

Destination Qatar

It's been almost 18 months since the final whistle blew at the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Yet tourists keep coming. And coming. In fact, a record 4 million people visited Qatar in 2023, a 60% increase from the previous year. The crowds easily surpassed the former high of 2.94 million vacationers in 2015. The transportation and civic infrastructure that Qatar's public and private sectors constructed in the run-up to the FIFA tournament proved their commitment to expanding the country's tourism industry. **To sustain that growth and reach the country's stated goal of attracting 6 million visitors by 2030, tourism industry players must build on their accomplishments.** They must deepen their commitment to working together by devising a comprehensive strategic plan for future development and promotion. And they must offer more of the experiences and activities that travelers today seek out when they book a holiday.

As a tourist destination, Qatar has much to offer. **Hundreds of miles of pristine beaches fronting crystalline waters.** A climate that makes most times of year good to visit. The futuristic skyscrapers that line Doha's West Bay. Luxury and family-friendly resorts. Theme parks. Museums that showcase the country's heritage and culture.

In recent years, civic leaders and private enterprise worked side by side to enhance the country's physical infrastructure.

- Doha's three-line Metro rapid transit system opened in 2019.
- **Two years later, construction wrapped on the 75-acre, environmentally friendly Msheireb Downtown Doha complex, replete with hotels, restaurants, and shopping.**
- **Work on Lusail, a US\$45 billion "green" city just north of Doha with mixed-use entertainment, commercial, and residential zones, is expected to be complete by 2025.**



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As a tourist destination, Qatar has much to offer: pristine beaches, crystalline waters, a year-round tourist-friendly climate, futuristic skyscrapers, resorts, theme parks, and museums.

Inviting and accessible transportation, public spaces, and accommodations are a solid starting point. But destinations need to offer more – more of the memorable experiences and activities that are a draw for modern travelers and the social media influencers that they look to for suggestions and inspiration, and more services that make it easy to travel.

Qatar has a lot going for it in those departments as well. Vacationers can choose from a year-round calendar of concerts, professional sports, and cultural events. **A who's who of global entertainers have performed in the country this year or will in the near future.**

This year's Qatar international food festival in Doha attracted more than 260,000 people. **Crowds were almost as big for an inaugural light festival in Lusail that immersed visitors in interactive light installations created by international artists.**

Visiting Qatar is easy. The country waives visas for citizens of more than 100 countries, and doesn't require them for nationals of the other five GCC countries. The Hayya mobile app originally designed for World Cup visitors has been upgraded to handle not only entry requirements but also trip planning, travel health insurance, and other aspects of a visit.

Leaders in Qatar's public and private sectors must build on recent advances and accomplishments to reach their ambitious goal of attracting 6 million visitors by the end of the decade. To do that, we suggest industry players work together on a unified tourism strategy.

- The country's central tourism authority could spearhead a joint public–private sector plan for the future, with action steps based on **existing tourism trends, metrics, and dashboards.**
- Travel and tourism players such as Qatar Airways could tap into the country's existing transportation coverage and network to create travel packages or all-inclusive excursions for visitors from different demographic backgrounds or with different holiday preferences. They could also plan marketing campaigns that appeal to vacationers from parts of the world that haven't been targeted in past promotions.
- Companies operating in the country could team up on multi-destination itineraries with tourism industry players in neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia, **which in 2023 accounted for a full 25% of all Qatar's visitors.**
- The public and private sectors could team up to promote the country's festivals, sports events, experiences, and interactive activities, to encourage other local and international entities to stage similar events in the area.
- Finally, the industry must work to ensure its digital infrastructure is as solid as its physical foundation to handle higher volumes of prospective vacationers so travelers don't encounter problems planning or taking a trip that could hamper their interest in a return visit.

The World Cup may be in the country's rearview mirror, but not the momentum and goodwill that came with it. Qatar can turn itself into a more attractive tourist destination by coordinating efforts and creating travel packages and activities that appeal to influencers and different demographic groups, with the physical and digital infrastructure needed to support them.

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