

# Ramadan travel revives

The tradition of traveling at the end of Ramadan is making a significant revival this year, according to data from flight analyst ForwardKeys.

As of 13 April, outbound flight bookings from the Middle East for travel covering the last 10 days of the festival (22 April to 2 May) reached 64% or pre-pandemic levels, a 220% increase on travel during the equivalent period last year.

The outbound market set to recover most strongly is Bahrain, where booked departures are up to 90% of 2019 levels. It is followed by Jordan, 86%, the UAE, 84%, Qatar, 75% and Kuwait 68%.

Analysis of the outbound markets reveals that a major feature is expat workers traveling home. For example, the top destinations from the UAE are Pakistan and India and from Bahrain are the UAE, India and Bangladesh.

The stand-out destination for Middle Eastern holidaymakers is set to be the Maldives, ahead by 178% on 2019. Bookings for France, 2% ahead, Pakistan, 2% behind, Bangladesh, 3% behind and the UK, 3% behind, are all extremely healthy compared to the end of Ramadan last year.

The next best performing destinations are the UAE, 12% behind, Turkey and the Philippines, both 21% behind, Thailand 24% behind and Spain 26% behind.

Looking at bookings for the UK, which is traditionally one of the most popular tourist destinations during this period, there is a significant difference in interest from the various source markets. Flight bookings from the UAE, which is the largest, are just 2% behind 2019. Bookings from Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are 17% and 10% behind, respectively, whereas bookings from Kuwait and Egypt are 32% and 59% ahead, respectively.

## Trend to premium class travel

The recovery is also showing an interesting trend towards premium class travel. In 2019, 20% of departures from Kuwait to the UK were in first or business class; this year the proportion has risen to 29%.

VisitBritain CEO Patricia Yates said: "The Gulf is a very important tourism source market for us and one of our highest spending. We know there is pent-up demand for international travel, so it is encouraging to see the continued recovery for travel to the UK, including the robust appetite for premium class travel from Kuwait and Qatar."

France is looking particularly popular with visitors from Egypt, Kuwait and the UAE, where flight bookings are ahead of 2019 by 60%, 46% and 13%, respectively.

Olivier Ponti, Vice President Insights, ForwardKeys, concluded: "As COVID-19 travel restrictions are being removed, the world is starting to travel again; and that trend is well demonstrated by the return to traditional travel at the end of Ramadan. Throughout the pandemic, the Maldives has done exceptionally well at attracting visitors and the reputation it has created for itself is evidently paying off, most notably in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which together account for 83% of arrivals from the Middle East."