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TRAVEL & TOURISM

Dubai retains 'seven-star' destination status

DUBAI **Keith J Fernandez**

Given that the first Armani Hotel in the world has just opened in Dubai, it is perhaps no surprise that Dubai retains its status as a luxury destination.

The Insignia Travel Intelligence Report, a survey of nearly 2,000 members of the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), has found that 71 per cent of respondents continue to view the shiny emirate as a luxury destination, underlining its status as a 'seven-star' tourism hub.

Over 90 per cent felt that news regarding the finances of entities such as Dubai World and of the emirate itself had no impact on travel bookings to Dubai, Insignia Managing Director Gaurav Sinha told **Emirates Business**. "In spite of negative coverage in the international press, tourists continue to recognise Dubai as an attractive and popular destination and it has not dented our reputation as a luxury

TRAVEL GALA OPENS TODAY

Arabian Travel Market, the regional tourism and hospitality event starting today, brings together more than 2,100 exhibitors and stand-sharers from 72 countries. "The ATM serves as a barometer

to the health of both the regional and international travel and tourism markets," said Mark Walsh, Group Exhibition Director, Reed Travel Exhibitions, which is in charge of organising ATM.

holiday getaway," he said.

The United Kingdom has been the top feeder market for the emirate since 2002, according to the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing. Together with Ireland, it sent 854,601 visitors to Dubai in 2008, while UK nationals using Dubai International Airport that year amounted to 3.55 million.

The ABTA handles over 90 per cent of outbound leisure travel from the UK, generating £23 billion (Dh128.92bn) annually. Insignia is a Dubai-based branding and communications agency and ABTA's

travel industry partner.

Of those unaffected by revelations concerning debt issues, 61 per cent said such news had negligible impact, while 32 per cent said there was no impact whatsoever.

However, opinions were split on the impact of a strict attitude to inappropriate behaviour. A succession of British nationals have fallen foul of the UAE law, but 45 per cent said media reports about such encounters had no influence on travel plans, while 41 per cent felt there had been a knock-on effect. "That says there has been some impact, but it isn't irreparable," Sinha said.