

Special Advertising Section

FOCUS ON TURKEY

SARAH JACKSON



WHY TURKEY'S TOURISM HAS TRIPLED IN 10 YEARS

BUSINESS IS BOOMING AS LUXURY HOTELS MOVE IN AND CONFERENCE VENUES BOOK OUT

By **Ian McCurrach**

Turkey has long been popular as a tourist destination, thanks to its sunny beaches and ancient historic sites. But it is now also a nation of luxury hotels and resorts. Significant investment has led to commercial and corporate success, and Turkey has emerged as a leading country in the high-end tourism sector, as well as in the Meeting, Incentive, Conference and Event (MICE) market.

"Turkey has shown extraordinary tourism growth, having nearly tripled its international tourist arrivals over the past decade, becoming the sixth most visited country in the world in 2011," says Taleb Rifai, secretary-general of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). "Some 29 million international tourists visited Turkey last year, drawn by its natural beauty and cultural attractions and increasingly so by its excellent infrastructure [for] business and MICE tourism."

CONFERENCE CAPITAL

Turkey hosts a growing number of international events, among which are the forthcoming UNWTO Global Summit on City Tourism and UNWTO 1st Affiliate Members General Meeting, both to be held in Istanbul in November.

The UK's recent Association of British Tour Agents' (ABTA) annual convention was held in Belek in Antalya, at the five-star Cornelia Resort. "With two hotels on site, along with a conference

center, an 18-hole golf course and beachfront location, it was ideal for our delegate profile," says Sean Tipton, media relations manager of ABTA. "Six hundred delegates attended, the majority of which were travel industry CEOs or senior managers and the feedback was very positive. The venue and surrounding area helped make this one of the most successful ABTA conventions in recent times."

"Istanbul's geographic position and easy accessibility from anywhere in the world contributes to its success as a congress destination," says Cagla Demircioglu, sales and marketing director, Istanbul Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Turkish Airlines, a member of the Star Alliance, offers almost 200

"TURKEY AIMS TO HAVE AT LEAST 50 MILLION VISITORS ANNUALLY BY 2023."

direct-destination flights between Istanbul and five continents, meaning that two billion people live within six hours' flying time of Istanbul. With two airports, one on the Asian side of the city and the other on the European side, Istanbul is served by nearly 300 international airlines."

"Turkey is not only popular for the variety of experiences it can offer but for its unique east-west position and its modern and advanced facilities," says Ali Sabanci, chairman of Pegasus Airlines, Turkey's low-cost carrier. "Turkey also offers better value than many European countries and its presence outside the euro zone confers a stable outlook on it

from an investment point of view."

The Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism was named "Europe's Leading Tourist Board" at the World Travel Awards 2012. "We are thrilled to have won this prestigious travel award during a year which has seen a number of awards for Turkey and unprecedented press coverage," says Ertugrul Gunay, Turkey's minister for culture and tourism. The awards also acknowledged Turkey's luxury hotel sector, with prizes for the Mardan Palace in Antalya (Europe's Leading Luxury Hotel), the Cornelia Diamond Gold Resort and Spa, Belek (Europe's Leading Luxury Resort) and for Angel's Peninsula, Marmaris (Europe's Leading New Luxury Hotel).

Istanbul is now regarded as one of Europe's top city break destinations. Once dubbed the Paris of the East, it has seen a year-on-year increase of 46.68% in foreign visitors in the first three months of 2012, equating to 1,605,741 visitors.

"With seven purpose-built convention centers and three exhibition centers large enough to accommodate even the biggest international fairs, Istanbul can easily accommodate large international congresses such as the World Development Federation and the World Federation of Neurological Sciences," says Ms. Demircioglu. "With over 72,000 guestrooms and 85 five-star and deluxe hotels, Istanbul offers meeting planners a

variety of options, including top international and domestic brands, at a variety of price points."

RICH WITH POTENTIAL

"Throughout the country, investment in tourism continues apace. For investors there are a number of inducements and opportunities, with the government continuing to develop large-scale areas designated especially for tourism, making Turkey a country still rich with potential," says Tolga Tuyuluoglu, director of the Turkish Culture and Tourism office in the U.K. "Turkey aims to have at least 50 million visitors annually by 2023."

"While Turkey partly benefited from a redirection of traffic from the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 thanks to the Arab Spring, its performance was in line with its average growth rated in previous years," says Mr. Rifai. "In fact, even in the global economic crisis of 2009, when world tourism was down by 4%, international tourists visiting Turkey grew by 2%."

For investors, Turkey offers various incentives. "There are no pre-permits required for foreign company establishment, along with no minimum capital requirement," says Levant Egeli, secretary general of the government's Investment Support and Promotion Agency.

"The Post Office Money's 2012 Holiday Costs Barometer found that falling prices in Turkey has meant that prices are now on a par with 2008, when Turkey was a magnet for travellers in search of a

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LEADING HOTELS AND CONVENTION CENTERS

ICEC ISTANBUL CONVENTION CENTER

Located in the center of Istanbul, the ICEC's facilities include two properties, Main Building and Rumeli Fair & Exhibition Center, which can be used together or separately. There are 25 multifunctional meeting rooms. The smallest has a capacity of six, the largest over 2,000. The exhibition area totals 7,000 square meters. ICEC provides five-star catering services.

ISTANBUL CONGRESS CENTER

The ICC is the largest facility in the heart of the city. It opened hosting the 2009 Annual Meetings of the Boards of Governors of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, with the participation of 15,000 delegates. The impressive facilities include state-of-the-art technology, simultaneous translation rooms and a theater-style auditorium with a 3,500 capacity.

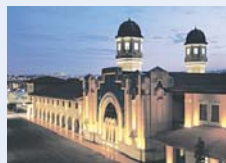
HALIÇ CONGRESS CENTER

Located in the Golden Horn's historic district, the Haliç Congress Center is a mix of the historic and the contemporary. Its seaside location allows fast sea transportation to the center of Istanbul and Ataturk airport. It is also connected by a series of underground tunnels with an average transfer time of seven minutes. The facility encompasses four buildings over 102,000 square meters. There are numerous multifunctional spaces and five auditoria with a 4,800 capacity.

GRAND CEVAHIR HOTEL AND CONVENTION CENTER

Fifteen minutes' drive from Ataturk Airport and seven minutes from the heart of Istanbul, the Grand Cevahir Hotel and Convention Center has 323 rooms, including four presidential suites. The hotel features a luxury spa and fitness facilities. There are 22 multifunctional meeting spaces and an auditorium with a 1,013 capacity.

— Ian McCurrach



The Haliç Congress Center, in the Golden Horn's historic district, Istanbul.

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bargain deal," says Mr. Tuyluoğlu. In 2012, restaurants and bars have cut prices "resulting in a drop of 12% in local costs," he adds, which lowers overall costs for event planners.

A number of luxury hotel groups are investing in Turkey: the first Le Meridien Hotel opened in March, as Le Meridien Istanbul Etiler, in an exclusive neighborhood overlooking the Bosphorus. The D-Hotel Maris resort opened on the Aegean coast's Dacta Peninsula in April, with 200 deluxe rooms, a private beach, spa, restaurants, bars and conference facilities.

MOVING UPMARKET

Izmir's best-known luxury hotel, the Izmir Palas, has

reopened after large-scale renovation of its 150 deluxe rooms and suites. Hilton Worldwide recently announced the building of four new properties across Turkey.

The luxury Mandarin Oriental Group will arrive in Turkey with the Mandarin Oriental Bodrum, opening in 2014. Located on a 60-hectare site, it will have 82 guestrooms and 20 suites, most with private gardens and infinity pools. (Plans are in place for the country's second Mandarin Oriental hotel, beside the Bosphorus in Istanbul.) Aman, the Singapore-based luxury hotel group, opened its latest property, Amanura, close to the main resort of Bodrum, which has been pulled steadily upmarket over the years. To cater for the influx of visitors, a new terminal

opened at Bodrum's Milas airport in May, which has a capacity of five million passengers and serves 40 destinations.

DESIRED DESTINATION

A new Raffles hotel, with one of the largest spas in Istanbul at some 3,000 square meters, is set to open by the end of 2012 in the award-winning Zorlu Centre, a mixed-use development with performance spaces, office and luxury retail units.

Istanbul broke into the world's Top 10 Congress Destinations in 2010. "The city is now on the short list of virtually every major event," says Elif Balci Fisunoglu, general manager of Istanbul's Convention and Visitors Bureau.

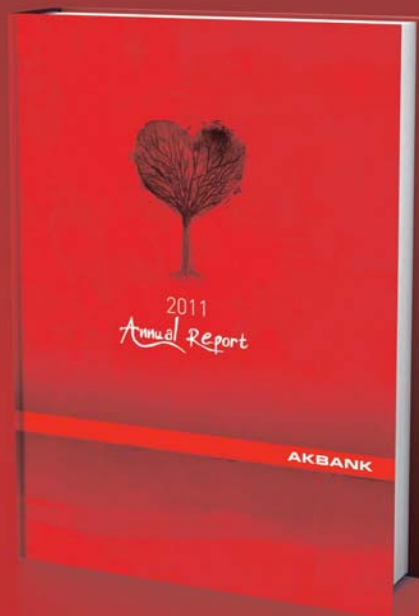
"Our mission is to continue communicating with planners that Istanbul offers unrivalled

flexibility and the confidence of knowing that all facilities are new and technologically up-to-date," she adds.

Convention, cultural and sporting events are currently planned up to 10 years in advance. The Mersin XV11th Mediterranean Games will be held in June, while autumn 2013 heralds the 13th Istanbul Biennial, and the Horticultural Branch of Expo will take place in Antalya in 2016. Istanbul is on a shortlist of three cities—alongside Tokyo and Madrid—in line to host the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

In preparation, Istanbul's Ataturk Airport will double its capacity to 70 aircraft an hour within a year, with its new fourth runway meeting its estimated needs for the next 10 years.

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