

Egypt – a jewel in the crown

Of all the countries along the north African coast, the jewel in the tourism crown has to be Egypt. It seems to have it all – sun, sand, sea, monuments, ruins and culture. **BRIAN SALTER** reports

EGYPT'S tourism sector grew 24 per cent in the past fiscal year, according to the country's minister for economic development, Osman Mohamed Osman.

To put that into context, the World Travel and Tourism Council expects the sector to rise from 16.1 per cent of GDP this year to 17.3 per cent by 2018 – equivalent to \$39.5 billion and to account for one in every seven jobs. Export earnings from foreign visitors are expected to generate \$12.9 billion this year, rising to over \$20 billion in 10 years' time.

Recently released central bank figures show that Egypt recorded a balance of payments surplus of \$5.4 billion in the year up to June – up from \$5.2 billion a year earlier; and net services and transfer revenue from tourism

jumped 32.3 per cent to \$10.8 billion, whilst revenue from the Suez Canal rose 23.6 per cent to \$5.2 billion due to an increase in shipping through the waterway and an increase in tonnage.

In a separate report entitled "Egypt Tourism Sector Analysis", recently compiled by industry research firm RNCOS, it estimates that Russia, Germany, the UK and Italy are the most important jumping off points for visitors to Egypt, with the UK expected soon to outpace Germany, acquiring second rank after Russia in terms of tourist arrivals.

With Egypt targeting to lure around 14 million tourists by the end of 2011, the report estimates that the country needs to build 240,000 hotel rooms by then and that this will require an annual

investment of over \$1 billion. This represents a huge opportunity for infrastructure developers, particularly hotel groups.

No wonder, then that property companies such as Emaar Misr – a wholly owned subsidiary of the UAE's Emaar Properties with a collective presence in over 36 markets spanning the Middle East, North Africa, Pan-Asia, Europe and North America – continue to pour so much capital into the country's tourism infrastructure.

Emaar Misr is one of the largest investors in Egyptian real estate with an investment portfolio of \$5.54 billion, and is developing four key projects: the \$2.1 billion Uptown Cairo standing at the highest point of downtown Cairo – Mukattam; the \$1.74 billion Marassi, tourist and residential



An artist's impression of the Uptown Cairo project

destination spanning 1,544 acres at Sidi Abdul Rahman; the \$1 billion residential community located at the fifth district New Cairo City; and the \$700 million commercial cum residential development on the Cairo – Alexandria desert road which also features the largest outdoor shopping and entertainment destinations in the country – Cairo Gate.

Even as construction of the master-planned Marassi resort project continues on an

accelerated schedule, Emaar Misr totally revamped the historic Alamein Hotel in record time, giving the local economy a major boost. The 50 year old Alamein Hotel has great social significance and is the first beachfront hospitality project in the region. With Emaar re-opening the hotel with a facelift, there has been a further surge in visitor inflow to the region, which has easy proximity to historic sites and offers residents the choice of

desert safari, eco-tourism and diving pursuits. Work on the project is ongoing with site grading completed and the construction of the beach clubhouse – the first of its kind in the region – progressing. The 6.25 million sq m gated community features premier leisure amenities including a world-class beach resort, a vibrant town centre, marina, golf course and hotels set amidst lush greenery and lagoons. ■