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

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- World's longest zip line in RAK.....05
- Air India spreading its wings far and wide.....06
- South Africa targets Middle East market.....15

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VAT to change spending habits

Come January 1, 2018, the UAE will charge five per cent Value Added Tax (VAT) on goods and services. Whilst it will contribute to the nation's development, it is imperative to understand the impact of VAT on the tourism and hospitality industry. **TRAVTALK** asks economists, tourism and hospitality partners about their views and subsequent impact of the new tax regime on business.

 SHEHARA RIZLY



Bruce Hamilton
Director-Indirect Tax
Deloitte

“The move to introduce VAT forces business owners to be more compliance oriented. You have to be rigid with your prices and procedures to ensure that the documentation gets to the right place and is recorded in the right way, so you can file your VAT return. The benefits of that are often small.

Redo your budget: Hotels which are earmarking budgets for next year, must add the VAT component. In terms of actual cost

of operations, the VAT may not cost more. However, to claim VAT on goods or services they acquire, they'd need to have the documentation from their suppliers as well.

Inform everyone around: Travel trade professionals need to have themselves registered by the tax authority and that has to be done by the end of December. This is for the reason that they will get a tax number which needs to be shown on all documents from January 2018.

Businesses need to have a number of different communication strategies—for suppliers, customers and staff. The staff is going to be dealing with situations where people might get a little upset or won't understand what's going on.

The Ministry of Finance's website offers information sessions. It is necessary to have a look and make sure you attend one of those sessions. Even small businesses can get themselves computerised; there are special computer packages that will allow you to work with VAT. Tax engine softwares will take you through the process but there's a lot that needs to happen. We don't have to be worried if food is going to be treated concessionary, it's not. It's simply subject to 5 per cent VAT. So it means if you're dealing with hospitality or F&B services, you pay VAT and reclaim it.

Impact on MICE: It is only 5 per cent unlike Europe that has more than 20 per cent VAT. It shouldn't impact travel and tourism much but there would be an impact on conferences. The costs will be slightly higher, particularly if they are international conferences, there will be VAT.

VAT on airfare: International flights are generally zero rated for VAT so there's no additional cost there. There will be some sort of VAT requirement on domestic flights. International travel is not treated as VAT. It is technically subject to VAT but it's at zero so the effect of cost has not changed at all. ”



Shan Saeed
Chief Economist
IOI Group

“VAT will consolidate the fiscal side for the government. It will give much further space in terms of investments; infrastructure and maneuverability not only short term but also in the long run. People will tend to benefit from this strategic initiative. VAT has been applicable in more than 147 countries, so it will bring more transparency, help to bring more people into the tax net and most importantly it will help in increasing tax to GDP ratio.

Not only that, it will eventually help the government in boosting the balance sheet. Any policy measure that the government will take, especially in order to curb inflation, will take 12 to 18 months for inflation to return to normal level. Economy does not run on a single variable and because of VAT the economy will not slow down. It is good for the government to introduce VAT at this point of time ahead of 2020 because that will give consumers and tourists an idea what is eventually to happen to the economy. Overall, it is a strategic initiative which will bring transparency and will enhance the tax GDP ratio in the long run. ”

“VAT will affect the industry without a doubt. One of the interesting talking points among industry leaders is how the tax will be incorporated into the operations and finances of hotels on a day-to-day basis. Dubai's leisure travellers often travel on holiday packages, and with VAT being charged on individual goods and services, it is as yet unclear how the industry will absorb or transfer these new costs when creating packages of services. What is important to know

is that there are still ways for businesses to reclaim VAT that is incurred on costs. For restaurants and hotels whose costs are based on purchasing expensive luxury items, this will come as a relief. The concern from the hospitality industry is that Dubai is already an expensive place to run a business from and with the introduction of tax, experience tells us that what starts at 5 per cent can quickly escalate over time. Industry professionals will need to have communication channels that can educate and support businesses in adhering to the requirements of VAT. ”



Jonathan Worsley
Chairman, Bench Events and
Board Director, STR



Haitham Mattar
CEO, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism
Development Authority

“While the full details of the VAT implementation are still being defined, it is not a measure that is likely to impact the tourism industry – which already contributes a significant portion to the GDP of the country. VAT is a common phenomenon in many countries around the world so tourists are familiar and accustomed to that. They will continue to travel to destinations like Ras Al Khaimah and the UAE to enjoy the diverse

and high-quality offering, unique landscapes and world-class hotels and attractions. The impact in terms of cost is likely to be very minimal, especially when weighed up with the other benefits of the destination. ”



“It is important to note that as we speak, only the UAE VAT Law has been published by the UAE Federal Tax Authority (FTA) and we are waiting for the Executive implementation regulations which will include far greater details in terms of VAT application in the UAE. That being said, the FTA has published some guidance on their website and I would highly encourage people to use it as much as possible as it will provide them with a lot of information on this topic. The most important exercise that any company needs to perform in the UAE, not just travel, tour operators and hoteliers, is to engage a tax advisor and perform a VAT impact assessment so they can understand how VAT will impact them as a business but also for example how to approach their pricing strategy when it comes to VAT. Time is running out for companies before January 1, 2018, and the travel, tourism and leisure sectors, because they fall under the exceptions in the UAE VAT regime, are by consequence, more complex to understand and assess. They should not underestimate the efforts needed to be VAT compliant by January 1, 2018. ”



Pierre Arman
Market Development Lead - Tax
& Accounting and Global Trade
Management, Thomson Reuters

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DTCM 'techs' the road to tourism

Dubai's tourism department has ventured on a new revolutionary campaign for the city's travel and tourism sectors. **Yousuf Lootah**, Executive Director–Tourism Development & Investments, Dubai's Department of Tourism & Commerce Marketing, shares their journey towards becoming a global hub for innovation.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

Q Elaborate on the objective behind the collaboration with GITEX. Why did DTCM decide to create the Dubai Tourism Futurism Competition?

The 37th GITEX Technology Week, to be held from October 8-12, 2017, has undoubtedly established itself as the region's largest consumer and trade technology event. The exhibition has evolved to encompass startups and entrepreneurship, both key pillars that act as accelerators of innovation and are supporting Dubai's growth as a future-ready city.

Dubai Tourism is exploring opportunities to partner with start-ups and innovators, not only in the region, but around the world, in an



Yousuf Lootah
Executive Director–Tourism Development & Investments, Dubai's Department of Tourism & Commerce Marketing

effort to create solutions that are targeted at further revolutionising the city's travel and tourism industry. By collaborating with GITEX Future Stars, we aim to create an international platform that encourages innovation, allowing the world's bright minds and start-ups to showcase pioneering travel-tech solutions. The Dubai Tourism Futurism Competition is our endeavour to in-

We are currently exploring various avenues that will allow us to further encourage pioneering thinking and offer platforms for innovators to create revolutionary solutions that tackle challenges of the future

spire travel-tech innovators and offer an opportunity for them to succeed.

Q Who was this competition targeting? Do the submissions received match the target audience?

The Dubai Tourism Futurism Competition features two sub-categories–hospitality and visitor experience–for which individuals and start-ups from around the world were invited to submit their proposed solutions and business plans. The competition was successful in attract-

ing over 100 submissions from across the globe, a stellar result for the first-ever edition.

Q What are the anticipated short-term and long-term impact of this competition on the travel and tourism industry?

The Dubai Tourism Futurism Competition is closely aligned to the Dubai 10x initiative which was launched under the leadership of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the

UAE and Ruler of Dubai. As the city continues on its journey to becoming a global hub for innovation in the next 10 years, platforms such as this Competition will not only support in discovering innovative solutions, but will also further facilitate the growth of Dubai's start-up ecosystem. We also anticipate that these solutions will play a crucial role in achieving Dubai's Tourism Vision 2020 of attracting 20 million visitors per year by 2020.

Q Are there any similar programmes and initiatives planned for the future following GITEX? How will you sustain the interest generated towards this initiative after GITEX?

We will continue to build on the success of the Dubai

Tourism Futurism Competition, as we aim to nurture an environment for start-ups to succeed. We are currently exploring various avenues that will allow us to further encourage pioneering thinking and offer platforms for innovators to create revolutionary solutions that tackle challenges of the future.

Save the Date

- » 37th GITEX Technology Week will be held from October 8-12, 2017
- » The exhibition has evolved to encompass start-ups and entrepreneurship
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EDITORIAL

Gearing for new trends

Many properties and airlines are increasing their capacities towards South Asian region expecting billions of dollars in turnover in the time to come. A question that arises at this point in time is whether the Asian market is ready to receive with open arms the luxury-seeking Middle East travellers. In most cases, there is a gap between the actual needs of the traveller and what the destinations wish to roll out to the traveller from the Middle Eastern region.

Certain South Asian countries have definitely scored one or two points higher than most others as they have taken the time and precautions to understand the travellers from this region but in most cases we have witnessed otherwise; the reason is that the Middle Eastern traveller needs more personalisation in their ventures. Japan and China are emerging inbound markets in the UAE, but are they ready to negotiate according to the terms of the Middle Eastern clientele.

Personalisation has become the buzz word in the trendsetting UAE. A few years ago, technology was hitherto unknown in this region, yet the setting up of various European technology giants pave the way for this market to gear up and take up the challenges that accompanied it. Today, Middle Eastern travellers have definitely overtaken most other more mature markets as a leader in trending as they move up to fulfill their goals. The UAE and Saudi Arabia are two countries which seem to be at the helm of utilising travel technology, hence the focus is on them. The UAE has taken one step further in ensuring their step on a different form of tourism altogether, what we know as space tourism. Artificial Intelligence is another aspect. A key point to note here is that these technologies have embraced people so much so that they have lost the human touch.

As UAE gets closer to vision 2020, new plans and regulations are been implemented to ensure that a more compliant society is developed over the next few years by the introduction of VAT in the two states from January 1, 2018.

10.6% hike in tourism for Dubai

The emirate maintains a strong 2017 tourism performance, with high double-digit spikes from five of top 10 source markets; India surpasses one million visitors in a six-month period for the first time

TTT BUREAU

A record total of 8.06 million international overnight tourists arrived in Dubai during the first six months of 2017, reflecting a stellar 10.6 per cent increase over the same period last year. Figures released by Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Dubai Tourism) affirm the foundational strength, and sustained acceleration of the emirate's tourism sector, as it stayed the course of its impressive growth trajectory from January this year, underscoring the expanding appeal of Dubai as a global tourism destination of choice.

Almost all of Dubai's top 20 inbound visitor source markets saw positive or near stable year-on-year performances in H1 2017, with five of the top 10 delivering standout double-digit growth. India continued to top the list of traffic generators, for the first time crossing the 1 million mark over a six-month period with 1,051,000 Indians visiting the city between January and June, up 21 per cent over the same period last year. Saudi Arabia and the UK retained their spots as the second and third largest feeder markets respectively, with the former rallying to stabilise in June despite facing economic challenges in 2017, while the latter delivered reliable volumes backed by solid 4 per cent year-on-year growth.

The strategic impetus of recent regulatory changes granting citizens from China and Russia free visa-on-arrival access to the UAE was evident in the continued growth peaks being delivered from these markets as they topped the charts with 55 per cent and 97 per cent increases respectively over the first six months of 2016. As a result, China delivered 413,000 visitors to end H1 2017 in fifth place, and Russia



H.E. Helal Saeed Almarri
Director General
Dubai Tourism

We are extremely pleased that Dubai has sustained the momentum of growth we achieved in the first quarter to deliver a strong double-digit performance through H1 2017

cemented its return to the top 10 with 233,000 visitors. With the exception of Oman – the GCC's second highest volume driver – which continued its negative slide through 2017 witnessing a sharp 30 per cent decline, the remainder of the top 10 all saw increased contributions. The USA continued its resurgence to end mid-year up 6 per cent in sixth place, followed by Pakistan up 11 per cent in seventh, Iran up 27 per cent in eighth, and Germany up 6 per cent in ninth spots respectively.

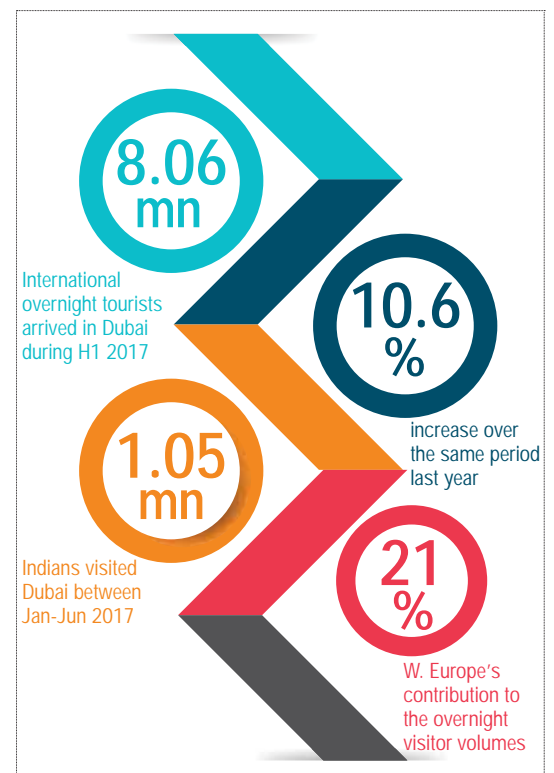
From a regional perspective, Western Europe contributed 21 per cent of the overnight visitor volumes, maintaining its pole position from earlier in the year, reflective of Dubai Tourism's strong international destination marketing efforts aimed at driving consideration from a wider spectrum of European market segments. Dubai sustained its appeal among traditional stronghold markets across the GCC that collectively accounted for 19 per cent of traffic during H1 2017, driven by efforts to continually

revive the city's offerings encouraging frequency of regular repeat travel.

North and South-East Asia as well as the Russia, CIS and Eastern Europe bloc both saw 2 per cent gains over their 2016 year-end contributions to end H1 2017 with 11 and 7 per cent shares re-

live the city's offerings encouraging frequency of regular repeat travel.

His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General, Dubai Tourism, commented: "We are extremely pleased that Dubai has sustained the momentum of



spectively. This performance is attributable to a series of sustained cross-industry activities to raise general market awareness and tangibly grow visitation via structured trade partnerships from these high-potential markets.

South Asia, meanwhile, delivered a robust 18 per cent share, making it the number three regional contributor, followed by the MENA region in fourth place with a stable 12 per cent share. Rounding off the regional mix and reflecting the continued diversity of Dubai's visitation base, the Americas contributed 6 per cent in volumes, Africa 4 per cent and Australasia the fi-

growth we achieved in the first quarter to deliver a strong double-digit performance through H1 2017, setting the stage for continued acceleration in tourism volumes and GDP contribution this year. Alongside the continuous expansion and enhancement of Dubai's infrastructure and tourism proposition, and backed by the strength of our industry stakeholders across government and private sectors, our goal now is to ensure that the city builds on this positive trajectory through not just the remainder of 2017 but also further, to get us closer to our Tourism Vision 2020 target of 20 million annual tourist arrivals." 🇦🇪



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is printed on behalf of
Durga Das Publications
(Middle East) FZE
at
Cirrus Graphics Private Limited
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Noida, (U.P.) 201 301
UAE : Z1-02, P.O. Box 9348,
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World's longest zip line in RAK

Adventure seekers are in for some real thrill as Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority is all set to launch the first phase of the world's longest zip line at mountain Jebel Jais this December. **Haitham Mattar**, CEO, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority, shares upcoming plans and agenda.

TT BUREAU

What was the reason behind starting the world's longest zip line in Ras Al Khaimah?

Jebel Jais has long been a favoured destination for travellers and visitors to Ras Al Khaimah, who partake in a number of adventure activities, or to enjoy the views from the UAE's tallest peak. Building on the success of last year's launch of the Jebel Jais Via Ferrata adventure product, the new zip line represents Ras Al Khaimah's most significant tourism product opening since Al Marjan Island, our coral-shaped leisure tourism archipelago.

As part of our wider tourism strategy, and in line with our goal of attracting one million visitors to the emirate by the end of 2018, RAKTDA

is investing significantly in developing products and attraction tourism stakeholders who will add value and appeal for a greater number of travellers to Ras Al Khaimah. We believe the world's longest zip line, which will instantly become a bucket list attraction, will add considerable appeal to the destination.

What importance does this zip line hold for tourism in Ras Al Khaimah and how long will it take to develop?

The zip line is a key product launch for Ras Al Khaimah and will enhance its unique mountain-beach-desert offering. Once we achieve the Guinness World Record as the longest and highest zip line, it will form a very successful tool in strengthening the awareness of the destination globally. In terms of increased

visitors, during its initial opening, the zip line will be able to accommodate around 250 people a day, that's 100,000 a year and will further stimulate visitor numbers to the emirate.

The initial phases of the project have already been completed earlier this year, this involved feasibility studies, design and master-planning, extensive surveys, soil tests, land planning and construction simulations. Construction began last month, and will take approximately 3.5 months and is scheduled to be complete ready for a December opening.

What is your target audience for this tourism product?

A key target market for the zip line will be active adventurers and those looking to fulfil bucket lists. However, it is not a niche product and



Haitham Mattar
CEO, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism
Development Authority (RAKTDA)

we will be promoting it across core and emerging markets for visitors of all ages. The only restrictions are that participants must meet the minimum and maximum weights of 35 kg and 150 kg, and be more than 120 m tall.

What can RAK offer to tourists other than those seeking adventure?

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Toro Verde brings with it a wealth of resources and expertise from its previous projects in Central and South America, including in Puerto Rico – the site of the world's current longest zip line. Toro Verde Ras

Al Khaimah counts specialist expertise in construction, engineering, operations, safety and marketing that will ensure the Ras Al Khaimah zip line is a truly world-class tourism product for the emirate.

Al Khaimah's Destination 2019 strategy, RAKTDA has worked with key stakeholders and investors to develop the emirate as an all-round destination for all traveller interests within a sustainable growth strategy, and an added value for tourism in the UAE. In addition to offering fantastic value for money, RAKTDA has focused on promoting our amazing natural landscapes. We offer diverse and exciting

new products, in addition to the world's longest zip line, coming online later this year and we are optimistic of continued growth from all key markets for the remainder of the year and beyond. In line with our Affiliate Membership of the UNWTO and the UN's Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, RAKTDA has instigated various initiatives to maximise the economic and social benefit from tourism. 🌍

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Air India spreading its wings far and wide

Although last year witnessed many challenges across the field of aviation, Air India continued its journey as the leader of the skies venturing out to new destinations and ensuring their rapid growth trajectory. The regional office in the UAE has been one of the most active hubs across the network.

TT BUREAU

The 2017 Arabian Travel Award-winner Air India's Middle East office has been thriving since the past few years, supported by a very proactive team led by Regional Manager-GMEA, **Melwin D'Silva**. It was a very busy year with many new routes inaugurated and expansion plans in the pipeline. Some of the key routes were the San Francisco and Washington flights, Vienna and Stockholm flights in Europe. The low-cost arm, Air India Express has also been performing very well in the region and there has been quite a



Melwin D'Silva
Regional Manager-GMEA
Air India

number of new routes which were unveiled over the past two years.

D'Silva shares, "We've been spreading our wings across the globe connecting two important destinations in

We've been spreading our wings across the globe connecting two important destinations in the USA and two in Europe. In terms of the budget or low cost carrier, we unveiled many key domestic destinations to our portfolio such as Varanasi, Amritsar, Lucknow, Kochi, and Calicut from India connecting to Sharjah, Riyadh, Ras Al Khaimah and Al Ain

the USA and two in Europe. In terms of the budget or low cost carrier, we unveiled many key domestic destinations to our portfolio such as Varanasi, Amritsar, Lucknow, Kochi, and Calicut from India connecting to Sharjah, Riyadh, Ras Al Khaimah and Al Ain. Travel agents form a very important component of our distribu-

tion channel and we've been coming up with very attractive schemes for them such as PLB scheme. We also ensure that we give our customers with market-driven baggage allowances from time to time. We were earlier restricting the baggage allowance to 20 kg but now we have increased the baggage allowance to 30 kg. Even in Air India Express we come up with very friendly schemes for passengers such as allowing 40 kg baggage when required."

In the past three years, Air India has been in the forefront with their growth plan, offering attractive rates and amenities onboard which has ensured a rapid yet steady growth from the region. The introduction of the six freedom fares where the fares that were competitive to go to and from the gulf region over India to any point further; i.e. for e.g. South East Asia, Australia, etc. saw a further increase in passenger numbers to avail this offer.

"As far as my region is concerned we are now flying to Delhi and Kochi on a Dreamliner which is doing very well. Riyadh to Calicut is another new route. We have a combination of 777 aircraft to Jeddah. These are the types of promotions that are been done with the passenger in view and this combination of

actions and promotions has helped air India to retain our share," D'Silva adds.

He concludes, "The market has become very competitive to maintain load factors. It is a meticulous job and minute-by-minute you have to monitor your loads, fares, how you are looking compared to the competitors. Based on the analysis, we planned a three-way strategy on how to retain our passengers, how to support our travel partners and how to be visible in the market. These focused strategies ensure our passenger base is retained, our distribution channel and travel partners supports us and we are visible in the market." Air India, as the national carrier, has many duties towards the nation and they work very closely with the local embassy and ambassadors to extend help during trying times. 🇮🇳





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Thailand showcases health & wellness

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) recently conducted the Amazing Thailand Health and Wellness Showcase 2017 in Bangkok. The event, attended by over 130 participants, was meant to encourage Thailand's health tourism sector demonstrate its potential and place the service providers on a global platform.



“We have a variety of products for health and wellness in Thailand that can give unparalleled rejuvenation to the body, mind and soul. This is why, throughout this annual event, we focus on the growth of health tourism sector in our country. This is the fourth year of this event and it gave an opportunity to bring over 123 buyers and media from 30 countries with 44 sellers from Thailand to meet under one roof. Middle East is a very important market for us. We work with a lot of airlines from the Middle East as their connectivity is well received.”



Pataraporn Sithivanich
Executive Director – Europe, Africa and Middle East Region, TAT

“The entire purpose behind organising this health and wellness showcase is to promote Thailand as a hub for medical and wellness tourism. Thailand has the potential to serve all kinds of wellness tourists, be it those who would like to get medical check-up done or beauty surgery or just rejuvenate themselves. The Middle East is one of the most lucrative markets for Thailand, because a lot of tourists love to come to Thailand for our health and wellness services, besides our hotels, shopping arenas and natural attractions. Compared to last year, the number of medical tourists to Thailand has increased by around 10 per cent from this region.”



Nithee Seepae
Executive Director – Product Promotion Department, TAT

“We carry out many campaigns in collaboration with TAT to promote the destination's health and wellness tourism sector, and invite our partners from the trade to get the benefits offered in these campaigns. This opens many new markets for our professionals from this sector and helps the country to grow. Also, Thai Airways has introduced a loyalty programme for its members in order to promote the destination as a wellness tourism hub. We have a number of flights from the Middle East as there are a lot of travellers from the region who come in here.”



Wantanee Kaewmeesaeng
Manager – Royal Orchid Plus Marketing Department Thai Airways



Homa Souratian
Managing Director – Global Sandhills Tourism UAE

“Thailand offers some of the best wellness and medical treatments available in this region. Their unique regeneration surgeries using new techniques was very interesting and the number of hospitals and companies attending this event was amazing. Coming from the UAE, I can see many opportunities for our clients to indulge in the treatments available in Thailand at a competitive rates, Arabic speaking environment, state-of-the-art facilities and levels of safety.”



Reem Al Daghma
General Manager Gate to Wellness

“It was a great opportunity for us to get introduced to different medical centres in Bangkok specifically and from different parts of Thailand. I like the idea that they took us to visit some clinics. To go there and see them made a huge difference. The B2B time allocated was better and because we were given more time. Usually, you just get time to meet and greet but here we had 10 minutes and it's a very good way to give you an idea of what's happening and decide.”



Syed Mohamed Aslam
BDM, Travel Point/Travel City, LLC of MediCare Tourism

“As a buyer we got a lot of time to speak with the sellers. There were many clinics and hospitals at the event with a few spas. TAT is really encouraging medical and wellness tourism in the country. For me, medical tourism isn't a business, it's a service. I have to ensure the client gets good quality treatment, good value for money and time spent on the process of the treatment. You need to prove to the person who is going to sell to the market.”

1st Travel Tuesday in Dubai

Travel Tuesday is a networking event where various destinations and airlines can meet and network with corporates, MICE and travel trade.

The inaugural session will be hosted with Singapore Tourism and Singapore Airlines on October 17, at the Taj Hotel Dubai. According to the organiser of the event **Ashwin Singh**, Managing Director, Plus Point, the event is setup in two segments. In the first segment there will be decision makers from the various corporates and MICE organisers who will attend a presentation of the supporting destination and the airline where they will get all the information that will help them to plan for future business. In the second segment there will be colleagues from the travel trade who are actively promoting and selling the supporting destination.

Singh says, “One of the biggest challenge for promoting destinations and their airlines in a networking trade event is to achieve an ROI and unfortunately this is not happening. Many desti-



Ashwin Singh
Managing Director Plus Point, Arabian Travel Award winner

One of the biggest challenge for promoting destinations and their airlines in a networking trade event is to achieve an ROI and unfortunately this is not happening

nations do not have access to corporates directly. Travel Tuesday had been launched to achieve that ROI and educate the awareness to the

corporates, MICE organisers and the travel trade associates information that they do not get first hand. Many people are not even aware of a destination tourism board presence in the region. This event will help people to understand various destinations to plan their companies future MICE or individual travel.”

Many events are done once a month which lose out steam and others are done once every year. This event will be held once every two months on a Tuesday and will stay focused on helping destinations and their airlines on achieving an ROI. They expect all destinations and their airlines having local office based in the UAE and also those who have no presence to take advantage of the Travel Tuesday event to reach out to these decision makers from corporates and travel and drive more business to their respective countries.



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ibis Styles Dubai Jumeirah is operated by R Hotels (a member of R Holdings) under a franchise agreement with Accor Hotels

Why savvy US fliers prefer Air Canada

Air Canada operates three weekly flights between Dubai and Toronto and offers connections to more than 100 destinations in Canada and the United States. **Deepu Cyriac**, Country Manager - UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman, tells **TRAVTALK** about the airline's new routes and expansion plans.

TT BUREAU

Air Canada, has turned its hubs in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver into easy, fast connecting points for travellers to the US and Canada. **Deepu Cyriac**, Country Manager-UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman, says, "Travellers clear US Customs in Canada without even having to retrieve their checked luggage. Waits are minimal. In the past, one had to reclaim luggage before US Customs clearance while entering the US and then go on to security screening. But Air Canada reversed the process. Luggage gets screened while you get screened. That slashed 15 minutes off connecting times in Toronto. After a security checkpoint, travellers wait in a holding room for their names to turn green on a display,

indicating that their bags have been X-rayed and US Customs is ready to process them. Unless officials order a physical search, the bags go straight to connecting flights."

Air Canada's international connection push has been a decade in the making. The airline has invested heavily in new planes, high-speed moving sidewalks, ultrafast baggage belts, bigger security checkpoints and international airport clubs with showers. Getting all its flights in the same terminal in all three of its hubs has made connections quicker and easier. Air Canada operates 3 weekly flights between Dubai and Toronto and offer them connections to more than 100 cities in Canada and US. Air Canada flies to about 60 American cities and considers many of



Deepu Cyriac, Country Manager - UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman, Air Canada and Nasir Jamal Khan, CEO Al Naboodah Travel and Tourism on the occasion of 80th anniversary for Air Canada

them as their strongest market as not many direct overseas flights are operated to these airports. Therefore, itineraries such as Dubai to Pittsburgh or Minneapolis via Toronto are of advantage to customers.

"During winter, Air Canada can get you from Detroit to Dubai in 15 hours 15 minutes which includes the transit time in Toronto. Geography helps with keeping flight times competitive, since trips between the US

and both Europe and Middle East pass over Canada," Cyriac adds. This year, airline rating firm Skytrax awarded Air Canada the best airline in North America. The airline offers lie-flat Business Class beds on all its long-haul aircraft with aisle access for all Business Class seats and Premium Economy on all long-haul flights. The airline has refreshed its fleet faster, largely with new Boeing Dreamliner 787s and 777s.

Air Canada's Premium Economy offers superior comfort and personalised service. Inside this exclusive, quiet cabin, passengers have ample room to stretch out – in a larger seat with more recline and extra legroom. Premium Economy class also includes, premium dining service, 11" personal touch TV, and a variety of airport

priority services. Lowest premium economy fare between Dubai & Toronto is AED 7,470 (including taxes). As part of Air Canada's 80th anniversary, all Premium Economy passengers will get lounge access in Dubai at the Lufthansa-Star Alliance lounge. The offer is valid until October 30, 2017, for tickets issued in UAE. The airline launched 16 international and US trans-border routes in the second quarter of 2017 which includes Toronto to Mumbai, Montreal to Algiers and Vancouver to Frankfurt.

Quick Facts

- Air Canada has invested heavily in new planes, high-speed moving sidewalks, baggage belts, bigger security checkpoints and international airport clubs with showers

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Personality of the month

Orient Travel's pillar of strength

Touted as one of the most dedicated travel personalities in the region with a career spanning over 37 years, **Asim Arshad**, Group CEO, Orient Travel and Tourism, truly deserves his rightful honour of being ranked 19th among the top 50 Indian Executives in the Arab World in 2017. Meet **TRAVTALK**'s personality of the month for September as we unravel his secret to success.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

Asim Arshad is synonymous with the Orient Travel brand. At the helm of the company for over 37 years, Arshad has been a pioneer and leading strategist for Orient Travel as well as the industry within the region. His direction and culture disposition has taken Orient Travel to great heights and their achievements speak for themselves.

Orient Travel's corporate travel services meet the highly individualised travel needs of companies and their people through a blend of technology and personalised service. They solely represent Carlson Wagonlit Travel in the UAE, a global leader with a presence in over 150 countries specialising in corporate travel management. With a strong reputation for providing market-leading solutions to corporate travellers, Orient Travel provides integrated online booking tools, programme optimisation through in-depth diagnostic analysis, risk management solutions, traveller assistance services, etc. all form part of our customised solutions.

Besides, Orient Travel Group comprises Corporate Travel, Holidays, Leisure & GSA Affairs; Orient Tours, the inbound Destination Management Company, and Orient Cargo (Freight division).

Arshad started his career as a management trainee in TCI (Travel Corporation of India), New Delhi, and then left for Muscat to work for Ehab Travel in 1979 for exploring greener pastures. In March 1981, he moved to Sharjah, UAE, to join Orient Travel and today after nearly four decades, he still holds fort as the leading executive in the company ensuring that there is a steady growth plan over the years. In 1985, he was promoted to the position of Sales Manager and subsequently given the nod to

lead the company in 1986. The same year, he was promoted as the CEO of the group with approximately 35 employees within his ambit. Today, the Orient Group employs over 600 travel professionals, which is a sizeable strength for this part of the world.

Established in 1963, Orient Travel is now in its 54th year of operation, a milestone for any travel business in the region. Spread across the UAE, with more than 25 strategically located offices and more than 10 implant offices, it is the only travel agency with branches in all the seven emirates of the UAE. In 2014, Orient Travel was appointed the sole partner

in the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Sultanate of Oman for Carlson Wagonlit Travel, catapulting it to unprecedented growth. Fully operational offices in Doha, Bahrain, Muscat & Kuwait now make Orient Travel a leading regional player in the Middle East.

Managing GSA representation of over a dozen international airlines, Orient Travel services some of the largest corporate portfolios in the country including sizeable clients who feature in the Fortune 100 companies.


Arshad throughout his career at Orient gained many achievements both at a professional level and personal as well. Professionally, the biggest achievement was when he obtained Orient Travel the partnership with Carlson Wagonlit Travel for five countries i.e. UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman. In 2009, he was awarded by the CEO Clubs UAE Chapter for his valuable contribution to the travel industry.

Having been in the industry for a while, Arshad stated how the industry has changed its course today and how it was when he first came in to the industry. "The industry has gone through a big change from the time I landed into the UAE. In 1981, everything was manually driven, technology did not have much of a role. Everything from the booking process, to the ticket issuances, etc. were all manual and our communication link was something known as SITA. However, today, technology is driving how we live, work and travel. Technology is what has record power and is rapidly changing our industry today. It is now completely automated. Customers expect to find what they need

Technology is what has record power and is rapidly changing our industry today. It is now completely automated. Customers expect to find what they need anytime, anywhere and any way they want it. From a travel agent, they expect the best price and service

Asim Arshad
Group CEO, Orient Travel and Tourism

to find what they need anytime, anywhere and any way they want it. From a travel agent, they expect the best price and the best service. Indeed, they are more demanding because supply is in abundance and technology is also disrupting and enabling the value chain. For example, OTAs, social media, etc. The customer demands are

timeless because they have always wanted the best price and excellent service. That is what they demand today, that is what they will demand tomorrow and that is what they will demand the day after. Basically, I don't see a change in the demand pattern but the requirements/ needs of customers will vary vis-à-vis products." 



Asim Arshad,
Group CEO
Orient Travel and Tourism

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Meeting rooms redefined at ibis Styles

In today's fast paced world, corporate training and brainstorming for new ideas is a regular feature in the calendar of most companies. ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira has become one of the premier locations in the area to introduce these next-gen meeting rooms and services which includes a three-minute free massage.

The ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira has definitely created a niche in the field of hospitality as they introduce one of the most promising new type of meeting rooms to their guests. This new concept of meetings rooms is relaxed, chic, vibrant and easy to arrange with even the shortest time span.

Muhammad Haider, Hotel Manager, ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira, says, "Our property is centrally located with close proximity to business and leisure areas. We are always developing new programmes which will ensure that our clients, both corporate and leisure, receive the best in service standards. Our new meeting room concept and the confectionary marketing campaign are the latest offerings to our clientele and we have entrusted our new Assistant Food and Beverage Manager Marvin Munoz to drive these campaigns."

Marvin Munoz, Assistant Food and Beverage Manager, ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira, is a legend at R Hotels Group for quite a long time and is known as the person behind the success of King's Grill, a popular outlet at the Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman under the guidance of **Iftikhar Hamdani**, Cluster General Manager for Ramada Ajman, Ramada

Beach and Wyndham Garden Ajman. He has been entrusted with some of the result-oriented projects for ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira and one of them is the new conceptual meeting rooms and the other is commodity trading with other partners, under the leadership of Muhammad Haider.

Marvin shares, "At first, we created one meeting room with this new concept which has a relaxing ambience and the maximum capacity of accommodating 30 participants. We have seen a great demand from most of our corporate guests for this. Soon, we will be launching a second one with a higher capacity to accommodate the many requests from our corporate clientele. We do provide all traditional meeting rooms facilities with an addition of a three-minute complimentary massage for a limited period of time for the guests who make their bookings."

The location plays a pivotal role in the development of such novel offerings to the guests. The seats in the meeting room are arranged according to the requirements of the guests with all other state of the art facilities and an extensive menu of snacks to choose from, depending once again on the clients' requirements and they even go one step



Muhammad Haider
Hotel Manager
ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira

We are always developing new programmes. Our new meetings room concept and the confectionary marketing campaign are the latest offerings to our clientele



Marvin Munoz
Assistant Food and Beverage Manager,
ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira

We have seen a great demand from most of our corporate guests for our new meetings room. Soon, we will be launching a second one with a higher capacity to accommodate the many requests



Chef Mohamed Ouakki
Executive Chef
ibis Style Dubai Jumeira,

Our aim is to ensure that any client booking our venues are given maximum support in not just choosing the menu of their choice but to tailor make one that will suit their requirements



Gayan Weerasinghe
Cluster Pastry Chef,
Ramada Downtown Dubai, Hawthorn
Suites by Wyndham Jumeirah Beach
Residence and ibis Styles Jumeira

This gives me and my team strength, more exposure in supplying our products and further enhancing our capacities to develop novel products to the clientele we serve

further to offer the clientele a tailor-made package should they require, hence it is fast becoming a popular choice among corporates.

According to Marvin, they have received many inquiries from corporate clients from India, the UK and Philippines with of course India taking the top spot even in the corporate field. This new concept is fast catching on in the corporate arena and very

soon it will be the most sought after meeting facility in the area. Today, most offices prefer to have informal meetings and workshops away from their own offices and this concept developed by ibis Styles is a game changer for those in the precinct of Al Mina road in Jumeira one area.

Marvin shares, "We have special packages to suit the needs of every client. If the clients recommend us to other corporates we do offer various discounts and other offerings depending on the volume of business. We can offer one, two or even three coffee breaks and even lunch buffet, tailor made to the request of our clientele, but our focus is our guests and we will offer what they require at all times. We are flexible and can understand any nationality and their requirements. Our menus are carefully planned by our chef but could also be accommodated according to the requests of the client. We have got many inquiries for the past few weeks mainly on corporate recommendations and we hope to launch the second meeting room on the top floor so that we can accommodate more corporate meetings for our clients. We want our clients to be happy and

experience the property as much as they can."

Chef Mohamed Ouakki, Executive Chef, ibis Style Dubai Jumeira, shares, "Our aim is to ensure that any client booking our venues are given maximum support in not just choosing the menu of their choice but to tailor make one that will suit their requirements. We ensure our guests are happy and we know that food makes people happy so we try our best to give them the best in food and beverage to satisfy their requests."

Another new concept offered by ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira is their own bakery and confectionary concept to provide fresh items for other properties in the vicinity apart from their sister properties. **Gayan Weerasinghe** joined R Hotels as Cluster Pastry Chef of its Dubai properties – Ramada Downtown Dubai, Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham Jumeirah Beach Residence and ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira. As Cluster Pastry Chef, he is tasked to create the confectionery items to be supplied to all three properties. He is expected to come up with creative dessert displays on various occasions, explore the latest trends on pastry-making and design, and en-

sure that all pastries served by the hotels are up to the highest standard in terms of taste and presentation. He works closely with the head chefs of each property. The young and passionate chef has 11 years of experience in the hospitality industry, having started in his home country, Sri Lanka at the Grand Oriental Hotel in Colombo. He was able to work under international award-winning Executive Pastry Chef Frederic Scaillteur in Bahrain.

Chef Gayan shares, "I have been serving the sister properties with bakery and confectionary items over the past 18 months and I'm really enthusiastic in the new project entrusted to increase supply to other hotels and establishments in the vicinity. This gives me and my team strength more exposure in supplying our products and further enhancing our capacities to develop novel products to the clientele we serve."

The hospitality sector mainly rely on rooms and meeting room revenues in their portfolios but ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira has taken that first step in ensuring that F&B is equally promoted to ensure a steady state of business round the clock.



IoT and Blockchain technology in travel

The technology and methodologies such as design thinking used by SAP, ensure that the most important experiences are well captured for future travellers. This was revealed to **TRAVTALK** recently by **Pedro Pereira**, Digital Transformation Leader at SAP EMEA South.

TT BUREAU

How has IoT (Internet of Things) become a part of the traveller experience?

Technology is really changing the game today. If you see the Internet of Things, it is a great enabler knowing more of the traveller every step of the way. We connect with the traveller from the house, to the taxi, to the airport and all the way when she/he lands at the destination and where she/he would prefer to visit. This information is made possible with this kind of technology. We are able to provide back to the traveller the best experience because we have the relevant data today. We have an opportunity to re-imagine the entire travel industry using the internet of things and artificial intelligence.

How does blockchain technology help travel?

This is a breakthrough technology to the travel industry. For example, imagine that you are arriving from London to Dubai and your identification is already processed and authorised digitally in London hence you do not have to pass immigration when you land in Dubai but walk straight ahead to the itinerary you have planned. We can have the digital identity from the travellers all the way from one airport to another which will completely improve the ecosystem of travel. This secured environmental trustworthy platform in block chain was not possible before.

How do travel agents and tour operators benefit from this technology?

They will have all the

benefits the needs of the traveller. This will change the whole travel ecosystem. This information will enable a better service

Dubai in digital mode by 2020

Dubai is not new to digitalisation. What we see in Dubai is a process started long time ago and we are just taking it to the next level.

Dubai is adopting innovation and technology to enhance the experiences of the citizens first by making them happy and at the same time ensuring the government entities and the service providers around the travel industry more productive and efficient that in a context of all your experiences you can have will make the travel industry from the UAE a model for worldwide benchmark.



Pedro Pereira
Digital Transformation Leader
at SAP EMEA South

We can have the digital identity from the travellers all the way from one airport to another which will completely improve the ecosystem of travel. This secured environmental trustworthy platform in block chain was not possible before

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necessary information about the traveller, such as their preferences, personal information, etc. which will enable them to ensure that they design their services with real time offers which

from the travel agent. For example, the travel agent can recommend the types of services required by the traveller ensuring that the privacy of the traveller is kept secure.

more productive and efficient that in a context of all your experiences you can have will make the travel industry from the UAE a model for worldwide benchmark.

Ezeego1 debuts in Dubai

Online travel marketplace, Ezeego1.com entered the Middle East with their newly established office in Dubai Internet City, which will be the headquarters and global base for strengthening its presence in MENA.

TT BUREAU

Recognised for its robust technology and innovative distribution channels Ezeego1 will enable and distribute comprehensive content of hotels, holidays, activities, cruises, cars and travel insurance through its B2B online travel portal

agent.ezeego1.ae. Travel agents, tour operators, retail and wholesale agents and destination management companies partnering with Ezeego1 can access millions of travel products on the online booking tool, avail flexible payment and settlement options, multi-currency support, custom-

ized technology and 24x7 customer support across geographies to be able to provide their customers the best travel experience.

Neelu Singh, CEO and Director, Ezeego1, said, "We started off our B2B arm in 2009 and have been in the forefront concentrating

on different offerings in the market. We have already mapped the requirements of the Middle East market and have confidence that we can cater to all those conditions, necessities and constraints. Dubai will be the headquarters catering to the Middle East and Africa region as we see a very good growth po-



(L-R): Thomas C Thottathil, VP-Corporate Communications and CSR, Cox and Kings; Neelu Singh, Director and CEO, Ezeego1 and Noel Swain, COO, Ezeego1

tential. We believe that our global reach and technological know-how combined well with the local expertise of the travel providers can address the growing demand of inbound and outbound travel in the region. Extension of our rich B2B

presence to this region will support the need of the growing client base of travel partners by providing solutions in the area of marketing, inventory management and dynamic pricing to achieve sustainable profit margins."

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Leaders in personalised hospitality

Personalisation is pivotal in the hospitality industry. Hurawalhi has revolutionised the Maldives resort industry as it celebrates one year of securing its position among the world's leading high-end luxury resorts catering to some of the most unique markets.

IT BUREAU

Just a 50-minute seaplane ride from Male is a distinctive collection of exclusively designed, and supremely spacious villas strung across the glistening lagoon – where guests can enjoy exquisite sunset panoramas. With dining options that include 'on the beach', 'over the water', and even 'underwater', the philosophy here is that nothing is impossible. Offering 90 villas including 60 Ocean Villas and 30 Beach Villas, Hurawalhi is a sanctuary of serenity for adults seeking luxury and innovation. The villas are stylish and beautifully conceived, featuring soothing décor, sumptuous linens on king size beds, bleached wooden floors, and private terraces with panoramic views.

The strength behind the brand will be the services rendered by the dedicated team of staff headed by an outdoorsman, passionate

diver, water sports enthusiast, with nearly 15 years' experience in hospitality covering a range of different resort brands across London, Fiji, New Zealand and Bali – **Bradley James Calder**. A New Zealand national, Calder recently took up the reins as General Manager for the property. During his almost four-year tenure as Resort Manager for Gili Lankanfushi was voted as the 'Best Hotel in the World 2015' and '2nd Best Luxury Resort 2016' by Trip Advisor Travellers' Choice Awards.

His game plan is very clear. The idea is to be recognised as an iconic resort of the Maldives and consistently rank in the top 10 resorts for the Maldives. Hurawalhi is unique as they encompass the correct environment technology coupled with sustainable practices at the resort as one of their brand attributes. Bradley states, "The Maldives has evolved from an escape destination

for the rich and famous, to a honeymoon destination and now more of a mass market destination with family travel becoming more popular. Due to the ever increasing number of resorts it is important to define the brand positioning of Hurawalhi and then to set the standard higher for Kudadoo. Hurawalhi Island Resort, Maldives, is unparalleled, extraordinary and utterly original. Environmentally innovative, a breath-taking undersea restaurant, stylish villas and an adults-only policy - Hurawalhi offers its own take on paradise."

He further explains, "More frequently people are yearning for a hassle free holiday where everything is available and they do not have to worry about monitoring their spend. Traditionally, Maldives resorts have price gouged guests for additional products and services once on island because they have exclusive rights to the guests. However, the supply chain and operating costs in the Maldives are very good and this does not have to be the case. The 'Sustainable Luxury' and 'Responsible Travel' themes are also becoming more prevalent and a requirement by potential guests. With regards to service there is a need for more personalisation. It is now expected that resorts hosts integrate themselves into the guest experience throughout their stay with a single point of contact for all their needs. I am currently reviewing how we can introduce an island host concept with the Front Office and Guest Service team whereby individuals are assigned the responsibility of the overall guest experience and will coordinate the guests interaction with the various departments."

Hurawalhi is one of the properties of Crown &



Bradley James Calder
General Manager
Hurawalhi

Due to the ever-increasing number of resorts, it is important to define the brand positioning of Hurawalhi and then to set the standard higher for Kudadoo. Hurawalhi Island Resort, Maldives, is unparalleled, extraordinary and utterly original

Champa Resorts, consisting of eight resorts in current operation, all of which are in the Maldives. Hurawalhi is the ultimate honeymoon or couples destination, an adults only retreat. Providing good service and facilities to all types of guests, the resort is designed for exceptional experiences for this clientele type. Their organic Duniye spa, stunning villas, sea plane arrival process and dining at our all glass restaurant submerged 5.8 meters under the sea is an experience of a lifetime, even for the most seasoned travellers. With over-the-water and beach villas on offer, the range is sure to match the needs of clients. The two basic types are Ocean Villas, perched directly above the water, and the second type is the Beach Villas on the resort island itself. Within each

main type there are units with or without private pools as well as ones with the ideal placement to enjoy the incredible Hurawalhi sunsets.

Hurawalhi is just a few months old now, and as such they are expanding their brand awareness in various global markets, but at the same time they are pleasantly surprised to have just under 10 per cent of their mix from the Middle East region, it seems that word of mouth still travels fast!

At Hurawalhi there is always something more to be done; their guests can enjoy a variety of dining venues, Duniye Spa, diving, snorkelling, marine biology centre, indoor fitness facilities, various non-motorised water sports, indoor games room, excursions, playing golf on a nearby sister island and also to utilise our sports ground to play tennis, badminton to keep themselves energised and active.

"We work closely with our travel partners both within the Maldives and of course in the UAE, Kuwait, KSA, Jordan and Lebanon. They act as an extension of our sales team and constantly introduce our unique property to their clients day in and day out, we thank them for their support and partnerships. Above and beyond that, we have as well invested heavily in marketing our resort

through traditional as well as social media platforms both directly as well as through bloggers to grow our brand awareness and coverage. The Middle East is a very important part of the world to our hotel and our guests will surely be thrilled to return home to tell all their families and friends about their experience with us," Bradley adds.

Hurawalhi gets guests from all corners of the globe; but quite a few from the United Kingdom, Switzerland, The Middle East, Singapore, Japan and Korea.

"Due to the nature of our business and geographic mix, we try and split of attention to Asia, The Middle East and Europe. As such we attend ILTM (International Luxury Travel Market) in Shanghai, ATM (Arabian Travel Market) in Dubai as well as the ILTM in Cannes," he says.

For Hurawalhi, the Middle East is a key focus as it provides a significant portion of their business. "As such, for the remainder of 2017, our sales force will travel extensively within KSA, UAE, Kuwait, Jordan and Lebanon to visit our travel partners to build on existing agreements and also forge new partnerships aimed at growing our brand awareness and distribution," Bradley concludes 🌴



Centara enters Oman with Muscat hotel

Centara opened its doors recently for clients in Muscat with their Centara Muscat Hotel in Oman. Conveniently located in the business and residential precinct, the hotel is just 10 minutes away from the Muscat International airport. General Manager **Anthony Wright** speaks with **TRAVTALK** about the property.



Q Please share an overview about the new property in Muscat?

Centara Muscat Hotel offers 152 rooms. It is a modern city hotel featuring well-rounded facilities; three restaurants serving Thai, traditional Turkish dishes and other international favourites, a dedicated Thai spa – Centara's signature SPA Cenvaree, a rooftop pool and terrace with views overlooking the Gulf of Oman, five meeting facilities that can hold up to 250 guests, premium lounge and complimentary Wi-Fi. We are conveniently located in Ghala Heights, a developing business and residential area which is just 10-minutes from Muscat International Airport and Oman Convention and Exhibition Center, suitable for both business and leisure travellers.

The room inventory comprises 152 rooms; 120 Deluxe

Rooms, 25 Premium Club Rooms and 7 Business Club Suites. The 33-square-metre Deluxe Rooms offer an option of king-sized or twin beds. Premium Club rooms come with Premium Class benefits, including access to the top-floor Premium Lounge where three meals are served daily. Business Club Suites offer comfortable living rooms and premium benefits – ideal for couples, small families or business travellers who want more space to relax after a busy day.

Q What is unique from the rest of the properties?

The Centara brand represents unique Thai hospitality and we will be the first one to bring this experience to the region. We believe that with our comprehensive and modern facilities matching those in a standard four-star Centara hotel, coupled with its supreme location, Centara Muscat Hotel Oman will be an ideal accommodation choice for those as-

piring for a city exploration and those on a business trip.

Q Tell us about the meeting facilities at the hotel?

We have a total of five meeting halls. The biggest one is about 237-square-metre Banquet Hall which is large enough to accommodate cocktail receptions of 250 people, or 220 seated theatre-style. It is complemented by a pre-function area. The hotel also offers four smaller venues. They include a boardroom which can be adjusted from 33 to 39 square metres to fit a range of uses from business meetings to presentations and seminars. Each meeting room comes with modern audio-visual equipment and complimentary wireless internet access. Another conference room, along with the pleasant rooftop terrace, can accommodate up to 80 people – perfect for an evening event, with the Gulf of Oman as a glittering backdrop.



Anthony Wright
General Manager
Centara Muscat Hotel

We are also expecting a growth on leisure travellers with Oman's government focusing on the development of its tourism sector

Q How will you promote the property with agents? Do they have any special benefits?

We provide commissionable rates to agents and promotional offers in every season are in place for them to avail to ensure that our property is easy for them to sell. We also do a lot of Fam tours to create more awareness of the product as well as Muscat as a destination.

Q Will the property be targeting business or leisure clientele?

We are targeting mainly MICE and business travellers as the hotel is footsteps away



from the government ministries and major companies and businesses around the area. The newly-opened Oman Convention and Exhibition Center is just an easy 10-minute drive.

We are also expecting a growth on leisure travellers with Oman's government focusing on the development of its tourism sector as part of the Omani Tourism Strategy 2040 where massive investments have been made to create supporting infrastructures, and this will be another target market for us as the hotel is situated to cater for both business and leisure.

Q How important is the ME market for Centara?

Tourist arrivals in Oman have increased by 15 per cent on the first few months of 2017 and almost 50 per cent of the tourist arrivals come from the Middle East. The GCC countries are the main

important source markets as many travellers opt to stay closer to home or travel domestically. With several billion dollars in GDP, ME market are a highly valuable consumers that represents a huge opportunity for growth-oriented companies like Centara that want to expand internationally.

Q What are the strategies used to attract more visitors from ME to the property?

We have chosen partners that can help broaden our reach to our clients. We have placed ourselves and set-up our rates with key travel agents (local and regional), wholesalers and DMCs. We do a lot of direct sales to meet corporate clients providing them with practical, efficient information that details how we can accommodate them and why our hotel is the best fit. Roadshows and regional marketing promotions and ads. 📱



All set to conquer the travel world

Satguru has been in the forefront expanding to over 60 countries worldwide. **J.V.R. Fernando**, General Manager, Satguru, wants to maintain this momentum of growth.

TTT BUREAU

Satguru's strategy is to be different yet be a leader in the market securing all the goals on a slow yet steady pace. The company is investing heavily in technology and to this effect they also opened a back office operation in India a couple of years ago with a team of 200 IT staff that develops their own portals for B2B or B2C customers. Apart from these tailor-made processes they still use the corporate tools from the GDS ensuring their way forward.

Satguru has now entered different verticals and among them, tourism takes pride of place—be it inbound, outbound, fixed departures, FITs, sports and medical tourism, etc. **J.V.R. Fernando**, General Manager, Satguru, stated, "We've taken a group of students from here to Sri Lanka recently for cricket and we are looking at other sports activities such as handball and basketball. In terms of medical tourism, we have already tied up with Thumbay Hospital and other hospitals in India, Thailand, Germany, etc. The main advantage that we have over others is our presence in over 60 plus countries and the fact that the operation is solely coordinated by the centralised Dubai office. The staff that would handle every medical situation will be able to directly contact us for any assistance and this clearly marks an edge over others for us. Another area we stress in medical tourism is language, to ensure that the hospital staff of our patients will know the language well. For this we have selected hospitals that would have a reasonable number of staff that can assist in the event of a language barrier."

Satguru adapted their own methods of training and motivation of staff by ensuring one specific officer travelled to all 60 plus locations around the globe to train, mentor



J.V.R. Fernando
General Manager
Satguru

The main advantage that we have over others is our presence in over 60 plus countries and the fact that the operation is solely coordinated by the centralised Dubai office

and motivate the team to be proactive at all times.

In 2016, Satguru sold over 3000 air tickets to Dubai alone, with 50 travel packages (including hotels, transfers, etc.) This paved way for a new lucrative market to explore; a new area of business which would multiply their services and place them as a TMC. The new element added on to the ticket sales have ensured over 500-600 tour/travel packages as against the initial 50 that was done earlier. Currently, they are expanding their network following the same goal as before ensuring they will add more to their portfolio. Before the end of the year their network expansion may reach almost 5 states in the US and 5 in Europe bringing their overall network reach to over 70 around the globe.

"Thanks to the visionary leader of Dubai His Highness Sheikh Mohamed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai, the amount of tourists visiting the destination increases and we are able to cope with the inquiries and attend to their requirements as well as not only as DMC but also as TMC," he concluded.

Marriott International

Dubai

Jitendra Jain, Vice President of Digital, Loyalty and Portfolio Marketing will be responsible for the company's award-winning Loyalty Programmes, Partnerships, cross-brand marketing of Marriott International's regional portfolio and will lead all Digital Marketing, Platforms and Products. A Starwood veteran, Jain previously led the Marketing function for the former Starwood portfolio in the Middle East, where he spearheaded the transformation of marketing processes, talent and culture, cultivating a data-driven and forward-looking mindset leveraging digital, brands and loyalty.



Copthorne Hotel

Dubai

Copthorne Hotel Dubai has appointed **Noushad Abdulrahim** as Director of Sales. With 15 years' experience in hospitality and a decade of that in Dubai – he brings his considerable expertise to the role. Part of Millennium Hotels and Resorts, the popular hotel is located in Deira City Centre in Port Saeed. Abdulrahim will focus on improving sales production, expanding the corporate segment and further developing the sales and marketing strategy. His career includes stints in South India at Taj Garden Retreat, Kerala and Casa Anjuna, Goa, before moving to the UAE in 2007. In Dubai, he has worked at Flora Grand Hotel, Dubai.



Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Spa

Kuwait

Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Spa, Kuwait has appointed **Savino Leone** as General Manager. A French national, Leone joins the Jumeirah Group after his position as General Manager of InterContinental Osaka, in Japan. Prior to this, he worked as GM of Crowne Plaza Doha – The Business Park, Qatar. Leone held the role of several senior management positions in InterContinental properties, such as Resident Manager of InterContinental Doha, Executive Assistant of Food & Beverage in Cairo, as well Food & Beverage Manager in London and Assistant Food & Beverage Manager in Dubai.



City Stay Beach Hotel Apartments

Al Marjan Island Ras Al Khaimah

Methsiri Channa Ranasinghe has been appointed as Operations Manager at City Stay Beach Hotel Apartments, Al Marjan Island - Ras Al Khaimah. He will be responsible for human resources, housekeeping, security, public relations, food and beverage as well as sales and marketing. A veteran hotelier who started his career in 1993 at Palm Village Hotel in Sri Lanka which is managed by Aitken Spence and the past five years he has been with Golden Tulip Hotels & Resorts. His last role was as Senior Director of Sales at Tulip Inn Ras Al Khaimah Hotel & Goldent Tulip Khatt Springs Resort.



Cathay Pacific

Dubai

Cathay Pacific has appointed **Jonathan Ng** as Country Manager – Middle East. He has previously held the position of Country Manager of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Offline Middle East. Ng joined Cathay Pacific as a Management Trainee in 2011 and has since held the post of Assistant Airline Alliance Manager and was seconded to Air China in Beijing, China as Deputy General Manager – Marketing and Sales before taking up the post in Bahrain. Educated in the UK, Ng graduated with Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics from the University of Warwick.



Dubai

Nikhil Kilpady will now take on the position of Regional Sales & Marketing Manager – Middle East, having recently served the airline as Sales & Marketing Manager for UAE and Oman. Kilpady has an MBA degree from University of Nottingham, UK. He has had extensive experience in the aviation and travel industries before joining Cathay Pacific in 2008, and has held a number of positions with the airline; including Area Sales Manager – Bengaluru, India, and Port Manager – Maldives. Kilpady will now be responsible for the commercial operations and strategy for the Middle East.



Bahrain

Hasan Qannati has been appointed as Trade, Corporate Sales, and Marketing Manager – Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Offline Middle East, and is based in Bahrain. Qannati, who has joined Cathay Pacific – Bahrain in 2013, has accumulated experience across the markets in Bahrain and the Eastern Province in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Qannati will now be looking after the company's commercial and business interests, as well strengthening trade relationships in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and other offline Middle East offices.



Sheraton Jumeirah Beach Resort

Dubai

Sarah Nait Merzeg has been appointed Marketing Manager for Sheraton Jumeirah Beach Resort, JBR. Her role will include driving the integrated marketing strategies designed to position the hotel in the country as well as internationally, look after all aspects of the marketing mix with a high end brand of a dynamic international business hotel while ensuring full compliance with all Marriott International standards & programs and drive loyalty Marketing activities. Merzeg previously worked with Rotana and was instrumental in the rebranding of Al Murooj and Al Bustan hotels; taken over by Roda Hotels & Resorts.



South Africa targets Middle East market

The South African Tourism Board has not only invested in new strategies but also appointed a dedicated and resourceful professional to spearhead the team in the right direction. **Sadiq Dindar**, Marketing & Promotions Manager for Middle East, shares the strategies to lure clientele from the region.

TT BUREAU

What plans has South Africa Tourism Board arranged for the Middle East market?

South African Tourism did a complete review of the globe starting nearly two years ago in order to realign our marketing investment. We reviewed our investment framework and made many in-depth research on various markets, focusing specifically on areas of operation and budget (cost of acquisition). The Middle East has shown enormous potential for tourism to South Africa and it was established as one of the markets that will be serviced from the India hub (together with markets in South East Asia and Turkey). Although the region is clubbed with India, the marketing and trade support will be rendered from our offices in Johannesburg.

How is the growth potential from the Middle East to South Africa?

We have seen incredibly good growth from the Middle East with 2016 being our best year ever. We recorded 53,536 arrivals, a 36 per cent increase on the previous year. (Arrivals figures only includes passport holders from Middle Eastern countries and excludes all expatriates travelling from the Middle East). January to June 2017 shows an increase of 13 per cent over the same period in 2016. Seasonality from the Middle East region is fairly flat, with slight peaks in March, July and August.

What are the unique features of the Middle Eastern traveller?

Safari and wildlife is not a significant drawback for this market and the average

requests venture more towards city life and shopping. We have found that our Middle Eastern travellers like to base themselves in a central point and explore from there. Our Middle Eastern clientele also travel with shorter notice period, in bigger family groups and very often multi-generational.

South Africa has a wide variety of accommodation available – everything from villas (serviced or self-catering if you prefer to bring your own chef) to hotels to apartments. Owing to the varied requirements from our target market, we have extended our grading criteria to cover all types of accommodation. This is an excellent quality guarantee and peace of mind not only for the travel agent, but also for the traveller! Although our travellers from the Middle East are bigger



Sadiq Dindar
Marketing & Promotions
Manager for Middle East

The Middle East has shown enormous potential for tourism to South Africa and it was established as one of the markets that will be serviced from the India hub (together with selected markets in South East Asia and Turkey)

spenders than some of our other markets, they have a keen eye for quality and value for money. South Africa is able to offer both of those – we have exceptional value, offer high quality goods, impeccable service – and that all in the same high standard of luxurious shopping centres that our visitors are used to in the Middle East. We have seen an increase in bleisure travel from the region – a mixture of business and leisure – and South Africa is perfectly positioned to give you the best of both worlds.

What are the strategies to lure more ME travellers to South Africa?

South African Tourism has a very deliberate strategy for the Middle East and the centre of the strategy focuses on the travel trade. Our research shows that the majority of our

travellers book through the trade, hence we have worked our strategy around education, training and support for the trade. The activation of this strategy would be done in different ways, inclusive of training workshops, online training offerings, hosting of familiarization trips, joint marketing agreements, exposure to Indaba and Meetings Africa, etc.

We are working very closely with the South African trade in order to offer the perfect experience to the Middle Eastern traveller. South Africa has a substantial Muslim population and Halal food is available all over the country. We also have a number of Muslim tour operators that specialize in the Middle Eastern market. We are seeing more and more of the bigger operators as well as niche operators venturing into the Middle East as they recognise the potential.

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