



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Qatar is a peninsula that juts north into the Arabian Gulf. With an area of 4,473 square miles (11,586 square kilometers), Qatar is smaller than the U.S. state of Connecticut. It is a mostly flat, stony desert with date palm oases. The populous east coast lies at sea level, but the terrain rises slightly to its highest elevation of 337 feet (103 meters) near the west coast. Limestone pinnacles sculpted by eons of water and wind erosion are a prominent feature of the central west coast. Giant sand dunes rise in the interior and line the Inland Sea on the nation's southern border.

Qatar's greatest resources are oil and natural gas. Open grazing supports small herds of sheep, goats, and camels, but agriculture is minimal. Wildlife is mostly nocturnal. Various species of birds, rodents, and reptiles (including poisonous vipers) are joined by hedgehogs, coastal foxes, and desert hares. Migratory birds such as the flamingo winter for two months in Qatar. The oryx and gazelle were hunted to extinction and survive now only on captive breeding farms. Cats, once imported to kill rats, roam free and feral in populated areas.

Summers (June–September) are hot and humid. Daily highs reach 120°F (49°C); lows generally remain in the 90s (32–37°C). Most homes, commercial buildings, and vehicles are air-conditioned. Winters (December–March) are warm and dry. Highs reach the low 80s (27–29°C); daily lows dip to 45°F (7°C). Rain (about 4 inches, or 10 centimeters) falls only in winter. Sandstorms occur in March and April.

History

Modern Qataris descend predominantly from Arab tribes migrating from Oman and the harsh interior of Saudi Arabia. Until the 1780s, only a few fishing villages existed on the peninsula. When the Al Thani family migrated from central Arabia in the 1800s to settle near Doha, the Al Khalifa family ruled Qatar from Bahrain.

By 1868, Britain helped negotiate an end to Bahrain's control and signed a treaty with Mohammed bin Thani. When Ottoman Turks gained control of Doha, they appointed Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani as Qatar's governor and helped the Al Thanis consolidate power. Sheikh Jassim overthrew the Turks in 1893 to establish the Al Thani Dynasty. Ties with Britain remained close, and Qatar eventually (1916) became a British protectorate. The country gained independence in 1971.

Qatari pearling vessels once constituted one-third of the entire Arabian Gulf fleet. However, the rise of Japanese cultured pearls in the 1930s ended Gulf pearling and plunged Qatar into a subsistence-level economy. Oil was discovered in 1939; exports did not begin until 1949 due to World War II. With the dramatic rise in oil prices after 1973, Qatar moved from the ranks of the poor to a position of near equality with Western Europe. The wealth has been distributed widely among Qataris, although the large and prosperous middle class has not absorbed a growing group of poor: naturalized citizens, widows or divorced women who have lower earning potential, and large households with undereducated male leaders.

In 1972, the reigning emir, Ahmed bin Ali Al Thani, was deposed by his cousin Khalifa bin Hamad. Then in 1995,

Khalifa's son Hamad, having decided his father's policies were flawed, deposed him in a bloodless coup. Hamad diversified industry to lessen the nation's dependence on oil, gave the press greater freedom, and allowed municipal elections. Qatar's first written constitution passed in a referendum in 2004. The constitution guarantees freedom of expression, assembly, and religion and allows for a national legislative body with two-thirds of its members elected.

Qatar has strengthened its economic ties with other countries by planning to build the world's biggest liquefied natural gas plant with the United States, becoming one of the biggest shareholders of the London Stock Exchange, and forming a committee of gas-exporting countries with Russia and Iran. Qatar, once the only Gulf state trading with Israel, severed those trade ties after the 2009 Gaza offensive.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Qatar's population of about 841,000 is growing by 0.87 percent annually. About 96 percent of the population lives in urban areas. Nearly 300,000 people live in Doha, the nation's capital and largest city.

Only 30 percent of the population holds Qatari citizenship. The remaining 70 percent consists largely of expatriate workers. About 40 percent of the population is Arab. Pakistanis and Indians constitute 18 percent each, Iranians comprise 10 percent, and 14 percent come from other nations. Many U.S. citizens work in education or in the oil and gas industries.

Language

Arabic is Qatar's official language. Prayers are given in classical Arabic, the language of Islam's scripture, the *Qur'an*. Otherwise, spoken Arabic differs considerably from the written form.

English is widely used in business and education, and students begin learning it in fifth grade. The engineering and science colleges at the University of Qatar teach only in English. Most commercial signs are in English and Arabic. Some Qataris favor Arabizing education to limit the influence of English on the culture. Proponents fear Arabic will weaken if English is used too much, but opponents of Arabization fear Arabs will be left behind if they cannot fluently access in English the latest technological developments.

Religion

The majority of Qatar's residents (78 percent) are Muslims, mainly Sunni. Some are Shi'i Muslims, including some Arabs and most Iranians. Shi'i and Sunni Islam differ on the question of Islam's leadership after the prophet Muhammad died.

Both groups of Muslims follow Islam's Five Pillars of Faith: submitting to *Allah* as the only God, with Muhammad as his prophet; praying five times daily facing Makkah, Saudi Arabia; giving alms to the poor; observing fasting and self-denial during the holy month of *Ramadan*; and making a *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah), if possible. The obligation to

pray daily is taken seriously; people will be late or interrupt other activities in order to pray. Friday is a day for sermons and worship; the noon prayers are the most important of the week. All Muslims except the sick, very young, and pregnant are required to honor *Ramadan* from sunrise to sunset. Non-Muslims are obligated to honor the fast only in public.

Islam acknowledges many Christian and Jewish (Old Testament) prophets, and Qatar tolerates public worship for Christians and Hindus. Qatar's first Catholic church opened in 2008, and permission has been granted for future construction of one building each for Protestants and Eastern Orthodox Christians.

General Attitudes

Despite the spread of cable television, mobile phones, and computers, Qatar remains at heart a deeply conservative and religious society, anxious to avoid the social problems it observes in Western countries. Religious references and justifications for action are omnipresent in any conversation. Qataris believe that *Allah* exercises considerable control over their fate and say *In sha'allah* (God willing) in discussing any future activity or accomplishment.

Family and privacy are dominant values; men and women avoid mixing in public and private. To preserve the privacy of females, many cars have tinted rear windows and most houses have high walls and tinted windows. Men and women stand in separate lines in banks and government institutions; some banks operate branches for women only. Swimming pools and gymnasiums often have times reserved only for women. Nice restaurants feature private family rooms; fast-food places at least offer separate family seating areas. Public education is segregated by gender from kindergarten through university.

Qataris generally feel money is for spending, not saving. Personal priorities include going on overseas vacations and having a large salary, a large home, expensive cars, fine clothing, and other material possessions—although not all Qataris and very few expatriates can achieve these goals.

Personal Appearance

Qatari men and women wear traditional Gulf dress that covers the body from head to foot, including the arms. Men wear a white *thobe* (a full-length cotton robe over long, loose-fitting cotton pants) and a white *ghutra* (head cloth) topped by an *aqal* (weighted black cord). In winter, a brown *mishlah* (cloak) is often worn over a darker woolen *thobe*.

Women cover their clothing in public with a thin black *'abaya* (ankle-length cloak made of silk or polyester) in all seasons. Attire beneath the *'abaya* may include colorful dresses, Western designer fashions, and even T-shirts and jeans. Women cover their hair with a *shailah* (head scarf). More conservative women add a *niqab* (a veil that covers the face and leaves only the eyes exposed). Older women may wear a *burqa* (a stiff mask that covers the bridge of the nose and cheeks) instead of a *niqab*. Urban women wear gold jewelry; men prefer silver. All adults wear perfume. Children wear Western sport clothing until they are preteens. Some youths continue to wear elements of Western clothing.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Men and women shake hands with members of the same gender only. They add a kiss on the cheek for close friends. For an especially warm greeting or to show deep respect, a man may kiss another man on the nose after kissing his cheeks. Qatari men shake hands far more frequently and longer than do men in the West. Men rarely introduce their wives in public.

The typical greeting is *Al-salām ‘alaykum* (Peace be upon you). This is responded to with *Wa ‘alaykum al-salām* (And upon you be peace). Then follows a series of elaborate and often repetitive forms of “How are you?” These include *Kayf halak?* (How is your condition?) to greet men and *Kayf halich?* to greet women; *Shū akhbarak?* (What is your news?) to men and *Shū akhbarich?* to women; and *Shlonak?* (literally, “What is your color?”) to men and *Shlonich?* to women.

Forms of address depend on age and position. Children call their mother *um* and their father *baba*. *Doctor* is a highly prized title sometimes applied to those who have not earned it professionally.

Gestures

The left hand is regarded as unclean and is not used for pointing, gesturing, or passing objects unless both hands are required. Bringing the tips of the fingers together with the palm up is a signal to wait, and “thumbs up” means “okay” or “good.” When sitting on a traditional floor cushion, one tucks the feet so the soles do not show. To beckon, one waves all fingers with the palm pointing down. Public displays of affection are not tolerated. Age and position can determine certain social graces such as who should open a door for whom. For instance, a less senior person holds a door and the oldest passes first.

Visiting

Visiting is a national pastime, with spontaneous visits to immediate family members an almost daily occurrence. People generally avoid visiting during the rest period after lunch. Invited guests usually take a small present (flowers or sweets) to their hosts. Guests are nearly always served foods such as tea, fruits, and baked goods.

Men and women entertain separately. Men have a separate building or room (*majlis*) in which to entertain their male guests. Young children go with their mother. Boys older than age nine go with their father and are expected to sit quietly or to help serve refreshments. Girls help serve the women.

As each new guest arrives, the assembled party rises so the guest can shake hands with and greet each individual, beginning with the oldest. When *bakhour* (incense) is passed around, guests waft the perfumed air toward their bodies and into their hair or head coverings. This ritual signals the evening is over. Hosts typically accompany guests to their cars, where guests offer profuse thanks for the entire evening.

Eating

The family eats meals together, gathered either around a table or the more traditional floorcloth. If guests are present, males and females eat separately. It is traditional to eat with the right hand, but some people use utensils. Diners wash their hands before and after each meal. Lunch is the main meal; dinner is lighter and eaten usually after 7:30 p.m.

For special occasions, *ghozi* (a whole lamb or kid goat stuffed with seasoned rice) is the centerpiece of a meal. Diners tear off meat with the hand; they also grasp a handful of rice, squeeze it into a ball, and flick it with the thumb into the mouth. The father offers guests extra helpings. They refuse a few times before accepting.

Eating at restaurants or getting take-out food is becoming more popular in Qatar as women in the workforce have less time to cook. Weather permitting, on weekends in November through March, families like to picnic in parks or along Doha's long promenade by the sea.

LIFESTYLE

Family

It is nearly impossible to exaggerate the strength of the family. Children remain at home until married. The oldest son is to marry first, and it is very rare for a younger daughter to be married before an elder one. Newlyweds move in with the man's parents until they can afford their own housing. They then live near their parents and generally do not seek work abroad. The elderly are respected as wise. Aging parents unable to care for themselves live with their children or other relatives. Most Qatari families have maids, drivers, gardeners, and nannies, so children rarely have chores and women have little housework.

Families carefully guard the honor and modesty of unmarried daughters, who usually cannot leave home without a parent or *mahram* (male relative, usually an uncle or brother). Women normally are not allowed to drive, but a rising number of working women are acquiring driver's licenses. Women have an advocate in Shaykha Mouza, the emir's second wife, who promotes women's issues with her husband's support. Traditional aversions to letting women pursue opportunities outside the home are fading as women assert their desire for higher education and employment.

Housing

The vast majority of Qatar's population lives in urban areas. Most Qatari families have large homes in compounds surrounded by high walls. A household may consist of three generations, with separate living quarters for each nuclear family. For example, a household may include a man and his wife, his unmarried children, his elderly parents, and his adult sons and their wives.

Live-in domestic servants such as maids and nannies have their own living quarters. The head of the household entertains his male guests in the *majlis*, which often features traditional floor cushions. Women socialize in a separate living area. Expatriate workers live in housing of a much lower standard, often cramped dormitories.

Dating and Marriage

Dating is virtually forbidden in Qatar. Even talking to members of the opposite sex, other than siblings, is frowned upon and can damage a young woman's reputation. Marriages are arranged by parents. Children can reject their parents' choices in theory, but some children are not realistically given the option.

Engagement is a formal declaration of the intent to marry and can be broken only under exceptional circumstances. It involves the male relatives signing a contract that mentions both the bride price (paid by the husband's family to the bride's family) and divorce terms, as well as limits on future behavior like continuing one's education. Most engaged couples meet together only if chaperoned, and some meet for the first time on their wedding day.

Marrying one's cousins is not only the norm, it is desirable. Qatari men can marry foreigners, even non-Muslim foreigners. In contrast, Qatari women can only marry Muslims, and if they marry a foreigner, they lose their Qatari citizenship.

Under Islamic law, men can have as many as four wives. However, most men have only one. Many women prefer to be an only wife, and Islamic law dictates that wives must be treated equally and can veto an additional wife. In many cases, a husband's decision to have only one wife may have more to do with the high costs of getting married, such as the bride price. Still, some men have two or three wives. Inheritance is passed from father to son.

The divorce rate is high. A man can divorce his wife by uttering his intention in the presence of his wife and witnesses. A woman must go to court to seek divorce. If she initiates the proceedings, the father has custody of all of their children after they reach puberty. Qatari men and women now usually marry in their twenties; for their parents, the age was much lower. This change has come about partly because women have greater aspirations for education and employment.

Life Cycle

The birth of a child is a welcome event, and parents typically host a family celebration. In accordance with Muslim tradition, a ceremony is held a week after the birth at which the child is formally given a name.

Muslim customs also govern funeral practices. When people die, they are buried as soon as possible, typically on the same day. The body is ritually washed and wrapped in white linen. Prayers are offered at a mosque, and the burial takes place in a cemetery. Later, relatives and friends gather to offer condolences to the bereaved family, and mourners read passages from the *Qur'an*.

Diet

Rice, flat bread, chicken, fish, and lamb are the main dietary staples. Fresh fruit, vegetables, and yogurt are also included in many meals. A typical lunch features *kabsa*, a dish of rice with chicken, fish, or lamb. Qatari cuisine features Indian curries and spices. Dinner is a light variation of lunch, usually without rice. Breakfast normally consists of eggs, cheese, jam, bread, and tea, although boxed cereal is becoming

popular. Tea, usually heavily sugared, is served at any hour. Cardamom-flavored *qahwah* (coffee) may be served after dinner.

Islamic law forbids Muslims from eating pork or drinking alcohol. Pork is not sold in Qatar. Alcohol is sold in bars and clubs in Doha. Many Qataris would consider the consumption of alcohol a highly objectionable offense, so those Qataris who do drink are unlikely to reveal that publicly.

Qataris especially like sandwiches called *shawarmas* (made with marinated chicken or beef cut from a large rotating cylinder and wrapped with dressing and salad in a thin dough wafer). A *shawarma* is wrapped in paper, which is then peeled like a banana. Fresh fruit juice is sold at small sandwich and juice shops. U.S. fast-food restaurants have become popular. Typical picnic foods are chicken kebabs, rice, tomatoes, cucumbers, yogurt, bread, and soft drinks.

Recreation

Soccer is Qatar's favorite sport. On all but the hottest days, almost every vacant lot features a game of soccer played with a makeshift goal. Basketball and, to a lesser extent, volleyball are also gaining popularity. Leagues for these three sports are highly organized and important to regional pride and national identity. Camel and horse racing, fishing, and boating are popular.

Outside of school, women are involved little in sports. They may enjoy an evening of walking along the coastal road. Many people have weekend residences in the north or west. There they raise vegetables, keep camels and small livestock, and relax. Women have greater freedom of movement in these settings. Movie theaters show U.S., Indian, and Arab films. Tickets are too expensive for most expatriates. Families generally prefer to watch DVDs at home rather than go to a theater.

The Arts

The government sponsors traditional arts and crafts, theater, music, publishing, and libraries through various programs. The city of Doha is home to many cultural art groups, including the Folklore Troupe, Qatari Fine Arts Society, and Doha Theatre Players.

Popular oral traditions include *Qur'anic* recitation, proverbs, poetry, and song. Decorative arts are more prevalent than painting or sculpture. Arabic calligraphy is highly treasured and used to decorate manuscripts, walls, furniture, metalwork, and pottery. Complex geometric designs, as well as intricate patterns of vegetal ornament called arabesques, are also frequently seen.

Holidays

Religious holidays are set by the lunar calendar. Most important is *Eid al-Adha* (Feast of Sacrifice), which honors Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. It also signals the end of the *Hajj*, undertaken to commemorate the prophet Muhammad's seventh-century journey from Medina.

Islam's other great feast, *Eid al-Fitr*, lasts three days at the end of *Ramadan*. Qatar's National Day (3 Sept.), marking independence from Britain, is a day of parades, art shows, sporting events, and feasting. Buildings are festooned with

red and white lights for the festive occasion.

SOCIETY

Government

The State of Qatar is a hereditary monarchy headed by an emir (currently Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani) as chief of state. Members of the al-Thani family occupy many top posts. The emir appoints a prime minister (currently Shaykh Hamad bin Jassem al-Thani) as head of government. The *Majlis al-Shura* (Consultative Council) is currently comprised of 35 appointed members, although the constitution, which came into effect in 2005, allows for a 45-seat *Majlis al-Shura* with 30 elected members and 15 members appointed by the emir. The appointed judiciary is comprised of mostly non-Qataris because few nationals are trained in law. *Adaliyya* (civil) code guides judicial practice, but *shari'a* (Islamic law) is applied in family affairs and criminal proceedings. Though a member of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council, Qatar often takes independent foreign policy stances.

Economy

Oil and natural gas account for most of Qatar's exports. Though a small oil producer, it has one of the world's largest gas reserves. Industry is mostly state owned, but retail and construction firms are privately held. Qatar encourages citizens to seek employment in the private sector but with little success. Private sector jobs offer lower salaries, longer hours, greater expectations, and less security than government jobs. To ease unemployment, the government is working to replace expatriates with Qatari nationals in professional fields. Although Qatar has an advanced service sector, it must import basic consumer goods. The currency is the *riyal* (QAR).

Transportation and Communications

Virtually all Qataris and middle-income expatriates own cars. Public transportation is provided by taxis and a bus system. There are two major divided highways, one running north-south and the other east-west. Feeder roads are not well maintained.

Telecommunications are highly advanced, with cable television, cellular phones, and pagers in use. Nearly all homes have televisions and radios. The Al-Jazeera satellite television station, supported by the Qatari government, is popular throughout the region. Six newspapers (three Arabic and three English) are published in Qatar. The postal system is modern, but delivery can be slow.

Education

Qatar's first school opened in 1952. Although public education to age 16 is mandatory for all citizens, education is also considered a right. Private schools offer a coeducational format and smaller classes; many are taught in English. A university degree is highly esteemed. Entrance to the University of Qatar is competitive. Women must meet higher admission standards than men so they do not overwhelm the

enrollment; they currently constitute 70 percent of the student body. Citizens attend for free; most nonnationals are charged tuition. Many males and some females attend foreign universities; tuition is often paid by the government or their employer.

Health

Although many Qataris prefer to go overseas for medical care, a free national public health system is anchored by three government hospitals. Satellite clinics offer outpatient treatment. Advanced surgery is performed at the flagship Hamad Hospital in Doha. Private clinics also offer care, and a private hospital is under construction. Maternal and child care are a focus of attention, but prenatal care is still not sufficient in outlying villages. Expatriates receive subsidized care if they purchase a health card. Blindness affects the elderly, and sickle-cell anemia is endemic. A sedentary lifestyle and fast-food consumption have increased rates of obesity and diabetes. Tuberculosis is common among low-income foreign workers, who often live in crowded, unsanitary conditions.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

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POPULATION & AREA

Population	840,926 (rank=158)
Area, sq. mi.	4,473 (rank=162)
Area, sq. km.	11,586

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	38 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	94 of 155 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$121,000
Adult literacy rate	89% (male); 89% (female)
Infant mortality rate	12 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	74 (male); 77 (female)

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

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