

# Oman to brand itself more forcefully

By Kelvin King

Expect to hear more — a lot more — about Oman as a tourism destination, especially for meetings, conferences and incentive rewards and as a hub of information and communication technology.

The sultanate is setting out to brand itself more clearly and proactively to ensure the world identifies clearly what it has to offer, including trade and the supply of educational service, with Oman seeking to diversify as a non oil-based sustainable economy.

This builds on the tourism marketing work Oman has done in recent years, establishing its credentials as “The Essence of Arabia”.

The concept of a “tranquil, authentic Arabian tourism experience” is likely to be retained and further enhanced.

The branding is expected to include further development of MICE marketing, Oman having already successfully positioned itself as a MICE destination with a genuine difference.

The sultanate has been discussing the need for branding at various government and private sector levels, most effectively through a branding committee headed by Maqbool bin Ali Sultan who is both Minister of Commerce and Industry and chairman of OCIPED, the Oman Centre for Investment Promotion and Export Development.

This committee enjoys a high status. It includes members from the ministries of tourism, national economy, finance, information, transport and communications, as well as the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and OCIPED.

Now this has been taken a big step further. Maqbool recently signed a contract with Landor Associates, a global branding consultancy, to develop a branding strategy.

This will be in two stages, the first of which is scheduled to take about six months and will involve comprehensive study to identify the sultanate’s competitive advantages. The second phase will



see the strategy put into effect once approved by the government.

Maqbool said the project was “in line with a trend among states to showcase their competitive advantages by developing national brands”. He said that opening up markets and the competition resulting from globalisation made it imperative for governments to undertake the marketing of their national products and services.

Andrew Blakemore, based in Dubai as nation branding specialist for Landor Associates, said that the aim was “to create a long-lasting image of Oman in people’s minds. It is clearly a unique country and will have enormous appeal to

markets on a global scale”. However, he pointed out, “it needs to be promoted in a way that is consistent and sustainable.

“The key is to position Oman, over time, in a way that is relevant to many different audiences but is equally based on values that are true to the national identity.”

Blakemore noted that branding a country required a very different mindset to branding a product or a corporation, as well as a great deal of collaboration between many different stakeholders.

“The first part of the job is to do a great deal of listening.”

## Action Oman

An incentive program focused on Oman is almost spoilt for choice in activities with a difference, quite apart from the usual run of water sports, dining and musical entertainment. And a meeting in Oman is guaranteed to be memorable, thanks to the variety of venues — from five star hotels to historic forts — and the options for break-outs, themed meals, evening entertainment, and post-event tours.

Among the many possibilities are arranging for your group to attend a camel race meeting or bull fight.

Camel racing is well organised. Meetings are usually held over two days, with a series of races that are largely dictated by the racing camels’ ages.

Bull fights are much more informal and therefore not so easy to sort out in



advance. The good thing is that the bull doesn’t get hurt.

Other activities include:

- four wheel driving tours in the desert or along the coast
- dune bashing
- camel trekking
- dhow cruising
- diving pristine waters
- visits to World Heritage sites such as the ancient city of Zafar

## Music meet hits the right note in Muscal

THE International Conference on Trends and Future Perspectives in Arabic Music is to be held in Muscat from December 11 to 14. It is hosted by the Ministry of Information's Center for Traditional Music, in association with the International Music Council. As the name suggests, the event's aims are "to assess critical issues and to discuss future prospects in the study and promotion of Arabic music". Venue is the Sheraton Oman Hotel.

## More than meets the eye

OMAN presents a picturesque image of old forts, desert trails, camels and diving deserted islands. While that's one reality of Oman, so too is that of sophisticated lifestyles and cutting edge technology, especially in and around Muscat and in the southern coastal area of Salalah. Muscat, for instance, has several five and four star hotels, including the Sheraton Oman, Intercontinental, Grand Hyatt and Crowne Plaza.

## OMAN on the web

WHEN His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said began his quest just over 34 years ago to propel the then sleepy and backward country into a future of economic and social wellbeing, even that remarkably forward-looking man could have had little idea that Oman would do so well in information and communications technology.

Computers were then mostly clunky mainframes, their capabilities anticipated but not yet fully understood. The IT industry was only a concept awaiting development.

In keeping with Oman's IT status, the sultanate is heavily oriented towards online information and communications. This includes a variety of government and other websites which a MICE planner can readily tap into for a wealth of information.

One of the most useful sites is that of the Directorate General of Tourism ([www.omantourism.gov.om](http://www.omantourism.gov.om)) which not only outlines Oman's visitor attributes but also lists contact details for inbound tour operators and hotels.



Another "must use" is [www.omanet.om](http://www.omanet.om), the official site of the Ministry of Information. This offers a wealth of information - including such fascinating features as how a camel race meeting is organised and run (it's a complicated affair) - and also offers handy links to other sites.

Among other websites worth visiting are:

- [www.mocioman.gov.om](http://www.mocioman.gov.om)
- [www.moneoman.gov.om](http://www.moneoman.gov.om)
- [www.oman-air.com](http://www.oman-air.com)
- [www.omanobserver.com](http://www.omanobserver.com)
- [www.timesofoman.com](http://www.timesofoman.com)

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**Directorate General of Tourism, Sultanate of Oman**  
 Website: [www.omantourism.gov.om](http://www.omantourism.gov.om) Email: [info@omantourism.gov.om](mailto:info@omantourism.gov.om)

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