



How to spend two days in Doha

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Qatar has been on the tourist radar for less than 20 years, but it's made a rapid rise. Thanks to one of the world's best airlines, a growing crop of luxury hotels and a hugely successful gig hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022, Doha is now the hottest stopover destination in the Middle East. Here's how to spend two days in the Qatari capital.



Day 1

9:00

Shop til you drop

Shake off that flight fog with a little retail therapy. Like many of its Middle Eastern counterparts, Doha is home to grand shopping malls packed with international designer labels, local boutiques and some seriously over-the-top extras. You could spend the whole day inside Doha Festival City, a 600,000 square metre complex containing endless stores and places to eat, as well as an indoor snow park, huge digital gaming centre and the exciting Angry Birds World theme park.

The Villaggio Mall is like Venice meets Las Vegas, complete with gondola boat rides, elaborate domed architecture (complete with frescoed clouds) and an indoor theme park. Once you've ridden the roller coaster, shop at Dior, Gucci, Prada, Bottega Venetta, Fendi, Valentino, Louis Vuitton and more. The Mall of Qatar features similar luxury labels as well as more budget-friendly brands like Charles & Keith, Mango, Jo Malone and Sephora. It's great for families too, with educational activities and adventure action parks for toddlers to teens.

12:00

Stroll the Corniche

One of the city's most iconic attractions, the Doha Corniche is a seven-kilometre stretch of gorgeous waterfront promenade overlooking the glassy waters of Doha Bay. Bookended by the pyramid-shaped Sheraton hotel at the north end and the dramatic Museum of Islamic Art at the south, the Corniche offers the best views of the city's modern skyline. Walk along the palm-fringed pathway, stop off at a café or restaurant, or take a boat ride to soak in the views of the city.

15:00

Hit the water

Watersports might not be your first thought in a city surrounded by desert, but there are plenty of opportunities for it in Doha. Banana Island Resort by Anantara is a 20-minute luxury ferry ride from the centre of the city and, even if you're not checking into one of their thatched over-water villas, you can still visit for the day. There's a long, golden stretch of beach to explore, watersports including kayaking, a children's water park and surfing in the wave pool. Other options include Katara Beach, which is centrally-located on the mainland and ideal for families, or Purple Island in the north-east of Qatar, which offers kayaking through mangroves.



19:00

Step back in time at the Souq

Souq means market in Arabic and there are plenty of these traditional marketplaces in Qatar. Souq Waqif in downtown Doha is one of the oldest and most cherished. Peruse the alleyways bursting with shops selling everything from spices and sweets to brightly coloured fabrics, gold, local pearls, and tweeting birds. Refresh with a karak chai tea or grab a taste of two local dishes; madrouba (a spicy chicken porridge) and harees (savoury whipped wheat) on the go. Shay Al Shomous café is legendary for its traditional Qatari all-day breakfast, or head to Damasca One for Syrian fare. As the sun sets, food vendors set up stalls selling ragag (Arabic crepes).

22:00

Discover Doha after dark

When the sun goes down, the lights come up and the people come out to play. Whether you're looking for live music or late night dancing, you can find a spot in Doha that ticks all the boxes. Public House Doha at the swish Marsa Malaz Kempinski on the manmade Pearl Island is styled like a retro American diner and sports bar, complete with cocktails, burgers and even a jukebox. Skybox 61 is part of the city's other Kempinski hotel, back on the mainland, and has exquisite views over Doha from its perch on the 61st floor. There's more rowdy fun and live sport on screen at Champions in the Marriott Marquis, one of Doha's original sports bars.

Day 2

8:00

Be immersed in art

Sitting on its own purpose-built island off in Doha Bay and designed by legendary architect IM Pei, the Museum of Islamic Art is an arresting sight. Inside, it's even more spectacular. It houses the largest collection of Islamic art in the world, drawn from three continents and spanning more than 1,400 years. Exquisite textiles, ceramics, glasswork, enamel, metalwork and jewellery are spread across three floors. The carefully curated exhibits not only highlight the diversity and beauty of Islamic art but also provide insight into the intellectual and scientific achievements of Islamic civilisations throughout the centuries.

12:00

Desert dune bashing

Desert off-roading aka 'dune bashing' is the most exhilarating way to explore the vast sand dunes in the south of Qatar. Khor Al-Adaid, around an hour south of Doha, is known as the Inland Sea and perfect for exploring on four wheels. In this remarkable landscape, undulating mountains of sand suddenly give way to crystal blue waters, creating a real life desert oasis (though the waters are incredibly salty). Experienced Qatari drivers will race across the sand in four wheel drives, racing down impossibly steep dunes and sliding across the slick surface as though on ice. You might even get to stop for a dip in the Inland Sea.

17:00

Soak up the seaside

On the way back to Doha, stop in at Al Wakrah Souq. This charming seaside market is a nod to Al Wakrah's heritage as a fishing village, which dates back to the 1820s. The souk was built in 2014 but evokes a different age, and you can travel back in time as you explore the winding alleyways that lead to the beach. A number of restaurants line the waterfront and fresh seafood is certainly the order of the day; try Danat Al Bahar BBQ Fish.



Travel Tips

- The easiest way to get around Doha is via the new state-of-the-art Doha Metro. Alternatively you can rent a car. Fuel is cheap and the roads are excellent.
- It is recommended that both men and women dress conservatively, ensuring shoulders and knees are covered. You may be refused admission to places like the Islamic Museum of Art if you are wearing shorts or strappy tops.
- The weekend is Friday and Saturday. Businesses close for two hours on Friday between 10:00am-12:00pm
- Bargaining in souqs is encouraged. You don't need to pay the first price offered and friendly haggling is all part of the experience.
- During the Holy Month of Ramadan, Muslims will fast from sunrise until sunset, breaking their fast with an Iftar meal once the sun goes down. During Ramadan, many locals take holidays, and eating and drinking in public during the day is not allowed.
- Refrain from taking photos of people you do not know in public, especially those in national dress.
- For police, ambulance and fire dial 999
- The best time to visit is from October to May when temperatures are at their most moderate and comfortable (around the mid to high 20s), humidity is down, and outside activities are enjoyable.

