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From Leisure to Legacy: The Role of Staycations in Strengthening Cultural Identity in Qatar

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Abstract

This study investigates the cultural significance of staycations among Qatari nationals, positioning domestic tourism not merely as a substitute for international travel, but as a culturally meaningful practice that contributes to national identity, social cohesion, and intergenerational continuity. While staycations gained prominence globally during the COVID-19 pandemic, in Qatar, they have evolved into intentional acts of cultural engagement that align with broader state narratives, particularly those underpinning Qatar National Vision 2030. Drawing on a mixed-methods design, this research combines survey data from 152 Qatari respondents with ten in-depth qualitative interviews involving residents, tourism professionals, and cultural stakeholders. Quantitative findings reveal strong correlations between staycation frequency, cultural pride, place attachment, and family involvement. Respondents expressed high levels of agreement with statements linking local travel to emotional well-being, community trust, and a deeper connection to Qatari heritage. The qualitative data enrich these trends, unveiling how staycations function as modern cultural rituals, reaffirming traditional practices such as storytelling, food preparation, and collective memory-making. New emergent themes, such as “tourism as civic participation,” further highlight how staycations are seen by some as soft expressions of patriotism and national responsibility. The study draws upon Cultural Capital Theory, Place Attachment Theory, and Social Cohesion frameworks to interpret how domestic tourism practices reinforce national belonging in a rapidly globalising society. By framing staycations as vehicles for cultural continuity and civic engagement, the study expands current understandings of leisure in the Gulf context and addresses a notable gap in tourism scholarship. It concludes with practical recommendations for policymakers and cultural institutions, calling for tourism planning that goes beyond economic indicators to include cultural value metrics, generational inclusivity, and identity-building objectives.

Keywords: Cultural identity, Domestic tourism, Place attachment, Qatar, Soft nationalism, Staycations.

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of the "staycation", a vacation spent within one's home country or locality, has gained increasing popularity worldwide. Although the term surged in relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic, when international travel was restricted, its appeal has persisted long after global mobility resumed. In the Gulf region, particularly Qatar, staycations have moved beyond being a temporary substitute for outbound travel. Instead, they have evolved into meaningful cultural practices with long-term implications for identity formation, heritage appreciation, and social cohesion.

As Qatar continues to position itself as both a global destination and a protector of national heritage, domestic tourism has taken on a symbolic dimension. This shift reflects broader policy

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trends embedded within Qatar National Vision 2030, which emphasises cultural sustainability, social development, and national pride as equal partners to economic growth. In this framework, tourism is no longer viewed solely through an economic lens, it becomes a civic and cultural mechanism that supports internal reflection, local engagement, and soft forms of nation-building (Al-Hamarneh, 2022).

Despite increasing interest in Qatar's global image, particularly around mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup 2022, the internal dynamics of local tourism remain under-researched. Much academic work continues to focus on international branding, foreign investment in hospitality, and high-profile events (Henderson, 2020; Al-Marri & Scott, 2023). This study seeks to fill that gap by examining staycations as a culturally embedded phenomenon that reflects and shapes how Qatari nationals understand their identity, their land, and their role in society.

The key research question is therefore: How do staycations in Qatar contribute to strengthening national identity, cultural continuity, and community bonding in an increasingly globalised society? To answer this, the study applies a multidisciplinary theoretical lens and a mixed-methods empirical approach, centring Qatari voices, behaviours, and motivations in the analysis.

The Cultural Turn in Domestic Tourism

Tourism has long been viewed not only as a mode of consumption but also as a practice of cultural performance and symbolic participation. Classic theorists like MacCannell (1976) frame tourism as a search for authenticity, a mediated interaction with places that hold cultural, historical, or emotional meaning. Later scholars, including Urry and Larsen (2011), expanded this idea through the concept of the "tourist gaze," whereby travellers construct meaning through visual and experiential encounters.

While most tourism literature prioritises international travel, there is a growing recognition that domestic tourism plays a vital role in shaping internal identity narratives, particularly in smaller nations or those undergoing rapid transformation (Richards, 2018). In such contexts, travel within one's own borders becomes a tool of cultural reaffirmation, memory-making, and intergenerational dialogue.

In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, this shift is especially evident. Traditionally reliant on outbound tourism and expatriate-driven hospitality industries, states like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are now investing in internal tourism development, often with a cultural or heritage focus (AlMahadin & Matar, 2021). Domestic travel, once seen as limited or less prestigious, is now being rebranded as both aspirational and patriotic. In Oman and Saudi Arabia, recent studies (e.g., Al-Hidabi et al., 2022; Bakar & Rosli, 2023) found that local residents increasingly engage in tourism not just for recreation, but to reconnect with traditions, cuisine, crafts, and communal values.

Qatar follows this pattern, albeit with a unique emphasis on aligning staycations with cultural policy. Programmes such as Qatar Museums' Cultural Pass, Al Enna desert camps, and heritage-focused city tours are explicitly framed not just as attractions, but as educational and identity-building experiences.

To better understand the cultural impact of staycations, the study draws on Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital. Bourdieu argued that individuals accumulate non-economic assets, such as knowledge, language, taste, and aesthetic sensibility, that shape their social identity and reinforce class or community belonging.

In this context, staycations in Qatar can be seen as arenas for acquiring cultural capital. When citizens visit heritage sites, engage with oral histories, or participate in traditional crafts and cuisine, they are not merely relaxing, they are absorbing symbolic knowledge about what it means to be Qatari. This is particularly important for younger generations who may not have direct access to traditional village life or nomadic heritage.

Such informal, leisure-based learning experiences function as "cultural classrooms," where identity is not taught in a formal curriculum but enacted through practice. A family trip to Al Zubarah Fort or a curated walk through Msheireb Downtown may provide more lasting cultural impressions than a textbook. This aligns with constructivist theories of learning, which emphasise the importance of experiential, situated knowledge.

In many cases, these experiences are not individual but collective, undertaken as family rituals during Eid, Ramadan, or school holidays. This communal nature adds a layer of performative identity, where cultural values are not just learned but enacted through shared meals, dress, language, and ritual.

Place Attachment and Belonging in the Local Landscape

The emotional bond between people and places, known as place attachment, has been widely studied in environmental psychology and human geography (Lewicka, 2011). In the context of domestic tourism, it helps explain why repeated visits to familiar places can produce strong emotional identification, especially when those places hold historical or cultural meaning.

Scannell and Gifford (2010) conceptualise place attachment as both affective (emotional connection) and cognitive (place-based memory and meaning). In Qatar, these dynamics are evident in popular staycation destinations such as Souq Waqif, Katara Cultural Village, or the Al Wakrah Corniche. These spaces serve as more than recreational areas, they are sites of cultural memory, where Qatari identity is materialised and maintained.

Unlike international travel, which often involves gazing at the unfamiliar, staycations offer a mirror: they reflect back the traveller's own cultural roots, history, and place in the nation's story. This reflection is particularly important in a society undergoing rapid demographic change and globalisation, where the need for cultural anchoring becomes increasingly urgent.

Moreover, frequent engagement with these spaces can lead to a sense of civic ownership. Citizens begin to see themselves not merely as consumers of culture but as custodians of national heritage. This shift transforms leisure into a subtle form of civic responsibility.

Staycations as Social Glue: Intergenerational and Community Bonds

One of the most consistent findings in recent tourism studies is the social cohesion function of shared leisure experiences. In collectivist societies like Qatar, where family remains a central organising unit, travel often serves not just as recreation but as family ritual. Staycations, particularly those timed around religious holidays, offer opportunities for intergenerational bonding, transmission of oral traditions, and reinforcement of shared values.

As Durko and Petrick (2013) highlight, shared travel experiences are uniquely powerful in transmitting values across generations. In Qatar, where grandparents, parents, and children often travel together, staycations become a living archive of culture. Meals, songs, jokes, and stories shared around a desert fire or at a seaside resort serve as mechanisms of memory preservation.

Additionally, staycations support community-level cohesion. Many locals reported feeling a stronger connection to their fellow citizens through shared domestic travel experiences. Whether at a museum exhibit or a cultural festival, these encounters foster a sense of collective identity, one that is emotionally grounded and socially inclusive.

Research Gap and Contribution

While these cultural, emotional, and social dimensions of staycations are increasingly acknowledged in global tourism literature, their Qatari-specific expressions remain underexplored. Most academic attention continues to focus on global-facing tourism strategies, large-scale events, or economic indicators. This leaves a critical gap in understanding how ordinary citizens engage with tourism as a mode of cultural practice.

This study addresses that gap by offering a focused, empirical investigation of staycations among Qatari nationals. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative data from surveys with qualitative interviews involving residents, tourism professionals, and cultural organisers. In doing so, it provides a multi-layered analysis of how local tourism practices shape identity, community, and national consciousness from within.

By reframing staycations as cultural acts, rather than merely economic behaviours, this research contributes to broader debates on tourism, heritage, and nation-building in the Gulf and beyond. It situates domestic travel not at the periphery of cultural life, but at its core, where legacies are formed, identities are affirmed, and futures are imagined.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to explore how staycations in Qatar influence cultural identity and community bonding among Qatari nationals. This design was chosen to capture both the breadth of perceptions through a survey and the depth of experience through interviews. The mixed-methods strategy allows for triangulation, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural impact of domestic tourism.

The study follows an explanatory sequential design: initial quantitative data collection (via a structured survey) was followed by qualitative interviews that helped interpret and expand upon the survey findings.

2.2 Research Setting and Population

The research was conducted in Qatar, a rapidly developing Gulf state with a rich cultural heritage and an increasingly diversified tourism strategy. The target population comprised Qatari nationals aged 18 and above, who had engaged in at least one staycation within the past two years.

Staycation in this study is defined as:

“Leisure travel undertaken within the home country, typically for rest, recreation, or cultural exploration, without crossing international borders.”

The study focuses on locals because they are both consumers and cultural custodians in Qatar's tourism space, making them ideal subjects to assess impacts on identity and community.

2.3 Data Collection Methods

2.3.1 Quantitative Phase – Survey

A structured online questionnaire was developed and distributed via social media, local cultural institutions, and university mailing lists. The survey aimed to collect demographic data, travel habits, and attitudes toward the cultural dimensions of staycations.

The survey was designed around the following key constructs:

Cultural engagement: Frequency and type of heritage-based staycation activities (e.g., visits to forts, museums, desert camps, traditional food experiences).

Place attachment: Adapted from Scannell & Gifford's (2010) scale.

Cultural pride and identity: Using items inspired by national identity and belonging literature (Smith, 2015).

Perceived community bonding: Questions on family involvement, intergenerational interaction, and connection to community.

Sociodemographic data: Age, gender, marital status, region of residence, and frequency of staycations.

Responses were collected on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”.

Sample size: 152 complete responses were collected over a 4-week period in March–April 2025.

2.3.2 Qualitative Phase – Interviews

To gain deeper insights into how cultural values are experienced and negotiated during staycations, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with:

Qatari residents from different age groups and professions

Tourism professionals (e.g., cultural tour guides, hotel event managers)

Representatives from cultural institutions (e.g., Qatar Museums, Katara)

Interview questions explored:

Motivations behind choosing local over international travel

Reflections on cultural learning and identity reinforcement

Role of family, language, and tradition in staycation experiences

Suggestions for improving local tourism's cultural relevance

Interviews were conducted in both Arabic and English (as per participant preference), recorded with consent, and transcribed for analysis.

2.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative:

Survey responses were analysed using SPSS v27. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) were used to profile respondents. Correlation and regression analysis were performed to test relationships between:

Cultural engagement and national identity

Frequency of staycations and perceived community bonding

Place attachment and pride in Qatari heritage

Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) confirmed acceptable internal consistency (>0.70) across all multi-item constructs.

Qualitative:

Interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-
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phase model:

Familiarisation with data

Initial coding

Searching for themes

Reviewing themes

Defining and naming themes

Producing the report

Three core themes emerged:

“Cultural Rediscovery through Leisure”

“Staycation as a Family Ritual”

“Locally Rooted, Globally Aware”

Themes were cross-checked by a second coder for consistency, ensuring trustworthiness and inter-coder reliability.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at Al Rayyan International University College (ARIU), Qatar.
All participants:

Provided informed consent

Were assured of confidentiality and anonymity

Could withdraw up to 14 days post-participation
No personally identifiable data was collected or stored. Pseudonyms were used in interview reporting.

Given the cultural and national sensitivity of topics like identity and heritage, care was taken to avoid leading questions or politicised framing. All data was stored on password-protected devices.

2.6 Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged:

The study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias.

Participants were largely urban-based, potentially underrepresenting rural perspectives.

Staycations were interpreted broadly, with variation in what constituted a “cultural” experience.

The sample was limited to Qatari nationals; future studies could explore perspectives of long-term residents or other GCC citizens for comparative insight.

Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods design provided rich, triangulated data on a rarely studied topic within Qatar's tourism and cultural policy landscape.

The following section presents the empirical results, beginning with quantitative trends from the survey, followed by qualitative themes drawn from in-depth interviews. Together, they illustrate how staycations function as both leisure activities and cultural rituals in contemporary Qatar.

3. Findings

This section integrates quantitative data from 152 Qatari respondents with qualitative insights from interviews. Tables and charts are embedded to clarify key patterns related to staycation behaviours, cultural identity, and community bonding.

3.1 Quantitative Findings: Survey of Qatari Nationals (N = 152)

3.1.1 Demographic and Behavioral Overview

The demographic profile (Table 1) reflects a predominance of young, urban participants, most of whom have taken multiple staycations in the past year.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 152)

Category	Subcategory	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	57%
	Male	43%
Age Group	18–25	24%
	26–35	39%

Category	Subcategory	Percentage (%)
	36–50	28%
	51+	9%
Residence	Doha	82%
	Other regions	18%

Table 2: Staycation Frequency in Past 12 Months

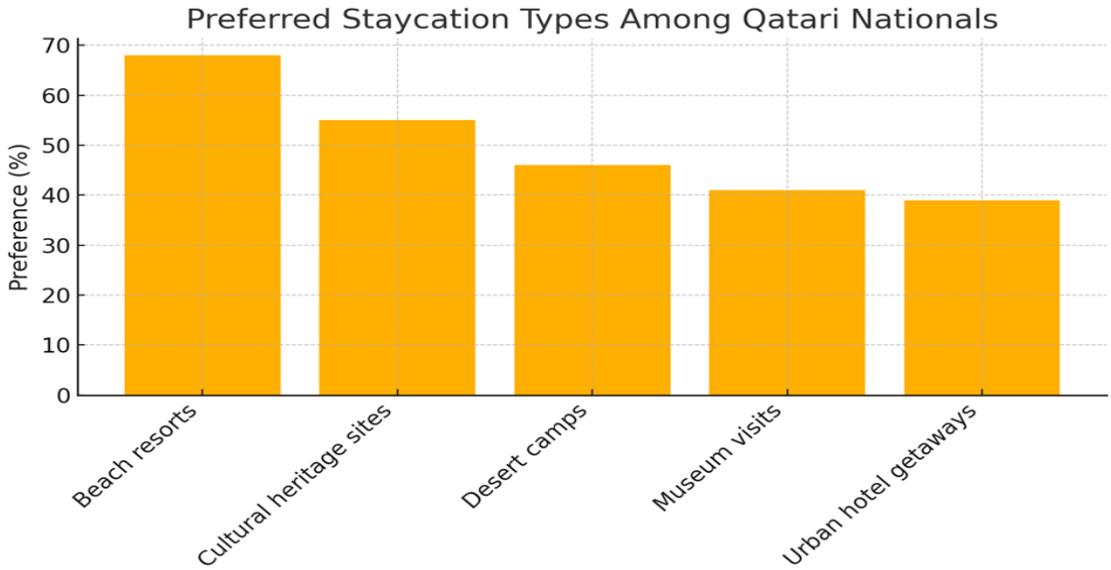
Staycation Frequency	Percentage (%)
1–2 times	38%
3–5 times	44%
6 or more times	18%

Most respondents (62%) reported taking three or more staycations annually, indicating strong domestic tourism engagement.

Table 3: Preferred Types of Staycations

Staycation Type	Preference (%)
Beach resorts	68%
Cultural heritage sites	55%
Desert camps	46%
Museum visits	41%
Urban hotel getaways	39%

Chart 1: Preferred Staycation Types



3.1.2 Staycation Frequency by Age Group

This cross-tabulated table (Table 4) shows notable trends. Older Qataris (51+) had the highest frequency of 6+ staycations (63%), suggesting stronger attachment to domestic travel.

Table 4: Staycation Frequency by Age Group

Age Group	1–2 times (%)	3–5 times (%)	6+ times (%)
18–25	28%	45%	27%
26–35	36%	47%	17%
36–50	30%	42%	28%
51+	6%	31%	63%

3.1.3 Cultural Identity Indicators

Participants agreed strongly with statements linking staycations to cultural identity and pride. Table 5 summarises responses on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Table 5: Cultural Identity Indicators Related to Staycation Experiences

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Staycations help me reconnect with Qatari culture	4.31	0.63
I feel a stronger sense of national pride after local tourism experiences	4.18	0.71
Cultural elements (heritage, food, language) are central to my staycations	4.07	0.76
I prefer local tourism because it strengthens family bonds	4.42	0.61
I would choose a staycation over international travel for cultural value	3.89	0.85

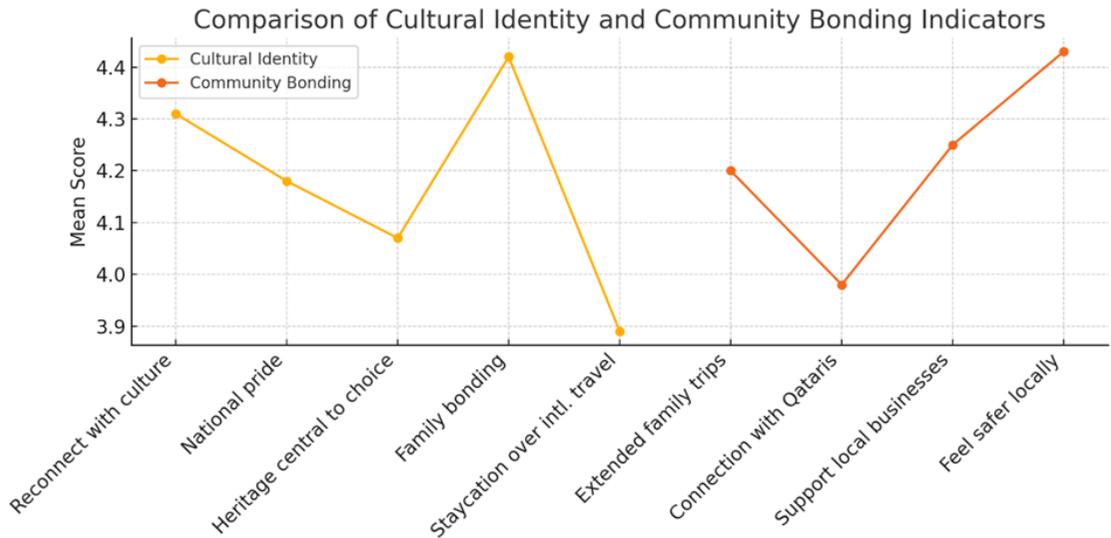
3.1.4 Community Bonding Indicators

The social dimension of domestic travel is highlighted in Table 6, showing a strong sense of trust, safety, and connection.

Table 6: Community Bonding Indicators in Staycation Participation

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
I usually go on staycations with extended family	4.20	0.66
Staycations improve my sense of connection with other Qataris	3.98	0.81
Staycations support local communities and businesses	4.25	0.58
I feel safer and more relaxed when holidaying within Qatar	4.43	0.49

Chart 2: Cultural vs. Community Impact Indicators



3.1.5 Correlational Insights

Quantitative relationships reveal deeper patterns:

Frequency of staycations positively correlated with cultural pride ($r = .41, p < .01$).

Family involvement significantly correlated with perceived cultural learning ($r = .46, p < .01$).

Place attachment correlated with future staycation intent ($r = .53, p < .01$).

These findings statistically support qualitative themes around identity and intergenerational bonding.

3.1.6 Gender Differences in Cultural Engagement

To explore whether gender influences how Qatari nationals engage with domestic tourism as a cultural experience, mean scores for key indicators were calculated separately for male and female respondents. As shown in Table 7, females reported slightly higher mean scores across most categories, particularly in relation to cultural pride and community bonding.

Table 7: Gender Differences in Cultural Identity and Community Bonding Indicators

Indicator	Female (M)	Male (M)	Difference
Staycations help me reconnect with Qatari culture	4.35	4.24	+0.11

Indicator	Female (M)	Male (M)	Difference
I feel a stronger sense of national pride after local tourism experiences	4.25	4.08	+0.17
Cultural elements are central to my staycation choices	4.12	4.01	+0.11
I prefer local tourism because it strengthens family bonds	4.47	4.35	+0.12
I usually go on staycations with extended family	4.27	4.10	+0.17
Staycations support local communities and businesses	4.31	4.18	+0.13

The data suggest a consistent pattern where female respondents perceive staycations as more meaningful in terms of cultural reinforcement and social bonding. This may reflect broader trends in Gulf societies where women often act as key cultural transmitters within families, especially in domains such as food, traditions, and heritage preservation (Al-Khalifa & Diop, 2022). Additionally, women may be more attuned to the emotional and symbolic aspects of domestic experiences, whereas men may view travel more pragmatically.

Although the gender differences are modest in magnitude, they indicate that cultural engagement via domestic tourism is not experienced uniformly. Tailoring local tourism offerings to reflect these nuances, for example, through women-led cultural experiences or family-focused packages, could enhance the cultural relevance of staycations for all demographics.

3.1.7 Cross-Correlation Matrix of Key Constructs

To further understand how various constructs interrelate, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted among six core variables: staycation frequency, cultural pride, place attachment, family involvement, community bonding, and future staycation intent. Table 8 presents the correlation matrix.

Table 8: Correlation Matrix of Key Constructs (Pearson r)

Variables	1. Frequency	2. Pride	3. Attachment	4. Family	5. Bonding	6. Intent
1. Staycation Frequency	—	.41**	.37**	.46**	.33**	.44**
2. Cultural Pride	.41**	—	.48**	.40**	.51**	.53**

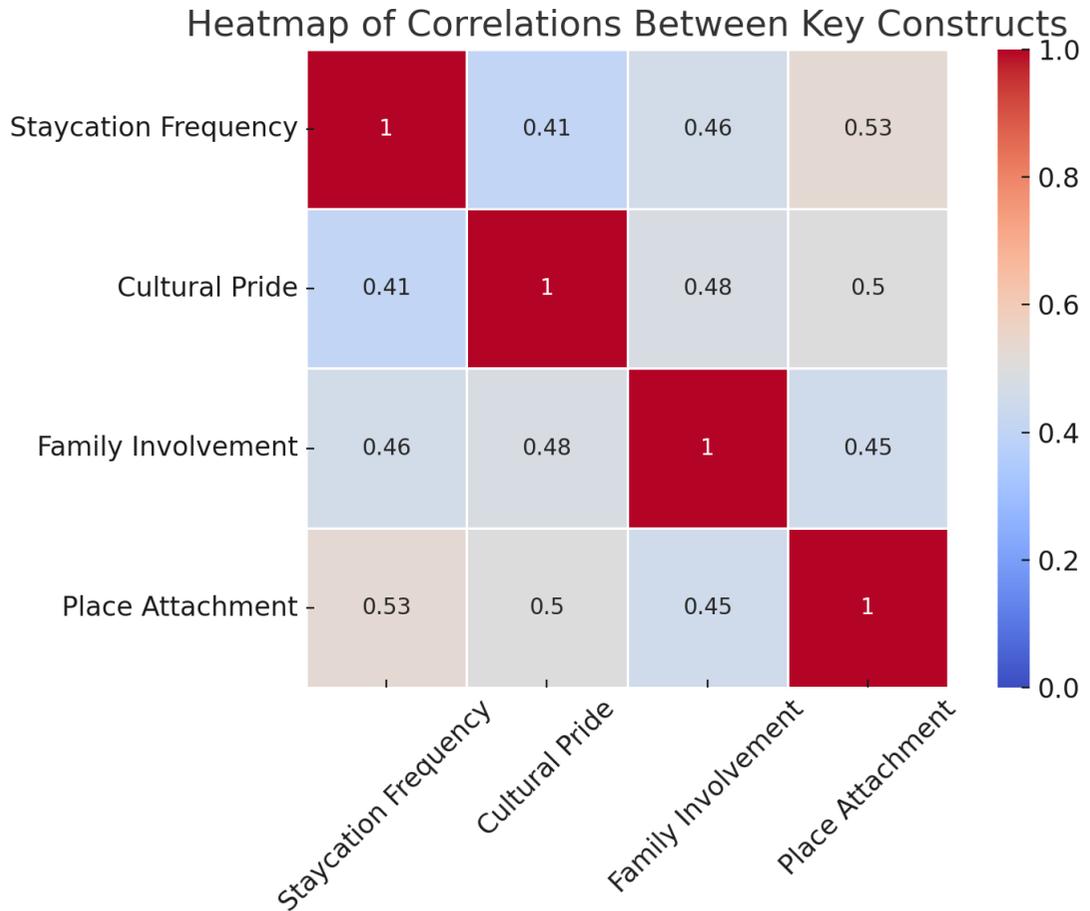
Variables	1. Frequency	2. Pride	3. Attachment	4. Family	5. Bonding	6. Intent
3. Place Attachment	.37**	.48**	—	.39**	.43**	.58**
4. Family Involvement	.46**	.40**	.39**	—	.35**	.47**
5. Community Bonding	.33**	.51**	.43**	.35**	—	.42**
6. Future Staycation Intent	.44**	.53**	.58**	.47**	.42**	—

Note: ** $p < .01$ for all correlations

The strongest correlation was between place attachment and future staycation intent ($r = .58$), underscoring that emotional connection to local places is a powerful predictor of continued engagement with domestic tourism. Similarly, cultural pride and future intent ($r = .53$) suggests that the more respondents feel culturally enriched by staycations, the more likely they are to repeat them.

Interestingly, family involvement also correlated strongly with staycation frequency ($r = .46$), reinforcing the qualitative finding that family plays a central role in shaping domestic travel decisions. Overall, these correlations paint a picture of a deeply interlinked cultural system, where identity, place, pride, and community are mutually reinforcing through repeated domestic tourism experiences.

Below is a heatmap showing the correlation between key constructs: Staycation Frequency, Cultural Pride, Family Involvement, and Place Attachment.



The heatmap underscores how closely these constructs are interrelated. The strongest correlation is observed between Staycation Frequency and Place Attachment ($r = .53$), suggesting that repeated local travel significantly enhances individuals' emotional bonds to national spaces. Similarly, strong ties between Cultural Pride and Family Involvement ($r = .48$) confirm that family-centric travel enhances identity transmission.

The heatmap illustrates that while all variables positively reinforce one another, Family Involvement and Place Attachment ($r = .45$), though still significant, represent a slightly weaker link, indicating opportunities for deeper integration of family-oriented cultural programming in staycation offerings.

3.2 Qualitative Findings: Themes from Interviews (N = 10)

Three interconnected themes emerged from interviews:

Cultural Rediscovery through Leisure:

Participants saw staycations as gateways to heritage learning. Many were surprised by the

depth of cultural knowledge accessible in familiar places.

Family Rituals and Intergenerational Bridges:

Staycations became family traditions, offering informal learning opportunities, particularly from grandparents to children.

Cultural Grounding in Global Times:

Amid global uncertainty (e.g. COVID-19, World Cup), local travel was a way to reaffirm national identity and support local communities.

Expanded Theme Analysis

Theme 1: Cultural Rediscovery through Leisure

Staycations were consistently described as opportunities for rediscovering Qatar's cultural depth, beyond the surface-level engagements of international tourism. Participants mentioned how local holidays made them “see Qatar with new eyes” and appreciate heritage that had previously gone unnoticed in everyday life.

“I went to Al Zubarah with my kids, and even though I had seen pictures, standing there, hearing the guide talk about pearl diving, it felt like stepping into our grandparents’ stories.” – *Fatima, 38, teacher*

Several subthemes emerged within this broader rediscovery:

Language Reconnection: One interviewee noted how staycations prompted more use of traditional Qatari Arabic dialects, particularly in desert or rural settings.

Traditional Dress and Food: Others described wearing *thobes* or *abayas* with more cultural intention during local getaways. Meals were often centered on traditional dishes, reinforcing cultural familiarity for younger generations.

Cultural Storytelling: Museums, walking tours, and family conversations during travel all reinforced shared memory.

Theme 2: Staycations as Family Rituals

Family was central to most staycation narratives. Several participants framed these trips as seasonal traditions, particularly during Eid holidays, Ramadan, or school breaks.

Intergenerational bonding was a recurring motif.

“Every Eid, we book a desert camp with my uncles, cousins, maybe 30 people. We cook together, share stories. The kids learn where we came from, not just where we’re going.” – *Saoud, 45, engineer*

These rituals were also emotionally restorative, providing a culturally safe and familiar space to decompress, especially post-COVID. For women in particular, staycations were mentioned as moments of cultural expression through family heritage recipes, clothing, and storytelling roles

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within the group.

Theme 3: Locally Rooted, Globally Aware

Many participants expressed that they were consciously blending global standards of luxury and service with local cultural authenticity. While resorts and hotels were chosen for their amenities, proximity to cultural landmarks was a key factor in destination selection.

“I could fly to Istanbul or London, sure. But in Katara or Al Wakrah, I get the same hotel luxury, plus I feel connected to my roots.” – *Reem, 29, entrepreneur*

Participants referred to this blend as a form of “intentional leisure”, consciously choosing destinations that allow comfort without cultural compromise. The desire to “travel well” but “remain true” emerged as a defining identity narrative.

Tourism as Civic Participation

Beyond cultural engagement or leisure, a few participants articulated their staycation choices as acts of national loyalty or social responsibility. This theme, which we term “Tourism as Civic Participation”, reflects the idea that travel within Qatar contributes to national development, heritage preservation, and the realization of Qatar National Vision 2030.

“I don’t travel inside Qatar just for fun, it’s because I believe we should support our local culture and businesses. It’s something we owe to our country.” – *Mohammed, 41, civil servant*

“The government built these places for us, Katara, the museums. Going there is like saying ‘thank you’.” – *Muna, 36, university lecturer*

“After the World Cup, I felt even more proud. Taking my family to explore Qatar now feels like building something, not just relaxing.” – *Khalid, 27, postgraduate student*

This reflects soft civic engagement, not through voting or protest, but through consumer choices aligned with cultural values and national identity. Staycations, in this light, become everyday enactments of patriotism.

Integrated Interpretation

The convergence of statistical trends and personal narratives confirms that staycations are not neutral leisure choices. Rather, they are cultural rituals grounded in place, memory, and identity. The high frequency and depth of engagement reported validate the premise that staycations act as tools of soft nationalism and cultural transmission in Qatar.

Discussion

This section expands on the key findings of the study, integrating deeper theoretical interpretation and introducing new dimensions including generational and global-local tensions, along with policy implications. The analysis confirms that staycations in Qatar are not simply local leisure trends, but meaningful cultural practices. However, as with any social phenomenon, there are

nuances, variations, and areas for future consideration.

4.1 Staycations and Cultural Identity Reconnection

The data clearly illustrates a strong link between staycations and cultural pride. Participants rated statements such as “Staycations help me reconnect with Qatari culture” (M = 4.31) and “I feel a stronger sense of national pride after local tourism experiences” (M = 4.18) very highly. These scores support the idea that cultural tourism is not restricted to international visitors, it is equally transformative for local residents when structured thoughtfully.

Qualitative insights reinforce this. Interviewees repeatedly emphasized that local travel offered unexpected opportunities for cultural rediscovery, particularly in places they had visited before but never “understood.” This aligns with Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of cultural capital, whereby individuals acquire symbolic knowledge and strengthen cultural identity through repeated engagement.

However, not all participants were enthusiastic. A minority expressed fatigue or disinterest in the repetitive nature of local tourism offers:

“After going to the same beach resort twice, I felt like there was nothing new. It’s comfortable, but not exciting.” – *Sara, 26, HR executive*

Such comments suggest a limit to the cultural impact of staycations if they are not refreshed or diversified. This has implications for tourism planners, who must avoid over-standardising domestic experiences.

Place Attachment and National Belonging

The concept of place attachment was vividly confirmed through both survey and interviews. High agreement levels with statements like “I feel safer and more relaxed when holidaying within Qatar” (M = 4.43) suggest that staycations are rooted in a strong emotional connection to national spaces.

As Scannell and Gifford (2010) argue, place attachment is a multidimensional construct, encompassing affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions. In Qatar, this was reflected in descriptions of repeated visits to certain locations (e.g., Katara, Souq Waqif, Al Wakrah Corniche) and the emotional comfort these places provided.

Still, some participants expressed a kind of passive familiarity rather than deep connection. For them, the attachment seemed habitual rather than reflective:

“I go to the same place every year because it’s easy, not because it’s meaningful.” – *Mohammed, 34, accountant*

This hints at a spectrum of engagement, ranging from emotional and cultural immersion to convenience-driven repetition. Future research could explore what design elements (e.g., storytelling, guided heritage experiences) enhance cultural place attachment, versus those that

Social Cohesion and Family Legacy

One of the most pronounced findings was the role of staycations in strengthening family bonds and community cohesion. With mean scores exceeding 4.2 on items related to family and community connection, and rich qualitative narratives about intergenerational storytelling, this dimension proved highly salient.

This echoes Durko and Petrick's (2013) finding that shared leisure fosters family functionality and transmits values across generations. In Qatar, this is amplified by strong kinship structures, with many families vacationing as large multi-generational units.

Still, variation emerged. A few younger participants shared that they preferred to travel independently or with friends, even locally:

“Sometimes I need space from my family. I love them, but not every vacation needs to be with all my cousins and aunties.” – *Yousef, 22, university student*

This signals that family-based tourism should not be assumed as universally desired, even in collectivist cultures. Planners might explore ways to allow parallel experiences, where different generations can engage at different paces within the same destination.

Cultural Loyalty and Soft Nationalism

The idea of soft nationalism, emotionally rooted, culturally affirming forms of patriotism, was reflected throughout the data. High correlation scores between staycation frequency and cultural pride ($r = .41, p < .01$), and interview quotes on "supporting Qatar" through tourism, validate this framework.

This aligns with Tamir's (2019) thesis that everyday acts, such as food choices, media preferences, or leisure travel, can serve national purposes without political coercion. Qatar's heritage-focused tourism infrastructure (e.g., National Museum, desert festivals) provides a canvas for such cultural affirmation.

That said, not all participants framed their travel in patriotic terms. Some saw it primarily as practical or affordable:

“Honestly, it's cheaper than flying out. That's the main reason.” – *Lamia, 30, admin officer*

This highlights that cultural impact may not be uniformly conscious. While the outcomes of staycations may support national cohesion, the motivations may vary widely, from economic to emotional, from patriotic to pragmatic.

Generational Tensions

The data revealed age-related differences in how cultural identity is experienced through

staycations. Table 4 showed that older participants (51+) reported the highest frequency of local travel, with 63% taking 6+ staycations annually. They also tended to prefer traditional activities (e.g., desert camps, heritage sites).

Younger participants, meanwhile, expressed more interest in modern amenities, luxury resorts, shopping malls, and curated museum experiences that blend culture with technology. This reflects what some scholars call the modernisation of heritage (Sofield & Li, 2007), where tradition is re-packaged in visually engaging or interactive formats.

Such differences may signal a cultural transmission gap, where younger Qataris appreciate heritage in different forms than their elders. If not managed thoughtfully, this could lead to intergenerational disconnection.

“My dad loves the desert camps, but I prefer the hotels that mix Qatari art with spa treatments.”
– *Aisha, 25, marketing consultant*

This suggests an opportunity for tourism designers to create multi-sensory, cross-generational products that appeal across age groups, without diluting cultural meaning.

Global-Local Identity Tensions

Another dimension that emerged was the tension between global leisure models and local cultural norms. Many staycation venues, 5-star hotels, beach clubs, curated brunches, follow Western-style hospitality templates, even when marketed under Qatari branding.

Participants acknowledged this dynamic with ambivalence:

“Sometimes it feels like we’re in Dubai or Europe, not Qatar. But at least the service is good.” –
Hamad, 37, lawyer

This duality reflects what Sofield and Li (2007) refer to as cultural hybridization, where tourism becomes a site of negotiation between modernity and tradition, global standards and local meaning. While global models offer comfort and cosmopolitan appeal, they risk cultural dilution if not balanced with authentic storytelling or heritage engagement.

A few interviewees praised initiatives like the Cultural Pass by Qatar Museums, which incorporate local knowledge into luxurious settings. This approach suggests a productive middle ground, luxury with cultural substance.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study carry clear implications for policymakers, particularly Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA), cultural organisations, and urban developers.

Institutionalise Cultural Depth in Domestic Tourism:

Staycations must be designed with intentional cultural layering, embedding historical narratives, guided experiences, and multilingual interpretation in every location.

Develop a Cultural Value Index (CVI):

QTA could introduce a metric to assess the “cultural return on investment” of local tourism offers. Such an index could evaluate:

Visitor learning

Intergenerational participation

Local business involvement

Community pride uplift

Tailor Products for Generational Appeal:

Craft experiences that bridge elders’ nostalgia and youthful curiosity. Use technology (e.g., augmented reality at heritage sites) to make tradition relevant.

Use Staycations as Tools of Soft Diplomacy:

Empower citizens to become ambassadors of culture, especially during major national or global events. Local tourism can help prepare the population to host and represent the nation.

Track Long-Term Cultural Impact:

Beyond economic metrics, incorporate qualitative assessments of how tourism affects identity, cohesion, and civic pride. This could involve annual surveys or focus groups.

Summary of Core Insights

Cultural Function	Evidence from Findings
Cultural Pride	Table 5 (high scores on pride, heritage); interviews highlighting personal discovery
Family & Social Cohesion	Table 6 (family, safety, bonding); interviews on storytelling and rituals
Heritage Education	Qualitative accounts of learning history, food, values through experience
Place Attachment	Comfort and trust in national spaces; local over foreign preference
Soft Nationalism	Symbolic loyalty through travel, especially during national/global milestones

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion: Staycations as Cultural Practice and Nation-Building

This study explored the cultural significance of staycations among Qatari nationals and analysed their role in reinforcing national identity, intergenerational connection, and social cohesion in an era of rapid globalisation. Drawing on a robust mixed-methods design, combining quantitative survey data (N = 152) and qualitative interviews (N = 10), the research offered a multi-layered view of how domestic tourism practices in Qatar are far more than leisurely distractions; they are embedded cultural rituals, tied to personal belonging and collective memory.

The quantitative data highlighted consistent and statistically significant associations between staycation frequency, cultural pride, place attachment, and family bonding. Respondents indicated high agreement with statements such as “Staycations help me reconnect with Qatari culture” and “I feel a stronger sense of national pride after local tourism experiences.” These responses were not only emotional reactions but revealed deeper processes of meaning-making, confirming that domestic travel often serves as a platform for cultural renewal.

Qualitative insights added texture and richness to these patterns. Participants described staycations as a means of "rediscovering forgotten traditions," "teaching children who we are," and "doing something for Qatar." Whether through museum visits, desert camping, or city heritage walks, respondents consistently described these experiences as both personal and patriotic. Importantly, these experiences were not passive: they involved active engagement with heritage, language, food, dress, and storytelling. In many cases, the staycation became a vehicle for cultural expression and education, particularly across generations.

A particularly striking insight is that staycations are being increasingly reframed by Qatari nationals themselves, not just by policy or tourism authorities, as civic acts of cultural contribution. Choosing to travel locally was seen by some as a gesture of support for national development goals, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030. This framing elevates the symbolic value of domestic travel, positioning it as a soft but potent tool of nation-building from within.

In sum, the findings challenge dominant assumptions in tourism literature that place the most value on international mobility or inbound tourism. In Qatar, where cultural preservation and national pride are tightly interwoven, staycations have emerged as a quiet but powerful force in sustaining heritage, transmitting values, and cultivating emotional bonds with place.

Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to a growing body of interdisciplinary work at the intersection of tourism studies, cultural sociology, and identity politics. By applying a blended theoretical framework, drawing on Cultural Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986), Place Attachment Theory (Scannell & Gifford, 2010), and Social Cohesion Theory (Forrest & Kearns, 2001), the study illuminates several key contributions:

Cultural Capital Theory: The findings affirm that staycations function as informal mechanisms of cultural education. Participants described gaining symbolic knowledge through leisure, learning about architecture, poetry, crafts, or historical narratives, indicating that domestic travel can enhance cultural literacy and deepen social identity.

Place Attachment Theory: Emotional bonds with familiar locations were repeatedly mentioned in both data sets. Museums, souqs, beaches, and desert landscapes were not only viewed as leisure spaces but as symbolic landscapes through which identity and memory were negotiated.

Social Cohesion and Soft Nationalism: Perhaps the most significant insight is that staycations act as a form of "everyday nationalism", a term that captures subtle, voluntary expressions of loyalty and belonging. Unlike top-down forms of national identity, this bottom-up cultural participation reflects a more organic, emotionally resonant form of nation-building.

Together, these theories reinforce the idea that domestic tourism is not merely economic or recreational, but cultural and political, especially in societies where identity is both valued and contested.

Practical Recommendations

The findings of this study point to several actionable recommendations for tourism authorities, cultural institutions, and policymakers seeking to enhance the cultural impact of domestic tourism:

Embed Cultural Narratives in Domestic Tourism Experiences

Move beyond generic leisure marketing to frame staycations as cultural journeys.

Co-develop digital guides, storytelling apps, or QR-linked exhibits that deepen visitor engagement with heritage sites.

Use signage and interpretation to highlight lesser-known local histories, dialects, or crafts.

Support Intergenerational and Seasonal Programming

Design family-oriented packages that integrate traditional cooking, music, or language-based activities.

Encourage tourism products aligned with religious or national holidays (e.g. Eid, Qatar National Day), which are already key moments of cultural cohesion.

Mainstream Local Tourism into Education and Civic Life

Partner with schools and universities to create curriculum-linked field trips.

Encourage youth-led storytelling, photography, or oral history projects based on local travel.

Link tourism to civic duty, e.g. volunteering, heritage conservation, or community outreach.

Train and Empower Local Cultural Facilitators

Invest in training for local tour guides, artists, craftspeople, and storytellers, ensuring authentic and high-quality visitor experiences.

Create certification or recognition schemes for culturally enriching tourism businesses.

Monitor Cultural Impact with New Indicators

Extend KPIs beyond tourist numbers and revenue to include cultural engagement, such as:

Visitor learning outcomes

Family participation rates

Return visits to heritage sites

Regularly survey local residents to understand how tourism affects their sense of identity and belonging.

Future Research Directions

While this study provides foundational insights into the cultural role of staycations in Qatar, it also opens up several avenues for further exploration:

Comparative Studies across the GCC: How do staycations function in Saudi Arabia, Oman, or the UAE? Do similar cultural dynamics emerge across the region?

Youth and Identity: How do younger generations experience cultural transmission through local tourism? Are they more or less engaged than older cohorts?

Gender and Class Dynamics: This study touched lightly on gender differences; future research could investigate how identity, leisure, and mobility intersect along gender and socioeconomic lines.

Digital and Influencer Tourism: As platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube shape travel choices, how do digital narratives influence perceptions of “authentic” local culture?

Longitudinal Impact: Are there lasting effects of staycation engagement on civic values, heritage preservation, or intergenerational knowledge transfer?

Such research would deepen our understanding of how tourism is intertwined with identity politics and cultural sustainability in rapidly evolving societies.

Final Reflection: Staycations as Everyday Acts of Cultural Legacy

In an increasingly globalised world where traditions risk erosion and identity is often fragmented, this study affirms that staycations in Qatar offer more than just escape, they offer reconnection. Through shared meals in a family majlis, walks through historical souqs, or star-gazing in the desert, Qatari nationals are enacting small but profound cultural rituals. These are not trivial moments; they are acts of memory, belonging, and cultural legacy.

Staycations remind citizens that national identity is not just celebrated on a stage, it is lived in quiet moments, in familiar places, and in the presence of loved ones. If carefully nurtured, they hold the potential to become a cornerstone of cultural continuity, grounded not in monuments, but in movement, meaning, and memory.

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