

DUBAI HOSTS THE ARABIAN TRAVEL MARKET FOR THE LAST 25 YEARS. WHY?



Arabian Travel Market (ATM), is the leading global event for the Middle East travel and hotel industry. The event, now a ¼ Century old, generates more than \$2.5 billion of industry deals. The annual business-to-business (B2B) exhibition showcases over 3,000 products and destinations from around the world to over 50,000 exhibitors/buyers and travel trade visitors across four days at the Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre (DICEC). But why was Dubai chosen to host this event at all??

Dubai has one of the most stable economies and is one of the safest cities in the World. It also hosts the World's largest and busiest airport with 84 million travelers in 2016 (London, UK #2 is 75 million).

Interesting to note, Dubai, with a population of 2.75 million had arrivals of 14 Million in 2016. It will have, by 2020 for Dubai's World Fair, 150,000 hotel rooms. Consider this in comparison to New York City, which had a population in 2014 of 8.5 million. New York had 50 Million travelers in 2015 and will have this year, 215,000 hotel rooms. Putting this in perspective, Dubai has a lot of hotel rooms for ¼ of the population and less than ¼ of the tourist arrivals than NY.

To even enhance the comment further, Dubai in 1980, 37 years ago, had about 10 hotels and 2,900 hotel rooms.

I must here digress to share a little bit about Dubai's history; the area was sustained by fishing and pearl diving for a thousand years with the first records of Dubai being made in 1799 when the Bani Yas clan established it as a dependency of Abu Dhabi. Dubai became a separate Sheikhdom in 1833. The invention of artificial pearls in 1926 and the Great Depression in 1929 caused a collapse in the pearl market, which resulted in Sheikh Saeed looking for an alternative source of income and Dubai becoming one of the leading re-export ports in the world.

In 1966, oil was discovered in Dubai, which changed the country beyond recognition and led to Dubai becoming a vibrant, modern, business-centered city.



My first trip to Dubai was in 1980. I was invited to visit the Hyatt Regency Dubai which had just opened with the only ice skating rink in the Middle East, then and now. I think I was invited because the General manager knew I was a Canadian and assumed I could ice skate and would show some of the locals how it is done. Unfortunately, he did not know that I had played goalie and could only skate side to side.

Initially, the Arabian Travel Market in Dubai flourished as a result of the growth of the real estate market in Dubai . Dubai has now grown to be one of the foremost modern hotel cities of the World. Every major hotel brand and most independents have at least 1 hotel there and most more. All of Marriott's 31 hotel brands are represented, all of Hilton's and InterContinental's brands as well.

The ATM in 2017



What happens at an ATM? Firstly, the ATM does not open until the Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, arrives and cuts the opening ribbon which In 2017 it was at 1:00 p.m. on the first day, April 24th. An important fact is that the ATM is the only major trade fair in the World that is free to enter for everyone; no entrance fee at all! There are crowds of business people mulling around talking to each other in a party atmosphere as all booths offered free refreshments and food. The show opened with free seminars held on Revenue Management, Etiquette for the Region, etc. The organizers also provided Promotional Activities on how to attract more visitors from two of the World's biggest inbound source markets, China and India. During the event, they held educational seminars including one by Jan Albreck, the CEO of Saudi Arabian Airlines. He gave an insightful one on one interview that explored Saudi's considerable investments in a new airline fleet; there was a Showcase on Sustainability. The 3 Pillars of Sustainability being economic, social and environmental. Other panels discussed how technologies old and new from blogs to podcasts to virtual reality are used to virtually transport the customers to destinations and sell them the Products. There were also, at the Global Halal Tourism Summit, some of

the World's leading Halal friendly destinations were on hand to discuss their success in developing Muslim focused tourist offering and revealing exactly how they are tapping into the top Muslim tourist market.

A large contingence of Cruise people attended as Dubai was originally settled by pearl divers and the cruise business is vital to the economy. They expect One Million cruise tourists for the World Fair in 2020.



There were blurring lines in online and offline travel with more and more of today's connected travelers not limiting themselves from either, but seeking out benefits from both Worlds.

This session took an in-depth look at the opportunity for forward thinking travel business to offer and capitalize on a wide range of touch points.

On the final day, April 27th, the ATM Travel Agents Academy was in action. This very popular initiative saw travel agents receiving invaluable destination briefings and honing their sales and presentations skills in the half day free workshop.

The ATM, due to its location, needs to offer added value to attract exhibitors, attendees and buyers. Especially since the adage that Dubai is a “cheap” place to visit and shop in is long gone. It is now easily as expensive for shopping and eating out as is New York or London. The hotel accommodation rates exceed Toronto’s easily, and air B&B has yet to get a foothold in the region.

