

## Study finds UAE travelers spend big at airports, second only to China

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**Dhaka: UAE passport holders are among the top airport spenders in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East, second only to Chinese travelers, a new study finds.**

The Airports Council International (ACI) Asia-Pacific & Middle East—representing over 600 airports across 44 countries—released its ‘Travel Retail Study in the Post-Pandemic Era,’ which examined 36 major airports across 21 countries and surveyed 4,000 passengers.

The study highlights a shift in airport retail dynamics, showing that spending is increasingly driven by passenger mix and behavior, not just traffic volumes, said a media report on February 4.

In 2025, Chinese passengers topped global airport retail spending, indexed at 100, followed by UAE passport holders at 78.8 and Indian

travelers at 74.7. In duty-free purchases, UAE travellers ranked even higher at 95.7, second only to China.

According to Stefano Baronci, Director General of ACI Asia-Pacific & Middle East, the survey focused on individuals based on their nationality to provide insights into the “Retail spending levels across nationalities” category.

### **International passengers drive spending**

Baronci noted that the UAE’s ranking reflects high disposable income, a strong gifting culture, and frequent international travel. The Middle East’s travel profile, dominated by long-haul, premium international passengers, further boosts spending at major hubs such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

The study found that international passengers spend more than 3.6 times what domestic travelers do, favoring the UAE, where most airport traffic is international. UAE travelers show lower price sensitivity than other nationalities, making them more likely to buy perfumes, cosmetics, and luxury goods.

### **Duty-free central to ME airport revenues**

Duty-free remains central to airport revenue. In the UAE, it accounts for over 50 percent of retail income, while non-aeronautical revenues in the Middle East represent 43.3 percent of total airport revenue, the highest share globally.

The report highlights that airport retail success increasingly depends on who is travelling, rather than how many. For UAE airports, attracting and retaining high-spending passengers is now as important as expanding capacity, cementing the country’s position as a global aviation and retail hub.

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