

UAE travel market to reach \$6.5b by 2030, online bookings gain ground

Online travel channels are expected to play an increasingly important role in the recovery of the United Arab Emirates' travel market, with online air bookings forecast to account for 52% of the market by 2030, according to new research presented at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2026.

The research by VIDEDEC, titled GCC & Egypt Travel Market Sizing & OTA Benchmarking Study, 2019–2030, forecasts that the UAE air market, based on bookings made at the local point of sale, will reach \$6.5 billion by 2030.

Online penetration is expected to rise from 42% in 2025 to 46% in 2026 and 52% by 2030, driven largely by digital booking channels and a recovery in corporate travel demand.

UAE airports handled about 160 million passengers in 2025, with low-cost carriers accounting for 35% of total traffic. Passenger volumes for low-cost carriers rose 81% from 31 million in 2019 to 56 million in 2025, while network carriers handled 103 million passengers, compared with 97 million in 2019.

VIDEC estimates that the UAE was the Middle East region's largest air market in gross booking value terms in 2025, worth about \$55 billion across local and global points of sale.

Virendra Jain, CEO and Co-Founder of VIDEDEC, said the UAE travel market began 2026 strongly but faced significant setbacks after the first two months of the year. He said full-service carrier capacity remained 15% to 25% below pre-war levels, while low-cost carriers were recovering faster.

Competition among online travel agencies (OTAs) is also intensifying. VIDEDEC said MakeMyTrip remained the leading UAE air OTA in 2026, while Trip.com had rapidly grown to become the second-largest air OTA. In hotel bookings, Booking.com and Agoda together accounted for about 70% of the market, according to the research.

The findings were discussed at ATM 2026 during a session titled The Future of OTAs in 30 Minutes, featuring senior executives from Wego, MakeMyTrip and Trip.com. The discussion focused on changing traveller expectations, technology, localisation, customer experience and digital payments.

The 33rd edition of Arabian Travel Market, held from September 14 to 17 at Dubai World Trade Centre, was organised under the theme "Travel 2040: Driving New Frontiers Through Innovation and Technology." The event brought together travel and tourism industry stakeholders to discuss emerging trends, partnerships and opportunities shaping the sector.