Oman launches specialist training program

With interest and demand for Oman at record levels across Australia, the national tourism authority - Sultanate of Oman Tourism - has launched a new travel industry training initiative to increase knowledge and understanding of the destination's unique attractions and appeal.

THE NEW online destination specialist training program, *Khanjar Club*, is now live with training modules available to download on the Oman Tourism website - www.tourismoman.com.au.

Mona Tannous

The modules are also being replicated onto the intranet sites of key retail partners, including Flight Centre, Travelscene American Express, Harvey World Travel and Jetset Travelworld agency groups, ensuring instant access to the latest updates and infomation.

Travel agents who register and complete the modules will qualify to be a part of an elite group of destination specialists, known as the *Khanjar Club*.

These specialists will have access to direct consumer leads as well as priority for all upcoming familiarisation trips to Oman.

The Khanjar is a traditional Omani dagger that symbolises the nation's rich heritage and culture. The dagger and local culture are significant, as both have survived the modernisation of the country and are symbolic of ancient and modern Oman.

Oman Tourism country manager Australia and New Zealand, Mona Tannous, said the launch of the new online training packages was timely, with record interest and demand for Oman.

"Demand and enquiry for Oman is growing rapidly, so we need to ensure our travel agent partners are equipped to really understand the destination and how to present it to clients.

"This will be an exclusive club of destination specialists and we look forward to opening the eyes of our agents to the beauty and diversity of Oman," said Tannous.

The modules can be completed in three stages, with the first an introductory overview to Oman.

The program uses a number of different mediums, including video content.

"Oman is an experiential destination, which is why we have used video clips to showcase the country. Agents will see the dramatic beauty of the landscape and discover that Oman is a modern country that has managed to retain the delicate balance between history, culture and modern infrastructure."

The second module will be launched in late May, with the third to follow shortly behind.

"Module two will show agents how to sell Oman, while module three will outline a range of short and long-stay itineraries for Oman that are available through wholesalers in Australia New Zealand," she said.

Agents who complete all three modules will qualify as a member of the *Khanjar Club* and could be in the running to travel on an exclusive familiarisation trip in October, which will see five agents from each Australian state visit Oman.

www.tourismoman.com.au

Image: Oman is warm and welcoming

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Capacity fuels Middle East growth

Airlines are adding more capacity to the Middle Eastern destinations of Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha providing greater choice for Australian consumers.

EMIRATES AIRLINES now operates 63 weekly flights between Australia and Dubai, including thrice daily services from Melbourne and double daily flights from Brisbane, Perth and Sydney. Etihad Airways has a total of 24 return flights per week between Australia and Abu Dhabi, including a double-daily service between Sydney and Abu Dhabi in conjunction with V Australia, as well as daily flights between Melbourne and Abu Dhabi, and thrice weekly services between Brisbane and Abu Dhabi. Qatar Airways also operates daily flights from Melbourne to Doha.

"Since launching flights from Australia 15 years ago, Emirates has steadily grown its services between Australia and Dubai and beyond to more than 100 cities in 60 countries, including 13 destinations in the Middle East," said Barry Brown, Emirates Vice President Australasia.

"Dubai, apart from being a unique stopover destination, has become a must–see for Australian travellers as well as a holiday destination in its own right. Emirates will add seven more flights from Sydney next October, bringing the total to 70 flights per week," added Brown.

Accommodation capacity is being expanded in Dubai, with 1137 hotel and apartment rooms opened in January 2011 and a further 11,530 rooms planned to open by the end of the year, taking the total accommodation inventory to 82,485 rooms.

To capitalise on this interest, the Dubai Government Department of Tourism has launched a new online training program for Australian and New Zealand agents to help them better sell Dubai as a destination.

The 'Dubai Expert' program is made up of a series of online modules designed to build in-depth knowledge about Dubai and allow agents to learn at their own pace.

Once completed agents will qualify as a 'Dubai Expert'. Further benefits of the program include priority selection for familiarisation trips and training workshops, special deals on travel and stay packages, and attractive incentives and prizes throughout the year.

"Australia and New Zealand are very important markets for Dubai. In 2010, the number of visitors rose to 158,907, a 5.9 percent increase over 2009. By increasing the knowledge of the destination we are confident we will see these figures increase significantly," said the Department's director, Julie King.

For further information and to register for the program visit http://anz.dubaixperts.com or www.dubaitourism.ae

Tempo offers Qatar stopover

THE ARABIAN PENINSULA is rapidly opening to tourism and business with Etihad and Qatar Airlines offering non-stop flights from Australia into the region and beyond.

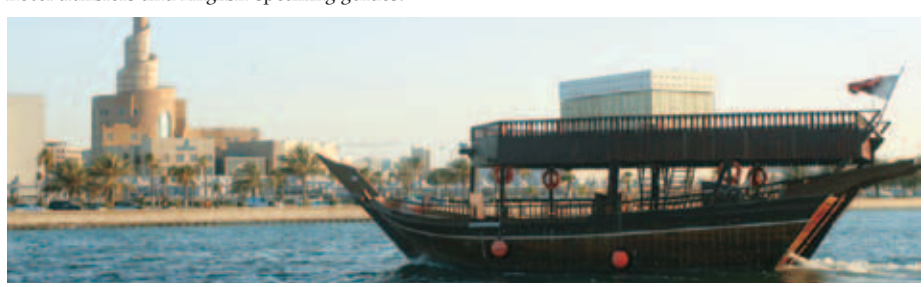
With Dubai and Abu Dhabi now established as stop-over destinations enroute to Europe, Tempo Holidays has launched a package combining Qatar Airways flights from Melbourne with a three-day *Taste of Qatar* getaway in Doha.

The stopover package is priced from $501 per person twin share.

The short-break stay is an ideal way to break up a flight to Europe and includes two nights' accommodation at the exclusive W Doha Hotel and Residences, with daily breakfast and a tour of the capital, Doha.

Travellers will visit the Qatar National Museum, Doha's beautiful seafront corniche, the fascinating Old Souq, Dhow Harbour, the Equestrian Club and Falcon Market, which attracts people from all over the Gulf, who still practice the ancient art of falcon breeding.

The package also includes private return airport/hotel transfers and English-speaking guides.

Doha is a classic blend of ancient and contemporary cultures with a modern skyline and world-class shopping mixed with the towering dunes of the country's southeast, traditional markets and timeless cultures.

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