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CASE STUDY

The Middle East is a trove of opportunities, but access remains elusive for most companies. For Aqua-Terra, IE Singapore's business intelligence network was vital in crossing this hurdle.

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Trade between Singapore and Qatar has been rising robustly, bolstered by the recent signing of an FTA, which covers trade-in goods and services, e-commerce and investment among others.

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Grow your business by exploring opportunities in Qatar

Global experts are ready to help.

MARKET FOCUS

Qatar: Steady growth amid economic turmoil

By *Kenneth Sim, Assistant Manager, International Operations (Middle East & Africa), IE Singapore*

Keen on expanding your operations to Qatar?

Get useful pointers from the box story, *Tips for Setting up Office in Qatar*

Qatar, the world's top exporter of liquefied natural gas and fastest growing economy in 2007, is forecasted to continue its strong growth in the years ahead. While most developed countries are expected to achieve near zero or negative growth rate, Qatar may reach a respectable average gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of about 9 percent in 2009, according to Samba Financial Group.

Cushioned by oil and gas earnings and driven by the importance of meeting the needs of an increasing population, Qatar has indicated that it would continue with its investments in major infrastructural projects such as gas fields, water treatment and power plants and airports.

Amid the current financial turmoil, Qatar stands out as one of the few countries with steady growth and an array of business opportunities for Singapore's small and large enterprises.

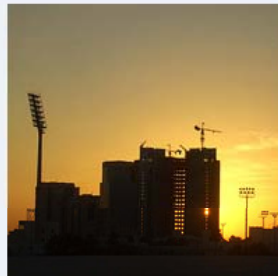
Opportunities for Singapore companies

"Many Qataris admire Singapore's progress on the basis of efficiency, integrity and excellence. [They] respect Singapore for our steady progress over the years in building up an economy from scratch without any natural resources, and are therefore keen to engage Singapore companies to help them build Doha into a vibrant city like Singapore," Feroz Siddiqui, Doha-based Centre Director for the Middle East and Africa at International Enterprise (IE) Singapore, said.

About US\$130 billion have been earmarked to build Qatar's infrastructures and to diversify its economy by 2020. This is positive news for Singapore businesses with the intention to set up or do business in Qatar and to seriously position themselves for the upswing of opportunities that lie ahead.

To date, most of the projects clinched by Singapore companies are in infrastructure services, such as master planning, architecture, interior design and facilities management. There are also similar opportunities in marine offshore services, towage and maritime services, offshore construction and maintenance engineering services.

Moreover, Qatar looks to invest heavily in environment-friendly buildings and facilities. Singapore companies that are able to integrate energy-efficient climate-control systems and technologies to create green living spaces will find a ready market in Qatar.



GCC countries: Singapore's 7th largest trading partner¹

Total bilateral trade between Singapore and Qatar, one of the six countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), increased by 50 percent from S\$6.7 billion in 2007 to S\$10.1 billion in 2008². Singapore's main exports to Qatar included civil engineering equipment parts, telecomms equipment and refined petroleum products.

The recently signed GCC-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (GSFTA) will further enhance trade between the GCC and Singapore. Singapore companies will enjoy immediate tariff elimination for most domestic exports to GCC and preferential access in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar for the following types of services: professional (such as legal, architectural, engineering and urban planning); construction; computer-related; and environmental.

For more information, please visit the [Singapore FTA Network](#) and [IE Singapore](#).

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Company: UPS
Expertise: Import/Export
Market: Asia Pacific, Europe

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Singapore companies with good track record and expertise in providing services such as education, tourism, transport and healthcare would also be able to find opportunities.

Key projects facilitated by IE Singapore

Since IE Singapore opened office in Doha in 2005, IE Singapore has successfully facilitated Singapore companies to venture into Qatar's infrastructure sector. Key projects include the integrated solid waste management facility by Keppel Seghers, master planning of two satellite towns of Al Wakra and Al Khor by Surbana International Consultants and the establishment of a regional supply base by Aqua-Terra Supply, an oil and gas equipment supplier.

Tips for Setting up Office in Qatar

Visa, work permits & driving licenses - Obtaining the necessary paperwork can be a complicated process, as all official documentation need to be completed in Arabic. Fortunately, there are local companies that offer translation services.

Nationals of 33 countries including Singapore and Malaysia can receive a visit-visa for a period of two weeks for a payment of about S\$45 upon arrival. For visas of a longer period, application should be made before flying to Qatar. Business visas, typically pre-obtained from a local Qatari company, are valid for a period of one to three months, while permanent employment visas (called Resident Permits) are valid for one to three years. Resident Permits are renewable and are granted to individuals who have employment contracts in Qatar.

Recruitment agencies - In the race for local and expatriate talent, employers are finding their efforts increasingly overshadowed by broader social and economic factors. High inflation in parts of the region has affected the purchasing power and saving potential of expatriates.

These conditions make finding qualified staff more challenging, and it is advisable to enlist the help of a professional recruitment agency. Key recruitment firms include Qatar Recruitment Agency, Ma Foi Management Consultant and Key Resources Recruitment Agency.*

Bank accounts - The process of opening a corporate bank account can take anywhere from one to three months after registering a business entity in Doha. A significant number of supporting documents are required, depending on the nature of your entity. Some documents require attestation by the Qatar embassy in the home country. Attestations from any GCC embassy are usually accepted by most authorities in Qatar.

Office rentals - There are primarily two kinds of office rentals in Qatar. Business centres, which come with comprehensive facilities comparable to those found in Singapore, are the first type. They are suitable for temporary office space typically needed for a few months up to a year. Notable business centers include Servcorp Smart Office, Gulf Business Centre, Regus Doha and Sidra Serviced Offices.*

Home rentals - Local newspaper classifieds are an appropriate source of real estate agents, who can assist with apartment rentals. Several contacts are listed daily, and it is advisable to get in touch with one of these agents shortly after arriving in Doha.

Rentals are quite high in Doha compared to Singapore. For example, a one-bedroom fully furnished studio apartment can cost roughly S\$2,000 to S\$3,000, while a three-bedroom semi-furnished apartment can range from S\$4,500 to S\$ 5,500.

Exit visas - All residents, except dependents, must have Exit Permits obtained from the sponsor and chopped by the immigration in order to leave the country. There are no restrictions on non-residents exiting the country, provided they have not overstayed.

Usually Exit Permits can be issued on the same day of travel in case of emergencies, but it is best to obtain them a few days in advance. Alternately the expatriate, with permission from the sponsor, can apply for an annual exit permit that is more expensive but gives peace of mind to the bearer.

** The companies listed are by no means an endorsement or guarantee by IE Singapore of their service quality or rates.*

For more information, please visit [IE Singapore website](#).

1. The GCC, which comprises Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, was Singapore's seventh largest trading partner after Malaysia, China, US, Indonesia, Japan and Hong Kong in 2007.
2. Based on latest available total trade figures from January to November 2008.

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