

DET announces the launch of the annual Dubai Tourism Summit, reinforcing Dubai's status as a global tourism leader

15 Dec 2022, Dubai, UAE



Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism (DET) has announced the launch of the annual Dubai Tourism Summit, a first-of-its-kind travel forum in the region which will lay the foundation for a home-grown world-class thought leadership programme to boost the city's resurgent tourism industry and support regional and global tourism.

The DET announced the forum today at its bi-annual 'City Briefing' event held during the Skift Global Forum East, the first-ever MENA extension of the Skift Global Forum. The Dubai Tourism Summit will provide a networking platform for industry stakeholders to share their vision, ideas, strategies and best practices, as well as insights on leveraging the latest innovations and trends to create a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable future for global tourism.

The DET also shared the latest tourism report for the first ten months of 2022. Data showed that Dubai welcomed 11.4 million international overnight visitors between January and October, an impressive year-on-year increase of 134%, taking the city further on its journey to becoming the world's most visited destination.

The DET's 'City Briefing' was presided over by His Excellency Helal Saeed Al Marri, Director General of DET, and attended by more than 1,000 executives from across the tourism ecosystem, including aviation, travel, hospitality and retail sectors. The meeting provided an update and outlook on the industry. It explored ways to continue accelerating the momentum to reinforce Dubai's position as a global hub for business, investment, talent and tourism.

Helal Al Marri said: "We are grateful to His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, for his visionary leadership, inspiration and guidance that has led to several milestones in 2022. Dubai has always been an international icon of innovation and excellence. The Dubai Tourism Summit will see us working even more closely with our domestic and global stakeholders and partners as we focus on pushing the boundaries further to highlight Dubai's position as the top international destination and the best city in the world to live in, work and invest. With the Dubai Tourism Summit, we will elevate our blueprint for sustainable growth, contributing towards our industry's continued success and supporting the recovery of regional and global tourism."

Al Marri added: "Our performance in the first ten months of 2022 indicates that we are on target to achieving our tourism goals, which dovetail with the UAE Tourism Strategy 2031 announced by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum to attract AED100 billion as additional tourism investments and 40 million hotel guests by 2031. It is also a testament to our city's resilience, robust and diversified market strategy, solid collaboration model between the government and private sectors, and the strength of the city's diverse destination proposition. We are well-placed to end this year on a resounding note and perform even better in 2023 and beyond, steadfastly supported by our aviation, travel and hospitality partners, who continue to champion Dubai's position as the first-choice destination for global travellers."

Key markets continue to deliver on tourism volumes

The 11.4 million international overnight visitors who arrived in Dubai between January and October 2022 represented a quantum leap over the 4.88 million visitors that the city welcomed for the same period in 2021. The numbers are close to the pre-pandemic record of 13.50 million international visitors in the first ten months of 2019. Dubai's international tourism arrivals significantly outperformed other major global destinations, giving Dubai a head start on post-pandemic recovery.

Hospitality sector shines across many metrics

Participants were also briefed on the hospitality sector's outstanding success, as it played a significant part in Dubai's impressive rebound. Dubai's growing popularity among global travellers is evident in the fact that there were 54 million online searches for Dubai per month during Q3 2022, which was close to pre-pandemic levels, with bookings in the last few months surpassing pre-pandemic levels.

Dubai shares limelight with other global cities with 71% occupancy

Average hotel occupancy in Dubai between January-October 2022 stood at 71%, one of the highest hotel occupancies in the world. This compares to 64% in the corresponding period of last year and just short of the 74% during the pre-pandemic period of 2019. Dubai's occupancy continues to closely trail the top benchmark cities: Istanbul (75%), New York (74%), Paris (73%), London (73%) and Los Angeles (72%).

Hotels register strong growth; supply up by 18% over pre-pandemic levels

Dubai's hotel inventory in October 2022 comprised 144,737 rooms at 790 hotel establishments compared with 122,185 rooms available at the end of October 2019 across 724 establishments. The total number of hotels in the first ten months of 2022 saw an 8% growth over the same period in 2021, highlighting strong investor confidence in Dubai's tourism sector.

The hotel sector outperformed pre-pandemic levels across all other key measurements: Occupied Room Nights, Average Daily Rate (ADR) and Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR). Despite the significant 18%

increase in supply compared with pre-pandemic levels, Dubai hotels achieved strong growth across ADR and RevPAR over 2019 levels. Dubai hotel establishments delivered a combined 30.40 million occupied room nights during the first ten months of the year, a 23% YTD growth and a 17% increase over the corresponding pre-pandemic period of 2019, which yielded 26.01 million occupied room nights.

The ADR of AED506 in the first ten months of 2022 surpassed the ADRs for the first ten months of 2021 (AED384) and 2019 (AED400), with a 32% increase in ADR in YTD October 2022 vs YTD October 2021 and a 27% increase vs YTD October 2019. The stellar performance of the hotel sector is also demonstrated in RevPAR growth: a 48% increase in RevPAR in YTD October 2022 vs YTD October 2021 (AED362 vs AED245) and 23% vs pre-pandemic YTD October 2019.

Taking Dubai to the world

The stakeholders and partners were also briefed on the creative global campaigns that Dubai has consistently launched across multiple traditional, digital and social media platforms to highlight the city's multi-faceted appeal to audiences in international markets. For instance, the highly successful Dubai Presents campaign comprises a series of movie-style trailers featuring Hollywood stars Jessica Alba and Zac Efron and Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan. Most recently, the 'Where the World Celebrates' global campaign features French football star Karim Benzema coinciding with the FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

His Excellency Issam Kazim, CEO of Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DCTCM), said: "Inspired by our visionary leadership, 2022 has been a transformative year for developing and broadening Dubai's global appeal, designed to keep the destination top-of-mind and to cater to the varied needs and tastes of international travellers. With the world on the move again, our ability to quickly react, adapt, evolve and tap into existing and new segments of travellers is key to Dubai's efforts to leverage and benefit from a rapidly and radically evolving global tourism landscape. We have ensured a steady influx of international visitors by offering more value than any comparable destination. We will maintain our competitive edge through our strong public-private partnerships, expansion of the diverse destination offering and constant launching of innovative initiatives and international campaigns to showcase Dubai as a 'must-visit' destination, as well as cement its position as one of the most accessible and liveable cities in the world."

Dubai, a family destination and global liveability hub

The briefing highlighted the results of the DET's International Visitor Survey. The survey revealed that, in H1 2022, Dubai gained significant ground as it consolidated its position as a destination of choice for families and couples (79%) and that international visitors stayed longer in Dubai during their visits in H1 2022 (+0.8 days vs H1 2019). With this, Dubai has seen positive performance across all tourism pillars, from culture to cuisine, adventure, entertainment to shopping. The survey also highlighted that young travellers in the under-35 age group constituted a significant proportion (40%) of travellers to Dubai in H1.

A Skift trends report published for the Skift Global Forum East in collaboration with the DET shed more light on Dubai's emergence as a global destination. The report titled 'Livable, agile, resilient – Dubai's blueprint for a 21st-century tourism destination' highlights the experiences and lessons learned by the city's leaders, tourism partners, and global industry leaders as they navigate numerous challenges together.

Dubai ranks highest among the region's most liveable cities

The report highlights that Dubai annually ranks highest among the most liveable cities in the Middle East according to the Economist Intelligence Unit report, a leading provider of global insights and market intelligence. The report underscores the city's focus on improving the quality of life and its efforts on building a well-rounded and sustainable community, noting that Dubai was ranked No. 2 in 2021 in the Euromonitor International Top 100 City Destinations Index. It also shows that Dubai was the only city with four Top-10 rankings out of six categories: Tourism Policy and Attractiveness, Health and Safety, Economic and Business Performance, and Tourism Performance.

The Skift report also shared DET data that ranked Dubai highly on tourism-specific pillars. More than 80% of visitors gave "general entertainment" and "hotels/accommodation" at least a nine out of 10 rating in 2021, with several other key areas — outdoor adventure and sports, family entertainment, and shopping and retail — earning such high marks from more than 75% of visitors to the emirate. Each of these areas saw anywhere from four to 12 percentage-point gains in visitor satisfaction.

Attractions, achievements and accolades

Building upon the city's drive to diversify its offerings to ensure a broad choice for travellers of all ages, 2022 saw the opening of new attractions and leisure landmarks, including the Museum of the Future and the Mohammed Bin Rashid Library. Dubai continued to be honoured with awards and recognition from the

industry. Dubai ranked as the No.1 global destination, the No.1 destination for 'City Lovers' and the No.4 destination for 'Food Lovers' in the Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards 2022. The accolades speak volumes about the city's appeal to a diverse global audience.

The biggest success story of the past year was Expo 2020 Dubai, which played a pivotal role in driving worldwide interest in Dubai and accelerating momentum across several sectors, including tourism. Expo attracted 192 participating nations and more than 24 million visits by residents and global travellers, placing Dubai at the heart of a dynamic international agenda and positioning it as a leading global city for trade, investment and tourism. A game-changer in this direction is Expo City Dubai, the dynamic legacy of Expo 2020 that will be a futuristic destination driven by sustainability, innovation, education and entertainment and a model city of the future.

A global gastronomy hub

During the briefing, DET shared the initiatives contributing to these successful tourism figures. The city's Gastronomy Always On (GAON) campaign has worked tirelessly to bolster Dubai's position as a global gastronomy hub. The GAON campaign championed Dubai's array of home-grown dining destinations and street food eateries through a series of events, including the Dubai Food Festival.

Dubai's reputation for serving diverse culinary experiences was further enhanced by the launch of MICHELIN Guide Dubai in June and the arrival of the renowned fine dining food critique brand Gault&Millau. Further, the inaugural edition of Middle East & North Africa's 50 Best Restaurants recognised 16 Dubai restaurants in February 2022. Dubai is home to more than 13,000 restaurants and cafés serving food and beverage from the cultures of over 200 nationalities residing in the city. This year, the DET also launched the region's first-ever Gastronomy Industry Report, a comprehensive study of the city and region's gastronomy scene, reinforcing Dubai's position as a sought-after global destination for food tourism.

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A year-round destination for international events

During the briefing, the DET presented the city's year-round calendar of events, which has been a driving factor behind Dubai's thriving tourism sector. With an impressive line-up of even more citywide events, activations and experiences led by the iconic Dubai Shopping Festival, the annual Retail Calendar is being unveiled on a large scale throughout 2023, featuring festivals, events, celebrations and promotions.

Dubai is also celebrating the FIFA World Cup in Qatar with several pop-ups, alfresco experiences and fan zones, which broadcast live the FIFA World Cup games. These fan zones include BudX FIFA Fan Festival at Dubai Harbour, with Dubai being one of only six cities around the world designated to host official BudX fan zones.

This year, Dubai also hosted the first edition of the inaugural Dubai Esports Festival, experiencing great success with attendance by global audiences and celebrity appearances. It reaffirmed Dubai's position as a global pioneer in technology and sports and further reinforced its international reputation as a leading city for year-round events.

The briefing explored Dubai's position as a key destination for global business events, with 370 bids submitted for international events with 283 international business events in the pipeline and set for future hosting in Dubai. In addition to Expo 2020, the city has hosted globally recognised business events and activities throughout the year, including Gulfood, Arabian Travel Market, Gitex Global and now the Skift Global Forum East. These international events have helped amplify Dubai's position as a tourist destination and welcome an array of 'bleisure' travellers.

His Excellency Ahmed Al Khaja, CEO, Dubai Festivals and Retail Establishment (DRFE), said: "As a multi-faceted destination that offers visitors a multitude of experiences, events form a key element of Dubai's tourism strategy. Our reputation as a pioneering year-round international events destination has been bolstered considerably this year, thanks to a roster of quality international leisure and business events. As we reach the end of a landmark year for Dubai in terms of festivals, events and entertainment, we are already looking ahead to 2023 and beyond to cater for the evolving needs of a diversified visitor profile. In preparing for such an outlook, sustained cross-industry partnerships will be even more crucial to retaining Dubai's status as a leading global events destination."

Cruise hub of the region set to welcome 900,000 cruise tourists

Cruise tourism also played a pivotal role in the success of Dubai's tourism sector, with the new season kicking off with the arrival of the cruise liner TUI Cruises (Mein Schiff 6) at the Hamdan bin Mohammed Cruise Terminal, Mina Rashid in October. The 2022-2023 season will see 166 ship calls between Mina Rashid and Dubai Harbour, bringing in an estimated 900,000 cruise passengers and crew.

New initiatives to spur growth

Dubai's ambition to become the city of the future will be primarily driven by the Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan, which aims to expand Dubai's offering and place a reimagined focus on enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors, with sustainability at the core of these developments. Dubai continues to launch bold regulatory citywide initiatives to promote accelerated growth across the tourism sector, including streamlining access to the city by establishing hassle-free entry procedures for business and leisure travellers and long-term engagement with the city. Such initiatives include the introduction of the 60-day tourist visa from September 2022 and the Five-Year Multi-Entry Visa for employees of multinational companies. These were in addition to other previously announced initiatives – including the Golden Visa initiative targeting investors, entrepreneurs and specialised talents, and Virtual working and Retire in Dubai programmes.

During the last year, Dubai has built momentum in business tourism with more flexibility for talent to visit and stay back in Dubai. The new era of flexible working means that people can work from anywhere and at the same time enjoy the diverse offering of that particular destination. Remote workers favour Dubai due to its vast array of co-working spaces, attractive hotel packages, and growing popularity as a global liveability hub.