

Aviation

Alexandria offers respite from summer

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Abu Abbas Mosque

BAHRAIN'S national carrier Gulf Air launched its expanded network for the summer season on June 22 with flights to the Egyptian port of Alexandria.

Services to Aleppo in Syria and Salalah in Oman followed in July and all will operate until mid-September. per cent, according to the airline.

The attractions of Alexandria – Egypt's second largest city – as a summer destination are not hard to find. With a Mediterranean climate in the upper 20s at the height of summer, and with a good mix of culture, places to visit and good restaurants, it makes a welcome break from the intense heat of the Gulf, and as such the destination attracts visitors from across the Arab world.

Alexandria's coastline stretches for over 20 km and the city features palm lined boulevards, beautiful gardens, ornate fountains and mosques, an undulating, scenic corniche and a wide selection of historical sites combined with a thriving café culture. Elaborate buildings, horse drawn carts and an antiquated tram system - that goes so slowly that you can cover the distance at twice its average speed on foot - encourage one to get out and explore the narrow streets and bazaars.

Although the city's most famous resident was Queen Cleopatra, it has also been home to a wide cosmopolitan mix of nationalities. Remnants of the colonial influences are to be found everywhere in the varied architecture, ranging from Greco-Roman style to suburbs more reminiscent of Marseilles. Even many of the street names are still in French, which at one time was the official language of business in the city.

Although there is a wide selection of hotels in all price brackets, one of the most distinctive is to be found right on the Corniche in the San Stefano district. The Four Seasons Hotel, which dominates the skyline, is the fourth in Egypt and the ninth to open in the Middle East. The wide range of facilities at the 118 room hotel includes restaurants offering Lebanese and Italian fare to contemporary Mediterranean, as well as sushi and other culinary delicacies from South East Asia.

The Four Seasons occupies 19 floors of a distinctive 28 storey tower – part of a crescent-shaped development where many of the rooms have splendid ocean views. Accommodation is in one, two and three bedroom suites plus Royal and Presidential Suites. The hotel's own private man made beach has to be one of the very best in the area with tonnes of specially shipped in white sand and a tunnel offering hotel access under the busy Corniche road.

Occupancy at the hotel averages around the 85 per cent mark during the summer months, falling in the winter as temperatures plummet, although with conference and banquet facilities able to accommodate up to 900 people, this is seen as an important out-of-season adjunct to the hotel's year round occupancy.

By Brian Salter