keeping our heritage, crafts and local cuisine alive. Young travellers from all around the world can be inspired by Qatar's youth, who share exciting ways to engage with local culture, from exploring interactive museums to meeting falcons at the souq and tasting delicious Qatari foods.

We invite you and your family to enjoy all that Qatar's diverse cities, coastlines and deserts have to offer as you make memories that will last a lifetime.

His Excellency

## Akbar Al Baker

*Chairman of Qatar Tourism and Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive*

مرحباً بكم في "فطر الآن"، دليلكم الإرشادي الأشمل لعيش تجربة سياحية كاملة الأوصاف في فطر، التي تُوجت عاصمتها الدوحة مؤخراً بلقب عاصمة السياحة العربية 2023.

تمتلك فطر ثقافة غنية ومشهداً فنياً زاهياً بأروع الأعمال الفنية عالمية المستوى ومناظر طبيعية خلابة بالإضافة إلى أفضل المطاعم التي تقدم أشهى المأكولات العصرية والتراثية وأشهر وجهات التسوق ومراكز الاستشفاء العالمية، مما يجعلها توفر للملايين من زوارها فرصة لفضاء عطلة مثالية وتجربة سياحية رائعة.

ويظهر بوضوح عبر صفحات هذه النسخة الخاصة ذات الوجهين من "فطر الآن"، ذلك المزيج الفريد الذي تمثله فطر حيث تجمع بين التطور والحداثة من ناحية والأصالة والعراقة من ناحية أخرى.

وفي هذا الجانب من الدليل، نستكشف جوانب التراث الفطري الذي ما زال ينبض بالحياة، حيث يمكنكم أن تلتقوا جيلاً جديداً من القائمين على حفظ هذا التراث الغني الذي يشمل المغننيات الأثرية والمأكولات الفطرية والحرف اليدوية.

كما يمكن للمسافرين الشباب الذين يأتون إلى فطر من جميع أنحاء العالم أن يجدوا الإلهام الذي يبحثون عنه لدى أقرانهم من الشباب الفطري الذي يقدم طرقاتاً رائعة للتعبير عن ثقافته الوطنية، بداية من استكشاف المناحيف النفاغلية ومشاهدة الصقور المعروضة في منطقة الأسواق وتناول أشهى المأكولات الفطرية.

ولذلك ندعوكم أنتم وعائلاتكم لزيارة فطر والاستمتاع بمدنها وشواطئها وصحاريها الساحرة التي يمكنها أن تصنع لكم أجمل الذكريات التي تعيش مدى الحياة.

سعادة السيد

## أكبر الباكر

رئيس قطر للسياحة، والرئيس التنفيذي لمجموعة الخطوط الجوية القطرية

## VIBRANT TRADITION

# Contents

This guide to Qatar is double-sided. Read on to be immersed in Vibrant Tradition. Then flip the book to explore our Modern Vision.

### ART & CULTURE

- 08 High definition heritage**  
Qatar's most futuristic building takes you on a journey through our storied past
- 11 Time travel at NMoQ**  
Take a step back in time starting from where it all began
- 12 Now don't miss...**  
Spectacular cultural treasures dotted around Doha
- 20 Artisans in residence**  
Where to try calligraphy and pottery or find a truly unique gift
- 22 Music from the heart**  
The ancient song of the oud is still the sound of the city
- 24 Call of faith**  
Learn about the spiritual customs of local life

### FAMILIES

- 30 Culture of fun**  
Local children show you where to make unique family memories

### FOOD & DINING

- 40 Soul kitchen**  
Discover aromatic spices and secrets with a celebrated local chef
- 44 Order like a local**  
Classic Qatari dishes you have to taste
- 46 Gather around**  
Top restaurants for authentic flavours and friendly atmosphere
- 48 The perfect pour**  
Coffee is an ancient ritual in Qatar—taste culture in every cup

### NATURAL WONDERS

- 52 Shifting sands**  
Find rich tribal heritage in Qatar's vast, golden deserts
- 56 Heritage sites**  
Explore archaeological treasures and mysteries preserved by the sand
- 58 Our stories come from the sea**  
A young diver revives the once-glorious pearl trade of his ancestors
- 62 Paradise found**  
Make the first footprints on gorgeous, unspoiled beaches
- 64 On the green edge**  
Paddle off the grid to find Qatar's greatest natural secrets

### SHOPPING

- 68 Into the labyrinth**  
Wander, haggle and meet local legends in the perfumed alleyways of Souq Waqif

### WELLNESS

- 74 Timeless wellness**  
Ancient healing practices for your skin, body and soul



**ART & CULTURE**

National Museum of Qatar

# High definition heritage

*At the futuristic National Museum of Qatar, take a journey through light and sound to explore the traditions of this country's storied past.*



Some people say the **National Museum of Qatar** (NMoQ, [nmoq.org.qa](http://nmoq.org.qa)) is a flash-forward, a vision of tomorrow that seems to hover above the Corniche like a mirage. Tania Al Majid, the museum's Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs, explains that the iconic building was designed by French architect Jean Nouvel to resemble a desert rose—a swirling mineral cluster that is naturally formed by forces of wind, sea spray and sand. And that inside it, you will travel back across Qatar's history to the time when this peninsula was still underwater. But other than that, the futuristic idea is not too far off.

"Celebrating and sharing our heritage is the key to our future," Al Majid explains. "It is not only important that we preserve the story of Qatar and who we are for our children, it's also important to help people from all over the world relate to our culture and traditions. I love having the ability to tell stories, bridge

gaps and change stereotypes."

NMoQ wants you to see things in ways you never imagined. Telling Qatar's backstory in three chapters—Beginnings, Life in Qatar and Modern History of Qatar—the galleries of the museum curve and flow into surprisingly huge caverns and secret nooks. "In a museum mostly without straight walls, our exhibits have to be creative."

Film projections of immense scale envelop you in light and sound. You will teleport 700 million years back to the geological formation of Qatar. Exploring natural history, you'll be stunned by a life-sized whale shark swimming in mid-air and the hundreds of flowering plants, foxes, oryxes, ostriches and other fauna that manage to survive in the arid wilderness.

Close your eyes. Let the smell of coffee draw you into a cinematic story about the customs, cooking and poetry of nomadic tribes who lived in *al barr* (the desert). In a gallery called Life on

Tania Al Majid says The National Museum of Qatar is no ordinary history lesson



Old principles are preserved by forward-thinking in NMoQ's design

the Coast, chants of *nahham* (singers aboard *dhow*s) and the crashing of waves will immerse you in the world of Qatar's pearl divers. "This film shows the struggles of the pearl divers who went to sea for months at a time—and the struggles of their families who stayed at home, hoping they would return," she says. It can give you goosebumps.

Glittering costumes and jewellery trace the maritime trade routes that first brought influences from India, China and even Europe to Qatar. Digital spectacles explore the prosperous age of oil and natural gas.

"The complex political history of our country—our relations with the Ottomans and the British, and the reigns of sheikhs, including Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed Al-Thani, who united the Qatari tribes to establish the State's sovereignty—is laid out chronologically," Al Majid explains. "Exhibitions also explore how the country is evolving through the current leadership of His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani."

The Old Palace building, carefully encompassed by the interlocking discs of Nouvel's design, lies at the heart of NMoQ. "This was built in 1906 to be the residence and

seat of government for Sheikh Abdullah Bin Jassim and, after he moved to what is known today as the Amiri Diwan, it became Qatar's original National Museum in 1975," she says. Gloriously restored, its ornate porticoes and rooms now host temporary exhibitions. This is one of Al Majid's favourite places.

"Working here has been my dream since I was six years old, when I first came to the old museum with my school," she says. "Now, 27 years later, I still feel a sense of wonder when I walk through this space."

At the current NMoQ, history is built for small, curious hands to touch and feel. Kids can play a virtual pearl-collecting game, talk into a giant shell to record a pledge to help the environment or learn how to milk a goat. Outside, they can scramble through a pirate's dhow, the archaeological-themed Cave of Wonders [see page 31] and a playground geared around modern sustainability.

"I was pregnant with my now nine-year-old, Laila, when I started here and now I also have two other kids who love to come to the museum," Al Majid says. "It's a beautiful thing to see children from around the world playing with kids from Qatar, seeing what they have in common and learning about their differences."

# Time travel at NMoQ

 [CLICK HERE](#)

## CHAPTER ONE BEGINNINGS

Explore the geological forces that shaped the peninsula, the landscape's surprisingly vibrant ecosystem and around 1,000 archaeological artefacts left by Qatar's earliest human inhabitants. See the extinct *Qataraspis depofundis*—an armoured fish that is roughly 400 million years old. A tiny fossil found in Qatar is the only proof the fish existed.

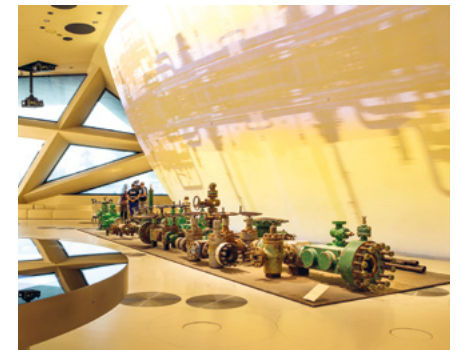


## CHAPTER TWO LIFE IN QATAR

Qataris are descendants of tribes who dived for pearls in the summer and moved to the desert during winter. Discover everyday traditions, celebrations and how far-reaching pearling and trade routes influenced the Qatari culture of today. "I love how immersive and interactive the Life in Al Barr gallery is. My daughter loves it here, too," Al Majid says.

## CHAPTER THREE MODERN HISTORY OF QATAR

Weapons, maps and letters tell stories of tribal battles, foreign powers and sheikhs, all leading to the emergence of a new nation. Dramatic digital installations reveal the modern treasures of oil, natural gas and innovation.



 [CLICK HERE](#)

to walk through NMoQ with Tania Al Majid

# Now don't miss...

*Galleries all over Doha preserve ancient Islamic treasures and the deep roots of local culture.*



The striking geometry of I.M. Pei's MIA building

CLICK HERE

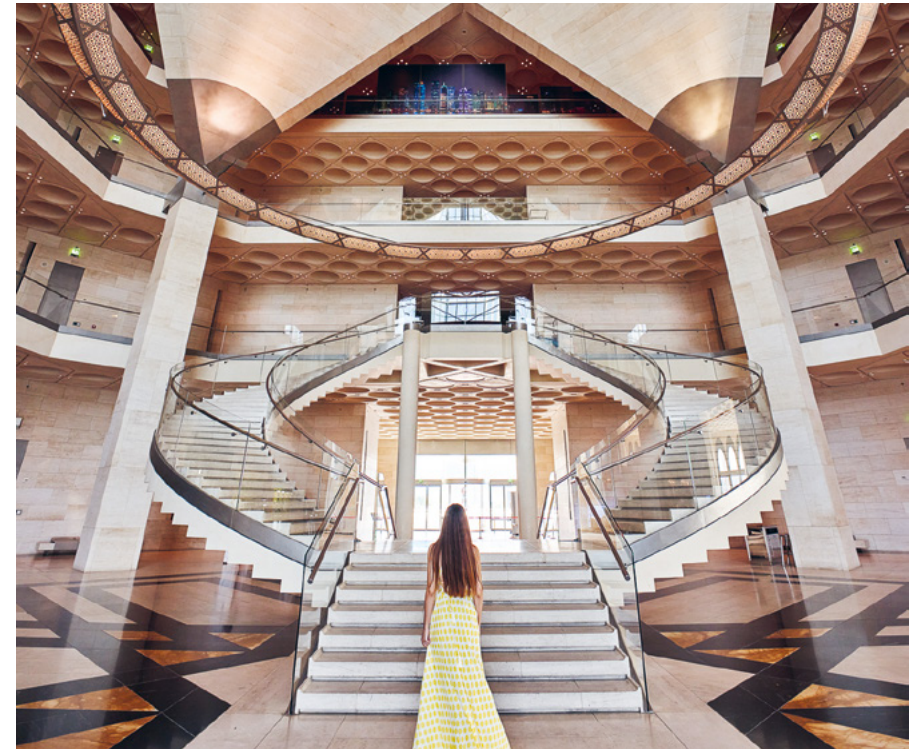


## MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART (MIA)

THE CORNICHE

[mia.org.qa](http://mia.org.qa)

Inside I.M. Pei's spectacular landmark, one of the world's most comprehensive collections of Middle Eastern, European and Central Asian art showcases masterpieces from across 1,400 years of Islamic history. Representing the diversity of Islamic people and their culture, treasures include elaborate ceramics, an Egyptian mosque lamp from the 8<sup>th</sup> century AH (14<sup>th</sup> century CE), goblets and medieval vases as well as splendid carpets. See an astonishing suit of armour once worn by an Ottoman warrior (and his horse) and the Abbasid Blue Qur'an, one of the rarest manuscripts in the Islamic world. The museum also houses pages from the so-called Timurid Baysunghur Qur'an, the largest Qur'an of its time, believed to have been made to impress



An oculus above MIA's grand staircase reflects light around a monumental atrium

“Discover how Islamic civilisation has influenced human civilisation in general.”

Tamerlan, a Timurid ruler and art lover, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

“One of my favourite objects is an example of the *sitara* of the Ka’ba, an Ottoman embroidered curtain that used to hang in front of the Ka’ba in Mecca in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century,” says Dr. Mounia Chekhab Abudaya, a senior curator at the museum.

“Islamic visitors come to MIA and connect to something spiritual and, at the same time, visitors from all countries and faiths can discover how Islamic civilisation has influenced human civilisation in general.” The experience is absolutely unmissable.

**DON’T MISS...**

Wrapping around the waterfront next to the Museum of Islamic Art is **MIA Park**, one of Doha’s impressive grassy spaces. This park and the adjacent **Qatar Museums Gallery**, **Al Riwaq**, showcase temporary installations by famous names such as Japan’s Yayoi Kusama. Check [qm.org.qa](http://qm.org.qa) for what’s popping up while you’re in town.



1. A page from the Abbasid Blue Qur'an
2. An external curtain from the Holy Ka'ba
- 3.

A scene from *Shahnameh*. Longer than Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined, this epic by the 10<sup>th</sup>-century Persian poet Abul-Qasim Firdausi tells the story of kings, from the first mythical ruler of Iran to the kings at the rise of Islam. It was used to teach young princes the morals of leadership



## MSHEIREB MUSEUMS

📍 DOWNTOWN DOHA

[msheirebmuseums.com](http://msheirebmuseums.com)



CLICK HERE

Surrounded by the eco-futuristic Msheireb district, four old Qatari houses have been turned into museums. Gorgeously restored, each explores a key phase in the nation's history. Radwani House gives you a peek inside traditional family life, reflecting on the evolution of domestic roles. Bin Jelmoor House takes an unflinching look at the history of slavery around the Indian Ocean while shining a light on modern forms of human exploitation. Mohammed Bin Jassim House explores the *sikka* (alleyways) of old Doha while Company House, the site of Qatar's first petroleum company's headquarters, tells the stories of labourers on the front lines of oil exploration. Exhibits are excellent, creatively engaging for children and free.

**Below:**  
Company House's ceiling filters the sunlight

**Right:**  
The four houses of Msheireb Museums capture key moments in Qatar's evolution





## SOUQ WAQIF ART CENTER

AL JASRA  
swacqatar.net



CLICK HERE

Traditional disciplines of Middle Eastern and Islamic art are given a fresh look at this atmospheric gallery, found at the city's famous souq. Wander under colourful mosaic lamps and archways to peruse works for sale by local painters, sculptors and makers. Check the website to catch workshops on crafts such as glass painting or to spy a ceramicist behind their wheel.

1. Inside the Souq Waqif Art Center
2. Slip through the entrance on the souq's main thoroughfare
3. See local artists at work



# Artisans in residence

*The time-honoured handcrafts of Qatar have a story to tell. Meet a maker, try a workshop and find something special to take home.*

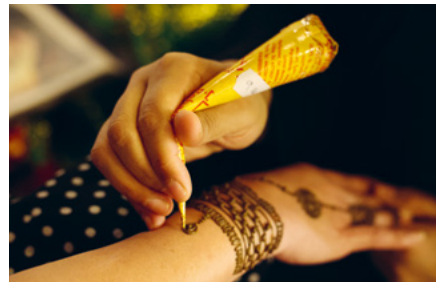
## ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY

The graceful art of calligraphy is revered across the Middle East, having been popularised by scholars who, while transcribing the Holy Qur'an, reflected the beauty they saw in Allah's word in elaborate script. It is still a rich form of expression in contemporary Qatar.

A free calligraphy tour runs on Tuesdays at the **Museum of Islamic Art** ([mia.org.qa](http://mia.org.qa)). To make your own masterstroke, learn to write your name at a workshop at **Embrace Doha** ([embracedoha.com](http://embracedoha.com)) in Souq Al Wakrah.

## HENNA BODY ART

Pearl divers once painted the reddish-brown paste made from henna leaves onto the soles of their feet as a skin conditioner. But decorating arms and hands with intricate tattoos has long been women's business. Unique designs are often applied to celebrate occasions, such as weddings and Eid, but henna artists at Souq Waqif can give you one at any time. Take time choosing because once it's on, the tint stays on for around 10 days.



## POTTERY

Though Qatari people relied on pottery to store water and food in the old days, it's most likely that the jugs and pots they used were brought in by foreign traders. These days, locals throw clay at The Gate Mall **Mud Pottery Studio** ([thegate-qatar.com/mud-pottery-studio](http://thegate-qatar.com/mud-pottery-studio)), **Ceramic Cube** ([ceramic3cube.com](http://ceramic3cube.com)) in Lusail and the **Liwan** ([liwan.org.qa](http://liwan.org.qa)) creative lab in Msheireb. In a workshop at **Heenat Salma Farm** ([heenatsalma.earth](http://heenatsalma.earth)), you can get your hands dirty with wild clay sourced from Qatar.



## WEAVING

Al Sadu weaving was the practical artform mastered by Qatari women, who turned goat and camel hair and sheep's wool into desert tents, called *bait al-sha'r* (house of hair). "Very traditional black, brown and beige fabrics reflect the natural materials but old weavers also used natural dyes such as pomegranate, saffron and henna to create vibrant shades of red and yellow," says Tania Al Majid from the National Museum of Qatar. Traders introduced the dyes that create the bright hues of the carpets, bags and cushions you'll see in souqs today.

Traditional geometric motifs were inspired by the animals, plants, pots and coffee cups of the desert environment. "The symbols of Al Sadu were storylines," Al Majid explains. "Patterns were designed to tell a story, but a story could only be read by the woman who had woven it." Only a small group of women still weave with tools such as the *meghzal* (spindle) and *el nul* (loom). The **Embrace Doha** ([embracedoha.com](http://embracedoha.com)) cultural centre in Souq Al Wakrah runs workshops with a masterweaver.

## GYPSUM CARVING

Locally produced gypsum was a favoured building material because of its ability to withstand extreme conditions. But the brilliantly cool and white plaster is also beautiful; when plants were few, etchings of flowers, the starry sky or passages from the Qur'an became the gardens of affluent houses, palaces and mosques. To find an ornament for your own home, drop by the gift shops at the Museum of Islamic Art and National Museum of Qatar or scan the stalls at Souq Waqif.

## EMBROIDERY

Women traditionally sewed their family's garments as there were no dressmakers in Qatar. Even in the early 1950s, there were only three tailors in the country, and all of them specialised in men's clothing. Fast-forward to now and Doha is a magnet for every fashion brand you can think of, but needlework techniques such as *an-naqdah*, in which women's headscarves and clothing are embroidered with gold and silver thread, are still beloved. Local label **Moonlight Concept** ([moonlightconcept.com](http://moonlightconcept.com)) elevates embroidery with modern luxury—wander through its showroom in Msheireb Galleria (building U02).

# Music from the heart

*Stirring and centuries-old, the song of the oud is still the soundtrack of the big city.*

“When I play, it’s like going into another world,” says musician Abdulrahman Al Ahmad, his fingertips plucking a low, trembling sound from the instrument in his hands. “The amazing thing about the oud is that whatever I am feeling, you hear in the music. If I am happy or sad, when you listen, you can feel it, too.”

*“Traditional music is ancient, but that is what makes it last for the future.”*

The sometimes frenetic, sometimes melancholic signature of music from around the Arabian Gulf, the oud is loved by the young and the old in Qatar. It might take a trained ear like Al Ahmad’s to pick the unique rhythmic patterns, or *iqa’at*, of the Qatari style, but the folk themes of songs are familiar even to kids. “It’s the

sound of gathering—everyone grows up hearing songs played on the oud,” he says.

Listen up in local restaurants such as **Saiyd Afandi** (+974 4488 3259) at Doha Festival City and squares surrounding city souqs—you might catch the oud’s guitar-like twang alongside the *qanun* (a harp-style instrument), *kamanja* (fiddle), *nay* (flute), *riq* (tambourine) and *darbuka* (drum) in *takht* ensembles. Yes, you’re allowed to dance. At oud festivals and workshops set up by the Katara Oud Center, a young generation of players like Al Ahmad learn from masters from around the Arabic world. “Traditional music is ancient but that is what makes it last for the future.”

## DID YOU KNOW?

‘Oud’ means wood in Arabic, giving the name to the instrument and the aromatic extract prized by perfumers.

Abdulrahman Al Ahmad at the **Katara Amphitheatre**

Doha's graceful Imam **Abdul Wahhab Mosque**, also called the Qatar State Grand Mosque, fuses simple lines with elegant Islamic flourishes



# Call of faith

*The spiritual customs of Islam set the rhythms of local life—tuning in can bring real beauty to a holiday experience.*

At the first touch of sun on the eastern horizon, minarets around the Islamic world sound the call. This, the morning *Fajr*, is the first of five prayer times that follow the sun from dawn to noon (*Dhuhr*), afternoon (*Asr*), sunset (*Maghrib*) and nightfall (*Isha*).

“Though the call has a stirring, emotive sound, it is not a song,” explains Dr. Mounia Chekhab Abudaya, Senior Curator at Doha’s Museum of Islamic Art. “The *muezzin* who is making the call is using his voice as the instrument, giving the words a different feel at different times of the day.”

At prayer times, peace falls as people all over Qatar pause to face Mecca. “These are spiritual moments,” Abudaya says. “Regardless of where they come from, I think anyone who hears the call floating across the city can sense the feeling.”

Prayer is a pillar of Islam and, in many ways, the Qatari way of life. Weekends begin on Friday, the day of prayer. “For the Friday *Dhuhr*,

Muslims gather at the mosque to hear the imam preach.” As many businesses close until the afternoon, Fridays are “a special time even for non-Muslims to stop for introspection and take a moment for themselves,” Abudaya notes.

Faith, family and feasts thread Qatari culture together. Ramadan, observed during the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, commemorates the revelation of the Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad. During this period, which fell between March and April in 2023, Muslims fast from dusk to dawn. “The fast is about self-restraint, self-reflection, purification, humility and humbleness,” says Abudaya. “You also get to think about not eating in excess and really respecting your body. Fasting is now being practiced all over the world, even in a non-religious way—it’s proven to be extremely healthy.”

At sunset, canons (you can see one fired at Souq Waqif) signal *iftar* far and wide—the day’s



*“Even when 30,000 people come here to worship, it still has a serene feeling.”*

particular,” Abudaya says. “Even when 30,000 people come here to worship, it still has a serene feeling.”

**Tip:** Visitors should cover their arms and legs and women should wear a headscarf to enter a mosque. Always remove your shoes. Photography is strictly prohibited in ladies’ praying areas.



**CLICK HERE**  
to learn more

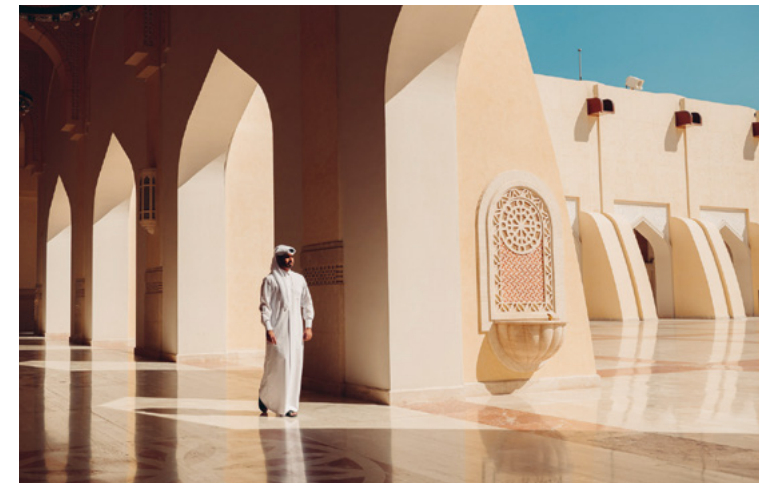
The **blue Katara Mosque** 🕌: During free *masjid* tours you are invited to ask any questions you have about Islam

fast is over. Ramadan tents pop up in hotels with elaborate buffets and a festive mood. “If locals invite you to eat with them, say yes!” Abudaya says. Each family has favourite dishes for the iftar table, but delicious staples include harees made with wheat and pounded meat, al thareed (crispy flatbread layered with chicken or meat stew) and luqaimat, which are fried, syrupy dough balls dripping in rosewater.

“Something unique people do in Qatar is Garangao, a tradition in which kids get dressed up, sing and go around neighbourhoods collecting bags of nuts and sweets,” Abudaya explains. “It’s really fun.”

Eid Al Fitr, a national holiday, marks the end of the holy month. Offices and schools close for days of celebration and people greet each other with “*Eid Mubarak*”, meaning “Blessed Eid”, or “*Kul’am wa enta bi-khair*”, meaning “May every year find you in good health”.

At any time of year, visitors are welcomed inside mosques (visit outside of worship times). The commanding sandstone Imam Abdul Wahhab Mosque is the most iconic in Doha. Beneath its magnificent 93 domes, earth-coloured marble floors stay cool in the heat of summer. “It reflects the traditional architectural style of mosques in the Gulf and in Qatar in



Feel the tranquility of the Imam Abdul Wahhab Mosque 🕌



**FAMILIES**

# Culture of fun

*Discover giant whale sharks, falcon flying sessions, farm days and delicious Arabic treats—let the children of Qatar show you secrets for a holiday you will never forget.*

## MEET THE YOUNG CURATORS



**JED, 10, AND ZEPHYR, 5, SUNTAY** have lived in Doha since their parents moved here for work in 2020. “Qatari kids are really friendly—if you ask if you can play with them, they say yes,” Jed says.

**MOHAMMED AL DOSARI, 7,** loves music and drawing. He posts his adventures on Instagram @moh.aldosari and YouTube (@mohammedaldosari5271). “I love to show Qatar through a child’s eyes,” he says.

1.

CLICK HERE

### EXPLORE THE CAVE OF WONDERS

📍 NATIONAL MUSEUM OF QATAR, DOHA  
[nmoq.org.qa](http://nmoq.org.qa)

Kids can jump, crawl and climb through Qatari history at the playgrounds built into the grounds of the **National Museum of Qatar**. Inside the Cave of Wonders, which looks like a rocky sinkhole found out in the desert, explore secret caverns, following the squeaks of digital bats to find light-up geckos and crystals. You can even see copies of the mysterious rock etchings discovered at Al Jassasiya (read more on page 57).

At the Adventure Ship playground, shimmy up the ladders to play aboard the *Ghatriusha* shipwreck and hear tales about the famous pirate and trader Rahmah ibin Jaber.

In summer, the walls of the cave are chilled and fans circulate mist inside the ship.







2.

**MEET AN ARABIAN ORYX**

📍 VARIOUS LOCATIONS



CLICK HERE

Local legend has it that Qatar’s national animal, with its long, spear-like horns, is the basis for the mythic unicorn. You’ll also recognise the oryx as the emblem of Qatar Airways. In their natural desert home, these graceful white antelopes rest in the shade by day and graze on vegetation at night—they might travel as far as 50 km to find food before dawn.

“At **North Sedra Farm** ([northsedra.qa](http://northsedra.qa), open from October), you can feed them straw and

wheat and there are other animals to see,” Jed says. “I like to pick the fresh fruit here, too.”

Think you could spot an oryx in the wild? Keep your eyes open while you go dune bashing on a desert day tour with **Doha Bus** ([dohabus.com](http://dohabus.com))—but don’t worry if the animals stay hidden; the tour pit stops for lunch or dinner at Al Majles Resort, where well-loved resident oryxes live in open-air pens, nibbling on grass and fruit. You can even take a photo with them!



3.

**TRAIN A FALCON**

📍 AL RUWAIIS

@[alkubaisi.educational.reserve](https://www.alkubaisi.educational.reserve)



CLICK HERE

“My favourite place in Doha is Souq Waqif because all the old buildings are interesting and you can hold a falcon in the falcon souq,” Jed says. “There’s even a falcon hospital!” Falcons are precious in Qatar and people fly them in competitions. “At **Alkubaisi Educational Sanctuary** (@[alkubaisi.educational.reserve](https://www.alkubaisi.educational.reserve)) near Al Ruwais, Mr. Al Kubaisi, who looks after Qatari animals, lets you wear a glove and hold some food and a big falcon will swoop down to sit on your arm.”



4.

CLICK HERE



**SWIM AT A SEA IN THE DESERT**

📍 INLAND SEA

“The Inland Sea is where there is beautiful water surrounded by dunes and I love to go there to go sand boarding and swimming, crabbing and fishing,” Jed says. “Once we caught a catfish that was as big as my sister, Zephyr.” Families come out to barbecue food in the evening. “Some people bring their camels, which you can ride for about 50 Riyals, too.”



5.

**RIDE A LEGENDARY HORSE**

📍 VARIOUS LOCATIONS

“Arabian horses are special because the colours are very beautiful and they are strong and kind,” Mohammed says. Police around Souq Waqif ride white horses. Want to saddle up? “You can see horses training and do riding lessons at **Al Shaqab** in Education City—it’s really fun.” Book private tours of the horseshoe-shaped equestrian centre at [alshaqab.com](http://alshaqab.com). Children aged four and older can ride a pony at **Al Samriya Estate** ([alsamriyaestate.com](http://alsamriyaestate.com)) in Al Shahaniya.





6.

**GO BACK IN TIME AT KATARA**

📍 KATARA CULTURAL VILLAGE  
katara.net

“There are so many fun things to do at **Katara Cultural Village**. It’s like walking around an old town, but there are paintings on walls and you can hire boats at the public beach,” Jed says. “I like all the Middle Eastern food places here.” Mohammed loves **Chac’Late** (chaclate.com) for shakshuka and Oreo cookie milkshakes. Everyone loves the new **Oli Oli Play Museum** (olioli.qa)—you will find it inside a building that looks like a giant giftbox.

Also in Katara, climb 62 steps up to the top of the amphitheatre, a dazzling white blend of old Greek and Arabian architecture. “The view is amazing—you can see all the way to The Pearl-Qatar island,” Jed says. This is also a great place in Doha to see a live show—try standing on the stage and hearing how your voice travels! Check katara.net for schedules.

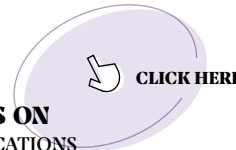


7.

**GET HANDS ON**

📍 VARIOUS LOCATIONS

Jed has mastered writing his name in Arabic calligraphy. Mohammed has made his own plate and cup in a pottery class. There are lots of ways for kids to learn about the traditional arts of Qatar. **Heenat Salma Farm** (heenatsalma.earth) runs calligraphy and clay workshops for juniors and the **Embrace Doha** (embracedoha.com) cultural centre at Souq Al Wakrah can teach the whole family how to weave the patterned fabric that Bedouin tents are made of.

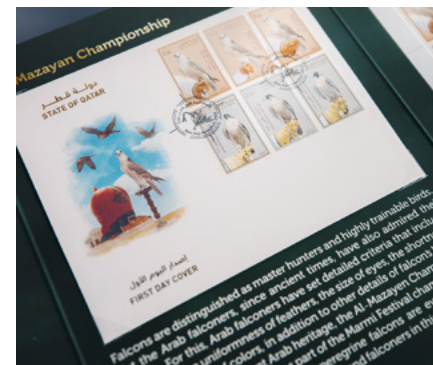
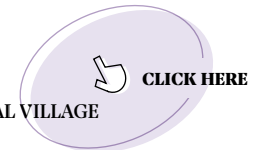


8.

**LOOK CLOSER**

📍 KATARA CULTURAL VILLAGE  
+974 4409 1077

A stamp can tell you a lot more than where a letter was posted from. **The Arab Postal Stamps Museum** in Katara Cultural Village (+974 4409 1077) showcases artefacts from 22 Arab countries, highlighting variations in design, history and commerce across the region. Stamp collecting could be your new hobby.



9.

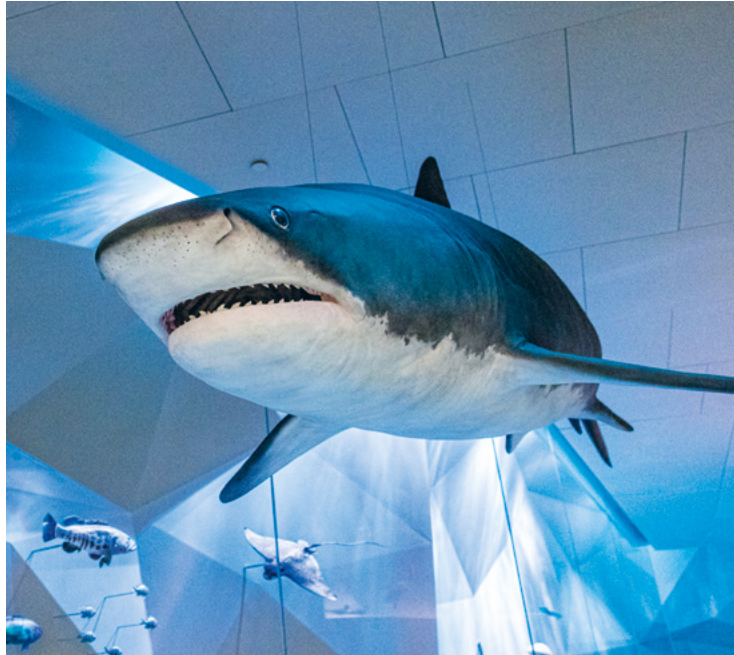


CLICK HERE

### GO INSIDE THE DESERT ROSE

📍 NATIONAL MUSEUM OF QATAR, DOHA  
[nmoq.org.qa](http://nmoq.org.qa)

“This museum is fun because there are so many interactive things to play with to learn about Qatar,” Mohammed says. “There is a big whale shark that hangs from the ceiling! I haven’t seen a real whale shark in the water yet so it’s amazing to see how big they are inside a museum.” The building is interesting, too. “It looks like a desert rose, which is what we call a cluster of minerals that forms in the sand,” Jed adds, who has a real desert rose at home. You can buy one at the NMOQ gift shop.



10.



CLICK HERE

### SEE MORE THAN 600 VINTAGE CARS

📍 SHEIKH FAISAL BIN QASSIM AL THANI MUSEUM  
[alsamriyaestate.com](http://alsamriyaestate.com)

The place everyone calls the FBQ Museum tells the story of Qatar through the priceless private collections of one of its richest entrepreneurs. “I saw *so* many old cars and the museum even has dhow boats and a rebuilt Qatari home from the old times,” Jed says. “You can look inside living rooms and bedrooms—it’s interesting to see what neighbourhoods used to look like.”



11.

### THE KIDS VOTE: TRADITIONAL QATARI SNACKS YOU HAVE TO TASTE

📍 VARIOUS LOCATIONS

**Mohammed:** “Ragag bread is the yummiest thing at Souq Waqif. Choose the flavour you want—Nutella or anything! My favourites are egg with cheese and honey.”

**Jed:** “Kunafa is a sweet pastry that a lot of restaurants serve. It’s so good because it has green pistachios on the top. And I love sweet karak tea.”

**Zephyr:** “Dates filled with cardamom, chocolate and rose cream are my favourite treats.” **Qinwan Café** (@qinwancafe.qa) at Msheireb, The Gate Mall and Place Vendôme do some of Doha’s most delicious.



CLICK HERE  
to learn more



**FOOD & DINING**



# Soul kitchen

*Spicy notes meet smooth nuance in Chef Noof Al Marri's Qatari cuisine.*



Handfuls of red bizar, green fenugreek and turmeric the colour of sunshine are thrown into a sizzling pot, sending explosions of earthy, sweet aroma into the air. "They are intense now, but just wait," says Chef Noof Al Marri, master of the **Desert Rose Café** (@desertrosedoha), which is set into the National Museum of Qatar. "Qatari spices seduce the palate; they don't attack." Locals don't call Al Marri the 'queen of spice' for nothing.

Today, Al Marri is making her famous madrouba, a traditional dish of beaten rice porridge mixed with meat. This is proper comfort food. "For me, cooking is communication—through my food, I share my culture, my cuisine and, when I share my spices, I share my heart," she says.

Al Marri first learnt the art of culinary storytelling from her mother. "I loved to cook with her as a little girl and the first thing we made together was eggs." It was her mother's

ghee (clarified butter) that made their omelettes special. "Every home cook, every family in Qatar, has their own spice mixes," the chef says. So come to every table hungry and curious. Classic dishes might sound humble, but they are stunningly diverse.

Machboos, the country's national dish of marinated fish, chicken or lamb and rice with turmeric, cardamom and cloves, is on almost every local menu. "Traditionally this was served at weddings and occasions, but now we eat it all the time," Al Marri says. "Machboos will be different in every place you try it. I can tell just from the aroma whether a bowl of it was made by my mother or my friend."

The madrouba she's cooking today is a Doha staple, usually made from tomato, rice and seafood or meat. "This is my grandmother's dish, but I have my secrets," she smiles again, stirring the pot with turmeric-laced Qatari butter, oats and a bunch of chopped spinach. "I like to make traditional dishes healthier."



1

2

1. Chef Al Marri selects spices for her mix

2. Piles of fragrant powders, pods and seeds at the spice souq



Her grandma wouldn't mind the updates. In a country that has long been at the crossroads of trade routes, fusion is a natural part of the cuisine. "Qatari food evolved over time with the flavours, aromas and recipes of so many different gastronomic cultures, especially influenced by rice and spices from India and food from the Levant. It started very humble but grew over the years into a more sophisticated cuisine."

*"Every home cook, every family in Qatar, has their own spice mixes."*

Al Marri is also known for re-thinking aseeda, a sweet date pudding originally from Yemen, with pumpkin. "It's one of the recipes in my *Tastes of Qatar* cookbook and one of my favourite desserts."

But for now, 'madrouba, Noof-style' is ready. At home, it would be heaped into a big dish and shared around the table. But at Desert Rose Café, the thick porridge is ladled into elegant bowls and trimmed with microgreens. It looks like restaurant food, but, luscious, hearty and complex, it still tastes like home.

"When local people come to eat here at my cafe, they close their eyes and say, 'Oh, Noof, I remember when my grandmother made this,'" she says. "This is what makes me happy." *Explore more Qatari classics on the next page.*

 **CLICK HERE**  
to watch Chef Al Marri bring her signature madrouba dish to life

## What to taste at the spice souq

### **BLACK LOUMI (LIME)**

Sun-dried lime adds a burst of zesty sourness perfect for flavouring fish. "In hot water, it's also fantastic for digestion."

### **ZAFFRAN (SAFFRON)**

Electric orange and expensive, slightly bitter saffron is often used to balance sweet dishes and karak.

### **HAEL (CARDAMOM)**

A staple in every Qatari kitchen, these fragrant pods have a camphor note and enhance the flavour of meats. A key ingredient in Arabic coffee and sweets.

### **MABOOJ (CHUTNEY)**

Chef Al Marri's recipe of coriander, curry leaves, garlic and red chilli spices up cheese dishes and saloona or can marinate chicken or fish.

### **BIZAR**

The word means spices in a blend. Chef Al Marri's speciality (available at her cafe) spikes cumin, coriander, cinnamon and two colours of cardamom with a stack of secrets.

# Order like a local

*Sharing plates around the table is the best way to try richly aromatic Qatari favourites. Tip: 'latheeth' means delicious.*

## 1. SHAKSHUKA

The local take on the Middle Eastern baked or poached egg classic sounds deceptively simple: eggs, tomato, salt and pepper. But together, it's salty, tart and sublime. Scoop the eggs up with bread and enjoy with a cup of red tea.

## 4. THAREED

You'll get something better in every bite of this complex curried dish. Vegetables such as okra, zucchini and pumpkin are layered with tender chicken or lamb and covered in sauce made with cinnamon, coriander, black seed and anise. The best bit? Ragag bread is layered at the bottom of the dish to soak up every drop.

## 7. TOMATO ACHAR

So simple, so good. Tomatoes stuffed with mint, hot peppers and garlic are pickled in lemon juice and vinegar until they become tangy. Pour or press into rice for a spicy hit.

## 2. SAGO

This sticky, sugary pudding made from sago pearls, butter, cardamom and saffron is a popular treat after dinner or in the afternoon. It is extra satisfying when sprinkled with crushed walnuts or cashews for a little savoury crunch.

## 5. SALOONA

Laden with cardamom, clove and the bright flavours of ginger, pepper and black louni, this thick tomato-based stew usually comes with chicken or meat and lots of hearty vegetables. But Doha is a fishing town, so whenever you spot saloona with fish, you will not want to miss out.

## 3. BALALEET

Doubling as both a breakfast and dessert, vermicelli noodles are sauteed for a crispy edge, sweetened with rosewater and cardamom and mixed with saffron and turmeric. Often topped with egg and always best with a sip of Arabic coffee.

## 6. HAREES

Bowls of boiled, cracked or coarsely ground wheat mashed like a porridge are a staple across the Middle East. "In Kuwait, they add sugar, but real Qatari harees comes with meat and ghee on the top," says local chef Noof Al Marri. "My kids love eating it when we go to Souq Waqif." It's also a great side for thareed.

### YOU CAN'T BEAT HOMEMADE

Even in this city of countless restaurants, there's a strong tradition of Doha locals preparing food for neighbours and friends. In the evening, home cooks bring pots full of classics to the square near the ladies' prayer hall at Souq Waqif.



# Gather around

*Book a table at these neighbourhood restaurants for authentic flavours and friendly atmosphere.*



Left:  
Bayt Sharq

## **BAYT SHARQ**

📍 THE CORNICHE, DOHA  
+974 7770 4589

This charming Doha restaurant is an easy stroll from Souq Waqif, set into a century-old house with its own little museum. Sit at a table in the palm-shaded courtyard or settle into a glass-walled, climate-controlled cube to take your time over ornate platters filled with classics such as bajella (beans) and shakshuka-style eggs at breakfast. Or, at dinner, enjoy slow-cooked harees and hamsset rubbian—a rich dry stew of shrimp simmered in the house’s unique blend of spices.

## **BAYT EL TALLEH**

📍 KATARA, DOHA  
+974 5010 1777

You need to go early in the evening to get a spot on the breeze-catching rooftop at this Katara Hills institution. Bayt El Talleh’s plates of home-style Levantine classics attract a crowd. The crunchy green fattoush and harra’ osba’a salad of lentils, citrus and pomegranate are satisfyingly fresh in summer and kids will love fried pastry rolls filled with fluffy cheese and sweet mahalabiya (milk pudding) flavoured with rosewater. Locals go straight for the set menu to hit all the highlights.



## **SHAY AL SHOMOUS**

📍 SOUQ WAQIF, DOHA  
+974 5551 5561

A Qatari cook’s favourite cook, Shams Al Qassabi was the first woman to open a business in Souq Waqif nearly 20 years ago. “She inspired me and other women in Qatar to follow our passions and share our traditional food with the world,” says local chef Noof Al Marri. “Shams is here every morning, early, making her famous breakfast.” Al Qassabi’s crispy ragag bread sprinkled with zataar, eggs scrambled with tomato and keema—a spiced mince meat eaten with chapati—are iconic.

## **BAIT AL MAJBOUS**

📍 AL RAYYAN  
+974 7767 2071

Opposite Aspire Park, on Furosiya Street in Al Rayyan, Bait Al Majbous does machboos—with gently spiced sand lobster, with local hamour fish, with chicken and even with Australian lamb. If you’re craving some wholesome vegetables, marqoq stew comes with zucchini, carrots, eggplant, tomato and potato. Chunks of dough mop up the stock.

## **EASAIR CAFÉ**

📍 AL WAKRAH  
+974 6606 2349

Balaleet breakfasts are very popular at this easygoing cafe right by the beach at Al Wakrah’s souq. But if you want a smaller snack, the karak tea and chapati come hot and sweet. You can pick up grilled sandwiches around lunchtime. Here in the afternoon? Toss a coin to decide what to get with your coffee—cake or aseeda pudding laced with cardamom and saffron.

## **SAASNA**

📍 MSHEIREB, DOHA  
+974 4038 1081

This upscale Qatari restaurant plates up juicy lamb baddawi and saucy fish saloona on beds of flavoured rice—a house specialty at dinnertime. If you come for breakfast, you can taste eggplant-wrapped halloumi and lamb liver that is drizzled with lemon.

## **DESERT ROSE CAFÉ**

📍 THE CORNICHE, DOHA  
+974 6620 4608

Chef Noof Al Marri’s menu is a multi-sensory feast. All the Qatari fusion dishes here have their secrets—ghee (clarified butter), spiked with fenugreek and turmeric, makes Al Marri’s crispy omelette and ragag labna unique and her aromatic chicken madrouba also features extra vegetables. Everything comes plated with contemporary finesse, as befits the cafe’s position inside Jean Nouvel’s desert rose building at the National Museum of Qatar. Try the coffee, which is blended with rosewater.



# The perfect pour

Whether you sip qahwa or cortado, a morning (or afternoon) cup of coffee comes rich with tradition.



Coffee is a serious matter in Qatar. Doha's growing roster of roasters and hip cafes can brew you everything from cold drip to charcoal lattes, potent V60 hits and new-school mixes of cinnamon, blended dates and espresso, but the roots of local *qahwa* (Arabic coffee) culture are ancient.

Going back to the nomadic traditions of the desert, the sharing of coffee is central to social life and deeply imbued with ritual. "Every visitor is immediately offered coffee. The unwritten laws of hospitality dictate the sharing of what is most precious," says chef Noof Al Marri from Desert Rose Café at the National Museum of Qatar.

"The only type of coffee considered appropriate is Arabica," she explains.

"Green coffee beans are lightly roasted and ground immediately before brewing to preserve the full aroma."

Spiced with cardamom, cloves and saffron and served in a *dallah*, a small metal pot with a long curving spout, mildly bitter golden qahwa is served in *finjan* (small cups) and sipped with plump dates or other sweets on the side. It's polite to pass coffee only with your right hand, fill a cup a third of the way and jently jiggle your cup from side to side when you've had enough.

In days gone by, a *majlis*, where matters from marriage to politics were discussed over qahwa, was a males-only space. Today, traditional coffee shops at Souq Waqif welcome all comers. You might even get an iced qahwa on a warm summer's day.

## MORE OF A TEA PERSON?

Sweetly simmered, milky, cardamom-infused karak (chai-style tea) originated in India and Pakistan but is now a true Qatari brew. Sip it with chapati and luqaimat (mini doughnuts) from the **Chapati & Karak** (@chapatiandkarak.qa) joints in Katara or Box Park in Al Mina.



# Brews near you

## EDUCATION CITY

At **Flat White Specialty Coffee** (flatwhite.qa) try a creamy El Majhool latte with dates and cinnamon or a refreshing spritz of cold brew spiked with sparkling water and lemon.

## WEST BAY

The signature iced rose latte from **Upside Down Cafe** (@upsidedown.qa) is heaven for sweet tooths, especially with French toast, saffron cake or ice cream. At **Gastronomy** (gastronomycafe.com), grab a spicy halloumi ciabatta to go with a Greek coffee dosed with a healthy shot of mastic.

## LUSAIL

**Calm Street Roastery** (@calmstreet.qa) prepares seasonal beans in-house for connoisseurs. Get your Chemex or V60 caffeine hit, rich Turkish coffee, piccolos or hot and cold spins on a true flat white.

## MSHEIREB AND SOUQ WAQIF

In the pedestrian underpass that connects Souq Waqif to downtown, **Nomad** (@nomad.qa) does a lightly floral iced pour-over brewed from Yemeni beans. **Profiles** (m7.org.qa), in the M7 Design hub, serves an iced Spanish latte in which coffee is frozen into cubes that bob in milk. Don't miss the espresso soft serve at **% Arabica** (@arabica.qatar). While exploring the souq, **Asherg Coffee** and **Majlis Al Damas** are the spots for proper qahwa.

## THE PEARL-QATAR

The shady outdoor terrace at **Harvest** (@harvest.qa) has a European vibe—order Madrid-style milky cortados or Colombian brews with notes of red apple, molasses and chocolate. Vegan cafe **Evergreen Organics** (evergreenorganics.com) ups the specialty ante with oat, nut or soy milks and raw hazelnut brownies.

**NATURAL WONDERS**



Khor Al Udaid / Inland Sea

# Shifting sands

*Qatar's golden deserts appear untouched—that's part of their magic. But venture into the expanse and you'll discover vibrant nomadic heritage that echoes through modern life.*



"I come out here to recharge myself with nature," says proud Bedouin woman, and Founding Director of the Embrace Doha cultural centre, Amal Al Shammari. "I listen to the wind and the quietness. Going barefoot in the desert is good for health."

Qatar's south-eastern desert is an epic wilderness on every scale. Here, an extension of Rub' al-Khali, the largest continuous sand desert in the world, runs into pale sunbaked peaks—and these spill into a turquoise body of water known as Khor Al Udaid, or the Inland Sea. "It feels like you're in a different world," Al Shammari says. Yet you're only a 40-minute drive by 4WD from the luxe resorts of the Sealine coast, and little more than an hour from central Doha.

Al Shammari, who also fronts Qatar's first animation company and works in strategic planning within the natural resource sector, could be called a city Bedouin. But her family have been desert people for uncounted generations. "My tribe, the Shammar, is one of the biggest in the Gulf region," she says.

"My parents were nomadic before settling down in Qatar. Being out here makes me appreciate all they had to do to survive."

Life in *al barr* (the desert) was simple and tough. "People would not stay in one place for more than 15 days—they had to follow the water that is moving under the sand and find vegetation to feed their animals." They owned little. "Everything had to be carried so everything they had needed to be useful."

From childhood, girls learned *Al Sadu*, the practical art of weaving camel and goat hair or wool into the sturdy, geometrically-patterned textiles now iconic throughout the Middle East. "Women made the tents and put them up and down—they were the builders and the architects of the desert," Al Shammari explains.

"Women were so important to the way of life that I used to joke with my mum, 'What were the men even doing?'"

Bedouins were herders, living mostly on meat and protein-rich milk. It was the men's job to find grazing land for the animals and protect their families. Hunters trained falcons to catch



Amal Al Shammari watches dusk fall over the dunes at Khor Al Udaid

*“Hospitality means everything in Qatari culture—guests are meant to be welcomed into the family circle...”*



rabbits and smaller birds to roast. Around campfires by night, the wails of the *rebab* (the Bedouin’s violin) curled away into the dark with the fire’s smoke. “Music, songs and poetry were a very meaningful part of life,” Al Shammari says. “In a culture with no writing, this is how history was recorded, being passed down from parents to children.”

Legends about Bedouin horsemen abound. In 1893, led by Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed Al-Thani, Bedouin riders helped win a pivotal battle against the Ottomans; a victory that eventually led to Qatar’s independence. Arabian horses, still revered for stamina, speed and good looks, are now raced with national passion.

Now the sport of princes (*amirs*), falconry remains a point of pride across the region. Prized falcons, some worth a million Qatari Riyal, can travel in style inside plane cabins (as long as they have a passport).

At Doha’s Souq Waqif, a dedicated falcon hospital administers state-subsidised healthcare and merchants display the hunting birds for sale in all their glory. But it’s not just an expensive hobby. Falconry is an art of patience and skill now recognised by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage.

Other desert hunts are more casual. In some seasons, after rain, spots around Khor Al Udaid and the rocky hamada to Qatar’s north sprout *faga’a* (desert truffle mushrooms), and families head out to collect them. Small, cracked mounds in the sand are one clue that savoury, earthy-flavoured delicacies might lie beneath.

“My dad could just tap or smell the land and know if the truffles were there,” Al Shammari says. “He’d bring my nine brothers and sisters and me out here to look—one year, we found so many he could buy a car!”

In this desert land, food has always been precious and generosity binds people together. “The Bedouin custom was always that if somebody came to your tent, lost or passing by, you welcomed them with food and hospitality and didn’t even ask who they were before they had stayed three days. You would never find a tent with a door.

“Still now, hospitality means everything in Qatari culture—guests are meant to be welcomed into the family circle and there will always be coffee and food.” When you come to Qatar, you eat a lot.

These days, city dwellers bring barbecues to the dunes to cook under a sky so bright it seems electric with stars. On a summer’s night, an air-conditioned drive to a spread set up by a tour company is an elegant way to indulge in these timeless, smoky pleasures.

“My mother always says that when you cook with desert wood, your food will taste better,” Al Shammari says. “You can taste nature.”

**Find cultural tours and weaving workshops at [embracedoha.com](http://embracedoha.com)**



1. A coffee ceremony at Embrace Doha
2. Hunting, now a prestige sport, began as an art of survival
3. Al Shammari is passionate about preserving Al Sadu

 **CLICK HERE**

## Feast at dusk

Book a five-hour Dinner in the Desert tour with Discover Qatar to experience a Bedouin-inspired camp where your barbecued dinner is served among the dunes. [discoverqatar.qa](http://discoverqatar.qa)





## HERITAGE SITES

*Explore rare archaeological sites and UNESCO World Heritage treasures hidden in the rocky northern desert.*

Though this is thought of as a young country, the name ‘Qatar’ has been known since the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when it was mentioned in Syriac letters, says Dr. Ferhan Sakal from Qatar Museums. “Many discoveries have been made since archaeological research started in Qatar during the 1950s,” he says.

### AL ZUBARAH ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE 📍

In the golden age of the pearling trade, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Al Zubarah was a bustling port city, at one time becoming the country’s largest and most important settlement. But its glory burned out fast. The city’s palaces, markets and mosques were all abandoned by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. “Frozen in time, never overbuilt, Al Zubarah town keeps the information about the way of life and the daily struggles of people in a time leading up to the creation of the modern Gulf,” Sakal says. “It also reveals the construction techniques that endure Qatar’s climate, which can inspire modern architecture and sustainability.” A towered fort near the town is now a museum. Visits are ticketed.

If self-driving, head north-east of Al Zubarah for 15 minutes to see Al Rekyat Fort, thought to have been built to protect water sources. Further on, you will find the Al Ruwaida Archaeological Site, the remains of a 16<sup>th</sup> century settlement. On your way from Al Zubarah, stop at Ain Mohammed village for refreshments and pull over to marvel at the reflective discs of Olafur Eliasson’s *Shadows Travelling on the Sea of the Day* artwork.



### ZEKREET ROCK FORMATIONS 📍

On the west coast of Qatar, near Zekreet, about 90 km from central Doha, the lunar-like landscape of Ras Brouq shimmers like a mirage. In this UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, a vast, barren valley is bounded by huge limestone escarpments and punctuated by ‘mushroom’ rock formations that appear to defy all laws of gravity. It is a most ethereal sunset. There is no public transport, so you’ll need a 4WD. Put ‘Zekreet Rock Formation’ into Google Maps.

1. Al Zubarah Fort
2. Zekreet’s otherworldly rock formations
3. Exploring Al Jassasiya’s rock art
4. The meanings of some petroglyphs at Al Jassasiya remain unknown

*Get maps and tickets at [qm.org.qa](http://qm.org.qa)*



### AL JASSASIYA ROCK ART SITE 📍

In 1957, petroglyphs were discovered in some low limestone hills 60 km north of Doha. “The more than 900 rock carvings here depict dhows, a fleet of ships, animals that might be donkeys and camels and many cup marks arranged in different combinations, mostly in rows or rosettes,” Sakal explains. When and why they got here is a mystery. It’s been theorised that some are Neolithic while radiocarbon dating places some around the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. “The boats are definitely not thousands of years old, but carvings like footprints might be.” Some scholars propose cup marks served as game boards. Others suggest they were used for sorting pearls or represent star constellations. What does Sakal think? “We still need to investigate more and study the carvings in their entirety to understand their function and possible development through the ages,” he explains.



Mohammed Al Sada updates the pearl diving tradition of his ancestors

# Our stories come from the sea

*For thousands of years, pearl hunting was the lifeblood of Qatar. Now, this young diver is bringing it back.*



Mohammed Al Sada is far too young to remember when Doha was a fishing village—a small but flourishing powerhouse on the global pearl trading map. But the 36-year-old freediver, whose uncle and grandfather were divers back in the day, still feels the pull of the tides.

“I have been diving since I was a teenager,” he says, sliding into his wetsuit like it is a second skin. “The salt is in my blood—every Qatari is connected to the sea.”

At least three times a week, Al Sada leaves his apartment in the city’s outer suburbs in the dark, driving to the northern port of Al Ruwais to be on his boat at daybreak. The quiet gives him pause for thought about the old pearl divers—*ghawas*—who boarded wooden dhows in the heat of summer, sailing off, sometimes for months at a time, in search of iridescent gems to bring back to market.

“It was a brutal way to earn a living,” Al Sada notes. “Their day began by opening oysters with sunrise, and they were diving until sunset.

“They would peg their noses and tie a heavy

stone to one foot to drag them down, holding their breath while they scoured the seabed.”

The idea was to stay at the bottom, looking for as long as possible, before tugging on a rope for a *seeb* (hauler) to pull the diver up. Many didn’t make it home, drowning or succumbing to illness.

Traders back in Qatar shipped the brilliant spoils to ports as far away as Bombay, Baghdad, London and Paris to be worn by nobles and royalty around the world. No pearls were considered as fine as those found in the Arabian Gulf.

In 2020, archaeologists excavated a burial site dating back to the Neolithic period, finding a pearl that had been left as a gift for the afterlife. Researchers say this proves the pearl hunting tradition in Qatar is at least 7,500 years old. For too many seasons to record, it drew people from far across the desert to the coast, providing a livelihood to the entire peninsula. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Arabian Gulf was producing more pearls than all other parts of the world combined.



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Then it was over. Following the worldwide economic depression of the 1930s, which destroyed prices, the cultivation of artificial Japanese pearls slowed demand. Qatar's pearling market quickly collapsed, replaced as an economic force by the oil discovered in Qatar's west in 1939.

These days, dhows that jostle along the Corniche waterfront take tourists on fishing and dinner cruises to beautiful spots such as Al Safliya island. But Al Sada is reconnecting the Qatari social media generation with its

*“The salt is in my blood—every Qatari is connected to the sea.”*

seafaring heritage by posting his freediving adventures on Instagram and TikTok (@86diver). Fans follow him spearfishing for giant hamour and trevally. Sometimes, he reclaims stone weights left on the bottom of the ocean by old divers. He always looks for pearls.

“I am proud of our sea history. I feel very proud to do this and I'll also teach my kids to do it—this is what we are.”

Most days, Al Sada emerges with a handful of small gems, some of which end up in designs sold by H Jewellery at Al Mina. “I have not found a dana, the rare pearl prized for its roundness and large size... yet,” he says. They might not have made his fortune but the oysters are still good bounty—shucked on-deck, drizzled with salt, lemon and chilli, they are best eaten straight from the shell. “I can always find my breakfast in the sea.”

**4-5.** Most of the oysters without pearls are cast back into the ocean for the fish, but some are set aside for breakfast

**6.** Al Sada sizes up a pearl from a recent dive



4



5



6

### SET SAIL

The annual Katara International Dhow Festival celebrates maritime heritage with pearl diving competitions, dhow racing and exhibitions. Check [katara.net](http://katara.net) for details. Book dhow trips with **National Cruise** ([nationalcruise.com](http://nationalcruise.com)) or try your luck along the Corniche.



# Paradise found

*With more than 560 km of coastline lapped by the Arabian Gulf, it's easy to escape the modern world on Qatar's untouched beaches.*

NATURAL WONDERS

## EASY FOR FAMILIES

- Sealine public beach
- Simaisma
- Al Ghariya
- Al Farkiah
- Al Wakrah Beach
- Dukhan Beach
- West Bay Beach
- Al Ruwais Beach
- Doha Sands Beach
- B12 Beach Club

## BEST FOR SOLITUDE

- Khor Al Udaid/ Inland Sea
- Zekreet
- Umm Bab
- Al Maroona Beach (French Beach)
- Fuwairit Beach
- Al Thakhira Beach
- Azerbaijani Beach

Make the first footprints in the pink-hued sands of the northern coast. Dive into the Inland Sea, surrounded by towering golden dunes. Ride the breeze at kitesurfing hotspot Zekreet or snorkel through the starfish-dotted shallows of gorgeous Umm Babb. There's a stretch of sand to suit every holiday style.

Though most sit within a 90-minute drive of Doha and some are edged by towns, many of the peninsula's most spectacular beaches are remote and unserved. Check if you need to load up with sunscreen, your own shade and supplies before you set off.







# On the green edge

*Traveller Shannon Harley swaps sand dunes for Qatar's best-kept natural secret.*

Our kayak cuts across the calm bay, making the crossing from the edge of Al Khor city (50 km north of Doha) to Purple Island in 15 easy minutes. As we steer into a mangrove channel with mainland Qatar at our backs, the cool green walls of foliage seem to close around us, cutting us off from the world. The only sound is the splash of a few grey heron grabbing at fish. “The music of nature,” Mohamed El Azab, my guide and paddling co-pilot from **AquaSports** (aquasportsq.com), calls it.

El Azab has been leading kayak and stand-up paddle tours into this nature reserve for years. He can't believe it has stayed a secret. “This is

my paradise, I feel alive here,” he says, expertly navigating between branches to point out mud crabs and other creatures in the shallows.

Qatar's mangrove forests make for a surprisingly diverse ecosystem. The Arabian Gulf is home to the *Avicennia Marina* species, also named the grey or white mangrove for the salt crystals that colour the undersides of its leaves. Its roots are a haven for fish. “Five times more oxygen comes from a mangrove plant than from any land plant,” El Azab says.

Around 70 per cent of Qatar's mangroves are located here in the country's east. So why is such a green space called Purple Island?

Bin Ghannam Island got the name Purple Island in the second millennium BC, when it was the main site of the Kassite-controlled dye industry. A prized purple colour was made from the murex snails that thrived here.

Now, these tranquil waterways are a bird-watcher's paradise. Look for gulls, cormorants, waders, geese, mallard and teal. From November until April, flocks of flamingos colour the landscape vivid pink as they migrate from Europe to feast on fish and shrimp.

Tours (90 minutes) exploring this mangrove forest run all year round and are family friendly—children from two years of age can join with parents in double kayaks. In summer, trips are timed to catch the cool of sunrise or, like today, the fairyfloss-coloured sunset.

As the sky darkens, El Azab and I float up to the eco-friendly AquaSports beach camp, where lanterns illuminate patterned rugs and cushions. Barbecues are sizzling up dinner.

There's much to fill your photo roll, but there's no WiFi, which El Azab says is intentional. “It's a good place for meditation.”

## Hidden gardens



### QUR'ANIC BOTANIC GARDENS

Find bliss in the big city inside the **Qur'anic Botanic Gardens** (qbg.org.qa) of Education City. This is the first garden in the world dedicated to the plants featured in the Holy Qur'an and Hadith. Weave through Islamic architecture to groves of olive, fig, camphor and date palm. Inhale the sharp, medicinal scents of ginger, camel grass or citron and snap a photo of the mighty Sidra tree, which symbolises perseverance and determination and is the national tree of Qatar.

### AL THAKHIRA MANGROVE FOREST

Less than 10 km from the city of Al Khor, you'll find **Al Thakhira** mangrove forest. This lush surprise is bursting with wildlife and family-friendly white-sand beaches. Pack a picnic (there are no shops here) and prepare for some off-roading.



**SHOPPING**



Guide Shaima Sherif shows you how to go with the flow of the souq

# Into the labyrinth

 [CLICK HERE](#)

*Souq Waqif is a heady tangle of spices, perfume, trinkets and treasures. But the joy isn't just in what you buy, it's in who you meet...*



Shaima Sherif could navigate the twisty-turny *sikkas* of Souq Waqif with her eyes closed. Guided as much by tingling senses as by memory, the Managing Director of the Embrace Doha cultural centre effortlessly sidesteps porters who push wheelbarrows loaded with food, fabric and cooking pots, pausing to trade easy greetings with stall keepers before again finding the slipstream that carries her through the crowds. “I can tell exactly where I am by the sounds and the smells—each part of the souq is different,” she says.

A rich, smoky trail leads her first to the perfume souq, a cluster of traders selling potions and attars of every description. “That’s *bakhoor*,” she says. “It’s a mixture of oud, or wood chips, mixed with musk and amber and other perfumes, which we burn to fragrance our homes and clothes.” Traditionally, smouldering *bakhoor* is passed around the *majlis* to welcome guests into Qatari homes. “You’d also use it as a polite sign when it’s time to leave,” she explains.

Sherif ducks through the old door to New

Mumtaz Perfumes. Vendor Abu Anas smiles wide. His family has been trading at Souq Waqif since the 1960s. Follow your intuition to choose from exotic oud—an aromatic wood extract more expensive than gold—or floral-sweet musk, strangely marine ambergris or powdery amber. “I can’t say what you will love; everyone has their own perfume,” Anas says. He does, however, have one honey-coloured mix that will nourish anyone’s crowning glory.

Much has changed since Sherif started wandering the historic labyrinth as a child. But much has not. “The market has been around for about a hundred years,” she says. “The name Souq Waqif means ‘the standing souq’ because the site was in a *wadi* and vendors would literally stand in water to trade.”

That old market burned down in 2004. “What you see here today has been rebuilt in traditional Qatari architectural style from raw materials, such as gypsum and limestone, shells and mangrove bark.”



CLICK HERE

## More markets to wander around

### SOUQ AL WAKRAH

The hushed laneways of this outdoor souq, found a 20-minute drive south of Doha, turn bronze in the afternoon. It's entirely recommended to get lost in the moment. Find the **Embrace Doha** cultural centre to experience a coffee ceremony. Have a trim under the bougainvillea at the barbers' *majlis* or drop into courtyards to find perfumes, pashminas and antiques. You will eventually pop out at the beachfront promenade, which is lined with ice cream and kebab joints, seafood grills (**Copacabana** does delicious fish and squid) and spots for coffee served with fat, juicy dates. Kids can paddle at the calm shoreline, build sandcastles outside desert-inspired tents and clap for the police camels on patrol.

### SOUQ OMANI

This small warehouse in Doha's Al Saliya neighbourhood brims with plants, jute baskets, truffles, Omani dried fish and terracotta pottery. "This market originally brought in products from Oman to Doha," Sherif explains.

### GOLD SOUQ

Between Souq Waqif and the glitzy Al Najada Doha hotel, you'll find a constellation of jewellery stores. "Gold jewellery here is usually bought by weight and the prices are constantly shifting," says Sherif. A pendant engraved with a name in English or Arabic makes a fabulous gift.

### SOUQ AL DIRA

This colourful market, a 10-minute walk up Banks and Al Ahmed streets from Souq Waqif, is lined with bolts of cotton, lace, fine Indian silks, cashmere and organza. Tailors make *abayas* and other outfits at bargain prices.

### AL MINA

The Old Doha Port has been reworked into an ice cream-hued shopping village, designed to echo the flat-roofed homes of Qatar's fishing coasts. Find Arabic coffee cups at **Clay Encounters**, handmade leatherware at **Jilid**, *mabkhara* (*bakhoor* burners) at **Carvers of Peninsula** and a buzzing fish market.

CLICK HERE to learn more

Meandering with Sherif is a history lesson. At the textile stalls near **Asherg Coffee**, she decodes the jumble of red, blue and yellow geometrics on carpets, cushion covers and tasselled rugs. In the traditional desert craft of Al Sadu, motifs represented animals, trees and elements of life and patterns wove tales that could only be read by the weaver. "There are only around 50 or 60 real Al Sadu weavers remaining," Sherif says. At Embrace Doha's workshop in Souq Al Wakrah, old-timers come to share skills with the younger generation. "We're trying to find ways to preserve the culture before it disappears," she says.

Wander up the souq's main drag and you'll find Pahlwan—translation: 'Strong Man'—the shop belonging to old pearl diver/ex-bodybuilder/policeman/footballer and current raconteur Saad Ismail Al Jassim. The 88-year-old is probably the last surviving diver from the glory days of pearling. Go in for a string of white, grey or pink pearls and get a story.

Up a little yonder, Sherif points out artisans beating *egal*, the black, corded headpieces characteristic of Qatari men, into shape. Further still, there's a falcon souq and 'hotel', where the prized national birds are sold and young

boys—junior falcon masters—wander in with their birds on their arms, seeking advice and accessories.

Haggling hums around the souq like a soundtrack. "Have a go—the vendors expect it," Sherif urges, drifting past intricate metalwork lanterns, racks of spangly kaftans and *abayas*, scarves and leather bags. You start low, they'll go high, "have fun with it, joke around." Throw in your best Arabic "*kam akhar*" ("what's the last?") to get a laugh, if not a few Riyals knocked off.

Sooner or later, your nose will guide you to bright mounds of cinnamon, turmeric and cloves mingling with piles of rose tips and mineral crystals. The spice souq is not just the ultimate cook's pantry (read more about kitchen spices on page 43); it's an apothecary.

Sherif dissolves clumps of frankincense in water. It's quite the acquired taste, but, she says, "locals call it good medicine—frankincense has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties and is said to cleanse the body." Black seed is considered a miracle fix. "In the Islamic faith, we are told the black seed can cure us of everything, except death."

Come to the market for keepsakes and curios—or just for the vibe. "The souq is still the social



**WELLNESS**

# Timeless wellness

*In need of a reboot? In the silent desert or the busy city, you'll find escapes for ancient healing—with a new twist of luxury.*



## CHECK INTO: A SANCTUARY IN THE SAND

AL RUWAIS  
[zual.com](http://zual.com)

Sitting in solitude between the placid shoreline of Al Khasooma Beach and the desert, **Zual Wellness Retreat** by Chiva-Som takes its role as an oasis seriously. It's only a 75-minute drive from Doha to reach this point on Qatar's northern tip, but as you check into the hushed resort, which is designed with the flat roofs and courtyard gardens of an old Qatari village, you just might disconnect from modern time entirely. Zual is the world's first centre for Traditional Arabic & Islamic Medicine (TAIM), and tapping into old-world wisdom is all part of the strategy.

TAIM is a healing system drawing from the works of Islamic scholars, physicians and herbalists. "The philosophy is the culmination

of Persian, Graeco-Roman, Chinese and Ayurvedic practices," says the resort's specialist, Dr. Mubaris Ahamed. "The origins of Islamic medicine can be traced back to the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century."

Key treatments include *al-hijama*, the Arabic term for cupping, and *al-batin*, an internal organ massage. "TAIM is of the belief that most disease starts in the abdomen," Ahamed explains. Qatari *hamiz* is a deep-tissue massage with medicinal oils designed to boost circulation while dissolving muscle tension.

"TAIM is holistic," Ahamed says, so the protocols of a stay at Zual mix hands-on treatments with movement, meditation and

1. **Zual Wellness Resort eases along the coastline**
2. A relaxing treatment begins
3. Ingredients from the apothecary

nutrition. The menu stirs superfoods into dishes such as lamb machboos, fattoush with crab and avocado, and dates with cinnamon custard and pistachio ice cream. Indigenous Qatari and Arabic remedies, such as saffron, black seed and sidra, are also prescribed by practitioners.

There are two separate resorts—Zual Discovery, for families with children of all ages, and Zual Serenity, which is dedicated to singles, couples and groups of guests aged 16 years and up—offering wellness journeys that last from two to 14 nights.



1



2

1. Unwind in a Moroccan hammam at La Cigale Hotel

2. The private hammam at Al Jasra Boutique Hotel

**DROP IN FOR: REJUVENATING STEAM RITUALS**


📍 VARIOUS LOCATIONS

[tivolihotels.com](http://tivolihotels.com), [lacigalehotel.com](http://lacigalehotel.com)

The Arabic tradition of hammam bathing is especially blissful after a day's sightseeing. Hidden near Souq Waqif, the upscale, private hammam experience at Al Jasra Boutique Hotel is steamy heaven. The full-body rejuvenation starts with a sole-to-scalp massage using a cleansing balm before a scrub down. Next, a cocoon of rose-infused mud does more detox work as a nourishing mask melts into your hair. After a cool rinse-off, you'll emerge feeling soft and silky smooth.

At **La Cigale Hotel's Oxygen** Gym and Spa, you can follow the five-star Moroccan-style hammam with a revitalising HydraFacial. Both spas are open until 22:00.





Qatar, a growing nation of timeless stories.  
Holding tight to its **vibrant tradition**  
of fragrant spices and modest dress  
and old trade routes crossing soft dunes and sea.  
Yet, turn over this book to discover its **modern vision...**





# QATAR NOW

MODERN  
VISION

*Shadows Travelling on the Sea of the Day* by Olafur Eliasson, located near Al Zubarah





Welcome to *Qatar Now*, your ultimate travel guide to the abundance of leisure and hospitality offerings that can only be found in Qatar.

Home to world-class beach resorts, exclusive shopping destinations and streets brimming with culinary delights, Qatar extends a holiday itinerary that is unrivalled and suited to every kind of traveller. Qatar has recently been named the Arab Tourism Capital for 2023, making now the perfect time for visitors from all over the world to experience this unique country.

This new edition explores two worlds that come together in Qatar. On this side of the book, we explore Qatar's Modern Vision. We speak with the artists, innovators and athletes who are shaping Qatar's contemporary culture.

Alongside this, you will find inspiration from Qatar's youth on the most fun-filled way to spend the day — from sliding down snow dunes to meeting with Qatar's very own pandas.

A curated experience awaits you, with adventures across Qatar's natural wonders and wellness escapes at our world-leading spas.

With its pristine shores, architectural wonders and cultural retreats, we invite you to discover all that Qatar has to offer and wish you a wonderful stay.

His Excellency

## Akbar Al Baker

Chairman of Qatar Tourism and Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive

مرحباً بكم في "قطر الآن"، دليلكم الإرشادي الأشمل للاستمتاع بمجموعة مدهشة من عروض الضيافة والترفيه التي لا مثيل لها.

نختر قطر بأفضل المنتجعات الشاطئية عالمية المستوى وبأشهر وجهات التسوق العصرية والشوارع المليئة بأشهى المأكولات، مما يجعلها تقدم لزوارها تجارب سياحية فريدة تلي تطلعات جميع المسافرين من سنى الفئات.

لقد تُوجت العاصمة القطرية الداوچه مؤخراً بلقب عاصمة السياحة العربية 2023، مما يعني أن الآن هو الوقت المثالي للزوار من جميع أنحاء العالم لزيارة قطر والاستمتاع بأجوائها المبهجة.

تستعرض هذه النسخة الجديدة من "قطر الآن" عالمين اثنين يمزجان كأفضل ما يكون في قطر. وفي هذا الجانب من الدليل، نستكشف رؤية قطر العصرية، حيث نتحدث مع كوكبة من الفنانين والمبدعين والرياضيين الذين يصنعون معاً ثقافة قطر الحديثة.

وإلى جانب ذلك، سوف نستلهمون كيفية قضاء أمتع الأوقات خلال عطلاتكم في قطر، بداية من النزول في الحدائق اللججية وصولاً إلى زيارة حديقة بيت الباندا.

وذلك تنتظركم دائماً في قطر تجارب سياحية فريدة تستمتعون خلالها بشواطئها البكر وتستكشفون معالمها المعمارية ذات النضماميم الأيقونية ومناظرها الطبيعية الرائحة بالجمال الطبيعي ونواديبها الصحية ومراكز الاستشفاء العالمية.

ويسعدنا أن نضع بين أيديكم هذه النسخة الخاصة من الدليل، وندعوكم للتعرف على جميع العروض والمزايا التي توفرها قطر لزوارها ونتمنى لكم عطلة هائلة وإقامة سعيدة.

سعادة السيد

## أكبر الباكر

رئيس قطر للسياحة والرئيس التنفيذي لمجموعة الخطوط الجوية القطرية

## MODERN VISION

# Contents

This guide to exploring Qatar is double-sided. Read on to see all our Modern Vision has to offer. Then flip the book for Vibrant Tradition.

## ART & CULTURE

- 08 Generation next**  
How a pioneer artist and his daughter are reinventing Arabic modern art
- 12 The new guard**  
Doha's spectacular museums and galleries
- 18 Inside out**  
A fine artist takes his story to the streets
- 20 Art in the wild**  
Creative public art to spot around Qatar
- 21 Feel the beat**  
Techno meets traditional music
- 22 Back to the future**  
Modernist architecture with a local soul

## FAMILIES

- 26 The kids' top 20**  
Young locals reveal the thrilling rides and adventures you can only find in Qatar
- 34 Eye spy**  
Tick your way through a treasure map of activities for families

## FOOD & DINING

- 38 Feed your curiosity**  
Taste Doha's international gastronomy scene with a chef
- 42 Top tables**  
Sky-high views, Michelin stars and creative flair: six restaurants not to miss
- 46 Cutting edge**  
The new landmark on Doha's skyline raises the bar on fine dining
- 48 Eat streets**  
Delicious finds in Doha's diverse food neighbourhoods

## NATURAL WONDERS

- 52 Meet the dune master**  
Rally champion Nasser Al-Attiyah shows you where he goes dune bashing
- 55 Desert adventure**  
Sand surfing, quad biking and sky safaris
- 56 Wild luxury**  
Luxury retreats set in the golden dunes
- 58 Out of the blue**  
The magic of seeing the world's biggest congregation of whale sharks
- 60 Dive in**  
Kitesurf, dive and fish around the coast
- 62 Make a splash**  
Luxurious beachfront and island resorts
- 64 Urban oasis**  
The ultimate eco destinations in Doha

## SHOPPING

- 68 Style scene**  
Unique gems to take home
- 70 The high end**  
The fashion and family attractions of Qatar's next-level shopping malls

## WELLNESS

- 74 Green game changer**  
Conscious eating and indulgent treatments on Doha's growing wellbeing scene
- 76 Big city bliss**  
Doha's day spas give the latest global trends a dose of pure luxury



**ART & CULTURE**

*East-West/West-East* by Richard Serra at Brouq Nature Reserve



Artists Yousef Ahmad (above) and Maryam Al-Homaid share a creative vision for Qatar 🇶🇦



# Generation next

*He sparked a movement. She stretches its boundaries. For this father and daughter, modern art is more than a family legacy.*



“You can see art by Koons, KAWS and Virgil Abloh in Doha’s contemporary museums and galleries,” says multidisciplinary artist Maryam Al-Homaid. The 35 year old’s own works of digital imagination are making waves in art spots around the city, too. “But local Arabic modern art is a booming scene—and my dad is the original”

Al-Homaid’s father, Yousef Ahmad, is a pioneer of contemporary art in Qatar. His repertoire, which spans oil on canvas, abstracted calligraphy and gently nostalgic landscapes, is not only famous around the region—his exhibitions have put a spotlight on progressive Arabic art in spaces from the British Museum to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. As father and daughter stroll together through **Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art** (mathaf.org.qa) in Doha’s Education City, museum officials and fans rush over to say hello to the affable, often funny, Ahmad. The artists take the attention in their stride. Ahmad has been famous all of Al-Homaid’s life.

It is well known that he helped to bring Mathaf, and the world’s largest specialised collection of Arabic modern art, into being.

“It’s a good story,” Ahmad says. “It was the beginning of the 1980s, I was a teaching professor at Qatar University and one of my students was His Excellency Dr. Sheikh Hassan bin Mohamed bin Ali Al-Thani.” The two bonded over a passion for art as the young royal commissioned Ahmad on a painting of the Al Zubarah heritage site. “I started to put in his ear that we have to put a collection of the Arabic world’s artists’ work here in Qatar.” The professor was soon travelling around the region, sourcing works to begin His Excellency’s collection—and the first institution of its kind.

Mathaf (the word for ‘museum’ in Arabic) now houses more than 9,000 artworks.

Standing before one of his own pieces, a giant triptyque of textured abstraction titled *The Birth of Innovation*, Ahmad had a career of firsts to reflect upon. The artist began drawing on walls of the old Al Jasra neighbourhood where he grew up, using charcoal from his mother’s cooking fire. “I held my first exhibition for the boys and girls of the *fereej* in the entry of our house when I was about eight years old,” he remembers. “I cut out and glued together bits



as he mixed, painted and created in his home studio. She has, she says, always been impressed by his aversion to being boxed in: “I don’t know how to define myself either. I call myself a ‘confused artist/designer’ all the time.”

Mixing augmented and virtual reality with digital and physical mediums, Al-Homaid explores transformations of context. “As a Millennial, I feel very excited by the rapid change in Qatar—in our architecture, lifestyle and even our language. But I also feel I need to use my creativity to document those changes.”

Her recent works are purposefully tactile: graphic pixels stamp the coordinates and images of city landmarks, which might change without much warning, onto textiles that are made to last.

Inside The Ned Doha, one carpet hangs on a wall as a homage to the Modernist government

office that preceded the hotel. Other rugs and blankets (look for them at the Studio 7 design concept store in Msheireb) record the original location of Al Wakrah’s iconic ‘pearl roundabout’ and scenes from a souq. “I use computer software to design the images and then the textiles are handwoven by special craftspeople.”

The process is a nod to the traditional Al Sadu weavers (read more on page 20 of the Vibrant Tradition side of this book) who recorded nomadic desert journeys on textiles. “Weaving is one of the crafts that risks getting lost with the transformation that’s happening at the moment,” Al-Homaid says. “I love to play with building bridges between the old crafts and technology.”

If there’s one thing her dad taught her it’s that art without experimentation is not art at all.

of old calendars and my father helped me hang them with black nails used for [making] shoes.

“It was the beginning of the 1960s and I was inspired by the children’s program *Baba Hattab* that I saw on television.”

The movements of technology and science have influenced Ahmad ever since. New typefaces and mediums sparked ideas for ‘visual solutions’ that rethink traditional script. “Arabic letters have flexibility—you can make them tall, short, thin and play with it,” he says. He’s a fan of how calligraphy has evolved in public art sprayed around Doha: “I love the graffiti!” Long before sustainability was a trend, Ahmad began upcycling old palm leaves into homemade paper, which he uses as a canvas for much of his work. He also invented a colour made from the dust of Qatar.

“I experiment as if I am in a lab; I consider technology an expressive tool,” he enthuses.

Equal parts proud dad and artist, Ahmad lights up when looking at the pixelated prototypes on Al-Homaid’s laptop. “I love her active creativity.”

Now herself an Assistant Professor in graphic design at Doha’s Virginia Commonwealth University, Al-Homaid grew up sketching her dad

*“I experiment as if I’m in a lab; I consider technology an expressive tool.”*

– Artist Yousef Ahmad



# The new guard

*Creative places to see contemporary art.*

CLICK HERE

ART & CULTURE

**MATHAF:  
ARAB MUSEUM OF  
MODERN ART**  
EDUCATION CITY  
[mathaf.org.qa](http://mathaf.org.qa)

Explore the region's largest collection of contemporary works by pivotal artists from Arabic-speaking cultures across the Arabian Gulf and Middle East, parts of Africa and Asia. An insightful audio guide, available in multiple languages, can take you on an 11-stop tour of highlights or you can find a family-geared talk running at intervals (check dates and register online).

But don't rush: you could easily roam around Mathaf for an entire day. Major themes address the politics of change and the movement of human civilisation through rapidly changing landscapes into the digital age. Paintings and sculptures by Mahmoud Mokhtar, Hafidh al-Droubi and Jewad Selim spin ancient civilisations into new visual forms. Works by Qatari luminary Yousef Ahmad (who you met on page 9) use natural materials and local language to express statements on economic and social shifts in Qatar. Gallery 8 explores the theme of women as an allegory of freedom in young societies. Until 5 August, see *Beirut and the Golden Sixties*, a mixed media exhibition examining the heady period of artistic and political ferment following Lebanon's independence from French-mandated colonial rule in 1943.



1

**1.** Inside a former school building in Education City, Mathaf's permanent collection was assembled over three decades by His Excellency Dr. Sheikh Hassan bin Mohamed bin Ali Al-Thani

**2.** A gallery of colourful Arabic inspiration inside Mathaf

**3.** *The Birth of Innovation* by Qatari pioneer Yousef Ahmad

**4.** "Woman and Sewing Machine is a treasure," Yousef Ahmad says. The piece by influential Iraqi painter and sculptor Jewad Selim was saved from shelling in Baghdad. Ahmad brought it to Mathaf in 1993

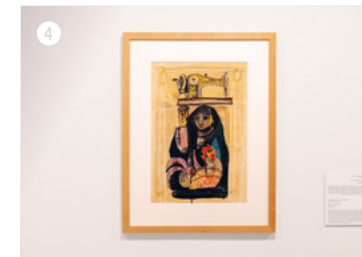
**5.** *Discovery* by Jassim al-Zaini. "Al-Zaini has had a strong influence on Qatari contemporary and modern art, presenting features that touched life in Qatar in the 1940s and 1950s," Ahmad explains. "This piece pictures a child pulling a thread on a mask and seeing the mother's face."



2



3



4



5

CLICK HERE

## FIRE STATION

DOHA

[firestation.org.qa](http://firestation.org.qa)

Culture-hunters will get a kick out of Fire Station from the street. The exterior of the reworked firehouse building is a concrete canvas for street art. Venture behind its canary-coloured doors and you'll find one of Doha's most celebrated contemporary art spaces, Garage Gallery, which hosts rotating exhibitions of painting, sculpture, fashion and digital works from local artists, as well as international powerhouses such as Virgil Abloh, KAWS and Ai Weiwei.

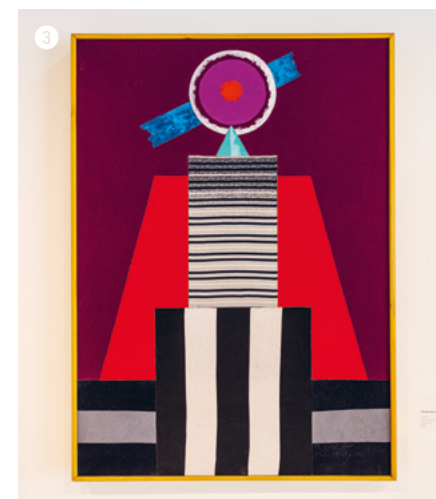
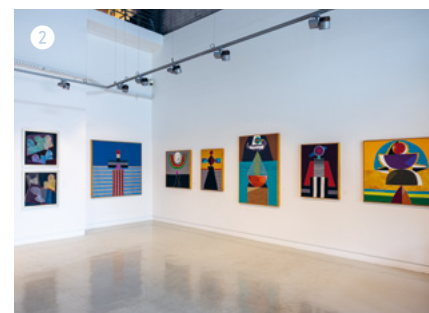
Fire Station also runs an Artist in Residence mentorship and development program, where now-notable Qatari names Aisha Al-Sowaidi, Fahad Al-Obaidly and Maryam Al-Homaid (read more on page 9) got their start. Drop in on studios and you might see experimentalists at work. On your way out, don't miss Café #999 and the excellent on-site art supplies retailer, Cass Art. If you're in the market for a Jeff Koons skateboard, this is just the place to pick one up.



**Above and left:** At Fire Station, the experience begins outside

*“The original fire station was for putting fires out; now the concept is the opposite—people come to see new ideas catch on.”*

– Artist Yousef Ahmad



**1 & 2.** Vibrant exhibitions at Al Markhiya Gallery

**3.** *Untitled* by Egyptian artist Mostafa Abdel Moity as shown at Al Markhiya

## AL MARKHIYA

FIRE STATION PLAZA

[almarkhiyagallery.com](http://almarkhiyagallery.com)

Curious minds will love this privately owned gallery in the Fire Station complex. Exhibitions change every six-to-eight weeks from September through to May, while in summer, you'll see its excellent permanent collection of pieces by Arabic legends and newcomers. Regular shows include *40 Minus*, which focuses on artists aged under 40, and *50 x 50*, featuring works of these dimensions, which can be bought by budding collectors.





1. Anima Gallery
2. Liwan's refreshed exterior
3. Qatar National Library

**ART 29**  
 W DOHA  
[marriott.com](http://marriott.com)



CLICK HERE

After jump-starting your curiosity with rainbow-coloured coffees and house-baked pastries at W Café, ride the elevator up to the 29<sup>th</sup> floor of the W Doha hotel to investigate a rotating line up of installations from multidisciplinary artists. Many were born elsewhere around the world and all have unexpected stories to tell. You might leave with a fresh appetite to taste something new at Spice Market, Jean-Georges Vongerichten's temple of south-eastern flavours on the hotel's first floor.

*"Incredible galleries are hidden everywhere across Doha—inside hotels, at pop-ups, everywhere."*

– Artist Maryam Al-Homaid

**ANIMA**  
 WEST BAY  
[animagallery.com](http://animagallery.com)

Representing emerging, mid-career and established artists working in a broad range of styles and mediums, this future-focused show space isn't open all the time (check website), but when it is, prepare to be lost in a riot of colour, movement and wild thought.

**EIWAN AL GASSAR**  
 ST. REGIS DOHA  
[eiwanalgassar.com](http://eiwanalgassar.com)

Billed as a melting pot for art, design and performance, this three-gallery artspace says anything goes. Past exhibitions have shown the wildly gorgeous aerial images of local nature photographer Azzam Al Mannai, the hanging rocks and bricks of Qatari sculptor Shua'a Ali and the latest Rolls Royce. Visit the website to see what's on this summer.

**QATAR NATIONAL LIBRARY**  
 EDUCATION CITY  
[qnl.qa](http://qnl.qa)

This is not just a giant library that gives the people of Qatar access to more than one million books. This is a bright, white portal into the future. Inside the building designed by Rem Koolhaas, robots sweep along seemingly endless rows, returning books to their proper places. Innovation stations cater to interests in videography, photography, design, sound editing, STEM and 3D printing. There's even a music studio. The Heritage Library houses rare Arabic manuscripts, maps and historical photographs.

## Workshops

### LIWAN DESIGN STUDIOS AND LABS

MSHEIREB  
[@liwan.qa](https://liwan.qa)

Qatar Museums has restored a mid-century girls school into a creative lab. Regular workshops in crafts such as dressmaking and ceramics aim to develop Doha's fresh generation of makers. Come to explore showcases of youthful obsessions such as sneaker culture and digital typography.

**M7**  
 MSHEIREB  
[m7.org.qa](http://m7.org.qa)

The upper levels of this cool incubator for design, fashion and tech are home to co-working spaces and resource libraries. The ground floor is more of a hangout, where fashion exhibitions and pop-ups are staged. Whatever else is on, the Studio 7 concept design store is always worth a peep (see shopping on page 69).

**KATARA ART CENTER**  
 KATARA CULTURAL VILLAGE, BUILDING 5  
[dohakac.com](http://dohakac.com)

Inside this vibrant playspace for local artists, you might see an illustrator's messages scrawled across a mirror. You might get to flick through racks of garments by free-thinking designers. Or you might see big ideas splashed onto canvas in paint.



# Inside out

*Spray cans. Vintage cars. No tickets. This graffiti artist is taking fine art to the streets.*

“My parents noticed that I had a talent for art when I was young, so I did classes in drawing, ceramics, sculpture and Arabic calligraphy,” Mubarak Al-Malik says. By his early 20s, he had started making a name for himself as a colourful abstract and realist-inspired painter.

“The thing is, I started to find it a little boring to only have exhibitions in galleries— a canvas on the wall and more canvas on the wall—with only ‘art people’ seeing it,” he explains. Excited by the street art he saw while travelling in Europe, in 2010, the fine artist picked up a spray can—and found his new niche. “I want to inspire all types of people, to make them think, every day.”

Now 36, Al-Malik is a leader of the grassroots movement taking Qatari art into the wild. Eyes open, up and down as you explore Doha, you’ll spot graphic murals splashed across the side of metro stations, public art along the curve of the Corniche and calligraffiti scrawled around corners. “There’s always something new to see.”

Al-Malik’s own street art is distinct, focusing on representations of the *batoola*, the metallic face covering traditionally worn by older Arabic women. It’s a bold move to give such an honoured image public expression. “But as soon as I started, people liked what I was doing on social media, then brands started asking

*“I want to inspire all types of people, to make them think, every day.”*

me to paint their buildings.” One of his most well-known works, a black and white mural of a batoola-wearing woman burning *bakhoor*, stretches across the exterior of Qatar Museums’ Fire Station.

Jedariart, the street-art program spearheaded by Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa Bint Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Chairperson of Qatar Museums, took Al-Malik and his motif to the Art Basel art fair in Miami in 2021. “I was a bit nervous to display a strongly Islamic symbol in the USA—would they like it?” the artist admits. “But the feedback was beautiful. People came with positive energy and asked, ‘What is this shape? What is this symbol?’”

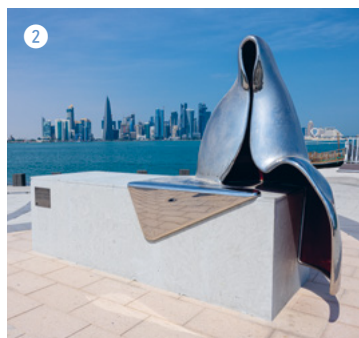
Al-Malik’s intention is always to provoke questions—because answers can challenge stereotypes. “For me, the batoola means customs, traditions and national heritage,” he says. “I grew up with my grandmother wearing this and she was strong—I consider the older generation of Qatari women to be strong figures.”

Back home in Qatar, Al-Malik has begun pushing beyond the city. Revving up his vintage Mustang Shelby GT500, he drives off the beaten path to find crumbling walls in old villages along the coast or in the desert. “I like to take something that is damaged or unused and make people see it as beautiful again.”

*See more outdoor art on the next page.*

MUBARAK  
ALMALIK

# Art in the wild



4

1. *Shadows Travelling on the Sea of the Day* by Olafur Eliasson, near Al Zubarah
2. *Toub Toub Ya Bahar* by Salman Al-Malik, on the Corniche
3. *Kan Ya Ma Kaan* by Bouthayna Al Muftah, at the National Museum of Qatar
4. *East-West/West-East* by Richard Serra, at Brouq Nature Reserve

# Feel the beat

*Scratch what you think you know about Arabic music. Doha's dancefloors have a new groove.*

Doha is a city that sings at night. In the cool that follows dusk, technicolour light beams pulse and sway across the West Bay skyline and neighbourhood souqs start to hum. As melodies spill through open doors of restaurants and drift from rooftop bars, Doha's dance music scene sparks to life.

On a sultry summer evening, beach clubs set around resort pools are the place to be. The new **Makani Beach Club** (+974 4494 8888) at Four Seasons Hotel Doha on the Corniche serves chic beverages and chill beats. International fusion restaurant **SUSHISAMBA** (+974 4456 5774) has set up its first beach club at Waldorf Astoria Lusail.

Want to dance later into the night? "Electronic music is growing in Qatar and a bunch of new clubs have recently opened up," says DJ and producer Khalid Al Ibrahim, who spins decks around Doha as Deus Deserto (check @deus.deserto for gigs). "You can find live music or a dancefloor any night of the week," he says.

The 28-year-old Al Wakrah native grew up on old-school West Coast (American) rap before getting into trance with Faithless, David Guetta and Daft Punk. He's the first Qatari DJ to push local clubbers beyond melodic dance music, playing the 'in-your-face, Berlin-style techno' that thrilled crowds at festivals held around the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™.

He's also the first to remix traditional Qatari music with this infectious, rapid-fire sound. "The done thing has always been to sample European lyrics in dance music—but local people don't even know what they mean," Al Ibrahim explains. "So, for my track *Amsy*, I featured the oud and the *darbuka*, which is an Arabic drum, and I asked a friend who is a poet to write something in Arabic, which I recorded in his voice."

It's cool finding new inspiration in what's old, the DJ says. "I love how the oud can be all mellow but then it can go really fast and intense... I'm all about that energy."

## Here's where to dance

### IRIS

📍 DOHA  
+974 5515 1339

On the rooftop at The Ritz-Carlton, Sharq Village, settle into a lounge for easy sunset sessions.

### HIDE

📍 DOHA  
+974 6003 0909

Doha's first megaclub, at the InterContinental Doha, is open until 03:00 and entry is free.

### MONKEY TALE

📍 DOHA  
+974 5077 7533

A beachside club for Boho-style climate-controlled cabanas, deep house and pop tunes.

### ACOUSTIC MUSIC PENTHOUSE

📍 DOHA  
+974 4030 7100

Serves beverages named after The Beatles and live jazz on the 36<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> floors of Raffles Doha.

# Back to the future

*Modernist landmarks are a magnet for architecture fans. But there's more to design-forward Doha than first meets the eye.*

Through the window of a plane, Doha first appears as a futuristic forest of skyscrapers with its back to the sand and its face staring out beyond the Arabian Gulf. On the ground, state-of-the-art infrastructure knits together Brutalist monuments and monoliths designed by Jean Nouvel, I.M. Pei and Zaha Hadid. There's no mistaking that you're in a city built for progress.

"But look closer," says local architect Ibrahim Jaidah. "Doha's buildings have another story to tell. What makes Qatar unique is that through incredible growth and globalisation, we have retained our own architectural identity."

The mastermind behind projects as diverse as Al Thumama Stadium, the renovation of the Fire Station art space and glamorous seafont resorts, Jaidah is also the Chief Architect of the Arab Engineering Bureau and champions the fusion of Islamic and Qatari vernacular with contemporary concepts.

Jaidah's own Barzan Tower in West Bay is considered the textbook example—above its base of concrete arches and domes rises a vision of glass. Nearby, Nouvel's Burj Doha stands 238 m tall, boldly reflecting Qatar's Islamic heart on its mashrabiya-patterned facade.

But Qatari design goes deeper than decoration. "Our ancestors managed to live

in this harsh climate without electricity by using architecture that is friendly with the environment," Jaidah explains. The organic, twisting layout and water features of the *Al Jasra fereej* (neighbourhood) where the architect grew up not only afford the privacy that is key to Qatari home life but is incredibly smart. "We did a study with Harvard in which they rebuilt the old town and did a thermal analysis. They realised that within the courtyards of these narrow pedestrian spaces, the temperature was up to 10 degrees less than in surroundings."

In the Msheireb district of Downtown Doha, the M7 building, the country's epicentre of fashion and tech innovation, winds this old technology into its sleek profile. On other buildings, 'basket-weave' walls imitate the cooling towers that were once used to amplify coastal winds. "As you walk through this area, you'll notice not only the orientation and shading but old-style landscaping with native trees that take most of their water from the air."

You'll also find a set of faithfully restored heritage houses, which now form the four Msheireb Museums, sitting comfortably close to the cafes and restaurants of cosmopolitan Barahat Square. Jaidah smiles: "Our tradition is so minimalist it looks modern."



1. Doha's skyline is electrifying at night

2. The Ceremonial Court at **Education City** gives grandeur fine details. Traditionally, mashrabiya, latticework and carved motifs provided privacy and ventilation

3. Ibrahim Jaidah's famous Barzan Tower. "In a desert environment, the sky and the patterns in our beautiful architecture are our garden."



**CLICK HERE**  
to learn more



**FAMILIES**

# The kids' top 20

Children from Qatar show you the best places to play, explore and eat on an epic day of adventure.

## MEET THE YOUNG CURATORS



**HAMAD AL-RAYAHI, 10,** loves video games, sports, ice cream and being in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade at school. "You can't get bored in Doha—there's always so much to do, even when it's warm outside."

**AMINA AHMED, 16,** was born in the USA and moved to Doha 11 years ago. "I love how busy you can be in Doha, but then go out into nature and feel far away."

1.

### COOL OFF ON EPIC WATER SLIDES

📍 SALWA BEACH RESORT, SALWA  
[salwabeachresort.qa](http://salwabeachresort.qa)

"**Desert Falls Water and Adventure Park** is a lot of fun," says Hamad. At one of the Middle East's best big family attractions, you can splash around 56 rides, slides and pools for all ages. "My favourite is the King Cobra—two people get inside a tube and slide into the mouth of a snake!"



2.

### SEE SNOW IN THE DESERT

📍 DOHA FESTIVAL CITY MALL, DOHA  
[snowdunes.qa](http://snowdunes.qa)

"**Snow Dunes Theme Park** is a cool surprise," says Amina. "There is actual snow and an ice skating rink—it gets as cold as -4 degrees Celsius. Everyone hires snow suits." On the 50 m Dune Dash slide, you can clock speeds up to 50 km an hour. Want more chill? **Subzero** (+974 5595 1101) at The Pearl-Qatar serves cups of hot chocolate while you sit on frozen chairs in an igloo carved completely out of ice.



3.

### BE A PILOT FOR A DAY

ASPIRE ZONE  
doha.kidzania.com

What do you want to be when you grow up? **KidZania** is a pint-sized city where children are in charge, role-playing at more than 60 fun jobs and earning special KidZos currency. Join the Aviation Academy to learn to fly a plane, jump in a fire truck to put out an inferno and see what it's like to be a doctor, bank teller or television host.



4.

### PLAY ON THE PEARL

THE PEARL-QATAR  
megapolisqatar.com,  
@yippylandentertainmentqatar

**Megapolis Entertainment Center** in Medina Centrale goes Hamad's speed. You can play arcade games or go in a car racing simulator while parents have fun bowling or finding their way out of the escape room. In Porto Arabia, **Yippyland Entertainment City** has gentle rides and plush toy prizes for children aged from two years. At Qanat Quartier, find the piano stairs—they play music out loud as you run up and down between the colourful buildings.



5.

### SLIDE DOWN AN ICON

AL MASRAH PARK, DOHA

The new **Modern Doha Playground** designed by artist Shezad Dawood shrinks iconic buildings from around Doha into play equipment. Swing on a miniature replica of the Sheraton, the city's first modern hotel, then slip down the side of the Qatar Post Office and climb all over Qatar University. The little buildings light up so you can keep playing after dark.



6.

### GO BIG ON YOUR GRID

THE CORNICHE

CLICK HERE

"There's so much cool public art to see around Doha—I like that it shows how young people feel about the world," Amina says. The most Instagrammable? "The huge dugong sculpture by Jeff Koons at the Corniche looks like a big metallic balloon." Fun fact: The world's second-largest population of dugongs lives in Qatar.



7.

### VISIT THE GIANT PANDAS

AL KHOR PANDA HOUSE, AL KHOR  
visitqatar.com

CLICK HERE

Last year, fluffy pandas, four-year-old male Suhail and three-year-old female Thuraya, moved into the Middle East's first **Panda House**, complete with precisely controlled humidity and air conditioning, 464 trees and 2814 bamboo plants. The pair are here from China to promote conservation, but seem to spend a lot of their time lazing around, reports Hamad. "You watch them through big windows—I saw Thuraya swinging in a tree and eating bamboo; Suhail was sleeping." Download the Oun app to buy tickets (Apple Store and Google Play).



8.

### CONQUER THE WORLD'S HIGHEST INDOOR RIDES

DOHA QUEST, MSHEIREB  
dohaquest.com

The great indoors are greatest at the **Doha Quest** theme park. There are more than 30 wild, adrenalin-spiking rides, simulators and virtual reality challenges under one roof in this hi-tech 32,000 sq m experience park. "The EpiQ Coaster holds the Guinness World Record for tallest indoor roller coaster," says Amina. The Magma Blast, the highest indoor shot-and-drop tower on the planet, is another challenge. "You can't miss it!"





9.

**REV YOUR ENGINES**

📍 VILLAGGIO MALL, DOHA  
[gondolania.com](http://gondolania.com)

“**Gondolania Theme Park** is one of the best places in Doha for one reason: you can go Go-Karting inside!” Hamad exclaims. Younger kids like the cruisy gondola ride and the train that chugs through a land of dinosaurs, but this 5<sup>th</sup> grader goes for the thrills. “The roller coaster flashes cool lights and sounds.” Does action make you hungry? Hamad recommends the tomahawk steak from **Outback Steakhouse** then dollops of vanilla ice cream with M&Ms from **Cold Stone Creamery**, both also inside Villaggio.

10.

**CHASE THE ANGRY BIRDS**

📍 DOHA FESTIVAL CITY  
[angrybirdsworld.qa](http://angrybirdsworld.qa)

You don’t need to love the video game to love **Angry Birds World**, but if you do, keep your eyes peeled to meet characters Angry Red, Chuck or Stella after the daily live shows. Indoor rides include the tummy-twisting drop tower or gently swooping Bouncing Blues ride for little ones. Outside, prepare to get soaked on the Raft Battle boats or scream your heart out as the Super Slingshot flings you 60 m into the air.



11.

**TAKE ON A ROBOT GOALIE**

📍 KHALIFA INTERNATIONAL STADIUM, DOHA  
[321qosm.org.qa](http://321qosm.org.qa)

“The **3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum** is the best,” says Hamad. “I love sports, especially boxing, and I learned a lot about Muhammad Ali.” Galleries cover the greatest events and athletes in sporting history—see Ali’s glove, Sachin Tendulkar’s ‘master blaster’ cricket bat and a Tony Hawk skateboard—and you can have a go at *el-gaiss*, a traditional Qatari game similar to hopscotch. “There’s a football game where you try to shoot the ball past a robot goalkeeper,” says Hamad. “Unfortunately, I haven’t beaten him yet—he’s too quick!”



12.

**UPGRADE YOUR TECH**

📍 THE GATE MALL, WEST BAY  
[store974.com](http://store974.com)

“Doha gets the best new video games and I enjoy going to the mall with my friends to spend my pocket money on them,” Hamad says. At The Gate Mall, teen tech-heads will find the consoles, new releases and classic arcade games of their dreams on **Geek Street**, a neon-lit Tokyo-meets-Doha ‘road’ attached to a gamer’s paradise called **Store 974**. You’ll also find pop figures, Pokemon and an arena space where local gamers go to train for esports games. Another Store 974 is set to open in **Place Vendôme** in summer—it will be the biggest gaming shop in the Middle East!



13.

**HIT A FAMILY-FRIENDLY BEACH CLUB**

📍 WEST BAY  
+974 5999 6122

Open daily at 10:00 until sunset, the easygoing new **B12 Beach Club** is an upbeat escape for the whole family. Parents can try SUP Yoga and Breakfast sessions then sink into a beach cushion to sip through the fruity drinks list. All-day dining will keep kids (entry to the club is free for under 18s) bouncing around the inflatable water park, the largest floating park in Doha, and fuelled up for games of volleyball, ping pong and Teqball.



14.

**UNCOVER MAGIC ILLUSIONS**

📍 THE GATE MALL, WEST BAY  
[museumofillusions.qa](http://museumofillusions.qa)

Part magical playroom, part brain teaser, the **Museum of Illusions** challenges you to figure out which way is up in a bright blue, rotating Vortex Tunnel, an Infinity Tunnel and frankly flabbergasting spaces where holograms rule. Take a photo ‘walking’ up a wall to confuse your friends back home.



15.

CLICK HERE

**HIT THE PARKS**

VARIOUS LOCATIONS

**MIA Park** on the Corniche waterfront is a relaxed family hangout, especially on Friday afternoons. Three playgrounds are set up for various age groups (two–five, five–12, and 12–16) and you can also go for a spin on the scenic carousel, bounce on bungee trampolines or pick up kayak or SUP tours on Dhow Harbour. Taco, burger and ice cream trucks pull up for snack times.

The giant **Al Bidda Park** splits into three zones, each filled with public art and attractions. Sprawl out for a picnic among natural

landscaping in Al Bidda, look for insects and birds at the Wadi Al Sail Historical Site or find manicured gardens and lawns in the Al Rumailah area.

“Doha’s parks have great bike paths,” says Amina. “My favourite is in **Aspire Park**—you can ride around Doha’s only lake, where there are ducks and swans.” You could also head for a swim at nearby Hamad Aquatic Center. Hire bikes or shaded four-wheelers for families from **Berg Arabia** (bergarabia.com) at Al Bidda or hire an electric scooter via the Fenix app.



16.

CLICK HERE

**SHOOT FOR THE STARS**

KATARA CULTURAL VILLAGE

[althuraya.katara.net](http://althuraya.katara.net)

**Al Thuraya Planetarium** is one of the best ways to while away the heat of a day in Katara—and entry is completely free. Find out how much you weigh on Mars and other planets, watch mini films and play at interactive screens to explore the mysteries of space.

17.

**CATCH A WAVE**

BANANA ISLAND RESORT DOHA BY ANANTARA  
[anantara.com](http://anantara.com)

First-time surfers can have a blast in the safe, supervised Surf Pool at Banana Island’s family resort. The instructors here can customise things to suit your size and skill level as they show you how to carve up the swell on body boards or surfboards.



18.

CLICK HERE

**WATCH THE WORLD GO BY**

AL MAHA ISLAND  
[almahaisland.com](http://almahaisland.com)

One of Doha’s newest attraction zones, Al Maha Island entertains with amazing views across Doha and Lusail and an upbeat atmosphere. A set of restaurants keeps kids of all ages happy. Pizzas at **Rossopomodoro** are authentically Neapolitan-style and the beautiful all-day cafe **Pura Vida Miami** serves delicious, healthy bowls. Everyone gets a thrill out of watching the world go by on Al Maha Drive, a street reserved only for luxury classics and supercars.



19.

**HAVE A FARM DAY**

AL KHOR  
[baladnapark.com](http://baladnapark.com)

Local yoghurt, cheese and custard-maker Baladna is so popular it has its own fun park. There are lots of ways to get your hands dirty at farm-themed **Baladna Park**: unearth fossils, gems and shells on a Mining Experience, plant a flower in the greenhouse, ride a (mechanical) rodeo bull and try out the ‘milking’ a cow statue. Ziplines, archery, a ninja warrior course and speedway-style karting stray from the theme, but who’s arguing?

20.

**EAT AROUND LUSAIL**

MARINA FOOD ARENA AND LUSAIL BOULEVARD, LUSAIL

“You can find any food you can imagine in Doha,” Amina says. “Food trucks at Marina Food Arena are a favourite.” **June Cafe** serves chocolate waffles with a retro diner vibe. **Owl Specialty Coffee** is the sweet spot to try soft-serves and smoothies in every colour. Nearby Lusail Boulevard has an array of indoor eateries, from **Salt Burger** (try the Cheetos fries) to **Chuck E. Cheese**—and you can hit the climbing wall at **WOW Entertainment Park** after filling up.

# Eye spy

How many activities on this map can you tick off on your holiday in Qatar?

- Walk around the Imam Abdul Wahhab Mosque
- See the pandas at Panda House
- Ride the world's highest roller coaster at Doha Quest
- Explore the desert rose at National Museum of Qatar
- Ride a bike to the Museum of Islamic Art
- Take a photo of Katara Towers
- Jump aboard a dhow at the Corniche
- Spot the giant falcon at the airport
- See an oryx walk through a wall at Katara Cultural Village
- Ride a camel at Souq Waqif
- Find the Pigeon Towers at Katara Cultural Village
- Slip and slide at Desert Falls Water and Adventure Park
- Pose with Jeff Koons' dugong on the Corniche
- Sail on a gondola at Villaggio Mall
- Cruise with whale sharks off Al Ruwais
- Kayak at Purple Island
- Take a selfie at Olafur Eliasson's *Shadows Travelling on the Sea of the Day* art installation
- Go karting at Lusail Circuit Sports Club



**CLICK HERE**  
to learn more



**FOOD & DINING**

# Feed *your* curiosity

*Take a spin around Doha's vibrant international food scene with Chef Edgar Hurtado.*



It can be hard to keep up with Edgar Hurtado. Born in Peru and trained in kitchens around the world, the chef, known for plating up Latin carnivals of flavour and colour, came to Qatar to flex his imagination. “Doha is the city of possibilities,” he says. “And I want to taste them all.”

Big enough to attract Michelin-starred names, but young and hungry for new ideas, Doha’s international food scene is exciting and creative. Luminaries Alain Ducasse from France, Dani García from Spain and Pino Lavarra from Italy each have a few restaurants around the city and Nobuyuki Matsuhisa has put the biggest Nobu in the world at the end of a jetty reaching into the Arabian Gulf.

At the end of 2022, Hurtado became the Executive Chef at the Four Seasons Hotel’s new **Curiosa by Jean-Georges** restaurant (fourseasons.com, +974 4494 8888) under Jean-Georges Vongerichten. “He’s a hero for me and he’s also a nice guy,” says Hurtado. “There’s a small community of chefs in Doha, the famous

ones, executive chefs from around the world and local guys, and we are all passionate about taking global dishes and giving them a local connection.”

This chef sees delicious parallels between his Latin cuisine and local food. “Like Qatar, Peru is a very multicultural place and very rich in traditions. My food is similar to Qatari cuisine in that we have a lot of influences from other places—from Africa, from Asia, Europe—and from history.

“What people here love is the mix of spices, chilli, sweetness... the mix of cultures in one cuisine. I’m very excited for people to taste dishes from the Latin world mixed with local produce.”

Curiosa’s kitchen is open to the dining room—Hurtado wants you to peek in. He’ll certainly come out. “Eating at Curiosa starts with the senses—you have the charcoal and wood aromas from the grill and the lively sizzling sounds from the kitchen—and I love to talk to my guests about ingredients and how we cook. I’m creating an experience.”

On the restaurant's plant-dotted terrace, a 150-year-old olive tree takes centre stage. "It's the heart of Curiosa," says Hurtado. "What we want to do is bring nature to the city."

The sustainable farm-to-fork movement is gathering speed in Qatar. A go-to for many of the city's chefs, **Heenat Salma Farm** (heenatsalma.earth) sits a 40-minute drive northwest of Doha. Here, forests of date palms frame rows of plump cabbages, zucchini, eggplant and watermelon. Tomatoes grow red and ripe in greenhouses. Birds chirp and bees make wild honey from Sidr trees. "The farmers are so passionate and help you pull your own produce straight out of the soil," says Hurtado. Heenat Salma's glamping accommodation is closed during summer, but the breezy, rustic-chic restaurant is open and serving organic

feasts year-round. "You can really taste the earth and sunshine in everything."

Back in Doha, Hurtado buys octopus and sweet local hamour fish at the Al Mina Fish Market, the catch ending up as ceviche or cooked on skewers with potato and sharp shots of lime at Curiosa. "If you're hungry while you're here, **Chabrat Al Mina** (+974 4449 2323) next to the market fries up prawns, octopus and fish and it's incredible."

The spice stalls at Souq Waqif are Hurtado's other happy place. "I could stand here, just smelling things, for 30 minutes," he says, breathing in hits of earthy mace and piquant chilli. As a Peruvian, he knows his spice, but there's always a new resin, rock or powder to experiment with. "I'm always asking 'What is this? What can I do with it?'"

**Opposite page:**  
Hurtado picking vegetables at Heenat Salma Farm

**Right:**  
Charred octopus with smoked paprika, crème fraîche and guajillo vinaigrette at Curiosa by Jean-Georges



*"What we want to do is bring nature to the city."*

"I always have so many questions for the vendors, they call me 'The Question Guy'."

When not on sourcing missions, the chef leads his family on food adventures. "I have two kids and when we have time off, we eat!" The food trucks at the Marina Food Arena at Lusail and Tasty Street in Katara (read more on page 48) are a cultural education. "You find mini versions of local restaurants and great street food from all around the world," he says.

Winding between Ibn Mahmoud Street and adjacent Al Jazeera Street in the Fereej Bin Mahmoud neighbourhood, the hungry chef darts between Korean, Russian and Thai joints, chatting to the cooks. He doesn't know restaurant names and it doesn't matter. "We never pick

a place before coming here—we just wander. It's so exciting to have all these amazing food cultures in one place.

"My wife is from Ukraine and when I met her a few years ago, her knowledge about food was really poor. But after living in Doha, she says she could be a food blogger."

Like many hungry travellers in Doha, Hurtado says a good day often ends with a hot Turkish shawarma, with the juice dripping down his chin. "There are so many great places in Al Sadd. **Chtoura** (+974 4436 9777), is my favourite, but I have a friend who argues with me that the sandwiches at **Shawarma El Khebbez** (@shawarmaelkhebbez) in Al Mina are better. It's a joke between us, but I don't mind if neither of us has found Doha's best shawarma yet—the joy is to keep looking."

# Top tables

*Eat Italian classics with a 360-degree view, new-school Spanish or a Michelin chef's camel rissole. These restaurants take dining to the next level.*

## **THREE SIXTY**

📍 THE TORCH DOHA  
+974 4446 5600

Take a spin in the sky at Doha's only revolving restaurant, 47 floors up inside landmark building The Torch Doha. In a relaxed dining space that makes children welcome, the menu elegantly mixes classic Mediterranean pasta, risotto, seafood and grilled meats with Qatari specialities such as umm ali, the sweetly spicy pudding made from pastry, milk and dried fruit. The changing views of the Arabian Gulf and city are incredible at different times. You might need to go twice.

## **CURIOSA BY JEAN-GEORGES**

📍 FOUR SEASONS HOTEL DOHA  
+974 4494 8888

At this vibrant new space in Four Seasons Hotel Doha, Executive Chef Edgar Hurtado elevates Latin staples with creative flair. Smoked mozzarella empanadas, guacamole, shrimp ceviche, charred octopus and churros dance in your mouth. "Our sea bass crudo, which is a ceviche, highlights freshness with acidity and spiciness in a way that surprises people," says the chef. "Our arroz con pollo sounds simple but it's very complex, with lots of jalapeno, gravy, mushroom and chicken cooked three ways for the right texture."

## **BIBO DOHA**

📍 THE ST. REGIS DOHA  
+974 4424 4870

Andalusian chef Dani García's West Bay brasserie was voted Best European Restaurant in Qatar in 2022. It's also one of Hurtado's favourites. "It's a beautiful Art Deco-inspired space and the tapas is something else." Take a seat around the central bar and snack on spicy patatas bravas, squid ink croquettes and BiBo's famous oxtail brioche. Settling in for dessert? Hurtado would order the tarta de queso manchego, a sweet-salty cheesecake served with strawberry sorbet.

Shrimp ceviche with almond, banana and coriander at Curiosa by Jean-Georges





Needle fish with potato and tarragon at Jiwan

## NOBU

📍 FOUR SEASONS HOTEL  
DOHA  
+974 4494 8500

The Doha outpost of Nobu serves Nobuyuki Matsuhisa's iconic Japanese fare with expected elegance. Inside the huge modernist shell on a private pier, waitstaff glide between three floors and a spectacular terrace, carrying plates of black cod in miso and glistening slabs of sashimi. "I'm good friends with Head Chef Andrew Bozoki," Hurtado says. "He's really passionate about the freshest local ingredients from top suppliers."

## PARISA SOUQ WAQIF

📍 SOUQ WAQIF, DOHA  
+974 4441 1494

"You'll find some of the best food in Doha inside Souq Waqif," says Hurtado. "You can taste the best kunafa in town or fantastic Turkish at little holes in the wall, but if you want real Persian food and an unforgettable setting, you go to Parisa." Here, under ornate chandeliers, every imaginable surface is painted with scenes from Persian myths and legends, mosaicked or inlaid with tiny mirrors imported from Iran. The food keeps pace with the palatial surroundings—think elevated kebabs, stews rich with nuts, fruit and spices and platters of coloured rice. To drink, choose from an array of freshly squeezed fruit juices.

## JIWAN

📍 NATIONAL MUSEUM  
OF QATAR  
+974 4452 5725

Nestled at the top of the National Museum of Qatar's desert rose, Jiwan is Michelin-starred chef Alain Ducasse's ode to the desert. Interiors curve and flow like dunes while four million Swarovski glass beads sway in curtains suspended from the ceiling in a tribute to Qatar's pearling legacy. The cuisine follows the rhythms of nature to refine dishes rooted in local history: succulent camel rissoles are brightened with sweet dashes of bell pepper, local needle fish is a tangy surprise and desserts swing from a light take on mahalabiya pudding to pear spiked with tangy local loumi. Set menus are extraordinarily good value and match each course with a creative mocktail. The panoramic view of the water and the city skyline from the restaurant's terrace is glorious.

# Cutting edge

*Lusail's Katara Towers is designed to represent the scimitars of Qatar's national seal. Dress sharp and indulge at the city's most opulent hotel dining destinations.*

## **FAIRMONT DOHA** *fairmont.com*

Inside **Fairmont Doha**, **Cyra Botanical Shisha** is a relaxed terrace space where Arabic mezze, rosewater-infused zero cocktails and shisha help ease you into the evening. The **Dôme Fairmont Lounge** is an elegant spot for Parisian-style afternoon tea—choose your chocolate parfait or luqaimat-topped mille-feuille from a walk-in dessert cooler that looks like a giant glass cloche. Dinner at **Masala Library by Jiggs Kalra** will take you on an odyssey through the cuisines of India, while **Vaya! Latin Mercado** restaurant's Argentinian barbecue sizzles to a live salsa beat. The Sky Terrace at **Provok Asian Project**, a glamorous glass temple of Japanese and Korean fusion spread across levels 33 and 34, masters an epic view of Lusail and The Pearl-Qatar.



**Right:**  
Katara Towers is home to both Fairmont and Raffles hotels

**Opposite page:**  
Fairmont's selection of sweet and savoury creations is accompanied by rare tea blends and botanical fruit tisanes

**Bottom:**  
The afternoon tea at Raffles is served with the sweetest of delicacies



## **RAFFLES DOHA** *raffles.com*

Ultra-luxe suites at **Raffles Doha** come with personal butlers and the hotel's restaurants keep up the sense of grandeur. Michelin-starred chef Enrico Crippa's Italian diner, **Alba by Enrico Crippa**, revolves dishes around seasonal produce and the rare white truffle found in Piedmont. At **L'Artisan**, plates are wheeled out on Gueridon trolleys and finished by your table with theatrical flourish. The palatial **Malaki** lounge takes traditional Arabian tea service to extravagant places. By night, slip behind a hidden door to sample smoky drinks under blue velvet curtains and chandeliers in the **Blue Cigar**. This bar-meets-library also has shelves of first-edition and rare books, the oldest being a copy of Homer's *Odyssey* from 1709. Slip on a set of special gloves to take a look. Upstairs, the **Acoustic Music Penthouse** is the city's slickest space to hear live music played until late.



# Eat streets

*You could spend a whole day cruising from drive-up taco trucks to cool spots for ice cream and shawarma. Why not?*



1. Watermelon ice cream at Tasty Street
2. SNAN Food Hall upgrades a picnic experience
3. Shawarma Al Zaeem at Marina Food Arena in Lusail

## TASTY STREET

📍 KATARA, DOHA  
[@tasty.street.qa](#)

Doha does food markets differently. In summer, locals stay in climate-controlled comfort to drive from one stall to the next at this fun hangout near Katara Cultural Village. Of course, you can stroll on foot to collect orders of smoky shawarma, beef burgers and smoothies from across the 40-ish little huts—just be sure to finish up with watermelon soft serve ice cream inside a frozen fruit ‘cone’ from **Icy Melon**, or the mango version from **Origami**. Open from 15:00 to 12:00 every day.

## MARINA FOOD ARENA

📍 LUSAIL, DOHA  
[@marina\\_food\\_arena](#)

There are street food trucks and cabins galore (about 70 at last count) at this late-night hotspot on Marina Promenade. The first to catch your eye will probably be the canary-coloured double decker bus called **Abocado**, which sizzles up Mexican fajitas, quesadillas and creamy guacamole. You could go on a shawarma tour, comparing the deconstructed meat and rice bowls at **Simply Shawarma** with the spicy lamb wrap from **Shawarma Palace** next door. **Shawarma Al Zaeem** is another popular spot. The flaming sweetcorn and chicken ‘toast burgers’ from **Last Order** and wholewheat noodles stacked with shrimp from **XFire** have also gained a cult following. Trucks open around 14:00 and many are open until the early hours of the morning.

## DOWNTOWN DOHA

📍 DOWNTOWN, DOHA

If hopping around Msheireb’s museums, galleries and boutiques fires up your appetite, never fear—sushi and Korean barbecue at **Yee Hwa Doha**’s downtown branch is filling and affordable (reserve a table for all-you-can-eat sessions on Fridays and Saturdays, +974 6662-9898). Wandering on to Souq Waqif, take a seat at one of the many juice bars and sip fresh mango or guava juice or try ragag (Arabian crepes), which street vendors cook over hotplates and fill with cheese, nutella or honey. **Asherg Coffee** is a no-frills hang-out popular for its rooftop terrace, where you can smoke apple shisha and people watch over simple plates of hummus, baba ganoush, kofta and chicken shish tawook.

## AL MIRQAB AL JADEED STREET

📍 AL NASR, DOHA

This busy strip, winding around the **Al Mirqab Mall**, is a delicious microcosm of multicultural Doha. For a taste of Tunisia, **Sidi Bou Said** eatery plates up meaty couscous dishes and fried brik pastries with cheesy fillings. Shawarma institutions **Jabal Lebnan** (tip: ask them to toast it and make it spicy), **Mashawi Al Arabi** and **Turkey Central** are open late for delicious, budget Turkish fare. To dial up the spice, **Bombay Cutting Chai** restaurant is a favourite for Parsi specialties, such as soft, doughy bun maska to dip into a cup of steaming spiced chai. If your tastebuds lean toward Asian comfort food, **Delizia Pinoy Cuisine** is where local Filipinos go for lomi, mami, goto and chicken sisig that taste like home. Find yourself craving a cleansing dose of antioxidants? Find them in fresh, cold juices at **Vitamin King**, right across the road from **Wooden Bakery**, where hot manoush (Lebanese pizza) comes with crunchy side salads.

## SNAN FOOD HALL

📍 KATARA, DOHA  
[2lhighst.net](#)

Need picnic supplies? This Parisian-style food pavilion at the **21 High Street** shopping mall is where chefs shop for takeaway charcuterie, baguettes, croissants, imported camembert, salads... almost any gastronomic deli delight you could ask for. If you fancy a latte and a quick bite on the spot, there’s a Juan Valdez coffee counter and bakery with indoor seating.



**NATURAL WONDERS**



Fuwairit Kite Beach (FKB)




**CLICK HERE**  
 to see him  
 in action



# Meet the dune master

*Rally champion Nasser Al-Attiyah does not have a second gear...*

The Qatari-born racing legend has taken out the Middle East Rally Championship a record 19 times and, in January 2023, triumphed over the most gruelling contest in motorsport to seize the Dakar Rally trophy for the fifth time, winning the race by the widest margin seen 20 years. He claimed another victory at the Qatar International Baja in March.

The 52 year old is also an Olympic skeet shooter—having taken the bronze, becoming the first ever Qatari-born Olympic medallist, at the London Games in 2012—and an accomplished show jumper. Then there was, of course, that time his friend (and then-president of the Qatar Marine Sports Federation, Sheikh Hassan Bin Jabor Al-Thani) mentioned that it might be easier to drive on land than on water, so Al-Attiyah took up the challenge and won Florida’s Key West World Championship. But he plays that one down as a bit of fun.

When *Qatar Now* meets the man nicknamed ‘The Prince of the Dunes’ on his home turf south of Doha, it’s technically the driver’s day off. Charming and humble, he says he loves being an ambassador for his country and dune bashing for casual weekend sport. But when the helmet’s on, The Prince goes to work, exploding over the top of sand mountains like a thunderclap, destroying turns and near-vertical drops with brutal agility. Full throttle is all this guy has got.

*Read on for a chat with Al-Attiyah.*

NATURAL WONDERS

## Fast talk: Five minutes with the quickest man on the sand...

### I'M A BORN COMPETITOR.

It was my dream to be a world champion from a very young age. Even in education at school, I wanted to be the best. I have a love for speed. My cousins all trained as pilots, but I was watching motorsports and knew I wanted to drive.

### I BUILT MY OWN RALLY CAR AT 18 YEARS OLD.

My father first taught me to drive in the desert and bought me my first car, a Nissan Patrol. It was a regular car and I converted it. Rallying with my friends was a great joy to me.

### BUT ONE OF THE MOST MEANINGFUL WINS IN MY CAREER WASN'T IN A CAR.

The medal at the London Olympics is what I consider to be the most beautiful victory in my life because it was a childhood dream to be one of the first Qatari Olympic medallists. My father was the first person to guide me to shooting—we used to go hunting together and he saw I loved it and suggested I could achieve my dream in this sport.

### RALLYING IS PHYSICAL, BUT IT IS MENTALLY DEMANDING, TOO.

The Dakar Rally is 12,000 km and 15 days long. We can drive in temperatures from 50–60 degrees Celsius. Drivers are athletes and need very high levels of fitness—it takes two-to-four hours of training every day. Also, we can reach speeds of up to 220 km per hour in the desert. When I started shooting, which is the concentration game, it helped me a lot with focus in the car.

### IT'S EASIER TO GET TO THE TOP THAN TO STAY THERE.

Even with the experience and expertise I have, I always have a sense of pressure. I am very lucky that today, Qatar has become the capital of sport, with all resources available. Courage and confidence also comes from my family and friends—that positive energy makes me give more.

### I HOPE THE HISTORY BOOKS SAY...

More than that people call me 'Superman' or 'Prince of the Dunes'. I am grateful to the fans, but you can't do this for the titles. I work or travel for 300 days a year and I can do it because I love it. I have never thought of retiring. Sport has taught me to be committed in life and that is something I am proud of.

Nasser Al-Attiyah tears up the soft dunes at Khor Al Udaid

# Desert adventure

*Slide on singing dunes, fly high or rev up for 4WD thrills on a day trip from Doha.*

### SURF GOLDEN WAVES

📍 MESAIEED AND INLAND SEA  
[goldenadventuresqatar.com](http://goldenadventuresqatar.com)  
[365adventures.me](http://365adventures.me)

What could be more fun than sand boarding down the smooth crescents that rise and fall around Khor Al Udaid? Going so fast you make the sand sing. In the desert about 40 km southwest of Doha, there's a spot where the dunes naturally make a musical sound as the mountains of sand shift in the wind. On a family-friendly safari tour with **Golden Adventures Qatar** or **365 Adventures**, you might just make the desert hum in a similar way as you cause sand particles to vibrate as you slide down the dunes.

### SOAR ON AN AIR SAFARI

📍 SEALINE AREA  
[skymasters.qa](http://skymasters.qa)

On a morning or afternoon paratrike tour with **Sky Masters Qatar**, strap into the back seat of an open-air three-wheel aircraft before your experienced pilot fires up the motor and gently lifts you up above the desert. For 20 minutes, you'll coast slow, low and free as a bird with unbeatable views of the dunes and Sealine Beach. Great for children over eight years old.

### GO DUNE BASHING

📍 SEALINE AREA  
[goldenadventuresqatar.com](http://goldenadventuresqatar.com)

Buckle up. Skidding sideways down giant desert peaks is a highlight that sends adrenaline off the charts. Things stay comfortable inside your air-conditioned 4WD, but it's a wild ride as you drift down the dunes with sand blasting the windscreen (expert drivers can tailor the speed to suit families, too). Many operators offer half-day or full-day experiences from Doha. Tours with **Golden Adventures Qatar** head to a waterside camp at Khor Al Udaid, where you can cool off with a swim and barbecue lunch. You can also add a camel ride or sand boarding to the adventure or snap a photo with a falcon.

### RIDE A QUAD BIKE

📍 MESAIEED  
[goldenadventuresqatar.com](http://goldenadventuresqatar.com)

Take off-riding to the next level, driving your own quad bike in a convoy through the desert. You will handle the steering and speed but a trusty guide shows you the ropes, leading you through a challenging course. Tip: you'll be dusting sand off, so wear loose and comfortable clothes. Closed shoes are a must. Book a quad bike safari with **Golden Adventures Qatar**.

# Wild luxury

*The good life awaits at these resorts tucked into the sand.*



The Outpost Al Barari

## **FOR QUIET: A SAFARI IN THE SAND**

📍 INLAND SEA

[theoutpostalbarari.com](http://theoutpostalbarari.com)

Secreted among the dunes of the Inland Sea nature reserve, chic and newly-opened **The Outpost Al Barari** wants you to feel all the way off the grid. Its one, two or three-bedroom villas grant privacy with uninterrupted views and as much solitude as you fancy. Grand expeditions into the desert include hot air balloon rides, camel safaris and nature walks to track wildlife with a guide, but you might just want to stay put. The big idea here is to leave healthier than when you checked in—yoga sessions are customised to each guest, as are fitness plans and the spa's 'earth-connecting' massage, which uses desert sand. This retreat is high on romance, too, with an outdoor cinema screening classics, swing seats for watching the sunset from your deck and a stargazing space where you can relax into the silence of night.

## **FOR FAMILY FUN: A TENT BY THE SEA**

📍 SEALINE BEACH

[regencysealinecamp.com](http://regencysealinecamp.com)

**Regency Sealine Camp's** glamping suites and family-sized rooms stretch along the gentle shores of Sealine Beach. By day, you're free to claim a waterfront cabana and do as little as you like, or explore the desert beyond on guided, kid-friendly camel rides or paragliding and 4WD adventures. In the evenings, bonfires set the scene for conversation and cool drinks. "It's all designed to give guests a chance to experience the unique desert culture and timeless landscape of Qatar in a luxurious way," says the camp's Operations Manager, Mohammed Al Wardani.

Out of

the blue

*Qatar's warm waters host one of the largest whale shark congregations in the world. Doha-based writer Shereen D'Souza gets close to the giants.*



CLICK HERE

I am not usually an early morning person, but standing on the northern edge of Qatar, seeing first light fall over the open Gulf, the 04:30 pickup from the city feels totally worth it. I can already tell that this will be one of the most memorable days in the 11 years I've called this country home.

From here at the port of Al Ruwais, where I meet the small group of other adventurers on this **Discover the Whale Sharks of Qatar tour** (discoverqatar.com, +974 4023 0458), the ride out to the protected patch of sea known as Al Shaheen is another two hours. But it's not exactly hard going aboard the luxurious catamaran, grazing on good strong coffee, mini sandwiches and pastries for breakfast.

Our guide, Dominika, keeps the energy high. "The most fascinating thing about whale sharks is how little even researchers know about them," she says. Though the world's biggest fish can give birth to up to 300 live pups at a time, the animals mostly live solitary lives far out at sea. Very few people even get to see one.

"Despite being endangered, whale sharks are only protected in around 13 countries," Dominika adds. And Qatar is particularly special. In this safe haven, the water is an ideal 27–33 degrees Celsius and abundant with plankton—the sharks' primary source of food. From May to September, the sharks gather here in droves every year.

Today, they are being elusive, even though two known regulars have been tagged by researchers and our captain can track the group. Dominika is passing binoculars around the boat, each of us taking a turn as lookout, when, out of nowhere, the first giant breaks the water's surface, its jaws four-feet-wide open, to feed.

It's hard to fathom the enormity of a whale shark until one is right in front of you. These magnificent creatures grow to an average of 20 feet—that's about the height of a male giraffe, to put things into perspective.

I'm holding my breath, the first shark gliding so close that I can count its spots, when the rest emerge. Sounds of awe echo around the boat as the on-board photographer takes photos of us all with the sharks from every imaginable angle, but I'm silent and laser-focused on this moment. Each creature is so unique in its patterns of imperfect circles, scattered dots and broken lines, their silvery bodies so graceful as they fade in and out of the blue. I'm surprised to realise I can barely hear a splash.

Congregations at Al Shaheen are gargantuan. In other places around the world, you might spot a few whale sharks together if you're lucky. But here, sightings of up to 200 sharks at a time have been recorded and today I lose count at around 100. This is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience—the stuff bucket lists are made of.

# Dive in

*How much saltwater action can you handle?*



## WING IT

VARIOUS LOCATIONS  
[flokiteschool.com](http://flokiteschool.com)

A reliable wind and the diversity of its beaches makes Qatar a magnet for kite surfers. Enthusiasts from around the world head for Zekreet on the west coast and Fuwairit Kite Beach in the north (read more on page 62), which will host the GKA Freestyle Kite World Cup finals in December 2023. L-platers can pick up lessons with **Flo Kite School** at Fuwairit, Zekreet or closer to the city at Al Wakrah Beach.

## CATCH A TROPHY FISH

VARIOUS LOCATIONS  
[anantara.com](http://anantara.com),  
Shraoh: +974 5066 0111

Doha is a fishing town at heart and you'll often spot locals throwing lines out along the Corniche. If you're staying at the **Banana Island Resort Doha by Anantara**, you can sail off on a sunrise or sunset fishing mission and a chef will serve your catch to your restaurant table for dinner. But if you want to chase the really big hamour, diamond trevally and tuna that hang around gorgeous offshore islands, **Shraoh Charters** can hook you up with a speedboat, captain and crew.

## GET UP, STAND UP

THE PEARL-QATAR  
[bluepearlexperience.com](http://bluepearlexperience.com)

Why not get off the tourist trail and paddle along the smooth waterways of The Pearl-Qatar? **Blue Pearl Experience** offers sunset SUP tours around the city's colourful, European-inspired island as well as day trips that venture to beaches up and down the coast.



## FEEL THE SPRAY

WEST BAY  
[qatarwatersport.com](http://qatarwatersport.com)

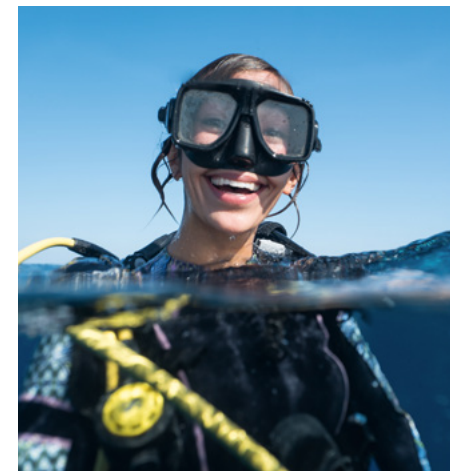
Book a tour with **Qatar Water Sport** to speed along Doha's coastal edges on a Sea Doo WAKE PRO SuperCharge 230cc jet ski. Churn, turn and rev it up on the open water but don't forget to slow down for a moment to take it all in—the view back across the city from the water is a showstopper.



## DIVE DEEP

VARIOUS LOCATIONS  
[poseidondivecenter.pdcqatar.com](http://poseidondivecenter.pdcqatar.com)

Surprise! The desert is a magnet for marine life enthusiasts. The waters that edge the Qatari peninsula are teeming with Arabian blue angel fish, Gulf parrot fish, sea turtles and dolphins. Diving or snorkelling at the Inland Sea, spotting bright nudibranchs and stingrays while surrounded by crescent dunes is pure magic. Coastal shipwrecks such as the Pericles are popular big fish hangouts. On guided dives with PADI-aligned **Poseidon Dive Center**, an underwater photographer comes along to snap you in action. The centre also runs learn-to-dive AquaMissions in hotel pools for juniors aged eight years and up.



# Make a splash

*Slip from a daybed into the sea. Escape to a secret island. These beach getaways are so close, yet feel so far...*



An overwater villa at Banana Island Resort Doha by Anantara

## FUWAIRIT KITE BEACH (FKB)

📍 FUWAIRIT  
[fkb.qa](http://fkb.qa)

The secret's out about one of kitesurfing's hidden hotspots now that FKB has opened on Qatar's northern coast. Consistent wind and a shallow lagoon make conditions at Fuwairit Beach, about an hour's drive from Doha, ideal year-round. Built 'by kitesurfers for kitesurfers', the new resort has a kitesurfing school and rental gear but also plenty of land activities. Take time out by the pool, do a yoga class or play volleyball on sand courts. Rooms have a breezy Californian vibe and from twin and king options you can see the water from your bed. Day passes are available if you're staying elsewhere.

## FOUR SEASONS HOTEL DOHA

📍 THE CORNICHE, DOHA  
[fourseasons.com](http://fourseasons.com)

With its understated Moorish design and cool white interiors, Doha's Four Seasons is a glimmering oasis on the Corniche. After a day exploring Qatar's sites, retreat to a serviced sun lounge at the private beach or the bar at Makani Beach Club. There are five indoor and outdoor pools catering to all ages dotted throughout the grounds. On site Après Spa Café does poached eggs and quinoa bowls for breakfast on a menu designed to support the many wellness treatments you can have in the spa.

## RITZ-CARLTON SHARQ VILLAGE & SPA

📍 DOHA  
[ritzcarlton.com](http://ritzcarlton.com)

Relax into the ultimate five-star beach holiday within easy reach of the National Museum of Qatar and Souq Waqif. Lavishly styled in the manner of a sheikh's palace, this resort's villas and suites are designed with opulent flourishes and glowing lanterns and are connected by a maze of courtyards and lush gardens. Afternoons at the private beach are best followed by evenings at the casually elegant El Cedro Lounge bar.

## HILTON SALWA BEACH RESORT & VILLAS

📍 ABU SAMRA  
[salwabeachresort.qa](http://salwabeachresort.qa)

Fusing a Mediterranean feel with an Arabian aesthetic, the Hilton Salwa sprawls along 3.5 km of private beachfront in Qatar's sunny south-west. Inside this paradise of canopied cabanas, beaches, pools, bars and restaurants, you'll also find one of the Middle East's largest children's attractions, Desert Falls Water and Adventure Park.

## MARSA MALAZ KEMPINSKI

📍 THE PEARL-QATAR  
[kempinski.com](http://kempinski.com)

You don't have to be a guest to soak up the high life at this resort on The Pearl-Qatar island. With a day pass, you can breeze through the majestic lobby, past the oversized aquarium and swaying palm trees, to claim your spot in the sun. Fanning out from the Arabian/Venetian-style hotel is a collection of crystal blue swimming pools and a private beachfront lined with thatched umbrellas. Roll out your towel and simply soak up some vitamin D or burn off energy on kayaks and hydrobikes.

## BANANA ISLAND RESORT DOHA BY ANANTARA

📍 BANANA ISLAND  
[anantara.com](http://anantara.com)

Surrounded entirely by sea, yet only a 25-minute ferry ride from Doha, Banana Island is the perfect tropical-themed escape for couples and families. At this resort and spa, wake up in an overwater villa, then decide whether to splash in the lagoon pool, surf pool, dive pool or on the golden sand beach. Kids will find their thrills at the water park, bowling alley, cinema or in cooking and camping sessions. Adults can try out watersports and golf or laze in a shady hammock before romantic dinners on a floating deck.



# Urban oasis

*With lush parks and one of the world's most eco-smart districts in downtown Doha, Qatar's future is brightly green. Dr. Gonzalo Castro de la Mata is planting the seeds of sustainability.*



Verdant, sprawling **Oxygen Park** in Doha's Education City precinct is a gorgeous place to catch your breath in the afternoon. Its subterranean waterfall plaza is a hushed hideout. Umbrella thorns and other medicinal, desert-proof trees offer picnickers shade on the grass below. Curving paths and undulating hills were carefully designed to maximise the breeze.

"This park is a visionary experiment, producing clean air as well as a space for exercise and connecting with nature," says Dr. Gonzalo Castro de la Mata, Executive Director of Earthna, Center for a Sustainable Future, and a member of Qatar Foundation. "It is one of my favourite places to escape."

Eight universities, three research centres and Qatar's futuristic National Library surround the park in Doha's educational hub. "A lot of the information generated by the researchers, the professors and students in Education City focuses on sustainability," he says. Earthna's purpose, at least in part, is to translate this research into policy actions that will help Qatar

hit the targets of its 2030 vision, the growing state's blueprint for a greener future.

"Education City works as a huge test bed, a living laboratory, where we implement solutions for improving air quality, biodiversity, energy efficient building design and water conservation to see if they can be applied to Qatar as a whole."

About 15 minutes across town by metro, the slick new Msheireb district shows Doha's sustainable vision in motion. This update of the old Doha neighbourhood has been billed as one of the world's most environmentally friendly city redevelopments.

"The way the district is designed is such that you always have shade when you walk, streets enhance airflow and many of the buildings have built-in renewable energy sources," says Castro de la Mata. More than 5,200 rooftop solar panels generate most of the neighbourhood's energy and hot water. An eco-tram slides between LEED-certified towers to the restaurants, cafes and boutiques of Barahat Square, the largest shaded open-air courtyard in the Middle East.

The elegant white-stone Msheireb Mosque is the very first LEED Gold-certified standalone mosque in the world.

"This is a typical example of what is called a 15-minute city," says Dr Castro de la Mata. "You don't need a car to go out to eat, to get coffee, to shop and get groceries, to go to a museum or to go between your office and apartment."

The Doha Metro, a 100 per cent electric network that runs largely underground, is a huge part of reducing the city's fuel footprint. "Here, sustainability is not about protecting the rainforest and conserving natural water sources, because we don't have these things.

"Instead, Qatar is very rich in natural gas, so what we need to do is turn this into human capital, into infrastructure and into savings and investments in sustainability. That's what we help to do at Earthna and Qatar Foundation."

Lusail, the 'future city' north of Doha, is next. "It's designed from scratch to be very sustainable: the shoreline has been developed to conserve natural habitat while providing

a recreational space and buildings are constructed to reduce CO2 emissions," Castro de la Mata says.

"Growth and all that is happening to make Doha a global city of the future is very exciting, but it is also important to pause and think about what the future looks like for our children."

## INTO ECO?

Shop locally made, organic skincare, food and handcrafts at the plastic-free **Torba Farmers Market** (@farmersmarketqa), held regularly in Education City. During **Qatar Sustainability Week** (qatarsustainabilityweek.com) in October, you can plant a tree or get hands-on at hundreds of community events. Check websites for dates.



SHOPPING

# Style scene

*Precious metals meet cultural gems in these works of wearable art.*



Nada bint Khamis Al-Sulaiti is inspired by the world around her. Signature collections from her jewellery brand, **Hairaat** (hairaat.com), reference the petroglyphs found in the desert at Al Jassasiya and the famous Al Zubarah ruins. The glittering Doha skyline is also fair game when it comes to ideas for setting bright topaz, sapphires and rubies into silver and gold.

“I see things and I imagine them in metal,” says Al-Sulaiti. “I’m so immersed in my world that I think I can bejewel everything around me.”

Storytelling is important to Al-Sulaiti, who, though a first generation jeweller, feels a strong connection to her craft. Her great grandfather was a pearl merchant who lost his trade to the introduction of cultured pearls. “I wanted to create this brand to give homage to him,” she explains.

The designer’s contemporary pearl

necklaces, bangles and engraved earrings are hits with Qatar’s style set and have drawn attention from the biggest international names. Hairaat was invited to appear on the Qatar Fashion United by CR Runway in 2022, a monumental style and culture event curated by the French fashion editor and icon Carine Roitfeld. “We were chosen by fashion designers to create their jewellery pieces,” she says. Collaborators included local labels **1309** (1309studios.com), **Drizzle** (drizzle.qa) and **TRZI** (trziofficial.com).

Al-Sulaiti says local fashion designers are not only crafting new silhouettes but contemporising *abayas* and modest wear for the modern market. “It’s about time for designers from this region to export their culture to the world. I think the world is waiting.”



## Local names to know



### WADHA

📍 NMOQ 📍

wadha.co

Designer Wadha Al Hajri reworks geometric Qatari patterns and Islamic-inspired latticework into tailored, minimalist pieces for women. Also find bags and fragrances at her boutique at the National Museum of Qatar.



### MARYAM AL DARWISH

@maryam.aldarwish

Think hooded maxi dresses and embroidered kaftans—modest, but creatively cool and crafted from all-natural textiles, this is perfect resortwear.



### STUDIO 7

📍 MSHEIREB

@studio7qa

The M7 design hub’s concept store sells one-of-a-kind finds from local makers. Find ceramic coasters, board games, rugs by artist Maryam Al-Homaid, RSPR loungewear made from recycled plastic, *qahwa* (coffee) capsule-cups and handmade garments by Arabology and Gigeez.

# The high end

*Float between palatial galleries on a gondola or take high tea in a piazza with outdoor air conditioning. Doha's malls are an experience not to be missed—even if you're only window shopping.*

## 21 HIGH STREET

♥ KATARA  
[21highst.net](http://21highst.net)

Luxury-lovers from around the world will be awestruck by streets inspired by the Palace of Versailles and kept cool all year round by a first-of-its-kind outdoor climate control system. Wander around **Galleries Lafayette**, **Cartier** and **Elie Saab**, then toast golden hour at Doha's world-famous **Novikov Restaurant and Lounge**.

## AL HAZM

♥ AL MARKHIYA  
[alhazm.com](http://alhazm.com)

Imagine soaring galleries carved from Tuscan marble and indoor gardens where 600-year-old olive trees grow and patterned floors absorb heat. In this fantasy land of indulgence, you could buy a McLaren as effortlessly as you can a custom embroidered *abaya*, *jalabiya* or kaftan. Soak up pure opulence over Arabic coffee at **Hawn Café** or try a creamy mozzarella balloon under the pink floral canopy of **Rosemary Café**.

## VILLAGGIO MALL

♥ ASPIRE ZONE  
[villaggioqatar.com](http://villaggioqatar.com)

You'll be transported to Venice as you glide between wings of this elegant shopping centre aboard a gondola on a real canal, hopping off at the Via Domo shopping 'street' to browse **Gucci**, **Dolce & Gabbana** and **Fendi**. On a sneakers and street style budget? Hit **Kendall + Kylie**, **Superdry** and **GAP**. Villaggio is also home to an **IMAX** cinema and the rides, bowling alley and games of **Gondolania Theme Park**, Doha's largest indoor family entertainment centre.

1. Ride on a real canal at Villaggio

2. Lagoona Mall is near West Bay's hotels



## LAGOONA MALL

♥ WEST BAY  
[lagoonamall.com](http://lagoonamall.com)

Located between the iconic Zig-Zag Towers, this is a popular family hangout. Shopping ranges from ready-to-wear **Chanel** to Mango, with the big draw being **Fifty One East**, one of the largest department stores in the Middle East. Teens, head for Y-3 Yohji Yamamoto hoodies. Fragrance-philes will love Frederic Malle colognes and hair mists by Casamorati. The **Jungaloona** fun zone (open until 02:30 on Fridays) entertains toddlers with a mini zipline while bigger kids can test their skills on the Valomotion augmented-reality climbing wall.

## PRINTEMPS DOHA

♥ MSHEIREB  
[doha.printemps.com](http://doha.printemps.com)

The first Printemps department store to open outside of France is 40,000 sq m of sheer glamour. Here, the hardest-to-find pieces from Dior, Valentino and Bottega Veneta meet exclusives from local designers. Then there's the 137 brands on Qatar's biggest beauty floor. So much temptation, too little time? The VIP Concierge can make personalised selections (and book restaurant reservations for when your shopping spree is complete).

## PLACE VENDÔME

♥ LUSAIL  
[placevendomeqatar.com](http://placevendomeqatar.com)

Epic in every way, this gleaming mall boasts more than 580 high-street and high-end shops, including the **Zara** villa, where smart fitting rooms have integrator sensors to find your perfect fit and colour, a giant **Sephora**, the biggest **Louis Vuitton** store in the Middle East, dancing fountains and a family entertainment centre called **Trocadéro**.

 **CLICK HERE**  
to learn more



**WELLNESS**

Ghanim Al-Sulaiti is helping to make Qatar a leading wellness destination



# Green game changer

*This vegan guru and eco entrepreneur is setting the healthy, holistic pace.*

Ghanim Al-Sulaiti is a morning person. Out of bed by 05:30, he's in his office half an hour later and, as might be expected of the face behind **Botany** (bo-ta-ny.shop), Qatar's trend-sparking organic, vegan skincare brand, he makes getting in early look good.

Since opening Qatar's first 100 per cent plant-based eatery, **Evergreen Organics** (evergreenorganics.qa), at The Pearl-Qatar in 2016, Al-Sulaiti's vegan vision has exploded into an empire. He's added cafes at The Gate Mall and **Hamad International Airport** and runs **Green and Go** counters, serving berry chia puddings and lentil salads in Metro stations around Doha. Botany's age-defying facial remedies stand next to luxurious French serums in Doha department stores and you can have a glow-up in the brand's own spa (read more on page 76). The turmeric-loaded face oil is particularly popular. "People say they see the results in three days," Al-Sulaiti says. "It's all I ever use on my own skin."

The entrepreneur has managed a mini revolution, making plant-focused wellness cool in a food culture traditionally built on fish or on meat and dairy from the desert. You could chalk some of it up to the global trend, but, really, his success comes down to street cred.

Al-Sulaiti, who switched to an electric car years ago, has been known as Qatar's 'Vegan Guru' since 2013. "I'd started eating a plant-based diet and felt amazing going through the journey, so I started sharing on social media. It got popular, which led to me giving talks at schools and universities."

But he says it's Evergreen's recipes that have really won Qataris over. "Beetroot ravioli lashed with pistachio pesto has been a bestseller since day one and the cheesy toast with seasonal figs and pomegranate is delicious in summer," he says. "Cashew cheese is *really* good."

When he launched dessert bar **Mylk** (analternativedestination.com) in 2020, Al-Sulaiti didn't even tell anyone it was vegan. "We didn't say in any way what the ingredients were or let anyone know I was behind it for a year." Mylk's small-batch handmade chocolates and creamy 'ice creams' quickly picked up a cult following. And after the big reveal—surprise, there's no dairy!—fans stayed loyal.

Al-Sulaiti's newest restaurant, **Thalatheen** (thalatheen.com), which is set into the National Museum of Qatar, is also quietly conscious. "Thalatheen means '30', in reference to Qatar's 2030 vision for a healthier society," he says.

"We don't really talk about being vegan—it's just a showcase of what Qatari food can be in the future: a cultural mix of local, Italian, Thai and Arabic dishes, all full of spice and nutrition." He bets burger lovers don't even realise their food is meat-free.

As the clean, green lifestyle gains popularity around the world, Al-Sulaiti says Qatar is raising the bar. "My local competition is starting to take off," he laughs. "We've got amazing wellness retreats and spas, organic produce in supermarkets and local brands focusing on self-care—I think that's a great thing."

# Big city bliss

*Doha's luxurious day spas take global wellness trends and turn them up a notch.*



1. The Four Seasons Spa uses colour as a relaxation tool

2. Inside the Oriental spa 'world' at Al Messila Spa

## THE RAINFOREST EXPERIENCE

📍 BANYAN TREE SPA  
[banyantree.com](http://banyantree.com)

A rainforest in the the desert? Yes! The Banyan Tree Hotel's signature Rainforest Experience "combines the best of European spa and hydrothermal therapy with the essence of Asian wellness philosophy to create a haven of serenity," says Khaled Jarrah from the Doha spa. Included with any other booked treatment, this wellness journey takes you through a rain walk, brine steam room and herbal sauna to heated beds and a vitality pool complete with jacuzzi.

## THE FACE WORKOUT

📍 BOTANY LAB  
[lab.bo-ta-ni.shop](http://lab.bo-ta-ni.shop)

Get your skin into glowing shape with a unique facial at the boutique Botany Lab spa. Vegan and organic ingredients—think ripened apricots hand-picked on a farm in Nepal or clove buds sourced from Indonesia—are applied with reflexology techniques and LED technologies. "Just like a body workout, the facial includes a warm-up, exercise and a cool down," says Manager Eman Meftah. For 'cardio', a therapist gives your facial muscles an invigorating massage. "This reduces tension and encourages natural toning and contour."



## A LADIES' SANCTUARY

📍 AL MESSILA SPA  
[almessilaspa.com](http://almessilaspa.com)

Built on the site of a natural oasis, Al Messila is the largest spa escape in the region and offers a women-only retreat with exclusive spa treatments, gyms and fitness studios. Choose to immerse yourself in one of four 'worlds'—Mineral, Mystic, Oriental or Floral—each themed with specific types of sensory and tactile sorcery. Undecided? Simply float through the universe of pampering, chasing Balinese body work with Shirodhara or a Turkish Bath Ceremony. Why not trade up to a massage with 24-carat gold stones? (A gents spa does men's treatments.)

## FAMILY RETREATS

📍 RAFFLES SPA  
[rafflesdoha.com/spa-wellness](http://rafflesdoha.com/spa-wellness)

At this serene hideaway, personalised treatments, based on clinical assessments of your skin, hair and nutrient levels, are administered in private cocoons. Facial therapies fuse active ingredients from nature with tech from Swiss laboratories. Parents, go alone for the pure escapism or, for a bonding session with your teen, Mum or Dad and Me rituals, designed to introduce youngsters to wellness, include quality time spent in the hydrotherapy area.

## COLOUR THERAPY

📍 FOUR SEASONS SPA  
[fourseasons.com/doha/spa](http://fourseasons.com/doha/spa)

"Colour therapy is rooted in Ayurvedic medicine," explains Ori Evapudan, Director of Spa at Doha's Four Seasons Hotel. "It is believed that colours are linked to chakra or energy points in the body, so if you are feeling tired, stressed or low in energy, relaxing under coloured lights can help." Which hue is for you? "Red increases energy by stimulating the lymphatic system, yellow makes people feel safe and happy, while green, a natural colour, helps you feel calmer." Evapudan adds that colour therapy can also help improve sleep and is more potent when combined with hot stone massage.

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