THE NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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Middle East hospitali industry at your servic

If entertainment, good connectivity and affordable fares are contributing to bullish tourism stats in the UAE, the hospitality industry is playing the perfect host, ensuring that visitors are well looked after. Middle East elicited views of senior officials of the region's hospitality industry for an exclusive overview of plans and strategies in store for 2006.

PRIYANKA SAXENA

he booming hospitality industry of the Middle East is maintaining its growth momentum with its everexpanding portfolio of hotels and hotel apartments posting impressive room occupancy rates for all across the Gulf. Sharing his views on expectations from 2006, Fadi Mazkour, director - business development, Coral International Hotels, Resorts & Spas said, "So far 2006 is looking very promising. We expect an average occupancy of above 90 per cent by the year end. Our clientele is a very balanced one which includes both leisure and business travellers."

Elaborating further on his marketing strategy for 2006, Mazkour averred, "Since we are looking at dedicating more room inventory to business and corporate segments in order to accommodate the increasing demand of transient business travellers from the region and elsewhere, our marketing strategy targets this segment. Besides standard marketing tools we will concentrate on e-business distribution and other affiliated procedures."

For the Rotana Group of Hotels, 2006 has begun on a positive note. "The first quarter of the year has been great and our



Fadi Mazkour, director - business developmer Coral International Hotels, Resorts & Spas



Daniel Hajjar, corporate VP - sales and marketing, Rotana Hotels



Chris Moloney, COO, InterContinental Hotels Group

expectations for the entire year are extremely positive. We believe that it would be another record year. We expect to achieve a yearly occupancy of around 80 per cent despite the challenges in certain markets such as Lebanon," informed Daniel Hajjar, corporate vice president sales and marketing, Rotana Hotels.

Throwing light on the marketing strategy for the current year, Hajjar stated, "Whilst we are operating in very exciting market places, we are conscious that the situation may change in the near future. We are consolidating our presence in key markets such as the UK and Germany but are also entering new markets like India.

Our plan for 2006-2007 is to set up an office in Saudi Arabia, Moscow and Western Europe. It is crucial to be very close to key decision makers in vital feeding markets and Rotana's aim is to be close to its customers."

Chris Moloney, COO, InterContinental Hotels Group pointed out, "For 2006 we forecast continued growth and that demand will continue to out-strip the additional supply in the region. An indication of our optimism is the rate of development at which we are moving ahead in the region. We are confident that the introduction of our new economy brand will drive a new approach to

travel and will be a catalyst demand. A major focus for whole is the Dubai Festival Working in conjunction. Futtaim Group, the group both the InterContinental Plaza brands within the dew well as the InterContinent Suites. The company has set 60,000 rooms' net organiz 2008 globally. As the pionet tional 5-star hotels in the respening in Lebanon over 4 this focus will continue."

this focus will continue."

Moloney's marketing stracurrent year would focus on ing the local management. "ing strategy has been and we to be, classical. We build around potential clients, by the channels to market across bookers, direct sales for conformation and e-mail. In line with our folio, the positioning ranges ly, informal and family-fel Holiday Inn to top of the rangthe InterContinental brand,"

Meanwhile, events such a World Cup, Dubai Shopping Dubai Summer Surprises p role in making Dubai one of tinations in the world, therel ically making the leisure sec ous choice for most high-end region. The Coral Internation however, are aiming to tal

Contd. c

OPINION

Stars for service - Keys for space

Oman is setting the trend for quality assurance through hotel classification as tourist arrivals in the Middle East are growing along with the competitiveness amongst different tourism destinations.

SVEN P GADE

Tourism arrivals in the Middle East are growing as is the competitiveness amongst different tourism destinations. With tourists becoming increasingly 'travel educated', unaligned classification standards ignor-

ing international standards throw the reputation of hotels in the region in disarray. The sultanate of Oman has confronted this problem by spending the last eight months manufacturing and introducing a unique classification system for tourism establishments.

The ministry of tourism of the sultanate of Oman commissioned MESA, a strategic advisory firm with offices in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Muscat who determined the need for a sustainable system that can be administered at a local level. For any classification system to be sustainable, MESA stated, all the stake-

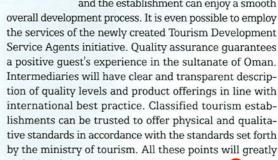
holders have to be integrated and the system to be based on the highest integrity.

With the shortfalls of the legacy system in mind, a new system was created that is to be implemented in the upcoming months. It focuses on quality, service and guest expectations in line with the sultanate's focus on upmarket and sustainable tourism development. This reflects not only international best practice, but most of all the needs of the ultimate target - the tourists. Emphasising the focus on service quality and guest experience, the new classification system has allocated 31 per cent to 'soft elements' such as service, management and staff work environment. 42 per cent focus on those elements

of the establishment that guests value most: rooms, comfort and cleanliness. This sets the new system apart from most existing regulations. The remaining 27 per cent cover structural, health and safety issues.

The new system also features unique functions to accommodate the specifics of the sultanate and its tourism

providers. An offset scheme prevents unfair location disadvantages and a bonus scheme recognises quality and service achievements. This innovative system was designed to ensure benefits for all stakeholders, operators, developers, intermediaries and end consumers. The classification system is now an integral part of the development process. When applying for a development licence, developers will receive physical classification criteria, which will enable them to align the property's business plan with the criteria. This will further reduce the development risk and the establishment can enjoy a smooth



assist in selecting and packaging tour offers. (Sven P Gade is the director, Middle East Strategy Advisors)



Sven P Gade, director, MESA