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This Ramadan, let the feeling stay

To sustain a regular flow of tourists during the holy month of Ramadan, the tourism industry in the Middle East is promoting staycations. Initially, staycations were promoted by five-star and beach properties in Dubai and Abu Dhabi but today other emirates and some short-haul destinations have taken up this niche tourism segment.

 SHEHARA RIZLY



Leonardo Baiocchi
General Manager
Four Seasons Dubai JB

“Ramadan is that time of the year when the consumer can experience the highest level of luxury at the best possible value. Consumers can maximise on their return on spend with excellent value-added rates. This is a slow and peaceful time of the year, so it is an ideal time for consumers to take a short break from work and pamper themselves with a staycation. It is a period that allows for flexibility, with the best possible chance for a consumer to secure a room at the last minute. For agents, Ramadan is the perfect time to experience the product, so when the high season comes around, they are well informed and ready to sell.”



Adam Harvey
Director of Business Development
Hilton Abu Dhabi

“Staycations offer a quick break from the everyday routine, allowing people to unwind and rejuvenate over a short stay away from home without having to splurge on a full vacation. More hotels are catering to the varied needs of customers with customisable packages for families, couples and leisure travellers. Customers can take advantage of the competitive deals available in the market and treat themselves to a short vacation. They can enjoy fine dining, spa treatments, and a swim in the sea, all for a bargain. From an agent's perspective, a staycation is simply a marketing gimmick that helps boost bookings for hotels within the leisure segment. Staycations have proven to be a great way to drive business during weekends, especially in the leisure sector of the industry.”



Manish Singh
Director of Sales
Anantara The Palm Dubai Resort

“Staycation is a fairly new concept that has picked up over the past two years as summers became longer for those residing in the UAE. Parents working in the UAE get a holiday for a certain number of days, different from the number of days their kids get in a year. The five-star and beach properties in Palm Jumeirah, Abu Dhabi and other emirates identified a niche and started exploring possibilities of offering various activities coupled

with a stay for the weekend where parents could holiday together with the children. This paved the way for staycations, which is a very popular concept today. At Anantara the Palm, we offer many activities for the entire family and ensure that all our guests are able to spend quality time together.”



Charlie Taylor
Group Director
Brand Communications
Jumeirah Group

Abu Dhabi offer a very competitive UAE resident rate that is available all-year-round. This includes up to a 20 per cent discount on the best available rate and unlimited access to WildWadi Waterpark, private beaches and fitness facilities.”

“UAE's resident population is one of our biggest markets throughout the year, with our hotels in Dubai and Abu Dhabi being very popular for staycations. During shoulder seasons, staycations help drive volumes, with our hotels providing most of the popular dining venues in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Staycation packages are seen as a great way to combine a couple of days at the beach or in the heart of the city with a fantastic dining experience. All Jumeirah properties in Dubai and



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

offer at nearly 200 participating Marriott International hotels in 30 countries. It gives travellers the opportunity to save up to 30 per cent and discover new locales either closer to home or within a few hours reach.”

Contd. on page 3 ▶



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Staycations bring festive cheer

► Contd. from page 1



Philip Jones
General Manager
Mövenpick Hotel Jumeirah Beach

“Staycations have become part of the travelling public's annual leisure experience, as a supplement to the annual vacation and providing a quick, convenient break from the day-to-day grind. During the month of Ramadan, staycations that feature a good package element are very important as many guests think there is nothing to do, when in fact it is really business as usual. We have, for this reason, created a package with Dubai Parks and Resorts. These packages do have a positive demand as they offer good value and cater to a wider audience.”



Slim Zaiane
General Manager
Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates

“We're looking forward to welcoming guests to Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates during the holy month of Ramadan and throughout the summer. It's a very special time of year for us in the region and we look forward to offering guests a memorable Ramadan experience. We will be offering authentic Levantine flavours during Iftar and Suhour in our signature, truly Levantine restaurant, Olea. We will also be offering a personalised and exclusive Iftar experience in our luxurious Aspen Ski Chalets, overlooking the slopes of Ski Dubai.”



Mark Deere
General Manager
Amwaj Rotana

“The biggest benefit of a staycation during Ramadan is the convenience it offers. When guests are fasting, they prefer to stay within their country of residence and not travel long distances or use a means of transportation other than a car. They also want less hassle when preparing for a trip. They also like taking last minute trips and not have to plan in advance. Such a trend has proven successful for us, looking at the number of bookings we get from UAE residents for short stays during Ramadan.”

“Over the last three years we have seen a significant increase in the number of 'staycations' at Desert Palm during the holy month of Ramadan. With Ramadan moving towards the cooler months over the coming years, we believe that this will be a trend to follow as more staycation options become available throughout the UAE. In the past, guests would have had to look outside of the UAE to escape the stress of city life, but like other countries around the world, UAE residents are reducing travel time and getting more out of their vacation budgets by staying closer to home.”



James Reeves
General Manager
Desert Palm Per Aquum

“Staycations continue to increase in popularity around the world due to fundamental geopolitical and demographical shifts. Cross-border travel is becoming increasingly difficult due to visa restrictions and security concerns. Furthermore, reasons such as the stress of travelling with a large family, and shorter breaks at work, iterate the importance of staycations. Dubai is home to one of the most exciting lodging markets in the world, making it the responsibility of the hospitality market to address these prospective travellers with staycation packages.”



Siegfried Poppe
General Manager
FORM Hotel Dubai

“Le Gray Beirut is ideal for short breaks, being a contemporary luxury hotel with a unique location in Downtown. When you are on a short break, you do not want to spend the time commuting; you want to make the most of your time and this is why Le Gray is the place to be. GCC nationals and residents from various nationalities consider Beirut as a short escape and we cater them accordingly. Inspired by their needs and existing trends, our packages help them choose among a variety of possibilities. Travellers can save time preparing their itinerary when they have a comprehensive package that is also mindful of budget.”



Rita Chbeir Saad
Director of Marketing and
Public Relations, Le Gray Beirut

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EDITORIAL

Ramadan calls for staycations

Come Ramadan, domestic travellers play a vital role in sustaining the tourism industry in the Middle East. In a bid to attract more and more domestic tourists, the travel industry in the Middle East has been promoting 'Staycations' to encourage travel within the seven emirates and other areas in the GCC.

During Ramadan the working hours are restricted, giving expats the perfect opportunity to either go for outbound or inbound vacations which will give them a lot of benefits whilst those who fast will remain loyal to the inbound staycations during the period.

The concept of 'Staycations' was originally introduced by five star and beach properties a couple of years ago as they saw the emergence of a niche segment in a market that yearns for something different. With the dawn of staycations, various properties started adopting this model and initiated schemes which would enable a higher number of domestic tourists to enjoy the facilities at various properties.

The corporate and MICE sector also discovered the value of this scheme and ensured that more MICE events are arranged during this period which are planned closer to a weekend, therefore allowing travellers attending an event to bring along their family as well. Travel agents and tour operators too are able to secure more business during this time as they get better incentives and rates to pass on to their clientele ensuring more business value during the summer.

They are able to provide offers for short haul destinations. The most popular destinations for domestic tourists are Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar as they also enjoy accessibility from UAE by road.

Lucrative investments in Dubai

A buoyant tourism market coupled with a range of benefits makes the ownership of a hospitality unit in Dubai attractive for individual investors seeking an alternative income option.

The hospitality sector in Dubai is flourishing. A growing number of international hotel developers and hospitality companies are making inroads into the emirate with a full portfolio of offerings – luxury, midscale, budget, you name it. The industry is riding the waves of a robust travel and tourism sector, which is only expected to benefit further from upcoming headline events such as Expo 2020 Dubai.

Last year alone, Dubai welcomed 14.9 million overnight visitors and the aim is to reach an annual target of 20 million visitors by 2020. All in all, the prospects are bright for a truly buoyant hospitality market driven by international visitor spending as well as inter-regional tourism.

Traditionally, hotel owners and large investors have been considered the biggest beneficiaries of this upswing in activity. Welcome to 2017! The power of flexible investments now also lies in the hands of individual investors looking to set aside smaller chunks of their capital for asset allocation. Take, for example, the option to invest in a hotel room offered by DAMAC Properties, one of

the few leading developers in the region so far to introduce an investment class of this kind. From higher returns on investments to a number of ownership benefits – purchasing a hospitality unit in Dubai makes the option an attractive way to generate alternate income.

Relatively Higher ROIs

Rental yields in Dubai continue to be among the highest in the world and surpass markets such as India, Hong Kong and London. Further, Dubai's strategy to attract more visitors is only strengthening its position on the world map. These factors together have contributed to high volumes of tourist arrivals year after year – resulting in high occupancy levels at hotels. Hotel rooms enjoy even higher returns and reap the highest yields within the real estate investment class.

Low-Risk Asset Allocation

Don't put all eggs in one basket is perhaps one of the oldest and enduring pieces of advice given to investors. Asset allocation or distributing your portfolio in various investment types minimises the risk quotient, thereby pro-

viding more peace of mind. Investing in a hotel room requires a relatively smaller capital allocation, providing an attractive means to diversify your portfolio.

Premium Ownership Benefits

Investing in a luxury serviced hotel room opens doors to a range of exclusive lifestyle benefits. For starters, owners can experience hospitality-inspired living in a premium hotel any time of the year. For example, at any of the properties operated by DAMAC Hotels & Resorts, owners can use their rooms for two weeks a year for personal use including one week during peak season with a number of personalized services including limousine booking – at market competitive rates, their preferred food inside their rooms, required set temperature prior to their arrival, and many more.

Hassle-free Management

Worried about the management hassles associated with investing in a hospitality unit? Don't, because there aren't any. A hospitality developer like DAMAC Hotels & Resorts will not only take care of the maintenance of your

investment under its unique rental pool system, but also manage it on your behalf – from looking after sourcing tenants to collecting rent.

Fast Returns

Considering the ever-increasing tourism volumes and high demand for hotels, investing in a hotel room also means owners can expect fast returns. At DAMAC Hotels & Resorts, investors enjoy pay out of revenues generated from their unit, at regular intervals during the year, starting immediately after placing their units in the rental pool.

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



Niall McLoughlin
Senior Vice President
DAMAC Properties

240-room Hilton Garden Inn RAK opens

Hilton's midscale brand, Hilton Garden Inn and Ras Al Khaimah National Hotels LLC (RAKNH), a subsidiary of RAK Hospitality Holding LLC (RAKHH), opened Hilton Garden Inn Ras Al Khaimah, marking the brand's entry into the northern most Emirate of the United Arab Emirates. Located in the heart of the Al Nakheel area, just steps from two major shopping malls and minutes from the souks and historical sites of the old city, Hilton Garden Inn Ras Al Khaimah features 240 guest rooms, including 10 family rooms and eight suites, with sweeping city, creek and garden views.



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Easing family travel plans

► Contd. from page 3

“Short haul staycations from the GCC are extremely important and growing in popularity. The fact that Turkish Airlines is launching new direct services from Kuwait and Beirut to Bodrum starting June 2017, shows the demand to the destination. Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum is a luxurious hideaway with 129 rooms, suites, apartments and villas. At Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum, we make sure to offer a variety of services covering all aspects of travel for families to ensure all their needs are met. The resort's children's recreational groups, managed jointly with Worldwide Kids, include activities for children to teenagers of all ages to keep them busy. Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum offers an exclusive VIP Gate to Gate service at the two international Airports in Istanbul (IST and SAW). This is an added value which any travel agent or tour operator may offer in addition to the accommodation arrangements at Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum.”



Guenter H. Gebhard
General Manager
Mandarin Oriental Bodrum



Ahmet Arslan
General Manager
Movenpick Hotel Istanbul
Golden Horn

“The holy month of Ramadan is a time for celebrating, spending time with family and sharing. With that in mind, we serve a traditional iftar buffet accompanied by whirling dervish ceremony at the Culi-nArt Restaurant of Mövenpick Hotel Istanbul Golden Horn. Guests can also visit Eyüp Sultan mosque, which is a short stroll away from our hotel. Although there has been a slight decrease in foreign visitors, we host local guests during Ramadan both for iftar buffet and accommodation. Istanbul is a cosmopolitan city with a remarkable history and offers a variety of shopping, dining and leisure options. We make attractive packages for locals to discover the beauty of Istanbul or visit their families during Eid al-Fitr or throughout the year. The ideal location of the hotel, on Istanbul's historic peninsula, gives guests the opportunity to spend a long weekend with their families and enjoy nearby attractions such as Miniaturk, Rahmi Koc Museum, Vialand or swimming with dolphins.”

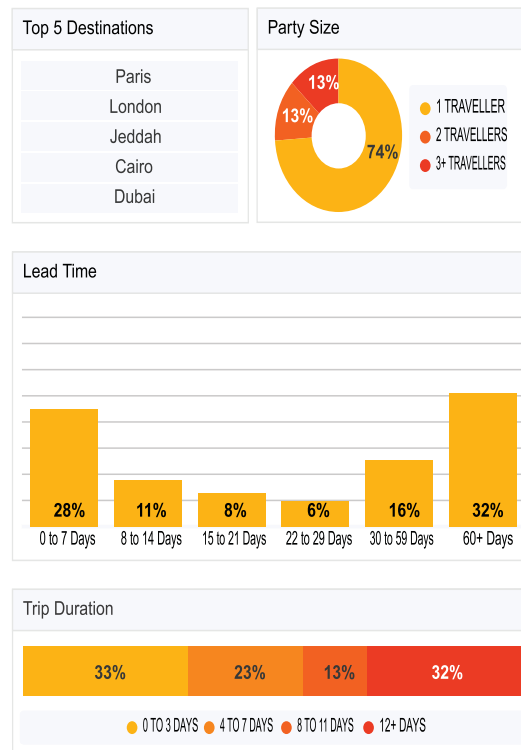
“Le Méridien Al Aqah Beach Resort has maintained an above average occupancy rate during the holy month of Ramadan, over the past years. We certainly look forward to nothing short of our previous success, hence have recreated attractive packages and promotional offers catering to residents, GCC and international guests. The resort has organised what will be the biggest indoor tent on the East Coast exclusively for the season with a variety of traditional delicacies and other favorites during iftar. The summer package will officially be launched on May 14 and will remain valid until the September 30. The campaign ideally focuses on fuss-free travel at unbeatable prices for family staycations, day-out packages, water sport excursions, and exquisite culinary experiences.”



Patrick Antaki
Complex General Manager, Le Méridien
Al Aqah Beach Resort, Fujairah

Quarterly outbound search trends for MEA

According to a survey by Sojern, a traveller audience engagement platform, Cairo is the new emerging destination for ME and Africa.



Source: Global Travel Insights, Sojern (Issue 2, 2017)

DISCOVER CENTARA AND SHARE



#BookCentara

Centara has a spectacular range of properties in gorgeous summer destinations including Thailand, as well as ravishing resorts in, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, giving travellers a choice ranging from sophisticated city retreats to luxurious beachfront resorts. There's also total access to local activities, and after the fun, guests can indulge the senses at super-sumptuous SPA Cenvaree — easy to enjoy with children busy at the Kids' Club.

The brand new Centara Muscat Hotel, in Al Ghala, the Oman capital's business district is now open and will be followed by the five-star Centara Grand Hotel Doha in October, set in the city's West Bay Area.

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FCS & NEC expand hospitality offerings

FCS Computer Systems (FCS) and NEC Enterprise Solutions EMEA have inked a partnership agreement that incorporates FCS solutions into the NEC Hospitality offering for the hospitality sector in EMEA. **Eric Rogers**, Vice President EMEA, FCS Computer Systems, shares details with **TRAVTALK**.

TT BUREAU

Q Explain the various hospitality offerings in the EMEA region.

FCS offers a complete suite of hospitality technology solutions to hotels globally. Our extensive portfolio of integrated products is used by more than 5,000 hotels in 32 countries. The Middle East is an important market for us and we have seen strong growth from this region in recent years. We start with our gateway solutions. These sit between the PABX to the PMS, and provide interface capabilities for FCS and 3rd party solutions, voicemail with wake-up, minibar and room status, and billing for calls and other charges.

Connecting to our interface, we have our eSolutions; FCS's operational software.

Our eSolutions are systems designed to improve performance, optimise service and enhance the hotel guest experience in areas such as job dispatch - both for guest requests and inter-departmental work order management, housekeeping, glitch management, engineering, concierge and laundry. FCS mobile applications are available on guests' own mobile devices, as well as the hotel's devices, allowing convenient access to hotel information and services.

Q Do share more details of the partnership signed between FCS and NEC?

Our partnership with NEC effectively means that FCS solutions are now part of the NEC Smart Hospitality Solutions offered to NEC partners and their hotel clients. Hotels in the region will be able to order

the solutions directly through NEC's business partners in EMEA. This means that NEC partners have access to a full range of new solutions they can offer to their partners in the region. This deal is for the EMEA region and puts FCS solutions into NEC's Smart Hospitality Drive.

Q Does this contribute to smart hospitality? If so, please explain.

FCS are world-renowned as providers of smart solutions for the hospitality industry and we have been working in this field since 1982. NEC have for many years had a very strong focus on the hotel sector, and with their Smart Hospitality Program have demonstrated that they are fully committed to the hospitality industry and have a deep understanding of the needs and requirements of hoteliers to make their op-



Eric Rogers
Vice President EMEA
FCS Computer Systems

Having a local presence is very helpful to understand what can be achieved, and makes the decision to move forward and automate easier

erations smarter and more efficient. By working with NEC to extend our reach through the NEC network, more hotels in

the region will be able to benefit from this technology to improve efficiency and provide a greener solution.

For example, consider the amount of paper a housekeeping department uses each year, which is about 1.5 tons in a 300-room property. If hotels automate their processes through our e-Housekeeping solution, they will not only provide a more streamlined and efficient service to their guests, but also save several trees annually. Multiply that by all the hotels in the Middle East, and we are talking about a very significant number.

Q How does hospitality partners benefit through this partnership?

For our and NEC's hotel partners, they now have a complete range of solutions available to them via local

trusted partners. Having a local presence is very helpful to understand what can be achieved, and makes the decision to move forward and automate a lot easier.

Q Could we expect more offerings in the pipeline for the rest of the year? If so, please explain

At FCS, we continually strive to further enhance our existing solutions and to extend our offering into other areas of the hotel. We recently launched our m-2Talk solution, which effectively turns a smartphone into a walkie-talkie at a lower cost and with more functionality. Using m-2Talk, housekeeping management, runners, room attendants and supervisors can communicate instantly with each other as you would on a walkie-talkie, but using their own personal devices. 📱

Seamless travel with One View

One View IT Solutions recently launched a seamless, cost effective, web-based travel booking and related expense management tool targeted at corporates.

TT BUREAU

One View IT Solutions as a leading and preferred travel technology partner provides its customers a winning combination of right minds and cutting edge technology. "Smart companies recognise the need of end-to-end solutions as a compelling factor. With our tool we are aiming at delivering an easy to use solution that not only helps corporates book travel but also manage expenses, analyze their major area of spending and thereby optimise a corporates' travel programme," said **Azima Chhuvara**, Head of Sales and Marketing, One View IT Solutions.

The tool incorporates several features and functionalities unique to MENA market which marks One View as a serious competitor in this arena. Their industry expertise

and high level understanding of corporates' requirements lays the basic foundation for an exceptional and dynamic solution. This framework also paves way for an individually tailored solution giving great flexibility and freedom to decide on the components one needs for their corporate booking engine.

"This solution will help address corporate requirements for real cost controls to better manage travel and travel administration, while providing the employee traveller with a seamless self-booking tool and automated expense reporting solution," she said.

One View also believes that true success lies in implementing the tool effectively. Having the right solution and right support in place is key to bring about a wave of change and cement the new process in any organisation. The tool is designed with



Azima Chhuvara
Head of Sales and Marketing
One View IT Solutions

This solution will help address corporate requirements for real cost controls to better manage travel and travel administration

utmost care and attention to achieve higher adoption and with One View as the technology partner online travel booking for corporates could not be any simpler. 📱

India on Qatar Airways' radar

Among the various business development plans of Qatar Airways, Group Chief Executive **H.E. Akbar Al Baker** shares that they will be starting a five-star airline in India. Excerpts from the interview.

SHEHARA RIZLY

QHow is your investment in India coming along?

We have not yet made a formal application, but have sounded out the authorities and they are very receptive. They have passed their new policy and Qatar Airways will take advantage of this opportunity. Our investment in India is to serve the Indian people and not to serve anybody else. We will create jobs, provide better connectivity and I promise a five star product which will cater the financial abilities of every Indian individual who wants to do air travel. In a few weeks the application will be submitted. It will be a joint application from Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) and Qatar Airways. It will have an Indian name for the carrier and consist of 100 aircraft. We will adhere as per all Indian rules and regulations.

QWhat are the current challenges you are facing in the aviation industry?

Whatever the challenges the industry faces and in particular Qatar Airways faces, we will continue to grow and expand our presence as we have been very successful. You already noticed that while all other airlines are shrinking and reducing capacity Qatar Airways is ordering more aircraft and announcing new destinations. We see a lot of opportunity in every economic downturn and at Qatar Airways we are very smart at tapping those opportunities and this is exactly what we are doing all the time. Very soon, we will be announcing a record profit, which will be the highest Qatar Airways has ever made and the people from Delta, American and United Airlines will be able to see our balance sheets and our audited accounts so they cannot make

any more excuses that we are subsidised or getting handouts like what they get from the cities that they operate from by getting tax exemptions, fuel subsidies, etc.

QWhat are Qatar Airways' expansion plans?

We are short of nearly 11 aircraft which have been delayed in the process. If those aircraft are delivered all the new 26 destinations will be fulfilled before the end of the Qatar Airways financial year ending in March 2018.

QSuite for ultimate private jet experience

We are trying to create a private executive jet experience for our passengers. It is very important for the passengers to be connected together with their family and friends. Therefore, this enables that connection whereby you can either be



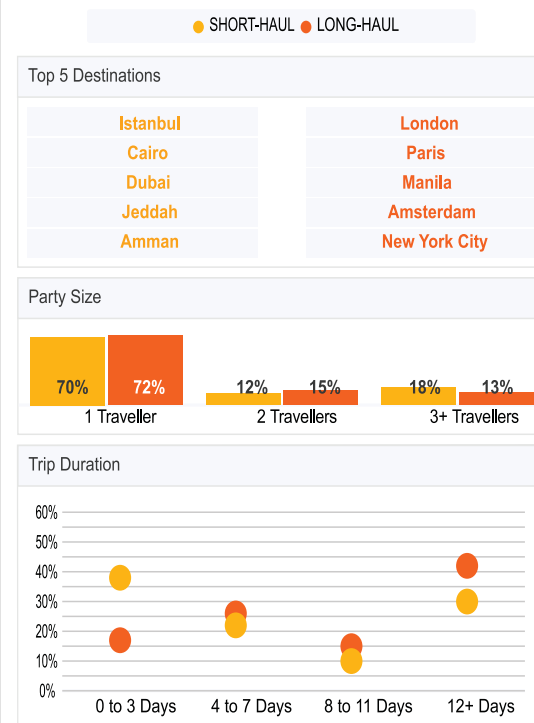
H.E. Akbar Al Baker
Group Chief Executive
Qatar Airways

Very soon, we will be announcing a record profit, which will be the highest Qatar Airways has ever made

connected with your family on holiday or have a business meeting with your friends in full privacy of your own space which can be converted. 🛏️

London & Istanbul top summer search trends

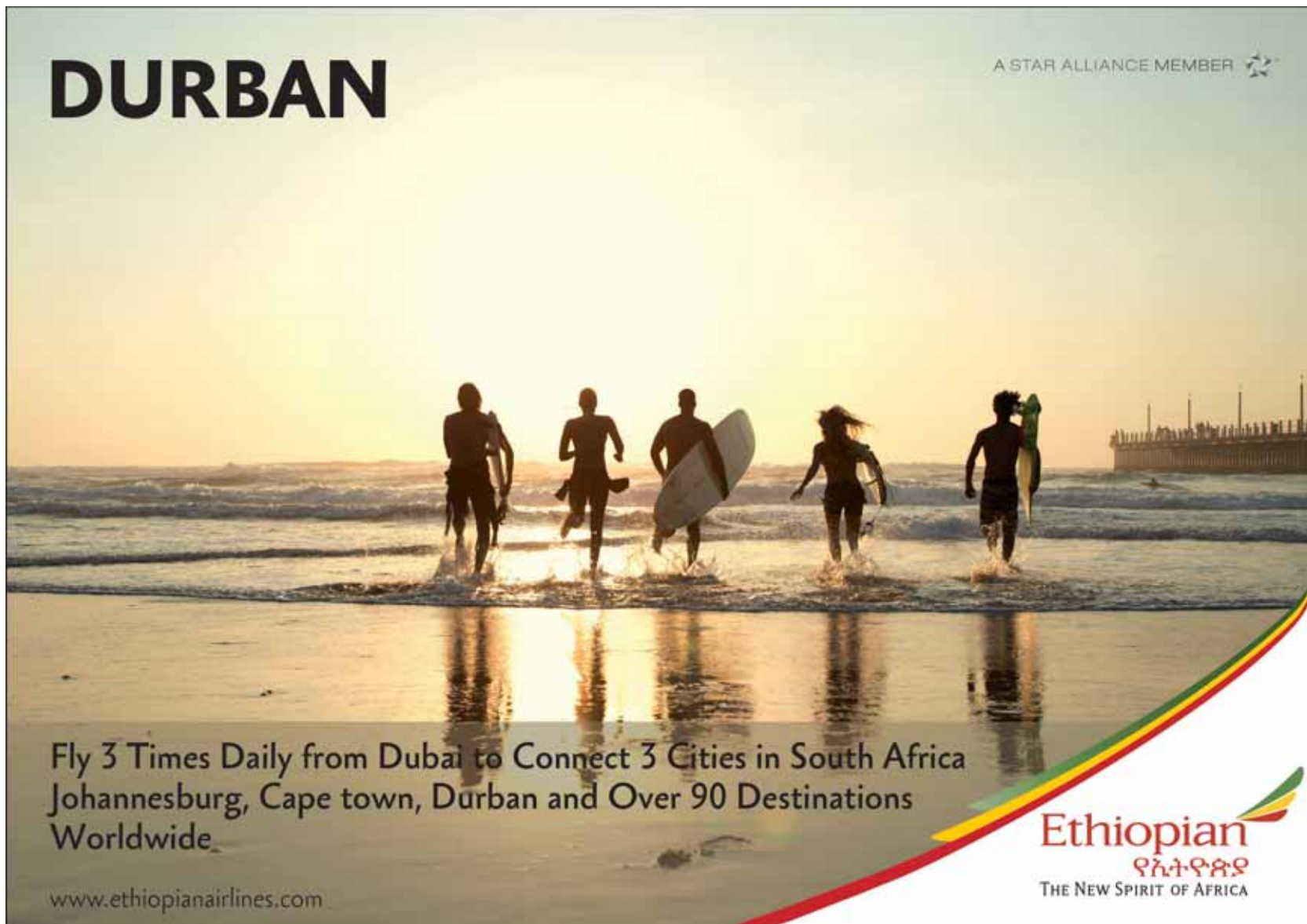
Middle East & African travellers looking to take a long weekend to celebrate Eid al-Fitr are mostly searching for Istanbul and London.



Source: Global Travel Insights, Sojern (Issue 2, 2017)

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THE NEW SPIRIT OF AFRICA

Centara marks its debut in Muscat

Centara Hotels and Resorts continues to expand internationally with the opening of a four-star, 152-room hotel in Muscat — its first of three hotels planned for the Middle East. The Thailand-based hotel operator is also looking at opening properties in Doha later this year and Deira Island in the UAE in 2020.

TT BUREAU

The Centara Muscat Hotel is ideally located in the Omani capital's bustling Ghala Heights business district, close to the convention centre, Royal Opera House, and the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque. It is conveniently mid-way between the airport and historical district, about 15 minutes from each. The hotel is a modern new building featuring three restaurants, a spa, and a rooftop pool and terrace with views out over the

Gulf of Oman. Its premium lounge, banquet and meeting facilities, complimentary Wi-Fi, plus proximity to Muscat's shopping and historical sites, are designed to serve both business and leisure travellers.

Centara is known for combining Thai qualities, such as its service and spa treatments, with Thai and international cuisine. The new Muscat hotel follows this blueprint. Akdeniz, an authentic Turkish restaurant, features fine coffees, Mid-

Eastern snacks and mezzes, plus meats and fresh fish seared on a traditional Ocak-basi grill. Tip-tara restaurant serves Thai dishes and international choices, while The Roof offers a relaxed venue for barbeques and private events. Centara's signature SPA Cenvaree offers a variety of therapies and treatments, plus Thai herbal spa products. The rooftop pool is complemented by a children's pool and fitness centre.

Generously appointed rooms and suites feature large windows that frame the city streets. Premium Club rooms come with extra benefits, including access to the top-floor lounge where three meals are served daily. Club Suites offer comfortable living rooms, ideal for couples, small families or business travellers who want extra space to relax.



The hotel's 237-square-metre banquet hall is large enough to accommodate cocktail receptions of 280 people. Three smaller venues include a boardroom which can be adjusted to fit a range of uses. Another conference room, along with the pleasant rooftop terrace, can accommodate up to 80 people — ideal for an evening event, with the Gulf of Oman as a glittering backdrop.

Thirayuth Chirathivat, Chief Executive Officer, Centara Hotels & Resorts, said, "Introducing Thai hospitality culture for the first time to this historic crossroads between East and West is an exciting opportunity. We believe a thoughtfully-designed, modern facility in this ideal location will be a welcome addition to Muscat, whether you are here on business or vacation."



Thirayuth Chirathivat
Chief Executive Officer
Centara Hotels & Resorts

We believe a thoughtfully-designed, modern facility in this ideal location will be a welcome addition to Muscat, whether you are here on business or vacation



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Dashboard for agents, by agents

Top Travel Trip now offers a dashboard made by agents, for agents, with features to grow business and keep track of performance of each agent.

TT BUREAU

Top Travel Trip, a business to business travel oriented organisation, has spent extensive time and budgets researching customers pain points and understanding exactly what is that could make the day to day running of the business more efficient, and cost effective.

By using Big Data, analytics and customer feedback while predicting future trends and demands for the travel industry, Top Travel Trip is now on the verge of launching a new travel management solution that will revolutionise the industry. Online travel management systems were created to assist agents in making the booking process simpler and faster. However, these systems still lack the ability to offer a full-fledged service offering to manage booking and man-

agement processes from beginning to end.

It features real-time updates from product suppliers, seamless integration into your current business



operations. Detailed target, sales and performance reporting, cost optimisation tools to increase profitability. With increase in staff productivity due to unparalleled system speeds and an optimized user interface for an improved user experience.

With Top Travel Trip's travel management system features product sales, real time notifications, special offers and historical data is now available at a touch of a button. The new look flights search results has improved

functionality with easy to use filters and features to help you find the best flights for your customers.

With a variety of filters it's easy to find the perfect product for your customer. Get quick access to offers and improve your cross selling rate by adding the right service to the right product. The Top Travel Trip platform now offers a dashboard made by agents, for agents with features to grow your business and keep track of performance for each agent.

Agents Matter

With Top Travel Trip's travel management system features product sales, real time notifications, special offers and historical data is now available at a touch of a button

ITB China debuts in Shanghai

At the first ITB China, some 600 exhibiting companies from nearly 70 countries met with over 10,000 attendees and buyers from May 10-12, 2017.

TT BUREAU

A total of 2,700 attendees took part in the lectures, discussions and keynotes, given by 70 industry speakers at ITB China. The keynotes proved to be major visitor attractions. Over 10,000 pre-scheduled appointments between exhibitors and hosted Chinese buyers were realised during the show. The quality of visitors contributed to strong business outcomes for the exhibitors at ITB China.

The spotlight was on the partner destination Europe, which featured a multitude of national presences paired with strong individual attendances of major European destinations. Next year ITB China will take place from May 16-18, 2018, at Shanghai World Expo Exhibition and Convention Centre.



Dr. Christian Göke, CEO, Messe Berlin, said, "I am extremely delighted with the way our first edition went. Our new Chinese ITB brand was the focus of general interest to a great degree, especially amongst Chinese buyers. ITB China marked a special milestone with 10,000 attendees participating in this significant premiere and also showed how important face-to-face meetings remain in the digital age. We can look back at a very successful trade show and set the stage for ITB China 2018."

The three days of ITB China offered many fabulous opportunities for discussion, networking and making new valuable industry contacts during the Opening Dinner,

ITB China Cruise Night and After-show parties.

Meituan-Dianping hosted a speed-dating event on the first day of ITB China with more than 400 participants in attendance. The event enabled buyers to establish valuable links with Meituan-Dianping in the shortest possible time. The World Bridge Tourism project took place alongside ITB China in Shanghai.

About 350 people attended this networking workshop involved hosting 100 European tourism suppliers who met with a similar number of Chinese outbound operators. ITB China also featured numerous on-site events, panel discussions and workshops that enabled visitors and exhibitors to engage with Chinese travel bloggers. The Blogger Speed Dating Event and the Blogger Lunch met with an extremely positive response. 🌟

Makarem goes the 'smart' way

Saudi-based Makarem Hotels showcased its strengths during ATM 2017 by promoting the use of smart technology to attract visitors.

TT BUREAU

Makarem Hotels, a renowned Saudi brand designed by Dur Hospitality, contributed in promoting Saudi Arabia's culture and tourism regionally as well as internationally and highlighted the added value of local knowledge and expertise at ATM 2017 as Gold Sponsors.

The brand showcased the bouquet of services it provides and launched new additions to its portfolio such as the centralized call center, which allows guests to inquire easily and book at any Makarem Hotel using the unified number. Makarem also launched its own mobile application, compatible with Android, iOS, and Windows, that provides a variety of unique features for all users. In addition to Karam Club loyalty program for corporates, which rewards employees of

corporations with special advantages in hotels and resorts around the world, through collecting points and redeeming it with partners. Commenting on their participation at ATM, **Sultan Al-Otaibi**, Acting President Hotel Operation, Dur Hospitality, said, "As a Saudi brand specialised in providing authentic hospitality services especially in the holy cities, we continually seek to participate in major regional and international exhibitions to contribute in strengthening the Kingdom's position worldwide through creating exposure on Makarem hotels' achievements and latest services.

"Exchanging expertise and sharing knowledge with the



world's leading hospitality companies, is another advantage of participating in such events. It reflects on the quality of the services Makarem provides which contributes to upgrading the Saudi hospitality market to international standards; it also keeps us up to date with the latest technologies that can be employed to meet the growing needs of travellers." 🌟

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ARABIAN TRAVEL AWARDS



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International travel fraternity

Tourism and hospitality trade professionals from across the globe gathered in Dubai from April 24-27 to exhibit their products and latest offerings to local and international buyers at the 24th edition of the Arabian Travel Market at Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre.



gets together at 24th ATM in Dubai



Sharjah Tourism buoyant about



Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Authority participated at Arabian Travel Market for the 20th year and recorded a significant milestone of attendance. It is also upbeat about the latest guest night returns according to which hotels in Sharjah are reporting higher occupancy in the first quarter against last year.

TT BUREAU

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Authority has created a strong brand presence in the main areas and witnessed a good vibe with the new stand design, taking elements from its award winning design at ITB Berlin. The Chairman of Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Authority, **H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**, said, "We always enjoy attending ATM in part because it is a show right at our doorstep, but mainly because it always opens the door to new possibilities and opportunities from new innovations, to new markets and of course the hope of the potential, as new companies pass by with ideas. It is an opportunity to reacquire with friends and as a member of the UNWTO

ministers panel to present and position Sharjah's message clearly and strongly to a key audience."

Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority is targeting a 12 per cent growth in GCC tourism figures for 2017, after success at the recent Riyadh Travel Fair at the beginning of the month, the Arabian Travel Market is the next step in achieving this strategic move in its overall growth.

The Middle East was highlighted as the main growth region for tourism with a particular emphasis on the United Arab Emirates. Sharjah attracted huge footfall thanks to its entrance branding and design and additional elements of the new pavilion.



Al Midfa further mentioned "As the visitors enter the main ATM atrium, they are instantly encouraged to "Explore More" of Sharjah with a new focus being given to

Sharjah as it creates a new positioning strategy for itself in outdoor tourism. Sharjah offers a huge diversity in its landscape stretching from the East Coast to the

West Coast with mountains, wadis, desert and of course beaches for visitors to enjoy. Through the work of the Environmental Protection Areas Authority who are also participating at the ATM with Sharjah Tourism there are great facilities for the family to enjoy, where you can see rare animals in their natural habitats such as the Arabian Leopard in Al Hefaiyah or migratory birds visiting the ancient salt flats at Wasit Wetlands Centre. Presenting Sharjah as an outdoor tourism destination seems sensible," said Al Midfa.

fragile ecosystem found in the dunes"

The new addition to Kalba with the high-end eco lodges further exemplifies the positioning, the lodges were recently launched and are another exciting proposition that we feel sure will encourage further outdoor tourism in Sharjah. Kalba is an undeveloped hamlet on the East Coast and has beautiful mangroves which are home to the critically endangered Arabian Collared Kingfisher.

This year the economic upturn and the strong presence created by the Tourism Authority has meant that the delegation attending with the Authority is particularly strong, with representation from Shar-

He adds, "Most people who enjoy desert activities take part in them in Sharjah, this year we will start to regulate these to ensure the safety of everyone and the preservation of the



record growth & occupancy for '17



H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and
Tourism Authority

We always enjoy attending ATM in part because it is a show right at our doorstep, but mainly because it always opens the door to new possibilities and opportunities from new innovations, to new markets and of course the hope of the potential, as new companies pass by with ideas

jah International Airport, The Sharjah Museums Department, Sharjah Institute for Heritage, Knowledge without borders, Beha'a The Sharjah Environment Company, Auras Tours, Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, Oceanic Khorfakkan Resort & Spa / Hotel Holiday International / Marbella Resort, Ramada Hotel, Royal Tulip the Act Hotel, SATA, Sheraton Sharjah Beach & Resort, Al Khaldiya, Radisson Blu, Hilton hotel, Al Majaz Premier, Aryana, Al Shaab Village, COZMO, Golden Tulip, Air Arabia, Trav Talk and Breeze Tourism.

SCTA joins the UNWTO Ministerial Forum at ATM

On the opening day of ATM, the UNWTO and the Arabian Travel Market hosted a ministerial forum

on tourism's contribution to sustainable and inclusive economic growth and diversification in the MENA region. Ministers and senior leaders from nine countries took part in the forum which was chaired by CNN's Becky Anderson. The ministers came from Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Tunisia, and the UAE as well as Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah to debate the agenda items.

The Chairman of Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority, HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa who was speaking as part of the forum said, "It is an honour to present Sharjah in a discussion at this level. This event is extremely important not just because we can discuss best practice with our colleagues from other countries

in the region who are all facing similar challenges and of course celebrating their own successes; but it also important that forums at this level spotlight the importance of the whole tourism infrastructure. This year the UNWTO has chosen "Sustainability" in all its forms for its focus. Sustainability is so important to the tourism industry, and it is particularly important that the key decision makers are enabled through the use of all possible technologies to make the correct decision for all our futures. As leaders of tourism destinations we are only the guardians of our natural assets for our future generations and it is important that we all focus on sustainability so that we can honour the trust that is placed on us."

Other areas of innovation include the Tour-



ism Satellite Account, this TSA provides the Authority with up to date information and measures tourism's results through providing

the factual data on economic performance across the board, including oil related and non-related GDP. The Chairman stressed

that the impact of tourism on Sharjah should not be underestimated as it currently contributed 8 per cent to the GDP. 📈



ME travellers' abiding love for Turkey

Middle East has become a leading feeder market today for Turkey after the many incidents which deterred other feeder markets from visiting this destination. **Çetin Gürcün**, General Secretary, Association of Turkish Travel Agencies, shares insight of their plans for the region.



QHow has tourism been between Turkey and Middle East?

Turkish travel agencies offer a wide range of products to satisfy demand of any segment of the market. Their dynamic enterprising nature and understanding of the market have enabled them to establish successful business relations, contributing to the growth of Turkish tourism.

According to recent figures published by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 25.3 million tourists visited Turkey in 2016, with 2.2 million of the tourists from the Middle East and North African region. The number of GCC nationals who travelled to Turkey in 2016 increased by 10.5% compared to the previous year to reach a total



Çetin Gürcün
General Secretary
Association of Turkish Travel Agencies

of 822,849 visitors. The biggest increase pertained to travellers from Saudi Arabia, which saw a growth of 18% to reach 530,410 visitors, while the second-largest increase in tourist numbers was from the UAE at 14 per cent.

QWhat are the benefits offered to travel agents from the Middle East?

The Turkish Government is currently providing opera-

25.3 million tourists visited Turkey in 2016, with 2.2 million of the tourists from the Middle East and North African region. The number of GCC nationals who travelled to Turkey in 2016 increased by 10.5% compared to the previous year to reach a total of 822,849 visitors

tors of charter flights with a \$6,000 subsidy to bring foreign tourists into the country. The \$6,000 subsidy per scheduled charter flight will be offered until the end of this year to travel agencies carrying passengers on airplanes to Antalya Gazipaşa-Alanya, Antalya, Muğla Dalaman, Muğla Milas-Bodrum, İzmir Adnan Menderes, Kütahya Zafer, Trabzon, Denizli Cardak, Isparta Süleyman Demirel, Eskişehir Hasan Polatkan, Ordu, Giresun Samsun Çarşamba, Erzurum and İstanbul Sabiha Gökçen Airports.

QOn an average how long does the UAE traveller stay in Turkey and what sort of activities do they prefer to do?

According to a market research report prepared by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2013 -the latest report that exists), the average staying time of tourists from the United Arab Emirates is one week. The most popular destinations for the UAE citizens traveling to Turkey are; İstanbul, Bursa, Yalova, Trabzon, Rize and Artvin region. UAE visitors usually spend around a minimum

of \$3,000 per person, which is four times higher than the average European tourist.

QHow do you plan to attract more visitors from ME this year?

ME is one of the most important markets for Turkish tourism. Not only because of the market volume or the high expenditures but also because of the destination preferences in Turkey. Middle Eastern tourists help to improve Turkish tourism in different regions such as Trabzon, Rize, Artvin, Bursa and Yalova. Middle Eastern visitors enable to differentiate our tourism products and segments and lengthen the tourism season. Moreover, we attend tourism fairs like ATM Dubai every year and hold destination promotion workshops to market Turkey.

QHow has your association handled negative publicity in terms of safety and security?

Unfortunately terrorism became a major concern not only for Turkey but also for the whole World recently. It is a global problem. The attacks were not the only reason for the last year's sharp decline in the Turkish tourism. The political problems between Turkey and Russia, increased terrorist attacks throughout the world including Turkey, the failed coup attempt are the main reasons for the decrease in numbers. The government is taking all necessary precautions nonetheless, we don't undermine the situation. The attacks had a negative impact on Turkey's image, which as TURSAB we are trying to strengthen. We are attending exhibitions, organising fairs, B2B meetings and workshops all around the world. 🇹🇷

25 years of Disneyland Paris

A favourite among Middle East travellers, Disneyland Paris held a grand event in Dubai to celebrate its silver jubilee. To mark the occasion, they announced a new office in Dubai to facilitate more visitors from the region. Travel agents and corporate bookers attended the sparkling 'Blue and Silver Night' at the JamJar Gallery.



Cozmo launches Travtrolley

Cozmo Travel's new online booking system offers a single account to manage complete tour packages, including airlines, hotels and car rentals worldwide.

TT BUREAU

Cozmo Travel's B2B trade portal www.travtrolley.com has a user-friendly interface developed to empower both travel agencies and corporates in the UAE and the GCC region. Commenting on the initiative, **Jamal Abdul Nazar**, CEO, Cozmo Travel, said, "We are proud to launch the B2B trade portal for the travel sector operators in the UAE. This is another milestone for Cozmo Travel that allows us to spearhead the industry by incorporating online innovations to serve our customers well."

"Our new B2B online platform will be a pioneering initiative in the UAE's travel and tourism industry. We also plan to expand this initiative to other GCC countries. The B2B portal provides both inbound and outbound holiday



Jamal Abdul Nazar
CEO
Cozmo Travel

packages across the globe based on various seasons and interests. We are launching this in order to help the smaller travel agents in their work; sub agents can find whatever content they require from this site. This is not for us to compete with them but to lend a hand in their business."

Deepa Rajesh, Head of Sales, Cozmo Travel, said, "We introduced this considering the evolution of new

business models in the travel industry to provide travellers more choices and assist them in making more informed decisions in the digital age.

"We firmly believe that technology and digital sector is the way forward and with dedication and hard work we want to be one of the best service providers in the travel and tourism industry. This portal is at the forefront both technologically and in terms of services offered. We are offering hundreds of airline fares and thousands of hotel rates at the users' fingertips with special deals on 25 plus airlines and access to multiple GDS inventories as well as various LCCs for most competitive airline fares. The rates are equal or lower than the major online travel portals. The portal is also to have on-hold airline reservations and 24/7 B2B support via call centre," Rajesh added.

CharterClick your next cruise!

Since its inception last December, Dubai-based start-up, CharterClick now has 34 boats onboard and is expanding its reach outside the emirates.

TT BUREAU

The main feature of CharterClick is that it works in real time which means the booking can be easily done from the convenience of your laptop or mobile phone. After four months of operation, the highest mark CharterClick has reached is 1200 new users in one day, with the total amount of users being around 1500 people for that very day. "We usually have around 100 new users daily, with the average of 250 - 275 total users coming to CharterClick every single day. We are averaging 3 to 5 bookings a day, and because of the advanced bookings, we are sure this number is only going to get bigger in the months to come," says **Michael Siyatsky**, CharterClick's Head of Content Curation.

The service started with only four boats in their fleet and a single partnership

agreement with a charter provider, but now has 34 boats available on its Dubai website, along with more than 10 charter companies, who have signed an agreement to be represented on CharterClick.com

"We are really trying to implement every single suggestion that our partners have in mind - after all, it's them who are being in control of their own fleet, we are just giving them the most comfortable tools on the market, and a space to be advertised on," says Business Development Executive **Nick Doroshenko**

CharterClick is in the process of doing some final preparations to fully launch a Phase II, by opening a branch



in Muscat, Oman. The plans to be represented in Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar have already been finalised.

"We are very excited about the things to come," says **Vlad Mozharov**, Managing Director, CharterClick. "While we are only living through the early days of the Phase II, we already have something in mind for the upcoming Phase III of our expansion. And without giving too much away, let's just say we feel very confident about introducing CharterClick overseas."

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Los Angeles rolls out red carpet for ME

Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board states that there was a 2.3 per cent year-on-year increase in visitors from the Middle East in 2016, compared to 2015. The destination has registered an increase of 6.3 per cent in new visitor spend, reveals its Regional Director–Europe and Middle East, **Francine Sheridan** to **TRAVTALK**.

Q SHEHARA RIZLY

How important is the Middle East market for LA?

The Gulf/Middle East market has seen impressive growth over the last few years. In 2014, we saw a 43 per cent growth year-on-year, and in 2015 we saw a 20 per cent growth year-on-year. While the growth has stabilised, we still view and consider this market as one with tremendous potential.

The spending power of our friends from the Gulf/Middle East region has not gone unnoticed, and we have worked very diligently with major carriers like Qatar, Emirates, Etihad and more on new direct air service offerings. We are committed to the market and have invested in the GCC by appointing Four Communications in 2016 for year-round trade outreach in the GCC

Do share about the recent 'welcome' campaign?

As a response to a business problem our economists have forecast the possibility of 800,000 less international visitors over the next three years, due in large part to a perceived "anti-welcome" sentiment. Discover Los Angeles conceived of and created a multi-pronged 'welcome' initiative. One of the activities included a direct message from our President and CEO, Ernest Wooden Jr. to our critically important travel trade audience worldwide.

In this message, Mr. Wooden reinforces that L.A.'s hospitality community will continue to roll out the red carpet for all our visitors. As a follow-up to that initiative, we orchestrated one of the world's largest human-powered welcome signs on May 6. Hundreds of Angelinos gathered in the



Francine Sheridan
Regional Director–Europe & ME
Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board

Exciting new hotels which have already launched in 2017 include Dream Hollywood, and The Everly Hollywood

flight path of LAX to spell out "welcome" in four languages: Arabic, English Chinese and Spanish. The eye-catching show of solidarity was seen from the air by visitors arriving on flights

to LAX from across the globe including flights arriving from the GCC into LAX

Any new hotel openings?

From modern boutique hotels and luxury properties, more than a dozen hotels are opening in Los Angeles this year. Exciting new hotels which have already launched in 2017 include Dream Hollywood, The Everly Hollywood and Hotel Indigo Downtown Los Angeles, whilst new openings for spring and beyond include Nobu Ryokan Malibu (June 2017), InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown (Summer 2017), and Nomad Hotel Downtown Los Angeles (November 2017).

Could you list some of the latest tourist attractions?

The latest attractions and greatest events for 2017

include the Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, which after four years of planning supported by more than \$16 million in grants from the Getty Foundation, will begin on September 15, 2017, in more than 70 cultural institutions throughout Southern California. The unprecedented collaboration will offer the public hundreds of concurrent exhibitions, programs and events on the subject of Latin American and Latino art, presented for four months in institutions ranging from community-based cultural organisations and university art galleries to the region's biggest museums. Los Angeles will welcome world-famous acts and rising stars for another stellar year of concerts. Throughout the year, iconic venues like the Hollywood Bowl, STAPLES Center and more will be hosting performances by acts from around the world.

What unique offerings are there for Middle East visitors?

Los Angeles is the entertainment capital of the world, offering 75 miles of sunny coastline, a flourishing Downtown, lifestyle playgrounds for the rich and famous, acclaimed restaurants, trend-setting art and fashion scenes, and internationally favored neighborhoods – all of which are highly attractive to visitors. Our residents and hospitality community still rolls out the same red carpet to all visitors, as we always have. From world-class shopping at brand-new venues and shopping districts and more than 300 days of mild temperatures and sunshine, to only-in-LA experiences like backstage tours of the acclaimed Dolby Theatre, visitors to LA are treated to memorable experiences. We will be promoting Los Angeles as the 'go to' destination in the US. 🌴

Kwality

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DINE IN, DELIVERY AND CATERING

Middle East says: Ready, steady, 'Wego'

Wego's Accelerated Mobile Page (AMP) combined with Progressive Web App (PWA), is set to become the fastest loading mobile travel site in the world. **Mamoun Hmedan**, MD, Wego Middle East, North Africa and India, shares insights into the radical evolution of the region's 'mobile first' travel market.

TT BUREAU

Q Please share your findings about the Middle East travel market.

Our analysis and expectations of what was to come in the Middle East travel market have been realised. The region's travellers were quick to embrace online travel shopping, possibly quicker than in any other emerging market, but the transition from desktop to a 'mobile first' market evolved even faster, and today Wego sees over 70 per cent of searches in the Middle East taking place on a mobile device.

Q What is different in terms of transaction?

The most striking difference we've seen on Wego for both flights and hotels over the last 12 months are booking transaction numbers on mobile devices, with conversions increasing by 65 per cent. The continued increase in conversion rates is largely attributed to flight bookings

where the business has continued to grow exponentially.

An additional shift has taken place over the past year with a majority of our mobile conversions previously taking place on iOS, but today we're seeing the gap closing with Android users also preferring to buy their flights and hotels on mobile. Consumers today are more experienced, and overall much more secure making purchases through a better designed mobile device, which more frequently have larger screens, and are more user friendly.

Q What did Wego introduce lately to support this ME market.

Wego redesigned and launched a new mobile site to mimic our travel app by rebuilding our static pages using AMP, and the core search

experience with PWA. Wego has decreased page load time from around 12 seconds to between .50 and three seconds, to alleviate issues

In addition, Wego has remained in the top five most popular travel apps on iTunes and Google Play stores for a number of years through-

pliers, accelerated Wego's popularity making it the travel shopping app of choice.

Q Describe to-days' Middle East traveller and Wego's role in ME.

Middle East travellers are tech savvy and brand loyal, and once they experienced the ease of using Wego, repeat visits and word of mouth spread quickly. We continued to develop our product based on feedback from our users, to tailor it to suit their individual needs

which was important to recognise and has ultimately proven a great investment of our resources. Combining our product and content with the latest in mobile technology, Wego has become the most relevant product in the Middle East today.

Wego committed to this market by establishing a Mid-



Mamoun Hmedan
Managing Director
Wego Middle East
North Africa and India

dle East headquarters in Dubai driven by a talented local team with proven experience, and a shared motivation to support local travel businesses throughout the evolution the industry has undergone. Wego's Middle East team has now doubled in response to our rapid growth, and a number of key commercial staff from the company's Asia headquarters in Singapore will soon relocate to support the growing regional business. Wego was the first travel search site for both flights and hotels in the region to produce a mobile product in Arabic.

Technology News

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with slow, unstable networks. Since the launch we have experienced around 50 per cent improvement in the click to search ratio during the first quarter of 2017 (y-o-y) lead by the UAE (23 per cent), followed by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which equates to a 50 per cent increase in the number of users referred to our flight and hotel partners.

out the region; its local language, currency and familiar local travel brands proving a hit with travellers. Wego has partnered with the majority of local domestic, low cost and full service carriers - more than any other flight meta-search business in the region, and the convenience of shopping for travel on mobile, with well-known local sup-

Al Rajhi joins hands with Sabre to offer seamless travel

■ Al Rajhi Aviation Company, a leading travel company in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, signed an agreement with Sabre Corporation, to deliver seamless travel experience and deploy their corporate travel strategy.

Under this agreement, Al Rajhi Aviation gains access to Sabre's broad portfolio of technology solutions, including Sabre Red Workspace; Sabre Red App Centre, in addition

to Sabre's franchise solutions and the leading corporate travel solution- GetThere. "The Saudi traveller is a high adopter of latest technology and expect an uncompromised level of service that is customised specially for him and can be accessed through the devices he uses," said **Daniel Naoumovitch**, CEO, Sabre Travel Network Middle East.

"We are proud to work with Al Rajhi Aviation Company

to deploy new online, mobile, franchise and personalisation solutions that will attain high level of satisfaction and customer's loyalty. We are committed to support their expansion strategy and growth with latest technology and talented team to deliver products and solutions that meet their diverse customer needs and support their business goals," he added.

Nayyar Alam, GM, Al



Rajhi Aviation Company, says, "We believe that Sabre has the experience, technology, innovation and support to

achieve our goals and help us deliver more personalised and seamless travel experience to our customers. We look

forward to working with them to expand our operations and deploy our corporate travel and online strategies."

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Personality of the month

Remarkable Rao from Incredible India

I.R.V Rao, Assistant Director of India Tourism for West Asia and Africa, has provided dedicated 29 years of service to the Indian Government, bringing him great responsibilities with power and position. He has been a pillar of strength for his government in the region ensuring strong bilateral ties between the two nations.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

I.R.V Rao's passion for travel and tourism led him to work with the Ministry of Tourism as it would ensure him job satisfaction coupled with both growth of self and organisation. Given his cordial and social attitude and philanthropic ways, Rao chose the Tourism Ministry to begin his career as an Information Officer.

When he first stepped into the Ministry of Tourism in 1988 as an Information Officer, he got many an opportunities to directly liaise with tourists. As Assistant Director, I.R.V. Rao's role is most challenging as he has to compete with different countries. Backed by the unique offerings of India Tourism, Rao and his team at the Dubai office have made both the ministry and the country proud.

Achievements

Rao began his professional career in Manipur state in the North East region of India. Once his years' tenure was over he was relocated to Goa. He completed 10 long years serving the government and tourists by earning a lot of appreciation. Some of the noteworthy incidents in his career during the early 1990s were that he helped many tourists in the capacity of an Information Officer. He successfully helped trace the missing son of a German tourist from Stuttgart, for which the then-Director General

Ashok Pradhan (IAS) gave him an appreciation letter. Devoid of technological support back then, Rao and his team had to base their investigations on human interactions and relations, and wired telephones.

During his stint in Goa, Rao helped many tourists in his capacity and received accolades from the Ministry of Tourism as well as tourists. Another noteworthy incident was when two ladies from Australia requested a hotel room on New Year's Eve in Goa, which is peak season for tourism in the state. However, Rao became the man of the hour as he managed to get the rooms through his cordial relations with industry players. "We need to help foreign tourists to ensure that they are very well equipped with lot information, ensuring safety and security. We conducted a programme 'Safe and Honourable' tourism in order to update all the stakeholders of hospitality, travel and tourism. This programme implemented by the Ministry of Tourism was one of its best received ones," Rao states.

His subsequent posting was at Aurangabad (Maharashtra, India) where he served for five years and then he was sent to Canada for a period of three and half years. Upon his return, he was promoted as Assistant Director and was posted at Mumbai for two and a half years. Rao was

re-posted to Aurangabad for three years and finally embarked on Dubai nearly four years ago. He operates out of India Tourism office in Dubai but overlooks West Asia and Africa as well. Here, Rao's role consists of promoting India as a preferred tourist destination in the West Asia and Africa region among locals, expats, NRIs and even encourage travel trade and media to organise tourism packages and experience India through roadshows, and familiarisation tours. India Tourism also supports the travel agents by providing brochure support, joint advertising, online advertising and provide sufficient tourism promotional material to promote India. They also conducted 'Know India' seminars in various GCC countries for tour operators and airlines.

India-UAE relations

His Highness Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, was the Chief Guest at India's Republic Day this year. This strengthened the bilateral ties even further and according to one of the MoU's signed, Indian passport holders with a valid US visa or Green Card will be granted visa-on-arrival in the UAE from May 1, 2017. This facility was only available to Japan as other 161 countries must apply online and secure the approval before embarking a flight.



Mudra Artwork at Indra Gandhi International Airport Terminal 3, Delhi

Changes in the tourism industry

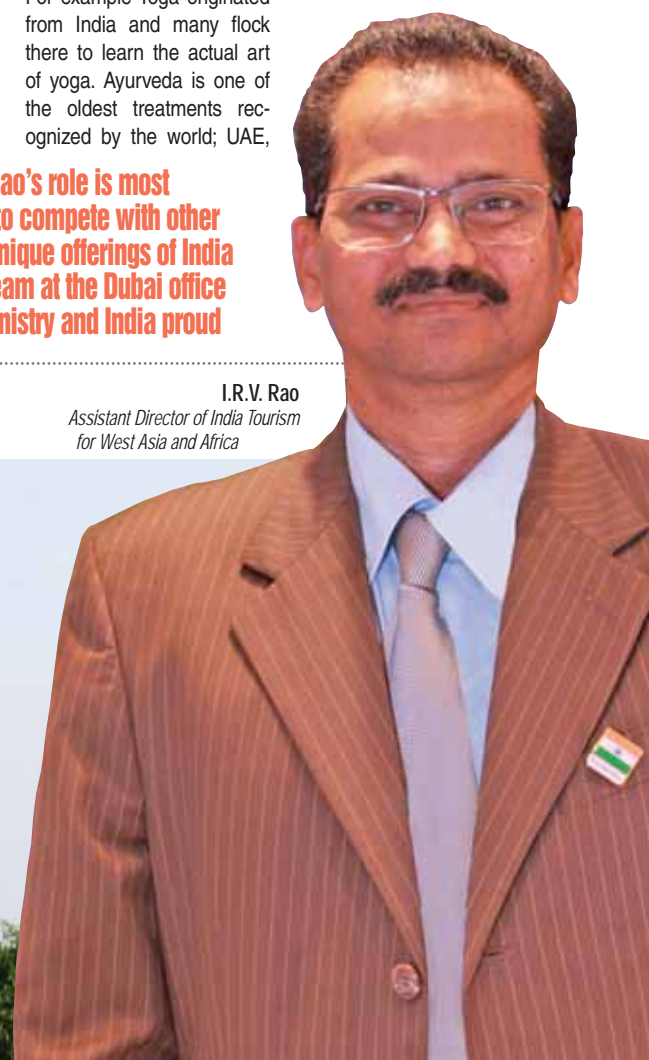
In the 1980s and 1990s Indian tourism industry boomed after 'Visit India Year 1991'. This was a turning point in the Indian tourism industry. All stakeholders worked together to promote India both internationally and domestically. Earlier, they had very few approve travel agents and tourist guides in India but after the tourism boom, the ministry started its own institute IITM in Gwalior to produce more trained man-

power required for the travel and tourism industry. After the IT boom and internet services in India it became quite easy for tourists to book their tours, hotels etc on their own saving their time and money India offers a wide range of tourism products which is unique and not available in most countries in the world. For example Yoga originated from India and many flock there to learn the actual art of yoga. Ayurveda is one of the oldest treatments recognized by the world; UAE,

Europe, America. India is the only country with over 6 luxury trains, 77% of Himalaya mountains and flora and fauna in Kashmir and the national parks with endangered species are just a few of what India can offer to ensure more visitors from all over the world. 🇮🇳

As Assistant Director, Rao's role is most challenging as he has to compete with other countries. Backed by unique offerings of India Tourism, Rao and his team at the Dubai office have made both the ministry and India proud

I.R.V. Rao
Assistant Director of India Tourism
for West Asia and Africa



Taj Mahal, Agra

Midscale outperforms upscale

The economy and mid-market hotel segment has been identified as a significant opportunity for hotel owners and operators alike at the Arabian Hotel Investment Conference held in Dubai from April 25-27, 2017.

TT BUREAU

“The mid-market has been discussed at Arabian Hotel Investment Conference (AHIC) for several years, but in 2017, we have witnessed a significant shift as the compelling investment model for lower development costs and higher, quicker returns has put the mid-market in favour. It was fascinating to explore the long-term view, looking at costs, rate strategy and returns with our many speakers and sponsors. Testament to the potential for the mid-market in the Middle East is the launch of US-based hotelier Choice Hotels International in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, with a pipeline of seven signed hotels already and many more to come.”



Jonathan Worsley
Chairman, Bench Events,
Board Director, STA and
Co-Founder of AHIC

“We are very active in the mid-scale market in the Middle East, with 20 percent of our properties within that bracket. However, we have more in the pipeline along with serviced apartments. Operational efficiency starts at the development of the product; you may not need a comprehensive back of house and you can reduce the staff-to-guest ratio.”



Elie Milky
Vice President Business
Development MEA for The
Rezidor Hotel Group

“We think the timing is now finally right for a company like Choice to enter the market in a fairly significant way and establish a strong/moderate tier lodging component which is purpose-built, value-oriented, yet high quality. Our operating model is ideally 20-25 employees in the hotel; it should run very high margins; it should be relatively low capex to get in; relatively high margin production and low cost to operate, but at the same time, satisfy the guests' needs in a way that isn't being done currently.”



Stephen P. Joyce
President & CEO, Choice
Hotels International Inc.

“Kempinski & Shaza Hotels' new venture, Mysk by Shaza, is carefully positioned in the upper-midscale bracket. While Shaza is five-star, we studied the ROI to position Mysk above the four-plus star rating. Owners are taking a different approach than they previously were, moving away from the need to have a luxury five-star property. However, they tend to demand add-ons such as ballrooms. We are managing their expectations by explaining that the Mysk brand and what it is offering is sufficient for the market.”



Chris Nader
Vice President Development,
Middle East & Africa
Kempinski & Shaza Hotels

Experiential tourism: Need of the hour

Expert speakers at AHIC identify a gap in Dubai's hospitality sector for experiential accommodation and entertainment.

TT BUREAU

“The total tourist spend in Dubai is expected to reach AED144 billion by 2021, compared to AED113 billion in 2016, and that the largest spending increase would be in the entertainment sector. Shopping malls may not have it all; Entertainment and experiential concepts will capture a significant proportion of total spend.”



Gurdish Bassi
Economist at GRMC
Advisory Consulting

“I think theme parks, more MICE space, more out of the box thinking from hotel operators will follow. As we know, there's growth already regarding shopping malls and many projects coming up. I think it becomes more residential, more freehold, just in general I think it will grow more and more but on the same pattern as it is now.”



Klaus Assmann
Vice President-Hospitality and Retail, Dubai
Parks and Resorts

“Dubai will develop into a city that is on a par with other cities, other global megacities, other global destinations and gateway cities.”



Dr. Martin Berlin
Partner, Deals Strategy
ME, Global Deals Real
Estate Leader, PwC

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- Feedspot's editorial team and expert review



A promising start for Somewhere

Somewhere Barsha Heights, located strategically near the business district in Dubai and close to the metro station, has completed one successful year of operation. **Abdullatif Kabbara**, General Manager, Somewhere Hotels, tells **TRAVTALK** about the hotel's plans and future course of action.



QWhat are the latest plans for summer by Somewhere hotel?

Somewhere Hotels will be welcoming diners to break their fast this Ramadan with a lavish buffet as well as their Suhour at NAY Restaurant, Barsha Heights. Available for AED 99 per person, from sunset to 9:00pm, the Iftar buffet comprises a variety of dishes across multiple courses and from hot and cold sections.

NAY Restaurant, Somewhere Hotel Barsha Heights will also be offering guests Suhour daily from 9:00 pm to 2:00 am, patrons can enjoy signature dishes from the À la carte menu which hosts a selection of appetizers, soups, salads and main courses. Live entertainment will include a traditional Arabic Oud player throughout the evening.

QAre there any special MICE activities for agents during this period?

In order to promote our brand we organise familiarisation trips and host accommodation for bookers from different parts of the world to experience our facilities during the summer.

QIt has been nearly a year since Somewhere Barsha Heights opened. How has the first year been?

The first year has enabled us to streamline our operations and position ourselves in the market. The figures have been in line with what we anticipated for rooms occupancy but there was a constant pressure on average rates due to market over supply.

QCould you share the type of travelers that the property attracts and from which countries they hail from?

Our main categories of guests include solo travelers, couples and business men and women with major focus on the GCC region, although we attract guests from various countries in Europe as well.

QDo share the many programmes implemented for the 'millennials' by the property.

The focus on living healthier lifestyles has become quite popular in the last couple of years. For millennials who wish to keep up with their workout sessions, we offer a wellness program through our gym and pool facilities. We also offer a food and beverage



loyalty program at our NAY Lebanese Restaurant. Social media is a huge component of the lives of millennials today and will continue to influence the way people go about their day-to-day schedules. Somewhere Hotels embraces social media platforms in ways that allow us to connect with guests on a more personal level. Presently, we are working on an overall loyalty program for Somewhere Hotels and will be rolled-out in the near future.

QTechnology plays a pivotal role in travel, tourism and hospitality; how does Somewhere Hotel adapt to these new trends?

Somewhere Hotels' success comes from signifi-

The most exciting project we will have soon are kiosk check-in robots in the lobby. They will be similar to the kiosk concept at airports but slightly different, offering a more interactive design

Abdullatif Kabbara
General Manager, Somewhere Hotels

QDo you have any special incentives for agents/bookers etc; please explain.

Based on the productivity from the clients we offer various discounts which can be utilised at the facilities of our hotel. The percentage of OTA business is 40 per cent. 📈



Gearing up for Legacy 2020

The first mega-event to be hosted in the region, Expo 2020 will lay the foundations for diversified and sustainable tourism through a series of initiatives designed to support UAE's plans for a knowledge-based economy.

TT BUREAU

“We planned the Expo with two missions in mind. The first is to make sure the visitor has an unforgettable experience. The second mission is the legacy question. Expo 2020 is being built with legacy in mind and all assets will remain after the event including the buildings and transport infrastructure. The first Expo in London had one of the most enduring legacies and we will celebrate this in many ways during Expo 2020. The legacy that we will leave behind is bringing Expo to a truly global audience, to inspire visitors to return to Dubai time and again.”



Marjan Faraidooni
SVP, Legacy Developments & Impact, Expo 2020 Dubai

“Many travel decisions are influenced by what people see on social media and their desire to re-create and share their own versions of the celebrity and influencer content. We work with influencers on social media to help them create shareable content that will help promote the many things happening in Dubai. Social media is also key to understanding that we market the right elements from Dubai to the right markets at the right time, to continue to drive visitor numbers. Most people are unaware of the depth of the cultural and historical attractions in Dubai and few understand there are 200 nationalities who have chosen to make Dubai their home. Leveraging social media, their posts help tell the world that story.”



Issam Kazim
CEO
DTCM

“The seminar explored the importance of Dubai's sustainable tourism initiatives, the expansion of the emirate's airports' capacity and the engagement of global audiences through partnerships with celebrities and social media influencers.”



Simon Press
Senior Exhibition Director
Arabian Travel Market



Deirdre Wells OBE
CEO
UKinbound

“London is an established market, welcoming an average of 30 million visitors a year. We knew the 2012 Olympics would attract significant additional arrivals so the critical part of the planning was focused on legacy, with tourism a key component. The Olympics is a major sports and broadcast event, so in terms of investment and planning around 60 per cent of our £30 million budget over four years was dedicated to post-event activities.”



Khalifa Bin Braik
Head-Asset Management
Hotels
Majid Al Futtaim Properties

“The UAE continues to attract both international and regional hotel brands as opportunities exist for expansion. In order to remain competitive in the hospitality market and beyond 2020, hoteliers should look to provide personalized omni-channel experiences to engage with their customers through multiple touch points. Social platforms and digital innovation have also triggered the rise of experiential travel where customers often want high quality inclusiveness through experience, simplicity and convenience. As a leading hotel developer and asset manager in the MENA region, Majid Al Futtaim is at the forefront of understanding how technology can generate long-term value beyond 2020. In the buildup to Expo, our work is focused on enhancing the customer experience through various technologies across our existing 12 hotels and future developments. Through our integrated retail, leisure and entertainment offerings, we continue seeking differentiation by providing unique experiences, aligned to customer needs, that creating great moments for everyone every day.”



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Al Tayyar Travel & Amadeus ink deal

Amadeus Saudi Arabia and Al Tayyar Group enhanced their partnership in order to strengthen the Middle East network platform.



The extended deal significantly boosts the strategic co-operation between the two parties and reaffirms Al Tayyar Travel Group's commitment to expand their online business. To achieve this, Al Tayyar Travel Group will take advantage of Amadeus cutting-edge technology and cost customised solutions such as the Premium Online Support, 24/7 contact with Amadeus experts, ATC Shopper Online, Booking

strategic partnership with Al Tayyar to the regional level, the corporate travel sector in the MENA region will benefit from the expertise of two leading players in the travel domain. Amadeus works with Al Tayyar to explore new ways to fulfil the customer needs and offer them exciting new opportunities."

The new extended deal is considered as valuable for Al Tayyar Travel Group which can take the Group's service performance to the excellent



and offline quality control check, etc. The agreement extension up to 2020 will expand the two parties' collaboration from the local to the MENA level.

Commenting on the agreement, **Abdullah Bin Nasser Al-Dawood**, Managing Director and CEO, Al Tayyar Travel Group, said, "Al Tayyar Travel Group has been leading the travel and tourism industry in the region by offering quality services. We are excited to perform the new online strategy with one of the pioneering entity in the field: Amadeus. This strategy aimed at enhancing our business and providing travelers with enjoyable lifetime experiences."

Antoine Medawar, Vice President, Amadeus MENA, said, "We are happy to extend our contract with Al Tayyar Travel Group as it further enriches our firm partnership. Al Tayyar Travel Group is a thriving company that is committed to service excellence. As Amadeus takes its

level in terms of added efficiency, fast automated results and less time delivery.

Amadeus is one of main leading innovators in the travel sector; it has been empowering the regional travel industry with next-generation products and services to help it overcome rising costs, unpredictable market conditions and changing business models. Its integrated and comprehensive suite of solutions allows travel agencies to streamline and enhance the corporate travel process, enabling them to leverage the opportunities offered by automation and digitization to gain competitive advantages in the market. Known for its professional services and distinguished client care, Al Tayyar Travel Group is the trusted agency of more than 1,600 governmental and private corporations. It has invested in approximately 400 branches across Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, Egypt, Lebanon, Malaysia, the UK, Canada and other popular tourist locations. 🇸🇦

Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham

JBR Dubai

Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham Jumeirah Beach Residence has promoted **Sumesh Gopal** from Senior Sales Manager to Assistant Director of Sales. Gopal, who specialises in the leisure segment, has nearly two decades of hospitality and sales experience. Before joining Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham, he was with the leisure sales team of Ramada Jumeirah Hotel, and held a cluster sales role for Accor Hotels. He was also previously affiliated with Habtoor Grand Resort and Spa, and Metropolitan Hotel Dubai.



Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham Jumeirah Beach Residence has appointed **Ahmed Sayed Mohamed** as Leisure Sales Manager. He has worked in various positions including group sales coordinator, reservations supervisor, revenue and reservations manager, and sales manager for corporate accounts. Along with the director of sales and marketing, they are expected to work on enhancing hotel occupancy and revenue with a strong focus on the leisure segment, strengthening relationships with the existing partners, and seeking out new markets and business deals.



British Airways

Singapore

Robert Williams appointed Head of Sales Asia Pacific and Middle East for British Airways is based in Singapore and reporting directly into the airline's Head of Global Sales in London. Williams's new roles see him responsible for managing the airline's growth and development some of British Airways' most important overseas markets. His most recent achievements in the Asian Pacific region include the launch of British Airways' Kuala Lumpur route, the opening of major new lounges and bringing the A380 to Singapore. Across his decade with British Airways, Williams has built a wealth of experience by working across the airlines various divisions and markets.



Hospitality Management Holding (HMH)

Dubai

HMH appointed **Aboudi Asali** as its Chief Executive Officer. Asali joins HMH with over 20 years of hospitality experience, starting at the Four Seasons Hotel Boston. In 2012, Asali established a company to guide hotel operators and owners in the Middle East and Africa region and negotiated a number of contracts with Hilton, IHG, and Starwood. Asali's last position was the Senior Vice President Development at Jumeirah Group where he was responsible for the expansion of both the Jumeirah and the Venu lifestyle brand, in the Middle East, Africa, etc.



Ajman Tourism Development Department

Ajman

Saleh Mohamed Al Geziry is the new General Manager of Ajman Tourism Development Department (ATDD). Prior to joining ATDD, Al Geziry was the Director of Overseas Promotions and Inward Missions at Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM). Having graduated from the American University in Dubai in 2002, Al Geziry has worked his way up through the ranks, building lasting relationships with key industry stakeholders in the public and private sectors.



Wyndham Dubai Marina and TRYP by Wyndham hotels

Dubai

Denis Nobre joins as Cluster Director of Finance. Nobre previously worked in Europe, the Middle East and Africa with Marriott International and Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group. With more than 10 years hotel experience in finance, including two pre-openings for Marriott hotels in Brussels and three takeovers for Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group in Dubai and Mauritius.



Sofitel

Dubai Jumeirah Beach

With more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, **Marc de Ruijter** joins Sofitel Dubai Jumeirah Beach as General Manager; in charge of overseeing the entire operation of the hotel. De Ruijter is no stranger to the Sofitel brand or Dubai, having previously been Hotel Manager at Sofitel Dubai the Palm. With a wealth of hospitality experience gleaned from positions taken in the USA, Belgium, France, Mauritius and the United Arab Emirates, Marc brings his global mind-set to a highly competitive market.



Omolola Banjo will take on the dynamic role of Cluster Director of Marketing & Communications. Banjo will spearhead all pre-opening campaigns and drive the storytelling for both hotels. She brings a wealth of experience in digital marketing and hospitality having worked in the UAE, China, Philippines and Nigeria. Before joining Wyndham Hotel Group Banjo she spent eight years with Starwood Hotels & Resorts in various digital roles including Regional Digital Marketing Manager and Director of Marketing.





‘Nice’ tour for Abu Dhabi travel agents

Amadeus held a three-day Educational Tour to Nice (France) in association with Turkish Airlines for its partner travel agencies. They participated at the business sessions at Amadeus Executive Briefing Centre – Sophia Antipolis focusing on latest developments and product updates. Customers were showcased the innovative Amadeus Selling Platform Connect along with Amadeus Ancillary services and they were also briefed on online travel trends and Amadeus Web Services.



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