

The vision of Dubai from a tourism expert

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During GIBTM, I had the chance to meet the chairman of The Vision, Mr. Ali Abu Monassar, who has a long and excellent history on tourism in Dubai and UAE and is a partner with Net Tours, which is one of the leading tour operators in Dubai.

ITM: Everybody is talking about the law business and drop in occupancy in hotel rooms in Dubai, but I heard you saying at the conference that the drop is very little. People, and in particular those who are involved in the travel and tourism industry, would like to know the correct picture from somebody working in the industry, receiving tourists, and involved in the meetings industry in Dubai and UAE for the past 25 years.

Ali Abu Monassar: Thank you very much for your interest in the GCC region. We are talking not only about Dubai, we are talking about UAE and GCC in general as well. We know that, unfortunately, the media generally has made a great campaign against Dubai or what is

happening in Dubai, and people thought that Dubai will drop the day after; it's not this. Dubai became a hub of a luxury and value for money, so we know very well that with the coming [of the] new 200 hotels investment [that] came in during the last 18 months, the occupancy in the historical hotels has to share the occupancy with the new hotels coming in. Actually [it] is not reducing the business, it's reducing the share of business, but the destination is full of tourists whom they are happy, because they have value for money. True, that prices went down, and we are very sorry for the hotel owners that their revenue have reduced a little bit, but it gave the possibility to create more availability; this has balance with

the meetings industry. Before two or three years [ago], it was not possible to find rooms and not affordable rates. Today, we have more availability, we have add[ed] value, [and] hotels are more flexible. We have a very good relationship with organizers, and semi organizers or conference organizers. We have add[ed] value today. The figures [of those] coming to Dubai has not reduced; 150 new hotels [are] to open in the coming 2 years.

We have developed Abu Dhabi; it was only political historical. Today [it] became a hub for sports, eco tourism, high-leisure tourism, for conferences. The GCC region also became a hub - Oman, Qatar, and other destinations in the Gulf. We are talking about a region which [does] not compete with each other but completes each other as combining two destinations in one trip, or two countries in one destination - [this] is the future trend for us to promote these destinations. We are very happy today that we have state-of-the-art infrastructure, hotels, venues, and collateral services where we gave to all clients in a cheap price to all our friends in the world and this

[was] acceptable.

ITM: You mentioned "completing not competing" - do you think that GCC Airlines, who flies around the world, is also completing and connecting the world to GCC countries and GCC countries with the world?

Ali Abu Monassar: Just I will give you two figures - 10 million to Abu Dhabi Airport last year and 46 million to Dubai Airport carrying from over the world - these [are] the airline figures. In addition to airports in the region like Doha, Sharjah, Bahrain, Oman, what we [are] saying [is] that this destination became a hub as [a] middle range between east and west. If you fly between Europe to Asia or Africa, or from North America to India or Malaysia, or from Middle East to Asia, or from Latin America etc., you have to pass by the gulf, we have Qatar Airways, Etihad, Emirates, Oman Air, Gulf Air, Saudi Airlines, and others, in addition to low-cost flights like Arabia, Gezira, Fly Dubai, and others. This is the region where it's happening. The respective and figures from MPI, Eca, and SITE indicate that the most development and the most growth in terms of figures and

values for money will be the Middle East. Why? Because it's undiscovered. Governments are investing huge investments to develop new concepts, new meetings infrastructure, venues, sport attractions, and other themes like [the] Louvre Museum will be hosted in Abu Dhabi. The new islands in Abu Dhabi, the islands for eco-tourism especially completing each other and the



unique in Dubai is different than in Abu Dhabi or in Oman or Saudi Arabia or Qatar, etc. Each country has unique attractions - a man who comes to this region, he can touch with [his] hands and see with his eyes the differences and enjoy the benefits and the excellent packages.

ITM: Can you tell us about your history in the tourism industry, and

what is your vision to the future as your company's name is "The Vision." Also your job in GIBTM as a ground handler was excellent - congratulations.

Ali Abu Monassar: I'm an old man who served tourism for 25 years. I started as a first person to create tourism in Dubai, and that was really [an] adventure. At that time there was no tourism. It was 1986, and [at] that time there was airlines but no tour operators to serve tourism, [no one] called tour operator. I had a vision, and that's why my company [is] called "The Vision," and I think I have been lucky enough to have all the rulers of UAE to have other visions who develop this kind of tourism, and I was matching and going parallel to develop the local and logistic

service. I'm lucky, and I'm happy, and I have serviced honestly not only UAE, but looking to combine all the regions. I'm [a] strong believer in the destination is one destination - the GCC and the Arab world, we are lucky that we have three civilizations, three religions in the world. We have the sun if we would like to have the sun, we have the sea, the

mountain, even we have created the snow. We have beautiful infrastructure, luxury services, but in the same time we are very open minded. We have 185 nationalities who live in harmony - they are doing their business, they are happy. I know that somebody [said] that over 90 percent are foreigners, but this doesn't matter. We believe that every person is a part of our history - it's a part of our energy and our future. My vision is to continue to service the meetings industry and leisure tourism, to service the industry by representing other destination who would like to grow in these destinations.

ITM: What tourist are you trying to attract to your destinations?

Ali Abu Monassar: [Historically], our clients are coming from Europe and Asia. For the last 15 years, we started to promote to more destinations - Qatar, Etihad, Emirates, and other airlines are reaching new destinations. We are looking [to] Asia as [a] future potential market; we are happy that in the new year, China had more than 45,000 tourists within five days of the Chinese New Year. We are looking for North America - yes, the trip is too long but with

the support from Emirates and other GCC airlines flying to North America [via] direct flights, these destinations [are] welcoming all guests from all [over] the world. Our focus today is the States, Latin America, and [the] Chinese market, as well as Russia. We have been, in last 10 years, a supplier for Russia. Today, we are targeting the corporate, events, and incentive [market]; normally it was small groups and FITs. The destination is prepared every day; we have a new venue and [a] new thing is coming; we are happy we are moving to bring some[thing] new, and we continue to invest money to invest in promotion.

eTN: This is a good news, Mr. Ali about Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and the GCC region. I wish you a good exhibition and good future for UAE and GCC countries. Do you want to add any message?

Ali Abu Monassar: Nothing; just to say, come to Dubai, come to Abu Dhabi, come to the region. Don't listen to news; this country is harmonious and safe; it welcomes anybody, and we will furnish the red carpet for you. Thanks very much.

ITM: Thank you so much.