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

Saudi Arabia Opens Investment Opportunities in Al Khafji Coastal Destination Through New MoU

Iraq Targets 2030 Completion of Ur Tourism City as International Museum Takes Shape

Dubai Ranks First Globally, Bahrain Seventh as 12 Arab Airports Enter Worldworthy's Top 100 for 2026

Jordan Records $7.08 Billion in Tourism Revenue Over 10 Months as October Growth Reaches 17.2%



Saudi Arabia's THC Confirms Order for 12 Bombardier Business Jets Valued at $568 Million



The Kingdom's largest business jet fleet order includes regional and intercontinental aircraft, with options for 48 additional jets that could expand the planned fleet to 60 aircraft

Riyadh – Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

Saudi Arabia's The Helicopter Company (THC), owned by the Public Investment Fund (PIF), and Canadian aircraft manufacturer Bombardier have signed definitive purchase agreements for 12 business jets valued at approximately $568 million at 2026 list prices, alongside options to acquire 48 additional aircraft, marking THC's entry into the private business jet market.

The agreement, announced on November 13, 2026, converts a letter of intent signed during the Farnborough International Airshow in July into a firm order. Bombardier described it as the largest business aviation fleet order of its kind in Saudi Arabia to date.

Three Aircraft Models for Regional and International Travel

The confirmed order comprises five Challenger 3500 aircraft, five Global 5500 jets, and two Global 8000 aircraft.

The Challenger 3500 accommodates up to nine passengers and offers a range of approximately 6,297 kilometers, making it suitable for flights within Saudi Arabia, across the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and to other regional destinations.

The Global 5500 accommodates up to 16 passengers and has a range of approximately 10,927 kilometers, enabling long-distance operations between Saudi Arabia and international destinations.

Meanwhile, the Global 8000 offers a range of up to 14,816 kilometers, supporting ultra-long-haul nonstop flights, including potential direct connections between Riyadh and Los Angeles, according to the manufacturer's specifications.

Neither company has disclosed a delivery schedule or the expected date for introducing each aircraft model into commercial operations.

From Helicopter Operations to Business Aviation

Established in 2018, THC began commercial operations in 2019 and currently operates more than 60 helicopters across a range of services, including air ambulance operations, private flights, aerial work, and



tourism activities.

Its expansion into business jets represents a significant development in its operating model, with plans to offer business jet charter and aircraft management services in response to demand for flexible and customized travel.

Captain Arnaud Martinez, Chief Executive Officer of THC, said the agreement marks the company's entry into business aviation and represents another step toward establishing an integrated aviation operator capable of serving the Saudi and regional markets.

Eric Martel, President and Chief Executive Officer of Bombardier, reaffirmed the manufacturer's commitment to supporting the Saudi operator's expansion through its aircraft portfolio and service network.

Additional Purchase Options and Planned Local Investment

The agreement includes options to purchase 48 additional jets, subject to THC's decision to exercise those options. If all are exercised, the total order could expand to 60 aircraft.

Bombardier also announced a commitment to long-term strategic investment in Saudi Arabia, including the establishment of a local presence. However, the company did not disclose the investment value, specific locations, or implementation timeline.

This commitment should not be interpreted as confirmation of a specific maintenance or technical services facility, as details of the planned local investments have yet to be announced.

Al-Rehla Perspective | What Does the Deal Mean for Luxury Tourism?

The agreement is significant for Saudi Arabia's tourism sector as the Kingdom continues developing destinations targeting high-spending travelers and business visitors.

Expanding private aviation capacity could improve connectivity between Saudi, regional, and international airports, offering greater flexibility for customized travel itineraries.

The combination of regional, long-range, and ultra-long-range aircraft could also support different travel requirements, from short business trips to intercontinental journeys.

However, the extent to which tourism destinations benefit will depend on aircraft delivery schedules, operating approvals, airport infrastructure, and actual charter pricing.

THC has not yet announced specific routes for the new fleet, charter rates, or exclusive agreements to serve individual tourism destinations.

The purchase agreements therefore represent a confirmed investment in expanding Saudi Arabia's private aviation capabilities, while their direct impact on passenger traffic and tourism destinations will become clearer as the aircraft enter service.

Saudi Arabia Opens Investment Opportunities in Al Khafji Coastal Destination Through New MoU



Ministry of Investment partners with PIF-owned Gulf Coast Development Company as the master plan targets nine hotels and resorts offering 1,400 rooms by 2040.

Riyadh – Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Investment has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Gulf Coast Development Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), to strengthen investor participation in the planned coastal destination in Al Khafji, in the northern part of the Eastern Province.

The development includes nine hotels and resorts as part of an integrated tourism and residential master plan.

Under the MoU, announced in November 2026, investment opportunities offered by the company will be incorporated into the Ministry of Investment's investor attraction programmes and platforms, helping connect international investors with projects aligned with their interests.

Nine Hotels and 1,400 Rooms Planned

The Al Khafji development covers approximately 20 square kilometres, featuring a 10-kilometre waterfront along the Arabian Gulf.

By 2040, the master plan aims to deliver nine hotels and resorts providing around 1,400 hotel rooms, alongside more than 16,000 residential units, over 214,000 square metres of retail space and approximately 390 marina berths.

The Public Investment Fund announced the establishment of the company and the launch of the project in September 2026.

Development is planned across three phases, with the first phase targeted for completion in 2030.



Amr Banajah
CEO of Gulf Coast Real Estate Development



Who Is Behind the Project?

Gulf Coast Development Company serves as the master developer of the destination and is wholly owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund.

The company is led by Chief Executive Officer Amr Banaja, who has highlighted the project's reliance on private-sector participation in developing its residential, tourism and commercial components.

The new MoU aims to expand access to potential investors and facilitate the promotion of investment opportunities.

However, it does not announce any new contracts for the construction or operation of the planned hotels.

Al Rehla Perspective | Could Al Khafji Become a Gulf Tourism Destination?

Al Khafji's location near the Kuwaiti border provides a potential advantage in attracting short-stay visitors and coastal tourism demand from neighbouring Gulf markets.

The planned destination presents potential opportunities in hotels, resorts, marinas and waterfront leisure activities.

However, transforming the master plan into an operational tourism destination will depend on securing investment, development and hotel management agreements, alongside completing the necessary infrastructure, facilities and services.

The total value of the planned hotel investments has not yet been disclosed, nor have the companies that will operate the nine proposed hotels and resorts been announced.

The latest agreement therefore represents a step towards attracting investors rather than confirmation of new hotel construction or operating contracts.





My Travel Experiences

Desert Tourism in Egypt's White Desert: A Journey into a World of Natural Beauty and Magic

BY:
Dr. Hossam Darwish
President of the Afro-Asian Union for Tourism
Secretary-General of the Arab Tourism Media Club

Egypt's White Desert is one of the world's most spectacular natural destinations and a unique tourism treasure, offering visitors an extraordinary experience that combines adventure, relaxation, and appreciation of nature's beauty. Located in Egypt's Western Desert, in New Valley Governorate near Farafra Oasis, the White Desert is famous for its remarkable white rock formations, sculpted by wind and erosion over millions of years into magnificent natural works of art.

The desert's charm lies in its extraordinary rock formations, which resemble giant mushrooms, birds, animals, and imaginative shapes, surrounded by vast golden sands and clear blue skies. The result is a breathtaking landscape unlike anywhere else in the world.

The White Desert offers a wide range of desert tourism activities, including four-wheel-drive safari adventures, overnight camping beneath spectacular star-filled skies, stargazing, and photography. Visitors can also explore nearby attractions such as the Black Desert, Crystal Mountain, and Farafra Oasis, discovering the region's remarkable natural and cultural diversity.

Beyond its natural beauty, the White Desert represents a promising opportunity for developing eco-tourism and adventure tourism in Egypt, attracting international travelers seeking authentic experiences away from conventional tourism destinations.

Investment in desert tourism requires improving tourism services, upgrading infrastructure, training professional local guides, and ensuring a sustainable balance between tourism development and environmental protection.

The White Desert is more than just a tourist destination; it is a unique human experience and a message from the heart of nature, reminding the world that Egypt is not only home to a civilization thousands of years old, but also possesses extraordinary natural attractions that make it one of the most beautiful tourism destinations in the world.



Iraq Targets 2030 Completion of Ur Tourism City as International Museum Takes Shape



Ur International Museum reaches 82–85% completion, with opening targeted for early 2027, while Nasiriyah International Airport reaches 70% completion with an initial annual capacity of 750,000 passengers.

Nasiriyah – Iraq | Al Rehla

Development work continues at Ur Tourism City in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar Governorate, as part of a project targeting the completion of a range of cultural and entertainment facilities by early 2030.

The initiative aims to strengthen the region's position on the international archaeological tourism map.

Recent statements from local officials indicate that construction of the Ur International Museum has reached between 82% and 85% completion, with an opening targeted for early 2027.

Work is also progressing on other projects within the tourism development, although individual facilities remain at different stages of implementation.

International Museum and Cultural Facilities

The Ur International Museum covers approximately 5,200 square metres across two floors and is expected to present exhibitions highlighting the historical and cultural heritage of Dhi Qar Governorate.

The wider tourism development includes the open-air Sumerian Theatre, designed to accommodate approximately 2,000 spectators, an indoor events venue, and the planned Drama City project, alongside other tourism and visitor facilities.

The long-term master plan also includes exhibition, conference and entertainment facilities, although these developments have not all been completed or entered operation.

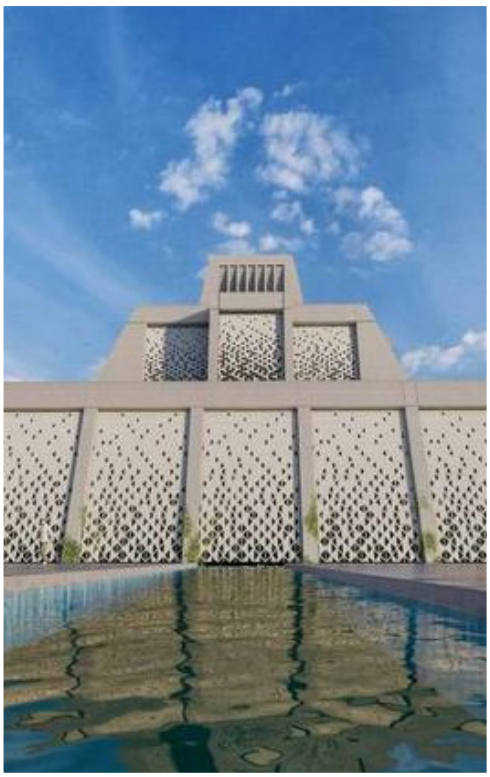
Ur's UNESCO World Heritage Status

Ur derives its historical significance from its position as one of the most important cities of ancient Sumer.

It is particularly renowned for the Great Ziggurat of Ur, an architectural landmark reflecting the achievements of early Mesopotamian civilisation.

In 2016, UNESCO inscribed the





archaeological site of Ur as part of the World Heritage property The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and the Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities.

This internationally recognised heritage provides Dhi Qar with an opportunity to develop tourism experiences combining archaeological exploration, local culture and visits to Iraq's southern marshlands.

Nasiriyah International Airport Nears Completion

Meanwhile, Iraq's Ministry of Planning has announced that construction of Nasiriyah International Airport has reached approximately 70% completion, with the project targeted for completion in early 2027.

The airport is designed to accommodate an initial 750,000 passengers annually, with long-term plans to increase capacity to 2.5 million passengers by 2050.

The project also includes a 100-room hotel, passenger facilities and supporting infrastructure.

However, the airport has not yet commenced commercial operations.

Al Rehla Perspective | Developing a Destination Requires More Than Museums

Ur already possesses established tourism attractions, most notably its ancient ziggurat and UNESCO-listed archaeological landscape.

The new developments aim to broaden the range of services and experiences available to visitors.

However, completing buildings alone will not transform the area into a fully integrated international tourism destination.

Success will also depend on the operation of accommodation and transport facilities, the availability of visitor services, and effective management of archaeological sites to preserve their historical significance.

The actual opening dates of the museum and airport, together with verified visitor statistics, will provide important indicators for assessing the project's progress in the coming years.

For Iraq's tourism industry, Ur represents an opportunity to connect one of the world's most significant archaeological landscapes with modern tourism infrastructure, while ensuring that development supports the long-term preservation of its cultural heritage.

Dubai Ranks First Globally, Bahrain Seventh as 12 Arab Airports Enter Worldworthy's Top 100 for 2026

Airports from seven Arab countries feature in the global ranking, with Muscat placing 15th, Queen Alia 21st, and Zayed International 26th, while Tabuk leads the Saudi airports included in the list

Dubai – UAE | Al Rehla

Twelve Arab airports have secured places among the world's top 100 airports for 2026, according to The Worldworthy 100 ranking, which placed Dubai International Airport first globally with a score of 9.26 out of 10, followed by Bahrain International Airport in seventh place with 8.99 and Muscat International Airport in 15th place with 8.86.

The results, based on data collected through November 4, 2026, highlight the presence of airports from seven Arab countries: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. The ranking features 100 airports across 67 countries.

Worldworthy uses an editorial methodology combining visitor experiences and recommendations, professional recognition reflected in international guides and media coverage, and publicly available records, with findings reviewed before publication.

Dubai Outranks Bogotá, Bengaluru, and Singapore

Dubai International Airport topped the global ranking with a score of 9.26 out of 10, ahead of El Dorado International Airport in Bogotá, Colombia, which ranked second with 9.18.

Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru, India, secured third place with 9.14, followed by Singapore Changi Airport in fourth with 9.10 and Rome Fiumicino Airport in fifth with 9.06.

South Korea's Incheon International Airport ranked sixth with 9.01, immediately ahead of Bahrain International Airport in seventh place.

These results reflect the ranking organization's specific assessment criteria and should not be interpreted as a direct comparison of passenger volumes, operational capacity, or flight punctuality.

Bahrain Ranks Seventh, Muscat Enters the Global Top 15

Bahrain International Airport achieved one of the strongest Arab performances, ranking seventh worldwide with a score of 8.99, ahead of several major international airports across Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

Muscat International Airport secured 15th place with 8.86, making it the third-highest-ranked Arab airport after Dubai and Bahrain.

In Jordan, Queen Alia International Airport placed 21st with a score of 8.78, while Amman Civil Airport appeared in 66th place with 8.57.

The results demonstrate that the ranking includes both major international aviation hubs and smaller regional airports, rather than focusing exclusively on airports handling the largest passenger volumes.

UAE and Saudi Arabia Each Secure Three Places

The UAE and Saudi Arabia had the highest number of entries among Arab countries, with three airports each.

Alongside Dubai International Airport's first-place ranking, Zayed International Airport in Abu Dhabi secured 26th place with a score of 8.75, while Ras Al Khaimah International Airport ranked 73rd with 8.54.

In Saudi Arabia, Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Airport in Tabuk was the country's highest-ranked airport on the list, securing 45th place with a score of 8.62.

Hail International Airport followed in 68th place with 8.57, while Taif International Airport ranked 75th with 8.53.

This distribution highlights that the assessment is not based solely on the volume of air traffic, as regional airports feature alongside major international gateways.

Qatar and Egypt Also Feature in the Ranking



Hamad International Airport in Doha secured 42nd place globally with a score of 8.63, according to the official results.

In Egypt, Luxor International Airport ranked 63rd with 8.59, making it the Egyptian airport included in the top 100.

Luxor's inclusion carries particular tourism significance, given the city's position as one of Egypt's leading cultural and archaeological destinations.

The airport serves as a major gateway for visitors exploring the city's ancient temples and historical landmarks.

However, its position in the ranking does not, by itself, indicate changes in tourist arrivals or passenger traffic.

How Were the Top 100 Airports Selected?

According to Worldworthy, the ranking draws on visitor feedback and experiences, international travel guides, media reporting, and publicly available records, with results undergoing editorial review before publication.

The organization states that airports and other establishments cannot purchase a ranking position or pay to guarantee inclusion.

This methodology differs from other airport rankings that rely on independent passenger surveys or specific service and operational performance indicators. As a result, airports may receive different positions across various international rankings.

A high score also does not guarantee that every journey through an airport will be free from congestion, delays, or service disruptions. Rather, it reflects the outcome of Worldworthy's assessment using its selected data and methodology.

Al-Rehla Perspective | What Do These Results Mean for Arab Travelers?

The ranking provides travelers with an additional reference point when comparing airport experiences, particularly when selecting destinations or connecting airports for international journeys.

It highlights a diverse range of Arab airports, from major international aviation hubs such as Dubai, Doha, and Abu Dhabi to regional gateways serving tourism destinations and cities such as Luxor, Tabuk, and Taif.

Nevertheless, choosing the most suitable airport remains dependent on practical considerations, including direct flight availability, connecting times, accessibility to city centers, travel costs, and passenger services.

For the tourism industry, the inclusion of Arab airports in international passenger-experience rankings offers an opportunity to showcase their services and facilities.

However, such recognition does not independently demonstrate growth in tourism arrivals, visitor spending, or hotel occupancy.

Official operational indicators, including passenger numbers, flight movements, air connectivity, and on-time performance, remain essential for evaluating airports' actual performance and economic contribution.

Kuwait Keeps Camping Season on Hold, Warns Against Setting Up Tents Without Permits



Municipality denies making a final decision to cancel the 2026–2027 camping season following an earlier announcement, confirming that the situation remains under review.

Kuwait – Kuwait | Al Rehla

Kuwait Municipality has confirmed that no final decision has been made regarding whether the 2026–2027 spring camping season will proceed or be cancelled, warning that setting up camps or preparing camping sites during the current period constitutes a violation of existing regulations.

The clarification was issued on Thursday, November 12, 2026, just hours after reports circulated claiming that the camping season had been cancelled due to regional developments and public safety concerns.

The earlier announcement was subsequently withdrawn by media outlets.

Cancellation Announcement Followed by Official Clarification

Initial reports, including a news item carried by the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), indicated that the camping season had been cancelled, citing statements attributed to the Spring Camping Committee.

However, Kuwait Municipality later issued a clarification confirming that the authorities were continuing to monitor and assess the situation in coordination with the relevant agencies.

The municipality emphasised that no final decision had been reached on whether to permit or cancel the season.

Kuwaiti media reports subsequently indicated that KUNA had withdrawn its earlier cancellation announcement.

No Permits Issued or Campsite Preparations Allowed

The municipality explained that it had not yet announced the start of the camping season or opened applications for camping permits.

It stressed that establishing camps or beginning preparations at camping sites during this period would constitute a regulatory violation.

Residents and visitors were urged to await official announcements and instructions through the municipality's authorised communication channels.

Kuwait's camping season traditionally begins in mid-November and continues until mid-March, attracting large numbers of citizens and residents to desert areas.

The previous 2025–2026 season ended more than two weeks ahead of its usual conclusion amid security developments in the region.



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Jordan Records $7.08 Billion in Tourism Revenue Over 10 Months as October Growth Reaches 17.2%



Arab and Asian markets drive revenue growth of 20.4% and 13.4%, respectively, while tourism receipts from European and American visitors decline.

Amman – Jordan | Al Rehla

Jordan's tourism revenue increased by 17.2% in October 2026, reaching $724.8 million compared with the same month last year, reflecting continued positive performance in the sector despite significant differences among its tourism source markets.

Preliminary data released by the Central Bank of Jordan on Thursday, November 12, showed that total tourism revenue during the first ten months of 2026 rose by 6% year-on-year to $7.077 billion.

Arab and Asian Markets Lead Growth

The data revealed that tourism revenue generated by Arab visitors increased by 20.4% between January and October 2026, while revenue from Asian visitors grew by 13.4%.

In contrast, tourism receipts from European visitors declined by 24%, while those from American visitors fell by 15.2%.

Revenue from Jordanian expatriates decreased by 3.1%, while receipts from visitors of other nationalities dropped by 36.8%.

These figures highlight significant differences in the performance of Jordan's tourism source markets, with revenue growth from Arab and Asian visitors contrasting with declining receipts from several Western markets.

The published data does not provide a direct explanation for these differences. Moreover, changes in tourism revenue do not necessarily reflect equivalent changes in visitor numbers.

Outbound Tourism Spending Declines by 4.3%

Regarding outbound travel, Central Bank figures showed that spending by Jordanians and residents on tourism abroad increased by 2.6% in October, reaching $155.9 million.

However, total outbound tourism expenditure during the first ten months of 2026 declined by 4.3% to $1.667 billion.

As a result, the arithmetic difference between inbound tourism revenue and outbound tourism expenditure reached approximately $5.41 billion during the period, compared with around $4.92 billion in the corresponding ten months of 2025.



Al Rehla Perspective | What Do the Figures Mean for the Tourism Industry?

The results underscore the importance of Arab and Asian markets in supporting Jordan's tourism revenue during 2026, providing a significant indicator for hotels, tour operators and travel companies operating in the Kingdom.

Meanwhile, declining revenue from European and American markets highlights the need to examine visitor arrivals, average tourist spending and overnight stays to determine whether the downturn reflects reduced visitor volumes or changes in spending patterns.

Despite October's revenue growth, the available figures alone are insufficient to confirm improvements in hotel occupancy or an increase in tourist arrivals, both of which require additional operational and statistical data.



Makkah Plans New Exhibition and Conference Destination Within Sumo District



"Al Balad Al Ameen Front" aims to host year-round events, with plans to launch 10 projects and events backed by investments exceeding SAR 100 million

Makkah, Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

Makkah is preparing to develop a new exhibition, conference and events destination known as Al Balad Al Ameen Front, within the Sumo District development, under an announced partnership between Markaz Al Balad Al Ameen for Exhibitions and Events, Sumo District and Nahwa Al Ro'ya.

The initiative forms part of efforts to expand the Holy City's events infrastructure and accommodate a diverse range of activities throughout the year. It is expected to create opportunities to diversify visitor traffic associated with business events, complementing Makkah's established position as a leading destination for Hajj and Umrah.

A Dedicated 25,000-Square-Metre Events Destination

The development is planned to cover approximately 25,000 square metres within Sumo District, a mixed-use development incorporating residential, commercial and service facilities.

The project is expected to provide dedicated spaces for exhibitions, conferences and other events. However, comprehensive details regarding the number of halls, visitor capacity, hospitality facilities and supporting services have yet to be disclosed.

Investment Plans Exceeding SAR 100 Million

Nahwa Al Ro'ya has announced plans to launch 10 proprietary projects and events at Al Balad Al Ameen Front, with investments exceeding SAR 100 million.

The announcement represents a step towards establishing a broader events programme in Makkah, although the development's opening date and the annual schedule of planned exhibitions and conferences remain unconfirmed.

An Opportunity to Expand Business Tourism

The new venue could accommodate specialised events attracting participants from across Saudi Arabia and international markets, including trade exhibitions, professional forums and conferences covering a range of economic sectors.

Developing dedicated events facilities could help diversify Makkah's visitor experience, provided the venue is supported by a consistent events calendar, efficient transport connections, suitable accommodation and the technical infrastructure required by conference organisers.

No official estimates have yet been released regarding expected visitor numbers or the potential impact on hotel occupancy and tourism spending.

Further details are expected to emerge as the project progresses, including its official opening date, the types of events it will target, and the facilities and services available to exhibitors, organisers and visitors.

Air Arabia Dammam Launches First International Destination with Five Weekly Flights to Amman



Saudi low-cost carrier begins international expansion from November 19, according to its announced schedule, operating Airbus A320 aircraft with 174 seats.

Dammam – Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

Air Arabia Dammam, Saudi Arabia's new low-cost carrier, has announced the launch of its first international destination, introducing five weekly nonstop flights connecting King Fahd International Airport in Dammam with Queen Alia International Airport in Amman, Jordan, starting November 19, 2026, according to the airline's announced schedule.

The new route marks the beginning of the carrier's international expansion, following the launch of its domestic operations in September after receiving its Air Operator Certificate from Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA).

Five Weekly Nonstop Flights

The airline plans to operate flights on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays using Airbus A320 aircraft configured with 174 economy-class seats.
According to the published schedule, flight 4P 301 will depart Dammam at 3:00 p.m. and arrive in Amman at 5:50 p.m.

The return service, flight 4P 302, will depart the Jordanian capital at 6:40 p.m. and arrive in Dammam at 8:55 p.m., with all times stated in the respective cities' local time.

Bookings are available through the Air Arabia website, customer service centres and authorised travel agents.

Saudi-Emirati Aviation Partnership

Air Arabia Dammam operates through a joint venture involving Air Arabia Group, which holds a 49% stake, alongside Saudi partners Nesma Group and KUN Holding, with Saudi shareholders retaining majority ownership.

The airline commenced domestic operations on September 20, 2026, initially connecting Dammam with Riyadh, Jeddah and Madinah.



"The launch of the first international service marks an important step in expanding the airline's operations from Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, providing an additional travel option between Saudi Arabia and Jordan for business and leisure travellers."

Adel Al Ali
Group CEO of Air Arabia

Adel Al Ali, Group Chief Executive Officer of Air Arabia, said the launch of the carrier's first international service represents an important step in expanding operations from Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province.

He highlighted the additional travel options the new service would provide between Saudi Arabia and Jordan for both business and leisure passengers.

Oman Completes Restoration of Historic Al Shawadhna Mosque in Nizwa, Home to a 500-Year-Old Mihrab

Restoration works covered decorative stucco, architectural arches and walls, preserving a historic landmark featuring a mihrab dating back to 936 AH in the heart of Al Aqr Quarter.

Nizwa – Oman | Al Rehla

Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has completed the restoration and maintenance of the historic Al Shawadhna Mosque in Al Aqr Quarter, Nizwa, in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The project aims to preserve one of Oman's notable examples of Islamic architecture, featuring architectural and decorative elements dating back nearly five centuries.

The ministry announced the completion of the project on November 12, 2026, following restoration works that included removing damaged plaster layers from the exterior façades and interior walls, restoring architectural arches and the mihrab (prayer niche), and maintaining traditional kandal wooden beams, electrical installations and service facilities, while preserving the mosque's original architectural and decorative features.

A Mihrab Dating Back to 1529

The historical significance of Al Shawadhna Mosque is particularly evident in its intricately decorated stucco mihrab, dating to 936 AH (1529 CE), which represents an example of Islamic decorative craftsmanship that flourished in Oman.

The mihrab features inscriptions alongside interwoven geometric and floral patterns, reflecting the artistic skills of Omani craftsmen and the precision involved in creating decorative elements in historic mosques.

According to published information about the mosque, the building is closely associated with Nizwa's religious and scholarly heritage and is listed in the Arab Architectural and Urban Heritage Register.

Al Aqr Quarter: Part of Nizwa's Living Heritage

The mosque stands in Al Aqr Quarter, one of Nizwa's historic neighbourhoods, which holds an important place in Oman's cultural and religious history.

Nizwa is renowned for its historic fort, traditional souq and old neighbourhoods, making it one of the country's leading destinations for visitors interested in heritage, architecture and traditional Omani life.

The mosque's restoration forms part of broader efforts to preserve historic landmarks associated with the city's past, with particular emphasis on maintaining original architectural components and protecting them against deterioration.

The official announcement did not specify whether the mosque would be open to visitors following the restoration or whether it would be included in organised cultural tourism itineraries.

Al-Rehla Perspective | Preserving Architectural Details, Protecting a City's Memory

The restoration of Al Shawadhna Mosque carries significance beyond the preservation of a historic building. It also safeguards artistic elements that document the construction techniques and decorative traditions practised by Omani craftsmen centuries ago.

The project's value is particularly evident in the restoration of the stucco mihrab, which provides tangible evidence of the development of religious architecture in Nizwa and the role historic mosques have played in shaping the city's cultural identity.

From a cultural tourism perspective, such landmarks can contribute to a deeper understanding of Oman's historic neighbourhoods and architectural heritage, provided that their religious significance and conservation requirements are respected.

However, the completion of restoration work does not necessarily mean that the site is open to tourists. Any visitor access would require clear arrangements that balance heritage preservation with opportunities for those interested in history and architecture to explore the landmark.




مسجد الشواذنة
وهو ثاني مسجد بني في عمان على الإطلاق بعد
مسجد المضمار بسمائل.
بني مسجد الشواذنة من عقر نزوى سنة سبعة
للهجرة (٧ هجرية) وذلك في عهد النبي الكريم
(صلى الله عليه وسلم).
ينسب مسجد الشواذنة إلى قبيلة الشاذاني التي
كانت مستقرة بجوار المسجد، وتذكر بعض
الروايات أن مسجد الشواذنة التاريخي منسوب
إلى موسسه عيسى بن عبد الله بن شاذان
ويطلق على مسجد الشواذنة، بمسجد رأس
العقر لكونه يقع في قلب محلة العقر.
عمر مسجد الشواذنة كثير من العلماء ورجال
الزهد، ومن أبرزهم:
الشيخ العلامة أبو عبد الله عثمان بن عبد الله
العزري الذي يسكن بجوار المسجد وهناك قبره
والشيخ الفقيه أحمد بن إبراهيم العقري،
والشيخ الفقيه أبو علي الحسن بن سعيد،
والعلامة ابن عبد الباقي، ومن المتأخرين الذين
كانت لهم حلق علم بمسجد الشواذنة:
العلامة حامد بن خميس المالكي، والشيخ
الفقيه سعود بن أحمد الإسحاقي.
قامت وزارة التراث بترميم مسجد الشواذنة سنة
(١٤٢٤ هجرية - ٢٠٠٣ ميلادية)
T ENTER NON
IM IN MASJID



Tunisia Signs Agreement with IATA to Simplify Travel Agency Accreditation and Airline Ticketing



Tunisia becomes the fifth country to benefit from this type of partnership, according to FTAV, as the GoLite programme offers simplified accreditation procedures without minimum financial security requirements.

Tunis – Tunisia | Al Rehla

The Tunisian Federation of Travel and Tourism Agencies (FTAV) has signed a partnership agreement with the International Air Transport Association (IATA) to facilitate Tunisian travel agencies' access to the GoLite accreditation programme and simplify procedures for joining the international accreditation framework, in a move relevant to the airline ticket distribution sector and related travel services.

The agreement was signed on Thursday, November 12, 2026, at FTAV headquarters, in the presence of Mohamed Kadrouche, IATA's Regional Manager for North Africa.

According to FTAV, Tunisia has become the fifth country worldwide to benefit from this type of agreement. However, the federation did not identify the four other countries or specify how many Tunisian travel agencies are expected to benefit from the new arrangements.

What Does GoLite Accreditation Offer Travel Agencies?

GoLite is one of IATA's accreditation options for travel agencies, designed to simplify access to its accreditation framework and enable agencies to issue airline tickets under specific conditions and requirements.

According to IATA's official information, the programme offers streamlined accreditation procedures and does not require minimum financial security for ticket issuance, unlike certain other accreditation options.

GoLite differs from the GoStandard accreditation model in the payment options available to agencies. GoStandard provides access to a broader range of payment solutions within IATA's Billing and Settlement Plan (BSP), while GoLite operates under a more simplified framework.

However, this does not exempt agencies from all regulatory or financial obligations, as they must still comply with the applicable accreditation requirements.



Professional Support for Tunisian Travel Agencies

The new agreement aims to reduce administrative procedures for Tunisian travel agencies seeking GoLite accreditation, potentially helping them expand their airline ticketing activities and strengthen their professional relationships with airlines.

The partnership forms part of FTAV's efforts to support businesses operating in the travel sector and improve their ability to adapt to ongoing industry developments, particularly in distribution systems, booking technologies and digital travel services.

The announcement did not specify whether accreditation fees would change under the agreement, how long applications would take to process, or when the simplified procedures would come into effect. The number of agencies expected to benefit was also not disclosed.

According to the figures cited in the announcement, IATA represents more than 370 airlines across over 120 countries, with its member airlines accounting for approximately 85% of global air traffic.

Al-Rehla Perspective | Will Smaller Travel Agencies Gain Greater Opportunities?

The professional significance of the agreement lies in its potential to reduce some of the barriers faced by travel agencies, particularly small and medium-sized businesses, when applying for IATA accreditation. This could make it easier for eligible agencies to access international airline ticketing systems and expand their services.

However, the agreement's economic value will depend not simply on its signing, but on the practical measures introduced, their impact on accreditation costs and processing times, and the number of agencies that ultimately benefit.

The key question is whether these arrangements will expand the number of IATA-accredited travel agencies in Tunisia or merely simplify procedures for agencies that already meet the eligibility requirements.

Answering that question will require monitoring the implementation of the agreement and the number of new accreditations granted in the coming months.

Italy's WeRoad Acquires Swiss TravelTribe, Targets €70 Million in Additional Revenue Through Acquisitions



First acquisition under a three-year expansion strategy brings ski trips in Zermatt, Laax and St. Moritz into WeRoad's portfolio starting this winter.

Milan – Italy | Al Rehla

Italian group travel company WeRoad has announced the acquisition of Switzerland-based TravelTribe, a specialist in group travel and sports experiences, marking the first transaction under a mergers and acquisitions strategy aimed at generating an additional €70 million in revenue over the next three years.

The company did not disclose the financial value of the acquisition, announced on November 12, 2026.

WeRoad said the transaction would strengthen its presence across Germany, Austria and Switzerland while expanding its portfolio of sports-related travel and group experiences.

Swiss Ski Trips Added to WeRoad's Portfolio

Under the agreement, TravelTribe's brand, platform and traveller community will be integrated into the WeRoad ecosystem.

The transaction includes transferring short ski holiday programmes in Zermatt, Laax and St. Moritz to WeRoad's travel portfolio, beginning with the upcoming winter season.

These programmes accounted for approximately 70% of TravelTribe's total bookings over the previous two winter seasons.

TravelTribe's existing website will remain accessible, while bookings will be managed through WeRoad.

A Community of More Than 1,600 Travellers

TravelTribe was founded in 2024 by Francesco Lorenzo and Francesco Stacconi.

The company has built a community of more than 1,600 people in Switzerland and organised over 300 travel and sports experiences.

According to company figures, 47.5% of travellers who participated in their first trip returned to book another experience within 12 months.

Stacconi will join WeRoad as a co-founder of WeMeet, the company's platform dedicated to organising local events and community activities.



He will help lead the platform's expansion, initially connecting established communities in Switzerland and Italy.

Expansion Backed by Airbnb-Led Funding

Founded in Milan in 2017 by Paolo De Nadai, Fabio Bin and Erika De Santi, WeRoad specialises in organising group travel experiences through a network of local travel coordinators.

In May 2026, the company raised $58 million in a funding round led by Airbnb to support its international expansion, including entry into the United States market.

WeRoad's broader acquisition strategy targets group travel operators and event companies serving between 2,000 and 40,000 participants annually.

The company aims to expand its international presence by integrating specialised travel businesses and established traveller communities.

Al Rehla Perspective | Acquiring Traveller Communities

The acquisition illustrates an emerging expansion model in the travel industry, in which companies acquire businesses with established customer communities and specialised experiences rather than building those networks entirely from scratch.

TravelTribe brings WeRoad an existing Swiss traveller community and a portfolio of sports-focused travel programmes, while gaining access to a broader international booking and distribution network.

However, the targeted €70 million in additional revenue does not represent income already generated by the TravelTribe acquisition.

Instead, it is a broader growth objective linked to WeRoad's future acquisition strategy, the full details of which have yet to be announced.



Tunisia Places Six Roman Archaeological Sites in Kasserine Under Legal Protection, Including Ancient Olive Presses and Houses



The decision covers 27,821 square metres of historic sites in El Ayoun and Thala, with a 200-metre protective buffer around each monument

Amman – Jordan | Al Rehla

Tunisia has placed six historical and archaeological monuments dating back to the Roman era in the governorate of Kasserine under legal protection, in a move aimed at preserving evidence of the region's ancient agricultural and residential life, particularly olive oil production facilities and houses associated with Roman-era settlements.

The decision was issued by Minister of Cultural Affairs Amina Srarfi on November 13, 2026, and published in Issue No. 110 of the Official Gazette of the Republic of Tunisia. It covers archaeological sites across the delegations of El Ayoun and Thala, with a combined area of 27,821 square metres and a protective buffer extending 200 metres around each monument.

Roman Olive Presses: Evidence of an Ancient Economy

Among the protected sites are two Roman olive presses located at Henchir El Beggar 1 and Henchir El Beggar 2 in the El Ayoun delegation, covering 1,371 and 1,800 square metres, respectively.

These structures offer valuable insights into the agricultural and production activities that shaped the region during Roman times, when olive oil production was a significant economic activity across large parts of North Africa.

Ancient olive presses are particularly important archaeological remains, helping researchers understand historical agricultural production methods and the technologies used to process crops.

Roman Houses, an Ancient Basin and a Historic Mausoleum

The protection measures also cover a group of Roman houses at Henchir El Beggar 1, extending across 20,000 square metres, making it the largest of the six designated sites.

An ancient basin covering 3,360 square metres and a historic mausoleum occupying 90 square metres at Henchir El Beggar 2 have also been included.
Together, these residential,

agricultural and funerary structures provide insights into different aspects of ancient life in the region, extending beyond the monumental amphitheatres, theatres and major public buildings more commonly associated with Roman heritage.



Thala: Protecting a Roman Agricultural Complex

In the Thala delegation, the decision includes an ancient agricultural complex known as the "Roman Olive Press and Its Components", located at Henchir El Kebassi in the El Joua sector, covering an area of 1,200 square metres.

The site provides further evidence of Roman agricultural activity in Tunisia's inland regions and the production systems and settlements associated with it.

Protection Extends Beyond the Monuments

The decision establishes a 200-metre protective buffer around each monument, subjecting activities and developments in the surrounding areas to regulations intended to safeguard the archaeological sites and their historical character.

The measure is based on Tunisia's Heritage Protection Code governing archaeological, historical and traditional arts heritage, following consultation with the National Heritage Commission at its meeting on February 13, 2026.

An Opportunity to Highlight Lesser-Known Heritage

The new legal protections offer an opportunity to draw attention to a lesser-known aspect of Tunisia's Roman heritage: rural life, agricultural production and ancient settlements beyond the country's celebrated monumental archaeological sites.



From a tourism perspective, these monuments could eventually become part of cultural and educational itineraries exploring the history of Kasserine, provided that adequate conservation, documentation, site preparation and visitor facilities are developed.

However, the current decision is limited to legal protection. It does not announce the opening of these sites to visitors, nor does it include new restoration programmes or tourism investment projects.



The next challenge will be translating legal protection into practical conservation measures that preserve these historical remains while making their cultural significance better understood by future generations.

Bangkok Launches Vijit Chao Phraya Festival with 19 Locations and 31 Nights of Free Light Shows



800 drones illuminate Wat Arun alongside laser displays and fireworks along the river, as Thailand targets 1.4 million visitors and THB 8.6 billion in economic activity.

Bangkok – Thailand | Al Rehla

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) officially launched the fifth edition of the Vijit Chao Phraya Festival on Friday evening, November 13, 2026, transforming the banks of Bangkok's Chao Phraya River into an open-air stage for spectacular light shows and cultural performances over 31 nights, through December 13.

Spanning 19 locations between Rama VIII Bridge and Rama III Bridge, alongside a floating light installation, the festival is being held under the theme "Light of Imagination." The programme features laser displays, fireworks, drone performances and projection mapping on historic buildings.

1.4 Million Visitors Targeted

The Tourism Authority of Thailand expects the festival to attract more than 1.4 million visitors and generate at least THB 8.6 billion in economic activity through spending on accommodation, restaurants, transportation, river cruises and other tourism-related services.

These figures represent official projections rather than confirmed economic results.

TAT confirmed that the light shows are available free of charge every evening from 6:00 PM to 10:00 PM, while tourist boat services and restaurants operate under their own pricing arrangements.

800 Drones Illuminate Wat Arun

Bangkok's iconic Temple of Dawn, Wat Arun, will host illuminated drone performances featuring 800 drones at 7:50 PM on selected evenings throughout November and December.

Rama VIII Bridge will feature synchronised laser and sound performances six times each evening, alongside fireworks displays on designated dates.

Meanwhile, Wat Kalayanamit will host light installations and traditional Thai cultural performances, while historic building façades and bridges will become canvases for artistic projection mapping.

Night Tourism Brings Bangkok's Riverside to Life

Through the festival, Thailand aims to expand its after-dark tourism offerings by connecting cultural landmarks with hotels, restaurants, markets and river cruise experiences.

Thai universities are also participating in the development of artistic installations featured in the programme, adding a creative dimension to the historic landmarks lining the Chao Phraya River.

Al-Rehla Perspective | How to Make the Most of the Festival

Travellers can enjoy the performances from public viewing areas along the river, including locations near Rama VIII Bridge and Memorial Bridge, choosing their viewing spots according to the scheduled performances.

Organisers have introduced access restrictions at certain locations during the shows for safety reasons, including areas surrounding Wat Arun. Visitors can watch the temple's illuminated displays from the opposite riverbank.

Al-Rehla recommends using available river transport services and checking the official festival schedule before visiting, as drone performances and fireworks are not held every evening, although the light installations continue throughout the festival.





Train Accidents Shake Passenger Confidence in Spain as High-Speed Rail Ridership Falls 15% in First Half of 2026



18.7 million passengers recorded in six months, while the Madrid–Andalusia high-speed rail line remains closed following an October collision that claimed 69 lives.

Madrid – Spain | Al Rehla

Spain's high-speed rail network is facing growing challenges in restoring passenger confidence after ridership declined by approximately 15% during the first half of 2026, amid operational disruptions and fatal accidents affecting travel between major cities and tourist destinations.

Data from Spain's National Commission on Markets and Competition (CNMC) showed that long-distance high-speed rail services carried approximately 18.7 million passengers between January and June, compared with around 22 million during the same period in 2025.

Two Accidents Claim 115 Lives

Spain experienced a major railway accident near Adamuz on January 18, 2026, which claimed 46 lives and caused significant disruption to rail services connecting Madrid with cities across Andalusia.

On October 28, another collision involving two trains near Urda, in the province of Toledo, killed 69 people and led to the renewed closure of the Madrid–Andalusia high-speed rail line.

Spain's railway infrastructure manager, Adif, confirmed that services on the affected line remained suspended in its November 13 update, without announcing a definitive reopening date.

Declining Ridership Puts Pressure on Tourism

High-speed rail passenger traffic fell by 21% year-on-year during the first quarter of 2026, before the rate of decline eased to 10% in the second quarter.

The decrease occurred amid line closures, operational restrictions and network disruptions following the January accident.

However, comprehensive data measuring the impact of the October collision on passenger traffic has not yet been released.

The closure of the Madrid–Andalusia corridor affects approximately 19,000 travellers daily, prompting some passengers to seek alternatives, including domestic flights, buses and rental cars.

Reuters cited estimates from the Seville Chamber of Commerce suggesting that disrupted rail connectivity was causing economic losses of approximately €1.5 million per day.

Asia-Pacific Airlines Warn of Persistently High Airfares as Jet Fuel Costs More Than Double



Airline association says fuel now accounts for one-third of operating costs, while slowing passenger growth makes it increasingly difficult to pass higher expenses on to travellers.

Kuala Lumpur – Malaysia | Al Rehla

The Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA) has warned that high airfares could persist as airlines face rising fuel prices and mounting operating costs, forcing carriers to balance profitability against the risk of discouraging passengers from travelling.

The warning came from AAPA Director General Subhas Menon during the association's 70th Assembly of Presidents, which concluded in Kuala Lumpur on Friday, November 13, 2026.

Fuel Accounts for One-Third of Operating Costs

Menon highlighted the sharp increase in jet fuel prices compared with the previous year, when prices stood at approximately $80 per barrel, before climbing to nearly $180 during the recent surge.

According to market data reported by Reuters, spot jet fuel prices stood at around $148 per barrel on November 13, after retreating from elevated levels recorded in late October.

Fuel currently accounts for approximately 33% of airline operating costs, compared with around 25% before the price surge, placing additional pressure on profit margins.

Higher Airfares Could Weaken Demand

AAPA warned that airlines face a difficult balancing act.

Absorbing higher fuel expenses reduces profitability, while passing those costs on to passengers through higher fares could weaken travel demand.

Passenger traffic among Asia-Pacific airlines recorded year-on-year declines for five consecutive months from April through August, before returning to modest growth in September.

Nevertheless, passenger traffic increased by 1.9% during the first nine months of 2026 compared with the corresponding period of the previous year.

Aircraft Delivery Delays Add Further Pressure

Airlines are also facing delays in deliveries of new aircraft amid a substantial global order backlog.

These delays are forcing some carriers to operate older aircraft for longer, creating additional challenges related to maintenance expenses and fuel efficiency.

Meanwhile, AAPA renewed its call for government support to expand sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) production.

The association reaffirmed its target of achieving 5% SAF use by 2030, despite challenges involving high production costs and limited supplies.

Syrian Airlines Launches Direct Flights Between Munich and Damascus, Expanding European Network



Inaugural flight takes off on November 12, two days after the launch of Berlin services, as the carrier aims to facilitate travel for Syrian communities in Germany and Austria.

Munich – Germany | Al Rehla

Syrian Airlines launched its first direct flight from Munich International Airport to Damascus International Airport on Thursday, November 12, 2026, strengthening air connectivity between Syria and Germany while expanding the national carrier's European network.

The inaugural flight was attended by Mohammed Baraa Shukri, Chargé d'Affaires of the Syrian Embassy in Berlin, alongside officials responsible for operations and customer services at Munich Airport.

Munich Joins the Airline's European Network

The new service began operations just two days after Damascus International Airport welcomed Syrian Airlines' first direct flight from Berlin, as part of a wider expansion programme aimed at rebuilding the carrier's presence in European markets.

Omar Al-Hosari, Head of Syria's General Authority of Civil Aviation and Air Transport, said Munich had joined the airline's network of destinations, which includes Amsterdam, Vienna, Copenhagen, Berlin and Moscow.

The authority had previously announced the scheduled launch of Munich services on October 28, before the inaugural flight was operated on November 12.

Direct Travel Options for Syrian Communities

The route primarily aims to facilitate travel for Syrian communities living in southern Germany and northern Austria, providing a direct connection to Damascus without the need to transit through another airport.

Meanwhile, Syria's civil aviation authority is working to complete the regulatory and operational arrangements required to introduce additional international destinations.

Preparations are also underway for two European airlines to enter the Syrian market in December, although neither carrier has officially commenced operations.

Al Rehla Perspective | Could the Route Support Inbound Tourism?

Improved direct connectivity between Germany and Syria could facilitate travel for families, business travellers and visitors interested in Syria's historic destinations.

However, launching a new air route does not necessarily indicate an increase in European tourist arrivals.

The route's potential tourism impact will depend on actual passenger demand, flight reliability, entry requirements and operating conditions.

Al Rehla advises travellers to verify flight schedules, fares and booking conditions before making travel arrangements.

Passengers should also consult official travel advisories and review entry requirements before planning trips to Syria.

Gulf Air Adds Six Bahrain–London Round Trips and 1,700 Seats Each Way Ahead of Formula 1 Grand Prix



Additional flights to Heathrow and Gatwick scheduled for March 11 and 15, 2027, as Bahrain prepares to host the Formula 1 season opener and its first-ever Sprint race.

Manama – Bahrain | Al Rehla

Gulf Air, the national carrier of the Kingdom of Bahrain, has announced six additional round-trip flights between Bahrain and London, providing approximately 1,700 extra seats in each direction ahead of the Formula 1 Bahrain Grand Prix, scheduled to take place at Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir from March 12 to 14, 2027.

The expansion aims to provide greater travel flexibility for racing fans, teams and international visitors attending the opening round of the 2027 Formula 1 World Championship.

Additional Flights to Heathrow and Gatwick

Gulf Air confirmed that the additional services will operate on March 11 and 15, 2027, serving London's Heathrow and Gatwick airports using Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft.

With these additional services, the airline's announced Bahrain–London schedule will increase to 18 round-trip flights during the relevant operating period, with up to five daily flights on peak travel days.

The carrier confirmed that the additional seats are available for booking through its official website, mobile application and authorised travel agents.

Bahrain to Open the 2027 Formula 1 Season

Bahrain International Circuit will host the opening round of the 2027 Formula 1 World Championship, marking the seventh time the Kingdom has staged the season-opening race.

The upcoming event will also feature Bahrain's first-ever Sprint race, introducing an additional competitive element to the three-day Grand Prix weekend.

The circuit is also scheduled to host pre-season testing from February 24 to 27, 2027.

Enhanced Air Connectivity Supports Event Tourism

Gulf Air's decision represents a targeted increase in airline capacity during a major international sporting event, providing additional travel options for passengers arriving in and departing from Bahrain.

Hotels, transportation providers and hospitality businesses may benefit from visitor activity associated with the Grand Prix.

However, the actual economic impact will depend on confirmed visitor numbers, accommodation bookings and tourist spending.

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