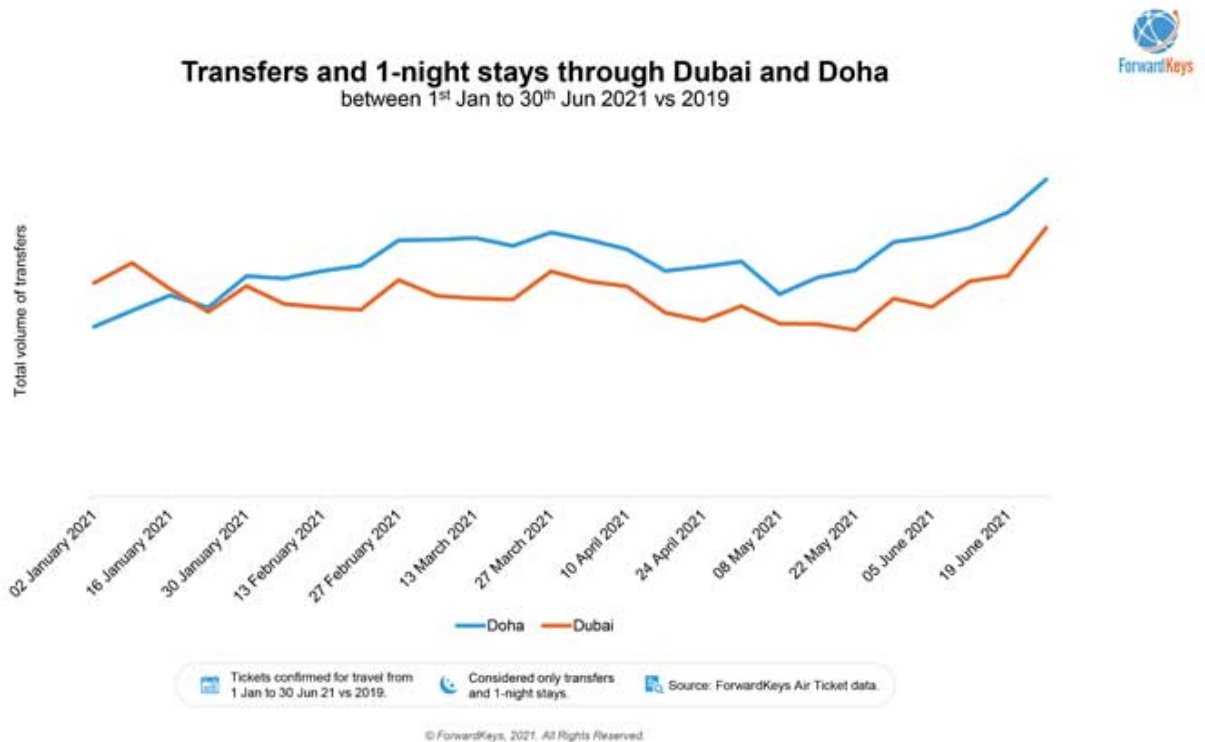


Doha overtakes Dubai as regional hub

Flight booking research company ForwardKeys has announced that from January 1 through June 30 of 2021, the volume of air tickets issued for travel through Doha was 18% higher than through Dubai. Current bookings for H2 2021 through Doha are 17% higher than through Dubai.



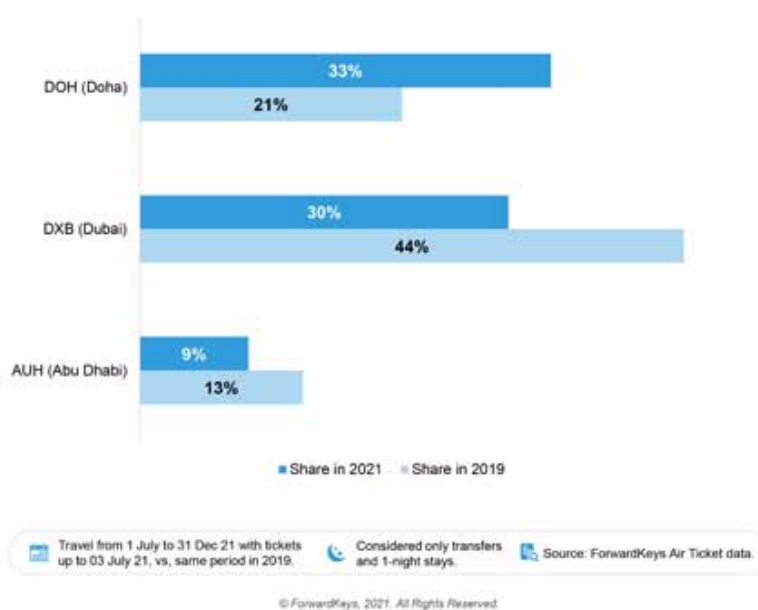
Driving the trend was mainly the lifting of the blockade of flights to and from Qatar, which had been imposed in June 2017 by Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who accused Qatar of sponsoring terrorism – an accusation strongly denied by Qatar.

Qatar Airways was immediately forced to drop 18 destinations from its network, and flights that were able to move through Doha were forced on longer routes to avoid the blockading countries' air space. The airport and its airline Qatar Airways responded by 24 new routes to utilise what would otherwise have been idle aircraft, but this did not make up for the losses.

In January of this year, five important routes — Cairo, Dammam, Dubai, Jeddah and Riyadh, to/from Doha — have been reopened and traffic on other routes has grown.

The Dammam to Doha route reached 30% of pre-blockade arrivals in the first half of 2017 and the Dubai to Doha route reached 21%.

Confirmed tickets for transfers in the main Middle East hubs for travel from 1st Jul to 31st Dec 2021 vs 2019

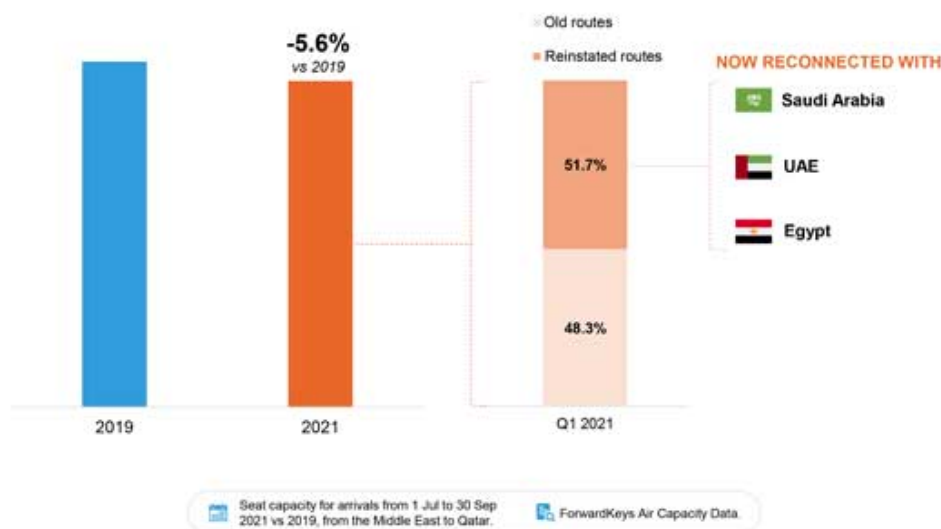


In addition, new connections with Seattle, San Francisco, and Abidjan, were established in December 2020, January 2021 and June 2021 respectively.

The existing routes showing strongest growth compared to pre-pandemic levels (H1 2021 vs H1 2019), by total number of passenger arriving in Qatar, are: Sao Paulo, up 137%, Kiev, up by 53%, Dhaka, up 29% and Stockholm, up 6.7%. There have also been notable increases in seat capacity between Doha and Johannesburg, up 25%, Male, up 21%, and Lahore up 19%.

For Q3 of 2021, seat capacity between Doha and its neighbours in the Middle East will be only 5.6% lower than pre-pandemic levels. Most of this capacity — 51.7% — is allocated to reinstated routes to/from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

International Seat Capacity from Middle East to Qatar, Q3 2021 vs. 2019



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One factor to give Qatar an edge over Dubai was its reaction to the pandemic, according to ForwardKeys. Many routes in and out of Doha remained operational even at the height of the pandemic, which was not the case for Dubai. The result was that Doha became a major hub for repatriation flights – most notably to Johannesburg and Montreal.

A market share comparison looking at the first half of 2021 against the first half of 2019, reveals that Doha has substantially improved its position against Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Currently, hub traffic is divided 33% Doha, 30% Dubai, 9% Abu Dhabi; previously, it was 21% Doha, 44% Dubai, 13% Abu Dhabi.

Olivier Ponti, VP Insights, ForwardKeys commented: “Without the blockade, which encouraged the establishment of new routes as a strategy to replace lost traffic, perhaps we would not have seen Doha charging past Dubai. So, it seems that the seeds of Doha’s relative success were, ironically, sown by the adverse actions of its neighbours. However, one needs to bear in mind that flights through the Middle East during H1 2021 were still 81% below pre-pandemic levels. So, as the recovery gathers pace, the picture could change significantly.”