

THE SAUDI TOURISM SECTOR DECLINED BY 5% TO 6% IN THE FIRST FIVE MONTHS OF 2026



Five months into 2026, Saudi Arabia's tourism sector dipped just slightly - by about 5% or 6%. Though tensions nearby stirred up trouble, the numbers hold firm. Air routes faced hurdles; expenses climbed. Still, movement within the kingdom stayed steady. Ahmed Al-Khatib, leading the Ministry of Tourism, sees this as a solid footing under pressure. Outside forces weighed heavily on transport networks. Yet the drop remained small. Regional strain tugged at growth. Even so, results avoided a steep loss.

The sector benefited significantly from robust domestic demand and the continued flow of pilgrims for Hajj and Umrah, which helped offset broader slowdowns. "The Saudi tourism sector recorded a decline of between 5% and 6% during the first five months of 2026, and this result represents a good performance under the current regional conditions," Al-Khatib stated.

Strong Start Followed by External Pressures

Early 2026 saw strong momentum in Gulf region tourism, especially in Saudi Arabia, marked by around 10% visitor growth in the opening three months. Yet, what followed brought challenges: conflict in Iran disrupted movement patterns across airspace zones. Flight operations faced halts on several routes, partly due to strained logistics and limited access to aviation fuel supplies. Alongside, rising price levels in local economies began affecting spending power. As expenses climbed for travelers, interest started fading. Momentum shifted downward through spring, dimming earlier optimism tied to tourist inflows.

Now things cost more to move around here, so trips feel heavier on wallets. Even with rough patches lately, countries like Saudi Arabia keep pushing hard to bounce back fast. Just last few weeks, their planes started running fully again - Al-Khatib pointed that out - as flights come alive and links strengthen step by step.

Although visitor numbers are now down, officials point out this aligns with usual patterns - Gulf destinations typically see more activity in winter, unlike European hotspots that thrive in summer. The dip is seen as mild, with local travel helping balance things; internal trips have been especially robust across the country.

Domestic Tourism and Red Sea Growth

Even though global trips slowed, movement inside the country stayed strong. Resorts along the Red Sea saw every room taken during Eid al-Fitr and again at Eid al-Adha. Rather than boarding planes abroad, plenty chose to stay home, visiting places across Saudi Arabia. Because of that shift, local travel beat last year's numbers by a clear margin.

Launch of Saudi Summer 2026 Promo Campaign

In a proactive move to boost activity during the summer months, the Saudi Tourism Authority has

officially launched the “Saudi Summer 2026” program. The nationwide initiative focuses on five key destinations: Aseer, the Red Sea, Jeddah, Taif, and Al-Baha. Operating under the Arabic slogan “Our Summer, Our Way”, the campaign offers a wide range of family-friendly, children-oriented, and group activities designed to appeal to both citizens and visitors seeking tailored summer experiences.

Key Facts of the Saudi Tourism Current Development:

- Saudi tourism declined 5-6% in the first five months of 2026.
- Gulf tourism grew ~10% in Q1 2026 before regional disruptions.
- Challenges included the war with Iran, flight disruptions, inflation, and fuel costs.
- Airlines have resumed full operations.

Domestic tourism and Red Sea resorts performed strongly, exceeding last year’s levels.

Despite temporary regional pressures, Saudi Arabia's push into tourism gains strength through steady local spending. Religious visits bring consistent flow throughout the year. Growth gets further support from timed promotions aimed at specific periods. Major investments in travel facilities back these efforts. Economic shifts toward non-oil revenue help too. The path forward looks stable, shaped by internal momentum rather than external trends.

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