

Oman Showcases Experiential Holidays at Arabian Travel Market 2017

Hospitality

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- *Over 3 million travelers visited unique historic and cultural attractions in 2016*
 - *Sultanate continues to remain year-round destination for GCC visitors*
 - *2040 Strategy targets tourism contributing to 6% to 10% of GDP*

One of the most unique destinations in the Arabian Peninsula – **Oman** has continued to attract a record number of visitors from neighbouring GCC countries in 2016 who are now moving beyond the traditional beach holidays and looking for more authentic experiences.

The Sultanate attracted over 3 million visitors in 2016 – who visited unique cultural and historical attractions from across the length and breadth of the country.

Some of the unique experiences gaining popularity include geo and eco tourism - exploring the Al Hoota Caves and the mountain trails in Jebel Akhdar and Jebel Shams – Oman’s highest mountain; unique hidden cultural gems – touring the forts in Nizwa or the Frankincense trail in Dhofar; and turtle watching in Ras Al Had or Masirah Island and snorkeling and diving in Damaniyat.

HE Maitha Saif Majid Al Mahrouqi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Tourism said: “The Ministry of Tourism, **Oman** is delighted to return to another edition of the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) to continue showcasing some of the unique cultural and historic highlights of **Oman** to repeat visitors and first time travelers alike.

“Oman has grown its reputation as a destination for beach and special interest holidays – and we are seeing a refreshed interest from GCC visitors to explore off the beaten track attractions. The opening of new hotels and the international standard **Oman** Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) are also reinforcing

the Sultanate's position as a preferred destination for **business** and investment and we want to encourage more visitors in the region to come and experience this growing aspect of tourism.”

In addition, **Oman** is also investing in major tourism projects to cater to the growing visitor demands including the ‘**Oagine Project**’ to develop eleven mega tourism projects – including hotels and leisure facilities in identified locations across the Sultanate. The projects are currently in various stages of development in Salalah, Ras Al Hadd, Jebel Sifah, Barka and Bousher.

Last year, **Oman** outlined an ambitious 2040 strategy to ensure that the tourism sector becomes responsible for six to ten per cent of GDP in the future and in 25 years will employ over 500,000 people – with 70 per cent of these **jobs** filled by Omani nationals.

The Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) sector has also been identified as a key pillar for future growth that has now received a further boost with the opening of the **Oman** Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) in Muscat at the end of last year. In addition to exhibition halls and conference facilities, OCEC will have four new hotels providing 1,100 new rooms in the capital.

Salem Al Mamari, director general, Tourism Promotion, Ministry of Tourism Oman, said: “Oman is coming of age as a holiday destination and we are seeing increased maturity in visitors to our country who are not just on the look-out for conventional holidays – but now want luxury, spa, wellness, adventure, culture and history. **Oman** is uniquely disposed to cater to all of these for the leisure and the **business** travelers - who may be looking for a break from their routine hectic work schedule. Our focus at ATM this year will be to convey this message to all of our **business** associates and key partners who can then encourage people to find even more reasons to visit Oman.”

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