

TRAVELERS FROM THE GULF STAY AWAY FROM 'UNSAFE' COUNTRIES



For Arabian travelers that wanted to go for a short holiday Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria were the popular options. Continuous conflicts however have changed the situation.

Governments of GCC countries (states bordering the Persian Gulf) including the UAE have sent out warnings to prospective travelers to travel to Egypt, Syria and Lebanon because of the unstable political situation that has made these countries potentially unsafe. **In the same vein, increasing public protests have kept GCC travelers away from Turkey.**

According to Kulwant Singh, the MD of the tour operator Lama Tours, the proportion of the flight bookings cancelled from UAE to Turkey, Syria and Lebanon ranges from 40% to 50%. He went on further to say that a few flight-booking cancellations for those travelling to Egypt have occurred as well.

Tarique Khatri, the senior vice president of the travel website Cleartrip.com said that the total flights booked from UAE to Istanbul, Turkey, for June has dropped by up to 19%. At the same time, the total flights booked from UAE to Beirut, Lebanon for June has dropped by 5%. Khatri also said they are expecting a larger drop in bookings in July for the two cities, particularly for Istanbul.

Since Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt and Syria are no longer attractive to GCC travelers, those seeking short holidays are focusing on Jordan. A return trip ticket to Amman costs less than a return trip to Beirut.

Dubai, UAE is a regional destination that travelers are fond of. A number of GCC travelers that usually fly to Turkey and Lebanon now opt to go to Dubai. Bookings of flights to Dubai from the GCC in May and June increased by about 9 per cent when compared to the same period last year. Dubai is thus gaining from the unrest in the troubled areas.

According to Manu Mehrotra, who is the general manager of Al Tayer, a travel agency, the options for short distance regional destinations are few; and this forces travelers to opt for longer distances.

Tunisia and Morocco are both short haul destinations, but they cost more than several other destinations in the region. These two countries are meant for those with a bigger budget. Flights to Tunisia and Morocco usually take more than seven hours. In the meantime, several travelers are now looking at Europe and the Far East, Mehrotra said. But some travelers have opted for the areas within the region that are clearly seen as unsafe due to financial constraints. Most flights to Turkey are most likely going to be for business instead of leisure, he stated.

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