

How UK Companies are Eyeing Middle East Growth Through the Right Partners

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As global markets shift and geopolitical currents reshape investment priorities, UK firms are no longer just exploring the Middle East — they're investing in it as a strategic imperative. The region, particularly the UAE, is emerging not simply as a destination for expansion, but as a partner in shaping the next chapter of global growth. Adam Taylor, Director of Marketing at [International Free Zone Authority](#) (IFZA), explains more.

A Strategic Recalibration

The impact of post-Brexit uncertainty, increasing tariffs, and a fast-evolving geopolitical climate have led UK firms to search for stability and growth prospects outside their usual markets. High-net-worth individuals and businesses have been exploring new markets which offer stability, and economic growth.

The region, rich in capital, ambition, and undergoing rapid transformation, presents a compelling opportunity for British firms seeking growth, diversification, and innovation. As UK business seek new expansion opportunities beyond the traditional markets, the Middle East emerges as a focus point for forming strategic partnerships to unlock growth potential.

The Middle East – A Region in Transformation

According to PwC's 2025 TransAct Middle East [report](#), the region has shown remarkable resilience in mergers and acquisitions (M&A), with deal volumes declining only 4% in 2024 compared to a global drop of 17%.

Dubai, in particular, has solidified its status as a global trade and financial hub, underpinned by a pro-

business legal environment, world-class infrastructure, and strategic global connectivity. Initiatives like Dubai Economic Agenda (D33), which aims to double the size of the emirate's economy in the next decade – further illustrate the region's long-term vision and investment-readiness.

Moreover, the UAE continues to lead the Arab world in foreign direct investment inflows, reflecting strong investor confidence in its legal clarity, economic resilience, and investor-friendly climate.

Strategic moves and strengthening ties

The UK and Middle East share complementary strengths. Recent numbers reveal a significant uptick in UK-UAE trade activity. In the four quarters to the end of Q4 2024, total UK exports to United Arab Emirates amounted to £15.5 billion (an increase of 13.5% or £1.8 billion in current prices, compared to the four quarters to the end of Q4 2023). This positions the UAE as the UK's 18th-largest trading partner, accounting for 1.4 percent of total UK trade in the 12 months leading to Q1 2024, according to the [Observatory of Economic Complexity \(OEC\)](#).

The UK and the UAE are also actively pursuing economic diversification, a shared objective that has led to ongoing talks around a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Although the agreement has yet to be finalized, it reflects a strong mutual interest in deepening economic collaboration. Projections suggest that this partnership could raise bilateral trade to £25 billion (\$30.7 billion) by 2030, opening the door to greater investment opportunities, particularly in established sectors.

This is a strategic alliance built on complementary strengths. The UK brings deep expertise in finance, legal services, education, and innovation, while the Middle East offers capital, access to emerging markets, and an openness to transformation.

UK Firms Expanding Through Strategic Partnerships

Several UK based firms are entering Dubai through partnerships, drawn by the emirate's favourable regulatory and tax environment. St. James's Place (SJP), a British financial advice and wealth management company, is planning to increase its adviser team in Dubai from 43 to at least 55 by the end of 2025, indicating an increased attractiveness for financial businesses in the region. Likewise, Canaccord Wealth is set to commence operations in DIFC to cater to expanding British expatriate businesses and the wider Middle Eastern markets. The moves demonstrate the Middle East's openness to innovation.

Wealth Migration – A Quiet Catalyst

While trade agreements and business expansion make headlines, it's the silent but powerful flow of global wealth that may prove most transformative. Henley & Partners predict that Dubai will become the largest city worldwide for migrating millionaires amid a projected a global flux of over 142,000 HNWIs, which would be the greatest wave of wealth migration ever documented and is a clear signal of the UAE's status as a magnet for wealth, talent, and enterprise.

Driven by tax efficiency, political stability, quality of life, and business accessibility, this influx of HNWIs is quietly reshaping the region's economic and social infrastructure. For UK firms, this migration represents a shifting centre of gravity where influence, capital, and opportunity converge.

"Dubai intersects ambition, access and agility," said Adam Taylor, Director of Marketing at IFZA. "For UK

firms, expanding through IFZA is not just a gateway to the UAE – it's a launchpad into a region that is actively shaping the future of global business. With its unique blend of agility, access, and vast partner network, IFZA empowers companies to scale with purpose."

Looking ahead

Strategic partnerships are no longer optional – they are essential. For UK companies, the Middle East offers a platform for co-creating the future. If UK firms can find the right partnerships, they can extend their footprint and make a genuine contribution to the region's ambitious transformation.