

SINGLE TOURIST VISA FOR SIX GULF COUNTRIES BETWEEN 2024-2025



The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have announced plans to introduce a unified tourist visa, allowing visitors to travel across all six Gulf countries. Abdullah bin Touq Al Marri, the UAE Minister of Economy, has stated that the seventh GCC tourism ministers meeting in Oman has unanimously endorsed the rollout of the visa, which is expected to be presented at the upcoming GCC summit. Specific regulations and legislation for the visa will be developed, and it is scheduled to be launched between 2024 and 2025, subject to the readiness of each GCC country's internal systems. Al-Marri emphasized that this new visa would enable travelers to access six countries with a single, unified tourist visa, ultimately promoting economic cooperation across the Gulf region.

The UAE is preparing to welcome more international tourists by introducing a unified visa. The Emirates Tourism Council has developed a tourist route that connects all seven emirates, positioning the UAE to be better prepared for integration with the GCC. Once the unified tourist visa is fully activated, the UAE will introduce a new and enticing tourism product to attract more international tourists to the Arabian Gulf region.

The tourism initiative, a crucial part of the GCC 2030 tourism strategy, aims to increase the tourism sector's contribution to the GDP by promoting inter-GCC travel and boosting hotel occupancy rates. This will help transform the GCC into a leading global destination for local and international tourists. Any spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors have been corrected.

The tourism sector currently contributes 14 percent to the UAE's GDP, with plans to increase it to 18 percent to meet its strategic tourism goals. Al-Marri highlighted that GCC nations have advanced and well-equipped travel and tourism infrastructure. By the end of 2022, the GCC had 10,649 hotel establishments, representing a 1.2 percent increase from 2016. In the GCC, the UAE has 1,114 hotel establishments, ranking second after Saudi Arabia. The total number of hotel rooms in the GCC reached 674,832, growing by 0.4 percent.

The GCC joint tourism strategy' 2023-2030' targets an annual seven percent increase in inbound trips to GCC countries. The number of visitors to GCC countries reached 39.8 million last year, showing a 136.6 percent growth compared to 2021, with a target of reaching 128.7 million visitors by 2030.

GCC countries aim to increase the spending of inbound tourists by 8.0 percent annually. It is expected to reach \$96.9 billion by the end of 2023, with 12.8 percent growth compared to 2022, and get \$188 billion by 2030.

The GCC countries have set a goal to increase the direct contribution of the travel and tourism sector to their GDP by seven percent every year. By 2023, the total value added to the GDP of GCC countries' travel and tourism sector is expected to reach \$185.9 billion, with an anticipated growth rate of 8.5 percent compared to 2022, when it was \$171.4 billion.

It's worth noting that the GCC countries boast 837 tourist sites, with the UAE having the most significant number at 399, making it the leader among GCC nations. Additionally, the UAE hosts the most tourist events and activities in the Gulf region, accounting for 73 out of 224.

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