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Summer cheer for ME travellers

With the holy month of Ramadan behind us, time is opportune for travellers in the Middle East to plan for outbound holidays. **TRAVTALK** finds out from some of the important National Tourist Offices about the promising and upcoming tourist destinations, special summer discounts on offer by elite hotels and airlines, besides incentives for travel trade for selling these destinations among Middle Eastern holidaymakers.

SHEHARA RIZLY



Chalerm Sak Suranant
Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand
- Dubai and Middle East Office

One of our innovative marketing strategies is the LINK that focuses on integration among the Thai tourism stakeholders. LINK stands for Local Experiences, Innovation, Networking and Keeping Character. It introduces the visitors to the unexplored exotic experiences of Thailand. For the Middle East, we would like to introduce the Samut Songkhram province, which is just 65 kilometres from Bangkok. Here, our guests from the Middle East can experience the local way of Thai life and rejuvenate themselves. They can experience the vivacity of Thai floating markets, which will give them options to enjoy shopping from morning till night. This year, we would like to emphasise on the enormous potential of celebrating weddings and honeymoons in Thailand. Thailand has extensive experience to cater to this highly specialised niche market, with many award-winning wedding planners, hotels and suppliers ready to organise events according to various themes and concepts. Honeymooners can choose from a range of luxury hotels nationwide.



Salih OZER
Culture and Information Attaché of
Turkey to the UAE

Turkey has always been a favoured destination for Middle East holidaymakers. Culture, nature and proximity are the main elements that attract the travellers. From big bustling cities full of ancient history and contemporary art to beautiful beaches and amazing natural heritage, Turkey has something to offer for everyone. From January to December 2016, a total of 822,849 holiday makers from the GCC visited Turkey's many destinations. UAE residents and nationals travelling to Turkey in 2016 reached around 300,000 tourists, which was a 27 per cent increase. Turkey's summers are warm and wonderful. Especially beautiful this time of the year is the far west city of Bursa city which features many great natural attractions: the Uluda mountains, the magnificent waterfalls that form from melting snow and the spring water. The Black Sea (Karadeniz) is impressive in the summer with its lush and subtropical climate, its historical ancient sites and picturesque coastal cities.

The Government of Japan will be relaxing the visa process for UAE nationals from July 1, as a result of which they will be able to make the necessary preparations within a shorter period. Most ME travellers are first-time visitors to Japan, so we would suggest the Golden Route that links the must-see destinations such as Tokyo, Mt. Fuji/Hakone, bullet train, Kyoto, Nara and Osaka. Japan is interested in the affluent ME market and would like to boost tourism to and from the region. In 2016, approximately 20,000 visitors from the six GCC countries visited Japan. In addition to the classic destinations above, for the ME travellers, there will be the option to stay at exotic mountain resorts built in the lap of nature in the Japanese Alps and visit the national parks, and shup at world-class shopping destinations.



Katsuhisa Ishizaki
Manager Europe, Americas and
Oceania Section
Inbound Promotion Department
Japan National Tourist Organisation

Orange County Visitors Association (OCVA), California, has launched its latest lifestyle tourism campaign centred on the celebration of Classic and Vintage Cars, coupled with exciting shopping experiences to entice visitors from the Middle East to visit the OC this summer. Titled 'The OClassic', this holiday package's highlights are one-day classic or vintage car hire, complimentary entry into one of the OC's many classic and vintage car fairs, complimentary VIP shopping experiences and exclusive discounts worth over \$2,000 at the OC's leading retail destinations of Fashion Island, Irvine Spectrum and South Coast Plaza. Participating hotel partners are also providing attractive deals to coincide with the campaign. This is the first time for Orange County to offer such a package in any market around the world, and we are extremely excited to promote it here in the Middle East. We believe many in the Middle East have a great affection and appreciation for classic and vintage cars, just like we do, and what better way to enjoy them but interacting with like-minded people at our many dedicated classic and vintage car fairs.



Ed Fuller
CEO and Chairman
Orange County Visitors Association



Maja Pak
Director
Slovenia Tourist Board

Family fun activities are popular amongst the Middle East travellers. In Slovenia, there are hundreds of ways to enjoy the destination with the family. The GCC is an emerging market for us, one which we see having significant potential for growth. GCC nationals as well as many others are always looking for new destinations where they will feel invigorated — a destination that has healthy lifestyle and green environment and is a true winter wonderland. Slovenia is the perfect choice for such a destination. It stands out also due to its quality and value-for-money experiences. Slovenia Tourist Board (STO), in collaboration with travel partners from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait, held in April 2017 a 'Kids Ski Free' campaign to promote Slovenia as an ideal winter holiday destination for families seeking ski packages, snow adventures and fun experiences. There is also three full-day ski passes for two adults; winter activities such as water aerobics; guided walks including Nordic walking basics, etc.



Caroline Melly
PR & Media Relations Manager,
Overseas Countries, Geneva
Tourism & Conventions Foundation

Geneva is an all-in-one destination, the third greenest city in the world, situated in the heart of Europe, offering summer activities for the entire family. Its unique shopping experiences, cruise itineraries and variety of restaurants, including halal, make it an attractive destination for the Middle East travellers. Geneva has been the number one Swiss destination for travellers from GCC for a long time, and our products and services have evolved based on their needs. Geneva offers a full range of summer and outdoor activities and events, which are attractive to our visitors from ME. One such event is The Geneva Festival, which is going to be held from August 3-13, 2017, including a captivating firework display on the lake on August 12.

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Arabian Travel Awards: Of, by & for the trade

India's most coveted travel award has now reached the shores of the Middle East, as it prepares to recognise the key players of the region's tourism and hospitality segments. The stalwarts of the industry will come together on July 4, to witness this black-tie event at the JW Marriott Hotel Dubai.

TT BUREAU

The grand success of the India Travel Awards, launched in 2014, steadily paved way for the emergence of the Arabian Travel Awards. This is one special night of glitz and glamour which recognises and honours the silent achievers of the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors in this region.

Middle East is known for its luxurious offerings, elegant properties and most importantly personalised services. The Arabian Travel Awards is a platform for the Middle East market to appreciate the efforts of those travel specialists owing to whom the travel and hospitality industry is booming as ever. The aim is to encourage them to con-

tinue promoting tourism in the region. The Arabian Travel Awards is fair and unbiased, following a systematic method of Internet-based voting. The awards are supported by TravelTV.news, TravTalk Middle East and TravTalk India which are premier media partners for its extensive coverage.

The awards will be divided into four categories: Personal Awards, Business Awards, Trending Awards and Partner Awards. These will include awards for Best Business Hotel, Best Family Friendly Hotel, Best City Hotel, Best Green Hotel, Best Leisure Hotel, Best Destination Management Company, Best Hotel Apartments, Best B2B Travel Portal, and Best Luxury Hotel to name a few.

Convener of the awards, **Gunjan Sabikhi** shares the efforts involved in order to make this a reality in this part of the world. "The past months have been a long process to attract the crème de la crème of Arabian travel fraternity to nominate and we are overwhelmed with the response received for the first edition of the awards. Based on nominations and voting, these awards are fair and unbiased and will recognise the contribution and achievements of travel and tourism players and will reward those who have gone above and beyond to offer a superior tourism experience to travellers. The award statuette, Maya, celebrates the grandeur of tourism and imbibes the representation of power to change the industry. Arabian Travel Awards

will be instrumental in improving the relationship of the winners with their suppliers, help build credibility and will also guide them to break into new markets."

Dominic Sherry, General Manager, JW Marriott Hotel Dubai, shares, "The JW Marriott Hotel Dubai is extremely proud to host the inaugural Arabian Travel Awards in Dubai. It is so important to recognise those who make such a difference within the travel and hospitality industry. We are expecting a significant presence from travel agencies, hoteliers, corporate representatives and professionals within the travel industry from all over the Middle East and India on July 4. I am sure it will be a fun and memorable evening."



Gunjan Sabikhi
Convener
Arabian Travel Awards



Dominic Sherry
General Manager
JW Marriott Hotel Dubai

Arabian Travel Awards will be instrumental in improving the relationship of the winners with their suppliers, help build credibility and will also guide them to break into new markets

We are expecting a significant presence from travel agencies, hoteliers, corporate representatives and travel professionals from the Middle East and India on July 4



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TRAVTALK

EDITORIAL

ME now goes on vacation mode

Post Ramadan comes the time for summer holidays in schools and vacation for the expats, which means it is time for outbound travel to do its magic! Each soul in the Middle East right now wants to break away from their monotonous daily life and the scorching summer heat and travel to any place cooler and more exotic. Every year, a new set of outbound destinations draw everyone's attention. Also, more and more countries are relaxing their visa rules for travellers from the Middle East because they now realise the importance of having tourists who can spend for a truly luxurious and exclusive service. This year, at the Arabian Travel Market, we witnessed many new outbound destinations offering their services to lure more guests from this region.

However, the climate, vacation time and the special outbound policies for the ME travellers are not the only factors that influence their choice of destination. There is another factor too — they are called the “influencers”. They are actually key “advertisers” or “travel gurus” who have rich experience in travelling and who cascade their practical knowledge to the amateur tourists from the region, helping them to decide which place to visit and how. Due to the emergence of these influencers and OTAs, the traditional travel agents and tour operators have to be on their toes. Whatever trend or experience the influencers share, the travellers cross-check with the traditional travel agents before making a decision.

Comfort and personalisation also play a pivotal role in the travel plans of Middle Eastern holidaymakers. Whether it is an airline, hotel booking or the visa application process, the travellers of this region want every documentation to be done quickly and easily. This is why, they mostly prefer mobile apps for booking tickets and hotels; and amongst hotels, they shortlist the ones which can give them customised services.

Technology transforming travel

As travellers evolve into explorers with the help of technology, the holiday-makers too need a metamorphosis so that they are still sought by these new-age tourists. Hence, it's work time for tech experts as hoteliers are looking towards complete automation and innovation in their services.

Over the years, we have watched travel evolve from being a souvenir-based experience to a memory-based exploration of a place, with holidaymakers of all ages looking for something authentic to be a part of even at a tour destination.

Central to this evolution is the increasing influence of technology in the tourism and hospitality industry. Starting from the way tickets and accommodation is booked to hotels and attractions operate and interact with their guests to the ways in which guests share their experiences with other travellers, everything is ultimately driven by technology.

Digital media platforms and apps have enabled consumers to be better informed about any and every destination in advance, book a more personalised trip and start their journey at any time of their convenience; while hotels have more tools at hand to get and stay in touch with their guests even prior to check-in, throughout their stay and even after they have left. Simultaneously, there has been the birth of experiential travellers — visitors who want to experience a place as a resident,

not a guest — this has led to the rise of two phenomena.

First, travellers are looking for accommodations other than the typical type — hotels and resorts — at the holiday stop, hence, there is the rise

any person or place even before they start planning their holiday and get to know about everything that authentically belongs to their desired destination, thus enabling them to experience the real thing and have an everlasting memory

The current phase is a great time for the technology providers to be in the hospitality industry because it means that hoteliers are recognising and measuring their return on investment in technology as they know that technology is helping them to increase guest satisfaction and consequently, increase their revenue. As travellers and travel experiences evolve, so will technology and our ability to better target, attract and promote to the travellers any city at any time and give them lasting memories to take back home.

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



Jean-Pierre (JP) Aramouni
Managing Director for Expansion
and the Middle East, Tink Labs

of home-sharing platforms. Second, while travelling, travellers now want to explore beyond the traditional tourist hotspots of a destination and experience the local culture and cuisine.

For us, the technology providers, this trend is exciting and game-changing, because it is now us who are going to shape the experience of hotels and holidays of the future. We get to challenge, innovate and disrupt the landscape because we see travel from a different perspective, having looked deeper at the layers that make a great country, city or town what it is — beyond traditional tourism.

Through technology, travellers can connect with

of the place when they visit it.

Moreover, through technology, those in hospitality can seamlessly connect with their potential, current and future customers and stay connected for the entire duration of their travel, regardless of where the customers are touring.

In the Middle East, and around the world, the trend is the same — hoteliers are investing in latest technology at a rapid rate. And although that means different things to different hotels, all hoteliers are seeing the benefit of the impact that technology is having on their bottom line and choosing to see it as an investment, not a cost.

Amadeus distributes iftar boxes in A'Dhabi

Ramadan is a time dedicated to the needy as every Muslim observes fast from dawn to dusk for 30 days. This practice ensures that all individuals feel the real hunger similar to those less fortunate ones. Many individuals and corporates take a special interest during this period to carry out meritorious activities to truly share something with the less fortunate. Amadeus took the initiative to distribute 1000 iftar packs to the less fortunate residents of Abu Dhabi to celebrate the season of giving.



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The swift and steady rise of Oman Air

Oman Air has been steadily growing its capacity and enhancing its services over the past few years. **Paul Gregorowitsch**, Chief Executive Officer, Oman Air, shares with **TRAVTALK** the current market trends, the challenges that the airline faces and its plans for the year ahead.

TT BUREAU

QHow has Oman Air fared during the past year?

Oman Air experienced a 20.1 per cent increase in passenger numbers, with over 7.7 million passengers travelling with the airline in 2016, compared to 6.3 million passengers in 2015 and the current contribution from Oman Air, as a national airline, to the economy of the Sultanate of Oman has been close to RO 900 million (as per the Oxford economic report update, 2017).

However, the fluctuating oil prices continue to affect Oman Air in different ways, and the Middle East is still experiencing economic downturn. The issue is not that people are not travelling with us, but the ongoing economic impact of low oil prices

has affected the high yield business travel traffic. As a Middle Eastern airline, Oman Air benefits from the thriving oil economies, and if this isn't the case and there is a general economic downturn, then all Middle Eastern airlines will have to work harder to attract the high yield guest.

QAre there any new routes or codeshares planned for the region?

The airline is always looking at opportunities to develop and grow its network and will be looking to expand further in 2017 and we do not rule out further developments in the ME. Recently, most of the codeshare announcements have been focused on Europe and the North Atlantic. For the time being, Oman Air will keep a close watch on the range of opportunities available to us



Paul Gregorowitsch
Chief Executive Officer
Oman Air

Oman Air has signed a number of agreements with service providers such as Sixt, Bank Muscat, Shangri La Hotels, that increase the mileage earnings of our Frequent Flyer Programme members

and will take a decision if and when we need to about any more codeshares in the ME.

QWith the new airport coming up in Muscat, what are Oman Air's growth plans?

The new airport will have a very positive effect on the Oman economy with its ability to handle 12 million passengers a year. We expect that effect to cascade to Oman Air as well. Knowing that we are soon going to have world-class facilities in place at our airport hub, Muscat, we are actively looking forward to expanding our services.

QPlease share the growth plans of Oman Air in the ME region for 2017.

The airline will closely monitor the demand curve

for the ME routes and consider further expansions and increase in frequencies accordingly. Currently, to continue its growth and increase the number of customers, Oman Air has signed a number of agreements with service providers such as Sixt, Bank Muscat, Shangri La Hotels and Resorts, Rock-etmiles, Al Nahdha Resort and Spa and Muscat Duty Free that increase the mileage earnings of our Frequent Flyer Programme members.

QAre there any new incentives for travel agents/tour operators from Oman Air?

Travel agents are an integral associate of Oman Air and so they are always included in the airline's incentive plans. Various loyalty schemes have been introduced for them over

the years, like productivity-based incentives, which run throughout the year. Recently, we introduced the Ramadan baggage offer, which includes permitting an additional baggage in economy as well as competitive fares on the European and Far Eastern routes. This assisted our travel agents and tour operators to sell Oman Air products on a bigger and better scale.

QWill there be any new offers from Oman Air for summer travel?

Oman Air creates a range of offers throughout the year to help guests plan their holidays, and abiding by that tradition, we will continue to introduce competitive offers that our guests can take advantage of when booking their holidays.



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This is 'IT' for travel agents all around

With the entire tourism industry going under the IT cover, it has become inevitable for travel agents to up their game on the technology quotient. We spoke to a stalwart from the industry, **Asim Arshad**, Group CEO, Orient Travel and Tourism, about the new phase in the profession of travel agents.

SHEHARA RIZLY

QHaving been in the industry for a while, what do you think are the travel trends of today?

The industry has gone through a big change from the time I landed in the UAE. Customers expect to find whatever they need anytime. From a travel agent, they expect the best price and service for travel as well as accommodation. Indeed, they are more demanding because supply is in abundance and technology is also disrupting and enabling the value chain.

QWhat are your thoughts on the new role of traditional travel agents, with new OTAs coming up?

There is a big shift in how and what sort of business is done by travel agents. As re-

tail business is dying down, high-street travel agents who are involved in catering to retail customers are getting affected. The trend started in the US, Canada and Europe, where now a huge number of retail travel agents have shut shops. This retail space is being taken over by OTAs, metasearch agencies, web-based, low-cost airlines and even some legacy carriers selling directly on their online portals.

Subsequently, traditional travel agents have evolved as travel management companies (TMC), depending heavily on corporate business. Now here again, there's a catch. As most of the corporate business is going global, all the local TMCs that have global tie-ups with global TMCs are doing well and should continue to do well. The competition for local corporate business will however become more intense with lo-



Asim Arshad
Group CEO
Orient Travel and Tourism

The competition for local corporate business will become more intense with local travel companies competing to take their share in this market as well. This will lead to more pressure on the bottomline

cal travel companies competing to take their share in this market as well. This will lead to more price competition, extended credit facilities and of course creating more pressure on the bottom line. We already see a lot of pressure on the receivables/collections from the local market because we all work on a fortnightly payment cycle with BSP. The outbound leisure business remains good, because that is a personalized service where people trust and believe in the company and the consultant they are dealing with, although even in that space, a number of clients are now going directly to popular OTAs to book tickets, hotels etc.

QHow can a traditional travel agent change with the tech savvy times of today?

Automate processes, improve proficiency and aver-

age turnaround time. Invest in the best travel distribution and point-of-sale systems. Focus on customer notifications, feedback and unique content and offer the best value for the highest quality service and support. Keep pricing flexible and competitive.

QIn your opinion, what tools must a travel agent use to attract more clientele?

It is said "there is no substitute for experience". I too believe in this. Experience is the most handy and valuable tool a travel agent can have. Continuous evolvement, process efficiency and specialisation are key in attracting new clientele and retaining the existing ones. Consistent marketing and engagement through direct channels with clients allow for easy accessibility as well as real-time communication.

QWhat are the latest offerings by Orient Travel to their clientele?

Orient Travel offers its corporate clientele the cutting edge in travel technology, which we receive from Carlson Wagonlit Travel. Data consolidation, daily data feed, online reports, extensive MIS reports, safety and security are some of the best offerings we have for our clients. We are now also rolling out the CWT-TO-GO mobile app. This is what makes us stand apart from competition. Other than that, Orient Travel continues to offer bespoke holiday and vacation packages for cities all over the world, with primary focus on niche destinations in countries like South Africa, Croatia, Scandinavia, and those of South America. We've also introduced a dedicated visa services division to assist with the visa application process for a nominal fee.

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A very special iftar by ibis Styles



In partnership with Women Helping Women support group, ibis Style Jumeira hosted an Iftar for families of children with special needs at its Street Café restaurant. **Muhammad Haider**, Hotel Manager, ibis Styles Jumeira, commented, "Our team is pleased to welcome the people of determination, for a special celebration this Ramadan. We are thankful for the opportunity to reach out to the UAE community during this holy month."

Hawthorn expresses gratitude



Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham JBR reached out to 100 labourers in Al Quoz Industrial Area labour camp and cab drivers during Ramadan and distributed Iftar meals. They also distributed 180 Iftar bags to cab drivers over a course of three days. **Samer Rafie**, Hotel Manager, commented, "This is our simple way of showing our gratitude and appreciation for all their hard work and dedication."

Musafir on growth trajectory with Amadeus

Musafir.com has signed another agreement with Amadeus to amplify its e-commerce offerings. This agreement provides the company with industry-leading business intelligence technologies and access to global travel content through the Amadeus system for making booking easier and faster for them.



Musafir.com, a UAE based travel website, has signed a new regional GCC agreement with the technology leader in the global travel industry, Amadeus, to further enhance its e-commerce offering.

The online company will be powered with Amadeus' latest advanced solutions such as Master Pricer, Business Intelligence, Fare Optimiser and Productivity Tracker to make the booking experience more efficient and convenient.

The announcement marks the newest achievement in Musafir.com's regional growth journey, following the recent launch of its online websites across the region and collaborations with global partners

like VISA, Singapore Tourism Board, Jordan Tourism Board and leading banks in the region earlier.

"As the UAE's first home-grown, premium-experience travel website, we are well positioned to lead the online travel sector in the Emirates and beyond," said **Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Thani**, Chairman of the Department of Statistics and Community Development and Co-founder of Musafir.com. "Signing strategic agreements with global industry leaders such as Amadeus allows us to access premium travel products and further boost our technological progressions, which is something that matters the most to our customers and partners. We are therefore, delighted to be partnering with Amadeus who will lend



Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Thani
Chairman, Department of Statistics and Community Development and Co-founder, Musafir.com

As the UAE's first home-grown, premium-experience travel website, we are well positioned to lead the online travel sector in the Emirates and beyond

us their extensive expertise in travel and consultancy and fuel our future growth."



Antoine Medawar
Vice President
Amadeus MENA

Online Travel Agencies continue to grow steadily in the region as there is a clear shift in booking patterns, however this is only the beginning

The agreement comes at a time when the online travel industry in the UAE is

witnessing some of its highest growths to date. Online travel bookings are expected to generate \$12 billion in sales in 2017, up from \$7 billion in 2014, according to a recent report by Amadeus and Phocuswright.

This is largely driven by increasing mobile and smartphone penetration in the region, buoyed by UAE's 73.8 per cent smartphone penetration ranking the highest in the world. This trend has been reflected by Musafir.com's booking data, which shows that over 60 per cent of all bookings are made via smartphones.

"Online Travel Agencies continue to grow steadily in the region as there is a clear shift in booking patterns, however this is only the beginning," said **Antoine Medawar**, Vice President, Ama-

deus MENA. "Amadeus has invested in delivering innovative solutions that enable our partners to thrive and lead in this industry with new business models and technology. In addition to delivering our products, we also provide consultancy expertise to optimise the online travel purchasing experience for our partners. We are excited to expand our agreement with Musafir.com and to continue working together to power pioneering travel experiences."

Millennial Travellers

- As much as 60 per cent of all travel bookings in the UAE are made via smartphones.
- UAE's 73.8 per cent smartphone penetration is the highest in the world

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Home away from home for ME travellers

Ametis Villa Bali is surely a tourist magnet. After all, who can resist holidaying at a hotel that offers the swankiest of villas with personal butlers and proximity to the best that nature has to offer. The Year-on-Year growing numbers of Middle Eastern travellers to this hotel stand testimony to the unmatched standards of this hotel in Canggu, a coastal village and 10km beach on the south coast of Bali, Indonesia.

TT BUREAU

Opened in 2011, Ametis Villa Bali is located in the coastal village of Canggu. It is one of the most elite luxury lifestyle hotels in the world, famous globally for the personal touch in its services and its villas well-equipped with all the modern amenities, running on latest technologies. Their primary markets are the countries of Asia and Asia Pacific, followed by those of Europe and the Middle East, and then come the travellers from the USA, domestic market and other countries, who constitute the emerging markets. The number of visitors from the Middle East has started growing since 2014, and with direct flight from UAE to Bali now, Ametis expects the number to grow at a faster rate.

The main reason for the increasing popularity of the hotel among the Middle East

holidaymakers is that Ametis is able to meet the high standards of the discerning guests from the region. For example, their luxury lifestyle villa structure makes the guests from the Middle Eastern countries feel at home away from home, with enough space, large private pools, personalized service with one personal butler for each villa etc. Further, as a part of Ametis' popular trait of giving attention to detail, alcohol beverages are removed from mini bars provided to the guests from the Gulf region as most of them do not consume alcohol. The check-in and check-out formalities can be done in their villas and not at the reception, and if requested, female butlers are assigned as caretakers for them.

Akiko Yoshioka, General Manager, Ametis Villa, states, "Ametis Villa Bali's personal butlers, who excel in

gauging their guests' needs and desires, are known to exceed every expectation with their sincere Balinese hospitality, and hence, they are the perfect caretakers for our visitors from the Middle East countries, who expect the highest level of service, along with appropriate level of privacy."

Spread over 7500 square metres of area and featuring 14 private villas, the serene resort promises a chance to experience escapism to travellers who seek a break from their mundane daily routine and need a place amidst Nature's bounties for the same. Ametis has greenery all around and is only 5 minutes away from the breathtaking beach of the Indian Ocean. For those who want to spend most of the time at their villa, Ametis brings nature to them through their semi-outdoor living rooms, which open out

Ametis Villa Bali's personal butlers, who excel in gauging their guests' needs and desires, are known to exceed every expectation with their sincere Balinese hospitality, and hence, they are the perfect caretakers for our visitors from the Middle East countries, who expect the highest level of service, along with appropriate level of privacy



Akiko Yoshioka
General Manager
Ametis Villa

into lush green lawns, with tall, dense trees all around. Even for art lovers, this hotel is the perfect choice because Canggu has rich cultural heritage and has quite a few historic destinations.

In the process of making their guest feel at special and at home right from

the word 'Go', the butlers establish contact with their assigned guests one week prior to their arrival in Bali and get familiar with them beforehand. They share their photo with the guests and the guests send the details of their preferences and needs so that the butler can get everything ready

and organised for them in advance and offer them the relaxing stay that they deserve. This also takes away the guests' anxiety of being in an unknown part of the world right from the moment they step down at the airport in Denpasar. They are already familiar with the little details and know who is going to take care of them right from the airport to the end of their vacation. Once the guests leave the premises, the butler sends a personal email to their assigned guest for their feedback on the stay and thanking them for their stay so that there would be a long-lasting relationship. 🌺



Personalised visa application for UAE

Personalisation plays a pivotal role in holiday itineraries these days, starting right from their visa application. VFS Global has introduced new strategies for the Middle Eastern travellers to ensure they experience a smooth and personalised visa application process, reveals **Vinay Malhotra**, COO – ME & South Asia.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

QHow central is the Middle East to your operations and what is your growth strategy for this region?

Ever since we launched operations in the United Arab Emirates in 2002, the Middle East has been an important travel hub for our business and holiday travellers alike due to its central location. In terms of our growth strategy for the region, beyond expanding our existing client base, we are focused on using innovation and 'anywhereisation' in all our services as a key business driver. This is partly because we have recognised a paradigm shift in customer behaviour over the last few years – today's traveller is far more analytical about the options that are available to him, and prefers speed,

comfort and convenience in all the services, including the visa application process.

QWhat are VFS Global's key differentiators in terms of services for applicants?

VFS Global introduced the concept of visa process outsourcing some 16 years ago, and today, we continue to create path-breaking innovations, by pushing the boundaries of flexibility and digitisation in visa application. Among these innovations are our 'bespoke' or tailor-made solutions that give applicants greater flexibility and accessibility in the visa application process so as to ensure their experience with our services is a smooth one.

Our 'doorstep' visa service for instance, introduced in the United Arab Emirates



Vinay Malhotra
COO – Middle East & South Asia,
VFS Global

Our mobile app for the United Arab Emirates visas for Emirates Airline is another example of a first-of-a-kind innovation that is increasing in popularity among the applicants the world over

in January last year, allows travellers to apply for visas from their home or office. Our VFS Global team visits the applicant's chosen location to complete the application submission process and biometric enrolment (obtaining finger scans and a photograph) in a safe and secure process. This level of personalisation — where the visa centre essentially comes to the applicant's location of choice — has revolutionised the flexibility of the process to a great extent and it is no wonder that this particular service has done very well in the Middle East.

Our mobile app for the United Arab Emirates visas for Emirates Airline is another example of a first-of-a-kind innovation that is increasing in popularity among the applicants world over — it is the first ever transactional visa application app that allows

applicants to apply for a visa from anywhere, anytime.

QWhich are the governments served by VFS Global?

Currently, we serve 28 client governments in the UAE; 18 Schengen countries, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

QWhat are the outbound summer destinations most popularly approached for by the agents and consumers?

The United Arab Emirates is home to a large number of expatriates who often require visas to travel abroad for tourism or business. Generally, many of the western and Schengen countries are

popular among the travellers from the Middle East.

QAre visas guaranteed when you apply through VFS Global?


VFS Global is only responsible for the processing of visa applications. All applications are assessed and visa decisions made at the sole discretion of our client governments.

QDo share the busiest periods for travel in the Middle East region.

For travellers from the Middle East, the peak travel season usually begins from March, peaking during the months of July and August, due to school holidays and summer breaks around this time. We observe a small spike in travel during the short Eid break as well, after Ramadan. 🌙



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BBTF brings leisure & corporate together

Bali and Beyond Travel Fair (BBTF) 2017 concluded with 264 buyers from 54 countries attending the event this year. The event aims to advance the tourism industry through business sessions and direct promotion of the best practices in MICE and Leisure Management. BBTF facilitated Pre-Scheduled Appointments (PSA) and business sessions for buyers and sellers. Constituting the attendees were corporations, travel agents, hotels and resorts, cruise operators, convention planners, venue operators and travel buyers.



Mezoon ported to the top by Travelport

One of the largest travel agencies in the Sultanate of Oman and an affiliate of BCD Travel, Mezoon International Travel & Tours (MITT), has just become larger with its new collaboration with Travelport. Next stop for Mezoon: Latest searching and booking tools and unstoppable growth!

TT BUREAU

Leading travel commerce platform, Travelport, has announced a new multi-year agreement with Mezoon International Travel & Tours (MITT), via Travelport's distributor in Oman. This agreement will allow one of the largest travel agencies in the Sultanate of Oman and an affiliate of BCD Travel to access Travelport's unrivalled choice of travel content and benefit from its smart, fast and accurate searching and booking to offer the customers information from more than 400 airlines, including low cost and network carriers, from over 650,000 hotel properties and

from 37,000 car rental locations around the world. MITT can also take advantage of Travelport Smartpoint as its agency desktop to search beyond rates and availabilities to book more personalised and tailored travel; work smarter and increase revenues.

Riyaz Kuttery, Chief Operating Officer of MITT, commented, "We are delighted by this agreement and look forward to benefitting from Travelport's content and merchandising capabilities. Travellers increasingly expect

more choice and personalisation when booking travel and Travelport's customer-centric technology enables us to deliver better-quality service, as well

as give our business continuing opportunity to grow."

Matt Powell, Managing Director in the Middle East

and South Asia, Travelport, added, "Travelport welcomes one of the Middle East's leading travel agencies as our newest partner in the region. To maintain their leadership in today's competitive world of travel, Mezoon needs access to both extensive global travel choice as well as the very best travel booking technology and this has remained our focus and an area in which we have continued to invest in and lead in. We're delighted that they have chosen Travelport."



Matt Powell
Managing Director - Middle East and South Asia, Travelport

Travelport welcomes one of ME's leading travel agencies as our newest partner

Technology News

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Redefining travel commerce

Virtual payments ease reality

Supplier payments have proved to be a complex, timetaking and costly process. However, now there is a breather in the form of virtual payments (VCNs). **Nissrin Damdam**, Business Development Manager at NEC Payments, throws some light on the same for **TRAVTALK**.

TT BUREAU

Managing supplier payments in the travel industry is a challenge that hogs time as well as resources and represents a significant underlying cost to doing business. The stringent requirements of the billing and settlement plan favoured by IATA can be restrictive and capital intensive, and settling multiple bookings within bulk settlement payments can lead to reconciliation issues. These potential problems are in addition to the fundamental shortcomings of bank transfers, which can be

expensive, are slow, and can also face additional compliance-related delays.

Nissrin Damdam, Business Development Manager at NEC Payments, however, says that now there is a solution for it, which she shares with us, "These challenges can be overcome by using virtual cards (Virtual Card Numbers — VCNs) to make payments. VCNs are single-use and can be issued dynamically at the time of booking in order to simplify reconciliation and workflow by linking the payment directly to a single booking".

VCNs are accepted by the supplier in the same way as any other card payment: they receive authorisation immediately, and funds are settled in the same way, and at the same time, as any other card payment that they might accept from any other customer.

Nissrin further adds, "VCNs offer travel agents and travel management companies a fast, convenient and secure way of making supplier payments at a lower cost than cheque or bank transfer. In addition to maximising profitability by reducing FX fees, resources

These challenges can be overcome by using virtual cards to make payments. VCNs are single-use and can be issued dynamically at the time of booking in order to simplify reconciliation

used, bank costs and capital requirements, they can generate new revenues from incentive rebates".

Overall, the numerous benefits of virtual payments for the travel industry can be summarised as below:

- They reduce the cost and time associated with making international bank transfer payments.

- They take control of FX and reduce exposure to FX rate movements.
- They reduce working capital requirements by lowering BSP volume and the requirement for BSP settlement guarantees.
- They generate a new revenue stream from the incentive rebates paid as a percentage of the total monthly value of VCN



Nissrin Damdam
BDM
NEC Payments

- They help get access to enhanced data for management reporting, BI and analytics.

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BBTF: Blurs boundaries, expands trade

The fourth annual Bali and Beyond Travel Fair (BBTF) recently hosted 174 sellers from Indonesia, including tour operators, hotel chains and resorts as well as provincial tourism offices, representing the country's tourism and hospitality industry along with 264 buyers from 54 other countries.



Bali and Beyond Travel Fair (BBTF) was founded in 2014 with the vision of creating Indonesia's very own international travel fair. Unlike other countries, Indonesia has over 17,000 islands, vast cultural heritage, customs, traditions, art, culinary and an unmatched natural beauty. Promoting such a vast destinations across the world is quite challenging, hence created the platform for the Bali and Beyond Travel Fair with the sole purpose of inviting buyers to experience the country first-hand, see the potential of each destination so they will know how to explain it later on to their customers. So BBTF became a single forum that brings potential buyers from around the globe - with special interest in Indonesia - to meet the travel agencies, tourism offices, tour operators, hotels, resorts and all the tourism industry from Indonesia in a B2B setting, to talk potential mutual business collaboration with each other.

I Ketut Ardana, SH, Chairman, Bali and Beyond Travel Fair, explained, "The fourth BBTF this year was an overall success. We included several additional programs to the main programs aimed to our media participants, giving our sellers the opportunity to present their products and services to the attending media. The Ministry of Tourism showcased the new 10 potential destinations beyond Bali and we got good feedbacks on that as buyers now start looking at more destinations to visit, if this goes well, Bali will surely be the

hub for Indonesia - before visitors venture out further to other destinations."

This year, BBTF also hosted several pre-event tour programs with the support of the Ministry of Tourism, another step to realising their goal to let the buyers experience the destinations themselves. This was helpful for them to find out whether the destination is ready for international market so they can bring it back to the Ministry for review and development. As a buyer from the Middle East region, **Gessy Gitapuri**, Chief Executive, MichiDe International, shared that BBTF is an amazing platform for quality sellers and buyers to do real business together. "Where the rhythm is intense yet effective, providing day-packed appointments to each participant with meticulous planning A to Z. The entertainment locations are hand-picked, providing world class service, cuisine and sceneries from the magical island of the gods, Bali. It is definitely a pleasure and an honor for MichiDe International-Luxury Expert from Dubai to join forces with BBTF!" she said.

The Middle East market is already an important market for Indonesia, however, they hope to increase the number of visitors by creating more destinations that are potential for ME market to consider. MICE is an option for them to focus more on for ME market as it covers a healthy spread of business across the board. They still need to deeply research the trends and interests within the ME market further to



"The fourth BBTF was an overall success. We included several additional programmes to the main programmes aimed to our media participants, giving our sellers the opportunity to present their products and services. The Ministry of Tourism showcased the new 10 potential destinations beyond Bali and we got good feedback on that as buyers now start looking at more destinations to visit. If this goes well, Bali will surely be the hub for Indonesia - before visitors venture out further to other destinations."

I Ketut Ardana, SH

Chairman, Bali and Beyond Travel Fair

make sure that they are able to provide the right products and services. John Hardy Bali Workshop Experience and Boutique as a luxury shopping destination is a special feature which would attract the ME traveller. It is an experience where customers are invited to see how their artisans create each piece of jewellery entirely by hand using traditional techniques unique to Bali. The workshop in Bali is an expression of the John Hardy values of upholding artisan communities and environmental sustainability, as well as the rich heritage of Bali which continues to inspire the brand. **Polly Purser**, Director of Heritage, Hospitality and Public Affairs-John Hardy shared that they support the BBTF in preserving and celebrating what is authentic to Bali and Indonesia. "We support BBTF to develop luxury tourism in Bali and Indonesia which highlights sustainability and cultural preservation. ME travel trade can send guests/travellers to John Hardy workshop and showroom. At the John Hardy Workshop and Boutique in Bali, guests can join them for one of a kind unique experi-

ence where they will discover the heritage and evolution of John Hardy brand, learn more about sustainable architecture and environmental sustainability initiatives," Purser said.

Indonesia Tourism has grown significantly over the past years, which also supports the growth of hospitality industry in the country. Biznet Hospitality is a service that offers integrated solution of Biznet Dedicated Internet and Biznet Cable TV services for hotels, dormitories, service apartments and hospitals. Biznet Dedicated Line service offers premium Internet Access service that can be distributed via wired or wireless solutions throughout customers' property. Speed options are customisable that can be easily installed an upgraded without disrupting business daily operations. **Adi Kusma**, President Director, Biznet, shared, "Internet has become a necessity for almost everyone, including those who are on holiday but still need to be connected with their loved ones. We are hoping that Biznet Hospitality service can support the growth of tourism industry in Indonesia by providing hotels and resorts with super-fast Internet connection with high-quality Cable TV, which will certainly provide better entertainment and experience for guests and customers."

Bali has a lot to offer, from shopping destinations to private luxury getaways in various locations around the island, hillside, mountain top to beachfront luxury. Business owners in the tourism industry understands the



Gessy Gitapuri
Chief Executive
MichiDe International



I Gusti Ngurah Swijana
Resort Manager
Wapa di Ume Resort and Spa

The entertainment locations are hand-picked, providing world class service, cuisine and sceneries from the magical island of the gods, Bali

ME is a very important market for us as clients look for luxury relaxing escapes. They are willing to spend more time in the resort and have in resort dining

need of the (ME) market. **Gusti Ngurah Swijana**, Resort Manager, Wapa di Ume Resort and Spa, explains their strategy to obtain more clientele from the ME region, "this is our second year at BBTF. We are focusing in exposing our brand to the market, upselling our current property in Ubud and presenting our new property in Sidemen (Karangasem).

Wapa di Ume Resort and Spa is 4 stars hotel. Middle East market is very important to us as those clients are looking for luxury relaxing escapes. They are willing to spend more time in the resort and have in resort dining. We are expanding the market to ME by joining trade show and do more intensive marketing with more exposure."



Wake up and smell the 'green' coffee

In line with the UAE Government's ongoing commitment to sustainability, Nespresso continues working on coffee capsule recycling with local partner Bee'ah. They celebrated International Recycling Day with hospitality partners. The partners share their thoughts on this effort and the importance of recycling.

TT BUREAU

“This International Recycling Day, we are proud to affirm the message of resource recovery through our partnership with Nespresso. As an industry leader in environmental management, Bee'ah encourages the adoption of a circular economy and actively seeks opportunities that unlock the potential of used materials. By collaborating with Nespresso, we have managed to achieve a zero waste recovery process for the capsules. This partnership is an excellent example of sustainable business practices, through its positive impact on the environment and the industry.”



H.E. Khaled Al Huraimel
Group CEO
Bee'ah

“Nespresso has been making great strides in contributing to sustainability through its 'Positive Cup' strategy, which seeks to create positive impact for farmers, consumers and the society at large, while caring for the environment. Locally, a large focus of Nespresso's strategy is on recycling and assisting its partners in the hospitality sector achieve their green targets by making the process frictionless; an increasingly crucial necessity for many hotels. The hassle-free service starts with free and regular collection from the partner's premises, before all the components of the coffee capsule are processed.”



Manuel Sancho
Business Development
Manager, Nespresso - Middle
East & Africa

“I would like to thank Nespresso for supporting us to become more sustainable in line with AccorHotels' implementation of Planet 21. Nespresso's idea of recycling the capsules is a great initiative towards sustainable development. The trainings and tools we've received from Nespresso to make this happen have also allowed the Pullman Hotel in Jumeirah Lakes Towers to implement the recycling initiative across our food and beverage outlets. We are grateful for allowing us to be a part of this beautiful initiative.”



Edi Ilmu Lahut
Seasons Restaurant Manager
Pullman Jumeirah Lakes
Towers



Rehan Ahmed
Purchasing Officer
Conrad Dubai

“Recycling is one of the best ways to have a positive impact on the planet and to make sure that our future generations live in a healthy environment. In addition to being good for us as human beings, it is important for our natural environment. Recycling helps reduce waste, pollution and global warming. It also reduces the consumption of raw materials, which in turn helps to preserve natural resources while growing and developing our business initiatives.”



Ayush Agarwal
Assistant Outlet Manager,
Sofitel, Jumeirah Beach
Residence

“As we are in the hotel business, recycling becomes all the more important and a greater responsibility for us. A lot of waste is produced by us and it is our job to reduce it and help the planet. Recycling waste is very important as harmful chemicals and greenhouse gases are released from rubbish in landfill sites. Recycling helps to reduce the pollution caused by waste. Recycling also reduces the need for raw materials so that the rainforests can be preserved.”



Balram Pawar
Store Keeper
Armani Hotel

“Recycling is good for the environment and requires far less energy and uses fewer natural resources. Recycling also offers significant energy savings over manufacturing with virgin materials. Manufacturing with recycled aluminum cans that are used heavily in the hospitality industry, uses less energy, prevents global warming, and reduces water pollution. We are glad to be a part of this initiative to help preserve our natural resources for the future generations.”

BA gifts new First Wing to ME flyers

British Airways recently announced a number of investment plans to enhance Middle Eastern customers' experience, the most important being the launch of its new First Wing at the Heathrow Airport. Robert Williams, Head of Sales for ME and Asia Pacific, talks about the efforts taken to drive the airline's regional operations.

SHEHARA RIZLY

Q Do share a little about British Airways' operations in the Middle East.

We've completed 85 years of successful operations in the Middle East and the region continues to remain extremely important to British Airways. We are continuously making investments in the direction of enhancing our customers' experience. The airline is set to launch 22 new routes in 2017, which will expand its network of onward connections for the United Arab Emirates and other Middle East customers. In my new role, I will be responsible for managing the airline's growth and development across Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar, which are some of British

Airways' most important overseas markets.

Q What are you offering to the Middle East passengers that others are not?

We witness a high preference for our premium services from across the region. This is primarily due to the unique flying experience that we provide to our customers. One such experience offered by us is the new First Wing at the Heathrow Airport, which is immediately available for all the passengers flying first class with us. Flights from across the Middle East land at Terminal 5, British Airways' flagship terminal, which is now home to its exclusive new 'First Wing' check-in area. Among the various exclusive features, the First Wing includes a dedicated two-lane security channel and direct access to



Robert Williams
Head of Sales-Middle East and APAC
British Airways

We have Terminal 5 as our flagship home, which together with the First Wing, significantly improves the airport experience for our premium customers

the Galleries First Lounge and Concorde Room for the first time. The new security lanes reduce the number of travellers passing through the current South security lanes, helping to speed up the checks and other formalities for the Club World customers too. A relaxed seating area is available after security check for the passengers to gather their possessions in an unhurried atmosphere. The First Wing gives the first-class and Gold Executive Club customers far greater exclusivity, with a dedicated combined check-in and Fast Track space.

Q What are you offering 'new' to the Middle East passengers?

We have recently announced our investment plans for our customers, which are primarily centred on providing excellence in the premium

cabins and more choice and quality for all.

The first of these new investments that is especially for our customers in the Middle East is the new First Wing at London's Heathrow Airport. It is designed to offer an exclusive experience to our first-class, Executive Club Gold, and one-world Emerald customers through a new and improved check-in zone and direct lounge access. It has two new dedicated security lanes, which are designed to make our premium customers' journey through the airport quick and convenient, and it provides direct access to the Galleries First Lounge and Concorde Room to make the stay of the customers at the airport much more relaxing. Further, we have Terminal 5 as our flagship home, which to-

gether with the First Wing, significantly improves the airport experience for our premium customers.

In the coming months, the airline will announce the introduction of new Club World cabins and self-service check-in, along with biometric boarding gates. More updates over the last 18 months include the opening of our prestigious new lounge at Concourse D in Dubai International Airport. We launched direct services between Oman and London Heathrow and Qatar and London Heathrow at the end of 2016 – these routes previously included one stopover. Additionally, this year, we introduced the 787-9 Dreamliner on our Jeddah route. The aircraft's new-generation first-class cabins have received positive feedback from all our sophisticated travellers in KSA.

Personality of the month

Breaking the glass ceiling

Mentor to a strong workforce of 300, **Roxana Jaffar** takes on the role of a strategist, a thought leader, a motivator, a change agent and a pragmatist at Dubai-based Holiday Inn Al Barsha. As the CEO, she works by the Triple P bottom line — defining their Profit by looking after the People and the Planet.

TT BUREAU

Roxana Jaffar enjoys her job of providing guidance and mentoring the staff. She is a follower of the 'servant leadership' concept, which means leading by growing the heart of a servant within and ensuring that all the heads below her lead with the same ethos. She makes sure that the team leaders treat their subordinates with love and respect and help spread the elements of trust, integrity and unity in the entire organisation so that even the lowest level staff work with complete dedication and learn to put another person's needs before oneself. This should finally reflect in the service levels accorded to the hotel guests.

Corporate Leader

Jaffar started her career as an Asset Ledger Executive in Germain Monteil (UK), a global cosmetics company, on Bond Street, London, whilst she studied to become a certified corporate accountant. Soon after, a related opportunity came up with Dunkin Donuts (UK)

and she switched jobs, becoming an accountant at a young age. However, soon after, Dunkin Donuts' UK operations were taken over by an Englishman and she moved on to becoming the FCO and Director of Brian Perry's Donuts (London). This led her to start her own business with her sister, where they manufactured and distributed donuts to outlets like Harrods, Selfridges, railway stations and airports. Jaffar reminisces, "At the height of our success, there came a time when we had to deliver over 14,000 donuts per night. Delivering them before breakfast was a challenge because they go bad quickly. This is when I learnt to strategise correctly and understand the merits of teamwork."

Accidentally in a new trade

Jaffar says she landed in the hospitality industry "totally by accident." She says, "the present owner of the chain, who is like my brother, wanted me to take charge of his hotel's operations in Dubai. Adding to that, my husband helped to acquire land for the hotel. Moreover,

food and beverage is my area of speciality. Hence, I ended up here. It was easy to adapt to the hospitality industry, however, I committed a lot of mistakes while learning in the process and never stopped innovating and challenging the norms. Today, our hotel not only houses 309 rooms with 54 suites and several conference venues equipped with state-of-the-art technology, but also award-winning restaurants as well as bars — The Royal Budha (Thai), Gharana (Indian), Xennya Terrace (Rooftop Bar & Lounge), The Q, Retox and a nightclub called Bodega Garage."

Remarkable achievements

Jaffar has been recognised as one of the 'Super 100 Women Achievers in the Middle East and Africa' in a coffee table book article, 'Pioneering the fusion of social responsibility with business strategy'. She also received the 'Global Inspirational Leadership Award 2015' for her innovations and initiatives in the corporate sector. In the same year, she was conferred the award for 'Best Woman in Hospitality UAE' by the 'Women Leaders of UAE', in association with HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. This award is for 'Outstanding Women Professional Leaders' who have the vision, flair, acumen and professionalism to demonstrate excellent leadership and managing skills in an organi-

sation, making changes and achieving results.

Evolving hospitality trade

Jaffar shares, "the hospitality arena has changed totally from the time we opened our doors in 2008. The total room inventory in Al Barsha was around 2000 keys then. Today, this small enclave in Al Barsha, as per Dubai Tourism, has listed 57 hotels with 10,065 rooms and Dubai as a whole has 697 hotels with around 118,000 rooms, all vying for the same market share. Granted the demand in Dubai has been up by 5.5 per cent over the previous year, but the supply was up by 6.6 per cent, resulting in a gap of 1.1 per cent in room nights, with over 12,000 rooms being vacant per night. Business has become ruthless, hotels are slashing their rates to attract more customers and the guest has become smarter in that they know how to 'shop around' to get the cheapest deal."

Tech-savvy new generation

Guests today are from the digital age, with complete awareness about everything through the social networking sites and the numerous mobile apps. Hence, they are confident and not scared to voice their opinion.

Hotels today have to be very careful about how each and every guest is treated and treat any complaint as



The motto of "Our monetary profit should only be defined by putting the People and the Planet first" is escalated down the line and even told to our young millennial guests so that they can be the best judge of our best practices and forge a long-lasting relationship with us

Roxana Jaffar
CEO, Holiday Inn Al Barsha



the hint to better their offerings. Further, in the present times, bookings are largely being done through OTAs, at a higher cost, that cut into our profits whilst OTAs' growth has reached double digits. OTAs appeal more to the guests of the current times because they are technology driven and so they offer the comfort of making reservations instantly with the touch of a button on our phones. "Today, the walk-in guest syndrome is on the decline. Another competition

that hotels have to now look out for is the rise in the demand for Airbnb - a smart method of serving, without the ownership of expensive real estate!" Jaffar says.

Her motto

The motto of "Our monetary profit should only be defined by putting the People and the Planet first" is escalated down the line and even told to young millennial guests so that they can be the best judge of our best practices and forge a long-lasting relationship with us, Jaffar concludes. 🌱

Costa cruises on Middle Eastern waters

Costa Cruises has gained immense popularity in the Middle East and it returns the love by dedicating its most exquisite ship, Costa Mediterranean, to the region every year during winter. **Alessandro Bottaro**, Head of Sales & Marketing for Mediterranean New Markets, UK, East Europe, Africa and Middle East at Costa Crociere S.p.A. speaks to **TRAVTALK** about the special bond that Costa shares with the Middle East.

U SHEHARA RIZLYV

Q How important is the Middle East market for Costa Cruises?

Costa Cruises believes in the region and in the future of the cruising industry here. We pioneered the tradition of cruising holidays here 12 years ago, offering cruises from Dubai and we are still the only cruise line that has done a ship christening in the region (February 2010 Costa Deliziosa was christened in Dubai) as we strongly believe in the potential of this area. We believe that our product fits perfectly with the needs of the locals and also of the expats living in the Middle East. On board our ships, our guests can find just the right products for any

of their needs and desires. For example, our family policy fits perfectly with the needs that a family with children can have. On almost all of our cruises, nothing is charged for the children (up to 18 years old) who share the cabin with their parents (only port charges to be paid).

Q Can travellers from the Middle Eastern countries personalise their itineraries?

Costa offers cruises to 261 destinations with 137 different itineraries and therefore, it is able to satisfy all possible needs of all the guests coming to be a part of it. Furthermore, we also offer 60 embarkation ports worldwide, giving our guests a huge variety in embarkation options as well.

On board our cruises, we have guests from almost 90 different nationalities. So we have an international environment with an Italian touch in everything on board, this is why our guests will feel at home. We offer customisation option for all of our products to all of our clients, be it for religious preferences, food preferences or any other reason involving their usual needs and habits. For example, for years we have had vegetarian menus and no-alcoholic-beverage packages as offerings on our cruises.

Q Please share the details of the ship and the itinerary of Costa Cruises for ME for 2017-18.

Costa Mediterranean is the ship that will be positioned in Dubai from December 2017



Alessandro Bottaro
Head of Sales & Marketing for Mediterranean New Markets, UK, East Europe, Africa and Middle East

Costa Mediterranean will be positioned in Dubai from December 2017 to March 2018. There are 1057 rooms on the cruise, including 660 cabins and 58 suites

to March 2018. Inspired by the style of Italy's historic palaces, Costa Mediterranean represents Italian elegance in its entirety — elaborate in its details and filled with works of art. An example of this is the Argenteria Restaurant, which is unique, spectacular and embellished with 139 artistic pieces of silverware.

There are 1057 rooms on the cruise, out of these, there are 660 cabins and 58 suites which are with private balconies. There are also 4 restaurants, 12 bars, including a Cognac & CigarBar and a Wine Bar, an Ischia Spa — a wellness centre on two levels, a gym, treatment rooms, sauna and Turkish bath, UVA-ray solarium, 4 jacuzzis, 4 pools — including one with a retractable cover, a water slide, a multipurpose sports pitch, an

outdoor jogging track, theatre on three levels, a disco, a shopping centre and a casino. With Dubai as homeport and calls in Muscat (overnight), Sir Bani Yas Island and Abu Dhabi, Costa Mediterranean will offer 5- and 7-day itineraries to the guests. They would get to have 2 overnights in Dubai if they go for the 7-day cruise.

Quick Facts

- Preferred season for cruising in Dubai: Winter
- Costa Mediterranean stays in the city from November-March
- Offers 5- and 7-day cruises in the Gulf
- North Europe and West Mediterranean itineraries also preferred choice in Middle East

Kwality

40 Years in Dubai

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DINE-IN AND TAKE AWAYS

Unstable oil prices: Boon or bane?

Aviation industry leaders highlight key challenges and opportunities for aviation industry during the 5th Global Airport Leaders Forum at the Airport Show in Dubai WTC.



Organised by CAPA—Centre for Aviation and hosted by Reed Exhibitions, the 5th Global Airport Leaders Forum (GALF) was recently held at Dubai World Trade Centre under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President of Dubai Civil Aviation Authority, Chairman of Dubai Airports and Chairman and Chief Executive of Emirates Airline.

Prominent leaders and experts of the aviation industry attended the forum and discussed the various challenges and opportunities for the industry at present. The major concerns of the industry according to them are uncertain oil price, low airport capacity, glitches in the facilitation of the next-gen technology, financing of airport projects and need for innovation. They highlighted that the industry is facing short-term and long-term challenges but there are also opportunities on increasing travel demand in the wake of competitive oil prices.

In his keynote address, **Paul Griffiths**, Chief Executive Officer, Dubai Airports outlined oil pricing, global economy, political unrest and consumer confidence as short-term factors and technology, urbanisation, economic balance of power and resource scarcity as long-term factors. Talking about opportunities, he said that he appreciated the role of technology in enhancing customer experience at the airports these days. He commented that while the cost involved in improving infrastructure at airports is phenomenally high, the smart technology can play an important role to improve the capacity and service of airlines.

Dubai invested around \$7.8 billion during the last two years to improve their infrastructure. "We are planning to increase the capacity of Dubai Airports to 118 million passengers by 2023 and we are expecting the number of passengers to increase at both the



Paul Griffiths
Chief Executive Officer
Dubai Airports

airports to 90 million by the end of 2017," he said. During another keynote address, General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) Deputy Director General **Omar Bin Ghaleb** talked about UAE Aviation Outlook 2025. He hoped that by 2025, the country will successfully address many of the challenges to the industry by adopting sound corrective measures.

"The aviation industry is going through a lot of changes in the wake of some uncertainties but it is a very interesting place to be," said **Peter Harbison**, Executive Chairman of CAPA—Centre for Aviation. During his presentation at the GALF, he said it's a relatively benign environment, with low interest rates, low oil prices and economies performing adequately. He added that the main driver of profit growth since 2014 has been lower fuel costs, but in a competitive market place, lower fuel prices have a strong tendency to drive prices down, which in turn squeezes margins instead of pushing profits up.

Harbison said that the uncertain direction of oil price is one of the major concerns for the aviation industry. Nobody really knows where fuel prices will go. "Only three months ago, projections were for a range of \$55-65 for 2017," he added. He said any airline that is not making money now is at risk if fuel prices rise. Talking about low-cost capacity (LCC), he said the bulk of LCC orders are in Asia Pacific. India has more LCC orders than any other country and they will stimulate the growth domestically and in East Asia. 🇦🇪

Mövenpick

Dubai

Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts has appointed **Marc Descrozaile** to the position of Vice President, Operations, MEA. Descrozaile joins Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts from Carlson Rezidor where he was Area Vice President for Africa and Indian Ocean operations. He has previously worked with major hospitality brands such as Hilton, Compass Group and London's Claridge's Hotel. Originally from France, Descrozaile is a graduate of Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne where he received a degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management. He also holds a MBA degree from IMHI (Cornell-Essec) in Paris.



Bahrain

Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts has appointed **Pasquale Baiguera** as the new General Manager of Mövenpick Hotel Bahrain. This will be Baiguera's fourth appointment in the Middle East. He joins the property from Mövenpick Hotel Beirut. With more than three decades in the hospitality industry, Baiguera brings a wealth of knowledge to Mövenpick Hotel Bahrain, with a focus on proactive leadership, strategic management, sales skills and revenue development. Apart from having an extensive experience in the Middle East, he has worked in Denmark, Finland and Italy with other five-star brands.



Rotana

Abu Dhabi

Rotana has appointed **Declan Hurley** as its new Corporate Vice President of Sales. An alumnus of the University of Evansville, Indiana, Hurley has had over 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry. He joins Rotana from The Ritz-Carlton, where he was Vice President of the International Sales Office for Europe, the Middle East and the Asia Pacific region. Prior to that, he has also worked with the leading chain of InterContinental Hotels & Resorts. In his new role at Rotana, Hurley will be in charge of developing and executing strategies to maximise the company's sales and profitability.



Centro Capital Centre and Capital Centre Arjaan

Abu Dhabi

Amber Kumar has joined Centro Capital Centre and Capital Centre Arjaan as the Cluster Director of Sales. He joins with over 11 years of experience in sales and business development, having previously worked with renowned international hotel chains in the region. Graduated in hotel management from WelcomGroup Graduate School of Hotel Management, Kumar's in-depth knowledge of the hotel industry will certainly be an invaluable asset to the company. At Centro, his main focus will be to build on the continued relationship with key corporate accounts.



Mercure Dubai Barsha Heights Hotel Suites & Apartments

Dubai

John Raffoul has been appointed as the new Hotel Manager for Mercure Dubai Barsha Heights Hotels & Suites. With more than 14 years of experience in the hotel industry, Raffoul has extensive knowledge of the hospitality industry in the Middle East and beyond. Since 2009, Raffoul has worked in various international five-star properties, such as Sofitel The Palm, Dubai and Pullman Dubai Creek City Centre.



Mercure Dubai Barsha Heights Hotel Suites & Apartments has appointed **Hany Samuel** as the Director of Rooms. Samuel has extensive global experience in optimising international operations, systems, teams, employee relations, organisational structure and competitive advantage through continuous improvement, training and cultural change. His earlier roles have all been in operational and management positions in the front offices for luxury and five-star hotels across the Middle East.



Baros

Maldives

Baros Maldives announced the appointment of **Daniel Draxl** as their new marketing manager. Prior to this, he was the marketing manager at Kitzbuehel Tourism Board in the Tyrolean Alps (Austria). His reputed appointments are preceded by his internships at Söl'ring Hof Sylt and Dorint Sofitel Schweizerhof Berlin in Germany, La Borne Impériale in Burgundy, Hilton Conrad in Brussels and The Dolder Grand, Zurich. Draxl holds an Austrian-French double Bachelor's degree in International Business Studies and a Master's degree in Business Studies from four universities in Italy, France, Germany and Spain.



DoubleTree Resort & Spa by Hilton Hotel Seychelles - Allamanda

Seychelles

Doreen D'Souza is the new Resort Manager of DoubleTree Resort & Spa by Hilton Hotel Seychelles - Allamanda. She has been promoted from her previous position as the HR & Training Manager for Hilton Seychelles Northolme Resort & Spa and DoubleTree Resort & Spa by Hilton Hotel Seychelles - Allamanda. Having 27 years of expertise in the hospitality industry, D'Souza joined Hilton Seychelles Northolme Resort & Spa in 2006 as a Training Coordinator, and later as the Training Manager.



Singapore weaves Silk Route to ME

To establish a strong relationship with the Middle East through tourism, Singapore Tourism Board (STB) concluded yet another roadshow in five prominent cities of the region. Singapore's travel industry professionals met and discussed how to make the country a compelling leisure and MICE destination.

TT BUREAU

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) recently concluded a roadshow across five Middle East cities to promote Singapore as a leading tourism destination. Themed 'Extending Our Hands in Partnership', the STB and Singapore tourism partners interacted with the top travel trade professionals in Dubai, Muscat, Kuwait City, Doha and Tehran. The delegation was led by **G.B. Srithar**, STB's Regional Director for South Asia, Middle East and Africa (SAMEA) and **Mohamed Firhan Abdul Salam**, STB's Area Director for Middle East and Africa. The roadshow gave an update on the latest leisure and MICE offerings in Singapore and networking opportunities. This year's roadshow saw a positive response from 17 Singa-

pore suppliers, ranging from Destination Management Companies (DMCs) to hoteliers and attraction partners who are keen on growing business in the Middle East markets. STB kept the events intimate, with about 60 to 80 decision-making trade partners per city, to make the business networking in the table top format effective for both the Singapore suppliers and the in-market trade.

While addressing the travel trade during the roadshows, Srithar emphasised on meaningful collaborations with the travel fraternity in Middle East to introduce new travel experiences and rejuvenate the existing packages for the visitors from the region. He says, "We are happy to bring our Singapore tourism stakeholders and 'extend our hands in partnership' to the travel

trade in the Middle East. The five-city journey helped us connect with the travel trade here, and we are eager to bring Middle East travellers to Singapore. STB remains committed to growing the arrivals from Middle East and we look forward to forging innovative partnerships that seek to differentiate Singapore as a compelling leisure and MICE destination."

Abdul Salam adds, "STB's office in the Middle East has been focused in the past few years to grow tourism receipts and arrivals from the region. Working with the travel trade of the Middle East remains a core strategy for STB. We will continue striking effective co-marketing partnerships, organising roadshows and familiarisation trips and embarking on new trade initiatives in the coming year."

The visitor arrivals from the Middle East has seen steady increase over the years, with UAE arrivals reaching a high of 80,212 in 2016, representing a two per cent growth, amidst a challenging outbound climate last year. Iran had registered a strong double-digit growth in visitor numbers to Singapore in 2016, making it one of the largest source markets from this region.

Yvonne Low, Group Executive Director of The Traveler DMC, who participated in STB's roadshow and travels to Dubai yearly and was a first time visitor to Oman, says, "The roadshows were tremendously successful and beneficial. Personally, I am deeply impressed with the travel trade from across the cities. They were welcoming and friendly to the Singapore delegation and expressed strong interest in working with us." STB



G.B. Srithar
Regional Director for
South Asia, Middle East and
Africa (SAMEA), STB



Mohamed Firhan Abdul Salam
Area Director for
Middle East and Africa, STB

We are happy to bring our Singapore tourism stakeholders and 'extend our hands in partnership' to the travel trade in the Middle East

Working with ME travel trade remains a core strategy for STB. We will continue embarking on new trade initiatives in the coming year

partnered with Singapore Airlines, Emirates Airlines and Qatar Airways for vari-

ous legs of this edition of the roadshows to emphasise the connectivity with the region. 🌐



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amazing
THAILAND

A stylized graphic element consisting of a thick, curved line that starts in a vibrant pink at the bottom left and transitions into a bright yellow at the top right, resembling a stylized smile or a swoosh.

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