

Our guide to...

great hotels for layovers in the GCC

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Whether you're on the starting side or tail end of a long flight – or caught in the in-between – when it comes to layovers, the main thing most of us are looking for in an airport hotel (or airport-adjacent hotel) is the ability to rest and recharge, before we have to jet off once again. Yet there are some that can be so much more than just a place to shower, eat, and catch some shut-eye. From hotels with runway views for outstanding plane-spotting to those with serene spas and lush pools, here are some picks for your next layover stay across the GCC.

DUBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT HOTEL

Described as a “five-star sanctuary located in the heart of the world’s busiest and most exciting airport”, this property – also known as Hotel DXB – is located airside in Terminal 3, with entrances from Concourses A, B, and C. This means if you’re transiting, you don’t need to pass through customs and immigration. It boasts a spa (complete with a relaxation pool, hydrotherapy spa bath, steam room, and sauna), a restaurant for premium dining, room service, and spacious and comfortable modern rooms. You can also access Duty Free shopping while staying here.

PREMIER INN DUBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Easily accessible through a free shuttle bus from Terminals 1 and 3 – that are just a 10-minute drive away – this cozy property serves up all of Premier Inn’s most beloved qualities, including its ability to feel like a home away from home. Plane-spotting enthusiasts will love the fact that many of its 281 rooms offer exclusive runway views, as does its rooftop swimming pool. The hotel also has a well-equipped

gym. The brand’s custom-made beds – known for their ability to support quality sleep – can also be found here, as can their famously good English Breakfast (alongside Arabic, Asian, and Indian options), and much-loved Mr. Toad’s Pub & Kitchen. The rooms have also just been beautifully refurbished.

LE MÉRIDIEN DUBAI HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTRE

This five-star hotel is a two-minute drive from Dubai International Airport, with 15 hectares of gardens, idyllic pools, an excellent and vast spa and fitness centre, various meeting and event venues, and a buzzing nightlife spot. It also offers a free shuttle service to and from the hotel and Terminals 1 and 3.

ALOFT DUBAI SOUTH

If you’re jetting in and out of Dubai’s Al Maktoum International Airport (DWC), the Aloft Dubai South – part of the Marriott Bonvoy network – isn’t just minutes away from flights – it’s also a hop and a skip away from attractions such as Dubai Parks and Resorts and Expo City Dubai. The hotel has an outdoor pool, a 24/7 fitness centre, a bar and a restaurant, a convenience store, a gift shop, and meeting rooms.

PREMIER INN ABU DHABI AIRPORT (BUSINESS PARK)

Also commonly known as the Abu Dhabi Airport Hotel, this comfy hotel from the British hotel chain is 6km away from Abu Dhabi’s Zayed International Airport, with a free shuttle service to Terminal A. It has three dining options – including a Costa Coffee and a modern sports bar-lounge – and is within easy reach of Yas Island and The National Aquarium.

ORYX AIRPORT HOTEL

Found within the passenger terminal of Doha’s Hamad

International Airport, this four-star 100-room transit-only hotel has spa services, a swimming pool, and other recreational facilities including squash courts, a swimming pool, and virtual golf. On the fourth floor is the Vitality Wellbeing and Fitness Centre, with complimentary access for hotel guests. Rooms can be booked for a maximum of 24 hours, and paid access to facilities is available to non-guests for a fee.

RADISSON HOTEL RIYADH AIRPORT

With 471 spacious rooms including family connecting options, plus duplexes and villas, it also has a fantastic spa, health clubs for men and women, and various dining choices – including an all-day option, casual café, and 24-hour room service. That’s not all: it has not just one but five (yes, five) pools, three of which are outdoors, with one heated option, and two indoor pools. This outstanding airport hotel also boasts 1,828 sqm of conference space for corporate and private events. It’s little wonder that it won the title of “Best Airport Hotel in the Middle East” at the *Business Traveller Middle East Awards 2024*. The property also has a kids club, and is pet-friendly – with a solid commitment to sustainability principles as well. It’s just 5km away from King Khalid International Airport, costing around SAR 50 for the five-minute taxi ride from the terminals.

AEROTEL JEDDAH

Found within the Departures Area of King Abdulaziz International Airport’s Terminal 1, guests have to clear a security checkpoint for transit passengers to get to the hotel, but do not need to clear arrival immigration – and are advised not to, since you will not be able to re-enter the restricted area without a valid onward boarding pass, which is subject to

the opening of the various airlines’ check-in counters. Once inside, you’ll find three considerably spacious room types with various pillow options, strong showers, and food and drinks at their Aerotel Lounge & Café on Level 2. There are also prayer rooms available. Online bookings can be made with pretty short notice, but must be done so at least one hour prior to your arrival at the hotel.

MÖVENPICK BAHRAIN

Just 10 minutes away from Manama’s city centre, and a two-minute walk from Bahrain International Airport, this five-star hotel has a stunning outdoor pool surrounded by acres of lush nature, three renowned food and beverage outlets (one of which has been described as having the best brunch in the country), alongside 106 newly-renovated rooms, including 10 suites.

NOVOTEL MUSCAT AIRPORT

This hotel is a 10-minute drive from Muscat International and close to Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre, making it an excellent pick for busy business and MICE travellers – plus anyone else who needs a convenient layover stay. The hotel itself has six meeting rooms and a ballroom, as well as four restaurants, a fully-equipped gym, an outdoor swimming pool, and a wet relaxation area with steam rooms. The 215 rooms are modern, spacious, and comfortable. **BT**

No time for an actual hotel stay? Catch some zzz’s on even the shortest layovers at the Sleep n Fly at Dubai International Airport T1 or Hamad International Airport Doha’s North Node, or make use of the Sleeping Pods at Jeddah’s JED airport.

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