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## SHORT REPORT

# Postcards from Qatar: Introduction

Eleanor Preston

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This report is the first of a series of ‘Postcards from Qatar’ aimed at providing information and updates on projects conducted by UCL Qatar in the region by both staff and students. This initial postcard provides an overview of UCL Qatar courses and facilities, an account of campus life, as well as a review of an exhibition for Doha’s Msheireb Museum created by the museum studies masters students.

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## Introduction

UCL Qatar, established in 2011, is located in Education City, Doha and is part of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. The Qatar Foundation is a non-profit, national organisation set up to establish Qatar as a leader in education, science and cultural development, which invites international universities (such as UCL) to Education City to set up programmes that in time Qatar Foundation and the local universities will take over and run.

The campus is currently home to several international universities including Georgetown University, Texas A&M University, Carnegie Mellon University (CMU Qatar), Northwestern University, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU Qatar) and Weill Cornell Medical College. The campus is very spread out, covering 14 square kilometres, so getting around is helped by shuttle buses that run throughout the week and connect all the main buildings.

These shuttles are particularly necessary in the summer months when temperatures get

above 40°C and walking between buildings becomes difficult. Education City itself is located west of Doha city centre and in some ways is a little isolated. While a metro system is under construction, the current public transport is limited so getting off campus can be problematic. Students must take a taxi to explore the city and to visit attractions such as the Museum of Islamic Art, the market Souq Waqif and the Corniche waterfront promenade as well as various shopping malls that are home to many international brands.

## Education City Accommodation

Student accommodation is on-campus and is divided into female and male halls. Each hall has five buildings and comprises undergraduate study rooms with shared facilities as well as studios and one and two bedroom apartments for postgraduate and research students. There are also facilities for married couples and those with families. The housing is spacious, modern and has limited smart home facilities to control temperature and lights. Throughout the halls are comfortable seating areas where students can study privately or socialise together. A cafeteria provides meals for those too busy to cook. The Halls have regular student events that



**Figure 1:** Education city (E.C.) shuttle, E.C. Green Spine and E.C. Ceremonial Court.



**Figure 2:** Education city Accommodation.

range from movie nights (complete with popcorn and pizza) to health and fitness classes.

### **UCL Qatar Department and Facilities**

The UCL Qatar department specialises in postgraduate programmes focused on archaeology, conservation, museum and gallery studies, and library science. It shares a building with the American Georgetown University and facilities include a library with specialised materials on the archaeology of the region and museum studies, as well as conservation and material science labs. The labs have specialised equipment that the students can learn to use such as SEM, XRF, portable XRF, digital x-ray and optical microscopes. There are also sample preparation and layout rooms. UCL Qatar, like London, holds public lecture series and students are free to attend these as well as those offered by the other universities on campus. These series are also complemented by

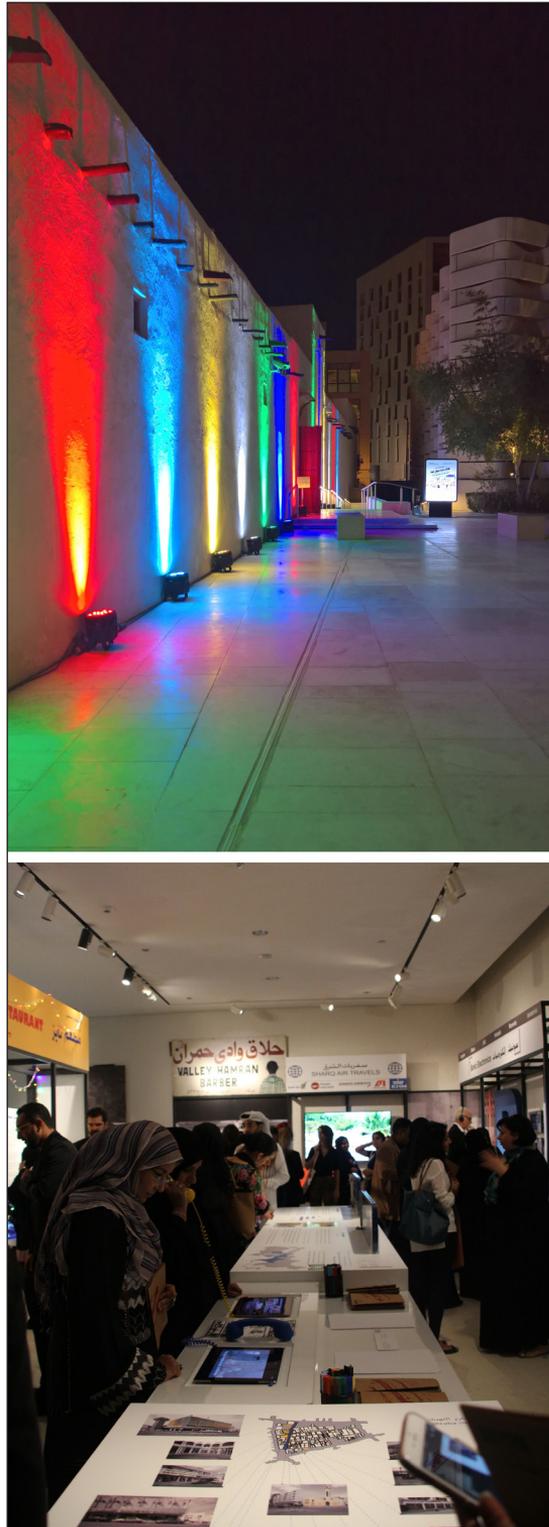
events organised by the Qatar Foundation, which include lectures as well as cultural days where food, dance and other traditional activities are set up for students to experience.

### **The Msheireb Museum**

During 2016/17 as part of their degree program, the Museum and Gallery Practice MA students put together a small exhibition, *'Back to Msheireb: Shared Streets-Shared Stories'*, for their core 'Exhibition Project' module. Their work is put on display at the Msheireb Museum in conjunction with UCL Qatar and Qatar Museums. The Msheireb Museum is comprised of four historic houses in the heart of downtown Doha and represents aspects of Qatar culture and social development. The Msheireb project is part of the inner-city rejuvenation of the old commercial centre where the traditional community-based lifestyle is preserved. The four heritage houses were restored and



**Figure 3:** UCL-Q Library, UCL-Q Conservation Labs and UCL-Q Archaeological Materials Labs.



**Figure 4:** Msheireb Museum and UCL Qatar students' exhibition.



**Figure 5:** Doha city centre and the Torch.

have become a place where local people can engage with their past as well as their future. The exhibition is a hands-on experience with materials from the 1980s onwards. It is during this time that the area became the home of new residents from outside Qatar. The neighbourhood became multi-ethnic in character with busy streets and shops as well as the commercial centre of a growing city. *'Back to Msheireb: Shared Streets-Shared Stories'* celebrates this diversity and explores the integration of these cultures as new residents arrived in Doha. All the displays can be physically interacted with and include electronics, rich textiles, a game and a photo studio complete with a chaise longue. Throughout the exhibition there are audio-visual stations where visitors can

watch videos of residents, past and present, telling stories about their experience living in Msheireb. These oral histories provide a context for the interactive displays. Opening night was busy and bustling. The clear favourite of the displays was the studio where people waited in turn to sit and have their group photo taken. At the centre console is a map of the world showing the countries from where Msheireb's new residents originated. Part of this display included stickers so that visitors who live(d) in Msheireb could mark their own places of origin on the map.

#### **Arrival and Study**

My first impression of Doha was by night and the city centre was awash with coloured lights that lit up the modern, glass buildings.

Education City seemed big at first, especially in the dark. However, after a week of riding on the shuttle I realised that while the distance between buildings is big, there are only about a dozen of them and each is self-contained. This is unlike London where one department leads into another and buildings are shared and connected. Much of what is here is familiar from the food to the shops, and homesickness and culture shock seem a distant possibility. I arrived in winter, when the temperature was comfortable and there were even showers of rain to make me feel at home, but summer is coming and already it is getting stiflingly hot. Many of the locals, university staff and undergraduates flee

Qatar in July and August to escape the heat and humidity but those of us engaged in postgraduate study cannot leave so freely at this time, carrying on research and writing dissertations. However, air conditioning is everywhere so at least while we work we can be comfortable and avoid venturing outside except for when it is necessary. I have been here since January 2017 and will remain for two years but Qatar is welcoming and friendly and, while I may miss a few luxuries from home, living and studying in Doha will be a pleasure.

### Competing Interests

The author is a doctoral student at UCL Qatar.

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