

QATAR LOOKS AHEAD

With the FIFA World Cup just eight years away, Qatar is looking to maximise its global exposure. This is leading to major development projects and an extensive tourism strategy to shape future growth



Words: Sarah McCay

Below: Check-in counters, Hamad International Airport (HIA)



HAMAD INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, DOHA

Doha's brand new Hamad International Airport (HIA) will begin a phased opening in mid-2014. The new facility, built at a reported cost of US\$15 billion, will open with an initial capacity of 30 million passengers per year.

The first phase of the project will offer a 600,000-square-metre passenger terminal with three concourses and 33 contact gates. This will eventually increase to five concourses and 65 gates when fully operational.

HIA will also offer 16 lounges and more than 100 food and beverage and retail outlets, as well as a transit hotel, swimming pool, spa and squash courts.

Qatar's tourism industry has set its sights firmly on the future, following the unveiling this February of the government's targets for the sector over the next 16 years. The Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) published its new *Qatar National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030* with the aim of achieving seven million annual visitors by 2030 and position Qatar as a 'world-class hub with deep cultural roots'.

"The strategy strives to fully capitalise on Qatar's tourism potential and represents the aspirations of the Qatari people for the future of their country," says HE Issa bin Mohammed Al Mohannadi, Chairman, QTA. "It will help reinforce Qatar's standing as a premium destination that offers authentic experiences, business facilitation and family-focused recreation, while expanding the country's sports, health and wellness, nature and educational tourism offering as well."

A key target of this strategy is to increase total tourist spend to US\$10.7 billion annually. Another stated aim is to increase tourism's contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) from 2.6 percent to 5.1 percent by 2030.

Left: Museum of Islamic Art, Doha
Above right: West Bay Skyline, The Corniche, Doha,
Below: Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC)



QATAR FAST FACTS

Land area: 11,600 square kilometres

Local time: UTC +3

Population: Two million

Languages: Arabic, but English is also widely spoken

Currency: Qatari riyal, US\$1 = QAR3.64

Getting there: Qatar Airways connects Doha to 133 destinations worldwide and the figure is rising every year

Peak season for meetings and incentives: October to May

Convention centre: Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC), voted Best Events Venue in the Middle East Event Awards 2013

In order to facilitate this, the government and the private sector have pledged up to US\$45 billion in investment in tourism with more than 60 developments already planned.

In 2012, Qatar welcomed 1.2 million visitors, with Saudi Arabia by far its largest inbound market. QTA aims to increase this to seven million visitors by 2030 and to widen Qatar's appeal so that its visitor base is more global. Already, QTA has set up satellite offices in London and Paris and has plans for eight more international offices in key outbound markets.

Meetings and incentives will play a role in the tourism strategy. ICCA ranked Qatar 17th in Asia Pacific & Middle East and 66th in the world, in terms of meetings held in 2012. The capital city of Doha hosted 20 large-scale meetings in 2012, placing it 24th in Asia Pacific & Middle East.

"Qatar has built a strong foundation for the tourism sector by developing a plethora of cultural offerings, sporting events, MICE facilities and leisure options," adds Al Mohannadi. "Now the time has come to build upon our past successes and bring our bold plans to fruition. The end result of the *National Tourism* →



Sector Strategy 2030 will be a thriving tourism sector, ready to handle the demands of the 2022 FIFA World Cup and far beyond.”

MEETINGS VENUES

The country’s flagship venue is the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC), which is a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (Qatar Foundation). It features a 4,000-seat conference hall, a 2,300-seat theatre, three auditoria and a total of 52 flexible meetings rooms. It also houses 40,000 square metres of exhibition space over nine halls and can be adapted to seat 10,000 for a conference or banquet.

“QNCC has played host to some of the most prominent events from across the world and both small- and large-scale conferences and exhibitions, which demonstrates the capacity and flexibility of the venue,” says Ken Jamieson, Commercial Director of AMLAK Venue Management. AMLAK is the holding company that oversees the strategy and operation of QNCC on behalf of Qatar Foundation.

QNCC has hosted such high-profile events as the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP18/CMP8), which saw 17,000 delegates in attendance. The event is widely accepted as one of the most logistically complex



Top, above and above right: Qatar National Convention Centre

Below left: Pigeon Towers, Katara Cultural Village

FLYING BUSINESS CLASS

Qatar Airways has announced the upgrade of business class seats and entertainment systems on select Airbus A330-200 and A320 aircraft.

Modifications to seven A330-200 and nine A320 aircraft are underway and will be completed by the third quarter of 2014. Once completed, business class passengers will enjoy seats that fully recline to lie flat.

Business class on both aircraft will feature new 15.4-inch smart monitors and touch-screen remote controlled handsets, which also allow a dual-screen mode. The seats also offer PC power, USB ports and connectivity for smart devices. On A330 aircraft, the in-flight entertainment system will be upgraded to the Panasonic eX2 platform.

The A330 aircraft will also be fitted with onboard connectivity, with the installation of the Panasonic Global Communications Suite, offering the capability of sending and receiving SMS and MMS messages.



events in the world. This year will also see QNCC welcome the 2014 SPE Middle East Health, Safety, Environment and Sustainable Development Conference and Exhibition (MEHSES) and the 3rd International Association of Science Parks and Areas of Innovation (IASP) World Conference.

“We have recently concluded the Qatar Motor Show and Doha Jewellery & Watches Exhibition, which recorded a turnout of more than 140,000 visitors,” explains Jamieson.

“We will also see QNCC host the prestigious ITU Telecom World 2014, an event from the specialised agency of the United Nations for information and communication technology (ICT). It will bring together influential global leaders in ICT from the public and private sectors for strategic debate, knowledge sharing, innovation showcasing and networking at the highest level,” he adds.

Other types of events scheduled in the calendar include the UFI Open Seminar Middle East and the ICCA Sector Venue – International Client/Supplier Business Workshop.

QNCC has led the way for the last three years, but a new venue is set to open, bringing new capacity and new competition to the meetings market in Doha. According to the QTA, the new Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC) is scheduled to open in 2014 and will be a ‘game-changer for the meetings sector’.

Currently under development by Qatari Diar, DECC will offer up to 90,000 square metres of event space, a

QNCC was purpose-built to achieve the LEED gold certification from day one



multi-function hall for conventions, parking for 5,000 vehicles and a retail area. The facility will be connected to the Sheraton Park hotel.

INCENTIVES

Qatar is steeped in culture. Embellishing this is the Katara Cultural Village – the country’s largest and the most multi-dimensional cultural project. The village offers theatres, concert halls and exhibition galleries, showcasing the best of Qatar alongside cultures and arts from around the world. Katara Cultural Village is home to the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra and the Katara Cinema.

The Museum of Islamic Art reflects the vitality and diversity of the arts of the Islamic world and is also an ideal setting for group events. The museum opened in 2008 and received its one-millionth visitor in 2013. An iconic feature of the Doha skyline, it represents the full scope of Islamic art from three continents over 1,400 years.

Alternative incentive ideas focus on the desert, where four-wheel-drive adventure and nights under the stars enjoying Bedouin hospitality are extremely popular.

2,300 seats are provided in the main theatre at the Qatar National Convention Centre

Below and below left: Qatar Airways Boeing 787 business class interiors



QNCC’s credentials

Ken Jamieson, Commercial Director of AMLAK Venue Management, holding company for QNCC, talks to *meet.me* about eco-friendly operations and Doha’s meetings USP

QNCC boasts a long list of green credentials. What do planners need to know about the venue if they are pursuing a green meeting?

QNCC was purpose-built to achieve the LEED gold certification (Leadership in Energy and Environment Design) from day one. This means the architect introduced the sustainability features into the design development. The conference centre was constructed to be approximately 32 percent more efficient compared to a similar designed building. It is fitted with 3,500 square metres of solar panels that provide 12.5 percent of the centre’s energy needs. The roof’s impressive solar energy system produces 1,225 MWh of electricity and offsets 1,140 tonnes of carbon emissions a year.

Besides the facilities at QNCC, why else should planners consider Doha? Accessibility plays a major role in attracting delegates to an

event. Conference organisers look at how easy it is to get to a destination, the number of flights available and transport infrastructure within the city. That is why we work very closely with Qatar Airways. Qatar’s location is perfect as the hub between the East and the West. Many delegates are often intrigued by the Middle East. Doha preserves its heritage and culture to complement the modernity of the developing city, resulting in a truly authentic Arabian experience.

With new competition entering the market, are there plans for expansion? What does the future hold? QNCC has only been in operation slightly over two years, so there is no expansion plan for the moment. The future looks exciting for us. We are working very closely with Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) on the country’s MICE strategy and this year will see QNCC host many exhibitions.

HOTELS

Currently, Qatar has more than 80 hotels in operation, with another 110 reportedly under construction. The spate of building activity is part of the country’s preparation for the FIFA World Cup in 2022, when it is expected that more than one million visitors from around the world will attend one of the biggest sporting tournaments on the planet.

Landmark properties in Qatar that offer meeting and convention space include the Sheraton Doha Resort and Convention Hotel, with 26 meeting and convention rooms and space for up to 5,000 delegates. The property closed for an eight-month refurbishment this year and will reopen in December. The works will modernise guest rooms, public areas, conference and meeting space. The St. Regis Doha offers 4,000 square metres of event space, eight meeting rooms including the largest ballroom with natural daylight in Doha and a terrace with views over the Arabian Gulf. Meanwhile, La Cigale offers two ballrooms, two pre-function areas and five meeting rooms.

This year will also see the 141-room Anantara Doha Island Resort and Spa open off the coast of Doha. Shangri-La Hotel, Doha (and its sister property Traders Hotel, Doha) are also both slated to open this year. Future hotel openings include two from Accor: a 150-room Ibis hotel and a 150-key Adagio apartment, both in Doha. →

Below: Artist's impression of a football stadium for Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup



Qatar will become the first Arab state to host the FIFA World Cup in 2022

Mondrian Doha, part of the bespoke Morgan's Hotel Group, will also open in 2014, bringing with it some Hollywood glamour. Located in West Bay Lagoon, the hotel will offer 270 guest rooms and innovative bars and restaurants, while the stylish property will also include ultra-modern meeting and conference venues, including a 2,000-square-metre ballroom and five meeting rooms, all located on one dedicated meeting floor. "The ballroom will have access to the bridal suite by a panoramic elevator, so we will be targeting the wedding market in addition to standard business," explains Sean Cullen, Director of Sales and Marketing, Mondrian Doha.

The hotel is currently not taking any business until it has a clear opening date, but Cullen is confident of success once operational. "Business demand in Doha is high and I am very happy to see that the annual increase in hotel inventory is being matched by the increase in demand," he says.

Meanwhile, established hotels are fine-tuning their meetings offering to remain competitive. The Ritz-Carlton, Doha, recently launched an Events Rewards scheme to incentivise meeting planners and bookers to choose the property, according to Samir Messaoudi, Director of Catering & Conference Services, The Ritz-Carlton, Doha. The 374-room hotel offers 3,000 square metres of meeting, conference and banqueting facilities that includes a pre-function area with 16-metre-high windows and views of the Arabian Gulf, the 1,131-square-metre Al Wosail ballroom, the 551-square-metre Al

THREE TO WATCH

1. Doha Convention Centre Tower: Set to stand 551 metres high, it will be one of the tallest towers in the world. However, construction has been delayed after a survey found that the building would impact flight paths to Doha International Airport. Construction is expected to recommence this year, once the new Hamad International Airport opens.

2. Missoni Doha: Opening in central Doha in 2015, the upmarket lifestyle hotel will offer 200 rooms and 70 one-, two- and three-bedroom serviced apartments. The property will boast 1,500 square metres of conference facilities and an 800-square-metre spa and fitness area.

3. Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup stadia: Qatar will welcome football's elite when it becomes the first Arab state to host the FIFA World Cup in 2022. In total, 12 stadiums will host the event, some of which are already under development. Each will employ cooling technology to help reduce temperatures. This will be solar-powered and carbon-neutral.



Mukhtasar ballroom, six individual meeting rooms and a dedicated video conferencing room.

The hotel catered to several large events in 2013, including a five-day conference for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This year the hotel will host a 1,000-pax event for Qatar Airways, as well as events for Qatar Foundation, Al Jazeera and others.

Sister property Sharq Village & Spa, which is operated by Ritz-Carlton, will host the ADCI Welcome Reception for 1,000 guests, a Ras Gas event for 1,500 guests and a Qatar Petroleum event for 1,400 guests in 2014.

Ishrat Yasin, Director of Catering & Conference Services, expects an upswing in business for the year. "We are expecting an increase in government business as well as in the corporate sector," she says. "Doha is conveniently located between the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which makes it a preferred market for companies who wish to try a new destination within reach of their budget." ◦



Above right: Doha Convention Centre Tower and construction site
Left: Sharq Village Et Spa