

The Museum of Islamic Art: Qatar's Cultural Epicenter

Qatar, the world's richest country on a per-head basis, has entered a new era of its history. The Museum of Islamic Arts which was opened last year in the capital city Doha is viewed by many as a perfect catalyst for the development of the city as a cultural and educational centre of excellence.

The museum opened in November 2008 with a glittering ceremony and a spectacular firework display that dazzled more than 200 guests. The inauguration was attended by heads of state, prominent experts in history and art as well as celebrities. Among them was also the Hollywood actor Robert De Niro, who is to bring his long-established Tribeca film festival to Qatar in October.



Built on an artificial island on reclaimed land, the museum holds 800 artistic and historical treasures from three continents and illustrates Islamic culture spanning 1,100 years. The geometric-shaped building, designed by world famous architect Ieoh Ming Pei, 91-year old creator of the Louvre pyramid, is determined to become the centerpiece of Qatar's strategy to become a tourist cultural destination of choice.

The museum houses manuscripts, textiles, ceramics and other works mostly assembled since 1990's and creating one of the world's most encyclopedic collections of Islamic art. The artifacts originate from numerous destinations like Spain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, India and Central Asia.

Stuart Pearce from the Qatar Financial Center Authority said: "Qatar is very proud of its new cultural icon. The Museum of Islamic Art represents a range of different qualities that reflect modern day Qatar – its culture and heritage, modern architecture, sharing with the community and education."

Within a couple of years Doha will open 17 new museums making it an art and cultural epicenter. By establishing the capital as a cultural bridge between the Middle East and the rest of the world Qatar has strengthened its position as a global capital of culture. The Chairperson of the Qatar Museums Authority (QMA), Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa Bint Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani said: "The goal of the QMA is to invest in our country's most valuable resource – our people – by developing new educational experiences. It is our aim to exhibit human creative and artistic genius to provide the educational keys to understanding the past, and incentives upon which to reflect and create the future."



Media representatives point out the current strategy of the Gulf States who are discovering culture as a missing part of their image: “They have the ritzy airports, big towers and financial institutions, but they want to get culture and they’re very competitive. Qatar wants to distinguish itself from Dubai, which is seen as brash, and it has got in there first,” commented Georgina Adam, from the Art Newspaper.

Qatar is ideally situated between Western Europe, Russia and India and is already a popular tourist destination. Building wonderful museums showcasing Qatar’s treasures to the world can only increase its attractiveness.

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