

MENALAC members prepare to open amusement facilities with a re-opening strategy after Covid-19 crisis eases

As the economies of the Middle East countries are gradually re-opening, the Middle East North Africa Leisure Attractions Council (MENALAC) has started working on recommended minimum standards before re-opening

Press Release

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Key News Highlights

- 1. Most amusement park operators are finalising risk assessment and response plan as part of their re-opening strategy.**
- 2. Operators are developing new standard operating procedures, re-deploying, and training staffs.**
- 3. International visitor impact in the Middle East is estimated at US\$102 billion (Dh375 billion) in 2019, of which 79 percent, or US\$80.58 (Dh295.7 billion) is in the leisure industry, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC).**

A robust re-opening strategy that takes into account the new health, safety and social distancing regime, will help the Middle East's leisure attraction facilities that includes amusement parks, theme parks, family entertainment centres and cinema theatres to gain customer confidence to avail the world-class entertainment facilities and bounce back soon after the planned re-opening of the economy.

With offices, business activities including shopping malls, retail outlets and cinema halls opening, the leisure operators are now ready with a new set of health and social distancing procedures, capacity management, adequate spacing on rides and theatre seating that will ensure safety of all customers.

The Covid-19 crisis has forced all the leisure tourism attraction facilities to shut down in March 2020 as part of a worldwide precautionary measure to stop the spread of the Coronavirus. Amusement park operators are currently making risk assessment and response plan as part of their re-opening strategy, while the impact of social distancing, health and safety procedures and their impact on the pricing and ticketing.

Middle East and North Africa Leisure Attractions Council (MENALAC), the leisure and entertainment industry council representing the Middle East's growing leisure attractions sector, has asked its Health and Safety Committee to draft a set of recommended minimum standards and procedures for its members before re-opening of these facilities.

"The Covid-19 crisis has changed the whole world and our industry is no exception. Consumers will have to continue social distancing in all public facilities till the situation improves," **Silvio Liedtke, Vice-President of MENALAC, says.**

"As governments ease restrictions and enable our industry to get back on our feet, it becomes our collective responsibility to ensure that we all take adequate measures for a prolonged period of time so that we don't need to go through a lockdown yet again.

"Our Health and Safety Committee is working on a recommended minimum standards and procedures programme for operations to follow. This will be shared with all the members in due course and will also be posted on our website for members to refer to.

"We urge members and operators to follow these recommended standards in conjunction with the standard that are specifically prescribed by authorities in your city/country of operation. In addition to this, there will be a wealth of other useful information that our committees have aggregated from the many sources worldwide. These will be also posted on our website for members as reference material for them to be informed and apply as they deem fit.

"Since our industry is part of the leisure entertainment attractions activities where people come to participate in amusement activities, we need to ensure that the health and safety aspects as well as minimum distance between participants are maintained.

"There will be new technology upgrades in facilities that include reduced human contacts across facilities, theatres, etc. to ensure that the customers face minimum touchpoints."

MENALAC members have started investing in implementing in the new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that ensures health and safety of employees, customers and all stakeholders, training of the staffs on the new requirements as well as regular cleaning, the availability of hand sanitisers, personal protective equipment (PPE) within facilities to ensure the customers remain healthy and free from virus infection while they avail amusement facilities.

The leisure and attractions industry is suffering each day amassing losses to the tune of millions of dollars while they remain shutdown and the re-opening will help them survive. The leisure tourism industry in the Middle East is losing US\$220.76 million (Dh810.21 million) every day or US\$6.71 billion (Dh24.64 billion) per month in due to the shutdown of business since the second week of March caused by COVID-19.

The entertainment operations across the world will start opening - from Shanghai to America and all of these operations are working on reduced capacities with increased signage, sanitization and checks to ensure public safety.

Sheikha Monira Al Sabah, Board Member of MENALAC, CEO of Kuwait based Play Enterprise and Co-Founder of Trampo Extreme, says, “We will have to increase our cleaning procedure even though it has always been our priority pre-Covid-19 crisis. Hand sanitisers will be placed all over our centres, staff will be wearing masks and gloves. We will also be disinfecting our playground around the hour with limiting guest capacity.

“We have provided our employees with training on guest health safety and entrance guidelines. We will offer special packages for people in the frontline and their families as rewards for their hard work. We will also have competitive prices to attract our customers.”

Andre PA van der Byl, Director Operations at Saudi Arabia-based Al Hokair Group (Entertainment), says, “We have selected 12 parks for a phase 1 opening. Currently we are doing all works under a strict curfew. As we are unable to travel between regions and countries our dependence on regional management is critical. The support from head office is key to empowerment and provision of services required.

“We are investing in the team that include subsistence and strong well-being practice. We are stripping everything down to clean and re-build from scratch to meet the new health and safety requirements.”

Mike Rigby, Vice-President for Business Development, Whitewater West Industries, says “Suppliers will need to think about reducing touch or cleaning items; designs may allow for more social distancing; solutions may be developed to reduce operational and human interaction, before we re-open. We can make processes more automated to reduce contacts.

“Density and capacities of venues will come under scrutiny as we re-open facilities. It will require smarter design; greater tracking of return on investment of assets. You may have less in your venue so you need to know what performs.”

Al Othaim Leisure, a member of MENALAC, said, its policy is to carry out family entertainment activities with full awareness of health and safety concerns of all persons working under the organisation and any visitor in its premises.

It has undertaken a proper customer management policy [No crowd policy], provide enough sanitisers to everyone who enters the location and proper sterilisation and sanitisation programme at regular intervals.

Jean Habre, Chief Executive Officer of Al Othaim Leisure, says, “We have updated our standard operating procedures in line with the new hazard analysis and World

Health Organisation and the UAE Ministry of Health and Prevention guidelines to ensure maximum physical distancing to create a safe playing / working atmosphere.

“We have prepared physical distancing advisories to be printed and placed in every section of the units. Also strict instructions to staff members not to accept more than scheduled [prepared in line with the official guidelines] number of clients at any circumstances.

“We have updated precautionary measures and crisis management to ensure staffs are well prepared for any possible circumstances in coming days. We will decrease the price from reopening stage to a limited period.”

MENALAC is a regional trade council for the leisure entertainment attractions industry that provides a platform for the industry to represent itself as one. It improves operating standards via educational forums and represents the industry to authorities and regulatory bodies in the MENA region.

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Editors' Notes

About MENALAC

Middle East and North Africa Leisure and Attractions Council (MENALAC) is a not-for-profit platform representing the Leisure, Entertainment and Attractions industry in the Middle East and North Africa.

With over 100 members from 22 countries in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region including Pakistan and Afghanistan, MENALAC offers great benefit to the industry as a platform for stakeholders to interact and stay informed.

It has been set up under the aegis of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) and the Dubai Association Centre in 2016 when leading companies within the region's entertainment industry, including Theme Parks, Visitor Attractions, Water Parks and Family Entertainment Centers companies joined forces to form a council to support the growth and development of the industry.

The Council was established as a platform to promote a safe operations, regional development, professional growth and commercial success of the amusement industry and to be an indispensable resource for the Council's members and an international authority for the attraction industry.

