

Attracting the Next Generation of Travelers:

*How Dubai and the Middle East
Are Transforming Global Tourism*

Presented by:

Skift + **DUBAI**

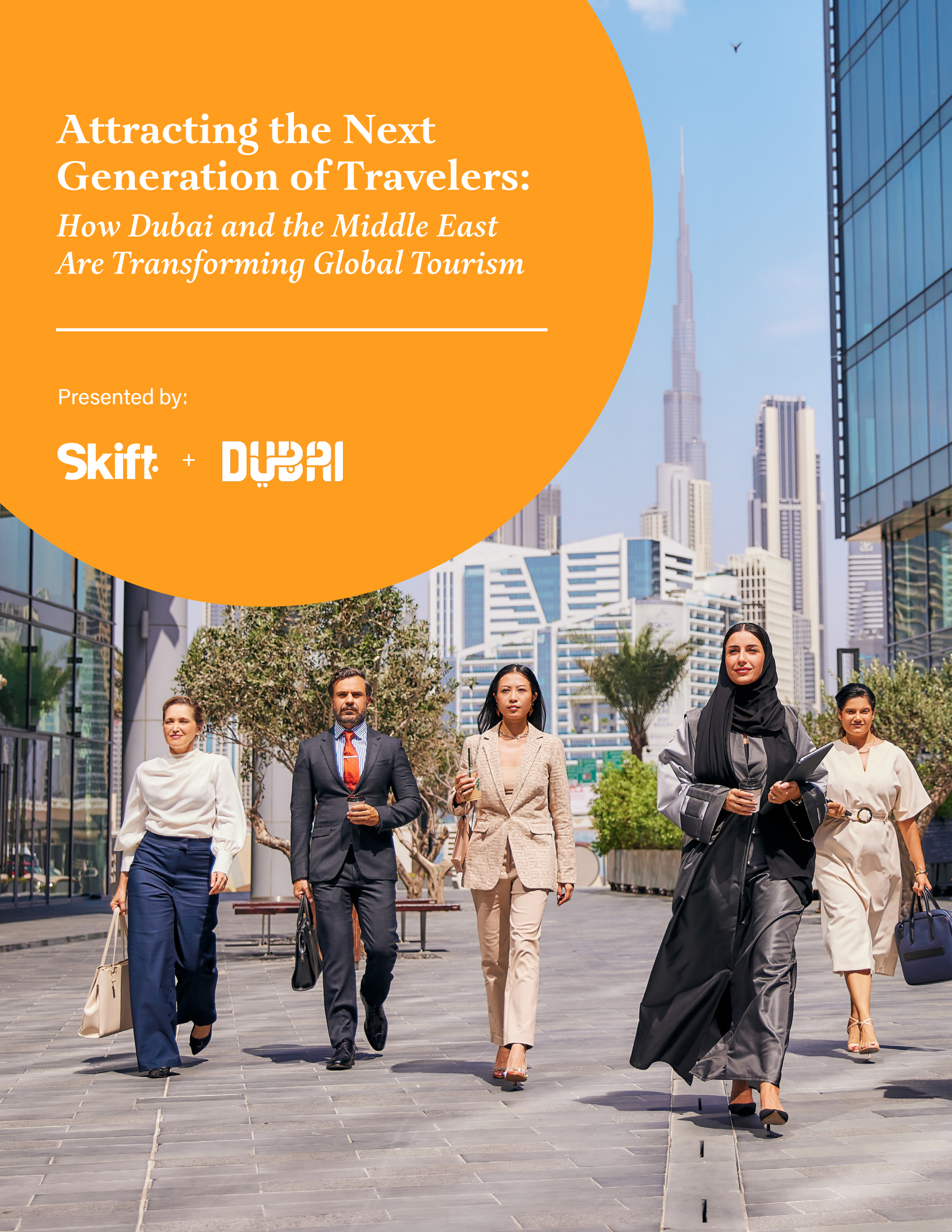


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Executive Summary

The focal point for the global travel and tourism industry is moving eastward. Middle Eastern countries are investing heavily in tourism infrastructure as a cornerstone for economic growth, and therefore have become models for future innovation in the travel sector.

In tandem, changes in consumer demographics, behaviors, and values have put the travel industry at a critical juncture. Increases in spending power, ease of travel, and freedom of movement each pose unique opportunities for travel companies and tourism destinations. To accommodate the travelers of the future, they will need to maintain economies of scale, manage overtourism, align with sustainability goals, and plan for critical infrastructure.

In this context, Middle Eastern destinations, led by Dubai and the UAE, are implementing ambitious plans to attract and welcome a new generation of travelers from around the world. They are reimagining travel services to address impending challenges and scale tourism growth to strengthen their economy.

In this report, you'll find:

- A data-driven global travel outlook centered on major, long-term trends that have put the Middle East and Dubai at the center of the tourism industry
- How demographics, demands, and desires of middle class, Gen Z, and “blended” business and leisure travelers are influencing the shift of global travel patterns
- How Dubai is leading the way with creative and innovative strategies to address industry-wide challenges of overtourism, sustainability, and blended travel
- How new technologies are enriching traveler experiences and supporting a more scalable and sustainable tourism model
- How travel companies can partner with Dubai to capitalize on global and regional tourism expansion

A Message From Dubai Department of Economy & Tourism

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this special report that highlights Dubai's leadership role in transforming Middle East and global tourism. This initiative not only showcases our city's remarkable resilience but, more importantly, aims to ignite a collective introspection on the industry's role and the crucial interdependencies that must evolve to foster sustainable growth.

Dubai is eager to share its successful journey, revealing the innovative pathways forged amidst the ongoing global transformation. In the pages that follow, you'll learn about the tenacity, adaptability, and multifaceted appeal that define Dubai as a leading destination globally for business and leisure, aligned with the goals of our Dubai Economic Agenda 2033, and its vision of becoming the best city in the world to visit, live and work in. This has been further validated by Dubai being recognised as the No. 1 global city to relocate to, according to a survey recently published by financial services provider, Remitly. I trust this commentary offers inspiring insights into how we got here, and provides an optimistic vision for our industry.

Dubai's tourism narrative is one of visionary leadership, surpassing pre-pandemic benchmarks in the first 10 months of the year, and a positive gaze toward the future. Through this narrative, we also hope to shed light on the sector's evolution and the headwinds, both regionally and globally, that we all must brace against.

Our industry's success is intricately interwoven with countless others, specifically our solid network of stakeholders and partners. Together, we stayed committed to inclusion, innovation and responsible growth, so I hope this report acts as a catalyst for further transformation — shining a light on how we may collectively redefine sustainability and partnerships across our industry. Through unwavering resolve, bold ideas and mutually beneficial solutions, I am confident we will seize the opportunities before us to ensure the success of our industry.

Looking ahead, I take heart in the words of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice President and Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai. He says: "Determination, strategy and vision for the future are our real resources in the quest for excellence and success." This resonates deeply with us as an industry, as we all look to accelerate the momentum that has brought us this far, through clearly defined transformative initiatives and innovative plans that will shape and propel the sector into the next phase of growth.



Issam Kazim

CEO, Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing
Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism



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Introduction: Global Travel Shifts Eastward

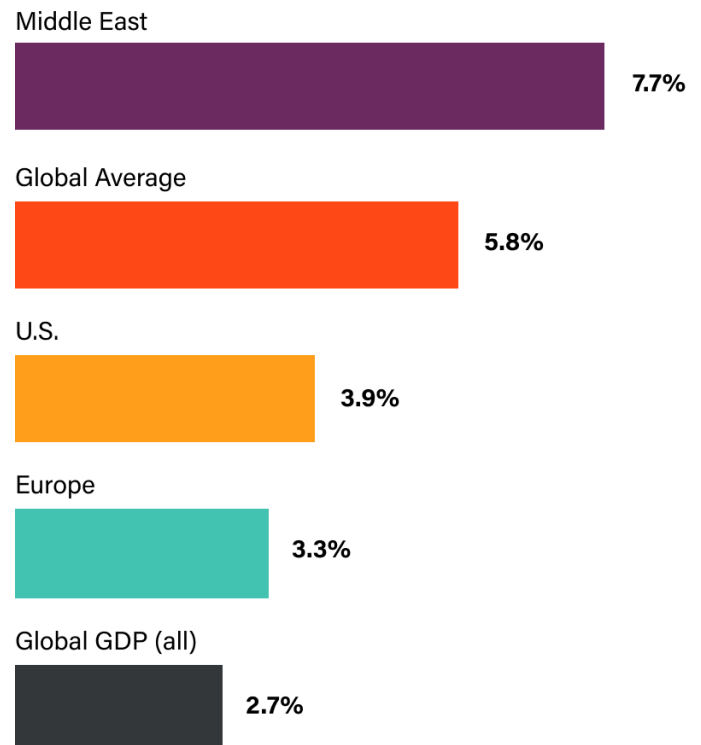
The global travel and tourism industry expects significant growth over the next decade. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the sector's global GDP contribution is projected to reach \$15.5 trillion* by 2033, representing 11.6 percent of the global economy and creating 126 million new jobs worldwide in that timeframe.

To put these figures in context, between 2022 and 2032, the WTTC forecasted that the sector is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 5.8 percent, outpacing the overall economy's annual growth of 2.7 percent.

As the Middle East rises in economic and geopolitical prominence, tourism is propelling the region forward. Lowered trade barriers, increased economic freedom, and substantial foreign direct investment have resulted in regional geographies seeing infrastructure improvements and becoming global hubs of economic activity.

For instance, the WTTC forecasted that travel and tourism in the Middle East would grow at an annual rate of 7.7 percent, in comparison to the U.S., forecasted to grow at a rate of 3.9 percent, and Europe, which is expected to rise 3.3 percent. Tourism in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on its own is projected to make a total economic contribution of more than \$76 billion by 2028, according to Statista.

Average Annual Growth Rate of Travel & Tourism, 2022-2032



Source: World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)

In terms of pure visitor numbers, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region currently welcomes approximately 90 million international arrivals per year. That figure equates to about 9 percent of the world's total arrivals, which reached 969 million in 2022. A forecast from Knight Frank and STR projected that the region's tourist figures may hit 160 million by 2030. Dubai alone welcomed 13.9 million tourists between January and October 2023, surpassing 2019 arrivals in the same period.

The global aviation industry is also set to see tremendous growth, with traffic centering on the Middle East and Dubai. IATA predicts that by 2040, the demand for global air travel is set to double to more than 8 billion, growing steadily at an annual average rate of 3.4 percent. Middle East carriers have made large strides in rebuilding their international networks, bolstered by an increase in the passenger load factor of nearly 25 percent in 2022, outstripping the performance of other regions. Dubai International Airport served 41.6 million passengers in the first half of 2023, surpassing 2019 volumes and reinforcing its position as a global transit hub and the world's busiest international airport.

Tourism Strategies Underpin Economic Growth in Dubai and the Middle East

The Middle East's continued rise in prominence is partly due to the fact that tourism has become a strategic lever for diversification in oil-based economies as both a cause and effect, and therefore will play a pivotal role in driving the region's economic growth in the next decade.

To prepare for this expected tourism boom, initiatives like the Dubai Economic Agenda target ambitious, holistic economic growth intended to support long-term, sustainable infrastructure. The D33 Agenda, as it's called, includes more than 100 projects aimed to double the size of Dubai's economy over the next decade and consolidate its position among the top three global cities.

In tandem, the goal of Dubai's 2040 Urban Master Plan is to align all urban development plans with its economic priorities and projected needs of the future. It will undertake upgrading Dubai's urban areas, improving the efficiency of resource utilization, doubling the number of green and leisure areas in the city,

and providing sustainable and flexible means of mobility. These efforts will have a direct impact on the emirate's ability to build and sustain its aviation, hospitality, and tourism infrastructure.

At the end of 2022, the UAE announced a national tourism strategy that is intended to attract 40 million hotel guests and attract an additional \$27 billion in tourism investment by 2031.

Other destinations in the Middle East region are seeing similarly ambitious strategic movements toward tourism growth. Saudi Arabia's (KSA) Vision 2030 aims to transform the Kingdom into a premier global destination for both residents and tourists. Oman's Vision 2040, Qatar's post-World Cup growth strategy, and Egypt's national tourism goals are other strategic plans that are in place, showcasing the region's ambitions to seize regional and international growth opportunities.

Yet these strategies don't exist in a vacuum. The other chief driver of tourism growth in Dubai and the Middle East is a direct result of an ongoing shift in global demographics.

The rise of the middle class, especially in Asia, the emergence of Generation Z (Gen Z) as a primary consumer market, and the growth in blended travel and digital nomadism are all fueling an increase in travelers to the region.

The confluence of traveler demands and expectations has created tensions and challenges, several of which are at the forefront as Dubai and Middle East destinations embark upon their tourism-led diversification plans:

- **Overtourism in popular destinations:** The most visited locales bear a disproportionate weight of increased traveler volume. As a result, destinations like Dubai and the Middle East, in the position to capitalize on the explosive growth of middle-class tourism, must strategically identify opportunities for dispersal to less populated yet equally impressive attractions and experiences.
- **Sustainable, responsible tourism:** Long-term growth in the tourism sector depends on fostering a sustainable natural environment. Gen Z travelers have made their demands known for more responsible and sustainable

tourism options. Offering eco-friendly travel destinations and options, and packaging them with environmentally safe and culturally immersive experiences, will meet this demand for sustainable travel while benefiting the planet and ensuring more stable economic growth.

- **Redefining business travel:** “Business as usual” in corporate travel has been upended by blended travel and digital nomadism. As trips or long-term stays combining business with leisure become the rule rather than the exception, destinations will bear the responsibility to facilitate new pathways for travel, create new accommodation types to support these travel occasions, and develop the technological infrastructure that both attracts and serves these types of individuals.

This report will explore these major drivers of and challenges to long-term tourism growth. Travel companies that align with destinations to address these industry challenges on a global scale have the opportunity to stay ahead of imminent and monumental shifts, capturing global traveler demand over the next 10 years and beyond.

As the world’s busiest international air travel hub and already one of the top global tourism destinations, Dubai is at the center of these industry-wide trends and seismic demographic shifts. The emirate’s proactive strategies to address tourism industry challenges by fostering ease of entry, infrastructure investment, and pioneering technology showcase Dubai’s forward-thinking dedication to tourism as a lever for larger economic growth in context with the rise of the region at large.





Rise of the Middle Class: Balancing Tourism Development and Dispersal

Changes in traveler demographics and demands are requiring destinations to reconceptualize how they market to and attract travelers — and how to direct them once they arrive. As millions upon millions of newly empowered middle-class travelers descend upon popular but ever-increasingly stressed tourism locales, travel companies also have a joint responsibility to work with those destinations to create the best possible customer experiences, which will ultimately help protect their investments.

New Traveler Behaviors Redefine Destination Management

According to the [World Economic Forum](#), the middle class in Asia is expected to have a population of 3.5 billion by 2030, a majority of which will live in India and China. These two countries will represent about 59 percent of middle-class consumption globally, [WorldBank estimates](#), which is expected to reach \$64 trillion by 2030.

59%

India and China's share of middle-class consumption globally by 2030

Source: WorldBank

“As international travel makes a strong comeback, we are witnessing a surge in demand from Chinese travelers seeking diverse and enriching experiences abroad,” said Jane Sun, CEO of Trip.com Group, in a recent press release.

For example, in October 2023, China Golden Week showed the impact Chinese travelers have on the Middle East tourism market. The holiday marks the annual weeklong period including the Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day in China. Trip.com told [Bloomberg](#) that Chinese tourists took advantage of the eight-day Golden Week holiday to visit places like Dubai because of their friendly visa policies, which Sun confirmed in her statements.

“The Golden Week has been a remarkable turning point. The recovery of international flights and the optimisation of visa policies will increase the enthusiasm for travel to overseas destinations,” Sun said.

Meanwhile, India has already surpassed China as the world’s most populous nation, and the Indian middle class’ spending power will command about 84 percent of the nation’s collective spending power by 2033. Outbound tourists from India are expected to reach 28.5 million by 2025.

Russian tourists have also flocked to the Middle East. In 2022, outbound travel spending in Russia was measured at \$20.3 billion, marking an increase of approximately 78 percent in comparison to the previous year. The UAE was the second most popular international tourism destination for Russians in 2022, preceded only by Turkey.

India, Russia, and China are key source markets for visitors to Dubai. From January to October 2023, the city attracted nearly 2 million tourists from India, 917,000 from Russia, and 522,000 from China — with the latter number expected to rise rapidly throughout the remainder of the year.

Another demographic headwind for the Middle Eastern region is the population of more than two billion Muslims worldwide,

the majority of whom live in the Middle East, northern and central Africa, and Southeast Asia. Many countries in these regions are more than 90 percent Muslim, including Egypt, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran.

The number of Muslim travelers is expected to increase tenfold from 25 million in 2000 to 250 million in 2026. In 2022 alone, 110 million Muslim travelers accounted for 12 percent of all international arrivals, and this number is predicted to increase to 140 million in 2023 and a further 160 million in 2024. This traveling population’s impact on tourism to and through Dubai and the Middle East will be significant in the region’s rising position on the global stage.

Expanded travel options in Dubai and the Middle East offer comfort and familiarity as these travelers seek both religious and secular travel occasions in destinations with halal food options, and where their religious routines can be performed easily.

Across the board, this influx of travelers, most of whom are embedded in the middle class, raises opportunities and challenges for destinations and travel companies as they aim to attract and retain these valued customer groups.





Addressing Overtourism to Expand Growth Opportunities

The [Mastercard 2023 Trend Report](#) cited that spending on experiences is up 65 percent since 2019, compared to a 12 percent increase in spending on material possessions in that time frame. The rise of the middle class aligns with this trend — ultimately, it means there will be a lot more people out there looking for places to go and things to do when they are in those locations, in contrast to prioritizing items to buy at home.

With greater tourism volume comes greater responsibility to protect cities and countries' most cherished sites. [According to the UNWTO](#), the "tourism carrying capacity" of a destination is "the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, and sociocultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction." As more people have the means and the motivation to travel globally, destinations may become the victim of their own successes if they aren't planning appropriately.

[Overtourism](#), which more broadly refers to the perception that a particular location has exceeded this "tourism carry capacity," has become a common problem, especially [in the era of social](#)

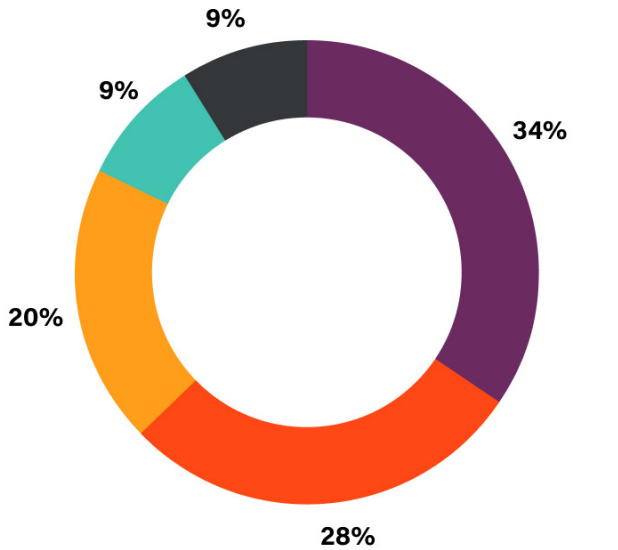
[media](#). It puts pressure on a destination's natural resources, infrastructure, and mobility — and ultimately on the traveler experience.

As the industry expands to meet the demands of new travelers, diversification of tourism options to augment visitation to traditional and popular attractions will encourage the dispersal of tourists. Through government and private sector collaboration, destinations have the ability to innovate and cater to new demands while preserving the environment and maximizing resources.

For instance, [Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism \(DET\)](#) works with stakeholders to carefully consider the city's hospitality development pipeline with visitor targets. Dubai is intent on bringing together global travel companies, local developers, and hotel owners alike to ensure growth is in step with demand, and the accommodations are meeting the needs of particular traveler segments as Dubai expands its tourism base.

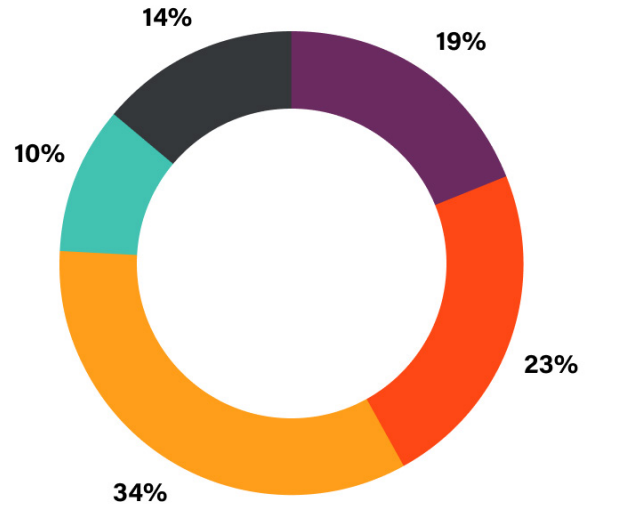
In support of this balanced strategy, through October 2023, Dubai's hotel sector has increased the number of accommodations by 13 percent and the number of rooms available by 22 percent since 2019, accelerating even further in the past year to balance supply across different sectors.

Share of Total Accommodation Supply in Dubai, by Number of Rooms, 2023



- 5-star
- 4-star
- 1- to 3-star
- Superior/Deluxe Hotel Apartment
- Standard Hotel Apartment

Share of Total Accommodation Supply in Dubai, by Property Type, 2023



- 5-star
- 4-star
- 1- to 3-star
- Superior/Deluxe Hotel Apartment
- Standard Hotel Apartment

Source: Dubai Department of Economy & Tourism

“In addition to monitoring the new hotel pipeline, we provide customer insight to our stakeholders via our Dubai International Visitor survey,” said Issam Kazim, CEO of Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DCTCM). “This information combined with the hotel management companies’ own brand and consumer insights allows them and hotel owners to iterate existing products, introduce new products or switch brands as necessary. It is this focus on the customer, the visitor experience, and ensuring that we have consistent dialogue with our stakeholders, that ensures we have a balanced supply across all accommodation types.”

Dubai also aligns planning for critical infrastructure with its Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan so that the city’s expansion yields positive benefits for residents and tourists alike, and is

able to accommodate the expected surge in visitors over the next decade.

According to Robert Whitehouse, vice president of research at Dubai Airports, a comprehensive plan that involves service and capacity enhancements at both Dubai International (DXB) and Dubai World Central (DWC) will optimize traffic and implement infrastructure to ensure a combined capacity for a further 40 million passengers above 2023 traffic levels across the airports. Dubai Airports is also improving runway capacity at DWC and major infrastructure at DXB, including a new apron for additional aircraft and an additional concourse.

“Dubai is unique in that there is a common understanding among the departments associated with both the government and

the private sector,” said Paul Griffiths, CEO of Dubai Airports. “Without a vibrant aviation industry and an ambitious, fit-for-purpose infrastructure, there would be no city. And if there were no city, there’d be no aviation industry. So that symbiotic relationship is extremely well understood.”

As the global middle class expands, especially in Asia, Middle Eastern countries are seeing significant opportunities to attract and retain a new cohort of travelers, exponentially increasing their potential to compete in the global tourism landscape. But growth for its own sake isn’t manageable or sustainable.

By focusing on improving information and accessibility beyond resorts and popular tourist attractions, destinations can drive the traveler seeking unique and immersive experiences to existing yet less visited historical and cultural locations. This would also address overtourism by encouraging dispersal to less familiar locations.

“The Middle East as a holiday destination is developing at an incredibly fast pace,” said Nishank Gopalkrishnan, chief commercial officer, TUI Musement. “From working with our partners in the destination, we know there is an incredible desire to provide the best hospitality and an increasing mission to showcase more of the local culture.”

Some examples in the UAE that go beyond the major attractions of Dubai include the recently opened [Museum of the Future](#); the [Etihad Museum](#), which tells the story of the founding of the UAE; the [Shindagha Museum](#), showcasing Dubai’s heritage and Emirati culture which is located in an historical neighborhood where the ruling family set up home in the early 20th century; as well as the [Hatta Heritage Village](#). In fact, the [Hatta Master Development Plan](#), which maps out the development of Hatta over the next two decades, plans to further transform this area in the mountains outside of Dubai into a year-round tourist destination.

Within the city itself, Dubai’s 2040 Urban Master Plan covers many aspects that will drive the dispersal of tourists. For example, the plan stipulates that parkland and recreational spaces will account for about 60 percent of the city’s total area — more than double the amount that exists today — and the total length of public beaches will increase by as much as 400 percent. The Urban Master Plan also mandates that the

available areas for hotels and tourism will be expanded by 134 percent.

Meanwhile, the [Dubai Countryside and Rural Areas Development Master Plan](#), also part of the 2040 Urban Master Plan, seeks to preserve the natural habitat and archaeological sites in the city’s south including “off the beaten track” locations such as Lehabab, Margham, Al Marmoom, and offer unique tourist experiences across this area that spans 2,216 square kilometers. It will also develop sustainable transportation systems that operate direct bus trips from Dubai’s main stations to these areas and provide designated tracks for bicycles and scooters.

Any major city can provide a long list of attractions. The key to maximizing the benefits for travelers and travel providers alike is through better connectivity. Part of Dubai’s 2040 Urban Master Plan includes the development of the [20-minute city policy](#), creating accessibility within the city so that visitors can reach key destinations on foot or by bicycle in just 20 minutes.

By expanding its infrastructure in thoughtful ways, Dubai will effectively allow tourists to have more range within the city, opening new doors to explore more of what the city has to offer beyond the well-publicized attractions.

Natalie Kidd, managing director, Asia, for Intrepid Travel, noted that her team works closely with local on-the-ground experts to help their customers explore different interests and experiences that are authentic and benefit both travelers and host communities. Without the ability to move seamlessly throughout the city and the region, these opportunities would be impossible.

“We are seeing more travelers that want an authentic look into local life. They are curious about different cultures and traditions.”

— Natalie Kidd, Managing Director, Asia, Intrepid Travel

“They want a unique travel experience that genuinely connects with people while making a positive influence along the way.”



Sustainable Tourism: Serving the Next Generation of Travelers

Sustainable tourism is more than a buzzword. The concept starts with the travel industry's impact on the environment, but it applies equally to companies' and destinations' abilities to provide accessible, affordable, responsible travel options to consumers across the globe. Without the purchasing power of the rising middle class and the up-and-coming travelers who comprise Generation Z, the travel business will be unable to maintain or build upon its success.

Middle Eastern countries face numerous environmental concerns, including limited water resources and potential erosion of mountainous areas, coral reefs, and coastlines. Rapid urbanization, population growth, and an increase in tourism could exacerbate these challenges.

As a result, it is crucial for destinations in the region, including Dubai, to balance environmental conservation, resource management, and sustainable practices with progress and development to ensure a better future for both the present and upcoming generations.

"Our longstanding efforts have been and continue to be rooted in tangible, meaningful actions across three focus areas that form our environmental framework: reducing emissions, consuming responsibly and preserving wildlife and habitats," said Adnan Kazim, chief commercial officer, Emirates.

In the short term, the ability to attract travelers depends on travel companies' and destinations' commitment to addressing these issues, and in the long term, their success in doing so will be the central path to maintaining their position at the top of the travel world.

"Travelers are much more conscious regarding the footprint they leave in the destination and the impact they have, which is why we have worked with the GSTC [[Global Sustainable Tourism Council](#)] to create criteria for developing experiences that ensure we protect the heritage of a destination, both from a cultural and environmental perspective," said TUI Musement's Gopalkrishnan.

Gen Z Travelers Accelerate the Drive Toward Sustainable Tourism

“Gen Z” typically refers to individuals born anywhere between 1995 and 2012. People in this age group already total about one-third of the global population, and they are projected to make up nearly 25 percent of the population in the Asia-Pacific region by 2025 — which will control a dominant percentage of the tourism purchasing power passing through the Middle East over the next decade and beyond.

According to Ross Veitch, CEO and co-founder of online travel agency Wego, the Middle East has among the youngest demographics in the world with a median age of just 27.

The rise of this generation as a key driver of the traveling public signals the urgency for leading destinations like Dubai to commit to and execute sustainability plans.

As the first generation born with the internet, Gen Z communicates seamlessly between the physical and digital worlds. Their choices and experimental nature frequently are influenced by social media, in particular TikTok, which is the search engine of choice for Gen Z and influences their purchase decisions more than any other platform. It’s worth noting that in 2022, Dubai was named the most-viewed travel destination on TikTok, amassing more than 92 billion views on the video-sharing app.

“Gen Z and Millennials are the largest generations on the planet, [and] they are more concerned about the environment than previous generations. They are more likely to choose sustainable travel options, such as staying in eco-friendly accommodations or using public transportation,” said Hayley Berg, Lead Economist at Hopper, an online travel agency. “The value of these segments is immense, and [they] are looking for experiences that are authentic and off-the-beaten-path.”

Influenced by their experiences with Covid-19, climate change-driven anxiety, and rising cost of living have made Gen Z seek meaningful experiences that they view as sustainable and responsible. According to American Express Travel’s 2023 Global Travel Trends Report, 79 percent of Gen Z respondents see leisure travel as an important budget priority and 84 percent



would rather take a dream vacation than purchase a new luxury item.

Despite these often-cited and seemingly clear attributes, a [McKinsey study of over 16,000 Gen Zers in Asia-Pacific](#) found that it is not uncommon to find contrasting views, perhaps as they are still young and making sense of the world around them and what values they hold. For example, they embrace sustainability and demand companies to commit to it, but whether they will pay for it is unclear. As a result, travel companies and destinations are beholden to show them the value of what they are doing from the standpoint of authenticity, accessibility, and affordability.

“Travel and traveling are almost synonymous with novel experiences,” said Wego’s Veitch. “Aligning with Gen Z’s desire for shared experiences, we promote unique destinations and hidden gems that resonate with [their] spirit of exploration.”

Building a Sustainable Tourism Model

“Sustainable” trips may include a number of categories, from those that have less environmental impact, support local economies, cultures, or communities, or visit smaller, less popular destinations, according to [Expedia’s Sustainable Travel Study](#) of 11,000 people from 11 countries. According to the study, 90 percent of consumers look for sustainable options while traveling, and 7 in 10 consumers have avoided a travel destination or transportation option due to skepticism that the commitment to sustainable practices was real.

Multiple studies conducted by WTTC, Expedia, and Mastercard indicate that business travelers and corporations who employ them are also consciously seeking and opting for eco-friendly and sustainable travel options. As an illustration, Marriott International experienced a sales opportunity worth \$5.5 billion by meeting the sustainability demands of 270 of its largest corporate clients in 2019.

To capture the opportunities from the new generation of travelers — and to maintain long-term feasibility and growth prospects — travel companies and destinations have to work together to offer solutions.

For example, the [UAE has various initiatives](#) in place to conserve the environment, protect its biodiversity, and stay aligned with the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#). For reference, tourism has been included in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as targets in Goals 8, 12, and 14, focusing on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production, and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively.

The [Dubai Sustainable Tourism](#) (DST) initiative aims to support the broader sustainable development goals of the city, in particular [Dubai’s Clean Energy Strategy](#) under which the emirate aims to produce 75 percent of its energy requirements from clean sources by 2050.

The UAE also recently announced stricter targets for reducing carbon emissions with major cuts within a decade, and the government is seeking to reduce emissions by 40 percent by 2030 and net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The nation has announced an investment of \$163 billion in clean and renewable energy and key technologies.

“My desire in two or three years’ time is to no longer give any form of airside permit to any vehicle that is powered by anything other than renewable fuels,” said Griffiths of Dubai Airports. “The idea is that we will be a zero-emissions-on-the-ground airport. That’s the design aim.”

According to American Express Travel’s 2023 Global Travel Trends Report, 79 percent of Gen Z respondents see leisure travel as an important budget priority and 84 percent would rather take a dream vacation than purchase a new luxury item.

Furthermore, the UAE has taken steps to address and mitigate negative impacts on the environment, including establishing the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment (MOCCA) in 2016; it launched a National Climate Change Plan in 2017. And, the UAE was the first Gulf country to ratify and sign the Paris Accord in 2015. In 2023, the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP28 was held in Dubai at the Expo 2020 site. Many hotels implemented special initiatives in the run-up to the United Nations COP28. For example, the Rove Hotel at the COP28 site will plant at least 28,000 trees by the end of 2023 — one tree for each room booked during the conference.

Beyond that event, Dubai's hotels are implementing a series of sustainability requirements set by DST. One such requirement is their use of the Dubai Carbon Calculator, which measures the carbon footprint within Dubai's hospitality sector. The tool has been revamped to track real-time data for carbon emission sources, allowing hotels to identify and effectively manage their energy consumption. Dubai Can is another city-wide sustainability movement that focuses on eliminating single-use plastic water bottles across various establishments, including hotels, businesses, and public spaces.

"The city's remarkable tourism success is a testament to the proactive measures taken under its decisive leadership and its ability to adapt to the evolving global tourism landscape," said DCTCM's Issam Kazim.

"Travelers today seek destinations that are not only beautiful and culturally rich but also environmentally responsible. Dubai's sustainability initiatives ensure that the city remains attractive to this segment of travelers."

— Issam Kazim, CEO of Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DCTCM)



Reimagining a Welcoming, Accessible, and Inclusive Destination

Sustainability does not end with environmentalism. Gen Z travelers are socially conscious and inclusive, demanding similar ethics from brands they patronize. This extends to accessibility of all types, and the UAE has initiated programs to support People of Determination across various sectors.

“Diversity and inclusivity are key principles guiding Dubai’s tourism strategy,” said Kazim. “By enhancing accessibility, the city opens its doors for a broader spectrum of individuals, including People of Determination, to participate in the tourism industry. This not only leads to a more inclusive workforce but also enriches the overall tourism experience, catering to a diverse range of visitors and their unique needs.”

DET said that Dubai’s commitment to providing special facilities and services for People of Determination include extensive audits, while major attractions in the city are adapting to be more accessible, making Dubai a place where every individual and visitor, regardless of their abilities, can explore and enjoy the city with ease, comfort and safety.

For instance, Dubai International Airport offers expedited security screening, dedicated lines at passport control, and accessible restrooms, ensuring a seamless and contactless experience for wheelchair users. Additionally, the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) of Dubai has made significant efforts by retrofitting 82 percent of its buildings and facilities with

features like automatic doors, braille signage, tactile guiding paths, and wheelchair ramps.

Iconic attractions like Burj Khalifa, Dubai Mall, and even its beaches have taken measures to provide wheelchair accessibility through ramps, elevators, and other designated spaces.

Dubai’s accessibility and inclusiveness efforts have expanded beyond accommodations for People of Determination. In October 2023, Dubai International Airport became the first international airport in the world to achieve the Certified Autism Centre™ status from The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards, recognizing its accessibility and convenience for individuals with autism and sensory sensitivities alongside their families.

Creating a legacy and reputation as an accessible destination starts with a strategy, but it needs reinforcement at all levels of the industry. As part of Dubai’s vision to be “a city for everyone”, Dubai College of Tourism (DCT) developed an Inclusive Service training program, which includes courses centered on People of Determination and autism and sensory awareness emphasizing the role of empathy and the importance of offering the highest standards of hospitality to all visitors.

“This program equips employees in tourist-facing roles with the skills they need to provide all customers with superior service,” said Kazim. “It also highlights the role of empathy and the significance of serving guests with disabilities in the most sensitive manner. Today, many of the program’s graduates are employed at hotels across the city.”



Increasing Awareness of Sustainable Travel Options

Despite wider efforts in the industry, travelers still cite a lack of information on sustainable travel options. Trip.com's [2022 Sustainable Travel Consumer Report](#), which surveyed 7,705 respondents across 11 markets in Asia and Europe, found that inadequate visibility of sustainable options poses a significant barrier to their wider adoption. Travelers blame this on the difficulty of accessing information about sustainable travel products, with about 33 percent stating there is a lack of sustainable options and 25 percent saying these are not clearly marked.

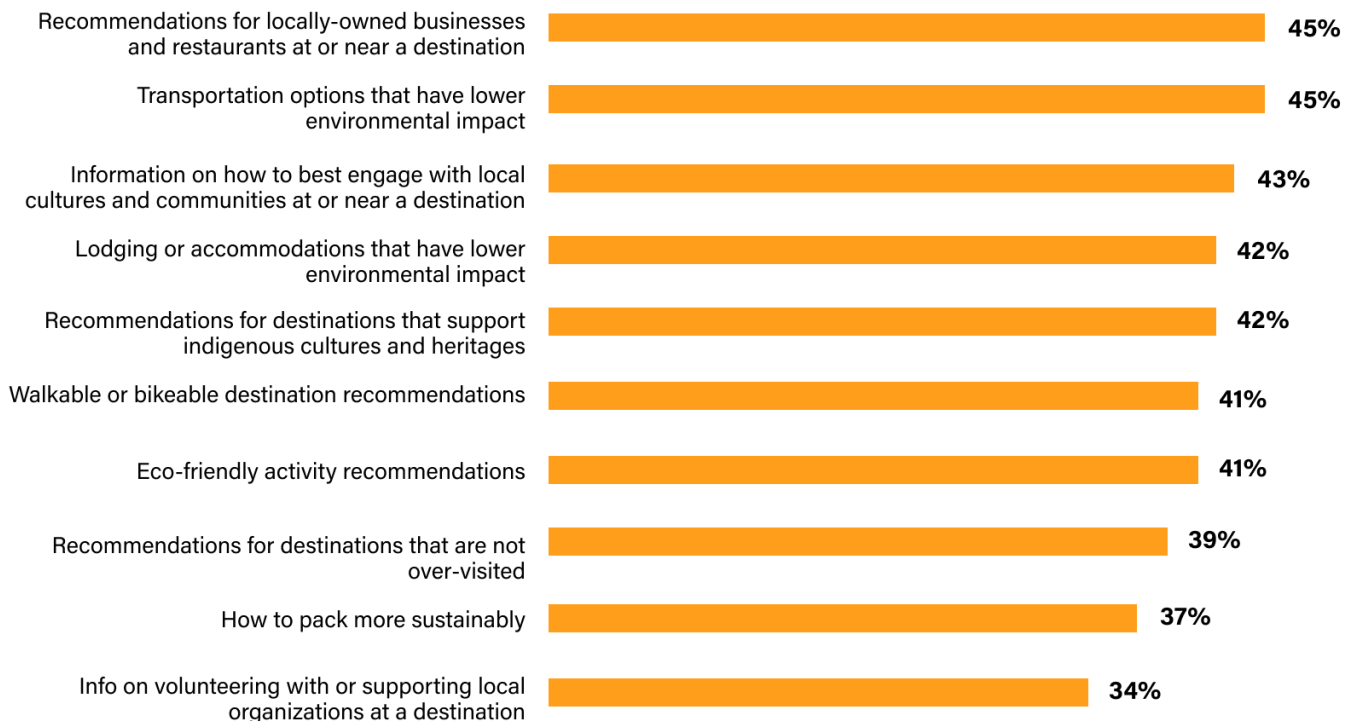
According to Expedia's Sustainable Travel Study, 74 percent of consumers believe that it costs too much to be sustainable when traveling. Yet, half of the sample surveyed still said they would be willing to pay more for sustainable travel — up to 38 percent more, in fact.

They also feel like they need more information: About 70 percent of travelers told Expedia that they feel overwhelmed by starting the process of being a more sustainable traveler. As a result, it's incumbent on travel brands and destinations to provide more information on existing inclusive and sustainable travel options.

To aid these efforts, DET has introduced the [Dubai Sustainable Tourism Stamp](#) to acknowledge hotels that demonstrate the highest adherence to sustainability standards, which enables hotels to market their accommodation options for the increasingly conscious traveler.

When it comes to providing access for People of Determination, DET has developed a comprehensive travel accessibility guide tailored for People of Determination and their families and caregivers, offering valuable insights for navigating Dubai effortlessly. This covers a range of aspects, from user-friendly airport facilities and practical metro tips to accessible attractions and more.

Types of Sustainable Travel Information Consumers Want to See During the Trip Planning Process



The infrastructure to support electric vehicle usage also demonstrates a city's seriousness towards managing its emissions. About 80 hotels in Dubai have free EV charging stations. By 2025, EV Green Charging Stations in Dubai will increase from the current 370, with more than 680 charging points to 1,000 Green Charging Stations. Dubai's goal is to have over 42,000 electric cars on its roads by 2030.

Furthermore, Emirates Airline recently signed a deal with Shell Aviation, which will supply more than 300,000 gallons of blended SAF (sustainable aviation fuel) for use at the airline's hub at Dubai International Airport.

The number of vertical farms providing fresh, sustainable produce has proliferated over the last several years in Dubai. In fact, Emirates Flight Catering (EKFC) — which serves more

than 100 airlines worldwide — is involved in a joint venture that opened the largest hydroponic farm in the world in 2022. According to the company, the 330,000-square-foot facility is geared to produce more than 1 million kilograms of high-quality leafy greens annually, while requiring 95 percent less water than conventional agriculture.

"Educating and engaging travelers is essential," said DCTCM's Issam Kazim. "Travel companies can actively market Dubai as a sustainable destination to their customers by offering sustainable travel packages, highlighting the city's commitment to responsible tourism, and encouraging travelers to make eco-conscious choices during their visits, such as respecting local culture, wildlife, and ecosystems, supporting eco-friendly activities and businesses."





Blended Travel: A Movement Toward Hybrid Hospitality

In 2019, business travel contributed nearly \$1.5 trillion to the global economy. Hit harder than any other travel segment by the Covid-19 pandemic, its recovery has been notoriously uneven. However, the public discourse around whether corporate travel by its traditional definition is coming “back” often neglects to fully explore the fundamental changes to the travel landscape at large. Indeed, traditional “road warriors” may be trading some business trips for video calls, and large corporations are cutting back on travel due to environmental concerns.

At the same time, the lines between “business” and “leisure” travel have blurred. The distinction marking “corporate travel” remains meaningful, but an increase in blended travel — business trips that include a leisure component — and digital nomads — individuals who have the ability to move regularly because their remote working set-up doesn’t require them to be in one location — has upended the travel sector.

“We see bleisure happening in the Middle East, and not just in terms of extended stays where the business traveler decides to stay for the weekend too, but also in terms of people bringing relatives with them on work trips,” said Wego’s Veitch. “It is important to see these business and leisure travelers not as distinct groups of customers but rather as customers who wear different ‘hats’ at different times depending on their travel purpose and trip-specific agenda.”

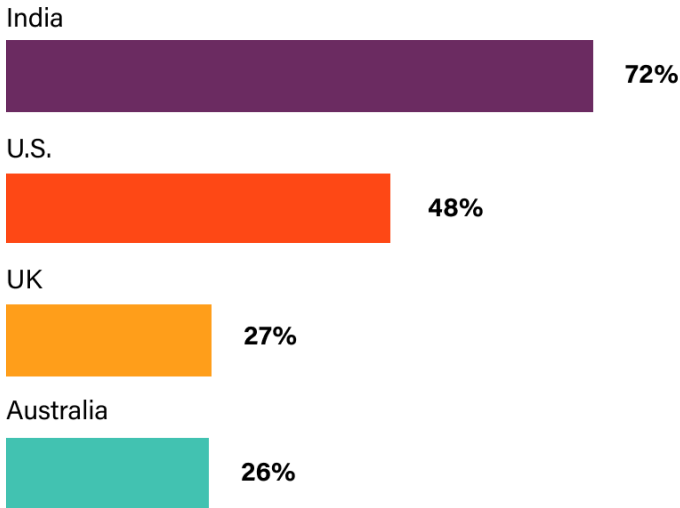
*Global spending by travelers combining business and leisure is projected to **more than double by 2027** compared to 2021, according to Euromonitor*

As blended travel becomes more prevalent, companies are adapting their policies to meet the new expectations of employees. These include more flexible working hours, allowing them personal time during business trips, and even reimbursing personal vacation expenses.

Whether executives like it or not, remote work is here to stay, with an average of 2.2 working-from-home days per week. This shift in work arrangements is leading to more frequent “blended” business trips that include leisure components. Nearly three-quarters of business travelers from India said they had extended a work-related excursion to include personal elements, and travelers from the U.S., UK, and Australia also reported adding onto such trips, according to the [Skift State of Travel 2023](#).

Griffiths of Dubai Airports explained they’ve seen notable shifts in air traffic in relation to business travel. He said point-to-point traffic, or the number of people traveling to Dubai rather than

Percentage of Business Travelers Who Extended Their Business Trip (Taken in the Last 12 Months) for Leisure Purposes



Source: Skift Research

just passing through, has increased by about 10 percentage points. They've also seen demographics shift younger by about 8 to 10 years.

"Technology has enabled us to switch from business to leisure at the drop of a hat at our discretion, and people have started to get used to that," he added. "It's changed both the passenger demographic, and also the reasons that people are now traveling."

Destinations that focus on attracting and retaining digital nomads and blended travelers will be able to maximize the growth opportunity. Travel companies aiming to capture business travel demand amid rapidly changing workplace dynamics are seeing meaningful opportunities to operate in Dubai given its forward-thinking approach to visa rules, hotel development, meetings and events strategies, and technology initiatives.

"Dubai is known for its agility in adopting evolving technologies found in the travel and hospitality sectors, often positioning the destination as a trendsetter," said DCTCM's Issam Kazim. "A strong emphasis is consistently placed on delivering an exceptionally high level of customer service at all touchpoints, which is evident across various sectors, including retail, hotels, and gastronomy. Furthermore, Dubai leads the way in embracing green technology, by adopting smart applications and sustainable solutions, as part of its wider goal to become the best destination to visit, live, and work in."



Thinking Outside the Business Travel Box

Hybrid hospitality and coworking opportunities at hotels encourage the blended traveler to stay there, whether traveling solo or with family. Dubai, a business and leisure hub with visa-friendly policies, proximity to the region at large, and easy connectivity to the world, has made extensive efforts to attract and serve blended travelers and digital nomads.

For example, more than 50 countries offer digital-nomad visas, enabling the remote or “work from anywhere” traveler to live where they please as they realize this demographic is spending more money than short-stay tourists. Just over half, or 28 countries, offer visas that are valid for up to six months for digital nomads, and only five offer one for 12 months, one of which is the UAE.

The UAE is also one of the seven countries where digital nomads can work tax-free.

“As we continue to build momentum in the tourism sector, we are actively exploring avenues to attract global entrepreneurs and specialized talents, encouraging them to live and work in Dubai,” said DCTCM’s Issam Kazim. “The introduction of initiatives such as the Golden Visa, which is also awarded to high-performing students, the 60-day tourist visa, and the Five-Year Multi-Entry Visa demonstrates our commitment to facilitating the experiences of global talents and remote workers in Dubai. These efforts reflect how we are nurturing business growth, meeting the needs of today’s talent, and establishing Dubai as a prime destination for remote work and leisure.”

A 2022 global online survey found that the main factors in choosing a destination for digital nomads were the cost of

living, a fast and reliable internet connection, and options to personalize their stay to reduce travel-induced fatigue. Safety was also cited as the most significant component in the decision-making process of around 15 percent of digital nomads looking for a destination.

Dubai was recently selected as one of 20 destinations globally by Airbnb’s Live and Work Anywhere initiative. In addition, the launch of Airbnb’s Dubai remote working hub, a one-stop-shop for remote workers in partnership with DET, further establishes Dubai’s dedication to attracting remote work.

A joint venture in the UAE and KSA recently launched the region’s first integrated co-living hybrid hotel chain called Innov8. The hybrid hotel model offers flexibility for short-term visitors and longer-term residents with various choices of lease options and services. Innov8 aims to expand regionally and internationally with a portfolio of properties valued at \$500 million.

Because the booking patterns of the digital nomad and blended traveler are no longer linked to specific days of the work week and often include a weekend, festivals and activities that last weeks or months foster more engagement during longer-term stays. Dubai has a busy activities and entertainment calendar, including events such as Dubai Shopping Festival, Dubai Summer Surprises, Emirates Literature Festival, Middle East Comic Con, Dubai Food Festival, Dubai Marathon, Dubai Fitness Challenge, and Dubai Esports and Games Festival.

“Our hub Dubai is a perfect example of how travelers are incorporating blended travel into their plan,” added Emirates’ Adnan Kazim. “Dubai continues to outperform the industry when it comes to not only sheer visitation figures, but also length of stay. Our top inbound markets like the UK, India, Germany, U.S. and Saudi have shown significant growth, almost doubling in size since 2019. A third of those visiting from these top markets are staying in Dubai for close to two weeks.”



Blended travelers also favor accommodations that have convenient access to wellness-related amenities. They want the convenience to reschedule in-destination activities to accommodate work. For those traveling with families, more spacious accommodations and activities where kids can be dropped off are also requirements.

“Key decisions, especially those pertaining to strategic investments, have played a pivotal role in the city’s success, which is closely intertwined with the tourism and hospitality sector,” DCTCM’s Issam Kazim said. “While Dubai has successfully positioned itself as a luxury destination with a plethora of high-end hotels, resorts, and shopping destinations, the city also caters to a diverse range of travelers — even making luxury travel affordable by offering options for budget-conscious travelers and value seekers — to further reinforce Dubai’s position as a global livability hub.”

“With greater flexibility for remote work, and more distributed workforce environments, Dubai also offers a broad range of spaces for business and leisure.”

— Adnan Kazim, Chief Commercial Officer, Emirates



Conclusion

As the world's economic and geopolitical focus shifts, the Middle East is emerging as the epicenter of growth for the global tourism industry, with Dubai at its heart. Dubai has the vision, infrastructure, and resources to spearhead this growth while addressing industry challenges posed by overtourism and sustainability, and reimagining travel for new demographics.

"Dubai's leadership embraces a distinctive style that involves creating and articulating a clear and compelling vision for the future," said DCTCM's Issam Kazim. "This visionary thinking has resulted in the implementation of supportive policies and significant investments in infrastructure."

By leveraging public-private partnerships (PPPs) empowered by robust investments and federal legislation, the emirate can accelerate its development projects and technology readiness to meet the evolving demands of future travelers. The implementation of [PPP laws](#) in the UAE guarantees governance and transparency in public procurement for large-scale projects, resulting in an increased attraction of long-term foreign direct investment.

"The development of a successful program of joint initiatives with a unified set of goals, in collaboration with other government departments and the private sector, ensures that all

stakeholders are aligned and can collectively present the city as a must-visit destination," Kazim added. "Our regular meetings with over 3,000 partners worldwide provide a platform for the exchange of ideas, as well as an opportunity to explore ways to provide guidance that encourages confidence among domestic and international tourists."

The future of travel will be shaped by the emerging middle-class and Generation Z, mainly from Asia, who seek distinctive experiences, responsible practices, and seamless convenience. Moreover, as a primary transit hub for tourists planning to explore destinations in the Middle East, and for Muslim travelers looking for Islam-friendly locations or itineraries, Dubai's influence spreads far beyond its borders.

As a hub for innovation, cutting-edge technology, and sustainability, Dubai will continue its ascent as a centerpoint in the global travel and tourism industry, beckoning leading travel companies to consider opportunities for investments and growth there in the years to come.

About Skift

Skift is the largest industry intelligence platform, providing media, insights, and marketing to key sectors in travel. Through news, research, conferences, exclusive interviews, strategic sector-focused newsletters, and more, Skift deciphers and defines the global trends that matter to the marketers, strategists, and technologists shaping the industry.

SkiftX is Skift's in-house content marketing studio, working collaboratively with partners like Accor, AWS, Expedia, Allianz Partners, and many more to help brands solve problems, create unforgettable moments, and communicate big ideas through content, research, and event activations.

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About Dubai Department of Economy & Tourism (DET)

With the ultimate vision of making Dubai the world's leading commercial center, investment hub and tourism destination, Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET) is mandated to support the Government in positioning the emirate as a major hub for global economy and tourism, and in boosting the city's economic and tourism competitiveness indicators. Under this remit, DET is driving efforts to further enhance Dubai's diversified, innovative service-based economy to attract top global talent, deliver a world-class business environment and accelerate productivity growth. Additionally, DET is supporting Dubai's vision to become the world's best city by promoting its diverse destination proposition, unique lifestyle and outstanding quality of life, overall.

Learn more at visitdubai.com.