

Canadians to be charged hefty fees for visas to enter UAE

Move follows refusal of more Emirates, Etihad flights to Canada

- By Derek Baldwin, Business Features Reporter
- Published: 00:00 December 30, 2010



Dubai: Relations continue to sour between the UAE and Canada regarding Ottawa's refusal to expand landing rights to Etihad and Emirates airlines as new UAE visa rules hit Canadian travellers in the wallet this weekend.

Canada's Conservative government is under fire from Liberal Opposition critics on home soil after the UAE Embassy in Ottawa announced new visa charges of up to C\$1,000 (Dh3,660) for Canadian visitors to the UAE.

Formerly free for Canadians, UAE visas must now be paid and applied for in writing to the UAE Embassy in Ottawa two weeks in advance of entering the UAE.

The new paid visas are mandatory effective January 2.

"The complete visa application needs to be sent to the UAE Embassy 15 working days before the departure date," the embassy said in its requirements, posted on Tuesday.

The UAE Embassy noted that a "short-term visa" will cost C\$250 and would be valid for 30 days, a long-term visa for three months would cost C\$500 and a six-month multiple-entry visa will set travellers back C\$1,000.

Radical departure

Requiring an approved UAE visa in advance of arrival is a radical departure from the time when Canadians were granted visas upon arrival at Dubai and Abu Dhabi international airports.

The new rules won't necessarily affect a large portion of the roughly 25,000 Canadians who live and work in the UAE because many already possess residence permits.

Damaging strong ties

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper is being accused of damaging formerly strong ties with an important Middle East ally by refusing additional landing rights for the UAE's two major airlines, Emirates and Etihad.

The airlines asked for more than the current six flights a week to Canada but were rejected.

In a previous statement, Abdullah Al Gafi, UAE Ambassador to Canada, said failure to reach a new agreement "undoubtedly affects the bilateral statement".

Al Gafi said the UAE was Canada's largest trading partner in the Middle East "with bilateral trade figures of over \$1.5 billion, of which 95 per cent is Canadian exports".

Ralph Goodale, Deputy Liberal Leader, attacked Harper's foreign policy in a Toronto Star news report yesterday, noting that taxpayers and the business community, not Conservative policymakers, would foot the bill for Canada's hardline stand.

"The cost of this is going right into the pocketbooks of individual Canadians and companies that make visits to and do business in the UAE," Goodale said.

"It's obvious that stupidity and incompetence extracts a cost, and it's a cost this is coming home to individual Canadians."

Liberal Foreign Affairs critic Bob Rae couldn't be reached for comment by Gulf News at his Canadian offices yesterday.

Support efforts

Rae, however, has been highly critical of Canada's decision not to open up its national airspace for more flights from the UAE.

Rae recently rebuked Harper when it was learned that the UAE ordered Canadian forces out of their Camp Mirage base near Dubai, an essential layover for Canadian supply flights to support efforts in Afghanistan.

The Canadian Embassy in Abu Dhabi couldn't be reached by Gulf News yesterday for comment.

NEW RULES

To apply for a visa to the UAE Embassy in Canada, multiple entry visas cost C\$1,000, valid for six months for up to 14 days for each visit. A long-term visa costs C\$500, valid for three months, which is not renewable. A short-term visa costs C\$250, valid for 30 days, and is not renewable.