

TRAVTALK

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Closing 2017 on a high note

It was a fruitful and eventful year for the travel and tourism industry in the UAE. On a steady growth plan towards Expo 2020, all the sectors have been busy expanding markets in terms of inbound and outbound reach. Industry specialists and stakeholders share their highlights of the year 2017 with **TRAVTALK**.

SHEHARA RIZLY



Adnan Kazim
DSVP Strategic Planning, Revenue
Optimisation and Aero Political
Affairs, Emirates Airline

“There are many highlights this year for Emirates. The first one is the half-yearly financial results that showed growth of 110 per cent for Emirates with a profit of AED 1.7 billion. Another highlight was the order of Boeing 787 aircraft worth \$15.1 billion, announced on the first day of the 2017 Dubai Airshow. The next game changer, as we call it, is the unveiling of the new Boeing 777-300ER First Class suites, raising the bar in the industry. The partnership between Emirates and flydubai is looking to be very lucrative and soon we will serve more destinations.”



Shahzad Naqvi
Country Manager-Dubai and
Northern Emirates, Oman Air

“Oman Air continues to be the natural choice for guests from the UAE, looking for the best and the most convenient airline. With 11 daily flights between UAE and Oman. Oman Air gives its valued guests an option to choose an award winning airline that offers more value for money. Oman Air has also entered into codeshare agreements with various international airlines. The implementation of such agreements with other airlines has been a key initiative to ensure that Oman Air's network continues to offer maximum options to guests.”



Nasir Jamal Khan
CEO, Al Naboodah Travel &
Tourism Agencies

“Our exclusive General Sales Agent (GSA) agreements with Japan Airlines, LATAM and Go Air represents a strategic move that bolsters our profile in key markets such as India, Latin America and East Asia. This extends the company's reach across fast growing tourism hubs. With these new partnerships, we are targeting the inbound and outbound markets of three key markets - India, Japan and Latin America. With these new partnerships, Al Naboodah Travel & Tourism Agencies now represents a total of 10 global airlines.”

“It has been quite a busy year for us as we grew our presence to 10 countries, establishing new partnerships with local insurance entities in Jordan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. As a facilitator of travel insurance, we have been able to support the specific needs of airline travellers as well as travellers of travel management companies, from the region, globally. Today, the comprehensive smart travel insurance benefits with regards to unplanned events during international travel have further evolved into providing 'peace of mind' for a specific activity.”



Arijit Munshi
General Manager, Tune Protect,
Arabian Travel Award winner

“In 2017, we have achieved our projected targets in terms of serving guests, enjoying our long range of tourism products like Desert Safari, Dhow Cruise Dinner (Marina), Yacht Rental Services and others. Our elegant shows in Marina got loads of appreciation by the guests from around the globe. Our yachts served thousands of visitors with memorable cruising and fishing experience in 2017. With innovative attractions opening in Dubai and overall UAE, we anticipate the significant growth in tourism sector in near future.”



Ishrat Khan
Managing Director, Al Wasl Yachts,
Al Wasl Dhow, Asia Pacific Tourism
and Oasis Palm Safari, Arabian
Travel Award winner

“It has been just over a year since we completed our acquisition of Starwood Hotels. In the MEA region, we now have 245 hotels, with 55,000 rooms under 19 brands. By 2022, we aim to have around 350 hotels in operation, with just under 80,000 rooms under 23 brands. Loyalty programmes remain a key purchasing factor as long as companies continue to evolve their loyalty offerings to suit the next generation of customer. It is about a deeper level of engagement with the guest, be they GCC nationals or next generation expats.”



Neal Jones
Chief Sales and Marketing Officer,
Middle East and Africa for Marriott
International

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Year of expansions and developments

► Contd. from page 1



Vinay Malhotra
COO-Middle East & South Asia,
VFS Global
Arabian Travel Award winner

“VFS Global has had a year filled with exciting developments in the Middle East region and across the globe. We signed our 57th client government this year and have significantly expanded the global footprint for several clients. In the Middle East, in 2017, we launched visa processing services for 16 client governments across nine countries. This year, we have also diversified and signed several partnerships with various government authorities in Dubai to provide residents and overseas investors with more convenient and globally accessible services.”



Haitham Mattar
CEO, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism
Development Authority (RAKTDA),
Arabian Travel Award winner

“As we approach the final month of 2017, Ras Al Khaimah is in a very strong position to achieve its target of 900,000 visitors by the end of the year. Having built upon our existing strong events calendar, Ras Al Khaimah is now considered a desired destination for both business and leisure events, with last month's spectacular Vivaldianno concert and Ras Al Khaimah 2017 Golf Challenge being key highlights to-date. The anticipated opening of the second season of Jebel Jais Via Ferrata has established the emirate as a credible leisure activity and adventure destination.”



Manish Singh
Director of Sales
Anantara The Palm Dubai Resort

“We had a positive year at Anantara The Palm Dubai Resort. We have seen an accelerated growth this year, with robust interest from families and a rise in repeated guests visiting us again and again. It's immense pleasure to observe that Europe is an exponentially growing market of guests for us with a consistent inflow of tourists every month. An important milestone is that our inflow of Russian guests have remarkably increased following the announcement of availing visa on arrival in UAE. Now, with Chinese also able to avail visa on arrival in UAE, our hopes soar high on 2018 and at this year-end.”

“The net profit recorded in Q3 2017 clearly demonstrates our capacity to generate cash. According to the 2017 Q3 financials, Turkish Airlines with 81.5 per cent reached the highest September occupancy capacity of the past five years. The airline's occupancy capacity increased by 17 per cent compared to Q3 of 2016, with the airline serving 21.3 million passengers. Hence the nine-monthly average reached 79 per cent occupancy reaching 52 million passengers. As to Turkish Cargo, the company increased destinations from 55 to 72 as of 2017 Q3, reaching to 294 thousand tons of cargo with 29 per cent increase.”



Ilker Ayçi
Chairman of the Board and Executive
Committee, Turkish Airlines

“This has been a fantastic year for us at Baros Maldives with exciting enhancements and recognitions. We were recognised and awarded for our luxury experiences on various occasions. Our amazing chefs took home a total of 25 medals and awards, more than any other resort, at the Food and Hospitality Asia Maldives (FHAM) – International Culinary Challenge and Exhibition held in Male in August. We've also upgraded our Deluxe Rooms, relaunched the very popular Cayenne Grill with a brand new menu and also introduced a new spa menu at Serenity Spa.”



Daniel Draxl
Marketing Manager
Baros Maldives

“The year 2017 has been a great year for North Island, particularly for our rehabilitation and conservation efforts. In March, we were awarded the prestigious National Geographic World Legacy Awards in the category of Conserving the Natural World, which is a testament to our efforts and a catalyst for us to keep moving forward with our rehabilitation plan and hopefully help others do the same. We've also recently joined Relais & Châteaux, a world-renowned association which shares the values and philosophy of North Island, Seychelles.”



Bruce Simpson
Managing Director
North Island Seychelles

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EDITORIAL

2017 in a nutshell!

This year whizzed past more rapidly than expected. In the Middle East, travel, tourism and hospitality sectors enjoyed quite a good growth over the year. Although summer depends on staycations or domestic tourism in terms of business, this year proved to be more lucrative. This was possible due to the strategic planning behind the retail tourism special 'summer promotions' which attracted tourists from all over the world. Another factor of increased tourism is the visa-free facility for Russia and China which created an influx of tourists from these destinations.

Through the year all stakeholders have been busy exploring new opportunities and markets that are more relevant and diverse, to offer something different to the clientele. Some of the key highlights over the year in the UAE affirms its stand to become the number one destination in the world. The opening of the much-anticipated Louvre Abu Dhabi on November 11, 2017, was a significant strategy staged at a perfect time when art and cultural tourism seems to have been submerging in certain pockets of the world. It was soon followed by Dubai Airshow where the partnership between Emirates and Mercedes Benz was unveiled.

The Airshow was marked by game-changing deals from start to finish. Airbus revealed its largest single announcement ever – a \$49.5 billion deal with Indigo Partners to purchase 430 aircraft in its A320neo family. Dubai's investment in technology and developing a "smart world" over the next few years is a steady growth plan which could attract many new markets to the destination. This year's GITEX bore witness as they displayed the "flying taxi" by RTA Dubai for the first time, with smart gates at the airport getting even smarter with facial recognition just by walking through a tunnel which would be effective over the next few years. The innovative "smart city" of the new future was also among the GITEX presentations where the latest features were shown to the visitors for the first time.

Closing the year again on a positive note for an even better 2018!

Dubai enroute to innovation

The changing landscape of Dubai has unleashed many an option for travellers who seek more than the usual hospitality at a destination. The Ain Dubai project promises to mark a new era for hospitality in the city.

Dubai has definitely not finished to surprise us all and will surely remain the city of superlatives. Over the past decade, I have witnessed the spectacular development of The Jumeirah Beach Residence, which is now part of the most vibrant leisure destinations in the United Arab Emirates and became one of the preferred location for international travellers as well as for local residents. The proximity with Dubai Tram and Dubai Metro provided to the area a new dynamic, it is now much easier and enjoyable to access this side of the town. The completion of the outstanding Ain Dubai project will mark a new era for us. Guests stay-

ing at the Sheraton Jumeirah Beach Resort will benefit from a premium view on what is set to become an iconic landmarks in the Gulf. This addition to Dubai's milestones is definitely a great asset for us as a leisure resort. Not only the surrounding environment has an impact on the way we do business, since 2016, we are operating under the umbrella of Marriott International, largest hospitality brand worldwide; together with my team, we very much look forward to learning from the company's strong service culture and innovative spirit.

My team has well embraced Marriott's standards

and we are already working on uplifting our offers with a fully revamped concept of regional cuisine for our signature restaurants. We want to bring to our guests' tables a selection of handpicked dishes matching the identity of our dining outlets, while using the skills of our associates. We also want to innovate the way we create beverages and are working on a new menu of refreshing drinks all made from regional products and fresh aromatic herbs. The upcoming year looks very promising for us, while we maintain consistency in delivering excellent services we are strongly focusing on innovation and create tailor-made experience for

each of our guest to go beyond their expectations.

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



Mohamed El Aghoury
General Manager
Sheraton Jumeirah Beach Resort

Abu Dhabi on the fast track

The Abu Dhabi Grand Prix is a major crowd puller for tourism and hospitality in the Emirate. Finland is the top inbound market for Abu Dhabi.

Most popular date of departure to Abu Dhabi (Indexed November 18, 2016)

- November 23 the most popular departure date for inbound travel to Abu Dhabi. (up 189 per cent vs Saturday November 18)
- Intent during race weekend down vs week prior.

Departure Date	Sat 18 Nov 17	Sun 19 Nov 17	Mon 20 Nov 17	Tue 21 Nov 17	Wed 22 Nov 17	Thu 23 Nov 17	Fri 24 Nov 17	Sat 25 Nov 17	Sun 26 Nov 17
Index	100	67	105	126	225	289	171	86	59

Top 5 Inbound markets to Abu Dhabi Indexed for Grand Prix week vs week prior (Index = Nov 13-19 vs. Nov 20-26)

- Finland seeing largest week on week increases for travel intent to Abu Dhabi (+271%)
- Qatar showing largest week on week increases of local countries (+265%)

Origin	Week Prior	GP Week	% Difference
Finland	100	371	+271%
Qatar	100	365	+265%
South Africa	100	364	+264%
Portugal	100	329	+229%
United Kingdom	100	303	+203%

Nearby Countries Index for Grand Prix week vs week prior (Index = Nov 13-19 vs. Nov 20-26)

- All local countries displaying increased intent to Abu Dhabi during Grand Prix week

Origin	Week Prior	GP Week	% Difference
Qatar	100	365	+265%
Bahrain	100	178	+78%
Oman	100	163	+63%
United Arab Emirates	100	128	+28%
Jordan	100	103	+3%
Saudi Arabia	100	102	+2%

(Source: Abu Dhabi Grand Prix 2017-Insights by Sojern)



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is printed on behalf of
Durga Das Publications
(Middle East) FZE

Cirrus Graphics Private Limited
B-61, Sector-67
Noida, (U.P.) 201 301

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Travel Tuesday connects corporates

In a move to bring together corporates, MICE and travel trade decision makers on a single platform, **Ashwin Singh**, Managing Director, Plus Point Hospitality, along with support of Singapore Tourism Board and Singapore Airlines held their maiden industry networking event at Taj Dubai.

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The event was conducted in two parts - the first one included decision makers from various corporates while MICE organisers attended

a presentation by the Singapore Tourism Board and Singapore Airlines where they received very valuable information about the destination and the airline. The attendees stated that it was a very

good meeting point as they were able to obtain valuable information as it was a personalised meeting with the two partners and they looked forward to another event in two months.

“I started Travel Tuesday with an intention to bring together destinations and airlines, to create an ROI so that they get the chance to meet corporates directly. The opportunity here was to directly meet up with the corporates and see what they can offer in terms of airlines and destinations. There are many corporates from different sectors like automobile, banking, trading and various others who attended the programme. The reason to initiate this programme was that there are many regional offices in ME which need to find a contact so that they can connect with them and work together. A lot of regional offices are available here and most corporates don't know that, so it is important to have some person who could be contacted. We will have Travel Tuesday every two months on a Tuesday. We decided that Tuesday was the best as the mid-week is a little easier for the clients to spend time away from office.”



Ashwin Singh
Managing Director
Plus Point Hospitality Marketing



Fawad Khan
Sales Manager for Gulf and Offshore
countries in Dubai

“I think it is a very successful collaboration with Singapore Airlines and Singapore Tourism Board. We appreciate the initiative by Plus Point Hospitality because there are not many opportunities to push the MICE segment from this market and grow Singapore more in terms of MICE movement. The best way to go to Singapore is through Singapore Airlines. We have lots of value additions that make the Singapore Airline ticket very unique. We have special offers, fares, MICE fares for our corporate customers and in terms of travel agents we provide them incentives in terms of group movements. At the end of the day, it is beneficial for Singapore Airlines and their stakeholders we have in the market for MICE movement to Singapore. We cover our travellers in terms of Singaporean Dollar vouchers, we have boarding pass privileges as

well and a lot of sales enablers that help to sell our Singapore Airlines tickets with value adds for the travellers. We have expanded our network to many new destinations. For example we are operating to Wellington and Canberra from Singapore which is a new destination. It is called the 'Capital Express' because it is connecting Singapore, Canberra and Wellington; all three capitals in Australia, Singapore and New Zealand. Also we have enhanced our capacities to the South West Pacific Region and Europe as well. Currently, we are operating daily 777-300 from Dubai, the only one in the city with four cabins onboard.”



Abdul Rahman Mohideen
Area Director for ME and Africa
Singapore Tourism Board

“This is an important event as it gives us the chance to meet the corporates directly and share our message on what Singapore has to offer and what incentives schemes we have that we can check and request them to send groups to Singapore. For this market, people have a misconception that we are just a cosmopolitan and urban destination only for business but in fact we have unlimited experiences based on every city you name it we have it in one small destination; leisure, business etc. Singapore is more like a theme park. We expect and encourage meetings and incentives travel to Singapore to have many memorable meetings. In Singapore we have private villas and private pools which is more the type of requirements for ME travellers.”

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Abu Dhabi expects 60% rise in Baltic visitors

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi welcomed the launch of airBaltic's programme to operate direct flights from Abu Dhabi to Riga in Latvia. As part of the initiative, four-weekly flights between the two cities will operate for five months until March 24, 2018.

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The four-weekly flights between the two cities will provide Baltic visitors from Tallinn, Estonia and Vilnius, Lithuania a more convenient opportunity to travel to Abu Dhabi. This programme is a result of Abu Dhabi's ongoing promotional efforts in the Baltic markets focused on positioning the Emirate as a leading tourism and business hub in the region.

Over the past years, the Emirate has witnessed a strong upsurge in travellers from the Latvia, Estonia and

Lithuania, with an increase of 25 per cent in the number of visitors in 2016 compared to 2014. Recognising the potential for further growth, the Department of Culture and Tourism–Abu Dhabi carried out a series of educational activities including Fam trips, sales calls, and seminars for trade agents in each of the Baltic markets. With airBaltic, a leading regional air carrier with vast regional routes, and its new programme, visitor numbers are expected to rise by up to 60 per cent this year, and overnight guests to grow by 100 per cent.

We are thrilled that due to our efforts, companies like airBaltic are seeing our tourism and business value we have to offer as a destination

Sultan Al Mutawa Al Dhaheeri
Acting Executive Director, Tourism Sector,
Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi

Sultan Al Mutawa Al Dhaheeri, Acting Executive Director, Tourism Sector, Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, said, "Over the past year, we have developed a carefully thought out strategy focused on identifying key tourism markets that do not yet have direct links to Abu Dhabi, and implementing a plan targeted at showcasing the benefits of our capital to private sector players there. We are thrilled that due to our efforts, companies like airBaltic are seeing the value we have to offer as a tourism and business destination, and are independently directing plans that connect the UAE capital to more markets around the world."

Visitors from the three Baltic countries also benefit from a visa-on-arrival policy, in

addition to a code-share agreement with Etihad Airways, which will give them unparalleled access to countries around the world. "By including the capital's national carrier in the new programme, Abu Dhabi can also become the gateway for our Baltic guests to travel to many other countries in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and Australia," added Al Dhaheeri.

Commenting on the launch of its latest destination, **Wolfgang Reuss**, SVP Network Management, airBaltic, said, "Riga is a dynamic city and the very business center of the Baltic states. We are thrilled to connect Riga and



We are thrilled to connect Riga and Abu Dhabi as it opens up connections not only to Latvia but also to our wider home region, the Baltic states

Wolfgang Reuss
SVP Network Management, airBaltic

Abu Dhabi as it opens up connections not only to Latvia but also to our wider home region, the Baltic states with Tallinn and Vilnius as well as

Northern Scandinavia with fast connections to Stockholm, Helsinki, Oslo and many more regional points in Northern Europe." 



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Air Arabia stands strong

In the third quarter, ending September 30, Air Arabia registered a net profit of AED 376 million, an increase of 27 per cent compared to the same period last year.

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Air Arabia's turnover for the third quarter of 2017 increased by four per cent to AED 1.16 billion, compared to AED 1.12 billion in the corresponding period last year. Air Arabia served over 2.33 million passengers in the third quarter of 2017, an increase of three per cent compared to the same period of last year while the average seat load factor – or passengers carried as a percentage of available seats – for the same quarter stood at an impressive 81 per cent.

Sheikh Abdullah Bin Mohammad Al Thani, Chairman, Air Arabia, said, "The solid third quarter results reflect the continuous appeal for our value driven product combined with the cost control measures and robust growth strategy adopted by the airline



Sheikh Abdullah Bin Mohammad Al Thani
Chairman, Air Arabia

We are glad to see Air Arabia delivering strong financial and operational performance throughout 2017

management team. We are glad to see Air Arabia delivering strong financial performance throughout 2017 despite the continuous pressure on yield margins that airlines in the region are witnessing."

Air Arabia's net profit for the first nine months of 2017 stood at AED 637 million, up 18 per cent compared to the corresponding period of 2016 while the turnover for the first nine months of this year reached AED 2.88 billion. Air Arabia received three new Airbus A320 aircraft in the first nine months of 2017 ending September 30 and added 14 new routes from its five operating hubs in the UAE, Morocco, Egypt and Jordan. The carrier currently serves a global destination network of 133 routes across the world. "Air Arabia continued its robust growth in the first nine months of this year and while we maintain our expansion, we remain focused on providing customers with the world's best value driven air travel while focusing on operational efficiency and cost control," Al Thani concluded. 

5-stars for JA Ocean View

Strategically located in the Dubai Marina JA Ocean View was officially recognised as a five-star beach hotel by DTCM recently.

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"The decision to move from a successful four-star to adding a well-deserved fifth star, is strategic," said **David Thomson**, Chief Operating Officer of JA Resorts & Hotels. "This development creates synergy in our portfolio, as all our properties now enjoy the highest classification."

"So far, the corporate enhancement strategy for our existing portfolio has made quite an impact," he continued. "The changes we made at JA Manafaru in the Maldives resulted in a fantastic listing as one of the world's 10 best resorts by the TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Awards 2017. We've also completely renovated JA Hatta Fort Hotel to elevate it as a product, so that it now further reflects our brand promise of Heart-



Yasser Mansour
Cluster General Manager of JA Ocean View Hotel and JA Oasis Beach Tower

felt Hospitality and Casual Luxury. Every enhancement strengthens the brand's positioning. Our next focus will be JA Jebel Ali Golf Resort, our flagship property and Dubai's only true resort."

Thomson made mention of the company's enhancement strategy when he was included in the Hotelier Middle East Power 50 list. He oversaw the re-branding of JA Resorts & Hotels in 2012, the same

year that JA Ocean View Hotel opened on The Walk at Jumeirah Beach Residence. All the rooms and suites at JA Ocean View Hotel have private balconies and sea views of the Arabian Gulf. Six restaurants and bars complement an infinity swimming pool, spa, salon, gym and Speedflex fitness zone.

"The fifth star is great news," said **Yasser Mansour**, Cluster General Manager of JA Ocean View Hotel and JA Oasis Beach Tower, another JA property on The Walk, which features deluxe serviced hotel apartments – the highest classification for serviced hotel apartments in Dubai. "Five-star status is an excellent accolade to take us through our five-year birthday celebrations. My team and I look forward to continuously welcoming many loyal guests."

'The Art of Housekeeping'

Reaching the one-million mark of perfectly-made beds, ibis Dubai Deira City Centre featured the best practices in housekeeping from November 2-7, 2017.

TT BUREAU

Understanding the human psyche and tapping into that sense of serenity when entering a living space that is fresh, organised and well-kept, the aim of the event was to showcase exceptional hospitality standards of the ibis brand with 'The Art of Making a Bed' as well as resetting a room to its freshness as conducted daily by talented housekeeping colleagues. AccorHotels Middle East and Majid Al Futtaim, the owning company of ibis Dubai Deira City Centre, brought this innovative event designed to engage with participants and guests in a quality assurance environment. All materials that make an ibis room meet the environmental standards to promote an eco-responsibility are energy-saving lighting, water



flow regulators to reduce water consumption and ecolabel hygiene products, including soap.

'The Art of Hospitality' also reinforced engagement and connectivity between the housekeeping department and guests. Often referred to as the 'heart of the house' or the 'backbone' in operations, the Housekeeping department at ibis Dubai Deira Centre have made over one million beds since the hotel opened in 2008. This translates on average into 20 well-

made beds per housekeeper each day, ensuring that guests receive a comfortable and quality driven experience.

ibis Hotels Worldwide makes a daily commitment by offering the "15 minutes satisfaction contract," which strives to resolve any issues that may arise during a guest's stay in the shortest amount of time. Characterised as an efficient and caring brand, ibis also provides the highest level of service brought together in a contemporary setting.

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Christmas Eve Dinner Buffet | from AED 75 per person
Ibis Dubai Al Rigga

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New Year's Eve Dinner with Live Entertainment
4 Course Set Menu | from AED 225 per person
Novotel & Ibis Dubai Deira City Centre

New Year's Eve Dinner Buffet | from AED 95 per person
Novotel Suites & Ibis Dubai Mall of the Emirates

New Year's Eve Dinner Buffet | from AED 75 per person
Ibis Dubai Al Rigga

Personality of the month

Game changer behind Shurooq

A dedicated CEO with a mission to elevate Sharjah at various international forums, **His Excellency Marwan Al Serkal** has always been the face of Shurooq along with his dedicated team responsible for the development of the emirate.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

As CEO of Shurooq, **Marwan Al Serkal** has been instrumental in initiating many global programmes to portray Sharjah as an attractive destination for trade, tourism, education, healthcare, transport and logistics. He states, "Having been involved with Shurooq since its inception in 2009, it has been a tremendous journey to see Sharjah evolve so dynamically in terms of a truly international destination for domestic and overseas investment. In parallel to that, maintaining and enhancing

Sharjah's cultural importance in terms of achievements and developments is a great testament to the vision of **His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi**, Ruler of Sharjah and his wife, **Her Highness Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan Al Qasimi**, Chairperson of Shurooq."

HE Marwan further states, "Our first priority is to the people of Sharjah by ensuring that they have first-class facilities, amenities and services by working hand in hand with government entities and private companies.

Besides, Shurooq is dedicated to establishing foreign ties

and subsequent investment in areas such as healthcare, environment, real estate, leisure and tourism, education and transport and logistics. We are constantly promoting Sharjah on a global scale, securing the emirate's position on a more international investment map. Shurooq has an enormous portfolio of cultural and commercial projects and as CEO, I want to increase that in terms of numbers and diversification."

Graduating with a diploma in accounting from Dubai Men's College and a Bachelor's degree in Applied Sciences in Business Administration, he joined the



if you understand numbers. I used to read a lot of articles about CEOs and found out that many of their backgrounds were accounting; that was the time I decided to change. I received huge resistance from my

transformed with his team. "Transforming Al Qasba was the biggest challenge and making it transform is something I'm proud of. We took a place that was dead and managed to make it a vibrant place with events year-round. We hosted major events in Al Qasba among which the Asian torch relay all around Sharjah and ending in Al Qasba was a huge achievement as we received a compliment from the organisers that Sharjah was the star."

Another project under his leadership in Shurooq is 'Heart of Sharjah'. He says, "It is really interesting because it's a story of the past that we believe will have a huge impact on future generations. It's a work in progress but Al Bait will be the jewel that we will celebrate in 2018. Kalba ecotourism is a lovely project that is going to be open to public for the first time, with Sharjah Collection Kalba as the top destination for bird watching in the region. Mleiha is another huge success on how Shurooq managed to transform this area, celebrating archaeological sites and making everyone proud of history. The best part is when you combine activities with archeology. The flag island and flag poles are projects that you will always be proud of and we are trying to create destinations rather than monuments for people to visit them everyday and not on occasions only."

Ecotourism is a project which HE Marwan has been working on for the past few years. He shares, "Some of Shurooq's most notable and ambitious conservation ven-

tures till date have been in the leisure and tourism industry, reflecting the combination of economic innovation and Sharjah's outstanding areas of natural beauty. Shurooq estimates the value of Sharjah's environmental market to be AED 960 million by the end of this year, growing to AED 1.13 billion by 2020.

The emirate has established itself as the premium ecotourism destination across MENA, which is more than a predetermined domestic strategy. It also shows Sharjah's ability to keep pace and often anticipate international trends. The AED 250 million Mleiha Archaeological and ecotourism project and Kalba ecotourism project, for example, combine luxury with an ecofriendly experience. While environmentally conscious tourism may still be a relatively niche market, these developments are not only fulfilling the existing demand but also promoting the concept. At this year's Arabian Travel Market, we launched the 'Sharjah Collection', which comprises three individual projects. Nestled within the Kalba ecotourism project will be Kingfisher Lodge – a collection of tented lodge-style accommodations surrounded by mangroves. Al Badayer Lodge is set in the sweeping deserts of Al Badayer Oasis where guests will enjoy five-star facilities amid authentic Bedouin surroundings, while Bait Khalid Bin Ibrahim will have two four-star B&B villas in the heart of Sharjah, converted from old Emirati homes that belonged to heritage settlements. 🇦🇪

“The best part is when you combine activities with archeology. The flag island and flag poles are projects that you will always be proud of and we are trying to create destinations rather than monuments for people to visit them everyday and not on occasions only.”

His Excellency Marwan Al Serkal
Chief Executive Officer
Shurooq

Sharjah Electricity and Water Authority in 1999 as the head of the auditing department. In 2003, he worked as Finance Manager for Dubai Shopping Festival and was promoted to Director of Finance and Administration in 2005, following which he became part of the Shurooq family, what he says is genuinely a constantly rewarding role.

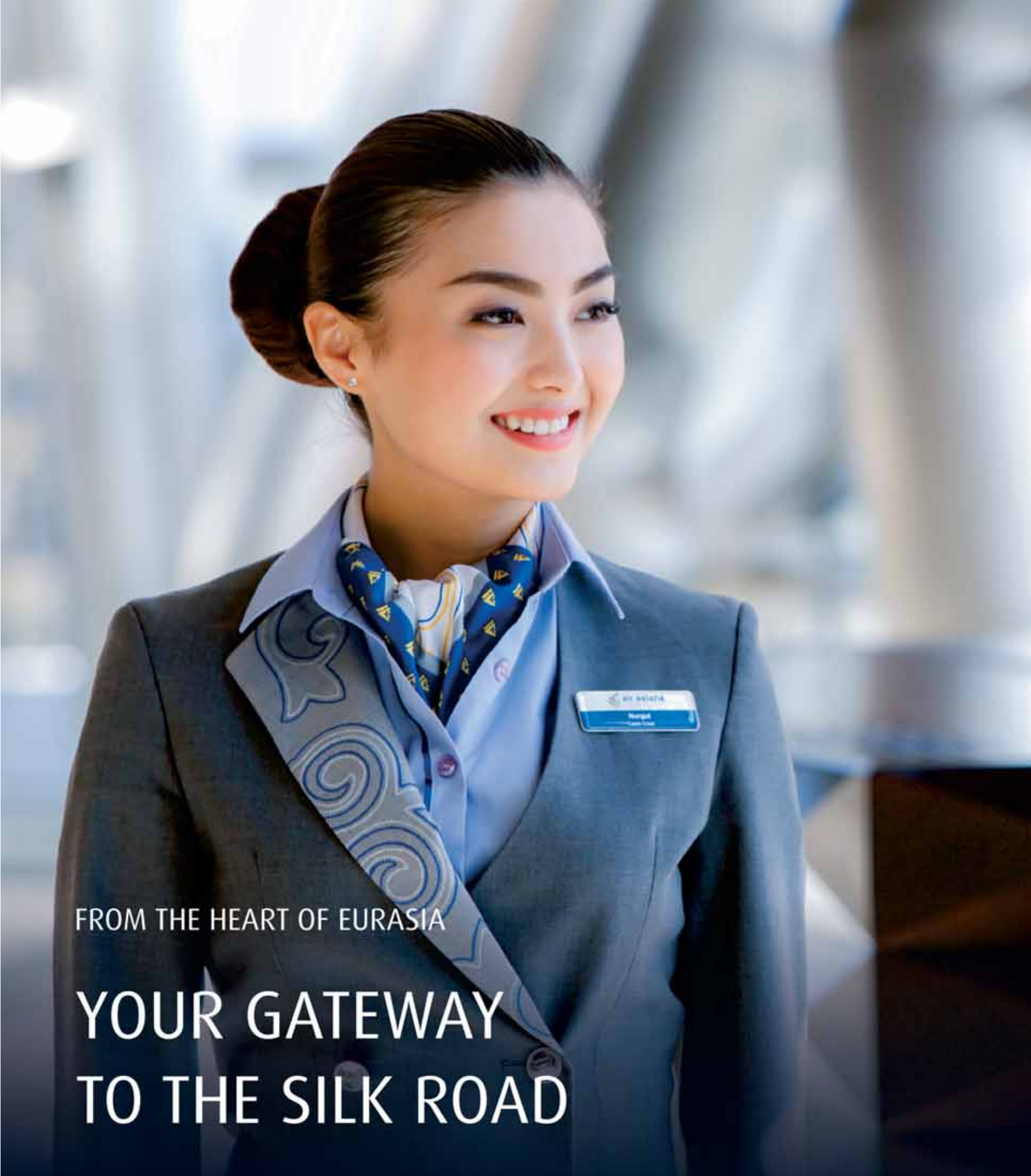
Reiterating the reason to select the specific career path, he said, "When I entered the HCT, I felt that I would be more a person in the IT world as I thought that it was the future. I would say the shift came when I realised that accounting is very interesting and it means a lot to the business

teachers because they knew that I was excellent and didn't want me to move but in the end, it was my decision and I don't really regret it. Accounting made me who I am today."

HE Marwan states that he has been lucky in his life, among some of the most remarkable achievements in his career. "In every place I felt that I achieved what was at that time something really special. I used to head the finance department in DSF and the achievement was to transform the way of management in the shopping festival. We also managed to flip the financials to make it breakeven and then profitable. My personal achievement was to be responsible of a motor-ing programme on Dubai TV. With no real experience in the automotive industry and no experience in media, I managed to create a programme that was a huge hit at that time."

Among his many challenges, Qasba is one that he



A smiling female flight attendant in an Air Astana uniform, featuring a grey blazer, a light blue shirt, and a patterned scarf. She has a name tag that reads "Nargiz" and "Captain".

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Sharjah at WTM London affirms

Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) participated in World Travel Market (WTM) exhibition for the 15th consecutive year, which was held in London until November 9, to emphasise Sharjah's tourist position in the international tourism map.

TT BUREAU

World Travel Market is one of world's most significant tourism events, which brings together pioneers of tourism and travel, tourism makers and those interested in the tourism sector from around the world, in addition to international media.

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority Heads Emirate of Sharjah delegation included 12 entities from tourism and heritage sector: Sharjah Investment and Development Authority-Shurooq, Environment and Protected Areas Authority (EPAA), Sharjah Airport Travel Agency (SATA),

Sharjah International Airport, Sharjah Museums Authority, Sharjah Women Sport Foundation, Al Bait Hotel, Al Shaab Village, Royal Tulip, Sheraton Beach Resort and Spa and Ramada Hotel and suites and .

SCTDA Chairman, **HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**, stated that the participation in the exhibition comes within the aspiration of **HH Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qassimi**, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah. "Our target is to promote optimal presence of Sharjah, transfer its outstanding tourism experiences, as well as enrich international tourism cooperation within the interest of Sharjah."

The programmes of SCTDA aimed at presenting Sharjah's unique tourism environment, rich in its diversity and various tourism developments. The importance of international exhibitions in advising international community about Sharjah's attractive tourist environment, and inviting tourism and investment markets to the emirate is noteworthy.

Al Midfa stressed the keenness of SCTDA to achieve the emirate's presence in the world's major events and to highlight its achievements and activities to the world and strengthen its position as a superior destination for family tourism.



"The diversified participation of Sharjah delegation, which represents tourism sector in its various sectors, cultural, sports and heritage, thus contributing to present an integrated image of Sharjah."

His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman
SCTDA

Al Midfa indicated the results of SCTDA's participation in previous sessions of World Travel Market in London, which concluded with positive results, which contributed in defining the tourism product of Sharjah, enhancing global tourism convergence, extending bridges of communication, attracting more tourists and considering tourism investment opportunities.

"The diversified participation of Sharjah delegation represents tourism sector in its various sectors, cultural, sports and heritage, thus contributing to present an integrated image of Sharjah," Al Midfa said.

SCTDA had a comprehensive programme at

World Travel Market including a number of activities and events that attracted visitors and meetings. This connected SCTDA with senior officials from the World Tourism Organisation. Sharjah's delegation will explore cooperation opportunities with the pioneers of global tourism sector along with mechanisms of coordination and constant communication. SCTDA enlightened thousands of visitors to the World Travel Market, via its spacious and distinguished booth, on the emirate's tourism and heritage projects, the first of its kind at local and international levels, and developments in tourism sector in the emirate, which is witnessing a great development.

SCTDA's publications which are prepared specifically for the exhibition informed European community, festival's leaders from around the world, and travel and tourism agents about Sharjah's tourism sector as a home to diverse and attractive tourist environment.

The World Travel Market (WTM), which celebrated its 37th anniversary this year, is one of the leading travel industry events, bringing together a large group of travel and tourism representatives from around the world. More than 50,000 people a year, travel and media representatives visit the exhibition. The value of contracts and business deals through the exhibition is more than £2.5 billion annually.



wish to consolidate tourist status



940 exhibitors attend milestone ITB Asia

Asia's leading travel trade show, ITB Asia 2017 held at the Sands Expo and convention center in Marina Bay Sands celebrated their 10th year anniversary. This year over 940 exhibitors from 951 buyers from MICE, corporate, leisure and other sectors with over 11,000 delegates were at the event. Asia by far is the largest market focus by many western countries for various purposes. When you take into account the amount of business derived from this trade exhibition it exceeds the general expectations.



Wanup signs deal with Travelport

A global agreement was inked between hotel loyalty innovator Wanup and Travelport under which the former will make a selection of Travelport's 650,000 bookable hotel properties to complement its own hotel collection, based on rating, destination and hotel style.

TT BUREAU

Launched in 2016, and based in Barcelona, Wanup is a loyalty club of-



Carlo Alvarez Spagnolo
Global Partnerships Director
Wanup

fering immediate rewards from a diverse collection of hotels, allowing travellers to enjoy their perks, but without feeling compelled to stay

with one hotel chain. When booking a hotel, members earn rewards in the form of travel cash, along with travel benefits and digital media subscriptions to enhance their hotel experience.

The multi-year agreement sees Travelport as its preferred travel commerce platform, giving access to global travel provider content. This aggregates the most comprehensive content from multiple sources, including vast numbers of unique, independent hotel properties providing Wanup with access to both unrivalled content

and functionality through a single connection. It allows Wanup members to benefit from intelligent, fast and accurate search beyond

ships Director, Wanup, commented, "We look forward to this new opportunity for our company, as this relationship makes it possi-

value proposition for partner hotels and consumers. We chose Travelport because they can support our aspirational growth with its rich, global hotel content and flexible uAPI technology."



Niklas Andreen
Vice President and Managing Director
Global Hospitality and Digital, Travelport,
Arabian Travel Award winner

flexibility of our platform to accommodate needs of any Travel Companies business model. We are pleased that our large inventory gives them an opportunity to improve its performance by scaling its business and increasing the revenue."

Technology News

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just rate and availability. **Carlo Alvarez Spagnolo**, Global Partner-

ble to accelerate international expansion, while we continue to enhance our

an innovative loyalty club solution and hotel industry innovator, shows the

Forget baggage woes with smart trolleys

emaratech launched Airport Smart Trolley, Next Generation Scanner Trolley and Intelligent Baggage Handling System - to improve baggage handling efficiency and facilitate passenger movement at airports.

TT BUREAU

During the 15th edition of Dubai Airshow - one of the largest exhibitions showcasing the latest in military, general and commercial aviation, emaratech launched a series of products that will soon be in action at the airports, thereby enhancing passenger experience as well as improving baggage handling efficiency. emaratech's Airport Smart Trolley comes with a web-based dashboard that allows the airport to locate

and send notifications during shopping to individual passengers, channelise information about shops, restaurants and services; locate devices that need to be charged, collect granular data (all types of passenger interaction), display advertisements from shops and export trolley data to BI tools to learn from it. In addition to the Intelligent Trol-



ley, emaratech showcased the Next Generation Scanner Trolley with a scannable design that makes the trolley compatible with the security scanner, linking the passenger journey from security to gate. The Scanner Trolley helps in efficient security process by taking passengers quickly through security without queuing, allowing them to have more time to shop, eat and relax before the flight.



Thani Al Zaffin
Director General & Board Member
emaratech

Thirdly, the Intelligent Baggage Handling System based on LEAN princi-

ples aims to create an efficient process of inbound and outbound baggage at airports. The departure system consists of the Capacity Booster Storage (CBS) and the Make-Up Station. The CBS system acts as a buffer area which stores all incoming checked-in baggage throughout the individual destinations check-in windows. The Make-Up station rapidly sorts and makes-up to 1200 BAX/hour into carts for

loading departing aircrafts. The arrival setup consists of an arrival station that can be connected to a wide variety of reclaim carousels.

"emaratech continues to build on its vision to innovate with advanced technologies that make UAE unique in world, while propelling Dubai's position as technologically forward city that integrates innovative smart technologies," said **Thani Al Zaffin**, Director General & Board Member.

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Date for corporates with Travel Tuesday

Plus Point Hospitality, along with Singapore Tourism Board and Singapore Airlines held their maiden industry networking event- Travel Tuesday at Taj Dubai. The event gave many an opportunity to various corporates and MICE organisers to gather valuable information about the destination and the airline.



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50,000 delegates for the first time at WTM

The numbers of senior industry buyers and travel professionals invited to do business at WTM London, the leading global event for the travel industry, rose yet again for 2017. The key benchmarks of exhibitor invitees and WTM Buyers' Club members in attendance topped last year's record figures at WTM London. The number of senior industry executives invited by exhibitors to do business at WTM London rose significantly, up by 14 per cent year-on-year to 16,049, including an 8 per cent rise on November 6 (invite-only day) to 11,861.



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Roda Hotels and Resorts

Dubai

Roda Hotels and Resorts appoints a veteran hotelier, **Nael El Waary** as Cluster General Manager for Roda Al Murooj Downtown, Roda Amwaj Suites, Roda Boutique Villas & Roda Beach Resort. Nael joins Roda Hotels & Resorts following six years of tenure in Abu Dhabi as General Manager of Sofitel Corniche. Over the past 30 years, El Waary has held senior positions while working with hotel brands like Hilton USA (San Francisco/ San Jose), Accor Hotels (Bahrain / Abu Dhabi), IHG, Venquest Hotels in California, and The Helmsley Hotels in New York.



Roda Al Bustan

Dubai

Roda Hotels & Resorts appointed **Puneet Bajjal** as General Manager of Roda Al Bustan Dubai Airport Hotel. With over 18 years' experience, Bajjal holds a degree from Institute of Hotel Management, Catering Technology and Applied Nutrition, Delhi and also holds a master's degree in Sales, Marketing & Finance. In his new role, Bajjal will be overseeing day-to-day operations and a strategic direction of the 279-rooms as well as utilising his hands-on management style to deliver the highest standards of service.



Shangri-La Hotel

Dubai

Shangri-La Hotel Dubai appointed **Hakan Ozel** as the new General Manager. He will be responsible for overseeing the daily operations of the hotel including hotel rooms, serviced apartments and residences as well as the colleagues' welfare. Prior to this, he was the General Manager at China World Summit Wing, a Shangri-La hotel in Beijing, China. Ozel has over 13 years of experience with the Shangri-La Group. He held several positions at luxury hotels spanning China, Egypt, United Arab Emirates and his hometown in Turkey, where he started his illustrious career of 23 years in food and beverage management.



ibis Styles Jumeira

Dubai

ibis Styles Jumeira promotes **Muhammad Mujtaba Haider** to General Manager from his earlier position of Hotel Manager. Haider has over 15 years of experience in the hospitality industry. He was the Project Manager at ibis Styles Jumeira during its pre-opening stage and was later appointed as hotel manager when it launched in September 2015. He has worked with Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham JBR, and Ramada Downtown Dubai.



Centara Hotels and Resorts

Thailand Corporate Office

Centara Hotels & Resorts has appointed **Markland Blaiklock** as Deputy Chief Executive Officer. Blaiklock returns to Centara in an expanded capacity having previously served as the company's Chief Operating Officer in 2015. He has held senior executive positions with Le Meridien, Shangri-La, Raffles and AccorHotel groups, in Asia and North America. He is a Canadian national educated in England and France. Blaiklock's operational experience will also be put to work leading improvement of Centara's technical platforms and systems, ensuring the company's core infrastructure supports its vision for global expansion.



Marriott International

Dubai

Candice D'Cruz has been appointed Vice President of Luxury Brands, Middle East and Africa Marriott International. D'Cruz, who previously headed Marketing and Communications for Meraas' Hospitality division, has been working in the luxury segment. Prior to Meraas, she worked with Starwood in various roles at property, regional and divisional level – working with St. Regis, The Luxury Collection, W and Westin brands across Europe, the Middle East and Africa. She has also championed the marketing and communication effort for the launch of Burj Khalifa and Armani Hotel Dubai.



W The Palm

Dubai

Anne Scott joined W Dubai – The Palm after eight years in Asia Pacific, where she held the role of General Manager at the St. Regis Kuala Lumpur Hotel & Residences, St. Regis Sanya Yalong Bay, The Andaman, a Luxury Collection Resort and Le Meridien Chiang Rai Resort. She was the first female that held General Manager posts across three luxury Brands of the former Starwood Hotels & Resorts and brings with her 25 years of hospitality experience. Prior to Asia, she also held the role Hotel Manager of The Park Tower, Knightsbridge, London – a member of The Luxury Collection.



Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection

Dubai

Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection has appointed **Haitham Assem** for the role of Multi-Property Director of Marketing and Communications at The St. Regis Dubai, W Dubai - Al Habtoor City and The Westin Dubai, Al Habtoor City. A law graduate from Ain Shams University Cairo, Assem has over 15 years of experience in the hospitality field, of which he has spent 10 years leading Marketing and Communications. He has worked with brands like The Westin and Le Meridien Bahrain City Centre, and Kempinski Mall of the Emirates.



Kempinski Mall of the Emirates

Dubai

Seema Pande has been appointed as the Commercial Director at Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates. In her role, Pande will oversee and drive the sales, marketing and revenue departments. Her hospitality experience has seen her work with esteemed hospitality groups such as Emaar, Starwood and Fairmont. In her previous role as Commercial Director for the Al Habtoor City Complex in Dubai, Pande oversaw the sales, marketing, PR and revenue teams and led the launch strategies across four hotels.



Malaysian visa centre in Abu Dhabi and Dubai

■ In a move aimed at bringing enhanced convenience and comfort to residents in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) travelling to Malaysia, the Embassy of Malaysia in Abu Dhabi and the Consulate General of Malaysia in Dubai launched two new One Stop Centres (OSC) providing Malaysia visa services in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

Both centres, managed by VFS Global in partnership with S5 Systems and Megan Gayabina, are centrally located in main commercial districts of the cities – the Abu Dhabi centre is located

at Shining Tower on Mubarak Bin Mohammed Street and the Dubai centre is located at Wafi Mall. An official inauguration ceremony was held in the presence of **H.E. Dato' Yubazlan Bin Haji Yusof**, Consul General of Malaysia in Dubai and **Vinay Malhotra**, COO – Middle East & South Asia, VFS Global, together with **Sharifah Ommunnafis Binti Sharif Abdul Aziz**, Chief –Commercial Officer of S5 Systems Sdn Bhd, **Mohd Fardhi Bin Ahmad**, Director of Visa, Pass & Permit, Immigration Malaysia Department and **Dato' Mohd Zulfikar Bin Ahmad**, Director of Secu-

rity & Passport, Immigration Malaysia Department, amongst other senior officials on November 6, 2017 in Dubai.

Commenting on the launches, H.E. Dato' Yubazlan Bin Haji Yusof, Consul General of Malaysia in Dubai, said, "Well coordinated models such as the OSC seeks to optimise a multi-dimensional approach and ensure consistency in the application to provide the best, streamlined and efficient visa service. The OSC also flexed its visa submission time to allow more applications to be submitted as part of the new customer-friendly initiative."

Services at the new One Stop Centres are intuitively designed to facilitate quicker visa application submission processes. The centres will provide services for extended working hours as compared to the previous process, ensuring an enhanced customer experience.

Vinay Malhotra, COO – Middle East & South Asia, VFS Global, said, "It is an honour to launch two new OSCs that will provide travellers to Malaysia from the UAE all-encompassing and professionally managed visa processing services. With the growth in

trade and tourism between Malaysia and the UAE, we are confident that the new centres will be able to meet the rising volumes of applicants aspiring to travel to Malaysia."

In the UAE, VFS Global currently provides visa application processing services on behalf of 30 client governments, since commencing operations in the country in 2004. Key features of the OSCs for Malaysia Visas include convenient and central location, automated queue management system for quicker submission processes, photocopy and photo-



Vinay Malhotra
COO – Middle East & South Asia
VFS Global, Arabian Travel Award winner

booth facilities, easy access to information including visa categories, requirements, checklist, applicable fees, visa status updates and dedicated helpline support to answer queries.

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