

Business Traveller Middle East

READERS' POLL 2005

The results of the fourth Business Traveller Middle East poll announced in the Godolphin Ballroom, Emirates Towers Hotel were a fitting curtain-raiser to the largest ever Arabian Travel Market. The awards were presented by BBC correspondent Kate Adie and disABILITY champion Michael McGrath



Special guest Michael McGrath presents an award to Omer Kaddouri, General Manager of the Beach Rotana Hotel & Towers Abu Dhabi, with Business Traveller Managing Director Julian Gregory at the podium.



What a difference a year makes. After two chefs, Keith Floyd and Jean-Christophe Novelli, cooked up a fun-filled lunchtime ceremony at Mina A'Salam in 2004, it was all change for the 2005 *Business Traveller Middle East Awards*.

Dinner replaced lunch, enabling nearly 500 guests to enjoy the evening at leisure, while the Emirates Towers Hotel proved

consummate hosts once again, as they did in 2002 and 2003.

As for the special guests that included BBC correspondent Kate Adie, few of their predecessors have managed to convey so many varied, thought-provoking travel anecdotes and experiences. Michael McGrath who made history in January 2004 by becoming the first disabled person in the world to have reached both North and South Poles delivered the evening's keynote

address. McGrath himself was recognised by Business Traveller and the events sponsor FedEx when he received the '2005 Business Traveller of the Year' award announced by Julian Gregory, Managing Director of *Business Traveller UK* and presented by Kate Adie.

Passionate in educating the hotel sector about access and the disability business case, McGrath later held everyone spellbound with slides illustrating his unique polar

experiences and feats of endeavour at both ends of the earth. His address culminated in a brief insight into the world of muscular dystrophy. World-renowned BBC correspondent Kate Adie provided an entertaining perspective into the precarious nature of flying to, and staying in, many of the world's trouble spots.

McGrath received an impromptu standing ovation at the end of his highly-charged presentation, which summed up the impact it made on the travel-hardened audience, while Adie rounded off her speech with an overview of CARE International.

Afflicted with the debilitating muscle wasting disease muscular dystrophy since he was diagnosed at age 17, McGrath has been utterly determined to not let his debilitating condition get the better of him, despite having lost some 65% of his muscle bulk.

In April 2002, he joined an expedition to the North Pole endorsed by Sir Ranulph Fiennes. It took him 29 minutes and 47 seconds to walk the last 150 metres – each metre symbolically represented those with muscular dystrophy in the UK.

A little over a year later, pole2pole was launched and McGrath planned an expedition to the South Pole to raise funds and global awareness for The Muscular Help Foundation, the charity which he co-founded in March 2003 and is Executive Director. The Muscular Help Foundation was the chosen beneficiary for the evening's fundraising activity.

He spent the final five kilometres cocooned in the horizontal position, literally man-hauled across the jagged ice, with the final leg of his exhausting Antarctic journey involving an 'assisted walk' of 310 metres – each metre represented those with muscle disorders including muscular dystrophy worldwide.

Winners strike consistent chord

Business travellers are seeing plenty of consistency during their Middle East travels, with four categories maintaining the same '1-2-3' ranking 12 months on.



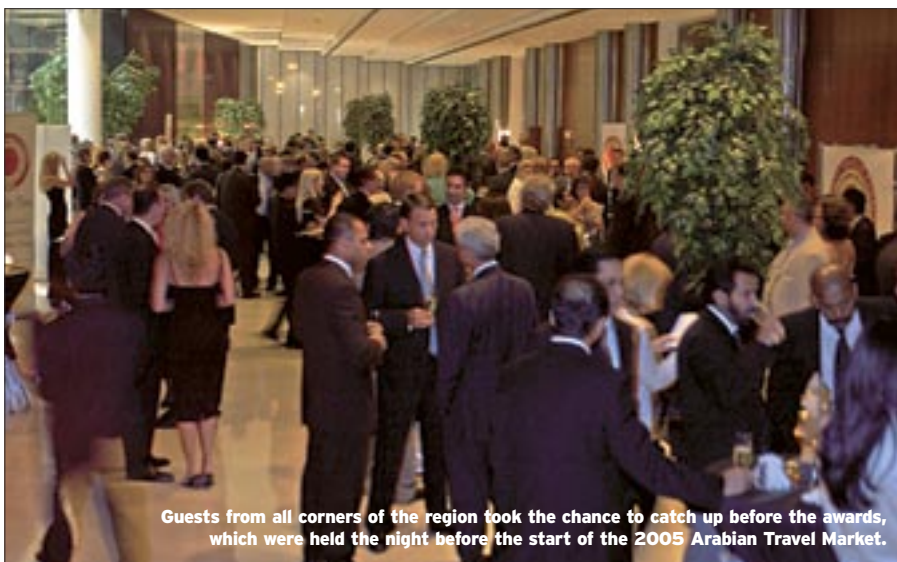
Motivate Publishing's Group Editor and Managing Partner Ian Fairservice welcomed guests to the fourth *Business Traveller Middle East* awards.



Hamdi Osman, Vice President of awards sponsor FedEx Middle East, addressed the guests.



Kate Adie presented Michael McGrath with the 2005 *Business Traveller of the Year* award.



Guests from all corners of the region took the chance to catch up before the awards, which were held the night before the start of the 2005 Arabian Travel Market.

AWARD RESULTS

Special Award
2005 *Business Traveller of the Year*
Michael McGrath

BEST AIRLINES VOTED BY READERS

Best Regional Airline for the Middle East

1. Emirates
2. Gulf Air
3. Middle East Airlines

Best Asian Airline serving the Middle East

1. Singapore Airlines
2. Cathay Pacific
3. Thai Airways

Best European Airline serving the Middle East

1. British Airways
2. Lufthansa
3. KLM

Best Airline overall serving the Middle East

1. Emirates Airlines
2. British Airways
3. Gulf Air

Airline with the Best Cabin Staff

1. Emirates
2. British Airways
3. Gulf Air

Best Airline Frequent Flyer Programme

1. British Airways
2. Skywards
3. Air France

Awards

They were Best Regional Airline (Emirates, Gulf Air, Middle East Airlines); Best Airport in the Middle East (Dubai, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi); Best Business Hotel in Manama (The Ritz-Carlton Bahrain, Sheraton Bahrain Hotel & Towers, The Regency InterContinental); and Best Business Hotel in Doha (Sheraton Doha Hotel & Resort, The Ritz-Carlton Doha and InterContinental).

Emirates Towers Hotels maintained its 100% winning record in the Best Business Hotel in Dubai category, while readers voted InterContinental and Sheraton the top two hotel chains in the Middle East for the second successive year.

The InterContinental Phoenicia once again picked up Best Business Hotel in Beirut and the Sheraton Cairo Hotel Towers & Casino was again adjudged to be the Best Business Hotel in Cairo.

Two categories, Best Business Hotel in Amman and Best Frequent Flyer programmes, featured the same three names albeit in a different order, with InterContinental jumping from second to first and Skywards and British Airways (Executive Club) changing places.

There was a surprise in the Best Leisure Resort Hotel in the Middle East category with One&Only Royal Mirage entering straight in at number one, displacing last year's winner The Jumeirah Beach Hotel to runner-up.

Riffa Golf Club and Montgomerie Dubai received second and third rankings respectively in the Best Golf Course category, although the Emirates Golf Club won once again.

See award results for the full list of winners.

Industry urged to accommodate disabled

Airlines and hotels could do more to make sure their hotels are disabled-friendly, Michael McGrath said after the *Business Traveller Middle East Awards 2005*. Although he couldn't fault the reception he received arriving in Dubai on Emirates, he felt that the global accessibility message still needed reinforcing.

"My first experience in Dubai has been fantastic," he said. "It was the first time that I had ever been physically lifted out of a taxi into my chariot [his wheelchair] – the desire to provide truly exceptional customer service was a very new experience for me. In some parts of Europe you still have to ask. Nihal, the security man at the magnificent Emirates Towers Hotel was a fine example where superb customer service was delivered."

He added that it was about getting much closer to customers needs. "Airlines for example are making real progress but there's room for improvement," he said.

Hotels may be more focused on revenue and yield per square foot than operating costs, but McGrath said that those service providers prepared to invest in training and accessible facilities for guests requiring additional assistance would see a return on their investment. He has discovered that a

AWARD RESULTS

BEST AIRPORTS VOTED BY READERS

Best Airport in the World

1. Singapore Changi
2. Dubai International
3. Hong Kong

Best Airport in the Middle East

1. Dubai International
2. Beirut International
3. Abu Dhabi International

Best Airport in the Middle East

For Duty Free Shopping

1. Dubai
2. Bahrain
3. Abu Dhabi

little common sense and confidence may be just what a guest with additional needs wants for a comfortable and memorable stay.

"In, for example, the United States, there have been dramatic improvements in accessibility. The disabled market segment in the UK and Ireland alone has a combined spending power of £50 billion. Service providers such as hotel operators and airlines will lose out if they fail to make the necessary improvements required to ensure disabled access," said McGrath, who is also disABILITY Champion for Hilton Hotels in the UK and Ireland.

McGrath advocates the need for education and inclusive thinking.

"In the Middle East and the Far East it is I believe a question of education, understanding and the desire to champion change. In positioning disability as an economic and ethical imperative, more needs to be done in creating a global society that is truly barrier free for all consumers."

Board-level leadership is a fundamental pre-requisite in mastering the challenges surrounding disability. The business case is clear – considerable bottom-line gains can be achieved as the disabled consumer base is tapped.

He added that while many five-star hotel rooms are well appointed, more attention should be taken when designing accessible rooms for guests with additional requirements.

"Think what it means for a mobility impaired guest using a wheelchair to move around an environment which for example has too much furniture in it and which has a carpet that makes it difficult to move about," he said.

"It is often the very small things that customers remember – for example the location of a soap dish, the ease in which to reach a shower head or simply knowing which way to turn a tap for either hot or cold water. People's inability to deal with disability is, itself, disabling. Fear, ignorance, and a lack of confidence impose needless barriers on



people with disabilities. It is these small things that make the difference between a really enjoyable stay and just an ok stay.”

When McGrath is not consulting with Hilton Hotels, he engages with corporates to support the work of The Muscular Help Foundation and is regularly invited to speak at conferences and events where he provokes, stimulates and inspires change. Click on www.musclehelp.com for more information.

Reporter with travel at heart

Kate Adie’s reporting career has taken her all over the world and her air miles tally would put even the most illustrious travel editor to shame.

She cited the period between 1988-1993 as particularly travel-intensive. “We did one big story after another, we didn’t stop,” she recalls. “There was the Armenian earthquake, air crashes in Kegworth and

Lockerbie, Tiananmen Square, the fall of the Berlin Wall and Ceausescu and the first Gulf War. After the war I went to Kurdistan and then I was straight out to the Bosnian War for another four years.”

She has fond memories of working in the pre-satellite, digital era. “Before the mobile phone came in you were genuinely out of contact, which was helpful as a journalist because you pursued your story without people directing you to them,” she said.

“You were often in the middle of places and just going for it – and you had to get around. I have bought a ship, a plane with one-and-a-half wings, a goat cart and a van with sheep on my travels – I had to buy the sheep too and then spent two days trying to get rid of them.”

Reporting the killings of pro-democracy supporters in Tiananmen Square in 1989 was the highlight of her career, she said. “We

should have not stayed,” she said. “I broke my own risk assessment rule on staying for a story and thought we wouldn’t survive. We’d already filmed for two-and-a-half-hours and we stayed on. But I felt we had to report it so no-one could deny it, and it paid off. We got unique footage.

“I’ve never counted the countries I’ve been to but I do have four passports,” she said. “I have some stamps from African countries that don’t exist or didn’t exist.”

She said the only places she hasn’t been to are the ‘nice places’ where people go on holiday. “I’d love to see more of the Far East, particularly Vietnam, which I’ve never been to, and I’ve only seen bits of South America.”

Commenting on today’s airline industry, she said: “I don’t like staff being servile but I love seeing people being happy and making it look like they want you there.” ■

AWARD RESULTS

BEST BUSINESS HOTELS VOTED BY READERS

Best Hotel Chain in the Middle East

1. InterContinental
2. Sheraton
3. Rotana

Best Business Hotel in the Middle East

1. Emirates Towers Hotel, Dubai
2. Beach Rotana, Abu Dhabi
3. Sheraton, Kuwait

Best Business Hotel in Abu Dhabi

1. Beach Rotana Hotel & Towers
2. InterContinental
3. Le Royal Meridien

Best Business Hotel in Dubai

1. Emirates Towers
2. Al Bustan Rotana
3. InterContinental

Best Business hotel in Amman

1. InterContinental
2. Sheraton Amman Al Nabil Hotel & Towers
3. Le Meridien

Best Business Hotel in Bahrain

1. The Ritz-Carlton
2. Sheraton
3. Regency InterContinental

Best Business Hotel in Beirut

1. InterContinental Phoenicia
2. Gefinor Rotana
3. Sheraton Coral Beach

Best Business Hotel in Cairo

1. Sheraton Cairo Hotel Towers & Casino
2. InterContinental Semiramis
3. Four Seasons

Best Business Hotel in Doha

1. Sheraton Doha Hotel & Resort
2. The Ritz-Carlton
3. InterContinental

Best Business Hotel in Riyadh

1. InterContinental
2. Sheraton Riyadh Hotel & Towers
3. Four Seasons

Best Business Hotel in Jeddah

1. Sheraton
2. InterContinental
3. Hilton

Best Business Hotel in Kuwait City

1. Sheraton Kuwait Hotel & Towers
2. Hilton
3. Crowne Plaza

Best Business Hotel in Muscat

1. Grand Hyatt
2. Sheraton
3. InterContinental

Best Hotel Loyalty Programme

1. Starwood Preferred Guest
2. Hilton HHonors
3. InterContinental Priority Club

Best Leisure/resort hotel in the Middle East

1. The One & Only Royal Mirage, Dubai
2. The Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Dubai
3. The Ritz-Carlton, Bahrain

Best Golf Course in the Middle East

1. Emirates Golf Club, Dubai
2. Riffa Golf Club, Bahrain
3. The Montgomerie, Dubai

Best Car rental company in the Middle East

1. Avis
2. Hertz
3. Budget

Doris Greif, James Young and Cornelia Koebele.



Kate Adie shared some of her extensive travel experiences.



Gerald Lawless and Neasa Lawless with Tom Nutley.

