



Understanding the economic impact of UAE Tourism and its role in business expansion

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Future generations will be living in a world that is very different from that to which we are accustomed. It is essential that we prepare ourselves and our children for that new world.

The Late H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, Former Ruler of Abu Dhabi and Founding President of the United Arab Emirates





The UAE has effectively positioned itself as among the premier tourist destinations worldwide, with the strategic initiatives that began in the 1990s laying the groundwork for its success. In fact, trade fairs and shopping events such as the Arabian Travel Market and Global Village have successfully captured global interest. Large-scale investments in iconic landmarks like the Burj Al Arab have also gathered the world's attention, which led to the expansion of major hotel chains such as Marriott International Inc., Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc., and InterContinental Hotels Group into the country. These developments have inarguably helped establish the UAE as among the primary locations for luxury, innovation, and business.

In the first half of 2024, the country welcomed over 30 million year-on-year increase in international visitors. This impressive rise in global tourists is largely attributable to proactive government initiatives like the UAE Tourism Strategy 2031, which aspires to welcome 40 million visitors annually in seven years. Furthermore, the integration of digital

technologies, ranging from smart hotel systems to sophisticated visitor management platforms at tourist attractions, has greatly enriched the experience of travellers. In turn, the UAE's tourism and hospitality sectors have contributed to the rise in aviation networks, job opportunities, and many others.

This ebook looks at the fundamental factors driving the UAE's vibrant tourism industry, such as its world-class attractions, government initiatives, and technological developments. It also explains how these elements gave rise to the rise of high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) and employment growth — factors that make the UAE an attractive destination for those looking to do business in the UAE.

Part I

The UAE's regional performance within the tourism industry





The hospitality sector in the GCC region continues to demonstrate robust growth, underpinned by its strategic importance to regional economies. Governments across the GCC are heavily investing in infrastructure, diversifying economies, and enhancing the appeal of their tourism sectors. In particular, the UAE stands out as a key driver of this growth as it leads the MENA region in tourism and secures the top 18th spot globally on the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Development Index. The nation has shown exceptional progress, with a 4.4% improvement in its index score between 2019 and 2024.

The TTDI index highlights critical areas where the UAE excels such as in air transport infrastructure, securing the top position globally. It also ranks second worldwide for overall infrastructure and services. Moreover, the country holds third place in data comprehensiveness, air transport efficiency, and tourism policy and infrastructure. These accomplishments underline the growing significance of the tourism space, including hospitality, to the UAE's national economy. These achievements also reflect the country's strong framework, thereby making it an increasingly appealing environment for global investors and firms interested in doing business in the UAE.

Dubai and Abu Dhabi have significantly contributed to this success. Dubai recorded 5.18 million international overnight visitors in the first quarter of 2024. Notably, a report from Deloitte shows that Dubai remains a regional leader in the hospitality sector, which offers over 150,000 hotel

rooms — surpassing major global cities like London and New York. In 2023, the city welcomed 17.15 million overnight visitors, with peak hotel occupancy reaching 88% in February, further solidifying its status as a global tourism hub.

Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi is implementing a \$10 billion tourism infrastructure strategy that aims to increase its hotel room capacity from 34,000 to 52,000 by 2030. These developments echo the broader initiatives set forth by the UAE to intensify its economic and social growth.

Impact Successful H1 2024 performance

In the first half of 2024, the UAE welcomed a remarkable inpouring of international visitors, particularly in three major emirates. Abu Dhabi's Zayed International Airport takes the lead as it recorded a 33.8% rise in global travellers, accommodating more than 13.7 million passengers. Dubai also performed well as it welcomed 9.31 million international overnight visitors. Additionally, Sharjah contributed positively to the growth, hosting 8.3 million passengers, and thus, achieving a notable 12.4% YoY increase.

As an emirate with a vibrant tourism expanse, Dubai continues to play an arguably central role in the UAE's tourism dominance. In fact, its achievements back this notion. In January 2024, Dubai was named the No. 1 Global Destination in the Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards 2023, a title it has retained for two consecutive years. The award is an affirmation of global travellers' trust in Dubai as a tourist capital that offers exceptional hospitality, attractions, and infrastructure. Dubai's vibrant gastronomy scene, enriched by the Michelin Guide's debut in the region, further cements its global standing.

Presence of prominent multinational brands in the UAE

The UAE's strong tourist inflow has spurred international hotel brands to expand their footprint across the country. Premium chains like Hilton Worldwide, Marriott International, and Accor have invested heavily in Dubai, drawn by its high occupancy rates at an average of 76% in H1 2024. This figure was cited by Knight Frank — a global real estate consultancy and estate agent — from STR Global data.

The presence of household names in the entertainment industry, such as Warner Bros. World, Legoland, and Louvre, adds to the UAE's appeal as a premium vacation haven. Indeed, these landmarks spotlight the country's excellence in offering diverse experiences that cater to leisure and cultural tourism.

However, while global brands are prominent in the country, homegrown entities like Emaar Properties and DAMAC showcase the nation's ingenuity. Emaar is celebrated for its role as the developer of the iconic Burj Khalifa, while DAMAC's luxury real estate offerings exemplify the UAE's high standards in construction and innovation. These firms, among many others, exemplify the UAE's dual focus on attracting international investments and fostering homegrown excellence.

Could the UAE's tourism growth be the key to expanding your business?



Read the accompanying article for more information.

Part II

Strategic roadmaps for Tourism growth





As established beforehand, the UAE has consistently demonstrated its forward-thinking approach by clearly planning strategic roadmaps to foster long-term, achievable, and ambitious growth in its tourism field. The UAE Strategy for Domestic Tourism and UAE Tourism Strategy 2031 are arguably among the prominent programs targeted to strengthen its position as a leading global tourism destination.

The UAE Strategy for Domestic Tourism

The UAE Strategy for Domestic Tourism aims to unify local and federal efforts to optimise the country's tourism resources and enhance its contribution to the national economy. Launched in December 2020, this initiative emphasises the government's mission to harness domestic tourism while complementing international tourism growth.

In 2019, domestic tourism contributed AED 41.2 billion, which constituted 23% of the industry's revenue. The strategy will double this figure by 2030 by showcasing the UAE's rich natural, cultural, and historical attractions through innovative campaigns like 'World's Coolest Winter' and public-private partnerships to boost local tourism businesses.

For context, the aforementioned campaign features the UAE's unique winter attractions, offering residents and global tourists the opportunities to explore landmarks, natural wonders, and outdoor activities during its most

pleasant winter season.

UAE Tourism Strategy 2031: Pillars and goals

As part of the transformative 'Projects of the 50,' the UAE Tourism Strategy 2031 was launched by H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the UAE's Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, in November 2022. This ambitious roadmap underpins the UAE's intent to position itself among the world's premier tourist destinations. It's worth noting that the 'Projects of the 50' represent a sweeping series of economic and developmental reforms designed to establish the UAE as a leading global hub for talent and investment.

Key objectives

The UAE Tourism Strategy 2031 targets a significant economic impact by increasing the tourism industry's GDP contribution to AED 450 billion, with annual growth of AED 27 billion. It also aims to attract AED 100 billion in new investments and host 40 million hotel guests annually.

The Core pillars

Further In addition, the Strategy seeks to:

- Strengthen the UAE's branding as a cohesive and leading global tourism destination;

- Diversify the attractions and entertainment factors or offerings across eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and adventure experiences to cater to global and regional demands.
- Empower UAE nationals to contribute meaningfully to the sector while fostering innovation in tourism services.
- Drive financial inflow across tourism-related infrastructure and services, creating a competitive and attractive UAE business environment.

Integrative initiatives

The strategy encompasses 25 initiatives and policies in order to align with global benchmarks to sustain and accelerate the sector’s growth. This is a clear opportunity for businesses considering market entry in the UAE, offering lucrative prospects for partnerships and investments.

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Supporting government-initiated projects

As part of the UAE’s broader ambition to become a capital of tourism, a series of supporting programs have also been laid out. Notably, Abu Dhabi and Dubai have launched strategic initiatives that align with and support the national objectives outlined in the UAE Tourism Strategy 2031. More broadly, they provide a plethora of business opportunities in the UAE as well as create employment prospects.

The UAE Tourism Strategy 2031 dovetails seamlessly with Dubai’s 2040 Urban Master Plan, a visionary framework to enhance the city’s sustainability and global appeal.

The plan projects a 134% increase in space allocated for hotels and tourism activities and an expansion of commercial zones to 168 square kilometres. Moreover, a fourfold increase in beach lengths is expected to boost Dubai’s allure as a premium tourist and business hub.

On the other hand, Abu Dhabi’s Tourism Strategy 2030 seeks to draw 39.3 million visitors by the end of the decade. The plan prioritises the growth of cultural landmarks, including museums and heritage sites, increasing hotel capacity, and hosting large-scale events. By 2030, the strategy will create approximately 178,000 new jobs, attract 7.2 million international overnight visitors, expand the availability of hotel rooms to 52,000, and diversify lodging options by strengthening the holiday home sector.

Indeed, these bold initiatives will soon establish the UAE as one of the most liveable and sustainable countries on the map. These projects, along with numerous others, will ensure that the country will continue to become a top-tier destination that prioritises the preservation of its cultural identity while significantly driving national economic growth. Moreover, they collectively enrich the UAE’s reputation as an ideal destination for international enterprises aiming to start or expand their ventures by doing business in the UAE.

Inside the UAE Tourism Strategy 2031: Key goals and complementary projects



Read the accompanying article for more information.

Part III

Leveraging technology to sustain tourism leadership





DUBAI CITY PASS

In an effort to sustain its competitive edge in the tourism industry, the UAE ceaselessly explores and implements advanced technologies into entertainment, leisure, and adventure spaces in the country. AI, AR, and VR are widely used to this end. As such, Dubai's Dubai Pass and Go Dubai Pass exemplify tech-driven convenience, offering tourists pre-paid access to multiple attractions while saving up to 60% on costs. These passes allow visitors to tailor their itineraries with minimal effort, thus reinforcing Dubai's reputation as a smart travel destination.

Notably, innovative alliances with global industry leaders further enhance the UAE's tourism infrastructure. The Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET) recently partnered with Hilton to promote the emirate globally — focusing on team training, service optimisation, and innovative experiences. This collaboration aligns with the goals of Dubai's Economic Agenda (D33) to establish the city as a leading business and leisure hub. Hilton's integration of DET-led training and the use of AI in customer engagement solidifies Dubai's position in hospitality excellence.

It's also worth noting that the major hotel chains in the UAE, such as Jumeirah Group, are adopting digital tools to elevate customer experiences. These innovations include digital gift services and language translation features, designed to enhance convenience and guest satisfaction. The Jumeirah Group's implementation of contactless check-ins streamlines arrival and departure processes while improving overall efficiency.

Similarly, W Dubai – The Palm has adopted AR, enabling visitors to use smartphone applications to interact with objects on the premises, such as artworks and sculptures. This easily creates a more engaging and personalised experience for its guests.

The Museum of the Future is also a potent example of the UAE's commitment to technology-driven tourism. It showcases AI, AR, and other cutting-edge technologies to offer immersive experiences that transport visitors into a futuristic world. Its exhibits span themes like space exploration, ecological preservation, and health innovation, presenting a blueprint for

the future of humanity.

Remarkably, this architectural marvel is recognised by National Geographic as one of the world's most stunning museums. Inarguably, the Museum of the Future embodies Dubai's seamless integration of cultural heritage with futuristic aspirations.

Truly, the UAE ensures its tourism ecosystem remains resilient, innovative, and appealing to both tourists and businesses by integrating such advanced solutions. Needless to say, the seamless adoption of technology contributes to a thriving business environment and creates diverse business opportunities in the UAE's tourism and hospitality sectors.

UAE Ministry of Economy's partnership with UN Tourism

Building on the exploration of the nation's broader focus on digital transformation in tourism, we now focus on a strategic alliance forged between the UAE Ministry of Economy and the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). Introduced during the

The agreement aims to enhance a mobile application-integrated platform featuring an e-voting system and real-time documentation management tools. These resources will be employed in UN Tourism meetings and other Governing Body sessions. Hence, they are set to promote more efficient communication and active engagement among participants.

The UAE's proactive approach to innovation strengthens its global influence and creates new market entry opportunities for businesses exploring the UAE's dynamic tourism field.

121st session of the UN Tourism Executive Council, the partnership will unveil an online platform that enhances tourism's global digital transformation.

How digital transformations boost the UAE's tourism industry and enhance smooth market entry strategies for global firms



Read the accompanying article for more information.



Part IV

Abundant opportunities
available for global businesses
in the UAE



As has been laid out before, the UAE's tourism industry stands as a strong pillar of its economic framework as it showcases a consistent trajectory of growth and global appeal. In 2023, the sector contributed AED 220 billion to the national GDP, representing 11% of the total economy, with 28 million hotel guests recorded. This figure is bolstered by the UAE's tourism success in attracting international visitors, accounting for 75.9% of total tourism spending, while domestic tourism contributed a notable 24.1%.

The UAE's tourism space also directly impacts employment opportunities. In fact, it has provided 809,300 jobs, which represents 12.3% of total employment, last year alone. Indeed, the strategic alignment of tourism with economic and societal goals ensures its position as a cornerstone of the UAE's economic narrative.

The role of Arabian Travel Market in the UAE's Tourism ecosystem

The Arabian Travel Market (ATM) is a premier event that has become central to the UAE's tourism strategy. Since its inception in 1994, ATM has evolved into a vital platform for showcasing regional and international tourism offerings. The event fosters collaboration between governments, hospitality providers, and technology innovators, shaping the future of the industry.

This convention mirrors the UAE's dynamic approach to attracting HNWIs and subsequent foreign investments. With its focus on infrastructure projects, cutting-edge strategies, and luxury offerings, ATM has become a platform where business opportunities in the UAE are effectively showcased. It also provides a platform where market entry in the UAE becomes seamless for global stakeholders.



The event has seen participation from global giants such as Google and Emirates, further amplifying its reach and impact. ATM also highlights the immense potential for companies exploring prospects in the tourism and hospitality spaces by doing business in the UAE.

Significant interest gained from HNWIs

As per the Henley Private Wealth Migration 2024 report, the net inflow of high-net-worth individuals reached 6,700 in 2024, driven by the nation's favourable business environment, zero-income tax policy, and cosmopolitan lifestyle. According to wealth management experts, the UAE's ability to create a stable, forward-thinking ecosystem has made it an even more attractive location to affluent individuals. Needless to say, major infrastructure developments, such as luxury resorts, cultural landmarks, and state-of-the-art travel hubs, reinforce the narrative of the UAE as a magnet for global wealth.

A magnet for global businesses in the tourism and hospitality sectors

Businesses worldwide are increasingly leveraging the UAE's booming hospitality sector to expand their operations. South Korea's ONDA, a hospitality technology company, exemplifies this trend. As firms aim for a seamless market entry in the UAE, the region's well-established networks, modern infrastructure, and investor-friendly regulations make it a lucrative choice.

The UAE's business environment is particularly conducive to supporting growth for companies looking to establish themselves in the Middle East. However, navigating the ecosystem requires strategic alliances with experienced facilitators. For example, firms can benefit from collaborating with leading entities such as Seed

Group, which connects international businesses to key decision-makers and accelerates their presence in the region.

The UAE's focus on innovation and digital transformation has created vast opportunities, particularly in hospitality, smart technologies, and luxury services. With its cosmopolitan culture and visionary leadership, the UAE remains a preferred destination for global enterprises seeking to tap into one of the world's most dynamic tourism and business hubs.



The UAE Tourism Industry: A model for sustainable growth

The UAE's transformative approach to tourism is exemplified through its seamless integration of advanced technology, ambitious infrastructure projects, and diversified sector offerings. Indeed, the UAE establishes a resilient model for tourism-driven development by balancing economic growth with cultural preservation, thereby reinforcing its standing as a world-class destination. As the nation proactively fosters innovation and strategic partnerships to meet its plans, it subsequently provides an attractive and supportive climate for companies doing business in the UAE.

Additional information and resources



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A screenshot of a web application form titled "Become a Royalty Partner". The form is white and centered on a background of desert dunes. It contains several input fields and a dropdown menu. The fields are: "Company Name", "Type of Business (B2B/B2C/B2G)", "Company Website", "Company Location", "Company Industry" (a dropdown menu with "Please Select" selected), "Product/Service", "Company Phone No.", and "Year of Establishment". There is a small note below the website field: "If not applicable, please type N/A".

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Company Industry * Product/Service *

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Over the past 20 years, Seed Group has formed strategic alliances with leading global companies from a variety of regions and industries. These companies have propelled their business interests and goals in the Middle East and North Africa region through the support and strong base of regional connections of the Seed Group. The Group's goal is to create mutually beneficial partnerships with multinational organisations and to accelerate their sustainable market entry and presence within the MENA region.

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