

# Gulf airports get busy with expansion plans, Saudi goes a step further with 20 new ones

GCC states have either completed airport expansion or starting – Saudi Arabia planning 20

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**Saudi Arabia will have a new airline and as many as 20 new airports, to keep all its travel and tourism ambitions flowing smoothly.**

Dubai: When it comes to new airports – or even expansion at existing ones – the Gulf is no mood to slow down. Saudi Arabia is en route to adding more, keeping in mind the unprecedented push the Kingdom is giving to travel and tourism. And keeping in mind the new airline that should soon hit the skies.

But airport build up will not be confined to Saudi Arabia alone, and what's being planned or already worked on should keep aviation authorities in the UAE and Qatar quite busy. According to Abdo Kardous, President for Middle East operations at the project management consultancy Hill International, busy enough for the next 10 years, at the least.

“The biggest development is planned in Saudi Arabia with more than 20 new airports, many of them greenfield,” said Kardous. “Since the majority of Middle East nations kept airports open during Covid, offering as many flights as possible, the Gulf became a hub between the East and the West, taking advantage of the connectivity the region provides to multiple destinations. “Also, the visa-free entry requirements in the GCC has helped to strengthen the region’s position as a hub for travel and as a destination for short vacations. Compared with the bottlenecks Europe’s major airports experienced this summer, it was relatively smooth in the GCC.



Abdo Kardous

“This will have a positive long-term impact to the GCC as travelers experienced first-hand the relative ease of transiting or transferring through the region, avoiding flight cancellations, airport capacity restrictions, travel disruptions and delays.”

More concourses, more terminals

**Here’s a project list of what’s happening within the airport in the region:**

- Abu Dhabi is operating with Terminal 3, but when the 750,000 square meter Midfield Terminal is operational, capacity will be greatly enhanced, the Hill International official said.
- Dubai is operating between Terminals, 1, 2 and 3 with two runways, while some flights are operating out of the Maktoum International Airport, which currently plans to have six runways.
- For the FIFA World Cup, Qatar has completed one of its planned expansions to Doha International Airport. Plans for Concourses D and E are under way.
- In Egypt, plans to build Terminal 4 at Cairo International Airport is advancing, There will also be construction of new regional airports that will connect travelers directly with tourist destinations along the Nile River.
- Plus, there is the Saudi rollout, focusing on connectivity to the new cities and tourist destinations taking shape.

Each of which would make perfect commercial sense. “Several airports are operating close to pre-Covid levels,” said Kardous. “Many regional travelers are opting as well to fly rather than use various land modes of transport, primarily due to cost considerations.

“The pandemic accelerated passengers’ acceptance of using technology at airports, sometimes in place of human interaction. Airport operators implemented touchless processes for check-in, and baggage handling, security, retail and other areas.

“Automation will only increase at airports, to streamlining the flow of passengers and goods through airports. Technology will also lead to more sustainable facilities, as smart airports will reduce use of natural resources.”

**EUROPE’S GOT A SPACE ISSUE**

The chaos that reigned at airports in Europe through summer should, ideally, have translated into building new, or refreshing existing ones. But Europe's running out of options.

"Europe has little room to expand existing or develop new airports," said Abdo Kardous of Hill International. "And with a strong growing demand for shipping, high-speed rail, an extensive rail corridor and highways, there are alternative options for travel."

The ground situation in the US is a whole lot different. "Major development programmes are planned or underway at JFK, Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, San Francisco, Austin, Houston and Atlanta," the official added.

"However, their aviation infrastructure sector is primarily focused on capital improvement projects, renovations and expansions to existing facilities."

India, China and Indonesia will experience growth for airports, given that free land is not an issue. "India has announced that they will build at least 100 greenfield airports, while China is considering nearly 400 additional airports," said Kardous. "Given its vast stretch of islands from east to west, Indonesia is also another potential investment destination."