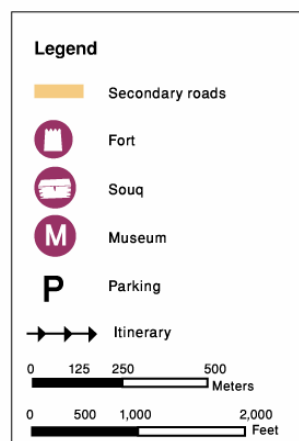


HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CAPITAL CITY

Spend between three and four hours visiting attractive sites in Doha

If you, your business partners or guests are on a short visit, take between three and four hours to visit the Qatar National Museum, Al-Koot fort, any mosque nearby and Waqif souq for some shopping.



2006

The itinerary starts at the Qatar National Museums, located on Al-Corniche, near the roundabout nicknamed Museum or Perfume Bottles roundabout.

Visiting the site, you can take a glimpse into local history and traditional architectural styles. Housed in one of the former Al-Thani residences, this museum is a notable example of eastern Arabian architecture. Built in 1901 during the reign of Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al-Thani, the home was transformed into a museum in the 1970s to display traditions and archaeological findings uncovered in Qatar. The three-year restoration was so meticulous that the museum won the first Agha Khan Award for Renovation Excellence.

The main “majlis”, a room used to receive guests, offers a complete archaeological collection that reveals the history of Qatar’s first pioneering residents. Another pavilion features a display on the Qatari marine ecosystem, which was the way of life for Qataris before the discovery of oil. A special collection of the ruling family’s array of military decorations is displayed in its own pavilion.

The museum’s lovely garden is highlighted by a reproduction of a traditional Bedouin tent. Authentically made from exquisite wool cloth, the tent is decorated with customary patterns and furnished with typical Qatari furniture.

Plan to spend between one and two hours visiting the museum. The museum is open every day from 8.30 a.m. to noon, and 4-7 p.m. except Friday. There is no admission fee. For more information, visit the museum’s Web site [<http://www.qnm.8m.com>] or call 429 1777 or 444 2191.

Once you have seen all the museum has to offer, drive along the Corniche towards the City Center. On the way, near the harbor, take a look at the Museum of Islamic Art, an imposing building designed by architect I. M. Pei. It will house a world class collection of Islamic objects and artifacts coming from Spain to India. In the 3,000 square meters exhibition area, visitors will enjoy collections of ceramics, metalwork, jewelry, woodwork, glass and artifacts of ivory and silk. The museum is scheduled to open in 2007.

Back on Al-Corniche, turn left into Grand Hamad Street and park your car near the second traffic light. Walk to the Al-Koot fort and enjoy this old example of military architecture.

Built in 1927 by Sheikh Abdullah bin Qassim Al-Thani, who governed Qatar between 1913 and 1949, the fort was created to protect the nearby Waqif souq from would-be thieves. The courtyard mosque is one of the massive fort’s most interesting features, mostly due to what it is missing: walls and a roof.

Since the mosque was often used by prisoners, its plan had to be modified so guards could keep a watchful eye on them, even during prayers. Despite the lack of physical structure, the “mehrab” still faces the “Kaaba” in Mecca.

The Al-Koot fort is open by appointment. To schedule a visit, call 442 41 43. There is no admission fee and the visit takes half an hour.

If you have enough time, visit the modern mosque beside the fort. Before entering it, Muslims must perform a long sequence of body cleaning actions called “wudu”, or ablutions.

The ablutions take place beside the entrance in the “mothawaddah”. On one corner is a minaret, which is a circular shaft with a simple rounded top and a small arched door that opens to a narrow spiral staircase. In the old time, the “muezzin” used to climb up to call people for prayer through four little windows. Today, speakers installed in the minaret are used for this purpose.

The prayer room is a huge carpeted space discretely lit by narrow windows. The “mehrab”, in front of the entrance, indicates the direction of the “Kaaba”, the Holy Stone at Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Normally the “imam”, who is responsible for leading prayer, stands facing the congregation in front of the “mehrab”. On Fridays, he usually gives a religious speech from the podium.

Visiting the mosque takes only half an hour. It is usually open from sunrise to late afternoon and there is no admission fee. Visitors are advised not to enter the mosque or take pictures during prayer time.

Then, enjoy the time remaining shopping in the Waqif souq, one of the places in Qatar where you can find anything and everything. Made up of a large labyrinth of alleyways lined with various shops, the popular souq is a feast for the senses. Selections of perfumes, spices, incense, sweets, rice and dried fruits are so plentiful they often spill out of the shops into the alleys where shoppers find them too tempting to resist.

Souqs are always the vibrant center of Arab cities, serving as a meeting location as well as a trading place. After shopping, take a cup of tea and smoke some “shisha” in one of the many traditional teahouses. We also recommend a visit to the typing section, where those who cannot read or write are assisted with completing documents or writing letters.

For more information on the Qatar National Museum, Al-Koot fort, and Waqif souq, download the complete descriptions of the sites and bring them with you.