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Winner of the "Most Influential Tourism Newspaper in the Arab World 2026" Award by AFUSU

Minor Hotels Targets Q3 2027 Opening for Tivoli and Avani Resorts in Bahrain

Nobu Enters Bahrain for the First Time Through Infracorp Partnership to Develop Luxury Hotel, Restaurant and Residences on Reef Island

Microsoft Outage Disrupts Airline Customer Service Emails as Flight Operations Continue

From the Haramain High-Speed Railway to the GCC Network: How Rail Transport Is Reshaping Tourism Across the Arab World



Madinah to Host Future Hospitality Summit Saudi Arabia for the First Time in April 2027



Knowledge Economic City signs hosting agreement with The Bench as the summit moves to a 325-room hotel near the Haramain High-Speed Railway station, amid major hospitality development plans.

Madinah – Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

Madinah will host the Future Hospitality Summit Saudi Arabia (FHS Saudi Arabia) for the first time on April 13–14, 2027, following a partnership agreement between Knowledge Economic City (KEC) and The Bench, the summit's organizer. The agreement will bring one of Saudi Arabia's leading hospitality investment gatherings from Riyadh to Madinah.

The agreement was signed in Cairo during FHS Egypt, held on November 10–11, 2026, by Saleh Al-Dakhil, Brand and Creative Marketing Director at Knowledge Economic City, and Jonathan Worsley, Chairman of The Bench.

A Hotel Next to the Haramain Railway Station

The summit will take place at the 325-room DoubleTree by Hilton hotel within Madinah Gate, the first operational destination developed by Knowledge Economic City.

The hotel forms part of a transit-oriented development featuring hospitality facilities, retail outlets, restaurants and an integrated bus station, located next to the Haramain High-Speed Railway station connecting Madinah with Makkah and Jeddah.

The venue will allow delegates to explore a development model integrating hospitality investment with public transport infrastructure, extending the summit experience beyond conference halls and investment presentations.

More Than 1,000 Participants at the Riyadh Edition

The 2026 edition in Riyadh attracted more than 1,000 participants from 32 countries, including investors representing institutions with combined assets under management of approximately $4.8 trillion.

According to an economic impact study conducted by JLL, participants reported generating $1.9 billion in business opportunities and deals during the summit.

However, this figure includes reported commercial opportunities





"Hosting the summit provides investors, hotel operators and developers with an opportunity to gain firsthand insights into ongoing projects and explore opportunities to participate in their development."

Dr. Muath Al Yahya
CEO of Knowledge Economic City

and transactions and should not be interpreted as entirely completed investments.

Hospitality Developments Under a SAR 24 Billion Master Plan

The summit comes as Knowledge Economic City advances a 6.8-million-square-metre master plan comprising four major destinations: Madinah Gate, Madinah Hub, the Islamic World District and Al-Alya.

According to the company, the master plan represents more than SAR 24 billion in announced investment commitments, with long-term plans targeting approximately 42,000 hotel rooms and 40,000 residential units upon completion of all development phases.

These figures represent future development targets rather than existing hotel accommodation.

Dr. Moath Al-Yahya, CEO of Knowledge Economic City, said hosting the summit would provide investors, hotel operators and developers with an opportunity to explore ongoing developments and potential investment opportunities firsthand.

Al-Rehla Insight | Bringing Hospitality Investment Closer to the Destination

The Madinah edition carries particular significance as it brings hospitality investment discussions directly to a destination whose hotel sector plays a central role in serving pilgrims, Umrah visitors and other travellers.

Hosting the event near the Haramain High-Speed Railway station also provides an opportunity to examine the relationship between transport connectivity, hotel development and commercial services—key components of successful religious tourism destinations.

Nevertheless, the summit's actual economic impact will depend on the agreements, investments and commercially viable projects that emerge from the event, rather than the scale of announced development plans or the assets managed by participating institutions alone.

Nobu Enters Bahrain for the First Time Through Infracorp Partnership to Develop Luxury Hotel, Restaurant and Residences on Reef Island



The 51,000-square-metre Marina Bay development will combine luxury hospitality, fine dining and branded residences, with an estimated development period of three years

Manama – Bahrain | Al Rehla

Nobu Hospitality has announced its entry into the Bahraini market for the first time through a partnership agreement with Infracorp to develop a luxury hospitality and residential destination at Marina Bay on Reef Island in Manama. The project will feature a Nobu hotel, restaurant and branded residences.

Announced on November 12, 2026, the agreement marks another step in Nobu's expansion across the Middle East, as Bahrain seeks to attract international hospitality brands and diversify its luxury accommodation and dining offerings.

The agreement was signed at Infracorp's headquarters in Manama in the presence of Fatima bint Jaffar Al Sairafi, Bahrain's Minister of Tourism and Chairperson of the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority.

The signatories were Talal Al Mahroos, Chief Executive Officer of Infracorp, and Trevor Horwell, Chief Executive Officer of Nobu Hospitality.

A Waterfront Hotel and International Restaurant

The development will comprise three main components: a Nobu hotel, a Nobu restaurant and luxury branded residences, creating an integrated waterfront destination on Reef Island.

The project will have a total gross floor area of approximately 51,000 square metres, with an estimated development period of three years.

The partners have yet to disclose the number of hotel rooms or residential units, the project's total investment value, or an official construction commencement or opening date.

Bahrain Attracts a New Luxury Hospitality Brand

Minister of Tourism Fatima bint Jaffar Al Sairafi highlighted the importance of collaboration between government



"Attracting the Nobu brand reflects the importance of collaboration between government entities, developers and investors in expanding the presence of international hotel brands in the Kingdom."

Fatima bint Jaffar Al Sairafi
Minister of Tourism, Bahrain



"The collaboration with Nobu aligns with Infracorp's strategy to develop destinations that combine luxury hospitality, distinctive design and residential services in prime locations."

Talal Al Mahroos
CEO of Infracorp

entities, developers and investors in attracting international hospitality brands to Bahrain.

She also emphasised the role of cooperation with the Bahrain Economic Development Board in promoting investment opportunities and securing projects that diversify the Kingdom's tourism offerings.

Talal Al Mahroos said the partnership with Nobu aligns with Infracorp's strategy of developing destinations that combine luxury hospitality, contemporary design and residential services in prime locations.

Trevor Horwell described Nobu's entry into Bahrain as another milestone in the group's regional expansion, noting that the project will bring together dining, design and accommodation within a single destination.

Nobu Combines Restaurants, Hotels and Branded Residences

Nobu is internationally recognised for its restaurants, which blend contemporary Japanese cuisine with global influences, before expanding into luxury hotels and branded residential developments.

The Bahrain project reflects the group's continued focus on integrated destinations, allowing visitors to experience its hospitality and dining concepts alongside residences carrying the same brand.

Branded residences differ from conventional hotel accommodation, as they are generally offered for private ownership under specific arrangements. Their inclusion does not necessarily mean that the properties will be available for short-term tourist bookings.

Al-Rehla Insight | What Will Nobu Bring to Bahrain's Tourism Industry?

The project's significance for Bahrain's tourism sector lies in attracting a new international hospitality brand that combines hotel accommodation and a signature restaurant in a waterfront location in Manama.

The proposed hotel could expand Bahrain's luxury accommodation options, while the Nobu restaurant could strengthen the Kingdom's dining scene and appeal to residents and visitors, particularly those travelling from neighbouring Gulf markets for short breaks.

However, the project's actual tourism impact will depend on the number of hotel rooms, pricing, services available to non-resident guests and the confirmed opening date. These details have not yet been announced.

Furthermore, the estimated three-year development period should not be interpreted as a confirmed opening in 2029, as the final construction schedule and commencement date remain undisclosed.

The agreement therefore represents a potential future addition to Bahrain's hospitality industry, rather than an immediate increase in the Kingdom's available hotel capacity.



Travel in Brief

When Winter Becomes a Travel Destination

BY:
Dr. Saleh Al-Makhdoom
President of the Arab Club for Tourism Media

As winter approaches, travel enthusiasts turn their attention to destinations covered in snow, where mountains and villages transform into beautiful white landscapes, and cold weather becomes part of the travel experience. Winter tourism is no longer limited to skiing; it has evolved into a complete experience combining nature, adventure, and relaxation.

Switzerland remains one of the most popular winter destinations, particularly Zermatt, St. Moritz, and Interlaken, where mountain resorts and scenic train journeys offer breathtaking snowy views. Austria, meanwhile, provides a different experience in Innsbruck and Zell am See, where traditional villages, lakes, and mountains come together, offering a wide range of accommodation and winter activities.

In Northern Europe, Finland, particularly the Lapland region, offers visitors the opportunity to witness the Northern Lights, enjoy husky sled rides, and stay in glass cabins surrounded by snow. Norway also provides an exceptional experience for nature lovers, especially in Tromsø, which has become a popular destination for viewing the Northern Lights.

For travelers seeking more affordable winter destinations, Georgia offers ski resorts such as Gudauri and Bakuriani, while Turkey features destinations like Uludağ and Kartalkaya, combining snow activities with local hospitality.

In Asia, Japan offers a unique winter experience, particularly in Hokkaido, known for its heavy snowfall, ski resorts, and natural hot springs, making it an ideal destination for those seeking both adventure and Japanese culture.

However, choosing a winter destination should not be based solely on beautiful photographs. Snowfall varies from one region to another, while hotel and flight prices often increase during holidays and peak seasons. Early planning and choosing the right travel dates can make a significant difference in both the cost and quality of the trip.

Ultimately, the most memorable winter journeys are not necessarily those spent at luxurious resorts. Sometimes, the best experiences can be found in lesser-known destinations, far from expensive hotels and crowded tourist attractions. Simply visiting a different city, discovering its winter atmosphere, and enjoying a new experience without spending too much can be just as rewarding.



Minor Hotels Targets Q3 2027 Opening for Tivoli and Avani Resorts in Bahrain



The two Bilaj Al Jazayer resorts will offer 210 rooms and suites under an agreement with Edamah, as Minor Hotels prepares to open 22 properties and enter six new countries worldwide.

Manama – Bahrain | Al Rehla

Minor Hotels has announced that it is targeting the third quarter of 2027 for the opening of Tivoli Bilaj Al Jazayer Bahrain Resort and Avani Bilaj Al Jazayer Bahrain Resort, marking the group's first operational presence in the Kingdom.

Together, the two properties will offer 210 rooms and suites.

The updated opening schedule was included in the group's November 11, 2026 announcement outlining its global hotel openings for 2027, which includes 22 hotels and resorts across six continents and entry into six new countries.

The announcement represents a revised timeline for the two Bahraini resorts, originally announced in August 2021 under a development and operating agreement with Bahrain Real Estate Investment Company (Edamah), the real estate arm of Bahrain Mumtalakat Holding Company.

Two Resorts on Bahrain's Southwestern Coast

The resorts are located within the Bilaj Al Jazayer development on Bahrain's southwestern coast, a mixed-use waterfront destination incorporating tourism, leisure and residential facilities.

The wider development covers approximately 1.3 million square metres and features around three kilometres of beachfront.

Tivoli Bilaj Al Jazayer Bahrain Resort will offer 100 rooms and suites in the luxury hospitality segment, alongside dining, leisure and wellness facilities.

Avani Bilaj Al Jazayer Bahrain Resort will feature 110 rooms and suites, offering a contemporary beachfront experience designed for families and leisure travellers.

Both resorts are planned to provide direct beach access, restaurants, wellness facilities and family-oriented amenities.

A Development First Announced in 2021

Edamah and Minor Hotels signed the original agreement in August 2021, when the resorts were initially scheduled to open in 2024.

In July 2023, Edamah announced the



commencement of works at the site.

A further construction milestone followed in November 2024, when the company announced the start of development works for the Tivoli and Avani hotels and branded residences, with completion then targeted for the second quarter of 2026.

The development also includes branded residential units as part of the broader transformation of the Bilaj Al Jazayer waterfront.

Minor Hotels' latest announcement indicates that the targeted operational opening has moved to the third quarter of 2027.

The group did not provide a detailed explanation for the revised schedule.

Global Expansion Across Six New Countries

Minor Hotels plans to enter six new markets during 2027: Bahrain, Croatia, Slovenia, Malta, Uzbekistan and Singapore.

Its international expansion programme includes properties operating under brands such as Anantara, Avani, Tivoli and NH Collection, alongside newer additions to the group's hospitality portfolio.

In the United Arab Emirates, Minor Hotels is also preparing to relaunch Dukes The Palm Dubai under its Colbert Collection brand in the third quarter of 2027.

Located on Palm West Beach, the existing property comprises 273 hotel rooms and 287 serviced apartments and is scheduled to be repositioned under the new brand.

Unlike the two Bahrain resorts, the Dubai project involves the relaunch and rebranding of an existing hospitality property rather than the development of an entirely new hotel.

What Will the Resorts Add to Bahrain's Tourism Sector?

The two Bilaj Al Jazayer resorts are expected to add 210 rooms and suites to Bahrain's hospitality offering within a coastal destination being developed for accommodation, leisure and recreational activities.

Their opening will also introduce two internationally recognised hospitality brands to the Bahraini market, expanding beachfront accommodation options along the Kingdom's southwestern coast, beyond the main urban areas where much of its hotel activity is concentrated.

However, the actual impact on visitor numbers, hotel occupancy and tourism spending cannot be established until construction is completed and the resorts begin operating.

The third quarter of 2027 therefore remains a targeted opening period rather than a confirmed operational date.

Further confirmation will depend on the completion of development works, the opening of reservations and the official commencement of guest services.

Tunisia to Host Chocolate and Pastry Salon with Over 150 Exhibitors from Six Countries



The eighth edition opens on November 19 for three days of chocolate tastings, live demonstrations, children's workshops and pastry competitions.

Tunis – Tunisia | Al Rehla

Tunisia's capital is preparing to host the eighth edition of the Chocolate and Pastry Salon (Salon du Chocolat & de la Pâtisserie) from November 19 to 21, 2026, at the headquarters of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), bringing together more than 150 exhibitors from Tunisia and abroad.

The event will feature chocolate makers, pastry chefs, confectioners, coffee specialists, ice cream producers and culinary artisans, alongside industry professionals, through a programme combining professional demonstrations with interactive experiences for visitors.

International Participation and Tasting Experiences

This year's edition will welcome participants from Egypt, Algeria, Cameroon, Italy and France, alongside Tunisian exhibitors, offering visitors an opportunity to discover different products, techniques and traditions in chocolate and pastry making.

The salon will be open daily from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., featuring live demonstrations and tasting sessions that allow visitors to observe pastry-making techniques and explore the products on display.

The event will also provide industry professionals with opportunities to exchange expertise and discover innovations in food production and confectionery.

Competitions and Children's Workshops

The programme includes interactive workshops for children and competitions designed to showcase emerging talent and encourage creativity in pastry making.

Highlights include the Best Chocolate Artistic Creation and Best Pastry competitions, featuring trainees from vocational training centres under the supervision of industry professionals.

Cash prizes will be awarded to the winners.

Chocolate as Part of the Tunis Visitor Experience

The salon offers an additional activity for visitors to Tunis in November, combining tasting experiences with opportunities to discover confectionery craftsmanship and locally produced specialities.

The event also reflects the appeal of culinary tourism, which encourages travellers to explore destinations through their food traditions and artisanal products alongside historical and cultural attractions.

For families, children's workshops and interactive demonstrations provide opportunities for shared experiences, while international participation introduces visitors to diverse confectionery traditions and techniques.

However, the event's actual contribution to international visitor arrivals and tourism spending will depend on attendance figures and other results, which have yet to be announced.

US Hotel Revenue Grows 4.7% in Early November as Smaller Markets Lead Performance



Average daily room rate reaches $168.35, with occupancy at 65.1%, while St. Louis records the strongest growth among major markets, supported by a large religious convention.

Washington – United States | Al Rehla

The US hotel industry recorded year-on-year growth of 4.7% in revenue per available room (RevPAR) during the week of November 1–7, 2026, although the pace of growth slowed compared with the previous week, according to data from CoStar, a leading provider of hospitality industry information and analytics.

The report, released on November 12, showed that RevPAR increased to $109.55, supported by a 3.2% rise in average daily rate (ADR) to $168.35 and a 1.4% increase in occupancy to 65.1%.

RevPAR had grown by 9.7% in the preceding week, indicating a slowdown in the annual growth rate at the beginning of November, rather than an actual decline in revenue compared with the previous year.

Markets Outside Major Cities Drive Growth

The data showed that hotels outside the 25 largest US hotel markets were the main drivers of national performance, recording a 7.1% increase in RevPAR.

Meanwhile, 15 of the 25 largest markets reported RevPAR growth, highlighting variations in performance across US destinations.

St. Louis Leads Revenue Gains

St. Louis recorded the strongest RevPAR growth among major markets, rising 18.6% to $97.73.

Occupancy in the city also increased by 7.5% to 68.5%, coinciding with the 118th Annual Holy Convocation of the Church of God in Christ, which attracted participants to the city from November 3 to 10.

Miami, meanwhile, recorded the largest increase in average daily room rates among major markets, rising 11.6% to $245.59.

Microsoft Outage Disrupts Airline Customer Service Emails as Flight Operations Continue



IndiGo and Akasa Air warn of delayed email responses, while Emirates responds with a humorous message: "The Skies Are Always Open."

Dubai – UAE | Al Rehla

A widespread Microsoft 365 outage, affecting Outlook email services and the Teams communication platform, disrupted electronic customer support services at several airlines, prompting carriers to warn passengers about possible delays in responding to inquiries. However, airlines did not report a suspension of flight operations directly resulting from the outage.

The disruption began on Thursday, November 12, 2026, and continued to affect services on Friday, with users across multiple countries reporting difficulties accessing email accounts and related digital platforms.

Airlines Activate Alternative Communication Channels

Indian carriers IndiGo and Akasa Air notified customers of disruptions affecting email-based customer support services, warning that responses to inquiries and requests could be delayed.

Meanwhile, Air India confirmed that its flight operations were continuing and that alternative communication methods were being used to handle passenger inquiries during the disruption.

No verified reports established that flights had been cancelled specifically because of the Microsoft outage.

Emirates Responds with Humour

Emirates chose a lighthearted approach to the situation, sharing an Instagram post featuring an Airbus A380 flying through the clouds.

The image carried the message: "Your email might be down, but the skies are always open."

The post attracted attention as an example of how airlines can use major technology-related events to engage with customers through creative marketing communication.

Al Rehla Perspective | What Should Travellers Do?

The incident highlights the importance of not relying exclusively on email for essential travel information, particularly during widespread technology disruptions.

Al Rehla recommends saving copies of flight tickets, boarding passes and booking confirmations directly to mobile devices and using airline applications or official websites to check flight status.

Passengers should also use alternative communication channels announced by airlines when email services become unavailable. Importantly, travellers should not assume that their flights have been cancelled simply because they cannot access a booking confirmation email.

The disruption also underscores the importance of digital business continuity plans within the aviation industry, ensuring that airlines can maintain effective communication with passengers when major technology services experience outages.



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European Union to Launch Tourism Academy in 2027 to Address Skills and Labour Shortages



92% of tourism SMEs struggle to recruit workers with the required skills, as the new academy aims to connect universities and vocational institutions with industry needs.

Brussels – Belgium | Al Rehla

The European Commission plans to launch the EU Tourism Academy in the second half of 2027 as part of a new strategy to address skills and labour shortages across the tourism industry and develop training programmes aligned with the needs of hotels, travel companies and tourism destinations.

The initiative was announced under the Sustainable Tourism Strategy presented by the European Commission on November 4, 2026.

European Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism Apostolos Tzitzikostas highlighted shortages of skilled workers as one of the major challenges facing the sector.

92% of Tourism SMEs Face Recruitment Difficulties

European Commission documents indicate that 92% of tourism-related small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the European Union face difficulties finding employees with the required skills.

The sector comprises approximately five million businesses, 99% of which are SMEs, and supports more than 20 million jobs across the EU.

The proposed academy aims to assist these businesses by providing access to professional training and skills development programmes designed to bridge the gap between education and labour market requirements.

European Network for Training and Qualifications

The academy will operate through a network connecting universities, national tourism education institutions, vocational education and training providers, and industry partners.

Its activities will focus on developing educational content and collaborative training programmes tailored to the evolving needs of the tourism industry.

Plans also include the possibility of offering digital microcredentials, allowing tourism professionals to formally demonstrate their skills and enhance their professional qualifications.



The initiative will draw on tourism labour market analysis and future skills forecasts to direct training towards areas experiencing the greatest demand.

However, the European Commission has not yet announced the academy's detailed budget or enrolment requirements.

World Travel & Tourism Council Welcomes the Initiative

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) welcomed the European Union's tourism strategy and the proposed academy in a statement issued on November 10.

The organisation described the initiative as an opportunity to address workforce shortages and better align training programmes with the practical needs of tourism businesses.

WTTC also emphasised the importance of collaboration between public institutions, education providers and the private sector, expressing its willingness to contribute industry expertise to support the initiative.

The academy forms part of a broader programme that includes the establishment of a European Tourism Observatory in the first half of 2027 to monitor industry trends, analyse data and support tourism policymaking.

Al Rehla Perspective | Can the Academy Bridge Europe's Tourism Skills Gap?

The significance of the initiative lies in moving beyond traditional recruitment approaches towards developing a structured training system closely connected to the needs of tourism businesses.

However, the academy's success will not be measured solely by the number of courses delivered or certificates awarded.

Its effectiveness will depend on whether it improves workforce capabilities and employment opportunities, particularly among smaller tourism companies that lack sufficient resources to provide extensive in-house training.

For the Arab hospitality and tourism sectors, the European initiative offers a model worth following, particularly in strengthening cooperation between universities, tourism institutes and private companies.

Practical skills, digital capabilities and hospitality service standards are among the areas where closer collaboration between education and industry could deliver measurable benefits.

The academy's actual impact will become clearer following its launch, when data on trainee participation, skills development and employment outcomes becomes available.



Influencer Promotion: Between Marketing Imagery and the Reality of Tourism Destinations.. Where Does Credibility Lie? (Part 1)

BY:
Abdulrahim Al-Arjan
Travel Explorer and Adventure Tourism Researcher

Tourism promotion today is no longer limited to traditional advertising campaigns or informational publications issued by tourism organizations. Social media platforms and travel influencers have become some of the most powerful tools for promoting and shaping the image of destinations, thanks to their ability to reach vast audiences, influence perceptions, and inspire people to visit places they may never have heard of before.

However, amid this rapid expansion of promotional tools, an important issue deserves serious attention: the promotion of destinations that are difficult to access, restricted for technical or environmental reasons, or subject to regulations intended to protect visitor safety. Some of these locations may be inherently dangerous or situated within environmentally or otherwise sensitive areas where access is prohibited without special permits.

The issue becomes even more concerning when such promotional activities are not merely individual initiatives by content creators but are sometimes supported or sponsored by official tourism authorities or relevant government ministries. Such endorsement gives the promotional material additional credibility, leading potential visitors to interpret it as a reliable invitation to explore the destination and assume that access is readily available to the general public.

When Promotion Collides with Reality

Imagine a tourist travelling thousands of kilometres, perhaps crossing international borders, spending money on flights and accommodation, and making a particular destination the highlight of their itinerary after watching videos and promotional campaigns portraying it as a place open to everyone.

Yet, upon arrival, the traveller discovers restrictions prohibiting entry, permits that are difficult to obtain, or conditions that could place their personal safety at serious risk.

At this point, the problem goes beyond simple disappointment or unmet expectations. It can turn into a negative experience that damages the reputation of the entire destination, particularly if the disappointed visitor shares their experience on social media or writes about it in the press.

More concerning still, some visitors, determined to reach the places they have seen in promotional content, may turn to individuals or unauthorized operators offering access through illegal means.

This creates a far more serious situation, potentially exposing visitors to life-threatening risks or accidents for which multiple parties may ultimately bear responsibility.



Spain Documents 280 Prehistoric Engravings in Tourist Cave Visited for Decades

New study reveals 55 animal figures, including a rare bear engraving, placing Cova de la Font Major among the Mediterranean Iberian Peninsula's most significant Palaeolithic cave art sites.

Tarragona – Spain | Al Rehla

Spanish researchers have published the findings of a scientific study documenting 280 prehistoric rock engravings and symbols inside Cova de la Font Major, a cave in the town of L'Espluga de Francolí in Catalonia, northeastern Spain.

The discovery is reshaping the archaeological understanding of the region and its place in the history of European cave art.

Remarkably, the engravings remained unidentified for decades inside a popular tourist attraction, despite thousands of visitors passing through the cave since its entrance was reopened in 1957.

The study was published in the scientific journal Antiquity on November 5, 2026, seven years after the engravings were first discovered in October 2019.

The research involved specialists from the IPHES-CERCA research institute and Rovira i Virgili University.

55 Animal Figures, Including a Rare Bear

The researchers documented 55 animal representations among the engravings, including horses, deer, wild cattle and goats.

One of the most distinctive discoveries is a rare bear engraving showing its ears from the front and its mouth partially open.

The cave also contains geometric shapes, parallel lines and abstract symbols, some of which incorporate natural cracks and rock formations into their designs.

According to the researchers, the site now represents the third-largest known collection of Palaeolithic cave art along the Mediterranean side of the Iberian Peninsula in terms of the number of animal figures, following Ardales and La Pileta in Andalusia.

Ancient Engravings Hidden Beneath Modern Graffiti

The engravings were discovered in passages approximately 250 metres from the cave's present-day entrance.

Some had been damaged by names, dates and drawings left by previous visitors on the rock surfaces.

The difficulty of identifying the fine engravings, particularly under direct lighting, contributed to their remaining unrecognised for decades. Researchers used digital imaging and high-resolution three-dimensional modelling to examine the details without damaging the fragile surfaces.

Evidence of Human Presence Dating Back 26,000 Years

Archaeological evidence inside the cave indicates periods of human occupation dating back approximately 41,000 to 26,000 years.

Although the engravings themselves have not yet been directly dated, their artistic characteristics and archaeological context suggest that a significant proportion may belong to periods preceding the Magdalenian era.

The findings have strengthened Catalonia's position in the study of prehistoric rock art, challenging earlier assumptions that northeastern Iberia contained very few examples of such ancient artistic expression.

Tourist Cave Welcomed More Than 48,000 Visitors

The caves of L'Espluga de Francolí are among the region's important heritage attractions, welcoming 48,250 visitors in 2025, according to municipal figures.

The discovery presents a conservation challenge: protecting the original

engravings while maintaining the site's tourism and educational functions.

Access to the section containing the engravings is restricted as part of protective measures, while researchers continue digitally documenting the artworks to support further study without exposing them to additional damage.

Al Rehla Perspective | When a Tourist Attraction Becomes an Archaeological Discovery

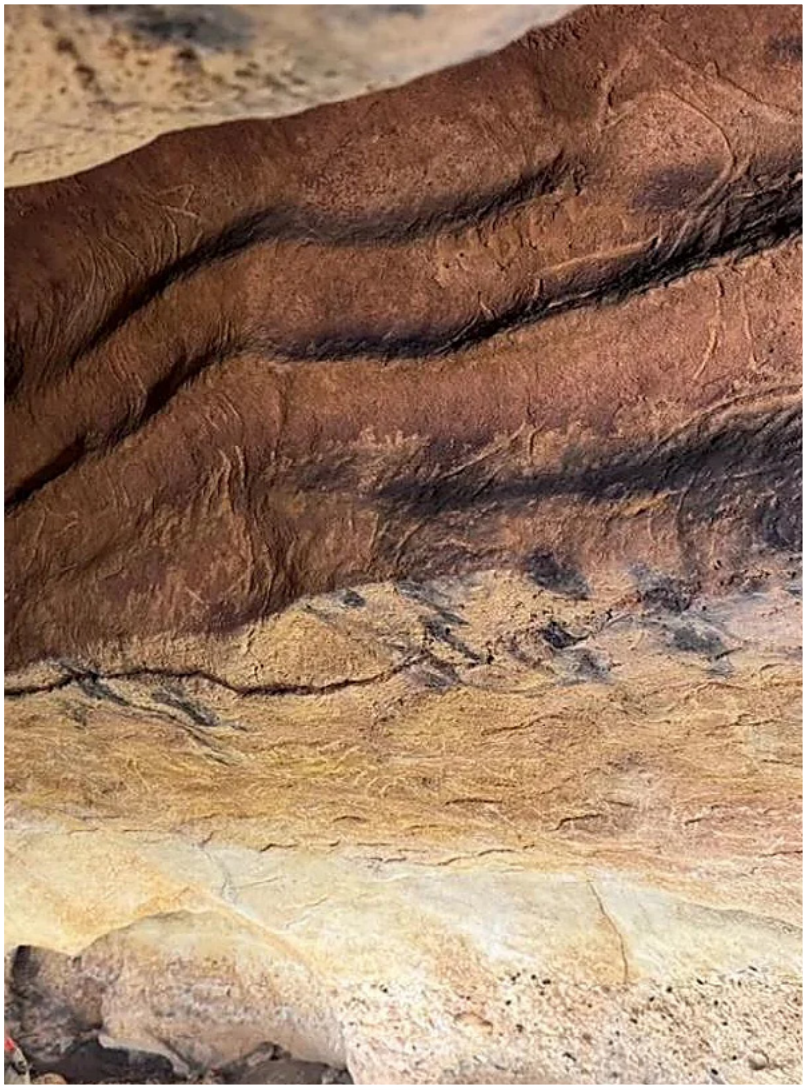
What makes the story of Cova de la Font Major particularly remarkable is not simply the number of engravings uncovered, but the fact that they remained unidentified within a tourist attraction visited for decades.

The discovery highlights the importance of continuously reassessing archaeological sites open to the public, rather than assuming that all their historical features have already been identified and documented.

For travellers, the research adds a new dimension to the cave's heritage appeal. However, visitors should not assume that the original engravings are accessible during regular tours unless the site's management officially confirms public access.
For the cultural tourism industry, the discovery also demonstrates the growing importance of digital interpretation and educational experiences that allow visitors to appreciate archaeological heritage without placing fragile original artworks at risk.

Ultimately, the Catalan discovery illustrates how scientific research can reveal extraordinary historical value within established tourism destinations, while reinforcing the need to balance public access with the long-term preservation of irreplaceable cultural heritage.





France Plans to Limit Visits to Mont Blanc Lakes to 1,000 People a Day from Summer 2027



Proposed advance booking system for Lac Blanc and the Chéserys Lakes near Chamonix, with a three-year trial following peak visitor numbers of 4,000 a day.

Chamonix – France | Al Rehla

Local authorities in Chamonix, in the French Alps, are preparing to introduce a new visitor management system for Lac Blanc and the Chéserys Lakes within the Aiguilles Rouges Nature Reserve.

The proposed measures include mandatory advance reservations and daily visitor limits beginning in summer 2027, aimed at reducing overcrowding and protecting the sensitive mountain environment.

Under the proposed plan, daily access would be limited to 600 visitors in June and between 900 and 1,000 visitors during July, August and September, following summer peaks of approximately 4,000 visitors on certain days.

The measures still require final regulatory approval before they can take effect.

130,000 Visitors Put Pressure on the Environment

Located at an altitude of approximately 2,350 metres, Lac Blanc is renowned for its panoramic views of the Mont Blanc massif and surrounding glaciers, making it a popular destination for hikers and photographers.

The area welcomed around 130,000 visitors in 2025, with visitor numbers having doubled compared with 2020.

Growing visitor traffic has increased pressure on hiking trails, vegetation and wildlife habitats, while also affecting the quality of the visitor experience during peak periods.

Online Reservations and On-Site Monitoring

Chamonix authorities plan to introduce an online reservation system covering the period from June to September, with booking checks at access points and potential fines for visitors who breach the rules once the measures are formally approved.

The proposed system would be tested over three years under the supervision of the authorities responsible for managing the nature reserve.



The initiative has an estimated budget of €590,000 for the 2027–2029 period.

The project draws inspiration from visitor management measures introduced at Calanques National Park near Marseille, where advance reservations are used to reduce pressure on environmentally sensitive sites.

Additional Measures for the Tour du Mont Blanc

Meanwhile, French municipalities along the famous Tour du Mont Blanc hiking route are developing a framework to regulate hiking and camping activities.

The route attracts approximately 90,000 hikers annually.

Proposed measures include strengthening advance accommodation booking requirements, restricting unauthorised camping, establishing designated overnight areas and deploying monitoring teams to help protect the natural environment.

This initiative is separate from the proposed visitor quota system for Lac Blanc.

Al Rehla Perspective | What Does This Mean for Travellers?

If approved, the new regulations would require visitors planning to explore Lac Blanc and the Chéserys Lakes during the summer season to arrange their visits in advance rather than relying on unrestricted access upon arrival.

Al Rehla advises travellers planning hiking trips to Chamonix in summer 2027 to monitor official announcements before finalising their itineraries and to check entry requirements and reservation procedures once they are published.



Finland Tops 2026 Happy Passports Index as Singapore Ranks Tenth Despite Passport Strength



Study covering 50 countries compares freedom of movement, life satisfaction and personal freedoms, with the UAE ranking 23rd and Saudi Arabia 41st overall.

Lisbon – Portugal | Al Rehla

Finland has topped the 2026 Happy Passports Index with a score of 93.2 out of 100, while Singapore ranked tenth despite holding the strongest passport among the countries included in the study, according to a report released by Global Citizen Solutions on November 10.

The index offers a different perspective from traditional passport rankings by combining international mobility with life satisfaction, personal freedoms, and economic, health and safety conditions.

European Countries Dominate the Top Rankings

Iceland ranked second with a score of 92.4, followed by Denmark at 92.1, Norway at 89.3 and Switzerland at 88.3.

Sweden placed sixth, followed by the Netherlands, New Zealand and Austria, while Singapore completed the top ten with a score of 82.8.

The study assessed 50 selected countries across four equally weighted dimensions, each accounting for 25% of the overall score.

Singapore: Passport Strength Is Not Enough

The findings showed that Singapore led the countries surveyed in passport strength, income levels and healthy life expectancy.

However, it ranked 23rd in well-being and 30th in domestic freedom.

By contrast, New Zealand secured eighth place overall despite ranking only 25th in income.

The United Kingdom ranked 17th, while Portugal placed 21st, highlighting the differences between passport strength and life satisfaction.

UAE and Saudi Arabia Featured in the Study

Among Arab countries, the United Arab Emirates ranked 23rd overall, while Saudi Arabia placed 41st.

Saudi Arabia ranked 16th in life satisfaction, demonstrating a notable difference between its performance in this individual category and its overall composite score, which also considers international mobility, freedoms and living conditions.

Al Rehla Perspective | What Does Passport Strength Mean for Travellers?

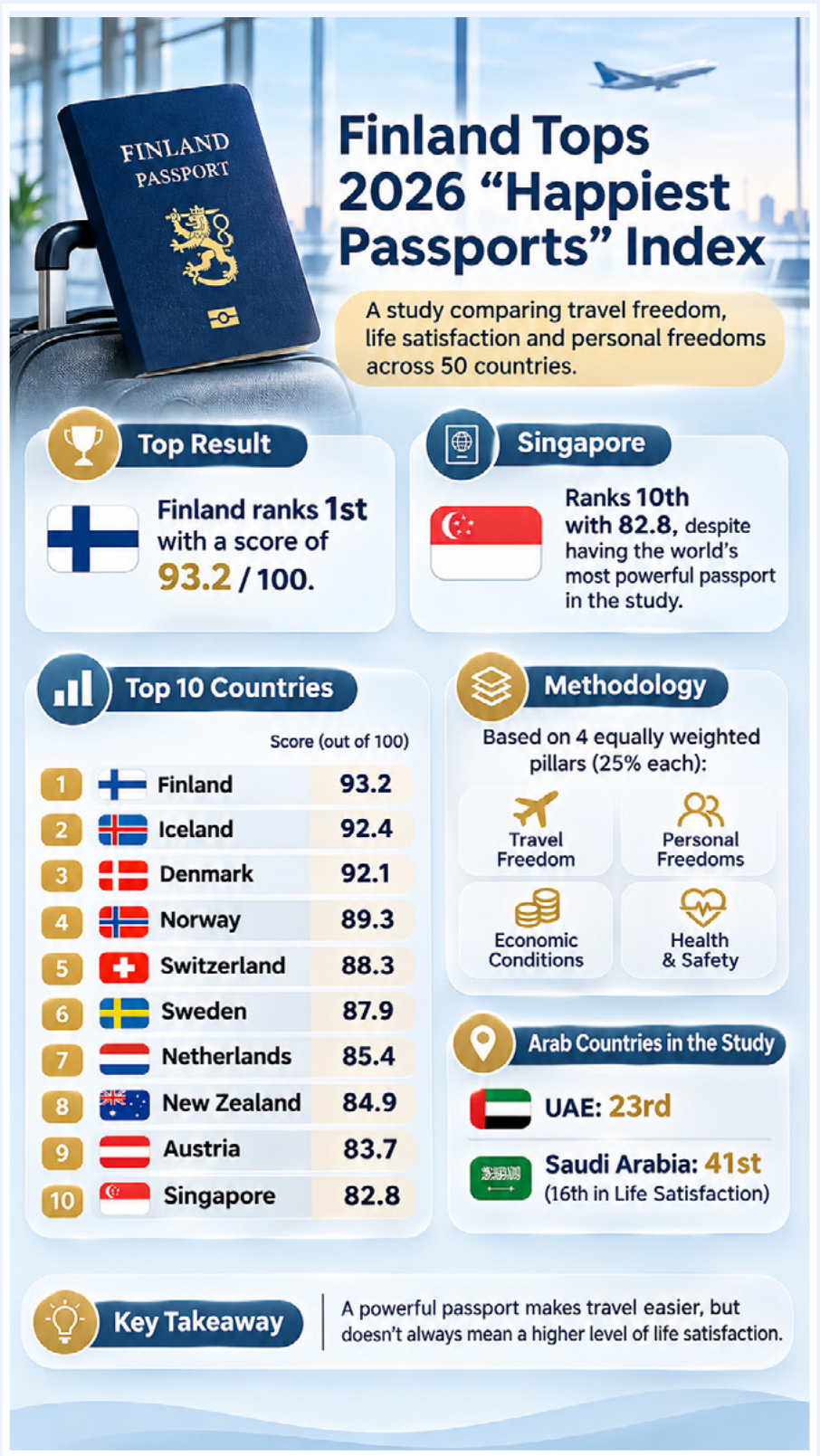
The study highlights that access to a large number of international destinations is an important advantage for passport holders, but it does not necessarily translate into greater satisfaction with life.

Lead researcher Dr. Laura Madrid noted that, among high-income countries, happiness was more strongly associated with freedom than with passport strength.

For travellers, international mobility indicators remain useful for understanding differences in travel access between nationalities.

However, actual travel decisions still require checking the destination's current entry requirements, visa regulations and applicable border procedures.

It is also important to distinguish between this composite index, which measures characteristics of countries and their populations, and the actual visitor experience, which the study does not directly assess.



Singapore Transforms into a BTS Wonderland This December with 1,500 Drones and Exclusive Hotel Experiences on Sentosa



Month-long programme organised with the Singapore Tourism Board and HYBE features a fan village, beachside performances, a run for 5,000 participants and an exclusive late-night event at Universal Studios Singapore.

Singapore – Al Rehla

Singapore is preparing to host BTS THE CITY ARIRANG SINGAPORE from December 1 to 31, 2026, transforming multiple locations across the city into entertainment and tourism experiences inspired by South Korean music group BTS, alongside four concerts at the National Stadium.

The initiative is organised by the Singapore Tourism Board in collaboration with HYBE and partners from the hospitality and entertainment sectors.

Sentosa Island will host the largest concentration of activities within the programme, according to details announced by the Sentosa Development Corporation and Resorts World Sentosa on November 11.

1,500 Drones to Light Up Palawan Beach

From December 4 to 31, Sentosa will feature art installations, themed photo opportunities and transport experiences inspired by BTS, alongside a giant installation measuring approximately 10 metres near Palawan Beach.

From December 18 to 20, the beach will host music events and spectacular drone shows featuring 1,500 drones creating formations inspired by BTS and iconic Singapore landmarks.

Tickets for the events start at SGD 30.

The island will also host a three-kilometre recreational run on December 12, targeting 5,000 participants.

Fan Village and a Late-Night Celebration

Resorts World Sentosa will host a dedicated BTS Fan Village from December 16 to 22, featuring interactive activities, group experiences, themed food and beauty zones, and photo opportunities.

A temporary merchandise store will also offer products associated with the group.

General admission tickets to the Fan Village start at SGD 10.





On December 21, Universal Studios Singapore will host a special evening event running from 8 p.m. until 1 a.m., featuring selected rides, dance performances, music and fireworks.

Themed light projections at one of the park's landmarks will continue until January 3, 2027.

Exclusive Hotel Packages and Themed Stays

The programme will include BTS-inspired accommodation packages at Hotel Ora, Equarius Hotel and The Laurus from December 15 to 23.

The packages will feature special in-room experiences and exclusive souvenirs for guests.

These offerings form part of a wider initiative connecting accommodation with entertainment events, restaurants, retail outlets and tourist attractions, with selected benefits available to Visa cardholders.

Al Rehla Perspective | When Music Becomes a Reason to Travel

Singapore's BTS initiative illustrates a tourism model that extends beyond hosting concerts by creating an integrated visitor experience across hotels, entertainment venues, transport services, restaurants and shopping destinations.

The significance of this approach lies in transforming interest in a major music event into a multi-day travel itinerary, rather than limiting visitors' experiences to attending a concert and leaving the destination.

For travellers, the programme offers an opportunity to combine live performances, beachside entertainment and interactive attractions within a single trip.

However, visitors should verify ticket availability and individual event schedules before finalising their travel arrangements.

From an economic perspective, the initiative's actual impact will become clearer after the events conclude, when visitor numbers, hotel performance and tourism spending data can be assessed.

The experience highlights how international music fandom can be developed into a comprehensive tourism offering, connecting cultural interests with accommodation, entertainment and destination discovery.

Errors in Europe's Entry/Exit System Could Wrongly Flag Travellers as Schengen Overstayers



Reports of departures going unrecorded despite travellers leaving Europe as scheduled, while EU rules allow passengers to request corrections by providing passports and proof of departure.

Brussels – European Union | Al Rehla

Reports of errors in the European Union's Entry/Exit System (EES) have raised concerns among non-EU travellers after some individuals were incorrectly recorded as having exceeded the permitted length of stay in the Schengen Area, despite having departed before their authorised stay expired.

On November 10, 2026, British consumer protection organisation Which? revealed that it had received dozens of reports involving inaccurate entry or exit records, warning that affected travellers could face difficulties when crossing European borders again if the information is not corrected.

Unrecorded Departures Cause Problems at Border Controls

Among the cases documented by the organisation was British novelist Jojo Moyes, who discovered while travelling through Marseille Airport in October that her records indicated she had overstayed.

According to her account, an earlier departure from Portugal in May had not been correctly recorded, despite her having spent only 23 days in the Schengen Area during the preceding six months.

European authorities have not published a comprehensive official figure for the number of affected travellers, nor has a single technical cause been established for all reported errors.

How Does the European Entry/ Exit System Work?

The EES began its phased introduction on October 12, 2025, and became fully operational on April 10, 2026, at the external borders of the 29 participating European countries.

The system electronically records the entry and exit of non-EU travellers covered by short-stay rules, along

with passport information and biometric data.

It is designed to monitor compliance with the rule generally allowing stays of up to 90 days within any 180-day period.

What Should Travellers Do If Their Records Are Incorrect?

Travellers can use the official EES online stay calculator to check their remaining permitted stay or seek clarification from the relevant border authorities.

If information appears inaccurate or incomplete, travellers have the right to request a review and correction from the authority responsible for processing the data in the European country concerned.

The request may require a passport copy and evidence of departure, such as boarding passes or transport tickets. Additional documentation may be requested depending on the circumstances.

Al Rehla Perspective | How Can Travellers Protect Their Travel Records?

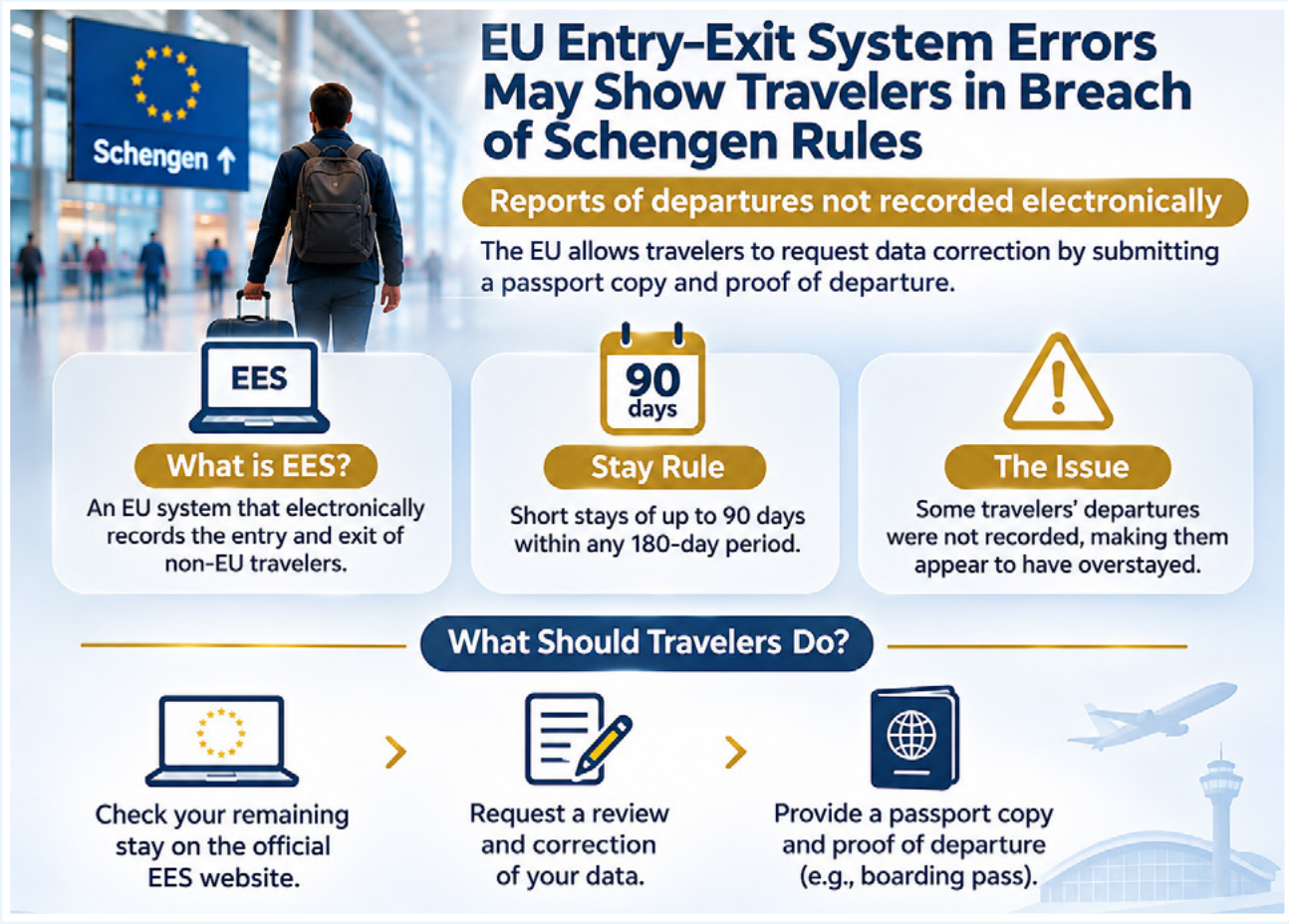
Al Rehla advises travellers visiting the Schengen Area, particularly frequent visitors, to retain electronic copies of boarding passes, flight confirmations and records of their actual entry and departure dates.

Checking the remaining permitted stay before booking another trip can also help identify potential discrepancies before reaching the airport.

Travellers who discover an error should contact the relevant authorities promptly and retain copies of their correction requests, correspondence and supporting documents.

An inaccurate record does not automatically establish an immigration violation. However, correcting the information may require a formal review, and travel documents alone do not guarantee that the error will be resolved automatically.

The key precaution is to rely on official European channels and retain clear evidence of completed journeys, rather than depending solely on booking records held by airlines or travel agencies.



Expedia: December 4 and February 18 Among Cheapest Days for International Flights as Dubai Ranks Sixth in UK Travel Searches



December 16 and 19 among the most expensive dates for international flights in winter 2026–2027, while Paris, New York and Amsterdam lead the most-searched destinations.

London – United Kingdom | Al Rehla

Data from travel platform Expedia has identified December 4, 2026, and February 18, 2027, as among the cheapest dates for international flights this winter, while December 16 and 19 are expected to be among the most expensive, coinciding with the peak year-end holiday season.

Expedia's winter travel trends report also identified December 18 and 19 as potentially among the busiest days for international departures, highlighting the importance of flexible travel dates for passengers seeking more affordable options.

Dubai Ranks Sixth Among Most-Searched Destinations

Paris topped the list of international destinations most searched by Expedia users in the United Kingdom, followed by New York and Amsterdam, with Bangkok and Tenerife completing the top five.

Dubai ranked sixth, ahead of Tokyo, the Canary Islands, Barbados and Prague.

The ranking reflects Dubai's popularity among British travellers planning winter trips, although search activity does not necessarily translate into an equivalent ranking for confirmed bookings.

Emerging Destinations Attract Growing Interest

Exuma in the Bahamas recorded the strongest growth in searches, increasing by 115%, followed by Quebec City in Canada, up 75%, and Malmö in Sweden, which registered a 45% increase.

Search interest in Hakone, Japan, and Curaçao also rose by 40% each, highlighting travellers' diverse preferences for beach destinations, winter cities, natural landscapes and cultural experiences.

The report was based on searches conducted through Expedia's UK website between July 20 and October 19, 2026, for travel scheduled from December 2026 through February 2027, compared with the corresponding period a year earlier.

Al Rehla Perspective | How Can Travellers Benefit from Seasonal Price Differences?

The findings highlight how departure dates can influence travel costs, particularly during the weeks surrounding Christmas and New Year.

For Arab travellers, these indicators can provide a useful reference when comparing travel dates. However, dates identified as cheaper for departures from the United Kingdom should not automatically be considered the most affordable for flights originating from Arab airports.

Al Rehla recommends comparing fares several days before and after the preferred departure date and checking the total ticket cost, including baggage allowances, additional charges and layover times, rather than relying solely on the advertised base fare.

Travellers should also compare accommodation costs alongside airfares, as choosing a cheaper flight may lead to higher overall expenses if hotel prices are elevated during the selected dates.

Meanwhile, Dubai's position among the most-searched destinations provides tourism companies and hotel operators with an indication of interest from the British market during the winter season.

However, confirmed booking figures and actual hotel occupancy data would be required before concluding that visitor arrivals have increased.

For travellers, the most economical departure date is not necessarily the one offering the lowest airfare, but the one that delivers the best overall trip cost while fitting their travel plans.





From the Haramain High-Speed Railway to the GCC Network: How Rail Transport Is Reshaping Tourism Across the Arab World



A global summit in Vancouver highlights the growing appeal of rail travel, while the UAE expands passenger services, Egypt develops a network exceeding 2,000 kilometres, and Morocco extends its high-speed railway towards Marrakech.

Special Report – Al Rehla

Railways are no longer simply a means of travelling between cities. They are increasingly becoming an integral part of the travel experience, whether through high-speed trains that significantly reduce journey times or scenic routes that allow visitors to discover destinations beyond traditional tourism centres.

This transformation returned to the spotlight during the Railbookers Group Global Summit, which opened in Vancouver, Canada, on November 9, 2026, bringing together leaders from the travel and rail industries, including Gloria Guevara, President and CEO of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC).

Guevara discussed the continued growth of global travel and the importance of developing infrastructure and experiences that connect visitors with destinations. She also highlighted China's progress in high-speed rail services and the integration of railway stations into the wider travel ecosystem.

Across the Arab world, this transformation is taking different forms, from operational high-speed railways to regional networks still under construction, raising an important question about rail transport's potential to support multi-destination tourism.

Saudi Arabia: Haramain Railway Connects Airports and Holy Cities

The Haramain High-Speed Railway represents one of the region's most prominent operational examples, linking Makkah and Madinah through Jeddah, King Abdulaziz International Airport and King Abdullah Economic City.

The railway extends approximately 453 kilometres, with trains operating at speeds of up to 300 kilometres per hour.

During the 1447 AH Hajj season, Saudi Arabia Railways allocated capacity exceeding 2.2 million seats, while the Haramain service transported more than 800,000 passengers during part of the pilgrimage period, according to official figures.

Its tourism significance lies in connecting airports with the holy cities and providing a direct transport option for pilgrims, Umrah visitors and other travellers.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar are also pursuing a separate high-speed electric railway project linking Riyadh and Doha, with planned stations serving Al Ahsa and Dammam.

However, the project remains under development and is not yet an operational passenger service.

UAE: Etihad Rail Enters the Passenger Transport Era

The United Arab Emirates reached an important operational milestone in 2026 with the introduction of passenger services on the Etihad Rail network between Fujairah and Abu Dhabi on June 30, followed by an expansion to Dubai and Al Dhaid in September.

The opening of the Dubai station also connected the national railway services with Dubai Metro, offering additional transport and booking options within the wider public transport system.

This integration represents an important

development for travellers, making intercity journeys more flexible and creating opportunities to visit destinations beyond the city where international passengers initially arrive.

Nevertheless, the network's full tourism impact will depend on further station development, service frequency and the ease of travelling from railway stations to hotels and tourist attractions.

GCC Railway: A Regional Network Targeting 2030

At the regional level, the Gulf Cooperation Council railway project reached an overall progress rate of 55.92%, according to figures announced in November 2026, with full operation targeted for December 2030.

The project aims to connect the six GCC member states through a shared network for passenger and freight transport.

However, the reported progress covers multiple development stages, including planning, design, land acquisition, civil works and railway construction. It does not mean that the same percentage of tracks is complete and ready for operation.

Once completed, and provided regular cross-border passenger services are introduced, the network could support tourism itineraries combining several Gulf countries within a single journey.

Achieving this potential will require coordinated timetables, border procedures, integrated booking systems and efficient connections with local transport networks.

Egypt: New Railways Connecting the Red Sea and Mediterranean

Egypt is continuing the development of an electric high-speed railway network extending more than 2,000 kilometres, connecting new cities, ports, industrial areas and tourism destinations.

The first line stretches approximately 660 kilometres between Ain Sokhna, New Alamein and Marsa Matrouh, with stations serving Cairo and Alexandria.

Passenger operations are targeted to begin in July 2027.

The wider network also includes a route extending towards Abu Simbel in southern Egypt and another connecting Qena with Safaga and Hurghada.

These projects could eventually help diversify travel itineraries between coastal destinations and historic cities.

However, they remain under development and should not be presented as railway services currently available for booking.

Morocco: Al Boraq Expands Towards Marrakech

Morocco already operates a high-speed railway through Al Boraq, connecting Tangier and Kenitra along a dedicated high-speed line, with services continuing towards Rabat and Casablanca on the conventional railway network.

The National Office of Railways (ONCF) is developing an extension of the high-speed line from Kenitra to Marrakech as part of a broader transport modernization programme ahead of major international events, particularly the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

The planned expansion offers opportunities to improve connectivity between cities with significant cultural and tourism appeal.

However, the Marrakech extension has not yet entered commercial service.

Elsewhere in North Africa, international passenger rail services have resumed between Annaba in Algeria and Tunis, providing a cross-border land transport option, although journey times and schedules differ substantially from those of high-speed rail networks.

Al Rehla Perspective | From Infrastructure to a Complete Tourism Product

Rail developments across the Arab world reveal a gradual transformation in the role of railway transport, although progress varies considerably from one market to another.

Saudi Arabia already operates a widely used high-speed service supporting religious tourism, the UAE has introduced a national passenger railway network, and Morocco has an established high-speed train service.

Meanwhile, Egypt is preparing to introduce new railway lines, while GCC countries continue developing cross-border connections.

However, building railway lines alone is not enough to create a successful tourism product.

A complete travel experience requires stations connected to airports and city centres, reliable schedules, convenient booking systems and efficient onward transport to hotels and attractions.

Tour operators also need to design itineraries that encourage travellers to stop in several cities rather than simply use trains to travel between two major destinations.

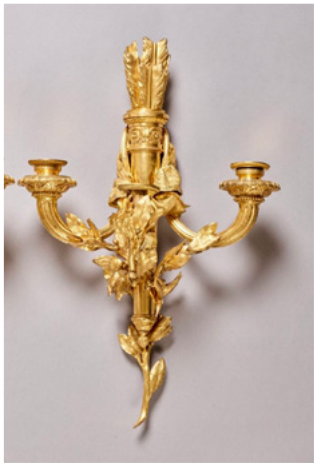
This creates opportunities for cultural tourism, regional excursions, heritage experiences and multi-destination travel packages.

For tourism and hospitality businesses, better railway connectivity could eventually expand access to destinations outside established tourism hubs. Yet such benefits must be measured through actual visitor movements, overnight stays and tourism spending rather than assumed from infrastructure investment alone.

Ultimately, the real test for railway development across the Arab world will not be the total length of announced networks, but their ability to turn the cities and regions they serve into accessible destinations worth discovering.

The wider opportunity lies in transforming rail transport from infrastructure into an integrated travel experience that connects visitors with the cultural, natural and historical diversity of the Arab world.

Palace of Versailles Acquires Four 18th-Century Royal Art Collections






A clock commissioned by Louis XVI, a historic cabinet and two pairs of wall-mounted candleholders bring royal history to life through the legacy of Françoise Lambert.

Versailles – France | Al Rehla

The Palace of Versailles has announced the acquisition of four collections of 18th-century artworks and furnishings, made possible through a bequest from the late Françoise Lambert to the Society of Friends of Versailles. The acquisitions support ongoing efforts to refurnish the royal apartments and recreate aspects of everyday life within the historic palace.

The acquisitions include a royal clock, an elaborately decorated cabinet and two pairs of gilded bronze wall-mounted candleholders, all associated with prominent members of the French royal family.

A Royal Clock and a Cabinet with an Extraordinary History

Among the acquisitions is the "Military Trophy" clock, created by Robert Robin between 1785 and 1788 at the request of King Louis XVI for the Château de Compiègne. Featuring gilded bronze decorations and a white marble base, the clock passed through several collections following the French Revolution and is now displayed in the Council Chamber at Versailles.

The collection also includes a cabinet dating to approximately 1756, associated with Princess Maria Josepha of Saxony at the Château de Choisy. Its craftsmanship is attributed to Jean-Pierre Latz and Jean-François Oeben. Confiscated by German authorities in 1941, the piece was returned to the Rothschild family in 1947.

Candleholders Restore the Character of Royal Apartments

The acquisitions also feature a pair of wall-mounted candleholders dating to around 1784, originally associated with the apartments of Madame Élisabeth, sister of Louis XVI.

A second pair, dating to the mid-18th century and attributed to Jacques Caffieri, contributes to the restoration of the decorative setting of Madame Victoire's grand apartment.

Al-Rehla Insight | Discovering History Through Everyday Life

These acquisitions offer visitors to Versailles an opportunity to explore royal life beyond its magnificent ceremonial halls, through the furnishings and decorative objects once used by the palace's inhabitants.

Their significance extends beyond artistic beauty, revealing stories of the French Revolution, wartime confiscations and the movement of historical treasures between private collections and museums.

For cultural travellers, the restoration of the royal apartments adds depth to the visitor experience, transforming historic objects into tangible connections with the past. However, visitors should check the display locations before travelling, as acquiring an object does not necessarily mean it is immediately accessible to the public.

South Korea Surpasses 20 Million Foreign Visitors for the First Time in History



International arrivals rise 21.5% in the first nine months of 2026 as the government targets 30 million visitors, with a longer-term ambition of reaching 40 million annually.

Seoul – South Korea | Al Rehla

South Korea has announced that foreign visitor arrivals surpassed 20 million in 2026 for the first time in its history, setting a new tourism record before the end of the year. The milestone was driven by the global popularity of Korean culture and growing demand for travel experiences centred on K-pop, television dramas and local cuisine.

On November 12, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism said the achievement came 14 years after the country first welcomed more than 10 million visitors in 2012. The previous annual record stood at 18.94 million visitors in 2025.

Tourism Arrivals and Spending Increase

Government figures showed that South Korea welcomed 17.11 million foreign visitors during the first nine months of 2026, representing year-on-year growth of 21.5%.

September alone recorded approximately 2.06 million visitors, an increase of 21.1% compared with the same month last year.

Tourism-related spending recorded through payment cards rose to 15.85 trillion won between January and September, compared with approximately 10.79 trillion won during the corresponding period in 2025, reflecting stronger economic activity associated with international visitors.

From 20 Million to 40 Million Visitors

Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism Chae Hwi-young described the 20-million-visitor milestone as a starting point for strengthening South Korea's position as a global tourism destination.

He said the government was working to develop infrastructure and tourism services capable of accommodating 30 million foreign visitors annually, with a longer-term ambition of attracting 40 million.

No binding deadline has been announced for achieving that target.

Expanding Tourism Beyond Seoul

The government is also seeking to distribute tourism activity more widely beyond the capital by developing regional destinations and improving transport connections and digital services.

This strategy carries economic significance, particularly as more than 80% of international visitors are concentrated in the greater Seoul metropolitan area.

Ensuring that other cities and regions benefit from the country's growing tourism sector remains a key challenge.

25 Italian Tourists with Visual Impairments Experience Red Sea Diving in Marsa Alam



Italian charity organises an underwater excursion accompanied by divers, highlighting opportunities to expand accessible tourism experiences in Egypt.

Marsa Alam – Egypt | Al Rehla

A group of 25 Italian tourists who are blind or have visual impairments took part in a diving experience in the Red Sea off Marsa Alam, as part of a trip organised by an Italian charitable association supporting people with disabilities.

The initiative highlighted opportunities to make marine tourism activities more inclusive and accessible to travellers with different abilities.

The experience took place in the Happy Life beach area of Marsa Alam, where divers accompanied members of the group into the water.

Participants expressed enthusiasm for the experience, with some exploring the Red Sea underwater environment for the first time.

Discovering the Red Sea Through a Different Experience

Tourism expert Atef Othman, who hosted the Italian group, said the organising association selected Marsa Alam for its warm climate, attractive beaches and diving sites renowned for coral reefs and marine biodiversity.

He explained that participants were delighted with the experience, which allowed them to engage with the marine environment in ways suited to their individual abilities.

Marsa Alam is well known for its diving destinations, attracting visitors from several European markets, particularly travellers seeking marine adventures and nature-based experiences.

Accessible Diving Requires Specialised Preparation

Diving for people with visual impairments is an established form of accessible tourism, supported by adaptive training methods, communication techniques and individual assistance tailored to participants' needs.

International diving training organisations, including the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), offer specialised programmes to help instructors and dive centres accommodate people with different abilities.

However, published information about the Italian group's excursion did not identify the dive centre involved or provide details about instructor qualifications and individual medical assessments.

The conditions of this particular experience therefore should not be assumed to apply to everyone interested in participating in similar activities.

Istanbul's Pera Museum to Host Philosophical Tour of Frank Bowling Exhibition on November 18



British artist's first exhibition in Turkey runs until January 31, 2027, featuring his works alongside paintings by Francis Bacon and Victor Willing.

Istanbul – Türkiye | Al Rehla

Pera Museum, located in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district, will host a special philosophical tour of British artist Frank Bowling's exhibition, Creation and Destruction, on Wednesday, November 18, 2026.

Led by philosopher and researcher Dilek H. Zadegan, the tour will explore the connections between the artworks and themes of identity, colonialism, modernity and the philosophy of art.

The exhibition, which opened on September 29 and runs until January 31, 2027, marks the first presentation of Bowling's work in Istanbul. It brings together pieces spanning more than six decades of his artistic career, alongside paintings by British artists Francis Bacon and Victor Willing.

Six Decades of Artistic Experimentation

Curated by Alistair Hicks, the exhibition presents a selection of Bowling's historical and recent works, including paintings from his celebrated Map Paintings series, created between 1967 and 1971.

It also features Mother's House Revisited (2026), in which the artist revisits memories of his childhood home in Guyana.

Bowling is renowned for his innovative use of colour, layered surfaces and unconventional materials, reflecting his exploration of memory, abstraction and transformation.

Selected paintings by Francis Bacon and Victor Willing are displayed alongside his works, offering visitors insight into the artistic and intellectual relationships that influenced his creative development.

Philosophical Tour on November 18

The special tour will begin at 6:30 p.m. and last approximately one hour.
It will be led by Dilek H. Zadegan, a philosophy researcher and professor of gender-related studies at Emory University in the United States.

The tour will examine concepts of modernity, identity, colonialism and colour, drawing on a study by Zadegan published in the exhibition catalogue.

Conducted in Turkish, the tour costs TRY 450, with a limited number of places available. Tickets can be purchased through Biletix or at the museum reception, subject to availability.

Air Arabia Profits Fall 47% to AED 757 Million Despite Revenue Growth in First Nine Months of 2026



Passenger numbers decline 10% to 14.4 million, while seat occupancy remains steady at 83% as the airline expands its network to 224 routes with a fleet of 100 aircraft.

Sharjah – UAE | Al Rehla

Air Arabia reported a pre-tax profit of AED 757 million for the nine months ended September 30, 2026, representing a 47% decline compared with the same period last year, despite a 2% increase in group revenue to AED 5.81 billion.

The results, announced on November 12, showed that passenger numbers across the airline's operating hubs fell by 10% to 14.4 million, while the average seat load factor remained at 83%, amid operational pressures linked to regional tensions, higher fuel prices and supply chain disruptions.

According to the financial statements, net profit after tax amounted to approximately AED 684 million.

Third-Quarter Profit Reaches AED 383 Million

During the third quarter of 2026, Air Arabia recorded a pre-tax profit of AED 383 million, down 42% year-on-year, while revenue increased by 10% to AED 2.31 billion.

The airline carried more than 5.7 million passengers between July and September, representing a 3% decline compared with the corresponding quarter of 2025, while the seat load factor stood at 82%.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Thani, Chairman of Air Arabia, said the company continued to generate profits despite rising operating costs, fluctuating fuel prices and ongoing supply chain challenges.

He noted that the group's focus on operational efficiency, cost control and network development had helped it navigate challenging economic and operational conditions.

14 New Routes as Fleet Reaches 100 Aircraft

Air Arabia continued expanding its network during the first nine months of the year, adding 14 routes across its operating hubs in the UAE, Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, bringing its total network to 224 routes.

The group also added ten aircraft to its fleet, bringing the total to 100 Airbus A320 and A321 aircraft, with plans to receive four additional aircraft before the end of 2026.

September also marked the launch of operations by the new Dammam-based airline, established through a consortium led by Air Arabia, with domestic services connecting Dammam to Jeddah, Madinah and Riyadh.

Akasa Air Extends Jeddah and Riyadh Flight Suspensions Until November 30, Offers Full Refunds



Indian low-cost carrier extends Jeddah flight suspension by 12 days amid security concerns, offering free rebooking and refunds within seven days.

Mumbai – India | Al Rehla

Indian low-cost carrier Akasa Air has announced the extension of its flight suspensions to and from Jeddah and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia until November 30, 2026, inclusive, citing ongoing security concerns affecting aviation operations in the region.

The decision was announced in an update issued on Thursday, November 12, following a review of operational and security conditions. The airline reaffirmed that passenger and crew safety remains its highest priority.

Jeddah Suspension Extended by 12 Days

The decision extends the suspension of Jeddah flights, previously scheduled to remain grounded until November 18, by an additional 12 days. Meanwhile, the suspension of Riyadh services remains unchanged, with November 30 still the announced end date.

Akasa Air said it continues to monitor developments and assess the possibility of resuming operations, without confirming a definitive date for flights to restart.

Full Refunds and Free Rebooking

Akasa Air is offering affected passengers the option of receiving a full ticket refund, with payments returned to the original payment method within seven days, according to the airline's announced policy.

Passengers may also reschedule their flights without additional charges. Customers who booked through travel agents have been advised to contact their original booking providers to complete refund or rebooking procedures.

Al Rehla Perspective | What Should Travellers Do?

The extended suspension could affect Umrah travel, family visits and business trips between India and Saudi Arabia, particularly for passengers with prearranged accommodation or ground transportation.

Al Rehla advises travellers to check their flight status before heading to the airport and contact the airline or their booking agent to choose between a refund and rescheduling.

Passengers should also review hotel and transportation cancellation policies separately, as a refund for an airline ticket does not automatically cover other travel-related expenses.

The November 30 suspension deadline does not guarantee that flights will resume on December 1, making it essential for travellers to monitor official airline updates before finalising their travel arrangements.

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