

Eastern Med region continues as a *star performer*



With strong consumer interest in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East regions and the solid \$A, wholesalers are forecasting ongoing vigorous sales in 2011.

By Jenny Burns

THE Eastern Mediterranean region is expected to continue as one of the star performers in 2011.

All major players are reporting strong consumer interest in the region, with Egypt and Jordan the stand-out destinations.

The continued strength of the Australian dollar together with major initiatives to ensure the region stays front of mind with Australian travellers is expected to fuel continued demand.

Eastern Mediterranean Tourism Association (EMTA) chair Iain Ferguson said members were looking forward to a very good 2011.

"The Australian dollar is going from strength to strength and more and more Australians are discovering the Eastern Med or going back again to see what they missed the first time around," he said.

"It's extraordinary – everywhere you go you hear Australian accents."

Cox & Kings Australia general manager Ash Jurberg said interest in the region has heightened with a

noticeable demand for tailor made itineraries.

"Croatia in particular has been hot for several years now and we have created Croatia island hopping packages along a similar vein to the famous Greek island hopping packages," he said.

Tempo's parent company, Cox & Kings, had also experienced huge demand for Jordan which is now the group's second best-selling destination after India.

"Bookings for Jordan-based tours have increased by almost 20 per cent compared to 2009 across the entire Cox & Kings group. Since 2008, tailor-made tours have been particularly popular after recording a 74 per cent increase in bookings and there has been a 36 per cent rise in bookings for the 'Splendours of Jordan' group itinerary," Jurberg said.

"As a result, Cox & Kings will be boosting the number of departures of this tour for 2011 by 58 per cent to 52.

"We expect Greece is also going to be very popular and Tempo has added a lot more hotels as well as self-drive packages."

APT is reporting a 250 per cent

gain on its 2010/11 sales for the region which it attributes to the launch of a stand-alone Egypt-Jordan brochure and a general cross-market growing interest in the region.

APT's general manager marketing Debra Fox said this was reflected in strong sales of tours combining Egypt with Jordan and Egypt with a "Magnificent Europe" package which offers cruising on the Nile and the European rivers.

"For travellers seeking a learning experience, this region is exceptionally rich and there is a market for travellers who have the time to capture as much as possible on the single trip," she said.

Bunnik Tours managing director Dennis Bunnik says the Eastern Med and Middle East are performing very strongly, with significant sales increases across the region.

"The biggest growth has been in Turkey and Egypt as stand-alone destinations as well as Turkey/Egypt and Libya/Egypt combos," he said.

"We believe 2011 will be a solid year, building on the momentum of 2010. However airline availability will continue to be an issue during peak periods."

International Destinations general manager Margaret Hill is also reporting good general enquiries and bookings for the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean.

"If the US dollar and Euro continue to be such great value, it will be an excellent year," she said.

Icon Holidays managing director Simon Hills is reporting clear growth in a number of destinations.

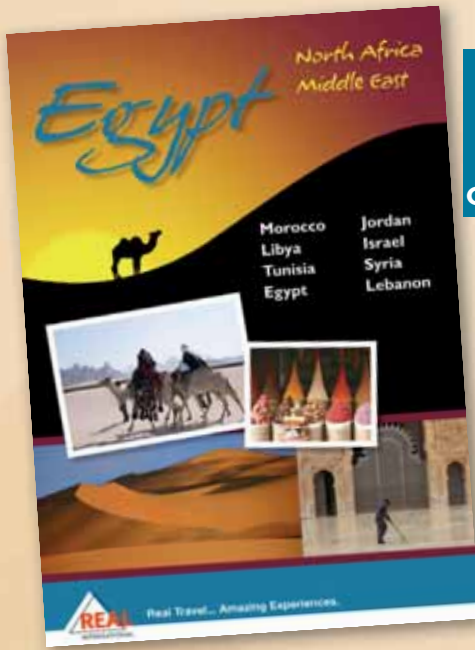
"Egypt has been performing particularly well, with solid growth of 18 per cent over the 12 months up to June 30," he said.

"Current forward bookings suggest that continued growth will keep Egypt buoyant over the next year or so.

"Jordan is also growing extremely well for us, with an increase in numbers of 21 per cent up to June 30. This is off a small base, but given that we have not actually brochured Jordan, although we certainly will in 2011, we are very pleased with booking levels.

"Increasingly, more clients are visiting both Jordan and Egypt in the same trip. Syria is also starting to make an impact amongst our clients, and in 2011 we will be introducing Syria to our product range."

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The Monastery, Petra, Jordan (credit: Tempo)

Eastern Med back in favour, says Iain

OVER the 13 years RAC travel supervisor Iain Roulston has worked in the travel industry he has seen demand for the Eastern Mediterranean region ebb and flow.

"It's an area that consumers have always been interested in travelling to but actual travel depends on security issues," explained Iain who is based in Perth.

"Currently the demand is strong, with Egypt being the most popular destination.

"Jordan is also increasing in popularity with many of our clients adding a few days in Jordan to visit Amman and Petra."

Personal experience was one of the keys to successfully selling the area and for this reason a familiarisation Iain undertook with Tempo has proved extremely useful.

"It was a very good educational and as a result I have been able to relay my personal experiences to clients which has helped answer any concerns they have about Egypt and help sell the destination," he said.

"There are also tips I can provide, such as no matter what the time of year make sure you have plenty of water, sunscreen and a hat – as it is always warm!"

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Med Holidays adds destinations under new ownership

NIC Rone has taken over ownership of Mediterranean Holidays & Tours.

The Greece and Mediterranean wholesale travel specialist and the general service agent (GSA) in Australia for Superfast Ferries and Blue Star Ferries was originally founded in 2001 by Colleen and John Woodward.

"Having grown up in Greece, and working as operations manager for one of Greece's largest inbound holiday and tour operators for over 10 years I have a true passion for Greece for which Mediterranean Holidays & Tours has become renowned," Rone said.

"My team's in-depth experience, knowledge, love and passion for Greece will ensure Mediterranean Holidays & Tours continues to be a true Greece and Mediterranean wholesale specialist.

"Heavy investment in Mediterranean Holidays & Tours' future now sees it expanding both in resource, capacity and in the range of destinations it offers.

"As well as our specialist destination of Greece and the Greek Islands, we have added new destinations to our product range including Turkey, Egypt and Italy where we have the backing



and support of highly regarded professional inbound local operators to ensure and uphold the quality of a Mediterranean Holidays experience.

Rone said the company was building a formidable new 'agent friendly' website which would be fully search capable and would have an 'Agents Only' log in area for up-to-the-minute extra special deals and announcements on extra commissionable product. The website is expected to be up and running this month.



"and the stones spoke to me..."



Egypt

where it all begins

Egypt boosts marketing as Aussie demand remains strong

THE Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA) continues to report strong demand from Australian travellers.

The number of Australians visiting Egypt has increased by more than 16 per cent this year.

ETA Tourism counsellor of Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, Ibrahim Khalil, attributed public relations and marketing

activities including a new logo, slogan and advertisement campaign highlighting images of Egypt, and travel industry support for the increase in Australian numbers.

Ancient cities such as Giza, Luxor, Aswan and major activities such as safari, diving (The Red Sea), Nile cruises and golf in Egypt have and will continue to be heavily

promoted through television, outdoor advertising, magazines and newspapers.

"The Australian market has high potential for growth and ETA will continue to attract Australian visitors with continuous and various PR and marketing activities," Khalil said.

As well as advertising, ETA will continue to participate in several

major exhibitions such as AIME and travel expos.

Working co-operatively with major travel agents in joint advertising and marketing campaigns is another priority.

ETA will also continue to support and sponsor many business-to-consumer activities in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra.

RJ's 50% capacity increase to benefit Australian travellers

ROYAL Jordanian (RJ) continues to report strong profits despite increase in fuel costs and other expenditure. RJ achieved a profit of JD19.6 million (about \$A28m) for the first nine months of 2010.

Royal Jordanian Australian manager, Iain Ferguson, said the airline had undertaken a number of major initiatives this year and more were planned.

"With the addition of three new Airbus A330s in June we now offer around 50 per cent more capacity for Australian travellers to the Eastern Med, linking with oneworld partners (Qantas, British Airways and Cathay Pacific), plus Thai and Malaysian Airlines," he said. "Our 11 state-of-the-art Boeing 787 Dreamliners will be delivered from 2013 replacing these new A330s on RJ's Far East route.

"Although only a few years old, RJ will also be replacing some of its still young A320 fleet with the latest versions with new inflight enhancements."

In October the airline upgraded its reservation and inventory control system to the Amadeus Altea system in line with other oneworld alliance partners.

Ferguson said RJ continued to offer a competitive range of fares to the Eastern Med and beyond with its link partners.

"The RJ's mixed class fares flying economy in daylight from Australia on Malaysian or Thai and RJ's renowned Crown Class (Premium Business) on the night sector from Asia to the Eastern Med are particularly popular and extremely cost effective," he said.

"Passengers have a good night's sleep in RJ's lie flat sleeper chair and arrive relaxed and ready to explore the Eastern Med after a hearty breakfast."

All fares, including special side trips, are available through major consolidators.

"Amman is conveniently located in the heart of the Eastern Med making it the ideal base to tour the region. At no additional cost to their airfare RJ passengers can not only stopover in Jordan en route to other Eastern Med destinations but also in Asia on both the outbound and inbound trips."

Oman to launch new marketing campaign

OMAN Tourism will shortly launch a new marketing campaign in Australia. The worldwide campaign was launched this month at the World Travel Mart and is expected to be launched in Australia in December and rolled out in 2011.

"The Ministry of Tourism has appointed the international recognised TBWA advertising agency to spearhead the new campaign which will focus on first-hand experiential travel and will carry the tag line 'Beauty has an Address,'" explained manager for Oman Tourism in Australia and New Zealand, Mona Tannous.

Tactical campaigns with wholesalers will play an important role in the promoting Oman and for this reason Oman Tourism recently hosted a familiarisation of marketing and general managers from leading wholesalers.

"We wanted to ensure our wholesale partners had an understanding of Oman to allow them to prepare suitable tactical campaigns which is one of our priorities next year," Tannous said.

Advertising campaigns currently under way in Sydney will be expanded.

Oman's new website www.tourismoman.com.au will allow wholesalers to post tactical campaigns.



"The website has been especially developed to promote Oman as an attractive long haul destination for Australian and New Zealand travellers," Tannous said. "This site not only provides inspiration to consumers, but will be an important resource for the travel trade when selling Oman."

"The second phase of the site will

give agents who have travelled to Oman direct access to all consumer enquiries that will be provided from the site. In addition, we will be launching an online agent training module in 2011 to enable agents who would like to specialise in the region to also take advantage of consumer leads which will be generated by our extensive consumer awareness campaigns."

Tempo adds new packages, discounts tours



Ephesus, Turkey

TEMPO's 2011 offerings for the Middle East/Eastern Mediterranean region includes new packages and products.

New Mediterranean packages include "Croatian Island Hopping" and a cruise/ferry package from Greece to Venice.

Also on offer are more Anzac Day packages including the 15-day "Turkish Delight" tour, which combines the 2011 Anzac Day service at Gallipoli with some of Turkey's greatest highlights including Istanbul, Troy, Ephesus and Pamukkale.

In Egypt a new cruise vessel, *Alexander the Great*, is being added to the Nile cruise product. "This elegant, five-star 30 suite floating boutique hotel will be used for the popular 'Nile in Style' package," said Cox & Kings general manager marketing, Ash Jurberg.

Tempo has also added a range of high-quality Four Seasons Hotels in Sharmh El Sheikh, Cairo and Alexandria. "These provide the perfect bases to explore the ancient Egyptian world," Jurberg said.

Also new is the eight-day "Holyland Tour" in Israel which visits the most famous Biblical sites including Jerusalem.

New in Oman are day tours – Al Hoota Caves, A Wadi Walk and the Jebel Akhdar Trail.



Leptis Magna marketplace

Visit 'beautiful, old worldly' Libya with International Destinations

INTERNATIONAL Destinations is running a 17-day tour to Libya from May 11.

The tour includes 14 nights in Libya visiting Tripoli, Leptis Magna, Greek, Roman and Phoenician sites, the Mediterranean coast, the ancient sites of Cyrenaica, the Byzantine mosaics of Qasr Libya, the UNESCO-listed ancient oasis of Ghadames in the Libyan desert and Tobruk.

The tour costs \$6866 (twin share) which includes airfares ex Australia with Emirates. The company can also organise FIT itineraries for travellers.

International Destinations general manager Margaret Hill, who recently spent time in Libya, said it was a fantastic and pleasant surprise.

"I found Tripoli, which is home to around 2,500,000 people, safe, beautiful, old worldly and with very polite people. The prosperity and general well-being of the people was very evident. Modern cars, driven too

fast as is usual in North Africa, are everywhere.

"Wide tree-lined streets, elegant but faded buildings from Italian colonial time rub shoulders with Ottoman and modern facades. The sometimes quite modest shop fronts have a selection of latest European fashions and cosmetics and all are duty free."

Hill said a visit to the walled medieval souq was a must. "It is the only souq I have ever been in where at no time is there any sales pitch or any attempt to sell. The shopping is great value and I would recommend allowing plenty of time here. The restaurants are also very good with the waiter service reminiscent of Europe 20 years ago.

"Alcohol is forbidden – the Heineker or Best Malt brew is refreshing and just like the real thing."

Hill said the treasures in the National Jamahiriya Museum, just off the Green Square were, in her opinion, without equal.

Bunnik Tours launches new products

BUNNIK Tours has released new Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East tours for 2011 and updated several others. A number of tours are also exclusively for single travellers as part of the company's new Solo Travellers program.

New tours include the 17-day "Discover Egypt and Jordan" which includes Cairo, Abu Simbel, Valley of the Kings, a three-night Nile cruise, Amman and Petra. It costs from \$6257 per person (twin share).

Also new is the 18-day "Syria and Jordan" tour which includes visits to Petra, the Crusader castles of Syria, a tour of Wadi Rum by jeep and camel and two nights in Damascus. It costs from \$6300 per person (twin share).

Tours which have been revised and improved include the 17-day "Egypt in Depth" which costs from \$5378, the 21-day "Egypt, Israel and Jordan" from \$8453, the 22-day "Treasures of the Ancient World" from \$7990 and the 26-day "Cairo to Zanzibar" from \$9660.



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Real Travel expands Syria options

REAL Travel is devoting two pages of its 2011 Egypt and Middle East brochure to Syria, offering up to eight small group escorted tours together with opportunities for FIT clients.

According to Real Travel managing director Riche du Plessis the decision is in response to client demand.

"During 2008, 934 Australians visited Syria, a 34 per cent increase over 2007," he said. "This is an indication that Australians are in the process of discovering this unique and historical country, already visited annually by many thousands of Europeans, particularly from France, Germany, Spain and Britain."

Having visited the destination

recently Du Plessis was impressed by both the safety of travelling in Syria and by the exciting new developments taking place.

"Syria offers a safe, interesting and unique opportunity to discover a country which, so far, has not succumbed to mass tourism. The prospects of future growth is enormous," he said.

Developments included the renovation and conversion to luxury boutique hotels of many historic houses within the walled, old city.

"These riad-style boutique hotels offer a very high level of comfort and service and an atmospheric environment," he said.



Dam Umayyad, Syria

Other highlights included historic Straight Street in Old Damascus where, it is believed, St Annanias met Biblical Soul who then converted to Christianity and became St Paul.

"Visitors and hundreds of locals still casually stroll along Straight Street, enjoying the relaxed atmosphere, small cafés and local craft shops until late at night," he said.

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Demand strong for APT Egypt packages

APT is reporting strong demand for its two main Egypt packages – the 13 and 19-day "Majesty of Egypt" tours.

Both tours feature a four-night Nile cruise on the newly renovated Moon Goddess and cost from \$4545 for the 13-day tour and \$6995 for 19 days.

"Many consumers are choosing to combine the tours with other packages," said APT's general manager marketing, Debra Fox. "As a result the 19-day 'Majesty of Egypt and Jordan' tour and the 27-day 'Majesty of Egypt – Magnificent Europe' – are our top sellers."

The "Majesty of Egypt and Jordan" tour combines land touring of Alexandria, Cairo, Luxor, Amman, Petra, Dead Sea with a four-night Nile cruise.

"This is a small group tour, with an average of 18 guests and includes the following APT Signature Experiences – the temples of Abu Simbel, a horse-drawn carriage to the Sound and Light show at Karnak Temple, riding a camel across the Giza Plateau, dinner cruise on the Nile, ancient Petra by Night, jeep tour of Wadi Rum, and swimming in the Dead Sea," Fox said.

The 27 day "Majesty of Egypt – Magnificent



Great court of Karnak, Egypt

Europe" package visits the must-see sights of an Egyptian adventure, and then cruising along the great rivers of Europe from Budapest to Amsterdam.

It costs from \$11,640 which includes five nights in Cairo, two nights in Alexandria, one night in Luxor, four nights on the *Moon Goddess*, 14 nights on a luxurious Aria or Concerto class river ship and 67 meals, and freedom of choice dining and touring.

If booked before December 20, 2010, APT offers free return flights to Europe, valid for select suites.

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