

## SCTDA launches training and licensing program for tour guides



*Sultan bin Ahmed Al Qassimi: We plan to make tourism a sustainable national product*

Sharjah 13<sup>th</sup> May 2009: The **Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA)**

in collaboration with Skyline University College Sharjah, announced yesterday a new training and licensing program for tourist guides operating in the emirate of Sharjah. The initiative is part of the Authority's strategy for 2009 that aims to further boost the performance of Sharjah's tourism sector and improve the quality of

services rendered to the more than 1.5 million tourists visiting Sharjah per year.

The announcement was made at a press conference that was held at the Radisson Blue, attended by H.E. Sheikh Sultan bin Ahmed Al Qassimi, Chairman of the **SCTDA**, H.E. Mohammed A. Al Noman, Director General of the **SCTDA**, Dr Amitabh Upadhy, Professor and Head of Academics at Skyline University College, and Mr Nitin Anand, Head of Academic Support Services at Skyline University College, as well as a number of VIPs and special guests from the tourism and business communities, and representatives of local and regional media.

Addressing the attendees of the press conference, H.E. Sheikh Sultan bin Ahmed Al Qassimi said that the launch of the training and licensing program for tour guides in the emirate of Sharjah marks a new achievement in the development of the emirate, under the wise leadership and vision of H.H. Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohammed Al-Qassimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah.

"The emirate is achieving record economic growth, in line with the Ruler's visionary strategies, and we at the **SCTDA** are proud to be part of this economic strategy, and of every contribution we have made to Sharjah's growth. We look forward to adding even more achievements to the series of successes achieved over the past few years," he said.

Al Qassimi added: "We are all aware that the tourism industry is a significant contributor to economic growth in Sharjah, and that it has become one of the emirate's most rapidly-growing industries, significantly supporting the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of both the UAE, in general, and the emirate of Sharjah, in particular. In 2007, the tourism sector accounted for 11 percent of Sharjah's GDP - or AED68.4 billion - exceeding that of many other economic sectors, and over the years the sector has occupied leading positions in balance of payment and GDP, becoming a significant contributor to the economic growth process".

"According to recent statistics," he continued, "the number of tourists visiting Sharjah in 2008 was 1.5 million - a significant increase from the 600,000 visitors Sharjah received in 2001. In order to accommodate the increasing number of tourists visiting Sharjah, the emirate is gearing up to increase hotel capacity, with 28 new hotel establishments soon to be added to the current 107, and is continuing to attract world-renowned hotel brands. The emirate is planning to add over 5,000 new hotel rooms in the next two years, increasing the total number of hotel rooms to 12,000 by 2010".

Al Qassimi clarified that the current global economic changes and challenges make it necessary to expend more effort than ever before to achieve medium- and long-term goals, stressing that more effort will also have to be made to improve the quality of services rendered to tourists in order to improve the competitiveness of Sharjah's tourist product. "For this reason, the **SCTDA** is eager to build on the rich and diverse cultural and national tourist attractions, thus making tourism a sustainable national product that yields strong and stable revenues."

"Recognizing the vital role tour guides play in the tourism development process, the **SCTDA** has decided to establish a training and licensing program for tour guides. A tour guide is one of the most important elements of the tourism system, one that is authorized to build good impressions of the emirate among tourists. This program aims to develop the role of tour guides and improve overall the tourist services in the UAE, in general, and Sharjah, in particular. The tour guide is the key to successful tours -and this concept has been widely recognized in the travel and tourism industry all over the world," Al Qassimi added.