

# THE JORDAN TIMES

## Airlines want Arab regulators to facilitate aviation growth

by Omar Obeidat | Jun 26, 2013 | 23:05

**SALALAH, Oman** — Aviation experts on Wednesday called on regulatory bodies in the Arab world to remove obstacles hindering further growth of regional air carriers. Speaking at the Arab Aviation and Media Summit 2013, panellists also discussed how the aviation industry can contribute to the development of the tourism sector in the region.

Adel Ali, Group Chief Executive Officer of UAE-based Air Arabia, called on Arab countries to adopt the Open Sky approach between each other and encourage intra-regional tourism, saying such policies would enable Arab airline companies achieve growth rates that could outpace those made by passenger carriers in the US and Europe.

Ali also criticised what he termed illogical government policies such as imposing high taxes on airline tickets, describing the policies as the biggest challenges facing the industry.

“Aviation is an expensive industry as plane prices are expensive and so are oil prices. Policy makers should know that an Open Sky approach is not only good for airlines but also for their countries,” he said at the summit, which was held this year in the Omani city of Salalah under the theme of “Aviation and Tourism: Enabler of Economic Growth”.

The head of the low-cost airline cited Jordan as success story for the Open Sky policy, explaining that the number of passengers to the Kingdom is seeing a tangible increase, noting that Amman has also made another successful step when it entered into a partnership with the private sector to expand the Queen Alia International Airport to accommodate the increasing number of passenger and aircraft traffic.

Awadh Al Ketbi from Dubai-based AKC Consultancy group, said intra-regional tourism could be an economic growth driver for Arab countries.

He indicated that in recent years travel patterns for tourists from the Gulf region have changed as many tourists opt to spend their summer holidays either in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states or visit tourist attractions in other regional countries.

“There is good opportunity for Gulf countries to promote the GCC as a destination not only among residents but also by targeting international travellers,” he said.

The population of the GCC is around 77 million, so there should be strategies in place to target a certain percentage of them, Ketbi added, noting that cities in the Gulf are ready to receive tourists and Arab airlines are also ready to transport large numbers of passengers.

Maitha Mahrouqi, undersecretary of Oman’s tourism ministry, indicated that the Gulf country is working on increasing the contribution of the tourism sector to the economy by partnering with regional and international airlines to carry out promotion campaigns. According to Mahrouqi, the contribution of tourism to Omani economy was 2.4 per cent in 2012, and the ministry’s strategy is to boost the contribution to 5 per cent in 2020. Andrew Gordon, director of strategic marketing at Airbus, cited a global market forecast conducted by the company, to indicate that passenger traffic from and to the Middle East is expected to grow by 6.2 per cent on an annual basis over the coming 20 years.

The summit was organised by Air Arabia for the third consecutive year and saw the participation of nearly 100 journalists from several Arab countries.