

Bold Austrian pavilion at EXPO 2020 Dubai

The next major world's fair, with the theme "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future", will take place in Dubai from 20 October 2020 to 10 April 2021. In the roughly 170-year history of the world exhibition, this is the first one to be held in an Arab country. Some 200 countries and organisations will use Dubai as an arena to present their ideas on the subthemes of opportunity, mobility, and sustainability over an area of 4.4 km². Austria will be represented by a pavilion that sparks curiosity before the visitor even enters: Around 60 cones made from loam collectively constitute a truly grounded pavilion.

"Domestic jobs are created by the export success of our businesses. At the EXPO in Dubai, we will reach an audience of millions and will use this platform to showcase companies in the best possible way. With Austria's bold pavilion, we combine tradition and modernity and present the country as a location for innovation in the heart of Europe. The Austrian pavilions in Milan and Astana won several awards and attracted large crowds of visitors. Of course, we have this same aspiration in Dubai," emphasised Margarete Schramböck, Minister for Digital and Economic Affairs, at the presentation of the Austrian pavilion for EXPO 2020 Dubai together with Commissioner Beatrix Karl and Federal Economic Chamber President Harald Mahrer.

Most important economic partner on the Gulf and hub to Africa

Around 25 million visitors are expected at this world exhibition, 70% of whom are expected to come from abroad. For Austria, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the most important economic partner in the Middle East, ahead of Israel and Saudi Arabia. Last year, Austrian direct investments in the seven Emirates amounted to just under EUR 5 billion. The economic ties between the two countries, which are almost identical in terms of population and size, are becoming increasingly close: In the last two years alone, Austrian businesses invested nearly EUR 1.5 billion.

Austrian exports of goods to the UAE amounted to EUR 610 million in 2017, and imports totalled EUR 114 million. Due to oil price developments and geopolitical factors, the volume of foreign trade has declined recently but Dubai was nevertheless able to maintain its position as a hub. "For the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, EXPO participation has a clear objective," emphasised WKO President Harald Mahrer: "We expect a deepening of bilateral relations with the host country and a stronger positioning in the entire region. Together with our businesses, we want to penetrate the growth markets of the future - and the Gulf States are among these. Dubai is also an ideal starting point for tapping into the entire region including Africa. With the harbour and airport, the transport logistics are very well developed, and safety and quality of life are high, making Dubai the most important location in the UAE for subsidiaries of Austrian companies."

New markets for innovative technologies and organic food

The new export strategy currently being developed by the Federal Ministry of Economy will provide even better support in the future for companies looking to enter new markets. “This will also create new opportunities for Austrian companies to gain a foothold in the growth market of the Gulf region and safeguard the international strength of our economy - after all, every second job in Austria is dependent on exports,” said Minister Schramböck. In the high-tech sector, for example, the UAE offers interesting prospects for the Austrian economy. “Innovations in the construction and environmental sectors are in great demand, especially when they can reduce project and operating costs. The fields of security and cybersecurity also have interesting potential for hidden champions,” Mahrer underlined. Organic food is another attractive niche: The UAE imports nearly all of its food products. Products manufactured according to ecological standards are particularly suited to the increasing health awareness in a country replete with affluent consumers. The high proportion of expatriates also stimulates the demand for international goods.

Collection point for the brightest ideas from 200 nations

The UAE is a cosmopolitan country - people from more than 200 nations have made the country their home. Two thirds of the world’s population can reach the UAE’s five major airports in no more than eight hours by plane. The well-developed transport infrastructure is another advantage for the EXPO. In 2020, the UAE’s largest city will become an international stage for exhibiting new impetus and solutions for today’s global challenges. “While in the past, world exhibitions were an arena for presenting inventions and new technological developments, today they are a showcase for countries to present their best ideas and solutions. This makes the EXPO in Dubai a great opportunity to add fresh dimensions to Austria’s image abroad. We are well known for Mozart and Sissi, but we are also frontrunners in groundbreaking innovations that can enrich and simplify our lives in the future - and we will demonstrate that,” Commissioner Beatrix Karl stressed.

Climate revolution from the ground up

A budget of EUR 16.48 million is available to fund Austria’s participation, 75% of which is provided by the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs and 25% by the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber. The project was announced as part of an EU-wide open realisation competition. In a two-stage process, a highly qualified jury selected the “in dialogue with austria” project by querkraft as the winner. In a country that is committed to excellence like no other, the interdisciplinary group developed a pavilion that harnesses the power of nature to produce a resourceful climate concept while employing a paradigmatic architectural expression. “What makes the pavilion so exceptional is not that it sets a new record in height or some other superficial attribute. It is the magic of loam cones which, thanks to an intelligent concept, provide a pleasant room climate in a completely natural way and create a haven of tranquillity at the EXPO mega-event - magic that is absolute reality,” explained Karl.

Mudineers: Pioneers for unearthing the intelligence of the soil

Loam, the oldest and simplest building material in the world, is an essential component of the pavilion, which achieves something extraordinary with very little: a building complex that appeals to the senses and is so intelligently constructed that it can do without artificial air conditioning.

A fresh breeze instead of heat build-up

Overall, the concept of the pavilion underlines the fact that Austria is synonymous with a highly developed, economical use of resources. Because of this Austrian core competence, the Austrian pavilion consumes 75% less energy than the average building in Dubai. How is this possible? The intelligent arrangement of the cones is the key factor. It allows natural air convection to be used for cooling. The air in the wind towers is exchanged 15 times in the space of one hour. This provides a stable indoor climate that is 5-10°C below the temperature of the surrounding area. No compression cooling technology is necessary, despite outside temperatures that reach 25-30°C during the day even in winter. This will save 50,000 kWh of electrical energy over the entire course of the EXPO.

Viennese coffee house culture, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage, makes an appearance in Dubai

At the same time, the presentation also has a delightful and profoundly Austrian appeal. The coffee house in the pavilion is intended to be a place of interaction, where Austrian hospitality and conviviality are celebrated. This is where the charm of bringing together different cultural traditions becomes evident. Coffee culture, which has its origins in Arabia, took on a special character all its own in Vienna, and now finds its way back again.

New visitors from the Gulf region for the tourism industry

A visit to the coffee house might also whet visitors' appetites for a trip to Austria. The pavilion as a whole has an important knock-on effect with respect to attracting tourists from the UAE and the other Gulf states. Visitor growth among this interesting, well funded target group is high, albeit seen from a low baseline. Typically, entire families travel together, with the summer months after Ramadan being the most important travel time. The most popular destinations in Austria are Vienna and the province of Salzburg. All in all, 380,000 people from the Gulf region vacationed in Austria last year. An average stay totals 3.4 days, usually in 4- or 5-star hotels.

Opportunity: Going boldly into the digital future

The substantive focus of the pavilion is on the EXPO subtheme of opportunity, which Austria has chosen from among the exhibition's three subthemes. While the Austrian exhibition does not provide any hasty answers, it explores how opportunities can emerge and poses forward-looking questions that facilitate innovation and creativity. In a light-hearted way, emotions and factual knowledge come together to form a coherent story, transforming the pavilion into an inspiring voyage of discovery that will leave a lasting positive impression. In a dialogue-based format, visitors can be a part of the ideas and visions of creative minds and change-makers from Austria. This reveals opportunities and potential while at the same time inspiring confidence. "Digitalisation and its associated issues often trigger uncertainty and even fear. Cultivating dialogue and fresh creative approaches - also in the field of education - is a positive way to counter this. That is why we want our pavilion to deliberately inspire people to explore the unknown," explained Minister Schramböck.

Another part of the exhibition is a separate "InnovationLab" dedicated to Austria's innovative strength. Temporary exhibitions, workshops, and installations enable topics to be explored in depth. Research institutes, businesses, and institutions will be given a platform to present their solutions.

Abu Dhabi: Recognition for dual education made in Austria

Education as a whole paves the road to joining the world's elite, as is repeatedly made clear at the WorldSkills Competition. At the last WorldSkills event in Abu Dhabi, young Austrian specialists clinched an impressive eleven medals. "We also want to use the EXPO in Dubai as a stage for our best-practice model of dual vocational training, which we now want to further develop into a triadic system by integrating digital skills. In addition, we are working specifically on a concept to integrate students from tourism schools in the service aspect of our pavilion. Young people are a core priority for us. We will place special emphasis on this important target group and foster their ability to actively confront the themes of the World Expo," Mahrer explained.

Perspectives and retrospective

At the last major world exhibition in Milan, 2.4 million people visited the Austrian pavilion and around 4,400 business contacts were established in the course of 172 events. The pavilion was equally well received by both the public and in professional circles and was honoured with numerous awards, such as a gold medal from the BIE, the office responsible for supervising the World Expo. Around 2.8 million visitors are anticipated at the Austrian pavilion in Dubai - which means that over one in ten guests at the EXPO are expected to attend the Austrian exhibition. The exhibition in the pavilion is primarily aimed at a family audience. At the same time, there will be a separate supporting programme with specific events focusing on business, youth, culture, and tourism.

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