

UAE TOURISTS EXPECTED TO HEAD TO THE SCHENGEN ZONE



European states within the Schengen Area anticipate the doubling up of UAE tourists thanks to the visa waiver for UAE citizens. Consequently, this is expected to greatly boost tourism business.

Tourism business revenues from UAE are expected to rise significantly in the European states. **The visa waiver for UAE citizens traveling to the Schengen zone became effective on May 7, 2015.** Therefore, UAE nationals will be able to visit all the European states that fall under the Schengen area without necessarily obtaining a visa.

The move to lift the need for a visa before traveling to the Schengen has received unanimous support. Tourism bodies from Greece, Switzerland, and Austria welcomed the move. All of them cited anticipation for the doubling up of the tourism business from the UAE.

Greece sees the move as one that is highly needed. This is because currently the tourism sector in Greece is negatively affected by political issues. Out of 300,000 tourists of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that visit Greece annually, 25 percent are from the UAE.

The Hellenic Association of Travel and Tourist Agencies vice president in Greece, George Daskalakis is foreseeing a growth of up to 50% within this year in Greece. He said that the visa waiver will have an immediate impact on the tourism sector of Greece since there will be an increase of 40 percent to 50 percent within the first year the waiver takes effect. Therefore, he noted that there will be an increase in the tourism revenues for Greece.

In Switzerland, Mathias Albrecht is expecting a very high inflow of UAE tourists. As the Switzerland Tourism Director for the GCC, he said that **the UAE is the strongest market for Switzerland in the GCC accounting for 36% of the tourists.** Therefore, he said that the waiver will make it very easy for UAE citizens to visit Switzerland, consequently leading more UAE visitors to the nation. He also noted that Saudi nationals account for 35% of the travelers.

In Austria, the UAE accounts for a third of the Middle East tourist traffic. Therefore with the waiver, it is expected that there will be a significant rise in visitors from the UAE. According to Klaus Ehrenbrandtner, apart from the visa waiver, the depreciating European currency is also a great advantage for the visitors. He said that currently, everything in Europe is at its lowest price and that the visitor's money will be worth 20% more. Klaus Ehrenbrandtner is the Regional Director for Asia and Middle East in the Austrian National Tourist Office.

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