



## **Considering Qatar's World Cup Venue Strategy as a Framework for the Future**

*This case study is for the purposes of education only and does not suggest any good or bad practice on the part of anyone mentioned in the case study.*



Doha Skylines, Qatar. (Source: Jaseem Hamza,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20161029205816/http://www.panoramio.com/photo/105265154>)

**Bobby Goldwater**  
Georgetown University

## **ABSTRACT**

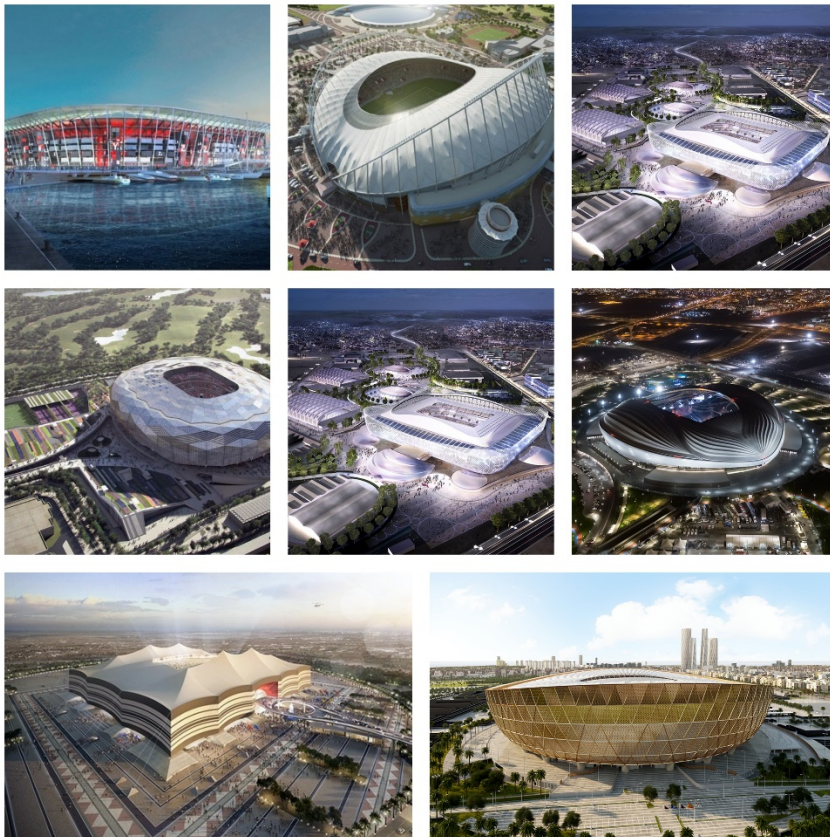
This case study considers whether Qatar's World Cup venue strategy could become a model for others. There are many special factors that go into Qatar's strategy including the small size of the country. Nonetheless, venue planning indicates that perceived constraints may be real advantages. Other hosts may wish to consider various elements of Qatar's venue planning as a framework for their own. These include stadia seating capacities, operational capabilities, locations, and legacies of the stadia and the values of proximity, efficiency and sustainability. Ultimately, though, it will be the professionalism and service in venue operations that will have the most lasting impact on legacy.

## **INTRODUCTION**

With the conclusion of the 2018 FIFA World Cup, the attention and focus of those who lead and follow the sport of football has turned to Qatar, the host of the next men's World Cup tournament in 2022. The benefits and challenges associated with awarding the privilege of staging the world's most passionate event to a small, wealthy country, where the unbridled fervor for the sport far exceeds national and regional competitive results, has been and likely will continue to be widely discussed and debated. Among the many highly visible and most consequential details with hosting a mega sports event involve the competition venues, including country-specific choices regarding the seating capacities, operational capabilities, locations, and legacies of the stadiums where matches will take place. Qatar's plan for its eight venues is distinctive and potentially instructive for its component concepts committed to proximity, efficiencies and sustainability.

### *Qatar's Proximity Strategy*

There is a significant amount of meaningful published material from sources ranging from sports trade publications to economic and environmental journals describing the combination of positive, questionable and unfortunate outcomes relating to the siting strategy and construction expense of stadiums in recent World Cup host countries, including Russia (2018) and Brazil (2014). Qatar's visionary, multi-faceted plan for its venues offers a potential blueprint for countries to consider for their future bids to host the major sports events that bring prestige, generate economic impact and attract business development and investment.



Qatar's stadiums. (Source: Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy website)

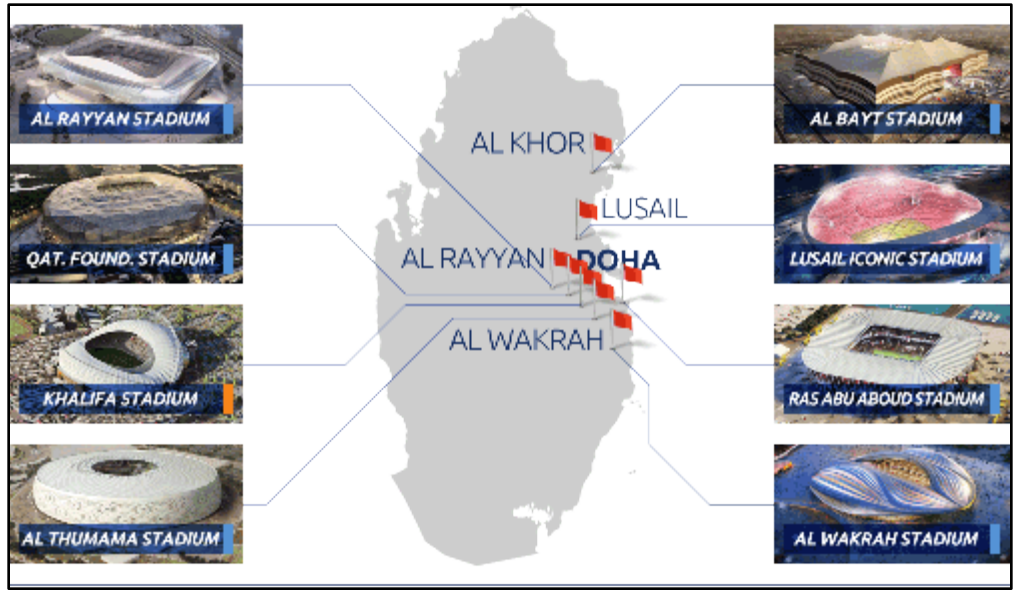
In awarding Qatar the 2022 World Cup, FIFA chose the smallest host country in square miles (4,416) and population (2.714 million people) in tournament history (FIFA) after two of the world's largest countries, Russia (6.612 million square miles, 143.956 million population) and Brazil (211.410 million square miles, 211.410 million population), were the World Cup destinations (Worldometers, 2018).<sup>1</sup>

Because of its size, Qatar will offer a comparatively intimate and distinctively compact footprint encompassing its eight football stadiums. In 2018, Russia held matches in 12 stadiums, including two in Moscow, stretching some 1,800 miles from Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea coast to Ekaterinburg at the base of the Ural Mountains. Four years earlier, Brazil also had 12 venues with an even wider geographic expanse, approximately 1,900 miles, between its two farthest cities, Manaus in the northwest Amazon rainforest and Porto Alegre in the south. The longest distance between two stadiums in Qatar will be just 35 miles, in what essentially will be tournament focused in the capital, Doha, nearby municipalities and an adjacent, newly created city, Lusail.

---

1. Demographic statistics for Brazil, Qatar and Russia, 2018, worldometers.info (website), <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>.





Locations of Qatar’s 2022 World Cup venues. (Source: dohadreams.com, 2018)



Locations of Brazil’s 2014 FIFA World Cup venues. (Source: Brasil 2014)



Locations of Russia's 2018 World Cup venues. (Source: Business Insider, 2018)

Instead of spending time and expense on elaborate travel, hotel and other arrangements to see matches at multiple venues in some combination of 12 destinations, as was required in Russia and Brazil, fans can expect to appreciate a superior experience in Qatar in 2022, with convenient transportation accessibility, a range of lodging options and iconic cultural attractions that will be showcased by a first-ever World Cup host country and region.

### ***Infrastructure***

As the Gulf Times newspaper<sup>2</sup> reported in a 2018 article updating the preparation for the World Cup, Qatar is investing in

“... new roads, hotels, museums, neighbourhoods, even towns ... Doha's first metro system, costing \$36 billion USD, is on track to open in 2019. Qatar expects up to 1.5 million fans to attend in 2022 and they will be housed in a combination of hotels, Airbnb properties, tents and some 12,000 on cruise ships.”

2. “Qatar surges ahead with 2022 World Cup plans,” *Gulf Times*, 19 July 2018, <https://www.gulf-times.com/story/600101/Qatar-surges-ahead-with-2022-World-Cup-plans>.

It is projected that Qatar's expenditures on infrastructure and other World Cup-related projects will approach \$200 billion USD.

A significant investment is being directed to the development, design and construction of the eight new and renovated football stadiums with costs estimated to be approaching \$10 billion USD, compared to Russia's almost \$5 billion USD and Brazil's nearly \$4 billion USD on their 12 World Cup tournament sites (Stadium DB.com, July 10, 2014 and July 11, 2018).<sup>3 4</sup> The enduring impressions from the 2022 FIFA World Cup can be expected to emanate from Qatar's spectacular venues which collectively will be the centerpiece in cementing its standing as a global sports destination.

A tour of the spectacular 2022 World Cup visitors' center at Al Bidda Tower in Doha proudly displays the determined vision, stirring mission and relentless progress of the host country. The vision, "using the power of football to deliver amazing," exclaims a standard of excellence that seems to have stirred the entire country and is being activated by the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy.

### *Design, Sustainability, Legacy*

The aspirational designs for the eight new or renovated stadiums are intended to reflect the culture and traditions of Qatar and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The seating capacities will range from the largest, 80,000 at Lusail Stadium, to several at 40,000

---

3. "Report: How much did Brazil spend on World Cup stadiums," 10 July 2014, StadiumDB.com (website).

4. "Report: Why is Russia's World Cup so expensive? (Part 1)," 11 July 2018, StadiumDB.com (website).

(FIFA World Cup 2022-Qatar-The Stadium Guide, 2018).<sup>5</sup> There is an impressive sustainability and legacy plan for each venue and its surrounding community that should serve as an inspirational example for future mega sports events and their host countries.

Among the important commitments to sustainability that Qatar is incorporating into its stadiums are the use of renewable energy, the implementation of green construction and the certification for the Global Sustainability Assessment System. Venue cooling systems will introduce hybrid ventilation to maintain temperatures of 24-28 degrees Celsius and smart power technology will include solar panels.

Leaders of and bid solicitations for global sports mega-events, particularly the World Cup and the Olympic Games, have strived to encourage prospective organizers to feature plans for legacy initiatives for their venues. Qatar's intentions for each of the eight stadiums are noteworthy and will be laudable if they are fully executed as expected. Included in these blueprints are the introduction of community markets and green spaces in stadium neighborhoods and, especially ambitious, reducing the seating capacity of some stadiums from 40,000 to 20,000 by removing and donating the upper tiers. In the specially designed case of Ras Abu Aboud Stadium, there will be a complete dismantling, loading and shipping of the 40,000-seat, port-situated venue to another country for the ultimate legacy of additional football use.

### ***Achievements in Sport Hosting***

Hosting the World Cup in 2022 will be the crowning achievement in a year-long, Qatari economic, tourism, business and globalization strategy that has employed major international competitions for purpose of establishing the country as global sports destination and regional

---

5. "FIFA World Cup 2018 Stadiums – Russia," The Stadium Guide (website), [stadiumguide.com/tournaments/fifa-world-cup-2018/](http://stadiumguide.com/tournaments/fifa-world-cup-2018/).



cultural center. Among the events that have been hosted in Qatar are the 2006 Asian Games, 2010 World Indoor Athletics Championships, 2011 Asian Football Confederation Cup and 2011 Pan Arab Games, 2015 Handball World Championships, 2015 IPC Athletics World Championships and the 2018 World Gymnastics Championships. In addition, there are top professional tournaments that come annually to Qatar including stops on the men's ATP and women's WTA tennis tours and the men's golf Qatar Masters. As many scholars, authors and experts who study the MENA region, including Hiba Khodr of Lebanon's American University of Beirut, have observed, "Qatar is using events as a way to reimage and position itself as a destination and increase its profile internationally in addition to gaining a competitive edge regionally" ("Exploring the driving factors behind the event strategy in Qatar: A case study of the 15th Asian Games," 2012). Qatar has taken full advantage of its central, Middle East location with most of Europe, North Africa and Asia within a few-hours flight of Doha to attract sports fans to events as well as tourists to attractions and businesspeople to economic opportunities. With a record of staging high-visibility events and accommodating demanding audiences, Qatar has successfully raised its international profile and prospects. With the 2022 World Cup as its sports centerpiece and a stated goal to bid for and host a Summer Olympic Games, Qatar remains committed to having sports continue to contribute to its national vision of transforming the country "into an advanced society capable of achieving sustainable development" by 2030. The plan's development goals are divided into four central pillars: economic, social, human and environmental development, all of which sports are expected to play an ongoing role.

While the benefits to Qatar for hosting the singular sports event that captures the attention and emotions of worldwide sports fans more than any other are many, there are several challenges that will require attention in order to successfully stage the World Cup that so many

will be watching. With the tournament dates in 2022 somewhat controversially shifted from the traditional summer weeks to the more temperate months of November and December in the Middle East, there will be heightened expectations for offering a superior guest experience that Qatar will need to meet and even exceed. The invited football fans will have to be made to feel welcome and comfortable in a country that is faithful to its cultural and traditional customs. While attendance projections suggest 1.2 to 1.5 million visitors are likely to attend Qatar's World Cup, which would be more than double the number of fans who attended Brazil's World Cup in 2014, Qatar should anticipate a potentially higher number, based on the positive promotion of its central location that could draw fans from Europe, Africa, Asia and the rest of the MENA region.

### ***Venue Operations Challenges***

But, the biggest test could well be how Qatar operates the eight football stadiums during the 32-nation tournament. There will be thousands of representatives of key stakeholders from around the world, including football executives, government officials, media, sponsors and others in addition to the fans, who will be experiencing Qatar and, most importantly, attending the matches. Venue management requires expertise in executing a list of specialized disciplines. From safety and security to staffing and sales, from food service to customer service, from maintenance to marketing, from ticketing to grounds keeping, a capable and dedicated staff needs to be hired, trained and supervised by knowledgeable venue management professionals. Those individuals from Qatar and the extended MENA region who have the required qualifications likely will need to be augmented by venue and event executives with experience running world-class stadiums and major competitions for the World Cup to be the unparalleled success that is envisioned.

## **A FINAL THOUGHT**

As the world admires the magnificence Qatar looks forward to sharing – the inspired designs and intimate layout of its football stadiums, the stunning architecture and cultural atmosphere of its capital city, its traditional customs and modern amenities, its opportunities and optimism, its warm and welcoming people – the lasting perception of the country, as has been the case with hosts of all recent global sports mega-events, ultimately will be determined by the competence and professionalism displayed in managing and operating the football venues, including the mastering of the associated disciplines and services required to capably present the most-watched sports competition in the world.

## Considering Qatar's World Cup Venue Strategy as a Framework for the Future

### Teaching Note

This case study introduces significant factors and considerations after a country has successfully bid to stage a prestigious sports mega-event, specifically Qatar hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup. A number of primary subjects and issues that received attention are available for further exploration, analysis and discussion.

### Learning Outcomes

The case study is intended to provide readers with information and insights to be able to:

1. Explain and apply the key disciplines and priorities associated with venue and event management.
2. Evaluate and analysis the costs and benefits associated with hosting a global sports mega-event
3. Explore and recognize strategies, goals and opportunities associated with staging major sports events
4. Discuss the needs and expectations of various stakeholders involved with the management of a global sports mega-event

### Questions for Analysis and Critical Thinking

1. With the amount of resources that has been committed to staging the 2022 World Cup, a projected cost/benefit analysis is appropriate. What can Qatar reasonably, aspirationally and strategically expect to receive as measurements of success, both as returns on its investment (ROI) and objective (ROO)?
2. How can hosting a sports mega-event contribute positively to national goals for its future, such as Qatar envisions the World Cup will do for its National Vision 2030? How have countries hosting similar global events succeeded or missed the mark in the past?
3. What are the venue and event management disciplines and practices that are most critical to operational success? How should they be prioritized?
4. Opening a venue involves a series of steps and complexities; introducing eight new or renovated sports stadiums into a market places a premium on the required details for planning and implementation. What are the phases to opening on which Qatari operators will need to concentrate to successfully integrate their World Cup venues in the community?
5. Qatar's innovative design and construction plan for its eight football stadiums focuses on sustainability and legacy. Through an analytical evaluation, how does Qatar's plan compare to the two most recent World Cup and Olympic Games host countries' actual results in these two vital areas?

6. How realistic is Qatar's housing plan to augment its expected 46,000 hotel rooms with a supplemental lodging options including cruise ships and tents in desert camps?
7. What significance or value will there be for Qatar by hosting major sports events in the years leading up to the 2022 World Cup?

### **Venue and Event Management Disciplines and Priorities**

As identified by leading industry executives with the International Association of Venue Managers, Georgetown University's Sports Industry Management master's program and other top experts, the following is a list of disciplines and priorities that are essential to the professional management and operation of sports venues:

**Venue Operations** – Daily, back-of-house, engineering, housekeeping, maintenance, changeover, groundskeeping, playing surfaces, staging, rigging, IT, FF&E

**Booking/Scheduling** – Booking process, tenant relations, event/venue scheduling, special events, deal structures, rent yield, promoters, agents, economic impact

**Box Office/Ticketing** – Ticketing systems, ticketing methods (building v. team), box office structure, ticket scaling, setting up an event, box office operations/procedures, secondary market, new technologies

**Marketing** – Websites/internet/digital media, broadcast (TV, radio), print, ad plans, event marketing, venue marketing, industry advertising, group sales

**Public Relations** – Publicizing events and venues, industry publications, communicating to the public, spokespeople, media relations and services, accreditation, emergency preparedness

**Media** – Broadcasting, digital, traditional, technology, production coordination

**Sales & Sponsorship** – Team sales v. building sales, sponsor rights, sponsor/partnership opportunities, activations, promotions, executive seating, suites, club seats, seat licenses, signage, media rights

**Customer Service** – Front-of-house, event staffing, ushers, ticket takers, venue and event security, accessibility services, customer issues, complaint resolution

**Event Management/Event Production/Event Coordination** – Event/operational details, working with shows, advancing information, distributing information, organizing event, coordinating requirements/specifications, event presentation/game operations, equipment, working with all departments, working with promoters

**Staffing/Human Resources/Labor Relations** – Training, practices and principles, employee engagement, performance management, volunteers, unions, negotiations

**Legal/Safety** – Contract negotiation and management, compliance, negligence, first aid, fire codes, permitting, safety codes, training, insurance, risk management, ticket scalping, indemnification

**Financial Management** – Budgets, policies, forecasts, revenues, expenses, settlement, capital projects

**Government/Community** – Coordination/communication with local/national government and business/civic stakeholders, mega-shelters, disaster relief, emergency management

**Venue Design & Development** – Project management, planning, criteria and priorities, services

**Sustainability/Legacy** – Recycling, renewable energy, certification designation, ongoing venue utilization

**Food Service & Merchandising** – Contract v. in-house, types of deals, types of food service, food service logistics, hospitality, catering, merchandise deals, merchandise logistics, bootleg merchandise

**Guest Management** – Hotels/lodging, coordinating/fulfilling guests' needs

**Training** – Site selection, facilities, security, logistical coordination

**Circulation/Transportation** – Parking, traffic, parking lots/garages, pedestrians, deliveries, infrastructure coordination, teams/officials/priority transportation coordination

**Creating Events/Generating New Revenue** – Creating new events, neighborhood/city/state considerations, analysis of venue, identifying/implementing new revenue streams, venue efficiencies, programming and content

Sources: Georgetown University Sports Industry Management Program; International Association of Venue Managers; *the Sports Event Management and Marketing Playbook, Second Edition*; *Public Assembly Venue Management*.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Al Heialy, Y. "Qatar's World Cup stadiums to cost \$10bn, official says." *Arabian Business* (website). 22 May 2016. [arabianbusiness.com/qatar-s-world-cup-stadiums-cost-10bn-official-says-632410.html](http://arabianbusiness.com/qatar-s-world-cup-stadiums-cost-10bn-official-says-632410.html).

Benson, M. "Qatar 2022 World Cup: Latest spectacular images of planned and completed stadiums." *talksport.com* (website). 21 May 2018.

Demographic statistics for Brazil, Qatar and Russia, 2018, [worldometers.info](http://worldometers.info) (website), <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>.

"FIFA World Cup 2018 Stadiums – Russia." *The Stadium Guide* (website). [stadiumguide.com/tournaments/fifa-world-cup-2018/](http://stadiumguide.com/tournaments/fifa-world-cup-2018/).

"FIFA World Cup 2022 Stadiums – Qatar." *The Stadium Guide* (website). [stadiumguide.com/tournaments/fifa-world-cup-2022-stadiums-qatar/](http://stadiumguide.com/tournaments/fifa-world-cup-2022-stadiums-qatar/).

Mahoney, K., Eskilsen, L., Jeralds, S., Camp, S. *Public Assembly Venue Management: Sports, Entertainment, Meeting, and Convention Venues*. Dallas, TX: Brown Books Publishing Group. 2015.

"Events hosting plays a key role in Qatar's sports industry development – The Report: Qatar 2016." *Oxford Business Group* (website). 2016. [oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/events-hosting-has-played-central-role-development-industry-skin-game](http://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/events-hosting-has-played-central-role-development-industry-skin-game).

"Report: How much did Brazil spend on World Cup stadiums?" *StadiumDB.com* (website). 10 July 2014.

"Report: Why is Russia's World Cup so expensive? (Part 1)." *StadiumDB.com* (website). 11 July 2018.

Supovitz, F., Goldwater, R. *The Sports Event Management and Marketing Playbook, Second Edition*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. 2014.

The Stadium Guide – FIFA World Cup 2014. [stadiumguide.com/tournaments/fifa-world-cup-2014/](http://stadiumguide.com/tournaments/fifa-world-cup-2014/)