

Exclusive Interview

Group aims to offer high-quality services within the reach of all classes of individuals: Khattab

# Papiro urges Kuwait airlines to open direct flights to Madrid

By Belal Badr  
Al-Seyassah Staff

KUWAIT CITY, July 16: Viajes Papiro (Papiro Group), one of the leading travel companies in Spain, offers both entertainment or tourism and treatment services. It provides integrated tourism facilities inside and outside Spain under the banner, "Tourism and Treatment for All". Its strategy is to offer high-quality services together with various options within the reach of all classes of individuals.

In a special interview with Al-Seyassah daily, Director General of the travel institution Haitham Khattab revealed a package of contracts with different bodies in the fields of tourism and health in some Arab countries, including Kuwait, Egypt and Dubai; in addition to its branches in a number of other countries.

Khattab disclosed the company contracted with six subsidiaries of Wadi El-Neel Company for Medical Services (Lotus), thus, it functions as the medical consultant that offers medical services to patients coming from Europe and the rest of world for the treatment of Hepatitis C in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Based on his long experience in the tourism sector in general and the projects of his institution in a number of countries in the world, Khattab expressed his surprise over the absence of direct flights from Kuwait to any of the Spanish cities. He called on Kuwait Airways Corporation and Al-Jazeera Airways to open direct flights to and from Madrid in order to pave way for new scopes of cooperation between the two countries and to realize aspirations of the Kuwaitis who want to travel to different Spanish cities, which are main destinations for Saudi and UAE citizens as well as people from Europe and the two Americas.

Khattab discussed many issues concerning recreational and therapeutic tourism (Tournure), highlighting the services that Papiro Group could offer to the State of Kuwait.

He confirmed the group enjoys great tourist viability, but at the same time it needs more support from the government in the next stage considering tourism has become one of the most important sources of income in many countries, including Arab countries such as the UAE, Qatar, Egypt and Bahrain.

He revealed the group has contracts with about 70 percent of the Spanish hospitals which have a database of 27,000 of the best doctors with various specialties and who are fully ready to receive Kuwaitis suffering from bones or eye problems or any endemic and intractable diseases, in addition to the best centers for hair transplant and cosmetic surgery, etc.

He said there is an exclusive agency for the institution through which it markets the medicine for Hepatitis C virus for less than world the prices by 80 percent. He added most of the citizens of Europe and America resort to the group for treatment of malignant diseases due to its reasonable fees — at cost price compared with the fees in other institutions and countries.

Following is the full text of the interview:

**Question:** Tell us about the activities of your company.

**Answer:** The company was founded 15 years ago in Spain. It is a private company specialized in recreational and therapeutic tourism as it aims to provide recreational and medical tourism services which are accessible to all categories at the most suitable prices. We offer our services to people with utmost transparency and openness based on our permanent motto, taking into account the high quality of services provided. We offer services to customers in Arab countries even before they pay.

Our institution has a database of contracts with more than 70 percent of medical centers and private hospitals in Spain. These contracts cover around 27,000 doctors specialized in various fields. This is in line with our objective of providing health services at a high level of quality and efficiency for all customers from throughout the world.

Also, the Recreational Tourism Department provides services for tourists — both within Spain and some other countries such as Germany, France and Turkey. We provide accommodations (hotels, apartments or villas) and transportation — cars with drivers according to the customer's need.

**Q:** What is the size of the contracts with countries in the region?

**A:** We have contracted with six subsidiaries of Wadi El-Neel Company for Medical Services (Lotus) to become the medical adviser which offers services to patients of the Spanish Group Papiro from Europe and around the world for the treatment of Hepatitis C in the Arab Republic of Egypt. I would like to point out that Wadi El-Neel Company has contracts with more than 2,500 medical service providers distributed all over the governorates of the republic, especially tourist cities like Cairo (Sharm El-Sheikh, Hurgada, Luxor and Aswan).

We have also contracted with the Egyptian Prime Pharma Company — one of the prime group companies operating in the field of international trade and it is the export arm of Farco Pharmaceuticals Company all over the



Haitham Khattab

world.

I would like to shed light on the activities of this company, especially since it created a program for medical tourism called, "Tournure", which is the medical tourism gateway to Egypt for the treatment of Hepatitis C. Egypt is considered one of the best countries in terms of the treatment rate for this disease.

Medical tourism, "Tournure", has been designed specifically for the treatment of Hepatitis C. It gives patients from all over the world 97 percent chance of recovery within a short period of time and at reasonable and competitive fees compared to its counterparts in other countries. This is in addition to spending a tourism week in one of the best destinations in the world.

In Dubai, a number of hospitals have contracted with the company and they send some cases to us for treatment in Spain. Some other hospitals in Dubai are in the process of signing contracts with the company, while Kuwait will soon sign contracts with some hospitals and institutions.

**Launching new flight route**

**Q:** Do you think that the Kuwait market represents a specific figure of tourists visiting Spain?

**A:** Let me say that Kuwait is an important and large market. I think that Kuwaitis love to travel to Spain because of its potential in tourism and its historic cities. Spanish cities such as Cordoba, Marbella, Valencia, Barcelona, Madrid, Granada, Seville and others are considered the best places in the world. They are regarded by Europeans and Arabs as favorite destinations in the old continent. Unfortunately, we found that the element of travel between the two countries is zero since there is no direct flight to and from Kuwait and Madrid. I do not know the fundamental reason for pushing toward this negative trend. I see this as one of the biggest disadvantages which threatens tourism to Spain from Kuwait and vice versa.

From this perspective, I call on the Kuwaiti airline to consider launching a direct flight to Madrid, because that would open new horizons for cooperation between the two countries and attract tourists from Spain to Kuwait as well, especially in light of the State's plan to develop the tourism sector. It has to move forward in order to actualize the vision of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to transform Kuwait into a global financial and commercial center.

I affirm the success of this project for the Kuwaiti carrier from an economic point of view and benefits will definitely be achieved. My opinion is sound because Kuwaitis are looking to travel directly to Spain without the need for a transit point which causes fatigue for the traveler, due to the long travel time which takes over 10 hours compared to the proposed new flight route that does not exceed six or seven hours.

I have always observed in some Kuwaitis who visit us their dissatisfaction over the long travel time due to the absence of a direct flight from Kuwait. Others say that if there was a direct flight, the Spanish cities would be the second destination for Kuwaitis after London, where there are ancient and modern history facilities and global resorts.

Kuwaitis love the Spanish league as they closely follow up the careers of Real Madrid and Barcelona — Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and others. A direct flight to Madrid will encourage citizens to travel to Spain in order to spend their holidays in Spanish cities and enjoy watching football matches or to see their favorite players.

**The first source of income**

**Q:** Do you think Kuwait has a global presence in international tourist exhibitions and events? Could it advance in the field of tourism?

**A:** Surely, a State with the size of Kuwait does not ignore participation in relevant international tourism events with the aim of promoting and marketing the country in order to attract tourists from different parts of the world. The most recent of these events that Kuwait participated in was the 36th International Tourism Fair, "Fitur 2016", which was held last January in Madrid and there was a significant presence of those in charge of the tour-

ism sector here.

I think Kuwait enjoys great tourist viability through its beaches, resorts, facilities and tourist extension at the Arabian Gulf; in addition to the fact that it is a hospitable country with multicultural setting, giving the impression of security for tourists and that the country is open to others. However, the sector needs more attention, support and care from the government since it could be another source of income besides oil. In many countries, tourism is the primary source of income.

I would like to give an example in the region. Dubai is known as the 'bride and crown of Arab tourism', since it has been able to impose its global presence in every country. It is regarded as one of the receiving countries for Latin American and Spanish tourists with a very large number that may match the number of English people, possibly due to Emirates Airline which has multiple long-term lines. Thus, it activated air traffic at Dubai Airport and the Emirates in general due to the increase in transit trips that prompted tourists to visit Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

**Q:** What about the Arab citizens to Spain?

**A:** Arab tourism in Andalusia is at its best especially in the last two years, led by Saudis and Emiratis who own a quarter of the city of Marbella, in addition to people from other Arab countries that consider Spanish cities as their favorite destinations.

**The integration of the Spanish experience**

**Q:** What is the purpose of your visit to Kuwait?

**A:** Our visit aims to bring the Spanish experience in health services and medical sector through the integra-

tion of Kuwaiti and Spanish hospitals such that Kuwaitis receive health insurance cover recognized in Spain with the same level of services at affordable prices for various segments of the society. We also have to consider the possibility of exporting medical expertise to Kuwait to raise the health sector level here.

**Q:** Is the cost of services you provide affordable for the limited-income groups?

**A:** The main goal since the establishment of our organization is to ensure the provision of high quality services, taking into account the health status of the patient without focusing on making huge profits. We do not follow the greedy trade patterns as it happens in other institutions. Our institution prioritizes humanitarian aspects so we provide the best medical care to any patient in return for a simple or modest profit, away from purely commercial operations.

Over the past 15 years, we have been able to achieve a breakthrough in medical tourism by attracting tourists from Europe, Latin America and some Arab countries, whether for medical tourism or recreation.

In the last few years, Spain has become famous for therapeutic tourism among European countries. It offers services in different disciplines such as the eyes, bones and other diseases like cancer, injuries caused by accidents or cosmetic surgery. Spain has the largest medical centers in most specialties.

**Advancement in medical tourism**

**Q:** Is Spain a magnet for tourists from Arab countries, particularly in medical tourism?

**A:** Frankly, Spain was very modest in this area compared with other countries because of the lack of attention to marketing of this type of tourism.

For example, Cuba is one of the prominent countries in medical tourism due to the great marketing done through extensive promotion so it occupies a privileged position in this area. This is in addition to Turkey which came in sixth place globally. By the way our institution, Group PAPIRO, has a branch in Istanbul and this branch includes a center for implanting hair.

**Q:** How many cases does the group receive monthly?

**A:** We receive around 10 to 15 cases monthly ranging — from bone diseases (knees and joints), cancer, implanting hair, eye diseases and the treatment of Hepatitis C. Citizens and residents of European countries are sent for the treatment of Hepatitis C to our institution in Cairo, Egypt bearing the cost of medication, travel and accommodation. The cost does not exceed 4,800 Euros.

**Q:** Do citizens from European and Arab countries visit Spain for medical treatment?

**A:** Citizens from European countries such as Germany, London and even America, come to Spain for medical treatment for two reasons: First, due to the progress witnessed in medical infrastructure such as equipment, etc. Second is due to the prices for these advanced services as the prices are affordable for all segments of society. The cost in Spain is less than Germany by 50 percent, although they offer the same level of services.

I think Kuwaitis love Spain but it is not regarded as the main destination like the rest of Gulf States due to the lack of a direct air route between the two countries; as well as poor advertising and marketing to Kuwaitis who, if they are aware of the charm and beauty of Spain and the extent of advancement witnessed in the tourism sector in general and health in particular, would not hesitate even a moment to travel to it.

Despite the fact that Spain enjoys tourist and historic viability which puts it within the ranks of the most attractive countries for Kuwaitis, there are a lot of tourist and historical cities dating back to the State of Andalusia. Add to this the prestigious sports clubs in the Spanish league beloved by the GCC citizens who follow the league eagerly and support Barcelona and Real Madrid. All of these are supposed to be the reasons for attracting Kuwaitis and others to Spain.

**90 percent discount**

**Q:** Do you have offices or branches outside Spain?

**A:** The institution has branches in a number of countries including Egypt, Colombia, Argentina, Turkey and recently in Dubai. We have a pre-paid system which gives customers the option to buy a smart card worth \$30 and the holder shall enjoy discounts of up to 90 percent of the cost of the services provided, whether hospitalization due to certain diseases or analyses, operations, etc., in any of Spain's hospitals. The card's validity is either for a year or a month and renewable for the same period. The card includes some free features and additional discounted services.

**We contract with Kuwaiti bodies**

**Q:** Do you have contracts with Kuwaiti authorities and hospitals?

**A:** We are already moving towards this direction. We are in the process of concluding agreements with some hospitals through the mediation of some companies specialized in medical tourism as a prelude to contracting with a number of Kuwaiti hospitals. During our visit to Kuwait at the beginning of Ramadan last year, we signed contracts with some of these companies. We are negotiating with private hospitals, and possibly government hospitals as well.

**Q:** What are the details of services that will be offered to Kuwaiti tourists?

**A:** Our institution provides all services before, during and after treatment, i.e. during the period of stay in Spain, arrival at Madrid Airport, accommodation, provision of translators into Arabic or English, services needed for local transportation and residence as well as a companion during the stay according to the wish of the client. We are responsible for everything during the patient's trip with us.

We are distinguished in the sense that we provide doctors and nurses who are highly efficient in all fields of specialization, not only in Spain as we can send them to the place of residence in Kuwait. It is a service for Kuwaitis to have medical treatment inside his house in his home country. We provide male or female doctors or nurses as per the case at very affordable cost. There are various options when staying in Spain, if not hotels, we can provide an apartment or villa and a car according to the wish of the client.

**Q:** What is the way to contact you?

**A:** This can be done by sending a report about the client through email haitham@viajespapiro.com, explaining the services required, whether tourism or therapeutic, the type of illness or the required medical treatment and options desired during the trip.

We shall reply via email and provide everything about the trip — detailed cost including reservation in the hospital, hotel or other accommodations, determining the quality of services and the cost for each service, and explain to the patient the length of stay based on details mentioned in the letter about his condition.

We shall also inquire if there is a need for annual follow-up or not, as some patients need a visit, two or four times during the year, according to the response to medical treatment.

One can also visit the website of the medical tourism management http://www.toursalud.com to obtain information on all the services provided by our institution which also allows the client to book any of the services.

Contact with the group can also be done by phone in Spain and the following countries:

Spain: +34911873256, +34637682213  
Argentina: +541159844013  
Colombia: +5715088216  
Egypt: +20 233 850 627/4 or +20109589163

**Q:** What is your most significant project in Egypt in line with your expansion there?

**A:** The Egyptian market is the largest in the region in terms of population. It is one of the most important markets in the pharmaceutical industry. In this context, we are doing the marketing for the treatment of Hepatitis C which has spread around the world. This treatment is made in the United States and then sold there for about 90,000 Euros. However, Egypt was able to manufacture the drug after obtaining permission from the American drug company.

Despite the political and economic problems experienced by the country, the Egyptian officials determined the price of the drug to be affordable for all people compared with the price in America and Europe. The Egyptian government could have taken advantage of these problems to increase the price of the drug as the case in the United States, but this did not happen.

The drug which was manufactured in Egypt has been approved by the World Health Organization. As per our contracts with the concerned authorities in Egypt, we are exclusively marketing the treatment for Hepatitis C abroad at competitive and unmatched prices — 80 percent less than global prices.

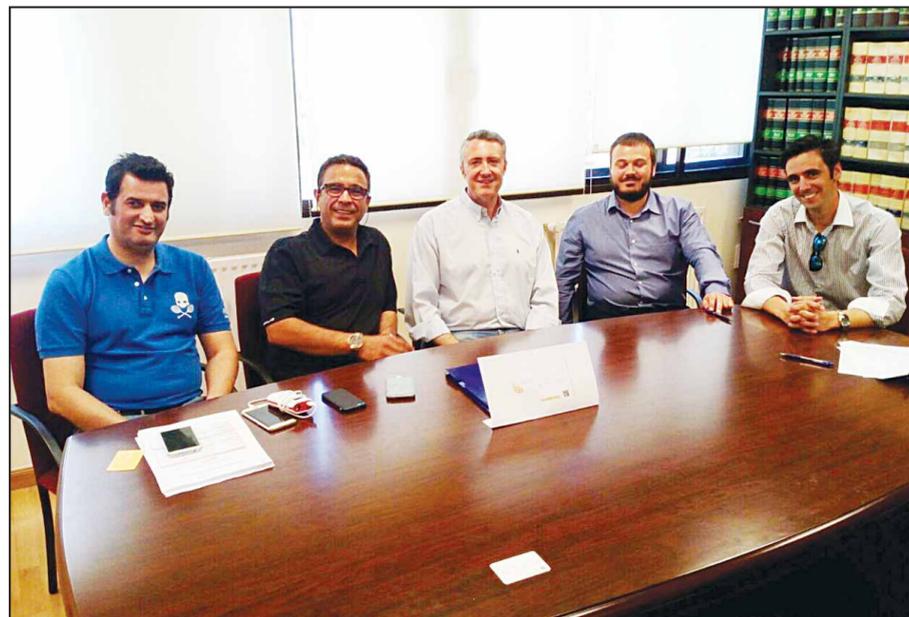
**Q:** How much is the price of drugs sold in Spain? What is your role as an exclusive agent for the Egyptian medicine in Kuwait or in the Gulf wants to buy from you?

**A:** As an exclusive agent for marketing the drug outside Egypt, we set a reasonable price compared with that in most countries and even Spain. After negotiations made by the Egyptian government with the US drug manufacturing company, Spain has been able to reduce the price of 90,000 Euros to 25,000 Euros for its citizens as a large number of Spaniards are suffering from the disease; while we, as an exclusive agent, sell the drug for 4,800 Euros and this is considered cost price after deducting the travel expenses and accommodation for Spanish or European and other patients.

Treatment shall be done in Egypt and the price ranges from 10 to 15 thousand Euros. It think this is what distinguishes us from others, so we have a large number of clients — hospitals and individuals in GCC countries — confirming that we are keen on providing medicines, treatment and other related services to all people from different segments at reasonable prices, which is the banner of our organization.

**Q:** How many Hepatitis C patients do you send to Egypt for treatment?

**A:** The number of cases from Spain, France, Italy and other European countries ranges from 30 to 40 per week. Spain is number one in Europe in terms of the number of Hepatitis C cases — around one million; whereas about 20 hair transplantation cases are being treated in Turkey every month.



Ahmad Al-Hajri and Haitham Khattab with Group's officials in Madrid

## 4,800 Euros Hepatitis C treatment

Director of Papiro Group Haitham Kkattab explained that the treatment of Hepatitis C is not covered by the health insurance for European citizens, so patients undergo treatment despite the exorbitant cost, such as in America or Spain from 90,000 to 25,000 Euros. When we signed an agreement with the concerned Egyptian medicine bodies as an exclusive agent to market the drug, our aim was to provide the drug at a price that all people can afford. We have determined a simple profit margin, which provides the patient with medication and stay in Egypt for a week and we bear the cost of travel and all of this at a price of 4,800 euros only.

## Papiro Group— the link

Group Director Haitham Kattab said: The experiences we gained in Europe prompted us to create a new medical program under the slogan, "Treatment for All", to provide the best quality of treatment for endemic and incurable diseases at affordable prices for the poor and the rich. This includes centers and hospitals that help in providing hospitalization services at reasonable and convenient rates.

He added the group is working to facilitate all services to the client wherever they are, because the group is considered the link between the patient and the doctor. We are not a medical or therapeutic company, we are a tourism company with a department for medical travel services.



Haitham Khattab during his interview with Belal



Papiro Group headquarters in Spain