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Al Khobar Downtown: New Waterfront Development to Add Over 500 Hotel Rooms in Saudi Arabia

$265 Million Financing Package Supports Egypt's Hotel Expansion, Including New Grand Hyatt

Türkiye to Expand Culture Route Festival to 32 Provinces and Plans International Convention Centre in Antalya

Sharjah Becomes a Global Cultural Destination in November with 12 Days of Books, Arts and Visitor Experiences



Al Khobar Downtown: New Waterfront Development to Add Over 500 Hotel Rooms in Saudi Arabia



Spanning more than 829,000 square metres, the new tourism and urban destination will bring together hotels, shopping, restaurants and public parks in a development led by a Public Investment Fund-owned company.

Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

Saudi Downtown Company, a subsidiary of Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), has officially launched Al Khobar Downtown, a major waterfront development covering more than 829,000 square metres and featuring over 500 hotel rooms, alongside retail, dining and entertainment facilities.

The project was launched on November 1, 2026, under the patronage of Prince Saud bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz, Governor of the Eastern Province, in the presence of Deputy Governor Prince Saud bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz and Saudi Downtown Company Chairman Ibrahim Al-Sultan.

Over 500 Hotel Rooms Planned

The development will feature more than 500 hotel rooms, over 139,000 square metres dedicated to retail, restaurants and cafés, and more than 103,000 square metres of parks and green spaces.

It will also include more than 4,000 residential units and over 40,000 square metres of office space, creating an integrated destination combining hospitality, residential, commercial and leisure activities.

The company has yet to announce the hotel brands or operators involved, the number of individual hotels, or the anticipated opening dates.

An Integrated Destination for Hospitality, Dining and Entertainment

Al Khobar Downtown is designed as a waterfront urban centre that brings together accommodation, restaurants, shopping and open public spaces.

Once completed, the development is expected to offer visitors a range of experiences within a single destination, including hotel stays, family activities, dining and entertainment.

Fahad Al-Hammad, CEO of Saudi Downtown Company, said the



project aims to support the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors while creating new opportunities for investment and partnerships across the Eastern Province.

What Will the Project Mean for Tourism in the Eastern Province?

Al Khobar is an established coastal city on the Arabian Gulf and a destination for family leisure and business travel. The new downtown development aims to strengthen its appeal by introducing additional hospitality, commercial and entertainment facilities.

From a tourism economics perspective, the project's contribution will depend on the hotel capacity that eventually enters operation, the brands and operators involved, the diversity of visitor experiences, and its ability to attract tourism throughout the year.

Its actual impact on visitor numbers, hotel occupancy and tourism spending cannot be measured until facilities open and operational performance data becomes available.

Coming to the Destination

The launch of Al Khobar Downtown marks the announcement of a planned tourism and urban destination, rather than the opening of hotels or entertainment facilities currently available to visitors.

The next significant milestones for the tourism industry will include announcements of hotel brands and operators, opening schedules, and the dining and leisure experiences that the destination will offer.



"The project aims to support the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors, while creating new opportunities for partnerships and investment in the Eastern Province."

Eng. Fahad Al-Hammad
CEO of Saudi Downtown Company

Türkiye to Expand Culture Route Festival to 32 Provinces and Plans International Convention Centre in Antalya



More than 440 events across 40 venues in Antalya over nine days, alongside 85 local culinary experiences, as Türkiye's tourism revenue reaches $51.3 billion in nine months

Antalya – Türkiye | Al Rehla

Türkiye's Minister of Culture and Tourism, Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, has announced plans to expand the Türkiye Culture Route Festival from 26 provinces in 2026 to 32 provinces in 2027, coinciding with the opening of the festival's Antalya programme and the unveiling of plans for a major exhibition and convention centre in the coastal city following its hosting of the COP31 climate conference.

The announcement came during the opening of the Antalya leg of the festival on Saturday, October 31, 2026. The nine-day programme runs until November 8 and features more than 440 events across over 40 venues.

Artistic Performances and Local Culinary Experiences

Antalya's festival programme includes concerts, theatre productions, opera, ballet, art exhibitions, traditional craft workshops and activities for children, alongside visits to historical attractions.

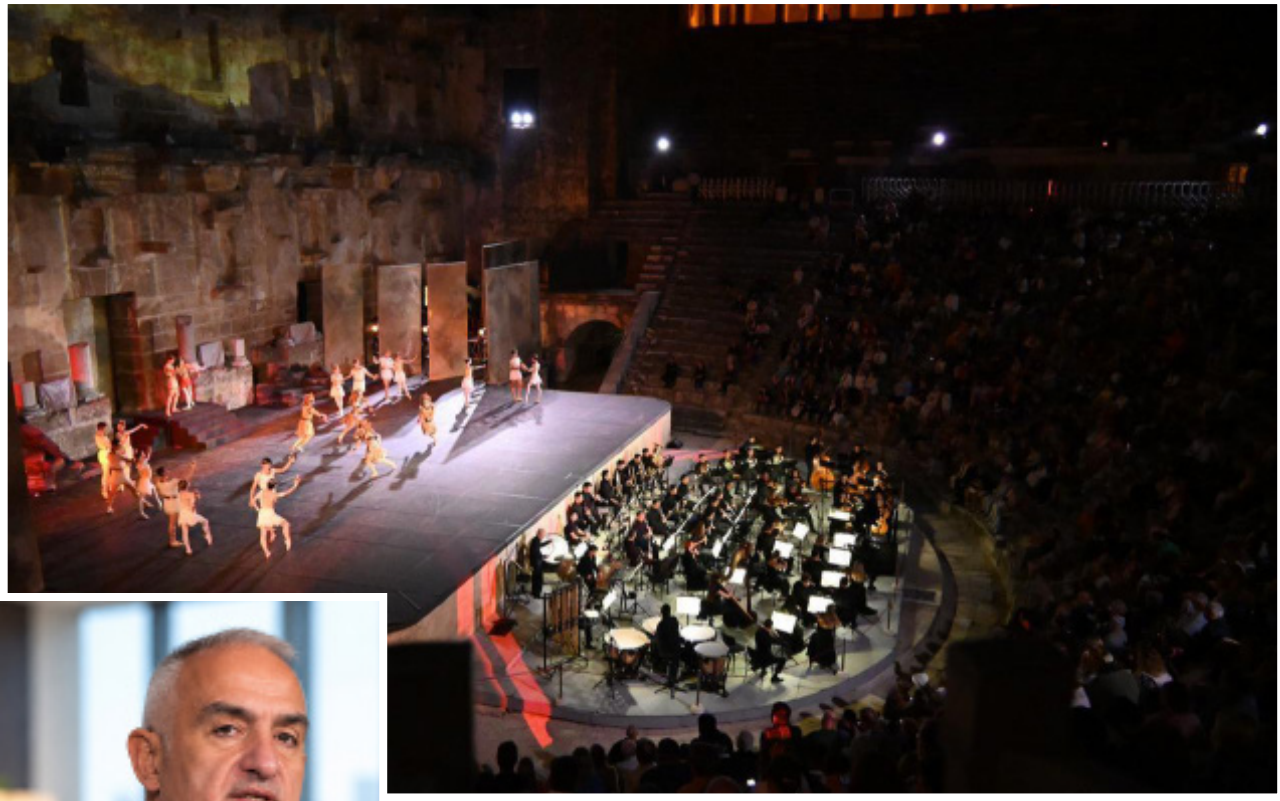
Major concerts are being held at Konyaaltı Beach Park, while the wider programme features artistic performances and exhibitions highlighting local heritage and Turkish culture.

In the culinary tourism segment, the minister announced the selection of 85 food-tasting locations to introduce visitors to Mediterranean cuisine and the influence of traditional Yörük culture on regional recipes.

The initiative provides an opportunity to showcase the region's culinary heritage alongside the natural and historical attractions for which Antalya is known.

New Exhibition and Convention Centre Planned

Ersoy also revealed plans to develop one of Türkiye's largest exhibition, convention and event centres at the Expo Antalya site following the city's hosting of the United Nations COP31 climate conference, scheduled for November 2026.





"The Culture Road Festival will expand next year to include 32 cities, after being held in 26 cities this year... Antalya hosted 440 events in 40 different locations as part of the ongoing festival activities."

Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, Turkey's Minister of Culture and Tourism

He explained that the project aims to strengthen meetings and convention tourism while expanding tourism activity during the winter and spring seasons.

The project's investment value, capacity and opening date have not yet been announced. It therefore remains at the planning stage.

Tourism Revenue Reaches $51.3 Billion

The developments coincide with the release of Türkiye's tourism results for the first nine months of 2026, which showed revenue rising by 2.4% to $51.28 billion, while visitor arrivals reached approximately 49.13 million. Russia, Germany and the United Kingdom were among the leading source markets, according to figures announced by the minister on October 30.

Al-Rehla Perspective | Tourism Beyond the Beach Season

The planned expansion of the Türkiye Culture Route Festival to 32 provinces reflects the country's approach to distributing cultural events across a wider range of destinations, rather than concentrating tourism experiences in major coastal cities.

For visitors to Antalya, the festival offers an opportunity to combine artistic performances, historical attractions and local culinary experiences within a single trip.

Meanwhile, the proposed convention centre represents a separate initiative to develop business tourism beyond the peak summer season.

$265 Million Financing Package Supports Egypt's Hotel Expansion, Including New Grand Hyatt



Overlooking the PyramidsEBRD-led financing consortium brings together IFC, Emirates NBD Egypt and the National Bank of Egypt, supporting the development of a new luxury hotel with more than 400 rooms near the Grand Egyptian Museum.

Cairo, Egypt | Al Rehla

ADD Properties, a subsidiary of Sami Saad Holding, has secured a syndicated financing package worth $265 million to support the expansion and development of its hospitality portfolio in Egypt, including a new Grand Hyatt hotel in West Cairo overlooking the Grand Egyptian Museum and the Giza Pyramids.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) announced the financing arrangement on October 30, 2026, as part of a partnership involving international development finance institutions and regional and Egyptian banks.

The funding will support the development of new hospitality facilities, improvements to existing hotel assets, and the company's broader investment programme.

New Grand Hyatt Near Egypt's Iconic Cultural Attractions

The investment programme includes the development of a new Grand Hyatt hotel featuring more than 400 rooms in West Cairo, close to the Giza Pyramids and the Grand Egyptian Museum.

The location offers a significant advantage within Egypt's cultural tourism landscape, placing the planned hotel near two of the country's most prominent heritage attractions.

Once completed and operational, the property is expected to introduce an additional international luxury accommodation option to West Cairo.

However, the opening date, room rates and final guest facilities have yet to be announced.

Four Lenders Participate in $265 Million Financing

The EBRD is acting as the initial mandated lead arranger of the financing package, contributing $127.5 million.

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) is providing $60 million, while Emirates NBD Egypt is contributing $40 million and the National Bank of Egypt is participating with $37.5 million.

EFG Hermes serves as the sole

financial adviser and arranger of the transaction, while participating banks undertake various responsibilities involving facilities, guarantees and account management.

Importantly, the $265 million financing package is not exclusively allocated to the construction of the new Grand Hyatt.

It also covers the refinancing of existing obligations, upgrades to hotel assets, and other capital expenditure across ADD Properties' hospitality portfolio.

Hospitality Development in Cairo and Hurghada

The financing package also includes a technical assistance programme focused on improving the environmental performance of hotels, strengthening corporate governance practices, and developing professional skills within Egypt's hospitality industry.

The programme will support training initiatives in Cairo and Hurghada, alongside measures designed to improve the environmental efficiency of hotel properties operated by the company.

These initiatives reflect a broader approach to hospitality investment that combines new accommodation capacity with improvements in operational standards and sustainability.

Al Rehla Perspective | Cultural Tourism Attracts International Financing

The significance of this transaction extends beyond the construction of a new hotel. It highlights the interest of international financial institutions in hospitality infrastructure associated with major cultural destinations.

The Grand Egyptian Museum and the Giza Pyramids are among the key attractions drawing international travellers to Greater Cairo, increasing the importance of accommodation and hospitality services that serve different visitor segments.

Once operational, the new Grand Hyatt could strengthen the hotel offering in West Cairo.

Its actual contribution to visitor numbers, occupancy rates and tourism expenditure, however, will only become measurable after the hotel opens.

Coming to the Destination

The new Grand Hyatt remains under development, with no confirmed opening date or reservation availability announced.

The next important milestones for the tourism industry will include confirmation of the construction schedule, hotel facilities, and the anticipated date when the additional rooms will enter the market.



Sharjah Becomes a Global Cultural Destination in November with 12 Days of Books, Arts and Visitor Experiences



An international publishers' conference precedes the opening of the Sharjah International Book Fair on November 4, featuring 2,673 publishers and exhibitors, 1,500 cultural events, and Oman as Guest of Honour.

Sharjah, UAE | Al Rehla

Sharjah is welcoming November with a major international cultural programme combining the global publishing industry with engaging visitor experiences, as the 16th Sharjah International Publishers Conference opened on Sunday, November 1, 2026, ahead of the 45th Sharjah International Book Fair, scheduled to run from November 4 to 15.

Throughout this period, the emirate will host publishers, literary agents, authors, and creative professionals from around the world, alongside an extensive programme of cultural performances, artistic activities, and family-friendly experiences.

1,200 Publishers and Literary Agents Open the International Programme

The Sharjah International Publishers Conference brings together more than 1,200 publishers and literary agents from 124 countries, according to announced participation figures, to discuss the future of publishing, publishing and translation rights, and opportunities for international business partnerships.

Running until November 3, the conference features more than 30 specialised sessions and workshops covering artificial intelligence in publishing, audiobooks, content marketing, and intellectual property rights.

The programme also includes business-to-business meetings between publishers and literary agents on November 2 and 3, aimed at exploring partnerships and facilitating publishing and translation agreements.

Book Fair Welcomes Visitors from November 4

Following the professional conference, the Sharjah International Book Fair will open under the theme "Once Upon a Tale", bringing together 2,673 publishers and exhibitors from 124 countries.

The fair will feature approximately 1,500 cultural, creative, and artistic events, with the participation of 106



authors, artists, and cultural figures from 25 countries.

Visitors can look forward to author discussions, book-signing sessions, children's workshops, and interactive performances.

New attractions include the Poets' Corner, where visitors' stories are transformed into poetry in Arabic and English, and the Future Hands District, an interactive educational space introducing children to different professions through practical activities.

Oman Celebrates Its Cultural Heritage

The Sultanate of Oman will participate as this year's Guest of Honour, presenting a programme featuring 15 cultural discussions, six children's workshops, and 20 artistic performances, alongside literary, musical, and heritage activities.

Oman's participation will give visitors an opportunity to explore different aspects of Gulf literature, arts, and cultural traditions through experiences extending beyond conventional book displays.

Al Rehla Insight | Why Is the Book Fair Worth Visiting?

The Sharjah International Book Fair offers much more than an opportunity to purchase newly released books. Its programme brings together encounters with celebrated authors, cultural performances, family workshops, and interactive artistic experiences.

From a cultural tourism perspective, the combination of the publishers' conference and the book fair demonstrates how Sharjah connects professional business events with public attractions that appeal to readers, families, and cultural enthusiasts.

However, verified figures on hotel bookings and tourism spending generated by the 2026 edition are not yet available. Its measurable economic impact will therefore require assessment following the conclusion of the events.





THROUGH THE TRAVEL LENS

Why Do We Stop Returning to Places We Loved?

By:
Duaa Al-Ajmi
Tourism Media Professional and Volunteer Work Ambassador

In a previous article, I wrote about what makes travelers return to destinations they've visited and loved, and how a memorable experience can create a lasting connection between a traveler and a place. But there's another side to that conversation worth exploring: what makes us stop visiting a city we once loved, even when it hasn't lost any of its beauty?

Through my travels, I've come to realize that a beautiful destination isn't always enough to bring people back. A city may have stunning attractions, luxurious hotels, and excellent restaurants, yet a disappointing experience can sometimes make us reconsider returning.

And it isn't always something major. Often, it's the little things that add up over time: prices that keep rising without any improvement in service, crowds that take away from the enjoyment, or poor treatment that leaves visitors feeling like nothing more than a source of revenue rather than welcomed guests.

I believe some destinations make the mistake of relying too heavily on their popularity, assuming travelers will keep returning regardless of what changes. But today's travelers are more informed, have more choices, and are increasingly unwilling to pay premium prices for experiences that don't meet their expectations.

From a tourism perspective, losing a returning visitor means much more than losing a hotel booking or a flight ticket. It means losing someone who once promoted the destination naturally, simply by sharing their experiences and recommending it to friends and family.

At the same time, I don't expect every trip to be perfect, nor do I believe one unpleasant incident should define an entire country. However, when disappointing experiences become a pattern and visitors' feedback is repeatedly overlooked, a destination's reputation can gradually suffer.

Attracting a traveler for the first time requires good marketing. Convincing them to return takes something far more important: consistent quality, fair pricing, and genuine respect for the visitor.

A destination may win our hearts on the first visit, but it has to earn our trust every time we return.




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The Future Demands
More Intelligent
and Smarter
Energy.
ADIPEC
2–5 November 2026 | Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi Prepares to Welcome Over 239,000 Participants at ADIPEC 2026



2,260 exhibiting companies and 1,800 speakers, with participants expected from more than 170 countries. Free shuttle services will connect hotels to ADNEC during four days of international business events.

Abu Dhabi, UAE | Al Rehla

Abu Dhabi is preparing to welcome more than 239,000 expected participants to ADIPEC 2026, which opens on Monday, November 2, at ADNEC Centre Abu Dhabi and runs until November 5, reinforcing the emirate's position as a leading destination for business tourism, exhibitions, and conferences.

Held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE, and hosted by ADNOC, the event will bring together 2,260 exhibiting companies, more than 1,800 speakers, and 30 national pavilions representing international markets.

A Global Gathering Supporting Business Tourism

Spanning 16 exhibition halls, ADIPEC will welcome government officials, investors, and industry experts from the energy, technology, finance, and industrial sectors.

Its conference programme will address energy security, artificial intelligence, sustainability, and digital transformation.

The event's international reach creates opportunities for Abu Dhabi's hospitality, transportation, and exhibition-related services as professional delegations arrive throughout the four-day programme.

Free Shuttle Services for Hotel Guests and Visitors

Organisers have arranged complimentary shuttle buses connecting selected Abu Dhabi hotels with ADNEC Centre.

Services will depart every 30 minutes between 8 AM and noon, with return journeys operating from 4 PM to 7 PM.

Additional transport arrangements include a free park-and-ride service operating every 20 minutes, a 15% discount on eligible Etihad Rail tickets, and shuttle connections between Mohamed bin Zayed City Station and the exhibition venue.

Al Rehla Insight | Conferences as a Driver of Travel

ADIPEC demonstrates the importance of specialised international exhibitions in generating business travel and supporting demand for accommodation, transportation, and meeting facilities.

However, projected attendance does not necessarily represent an equivalent number of international tourists. The event's actual impact on Abu Dhabi's hospitality sector and wider economy will require assessment once final attendance figures and performance data become available.

Türkiye Prepares to Open Parts of Hagia Sophia's Historic Underground Tunnels to Visitors

Removal of 3,000 tonnes of mud and debris reveals ancient water channels, vaulted chambers and a four-room underground burial site, as authorities link public access to the completion of restoration and safety measures.

Istanbul, Türkiye | Al Rehla

Türkiye is preparing to open sections of the historic underground structures beneath Istanbul's Hagia Sophia Mosque to visitors in the future, once archaeological investigations, restoration work and safety preparations have been completed.

The initiative could introduce a new visitor experience at one of Istanbul's most significant cultural and historical landmarks.

Speaking to journalists on the sidelines of the Antalya Culture Road Festival, Minister of Culture and Tourism Mehmet Nuri Ersoy revealed that approximately 3,000 tonnes of mud and debris had been removed from underground areas beneath the monument.

The operation has enabled specialists to examine historic tunnels, water channels and vaulted chambers, some of which had previously been inaccessible for detailed investigation.

Ancient Tunnels and Water Channels Beneath Hagia Sophia

Ersoy explained that ongoing research has revealed additional underground spaces, including passages large enough for people to walk through.

However, the original functions and historical connections of some of these structures remain under investigation.

The discoveries are providing new insights into Istanbul's ancient water management systems, including rainwater drainage and distribution networks, as well as the infrastructure that served the surrounding area throughout different historical periods.

The restoration programme also includes the investigation of a four-room underground burial structure in the northeastern section of the site, with researchers seeking to better understand archaeological remains associated with earlier phases of the area's history.

From Archaeological Research to Visitor Routes

The minister said the authorities intend to provide journalists with an opportunity to inspect the underground discoveries and restoration work before considering the opening of suitable sections to the public.

He emphasised that decisions on which areas may become accessible will depend on scientific assessments, structural conditions, conservation requirements and the installation of appropriate visitor safety infrastructure.

No official opening date has been announced, and details of potential guided tours, admission arrangements or ticket prices remain unavailable.

Major Restoration Work Continues

The underground investigations form part of a wider restoration and conservation programme designed to protect Hagia Sophia's architectural and historical features.
The work includes strengthening parts of the structure and monitoring the condition of its dome and supporting elements.

The mosque continues to welcome worshippers and visitors in designated accessible areas while restoration activities proceed, subject to existing visitor arrangements.

Al Rehla Perspective | A New Journey Into Istanbul's Hidden History

The tourism significance of the project lies in the possibility of adding underground heritage routes to the Hagia Sophia visitor experience.
Once approved and opened, these routes could allow travellers to explore historical and architectural features that remain hidden beneath the monument's famous interior spaces.
They could also enrich cultural walking tours around Sultanahmet, a district that contains several of Istanbul's most celebrated historical landmarks.
However, the underground experience is not currently open to the public, and no reservations or visitor tours have been announced.
It is also too early to estimate the potential impact on tourist arrivals, visitor spending or tourism revenues.
The next significant development will be the official announcement of approved visitor routes, opening dates and access conditions.







ALREHLA | Taste of the Place

Palestinian Musakhan: When Olive Oil, Sumac and Taboon Bread Tell the Story of a Land

Rooted in the olive harvest season in Palestinian villages, this traditional dish brings together chicken, onions and olive oil, reflecting generations of farming, breadmaking and family gatherings.



Palestine – AlRehla

As the olive harvest season begins in Palestine, Musakhan returns to the tables of many families as one of the dishes most closely associated with agricultural traditions and rural life.

What makes Musakhan distinctive is not the complexity of its ingredients, but the combination of olive oil, taboon bread, onions, sumac and chicken. Together, these elements reflect the agricultural practices and cooking traditions that have shaped Palestinian villages for generations.

Olive Oil: The Foundation of Its Flavour

Traditional Musakhan consists of taboon bread topped with onions cooked in olive oil and sumac, followed by roasted or browned chicken pieces. Some recipes also include nuts.

Sumac gives the dish its characteristic tangy flavour, while olive oil plays an essential role in softening the bread and infusing it with the flavours of onions and spices.

According to the guide to Palestinian dishes published on Bethlehem's tourism portal, Musakhan is traditionally served on taboon bread with onions, sumac, chicken and nuts.

From the Olive Harvest to the Family Table

Musakhan has historically been associated with the olive harvest season, when families celebrated the new crop and the extraction of fresh olive oil at local presses.



Canaan Palestine, an organisation specialising in Palestinian agricultural products, describes Musakhan as a traditional olive harvest dish because of the generous quantity of olive oil used in its preparation.

Its traditional recipes explain that taboon bread is soaked with the olive oil used to cook the onions before the remaining ingredients are arranged on top.

The dish is typically served on a large communal platter, reflecting its connection to family gatherings and shared meals.

Taboon Bread: Just as Important as the Chicken

Taboon bread is one of the defining elements of Musakhan.

Traditionally baked in a clay oven that uses heat retained by stones, the bread develops a texture that allows it to absorb olive oil without completely losing its structure.

Modern variations sometimes use other types of bread, while smaller Musakhan rolls have become popular in restaurants and at social gatherings.

Nevertheless, the traditional version retains its close association with rustic bread and a shared serving platter. The bread is not simply an accompaniment; it is an essential part of the dish itself.

A Dish That Reflects the Village Economy

The ingredients of Musakhan reveal important elements of Palestinian agricultural life: olives that provide the oil, wheat used to make bread, and the onions, spices and poultry that complete the meal.

Musakhan is therefore more than a local recipe. It expresses the relationship between food, agricultural seasons and household production.

In a report published on October 20, 2026, the United Nations emphasised that the olive harvest is an important source of food, income and cultural heritage for thousands of Palestinian families.

The report also warned about attacks and restrictions threatening farmers and their access to agricultural land.

AlRehla Perspective

The significance of Musakhan lies in its ability to bring together several aspects of Palestinian food culture in a single dish, combining locally grown agricultural products with traditional breadmaking, cooking techniques and family customs.

It also demonstrates that culinary heritage cannot be understood through recipes alone. It must be viewed in the context of the land, seasons and communities that created and preserved those traditions.

Tasting Musakhan, therefore, offers an experience that goes beyond flavour. It provides an introduction to the history of rural Palestine and its enduring relationship with the olive tree.

Tunisia Revives Ain Essabia in Korbous to Strengthen Thermal Wellness Tourism

Detailed restoration plans approved for the historic thermal spring and surrounding water facilities, as seven natural hot springs continue to shape the destination's identity, with water temperatures reaching approximately 50°C.

Korbous, Tunisia | Al Rehla

Tunisia's coastal town of Korbous, in Nabeul Governorate, is preparing to restore one of its historic natural landmarks following the approval of detailed plans to rehabilitate the Ain Essabia thermal spring and improve the surrounding water facilities, as part of efforts to preserve the area's natural heritage and strengthen its appeal as a thermal wellness tourism destination.

The plans were approved during a meeting of the Technical Committee for Civil Buildings at the National Office of Thermalism and Hydrotherapy on October 29, 2026, attended by representatives of the relevant authorities and the architects responsible for the projects.

Ain Essabia: A Hot Spring Steeped in History

The rehabilitation project covers an area of 30 square meters and includes a gravity-fed mineral water system, traditional drinking fountains, and foot baths designed to preserve the spring's historic uses.

With water temperatures reaching approximately 50°C, Ain Essabia is renowned for its mineral composition and longstanding connection to Korbous' thermal bathing traditions.

The project aims to improve visitor facilities while maintaining the spring's historical character and local identity.

Seven Springs Shape the Identity of Korbous

Nestled between coastal mountains and the Mediterranean Sea, Korbous is known for its dramatic landscapes and natural thermal springs, which have long distinguished it as a destination for mineral-water bathing and wellness tourism.

The area is home to seven natural thermal springs, including Ain Essabia, Ain El Kebira, Ain Echfa, and Ain El Atrous.

A second project will enhance the surroundings of the water pumping station and related infrastructure, improving the area's appearance while preserving its relationship with the natural landscape.

Project costs and construction commencement dates have not yet been announced.

Tunisia's Thermal Wellness Sector Welcomes Seven Million Visitors

The initiative comes as Tunisia's hydrotherapy and thermal wellness sector continues to attract significant visitor numbers.
According to official figures, approximately seven million visits were recorded across 490 thermal and hydrotherapy facilities nationwide in 2025, representing a 5% increase compared with the previous year.

These figures highlight the sector's importance within Tunisia's diversified tourism offering, although they do not represent visitor numbers for Korbous specifically.

Al Rehla Insight | When Water Becomes a Destination's Story

Korbous offers a distinctive combination of Mediterranean coastline, mountain scenery, and naturally heated mineral springs, providing an experience beyond conventional beach tourism.

The restoration of Ain Essabia represents an opportunity to safeguard this heritage while improving the visitor experience without compromising the area's natural and historical identity.

However, the project's actual tourism impact will depend on the completion of restoration works, improvements to visitor services, and accessibility to the destination.







Dubai Transforms Sheikh Zayed Road into a Cycling Track for One Day



The seventh edition of Dubai Ride brings together thousands of participants on 12 km and 4 km routes passing some of the city's most iconic landmarks

Dubai, UAE | Al Rehla

Sheikh Zayed Road and Downtown Dubai were transformed into cycling routes on the morning of Sunday, November 1, 2026, as thousands of cyclists took part in the seventh edition of Dubai Ride 2026, presented by DP World.

The community event offered participants a unique opportunity to explore some of Dubai's most famous landmarks away from the city's usual vehicle traffic.

The event forms part of the tenth edition of the Dubai Fitness Challenge, running from October 31 to November 29, encouraging residents and visitors to engage in 30 minutes of physical activity every day for 30 days.

Two Routes Through Dubai's Landmarks

Participants could choose between two routes. The first, a 12-kilometre course along Sheikh Zayed Road, was designed for more experienced cyclists and passed near the Museum of the Future and Dubai Water Canal.

The second route covered four kilometres through Downtown Dubai and was designed for families and children, passing areas around Dubai Mall, Dubai Opera and Burj Khalifa.

The event began early in the morning, with temporary road closures and extended Dubai Metro operating hours to facilitate participants' journeys.

A Sporting Experience with Tourist Appeal

Dubai Ride is not organised as a competitive race but as an inclusive community experience combining sport, recreation and urban exploration.

The 2025 edition attracted 40,327 participants, while the final attendance figure for the 2026 event had not been announced at the time of reporting.

Al-Rehla Perspective | Discovering the City Differently

The event offers residents and visitors a distinctive way to experience Dubai, temporarily transforming one of its most recognisable roads into a space for cycling and exploration.

It allows participants to appreciate the city's architectural landmarks from a different perspective.

Its significance lies in diversifying Dubai's urban tourism experiences and strengthening the role of community activities in the city's events calendar, without assuming economic or tourism impacts that have not yet been supported by published data.



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ALREHLA | Before You Travel

Before You Travel to Aqaba: Special Visa Arrangements, Two Airports and Accommodation Options from the City to the Beach

A practical guide to visiting Jordan's only coastal city, where entry exemptions vary by nationality and point of arrival, and autumn offers favourable conditions for marine activities.



Aqaba, Jordan | Al Rehla

Travelling to Aqaba differs from visiting many other Jordanian cities, not only because of its location on the Red Sea but also because of the special entry arrangements associated with the Aqaba Special Economic Zone and the variety of transport options available by air, land and sea.

Before booking a trip, travellers should identify their intended point of entry, verify visa requirements based on their nationality, and choose accommodation that suits their planned activities.

Visa Requirements: Pay Attention to Your Point of Entry

According to Aqaba's official tourism portal, certain eligible visitors may obtain a free visa when entering through King Hussein International Airport or the Port of Aqaba, subject to the conditions established by the Aqaba Special Economic Zone.

However, this exemption does not apply to all nationalities, and entry procedures may differ at certain land crossings, particularly the southern Wadi Araba border crossing.

The official authority also indicates that travellers entering Jordan through another point of entry who wish to benefit from Aqaba's special arrangements may be required to register their arrival with the designated visa office within 48 hours.

Travellers should therefore consult Aqaba's official visa regulations and the relevant Jordanian embassy before departure, rather than assuming that the exemption automatically applies to every visitor.

How to Get to Aqaba

Aqaba is served by King Hussein International Airport, while Queen Alia International Airport in Amman provides another option for travellers who cannot find a suitable direct flight to Aqaba.

From Amman, visitors can continue their journey by road using scheduled buses or private vehicles.

Travellers arriving from Egypt may also reach Aqaba by sea through ferry services, subject to the operators' published schedules.

It is advisable to verify flight and ferry timetables before booking, as the existence of a transport route does not necessarily mean that services operate daily.

Where to Stay

Aqaba offers a range of accommodation options, including hotels, beachfront



resorts, serviced apartments and properties located within the city.

Staying in central Aqaba is convenient for visitors who wish to explore markets, restaurants and historic attractions on foot.

Beachfront resorts, meanwhile, are better suited to travellers who prioritise beach access, swimming and diving.

Hotel classifications alone should not determine the choice of accommodation. Visitors should also confirm whether a property has a private beach or provides beach access, and whether marine activities, meals and transfers are included in the quoted rate.

Weather and Marine Activities

Aqaba's official tourism portal identifies September through November, along with the spring months, as favourable periods for visiting the city, thanks to milder conditions compared with the intense summer heat.

Travellers are advised to pack lightweight daytime clothing, an additional layer for the evening, sunscreen and comfortable walking shoes.

Diving and snorkelling activities are best arranged through licensed operators, with visitors expected to follow the regulations of the Aqaba Marine Reserve, particularly the prohibition on touching or standing on coral reefs.

Do You Need the Jordan Pass?

The official Jordan Pass starts at JOD 70 and includes admission to selected tourist attractions, along with a conditional exemption from visa fees for certain eligible visitors.

However, the official website states that the pass is not available to holders of Arab nationalities and that it does not constitute a visa in itself.

It should therefore not be presented as a universal way for Arab travellers to reduce entry costs.

Mexico City Combines Formula 1 and Day of the Dead Celebrations in an Extraordinary Weekend of Sports and Cultural Tourism



Hamilton starts the Mexican Grand Prix from pole position as the capital celebrates its heritage with traditional parades, giant sculptures, and cultural experiences continuing into November.

Mexico City, Mexico | Al Rehla

Mexico City is experiencing one of its most vibrant weekends of the year on Sunday, November 1, 2026, as the Formula 1 Mexico City Grand Prix coincides with Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebrations, transforming the capital's streets and public squares into open-air showcases of art, music, and cultural heritage.

The combination offers visitors an opportunity to enjoy one of the world's leading motorsport events while discovering Mexican traditions that honour the memory of loved ones who have passed away, bringing sports tourism and local culture together in a single travel experience.

Hamilton Takes Pole Position for the Grand Prix

The Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez will host the Mexican Grand Prix at 2 PM local time, with drivers competing over 71 laps of the 4.304-kilometre circuit.

British driver Lewis Hamilton will start from pole position after topping Saturday's qualifying session, securing his first pole with Ferrari and the 105th of his Formula 1 career.

Organisers reported an attendance of 147,889 spectators on Saturday, highlighting strong interest in the race weekend. However, the figure represents Saturday's attendance alone, rather than total event attendance or the number of international tourists.

Day of the Dead Celebrates Memory and Heritage

Alongside the motorsport action, Mexico City continues its Day of the Dead festivities following a spectacular parade on Saturday along Paseo de la Reforma towards Zócalo Square.

The procession featured musical performances, dancers, giant sculptures, and elaborately decorated floats celebrating Mexican cultural traditions.

Zócalo Square is hosting a monumental commemorative altar through November 2, while Chapultepec Park offers cultural experiences featuring music, art, traditional cuisine, and illuminated displays until November 4.

The celebrations are distinguished by vibrant orange marigolds, traditional costumes, and intricately decorated masks, reflecting Mexican customs that honour deceased loved ones and celebrate their lives.





Al Rehla Insight | One Destination, Two Global Experiences

The combination of Formula 1 and Day of the Dead celebrations demonstrates how major cities can offer diverse tourism experiences within a single visit, bringing together sport, heritage, art, and local traditions.

For travelers, a visit to Mexico City extends well beyond the grandstands of the racing circuit to historic squares, bustling markets, and cultural celebrations that reveal the city's distinctive identity.

Although both events hold considerable tourism significance, assessing their combined impact on hotel occupancy and visitor spending will require verified economic data that has not yet been released.

Dubai Hosts Woofstock Festival, Where Dogs Take Centre Stage



The fourth edition brings pet owners together at Dubai Media City for games, free training sessions, creative workshops, and live music, with tickets starting from AED 25.

Dubai – UAE | Al Rehla

Dubai is hosting a unique entertainment experience on Sunday, November 1, 2026, bringing dogs and their owners together for the fourth edition of Woofstock at the Dubai Media City Amphitheatre.

Running from 3 PM to 11 PM, the festival offers a programme of interactive activities and family-friendly experiences, combining entertainment, pet training, music, and creative workshops.

The event provides animal lovers with an opportunity to enjoy a day outdoors with their dogs while discovering initiatives dedicated to animal rescue and welfare.

A Fun-Filled Day for Four-Legged Friends

The festival features a designated off-leash area where dogs can run and play freely, alongside complimentary training sessions led by professionals who offer practical advice on animal behaviour and responsible pet care.

Visitors can also participate in creative workshops to make keepsakes inspired by their dogs' paw prints and attend educational sessions covering animal welfare and pet first aid.

Veterinarians and professional trainers will be available to provide guidance and answer visitors' questions.

The entertainment programme also includes live music, food and beverage trucks, a marketplace featuring pet products and handmade crafts, and a dedicated children's area.

Entertainment with a Mission to Support Animal Rescue

Woofstock goes beyond entertainment by providing a platform for dog rescue organisations to

introduce their initiatives, connect with the public, and encourage community involvement in animal welfare.

According to the organisers, proceeds from dog admission tickets will be donated to participating rescue organisations.

To ensure a safe and enjoyable environment, all participating dogs must have up-to-date vaccinations and undergo a behavioural assessment upon entry.

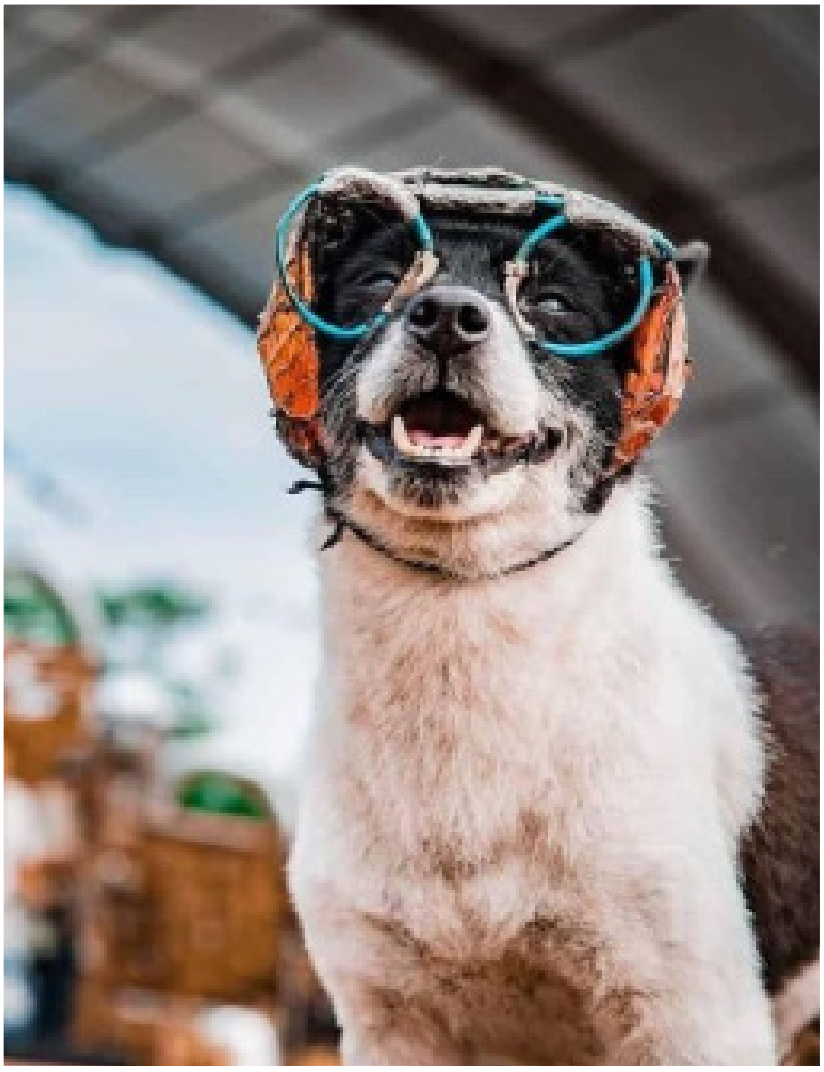
Dogs must also remain on a leash outside the designated off-leash play area.

Al Rehla Insight | A Different Kind of Dubai Experience

Woofstock highlights the growing appeal of specialised entertainment events designed around particular interests and communities, offering an alternative to traditional large-scale festivals.

For pet lovers, the event provides a family-friendly experience that combines entertainment, education, and community engagement, while its inclusion in Dubai's official events calendar reflects the diversity of activities available across the emirate.

Tickets start from AED 25, with admission details and booking information available through the festival's official website and authorised ticketing platform.





Dubai Launches Winter Camping Season with 600 Campsites in Al Ruwayyah



Camping capacity increases by 120%, with 50 caravan sites and 10 fully equipped camps available for daily rental. Seasonal bookings are reserved for UAE nationals through April 30, 2027.

Dubai – UAE | Al Rehla

Dubai officially launched its winter camping season in Al Ruwayyah on Sunday, November 1, 2026, with a total capacity of 600 campsites, representing a 120% increase compared with previous seasons.

The season, which runs until April 30, 2027, introduces dedicated caravan sites and fully equipped camps for daily rental, expanding the range of outdoor experiences available during Dubai's winter months.

Dubai Municipality announced that it has expanded designated camping areas and introduced additional facilities for family and community activities, aiming to enhance the desert camping experience and provide more recreational options for UAE nationals.

New Caravan Sites and Fully Equipped Camps

This year's season introduces 50 dedicated caravan sites for the first time, alongside the return of double campsites measuring up to 800 square metres and single campsites covering 400 square metres.

Dubai Municipality has also introduced 10 fully equipped camps available for daily rental, allowing visitors to enjoy a camping experience without having to establish or prepare their own campsite.

In addition, 10 designated areas have been allocated for events, winter gatherings, community activities, and seasonal markets.

The expansion also creates business opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises operating in food and beverage services, desert activities, and recreational experiences.

Digital Booking Services

Dubai Municipality allows UAE nationals to reserve seasonal campsites for periods ranging from three to six months through its winter camping portal or the Dubai Now application.

Permit holders may prepare their campsites in accordance with municipal regulations, including the installation of temporary fencing and the use of designated areas exclusively for family activities and camping.

Caravan sites and fully equipped daily rental camps are subject to separate booking arrangements and eligibility requirements.

Al Rehla Insight | A Winter Experience with a Local Character

The expansion of Al Ruwayyah's camping facilities highlights Dubai's growing range of desert and family-oriented activities during the winter season, with more flexible options for short stays and outdoor recreation.

However, the initiative remains primarily focused on UAE nationals, and official information has not yet confirmed whether all camping options will be accessible to international tourists.

Travelers interested in experiencing the facilities should therefore verify eligibility requirements and booking conditions before making arrangements.

Japan Changes Tax-Free Shopping Rules: Tourists Must Pay First and Claim Refunds Upon Departure



New system takes effect on November 1, 2026, giving visitors up to 90 days to take purchases out of Japan and requiring customs verification before checking in baggage at airports and seaports.

Tokyo, Japan | Al Rehla

Japan began implementing a new tax-free shopping system for eligible international visitors on Sunday, November 1, 2026, requiring tourists to pay consumption tax at the time of purchase and claim a refund after customs confirms that the goods are being taken out of the country.

The change marks a significant shift in the shopping experience for international travelers, including visitors from the Gulf and other Arab countries.

The new system replaces the previous point-of-sale tax exemption, which allowed eligible tourists to purchase goods without paying consumption tax at authorized retailers.

Under the revised rules, visitors must initially pay the full price, including tax, while the minimum qualifying purchase remains 5,000 Japanese yen before tax at the same store on the same day.

New Procedures Before Checking In Baggage

According to the Japan Tourism Agency, travelers must retain their purchased goods and present their passports at designated tax-free verification terminals at airports or seaports before checking in baggage.

Eligible purchases must be taken out of Japan within 90 days of the purchase date.

The verification system determines whether physical inspection is required. A green indication confirms that customs verification has been completed, while a red indication requires travelers to proceed to a customs inspection area with their purchases.

Once verification is completed, the retailer or its authorized refund service provider processes the tax refund through the designated payment method.

Travelers should not assume that refunds will necessarily be issued immediately or in cash at the airport.

Digital Verification Available at Seven Airports

Japanese authorities have introduced digital customs verification through the Visit Japan Web platform at designated international departure areas in seven airports, including Narita, Haneda, Kansai, Chubu Centrair, Fukuoka, New Chitose, and Naha.

The revised system also removes certain previous special packaging requirements for consumable products.

However, eligible purchases must be taken out of Japan and must not be consumed within the country, including food products and cosmetics purchased under the tax-free scheme.

The new regulations apply to purchases made from November 1, 2026, while earlier purchases remain subject to the rules in effect at the time of purchase.

World Vegan Day: How to Travel the World Without Missing Out on Great Food



From London and Paris to Japanese temples and Middle Eastern kitchens, a traveler's guide to discovering local flavours, avoiding hidden animal ingredients, and arranging vegan meals before departure.

London, United Kingdom | Al Rehla

Imagine arriving at a destination you have always dreamed of visiting, exploring its streets and attractions, only to discover that finding a meal that suits your dietary preferences requires almost as much planning as booking your hotel or flight.

As the world marks World Vegan Day on November 1, an annual celebration established in 1994, the occasion offers an opportunity to explore vegan food tourism, where local dishes become a gateway to discovering different cultures without consuming animal-derived products.

From London to Tokyo: Cities Embracing Vegan Cuisine

London, Berlin, Paris, Barcelona, and Tokyo are among the leading destinations for travelers seeking plant-based dining experiences, according to insights from HappyCow, a platform specialising in vegan and vegetarian restaurants worldwide.

In London, vegan restaurants, bakeries, and cafés offer an extensive range of dining options, while Paris invites visitors to discover plant-based interpretations of traditional French pastries and desserts.

Berlin is known for its diverse international vegan food scene, while Tokyo offers a distinctive culinary experience built around tofu, seasonal vegetables, and traditional Japanese dishes.
One of Japan's most fascinating experiences is Shojin Ryori, a traditional cuisine associated with Buddhist temples. Historically based on plant ingredients, its carefully prepared dishes reflect a philosophy of balance, simplicity, and mindfulness.

Be Careful: Not Every Vegetable Dish Is Vegan

One of the biggest challenges for vegan travelers is identifying ingredients that are not immediately visible.

While vegetarian diets may include dairy products and eggs, a vegan diet excludes all animal-derived ingredients, including honey.

A Japanese soup that appears entirely plant-based may contain dashi made



from fish, while some Asian rice and vegetable dishes include fish sauce. Butter and animal-derived gelatin can also be found in certain desserts and baked goods.

Travelers should therefore ask about ingredients and preparation methods rather than relying solely on a dish being described as vegetarian.

Arab Cuisine Offers a Wealth of Plant-Based Flavours

Middle Eastern cuisine provides a rich selection of dishes suitable for vegan travelers, including hummus, ful medames, mujaddara, tabbouleh, falafel, and grilled vegetables.

However, some recipes may contain yogurt, animal-based ghee, or meat stock, making it important to confirm how dishes are prepared, particularly at traditional and local restaurants.

Your Vegan Meal Starts Before Takeoff

Travelers can use the HappyCow app to locate vegan restaurants near their hotels and tourist attractions, check menus, and read customer reviews before arriving.

When booking accommodation, it is advisable to confirm whether vegan breakfast options and plant-based milk alternatives are available.

Airlines, including Emirates, offer special vegan meals identified by the code VGML. Passengers should check the advance-order requirements for their specific flight and, whenever possible, request their meals at least 48 hours before departure.

Another practical tip is to save a translated statement in the destination's local language explaining which ingredients must be avoided, particularly when visiting street markets and small restaurants.

Al Rehla Insight | Discovering the World Through a Different Plate

Vegan food tourism does not mean sacrificing the pleasure of exploring local cuisine. Instead, it offers travelers a chance to rediscover the world's culinary traditions from a different perspective.

Some of the most memorable travel experiences may come from a simple dish of seasonal vegetables at a Japanese temple, a traditional meal at a Middle Eastern restaurant, or an innovative vegan dessert in a Parisian neighbourhood.

Ultimately, the best journeys allow travelers to explore a destination and its culture while respecting their dietary choices and discovering exciting new flavours along the way.

Harith Moves Closer to Acquiring South Africa's Largest Domestic Airline in R7 Billion Deal



Competition Tribunal conditionally approves the acquisition of 100% of FlySafair's parent company, introducing safeguards against preferential treatment at Lanseria Airport and protecting jobs for three years.

Johannesburg, South Africa | Al Rehla

The Harith Aviation investment consortium has received conditional approval from South Africa's Competition Tribunal to acquire 100% of Safair Holdings, the parent company of low-cost carrier FlySafair, in a transaction reportedly valued at approximately R7 billion, according to local business reports.

The deal paves the way for South African investors to take control of the country's largest domestic airline.

The Tribunal issued its decision on October 27, 2026, with the consortium announcing the approval two days later. Completion is expected before the end of the year, subject to outstanding regulatory approvals and the fulfillment of relevant conditions.

Acquisition Targets an Airline Holding Over 60% of Domestic Seat Capacity

FlySafair accounts for more than 60% of South Africa's domestic airline seat capacity, making the acquisition significant for the country's aviation sector and its tourism connectivity.

The investment is led by Harith General Partners, an African infrastructure investment firm, while the airline's existing ownership structure includes Ireland-based ASL Aviation Holdings and local shareholders.

The transaction represents a significant shift in ownership of an airline that plays a major role in connecting South African cities and tourism destinations.

Competition Safeguards at Lanseria Airport

The Competition Tribunal imposed conditions addressing Harith's interests in Lanseria International Airport, where the investment group holds an approximately 37% stake.

The conditions are designed to prevent preferential treatment of FlySafair in airport service pricing, flight slot allocation, and access to facilities, ensuring fair and non-discriminatory treatment of competing airlines.

Additional restrictions address the exchange of commercially sensitive information and overlapping board memberships.

The approval also prohibits merger-related employee retrenchments until the transaction is completed and for three years thereafter, subject to specified exceptions.

Operations to Continue Without Immediate Changes

FlySafair has confirmed that its operations will continue under the existing management team, retaining its brand identity and low-cost business model.

FlySafair CEO Elmar Conradie described the Tribunal's approval as an important milestone in the acquisition process.

Meanwhile, Harith General Partners CEO Sipho Makhubela emphasized the importance of long-term domestic investment capital in supporting South Africa's aviation industry.

The airline has indicated that passengers should not expect immediate operational changes as a result of the regulatory approval.

Riyadh Airport Gradually Resumes Flights as Airlines Set November Return Dates



Aviation Update | Two terminals reopened on October 25 amid continued suspension of some international flights, while foreign airlines' resumption schedules remain subject to change

Riyadh – Saudi Arabia | Al Rehla

King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh is experiencing a gradual resumption of flight operations following the reopening of Terminals 1 and 2 on October 25, 2026, as international airlines continue updating their schedules to the Saudi capital amid ongoing suspensions of some services.

The developments follow operational disruptions during October that led to flight cancellations and schedule changes. However, the reopening of the two terminals does not mean that the airport has fully restored its operations.

Partial Resumption of Flight Operations

Under the announced operating arrangements, Terminal 1 has been designated for domestic flights, while Terminal 2 is serving international flights operated by Saudi national carriers.

Flight schedules continue to show domestic and international services, although some remain subject to cancellation or rescheduling depending on airline decisions and operational developments.

International Airlines Prepare to Resume Services

Published schedules indicate that British Airways is targeting November 3 for the resumption of flights to Riyadh, while Emirates' schedules have indicated November 8 as a planned return date.

Meanwhile, other carriers, including Lufthansa and KLM, have extended their flight suspensions to later dates, with schedules continuing to be reviewed as circumstances develop.

The appearance of a flight in a booking system does not necessarily confirm that it will operate, as announced schedules remain subject to change or cancellation.

Al-Rehla Perspective | What Should Travellers Do?

The partial resumption of operations provides additional travel options to and from Riyadh, but passengers should monitor their bookings carefully, particularly as airlines are following different timelines for restoring services.

Travellers are advised to confirm their flight status, flight number, departure time and assigned terminal directly with the operating airline before heading to the airport. They should also review rebooking or refund options if their flight is cancelled.

A full recovery in air traffic will depend on flights actually operating and the restoration of airline services and destinations, rather than announcements of future resumption dates alone.

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