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Rouble trouble hits travel in UAE

SUSMITA GHOSH

Currency fluctuation, political uncertainty and global restrictions put on Russian government are taking a toll. Russia was Dubai's fifth-largest source market. The Russian tour operators that have closed operations due to the weakening of Russian Rouble and the crisis in Ukraine are IntAer, Labirint and Neva. They had the greatest number of tie-ups with agencies abroad, including in the UAE. Russian hotel guests in Dubai have dropped drastically.

After having a heavy influx of tourists from the Russian and CIS countries for the past many years, the UAE faced and is still facing low occupancy levels in the hotels compared to previous years. Due to the less number of tourists from Russia and CIS countries, the availability with almost all hotels continued even during the Christmas/New Year. We, at Al Bustan Centre and Residence, are very well established in other destinations and have placed our plans much earlier to focus on these markets to compensate for the decline which we witnessed in the CIS Market. We are focusing on the Far East, East Europe, Africa, Indian, Chinese and European markets. We've rolled out many promotions to target these markets suitable to their requirements. Simultaneously, we are also focusing on 'online business' to secure our fair share of the market.



Moussa El Hayek,
Chief Operating Officer, Al Bustan Centre & Residence

Contd. on page 2 ▶

MICE spreads wings at IBTM Arabia



Lois Wilcox
Exhibition Manager, ibtm arabia

Transformation of the former annual GIBTM show, IBTM Arabia is the new name for the event with a new location, The St Regis Hotel Saadiyat Island Resort, Abu Dhabi.

SUSMITA GHOSH

IBTM Arabia is an exclusive event designed for meeting professionals, where Hosted Buyers and

exhibitors are carefully selected using a quality over quantity approach.

The name change also provides synergy with the

other shows within the IBTM Global Events portfolio.

"The unique concept for the Middle East's leading MICE event is now similar to

IBTM America, IBTM India and IBTM Africa, although the latter two are table top events, the content and concept is virtually the same," mentioned **Lois Wilcox**, Exhibition

Manager, IBTM Arabia. "Foremost in this transformation is that IBTM Arabia will be an all-inclusive solution where an innovative meeting

Contd. on page 19 ▶



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Rouble pounces hard on travel in UAE

► Contd. from page 1

Everyone in the industry, hotels and tour operations and incentive companies are thinking hard on how to compensate this valuable traffic which we used to have from Russia and CIS. On the other hand, Dubai has proved itself again regardless of the circumstances focussing on sustaining inbound tourism and ensuring that the numbers don't fall. We are collectively looking at the opportunities in GCC, Europe to attract traffic from there. With the additional

flight's capacity from these two regions, we hope to maintain good number in 2015. Europe has always been good source of tourists to Dubai and we are confident that this market will open up further now the capacity is available.



Dayana Persan
General Manager, Atlantis Holidays

Russia and CIS have been one of Dubai's top ten source markets. The challenges faced are certainly evident, particularly, the finance industry. Trickle into the industry we operate in, the challenges noted are the fall in the occupancy rates at hotels, particularly in the middle market segment. In the five-star category and above, disposable income levels do permit more travel. However, the thinning out of visitor arrivals has been challenging for the hospitality sector, in general, as it affects occupancy rates, operational costs as well as holding costs. Market expansion efforts could now be focused on the United Kingdom, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Spain and far-eastern markets like Malaysia and Thailand. The industry is witnessing an inflow of tourist arrivals from the mentioned markets of Portugal, Spain, Italy and Poland, so we can expect to prepare ourselves to cater to the unique requirements of these. At this juncture, it would be worth to position the appeal of all seven Emirates, so as to offer visitors a truly holistic experience of the UAE.



Chidrupa Rangala
Director, Product & Contracting
Pearl of Arabia Travel & Tourism

Indeed, UAE is suffering significant financial losses in the tourism industry due to a sharp decline in the flow of travellers from Russia. This problem is associated not only with the economic crisis in Russia but also with the fact that UAE has become very expensive and tourists choose other destinations for their vacations. Many areas were affected quite significantly, including hotels that faced occupancy challenges, tourism companies, as well as UAE immigration that suffered from sharp decrease in visitor visa's income. To cover up these financial losses, UAE immigration raised the cost of tourist visas by AED 40.

Tourism companies, including our company, have started focusing on other markets like European market since they are easy to work with due to visa-free regime. Experts predict improvement of the situation over the next year. We certainly hope to see some improvement in the situation and do our best to attract more visitors into UAE.

Aya Hajiyeva
Head, CIS Department, Sadaf Sarv, DMC

Many travel agencies who are handling Russian market get quite unpleasant losses. As the situation of our company, our sale was dropped down to 50 per cent compared to last year. We can see that in such tough times in Russia, many hotels are trying to push up the market by giving special prices, different facilities and more opportunities to encourage tourists to come. We are trying to convince the clients by giving them special prices and discounts for different type of services. We have already started our business with Chinese tourists. Chinese market is still new for UAE and it needs to be explored more. In future, we are planning to get tourists from Turkish and European market. In general, our main plan is to make the difference for the guests, let them feel value of visiting UAE with good prices, new programs and special organisation.



Irina Filipenko
Reservation Manager, Reservation Department,
Phoenix Tour



I believe UAE doesn't face any major challenge due to this decrease but it does affect the hospitality industry, luxury goods industry and foreign investments. I think this is a good example for businesses in this industry to diversify their market to get prepared for political problems that they have no control over. Abu Dhabi recently held a conference that hosted 120 travel agents from 20 cities in Russia and Belorussia. It seems their plan is to continue promoting the UAE culture and landmarks worldwide, which has been proven to be successful. There are always new markets to tap but focusing on existing markets is more beneficial at this moment. The right market to focus on is Asia, specifically China. The increase in wealth has persuaded a lot of people to travel and UAE seems to be the hotspot.



Rinat Ablet
General Manager, Etakar Tourism

The travel and hospitality industry in UAE have changed their strategy and diversified their market with other countries to offset the loss in CIS arrivals. They are now focusing more on China, Africa and South America to tap new business potentials.

Munir Sherwani
Director, Ena Travel & Tourism



As of now, what we have seen and analysed is that Government is just trying to save the power of Rouble and now dollars too are not being accepted in Russia. So people who are left with dollars are trying to spend it as much as possible but significantly the numbers of this class of people is very less. Dubai is getting expensive day by day and the hoteliers are not doing any promotions to bring the tourist from Russia except Jumeirah properties but I am confident that they will be back as UAE has a good relationship with Russia that should not be affected by sanctions. What we have seen in the last couple of months is that the hotels in Europe and tour operators are getting benefit out of these sanctions and trying to promote Europe in Russia as much as they can and some of the hotels are giving 50 per cent discount for Russia market which make people travel to European countries and also Far east and Egypt. Although this trend is picking up again, but again I would say that due to sanctions, we won't see that figures which we used to see earlier.



Muhammad Yousuf
Outbound Manager, Avionics Travel & Holidays

Partnering for excellence

IBTM Arabia has associated with Abu Dhabi Convention Bureau for the closed event, which is set to take place at the St. Regis Hotel Saadiyat Island Resort, Abu Dhabi, from February 10-12, 2015.

TT BUREAU

Lois Wilcox, Exhibition Manager, IBTM Arabia, commented, "We are delight-

class, sustainable meetings industry destination and our strong relationship with Abu Dhabi Convention Bureau has really allowed us

whole new concept to the region, creating a three day community where everyone does everything together; business, education and networking."

buyers that they want to meet with.

IBTM Arabia has significant potential for growth for the global, regional and local meetings industry according to **Mubarak Al Shamisi**, Director of Abu Dhabi Convention Bureau.

This new closed-show format will ensure that buyers and exhibitors

We are confident that our commitment to ibtm arabia will bring significant benefit to our growing MICE sector

Mubarak Al Shamisi
Director of Abu Dhabi Convention Bureau

This year, our exclusive one-to-one event, will bring a whole new concept to the region, creating a three day community where everyone does everything together; business, education and networking

Lois Wilcox
Exhibition Manager, IBTM Arabia



ed to have Abu Dhabi Convention Bureau on board as our premier partner for ibtm arabia. Abu Dhabi is rapidly evolving into a world-

to showcase the destination's potential to prospective meeting planners from across the globe. This year, our exclusive one-to-one event, will bring a

can focus solely on their business appointments and the new one-to-one mutual matching format will ensure that exhibitors attending can select the

"We are confident that our commitment to ibtm arabia will bring significant benefit to our growing MICE sector," he added. ☺

Starwood Hotels debuts in Tajikistan

■ Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc. (NYSE: HOT) announced that it has entered Tajikistan with the opening of Sheraton Dushanbe Hotel. Owned by CJSC CHL International, a subsidiary of CHL Limited (BSE:CHL), Sheraton Dushanbe Hotel boasts a central location within Tajikistan's capital city and features 148 rooms, state-of-the-art meeting facilities, three restaurants and all of the Sheraton brand's signature amenities and services.

Strategically located just five minutes from Dushanbe

International Airport, the new Sheraton offers easy access to the city's central business district, government offices and embassies. Nearby attractions include the National Museum of Ancient Art, National Palace, Victory Park, Botanical Garden and several traditional tea houses. All guestrooms, including the top-floor Presidential Suite, boast the all-white Sheraton Sweet Sleeper® bed, Shine Spa for Sheraton™ bath amenities, a 42" screen LCD television, in-room safe, well-designed work station and high-speed Internet.

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EDITORIAL

Capturing MICE potential

Study reports GCC countries are in an excellent position to become a global meeting hub. There is huge untapped potential for GCC countries to grab a larger slice of the meeting, incentive, convention and exhibition (MICE) market with just five per cent of annual visitors presently arriving for large-scale business events.

Its competitive advantages include a growing trade activity, central geographical location, stable political systems and variety of venues, attractions and hi-tech meeting facilities.

Among the GCC countries, the UAE is seen to have the most robust MICE business. The country has transformed itself into the region's most important travel hub and this is evident with the Dubai International Airport recently surpassing Heathrow as the world's busiest airport. The UAE also provides an increasing range and quality of leisure offerings which has enhanced the country's popularity as a place for meetings.

There are few challenges that are hindering the GCC's ability to emerge as a meeting destination. Many of the challenges are amenable to policy changes and may disappear in the face of better practices. So important it is to use a structured approach to allow the GCC to develop the great potential of its meetings tourism business and win a greater share of the meetings market.

The unique concept for the Middle East's leading MICE event is now similar to IBTM America, IBTM India and IBTM Africa, though the latter two are table top events, the content and concept is virtually the same. IBTM Arabia is the new name leading a transformation of the former annual GIBTM show. The event will definitely bring significant benefit to the growing MICE sector, expand awareness of the luxury, competitive destination to global industry players. Around 200 Hosted Buyers will approach from Middle East, Europe, Asia Pacific, North America, South America and Africa.

Making travel simpler

Another year goes by and it was a very successful one for Amadeus Gulf. We have grown bookings, increased market share and sold more products than ever before. We retained business with all our large customers and have successfully won key accounts in Dubai. This new business is all fully migrated onto our platform and our customers are already seeing the benefits.

How have we achieved this? First of all there is no magic bullet for us or any other business. I believe strongly that for a company to prosper it has to do thousands of small things well throughout the year and in the end you will get your rewards. Of course staffs have to be trained, knowledgeable and motivated with a clear vision and purpose. But beyond that they need to have a passion for customer empathy, for listening and questioning to understand the true issue even if the customer does not fully understand himself. How often have you heard a salesman push his products with a bewildering array of features and maybe even some benefits, but who is to say those benefits are what the customer is asking for or needs at that moment in time. We have all been on the receiving end of such an approach and I am sure most of us are completely put off by it.

The travel industry seems simple on the outside but in reality is made highly complex by multiple technology suppliers who all think they have the best thing.

In fact the travel business is becoming more and more complex as we seek to personalise our services which puts greater pressure on everyone involved to keep up to speed with everything that is on offer and to be able to make sense of it in a holistic way.

Against this background and given the low margins in our industry all travel agents need to look at their overall operations and re-invent their processes in order to optimise their costs and speed of service. This is where technology

Tips & Tricks to Grow

- ◆ For a company to prosper it has to do thousands of small things well throughout the year and in the end you will get your rewards
- ◆ Staffs have to be trained, and motivated with a clear vision and purpose
- ◆ They need to have a passion for customer empathy, for listening and questioning to understand the true issue even if the customer does not fully understand himself

comes in and I believe our greatest contribution can be made. By making sure we understand our customers business and processes,

which is carried out by an independent third party. It was particularly gratifying to see that our service and support received very



high marks showing that customers really appreciate the efforts we make to handle their queries quickly and professionally. This goes a long way to establishing

The travel business is becoming more and more complex as we seek to personalise our services which puts greater pressure on everyone involved to keep up to speed with everything that is on offer and to be able to make sense of it in a holistic way.

often through in-depth workshops with key managers and staff, we can tailor and package a solution to address the real problem. This is a complex and time consuming approach but the benefits can be truly transformational, allowing the customer to grow faster with lower cost whilst providing a better service to his customers. The medium and long term benefits vastly outweigh high incentives or discounts offered in the absence of a true solution.

Service is of course also very important. We recently received the results of our annual customer survey

credibility and support from the user community.

We also put a lot of effort in getting to know our customers better and helping them to keep abreast of industry trends. We held several such educational events in 2014 and towards year-end hosted 700 customers and booking agents at a gala awards dinner. Recently we held for the second time the Amadeus Cricket Tournament with 10 teams, 6 locally based and 4 foreign teams from Oman, Bahrain, Muscat and Pakistan. This was played at the Sheikh Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi and was extremely well received

by all the players and agency management. I believe the values of cricket such as sportsmanship, team spirit, competitiveness and professionalism fit well with our own values and hence is an excellent fit with our business as well as being a lot of fun.

In 2015 we plan many more product roadshows and focussed forums on key industry topics such as leisure, mobile and social media. We will seek to build on the approaches described above and continue with our philosophy of 'delivering what we promise'. Any company that does that consistently



Graham Nichols
Managing Director
Amadeus Gulf



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An answer to all your queries

Ajman Tourism Development Department (ATDD) discloses plans to establish Ajman Tourism Information Centre. It announced to establish the Emirate's first Tourism Information Centre in 2015.

TT BUREAU

Khulood Khaled Al Nuaimi, ATDD's Director of Tourism Development and Marketing informed, "The Center is to be set up on Ajman Corniche. It will include a reception area to reply all queries of visitors and offer all available tourism information about the Emirate."

"It will also include two counters for issuing licenses for tourism establishments and activities following the offi-



Students of Ajman University of Science & Technology with the Directors

cial Ajman Government working hours," she added.

ATDD invited the students of Engineering College

of Ajman University of Science and Technology to contest for a design for the new centre. During a ceremony at the University's Headquarter in Ajman's Jarf area, ATDD honoured the winners of the competition, in presence of Al Nuaimi, Dean of Engineering College, Professor Fahar Hayati and Head of the College, Interior Design Department Mohsen El Fadl. The event was also witnessed by members of ATDD's Marketing and

Promotion team, university staff and students.

Al Nuaimi said that the competition was initiated upon directives from ATDD Chairman **Sheikh Abdulaziz Bin Humaid Al Nuaimi** who believed in the talents of Engineering College students. Hayati welcomed the students, providing market experience who expressed eagerness to participate in ATDD future projects. 🏠

The Centre is to be set up on Ajman Corniche. It will include a reception area to reply all queries of visitors and offer all available tourism information about the Emirate

Khulood Khaled Al Nuaimi
ATDD's Director of Tourism Development and Marketing

Abu Dhabi hotels report 20% increase in guest nights

■ Top sales executives from The Ajman Palace Hotel will be present at SATTE travel show scheduled to take place in New Delhi, India, from January 29-31, 2015.




Ferghal Purcell
General Manager
The Ajman Palace Hotel

Ferghal Purcell, General Manager, The Ajman Palace Hotel, said, "SATTE is one of South Asia's leading travel shows that offers a fantastic platform to conduct business with over 12,000 travel trade professionals. This year marks the 21st edition of the show with more than 640 exhibitors taking part in the event from 35 countries as well as 23 Indian states. It provides us a fabulous opportunity to showcase our


products to the Indian market that is one of the key source markets for the UAE. Our aim is to increase our share of visitors from the country by primarily targeting leisure groups, families and women travellers, luxury seekers and wedding groups as well as MICE business. Destination weddings are extremely popular in India and have got outstanding facilities including the spectacular 'Al Saalah' Ballroom that is the largest in the Northern Emirates with a capacity of 700 guests. This makes us the most prestigious address for weddings and corporate events."




India is among the top 10 feeder markets for The Ajman Palace Hotel. In 2014, more than 8 per cent of hotel's total guests came from India. As the UAE experiences a surge in visitors from the country, this number is likely to go up. The property is also witnessing an increase in average length of stay of Indian guests.



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Al Futtaim's new car rental location

■ Thrifty Car Rental in Oman has announced the recent opening of its new car rental location in Muscat International Airport, capitalising on growing passenger numbers and marking a new direction for the brand in the Sultanate. The new location marks a significant step for the brand in Oman under new management, having recently been acquired by the Al Futtaim Group, marking the start of a stronger Thrifty presence in Oman. The new branch becomes Thrifty's main Oman location and Thrifty's 47th in the GCC among an extensive and growing global network. The new Thrifty Car Rental in Oman will be providing exceptional convenience, service and value at the main entry point to Oman for growing numbers of both business & leisure travellers. The total number of passengers recorded at Muscat International Airport at the end of August last year increased by 6.8 per cent compared to the same period in 2013.

Oman leads the competition

Oman has emerged as one of the top destinations among GCC travellers for short breaks. Registering a 17 per cent increase in the number of GCC citizens by the end of Q3 2014, Oman Ministry of Tourism in cooperation with Oman Air recently held a promotional event in Dubai.

TT BUREAU

According to the latest statistics by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, over 701,311 inbound tourists from the GCC visited the Sultanate until September 2014.

Moving forward to attract more tourists during the upcoming tourism season, the event aimed to reinforce the joint venture between both parties to promote Oman as the leading tourist destination.



Salem Adi Al Mamari
Director General of Tourism Promotion,
Oman Ministry of Tourism

The session included informative presentations on Oman's tourism infrastructure

and facilities along with the announcement of cost-effective holiday packages designed for GCC visitors, including luxury hotel stays and return tickets from Oman Air. The proactive measures

Salem Adi Al Mamari, Director General of Tourism Promotion, Oman Ministry of Tourism, informed, "Compared to other countries, Oman offers a wide range of variety in its geographical fea-

Oman Air passengers can now experience a new level of on-ground service with the airlines' front-end check-in facility exclusively for First Class and Business Class guests, besides Oman Air's Premium Lounges located at Muscat International Airport.

We have partnered with Oman Air to offer economical travel packages to attract potential travellers to see our country and remind the existing travellers to visit again



Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Muscat, Oman

undertaken by the Omani government to sustain the seamless expansion in the country's tourism sectors have complemented this growth. The country has witnessed a spurt in developing activities in its infrastructural facilities, including airports, roads and rail networks, and maritime sectors.

tures, making it an attractive destination for all-year-round tourism. Besides, ancient forts to most modern hotels, beaches to mountains, the Sultanate boasts of the world-class airports, wide network of highways, ports to make the travel smooth. We have partnered with Oman Air to offer economical travel packages to attract potential travellers to see our country and remind the existing travellers to visit again."

Stats speak

- ◆ Oman Ministry of Tourism registered a 17 per cent increase in the number of GCC citizens by the end of Q3 2014
- ◆ The tourism board, in cooperation with Oman Air, recently held a promotional event in Dubai
- ◆ According to the latest statistics by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, over 701,311 inbound tourists from the GCC visited the Sultanate until September 2014

GCC on Tourism Ireland's radar

Following continued year-on-year increase in the number of visitors from the Gulf region, GCC will remain a key part of Tourism Ireland's marketing plans for 2015. The tourism authority plans to promote Ireland in the region.

TT BUREAU

Recently published Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures confirmed growth of more than 9 per cent in over-

19 per cent in overseas holidaymakers to Northern Ireland, compared to 2013.

Tourism Ireland announced that Northern

East, Asia & South Africa for Tourism Ireland commented, "Following a very positive year regarding visitor statistics for the Gulf region in 2014, Tourism Ireland is keen to continue focusing on the GCC as a key market in 2015."

"Gulf visitors are known for their appreciation of natural landscapes and destinations like the Giant's Causeway have strong appeal for the region's travellers, providing perfect opportunities for adventure and exploration in 2015," added Burns.

Digital growth

- ◆ Tourism Ireland is now the fourth most popular tourism board in the world on Facebook, number three on Twitter and number two on YouTube.
- ◆ Major Northern Ireland themes and attractions in 2015 will be central to Tourism Ireland's marketing plans – including the Causeway Coastal Route, Titanic Belfast, the Giant's Causeway, National Trust properties.
- ◆ Tourism Ireland sets to welcome almost 1.9 million visitors to Northern Ireland in 2015, six per cent more than in 2014 and delivering an estimated £552 million to the Northern Irish economy next year.

Amanda Burns

General Manager - Middle East
Asia & South Africa for Tourism Ireland

seas visitors to Ireland for 2014, with Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) figures confirming a growth of more than

Ireland attracts 21 per cent of all visitors to the Ireland, keen to see rise in 2015. **Amanda Burns**, General Manager - Middle

Dubai to host global conference on the Future of Borders

Under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President of Dubai Civil Aviation Authority (DCAA), Chairman

present UAE's successful borders management experiment and its expertise in harnessing the latest technologies, smart gates, smart travel



of Dubai Airports and Chairman and Chief Executive of Emirates Airline and Group, Dubai will host an international conference on the 'Future of Borders' from March 11 to 12, at the Ritz Carlton Hotel, Dubai International Financial Centre. Major General Obaid Muhair bin Suroor, Deputy Director General, GDRFA-Dubai, said, "The conference provides an ideal platform to

solutions and biometric devices to accelerate and facilitate travel."

The conference's agenda is on sharing information, knowledge and best practices in managing borders control, the role of advanced technology and travel smart solutions and the importance of intensifying international cooperation among all the stakeholders in borders, travel and tourism domains.

dnata and Dubai – A good fellowship

The year 2014 was full of opportunities, milestones and a few challenges for dnata. It invested more than AED545 million to enhance its service offerings in travel, cargo, ground handling and catering.

TT BUREAU

In 2014, dnata became the UK's largest long-haul travel services provider, with the acquisitions of Gold Medal

Pakistan, airport runway upgrades in Dubai and increased economic pressures around the globe, dnata had to respond quickly, delivered high quality services.



Gary Chapman
President
dnata

In 2014, dnata continued to strengthen its business footprint, adding capacity and new complementary competencies which will pay dividends for both dnata and our customers

Travel Group and Stella Travel Services. The investments, made across the globe, also included new halal kitchens, enhanced cargo infrastructure in the UK, and continued investments for the company's operations in Dubai.

Challenges are also not far to seek - instability in Iraq, security threats in

"We faced several challenges last year and though our teams were tested, we have kept our focus to deliver to our customers," said Gary Chapman, President, dnata. "There will always be short term challenges for which we have to be responsive."

"In 2014, dnata continued to strengthen its business

footprint, adding capacity and new complementary competencies, which will pay dividends for both dnata and our customers," added Chapman. "We remain committed to innovation, while never compromising on safety and operational excellence. Safety and security remained top priorities for dnata," he said.

Interest from international airlines to fly to Dubai

remains high, as the world recognises the city's position as a key connector for global destinations.

Al Maktoum International airport at Dubai World Central (DWC) marked its first full year of passenger operations in 2014. During Dubai International airport's (DXB) 80-day runway upgrade from May to July, more than 300 flights a week used Al Maktoum International airport. dnata ensured the tight schedule ran smoothly at both the hubs, handling over 20.2 million passengers and 45,000 flights between the two airports over the period.

In addition, to the runway upgrades, dnata also worked closely with Dubai Airports and other stakeholders on other expansion work at DXB. In response

to customer demand, dnata also launched its Line Maintenance services at DXB and DWC. To support the continued growth of the tourism industry in the Emirate, dnata partnered with international sightseeing operator, City Sightseeing Worldwide to Dubai.

All About Fame

◆ In 2014, dnata became the UK's largest long-haul travel services provider, with the acquisitions of Gold Medal Travel Group and Stella Travel Services

◆ In addition, to the runway upgrades, dnata also worked closely with Dubai Airports and other stakeholders on other expansion work at DXB

7.36% jump in DDF sales in 2014

■ Dubai Duty Free ushered in the New Year by announcing record-breaking sales of Dhs6,999 billion (US\$ 1.917 billion) for 2014, representing a 7.36 per cent increase over the previous year. The sign that a remarkable year was coming to an end was evident in December 2014 when a new monthly sales record of Dhs749.13 million (US\$205.24 million) was set, representing a 7 per cent increase over last year's sales of Dhs700 million (US\$192 million). The December high was fuelled by Dubai Duty Free's 31st anniversary celebrations when the operation offered a 25 per cent discount across a wide range of merchandise from the December 18-20, which resulted in a shopping spree by passengers of Dhs188.86 million (US\$51.74 million) during the 72-hour period. Over the anniversary week-end, the cash registers recorded a total of 405,407 sales transactions with 205,485 sales transactions alone on the anniversary day itself, Dec 20.



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Lifestyle boutique hotel for GenX

Emaar Hospitality Group, recently opened doors to a lifestyle boutique hotel, Manzil Downtown, Dubai. The hotel is an ideal place for the new generation business executives, entrepreneurs and leisure travellers.



TT BUREAU

Located on Mohammed Bin Rashid Boulevard, known as 'The Centre of Now,' the 197-room Manzil Downtown Dubai is a haven that provides an imaginative interpretation of Arabian culture for Arab guests and a cultural experience for international visitors.

Philippe Zuber, Chief Operating Officer, Emaar Hospitality Group, informed, "Arabian hospitality serves as the fundamental growth driver of Dubai's tourism sector. With Manzil, born and bred in Dubai, we are integrating our region's cultural ethos



Delegates at an inaugural function of the hotel

with the convenience of modernity to offer distinctive value. Manzil Downtown Dubai stands apart across all touch-points – from design to décor and service standards, focus on engaging guests assuring

them authentic must-return lifestyle experiences."

"The addition of Manzil Downtown Dubai to the Vida Hotels and Resorts portfolio also reflects our goal of connecting with the new generation of global travellers, especially local Emirati and GCC guests, who are discerning in their preferences and cherish a fuss-free hospitality choice," he added. The Courtyard, a social destination, serves as a differentiating factor of Manzil

Downtown Dubai. It features Boulevard Kitchen, an all-day dining restaurant that serves food from across the Middle East.

Short for New Zealand, South Africa and Australia, Nezeaussi serves as the ultimate sports hub in Downtown Dubai, and serves food from the tri-nation countries. Fumé, a truly unique concept, offers uncomplicated, delicious food with an international twist, served in a unique vintage-style setting. 🍷

This addition to our portfolio also reflects our goal of connecting with the new generation of global travellers, especially local Emirati and GCC guests

Philippe Zuber

Chief Operating Officer, Emaar Hospitality Group

DAMAC rises in number

DAMAC Properties has opened its third luxury serviced hotel apartments, 'DAMAC Maison Cour Jardin' in the Burj Area of Dubai, managed by the company's hospitality arm, DAMAC Maison Hotels and Resorts



TT BUREAU

The official opening took place recently and was led by a special event for business partners of the travel and tourism industry who visited the project. They have received first-hand information about the various aspects, facilities and services offered at this new luxury property.

"DAMAC Properties is extending our hospitality offering regarding quantity and quality for the visitors of Dubai," confided **Niall McLoughlin**, Senior Vice President, DAMAC Properties. 'DAMAC Maison Cour Jardin, along with all DAMAC Maison projects, will offer various options to clients searching for the best experience in town, be it for leisure or business.'

Strategically located in the heart of the business, dining and shopping district of Dubai, this plush hotel is an ideal place for both business and leisure travellers alike.

DAMAC Maison Cour Jardin, along with all DAMAC Maison projects, will offer various options to clients searching for the best experience in town, be it for leisure or business

ter, especially during this very busy period as the festive season and the Dubai Shopping Festival around. It will generate a substantial increase in the number of

Niall McLoughlin
Senior Vice President, DAMAC Properties

Spreading across 19 floors, with more than 350 apartments, DAMAC Maison Cour Jardin offers stay in comfortable deluxe rooms.

"The opening of 'DAMAC Maison Cour Jardin' couldn't have been timed bet-

visitors coming to Dubai," he further informed.

One of the special features of DAMAC Maison Cour Jardin is the 'Chrysalis Spa', the second in town after the one launched at DAMAC Maison – Dubai

Mall Street. DAMAC Properties' hospitality portfolio will extend within the coming three years to reach around 10,000 units of hotel rooms, serviced hotel apartments and villas.

Luxury Talk

◆ 'DAMAC Maison Cour Jardin, along with all DAMAC Maison projects, will offer various options to clients searching for the best experience in town

◆ Strategically located in the heart of the business, dining and shopping district of Dubai, this plush hotel is an ideal place for both business and leisure travellers alike. Spreading across 19 floors, with more than 350 apartments

Katara Hospitality ahead of time

■ Katara Hospitality, the leading global hotel developer, owner and operator based in Qatar, has confirmed its global portfolio has grown to 30 hotels in operation or under development, achieving the company's long established goal of 30 properties by 2016 two years ahead of schedule. The achievement of this goal has been complemented by the accomplishment of major milestones in acquisitions,

investment and development during 2014. Over the past year, Katara Hospitality has added six international properties to its collection of iconic hotels. Katara Hospitality has also expanded its footprint into the London market this year with an investment in The Savoy, A FairmontManaged Hotel. The past year has also witnessed several important hotel openings for Katara Hospitality.

Jannah to open 30 hotels by 2020

■ Jannah Hotels and Resorts group is planning to open 30 new hotels by 2020 while its Burj Al Sarab by Jannah will be inaugurated in the first quarter of 2015, according to the group's VP Operations Abu Dhabi. **Richard Haddad** said the 18-floor Burj Al Sarab is located in Mina area and is one of the most luxuri-

ous hotels in the city. The hotel also includes royal suites comprising two and three bedrooms and has an area of up to 210 square metres each. It comprises 224 deluxe rooms, 66 junior suites, 22 executive suites four 3-bedroom penthouses, and two 2-bedroom penthouses.

Another feather in Air Arabia's cap

Air Arabia is all geared up to open a new international hub at Amman Queen Alia International Airport in Jordan, its fifth fixed-based operation globally, following the acquisition of a 49 per cent stake in Petra Airlines.

TT BUREAU

The deal will see the existing principle shareholder of Petra Airlines, RUM Group maintain a 51 per cent stake. The new partnership will also lead to the creation of Air Arabia, Jordan. Following the

ness model serving as Air Arabia's fifth hub in the Arab world. Air Arabia Jordan will provide direct service to a range of destinations across the Europe, Middle East and North Africa region from Queen Alia International Airport.

Partnering with an established airline like Petra Airlines provides this agreement with an advantageous position in terms of operational and commercial support, which will enable Air Arabia Jordan to reach its full potential

Sheikh Abdullah Bin Mohammad Al Thani
Chairman of Air Arabia

acquisition, Air Arabia Jordan's operation is expected to commence in the first quarter of 2015. The newly established carrier, managed by Air Arabia, will follow the carrier's busi-

"Partnering with an established airline like Petra Airlines provides this agreement with an advantageous position in terms of operational and commercial support, which will enable Air



Delegates at the press conference

Arabia Jordan to reach its full potential in a shorter time span. We thank the local authorities and the Jordanian Ministry of Transport for granting all the support to launch this new project," said **Sheikh Abdullah Bin Mohammad Al Thani**, Chairman of Air Arabia. The establishment of a new hub in Jordan extends Air Arabia's operational foot-

print into the heart of the Levant and brings us a step

closer to achieving our stated goal of connecting the

How this partnership works

- RUM Group, principal shareholder of Petra Airlines, partners with UAE-based low-cost carrier
- Move follows acquisition of 49 per cent stake in Petra Airlines, which will be re-launched as 'Air Arabia Jordan'
- Located at Amman Queen Alia International Airport, 'Air Arabia Jordan' to serve Europe, Middle East and North Africa markets

platform for growth through direct contributions to the local economy".

Riad Khashman, Chairman of RUM Group and Petra Airlines, said, "Our partnership with Air Arabia represents an important next phase in the progression of Petra Airlines and will be the catalyst for a new era of growth for the low cost aviation sector in Jordan and the wider Levant region. Alongside offering greatly increased flexibility for passengers, Air Arabia Jordan will also be an important contributor to the local economy through the creation of skilled jobs and by increasing the number of leisure and business travellers visiting Jordan. We look forward to launching Air Arabia Jordan operations in the coming months."

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Emirates launches second daily Airbus A380

Emirates has announced that as of February 1, 2015, its EK019/020 service between Dubai International Airport and Manchester Airport, currently operated by a Boeing 777, will be replaced with an Airbus A380. The introduction of the second daily A380 means that half of



Emirates' 16 daily flights to the UK will be operated by an A380 from February. The second daily A380 will increase Emirates' capacity from Manchester by 13 per cent, with over 20 per cent of this increase in the premium cabins. Emirates flight EK019 will depart from Dubai International Airport at 1435hrs and arrive in Manchester at 1835hrs. The outbound flight, EK020, will depart from Manchester Airport at 2025hrs and arrive in Dubai at 0740hrs.

Gassim, Taif in Gulf Air's kitty

Gulf Air has announced further growth of its network in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia flying to two new destinations – Gassim and Taif, making the total number of Saudi Arabian cities serviced by the airline to 6. Services to Gassim and Taif have begun from Jan 10, with 4 flights to each city every week.



TT BUREAU

Announcing the new destinations, **Maher Salman Al Musallam**, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Gulf Air mentioned, "Bahrain's rela-

important market for us and the launch of services to Gassim and Taif, supplementing our Dammam, Jeddah, Riyadh and Medina operations, further demonstrates our commitment to connecting

In response to growing demand Gulf Air has also increased its direct services between Bahrain and Muscat with an additional 4 weekly flights. The new schedule has started from Jan 20, 2015.

We are pleased to announce the four additional frequencies between Bahrain and Muscat, further strengthening our position as one of the largest regional networks, providing convenient schedules and enhanced connectivity

Ahmed Janahi

Gulf Air's Acting Chief Commercial Officer

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an important market for us and the launch of services to Gassim and Taif, supplementing our Dammam, Jeddah, Riyadh and Medina operations, further demonstrates our commitment to connecting people to various destinations

Maher Salman Al Musallam
Acting Chief Executive Officer, Gulf Air

tionship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a long-standing one and our national carrier's ties to our neighbour date back to our maiden service to Dhahran in 1950. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an

people to various destinations across Gulf Air's network. I extend my warmest thank to the Saudi authorities for facilitating this new development that will be well-received by the travellers."

The additional flights will enhance connectivity for Oman-based travellers to the rest of the Gulf, Middle East, India and beyond via Bahrain facilitating same-day travel between the two countries with the new flight timings.

Commenting on the enhanced flight schedule, Gulf Air's Acting Chief Commercial Officer, **Ahmed Janahi** said, "We are pleased to announce the four additional frequencies between Bahrain and Muscat, further strengthening our position as one of the

largest regional networks, providing convenient schedules and enhanced connectivity."

Flights to Muscat have increased from 21 to 25 weekly flights, adding 4 weekly flights on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays departing from Bahrain International Airport at 09:00, arriving Muscat International Airport at 11:30 and departing Muscat at 12:15 to arrive Bahrain International Airport at 12:50.

Strengthening Position

- ◆ In response to growing demand Gulf Air has also increased its direct services between Bahrain and Muscat with an additional 4 weekly flights
- ◆ Flights to Muscat have increased from 21 to 25 weekly flights, adding 4 weekly flights on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays

US preclearance at Abu Dhabi Airport

Air travellers on all Etihad Airways flights to the United States can now experience the benefits of arriving in the US having precleared US Customs and Border Protection at Abu Dhabi Airport.



TT BUREAU

Now, US preclearance opens for the early morning EY103 to New York JFK and EY183 to San

Francisco flights, both of which conveniently connect with inbound services from Mumbai, Delhi and other cities in India and the Indian Subcontinent.



Peter Baumgartner
Chief Commercial Officer
Etihad Airways

The new early morning US preclearance operation complements the mid-morning one, which caters to Etihad Airways passengers on flights to Chicago, Dallas-Fort Worth, Los Angeles, New York JFK, and Washington, D.C., who all proceed through the facility.

Peter Baumgartner, Chief Commercial Officer, Etihad Airways said, "We're delighted that all air travellers

flying to the United States from Abu Dhabi will now enjoy the benefits that US customs and immigration preclearance offers. Since its opening in January last year, the US preclearance has been extremely

tunity to pass through all required checks including US customs, immigration and security conveniently while in Abu Dhabi before they board their flight to the US, enabling

We're delighted that all air travellers flying to the United States from Abu Dhabi will now enjoy the benefits that US customs and immigration preclearance offers

popular with air travellers, particularly those from the Indian Subcontinent and Middle East region. More than 325,000 people have passed through the facility, arriving in the United States as domestic passengers."

The preclearance process provides passengers with the unique oppor-

them to avoid queues on arrival. Another key benefit of US preclearance is that baggage security screening meets United States TSA security standards, allowing air travellers who connect onto a US domestic flight to have their baggage checked through from Abu Dhabi to their final destination. ✈️

MoU for knowledge exchange

Air Arabia and Bee'ah, the Sharjah Environment Co., the Middle East's leading and award-winning fully integrated environmental and waste management company, on Jan 10 announced the signing of a Memorandum of



Understanding. The MoU will have Air Arabia and Bee'ah collaborate and share knowledge and expertise in a number of key areas relating to both commercial activities and corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects. As part of its dedication to the environment, Air Arabia will work with Bee'ah to enhance its green credentials, augmenting its programme of recycling and waste disposal. It is anticipated that the MoU will encourage sustainable environmental practices in order to help engender a more prosperous and greener Sharjah.

First-of-its-kind

- US preclearance at Abu Dhabi Airport is the only one of its kind in the Middle East
- The United Arab Emirates' capital is one of a small group of airports around the world to offer passengers preclearance into the US
- During its first 12 months of operation, the US preclearance in Abu Dhabi has improved the passenger experience through the introduction of automated passport control (APC) kiosks and greater numbers of officer processing desks.
- The self-service APC kiosks expedite the US entry process for American, Canadian, and eligible visa waiver program (VWP) for international travellers, by providing an automated process through US preclearance's primary inspection area.



Now 'satellite route' for Air India Express

As part of Air India Express strategy to commission more number of outlets to reach out to valued clients in UAE, the airline opened on Jan 18, 2015, a new dedicated satellite office located at Al Aruba Street, Sharjah.

SUSMITA GHOSH

The new satellite office in Sharjah, which is aimed at enhancing service levels, is equipped to cater all reserva-

missions in other parts in the near future.

The airline is also in the process of developing online UAE visa service facilities for

from UAE connecting to 9 cities in India. In the Summer' 15 Schedule, we have planned to restructure the 4 times weekly round-robin operations on the Mangalore-Muscat-Abu Dhabi-Mangalore into terminator services. In summer schedule 2015, the airlines' passengers will have non-stop flights between Abu Dhabi- Mangalore and Muscat- Mangalore and vice versa. The flights from Abu Dhabi to Mangalore operating on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday will depart Abu Dhabi at 2.20 AM and reach Mangalore at 7.35 AM," informed **K. Shyam Sundar**, Chief Executive Office, Air India Express.

million by the close of this fiscal year.

"UAE is a major market for us, accounting for about 60 per cent of our capacity and revenues. The airline has

maintaining the high degree of punctuality and reliability of services achieved in the current year," he further stated.

Air India Express plans to increase its fleet size from



K. Shyam Sundar
Chief Executive Office
Air India Express



Opening of the new satellite office

tions and ticketing requirements including sale of ancillary services on Air India Express services. More such offices are planned to be com-

customers. This online service is expected to launch shortly.

"Presently, we operate over 100 flights every week

With a fleet size of 17 aircraft, Air India Express has carried about 2 million passengers in the current financial year till Dec 2014. It is projected that passenger carriage will touch 2.6



K Shyam Sundar addressing the press

achieved load factor of close to 85 per cent on the services to UAE. We are thankful to our esteemed clients especially to the expatriate Indian community in UAE who have helped us in achieving high occupancy factors. AIE is committed in

the current 17 aircraft to 20 in early 2016. The process of leasing these three aircraft has been finalised to induct them during the summer schedule of 2016. In addition, five more aircraft will be added in 2016.

UAE is a major market for us, accounting for about 60 per cent of our capacity and revenues. The airline has achieved load factor of close to 85 per cent

Najran & Dubai connected

flydubai's inaugural flight on Jan 10, 2015 to Najran, one of Saudi Arabia's most culturally and historically diversified centres, marks the start of the first direct link between the region and Dubai.

TT BUREAU

Flight FZ817 departs Dubai at 3.25pm and arrives at Najran Airport at 5.30pm local time. The return flight departs Najran at 6.40pm and arrives at Dubai International at 10.30pm local time.

"The launch and growth of flydubai has been significant in helping Dubai to



Issam Kazim
Chief Executive Officer
Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing

Executive Officer of the Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing.

Passengers from Najran will now be able to travel directly to Dubai while UAE residents will have the opportunity to explore a region rich in local historical heritage, traditions and environmental diversity.

Najran Airport welcomed flydubai's first flight. The Saudi Authorities efforts towards developing domestic airports in the Kingdom have resulted in having modern facilities like Najran Airport available for its citizens. These direct flights will not only enhance trade and tourism flows between the two cities, but enable the people of Najran to travel anywhere in the world via Dubai.

We are delighted that flydubai has launched this new route, connecting Dubai to Najran city directly for the first time. Saudi Arabia is consistently our top source market

achieve its year-on-year growth when it comes to visitors' figures. We are delighted that flydubai has launched this new route, connecting Dubai

to Najran city directly for the first time. Saudi Arabia is consistently our top source market for the visitors to Dubai," asserted **Issam Kazim**, Chief

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Meetings market makes the most in GCC

According to a study by management consultancy, Strategy &, formerly Booz & Company, GCC countries are in an outstanding position to become a global meetings hub. The contributing factors are growing trade activity, central geographical location and increasing status as prospecting spots for business travellers.



TT BUREAU

The 'Strategy &' study identifies the meetings sector as one of the most lucrative niches within the tourism industry. Since business people who travel to a country to attend a trade show or conference tend to spend far more than other travellers, a country that positions itself as a good place for large-scale meetings, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) can attract a high volume of foreign business visitors.

The study reveals that presently, only about 5 per cent of travellers in any given year, fall into the MICE cate-

gory, also known as meetings tourism market. MICE tourists account for about US\$11 of every US\$100 that tourists spend an excessively high figure compared to the 5 per cent of tourist arrivals they represent. The study highlights the steady progress that GCC has made as a destination for business travel. Total business-tourist arrivals reached around 10 million in 2012, representing 5 per cent annual growth from 2009. The proportion of business tourists as a whole is higher, probably closer to one-third of all tourist arrivals. This validates the fact that business travellers in the GCC represent a unusually high percentage of total tourist



Dubai World Trade Centre

arrivals compared to the rest of the world.

Richard Shediak,
Senior Partner with Strategy

&, informed, "Despite the potential of the meetings market, most emerging economies have not developed a good understanding of this part of the tourism industry, nor do they have a well-considered strategy for getting a larger share of the pie. These gaps have contributed to a situation in which emerging markets like GCC lag far behind the west in terms of MICE market share. Only about 2 per cent of all the exhibitions in the world take place in the Middle East and only about 4 per cent take place in South America. By contrast, Europe and North

Only about 2% of all the exhibitions in the world take place in the ME and only about 4% take place in South America. By contrast, Europe and North America, combined, are home to more than 80% of the world's exhibitions, according to the most recent data

Richard Shediak
Senior Partner with Strategy &

Understanding the MICE Tourism ecosystem

According to the study, for GCC countries to tap into opportunities in the meetings market, it is important for government and policy makers to have a clear understanding of the MICE tourism ecosystem, which comprises four parts.

The first is the basic set of MICE products and a clear economic strength that is likely to attract MICE tourists to a country. MICE tourism tends to be often correlated with the level of trade in a country and built around a country's trade and economic activities. The second consists of MICE services, both core and ancillary. Core services consist mainly of

intermediaries such as professional congress organisers (PCOs) - firms that arrange meetings for international associations and destination management companies (DMCs) that bid for meetings, plan events and handle on-site logistics. The third is composed of the MICE sector-enablers, which refer to a variety of different factors involving planning, marketing, sales and research.

The ecosystem's fourth element is system enablers which refer to a nation's handling of security, health and safety, environmental sustainability and infrastructure.

GCC's MICE strengths

Antoine Nasr, Principal at Strategy &, said: "Among the GCC countries, the UAE is seen to have the most robust MICE business. The country has transformed itself into the region's most important travel hub and this is evident with the Dubai international airport recently surpassing Heathrow as the world's busiest airport. The UAE also provides an increasing range and quality of leisure offerings which has enhanced the country's popularity as a place for meetings." GCC countries have five major competitive advantages as MICE destinations like - central geographic location, considerable trade activity and expanding economic and corporate bases, stable political systems, a host of emerging ancillary services (such as restored ancient sites and rapidly improving museums) and new and technologically advanced meeting facilities that can host sizeable gatherings.

Among the GCC countries, the UAE is seen to have the most robust MICE business. The country has transformed itself into the region's most important travel hub and this is evident with the Dubai international airport recently surpassing Heathrow as the world's busiest airport

Antoine Nasr
Principal at Strategy &

Roadblocks to GCC's emergence as a meeting hub

The study outlines a few challenges that are hindering the GCC's ability to emerge as a meetings destination. These include - a higher concentration of MICE tourists from other GCC countries which limit the possibility of longer stays, a limited market for congresses (the exchanges of ideas organised by international associations) due to inadequate local participation in such associations, lack of unconventional venues, lack of internationally active intermediaries like the PCOs and DMCs and poor public transportation systems which impacts accessibility to the venues. Most GCC countries do not provide ancillary leisure products with the exception of UAE and Oman.

Capturing MICE market share

Many of the challenges are amenable to policy changes and may disappear in the face of better practices. Hence, it is important to use a structured approach to allow the GCC to develop the great potential of its meetings tourism business and win a greater share of the meetings market. The study suggests the use of a three-step approach - assessing the MICE tourism ecosystem, forging a strategy to win more MICE business and developing a governance model for MICE tourism efforts.



Schengen Visas@VFS Global in Abu Dhabi, Dubai

People willing to apply for Schengen visas to Sweden can now carry out this at two new centres managed by VFS Global – one in Abu Dhabi and one in Dubai. The Embassy of Sweden in Abu Dhabi has outsourced its visa application process to VFS Global.



While VFS Global will accept visa applications, the Embassy will continue to make the assessment and decisions regarding all visas.

The new visa application centres are located at Wafi Mall in Dubai and Shining Tower in Abu Dhabi. The Ambassador of Sweden to the UAE, Jan Thesleff, along with

Ajit Alexander, COO - Middle East and Africa, VFS Global, on January 14 inaugurated the Sweden Visa Application Centre in Dubai. This was followed by a launch of Visa operations in Abu Dhabi on Jan 15, 2015.

While inaugurating the centre, Ambassador Jan Thesleff expressed, "I am delighted to offer a substantially increased service-level for Sweden visa applicants.



Jan Thesleff, Ambassador, Sweden Visa Application Centre and Ajit Alexander, COO Middle East and Africa, VFS Global at the ribbon cutting ceremony

VFS Global has presence both in Abu Dhabi and in Dubai and as visa applicants can turn to them to apply, we are getting closer to our customers and hopefully also

shortening handling times. VFS Global handles applications for Sweden visa applicants in many places around the world and I am confident that doing so in the UAE will

The centre in Dubai will accept applications for visas to Sweden from applicants and travel agents residing in the UAE. The service would attract a nominal service fee, payable at the Centre at the time of submitting applications.

The key features of the Centre facility include –

- ▶ Priority facilitation for disabled, senior applicants and pregnant women
- ▶ Professional and responsive staff with local language capability dedicated to handle visa queries and applications
- ▶ Automated queue governance for smooth flow of applicants, providing better crowd management
- ▶ Dedicated website for easy access to information including visa categories, requirements, check-list and applicable fees
- ▶ Call centres and email support to answer queries and status of application
- ▶ SMS alerts for visa status update
- ▶ Door-step delivery of passports
- ▶ Visa enquiry desks in English and Arabic

further increase our exchange with this important country."

This launch will offer a convenient visa application submission experience to the residents in the country. VFS Global started

operations for the Government of Sweden in 2008, and now serves the client in 23 countries from 58 Visa Application Centers globally," confided Ajit Alexander, COO Middle East and Africa, VFS Global.

VFS Global has presence both in Abu Dhabi and in Dubai and as visa applicants can turn to them to apply, we are getting closer to our customers and hopefully also shortening handling times

Jan Thesleff

Ambassador, Sweden Visa Application Centres



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UAE Coach Tour with Cozmo

Cozmo Travel's latest product offerings are the 'Fixed Departures' – guest oriented tour packages and 'Beyond the Classroom' – educational packages. It's the first travel management company in the UAE, which help guests to book complete tour online through their web portal and also 'UAE Coach tour' help travellers explore Sharjah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, RAK and Al Ain in luxury coaches...

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'UAE Coach tour' package includes 7 night accommodation at 4 star hotels, breakfast, transfers and English speaking tour guide. Cozmo Travel has been appointed as the Preferred Sales Agent (PSA) for Costa Cruises in UAE, KSA, Qatar Bahrain and Kuwait.

As part of 'fixed departure' package Cozmo Travel offers more than 30 group tour products to Europe, South East Asia, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and America. The guests can choose specially designed, an all inclusive packages including airfare, all taxes, travel insurance, visa hotel accommodations, meals, tour transfers and more.

"We have seen tremendous potential by negotiating



Jamal Abdunazar, General Manager, Cozmo Travel (3rd from left) with his team

with the airlines, securing rate inventories from hotels and other land players at the beginning of the year for rest of the season especially for the peaks. We have kept our margins reasonable and focus more on volumes," explained **Jamal**

Abdunazar, General Manager, Cozmo Travel.

"Our guests also have an option to pay in installments using their Credit Cards. As an introductory offer Cozmo Travel has a 'Book Now with AED 500 and pay

later' for its first 100 guests. Our inbound fixed departures have already brought in close to 4000 travellers to the UAE in 3 months," he added.

Besides 'fixed departures,' Cozmo has also introduced 'Beyond the

Classroom' an exclusive affordable educational package aiming not only schools in UAE but anywhere in Middle East keeping in mind today's holistic approach in

encing and exploring, 'Beyond the Classroom.'

"We are definitely looking at the business growth of 30 per cent in next 3 years

We are definitely looking at the business growth of 30 per cent in next 3 years and more thereafter. Looking ahead to work with India and beyond in near future

Jamal Abdunazar
General Manager, Cozmo Travel

education to develop students. They have handpicked destination rich in culture, heritage, adventure architecture history nature and wildlife providing students with the opportunity to see feel and learn. A unique opportunity where learning begins while experi-

and more thereafter. Looking ahead to work with India and beyond in near future," confided Jamal. In addition Cozmo Travel has become an 'Austrian Certified Travel Specialist' certified by Austrian National Tourist Office providing attractive packages to different parts of Austria. 🇦🇹

KTB & KA partner for a training programme

Kenya Tourism Board and Kenya Airways jointly officially launched the new travel agents online training program held in Dubai and Abu Dhabi designed specifically for the Middle East market.

TT BUREAU

The program is formed of 5 unique modules each pro-



Fatma Bashir
Regional Marketing Manager GCC region for Kenya Tourism Board

viding the travel agents with an in-depth look at the wide variety of tourism products available throughout Magical Kenya. The program will train agents on many key aspects of Kenya's tourism industry from visa information to various national parks and other aspects of Kenya that are not as well-known across the region. It includes the diving available of the coast and the various UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Speaking at travel trade networking events held in



Glimpses from the launch of Agents Online Training Programme held in Dubai



We have launched our online training program to help remind trade of the beauty of Magical Kenya

Fatma Bashir
Regional Marketing Manager GCC region for Kenya Tourism Board

Dubai and Abu Dhabi hosted jointly by Kenya Tourism Board and Kenya Airways, **Fatma Bashir**, Regional Marketing Manager GCC region for Kenya Tourism Board expressed, "We have launched our online training program to help remind trade

Training Agents

◆ The program will train agents on key aspects of Kenya's tourism industry from visa information to various national parks and lesser known aspects of Kenya

of the beauty of Magical Kenya. Many people have a broad idea of the destination and focus mainly on the safari product. But through this training program, we hope to show a whole new side of Kenya to the travel trade in the region,

from world class beaches to the second highest peak in Africa."

Agents who register and complete the course will receive preferential selection on future FAM trips carried out by Kenya Tourism Board. 🇰🇪

Be a globejetter with sMiles Credit Card

Mashreq sMiles Credit Card – the first miles card in the UAE is set to change the rules of travel forever. It offers the fastest, easiest and simplest way to earn free flights, hotel stays and holiday packages around the world.

TT BUREAU

Mashreq, the UAE's banking institution, launched the first miles card that allows customers to fly for free, instantly, with over 300 airlines including all domestic carriers of the UAE.

Mashreq sMiles is free-for-life, helps earn miles from the very first Dirham - no tiers, no caps, no thresholds, no complicated calculations. The new card is designed specifically to meet the travel needs of the large expatriate population in the UAE. Speaking on the occasion, **Farhad Dhun Irani**, Head of Retail Banking Group at Mashreq, informed, "At Mashreq, we pride ourselves on offering products and solutions that are innovative, relevant and set new standards in customer experience. The new Mashreq



The launching of Mashreq sMiles Credit Card

sMiles Credit Card hits the bull-eye on all counts – customer value, convenience and choice and is one more example of how we make things possible."

Cardholders also get a guaranteed give-back of 1.25 per cent on every domestic purchase and

3.25 per cent on all international spends and have the flexibility to instantly redeem accumulated sMiles for free air tickets for anyone (self, friends and family), from anywhere (not just for flights originating from the UAE) and at anytime (no black-out dates), with over 300 airlines.

sMiles can also be redeemed for hotel stays at more than 180,000 properties across the globe, holiday packages to exotic destinations and a host of ancillary services like car rentals, Marhaba 'Meet & Greet' and visa assistance.

Nimish Dwivedi, Head of Payments at

a memorable experience. Our new card democratises air travel by doing away with entry barriers, making it so simple to get that free flight. In a market where the typical travel card is either co-branded with a specific airline, has a high fee, strict eligibility criteria or very limited redemption options, Mashreq sMiles literally brings smile on your face and Miles in your pocket." In 2014, Mashreq has

With zero annual fees, it's a simple yet powerful 'what you see is what you get' proposition and a redemption experience

Nimish Dwivedi
Head of Payments at Mashreq

Mashreq, emphasised, "With zero annual fees, it's a simple yet powerful "what you see is what you get" proposition and

launched a new corporate identity that builds on its history of innovation and illustrates to the wider world. 🌟

Banana Island Resort Doha by Anantara in Qatar

■ Kick-starting 2015, Banana Island Resort Doha by Anantara's first property was opened in Qatar.

Located 20 minutes by luxury ferry off the coast, Banana Island Resort Doha by Anantara is stunning – from the Maldivian-style over water villas to the magnificent wellness centre. The facilities for families are out of this world – from ten pin bowling, a huge soft play jungle gym, a luxury gold class cinema to the surf pool which is the first and only in Qatar with a professional surf instructor from the Maldives, and the nine hole golf putting course nestled in lush green tropical gardens. Special touches include the oxygen garden and hydro pool at the wellness centre, an 18 carat gold manicure at Anantara Spa, an expensive shisha pipes and the 1kg hamburger at the American-style diner Ted's.

Airbus launches A321neo

At the 2014 Farnborough Airshow, the Los Angeles based lessor signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for 30 more A321neo, from 60 to 90, becoming the launch customer for Airbus' increased ranges option.

TT BUREAU

Airbus has officially launched the A321neo with 97 tonnes Maximum Take Off Weight (MTOW) having secured the first commitment from Air Lease Corporation (ALC).

Making it ideally suited to transatlantic routes, the A321neo 97t will have



John Leahy
Airbus Chief Operating Officer
Customers

option with ALC," expressed John Leahy, Airbus Chief Operating Officer, Customers. "ALC, once again demonstrated its confidence in Airbus' latest innovations just six months after being a launch customer for the A330neo."

"The longer haul single aisle market is a lucrative one that the A321neo will now dominate, thanks to the aircraft's superior comfort and range. This new version of the A321neo is a high revenue generating aircraft which will open up many new opportunities for our customers," he added. Under the assumption that ALC's MoUs for 30 A321neo aircraft plus 25 A330neo Family become firm orders, ALC's total orders for Airbus aircraft would stand at 258. 🌟

accessible with current single aisle aircraft.

"We are delighted to officially launch the A321neo 97t

4,000nm, the longest range of any single aisle airliner available. It will allow airlines to tap into new long haul markets which were not previously

ALC, once again demonstrated its confidence in Airbus' latest innovations just six months after being a launch customer for the A330neo

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Amadeus bats for tourism



Amadeus held Cricket Tournament for the second time with 10 teams, 6 locally based and 4 foreign teams from Oman, Bahrain, Muscat and Pakistan. This was played at the Sheikh Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi and was well received by all the players and agency management.



Investment cell for Make in India queries

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) has recently launched a web portal, 'Make in India' and the officers from various Ministries have been nominated as Nodal Officers.

TT BUREAU

Invest India is the national investment promotion and facilitation agency for India. It acts as the first point of reference for foreign investors, handholding them through the pre-investment phase, execution and after care phases.

The objective of the Investment cell is to handle 'Make in India' queries as well as attract FDI to India. The Ministry of Tourism has also set up an Investment Cell to

India Cell-ing Design

- ◆ eVoA is a hassle free scheme
- ◆ A tourist sitting at home can upload his image, first page of the Passport and through his credit or debit card, can pay online visa fees of US\$60
- ◆ The confirmation of visa approval reaches them in 72 hours
- ◆ Lot of interest is generated as India has a very close proximity with the Gulf region



IRV Rao
Assistant Director
India Tourism, Dubai

coordinate queries related to tourism sector. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has launched 'Tourist

Visa on Arrival' on Nov 27, 2014 enabled by Electronic Travel Authorisation' (ETA). Its applicable only for the ordinary Passport holders for the

the nature of activities executed after the announcement, IRV Rao, Assistant Director, India Tourism, Dubai expressed, "In association

tations to reach the travel agents for rest of the Emirates, help create awareness about these facilities among them."

India Tourism Dubai has organised presentations to reach the travel agents for rest of the Emirates. This helps create awareness about these facilities among them

This is a hassle free scheme. A tourist sitting at home can upload his image, first page of the Passport and through his credit or debit card, can pay online visa fees of US\$60. The confirmation of visa approval reaches them in 72 hours. Lot of interest is generated as India has a very close proximity with the Gulf region. 🇮🇳

nationalities of 43 countries in the world. UAE, Oman and Jordan are the ones from the Middle East. Discussing on

with Indian missions in UAE, Oman and Jordan and now with Air India, India Tourism Dubai has organised presen-



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*Terms & conditions apply

'Beyond the gateway' experiences

To suit every interest, the United States is a diverse country with thrilling adventures and delightful locations. Tourism in the United States is a large industry that serves millions of international and domestic tourists every year.



SUSMITA GHOSH IN USA

"In doing so, we introduce travellers to different parts of the US that they may have never known existed. By making travellers aware of these 'Beyond the gateway' experiences, we introduce entirely new leisure products and invite the world to rediscover USA," updated **Jay Gray**, Brand USA's Vice President, Global Partnership Development.

New York City is by far the number-one destination in the US for the travellers from the Middle East with nearly 5 out of 10 Middle Eastern travellers to the US making NYC stop on their itineraries.

A large and diverse predominantly is the leisure market with an average share for business. This relatively high percentage is largely driven by a significant share of



US and ME

Lot of travel agents and the tour operators in the market are interested to get information about the country, but they also need proper education and awareness. While discussing about the future plans, Gray expressed. "We are interested to roll out online training programme, education awareness for the travel trade, help learn more about US and the strategies of selling their products. Roadshows, familiarisation trips clubbing up East and West coast – all are included in the pipeline."

Brand USA is currently developing several cooperative and marketing initiatives and strategies. Focussing on educational program for the traditional travel trade the organisation has planned online training program like USA discovery program in Q3 2015 designed as one under 2015 expansion plans establishing a physical footing by opening a representative office in UAE.

The Middle East continues to be an important and growing market for US, observing traffic growth of 14 per cent in 2013 and 17 per cent in 2014. In the last seven years, the number of visitors from this region has almost doubled, with leisure travel outpacing business travel. These tend to be high-spend travels with shopping and fine dining as some of their top activities.



Jay Gray
Brand USA's Vice President
Global Partnership Development

By 'Beyond the gateway' experiences, we invite the world to rediscover USA

Middle East professionals /managers and convention goers.

Makiko Matsuda Healy, Vice President Tourism Development, NYC & Company is confident about the awareness created more of late. "The knowledge about US product is gaining gradually, hence observed an increase of 6 per cent travellers graph from the region in 2014 over 2013, foreseeing more in 2015," she elucidated.

NYC is the patchwork of 5 different boroughs and each one has distinctive characteristics. NYC & Company has plans to create vig-



Makiko Matsuda Healy
Vice President Tourism
Development, NYC & Company

We have observed an increase of 6% travellers graph from the region in 2014, foreseeing more in 2015

orous awareness through media and travel agents FAM trips besides various marketing strategies. NYC is Muslim travelers' family friendly destination opting for proper food requisites and prayer options. It's a diverse and optimistic place where travelers visit no matter from where they come from, become a part of the culture.

While enquiring as regards Middle East travellers' if they term Delta Airlines as the seamless gateway to US, as it offers more than 15,000 daily flights worldwide, **Manoj Kuriakose**, Commercial Director, Middle East, Delta Airlines



Manoj Kuriakose
Commercial Director
Middle East, Delta Airlines

We offer connections to more than 230 cities in North America, Latin America and the Caribbean

informed, "We offer Middle East travelers connections from Dubai through our Atlanta hub to more than 230 cities in North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. The overnight timing of Dubai to Atlanta service enables customers to take advantage of the unspoiled connectivity through Atlanta. Moreover, trans-Atlantic joint venture with Air France-KLM and Alitalia facilitates Delta customers travelling to and from the Middle East the benefit of connecting via Amsterdam, Paris and Rome to additional US cities, including New York, Cincinnati, Detroit, Minneapolis, Los Angeles & Salt Lake City."

- ◆ The Middle East continues to be an important and growing market for US, observing traffic growth of 14% in 2013 and 17% in 2014
- ◆ In the last seven years, the number of visitors from this region has almost doubled, with leisure travel outpacing business travel. These tend to be high-spend travels with shopping and fine dining as some of their top activities.
- ◆ New York City is by far the number-one destination in the US for the travellers from the Middle East with nearly 5 out of 10 Middle Eastern travellers to the US making NYC stop on their itineraries.
- ◆ A large and diverse predominantly is the leisure market with an average share for business. This relatively high percentage is largely driven by a significant share of Middle East professionals/managers and convention goers. Patterns do vary between hotel guests and an important segment



Photo Credit: Fashion Island

Standards set with TIME

The year 2015 had been an active year for the flagship brand of TIME with its continued expansion plans. The new five-star hotel in the Wafi, Healthcare City, Dubai, TIME Royal Hotel intends to move closer to 14 hotels by 2016.

TT BUREAU

TIME Hotels & Resorts ensures high standards across every facet of the guest experience. TIME Hotel Apartments deliver a cost-efficient accommodation solution, which is a home-away-from home. The properties in UAE include TIME Oak Hotel & Suites and TIME Grand Plaza Hotel and four hotel apartments as the Opal, Topaz and Crystal Hotel Apartments in Dubai and the Ruby Hotel Apartments in Sharjah.

TIME also has a new business property under development in Doha, Qatar



Ghassan Farhat
Hotel Manager
TIME Hotel Apartments

and the pipeline of hotels includes Wafi, Dubai, UAE - TIME Royal Hotel (2016), Luxor, Egypt - TIME TUT Hotel (2015), Doha, Qatar - TIME Warka Hotel (2015) and Abu Dhabi - Jouhara Residence (Q1 2016).

Discussing on the business scenario, **Ghassan Farhat**, Hotel Manager, TIME Hotel Apartments informed, "Demands are always more due to the significant location

from Italy, US, Europe and some from GCC."

"Apart from our participation in all the international events like ITB Berlin, ATM,

Demands are always more due to the significant location of the three hotel apartments and hence observed an increase of 7 per cent business in 2014 over 2013 and expect more in 2015

of the three hotel apartments and hence observed an increase of 7 per cent business in 2014 over 2013 and expect more in 2015. The guests, preferably long term business travellers, pour in

WTM, we take part in most of the GCC roadshows in collaboration with Dubai Tourism. We invite all our travel partners and the loyal bookers once in a year and in appreciation of their support," he added.

Now a Snapchat portal to tap global travellers

W Doha Hotel & Residences recently launched a SnapChat account to reach global travellers and the local community with engaging content. The hotel is not only the first business in Qatar to start communicating with followers via the App, but also the first hotel to launch the platform globally. Dedicated to offering instant communication, W Doha is also active on other platforms including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and messaging services, Whatsapp and Blackberry.

By signing up to the App and adding the hotel's profile name 'w.doha', followers will enter a world of instant communication. SnapChat users can keep up-to-date with all that is happening at the vibrant hotel, including an array of regular behind the

scene pictures, competitions, restaurant offers and more. By providing insider access to what's new and next, W Doha is committed to offering innovative and exciting experiences for all to enjoy.

The SnapChat campaign also brings to an end an extremely successful year for W Doha, having carved out a niche for itself as a technology trendsetter. From the moment of arrival, only the highest level of service is offered to guests, to create more than just a hotel stay, but a luxury lifestyle hotel. In November 2014, W Doha was the first hotel in Europe, Middle East and Africa to launch mobile, keyless room entry with SPG Keyless - the hospitality industry's entry system allowing guests to use their smartphone as a key.

IBTM Arabia in line with the biz trends

► Contd. from page 1

pod design customised with the exhibitor's corporate branding will give privacy to meetings between hosted

future business to place at IBTM Arabia. In addition, each of these Hosted Buyers have not attended GIBTM 2014. Some 30 appointments will be provided to each exhibitor

IBTM Arabia will be an all-inclusive solution where an innovative meeting pod design customised with the exhibitor's corporate branding will give privacy to meetings between hosted buyers and exhibitors

Lois Wilcox
Exhibition Manager, IBTM Arabia

buyers and exhibitors. Exhibitors only pay one price and their meeting pod will be ready upon their arrival so that they can go straight into business meetings. Everything is included in the price, no additional stand costs, freight, or build costs," added Wilcox.

In all, up to 200 Hosted Buyers will come from Middle East, Europe, Asia Pacific, North America, South America and Africa. All are qualified under strict criteria including their purchasing authority, their annual Middle East and international MICE business organised, confirmation of their annual budget and

and Hosted Buyer on a one-on-one ratio over the duration of the event.

IBTM Arabia is held with the support of Abu Dhabi Convention Bureau - a dedicated entity of Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority (TCA Abu Dhabi) charged with stimulating the meetings industry in the emirate.

"Given that this alteration has been achieved in association with the industry it serves - both exhibitors and Hosted Buyers. We believe IBTM Arabia has significant potential for growth and look forward to it

helping to stimulate the global, regional and local meetings industry," informed **Mubarak Al Shamisi**, Director, Abu Dhabi Convention Bureau.

"We are confident that our commitment to IBTM Arabia will bring significant benefit to our growing MICE sector, expand awareness of our luxury, competitive destination to global industry players. As the premier partner for this year's inaugural event, we will demonstrate a commitment to supporting our

Destination Management, Ras Al Khaimah explained, "Participating GIBTM helped me to find some valuable sellers from the industry, achieved latest knowledge and trends in MICE industry. IBTM Arabia will bring a fresh format with quality meetings and exclusive one-on-one ratio closed community experience for elite exhibitors and Hosted Buyers who are in business venture in Arab world."

"The event will play a major role for MICE business

We believe IBTM Arabia has significant potential for growth and look forward to it helping to stimulate the global, regional and local meetings industry

Mubarak Al Shamisi
Director, Abu Dhabi Convention Bureau

public and private sector partners, ensure Abu Dhabi remains front of mind as a leading regional MICE destination," he asserted.

Commenting on his plans to attend IBTM Arabia, **Noushad KP**, Founder & MD, Access Worldwide

and overall travel trade. It will open more doors for business in MICE and travel trade industry when the decision makers meet global business adventures," he added.

According to **Saji Chacko**, General Manager, Belhasa Global Tourism and



Noushad KP
Founder & MD, Access Worldwide
Destination Management
Ras Al Khaimah

IBTM Arabia will bring a fresh new format with quality meetings and exclusive one-on-one ratio closed community experience

Travel, "Attending GIBTM over the past few years, has helped us to get connected with new business partners, hence achieved growth in our business. With by and large new concept now, I feel it will convey a message to make it more global and widely acclaimed."



Saji Chacko
General Manager
Belhasa Global Tourism and Travel

The biggest advantage about IBTM Arabia would be the quality of exhibitors and participants. All will experience an overall positive outcome out of it

"The biggest advantage about IBTM Arabia would be the quality of exhibitors and participants. It is more of a personalised or one-on-one way of doing business and building relationships. All will experience an overall positive outcome out of it," he highlighted.

SweetBeam, expects guest nights to swell to 90%

■ SweetBeam, the leading marketing specialist focused exclusively on the in-house guests of luxury hotels and resorts, has announced that it expects the number of guest nights it serves to nearly double during 2015 to 3.4 million, compared to 1.8 million guest nights across all its partner hotels in 2014. Since the company was established in 2009, SweetBeam has offered its bespoke, individual marketing services to a cumulative total of nearly 5 million guest nights at partner properties. SweetBeam is currently partnering with 11 leading hotels and resorts in Dubai and more than a dozen others in top tourist destinations

across the world to boost the capture rates and average check of in-house guests. By 2020, the fast-growing firm will expand its operations to over 50 million guestnights across partner properties. SweetBeam has set its sights firmly on the London market as part of its global expansion plan and has recently started providing its personalised communication services to two high-end luxury hotels in London, with more in the pipeline. By consistently increasing capture rate and average check, SweetBeam has a proven track record of uplifting in-house guest spending across hotel outlets and services by 23 per cent.

DID YOU KNOW?

When Dubai was a small fishing village

One of the United Arab Emirates' seven emirates, Dubai has transformed from a small fishing village and pearling center to a regional transport and tourism center for the Middle East. Set on the southern shore of the Persian Gulf, Dubai's development took off with the discovery of oil there in the 1960s. Now it has a well-developed tourist infrastructure.

Sharjah: High on cruising

With the arrival of two new cruise ships, Sharjah welcomes the start of a busy 2014-2015 cruise tourism season. MV Mein Schiff 2 and Aida Aura operated by German cruise companies (TUI Cruises and Aida Cruises) arrive at Khorfakkan with 3,400 passengers on board.



TT BUREAU

It was the maiden visit of the cruise ships. The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA), Khorfakkan port officials and local tourism industry players welcomed with traditional Ayala band playing on the quay.

The visitors also got an opportunity to learn about the Emirati customs, traditions, food, culture, traditional attire and the beautiful art of henna painting.

More than 71 calls by 17 major international cruise liners are expected at Khorfakkan Port during the upcoming two cruise seasons, carrying more than 157,000 international cruise passengers.



HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Director General, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority

2015 is going to be an important year for us. Emirate is getting ready to be crowned as the Capital of Arab Tourism for 2015

HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Director General, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority informed, "Sharjah is looking forward to a strong cruise tourism season with thousands of international tourists in the months ahead. 2015 is going to be an important year for us on many levels, particularly when the emirate is getting ready to be crowned as the Capital of Arab Tourism for 2015."

Sharjah is working closely with various destinations, government and private entities involved in the cruise tourism sector to attract more international cruise ships and tourists to the Eastern Region.

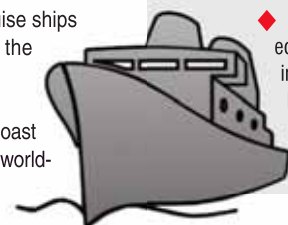
The East Coast has a number of world-class tourism

projects and hotels like the Chedi Khorfakkan. Kalba ecotourism initiative has been unveiled to bolster the tourism industry in the region. Al Midfa added, "We are seeing more and more international investors and hospitality chains showing interest in the East Coast. Hence many new tourism and hospitality projects have started taking shape."

Busy Season

◆ More than 71 calls by 17 major international cruise liners are expected at Khorfakkan Port

◆ Kalba ecotourism initiative has been unveiled



More tides in cruising waters

Travel Matrix has been appointed as the sole Middle East Representative of Celebrity Cruises, the cruise line that has a perfect blend of luxury and quality for the globetrotters.



TT BUREAU

Lakshmi Durai, a cruise industry professional with 20 years of experience in the Middle East announced the establishment of her own company, Travel Matrix in Dubai. The new entrant will be engaged primarily in promoting cruise holidays to the guests with the support of the travel trade partners.

"We are extremely excited to announce the newly established company. Our focus is on familiarising cruising as the most preferred vacation choice for our guests. I would like to express our thanks to Celebrity Cruises for giving us the opportunity to represent them in the Middle East. With more ships in the pipeline, new and exciting itineraries in 2015



Lakshmi Durai
Chief Executive Officer
Travel Matrix

and, more importantly sailing out of Abu Dhabi in 2016-17, we are confident of taking Celebrity Cruises to the next level," said Lakshmi Durai, Chief Executive Officer of Travel Matrix.

Since the first sailing of Celebrity Cruises in 1990, it has evolved into being recognised as an industry leader,

praised for providing spacious, stylish and sophisticated interiors; dining experiences elevated to an art form; personalised service, with a guest-to-staff ratio of nearly 2:1 and interesting, trendsetting onboard activities, all

with our global strategy of identifying key markets which really have a great fit with our award-winning cruise line, Celebrity Cruises, I'm pleased to be starting this new chapter for Celebrity in the region with Lakshmi Durai and her newly-

I would like to express our thanks to Celebrity Cruises for giving us the opportunity to represent them in the Middle East

designed to provide an unmatched experience for vacationers.

Helen Beck, Regional Director, Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises, Azamara Club Cruises, EMEA said, "In line

formed company, Travel Matrix. Celebrity Cruises' combination of cool sophistication, outstanding service and excellent family programs appeal greatly to this region and we're looking forward to welcoming ever more Middle Eastern guests onboard."

Oman promoted as a tourist destination

■ Oman registers 17 per cent increase in GCC tourists in 2014 with 701,311 visitors in the first three quarters. Moving forward to attract more tourists during the upcoming tourism season, Oman Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with Oman Air, has recently held a promotional event at the Conrad Hotel Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The event aimed to reinforce the joint venture

between both parties to promote Oman as the leading tourist destination for short breaks. The session included informative and interactive presentations on Oman's tourism infrastructure and facilities along with the announcement of attractive and cost-effective holiday packages designed for GCC visitors, including luxury hotel stays and return tickets from Oman Air.

Amsterdam: New route for Qatar Airways

■ Qatar Airways has revealed its first new destination in 2015, to the capital city of the Netherlands, Amsterdam, starting from June 16. The Doha-Amsterdam route will operate with a Boeing 787 Dreamliner, one of the latest next-generation aircraft in the

airline's fleet, offering 254 seats configured in two classes, with 22 fully-flat-bed seats in Business Class and 232 in Economy Class. Flying non-stop, the total journey time between Doha and Amsterdam is six hours and 35 minutes.

Trending with lifestyle boutique hotel

Emaar Hospitality Group has officially opened the doors of Manzil Downtown Dubai, a lifestyle boutique hotel. Managed by Vida Hotels and Resorts, the lifestyle hotel brand is described as 'The Centre of Now.'



India calling with eVoA



India Tourism, Dubai conducted a workshop/seminar on Visa on Arrival (eVoA) on Dec 29, 2014 in Al Ain. India Tourism, Dubai graced the occasion with power point presentation. 50 travel agents were present for the presentation and eVoA brochures specially printed based on the guidelines of MOT and other tourist promotional material with giveaways were distributed among them.



Sofitel Dubai Jumeirah Beach

Dubai

Antoine M. Lhuguenot has been appointed as the new General Manager of Sofitel Dubai Jumeirah Beach, a 5-star luxury hotel located in the très chic heart of Dubai Marina, Jumeirah Beach Residence (JBR), "The Walk" promenade and the new low-rise beachfront leisure and retail destination "The Beach". Bringing with him more than 30 years of extensive hotelier and General Manager experience, Antoine M. Lhuguenot is focused on translating the brand vision, while promoting quality service and driving revenue for the property.



InterContinental Dubai Marina

Dubai

Michael Martin has been appointed as the General Manager, InterContinental Dubai Marina and Regional General Manager of InterContinental Hotels Group. As General Manager and Regional General Manager of InterContinental Hotels, he will oversee the overall operation of InterContinental Dubai Marina and a portfolio of 10 hotels within the UAE. With more than 30 years of industry experience, 22 of which have been with IHG, Martin is well placed to lead the InterContinental Dubai Marina and the UAE teams.



Cathy Mead, Director of Sales and Marketing, will be responsible for driving all sales and marketing activities to establish the hotel on the global map and the competitive UAE market. Mead enters into the position with more than 20 years' experience in the field, including overseeing a number of high-profile Luxury Hotel Brands across Europe and the Middle East. She will bring her enthusiastic, creative style of management to InterContinental Dubai Marina.



Four Seasons Amman

Jordan

Ibrahim Kharman has been promoted to Director of Sales Four Seasons at Hotel Amman as of January 1, 2015 where he will develop and implement dynamic and creative sales strategies that support the success of the hotel. Graduating with a Business Administration Degree, Kharman kicked off his career in 1999 when he joined the Holiday Inn Hotel Amman as a Sales Manager for 4 years. He quickly found his calling and his perfect fit at Four Seasons Amman in 2003 where he joined the team as a Sales Manager.



Antje Sahling has been appointed as Hotel Manager at InterContinental Dubai Marina. Sahling will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the hotel and its staff. With more than 15 years' experience in luxury resorts and city hotels across Europe, the Middle East, China and Asia, her career highlights include the establishment of the first InterContinental resort in Europe and the debut Crowne Plaza resort in Asia.



James Worthington has been appointed as Director of Food & Beverage, InterContinental Dubai Marina. A 17-year veteran of the food and beverage industry, Worthington will be in charge of overseeing the food & beverage team, ensuring excellent operation and delivery standards. Prior to joining InterContinental Dubai Marina, he worked in various senior roles at leading restaurants in Australia, UK and the UAE.



Habtoor Grand Beach Resort & Spa

Dubai

The Habtoor Grand Beach Resort & Spa has announced the appointment of **Mohamed Ramadan** as Front Office Manager of the luxury five-star beach resort. Ramadan brings 15 years of international hospitality managerial experience with him, most recently serving as Front Office Director at the 396-room River Rock Casino Resort in Richmond, Canada where he also managed the property's pre-opening. Prior to that he was Service Express Manager of the Westin Bayshore Hotel in Vancouver, Canada, and for six years was Front Office Manager at the Ritz-Carlton Doha.



Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman

Ajman

Ramada Hotel and Suites Ajman announces the appointments of **Prabath Chaminda** as Recreation Manager. Chaminda's main responsibility as Recreation Manager is to ensure efficient and smooth day-to-day operations of the beach and health club facilities. He is also tasked to help maximise revenue-producing opportunities relating to the beach and health club by establishing relationship with its existing clientele and securing new leads.



Manish Banerji has been appointed as Assistant Executive Housekeeper for Ramada Hotel and Suites. As Assistant Executive Housekeeper, Banerji's role is to assist the Executive Housekeeper in the supervision and smooth operation of the department. He is also responsible in ensuring that the guests are provided with high standard of comfort by inspecting the rooms and hotel's common areas, and coordinating with the respective departments including engineering and food and beverage.



GenNext tutored on sustainability



On December 14th, 2014, Fujairah Rotana Resort and Spa hosted a one day conference for school students to create awareness on the impact of global warming and the importance of sustainability. The conference "My Planet, My Life", the first initiative of its kind in the region, had the objective of encouraging the future generation towards caring and saving the environment.



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