



Tourism Must Be Led as Economic Infrastructure to Drive Growth and Resilience, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Tourism Tells the World Economic Forum

Descrizione

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DAVOS, Switzerland, Jan. 24, 2026 /PRNewswire/ - At the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026 in Davos, His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb, Minister of Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, delivered a clear message to global leaders: tourism must be led as economic infrastructure if it is to drive growth, resilience, and human connection in an increasingly fragmented world.

Speaking during engagements at the World Economic Forum, the Minister emphasized that tourism should no longer be treated as a discretionary sector, but as a strategic system capable of supporting diversification, attracting long term investment, and creating inclusive employment across regions when planned and governed intentionally.

"With an estimated 2 billion international arrivals by 2030, the question for leaders is not whether tourism will grow, but whether it will scale responsibly," said His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb. "When tourism is designed as economic, social, and cultural infrastructure, it becomes a powerful engine for diversification, resilience, and long-term value, not simply movement across borders."

Drawing on Saudi Arabia's experience under Vision 2030, the Minister highlighted how tourism has become a cornerstone of the Kingdom's economic transformation. In 2025, the Kingdom recorded 30 million inbound visitors, with a target of 150 million by 2030. Saudi Arabia has is the world's largest single investor in tourism, with a pipeline of investment that covers destinations, aviation, digital platforms, and human capital. Tourism now contributes nearly 5% of the Kingdoms direct GDP and employs more than 1 million people.

He pointed to projects such as AlUla, Diriyah, and the Red Sea as examples of a master planned approach to destination development focused on safety, sustainability, governance, and quality of life. This model, he noted, has supported long term investment, strengthened investor confidence, and aligned tourism growth with community benefit and cultural protection.

During the World Economic Forum, His Excellency also highlighted “Beyond Tourism”, a multi sector initiative developed in collaboration with the World Economic Forum to elevate tourism from an industry discussion to a system-level leadership agenda. The initiative aims to align policy, capital, and innovation across sustainability, inclusion, resilience, and investment.

“Tourism remains undervalued in economic decision making,” said His Excellency. “Despite representing a USD 10 trillion global economy, it is still too often absent from infrastructure, trade, and industrial policy. Elevating tourism requires treating it as a productivity, resilience, and connectivity engine supported by coherent policy and data driven frameworks.”

Saudi Arabia also highlighted TOURISE, a global platform designed to move tourism from ambition to execution by convening governments, investors, and industry leaders to accelerate collaboration and delivery. Since its launch, TOURISE has convened nearly 10,000 leaders from more than 100 countries and helped catalyze over USD 113 billion in tourism related investment. The next global TOURISE gathering is scheduled for March 2027.

Globally, travel and tourism account for approximately 10% of global GDP and support more than 357 million jobs, making it one of the most inclusive sectors of the global economy. Beyond economics, the Minister noted that tourism continues to play an important role in fostering people-to-people exchange at a time of heightened geopolitical tension.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum, His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb highlighted Saudi Arabia’s role in utilizing tourism to help other countries around the world and not just themselves. He called on governments and global institutions to elevate tourism within economic and infrastructure policy, emphasizing its role in supporting growth, resilience, and international cooperation.

“One of our biggest challenges is not just looking at ourselves, but other countries and how we can help. There are 80% of other countries around the world that do not get enough tourists, particularly in places like Africa and Latin America. We want to strengthen relationships with these places to help them build their own tourism sectors and economies, for global benefit.

“In some of these instances tourism helps to sustain dialogue when formal channels are under strain. It builds understanding, trust, and connection. Led responsibly, it can act as a stabilizing force and a multiplier for peace globally.”

Throughout the week in Davos, Saudi Arabia’s delegation engaged in open, constructive dialogue with leaders from government, business, civil society, and academia to promote global stability and prosperity. Under the Kingdom’s role as a responsible and committed member of the international community, the delegation showcased how Saudi Vision 2030 has become a blueprint for transformative driving growth.

Saudi House also returned to Davos, following its establishment by the Ministry of Economy and Planning (MEP) in 2025. Across the week it hosted 20+ sessions, including 10+ WEF-accredited sessions, across six themes: Bold Vision, Insights for Impact, People & Human Capability, Quality of Life, Investment & Collaboration, and Welcoming the World. It also launched “NextOn”, a series of influential, educational, and inspiring talks from thought leaders.

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