



## **Qatar 2014 Crime and Safety Report**

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Burglary; Fraud; Financial Security; Embezzlement; Drug Trafficking; Stolen items; Theft; Anti-American sentiment; VBIEDs; Earthquakes; Extreme heat/drought; Winter weather; Employee Health Safety; Maritime

Near East > Qatar; Near East > Qatar > Doha

2/25/2014

### **Overall Crime and Safety Situation**

The U.S. Department of State assesses the current crime rate in Qatar to be Low. According to reports released by Qatar's Ministry of Interior (MOI), however, crime levels have increased substantially in recent years and are projected to continue to rise with the influx of third country nationals. Some of the increases over the last several years can be explained by better reporting mechanisms and statistical tracking

### **Crime Threats**

Given the massive number of construction projects and enormous economic activity ongoing throughout Qatar, in particular in and around Doha and the Industrial and Energy producing areas, foreign labor camps have been established to house the large foreign labor pool resident in Qatar. These areas tend to have higher incidents of crime than other areas. Large numbers of foreign workers congregate in certain areas of Doha and its environs during weekends and after hours, making visits to these areas by most expats and their families, unaccompanied females, and minor-aged children inadvisable and/or unappealing due to

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over-crowding and the presence of an almost exclusively male laborer demographic.

Local media and government data have indicated a small increase in both commercial and residential burglaries, as well as an increase in petty street crime. The burglary rate is 25 per 100,000 inhabitants, while the global average is 100 per 100,000. These types of criminal activity typically occur after dark and/or when Western expats are away from their homes for extended periods of time. The Embassy has received reports indicating that criminal elements sometimes enter villas located on private residential compounds to burglarize them. This is not a common occurrence for most residential compounds utilized by Western expatriates and diplomatic personnel. Past local media reporting has suggested the rise in burglaries is due to an increase in the number of guest workers, but this has not been verified by Qatari government officials.

The government is monitoring crime trends carefully and is expending great effort to keep pace with it via improved enforcement capabilities, in an effort to identify, deter, and neutralize any emerging crime trends. The government is also becoming more efficient at deporting unemployed guest workers, in an effort to reduce the population of a demographic perceived to be more often involved in crime. The Embassy's Regional Security Office has assessed prospects for potential crime increases in Qatar over the next 36 months and believes that low level illegal activity will likely continue to increase over time, both in frequency and level of sophistication.

Violent crime, although comparatively rare, does occur in Qatar and is more prevalent within the third country national (TCN) labor camps and the industrial areas. The government reports that most instances of violent crime are between/among certain ethnic groups comprised of young male laborers and are not generally directed against Western expatriates, although instances of sexual harassment or assault have been reported by expatriate females, both in public areas and at their residences. One rare example occurred in 2012, when a private

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American citizen was sexually assaulted and then murdered at her residence in Doha. Violent crime also occurs between/among Qatari nationals and/or by Qataris against foreign workers (such as domestic staff) but often goes unreported or is not fully investigated.

Violent crime involving the use of weapons is again rare but does occur. Edged weapons are available and are often the weapon of choice as are blunt instruments. Improvised weapons such as tools, sports equipment, and construction materials are also frequently used in targeted instances of violence by one group of TCNs against another. These altercations are often the result of specific disputes that are unique to industrial neighborhoods and labor camps and the sub-populations living there. These incidents occasionally occur near, or overflow into, commercial business areas where criminals can routinely locate/create burglary tools and other cutting instruments to perpetrate criminal activity.

In the past, media reporting on information released by government authorities has indicated that rates of crimes such as kidnapping, assault, and arson are comparatively low in Qatar compared to the rest of the region; the collective rate for these categories of crime is 5.0 per 100,000 persons, while the world average is 8.0 per 100,000.

Recent media reporting indicated that the national murder rate is 0.5 for every 100,000 residents, whereas the global average based on United Nations data is 4.0 per 100,000.

Other reported crimes include, but are not limited to, various types of immigration and residency fraud, ATM/credit card theft, and white collar fraud, embezzlement, vehicle theft, illegal narcotics (use/smuggling/possession/trafficking/distribution), identity theft/fraud, begging, pick-pocketing (particularly in crowded locales), unauthorized real estate businesses,

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illegal private taxi services, and various cyber-crimes. Corporate disputes over business practices are also frequently reported.

## **Overall Road Safety Situation**

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

The existing road network in metro Doha, though generally in good repair, is increasingly strained and unable to handle current traffic levels. This is exacerbated by the widespread presence of inefficient and dated British-style traffic roundabouts. The government enacted a plan in mid-2013 to smooth the traffic flow in many heavily traveled portions of the city, and efforts are underway to replace the roundabouts with traffic intersections. Outside of Doha the roadways vary from very good to poor condition. Many are not properly illuminated during hours of darkness and also lack shoulders. Although many highways are fenced to prevent livestock from venturing onto the road, many fences have improvised gates and holes in them, allowing animals to wander onto the roads. Low areas are frequently also muddy or washed out during the winter when rains can occur.

Driving can be dangerous. Drivers displaying varying degrees of skill, aggressiveness, and attentiveness often maneuver erratically and at high speed, demonstrating little road discipline or courtesy. Drivers often fail to use turn signals and may neglect to turn on their headlights during hours of darkness or inclement weather. Many drivers do not use seat belts and tend to disregard traffic lights at both intersections and roundabouts that are not monitored by a comprehensive traffic enforcement system. This system utilizes radars, sensors and photo/video monitoring to enforce speed limits and red light controls at many intersections. Even with these increased controls, compliance at non-controlled intersections and along

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unmonitored roads is poor, resulting in a vehicular accident rate in excess of 100,000 per annum. Traffic fatalities are one of Qatar's leading causes of death and are the number one cause of accidental death. According to a recent issue of the Annual Bulletin of Vital Statistics, a majority of the victims of vehicle accidents in Qatar are below 30 years of age. Foreigners or others who are unaccustomed to the liberal rules of the road in Qatar, and who lose their temper and engage in road rage could face severe civil and/or criminal penalties or (in rare cases) be subject to a travel ban preventing them from departing the country until the matter is resolved to the offended party's satisfaction.

Public intoxication and/or driving while under the influence of alcohol or other substances is not tolerated by authorities. Offenders will be detained, arrested, and if found guilty be required to pay heavy civil and/or criminal fines and other penalties. Immediate deportation/expulsion is also a common penalty.

If involved in a vehicular accident, it is best to remain with the vehicle at the scene until the police arrive, provided that this can be done safely. The traffic law of October 2007 does stipulate a 1,500 Qatari Riyal (US\$412) fine for anyone who blocks traffic after a minor vehicular accident. If the cause of the accident is disputed or if a party is injured, then the vehicles involved should not be moved. This is particularly true if there is significant property damage or if the accident requires further investigation to determine culpability. It is also a criminal offense to leave the scene of an accident, although in the case of minor accidents that are not disputed (both parties agree to the cause and culpability of the accident) it is generally permissible to drive to a police station and file a report. In accidents with property damage, it is imperative that a police report be filed in order to have the vehicle repaired or to collect on an insurance claim. If an accident results in injuries, it may be necessary to self-transport to medical facilities. There are no Good Samaritan laws, so assisting at the scene of an accident may expose the responder to liability.

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Participating in off-road desert excursions can be dangerous, so it is better left to the experienced "off-road" driver with a suitably equipped four-wheel drive (4x4) vehicle. Always have a travel plan/itinerary that can be shared with colleagues or family members who are not on the trip. Travel with one or more other appropriately equipped vehicles and always carry extra potable water, food, first aid equipment, excavation tools, reliable navigation and communications equipment (GPS, a map, radio, satellite phone, extended range cell phone with antenna, etc), and layered clothing suitable for the variable temperatures. All navigation/communications equipment should be well charged and have extra batteries.

Incidents of vehicle break-ins do occur as crimes of opportunity but are rare in guarded/gated residential communities. Theft is most common from vehicles left unattended/unsecured in known tourist locations such as Souks and shopping malls throughout Doha.

## **Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence**

### Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Violent terrorist incidents are rare, but harassment and attacks against Western targets have occurred. On March 19, 2005, a suicide bomber attacked a local theater frequented by Westerners using a vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED). This attack resulted in the death of the attacker and two bystanders and the injury of at least 12 others.

### Civil Unrest

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The U. S. Department of State assesses the risk from political violence in Qatar as Low, and there have been no known acts of violence directed at American-branded businesses. Ongoing regional developments in the Arabian Peninsula and the broader region may, however, quickly affect local public opinion and sentiment. Public protests and/or demonstrations are rare but have occurred within the last 12 months. Demonstrations usually occur only with the prior approval of the Qatari government, and tight controls are imposed on the event organizers.

## **Post-specific Concerns**

### Environmental Hazards

The climate is extreme and unforgiving for several months. During the summer months (April to October), temperatures can average between 95 degrees Fahrenheit (35 degrees Celsius) and 122 degrees Fahrenheit (50 degrees Celsius). The average humidity level is 90 percent. During the winter months (December to February), rain showers are more likely to occur, with the days generally being mild and the evenings occasionally being relatively cold at 55 degrees Fahrenheit (13 degrees Celsius). Residential apartments and villas are usually not equipped with substantial insulation, lack water-proofing, and often have no interior heat.

Throughout the year, but especially in the spring, Qatar is subject to dust storms that can emerge quickly, causing white out and low visibility conditions for hours to days. These storms

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can have a substantial impact on driving/road conditions and airport operations.

Qatar is also in an earthquake zone. Buildings located on any reclaimed property or landfills are often not fully evaluated for structural integrity and are more susceptible to damage from natural hazards, such as flash flooding or earthquakes with epicenters in the region.

### Industrial and Transportation Accidents

Industrial and public health/safety standards are generally not up to Western standards. Workplace accidents are common due to hazardous working conditions, relaxed safety standards, and the presence of dangerous/toxic industrial materials and equipment. Roads often have unrepaired potholes and obstacles, as well as unmarked speed bumps that can cause loss of control of vehicles if hit at high speed.

All visitors should exercise care and caution before chartering any local watercraft (dhows, in particular), motor boats, and jet skis for recreational excursions, particularly when operating close to shore in congested waterways. Safety procedures and protocols are generally not up to U.S. Coast Guard standards. Specifically, there may not be adequate numbers of and/or accessibility to life jackets onboard vessels, and licensing requirements to operate certain types of motorized watercraft are not required. The Gulf's waters are heavily traversed by commercial and military vessels and are laced with many offshore oil and gas rigs, sunken platforms, and artificial atolls. It is not unusual for private watercraft to be stopped and boarded by the Qatari Coast Guard and/or Navy for straying into sensitive or restricted zones. Furthermore, Qatar has experienced maritime-based narcotics smuggling and conflicts in its littoral waters with foreign fisherman, so security awareness while in the maritime environment

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is essential.

## Drug-related Crimes

Drugs have been seized in/around Qatar by local authorities due to improved enforcement, greater emphasis on interdiction, and increased law enforcement capabilities to identify, monitor, track, and apprehend offenders. Seizures occurred primarily at ports of entry and in coastal waters. Drug totals seized in the past few years have included hashish (557kg), heroin (1,449kg), opium (6,868kg), kat (414kg), and various drug tablets (2,933kg). According to United Nations reporting, Qatar continues to grow as a center for contraband trafficking coming from Latin America. The Qatari Coast Guard has, however, reported a small decrease in the number of maritime drug seizures, explaining that the government has increased its capability in interdiction through better rules of engagement and the use of surface monitoring coastal radars that have contributed to the decline in maritime smuggling activity along Qatar's extended coastline. In the past few years, several drug seizures have occurred at Doha International Airport; these cases have involved international drug smugglers using couriers to transport narcotics aboard commercial aircraft to/through Qatar.

## Police Response

Qatar possesses enormous financial resources that have been used to purchase top of the line law enforcement equipment, communications systems, and both private and governmental training. However, a small Qatari population limits the amount of manpower that can be recruited, creating perpetual shortfalls in the public safety and law enforcement fields. The majority of the uniformed, enlisted police forces in Qatar working within the Ministry of Interior are individual third country nationals, or TCNs, from elsewhere in the Middle East and

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North Africa. Police holding the rank of officer, and personnel in the Internal Security Force (ISF) – who drive red police vehicles, are Qataris. This mixture of nationalities in the public safety field can present some command, control, and communications challenges for the Qatari national leadership. Customer service, response and investigative skills may not always be at a level expected in the EU, Australia, or North American police forces. English language skills of first responders may be lacking. Depending upon traffic density and other priorities, police response times in Doha can range from 5 to 30 minutes or more. Response times can be even longer during local religious holidays (Ramadan, in particular), on weekends, and/or during the night. The presence of major events may result in blocked roadways, further preventing responders from arriving at a scene. Nevertheless, Qatari police officers are generally professional, cooperative and courteous when responding to American community requests for assistance, particularly when assisting and adjudicating traffic accidents and infractions.

Qatari police officers, particularly patrol officers, public premises, and traffic police, are generally passive in terms of exercising their duties to serve and protect. Some are overly complacent, may not be fully alert at their posts, lack training to Western standards, and may not be properly equipped for their assigned duties. For example, police officers are often assigned to locations solely as a visual/psychological deterrence and not necessarily to perform response or incident management functions.

## How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

If arrested or detained, U.S. citizens should politely insist on speaking with a Consular Officer at the U.S. Embassy or, if after hours, with the Embassy's after-hours Duty Officer who can be reached at (974) 4496-6000. Do not assume your arrest has been reported to the U.S. Embassy. A Consular Officer will visit the U.S. citizen within 24 to 72 hours of the initial

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notification. If a local attorney is required to assist in any civil/criminal proceeding, their professional fees can approach or exceed QR 30,000 (US \$8,250) to consider the case.

The capability of law enforcement has increased in recent years. Leveraging innovative technology to mitigate manpower shortfalls, the government lacks the skilled manpower and experience in investigating sophisticated types of fraud to meet all of the law enforcement challenges it faces.

#### Where to Turn to for Assistance if you Become a Victim of Crime

The police may be contacted for emergency assistance by dialing 999 from anywhere in Qatar; English speaking dispatchers are routinely assigned to handle calls to this number, but their language proficiency can vary.

#### Various Police/Security Agencies

Most residential compounds occupied by U.S. government and expatriate personnel employ local security guards that are under contract with the compound's management. Most compounds have varying degrees of physical and technical security systems, including various types of access control, vehicle placards/stickers, barrier systems, CCTVs, and other countermeasures. Some compounds have local police (Ministry of Interior Public Guards) assigned to provide deterrence/response. In early 2010, local print media reported the creation of a pilot community-policing program. This program was initiated by the Ministry of Interior /Al Faza'a (neighborhood police). Recently, the government enacted legislation that

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will allow private security companies to apply for arming permits for their security officers. This step is an effort to privatize some security functions while alleviating the growing burden on the police force. However, the requirements for obtaining permits are many, and it is unclear if any private security companies have succeeded in obtaining approval for non-governmental security personnel to arm.

In 2006, the Ministry of Interior built and put into operation a National Command Center (NCC) in northern Doha. The NCC possesses sophisticated capabilities to respond to emergency calls, identify and monitor security incidents, and provide response coordination. All Ministry of Interior entities are represented at the NCC, which operates on a 24/7 basis, 365 days per year. The NCC continues to expand its capabilities and over time will serve as the primary focal point for incident response and crisis management, as well as a control center for major events.

## **Medical Emergencies**

Before traveling, U.S. citizens should ensure they have comprehensive travel and medical insurance. Many physicians and health care facilities will require payment of either cash or credit card before rendering service; medical treatment costs are considered expensive.

Depending upon traffic density and other service calls, ambulance response time in Doha usually ranges between 5 and 30 minutes. During local religious holidays (Ramadan, in particular), weekends, and/or after hours, response times could be longer. Relative to the region, responding crews are considered to be well-equipped and trained. Patients may find that their actual experience will vary.

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## Contact Information for Recommended Local Hospitals and Clinics

Patients will, in most cases, be transported to the government-owned Hamad Hospital Emergency Room for triage and treatment. Hamad Hospital's ER was reportedly rated as the busiest in the world by an accreditation committee. Emergency care is assessed to be adequate; for secondary care, many expatriates choose the Al Emadi Hospital, Doha Clinic Hospital or Al Ahli Hospital.

Fire/Police/Ambulance: Tel. 999

Hamad Hospital Emergency Room: Tel. 4439-2333 <http://www.hmc.org.qa>

Doha Clinic Hospital: Tel. 4438-4211

Al Emadi Hospital: Tel. 4466-6009

Al Ahli Hospital: Tel. 4489-8901

## Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Hamad Hospital operates an air medevac service as part of the government's emergency medical service system.

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## CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For vaccine and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:  
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/qatar>.

Additional medical websites for further reference:

<http://www.who.int/en>

<http://www.nha.org.qa>

## Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

### Best Situational Awareness Practices

Do maintain a low profile and do not draw attention to yourself. Should you encounter a hostile or verbally abusive individual, leave the scene quickly, move to a public area (restaurant, store or hotel), and immediately notify the police and embassy. Do not flaunt your (relative) wealth. Carry only the minimum amount of cash that you need for the day. Leave your valuables and spare cash in the hotel safe or other secure place. Always be aware of your surroundings. Report all suspicious activity to your corporate security representative or

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the police. Avoid unfamiliar areas of town when alone. Avoid unlit streets at night. Travel in a group (3-5) and avoid travel when alone at night. When traveling at night, be sure someone knows where you are going and when you are expected back. Be familiar with travel routes. Never resist armed theft.

Vary your days for shopping, errands, and personal needs. Be unpredictable with your routines. Do vary your times and routes to and from work. Do identify and report to your corporate designated security representative any vehicles or persons possibly involved in surveillance of your activities. Alert your colleagues and family to your daily plans and how to reach you.

Always carry a cellular phone but utilize a hands-free device while driving. In traffic, always attempt to leave space in which to maneuver. Be prepared to take evasive action at any time. Do keep your doors locked and windows closed (residence and vehicle). Do check the interior and exterior of your vehicle prior to approaching/entering it. Look for things that are irregular or abnormal. If you are being followed or harassed by another driver, try to find the nearest police station, hotel, or other public facility to call the police. Never lead the person back to your home. Keep bottles of water in your vehicle.

Notify hotel security of any suspicious activity. Always pack your own baggage and never leave it unattended. Should you lose your hotel room key card, bear in mind that information stored on it may include your name, partial home address, hotel room, check-in and check-out dates, and credit card number and expiration date. Do not leave valuables in the room unattended. Keep doors locked at all times. Use the optical viewer before opening the door. Keep at least two bottles of water in your room in case of emergency.

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Dress conservatively and avoid revealing clothing, especially for females.

The use of metered fares for a taxi should be established prior to entering the vehicle. Limousine services are the preferred means for females traveling to and from hotels, and females should always sit in the back seat (never the front seat). When using public taxis or limousine services, do not allow the driver to pick up additional passengers along the way.

Always remember to carry appropriate forms of identification with you at all times. Follow the directions of the host nation police and obey all local traffic laws.

U.S. citizens should take reasonable and prudent security precautions regarding their personal safety, by avoiding political, religious, or other large public gatherings and demonstrations, and remaining alert when visiting any establishments or events known to be frequented by Westerners. Do not discuss work-related issues in public. Keep abreast of the local and regional political scene. All residents and visitors should remain aware of and alert for the significant continuing terrorism threat in the region. Terrorist attacks can be indiscriminate, occur with little or no warning and be conducted against any Western or Western affiliated target, to particularly include those associated with Americans and American interests.

## **U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information**

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## Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Doha is located in the Al-Luqta District on 22nd February Street, P.O. Box 2399.

Absent local and U.S. declared holidays, the official workweek/hours that the Embassy follows are Sunday through Thursday, 7:30 am to 4:00 pm.

The hours for routine American Citizen Services are 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. The Embassy is ready at any time to assist American citizens in genuine emergencies such as arrest, life-threatening injury, or death of a companion.

There is limited outside parking available to privately owned vehicles. Although virtually all taxis in town can get you to the Embassy with relative ease, getting a taxi to pick you up from the Embassy may be problematic.

## Embassy Contact Numbers

The main Embassy phone number is (974) 4496-6000.

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During normal working hours American citizens may call (974) 4496-6614 or email [ACSCONSULARDOHA@state.gov](mailto:ACSCONSULARDOHA@state.gov). For after-hours emergencies, U.S. citizens should call (974) 4496-6000 to be transferred to the on-call Duty Officer.

Travelers should also regularly consult the Department's travel website at <http://travel.state.gov> and/or the Embassy's site at <http://qatar.usembassy.gov>. Travelers are also encouraged to read the latest Consular Information Sheet for Qatar that can be found at <http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis>. In the United States, one can also call: 1-888-407-4747 toll free or 1-202-501-4444.

## **OSAC Country Council Information**

Qatar's OSAC Country Council was chartered in May 2004. It enjoys an active private sector-led council, which has a diverse membership including U.S.-owned or joint venture firms from the energy sector (i.e. oil and gas), service sector organizations, academia, and the medical community. In 2007, the OSAC Doha Steering Committee partnered with the British Embassy's SISBO (Security Information Service for Businesses Overseas) Coordinator in an initiative to further our partnership in providing information on a wide range of security issues that U.S. or U.K. businesses may face when operating in Qatar. Furthermore, many within the local OSAC chapter also are active in the ASIS International chapter.

Security representatives of companies or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) doing business in Qatar are encouraged to contact OSAC headquarters soonest to learn of security-related issues relevant to their business plans. The contact number in Washington, DC is 1 (571) 345-2223 or by visiting [OSAC.gov](http://OSAC.gov). Following this, the Embassy's Regional

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Security Office (RSO) may be contacted to see if a follow-on appointment is warranted. The contact number for the RSO is (974) 4496-6767.

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