

Iraq embraces new dawn of opportunity



International tourism investors are moving into Iraq

UK-based Dunira Strategy has been commissioned to write the 'Travel and Tourism' chapter of the leading investment guide to Iraq, jointly published by UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) and Iraq's National Investment Commission.

Dunira's connection with Iraq most notably brought about the guidance and successful facilitation of the Tourism Board of Iraq's presence at WTM 2010 for the first time.

Managing director, Dunira Strategy, Benjamin Carey

recalled that on its first ever visit to an international tourism fair, the delegation "recognised that Iraq's 10,000 years of history could easily compete with every other destination in the world."

More than 1.5 million travellers visited Iraq in 2010, following triple digit growth for three successive years.

Some niche tourism sectors have emerged post-conflict and at least 20 airlines now fly into six airports across Iraq.

Steve Askin, owner, Trail

Riding UK, guides tourists across Iraq's impressive terrain. He said: "Trail Riding UK is forging the way ahead with an exciting dirt bike ride starting in the north and finishing in Basra. Our inaugural ride next June will show that Iraq is no longer a no go area and

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open to the rest of the world." The key, Askin added, is to work with local partners and to encourage entrepreneurs.

There are also options for visits to ancient Babylon, current day Al Hillah in Babil Province and shrine cities.

The majority of Iraq's visitors previously came from Iran but this is changing with the success of international tour

operators, such as Hinterland Travel. Booming business has forced them to increase the number of tours offered in 2011/2012.

Investors are also moving into Iraq: Millennium & Copthorne Hotels seven hotel developments underway,

Marriott International is constructing two luxury hotels and Range Hospitality, in conjunction with Shaza Hotels, is developing the first five-star hotel in Karbala. In the Kurdistan region the newest addition to their luxury hotel market is the Park Hotel which joins the likes of Erbil Rotana.

By Dunira Strategy

Partnership success

Iran-based airline Mahan Air has signed a full content deal with Travelport, a business services provider to the global travel industry.

The deal will make the carrier's published fares and inventory will be accessible to Travelport-connected agents and available immediately for e-ticketing on both its Galileo and Worldspan systems.

Mahan Air has upgraded its GDS connectivity on Galileo and Worldspan to Inside Availability to ensure real-time access to its fares and inventory, and will make its inventory available to Travelport agency subscribers at the same rates as the carrier's web fares.

Senior director supplier services, Travelport Middle East and Africa, Will Owen Hughes said: "We are pleased to ensure that with these system upgrades and Mahan Air's full content commitment to Travelport connected agents will enjoy access to their full range of fares and inventory, which in turn will maximise Mahan Air's access to our global travel agency network and help them achieve continued growth."

"This enhanced partnership underscores the relevance of Travelport's GDS as the preferred booking channel for travel agents and airlines in all corners of the Middle East, including Iran."

From its base in Tehran, Mahan Air operates services to the Far East, Middle East, Central Asia and Europe. Established as Iran's first private airline, it now has a fleet of 25 Airbus and Boeing 747 aircraft supporting a route network spanning 28 destinations and 12 countries. Mahan Air currently handles 13 per cent of all international flights from Iran.



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A quietly confident approach

Yemen boasts some of the best undiscovered sites in the world, yet it struggles to reach the renown it deserves. Managing director, Dunira Strategy – sustainable tourism consultants – Benjamin Carey talks to TTTG about Yemen’s real potential



Whilst Yemen’s beaches may be beautiful, they are usually empty – apart from hundreds of nesting turtles and some local fishermen. A few boutique hotels are starting to emerge, run by Yemeni entrepreneurs, European travellers that have fallen in love with the country, and Gulf investors that have spotted an opportunity. Accor, Mövenpick, Sheraton and Taj have all already recognised the unique attraction of Yemen and other leading brands are rapidly

is having a challenging time. As executive director, Yemen Tourism Promotion Board, Fatima Al-Huraibi recently remarked: “The last few months have been difficult for Yemen. But we look forward to welcoming back our friends in Europe and the rest of the world. Tourism is the industry that can offer perhaps the greatest opportunities for sustainable social and economic development in Yemen, especially for women in rural areas.”



renewing their plans and looking forward. Carey said: “Unlike Oman and Egypt, Yemen is not a package holiday destination and this ensures its authenticity. Its traditional Bedouin hospitality makes it distinctive and unique, and – if you want to learn Arabic – it’s the best place to go: Yemeni Arabic is the purest and Yemen has the best language schools. “Whilst there is sometimes disagreement between Arab nations, there is a broad consensus amongst Arabs all over the world, describing Yemen as the ancestral home of all Arabs and expressing pride in their shared heritage.” First described by Ptolemy as ‘Arabia Felix’ (fortunate or happy Arabia), Yemen is truly blessed, according to Carey. Not only does it have the largest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites on the Arabian Peninsula, but it is also the only place in the region that you can find dinosaur footprints. Freya Stark famously described Shibam Hadhramaut (another UNESCO site) as the ‘Manhattan of the Desert’ on account of its 1,000 year old mud-brick tower houses that rise out of the desert. Yet, in spite of all its attractions, Yemen

At the time of writing, the impact of the Arab Spring on Yemen is not yet clear. But tourism represents the best prospect for sustainable economic development. When, during last year’s WTM, secretary general, UNWTO, Taleb Rifai argued that this is not the time to turn our backs on Yemen because tourism celebrates all that is beautiful, he was anticipating today’s challenges. Carey added: “The next few weeks for Yemeni tourism are uncertain, although responsible and adventurous travellers will always find their way to the world’s best destinations. Hotels throughout Yemen are confident that, as soon as the situation is clarified, tourists will return, led by the more adventurous Europeans. “Yemen, has an ancient culture and is a resilient country; it is also easily accessible with 11 airlines regularly flying in to Sana’a and Aden, which has great ambition and real potential to return as a major cruise destination in the region.” Despite Yemen’s decision to withdraw from this year’s WTM, Al-Huraibi has promised that they will return next year. Meetings with Benjamin Carey at WTM can be arranged by contacting yemen@dunira.com.

Creating unique and inspiring packages for next season

Dubai’s Ibn Battuta Gate Hotel, operated by Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts, has completed the soft opening of its Safar Spa. The spa is designed to reflect the story of the hotel, being themed around the journey of famed 14th century traveller Ibn Battuta. Director of sales and marketing, Ibn Battuta Gate Hotel, Andrew Hughes said: “With Safar Spa you can take a journey through the world of spa. The concept is that the ingredients used in our treatments are from around the world, taking guests through an international spa journey.” This year, the hotel has been offering unique summer packages and at WTM the hotel will be promoting its new winter initiative. Hughes explained: “Being a

city hotel, we created a unique package this summer, which has been the all-inclusive summer offer. It was the first time a city hotel has offered an all-inclusive package and we have had great success, and seen great positive response from the UK and Germany. “Following this success we have launched our winter all-inclusive to attract the winter and festive holidaymakers.” Normal restaurant menus will apply with no restrictions, and quality house and branded beverages remain available, with additional discounts on Oceana’s highly popular West

14th Steak House. At Oceana Beach Club on The Palm, Jumeirah, guests can also enjoy the sun, sand and sea, with a private beach, infinity pool and outdoor dining accessible through the hotel’s complimentary shuttle bus. “At WTM we want to increase more awareness of our winter package, and we wish to refresh

“At WTM, we want to increase more awareness of our winter package.”

our message of being a city hotel with a private beach club, great dining options, shopping mall facilities, and metro link within walking distance. These facilities make us the perfect destination for both leisure and corporate travellers.”

You wouldn't be the first to visit Yemen - the Queen of Sheba, Cain and Abel have all been here before, not to mention our own Queen on her honeymoon! You would however be one of the few modern adventurers to experience this incredible and unspoilt country and see the mud-brick tower houses sprouting out of mountainsides, smell the frankincense and myrrh which permeate the bustling souks, taste the fabbed Hadhramaut honey and journey through the ethereal landscapes from prehistoric islands to vast deserts and mountain villages shrouded in clouds. Yemen boasts UNESCO Cultural and Natural Heritage sites, but we are most proud of our reputation for traditional hospitality. Oh, and there are endless beaches, coral reefs and a guarantee of sun too!

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