

MEADFA holds first virtual event as fight against Covid-19 impact continues

The Middle East and Africa Duty Free Association (MEADFA) held its first virtual event today (7 October), outlining how travel retail in the Middle and Africa is fighting against the impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

More than 150 participants from around the world took part in the event, including *TRBusiness* which will provide a detailed round-up in due course. The event was moderated by John Hume, Managing Partner, Hume Brophy Managing Partner.



As reported the MEADFA Board made the unanimous decision in June to cancel this years MEADFA conference, which was due to be held on 23-24 November in Dubai. At the same time, plans were revealed designed to present the views of retailers, brands and landlords.

This years MEADFA Conference was due to take place on 23-24 November in Dubai.

A strong speaker line-up included Ali Tounsi, Secretary General, ACI Africa, Rita Chidiac, Corporate Affairs & Communications Manager Worldwide Duty Free, JT International and Ramesh Cidambi, Chief Operating Officer Dubai Duty Free.

A CRISIS LIKE NO OTHER

Speaking on behalf of MEADFA President Haitham Al Majali, who was unable to attend the online event, Chidiac said: "This is a crisis like no other and travel retail is very much in the eye of the storm. Our industry requires the full support of our governments and our airport partners and stakeholders.

"Global industry associations including MEADFA, International Civil Aviation Organisation, ACI World, International Air Transport Association, European Travel Retail Confederation, Asia Pacific Travel Retail Association, Asociación Sudamericana de Tiendas Libres and many more are working together joining efforts to mitigate against the effect of Covid-19."

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The impact of Covid-19 may have been 'catastrophic', but steps are being taken towards recovery in the region, according to MEADFA. The Association also indicated that passenger behaviour and spending patterns have held up well despite the low numbers, with many categories proving resilient.

A MEADFA Board Member, Chidiac added: "Our airport and airline partners have taken major steps to make travelling by air very safe. Travel retail operators have worked hard to create the new safe operating conditions in our shops to protect both staff and customers. All of us must now work together to convince people that they can fly safely and comfortably.

MEADFA Board Member Rita Chidiac was among the speakers at the Associations first virtual event which attracted around 150 participants.

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“Most importantly, more needs to be done to ensure the industry maintains a deeper dialogue with governments in Africa and the Middle East. The patchwork of quarantine and travelling restrictions currently in place, means that passenger confidence and ability to travel is at an all time low.”

She concluded: “We need to move away from quarantining travellers and introduce consistent and coordinated testing procedures to really give our passengers the confidence and the ability to take to the skies again.”

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