

## Flight boom to Saudi Arabia rises

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Riyadh : A dozen foreign airlines introduced direct flights to Saudi Arabia in the first 10 months of 2024.

In comparison, the global average is only two to four foreign carriers entering new markets annually, Air Connectivity Programme CEO Majid Khan told Saudi News Agency.

“This growth has boosted increase inbound tourism and air traffic,” he added.

Launched in 2021, the programme aims to enhance Saudi Arabia's flight connections and has successfully established over 60 new direct routes.

Khan noted that Saudi Arabia's strategic location enables access to Europe, Asia, and Africa within an eight-hour flight, providing numerous opportunities for airlines to connect with the country.

The programme has organised more than 100 meetings with global aviation leaders to explore and improve air routes, as reported by Rashed Al Shammari, deputy CEO for commercial affairs.

Ali Bin Mohammed Masrahi, CEO of the Second Airports Cluster Company, which oversees 22 airports across Saudi Arabia, mentioned that the growth in flights and passenger traffic has ranged from 15 per cent to 18 per cent over the past year.

Planned expansions at Al Qassim and Taif airports, upgrades at Abha Airport, and the development of new airports in Jazan, Al-Baha, and Al-Jawf are expected to accommodate over a million passengers each year.

In February, Saudi Arabia announced that it welcomed more than 106 million tourists in 2023, exceeding its target for 2030. The country now aims to attract 150 million visitors annually by the end of the decade. In 2023, around 27 million international tourists spent \$37.6 billion (Dh138 billion) in the country, the highest figure to date, according to the tourism ministry's report in August.

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