



THE NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY Published from : ★ India ★ Middle East

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# ME game for sports tourism

The Middle East region has set the ball rolling with its various initiatives to encourage sports tourism in the region. Having invested billions of dollars in this sector, key players such as airlines, hotels and technology professionals have come forward to ensure continued business.



SHEHARA RIZLY



**Mamoun Hmedan**  
Managing Director - Middle East  
North Africa and India  
Wego

“The Gulf’s tourism industry is a proactive supporter of the region’s sporting calendar. Airlines too have aligned their sponsorship investments – Emirates hosts the Rugby Sevens and Gulf Air sponsors the Bahrain Grand Prix, the first Formula One to be held in the Middle East. Saudi Airlines will now sponsor the Saudi football team in their efforts to secure a place in the 2018 World Cup. We can expect to see more announcements in 2017 in an effort to draw more international visitors to the region. Sport and tourism are a perfect fit. A passion for sport crosses languages, cultures and countries, and is definitely a great way to draw more visitors to our region, while supporting the local tourism industry.”



**Matteo Prato**  
Director of Marketing and  
Promotions  
Ras Al Khaimah Tourism  
Development Authority

“As part of Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority’s goals of achieving one million visitors by the end of 2018, we have outlined some key segments which have proven promising over the recent years. One such sector is sports tourism, and we have worked to enhance Ras Al Khaimah’s offering, and through strategic partnerships brought a number of international tournaments to the emirate. Last year Ras Al Khaimah hosted the inaugural Ras Al Khaimah 2016 Golf Challenge, in addition to the debut of Dubai Tour Ras Al Khaimah Stage. Such events not only encourage larger visitor numbers, but also promote the destination for sports tourism on an international stage.”



**Derv Rao**  
Co-founder  
DUPLAYS

“Sport and sporting events play a major role in boosting tourism. We see thousands of people attend major events such as the Super Bowl, Dubai World Cup and other mega events around the globe and these attendance generate a great deal of revenue and help grow other tourism sectors, such as hospitality, as well as enhancing a destination’s image. At DUPLAYS, we are committed to building sustainable sporting events and contributing to the continued growth of participation sport in Dubai for years to come. We are constantly introducing concepts such as DUPLAYS 10 and the Golf Regional Masters.”

“As a Destination Management Company, Miracle Adventure Tourism has been promoting sports tourism in the UAE in the past and are now being recognized as specialized agent for the sports industry. Continuing our sports reputation as a truly global ground handler for the game, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in partnership with Cricket Australia, has secured the hosting rights for the prestigious 2017 World Indoor Cricket Federation (WICF) World Cup. The event will attract approximately 400 players and officials and will be held over seven days of competition from September 16-23, 2017, in Dubai’s newly renovated Insportz Club. This is a great opportunity for us to show the heritage, culture and modern city to our guest in promoting leisure, business, medical and sports tourism.”



**Nilanka Fernando**  
Managing Director  
Miracle Adventures

“The five-star Ghaya Grand Hotel is all set to host the cricketing legends and star players as Emirates Airline Twenty20 tournament kick-starts in Dubai. We are delighted to host the players and team officials for the tournament and we look forward to enjoying some top-quality cricket. Our vision is totally aligned with Sheikh Mohammad’s on growing sports tourism in Dubai and the current infrastructure offerings are a huge opportunity to drive the same. He sees Ghaya Grand as the sports destination by 2020 and working tirelessly towards achieving the same. Supporting sporting events like these is part of our strategy and this event provides us with the platform to engage with our customers directly.”



**Olwin Desouza**  
General Manager  
Ghaya Grand Hotel



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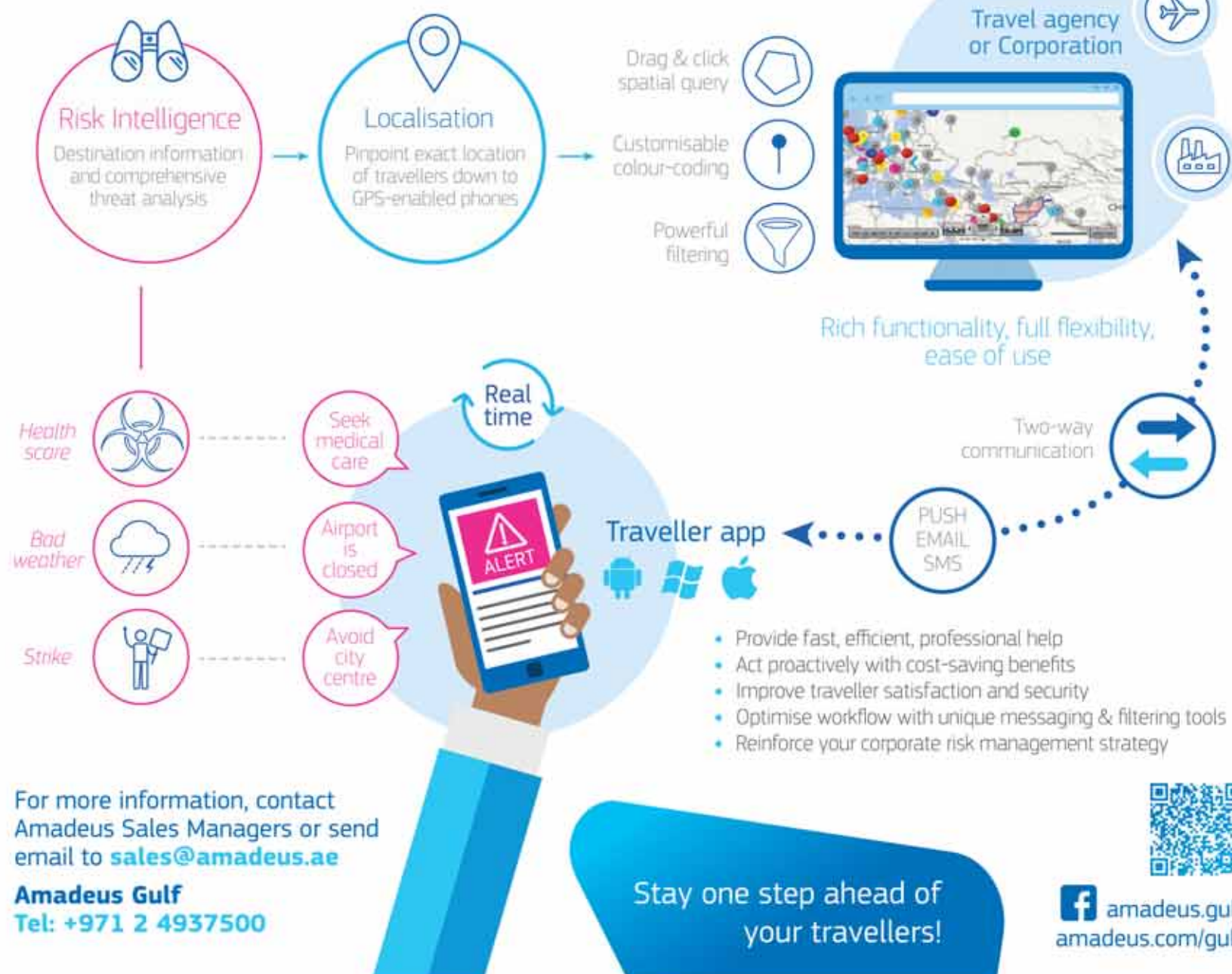
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# RTF 2017 puts spotlight on medical tourism

Saudi Arabia's largest domestic and outbound tourism promotion event, Riyadh Travel Fair will commence its ninth edition at the Al Faisaliah Hotel, Riyadh from April 7-10, 2017. It is expected to receive over 250 exhibitors; national pavillions and seminars set to welcome an anticipated 30,000 visitors.



The theme of this year is to introduce more trade visitors and to bring in new destinations into Saudi Arabia for promotion of tourism sector especially in keeping with the 2030 tourism growth vision of the kingdom.

**Bander Al Gryni**, General Manager - ASAS Exhibitions, organiser of Riyadh Travel Fair, said, "Year after year, we have seen a consistent positive growth in the number of participants, exhibitors and attendees at RTF. With Saudi nationals increasingly travelling both domestically and overseas, the opportunities that the Riyadh Travel Fair provides for domestic and overseas destinations, hospitality service providers and other tourism-related businesses, to directly meet with the kingdom's lead-

ing travel professionals and travellers have never been more significant."

For the first time, RTF spotlights on medical tourism this year. Medical service providers, hotels, destinations, spas and wellness resorts from around the world will present their latest products, services and special offerings at the four day event.

**Sheikh Hafeez**, Director of Sales and Marketing, ASA Exhibitions, said that medical tourism will be one of the elements under focus at this year's RTF. "Travelling abroad to seek medical care is increasing steadily as medical tourists are seeking new technology, expertise and a serene environment to recover and rejuvenate. Riyadh Travel Fair 2017 will showcase the potential of medical tourism along

with its plethora of health and wellness offerings from various destinations from around the world. It will also offer a marketing platform for health and wellness providers to discuss prospective business deals with medical tourism facilitators and travel agencies from across the globe," he added.

The Riyadh Travel Fair is open to both travel professionals and the general public looking for in-depth destination information and special deals. Visitors to the 2017 edition will be able to interact directly with various tourism authorities, hotels, airlines and travel agents from around the world. The Arabian Gulf region will have a strong presence at the fair including pavilions sponsored by; Abu Dhabi Tourism & Cultural Authority (Strategic Partner), Sharjah Commerce

& Tourism Development Authority (Diamond Sponsor), Indonesia Tourism as Platinum Partner, Al-Riyadh Travel & Tourism (Gold Sponsors), Alia Travel (Silver Sponsor) and Careem (Transportation Sponsor). National pavilions confirmed to attend include those of: Austria, Kyoto Japan, the Philippines, Doka, Orange County California, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Slovenia, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, Bursa, Taiwan, Mexico, Holland, Maldives and Korea, to name just a few.

Exhibitors from Asia, Oceania, Europe and North Africa will also be present, along with hotels, airlines, travel agencies, online booking sites, and car rental companies such as Rotana, Lufthansa, MATATO, Thrifty, Dollar Rent A Car, Fursan Travel, and AirFrance & KLM, to name a few. ✈️



**Bander Al Gryni**  
General Manager -  
ASAS Exhibitions, organiser of  
Riyadh Travel Fair



**Sheikh Hafeez**  
Director of Sales and Marketing  
ASA Exhibitions

**With Saudi nationals travelling increasingly, the opportunities that the Riyadh Travel Fair provides to directly meet with the kingdom's leading travel professionals have never been more significant**

**RTF will showcase the potential of medical tourism along with its plethora of health and wellness offerings from various destinations. It will also offer a marketing platform for health and wellness providers**



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## TRAVTALK

## EDITORIAL

## New trends in tourism

Sports tourism is one of the oldest forms of tourism which kept nations in contact. Over the years, slowly but steadily sports tourism has made its way to crowning glory as today it is one of the leading entities that reaps billions of dollars in revenue and spending all the same.

A number of international sporting organisations have chosen to base themselves in Dubai either permanently or on a temporary basis. This year is special for Dubai as they will be hosting prestigious 2017 World Indoor Cricket Federation (WICF) World Cup in September. Every emirate has had a foot in sports tourism over the years. Organisers of the ITU World Triathlon Abu Dhabi are targeting even more aggressive growth for the season-opener, aiming to see close to 3,500 participants descend on Yas Island for the 2019 edition — a 20 per cent year-on-year growth in participation.

Meanwhile, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will host the ninth Riyadh Travel Fair 2017 with high expectations and for the first time they will focus on medical tourism, which seems to be a global trend-setter. It is estimated that \$20 billion (SAR 75 billion) in outbound medical tourism is being generated from GCC countries alone. Increasingly, countries like Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, India and the Philippines are becoming popular choices for patients from the Middle East, in addition to the traditional medical tourism destinations within Europe and the USA.

Travel agents, tour operators or DMC need to ensure that they keep up with the new trends and adapt accordingly. Although digital media platform has increased tremendously over the past number of years, the need for a traditional travel agent will never cease in certain areas. Is it possible to have all your guests' requests granted over the digital world? Shouldn't there be a point of contact or a coordinator who will be able to answer and take immediate action? That keeps travel agents relevant even in these times.

## Talent acquisition to boost future

Investment in robust recruitment processes will be critical for the future success of the hospitality industry.

As Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, was recently quoted as saying, "Talent, not capital, will be the key factor linking innovation, competitiveness and growth." Nowhere is this truer than in the hospitality industry.

Attracting and retaining the best talent in the region is increasingly a key focus for the hospitality sector, but it brings with it many ques-

looking at the macro growth picture for the hotel sector across the region. To do this it is important to consider the existing rooms supply pipeline, as well as the growth plans for the Middle East and Africa by the key global brands.

Our latest research at HVS reveals the following:

- There are 864 expected new hotel openings in the MEA region by 2020.

- We will see an addition of another 28,898 rooms, in 2017 itself 16,000 hotel keys are expected to be handed over.

- Saudi Arabia has 85 ongoing hotel projects that will offer 36,742 rooms.

- Qatar with an existing hotel base of 110 hotels has 34 hotels in the pipeline.

The wealth of upcoming supply means that we estimate between 100,000 and 120,000 additional staff will be needed to support the increase in rooms in the region. As the search for new talent becomes more competitive, it makes it even more critical to retain existing qualified talent.

According to a study by the Society for Human Resource Management, employers will need to spend the equivalent of six to nine months of an employee's salary in order to find and train their replacement. That means that for an employee salaried at \$100,000, it will cost the company anywhere from \$50,000 to \$75,000 to

hire and train a replacement. The situation is potentially even more extreme for the Middle East due to the increasing costs of relocation, and benefits such as housing, school education, travel etc.

Keeping in mind the accepted need for high performing talent, focus on controlling costs and the 80-20 principle, it is crucial that we effectively hire right the first time around. In the end, it will be the people who will be the key differentiators in our future success story.

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



Hala Matar Choufany\*  
President-Middle East  
and Africa, HVS

**Keeping in mind the accepted need for high performing talent, focus on controlling costs and the 80-20 principle, it is crucial that we effectively hire right the first time around**

tions. What are the expectations from our hospitality executives? Is the compensation to revenue ratio at par with the world standards? How well are some of the star hires treated? Why is the attrition rate so high? Are the people who are hiring properly qualified? Do they know what they are looking for?

In order to best understand the talent requirement ahead, it is perhaps worth

- A recent report shows 158,441 rooms in 555 projects under contract in the Middle East and 57,626 rooms in 309 projects under contract in Africa.

- The UAE is leading the expansion of the hospitality market in the Middle East and Africa region, with nearly 100 hotel projects now under construction.

\* Hala Matar Choufany is the President – Middle East and Africa for HVS and will be speaking at the Arabian Hotel Investment Conference 2017 on the topic of Alternative Hotel Investment Models.

## Hawthorn Suites upholds support to DCSN

The team from Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham JBR paid a visit to Dubai Centre for Special Needs (DCSN) to personally hand over a cheque donation worth AED5,000. The cheque was presented by **Samer Rafie**, the property's Hotel Manager, to **Maya Choueiri**, Public Relations Manager, and **Mahshid Salahi**, Director of Dubai Centre for Special Needs (DCSN).



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## Offices:

DELHI: 72, Todarmal Road, New Delhi - 110 001  
Ph.: +91-11-23344179  
E-mail: travtalk@ddpl.com

MUMBAI: 504, Marine Chambers, 43,  
New Marine Lines, Opp. SNDT College,  
Mumbai - 400 020, India  
Ph.: +91-22-22070129; 22070130,  
Fax: +91-22-22070131,  
E-mail: mumbai@ddpl.com

UAE: Z1-02, P.O. Box 9348, Saif Zone, Sharjah, UAE  
Ph.: +971 6 5528954  
Fax: +971 6 5528956  
E-mail: uae@ddpl.com

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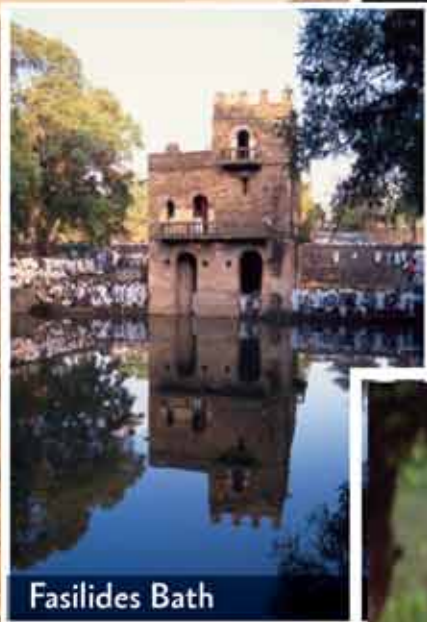
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# Maximising online hotel solutions

eRevMax works closely with over 9000 hotels worldwide to increase revenue opportunities through real time distribution, market intelligence and connectivity solutions, reveals its Regional Sales Director for the Middle East, Ali Kansou.



## Give us a brief about your company.

Travel technology provider, eRevMax offers specifically tailored solutions within its core product brands – RateTiger, RTConnect and LIVE OS. The company has sales and technology presence in the US, UK, Spain, France, India, Brazil and Argentina. There are over 350 hotels across the Middle East using our solutions, including major hotel groups like AccorHotels, Kempinski, Golden Tulip, Millennium Hotel, Rotana & Auris, etc.

## What are the services you extend?

RateTiger product suite offers the industry's leading Channel Manager for online distribution, Shopper for rate benchmarking. RTConnect provides seamless two-way XML integration of channel management functionality with the hotel's central systems. LIVE OS offers hotels a single sign-on platform to access multiple applications, while offering

technology partners a chance to get in front of hotels allowing greater distribution of promotional opportunities. eRevMax is working closely with over 300 certified channel and technology partners helping over 9000 hotels worldwide to increase revenue opportunities and streamline business processes.

## In terms of properties what is the strategy to attract more online visitors?

More than 50 per cent of the population in the Middle East is aged between 18 and 34 years and Internet is their preferred choice. They would visit over 17 websites, check reviews, exchange notes with friends and family before finalising on where to stay. As the fight for the share of the pie heats up with the availability of more inventories, hotels need to be visible at every touch point to capture customer's interest.

When it comes to online advertising, OTAs spend lot more compared



Ali Kansou  
Regional Sales Director - Middle East  
eRevMax

**In the Middle East, where about 38 per cent of online bookings are made in OTAs, online sales channels can be a great opportunity for hotels to not only increase their visibility in the region, but also expand their market reach**

to individual hotels. Two online travel giants Expedia and Priceline spend

around \$4 billion annually on Google Search advertising. Most often they are the first point of call for potential guests. Studies suggest, OTAs spend an average of \$300 per hotel on promotions and marketing. For hotels to compete OTAs on their own on digital marketing, the cost can go up to \$7,000 to \$10,000. The trade-off between OTA commissions and direct customer acquisition cost remains a paradox for many hotels. In the Middle East, where about 38 per cent of online bookings are made in OTAs, online sales channels can be a great opportunity for hotels to not only increase their visibility in the region, but also expand their market reach.

## Technology plays a pivotal part in hospitality – in your opinion what will the future traveller look for and what will the future travel agent focus on?

Online has made people more impatient and more demanding. Today's traveller wants quick answers, simple process – a phenomenon

Booking.com calls 'instant gratification 2.0'. According to an American Express survey, '78 per cent of consumers have bailed on a transaction or not made an intended purchase because of a poor service experience.' Customer friction has a negative impact on the experience, and can lead to an overall negative feeling about the brand. With major OTAs and Airbnb investing huge on guest experience with personalised trip planning, and easy cancellation like features, hotels need to up their game. As booking moves to mobile, hotels cannot afford to not to have a responsive, mobile-friendly, content rich and secure website for more conversions.

## Good to Know

- ▷ RateTiger, RTConnect and LIVE OS are three core products from the house of eRevMax
- ▷ Over 350 hotels in the Middle East are using eRevMax solutions

## Latin WTM to host 650 exhibitors

The 5<sup>th</sup> WTM Latin America aims to attract more than 6,000 industry executives, says **Charlie Cracknell**, Senior Exhibition Director, WTM Latin America, WTM Connect Asia & International Golf Travel Market.



## What are your expectations from the exhibition this year?

WTM Latin America this year will be held at Expo Center Norte, a great conven-

## What is new at WTM Latin America this year?

For 2017, we will have new partnerships and better technology to improve participation. We have Hotel Map as a partner which will offer discounts



Charlie Cracknell  
Senior Exhibition Director, WTM Latin America, WTM Connect Asia & International Golf Travel Market

**We expect the event to be a great success, better than the \$371 million worth business generated last year. We are working in partnerships and making changes in the Press Centre to have the best WTM Latin America ever**

tion center in Sao Paulo which offers more than 75,000 square metres for exhibitions. For 2017, WTM Latin America will be even better. The focus remains on generating business. We expect presence of at least 50 countries and regions represented, 650 exhibitors, more than 6,540 unique visitors.

in hospitality, with the possibility to custom the offer, according to visitor's profile. WTM Latin America in partnership with OneWorld, will also provide discounts to participants. 'My Event platform' App will connect buyers, media and visitors to schedule meetings.

We expect the event to be a great success, better than the \$371 million worth business generated last year. We are working in partnerships and making changes in the Press Centre to have the best WTM Latin America ever. 📱

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# Hahn Air revs up on ME runway

Hahn Air is focusing on the Middle East region in 2017 in order to attract more partners and enable them to maximise their revenues, says its VP Sales and Agency Distribution, **Kimberley Long**.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

## QHow does Hahn Air connect with travel trade?

Hahn Air facilitates global business between travel agencies and airlines to do business with each other, the airline's flights have to be available in a Global Distribution System (GDS). In addition, both the travel agent and the airline need to be a member of the local Billing and Settlement Plan (BSP). As it is generally not financially sustainable for an airline to be a member of all BSPs and GDSs in the world, not all travel agents are able to sell tickets of all airlines. For example, a travel agent in Dubai may not be able to issue a ticket of an African carrier in the GDS. For both parties this means a missed business opportunity. We provide the missing link as we are connected to all major GDSs and are members of almost every BSP. Moreover, as we are an IATA airline, we can form interline agreements with other airlines and can sell their flights on the HR-169 ticket stock.



Kimberley Long  
VP Sales and Agency Distribution  
Hahn Air

**Middle Eastern travel agencies have increased their business with Hahn Air to date by over 8 per cent in 2016 compared to 2015**

Our large network of partners and travel agents can sell countless combinations of carriers on the HR-169 ticket. For groups of 10 travellers or more, the HR-Groups team will help travel agents to save time and effort. We are also the only ticket-

ing provider to offer the complimentary insolvency insurance Securtix®, with each ticket. Our complimentary ticket insurance guarantees passengers a refund in the event that a service issued on an HR-169 document with any of Hahn Air's partners is cancelled due to insolvency. We are proud that Securtix® has proven to be such a valuable service to our travel agency partners. Since 2010, travel agencies have issued over 27 million insolvency safe HR-169 tickets with Hahn Air.

Our team of 22 dedicated Global Account Directors regularly contact and visit travel agents in their respective markets. Each director actively creates awareness of Hahn Air and our ticketing services through presentations, trainings and networking

events across the countries in their portfolio. Our global and multilingual team provides daily support round the clock at the service desk. Agents can contact the Global Service Desk at [service@hahnair.com](mailto:service@hahnair.com). Our website [www.hahnair.com](http://www.hahnair.com) also provides lots of useful tools and information including Quick Check, the GDS Ticketing Assistant and an entertaining series of informational videos.

## QWhat benefits do you offer the agents in the ME region?

For the Middle East region we will continue to support the markets with regular newsletters on recent Hahn Air developments as well as targeted newsletters on the latest routes and promotions from our

growing partner network. We will remain committed to providing in-house agency trainings, webinars and sales visits and not to forget our 24/7 service desk support system.

## QWhat have you planned for 2017 for the ME region?

We will support our agents to see strong revenue developments in 2017. We are planning to add more airline partners and work closely with Middle Eastern travel agencies to maximise their potential. The Middle Eastern market holds great potential and Middle Eastern travel agencies have increased their business with Hahn Air to date by over 8 per cent in 2016 compared to 2015. 🇦🇪



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Offering 252 guest rooms with state-of-art amenities, the hotel caters to business travelers and discerning holiday-makers, drawn to its unique location - close to beach and city - and provides a broad scope of facilities and services. Spacious underground parking, concierge services and a regular shuttle bus to Jumeirah Beach and shopping malls offer additional convenience for guests.

### Dine at Ramada Jumeirah Hotel

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# ARABIAN TRAVEL AWARDS



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## Personality of the month

# Visionary entrepreneur: Ishrat Ali Khan

An exemplary leader, who owns four companies and plays multiple roles in the competitive business environment, **Ishrat Ali Khan**, Group Managing Director, Al Wasl Yachts, has made an impact as one of the most innovative young businessmen in the UAE.

TT BUREAU

In 1997, Ishrat Ali Khan began his journey in the hotel industry in Dubai. His hard work in the industry paid off as he rose to become the General Manager of two efficiently run popular Deira-based properties 13 years ago. A person who is abuzz with new ideas, constantly looking out for new challenges and growth, he moved from hospitality to tourism industry with the modest resources at hand and established Oasis Palm Tourism in the year 2004; over the past decade he has been able to add three more. Single-minded focus on service and achieving client satisfaction with highly personalised service, timely diversifications in line with clients' needs has resulted in business growth in multiple segments, specialising in desert and mountain safaris, dhow cruises, sports fishing, luxury yacht cruising and destination management services.

As he always states, it is all about a broad vision, keeping it simple, dedication, sincerity and honesty in dealing with clients and partner companies and above all



chasing the dream to fruition. "To be the best and to offer the best to the clients" has been his mantra and the inspiration behind the set-up of four successfully run companies in the last 13 years. They are one of the very few companies, who provide one-window solution to all excursion needs of tourists/residents of Dubai, UAE. The four companies: Al Wasl Yachts, Al Wasl Dhow, Oasis Palm Tourism and Asia Pacific Travel & Tourism deals in yacht rental,

desert safari, dhow cruise, city tour, Musandam Dibba Tour and other excursions.

Challenging himself with the trade best known to him, he ventured into the travel and tourism sector. "Personally, I feel it was a right decision and growth matrix justifies it. Be a visionary, be decisive, keep changing the game and continually self-evaluate for improvement. My business style has evolved over the 13 years since I first

came into this position. I have a lot more confidence in my ability and I have reinvented myself over the course of time. I think as a businessman, especially in Dubai, you have to do that. If you don't continue to reinvent, at some stage you are going to lose your edge. I started with one company and over the past decade have been able to add three more to our portfolio but the greatest achievement in my life has been the guest pleasure which stems out from conformance to high quality standards."

Evaluating how the industry has changed in the last decade, Khan says, "There is a significant change in the industry especially over the past 15 years. The market has had its good years and bad years but it has gotten more competitive, demanding and challenging too at times. Today even the targets are very much different than nearly 10 or 15 years back in terms of information collection, dissemination and understand-



ing the importance of quality consciousness and price comparison. Recent digital solutions have reshaped the entire business. They are more demanding and success for tourism lies in providing right combination of price and services."

Khan outlines how Dubai is known for its eagerness for differentiation along with already existence excursions and attractions and that there will be a series of new things on to-do list in Dubai. However, quality standards for services will keep on escalating. "Our core products vary from yachts, safari, dhow cruise and city tour; although each of them require the same trips but the trends in degree of customization is entirely different. The best part of having equally competitive products is that we have variety in order to fulfill the needs of the guests at the end of the day," he adds. "Every business witnesses the shift of customers from 'Market Place' to 'Market Space.' We keep ourselves in pace with this regime of digitalisation and ensure our presence and availability to through all modern tools; stated Khan.

Khan and his team actively participate in initiatives and activi-

ties relating to CSR. They offer their recreational and services to academic institutions on nonprofit basis. They actively participate in all type of green initiatives as well. "We have quite an extensive CSR policy and we set targets and measure against those targets at the end of the year. So, we are very committed to CSR. We don't see it as a cost to the business. We see it as good corporate citizenship. We actively participate in initiatives and activities relating to CSR. We do offer our recreational and services to academic institutions on non-profit basis. We actively participate in all type of green initiatives as well," he says.



**There is a significant change in the industry especially over the past 15 years. The market has had its good years and bad years but it has gotten more competitive, demanding and challenging too at times**

Ishrat Ali Khan  
Group Managing Director, Al Wasl Yachts





# Ethiopian commands African skies

Ethiopian Airlines is on a rapid growth trajectory with a very clear vision towards 2025 — to add 120 international and 26 domestic destinations with a revenue of over \$10 billion. **Ali Mohammed**, Area Manager – Gulf, Ethiopian Airlines, speaks to **TRAVTALK**.

TT BUREAU

**Q Give us an overview of the Ethiopian Airlines operation in the region and the world.**

Ethiopian commands the lion's share of the pan-African passenger and cargo network operating the youngest and most modern fleet to more than 90 international destinations across five continents. Ethiopian operates ultra-modern and environmentally friendly aircraft like Airbus A350, Boeing 787 and Boeing 777-300ER with an average fleet age of five years. In fact, Ethiopian is the first airline in Africa to own and operate these aircraft.

**Q Will you be looking at any new route enhancements? What are the projections for 2017?**

We are introducing seven new destinations in five months of the current fiscal year. February-June, Ethiopian will be connecting Conakry, Victoria Falls, Antananarivo,

Oslo, Chengdu, Singapore and Jakarta. While our travellers are enjoying our services to and from Conakry, the rest are in the pipeline per the plan. There are also code-share agreements with 25 airlines and more agreements in the pipeline.

**Q What is the strategy for the GCC and especially the UAE to?**

This region is very important to Ethiopian Airlines due to the trade ties between a rising Africa and the Middle East. In addition to business travellers, we are also expecting a huge leisure travel from/to the Middle East and Africa. Ethiopian Airlines currently flies to 10 destinations in the Middle East and connecting to more than 50 destinations in Africa. Specially Dubai since has emerged as a Global City and business hub of the Middle East and a major transport hub for passengers and cargo, with EXPO 2020 expected to bring a lot of opportunities for Ethiopian Airlines, currently from Dubai operating three daily passenger services

using the ultra-modern Dreamliner and Airbus 350 and four cargo services a week. In order to strengthen Ethiopian's market in these regions, we are working to boost in areas such as additional capacity, more frequencies and planning to expand to all Middle East cities.

**Q Could you share about the latest training facilities offered by Ethiopian Airlines?**

Ethiopian Aviation Academy (EEA) is the largest and the oldest in the continent established in 1956. The Academy has been revamped with \$100 million and inaugurated last year. And it is heavily equipped itself with modern training aircraft, computer-based trainings, full flight simulators, and other ultra-modern facilities.

**Q Do you have any targets for adding more guests from Ethiopia and other African cities?**

Ethiopia is a land of diversity, rich with history and home to nine



Ali Mohammed  
Area Manager-Gulf  
Ethiopian Airlines

**In order to strengthen Ethiopian's market in these regions, we are working to boost in areas such as additional capacity, more frequencies and planning to expand to all Middle East cities**

destination for all travellers. Our effort is focused to increase tourist inflow to Ethiopia from every corner of the globe including the UAE. Thanks to our daily three flights from Dubai together with 19 domestic flights to the tourist attractions the number of tourist from the UAE is growing significantly. On the other hand, we have developed attractive packages and started selling from Ethiopia and all Africa points towards the UAE especially for those targeting business with leisure.

**Q What are the main projects undertaken by Ethiopian Airlines for medical tourism?**

In order to serve the growing medical travel market and to medically connect Africa to the rest of the world, Ethiopian Airlines has collaborated with hospitals to introduce a medical travel package to popular medical destination worldwide including the UAE. The package includes medical service, air travel and other ground handling services. 🇪🇹

UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the uncommon combination of history, culture, nature and adventure makes Ethiopia a unique, must-visit

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# Sharjah triumphs, steps up



Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority headed a tourism delegation to Germany for ITB Berlin 2017, from March 8-12, as part of the emirate's strategy to continue building its reputation globally as a family destination offering a diverse tourism portfolio with its unparalleled experiences in culture and heritage.



Sharjah has announced a 16 per cent growth in guest numbers in 2016 against the global growth of 4.6 per cent and the Middle East overall growth of 9 per cent. The growth clearly underlines the success of the Authority's endeavors.

**His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority, said, "We are always delighted to be at Berlin and this is our 20<sup>th</sup> year of participation demonstrating our long-term

investment in the European market. ITB is always a good exhibition for us but this year our improved stand design has added a new dimension and we noticed a considerable increase in footfall and business this year. We are delighted that our efforts have been recognised and we received first place in the best stand for the Middle East category awarded at a glittering ceremony during ITB. The success of the Authority is thanks to the wise leadership of and guidance of **H.H. Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammad Al Qasimi**, UAE Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah."

On the opening day, Sharjah's outstanding award win-

ning pavilion quickly became the heart of the Middle East hall. The traditional café occupied the middle section at the stand with a traditional date souk and opportunities for the visitors to experience henna art and calligraphy, the stand certainly underscored the heritage and culture of the region.

The 'Natural Sharjah' tunnel attracted great attention and was supported by the new coffee table book which emphasizes all of Sharjah's natural treasures. This innovative tunnel, made entirely from sustainable wood sources, very visually reflected the importance that is being placed on the environment and outdoor tourism by the Authority for the coming years. To ensure understanding of the wide diversity of natural assets that Sharjah has, the Authority has worked closely with the Environmental Protection Authority to launch a new coffee table book profiling the protected areas as well as the flora and fauna found in the emirate.



**The 'Natural Sharjah' tunnel attracted great attention and was supported by the new coffee table book which emphasizes all of Sharjah's natural treasures. This innovative tunnel, made entirely from sustainable wood sources, very visually reflected the importance that is being placed on the environment and outdoor tourism by the Authority for the coming years**

"Sharjah has established itself as a global tourism brand with huge potential for further investment, capitalising on its diverse landscape, rich heritage, temperate climate and excellent accommodation industry, which together makes Sharjah a fabulous, affordable family destination for leisure and business travel on local, regional and international levels," said Al Midfa. Historically, Germany is one of Sharjah's

important source markets, which together with the rest of Europe accounts for 20 per cent of all guest stays in the emirate.

"Our presence at ITB comes as a testament of our commitment to continue strengthening our ties with Germany, as one of our top source markets; and exemplifies our initiatives to further grow the emirate's brand presence, which with its temperate climate,

stunning landscapes and vast outdoor offering, Sharjah is securely establishing itself internationally as a premier global affordable family destination," the SCTDA Chairman added.

The number of visitors to the stand underscored Sharjah stand's recognition and prominence at the show. The Authority was delighted to receive visits from **H.E. Dr. Amal Al Qubaisi**,





# presence @ITB Berlin 2017



His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa  
Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and  
Tourism Development Authority

**We are delighted that we received first place in the best stand for the Middle East category. The success is thanks to the wise leadership of and guidance of H.H. Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammad Al Qasimi, UAE Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah**

President, Federal National Council, as well as the UAE Ambassador H.E. Ali Al Ahmad along with the Minister of Economy H.E. Mohammed Al Muhairi.

Among many meetings on the stand from investors, media, and key outbound players in the tourism industry, Sharjah Tourism noted the enthusiasm towards the new positioning of the emirate reflected in the stand design and the increased desire by the travel industry for Sharjah to be included and positioned in their portfolios. A number of key outbound operators announced their intention to increase flight frequency to the region which is a positive sign of not only economic improvement but also reflects the hard work of all the tourism boards in the region to positioning their products in the minds of the European consumer.



The delegation, led by the SCTDA Chairman, included the co-exhibitors of Shurooq, Sharjah Airport Authority, Environmental Protected Areas Authority, Sharjah Museums Department, Sharjah Heritage, Knowledge without Borders, SATA, Sharjah National Hotels, Golden Tulip, Ramada, Coral Beach Resort, Sheraton, Auras Tours, and 🇦🇪 🇩🇪 🇯🇪.





# La Ville gets a new address in Dubai

Part of Marriott International's Autograph collection, La Ville Hotel and Suites has officially opened its doors in Dubai recently.

TT BUREAU

The new boutique hotel developed by Meraas, La Ville Hotel and Suites is located at the heart of City Walk, Dubai's new urban living destination. With 77 rooms, 11 suites and 68 apartments, the guest rooms celebrate relaxed urban luxury with neutral shades in furnishings, combined with contemporary artistic twists. The bathrooms include marble counter tops, a free-standing bath tub and a walk-in shower.

The Penthouse Suite, spread across 180 square metres, includes a separate living space, a private dining area and a terrace with spectacular views of Dubai's magical skyline.

The hotel houses three restaurants, a lobby café and rooftop bar all adding signifi-

cantly to Dubai's culinary and bar scene. The hotel's restaurants are headed by Chef Pedro Joaquín Arceyut who has carefully crafted each menu to reflect the individuality of each venue while South African native, Juan Jacques

van Huyssteen oversees La Ville's bar concepts as Director of Beverages.

The hotel's all day dining concept, Chival, focuses on healthy and thoughtfully sourced produce set within



light and airy interiors that includes seating in the open-air courtyard. The Graze gastro grill serves prime cuts and seafood cooked in a Josper oven and the restaurant evokes a passionate dining experience, sharing good food and grape among great company.

With extensive outdoor seating, guests also have the option of dining outside amongst a range of terrace fireplaces and overlooking the unique City Walk streets. Set across the courtyard is Grapeskin, a standalone grape bar and kitchen with its own dedicated entrance. Up

on the rooftop, LookUp boasts spectacular views of the Burj Khalifa where guests can sip carefully crafted beverages overlooking Dubai's magical skyline and the infinity pool.

Open 24 hours a day, the Lobby Café is a relaxing open space where one can sit back and take some time out with a coffee and healthy snack at any time, night or day. For the sophisticated experience seeker, frequent traveller or stylish socialite looking for a chic urban setting, new horizons have arrived at La Ville Hotel & Suites City Walk, Dubai. 🍷

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# Travel platform for KSA's Vision 2030

Saudi Arabia is rapidly becoming one of the most important source markets for various industry players in keeping with the 2030 vision of the kingdom in the travel sector. Travelport is currently supporting the Saudi Arabian travel industry players through technology and travel commerce platform, reveals **Matthew Powell**, Director - Middle East & South Asia, Travelport.

TT BUREAU

## QHow important is the KSA market for Travelport?

Saudi Arabia's travel and tourism industry is increasingly in the spotlight as a driving sector for growth in the kingdom's Vision 2030 economic diversification strategy and Travelport is dedicated to supporting Saudi Arabia's travel industry player to drive high performance in travel through our technology and travel commerce platform. Our vision is to redefine travel commerce in the region, working with industry players to connect travellers to a world of travel choice through the power of our unique platform.

We have made several noteworthy steps towards this direction recently by building partnerships with key travel industry players in the Kingdom, such as the leading low cost carrier Flynas, AlHashim Travel and Roibek Travel, who have come to rely on Travelport's innovative technology and merchandising solutions to stand out from the competition to drive high travel performance and connect travellers to a world of travel choice.

This is especially evidenced in the strategic partnership with IndiGo, India's largest domestic airline, which is expanding operations across the Middle East and one of the world's fastest growing LCCs, announced in September 2016.

## QWhat would you say is different when you compare other markets in the GCC region?

Saudi Arabia leads the Middle Eastern region in terms of internet penetration and with a young, tech-savvy population, e-commerce is a thriving industry in Saudi Arabia. Online travel sales have been growing faster than offline sales. Internet penetration is high and growing in Saudi Arabia and the population is becoming more aware and accepting of the idea of making purchases online. Mobile travel sales are also growing fueled by mobile device penetration.

**With Saudi tourism revenues predicted to reach \$81 billion by 2026, we are committed to supporting the country's travel industry players to grow their businesses and meet traveller demands, connecting travellers in the region to a world of travel choice through our unique platform**

## QCould you share the role played by Travelport to the clientele in KSA?

Travelport first opened its offices in KSA in 2008 and has offices in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam. As a major global business and connector of travel services, Travelport is well placed to play an integral role in the projected growth of the

Saudi travel industry. We would encourage airlines in Saudi Arabia to consider the

er of our platform creates synergies and network effects that facilitate revenue

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benefits of the indirect sales channel as part of their distribution strategy to reach new customer segments and generate incremental revenue. Travelport delivers differentiated content, tech-

growth across the travel value chain.

## QHow has Travelport fared in KSA and what were the challenges faced and results?

Travelport sits at the heart of the travel industry and with Saudi tourism revenues predicted to reach \$81 billion by 2026, we are committed to supporting the country's travel industry players to grow their businesses and meet traveller demands, connecting travellers in the region to a world of travel choice through our unique platform. The Saudi travel and tourism industry is on the rise and we are very proud of our partnerships in the region, both on the travel agent community and airlines side. While uncertainty is a theme in the global economy in 2017, demand for international tourism remains high.

## QWhat kind of growth trajectory you see in the KSA in terms of adapting travel technology?

Yes, and the online and mobile penetration rates in Saudi Arabia are reported to be very high; as a result, online travel to locals went up to 33 per cent in 2015, much quicker than offline travel merchandising. Saudi Arabia is the leading Internet penetrator in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia has also become very active on social media and applications such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram.

As a result, travel and tourism businesses utilise their accounts in such platforms to effectively communicate their offerings to possible travellers, a factor that has resulted to a similar increase in online purchases. Consequently, primarily due to the young and tech-savvy generation, e-commerce has become a very prosperous industry in Saudi Arabia.

As such, tour operators should welcome innovation, instead of treating it as a challenge, as new technology platforms provide make travel agents offerings more competitive, personalised and convenient and time effective.



Matthew Powell  
Director - Middle East & South Asia  
Travelport

## QDo share the plans for 2017 in terms of the KSA market.

Travelport held a series of travel awards in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam in February. These were the first of their kind in the Kingdom and honored Saudi Arabia's travel leaders. They also provided a networking platform for the travel industry's stakeholders and key opinion leaders on how technology can be leveraged to drive high performances in travel and meet traveller demands; personalising their travel experiences and further connecting them to a world of travel choice.

In March we are hosting our 'Spotlight in Innovation' tour across the Kingdom. The roadshow features a series of interactive sessions which will showcase the solutions and technologies redefining the way travel is being searched, shared and booked by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's leading travel industry players.



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# MICE and luxury travel to the fore

This year's edition of MICE Arabia and Luxury Travel Congress attracted more than 60 global suppliers and over 150 buyers signaling the potential of the GCC's MICE & luxury travel market.



## TT BUREAU

The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual MICE Arabia and Luxury Travel Congress (MALT) concluded on a strong and positive note highlighting value-for-money, creativity and innovation as business game-changers for MICE & luxury travel from the region.

There was a positive increase in the number of suppliers representing global and emerging destinations and in the number of influencers and decision makers from corporate organisations, travel agencies as well as luxury representatives attending the event, there-

**A clear pattern of business game changers emerged over the course of the event. Exclusivity continues to be a defining attribute of luxury travel from the region. We are now in the process of condensing the lessons we have learnt, and drafting these into action plans**

Sidh N.C.



Sidh N.C.  
Director  
QnA International  
Organisers of the MALT Congress

by creating an optimistic outlook for the overall development of outbound travel from the region.

It is poised to be the only MICE platform in the region



Amna Al Hammadi  
Communications Consultant,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and  
International Co-operation, UAE

to bring buyers and world class suppliers in a one-to-one format. The congress, a closed door, by invitation only platform, delivered more than 1800 mutually matched and pre-selected appointments over the two days.

"This year's figures mirror the increase, both in confidence and business levels across major industry sectors in the GCC. We have had an exciting two days, a clear pat-

tern of business game changers emerged over the course of the event, and these we see as imminent and important characteristics in the world of MICE and Luxury Travel. Exclusivity continues to be a defining attribute of luxury travel from the region. We are now in the process of condensing the lessons we have learnt from experts, and drafting these into action plans. There was great feedback from our participants and sponsors that will help us plan for the next edition of the MALT Congress," commented **Sidh N.C.**, Director, QnA International, organisers of the MALT Congress.

From North America to Asia, from the African continent to Europe and the Middle East, the event boasted of suppliers from every corner of the world including but not limited to Dubai, Zurich, Davos, Switzerland, India, Japan,

Italy, Montenegro, Azerbaijan, the UK, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Croatia, Morocco, Anguilla, Dominican Republic, Sri Lanka, Thailand,

and round table discussions that focused on the tremendous potential of the GCC outbound market cutting across luxury, MICE and

**It brings experience from all around the world under one roof from corporate companies to destinations. The one-to-one meetings cover different interesting elements that can be used for future business**

Amna Al Hammadi

Turkey, Cyprus, Greece, Seychelles, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Georgia, France, Abu Dhabi, Singapore, Indonesia, Taiwan, California, Fort Lauderdale, China, Spain, Germany, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iceland, Tanzania, Kenya, the Philippines, Canada, and Uganda.

Interwoven in the event agenda were panel discussions, keynote presentations

sports sectors and bought back the confidence of the suppliers in the region's robust economy

**Amna Al Hammadi**, Communications Consultant, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, UAE, commented, "It brings experience from all around the world under one roof from corporate companies to destinations. It offers the perfect mix of exchanging knowledge and experience. The one to one meetings cover different interesting elements that can be used for future business. I thank the organisers for bringing this varied mixture of backgrounds & companies. The platform is unique and this is what motivates and encourages us to participate in the event every year

"It was a very well-organised event, from the minute we got here till the end of the event, the appointments were well done, pre-qualified and very engaging. I see a good ROI coming from the event, commented another sponsor from Sofitel, Los Angeles. 🇸🇦





# Are you offering the right hotel choice?

Personalisation is the key to retain clients and attract potential ones. To meet customer expectations, agents need a shop window with everything available in one place together with rich content that will help the agent find the right product.

Travellers increasingly expect agents to offer personalised guidance and a unique hotel experience. They want to be treated as individuals and receive recommendations that reflect their own tastes and preferences.

Customers looking to book a hotel are faced with an overwhelming amount of options compared to booking a flight and their decisions are much more emotional and driven by personal preference, as the final choice is so integral to the enjoyment of the whole trip. Knowing as much as possible about a potential customer's likes and dislikes means an agent can guide customers through all the relevant options — and relevancy is the key word. With such information they can send timely messages via the customer's preferred channel — be it direct mail, social or email.

To meet customer expectations, agents need a shop window with everything available in one place together with rich content that will help the agent find the right product to recommend. Assets such as 360 degree video, strong imagery and customer reviews are key levers in decision-making. Leisure travellers ranked photos and price high as factors helping them make a hotel booking for a leisure break in a recent Sabre Twitter poll, compared to location for business travellers.

TMCs are specialists and keep their finger on the pulse of emerging travel trends — but the 'secret sauce' that delivers success is being able to deliver on these trends with the aid of technology.

Two key overlapping trends illustrate the importance of understanding the

customer and tailoring recommendations — the rise of the 'bleisure' trip and the expectations millennials bring to their workplace and holidays.

Bleisure bookings are gaining ground as time-

**The TMC that serves solutions at speed will satisfy the customer and also free up agents to be more productive, rather than tying them up searching in multiple places**

pressed business travellers look to extend work trips and explore surrounding leisure options. TMCs know the importance of large hotel chains in delivering a consistent, convenient and quality experience, but some business travellers want to stretch out and try boutique, tailored accommodation as well. The percentage of leisure trips with a business component jumped to 17 per cent last year, compared

to 14 per cent in 2015, according to Travel Weekly's 2016 Consumer Trends report.

Millennials blur their work/life boundaries and their behaviour has a growing impact on the hotel busi-

ness — under 30s travel 4.7 times per year on business, versus 3.6 times per year among 30-45-year-olds, and 4.2 times per year among 46-65-year-olds. They also take more leisure trips, at 4.2 trips a year, versus 2.9 for 31-45 year olds and 3.2 for 46-65 year olds.

TMCs need to 'get under the skin' of this cohort — and don't forget they make up a

sizeable chunk of your own employees too, so understanding their likes and dislikes will be extremely helpful.

Travellers head to agents that offer the widest array of accommodation and can surface what they are looking for quickly and easily. The TMC that serves solutions at speed thanks to having a breadth of content in one place and an efficient workflow will satisfy the customer and also free up agents to be more productive, rather than tying them up searching in multiple places for a suitable hotel solution.

Booking everything within a single system also means no time is wasted adding passive bookings to the Passenger Name Record — and there is no risk of passenger information being lost. A corporate will be able to keep track of employees'

whereabouts and carry out its duty of care in case of a crisis.

All in all, TMCs that can meet emerging trends with fast, efficient and personalised services will stand out and differentiate from the competition.

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



**Melissa Gay**  
Land and Sea Business Development  
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# 32 exhibitors from ME at ITB Berlin

51<sup>st</sup> ITB Berlin, held at Messe Berlin, saw participation from a total of 32 exhibitors from the Middle East region with tourism boards such as Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah and Abu Dhabi taking centre stage. Emirates and Qatar Airways showcased their unique Business Class cabins this year and for the first time Saudi Arabia exhibited as a country.





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# 10,000 exhibitors at 51<sup>st</sup> ITB Berlin



## Ramada Ajman strengthens CSR in Gulf

Ramada Hotel & Suites Ajman bagged the Waste Management Award at the Gulf Sustainability and CSR Awards 2016. The awards are designed to provide recognition for companies and individuals implementing outstanding sustainability and CSR initiatives across the region. The property competed against the region's most prominent companies from diverse industries like Emaar Community Management, Farnek Services and Dubai Duty Free. The finals and awards ceremony was held at Jumeirah Creekside Hotel in Dubai on February 15, 2017.



## Now, Muscat-Dubai double daily

Oman's first budget airline SalamAir has introduced Dubai as its first international destination. Fares from Dubai to Muscat start as low as AED122.

TT BUREAU

The double daily service will operate from Muscat International Airport (MCT) to Dubai World Central (DWC) before moving to Dubai International Airport (DXB) starting March 26, 2017. SalamAir's growing destination network was made possible with the arrival of the second A320 to its fleet, named "Fateh Al Khair" and will introduce a third daily flight to Salalah.

"It has been an exciting start to the year for SalamAir with the introduction of our two destinations, Salalah and Dubai, which reinforces our commitment to strongly support and further trade and economic opportunities for Oman," said **Khalid Al Yahmadi**, Chairman, SalamAir. "For a newly launched airline, our figures are already showing very promising results. The response from our guests has been very posi-



Khalid Al Yahmadi  
Chairman  
SalamAir



François Bouteiller  
CEO  
SalamAir

tive which demonstrates our capabilities in offering a redefined travel experience."

Delivering on its promise to offer value for money, SalamAir will provide the option of "through flights" on the 17:35 flight from Salalah to Dubai, meaning that guests can fly to Dubai without having to disembark in Muscat. The service includes a 50-minute stopover. Built on the philosophy of "Always Welcome", SalamAir ensures that Omani hospitality is reflected in all

aspects of its services, whether on-ground or in-flight.

**François Bouteiller**, SalamAir CEO, said, "Dubai is a thriving leisure and business destination with convenient dual flight times, we are offering more flexible travel options for our guests, all within their budget. With the aim of improving the connectivity, we will also be announcing multiple new destinations to and from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in the coming weeks with the arrival of additional aircrafts."



## IndiGo now flies to Sharjah

IndiGo, the Indian low-cost airline, has commenced flights to Sharjah making it the sixth international destination in their route plan.

TT BUREAU

Effective March 20, IndiGo has started its new daily non-stop flights between Sharjah-Kozhikode-Sharjah and a second daily flight to operate non-stop between Sharjah-

Sanjay Kumar, Chief Commercial Officer, IndiGo, said, "We are extremely pleased to expand our international network with Sharjah. The Middle East has been an important market for IndiGo with rising business and tour-

choice for our customers as IndiGo continues to offer them on time, hassle free and always affordable flying experience. We are now available on all Travelport platforms and interfaces reaching 68,000 travel agents around the globe. This partnership gives us a marketing edge and is very important to us as we can enhance our distribution capability."

He further stressed that Sharjah was an important market after Dubai due to the vast number of south Indian population residing hence it was an opportune time to penetrate this market. The introductory fares start as low as AED243 for Kozhikode-Sharjah one way. The flight capacity will be 180 passengers with a baggage allowance of 30kgs per passenger both to Sharjah and return from Kozhikode. They will be looking at other destinations in the Middle East region within the next few months.



Thiruvananthapuram-Sharjah effective April 8, 2017. Currently operating 13 daily flights to Dubai, the addition of these two flights to Sharjah will increase the frequency to 15 flights daily to the southern region in India. The new flights will cater to both leisure and business travellers.

ism stemming from the Gulf market. We are determined to provide the best travel experience to all those who wish to fly these destinations. We are looking at providing affordable fares on these new routes to our 6E travellers. It is our constant endeavor to provide more flexibility of

## Turkish adds 2 Russian cities

Turkish Airlines will now fly to Voronezh and Samara in Russia. The move is to attract more tourists from one of the airlines' most important source markets.



TT BUREAU

Currently operating to Moscow, St.Petersburg, Sochi, Rostov, Kazan, Ekaterinburg, Ufa, Astrakhan, Novosibirsk and Stavropol. Turkish Airlines plans to further increase capacity in Russia by operating three flights per week between Istanbul-Samara and Istanbul-Voronej instead of Astrakhan and Novosibirsk which are currently operated as two flights per week. Istanbul-Voronej v.v. flights will be launched on April 4, 2017, and Istanbul-Samara v.v.

flights will also be launched on April 11, 2017. It was announced that there would be special round-trip fares available for Istanbul-Samara starting from \$159 and for Istanbul-Voronej starting from \$189 (including taxes).

Voronej flight times as scheduled from April 4 will depart every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday on TK 481 from Istanbul at 01:05 and arrive at Voronej by 03:45. Flight number TK 482 will depart every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday and arrive at Voronej by 03:45. Flight

number TK 482 will depart Voronej every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 04:40 and arrive in Istanbul by 07:40.

Samara flight times are scheduled from April 11 to depart from Istanbul aboard flight TK 487 every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 20:30 and arrive by 00:55 +1 (the next day). It would head to Istanbul on TK 488 every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at 02:05 and arrive by 04:45. There will be more information available on their website.

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## Travelport gets IATA NDC certification

Travelport has been granted 'Aggregator Level One' certification and 'IT Provider Level Two' status by IATA as part of its New Distribution Capability programme.



Travelport has also achieved the NDC-capable 'IT Provider' Level Two status, making it only the second organisation — and first GDS ever — to be designated as NDC certified and NDC Capable. This further expands its NDC capabilities and means that Travelport

is now chosen to be an active participant in IATA's NDC planning and has been a member of various working groups and steering and committees focused on NDC development. These groups include the Passenger Distribution Management Group Advisory Forum, the PDMG Working Group, IATA Simplifying the Business



**Ian Heywood**  
Travelport's Global Head of Product and Marketing, Air Commerce



**Yanik Hoyle**  
Director, New Distribution Capability (NDC) Program, IATA

also has the option to distribute IATA NDC offers for fares and prices on behalf of the airlines electing to use IATA's industry standards.

For airlines, this means that Travelport is able to fully integrate with its NDC application programme interface should the airline choose to use NDC-XML messaging to distribute and deliver their fares and products. For travel agencies and travel management companies, this means that when shopping for and booking flights via Travelport's Travel Commerce Platform, they will have even more enhanced travel content and greater access to ancillary offers. In particular, Travelport-connected agents will be able to make ancillary sales post the original flight booking, and through their preferred agency workflows, for the first time. This technology allows airlines to retail their full offering and brand proposition to Travelport-connected travel agencies and travel management companies around the world and over 200 airlines are already using the technology.

As well as driving its own merchandising innovation, Travelport has always there-

Think Tank, and the ONE Order Taskforce.

**Ian Heywood**, Travelport's Global Head of Product and Marketing, Air Commerce, commented, "We know the industry needs to transform the way flights are sold and IATA's NDC is an important part of this. It very much complements the pioneering merchandising technology we launched in 2014 with our Rich Content and Branding solution which enables airlines to retail their full range of products, and extensively promote their brand, to the travel trade and corporate bookers. With this latest industry-first milestone, we are proud to maintain our leadership position."

**Yanik Hoyle**, Director, New Distribution Capability Program, IATA, said, "We are very excited to welcome Travelport as the first GDS to join the certification program as both Aggregator and IT Provider within our NDC program. With basic and Offer Management messages whose schemas are compliant with the NDC schema, Travelport joins the fold of NDC players who are supporting airline efforts to provide full, rich content and product differentiation in the travel agent channel."

## Burj Al Arab Jumeirah

### Dubai

**Margaret Paul** has been appointed General Manager at Burj Al Arab Jumeirah. Paul brings a wealth of experience to the role after spearheading Madinat Jumeirah – The Arabian Resort since 2012. In this role, Paul oversaw the resort's four hotels – Jumeirah Al Qasr, Jumeirah Mina A'Salam, Jumeirah Dar Al Masyaf and the latest luxury hotel in the Group's portfolio, Jumeirah Al Naseem, as well as the popular Souk Madinat Jumeirah and the resort's Conference Centre. Paul, a Scottish national, has been with Jumeirah Group since 2002, and has previously been associated with Jumeirah Carlton Tower, London.



## Rotana Corporate Office

### Dubai

Rotana has promoted **Sam El Asmar** to the post of Corporate Vice President–Revenue & Distribution. El Asmar will lead the company's efforts to improve core revenue processes and maximise long-term revenue and profitability. Previously Corporate Director of Revenue, El Asmar joined Rotana in 2012 bringing with him 14 years of experience in hotel revenue management and distribution. Prior to joining Rotana, El Asmar worked with leading international hotel chains including Hilton Hotels & Resorts and Concorde Hotels & Resorts. He holds an MBA in Hospitality Management IMHI from ESSEC Business School, Paris.



## TIME Hotels

### Dubai

TIME Hotels welcomes **Mahmoud Al Zaibak** as Director of Business Development as hotel chain eyes expansion in the Middle East. A graduate of the Damascus State University, Syrian national Al Zaibak has over 17 years' corporate hospitality experience. His career includes senior sales positions with InterContinental in Al Ain, Dusit Thani, Dubai, and latterly Director of Sales for the pre-opening phase for Hilton Garden Inn, Dubai. Al Zaibak also brings in-depth knowledge of TIME Hotels having previously worked as Director of Sales and Marketing for Dubai-located TIME Grand Plaza earlier in his career.



## Fairmont The Palm

### Dubai

**Jenna Saunders** has been appointed as Public Relations Manager at Fairmont The Palm Dubai. She brings extensive international experience to the luxury resort. Saunders is a British national with six years of experience with four of those years within the UAE. She has both agency and in house experience having worked with another five star property on Palm Jumeirah, in addition to a consumer PR Agency in Downtown Dubai. Saunders holds a degree in International Events Management with Travel and Tourism through Sheffield Hallam University.



## Dubai City Hotels and Jumeirah Emirates Towers

### Dubai

**Mahmoud Sakr** has been appointed to the role of Area General Manager for the Dubai City Hotels and General Manager of Jumeirah Emirates Towers. Sakr has three decades of experience in the industry and began his career with Jumeirah Group in 1999 as Director of Rooms at the Burj Al Arab Jumeirah. Sakr was appointed General Manager of Jumeirah Mina A'Salam in 2008. The Cairo-born hospitality professional moved to Jumeirah Emirates Towers from his role at Jumeirah Beach Hotel as General Manager on March 1.



## IHG

### Dubai

InterContinental Hotels Group has appointed **Rajit Sukumaran** as Chief Development Officer in the Asia, Middle East and Africa region. In his new role, Sukumaran will head the Development team. He brings more than 12 years of experience in Development, Acquisitions, Feasibility from his previous role as Senior VP, Acquisitions & Development, Asia Pacific at Starwood Hotels & Resorts. Prior to joining Starwood, he worked in the Corporate Finance division of PricewaterhouseCoopers Singapore. Sukumaran graduated from Singapore's Nanyang Technological University with a Bachelor's degree in Accountancy.



## Tulip Inn

### Ras Al Khaimah

Louvre Hotels Group MENA has appointed **Jean Claude El Hitti** as the new General Manager for their new property Tulip Inn Ras Al Khaimah. Hitti is a professional hotelier with more than 24 years of experience. Hitti is entrusted in the overall operations of the new property which just celebrated one year.



## Millennium Airport Hotel

### Dubai

**Anupam Singh** has been appointed as Assistant Director of Sales - MICE by Millennium Airport Hotel Dubai. He brings strong experience to his new role having worked previously with Jumeirah, InterContinental Hotel Group and Starwood Hotels & Resorts. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Hotel and Tourism Management Catering Technology, Hygiene & Sanitation from National Institute of Hotel Management & Catering Technology in Goa, India.





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Plus, coming soon, two brand new openings — four-star Centara Muscat Hotel in Al Ghala, the business district of Oman and the sophisticated Centara Grand Hotel Doha in West Bay district, where two children under the age of 12 can stay and play for FREE.

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