



**Adam Bradley,
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<http://www.designls.com/>

Design Landscapes is a commercial landscape contracting company, specialising in landscape construction, design/build and maintenance. Its landmark projects include Hong Kong's Disneyland and large parts of Sydney's Homebush Bay Olympic precinct. The company was registered to operate in Qatar in early 2007.

Adam Bradley has a cautionary tale: 'It is critical to have a local partner who is well-connected and who is very pro-active.'

'You need to have an alignment with a very high-profile, successful local, whether it be one of the sheikhs, a local company or an individual businessman.

'Qatar is a small society with approximately 200,000 nationals, with the remaining 80% of the population being expatriates. It means that all the key local decision makers in both public and private sectors generally know each other.

'This can be the most important decision in entering this market.

'There can be lengthy negotiations, once you select the local shareholder, as to the new company's financial structuring. This is vital to ensure a fair deal is generated between foreign and local shareholders. This process, depending on how complex the agreement is, can take many months to sign off.

'The attractive part of the market to us was the amount of money - billions of dollars earmarked by the government for development. It was a big lure; however, in hindsight, not quite the "pot of gold" we thought it to be.

'As far as competition goes, we looked long and hard at Dubai and the UAE but we found it was much more competitive there. It didn't appear to be nearly as competitive in Qatar at the time, but it increased dramatically after we arrived.

'In our line of work there are a lot of pitfalls. In the construction sector here, you can experience massive project delays. Goods can be held up in a port. There are rapidly spiralling costs right across the board. You have to remember that resources are very limited, with little manufactured locally,

so there can be lengthy procurement lines. As a small contractor there is also a real problem with getting people to pay.

'You need to have very good financial backing because payment lags are so long. Sound funding is vital, as everything seems to take so much longer to achieve here. Without it, you could be in real trouble.

'From the business culture point of view, things are done very differently to Australia. We are used to calling a spade a spade, but here people are likely to tell you what they think you would like to hear. This happens at every level of the system and it makes it a very frustrating proposition.

'Language can also be a problem. Despite most business being done in English, for many it will be a second or third language, so you do find regular breakdowns in communication and a lot of misunderstanding. Dependent on what type of business you are conducting, other languages that would assist are Hindi, Urdu, Malay and of course Arabic.

'Differing hours of work can also be a problem. A lot of companies follow the Arab business culture, closing at noon, re-opening at 4pm and finishing late in the evening. This can cause further lags in general day-to-day business dealings. Also, the Arab business week differs with western markets, with Friday being the day off, meaning you can lose up to 3-4 days per week between international offices.

'Obviously, do as much research as possible, but in the end it's your call. There are some agencies that can assist, such as Austrade, and I would strongly suggest doing your homework first and don't rush straight in. Profits are there, but can be evasive.'