

# Cyprus steps up drive to woo Arab tourists

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DUBAI — The outbound tourism market from the Middle East offers strong potential for Cyprus as the destination is emerging as a preferred choice for tourists who want to stay away from the trouble spots in the region, a senior tourism official said at the Arab Travel Market.

"We are drawing more tourists who are originally destined to be travelling to other countries which are undergoing political turmoil. Although this spurt is temporary, we have been recording a steady increase in tourist traffic thanks to our year round ideal climate, beautiful scenery, traditionally hospitable people and rich that goes back 10,000 years help boost the island's attractiveness," said Hrach Kalsahakian, sales and marketing manager of Cyprus Tourism Organisation.

Overall, tourist arrivals in Cyprus increased six per cent year-on-year in April, the Statistical Service of the Republic of Cyprus revealed recently. In the January-April 2011 period, tourist arrivals in Cyprus from the Middle East grew four per cent. As the Eastern-most member of the European Union, the island of Cyprus is a perfect holiday get away for the regional traveller, especially Arabs, said Kalsahakian. "We have noticed an increased movement for incentives trips in Cyprus, mostly stemming from the Middle East and India. Cyprus is just a short haul flight away (three and a half hours) from most Arab cities and the island, though small in size, is big in variety, offering a range of climate types in close proximity that are extremely easy to access."

He said with Cyprus figuring increasingly prominently as a preferred destination on the Middle East traveller's wish list, the Cyprus Tourism Organisation has been stepping promotional campaigns to woo tourists.

"Cyprus has been a traditional destination for the Middle East for many years. The short-haul distance from the region allows travellers to choose Cyprus for short escapes; the average length of stay from our latest statistics is four days," said Kalsahakian.

The Cyprus Tourism Organisation

(CTO) has mounted a strong presence at the Arabian Travel Market in conjunction with Cypriot travel industry professionals at the Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre. "Each country in the Middle East has different needs; the Lebanese travellers prefer our beaches whilst the Gulf countries want to discover the island and particularly enjoy the serene nature," said Kalsahakian.

As Cyprus is proving such a popular destination with its regional counterparts, coupled with a strong increase in tourist arrivals to Cyprus from the UAE over the past five years, CTO has opened a new visa processing centre in Dubai to facilitate tourists and fast track visa processing. "The fact that Cyprus is growing increasingly popular as a leisure, incentive and business destination for the Arab world is borne out by the 16.4 per cent increase in the number of tourists from the region in 2010," he said.

"Lying in the sparkling blue waters of the Eastern Mediterranean and at the crossroads between Europe, Africa and Asia, Cyprus has always had an important strategic position throughout history. Nowadays, as the Eastern-most member of the European Union, the island is a perfect meeting place for decision-makers from all over the world," said Kalsahakian.

Some of the leading travel trade companies from Cyprus are also exhibiting under the CTO umbrella at the Cyprus pavilion. These include Chronos Travel Ltd, Columbia Hotels & Resort Ltd/Londa Hotel, Cyprus Health Services Promotion Board, Intercontinental Aphrodite Hills Resort Hotel, Le Meridien Limassol Spa & Resort, Lordos Hotels (Holdings) Ltd, and Palco Travel Co Ltd.

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