

Audience Research for Qatar Museums

Author **Sue Underwood OBE**
 Institution Qatar Museums Authority, Doha, Qatar
 e mail sunderwood@qma.org.qa

Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) is developing a variety of different museums. It is essential that QMA understands the needs and expectations of potential audiences. As part of this process, during 2011, a significant ongoing research project investigating potential family audiences for museums in Qatar was undertaken.

The objectives fall into two categories: understanding the demographics of potential family audiences and their perceptions of museums and secondly understanding current family usage of museums in Qatar and neighboring countries.

It focused upon developing an understanding of the needs of families during leisure time, and their motivations for family activities. Perceptions of museums as family destinations were sought and actual behavior in museums recorded.

The research was conducted over two phases from winter 2010 to summer 2011, and consisted of a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

* Questionnaires were sent to all eligible schools in Qatar and forwarded to every pupil's family. Focus groups explored motivations for and expectations of, family engagement with museums.

* Motivations and expectations were further tested through observation of family visits to museums and comparable venues.

* In depth discussions with family groups.

Results have confirmed a significant interest in museum visitation. Families are motivated by a variety of factors, which can be divided into social, intellectual and emotional categories. The majority (72%) of families are motivated by social factors (e.g. the desire to spend enjoyable time with family). This percentage is significantly higher than is normally exhibited in Europe and America, suggesting a cultural difference.

Observations confirmed this social motivation, but highlighted a lack of familiarity with museums as venues for interaction. Challenges faced by family visitors were highlighted, including orientation, exhibit usage and how best to support children's learning.

The research indicated a potential family audience for museums in Qatar, and built an understanding of the motivating factors for visits, illustrating a marked difference from other countries. It has also shown several potential barriers to family engagement in museums which must be addressed for museums to successfully appeal to this key audience.