MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA DUTY FREE ASSOCIATION

PO Box 54394, Dubai - UAE
Phone: +971 4 299 66 63
Fax: +971 4 299 66 30

MEADFA Conference 2026 Highlights Industry Resilience and Opportunities for Growth Across the Middle East and Africa



The MEADFA Conference 2026 concluded today in Rabat, Morocco, bringing together 460 delegates from across the travel retail industry. Held from 15–17 November, the three-day event also marked the 25th anniversary of the Middle East & Africa Duty Free Association. Across nine conference sessions, speakers shared new data and industry perspectives on geopolitical uncertainty, evolving travel patterns, regulatory developments and opportunities for growth across the Middle East and Africa. Key insights from selected sessions included:

Growth under pressure: Industry resilience and long-term confidence in the Middle East and Africa

The panellists highlighted the importance of supporting teams operating across the Middle East and Africa amid ongoing geopolitical challenges. Despite current uncertainty, the group reaffirmed its confidence in the region's long-term potential and its commitment to continued investment.

Luis Marin, President and CEO EMEA at Avolta, stressed that "resilience starts with people and partners", adding that a deeper understanding of travellers and their changing behaviour enables businesses to adapt more quickly with locally relevant assortments, offers and experiences.

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Vincent Romet, COO France & Luxembourg & COO, MEA & Asia at Lagardère Travel Retail, said: "Our teams across the Middle East and Africa have shown extraordinary resilience and commitment in very challenging circumstances. Recovery will require flexibility and close collaboration across the industry, particularly with our brand partners, and we remain committed to investing in the region and preparing for the opportunities ahead."

Protecting the channel: The importance of collective industry advocacy

John Rimmer, moderator of the session, emphasised the importance of collective advocacy in protecting the duty free industry against regulatory challenges. He highlighted the need for businesses to remain vigilant about national regulatory developments and work closely with trade associations such as MEADFA, whose advocacy efforts benefit the wider industry across markets and product categories.

MEA air traffic outlook: Middle East international departures expected to exceed 2025 levels

Marina Giuliano, Vice President, Brands, Retailers and Media at ForwardKeys, highlighted the recovery of Middle Eastern travel and growth across several African markets. According to Amadeus data, international departures from the Middle East are expected to slightly exceed 2025 levels in the first half of 2027, while international travel among Nigerian, Moroccan and Kenyan passengers has increased by 31%, 22% and 19% respectively, compared with the first half of 2025.

Giuliano said: "Travel demand remains resilient; however, geopolitical events can reshape traveller flows quickly. Businesses need to monitor where passengers are coming from and travelling to, how connectivity is changing, and how the passenger mix is evolving."

Africa in focus: Unlocking growth through connectivity and a changing visitor economy

Naledi K. Khabo, CEO of the Africa Tourism Association, highlighted the changing profile of travellers visiting Africa, with growing interest in the continent's culture, heritage, creativity and major sporting events. She identified diaspora travellers, particularly those from North America, as an important yet underdeveloped market, seeking authentic experiences and products that reflect African identity. Khabo also emphasised the opportunity for travel retail to showcase locally made products and African brands, while calling for improved air connectivity, greater visa openness and closer collaboration between tourism, aviation and retail stakeholders.

Isaías Díaz, General Manager Africa at Avolta, echoed the importance of local relevance, observing that "Africa's travel retail growth will be built airport by airport". He highlighted the need to combine international standards with offers reflecting local tastes, needs and identity, while pointing to opportunities for African food, beauty and craftsmanship to make the airport experience more distinctive alongside international brands.

Closing reflections

Reflecting on the conference as a whole, Abdeslam Agzoul, President of MEADFA, said: "This year's conference highlighted the significant opportunities across our region and the importance of adaptability and collaboration in supporting future growth. As MEADFA marks its 25th anniversary, it has been particularly meaningful to bring the industry together in Morocco for the first time."

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Sarah Branquinho, President of TFWA, added: "What struck me most in Rabat was the determination of an industry navigating very different challenges across the Middle East and Africa, while remaining focused on the future. There is a real sense of commitment to the region, even in difficult circumstances. To see the industry come together in Morocco as MEADFA celebrates its 25th anniversary has been particularly meaningful, and I am proud that TFWA has been part of MEADFA's journey from the very beginning and continues to be part of its journey."

Ramesh Cidambi, Managing Director of Dubai Duty Free, said: "The conference offered a valuable breadth of perspectives, from aviation and tourism to the sports business and artificial intelligence, alongside insights from leading travel retail operators across the region. Rabat also provided a memorable setting and, for many delegates, a first introduction to Morocco. For Dubai Duty Free, receiving both the Airport Retailer Award and the Corporate Sustainability Award, jointly with Lagardère Travel Retail, made the occasion particularly significant."

The MEADFA Conference is managed by TFWA, with Avolta as Official Host. Diamond Partners included Swedish Smokeless Solutions, Chkoudra, Scent of Africa, L'Ocali Gourmet and Hama Gulf. Heinemann Middle East Africa sponsored the Opening Cocktail, International Duty Free Shops (IDFS) Maroc sponsored Lunch Day 1, while Lagardère Travel Retail and Mazaya supported Lunch Day 2. Masra by Al Waha Duty Free sponsored the Networking Lounge.

Platinum Partners included Aphrodite Duty Free, Aer Rianta Middle East, DZRT, Dubai Duty Free, DFP World, Estée Lauder Companies and Imperial Brands. Inter African Marketing, Japan Tobacco International and Pernod Ricard were Gold Partners, while Mondelēz International and Mars Wrigley sponsored the Coffee Breaks. Further support came from Moroccanoil, Seeberger, Al Jaber, Bloom - Dead Sea Gift Enterprise and Groupe Slaoui Investments.

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For further information, please contact: Micheline El Ammar Enkiri
Email: micheline@meadfa.com
Website: www.meadfa.com

About MEADFA

Established in 2001, the Middle East & Africa Duty Free Association (MEADFA) represents the interests of duty free and travel retail stakeholders across the Middle East and Africa. Through advocacy, networking, education and industry events, MEADFA works to support the sustainable growth and development of the sector throughout the region.

25 Years of MEADFA

2001 – MEADFA Founded
2002 – First MEADFA Conference Held in Dubai
2006 – Launch of MEADFA Training Programs
2013 – Expansion into Africa and Transition from MEDFA to MEADFA
2018 – MEADFA Expands Membership to Include Suppliers
2019 – Strengthening Industry Representation, Advocacy Committee launched
2022 – Launch of the MEADFA Awards
2023 – First MEADFA Conference Hosted in West Africa (Accra)
2026 – 25 Years of Supporting Duty Free & Travel Retail Across the Middle East & Africa