



BOOST TO TOURISM: Business tourism is poised for growth following the commencement of construction of the new \$1 billion Oman Conference and Exhibition Centre in Muscat. The facility will transform Oman into a key destination for major business events in the region. ■ Details, P4

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\$1 billion convention centre to drive business tourism sector

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — Oman's business tourism sector is poised for further growth following the commencement of construction on the new \$1 billion Oman Conference and Exhibition Centre in Muscat.

The facility — set to become the largest meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) venue in Oman upon its scheduled completion in 2014 — will transform Oman into a key destination for major business events in the region.

The upcoming Muscat centre embodies Oman's thriving tourism sector, which is expected to contribute \$1.93 billion or around 3 per cent of total GDP in 2011.

The leisure segment is already booming as reflected by the 10 per cent average annual growth in hotel occupancies.

Oman has already approved the spending of around \$8 billion on tourism-related property developments across the country.

The Ministry of Tourism aims to eventually draw in 12 million visitors a year by 2020 to make the tourism industry one of the country's largest income generators and a vital component of the 'Visions for Oman's Economy: Oman 2020' development plan.

"The development of the convention centre in Muscat forms part of our efforts to establish Oman as an all-around

business, leisure and lifestyle destination. "Travellers from all over the world are already attracted to our natural beauty, fine weather, special events and excellent transport infrastructure. By building up our MICE offerings we grow closer to tourism targets that we have specifically aligned under the Oman 2020 economic vision.

"The media has been an important ally in the realisation of our goals, we appreciate the full support that they have been giving throughout our campaigns," said Salem al Maamari, Director-General of Tourism Promotions, Ministry of Tourism.

Among the Ministry of Tourism's latest initiatives to gain support for its pro-

grammes is a media familiarisation trip to point out the tourist attractions in Muscat and Salalah.

Running from June 25 to 29, 2011, the tour is part of the Ministry's strategy of involving the media and other key partners in the industry's sustained growth.

Oman welcomed around 1.6 million tourists in 2010 and expects to raise the figure this year mainly through visits from neighbouring GCC states, India and Russia.

The construction of three new airports and a growing sea cruise trade that brought in more than 120 cruise ships and 300,000 passengers in the 2010-11 season will further advance Oman's tourism plans.