

CONFERENCE REPORT

THE VII INTERNATIONAL TOURISM CONGRESS – THE IMAGE AND SUSTAINABILITY OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

2-4 December 2014, Muscat - Sultanate of Oman

On behalf of the Steering Committee, Galal M. H. Afifi
Tourism Department, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

As a result of long-term collaborations, the VII International Tourism Congress (ITC 14) was co-organized by the Tourism Department, College of Arts and Social Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman and the School of Tourism and Maritime Technology, Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal, from the 2nd to the 4th of December 2014. Being hosted in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, it was the first time the congress was held outside its original base in Peniche, Leiria, Portugal. The ITC 14 organizing team was keen to maintain the congress' usual theme “the Image and Sustainability of Tourist Destinations”, as well as its focal aim “to present and discuss national and international experiences about tourism competitiveness, customers' experience, destination image and branding, sustainability and tourism marketing”.

The conference also features seven world-class keynote speakers who presented, over the congress duration, their valuable views on different tourism aspects. Professor Jafar Jafari (University of Wisconsin-Stout, USA) argued that “A nice place to live is a nice place to visit”. Professor Eduardo Fayos-Sola (President of the Ulysses Foundation, Spain) talked about “The future of tourism destinations: progress and development on a less travelled road”. Professor Maged Negm (Vice-president, Helwan University, Egypt) and Professor João Paulo Jorge (Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal) addressed the audience about the new approaches of “Heritage tourism”, and “Coastal tourism” respectively. On the second day, Professor Adele Ladkin (Bournemouth University, UK) spoke on “Sustainable tourism destinations: a human

resource perspective”. Mr. Abdul Wahed Al Farsi (Acting Chief Communications Officer, Omran, Oman) highlighted the role of “Omran as a catalyst for tourism projects in Oman”. Finally, Professor Metin Kozak (The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, China) focused on “The future of tourism marketing and management: moving from current issues to future trends”.

More than ninety delegates from 23 different countries enriched the conference by presenting 102 papers, which were classified under seven main themes: Sustainable tourism and development; Tourism marketing and destination image; Tourism economics and management; Tourism education and training; Tourism experience management; and Innovation and new trends. In addition, there was also an Arabic language track. The ITC 14 attracted a wide variety of attendees including under- and post-graduate students, entrepreneurs, developers, policy and decision-makers, and tourism professionals who attended the presentations to share their knowledge and experience with the academic delegates.

Seven papers received honorable mention certificates, while Annalisa Stacchini and Andrea Guizzardi (University of Bologna, Italy) received the best paper award for their article entitled “*Demand-driven regional tourist clusters: a new methodology for analyzing competitiveness of international tourist destinations from satisfaction statements*”.

Thirty of the conference full papers are planned to be published in three regional and international journals namely: *the European Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Recreation*; *the College of Arts and Social Sciences Journal* (Sultan Qaboos University); and *the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Helwan University Journal*. The other papers will be fully published in the conference proceedings to be issued by the end of 2015.

To enhance delegates’ experience of the Omani tourism, a sight-seeing tour was organized on the third day for conference attendees to explore Muscat. The city tour gives participants the impression that tourism is progressing rapidly in the Sultanate of Oman. In prospect, the VIII International Tourism Congress will be held on 25-27 November 2015 at Peniche, Portugal.