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A1. How is the Middle East performing as a region?

This is a rapidly developing area, in terms of both new business and new facilities. In the past, the majority of venues were associated with hotels but now there are a number of major congress centres in place and more joining the scene in the next few years. At the same time, a number of industry events are locating in this area – GIBTM, and a new MPI Professional Education Conference, for example – and these will attract other members of the industry as well.

2. Any venue that stands out in particular?

Current AIPC members in the region are Bahrain International Exhibition & Convention Centre, Cairo International Convention & Exhibition Centre, Dubai International Convention & Exhibition Centre and Qatar Convention Centre (in the process of joining). The whole point is that each centre has unique features that distinguish them from their colleagues and create an experience that is specific to their location and advantages. It's not so much that one or another stands out, but rather that each builds upon their particular strengths in different ways.

3. How active is this region (Middle East)?

It is getting more active by the day. Business is being attracted by a combination of new facilities, new opportunities and the attraction of a very unique experience.

For the future, a lot depends on how this region's reputation develops. It is increasingly important these days to have a strong image as a business or academic region, not just a tourism destination, and many areas that are relatively new to the meetings industry need to emphasise this as they develop. At the same time, safety and security are big issues, so overall Middle East political issues and developments will have an impact as well because many people think in terms of regions, not specific destinations.

It will also be important for the industry to grow its links with the international industry because so much business these days is done on a global rotation and you need to be recognised as an international player to be taken seriously.

4. What are the benefits of a centre being an AIPC member?

AIPC offers members a network of over 155 centres in 53 countries around the world and enables them to draw on the knowledge and expertise of colleagues throughout the entire industry. This is an invaluable resource in today's highly competitive world, and enables members to not only learn and strengthen their operations but at the same time to benchmark and distinguish themselves amongst the best in the world. This is particularly important in areas that are newly developing as it allows centres to benefit from what others have learned in their own development processes. ●

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DUBAI PLACES MEETINGS INDUSTRY HIGH ON AGENDA

As part of its Proposed Strategic Plan, the Dubai Convention Bureau (DCB) has set itself the target to increase the number of international meetings held in the emirate by 20 percent by 2010.

Talking at the seminar for the ICCA Middle East Chapter in December, Awadh S. Al Ketbi director of DCB said: "Our mission is to increase the meetings market in Dubai and we are dedicated to pursuing and winning event business."

As part of its strategy, the DCB plans to establish more local and regional chapters of international associations and encourage local membership. At the same time it has pledged to appoint some 30 DCB ambassadors by 2010.

"We will also conduct extensive research among regional corporations and associations that have the potential for rotating meetings," he said.

According to the latest figures from the DCB, there were 6.4 million hotel visitors to Dubai in 2006. Some 45 percent of them are business travellers said Al Ketbi. By 2015 the DCB projects 15 million visitors each year. ●

CIBTM RE-SCHEDULED: NEW DATES & VENUE ANNOUNCED FOR 2009

The China Incentive Business Travel & Meetings Exhibition (CIBTM) organised by Reed Travel Exhibitions (RTE) is to be postponed in 2008 but will take place again in 2009 at a new Beijing venue and with new dates. Because of the impact of the Olympic Games on Beijing, it was decided not to proceed with next year's event.

"Whilst the world is focused on one of its greatest sporting events, we have decided it was best for exhibitors and visitors alike to focus on 2009 in order not to compromise CIBTM in any way. RTE is strategically committed to China and the whole of Asia and sees Beijing as a growing hub for the meetings industry" says Paul Kennedy, group exhibition director.

CIBTM 2009 will take place between the 8-10 September at Beijing's new state of the art China National Convention Centre (CNCC) which will serve as the main international media & broadcasting centre for the Olympic Games next summer. Ideally located just 25 minutes from either the city centre or Beijing's International Airport, the venue boasts China's biggest and newest world-class meeting and exhibition space including a 6,400 square metre Grand Convention Hall accommodating up to 6,000 delegates, a 24,000 square metre exhibition hall and another ballroom with a capacity to host 3,500 guests, the China National Convention Centre will create a modern backdrop for CIBTM. ●