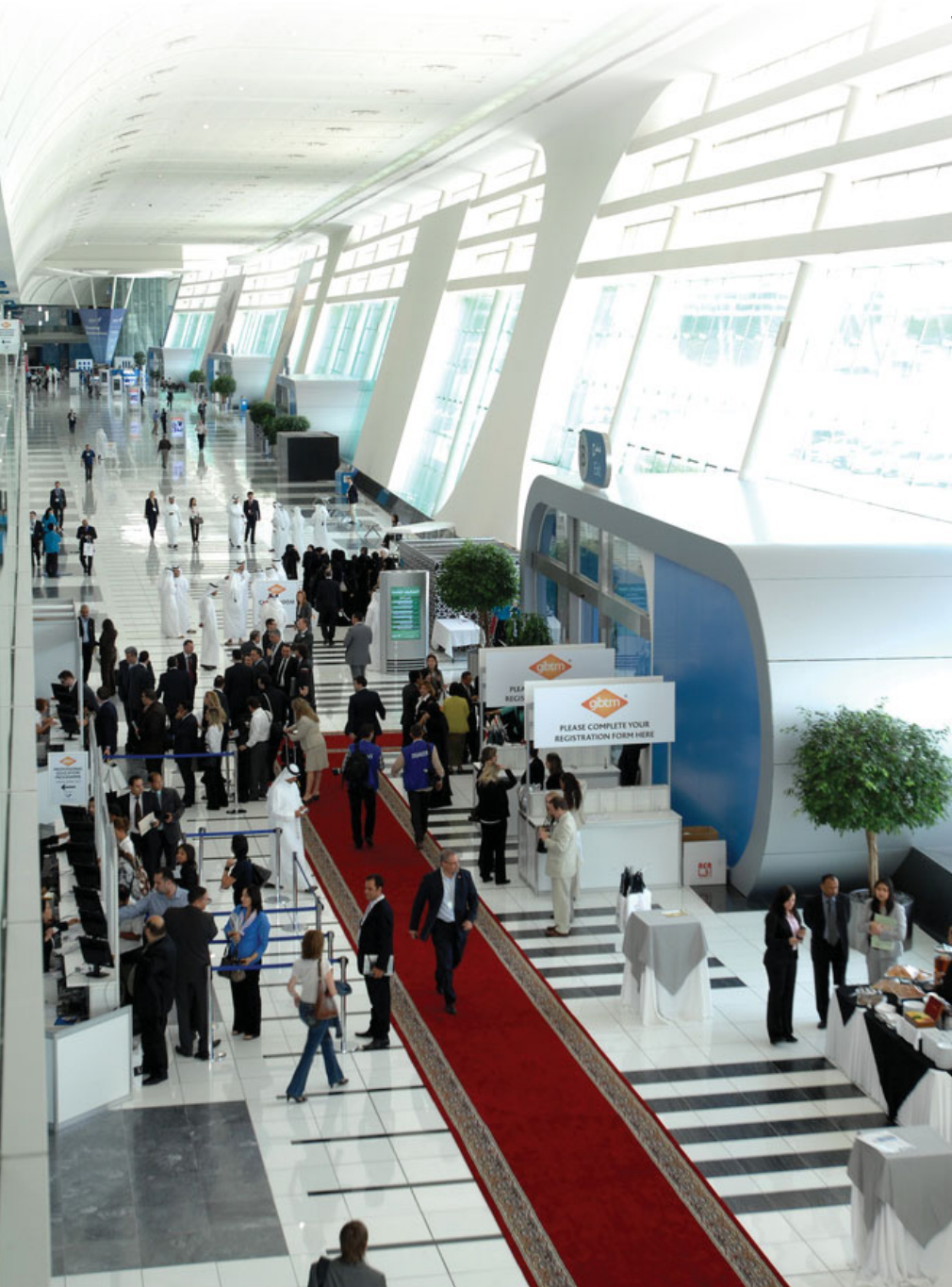


# GIBTM 2011 *report back*



GIBTM, which was held at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre, is fast establishing itself as the 'event of the year' for the rapidly developing Middle Eastern meetings and incentives industry.

by Stephanie Moss

As with most international exhibitions, the Gulf Incentive, Business Travel and Meetings (GIBTM) showcases international meetings and incentive suppliers from destination marketing organisations, tour operators, national convention bureaus, hotels and hotel groups, as well as destination management companies representing the Gulf region, South and Southeast Asia, Europe, North Africa and beyond.

The expo covered a good wide and spread of the sectors represented within the business tourism industry, including:

- airlines
- destination management companies
- venues and hotels
- wellness resorts and health spas
- media and industry publications
- PCOs
- trade associations.

The event took place at the über-super Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre (ADNEC), which is undeniably the most modern exhibition centre in the world, with its 12 state-of-the-art fully connected exhibition halls, an atrium and the concourse making up 73 000 m<sup>2</sup> of event space.

An interesting and unique novelty at ADNEC is its 'trial project'. This a robot that assists visitors at the centre, providing them with information. It also guides visitors to stands and key locations within the venue via a motorised head with vision, face-tracking and recognition functions.

As one would imagine with any Reed Exhibitions organised event, the arrangements were slick and chic. Though vastly smaller than its European and American counterparts, I believe this show has legs and will in future encompass further interest from the Europe and Asia regions, and may in fact become hailed in the league of AIME, EIBTM and AIBTM, among others.

One fantastic thing I noted regarding the event, in comparison to its European counterpart, is that everything is new in this part of the world. It is all luxurious, from the Etihad airline and the quick and efficient passport control and biometric procedure on site at the airport, to the limousine transfer to the five-star hotel.

## **GIBTM at large**

It was interesting that the Asian countries, including Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, were incredibly well represented at the exhibition. In addition, given the myriad hotels and hotel groups in the Middle East, attending GIBTM 2011 has given me a far greater understanding of the true scope and size of the hospitality and conference market in the Middle East.

Noticeably, for the first time, four of the leading cruise lines participated in the 2011 exhibition. These included Costa Cruises, Silversea Cruises, MSC Cruises and Royal Caribbean International.

As all cruise companies I spoke to reiterated, cruising is 'the new' travel option and is becoming widely accepted as an important form of employee incentive travel or a client hospitality option, as well as the ideal leisure holiday choice, with highly competitive, all-inclusive pricing. State rooms starting as low as US\$90 (approximately R600) per person per day, including all meals and entertainment, make cruising a 'no brainer'.

Seven-night cruises from Abu Dhabi and Dubai give guests an unforgettable experience of Arabia. An added bonus is that MICE clients are able to combine meetings with short break holidays, and delegates get to explore multiple destinations seamlessly.

Cruise ships come into the region on a variety of routes, including from Singapore, Monte Carlo, Seychelles, Mauritius and Greece.

### Professional education programme

GITBM's professional education programme topped 300 attendees, which is nearly double the amount of participants in 2010, making it

the largest Middle East education gathering of industry professionals. Some of the distinguished speakers at this year's education sessions included Sally Greenhill from The Right Solution and Rob Nicolas of Meetme, presenting research undertaken by GIBTM into the Middle Eastern MICE market.

Rebecca Saunders of Sustainable Events undertook an interactive workshop, providing an overview of practical sustainability that can be implemented to enhance organisational efficiency.

Joyce Dodniez, director of development at Meeting Professionals International, examined the business value of meetings and events. Her findings included research from the following reliable sources: Harvard Business Review, Oxford Economics, Forbes and MPI, among others. Dodniez made the business case for the profitability of face-to-face gatherings through meetings, incentives and events. Further adding to the remarkable education programme, John Quinn of Satellite Communications covered the topical issue of social media and five crucial tips for this.

Other appealing sessions included a lively panel debate focusing on 'what is happening in the world of meetings', as well as an assembly on sustainability reporting and how to start monitoring and measuring the impact of an event.

### Yas Island

I stayed on Yas Island, a mere 50 minutes from Dubai. The island is around 20 minutes from ADNEC and is in the early stages of development. Yas is part of the government's ambitious strategy to develop tourism in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. It is home to the unbelievable new Formula 1 racing circuit and the Yas hotel, plus another six. Ferrari World has recently been completed and offers an amazing F1 experience for the whole family – it's put together brilliantly.

The new Links Golf Course on Yas Island is also something to

behold and I believe it's already ranked among the top 50 courses in the world. It is simply amazing to see what big budgets can buy.

Saadiyat Island is the 'neighbouring' island, joined to Yas by high-tech bridges, and there are big plans for this island, including the Saadiyat Cultural District, which is set to become an internationally renowned arts hub featuring the Zayed National Museum, Louvre Abu Dhabi, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and the Performing Arts Centre. Saadiyat is positioned to become a desirable international flagship for Abu Dhabi and a treasure for the world.

All in all Abu Dhabi is a cosmopolitan city with urban architecture, lush green gardens and fountains, bursting with dazzling business-cum-leisure facilities, luxurious hotels, spas, designer golf courses, theatres and very soon, some of the world's most famous museums. The palace-like shopping malls and indigenous souqs in Abu Dhabi make for great shopping, while gastronomic treats abound from cool and sophisticated cafes, clubs and restaurants.

The exhibition was certainly worth attending to connect and re-acquaint with regional and international suppliers. Taking into account the huge plans for the area I found it well worthwhile to get up close and personal with so many companies that are leaders in their fields in the Gulf region as it can only be useful to have a network as such up and running for the future. **35**



GIBTM

GIBTM 2011 attracted over 2 100 visitors and buyers, which is an 11% increase on last year's figures. It also saw a 20% increase in exhibitor numbers, totalling 275, with nearly 20 international countries participating in this year's show. These unaudited figures demonstrate not only the great success of the 2011 show, but also the growing interest in the Middle East meetings industry. *Source: www.gibtm.com*



### About the author

Stephanie Moss is the MD of Stephanie Moss Solutions, a leading provider of stylish events and incentive solutions to corporate South Africa. For more than 17 years now, her Bryanston-based company has honed its skills in the delivery of unparalleled events, conferences and incentives. Get in touch with Stephanie on +27 (0)11 706 3242 or [stephanie@solutionsgroup.co.za](mailto:stephanie@solutionsgroup.co.za). Alternatively, visit [www.solutionsgroup.co.za](http://www.solutionsgroup.co.za) for more information.