

General Session: The Middle Eastern Spa Industry Numbers

Tuesday, May 22nd

9:30AM – 10:00AM

Empire Room

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Many people characterize the Middle East by lack of accountability and lack of tastefulness. But we see it as full of dynamism, innovation and forward-thinking. Spas will shape the future of the ME and therefore help to shape history.

US is ahead of ME in data? No doubt about it, but this area has an incredible story that encompasses the past and the future. There is a desire to be the biggest, the best, the tallest - perhaps a fantasyland.

Some of the iconic visions for this in the ME are the 300 islands shaped into the map of the world.

Airlines play a major role in the ME, as they are investing to become the greatest in the globe. Airport expansion has been also targeted for huge investments, besides the airlines fast growth in the last years.

The ME population has also been growing at a fast rate and currently there are around two hundred thousand new people coming to the region every month. The age of the population is also a factor to consider, since 65% is less than thirty years old. This contrast with the rest of the world is enough for some discussion for fresh and new ideas regarding spa and wellness. These young people are tech savvy and have a considerable level of online penetration. People are in rush for progress. Still much of the labor population is unskilled.

Tourism in the ME has the fastest growth rate in the world (10.2%), surpassing Asia Pacific (7.1%). Two hundred and sixty five hotels are expected to open by 2010 and all these will have a high-end spa. It's known it has to exist at these properties. We will need educated people, nevertheless to support this growth.

Dubai will be paving the way. A lot of what is done here is iconic and creating a sense of legacy has always been important. Everybody knows the hotel with shape of a sail – The Burj Al-Arab.

Qatar and “The Pearl”, a 985-acre island development, but also many museums, hotels, and airport, will be of considerable importance in the ME. This resort will even attempt to host the Olympics.

Kuwait has a twenty year old tourism strategy and is doubling in the number of hotels. Failaka Island in the Persian Gulf will also have all the star-elements possible.

Oman will have a huge residential project as well. Palm Islands will become the largest man-made islands in the world. Dubailand will imply a \$20 Billion investment, etc.

Abu Dhabi is the capital of UAE and is also the richest city in the world. Every person would be worth \$17 Million. Here, over \$277 Billion are being spent, and things that should have been done in Dubai will be done here, reaching higher perfection in its growth. Abu Dhabi also has more natural resources, and therefore will be more easily able to support more sustainable projects. This area is also embracing many eco-initiatives.

The hotel anticipated growth is enormous and the ME has very quickly been adapting the rest or the world trends. All new types of development already exist here.

Regarding spas, predominantly we have resort spas, day spas are less relevant. For spas, Dubai is a regional leader.

Beyond economics, ME will have the worlds' first green city, in footprint. A fully sustainable city, recycling its own waste, for example.

Health in the ME is not so good in terms of pace and rate people live in. Obesity is a reality, as well as diabetes, and hypertension.

In the ME there is an "everything is possible" approach, not at how we can do it, but when. The best possible way is researched, as well as excelled in. But also global issues are being embraced and this is very important. Soon we will be talking about places that provide medicine in a unique way.

Overall, capitalism is giving away to altruism.