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UAE's Abu Dhabi offers COVID vaccines to tourists

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The UAE has quietly launched vaccine tourism, with the emirate of Abu Dhabi offering visitors free jabs after approving the inoculation of all those with visas issued by its authorities.

Abu Dhabi has not officially announced that it is vaccinating tourists, but authorities in the emirate said in a brief statement earlier this month that free COVID-19 vaccines were approved for everyone with an "entry [visa]() ".

The UAE is made up of seven emirates including the capital Abu Dhabi and freewheeling Dubai.

Social media groups have lit up with enquiries as to how tourists could navigate the vaccination system, which was previously only open to UAE residents holding a locally issued identity card.

Now, however, Abu Dhabi's healthcare app has a facility for visitors to register either for the US-German Pfizer/BioNTech jab or the Chinese-made vaccine Sinopharm.

The app features two separate tabs—one for Emiratis and residents, and the other for visitors.

Visitors can book appointments using their passport information on the app, which states that those with an Abu Dhabi-issued visa or with passports "eligible for visa on arrival" can register to be vaccinated.

Proof of a visa or an entry stamp is required at the time of inoculation, it adds.

When contacted by AFP, the Abu Dhabi authorities did not provide further details on the initiative.

The Abu Dhabi Emergency, Crisis and Disasters Committee said in a June 11 statement that it had also approved the vaccination of those with expired entry visas or residency permits "for their safety and health, and in consideration of the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic".

The UAE has launched an energetic vaccination drive with some of the highest inoculation rates worldwide.

While life in the Gulf country has largely returned to normal, with restaurants and hotels open, it continues to enforce strict rules on wearing masks and social distancing.

Dubai was one of the first destinations to open its doors to travellers, allowing tourists into the emirate in July last year, just a few months after the coronavirus pandemic took hold.

Abu Dhabi, meanwhile, has been more cautious, opening up to visitors only in December.

The two cities are just 90 minutes away from each other via an express highway, but since the pandemic hit, visitors to Abu Dhabi must show a negative coronavirus test.

The UAE does not release COVID-19 figures for each individual emirate, but across the country it has so far recorded more than 613,993 cases, including 1,763 deaths.

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