

40 projects worth billions of dollars taking shape

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The Minister of Tourism with the Chief Executive Officer of OEPPA.

By Shaddad al Musalmy

MUSCAT — The Sultanate has seen tremendous growth in the tourism sector with more than 40 projects worth billions of dollars taking shape during the last two years, said Dr Rajha bint Abdulameer bin Ali, Minister of Tourism, while speaking to journalists here yesterday. “Growth in tourism sector over the last two years has been larger than expected. In 2006, it recorded a growth of 19 per cent while in 2007, it was 9 per cent as against the expected 7 per cent with 1.4 million tourists visiting the Sultanate last year while more increase is expected this year,” Dr Rajha said.

On the availability of hotel rooms in Oman, Dr Rajha said: “There are a number of hotel projects coming up and in five years, the number of rooms will be more than doubled after the integrated projects are completed.” Dr Rajha said that a number of tourism projects will be developed in different regions and governorates of the Sultanate by Omani and non-Omani investors. The ministry is currently preparing new procedures and ideas that will have positive outcome on the country and citizens.

The minister noted that the new projects include Al Sifa, Kalbough Park, Al Souda Island, A’Seeb, Ras Al Hamra, Al Rowdah and Ras Al Hadd, **in addition to two other projects near The Wave** and five other projects in Musandam governorate, the Al Batinah region, the Al Buraimi governorate, and the Wilayat of A’Duqm in the Wusta region.

She pointed out that investment in tourism projects will contribute to the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). “The contribution of tourism sector to the GDP is almost 1 per cent. The Tourism Ministry will organise a workshop on April 21 to find out the exact contribution of the tourism sector to the GDP,” she said. On the role of the tourism ministry, Dr Rajha said: “The ministry promotes tourism in the Sultanate and makes the Sultanate a tourist hub by selecting strategic investors who have international experience and high reputation which in turn will transfer experience and lure financial resources to the Sultanate.”

On the strategic partnership between the Sultanate's government and foreign investors, the minister said the aim is to ensure that all sectors of society receive the benefits and that such benefits are not limited to specific person. "This aim will be later achieved when the contribution of the government will be offered for subscription by the Omani private sector in preparation for offering to the sectors of society," she said. There is a trend at the Tourism Ministry to establish a public company or closed joint stock companies that take part in implementing the tourism projects with the government, she noted.

"The idea of establishing a public company that takes part in implementing tourism project has been implemented at the tourism project in the Al Buraimi when 30 per cent of the capital shares have been allocated for a public company from the governorate. The trend will be implemented also through Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran)'s implementation of one of the tourism projects in Muscat governorate," she said. "As per the studies conducted by the Supreme Committee for Town Planning, land plots will be allocated for tourism projects in the coming period. These land plots will be offered for bidding by investors interested in the field.

The Tourism Ministry will then select the best offers for implementing the tourism projects, she added. Answering a question on sharing recreational facilities at the tourism projects, Dr Rajha said that the Tourism Ministry encourages setting up the projects with novel ideas that add value to the recreational facilities. The press conference was also attended by Abdullah bin Nassir bin Musallam al Rahbi, Chief Executive Officer, Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising, OEPPA.