



Member Interview



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Nationality	Austrian
Hometown	Velden (Carinthia)
Education	MA German and English Literature (University of Klagenfurt), Postgraduate studies in Public Relations (Danube University Krems)
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Q: Today we speak to the head of the Austrian National Tourist Office in the Middle East, Mr. Robert Gröblacher. Welcome to the interview.

Robert: Thank you very much for having me.

Q: Can you just tell us about your career? What did you do in the past and what brought you to Dubai?

Robert: I am an Austrian national from Carinthia, which is in the very South of Austria, close to Italy and Slovenia. Originally, I studied English and German literature and worked very briefly in education, but very quickly I decided I wanted to change my career into PR and marketing. I made some post graduate studies in public relations and worked for different companies and projects in the area of PR and marketing. And, eventually like 10 years ago, I came into the field of tourism, specifically to tourism marketing. So, I started working for the Austrian National Tourist Office, which is my current employer as well. I started in our office in Warsaw, Poland, and worked there for more or less four years. Then I changed job and went to the head office in Vienna to also see the other side of the company. Then around three years ago in September of 2017, I had the chance to go to Dubai to take over our office in the Middle East, that promotes Austria as a touristic country in the Middle East. So I'm here now for three years in Dubai.

Q: In general, we would think that we know what the Austrian national tourist office is doing, but maybe we do not have such a clear idea as we think. Can you maybe describe a little bit what your work is; what is your daily routine?

Robert: Sure. What we actually do is we promote Austria as a touristic country abroad. We have more than 30 offices in 30 countries worldwide. So, our office here promotes Austria as a touristic country, mainly in the GCC countries and some selected countries in Southeast Asia. Some people think we are selling holidays, holiday packages. This is actually not, what we are doing; we promote our country in different ways. For example, through B2C and social media and digital campaigns. Then also via B2B measures. This means we work with local tour operators and wholesalers who actually sell the product to the final clients. We bring them in touch with Austrian destinations and TNCs and so on. And thirdly, we also work with stakeholders like airlines, the institutions that actually bring the guests to Austria. Additionally, what is also important, we provide the Austrian tourism trade with inside knowledge and information about our different markets for example in our case how the GCC tourists behave, what they want, what the best strategy is to be on the market, etc. Especially now in the COVID-19 times, it proved to be an important source of information if you have somebody sitting in the respective country or in the respective area.

Q: You just mentioned, COVID-19, one could assume that there's not much traveling going on, that people do not fly to Austria. They're not allowed to go in. So does this mean that you have nothing to do right now?

Robert: It doesn't mean that we have nothing to do. It means though that our work changed a bit. So what we do now is a lot of research. We talk to different institutions from different countries to find out by talking to our colleagues at the national tourist offices when travel might be possible again. We provide this information to the national tourism office in Austria. Then what we also do is to stay in contact with the local stakeholders in tourism. On the one hand, the airlines who are struggling now, but also the different tour operators who obviously have big problems now too. Everybody is just hoping that things get better. But what our main task is now is not to promote traveling to Austria, but to keep the positive picture of Austria in people's heads. And as soon as traveling is possible again, to be there again. And we hope that traveling will be possible again soon because what you could see now in the summer, when we were contacted by our partners like the travel trade, they are just waiting for tourism to start again. They are waiting to send their clients to countries like Austria, which is perceived also here in the region as a very safe country to make holidays. So more or less I'm optimistic. It will just take hopefully a short time.

Q: I think that we can all relate to that. We all want to have the freedom of traveling back again, as soon as possible. Talking about the Austrian Business Council, is there anything that you could do specifically for our members?

Robert: What we can do is we can provide a certain insight for example how we perceive the local population. But also, how they see Austria, mainly from a touristic perspective. Also, how expats perceive Austria as a touristic country, what they see as the strengths and the assets of our country. And furthermore, our product "holidays in Austria" is seen as something very positive and genuine in the Arab world. So, what we can do, if it makes sense for you, is to make a joint promotion campaign. So, you can use the positive brand image transfer of Austria and use it for your respective business.

Q: That sounds like an opportunity that maybe some of our members could really take up Robert. Thanks so much for this interview. And we all hope that the challenges of the COVID-19 situation will be overcome very soon, all the best.

Robert: Thank you very much. Thank you. And I'm sure it will be like that. Thanks