

## China returns to Arabian Travel Market

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 02 April, 2023



Chinese exhibitors and travel professionals are making a welcome return to Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2023 which is being held at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) for its 30th edition from 1-4 May, for the first time in 3 years.

China lifted its covid-related travel restrictions on 8th January 2023, allowing Chinese tourists to travel abroad, without having to quarantine upon their return. Bookings for overseas travel during Chinese New Year, soared by 540% compared with the same period in 2022, according to data from the Chinese travel site Trip.com.

Furthermore, in a CNN report, Steve Saxon, a partner at McKinsey, based in Shenzhen, predicted the Chinese outbound market would recover to around six million per month by the summer of 2023, driven in part by the pent-up demand especially from young, affluent Chinese.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market commented, “China became the world’s top source market in 2019, with 155 million tourists spending more than \$250 billion overseas. However, its isolation from the global market over the past three years has set the industry back by an estimated \$840 billion, equivalent, to 16% of the \$1.7 trillion spent annually on global tourism, according to UNWTO.”

Dubai received almost one million Chinese visitors in 2019, which was an increase

of over 15% compared with 2018. And while the 154,000 Chinese visitors Dubai welcomed over the first 11 months of 2022 was down 83% compared to the same period prior to 2020, it was up 115% year-on-year, which bodes well not only for Dubai, but also for the wider Middle East tourism sector.

Popular destinations such as Dubai, Saudi's AlUla, Egypt and Jordan, which have consistently marketed to Chinese outbound business-to-consumer and business-to-business, should be in a strong position to benefit from the predicted rebound of Chinese visitor numbers.

“We have noticed a considerable amount of enquiries recently from travel professionals in China. Although we would not expect the same volume of Chinese exhibitors and visitors we received in 2019, we are confident of healthy participation numbers this year,” she added.

Considering the short notice, ATM 2023 has already confirmed the participation of key Chinese exhibitors such as FLIGHTROUTES24 Travel, Shenzhen GoodLuck Trip International and Travel World China, with many more bookings anticipated ahead of the show.

ATM is also organising a dedicated conference session on its Global Stage, entitled ‘China is back on the map: Macro and micro impacts’, in partnership with Dragon Trail International.

An expert panel of speakers including Sienna Parulis-Cook, Director, Marketing and Communications for Dragon Trail International, Peggy Li, CEO & Chief Trouble shooter at sps:affinity and Winnie Chiu, President, Dorsett Hospitality International, will discuss the latest trends that are driving the recovery of Chinese tourism to the Middle East.

Business travel will be integral to the tourism revival. According to a recent survey by the Shanghai Institute of International Studies and PwC China, over 75% of Chinese businesses polled were looking to enter or expand their presence in the Middle East over the next three to five years, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia top destinations for investors.

“I am convinced that the Middle East will experience a surge in Chinese tourism, reminiscent of the rebound we witnessed from Europe and India in late 2021 and early 2022,” said Curtis.

Other highlights at ATM 2023 include exploring the future of sustainable travel in line with its theme of ‘Working Towards Net Zero’. Having officially initiated its journey to net zero, the conference programme will explore how innovative sustainable travel trends will likely evolve. It will enable delegates to identify growth strategies within key vertical sectors while providing a platform for regional experts to explore a sustainable future ahead of COP28, which will take place in November 2023 at Expo City Dubai.

The conference will also feature a sustainability category at its annual exhibitor awards for the first time. Exhibiting organisations will be recognised based on the extent to which they have considered the environmental impact of their stands and their efforts to reduce their carbon footprint.

ATM 2023 is held in conjunction with Dubai World Trade Centre, and its strategic partners include Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism (DET) as the Destination Partner, Emirates as the Official Airline Partner, IHG Hotels & Resorts as the Official Hotel Partner and Al Rais Travel as the Official DMC Partner.

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