

# Dubai surpasses global tourism growth to deliver an all-time high 16.73 million overnight visitors in 2019

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Dubai's tourism industry closed a successful decade at the end of 2019, welcoming an all-time high 16.73 million international overnight visitors, an impressive 5.1 per cent increase in tourism volumes, definitively surpassing the global tourism growth forecast by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) by over one per cent.

- *India, KSA and the UK retain top three positions as city's largest tourist contributors*
- *China, Oman and Philippines drive high impact with double-digit growth, solidifying their top 10 status*
- *Nigeria continues to fuel Africa's volumes with 33 per cent growth, the highest single market increase in 2019*

With momentum firmly tracking against Dubai's Tourism Vision 2022-25, latest data released by Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Dubai Tourism) reflects the sector's exponential progress in a compressed time-frame relative to peers, culminating in Dubai being ranked the **World's Fourth Most Visited City** for the fifth consecutive year by MasterCard's Global Destination Cities Index 2019. Rapidly gaining traction on the 'travel wish list' for today's global traveller, 2019 not only delivered record tourist arrivals and indicated strong desirability for future visits, but also reinforced tourism's role as key economic growth driver. Contributing an impressive 11.5 per cent in GDP value, Dubai's tourism sector was ranked one of 'Top 10' strongest economic share generators, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council's Cities Report 2019. The Report also ranked Dubai the third largest city in capturing direct international tourism spending with a total of US \$27.9 billion.

His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General, Dubai Tourism, said: "The strong performances across our diversified spectrum of traditional strongholds and fast-growing high value segments have continued to solidify the global competitiveness and sustained resilience of Dubai's tourism sector. This past decade, and 2019 in particular, have delivered unmatched acceleration in Dubai's stature as a 'Destination of Choice' for global travellers assuring advancement towards the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai to make it the **#1 most visited, preferred and revisited global city**. While the global economy remains in a state of flux, we can clearly see an exciting opportunity to further grow Dubai's dominance in the tourism industry in 2020, and to pioneer the next decade for global travel, offering unique and transformative tourism experiences created and driven by our strong appetite for radical innovation and stakeholder collaboration."

Impressive growth is evidenced by Dubai's top six source markets – India, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), United Kingdom (UK), Oman, China and Russia - delivering over seven million visitors in 2019, with 9 of the top 10 countries crossing half a million visitors each for the first time, highlighting the robust diversity of Dubai's base for tourist attraction.

Results reveal India once again retains its No.1 market status, drawing the highest visitation with nearly two million visitors, thanks to high-impact delivery of timely, seasonal messaging, and segment specific campaigns. The Department's investments yielded strong stabilising returns, strategically tapping into the close association and diaspora affinity, which Dubai shares with this market, countering the relentless spate of outbound tourism challenges including airline industry degradation and geopolitical volatility.

Coming in strong at No. 2, KSA consolidates its position as the GCC's highest traffic generator with 1.6 million Saudis visiting Dubai - commendable in a year that saw a massive surge in availability of competitive domestic tourist products, from attractions and sporting events to entertainment and festivals, for the market. In a resounding affirmation of the Emirate's unmatched attractiveness to leisure travellers and families in specific, Eid and KSA National Holiday periods in 2019 broke all prior records with the latter alone registering an astounding year-on-year growth of over 36 per cent.

The UK, meanwhile, remains Dubai's third largest source market, with an impressive 1.2 million British travellers visiting the city in 2019 even as they continued to be affected by economic instability and a weaker pound, impacting affordability. To ensure effective consideration and strong value for various segments of repeat and new tourists, Dubai deployed a well-rounded and rigorously executed 'always on' series of in-market activities, including seasonal campaigns and promotions, industry engagements, and strategic destination partnerships with leading media houses, publishers, digital networks and trade stakeholders.

As the second highest volume driver for the GCC, Oman secures fourth spot in 2019 with a sharp 24.3 per cent spike to deliver over a million visitors, attributable in large part to Dubai Tourism's innovative range of seasonal campaigns and a strong annual programme of custom activations for the market. Successful advocacy-based marketing saw four Omani influencers visiting Dubai over their National Day period to experience the city and share their first-hand account with a social media fan base of over 750,000 followers. With Omani arrivals growing 47 per cent during Eid Al Adha and 25 per cent during Oman National Day celebrations, the GCC region led the way in supporting Dubai's summer arrivals of over three and half million tourists, showcasing an impressive 13 per cent year-on-year growth for the season, largely from the global family tourism segment – all of which emphatically announced the Emirate's competitiveness as a year-round destination.

Poised to break the one million barrier in 2020, fifth-placed China registers 989,000 visitors to Dubai in 2019 at 15.5 per cent year-on-year growth, more than doubling its 450,000 volume from just four years ago before the impactful regulatory easing of accessibility with the introduction of the visa-on-arrival provision for this market. To sustain attractiveness, and actively grow share in this high-volume, high-growth and high-competition country, Dubai has successfully built and proven the efficacy of its three-pronged approach – 'direct-to-consumer' platform-based awareness programmes; customised trip-planning supplemented by advocacy-driven collaborations; and in-city experience and China Readiness delivery.

Despite airlift constraints and aggressive competitor pricing, Dubai retains attractiveness for Russia on the back of a strong fourth quarter rally to take the sixth spot with 728,000 visitors at a strong 7.4 per cent growth. The USA follows right behind with a two per cent increase to land at 667,000 visitors, while Germany takes eighth place with 560,000 visitors. Closing out the top 10 markets, Pakistan also crosses the half a million mark with a strong 501,000 visitors, while the Philippines impresses again with a dramatic 23.2 per cent increase, cementing its status as a top 10 feeder delivering 477,000 visitors to Dubai.

Some noteworthy highlights from the top 20 list include France with 382,000 visitors, Egypt with 314,000 visitors and Italy with 247,000 visitors – all demonstrating potential to positively impact the tourist traffic in 2020, followed closely by Nigeria at 246,000 tourist arrivals even as it retained its position as the fastest growing source market with an exceptional 33 per cent spike in travel to Dubai. Complementing its Russian counterpart, the CIS region makes a first-time appearance in this category with newcomer Kazakhstan leading the bloc with a 23 per cent growth to round off the top 20 with 147,000 visitors.

Performance results at a regional level showcase Dubai's continued attractiveness to Western Europe amidst a recessionary economy and a strong US Dollar limiting Dubai's price competitiveness, as it emerges on top of the contributor list with a 20 per cent share and 3.4 million tourists. Close on its heels, the GCC brought in over three million visitors, followed by South Asia with 2.7 million visitors, each contributing 18 and 16 per cent of international visitation to the city respectively. With a strong 12 per cent share from North East Asia and South-East Asia and the proximate Middle East and North African region accounting for a further 10 per cent, the numbers reflect both the sustained level of demand conversion and the widespread global consideration for Dubai.

Dubai remains among the most preferred destinations for segments across the Russia, CIS and Eastern European economies that collectively drive nine per cent of the volumes, with 1.6 million visitors, while the Americas and Africa followed, each with six per cent of the share. Australasia rounds off the regional mix with two per cent of the tourist contribution.

#### **'Best in Travel' for 2020**

In a major boost for the city's tourism sector, Dubai has been named one of the world's top 10 cities for travellers to visit in 2020 by global travel authority Lonely Planet, which announced its 'Best in Travel 2020' list last October. Dubai's attractiveness as a tourist hotspot was also acknowledged by major publications and news outlets such as CNN, Condé Nast Traveller, Travel & Leisure, Afar, Forbes and many others around the globe.

#### **Strategic Partnerships**

Dubai Tourism's commitment to its source markets is further emphasised by the launch of strategic collaborations with the biggest names in the travel and technology ecosystem such as Travel Audience - an Amadeus company, Hotelbeds - a leading Spain-based travel distribution platform, Chinese conglomerate Tencent's WeChat, new Gen Z platforms like TikTok, online travel agencies like Ctrip, region specific ones like Seera Group for the MENA, and airline partners like FTI to name just a few.

## Global and Regional Outreach

As Dubai continues to be a leading destination of choice for visitors from around the world, targeted 360 integrated and 'Always On' campaigns were developed for key source markets along with joint initiatives with the trade, stakeholders and media in-market to further highlight the city's multi-faceted touristic appeal.

Two noteworthy examples include:

1. With India retaining its top source market status, new innovative campaigns and trade initiatives were adopted including a highly successful 'Monsoon' promotion across digital platforms that showcased Dubai as the perfect getaway from the rain. The campaign reached over 30 million frequent travellers in India. Further, trade roadshows in three key Indian cities - Mumbai, Kolkata and Ahmedabad – helped promote Dubai's destination offerings to over 750 travel agents.
1. The 2019 Greater China Roadshow of Dubai Tourism supported by 35 stakeholders including an Expo 2020 team helped initiate key trade opportunities in six leading cities in China, with over 350 buyers participating in a series of activities, which included networking dinner events with Expo 2020.

### Celebrities-led Mega Campaigns

Dubai Tourism's efforts to showcase the diversity of its offerings to a worldwide audience have been amplified through mega celebrity-led initiatives, with the first-of-its-kind global campaign for Dubai featuring a powerful all-female Hollywood superstar cast bringing up the last quarter with resounding success. **'A Story Takes Flight'**, a short film directed by award-winning filmmaker Reed Morano and featuring three top Hollywood superstars Gwyneth Paltrow, Kate Hudson and Zoe Saldana, brings Dubai to the fore in three separate journeys of exploration through the city. The film has so far generated 340 million views across digital platforms in under eight weeks of run-time.

Earlier in the year, the phenomenally successful customised campaign, **#BeMyGuest** with megastar Shah Rukh Khan raised high awareness levels among audiences in Dubai's No. 1 source market India, logging 160 million views in a short few weeks in its third edition. These campaigns have successfully converted celebrities and influencers into ardent fans and ambassadors of Dubai, ensuring that they become Dubai loyalists and advocates with their resounding endorsements bringing the city even closer to their legions of followers.

The 'Dubai Face Off' campaign in the Nigerian market saw Dubai Tourism collaborating exclusively with two trade partners, WONTRA and Tour Brokers International, to create a one-of-a-kind travel experience package where ten Nigerian celebrities gave their fans the opportunity to travel with them to Dubai. The campaign surpassed projected results with over 200 fans travelling to Dubai for the exclusive campaign, while the celebrities received just under 31 million engagements on social media to boost the Department's 'always-on' social media strategy.

### Multi-platform Social Engagement

2019 saw Dubai Tourism launching many technology-led pilot activations across social media and digital platforms, positioning Dubai as a major partner for global technology players. The activations sought to influence decision-making related to outbound travel through cutting-edge user-generated initiatives.

One such programme was the #ThisisDubai campaign - a unique first with TikTok that invited GCC users to share their Dubai stories with themed music for a chance to win an exciting holiday to the emirate. Successfully engaging its target audience by harnessing the power of user-generated content and organic distribution, this resulted in an overwhelming response of over 30 million video views on the campaign page and over 47,000 user generated videos featuring the song 'This is Dubai'.

With Red Bull, Dubai Tourism showcased diverse and 'Only in Dubai' experiences featuring BMX star Kriss Kyle across iconic landmarks in Dubai, and delivered powerful video content that yielded close to five million views driving deeper intrigue and dialogue around Dubai.

Dubai Tourism also ran a series of bespoke campaigns and initiatives aimed at delivering unforgettable experiences for segments across several global markets on tailored channels for their audiences such as the highly popular WeChat Mini-Program and partnerships with Tencent Games to launch The Map as part of the successful online LEGO@Cube game for the Chinese market.

### Proactive and future-focused regulatory reforms

New strategic, legislative and regulatory enablers including the proposed UAE-wide implementation of a five year multiple entry visa for tourists of all nationalities, and efforts to increase air capacity to Dubai, are set to further increase visitor arrivals. The emirate also announced a tourist visa fee waiver for children under 18 years of age, accompanied by their parents, from 15 July to 15 September, strengthening Dubai's appeal as a family-friendly destination for the summer period.

### Leveraging Festivals and Events

With an impressive line-up of even more city-wide events, activations and experiences led by the 25th edition of Dubai Shopping Festival, the Retail Calendar is being unveiled on a large scale throughout 2020, featuring 18 festivals, events, celebrations and promotions over 248 days. As a testament to the competitiveness of the city's ever-evolving calendar, Dubai was honoured as the 'World Festival and Event City' by the International Festivals and Events Association in 2011, 2012 and 2014.

Strengthening Dubai's position as the 'leading cruise hub of the region', the emirate welcomed six international cruise liners on 29 December, through its award-winning Mina Rashid cruise terminal, which dealt with formalities and processes for more than 60,000 cruise passengers. Following a highly successful 2018/2019 cruise season, which saw a record increase of over 51 per cent in cruise

tourist footfall and a 38 per cent increase in cruise ship calls, Dubai is expected to welcome more than 200 ship calls and an estimated one million cruise visitors during the 2019/2020 season.

**His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General, Dubai Tourism** concluded: "In 2019, we developed and deployed a custom-market specific approach to our global outreach programmes to gain greater access in our target markets and widen the sphere of influence and engagement with the Dubai proposition. Our strategic investments, innovative destination promotion programmes, responsive federal policy reforms, and long-term global partnerships – all backed by the tremendous support of our stakeholders across the government and private sector – continue to yield strong results and ultimately drive both first-time and repeat visitation. In 2020, we will continue to accelerate the tourism momentum by showcasing Dubai's event hosting capabilities in the run up to Expo 2020, roll out brand new campaigns and high-profile entertainment programming, develop richer content partnerships, in addition to widening existing marketing outreach activities and expanding our portfolio of destination offerings. In an era of hyper-connectivity, globally integrated technologies, and instantaneous communications, we are well aware of the importance of staying ahead of the curve to cement our place at the forefront of leading world destinations."



