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TRAVTALK

ARABIAN TRAVEL AWARDS

2016: The year that was

The travel and tourism industry in the Middle East has witnessed many a trend in 2016. **TRAVTALK** finds out from stakeholders what strategies can ensure growth for the industry in 2017.

 SHEHARA RIZLY



H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and
Tourism Development Authority
(SCTDA)

“As always, 2016 has been an eventful year for the tourism sector in Sharjah. We have continued to build on the strategy that we launched in 2015 to attract 10 million visitors to the emirate by 2021. We are pleased to see growth in key markets with some new markets such as China achieving a 75 per cent growth over the first nine months of this year. There have been some gains in guest nights and we are pleased that the work we are undertaking to extend the length of stay is making good ground. The Light Festival has continued to grow and received an unprecedented following online this year. The emirate as a whole has continued to grow and develop with new hotels and attractions continuing to enrich the diverse tourism portfolio. Other achievement this year has been that SCTDA has been named as the second best exhibitor from the Middle East at ITB Berlin 2016, taking part in the Moscow International Travel & Tourism Exhibition (MITT) for the 17th consecutive year, as well as World Travel Market London. SCTDA also covered a number of key markets in promotional roadshows this year, including China, India, and, most recently, Saudi Arabia.”

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Matthew Powell
Director Middle East & South Asia
Travelport

“In the Middle East, Travelport has had a robust set of highlights so far in 2016. We have continued to lead in our unrivalled airline merchandising innovations and our diverse Beyond Air portfolio announcing several new commercial deals across our platform. These included a GDS industry-first partnership with the largest airline in India, IndiGo, a long-term agreement as well as Etihad Airways, who also partnered with MTT, a Travelport company and leading provider of digital solutions to the airline industry, to launch a mobile application for iPhone. We announced the renewal of both our global full content and IT agreements with Emirates. We are also pleased with several new key agency wins in the region, such as new partnerships with Roibek Travel and Rehlat.”

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“Starting with the latest addition to the TIME Hotels family, O'Learys Sports restaurant franchise with two operating outlets; Fujairah opened its door in January this year and Dubai in September of the same year. The dedication that TIME Hotels has showcased to its guests was awarded on several platforms and for different initiatives, receiving Best CSR Project by Hotel Show 2016, CSR Label by Dubai Chamber 2016, Green Key Certification Accolade, Best Customer Focus of the Year by Gulf SME Capital Awards 2016 and a series of finalist in different categories.”



Mohamad Awadalla
CEO
TIME Hotels

“This year has been remarkable for Ramada Plaza Jumeirah Beach and Ramada Sharjah. Market trends have resulted to a slowdown of business, however, the year is anticipated to close on a positive note. To enhance the awareness in our target markets, we attended exhibitions, events, roadshows to promote our excellent location, spacious accommodations, award-winning restaurants and hotel services. For Ramada Sharjah, the conversion project is anticipated to be completed by end of year, presenting an enhanced hotel product in Sharjah.”



Alper Can Bulcum
Cluster General Manager, Ramada
Plaza Jumeirah Beach & Ramada
Sharjah

“Centara Hotels and Resorts continued to expand its brand footprint in 2016, opening several new properties; Centara Q Rayong, Centra by Centara Maris Resort Jomtien, Centra by Centara Phu Pano Resort Krabi and opening its doors in December – Centara Azure Hotel Pattaya. The group will also grow its international network in 2017 with two openings in Doha and one in Muscat – Centara's first properties in the Middle East, whilst exciting deals were struck for hotels in China which are under development and set to open in 2018.”



Paul Wilson
Vice President Sales
Centara Hotels and Resorts

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Looking back at a good year

► Contd. from page 1



Freddy Farid
Area General Manager
Gloria Hotels and Resorts

“The region's hospitality industry has had a bumpy ride in 2016, but so far as Gloria Hotels and Resorts, we have put up a strong fight against challenges such as recession, declining visitors from some key markets while gradually adapting to an ever-changing demographic. Without giving too much away we have had an aggressive strategy to maintain a very strong business mix in corporate, leisure, MICE, government and conference and events business and we hope to continue the same in 2017.”



Enad Tannous
General Manager, Centro Capital
Centre & Capital Centre Arjaan

“Several exhibitions like AD-IPEC have kept the occupancies very high and certainly the momentum has picked up. The first quarter of 2017 will continue to be busy, a few soft renovations at Centro will be done and Arjaan being a relatively new property, we will continue to strive for guest satisfaction focusing on long stay, MICE and leisure segments. There is no doubt that next year, price strategy is going to be key and we are focusing on a multitude of activities to better decipher consumer behavior at a micro level which will impact our plan for revenue management.”



Iftikhar Hamdani
Cluster General Manager, Ramada
Hotel & Suites Ajman and Ramada
Beach Hotel Ajman

“Our two properties once again reigned among the hotels in Northern Emirates in terms of occupancy, an achievement which we have held for six consecutive years. Our YTD occupancy is 93 per cent and while all other hotels struggle during the UAE's off-peak seasons which are Ramadan and summer, we are proud to say that we enjoyed 90 per cent occupancy during these periods. We are also excited for the new addition to our group's room inventory in Ajman, which is expected to open in Q3 2017. We will be opening a new four-star, 179-key hotel, right beside Ramada Beach Hotel in Ajman Corniche.”

“To boost our position as the preferred family accommodation in JBR, Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham launched new room categories – the 2+2 one bedroom family suite, and the three-bedroom suite. We have focused on family-oriented and kid-friendly offers in terms of our amenities and F&B promotions. Our YTD occupancy is 85 per cent, which is up by 4 per cent from last year. We expect to increase this figure with the opening of new attractions in the emirate, and additional routes from the Gulf-based airlines.”



Samir Arora
General Manager, Hawthorn Suites
by Wyndham JBR

“I joined Ramada Downtown Dubai during the Ramadan period, which is an off-peak season. We took that opportunity to work on our next strategies and make sure that to fill the rooms at the right rate. The hotel managed to maintain a healthy RevPAR in spite of the downward average rate trend in Dubai. We expect full occupancy in the coming months, given the events like the NYE celebration and Dubai Shopping Festivals. Also, there has been an added value in our location with the opening of Dubai Opera, and we are exploring options to maximise this attraction alongside the other exciting projects in Dubai.”



Shahzad Butt
General Manager
Ramada Downtown Dubai

“ibis Styles Jumeira did a tremendous job in 2016; I am proud of my team as they were able to keep up with the challenges of the hospitality scene. With the uneven supply and demand in the region and the stiff competition to secure market share, our game plan has been focused on the RevPAR. In addition, we attained remarkable ratings in various review and booking sites after only a year of operations. We received a certificate from HolidayCheck and have been recognised by Myth Travel as one of the top 10 hotels in Dubai in three-star category.”



Muhammad Mujtaba Haider
Hotel Manager
ibis Styles Jumeira

Contd. on page 5 ►

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TRAVTALK

EDITORIAL

Ending 2016 on a high note!

Dubai is set to secure a new market — the family entertainment segment — as it will be the first in the GCC to become a theme park destination. The last quarter of the year was very exciting as they opened five of the most important entertainment parks; four in Dubai Parks; Legoland, Riverland, Bollywood Parks and MOTIONGATE, and IMG Worlds. Bollywood Parks is poised to be a major crowd-puller, as the Indian film industry continues to fascinate people around the world.

Dubai Parks and Resorts' projected revenue in the first full year of operation is estimated at AED2.4 billion. As the only theme park destination in the GCC, Dubai once again aims to chart its roadmap to success. Another highlight this year was the opening of the Dubai Opera with a clear vision of attracting a niche segment. The first phase of the Dubai Canal project is another addition which will connect the new to the old, steadily pushing the emirate towards its vision to attract 20 million visitors by 2020.

Sharjah enjoyed a very fruitful year with the travel sector generating AED497 million in revenue. Hotels and hotel apartments across Sharjah welcomed over 1.3 million guests during January-September, 2016, who spent 2,943,106 nights in the emirate — a 19 per cent increase from 2015.

Technology is the way forward as we close the year with the UAE revolutionising transportation through its latest high speed transport system 'Hyperloop', hence reducing travel time between all the emirates.

Economic downturns, terror activities, Brexit, currency demonetisation in India and continuous instability in some parts of the world have acted as a deterrent to the tourism industry on the whole. Hopefully, the New Year 2017 will bring good cheer for the industry as these new projects start taking shape.

Adapting to travel patterns

With drastic political changes occurring across the globe, the impact on tourism is imperative. The aviation and hospitality industries need to work together, share intelligence and future plans to prosper.

Aviation development has been a major catalyst for hospitality infrastructure development across the Middle East. This has been driven by an enviable geographic location conveniently connecting East and West, plus huge investment in both aviation and tourism infrastructure from the governments. Put simply, the hospitality industry is adapting by building rapidly. In their Middle East Real Estate Predictions 2016 publication, Deloitte predict that Dubai's hotel room inventory will increase by approximately 14 per cent in 2016, representing 31 hotels coming online.

The Middle East has moved from simply being a hub between destinations to becoming a destination in its own right. Dubai is now the fourth most visited city globally after Bangkok, London and Paris, so its global appeal is clear.

The UNWTO have just announced that international tourism arrivals for the Middle East for the first nine months of 2016 are down by six per cent year-on-year. This is worrying and indicative of the in-

stability that exists across the region. The terrorist attacks on Istanbul have had a devastating effect on Turkish Airlines, whilst Emirates has seen their net profits decline by 75 per

cent. However, having said this, the uncertainty that these events bring is already taking effect. The pound has plunged in value, increasing the number of foreign tourists coming

With over 50 per cent of all international tourists arriving at their destination by air, the link is clear. The Middle East has the enviable opportunity to reach almost any market globally, so they must be strategic in their focus in order to make sound development decisions. China is now the world's largest outbound tourism market, so it makes perfect sense that this would be a focus for the Middle Eastern carriers.

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cent year-on-year. However, we know that tourism is a resilient industry and its 'bounce-back-ability' is strong.

Brexit will bring new challenges for the UK and Europe, but the truth is that the UK has not even invoked Article 50 as yet. In essence, they have not even begun the process of exiting the EU, so we do not know what post-Brexit Britain will look like. It is very much the same as the new US administration. President-elect Donald Trump does not take office until January and has already shown some early signs of moderating his battle cry, so it's a waiting game.

to a new, affordable Britain, whilst the Brits become less mobile as they have less money to travel with. Trump has indicated that he will be a "protectionist President" and this is not good news for the Middle Eastern carriers in their continued fight with the US carriers.

One thing we aim to do via our conferences is to bring the aviation planning teams and the hotel development teams closer together. We believe that by sharing intelligence and future plans, both industries will prosper. After all, travellers need hotels and hotels need travel-

(The views expressed are solely of the author. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)



Jonathan Worsley
Chairman of Bench Events
Arabian Hotel Investment Conference
2017 (AHIC)

Dubai-Mangalore on SG

Indian budget carrier SpiceJet has rapid expansion plans as they target key markets which will ensure new traffic flow.



The daily direct flight SG 59 on the Mangalore-Dubai route will depart at 0.20 AM. Whereas SG 60 will be operational on the Dubai-Mangalore route departing at 12.55 PM on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday and at 3.40 AM on Monday and Saturday respectively. SpiceJet will deploy its Boeing-737 fleet for the newly devised sched-



ule. Dubai is one of SpiceJet's six international destinations and with this launch, SpiceJet now serves non-stop flights to Dubai from 10 Indian cities — Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Delhi,

Jaipur, Kochi, Kozhikode, Madurai, Mumbai, Pune and Mangalore and with connections from Tier II and Tier III cities, besides Bengaluru, Chennai and Kolkata.

On the occasion, **Shilpa Bhatia**, Sr. VP-Commercial, SpiceJet, said, "Being the port hub of Karnataka, Mangalore city offers immense potential for business travel. And Dubai being the key hub for Middle East markets, a direct flight in place on the route will further boost the economic activities besides offering a convenient travel option for both business and leisure travellers."



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Wrapping up on positive vibes

► Contd. from page 3



Wael El Behi
General Manager
First Central Hotel Suites

“With 2016 closing in fast, it has proved to be a successful year as we focused on sustainable development, community-oriented CSR activities, and product improvement. First Central Hotel Suites has been granted the Green Key Certification. We have partnered with organisations such as the Dubai Health Authority, Dubai Municipality, Saudi German Hospital, Aster, and more to raise awareness on the community, eco-systems, health, and wellness. Also, we are proud to announce that we have launched a new fully optimised website.”



Chalerm Sak Suranant
Director – Dubai and Middle East
office, Tourism Authority of Thailand

“Thailand received 507,090 visitors from the Middle East with 89,495 from the UAE this year. Pre-ATM roadshows in Oman and Abu Dhabi earlier this year was received with tremendous response from travel trade fraternity. A significant presence was witnessed during IMTEC 2016 and our first ever medical tourism dedicated roadshows in Oman and Kuwait. We also signed MoUs with Emirates Airline for a range of joint promotions to mutually increase tourism and visibility through the Emirates Airline Global Network with other regional airlines such as AirAsiaX, flydubai and Qatar Airways introduce new routes to Thailand. We also appointed two prominent personalities to be Thailand Ambassadors in the Middle East thus launching “Women’s Journey in Thailand” campaign.”



Maja Pak
Director
Slovenian Tourist Board

“As per provincial data by the Statistical Office of The Republic of Slovenia (SORS) in the first eight months, the number of domestic and international tourists recorded 10 per cent increase. Slovenia became the first green country in the world when it scored 96 points from a total of 100, and was the first nation to participate in a comprehensive assessment as per the Global Destinations criteria thus became a role model for the entire world. Slovenia hosted this year’s World Tourism Day in Ljubljana, the European Green Capital 2016. At the World Travel Market (WTM) in London, Slovenia promoted and focused on sports tourism.”

“The Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Philippine Hotel Owners Associations, Inc. (PHOAI) announced their joint commitment to ensure that hotels in the country adopt green practices and help curb greenhouse gas emissions during the ‘Forum on Greening the Hotel Industry’. The Philippine DOT Secretary Ramon Jimenez, Jr. launched the Philippine Halal Tourism Project at the gastronomic event Madrid Fusion Manila in April 2016. DOT participated at ATM 2016 and participated for the fourth time at Riyadh Travel Fair 2016.”



Wanda Teo
Secretary
Department of Tourism Philippines

“It has been a remarkable year for Orange County Visitors Association. We also launched ‘The O.C. & Sotheby’s Own A Piece of Paradise Holiday Package’ exclusively for the Middle East market and is the first of its kind to offer complimentary VIP shopping experiences combined with a complimentary and private three-day tour of Orange County luxury homes and properties that are currently on the market for private purchase. OCVA organised Fam trips and educational seminar for media and travel trade from the Middle East to gain exposure in the market.”



Ed Fuller
CEO, Orange County Visitors
Association, California

“Passenger transportation volume has been increasing over the years and reached 100 million in the year 2016. The airline was awarded CAPA Asia Pacific Airlines of the year 2016. With its strategic plan of pacific and Europe expansion, China Eastern Airlines brings in more 777-300 to serve the new routes from China to Europe. China Eastern Airlines Dubai office is currently flying from Dubai to Shanghai via Kunming.”



Randy Cui
General Manager,
China Eastern Airlines UAE

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Dubai: Emerging cultural tourism hub

The versatile city of Dubai plans to draw attention of different travel segments in the next few years. Opening of the Dubai Opera is a clear example of the way forward in terms of promoting the destination as a cultural hub. Industry experts share their views on Dubai's development as a cultural tourism hub.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

“Cultural and sustainable tourism is part of the development agenda of Dubai Tourism in order to achieve 20 million visitors by the year 2020. Increasing cultural awareness by opening Dubai Opera will create new visitors to the destination. Followed by the opening of the Dubai Canal which adds to the fabric of Dubai's urban plan as it connects the new to the old through a waterway not only through the sea but now through the canal too. His Highness Sheikh Mohammad Al Maktoum announced the activation of the Hatta development which is an all-composing development of a part of Dubai about 100 kms away in the mountain with one of the oldest ports, oldest water systems, (3000 years old) caves and graveyards. Shindaga is being developed with the heritage museum that encompasses aspects of our culture, it revolves around culture, society and life which will be open within the next two years.”



Yousuf Lootah
Executive Director Tourism Development & Investment, DTCM

“The Middle East has great potential for cultural tourism because of its cultural wealth. The Middle East is a good model of sustainable development through cultural tourism. In terms of cultural tourism, partnerships are most important between tourism and culture, these two sectors are so different but they are one so they need each other. Second is private and public partnership, so government and private sector should work together. UNWTO is working with UNESCO very closely in this regard. We organised the inaugural international conference on tourism and culture together in 2015 in Cambodia and next year the second edition will be in Oman.”



Jin Woo
Advisor to the Secretary General on Tourism & Culture, UNWTO Spain



Dr. Sue Millar
President, ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Culture Tourism

“In the Middle East, we look at historic places, where people want the old buildings, to understand the way of life, but they want to do it in a modern way with the living heritage. The culture of respect you have in Dubai is something to be cherished, something to be built on. People are interested in finding out more about the kind of food, different places, the way of life in the past and in the present, markets like souqs, how dhows are made, how you live your lives inside the quadrangles, inside the houses, etc. So I think the opportunity to actually tell us more about the way of life of the past is a very good one and I know that's happening here in Dubai in the historic district that you are now beginning to redevelop and that's a great move forward.”



Basma Dawwas
Conference Director IQPC

“Basically IQPC organised and conceptualised this topic in order to drive economic diversification and sustainable development through the promotion of cultural tourism. At the event, participants from across the GCC and also the Arab world gathered to discuss cultural tourism development in the region. This is the first inaugural event which we hope to continue as an annual event, as a must attend gathering for all the culture and tourism authorities in the GCC and Middle East. A key in this event for the industry is to come together to engage and create and establish foster relationships and partnerships in the industry, stakeholders and let it be travel agents, private companies and public companies and this is what we are going to discuss, a big theme about how to foster and create industry partnerships to promote culture.”

Ras Al Khaimah gets its own Jannah

Jannah Hotels & Resorts, the noble Bedouin culture-inspired collection of luxury hotels, has expanded into Ras Al Khaimah with their first property in the city — Jannah Resort & Villas, Mina Al Arab, comprising 22 luxury beach villas and 100 apartment suites.

 TTT BUREAU

The Jannah Resort & Villas, Mina Al Arab will open its doors in December 2016, bringing the brand's intuitive design, exquisite atmosphere, first-class hospitality and luxurious amenities to Ras Al Khaimah. The hotel is conveniently located at the heart of the

city and gives its guests easy access to the shopping district and the beach.

“As Ras Al Khaimah continues to grow and thrive economically, we are excited to add to the momentum by welcoming the first Jannah hotel to the area,” said Chief Executive Officer **Nehme Imad Darwiche**.



nah Resort and Villas Mina, Al Arab promises to bring the best hospitality standards with the signature Karim butler service to the destination. The Karims will provide personalised services throughout the course of the stay such as unpacking luggage, laundry, shoe-shine services, provision of local daily newspaper, arranging celebrations, preparing foam bath, delivery of beverages and arranging food.

“Ras Al Khaimah is a vibrant city, filled with friendly people, inviting travellers from the neighborhood, and an ever-expanding list of attractions and landmarks to visit,” added Darwiche. “Our hotel is central to all of Ras Al Khaimah's popular sites, and we

In addition to taking its place among Ras Al Khaimah's elite hotel addresses, Jan-



Nehme Imad Darwiche
Chief Executive Officer Jannah Hotels & Resorts

Jannah Resort and Villas Mina Al Arab offers a wide assortment of luxury facilities that will delight travellers, families and business visitors

have designed the experience to meet and exceed guest expectations and provide them with everything they need while visiting our beach resort,” concluded Darwiche. 🌴



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SHEHARA RIZLY

Beachcomber Resorts and Hotels is a historical key player; pioneer in island hospitality in Mauritius with locations that cater to various markets. Their unique selling point is the service standard coupled with expe-

Bruno Bosquet, MICE and Market Sales Manager, Beachcomber House, shares that their focus is on family travel. There are 8 properties in Mauritius, one in Seychelles, one in Marrakech and another in Nice. Beachcomber in Marrakech is a luxury product on offer. Different hotels



Bruno Bosquet
MICE and Market Sales Manager
Beachcomber House

to create the ultimate luxury experience to preserve the hotel's unique atmosphere, natural charm and timeless elegance. It consists 69 spa-

cious, elegantly decorated suites facing the sea. Dinarobin Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa is an elegant five-star resort in Mauritius; adjacent to Paradis Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa; a 5 star hotel with a championship 18 hole golf course. The other 5 star properties in Mauritius are Trou Aux Biches Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa and Shandrani Beachcomber Resort & Spa. Beachcomber also owns four-star properties; namely Victoria Beachcomber Resort & Spa, Canonnier Beachcomber which stands above the coastline on a his-



Dinarobin Beachcomber Hotel Mauritius

toric peninsula and Mauricia Beachcomber Resort & Spa, located on the sun-drenched northern coast of Mauritius and a four-star cosmopolitan, relaxed, simple yet cosy hotel.

29 of which have private pools. All are set on a 220-hectare private island, surrounded by one of the largest marine parks in the Indian Ocean.

Royal Palm Beachcomber Luxury Marrakech is a six-star hotel featuring 134 exquisite suites and villas set within a vast estate lying at the foot of the Atlas mountain range, only a few kilometres from the mythical Red City. Finally in the French Riviera is a four star resort with a 13-hectare park, bathed in sunshine 300 days a year. 🌞

In Seychelles their property is set on a private island, Sainte Anne island. This hotel is one of the finest properties in Seychelles for couples and honeymooners. An optional all-inclusive package offers you carefree holidays from the moment you arrive until the day of departure. Accommodation is in 87 private villas,



Beachcomber Hotel Seychelles Sainte Anne

rienced professionals in the field of hospitality.

Sustainable tourism has been a part of Beachcomber's mission for the past 40 plus years since they first started the system of recycling water.

carry different colors and their brand logo; it is represented with 52 waves to remind the year of creation in 1952.

Royal Palm Beachcomber Luxury recently refurbished the common areas and suites



Royal Palm Beachcomber Hotel Morocco

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SOMEWHERE Hotel leads in Barsha Heights

Within a few months of the official opening of its fourth property, **SOMEWHERE Hotel** has directly identified itself as the trendsetter in town. It offers a warm welcome to its guests, friendly service, with competitive rates and special packages. An upgraded four-star property, including 306 rooms, the hotel is a combination of rooms and suites and a full facility to cater to all sectors.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

From the minute you enter the property, the fresh aroma and music in the lobby fill

your senses and the courteous staff, trendy furniture designs and colours liven you up, an essential part of the SOMEWHERE brand in every hotel.



desk. Well-equipped amenities such as high-speed Wi-Fi, mini bar, and complimentary tea and coffee making facilities. The types of rooms include Classic Room, Premium Room, Club Room, and Executive Suite and Executive Club Suite.

The property is strategically located in Barsha Heights and is just a few minutes away from Mall of the Emirates, a 10-minute ride from Ibn Battuta Mall and Marina Mall, 40 km from Al Maktoum Airport (2020 Expo Zone), and 30 km from Dubai Airport DXB.

SOMEWHERE Hotel features several types of rooms and suites, depending on guest preference, whether you're visiting Dubai for business or leisure, you can choose

from five different room types, size and preferences.

All room types include a seating area with flat-screen TV and a work

At the roof top, the outdoor pool and sun terrace would add to this list, to simply relax and enjoy a cold beverage.

The facility offers two F&B outlets:

NAY Restaurant, offering Mediterranean cuisines with a 'twist', along with its outdoor terrace overlooking the Barsha Heights. Offering Shisha, and a wide range of grapes and beverages. NAY is perfectly suited for both private and corporate events.

The Clavichord Music Lounge, a cozy and laid back music lounge, offering happy hours, cigar lounge, live music performers, special packages for events. A venue with indoor and outdoor seating offering full bar beverages and international tapas.



Promotion push for Saudi tourism

Saudi Arabia remains as the number one destination for religious tourism. In keeping with the Saudi Vision 2030, more properties are opening up with various offerings for tourism. **Ziyad Bin Mahfouz**, CEO, Elaf Group, shares some of the key strategies.

SHEHARA RIZLY

QPlease explain the role Elaf plays in promoting tourism in KSA.

The Elaf Group recognises tourism's vital role in Saudi Arabia's national economy. We have always taken a proactive stance in promoting Saudi Arabia as a key destination for activities such as tourism for religious purposes, particularly for Haj and Umrah pilgrimages, by developing innovative marketing strategies and promotional tours.

We place premium on maintaining the highest hospitality service standards to ensure visitors will have a memorable experience of Saudi Arabia's unique hospitality. We also continuously engage our partners in the global market through



Ziyad Bin Mahfouz
CEO
Elaf Group

inbound tourism packages ideal for exploring the country's rich culture and most popular attractions.

QWhat are the steps being taken to improve the tourism sector in keeping with Saudi Vision 2030?

In line with Saudi Vision 2030, we have aligned our targets with the country's goal to increase visitor foot-

fall for religious purposes within the next five years, which is expected to reach 30 million by 2020.

One of the hospitality related corner stone of the Vision 2030 pertains to having three Saudi

Saudi Arabia recently started the implementation of new visa fees to boost non-oil revenues. However, the fee is waived if the visitor is entering Saudi Arabia for the first time to perform the Haj pilgrimage or Umrah. Elaf has designed all its packages in a way that will make sure tourists enjoy and have a memorable experience

cities in the world top 100 cities. In line with this, we are opening another five star property in Jeddah in 2017 and opening one four star property each in Riyadh and Eastern region in the near future.

QPlease share with us how the government involves the private sector in its efforts to achieve Saudi Vision 2030.

The government is pushing for economic diversification and strengthening the

role of the private sector in Saudi Arabia which makes it a key growth market. We have already been witnessing big changes such as the ramping up of tourism infrastructures, including roads and transports in order to make key

tourism sites more accessible for tourists. The government has also been highly encouraging the involvement of the private sector through partnerships and the streamlining of regulations for tourism investments as well as providing incentives to businesses. These efforts will pave the way for the realisation of Saudi Vision 2030 given that tourism is a top priority in the agenda to strengthen the national economy. For our part, the Elaf Group is continuously focused on improving its operations and expanding its reach in KSA as well as across the GCC and the Middle East region, opening many new opportunities for businesses as well to participate. For example, we have recently held a marketing tour in key markets including Istanbul, Turkey; Cairo, Egypt; Casablanca, Morocco; and Makassar, Indonesia.

QIs there any new visa procedure for tourists offered by the government?

Saudi Arabia recently started the implementation of new visa fees to boost non-oil revenues. However, the fee is waived if the visitor is entering Saudi Arabia for the first time to perform the Haj pilgrimage or Umrah. In support of this move, Elaf has designed all its packages in a way that will make sure tourists enjoy and have a memorable experience during their visit to the Kingdom.

In the Pipeline

- ◆ Elaf Group is opening another five star property in Jeddah in 2017 and opening one four star property each in Riyadh and Eastern region in the near future

RAK investment forum in Dec

Ras Al Khaimah Finance & Investment Forum (RAKFIF), is gearing up for the first edition this month from Dec 13-14, at the Rixos Bab Al Bahr in Ras Al Khaimah.

TT BUREAU

The forum will cover hospitality and tourism, real estate, manufacturing, production and infrastructure sectors with over 300 C level, regional and international industry leaders and key RAK entities will come together.

RAKFIF is already attracting huge interest in line with the growing demand for events like this in the region, which focus on markets with high growth rates such as RAK. Aiming to help business leaders, financiers, and investors navigate this developing landscape, the inaugural event Ras Al Khaimah Finance & Investment Forum provides a platform for information, networking and commercial opportunities.

RAKFIF, hosted under the patronage and with the presence of **His Highness Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al**

Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah, is backed by strong government support and key RAK entities.

Commenting on their involvement in the forum, **His Highness Sheikh Ahmed**

RAKFIF
RAS AL KHAIMAH FINANCE & INVESTMENT FORUM

bin Saqr Al Qasimi, Chairman of Ras Al Khaimah Free Trade Zone (RAK FTZ) and Ras Al Khaimah Investment Authority (RAKIA), said, "RAK FTZ and RAKIA are proud strategic partners of this unique event. We, together with other government authorities in the emirate, have been committed to reinforce the positioning of the emirate in the global economic map as a premier business destination. RAKFIF is a wonderful platform for the international busi-

ness community to learn more about the opportunities and advantages available in the emirate."

The event will have panel discussions, sector specific breakout sessions and plenary sessions and already has a confirmed line-up of speakers representing key economic sectors that the forum will focus upon, such as the Ras Al Khaimah Department of Civil Aviation, RAK International Airport, RAK Ports, Al Marjan Island Company, RAK Tourism Development Authority, RAK Free Trade zone & RAK Investment Authority, as well as from leading corporations such as Goldman Sachs International, HSBC, Samena Capital Investments, Colliers International, UTICO, Nabarro, Hilton Worldwide, ADPI, Hutchison Ports to name a few. 📌

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Sharjah aims to boost investment

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) is keen to increase its investment in the UK market by 16 per cent this year as it offers a good platform for growth. This was revealed during the World Travel Market (WTM) in London.

TT BUREAU

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) led a delegation from the emirate for the World Travel Market London, where it profiled tourism projects taking place across Sharjah, and explored opportunities for new contracts from the European travel market.

Hotels and hotel apartments across the Emirate of Sharjah welcomed a combined 1,318,748 guests in the first nine months of 2016 (January to September).

The 1.3 million guests spent a total of 2,943,106 nights in the emirate's hospi-



“During the first nine months of this year Sharjah’s travel sector generated AED497 million in revenues, pointing to the success of our efforts to bolster the sector and, subsequently, the emirate’s economy.”

His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman
SCTDA

ality facilities during the first three quarters of 2016 — a 19 per cent increase from the 2,482,721 nights spent in Sharjah in the same period in 2015. Meanwhile, overall occupancy rates remained at 62 per cent, the same rate as last year.

The GCC region remains a key market segment for Sharjah showing the success of the campaigns run throughout this region reflected through the fluctuations and increases as a direct result of the marketing activities dur-

ing the first nine months of 2016. Europe remains the fifth most important market to the region. New contracts signed at WTM this year suggest that the predicted 16 per cent increase in this market will start to show shortly.

The biggest growth market for Sharjah continues to come from China; in the first nine months of 2016, Sharjah welcomed 62,936 Chinese visitors — a staggering 75 per cent growth from the 35,928 guests welcomed during same period in 2015. Work will continue in China to further double this number by this time next year. There is considerable scope there and this market will undoubtedly continue to deliver results while the emirate looks to establish other serious source markets. On the same note, Sharjah witnessed a 12 per cent growth in the number of Pakistani visitors. It is reassuring to see recovery in the traditional Russian markets with tourism showing an 8.7 per cent increase which is the first real positive measure of growth since the ruble devalued.

H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, SCTDA, said, “Sharjah’s travel and tourism sector has been scoring impressive results since the beginning of this year, it is spreading its risk by having a diverse portfolio of markets and this has been supported by the host of programs and promotions

organised by the SCTDA in collaboration with other stakeholders. As Sharjah aims to achieve its ambitious target of 10 million visitors by 2021 it is confident that all the markers are showing good growth. During the first nine months of this year Sharjah’s travel sector generated AED497 million in revenues, pointing to the success of our efforts to bolster the sector and, subsequently, the emirate’s economy.”

His Excellency Al Midfa added, “The GCC region maintained its position at the top of our list of source markets as a result of good connectivity among other factors. However, the emirate has witnessed a significant increase from a diversity of markets representing our strategy focus. Sharjah stands out with its tourism offering, that combines culture, entertainment, and shopping to create a truly remarkable experience for everyone that visits.” Sharjah has 105 hospitality facilities with more due to open this year. It offers an interesting mix of international brands and boutique hotels, which are spread equally between city and beaches. 🌴



in the buoyant UK market



UAE shines at WTM London

The three-day World Travel Market in London this year proved to be more lucrative than the previous years, thanks to the planning which was practiced this year. According to some of the partners in the hospitality and tourism trade, almost 35 per cent meetings could be converted as business transactions.



UAE leads world's Internet usage at 96%

The UAE has the highest Internet usage by a country in the world at 96 per cent whereas USA has 86 per cent penetration and Singapore, 82 per cent. Several Middle East countries are above the global average according to Mamoun Hmedan, Managing Director MENA & India, Wego.

SHEHARA RIZLY

Q Could you give us a brief overview of the company and its main focus?

Wego is a leading travel meta-search site in the Middle East and Asia Pacific. Wego aggregates airlines, hotels and online travel agent options in one easy-to-use site. It helps travellers shop and compare the best options online and connects them with our travel partners where they make their booking directly.

Wego is optimised for both desktop and mobile and our travel App has proved extremely popular with MENA travellers. Founded in Singapore in 2005, Wego expanded and specialised in emerging markets, establishing offices in Jakarta, Bangalore and in 2012, Dubai. Each month, Wego sends flight and hotel booking referrals worth \$1.5 billion to travel partners.

Q How important is the UAE and Middle East region for Wego?

We recognised early that the travel industry in the Middle East, and the Gulf especially, was undergoing a transformation which is why we opened our office in Dubai. The market moved very quickly from traditional travel planning and booking methods to almost completely online. This provided new opportunities for businesses to connect with Middle East travellers outside of the region, as well as inter-regionally.

From a product point of view the region has become a global phenomenon. More travellers are discovering what the region has to offer, thanks to the commitment of local government, tourism bodies and airlines. Hotels have become renowned for a distinctive luxury and service delivered in a way that only we can deliver. Tourism bodies too have developed exciting international events that continue to attract travellers from all over the world. From a tourism point of view, the entire region has been on fast forward.

Q Could you please give us a brief of the growing trends affecting the travel industry?

The UAE has the highest Internet usage by country in the world at 96 per cent. To put that into some perspective, USA has 86 per cent penetration and Singapore, 82 per cent. Several Middle East countries are above the global average. Wego moved fast to deliver travellers what they wanted. A seamless mobile travel planning app that connected them with local and global travel partners in their own language and currency of choice. In fact, Wego's travel App was the first travel meta-search delivered in Arabic and from RTL.

The rapid adoption of mobile for trip planning and the popularity of travel shopping online has resulted in a giant shift in the Middle East travel industry. The GCC is second

in the world in terms of mobile transactions on smartphones. And this hasn't gone unnoticed by destinations around the world. Travellers from this re-

opportunities that now present themselves for Gulf businesses to fit into the more frequent outbound and inter-regional travel.

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gion have become a lucrative inbound market as well. Hotels have learned that many travellers in this region, especially from Saudi, prefer to travel with their extended families. Many hotels now directly target these travellers with connecting rooms, or larger suites.

Q What trends could we expect for the ME region by 2020?

E-commerce facilities will continue to adapt to suit online shopping, and travel businesses will continue to build their online presence. For Wego, we intend to continue to develop our

The rapid adoption of mobile for trip planning and the popularity of travel shopping online has resulted in a giant shift in the Middle East travel industry. The GCC is second in the world in terms of mobile transactions on smartphones

Properties understand that to lure these travellers they need to provide diverse experiences. Children's activities, shopping, golf, entertainment to suit families. Also, the preference is for high levels of service and properties usually four stars or above in ratings. These expectations are not surprising to us. But what we should consider are the new

product based on our customer needs and feedback, and create the most personalised experience as possible. Personalisation and local relevance are what we've found to be of most importance to our users, with the obvious resulting benefits for increased business for our local travel partners. We have worked very hard to also deliver targeted and waste-free advertising opportunities.

Q What tools can be used to boost direct connectivity with customers?

Social media will continue to play a direct role in customer communication and engagement, although we can expect channels and algorithms may change over the years. The process will remain the same however, and that's to provide original and unique content that responds to users needs and interests. Targeted advertising, as mentioned, is another effective

way to connect with a travel audience. Wego's Private Marketplace is a targeted, data-driven advertising solution. Advertisers can run more complex campaigns on Wego, so we give them the opportunity to buy media that fits into their workflow and ad technology stack. Our clients are extremely pleased with these scalable and flexible ad technologies which enables advertisers and agencies to access Wego's inventory and audience efficiently.


Q Do share your views on the growth of airlines, airports, hubs and trip frequency and how these will affect businesses in general?

Ever since the Gulf carriers began expanding their fleets, the number of new routes and investment in even longer-haul flights, aviation around the world has stepped



Mamoun Hmedan
Managing Director MENA & India
Wego

up. The large investments in new fleets, routes, in-flight and ground services coming out of the Gulf is sparking growth in other regions. This competition results in more choice for the traveller, more opportunities for the global travel economy, regional development and an improved infrastructure. The resulting effects on how we travel, associated costs, infrastructure, increased services and new routes also introduces new markets and business opportunities. It's for these reasons that this region continues to develop from an aviation point of view, faster than any other in the world.

It's a historical time to be in the travel industry in the Middle East. We are no longer a stopover point for planes to refuel on their long haul journeys — we're becoming the leader of long haul aviation instead. We have grown faster than any other travel market, jumping from the traditional travel agent business to becoming one of the most valuable e-commerce travel-related markets in the world. I have no doubt we will continue to achieve more historic milestones. 

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Air Canada expands reach in Middle East

The only four-star international network carrier in North America celebrated one year in Dubai. Air Canada is tapping into new market segments and expanding its reach within the Middle East to Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Oman.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

Margaret Skinner, Director Sales EMEA, Air Canada, shares, "This past year we have worked very hard and received fantastic response from the market in terms of our product and its services. As we celebrate one year we have interesting news to share with our clients. Dreamliner is the game changer for us, now we have upgraded it to a Boeing 777 for the convenience of the passengers travelling from Dubai-Toronto vice versa route. The cabin classes offered are the very same as economy, premium economy and busi-

ness. Our premium economy is a product of its own, it is not just a segment closed by a curtain, instead it offers different meal services, priority baggage and other important aspects which would make the customer relax throughout the journey."

Today, many airlines invest on this premium economy class, which is a very convenient and valued service due to the rise of more middle class travellers and the corporate sector which prefers to pay extra for certain privileges. Their current focus is rather diverse in terms of the many different markets. Visiting friends and



relatives, student movements, corporate and leisure travellers are among those who would regularly visit Canada or North American region.

"We have tremendous growth from Indian market. This year we launched non-stop seasonal flights between Delhi and Vancouver. Delhi-Toronto is now upgraded to daily and Air Canada announced launching a new, three-times weekly year round service

We are further expanding our services to have SPA partnerships with Qatar Airways, Kuwait Airways, Oman Air and Saudi Arabian Airline to travel via Dubai and London to more destinations in Canada

Deepu Cyriac
Country Manager for UAE / GCC, Air Canada

between Toronto and Mumbai starting July 1, 2017. All flights out of India will be operated by Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner," Skinner adds.

Deepu Cyriac, Country Manager for UAE / GCC, Air Canada, says, "We recently opened BSP in Kuwait. We are further expanding our services

to have SPA partnerships with Qatar Airways, Kuwait Airways, Oman Air and Saudi Arabian Airline to travel via Dubai and London to more destinations in Canada. This flexibility has seen a very good growth from the region. We are currently serving a very good mix of markets around the region.

"Another important aspect which enabled us to grow so fast was the timing factor on Dubai-Toronto route. We offer night departures on both routes. From Toronto our flight departs at 20:50 and arrives in Dubai 18:55 local time. Departure from Dubai is at 23:55 and arrival Toronto next day morning 5 am. Passengers travelling onward to the US can clear US Immigration & Customs at Toronto Pearson International airport. Air Canada is the largest international airline operating to 55 cities in the USA," he adds. 🇨🇦

Dreamliner is the game changer for us, now we have upgraded it to a Boeing 777 for the convenience of the passengers travelling from Dubai-Toronto vice versa route

Margaret Skinner
Director Sales EMEA, Air Canada

Korea bullish on ME medical tourists

The Korea National Tourism Organization organised a two-day 'Korea Medical Tourism Convention' at the InterContinental Hotel Abu Dhabi, which gathered 16 Korean health establishments, government departments and medical agencies to promote attractive and reasonable medical and travel combo packages.



Amadeus' 1st #Fly by Digital

Amadeus Gulf's first #Fly by Digital event in this region offered travel industry professionals the opportunity to learn how they can build a digital travel business from scratch.

TT BUREAU

The event brought together a number of digital and travel experts who shared their insights on how to take the travel business successfully online. Over the past 10 years, the travel industry in MENA has been constantly reminded of the opportunity of moving online.

With research suggesting that the online travel market space is estimated to be worth over \$35 billion by 2018, the objective seems pretty simple. Amadeus has seen over the past few years the significant growth that online travel has achieved and wants to show travel partners how to leverage the significant opportunities that exist today. The event addressed over 200 participants from the UAE, Oman and Bahrain.



Graham J. Nichols
Managing Director
Amadeus Gulf

Graham J. Nichols, Managing Director, Amadeus Gulf, said, "The digital world is fast paced and operates on the currency of data, as opposed to being built on the competency and excellence of service personnel. Companies need to be able to build the capabilities across their organisation to capture, interpret and utilise data to build value across the chain and serve their customers in a way that they want. Therefore, our invitation to

our customers to ##Flyby digital is their opportunity to learn about how they can build a digital travel business from the ground up. They'll hear from the world's leading experts on how to build the right strategies, attract the right people and build a digital presence that brings a strong commercial return."

The event covered four key areas across the two days, including panel discussions and presentations held by some of the most relevant speakers in the travel industry, including **Muhammad Chbib**, CEO & Co-Founder, Tajawal; **Alexandre Migan**, GM, FLYR; **Farid Gharazed-dine**, Analytical Lead - Google; **Amy Kiernan**, Head of Digital Performance, iProspect; **Rajnish Kumar**, CTO & Co-Founder, IXIGO; and **Remo Giovanni Abbondandolo**, GM, Middle East, TravelStart, among others.

Rotana's 2nd hotel in Amman

Strengthening its position in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and Eastern Europe, Rotana has launched its 2nd hotel in Amman with an investment of \$280 million.

TT BUREAU

Deputising for His Majesty King Abdullah II, Jordan's Prime Minister Hani Al-Mulki patronised the official opening of 'Rotana Amman', which brings the group's combined inventory in Amman to 803 rooms, suites and hotel apartments, making Rotana the largest hotel operator in the Kingdom employing 900 Jordanians.

In his speech during the opening ceremony, **Nasser Al Nowais**, Chairman & Founder, Rotana, said, "The opening of Amman Rotana encapsulates Rotana's broader growth vision and expansion plans, as we reinforce our leadership in the region and continue our pursuit of delivering unparalleled hospitality experiences that our guests have come to associate with the Rotana brand. Jordan is among the top tourism des-



Nasser Al Nowais
Chairman & Founder
Rotana

tinations in the region and the opening of this new hotel enhances our growing portfolio in the Jordanian market, which includes The Boulevard Arjaan by Rotana in the new Abdali downtown area. We look forward to enhancing our presence in the Kingdom's tourism sector as part of our vision of operating more than 100 hotels globally by 2020. We remain committed to providing our guests with only the best services, while maintaining the highest levels

of luxury, privacy and comfort across all our hotels". As the tallest building in the Kingdom, Amman Rotana towers 188 meters and features 50 floors that include 412 rooms and suites designed to combine luxury and comfort. Amman Rotana features six dining outlets and houses the Monarch Ballroom, a deluxe hall for special occasions and nine exclusive meeting spaces, as well as a Bodylines Fitness & Wellness Club.

Amman Rotana is adjacent to The Boulevard Arjaan by Rotana and is steps away from the Boulevard, a contemporary commercial district that features luxurious outdoor retail stores as well as a number of popular restaurants and cafes. Also close by is the Al-Abdali Mall, Jordan's largest commercial complex, showcasing numerous international brands and boutique shops.

Kwality

38 Years in Dubai

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DINE IN & CATERING

Qatar Airways & Orange County's agent seminar

Over 50 travel agents and tour operators from Dubai and Sharjah attended the educational seminar session conducted by Qatar Airways and Orange County. The event took place at Raffles Dubai in association with AVIAREPS, the representative for ME region for Orange County.



Slovenia tourism products in Dubai

The inaugural Slovenian roadshow showcased many interesting sites to travel agents, tour operators and DMCs in Dubai. It was attended by over 140 government and business community leaders from across the UAE and included a Slovenian trade development delegation of over 80 industry and government leaders, representing almost 50 companies across six economic sectors.



Dubai: A theme park destination

Over the past few years, Dubai has been working on a new agenda to attract new market segments. Unveiling the much-awaited MOTIONGATE™ Dubai this month will definitely drive this new segment of travellers to Dubai, reveals **John Hallenbeck**, General Manager, MOTIONGATE™ Dubai.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

Q Do give us an insight into the theme park industry?

The theme park industry is still growing in the Middle East with a huge potential to benefit the economy. There are three billion people that live within a four-hour flight of the UAE, and there is a significant gap in this market for a world-class fam-

Q Could you share the unique offerings of MOTIONGATE?

MOTIONGATE™ Dubai is a part of Dubai Parks and Resorts which is an AED13.2 billion development spread across 30.6 million square feet of land. Dubai Parks and Resorts' projected revenue in the first full year of operation is estimated at AED2.4 Billion.



John Hallenbeck
General Manager
MOTIONGATE™ Dubai

Our travel and trade partners are a key stakeholder group for MOTIONGATE™ Dubai and we are working on a tailored program to ensure they are recognised. We are working on a program, details of which will be released soon

ily leisure and entertainment destination and as the region's largest integrated theme park destination, we are positioned to meet this demand.

It is the largest Hollywood-inspired theme park in the Middle East and unites three legendary film studios for the first time in a theme

park environment – Sony Pictures Studios including the *Smurfs*, DreamWorks Animation and Lionsgate. Spread across five uniquely themed zones, MOTIONGATE™ Dubai will feature 27 immersive rides and attractions, plus 15 live entertainment experiences – all inspired by 13 Hollywood blockbuster films including *Ghostbusters*, *Zombieland*, *Shrek*, *Kung Fu Panda*, *Smurfs* and *The Hunger Games*.

Other 'world firsts' include the first-ever theme park attractions inspired by *The Hunger Games*, the first-ever live stage show inspired by the *Step Up* hit dance franchise and the world's first theme park attraction inspired by the *Ghostbusters*. Families can also experience the world's first *Smurfs*-themed roller coaster.

Q Where the park is at currently in terms of completion?

With the park opening mid-December, the park is undergoing finishing touches. Rides are currently being tested, all of our teams from park operations, guest services to ticketing are currently going through intense training, our shops are being stocked up with merchandise and our restaurants and kitchens are testing their menus.

Q How are the tickets and annual passes priced at? Are there any special rates for various kinds of travellers?

Visitors can purchase a daily ticket for AED330 for adults and AED280 for children and senior citizens, respectively. MOTIONGATE™ Dubai is wheelchair accessible, and we have made provisions to ensure that guests can enjoy the vast majority of our attractions. For the ultimate theme park experience, guests can purchase the Annual Pass at AED865 – equating to less than three adult visits to the park, and offering a host of exclusive perks.

Q Will there be special rates for travel agents and tour operators?

Our travel and trade partners are a key stakeholder group for MOTIONGATE™

Dubai and we are working on a tailored programme to ensure they are recognised. We are working on a program, details of which will be released soon.

Q What are the strategies used to gain more business to the parks and what expansion plans are in the pipeline.

Once complete, MOTIONGATE™ Dubai will occupy 1.9 million sq ft of a total 4 million for planned expansion, so in the future, guests can expect more of their favourite Hollywood films being brought to life as rides, attractions, live entertainment and dining experiences. These plans will be revealed in due time. Throughout the year, we will also be hosting events throughout the year, bringing a renewed experience for residents and offering additional value and entertainment for visiting guests. 🎢



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Exploring Ethiopia

Yibeltal Aemero Alemu, Consul General of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, shares some of the strategies to promote this destination.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

What role does the Consulate play in promoting the destination?

One of the main tasks of the Consulate is to promote Ethiopia as a tourist destination. It requires closer working relationships with tour operators, travel agents, Ethiopian Airlines Dubai office and relevant gov-

ways co-existed in peace with other religions. In Islamic history and tradition, Ethiopia is known as the 'Haven of the First Migration or Hijra' of the Companions and relatives of the Prophet Muhammad. For Muslims, Ethiopia is synonymous with freedom from persecution and emancipation from fear. It is therefore imperative for the people of this region to visit this historic country.



Consul General Yibeltal Aemero Alemu
Federal Democratic Republic
of Ethiopia

ernment institutions of both Ethiopia and the host country. Ethiopia is endowed with numerous historical and natural tourist

What is unique about Ethiopia?

When it comes to tourism, one can find both history and nature in Ethiopia which made the country one of the best tourist destinations. It is a home for both historic and natural attractions. Its excellent network of national parks, UNESCO World Heritage Sites and other tourist attractions can be explored along several well-established routes. National parks include the scenic Simien and Bale Mountains, with their wealth of endemic wildlife, while historical sites range from the atmos-

The Consulate provides all the necessary support to tour operators. It provides information about destinations and hotels, facilitate links with Ethiopian tour operators, and issues visa in less than 48 hours

attraction sites. However, the number of UAE tourists going to Ethiopia is insignificant due to lack of information. Therefore, from the consulate we have undertaken to promote the destination in cooperation with the aforementioned institutions.

Why should UAE and GCC residents visit Ethiopia?

Ethiopia is the Land of Origins. It is the source of Blue Nile, the great river whose power and fertility nurtured the origin of civilisation and the origin of coffee as well. Ethiopia is a land of natural and historic attractions. The people of Ethiopia and the Arab world are tied by geography and common history. It is only the Red Sea that divides us. It takes only three hours and 30 minutes by air from Dubai to Addis Ababa. Historically, Ethiopia is the first place where Islam was preached, spread and accepted peacefully throughout the whole territory. Islam al-

pheric rock-hewn churches of Lalibela to the towering stelae of Aksum and castles in Gondar. An array of five well-established routes can be followed to explore Ethiopia's best-known destinations, along with some more off-the-beaten-track gems. Ethiopia is safe and stable for tourists while its people are friendly and welcoming.

What incentives would travel trade receive to promote this destination?

The Consulate provides all the necessary support to tour operators. It provides the necessary information about destinations, hotels and other facilities, facilitate the link with Ethiopian tour operators, issues visa in less than 48 hours. There is good connectivity between the two destinations. Four to five flights connect Dubai and Addis Ababa; Ethiopian Airlines flies three times a day, Emirates fly daily while fly Dubai has three flights per week.

Travelport

Dubai

Travelport has appointed **Matthew Powell** as its Managing Director for the Middle East and South Asia. Powell's Travelport career spans more than two decades during which time he has held a variety of leadership roles; most recently spearheading Travelport's growth in India as well as leading agency commerce solutions for Africa, Middle East and South Asia. Powell will continue to drive growth of the business with a major focus on driving adoption of Travelport Smartpoint, Universal API, and further product offerings, available to the travel agency community across the Middle East and South Asia.



Royal Tulip The Act & Royal Tulip 72 Hotels

Sharjah

Louvre Hotel appointed **Tarek Lotfy** as Cluster General Manager for Royal Tulip The Act & Royal Tulip 72 Hotels in Sharjah. Previously, he held the position of General Manager at Golden Tulip Al Barsha and Regional Revenue Director for Golden Tulip Mena. He brings over two decades of experience out of which seven were with the Golden Tulip group, and rest with Le Méridien and Forte Hotels.



TIME Oak Hotel & Suites

Dubai

TIME Hotels has appointed Spanish national **Guzman Muela** as General Manager for TIME Oak Hotel & Suites. Fluent in four languages, Muela has worked on four continents, including food and beverage positions in Latin America and senior management positions in his native Spain. In addition, Muela was tasked with implementing duty free projects in a number of challenging African locations including South Sudan, the Ivory Coast and Liberia. He also spent several years in the Middle East working with InterContinental Hotels Group as both a special task force leader and general manager for various properties in Jordan and the UAE.



Centro Capital Centre & Capital Centre Arjaan

Abu Dhabi

Sami Savanur has been promoted to Cluster Assistance Director of Marketing & Communications at Centro Capital Centre & Capital Centre Arjaan. An Indian national, Savanur has completed his MBA specialising in marketing from James Cook University, Singapore and has been working with Rotana Hotel Management Corporation PJSC since 2014. In his new role, he will lead the marketing strategy encompassing digital marketing, guest engagement, hotel activations, CSR and brand alliances.



Le Méridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre

Dubai

Le Méridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre has appointed **Sam Jones** as Director of Sales for a fresh and international perspective for the property's Meetings and Incentives business. Jones earned his BBA in Hotel Management and a Diploma in Hospitality Management from the International College of Management in Sydney, Australia before joining W Hotel, Sydney. He has previously worked at Starwood Central London Hotels, and Sheraton Heathrow Hotel, leading up to his appointment at Le Méridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre.



Al Faisaliah Hotel and Hotel Al Khozama

Riyadh, KSA

Al Faisaliah Hotel and Hotel Al Khozama has appointed **Russell Loughland** as its new Director of Sales and Marketing. British national Loughland is expected to bring his unparalleled expertise to the role, as he develops the domestic and international sales and marketing strategy for Al Faisaliah Hotel, Al Faisaliah Suites and Hotel Al Khozama. With more than 25 years experience in the hospitality industry, most recently he held the position of Executive Assistant Manager for Crowne Plaza Kuwait Al Thuraya City. He has worked with some of the world's leading brands including, Shangri La, Fairmont, Banyan Tree, Rosewood, Yas Hotel in Abu Dhabi and the Regency Kuwait.



TIME Grand Plaza Hotel

Dubai

Martin Michael Fabiano, from Italy, has been appointed as General Manager at TIME Grand Plaza Hotel. Fabiano's global experience covers the operational spectrum with food and beverage, consultancy, private member club and VP/general manager roles within the cruise tourism sector as well as with luxury hospitality brands including Mandarin Oriental, Fairmont Hotels and Four Seasons. His career path has similarly taken him on a worldwide journey from Indonesia, the Philippines and Canada to China, Italy, India, Thailand and the high seas.



Six Senses Ziggy Bay

Oman

Six Senses Ziggy Bay has appointed **Aaron McGrath** as its General Manager. McGrath holds a diploma in Hotel Management from Hotel Institute Montreux, Switzerland and has over 24 years of experience. He began his career at Hyatt Regency Riyadh Olaya in Saudi Arabia and moved to Sonaisali Island Resort in Fiji, Sonaisali Island Resort, Sonaisali Premium Residences and Tadrai Island Resort. Prior to joining Six Senses Ziggy Bay, he was the general manager of Imperial Springs International Summit Hotel in Guangzhou, China.



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