

Saudi Arabia breaks tourism records

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 13 June, 2024



Riyadh: Saudi Arabia has achieved a remarkable milestone in its tourism sector, welcoming over 100 million tourists in 2023. This significant achievement marks a 56pc increase compared to 2019 and was reached seven years ahead of the ambitious timeline set by the Kingdom's Vision 2030 plan. This accomplishment underscores Saudi Arabia's rapid emergence as a global tourism powerhouse.

According to the Saudi Tourism Authority, the influx of tourists has brought substantial economic benefits. Around 77 million domestic travelers and approximately 27 million international tourists visited the Kingdom, collectively spending over USD 67 billion. This surge in tourism has significantly contributed to Saudi Arabia's economy, reflecting the nation's rapid growth as the world's fastest-growing tourism destination.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) praised Saudi Arabia's

leadership and dedication, highlighting the nation's successful efforts to enhance its tourism infrastructure and connectivity. These improvements have made the Kingdom more accessible to international visitors, opening new routes and markets for the travel industry.

UNWTO commended the collaborative and innovative approach of Saudi Arabia in achieving this milestone and expressed optimism for the Kingdom's goal of attracting 150 million tourists by 2030.

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) also highlighted Saudi Arabia's record-breaking year in its 2024 Economic Impact Research. The Travel & Tourism sector grew by more than 32pc, contributing a record SAR 444.3 billion to the nation's GDP, which now accounts for 11.5pc of the entire economy. This growth underscores the pivotal role of tourism in Saudi Arabia's economic framework.

The sector supported over 2.5 million jobs, nearly one in five jobs in the country, marking an increase of 436,000 jobs compared to the previous year.

International visitor spending saw a remarkable increase of nearly 57pc, reaching SAR 227.4 billion, while domestic visitor spending grew by 21.5pc, totaling SAR 142.5 billion. These figures highlight the robust recovery and growth of Saudi Arabia's tourism industry post-pandemic.

Julia Simpson, WTTC President & CEO, lauded the Kingdom's extraordinary achievements, attributing the success to Saudi Arabia's visionary commitment to tourism. She emphasized the fusion of cultural heritage and innovative tourism initiatives as key drivers of this growth, positioning the sector as a crucial element in the nation's diversified economic future.

Looking ahead, Saudi Arabia's tourism sector is expected to continue its rapid growth. In 2024, the GDP contribution from tourism is projected to reach SAR 498 billion, with employment in the sector increasing by more than 158,000 jobs to nearly 2.7 million. International visitor spending is forecast to reach SAR 256 billion, while domestic visitor spending is expected to rise to SAR 155.2 billion.

Over the next decade, the global tourism body anticipates the sector will grow its annual GDP contribution to SAR 836.1 billion by 2034, representing almost 16pc of the Saudi economy. Employment in the

sector is projected to exceed 3.6 million, with one in five people working in tourism-related jobs.

Regionally, the Middle Eastern Travel & Tourism sector also experienced significant growth in 2023, with GDP contributions reaching almost \$460 billion. The sector supported nearly 7.75 million jobs, and international visitor spending grew by 50pc, reaching \$179.8 billion. The Middle Eastern tourism sector is expected to continue its upward trajectory in 2024, with GDP contributions projected to reach \$507 billion and job numbers rising to 8.3 million.

Saudi Arabia's tourism success story is a testament to its strategic vision and commitment to becoming a global tourism leader. The Kingdom's continued investments in infrastructure and innovative initiatives promise to drive further growth and solidify its position as a top global destination.

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