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An eye on global trends

INDUSTRY optimism at the recently concluded World Travel Market London 2016 was high with deals worth more than £2.5 billion (\$3 billion) agreed and signed.

Furthermore, more than two thirds of industry respondents say travel and tourism will grow in 2017, including 15 per cent believing there will be a significant increase in the global travel and tourism industry. A further 53 per cent see the industry increasing next year. Almost seven out ten expect their business to increase bookings next year, including more than a fifth that feel business will significantly increase.

The WTM Global Trends Report 2016, in association with Euromonitor International, reports that the global economic outlook looks uncertain, with most developed economies showing sluggish growth and emerging economies struggling to maintain higher advances. Terrorism threats, the US Presidential elections and the aftermath of Brexit are the leading causes of uncertainty across the globe and are impacting economic growth and stability.

Nonetheless, tourism arrivals are extremely resilient with 2016 predicted to be another record year for inbound trips, with 2015 seeing more than 1.2 billion worldwide. Travel product sales were \$2.1 trillion in 2015 and are expected to top \$2.5 trillion by 2020, boosted by the adoption of new technology and diverse business models.

Online and mobile travel continues to expand across the globe, helped by growing consumer confidence in emerging regions for mobile payments. However, the majority of mobile travel purchases are stealing share from other online methods such as PCs, offline is still predicted to have higher global value than online in 2020, as said in the WTM Global Trends Report 2016.

Convenience is king with consumers choosing bag-free, hassle-free travel and 'clicks and mortar' agencies that blend the best of the online and offline worlds. With global online value sales for intermediaries set to overtake offline sales, traditional retailers need



Dubai shared a virtual preview of its iconic experiences at World Travel Market 2016

Convenience is king with consumers choosing bag-free, hassle-free travel and 'clicks and mortar' agencies that blend the best of the online and offline worlds

to evolve so as not to lose out, advised the report.

The Middle East continues to see security issues and instability impacting tourism, but also strong arrivals for the UAE and Saudi Arabia in 2015. Airlines showed the highest growth of all categories, with the low cost of fuel benefiting travel but economic growth is stagnating for some key oil-producing nations. Mobile travel sales to residents are booming, with Saudi Arabia seeing 68 per cent growth in 2015 as

confidence in the payment mode expands.

Tourism in certain Middle Eastern countries continues to face challenging times, with the political situation in the region remaining unstable. National tourist boards are looking to history to find attractions for visitors, with the development and promotion of hiking trails proving a surprising success. Key trails include the Nativity Path in Palestine, Abraham's Path from Turkey to Egypt, the Jordan trail and Lebanon's mountain trail.

A key benefit for rural communities is the creation of tourism in areas that have never seen visitors, and is particularly beneficial for women involved in providing home stays. While security can be a concern, local communities that are invested in the growth of tourism are ensuring a safe and welcoming environment for tourists.

Some of the trails go across country borders, offering visitors a more varied trip, as well as fostering stronger relationships between neighbouring tourism

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Rotana targets 16 hotels in 2017

ROTANA, one of the leading hospitality management companies in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and Eastern Europe, is driving forward its ambitious vision of operating 100 hotels by 2020,



Kaddouri... free wi-fi for everyone from 2017

with the opening of 16 new properties by 2017.

The developments will see more than 3,756 keys added to the group's existing inventory, helping Rotana grow its portfolio to 75 operating hotels with more than 19,450 keys in total. Projects will include five new properties in the UAE, four in Saudi Arabia, two each in Turkey and Iraq, and the opening of Rotana's first ever property in Muscat, Oman. The extension work on one of the company's iconic UAE properties, The Cove Rotana Resort in Ras Al Khaimah, will also take place next year.

This is in addition to ten property openings this year, president and chief executive officer Omer Kaddouri tells *TNTN*. "We have about 1.5 hotels opening a month next year. It will be very, very busy, putting teams together, with travel thrown in for good measure."

Saudi Arabia, the UK and Germany have always been important markets for Rotana. "Now, the US is starting to become an important feeder market, it ranks number four on our list. India's on the top ten list too and it's growing but not as fast as we'd like it to grow. A lot of the visitors are coming in to the UAE from India but they are not keen on the five- and four-star market but other segments."

The brand is evolving very quickly and the growth is shared among all our products from Centro and Arjaan to Rotana, all are growing at a similar pace. "I

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SOMEWHERE Grand Hotel
Al Ahsa

LUXURY

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Al Faisaliah Resort & Spa, Durrat Arriyadh features ornate Arabian design

Arabian nights

Al Faisaliah Resort & Spa, Durrat Arriyadh marks the debut of a new kind of luxury in Saudi Arabian hospitality

By Mark Lazell

WHEN Al Faisaliah Resort & Spa, Durrat Arriyadh welcomed its first guests in the middle of 2016, it marked the beginning of a distinguished new chapter in Saudi Arabia's hospitality story.

The sprawling real life oasis, set among lush greenery and rolling natural desert landscapes just 40 minutes from downtown Riyadh, is the first resort of its type in the Kingdom and is being developed by Dallah Al Baraka and Al Rawabi Company for Hotels and Tourism in partnership with Al Khozama Management Company (AKMC), itself renowned for its meticulous attention to detail, excellence and world-class service in Saudi Arabia.

As the Kingdom's first 'Country Club'-style

retreat, two thirds of the 159,000 square metre estate is dedicated to green space and water, attracting a variety of wildlife and a perfect place for outdoor strolls.

"We are part of the lungs of the city," says Fred Petry, general manager, Al Faisaliah Resort & Spa who, with his team and the support of Al Khozama, has overseen the development of this exceptional destination.

By day, the surrounding gardens envelop the resort in a lush green blanket. By night, the black sky heaves spectacularly with stars above the gardens and terraces where guests can sample fine local and international cuisine. And all this on the doorstep of the city's beating commercial heart at Olaya and just 15 minutes from King Khaled International Airport.

As a sister property to the iconic and award-

winning Faisaliah Hotel in downtown Riyadh, considered one of Saudi Arabia's finest hotels, the facilities are world-class. From the airy lobby, stairs cascade down to the beautifully-appointed restaurants, with doors which open out onto lounge terraces overlooking manicured lawns, three outdoor pools (including three pool chalets and one of the only Infinity pools in a hotel in Saudi Arabia), and 10 private villas. Soon a 5,000 square metre spa, which will be the largest in the country, will pamper both male and female guests in separate facilities.

The atmosphere of sanctuary, recharge and rejuvenation similarly extends to each of the 121 standard guest rooms which, at 68 square metres, are larger than the average hotel suite in Saudi Arabia. The 31 suites, including the 580 square metre, SR50,000 (\$13,300) per night

Royal Suite, are a homage to opulence.

Al Faisaliah Resort & Spa is already the preferred choice for a discerning clientele in Riyadh and beyond, and is expected to be the torch bearer for the Kingdom's five-star resort sector for many years to come.

"At Al Faisaliah Resort & Spa we are closely aligned with the vision of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Internal Heritage, under the Chairmanship of HRH Prince Sultan, to promote Saudi heritage and celebrate its rich culture, and our appreciation of this is reflected in the design, cuisine and service," Petry explains.

"This is an entirely new concept for Riyadh and the Kingdom and we are proud to be creating history with the full support of Al Khozama, one of the most prestigious names in Saudi Arabia's luxury hospitality industry." ■



Chenot Palace Health Wellness Hotel takes a strict view of health and is not a casual spa break

Heal in the hills

Luxurious health wellness hotel opens in Azerbaijan

By Christine Hinz

WITH two million visitors arriving in 2015, Azerbaijan is on pace to break visitor records in 2016 with a ten percent increase in visitor arrivals, largely as a result of increased airlift, eased visa requirements and a continuing investment in infrastructure aimed at luring upmarket travelers from the GCC, Russia, and Europe. The Middle East is Azerbaijan's fastest-growing market, increasing tourist arrivals over the past year by 34 percent, with arrivals from Iran growing nearly 63 per cent.

The capital of Baku is top of the list for international visitors with its mix of Russian, European and Muslim influences and is reaping the tourism benefits of hosting successful high-profile events such as the 2015 European Games and the 2016 Formula One street circuit, both which showcased the city's mix of ultra-modern architecture enveloped by the pristinely-preserved UNESCO World Heritage Site of Baku's Old City, as well as the city's vibrant cultural scene and other attractions.

Beyond Baku is the mountain retreat town of Gabala, located in the heart of the Caucasian range and once the geographic middle point of the Silk Route. Today the area serves as a getaway destination for upmarket travel-



The pool with a view

ers and family vacationers. Gabala is home to the Tufandag Mountain Resort, a world-class downhill skiing facility that opened in 2015, the country's largest amusement park, stunning forests and valleys, as well as the highly-anticipated Chenot Palace, a five-star luxury health wellness hotel.

Checking into Chenot Palace on behalf of **TTN**, I am forewarned by Dr George Gaitanos, Chenot Group Scientific Director, that despite my luxurious contemporary surroundings, "Chenot Palace is not a pampering spa." In fact, the Chenot therapeutic approach focuses on a holistic detox and revitalisation method that uti-

lises the most advanced diagnostic techniques and state of the art, non-invasive equipment to provide a completely individualised approach to individual wellness.

The Chenot approach developed by Dr Henri Chenot, who has been dedicated to individual wellness for more than 45 years to provide guests with a holistic view of their body, mind, and emotional life, explains, "People are living longer, and there is the need to maintain performance as in youth. Our quest, our constant commitment, is to provide the means to invest in wellness so that our body cells will be harmonious and rich in vital energy and functionality."

My first morning at Chenot Palace includes a full battery of medical and nutritional diagnostics and check-ups. This includes a discussion with one of the several on-site medical doctors about my family health history, followed by a completely non-invasive series of tests to check my body composition, metabolic age, and a full bio-energetic scan using onboarding diagnostic equipment developed by NASA to check my organ function.

From there, I undergo a postural scan, where a slight abnormality is found in my lumbar region, followed by an impromptu knee exam when I mention pain following activities such as tennis and running. From there I do a session of Neurac treatment, where everyday movements such as walking, sitting and body mobility are assessed and I undergo a neuromuscular re-activation session with a trained therapist using Redcord® technology. While skeptical, I witness surprisingly quick and significantly measurable success and leave the one-hour session feeling as if my musculoskeletal system has been reset, walking lighter and with more mobility in my upper torso and head.

As I break for a 'bio-light' lunch that consists of a thinly-sliced plate of pineapple carpaccio, a robust cabbage salad and a main course that is a healthy spin on eggplant parmigiana, a personalised treatment of hydro-therapeutic and energetic massages are coordinated on my behalf. The food offerings at Chenot Palace, while restrictive in calories, do not leave me feeling undernourished or hungry (though I admit I am craving bread and caffeine). The two meal plans at Chenot Palace focus on different outcomes, I am on the 'detox' plan that allows animal protein but does not exceed 1200 calories per day; the other, focused on weight loss, is vegetarian/vegan and more calorie stringent.

I begin my massage treatments with a one-hour Hydro PhytoMud therapy session. Through variations in water temperature and pressure along with a tailored mixture of essential oils added, the treatment aims to improve my circulation and eliminate toxins and fat deposits. Then, a special application of Chenot 'mud' is applied and I am wrapped and submerged into what feels like a waterbed and topped with a blanket-sized heating pad to help my body further rid itself of toxins.

After being sprayed down with a hydro-jet, I am taken to a two-hour session of Biontology massage, that incorporates deep tissue massage and electronic 'cupping' that leaves no marks and which focuses on activating my energy channels and stimulating my bodily functions. The next day I go through another round of Hydro PhytoMud therapy and an even more strenuous Biontology massage that focuses on my problem points. Talking me through my treatment, my therapist points out that he is working to realign my shoulder blades, then explains his work on my diaphragm and rib cage to open my lungs. Later, he works on my organs to stimulate further function and detoxification.

Over the course of my stay, I can feel the effects almost immediately. The first days aren't easy, I feel nauseous and have a headache but I can tell something significant within my body is taking place, confirmed when I step on the scale on day two and weighing two kilos lighter. By my third evening, I've turned a corner. I feel a new sense of energy and my mind feels clear.

Throughout my visit I'm given insights into the Chenot wellness philosophy that includes information about diet, cooking, overall wellness and recommendations for everything from exercise to herbal medications to consider in maintaining my overall health and wellbeing. I find that all of the information is easy to incorporate into my lifestyle and I look forward to the lasting effects that some of the changes I will make will benefit my short and long-term wellness. ■

Chenot Palace Health Wellness Hotel

THE Chenot Palace Health Wellness Hotel features 72 guest rooms and suites. Suites offer private balconies; all rooms enjoy lake views and complimentary wi-fi. Three private villas include complete spa facilities (hydro-tubs, massage rooms, steam, and sauna) and private outdoor pool.

The 6,000 sq m facility includes medical and treatment wings, cryotherapy centre, fitness center with anti-gravity and oxygen-reduced training capabilities, indoor/outdoor pool,

squash, as well as a yoga and Pilates studio. A childcare centre, game room and a small gallery of upscale boutiques are also on site, along with a dedicated meeting room where evening lectures on the Chenot diet and wellness approach are held.

Chenot programmes: The seven-night Fundamental Detox Henri Chenot Programme starts at Dh12,000 (). Three-day Active Detox programs are also available starting at Dh4,500 (). Other packages include seven-

night Advance Detox; Prevention and Aging Well; and Stress and Re-Energising programmes, as well as a 14-night Metabolic Optimising for Weight Loss program.

Getting There: Azerbaijan Airlines, Fly-Dubai and Qatar Airways offer direct flights to Baku. Air Arabia will launch flights from Sharjah to Baku in March 2017. Flights to Gabala are available via Baku on Azerbaijan Airlines. Pegasus Airlines launched service to Gabala from Istanbul in March.