

Fortnum & Mason in talks about Qatar expansion as World Cup looms

Fortnum & Mason, the upmarket London department store, is in talks to open an outlet in Qatar amid growing interest from international brands in the tiny Gulf state ahead of this year's football World Cup.

Sky News understands that executives at the 315-year-old grocer are in talks with potential franchise partners in Qatar about the move.

If the project proceeds, it would represent Fortnum & Mason's first store in the country, although it did briefly have a presence in the Gulf with an outlet in Dubai which closed in 2017.

One source said that Tom Athron, the company's new chief executive, was an enthusiastic advocate of the move following the brand's successful expansion under his predecessor, Ewan Venters.

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Qatar 'unfairly treated and scrutinised'

Owned by a branch of the Weston family, which recently sold Selfridges for £4bn, Fortnum still has a limited international presence, with its own store in Hong Kong, and partnerships in Australia and Japan.

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Expanding into Qatar could augment the brand's global profile ahead of the [FIFA World Cup](#), which gets underway in November.

Fortnum's business was badly affected during the initial phase of the pandemic, forcing it to furlough hundreds of staff, but it has since seen strong growth in its online business.

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The recent Christmas trading period saw digital sales surge by more than 60%.

The company's store on Piccadilly is one of the world's best-known retail outlets, and it holds royal warrants from The Queen and The Prince of Wales.

A spokesman for Fortnum said: "As part of our strategy, we are exploring opportunities to expand both online and internationally, the Gulf being a region we'd like to look at again."