

Considering a Castle in the Sandbox?



Application to [QATAR Airways](#) – September, 2011

Arrival in Qatar

As an airport “professional”, the airport at Doha rates high. Entry into the country requires a visa. QATAR Airways had arranged for my business visa and thought there was nothing in my passport, the immigration officer found it immediately on her computer. For my wife, it was a matter of passing our credit card to the immigration agent and 30 seconds (and US\$25.00) later, a tourist visa was installed in the passport. The current airport is due to be replaced early next year by a brand new airport right next door. Currently, it is a bus operation to the arrival hall (pay attention that you do not disembark in the connection hall which appears to be the busiest). Once immigration is cleared, the bag retrieved, and customs bypassed, one enters an area with many small booths for car rentals and hotels. The major hotels are all represented and will provide transportation to your hotel.

Downtown Doha

We were paying for the first couple of nights in Doha and elected to stay at the relatively modest [Mercure Grand Hotel Doha City Centre](#). It is clean, but does not quite live up to the Mercure brand one expects. Fortunately, it is right downtown in the old city district and a block away (extreme caution crossing any roadways) from the Souq Wakif. *Warning!!* Across the street from this hotel is a major construction project. Six city blocks have been demolished to make way for facilities for the 2022 World Cup. Construction takes place around the clock. Do NOT accept a room on the ocean view side but take the city side and specify the non-smoking floor when you make your reservation.

Transportation is inexpensive with the equivalent of about CA\$5.00 taking you anywhere in the city. Souq Wakif is a must to walk through in the evening. The main passage had every kind of restaurant. Do NOT expect to find any that will serve alcohol. That is reserved for the hotel bars and is quite pricy (CA\$9.00/bottle). The food is excellent and the tiny shops that infest the souk offer exotic wares.

A trip to the City Mall in the Diplomatic District provides the daytime, air-conditioned entertainment. This mall includes a Carrefour (French equivalent of WalMart) with a full grocery floor. Prices of goods here are equivalent to Canada; a few higher, a few lower. Electronics are a bit pricier for TVs and computers. Clothing varies depending on Western style or traditional. A snap opinion would place cost of living (outside accommodation) at close to par with Canada, especially when factoring in the CA\$0.23/litre for gasoline.

The selection process.

The day before starting the selection process, we moved to the designated hotel provided by QATAR airways. This is a first class hotel ([Oryx Rotana Doha airport hotel](#)) situated beside the current airport. The introduction, exam, and interview take place on the first floor at this location. Rooms are large and wifi available (for a price). They promote their excellent yet pricy buffet however, within a ten minute

walk one can find a Pizza Hut, MacDonald's, and local fare. Ask the concierge the best way to walk there. I suggest walking through the park then crossing the main street at the far corner. Attempting to cross at other than a crosswalk (and even then) is hazardous.

The morning introduction starts at 0800 with candidates gathering in the lounge in front of the business centre on the first floor. There were eleven in our group with a real mix of nationalities. I was the only representative from North America. The introduction is short and covers what the basic contract includes and a little information on housing. [Check this link for a general contract outline](#). There is little opportunity for questions as, after a break (coffee and sandwiches provided) there is a 50 question exam. Many of the questions are very basic airmanship. None involve aircraft technical questions nor ETOPS items. Review TORA, TOGA, clearway, stopway definitions, as well as the multitude of V speeds (what, exactly, is V_{mca} ?) The questions are multiple-choice and you may bring a smartphone or calculator to help with pressure and temperature derivatives. Anyone who would like a bit of a head start on the exam questions, please send me a note through this forum.

While doing the exams, the QATAR representatives will be checking your documentation. They require all logbooks, licenses, passport, medical documents, and a copy of the paper generated by your last simulator ride (doesn't seem to matter that it doesn't really say anything). A bonus if you provide a letter(s) of recommendation. The documents will be returned by the end of the exam.

Once past the exam phase (all eleven passed), a time is assigned for your interview. In our case, it was still quite early so we agreed to meet for lunch at 12:00. This is provided by QATAR airways and the lunch buffet is quite spectacular. If your spouse is with you, bring him/her along (we didn't ask if this was acceptable). The coffee is great. We had a lively discussion among ourselves as to why we were here and where we came from. Three of the candidates were from Argentina.

The interview takes about an hour. One of the questions that will be asked is how you handled a difficult situation. The interviewers want detail, so I would suggest taking a relatively involved incident in your past and think through the details, then relate the whole story. If you provide enough information on how YOU made decisions and why, they will listen attentively (while scribbling notes). Otherwise, you will be bombarded by many questions from a very large question bank. In all, I had three questions asked, one being my cue for a story; "What was your most difficult day?" Remember that the answers should relate to you *flying* career. "Why are you here?" was another popular question. "The contribution I can make to a growing airline" goes over much better than mentioning issues about maximum age. Once again, for those interested, send me a note on the forum and I will forward further details.

The next stage was the simulator evaluation. We were initially given a pickup time of 2230, but they managed to move the times forward to pickup at 1730. When we gathered for the simulator pickup, our group was down by three. Suspect that difficulty with English may have been one of the issues with the eliminated candidates.

The two simulators are modern A320 and A330 Thale units. The B777 is too busy 24/7 to be used for anything other than training. The simulator building is about a 10 minute ride from the hotel and

adjacent to the current airport. Each candidate has a 45 – 60 minute session so plan on waiting at least four hours before returning to the hotel.

Preparation: Prior to the simulator, all pilots are given a briefing as to what they should expect. During the simulator session, there is no autopilot, autothrust, or flight directors available. The ND is kept in compass rose mode. The area being worked is LHR and departure runway is 27R. Remember to complete the takeoff briefings as the PNF will do nothing unless directed. Initial clearance is runway heading to 3,000 feet. Once you call for climb thrust at 1,000' the power is set by the PNF and subsequently belongs to you. Once at 1500 feet, call for speed bug set to 220 kts and commence acceleration. Retract flaps at F and S speeds on the speedtape. Once flaps retracted, call for the "AFTER TAKEOFF" CHECKLIST. For those who have not flown the Airbus for awhile, be prepared for a period of sheer panic as the first exercise after the level off at 3,000' is a right climbing turn to specific heading at a specific rate of climb (1,000 fpm) and specific bank angle (25 degrees). There was a moment there when I figured I had forgotten how to fly altogether. Fortunately my PNF was one of the chief instructors on the A330 and he reminded me that one must target one thing at a time, then *remove one's hand from the stick*. After a few moments of panic, things were once again under control, and the descent to 3,000 ft, 25 degree bank, left turn, 500 fpm turned out to be almost acceptable. A clearance was given to intercept a radial inbound (order PNF to set it up on the compass rose). Once the radial is established inbound, a clearance is given to intercept a radial outbound. The aircraft is then placed downwind for an ILS on 27R. If things have been a bit tense up to now, give control to the PNF while you do the briefing. This has the added advantage of having the PNF get the aircraft at the proper altitude/speed/power setting before you take over control. Once in control, ask for an approach checklist. Weather is good with a ceiling of 1,000'. Vectors are given to place the aircraft on a 90 degree intercept to the final approach course, then approach clearance is given. Use the needles on the rose to twig you to the proper time to turn onto final. Base leg was done at 1 flap. When cleared to 2500, that seems to be the cue to select flap 2. Glideslope alive, gear down and flap 3. Glideslope intercept, flap full and landing checklist. You must be stabilized with all checklists complete by 1,000' else execute a missed approach.

Once on the ground. Full stop, back to the button, re-configure for take-off, and cleared straight ahead to 3,000'. After takeoff and sometime after climb power commanded, the examiner advises that there is an engine, cargo, galley fire, some emergency that is critical but allows both engines to stay operating. Called for the "--- FIRE DRILL" then ECAM action (about the only Airbus command I remember) then followed the standard ABCOT procedure. Not sure if this was appropriate or not, but got vectors back to the ILS (though he forgot to clear me for the approach so had a bit of a scramble to get onto final), landed off the ILS (same as previous approach). Set the break at the intersection, conferred with the F/O that evacuation was appropriate, then called for the evacuation checklist. That was the end of the simulator session and from what I gathered from the other candidates, pretty much what they experienced as well. The F/O candidates did not have an emergency scenario on their second approach.

After everyone was done, we were all driven back to the hotel. As most were leaving early the following morning, we said our goodbyes. Due to the non-daily service from Doha to Montreal, my wife and I had

an extra day and invited one of the other candidates to accompany us the following day as we did a bit of a tour in a rented car.

Living in Doha

If you are planning to rent a car on QATAR, rent from an established company. You must secure the car with your credit card and there are rumours that some of the smaller companies take advantage of this procedure. We used Euro-car and they rented us a modern Honda Civic that was satisfactory but had many “battle scars”. The rental agent dutifully recorded all the marks on the vehicle before we drove away.

We were aware of three areas that QATAR placed their pilots. Captains qualify for a 3 bedroom residence while F/Os qualify for 2 bedrooms. The pilot we toured with was a First Officer based in Vietnam so we reviewed both types of accommodation. Our priorities were for modern, clean, and bright accommodation that would comfortably handle visitors and be within reasonable transit time to work and downtown. Facilities would have to include access to a swimming pool and exercise room (good intentions, anyway).

The first destination was [Holiday Villas](#). This complex has been around for awhile and though convenient to the airport is quite depressing. The unit we saw was roomy but tired with dated furniture (units provided by QATAR are all furnished) and “scruffy”. The rentals are arrayed around a central hotel tower which contains the exercise area and swimming pool. It also appears to be the residence for many of the QATAR flight attendants. We were not pleased with this complex though there may be better/cleaner units available.

The next living quarters were contained in a compound about 25 minutes from the airport called [Ain Khaled](#). There is a lot of construction along the route, and believe that it might often take over an hour to transit to work. The compound is OK and might be quite liveable. QATAR Airways has a specific area of the compound with villas that do NOT have private pools. We were unable to view any of the units but the central pool/recreation facility is very nice and has a coffee shop and juice bar. There is a large and modern mall close to this compound (with gondolas) and the liquor store (the ONLY liquor store) is in the area. One report is that the compound has a LOT of children and currently there is some issue with dog poop. It might be worth considering, but there are alternatives.

The next units were in the downtown diplomatic area close to the city mall. There are two towers on the waterfront beside the almost finished Hilton hotel. The Falconer and Pearl towers contain 1 – 4 bedroom units. We toured a couple and frankly, between the units and the area, they would be our first choice. Unfortunately, it appears that many QATAR pilots have been vying for these same digs and they will likely not be available.

There are likely other QATAR sponsored residences but we were unable to acquire a list.

The final alternative is to take the money QATAR is willing to give you for accommodation and find your own place. One of the pilots I talked to mentioned that many of their co-workers are negotiating great

deals for apartments at [the Pearl-QATAR](#). This is second hand information, but research online shows that this could be a very attractive destination. Unsure though how the transition works from QATAR sponsored accommodation to receiving the cash for your own place.

Transportation by taxi to the airport from any of these locations is a maximum of CA\$10.00. QATAR provides a transportation allowance that more than covers using taxis for work and personal transportation. If a vehicle is desired, they are relatively inexpensive and many are available on the used car market.

Considerations

There were opportunities to chat with several pilots. Here are some of the (second hand) highlights:

- B777 pays works out to about \$12,300US/flying month.
- Blocks vary from 70 – 100 hours.
- There is little choice in scheduling HOWEVER, if important time off is required, it is normally granted.
- Pay credits accumulate while in the bunk, but time credits do not.
- Long range flights are crewed by two Captains and two F/Os. One crew does the outbound takeoff and landing, the other crew does it on return. It would appear that F/Os do not get many landings!
- There is an ongoing effort to reduce double crew to three crewmembers (sound familiar?).
- Six weeks vacation are given in minimum 7 day blocks. Three weeks are taken in the summer, three in the winter. Vacation may be subject to buy-out.
- There is no practical way to commute.
- Many pilots had been there for over eight years. Some were seeking alternative employment after three years.
- There have been over 160 pilots leave QATAR airways since the beginning of the year.
- They plan on having 22 simulators operational within three years.
- There is little/no protection against dismissal if one happens to run afoul of management.
- The airline is on a buying spree and has a solid financial footing.

Observations

- It is a long way home. Transit time from Doha to Montreal is about 13 hours. The flight currently does not operate every day.
- Summertime temperatures are often over 40C. There is limited opportunity for outdoor activities even on the water.
- There is sand EVERYWHERE (and in everything).
- I could not reach a consensus from the pilots on general satisfaction. Some were enthusiastic, some not. Even among different age groups there was disagreement.
- The A330 pilots are currently overworked. Many had ongoing 90+ hour blocks.
- There are lots of destinations and unlimited ID90s are available on the airline.

After completing the screening there is about a three week gap until advised if hired. As we found out, though, those who do NOT pass the process are usually advised within two to three days. So far, there has been no indication one way or the other, but if successful, I will update this article with the exact terms of the contract.

Is QATAR Airways for you?

Personally, I found the introduction/testing process much more friendly than Emirates. The people at QATAR seem genuine and welcoming and do not present the “attitude” experienced at UAE. That being said, the benefit package is better at Emirates and it is definitely a larger operation (making an individual a smaller target). As for family living, there is much more to do in Dubai though the infrastructure is still better in QATAR. There does not appear to be much of a problem for westerners living in either country. There is much information on-line for potential ex-pats.

Every individual has their own priorities but it is worth exploring the opportunities being presented at this time in these fascinating countries.

Please keep this review confidential.