

Arabian nights

Clients flying via the Middle East? Sell them a stopover, says Laura French

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Vast deserts, ancient cultures, glittering cities, centuries-old architecture...there's a magic to Arabia that seeps out from its rich, rolling landscapes, and it needn't be reserved for long trips. As a connecting point for the Far East and beyond, its cities are perfectly located for quick, catch-a-glimpse stopovers.

And they don't only mean boosting your commission with add-ons; they also mean selling the region to a market that might not normally consider it as a standalone trip, and saving your clients money in the process.

"Stopover flights can often be better value, and they open up more choice in terms of airlines from the UK," says Sam Dowling, Kuoni product and purchasing

manager for the Middle East.

Combine that with the other benefits – breaking up the journey, catching up on some sleep and adjusting to the time difference – and it makes perfect sense to try and sell to clients going long-haul. So where can you sell, and how?

DUBAI

Why: Dubai sells itself to those looking for no-holds-barred extravagance, and with Emirates flying from here to Asia, the Indian Ocean, Australasia and beyond, it's little surprise operators report it as the most popular stopover in the region. **Upsell:** IMG Worlds of Adventure, Dubai Parks and Resorts, the Burj Khalifa and Aquaventure are just a few of the attractions



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you can push, while helicopter tours, dhow cruises and desert safaris throw adventure into the mix. Attraction World offers commissionable tickets to all of them, as well as a Best of Dubai city tour combining the highlights of downtown with a 'dinner safari' amid the sand dunes, from £89 per adult. **Where to stay:** Tricia Birmingham, product and commercial director

for Gold Medal, recommends the new Al Seef Hotel by Jumeirah, made up of 22 Arabian-design buildings set on Dubai Creek. "It's a fantastic choice for stopovers as it offers great value in an upcoming area and is perfectly located for exploring the city," she says.

MUSCAT

Why: If Only's Iain Raeper says: "Muscat offers a different slant on the Middle Eastern stopover, offering a more authentic Arabic experience as it's less commercialised than its traditional competitor set." Huge domes and opulent Arabic architecture meet head-on with 16th-century Portuguese forts and atmospheric souks, while upscale shopping





Gold Medal can twin three nights in a Deluxe Souk View room at the four-star Al Seef Hotel by Jumeirah (room-only) with a week half-board at the five-star Radisson Blu Azuri, Mauritius, from £1,199 per person, including Emirates flights from Gatwick. Valid for travel between May 7 and June 18, 2019. goldmedal.co.uk

Premier Holidays offers a 13-night Qatar and Thailand holiday from £1,729 per person with three nights at Al Najada Doha Hotel by Tivoli, three nights in Bangkok and seven nights in Krabi. Price based on travel between May 16 and July 12, 2019, with flights from Heathrow and private transfers. premierholidays.co.uk



FAR LEFT: Souk Waqif, Doha

LEFT: Shangri-La Qaryat Al Beri, Abu Dhabi

BELOW: Grand Mosque, Muscat



PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK

centres add a slice of modernity.

Upsell: The marble-covered Royal Opera House is an architectural feat, while the Grand Mosque, Sultan's Palace and Mutrah Corniche – a stretch of latticed buildings and mosques – bring cultural types flocking. Viator offers a city tour of the key highlights, as well as various day-long excursions outside the city, including adventures in the desert, visits to the historic Nizwa forts, and trekking in the Wadi Shab, a gorge between cliffs filled with iridescent pools, cascading waterfalls and stepped plantations (from £95 for the latter).

Where to stay: Suggest Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, for a luxury pad in the centre of the action, complete with a Six Senses Spa and sandwiched between the sea and the Al Hajar mountains.

ABU DHABI

Why: Combining the glitz of Dubai with the authenticity of less-developed destinations, Abu Dhabi is a hub for culture as much as it is family adventure, and the product offering is growing by the day.

Upsell: Ferrari World, Yas Waterworld and the recently opened Warner Bros



Visit Wadi Shab, a gorge between cliffs filled with iridescent pools and cascading waterfalls

World Abu Dhabi make Yas Island the city's adventure playground, while elsewhere there's the Louvre Abu Dhabi, a £1 billion complex set on Saadiyat Island; the Heritage Village, a reconstruction of traditional desert life filled with craft workshops; and the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, a sprawling mass of white-and-gold domes set above glossy mosaic floors. Do Something Different offers tickets to all of the parks, with prices for Warner Bros World Abu Dhabi from £64.

Where to stay: Caribtours recommends the Shangri-La Hotel, Qaryat al Beri, centrally located on a stretch of white sand along the Grand Canal and offering pick-me-up treatments for those going long-haul at its signature spa.

DOHA

Why: All eyes will soon be on Doha, with the 2022 World Cup on the horizon, but for now it remains relatively undiscovered. "It's not somewhere that immediately springs to mind so it's unaffected by tourism and maintains its traditional Arabic roots," says Nikki Hain, Premier Holidays' Middle East product manager.

Upsell: Highlights include Souk Waqif, a vibrant, 19th-century market filled with spices, shisha, galleries and souvenir shops; the Museum of Islamic Art, a striking behemoth home to historic artworks; and Katara, a cultural village filled with theatres, galleries, food stalls and a beach. Outside the city there's Khor Al Adaid, an inland sea and nature reserve on the Qatari border, where the water laps onto rolling desert dunes. Viator offers small-group tours out from the city in a 4x4 to see it, from £46.

Where to stay: For an authentic experience, Premier Holidays recommends Souq Waqif Hotels by Tivoli, a string of boutiques housed in traditional Qatari buildings and set in the heart of the bustling marketplace – twin it with Thailand for the ultimate city-plus-beach break. TW