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SPECIAL ISSUE  
ITB BERLIN  
March 8-12  
2017

# TRAVTALK

TravTalkMiddleEast.com

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

**■ Dubai-Kochi on AI Dreamliner ..... 06**  
**■ DoubleTree RAK focuses on bleisure ..... 08**  
**■ Expansion for Sharjah Airport ..... 27**

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# Middle East focus on ITB Berlin

Leading travel trade show ITB Berlin takes place from March 8-12, 2017, at Messe Berlin. As many as 120,000 trade visitors from 187 countries will convene at the venue expecting to reap up to €7 billion in turnover. Leading players from the Middle East share their views for this year's edition of the event.

 SHEHARA RIZLY



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

“Following our success in last year's edition of ITB Berlin — where the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority was named second best exhibitor from the Middle East — we are back in the German capital in 2017 to announce even greater successes for Sharjah's tourism sector, buoyed by substantial investments in infrastructure and human resources. We are also throwing significant weight behind the development of attractions that appeal to nature lovers and environmental enthusiasts: Sharjah boasts a rich and diverse ecosystem where protected areas form 4.6 per cent of the emirate's total surface area and are divided into eight conservation centres.

Europe remains one of the top source regions for Sharjah-bound tourists. Germany, meanwhile, is one of the top 10 source countries — and the top source market in the European Union. Europe sent 348,570 visitors to Sharjah in 2016, accounting for around a fifth of tourists to the emirate. Germany alone sent 27,985 visitors — that's 8 per cent of all Europeans visiting Sharjah. We will further promote the aspects of Sharjah that are most appealing to Europeans: warm weather and sunny beaches during the winter months, and authentic Arabian culture and heritage offerings.”

“Western Europe continues to be the second-largest inbound market for tourism to Dubai, with more than 3.1 million visitors in 2016. This accounts for 21 per cent of total tourism to the city — up four per cent from 2015. Germany remained one of the top 10 source markets in 2016, maintaining a stable performance with 460,000 visitors. We aim to help increase visitation from the country and the wider region by further highlighting Dubai's overall destination offering, with an emphasis on newly-opened theme parks, hotels and attractions in the city.”



Issam Abdul Rahim Kazim  
CEO, Department of Tourism and  
Commerce Marketing-Dubai

“We, at Meeting Point Emirates, pride ourselves on being the leading DMC in the UAE for the German market by handling 55 per cent of the market share. Based on the tourism performance report by Visit Dubai, Western Europe accounted for 21 per cent of total visitors to Dubai in 2016 with Germany being the second western source country after the UK. Increase in flight capacities as well as having more four star, all-inclusive hotels that creates diversification and caters to the German market, can contribute to the increase in German tourists.”



Roula Jouny  
CEO  
Meeting Point International

“The German market now falls within our top 5 source markets and we will continue to work with key DMCs locally in the UAE and key tour operators in Germany to ensure we have sustainable growth for years to come. ITB is a very important trade show for us, and this year we will announce some very exciting developments and new hotel openings in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. We will be located at the Dubai Tourism stand in the Middle East section and we look forward to meeting as many trade partners as possible.”



Freddy Farid  
Area General Manager  
Gloria Hotels and Resorts

“Following 10.9 per cent year-on-year growth in visitors in 2016, we're re-energising our efforts in Europe this year. Germany, where we signed strategic partnerships with five new tour operators at the end of 2016, remains our largest international source market with visitors up 24.6 per cent last year. German nationals now constitute one in 10 of all our visitors. With British and Russian visitor increases of 35 per cent and 19.5 per cent, respectively. Czech Republic, Poland, Finland, Switzerland, France and Denmark are also on our radar.”



Haitham Mattar  
CEO, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism  
Development Authority

“There are multiple complexities in the world of travel booking, processing and payments, including the risk of fraud. That's why Travelport offers a travel commerce platform that facilitates and simplifies ticketing, payment and fulfilment. We are excited to attend ITB Berlin and are looking forward to meeting partners and customers to exchange thoughts and ideas, and showcase how fully integrating pioneering B2B payments technology address the multiple challenges travel agencies face.”



Simon Ferguson  
Managing Director Northern Europe  
Travelport

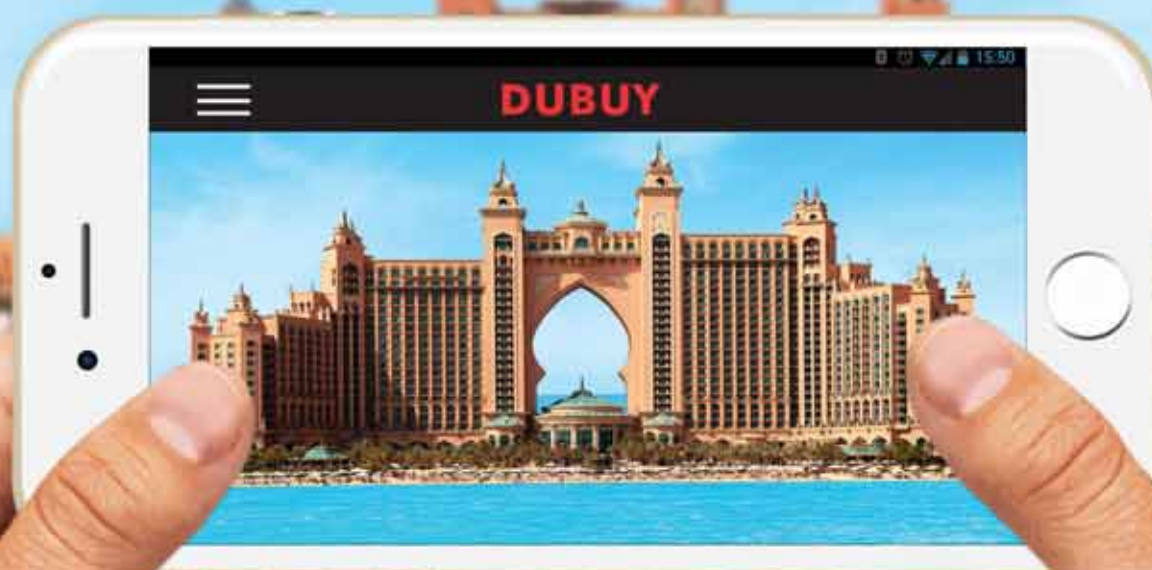
“I am delighted to officially announce that this year's ITB exhibition will be the location at which we will premier our much-anticipated new Business Class product. As an airline we strive to offer our passengers the very best, not only in terms of our world class on-board experience, but also our expanding global network. At this year's ITB, I look forward to sharing the revolutionary new patented Business Class seat with the travel industry and worldwide media, alongside many other new and exciting developments to our network.”



His Excellency Akbar Al Baker  
Group Chief Executive  
Qatar Airways

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# Travelport honours KSA leaders

The awards started in Jeddah on February 20, followed by Riyadh on February 22 and Dammam on February 28, 2017.



With Saudi Arabia's travel and tourism industry increasingly in the spotlight as a driving sector for growth in the Kingdom's Vision 2030 economic diversification strategy, the event also provided a networking platform for the travel industry's stakeholders and key opinion leaders on how technology can be leveraged to drive high performances in travel and meet traveller demands; personalising their travel experiences and further connecting them to a world of travel choice. There are currently 900,000 Saudis in tourism and related sectors and this number is expected to rise to 1.2 million in the period leading up to 2030.

Saudi Arabia leads the Middle Eastern region in terms of Internet penetration and with a young, tech-savvy population, e-commerce is



Rabih Saab  
President and Managing Director of Europe, Middle East, Africa and South Asia, Travelport

**The Saudi industry is on the rise and we are very proud of our partnerships in the region, both in the travel agent community and airlines side**

a thriving industry in Saudi Arabia. Online travel sales have been growing faster than offline sales. Internet penetration is high and growing in

Saudi Arabia and the population is becoming more aware and accepting of the idea of making purchases online. Mobile travel sales are also growing fuelled by mobile device penetration.

Rabih Saab, President and Managing Director of Europe, Middle East, Africa and South Asia commented, "The Saudi travel and tourism industry is on the rise and we are very proud of our partnerships in the region, both on the travel agent community and airlines side. While uncertainty is a theme in the global economy in 2017, demand for international tourism remains high. Travelport sits at the heart of the travel industry and with Saudi tourism revenues predicted to reach \$81 billion by 2026, we are committed to supporting the country's travel industry players to grow their businesses and meet traveller demands."



Dubuy is a smartphone application which can function on both Android and iOS formats for travellers to Dubai. Tourists can browse for merchant categories, apply filters and find locations near them using the simple geo-location tool, which shows all merchant offers nearby. It can be availed through hotels, DMCs or registered travel agents of Dubai. A tourist visiting Dubai will be provided with a downloadable application link by the travel agent. Once the link is downloaded, entering an authentication code makes the application ready for use. The tourist can then view multiple options of discounts, offers and deals across various categories to explore in Dubai.

Dubuy enfolds a number of options to discover Dubai like never before, with



Prashant Khattar  
MD and Founder Infinia

**With the launch of Dubuy, we strongly believe we have filled a huge gap in the Dubai inbound travel market**

valuable discounts, offers and deals across shopping, dining, leisure & attractions, spa & wellness and many more. The initial launch phase of Dubuy has already brought leading brands on board

and plans are to build Dubuy into the ultimate experience for a tourist. With Dubuy, Infinia brings to tourists the 'great deals more fun' experience in one of the world's most popular tourist destinations – Dubai.

"The driving force for growth at Infinia results from putting the customer at the centre of everything we do. Instead of offering a one-size-fits all model, we invest time and effort in understanding consumer needs and go about devising comprehensive solutions with the help of best-in-class technology and innovation. With the launch of Dubuy, we strongly believe we have filled a huge gap in the Dubai inbound travel market. This is a product conceptualised, designed and delivered keeping a Dubai tourist in mind," according to Prashant Khattar, MD and Founder, Infinia.

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# TRAVTALK

## EDITORIAL

### Billion dollar business

Our attention is focused on Germany where over €7 billion turnover is expected with over 187 countries participating from five continents. About 10,000 exhibitors, 120,000 trade visitors, 60,000 private visitors, 25,000 convention visitors and 1000 top quality buyers are expected to convene at ITB Messe Berlin from March 8-12, 2017. As the position of the stand changed this year it ensures more prominence to the Middle East. The participating tourism boards are Dubai, Sharjah, Abu Dhabi and Ras Al Khaimah.

Sports tourism is the next developing trend in the Middle East as billions of dollars are spent on sponsoring these events by various private and public enterprise players. The next two to three years will witness many international sporting events starting with the UAE gearing up for the 2019 edition of the Asian Football Cup (AFC). As a result, stadia in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, and Al Ain are to witness massive infrastructure renovations and technological upgrades.

Some of the new terminology and trending tourism in the region are experiential tourism, entertainment tourism, spa/beauty tourism, retail and medical tourism etc. The dawn of 2017 seems to have given birth to "selling experiences" in the hospitality and travel industry. Every agent, hotelier, airline and other partners are ensuring the best experiences with best practices in order to have repeat guests. All trade partners are investing heavily on revamping websites and loyalty schemes which results in better options and experiences to the clientele.

Technology continues to play a pivotal role in the trade of travel, tourism and hospitality. Leading partners are investing billions of dollars to provide the best possible services ensuring that the profits are kept high with little or less losses and more benefits to the guests. Hotel or hospitality is a trade where you require technology to go hand in hand with human touch. Ensuring the smooth flow of these two important elements is entirely up to the stakeholders and their many practices.

# Evolution and efficiency

For major tourism destinations in the Middle East, 2016 has been a year of adaptation to new market dynamics. Traditional business from the governments and oil & gas sectors dramatically declined and as a result, tourism boards and hotels had to work together to activate other segments.

In Abu Dhabi, the industry reacted relatively quickly and hotels partnered with tour operators and airlines to create packages that would appeal to the FIT market. This has driven volume from previously non-producing customer segments and meant that we have been able to maintain occupancy levels in the hotels. However, it has resulted in a reduction in the average daily rates.

This, I believe, is the 'new normal' and there are no economic grounds for anyone to forecast room rate improvement in the coming months. We're attracting a broader base of guests who require a more affordable package, creating an opportunity for owners to venture into upscale four-star and entry-level five-star hotel developments in Abu Dhabi and beyond.

This is positive, but it brings with it its own set of

challenges. Owners, like ourselves at Abu Dhabi National Hotels, still need to drive a return on our assets. If we can't do this via increases

already common practice in Europe. In Paris, for example, a 150-room upscale hotel will have no more than 70 staff. In the Middle East, ho-

tel there is still a long way to go.

From the owner's perspective, these commissions are not only painful; they also significantly reduce the operator's value proposition. Operators need to take initiative to bring back the value of distribution to the owners.

(The views expressed are solely of the author.

The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)

**Operators must also address the ongoing cost of OTA commissions and take innovative and proactive measures to drive direct bookings. They need to engage with the consumer and understand better what drives the customer to book online**

in rate, we must look at the cost component. The current business environment provides opportunity for hotel brands to revise their operating models. They need to put aside historical trends and focus on how to become efficient in the current market scenario.

Operators will have to streamline their operations by considering clustering, perhaps, or shared back office and support services among their portfolio. This is

tels of this size are currently running with no less than 150 staff. The time has come for this to change.

Operators must also address the ongoing cost of OTA commissions and take innovative, proactive measures to drive direct bookings. They need to engage with the consumer and understand better what drives the customer to book online. Many are taking steps in this direction, with Hilton's 'Stop Clicking Around' campaign



Khalid Anib\*  
CEO  
Abu Dhabi National Hotels

\*Anib is speaking at the upcoming Arabian Hotel Investment Conference 2017 (AHIC), to be held from April 25-27 at Madinat Jumeirah in Dubai

# Golden Sands eyes German market

Golden Sands Hotel Apartments, part of A. A. Al Moosa Enterprises, will continue to highlight its affordable accommodation available to both leisure and business travellers from Europe.



**Mohammed Khoori**, General Manager, along with his sales team will meet with decision-makers and business partners to share key developments and strategies such as the new loyalty scheme that will be introduced to guests this year and an update on GSHA's website to ensure that it is user-friendly and guests can book easily, of-

fering special deals to loyalty members.

He added: "We will discuss ways to further enhance awareness of Golden Sands Hotel Apartments to our key markets by working closely with our partners. However, we will also focus on growing markets such as Scandinavia, Holland, India and Far East. These markets are showing continued growth in number of visitors to Dubai,

and they are also key markets for Golden Sands." Golden Sands continues to participate at key travel and trade exhibitions such as ITB because it is an ideal platform to meet with decision makers and partners to discuss contracts as well as market feedback and trends.

Golden Sands Hotel Apartments will be exhibiting with Dubai's Department of Tourism Commerce & Mar-



Mohammed Khoori  
General Manager  
Golden Sands Hotel Apartments

keting (DTCM) stand, hall 2.2, Stand 101.



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# High demand from Middle East @ITB

A high demand from the Middle East and Arab region is expected at this year's edition of ITB Berlin as the two main carriers – Emirates and Qatar Airways – have booked in a lot more space than the previous year. **David Ruetz**, Head, ITB Berlin, gives **TRAVTALK** further details about the upcoming exhibition.

**SHEHARA RIZLY**

**Q Please explain the new hall concept for the Middle East region?**

The new hall concept makes it possible for the fast-growing markets of the Arab states to enlarge their displays. In recent years there has been an increase in demand for more floor space and two-tier stands for certain markets which up to now we have been unable to satisfy. Several display halls already have waiting lists. By reorganising the halls to suit the market we are now able to meet this demand.

**Q How many exhibitors have confirmed their participation and do you expect an increase this year from this region?**

Once again we expect more than 10,000 exhibitors from around 185 countries and regions to be at the show, including some 32 important major exhibitors from the Middle East. We have registered a

very strong growth from Abu Dhabi, Etihad, Ras Al Khaimah and Qatar Airways and for the very first time Saudi Arabia exhibits as a country on a 300-square-metre stand in Hall 4.2. Exhibitors from the UAE and Qatar will be presenting their many products and services on an enlarged stand in Hall 2.2 which now occupies 3,383 square metres in total.

**Q What's new and different at ITB Berlin 2017?**

The new hall concept and that there is now a better concentration of markets, which makes it easier for trade visitors to plan their visit and allows the growing markets to receive more space.

At the ITB Berlin Convention leading international experts will show how tourism professionals are successfully taking on controversial issues and current challenges such as geopolitical crises, travel safety risks and the use of artificial intelligence. The theme will be 'Disruptive Travel: The End of the World as We Know It'.

**Travel Technology:** The e-Travel World at ITB Berlin is booked up and for the first time it will occupy two halls, with more than 70 exhibitors displaying their innovative products and services. In Halls 6.1 and 7.1c, visitors can find established companies as well as newcomers, which include Aldebaran, Beterspace, Conichi, Dayuse, eNett, Igola, Paymentwall, Traveltripper and Wanup.

**ITB Speed networking:**

Senior buyers who belong to the exclusive ITB Buyers Circle can get to know exhibitors at previously booked brief appointments. Using the new ITB Matchmaking Tool participants can book appointments in advance. Personal invitations will be sent to exhibitors, who can invite co-exhibitors to register for the event too. Buyers and exhibitors can provide information on key themes in their profile and also emphasise particular interests. This makes it easier to find exactly the right conversation partners. Only participants who have pre-booked



David Ruetz  
Head  
ITB Berlin

new contacts, find out about destinations and products, and expand their business interests.

**Medical Tourism:** For the first time ITB Berlin 2017 will be fully devoting a platform to medical tourism, which has become an important fast-growing market. Medical service providers, hotels and destinations will be able to exhibit their products and services in the Medical Tourism Pavilion in Hall 3.2.

**Q Please share the total business transacted last year and the expected figures for this year?**

On the purchasing side, there was also a further increase in the number of decision-makers last year: two thirds of the trade visitors stated that they held direct authority for all purchasing decisions. Business conducted during the trade show rose from 2015's figure of €6.7 billion to around seven billion last year. I believe the expected figures 2017 will equal the previous year's level. 📈

Once again we expect more than 10,000 exhibitors from around 185 countries and regions to be at the show, including some 32 important major exhibitors from ME

may attend the networking event and they will receive an appointment list beforehand. During the eight-minute time slots, participants can exchange information, establish

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# Dubai-Kochi on AI Dreamliner

Air India launched the second Dreamliner from Dubai to Kochi on February 1, 2017.

**SHEHARA RIZLY**

Air India's flight 934 will be a daily operation with departure from Dubai at 1330 hours arriving in Kochi at 1850 hours. The return from Kochi will be AI 933 departing at 0915 hours from Kochi and arrive in Dubai at 1200 hours.

The press briefing was presided over by Consul General of India, **H.E. Anurag Bhushan** and **Melvin D'Silva**, Regional Manager-Middle East and Africa, Air India. The Consul General reiterated that last year the national carrier has seen an increase in capacity and the regional connectivity has improved quite well.

D'Silva stated that Air India is on a very aggressive growth trajectory to become No. 3 in the world after the US and China with a young strong fleet of 107 aircraft and their aim is to "fly more and fill more." Kerala has be-

come an important destination as there has been a 24 per cent increase of traffic from Dubai. Within the next four years they will be purchasing nearly 100 new air-



(L-R): Melvin D'Silva and H.E. Anurag Bhushan

craft and they have planned about 30 to 35 aircraft to be purchased this year. In order to promote the new Dubai-Kochi service, they will be offering a free baggage allowance of 40 kgs on Economy Class and 50 kgs on Business Class.

Some of the upcoming new routes will be Delhi-Copenhagen from May on the Dreamliner increasing their coverage of the European network with the existing flights

to London, Birmingham, Paris, Rome, Milan, Frankfurt, Moscow, Vienna and Madrid. In July this year, AI would be linking the capitals of India with USA with a non-stop

service between Delhi and Washington on their Boeing 777. This flight will add to the North American nonstop flights to New York, Newark, Chicago and San Francisco. Air India will commence operations linking Bangkok with cities of Kolkata and Chandigarh as well. On the domestic front, frequencies from Delhi to popular destinations such as Port Blair, Bangkok, Leh, Nagpur and Ahmedabad will be increased from the summer schedule. 🌄

# Etihad, TAT to boost tourism

Etihad Airways and the Tourism Authority of Thailand signed a \$1 mn deal to promote travel from the UAE.

**TT BUREAU**

The agreement was signed by Etihad Airways Vice President Marketing, **Tim Burnell**, and Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT's) Deputy Governor **Tanes Petsuwan** at an event in Bangkok at the Grande Centre Point Terminal 21. They were joined by Etihad Air-

international routes. It continues to be one of the busiest in our network enjoying strong year-round demand, particularly from the UAE, GCC, Middle East, Africa and Europe.

"With five daily flights to Thailand – four to Bangkok and one to Phuket – Etihad Airways has a significant

hundreds of thousands of first-time and repeat travellers from Europe and the Middle East to Thailand to enjoy this beautiful country and to experience the warm, friendly hospitality for which the Thai people are world-renowned."

Bangkok continues to be one of Etihad Airways' busiest routes – around 800,000 guests travelled to and from Bangkok in 2016 alone. In all, more than 6 million guests have flown on the airline's Thailand routes since 2007 and further growth is expected.

In 2017, TAT has set a target of 34.5 million international visitors, generating an estimated 1.81 trillion Baht (\$50 billion) – a 10 per cent increase year on year – in international tourism receipts. Etihad Airways added a second daily service in June 2006, a third daily flight in April 2012, and a fourth on July 1, 2015. 🌄



ways Senior Manager Marketing, **Lamy Al Nuaimi**. Burnell said, "Etihad Airways has a long and proud association with Thailand – in fact Bangkok was one of our first

investment in Thai tourism and the new agreement with TAT supports and extends that commitment. Through innovative joint marketing campaigns, we aim to bring

# Turkish now flies to Conakry

Turkish Airlines has launched its first flight between Istanbul and Conakry, Republic of Guinea, making it the airline's 296<sup>th</sup> destination.

**TT BUREAU**

With this new addition, Turkish Airlines has expanded its network to 51 destinations on the continent, the largest number of destinations among all carriers. Conakry joins a widening destination portfolio in West Africa that include city-hubs of Accra, Abuja, Bamako, Dakar, Abidjan, Cotonou, Douala, Yaounde,



**Ahmet Olmüştür**  
Chief Marketing Officer  
Turkish Airlines

Milano. Flight TK 537 will be available two times weekly as of January 30, 2017.

Commenting on the launch, **Ahmet Olmüştür**, Chief Marketing Officer, Turkish Airlines, said, "Our entry into the Conakry route is a testimony of our faith in the Guinean people and economy. This milestone strengthens the position of our airline as the one that flies to more countries than any other air carrier globally."

**Our entry into the Conakry route is a testimony of our faith in the Guinean people and economy. This milestone strengthens the position of our airline as the one that flies to more countries than any other air carrier globally**

Roundtrip flights between Istanbul and Conakry will be operated two times per week on Mondays, and Thursdays in both directions. Introductory round trip fares are available from Istanbul to Conakry starting at \$699 (including taxes and fees). Additionally, for the first 6 months of operation to Conakry, Miles&Smiles members will be able to earn 25 per cent extra status miles. 🌄

N'Djamena, Ougadougou and Niamey.

The service will provide a link between Istanbul Atatürk Airport and the Conakry International Airport via Ouagadougou. The

return flight will give passengers departing Guinea access to top global destinations such as London, Dubai, Paris, Frankfurt, Muscat, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Brussels, Berlin, Amsterdam, Vienna, Asmara, Hamburg, Düsseldorf and

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Resort – Ras Al Khaimah

**Profitable 2016 for Air Arabia**

■ Air Arabia's net profit for the full year ending December 31, 2016 was AED509 million, a 4 per cent lower than 2015 figure of AED531 million. Turnover for the full year 2016 was in line with the preceding 12 months reaching AED3.8 billion. More than 8.4 million passengers flew with Air Arabia in 2016, a 12 per cent year-on-year increase. The average seat load factor – or passengers carried as a percentage of available seats – in 2016 stood at an impressive 79 per cent.

Following its solid full year 2016 performance, Air Arabia's Board of Directors proposed a dividend distribution of 7 per cent of share capital, which is equivalent to 7 fils per share. This proposal was made following a meeting of the board of directors of Air Arabia and is subject to ratification by Air Arabia's shareholders at the company's upcoming Annual General Meeting. Air Arabia added nine new routes to its global network in 2016 from its five operating hubs in the UAE, Morocco, Egypt and Jordan. The carrier took delivery of new aircraft and ended the year with a fleet of 46 Airbus A320 aircraft operating on 124 routes across the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe.

# DoubleTree RAK focuses on bleisure

Newly appointed Hotel Manager at DoubleTree by Hilton, Ras Al Khaimah, **Nayla Chowdhury**, shares the way forward in 2017 driving a mix of business and leisure guests.

**SHEHARA RIZLY**

**Nayla Chowdhury**, Hotel Manager, DoubleTree by Hilton, Ras Al Khaimah, shared that last year the hotel's performance was very strong as both occupancy and ADR Y-o-Y were good, which resulted in a healthy REVPAR growth.



Nayla Chowdhury  
Hotel Manager  
DoubleTree by Hilton, Ras Al Khaimah

"The corporate market was an important driver being in the business and government hub of the city. Our weekend leisure business has seen a growth as well since the hotel offers a great value proposition to our guests by being able to offer beach and world class resort facility access in our sister property, DoubleTree by Hilton Resort & Spa Marjan Island. Another highlight last year was when we renovated our Lobby Lounge and expanded

outdoor café for our in-house as well as guests from the surrounding areas."

The average lengths of stay of most of the guests at the DoubleTree Hilton are 3+ nights. Majority are coming through agents, although they have recently seen a lot more corporate travellers coming to Ras Al Khaimah that are booking directly through their website and third-party channels.

Chowdhury stated that in 2017 they are focusing on few additional feeder markets for the hotel to diversify their mix by focusing on the GCC, Chinese and CIS market. Some of the international trade ex-

hibitions they will attend this year would be ITB Berlin, ATM and WTM.

**We would like to leverage some of the new products that are being developed by RAK Tourism for adventure travellers such as Via Ferrata, which would include three zip lines, and other outdoor adventures**

hibitions they will attend this year would be ITB Berlin, ATM and WTM.

In terms of technology in the hospitality sector, she shared, "Advances in technology will play a big part in future customer experience of the guests. The role of social media will continue and hotels need to be very visible in this

channel to forge close relationship with customers and potential customers in order to capture their business. The hospitality industry has begun to fully leverage this new technology to their advantage. Hotels, attractions and restaurants are finding unique, consumer-friendly ways to engage their guests via their mobile devices, including mobile microsites, one-click check-ins."

Ras Al Khaimah is a destination where you receive both expats and locals apart from the foreign visitors. "Ras Al Khaimah is becoming a

popular adventure destination in the region due to its majestic mountains, Jebel Jais, which is the tallest mountain in the UAE. We would like to leverage some of the new products that are being developed by RAK Tourism for adventure travellers such as Via Ferrata, which would include three zip lines, and other outdoor adventures. In addition we will continue to attract visitors from the neighboring emirates due to our tranquil white sandy beaches in Marjan Island and desert adventures in the area," she says.

Currently they are working on a refurbishment of the Lobby, the Rooftop Bar and soft renovation of the hotel's 154 rooms. They will be re-positioning the hotel very soon to give it a trendier and more of boutique feel to the hotel. 🌟

# Smartotels launches FORM Hotel

FORM Hotel, the upscale hotel brand in Smartotels Hospitality International's portfolio, was launched at Gulf & Indian Ocean Hotel Investors' Summit in the UAE.

**TT BUREAU**

FORM Hotel's 143-key flagship property is being developed by Dubai Contracting Company (DCC), a UAE-based contracting and development company, and designed by Paris-based global architectural firm, Architecture-Studio. FORM Hotel Dubai's facilities will include an all-day dining restaurant, a rooftop infinity pool, a rooftop gym, and a technology-focused boardroom. It is



Tarek M. Daouk  
Smartotels Hospitality International's  
Founder and Managing Partner

located within close proximity to some of Dubai's most famous

landmarks and business and leisure destinations. Currently under construction, it is expected to open in Q1 2018.

Smartotels Hospitality International's Founder and Managing Partner, **Tarek M. Daouk**, said, "By offering a core hospitality experience with the flexibility of add-on service and amenity features, FORM Hotel will empower its guests to customise their journey. The hotel will benefit

from an operating model that is engineered to drive strong returns to investors through an increased ability to control operating expenses by compressing fixed costs and exploiting variable costs."

FORM Hotel has designed and developed a proprietary enterprise application system that ensures operational efficiency and seamlessness of service delivery to guests. 🌟

## 25kg baggage for ME on Cebu Pacific

■ Starting February 13 to March 15, 2017, all passengers originating from Doha, Dubai, Kuwait and Riyadh travelling to Manila with pre-purchased baggage allowance of 40 kilograms will be receiving additional 25 kilograms baggage allowance, free-of-charge on the Philippine carrier, Cebu Pacific. The extra baggage allowance will be given upon check-in of the guest at the airport.

For those guests with connecting flights to other domestic destinations, the additional 25kg will be carried over up to their next flight, given

that their flight itineraries were booked under one reference number only. This promotion is not valid on return flights from the Philippines to the Middle East and on bookings with Cebgo connecting flights.

"With the launch of this special promotion, CEB opens up more opportunities for its travellers across the Middle East region, most especially the Filipinos, to maximize their trip to the Philippines by allowing them to bring more items for their families and friends back home," says **Atty. JR Mantaring**, CEB Vice President for Corporate Affairs.



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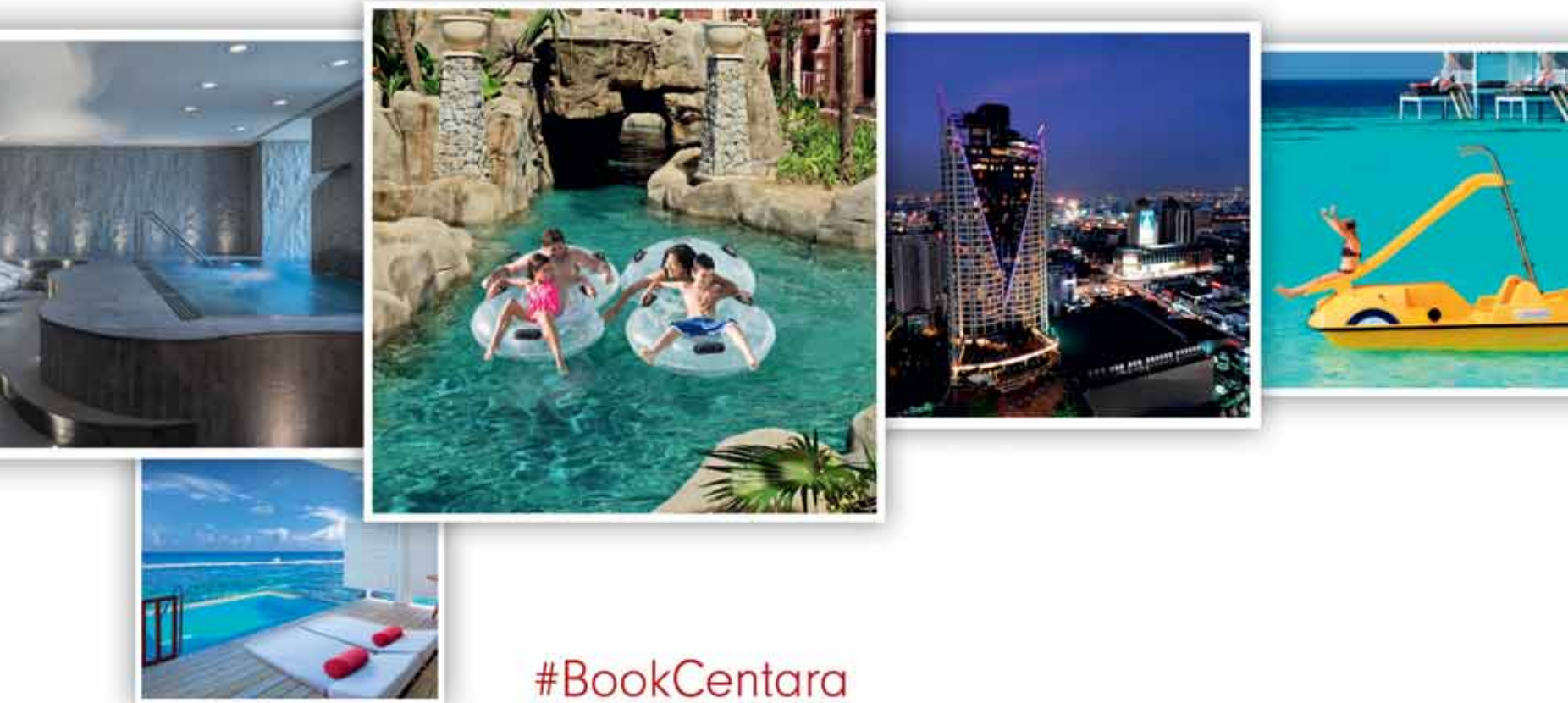
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Plus, coming soon, two brand new openings — four-star Centara Muscat Hotel in Al Ghala, the business district of Oman and the sophisticated Centara Grand Hotel Doha in West Bay district, where two children under the age of 12 can stay and play for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

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# Middle East buoyant about European market

ITB Berlin is undoubtedly the foremost business platform where all stakeholders from around the globe gather to showcase their products and offerings. Leading hospitality and other stakeholders from the United Arab Emirates share with **TRAVTALK** their focus for 2017.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

“In line with Ajman’s Vision 2021 and ATDD’s strategic plan, we will be focusing on increasing brand awareness by promoting our different tourist destinations, activities and events through our destination website [www.ajman.travel](http://www.ajman.travel) and mobile App. We will be discussing tourism investment opportunities and sign major marketing agreements with leading German tour operators to attract more tourists and investors. Germany is one of the most important European markets for Ajman. Europeans contribute 17 per cent to room nights and Ajman welcomed around 52,000 tourists from Europe making it overall a very important market with further potential.”



Faisal Al Nuaimi  
General Manager  
Ajman Tourism Development  
Department

“We look forward to generate contractual business with German, European operators and to get an insight on the latest trends developed from a marketing aspect. European and in specific German visitors are a major market feeder for our properties holding more than quarter of the leisure market followed by Scandinavians countries.”



Mohamed Awadalla  
CEO, Time Hotels

“We will be promoting our new 179-key property, Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche, at this year’s ITB. The new hotel will be part of Ajman Tourism Development Department (ATDD) stand. We seek to strengthen our presence in the Balkans, Baltic, East Europe, and West Europe, particularly Germany, which are the stronghold in our two existing properties in Ajman; and these will be also be our key markets for Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche.”



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



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Shahzad Butt  
General Manager  
Ramada Downtown Dubai

“Ramada Downtown Dubai will highlight its location which has always been its USP. Germans are champions of world travel and are loyal tourists. Once they like the destination, they keep visiting and we aim to capture this. The German and West European market share in our property was at 14 per cent and we seek to boost this percentage, alongside the overall European segment. There has been a decline in tourists but the numbers are gradually increasing. The cruise business is also gaining momentum, which will help us to develop this market further.”



Angela Christodoulou  
Cluster Director of Sales and  
Marketing, Ramada Plaza Jumeirah  
Beach & Ramada Sharjah

“The main focus will be for both hotels – Ramada Plaza Jumeirah Beach and for Ramada Sharjah. Especially for Ramada Sharjah as the conversion of the hotel has been completed now with an inventory of 343 units we will focus on the hotel and all its benefits and new facilities available. The European market is very important for both the hotels. The business mix is very important and for UAE the variety in the incoming market is big, but one of the main market has always been the European market.”



Mohammed Khoori  
General Manager  
Golden Sands Hotel Apartments

“We are rolling out our loyalty scheme to our guests and expect to see good results not only for 2017 but also the future. We will update our website, ensuring that it is easy for guests to book and also offer special deals to our loyalty members. We will continue to focus on our key markets, working closely with our partners. However, we are also focusing on growing markets as well. Golden Sands continues to participate at key exhibitions as it is important to meet with decision-makers from our partner companies to discuss contracts, as well as market feedback and trends. It is also a good platform for networking. Our must-attend exhibitions currently are; SATTE, ITB, ATM & WTM.”

“Latest product developments and openings including Centara’s first properties in the Middle East, opening in Qatar and Oman in mid-2017. Europe is a major source market contributing a fifth of total business. For the Middle East properties, Europe will remain a crucial market due to location convenience and myriad choices of airline carriers.”



Paul Wilson  
VP Sales, Centara

“ITB Berlin will be the first exhibition for us to officially introduce our new property, MGallery by Sofitel, at the global stage. Located in Palm Jumeirah, it will be the first health and wellness resort in the GCC. There is an increased demand in wellness tourism, not just in Europe, but across the globe, and we aim to take full advantage of this trend. With all the travel trade professionals under one roof, this is an ideal opportunity for us to promote our product, including the treatments and retreat packages.”



Samir Arora  
General Manager  
MGallery by Sofitel



Manoj Kanwal  
Operations Director  
Danat

“ITB is an important platform to promote our hotels where we have German guests who like to stay in our properties for leisure and to enjoy our hotel activities and the beach. During ITB, we will meet with all our partners based in Europe and will discuss any additional services they may provide us to increase business opportunities. We will meet travel agencies, DMCs and tour operators for the leisure business and inbound travel to Abu Dhabi and discuss the rates that we would offer to book them mainly from Europe and to meet new TPIs to broaden our online GDS’ channels.”



Mohamed Saad  
Director of Sales & Marketing  
Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham JBR

“With its proximity to the beach, Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham JBR will be targeting the European markets seeking the year-long sunny weather which Dubai has, especially the family travellers. We’ll highlight our kid-friendly facilities and offers, including the Junior VIP check-in, the spacious family suites, etc. Our property’s main feeder market remains leisure and family travellers from the GCC, but we’ve seen an increase in German and European markets last year, with five per cent in the total nationality mix and we aim to strengthen our presence in these segments.”

## Rove opens at Healthcare City

The unveiling of Rove Healthcare City follows the opening of Rove Downtown Dubai and Rove City Centre, with focus on an engaging guest experience.

TT BUREAU

Dubai Healthcare City, the hub for medical enterprises, healthcare facilities and medical education, now has a new design-influenced, value-lifestyle hotel adjacent to it, which will aim to appeal



in equal measure to business and leisure guests as well as wellness tourists. The 286-room hotel, 30 per cent of the rooms interconnected for the convenience of families, will also serve as a stimulating cultural hub, where the young and trendy can get together for a social evening, and for

families to enjoy quality time with friends and loved ones.

The unique selling proposition of Rove Healthcare City is its location, which is only 10 minutes from the Dubai International Airport, Dubai World Trade Centre, Downtown Dubai and DIFC. In close proximity to the established neighbourhoods of Karama, Satwa, Bur Dubai and Deira, the hotel offers guests effortless access to a wide range of shopping and leisure options

that are conventionally part of the tourist itinerary.

Rove Healthcare City also serves as a venue of choice for business events and Continuing Medical Education (CME) training programmes, which will appeal to healthcare companies,

distributors and others seeking to engage medical professionals in Dubai Healthcare City. Its proximity to Rashid Hospital and the American Hospital means guests of in-house patients, especially wellness tourists, will have a comfortable place to stay.

**Chris Newman**, Chief Operating Officer of Emaar Hospitality Group, said: "Rove Healthcare City is a unique property that caters to the needs of the business community and visitors to the Dubai Healthcare City and the surrounding neighbourhoods. The location has a unique dynamic, being home to hospitals, schools, social and cultural clubs, family parks and malls. Tucked away from the bustle of the city yet in a central location, the area demanded a hotel that assures guests true value hospitality experiences. We deliver that with Rove Healthcare City." 🌟

## Rapid expansion plans in 2017

Central Hotel has announced aggressive expansion plans with three new hotels lined up for opening in Dubai in 2017.

TT BUREAU

**Ahmad Ali Al Abdulla Alansaari**, Chairman, Central Hotels, stated, "2017 is a very exciting year for us with three exceptional properties opening in quick succession. This massive expansion



Ahmad Ali Al Abdulla Alansaari  
Chairman  
Central Hotels

will double our existing inventory of rooms from 524 to 1220 keys and reflects our commitment to serve the needs of our guests with great value in iconic locations

such as The Palm and Business Bay. In addition to the existing development, our aim is to add another five hotels to our outstanding portfolio of properties by 2018 creating greater choice and opportunities for our guests, associates and stakeholders.



Ammar Kanaan  
General Manager  
Central Hotels

We are in the midst of advanced negotiations for three fabulous projects in KSA as well as two hotels in the UAE. These accomplishments are designed to position Central

Hotels for continued success in the years ahead."

Giving details about the new projects opening in 2017, **Ammar Kanaan**, General Manager, Central Hotels, said, "Bay Central located at The Burj Khalifa district features 284 keys and is expected to welcome its first guests in the third quarter of 2017 followed by two other hotels of 208 and 204 keys each in The Palm. All three properties are in the 4-stars category and progressing towards completion."

Central Hotels has very quickly established itself as a reputed hotel management group in the UAE with its flagship property First Central Hotel Suites located in Barsha Heights (TECOM) near Sheikh Zayed Road. Building up on this, the brand is now poised to expand its footprint in the GCC targeting Saudi Arabia and the UAE as the primary markets for growth. 🌟

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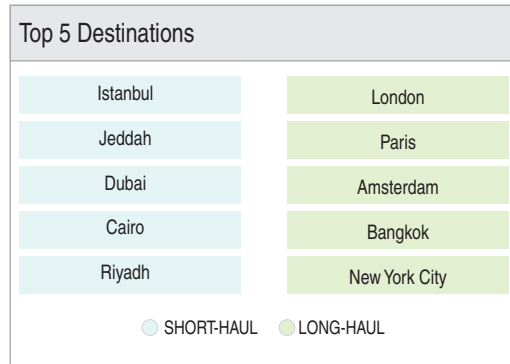
**Oman Air boosts weekly capacity to India**

■ Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman is growing its capacity to India whereby it will increase its weekly frequencies from 126 to 161 flights per week between Oman and its 11 destinations in India. Effective February onward, Mumbai, Delhi, Calicut and Hyderabad will be operated with 21 weekly flights each, and Lucknow with 14 weekly flights. The growth in capacity follows the recently signed agreement between the Governments of Oman and India, where both sides agreed to increase the weekly seats.

**Paul Gregorowitsch** CEO, Oman Air, commented: "India is a key destination for Oman Air and we are delighted to be offering thousands more guests the opportunity to travel between Oman and India (and beyond). The demand for all 11 of our Indian destinations has always been high and the increased frequencies offer yet more choice and convenience to our guests. The extended traffic entitlements will give a further boost to the tourism sector, prompting many discerning tourists to visit magnificent Oman as well as India's beautiful touristic spots."

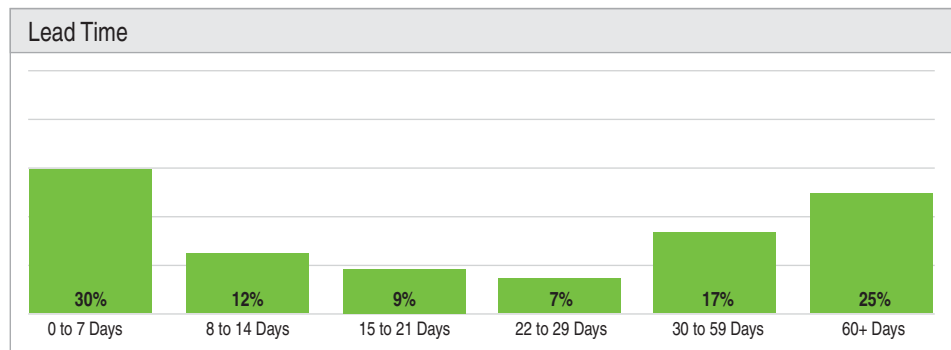
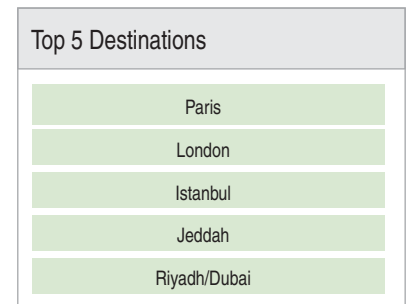
# UK top destination for ME travellers

Carrying forward the 2016 trend, the top destinations for Middle East and African travellers continue to be in Europe's favour with London and Paris taking the top two spots.



Interestingly, travellers (30%) were either conducting very last-minute searches, within 7 days of their planned departure date, or very far in advance (25%), over 60 days in advance of their planned departure date.

We know that there is a perception in the market that consumers in the Middle Eastern and African region have an affinity for impulse buying based on price point and last-minute bookings and the data seems to be echoing this trend.



Although looking back at past trends can be extremely helpful, we at Sojern, use our billions of travel intent signals in order to see the early trends that are beginning to evolve for future months. This allows travel marketers to effectively optimise future campaigns.

Beach	Metropolitan	Sightseeing/Recreational
Tel Aviv	London	Bangkok
Barcelona	Amsterdam	Tel Aviv
Dubai	New York City	Madrid
Miami	Paris	Rome
Bali	Istanbul	Berlin

For April, European destinations make up half of the top 10 destinations searched by Middle East & African travellers. Tel Aviv also cracks the top five list - perhaps drawing Easter travellers

Source: Sojern Report on Q2 2016 Global Travel Insights

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## Personality of the month

# Hamdani: the Green Champion

**Iftikhar Hamdani** has revolutionised the hospitality industry over the past seven years with his commitment to carry out projects on environment, community and charity work. Known as the initiator of green programmes in the emirate of Ajman, he has definitely made his mark to engage hoteliers over the past couple of years.



Hamdani with his 22-year experience in different hospitality brands in different positions, is currently working as Cluster General Manager to lead two hotels, Ramada Ajman and Ramada Beach Ajman, additionally he is engaged with his hotel group expansion and working as VP Development and Acquisition - R Hotels.

Iftikhar Hamdani is a graduate from Hailey College of Commerce Lahore, Pakistan. Hamdani is fully engaged from 2011 on environment and charity initiatives; he is on a mission to create awareness among his hospitality colleagues to do more for environment and charity within their routine life and daily operations of their hotel job. The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) at Ramada Hotel & Suites Aj-

man has developed through the initiative and determination of Hamdani.

He was known for his remarkable ground-breaking environment initiatives like the launch of Zero Landfill Project in 2012 — a waste management system of the property. Four years after the launch of the project, with the help of recycling and an in-house composter machine, the hotel was able to reduce its landfill waste disposal by 90 per cent and divert more than a million kilogram of waste. Hamdani pioneered an Urban Farming project, where he converted 430 square metres of its vast parking space to an urban farm, growing seasonal vegetables and crops, which can be of use in the hotel's kitchen. He also launched an all-new Reverse Osmosis (RO) plant, which aims to recycle the hotel's waste water



by 60 per cent and target an annual savings of about AED 290,000 (\$79,019).

Hamdani led various activities such as Go Green Painting Exhibition in 2013 and raised awareness to 100,000 students & parents in the Northern Emirates. Recently, Hamdani organised again an environmental awareness conference as "International Roundtable Conference by Future Leaders" with topic on Climate

Change on December 2016. 22 young speakers aged between 12 to 16 years from 22 different nationalities took part in the interactive discussion, which aimed to gather insights and share the best practices that are being carried out by their respective country to address the pressing subject. Under his leadership, the Ramada Hotel & Suites Ajman does its share for sustainable tourism through regular beach clean-ups and organising activities for Earth Hour, Earth Day, World Environment Day.

To step up its CSR programmes, Hamdani joined the United Nations Global Compact in 2016, the largest corporate social responsibility initiative in the world. He has been recognised as the "Brand Ambassador of Wyndham Hotel Group in year 2012" which signifies Wyndham management's appreciation of all his efforts

towards the environment and community. Hamdani has also been recognised as a "Highly Commended CSR Champion of the Year 2013" by the Hotelier Middle East. He has been honoured the "National Award" on April 2014 by the Pakistan Association Dubai (PAD) because of his good deeds towards creating better image of Pakistan. Another accolade in his kitty is the "Alleem Sustainable Development Excellence Awards" on December 18, 2014, by the Alleem Business Congress in recognition to his numerous CSR initiatives.

Additionally, he has been recognised by Pakistan Social Centre Sharjah on March 19, 2015, in appreciation to his valuable CSR initiatives during the commemoration of the March 23<sup>rd</sup> Lahore Resolution and the adaptation of the 1<sup>st</sup> constitution of Pakistan. The award was given to the key figures from the Pakistan community who truly made noteworthy contribution, influence and progress in the UAE. Hamdani received the CSR Champion 2015 by the Hospitality Excellence Awards. The latest accolade he received was the General Manager of the Year 2016 by the Hospitality Excellence Awards.

Hamdani continues to spread the cause on sustainable waste management by speaking in different forums and conferences locally and internationally. The hotel's waste management system was featured in the China Central Television (CCTV-13) aired in China. He had represented the hotel to speak about "Responsible Tourism" and "Sustainable Hospitality" in London and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, respectively.

Over the years, Ramada Hotel and Suites Ajman, led by Hamdani, has been actively leading sustainable tourism initiatives within the UAE's hospitality sector. As a testament to its successful green campaigns, the hotel has won several awards, citations and certifications including Green Globe, making it the first hotel in Northern Emirates to receive the prestigious certification.



# Dubai Miracle Garden eyes 1.5 million guests

Dubai Miracle Garden, the world's largest natural flower garden, is all set to attract over 1.5 million guests as they display its breathtaking array of over 60 million flowers with a specially designed floral display in association with Emirates Airline A380.



Abdel Naser Rahhal, Vice Chairman, Cityland Group



TT BUREAU

**Abdel Naser Rahhal**, Vice Chairman, Cityland Group, which is the developer of the Dubai Miracle Garden, said, "As a unique destination to see spectacular floral displays showcased in a variety of dramatic sculptures and designs, the Dubai Miracle Garden has carved a special place in the hearts of residents and visitors over the last four years. This year, we look forward to welcoming visitors so that they can enjoy the stunning landscapes within the park and enjoy the

vibrant new displays we have in store for them."

This year, Dubai Miracle Garden will also have another new exhibit called 'Lost Paradise' which is an underground floral cascade with a depth of 20 ft. There will also be more than 20 food and beverage vendors to choose from for visitors to enjoy a great meal



with beautiful views. During the past four years, residents and visitors from various other countries have enjoyed new attractions/features every time it opens towards the end of autumn in November. There are several entrances and when you enter it is truly as if you have entered through the gates of paradise. The fine detailing of every feature in the garden is an exceptional concept by the creators. At the first glance you will be wooed almost magically to this really happy land full of flowers. The whole garden measures up to about 700,000 square feet. Some of the at-

tractions include the love boat, parrots, white house, butterfly windmills, beautiful arches and pergolas with flowers and umbrellas as well. Burj Khalifa with a water fountain, many palaces and houses, crying face, a flower clock embedded on the floor.

It is a seasonal attraction which opens from end of November to end of May. The garden will be open from 0900 to 2100 hours on weekdays and 0900 to 2300 hours on Friday and Saturdays. Regular admission is DH40 per adult, DH 30 per child (from 3-12 years). Entry is free for people with disabilities and children 2 years and under. 🌸

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# Emirates daily to Newark via Athens

Emirates Airlines will launch a new daily service from Dubai to Newark Liberty International Airport, via the Greek capital city of Athens, starting March 12, 2017.

**T**TT BUREAU

The new route complements Emirates' existing four daily flights between Dubai and New York's JFK airport, by offering global travellers with another convenient access point to the popular New York Metropolitan area.

Emirates' new Dubai-Athens-Newark flight will also provide a year-round non-stop daily service between the United States and Greece — a service that does not exist today and has not existed since 2012. The airline will operate a wide-body Boeing 777-300ER powered by General Electric GE90 engines

on the route, offering 8 seats in First, 42 seats in Business and 304 seats in Economy Class, as well as 19 tonnes of belly-hold cargo capacity.

Sir Tim Clark, President, Emirates Airline, said: "The Greek Government and Athens International Airport approached Emirates some time ago to consider serving the route between Athens and New York. After careful review, Emirates concluded that extending one of our Dubai-Athens flights to New-



Sir Tim Clark  
President  
Emirates Airline

airlines, and we would like to thank the authorities and our partners in both the US and Greece for their support of the new route.

"The availability of high quality, daily international air services is essential for the development of business and cultural ties. Trade, especially in high-value and time-sensitive products, will be facilitated by the ample cargo capacity on Emirates' Boeing 777 aircraft. We

also expect tourism to receive a major boost from the availability of daily flights year-round."

Elena Kountoura, Minister of Tourism of the Hellenic Republic said: "Within the framework of our excellent cooperation, and in line with our common goal for the growth of tourism between our two countries as well as the expansion to long-haul markets, I would like to thank Emirates for having positively considered our request to launch a new Emirates itinerary connecting Dubai with New York via Athens all year round. This strategic choice substantially supports our efforts at the Ministry of Tourism to enhance the already increasing flow of visitors to Greece from the United States and the UAE on a yearly basis, travelling either for leisure or business purposes."

## 31.6 million profit for flydubai

Flydubai has announced its full-year results for 2016 reporting a profit of AED31.6 million (\$8.6 million). It has reported total revenue of AED5 billion (\$1.37 billion), an increase of 2.4 per cent compared to the same period last year. The stronger second half, driven by increased passenger numbers, was impacted by downward pressure on yield leading to lower overall revenue growth reflecting a continuation of the same adverse factors reported in the first half.

His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman, flydubai, said: "These results see flydubai report its fifth consecutive full-year of profitability. In 2012, our third year of operation, we carried 5.1 million passengers. This year, we have carried 10.4 million passengers demonstrating that flydubai continues to help change the way both business and leisure passengers travel around the region. An established tourism destination and global centre for business together with the UAE's geographic location has supported the need for increased connectivity."

Ghaith Al Ghaith, Chief Executive Officer of flydubai, reviewing the Annual Results for 2016, commented: "Over the last two years we have



Ghaith Al Ghaith  
Chief Executive Officer  
flydubai

seen passenger traffic grow cumulatively by 52 per cent in terms of RPKM. We continue to demonstrate that we gain loyal customers across our network who recognise the benefits of direct air links and enjoy our onboard offering. The continuation of mainly lower fuel prices and ongoing cost management efforts are reflected in the 16 per cent improvement in terms of ASKM over the last two years. We have however seen a difficult pricing and operating environment."

### The Greek Government and Athens International Airport approached Emirates some time ago to consider serving the route between Athens and New York

ist today and has not existed since 2012. The airline will operate a wide-body Boeing 777-300ER powered by General Electric GE90 engines

ark would be commercially and operationally feasible. We are pleased to be able to help meet a strong consumer need long neglected by other

# Kwality

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DINE IN, DELIVERY AND CATERING



# All Philippine Airlines Middle East Flights to operate non-stop to Manila

Flag carrier Philippine Airlines will mark a new and exciting milestone in its Middle East operations on March 26 this year.

On that much-anticipated date, PAL will have an 'all non-stop service' between seven points in the Middle East and Manila.

"The non-stop service across all these routes will give us a better product to offer our primary market which comprises close to 800,000 Filipino contract workers. Aside from the convenience of this direct service, our kababayans (countrymen) will feel right at home on each and every PAL flight. What we offer our passengers is the Heart of the Filipino, marked by warmth, care and hospitality. 'Buong pusong alaga' (wholehearted care) is what makes Philippine Airlines a cut above the rest", said PAL President and COO Jaime J. Bautista.

With all flights devoted solely to passengers from origin to destination, this gives the Middle East – Philippine route an increased capacity of 47%.

The operating aircraft for the routes will be the 414 - seater Airbus A330 with economy and premium economy. The shift to the bi-class A330, with full-flat beds on business class, will take place on June 15 for Dubai, July 15 for Abu Dhabi and Doha, August 15 for Riyadh, and September 15 for Kuwait and Jeddah.

The shift to bi-class service gives our passengers the flexibility to choose between regular economy, premium economy and business class service. Regardless of which class of service you choose, PAL will deliver its distinct brand of Filipino service", Bautista added.

Passengers will also have the option to enjoy wireless In-flight Entertainment by simply downloading the myPAL Player app for free in order to stream a wide selection of movies, TV shows and music from their personal laptop, tablet or smartphone. The aircraft's myPALWi-fi allows one to surf, browse and keep in touch with loved ones and friends while on board the flight. An added treat is 30 minutes free Wi-fi. Ipads will also be offered.

Full-service inflight offerings include a selection of Asian, Continental and Halal meals and a wide selection of beverages. Each passenger is entitled to free baggage allowance of two pieces, weighing not more than 23kilos each.

With the non-stop operations to Manila, travelers from the Middle East will now have a direct gateway to the Philippines and international destinations PAL flies to.



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Fly non-stop from Riyadh, Dammam, Abu Dhabi and Dubai to Manila, Philippines. Plus, enjoy more non-stop flights from Jeddah, Doha and Kuwait starting March 26, 2017.\*

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\*Jeddah/Kuwait - Manila (via Dubai) and Doha-Manila (via Abu Dhabi) flights to operate until March 25, 2017.

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# Everyone's cup of tea: Sharjah has something in store for all

The emirate offers an authentic Arabian and cultural experience in close proximity to sandy beaches and boasts a wide selection of outdoor adventures, that cater to all the members of a family

## TT BUREAU

The Emirate of Sharjah has firmly established itself as a year-round tourist destination, attracting families and travellers seeking to truly explore the region and immerse themselves in its traditions, identity, and culture. The emirate offers them an authentic Arabian experience in close proximity to sandy beaches, basking in perpetually warm weather.

A visit to Sharjah is never complete without a stop at Al Majaz Waterfront. Boasting an impressive line-up of exquisite landscaped gardens, cafés, shops, and kiosks that cater to all tastes, the waterfront is home to the imposing musical fountain. Stretching as long as 200 metres in width, and thrusting water as high up as 100 metres, the Sharjah

Fountain is truly a sight to behold. In addition to that, the waterfront features an open-air Roman-style amphitheatre — the first of its kind in the region. Located on Khalid Lagoon's Al Majaz Island — and covering a surface area of 7,238 square metres — the semi-circular theatre includes several terraced seating areas that can accommodate up to 4,500 spectators.

Travellers don't need to wander too far from Al Majaz to find themselves facing Al Qasba waterfront. Centrally located within the city of Sharjah, Al Qasba is easily accessible from anywhere in the city, and offers a range of trendy restaurants and cafés lining up its banks and serving cuisines from around the world. Towering over the waterfront and dominating the skyline, the Eye of the Emirates Wheel stands 60 metres tall. From its highest point, visitors can en-

joy the breath-taking views of the city's landmarks, as well as the Gulf coast stretching all the way to Dubai. Al Qasba reiterates Sharjah's cultural inclinations, offering events that combine culture with entertainment and continuously striving to develop leisure activities that highlight the Arabic and Islamic heritage of the emirate.

Meanwhile, the recently completed Al Noor Island, engulfed in the emirate's famed Khalid Lagoon, is accessible via a pedestrian bridge. The most prominent structures on the island were designed to invoke nature — butterflies, in particular. The island features a Literature Pavilion, including an open seating area for writers and book lovers, an egg-shaped OVO Art Sculpture — that has been displayed in major cities around the world — and a Butterfly House (one of the des-

tinuation's main attractions), which harbours as many as 500 exotic butterflies brought from Far East Asian countries.

The Heart of Sharjah, moreover, is a microcosm of the blend of history and progress that characterises the emirate. Sharjah Al Hisn Museum — the crown jewel of the Heart of Sharjah — occupies a historic fort that once served as the seat of the emirate's Government, the residence of the Al Qasimi ruling family, and a jail. A two-storey traditional rock, coral, and adobe fortification built in 1823 in the centre of the city, the structure now houses a collection of artefacts, photographs, and heritage items that cast an enchanting image of past centuries.

Other heritage offerings in the Heart of Sharjah include the Sharjah Heritage Museum; Traditional

Games House, which aims to bring traditional folk games back to life; and the Emirates Handcraft Centre, which showcases how many tasks were handled in bygone days — most notably, the production of "dibs"; among others. Overlooking the Sharjah Creek, the Heart of Sharjah is also home to four winding souks: Souk Al Arsa, Souk Al Shanasiyah, Souk Saqr, and the Old Souk. With its coral-brick walls, wooden doors, and hanging lanterns, Souk Al Arsa — believed by many to be the oldest in the UAE — conjures up a quintessentially Arabesque ambiance, complete with shopkeepers serving suleimani (a sweet and spicy tea) to their patrons as they narrate their family's history with their craft. Souk Al Shanasiyah, meanwhile, was built on the ruins of a much older souk that were discovered following excavations in the area between Al Hisn



Al Arsa Souk



**The Heart of Sharjah, moreover, is a microcosm of the blend of history and progress than characterises the emirate.**



Noor Mosque



Central Souq

Fort and the Corniche. The souk gets its name from the merchants hailing from the state of Shanas in Oman who used to populate the market. The 25-year-old Old Souk, on the other hand, is home to Al Daleel Mosque — the oldest mosque in the city — as well as the Sharjah Art Museum.

Sharjah is a family destination par excellence; all members of the family are guaranteed to find something to their liking in the emirate, from dazzling shows and carnivals to enchanting parks and stunning desert landscapes, as well as an array of cultural and edutainment locations. Visitors can relax with their families in any of the nearly 55 parks, which offer the latest facilities and amenities. The emirate's latest destination for a family day out is the Al Montazah Park, a 126,000-square-metre theme park featuring eight thrilling rides. For adults and children seeking an extra bit of adventure, the park offers Al Montazah Adventures, which consists of a number of gladiator-inspired obstacle courses divided into varying difficulty levels.

A shoppers' paradise, the emirate is home to a host of modern malls, many of which include massive entertainment centres for children: Sahara Centre, for example, houses an indoor family entertainment park — Adventureland — complete with an Aztec- and Mayan-inspired interior, as well as electronic games and rides, including an indoor roller coaster. Sharjah Mega Mall, meanwhile, is home to Antic's Land, a

"distinctively themed" family entertainment centre, comprising three mystical lands with unique rides, edutainment activities, a roller coaster, a monorail, 3D cinema and haunted house, and the latest video games.

Additionally, and perhaps most famously, the Emirate of Sharjah has long been a magnet for culture enthusiasts seeking a deeper understanding of the civilisation of the Arab region, both traditional and contemporary — and for good reason. From its fairs and festivals to its museums and universities, Sharjah truly holds its own as a cultural capital in the region.

The traditional Arabian and Islamic architecture that characterises much of Sharjah's landmarks bear faithful witness to the emirate's dedication to preserve its culture. To shed light, quite literally, on that aspect, the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority organises the now-world-famous yearly Sharjah Light Festival, whereby landmarks across Sharjah bear three-dimensional light displays for nine days each February.

Away from architecture, Sharjah pays particular attention to art and literature, among other cultural activities. The emirate has been organising the Sharjah International Book Fair (SIBF) every November since 1982. The 10-day fair regularly attracts upwards of one million attendees every year (SIBF attracted 1.2 million visitors and 1,547 exhibitors from 64 countries in 2015). The American University of Sharjah (AUS), meanwhile, boasts an 11,000-square-metre library housing a staggering collection of 125,000 English-language books, as well as literature in other languages — chiefly Arabic.

As for art, the Sharjah Art Museum presents itself as a three-storey exhibition space showing

artworks and collections covering various mediums and techniques. The museum welcomes patrons every day from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm (4:00 pm to 8:00 pm on Fridays) free of charge. Throughout the year, the museum houses several temporary exhibitions and art events. The Museum's Art Library, meanwhile, is home to over 4,000 titles in Arabic, English, and other languages, along with visual and audio materials.

The emirate has also established a dedicated Calligraphy Museum. In over a decade of operation, the Sharjah Calligraphy Museum has managed to collect over 300 works adorning canvas, wood, paper, and ceramics. The assortment includes historic paintings in the Kufic font and, most notably, the Al Hulia Al Sharifa by Iraqi calligrapher Ziad Al Muhandis (measuring 280x300cm and considered the largest in the Islamic world).

For the outdoorsy and adventurous, the emirate offers water sports, snorkelling, and diving activities on its east coast, where travellers have the option to either camp on the beach or stay in any of the hotels that line the coast. The emirate also offers plenty of attractions for nature lovers and environmental enthusiasts. Sharjah boasts a rich and diverse ecosystem; protected areas form 4.6 per cent of the area of the emirate and are divided into eight conservation centres — namely, Jazirat Sir Bo Naair, Alqurm Wa Lehfaiah, Wasit Nature Reserve, Ed Dhelaimah, Wadil Helo, Mleiha Protected Area, Elebriddi, and Lemdynah.

From family outings and urban tours to cultural excursions and outdoor expeditions, Sharjah doesn't play favourites. The emirate has something on offer for all visitors who make the journey to its golden dunes, azure beaches, and glittering skyscrapers. 🌅



Al Casba

# Providing solutions for corporate travellers

Amadeus, as a leading travel commerce platform in the region, is on a rapid plan of dispersing all relevant information to their stakeholders. **Jauhar Abdul Gafoor**, Director Sales - Abu Dhabi, Al Ain & Oman at Amadeus Gulf, shares the latest offerings.



## Q Could you share the market dynamics for Abu Dhabi and Oman?

Abu Dhabi and Oman are key travel markets in terms of outbound and inbound traffic, especially as the tourism sector is charged with supporting the evolution of Abu Dhabi and Muscat into world-class destinations — part of the government initiative. For this reason, more and more corporations are realising the benefit of implementing the latest technologies in their infrastructure in order to better manage their travel spend. A lot of traditional and accustomed ways of handling travel are becoming obsolete. As a result of centralisation and mergers of large corporations, more automation and optimisation of the business processes have been implemented, which eventually will help the travel market to evolve and become more sophisticated.

## Q How has Amadeus fared in Abu Dhabi and Oman markets and what are the challenges faced and results?

Amadeus continues to invest in R&D and make innovations in the travel market. Between 2004 and 2015, Amadeus has invested €4.1 billion in R&D and has consistently been named an R&D investment leader by the European



Jauhar Abdul Gafoor, Director Sales - Abu Dhabi, Al Ain & Oman at Amadeus Gulf LLC

**As we cater for majority of the travel business worldwide, including the Middle East which estimated online travel market to be double in coming years rising from \$18 billion to \$35 billion (source: Phocuswright Study). As Amadeus, we are better positioned to address the digital transformation that we face now in this region**

deus Selling Platform. We have launched our new cloud-based Amadeus Selling Platform Connect last year and migrated ma-

10 Middle East people shopping for goods and services on the Internet. 60 per cent of smartphone users purchased some-

## Q What will be different this year in terms of new projects to focus on Abu Dhabi and Oman markets?

A new self-booking tool Amadeus Corporate Travel & Expense management will be launched in the market, so we will rapidly migrate our existing customers into the new platform by end of this year. We have foreseen many corporations looking to implement travel management systems, so we expect to have many new projects as well with this upcoming tool.

## What's trending

- UAE accounts for five in 10 Middle East people shopping for goods and services on the Internet
- 60 per cent of smartphone users purchased something with their smartphones in the past 12 months
- Amadeus launched its new cloud-based Amadeus Selling Platform Connect last year and migrated majority of users to this new platform and is looking forward to migrate the rest of the markets by the end of 2017
- To educate agents on the importance of going digital, Amadeus recently organised 'Fly by Digital'

hours). We also have out of office support available for our subscribed customers.

Apart from that, we also have dedicated product specialists working closely with customers to drive their business success.

## Q Do you conduct any workshops/training for new agents?

We conduct product workshops every quarter along with technology shows and keynote events. We host educational tours for our customers to our headquarter (Madrid), development centre (France) and to our data centre (Germany) every year, as well as regular trainings scheduled for the end-users round the year. Apart from that we also conduct ad-hoc trainings for selected customers or for the market for specific products and solutions.

## Q Could you share the plans for 2017 for the agents and what they can look forward to?

This year we have key projects in pipeline such as:

- ❖ Launching the new corporate tool known as 'Amadeus Online Corporate Traveller' for Abu Dhabi and Oman by mid of this year.
- ❖ Ongoing Migration of customers to our new Amadeus Selling Platform connect – which gives more freedom.
- ❖ Educating the market on the importance of online and helping agencies to grow their online presence.
- ❖ Launching our new state-of-the-art mobile App by second quarter of this year. 📱

Union. As we cater for majority of the travel business worldwide, including the Middle East which estimated online travel market to be double in coming years rising from \$18 billion to \$35 billion (source: Phocuswright Study). As Amadeus, we are better positioned to address the digital transformation that we face now in this region.

## Q What are the latest offerings for customers in 2017 from Amadeus?

Amadeus has large number of travel provider's bookings through booking tool known as Ama-

deus Selling Platform. We have launched our new cloud-based Amadeus Selling Platform Connect last year and migrated majority of users to this new platform and looking forward to migrate the rest of the markets by the end of 2017. The new tool gives immense flexibility for the users such as mobility, possibility of customisation and rich contents.

## Q Please share your opinion about the online trend in your market. How does Amadeus contribute?

Online business in the UAE market has been growing rapidly. According to the survey by Go Gulf; UAE accounts for five in

thing with their smartphones in the past 12 months.

Such figures are very promising and as Amadeus we are constantly looking at innovative ways to help travel providers to take the lead and succeed online. We deliver solutions such as Amadeus e-power suite for creating online presence requiring minimal efforts from travel providers. Similarly we have Amadeus Mobile Traveler which allow agencies to brand their own booking App for their customers.

To educate agents on the importance of going digital, we have successfully organised an event in Dubai last year called 'Fly by Digital'. This was a unique event where we invited industry experts to showcase the latest online trends and their experiences in the market.

## Q How does Amadeus support travel agents in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain and Oman?

We have centralised call center in Abu Dhabi which operates from 8 am till 10 pm (extended

**We deliver solutions such as Amadeus e-power suite for creating online presence requiring minimal efforts from travel providers. Similarly we have Amadeus Mobile Traveler which allow agencies to brand their own booking App for their customers. A new self-booking tool Amadeus Corporate Travel & Expense management will be launched in the market, so we will rapidly migrate our existing customers into the new platform by end of this year.**



# Global hotel industry CEOs at AHIC 2017

Global leaders from some of the world's largest hotel chains will take to the stage at the Arabian Hotel Investment Conference 2017 (AHIC) at Madinat Jumeirah in Dubai from April 25-27, in a series of CEO keynote sessions to offer an international perspective on the dynamic Middle East hospitality industry.

**TT BUREAU**

The annual knowledge and networking platform for the hotel investment community is set to welcome **Chris Nassetta**, President and CEO, Hilton; **Sébastien Bazin**, Chairman and CEO, AccorHotels; and **Pierre-Frédéric Roulot**, CEO, Louvre Hotels Group, as it takes on a distinctly international theme for its 13<sup>th</sup> edition.

Speaking ahead of AHIC, **Jonathan Worsley**, Chairman of Bench Events and Founder of AHIC, said: "As the Middle East plays an increasingly important role in the international hospitality industry for owners and operators alike, it seemed only right to bring a global perspective to AHIC. We are delighted to welcome our



**Jonathan Worsley**  
Chairman  
Bench Events and Founder of AHIC

**As the Middle East plays an important role in the international hospitality industry, it seemed only right to bring a global perspective to AHIC**

keynote speakers to the conference and look forward to hearing their take on the current state of the hospitality industry and their plans to adapt to an ever-evolving marketplace."

The AHIC conference programme will open on April 26 with a one-to-one interview with Nassetta live on stage hosted by Richard Dean, Presenter of The Business Breakfast on Dubai Eye.

The opening keynote will be followed by a panel session entitled Global Catalysts For Change, featuring **Stefan Leser**, Group Chief Executive Officer, Jumeirah Group; **Olivier Harnisch**, Chief Executive Officer, Emaar Hospitality Group; **Steven Daines**, COO New Busi-


nesses and CEO HotelServices Africa and Middle East AccorHotels; and **Jean-Gabriel Pérès**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Kerzner International.

This session will tackle the impact of the ongoing digital revo-

lution, the emergence of the Internet of Things (IoT), the advent of the sharing economy and the changing face of the consumer on today's hotel businesses. The speakers will share their insights, learnings and predictions on these so-called disruptors.

On April 27, Roulot, CEO of Louvre Hotels Group, which is owned by Shanghai-based Jin Jiang International Hotels (Group) Co., will present a keynote session on the growing influence of the East on the international hotel industry.

AHIC 2017 will close with a much-anticipated keynote interview with Bazin, Chairman and CEO, AccorHotels, live from Paris via video conference. In this session, Bazin promises to reveal insights behind the diversification of AccorHotels and his outlook for the future.



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# Business traveller trends 2017

Mobile payments and travel assistance, location-based services and business travel specific insurance programs are all part of the trends influencing business travel in 2017. Tune Protect and Regency Travels of Qatar share an insight on the latest business traveller trends for the year.

## TT BUREAU

The outlook for business travel in 2017 forecast by Business Travel Show UK showed that the number of business travel buyers with big budgets was on the rise for the first time in four years, with 32 per cent of the buyers

riers (LCCs) and mid-range and budget hotels.

"The only difference is that business travellers are now looking for a full-service experience from LCCs, including mobile alerts and a higher level of duty of care", says **N.M. Shafiq**, Gen-

**The only difference is that business travellers are now looking for a full-service experience from LCCs, including mobile alerts and a higher level of duty of care.**

**N.M. Shafiq**  
General Manager, Doha-based Regency Travels

having more money to spend in 2017 compared to the 29 per cent in 2016. It also predicted an increase in airline and accommodation budgets while emphasizing that cutting costs was still a concern, prompting the popularity and preference for low cost car-

eral Manager, Doha-based Regency Travels.

These trends have been gaining ground since 2016, as has the trend for customisation and all things mobile — to woo the business traveller. "We are seeing a contin-



**N.M. Shafiq**  
General Manager  
Doha-based Regency Travels

ued increase in demand for free services for the price the business travellers are paying. For instance, they are looking to stay in hotels that offer free Wi-Fi and complimentary breakfast and shuttle service to the airport, among other frills. Business travellers are now choosing to combine and customise their business travel trips, with a short break (in the form of a side trip) either before or after their business trips."



**Arijit Munshi**  
General Manager  
Tune Protect EMEA

As far as trends go, the increased use of mobile platforms is changing the ways in which people travel for business. Mobile-based transactions and services are continuing to play a key role in the travel sector, allowing travellers to have more control over their experience.

"Mobile payments and location-based services will soon be a priority among airlines, airports and hotels, as will mobile-based travel assistance. Business travellers are also looking at more experiential travel, hence VR (virtual reality) and AR (augmented reality) will become important selling tools. As these technologies become more mainstream, travellers will be able to go 'inside' an aircraft cabin and choose their seat, or walk around a hotel room or downtown neighborhood, encouraging them to make a decision and book the seat or room of their choice," says Shafiq.

More corporates are also opting for a travel policy which is more beneficial to their employees, factoring in travel safety with more specific coverage and other allowances. In fact, a survey commissioned by the Business Travel Show, which was published in February, showed that more than three quarters of business travel buyers have reviewed their traveller risk strategies to ensure they provide greater duty of care.

Awareness is a key factor when it comes to travel risk management. It is equally important in understanding the kind of insurance that a business traveller has to have, to avoid scenarios

where they are left without any support when they travel.

**Arijit Munshi**, General Manager, Tune Protect EMEA, an online facilitator of travel insurance that has partnership with the Qatar Insurance Company (QIC) in Qatar, UAE, Oman, Kuwait & similar partnerships with local insurance companies in other countries too, says, "General medical insurance policies for employees, which are negotiated by the company would always have extensive medical cover, until and unless the company has an in-depth & detailed recorded understanding of the travel issues that their employees could face or have encountered either before or during or after his/her business trips. Majority of companies would not necessarily prompt the insurance company to include travel

Before, During & After, program, apart from medical as well as emergency evacuation for the business travellers is the loss of travel documents, travel delays, cancellation/travel curtailment as well as visa refusal fees. Additional benefits such as Baggage Benefits covers include baggage delay, baggage damage or loss by a common carrier are extremely important to a business traveller today. The benefits range from anywhere between \$100 up to \$5000 per insured traveller."

Tune Protect, online facilitator of Travel Insurance in partnership with QIC in the four GCC countries and similar partnerships in other countries in the region, including India, have launched specific to frequent or business travelers called the Travel Easy, program. Travel

**General medical insurance policies for employees, which are negotiated by the company would always have extensive medical cover, until and unless the company has an in-depth & detailed recorded understanding of the travel issues that their employees could face or have encountered either before or during or after his/her business trips.**

**Arijit Munshi**  
General Manager, Tune Protect EMEA

specific coverage and it's here that we step in with our expertise to facilitate peace of mind for the traveller.

"At Tune Protect, we facilitate based on our global expertise on travel through our various local insurance partners to include Travel Inconvenience benefits within the generic products related to travel insurance. Within the Travel Assurance,

Easy covers flight delays, baggage loss, baggage damage as well as baggage delays. This travel cover is per trip (either one-way as well as return coverage is available), with variations to the benefits from the Platinum Plan being offered with the highest benefits to Silver Plan at the other end of the spectrum, with coverage starting at \$300 up to \$800 per traveller.



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# Ihlah.com by Q2 2017

The first dual IATA NDC certified travel technology provider unveiled that it will be launching [ihlah.com](http://ihlah.com) – MEA’s first travel search engine, by Q2 of 2017.



Travel search website [ihlah.com](http://ihlah.com) is accompanied by mobile apps for travellers living in Middle East & Africa region. [Ihlah.com](http://ihlah.com) or [arihlah.com](http://arihlah.com) allows travellers to source the best possible flight and hotel deals from various airlines and online travel agencies around the web in one streamlined, convenient and easy-to-use search engine. Users will be able to search for flights and hotels according to their preference, compare prices and various offers and once selected [ihlah.com](http://ihlah.com) will take them directly to the source to make the booking.

“Ihlah.com is Africa & Middle East’s region’s first travel search site targeting a market of 482 million Internet users in the region and 232 million passengers who travelled by air. We help travellers with a comprehensive brows-



Praveen Kumar  
Chief Technology Officer  
TPCConnects

**Ihlah.com is Africa & Middle East’s region’s first travel search site targeting a market of 482 million Internet users in the region and 232 million passengers who travelled by air**

ing experience to compare flight and hotel options and pricing from various suppliers while keeping shoppers

engaged in a single tab. [Ihlah.com](http://Ihlah.com) presents an unbiased comparison of all travel products and prices offered in the marketplace by merchants both local and global and enables shoppers to quickly find the best deal and place to book, whether from airline, hotel direct or with a third party aggregator website. [Ihlah.com](http://Ihlah.com) harnesses powerful yet simple to use technology based on IATA’s New Distribution Capability (NDC) that automates the process of searching and comparing results from hundreds of airline, hotel and online travel agency websites,” said **Praveen Kumar**, Chief Technology Officer, TPCConnects. For registered users, to search and compare travel products on [ihlah.com](http://ihlah.com) will be offered as free of cost, while it works on a Cost Per Acquisition and/or Cost Per Click business model with airlines, hotels and online travel agencies. 📱

# Sabre inks deal with Gulf Air

Sabre Corporation has signed a new agreement with Gulf Air to provide an expanded portfolio of core passenger services technology.



For the past two decades, Gulf Air has been using SabreSonic core reservations and departure control systems to conduct the most critical services ranging from sales of tickets to checking in passengers on flights.

“It is clearly evident that Gulf Air is enjoying much greater success and has a clear path for continued growth over the coming years,” said **Dino Gelmetti**, Vice President - Airline Solutions EMEA, Sabre. “Sabre is proud to have played an integral role in its turn-around strategy by providing robust, reliable and flexible technology that forms an essential foundation for streamlining its operations, reducing costs and increasing revenue. We look forward to continuing to support

Gulf Air in what continues to be an important and exciting period of change and growth.”

Under this new agreement, Sabre will continue providing the latest develop-

ments and trends through its technology solutions to Gulf Air, giving the airline access to an expanded portfolio of progressive technologies including passenger re-accommodation, mobile concierge services, ancillary inventory and real time revenue integrity software.



ments and trends through its technology solutions to Gulf Air, giving the airline access to an expanded portfolio of progressive technologies including passenger re-accommodation, mobile concierge services, ancillary inventory and real time revenue integrity software.

convenient and comfortable for Gulf Air passengers,” said **Ahmed Janahi**, Gulf Air Chief Commercial Officer. “We are pleased to utilise an expanded range of solutions provided by Sabre, geared towards increasing passenger satisfaction and giving them greater control over their travel.” 📱



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Ras Al Khaimah, UAE's northern-most emirate, offers visitors an authentic Arabian experience; from its golden beaches, lush mangroves and terracotta deserts, to the towering Hajar Mountains. In 2016, the emirate received 11% more visitors than the previous year, and reported a continued trend of increased hotel occupancy rates and length of stay.

# Ras Al Khaimah

## The next big destination

**TT BUREAU**

Along with boundless natural attractions and activities, Ras Al Khaimah boasts a number of ancient archaeological sites, giving visitors a fascinating insight into rich culture that still runs through the very heart of the local population.

"The continued growth in visitor numbers to Ras Al Khaimah reflects the strategic initiatives and promotional activities undertaken by the authority in domestic and international source markets during 2016. As the destination's diverse tourism offering continues to mature, the last 12 months saw a series of significant developments including the opening of Jebel Jais Via Ferrata and the emirate hosting a number of international sporting events and conferences. Collectively, our achievements stimulated increased visitor numbers from both established source markets and emerging ones," said **Haitham Mattar**, CEO, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority.

Year-on-year, the UAE continues to remain the most significant source market in

terms of visitor numbers, accounting for 41.2 per cent of total visitors to Ras Al Khaimah last year. Internationally, Ras Al Khaimah's four largest source markets each recorded double digit year-on-year growth in 2016, with German visitors up 24.6 per cent last year and now contributing

incredible sunsets on post-card beaches, enjoy world class resorts that welcome tourists with relaxed customs and warm hospitality, as well as stunning nature with terracotta deserts and high mountains making it a unique destination with year-round sunshine.



one in 10 of all visitors to the emirate. The UK, Russia and India also reported similar visitor increases of 35 per cent, 19.5 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively.

**Relaxing winter sun:** Only 45 minutes from Dubai airport, Ras Al Khaimah offers pristine beaches, clear sea, nature and a truly relaxed atmosphere away from the hustle and bustle of city life. Here you can see

**Water activities:** A perfect activity for those who wish to either relax or enjoy a wide range of water sports, Ras Al Khaimah's beaches offer an extraordinary experience amongst the stunning stretches of white sand – spanning 64 km of pristine coastline. The many upscale hotels available in Ras Al Khaimah also offer private beaches; some with natural lagoons for a special retreat.

For adventure seekers keen to take to the water, Ras Al Khaimah offers a great setting for scuba diving, sailing, water skiing, jet skiing, parasailing and fishing just to name a few. Many of the activities are available via the emirate's hotels and resorts, and span from beginner to expert level.

**Active holidays for the whole family:** Live the ultimate desert experience! Enjoy a wide range of traditional Arabic activities with dune bashing, belly dancers, Arabic Tanoura, camel riding as well as Arabic barbecue. Desert camps also provide facilities to experience an overnight stay for those who wish to camp under the stars. If you enjoy mountains and cycling, spend a day mountain biking on the UAE's highest mountain, Jebel Jais, and take part in a guided hike with three adrenaline filled ziplines with the Via Ferrata experience ([www.jebeljais.ae](http://www.jebeljais.ae)).

Whether you're young or young at heart, there's plenty for families to do in Ras Al Khaimah. The beaches and hotels offer a variety of activities as well as excellent kid clubs. The desert and moun-



“The continued growth in visitor numbers to Ras Al Khaimah reflects the strategic initiatives and promotional activities undertaken by the authority in domestic and international source markets during 2016.”

**Haitham Mattar**  
CEO

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority

tains are ideal for safaris, nature trails, riding horses and camels and experiencing a falcon show.

From traditional cuisine to the finest restaurants you will be spoilt for choice in Ras Al Khaimah. Whether you are looking for an elegant dinner in a five-star hotel or a casual lunch along the Corniche, there is something for every taste and budget.

**Kids go free this summer:** Ras Al Khaimah

Tourism Development Authority is rolling out a campaign in all of its key source markets aimed at driving even more visitors during the summer months – June to August. Tour operators and hotels are partnering to create attractive packages where kids under 12 will get to stay and enjoy their holiday free. With so many activities for children at the resorts and hotels, this is one emirate that is going to be in demand for summer holiday bookings. 🌞





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**Ras Al Khaimah**  
BEYOND A JOURNEY  
[www.rasalkhaimah.ae](http://www.rasalkhaimah.ae)

The two Rotana Resorts located in Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah witnessed an increased number of foreign visitors from Europe and East Europe apart from the staycations by local residents and expats during the past year. **Mrad El Khoury**, Cluster General Manager, Rotana Fujairah and Cove Rotana Ras Al Khaimah, shares some insights on the future.



## Europe top market for RAK and Fujairah

 SHEHARA RIZLY

The two properties Cove Rotana and Rotana Fujairah witnessed business results and performance way above expectation due to the market coverage and targeted marketing and promotion strategies and guests need for getting out of the city's crowd and away from their busy schedules. When compared to 2015 it was better mainly because the European and East European markets productivity increased in the northern emirates so both properties became beneficiaries. Taking into consideration as well the increase of the local market increase of demands for the weekends, public holidays and festive period.

According to El Khoury, in order to maintain their position as leaders they always search for new feeder markets and increase their presence in the existing markets where they have strong partnerships. The two properties have their own unique selling points. For instance, Cove Rotana RAK is located a short distance from both RAK airport and Dubai airport within the proximity of RAK city and shopping area and away from the traffic and hustle and bustle of the city. It is rich in the green landscaping, two infinity pools, and plunge private pools in the 2 and 3 bedroom villas. The resort structure is unique in the UAE — a 600-metre beach with variety of activities and F&B outlets. It offers team building activities, has the only Mediterranean restaurant in RAK.

Fujairah has its own unique points — a very relaxing and family friendly hotel with an impressive award-winning Zen; the SPA with 11 treatment rooms for relaxation. In addition the variety of water sports activities, motorised and non-motorised, a dedicated animation team, variety of fantastic sites for divers and fisherman with colonial style international F&B flair that suit all tastes and a huge kids club with fun activities.

Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah are destinations which receive both expats and locals apart from the foreign visitors. We asked Mrad the strategies lined up for this year to lure more travellers to both properties. "We are focusing to meet guest needs and expecta-

tions by introducing week-days and weekend packages, festivity packages, summer packages including many other benefits that suit several tastes and budgets. Our tailor-made packages and activities suits most of our local and international markets demands and needs. Rotana in general

The new search engines and the traditional travel agents are still on a par when it comes to bookings. In these two properties there is a very good mix of bookings made online and offline too. Their regular guests book direct with the hotel or through online search engines whereas international

whether it is a hotel or a resort, Mrad says: "Technology is becoming a necessity and very useful especially as it is rapidly developing. The high-tech and new ways of communication keep you in direct communication and reach your client whenever you want and wherever the client is located. It keeps him



"Our tailor-made packages and activities suits most of our local and international markets demands and needs. Rotana in general have created the Rotana Escapes that have 5 to 6 different packages including night stays and food and beverage with activities in the hotels or the city itself, where guests can explore the culture of the city and experience the real meaning of hospitality."

**Mrad El Khoury**

Cluster General Manager, Rotana Fujairah and Cove Rotana, Ras Al Khaimah

have created the Rotana Escapes that have 5 to 6 different packages including night stays and food and beverage with activities in the hotels or the city itself, where guests can explore the culture of the city and experience the real meaning of hospitality," he says.

These packages have witnessed an increase in the number of guests at the properties managed by the Rotana group. For both Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah, local expats or residents from other emirates will spend between one or two nights during the weekend, whereas international guests will stay between 5 and 7 nights with the corporate meeting and incentives between 2 and 3 nights.

travellers still book through an agent because they book a package including ticket, room, excursions, city tours, etc.

Their continued participation in travel trade international events such as ITB, WTM and MTT Moscow due to the importance of these countries and the volume they produce into the UAE along with ATM here in Dubai ensures that they keep their branding business in full swing around the world. In terms of expansion for 2017, Cove is witnessing a new extension which includes a water park for family entertainment and leisure to be opened this year around the second quarter.

Technology plays a pivotal role in hospitality

updated with all new promotions, updates, and activities, packages the social media channels create a real interaction with the guest and give him the exact look and feel of the place. In both resorts, we are very active online and the Rotana mobile App is a friendly user which ease your bookings and stays in any of the Rotana properties in the MENA region."

### Rotana USP

- » Cove Rotana RAK is located a short distance from both RAK airport and Dubai airport
- » Cove Rotana will soon have a water park for family entertainment and leisure to be opened this year around the second quarter



# AVIAREPS represents Bahrain

AVIAREPS has been appointed as market representative for the Bahrain Tourism & Exhibitions Authority in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and China.



AVIAREPS will be responsible for proactively coordinating and developing the authority's media relations, press events and familiarisation trips, and the organisation of roadshows and seminars in Central Europe and China based on Bahrain's tourism offering. These activities will also include a major presentation to be conducted at ITB Berlin, the world's leading travel trade show in March 2017.

**Thomas Drechsler**, Chief Operating Officer - Tourism, AVIAREPS, says: "Our media partners will be pleasantly surprised with the unique and aspirational stories the Kingdom of Bahrain has to tell. Bahrain is a small country packed with many wonders of nature and a unique culture to share with travellers. At the same time, Bahrain boasts an



Thomas Drechsler  
Chief Operating Officer - Tourism  
AVIAREPS



Yousef AlKhan  
Director of Marketing and Tourism  
Promotion, BTEA

impressively modern tourism infrastructure. We are very excited and honoured about our appointment, and looking forward to representing Bahrain's interests in both German-speaking Europe and China."

**Yousef AlKhan**, Director of Marketing and Tourism promotion, BTEA, added, "BTEA took a huge step forward by introducing its new brand 'Ours. Yours. Bahrain' at the World Travel Market in

London in November 2016. We are now showcasing our new brand outside of the region. 'Ours. Yours. Bahrain' embraces the generosity and hospitality of our people, which visitors will surely feel when they come to Bahrain. Through Brand Bahrain, we are hoping to place Bahrain on the world map by not only showcasing its authentic culture and heritage but also the harmonious blend of an old and modern, business-friendly world."

# Expansion for Sharjah Airport

The Government has approved \$400 million for the expansion of Sharjah International Airport, according to MEED (Middle East Economic Digest).



According to the airline CEO, the expansion project is expected to begin this summer and will increase air-

port capacity from 8 to 18 million passengers a year.

International Airport opened a new AED 500 million (\$136 million) airport runway, significantly expanding the airport's aircraft capacity. The new runway allows large and

handled 969,633 passengers, showing a 4 percent increase on January last year. Sharjah International Airport's growth has been



new-generation ICAO Code F aircraft such as the Airbus A380 and Boeings B747-8 Intercontinental and B747-8 freighter. The old runway now serves as a taxiway.

A master plan for the expansion of the airport was submitted by American engineering firm Bechtel in 2013, recommending a new terminal, construction of new roads around the airport, plus additional services such as a new hotel and a shopping mall. In 2014, Sharjah

driven by its strategic location, the success of Sharjah's in-bound tourism industry and the expansion of Sharjah-headquartered Air Arabia. The airport's ideal location, close to Sharjah city, Dubai city and the main highways connecting the country's seven emirates, has made it a convenient hub for both business and leisure travellers.

The airport handled 11 million passengers from January to December, 2016, registering a 10 percent year-on-year increase on 2015. In January 2017, the airport



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# New outbound homes for UAE, GCC

The latest trend from the Middle East is the offerings by various destinations to promote more UAE and GCC visitors to invest on a second home in different destinations. **Stavros Caramondanis**, Chief Executive Officer, Ayia Napa Marina, based in Cyprus, speaks to **TRAVTALK**.

**SHEHARA RIZLY**

**Q**How important is the UAE market to Cyprus in terms of tourism? Any numbers/data that you can share?

Cyprus is a safe haven blessed by beautiful nature, year-round sunshine, modern infrastructure, a high standard of living and a genuine culture of warmth and hospitality, strategically located in the eastern Mediterranean at

recent figures show there has been a 45 per cent increase in visitors from the UAE who are taking advantage of the direct, short-haul flights to this fantastic country.

**Q**Why should citizens/residents of the UAE purchase beach front properties from Cyprus? What are the advantages?

Waterfront living is a reality in the UAE and for those citizens looking for a second



Stavros Caramondanis  
CEO  
Ayia Napa Marina

rupted panoramic views of the Mediterranean paired with comfortable, spacious living space. Combined with a 600 berth full-service marina and boatyard and a collection of elegant retail, waterfront dining and premium lifestyle amenities for residents and visitors, living on the water has never been better. Most importantly, UAE residents can benefit from the existing citizenship and/or residency scheme that Cyprus provides to investors.

In essence, they will be eligible for Cyprus passport which consequently opens the door to all EU benefits, as Cyprus is a full member.

**Q**In selling these properties what is the benefit the government of Cyprus gains in terms of tourism?

With its 190 spacious and deluxe apartments in two iconic, twisting towers, 29 luxury villas, a 600 berth full-service marina and boatyard and a collection of elegant retail, waterfront dining and premium lifestyle amenities, we expect Ayia Napa Marina to have a very positive impact on tourism to the country. Such an infrastructure project will help to attract higher-end quality tourism and put Cyprus on the map as a destination of nautical tourism as well.

**Q**What criteria, eligibility needs to be met to purchase these properties and can they be rent out as vacation destinations? Is it like time sharing basis or please explain.

There are no restrictions in buying property in Cyprus. Furthermore, as we shall operate the Marina and the whole compound for the next 50 years, we shall also offer facility management services.

Obviously, should a purchaser wish for us to handle his/her property then we can rent it out for them and they will enjoy the yields produced.

**Q**What will be the future outcome of this venture?

This development will not only exceed the expectations of our residents and our guests and not only transform the Cyprus skyline but change the way you think about Cyprus.



**There are no restrictions in buying property in Cyprus. Furthermore, as we shall operate the Marina and the whole compound for the next 50 years, we shall also offer facility management services**

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# Travelport-Emirates extend partnership

Travelport and Emirates Airlines have announced the ability to select and pay for seats in advance according to the Emirates Fare Brand, available for the first time to book on Travelport's Travel Commerce Platform.

**T**T BUREAU

The launch of advanced paid seating options for certain economy fares on



Derek Sharp  
Senior Vice President and Managing Director, Air Commerce, Travelport

Travelport continues to promote Emirates' ongoing in-

vestment in inflight customer experience which includes numerous new and innovative products. Previously only available on Emirates' website, the enhancement allows over 68,000 Travelport-connected online and offline travel agencies and travel management companies operating in over 180 countries across the globe an even more personalised and enhanced service to travellers.

**Derek Sharp,** Senior Vice President and Managing Director, Air Commerce,

**Emirates has made some significant investments in its inflight customer experience and it's essential that we are able to fully explain this to travel bookers around the world.**

Travelport, commented: "This is an exciting development in Travelport's longstanding and deep relationship with Emirates. Their decision to launch advanced paid seating through Travelport — in an industry-first move — is testament to how we are able to help Emirates market their unique offerings to the global travel trade and end travellers. Emirates has made some significant investments in its inflight customer experience and it's essential that

we are able to fully explain this to travel bookers around the world."



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The enhancement allows over 68,000 Travelport-connected online and offline travel agencies and travel management companies an even more personalised and enhanced service to travellers

# New interactive website by Qatar Executive

Qatar Executive has enhanced its website to offer its exclusive clientele a VIP service and global expertise throughout their journey, from online enquiry to arriving at their final destination.

**T**T BUREAU

Qatar Executive clients can enjoy the ultimate travel experience beginning with a visit to its newly designed website [www.qatarexec.com.qa](http://www.qatarexec.com.qa) where they can explore the world's most luxurious private jets via 360 degree interactive panoramic photography, discover flight availability, and access VIP online enquiry and charter management services from any mobile device anywhere in the world.

The newly enhanced website reflects Qatar Executive's boundless commitment

**With new interactive tools, mobile optimisation and improved responsiveness our customers will begin their extraordinary experience with Qatar Executive from the moment they visit us online. Tailor-made services ensure that all clients' travel needs are accommodated**

**Ettore Rodaro**  
Vice President, Qatar Executive

to excellence and utilises the latest online technology to provide clients with fast and convenient access to booking information, including real-time worldwide flight availability of return leg charters. Reflecting the refined and elegant style of Qatar Ex-

ecutive, the new website has been designed to provide an intuitive online experience offering clients a virtual tour on board any one of its exceptional 11 aircraft, including the fastest ultra-long-range business jet in the world, the Gulfstream G650ER, which is

one of the most coveted aircraft among the global travelling elite. The Qatar Executive G650ER aircraft can easily fly a group of up to 13 guests non-stop from the Middle East to North America or from destinations in Asia to Africa. It can fly further, faster than any other jet of its kind, and is perfectly suited for those whose travel needs include flights halfway around the globe. The Qatar Executive fleet comprises four Global 5000s, one Global XRS, three Challenger 605s and three brand new Gulfstream

G650ERs, each offering the highest levels of personalised service comfort, privacy and convenience, through flexible and individual travel to any place in the world.



Qatar Executive Vice President **Ettore Rodaro** said, "With Qatar Executive, customers can fly wherever they want, whenever they want, and our new website has been enhanced to provide them with more accessibility to our exclusive and luxurious private jets. With new interactive tools, mobile optimisation and improved re-

sponsiveness our customers will begin their extraordinary experience with Qatar Executive from the moment they visit us online. Private travel is the most comfortable and convenient way to fly and tailor-made services ensure that all clients' travel needs are accommodated."

**Quick Fact**

The Qatar Executive G650ER aircraft can fly a group of up to 13 guests non-stop from ME to North America or from destinations in Asia to Africa



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# Global Village aims at 5.5 mn visitors

The multicultural festival park opened its 21<sup>st</sup> season with a record number of 2.3 million guests during the first two months. This season Global Village promises to take its guests on a journey by ‘discovering a new world every day.’

 SHEHARA RIZLY

Global Village welcomes its guests from November 1, 2016, until April 8, 2017, for over 159 days of fun and amazement. While announcing their plans for the 21<sup>st</sup> season, Global Village’s management announced that they are preparing to welcome their guests after two decades of success, and promised to continue to deliver the best entertainment experiences in the region through an exciting and unique schedule of first-time events on a regional scale.

Ahmad Hussain bin Essa, Chief Executive Officer, Global Village, said: “Global Village is back for its 21<sup>st</sup> season and this year we are keen on providing our guests with an experience that allows them to discover a new world every day. This season

will host more entertainment shows on an international scale that are sure to please our guests.

“With more participation from different countries by the inclusion of new pavilions such as the Far East pavilion representing Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and the Philippines, Global Village hopes to provide its guests with a more diverse cultural experience. Other new pavilions include Algeria, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine pavilions, along with the return of Jordan pavilion. As part of Global Village’s plan to help promote tourism in Dubai, Global Village has announced partnerships with international and local travel and tourism agencies for its 21<sup>st</sup> season. Global Village has also launched a digital platform where the travel agencies can purchase special packs that offer exclusive



“With more participation from different countries by the inclusion of new pavilions such as the Far East pavilion representing Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and the Philippines, Global Village hopes to provide its guests with a more diverse cultural experience.”

**Ahmad Hussain bin Essa**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Global Village

deals for travellers at cheaper prices. Global Village has signed with over 42 agencies.”

Some of the key partnerships include agencies such as: Cox & Kings, North Tours, and Royal Arabian Tours. “We will be working very closely with Dubai’s tourism authorities and participating in international expos, roadshows

and promotional campaigns that promote Dubai across the world with a focus on new markets such as India and China,” he said.

He further stated that this time they were ensuring that the guest experience is improved by keeping a close watch on the touch points which starts from the time a

person decides to enter Global Village. From the entrance up to the exit key touch point areas are mapped where the happiness meter during the past two months have gone up to 9 out of 10 and the average stay has increased by 20 per cent to six hours. Implementation of Smart solutions with smart gates, the enhanced social media portal have cre-

ated quite a good influx of tourists and residents alike. The RTA has allocated special transport services to and from Global Village which makes it easier for the visitors.

Essa explained that these developments are part of Global Village’s strategic development plan to keep up with the future vision of Dubai, which aims towards increasing the number of tourists visiting the city. Global Village will focus its offerings on family tourism, which is an essential aspect to Dubai tourism. He also pointed out that Global Village is considered to be one of the main tourist attractions of Dubai and the region as a whole. Over two decades, Global Village has managed to position itself as a unique tourist destination, a shopping and entertainment outlet for visitors and travellers, characterised by cultural diversity.

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# Sharjah sparks at Annual Light Festival

The seventh annual Sharjah Light Festival kicked off at the University City Hall in Sharjah. The 10-day annual festival, organised by Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority, covered 14 locations across the emirate.



## Registration for WTM Latin America 2017 & 47th Braztoa Business Event is now open

Registration for the fifth edition of WTM Latin America, the main global event in the travel industry in Latin America, is now open. The event will be held from 4 - 6 April in Expo Center Norte in São Paulo, jointly with the 47th Braztoa Business Event.

This business-to-business event, which is entirely for networking and business generation, will welcome the main tour operators, travel agents, journalists of all nationalities and buyers who are interested in getting to know what's new in the industry in terms of products, services and technologies and to do business deals.

WTM Latin America & Braztoa Business

Event estimates that the 2016 edition was responsible for generating US\$ 370 million in commercial agreements. It is expected that 2017 will generate an even greater amount of business, as it adopts a new online tool that will connect all the visitors and exhibitors even before the event begins.

Until 3 April visitors from the tourism industry, journalists and buyers can register free of charge for WTM Latin America 2017 & 47th Braztoa Business Event at <http://latinamerica.wtm.com/en/visit/register/>. After this date registration can be done on arrival at the location, when the charge for entering the event will be R\$ 150.



WTM Latin America, which has had Braztoa as its main partner since the beginning, is coming up to its fifth edition with the mission of offering visitors, exhibitors and buyers the best experience possible for discovering the opportunities that Latin American tourism has to offer. It brings together in Expo Center Norte the industry's main representatives and the best initiatives for consolidating business deals

Lawrence Reinisch  
WTM Latin America's director



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Amadeus Gulf hosted its first ever football tournament in Oman for the travel community



Winning team's captain Mr. Khalfan Al Fazari commented, "Thanks to Amadeus for a very well organized event. We enjoyed participating in the tournament. Weather was not too good but the spirit of the sport brought us together, all the participants should have enjoyed the event as we did. We look forward to many more such events"

The competition was very healthy, and the spectators enjoyed 15 closely fought matches. The final between Bahwan Travel & Majan Intl. was very closely competed and stayed scoreless until the final whistle. Bahwan travel were declared the winners on penalty shoot out 3-4.






According to Jauhar Abdul Gafoor-Director of Sales Abu Dhabi, Al-Ain and Oman, "Amadeus will endeavor to increase the bonding among the travel community and will arrange more events where the travel fraternity can come together and have enjoyable time"

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# New travelling class for MENA

Emerging middle class will define the next decade of MENA tourism, says **Richard Lung**, Senior Director and International Economist, Visa Performance Solutions.



The rise of an emerging middle class will define and transform the travel and tourism industry in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) over the next decade, according to global payments technology company Visa.

Speaking at the Visa Travel and Payment Trends Seminar in Dubai recently, the company's Senior Director and International Economist, **Richard Lung**, identified three key global trends that will shape the industry between now and 2025: a new 'travelling class,' increasing digital connectivity, and an ageing population. By 2025, annual spending on global cross-border travel will reach \$1.5 trillion in today's dollars, from \$1.1 trillion currently, with growth driven by an increasing number of middle income families, according to Visa's 'Mapping the Future of Global Travel and



**Richard Lung**  
Senior Director and International Economist, Visa Performance Solutions

options, modes of transportation, accommodation choices, and costs. Visa says this will foster not only greater spontaneity in travel among tourists from the MENA region, but also a broader array of personalised travel and tourism options as well.

"Global tourism finds itself at a crossroads, with three key megatrends all pointing towards an era of transformation. The MENA region is not isolated from these forces, and indeed is set to gain more

**The next decade will be one of significant change for the travel and tourism industry and all participants need to start planning for an exciting new future now**

Tourism" study. Households making \$20,000 or more annually account for 90 per cent of all international travel. Visa estimates that more than 37 million MENA households will fall into this category by 2025, with more than 40 per cent of this new travelling class taking at least one international trip per year.

Visa estimates that the MENA region will see the number of annual outbound trips rise from 42 million in 2016 to 65 million by 2025. This may in turn lead to regional outbound travel spend increasing annually by 3.6 percent, from \$77 billion to \$110 billion by 2025, with the middle class accounting for approximately two thirds of growth. In addition to spending more, these travellers will be fully connected digitally and consequently better informed about their destination

than most given the extent of its growing middle class. The next decade will be one of significant change for the travel and tourism industry and all participants need to start planning for an exciting new future now," Lung said. The MENA region's young demographics, where two-thirds of the population is under 35, will help to counter the impact of the third key trend, an ageing global population. Approximately one in 10 people globally will be over the age of 65 by 2025, with older travellers taking about only half as many trips as the average person. The focus for many in this group is comfort and health rather than saving money. Visa says that destinations like Dubai and Abu Dhabi, which have invested heavily in their healthcare infrastructure, could be positioned to benefit from this trend.

## VFS Global

### Dubai

**Vinay Malhotra** has been appointed as Chief Operating Officer (COO) — Middle East and South Asia, VFS Global. In this new role, Malhotra will be based in Dubai, and responsible for the core visa business and B2C services for the travel industry, managing key client relationships, and business development in the two regions. Malhotra is a commerce graduate from Delhi University, and also holds an MBA degree from Bradford University, UK. Prior to joining VFS Global in 2013, he served Emirates Airline for over 10 years overseeing airport as well as commercial operations in North India, East India & Nepal.



## Millennium Plaza

### Dubai

**Nemo Acimovic** has been appointed as General Manager at Millennium Plaza Dubai. He will implement strategic plans to enhance guest experiences and increase revenues. A Serbian national who has more than 27 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Acimovic has a proven record of success, managing luxury hotels and resorts in the UK, Australia and the Middle East. He has previously served in the capacity of Director of Food and Beverage and Deputy General Manager of Le Royal Meridien, Abu Dhabi in 2008. Most recently, he held the position of General Manager at the Millennium Corniche Abu Dhabi.



## Mövenpick Hotel

### Doha

**Sami Aawar**, with 20 years' experience in the region, has been appointed to the post of General Manager for Mövenpick Hotel Doha. His career with Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts started in 2002 as Front Office Duty Manager in Beirut. In 2011, Aawar was appointed as Rooms Division Manager at Mövenpick Hotel West Bay Doha, then as Director of Operations at Mövenpick Hotel Jumeirah Beach Dubai in 2014. He holds a Bachelor of Business Administration Degree in Business Management and is fluent in English, Arabic and French.



## Kempinski Hotel MOE

### Dubai

Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates has promoted **Slim Zaiane** to General Manager. With 15 years of experience in luxury hospitality in Europe, working with international chains including Hilton and Sofitel, Zaiane was previously Hotel Manager at Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates, having first joined the property in this role in 2014. Originally from the UK, Zaiane graduated with a B.A. Honours degree in Hotel Management from Gllion Hotel School in Switzerland and completed his Masters at Oxford Brookes University.



## AVANI Hotels & Resorts

### Bangkok

**Alejandro Bernabé** has been appointed Group Director, AVANI Hotels & Resorts. With over 20 years of experience, he started his career in F&B working in Switzerland, followed by South Africa, France and Sri Lanka, before joining Kempinski in 1998. Staying with Kempinski, for the next 16 years, he continued in F&B at the Grand Hotel Europe in St Petersburg, then at the Çiragan Palace Hotel Kempinski in Istanbul. He holds several Bachelor degrees obtained in Spain and the USA, a Hotel Management degree from the Hotel Institute Montreux in Switzerland and MBA from Reims Management School in France.



## Ramada Plaza JBR

### Dubai

**Mircea Canduletiu** has been appointed Executive Assistant Manager – Rooms. A Guest Relationship and Engagement expert with extensive experience in the hospitality industry, Canduletiu is responsible for the operation of Guest Services, Front Office, Concierge, Housekeeping, Laundry, Security and Engineering departments. Canduletiu holds a Bachelor's Degree in Management and Marketing, Economical Affairs and has completed his Master's in Human Resources from Constantin Brancoveanu University, Romania.



## Le Meridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre

### Dubai

**Ileshaa Nijhawan** has been appointed as Groups and Events Sales Manager at Le Meridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre. A Business Management graduate from the University of Warwick UK, Nijhawan joined the hotel as an Events & Sales Executive in 2012 and was soon promoted to Assistant Groups and Events Sales Manager. She brings to her new role years of hands-on experience in the events and banqueting business. She is consistently recognised by her clients for her 'never say no' and 'can-do' attitude, excellent service standards and team leader and player status.



**Ekta Kapoor** has joined as Groups and Events Sales Manager at Le Meridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre. A post-graduate in Business Management, Kapoor comes with eight years of banquet sales and event management experience. She started her hospitality career in 2009 in Mumbai, India with the InterContinental Hotels Group followed by The Leela Palaces & Resorts. Her most recent position was at JW Marriott in Mumbai before she came onboard with the groups and events team at Le Meridien Dubai in 2016.





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