

Expecting a full house from MENA region

The Arabian Travel Market enters its 16th consecutive year under tough economic conditions, but it has exceeded expectations. NADÈGE NOBLET, ATM's regional account manager, MENA spoke to TTN's editor CHERYL MANDY

WHAT are you expecting for ATM this year?

Given the tough economic conditions, it has been one of our most challenging events to date. However both exhibitor sign up and visitor pre-registration have exceeded expectations with both being up on this time last year. What we are finding is that companies and governments are actively searching out events that offer high level business interaction and solid returns on investments.

More than 2,000 exhibitors and stand sharers representing 62 countries have signed up for the show, with more than 70 exhibitors making their debuts. Nearly 60 national tourist bodies will be represented, including new-to-market showings from the Philippines, Ecuador, Vietnam, Cambodia, Slovenia, San Marino, Romania and Nigeria.

We also have full house representation from all Middle East and north African countries. Where we are really looking at increasing is the number of quality visitors attending the show. And our hosted buyers will increase to 150 top international, first time participants for 2009 – up from 120 last year.

Will it be a bigger event than previous years or is the downturn taking its toll?

What we are looking for 2009 is to maintain the size of the show; however this is something we have been doing for the last couple of years, and it has little to do with the economic downturn. ATM is not just about seeing how many people we can get through the door, it is about being selective and making sure the right exhibitors and quality visitors are in attendance. We are trying to create an industry platform where business can be done, and if we keep growing the show without taking this core fundamental into account, then the value of Arabian Travel Market is compromised.

That aside, it would be naive of me to say that the economic slowdown has not had an effect on the show. We have seen some exhibitors reduce the size of their stands or even cancel. However, positively, we have seen a lot of new-to-market exhibitors commit this year, and this has balanced it out.

What is your target in terms of visitor numbers?

I would like to think we are on target to equal our 2008 figures, which saw 14,000 trade professionals come through the doors. However, again, it is about quality not quantity.

How many exhibitors from the Middle East region?

We already have more than 800 MENA exhibitors signed up with more expected. The UAE is leading MENA's charge at this year's event. We are also seeing strong delegations from Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, each boasting more than 60 exhibitors apiece, and other GCC countries' contingents all being led by their country NTOs. There has also been good representation from Levant based countries Lebanon.

Any highlights to look out for?

Careers Day - a programme designed to enable meetings between exhibitors and members of the general public with a keen interest to work within the industry or developing an existing career - will debut this year. The initiative is held under the patronage of the United Arab Emirates' Ministry of Education.

As well as face-to-face meetings with potential employers, visitors can attend specific career workshops and seminars hosted by established industry representatives.

How successful are your seminar programmes?

The feedback we have received over the last couple of years has been extremely positive, hence the reason that we have grown the programme year-on-year. This year's seminar programme is our largest to date with 18

session representing 25 speakers covering a wide-range of important industry topics such as the rise of spa tourism, maximising business opportunities in the growing Middle East cruise industry; the outlook for the Gulf's MICE industry and the future of air travel in the Middle East.

These free-of-charge sessions help create that dialogue which is essential to our recovery and will

ensure that attendees hopefully come away more in the know about the opportunities and possibilities available to them and their business.

And your key speakers?

We've got a great speaker line-up this year which includes airline decision makers, recruitment specialists, medical tourism experts and research authorities



which will be unveiling some hard hitting reports during their sessions. Sessions I am most looking forward to will be the

aviation led seminars. Also, Dr Prem Jagaysi, one of the leading medical tourism consultants, will be one to watch. ■



Noblet

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