

Dubai reopens doors to tourists after long shutdown

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DUBAI: With a "welcome" passport sticker and coronavirus tests on arrival, Dubai reopened its doors to international visitors Tuesday in the hope of reviving its tourism industry after a nearly four-month closure.

But businesses are mainly betting on those already living in the gleaming desert city to energise its ailing economy and serve as a test run before wary foreign holidaymakers return.

"A warm welcome to your second home," said the sticker applied to passports at Dubai airport, where employees wore hazmat suits and vending machines offered personal protective equipment.

Italian tourist Francesca Conte said on arrival she was worried up until the last minute that her flight would be canceled.

"When I saw passengers queueing at the gate, I thought today we are not leaving, since the trip to Dubai had already been skipped three times," Conte said.

She said she felt sad "seeing empty spaces" on the plane and stewards and hostesses "dressed like nurses and doctors," in their lab coats.

The reopening Tuesday came as the number of COVID-19 cases in the United Arab Emirates climbed to 52,600 included 326 deaths, with millions of foreign workers living in cramped accommodation particularly hard hit.

Incoming tourists are required to present a negative test result taken within four days of the flight. If not, they can take the test on arrival, but must self-isolate until they receive the all-clear.

Tourism has long been the lifeline of the glitzy Gulf emirate, one of the seven sheikhdoms that make up the UAE.

High season starts in October when the scorching heat of the Gulf summer starts to dissipate.

Dubai welcomed more than 16.7 million visitors last year, and before the pandemic crippled global travel, the aim had been to reach 20 million arrivals in 2020.

"We are ready to receive tourists while we take all necessary precautions," said Talal Al-Shanqiti of Dubai's General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs in a video message tweeted on Sunday.

With scant oil resources compared to its neighbors, Dubai has built the most diversified economy in the Gulf, boasting a reputation as a financial, commercial and tourism hub despite an economic downturn in recent years.

The city-state is known for its mega malls, high-end restaurants and five-star hotels and resorts.

But all have taken a severe hit during the coronavirus outbreak, and Dubai's GDP in the first quarter of 2020 contracted 3.5 percent following two years of modest growth.

Dubai-based airline Emirates, the largest in the Middle East, has been forced to slash its sprawling network and is believed to have laid off thousands of staff.

Before reopening to international tourists, authorities launched social media campaigns and deployed hundreds of social media “influencers” to tout Dubai’s attractions.

As the hospitality business works out how to create an environment that follows strict hygiene rules but is still worth the hassle for potential foreign clients, hotels are offering Dubai residents “staycation” and “daycation” deals to offset the slump.

Restarting hospitality by “primarily targeting the domestic market is an important first step in our phased approach toward restoring normalcy in the tourism industry,” said Issam Kazim, CEO of the Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing.

And key to the effort are health and safety measures at hotels to “reassure guests and travelers that Dubai is one of the world’s safest destinations,” he said in a statement last month.

Boosting domestic tourism is also part of the strategy of the UAE’s other main destination, the oil-rich capital Abu Dhabi, which welcomed a record 11.35 million international visitors in 2019.

The UAE’s capital is home to top attractions including an F1 circuit and the Louvre Abu Dhabi museum, which in late June opened its doors to masked, gloved visitors after a 100-day closure.

But the emirate does not share Dubai’s enthusiasm about opening doors to foreign tourists just yet, although those with negative test results are now allowed to enter.

“Plans have changed and we are not expecting to have the same numbers of 2019 this year definitely. It would take another two to three years,” said Ali Al-Shaiba, executive director of tourism and marketing for the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism.

“As of today, I can say domestic tourism is what is in our plan. We believe domestic tourism is key now and we don’t see us opening for international travelers very soon,” he told AFP on Monday.



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[Iraqis mourn expert on armed groups killed by unknown gunmen](#)

Tue, 2020-07-07 18:17

BAGHDAD: Iraqi mourners and relatives on Tuesday carried the body of a respected analyst shot and killed the previous night in Baghdad after receiving threats from Iran-backed militias. Many Iraqis expressed their shock over the slaying.

Hisham Al-Hashimi, 47, was gunned down on Monday night outside his home in Baghdad's Zeyouneh neighborhood. His casket, draped in the Iraqi flag, was

taken to his family home before being driven to the burial site. Al-Hashimi, a leading expert on Daesh and other militant organization, was a regular fixture on Iraqi television and his expertise was often sought by government officials, journalists and researchers.

I cant believe it. A strikingly bright mind and a true gentleman, Hisham al-Hashimi, was assassinated today. A major loss and an unforgivable crime. RIP. pic.twitter.com/bK4SGcXAGW

– Fanar Haddad فنر الحداد (@fanarhaddad) [July 6, 2020](#)

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the killing, which comes weeks after he confided to close friends that he had received threats from militia groups. The slaying also coincides with a spate of rocket attacks targeting US interests that has been blamed on Iran-backed armed groups. Authorities launched a raid last week in Baghdad, in which they detained 14 members of the powerful Kataib Hezbollah group, suspected of orchestrating the attacks. All but one detainees were released days later. Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi said Iraqi security forces would “spare no effort” in pursuing Al-Hashimi’s killers.

Video shows how Iraqi Security Researcher Hisham al-Hashimi was assassinated after retiring home from a nearby TV studio. pic.twitter.com/CUVkFARd6x

– ZaidBenjamin (@ZaidBenjamin5) [July 6, 2020](#)

Hours after Al-Hashimi’s killing, authorities fired the top police officer for Zeyouneh and launched an investigation into his activities, according to an order from the prime minister’s office, seen by The Associated Press. Condemnations from Iraqi officials poured in as shock reverberated across the country at the news of Al-Hashimi’s killing.

Horrific video of the assassination today of [#Iraq](#) security expert Hisham al-Hashimi. Washington Post reports about threats al-Hashimi had received from [#Iran](#)-backed militia groups recently. 1/2 pic.twitter.com/nJFuSNXeio

– Jason Brodsky (@JasonMBrodsky) [July 6, 2020](#)

Nechirvan Barzani, president of the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq, said “authorities must find the perpetrators of this terror act and bring them to justice,” in a tweet on Tuesday.



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Iraqi analyst Hisham Al-Hashimi killed in Baghdad after pro-Iran militia threats
Iraq partially reopens Iran trade crossing

[Syrian, Russian airstrikes in Idlib amount to war crimes, as do extremist attacks – UN](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2020-07-07 12:00

GENEVA: Syrian and Russian planes have carried out deadly aerial strikes amounting to war crimes on schools, hospitals and markets in Idlib province, UN investigators said on Tuesday in a report that also condemned attacks by

extremist fighters.

They said that “indiscriminate bombardment” by pro-government forces, ahead of a March cease-fire brokered with Turkey, claimed hundreds of lives and forced nearly one million civilians to flee, which may amount to a crime against humanity.

The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria also accused Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), a extremist group that controls part of northwest Syria, of firing artillery into civilian areas “with no apparent legitimate military objective.”

Fighters from HTS, a group formerly known as Nusra Front, have tortured and executed detainees, it added.

“What is clear from the military campaign is that pro-government forces and UN-designated terrorists flagrantly violated the laws of war and the rights of Syrian civilians,” Paulo Pinheiro, chairman of the UN panel, said in a statement.

The report, covering Nov. 2019 until June 2020, was based on overflight data and witness testimony.

It examines 52 “emblematic attacks” in northwest Syria, including 47 attributed to the Russian-backed Syrian government.

Russian warplanes were solely implicated in a deadly March 5 strike on a poultry farm near Marat Misrin that sheltered displaced people and in three strikes next to a hospital damaged in the rebel-held town of Ariha on Jan. 29, the report said. Russia denies involvement in the latter attack, it said. The region is home to a mix of Islamist militant and opposition groups, many of which fled other parts of Syria as President Bashar Assad, with Russian backing, seized back territory from them.

“The Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that pro-government forces committed the war crimes of deliberately attacking medical personnel and facilities by conducting airstrikes,” it said.

Karen Koning AbuZayd, a panel member, said: “Women, men and children that we interviewed faced the ghastly choice of being bombarded or fleeing deeper into HTS-controlled areas where there are rampant abuses of human rights...

“The acts by HTS members amount to war crimes.”



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[Iraq partially reopens Iran trade crossing](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2020-07-07 11:29

BASRA: Iraq partially reopened its southern Shalamcheh border crossing with Iran on Tuesday after more than three months of closure to combat the spread of the new coronavirus, border officials said.

The crossing was being opened only for the trade of foodstuffs, allowing in some 500 trucks from Iran per week and would open every Wednesday and Sunday from now on, one of the officials said.

Iraq closed its international borders and provincial boundaries in March except for the delivery of essential goods such as food as it sought to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Iran, which shares a long border with Iraq, has been the epicenter of the virus in the Middle East but the spread has also accelerated in Iraq which is registering nearly 2,000 new cases every day. More than 2,500 people have died from COVID-19 in Iraq according to its health ministry.

Iran is one of Iraq's biggest trading partners. Both countries' economies are in crisis. Iran continues to suffer from US sanctions and Iraq is reeling from low prices of oil, which accounts for almost all its state revenue.



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Iraqi analyst Hisham Al-Hashimi killed in Baghdad after pro-Iran militia threats
Rocket targeting US embassy in Baghdad intercepted while Iraq condemns Turkish operations against state

Iran factory blast kills two

Tue, 2020-07-07 14:25

TEHRAN: Two people died and another three were injured Tuesday when an pre-dawn explosion rocked a factory south of Tehran, Iran's official IRNA agency reported, blaming human error.

The blast in "a completely industrial zone" of Baqershahr, 23 kilometers (14 miles) from the capital, was caused by "workers being negligent whilst filling oxygen tanks," it quoted the town's governor as saying.

"The explosion... was so powerful that the walls of the Saipapress factory nearby were also totally destroyed," Amin Babai said, without giving details on the function of the factory.

The incident took place inside the Oxijen factory at 3:03 AM local time (22.33 GMT Monday), an emergency services spokesperson told AFP, adding that all the casualties were male and that two of those wounded had been admitted to hospital.

Babai said that "firefighters had been on the scene" since shortly after the explosion and "prevented further fires and explosions."

It was the latest of a string of explosions to have hit the Tehran area and a key nuclear site in the past two weeks.

On July 1, a powerful explosion hit a health center in the upmarket northern Tehran neighborhood of Tajrish, killing 19 people and damaging nearby buildings.

The fire service blamed a fire that had set light to gas canisters.

It came days after a gas tank explosion near a military complex east of the capital, which authorities said caused no casualties.

Then last week, the country's atomic energy agency reported that an "accident" had damaged warehouses under construction at the Natanz nuclear site, some 250 kilometers (150 miles) south of Tehran.

The organization released a photo of a building apparently damaged by fire, with doors hanging off hinges after they appeared to have been blown outwards.

On Friday, Iran's Supreme National Security Council announced that the "cause of the accident" at Natanz had been "accurately determined."

It declined to give further details, citing security reasons.



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Iran's hard-line lawmakers move to summon Rouhani – TasnimIranian fishing fleet accused of illegally plundering Yemeni waters