

# SAUDI ARABIA TO BECOME THE NEW GLOBAL TOURISM POWER?



Saudi Arabia has become a key player on the international economic scene and is now aiming to become the new global tourism power.

Saudi Arabia spans an area of 2 million square kilometers and has a population of 35 million people. It is the fastest-growing nation in the G20 and boasts a favorable demographic bonus, with 70% of its population aged 35 or under.

**To ensure the protection of the tourism sector, which supports 330 million people, clear and decisive steps are being taken for the future.**

According to Gloria Guevara Manzo, the chief advisor to the Saudi Arabian Minister of Tourism, the country has witnessed a significant increase of 378% in the number of international visitors and 168% in spending. With these impressive numbers, Saudi Arabia is on the way of establishing itself as a global tourism power. Moreover, the country is setting an unprecedented benchmark by addressing the challenges posed by the tourism sector, which is now considered the new oil in Saudi Arabia.

Ahmed Al-Khataheeb, the Minister of Tourism of Saudi Arabia, is spearheading the new tourism strategy for the country globally. He has visited different parts of the world, including Latin America, to promote Saudi Arabia as a preferred destination for travel, tourism, and investment. The primary objective of these visits is to announce to the world that Saudi Arabia is now a new and exciting option for tourists and investors alike.

Saudi Arabia invests in megaprojects to transform the kingdom's infrastructure, making it more attractive to tourists. The plan is to build new cities, airports, and over 600,000 hotel rooms to attract 120 million visitors by 2030, with a \$1 trillion budget.

One of the key focuses of this initiative is the Red Sea, home to the fourth-largest coral reef in the world. The Saudi Arabian government is working to sustain the Red Sea.

The kingdom's flagship project, Neom, is a \$500 billion megacity 33 times larger than New York City. The first phase of Neom will open in 2024, along with other projects such as Sindalah, The Line, Trojena, and Oxagon. These projects aim to create a futuristic region full of hyper-connected cities, ports, business zones, research centers, sports facilities, and world-class tourist destinations, turning the region into the most advanced place.

Saudi Arabia uses sports to attract tourism and directly contributes to GDP equivalent to 10%. To achieve this goal, the local team Al-Nassr has signed Cristiano Ronaldo for around US\$ 215 million a year. Other clubs in the Saudi Pro League have invested close to \$US 1 billion to attract players such as Neymar, Karim Benzema and Roberto Firmino. Thanks to this investment, the country has grown one percentage point of GDP, according to Gloria Guevara Manzo. This approach promotes

sports in the country and attracts more tourists to watch the games. Moreover, the country has launched an air connectivity plan to expand the number of destinations from 99 to over 250 by 2030.

Saudi Arabia is setting an example of being a sustainable country. Despite having one of the biggest oil reserves in the world, the country is committed to the green agenda and preserving the environment. As a result, investing in Saudi Arabia is investing in one of the fastest-growing destinations globally. The country's tourism industry has become a new engine of economic growth and development.

Sustainable tourism aims to make tourism a part of the solution to climate change. Accelerating action requires collaboration with entrepreneurs, travelers, governments, destinations, and international organizations.

Ahmed Al-Khateeb, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Tourism, believes that **the global tourism sector now has a unique opportunity to focus on sustainable development, job creation, and economic resilience**. He emphasizes that climate change concerns everyone and that the tourism industry is responsible for caring for and preserving the planet. Sustainable tourism is the new face of the industry.

Today, travelers prefer destinations that prioritize the environment and protect communities while respecting multiple ecosystems. They also prefer destinations with clean and renewable energy. Saudi Arabia has launched the Sustainable Tourism Global Center (STGC) initiative to reduce the tourism sector's estimated contribution of 8% to total global greenhouse gases and move towards net-zero emissions.

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