

Qatar Forts & Towers

Al Koot Fort, photo credit: Alexey Sergeev

Al Koot Fort (Doha)

Deep in the heart of the city of Doha stands Al-Koot fort. Built in 1927 by Sheikh Abdullah bin Qassim Al-Thani, who governed Qatar between 1913 and 1949, the fort was created to protect the nearby Waqif souq from would-be thieves. The courtyard mosque is one of the massive fort's most interesting features, mostly due to what it is missing: walls and a roof.

Al Koot fort has a square courtyard surrounded on all sides by a high wall. Circular towers are found in three corners and a rectangular one in the fourth. The towers are crowned with traditional Qatari-style battlements and triangular-based ledges with slits called machicolations that guards used to shoot at enemies.

Open: open by appointment.

Al Zubarah Fort, photo credit: Alexey Sergeev

Al Zubarah Fort (Zubarah)

Al Zubarah fort is a typical Arab fort built using the traditional Qatari technique.

H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Qassim Al-Thani built the fort in 1938 on the ruins of an older castle that had been destroyed. It was constructed with high, thick walls that would last for countless decades and would serve to protect those inside. The fort is a regular square courtyard with massive walls on each side. Three of the corners have large circular towers topped with Qatari-style battlements. The fourth corner contains a striking rectangular tower with traditional triangular-based ledges with slits called machicolations that - in the event of an attack - were used to shoot at enemies.

Eight rooms on the ground floor, which were originally used to accommodate soldiers, now house exhibitions of exquisite pottery and archaeological findings such as coins from the neighboring Al Zubarah town.

This fort, and the town in which it sits, are extraordinarily important pieces in the early development of Qatar, and ones that shouldn't be missed.

Open: Daily from 0800 – 1800 hours, and closed on Friday mornings.

North Forts

Al Thagab and Al Rekayat

Throughout history, Northern Qatar was a much sought-after location for nomadic people looking to settle down. Vestiges of early fishermen's villages, archaeological areas and magnificent forts can still be found throughout the area. Two of the most historically significant forts, "Al Thagab" and "Al Rekayat", stand just north of the well-known Al Zubarah fort.

Rain is a priceless commodity in the desert, and although much of the surrounding areas have been desolate for hundreds of years, these two forts were constructed in the 17th century to help the inhabitants protect a nearby "raudah", a small depression, where rainwater would collect in the spring months. Today, water is still collected in wells nearby the fort, enabling local farmers to grow vegetables.

Al Thagab is a traditional rectangular fort. Similar to Al Zubarah, Al Thagab has three round corner defensive towers and one rectangular one. Its central courtyard is a wide-open space, and all of the interior rooms are on the west side.

Local authorities restored Al Thagab in 2003, staying faithful to traditional building technique of using coral rock and limestone, joined by a mud mortar and covered with gypsum-based plaster. A visit to the fishermen's villages in the northwest as well as the 3D model of the Qatari mosque clearly show the features of this building technique.

Al Rekayat is also a traditional four-sided fort, but this one has three rectangular towers and one circular one. However, the most remarkable feature of this fort is its walls. The bottom portions are made with irregular coral rock and limestone blocks joined together with mud mortar, but the tops are made of mud bricks. This technique is known locally as "liban", though most of the world calls it "adobe".

Moreover, a small mosque for the farmers can still be found outside the Al Rekayat fort. Instead of using a "minaret" to call people to prayer, the "muezzin" called from the circular tower.

Qatari Authorities carried out preservation works in 1988.

Both forts were built with thick walls that isolated the heat and kept the rooms cool. The roofs were finished with a layer of compressed mud that further protected the forts from the sun during the hot seasons.

Zekreet Fort

Zekreet Fort

Located close to Dukhan on the west coast of Qatar, the Zekreet area boasts an astonishing landscape with prehistoric sites and remnants of old settlements. One such destination site is the 18th century fort and early date press found on the beach. The fort has a very distinctive layout that allows seeing the two different phases of construction.

Originally, the fort was built as a simple square without towers in each corner. In a second phase of development, towers were added at the outer four corners of the fort. However these towers were never completed. Because they were added at a later date, their shape is incomplete. Actually, only three-quarters of their plans were built.

On the fort's coastal side, the ruins of "madabes" can be found. These rooms were used to produce "debis", which is a traditional date-based food. The rooms have parallel channels 10 cm deep into the floor that are linked together by a perpendicular canal near the entrance that funnels into an underground pot in the corner.

During the process of making "debis", palm fronds were laid on the channels, creating a smooth, flat base. The dates were then put in sacks made of palm leaves and laid on top of each other in piles that could reach two meters high. The weight of the upper sacks often squashed the dates in the lower sacks and their thick juice ran into the channels and eventually into the underground pot.

A complete and very well-preserved room used in the production of "debis" can be visited at House of Sheikh Ghanim bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani in Al Wakra. Evidence of many more can be found in the Al Zubarah town.

Open: The site is always open and there is no admission fee.

Barzan Towers

Barzan Towers

They have been used as a platform to keep a watchful eye on pearl divers, as a look-out for approaching ships and as an observatory to scrutinise the moon's phases.

The name Barzan comes from the Arabic for "high place", quite appropriate for towers measuring 16 meters in height. Built in 1910 by Sheikh Mohammed bin Jassim Al-Thani, they are located at the southern side of the defensive system established in the late 19th/early 20th century to protect the "raudah", the valley where precious rainwater collects from adjacent higher ground. They link with two other fortified buildings towards the west and another tower towards the north.

The towers were built for strength. The walls are one meter thick at the base and further strengthened by buttresses. These were constructed as cones in one tower and as massive staircases in the other.

Besides the two Barzan towers there is a "majlis", a room to receive guests, built as an L-shaped pavilion with small windows for ventilation. Moreover, there is a mosque containing a simple prayer room which was also used as a "madrassa", a school for teaching the Holy Quran to children.

The pavilion provides an excellent example of traditional Qatari building methods and techniques. Thick walls helped to keep the buildings cool.

Qatar Forts and Towers Guide Map

Find forts and towers by location, check out all the featured qatari forts and towers

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