Oman emerges as a new luxury destination

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A new report from Euromonitor International identifies Oman as a new luxury hotspot for tourists.

Oman is experiencing robust growth in tourism. According to the Tourism Authority and the Ministry of the Economy, arrivals of leisure visitors almost doubled between 2000 and 2005 and saw a particularly hefty increase in 2006. Oman's natural landscape includes a long coastline, majestic deserts, several mountain ranges and a lush southern region, making it an ideal destination for tourists who are on the look out for a luxury holiday. Increasing awareness of Oman, new hotels and resort facilities are also playing a role in the growth in arrivals. According to Euromonitor International's new report, â€œTravel and Tourism in Omanâ€• this boom will create opportunities for all tourism sectors, from travel agents and tour operators to accommodation and transportation providers. The question, however, is does Oman have the capacity and facilities to accommodate the expected increase in tourists?

Oman's development boom
In order to accommodate the influx of tourism, Oman is in the midst of a development boom. Inspired by the large-scale building and massive tourism inflows in neighbouring Dubai, the Sultanate announced several mega projects, including the multi billion Blue City residential project, the Wave (a mega mixed-use development) and the Muriya tourism project (a joint-venture between the government and Egypt's Orascom). These increased business activities, driven by the larger projects, are expected to boost business arrivals to the country, while the presence of more hotels and resorts are expected to attract leisure tourists and primarily those from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

With Oman's tourism authority identifying regional travellers as a key emerging market, officials are putting more and more effort into promoting Oman to its neighbours. The grand opening of Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort and Spa celebrated in 2005, for example, is expected to attract numerous wealthy Gulf tourists. According to Euromonitor International, leisure guest arrivals to Oman will increase by more than 22% between 2006-1010, with arrivals from Bahrain and Egypt growing by over 30% over the same period.

Government in the lead
Oman's government is one of the most pro-active bodies in the region in terms of promoting tourism development. The government is active in encouraging private and foreign participation in the market, and is a co-investor in many tourism projects. It embarked on a promotional and marketing blitz, appointing destination marketing agents in key markets (UK, Germany, France) as well as participating in tourism fairs and conventions. Furthermore, in 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the UAE and Oman to increase flights between the two countries. Under the MoU, flights will increase to eleven a week on Sharjah â€“ Muscat route and four a week on Sharjah â€“ Salalah route.

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