

Saudi Arabia launches air taxi for Haj pilgrims

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Riyadh: Pilgrims visiting Saudi Arabia for the Hajj season this year will have a unique opportunity to travel by flying taxis and drones, Saudi Minister of Transport and Logistics Saleh Al Jasser has said.

Speaking at a press briefing after the arrival of the first batch of international pilgrims at Prince Muhammad bin Abdulaziz International Airport in Medina, Al Jasser said that these cutting-edge modes of transportation, including taxi applications, aim at bettering the overall pilgrimage experience.

Al Jasser said several specialised companies in the transport sector are competing to provide the best mode of travel in the next years. He underscored the significance of understanding these technologies and creating an appropriate environment for them to be utilised during the Hajj season.

Al Jasser stressed that Saudi Arabia is committed to being at the forefront of utilising such services, noting that the Hajj season will witness the largest deployment of these advanced transportation modes.

Last year, Al Jasser announced plans to test flying taxis during future Hajj seasons. Saudi Arabian Airlines, also known as Saudia, previously unveiled its intention to operate flying taxis to transport Hajj pilgrims between King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah and hotels in Mecca. The airline aims to procure approximately 100 aircraft to facilitate this service.

In January, Abdullah Al Shahrani, director of corporate communications and spokesman for the Saudia Group, revealed preparations to introduce air taxis as a new mode of transportation during the Hajj season. The airline has entered into a contract to purchase 100 Lilium jets, German electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft, for transportation between Jeddah airport and airstrips in Makkah hotels near the Grand Mosque and other holy sites.

Al Shahrani highlighted that the Lilium aircraft operate entirely on electric power, making them environmentally friendly. Once the necessary arrangements are completed, these planes will transport pilgrims from King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah to airstrips near the Grand Mosque in Mecca during the Hajj and Umrah seasons.

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