

The perfect pitch for sports tourism

ATM diaries

by Mark Walsh

FOR the Middle East, sports tourism has been taken to a new level. The award of the 2022 FIFA World Cup tournament to Qatar, has fuelled expectations of a new wave of visitors to the region driven by sports tourism.

It is a sector long recognised by tourism authorities in the region who have variously established and promoted international championships and tournaments in golf, tennis, Formula One Grand Prix, horse-racing, sailing, powerboat racing, rugby, football and more.

For the most part, these events have served as a platform to market the destinations, creating awareness through media coverage that reaches far around the world - but sports tourism has far greater potential for all those involved in the travel industry here.

Even the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) acknowledges there is a need to better understand the impact of such mega-events in tourism, according to secretary-general Taleb Rifai, who said UNWTO predicted this would be the century of sports tourism.

That is why Arabian Travel Market (ATM) this year has created a 'Soccer Zone' which has already attracted a number of famous participants such as a representative team from Argentina.

How to address this issue will also be one of the topics covered in this year's seminar programme.

The challenge for everyone involved is to understand

how to translate the hosting of a big name sports event into tourism dollars for both the destination and the inbound and outbound operators.

Add in the 'me-too' factor, where the publicity generated pre-event highlights a destination's attractions to a wider audience, and there is additional potential for increased meeting, incentive, conference and event business.

Anecdotal evidence pointed to a 73 per cent rise in meetings and corporate business in Sydney in the run up to the Olympics there, while the World Cup in South Africa generated more than 370,000 visitors during the event alone, as well as a rise in interest and tourists prior to the month-long tournament.

For Qatar, of course, there is still a long way to go. However, the emirate is now firmly on the world map, with every move monitored, especially regarding stadia, hotels and infrastructure.

This heightened interest is a useful tool that the travel trade here

can use to attract business. Neighbouring states can also present their credentials as a destination partner for potential two-centre holidays.

And, it is the same for every sport and sporting event ... there's world-class tennis, golf and Formula One around the region and a host of loyal fans who will travel many miles to cheer on their heroes.

There's those who also participate and play ... golf is a classic example but there's diving, ski-ing, tennis camps, sailing and riding, all of which can form the basis of a tailored holiday package.

And there's training camps too, another lucrative sector many in the Gulf have already tapped into.

The key is to understand the market, establish the right contacts and get involved - if the UNWTO is right, this is one sector that cannot be ignored.

Mark Walsh is ATM's group exhibitions director ■

New media buying service launched

GLOBAL brand communication agency Insignia recently launched the Insignia Travel Media Group, the region's first media buying service aimed specifically at the travel industry.



Sinha...experienced

The new, dedicated media-buying house aims to provide hotels, airlines, leisure attractions and tourism bodies with a host of strategic media and marketing solutions worldwide.

The group is the first service of its kind looking to offer a comprehensive solution to travel brands working in an ever-fragmented market with rapidly expanding media channels and recognises the importance of the Middle East for the travel trade, both as a major feeder to Western and Asian markets and as an established holiday destination in its own right.

Insignia Travel Media Group will allow industry players to promote their brands and maximise their exposure via geo-targeted media campaigns, aimed at specific segments within the Middle East, as well as on the global market.

With its headquarters in Dubai, Insignia boasts high levels of experience offering insight into the dynamics of the international travel market and the necessary expertise required to implement multi-channel campaigns.

Founder and managing director Gaurav Sinha said: "We have formed Insignia Travel Media Group to meet these challenges head on, creating targeted media strategies specifically crafted to deliver impact by optimising media channels that are unique and relevant to the travel industry. As the only agency in the Middle East specialising in travel and luxury we offer a unique insight into the travel industry and extend a strong competitive advantage."

Working with an experienced network of dedicated territory and category managers, the team has the ability to channel a diverse range of on and offline media from in-flight TV, airport billboards, GDS and social media to traditional print and broadcast. To further streamline the buying process, it offers pre-planned media packages, with the option of purchasing 'off-the-peg' media campaigns, tailored to address a particular segment, season or market.

"Our ability to match the message, the media and the market, our experience and network of on-the-ground managers makes us best placed to bring this value to our clients," added Sinha.

Insignia is a global brand communication agency that is headquartered in Dubai, with representative offices in London, Delhi and Sydney. ■

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