

NEW MULTIPLE ENTRY VISA TO BOOST GROWTH IN UAE CRUISES



Early this year, UAE introduced a multiple entry visa system for their cruise tourists. According to one of the senior executives at the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, the system will help boost the ship calls by 16 percent while passenger numbers will increase by at least 7 percent.

The department expects the coming season that runs from September 2015 to June 2016 to attract about 410,000 passengers and over 128 ship calls. **That will be a significant increase on the current season ending in June 2015 that has attracted 381,000 passengers and 110 ship calls.**

The growth will be facilitated by the new visa system that took effect at the beginning of August. The visa allows the tourists to enter and leave UAE several times through all ports.

Hamad Bin Mejren, the Executive Director of Business and Tourism said that he expected the visa to have a huge impact on the industry for the coming seasons. It will help draw more ships and in turn, the demand will continue rising.

In a similar way, Alpha Holiday's Dubai director, Samer Assad too echoed he expected to see a surge on the number of passengers. The Dubai-based director of Alpha Tours, Ghassan Aridi said the parent company has recorded an increase in the cruise packages sold in the current season. The packages have increased by 7 percent since last year. He, however, expects the growth to hit 10 percent next season.

The local travel agencies and cruise operators expect to witness and benefit from the high traffic of passengers next season. The regional director of Royal Caribbean International, Helen Ben said they were delighted with the current strategy and the multiple entry visa within UAE. The company expects to receive a greater diversity of foreign guests coming to UAE from countries such as Latin America, South America, China, Russia, India and various parts of Eastern and Central Europe. **Royal Caribbean left the Dubai market in 2013 because of reduced revenue growth but expects to make a comeback in September 2015.**

The visa system is expected to attract more passengers from India, China, Russia, South Africa, Brazil and the Commonwealth of Independent States is also set to benefit from the new visa system. Previous regulations had put the costs way too high, although the current permit costs about Dh200.

The visa system will also be of benefit to the GCC countries since it will increase the amount of trips to the region. It will be of value in creating demand for the Arabian Gulf Cruises. Facilitating the visa processing and easing requirements are essential for countries that have long depended on lots of paperwork. The GCC visa will speed operations since several ships depend on Dubai as they travel to other countries such as Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain.

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