

# **BUSINESS**

## **Eid Al Adha travel: Wellness, detox trips score high for UAE residents as Schengen visa delays continue**

Wellness packages cost anything between Dh3,000 to Dh8,000 per person

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**Treehouse-style accommodation at Keemala in Phuket.**

Image Credit: Supplied

Dubai: With Schengen visa delays continuing, UAE residents are breaking away from conventional holiday spots and picking offbeat destinations, especially those with a strong wellness, scenic and adventure element, for the upcoming Eid Al Adha travel break.

Consumer preferences include going for retreats offering a complete physical and digital detox, including 21-day yoga retreats, spa breaks, weight loss spas, nature hikes, and curated adventure trips. “Phuket (Thailand) and Bali (Indonesia) have some great options for serene nature retreats,” said Sapna Aidasani, Marketing Director at Pluto Travels. These holidays last for anything between a week to 21 days.

“Even though Europe is the No. 1 summer travel destination for UAE residents, they don’t want to face hassles in the travel and booking process this year. Now, they are prioritising wellness, holistic experiences with a retreat or adventure element,” she added.

“Travellers hope to form a habit, like practising yoga, or have a complete detox by the end of their trip. Retreat centres are in remote, scenic locations and are a rage for the upcoming Eid Al Adha holidays,” she said. According to the travel agent, wellness retreats are not to be confused with medical tourism as these trips allow travellers to enhance their overall well-being compared to being treated for a medical condition.

## **Untapped potential**

According to a study by the Global Wellness Institute, the wellness tourism sector has emerged as a prominent player in the worldwide tourism market. In 2022, it reached a valuation of \$815 billion, accounting for 18 per cent of the total market, and is expected to reach \$1.06 trillion by 2026.

Ingo Schweder, CEO of GOCO Hospitality, a consultancy that specialises in spa and wellness consulting, said: “Currently, clients from this region frequent the Far East, including Thailand and India predominantly, as well as Indonesia and Japan to a smaller extent, as the GCC is yet to build an integrated wellness resort.” He added: “Many GCC clients are also found between spring and fall across European wellness centres in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, UK and France, representing 8-15 per cent of the total guest share.”

## **What's driving consumers?**

According to Tatiana Veller, Managing Director of Stirling Hospitality Advisors, the ageing population, environmental crises, and lifestyle changes have made wellness the centre of consumer decision-making.

Wellness tourism offerings include meditation retreats, weight loss spas, classic yoga retreats (where travellers come back with a certification to teach yoga), writing retreats, a short spa break and music festivals, for example. They also include community-oriented charity events and spiritual retreats.

## **Big draw for budget travellers**

Retreat holidays are becoming a popular choice even among UAE's budget-conscious travellers, said some travel consultants. While high airfares and inflation have impacted lifestyles and spending for many middle class families, it hasn't put them off travelling.

“However, we have noticed that this does not discourage people from travelling. On the contrary, UAE residents look forward to spending a luxurious and anticipated holiday. This makes them willing to stretch their budgets for a holistic experience,” said Mouhamed Abdulkhalek, Managing Director of Akhom, a travel and tourism consultancy. He said: “People are looking for more authentic experiences to immerse themselves in a complete change of scenery.”

## **How much do they cost?**

According to dnata, wellness package inclusive of a stay, activities and treatments at Keemala, famous for its treehouse-style accommodation on a hillside in Phuket, costs Dh3,185 (per person), which includes holiday packages inclusive of three-night stays, five-star accommodation, airport transfers, meal plans and complimentary kids stays.

*Here is a cost breakdown of some popular wellness tours:*

- 10-day yoga and meditation tour in India - \$740
- Wellness yoga retreat in Bali - \$1189
- Sri Lanka Wellness Resort - \$3100
- Ayurveda Sri Lanka - \$1200
- Equador shaman and spiritual tour - \$1250

*Source: Tour Radar*