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#### SNAPSHOT REPORT ON TOURISM TRENDS IN THE MENA REGION - APRIL 2017

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- International arrivals in the Middle East decreased by an estimated 4% in 2016 to 54 million, with mixed results across the region. The region's performance, which had begun to show signs of recovery in the past two years, was weighed down mainly by the sharp drop of 42% in international arrivals in Egypt in 2016.
- In North Africa, arrivals increased by 3%, after a double digit decline in the previous year. Recovery was largely led by improved performance in Tunisia (+7%).
- Key performance trends by industry sector were as follows:

### **Aviation**

- Middle East airlines recorded the strongest increase in passenger traffic (+11%) in 2016 over 2015. Year-over-year demand growth in January 2017 was at 14%, helped by ongoing network and fleet expansion.
- African airlines experienced annual increase in demand of 7% in 2016 compared to 2015. January 2017 traffic rose 6% year-on-year, on the back of a recovery on the key routes to/from Europe.

### **Accommodation Sector**

- Middle East hotels posted negative results on all three performance measures: Occupancy (-2%), Average Daily Rate (ADR) (-7%) and Revenue per Available room (RevPAR) (-9%) in 2016. The softening of the markets was primarily due to wider economic and geopolitical issues such as the lower oil prices, weak European economic performance, currency exchange fluctuations and regional unrest. The first two months of 2017 saw mixed results, with occupancy and RevPAR up but ADR down.
- Northern Africa hotels reported 10% decline in occupancy in 2016, though an increase of 18% in ADR and a 7% rise in RevPAR, mostly driven by Egypt (classified in North Africa by STR). The first two months of 2017 saw increase in all three performance measures.

### **Travel Distribution**

- The mixed picture of tourism trends across MENA destinations reflected on the performance of the region's travel trade, though across most destinations travel businesses' profitability was under pressure. A similar trend continued in the first months of 2017, even as there were signs of improved tourism performance in key destinations.

### **Tourism Segments and Products**

- Leisure tourism trends reflected a mixed picture across destinations in MENA, while business (MICE) tourism saw stable growth in key destinations.
- Religious tourism in Saudi Arabia continued to be affected by capacity constraints related to ongoing construction activity in Mecca and by geopolitical tensions in the region.
- Cruise tourism showed signs of revival in Tunisia. In the GCC, the sector maintained steady growth in cruise passengers and ship calls.
- Medical tourism was negatively impacted in Jordan due to visa restrictions for tourists. Dubai also witnessed negative results as the UAE's strong currency, pegged to the dollar, deterred overseas patients.
- Performance in the first months of 2017 showed early signs of improvement, across tourism segments and products.

### **Source Markets**

- International visitors continued to travel to MENA in 2016, though numbers varied by destination.
- Air travel demand from the Americas to Africa and the Middle East grew 8% in 2016, with an increased momentum towards the end of the year. Air travel from Europe and Asia and the Pacific increased 6% and intra-regional tourism demand was also higher by 7%, despite negative flows to some countries.
- However, in the first months of 2017, European tourism declined to North African destinations and Egypt, while maintaining growth in key GCC countries, driven by Russian arrivals. In the GCC, tourist traffic from Asia and the Middle East is seen to be maintaining growth, led by visitors from China and India.

### **Intraregional (Arab) versus Interregional Market**

- In 2016, intraregional travel in the Middle East and Africa region was up 7% compared to 2015, a reversal of trend from the 2% decline registered in 2015 over the previous year. Much of the increase in intraregional travel was centered on travel within the GCC countries.
- Interregional air travel trends for 2016 reveal that travel from the Americas was the strongest (+8%), followed by emerging markets in Asia and the Pacific (+6%) and Europe (+6%).
- Air passenger travel trends for January to April 2017 indicate 5% decline in expected departures to destinations within the Africa and the Middle East region. Bookings from Europe show a massive 13% growth underscoring the importance, maturity and resilience of this traditional source market for regional destinations. Bookings from the Americas to Africa and the Middle East destinations also indicate a strong positive trend in this period.

### **Planned Investments**

- 153,460 rooms in 540 hotel projects under contract in the Middle East and 58,374 rooms in 309 projects under contract in Africa. About one-half of these hotel projects are in the construction phase, with Makkah and Dubai accounting for more than 10,000 rooms under construction.
- Despite the drop in oil prices, UAE Government spending on infrastructure projects is expected to be maintained, particularly in Dubai where preparations for Expo 2020 continue. Other GCC countries also have infrastructure and tourism related projects under development, including airport expansion Programmes.
- Egypt and Morocco are also implementing a number of projects that aim to boost their tourism performance.

### **Key factors influencing the development of tourism in MENA**

- The impact of the geopolitical situation in MENA has been most profound on once vibrant markets such as Egypt, Tunisia and Lebanon, where tourism is well below pre-crisis levels.
- On the other hand, destinations such as the UAE and Oman continue to capitalize on ever growing tourist numbers – in part, due to redirected tourism traffic from affected countries in the region, but majorly because of large scale infrastructural investments and focused efforts to diversify their economies.

- Apart from the geopolitical situation in MENA, several other external (exogenous) and internal (endogenous) factors have shaped and influenced the development of tourism in MENA in the past several years, and will likely continue to do so, in the near future. These include the shape of the global economy and global tourism trends, terrorist incidents (global and regional), health-related outbreaks, natural disasters, etc.
- Factors such as visa facilitation policies, currency fluctuations, and travel restrictions (travel bans and advisories) have had variable impacts – positive and negative, on tourism performance in different destinations in MENA.
- Equally, market access, infrastructure development, additions and changes in tourism products, facilities, capacity and quality, adoption of technology, and marketing and promotion are some of the endogenous factors influencing the state of tourism development in MENA.
- In 2016, wider economic and geopolitical issues such as lower oil prices, weak European economic performance, currency exchange fluctuations and regional unrest have played a significant role in tourism performance in MENA.
- Tourism in Egypt suffered strongly due to the imposition of travel bans on flights to Sharm el-Sheikh by a number of foreign countries, including Russia, the UK and Germany.
- Down in the first half of the year, due to the impact of various acts of terrorism in the previous year, Tunisian tourism recovered to post positive results for 2016, on the back of increased arrivals from Russia, resulting from a diversion of traffic from other troubled destinations such as Turkey and Egypt.
- Gulf travel to Lebanon remained down in 2016, due to issuance of travel bans by GCC countries.
- Global oil prices continued to impact tourism particularly in GCC countries. Economic measures by the Saudi government to cut down expenses, has influenced the travel decisions of Saudis, who comprise the largest portion of intraregional visitors in MENA.
- The slide of the Russian rouble following the plunge in the price of oil since mid-2014, led to an 18-year record low for Russian outbound tourism in 2015, impacting tourism in global destinations, including in MENA.
- At the same time, the closure of the Turkish and Egyptian tourism markets to Russian travelers, following travel bans, redirected Russian tourism flows to destinations such as Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon.
- In a bid to gain/regain more visitors from foreign source markets, a number of countries in MENA have announced and/or implemented visitor-friendly visa facilitation policies.

### **Main tourism policies and strategies in MENA**

- Egypt's Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2020 seeks to address the challenges it faces and create a suitable environment to raise competitiveness and support inclusive growth, by focusing on specific strategic initiatives such as enhancing safety and security, marketing and promotion, improving service quality, enhancing sustainability, making institutional changes and embarking upon visa facilitation measures.
- Jordan's National Tourism Strategy aims to focus on training and the use of digital technology in developing tourism, in addition to plans for marketing, regulations and quality standards development.
- Lebanon has launched a 5-year Rural Tourism Strategy to enhance economic opportunities in Lebanese rural areas through improving the competitiveness of specific value chains, including rural tourism.

- Tunisia's Tourism Development Strategy hinges on five pillars: product innovation and diversification, tourism promotion, re-structuring the institutional framework to create a tourism promotion and marketing structure, creating a separate structure for tourism vocational training, financial sector restructuring, and upgrading of ICT in tourism.
- Morocco's Vision 2020 Tourism Strategy calls for implementing six major development Programmes for a diversified portfolio of products, built around culture, the seaside and nature, with an underlying theme of sustainability.
- Bahrain's Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2026's four driving pillars, aimed to double tourism's contribution to Bahrain's GDP by 2020, include Awareness, Attraction, Access and Accommodation.
- The 'Oman Tourism Strategy 2016-2040' of Oman provides a clearly defined and structured road map to ensure that tourism becomes one of the most important pillars for the diversification and sustainable growth of the country's economy. The Government's vision is to turn the destination into a model of sustainable tourism for the entire Gulf region.
- Qatar's National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030, developed in line with the objectives of the Qatar National Vision 2030, is set to have numerous economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits, in addition to various positive ramifications on the tourism industry in Qatar:
- The Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH)'s National Tourism development Strategy is aimed at developing sustainable tourism in the Kingdom that will support local communities, providing jobs and preserving the natural environment and cultural heritage through an integrated partnership with all stakeholders.
- In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), tourism policy and operations are currently the reserve of the individual Emirates, each of which has a tourism authority or department, are responsible for all aspects of tourism such as operations, regulation, development, human resources, destination marketing etc.
- The Government of UAE and, particularly the Ministry of Economy to which tourism responsibility has recently been assigned aims at harnessing the potential of tourism as an engine for "post oil" economic growth, enterprise creation, income distribution and socio-economic development. The Ministry has called for a national tourism strategy and action plan that would help drive sustained and sustainable growth in the tourism economy across the Emirates of the UAE.

### **Outlook for MENA tourism**

- For the Middle East and Africa, UNWTO forecasts international tourist arrivals to increase by 2% to 5% in 2017, following a decrease of 4% in 2016. The forecast interval is wider in these regions due to higher uncertainty and disruption risks.
- Long term prospects for the MENA region are strongly positive, with international tourist arrivals projected to reach 195 million by 2030, benefiting both established and emerging destinations.
- However, political stability will be critical for tourism to prosper and contribute to socio-economic progress in the region's nations.

## **A- Overall Assessment**

- International arrivals in the Middle East decreased by an estimated 4% in 2016 to 54 million, with mixed results across the region. The region's performance, which had begun to show signs of recovery in the past two years, was weighed down mainly by the sharp drop of 42% in international arrivals in Egypt in 2016.
- In North Africa, arrivals increased by 3%, after a double digit decline in the previous year. Recovery was largely led by improved performance in Tunisia (+7%).
- First months of 2017 show signs of improved performance in MENA, although data is still pending for several destinations.

1. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region recorded 72 million international tourist arrivals in 2016, 2% below 2015 levels.
2. Key indicators during the first two months of 2017 show signs of improved performance in MENA, although data is still pending for several destinations.
3. Based on current trends and the UNWTO Confidence Index (based on feedback from over 300 tourism experts worldwide), UNWTO forecasts modest growth of between 2% and 5% for MENA, due to a large degree of uncertainty and volatility.

### **A.1. Full year results - 2016**

4. The Middle East received 54 million international tourist arrivals in 2016. Arrivals were down an estimated 4% with mixed results among the region's destinations, with positive results in some destinations but declines in others. Data from other destinations, however, is still pending.<sup>1</sup>
5. Participants in the UNWTO Panel of Experts from the Middle East evaluated tourism performance in 2016 with a slightly negative score, just below the neutral 100 at 97. This was also short of their prospects at the beginning of the year (117).
6. Among Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) countries, Oman performed the best, with visitor numbers up by 11%. United Arab Emirates received 5% more overnight visitors in 2016 compared to the previous year.<sup>2</sup> In Saudi Arabia (+0.3%), the slight increase in inbound tourism flows was driven by visitors from GCC countries, and by tourists who came to the Kingdom for religious purposes (Umrah and Hajj).<sup>3</sup>
7. Bahrain reported 6% growth in arrivals from Saudi Arabia, its main tourism source market, while Qatar (-1%) witnessed a slight decline which is a reversal from a compound annual growth of 12% in the period 2010-2015 and a growth of 4% between 2014-2015.
8. In the Levant, Lebanon (+11%) performed well, with tourist arrivals hitting their highest level since 2011. 1.7 million tourists from all nationalities visited the country in 2016, the closest Lebanon has been to the 2.2 million visitors mark reached back in 2010.<sup>4</sup> Jordan registered a 3% increase in

<sup>1</sup> January 2017 edition of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.visitdubai.com/en/tourism-performance-report#>.

<sup>3</sup> Saudi Commission for Tourism & National Heritage (SCTH)

<sup>4</sup> <http://blog.blominvestbank.com/tourism-sector-lebanon-2016/>

individual overnight visitors compared to 2015, while group overnight visitors were up 20% over the same period.<sup>5</sup>

9. By contrast, Egypt (-42% through November) witnessed a sharp decline in international arrivals following a string of security incidents and negative travel advisories. Palestine (7%) also reported a decline in arrivals.<sup>6</sup>
10. In North Africa (+3%), double digit growth in arrivals in the second half of 2016 helped offset the negative performance of earlier months. This was largely led by recovery in Tunisia (+7%) which received 5.7 million international arrivals in 2016 compared to 5.4 million in the previous year. The largest destination in the sub region, Morocco (+2%) posted moderate growth in visitor arrivals in the year.
11. Participants of the UNWTO Panel of Experts from Africa evaluated tourism performance in 2016 with a cautious but positive score of 113, though quite below their expectations at the start of the year (131).
12. Data on tourism receipts for full year 2016 is still pending for many MENA destinations. Morocco reported a rise in international tourism receipts by 3% to US\$ 4 billion, whereas receipts in Tunisia declined (-2%) despite the signs of a recovery in arrivals. Sudan surpassed the one billion US dollar mark for the first time after 6% growth in 2016. Saudi Arabia reported a 10% growth in receipts to US\$ 11.1 billion, and in Qatar receipts grew by 8%. In Kuwait, receipts have increased by 21% after several years of double digits growth already, yet from a smaller base than most other destinations in the region. Jordan reported flat revenue growth at about US\$ 4.0 billion despite the small increase in visitor arrivals, due to changes in the origin of tourists and their spending habits.<sup>7</sup> Receipts in Egypt, on the other hand, have dropped to US\$ 2.6 billion (-56%) after the downing of a Russian plane in the Sinai Peninsula in October 2015 and due to ongoing security concerns.

## **A.2. Key Indicators for the first months of 2017**

13. Tourism in MENA shows signs of improved performance in the first months of 2017, although data is still pending for some destinations. In particular, Egypt, which suffered the most in 2016, reported encouraging signs of recovery in the first months of 2017. Indications are that German holidaymakers' bookings for trips to Egypt in the upcoming summer season are up 91% from last year, though still 23% below pre-2010 levels.
14. Jordan continued on its positive performance in 2016, reporting tourism revenues were up 16% in the first two months of 2017 compared to the same period last year. Growth was driven by group visitors with number of arrivals rising by 84% in the first two months of 2017 compared to the same period in the previous year.
15. Dubai's tourism sector reported a 12% year-on-year growth in visitor numbers in the first two months of 2017.<sup>8</sup>
16. There are signs of continued uptick in tourism to Tunisia ahead of the 2017 summer season, on account of enhanced security measures, and the adoption of an aggressive pricing policy, with very low prices.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/despite-rise-number-visitors-last-year%E2%80%99s-tourism-revenues-similar-2015%E2%80%99>

<sup>6</sup> January 2017 edition of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/despite-rise-number-visitors-last-year%E2%80%99s-tourism-revenues-similar-2015%E2%80%99>

<sup>8</sup> <http://gulfnews.com/business/sectors/tourism/over-3m-visitors-to-dubai-in-first-2-months-of-this-year-1.1998712>

17. The UNWTO Panel of Experts from Africa (141) have the highest expectations for 2017, as growth in that region picked up firmly in the second half of 2016 after some years of subdued growth. Experts from the Middle East are also optimistic, looking forward to a considerable improvement from the weak results in 2016, despite ongoing geopolitical tensions and security concerns in the region.
18. Main highlights of trends in performance of the different sectors in the travel and tourism business in the MENA region in 2016 and the first months of 2017 are presented below:

## **B. Aviation sector**

- Middle East airlines recorded the strongest increase in passenger traffic (+11%) in 2016 over 2015. Year-over-year demand growth in January 2017 was at 14%, helped by ongoing network and fleet expansion.
- African airlines experienced annual increase in demand of 7% in 2016 compared to 2015. January 2017 traffic rose 6% year-on-year, on the back of a recovery on the key routes to/from Europe.

### **B.1. Full year results - 2016**

19. Air transport data from International Air Transport Association (IATA) shows that Middle East carriers recorded the strongest annual passenger traffic growth (+11%) for the fifth year in a row. However, demand growth in the region has continued to lag behind that of capacity, with passenger load factors on the key routes to and from the Middle East (between Asia and Europe) falling by around 2.5 percentage points in 2016 compared to 2015.<sup>9</sup>
20. Leading aviation markets United Arab Emirates (Dubai +7%, Abu Dhabi +5%), Qatar (+20%) and Oman (+17%) all reported growth in total passenger traffic.
21. Middle East regional share of total international traffic rose to 15% in 2016, the third highest after Europe and Asia and the Pacific. Capacity rose 14%, reducing load factor by 1.3 percentage points to 75%.
22. International demand for African carriers was up 7% in 2016 compared to 2015, helped by strong demand on routes to/from Asia and the Middle East.

### **B.2. Key Indicators for the first months of 2017**

23. Middle East carriers had the strongest year-over-year demand growth in January 2017 at 14%. Capacity climbed 11% and load factor was up 2.1 percentage points to 80%.
24. African airlines saw January traffic rise 6% compared to January 2016. This reflects a recovery on the key routes to/from Europe. With capacity up 5%, load factor rose 0.7 percentage point to 70%.<sup>10</sup>
25. Middle Eastern airlines are forecast to see profits fall to US\$300 million in 2017 from US\$900 million last year in part due to high capacity and limited demand growth. Capacity expansion is forecast at 10%, ahead of the expected demand growth at 9%.
26. In contrast, carriers in Africa are forecast to lose US\$800 million in 2017. For each passenger flown, this amounts to an average loss of US\$10. Capacity is expected to grow 4.7%, ahead of 4.5% demand growth.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.iata.org/whatwedo/Documents/economics/passenger-analysis-dec-2016.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.iata.org/pressroom/pr/Pages/2017-03-07-01.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> <http://airlines.iata.org/analysis/profitability-set-to-continue>

## **C. Accommodation sector**

- Middle East hotels posted negative results on all three performance measures: Occupancy (-2%), Average Daily Rate (ADR) (-7%) and Revenue per Available room (RevPAR) (-9%) in 2016. The first two months of 2017 saw mixed results, with occupancy and RevPAR up but ADR down.
- Northern Africa hotels reported 10% decline in occupancy in 2016, though an increase of 18% in ADR and a 7% rise in RevPAR, mostly driven by Egypt (classified in North Africa by STR). The first two months of 2017 saw increase in all three performance measures.

### **C.1. Full year results - 2016**

27. 2016 was a very challenging year for the hotel sector in the Middle East region, with all major markets experiencing a decline in all three key performance measures: Occupancy (-2%), ADR (-7%) and RevPAR (-9%) in 2016.<sup>12</sup> Although the RevPAR of US\$115 was the second highest in the world (after Caribbean hotels), the decline from US\$127 was the highest across all world regions. The softening of the markets was primarily due to wider economic and geopolitical issues such as the lower oil prices, weak European economic performance, currency exchange fluctuations and regional unrest.
28. Northern Africa hotels reported 10% decline in occupancy in 2016, though an increase of 18% in ADR and 7% in RevPAR. Egypt's occupancy continued to fall amid ongoing security concerns, dropping 36% below pre-Arab Spring levels. The devaluation of the Egyptian pound in November resulted in a sharp increase in ADR when reported in local currency, but when reported in U.S. dollars, year-end ADR growth was 3%. Egypt has recorded very little supply growth since 2012, while demand has been volatile (-14% for 2016).<sup>13</sup>
29. According to the EY Middle East Hotel Benchmark Survey Report, a slower global economy and the drop in oil prices coupled with supply growth particularly impacted hotel performance and profitability in the GCC countries.
30. The oil crisis heavily affected Saudi Arabia's economy and hotel industry in 2016. In Riyadh, occupancy and ADR were down 10% and 8% respectively. Sharp supply growth also pressured occupancy levels and overall performance. In December, Saudi Arabia's luxury segment experienced a 19% increase in supply compared with the same month in the previous year, contributing to a 23% year-over-year RevPAR decline for the country's luxury hotels during the month.
31. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Abu Dhabi reported declines in both occupancy (-4%) and ADR (-10%). Dubai reported a slight increase in occupancy (+0.5%) but a significant drop in ADR (-10%). Notably, 2016 marked a significant milestone for Dubai's hospitality industry with 100,000 hotel rooms and hotel apartments on-board.<sup>14</sup>
32. Manama's hotels saw a slight increase (+1%) in occupancy to 50% in 2016. However, both ADR (-5%) and RevPAR (-4%) dropped for the year compared to 2015. 2016 was a tough year for Doha hotels too, which posted negative results on all three performance metrics – occupancy (-5%), ADR (-13%) and RevPAR (-18%). Hotels in Kuwait witnessed a similar, though less severe, situation with lower occupancy (-0.2%), ADR (-7%) and RevPAR (-8%) in 2016 compared to the previous year.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.hotelnewsnow.com/Media/Default/PDFs/GlobalHotelReviewCC\\_Media\\_december\\_2016.pdf](http://www.hotelnewsnow.com/Media/Default/PDFs/GlobalHotelReviewCC_Media_december_2016.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.hotelnewsnow.com/Articles/108393/STR-2016-Middle-East-and-Africa-hotel-performance>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.hotelnewsnow.com/Articles/108393/STR-2016-Middle-East-and-Africa-hotel-performance>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.hotelnewsresource.com/pdf17/HotStats\\_MENA\\_Chain\\_December\\_2016.pdf](https://www.hotelnewsresource.com/pdf17/HotStats_MENA_Chain_December_2016.pdf)

33. Beirut's hotel occupancy rate recorded a marginal increase of 1% in 2016 to stand at 59%, compared to the same period last year. However, as hotel room rates decreased over the period as a part of hotels' marketing strategies, ADR and RevPAR fell by 15% and 14% year-on-year respectively.<sup>16</sup>
34. Hotels in Tunisia saw higher occupancy levels due to the 7% increase in international arrivals in 2016. The market has shown signs of recovery, with positive RevPAR performance from July 2016 onwards - a result of a bounce-back from the previous year.<sup>17</sup>

## **C.2. Key Indicators for the first months of 2017**

35. According to February 2017 data from STR, hotels in the Middle East reported mixed results in the three key performance metrics: occupancy and RevPAR were up 3% and 1% respectively, but ADR was down 2%. On the other hand, hotels in Africa recorded positive results on all three parameters, with occupancy, ADR and RevPAR up 6%, 10% and 16% respectively.<sup>18</sup>
36. In the GCC, the United Arab Emirates saw hotels improve performance on all three measures. Occupancy was up 6% to 84% which was the highest for a February in the country since 2008. February performance was boosted by major MICE events in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.
37. Jordan saw declines in occupancy (-10%), ADR (-5%) as well as RevPAR (-15%), with ongoing security concerns hindering the country's hotel performance in February 2017. Demand levels in Jordan have fluctuated over the past year with decreases as large as 25% and increases as high as 22%.

## **D. Travel distribution**

- The mixed picture of tourism trends across MENA destinations reflected on the performance of the region's travel trade, though across most destinations travel businesses' profitability was under pressure.
- A similar trend continued in the first months of 2017, even as there were signs of improved tourism performance in key destinations.

### **D.1. Full year results - 2016**

38. The mixed picture of tourism trends across MENA destinations reflected on the performance of the region's travel trade. In the GCC, the pressure on tourism businesses to reduce margins, thus affecting their profitability, continued from the previous year, despite countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Oman receiving an increased number of tourists. Online bookings have also negatively affected these businesses, significantly trimming profits.
39. In Saudi Arabia, the travel trade that relies on religious tourism suffered as Haj numbers were down, because of ongoing construction works and regional tensions . Overall, Haj related business was down by half.<sup>19</sup>
40. In the Levant region, the Lebanese travel trade benefited from the revival in tourist inflows (+11%) in 2016, despite the number of high-spending GCC travellers still being down. Arab visitor decline was somewhat offset by a higher number of European and American visitors to Lebanon.

<sup>16</sup> <http://blog.blominvestbank.com/decembers-festive-season-raises-beiruts-hotel-occupancy-rates-6-y-o-y/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.strglobal.com/news/hotel-data-blog/Tunisia-Hotel-Market-Analysis>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.hotelnewsnow.com/Articles/127080/STR-Middle-East-Africa-performance-for-February-2017>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.thenational.ae/business/travel-tourism/haj-slowdown-hits-saudi-tourism-businesses>

41. In Jordan, despite the increase in the number of visitors, the sector's revenues in 2016 remained similar to 2015 levels due to changes in the origin of tourists, and consequently their spending habits.
42. In Egypt, the slump in tourism resulted in significant loss of revenues for businesses dependent on tourism for their livelihood such as taxi drivers, souvenir sellers, dive instructors and tour guides. Tourism companies struggled to maintain vehicle fleet in 2016.<sup>20</sup>
43. Tunisia's tourism businesses benefited from an influx of Russian visitors, whose numbers increased ten-fold in the first ten months of the year, buoyed by visa-free travel and low prices. Local companies anticipated continuing growth in business from this market.<sup>21</sup>

## **D.2. Key Indicators for the first months of 2017**

44. In the GCC, Dubai received 3 million visitors in the first two months of 2017. The 22<sup>nd</sup> edition of the annual Dubai Shopping Festival (26 December – 28 January) led to an upswing in activity across various sectors in Dubai including retail, hospitality and entertainment destinations, and gave a boost to ancillary services such as money exchange houses and travel agencies. Travel agencies witnessed a 10% increase in travel bookings to Dubai compared to the same period last year.
45. In the Levant, the Lebanese travel trade witnessed a marginal improvement in business as airport passenger numbers and consequently hotel guests increased by 1% in the first two months of 2017.<sup>22</sup> The Jordanian travel trade also witnessed positive results as there was a rise in both individual and group visitors in the first two months of the year.
46. Signs of recovery in Egypt's tourism in the first two months of 2017 were welcomed by the local travel trade which struggled through 2016.
47. Tunisia travel businesses continued to benefit from the influx of Russian visitors on account of redirected traffic from Turkey and Egypt where Moscow imposed travel restrictions due to security considerations.

## **E. Tourism segments and products**

- Leisure tourism trends reflected a mixed picture across destinations in MENA, while business (MICE) tourism saw stable growth in key destinations.
- Religious tourism in Saudi Arabia continued to be affected by capacity constraints related to ongoing construction activity in Mecca and regional tensions.
- Cruise tourism showed signs of revival in Tunisia. In the GCC, the sector maintained steady growth in cruise passengers and ship calls.
- Medical tourism dropped sharply in Jordan due to visa restrictions for tourists. Dubai also witnessed negative results as the UAE's strong currency, pegged to the dollar, deterred overseas patients.
- Performance in the first months of 2017 showed early signs of improvement, across tourism segments and products.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2017/02/02/tourism-companies-struggle-maintain-vehicle-fleet-2016-chamber/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.tourism-review.com/tunisian-tourism-pleased-by-growing-russian-arrivals-news5203>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.byblosbank.com.lb>

## **E.1. Full year results – 2016**

48. Leisure tourism trends varied across destinations in MENA, in response to factors such as the economic and political situation, currency fluctuations, security incidents and travel advisories by Governments in source markets.
49. In North Africa, the increase in international arrivals was due to a major upward trend in Russian leisure tourist arrivals. In Egypt, leisure tourism suffered a sharp decline due to last year's security incidents and negative travel advisories.
50. Leisure tourism in Lebanon maintained its positive growth of last year, though travel bans from GCC countries meant fewer high spending visitors. Jordan also received 10% less GCC visitors, particularly from Saudi Arabia.
51. Religious tourism in Saudi Arabia suffered as Haj numbers were down, due to ongoing construction activity in Mecca and regional tensions.<sup>23</sup>
52. The business tourism sector in key GCC countries namely Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE, registered positive growth, particularly the MICE segment. In Kuwait, business travellers, who make up the vast proportion of hotel guests, generated 23% of direct Travel & Tourism GDP in 2016<sup>24</sup> compared to 19% in 2015.<sup>25</sup>
- The GCC enjoys a thriving intra-regional business travel and meetings and events industry. The MICE segment has expanded significantly over the past couple of years, led by the UAE (mainly Dubai) which commands 50% share of the total GCC MICE market.<sup>26</sup>
  - Dubai has announced plans to build a new convention centre which will span 55,000 square meters and provide space for 10,000 people. The new convention centre is part of the city's run-up to World Expo 2020, which will take place in Dubai.
  - In Oman, the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) opened its doors in August 2016, with the vision to make the country a destination for business events.
53. Qatar and the UAE, key sports tourism destinations, hosted several sporting events as scheduled. In the UAE, leading hotels in Abu Dhabi reported occupancy rates of over 90% for the Formula 1 Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix which attracts over 60,000 visitors over the three days of racing. For Qatar, which hosts a number of world-class competitions across a multitude of sporting disciplines, the first-ever Match of Champions held in December 2016, attracted thousands of football fans, and is estimated to have brought over 5,000 international visitors to Qatar and to have generated an estimated QAR 9.6 million (US\$ 2.6 million) for the local economy.
54. Cruise tourism showed signs of revival in Tunisia as German cruise ships began returning to Tunisian ports towards the end of the year. In Oman, there was a major surge in arrivals through cruise ships in 2016, up 48% compared to the previous year, to reach a total of 217,000 visitors. In the UAE, the cruise sector in Abu Dhabi also reported record numbers, receiving more than 100 ship calls for the first time and welcoming more than 228,000 passengers during the 2015-16 season, while Dubai received 541,000 passengers and 133 ship calls in the season. Over 23 cruise lines have Dubai in their itineraries, which is indicative of Dubai's continued popularity as a tourist destination.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.thenational.ae/business/travel-tourism/haj-slowdown-hits-saudi-tourism-businesses>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/countries-2017/kuwait2017.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/countries-2016/kuwait2016.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Bloomberg & Euromonitor

55. Jordan's medical tourism sector saw a 40% drop in numbers in the first nine months of 2016. There was an unprecedented drop in patients from Sudan, Libya Yemen and Iraq due to visa restrictions, and conflicts in all four countries.<sup>27</sup> Dubai, which aims to be a medical tourism hub in the Gulf region, received fewer medical tourists as the strong dirham deterred overseas patients. The number of British medical tourists fell by about 10% at the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery Hospital, an effect of the weakened pound following the UK's decision in June to leave the European Union. Dubai is targeting 500,000 overseas medical tourists by 2020.<sup>28</sup>

## **E.2. Key Indicators in the first months of 2017**

56. Leisure tourism showed early signs of revival in Egypt. Other destinations such as Tunisia, Morocco and Dubai maintained their positive growth trend from 2016. Leisure tourism demand has accelerated in Jordan, particularly from group visitors up 84% in the first two months of 2017, compared to the same period last year.

57. Cruise tourism in the GCC is performing well, with Oman welcoming 46,000 cruise ship visitors in January 2017, up 7% when compared with December 2016 figures.

58. Dubai Health Experience (DXH) launched in April last year - which is the brand conceived by the Dubai Health Authority to market Dubai as a medical tourism destination, is beginning to attract medical tourists. In Jordan, the decision to reduce the visa issuance time for Libyan and Yemeni nationals who make up a large portion of medical tourists is expected to have a positive effect on the medical tourism industry in the country.

## **F. Source markets**

- International visitors continued to travel to MENA in 2016, though numbers varied by destination.
- Overall intra-regional tourism demand increased, despite negative flows to some countries.
- In the first months of 2017, European tourism to Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt declined. In the GCC, tourist traffic from Asia and the Middle East is seen to be maintaining growth.

### **F.1. Full year results - 2016**

59. Air travel demand from the Americas to Africa and the Middle East grew 8% in 2016, with an increased momentum towards the end of the year. Air travel from Europe and Asia and the Pacific increased 6% and intra-regional tourism demand was also higher by 7%.<sup>29</sup>

60. In the UAE, overnight visitors to Dubai increased 5% to 14.9 million in 2016, largely spurred by an upswing in traffic from the GCC, India, Pakistan, China, Britain and Russia. For Abu Dhabi (+8%), hotel establishments reported that the top five source markets for overnight stays were the UAE (domestic), India, UK, China and Philippines. UK tourists continued to flock to the UAE – up 5% in Dubai and 3% in Abu Dhabi, despite the pound shedding over 16% of its value against the US dollar since the June referendum to leave the European Union. There was a massive boost in Chinese visitors (+20%) and a definitive resurgence of Russian visitors (+14%) after the UAE's implementation of visas-on-arrival for citizens of both countries.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.imtj.com/news/40-drop-medical-tourism-numbers-jordan/>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.thenational.ae/business/travel-tourism/dubais-hospitals-seek-help-to-stem-haemorrhage-of-medical-tourists>

<sup>29</sup> ForwardKeys for UNWTO, World Tourism Barometer, January 2017 issue

61. Oman saw steady growth in visitors from Europe, with Britain and Germany among the top five tourism generating source markets. GCC nationals topped the number of tourist arrivals, followed by tourists from India, Britain and Germany.<sup>30</sup>
62. Lebanon received an increasing number of European (+16%) and American (+33%) visitors in 2016. German, French and Russian tourists made up the bulk of European arrivals. Arab travellers to Lebanon increased by 9%, mainly from Iraq, and to a lesser extent from Jordan and Egypt. Political tensions between Lebanon on one hand and Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the other resulted in the issuance of travel bans preventing Gulf nationals from going to Lebanon.<sup>31</sup>
63. Jordan's positive performance in 2016 was led by the double digit growth in visitor arrivals from Asia and the Pacific (+20%) followed by visitors from Europe (+6%), Africa (+5%) and the Americas (+3%). However, the number of visitors from GCC countries dropped by 10%. This was attributed to the economic measures the Saudi government is taking to cut down expenses, which has influenced the travel decisions of Saudis, who comprise the largest portion of visitors from the Gulf.<sup>32</sup>
64. Egypt's main tourism generating source markets UK and Russia dried up after travel bans were imposed, following the Russian plane crash in 2015. On the other hand, November's massive depreciation of the Egyptian pound against the dollar that made Sharm El Sheikh one of the cheapest beach getaways in the world, attracted price-sensitive tourists from Ukraine, Lebanon, and neighbouring African countries. In addition, visitor numbers from China to Egypt continued to rise as charter flights were introduced from the Asian country. Resumption of Egypt Air charter flights to Japan in November 2016, after a five-year absence from Egypt, brought in high-spending Japanese tourists. The series of weekly charter flights at Luxor Airport is expected to run until May 2017.
65. In Morocco, the number of foreign tourists decreased by 1%, while arrivals of Moroccans living abroad increased by 4% in 2016, compared to the previous year. Spanish, Dutch and Belgian tourist arrivals increased by 2%, 3% and 2% respectively, while arrivals from the United Kingdom, Germany and France showed decreases of 6%, 2% and 1% respectively. The biggest gains were in the Chinese and Russian markets which showed increases by 32,329 and 23,921 of arrivals compared to 2015.<sup>33</sup> The number of Chinese visitors reflected a 300% growth, attributed in large part to the abolition of visas for the Chinese from June onwards.
66. In Tunisia, domestic tourism was the main stay accounting for 30% share of the market. 2.5 million Algerians and Libyans visited the country in 2016. While there were signs of recovery from traditional European source markets, rising number of arrivals from Russia and China provided a much-needed boost to the tourism sector in the country.<sup>34</sup>

## **F.2. Key Indicators in the first months of 2017**

67. There are signs of positive trends in international tourist arrivals from key source markets in a number of MENA destinations in the first months of 2017.

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.ncsi.gov.om/Elibrary/LibraryContentDoc/ben\\_Tourism%20Indicators.Dec.E\\_b404829b-3bf8-4386-9a69-4a54ce899d67.pdf](https://www.ncsi.gov.om/Elibrary/LibraryContentDoc/ben_Tourism%20Indicators.Dec.E_b404829b-3bf8-4386-9a69-4a54ce899d67.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> <http://blog.blominvestbank.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Tourism-Sector-in-Lebanon-2016-.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/despite-rise-number-visitors-last-year%E2%80%99s-tourism-revenues-similar-2015%E2%80%99>

<sup>33</sup> <http://riadzany.blogspot.ae/2017/02/moroccan-tourism-latest-update.html>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.tourism-review.com/tunisian-tourism-has-a-positive-outlook-news5327>

68. Dubai's 12% year-on-year growth in visitor numbers over the first two months of 2017, was supported by growth in all key markets but largely driven by Chinese and Russian markets. Overnight tourists from China grew 60% and Russian visitation jumped 84% year-on-year in the first two months of the year.<sup>35</sup>
69. The tourism sector in Tunisia is doing better since the end of 2016, with signs of a certain recovery in traditional markets. There was renewed interest among French holidaymakers, leading to an increase of 30% in French arrivals in Tunisia in January 2017.
70. In Egypt, the situation was much better in January than in previous years, with an increase in the number of tourists, particularly from China, Japan and Ukraine. European countries such as Germany and France have registered a slight increase in reservations to Egypt.

### **F.3 Intraregional (Arab) versus interregional market**

#### **F.3.1. Major trends**

71. Globally, around 80% of the world's 1.2 billion international tourists travel within their own region. In contrast, only 42% of international tourist arrivals to the Middle East originate in countries within the region. However, this trend appears to be changing.
72. In 2016, intraregional travel in the Middle East and Africa region was up 7% compared to 2015, a reversal of trend from the 2% decline registered in 2015 over the previous year. International travel to other world regions also grew, but at a much slower pace (+4%). Much of the increase in intraregional travel was centred on travel within the GCC countries, as Gulf Arab residents continued to avoid destinations such as Lebanon and Egypt due to security concerns, and travel restrictions.
73. Interregional air travel trends for 2016 reveal that travel from the Americas was the strongest for destinations in Africa and the Middle East (+8%), followed by emerging markets in Asia and the Pacific (+6%), led by the Indian subcontinent and China. Trend from Europe (+6%), the largest source market, also showed an upward trajectory in the year, after a dip (-1%) in 2015 and modest growth (+2%) in 2014.<sup>36</sup>
74. Air passenger travel trends for January to April 2017 indicate 5% decline in expected departures to destinations within the Africa and the Middle East region, compared to an anticipated 1% increase in travel to other world regions. At the same time, bookings from Europe to Africa and the Middle East show a massive 13% growth underscoring the importance, maturity and resilience of this traditional source market for regional destinations. Bookings from the Americas to Africa and the Middle East destinations also indicate a strong positive trend in this period.<sup>37</sup>
75. Notably, tourists' destination choices within MENA would be affected by the prevailing security situation in individual markets.

#### **F.3.2. Key opportunities**

76. The Arab market can play a particular role in progressing tourism in the Middle East as it tends to spend more, stay longer and be more resilient in times of crisis due to its greater knowledge about the reality of the region. Although tourism in MENA reveals a diverse picture with the Gulf Council

<sup>35</sup> <http://gulfnews.com/business/sectors/tourism/over-3m-visitors-to-dubai-in-first-2-months-of-this-year-1.1998712>

<sup>36</sup> Forward Keys data from March 2017 edition of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

Countries (GCC), North Africa and the Levant destinations presenting different tourism development levels, there are important opportunities to strengthen regional cooperation. Some of the key benefits of collaboration and cooperation include:

- leveraging economies of scale and reducing costs by pooling resources
- transnational product development, knowledge sharing and human capital development, and more effective outreach
- lesser known destinations can benefit from the positive image of better known destinations in the region.

### **F.3.3. Key issues and constraints**

77. The main factors constraining the development of intraregional tourism in the Arab world are as follows:
- Poor cross border access and transportation connectivity
  - Narrow and poorly adapted tourism product base designed to meet the needs of the intraregional market
  - Inadequate marketing and promotion at the country and regional level
  - Poor quality of tourism facilities and services, compared to that offered by competing destinations in other regions
  - Lack of comprehensive, reliable, comparable and timely tourism statistics and economic impact data
  - Limited tourism investment promotion
  - Tourism education and training institutional policies and Programmes that do not meet the tourism labour market's needs

### **G. Planned investments**

78. STR's February 2017 Pipeline Report shows 153,460 rooms in 540 hotel projects under contract in the Middle East and 58,374 rooms in 309 projects under contract in Africa. About one-half of these hotel projects are in the construction phase, with Makkah and Dubai accounting for more than 10,000 rooms under construction.<sup>38</sup>
79. Despite the drop in oil prices, UAE Government spending on infrastructure projects is expected to be maintained, particularly in Dubai where preparations for Expo 2020 continue. Several development projects are ongoing such as the USD 26bn Dubai South airport expansion, the USD 15.7bn MBR Dubai Creek harbour development project, the USD 545mn Dubai Water Canal Project and the USD 6.8bn Mall of the World which is expected to welcome around 180 million visitors annually.
80. Under a new, US\$35 bn investment plan, the Omani government predicts the tourism sector will employ more than 500,000 people, with a large number of them predicted to be Omanis. Currently, at least 39 major tourism projects are at some stage of design, construction or tendering across the country.
81. Kuwait's investment into the travel and tourism sector was US\$408 mn in 2015 and is forecast to have risen by 11% in 2016 to reach US\$452 mn. In the years to 2026, tourism investment is expected to grow by an average of 3.7% annually to hit US\$651 mn. Kuwait is focused on adding new high profile brands to its hotel mix as well as opening up the country with its expansion Programme for Kuwait International Airport.
82. Bahrain is investing heavily in large infrastructure projects which will have direct benefits to the sector, including the US\$1 billion Bahrain International Airport Modernisation Programme. US\$928 million will be invested in the transformation of Hawar Islands into an eco-friendly tourism destination. Set along 100 hectares of the island's northern coast, the project is expected to create 3,000 job opportunities.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.hotelnewsnow.com/Articles/124653/STR-Middle-East-and-Africa-hotel-pipeline-for-February>

83. In Saudi Arabia, more than US\$6.9 billion worth of tourism projects have been approved by the Kingdom's National Transformation Programme, which is part of the nation's Vision 2030 strategy to diversify the economy away from oil.
84. In Egypt, seven new tourism projects are to be implemented in Egypt's Northern Coast. The plan includes hotels, services and entertainment centres to meet tourists' needs.<sup>39</sup>
85. In Morocco, several key infrastructure projects valued at about US\$742 million are underway in its economic capital Casablanca.

## **H. Key factors influencing the development of tourism in MENA**

### **H.1 Key factors**

86. The MENA region has been one of the fastest growing tourism regions in the world. Yet, events unfolding since the past several years are having a profound effect on tourist flows to several destinations and created uncertainty over the future of tourism in the region.
87. After being hit hard by the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war, the Middle East's troubled tourism markets are fighting back even as political hurdles remain. However, the unrest has divided countries in the region into three groups in terms of tourism performance:
- First, the group of countries that were doing very well and were indirectly and severely affected, such as Tunisia and Egypt
  - Second, the group of countries that were affected by the spillover, such as Jordan and Lebanon
  - Third, countries that managed to sustain growth and did extremely well, such as the GCC nations – UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia
88. The impact of the unrest in MENA has been most profound on once vibrant markets such as Egypt, Tunisia and Lebanon, where tourism is well below pre-crisis levels. On the other hand, destinations such as the UAE and Oman continue to capitalise on ever growing tourist numbers – in part, due to redirected tourism traffic from affected countries in the region, but majorly because of large scale infrastructural investments and focussed efforts to diversify their economies.
89. Apart from the geopolitical situation in MENA, several other external (exogenous) and internal (endogenous) factors have shaped and influenced the development of tourism in MENA in the past several years, and will likely continue to do so, in the near future. These include the shape of the global economy and global tourism trends, terrorist incidents (global and regional), health-related outbreaks, natural disasters, etc. Factors such as visa facilitation policies, currency fluctuations, and travel restrictions (travel bans and advisories) have had variable impacts – positive and negative, on tourism performance in different destinations in MENA. Equally, market access, infrastructure development, additions and changes in tourism products, facilities, capacity and quality, adoption of technology, and marketing and promotion are some of the endogenous factors influencing the state of tourism development in MENA.
90. In 2016, wider economic and geopolitical issues such as the lower oil prices, slow European economic performance, currency exchange fluctuations and regional unrest have played a significant role in tourism performance in MENA. Some of the key issues and impacts on different destinations are as follows:

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.meobserver.org/egypts-northern-coast/>

91. Tourism in Egypt was dealt a massive blow due to the imposition of travel bans on flights to Sharm el-Sheikh by a number of foreign countries, including Russia, the UK and Germany which represent over 40% of total tourism flows to the country.<sup>40</sup> Egypt's economy has been struggling since the 'Arab Spring' uprising in 2011 ushered in political instability that drove away tourists and foreign investors, major earners of foreign currency. Instability continues to mar the image of Egypt and tourists have yet to return to pre-uprising levels.
92. On a positive note, the Egyptian currency devaluation by 48% against the US dollar and the lifting of travel bans by some countries towards the end of the year somewhat helped reduce the free fall, though Egypt still ended the year with 46% less international tourist arrivals compared to the previous year.
93. The 2011 Jasmine revolution in Tunisia led to a drop in visitor numbers, and sporadic incidents of terrorist attacks continue to pose a challenge to the revival of its tourism industry. In the first half of 2016, Tunisia continued to suffer from the impact of various acts of terrorism in the previous year, reporting negative figures. However, it posted positive results in the second half of the year, as it welcomed a recovery in the Russian market, resulting from a diversion of traffic from other troubled destinations such as Turkey and Egypt.
94. Political tensions between Lebanon and the Gulf Countries - Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, led to the issuance of travel bans on Gulf nationals from visiting Lebanon in 2016. Travel advisories by GCC countries have been an ongoing challenge for Lebanon, as its tourism sector has hugely depended on the high spending Gulf nationals for its income.
95. Global oil prices continued to impact tourism particularly in GCC countries. Economic measures by the Saudi government to cut down expenses, has influenced the travel decisions of Saudis, who comprise the largest portion of intraregional visitors in MENA. Last year, Saudi Arabia announced that it would cut ministers' salaries by 20 percent and scale back financial perks for public sector employees in one of the most drastic measures yet by the energy-rich kingdom to save money at a time of low oil prices.
96. The slide of the Russian rouble following the plunge in the price of oil since mid-2014, led to an 18-year record low for Russian outbound tourism in 2015, impacting tourism in global destinations, including in MENA. However, the rebound in the rouble, gaining 19% against the US dollar since January 2016, had a positive impact on Russian tourist arrivals in several MENA destinations. Dubai reported 18% rise in Russian tourist arrivals in 2016 compared to the previous year.
97. At the same time, the closure of the Turkish and Egyptian tourism markets to Russian travellers, following travel bans, had the biggest impact on tourism in MENA. While the ban dealt a massive blow to Egypt's tourism sector, it redirected Russian tourism flows to destinations such as Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon providing a much-needed boost to their tourism sector. Redirected traffic from other European source markets such as UK, Germany and France also contributed to tourism growth in destinations such as Lebanon and the UAE.
98. In a bid to gain/regain more visitors from foreign source markets, a number of countries in MENA have recently announced and/or implemented visitor-friendly visa facilitation policies.

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/egypt-new-tourism-industry-fund.html>

- The UAE introduced visa on arrival for Chinese visitors in September 2016 – numbers increased 22% to 520,000 in 2016. As of January 2017, citizens of the Russian Federation visiting the UAE have also been granted visa on arrival at any entry point in the country. Apart from citizens of its five gulf neighbours, nationals of 49 countries - most of them westerners – can enter the UAE without a visa or can obtain a visa on arrival at any point of entry in the country.
  - The UAE Government has taken further steps to simplify the visa formalities for transit passengers, who can avail of a 96-hour visa at UAE airports irrespective of the airlines they are flying in. Previously, such a visa was given only to passengers flying on UAE airlines.
  - In March 2017, the UAE further announced that Indian citizens with a valid US visit visa or Green Card can avail of visa on arrival in the country. This move is anticipated to further boost leisure and business travel from India, already the largest tourism generating source market for the UAE.
  - In 2016, Bahrain made large efforts to facilitate the entry of international visitors to the country: visa fees were decreased by 80%, and the number of countries applying for visa upon arrival and online visas was increased. As a result, citizens of 67 countries can now get visas on arrival and another 114 countries can apply for online visas.
  - Tunisia lifted entry visas for Indian and Chinese tourists, and is initiating the process for setting up an electronic visa system
  - Egypt has also announced that it will introduce an electronic visa system by the end of May 2017
99. Concerted efforts are also being made by several destinations in MENA to develop their tourism infrastructure, build capacity, diversify tourism products, target new source markets, and invest in technology and human resources, in order to improve the contribution of tourism to their respective economies. Understandably, the level and scale of such efforts vary by destination.

## **H.2 Main challenges**

100. Given ongoing economic and geopolitical uncertainty in the region, attaining sustained growth and recovery in the tourism sector will require a renewed commitment by authorities to address the strategic, operational and regulatory bottlenecks in the sector that hamper competitiveness and growth.
101. Development of the sector in the region often lacks strategic focus, with many countries beset by outdated regulatory and administrative structures that impede market entrants, strategies that fail to integrate local communities, and underdeveloped infrastructure that prevents lucrative sub-sectors from flourishing (for example eco-tourism).
102. In North Africa, the main challenges are to improve the quality and diversity of tourism products and boost the image of destinations, while:
- National carriers continue to struggle to compete with much bigger international carriers which carry the bulk of passengers to and from the continent as a whole.
  - Tourism promoters, largely catering to the market for mass beach ('sun, sand, and sea') tourism, are forced to compete with other similar Mediterranean destinations driving down prices and profit margins.
  - Over-reliance of major destinations on European source markets resulted in vulnerability to the impact of economic conditions in Europe which in turn has resulted in drawing price-conscious tourists whose lower level of spending has led to reduced revenues for local tourism suppliers.

103. On the other hand, in the fast growing GCC region, growth continues to be driven by the “Gulf Three” airlines – Emirates, Etihad and Qatar Airways, supported by huge investments in infrastructure development including world-class airports, hotels and mega retail, leisure and entertainment projects.
104. Yet, the GCC’s tourism industry also faces several specific challenges which, in a sense, at least partly, spring from its rapid and successful development.
- Massive fleet expansion of major GCC-based carriers, leading to overcapacity across the sector
  - Product development deficiencies and limited appeal of tourist offerings
  - Requirement of increased number of skilled personnel and staff, leading to potential labour supply issues across the tourism industry
  - Risk of water shortages (while already being among the most water scarce countries in the world) – a key challenge in tourism development and sustainability
  - Lack of sufficient mid-market hotels and accommodations to cater to demand from fast emerging source markets in Asia and Africa
105. In the Levant, destinations such as Jordan and Lebanon have additional challenges of addressing the spill-over effect of instability in neighbouring countries. They both face the very real challenge of addressing the issue of Syrian refugees and containing the security, political, social and economic repercussion of their presence in the long term on the tourism sector.

### **H.3. Key opportunities**

106. Tourism has shown extraordinary strength and resilience in recent years, despite many challenges, particularly those related to safety and security. Yet, international travel continues to grow strongly and contribute to job creation and the wellbeing of communities around the world.
107. Against the background of terror attacks in various countries around the world, the regional geopolitical situation, and several other exogenous and endogenous factors, MENA destinations face significant challenges. Equally, the opportunities are significant.
108. First and foremost, all destinations in MENA must have a Crisis Management Plan in place to deal with any crisis situation. Since travellers’ destination choice is dependent on security perceptions, destinations that are prepared for crises so that they can act and react quickly and flexibly, can ensure fast recovery and maintain tourism in a turbulent environment.
109. Secondly, political stability is a key driver for sustainable growth in tourism. The GCC countries have reaped the benefits of providing a secure and stable tourism environment, with limited impact of the regional unrest on their tourism appeal to international visitors. In fact, these countries have benefitted from redistribution of tourist traffic from affected MENA countries towards their economies. Politically stable destinations in MENA have the opportunity to leverage their safe and secure tourism environment to international and regional tourists.
110. Europe is the backbone of world tourism and is the key source market for tourism in MENA. However, during times of crisis, the tourism sector in MENA has borne the brunt of its over-reliance on European source markets that have avoided travel to specific destinations due to economic (currency fluctuations) or political decision making (travel bans and advisories). MENA destinations have the opportunity to diversify their tourism base by targeting new markets, especially emerging economies such as India and China that are fast growing tourism source markets and are easily

accessible. India is already the largest source market for the United Arab Emirates, and China has been growing as a tourism source market for several countries in the region.

111. The MENA region is blessed with vast natural, cultural and heritage, rural and eco-tourism, and religious tourism assets. Destinations have the opportunity to create new products and develop new segments to cater to international and regional tourists.
112. For example, culture can be an important element of the tourism product, which creates distinctiveness in a crowded global marketplace. By pursuing cultural tourism, MENA destinations can reap a raft of benefits such as creating jobs and businesses; diversifying the local economy; creating opportunities for SMEs; attracting visitors interested in history and preservation; preserving local traditions and culture; generating local investment in historic resources; enhancing local community pride in heritage; and increasing awareness of the site's significance.<sup>41</sup>
113. Other opportunities to develop and accelerate the development of tourism in MENA include:
  - facilitating visa arrangements, improving air connectivity, and improving airport infrastructure and facilities; destinations such as the UAE, Tunisia and Bahrain have already implemented visitor friendly visa policies in 2016 for citizens of specific markets
  - enhancing marketing and promotions focusing on marketing and promoting key destinations and commercial products likely to attract visitors from a diversified target base;
  - harnessing the use of ICT, and mobile technology to cater to the young, millennial travellers
  - improving the quality of tourism facilities and services to meet market requirements;
  - enhancing the capacity of tourism education and training institutions to meet the industry's need for skilled staff;
  - increasing the level of tourism investment promotion; and
  - using existing and developing new training Programmes and processes designed to raise the capacity of national tourism administration officials to undertake the above initiatives in partnership with the private sector.
114. Above all, a balanced approach to marketing and product development will provide an opportunity to develop a distinct destination brand that can withstand external and internal pressures, in times of crisis.

## **I. Overview of main policies and strategies to enhance the resilience of tourism, accelerate and consolidate recovery and step up the sector's contribution to inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development**

### **I.1 Egypt**

115. Egypt's Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2020 considers tourism as an important national industry. It seeks to address the challenges it faces and create a suitable environment to raise competitiveness and support inclusive growth.
116. Specific strategic initiatives include:
  - Enhancing safety and security: Creating a hygiene unit to monitor food and beverage quality; using rapid response emergency systems; applying new system of classification for hotels and resorts; introducing advanced security systems in hotels; developing a tourism awareness campaign for locals; and the Egypt Now project which direct broadcasts images from cameras installed in tourist areas to reassure visitors of the stability of key destinations including Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, Hurghada and Sharm El Sheikh.

<sup>41</sup> <http://omanobserver.om/oman-needs-to-tap-cultural-tourism-intensively/>

- Marketing and promotion: High impact public relations and advertising campaigns, and enhanced e-marketing, particularly targeting high potential markets such as China, India and Scandinavian countries
- Improving service quality: Education and vocational training through the National Skill Standards Project; creating a culinary training centre; and applying accreditation and certification systems.
- Enhancing sustainability: Establishing a green tourism unit and green star hotel Programme to monitor environmentally friendly and social responsible management of hotels; enhancing environmental awareness; pursuing energy efficiency; encouraging the use of solar and renewable energy sources; reducing water consumption; and maintaining the biodiversity and reducing solid/liquid waste and carbon emissions.
- Making institutional changes: Tourism Development Authority and Ministry of Tourism as a one-stop-shop for licences and permits; launching an intranet system linking five and four star hotels with the Egyptian Hotels Association and Ministry; and gathering selected independent professionals to provide skills and experience.
- Providing visas on arrival for many source market countries and provide support for new or enhanced transport routes.

117. In 2016, some of the measures undertaken to revive and restore tourism include:

- Developing a new tourism plan to enhance tourism infrastructure, upgrade product/services levels, and develop stronger cooperation with international tourism partners
- Opening of a brand new state-of-the-art Terminal 2 at Cairo Airport which is expected to boost its annual passenger capacity by 7.5 million passengers per year, as well as bring the airport's total passenger handling capacity to 30 million
- Upgrading security and safety measures in all airports to international standards
- Offer to upgrade and restore accommodations that have been negatively affected due to the decrease in tourism flow over the past five years
- Cooperation with national carrier EgyptAir to launch new destinations, and support charter/low-cost companies to launch more charter services to destinations in Egypt; relaunch of EgyptAir charter flights to Japan, after an absence of five years
- Special promotional and PR campaigns in key source markets to enhance the perception of the market; advertising campaigns in new markets in Central Asia and the Far East; use of social media to enhance Egypt's image across target markets
- Launch of the "The Holy Family Trip" path as a new product for religious tourism; launch of the Tour n' Cure product for the treatment of Virus C patients to boost medical tourism in the country
- Initiating the launch of electronic visa systems (to be activated by Summer 2017) to help boost tourism flow to the country

## **I.2 Jordan**

118. The Jordan Tourism Development Project (2005-2008) provided support for the Jordan National Tourism Strategy, launched in 2005, with the aim of doubling tourism receipts by 2010. In 2016, a new national strategy has been drawn up, with input from government departments and agencies as well as industry representatives. In addition to plans for marketing, regulation and standards, the strategy aims to focus on training and improvements to technology.

119. Between 2015 and 2020, US\$36 million from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) funding Programme is being used to support new marketing initiatives, adaptations of the regulatory framework, improvements to facilities, skills and service quality, and access to finance for companies in the tourism sector.

120. In 2016, some of the measures undertaken to enhance and boost tourism include:

- Waiver of tourist entry visa fees for those who stay in Jordan for two consecutive nights
- Agreement between the Jordan Tourism Board (JTB) and a Hungarian charter flight firm in October 2016, to bring weekly flights from Budapest to Aqaba; initiation of negotiations to bring low-cost airline carriers from the United Kingdom and Italy to Aqaba; launch of low cost flights by Royal Jordanian from Lebanon to Aqaba
- A JD37 (US\$52) million budget was earmarked for marketing activities to promote tourism; diversification of marketing and promotion techniques/tools, targeting arrivals from new and more resilient markets, with an emphasis on Asian & pilgrim markets; encouraging tourists to share their experiences on social media with the hashtags #love\_Jordan or #Share\_Your\_Jordan
- Targeted advertising on popular Saudi television stations and in the country's major shopping malls to boost visitor arrivals from Saudi Arabia
- Launch of "Jordan: A family destination" summer brochure, targeting families with recommended activities for tourists of all ages; distributed in airports and at border crossings
- Incentives for private tour operators to reduce operational costs; orienting private sector to offer new products and meet demand for alternative accommodation (e.g. bed and breakfast accommodation); improve tourism services in historical sites
- Providing IT training for small businesses, enabling them to market themselves through their own websites
- Launch of a new website - [www.johotels.org](http://www.johotels.org) by the Jordan Hotels Association (JHA) to serve tourists and the hospitality sector, offering hotel reservations with minimal commissions

### **I.3 Lebanon**

121. Lebanon has launched a 5-year Rural Tourism Strategy to enhance economic opportunities in Lebanese rural areas through improving the competitiveness of specific value chains, including rural tourism and another set of agriculture sectors and food products.

122. Some of the measures to stimulate and sustain tourism growth include:

- Organization of over 90 international concerts and cultural performances lined up for the 2016 summer season
- Launch of promotional campaigns on the MBC channel for Eid el Adha to induce increased inbound tourism during the festival season.
- Continuing promotion of the 'Live Love Lebanon' campaign ([www.livelovelebanon.com](http://www.livelovelebanon.com)) that aims to share the beauty of Lebanon and portray a genuine and positive image of the country with the rest of the world. People are encouraged to capture a picture or video anywhere in Lebanon and upload it with the hashtag #LiveLoveLebanon on the campaign's official Facebook page and other social media.
- Development of leisure concepts that are appealing to European and American visitors, as well as domestic visitors, such as guesthouses, bed and breakfasts, boutique hotels in regions outside Beirut but also in the heart of the capital city.
- Launch of the Lebanese diaspora tourism promotion Programme (Ana) which targets 14 million Lebanese abroad and encourages them to visit Lebanon at least once in their lifetime.
- Launch of the Phoenicians' Route initiative which aims to develop and promote cultural tourism itineraries along 18 Mediterranean countries and more than 80 towns of Phoenician-Punic origin and culture.

- Launch of the ‘Authentic Shouf’ advertising campaign and website [www.authenticshouf.com](http://www.authenticshouf.com) to promote the Shouf region and unveil its authentic side and shed light on its many environmental, historical and cultural assets, from its coastal beaches to its cedars, and its most important religious landmarks and heritage sites.

#### **I.4 Tunisia**

123. Tunisia’s Tourism Development Strategy has three main objectives: competitiveness, profitability and sustainability. The strategy’s five pillars to achieve its objectives are:

- Product innovation and diversification: develop a quality charter for all professionals; encourage innovative projects by supporting and rebuilding the tourist areas; encourage new forms of accommodation; strengthen diversification in the supply chain
- Tourism promotion: adopt a marketing approach to target source markets; develop a new events policy; diversify funding sources to increase promotion budget; create a Tunisia Tourism brand and regional identity
- Institutional framework: re-structure the National Office of Tunisian Tourism (ONTT) and create a tourist promotion and marketing structure; and a separate structure for tourism vocational training
- Financial sector restructuring: perform an audit to measure the financial health of hotels; restore the financial health of hotels in financial distress
- Upgrading of ICT in tourism (tourism web compatible): ONTT website overhaul; launch e-tourism training; create and manage a Tunisia tourism portal; create websites focused on Tunisia’s cultural and historical products and experiences

124. Some of the measures undertaken to stimulate tourism demand and provide support to the local industry include:

- Granting of loans to tourism businesses that could be repaid over a period of seven years
- Deferment of loan repayments scheduled for 2016; deferment of payment of tax arrears
- 25 new tourism projects with a total value of 260 million dinars have been set up. Another 250 projects worth 1.5 billion dinars are planned for the period 2017-2020
- Implementation of safety measures at tourist locations, such as providing armed policemen to guard hotels and beaches
- Lifting of entry visas in Tunisia for Indian and Chinese tourists; initiating the process for setting up an electronic visa system
- Tourism promotion in new markets such as India and China, and regional markets; encouraging domestic tourism
- Product diversification and promotion of cultural tourism, Sahara safari trips and medical tourism packages - giving European patients access to less costly therapeutic and cosmetic treatments in Tunisia

#### **I.5 Morocco**

125. Morocco’s Vision 2020 Tourism Strategy aims to double the size of the Moroccan tourist industry, based on a unique tourism model that combines growth with responsible management of the environment and respect for socio-cultural authenticity.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2016

126. The Strategy calls for implementing six major development Programmes for a diversified portfolio of products, built around culture, the seaside and nature, with an underlying theme of sustainability, and supplemented with Programmes centred on high added value niches such as business, wellness and health tourism. The main priorities for improving tourism performance are to:
- Raise the quality of professional training and higher education
  - Improve the sector's attractiveness to young people
  - Make tourism companies more competitive
  - Give Morocco greater online visibility as a tourist destination
  - Diversify the tourist offering
  - Roll out sustainability tracking in the tourist sector
127. Some of the specific measures implemented by Morocco's tourism promotion office (ONMT) in 2016 to promote the country as a tourism destination include:
- Adoption of an emergency plan providing for a set of measures ranging from opening new air routes, launching promotional campaigns to showcasing Morocco's attractions and using the Climate COP22 Summit to attract more tourists.
  - Additional flights for the 2016/2017 autumn season to boost tourist arrivals from key European source markets and from the GCC.
  - Launch of a digital promotion campaign in the Scandinavian markets, focussed on bloggers to create a 'circle of digital ambassadors' of Morocco in the Scandinavian countries.
  - Launch of a digital campaign targeting six bloggers from countries such as France, USA and China to create culturally enriched content incorporating six viral videos and six different themes - Gastronomy, History, Discovery, Beauty, Decoration and Sport.
  - Introduction of visa exemption policy for Chinese citizens from June 2016; development of promotional materials in Mandarin, increased participation in tourism fairs in China and Mandarin-language training for tour guides; launch of a '100,000 Chinese' promotion plan with Etihad Airways targeting 100,000 Chinese visitors to Morocco each year until 2018.
  - Launch of aggressive marketing campaigns to promote Morocco in Russia; hosting of representatives of 30 Russian news outlets and 400 Russian travel agencies in Agadir, Marrakech and Casablanca to promote and increase the visibility of the Kingdom's tourist offerings
  - From March 2016, launch of a 20% cash rebate as a filming incentive. While the destination has been a popular location for decades, it has started to promote itself much more in recent years.

## **I.6 Bahrain**

128. Bahrain's Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2026 lays out several strategic and infrastructural initiatives aimed to double tourism's contribution to Bahrain's GDP from 3.6% in 2015 to 6.6% by 2020. The strategy's four driving pillars are: Awareness, Attraction, Access and Accommodation.
129. Initiatives are already underway in support of these pillars, including:
- Awareness: Establishing tourism offices in key markets to promote tourism in Bahrain, as well as its key offerings as a destination for both tourists and operators of tours, hotels and cruise lines.
  - Attraction: Developing new leisure attractions through utilizing the island's many beaches, and certifying Bahraini tour guides to offer tourists an insider's experience of the Kingdom. MICE tourism is also being targeted through the planned construction of a new 40,000 sqm. exhibition site capable of hosting over 5,000 people.

- Access: Revamping existing airport facilities to accommodate 14 million passengers (a 65% increase to existing capacity), and upgrading port infrastructure to increase amount of mooring facilities for cruise liners and yachts passing through the Arabian Gulf. In addition, the construction of the new King Hamad Causeway, connecting Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, will provide increased and more efficient access for vehicles traveling between the two Kingdoms.
  - Accommodation: Encouraging hotel operators to establish operations in Bahrain to cater to a strong demand for sea-front hotels, as well as high-quality mid-range accommodation for family and business travellers. Over 10 five-star and four-star hotels are now under development.
130. Key measures undertaken in 2016 to step up the sector's contribution to inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development include:
- Launch of a new project, "Brand Bahrain," with the tagline 'Bahrain Ours Yours' that aims to celebrate Bahrain's identity. As part of the initiative, Bahrain opened seven representative offices in key target markets in Europe (United Kingdom, France and Germany), Asia (India, Russia and China) and Middle East (Saudi Arabia) to promote and market the country regionally and internationally. These offices will work in collaboration with Gulf Air to create more inbound tourism.
  - Initiation of a regulatory framework and policy governing water sports to guarantee the safety of tourists. This policy will impact different activities such as parasailing, boat rides, day cruises, and activities linked to the Bahraini tradition of pearl diving.
  - Substantial increase in the number of sporting events, cultural activities and themed festivals, compared to the previous year. Bahrain hosted the first Ironman Championship in the region, bringing competitors, fans and supporters from all over the world.
  - Launch of visa facilitation measures such as decreasing visa fees by 80% from 25BD to 5BD, and increasing the number of countries that can avail visa upon arrival and online visa. As a result, 67 countries can now get visa on arrival and 114 countries can apply for a visa online for entry into Bahrain.
  - Launch of training Programmes and certification of 100 Bahraini tour guides to offer tourists an insider's experience of the Kingdom.

## **I.7 Oman**

131. Oman's government has launched the 'Oman Tourism Strategy' covering the years 2016 to 2040, which provides a clearly defined and structured road map to ensure that tourism becomes one of the most important economic pillars for the country's future.
132. By 2040, with five million international tourists, tourism would generate over 6% of the Sultanate's annual GDP and provide employment for 500,000 people, of which 75% would be Omani. The Government is looking to turn the destination into a model of sustainable tourism for the entire Gulf region. It is also targeting foreign investors, particularly from the Middle East, the UK and the USA.<sup>43</sup>
133. A think-tank is working on developing new products in tourism, including cruise tourism and iconic tourism projects, as well as favouring the construction of hotels, resorts and themed attractions.
134. Oman's Ministry of Tourism has identified regions which will be developed in "clusters" to highlight the uniqueness of Oman's "tourism experience" in the Gulf area. Oman will highlight various areas

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<sup>43</sup> <https://hotelandtourisonline.com/2017/02/07/oman-tourism-sets-sights-for-2040/>

such as the unique coastal area of Musandam; the Hajar Mountains; the Frankincense Trail in Salalah; cosmopolitan culture in Muscat and soft adventure in Oman's deserts. Each area will offer accommodation suitable for different budgets, culinary offerings, transportation and unique experiences.

135. To support and encourage small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to operate and invest in the tourism sector, the Ministry of Tourism is facilitating the issuance of tourism licences in a number of governorates.
136. Some of the measures undertaken in 2016 to step up the sector's contribution to inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development include:
  - To maintain the quality of its tourism services sector, Oman regularly monitors tourism enterprises to ensure strict compliance with applicable laws and regulations. In 2016, licenses of some establishments were cancelled as these were found flouting tourism related laws and regulations.<sup>44</sup>
  - Looking for growth in its mid-market travel sector and focusing on rural areas, Oman announced the opening of three new budget hotels in Muscat in the first quarter of 2017.
  - The Ministry of Tourism launched its 'Discover Oman's Beauty' summer campaign in the Sultanate, targeted at locals and residents. The campaign was also promoted in GCC countries, in collaboration with Oman Air and a number of travel & tourism agencies and hotels.
  - The Ministry of Tourism signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Oman LNG and the Spanish Cultural Center to train 30 jobseekers to learn the basics of spoken Spanish and Italian, in order to become effective tour guides and add value to the tourism sector in the country.

### **I.7 Qatar**

137. Qatar's National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030, developed in line with the objectives of the Qatar National Vision 2030, has four guiding principles in alignment with national priorities: must be in harmony with local traditions and values; must align with the national agenda; must create a positive economic impact; and must be environmentally responsible.
138. The strategy is set to have numerous economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits, in addition to various positive ramifications on the tourism industry in Qatar:
  - Economic benefits: diversified economy; greater foreign and domestic investments; increased GDP; more opportunities for entrepreneurship and private initiative; growth in the number of SMEs; reinforced role for the private sector in the economy; advanced and more developed tourism sector characterized by world-class standards, capabilities and performance levels
  - Social benefits: greater opportunities for family-friendly leisure and recreation; equitable and balanced development of all areas and regions in Qatar; better return of investment on the infrastructure; increased employment opportunities; easier access to transportation; strengthened ability to host world-class international events, including the FIFA World Cup 2022; ability to benefit in the long-term from the investments made to host the FIFA World Cup 2022 as well as other landmark events; chance to ensure a prosperous and thriving future for the generations to come
  - Cultural benefits: opportunity to uphold and promote Qatar's cultural legacy and traditions; expansion of Qatar's cultural tourism offering through projects showcasing the country's distinctive heritage and perpetuating many of its traditions; greater promotion of local artisans and their work; additional support for the development of local artistic talent

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<sup>44</sup> <http://timesofoman.com/article/103229/Oman/Tourism/Eighteen-tourism-licences-cancelled-in-Oman-in-2016>

- Environmental benefits: greater ability to protect the country's natural resources; improved capacity to preserve fragile habitats and ecosystems; enhances capability to safeguard the country's wildlife, fauna and flora; reduced road congestions and air pollution levels resulting from a more efficient transportation network
  - Industry benefits: better planning and growth-conducive regulations in line with international best practices; greater role for the private sector in spearheading tourism-related initiatives and plans; a greatly enhanced tourism human capital; better targeted and more efficiently rolled out tourism promotional efforts; increased synergy between the various industry stakeholders from the private sector, the public sector and civil society
139. Several measures have been undertaken to step up the sector's contribution to inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development include:
- New policies were instituted end-2016, including a new 96-hour, free-of-charge transit visa for all nationalities offered through Qatar Airways and a revised Qatar Airways fare structure to promote stopovers. Cruise passenger visas are also being processed very efficiently.
  - As of the end of 2016, QTA has a network of eight offices representing Qatar in New York, Milan, London, Paris, Berlin, Singapore, Riyadh and Istanbul, with plans to expand into other East Asian and Scandinavian markets in 2017. The representative offices have launched over 70 campaigns, targeting media outlets, tour operators, and travel agents.
  - In January 2017, the Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) launched its inaugural shopping festival – Shop Qatar – which created a pull factor for visitors from the neighbouring GCC countries.
  - To promote Qatar as a destination for business events, QTA partnered with 27 local organisations to bid for international events, in addition to participating in numerous global tradeshows alongside private sector partners.
  - Executive training Programmes are offered for continuous professional development in the tourism sector; a new tour guide training course has been launched to hone the skills of tour guides in the market.
  - Qatar will host the official World Tourism Day celebrations in 2017, which will be held under the theme “Sustainable Tourism – A Tool for Development.”

### **I.8 Saudi Arabia**

140. The Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) is mandated to promote tourism and preserve the national heritage of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The SCTH's National Tourism Development Project, the strategy framework for tourism established in 2001, is aimed at developing sustainable tourism in the Kingdom that will support local communities, providing jobs and preserving the natural environment through an integrated partnership with all parties.
141. In 2016, the Saudi Vision 2030 was prepared which considers tourism as a promising sector and one of the new pillars of the Saudi economy. This has been reflected in the National Transformation Programme where four strategic objectives for tourism development are being targeted by 2020:
- Establishing and developing tourism destinations as well as integrated entertainment cities and islands for all family members, and encourage the private sector to invest in and operate them;
  - Protect and develop awareness of national heritage sites, and encourage private investment and operation;
  - Increase and organize events and festivals that appeal to the various segments of society
  - Increase and develop hospitality facilities and tourism services.

142. To achieve these tourism strategic objectives, the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage has launched a number of different initiatives as follows:
- Saudi Company for handicraft industries;
  - The Kingdom as a Destination for Muslims;
  - Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Programme to maintain cultural heritage of the kingdom;
  - Establish Finance guarantee Programme;
  - Ola City Development;
  - Uqair Development;
  - Farasan Islands Development;
  - Developing the alrras al'abyad beach in Arrais in Madinah;
  - Okaz City Development;
  - Provide funding/financing for hospitality and tourism related projects;
  - Support "Live Saudi" Programme;
  - Tourism Marketing Council
143. In 2016, the General Authority for Entertainment was formed, mandated to regulate and develop the entertainment sector in the Kingdom, in order to encourage domestic tourism and minimize leakages from outbound tourism.
144. Measures being taken for development of tourism and to increase domestic tourism include:
- Ongoing investment in major transport infrastructure
  - Increased capacity at the Holy Mosques in both Mecca and Madinah
  - Significant private sector investment in hotels and resorts
  - Significant investment in parks, attractions, festivals and other recreational activities
  - SCTH investment in the preservation of heritage sites
  - Introduction of the "Post Umrah Programme" which allows Pilgrims to travel around the Kingdom
  - Provision of tourism skills training to over 30,000 Saudi citizens
145. In 2016, more than 70 major festivals and 620 smaller events were organized in the country, which included cultural, arts, sports and shopping activities, creating over 7,000 temporary jobs for young Saudis, and boosting domestic tourism.
146. A nationwide campaign – Live Saudi Arabia – was created, to encourage residents to visit historic locations. It was supported by an advertisement campaign on social media. Information on local tourism was provided through its internal tourism information centers at the Taif and Asir airports, in addition to 350 electronic tourist guides distributed at airports, hotels and markets across the country.<sup>45</sup>
147. SCTH also encourages ecotourism through its ongoing 'Leave No Trace' initiative – which aims to raise awareness about the importance of preserving the natural beauty of the country, and to encourage responsible tourism behavior among travelers. It promotes the "environment preservation" concept through events and contests organized in natural areas, schools, universities and markets, and uses multimedia to disseminate the "Leave No Trace" principles.

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.arabnews.com/node/933926/saudi-arabia>

## **I.9 United Arab Emirates**

148. Tourism is well established in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as a significant “non-oil” contributor to the economy with some Emirates currently more successful than others. Tourism policy and operations are currently the reserve of the individual Emirates. The Emirates, which each have a tourism authority or department, are responsible for all aspects of tourism such as operations, regulation, development, human resources, destination marketing etc.
149. The Government of UAE and, particularly the Minister of Economy to which tourism responsibility has recently been assigned is aware of the potential of tourism as an engine for “post oil” economic growth, enterprise creation, income distribution and socio-economic development. A new ‘Department of Tourism Affairs’ has been established within the Ministry of Economy, with the eventual possible transition to a National Tourism Authority as an agency of the Ministry.
150. Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansouri, Minister of Economy, has called for a national tourism strategy. Tourism is projected to play a major role in the government’s plans to diversify the national economy and stimulate non-oil sectors to increase their contribution to the GDP as part of the UAE’s vision for the post-oil era.<sup>46</sup>
151. The presentation of the UAE as a national destination composed of seven internal destinations with diverse experiences and regions will enhance its overall attractiveness and broaden its appeal to wide target markets. A national tourism strategy and action plan would help drive sustained and sustainable growth in the tourism economy across the Emirates of the UAE.
152. The federal ministry intends to focus on a number of issues, including promotion of domestic tourism and green tourism.
153. Tourism policies of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the key tourism destinations in the UAE, are highlighted below.

### **I.9.1 Dubai**

154. Tourism is a central pillar of Dubai’s economic growth and diversification strategy. Dubai’s Tourism Vision for 2020 is a strategic roadmap with the key objective of attracting 20 million visitors per year by 2020, doubling the number welcomed in 2012.
155. The strategy outlines what needs to be delivered for the emirate to effectively drive and serve visitor growth with multiple initiatives covering regulatory policy, infrastructure development, product offering enhancement, and destination marketing investments. The overall goal of these initiatives and the strategy is to position Dubai as the ‘first choice’ for the international leisure and business traveler.
156. Part of this strategy involves adapting a marketing approach to showcase Dubai to a wider audience and increasing awareness and conversion of flight and hotel bookings.
157. To accomplish these goals, the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM), the principal authority for the planning, supervision, development and marketing of tourism in Dubai, is focusing on three key objectives:
- Maintaining market share and momentum in existing source markets
  - Increasing market share in markets identified as having high growth potential, including a number of emerging markets
  - Increasing the number of repeat visitors from all markets and encourage them to stay longer

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/tourism/uae-needs-tourism-strategy-to-advance-economic-diversification>

158. Significantly, attracting young UAE nationals to become part of Dubai's fast growing tourism sector is at the heart of DTCM's social and economic development plans. It aims to build future leaders and enhance capacity within the Emirati community to increase the number of nationals working in tourist-facing roles.
159. In January 2017, DTCM's Dubai College of Tourism announced the launch of its "Industry Nationalization Initiative" - a platform that will offer a series of recruitment, training and industry on-boarding Programmes, geared toward increasing the Emirati workforce, and adding to the sustainability and growth of Dubai's tourism industry.<sup>47</sup>

### **I.9.2 Abu Dhabi**

160. Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority (TCA Abu Dhabi) regulates, develops and promotes the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, with the aim of supporting Abu Dhabi's evolution into a world-class, sustainable tourism destination of distinction.
161. In alignment with the core tenets of Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 and the Abu Dhabi Plan, TCA Abu Dhabi's strategy is geared towards contributing to the nation's vision of economic diversification, by working closely with stakeholders and partners to market Abu Dhabi locally and internationally:
- Promote Abu Dhabi as an inspiring destination to experience cultural authenticity, diverse natural
  - Position Abu Dhabi as a thriving cultural hub that engages and educates residents and tourists alike by highlighting the UAE's rich national heritage and bringing the best global art, museums and music to the region.
162. Through a combination of activities that engage its stakeholders, TCA Abu Dhabi aims to nurture a cultured community that preserves heritage and values, attract national and international investments by marketing Abu Dhabi's key tourism segments, increase visitor numbers and stimulate growth by building an attractive yet distinctive tourism and cultural destination.
163. Part of TCA Abu Dhabi's ongoing efforts involve building human capital, by creating unique employment and skills training opportunities for Emiratis and contributing positively to the sustained growth of the emirate's tourism industry and the socio-economic welfare of its citizens:
- TCA Abu Dhabi has signed memorandums of understanding and agreements with a number of local universities to introduce training courses that relate to tourism and its services.
  - To nurture a generation of school students to appreciate the importance of the tourism and investment sector, a number of Programmes have been launched such as the Tourism Summer Youth Programme.
164. Abu Dhabi is also a frontrunner in promoting eco-tourism in the UAE, with the launch of a Dh11.5 billion (US\$3.1 billion) eco-tourism project way back in 2009. The project called Desert Islands combines six nature reserves spread across eight islands. When fully operational, the Desert Islands are expected to generate Dh1.2 billion (\$326 million) in tourism revenue annually, and create around 6,500 jobs.

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.travelandtourworld.com/news/article/dubai-college-prepared-boost-tourism-via-new-initiative/>

## **J. Outlook for MENA tourism**

### **J.1. Outlook for 2017**

165. Based on the analysis of tourism trends in 2016, the UNWTO Confidence Index and economic projections, international tourist arrivals are forecast to grow between 3% and 4% worldwide in 2017, following an increase of 4% in 2016. For the Middle East and Africa, UNWTO forecasts international tourist arrivals to increase by 2% to 5% in 2017, following a decrease of 4% in 2016. The forecast interval is wider in these regions due to higher uncertainty and disruption risks.
166. The latest survey by the UNWTO Panel of Experts confirms these positive expectations. The panel of experts from Africa (141) have the highest expectations for 2017, as growth in that region picked up firmly in the second half of 2016 after some years of subdued growth. In the Middle East (137), experts are also optimistic, looking forward to a considerable improvement from the weak results in 2016.

### **J.2. Long term prospects (horizon 2030)**

167. Long term prospects for the MENA region are strongly positive, with international tourist arrivals projected to reach 195 million by 2030.
168. By sub-region, the Middle East and Africa are projected to receive 149 million and 46 million international arrivals respectively in 2030, benefiting both established and emerging destinations.
169. Experts trust in a strong pent up demand for tourism to the region from both intra and inter-regional generating markets, which will continue to be released as uncertainty fades away and consumer confidence returns. Above all, political stability will be critical for tourism to prosper and contribute to socio-economic progress in the region's nations.
- A more stable political framework is conducive to successfully addressing challenges which include the removal of barriers to growth, strengthening the sector's resilience, adapting to changing consumer patterns and technological changes, as well as developing new business models and maximizing tourism's social and economic benefits, while minimizing possible negative impacts.

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