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In response to feedback from last year's show, ATM 2008 will see a number of changes to ensure the event's success will continue for yet another 15 years

# New key objectives set for ATM 2008

ATM is back once again and is set to celebrate its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary in style.

Expected attendance figures for this year's event have rocketed once more, with more than 23,449 industry players from over 100 countries set to participate. In response to exhibitor feedback, and to ensure a successful 2008 edition, organiser Reed Travel Exhibitions (RTE), has introduced key changes to the 2008 show including a change of opening times – the event will open at 11.00am and close at 7.00pm – in a bid to avoid peak traffic hours. “Working to ensure exhibitor and visitor satisfaction is of the utmost importance for us,” said exhibition director, ATM, Simon Press.

This year, an improved floorplan will see hotel, travel and technology companies being flanked by Europe on one side and the Middle East on

the other, followed by North Africa, Africa, the Americas and Asia. “Following ATM 2007, we wanted to improve the visitor footprint throughout the show. For the 2008 event, we have decided to give Europe a main entrance and sandwich the hotels, car rental and technology area between the Middle East and Europe halls. By taking this action, the flow from Middle East through to Europe will be time effective for both visitors and exhibitors alike,” added Press.

“We have also grouped the UAE with the rest of the Middle East and North Africa so all the tourism products from the region are in one area, which will help visitors locate them easily.”

Covering a wide diversity of key industry trends and issues, ATM 2008's seminar programme is the largest to date with 14 sessions planned over the four day event. Attracting

many of the industry's heavyweights, the seminars, which will be staged on the show floor for the first time, will cover critical human resource issues in the region, groundbreaking medical tourism initiatives, recruitment and retention strategies in the Middle East's hotel industry, the future of travel agents and the development of online travel bookings and the role of the Internet and new web marketing techniques as the industry evolves.

“These seminars concentrate on crucial issues currently facing the regional and international travel and tourism industry. We have been in long-term talks with exhibitors and key decision makers to identify core trends and initiatives that will have a significant impact on the industry at large,” Press said.

With corporate social responsibility currently being a definitive catch-

phrase resounding through the industry, Middle East tour operators, travel agents, hotels and governmental bodies are being highly urged to accommodate the needs of the visually impaired tourism market, which currently represents an estimated 161 million people worldwide.

Founder, Traveleyes, Amar Latif is the latest addition to this year's seminar speaker line-up and will examine the potential of the visually-impaired travel market and how organisations can adopt best practice initiatives to meet the needs of blind travellers.

According to Latif, the world's first commercial international air tour operator to specialise in serving blind as well as sighted travellers, a key challenge facing the Middle East is the need to tailor holidays around features which will stimulate senses other than sight.

With industry figures predicting that by 2020 tourist numbers to the GCC will swell to 150 million a year, Latif believes an increasing number of visually impaired travellers will feature in arrivals if action is taken now. “As expectations of access, empowerment, and technology develop, more and more people with a visual disability are questioning old assumptions regarding their exclusion from experiences and activities that able bodied people take for granted,” said Latif.

“Access is opening on all sides and expectations of inclusion are, quite reasonably, increasing. This is essentially a niche market sector, with quality, appropriate features and attention to detail being crucial elements.”

Additionally, RTE is set to give the Just A Drop charity, a small non-profit organisation which saves the lives of

children by providing clean water close to their homes, an added boost this year. “I believe Just A Drop is a great cause. Not only is water a universal and basic need, fundamental to human life, but also the charity is highly efficient. Through ATM, we are giving exhibitors, visitors and the media an opportunity to give something meaningful to a worth initiative,” said Press.

The money raised by RTE, and its parent company, Reed Exhibitions, goes to building protected wells and other water-related projects in some of the most remote areas across the globe, assisted by The Scientific Exploration Society. “I cannot express in words what this means to Just a Drop and the thousands of children and their families across the world who will benefit from Reed's continuing support,” said founder, Just A Drop, Fiona Jeffery.

Amadeus Employees at the Amadeus Research & Development Centre, Sophia Antipolis, Nice, France

**20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

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# Merging the past and present

From the treasures of the Pharaohs to the diverse scenery of sea, mountains, deserts, lakes and oases, Egypt has become a pioneer on the frontier of tourism, reports **Christina Constantouris**

A total of 9.8 million visitors were received in Egypt during the 2007 fiscal year, marking a robust increase of 22 per cent over 2006 and thrusting Egypt back into a leading position on the global tourism map.

While Europe remained the largest tourist market for Egypt during this period, there was a significant expansion from the Eastern European market, as well as healthy results from Asian, Indian and Chinese markets. According to WTTC forecasts, Egypt's travel and tourism is expected to generate \$23 billion of economic activity, and real GDP growth for the travel and tourism economy is estimated to be 5.5 per cent.

"Tourism has become the fastest growing sector of the Egyptian economy and enjoys a dynamic level of support from the government and ministry of tourism. Egypt offers a special mystique and attraction due to its rich culture and history and has become a D4 Star performer and a D5 tourist destination as judged by the World Tourism Organisation.

"Egypt has proven politically stable, economically sound, progressive and investor-friendly for the past 20 years. It remains an attractive and safe place for investment, and offers good incentives for foreign direct investment," commented sales and marketing director, Sun International, GCC and Middle East, Brett Hoppe.

From a cultural angle, Egypt remains the leading destination with Wadi al-Hitan, otherwise known as the Whale Valley, being the first natural site on UNESCO's World Heritage List in the Arab World. Whale Valley, one of the most important sites in the world demonstrating one of the iconic changes that make up the record of Life on Earth, was inaugurated by the first lady of Egypt, Suzanne Mubarak in February, while the minister of environment has completed operations to develop the area into a unique open museum.

#### Functional and stylish

With a focus on the country's heritage and future, Port Ghalib, an integrated development

situated along the southern Red Sea coast, is a manifestation of a new and modern Egypt where tourists can discover the corals of the Red Sea and the shipwrecks of the high seas, while experiencing the wonders of Ancient Egypt.

"Port Ghalib is a major tourism development project. It is an international destination, a premier integrated resort community designed to achieve the functionality of Puerto Banus, the sense of adventure of Sun City, and the excitement and allure of St. Tropez, all set in architectural styles form Egypt's 7,000-year history. Port Ghalib will be a living, integrated community of distinction, activity and variety setting it apart from other resort communities in the region. It will offer a highly-animated town centre, extensive marine and sport facilities, and provide a world-class marina of distinction," said Hoppe.

With a total area of eight million m<sup>2</sup>, Port Ghalib comprises nine villages featuring 23 hotels, an international marina, an 18-hole golf course,

residential and luxury properties, retail and commercial outlets, entertainment facilities and an International Conference Centre (ICC).

The opening of Port Ghalib brings a new dimension to business tourism for Egypt as it is able to seat up to 1,500 guests in its ballroom, as well as accommodating a number of events simultaneously through its innovative design, sound-proofing and division. The ICC also offers a dignitary salon, a dining room and 18 meeting rooms fully-equipped with the latest state-of-the-art audio-visual technology. The main convention hall has fully-acoustic panelled walls and translation booths, which are discretely concealed behind curtain wall sections.

"Sun International has the experience to manage and co-ordinate state-of-the-art conferences. Whether it is a conference for 20 or 1,500 delegates or whether it requires hi-tech staging or unusual venues, Port Ghalib will offer the most extraordinary conference and incentive destination in the world," Hoppe

stated.

Meanwhile, the ICC offers a range of alternatives catering to small discreet breakaways or large international conferences. Incentives include creative themes such as the mysteries of the ocean, a sultry Arabian night or even bringing to life the golden ages of Egypt's heritage with visual displays of the pyramids and the Nile River Valley.

The ICC is internationally-recognised and has become an ideal venue for conventions, exhibitions and motor car launches, as it has hosted major events such as Chrysler Jeep Cherokee Launch. "The excellent layout of the resort and variety of facilities allowed Chrysler to effectively position their vehicles throughout the resort. There were jeeps in the lagoon, on the marina waterfront, at the entrance to the Palace Hotel. Almost everywhere you looked, there was a brand new Jeep Cherokee," Hoppe commented.

"Sun International has a great deal of expertise in the attraction and execution of major events, as we have previously host-

ed various extremely high profile events. It is our intention, given the suitability of Port Ghalib to host such events, to attract a number of very high-profile events to Port Ghalib in the near future. Obviously the multiplier effect of such large events has a drastic impact on the local economy in the short-term. However, the greater benefit, which is often very difficult to quantify, lies in the exposure the destination receives through the execution of such events, since this exposure often provides ongoing sustainability and profile resorts like Port Ghalib," added Hoppe.

In the very heart of the development, Port Ghalib offers an international marina and yacht club, which can accommodate up to 1,000 yachts of 50m length, allowing it to become an international yachting destination.

#### Nile experiences

Seen as a byword for luxury, relaxation and comfort, cruising in Egypt is flourishing. Sonesta Nile Cruises boasts the ability

to offer majestic sailing along the Nile River between Luxor and Aswan with comfort and luxury with any one of its five-star cruise ships.

Sonesta's fleet of Nile cruises comprises of *Sonesta Nile Goddess*, *Sonesta Sun Goddess*, *Sonesta Moon Goddess*, *Sonesta Star Goddess* and *St. George I*, all of which explore the landmark temples, tombs and ruins in the region. Each cruise ship offers guided excursions with Egyptologists unfolding 5,000 years of history followed by enthralling leisure activities.

*Sonesta Nile Goddess* has finished complete renovations on all cabins, suites, restaurants and public spaces and relaunched in February, 2008. The ship now features 49 standard cabins, four presidential suites with private terrace and four senator suites. All cabins contain wide panoramic windows, private direct-dial telephones, hairdryers, safety deposit boxes, music, individual climate control, wireless Internet access, plasma televisions, as well as full-size bathtubs.

The newly-rejuvenated *Sonesta Nile Goddess* was awarded a certificate of excellence from the American Bureau of Shipping and was classified as an A1 river service. Some of its upscale amenities redefining luxury include several restaurants and lounges, in-room dining available until midnight, elevator, purified water, outdoor BBQ, international telephone line, meeting room for up to 12 people with plasma TV and bar service, jogging track, outdoor swimming pool, spa and fully-equipped gym.

Sonesta Nile Cruises are part of the Sonesta Collection, a distinctive international collection of upscale hotels, resorts and cruise ships. As every property reflects the energy, style and spirit of its location, the Nile Cruises are formatted to discover Egypt's unbeatable historical and cultural activities while reaching new heights of individualised service and luxury.

#### Future investments

According to Business Monitor International, Egyptian tourism is flourishing with tourist nights increasing by 13 per cent,

amounting to 96.3 million nights over the 2007 fiscal year. Projections for 2010 placed visitor numbers in excess of 11.2 million, which paves the way for additional hotel accommodation to cater to the influx of guests.

Entering the Egyptian market for the first time, Louis Hotels' latest development underway on the coastline of Sharm el Sheikh is scheduled to open in November. Louis Tiran Sharm added a new construction phase to the development, adding features such as swim-up rooms, rooms with private pools, an extensive and unique designer spa centre and a club room with more sport facilities, raising the standard of luxury even higher.

The hotel will feature 342 rooms including five junior suites and four royal suites filled with delights and the option to order room massage. Being the first of the Louis Hotels to be built in a completely bespoke design, Louis Tiran Sharm will mark the beginning of a successful investment in Egypt offering the finest quality facilities.

Meanwhile, the luxurious Red Sea resort destination of Soma Bay is expanding its horizons with its newest inventory addition of The Breakers Diving and Surfing Lodge scheduled to open this summer. Designed to appeal to divers, windsurfers and kite surfers, The Breakers will offer quality and affordable lodging in one of the Red Sea's finest locations for water sports.

The hotel will feature 160 comfortable guest rooms equipped with all modern amenities, overlooking the house reef, the lagoon, the panoramic jetty and the open sea. In addition, the hotel will offer an array of options for relaxation such as a waterfront restaurant and bar, beachside BBQ's and outdoor events, sauna and heated swimming pool.

"The Breakers is really going to help put Soma Bay on the map for water sports. Here we have some of the best conditions for windsurfing, diving and kite surfing in the world. The opening of the Breakers means that Soma Bay's unique attributes will be more accessible than ever," said general manager, The Breakers, Stefan Reichl.

Kempinski, an established brand leader in the European market and a strong contender for Middle Eastern clientele, signed an agreement with local tourism developers Abu Soma Development Company, marking the managerial handover of the new Kempinski Hotel Soma Bay. Kempinski's newest hotel represents its first foray into the Egyptian hospitality market, which is likely to be followed quickly by a series of new upscale resorts through-

out the country.

The new Kempinski Hotel Soma Bay scheduled to open in August 2008 will feature 324 rooms with a private, natural sandy beach extending 400m along the seafront. Consequently, the hotel will offer access to excellent water sports and diving opportunities.

An inviting range of cuisines will be offered in the six restaurants at the new Kempinski Hotel Soma Bay as well as bar outlets, while an impressive landscaping of water-

falls, lagoons and pools will complement the resort along with four floodlit tennis courts and two squash courts.

Kempinski Hotel Soma Bay will offer a luxurious health club and spa with a state-of-the-art gymnasium and a full range of wellness treatments.

"Premium developments such as Soma Bay hold great appeal for the European and Middle Eastern tourist markets, who are currently the predominant visitors to Egypt and also

Kempinski's clientele, therefore it makes good business sense for Kempinski to align with these ambitious new projects," said senior vice president of sales and marketing, Kempinski, Juerg Siegenthaler.

"As a rule, Kempinski is very selective about the markets and properties we add to our portfolio and we have identified Egypt as a strong destination with great potential in terms of tourism growth and quality of the offering."

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