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Bahrain Marina Prepares to Open 167-Berth Yacht Marina as Part of New Waterfront Leisure Destination in Manama

Emaar Hospitality and ALAIN Expand in Abu Dhabi with Five Branded Residential Projects Worth AED 8 Billion

Saudi Private Real Estate Funds Expand Hotel Financing as Assets Reach SAR 424.6 Billion

Abu Dhabi Public Art Biennial Opens with 22 Artworks Across Historic and Cultural Sites Until February 2027



Bahrain Marina Prepares to Open 167-Berth Yacht Marina as Part of New Waterfront Leisure Destination in Manama



Marina Club brand unveiled ahead of phased opening, featuring a private beach, swimming pools and restaurants within a BHD 200 million development

Manama, Bahrain | Al Rehla

Bahrain Marina Development Company has announced the launch of its new Marina Club brand as part of the first phase of Bahrain Marina, located along Manama's eastern waterfront. The announcement marks preparations for the phased opening of marine and leisure facilities, including a marina accommodating 167 yachts and boats, within a mixed-use development with a total announced development value of approximately BHD 200 million.

The company plans to open the facilities in stages, starting with the marina, although no confirmed operational launch date has been announced. The first phase was previously reported to have reached 97% completion.

Yacht Berths and Private Beach Facilities

The marina will offer 167 berths for yachts and boats measuring up to 50 metres in length, alongside 42 dedicated spaces for jet skis and operational services for boat owners and marine enthusiasts.

Covering approximately 3,200 square metres, Marina Club will feature a private beach, swimming pools, restaurants, social lounges, fitness and wellness facilities, and designated areas for relaxation and beach activities.

The company also plans to introduce several membership categories, including options for yacht and boat owners. Membership fees and access



"The launch of the new identity revives the Marine Club name, which is deeply rooted in Manama's social and maritime history, while offering a modern experience inspired by Bahrain's heritage."

Riyadh Yousif Sater
Chairman of Bahrain Marina Development Company



conditions for non-members have yet to be announced.

Reviving Manama's Maritime Heritage

Riyad Yousif Sater, Chairman of Bahrain Marina Development Company, said the new identity revives the historic Marina Club name, long associated with Manama's maritime and social heritage, while introducing a contemporary experience inspired by Bahrain's seafaring traditions.

Gagan Suri, Chief Executive Officer, explained that facilities would open gradually according to operational readiness, adding that the project aims to create employment opportunities for Bahraini professionals in marine operations, hospitality and leisure.

Expanding Bahrain's Tourism Offering

Marina Club forms part of the wider Bahrain Marina development, which includes a residential tower, retail outlets, restaurants, cafés and planned hospitality and entertainment facilities.

The project is expected to diversify Manama's waterfront leisure offering, particularly in yacht tourism and marine recreation. However, its actual contribution to tourism activity will depend on the commencement of operations, visitor accessibility and demand once the facilities officially open.



"The facilities will open gradually based on their operational readiness, with a focus on creating job opportunities for Bahraini talent in marine operations, hospitality and entertainment."

Gagan Suri
CEO of Bahrain Marina Development Company

Emaar Hospitality and ALAIN Expand in Abu Dhabi with Five Branded Residential Projects Worth AED 8 Billion



Address, Palace and Vida brands to feature across new developments spanning 4.7 million square feet, with the first project on Al Maryah Island offering 452 apartments alongside luxury residences

Abu Dhabi – UAE | Al Rehla

Emaar Hospitality Group and ALAIN Asset Management announced on November 16, 2026, the expansion of their strategic partnership to develop five branded residential projects in Abu Dhabi, with a combined planned development value of AED 8 billion and a total area of approximately 4.7 million square feet.

The move marks a significant expansion of Emaar Hospitality's brand presence in the UAE capital, extending hotel-inspired service and design standards into luxury residential developments.

However, these projects do not represent new hotel developments or an increase in Abu Dhabi's hotel room inventory.

Three Hospitality Brands Expand into the Residential Sector

The new developments will feature Emaar Hospitality's Address, Palace and Vida brands, bringing hospitality-inspired living experiences to the residential market.

The partnership focuses on creating branded residences that combine property ownership with services and lifestyle experiences associated with established hospitality brands.

Al Maryah Island to Host the First Development

The first project will be located on Al Maryah Island in Abu Dhabi, featuring 452 apartments alongside luxury penthouses, across approximately one million square feet of development space.

According to the announced details, prices for one-bedroom apartments



will start at AED 3.7 million, with sales expected to launch soon.

The development will be situated near Abu Dhabi Global Market, as well as the island's retail and healthcare facilities.

The locations, construction schedules and completion dates of the remaining four projects have not yet been disclosed.

A Partnership Spanning a Decade

The relationship between the two companies dates back to 2016 and has included collaboration on Address Beach Resort in Dubai, followed by the Vida Residences development on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi.

The new agreement was signed by Mohamed Alabbar, founder and Managing Director of Emaar, and Sultan Khalfan Al Ketbi, Vice Chairman of ALAIN Asset Management.

Through this expansion, the companies aim to strengthen the presence of hospitality brands in the residential sector, leveraging hotel management expertise to develop properties targeting buyers seeking premium branded services.

Al-Rehla Perspective | Hospitality Expands Beyond Hotels

The announcement highlights a growing trend among hospitality groups to capitalise on their brand recognition and operational expertise by expanding into branded residences rather than relying exclusively on hotels and resorts.

This model offers hospitality companies opportunities to grow through branding agreements, management arrangements and residential services, although these activities differ from conventional hotel accommodation.

However, the announced AED 8 billion represents the planned value of a development portfolio, rather than confirmed hotel operating contracts or realised revenue.

The companies have also not disclosed the expected financial returns to Emaar Hospitality Group from the partnership.

The actual impact of this expansion will depend on project execution, the scope of services provided under the three brands, and the management arrangements implemented following completion.



Educational Tourism

When Museums Speak the Language of Children... A Journey Beyond Words From Exhibition Halls to Experiences of Discovery

BY:
Rajaa Aljeshi
Special Education Specialist

In museums around the world, ancient artifacts stand behind glass displays, preserving the stories of civilizations that span thousands of years. While visitors read the accompanying descriptions, a child may stand before a small exhibit, studying its colors and details, trying to understand a story they cannot yet read.

This raises an important question for global cultural tourism: Is it enough to display history, or should we make it accessible and understandable to everyone?

From European museums to cultural centers across Asia and the Arab world, the value of a museum experience is no longer determined solely by the treasures it houses, but also by how knowledge is presented to visitors.

Exhibitions that rely heavily on lengthy written descriptions may suit some visitors, but they are not equally accessible to all children, particularly those with learning difficulties or challenges involving communication and attention.

This is where interactive museums can make a meaningful difference. Visual storytelling, audio narratives, touchable replicas, and hands-on activities can transform history from static information into a living experience, while ensuring that original artifacts remain protected.

Modern technologies, including artificial intelligence, may further enhance accessibility by simplifying explanations, offering information at different language levels, and creating personalized visitor routes based on children's interests and abilities. However, the effectiveness of these tools depends on the accuracy of their content and their ease of use.

For children with special educational needs, providing multiple ways to engage with exhibits is not a luxury. It is an opportunity to participate, develop independence, and discover knowledge without feeling excluded or inadequate.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing museums worldwide today is not simply attracting more visitors, but ensuring that no child leaves an exhibition feeling that its stories were never meant for them.

A successful museum does more than preserve the memory of civilizations; it knows how to open that heritage to new generations, regardless of how differently they learn.

And when every child can understand the story of a place in their own way, a museum becomes more than a tourist attraction... it becomes a meaningful bridge between humanity and the history of the world.



Saudi Private Real Estate Funds Expand Hotel Financing as Assets Reach SAR 424.6 Billion



A hospitality project in Al Khobar targets SAR 713 million in investment, while a Riyadh hotel development involves contracts exceeding SAR 700 million; real estate funds account for 56.2% of total private fund assets

Riyadh – Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

Private real estate investment funds are emerging as an important financing channel for hospitality developments in Saudi Arabia, with new funds linked to hotel projects in Al Khobar and Riyadh, as total assets held by private real estate funds reached SAR 424.6 billion by the end of the second quarter of 2026.

According to data from the Capital Market Authority (CMA), total assets of private investment funds in the Kingdom reached SAR 755.7 billion, representing annual growth of 31%. Real estate funds accounted for 56.2% of the total, making them the largest category within the private investment fund market.

These figures reflect the expansion of the private fund industry. However, they do not indicate how much capital is specifically allocated to hotels and resorts, as real estate funds invest across residential, commercial, tourism-related and other property sectors.

SAR 713 Million Hospitality Development in Al Khobar

In June 2026, Osool & Bakheet Investment Company announced the launch of a closed-ended private real estate fund targeting the development of a luxury hotel project in Al Khobar, Eastern Province, with a planned investment value of SAR 713 million, including bank financing.

The project illustrates how real estate funds can pool capital and direct financing towards hospitality developments seeking to benefit from growing demand for accommodation and hotel services across Saudi cities.

However, the targeted investment value does not mean that the entire amount has already been raised from investors or spent on development.

Five-Star Hotel Planned Within Riyadh's Sports Boulevard

In Riyadh, an agreement was



resorts and accommodation facilities associated with tourism destinations.

These investment vehicles are becoming increasingly relevant as Saudi Arabia expands its tourism developments, particularly when hotel properties form part of new urban, leisure and entertainment destinations.

However, assessing their actual contribution to tourism requires tracking the number of hotels and rooms developed through these investments, their construction progress, and the amount of financing specifically allocated to hospitality.

While the growth of private real estate fund assets to SAR 424.6 billion demonstrates the expansion of Saudi Arabia's investment market, the figure does not, on its own, represent the value of tourism or hotel investments in the Kingdom.

to 1,878 by the end of June 2026, compared with 1,407 a year earlier.

Meanwhile, the number of fund subscribers reached approximately 181,000, representing annual growth of around 17%.

This expansion reflects the growing use of investment funds as vehicles for structuring capital and financing assets, including hotel projects that require substantial investment and extended development and operating periods.

Al-Rehla Perspective | Could Investment Funds Become a Driving Force Behind Hospitality Development?

Private real estate funds enable developers and investment managers to pool capital and distribute risks among investors, providing a financing model that can support hotels,

announced in August 2026 to establish a real estate investment fund for the development of a five-star hotel within the Wadi destination of the Sports Boulevard project, involving contracts valued at more than SAR 700 million.

The participating entities include the Sports Boulevard Foundation, AlJazira Capital as fund manager, and Rikaz Real Estate as developer and one of the investors.

The project forms part of a mixed-use urban destination combining sports, entertainment and supporting services, creating opportunities for hospitality developments serving visitors to Riyadh.

Growth in Investment Funds and Investor Participation

The number of private investment funds in Saudi Arabia increased

Shamael Signs Agreement to Develop 80,000-Square-Metre Glamping Resort in Hail



The Gate Camp will feature 38 accommodation units with capacity for 88 guests in the Al Maghwah area, marking the project's transition from an investment opportunity to a signed development agreement

Hail – Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

Shamael Development Company, the investment arm of Hail Municipality in Saudi Arabia, has signed an investment agreement to develop The Gate Camp, a glamping resort in the Al Maghwah area, covering 80,000 square metres as part of efforts to expand nature-based hospitality and outdoor tourism experiences.

The project will feature 38 tourist accommodation units with a total capacity of 88 guests, alongside hospitality and relaxation facilities, recreational areas, sports activities and nature-based experiences.

From Investment Opportunity to Development Agreement

Shamael previously offered the site as part of its investment opportunities in April 2026 under the name Al Maghwah 6, identifying it as a suitable location for developing desert glamping accommodation.

The site is located near several entertainment and event facilities, including the Al Maghwah Celebration Centre and Mashar National Park, providing the project with opportunities to benefit from visitor traffic and activities hosted in the region.

The signing of the agreement marks progress in the project's development. However, the investment value, identity of the implementing investor, construction schedule and expected opening date have not yet been disclosed.

Accommodation Units and Nature-Based Experiences

The resort aims to introduce an accommodation concept combining hotel-style services with outdoor activities, offering visitors an alternative to conventional hotels while exploring Hail's natural and cultural attractions.

The project forms part of Shamael's strategy to develop tourism and recreational assets through partnerships with the private sector.

Al-Rehla Perspective | Nature-Based Hospitality in Hail

The project reflects growing interest in developing relatively small-scale accommodation experiences connected to nature, which could eventually be incorporated into travel programmes featuring heritage attractions, desert activities and local events.

Such developments could help diversify accommodation options and stimulate demand for surrounding tourism services. However, their economic impact will depend on successful implementation, operational performance and actual occupancy rates.

The announced capacity of 88 guests does not yet represent an operational addition to Hail's hospitality supply, as the project remains at the post-agreement stage and has not opened to visitors.

Last Edition Crowned

the Leaders of Hospitality...

Who Will Claim the Gold This Year?

Nominations Open Now



Abu Dhabi Signs 8 Tourism Agreements in London to Expand Travel Sales and Hotel Bookings



Seven partnerships target the UK market, while Hotelbeds renews cooperation for a fifth year as Guggenheim Abu Dhabi prepares for its December opening

Abu Dhabi – UAE | Al Rehla

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) signed and renewed eight commercial agreements during World Travel Market London (WTM London 2026), held from November 3 to 5, aimed at strengthening the emirate's tourism distribution across international markets, expanding booking channels and encouraging longer stays.

Seven agreements target the United Kingdom, one of Abu Dhabi's key international source markets, while the eighth renews the department's partnership with Hotelbeds for the fifth consecutive year.

Seven Partnerships with UK Travel Companies

The UK partners include Best At Travel, Destination2, Elevate DMC, Kenwood Travel, loveholidays, Luxury Holidays and Southall Travel.

The agreements focus on sales incentives and promotional campaigns targeting various traveller segments, including Abu Dhabi holidays, multi-centre itineraries and stopover programmes.

DCT Abu Dhabi indicated that forward bookings for 2027 are showing encouraging signs of demand from the UK market, although no specific booking volumes or financial figures were disclosed.

Expanding Global Hotel Distribution

The eighth agreement renews the strategic partnership with Hotelbeds, leveraging its global business-to-business (B2B) distribution network to strengthen the promotion of hotels in Abu Dhabi and the Al Ain Region across priority international markets.

The cooperation includes joint marketing campaigns, travel trade familiarisation programmes and destination promotion initiatives designed to encourage longer stays.

New Cultural Attractions Support Tourism Promotion

The partnerships come as Abu Dhabi continues to expand its tourism and cultural offerings, highlighted by the upcoming opening of Guggenheim Abu Dhabi on Saadiyat Island, scheduled for December 11, 2026.

> **Abdulla Yousuf, Director of International Operations at DCT Abu Dhabi, said the agreements would help travel partners make Abu Dhabi easier to discover and book, while strengthening travellers' connections with the emirate's year-round cultural and leisure experiences.**

Hilton Reopens Al Seef Heritage Hotel in Dubai Following Refurbishment, Bringing Back 190 Rooms Along Dubai Creek





The hotel welcomes guests across 10 traditional Emirati-inspired houses, offering a hospitality experience that blends modern comfort with Dubai's cultural heritage

Dubai – UAE | Al Rehla

Hilton has reopened Al Seef Heritage Hotel Dubai, Curio Collection by Hilton, in November 2026, following a temporary closure for maintenance and refurbishment. The property has resumed welcoming guests with 190 rooms and suites spread across 10 houses inspired by traditional Emirati architecture.

Located in the historic Al Seef district overlooking Dubai Creek, the hotel offers an accommodation experience combining local heritage with modern hospitality services, coinciding with the emirate's winter tourism season.

Ten Houses Reflecting Old Dubai

The hotel's rooms and suites are distributed across heritage-style buildings known as Bayts, designed to reflect the character of traditional Emirati neighbourhoods, with views of historic markets or Dubai Creek and its traditional wooden boats.

Its location provides guests with convenient access to museums, art galleries, handicraft shops and historic souks, combining hotel accommodation with opportunities to explore Dubai's cultural heritage.

Heritage-Inspired Hospitality Experiences

The hotel features Saba'a Restaurant & Bar, named after the seven emirates of the UAE, serving dishes inspired by Emirati and Arabic culinary traditions.

Gajendra Sharma, General Manager of Hilton Al Seef Hotels, said the reopening reflects the group's commitment to delivering a hospitality experience that combines authentic Emirati architecture with contemporary comfort, while supporting cultural and heritage tourism in Dubai.

Al-Rehla Perspective | A Stay That Tells Dubai's Story

Al Seef Heritage Hotel offers travellers an opportunity to discover Dubai's historic character beyond its skyscrapers and modern resorts, with accommodation close to traditional markets, cultural landmarks and Dubai Creek.

The surrounding district allows visitors to explore heritage neighbourhoods and experience traditional abra rides across the creek, making their stay part of a broader cultural itinerary.

The hotel's reopening returns 190 rooms and suites to the available accommodation supply in the area, rather than adding new capacity to Dubai's existing hotel inventory.

Abu Dhabi Public Art Biennial Opens with 22 Artworks Across Historic and Cultural Sites Until February 2027



Featuring 21 artists and art collectives from the UAE and around the world, the free-entry event explores the concept of "Home" across Abu Dhabi and Al Ain

Abu Dhabi – UAE | Al Rehla

The second edition of the Abu Dhabi Public Art Biennial opened on November 15, 2026, organised by the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi). The event features 22 artworks, including 20 new commissions, by 21 artists and art collectives from the UAE and around the world, displayed across historic, cultural and waterfront locations in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain. Admission is free until February 15, 2027.

Held under the theme Home: A Dictionary of Shared Places, the biennial is curated by Elvira Dyangani Ose, Director of Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, and explores the relationship between people, places and collective memory.

Artworks Across the Port and Saadiyat Island

In Abu Dhabi, the artworks are displayed at Mina Market, Mina Zayed (MiZa), Hidd Al Saadiyat Promenade and the Saadiyat Cultural District. Activities in Al Ain began on October 23 at Al Qattara Oasis and Al Towayya Roundabout.

At Mina Market, visitors can explore interactive and illuminated installations inspired by different cultures, including a giant circular seesaw by Colombian artist Iván Argote and a large-scale light installation by Italian artist Marinella Senatore.

Meanwhile, Mina Zayed hosts artworks inspired by Abu Dhabi's maritime heritage, including Gargoor by Emirati artist Khalid Al Banna, which reinterprets a traditional fishing trap as a contemporary art installation.

In Al Ain, Emirati artist Rawdha Al Mazrouei presents Tasa, a large-scale installation measuring 80 metres in diameter, inspired by traditional Emirati gold headwear.

Al-Rehla Perspective | A Free Cultural Journey

The biennial offers visitors an opportunity to discover Abu Dhabi from a different perspective through a cultural route connecting historic markets, ports, waterfronts, museums and oases.

Families and art enthusiasts can incorporate the biennial's locations into their travel itineraries, particularly as admission is free and the artworks remain on display until mid-February 2027.

The installations, spread across multiple locations, provide an opportunity to explore local heritage and contemporary art within the same visit. Visitors should note that some additional artworks will open in December.

A separate programme of guided tours, workshops and live performances is expected to be announced.

Ethiopia Promotes Coffee Tourism at International Exhibition in Jimma, Bringing Together Global Producers and Buyers



Two-day event highlights the birthplace of Arabica coffee and explores tourism investment opportunities, as Southwest Oromia targets 700,000 tonnes of coffee production

Jimma – Ethiopia | Al Rehla

The Ethiopian city of Jimma, in the Oromia region, hosted the World Coffee Exhibition 2026 on November 14–15, bringing together producers, exporters, buyers and international experts to strengthen the coffee trade and promote coffee tourism as a promising cultural and agricultural tourism product.

The exhibition brought together public- and private-sector representatives to explore opportunities for developing the coffee industry, improving production quality and expanding trade and investment partnerships, while highlighting Ethiopia's historical significance as the birthplace of Arabica coffee.

Coffee Tourism Takes Centre Stage

The exhibition programme featured activities showcasing Ethiopian coffee varieties and experiences connected to the country's coffee culture, alongside a trade exhibition comprising 100 booths and business meetings between producers and buyers.

Organisers aim to build on this agricultural and cultural heritage to develop tourism opportunities linked to coffee farms and production regions, particularly in southwestern Oromia.

Ethiopia is renowned for its distinctive coffee-growing regions and varieties, including Sidama, Yirgacheffe, Guji, Harar and Limu, which attract considerable interest from the international specialty coffee market.

New Production and Export Targets

Mohammed Taha Abafita, a political official in Southwest Oromia, announced a target of producing 700,000 tonnes of coffee during the current season, with 195,000 tonnes earmarked for export.

Discussions at the exhibition focused on improving quality, increasing productivity and expanding producers' access to international markets.

Al-Rehla Perspective | From Coffee Farms to Travel Experiences

Coffee tourism offers visitors an opportunity to discover the stages of coffee cultivation, processing and roasting, alongside traditional Ethiopian coffee preparation and serving ceremonies.

These experiences could support rural tourism and create opportunities for local guides, farmers and hospitality businesses, particularly if developed into organised visitor programmes.

However, the exhibition has not announced any specific tourism development contracts or confirmed investment projects, meaning that coffee tourism development remains an emerging opportunity rather than an established investment outcome.

Abu Dhabi Launches Two Yachting Guides Covering 8 Marinas and Seven-Day Luxury Itineraries



Navigational information for vessels up to 180 metres long, with itineraries connecting marine tourism to hotels, museums and desert experiences

Abu Dhabi – UAE | Al Rehla

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) has launched two specialised guides to support luxury yachting and marine tourism, providing operational information on eight marinas across the emirate alongside seven-day itineraries combining sailing, luxury accommodation, cultural attractions and desert experiences.

The Abu Dhabi Waterfront Guide and the Luxury Yacht Charter Itinerary Guide aim to assist charter companies, travel advisors and yacht captains in developing comprehensive tourism programmes for international visitors, supporting the Abu Dhabi Tourism Strategy 2030.

Eight Marinas and Operational Information

The first phase of the Waterfront Guide covers eight major marinas, providing details on their locations, facilities and capabilities to accommodate vessels measuring up to 180 metres in length.

The guide also outlines UAE entry procedures, sailing permits, safety requirements and digital services available through Abu Dhabi Maritime, alongside information about nearby hotels, restaurants, beach clubs and tourist attractions.

Itineraries Combining Sea, Culture and Desert

The Luxury Yacht Charter Guide presents options for vessels ranging from 18 to 43 metres, accommodating up to 60 guests during the day or 12 overnight, depending on vessel specifications.

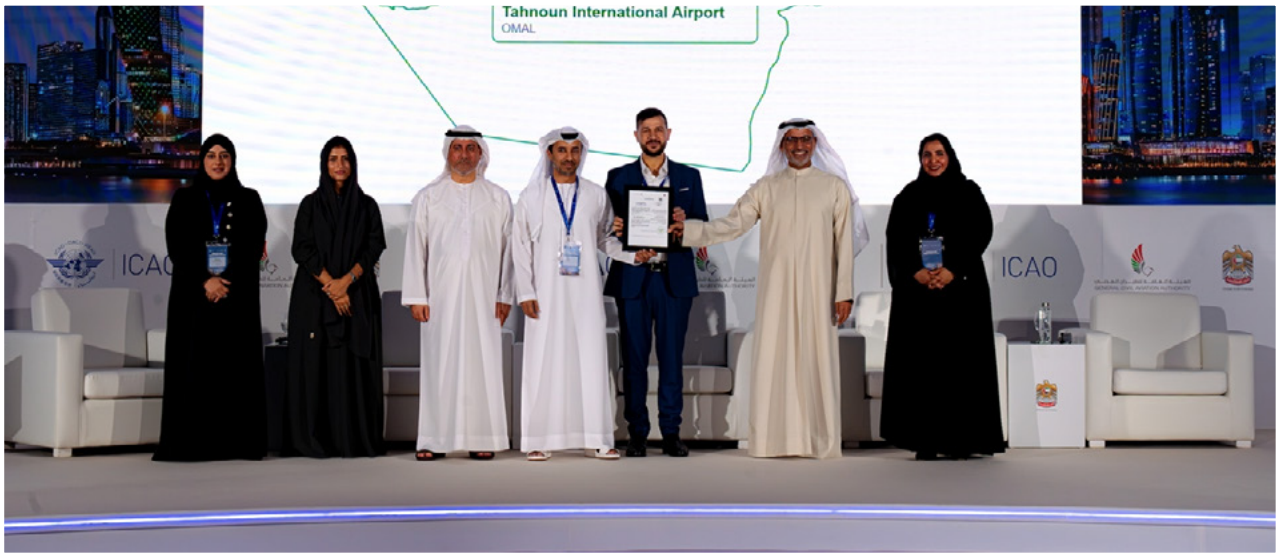
It features a proposed seven-day itinerary incorporating exclusive visits to Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi, Arabic calligraphy and perfume-making experiences, and excursions to the Al Dhafra region and Sir Bani Yas Island, complemented by luxury accommodation and fine dining.

Supporting Tourism and Hospitality Businesses

” Haitham Ali Khamis, Acting Director of Tourism Product Development at DCT Abu Dhabi, said the guides provide practical tools for industry partners and charter brokers to develop customised multi-day itineraries by connecting marinas with the emirate’s hotels, restaurants and cultural landmarks.

The launch coincides with the Abu Dhabi International Boat Show, scheduled for November 19–22, 2026, providing marine tourism companies with additional resources to develop and market their offerings.

Abu Dhabi Airports Receives Five Honours for Sustainability, Aviation Safety and Future Technologies



Three airports awarded the Green Seal accreditation, alongside two awards recognising advanced air mobility infrastructure development in collaboration with Archer Aviation

Abu Dhabi – UAE | Al Rehla

Abu Dhabi Airports has received five awards and honours at the sixth edition of the ICAO Middle East Aviation Safety Summit, hosted by the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), including three environmental accreditations and two awards in the field of advanced air mobility.

In a statement issued on Monday, November 16, 2026, Abu Dhabi Airports announced that it had received the highest number of honours among airport operators participating in the event, under two programmes administered by the GCAA.

Three Airports Earn Green Seal Accreditation

Zayed International Airport, Tahnoun International Airport and Sir Bani Yas Airport received Green Seal accreditation under the GCAA's Green Airports Accreditation Programme after meeting the programme's environmental performance and operational sustainability requirements.

The GCAA and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) acknowledged the environmental achievements of Abu Dhabi Airports' sustainability initiatives and the three airports' compliance with the accreditation standards.

Two Awards for Advanced Air Mobility Technologies

Abu Dhabi Airports also received the Excellence in Sustainability and Lifecycle Management Award for Urban Air Mobility, jointly with Archer Aviation, as well as the Excellence in Infrastructure and Vertiport Design Award.

The two honours were presented as part of the 2026 Aviation Safety Marathon Awards, recognising efforts to develop infrastructure for electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft and establish the operational frameworks required for their future integration into the aviation transport network.

> **Ahmed Juma Al Shamsi, Chief Executive Officer of Abu Dhabi Airports, said the recognitions reflect the company's efforts to address current operational priorities while preparing for future developments in the aviation industry through sustainability, innovation and safety initiatives.**

The awards highlight Abu Dhabi Airports' commitment to advancing its operational and environmental infrastructure, while commercial electric urban air mobility services remain subject to the completion of the necessary technical and regulatory requirements.

Saudi Arabia Recovers Nearly 70,000 Archaeological Artefacts from Home and Abroad to Preserve Its Cultural Heritage

Heritage Commission reports the recovery of 28,577 artefacts from abroad and 41,057 domestically, alongside the seizure or voluntary handover of more than 9,000 items in 2025

Riyadh – Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

Saudi Arabia's Heritage Commission has announced the recovery of 69,634 archaeological artefacts from within the Kingdom and abroad as of 2026, as part of its efforts to safeguard cultural property, preserve historical heritage and combat the illicit trafficking of antiquities.

According to figures released by the Commission to mark the International Day Against Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Property, the recovered items include 41,057 artefacts from within Saudi Arabia, accounting for 59% of the total, and 28,577 recovered from abroad, representing 41%.

More Than 28,000 Artefacts Recovered from Abroad

Recovery efforts include tracing cultural objects that were unlawfully removed from Saudi Arabia, documenting their origins and coordinating with national authorities and international organisations to secure their return.

Domestically, recovery activities include the seizure of artefacts involved in regulatory violations and the voluntary handover of archaeological objects by individuals to the relevant authorities.

These measures contribute to safeguarding material evidence of the Arabian Peninsula's history and preserving it for future generations.

9,197 Artefacts Seized or Handed Over in 2025

The Commission's figures show that its efforts during 2025 resulted in the seizure or receipt of 9,197 archaeological artefacts.

Authorities also recorded 195 violations involving the unlicensed sale and trading of antiquities through social media platforms.

In addition, 26 voluntary handover initiatives were recorded, involving individuals who transferred archaeological objects to the relevant authorities, reflecting growing community participation in protecting national heritage.

International Cooperation to Combat Antiquities Trafficking

Saudi Arabia's heritage protection efforts are supported by the 1970 UNESCO Convention, which the Kingdom joined in 1976. The convention seeks to prevent the illicit trade in cultural property and strengthen international cooperation to facilitate its recovery.

On November 16, 2026, the Heritage Commission organised a virtual meeting highlighting efforts to combat illicit trafficking and the role of national and international partnerships in protecting historical artefacts.

Al-Rehla Perspective | Heritage Protection as a Foundation for Cultural Tourism

Archaeological artefacts provide valuable insights into the civilisations that have shaped the Arabian Peninsula throughout history. Their study, documentation and appropriate public display can help enrich cultural experiences for visitors.

The tourism significance of recovering archaeological objects lies in preserving their authenticity and historical context while creating future opportunities to introduce them to the public through museums, exhibitions and educational programmes.

However, recovering artefacts does not automatically mean they will be placed on public display or developed into tourism attractions. Such outcomes require conservation, documentation, exhibition preparation and official announcements identifying where visitors will be able to view them.









Educational Tourism

Saudi Arabias highway motels deserve a closer look Affordable accommodation on the routes connecting Vision 2030

BY:
Ashraf Hendawi
Hotel Expert

A place travellers can trust
Families on the road need a clean room, a comfortable bed, safe parking and a reasonable price. Saudi hospitality investors should consider it.
The Kingdom recorded 122.6 million domestic and inbound tourist visits in 2025, including 93.3 million domestic visits, according to OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2026. With a target of 150 million annual visits by 2030, we should ask whether travellers can find suitable accommodation along their routes. These are visits, not necessarily different people.

More than a rest stop
A good highway motel offers dependable service, from digital booking to cleanliness and access. Tourism licensing, classification, safety, Shamous linkage and tourism monitoring requirements provide a foundation for trust. Qualification arrangements for regional-road fuel stations and service centres create opportunities for accommodation, food and other services to work together.

Who needs a room?
Potential guests include:
▪ Families taking road trips between regions and emerging destinations.
▪ Umrah pilgrims and visitors travelling overland towards Makkah and Madinah, including across borders.
▪ Business travellers, event visitors and logistics workers.
Traffic alone does not establish demand. We need to know who will stop overnight, where, when and at what price.

Do the numbers first
Knight Frank identifies an opportunity in economy and midscale accommodation. Not every road lacks rooms, and not every roadside site suits a motel.

A limited-service model may cost less to build and operate than a luxury hotel. Land, fit-out and financing costs can change the outcome. Quick payback cannot be promised without testing occupancy, rates and seasonality.

Local or international economy-brand franchises and partnerships with station operators offer possible entry routes. The Tourism Development Fund's Kafalah programme provides financing guarantees for eligible tourism micro, small and medium enterprises, subject to its terms.

The test comes after opening
Maintenance, recruitment, training and continuing regulatory and technical compliance belong in the budget from the start. Guests may accept a simple room. Poor cleaning or broken air conditioning is another matter.

The future is built along the road
Roads carry trade and tourism between cities. Highway motels can serve visitors and pilgrims as property and tourism assets. I see a case for investing early in well-chosen locations and reliable hospitality. Returns depend on demand and operations, not buying land first.



Riyadh to Host Ethnosport Festival Featuring 18 Countries and 38 Traditional Sports from November 19 to 28

The festival makes its debut outside Turkey as part of Riyadh Season 2026, offering traditional wrestling, equestrian activities, handicrafts and cultural performances

Riyadh – Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

Saudi Arabia's capital is preparing to host the Ethnosport Culture Festival from November 19 to 28, 2026, as part of Riyadh Season, marking the festival's first edition outside Turkey.

The event will bring together participants from 18 countries, showcasing 38 traditional sports and games.

Organised by the World Ethnosport Confederation in cooperation with Riyadh Season, the festival will take place in the New Murabba area along King Salman bin Abdulaziz Road. Tickets went on sale through the Webook platform on November 16.

Traditional Sports from Different Cultures

The festival will feature competitions and demonstrations of traditional sports, including oil wrestling, Kazakh and Uzbek wrestling, equestrian activities, traditional archery, folk games and strategy-based games.

Visitors will have the opportunity to explore sporting traditions deeply rooted in the histories and cultures of participating nations through live performances and interactive experiences designed for different age groups.

Cultural Village and Family Experiences

Beyond sporting competitions, the festival will feature a cultural village with traditional tents, handicraft workshops and a museum dedicated to the history of traditional sports.

The programme will also include children's activities and opportunities to experience traditional folk games.

International cuisine, musical performances and folklore shows will further enrich the event, offering visitors an experience that combines entertainment with cultural discovery.

International Cooperation Beyond Riyadh

The World Ethnosport Confederation has organised its cultural festival since 2016, aiming to preserve traditional sports and games while introducing them to younger generations.

The partnership with Riyadh Season will also extend to the festival's next edition, scheduled for Istanbul in May 2027, where Riyadh Season will participate as a sponsor.

Al-Rehla Perspective | Traditional Sports as a Tourism Experience

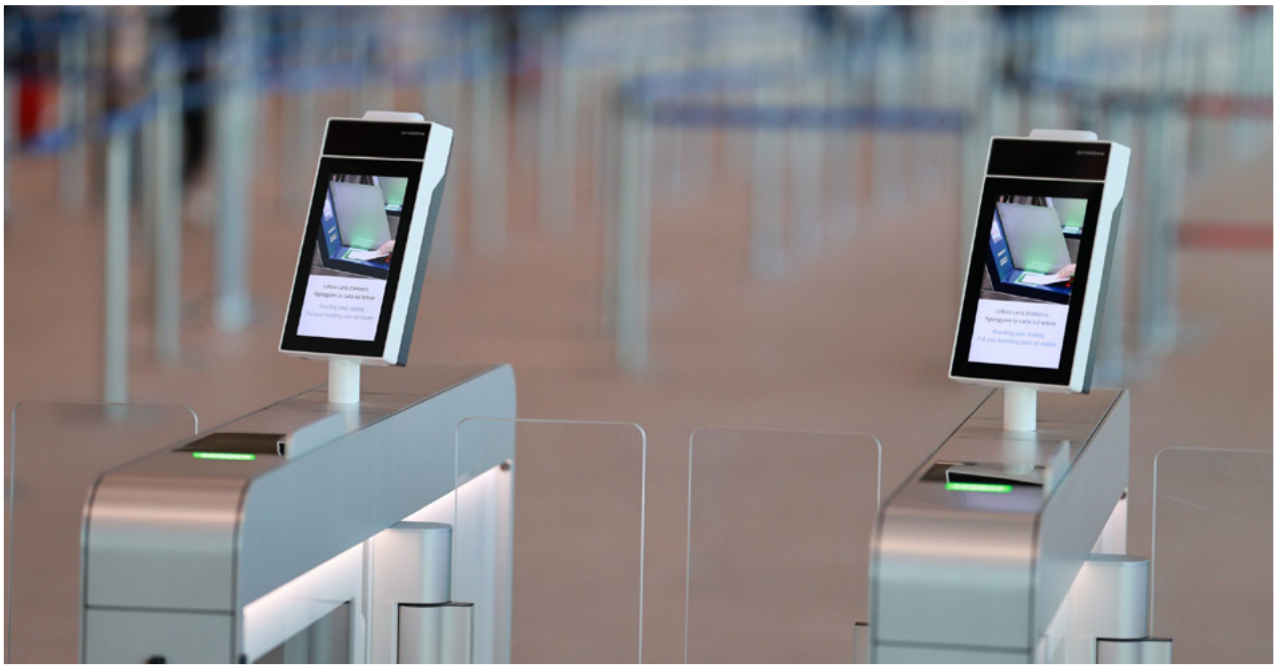
The festival adds a distinctive cultural dimension to Riyadh Season, offering an experience that goes beyond conventional entertainment events by bringing together sporting and heritage traditions from multiple countries in one destination.

Such events can diversify the experiences available to families and international visitors while strengthening Riyadh's appeal as a destination for short leisure trips.

However, assessing the festival's actual impact on tourism, hotel occupancy and local spending will require data on visitor numbers and their markets of origin, which have not yet been announced.


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Saudi
Welcome to Arabia
RIYADH SEASON

Nigeria to Launch vPASS Biometric Passenger Verification System at Lagos and Abuja Airports



Facial recognition technology aims to streamline domestic travel procedures and enhance airport security, while mandatory registration requirements remain unclear

Lagos – Nigeria | Al Rehla

Nigeria's Federal Airports Authority (FAAN) has scheduled November 16, 2026, for the launch of its new biometric passenger verification system, vPASS, at the domestic terminal of Murtala Muhammed Airport in Lagos, as part of an initial rollout that also includes Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Abuja.

The system aims to streamline domestic travel procedures and strengthen airport security through facial recognition technology and electronic gates, reducing the need for repeated manual identity checks.

Digital Registration and Smart Gates

vPASS requires an initial registration process linking Nigerian passengers' personal information to their National Identification Numbers (NIN), along with facial identity verification.

Once registered, passengers can use facial recognition technology at designated airport access points.

Available information indicates that foreign passengers may register using their passport details, although FAAN has not yet published comprehensive procedural requirements for this category.

The project is being implemented by Verxid Technologies in cooperation with FAAN as part of broader efforts to digitalise civil aviation services and improve operational efficiency.

Questions Over Mandatory Registration

FAAN has encouraged passengers to register in advance to benefit from faster airport procedures.

However, the authority has not explicitly clarified whether registration will be mandatory for all travellers or whether conventional identity verification procedures will remain available during the initial implementation phase.

The Nigerian government first announced the project in April 2026 as part of plans to modernise passenger identity verification for domestic flights.

Turkey Moves Closer to Imposing TRY 5 Million Licensing Fees on Foreign Hotel Booking Platforms



Parliament to debate legislation this week proposing a 17% commission cap, mandatory local legal representation and potential blocking of unlicensed platforms

Ankara – Turkey | Al Rehla

The Turkish Parliament is set to debate new legislation regulating foreign accommodation booking platforms during the week beginning November 17, 2026, in a move that could reshape relationships between international booking companies, hotels and tourism accommodation providers across the country.

The bill has been placed on the parliamentary agenda following its approval by the Public Works, Reconstruction, Transport and Tourism Committee in October. However, its proposed provisions remain subject to final legislative approval.

TRY 5 Million Licence and Local Representation

Under the proposed legislation, foreign accommodation booking platforms would be required to obtain a licence from Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism, at a cost of TRY 5 million, valid for two years and renewable.

The bill also requires platforms to appoint a local representative in Turkey, comply with applicable tax obligations and submit disputes arising from regulated activities to Turkish law and courts.

Additionally, the legislation proposes a 0.075% contribution to the Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency, calculated on the tax base specified for digital services.

Commission Cap and Hotel Listing Regulations

The proposed legislation would introduce a 17% commission cap on domestic transactions covered by the regulations, while requiring booking platforms to verify the official licences of hotels and short-term tourist accommodation properties listed on their websites.

It would also prohibit unjustified restrictions preventing hotels from offering different prices through alternative sales channels.

Administrative fines and potential access restrictions could be imposed on platforms operating without the required licences, subject to the applicable legal procedures.

Proposed Implementation in Early 2027

The current draft proposes that the regulations take effect on January 1, 2027, with existing platforms granted a three-month transition period to submit their licensing applications.

However, these dates remain dependent on the bill's final approval and official publication and may change during parliamentary deliberations.

Schengen Visa Appointment Delays of Up to Two Months Prompt UAE Residents to Rethink Winter Holiday Destinations



As UAE National Day and New Year holidays approach, interest grows in Asian and Caucasus destinations amid varying European visa appointment availability

Dubai – UAE | Al Rehla

Long waiting times for Schengen visa appointments are prompting some UAE residents to reconsider their travel plans to Europe during the upcoming UAE National Day and New Year holidays. According to local travel agencies, appointment waiting periods at certain consulates have reached approximately two months during October and November 2026.

The delays coincide with seasonal demand for winter holidays, leading some travellers to postpone bookings or explore alternative destinations with more flexible entry requirements.

Two-Month Appointment Waits and 15-Day Processing Times

Travel agents report significant differences in appointment availability among European consulates, particularly for popular destinations such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands.

Under European Union regulations, Schengen visa applications are normally processed within 15 calendar days after submission, although processing may take up to 45 days in certain cases. These periods do not include the time required to secure an appointment.

Asian and Caucasus Destinations Gain Attention

Meanwhile, some travellers are turning their attention to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, alongside Thailand, Vietnam and Sri Lanka, as well as European destinations outside the Schengen Area, such as Montenegro.

These markets offer a variety of winter holiday experiences, although visa and entry requirements vary depending on travellers' nationalities and residency status.

Al-Rehla Perspective | Early Planning Can Protect Your Holiday

Travellers are advised to check visa appointment availability before confirming non-refundable flight and hotel bookings, and to choose flexible reservation options to minimise potential financial losses.

European regulations allow Schengen visa applications to be submitted up to six months before the intended travel date. Applicants must apply through the country that represents their main destination, rather than simply choosing the consulate offering the earliest appointment.

Although visa delays may redirect some bookings towards alternative destinations, their actual impact on European tourism flows and spending by UAE-based travellers has yet to be established through official data.



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Aleppo International Airport Expansion Begins with Saudi Investment Partnership to Raise Capacity Above 2 Million Passengers



Saudi Arabia's Elaf Investment Fund, led by BinDawood Group, backs the project, with the first phase focusing on terminal rehabilitation, infrastructure upgrades and modernisation of operational systems

Aleppo – Syria | Al Rehla

Construction and development work officially began at Aleppo International Airport on Sunday, November 15, 2026, under an investment partnership between Syria's General Authority of Civil Aviation and Air Transport and Saudi Arabia's Elaf Investment Fund, led by BinDawood Group.

The project aims to modernise the airport and increase its annual passenger capacity to more than two million.

Omar Al-Hosari, President of the General Authority of Civil Aviation and Air Transport, confirmed that technical teams and construction crews had commenced the first phase, marking the project's transition from planning and preparatory studies to on-site implementation.

Work has started ahead of the previously announced schedule. In September, the authority had indicated that development activities were expected to begin in early 2027.

Terminal and Operational Systems Upgrades

The current phase includes the rehabilitation of airport infrastructure, facilities and passenger terminals, alongside upgrades to technical systems, service facilities and operational equipment, as well as improvements to the airport's visual identity.

Engineering and operational studies for subsequent phases are continuing in parallel, as part of a broader plan to improve airport efficiency and accommodate anticipated growth in passenger and air cargo traffic.

Fadi Mashar, the official overseeing project implementation at Aleppo International Airport, said the development aims to increase annual passenger capacity to more than two million, although no specific completion date has been announced for achieving this operational target.

Saudi Investment to Develop Existing and New Airport Facilities



The project forms part of a partnership between the Syrian aviation authority and Saudi Arabia's Elaf Investment Fund, led by BinDawood Group, covering upgrades to the existing airport and preparations for the development of a new international airport in Aleppo.

The two parties held meetings in Jeddah in September 2026 to review the project's technical, commercial, financial and contractual aspects and establish implementation priorities.

Improvements to the existing airport form part of a broader strategy to modernise Syria's civil aviation infrastructure and strengthen its connections with regional and international transport networks.

The investment value allocated to the current phase and its expected completion date have not yet been disclosed.

Aleppo Seeks to Strengthen Air Connectivity

The Syrian aviation authority aims to enhance Aleppo International Airport's capacity to accommodate additional air traffic while improving services for passengers and airlines.

The project also seeks to strengthen Aleppo's position in air transport, cargo operations and logistics, supporting the city's commercial and economic activities.

Al-Rehla Perspective | Airport Development as a Step Towards Tourism Recovery

Modernising Aleppo International Airport represents an important step towards improving air access to northern Syria, a key requirement for any future expansion of travel and tourism activity.

Upgraded terminals and operational services could help attract additional airlines, facilitate the movement of visitors and business travellers, and improve Aleppo's connectivity with regional markets.

However, the project's actual tourism impact will depend on the completion of development works, an increase in scheduled flights, improvements in transport and accommodation services, and suitable conditions for welcoming visitors.

The start of construction therefore represents progress in aviation infrastructure, rather than evidence that passenger or tourist arrivals have already increased.

China Completes First Crewed Flight of 19-Passenger Electric Aircraft with 400-Kilometre Range



CE-25A aircraft covers 60.4 kilometres in a 16-minute, 38-second test flight, as China's civil aviation regulator begins the certification process

Beijing – China | Al Rehla

Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC) has announced the successful completion of the first crewed test flight of its new CE-25A electric aircraft, marking a significant step in the development of aircraft designed for short-distance commercial services between cities.

The flight took place on November 14, 2026, in Binzhou, Shandong Province, eastern China, with two pilots and a flight test engineer on board.

The aircraft covered 60.4 kilometres in 16 minutes and 38 seconds, with its systems operating normally and performance indicators meeting expectations.

Electric Aircraft Designed for 19 Passengers

The CE-25A is COMAC's first commercial electric aircraft, designed to accommodate 19 passengers, with a maximum takeoff weight of 10 tonnes.

It has a cruising speed of up to 300 kilometres per hour, a design range of 400 kilometres and an operating altitude of up to 2,400 metres.

The aircraft features a distributed electric propulsion system comprising ten ducted fans mounted on its wings, replacing conventional aircraft engines.

Industrial Partnership and Certification Testing

The aircraft was developed through a collaboration involving COMAC, Chinese battery manufacturer CATL, Shanghai Jiao Tong University and other partners.

It completed its first uncrewed flight on February 2, 2026, followed by 19 additional uncrewed test flights to assess performance and reliability.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China has accepted the aircraft's application for type certification, an essential step towards obtaining regulatory approval for commercial operations.

However, no specific date has been announced for the aircraft to enter passenger service.

Al-Rehla Perspective | Could Electric Aircraft Open New Tourism Routes?

Small electric aircraft could eventually provide new opportunities to connect neighbouring cities and tourism destinations, particularly on short regional routes where larger aircraft may not be commercially practical.

However, introducing this technology into commercial passenger services will require the completion of safety testing and certification, proof of economic viability, and suitable charging and maintenance infrastructure.

The successful crewed flight does not mean the aircraft is ready to carry commercial passengers or that ticket prices will decrease, as the CE-25A remains in the development and testing phase.

Riyadh Air Postpones Jakarta Flights to November 23 and Cancels Connecting Flights Until Further Notice



Launch date revised from November 16, as the airline offers rebooking and refund options amid operational disruptions

Riyadh – Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

Riyadh Air has postponed the launch of its direct flights between Riyadh and Jakarta, Indonesia, after an official update on the airline's English-language website listed November 23, 2026, as the revised date for resuming services, instead of the originally scheduled launch on November 16.

The airline has also announced the cancellation of all connecting flights across its network until further notice, affecting passengers whose itineraries involve multiple flights, particularly those connecting through its Riyadh hub.

Three Weekly Flights to Jakarta

On October 5, Riyadh Air announced the opening of bookings for its Jakarta route, with three weekly flights scheduled on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, operated by Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft.

The Indonesian capital forms part of the airline's expansion strategy in Asian markets, aimed at strengthening connectivity between Saudi Arabia and Southeast Asia.

However, the airline has not confirmed whether November 23 represents a definitive operational restart date, while the Arabic version of its travel advisories does not specify a date for resuming Jakarta services.

Rebooking and Ticket Refunds

Riyadh Air stated that operational disruptions beyond its control could result in flight delays, cancellations or route changes, without providing further details about their causes.

Eligible passengers have been offered fee-free rebooking on available flights through January 31, 2027, subject to applicable conditions and seat availability.

Alternatively, passengers may request a full refund for eligible unused flight segments under the airline's published terms.

Al-Rehla Perspective | What Does the Postponement Mean for Travellers?

The schedule changes require passengers travelling between Saudi Arabia and Indonesia to review their bookings directly with the airline, particularly those relying on connecting flights through Riyadh.

Travellers should not treat November 23 as a guaranteed departure date without obtaining official confirmation of their flight status and reservation.

The airline has not disclosed the number of affected bookings or announced when connecting services will be fully restored.

Air Arabia Dammam to Launch Four Weekly Direct Flights to Damascus from November 20



The Syrian capital becomes the airline's second international destination after Amman, with services operated by 174-seat Airbus A320 aircraft

Dammam – Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

Air Arabia Dammam has announced plans to launch direct flights between King Fahd International Airport in Dammam and the Syrian capital, Damascus, operating four weekly services starting November 20, 2026, as part of its strategy to expand its international network from Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province.

Damascus will become the airline's second international destination after Amman, Jordan, where services are scheduled to begin on November 19, marking the gradual expansion of operations that commenced in September.

Four Weekly Flights Operated by Airbus Aircraft

According to the announced schedule, flights will operate on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, departing Dammam at 3:00 PM and arriving in Damascus at 6:00 PM.

Return flights will depart Damascus at 7:00 PM and arrive in Dammam at 9:20 PM, with all times stated in the respective local time zones.

The airline will operate Airbus A320 aircraft configured with 174 seats under a low-cost business model. Bookings are available through its website, customer service centres and travel agents.

Expanding Regional Air Connectivity

The addition of Damascus forms part of the airline's strategy to expand direct travel connections between Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province and regional cities, offering passengers more options without the need to transit through intermediate airports.

The new service is expected to cater to family visits and business travel, as well as passengers interested in visiting Damascus and its surrounding areas.

Al-Rehla Perspective | New Travel Options for Passengers

The new route represents an addition to air connectivity between Saudi Arabia and Syria and could facilitate passenger travel while supporting demand for transportation and accommodation services.

However, its actual impact on tourism and airfares will depend on operational reliability, passenger load factors and travel demand, alongside entry requirements and travel conditions at the destination.

ADQ Aviation Raises Stake in Abu Dhabi Aviation to 71.61% Following Acquisition of 133.4 Million Shares



The transaction increases the company's stake by approximately 12.17 percentage points, strengthening L'imad Holding's indirect ownership in the UAE aviation services operator. The financial value of the acquisition was not disclosed.

Abu Dhabi – UAE | Al Rehla

Abu Dhabi Aviation, listed on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX), announced that ADQ Aviation and Aerospace Services has completed the acquisition of an additional 133.44 million ordinary shares in the company, increasing its ownership stake to approximately 71.61%, compared with 59.45% before the transaction.

The acquisition further consolidates ownership in one of the UAE's leading specialised aviation services companies.

In a disclosure published on Monday, November 16, 2026, Abu Dhabi Aviation stated that the additional shares were acquired from Mamoura Diversified Global Holding, raising ADQ Aviation's stake by 12.1661 percentage points of the company's issued share capital.

L'imad Holding Strengthens Indirect Ownership

According to the disclosure, ADQ Aviation and Aerospace Services is wholly owned, indirectly, by L'imad Holding.

Following completion of the transaction, L'imad Holding's indirect ownership in Abu Dhabi Aviation, through its subsidiary, increased to 71.6125%, compared with 59.4464% previously.

The transaction represents a completed transfer of additional shares rather than a preliminary agreement or a proposed acquisition awaiting execution.

The disclosure did not specify the financial value of the transaction or the price paid per share. No operational or management changes directly associated with the acquisition were announced.

A Specialised Aviation Services Operator

Abu Dhabi Aviation operates in the specialised aviation services sector, including helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft operations, air transportation, and aviation support services for various economic sectors.

Its business model differs from that of scheduled commercial airlines, which primarily transport passengers across domestic and international route networks.

Instead, Abu Dhabi Aviation's activities are more closely associated with specialised aviation operations, service contracts, and aviation support for various industries.

Accordingly, the acquisition represents a development in the ownership structure of a company operating within the UAE's broader aviation industry, rather than a direct expansion of tourism flights or passenger seat capacity.

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