

Impressive Middle Eastern Stands At World Travel Market

By: Karen Dabrowska

Middle Eastern and North African countries at this year's World Travel Market (WTM) held in London's Excel Centre in November, showcased their tourist attractions on elegant, spacious, impressive stands.



More than a third of the 400 exhibitors from the Middle East were from the UAE. This year, WTM celebrated its 30th year, which also reflected Dubai's 20th year participation.

Shaikh Sultan Bin Ahmad Al Qasimi, Chairman of the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism

Development Authority (SCTDA), led a delegation from Sharjah which included members representing various official institutions — Al Qasba Development Authority, Sharjah Airport Authority, Sharjah Airport Travel Agency, Radisson Blue Resort and Hotel, Coral Beach, and Orient Tours.

"The challenges faced by the tourism sector require us to combine our efforts and available resources to achieve our set goals. As such, all tourism-oriented institutions and establishments are working as a team to introduce Sharjah as a leading tourism destination," Shaikh Sultan said in a statement.

"Sharjah is a favourite destination among European tourists, with 33 per cent of the total tourist flow to the emirate

coming from Europe. This shows the significance of Sharjah's tourism products in the European market, as well as Sharjah's distinct place as a leading tourist destination in the world."

Mubarak Al Muhairi, director-general of the Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority said: "Overseas promotion is a key strategic business in our five-year plan 2008-2012 which looks to achieve 2.7 million hotel guests a year by 2012 - 1.25





Libyan stand

million more than the annual guest stay achieved last year. This managed approach to growth holds out substantial opportunity to the travel trade and hospitality investors who are looking to play a role in the advancement of Abu Dhabi into an internationally recognised business and leisure destination."

The UAE was very keen to promote its desert islands – an archipelago of eight natural islands consisting of Sir Banhi

Yas Island, the historical Dalma Island and the previously unexplored Discovery Islands – situated in the Arabian Gulf, approximately eight kilometres from Abu Dhabi's western coastline in the Al Gharbia region.

A few months after its opening the Tourism Development & Investment Company (TDIC) Desert Islands Resort and Spa located in Sir Bani Yas was already making international headlines. It was one of two

hotels in the region to be named among the world's 70 hottest hotels in the 2009 'Hot list' of Conte Naste Traveller Magazine. The opening of the 64 room boutique resort, managed by the award-winning Thai hospitality group Anantara, ensured that Desert Islands is firmly placed on the global tourism map.

A global first for the Gulf was announced at this year's WTM. Costa Deliziosa, the Italian company's new top of the range ship will be named in Dubai on

23rd February 2010. Costa Deliziosa, the 15th ship in the Costa's fleet, will be the first ever cruise ship to be named in an Arabian city.

The WTM was also used by Alternative Business Solutions to announce the official launch of www.visitpalestine.ps

– Palestine's newest online tourism guide. This was the third consecutive year that Palestine participated at the WTM. Tourism to Palestine has risen again. According to the





Syrian stand

Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2008 was a record breaking year with 1.4 million visitors and over 600,000 overnight stays.

Oman promoted its national airline Oman Air, which gave visitors to WTM an opportunity to experience some of the most luxurious seats ever offered by a commercial airline when it showcased its new First Class Mini Suite and Business Class Seat. Featuring a fully-flat bed within a pitch of 87 inches, a seat width of 25.5 inches,

electrically-operated backrest, leg rest and seat depth controls and an eight-point massage system Oman Air's First Class Mini Suite provides unparalleled levels of comfort and space.

Oman also promoted itself as a sporting tourism destination. It will be hosting next year's Asian Beach Games created by the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) as a platform to strengthen friendship amongst Asian nations including the GCC countries. A dedicated one

Abu Dhabi stand



and the preservation of cultural heritage.

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UTC is working on an eco-tourism strategy with the Yemen Tourism Promotion Board and the Ministry of Tourism and plans to open up the Socotra Islands to sustainable tourism. One-third of the archipelago's plant life is found nowhere else on the planet, hence the need for a responsible approach.

Satellite TV Al Masar conducted a number of interviews at WTM including an extensive discussion with publisher or Islamic Tourism Magazine, Mr Shakiry.

The World Travel Market's survey of trends in the tourist

industry commented that with an increasing young population living in the Middle East, travel and tourism operators are striving to identify innovative concepts that are in harmony with the region's culture. Exclusively female only accommodation is a recent trend, spearheaded in 2007 by a group of entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia which opened the first female-only hotel in the region. Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia represent key target markets for female-only concepts, where women account for almost half of the total population.

