

TRAVTALK



Special

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2017

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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WTM: A gamut of opportunities

This November, Excel London will become the focal point for leading travel, tourism and hospitality partners as they gather to network on one stage for World Travel Market (WTM) from November 6-8, 2017. It is expected that this year will be a record year with a strong contingent from the Middle East region participating in the event.

SHEHARA RIZLY

“World Travel Market is one of the very top events for any institution operating within the tourism industry; a mammoth function that draws more than 30,000 professionals. As with every year and every event we attend, we seek to promote Sharjah as a year-round tourist destination, catering to families and culture enthusiasts the world over. The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) will introduce its events, including cultural events such as Sharjah International Book Fair, Sharjah Heritage Days, and Sharjah Art Biennial, as well as leisure and sports events including the world-famous Sharjah Light Festival, the final race of the U.I.M. F1H2O World Championship, and the Aquabike World Championship Grand Prix. Moreover, the Authority will introduce new additions to its already rich touristic offerings.

The UK expatriate community is the largest western community in the country: there were 240,000 Britons living in the country in 2012, a large number of whom reside in



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

Sharjah or frequently visit the emirate coming from the neighbouring territories. Older UK tourists show considerable interest in the type of cultural tourism that Sharjah offers and places high importance on it when choosing a destination.

We seek to promote Sharjah to as many people as possible. We have concentrated many efforts this year towards Asia and Russia. We have recently concluded very successful roadshows in GCC, India, China, Kazakhstan and Baltic countries. We are focusing on forging partnerships with online travel agencies and rating services. We work to create a compelling value proposition with international travel trade businesses and receptive tour operators. To maximise current partnerships, we have to gain a greater voice in key global markets. WTM is one of the largest and widest-reaching tourism events in the world. Tourism authorities around the region should utilise this platform and communicate their message to source markets. After all, more than £2.5 billion (\$3.24 billion) in travel industry contracts are concluded at WTM each year.”



Freddy Farid
Area General Manager
Gloria Hotels

“We look forward to learning about new trends within the travel industry, including approaches to online solutions and development of niche markets at WTM. We anticipate to meet and establish relations with new partners and strengthen our relationship with our existing partners. We have launched an aggressive ‘Kids Go Free’ offer partnered with DTCM in their ‘Stay Sunny’ campaign where kids below age 16 can stay for

free. The UK represents a major market for us at Gloria Hotels. We are currently launching a special programmes for the next summer with aggressive offers and added values.”



Samir Hamadeh
General Manager
Alpha Destination Management

further into technology to enhance customer experience in the destination. Visitors at WTM will be able to find us at the Dubai Tourism stand on booth M300.”

“It’s our 20th time to exhibit at the WTM. The UK market is still a leading market into our destination and Alpha Destination Management is a well-known brand among the UK tour operators. It is important for us to continue nurturing those relations with key industry partners. The message that we are conveying this year is that we are committed to offering greater added value as well as investing

“Our objective was to showcase Satguru Travel & Tourism as the leading Destination Management Company (DMC). We will be showcasing our strong points to become the leading DMC in 22 countries under the six zones. Under the six zones, the following destinations are selected to promote Satguru as the leading DMC: North Africa, Europe & Latin America, South Africa, Asia Pacific, Middle East, East Africa. With our strong presence in UAE and head office based in Dubai, we offer a range of travel related products and services, with great value for money and developed after extensive research.”



JVR Fernando
Commercial Director
(West Africa & Asia)
Satguru Travel & Tourism

Contd. on page 3 ▶

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A bigger and better WTM London 2017

► Contd. from page 1

“More than 51,000 of the most senior industry professional will take part in around one million business meetings leading to £3 billion in travel industry deals being agreed. An extra speed-networking session has been added to help facilitate even more business. This year we have some of the most senior industry executives talking part in the event programme. Furthermore, we have the European Union's chief Brexit negotiator Guy Verhofstadt speaking to 200 of travel's most senior leaders about the impact of Brexit on the travel industry. It is shaping up to be a great WTM London!”



Simon Press
Senior Director
WTM London



Ravini Perera
Senior Vice President- Sales,
Marketing and PR, Atlantis-The
Palm Dubai and Global Partner-
ships Kerzner

“We will be participating at WTM once again this year as the UK is one of our primary markets. Year-on-Year we have had a good influx of tourists from various markets. We have nearly 223 countries and territories in our database. Over the past nine years we have been consistently picking up business from varied markets. We are getting ready with our new property to be opened in China in Q1 2018 with 1300 rooms and similar unique facilities the guests can indulge in.”

In pursuit of new business

Middle East travel and hospitality stakeholders are once again ready to head to WTM London with great business expectations.

TT BUREAU

“We are participating along with Ajman Tourism, and will showcase our three properties in Ajman. Our main objective is to highlight our new property Wyndham Garden Ajman, particularly for the UK market. We did not see a decline in UK travellers after Brexit. Our objective is to meet existing clients, find new partners, and introduce Wyndham Garden Ajman not just for UK but overall Europe.”



Iftikhar Hamdani
Cluster GM, Wyndham
Garden Ajman Corniche,
Ramada Hotel & Suites Aj-
man, and Ramada Beach
Hotel Ajman



Samir Arora
General Manager, The
Retreat Palm Dubai M
Gallery by Sofitel

“We are participating with two objectives – to support our upcoming opening of The Retreat Palm Dubai MGallery by Sofitel, the first well-being resort in the Middle East in our top feeder markets—Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands and Switzerland in Europe as well as the GCC. Our objective is to educate the market about our unique concept—a new holistic wellbeing resort in ME.”

“First Central Hotel Suites aims to deliver the UK guests, a home away from home. Our location and spacious suites are ideal for the UK market where room size, beaches, facilities, and convenient shopping options are an attractive attribution for this specific clientele. This 2017, we are focused on improving our services and facilities as well as introducing new concepts. We want our guests to know that apart from providing them fully-furnished apartments, we are also committed to the environment by adapting eco-friendly practices in operations.”



Wael El Behi
General Manager
First Central Hotel Suites



Mohamed Awadalla
CEO
TIME Hotels

“TIME Hotels are participating this time under the umbrella of DTCM on stand ME300, creating awareness for new clients and associates and existing ones alike. TIME Hotels will be sharing a series of news. We are expecting the usual traffic from WTM with lined up agendas to be translated into converted business for 2018 to widen the leisure market base.”

“The B2B and B2C portals of SATA are designed to meet all the requirements of travellers under the same umbrella and to promote the local attractions all across the UAE. The UK market is picking up and is vital for Dubai. To provide unique combinations to the visitors, we blend traditional and contemporary activities/attractions in Sharjah and neighbouring emirates. Family tourism is being promoted by offering competitive packages. We try to identify latest trends in the industry and incorporate it to our business realm, thereby, enhancing digital transformation to connect with everyone who travels.”



Thomas P. Varghese
Deputy General Man-
ager, Sharjah Airport
Travel Agency (SATA)

Jazeera routes to 4 Indian cities

Kuwait's low-cost airline, Jazeera Airways will launch to new destinations in India before the end of 2017, starting off with Hyderabad from November 16, followed by Kochi, Mumbai and Ahmedabad by mid-December.

TT BUREAU

This move comes as part of Jazeera Airways' commitment to addressing increasing travel demands with low cost fares at convenient frequencies that suit all. “India is a dynamic business and tourist destination that has shared close ties

with Kuwait for many years. Stepping into a new territory is always exciting as it holds tremendous potential for our growing customer base and brings diverse cultures closer together,” said **Rohit Ramachandran**, CEO, Jazeera Airways. Hyderabad, the 400-year-old city rich with history and

tradition is backed by intriguing attractions such as the Chowmahalla Palace and Ramoji Film city, the world's largest film studio. Home to many upscale restaurants and shops, its other popular landmark sites include Golconda Fort, a former diamond-trading center and the Charminar, a 16th century

mosque. Jazeera Airways will operate daily flights to Hyderabad departing 1840 hours arriving 0135 hours, making it possible to travel to India without wasting a working day.

Schedules for other routes to the subcontinent will be announced shortly.

Fares from Kuwait to Hyderabad start from KD32 one way and are on sale now with a baggage allowance of 30 kg in economy class and 50 kg per passenger in business class. Travellers can book now via Jazeera's revamped website—www.jazeeraairways.com, or through the dedicated app

or from all travel agents. Jazeera has just launched its refurbished cabin interiors in both economy and business class on the first aircraft of its A320 fleet, together with a bold new livery and stylish new crew uniforms. The complete fleet will receive the cabin upgrades by the end of this year.



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EDITORIAL

Networking on common ground

That time of the year has finally arrived when global tourism trade representatives will meet in London for the World Travel Market. Among the many trends that emerged this year in travel is the application of technology in travel and tourism. Technology giants like Amadeus, Sabre and Travelport are working towards ensuring seamless travel by introducing new methodologies, research and studies. They have been active during this year by educating the travel partners of their goals and plans towards a better technology-enabled society to make travel an ease for all.

According to figures from UNWTO, there is a five per cent increase in tourists from the UK to Dubai and a three per cent rise to Abu Dhabi. They expect this number to rise over the next year as the UAE keeps adding attractions, retail promotions and various other interesting activities to lure tourists. Another key factor to attract visitors is the increase of hotel rooms, especially in Dubai, hitting over 100,000 and continued increase over the next few years leading up to 2020. These numbers cater to a wide variety of guests ranging from three to five-star luxury properties, not forgetting Airbnb and the likes that add to the count. As Dubai gets closer to Vision 2020, there are many developments in terms of infrastructure and new properties to be completed in due course. Middle East has always been a resilient market, hopeful for the upcoming season. Opening of luxury brands in Dubai will further add to the portfolio of hotels.

Key exhibitors from the region at WTM this year include: Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing, Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority, Sharjah Commerce & Tourism Development Authority, Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, Ajman Tourism Development Department, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority, Oman Ministry of Tourism and Jordan Tourism Board. Recently concluded GITEX Technology Week launched many new technological programmes and know-how to ease the pressure on visitors to the emirates. Introduction of the flying taxi was a major crowd puller to the event.

Empathy Economy brings purpose

Companies have to think exponentially if they want to solve big challenges for the larger community. This requires a diametric shift in their mindset towards customers and life.

Empathy is the new currency for progress

In recent years, there has been constant evolution in the world of consumer marketing. The focus has transitioned from a push strategy, where organisations create products and then promote them to buyers, to a pull strategy, where the idea is to draw customers to seek out a product willingly.

Today, the new breed of business is hinged on relevance and purpose - relevance for customers, relevance for companies themselves, as well as viz-a-viz the world and community at large. This has led to an interesting concept of Empathy Economy—an economy that is human-centric and values empathy, placing it at the core of all activities and business. It is an ethos that drives the pull strategy, by truly adapting to the needs of the customer.

Improving people's lives

What we need today is an overarching need to produce value by engaging customers and create personalised experiences for them. However, the dilemma sits right at the core of doing business – our approach and mentality to the concept of buying and selling. By putting ourselves in the customers' shoes, we are able to deliver a heightened level of personalisation and relevance to them.

According to SAP, empathy towards customers should guide the culture and design thinking across an organisation and the way technology is created in favour of your end customers. Empathy strategy is more about a major shift in the mindset, focussed on close learning from customers. Personalisation on the other hand, is focussed on selling more to customers. An empathy economy balances

such a 'buy and sell' model with a focus on improving peoples' lives.

Connecting people digitally

Everything starts with connecting people. Digital transformation is a tool to connect and establish a uniform view of relationships. Since people are aggregating and converging on digital plat-

hyper-connectivity steps in to enable true fulfillment. A classic example I'd like to describe is the Harley Davidson case. The company decided to gather community information to create personalised bikes for its customers. Using advanced digital technologies on the shop floor that connected systems, Harley was able to manufacture customised products at the

Uber became the last mile connectivity supplier. This is what one can call a clever leverage of resources, because it makes the experience more meaningful to customers who are always on the move. By taking the pain of delivery out of the way for themselves, the company also cut out on waiting time for the customer.

Empathy works inside out

Empathetic enterprises preserve and refine their intuition, and lead with empathy, despite the deluge of 'big data' that seeks to quantify human relationships. It traverses the fundamental chasm that exists between natural human behaviour—which can often be sentimental and equally unpredictable—and the design of organisations, which is rational, results-oriented and consistent. The empathy economy is not just about customers. It is about pursuing an ideal. By connecting all these stakeholders in a meaningful experience, digitisation and automation can inspire everyone to aspire to a higher ideal. An empathetic business caters not only to actual human needs but also aspires to a greater purpose of improving the human condition.

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



Pedro S. Pereira
Head of Digital Innovation
SAP MENA

What we need today is an overarching need to produce value by engaging customers and create personalised experiences for them. However, the dilemma sits right at the core of doing business – our approach and mentality to the concept of buying and selling

forms, so too is the heart of customer relationship. At the top of this value chain is the Digital Core.

What makes a company empathetic?

The empathetic considerations into a basic technology framework are: understand, inspire fulfill, trust and freedom. Never before have people been understood as much by technology before as now. One can understand how to inspire the customer by learning from information shared by the customer. Similarly, hyperconnectivity would enable fulfillment, the platform economy would create meaning, while smart contracts would represent trust. And for all these elements to be in place, we need to find an integrating application to service the customer with the objective of helping him 'lead a meaningful life'.

Reimagining customer relationships

Every customer relationship starts with inspiration. However, without fulfillment, customers would get very frustrated. This is where

efficiency of mass production to give customers what they want, when they want it, while streamlining the supply chain. This became a simple and meaningful relationship for customers, despite the complexities involved in integrating this experience. What Harley really did was to show care through personalisation, by capturing that 'high' of differentiation that customers experience when purchasing a customised Harley. By reimagining how they traditionally viewed customers of bikes and acknowledging it as an emotional purchase, Harley-Davidson managed to reinvent their brand.

Going a full circle

If we want to go full circle in the customer relationship value chain, following fulfillment comes last mile delivery. A global leader in travel accessories found that their customers were expecting day delivery as an outcome of buying from the brand. To meet this need, the company integrated their delivery services with Uber RUSH, thereby ensuring that this actually happened. Turning the concept on its head, the store became the warehouse and

Al Shaab Village strengthens its presence

Popular as a year-round exhibition ground in Sharjah, Al Shaab Village is soon facilitating more interesting features and converting it to an indoor playground where guests can enjoy the premises with more rides aimed at wooing youngsters.

TT BUREAU

Al Shaab Village's discount booklet, especially made for the travel agents, tour operators, hoteliers and other partners, has become very popular as it brings in a lot more value for the visitors. Generally, the outdoor park was enjoyed by youngsters during school holidays but now they have a new plan of action where they have extended a special partnership with schools

within the area. The state-of-the-art exhibition center has many offerings for the entire family. During the time of national holidays they run special campaigns that offer valuable prizes and surprises to the visitors that enjoy the premises. Housing the largest ice rink is no easy task but the dedication of the Al Shaab team with hands on CEO Abdulla Al Dah, the center keeps going from strength to strength.

Their presence at international exhibitions along with the Sharjah Tourism Development Authority enables them to build and strengthen partnerships with many feeder markets that prefer to visit the destination of Sharjah. Residents from Sharjah, GCC and other emirates are regular visitors who keep soaring the numbers. Over the past few years they have witnessed over 250,000 visitors monthly and their new refurbishment plan, set to take place very



Abdulla Al Dah
Chief Executive Officer
Al Shaab Village

soon, will place them on an even higher level as there is nothing similar in the emirate.

The term "village" is used to ensure that Sharjah's cultural identity is maintained and preserved. Housing the first and largest ice rink in the emirate of Sharjah with over 240 stands, 52 products on food, textile, cosmetics, uniforms, accessories, perfumes etc. for the entire family, Al Shaab Village has an edge

over all the malls in the emirate as it has both indoor and outdoor amusement parks but after the outdoor park is turned to an air conditioned indoor park with interesting rides they are sure to receive a lot more visitors who would prefer to spend their time. The state-of-the-art seven screen multiplex cinemas operated by Oscar cinemas provide entertainment for the visitors with a mix of Arabic, English and Hindi movies.

Abdulla Al Dah, Chief Executive Officer, Al Shaab Village, says, "As you know, we like to preserve the cultural heritage of Sharjah yet offer something unique to our visitors who seek novel ideas and facilities. Once we refurbish the fully-integrated state-of-the-art facility into an indoor permanent exhibition center to be enjoyed by residents and tourists right throughout

the year with interesting activities we are sure to attract more visitor numbers. From outside, the building displays traditional architecture but you enter into a state-of-the-art modern ambience. We are the first to have an ice rink in the emirate of Sharjah which can be enjoyed by the whole family. We want the tourists and residents of Sharjah to be amazed by the offerings in store and ensure that they return for more in their next visit. Our participation at roadshows with Sharjah tourism and the international exhibitions like ITB Berlin, WTM and ATM in Dubai provide us more networking opportunities to ensure the growth of visitor numbers. Most travel agents and tour operators who have brought in their clients have left with a very positive attitude. I have a very good and supportive team that partakes in strengthening the facility."



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Shaping the future of the travel industry

The Middle East has one of the most active technology users of today in terms of travel. The region introduced various new technologies to drive towards the growth of future in travel.

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Travel Technology Exchange or TTX Middle East was an important forum where Sabre delivered some key pointers by industry leaders and subject matter experts over a series of presentations and discussions on tourism development in the Middle East. The future of travel is shaped by numerous factors – advances in technology, increasing online and mobile penetration, changing payment landscape and evolving consumer expectations. With emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, voice or augmented reality, the way we experience travel is set to change drastically in the years to come.

Antonella Vecchio, Vice President, EMEA Online and Western region at Sabre Travel Network shared interesting points with the audience. Standing at crossroads between online and offline,

she pointed out six key factors in her presentation to be taken into consideration to forge ahead in the travel business. The most important point was that by the end of 2017, there would be over \$35 billion worth opportunities which, in turn, would reach up to \$90 billion by 2020. Personalisation played a key role as the second fact as over 94 per cent of travellers wanted to choose their own extras by spending over \$98 billion on airline ancillary services. The third point focussed on the rapid growth of mobile technology in the region where there would be 56 per cent online purchase and 41 per cent pay for offline purchase, 43 per cent compare prices and 33 per cent read product reviews. The online-offline experience is very important as there has been a shifting trend between the two.

Vecchio reiterated that online travel was following the offline trend with examples



Antonella Vecchio
Vice President, EMEA Online and Western region at Sabre Travel Network

from Europe. She spoke of how some online travel agents started offline to engage more travellers to purchase their products. Finally, she stressed on the importance of optimising the traveller experience by online expertise and consultative approach to enhance business performance.

Aya Sadler, Incubator Manager, Intelak which is part of the Emirates Group explained the importance of the



Aya Sadler
Incubator Manager Intelak

millennial traveller. According to research, she stated that by 2020, 50 per cent of the workforce would be millennials which would increase up to 75 per cent by 2030. She further emphasised on providing 'free Wi-Fi' to millennials and shared many insights from Emirates' Aya Sadler on the behaviours and expectations of the millennial traveller.

Mark McSpadden, Vice President, Emerging Products & Technologies



Mark McSpadden
Vice President, Emerging Products & Technologies Sabre Labs

presented an overview of the work of Sabre Labs, the company's research division, and the emerging technologies set to reshape travel to space tourism.

The UAE is far ahead of many other countries as the chatbot features are already available in most of the banking sector in the UAE but travel is yet to experience. However, as UAE encourages space tourism in the near future, many programmes have been

implemented to be above the rest ensuring that more expertise and efforts were made for these important technology aspects. Sabre has their own labs which keep creating various new technologies to enable to understand the new or next gen travellers and their behaviours as well. Millions of dollars are been spent every year on development of these important tech hubs.

Sabre is best placed to explore and help shape the travel of the future. One of the world's largest software companies, Sabre technology processes over US\$120 billion of travel spend and more than 1.1 trillion system messages every year. Headquartered in Southlake, Texas, Sabre employs nearly 10,000 people in approximately 65 countries around the world, and serves its customers through cutting-edge technology developed in six facilities located across four continents.



40% of travelers say their travel experience impacts business results

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Keep browsing with Virgin

Customers travelling with Virgin Atlantic can now browse at 35,000 ft from as little as £2.99, as the airline completes its ambitious Wi-Fi programme.

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To celebrate the fully Wi-Fi fleet, Virgin Atlantic will be kicking off a series of fun-filled events from the sky, connecting together with



technology, Wi-Fi is now available across the fleet of 39 aircraft and connectivity is available above 10,000ft for customers to be able to connect shortly after take-off, and remain online until landing. Results so far have shown that 42 per cent of customers opt for the WiFi max package which

Whilst Wi-Fi has been commonplace on domestic carriers, there's been a challenge for the industry to find reliable connections over vast expanses of ocean. Unlike flying over Europe or the US, the signal cannot come from the ground, and instead has to be transmitted to aircraft from satellites. The airline is using a combination of two Wi-Fi providers across the network; customers travelling on the 787 will use Wi-Fi from Panasonic, while the A330s, 747s, A340-600s are powered by Gogo technology.

QUICK FACT

Virgin Atlantic has become the first airline in Europe to offer WiFi across its entire fleet – ensuring customers can remain connected across flights

#LiveFromVirgin. One of the first #livefromvirgin events will be a comedy set in the sky. Using a combination of Panasonic and Gogo

lasts the entire flight. The most popular routes for Wi-Fi use are London Heathrow to New York (JFK), San Francisco and Atlanta.

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Improving experiences through technology

As the hospitality sector continues to come under profit pressure, it's reassuring to see hotels investing in technology to improve service delivery, enable efficient operations and optimise guest experiences.

Hospitality applications, which connect people, enable hotels to enrich their guests' experience by providing them with access to a range of services, including pre-arrival and pre-check-in arrangements, concierge services, destination information and express check-out—all in the palm of their hand.

Through Apps, hoteliers can deliver best-in-class customer service, using unique mobile platforms that streamline hotel processes and seamlessly integrate with hotel CRM, PMS, CRS, PBX, as well as restaurant booking systems, spa systems and more. The best example is the check-in and check-out experience, which many hotel companies still struggle with, as it is often cumbersome and process-oriented because of legal requirements, local regulations and credit card authorisations.

Globally, however, check-in and check-out is recognised as one of the most critical guest satisfaction triggers, as it's the first and last impression the guest has of a hotel. So, it's no surprise that mobile technology is increasingly being used to enhance the check-in/check-out experience, which proves to have positive impact on guest satisfaction whilst reducing costs – with less paper and manpower required for automated systems. A pre-arrival email, coupled with pre-check-in services that facilitate an opportunity to better know your guests and their requests before arrival, enable hoteliers to update guest profile information with precise details, which is then reflected in real time, in the PMS—thereby reducing time at check-in.

When you overlay the outcome of a more tradition-

Using technology solutions before guest arrival, on check-in and during their stay is by far the best way to streamline check-in processes, reduce waiting time, and proactively engage with guests for the duration of their travel time

al communication exchange with the benefits of a customised mobile app, this is where the real advantages of technology become tangible. And, using beacon technology, hoteliers can push personalised offers and promotions, to provide a more personalised guest experience, as it enables them to recognise guests and their movements and upsell hotel services based on guest locations within the hotel.

From being notified about hotel events and happy hours to requesting pillows and sewing kits,

guests can request anything they need directly from the App without having to call any staff or in fact be in the hotel. Technology also enables hoteliers to engage with their guests via in-app chat, notifications or direct 'Talk to Manager' option. This technology offers guests enhanced experiences and hotels can extend their hospitality and service information with information such as tours, ticketing and attractions, directly from the application, when the guest is outside the hotel.

Guests can also view their bill and account status,

without having to request a print-out from reception, or use their room extension on their mobile phone to call family and friends staying with them at same hotel while using any public Wi-Fi and internal extension technology. Many think that the primary role of a customised application is to mainly simplify check-in and book a room, however the real goal is to make a hotel guest stays smarter, simpler and more enjoyable – from arrival to departure.

Using technology solutions before guest arrival, on check-in and during their stay is by far the best way to streamline check-in processes, reduce waiting time, and proactively engage with guests for the duration of their travel time. When using smart technology, hospitality applications enable hoteliers to revolutionise customer experienc-

es and deliver best-in-class guest services through the ability to capture a guest's attention, enable navigation within the hotel, entice guests to experience hotel services, customise hotel privileges and streamline operations processes.

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



Roger El Khoury
Managing Partner
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ME Tourism to benefit at WTM London

With Expo 2020 on the horizon and a successful push to diversify economies away from a reliance on hydrocarbon receipts, confident travel professionals from the Middle East are heading to WTM London this November, to achieve a greater share of the multibillion dollar international market.



According to figures from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, UK tourists continued to flock to the UAE in 2016 – up five per cent in Dubai and three per cent in Abu Dhabi, despite the pound shedding over 16 per cent of its value against the US Dollar since the referendum result to leave the European Union. There was also a definitive resurgence in Russian visitors (+14%) after the UAE's implementation of Visa-on-Arrival. Oman witnessed steady growth in visitors from Europe, with Britain and Germany among the top five tourism generating source markets. GCC nationals topped the number of tourist arrivals, followed by tourists from India, Britain and Germany.

Key exhibitors from the region this year include: Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM), Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority, Sharjah Commerce & Tourism Development Authority, Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, Ajman Tourism Development Department, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority, Oman Ministry of Tourism and Jordan Tourism Board. Other new exhibitors from the region include: Solar Empire Travel, Azar Gasht Aseman, Baghdad Hotel Company and Kurdistan Tourism.

Simon Press, Senior Director, WTM London, said, "According to figures from the World Travel and Tourism Council, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP in the Middle East was \$227.1



Simon Press
Senior Director
WTM London

It's a reflection of the burgeoning growth in that part of the world and how the travel trade there recognises that WTM London is an important platform to both conduct business and boost awareness

billion (9.1 per cent of GDP) in 2016, and is forecast to

rise by 5.2 per cent in 2017, and by 4.8 per cent p.a. to \$381.9 billion (9.7 per cent of GDP) in 2027. There are exciting times ahead for the Middle East, not least with the UAE set to host Expo 2020, with Dubai alone forecasting 160,000 hotel rooms in the emirate ahead of the world showcase opening. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to see the large number of exhibitors already signed up for WTM London. It's a reflection of the burgeoning growth in that part of the world and how the travel trade there recognises that WTM London is an important platform to both conduct business and boost awareness. With 2017 being the UN's International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, it is fitting that this year WTM London plays host to more responsible tourism sessions than ever

before, with almost 30 panels taking place across the three days. Overtourism will also look at other topics currently getting a lot of attention, such as what the industry can do to fight plastic pollution and protect its oceans; how it can fight trafficking in its supply chain; and animal welfare."

More than 80 conference seminars will take place throughout the three days covering all the key sectors pertinent to the Middle East, including aviation, hotels, wedding and honeymoon, gastronomy, sports tourism, responsible tourism, digital influencers, social media and travel technology. Among other highlights is the 300-seater WTM Inspire Theatre, a taste of ILTM joined by a new Wellness & Spa section on the exhibition floor, the WTM Speed Net-

working, and the UNWTO & WTM Ministers' Summit. The 2017 edition of World Travel Market London's sister show, Arabian Travel Market (ATM), witnessed a 10 per cent increase in visitors from the GCC and a 7 per cent increase in international visitors to the event. For the second year in a row, more than 28,000 visitors attended the show, a 71 per cent increase over the last five years. The next edition of ATM takes place from April 22-25, 2018, at the Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre (DICEC).

WTM HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ 80 conference seminars will take place throughout the three days covering all the key sectors pertinent to Middle East
- ▶ 300-seater WTM Inspire Theatre

Wyndham Garden in Q4

Slated to open in Q4 2017, Wyndham Garden has been quite busy participating in many roadshows organised by the Ajman Tourism Development Department.



The four-star hotel Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche will feature rooms and suites, an executive lounge on the top floor with panoramic sea views, a seafood restaurant, an all-day dining venue, an outdoor swimming pool, gym and spa, separate health clubs for men and women, and a kids' play area. The soon-to-open hotel joined the ATDD roadshows in Scandinavia and covered three countries including Denmark, Norway and Sweden. It also joined the ATDD delegation at the CIS road show in Armenia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. Eyeing more markets in Europe, Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche will similarly be promoted in the ATDD DER Touristik event in Euro Disney in Paris, France.

Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche was also showcased



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

the property at Natalie Tours' annual congress and hotelier workshop held in Dubai. More than 200 top agents from Russia and CIS region were in attendance to learn about the latest promotions and updates on Dubai and UAE as a leisure destination.

The other events that Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche will take part in are workshops organised by Tez Tour in Larnaca, Cyprus; Odeon Tours

in Antalya, Turkey; and Annex Tours in Moscow, Russia. To boost the hotel's guest nationality mix, the property will also target the South Asian market by attending the Pakistan Travel Mart (PTM) in Karachi.

Iftikhar Hamdani, Cluster General Manager, Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche, Ramada Hotel & Suites Ajman, and Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman, commented, "We are all excited to welcome guests at the new Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche, and take part in all these activities happening from September to November. We have already received positive feedback on the roadshows and exhibitions we've attended to date, especially in the Scandinavian region. We are positive that this will be a great addition in Ajman, as it continues to attract new markets and reinforce its status as a preferred tourist and business destination in ME."



STAY WITH US, AND FEEL LIKE HOME.

Positioned close on the sandy beaches of the Emirates, the hotel includes a number of facilities to make your stay more comfortable. Work up a sweat on the beach or in the hotel's luxurious fitness club, where you'll find all of the latest high-tech gym equipment. A currency exchange, and a breakfast buffet to start the day off with a lavish spread of fresh fruit and the finest Middle Eastern cuisine.

Both standard rooms and suites are available at the Tulip Inn Ras Al Khaimah. All of our 102 hotel rooms are outfitted to a high standard with a variety of different layouts. Suites include 1 double bed and twin beds, while standard rooms allow guests to choose from singles or doubles as needed. There's a wealth of 3 star amenities on offer, including satellite television, spacious private bathrooms, and high quality toiletries at your disposal. Stay connected with high speed internet access in all public areas, and make use of the air conditioning in Ras Al Khaimah's desert climate.

For reservations, Please call 07 2465222
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TRYP by Wyndham debuts in Dubai

A new hotel on the block, TRYP by Wyndham, entered Dubai with the largest property in the portfolio of TRYP Hotels. With 650 rooms, the hotel aims to attract urban explorers and business travellers alike. The hotel is located in Barsha Heights, Dubai's vibrant and connected community, which is home to many creative and local business as well as residential communities.



TTT BUREAU

TRYP by Wyndham consists a wide range of room types. The Tryp Room is equipped with all the facilities required

separate parents rooms. The one Bedroom Suite features a Living Room area with a convertible sofa bed, family-friendly amenities and two bathrooms. The Premium Rooms of

Rooms to a higher level are the VYP Rooms. Upgraded amenities and complimentary access to the VYP Lounge, the VYP Rooms are located on the upper floors and overlook the breathtaking city skyline.

In terms of dining indulgence, three restaurants and bars will tantalise your taste buds and when you've got some work to do, 'Nest', a co-working space is where you can meet up and turn those ideas into reality. It is one of the world's first fully integrated co-working spaces within an internationally branded hotel, 'Nest' is an innovative concept that perfectly pairs office and hospitality to enhance the workplace experience. 'Nest' offers eclectic meeting rooms, unlimited coffee, business center services and quality networking opportunities. 'Nest' is where Dubai's most innovative, creative and entrepreneurial communities collide.

to keep one connected to all that's happening in the digital space, sit back and relax. The Family Room offers the best comfort for that family vacation. Each room occupies up to five people, with a

fer spacious Premium Suites with sleek, stylish décor designed with HiTV to guests connected to all that's happening around and 180-degree spanning balconies to marvel at the skyline of Dubai.

Taking TRYP

'Local' is a rustic social eating house serving comfort food while keeping it real. The place that makes you reach out to your friends for a catch-up, secure a space for a play date for the kids and pass through from the park with your pooch. 'Local' is for everyone!

Some of the interesting indulgences to look forward to in the near future is LIQD—a luxe-bohemian tapas bar ideal for the late-night hangout by the pool. If you want a taste of the perfect mash-up where Ibiza meets Coachella with tapas, cocktails and your R&R served up with a twist of lemon then drop by 'LIQD'. Complete with its pool and lifestyle focused cocktails - keeping you hydrated both inside and out. Think luxe-bohemian and feel poolside SoHo vibes served up with a kick-ass Tapas menu. 'LIQD's persona comes with its iden-



tifiers such as a selection of sangrias, varieties of craft beers and handsome range of well-sourced wines by the glass. Home to themed evenings like Ladies Night and other exciting promos. Don't get it twisted, 'LIQD' is still our Zen haven, it just comes with a dash of fun on the side in an energised space.

'Barbary,' a deli and cocktail club is another indulgence to look forward to as it is a by-product of the tawdry values, brazen spirit and musical energy of the neighborhood. Equal parts cocktail bar, retro club and delicatessen the

room is a decorous blend of clandestine bar naughtiness with an illicit parlour feel.



Personality of the month

Timur Ilgaz to drive Cove Rotana RAK

Armed with over three decades of experience in hospitality and having worked in countries like Turkey, Canada, Czech Republic, Kazakhstan and UAE, **Timur Ilgaz**, General Manager of Cove Rotana Ras Al Khaimah, is acknowledged for his excellence in managing resorts, leisure and city hotels. **TRAVTALK** celebrates his achievements.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

A Turkish national, **Timur Ilgaz** spent his childhood in the environs of starred hotels, thanks to his hotelier father. Mesmerised by the dynamic and vibrant industry, Ilgaz followed in the footsteps of his father and went on to pursue studies in Economics, to find a position as a night auditor at a property. Ilgaz further went on to gather training in all the departments of the hospitality sector which gave him maximum exposure. From manning the reception, duties in food and beverage outlets, housekeeping, etc., he worked his way up to become one of the youngest General Managers at the age of 28.

"My father was a hotelier and I did follow in his footsteps. It was my great passion since childhood as I spent most of it in hotels, so basically I grew up in this industry. As I was studying Economics, I found employment as a night auditor

at a hotel. So during the day I studied and by night, I returned to work. From the time I was 18 years old, I wanted to get an experience and explore other destinations," Ilgaz said.

Ilgaz's first stint abroad was in Toronto, Canada, as Assistant Manager at a five-star property. From there he moved to Czech Republic, where he was assigned to a property with 800 rooms with a banquet capacity of 5000 guests. His next move took him to Kazakhstan to work at The Regent Almaty and later moved to the UAE.

Ilgaz has managed and lead Al Ghurair Rayhaan and Arjaan by Rotana, opening and operating of Amwaj Rotana in Jumeirah Beach and the successful renovation project of Jumeirah Rotana in Dubai. He brings years of expertise in managing different types of properties and has been versatile in bringing method, team work and energy to his team throughout.

In the Middle East region, persons of Turkish origin are known for their traditions, values, and culture along with their well-established Mediterranean hospitality and close-knit family connections. Ilgaz with his background and experience, will ensure that Cove Rotana soars high in terms of service and quality to create memorable experiences that define the essence of true hospitality. His vision for the property is to provide a good, relaxing and experiences that last a lifetime. "This is one of the most beautiful properties in the UAE with a wide expanse of beach stretching to almost a kilometer. The whole property

is more than 300,000 square meters serving different markets throughout the year."

The five-star Cove Rotana is a relaxed property which caters to different categories of tourists from around the world. As Ras Al Khaimah is a perfect staycation getaway many locals and expats living in other emirates drive up to the property to indulge in the luxuries offered. The resort has three different areas which can be chosen by the guests to spend their relaxing beach holiday. Apart from the 150 villas in one, two and three bedrooms with its own swimming pool, kitchenette, garden, etc., especially de-

signed for the discerning travellers, there are over 200 identical superior rooms and a special area known as the 'The village' for tour operators to have their clientele in a totally different area secluded from the rest of the property. The whole property houses over 1000 beds with eight food and beverage outlets, swimming pools, water slides, state-of-the-art facilities, kids activity club and many others to the list. 



Timur Ilgaz, General Manager, Cove Rotana Ras Al Khaimah

My father was a hotelier and I did follow in his footsteps. It was my great passion since childhood as I spent most of it in hotels, so basically I grew up in this industry. As I was studying Economics, I found employment as a night auditor at a hotel. So during the day I studied and by night, I returned to work



British Airways soars high in ME skies

Completing 85 years of successful operations in the Middle East with its first flight touching down in Sharjah in 1932, the airline has continued to increase its frequency and currently operates four daily flights from the UAE. **Anjulika Dutton**, Head of Sales, British Airways, shares an insight with **TRAVTALK**.

TT BUREAU

QHow has the year fared for BA over the past eight months in the ME region?

The Middle East continues to be an important market for British Airways. The carrier has made several investments across the region in recent years and now offers direct services to London Heathrow from across eight countries in the region.

Some of these investments include the launch of the most-technologically advanced aircraft in British Airways' fleet – the 787-9 Dreamliner – on its Abu Dhabi to London service and on its Jeddah to London route. In 2016, Dubai became the second airport to receive British Airways' new concept of Concorde Lounge globally; launched at the Concourse D at Dubai International Airport.

QCould you share the new million-pound investment made by BA and how it would contribute to ME region?

British Airways' ongoing investments will directly benefit customers from the Middle East starting with the new First Wing in London Heathrow that opened in April this year. The multi-million-pound investments to be rolled out across the airline's fleet include £400m in Club World (long-haul business class), Club Europe on UK domestic services, new lounges, First Wing direct



Anjulika Dutton
Head of Sales
British Airways

security and lounge access at Heathrow, Wi-Fi fitted on long-haul and short-haul fleets over the next two years, self-service check-in and biometric

By 2017 end, there would be over \$35 bn worth opportunities which, in turn, would reach up to \$90 bn by 2020. Personalisation played a key role as over 94% of travellers wanted to choose their own extras by spending over \$98 bn on airline ancillary services

boarding gates to speed up the airport journey.

The airline's £400 million investment in its Club World service includes an enhanced sleep and food proposition. Part of our investment into Club World is our recent partnership with The White Company

who have exclusively, for British Airways, designed a bespoke, luxuriously soft large pillow and white cotton pillowcase to enhance customers' comfort. Customers will also be given a super-soft woven blanket with satin trim and a specially developed luxury duvet to improve their quality of sleep, as well as a padded mattress cover giving an extra layer of comfort.

QAre there any new routes, partnerships or enhancements planned for BA? If so, please explain.

British Airways has launched over 30 new routes

across the globe this year including direct flights to New Orleans, Oakland (California) and Fort Lauderdale (Florida) enabling passengers from the Middle East to connect through London to a wide range of destinations across Europe and North America. An exciting route for travellers from the UAE is our new service to Nashville. From May 2018, British Airways will launch a five-a-week service from Heathrow, Terminal 5 and will be the only airline flying direct between Europe and the capital of Tennessee. The flights will run on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday with the BA223 departing from London Heathrow at 3:45 pm and arriving to Nashville Airport at 6:50 pm, while the BA222 will leave Nashville at 8:20 pm and arrive into London at 10:30 am on the following day. 🇦🇪



WYNDHAM GARDEN

Ajman Corniche



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Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche is operated by R Hotels under a franchise agreement from Wyndham Hotel Group.

Kingpin in African skies: Ethiopian Airlines

Ethiopian Airlines has become a key player in the African aviation market. **Ali Mohammed**, Area Manager-Gulf, Ethiopian Airlines, shares with **TRAVTALK** their plan towards achieving their Vision 2025 with an aim to earn \$10 billion revenue, \$1 billion profit, and expand to 120 international and 26 domestic destinations.



SHEHARA RIZLY

How has business been for Ethiopian Airlines during the past 10 months?

Despite the challenging aviation macro business dynamics, Ethiopian Airlines continued to drive robust growth across the continent during 2016-2017 fiscal year. Ethiopian Airlines Group reported a profit of \$232.8 million, total revenue of \$2.71 billion in 2016-17 fiscal year and carried close to nine million passengers and close to 350,000 tons of airfreight during the fiscal year. All in all, Ethiopian is growing in leaps and bounds, registering an average growth of 25 per cent over the past seven years; shining and winning prominent awards on several international stages for its excellence and commendable performance.

What are the stronger markets served by the airline this year?

To mention the stronger markets served by Ethiopian this year: from Middle East-Dubai; Africa-our hub Addis Ababa and other cities like Johannesburg, Nairobi, Legos; from Asia-Mumbai, Guangzhou, Beijing; from Americas-Washington, and from Europe-London and Frankfurt.

Please explain the new routes that were introduced over the past few months?

During 2016-2017 fiscal year,

Ethiopian Airlines continued to build global network, adding new destinations to its ever-emerging route network: Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe; Kaduna, Nigeria; Antananarivo, Madagascar; Conakry, Guinea; Oslo, Norway; Chengdu, China and Singapore and Ethiopian's broad network is further expanded through its membership of the Star alliance and its code-share agreements with its airline partners.

Ethiopian Cargo & Logistics Services too expanded its services only in 2016/17, has launched cargo services to Ahmedabad (fifth gateway to India), Zaragoza, Milan, Hanoi and now to Mexico and Los Angeles while reinstating services to N'djamena. The largest cargo network operator and one of the major global cargo players, Ethiopian now serves more than 42 global freighter destinations.

Before the end of the fiscal year 2017-2018, Ethiopian tentatively planned the following destinations: Gujarat (India), Shenzhen (Buenos Aires), Geneva (Switzerland), Man (Côte d'Ivoire), Mauritius, Chennai (India), Istanbul (Turkey) and Lisbon (Portugal).

Could you share some details on the upgrade of services to some destinations and refurbishment to some others?

Ethiopian has invested \$6 million to retrofit all its B-767-300 ER

“Ethiopian Airlines Group reported a profit of \$232.8 million, total revenue of \$2.71 billion in 2016-17 fiscal year and carried close to nine million passengers and close to 350,000 tons of airfreight during the fiscal year. All in all, Ethiopian is growing in leaps and bounds, registering an average growth of 25 per cent over the past seven years; shining and winning prominent awards on several international stages for its excellence and commendable performance.”

Ali Mohammed
Area Manager-Gulf
Ethiopian Airlines



fleet, fitting them with flat-bed seats in Cloud Nine with a range of video programming available for wireless streaming in all cabins. Ethiopian has also launched another Platinum Tier to deliver a significant boost to its high valued and loyal ShebaMiles member passenger's travel experience during 2016-17 fiscal year.

Ethiopian drew the fiscal year to a close with the government's decision to form a holding company through amalgamating Ethiopian Airlines and Ethiopian Airport Enterprise thereby establishing a giant aviation group. The merger has enabled Ethiopian offer an efficient and streamlined global standard airport service to its customers at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport, its main hub.

As Ethiopian celebrated 20 years with Star Alliance what is the strategy for the next decade?

Ethiopian, a proud member of Star Alliance,

has enabled Ethiopian serve global customers across the globe via the widest network of Star. Working harder along with Star, Ethiopian wishes to mark more success years in the alliance. Ethiopian is pursuing a well-designed 15 years growth plan or strategic road map dubbed Vision 2025, to transform the airline to a Leading Aviation Group in Africa by 2025 and we are now in the seventh year of implementation with what can be considered as the highest performance and profit in the industry.

Do explain the importance of obtaining most promising airline at the maiden Arabian Travel Awards this year?

As a multi award winning airline, Ethiopian strongly believes that the maiden Arabian Travel Awards is an important accolade to receive. This is a very strong testimony that in line with our vision 2025, our heavy investment in customer service, Human Resource Development,

modern fleet, infrastructure and ICT has resulted in the desired customer delight which is expressed by the strong vote of confidence we enjoy from our esteemed customers. The accolade will motivate us to continue to invest time, energy and money on the four pillars of our Vision 2025 with sharp focus in customer service across the value chain.

This October, Ethiopian Airlines was voted 2017 Middle East and Africa Airline of the Year by Airline Economics Magazine and has been crowned as the Rising Star Carrier of the Year both in industry and customer choice awards on Payload Asia Awards 2017.

What are the plans and strategies used by Ethiopian to train and mentor more youngsters to the trade?

Focusing on Human Resources Development (HRD) as one of the four major pillars of our fifteen

years growth plan, Vision 2025, Ethiopian is continually striving to ensure self-sufficiency in meeting the growing skilled manpower requirement and avail competent aviation professionals throughout the continent and beyond. With the largest aviation academy in Africa, a full ICAO TRAIN-AIR Plus Member and IATA Authorised Global Training Center, Ethiopian Aviation Academy, Currently, Ethiopian trains about 2,000 aviation trainees per annum and it envisages enhancing its intake capacity to 4,000 by 2025.

Growing Network

Ethiopian Airlines continued to add new destinations to its ever-emerging route network: Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe; Kaduna, Nigeria; Antananarivo, Madagascar; Conakry, Guinea; Oslo, Norway; Chengdu, China and Singapore



Amadeus lends itself for accessibility

More than two billion people around the world have accessibility needs due to disability and age. Yet, a new global study released by Amadeus reveals that most of their needs are not being fully catered for by either the travel industry or the public sector, with accessible travel being taken for granted by travellers.

TT BUREAU

According to the report "Voyage of discovery: Working towards inclusive and accessible travel for all", one of the biggest barriers to accessible travel remains inaccurate or incomplete information being available, coupled with a lack of skilled customer service. The report also shows that travellers with accessibility needs increasingly now expect these to be met as part of the mainstream service and at no extra cost. The role of technology in accessible travel is becoming more important, with

specific developments such as voice recognition starting to be seen as commonplace.

Within the Middle East, providing equal rights and services to people of determination has risen on the public sector's agenda in recent years. In countries like the UAE, initiatives such as the Dubai Disability Strategy 2020 (DDS) aim to enhance Dubai's global status by securing full and equal rights of the determined ones and ensuring that they are able to thrive in an inclusive environment with suitable, accessible

and quality services in health-care, education, employment, and more.

When it comes to travel, the latest Amadeus study also finds:

- The overall travel experience and how this is adapted to different needs is rated at just 6.2 out of 10
- The least satisfactory areas with regards to accessibility are those related to railway stations and the most satisfactory area is accommodation

- Travelling by plane is the preferred transportation method

The study highlights that transitioning to an accessible travel-friendly environment for all will require the improvement of many aspects.

Moreover, standardised content and services would increase consistency across the industry ensuring clarity in the type of services that any customer could expect. There is an opportunity in tandem for a more personalised travel experience so that each travel segment is tailored to the individual and their specific needs, the report says. Finally, the research recommends further collaboration between the private and public sectors to meet the expectations of travellers with accessibility needs.

"Lifting barriers to travel,



Alex Luzárraga
Vice President
Corporate Strategy, Amadeus



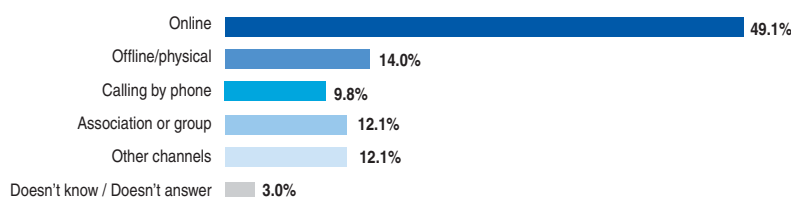
Tomas López Fernebrand
Senior Vice President, General
Counsel & Corporate Secretary
Amadeus

personalising the travel offer, using technology to further facilitate travellers' experiences and creating more accessible infrastructure where people can navigate autonomously will benefit everybody," comments Alex Luzárraga, VP, Corporate Strategy, Amadeus.

"We are committed to sustainability in the travel industry," says Tomas López Fernebrand, Senior VP,

General Counsel & Corporate Secretary, Amadeus. "Accessibility is a key element, and a powerful tool to broaden people's access to travel. Technology has a key role to play as an enabler in this. It is also necessary to work together with consumers and the private and public sectors to consolidate industry standards that ensure accessible travel for all becomes a reality."

Booking transport and accommodation at the same time



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Use innovative technology to increase ROI

The 5th MICE ME Forum recently concluded in Dubai and highlighted issues pertaining to the travel industry such as thought leadership and how technology has revolutionised the events sector in the Middle East region. Some of the speakers at the event share their thoughts with **TRAVTALK**.



Most of the speakers stressed on the importance of engaging the audience especially at events where they have to spend more time than allocated. **Craig D'Silva**, Head of PR and Corporate Communications, Infiniti Middle East office, says, "The event gave you an insight to the role of events between the large corporations, small corporations, B2B and B2C spaces. More importantly it also shared a number of key insights that we have learnt, trends that we have seen working in the events space for the last few years with the rise of digital."

The innovative Virtual Reality which is mainly taken for training purposes has many other areas that can be addressed. D'Silva reiter-

ates, "It is really important for companies and organisations to understand that it is not just ticking the box by use of these technologies and innovations but rather evaluate and see innovations like Virtual Reality and other innovative technologies really impact your business. Are they really relevant to what you want to communicate? Are they relevant to the experience you want to give your audience; be it your consumer, media or the wider public and does it really impact that bottom line? If it does, then by all means use it and utilise it to increase the ROI. But if it doesn't, definitely don't use it to tick a box rather really see how it integrates with whatever your objectives are and how you are trying to communicate."

In terms of trends in the region, macro-economic



Craig D'Silva
Head of PR and Corporate Communications
Infiniti Middle East office

The event gave you an insight to the role of events between the large corporations, small corporations, B2B and B2C spaces. More importantly it also shared a number of key insights and trends

trends will continue to affect the region but this is an



Paul Wilson
Executive Director for Planning, Business Development and International Relations
Index Holdings Dubai

The buzz-word that was used was 'thought leadership'. I think its leaders and planning for the future not just expertise and knowledge transfer but its new ideas that we are taking forward

important time for brands across the region to take a

step back and evaluate how to strategically use their resources for events, exhibitions, the rise of social media influencers and bloggers which play a crucial part on how and what you communicate to your audiences.

Paul Wilson, Executive Director for Planning, Business Development and International Relations, Index Holdings Dubai, shares, "We focus on the B2B component of the conference and exhibitions business. The buzz-word that was used was 'thought leadership'. I think its leaders and planning for the future not just expertise and knowledge transfer but its new ideas that we are taking forward so we spoke about importance of B2B and how bringing people together is the most important component when you have exhibitors and del-

egates that invest so much money and time."

The company officially ventured into events and exhibitions in 1991 and annually they organise 26 conferences and exhibitions in the UAE. Among some of the trends in the region, Wilson states, "The conferences today are most solid trend we see is the delivery of content we see through apps. I think people don't go to websites, they probably go to an app. For me the best in terms of an app are push notifications—it's a very minor thing but it is very important. When people are there for three to four days they get caught up with other things and we can talk to them. Every person goes through their phone around eighty times or so, so if you have push notifications at conferences you will have much better mileage."



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China VAC debuts in ME with Dubai centre

Middle East's first Chinese Visa Application Center (VAC) opened at the Wafi Mall in Dubai. VFS Global is the provider partnering with the country in this venture to ensure smooth service standards to the locals and residents of the United Arab Emirates.

TT BUREAU

The Middle East's maiden Chinese VAC was inaugurated under the patronage of the Consul General of the People's Republic of China Her Excellency **Li Lingbing**, **Chen Xiong-feng**, Deputy Director General, Department of Consular Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, **Wei Xiaodong**, Deputy Director General, Department of Services for the Foreign Ministry, Home and Overseas Offices, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, **Mona Hassan Al Khumari**, Deputy Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in Dubai, **Zubin Karkaria**, Chief Executive Officer, VFS Global Group, and **Vinay Malhotra**, Chief Operating Officer, Middle East & South Asia, VFS Global graced the occasion by

their presence. In her address, Li Lingbing, Consul General, Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Dubai, said, "The new Chinese Visa Application Service Center in Dubai will ensure visa applicants enjoy a service with higher quality, faster processing, and more convenience. The opening of this center will be another boost for further uplifting our people-to-people exchange, cultural communication and practical cooperation between China and the UAE."

Zubin Karkaria, CEO, VFS Global Group, said, "It is a privilege to launch the Chinese Visa Application Service Center in Dubai in partnership with the Government of the People's Republic of China. With the advancement of trade and tourism ties between the UAE and China, we are confident this new center will be effective in meeting the rising demand of China visas for UAE travellers. For greater convenience to applicants, the new center will provide services during longer operating hours and offer applicants the option of Premium Lounge services in a beautifully designed private lounge that echoes the magnificence of Chinese art and culture."



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The new center is distinguished by enhanced levels of customer service, efficient visa submission processes, and professionally trained staff fluent in local languages and Mandarin, and an exclusive Premium Lounge for personalised comfort of applicants. Applicants for visas to China are no longer required to apply at the Con-

sulate General of China in Dubai. Also launched at the new Chinese Visa Application Service Center in Dubai is the exclusive 'China in Luxury' retail offering, which offers ultra-premium travel experiences to aspiring travellers to China. Through a unique arrangement, VFS Global will offer customised tourism experiences that

open up a world of exclusivity and one-of-a-kind travel in China to the residents of the UAE.

Over the next few weeks, China Visa Application Service Centers will be launched in Nigeria, in the cities of Abuja and Lagos, in Algeria in the city of Algiers, and in Lebanon, in the city of Beirut. 🇸🇦

Emirates, Qantas enhance Oz. network

After the five-year-long successful partnership, Emirates and Qantas once again extended their alliance until 2023 so that there is improved connectivity and schedule choice across combined network over Australia, New Zealand sectors with trans-Tasman services as well.

TT BUREAU

The extension of the partnership between Qantas and Emirates will provide customers with greater year-round frequency, additional network changes and will reflect customer demand and the airlines' respective network strengths and provide more options for customers to travel between Australia and New Zealand to Asia, the UK/Europe, Middle East and Africa.

From March 2018, Emirates will stop flying from Melbourne and Brisbane to Auckland and instead focus on its non-stop Auckland-Dubai service. Emirates will retain its existing daily A380 flights from Dubai to Christchurch via Sydney, and the airline is also evaluating potential new direct services between New Zealand and Dubai. At the same time,



Sir Tim Clark, President, Emirates Airline (3rd from left) and Alan Joyce, Group CEO Qantas (4th from left)

to provide greater choice across the Tasman, Qantas will increase the frequency of its services between the two countries, adding seven new return flights per week between Melbourne and Auckland and an extra two return services per week between Brisbane and Auckland. Some of these services will be up-gauged from a 737 to a wide-body A330. Qantas' new trans-Tasman services will

carry Emirates code and will connect seamlessly to Qantas' London services via Perth or Singapore and Emirates' services between Australia and Europe via Dubai. Customers flying between Australia and New Zealand, particularly business travellers, will benefit from the improved schedule choice. The changes also enable Emirates to reschedule its Australia flights to create a better spread of departure

times throughout the day, offering customers more choice when connecting and arriving in to the 38 European and 28 Middle East and North African destinations served by the airline's popular A380 and 777 aircraft. These latest changes are included in the airlines' application to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and New Zealand Minister of Transport for the extension of authorisa-

tion for the airlines' joint business for another five years. The airlines' joint submission also includes, as previously announced, Qantas' re-routing of its Sydney-London service via Singapore rather than Dubai and Emirates' new, fourth daily A380 Sydney-Dubai service.

Sir Tim Clark, President, Emirates Airlines, said, "Re-authorisation of the partnership will allow us to leverage our combined network strengths to offer customers even more flight choices. It will enable us to continue developing world-class customer experiences, and contribute to stimulating increased opportunities for international trade, tourism and commerce."

Alan Joyce, Qantas Group CEO, said the network changes outlined in the air-

lines' submission to the regulators provide even more options for customers. "Since 2013 we have delivered more choice and a larger network to eight million passengers who have travelled more than 65 billion kilometres on our joint network. We are now enhancing the partnership to reflect customer demand, new aircraft technology and our respective network strengths. The premise of the partnership has always been that we could serve our customers better together. That's certainly been true for the past five years and now we're evolving our joint network so we can serve them even better for the next five."

Tickets for Qantas' new Tasman services are available now. Emirates customers with existing bookings impacted by the Tasman changes will be re-accommodated onto Qantas services. 🇸🇦

UAE events to draw \$44bn tourism value

Virtual reality concerts and matches, augmented reality apps, and immersive audio-visual will catalyse \$44 billion in UAE tourism receipts by 2020, and transform the live entertainment and mega-event experience for millions of people across the Middle East and Africa.

TT BUREAU

With the UAE enhancing its role as a global tourism and entertainment hub, it is set to welcome 25 million visitors for Expo 2020 Dubai, and draw \$44 billion in international tourism receipts by 2020, or 51 per cent growth from 2016, according to BMI

Research. Thanks to mega-projects such as the UAE's Bluewaters Island, Expo 2020 Dubai and the Warner Brothers theme park.

"The Middle East and North Africa is one of the world's fastest-growing live event markets. The UAE has the potential

to leapfrog established European and North American markets in using the latest audio-visual innovations to transform the visitor experience," said **Dan Bolton**, President of the International Live Events Association Middle East.

As a result, the Middle East's professional audio-visual market is one of the world's fastest-growing at 15 per cent CAGR, reaching \$2.8 billion in 2016, with the UAE as the region's largest at \$1.2 billion in 2016, according to a report by InfoComm International, organisers of InfoComm Middle East and Africa, the region's largest professional audio-visual event.

InfoComm MEA 2017 will

be held under the theme of "See the Future of Networked Communications," showcasing the latest audio-visual solutions and knowledge across audio, digital signage and immersive technologies such as augmented reality and virtual reality. Thanks to the Middle East and North Africa's ICT infrastructure, along with the region being the world's second-fastest market in smartphone adoption, according to industry group GSMA. The virtual and augmented reality can transform the live event experience, a key driver for tourism as it will be an experience worth travelling for unlike any other region. The InfoComm MEA Summit expects to host more than 500 delegates to network with the world's top audio-visual experts, exchange knowledge and share rising trends, technology updates and best practices

of the industry. Three programme tracks will include the InfoComm University Seminar, Technology Forums and Industry Forums. The 7th InfoComm MEA will run from December 5-7, 2017, at the Dubai World Trade Centre. For more information and to register for free, visit www.infocomm-mea.com.

"InfoComm MEA saw strong success on our first standalone edition in 2016, with 45 per cent visitor growth. Thanks to our expanded partnerships, conference program tracks and enhanced exhibitor and visitor experiences, Middle East and Africa entertainment leaders will be able to sign deals and exchange knowledge to support the region's audio-visual growth," said **David Lim**, Project Director of InfoCommAsia Pvt Ltd, the event's co-organisers.



David Lim
Project Director
InfoCommAsia

"With MENA's strong investment and innovative mindset, Expo 2020 Dubai and Morocco's potential hosting of the 2026 World Cup present strong opportunities to showcase how virtual and augmented reality can deliver immersive mega-event experiences. Fans can be in the front row at a match or concert, and receive geo-location offers in venues," said **Shujat Mirza**, Chapter President-Dubai at the global association Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality Association.



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WTM London draws in upwards of 50,000 participants, while generating more than \$3 billion in travel industry contracts. At this grand event, Sharjah will be celebrating being named as World Book Capital for 2019.



SHARJAH

gears up for

WTM London



Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) is preparing to participate for the 15th year running in the prestigious World Travel Market (WTM) fair, taking place in London in November. In the lead-up to this event, the Authority is able to reflect on the huge successes it secured throughout 2017.

The WTM London has become an unrivalled must-attend event for any entity with a stake in the travel and tourism sector. The fair draws in upwards of 50,000 senior travel industry professionals, government ministers, and international press, while generating more than £2.5 billion (\$3.24 billion) in travel industry contracts. It has always been a great platform to tackle international issues that relate to the travel and tourism industry. It is one of the must go to events as Sharjah continues to solidify the emirate's place as a tourism place of note and further promote it as a diverse

year-round destination, the Authority will be introducing the audience at the fair to its calendar of events including the Sharjah International Book Fair, Sharjah Heritage Days, and Sharjah Art Biennial, the world-famous Sharjah Light Festival as well as sports events including, the final race of the U.I.M. F1H2O World Championship, and the Aquabike World Championship grand prix.

The Authority will introduce visitors at WTM to the new additions of its already rich touristic offering – this includes Sharjah International Airport's expansion, the opening of our new East Coast office and tourism centre, the additions to the famed Al Majaz waterfront, historic Al Meiha archaeological site, where excavations unearthed multi-chambered tombs where horses and camels were laid to rest by their masters' sides, in addition to buildings ranging from small houses to a multi-purpose fort, Al Noor Island with its beautiful butterfly house hosting over 500 butterflies.

The Authority is also pleased to announce that Sharjah has been named the World Book Capital for 2019. The honour is a recognition of the emirate's pioneering role in supporting and expanding the local and regional publishing industries, promoting reading to become an intrinsic cultural practice, as well as embracing intercultural, knowledge-based dialogue.

The accolade is an important addition to Sharjah's existing portfolio of milestones like, Capital of Arab Culture (1998), Capital of Islamic Culture (2014), and Capital of Arab Tourism (2015). More so, the emirate





Sharjah International Book Fair, the third largest book fair in the world. Now in its 36th year, the book fair is one of the most prominent bastions of Sharjah's cultural and educational landscapes. Born out of an urge to promote literacy in the region, the book

fair has grown from humble beginnings as a small fair in a tent to now attracting record numbers of visitors annually—2.3 million in 2016, along with publishing representatives from 60 different countries. Books are available in a number of different languages and subjects and the fair has become a meeting point for intellectuals from all over the world. Famous authors, actors and Booker prize winners have all been known to attend the Sharjah Book Fair and with discounts, fun shows and programmes for all, it is no wonder that the fair grows yearly in reputation and popularity, more than fulfilling its original vision of spreading the pleasure of reading.

ents and internationally renowned artists switches on again. The Sharjah Light Festival attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors who come to be amazed by the beautifully composed music, ingenuity of the artists and technical masters who curate the stunning illuminations onto the inspiring architecture of Sharjah. SLF is a highly anticipated event as each year it takes the advancements of technology and transforms them with an elegant touch into something awe-inspiring. The emirate's architectural wonders and beautiful landmarks are newly seen, their rare and stunning details beautifully highlighted by the wonders of modern light technology in displays that take place over 10 days and a huge range of locations all over the emirate. No other event can exemplify so many of the emirate's gifts in this all-encompassing way; heritage and culture, beauty and sophistication.

A well-deserved reputation as a beacon of imaginative expression and thought-provoking artistic interpretation heralds the Sharjah Art Biennial, a platform for artists to collaborate, produce and display work. A non-commercial contemporary art event that takes place every two years, the biennial began in 1993 and has been curated by curators from all over the world and continually fosters the idea that every community needs access to and an understanding of artistic culture, which in turn will afford a greater understanding of and benevolence towards all other cultures and communities. The biennial is characterised by its interesting themes, sometimes contemplative, sometimes challenging and an open-minded approach to art. The Sharjah Art Biennial rami-fies into almost all versions of art a viewer could wish for, beyond the straightforward paint on paper; visitors come from all over the world to view art installations, interactive exhibitions, poetry readings and collaborative performances taking place at venues all over Sharjah bringing art and culture to everyone.

Summer 2017 saw Sharjah launch its first summer campaign, introducing a package of world-class events and promotions, setting the emirate apart in the way of enticements. The Sharjah Summer weekend nights brimmed with exceptionally entertaining theatrical and cinematic shows. The event was enjoyed by children and adults alike with its many activities such as a splash park, pirate village, free movie nights, food and beverage stalls, an arts and crafts workshop, and much more.



Growing Network

- Sharjah is the third largest emirate in the United Arab Emirates, and the only emirate to have land on both the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.
- Sharjah covers 2,600 km², equivalent to 3.3 per cent of the UAE's total area, excluding the islands. It enjoys idyllic weather from November to April, with warm sunny days, cool evenings and low humidity. Daytime temperatures range from 18°C to 30°C, dropping down to 12°C at night.
- From May to September, the climate is hot with midday temperatures in July, August and September reaching in excess of 45°C with high humidity. Nights remain warm, averaging over 30°C.
- While Arabic is the official and national language and Islam is the official religion.
- Citizens from some countries are required to obtain a tourist visa before entering the UAE; others can purchase a visa on arrival, while Citizens from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries do not require a visa to enter Sharjah
- Sharjah is connected to major destinations around the world through the Sharjah International Airport as well as close by Dubai International Airport.
- Sharjah's Air Arabia flies to over 88 destinations across the Middle East, North Africa, Asia and Europe.
- Sharjah is home to three of the finest deep water harbours in the United Arab Emirates – Port Khalid, Khorfakkan (one of the world's leading container transshipment ports), and Hamriyah Free Zone.
- Sharjah comprises cities including; Sharjah city, Al Dhaid, Khorfakkan, Kalba and Dibba Al Hisn.
- Sharjah has been awarded the following accolades; 'Cultural Capital of the Arab World' in 1998, the Islamic Culture Capital for 2014 and the Arab Tourism Capital for 2015.
- In 2003, the first low cost airline in the Middle East (Air Arabia) was established in Sharjah.
- Sharjah is investing in education, research and development. It supports a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation, and is home to almost 45,000 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) focused mainly on manufacturing, real estate, and business services.



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

is the first in the GCC and third in the Arab world and Middle East, to have received this recognition.

Celebrate with Sharjah

The emirate's busy and exciting events calendar offers visitors a taste of year round festivity. Sharjah is that perfect hidden gem of a holiday destination offering something special for everyone. Visitors will be entranced by vast lengths of undulating sandy beaches fringed by shady palms, clear azure waters teeming with an astonishing variety of marine life, carefully preserved historical attractions, extreme sports and activities for the intrepid and its own charming culture – as inviting as a fragrant cup of *kawa* (Arabic coffee).

This captivating emirate does not rest on its laurels. However, the events calendar is buzzing with celebrations and festivals that are a unique blend of culture, sports, entertainment, past and present – all showcasing Sharjah's fascinating attractions, allowing guests to uncover the distinct beating heart of the region.

As the cooler months approach, the higher pursuit and pure pleasure of reading is brought to the fore with the

Proving that Sharjah is an emirate with something for everyone, the educational world of books gives way to the exciting world of high octane sports with the U.I.M. F1H2O World Powerboat Championship. The waters of the emirate's normally placid Kahlid Lagoon are churned in swells as daredevil drivers push themselves and their powerboats in ever-challenging moves, providing thrilling viewing for the spectators that line the corniche (waterside walkway). This international motorboat racing competition has in recent years been followed by the equally exciting and edge-of-your-seat Sharjah Aquabike Grand Prix, where drivers flip and dive in astonishing displays as they race. Both events, taking place in December, culminate with the champions being crowned next to the waters of the Arabian Gulf.

In February, Sharjah takes things up a notch, the Sharjah Light Festival, the world's most acclaimed light festival, combining local tal-



Al Ain's ultra-modern Aloft

Chic, modern, casual and relaxing, Aloft Al Ain gains an edge over others by providing entertainment as well as options for sports tourism. Strategically located adjacent to the Hazza Bin Zayed multi-purpose stadium, Al Jimi shopping mall and a few street cafes, restaurants, residential and business units in the Al Towwaya area, at Aloft there is something for everyone.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

The drive up to Al Ain is quite picturesque as you move away from the skyscrapers to a greener, cooler environment with many mountains and valleys along the way. It is also famous as the city with the most roundabouts. Once you enter into the precinct of Al Ain, you will notice a similarity in the type of housing which is akin to that of Oman. Al Ain shares its borders with Oman, making this city open for passengers as well as cargo movements.

An ultimate getaway

The 172-room Aloft Al Ain serves as the perfect getaway from the hustle and bustle of city life to a modern, stylish yet relaxing environment. You walk into a large open space with the reception in the middle of a wide open space, a coffee shop in the far corner of the lobby. Among the many unique Marriott features is the keyless system, employed by the property, which gives absolute ease for the guests to spend less time at the reception and more time to explore the many interesting activities that can be done during their

stay. 'Bellgirls' ensure that your luggage gets into your room fast.

Stylish Chic rooms and suites

There are different room and suite types to suit the needs of family groups or business travellers. The room categories consist of King- or Twin-bed depending on the requirement of the guest ranging from 40 square metre to 51 square metre of space and the suites in an area of 60 square metre for savvy suites, 108 square metre for breezy suites and 120 square metre for ultra-savvy suites, ensuring the perfect space depending on the number of members in the family.

Dining at leisure

There are several dining options such as Olive Tree (International restaurant), The Rooftop (Pool and lounge), W XYZ Lounge (Bar) and Re:fuel by Aloft (Grab'n'go). Olive Tree is more an all-day dining restaurant with an a la carte menu. You can tailor-make your menu for the day or your whole stay. The Roof



top adjacent to the pool is a relaxing area with both indoor and outdoor seating. W XYZ Lounge is a signature brand in the chain which offers a relaxed, chilled-out experience, whereas Re:fuel by Aloft is the coffee shop where you can grab a quick bite on the move.

Recreation at its best

The pool and gym located on the roof top is an ideal combination to your weekend or short getaway. Even the long summer can be transformed to a pleasant one with a high octane energy workout at the gym followed by a dip in the plunge pool overlooking the picturesque vicinity. The pool is located on the roof top with dedicated



covered spaces for families to relax and watch over the youngsters in the pool.

Activities around the property

The 26 km-long Jebel Hafeet is just 20 minutes' drive from the property and borders Oman. It is about 4000 feet high and if you climb to the top it gives you a spectacular view of the city. At the foot of the mountain there are several hot springs which flow into small stream and form a lake, while pools and hot tubs are spread around the area. This is quite a famous tourist attraction. It has been named as a UNESCO heritage site es-



pecially because they found many ancient tombs that dated back to 3000BC. The caves are natural habitat for a wide range of animals, 200 birds and over 23 species of butterflies according

to research. Apart from this, the Al Ain Zoo, museums, Al Ain mall, several other smaller shopping malls and many other attractions will personify the importance of this destination. 📍



Al Bait Sharjah exuberates new luxury

Spread over 10,000 sqm, the latest five-star hotel project being developed by GHM Hotels under the Government of Sharjah's Heart of the City campaign is 'Al Bait'. The property will provide the experience of stepping into a real Emirati house of the bygone era, reveals its General Manager **Florian Leven**.

TT BUREAU

A boutique property with 53 luxury guestrooms and suites, Al Bait is currently under construction in the heart of Sharjah. The whole area will consist of two storied buildings in order to preserve the area considered a heritage site. General Hotel Management (GHM) is known for its most exceptional creation of luxury hotels and resorts in some of the most unique locations catering to the discerning clientele from around the globe. Al Bait Sharjah will comprise of suites of various sizes depicting Arabic influence combined with Asian design. There will be nine deluxe rooms, 13 deluxe patio rooms, nine grand rooms, 10 grand patio rooms, four heritage rooms, two heritage suites and four suites.

Sharjah preserves itself

as the cultural capital of the Arab world, hence, this hotel has been conceptualised and is on its way to be one of the most unique properties in the emirates. GHM is a Singapore-based company unique for its exclusive management of conceptualised hotels around the globe.

"We are a five star exclusive boutique hotel which cater to a very discerning and high end clientele. There are very ancient buildings around and regarded as a UNESCO heritage site. The hotel has nearly 10 to 12 buildings and is integrated to the surroundings we built the concept among them with over 17 access points. There are various souks around the hotel, various walkways and paths to go around and discover the hotel. We have hosts assigned to various rooms with personalised check-

in for the guests. The tag line is - a style to remember," Leven said.

In terms of gastronomic delights, there will be restaurants serving different types of cuisines from around the world. The names of the F&B outlets are simple. 'The Restaurant' will open for breakfast, lunch and dinner offering international cuisine and scrumptious dishes from around the world. The space has a main dining area and an open-air terrace. For those who prefer a taste of Arabia, there is 'The Arabic Restaurant'. It will be Al Bait Sharjah's signature restaurant specialising in traditional Emirati cuisine, served in an elegant, Arabic setting.

The 'Ice Cream Shop' is different from the traditional ice cream parlours. Ice cream is referred to as Dondurma



Florian Leven
General Manager
Al Bait Sharjah

(which translates to 'freezing') and are unique ice creams with Turkish and Azerbaijani influence. 'The Café' will open daily for afternoon tea and offer a quiet space among the heritage buildings, where guests can savor rich Arabic tea and coffee and pair with traditional Emirati sweets such as the 'luqeymat'.

Spa and Fitness

The 500m² spa at Al Bait Sharjah opens the door to an

We are a five star exclusive boutique hotel which cater to a very discerning and high end clientele. There are very ancient buildings around and regarded as a UNESCO heritage site. The hotel has nearly 12 buildings and is integrated to the surroundings

intimate world dedicated to the restoration of strength, beauty, and balance of the body, mind and soul following ancient healing traditions of the East. The treatments include stimulating body polishes, nurturing envelopments, rejuvenating beauty rituals and therapeutic massages, are designed to pamper and restore vitality. The ladies' spa facility includes a reception and spa boutique, three treatment rooms, a relaxation lounge, and hydrothermal facilities including a 'hammam', steam

room, sauna, hot and cold plunge pools.

The men's spa facility shares the reception and spa boutique, and has two separate treatment suites, and hydrothermal facilities include a hammam, steam room and sauna. 'The Health Club' will be a state-of-the-art gymnasium, complete with the latest technogym equipment that includes a kinesis zone, cardio zone, free weights zone, stretch and Arke zone, and fitness lounge. The outdoor swimming pool will be exclusively open to hotel guests. 🏊

An illusion 'At the Top'

Burj Khalifa recently revamped to offer new immersive technology and digital art to create an interactive experience for visitors.

TT BUREAU

The region's most-visited attraction by Emaar Properties, Burj Khalifa offers spectacular views of the city and beyond from the world's highest outdoor observation deck, now welcomes visitors with a series of never-seen immersive technology experiences. VIP ticket holders can relax at a stylish new lounge as they await their turn to commence the tour. As the guests set to start the At the Top, Burj Khalifa journey, the ambience changes; white gradient glass walls provide an illusion of clouds, highlighting the heights they will scale soon and giving a first glimpse of a four-metre illuminated model of Burj Khalifa.

This new digital makeover with a spacious new welcome reception at the Dubai Mall features unprecedented immersive technology experiences and some fascinating



'movement art'. The giant video wall creates a spellbinding 'movement art' of all visitors. Sensors gather the presence of every individual visitor, his/her location and movement, and turn them into real-time digital art. The screen uses three different themes—sea water, desert rocks and mosaic motifs—to interact with the audiences. Assured to capture the fancy of everyone is a 24-hour time-lapse shot of Downtown Dubai, the 500-acre mega-development.

As the visitors continue the journey, an inspiring message of His Highness Sheikh

Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice President & Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, greets them. They then pass by the 'Dubai Then & Now' digital tunnel, which provides an audio-visual narration of five key eras of Dubai's history. **Ahmad Al Falasi**, Executive Director-Group Operations, Emaar Properties, said, "We have leveraged the latest advancements in digital technology to ensure that every visit, every time, by anyone will assure them delightful surprises. The digitally enhanced reception will significantly add to the convenience of our visitors from across the world." 🏙



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Seven decades of flying high on SQ

Singapore Airlines recently celebrated 70 years of operations with a grand celebration at the JW Marriott Marquis hotel in Dubai. The event was graced by **His Excellency Samuel Tan**, Ambassador of Singapore to the UAE, **Joey Seow**, Regional Vice President West Asia and Africa, Singapore Airlines, among other dignitaries.



Over 230 agents attend Travelport MESA

Travelport hosted over 230 customers from 14 countries to a special conference to provide an insight into the emerging new trends, future of the sector with Artificial Intelligence and the various trends that shape the travel industry, over a period of two days at Shangri-La Oman.

 SHEHARA RIZLY



Rabih Saab
President and Managing Director –
EMEA and South Asia, Travelport

“The event is a gathering of industry stakeholders, airlines, travel agency customers, Travelport distributors in various markets and some Travelport staff discussing the trends in travel industry and beyond. As an industry we can take stock of these changes and opportunities and see how Travelport can support both airline and agency customers to drive growth in their own business. We chose Oman as it is well served, the facilities are wonderful and the properties are good with a nice environment. We’ve invested almost a billion dollars in our products and technology. We have rebranded ourselves not as a GDS but as a travel commerce platform and all that is giving airlines and other travel content and their brand the way they want to sell it. So it’s a great opportunity for the consumer to see what we are going to do.”

Technology News

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Travelport 
Redefining travel commerce

“So many people were involved to pull this event together and have taken a couple of months to get it to this stage. The concept

was to show our customers how we’ve transformed the travel industry and how we have moved and invested in our technology. We had 230 customers at our event from 14 countries and they were our key customers. We also had airlines and suppliers. The key highlights of the event include discussions on how far we have come in terms of our technology and where we are today and how we can support the business and travel industry to help them grow and build their business. We have sales teams in all the countries so we will be following up with them and we also hope to run this again next year as an annual event. They got a lot from it and enjoyed it.”



Kathryn Wallington
Country Manager UAE
Travelport

“We are focusing on mobile strategy, digital and how we give our customers more content and choice and how we provide efficiencies to the travel industry. For us it will be a real focus in 2018 on how we help the Middle East and South Asia region to utilise these new tools to their benefit. We see ourselves as a travel commerce platform and we moved away from our old-fashioned GDS model. Our key focus is on listening to what customers are asking for and allowing them to give their customers the content and services they require. Travellers who need more information need to have more content and data. We are looking at Artificial Intelligence how it can make life easier for agents. We are planning machine learning so we can give our customers faster more accurate responses.”



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

“We spoke about the power of the platform and Travelport’s new messaging that we’ve been putting to the market. Travelport is now able to touch all of the customer life cycle through pre-trip travelling and post-trip evaluation. We are really focusing on maximising returns on every trip that is booked through the Travelport platform, so traditionally, if agents booked through us there is so much more they can make money on. The role we play with travel agents is changing. We used to be the source of content for air bookings primarily and I think what we have started to get travel agents to understand is that in this world where customers are increasingly connected to their smartphones.”



Jason Nash
Chief Story Teller
Travelport



Edward Chandler
Chief Commercial and Partnerships
Officer, eNell International

“E-nett is a B2B payment company and we focus on the travel industry. We provide our customers with a virtual master card that they can use to pay their suppliers like airlines, hotels, car rental. We’re working hard to extend our presence into some local markets where it might be slightly difficult to get local paying accounts or to work with local entity because of regulation or the banking structure or the infrastructure. We’ve been in the Middle East and Africa for five years and we have a number of customers in Dubai and Saudi Arabia. The biggest challenge applies to this region and some other regions like South America. We work to provide the majority of our banking structure, banking operations.”



Niklas Andreen
Vice President and
Managing Director for Global
hospitality and digital, Travelport

“Our hospitality business is divided into three parts. We work with supplying travel agencies with hotel content they need globally, so we have around 50,000 properties and we help travel agencies book about 65 million rooms a year. Our car rental business helps travel agencies book cars and we do 95 million car rentals a year. We also work with travel agencies to provide ground transportation to and from the airport. We’ve aggravated content and made a simple and seamless way to book that on behalf of your travellers. The ground transportation space is worth almost \$65 billion. We’re making that content available on mobile devices or on website. We have transformed from GDS to a platform where travel agencies are able to engage with their travellers not just at their bookings but also throughout their journey.”



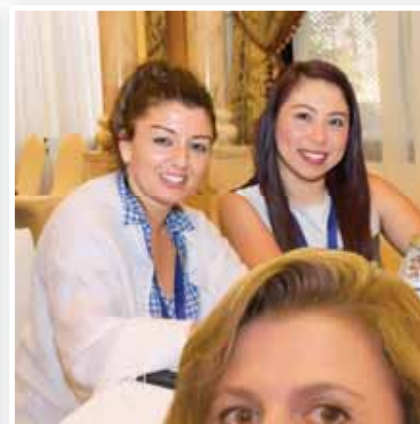
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1st OTB Abu Dhabi leaves a positive mark

The first-ever Outbound Travel Bazaar was held at the InterContinental Hotel in Abu Dhabi under the guidance of travel professional **Mario Anthony** and his team at Luxury Connections. The event was quite different from the regular B2B meetings as the buyers were brought in to a closed door setup.





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ITE HCMC hosts 305 international buyers

Vietnam is steadily growing to become a hub in the Southeast Asian region. The 13th ITE HCMC closed with a record number of exhibitors, visitors and buyer-seller meetings in 2017, bridging more international and local travel business together, further boosting the tourism potential of the Mekong sub-region.

TT BUREAU

The International Travel Expo Ho Chi Minh City (ITE HCMC), the Greater Mekong sub region's largest international travel event, concluded its 13th annual event in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam on September 9. A total of 5,282 meetings were conducted between the buyers and sellers during the three-day event, a 45 per cent increase from last year, reaffirming the importance of the event as a key bridge in the tourism industry for both inbound and outbound markets in Vietnam and the region. Vietnam's tourism welcomed more than one million international visitors in August 2017 alone – an increase of 35.1 per cent as compared to 2016.

Organised by the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, Ho Chi Minh City Department of Tourism, Informa Exhibitions and the Vi-

etnam Trade Fair & Advertising Joint Stock, ITE HCMC 2017 continued to be the leading travel trade event for international and local travel businesses. The extensive support from key exhibitors and new companies has further promoted the country's tourism opportunities. ITE HCMC 2017 showcased the strong participation of 300 international and local travel companies, including international promotion agencies.

"The tourism industry in Vietnam has an unlimited dynamism," says **Jack Wei**, General Manager of Informa Exhibitions (Asia) and Co-Organiser of ITE HCMC. "For us, it is important to discuss and present this dynamic development in a focussed way at ITE HCMC. We also want to offer all our market partners a central platform so that they can showcase their achievements and prepare

their companies for future of the tourism industry."

ITE HCMC 2017 hosted 305 international buyers from 40 countries and territories, and 40 international media from prominent travel, lifestyle, tourism and broadcast platforms, as well as award-winning travel bloggers and digital influencers.

The Gala Dinner, themed 'Vietnam Night' held on September 6, was one of the first in a series of activities of ITE HCMC 2017. The dinner was attended by government officials from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand (CLMT), Vietnam, Italy together with the sponsors, partners, hosted buyers, sellers and media. It featured the unique beauty

of Vietnam with 54 ethnic groups, together with different traditional performances from the Mekong sub-region. The opening of the 13th ITE HCMC was graced by H.E. Nguyen Ngoc Thien, Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Vietnam; H.E. Nguyen Thanh Phong, Chairman of Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee together with other government officials from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Italy at the Saigon Exhibition & Convention Center (SECC), Ho Chi Minh City. ITE HCMC 2017 hosted important multi-lateral meetings, attended by high ranking dignitaries from the ACMECS countries and Italy, to promote cooperation and development of the tourism sector among the

countries, including, the 4th CLMV Tourism Ministerial Conference, the 3rd ACMECS Tourism Ministerial Conference and the Vietnam-Italy Tourism Forum.

This year, ITE HCMC presented new ITE Awards to recognise the outstanding participants and partners for their exemplary support and contributions, including three award categories – ITE Best Booth Design Award, ITE Exhibitor Recognition Award and ITE Partner Recognition Award. The Travel Fun Fair Day held on the last day of ITE HCMC 2017 attracted more than 16,000 visitors and presented them with exclusive travel promotions on flight tickets, accommodation and tour packages. Public visitors also experienced stage performances and traditional showcases on musical and culinary cultures from exhibiting booths. ITE HCMC will return for its 14th edition on September

6-8, 2018 at SECC, featuring more international and local travel companies, thereby, promising a better tourism market mix to the event. All travel companies who are looking to develop both inbound and outbound tourism businesses in Vietnam or CLMT countries are welcome to register at www.itehcmc.com.



Fact file

- ▶ The Gala Dinner, themed 'Vietnam Night' held on September 6, was one of the first in a series of activities of ITE HCMC 2017
- ▶ ITE HCMC will return for its 14th edition on September 6-8, 2018, at SECC
- ▶ Vietnam Tourism welcomed more than one million international visitors in Aug 2017—an increase of 35.1% as compared to 2016



U-tinerary: The new travel guide

The recent rise of millennials in the Middle East, UK, USA and Europe is witnessing growth in experiential tourism with very personalised, tech savvy and unique trends. **Gabriela Asquith**, Founder, Story Unheard, talks about its hip 'U-tinerary' service.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

Q What is the concept of U-tinerary?

The concept is that of travel guide cum luxury concierge combined with travel itinerary. Just like a travel guide, we give you the most up-to-date and personalised information on your chosen destination, like the ones you'd expect from a luxury concierge – and then we fuse it with the planning and scheduling involved in an organised travel itinerary you'd receive from a tour operator. Instead of undergoing the trouble of planning your trip and researching for hours on where to stay or things to do, one of our travel experts curate your customised and detailed itinerary which you can receive in a matter of days. Our itineraries only recommend the very best options based on your likes



Gabriela Asquith
Founder
Story Unheard

We present you with the highlight reel of any given destination so when you leave, you feel you haven't missed out on any of its top highlights. Travellers fill in a questionnaire that tells us about them and how they would like to travel

and interests. We present you with the highlight reel of any given destination so when you leave, you feel you haven't missed out on any of its top highlights. Travellers fill in a questionnaire that tells us about them and how they would like to travel.

Q Who is the target audience?

We targeted travellers in the UK, Europe, USA and UAE from the ages of 18-35 who found the entire holiday planning process cumbersome and just wanted the top suggestions without any hassle. We focussed on young couples, groups of friends and solo travellers looking for an itinerary that put forward the most unique suggestions from their chosen destination. However, our current audience is actually much wider than that. We now have families and

senior travellers approaching us for our itineraries.

Q Is there a fee to join? Who can join in?

There's no fee to join and anyone is welcome. You just pay for the U-tinerary. The rate will vary, depending on the number of days you want a play-by-play itinerary. It's all very transparent with no hidden costs. All prices are listed on the website in the U-tinerary page. For example a three-day trip costs £150 (AED 738) and a five-day trip costs £250 (AED 1,230). You can even just have a one-day itinerary for £50 (AED 246)! By opting for our 'Bookings Service', restaurants, hotels, transportation, activities, trips and events, tickets can be booked directly through us at an additional handling fee which is listed on the U-tinerary website.

Q How will the service help the ME travellers?

More and more travellers in the Middle East are looking to experience the very best of their chosen destination based on their preferences. In comes Story Unheard's U-tinerary! We understand the needs of the Middle East travellers well and know exactly what makes them tick. Whether it's for a chic city break or an exotic trip in a far-flung destination, we ensure they feel incredibly comfortable wherever they are in the world with recommendations that meet their expectations.

Booking Spree

➤ A three-day trip costs £150 (AED 738) and a five-day trip costs £250 (AED 1,230). A one-day itinerary costs £50 (AED 246)

Smart App for Sharjah tourism

■ This year over 4,000 exhibitors and 147,000 visitors participated at GITEX Technology Week spread across a week at WTC Dubai. HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority, emphasised that the Authority was keen to participate in the event for the fourth year in a row based on the vision and directives of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah.

SCTDA showcased the latest applications for smartphones at this year's event, highlighting Sharjah's new Mobile App, Virtual Reality, which enables visitors to immerse themselves in short promotional films about Sharjah. In addition, the Authority introduced 'Virtual Dressing', a new interactive technology which allows tourists to experience traditional Emirati clothing and take souvenir images with digital activation. SCTDA also launched its new website. Al Midfa noted that the Authority was eager to assimilate new methods of promoting Sharjah and introducing its landmarks and tourism elements in the most modern and sophisticated way.



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Uganda entices Dubai travel trade

Recognising Uganda's influence on the global market, Satguru Travel organised a Uganda Convention in Dubai from October 7-9, 2017, at Hyatt Regency Deira Dubai, to highlight the country's strength and contributions to the Middle Eastern audience.

TT BUREAU

Uganda Convention Dubai 2017 was hosted in collaboration with hotel partners—Hyatt Regency Deira Dubai and Grand Excelsior Deira—with Satguru Travel's focus on bringing attention to the lucrative investment opportunities in Uganda, in addition to showcasing its distinct produce including agriculture, coffee, and local handicraft.

The event is the first of many executed by Satguru Travel to transform from Travel

Management to a Destination Management Company. Almost 80 exhibitors participated in the convention to promote their products and tourism initiatives, including many travel agents that experienced widespread interest in Uganda's inbound tourism opportunities. A truly extravagant affair, High Ministers and an estimated 30 members of the Parliament were in attendance alongside the Ambassador of Uganda in Abu Dhabi, H.E. Nimisha J. Madhvani. The Ambassadors said that Uganda is a wonderful coun-

try to be in and is celebrating Uganda's 55th Independence Day for the first time in the UAE. They want to develop tourism and trade between the two countries and explore the many business opportunities between them.

Santosh Punjabi, Regional Manager, Satguru Travel, said, "Being one of its kind event between the two nations, I am confident that the synergy will triple the number of participants and business by next year." The last day of the convention was



Santosh Punjabi
Regional Manager
Satguru Travel

a lavish affair with over 350 guests in attendance including local visitors, government officials and business partners



all came together in the Hyatt Regency Deira Dubai's Crystal Ballroom. Uganda's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Henry **Oryem Okello** graced the occasion as the chief guest and encouraged local investors to actively consider investing in a diverse range of sectors such as petroleum, manufacturing, agriculture and farming.

With trade between the UAE and Uganda already valued at over \$600 million, the Uganda Convention Dubai 2017 played a key role in strengthening

economic ties. Not only was the audience impressed by the intricate displays, there was undeniable enthusiasm generated towards investing in Uganda's products and learning more about their export capabilities. Satguru Travel will take proactive steps to invite an increasing number of African countries including Rwanda, Ghana and Ethiopia to use this platform to nurture new trade and business partnerships that will serve as a gateway to economic prosperity for all stakeholders. 🇦🇪



flydubai takes off to over 200 routes

The recent strategic partnership between flydubai and Russia aims to further strengthen not just the two carriers, but also the hub of Dubai. **Jeyhun Efendi**, Senior President – Commercial Operations UAE, Middle East, Europe and CIS, flydubai, speaks with **TRAVTALK** on their plans.

SHEHARA RIZLY

Q Could you share flydubai's the plan of action?

From the start of our operations in 2009, flydubai was created to connect Dubai with underserved markets and to strengthen tourism and business traffic. Following the strategy, we have introduced Russian destinations in the early years of our operations and have started mainly flights to regions of Russia which either didn't have direct flights or didn't have regular flights around the year.

Q How was the performance of the Russian market?

Over the years we have seen a growth of several folds of tourism traffic but in the last four years, there has been a slight decline in passenger numbers due to the economic

crisis, although with the removal of the visa restrictions for the Russian nationals in February 2017, we have seen a huge growth in passenger numbers.

Q What are the plans for the upcoming season?

We have doubled our capacity into Russia this year, so now we are operating to 10 cities in Russia including Moscow and nine regional airports. We are further doubling our capacity in general in terms of the number of flights as we believe



Jeyhun Efendi
Senior President – Commercial
Operations UAE, ME, Europe and CIS
flydubai

that having a regular source of flights will further boost in passenger numbers. We are also operating our 58 brand

We have doubled our capacity into Russia this year so now we are operating to 10 cities in Russia including Moscow and nine regional airports and we are further doubling our capacity in general in terms of the number of flights as we believe that having a regular source of flights will further boost in passenger numbers

new fleet of 737-800 aircrafts and by next year, we shall have a further addition of 80 737 Max order. We will double the capacity to 50 flights per week to 10 Russian cities and also start operations to Makhachkala in south of

Russia, Voronezh and Ufa in central Russia.

Q Could you throw light on the partnership with Emirates?

Several months ago, our Chairman H.E. Sheikh Ahmed Bin Saheed Al Maktoum announced the strategic partnership with Emirates Airlines. Over the past few weeks the code-share network was opened between Emirates airline and flydubai. Effective November 1, 2017, all of flydubai Russian flights

will have Emirates code-share which would mean that Emirates would be able to connect from all of the network of Emirates to flydubai and vice versa.

Q How many code-share will you have with Emirates over the next few weeks?

flydubai operates to over 95 destinations, out of which, 60 routes were never connected to Dubai by Emirates or any other airline. Combining over 60 destinations with Emirates, we will reach 200 plus routes that can connect via Dubai International Airport. We plan to codeshare on all our routes. We started with 30 routes two weeks ago, and would eventually be introducing 30 more over the next couple of weeks. We plan to finish all the flydubai network with Emirates by the end of the year. 🇦🇪



Russian trade comes calling to Dubai

Dubai's leading Russian tour operator, Natalie Tours organised its 12th annual congress with over 200 CEOs and owners of Russian travel agencies, who have shown the best sales performance in the UAE during the past year, in attendance.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

Natalie Tours' annual congress was partnered by its UAE arm, Alpha Destination Management, Dubai Tourism, flydubai and Atlantis-The Palm. The event was hosted for the fifth time at Atlantis-The Palm under the patronage of **H.E. Gocha Buachidze**, Consul General of Russian Federation in Dubai, **H.E. Ahmed Khalifa Al Falasi**, CEO, Support Services, Dubai Corporation for Tour-

ism and Commerce Marketing (DCTCM), **Vladimir Vorobiev**, President, Natalie tours, **Adnan Aridi**, Managing Director, Alpha Destination Management, **Serge Zaalof**, COO, Atlantis-The Palm Dubai, **Jeyhun Efendi**, Senior Vice President – Commercial Operations UAE, Middle East, Europe, CIS, flydubai and **Natalia Vorobieva**, General Director, Natalie Tours.

For two decades now, the leading Russian tour operator

with a 25-year history of work in the Russian travel services market has been holding this event to award best sellers, discuss further cooperation with top managers of retail companies and motivate its partners to promote the travel direction and increase sales of Natalie Tours' services in the UAE. Currently, the share of Natalie Tours' customers in the total flow of Russian tourists travelling to the UAE exceeds 15 per cent, and this indicator ranks Natalie Tours as number one travel agency for the UAE destination. According to the results of the past winter season, the United Arab Emirates were in first place in the company's sales structure, accounting for 43 per cent in the revenue distribution and for 37 per cent in the total number of serviced customers. While opening



the Managers' Congress, V. Vorobiev said that Natalie Tours planned to "at least double" these indicators.

In his address, Al Falasi stated, "We have a wide range of hotel categories for Russian travellers to suit their budget as we now have over 100,000 hotel rooms. Dubai hospitality has diversified but the service standard has increased the quality to ensure that visitors return to Dubai. The two carriers, Emirates and flydubai have increased capacities over the years and from October 1, 2017, Emirates will further increase capacity on the Dubai-

Moscow route. End of the month sees flydubai increasing to 10 flights so that more Russian travellers can visit. Our overall goal is to welcome over 20 million visitors by 2020 and this is possible with your continued support."

In his opening speech, V. Vorobiev also referred to the rapid development of UAE hotel base and the focus of the country's authorities on boosting the flow of Russian tourists. He reiterated, "In 2013, the number of tourists visiting from Russia to Dubai had a good growth, then when the economic crisis hit the nation, there was a drop

in tourist numbers. However, this year we have seen a further increase and hope to have at least 150,000 tourists from Russia before the end of the year and by 2018 target nearly 200,000." **Adnan Aridi**, MD, Alpha Destination Management, stated, "We have been working together with Natalie Tours for the past 15 years. The last quarter of this year looks very good and we are hoping that the numbers will increase. With the support of our partners flydubai increasing flights to Russian destinations and DCTCM extending their support we are bound to have a good influx of Russian tourists." 



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Enhancing housekeeping efficiency

Housekeeping standards and efficiency is of utmost importance as the guest needs to be ensured of excellent service during his stay. The announcement of the General Availability (GA) of FCS Housekeeping V3.1 with new features serve to further boost housekeeping efficiency and guest satisfaction.



The latest version of FCS Housekeeping includes the ability to implement task assignment rules that can adapt to changing priorities throughout the day. Other useful enhancements include instant access to guest profiles via mobile app, greater report customisation and the ability to view or update an array of additional information via mobile device.

"FCS Housekeeping has been an industry game-changer in housekeeping ef-

iciency since its initial launch, and the new version continues this legacy by providing the staff with even greater insight into the tracking and management of tasks," said **Shannon Lau**, Product Manager for FCS Housekeeping. "With the new features, properties can further streamline task related data to ensure swift and effective completion of all assignments," she said.

With each guest room constantly undergoing changes in room status, from an active task to completion and being ready for a new guest, it is vital for an efficient house-



Shannon Lau
Product Manager
FCS Housekeeping

workforce to be able to rely on an assignment list that reflects current priorities. That is why one of the key features included in the FCS Housekeeping upgrade is the ability to configure specific assignment rules that can be sent to staff depending on the time of day that run repeatedly with the use of pre-set time scheduling. This ensures that room attendants adhere to specific responsibilities that reflect what is needed to be com-

FCS Housekeeping has been an industry game-changer in housekeeping efficiency since its initial launch, and the new version continues this legacy by providing the staff with even greater insight into the tracking and management of tasks

pleted at a certain time, such as attending to a rush room or working on an arrival room.

FCS Housekeeping V3.1 also equips hoteliers with far greater control over how and when performance reports are generated and sent, as well as what sort of information is included. Specific fields such as guest room activities, status tracking or time taken to complete tasks on a certain floor, can now be grouped and sorted based on user preference. This functionality provides hoteliers with even greater insight by allowing them to edit reports down to specific data,

facilitating the ability to analyse and make performance comparisons where needed. Reports can be customised to offer either summary or detailed descriptions. Sent via email as an attachment, each report can also be submitted to multiple recipients.

The latest version of FCS Housekeeping allows staff to access a guest's profile from mobile devices. With the ability to instantly look up a guest by room number or name, room attendants can view essential information, such as personal preferences and profile notes, increas-

ing their ability to provide customised service to each guest. Further enhancements made to the FCS Housekeeping mobile app also include a job posting confirmation message that allows staff to verify the accuracy of information before being submitted. Besides, the new platform also includes a list of other performance enhancing abilities that include optimised room matrix user interface offering the ability to view more rooms and hours, new pop-up screen that allows users to perform multiple actions, new room assignment rules based on room number and guest preference codes which can be sorted in ascending or descending order, remarks and notes that remain linked to a specific guest room until guest check-out, minibar items, linens and amenities tailored based on guest room type. 📱



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ONEVIEW tailored to its unique offering, has enabled its new acquisition to gain an unbeatable foothold in the market. We provide products that have a distinctive edge through our technological difference (even the designs), through our innate UI characteristics and UX experience to our customers

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To make this happen, we collaborate with the customer to take them through all the phases of the product development. Moving towards the exploration phase along with the team creates a required development and healthy bonding. This provides better adaptability on quality terms to the product for its delivery and high customer satisfaction. We believe in utmost satisfaction of our customers by providing solutions in set timeline (Sprints). 🚀

Brijesh Agarwal, Director of Operations, One View IT solutions

Online, not an option anymore

It is predicted that by the end of 2017, online revenue is expected to reach \$35 billion in the Middle East. Ernesto Hernandez, Director, EMEA Online Technical Sales at Sabre Corporation, speaks to **TRAVTALK**.



Q Please explain the importance of transition from offline to online for agents.

Agencies that still believe they don't need to go online are missing on a huge growth opportunity in the market. On the other hand, the demands of travellers in the Middle East are driven by advances in technology and consumer adoption. Today's travellers don't think of 'online' and 'offline' when they manage their travel. Some estimates suggest travellers look at an average of 38 websites before making a booking decision. Consumers may start on a desktop,

drop out of sight and then re-start searches on a different device or check with offline travel agencies. They also now look for more inspiration and validation of their choices on review sites, social media and among their own peers. They seek benefits from both worlds.

Q In the ME region, a large segment of offline travel agents still perform well. What should they do to ensure more profits from online too?

People still see some distinct benefits of traditional brick-and-mortar travel agents, especially when it comes to human interaction,



Ernesto Hernandez
Director, EMEA Online Technical Sales
at Sabre Corporation

personal service and support when something goes wrong. I believe this is important in the case of complex itineraries – the personal connection allows a travel agent to establish a level of trust that can be hard to match in a digital interaction. Fortunately for agents, these complex itineraries often result in high-yield products.

For offline travel agencies to succeed in today's competitive world, they require to adopt an online and mobile strategy to balance their investments in both online and offline. Online is not an option anymore.

For offline travel agencies to succeed in today's competitive world, they require to adopt an online and mobile strategy to balance their investments in both online and offline. Online is not an option anymore

Q How should travel agents prepare themselves for online platforms?

The question is whether the main reason to 'go online' is to enhance the existing value proposition of the brand or to diversify the brand by making it accessible to new market segments. For example, enhancing the value proposition of the brand could mean just extending the customer experience or service into the online realm, which may or may not involve getting 'new bookings' through it, but could increase 'customer retention' or 'revenue per customer' by capitalising on upselling opportunities. On the other hand, the main driver for diversifying the brand value through the online space could be to generate new bookings from an

altogether different market segment than the one currently reached through the offline channel.

Q Could you share the strategies to be used by travel agents, both online and offline, to engage millennials?

In context of the financial and strategic implications, the travel agency will still have to select upon a vast number of execution related 'build versus buy' decisions. One of the most common among them is whether it should build and maintain its own internet booking engine (IBE) or source it from a qualified third party provider. While it is true that most big travel agencies have developed their own IBE, it is also true that some small to medium or niche agen-

cies have remained with an off-the-shelf IBE for many years in a very successful manner. Therefore, while it is difficult not to give a very general set of questions that will make the final decision too relative depending on the customer scenario, I find it easier and more practical to simply suggest to the travel agency to realise that this key decision can be changed or reversed at different points in time. Therefore, I strongly suggest exploring reliable third party providers to see if their off-the-shelf IBE solution can be a practical means to experiment and further refine their initial online strategies without having to make significant capital expenditures at the beginning.

Fact file

- Some estimates suggest travellers look at an average of 38 websites before making a booking decision
- They also now look for more inspiration and validation of their choices on review sites, social media and among their own peers



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UK remains primary market for UAE

The UK has always been a primary market for UAE, shares **Samir Hamadeh**, General Manager, Alpha Destination Management, with **TRAVTALK**.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

Q Is the UK market picking up in terms of outbound to Dubai?

There has been a major focus from the destination and its stakeholders on UK and we believe it will remain one of the top source markets in 2018 for Dubai.

Q Do explain the strategies used to get more UK tourists to visit UAE.

The more the destinations create attractions and tailor their product to cater to UK tourists, the better conversion they can expect. People seek experiences. Dubai is becoming a major attractions hub and it is very important that we focus on offering experiences and added value to our customer. Our approach to UK has to be different than other markets and key to that is coming up with new ideas to grow stop over business. In order to support Dubai's goal to attract 20 million visitors annually by 2020 and maintain a stable momentum of growth, there is need for new packages and offers with added-value to entice



Samir Hamadeh
General Manager
Alpha Destination Management

transit passengers to stay for least one night rather than simply pass by. We are also focusing on Dubai's strong calendar of events to excite more travellers to come over.

Q Which emirate do they like and what sort of vacations do they book?

Dubai is still at the heart of the UAE tourism attractions and it is still within the heart of UK tourists. This does not mean it stops them from exploring other lower budget emirates such as Ras Al Khaimah. We have also seen a major increase of visitors to Abu Dhabi from UK offering a great cultural experience, yet Dubai remains the main center and main attraction. 🇦🇪

Mauritius beckons agents for fun and frolic



Constance Hotels and Resorts recently hosted a Fam trip to Mauritius from Dubai partnering with Nasser Air Travel & Shipping Agencies-GSA for Air Mauritius in UAE in association with MTPA in September 2017. The trip was arranged specially for agents promoting and selling Mauritius and to give them a better understanding of the destination and what it has to offer. The agents stayed two nights each at the Constance properties - Constance Belle Mare Plage & Constance Prince Maurice to experience the property and its offerings. They also had a chance to interact with the lions at Casela Park, visit the Grand River South East Waterfall and the Ile aux cerf arranged by MTPA.

Sheraton Jumeirah Beach Resort

Dubai

Mohamed El Aghoury takes charge as the new General Manager for Sheraton Jumeirah Beach Resort. Mohamed brings along more than 25 years of hospitality experience including 21 years spent at some of the most prestigious hotels and resorts in United Arab Emirates. Prior to joining Sheraton Jumeirah Beach Resort, he was the Cluster General Manager at The Meydan Hotel and Bab Al Shams Desert Resort & SPA. El Aghoury holds a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and Business Administration as well as a Sales & Marketing diploma obtained at the American University of Cairo.



Mövenpick Hotel

Bahrain

Mövenpick Hotel, Bahrain appointed **Karim El Berkchi** as the property's new Director of Sales and Marketing. With over 15 years in the hospitality industry, El Berkchi brings a wealth of knowledge to the five star hotel, including a solid GCC background and strategic sales experience. He was previously the cluster director of sales and marketing for the Radisson Blu Hotels in Muscat and Sohar. This appointment also marks a personal return for him to the hotel group, as he worked with Mövenpick Hotel, Kuwait as sales manager in 2006.



Marriott International

Dubai

Neal Jones has been appointed Chief Sales and Marketing Officer, Middle East and Africa, Marriott International. He will provide support to the company's thriving regional portfolio and will be responsible for driving top line revenue for Marriott International brands, ensuring the regional sales and marketing strategy is aligned with the company's vision and priorities.



Sandra Schulze-Potgieter, Vice President of Premium and Select Brands will be responsible for Brand Marketing and Management for Marriott International and will oversee Restaurants & Bars Marketing as well as Area Field Marketing. Sandra was previously Senior Director, Brand Marketing & eCommerce for Marriott International, Middle East and Africa where she managed field marketing, brand marketing, public relations, partnerships, social media, digital as well as loyalty. She was instrumental in positioning Marriott International's lead in brand marketing in the region.



Sarah Walker Kerr, Vice President of Communications, Middle East and Africa will be responsible for devising and implementing the overall communications strategy for Marriott International in the region. She will provide strategic counsel to the senior executive leadership team, manage internal and external communications, crisis communications and reputation management as well as brand communications. Sarah was previously Regional Director of Public Relations, Middle East, Africa, India and Japan for The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company.



Sarah Allen, Vice President of Revenue Strategy & Analysis will be responsible for property, market and Area Revenue Management, Remote Revenue Management Solutions and Revenue Management Analysis. Formerly Vice President of Revenue Management, Marriott International, MEA, Allen has played a key role in moving hotels on to Marriott's revenue management platforms, implementing processes as well as setting up shared services across the markets to drive synergies. She was also the business leader for the integration of Protea Hotels which was acquired by Marriott International in 2014.



Aloft and Element Hotels

Dubai

Marriott International has announced the appointment of **Stuart Birkwood** as Cluster General Manager for its upcoming properties in Dubai - Aloft Me'aisem, Element Me'aisem and Aloft Dubai South. Birkwood will oversee the operations of over 500 rooms, eight food and beverage outlets and facilities across the hotels. Birkwood brings more than 25 years of experience from across the UAE, Poland, Finland, UK and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He started his career with Hilton in the UK in 1991 before joining Marriott International in 1994 and has since worked in some of the company's most prolific properties.



InterContinental Hotels

Abu Dhabi

InterContinental Abu Dhabi appointed **Georges Abi Aad** as Resident Manager in charge of the Commercial Department, to oversee its day-to-day operations. He will head the Sales & Marketing department as well as assist the General Manager of InterContinental Abu Dhabi with the day-to-day activities of the hotel. Prior to this, Abi Aad was the General Manager at Vision Hotels Management in Abu Dhabi. With more than 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Abi Aad worked at Sofitel Abu Dhabi Corniche as Director of Sales and 'The Diplomat', Radisson Blu Hotel, Residence & Spa in Bahrain.



We create and facilitate investment and development opportunities in Sharjah

At Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) we identify, develop and execute initiatives that address the strategic needs of the Emirate of Sharjah, whether it is fostering investment in key economic sectors or actively developing iconic tourism infrastructure developments, we represent a vital role in the continued economic diversification of Sharjah.



Al Majaz Waterfront

The popular Al Majaz Waterfront has reached the second phase of its plan and is expanding to accommodate more visitors and offer more entertainment options. It is a premier destination which offers world-class restaurants and cafes, overlooking the breath-taking Sharjah Fountain.



Al Qasba

Cast off in a traditional 'abra' to tour Sharjah's lagoons or ride the 60-metre-high ferris wheel to take in views of Sharjah City. Al Qasba's diverse range of offerings as restaurants and cafes provide something for everyone.



Al Noor Island

Al Noor's fantastical lighting creates a surreal sensory experience. Visitors can enjoy various attractions including the Butterfly House with its hundreds of brightly coloured butterflies, the Literature Pavillion which provides a place of solitude, Noor Cafe and more.



Heart of Sharjah

Step into a world of bustling arab souqs and fascinating Emirati History reflected by Souq Al Arsa and Souq Al Shanasiyah. This unique destination offers an unparalleled historical and cultural experience that weaves modern life with a rich history.

Corporate Office

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