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Hub of Aviation



Sheikh Aimen Al Hosni, CEO, Oman Airports Management Company, discusses the rapid development of Oman's aviation sector and what it means for the wider economy.

Are you seeing passenger growth overall?

Overall, our performance is very positive. We are performing better than many other airports in the Middle East, especially during these challenging times in the region. We've seen a 7% increase on our passenger numbers in the last year across all our airports, including a 15% increase in transfer passengers in Muscat, which has been made possible through forging and nurturing strong relationships with our airline and other partners.

The opening of the new Muscat International Airport in March 2018 has helped us achieve an increase in our revenue. Our new retail and duty free offer a wonderful product portfolio which can compete with the best airports globally. Passenger experience has also improved significantly since opening the new airport and our satisfaction scores have improved across multiple indicators, reflecting passenger satisfaction with the new airport infrastructure and services offered. Quarter 3 scores in the ACI-ASQ survey (an airport benchmark quality survey) have ranked Muscat Airport 20th Best Airport in the world in the 5-15 million passengers airport category.

Salalah Airport is also performing very well and experienced a record breaking Khareef season this year, with over 630,000 tourists visiting the region, compared to around 470,000 in the same period in 2017. After opening a new airport in Salalah in 2015, we have been ranked 6th Best Airport in Q3 2018 in the under 2 million passengers category, based on the ACI-ASQ results. Salalah is also ranked number two out of all Airports in the Middle East.

There has been steady growth in Muscat in our cargo market in the last 12 months, helped by the opening of a new cargo facility in March 2018, with a capacity of up to 380k tonnes. This is definitely a targeted growth area for Oman Airports over the coming years, and we will be working closely with our national stakeholders and international partners to continue to improve and manage the cargo market in Oman.

Tell me about some of the key developments over the past 18 months

The last few years has seen an incredible period of maturing and growth in the aviation sector in Oman. We have opened three airports in three years, with the start of operations at the new Salalah Airport in June 2015, the opening of the new Muscat Interna-

tional Airport in March 2018 and the opening of the new Duqm airport in September 2018. Each of these new airports provides state of the art infrastructure and facilities to passengers and raises the bar on customer experience through our airports. It also raises the expectations of our stakeholders and our customers: We have been investing heavily in new technologies and exploring innovative approaches, both in terms of our systems and our processes, to make sure we continue to meet and hopefully exceed these expectations.

We've also been investing heavily in our human capital. Our people have a great sense of pride in representing their country and are an absolutely vital part of our success. Like many top companies around the world, we've been exploring how our culture drives our performance and have been actively promoting colleague engagement and supporting leadership development, so our people can truly invest themselves when they come to work. Over the last 18 months we've seen this focus deliver considerable benefits across all areas of our business.

How much was invested in these projects and how will they transform Oman Airports?

We are incredibly fortunate to have been able to work in partnership with the Government of the Sultanate of Oman to open new airports for the nation. The scale of the projects to build and open the new airports is unprecedented in Oman in terms of investment, profile and prestige. 10 years in the planning, the new Muscat International Airport terminal cost US\$1.8bn and the Salalah terminal cost US\$0.95bn, with further investment in ancillary infrastructure, including roads.

There is no comparison between the old world airports and the new; every single part of the service offering for customers and the systems behind our operations is different. In Muscat a 44-year-old 52,000 sqm building, has been replaced with a new 580,000sqm terminal, with a capacity of 20 million and the airports have already been developed to allow for future expansion in line with the airports' Master plans. All airports also now have boarding bridges, improved retail space and fully integrated systems and control centres, allowing us to provide a much higher quality of service to airlines and passengers. Indeed, the new infrastructure is absolutely essential to be able to deliver the level of service that our customers expect and to help us achieve our vision to become and remain a top 20 airport in the world by 2020.