



## **Qatar opportunities' meet a big draw in UK**

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**A view of the audience at the 'Business Opportunities in Qatar' conference in London.**

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The appetite for British companies to do business in Qatar was well-illustrated this week at a packed seminar organised by Major Events International (MEI) in collaboration with their hosts Simmons &

Simmons.

The event was also supported by the Middle East Association and ADS — Advancing UK Aerospace, Defence, Security & Space Industries, globally.

CEO MEI, Dennis Mills, opened the seminar and the scene setter was provided by IHS Mena country Risk Analyst Jamie Ingram; and research director, Cross Border Information, Eleanor Gillespie. They provided succinct profiles of Qatar's history, foreign policy, economy and government structures, setting the frame for the detailed information that followed on doing business in the State.

Andrew Wingfield, regional head, Simmons & Simmons Middle East, attended from Doha to talk the delegates through the key steps that should be followed when setting up in Qatar in order to comply with local regulations and avoid expensive errors.

Keynote speakers included: Chris Ford, police and security adviser, UK Trade & Investment Defence & Security Organisation; John Hawkins, former British ambassador to Qatar; Gareth Evans, VectorCommand; Peter Ryan, IndigoVision; **Tilman Engel, MEI associate Qatar, Sport Business Consulting (SBC) International**; and Perry Smith, Culture Bridge & former Sports Business Adviser to HE the President Qatar Olympic Committee & director, Marketing & International Relations, Qatar Sports Investment.

The seminar was held under the Chatham House rule to encourage free and frank discussion. Statements can thus be observed but not attributed. Here is a round-up of some of the key points made by speakers and delegates.

Top of the list of advice given was to show respect for the religion and culture of Qatar and to understand that Islam governs all aspects of life. Any shows of impatience or worse displays of temper are absolutely to be avoided as these are game-enders. This does not mean that tenacious and sustained bargaining cannot be deployed, but always in a civilised manner. Being amenable to building relationships with local partners is key to success as great importance is placed on personal relationships and friendships.

Having the patience to wait for deals to be done is essential. Executives in Doha were advised to get their UK bosses to come over for a visit. This exposure to how business is done on the ground can help take the heat off the team dealing with the day to day realities and allay suspicions of bosses back in the UK that 'their man in Doha' is slacking or sloping off to the beach.

In addition to being patient — be ready to move fast once a decision is made. The pace, as it was put by one speaker is often — 'Wait, Wait, Hurry, Hurry!'

Factor in to planning that key decision makers are not likely to be on hand during the summer months after Ramadan and Eid festivals.

Remember that local agents should be valued for their insights into business opportunities that only those well-connected and well-established can hope to acquire: "The agents build a lobby in the Majlis."

"Always protect your guy on the ground from over-zealous spread-sheet readers."

Bear in mind that if you have an exclusive arrangement with an agent you must compensate the agent if the arrangement is broken.

Remember to involve local expertise; small problems can quickly escalate into big problems but a local can ease and smooth the path. Mutual sharing of expertise is a win-win.

At all costs avoid going to court to resolve disputes. Use arbitration.

In the event of late payments use dialogue and reasoning to resolve the problem. Avoid corrupt practices as penalties are harsh.

Do your spade work; double check what the prime contractor tells you. He may not always be the prime contractor.

Be aware that profit split can be more than equity split.

Remember to have all documents ready to print in Arabic — don't be caught out by this simple but all too common error. Face up to the fact that there is going to be a lot of paperwork and just work your way through it in the expectation that there will be yet more additional requests for paperwork.

If you are attending a conference in a hotel and you are asked what you would like a drink — don't offend the hosts by ordering alcohol. Show common sense and stick to soft drinks.

Remember to be sensitive to local culture and laws. One company had to send two staff home after a male and female shared an apartment — even though it was a four-bedroom flat and they were in

separate rooms and only sharing the living space.

Exercise caution and avoid talking politics. Remember when looking for opportunities to read Qatar 2030 Vision. Here, the full range of business opportunities can be assessed. In addition to the World Cup 2022 there are significant opportunities, for example, around infrastructure (railways and port) and capacity building and education.

Keep initial presentations brief; government officials are extremely busy and dislike lengthy opening presentations — four or five slides is enough to illustrate the key points — (management consultants take note).

Companies keen to win contracts related to security and policing the World Cup should make sure they are on the approved Vendor List. British expertise is highly regarded for policing and big event security; facial recognition and biometrics are, for example, fields where the British are seen to excel.

The Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy which ensures that all preparations for the 2022 FIFA World Cup align with Qatar's other development imperatives, as described in the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy 2011-2016, is looking for the very latest technology: the idea is not to present just what you have now but to offer what will be available over the coming years according to current research.

Five Stadia contracts should be announced within the next six months. Only two have been awarded to date.

Utilise the resources and advice of UKTI and remember to make contact with the embassy for commercial as well as political information.

Finally, "Commit — dabblers don't succeed." Prepare for a two year run-in and build in unforeseen costs, for example, over design changes.

Judging from the interest shown during the Q&A and the discussion at the reception that followed the conference, a lot of companies are determined to invest their time and energy and expertise in Qatar.