

# **QATAR**

## Business Guide

Compiled by:

### **Swiss Business Hub Middle East - Qatar**

Qatar, July 2018

#### **ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE**

Swiss nationals holding regular (NOT Provisional) passports can get a visa at the airport upon arrival at the immigration booth. A fee of 100 Qatari Riyal will be charged. Payment is only possible by Credit Card. The visa procedure is relatively quickly done. Swiss Diplomatic and Service passports are exempted of paying the visa fee.

A visa prior to the arrival to Qatar could also be requested at the Consulate General of Qatar in Geneva. This procedure may take several days.

#### **LANGUAGES USED FOR BUSINESS**

English is very widely used as a second language; especially Qatar has large foreign communities, mainly from India, Philippines and other Asian nations. Swiss businessmen must avoid bringing catalogues in French or German.

#### **PUBLIC HOLIDAYS**

The weekend is Friday and Saturday. December 18<sup>th</sup> is the Independence Day. There are two major religious celebrations in Qatar:

- Eid Al-Fitr: At the 1st of Shawwal for three days (from June 25<sup>th</sup> to June 27<sup>th</sup> 2018), private sector and (from June 25<sup>th</sup> to July 03<sup>rd</sup> 2018), public sector.
- Eid Al- Adha: it is holiday for three days (from August 22<sup>nd</sup> to August 25<sup>th</sup> 2018), private sector and (from August 19<sup>th</sup> to September 03<sup>rd</sup> 2018), public sector.

#### **HEALTH AND INOCULATIONS**

No inoculation is needed for visitors.

## TIME ZONES

Qatar's time is three hours ahead of GMT year round, with no change of timing in summer.

## TIME DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SWITZERLAND AND QATAR

Qatar is one hour ahead of Switzerland in summer and two hours in winter.

## ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

240 Volts + 6% with frequency 50 hertz

## METHODS OF PAYMENT

Cash in local currency remains the most common form of payment. International credit cards are widely accepted in hotels, car rental offices, large restaurants and supermarkets.

The currency used in Qatar is the Qatari riyal (QAR). The riyal is pegged to the CHF at a rate of 1 CHF to 3.861 QAR

## TRANSPORTATION

Qatar has one international airport, which is the country's main gate to the outside world. Doha seaport handles general imports, particularly consumer goods and container cargo, while the other two ports in Messaeid and Ras Laffan are more industrial. Qatar has a modern network of highways linking it to its neighbours (Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates).

Qatar Airways, the national carrier, runs **daily** direct flights from Doha to Geneva and direct flights per week from Doha to Zurich. Three additional flight will be added in September 17<sup>th</sup> 2018 from Doha to Zurich.

Qatar will have underground system railway in 2019. A multi-billion-dollar project is already underway to finalise the rail network. However, public transport is limited to city busses.

Taxis are readily available and are all equipped with meters. UBER is already in Qatar; visitors can only download the application and activate the location in the cell phone. Rates are fairly cheap, as an average trip would cost 40 Riyals (CHF 10.35). Car rental companies have offices in the airport and major hotels, which can also provide limousine services.

## BY AIR

Air transport is an area where the country has a good international reputation derived from the Qatar Airways fleet, and Doha's position as an international hub.

## BY SEA

Doha seaport handles general imports, particularly consumer goods and container cargo, while the other two ports at Messeeid and Ras Laffan are more industrial. The new port project-Hamad Port- was officially opened for early partial operations on 24 December 2015. And, it is receiving commercial cargo which includes vehicles, livestock and heavy equipment. The new port project is fully operated and it will cover an area of 20km<sup>2</sup>.

Due to the blockade, Qatar Ports Management Company (Mwani Qatar) has launched a new direct service between Hamad Port and Sohar Port in Oman under Milaha service, which will operate three times a week.



## BY ROAD

The blockade of Qatar's neighbors Saudi Arabia, United Emirates and Bahrain has closed the road transport network which was connecting each part of the country with another.

## BY RAIL

Qatar will have underground system railway in 2019. A multi-billion-dollar project is already underway to finalise the rail network.

## HOTELS

Several international 5-star hotels chains have presence in Qatar, in addition to tens of 4- and 3-star hotels. Room rates are quite close to the ones in major world cities.

Hotel apartments can be cheaper and are often preferred by foreign visitors coming for long stays. Their numbers are also on the rise and the new ones are of good quality.

## COMMUNICATION

The telecom system in Qatar provides immediate telephone, fax and internet access to all parts of the world. All telecom services are operated by the government-owned company OOREDOO or VODAFONE private company. The country code of Qatar is 00974.

## CELL PHONES

The visitors can get Sim Card from any supermarkets in Qatar.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are open from 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. from Sunday through Thursday.

Semi government offices are open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Private companies generally open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Shopping malls remain open until 11.00 p.m.

## **ADDRESSES AND OPENING HOURS OF QATAR EMBASSY IN SWITZERLAND**

Qatar Embassy in Switzerland is located in Bahnhofplatz 11  
3001 Bern Switzerland  
Tel: (41) 31 313 72 09 / 10  
Fax: (41) 31 313 73 00  
Email: [bern@mofa.gov.qa](mailto:bern@mofa.gov.qa)

Qatar Consulate in Switzerland is located in Avenue du Bouchet 27-29  
1209 Geneva Switzerland  
Tel: (41) 22 798 85 00  
Tel: (41) 22 929 89 50  
Fax: (41) 22 791 04 85  
Email: [mission.qatar@ties.itu.int](mailto:mission.qatar@ties.itu.int)

## **ADDRESSES OF THE SWISS EMBASSY TO QATAR**

The Swiss Embassy in Qatar is open from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and it is located in:

Villa 60, Wadi al Humra street 807  
P.O. Box 23745  
Area 66, Al Dafna, Doha-Qatar  
Tel: +974 4020 3400  
Fax: +974 4020 3402

## **TIPS FOR INITIATING BUSINESS CONTACTS**

Business contacts with Qatari companies often need very good follow-up and patience, as the decision-making process may take more time than a Swiss businessman would expect.

The market is dominated by some 50 relatively large companies or groups, which are often family businesses including those owned by members of the ruling Al-Thani family.

Claims by Qatari companies that they are very well-connected to the highest echelon of power in the country should be cautiously dealt with. The country is small and it is no surprise that everyone is, one way or another, connected to somebody, and hence the tough competition.

Qataris have highest per capita income in the world. They admire, and can afford, the top quality Swiss products. As Qatar is now one of the world's fastest growing economies, Qatari firms are receiving competitive offers from various parts of the world and thus have the luxury of wide choices. So, Swiss exporting companies would probably be well-advised to emphasize the high quality of their products or services, accept a reasonable profit margin and always be willing to cut down the first price quotation. The case is especially so, if the client is a supplier to the public sector as government tenders are often won by the lowest bidders.

## **BUSINESS PRACTICES**

A foreign supplier generally needs a local agent to oversee the import formalities, defend the trade mark and secure distribution of the product. The local agent is particularly needed, if the end user of a product or services is a public sector entity. The government buys its requirements through public tenders which are generally open to local suppliers, who are agents of foreign principals. Occasionally, international firms are invited to pre-qualify for upcoming large-scale projects, and the local agent would be instrumental to complete the pre-qualification procedures for the foreign company. However, a Swiss company should avoid signing an agency agreement before having

already dealt with the local partner, or having conducted a careful examination of the partner's standing and capabilities in the market. Qatari regulations provide ample protection to local agents, making cancellation of an agency agreement a rather lengthy and costly process for the foreign principal. A trial period would be recommended before signing any documents.

With or without an agency agreement, a Swiss exporter would be recommended to insist that payment for the goods should be in the form of a letter of credit L/C when dealing with private companies. Government agencies do not fail to honour their financial commitments, though some delays might occur due to red tape.

Problems of outstanding payments occasionally pop up, and are often the result of a dispute over the specifications of the dispatched merchandise or cash-flow shortages on the part of the importer. In such disputes, the Swiss supplier will be better to seek an amicable settlement, even if it entailed some sacrifice. Legal action against the customer could take long and be costly in legal and translation fees. Qatari courts accept documents in Arabic only.

### **SPECIAL FEATURES ON THE MARKET**

Qatar is an open market expanding rapidly, mainly into industrialization associated with the oil and gas sector. The latter makes Qatar one of the world's leading suppliers, and gives the country enormous long-term growth prospects. Hosting international conferences and global sports events has also emerged as a main industry, with Qatar seeking to be known for more than its Al-Jazeera TV satellite station. Having won the honour to host the Football World Cup in 2022, Qatar has now been transformed into a beehive, busily preparing for mega-size infrastructure projects ranging from stadiums and hotels to rail network roads and a new world-class airport. Doha hosted the 24<sup>th</sup> Men's Handball World Championship 2015, the Asian Games in 2006, while Qatar Open is now established as one of the main features of the world tennis circuit. In recent years, Doha has hosted several international political and economic events like Arab summit, the summit of the Islamic conference Organization, OPEC conference, COP 18, the 8<sup>th</sup> World Chamber of Commerce and the Doha round of the World Trade Organization.

Although Qatar's economy is based on the production and export of crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG), diversification is a main target of the country's economic policies. The country is already working on the development of energy-intensive heavy industries using natural gas as a fuel and/or feedstock, while other key targets include augmenting the private sector's participation in the economy and attracting foreign investors equipped with know-how.

While heavy industry remains mostly in government hands, the private sector is becoming increasingly involved in light industries such as paints, detergents, building materials, food and beverages.

The U.S., Japan, France and Britain are the largest suppliers of merchandise to Qatar, mainly of capital goods related to gas projects, while Far East countries are the largest destinations of Qatari exports of oil and LNG.

About 150 Swiss companies, mainly watchmakers, are represented by local agents, while twenty three Swiss firms maintain physical presence in Qatar (branches or rep. offices).

### **DO'S AND DON'TS IN THE QATAR**

Qatar is an Islamic nation, built on a history steeped in tradition and rich in values, culture and heritage.

Family and prayer are the foundations of modern society and the teachings of Islam are reflected in every aspect of daily life.

The Qatari people are renowned for their national pride, boundless hospitality and seemingly limitless generosity. They are courteous, respectful people who place much faith in family values and have impeccable taste, manners and etiquette. As a resident or visitor to Qatar it is only fitting that one should observe local laws and customs as well as behave in a manner that is respectful toward the local Qatari people.

Always **DO** Dress modestly. A woman's shoulders should always be covered in public.

**DON'T** wear mini-shorts, mini-skirts, strappy tops and see-through clothing unless you are at the beach or swimming pool. Men's clothing should be smart-casual. Tattoos should be covered up and piercings (other than earrings) are not acceptable. During the Holy month of Ramadan it is considered extremely offensive to dress inappropriately.

**DO** Be polite when conversing with a Qatari person. Formalities such as 'Good morning' are expected and exchanging handshakes with someone of the same sex is customary.

**DON'T** Be offended if your handshake is refused as members of the opposite sex are prohibited from touching in public.

**DON'T** Pull your hand away if a Qatari person keeps holding on to yours - it is merely a sign of friendship and should be reciprocated, along with a kiss on both cheeks if offered. Qataris tend to stand very close to you while talking but ..

**DON'T** Back away, even if it makes you feel uncomfortable, as doing so would be considered rude.

Public displays of affection are forbidden and touching a member of the opposite sex is considered to be in poor taste, whether you are a Muslim or not.

**DON'T** Approach a female for information or directions if you are a man and **DON'T** Take photographs of sensitive sites such as military bases, airports and seaports.

**DO** Ask for permission before photographing a Qatari, especially if that person is elderly, female or is in the police or military.

**DON'T** Sit with the soles of your shoes or feet pointing at a Qatari and **DON'T** Eat with your left hand - use of the left hand is associated with personal hygiene! Remember that pork products and pornography are banned in Qatar and the use and distribution of alcohol is strictly regulated. It is illegal to be drunk in public and **DON'T** Drive while under the influence of alcohol.

Your partner will appreciate if you are able to speak in Arabic. The customary greeting is "As-salam alaikum," (peace be upon you) to which the reply is "Wa alaikum as-salam," (and upon you be peace).

## **BODY LANGUAGE**

Avoid staring and prolonged eye contact as this can be considered rude. Do not sit with your ankle crossed over your knee. Always use your right hand, like when giving or taking anything (gift, business card etc.).

Date: 29<sup>th</sup> July 2018

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