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Passenger arrivals in Dubai from London down 75pc in Q4

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Dhaka: Passenger arrivals in Dubai from London have plunged by 69.1 per cent year to date, according to reports. Bookings to Dubai from London in Q4 2020 are currently 74.1 per cent behind year-on-year, travel analytics firm ForwardKeys announced.

Dubai's tourism industry, like many major cities around the world, has suffered from collapsed consumer demand, flight restrictions and international quarantine measures following the coronavirus pandemic.

"It is difficult to predict when normality will return to the previously busy London-Dubai route. The UAE is not currently included in the UK government's safe travel corridor and, therefore, travellers are expected to quarantine for 14 days on arrival," said Olivier Ponti, VP, Insights, ForwardKeys.

According to research firm Euromonitor International, the UK is an important source market for Dubai historically, ranking as the third biggest source market to

Dubai in 2019.

“While Dubai has opened up to tourists, COVID-19 has severely impacted the UK’s economy,” mentioned Rabia Yasmeen, Senior Analyst, Euromonitor. “With Brexit coming up, the increased economic uncertainty in the UK has also impacted the British outbound market to long-haul destinations such as Dubai,” she added.

Euromonitor International forecasts that overall visitor arrivals from the UK to UAE are expected to decline by 69 per cent in 2020.

“Brits are more likely to travel domestically to countryside locations or regionally for relaxation. Likewise in the UAE, domestic tourists are currently a key market for local hotels,” Yasmeen said.

Hans-Peter Betz, Director of the Dubai-headquartered the International Association of Hotel General Managers, confirmed that hotel occupancy is currently being driven by domestic demand. “Dubai's hospitality is driven by local demand at this point with weekends doing very well. The percentage of international tourist is still very small,” he said.

Dubai’s state-owned Emirates airline on September 7 revealed that it has returned over USD 1.4 billion in COVID-19 related travel refunds to date.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Emirates laid on six daily A380 flights to London’s Heathrow and a further three a day to Gatwick. It had also just begun a double-daily 777-300ER service to Stansted.

As of September 8, a sizeable proportion of its A380 fleet remains grounded – only one A380 flight makes it to Heathrow, as well as several 777-300ERs.

The key to restoring demand relies almost exclusively on the global medical community coming up with a COVID-19 cure or a suppressant, said Saj Ahmed, Founder, UK-based Strategic Aero Research.

The expert also noted that the increased take up of remote working software such as Zoom, Skype and Microsoft Teams would mean that companies now no longer see the benefit of expensive business flights.