



Emirates planes parked at Dubai's International Airport. (Dubai Airports)

# World-class infrastructure makes Dubai's airport busiest in the world

N.P. Krishna Kumar

## Dubai

Dubai International Airport has, for the fourth consecutive year, achieved the coveted status of being the world's busiest for international passengers with 88.2 million travellers in 2017, a figure that is expected to grow to 90.3 million in 2018.

In its nearly six decades of existence, Dubai International Airport (DXB) has witnessed average percentage growth in the double digits. Under the DXB Plus programme, the airport aims to raise its annual capacity to 118 million travellers by 2023.

This achievement is primarily a result of the United Arab Emirates' vision, which recognised aviation as one of the core sectors and key drivers of the economy. Dubai's location, which puts the city within a 4-hour flight of one-third of the world's population, world-class infrastructure and successful flagship carriers, such as Emirates and flydubai, with constantly expanding global networks create an aviation hub favoured by travellers globally.

Dubai airport is a hub for 90 international airlines connected to some 240 destinations across six continents. It has a capacity of 90 million passengers yearly and needs to expand to accommodate growth. The DXB Plus programme will focus on using process improvements and technology, along with data management, to boost

capacity and service when there is no room to expand the airport physically.

The first initiative under the programme was the introduction last year of a facility that enabled the use of Emirates IDs at 120 smart gates, reducing immigration time to a few seconds for many travellers.

Another DXB Plus initiative was a sophisticated motion sensor system that tracks queues across all touch points in real time, allowing staff members to identify bottlenecks and deploy resources quickly.

The record traffic figures do not come as a surprise for Premjit Bangara, general manager for travel at Dubai-based Sharaf Travel Services. "Dubai has one of the most modern airports in the world and they have wisely invested in developing infrastructure aligned to their year-on-year growth," Bangara said.

"The addition of new terminals and cutting-edge airport technology has been a result of meticulous planning to cater to their growth. In addition to this, the government of Dubai has created a support system to promote tourism with massive investments in hotels and resorts along with theme parks and various other attractions that make Dubai a top-notch destination for tourists worldwide."

Bangara cited the "excellent connectivity on both eastbound and westbound destinations" of Dubai-based Emirates and flydubai that have contributed to the dominance of Dubai with the large fleet of Airbus A380 Superjumbo and Boeing 777 jets. "All their passengers can



People walk at Dubai's International Airport. (AFP)

avail of free stopovers in Dubai with access to a range of quality hotels, too," he said.

Saj Ahmad, chief analyst of London-based StrategicAero Research, argued that the key to growth has been the city of Dubai itself.

### ● Dubai airport is a hub for 90 international airlines connected to some 240 destinations across six continents.

"The city boasts plenty to do for those wanting to travel to Dubai and the airport itself is a mini-state within a state, comprising immense facilities, retail and rest areas for those who are transiting the UAE," he said. "It literally has something for everyone and, despite the airport being ever-busy,

flights are rarely delayed and it is far better to fly to and through this hub with zero stress versus the bottlenecks and panic at places like Heathrow."

Ahmad attributed the rise in the number of passengers to "an element of the 'Dubai-allure'" and because key airlines such as Emirates and flydubai, the biggest two operators at the airport, have forged air links where none previously existed. "So this demand development and route proliferation has also added to the throughput of passengers into Dubai International," he said.

"The additional aeroplanes for Emirates and for flydubai will not only allow both carriers to replace some of their earliest aeroplanes in the fleet but the majority of what they've ordered is also going to be used for new markets and opening up routes. It's not hard to see that both will continue to pull in passengers to and through Dubai, thus propelling the airport to new heights," Ahmad said.

About the 2018 forecast of more than 90 million passengers, he said, "some may argue that this is a slowdown – on the contrary."

"Growth is not infinite and Dubai has worked hard to get the airport as efficient as it can be. The dual runway works undertaken a few years ago has unlocked the potential to handle more flights but it's the terminals that need physical growth to cater for all those customers. We may see Dubai Airports wanting to alleviate pressure on DXB by encouraging some airlines to shift over to Dubai World Central.

"Regardless, Dubai International will almost certainly breach the 90 million-passenger mark this year and retain its title as the world's busiest international airport," said Ahmad.

N.P. Krishna Kumar is an Arab Weekly contributor in Dubai.



People waiting at Dubai's International Airport. (AFP)



## Agenda

### Bahrain: Through March 7

The Bahrain Fine Arts Exhibition is an annual event that celebrates art in Bahrain. Every year, the arts community gathers to present work through different media of expression. In its 44th edition, the exhibition is presenting a collection of local and international artists residing in Bahrain.

### Doha: Through April 25

Souq Waqif Spring Festival brings together street performers, puppet and musical shows, along with African circus performers, magicians and a range of slightly surreal one-off events, including a human cannonball and bungee jumping.

### Amman: Through May

As part of Friends of Jordan Festivals, Al Hussein Cultural Centre will host a Classical Concerts Cycle with acts from Japan, France, the Czech Republic and other countries.

### Dubai: Through June 30

"Amazing Dubai" is a musical that tells the story of Dubai as it grew from a small community of Bedouins and pearl divers to a modern metropolis. Performances will be at the Jumeirah Madinat Theatre.

### Beirut: February 13-March 21

Al Bustan International Festival of Music and the Performing Arts is a musical celebration in Beirut. With an emphasis on chamber music, the festival promotes music from all over the world and includes orchestral concerts, choral music, puppets, opera and dance.

### Tizi Ouzou: February 24-28

The National Amazigh Film Festival in Tizi Ouzou, Algeria, showcases full-length feature films, documentaries, shorts and animation that celebrate Amazigh culture.

### Luxor: March 16-22

The Luxor African Film Festival is an annual event in Egypt. In its seventh year, the festival will screen films produced in African countries in Long Narratives, Long Documentaries and Short Films categories.

### Zammour, Tunisia: March 17-20

The second Zammour Fest takes place in a Berber village in the Tunisian Sahara. Over four days and three nights, visitors camp in Bedouin tents, trek or bike in the village, visit mountains, attend folklore parties and enjoy traditional food.

### Gammarrh, Tunisia: April 5-15

The 13th Jazz à Carthage, an annual music festival, brings together renowned international and local musicians and fans to perform and attend concerts, lectures, exhibitions and nightly jam sessions.

**We welcome submissions of calendar items related to cultural events of interest to travellers in the Middle East and North Africa.**

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