

CATEGORY SPONSOR



G.M. of the Year

DARREN DARWIN

ANANTARA AL JABAL AL AKHDAR RESORT



Delivering authentic, experiential offerings that champion local culture, and excelling at employee engagement in a challenging emerging destination earned Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort's general manager, Darren Darwin, the coveted crown of General Manager of the Year 2017.

After overcoming severe logistical, engineering, and supply-chain issues during the opening of the 66,000m² Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort — located 2,000m above sea level on the edge of a cliff in Nizwa, Oman — Darwin led the property's team to surpass pre- and post-opening budgets and key performance indicators. The resort also exceeded financial expectations post-budget for both revenue and GOP.

Darwin has been instrumental in designing and delivering experiences for guests that highlight Omani culture and heritage, the success of which has been reflected in the resort's outstanding guest satisfaction scores. These initiatives also support local employment and optimise local community relations.

He also impressed the panel of judges with

the lengths to which he went to ensure his resort's employees were engaged, motivated, and developed. Darwin personally oversaw the building of well-equipped staff accommodation, complete with extensive recreational facilities, and he arranges activities such as trips to Muscat for shopping, and relaxing at the beach; or mountain-side barbecues for the team, at which he occasionally mans the grill.

In addition, he actively champions the training and development programmes of his people, resulting in internal promotions for 74% of division heads, one of the highest internal promotion ratios within Minor Hotels.

Not surprisingly, Darwin credits his team with his success. "I owe it all to the excellent team members I have at Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar," he told *Hotelier Middle East* after accepting his award.

"When your property is located in a relatively remote destination, employee engagement becomes more crucial than ever because, in the end, it is our employees who are responsible for delivering memorable guest experiences. This award belongs to all of them."



MMI general manager, Mike Glenn (left) presented Darwin with the coveted GM of the Year award.



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Highly Commended Nominee

- **Bill Keffer**, JW Marriott Marquis Hotel Dubai

Shortlist:

- **Andreas Searty**, Hilton Dubai Jumeirah, Hilton Dubai The Walk, and Hilton Dubai Creek
- **Charles Saliba**, Crowne Plaza Sohar
- **Omar Souab**, Fairmont Fujairah Beach Resort
- **Philip Jones**, Mövenpick Hotel Jumeirah Beach
- **Richard Collins**, The Ritz-Carlton, Dubai
- **Tariq Dowidar**, InterContinental Riyadh