

## **Qatar Airways announces world cup ‘Tie Up’ with Gulf carriers**

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The 2022 FIFA World Cup football tournament in Qatar is less than six months away and airlines in the region have announced increased services to accommodate the demand for the event. This is the first time that the World Cup has been held in the Middle East and it is forecast that over 200,000 fans per day will be arriving into the nation of just under 3 million.

Qatar Airways as the official carrier of the tournament announced a ‘tie up’ with fellow Gulf carriers flydubai, Kuwait Airways, Oman Air and Saudia on Thursday. The collaboration will see the availability of ‘Match Day Shuttles’ to games with rotating frequencies from Dubai, Jeddah, Kuwait City, Muscat and Riyadh. The statement advises that Match Day Shuttles are ‘designed with the purpose of connecting fans seamlessly to Qatar so they can attend their respective matches, capture the sights and sounds of the host country, before departing Doha on the same day.’

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, His Excellency Mr. Akbar Al Baker, said, “The landscape of this tournament gives us the opportunity to spread the business with various regional airlines. Our combined bandwidth with flydubai, Kuwait Airways, Oman Air and Saudia will create travel flexibility that will bridge cultures and give fans the chance to explore multiple places in the Middle East.”

The event is expected to attract a total of 1.4 million visitors to the State of Qatar during the tournament run from 21 November – 17 December. The scheduling of the Match Day Shuttles is seen as a way of alleviating pressure on accommodation within the State of Qatar during the World Cup period allowing fans to see more than one game per day.

Mr. Al Baker who is also Qatar’s tourism minister said, “Connecting fans and shared love for football are at the heart of this game-changing partnership. We are immensely privileged to have the opportunity to unite fans from all walks of life to enjoy the beautiful game at its best, while introducing them to our hospitable

culture and traditions. The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022<sup>Ω</sup> will be the first in the Middle East and Arab world, and we have always believed that a win for Qatar is a win for the region.”

The number of services offered to Doha will vary between the different Gulf states with fans arriving in Qatar in the morning, departing in the evening and with a strict no check-in baggage policy. There are scheduled to be 30 daily flights from Dubai; 24 from Muscat; 20 from Riyadh and Jeddah; and 10 daily services from Kuwait City. To be able to travel to Qatar football fans must have a ticket to a game and apply for a special ‘Haya’ pass.

To facilitate travel to the tournament the State of Qatar will be limiting inbound visitors only to those who qualify for the Haya pass. The Al-Monitor news site states that ‘Qataris and legal residents will also be able to enter but authorities have yet to announce how business people will be processed.’ It is also expected that Qatar Airways may reduce flights over the tournament period from countries that have not qualified.

Mr. Ghaith Al Ghaith, Chief Executive Officer at flydubai, said, “We are very pleased to be part of this game-changing partnership with Qatar Airways and the other partner GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) national carriers. This will allow us to welcome more football fans and visitors from all over the world to experience the warm hospitality and rich culture of our region.”

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