



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 13, 2018
+1 (202) 289-5920
info@nusacc.org



MOROCCO WRAPS UP TOURISM INVESTMENT ROADSHOW TO THE UNITED STATES

*Moroccan Agency for Tourism Development (SMIT) Touts “Open Door”
Policies That Offer Excellent Investment Opportunities*

*Delegation Highlights Morocco’s Geography and History: “No Country in
the Middle East and North Africa Is as Close to the USA as Morocco Is.”*

Washington D.C. – The Kingdom of Morocco recently completed its first tourism investment “road show” to the United States. Organized by the National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC), in partnership with the Moroccan Agency for Tourism Development (SMIT), the tour concentrated on three cities: Los Angeles, Washington DC, and New York City. The road show generated considerable interest among American investors, developers, and operators, some of whom learned for the first time about investment opportunities in Morocco’s growing tourism sector.

“For American investors, Morocco’s ‘open door’ policies translate into excellent opportunities to diversify investment portfolios,” said Imad Barrakad, Chairman & CEO of SMIT. “Our country is experiencing unprecedented growth in the tourism and hospitality sectors, and more U.S. companies should be part of this.”



Front row, from left to right: Tarik Sadik, Head of Strategy and Cooperation at Ministry of Tourism; David Hamod, NUSACC’s President & CEO; Laura Mandala, Managing Director, Mandala Research.

Back row, from left to right: Ambassador Marc Ginsberg; Ahmad Mukaddam, Director of Advisory Services at PwC; Imad Barrakad, Chairman & CEO at SMIT; Larbi Bouattaf, Economic Counselor, Embassy of Morocco; Younes Hajoui, Investment Development Manager at SMIT; and Khaled Sedrak, Founder & CEO, NxtVn Group.

WASHINGTON, D.C. (HEADQUARTERS) • HOUSTON • LOS ANGELES • NEW YORK • SALT LAKE CITY

1101 17TH STREET, NW • SUITE 1220 • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036

TEL: (202) 289-5920 • FAX: (202) 289-5938 • WWW.NUSACC.ORG



NUSACC hosted a high-level Roundtable in Washington, DC, featuring senior officials from Morocco’s Ministry of Tourism.



Imad Barrakad, Chairman and CEO of SMIT.

This sentiment was echoed by Tarik Sadik, Head of Strategy and Cooperation at Morocco’s Ministry of Tourism. “Morocco is riding a wave of popularity, and American tourists are an important part of that growing popularity,” he noted. “Geographically and historically, no country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is as close to the United States as Morocco is.”

David Hamod, NUSACC’s President & CEO, accompanied the Moroccan delegation to all three cities. “This high-level delegation did an excellent job of highlighting Morocco’s comparative and competitive advantages in tourism,” he said. “The Kingdom’s role as a gateway, coupled with its stability and security, has made Morocco a prime destination.”

Morocco as a Tourism Destination

Tourism investment in the Kingdom is surging, with 15 straight years of increased arrivals from around the globe. Morocco offers something for everyone: Historical sites, cosmopolitan cities, majestic mountains, desert landscapes, medical tourism, eco-resorts, and thousands of kilometers of Atlantic coastline.

The country’s overall tourism sector increased by 10 percent from 2016 to 2017, and the number of American tourists visiting Morocco has increased by 15 percent, on average, since 2014. In recent years, *The Washington Post* named Morocco as one of the world’s top-three most welcoming countries.

Earlier this year, Morocco received an additional boost from the U.S. Government when the U.S. Department of State launched a [new system of travel advisories](#) for ranking security threats around the world. Morocco was the only country in North Africa to receive a “Level One” ranking, encouraging American travelers to “exercise normal precautions” when visiting there. By comparison, such nations as France, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom received a “Level Two” rating, encouraging American travelers to “exercise increased caution.”

Morocco’s strong economy and social stability certainly contribute to the country’s flourishing tourism industry. According to SMIT, that nation’s steadily rising GDP, as well as decreasing inflation and unemployment rates, have helped to distinguish Morocco.

In terms of tourist arrivals in Africa, Morocco is the top destination on the continent. The national carrier, Royal Air Maroc, connects 40 African cities to over 32 European airports and North America. This has strengthened Morocco’s role as a tourism and business destination, especially when coupled with Attijari Bank’s extensive outreach in African cities.

Younes Hajoui, Investment Development Manager at SMIT, highlighted Morocco’s “accessibility and business-friendly environment” as key to the Kingdom’s success. In meetings with American investors, he also touted Royal Air Maroc’s two daily flights to Washington, DC and New York.

Morocco as an Investment Destination

This first-of-its-kind visit provided an excellent opportunity for U.S. companies and American individuals to learn about investing in Morocco’s fast-growing tourism sector by:

- Acquiring existing hotel assets with ongoing operations, including brownfield projects, distressed properties, and trophy assets;
- Developing greenfield tourism projects in emerging, mature, or premium destinations;
- Investing in public or private holding companies involved in tourism investment and operations;
- Investing in public company stocks in the Casablanca Stock Exchange that provide exposure to tourism investment and operations.



WASHINGTON, D.C. (HEADQUARTERS) • HOUSTON • LOS ANGELES • NEW YORK • SALT LAKE CITY

1101 17TH STREET, NW • SUITE 1220 • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036

TEL: (202) 289-5920 • FAX: (202) 289-5938 • WWW.NUSACC.ORG



Salim Mikram, SMIT Business Development Head.

During the road show to the United States, SMIT delegates highlighted numerous **investment opportunities**, ranging from ambitious investments of over \$1 billion to more modest investments in the range of \$10 to \$20 million.

Delegation leaders emphasized Morocco's ease of doing business, including one-stop-shop support provided by SMIT. Salim Mikram, SMIT Business Development Head, explained that foreign entities doing business in Morocco are entitled to full repatriation of capital and profits. Moreover, according to Mikram, there is no restriction on land ownership, and investors may recruit domestic or international staff.

In addition, for select investment opportunities, Morocco offers a 17.5 percent corporate tax rate to all businesses engaging in hotel and tourism investments, both local and foreign, compared to the standard 30 percent rate. Government incentives may also include cash contributions of up to 50 percent of land value incentives for training, as well as attractive loans that help boost business in Morocco.

For a list of incentives and benefits offered by the Government of Morocco, please click [here](#).

Tourism Investment Road Show Events and Partners

The road show kicked off on the West Coast, in **Los Angeles**, at the Americas Lodging Investment Summit (ALIS), one of the top hotel investment conferences in the world. SMIT led a workshop featuring the "Flavors of Morocco" that highlighted that nation's diverse offerings.



At the investment workshop in Los Angeles (from left to right): David Hamod, NUSACC's President & CEO; Imad Barrakad, SMIT Chairman & CEO; Tarik Sadik, Head of Strategy and Cooperation at Morocco's Ministry of Tourism; Bijan Kian, Director (emeritus) of the Export - Import Bank; Rachid Sayouty, Director - U.S. Department of Commerce Office in Los Angeles.



Moroccan Tourism Development Agency (SMIT) delegates met with a senior representative of Marriott in a B2B meeting in Washington, DC.

On the sidelines of ALIS, NUSACC organized a workshop and luncheon for prospective investors at the InterContinental Los Angeles Century City Hotel. SMIT delegates provided an overview of tourism development and frameworks, with a special focus on entertainment and theme parks. Partners in the visit to Los Angeles included the California Chamber of Commerce, the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Los Angeles office of the U.S. Commercial Service.

Following the workshop, the SMIT delegation paid visits to senior executives at such industry-leading firms as TCW, DelMorgan, and Cinedigm Corporation.

The road show continued in **Washington DC**, where NUSACC organized a high-level Roundtable with U.S. Government officials, business leaders, entrepreneurs, and investors in the hospitality and tourism sectors. In partnership with the Corporate Council on Africa, NUSACC's Roundtable attracted a high-level group of corporate executives, travel association leaders, and Friends of Morocco, including two former U.S. Ambassadors, the Hon. Marc Ginsburg and the Hon. Michael Ussery. Quipped Ginsberg, "Former U.S. Ambassadors become unofficial tourism ambassadors for Morocco."



The Moroccan delegation met with senior officials of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), including Executive Vice President David Bohigian (top right) and Abe Goldschmidt, Senior Advisor to the President & Managing Director.

While in Washington DC, the SMIT delegates held high-level meetings with Marriott International, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), and the American Hotel & Lodging Association.

The final leg of the road show took place in **New York City**, at the InterContinental Barclay Hotel. SMIT delegates were well received by a standing-room-only crowd of private equity firms, attorneys, bankers, entrepreneurs, and hospitality sector experts.

Partners in the New York workshop included the Arab Bankers' Association of North America (ABANA), the African Travel Association, American Moroccan Competencies Network, and the Greater New York Chamber of Commerce. Following the workshop, SMIT held a series of business-to-business (B2B) meetings with New York-based investment professionals.

The road show concluded with site visits to such leading private equity firms as Pegasus Capital Advisors, Oak Hill Advisors, and others, with more than \$40 billion under management.



The SMIT Workshop in New York City drew a standing-room-only crowd of private equity firms, attorneys, bankers, entrepreneurs, and hospitality sector experts.

Tourism in Morocco: An Authentic Cultural Experience

Pollsters suggest that increasing numbers of tourists – especially among Millennials – are looking for “exotic” travel opportunities that lead to extraordinary experiences. Morocco fills the bill. The distinctive sights, sounds, and tastes of the country’s *souks* and *kasbahs* make for an enriching cultural experience.



Offering a diverse array of scenery and cultural traditions, Morocco is one of the few places in Africa where tourists can go to the beach or to the desert in the morning, and then hit the slopes for downhill skiing in the afternoon.

Ouikaimeden is the largest and best-established ski resort in Morocco, offering lifts and a two-mile run on Jebel Attar, the resort's highest peak. Increasingly popular as a ski destination is Ifrane, renowned for its Alpine-village environment, drawing winter enthusiasts from Europe and Africa.

Morocco is even more famous, of course, for Saharan camel treks, private tours, and camping under the stars. The village of Merzouga, for example, is a hot-spot for Moroccan desert activities and is a well-known gateway to a vast expanse of sand dunes known as the Erg Chebbi. Visitors are also drawn to Ouarzazate, which has been featured as a backdrop in such U.S. blockbuster movies as "Lawrence of Arabia" and "Gladiator."

Morocco's wide-ranging cultural experiences are well suited for Millennials and seasoned travelers alike in today's "experience-driven" tourism sector. In addition to capitalizing on the country's rich history and vivid topography, Morocco is expanding its offerings in global entertainment.

Morocco hosted COP22, the most recent gathering of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, and the Kingdom is recognized as a regional leader in sustainable business practices. Tarik Sadik, speaking for the Ministry of Tourism, discussed how important environmentally-friendly tourism is to Morocco and its leadership. He cited a \$120 million investment, for example, to irrigate Marrakesh's 12 golf courses with recycled water. He also highlighted Project Noor – the world's largest solar facility – which is expected to reduce carbon emissions by about 760,000 tons per year. Investments like these, Sadik noted, serve to "protect the country's natural assets."

Nearly 250 Years of U.S. – Morocco Relations

Imad Barrakad, SMIT Chairman & CEO, characterized Morocco as a "natural partner for the USA," with a shared history that goes back almost 250 years, to the inception of an independent United States. In 1777, he noted, Morocco became the first country to recognize America's independence from Great Britain. Nine years later, the two countries enacted the U.S. - Morocco Treaty of Friendship, a treatise that is still in effect today.

WASHINGTON, D.C. (HEADQUARTERS) • HOUSTON • LOS ANGELES • NEW YORK • SALT LAKE CITY

1101 17TH STREET, NW • SUITE 1220 • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036

TEL: (202) 289-5920 • FAX: (202) 289-5938 • WWW.NUSACC.ORG

Morocco is the only African country, Barrakad pointed out, to conclude a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States. Since the agreement took effect in 2006, trade between the two countries has grown significantly, and nearly 100 major U.S. firms have opened offices in Morocco since 2006. The trade accord has also enabled U.S. entities doing business in Morocco to benefit by exporting U.S.-made industrial products duty-free to Europe.

Concluding Remarks

The recent tourism investment road show to the United States serves as a benchmark in Morocco's efforts to reach out to American investors.

Tourism and hospitality are increasingly important sectors for Morocco, and these are also sectors in which U.S. firms excel. Conversations between SMIT and major U.S. tourism entities, including investors, were productive and wide-ranging, reflecting win/win opportunities both for Morocco and the United States.

In the words of the Tourism Ministry's Tarik Sadik, Morocco is "uniquely positioned to provide an authentic, human experience that is unrivalled by other country in the region." Imad Barrakad, the delegation leader, concurred: "Investment in Morocco's tourism and hospitality sectors is also an investment in sustainability, technology, human resources, and the bilateral relationship between our two nations. Perhaps most important of all, it is an investment in a unique experience that connects the world in a meaningful way to Morocco's 1,200-year-old history."



David Hamod (right), NUSACC's President & CEO, welcomes Imad Barrakad, SMIT Chairman & CEO

* * *

The National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce, widely regarded as the voice of American business in the Arab world, is in touch with business communities across the United States and serves as the U.S. point of contact for the national chambers of commerce in the 22 Arab nations. On a daily basis, NUSACC works closely with leaders throughout the Arab world, as well as high-level decision makers in the U.S. business community, public policy research centers, multilateral institutions, nongovernmental organizations, media, and the U.S. Government.

Morocco Tourism Investment Road Show to the United States

Promoting Investment in the Kingdom of Morocco



Los Angeles – New York – Washington DC



Organized by:

In Partnership with:



Tourism Engineering
and Investment
SMIT MOROCCO



National U.S.-Arab
Chamber of Commerce
الغرفة التجارية
الأمريكية العربية الوطنية



American Moroccan
COMPETENCIES NETWORK
شبكة الكفاءات المغربية الأمريكية



CalChamber
CALIFORNIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



LOS ANGELES AREA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



U.S. COMMERCIAL
SERVICE
United States of America
Department of Commerce