

**LIB  
ERO**

# QATAR 2022

**DOHA  
LUSAIL  
AL BAYT  
AL THUMAMA  
KHALIFA INTERNATIONAL  
AL JANOUB  
AHMAD BIN ALI  
EDUCATION CITY  
LUSAIL ICONIC STADIUM  
STADIUM 974**



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"The winner to organise the 2022 FIFA World Cup is... Qatar!" With these words echoing around the Messe events hall in Zürich on December 2, 2010, the president of football's governing body, Sepp Blatter, bestowed the game's most prestigious showcase upon a small nation in the Persian Gulf.

**B**ACK THEN, its population was under two million, a sixth of the size of the city granted the 2018 final, Moscow. Today, nearly three million people live in Qatar, 80% of them in the capital, **Doha**, location of the country's only airport and urban transport network. All the 2022 stadiums but one, up in **Al Khor**, are on Doha's recently unveiled metro system. **Al Rayyan** and **Al Wakrah**, where four stadiums are set, are within Metropolitan Doha. **Lusail**, setting for the final, is developing as an overspill from the capital just across the West Bay Lagoon.

Currently involving 32 teams, due to expand to 48 by 2026, World Cups are huge, sprawling affairs usually hosted in a dozen major cities where arenas long versed in staging prestigious football events can be reasonably easily adapted for the month-long soccer jamboree. Since the inaugural finals in 1930, they have taken place in June and July so as not to clash with the European season. And, invariably, the world's greatest sporting event after the Olympics is played in a country with a notable football pedigree.

## QATAR 2022

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Qatar is a case apart. The gasps when Blatter opened that envelope were from delegates and dignitaries shocked that an petro-rich nation just over half the size of El Salvador had been chosen as 2022 hosts above the United States, Australia, Japan and South Korea. True, the two bidders from the Far East had co-hosted in 2002. The US was later selected to stage that 48-team World Cup in 2026, while Australia welcomes the Women's World Cup in 2023.



For all that, the challenges Qatar faced were huge. Of the 12 stadiums it had originally proposed, nine only existed on paper. Two had capacities of 21,000 – the minimum size specified for World Cups being 40,000. Dating back to 1976, the **Khalifa International Stadium** was

duly redeveloped to accommodate the World Athletics Championships in 2019 and the Club World Cup, won by the Liverpool that same year – but would retain its 45,000 capacity. Another 35,000 is the minimum needed to stage a World Cup final.

This does not begin to address other key issues. Qatar is impossibly hot in summer. Whereas the bidding team had assured everyone that sophisticated air-conditioning systems in stadiums would allow the tournament to take place during the European fixture lull, doing anything in ➔





high summer requires Herculean depths of strength to endure. Training in such heat is out of the question, potentially dangerous, in fact. These are some of the highest-paid athletes in the world, their bodies insured for huge sums.

Eventually, the authorities persuaded the European federations – whose clubs pay the spiralling salaries for the majority of the 832 players selected to join the 32 squads – to carve out a six-week break during their lucrative autumn/

winter season, from mid-November to Christmas, in order for the tournament to start on November 21 and run for a month. Even then, the schedule was moved forward to November 20 so that host country Qatar could kick things off.



Not that November guarantees cool climates. Temperatures stay in the high twenties and, to squeeze in a schedule even tighter than usual, seven games are timetabled to kick off at 1pm local time, 11am in Central Europe, 10am in the UK. Two quarter-finals begin at 6pm, when it will still be humid.

That is assuming that a World Cup is just a series of matches, each watched by tens of thousands in a stadium and billions at home. It isn't. A World Cup is a 24/7 global cavalcade of involvement, of fan zones and random bar encounters, of business pow-wows and sponsors' promotions, of communal marches to matches and 45,000 Peruvians descending on Yekaterinburg, Russia, many selling their cars and houses to travel halfway across the world for 90

minutes of football and a lifetime of memories. (Peru lost 1-0 to eventual winners, France.)

And Andeans and entrepreneurs, Australians and Ghanaians, Canadians and Danes, all need somewhere to enjoy this once-in-a-lifetime experience. Qatari organisers are setting up a sizeable fan zone at Al Bidda park in Doha. In nearby Lusail, where that one large-sized arena was eventually sited, a 3,500-capacity Hayya Fan Zone will be centrepieced by a skating rink (!) for musical entertainment and ice ballet shows (!!). Attached to Lusail, the floating leisure zone of Qetaifan Island hosts the Qetaifan Beach Fest, with live music and partying until 4am. It's ticketed and numbers are limited to 30,000 – book early for World Cup final night (and Qatar National Day) on December 18. ➔

À propos, alcohol. No, there will be no beer sold around stadium compounds and nor within the actual arenas. At the Al Bidda Park fan zone, beer goes on sale from 6.30pm and bars close at 1am. Around Doha, beer, wine and spirits are served at the various faux pubs and sports bars within hotels. The hotels themselves are a different matter. With 32 squads to accommodate, officials, media and sponsors to schmooze, Doha's many high-end hotels have long been earmarked for specific guests rather than the scarf-toting hordes.

As the local hotel stock is mainly high-end, with very limited rooms available at least during the initial group stages, fan villages have been set up. Prices for a cabin, a container with a bed and basic necessities, start at QR740/€200. There's usually a minimum stay of two nights and nearly all are booked but again, availability increases once half the teams head home on 3 December. Two cruise ships, the MSC World Europe and the MSC Poesia, have been pressganged into hospitality duty, moored at the main ferry terminal at West Bay at the Lusail end of the city.

To book all of this, to even enter Qatar as a ticket-holder, you have to register with the **Hayya Card system**, that also allows free urban transport for the duration of the tournament. You can reach seven of the eight stadiums in and around Doha by one single metro journey, usually followed by a shuttle bus between station and stadium.



Many are looking to stay in nearby Dubai and fly in, thus completely negating the underlining hard sell of this being the green-friendly World Cup. This is not to dismiss Qatar's eco efforts, most notably the remarkable (and temporary) **Stadium 974**, created from 974 shipping containers and cannily echoing the three-digit international phone code for Qatar. After the last game here on December 5, the boxes will be packed away and

possibly shipped to Uruguay should the hosts of the inaugural tournament be awarded the centenary event in eight years' time.

For a significant number of football followers, giving 2022 a miss is not a question of cost. The shocking treatment of the migrant workers who built all this infrastructure is an issue that will blight Qatar, and

world football's governing body, for many years to come. There are far too many families, particularly around the Indian sub-continent, whose breadwinners never came home from Doha, or who later died due to health conditions contracted while labouring in inhuman temperatures. All still await compensation, while the minimum estimated cost of staging this World Cup is said to be \$220 billion.

Dutifully aware that the nation is putting on a first World Cup for the Arab world, Qatar has chimed architectural detail with regional cultural heritage when commissioning the eight host arenas. The **Lusail Iconic Stadium** is a golden bowl inspired by the glowing lanterns of Ramadan and by the finely crafted kitchenware used on Arab dining tables. Up in Al Khor, the **Al Bayt Stadium** is laid out like a Bedouin tent, patterned in the traditional local fashion. Those with a window seat as they fly into Doha can make out the distinctive circular shape of the **Al Thumama Stadium**, in the same form as the taqiyah skullcap worn by menfolk at prayer. The most globally renowned architect linked to the Gulf region, the late Zaha Hadid, modelled the **Al Janoub Stadium** on the dhow boats that once carried pearl divers from the nearby shores of Al Wakrah.

Having been granted the World Cup as only 17 countries before them, and as the fourth-richest nation on Earth, Qatar was always going to push the boat out as far as tournament organisation was concerned. The price for doing so has been astronomical, in some cases, far too high. It now needs to deliver on the promise that Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad Al Thani, brother of the current Emir and head of Qatar's 2022 bid team, gave that December day in 2010: "Thank you for believing in change... thank you for giving Qatar a chance. We will not let you down. You will be proud of us. You will be proud of the Middle East". **LE**



## QATAR 2022 Match schedule

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All times  
are local. CET  
is 2hrs behind  
Qatar, UK  
3hrs behind

## AHMAD BIN ALI

21.11/10pm  
USA-WAL  
  
23.11/10pm  
BEL-CAN  
  
25.11/1pm  
WAL-IRAN  
  
27.11/1pm  
JAP-COS  
  
29.11/10pm  
WAL-ENG  
  
1.12/6pm  
CRO-BEL  
  
3.12/10pm  
R16/M50  
1st Gp C-2nd Gp D

KHALIFA  
INTERNATIONAL

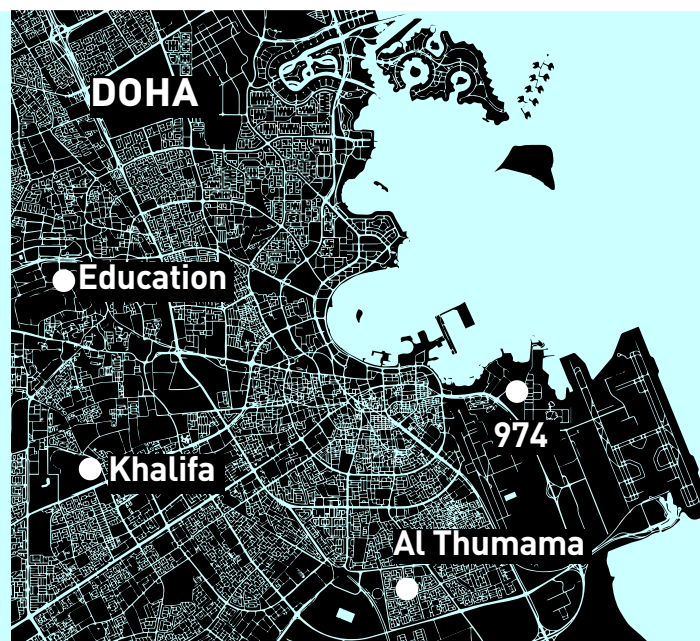
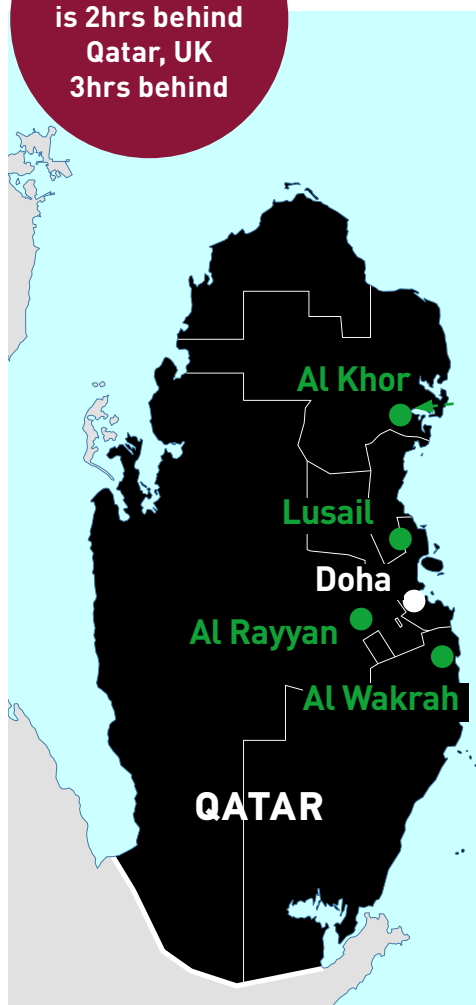
21.11/4pm  
ENG-IRAN  
  
23.11/4pm  
GER-JAP  
  
25.11/7pm  
NL-ECU  
  
27.11/7pm  
CRO-CAN  
  
29.11/6pm  
ECU-SEN  
  
1.12/10pm  
JAP-SPA  
  
3.12/6pm  
R16/M49  
1st Gp A-2nd Gp B  
  
17.12/6pm  
3rd-place PO

## LUSAIL ICONIC

22.11/1pm  
ARG-SAU  
  
24.11/10pm  
BRZ-SRB  
  
26.11/10pm  
ARG-MEX  
  
28.11/10pm  
POR-URU  
  
30.11/10pm  
SAU-MEX  
  
2.12/10pm  
CAM-BRZ  
  
6.12/10pm  
R16/M56  
1st Gp H-2nd Gp G  
  
9.12/10pm  
QF/M57  
Winners M49-M50  
  
13.12/10pm  
SF Winners M57-M58  
  
18.12/6pm  
FINAL

## AL JANOUB

22.11/10pm  
FRA-AUS  
  
24.11/1pm  
SWZ-CAM  
  
26.11/1pm  
TUN-AUS  
  
28.11/1pm  
CAM-SRB  
  
30.11/6pm  
AUS-DEN  
  
2.12/6pm  
GHA-URU  
  
5.12/6pm  
R16/M53  
1st Gp E-2nd Gp F



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## Group A

Qatar/QAT  
Ecuador/ECU  
Senegal/SEN  
Netherlands/NL

## Group B

England/ENG  
Iran/IRAN  
USA/USA  
Wales/WAL

## Group C

Argentina/ARG  
Saudi Arabia/SAU  
Mexico/MEX  
Poland/POL

## Group D

France/FRA  
Australia/AUS  
Denmark/DEN  
Tunisia/TUN

## Group E

Spain/SPA  
Costa Rica/COS  
Germany/GER  
Japan/JAP

## Group F

Belgium/BEL  
Canada/CAN  
Morocco/MOR  
Croatia/CRO

## Group G

Brazil/BRZ  
Serbia/SRB  
Switzerland/SWZ  
Cameroon/CAM

## Group H

Portugal/POR  
Ghana/GHA  
Uruguay/URU  
South Korea/SK

## AL THUMAMA

21.11/7pm  
SEN-NL  
  
23.11/7pm  
SPA-COS  
  
25.11/4pm  
QAT-SEN  
  
27.11/4pm  
BEL-MOR  
  
29.11/10pm  
IRAN-USA  
  
1.12/6pm  
CAN-MOR  
  
4.12/6pm  
R16/M52  
1st Gp D-2nd Gp C  
  
10.12/6pm  
QF/M60  
Winners M55-M56

## AL BAYT

20.11/7pm  
QAT-ECU  
  
23.11/1pm  
MOR-CRO  
  
25.11/10pm  
ENG-USA  
  
27.11/10pm  
SPA-GER  
  
29.11/6pm  
NL-QAT  
  
1.12/10pm  
COS-GER  
  
4.12/10pm  
R16/M51  
1st Gp B-2nd Gp A  
  
10.12/10pm  
QF/M59  
Winners M51-M52  
  
14.12/10pm  
SF Winners M59-M60

## STADIUM 974

22.11/7pm  
MEX-POL  
  
24.11/7pm  
POR-GHA  
  
26.11/7pm  
FRA-DEN  
  
28.11/7pm  
BRZ-SWZ  
  
30.11/10pm  
POL-ARG  
  
2.12/10pm  
SRB-SWZ  
  
5.12/10pm  
R16/M54  
1st Gp G-2nd Gp H  
  
22.11/4pm  
DEN-TUN

## EDUCATION CITY

24.11/4pm  
URU-SK  
  
26.11/4pm  
POL-SAU  
  
28.11/4pm  
SK-GHA  
  
30.11/6pm  
TUN-FRA  
  
2.12/6pm  
SK-POR  
  
6.12/6pm  
R16/M55  
1st Gp F-2nd Gp E  
  
9.12/6pm  
QF/M58  
Winners M53-M54

## Doha

All roads lead to **Doha**. The smallest and certainly the most surprising city to host the World Cup, Qatar's capital and nearby satellites on its metro network are where you find seven of the eight host stadiums. Three are officially in Doha itself, two in adjoining **Al Rayyan**, one in sleepy **Al Wakrah** to the south and one, the location for the final, in new-build Lusail a few kilometres up the coast to the north.

The odd man out is **Al Khor**, an oil base 55km north of the capital. Doha is therefore the hub of the greatest football show on Earth. Not since the first World Cup in Montevideo 92 years ago has a single metropolis staged the tournament. Three stadiums staged the 18 matches, two of which remain in place today.

Legacy is a buzzword not lost on Doha. This is a city where gates for the domestic Qatar Stars League are in the hundreds, yet Qatar's capital has long had a proven record in staging huge sporting events. In balancing these differing requirements for and beyond World Cup, while keeping the wow factor in mind when it came to stadium design, organisers faced a challenging logistic.

South of town, near Doha's Hamad International Airport, the **Al Thumama Stadium** is a case in point, its shape inspired by the traditional men's skullcap, a taqiyah. Putting on a first World Cup in



Hamad International Airport

and for the Arab world, Doha has aimed to chime detail with regional cultural heritage and, that word again, legacy in mind. Of the 40,000 seats comprising the Al Thumama, the minimum required for World Cup finals, half will be later donated to a willing recipient. A large

public park – all too lacking in this contemporary capital of steel and glass – will be created around the site.

The most central of Doha's stadiums, near the metro station whose name it once shared, **Ras Abu Aboud**, the now

rebranded **974** stands near the seafront where George Barnes Brucks of the East India Company carried out the first detailed survey of the Gulf coast 200 years ago. 974 is the number of recycled shipping containers lain together, Lego-style, it took to create the new

stadium. Not coincidentally, it's also the international dialling code for Qatar.

Effectively a pop-up football ground, Stadium 974 will be packed up after December 5 when the winners of Group G meet the runners-up of Group H. Potentially, this could be Brazil against Uruguay, where these 974 containers will be shipped should the tiny South American nation earn hosting rights in 2030, a century after the inaugural tournament.

Legacy was therefore a key factor when Doha gained the 2022 vote in 2010. But Doha has its own football legacy, one dating back longer than many in the room that fateful December day of the ballot may have appreciated at the time.

Having participated in the inaugural Gulf Cup in 1970, Doha hosted the 1976 edition at the newly built Khalifa Sports City Stadium. Games between the seven teams were played at what was a 20,000-capacity ground. Its current iteration, the **Khalifa International**, is now the de facto national stadium where eight World Cup games will be played. These include England's opening fixture against Iran and Germany's against Japan.

It sits on the western edge of Doha, beside Al Rayyan, a separate municipality but part of the all-encompassing metropolis. University quarter **Education City** in Al Rayyan has its own metro ➔





station and new-build stadium of the same name. Again, around half the seats will be donated elsewhere. Student teams will then compete in the smaller arena.

Just south, the Aspire Zone has sport at its core. Home of Doha Sports City and the Khalifa International, this extensive

complex was developed around the stadium of 1976 vintage for the Asian Games 30 years later. The 300-metre-high Aspire Tower acted as a giant torch during the event.

The construction of the initial Khalifa Sports City Stadium was inspired by

the visit here of one man on Valentine's Day, 1973: Pelé. He was welcomed by an independent Gulf capital recently free from British protectorate status. Santos sources give the match attendance figure at 12,000 but exactly 2,000 spectators would have paid their riyals that day, the exact capacity around the



only grass pitch in Qatar at the time, the **Doha Sports Stadium**.

For the 2022 World Cup, an exhibition celebrating this historic occasion is planned for the stadium, today close to Souq Waqif metro station. This was once the heart of town, near the market quarter of Al Souq and historic hub of Old Al Ghanim.

Based solely at the Doha Sports Stadium, a local league started up in 1963. One prominent Doha side, Al Tahrir developed a local fan base, one that grew significantly after a name change to Al Arabi in 1972 and the signing of Gabriel Batistuta in 2003. Al Arabi's

13,000-capacity Grand Hamad Stadium south-west of town will be Brazil's training base in 2022.

Back in 2006, apart from the weather, heavy rain in December, it should be noted, Doha proved that it could, pretty much, cope with an event like the Asian Games. Doha also set up the Aspire Academy, a centre of sporting excellence based at Khalifa Sports City, featuring a huge indoor multi-sports dome beside the Aspire Tower. The leadership now realised there was mileage beyond oil in investing in sport. Although two years later, the city failed in its attempt to host the 2016 Olympics, the need to allocate massive resources to produce ➔

a credible bid for the World Cup was obvious. Doha will also host the Asian Games in 2030, for which much of the 2022 infrastructure will be put to good use.

Working at the Aspire Academy from the early days was Barcelona-born Félix Sánchez, a former coach at La Masia, the legendary FCB training centre that nurtured Messi, Xavi and Iniesta. This initiated a long-term relationship with the world's most sought-after football brand. Sánchez now leads Qatar's national team at its own World Cup finals.

Shortly before the FIFA vote in 2010, Doha staged a showcase fixture between Brazil and Argentina at the Khalifa International. Lionel Messi duly crowned the occasion with a last-minute wonder goal. Shortly afterwards, Doha-based Al Jazeera Sports TV entered the European market, later rebranding as the globally influential beIN Sports.

Its cameras were there to record the wild celebrations around Doha in 2010. Honking traffic blocked the seafront Corniche while the crowds swept from the many shisha cafés and Katara exhibition complex to take to the streets. The World Cup won, Doha got to work. In many ways, the shock 2010 decision had caught the city on the hop more than anybody. In 2008, the country had laid out a far-reaching development plan, Qatar National Vision 2030, to create a more advanced, technologically adept, society.



Within two years or so of the QNV 2030 announcement, Doha and surroundings were a morass of construction sites. The skyline changed, particularly around the West Bay area. A new metro system was stretched south to the Hamad International Airport and Al Wakrah, and north to Lusail.

Doha hosted a string of prestigious sporting events in 2019. In the warmth of September came the World Athletics Championships at the now tournament-ready Khalifa International, equipped with a unique open-air air-conditioning system that kept the stadium temperature below 25 degrees.



Then came the Gulf Cup, played at three venues including the late Zaha Hadid's stunningly designed **Al Janoub Stadium** in Al Wakrah, the first of the new-build arenas to be unveiled. Inspired by the sails of the dhow boats that



would take pearl divers out to sea, this 40,000-capacity arena was a source of particular pride here, given the regional heritage of the Baghdad-born architect. The so-called Queen of the Curve designed the stadium before her untimely death in 2016.

Redeveloped from 2008, Al Wakrah has changed greatly in appearance since but its popular beaches and Heritage Village still attract visitors from the metropolis. The Al Janoub is on the eastern edge of a town that otherwise hugs the coastline. Australia play all their group games at the Al Janoub, England's training base for 2022.

The 2021 Arab Cup was held at six of the eight World Cup stadiums, including

the **Ahmad bin Ali**, aka the **Al Rayyan**, venue for Wales' group games against USA, Iran and England. The 2021 final took place at the **Al Bayt Stadium** in Al Khor, north of Doha and beyond its metro system. The second-largest of the 2022 venues, Al Bayt ('The House') was inspired by the traditional tents used by local nomadic tribes. It now stages the opening game, England's clash with the USA and one semi-final.

Between Al Khor and Doha, Lusail and its **Iconic Stadium** hosts the other semi, plus the final itself. This is also where you find the liveliest fan zone, while Doha's at Al Bidda park will have the standard big screens, and food and drink outlets. **LE**



## Khalifa International Stadium

Qatar's de facto national stadium from the time it was built back in 1976, the **Khalifa International** centrepieces the Aspire project to showcase and nurture sporting excellence. Current national coach Félix Sánchez arrived from Barcelona's academy in 2006 to be part of this global initiative partly inspired by the renowned training methods at the Nou Camp.

The same year, Doha hosted the Asian Games, which generated the most dramatic transformation of the city's urban and sporting infrastructure until now. Sports City was built around the Khalifa Stadium, originally a modest ground of 20,000 created for the Gulf Cup of 1976. Since referred to as the Aspire Zone, this extensive complex forms the border between Doha proper and the separate community of Al Rayyan, part of Metropolitan Doha. Here you find a vast indoor multi-sports arena, a Venetian-themed mall and, beaming out 300 metres high, the glowing Aspire Tower erected as a flame-like symbol of the Asian Games.

The stadium has gone through to two major iterations, one for 2006, the other for 2022. For 2006, a giant arch was installed for the ceremonial fireworks display and capacity was doubled. The



more recent overhaul – the Khalifa was Qatar's first tournament-ready stadium, back in 2017 – simply added to the work of a decade before. Beirut-based architects Dar Al Handasah expanded the East Stand to raise capacity to 45,400, and provided a canopy to complement the existing arches.

The Khalifa then staged the Asian Athletics Championships, the World Athletics Championships, the Gulf Cup and the Club World Cup, won by Liverpool – all in 2019. Eight World Cup games will be played beneath the Aspire Tower, including England's opening fixture against Iran and the play-off for third

place. In case Qatar make it, the interior colours match the national flag.


Surrounded by greenery, the Khalifa International feels like a public amenity, locals heading for the amusement parks or the Aspire Tower. There a lift beams you up to the 47th floor and Doha's only revolving



restaurant, the **Three Sixty**, part of the panoramic five-star hotel **Torch Doha**. The views are unbeatable and immediately below you'll make out the 2022 World Cup building, shaped in the form of the four numerals from the top and to the side. For affordable dining options, the **Villaggio Mall** has steakhouses, sushi bars and Mongolian grills.

Another attraction is the **3-2-1 Qatar Olympic & Sports Museum**, where football memorabilia includes the ball used by WBA to beat The Invincibles of Preston in the FA Cup final of 1888, and the one kicked by Pelé to score his 1,000 goal. The Activation Zone draws most visitors, though, including early VIP guest David Beckham.

### Getting there

**Sport City** has its own metro station on the yellow line. There's a separate exit for the stadium, which brings you out inside the park complex with the stadium 200 metres ahead. If you're going to the Villaggio Mall before the game, then stay on the metro to the next and last stop, **Al Aziziyah**. 

# QATAR 2022 Al Thumama Stadium

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## Al Thumama Stadium

The nearest venue to Doha's Hamad International Airport, **Al Thumama** opened for the Emir Cup, a showcase event in Qatar's domestic football calendar. Usually held in May, it was pushed back to October 2021, partly because of Covid restrictions that spring, partly to provide the arena with a fitting celebration for the inauguration.

Locals flying into Doha by day should appreciate the symbolism at play here. Designed by Qatari architect Ibrahim Jaidah, head of the Doha-based Arab Engineering Bureau (AEB), the Al Thumama Stadium has been fashioned in the form of a traditional men's skullcap, a taqiyah. Worn for prayers, it has a similar function but different names across the Muslim world, like ghafiyah elsewhere in the Gulf. It illustrates the host nation's acute awareness that it is staging a first World Cup in and for the Arab region. With more than 50 years of experience and 1,500 projects under its belt, as Qatar's first architectural and engineering consultancy AEB understood the local context when creating this groundbreaking structure.

Its mish-mash exterior copying the patterns of woven fabric used by taqiyah makers, Al Thumama wowed the full house of 40,000 for the opening fixture. Its circular form perceptible inside and out, Ibrahim Jaidah's award-winning



arena takes the headwear idea and runs with it, as the canopy protects spectators from the sun the same as the taqiyah does its wearer. Two of the matches here kick off at 4pm local time, when heat and humidity will still be high. The stadium's cooling system runs on solar energy.

With the low, mostly enclosed canopy, noise and atmosphere here should be a given. For the Emir Cup game, music, dance and mime shows greeted visitors on the approach to the stadium. The stadium's name, by the way, refers to a local type of tree after which this otherwise featureless district of south Doha is called.

After the last game is played here on December 10, the top 20,000 seats will be taken away and donated to a willing recipient. A park will be created and there's even talk of a boutique hotel, although there are currently few amenities in the surrounding area apart from the Bsquare Mall, modest by Doha standards. For those staying in the Fan



Village Cabins Free Zone the other side of the airport road from the Free Zone metro station, Al Thumama couldn't be more convenient. For Emir Cup night, along with outlets selling standard soft drinks and snacks inside the ground, the old-school van used by Doha-wide

burger chain **Exit 55** was a popular option outside the stadium.

### Getting there

Take the red metro from central Doha to **Free Zone**. Buses will be waiting to take you to the stadium. After the final

whistle, when everyone's leaving at the same time, remember that you will have been in an air-conditioned environment for two hours, and it might get quite chilly in the long queue for shuttle buses. A long-sleeved top for later use is not a bad idea. **LE**





## Stadium 974

Of all the eight World Cup venues, each architecturally imaginative and groundbreaking in its own way, the most talked-about is **Stadium 974**. And for good reason. A pop-up football ground fashioned from boxes, due to host seven games over the course of a fortnight and

then be packed up and carted away, never to be seen again, is such a revolutionary yet simple idea, you wonder why it wasn't used sooner.

Actually these boxes, all 974 of them, may well be seen again, one proposal being to ship them across the Atlantic to Uruguay, to be reused should the centennial World Cup take place there in 2030.

Fans coming here, Brazilians, Argentinians, Mexicans and Poles, among others, shouldn't worry that they'll be watching their team in the equivalent of an IKEA showroom, all in the name of a lighter ecological footprint. Once they pass through an exterior of numbered, multi-coloured shipping containers, along corridors and up staircases like the hull of a car ferry,



they come out into what seems like any other modern-day football stadium.

The maritime analogy is no coincidence. Stadium 974 stands, until December 5 at least, on Doha's waterfront. The shipping containers, within which much of the building material was transported, echo the surrounding industrial and seafaring heritage.

They also required less water to use in construction than concrete. This is also because the stadium interior, a seemingly standard-issue structure, has been made from modular steel, much of it recycled. The engineers behind it, Schlaich Bergermann Partner, have long had a holistic approach to their projects, which have recently included the rebuilding of Real Madrid's Bernabéu, Tottenham's new stadium and, here in Qatar, Zaha Hadid's Al Janoub Stadium in Al Wakrah.

Architects Fenwick Iribarren, also responsible for the Education City

Stadium, are no strangers to pushing the envelope either, having designed numerous constructions during Spain's boom years of the 1990s.

This, however, is next level. Even the incoming sea air is a factor in the ventilation, the gaps around the steel structure allowing nature to provide maximum draught. Quick assembly and, naturally, disassembly are also immediate benefits.

This moveable feast sits on an industrial zone, site for a power station and a desalination plant. This is Ras Abu Aboud, the name of the nearby metro station and, before someone savvy realised that 974 was also Qatar's international dialling code, the original one of the stadium itself. Capacity is the World Cup minimum of 40,000.

What happens to the site isn't yet clear. It's certainly a prime location, with cycle paths and the National Museum of Qatar close by, facing the jetty that accommodates the marina and cruise terminal.

### Getting there

From the nearest metro station of **Ras Bu Aboud**, the eastern terminus of the yellow line, the stadium is so close there's no need for shuttle buses to reach the arena. It also means that those attending the three late kick-offs here should reach their post-match destination pretty quickly, with no queuing for the shuttle bus. **LE**

## Education City Stadium

Originally slated to host the 2019 Club World Cup that was duly won by Liverpool, the **Education City Stadium** required a few more months of preparation before it was finally unveiled in June 2020. After staging domestic fixtures, this 45,350-capacity stadium was one of two venues used for the 2020 Club World Cup that was also pushed back, this time because of the pandemic.

When it was finally played in February 2021, crowds were limited. The Education City Stadium was given its first proper run-out for the Arab Cup in December 2021. It was then that spectators in serious numbers – 47,813 for Qatar's first group game against bitter local rivals Bahrain – got to see this polished gem created by the UK-Spanish architectural team of Fenwick Iribarren.

The concept behind this green arena – dramatically green in seating colour, sustainably green in approach – is that of, their words, a Diamond in the Desert. Jagged triangular patterns mark the wraparound façade that glows multiple colours after dark, and the lower seating sections that will remain here after the upper half is spirited away post-World Cup for other beneficiaries.



One problem with the concept in this case is, technically speaking, in the name – this isn't desert. The Education City Stadium is in Education City, a sprawling university quarter where no fewer than eight institutions from the US, UK and France have a branch campus. Extending for 12 square kilometres, five times the size of Monaco, Education City has its own hotel and golf course, national Science & Technology Park and Medical & Research Center. After the World Cup quarter-final on December 9, and half the seats delivered elsewhere, students will have their own sports stadium, of around 20,000 capacity.

Design delivery was by partly London-based BDP Pattern, also stadium specialists. As well as creating the nearby Ahmad bin Ali Stadium, BDP Pattern has a portfolio of upcoming proposals including Everton's new home at Bramley Moore Dock. The light Arabic touches around the façade here will have been engineered on a drawing board in London EC1.

In this part of the world, the aesthetics of construction are governed by one crucial facility: the ability to reflect sunlight. Inspired by Islamic architectural heritage, the Education City Stadium refracts the sun's rays



but, something fans of France, Portugal and Tunisia may appreciate during early-evening games, allows dusk to transform the exterior into a kaleidoscope of ever-changing colours. The passage of the sun was also taken into account when the roof was designed, making late-afternoon games equally memorable. And, to underline those green credentials, almost a third of the material used to build the arena was recycled.

### Getting there

**Education City** has its own metro station, making this an easy venue to access by public transport. The so-called Last Mile, the transit area between station and stadium, is particularly striking, set on two levels. Education City is on the green line heading west from town, linked with Al Bidda and Doha's main fan zone in Al Bidda Park. **LE**





## Ahmad bin Ali Stadium

The easiest to reach of Qatar's eight stadiums, the metro station alongside serving the Mall of Qatar, the **Ahmad bin Ali** is no less aesthetically pleasing than its counterparts. This is where Wales play all their group games, including the clash with England on November 29. It's also near the Fan Village Cabins Rawdat Al Jahhaniya, one of several makeshift accommodation complexes set up for 2022.

Officially a separate city, Al Rayyan at the western edge of Metropolitan Doha forms a wedge between the capital and the large, empty plains of Al Shahaniya that stretch east. This location was not lost on planners Pattern Design. For this gateway to the desert, the London-based team envisaged the complex as being a convivial setting-off point or a welcoming retreat before or after exotic adventures.



The stadium façade is latticed with traditional Qatari motifs, behind which a huge screen of photovoltaic panels beams out patterns and images to those gathered on the concourse. Dotted around are food and drinks outlets, curved like the sand dunes that could be awaiting beyond. Pattern Design also

worked on the Education City Stadium a metro station away.

Al Rayyan lends its name to the local club that has won eight Qatar Stars League titles. The Ahmad bin Ali, also called the Al Rayyan Stadium, has been built using rubble from the former

ground knocked down in 2015, but also upon 55 years of footballing activity. Red has been the colour in Al Rayyan for several generations.


And red it will stay, for half the distinctive seating of the Ahmad bin Ali/Al Rayyan Stadium, doubtless

pleasing to Wales fans, will form a 21,000-capacity ground for the popular local club while the rest will be transported to a willing recipient. There's no issue about its post-World Cup function either – this was, is and will remain, a football stadium. It will also be one of several venues to co-host the football tournament of the 2030 Asian Games.

As for the stadium name, the Ahmad bin Ali in question is Sheikh Ahmad bin Ali Al Thani, Emir of Qatar during the country's seminal period of transition between a British protectorate state and an independent nation in the Gulf.

Right opposite the stadium is the **Mall of Qatar**, one of Doha's largest and newest. Of the many cafés and restaurants, there's a Mongolian grill, a retro Arabic eatery, a steakhouse and an Indian restaurant among the standard chains.

### Getting there

The Ahmad bin Ali Stadium is the most accessible of Qatar's eight World Cup stadiums, so close to the **Al Riffa Mall of Qatar metro station** that there's no need for shuttle buses. This is at the end of the green line, and so directly connected with Al Bidda in the centre of town, where you find Doha's main fan zone. Note that as the terminus, Al Riffa Mall of Qatar is a big metro station, with separate walking lanes for women and children, and single males. 



## Al Janoub Stadium

It's fitting that the most famous name in international contemporary architecture whose roots lie in the Gulf region, Zaha Hadid, was responsible for the **Al Janoub**

**Stadium**, especially when you consider its look, its location and its legacy.

In 2013, the London-based UK-Iraqi designer unveiled plans for what was originally called the Al Wakrah Stadium, after the former fishing and pearl-diving

village it was set in. Three years later, Hadid died of a heart attack in a Miami hospital, several projects around the world left in various states of readiness.

Her team in London then saw her concept through to the letter, creating

the most streamlined of Qatar's eight World Cup stadiums. Hadid, the Queen of the Curve, had been inspired by the waves of the sea that separates Qatar from Iraq, and the dhow boats that still bob upon them. The shell-like roof of the later named Al Janoub Stadium refers to the sails of the traditional dhows that have guided locals over these oil-rich waters.

Before the 2008 urban development plan that transformed this sleepy seaside village, Al Wakrah would have been one of the least likely locations for a 40,000-capacity World Cup stadium. Looking to spread investment away from Doha, and bring visitors and, indeed, potential residents some 15km south, the authorities first opened the Al Wakrah Heritage Village in 2016, then a main road from the capital, then the southern extension of Doha's metro network.

Al Wakrah is a pleasant place to spend time, blessed with popular beaches. It has something of the Qatar-like-it-used-to-be about it, and although that's partly illusion, the traditional houses of the wealthy pearl merchants and date traders deliberately kept in their original condition, menfolk still go out and fish. Bringing fans of France, Denmark and Australia, who play all their group games here, to Al Wakrah, the Qataris can display something of their country's origins – and show how far they've come since then.



Ergo, Zaha Hadid. It's not only the retractable roof that chimes with the local seafaring heritage. The entire interior feels like the hull of a ship, offering a sense of sanctuary and refuge from the beating sun. Originally designed for a summer World Cup, the Al Janoub Stadium has a cooling system within that keeps temperatures around 20 degrees in the stands and on the pitch.

As at most of the other grounds, half the seating will be taken away after the tournament and shipped to a worthy recipient.

### Getting there

Take the red metro all the way to its southern terminus at Al Wakrah, where fleets of shuttle buses await for the longish drive to the stadium. After the game, you may have to queue a fair while to board your bus, with everyone leaving at the same time. For the only late game here, which finishes close to midnight, it may be an idea to bring something long-sleeved while you wait as you will have been sitting in an air-conditioned environment for most of the evening. **LE**



## QATAR 2022 Al Bayt Stadium

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## Al Bayt Stadium

**Al Bayt** is where the World Cup's showcase opening match takes place, a semi-final too, plus group games involving England, USA, Germany, Spain, Croatia and the Netherlands. At 60,000, the second-largest 2022 venue by capacity after Lusail, Al Bayt is also the only site outside of the Doha Municipality and its metro network.

The city of **Al Khor** is not where you would ordinarily head to unless you were working in the oil industry. At some point, Doha's red metro line will stretch this far north, but given the distance of around 55km from the centre of the capital to this former outpost surrounded by century-old watchtowers, that may be some time yet.

For the World Cup, shuttle buses and taxis will be making the trek directly to

Al Bayt, set on the southern outskirts of Al Khor. Honing into view will be a vast marquee, as welcoming as it would be in the desert were this not a football stadium, a feast for the eyes beckoning in the distance. Its tent shape formed by fibreglass membranes woven with panels, the stadium reveals more intricate design details the closer you approach. Rows of elegant thick-and-thin stripes in dark colours run around the middle to offset the stylish sand tone, patterns that the nomadic tribes here would have used for their own temporary abodes. Al Bayt, in fact, means 'house', as in Bayt al Sha'ar, literally 'House of Hair', the mobile homes that Bedouin women across the Gulf weave with goat and camel hair, and sheep's fleece. A scarcer sight as the region becomes more urbanised and Bedouins less nomadic, these tents have been woven for millennia.

Visitors are welcomed deeper into the tent when they step inside the stadium, with its weaving patterns of bright reds, whites and blacks within, another nod towards traditional hand-crafted embroidery. Certainly, the ornamentation would have been familiar to the 48,000 Qataris who packed into the Al Bayt Stadium for its opening night, the Arab Cup game with bitter local rivals Bahrain on November 30, 2021.

Once the circus leaves town on December 14, like the tent it represents,



Al Bayt will be packed up and half of it shipped out elsewhere. A 32,000-capacity stadium will remain in place, alongside whatever else (hotel? Shopping centre? Communal hall?) comes next.

### Getting there

Take the red metro to its northern terminus at Lusail. From there, shuttle buses make the 40km journey to the stadium, straight road all the way. Given the larger crowds here, the distance from Doha and the 10pm kick-offs (so that UK and European TV stations can broadcast at 7pm and 8pm), the late finish is going to be a lot of queuing for your bus afterwards, with nowhere else to go. Definitely take a top of some sort as you will have been in an air-conditioned environment for at least two hours before standing around in what is, effectively, the desert at night in winter. You then climb into an air-conditioned bus, eventually. **LG**

## Lusail

**Lusail** is Qatar's new playground. Some 20km north of the capital, a skip over from West Bay's skyscrapers and integral to Doha's newly extensive metro network, Lusail has been busy with development ever since a plan was announced in 2005 to create a hub of leisure, retail and commerce here.

First came the golf club, then the Lusail International Circuit, a racetrack for motorcycle riders and, since 2021, Formula One drivers. This was followed by the Lusail Sports Arena. The cherry on the cake, the gleaming **Lusail Iconic Stadium**, was opened in September 2022.

Ten weeks after the Lusail Super Cup curtain-raiser initiated a spectacular light show before and after the game, Lionel Messi will stride out with his Argentine team-mates for what will be his last World Cup, facing some of the same Saudi players who triumphed here in the colours of their club, Al Hilal.

A month later comes the World Cup final. The date, December 18, is no coincidence, Qatar National Day. Nor is the location, Lusail, pure chance. Here, in 1913, the man considered the founder of the nation, Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani, was buried. Lusail was then a village, described by a colonial administrator as a community of three wells, 50 houses

of stone or mud and a fort-like residence where the sheikh lived. A handful of boats used for fishing and pearl hunting, plus a few camels and horses, completed a sleepy picture.

In the boom years after independence in 1971, the population of Doha tripled and adjoining settlements were adapted to deal with the overspill. Where Doha

meets Lusail, the Doha Golf Club and the marina promenade were earlier indications of what was to follow. Beyond, Lusail began to take shape. Qatar's initial proposal for 2022 boasted of a large-scale arena in Lusail where the final would take place. It was no idle boast. Qatar won the vote and then the renowned architects behind the design, the UK's Foster + Partners of Wembley

fame, were commissioned to come up with something more impressive.

This they did. **The Lusail Iconic Stadium** outshines its seven smaller counterparts co-hosting the 2022 World Cup. Glowing gold like the traditional bowls you see in local markets and in every Arab household, it comprises a criss-cross of triangular motifs through



which natural light travels to project shapes and shadows across the inner walls of the arena. Equally influential to the design was the intersecting casing of the lanterns, fanous, that illuminate façades across the Muslim world during the celebration of Ramadan. Lusail may be awash with rapid development in thrall to globalised foreign influences but here, centrepiecing what will be a busy community of some 250,000 residents and 200,000 salaried visitors, is a monument to the region's heritage.

And here it will remain, even though Lusail's stadium falls in line with Qatar's vote-winning trend to create an eco-friendly World Cup of minimal waste. After the tickertape has been swept away, work will begin de-assembling the arena and converting it into a communal resource for health, education and leisure.

Lusail, meanwhile, will be transformed. The process has already started. Opening days before the first World Cup game here, the **Waldorf Astoria Lusail Doha** dominates the nearby beachfront with its twin-finned, multi-storey façade containing 429 rooms, suites and apartments, two pools and numerous restaurants also open to non-residents.

Beyond, an outlying semi-circle of interconnecting man-made islands includes Qetaifan, a waterpark, hotels and sea-facing apartments to follow. Before all this happens, the Qetaifan Island Fan Village at the far end will be ➔





Place Vendôme

where the party's at during the World Cup. Live music and DJs will keep 30,000 ticketholders rocking until 4am.

Back on the mainland, the seafront promenade is dominated by the Katara Towers, curving high-rises symmetrically facing each other like a vast half-pipe for skateboarders. These represent scimitar swords of desert lore and contain two high-end hotels, the all-suite Raffles and the yacht-themed Fairmont. Booked out for officials and dignitaries during the tournament, they are linked by the Katara events space at lower level, a schmooze zone for delegates and sponsors according to event. For everyone else, regular cafés and eateries dot the Lusail Food Arena, an open market area between

the Yacht Club stop on the city's new tram line and the waterfront promenade for strollers and cyclists.

Alongside to the south, nearer Marina Promenade tram stop, is the Lusail Fan Zone, significantly smaller and more family-oriented than the one on Qetaifan Island. Dutch fans might appreciate the skating rink.

For a regular bar, head to the hotels at West Bay Lagoon, on the northern edge of Doha, between the Marina and Legtaifiya tram stops. Legtaifiya is also a transfer station for the red metro line, and the stadium. The contemporary Hudson Tavern at the Mondrian Doha offers screens aplenty, craft burgers and Benelux brews on tap.



Hudson Tavern

Close by, the Ritz-Carlton Doha has a more exclusive approach to complement the marina views, typified by the b-lounge and its celebrity mixologists and DJs.

### Getting there and around

Thanks to its new-found status, Lusail now has two recently opened transport lines. For the stadium, take the **red metro** direct from central Doha to **Lusail**, the station

close enough to the park that there's no need for shuttle buses. It can be a fair stroll, depending on where your seat is located.

The **Lusail tram**, the orange line of a network whose other branches will open up as Lusail does, consists of seven stops. These are spread out in a line parallel to the seafront, starting with **Legtaifiya** that acts as a transfer station onto the red

metro. The **Marina Promenade** is closest to the Lusail Fan Zone, the **Yacht Club** to the Lusail Food Arena and **Lusail Central** serves the Place Vendôme mall.

Doha's **Hamad International Airport** is the other side of the city from Lusail, but its metro station is on its own spur of the red line, so a direct journey of 14 stops to the northern terminus. **LG**





## Lusail Iconic Stadium

Wembley, the Maracanã, **Lusail**? Yup, the World Cup final is taking place at a location few outside of Qatar had heard of before people started pinning up their wallcharts. Few from Doha had

much reason to journey the 20km here either, until development plans for this residential, retail and leisure zone were announced in 2005.

In April 2017, construction started on the 80,000-capacity **Lusail Iconic Stadium**, which will join a very select

roster of arenas from Montevideo to Moscow once it puts on football's grand showcase on December 18, Qatar National Day.

It hasn't had much time to practise. After a 2020 opening date was pushed back, a Super Cup game was arranged



here between the champions of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Al Hilal and Zamalek, in September 2022. Only ten weeks afterwards, some Saudi players return to face Lionel Messi's Argentina on November 22. Brazil play two group matches at Lusail, Portugal and Uruguay one against each other.

The setting is appropriately dramatic. A glowing, golden bowl modelled on the traditional ones fashioned by Arab craftsmen has been woven together by rows of triangular patterns. Threads of natural light stab through the stadium façade and create constant interaction of beams and shadows over the corridors. The inspiration for this is the age-old Egyptian lanterns or fanous that illuminate façades across the Muslim world during Ramadan. Fans enter halfway between the two main tiers of seating for the full sensurround effect of light, noise and colour.

The concept was developed by Foster + Partners. Reconvening the team that had worked on Wembley Stadium and

the Millennium Bridge in London – structural engineers Arup and stadium architects Populous – F + P also knew they were conceiving an arena with a short shelf life in its large-scale form. Like most 2022 venues, the Lusail Iconic Stadium will be taken apart after the tournament. At least half of the seats will be removed and a communal facility created. The roof, however, stays. In a feat of engineering as impressive as the bulbous shining dome, a canopy extends halfway over the pitch supported by a cat's cradle of cables, removing the need for pillars and helping air circulate.

The stadium, set in greenery, is also close to the sea, where a string of man-made islands is being converted for leisure purposes. At the far end of Qetaifan Island North, a fan village will be the main party zone for 2022, live music, DJs and 4am closing times promised all month.

### Getting there

The northern outpost on the red line, **Lusail metro station** is close enough to the stadium to allow the Last Mile walk to be taken directly from the terminus, with no need for shuttle buses. That Last Mile can feel like two, though, depending on where your seat is located. Stewarding for September's Super Cup game (attendance 77,575) was excellent, although if you can imagine the crowd pouring out of Wembley all heading for the one station, you may be waiting a while. **LE**