

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Outbound Travel Market

with Special Focus on Europe as a Tourism Destination



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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.

-
- 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.