

Ras Al Khaimah exceeds 2011 tourism target

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Visitors to Ras Al Khaimah exceeded the emirate's target of 800,000 during 2011, boosted by a surge of German tourists and hitting a new record for the UAE's most northern emirate. Figures from Ras Al Khaimah's Tourism Investment and Development Authority (TIDA) said some 835,200 holiday-makers visited the city last year, an increase of 40 percent, boosting tourism revenues by more than a third to AED400m (\$108m).

Most of the tourists came from Germany, the TIDA said, with a 200 percent growth in German visitors since 2010. Other key source markets included Russia, the United Kingdom, Italy, Austria and Switzerland. Hotel occupancy rates also grew 8.62 percent for beach resorts and 1.92 percent for city hotels. Revenue per Available Room (RevPar) soared 24.50 percent and 10.24 percent respectively.

"[These figures] have been achieved due to the joint cooperation of our travel partners both within Ras Al Khaimah and beyond," said Victor Louis, the COO of the Ras Al Khaimah TIDA. "With new attractions, hotels and resorts, as well as charter flights from European destinations, our goal of welcoming 1.2m visitors by 2013 and reaching the hotel room inventory of 10,000 rooms by 2016 is on track."

Ras Al Khaimah made several moves to boost its tourism industry and overall economy last year, establishing the Ras Al Khaimah TIDA in May and later the Ras Al Khaimah Hospitality Group to act as a management company for government hotels and leisure assets. The emirate, which has little oil wealth and whose GDP comprises 1.5 percent of the UAE's economy, currently relies on industries such as cement, pharmaceuticals and glass, which it is keen to diversify away from.

Authorities said last year they hoped to see tourism revenues account for 20 percent of the emirate's income by 2021 by positioning Ras Al Khaimah as a low-cost destination compared with its glitzy neighbour, Dubai. In a bid to quadruple the visitor count to RAK, they pledged to invest \$100m into hotel and tourism projects over four years, eyeing several new hotels as well as residential developments. In 2009, RAK also relaunched its flag carrier RAK Airways, with tickets priced as low as AED10 in the hopes of ramping up new guests. The airline especially targeted the budget, short-haul market, offering routes to India, Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

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