

Things to do in Doha, Qatar: A three minute guide

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<http://www.traveller.com.au/threeminute-guide-to-doha-qatar-gqsggz>

WHY

The highlight of the world's richest country is the white mud-brick buildings of Souq Waqif, where veiled women henna ancient designs on hands while men gather to gossip in sparkling white thobes (robes). With a look over his shoulder at nearby Dubai, Qatar's Emir has seen the writing on the wall and is preserving his emirate's pre-resource-boom Bedouin culture. Doha is the Middle East's newest refuelling stop for Aussies en route to Europe, though a summer stopover sees temps always above 40. The city naps in the day and comes alive in the evenings.

The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar



VISIT

Top of the list is the beautiful Museum of Islamic Art. Designed by star-architect I. M. Pei, the futurist building is surrounded by graceful, timeless dhows, Arabian sailing boats that have been plying the Arabian Gulf for millennia. Inside, massive windows look out on the skyscrapers of West Bay and the permanent exhibition is a delight for lovers of fine calligraphy, art and design from across the Islamic world (mia.org.qa). It's rumoured the \$500 million National Museum of Qatar by architect Jean Nouvel will open later this year (qm.org.qa). See also Qatar travel guide

EAT

Doha's cash lures the world's best chefs, and Michelin stars abound. For those without an expense account, the glittering mirrors of Persian favourite, Parisi, won't overshadow the cuisine. Order the khorosht e-fesenjan (chicken cooked in pomegranate and walnuts) and saffron creme brulee. Argan in Al Jasra Boutique Hotel serves classic Moroccan dishes in rich surrounds – recline in the majilis area with low couches for an extravagant spread of mezze and tagines followed by sweet tea and a puff on a shisha pipe at neighbouring hotel Al Jomrok's rooftop terrace, overlooking the souq (swbh.com).

Traditionally clad police atop prancing Arabian horses in Doha's souq.

Photo: Alamy

LOOK

Doha has two faces. In futuristic West Bay, each new skyscraper jostles for kudos within a landscape of statement buildings, where happening bars live in five-star, multinational hotels. On the other side, the romantic Souq Waqif's cobbled lanes lead into tiny stores selling spices, gold, Arabian perfumes, camels and Qataris' beloved falcons: save time for the modern falcon hospital. On Friday evenings, local musicians and singers gather in the market's centre to jam, Bedouin-style. See souq-waqif-doha.com.

MUST

Modelled on a traditional Bedouin village, experience a true hammam in the Doha's best spa, the Six Senses spa in the Ritz Carlton's luxurious Sharq Village & Spa. It'll have you scrubbed, rubbed, and then lavished with sweet oils until you glimmer (sixsenses.com). Dhows line the seaside promenade, the Corniche, waiting for customers – take a dhow cruise out into the bay, from a 20-minute dash to a sunset barbecue.

SLEEP

Cool white interiors, with richly woven carpets and elaborate metalwork lanterns, set the tone for an Arabian stay. Sleep in the heart of old Doha, in one of Souq Waqif's nine boutique hotels, in reworked 30s' Qatari homes or fortress-style new builds. They range from the two-suite Bismillah apartment to the five-star, 37-room Al Mirqab (swbh.com). For a resort getaway with white-sand beaches and lagoon pools, and a serious wellness team, join well-heeled locals at luxe Banana Island Resort, on an island in Doha bay (doha.anantara.com).

TIP

The city is extremely well monitored by CCTV and dashing, traditionally clad police in atop prancing Arabian horses in the souq, and feels safe even for solo female travellers. English is widely spoken. *Belinda Jackson travelled courtesy of Souq Waqif Boutique Hotels, Banana Island Resort Doha by Anantara and Six Senses Spa at Sharq Village & Spa.* Recommended

