Working at Carnegie Mellon University – Qatar
Frequently Asked Questions

When moving to Qatar, many questions arise about living in a different cultural environment. Here are answers to some of the questions that you might have before and after arriving to work in Qatar. Note that a comprehensive Orientation Program is provided upon your arrival in Qatar that provides significant detail.

Q- What is Qatar like, generally speaking?

Qatar is an Islamic country in the Arabian Gulf. It has a population of approximately 1,670,389 people. With a small citizen population of less than 334,078 people, Qatar workforce comprises expatriates from other Arab nations (20% of population), the Indian subcontinent (India 20%, Nepal 13%, Pakistan 7%, Sri Lanka 5%), Southeast Asia (Philippines 10%), and other countries (5%).

In the past few years many Europeans and Americans have opted to work in Qatar, forming a growing community themselves.

Doha is the political, commercial and educational capital of Qatar. One of the noticeable features of Doha is its diverse cultural atmosphere, which combines different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, creating a cosmopolitan city open to the world.

Although Arabic is the official language in Qatar, English is widely spoken. An apparent respect is shown towards different nationalities and religions, as the basic elements in Qatari tradition are courtesy, politeness and respect.

Although Muslim law forbids alcohol, visitors and foreigners are allowed to drink discretely in licensed hotels and restaurants. Liquor permits can be acquired after obtaining a resident permit, which takes three to four weeks.

In Ramadan, the ninth month in the Arabic calendar, the Muslim population fasts from sunrise to sundown. During that time, eating and drinking are prohibited in public, in order to respect Muslim practices.
Q- What is the educational atmosphere in Qatar in general?

Qatar also has government schools and private schools, as well as schools for the different Arab communities like the Lebanese, Jordanian and Sudanese schools plus those for non-Arab communities like the Indian, American and other schools.

Private schooling has been offered for the last few years, increasing the options for parents to choose from different curriculums, study atmospheres and student activities.

Higher education in Qatar has witnessed a major step forward. In addition to the University of Qatar’s two campuses (one for each gender), private colleges and universities have also been established, such as North Atlantic College and Holland University. The establishment of Education City has changed the map of education in Qatar, as it offers the best of western education through some of the world’s leading universities, including Carnegie Mellon University, Weill Cornell Medical College, Texas A&M University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Georgetown University and Northwestern University in Qatar.

If you have dependent children relocating with you to Qatar and need to be registered in schools, the Human Resources department at CMUQ will help you register your dependents in the desired school; however, this will require providing previous school reports, and submitting application forms and paying application fees (which are reimbursable by the university). Application fees are up to QR500.00 (approximately $137 USD).

Q- Are there any restrictions on moving around the city or any other parts of the country?

Not at all! Qatar welcomes people from all over the world and wants you to enjoy your stay.

You may live and move anywhere, as long as you respect people’s beliefs and traditions. (For example, do not eat in public during Ramadan and turn down the radio volume during the call for prayers.) All residents or visitors are asked to carry a form of ID, such as a driver’s license. Qatari culture expects respect and politeness at all times in dealing with other individuals and the police.

Use “Karwa” taxi or other transportation companies recommended by the HR department in
Qatar. The majority of the drivers speak English. Make sure that you place an order for a taxi by phone in advance, as delays can occur. Drink a lot of water as you go about your day, as the temperature is very high and reaches over 40°C (104°F). You will need at least two liters a day. Please note that deep yellow urine is a sign of dehydration.

Q- Will I have a problem communicating with locals?

Although Arabic is the official language in Qatar, English is widely spoken. You will be able to communicate with most of the people in your daily life, including in shops, restaurants, supermarkets, pharmacies, and other places of commerce. On a personal level, you might meet a local who does not speak English, where a translator (or a bilingual common friend) might be needed. However, Arabs appreciate courtesy and few words of Arabic will be met with great pleasure.

Use Greetings and formalities, as they are particularly important when dealing with Arabs. It is considered impolite to start any conversation or request without at least saying “Good Morning” or “Good Afternoon”, and ending the conversation without saying “Thank you” or “Good bye.”

Q- Is there a dress-code that I have to abide to in Qatar?

To familiarize you, Qatari national men wear a thobe, a long white shirt over loose pants. They also wear a loose headdress, called a gutra, in white or red and white cloth, held on with a black rope known as the agal. Qatari national women cover their heads with a black headdress called a shayla and their bodies with a long black dress called an abayah. The national dress for both men and women is a traditional custom that Qataris respect and seek to preserve.

However, expatriates are free to wear whatever they like and feel would be appropriate within the society and its customs. They are expected to remain sensitive to the Islamic culture and not dress in a revealing or provocative manner. Men generally wear long pants and a shirt in public. Women’s attire should cover shoulders and knees. Shorts and short skirts are considered inappropriate, although casual dress is becoming increasingly flexible. Western bathing attire is worn at hotels, clubs, swimming pools, some beaches, and in private gated housing communities. Topless sunbathing is not permitted. For business attire, suits are the most common dress for men at work. Working women tend to wear items similar to those they would wear in their home country.
Q- What are the main legal prohibitions of which I should be aware?

Qatar is an Islamic state and expatriates and visitors need to observe the customs, laws and sensitivities applicable to its Islamic culture. All persons in Qatar are subject to the country’s laws and regulations. Some of these laws differ significantly from those in the employee’s home country. Further, the penalties for breaking a law in Qatar can result in more severe consequences than they might have experienced in their home country for a similar offense.

Persons violating Qatari laws—even unknowingly—may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned, depending upon the circumstances. Some examples follow:

- **Prohibited imported items**: weapons and ammunition, fireworks, obscene material, narcotics and illicit drugs, counterfeit currency, alcohol, pork products, religious materials intended for proselytizing.

- **Drugs and alcohol use is limited**: The sale of alcohol is permitted at one designated government outlet in Doha, only with a special permit. Five star hotels in Doha have bars and restaurants that are permitted to serve alcohol to registered residents and visitors, except during Ramadan. Alcohol should only be consumed in the home/private residence or at authorized restaurants—never in public places. It is also illegal to transport liquor in your vehicle except from the point of sale directly to your home. Driving under the influence of alcohol is a very serious offense in Qatar.

- **Public displays of intimate affection**: Such action is considered offensive and detrimental to Qatar’s culture and values, individuals could be detained and/or prosecuted if laws are broken. Also note that homosexual activity is a criminal offense in Qatar, with those convicted of such action subject to applicable judicial treatment and/or deportation.

Q- What are the main cultural Don’ts that I should observe in Qatar?

Physical contact between men and women in public is discouraged, including handshaking among opposite sexes. Whether in a business or a social context, do not extend your hand to a local from the opposite sex unless he/she extends it first.

There are many photographic opportunities in Qatar. However, as in most cultures, courtesy requires discretion when photographing local residents. Many people are strongly opposed to having their picture taken. Always ask for their permission before taking photographs. In addition, avoid taking photographs of sensitive sites or people, such as the police or armed forces.
While a specific dress code is not mandated, both men and women should dress in appropriate, modest clothing. Employees and their families should be particularly conscious of their dress when visiting the large shopping malls, souqs (traditional markets) or other areas frequented by mixed nationalities. It is particularly important to dress modestly during the month of Ramadan. Normal swimwear, including bikinis, is acceptable on some beaches, hotel pools, and private pool areas, though modest cover-ups are desirable when swimmers move away from the swimming areas. Topless sunbathing by women is not permitted.

It is important not to look or stare at people closely, no matter how fascinating their dress! It is considered common courtesy not to stare, particularly important in a society where modesty of dress and behavior are mandatory.

If you are a man, respect the fact that some women are private people in public places. So don’t ask an Arab woman for information or directions; they are more willing to help other females—if you are with your family, let your wife do the talking.

Try not to use your left hand when eating or hand greeting, as it is reserved for personal hygiene and the right hand is considered more proper.

It is important not to sit with your feet pointing to your Arab hosts, as it is considered insulting. And don’t sit with your back to their guests.

**Q- What documents do I need to bring with me?**

- Valid passports (make sure it does not expire prior to your return trip home) of the employee and all family members planning to live in Qatar. Upon arrival in Qatar, passports must have a minimum of a six-month validity period. The Human Resources department in Qatar will contact you prior to your travel to Qatar to obtain you passport(s). The HR office in Qatar will apply for your visa and email it back to you prior to your departure to Qatar.

- Copies of your marriage certificate, highest academic diplomas/certificates, and birth certificates of accompanying dependent spouses and children.

- Proof of your blood type, for immigration processing. A blood donor card or medical documentation will suffice.) In addition, Qatar requires you to complete the CMU Qatar pre-travel medical certification form by your personal physician prior to your relocating to Qatar. All of these requirements will be communicated to you by the HR office in Qatar upon the start of planning for your travel.

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Q- What kind of license do I need to drive in Qatar?

U.S. citizens can drive using their US driver’s license for two weeks upon their arrival in Doha. An international license can be used for one year under a business visa. You can apply for an international driver’s license at a local Triple A, but you should also bring your US driver’s license with you. After that, they need to apply for a permanent driver’s license. The CMUQ HR department will apply for a temporary Qatari driver’s license until your permanent residence permit arrives.

Temporary driving license requires:
• Copy of your valid passport.
• Original driver’s license.
• Eye examination.
• Processing fee of QR150.00 (approximately $41.00 USD).
• Two personal photos (with eye glasses, if required).

Your residency permit will qualify you to obtain a permanent Qatari driver’s license.

Permanent driving license requires:
• Copies of your passport and residence permit in Qatar.
• Processing fee of QR250.00 (approximately $68.50 USD).
• Original driver’s license.
• Eye examination.
• Two personal photos (with eye glasses, if required).

All nationalities are required to pass a driving test to issue the permanent driving license, except new residents from 33 countries are allowed to simply transfer a valid driver’s license to a Qatari driver’s license. The only requirement is passing a simple eye exam; those countries include West Europe, Canada, Japan, Singapore, and GCC countries.

Q- What should I do if I am involved in a car accident in Qatar?

It is strongly advised that you always carry your car papers, including car insurance and your license, in your car. If you have an accident, stop immediately where you are, if it is a minor accident and if all parties agreed on who is to blame, drivers may pull over to the side of the road not to block the traffic and wait for the police to come and report the accident or they may leave the scene and go to the nearest police station to report the accident. If the accident is big and have major injuries don’t pull over to the side of the road, even if you are blocking traffic. Most motorists still prefer to play it safe and wait on the spot for the police to arrive in all cases. Police must be notified of every
accident regardless of whether there are any injuries, and a police report must be issued. (No damage can be paid by your insurance without a police report, not even a touch-up to the paint!) Remember that Qatari culture expects respect and politeness at all times in dealing with other individuals and the police. Call the police (999) to come and write a report. If in doubt, call any of the Carnegie Mellon in Qatar contacts listed on the emergency contact card for “Motor Vehicle Accident Instructions”. This Emergency contact card will be given to you by the HR office once you arrive to Qatar.

Q – What medical tests or records will I need to provide?

Employees and other relocating family members who are staying for more than two months must have an examination and ancillary testing performed by their personal physician within four weeks prior to their departure. You are required to submit to the CMU in Qatar HR department the “Qatar Pre-Travel Medical Certification Form” completed and signed by your personal physician before your relocation to Qatar. In addition, you should have the following tests performed. These results will not be used for immigration processing, because Qatar’s Immigration Services will perform these tests again and consider their results official. However, the results should be maintained by your private physician and be readily available to dispute false positive findings on future tests.

(You are not required to submit the test results to CMU.) The required tests include:

- Chest-x-ray
- HIV/AIDS antibodies
- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- Blood typing (you bring the result with you to Qatar)
- CMU Qatar Pre-Travel Medical Certification form (you must submit to HR)

Q – What are the local Emergency numbers in Qatar?

The number for emergencies (fire, police or ambulance) is: 999. Qatar Foundation for Child & Woman Protection hotline is: 466-6671/2/3.

Q – Who should I contact at Carnegie Mellon University with my questions?

- For questions regarding the offer letter, allowances, pay related questions or any other HR concerns with relocating to Qatar, please contact Erin Stewart Galloway, Director of Human Resources at Carnegie Mellon University-Qatar Campus emstewar@qatar.cmu.edu or call + 974 4454-8510 or +974 5552-3637.
You may also contact Zeeshan Kahya, Human Resources Manager at Carnegie Mellon University-Qatar Campus zkahya@qatar.cmu.edu or call +974 4454-8659 or +974 6627-0001.

• All travel arrangements to Qatar from United States of America need to be arranged by the International Operations Specialist at the Carnegie Mellon main campus at gartrav@andrew.cmu.edu or 412-268-3065. However, if the travel to Qatar is from another destination other than the United States, then you should contact Renee Barcelona, Human Resources Administrative Coordinator at Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar barcelon@qatar.cmu.edu or call +974 454 8513 or +974 5500-2954; in this case Renee will be arranging the travel.

• For questions related to immigration, visa, banks services, employee services or related government services, please contact Fadhel Annan, Director of Government Initiatives and Employment Services at Carnegie Mellon University-Qatar Campus, fannan@qatar.cmu.edu or call +974 454 8555 or +974 5587-7802.

• HR at CMU-Q supports all sponsored employees and their families during the initial and later processing stage and in other required areas. For questions related to your Benefits, move to Qatar, dependents’ schooling (if applicable) and the relocation process, please contact Dina Al Baradee, Orientation and Benefits Specialist at Carnegie Mellon University-Qatar Campus, dbaradee@qatar.cmu.edu or call +974 454 8511 or +974 6699-8904.