

Press release: Alun Cairns: “Wales is on the fast track to new opportunities in the Gulf”

Wales is poised to tap straight into one of the world’s fastest growing economies with a new flight from Cardiff to Doha, the Secretary of State for Wales has said.

Alun Cairns spoke as he today (Sunday April 29th) began a two-day visit to the Kuwait and Qatar. The visit culminates with the Secretary of State joining the first direct flight from the Qatari capital to Cardiff on May 1, operated by national carrier Qatar Airways.

Mr Cairns is meeting Government Ministers from both Gulf states in a packed programme which starts in Kuwait before transferring to Qatar later today. He will also meet business people ranging from bank chief executives to the largest shareholder in luxury car maker Aston Martin and the head of Qatar’s biggest hospitality and hotel group.

The visit concludes with the Secretary of State boarding a Qatar Airways Airbus 350 – with wings made at the Airbus plant in North Wales – which will land at Cardiff Airport just before 1pm after a flight lasting 6 hours 50 mins. It will mark the first daily flight between the two cities.

Mr Cairns said:

Wales is on the fast track to new opportunities in the Gulf. The new flight from Cardiff to Doha plugs our entrepreneurs straight into one of the most dynamic economies in the Middle East, and an airport which offers a further 150 global destinations.

Qatar wants to diversify its economy away from oil and gas and branch out into healthcare, education, sporting events and other areas. This presents unparalleled opportunities as these are all growth areas for Wales – our financial services sector in Cardiff is one of the fastest growing outside of London, we have outstanding universities with global keen to take Qatari students, we have a world-renowned tourism sector and a proven ability to host international sports events.

The inaugural flight from Cardiff to Doha is the culmination of months of UK Government work both in public and behind the scenes. The Secretary of State for Wales discussed the ambition for a daily flight more than a year ago when he met Qatar Airways chief executive Akbar Al Baker at a UK investment summit.

The growing links between the two countries were underlined last September by the UK Government trade mission to Qatar, which concluded in a 20-minute display by the Red Arrows over Doha.

Mr Cairns added:

Wales is now intent on joining the Premier League of countries trading in the Gulf. Visitors arriving on the daily flight from Doha will get a warm welcome and a clear message – this is a country with open skies, and open for business.

Notes to editors:

- While in the Gulf, the Secretary of State is meeting Ministers responsible for commerce, the environment, education, financial services, Welsh business figures in the region and Qatari alumni of Welsh universities.
- The visit to Kuwait involves a meeting with financier Najeeb Al-Humaidhi, the largest shareholder in Aston Martin UK who also sits on the company's main board. The luxury car company is to produce its DBX car at St Athan in Wales.
- The flight is due to arrive at Cardiff Airport at 12.50 UK time
- Qatar is already big business for the UK. Last year, the Welsh economy exported more than £150 million worth of goods to Qatar. From manufacturing to our famous foodstuffs, Welsh products are being shipped in big quantities to Qatar.
- Qatar has already invested more than £35bn into the UK economy.

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