

Eastern Med sales still solid as travellers shift to alternate destinations

While political events are affecting traveller numbers to some Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East countries, operators are reporting a shift towards more stable destinations in the region.

By Jenny Burns

LEADING Eastern Mediterranean operators are confident areas affected by recent political events will bounce back this year.

At the same time many areas remain unaffected with sales to Italy, Greece and Turkey particularly strong.

Eastern Mediterranean Tourism Association (EMTA) chair Iain Ferguson said nightly reporting on the Libya situation accompanied by sensationalist generalisations inferring a general problem across the whole region was having an impact on tourism to unaffected Eastern Med destinations. As a result, regional performances were varying depending on location.

“Countries in the north such as Italy, Greece, Balkans and Turkey are travelling pretty much as expected,” Ferguson said.

“But those in the south such as Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Libya look like having a slower year.

“Recent events in prime destination Egypt and reduced tourism numbers there have had a spin-off effect on linked destinations such as Jordan, Israel and Syria.”

At the same time Ferguson said it was heartening to see high profile operators back in Egypt and to hear how the Egyptians had welcomed

them back and how normal everything was.

“There is also the added bonus of no crowds and quick easy access to sites and attractions not only in Egypt but at other destinations now affected by reduced tourist numbers,” he said.

Ferguson said during the recent uncertainty in Egypt anecdotal evidence indicated that most experienced markets continued to travel but to alternate destinations in the region, whereas those less familiar with the region.

“Experienced travellers will do their research, check DFAT’s Smarttraveller advice and make their decision accordingly,” he said.

“Less experienced travellers are more likely to delay until later in the year or go at another time.

“Regardless, the Eastern Med still has and will continue to have a strong attraction for Australian travel markets of all types, whether they be religious, historical, cultural or experiential.”

Bunnik Tours managing director Dennis Bunnik said the troubles in Egypt have had a dampening effect on the whole region.

“However with Egypt finally returning to normal we are seeing a resumption of bookings – especially last minute bookings for travel to Egypt this month,” he said.

For 2011 the hot destinations for Bunnik clients are Turkey and Syria – either by themselves or in a combo tour. “Turkey is well up on last year as is our ‘Ancient Road’ tour (Istanbul to Rome via Greece),” he said.

“In the coming months we expect Turkey to remain strong and Egypt to bounce back for travel during the peak September to March high season. This will have a flow-on effect on Jordan and Israel.”

Insight Vacations managing director Lorraine Sharp said prior to the situation in Cairo, Egypt was not only the company’s top performer in the

Eastern Mediterranean but amongst the top three performing regions across the entire product range.

“We are confident this trend will continue into the remainder of the year,” she said.

“We were extremely excited to announce Insight’s return to Egypt from the start of this month. We had been monitoring the situation closely and kept in constant communication with our ground handlers and are completely confident our tours will operate effectively and safely.”

Sharp said whilst bookings to the region hadn’t completely picked up again, the number of bookings that came in after the return announcement had certainly exceeded expectations.

“Our retention of previously booked clients has remained strong at 80 per cent and of the 20 per cent that cancelled many bought other destinations which is an advantage of having such a large portfolio of product like Insight offers,” she said.

Sun Island Tours product manager Karen Bonanno said the problems that had occurred in Egypt, Libya and the rest of the Middle East have had an impact on business.

At the same time it has shifted the business to more stable countries within the Eastern Mediterranean like Greece, Turkey and Cyprus as well as

Italy, France, Croatia, Spain, Portugal and Malta.

Greece and Mediterranean Travel Centre managing director Halina Hussein said while the Middle Eastern region suffered originally she could see the area was starting to bounce back. “Though we had some original cancellations, we have had clients changing from their original destination, being Egypt to instead travel to Jordan or Israel,” she said.

“Both these destinations are starting to enjoy increased traffic from travellers wishing to avoid Egypt for the moment, but still visit the area – however we believe it won’t be long till travel to Egypt returns to its normal numbers, if not more.”

Hussein said Greece and Turkey were performing extremely well while Oman was also gaining in popularity.

DFAT revises Egypt travel advisory

THE Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has this month revised its travel advisory for certain areas in Egypt. Luxor, Aswan and the Red Sea Resorts have been issued a lower level of alert – down from level four ‘Reconsider your need to travel’ to level three ‘High degree of caution’. The decision was welcomed by the Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA).



Coach touring is 'best way to see' Eastern Med region

DURING the 16-plus years Kath Williams has been selling the Eastern Mediterranean region she has seen demand ebb and flow. However her advice to clients on the best way to see the region hasn't changed over the years.

"I have always been a great fan of coach touring, I believe it's the best way to see the region," explained Kath a senior consultant with Jetset Rowville, south-east of Melbourne.

In more recent times Kath has also seen strong demand for cruises around the region.

"One of the great advantages of cruising and coach touring is they are all inclusive so my clients know exactly what they will be paying," she said.

"Itineraries also take in the highlights of these countries and are conducted by experts who can explain their fascinating history and culture.

"As I explain to my clients who are nervous about travelling to the region, the other great advantage of coach travel and cruising is they are safe.

"None of the coach or cruising companies

will ever put their clients in danger – if an area is not safe they won't go there.

"This reassurance is most important especially in regions that can be volatile."

'One of the great advantages of cruising and coach touring is they are all inclusive'

Having been to the region on a number of occasions Kath is a great fan.

"I describe Turkey as the world's best kept secret, I think it is just wonderful," she said.

"The ruins are remarkable and attending the Anzac Day service at Gallipoli was very humbling."

Kath was so moved by Gallipoli and the service that she is taking a group there in 2015 to mark the 100-year anniversary.

Having been to Egypt on a number of occasions she can also pass on many personal experiences and tips to her clients.



Gallipoli a key focus of Albatross Travel's 'Grand Tour of Turkey'

ALBATROSS Travel's "Grand Tour of Turkey" tour has been designed specifically for Australians and includes more time in the Gallipoli region. It also includes all the must-see sights of Turkey.

During a three-night stay around Gallipoli travellers spend an uninterrupted day exploring the Anzac commemorative sites and conduct a private wreath laying ceremony to commemorate the events of April 25, 1915.

In addition, the tour includes sightseeing tours of Istanbul, Cappadocia, Pamukkale, Pergamum, Perge and the ruins of Ephesus.

The 16-day tour is priced at \$2989 per person (twin share). Departures are available from May to September 2011 and space is limited to a maximum of 30 passengers per departure.

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Insight offers encourage travellers to return



INSIGHT Vacations is offering a range of specials to encourage consumers to visit Egypt. Agent incentives are also on offer.

In conjunction with Singapore Airlines, Insight is offering its nine-day "Best of Egypt" itinerary from \$3474 per person ex Sydney or Brisbane, or \$3454 ex Melbourne or Perth. The itinerary includes visits to Cairo, Memphis, Sakkara, Giza, Aswan, Philae Island, Edfu and Luxor. The deal is valid for travel from until March 31, 2012, but must be booked by October 23, 2011.

For those who don't need airfares, Insight also has a number of discounts available across its Egypt product, ranging from \$150 to \$310 per person off the tour price, valid for all tours departing until September 2011.

Until May 27 travel agents earn triple the amount of World Rewards points for all new bookings made on Egypt escorted tours.

Save \$2200 with Bench Egypt deals

SAVINGS of up to \$2200 per couple are available on a range of discounted Bench International itineraries in Egypt.

Savings from \$470 per couple are available on shorter packages taken between April and September.

Bench product director Fiona Orton said services and facilities for tourists had returned to normal in Cairo and other main locations like Luxor, Aswan, Abu Simbel and the Sinai Peninsula, offering a great opportunity to visit during the quiet season.

Major savings are on the 11-Day "Nile Explorer", which includes a stay in Cairo, and seven nights sailing on the Nile in a traditional Dahabiya, with a complimentary Sound and Light Show at Karnak Temple in Luxor or a hot air balloon ride. It's now available for \$2850 per person (twin share).

There are also savings of \$1130 per couple on the nine-day "Nile Discoverer" which now costs \$1830 per person.

Emirates predicts steady growth for Eastern Med region

EMIRATES is predicting travel to the Eastern Mediterranean region will bounce back in the year ahead. Sales manager Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Northern Territory, Dean Cleaver, said while demand for the region had been affected by the recent political unrest, Emirates was predicting steady growth during the year, especially as the peak travel season from April to November approached.

Emirates' destinations in the Eastern Mediterranean were among the strongest

performing for the airline ex Australia. A high number of VFR travellers ensured demand remains consistent.

"With the strong Australian dollar and a combination of unique destinations available, we've also seen a strong growth in leisure travel to the region," Cleaver said.

Emirates operates daily flights to three Italian destinations together with Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey.

"Our Dubai hub is perfectly placed for

Australians seeking to travel to the Eastern Mediterranean region," Cleaver said.

"There has been a particularly strong growth for Emirates' services that depart from Australia that enable travellers to reach these destinations within the same day of travel.

"A stopover in Dubai remains an attractive option – as a unique crossroad of Asia, Europe and Africa, this exciting and modern city offers travellers a different experience against more traditional destinations in the region."



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Sun Island Tours expands Eastern Med experiences

SUN Island Tours is offering a diverse range of new product in the Eastern Mediterranean.

New destinations are also on offer including Lebanon and Syria.

In Lebanon Sun Island is offering hotel and city stay packages in Beirut together with escorted tours.

In Syria private multi-day tours with English speaking guides are on offer while packages combining Jordan, Syria and Lebanon are also available.

New in Jordan is a package aimed at the family market. The seven-night "Jordan Family Adventure" takes in such attractions as Amman, Jerash, the Dead Sea, Madaba, Mt Nebo, Kerak, Petra, Aqaba and Wadi Rum. The package costs \$1286 for adults, \$964 for children based on two adults sharing with either one or two children.

Sun Island is also offering a family package in Egypt. The 11-night "Egypt Family Adventure" includes Cairo, Aswan, Kom Ombo, Edfu, Luxor and Cairo. It costs \$2536 per adult, \$1058 per children based again on adults sharing with one or two children.

There's also a new tour taking in Israel and Jordan. The 11-night "Holy Land and Jordan Tour" includes Tel



Aviv, Massada, Jerusalem, Ein Karem, Bethlehem, Jericho, Tiberias, Galilee, Golan Heights, Nazareth, Haifa, Jaffa, Allenby Bridge, Amman, Madaba, Nebo, Kerak, Petra and Wadi Rum. Prices start from \$2810 per person (twin share).

In Greece, Sun Island has introduced new hotels as well as new "Greek Island Hopping" packages. The new packages include Sifnos, Tinos, Milos and Amorgos.

In Turkey Sun Island's product has expanded with new escorted tours throughout the brochure as well as new traditional gulette sailings. There's also a Turkish cooking tour.

RJ – 'all about helping the agent'

'DON'T try to squeeze your holiday into a fare, let Royal Jordanian help you build a fare to fit your holiday' is Royal Jordanian's new Australian marketing catchcry.

RJ Australian manager, Iain Ferguson, said the line perfectly encapsulated what the airline offered Australian travellers.

"We have so many options in terms of where we fly, our value added packages and competitive airfares that we can look after all Australians travel requirements in the Eastern Med and further afield," he said.

"With daily flights from Australia over Bangkok, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur in conjunction with our oneworld partners Qantas, British Airways and Cathay Pacific or with Thai Airways International or Malaysia Airlines, RJ flies to 58 destinations in 37 countries with one of the most modern fleets in the world.

"Specially priced side trip fares to other regional destinations, free stopover points in Asia and stopover packages in Jordan and other flexible options help travel agents to

build a competitive fare to fit what their client wants to do rather than try to cram their client's journey into an inflexible fare structure.

"At Royal Jordanian we're all about helping the agent win the business and provide an enjoyable travel experience so that the client will come back to that same agent next time they want to travel.

"Added to this is the opportunity for the client to earn oneworld frequent flyer points."

Ferguson said over time Jordan has proved itself to be a stable and progressive state and continued to do so.

"Regrettably Jordan's tourism industry has been effected by recent events in nearby Egypt and the accompanying sensationalist media generalisations about the whole region which have impacted on unaffected neighbouring states," he said. "As a consequence, tourism numbers to Jordan are down considerably. However with none of the usual crowds around, this is the perfect time to visit Jordan's world renowned attractions."

Cox & Kings expands Turkey options

COX & Kings has increased its range of Small Group Journeys to Turkey.

On the back of demand for the longer "Grand Tour of Turkey" and shorter seven and eight-day options

to the west and south of the country, the company has launched a 15-day "Anatolian Explorer" (from \$5095) and a 17-day "Highlights of Turkey" (from \$5281) tour.



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Firopotamos beach in Milos, Greece

ICON Holidays has added Icon Journeys to its tailored travel service, with almost 40 itineraries across Icon's key destinations of Greece, Turkey, Egypt, India and the Middle East.

Icon's owner, Simon Hills, said the key difference from most on the market was that every itinerary was available for departure 365 days of the year (cruises excepted) with a minimum of two passengers on each departure. All touring was based on private arrangements, with private guides and drivers and private vehicles.

"So there's no waiting for stragglers, no full coach loads and no need to listen to descriptions in other languages," Hills said.

Icon Journeys offers four tiers of accommodation levels and styles, starting with Icon Select, chosen by the Icon staff as being faithful to the

places they are in. At the top of the tree is the Premium level which offers the "best of the best".

New to the Icon product range, Icon Journeys carries itineraries in Jordan, Syria and Israel.

"While Icon Holidays is for all those who want their travel to be completely tailor-made, Icon Journeys is for all those clients who are less certain about what they want, who seek the 'cost benefit' of pre-organised itineraries and involvement in local experiences," Hills said.

"This is a quality product aimed at travellers rather than tourists and designed with a core of experiential travel plus plenty of free time to sit back and enjoy the experience."

The packages range from four-day city explorer itineraries to 16-day extended country-wide packages.

Enjoy a 'Taste of Egypt' at a special price

TEMPO Holidays is offering a special price on its "Taste of Egypt" tour.

"Egypt is one of Tempo Holidays' most popular destinations and we are keen to recommence our operations to the destination after the recent unrest," said Tempo Holidays product manager Middle East, Shan Puvi.

"We are offering some incredible deals and this is a great time for travellers to experience the destination's rich history and culture which spans over 5000 years."

Puvi said the seven-day "Taste of Egypt" special offer was perfect for the time-challenged traveller and included some of the 'must see' sites.

Departing Cairo Airport, the package includes the Pyramids of Giza, Sphinx and Egyptian Museum in Cairo and a three-night Nile cruise between Aswan and Luxor, taking in the Valley of the Kings and Philae, Luxor, Karnak and Queen Hatshepsut temples.

The package includes three nights in Cairo, all transfers in Cairo, Luxor and Aswan, six breakfasts, four lunches, three dinners, portage and taxes, private sightseeing in Cairo and group sightseeing in Luxor and Aswan.

Two people booking the package will get 40 per cent



off the second fare and a free hotel upgrade in Cairo if travelling from May 1 to September 25. Prices start at \$1175 per person (twin share).



Luxor temple (ETA)

Efforts under way to bring Egypt back 'better than ever'

MAJOR tourist sites throughout Egypt have reopened to the public as international travel warnings begin to ease.

"Australia was among the first to downgrade its warning from do not travel to reconsider your need to travel," said Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA) Tourism Counsellor, Ibrahim Khalil.

"There have been some tangible moves back to normality with the reopening of the Egyptian Museum and the return of tourists, particularly those from Europe, to Sharm El Sheikh, the Red Sea and Upper Egypt.

"The situation on the ground has continued to improve and we believe that the groundwork is being laid for a return to normal. There are tremendous efforts under way to bring Egypt back better than ever, and the new energy and spirit of optimism are leading the country forward to greater political reform and stability."

APT introduces Oberoi Philae cruise ship



THE *Oberoi Philae* has joined the *Moon Goddess* as a boutique APT Nile cruise ship for the 2011/12 season.

Both vessels are featured in APT's new 2011/12 Egypt and Jordan (featuring Turkey, Dubai and Europe) brochure, promising passengers up to six nights in colonial era surroundings as they cruise from Aswan to Luxor in luxury.

The *Oberoi Philae* features in a new tour, the 13-night "Egyptian Jewels" which includes a Nile cruise, four nights in Cairo at the Sofitel El Gezira and three nights at The Oberoi Sahl Hasheesh on the Red Sea.



Bunnik Ancient Road tour attracts strong demand

BUNNIK Tours is reporting strong demand for its 26-day "Ancient Road Tour".

The tour explores the ancient roads once taken by the Ottoman, Greek and Roman empires. It starts in Istanbul where group members explore such attractions as the Blue Mosque, the domed Basilica of St Sophia and the Topkapi Palace. The group then visits Gallipoli and Troy.

Greece is the next stop where the group visits the monasteries of Meteora and the town of Delphi, one of the most popular archaeological sites in Greece. In Athens the tour takes in the Acropolis, the Plaka district and

other well-known attractions.

The final stop is Italy where the group spends four nights in the city of Sorrento followed by two nights in Rome. Visits to Capri and Pompeii are amongst the sightseeing highlights.

The tour costs from \$8298 per person (twin share) which includes airfares from Australia, 20 nights' accommodation in good quality hotels with private facilities (three to four star) one night on the sleeper train from Istanbul to Thessaloniki, one night onboard a ferry (Patras to Bari) in an outside cabin and 20 breakfasts and three dinners, including group welcome and farewell dinners.

Turkey boom prompts dedicated brochure

GREECE and Mediterranean Travel Centre (GMTC) has released a stand-alone Turkey brochure.

GMTC products and marketing co-ordinator Kelly Dodd said the brochure was in response to strong consumer demand.

"Turkey is currently going through a boom, with a lot of interest," she said.

"The brochure aims to showcase just how incredible a destination it is."

The brochure also includes Greece and Egypt extension options.

Dodd said the brochure featured GMTC's most popular Turkey tours including the 10-day "Classical Turkey" which included the

main sites in Turkey including Istanbul, Ankara, Cappadocia, Konya, Pamukkale, Kusadasi, Ephesus, Pergamum, Troy, Canakkale and Gallipoli. The tour costs from \$1095 per person (twin share).

Other tours included ranged in size from a few days up to 18 day with most programs easily combinable with the Greek Islands.

"We have also introduced a new 21-day "Grand Tour of Turkey" which combines a 14-day coach tour taking in all the historical highlights of Turkey with a cruise around Southern Turkey and Greece," Dodd said.

The tour costs from \$3794 per person (twin share).

New online Oman agent training

OMAN Tourism has launched an on line training program for agents.

The first module is now on line, the second and third modules will be released in the next few months.

Agents who complete all three modules will be eligible to win a trip to Oman with one agent per state per travel agent group being selected.

In addition Oman will be running more travel agent familiarisation tours

and is offering discounted rates for those agents who wish to travel to Oman independently.

Oman Tourism manager Australia/ New Zealand Mona Tannous said tactical campaigns and working more closely with the trade was the next major step in Oman's marketing plans in Australia. Tannous said the training modules would provide agents with all the tools they needed to sell Oman.



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