

# WTM Africa 2016: A destination within a destination

By  Cari Van Wyk

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World Travel Market Africa 2016 played host to an impressive array of stands and professionals from around the world, and one you could not miss was Dubai Tourism. We caught up with Stella Obinwa, regional director for Dubai Tourism, and wanted to know more about Dubai Tourism's plans, new theme parks and more.



Stella Obinwa being interviewed at WTM Africa 2016.

## ■ Tell me about the new theme parks.

**Stella Obinwa:** The park will open fully in October with the pre-launch taking place during the summer. The theme park has four parks within it: Lego Land (the first Lego Land outside North America or Europe) and they also have a huge waterpark, Bollywood and Motion Gate. There are hotels, entertainment and everything that a theme park should have to cater for visitors and allow them to visit all day, every day, for four to five days.



The first LEGO model has been installed at LEGOLAND, Dubai

## ■ Why Hollywood and Bollywood themed parks?

**Obinwa:** In most theme parks in the world, there's always a park that features television and movie series, because that is what the audience watches for entertainment and it's exciting for them. Especially for families and children, to get to see that cartoon character that they watch every day, or to get to see that star they love. All those things feature heavily in family vacations and it's really exciting for people to make memories with them, to dine with them, to walk the parks with them.

Bollywood is really big in the Middle East and Africa and so to come up and close with many of the features from that movie industry is really a key factor for family vacations. And we will probably encourage Dubai Parks and Resorts to extend it not just to Bollywood, but also the African movie industry so that when Africans come they can relate to the characters that they watch every day on TV.



Bollywood Parks Găo Dubai - Bollywood Boulevard

■ ***It seems you are really focusing on marketing Dubai as a family destination. Why is that?***

**Obinwa:** Because Dubai is probably anywhere between a four to nine hour flight from most African countries, which means if you're four hours away, you can hop on a flight at 8am in the morning and be in Dubai by 12pm with your kids. It's a short flight for them, they're not going to be cranky when they get there, and they have something to look forward too. You don't have to fly 14 hours to North America or other parts of Europe. You can capture the same experience in Dubai with your family.



Family - Dubai Aquarium



We're also focusing on business and we do realise there is quite a bit of synergy between family and business. A lot of business travellers, when they go on a business retreat, will ask "can I bring my family?", "what will there be for them to do while I'm in a conference all day long?" So we have to provide the full spectrum for all the travellers.

■ ***You said one of the parks will be a water park. How did you approach that in light of global water shortages and how do you think it will affect the opening of the park and how you are viewed in terms of sustainability?***

**Obinwa:** Climate change – I would like to alert everyone to the fact that Dubai has had rain almost every week for the last four or five months.

What the rest of the world considers a shortage, the Middle East is used to. That is their way of life. They built their infrastructure knowing that they were in the desert, so they have already accommodated for the fact that water is in scarce supply. The rest of the world is just waking up to that. So Dubai is ready!

■ ***In what way does the African continent show potential? Why is it such an attractive market?***

**Obinwa:** Several African countries have been recognised globally as the fastest growing economies in the world. I think there are about eight countries in Africa – South-Africa, Nigeria, Angola included. Yes, some of them are reliant on the oil industry, but what African countries are quickly realising is that they can't be a one-product country. They need to expand, they need to take a look at what the rest of the world have done and take best practices back to Africa.

So, you realise there can be a lot of synergy between businesses in Dubai and businesses in Africa. We're the closest climate to Africa's, we're hot when their hot. We're used to the water shortage, if you would, and Dubai has learned to adapt to that. We feel that we will complement our "neighbours" in Africa, by encouraging them to do business with Dubai, in Dubai. And vice versa, businesses in Dubai to do business in Africa.

■ ***What is it that you hope to gain from participating in World Travel Market Africa, what would you like to achieve?***

**Obinwa:** I would like to expose all the travel business trade partners that are visiting WTM Africa to our stand, to meet several partners that came with us to understand what is available for them and to help them with product knowledge.

For example, if a client walks into a travel agency in South Africa or anywhere in Africa, we hope that the travel professional is fully knowledgeable about what Dubai has to offer – both from an affordability aspect as well as activities – and can sell Dubai to their customers, because a visit to Dubai should be on everyone's bucket list and I hope that we can communicate that to the travel industry here and they can help us push Dubai as a travel destination.

■ ***After WTMA, what are you doing or where are you going next in terms of promoting Dubai as a destination?***

**Obinwa:** The next event we have is a roadshow in Nigeria. We will be taking over 20 Dubai participants with us and do the roadshow in three cities, one day in each city. And again, simply to introduce Dubai to the travel profession in Nigeria. Nigeria has a population of over 170 million (depending on what resource you take a look at) and if we are able to capture even 10% of that traveling to Dubai and give them a full experience of Dubai, it would be in the interest of both businesses in Dubai and the travel trade in Nigeria. That's the next big thing coming up in May.

In June (we're announcing this here at WTM), Dubai Tourism will host 500 African delegates in Dubai for a four day and five nights stay where we will take care of everything including flights, meals, accommodation, all the sites that they need to see, etc. We hope to attract about 150 travel professionals from Southern Africa and the rest from other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa.

This will be our first African mega familiarisation trip. We've never hosted so many. And then, I think, we would have done quite a bit this year.

## ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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