

Travelport reveals global trends in flight bookings ahead of Hajj 2019

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Advanced flight bookings to airports around the holy city of Mecca ahead of this year's Hajj have increased from Asia, Europe and Oceania, according to research by Travelport, a leading technology company serving the global travel industry. According to an analysis, India (44,611) had the second highest number of bookings in the world, and the highest in Asia.

As part of its study, Travelport analyzed bookings made through all global distribution systems (GDS) to King Abdulaziz International Airport, Ta'if Regional Airport and Prince Mohammed Bin Abdulaziz International Airport, as of Tuesday 21 July 2019, arriving from Tuesday 9 July 2019 to Thursday 8 August 2019. The company then ran comparable data for last year's Hajj, so trends could be identified.

According to Travelport's analysis of available data, Asia recorded the greatest growth in flight bookings made through GDS to airports around Mecca this year in terms of volume, with bookings up by 11,284 (+5 per cent). On a country level, the greatest growth came from Bangladesh, with bookings up by +171 per cent (13,906). The South Asian country is one of five (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, Malaysia and Tunisia) benefiting from the Mecca Route initiative, a new service offering immigration pre-clearance for pilgrims at their points of embarkation.

Globally, Egypt recorded the greatest number of flight bookings through a GDS out of any country this year (49,477). The United Arab Emirates recorded the second highest rise in Asia and the Middle East, up 17 per cent (3,981); followed by Qatar, up 217 per cent (3,278), a country where pilgrims can now register for their Hajj using dedicated 'electronic gates'.

Damian Hickey, Global Vice President and Global Head of Air Travel Partners at Travelport, said, "There are many things that influence the decision to travel, especially when it comes to something as personal as performing the Hajj. For some, economic conditions and increased allocations from the government in Saudi Arabia could make this year the ideal time for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Others may be looking at their situation and thinking that it might be better to wait; this diversity of push and pull factors was certainly evident in the travel trends that we've seen around the globe."

Every year, in excess of one million people from all over the world fly into western Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj, making it one of the largest annual spikes in global air traffic. To manage numbers from overseas, Saudi Arabia sets quotas for countries based on their Muslim population. Local governments and licensed private travel companies then begin allocating places for citizens.

Hickey added, "In recent years we have seen an increase in efforts to introduce policies and technologies that make the Hajj, which has often been compared to hosting an Olympics Games each year, a more convenient experience for the global Islamic community. Our analysis suggests that these initiatives may well be having a tangible impact, which is encouraging from a technological standpoint."

Sandeep Dwivedi, Chief Operating Officer at InterGlobe Technology Quotient (ITQ) stated that, "The Hajj pilgrimage is a once in a lifetime custom of spiritual significance for the Islamic community of the world and we are delighted that the second-highest share of global bookings have been made on our platform from India, a nation that values culture and traditions. We are thankful to our customers for using our solutions & services, and our teams will continue to provide 24x7 support in their journey of growth."
