

# Fascination for Eastern Med region sees demand remain strong



Abu Simbel, Egypt (image courtesy of Bunnik Tours)

Demand for the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East regions remains strong, aided by a strong Aussie dollar, and good deals in the market.

By Jenny Burns

**M**AJOR Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East operators are reporting continued demand for the region.

Eastern Mediterranean Tourism Association (EMTA) chair Iain Ferguson said the strong market recovery experienced at the start of the year showed no signs of abating.

"It seems to be driven by a combination of factors, including pent-up demand, from the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) which impacted in 2009, the strength of the Australian dollar

against the euro and despite a recent hiccup, against the US dollar.

"The fact that the region holds a certain fascination and must-see factor for Australians from all walks of life and the diverse scope of product created by Australian wholesalers to cater for all the various market segments are other reasons.

"With stability returning to Lebanon, it is very pleasing to see the steady increase in travellers to what used to be a 'must see region'. Most trips seem to be combined with visits to nearby Syria, Jordan and Israel."

Ferguson said more and more retailers now understood what drove this market and appreciated the selling power of the region as a whole rather than an individual destination.

"Consequently the canny ones are pre-booking and maximising the sale of as much product as possible before their clients leave Australia," he said.

"Having contributed significantly to this outcome, EMTA is now looking to promote the Eastern Med region direct to the Australian traveller by means of a consumer roadshow later this year. Timing will obviously

be related to the production and distribution of 2011 product and all Eastern Med operators will be invited to participate."

Emirates' senior vice president, commercial operations Far East and Australasia, Richard Jewsbury, says the airline's performance has been outstanding even while the industry has experienced extremely tough conditions.

"More and more people are choosing to fly Emirates to Europe, and then make the most of a stopover in Dubai. And why not? With overflowing malls, world-class businesses and sophisticated haunts, it's a truly international oasis that attracts entrepreneurs, adventurers and pleasure-seekers alike," he said.

"Research shows that Australians are avid travellers, and it's great to see that this trend is here to stay. Affordable prices and a strong Aussie dollar are combining to create ideal travel conditions for Aussies – we're confident that we will continue to grow the number of Australians flying Emirates in the next 12 months"

Greece and Mediterranean Travel

Centre chief executive officer Halina Hussein said the Mediterranean was still performing fairly strongly, with Egypt being the strongest performer. There has also been strong demand for Jordan.

"We are already getting calls for clients interested in travel for 2011 proving demand for the region is strong," Hussein said.

"We are also seeing a rise in the number of quality driven travellers. With the Australian dollar doing better against the \$US and euro than in previous years, clients are more selective in regards of the type of holiday they want.

"These clients are independent travellers wanting a quality holiday, variety, and interesting itineraries in the Eastern Med, particularly when travelling to Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates.

"Product that presents good value for money without the risk of cancellation is in demand."

APT general manager marketing Debra Fox said sales and inquiries were up on the previous season, due in part to APT running with a stand-alone Egypt brochure.

"Egypt is on the list of our target market, so we predict it will grow for us," she said. "We are seeing our Canada-Alaska and our Europe river cruising customers looking for a similar experience in Egypt.

"Egypt also has wow factor experiences so combined with our style of packaging the destination is becoming more important for us."

International Destinations managing director Margaret Hill described the market as "a little bumpy".

"The euro news and the erratic behaviour of the US dollar has had an effect," she said. "We are seeing lots of forward booking for December and the first half of 2011, but it is rather quiet for the next few months.

"We are finding that escorted groups are the way to go especially in Middle Eastern areas. Syria and Jordan are our bestsellers."

Mediterranean Holidays and Tours director Colleen Woodward said Greece bookings had been firm for the 2010 season considering all the media hype regarding the Greek financial crisis.

"Of course it does not impact on the tourism aspect, because hotels and tour companies are all business as usual and in a lot of instances hotels are much cheaper there than last year," she said.

*selling* EasternMed

## Oman famil increases sales opportunities

A RECENT familiarisation to Oman has given Mike McGrath from Travel Associates Australia far more confidence to sell the destination.

The famil, organised by the Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Tourism, was Mike's first trip to the region. With around 20 to 25 per cent of his clients travelling through the Middle East he was keen to gather more information about the region.

"Many of my clients stopover in Dubai for anything from two to seven days," explained Mike who is based in the agency's Perth office.

"My visit to Oman now allows me to confidently sell the destination as a side trip from Dubai. As I discovered, Oman has so much to offer and is very close to and easily accessed from Dubai.

"As my clients are looking for somewhere 'different' as a destination or stopover, I would hope it will increase my market. Once the word gets out about Oman, I am sure it will.

"Furthermore more reasonable priced fares to the region in conjunction with Oman Tourism's current promotions and advertising would open it up as a destination in its own right and may tempt people to try it instead of the staple Asian holiday."

Mike said he was particularly impressed with the friendliness of the local population and their willingness to show off their country.

"They are very proud of their country and history," he said.



Wadi Shab village, Oman (image by Robert La Bua)

"Politically Oman is very stable and this shows in the general feel of the place. The infrastructure is very good and the hotels are of a very high standard.

"In and around Muscat Road verges are green and flowers are in abundance, especially on their roundabouts which are monuments in their own right.

"The food is also excellent, as is the antique shopping in the local souks."

Another highlight was the diversity of the country.

"There really is everything from oceans to deserts and mountains to rainforests," he said.



Luxor Temple, Egypt

## Book now for popular Bunnik Egypt tour

BUNNIK Tours is encouraging agents to explore its range of touring options.

"We have some fantastic independent touring options that can be added pre or post to our main tours covering Syria, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Libya and Petra, and stopover options in Dubai and Abu Dhabi," said managing director Dennis Bunnik.

"The combinations are endless."

Bunnik is encouraging agents to book now for December and January departures of its "Egypt in Depth" tour.

"This tour continues to be very popular with clients," he said.

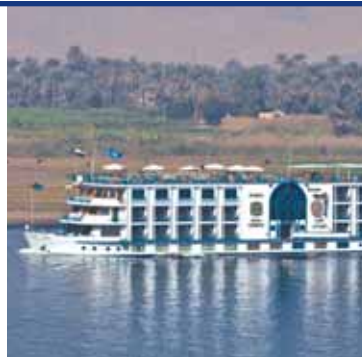
"We have a fantastic option for those who want to get away for Christmas and New Year with our 'Egypt in Depth' tour departing on December 21.

"Travel in January is also proving to be very popular with our January departures already half full."

Tours depart on January 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29.



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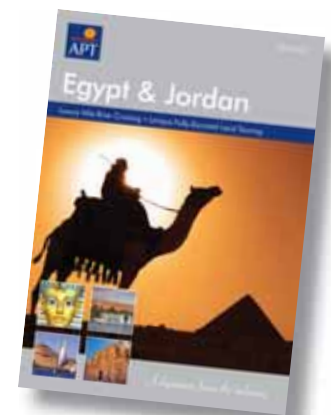
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## Egypt and Turkey lead Insight sales

THE Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East continue to be strong sellers for Insight Vacations according to national marketing manager Maureen Van Metter.

"The unique destinations that make up the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East have always been popular with Australian travellers which can be attributed to the endless and unique options, sights and experiences it offers," she said.

"Over the past couple of years, these regions have been amongst our biggest growth areas. Destinations such as Egypt and Turkey are on track to be

our top sellers for 2010, with Greece, Israel and Jordan also attracting a lot of interest."

Van Metter said the 2010 Ancient Civilizations program, which was released in October and featured 27 itineraries to countries in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, recorded double digit growth from 2009 sales. "In fact, the region has become so popular, that we introduced a number of these itineraries from our summer Ancient Civilizations program into our recently released 2010 Winter Europe and Eastern Mediterranean brochure," she said.

Eleven itineraries were added to this year's winter program, 10 of which visit the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East region.

These include the 13-day "Egypt and Jordan", the five-day "Jordan Experience", the 15-day "Treasures of Turkey" and the eight-day "Israel Discovery", all tours which Van Metter says have experienced incredible growth in our summer program.

"We expect a similarly positive response to these itineraries throughout the November to March period," she said. "Travelling in Turkey, Greece, Egypt, Israel or Jordan during these

months is particularly pleasant as the climate is a lot milder, there are less crowds and of course, fantastic savings on offer, with all winter itineraries less expensive than similar summer tours.

"In addition to these amazing seasonal savings, all of our escorted itineraries in the Eastern Med and Middle East include hotels in desirable locations, premium highlights and personal insights worth hundreds of dollars, many meals, luxury transport and an expert tour director, making Insight the perfect choice for travellers who want to make the most of their money while travelling in style."



Palmyra Ruins, Syria

## International Destinations offers 'new and very different' hotel options

TRAVELLERS to the Eastern Mediterranean have more accommodation options than ever before thanks to new styles of hotels according to International Destinations managing director Margaret Hill.

"For example over the past few years many of the beautiful Old Arab Houses in Syria have been converted into small deluxe Hotels de Charme, similar in style to the Riads of Morocco," she explained.

"The central courtyard, fountains and gardens are the main focus, while the bedrooms are richly decorated with traditional themes, updated with excellent bathrooms."

The hotels were mainly found in the narrow

streets of the Old City, especially in Damascus and Aleppo, Syria.

"Thanks to excellent reports from current travel magazines there is huge demand," Hill said. "Space is limited as the usual number of rooms in each hotel is around 10 to 14 people maximum."

Egypt now has its first Old Arab House, set in a street off El Tahrir Square.

"The front entrance is anything but charming but once inside the hotel the ambience and the luxury of the hotel offer the visitor a great experience," Hill said.

"These hotels are something new and very different for agents to offer their clients."

## RJ increases frequency, adds new aircraft to fleet

ROYAL Jordanian (RJ) has significantly increased the frequency of its operations to a number of destinations while the new service between Amman and Malaysia is also expected to benefit the Australian market.

The airline has increased flight frequencies operated to and from Amman to more than 110 daily for the northern hemisphere summer season.

Flights have been added to such destinations as Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Dubai, Doha, Manama, Jeddah, Dammam, Kuwait, Beirut, Cairo, Istanbul, Damascus and Aleppo. RJ also has regular daily flights to Baghdad, Bangkok, Colombo, Riyadh, Sharm El-Sheikh, Frankfurt and London.

The airline launched its new service to Kuala Lumpur in June, operating three weekly flights, departing from Amman Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, via Bangkok, using modern Airbus 330 aircraft which joined the RJ fleet on May 24.

With Kuala Lumpur added, the airline's destinations reach 58 served directly from Amman, in addition to more than 750 other destinations served in collaboration with RJ's 10 partners, members of the oneworld airline alliance.

Not only has RJ added additional

capacity and frequency to and around the Eastern Med region but RJ is also adding seven brand new A320s and A321 aircraft to replace six not very old A320s and A321s. The new aircraft will be fitted with the latest technical features including state-of-the-art in-seat video systems in all classes and be used on short and medium haul routes. A spokesperson for RJ says it operates one of the "youngest, most modern fleets" in the sky.

RJ Australian manager Iain Ferguson said the developments were very good for the Australian market as it provided many more options.

"As a result of the Kuala Lumpur flights, Australian travellers will now be able to connect to RJ flights in Malaysia by flying Malaysian Airlines to Kuala Lumpur," he said.

"We have also upgraded our other Far East routes by using A330 aircraft, thereby increasing capacity for the Australian markets by around 50 per cent."

The Australian frequency is now daily via Bangkok, three times a week via Kuala Lumpur and four times a week via Hong Kong. Australian connections are provided by Qantas, Cathay Pacific, British Airways, Thai and now Malaysian.



## APT releases stand-alone brochure for Egypt, Jordan

APT has returned to a stand-alone brochure for Egypt and Jordan for the 2010/11 season. The 28-page brochure has five Egypt-Nile cruise packages, two combining Egypt and Jordan and one complete Jordan tour.

Egypt-Jordan product was in the Europe and Russia cruising brochure in recent years, but new market demand for Egypt-Jordan as a single destination called for a stand-alone brochure, according to APT's general marketing manager, Debra Fox.

"The high quality and style of our Egypt and Jordan tours are aligned to that enjoyed by APT customers on European river cruises," she said.

The brochure highlights APT Signature Experiences, the small group nature of the tours (average 18

guests), accommodation at world-renowned hotels and the newly-renovated *Moon Goddess* as the vessel used on Nile cruises.

"This luxury boutique ship has just 50 cabins onboard, each with its own private balcony," Fox said.

Lead-in package is the 19-day "Majesty of Egypt and Jordan". It is priced from \$6695 per person (twin share) and includes Cairo, Alexandria, Nile cruise, Egypt internal flights, Amman, Petra and the Dead Sea, 35 meals, tipping and port charges. Forty two departures are available between September 2010 and December 2011.

The 10-day "Splendours of Egypt" is priced from \$3495 and the seven-day "Splendours of Jordan" tour costs from \$3895.

## Free Dubai stays with Emirates deal

EMIRATES is offering complimentary stays in Dubai for business and first class passengers until August 31.

First class passengers can stay two nights at Armani's first luxury hotel located in Burj Khalifa.

Business class passengers can stay one night at The Address Downtown Dubai. The offer is on bed and breakfast basis and inclusive of all applicable taxes and service charges.

Passengers can also take advantage of a complimentary fast track access pass to see the city in all of its glory from At the Top – the Burj Khalifa observation deck.

Emirates is also offering an Arabian Airpass. The pass includes 12 cities in the region such as Egypt and Oman and cost from \$US50 (about \$A57) per flight sector in economy.

In other news the airline has launched a new service to Al Medinah al Munawwarrah in Saudia Arabia throughout summer, catering for increased demand during this peak travel period. The twice weekly flights will operate until September 24 and will be operated by an Airbus A330-200.



Emirates A380 bar

The Emirates flight departs Dubai each Friday and Sunday at 0115 hours and will arrive in Al Medinah al Munawwarrah at 0300 hours. On the return journey the flight will depart Al Medinah al Munawwarrah at 0435 hours, arriving in Dubai at 0815 hours.

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## International Destinations' exotic small group tours

In 2011, International Destinations has a series of small group tours, ideal for those clients who do not wish to travel to these exotic destinations as an FIT passenger. Fully escorted from Australia including air/taxes, quality accommodation, extensive sightseeing and most meals – contact us for more details

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# New branding for Oman promotes its 'uniqueness'

THE recently unveiled new national brand of the Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Tourism is the beginning of a brand journey that will allow Oman to differentiate itself from other countries in the region by positioning its unique national identity, according to Australia/New Zealand manager Mona Tannous.

"Brand Oman takes its inspiration from the depth and diversity of this awesome country," she said.

"The brand mark represents Arabic calligraphy, the marine environment, local textiles and the magnificent landscapes. It reflects the country's historic leadership in trade and its pioneering role in exploration and of course frankincense, which has been at the core of Oman's economy and culture for generations.

"The development of Oman's global brand strategy, along with substantial public and private sector investments will further enhance Oman's tourism offering whilst still maintaining the authenticity of the nation."

Tannous said in the second half of the year the Australian office would focus on print and radio advertising and promotions to prompt consumers



Archway of the Grand Mosque

to consider Oman as a holiday destination.

"We will also continue to work with our wholesaler and airline partners on more incentive promotions over the next few months as we consider first-hand knowledge of Oman the very key in selling the destination."

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## GMTC releases 'stay four, pay for three' special offers to Greece

GREECE and Mediterranean Travel Centre (GMTC) is offering several specials to Greece and Turkey.

For those looking to stay in Athens this summer GMTC is offering "a stay for four pay for three" special offer at the Electra Hotel. The deal is valid until August 31.

GMTC products and marketing co-ordinator Kelly Dodd says the hotel is a four-star property, centrally located in the heart of Athens on Syntagma Square, facing the Greek Parliament and within walking distance of the Acropolis, all major historical sites and the business and commercial districts.

"The hotel offers a variety of tastefully designed facilities such as dining areas and business conference venues and efficient services," she said. "The 106 rooms and three junior suites are elegantly furnished and fully equipped to meet the requirements of even the most demand-ing traveller. A separate floor is provided for non-smokers.

"The hotel has been fully renovated and refurbished in 2004 and presents today a

completely new face, combining the excellent traditional Greek service with modern and comfortable facilities."

Special deals are also being offered on several other hotels in Athens and the Greek Islands.

GMTC is also offering \$300 off the cost of a second person on the 14-day "Glories of Turkey" tour for travel from October 1, 2010 to March 31, 2011 if booked and paid by August 20. The deal is valid for new bookings only.

Dodd said the tour was GMTC's most comprehensive

tour of Turkey.

"It covers all of the most popular sites in Western Turkey including Istanbul, Anzac Cove, the Aegean coast, Izmir, historic Ephesus, Pamukkale, the spectacular fairy chimney's of Cappadocia, Turkey's capital city Ankara and the Mediterranean coastal resort city of Antalya," she said.

"Clients enjoy air-conditioned coaches, first class accommodation, breakfast and dinners on all touring days and the services of a well informed English speaking guide."

