

'Kingdom among fastest emerging tourist destinations for Americans'

50,000 Americans visited Bahrain last year, says American envoy

TDT | Manama
Mohammed Zafran

Americans coming to the Kingdom for business and leisure tourism have increased in the recent years with last year's number reaching 50,000, American Ambassador Justin Siberell said.

He was speaking at an event titled 'Innovation in Tourism - Building the Tourism Sector

for the Savvy Travellers', organised by the American Chamber of Commerce in Bahrain (Amcham) in coordination with the American Embassy yesterday at The Ritz Carlton.

"We have a vibrant American community here and we have many Americans who are coming to visit here as well. More Americans are coming to Bahrain as a tourism destination, be it from the United States or other countries."

Speaking about tourists from the Middle East region to the United States, he said, "According to the United States national tourism office, we have nearly 77 million international visitors and about 1.2 million came from this region. The tourism industry is a vital component of the American economy."

In terms of citizens and residents of Bahrain visiting the US, he said, "Each year, more than



Mr Siberell speaking at the event.

11,000 people including Bahrainis and residents of the Kingdom visit the embassy seeking visas. We have taken significant

strides over the last year to ease the visa process to make it even more streamlined.

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Describing the Discover America Week that is being held, he said, "It's an annual

celebration intended to draw attention to the diversity of American business, technology, and innovation in Bahrain. The Discover America Week will run until October 24.

"During the week, we are featuring a number of activities to draw attention to American brands, entrepreneurship, technology, services, and other sectors. We are very proud of the many American firms that have been part of Bahrain's growth."

The event also featured a number of speakers including CEO of the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority (BTEA), Shaikh Khaled bin Humood Al Khalifa, BTEA Tourism Marketing and Promotion Director Yousef Al Khan, Bahrain Travel and Tourism Society Chairman Jihad Ameen and CEO of Visit Bahrain Kyriakos Zarkadas.

11,000

Bahrain residents and citizens approach the US Embassy for visas every year, says envoy.

'9.1 million tourists visited Bahrain this year'

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With 9.1 million tourists visiting the Kingdom during the first nine months of this year, the tourism segment is witnessing a strong growth, it emerged.

This is a 5.7 per cent increase compared to the numbers from the last year during the same period.

Bahrain's tourism sector has showed further growth this year with more tourists coming to the country and longer stays, said Shaikh Khaled Bin Humood Al Khalifa, the Chief Executive Officer of the Bahrain Authority for Tourism and Exhibitions.

"I think it is time for the tourism industry to take the economy forward," he said, adding "Bahrain is maintaining excellent tourism numbers this year".

He was also speaking at the 'Innovation in Tourism - Building the Tourism Sector for the Savvy Travellers' event.

"Our tourism strategy is based on four As: Awareness, Attraction, Accessibility and Accommodation. We have worked closely with the Economic Development Board to create the tourism brand. Now we have a unified message on what Bahrain offers and how we can market Bahrain.

"As a result of creating the Bahrain tourism brand, we

launched international tourism offices in seven countries.

"Bahrain is no longer a weekend destination, people now spend more time here. Our aim now is to extend the average length of stay of the tourists to four nights.

Free transit visas

Bahrain will be issuing transit visas to tourists for free, according to BTEA chief. "For stopover visas, we will ensure that the cost will be covered by the BTEA and free of charge for the tourist."

He also added that steps are being taken to reduce the waiting time at King Fahad Causeway.

"Eighty-three per cent of the people that enter Bahrain come through the causeway, so it is important to make sure the traffic flow there is smooth. We will be making more arrangements to reduce the waiting times at the causeway."

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SHAIKH KHALED



Bridge 19 naval drill continues

● A Saudi naval vessel commander said the drill aims to accomplish a high standard of organisation and coordination.

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The second stage of the joint marine drill (Bridge 19) kicked off on Sunday with the participation of the Royal Bahrain Naval Force and Saudi Eastern Fleet.

The periodically joint drill between the two countries reflects the solid military relations and Bahrain's interest to reinforce military cooperation with Arab and friendly countries.

It also targets upgrading combat performance,

improving capabilities and leadership competencies, in addition to establishing military cooperation and coordination and the exchange of expertise.

The Bridge 19 Drill Commander said the drill comprises a number of exercises aimed at strengthening military cooperation with the Saudi forces, unifying concepts and exchange of expertise, as well as training on the latest systems to achieve maritime integration level.

A Saudi naval vessel commander said the drill aims to accomplish a high standard of organisation and coordination.

It also contributes to boosting combat capabilities and raising the operational performance between the two forces.

He extended appreciation to the Bahrain Defence Force, Bahrain Naval Force for the high organisational level and generous hospitality.



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