

Middle East dynamics

MANY countries in the Middle East — notably the UAE's Dubai and Abu Dhabi, Oman, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain — are marketing themselves actively as MICE destinations. Dubai, for instance, sometimes has several regional or global conferences and exhibitions running in one week, while smaller meetings and conferences are held throughout the region. And the colourful differences of the Middle East, the many unique or difficult-to-otherwise-attain experiences provide the colourful and dramatic makings of an incentive reward that really stands out. MICE Asia-Pacific reporters filed these updates on hotels, services and events.

OMAN IS HIGHLIGHTING the appeal of its annual Khareef Festival as a drawcard for both general tourism and MICE. The festival, held every year in July/August, celebrates the cultural heritage of Oman. It also hosts a huge variety of other events including sports, music and shopping. It is named for the monsoon winds which sweep across the southern region of Dhofar from June to September. Moisture-laden breezes cool the blazing summer temperatures and turn the arid landscape into a lush, green oasis.

ARAB CONFERENCES COMPANY is the name of a new venture set up in Saudi Arabia with the aim of becoming a leading MICE planner and manager in the kingdom. Known as ARC for short, the company was introduced at a ceremony in Jeddah by Prince Abdulaziz bin Fahad bin Abdullah, deputy secretary-general for investment and marketing at the Supreme Commission for Tourism (pictured at the ceremony, second from left). ARC chairman Loay Hisham Nazer (on right in pic) said the company's creation "stemmed from a need to have a specialised conference organiser in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to match the increasing demand for professional conferences". Managing director Mohamed Al-Ayed (on left) said that ARC had "a profound and intrinsic belief in the potential and calibre of local capabilities" and was "committed to integrating our culture and heritage as an instrumental component of conference organisation".

AN EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP was held recently by the Dubai Convention Bureau to boost awareness of the emirate's MICE industry. The program included addresses by Sydney's Jon Hutchison and Melbourne's Garry Kingshott as well as MICE leaders from elsewhere in the world. Awadh Seghayer Al Ketbi, director of the DCB, explained that the workshop was organised "to give an opportunity to the participants to learn the key steps in building the international meetings business in Dubai and to make them understand the steps they need to take in working with DCB to build the Dubai brand as an international convention destination". Mohamed Khamis bin Hareb, director operations and marketing at the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, said that "the Dubai MICE sector is expected to soar in the near future".

A WORLD TRADE CENTRE is well under way in Bahrain, with completion scheduled for June 2006. Sited adjacent to the Sheraton, the 50-storey twin tower will be the tallest building in Bahrain. 43 storeys are being marketed to office tenants - DTZ is handling this. An existing mall is being extended as part of the complex and the Sheraton is to be completely refurbished. More information on the Bahrain World Trade Centre's new website: www.bahrainwtc.com

PARK HYATT DUBAI, set within the Dubai Creek Golf and Yacht Club on the



banks of Dubai Creek, is due to open soon. It is being presented as "the only luxury urban resort-style city centre hotel in the UAE". It has 225 guest rooms, each of a minimum 50 square metres plus an open terrace or balcony with views across the creek. Meetings facilities include a ballroom, four meeting rooms, executive boardroom, impressive pre-function area of over 300 square metres and intimate courtyards for social functions.

MOUTAMARAT has been created as a joint venture between Dubai Holding and the big Saudi Research and Publishing Company group to manage confer-

Middle East dynamics

From previous page.

ences and exhibitions in the Gulf region. “The companies decided to partner for the region in Dubai to build on the unrivalled value proposition of Dubai as a hub for business, travel and leisure,” said Dubai Holding chief executive Mohammed Al Gergawi. “Dubai is fast emerging as a hub for knowledge generation. We have always wanted to create a more structured approach towards bringing the latest in thought, leadership and knowledge. Moutamarat is the result.”

GRAND-DELUXE is the rating claimed by The Grosvenor House West Marina Beach, Dubai by Méréidien, the first hotel complex opened on the Dubai Marina. It has a long name - it’s already being abbreviated to Grosvenor House - and it’s a big property: 45 storeys, encompassing 217 sea-facing hotel rooms and suites, as well as 205 apartments of varying sizes. General manager Pam Wilby reckons that “the established five-star certification will not do justice to this project” and is positioning it as “grand-deluxe”. “The grand-deluxe denomination fits our vision perfectly,” she claimed, describing the venue as “a total lifestyle property”. The driving force behind the Grosvenor House complex is Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, chairman of Emirates and president of Dubai Civil Aviation.

BANYAN TREE GROUP has revealed wide-scale expansion plans for the Middle East and North Africa, starting with the launch of Angsana Spa and Health Club Dubai Marina. Other properties will join the brand soon or are under development in the UAE, Kuwait, Egypt and Morocco.

THE ARABIAN COURT HOTEL, newly opened, is set amidst ancient wind towers, souqs and abras (water taxis) in the Bastakiya, the last bastion of a bygone era in Dubai. With an intricate mashrabiya (screen) façade, the hotel blends seamlessly with the historic buildings around it. Its Bastakiya setting is also honoured by a restaurant of that name.

JUMEIRAH, the Dubai-based luxury hospitality group, has joined Dubai Holding. The move is aimed at giving Jumeirah the clout to carry through what Dubai Holding chief executive Mohammed Al Gergawi described as “ambitious expansion plans”. Jumeirah operates several major hotels as well as other ventures such as the Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management.

DUBAI TOWERS-DOHA, an 80-storey hotel and apartment

complex under construction in the capital city of Qatar, will be managed by Jumeirah. The venue, which will also feature an up-market shopping boulevard, is to be marketed as a MICE venue as Qatar bids for more MICE business.

DANAT RESORT JEBEL DHANNA resort is looking to build



MICE business. Located 240km west of Abu Dhabi city on the undeveloped west coast of the UAE, this five-star property (the first in that area), is presented as a “pure leisure” destination. That positioning is helped by 800 metres of unspoilt beach, landscaped gardens, health club and spa, a par-36 nine-hole sand golf course and driving range, pool and sports (including fishing and diving) facilities, plus access to Sir Bani Yas wildlife reserve and the deep dunes of the west coast. As well as its attributes suited to an incentive reward with a difference, Danat Resort Jebel Dhanna is also expected to be big for meetings and conferences. It is owned by the National Corporation of Tourism & Hotels, based in Abu Dhabi.

THE DANAT BRAND is likely to become increasingly familiar in the Middle East and North Africa. A division of Abu Dhabi’s National Corporation of Tourism & Hotels, it is actively seeking properties to manage and has long-term plans to expand further afield. Danat is the plural of Dana, a precious pearl.

THE FIRST HILTON HOTEL in Doha is to be funded by QNB, Qatar’s largest financial institution, and operated by New Doha Hotels which is controlled by Sheikh Khalid Bin Hamad Al Thani. Doha is growing in importance as a regional business centre, thanks partly to the ever-expanding reach of Qatar Airways which is based in the city.