

TOURISM BETWEEN THE EU AND GCC



SUMMARY



26
COUNTRIES
ONE VISA

The FIFA World Cup 2022 will make the Gulf region the world's destination in the upcoming year, as Qatar is hosting one of the biggest global events. The GCC countries have no harmonized strategies or treaties with each other to develop Gulf tourism as a whole. Tourism made Europe the world's first destination, due to the Schengen agreement that helps increasing tourism and economics. We recommend that the GCC countries sign an agreement to abolish internal borders to make travelling easier for tourists. Also, to promote their efforts to sign a Visa-waiver agreement with the EU. Moreover, create a common visa (Batota Visa) for visitors coming to GCC.



INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant factors while tourists choose their destination is the accessibility and the requirement for a visa. Visa restrictions hinder cross-border travel and deter any prospective visitors whilst liberal visa policies facilitate tourism travels. Therefore, one of the biggest achievements of the Schengen area is the free movement of people. Non-EU visitors view the Union as a single destination that requires one visa. GCC nationals require a Schengen visa for visiting Europe. One document provides an access to 26 countries offering a wide range of Europe's tourist attractions.

On the other hand, Europeans who visit the GCC need to get visas, move by a plan or wait for long times at borders to visit the five member states. These are serious disadvantages preventing other countries, rather than Qatar, from being a tourism hub during the World Cup 2022.

Put yourself in the position of a European visitor to the GCC: it is his\her first time to travel for the western region, excited to watch the World Cup matches for his\her favorite team. Additionally, he\she is curious to visit other GCC countries at the same time, but planning several trips is a complicated matter, with several applications should be arranged with hotel bookings and flight schedules. Many visitors prefer flexibility. But to get a visa, the passport might be surrendered for an uncertain period, several visas or procedures mean that the hassle is multiplied. Thus, the tourist would prefer going to Qatar for the World Cup's week and leaving the region without visiting any other GCC country.

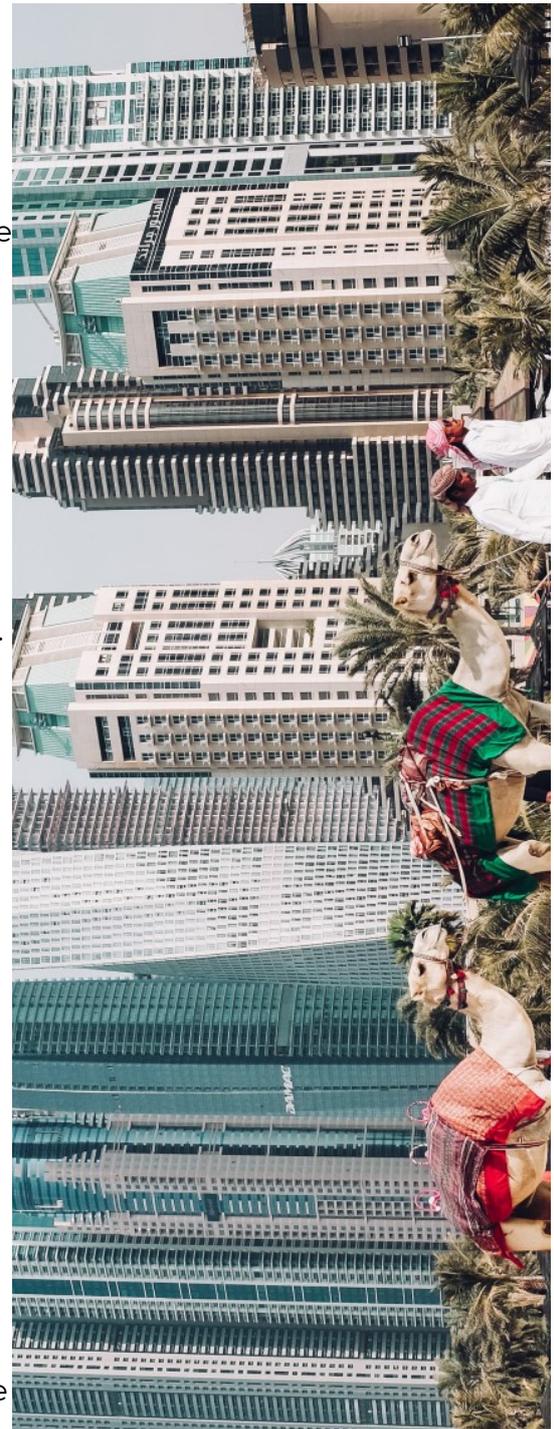


A nut with a hard shell and a soft interior

Gulf countries built many tourist attractions to promote tourism in the region, such as Dubai land, Dubai's Palm Islands, Durrat al-Bahrain, and many other projects. Additionally, Gulf states were the host countries for many leisure activities, exhibitions and conventions, adventure and sports events. The most incredible upcoming event is the World Cup 2022 that Qatar is going to host. The GCC countries ease their internal borders for GCC residents to move freely by car in the region, but not for tourists. GCC policymakers made some efforts to initiate intra-GCC tourism action plans in May 2015, aiming to build the Gulf's position as a cruise destination. These plans aim to ensure that all Gulf states benefit from international events that are taking place in the region, such as the Dubai Expo 2020 and the FIFA World Cup 2022.

The EU recorded the highest percentage of international tourist arrivals by 619 million arrivals (50% of the world's total). Tourism creates 10% of the EU GDP and 26 million job opportunities

On the other hand, Schengen area enjoys abolition of internal borders with no controls on people's movement, regardless of their nationality (Article 77 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). The ease of mobility and the absence of administrative delays at internal borders promote a positive impact on the economy of the EU states, especially in the tourism sector. Hence, GCC policymakers should apply intra-regional tourism policies that abolish their internal borders for tourists, so the tourists would view the five states as one destination.



The Schengen area has growth rates on economic and tourism sectors for EU countries. The Central and Eastern European countries are a good example of such growth. CEE countries (8 countries) were new members of the EU in 2004, they experienced increasing rates of international tourist arrivals after the accession (Figure 1), as it becomes easy for the tourists to visit these countries within the Schengen visa. This demonstrates how being a part of a collective visa is an attractive destination for tourists.

Country	Arrivals 2004 (million)	% change 2003/2004	% change 2002/2003
Czech Republic	6.0	19.4	10.9
Estonia	1.7	19.7	3.2
Hungary	12.2	NA	-1.0
Latvia	1.0	11.2	14.5
Lithuania	1.8	20.7	4.4
Poland	14.2	4.2	-1.9
Slovakia	1.4	1.0	-0.9
Slovenia	1.5	9.2	5.5
Total Europe	425.6	4.2	0.4

Source: ETC 2005; ETC 2006

FIGURE 1 INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS AND GROWTH IN THE EIGHT ACCESSION COUNTRIES

37 million
Gulf nationals travelled overseas IN 2013

Meanwhile, EU citizens made up to 4 trips on average for personal reasons in 2015, and one of the main Non-EU destinations was the United Arab Emirates. This is because the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the only Gulf state that signed a visa-free travel agreement with the EU. The agreement is eligible for a short stay visa for 90 days. Thus, the UAE nationals do not need Schengen visa nor EU citizens need a visa to visit the UAE. This waiver came under the Regulation (EU) 2018/1806 of the European Parliament and of the Council which listing the third countries whose nationals are exempt from possession of visas when crossing EU external borders.

The country	The visa requirement for EU nationals
Qatar	Visa free (90 days stay)
Saudi Arabia	E-visa (valid for two weeks, and costed around €150)
Bahrain	E-visa (costs approximately \$77)
Oman	Tourist visa (submit to the Diplomatic Mission or authorized visa application centers) (One month stay and costs approximately \$51)
UAE	Visa free (90 days in any 180-day period)

AS SHOWN IN THE TABLE, EU CITIZENS ENJOY SOME SMOOTH PROCEDURES FOR VISITING THE GCC COUNTRIES, BUT EU NATIONALS STILL NEED ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS, AND THEY CANNOT MOVE FREELY ACROSS THE INTERNAL BORDERS OF THE GULF STATES, WHICH MAY PREVENT THE WORLD CUP VISITORS FROM TAKING A TOUR IN THE REGION.

In addition, all GCC nationals (except UAE) need a Schengen visa to visit EU countries. Schengen visa costs about 60 Euros for GCC nationals for a short stay visa (90 days). Gulf nationals have to apply for EU State's embassy or consulate. Moreover, all first-time visa applicants need to go in-person for fingerprints taking. In some individual cases, an interview is required in the process of examination of the application. This long process might deter GCC nationals from choosing the EU as their favourite destination. All GCC countries show their desire to benefit from the visa waiver for their citizen and to comply with all needed measures to be eligible for the waiver under Regulation (EU) 2018/1806, while the European Commission does not make any decision, but it stated that the commission is going to examine the GCC countries requests under the visa regulation criteria.

A study had investigated the causal relationship between tourism development and economic growth in GCC countries as a whole and individually for the period of 1995–2012. The results showed that:

- GCC countries ,as a whole, have one-way Granger causality, from economic growth to tourism growth, at the 1% level.
- Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates follow the approach of economy-driven tourism growth, significant (1% and 5% significance level, respectively).
- For Bahrain, tourism positively affects economic growth (significant at the 10% level). This strong link lies in the Bahraini tourism policy that was adopted in the 1980s. Thus, Bahrain has become the regional hub for international leisure facilities. While no causal relationship between tourism and economic growth in Oman.
- The direct contribution of the tourism sector to the GDP of Gulf states is very small, between 1.5% for Kuwait till about 4.1% for UAE in 2015.



NEXT STEPS

Given the fact that GCC countries share a similar environment and cultures. GCC policymakers should enhance intra-GCC tourism policy based on comparative efforts, rather than competitive efforts, to promote GCC countries as a tourist destination and attract international tourists. The GCC member states shall:



01. Recommendation 1

- Sign an agreement within the GCC countries to abolish internal borders for EU tourists, at least during international events.

02. Recommendation 2

- Restrengthen their efforts to sign an agreement with the EU for Visa-waiver.

03. Recommendation 3

- Create a common visa for GCC visitors (Batota Visa), similar to the Schengen Visa or Recognize each others visa.

Conclusion:

The GCC is approaching a new phase as the FIFA World Cup 2022 is after a year from now. So, both EU and GCC countries have to find a solution to make travelling easier for tourists and residents to attend this global event in a safe environment through smooth and harmonized procedures. The policy recommended in this brief is the ideal solution for this issue.

References::

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This policy brief was written in the Jean Monnet course funded by Erasmus program and presented by EU DOHA course center.

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