

 PAUSE


Qatar doesn't do anything by halves, with mindboggling levels of wealth and enormous oil and gas reserves making it the richest country in the world by quite some distance.


So the fact that it has holidays to suit every extreme, from daredevils who fancy speeding down sand dunes to spa lovers who want to be primped and pampered at every turn, is only to be expected.

It's relatively under-served by leisure operators compared with its Middle East neighbours, and still predominantly used as a stopover rather than a standalone destination. But with 73 Qatar Airways flights from the UK to Doha each week - including a new eight-times-a-week service from Birmingham, starting March 30 - there are plenty of ways to work a short stopover in Doha into a longer holiday.

For clients en route to a busy itinerary in Australia or the Far East, Qatar can provide a relaxing pre or post-tour contrast, while those set for a beach stay in the Maldives can complement it with a couple of busier days devoted to sightseeing and activities.

▶ **PAUSE: TAKE IT EASY**

Sightseeing: Doha is home to 90% of Qatar's residents - with expats outnumbering the locals by five to one - so its manageable size means there's no need to rush from one attraction to the next. One of the gentlest ways to enjoy the sights without having to lift a finger is a dhow cruise around the bay on a traditional sailing vessel of the type once used by pearl fishermen.

It's pleasant by day - provided it's not too hot - but the bay really comes to life at night, 

 PLAY


QATAR

Pause & Play

Take life as easy as you like in this stopover spot

@Katie_McGonagle

→ when the towering skyline lights up in a rainbow of colours, offering an unmistakable contrast between Qatar's contemporary, business-like face on one bank and its nod towards traditional architecture on the other. Local destination management company Travel Designer offers a two-hour dhow cruise with a barbecue from £22 for adults or £13 per child.

Alternatively, try a gentle stroll along the Corniche or, for an exciting way to get your bearings, take to the skies for a helicopter ride over Doha and see the West Bay skyline, man-made Pearl-Qatar island and the city centre all in one go (from £171 through local operator Qatar International Adventures).

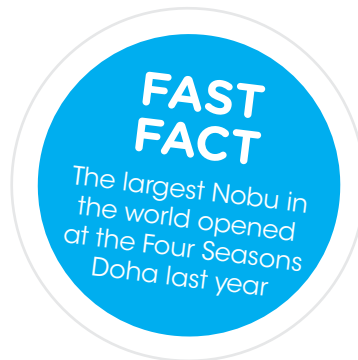
Spa: Fans of aromatherapy massages or sea-salt scrubs might not think they owe much to the world of football, but Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup – as well as sparking controversy in sporting circles – has prompted a boom in luxury hotel construction. New openings in the past couple of years have included the Shangri-La Hotel Doha, Marsa Malaz Kempinski on The Pearl, Meliá Doha, Banana Island Resort Doha by Anantara, plus The Westin Doha Hotel & Spa which opened its doors earlier this month.

As befits these international brands, many have a strong bent towards wellbeing. The Anantara resort, for example, is set on a private banana-

shaped island, a 20-minute boat ride from Doha, and has separate spa and wellness centres, with the former focusing on massage, beauty therapies and an array of spa treatments, while the latter offers longer programmes dedicated to detox, fitness and weight management.

Culture: The Middle East often gets a bad rap for its relative lack of arts and culture, but the excellent Museum of Islamic Art should silence any critics. It's worth a visit for the inspiring architecture alone – Louvre designer I M Pei came out of retirement to work on the project, taking his cue from traditional Arabian motifs – with a multi-storey entrance hall that is as striking as any New York or Paris gallery, and a jaw-dropping view across the West Bay.

Inside, the displays range from Islamic art and Arabian folklore to



ABOVE:
Desert safari

gold-embossed Chinese dragons and jewels and textiles from India, including some from Shah Jahan, who commissioned the Taj Mahal.

Alternatively, Katara Cultural Village hosts plays, concerts, film festivals and more, with a public beach suited to a relaxing-yet-educational day out.

▶ PLAY: FEEL THE HIGH


Adventure: Dune-bashing isn't exactly new territory for the Middle East, but dune-bashing along near-deserted stretches of sand with a sea view on the side is another story entirely. Rather than being right in the heart of the desert, as in some neighbouring destinations, here most dune-bashing excursions take place along the coast about an hour from Doha, revealing →



LEFT: Banana Island Resort Doha
BELOW: Central Doha



Abercrombie & Kent offers five nights in a deluxe sea view room at Banana Island Resort Doha by Anantara from £1,495, including breakfast, BA flights and private transfers.
abercrombiekent.co.uk



HOW TO SELL

Qatar Airways flies to Doha's new Hamad International airport from Heathrow, Manchester, Edinburgh and, from March 30, Birmingham. Return economy-class fares from £638. qatarairways.com



LEFT: Museum of Islamic Art

RIGHT: Souk Waqif

BELOW: Kayak through mangroves



→ views of the Persian Gulf from the crest of every ridge, and finishing at the shore of the Inland Sea where Saudi Arabia is visible just across the water.

It need not be a rollercoaster ride – drivers will tailor it to suit their passengers' preferences – but those who want the full adrenaline-fuelled experience


will find plenty to get their hearts racing. Qatar International Adventures has half-day, full-day and even overnight desert safaris, starting at a respective £37, £48 or £67 based on the maximum four-person occupancy. The longer tours include a barbecue and a chance to go sandskiing or sandboarding, with optional extras such as quad biking and camel riding.

Shopping: If visitors want to see Doha at its most diverse, just suggest a browse through the shops. Retail options span the divide from high-end designer brands in shiny new shopping malls like The Pearl-Qatar, where Alexander McQueen and Vera Wang are the order of the day, to the piled-high stalls of the old-fashioned Souk Waqif. Here, it's all barrels of lemon-scented pistachios, dried limes and delicate rose petals, interspersed with a handful of more luxurious offshoots selling gold and silver jewellery, a reminder of Qatar's

immense modern-day wealth.

Travel Designer runs a half-day shopping tour where visitors can be guided around the two areas, priced from £22, or £13 per child.

Due north: If clients get more of a thrill from offroading in the 'real' Qatar, head in the opposite direction from the dune-bashers and explore the north of the country. That's the place to find ancient mosques and traditional Qatari villages, a total contrast to the glitzy capital, plus the well-restored Zubara Fort, which was key to this area's history as one of the Gulf's most important pearl-diving and trading ports of the 18th century.

To add an extra jolt of excitement, throw in a kayaking tour through the Mangroves of Al Thakhira, looking out for wildlife including terns, herons and reef egrets. A day's kayaking costs from £133 with Qatar International Adventures, and includes a visit to Zubara Fort, a Unesco World Heritage Site. 




Cyplon HOLIDAYS
THE HOME OF MEDITERRANEAN HOLIDAYS

GUIDED TOURS IN ISRAEL

- ★ FLIGHTS FROM REGIONAL UK AIRPORTS
- ★ ENGLISH SPEAKING GUIDES
- ★ VISITING TEL AVIV, JERUSALEM, & MORE...
- ★ PRIVATE TAXI TRANSFERS INCLUDED
- ★ 100% FINANCIALLY PROTECTED

NEW 2016 BROCHURE OUT NOW!

CONTACT US ON FREEPHONE
0800 074 8888
or visit www.cyplon.co.uk

All our holidays are financially protected