

DUBAI TO BENEFIT FROM WORLD CUP IN QATAR: MILLION OF FANS EXPECTED



Creation of fan zones, special hotel packages with shuttles, and easier access to alcohol: Dubai is already registering many reservations from all over the world for the World Cup in Qatar which will be held from November 20 to December 18.

The United Arab Emirates may not have qualified for the World Cup in Qatar, but they will still come out ahead if the expected influx of fans to their hotels, restaurants and airplanes materializes.

With little investment, the Emirates, and Dubai in particular, stand to gain if, as expected, **fans choose to stay in this tourist hub instead of the small territory of neighboring Qatar** during the tournament scheduled for November and December.

According to experts, the high prices of accommodation in the Qatari capital Doha and the more relaxed environment offered by Dubai, including easier access to alcohol, could attract fans.

The low-cost airline Flydubai will operate at least 30 round-trip flights a day to Doha, an hour away, as part of a daily airlift of 160 shuttle services from various cities in the resource-rich Gulf region.

Dubai has relaxed its social norms relatively in terms of certain cultural aspects, such as alcohol consumption and dress codes experts point out.

This potential financial windfall, as well as the honor of hosting the first World Cup on Arab soil, will come less than two years after the end of the rift between Doha and the United Arab Emirates as part of a regional blockade that has isolated Qatar from its neighbors.

The Dubai Sports Council estimates that around one million fans could arrive in the city for the World Cup. Given that Qatar is expecting a similar number, this may seem an ambitious prediction.

But Dubai is preparing by announcing the creation of fan zones in parks, beaches and the financial center, while hotels are offering special packages including flights and transfers to airports and fan zones.

The United Arab Emirates is also offering multiple-entry visas for as little as 100 dirhams (about US\$ 27) to people with tickets to World Cup matches.

Visiting fans won't be the only ones commuting during the World Cup. Authorized by FIFA to sell hotel packages for matches in Doha, Expat Sport says that "convenience" is a key factor in attracting people to stay in Dubai.

The company mentions "the regular air shuttles between the two cities and the fact that the flight lasts only one hour".

A Dubai hotel located on one of the artificial palm-shaped archipelagos built as part of the Palm Islands project will be entirely reserved for supporters.

"We've had a flurry of bookings from Mexico, the United Kingdom, Europe and India," says Expat Sport. "Overnight stays are selling quickly and we expect to sell out at this rate."

UAE hotel occupancy this year is already more than 40 percent higher than in 2021, a year marked by the pandemic, while a "strong tourism performance" is expected this winter, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, emir of Dubai and vice-president of the United Arab Emirates, said earlier this month.

As of May, Dubai had 769 hotels and more than 140,000 rooms, a significant increase from early 2019, according to official figures.

Air shuttles will also be offered from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman to relieve the accommodation pressure on Doha, a city of 2.4 million people. However, compared to the other Gulf states, Dubai has the advantage of already being a major tourist destination.

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