

Qatar Duty Free luxuriates in new offerings

By **Hibah Noor** on April, 9 2018 | Retailers



Luxury fashion brand Moncler was recently added to QDF's portfolio of 90 luxury brands and boutiques

Changing passenger demographics at Qatar's gateway airport haven't stopped the fashion and lifestyle category's stellar growth at Qatar Duty Free, where luxury brands Gucci and Moncler have recently been added to a diverse range of both mono-brand boutiques and multi-brand outlets.

In an exclusive interview, Thabet Musleh, Head of Qatar Duty Free, explains how the operator is reaping rewards from the category at Hamad International Airport.

Q: How is the fashion and lifestyle category performing in your stores? How much space is dedicated to the category?

Thabet Musleh, Head of Qatar Duty Free: Qatar's fashion and lifestyle category is performing extremely well and now occupies 5,500 square meters across five concourses at Qatar Duty Free

(QDF) at Hamad International Airport (HIA), with a diverse range of both mono-brand boutiques and multi-brand outlets.

New store openings, such as Gucci and Moncler, have contributed significantly to the growth of this category and have been positively received by our customers.

Q: What are some of the challenges it's facing currently?

TM: The Qatar diplomatic crisis that began in June 2017 undoubtedly presented a challenge to us in terms of our supply chain. However, thanks to our strategic relationships with our core suppliers, we were agile in minimizing the impact on our sales and profitability. QDF also worked with Hamad International Airport and Qatar Airways to understand the changes in customer profiles through dynamic business intelligence, which enabled us to quickly evolve our business in response to the changing sales environment.

As a result of the ongoing geopolitical situation, we have seen a definite shift in customer demographics. However, the evolution of our product offering from QDF, combined with Qatar Airways' expedited expansion plans and the opening of many new routes, has catered to our new passenger segment.

Q: What are some trends you're seeing?

TM: Luxury brands are tailoring their offerings to be relevant to the younger segment. Traditionally, more classic and timeless brands have developed product lines to target the millennials. A good example of this is Gucci, which as a luxury brand has appealed to the younger generation through the use of color, texture and design.

In addition, consumers are increasingly seeking a more personalized shopping experience. With the notable increase in fashion, lifestyle and luxury offerings at QDF, we understand that one of the most important differentiators is the ability of our staff to deliver a five-star customer service to all passengers shopping at the airport.

To ensure we can deliver this to our customers, we invest heavily in training and development for all of our 2,000-strong workforce, to ensure that we offer the highest standards of service possible.

Just last year, we delivered more than 29,000 hours of training to our employees through our QDF Academy, including 2,500 hours dedicated solely to the fashion and lifestyle category, which covered new store openings training, on-the-job role play, in-store training, service training and numerous bite-sized learning and product training sessions delivered both in the classroom and on the shop floor. All training sessions that we offer are designed to support sales staff in becoming experts in their field, to ensure that passengers' experience at QDF is aligned with their journey at the five-star Hamad International Airport.