

Behind the scenes

One-on-one with four of Dubai's leading business events professionals By Joe Mortimer



New heights Offerings for planners are diversifying beyond the glittering infrastructure (main); Dubai International Financial Centre promoting development since 2004 (right)



Manal AlBayat Vice president, engagement, Expo 2020 Dubai

What is Expo 2020 Dubai?

Bringing together more than 180 nations, and an

international audience of 25 million people, Expo 2020 Dubai will quite literally be 'the greatest show on Earth'. The overall theme for Expo 2020 is 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future'. This defines what our event as a whole aims to achieve and the essential impact it hopes to make on humankind.

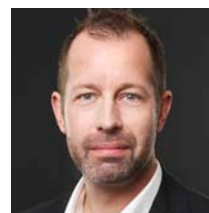
What pressures are there on the committee to ensure it goes well?

An event of this scale has many complexities, but it also presents

a number of opportunities. We are committed to delivering an exceptional event that inspires and leaves a sense of hope and wonder. Importantly, we are equally committed to ensuring that this event leaves behind a meaningful legacy, not only for the nation and the region, but for all those who participate.

Why was Dubai chosen to stage Expo 2020?

Dubai and the U.A.E. have a reputation for delivering successfully on large-scale projects and hosting wondrous events. This is a primary reason that 167 national members of the governing body voted for Dubai—a massive vote of confidence, and one that we are determined to honour.



Steen Director, Dubai

How do you incentivise event organisers to come to Dubai?

Dubai itself is an incentive because it provides opportunities for organisers to plan successful events. We often see event attendance grow when they take place in Dubai, because it's easy to get here from many parts of the world, we have great facilities, high service levels, and the infrastructure is in place.

What are the biggest challenges in bringing events to Dubai?

We are addressing the misconception that Dubai is only for the very wealthy and only offers luxury products. That's not the case.



Ajay Bhojwani

Managing director, Dubai & Abu Dhabi, MCI Middle East

How does Dubai's meetings industry come together to facilitate events?

Local tourism authorities and CVBs play an active role in nurturing the local leaders, bringing the industry together through supporting local industry events. This is crucial in order to bring in world meetings. Our great infrastructure continues to be enhanced year-on-year; we have great connectivity through the ever-expanding network of Emirates Airlines; and possess the ability to innovate and market ourselves alongside great competitive destinations.

How has the business events industry in Dubai recovered post-recession?

Dubai has seen a substantial increase in

event agencies across various service offerings: PCOs, corporate events marketing agencies and DMCs, which has always been a highly competitive space. Buyers have more choice, and as agencies, we need to perform at optimum quality—we like it that way.

How has your firm evolved to meet current needs?

As industries face market challenges and operate on tighter budgets, the focus has been on providing the best possible value in the most cost-effective way to ensure maximum ROI. We have also put more emphasis on 'Strategic Meetings Management' to offer corporates a more focused approach to their meetings in alignment with their business objectives.



Jakobsen Business Events

Dubai is very diversified when it comes to its offerings within hospitality, venues and air access, with a huge spectrum of budget options. We have 98,000 rooms available in Dubai.

How do events in the wider Middle East region impact your work in Dubai?

There's nothing to indicate that what's happening in the region is affecting what's taking place here. In 2015, we had a growth in international visitors of 7.5 per cent (14.2 million) compared to 2014. But we also monitor very closely what's happening around us. We have a huge role in educating meeting planners to assure them that Dubai is a safe place.



Justine Thomas-Butler

Head, Arabian Adventures (MIE) & Congress Solutions International

What are people looking for in a Dubai incentive programme?

There's a really strong thirst for culture. You have the razzle-dazzle factor and the big, the bold and the beautiful, but you also have this beautiful story of how Dubai started. We take guests to Dubai Museum, Dubai Creek and the Islamic Art Centre and try to give them a sense of how Dubai has evolved and what it's all about.

How has the destination developed?

One of the big factors is the variety and diversity of the hotels. Previously it was predominantly five-star and a big percentage

of budgets used to go into accommodation. Now that rates are more competitive, organisers are able to invest those savings into programmes to create more tailor-made experiences: something personable and memorable.

What makes Dubai so appealing to incentives programme organisers?

There's a synergy with incentives that are about dreaming big: Dubai is an example of what you can achieve with hard work. If corporate organisers select Dubai as the destination for an incentive programme a year out, their sales initiatives go through the roof and they always end up bringing around 10 per cent more people than expected.



New perspective Platinum Heritage is renowned for respectful journeys into the desert combining tradition and fun for high-impact events

Unforgettable team experiences in Dubai

Show staff what can happen when you dream big, with these exceptional activities **By Joe Mortimer**

Desert exploration

Paying genuine tribute to Dubai's long heritage of desert exploration as well as the modern age, **Platinum Heritage** has a fleet of classic 1950s Land Rovers and state-of-the-art Mercedes-Benz G-Class SUVs at the ready to take groups out on desert safari. The company tailors team-building activities based around treasure hunts, 4x4 journeys, and "Fat Bike" races, combined with an authentic taste of Emirati culture.

At the company's solar-powered camps, chefs prepare traditional Emirati cuisine served on antique furniture from the *souks* of old Dubai. A Bedouin can be arranged to arrive at the camp at sunrise to talk about the challenges faced by desert-dwellers and explorers, setting the scene for another day of problem solving and adventure. platinum-heritage.com

Blue-sky thinking

There's probably no better way to get a team's creativity flowing than letting their imaginations and bodies soar, in this case, above the red sands of the Arabian Desert.

Balloon Adventures Emirates puts together complete itineraries for corporate groups, whether team building or a performance-based reward for a sales team.

Transportation collects guests from the hotel for a pre-dawn transfer to the launch site, where the balloon awaits, complete with the company logo affixed to the basket. Delegates will witness the sun rise over the dunes, and share a once-in-a-lifetime experience that lets them know their hard work has not gone unnoticed. ballooning.ae

Dubai from above

Dubai's incredible skyline looks good from the ground, but it looks even better from above, on an aerial tour with **Seawings**. Flying over the mighty skyscrapers of Sheikh Zayed Road and Downtown Dubai and out over the man-made islands — Palm Jumeirah and The World — allows guests to appreciate the scope of what Dubai has achieved. Or add a touch of drama to your event by dropping in via seaplane, which can land at key locations throughout Dubai

and Abu Dhabi such as hotels, golf clubs and even Meydan Racecourse. Cap it off with limousine transfers and it makes a superb way to introduce the top brass to Dubai. seawings.ae

Cultural exchange

The Middle East is one of the world's most misunderstood places, and our knowledge is often riddled with misconceptions. At the **Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding**, Emirati volunteers welcome corporate groups to come and learn about traditional Emirati life. Over food, guests are invited to ask the questions they have always been afraid to. Ever wondered what Emirati men wear under their *kandura*? Or what everyday Emiratis think about religious extremism? This is your chance. ■ cultures.ae



Dramatic entrance Seawings Seaplane Tours