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DESTINATION

Winds of change have already been sweeping across the Northern Emirates, with a number of impressive developments underway

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ON LOCATION

With the world's third largest sporting event to be held this summer in co-host Switzerland, this year is expected to be another record-breaking year for the country's travel and tourism sector

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ANALYSIS

As the region's aviation sector continues to grow, the industry is preparing solutions to accommodate the rise in traffic while concurrently addressing environmental challenges

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Dubai is furthering efforts to maintain its status as a leading regional business hub

A logical choice for business tourism

BY CLAUDIO SAGHBINI

Projects with innovative concepts, a conducive investment-friendly climate, as well as a robust exhibitions and events sector, have collectively shaped Dubai as one of the most thriving destinations for business tourism.

Reaffirming the status of the emirate, the Society of Incentive and Travel Executives (SITE) in its recent report highlighted Dubai as one of the most popular destinations in the world for companies organising overseas meetings and incentive travel.

Dubai is seen as a logical choice for investors and businesses to set up operations as a major gateway to regions such as the Middle East, Africa, South and Central Asia. More than a quarter of Fortune 500 firms have made Dubai their regional base due to its infrastructure and business environment.

Rather than resting on its successes, Dubai's leadership capabilities are further augmenting the emirate's status as a regional business hub. With the Dubai Strategic Plan 2015,



Dubai is being cast as a model for economic diversification

unveiled in February 2007, ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum cast Dubai as a model for economic diversification for the region's oil-rich countries, emphasising on investment in non-oil and gas sectors. Tourism services, both direct and indirect, figured prominently in his plan, standing out as drivers in the emirate's economic development.

President, World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Jean-Claude

Baumgarten said: "Dubai has always been characterised as a place to trade and conduct business, a place where markets and merchants come together. This characteristic element gives Dubai the momentum to thrive while defining a new, modern emirate.

"Dubai's travel and tourism sector continues to grow at an impressive rate. Hundreds of thousands of business visitors and exhibitors increase the

Continued on page 2

Africa has sustained its above average tourism growth

African tourism recovery

In April, secretary-general, UNWTO, Francesco Frangialli visited Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya (in May) to underscore the organisation's support of their tourism potential.

According to Frangialli, these countries are now back on track to relaunch their tourism offerings and to start receiving international visitors under improved conditions.

Overall, Africa sustained its above average tourism growth with international arrivals increasing eight per cent in 2007, representing 44 million additional travellers, according to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer.

"These figures prove that tourism has the potential to foster sustainable development, and Africa as a whole is among the top growing regions. But many countries who have experienced less favourable developments in the recent past have now the opportunity to regain tourism strength," Frangialli said.

After the events that led to the suspension of the Paris-Dakar Rally, conditions in Mauritania are

returning to normality, while Côte d'Ivoire, led by a new interim government of national unity, is ready to work towards becoming the important destination it was in the past.

Meanwhile, Kenya is regaining its stability and resurrecting its tourism industry following a recent slow-down. The country has always been one of the key African destinations, with 1.6 million international arrivals in 2006. International tourism now has the opportunity to experience a strong comeback, thanks to its famed wildlife and coastal attractions.

"In the same spirit as my recent participation at the National Tourism Conference in Algeria, our active support to countries like Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya comes at a critical point in time, given the current global economic outlook.

"These countries are starting to recover in many ways, and UNWTO underscores that tourism is a means to support this positive development," Frangialli added.

Frangialli will also visit Kenya on May 6 and 7.

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Favourable year ahead for Kempinski hotel

Kempinski Soma Bay is expecting a promising year ahead when it opens its doors this summer, with the rest of the properties in the Soma Bay development having experienced favourable occupancy figures since their launch last year.

"The occupancy all over was good in 2007. Most of the hotels had a good occupancy of around 65 to 75 per cent. Our Kempinski Hotel Soma Bay has not yet opened, but the surrounding hotels are running occupancies in the 80s," PR and marketing manager, Kempinski Hotel Soma Bay Red Sea, Helen Andersson told *TTG*.

The main focus for the property will be catering to a mix of markets, with particular emphasis on the MICE sector. "We will focus on the European, Eastern European and Middle Eastern markets. We aim to receive ten per cent from the total guest's occupancy in our hotel from the Middle East and North Africa region. At Kempinski Hotel

Soma Bay, we will have great facilities for MICE activities," Andersson added.

Furthermore, the property will promote a number of niche packages including golf, spa, honeymoon, kite surfing and diving packages within the complex of Soma Bay.

Meanwhile, with the evolution of the hospitality industry, it is clear that holidaymakers are opting for less traditional accommodation choices. "We can see that the trend in accommodation is moving towards half, full or only bed and breakfast compared to an all inclusive stay."

"Egypt is booming in terms of tourism, lots of projects are planned in Soma Bay, Sharm El Sheikh and many others in Cairo," she continued. "The Red Sea, with its beautiful beaches and coral reefs and guaranteed sunshine, is one of its main attractions. Also, the closeness to Central Europe and the Middle East is another factor for Egypt's tourist growth."

Introducing signature service



The Westin Dubai Mina Seyahi Beach Resort and Marina marks the brand's entry into the Middle East market.

The five-star resort property, The Westin Dubai Mina Seyahi Beach Resort and Marina was set to open its doors on May 1, marking the brand's entry into the Middle East.

"Westin Hotels & Resorts are about effortless style and gracious attitude, and that is exactly what we plan to bring to Dubai. Every Westin, and there are over 120 worldwide, offers a stunning tranquil setting to guests. This Westin will be a place for everyone to relax, revive and escape," said complex general manager, Le Meridien Mina Seyahi Beach Resort & Marina and The Westin Dubai Mina Seyahi Beach Resort & Marina, Michael Scully.

"Westin properties are distinctive through their architecture, innovative interiors and exemplary services. As the region's flagship property, The Westin Dubai Mina Seyahi Beach Resort and Marina will inspire with its stylish interiors and satisfy through its anticipatory services."

Located on a 1,200m private shoreline, the property features 294 rooms, includ-

ing 216 deluxe rooms, 52 Westin Executive rooms, and 24 suites, as well as a spa, a health club, and four bars and four themed restaurants. State-of-the-art conference and banqueting facilities include an 8,999ft² ballroom, an Italian-designed conference centre with seven meeting rooms, an outdoor beachside amphitheatre, and a variety of lawn locations accommodating up to 5,000 guests. The property also features a 238-berth marina, five swimming pools, a water sports centre, a sailing academy, and facilities for deep sea fishing and boat chartering.

Westin Dubai Mina Seyahi Beach Resort and Marina will offer Westin signature services, including the Heavenly Bed, Westin Workout and Westin Service Express. All rooms and suites at The Westin Dubai Mina Seyahi Beach Resort & Marina feature Heavenly Beds, bath amenities and hi-tech LCD TV screens, while the Heavenly Spa and Westin Workout provide total relaxation and rejuvenation.

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