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Arabian Falcon Holidays LLC

Spreading Its Wings Beyond the UAE

[] By Judy Kenninger



AL MOHANNAD SHARAFUDDIN

Since starting his own company in 1999, Al Mohannad Sharafuddin, CEO of [Arabian Falcon Holidays](#), has become a leading figure in vacation ownership in Dubai, the second-largest state in the United Arab Emirates, as well as in the rest of the Middle East and North America. With sales and marketing contracts for three Dubai resorts, Arabian Falcon has been delivering its pitches in a 10,500-square-foot (1,000 square meters) purpose-built sales center to prospects from the Middle East and across the globe.

Arabian Falcon has added a sales center in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and has representatives in Kuwait and Nigeria. In the past two years, Arabian Falcon has also added resorts in Malaysia, Morocco, and Turkey. To be sure, Arabian Falcon is spreading its wings to become a regional player and, according to Sharafuddin, the opportunities for sales in the Middle East are unending.

“Although the unrest associated with the Arabian Spring has generated a lot of attention, our part of the Middle East — the Gulf States, especially the United Arab

Emirates — has been very stable. We’re far away from any disturbance that might be happening,” he says. “As an industry, we are still in the beginning, as timeshare has less than 5 percent market penetration here.”

Global Hub

Over the past four decades, Dubai, Arabian Falcon’s headquarters, has become a global hub for both business and tourism. Dubai International Airport ranks alongside Paris, London, and Hong Kong as the world’s busiest in terms of international passengers. In 2013, more than 57 million people passed through its terminals, and it’s projected to have the highest number of arrivals of any airport by 2015. All these international visitors mean a fertile market for timeshare sales.

With off-premises contact booths at the airport and local malls, Arabian Falcon can engage visitors once they arrive. Shopping is a major attraction for many visitors to Dubai, and the [Dubai Mall](#) has become the world’s largest, based on total area, attracting 65 million visitors each year, surpassing New York City (52 million tourists). Attractions here include an aquarium, ice rink, hotel, and an indoor theme park. A recently announced expansion will add more than 12 million square feet (1.2 million square meters). Premiums include dinner cruises, safari tours, and tickets to the observation center at the tallest building in the world, the [Burj Khalifa](#).

In addition, the company uses emails,



LES JARDINS DE ZYRIAB



ROYAL CLUB AT PALM-JUMEIRAH



partnerships with credit card companies, and fly-buy programs to bring prospects in for sales presentations. The Russian market has grown rapidly in recent years; airport arrivals from Russia in 2013 were up 18 percent.

In 2013, Dubai was selected to host World Expo 2020, which is expected to attract more than 25 million visitors to Dubai between October 2020 and April 2021, according to Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing. Dubai has announced plans to double its hotel room count by that time. "This makes us even more optimistic that we can continue growing sales over the coming years," Sharafuddin says.

Arabian Falcon has worked with the government to increase the stay of the typical visitor, who comes for, on average, two or three nights. "Timesharing is a great way to boost that stay to a week," he says.

Dubai's Real Estate Regulatory Agency has established a 10-point regimen for timesharing in Dubai, which requires a bank guarantee of 1 million dirhams (US\$270,000), a 10-day cooling-off period, exchange-company affiliation, and completed construction before sales begin. "This has changed the market, as other companies have found the rules too restrictive," Sharafuddin says. "It's made a big difference because our industry doesn't always have the best reputation, especially in this part of the world. We had always had a code of ethics that we applied."

Royal Family

Arabian Falcon's first resort contract was with *Royal Club at Palm-Jumeirah*, which offers 50 residences on the palm-shaped, man-made island rife with hotels (including an Atlantis hotel with a water park), shopping complexes, health spas, cinemas, restaurants, an international diving center, and a golf course.

Two-bedroom, two-bathroom luxury units at the beachfront resort measure 1,469 square feet (139 square meters) and have a bright, modern decor. One-bedroom units offer 1,173 square feet

(109 square meters) and also have two bathrooms. All have balconies for alfresco dining.

The development proved to be a major success, and more Royal Club offerings followed, including in 2010 the *Royal Club at Bonnington Tower*, which occupies floors 14 through 40 in the 40-floor Jumeirah Lakes Towers. There's also the *Royal Club at Downtown*.

Prices for the Dubai resorts average US\$25,000 (92,000 dirhams) per week, and all are sold on a weeks basis. Financing is available for up to 24 weeks, which is provided by Arabian Falcon. "The banks here aren't in that business," Sharafuddin says.

Moving On

In 2008, Arabian Falcon Holidays expanded to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where Sharafuddin started in the timeshare industry in 1994 as a sales consultant. The company opened a 7,534-square-foot (700 square meters) sales center and dubbed the new venture Arabian Holidays International.

In 2012, Arabian Falcon signed agreements to market high-end resorts in Malaysia and Morocco from its offices in Dubai and Jeddah. The new resorts fit in with the standard the company has set. "We don't accept anything under four stars when it comes to quality," Sharafuddin says. "However, because real estate is less expensive in these markets, prices in Malaysia average US\$9,000 to US\$15,000 per week."

The Arab market is mainly interested in urban resorts, he says, and prefers to be close to malls and nightlife. "They'll spend two or three days maximum on the beach." Because of less-restrictive visa and security measures, Malaysia, Morocco, and Turkey are popular destinations for travelers from the Middle East.

The company's new resorts fit the profile. *Les Jardins de Zyriab* has 20 one- and two-bedroom suites on a plantation of olive, pomegranate, and palm trees in Marrakech, Morocco. Amenities include a

spa, swimming pool, and restaurant — and the city itself.

In Malaysia, the Golden Palm Tree is located on the coast of Sepang, close to Kuala Lumpur International Airport, and offers 392 sea villas arranged in the shape of a palm tree. The Palace of the Golden Horses is in the iconic Mines Resort City in the heart of Kuala Lumpur.

In 2012, Arabian Falcon International in Jeddah signed a broker agreement with Marriott Vacation Club to sell and market five *Marriott Vacations Worldwide Corp.* resorts in Spain, France, and the U.K. "Saudi Arabia is the biggest market in the Middle East," he says. "Families tend to travel together in groups of six or seven."

Manifesting Destiny

Sharafuddin is looking to add resorts in Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, and Tunisia soon. "We have finalized the deal in Istanbul last November, and we are going to start sales soon," he says.

No matter where the resort is located, Sharafuddin has a preferred exchange

partner. "I have been with *Interval International* for 17 years, and when I bring in a new developer, I make sure they affiliate with Interval International," he says. "In the Middle East, they are the quality network. Their representatives are true professionals."

The next move? "I would like to develop my own resorts," Sharafuddin says. "We hope to start our own club with three or four destinations in Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, Istanbul, and Morocco. That way I can control my own destiny."

"With Arabian Falcon's track record of success, I have no doubt they can accomplish any goal they set," says Darren Ettridge, Interval International's senior vice president of resort sales and business development for Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. "Interval is proud to support them in their efforts." [E]

See page 2 for currency conversions.

fastfacts

Arabian Falcon Holidays LLC

PRINCIPAL: Al Mohannad Sharafuddin, CEO

HEADQUARTERS: Dubai, United Arab Emirates, with sales offices in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Nigeria

SERVICES: Sales, marketing, customer service, and referrals for shared ownership developers in the UAE, Morocco, Tunisia, Malaysia, and Europe

RESORTS: Dubai: Royal Club at Bonnington Tower, Royal Club at Downtown, Royal Club at Palm-Jumeirah; Morocco: Les Jardins de Zyriab; Malaysia: Golden Palm Tree; Europe: Five Marriott Vacation Club properties

PRICE: US\$9,000 and up

WEBSITE: arabianfalcon.com