

Local

Kuwait travel sector 'unfazed' by Omicron, recovery to continue

Civilian flights are mostly operating normally from Kuwait as of now

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Kuwait's travel industry remains largely unfazed in the face of the new Omicron coronavirus variant and continues on its path to full recovery from the devastating effect of the pandemic that has paralyzed the world for almost two years, local industry experts said.

"There were some initial concerns and panic in the industry. We had some sudden cancellations of bookings as well. But concerns about the potential effect of the new variant lasted only for two days, and everything has become normal now," said Anasuddin Azeez, a travel professional working at a travel agency in downtown Kuwait.

The new variant ignited concerns around the world and triggered new travel bans after it was detected in South Africa. The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and the European Union announced almost immediate travel bans from South Africa and other southern African nations. Kuwait's government also warned citizens against non-essential travel and suspended direct flights from nine African countries following the detection of the variant.

"It was much ado about nothing. The fear over the 'dubious' Omicron variant was unwarranted. The virus may be fast-spreading, but we haven't heard any report of mortalities from the virus yet. We need to be cautious, but no need for panic," a travel executive told Kuwait Times on condition of anonymity.

Civilian flights are operating normally from Kuwait

as of now, barring a few cancellations to some African destinations. Kuwait Airways announced that it will regularly review its flight schedules in light of the emerging COVID-19 situation. It said passengers are required to check the status of their planned flights for the latest information before making their way to the

“ Fear over ‘dubious’ variant unwarranted ”

airport.

The local travel sector has begun to bounce back after a two-year long hiatus due to the global pandemic. According to unofficial estimates, recovery in the travel and tourism sector reached nearly 80 percent of pre-COVID levels as of Oct-Nov 2021. "The industry is in recovery mode. Not only the airline sector, but related sectors such as hospitality and service sectors are also witnessing a recovery. The recovery is also helping a considerable amount of job creation in the local market. I don't think this variant will have any



serious repercussions on the travel industry. We have overcome the worst," said Faizal Ahmad, another travel professional in Salmiya.

Many travel agents who spoke to Kuwait Times said people have overcome initial apprehensions about the new virus and are going ahead with their travel plans. Local airlines are reporting a spike in sales volumes. Hotel chains, resorts, function halls and restaurants across the country are also witnessing a noticeable spike in bookings and as the holiday season approaches the trend is expected to pick up, they said. The country's tour operators are also reporting a jump in bookings for holiday packages, leisure trips

and cruise ship reservations.

"It is interesting to note that a large number of citizens are opting for holiday packages from the new year onwards to destinations such as UAE, Georgia, Turkey and Spain. Some people may be postponing their travel for the time being, but nobody is cancelling their plans. Some prefer to travel in the new year as they want to see how the impact of new virus is going to evolve," said Thomas Abraham, an executive working with a travel and tourism company in Kuwait. "I don't think this new variant is going to dampen the holiday mood of the people and derail the travel industry's recovery momentum."

Gulf Bank concludes sponsorship of NUKS US conference

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has concluded its sponsorship of the conference of the National Union of Kuwaiti Students (NUKS) in the United States of America, which was launched last week as part of the bank's social sustainability program, which focuses on supporting Kuwaiti youth.

Gulf Bank participated in the conference, which was held in Chicago, from 25 to 28 November, in several activities for Kuwaiti expatriate students. The bank's participation included many entertainment sessions and activities for the stu-

dents present at the conference. The conference included raffle draws for cash prizes. One lucky winner, Ziad Alroumi, was awarded the grand prize of having his rent expenses covered by Gulf Bank for an entire year. Two lucky winners - Abbas Johar and Abdullah Althafiri - also received cash prizes worth \$5,000 and \$2,500. Commenting on Gulf Bank's sponsorship of this year's NUKS Conference, Mohammed Al-Qattan, General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, said: "We are delighted to have sponsored this year's NUKS conference, and to have got-

ten a chance to meet with our Kuwaiti students there. We are looking forward to welcoming them back home."

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental



levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the bank. The bank also

supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various relevant parties to achieve it.



High school students learn diplomacy at US embassy, UN office

KUWAIT: Five high school students spent the day at the US Embassy and the Office of the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator in Kuwait yesterday as winners of the US Embassy-sponsored Diplomat for a Day competition, held in collaboration with the UN.

The competition is part of a wider effort by the US Embassy and the UN to promote the next generation of global diplomats. Local high school students were challenged to upload one-minute videos on social media with the hashtag #Diplomat4aDayQ8 and present realistic solutions to some of the world's most pressing issues.

Yasmeen Al-Ghanim, Nora Al-Tuwajri, Lina Lee, Youssef Mokhtar, and Noor Salem were selected from over 50 shortlisted candidates with their videos on climate change, learning disabilities, and preventing illicit drug use, among others.

"The five talented winners were offered a window into the world of American diplomacy," US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L Romanowski said. "They spent the day shadowing US diplomats from different sections and attending in-depth briefings on key embassy functions like consular, political, economic, foreign commercial services, and public affairs."

After a tour of the embassy compound and discussions with working-level American diplomats, the students joined Ambassador Romanowski for a lunch at her residence alongside UN Resident Coordinator Dr Tarek El-Sheikh, representatives from Kuwait's Foreign Affairs Ministry, and officials from other inter-



national organizations. "We wanted the winners to experience how the business of diplomacy takes place in different settings and with bilateral and multi-lateral partners," Romanowski explained.

"2021 has been a momentous year for our two countries," the Ambassador added. "In February, we marked the 30th anniversary of Kuwait's liberation by a US-led international coalition, and last September we celebrated 60 years of US - Kuwait diplomatic ties. Highlighting the history of these milestones to a new generation of youth is central to our two countries' shared legacy and diplomatic relations."

"The #Diplomat4aDayQ8 competition is a great example of how young people can advocate for solutions to global challenges and contribute to sustainable development and the Common Agenda. The five winners were announced in celebration of World Children's Day on November 20 to highlight that children and young people are raising their voices on the issues that matter to their generation and calling for adults to create a better future for people, the planet, partnerships, peace, and prosperity," said Dr Tarek El-Sheikh, Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator to the State of Kuwait.

Following the lunch, Ambassador Romanowski and Dr Sheikh presented each winning student with a certificate. The students then ended the day with a tour of the UN House in Kuwait, where they were introduced to the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and its functions and met with UN agency representatives from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHABITAT, UNICEF, United Nations Volunteers (UNV), and the World Food Program (WFP).



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