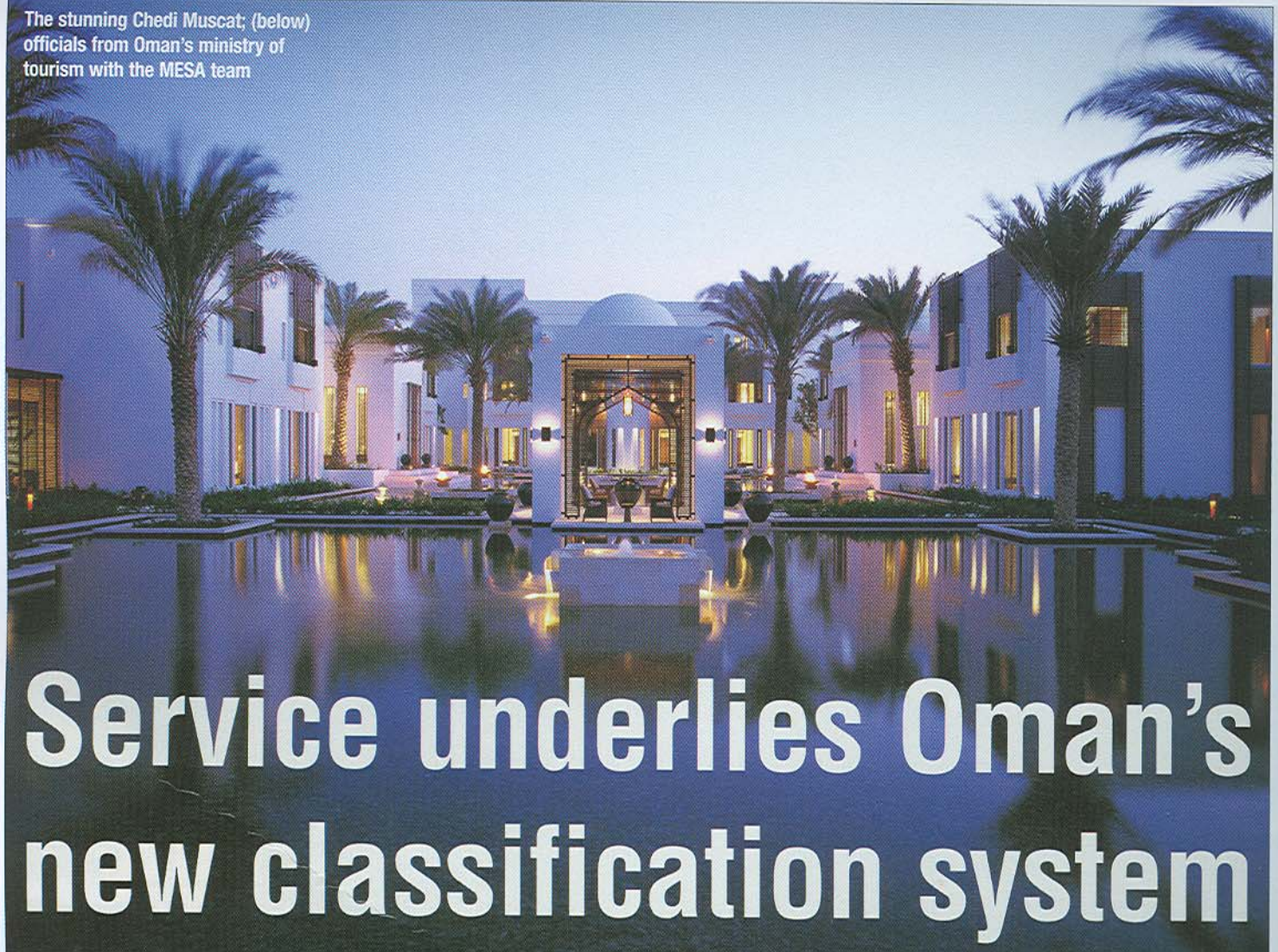


The stunning Chedi Muscat; (below) officials from Oman's ministry of tourism with the MESA team



Service underlies Oman's new classification system

AFTER six months of intensive work in concert with Oman's ministry of tourism, Middle East Strategy Advisors (MESA) have handed over a new tourism accommodation classification system for the sultanate.

A 15-strong joint task force including members of the ministry's Department of Investment Services and Quality Control completed the work on a new classification system for tourism accommodation for the Sultanate. The new system was tested extensively and is ready to be officially launched in May so that inspections based upon the new system will commence in June 2006. In preparation, the ministry will introduce the global industry to the new system at their stand throughout the ATM in Dubai in early May.

Says Glen Osmond, managing partner of MESA: "The new hotel classification scheme has been developed to benefit all stakeholders; that is, first and foremost tourists, second hotel operators, third tour operators, travel agents and travel web portals and, last but not least, Omani hotel inspectors who have been intensively trained by MESA's experts."

The system developed is based on extensive international best practice research, combined with detailed assessment of the local regulation, requirements and specifications. The new system has a wide range of innovative features such as an easy

comparable framework, room for future development and a focus on the qualitative aspects of tourism accommodation such as product and service.

Adds Sven Gade, MESA's director of Travel & Tourism Development, who led the project, "The underlying philosophy of the new system is to assess quality factors – they determine the experience for the end-user (the tourist) which is where success is ultimately measured. The new system provides objective information in international comparison whilst taking into account the specific requirements of the Omani industry. The result is a very innovative and unique classification system making the sultanate an international trend-setter."

International research shows an ever increasing emphasis on the quality of service. This important trend has been given special attention through a large portion of service quality criteria built into the new classification scheme. Over and above physical minimum requirements, the classification covers subjective criteria like ambience, the quality of facilities and furnishings, and consistency in the quality of service at each tourism accommodation facility.

The system's architecture combines best international practice with a new typology which also considers special lodging types unique to Destination Oman. Based on transparent definitions, the classification scheme will assist tourist professionals, tour



operators and travel agents in creating specific packages for their clients wanting to visit the Sultanate. Hotel operators can use the criteria to precisely position their properties and services in relation to their target markets overseas thus maximizing their business potential.

The system for Destination Oman also reflects the requirements of international regulations such as the EU directives protecting consumer standards and rights with regard to their holiday experience. This will minimize negative travel experiences for tourists caused by poor or confusing standards.

The new classification system allows the ministry to oversee the quality of management and operations of tourist facilities throughout the sultanate. It also clarifies requirements for the development of new properties.

A new team of inspectors trained by MESA will roll out the new classification system. ■