

# Tourist visas for Qatar: An update on recent immigration changes

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Earlier this year, in a bid to attract more visitors to the country, the Qatar government took a number of proactive steps including:

- introducing a visa free programme (or visa waiver) for eligible nationals of 80 countries;
- introducing an “e-visa” application process for eligible nationals of 242 countries; and
- introducing visa on arrival for eligible Pakistani nationals.

Qatar hopes that these changes (discussed below) will bring more visitors to the country and will provide a boost in tourism. The changes have been widely welcomed by tourism industry professionals, as well as hospitality and retail operators in the country. In a recent statement, the Chief Tourism Development Officer at the Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA), Hassan Al Ibrahim, said:

***“With 80 countries eligible for a visa waiver, Qatar is now the most open country in the region and we are delighted to invite visitors to discover our renowned hospitality, cultural heritage and natural treasures.”***

Before turning to the recent amendments, it is worth summarising Qatar’s position regarding tourist visas prior to the introduction of the new changes.

## **Tourist visas for Qatar prior to the diplomatic crisis**

Until recent months, the position in Qatar was that one-month tourist visas (single-entry and renewable) were available to:

- passport holders of the following 33 countries: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lichtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA, and the Vatican; and
- people holding a valid resident permit from one of the other five Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (i.e. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) provided that the individual’s job fell within the list of approximately 200 professions approved for visa on arrival.

The visa fee was QAR 100 and the visa was renewable for up to three months. Nationals of the other GCC countries do not require a visa to enter Qatar. All other visitors were required to arrange for a tourist visa prior to travel (e.g. through Qatar Airways or a Qatar-based hotel) or be sponsored by Qatar-based relatives/friends).

## **Visa free programme for nationals of 80 countries**

The first key change is a visa waiver for nationals of 80 countries. The waiver means that nationals of those 80 countries will no longer need to apply for (or pay for) a visa upon arrival in Qatar. Instead, a multi-entry waiver will be issued free of charge upon the presentation of:

- a valid passport with a minimum validity of six months;
- a confirmed onward or return ticket; and
- a valid address for the visitor's stay in Qatar (e.g. hotel booking confirmation, or the physical address of a friend or family member with whom the visitor will be staying).

The 80 countries are divided into two groups as set out below.

### ***Group one - 180 days' waiver***

The first group consists of 34 countries (note that Malaysia was initially in the second group of countries discussed below, however, it was subsequently moved into this first group) whose nationals are eligible for a visa waiver that is valid for 180 days from the date of issuance and at zero cost. It entitles the visitor to spend up to 90 days in Qatar either during a single trip or across multiple trips. The list of countries is as follows:

Austria	Greece	Poland
Bahamas	Hungary	Portugal
Belgium	Iceland	Romania
Bulgaria	Italy	Seychelles
Croatia	Latvia	Slovakia
Cyprus	Liechtenstein	Slovenia
Czech Republic	Lithuania	Spain
Denmark	Luxembourg	Sweden
Estonia	Malta	Switzerland
Finland	Malaysia	Turkey
France	Netherlands	
Germany	Norway	

### ***Group two - 30 days' waiver***

The second group consists of 46 countries (this number was previously 47 when Malaysia was part of this group) whose nationals are eligible for a visa waiver that is valid for 30 days from the date of issuance. The waiver entitles the visitor to spend up to 30 days in Qatar during a single trip or on multiple trips. This visa waiver may be extended for a further 30 days at zero cost. The list of countries is as follows:

Andorra	Guyana	Peru
Argentina	Hong Kong	Russia
Australia	India	San Marino
Azerbaijan	Indonesia	Singapore
Belarus	Ireland	South Africa

Bolivia	Japan	South Korea
Brazil	Kazakhstan	Suriname
Brunei	Lebanon	Thailand
Canada	Macedonia	Ukraine
Chile	Maldives	United Kingdom
China	Mexico	United States
Colombia	Moldova	Uruguay
Costa Rica	Monaco	Vatican City
Cuba	New Zealand	Venezuela
Ecuador	Panama	
Georgia	Paraguay	

### **“E-Visas” for nationals of 242 countries and territories**

The second key change that has been introduced is that nationals of 242 countries and territories ([see complete list here](#)) may now apply for “e-visas” if they hold either a residence permit or visa issued by one of the following countries:

Australia	Hungary	Poland
Austria	Iceland	Portugal
Bahrain	Italy	Saudi Arabia
Belgium	Kuwait	Slovakia
Canada	Latvia	Slovenia
Czech Republic	Lithuania	Spain
Denmark	Luxembourg	Sweden
Estonia	Malta	Switzerland
Finland	Netherlands	UAE
France	New Zealand	UK
Germany	Norway	US
Greece	Oman	

To visit Qatar under the new “e-visa” system, applicants will need to present:

- a machine-readable passport with a minimum validity of six months from the date of travel to Qatar (applicants are required to upload coloured copies of their passport bio-data pages) together with a

- passport-size photograph;
- itinerary (i.e. plane tickets confirming onward or return ticket, although Qatar Airways passengers are exempt from this requirement);
- a proof of accommodation (such as hotel booking or address of relative/ friend); and
- a copy of their residence permit or visa (with a minimum validity of 30 days) for one of the countries listed in the table above.

Nationals of some of the 242 countries may be asked to submit additional documentation.

E-visa applications must be submitted online at least four days before travel (and no more than 90 days before travel). Visas are e-mailed to successful applicants and are valid for travel within 90 days of the date on which they are issued. The visa holder may stay in Qatar for up to 30 days.

### **Visa on arrival for Pakistani nationals**

The third change is that Pakistani nationals are now eligible for visas on arrival in Qatar. Visas are issued free of cost upon the presentation of:

- a valid passport with a minimum validity of six months;
- a confirmed onward or return ticket; and
- cash funds equivalent to 5,000 Qatari riyals (about 141,250 Pakistani rupees or US\$1,340) or a valid credit card.

In addition, Pakistani nationals travelling directly from Pakistan must also provide “a certificate of vaccination against polio according to the procedures currently in place”. Visas are valid for 30 days and are renewable (for another 30 days) subject to confirmation of a return ticket.

### **Transit visas for Qatar Airways passengers of any nationality**

Finally, for completeness, it is also worth mentioning that transit visas were introduced in 2016. All passengers (regardless of nationality) flying with Qatar Airways and transiting through Hamad International Airport (HIA) are eligible for a 96-hour transit visa (free of charge) if their layover at HIA is at least five or more hours. However, visas are granted at the sole discretion of Qatar’s Ministry of Interior and must be applied for at least seven days in advance. The applicant must present:

- a valid passport with a minimum validity of six months; and
- a confirmed onward or return ticket with Qatar Airways

The transit visa is valid for entry within 30 days from the date of issuance. It is a single entry visa permitting the holder to stay in Qatar for a maximum duration of 96 hour (extension is not permitted and a fresh visa application must be submitted if the visitor wishes to extend their stay in the country).

### **Do the recent changes allow you to work in Qatar?**

The visas discussed in this article are tourist visas and do not entitle an individual to work in Qatar. Individuals travelling to Qatar for work or business must continue to ensure that they have the correct visa before travelling to Qatar.

### **What do the changes mean for tourism in Qatar?**

In line with Qatar’s National Vision 2030, Qatar hopes to increase the number of tourists to the country from 2.93 million in 2015 to 7 -10 million annually by 2030. The range of new visa measures announced by the QTA have been well-received, however, it remains to be seen whether these measures will have the desired effect in terms of bringing visitors to the country.

Finally, although the contents of this article are accurate as at the date of publication, immigration policies are subject to frequent changes. We would therefore advise that appropriate enquiries are made (e.g. with the Qatari Embassy or diplomatic mission within your home country) prior to making any travel arrangements for Qatar.