

FACT SHEET

TRADITIONAL QATARI CULTURE





HISTORY

Qatar's history is informed by its geography, as a peninsula in the middle of historical trade routes we benefited from a lot of cross-cultural exchange. Almost all of Qatar's history is discovered through oral accounts of people who lived through its history.

Two major groups contributed to Qatar's rich cultural legacy: the nomadic bedouin tribes and the settled pearl diving hadar community.

Aspects of Qatar's culture especially the social structures have been documented from the bedouin community. Through listening to the older generations we have found that a lot of the 'Bedouin' social norms and structure also apply to the Hadars who settled along the coastlines and traded with visiting merchants.



BEDOUIN TRIBES

They lived nomadically in tents made from Sadu, a textile woven by the women from the livestock they reared.

The bedouin tribes migrated frequently in search of water and trade.

Most social norms and traditions originate from the Bedouin communities.

HADAR PEARL DIVERS



Every Hadar originated from a bedouin tribe, they just settled alongside the coast to seek a better life for their family.

Every tradition that came from their nomadic past came with them. The change was in shelter instead of tents; they resided in permanent houses traditionally made of mud brick along the coast.

This new way of life was not necessarily easier because the men had to go on long voyages in search of pearls which was a very dangerous occupation.

CUISINE

Qatar's cuisine is based on our history as a once impoverished country. In the past we only had enough resources for one meal a day. This made the food very rich and heavy.

The cuisine is also influenced by our neighbours and features similarities to Indian cuisine due to the spice trade.



Mathroba (beaten rice) is a slow-cooked dish with vegetables, rice, oats, and meat, is a good example and a beloved local dish.

The national dish is Machboos, a layered rice dish similar to biryani but spiced with a Qatari mix of spices referred to as Baharat. The Baharat mix differs from family to family but contains 7 main spices.

HOSPITALITY

One of the four pillars of Qatar National Vision 2030 emphasises the perseverance of the country's national heritage and enhancing Arab values and identity. These values and identity include hospitality.

Qatar is known for its unmatched level of hospitality, there's a standard word that every household aims to follow "karam", which translates to generosity, giving your guest the best of what you can get.



Historically, the unspoken rule of the land was to welcome and host travellers into your home for three days, before questioning their background and purpose of visit. The guest would stay and experience being a part of their family. This means they would also be provided food, bed, shelter and protection, given the best of what the host could offer.

FAMILY

Family values are very important to Qatar's culture, which is based on collectivism like other countries in the MENSA region. Respecting one's elders is considered a key virtue in Qatari culture. This can be reflected through actions that place your elder at the top of social structures.



The Bedouin lifestyle was difficult, as a result, every member of the household had a role to serve. The patriarch would go hunting and trade to ensure that his family was taken care of. The women would stay behind in the camp and rear the livestock, weave sadu, take care of the children and prepare the food.

In Hadar communities the men would go on long pearling voyages which left the mothers in charge of the household and community.



MAJLIS

A majlis is a sitting room where people can openly and comfortably talk about cultural differences, family issues and politics. The word Majlis comes from the Arabic word “Jalas” which means sat-down.

Every Qatari home has a majlis, which is a room apart from the main living space to ensure that the women in the household have their privacy. Traditionally, it would be close to the right side of the tent’s or house's entrance with outward facing windows (in the case of the settled hadars).

The majlis is a male only space and serves as a place to host guests or in more important spaces a council... If the doors of the majlis open it means that anyone is welcome to enter and receive the host’s hospitality. It serves as a public sphere where important discussions take place.

COFFEE

When you first come to Qatar you will experience getting served Gahwa, a wonderful golden hued drink that is spiced arabic coffee. There is a lot of significance placed on the act of serving and drinking Qahwa (pronounced Gahw-aa) in Qatar.



It is a drink traditionally prepared and served by men to their guests in the majlis. Reputation is highly regarded in Bedouin society, so to ensure that the host and his guests saved face, communication was done through Finjan (cup). The amount of coffee in the finjan showed how welcome you were to the majlis.

The finjan had no handles so only a small amount of coffee was poured in to ensure that the guest can comfortably hold the cup whilst also enjoying the perfect sip of Qahwa (not too hot and not too cold).

CELEBRATION

Our celebrations are definitely unique to our country. Take the National Day every 18th December for example, akin to the 183 independence days celebrated in other countries across the globe.



It marks the day the country received national unity and became an independent state. We celebrate by having a national parade each year in the corniche with His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, with his ministers, citizens and expat residents. It's a day of unity when we all celebrate being a part of Qatar together.

Another national holiday is Sports Day celebrated every second Tuesday in February. We are the first and only country in the MENA region to dedicate an entire day to sports. Sports Day is celebrated across the country and is used to raise awareness of diabetes and heart disease.



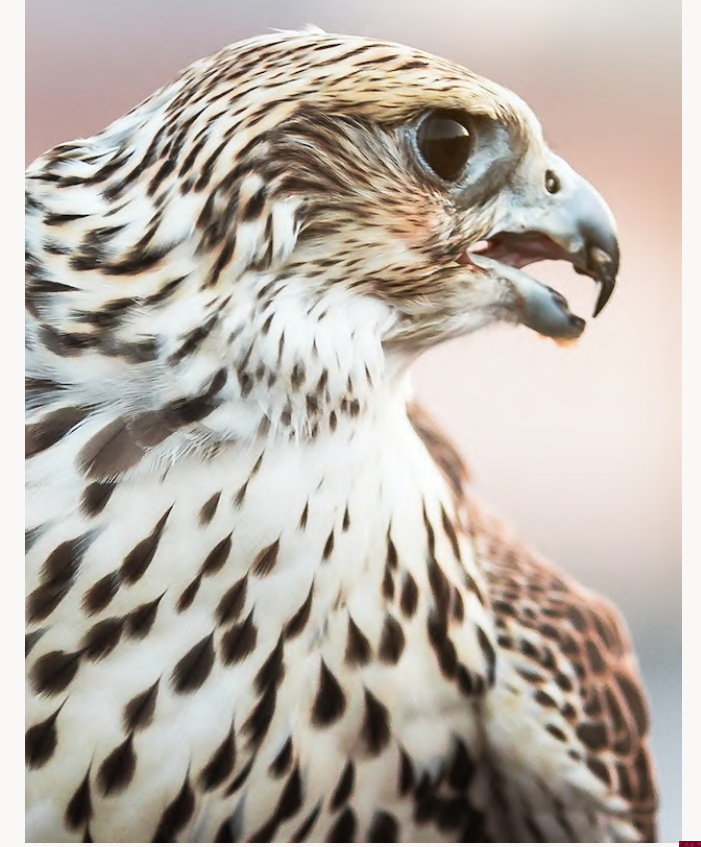
ANCIENT INDUSTRIES

Without pearl fishing the Qatar peninsula would have been almost entirely deserted, except for small groups of bedouin who visited during their annual migrations. All of Qatar's towns and villages were located on the coast, and all of them relied on pearl fishing for survival. This trade goes back as far as 7000 years ago.

Another lesser known trade was the manufacturing of date syrup.

It was extracted from the madbasa, a traditional date press. Date syrup is nutrient-dense and high in calories so it gave locals, especially pearl divers, a quick and cheap source of energy.

Date syrup manufacturing is one of the oldest industries in Qatar, it speaks to the resourceful nature of the people. Date trees are one of the few types of agriculture that Qatar's natural landscape can cultivate.



FALCONRY

While the women were busy taking care of the livestock, making the tents, and cooking the food, the men trained and hunted with their falcons/ birds of prey in the desert. Training the falcon was a very common occupation that was done with great care. Falconry helped with hunting wild game and providing food to the family. Although livestock provided the majority of the nomads' food, falconry was regarded as a skillful art, and men would frequently compare how well their birds were trained and cared for.

This brings us to the present day, falconry is seen as a very prestigious sport and birds are sold for upwards of QAR 1,000,000. There is even a falcon hospital in Souq Waqif where men send their falcons to be taken care of during the off-season.

QATARI ARCHITECTURE

Qatar's most iconic landmarks always feature elements of our heritage, such as the desert rose crystals for the National Museum of Qatar, and the Al Bayt stadium which mirrors the traditional bedouin tent, Bayt Al Shar (House of Hair)



Islamic artwork and patterns are also regular elements seen in architecture with the motifs regularly used. Katara Cultural Village, Souq Waqif and Souq Al Wakrah recreate the older markets and public spaces that were along the coast before the recent waves of modernisation.

Qatar has a focus on preserving its cultural heritage and this is seen in the structures we continue to create.

SOUQS & SHOPPING

Qatar has a lot of shopping malls around the country but their love of retail therapy goes back to their history as traders in the souq. The souq functions as a one stop shop for daily necessities, fabrics, spices and more.

Souq Waqif (Standing Market) is located near the coast of the present day Corniche. Merchants and traders sell their wares of fish, spices and cloth standing up in case of a rising tide that in times gone by may have flooded the market. Traders could quickly take their goods with them to dry land. There were ships docked nearby which gave access to global trade goods like spices from Persia and India along with textiles, pearls and other wares.



The items that were sold included the bisht (a finely woven robe made out of camel hair), textiles, freshly caught fish, and livestock.

FOLKTALES AND POETRY



The history of Qatar is based on oral transmission. The traditions we have were passed down from family to family, tribe to tribe. Storytelling and poetry were the ways that the older generation would entertain themselves and pass down proverbs to their children.

Bedouins were known for their poetry and the Hadar's folktales were based on the unknown vastness of the ocean. The work of Ibn al Fuja'a concerning the tribal wars, and the tales of the pirate Rahmah Ibn Jabir Al Jalhami, are some of the more well known stories spread around the country.

Another well known folktale was about the conquests of Mai, a female pearl diver. Even though traditionally women weren't involved in the pearling industry her story is one of legends that is repeated to this day.



HANDICRAFTS - AL SADU

Al-Sadu, the ancient embroidery practice of the Bedouins, went beyond handicraft, artisanal and cultural practice. Within the traditional nomadic lifestyle, al-Sadu was involved in the making of tents and their different parts, as such it was a form of architecture as well as an expression of tribal and gender identity. The hair tent indicated social status within the tribe, relating also to the size of the tent itself.



ABOUT EMBRACE DOHA

Embrace Doha is a unique Qatari cultural consultancy dedicated to delivering professional services locally and internationally with their multi-disciplinary team of expert consultants.

Visitors learn and connect with the heritage through cultural sessions, events, tours, and shopping local goods. Sessions are held to educate on topics like business etiquette, lifestyles, and traditional clothing in Qatari culture.

Our team of heritage specialists works closely with private and government entities to ensure their events or products are culturally accurate. Embrace Doha assists companies, ministries, and educational entities to develop an understanding of Qatari culture through cultural events and consultancy.

CONTACT EMBRACE DOHA





THANK YOU