



The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Outbound Travel Market

with Special Focus on Europe as a Tourism Destination



The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Outbound Travel Market

with Special Focus on Europe as a Tourism Destination

Copyright © 2018, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and European Travel Commission (ETC) Cover photo: Copyright © Typhoonski | Dreamstime.com

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Outbound Travel Market with Special Focus on Europe as a Tourism Destination

 ISBN UNWTO:
 printed version: 978-92-844-2012-4
 electronic version: 978-92-844-2013-1

 ISBN ETC:
 printed version: 978-92-95107-24-3
 electronic version: 978-92-95107-23-6

DOI: 10.18111/9789284420131

Published by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the European Travel Commission (ETC). First printing: November 2018.

All rights reserved.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinions whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the World Tourism Organization and the European Travel Commission concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) European Travel Commission (ETC)
Calle Poeta Joan Maragall, 42 Rue du Marché aux Herbes 61

28020 Madrid 1000 Brussels Spain Belgium

 Tel.: (+34) 915 678 100
 Tel.: (+32) 2 - 548 90 00

 Website: www.unwto.org
 Website: www.etc-corporate.org

 E-mail: info@unwto.org
 E-mail: info@visiteurope.com

Citation: World Tourism Organization and European Travel Commission (2018), The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

Outbound Travel Market with Special Focus on Europe as a Tourism Destination, UNWTO, Madrid,

DOI: https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420131.

All UNWTO/ETC joint publications are protected by copyright. Therefore and unless otherwise specified, no part of a UNWTO/ETC publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, microfilm, scanning, without prior permission in writing. UNWTO and ETC encourage the dissemination of their work and are pleased to consider permissions, licensing, and translation requests related to UNWTO/ETC publications.

Permission to photocopy this material in Spain must be obtained through:

CEDRO, Centro Español de Derechos Reprográficos

Calle Alcalá, 26, 3°

28014 Madrid

Spain

Tel.: (+34) 913 08 63 30
Fax: (+34) 913 08 63 27
Website: www.cedro.org
Spain

E-mail: cedro@cedro.org

For authorization of the reproduction of UNWTO works outside of Spain, please contact one of CEDRO's partner organizations, with which bilateral agreements are in place (see: www.cedro.org/en).

For all remaining countries as well as for other permissions, requests should be addressed directly to the World Tourism Organization.

For applications see http://publications.unwto.org/content/rights-permissions.

Table of contents

Acknowledgments	11
Foreword	13
Scope of the study	15
Executive summary	17
The Gulf Cooperation Council outbound travel market	21
Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region profile	23
Key characteristics of the GCC region	23
1.1.1 Geography	23
1.1.2 Demographics	23
1.1.3 Political situation	24
1.1.4 Economic profile	25
GCC outbound tourism	26
1.2.1 Outbound tourism trends	26
1.2.2 Potential for outbound tourism	28
Saudi Arabia	29
Country profile	29
Country profile	29
Country profile 2.1.1 Introduction to Saudi Arabia	29 29
Country profile 2.1.1 Introduction to Saudi Arabia 2.1.2 Demographic characteristics	29 29 30
Country profile 2.1.1 Introduction to Saudi Arabia 2.1.2 Demographic characteristics 2.1.3 Economic environment	29 29 30 32
Country profile 2.1.1 Introduction to Saudi Arabia 2.1.2 Demographic characteristics 2.1.3 Economic environment 2.1.4 Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy	29 29 30 32 35
Country profile 2.1.1 Introduction to Saudi Arabia 2.1.2 Demographic characteristics 2.1.3 Economic environment 2.1.4 Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy 2.1.5 Transport and infrastructure	29 29 30 32 35 37
Country profile 2.1.1 Introduction to Saudi Arabia 2.1.2 Demographic characteristics 2.1.3 Economic environment 2.1.4 Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy 2.1.5 Transport and infrastructure Outbound travel	29 29 30 32 35 37
Country profile 2.1.1 Introduction to Saudi Arabia 2.1.2 Demographic characteristics 2.1.3 Economic environment 2.1.4 Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy 2.1.5 Transport and infrastructure Outbound travel 2.2.1 Outbound trips	29 29 30 32 35 37 40
Country profile 2.1.1 Introduction to Saudi Arabia 2.1.2 Demographic characteristics 2.1.3 Economic environment 2.1.4 Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy 2.1.5 Transport and infrastructure Outbound travel 2.2.1 Outbound trips 2.2.2 International travel expenditure	29 29 30 32 35 37 40 40
Country profile 2.1.1 Introduction to Saudi Arabia 2.1.2 Demographic characteristics 2.1.3 Economic environment 2.1.4 Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy 2.1.5 Transport and infrastructure Outbound travel 2.2.1 Outbound trips 2.2.2 International travel expenditure 2.2.3 Outbound travel by region	29 29 30 32 35 37 40 40 41 42
Country profile 2.1.1 Introduction to Saudi Arabia 2.1.2 Demographic characteristics 2.1.3 Economic environment 2.1.4 Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy 2.1.5 Transport and infrastructure Outbound travel 2.2.1 Outbound trips 2.2.2 International travel expenditure 2.2.3 Outbound travel by region 2.2.4 Destinations in the Middle East	29 29 30 32 35 37 40 40 41 42 43
Country profile 2.1.1 Introduction to Saudi Arabia 2.1.2 Demographic characteristics 2.1.3 Economic environment 2.1.4 Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy 2.1.5 Transport and infrastructure Outbound travel 2.2.1 Outbound trips 2.2.2 International travel expenditure 2.2.3 Outbound travel by region 2.2.4 Destinations in the Middle East 2.2.5 Destinations in Europe	29 29 30 32 35 37 40 40 41 42 43
	Foreword Scope of the study Executive summary The Gulf Cooperation Council outbound travel market Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region profile Key characteristics of the GCC region 1.1.1 Geography 1.1.2 Demographics 1.1.3 Political situation 1.1.4 Economic profile GCC outbound tourism 1.2.1 Outbound tourism trends

2.3	Nature	of trips and travellers	47
	2.3.1	Characteristics of outbound travellers	47
	2.3.2	Purpose of travel	47
	2.3.3	Characteristics of trips	48
	2.3.4	Activities on leisure trips	50
	2.3.5	Travel information, planning and booking	51
2.4	The tra	vel trade	51
	2.4.1	Structure of the travel trade	51
	2.4.2	Online travel resources	52
	2.4.3	Marketing	53
	2.4.4	Key trends and prospects	54
Chapter 3	United	Arab Emirates	57
3.1	Countr	y profile	57
	3.1.1	Introduction to United Arab Emirates	57
	3.1.2	Demographic characteristics	58
	3.1.3	Economic environment	59
	3.1.4	Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy	62
	3.1.5	Transport and infrastructure	64
3.2	Outbou	und travel	68
	3.2.1	Outbound trips	68
	3.2.2	International travel expenditure	68
	3.2.3	Outbound travel by region	68
	3.2.4	Destinations in the Middle East	68
	3.2.5	Destinations in Europe	69
	3.2.6	Destinations in Asia and the Pacific	70
	3.2.7	Destinations in the Americas	70
	3.2.8	Destinations in Africa	71
3.3	Nature	of trips and travellers	71
	3.3.1	Characteristics of outbound travellers	71
	3.3.2	Purpose of travel	71
	3.3.3	Characteristics of trips	72
	3.3.4	Activities on leisure trips	74
	3.3.5	Travel information, planning and booking	74
3.4		vel trade	75
	3.4.1	Structure of the travel trade	75
	3.4.2	Online travel resources	75
	3.4.3	Marketing	76
	3.4.4	Key trends and prospects	77
Chapter 4	Kuwait	t	79
4.1	Countr	y profile	79
	4.1.1	Introduction to Kuwait	79
	4.1.2	Demographic characteristics	80
	4.1.3	Economic environment	81

	4.1.4	Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy	84
	4.1.5	Transport and infrastructure	85
4.2	Outbou	and travel	88
	4.2.1	Outbound trips	88
	4.2.2	International travel expenditure	88
	4.2.3	Outbound travel by region	88
	4.2.4	Destinations in the Middle East	89
	4.2.5	Destinations in Europe	89
	4.2.6	Destinations in Asia and the Pacific	90
	4.2.7	Destinations in the Americas	91
	4.2.8	Destinations in Africa	91
4.3	Nature	of trips and travellers	91
	4.3.1	Characteristics of outbound travellers	91
	4.3.2	Purpose of travel	92
	4.3.3	Characteristics of trips	92
	4.3.4	Activities on leisure trips	94
	4.3.5	Travel information, planning and booking	94
4.4	The trav	vel trade	95
	4.4.1	Structure of the travel trade	95
	4.4.2	Online travel resources	95
	4.4.3	Marketing	95
	4.4.4	Key trends and prospects	97
Chapter 5	Qatar		99
5.1	Country	y profile	99
	5.1.1	Introduction to Qatar	99
	5.1.2	Demographic characteristics	99
	5.1.3	Economic environment	101
	5.1.4	Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy	104
	5.1.5	Transport and infrastructure	105
5.2	Outbou	and travel	108
	5.2.1	Outbound trips	108
	5.2.2	International travel expenditure	108
	5.2.3	Outbound travel by region	109
	5.2.4	Destinations in the Middle East	109
	5.2.5	Destinations in Europe	109
	5.2.6	Destinations in Asia and the Pacific	111
	5.2.7	Destinations in the Americas	111
	5.2.8	Destinations in Africa	111
5.3	Nature	of trips and travellers	111
	5.3.1	Characteristics of outbound travellers	111
	5.3.2	Purpose of travel	112
	5.3.3	Characteristics of trips	112
	5.3.4	Activities on leisure trips	114

5.4	The tra	vel trade	114
	5.4.1	Structure of the travel trade	114
	5.4.2	Online travel resources	115
	5.4.3	Marketing	115
	5.4.4	Key trends and prospects	116
Chapter 6	Oman		119
6.1	Country	y profile	119
	6.1.1	Introduction to Oman	119
	6.1.2	Demographic characteristics	120
	6.1.3	Economic environment	121
	6.1.4	Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy	124
	6.1.5	Transport and infrastructure	125
6.2		und travel	128
	6.2.1	Outbound trips	128
	6.2.2	International travel expenditure	128
	6.2.3	Outbound travel by region	129
	6.2.4	Destinations in the Middle East	129
	6.2.5	Destinations in Europe	129
	6.2.6	Destinations in Asia and the Pacific	130
	6.2.7	Destinations in the Americas	130
	6.2.8	Destinations in Africa	130
6.3	Nature	of trips and travellers	131
	6.3.1	Characteristics of outbound travellers	131
	6.3.2	Purpose of travel	131
	6.3.3	Characteristics of trips	132
	6.3.4	Activities on leisure trips	133
	6.3.5	Travel information, planning and booking	133
6.4	The tra	vel trade	134
	6.4.1	Structure of the travel trade	134
	6.4.2	Online travel resources	134
	6.4.3	Marketing	135
	6.4.4	Key trends and prospects	136
Chapter 7	Bahrai	in	137
7.1	Countr	y profile	137
	7.1.1	Introduction to Bahrain	137
	7.1.2	Demographic characteristics	138
	7.1.3	Economic environment	139
	7.1.4	Regulatory environment and travel and tourism policy	142
	7.1.5	Transport and infrastructure	143
7.2		und travel	145
	7.2.1	Outbound trips	145
	7.2.2	International travel expenditure	146
	7.2.3	Outbound travel by region	146

	7.2.4	Destinations in the Middle East	146
	7.2.5	Destinations in Europe	146
	7.2.6	Destinations in Asia and the Pacific	147
	7.2.7	Destinations in the Americas	148
	7.2.8	Destinations in Africa	148
7.3	Nature	of trips and travellers	148
	7.3.1	Characteristics of outbound travellers	148
	7.3.2	Purpose of travel	149
	7.3.3	Characteristics of trips	149
	7.3.4	Activities on leisure trips	150
	7.3.5	Travel information, planning and booking	150
7.4	The trav	vel trade	151
	7.4.1	Structure of the travel trade	151
	7.4.2	Online travel resources	151
	7.4.3	Marketing	151
	7.4.4	Key trends and prospects	152
Part 2	Image	of Europe as a holiday destination in the GCC	155
	Backgr	round and objectives	157
Chapter 8	Intervie	ews with the travel trade	159
8.1	Profile a	and behaviour of international leisure travellers	159
8.2	Key driv	vers and barriers to holiday in Europe	161
8.3	Marketing of Europe to travellers		162
8.4	Trade activities in promoting Europe		164
8.5	Future travel trends		165
8.6	'Best prospect' customer segments for Europe		166
8.7	Case S	tudy: Value retail's approach to 'guest-centricity'	167
	8.7.1	Why is the guest experience important?	167
	8.7.2	How has The Bicester Village Shopping Collection become a pioneer	
		in hospitality?	167
	8.7.3	Why focus on Middle Eastern guests?	168
	8.7.4	How has The Bicester Village Shopping Collection refined its hospitality	
		offering for Middle Eastern guests?	168
	8.7.5	The perfect Middle Eastern customer journey	169
	8.7.6	Directly targeting Middle Eastern guests	170
	8.7.7	Increasing appeal even further	170
	8.7.8	Consistent growth in non-EU guests	171

Chapter 9	Online i	interviews with consumers	173
9.1	Motivations and barriers to holiday abroad		174
	9.1.1	General motivations to holiday abroad	174
	9.1.2	Motivations to holiday in Europe	174
	9.1.3	Barriers to holiday in Europe	177
9.2	Travel e	experience	178
	9.2.1	Travel frequency	178
	9.2.2	Travel destinations	179
	9.2.3	Purpose of travel	182
	9.2.4	Number of holiday trips	183
9.3	Travel b	ehaviour – Europe vs other world destinations	184
	9.3.1	Characteristics of most recent holiday trip to Europe	184
	9.3.2	Travel to other world destinations	193
9.4	Sources	s of information for holiday planning	200
9.5	Travel b	pooking	201
9.6	Travel s	pend	202
9.7	Future t	ravel	203
	9.7.1	Europe visit time frame	203
	9.7.2	European destinations likely to visit	204
	9.7.3	European destination likely to visit first	206
	9.7.4	Other world destinations likely to visit	209
9.8	Interest	in pan-European holiday experiences	209
Chapter 10	Focus	groups with consumers	211
10.1	Travel h	abits and behaviour	211
	10.1.1	Travel destinations	214
	10.1.2	Type of holidays and activities	215
	10.1.3	Travel organisation	216
	10.1.4	Booking lead time	217
10.2	Factors important in destination decision making		217
	10.2.1	Key influencers in travel-related decision making	218
10.3		o Europe – motivations and barriers	219
	10.3.1	Travel motivations	219
	10.3.2	Travel barriers	220
10.4		teristics of recent holiday abroad	221
	10.4.1	Holiday in Europe	221
	10.4.2	Holiday in other destinations	222
	10.4.3	Holiday activities	222
	10.4.4	Shopping	222
	10.4.5	Overall holiday experience	224

10.5	Perception of Europe versus other destination regions 10.5.1 Holiday associations with Europe	224 226
10.6	Image perceptions of individual European destinations	226
10.7	Future trip to Europe	230
10.8	Interest in pan-European holiday experiences	231
10.9	Perception of luxury travel	232
Chapter 11	Conclusions and recommendations	235
11.1	Current image and position of Europe as a destination brand	235
11.2	Marketing strengths and weaknesses of Europe as a destination brand	237
11.3	Recommendations for promoting Europe as a destination brand in the GCC 11.3.1 Family segment 11.3.2 Youth segment 11.3.3 Communication and PR activities to promote Europe in the GCC	239 239 240 240
Annexes		
Annex I	List of airport codes in Europe and the GCC	241
Annex II	Profile of travel agencies and tour operators	243
Annex III	Travel trade publications	251
Annex IV	List of travel trade organisations contacted for interviews	
Annex V	Bloggers and vloggers in the GCC	255
Annex VI	List of European Travel Commission Member Countries	257
	List of figures and tables	259
	References and bibliography	263

Executive summary

GCC outbound tourism has grown ten-fold since 1990, with international tourism departures estimated to have crossed the 40 million mark in 2015. International tourism expenditure has also risen exponentially to cross an estimated USD 60 billion in 2015.

Travel from the GCC to Europe has seen significant growth over the past several years. It was the ninth fastest growing long-haul source market for Europe over the period 2010 to 2015, recording 16% growth in tourist arrivals and over 3% increase in tourism expenditure. Its contribution in terms of overnights is much more significant, due to the high average length of stay.

Even with modest growth, in the five-year period 2015 to 2020, the GCC is expected to remain one of the top ten contributors to visits and nights growth for Europe.

Long-haul travel to international destinations, including Europe, from the GCC is led by its citizens, although non-nationals (expatriates) also travel overseas, including to Europe. The majority are in the age group of 18–54 years, more males than females.

Holiday travel tends to largely be family-oriented with younger and older family members also forming the multi-generational travel party.

Primary research conducted among GCC nationals reveals that the top five drivers to holiday in Europe are its scenic beauty and natural landscapes, good (cool) weather compared to the high temperatures in the GCC, diversity of cultural and historical attractions, diversity of holiday experiences and activities, and ease of accessibility.

Ease of multi-country travel with Schengen visa and shopping for high quality, luxury products are some of the other key motivations to holiday in Europe.

Among non-visitors to Europe, the top five barriers to holiday in Europe have been: lack of opportunity to visit, high cost of holiday, need for advance planning, perception of lack of availability of Halal food and difficulty in getting visa.

In terms of image perceptions, Europe is seen as an aspirational holiday destination, especially by potential first time visitors, who consider it to be a prestigious, world-class destination, with positive high status connotations.

Europe also attracts high repeat visitation, and the majority of visitors are satisfied with their visit and would highly recommend Europe to their friends and relatives.

Overall, Europe is well perceived for its natural beauty, diverse landscape, history, culture and good weather. It is well regarded as a destination that offers great diversity in holiday types and holiday experiences, and shopping for luxury fashion and designer brands. These are Europe's main marketing strengths.

Ease of accessibility, well-developed transport infrastructure and ease of multi-country travel are other perceived strengths of Europe among potential visitors from the GCC.

On the other hand, perceptions of lack of cultural affinity, safety and security concerns, fear of harassment, and high cost of holiday can be considered as Europe's main **marketing weaknesses**.

Lack of availability of Halal food and language issues (particularly in non-English speaking areas of Europe) are other potential negative aspects associated with holidaying in Europe.

The **key opportunities** for Europe lie in its strong appeal as a tourism brand that offers diversity in destinations, tourism products and holiday experiences, catering to the interests of different customer segments.

Increasingly, GCC travellers to Europe are a mix of solo travellers, group travellers, couples and families, although families are still the dominant travel group among GCC nationals. As a result, opportunities exist for promoting multi-destination holidays and Pan-European thematic holiday experiences that would appeal to different customer segments.

The **main threat** for Europe comes from the intensifying global competition from short/medium haul as well as long-haul destinations in Asia, Africa, Middle East and the Americas.

GCC destinations such as the United Arab Emirates (mainly Dubai and Abu Dhabi) and Saudi Arabia can themselves be considered as potential competitors for short holidays as they continue to invest in world-class tourism projects in a bid to encourage domestic and regional tourism.

Factors such as fluctuations in currency exchange rates, natural or man-made disasters, political instability and economic downturn could also have negative impacts on tourism flows to Europe (at least in the short term), if cost, access and safety and security of visitors is adversely affected.

Recommendations for promoting Europe as a destination brand in the GCC

It is recommended that European tourism should focus on promoting specific tourism products, Pan-European themes and destinations targeting the 'best prospect' customer segments in the GCC, namely the family segment and the youth segment (millennials).

Given that the European Travel Commission's marketing activity is principally focussed on promoting Europe through its visiteurope.com website and online social media channels, a number of e-marketing activities are proposed to reach the GCC consumers. These include:

- Create original content: blogposts, photos, videos to inspire the GCC traveller;
- Use Instagram to post inspiring imagery (nature, landscape);
- Activate and maintain presence on all key social media channels;
- Develop interactive digital maps, showcasing key attractions across Europe;

- Provide information on Halal gastronomy in Europe;
- Launch online campaigns/contests to create awareness and inspire travel to Europe;
- Use influencer marketing to promote tourism products and Pan-European themes;
- Use local bloggers to create original content in native language; and
- Harness user-generated content showcasing visitors' first-hand experiences in Europe.

In addition, partnerships with traditional travel agents, online travel agencies (OTAs), airlines and other travel trade organisations to promote multi-country tourism packages to Europe would be recommended.

Search engine marketing (Google) and social network advertising will further help generate high visibility for Destination Europe.