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Medical intervention for Dubai

Health and wellness tourism is a very promising market segment for travel. Dubai is on a steady path in ensuring that the number of tourists visiting for health would reach over 1.3 million in 2021. **TRAVTALK** finds out from key industry stakeholders on the aspects of this emerging trend.

SHEHARA RIZLY

“It is estimated that the worldwide medical tourism market is growing at the rate of 15-25 per cent. The UAE government wants to make the country a world-class healthcare destination. A variety of factors are being considered such as: Government and private sector investment in healthcare infrastructure – wherein 2016 health expenditure increased by 4.9 per cent in local currency terms, reaching AED59.02 billion (\$16.08 billion) and it is estimated to rise to AED101.38 billion, which equates to a CAGR of 6.1 per cent. Demonstrable commitment to international accreditation, quality assurance, international patient flow, potential for cost savings on medical procedures, excellent tourism infrastructure, sustained reputation for clinical excellence, healthcare innovations, and the availability of internationally-trained, experienced medical staff, are also being considered. The government is keen to diversify from an oil-based economy and has identified medical tourism as a potential area for growth. According to the Business Monitor International UAE healthcare report 2016, the goal is to attract half a million medical tourists per year by 2020, with the sector contributing AED2.6 billion (\$708 million) to the UAE's GDP by this time.”



H.E. Dr. Amin Hussein Al Amiri
Assistant Undersecretary of Public
Health Policy and Licensing
UAE Ministry of Health

“Our consolidated efforts to develop Dubai's medical tourism sector started in 2014 when His Highness Sheikh Hamdan Bin Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and Chairman of the Executive Council of Dubai, launched 'Dubai, a Global Destination for Medical Tourism' initiative. Guided by this ambitious initiative, Dubai Health Authority (DHA) launched Dubai Health Experience (DXH) as a brand in April 2016. In 2017, we will be conducting roadshows in the GCC and African region countries along with DXH Group members and our strategic partner Emirates Airlines. Dubai offers 90-day medical tourism visa, which is renewable for an extra 30 days depending on the procedure and the patient's case. The healthcare facility in Dubai can assist the medical tourist to apply for medical tourism visa. Travel partners are very important stakeholders in boosting Dubai's medical tourism industry. They can facilitate the trip for the accompanying family members at the same time and ensure that the stay is more like a rejuvenating holiday experience. Travel agents can create customized healthcare packages with members of the DXH Group. In 2015, 298,359 international medical tourists came to Dubai in 2015. About 43 per cent of the medical tourist came from Asian countries, 29 per cent came from the GCC and Arab countries, 15 per cent from European countries, seven per cent from African countries.”



Linda Abdullah Ali Ruhi
Consultant-Medical Tourism Council
Dubai Health Authority



J.V.R. Fernando
General Manager
Safguru Travel and Tourism

“DHA forecasts a big boom in medical tourism by the year 2021. Dubai Medical Tourism focuses on Gulf states and then on the Asian market, particularly India and Pakistan. Newer targets are the UK, and Africa, particularly Nigeria and Angola. As per newspaper reports, DHA launched Dubai Health Experience with the aim of attracting maximum tourists from abroad. World's first comprehensive medical tourism portal is also launched to provide the best available service to this group of travellers. It is a more purposeful group of travellers and they require special care and service. In short, it is a health-related activity which involves travel. As per available statistics, Dubai attracted more than 250,000 medical tourists in the first half of 2015 which was more than 12 per cent compared to previous year.”



Samir Arora
General Manager
MGallery by Sofitel

“MGallery by Sofitel will be the first health and wellness resort in the UAE. It will be located at the East Crescent of Palm Jumeirah and is slated to open in Q2 2017. The property will feature a wellness centre, which offers a range of treatments and retreat packages. The hotel has partnered with NHP (Natural Health Practice) in providing trademarked wellness products. The resort will also offer a range of all-inclusive retreat packages inclusive of room and board, and activities geared towards emotional and physical wellbeing. In terms of F&B, all the hotel's dining outlets will offer healthy meal options, with select organic ingredients and fresh produce.”

Contd. on page 3 ▶









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MEDIA PARTNERS



Medical tourism to the fore

► Contd. from page 1



Akbar Moideen Thumbay
Vice President
Thumbay Group

“We have customised healthcare services that are both affordable and state-of-the-art, along with access to staff from 20 countries who speak 50 different languages to help our patients feel at home. Our initiatives like tying up with airlines, setting-up information kiosks at airports and collaboration with Satguru Travels to establish 50 representative offices across the globe, has contributed to the overall Dubai's medical tourism initiative that projects up to nearly 1.3 million medical tourists by 2021, according to Dubai Health Authority (DHA) report.”

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Dr. Saif Aljaibeeji
Co-founder
SEHTEQ Inc

“The average spend by a medical traveller is \$4,000-6,000. Health insurance plays a key role in health tourism development and the maturity of a destination. The introduction of mandatory health insurance and electronic claims are important factors for Dubai as a medical tourism destination. We have seen more investment into private hospitals, and this leads to a healthy competition. On top of that, e-claims provide necessary data to publish key performance indicators for hospitals – both financial and clinical which will empower patients to make informed decisions.”

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“I look forward to maintaining UAE/Dubai activities in this direction of medical tourism, particularly when the potential is so promising and it can be such an important challenge for me professionally. We have to define our target markets/patient types, find the sources of patients from those markets, learn the competition and win it by creating the additional values for clients and business partners. There should be short, medium and long-term goals and very clever stage-by-stage development. Travel agents and tour operators can provide the part of non-medical services for international patients and their companies.”



Dr. Paata Ratiani
Director
Med Tour

“As part of its commitment to help establish Dubai as a leader on the world map of medical tourism, Al Zahra Hospital Dubai (AZHD) has explored opportunities in China. The country has traditionally accessed adjunct healthcare services in Thailand, South Korea and Malaysia. Following the decision of His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai to grant Chinese tourists visas on arrival, we have seen a major influx of tourists from that region. Dubai has become a preferred tourist destination for Chinese travellers.”



Dr. Mohaymen Abdelghany
CEO
Al Zahra Hospital Dubai

Sharjah airport hits 11 mn passenger mark

■ Sharjah International Airport registered a 10 percent year-on-year increase in passengers, handling 11 million passengers from January to December 2016. The airport passed the 10 million passenger mark

2016 compared with 71,426 in 2015.

Sharjah International Airport's growth has been driven by its strategic location, the success of Sharjah's in-bound tourism industry and the expansion of Sharjah-headquartered

Air Arabia. The airport's ideal location, close to Sharjah city, Dubai city and the main highways connecting the country's seven emirates, has made it a convenient hub for both business

and leisure travellers. Whilst Air Arabia hasn't yet announced overall figures for 2016, the airline served over 2.27 million passengers during the first nine months of 2016, a 14 percent increase compared to the 2 million passengers during the same period of 2015.

The airline currently operates a fleet of 46 Airbus A320 aircraft offering flights to over 120 destinations in 33 countries from five hubs across the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe.



for the first time in 2015, showing 5.5 percent growth. Since then, the airport has continued to show strong growth. Airport passengers increased 12 percent during the first quarter of 2016, 11 percent during Q2 and 13 percent during Q3, reaching one million passengers per month for the first time in August 2016.

Aircraft movements at Sharjah International Airport increased by 6 percent to 75,900 scheduled and non-scheduled movements in



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The 4-star deluxe Ramada Jumeirah is situated on Dubai's Al Mina Road and is centrally located near to some of the city's main focus points including Sheikh Zayed Road, Jumeirah Beach, Etihad Museum and Port Rashid (Dry Docks & Dubai Maritime City). The hotel is only a few minutes' drive from the Dubai World Trade Centre and Dubai International Financial Centre, the Dubai Mall and the Burj Khalifa and is just a 20-minute drive from Dubai International Airport.

Offering 252 guest rooms with state-of-art amenities, the hotel caters to business travelers and discerning holiday-makers, drawn to its unique location - close to beach and city - and provides a broad scope of facilities and services. Spacious underground parking, concierge services and a regular shuttle bus to Jumeirah Beach and shopping malls offer additional convenience for guests.

Dine at Ramada Jumeirah Hotel

Ramada Jumeirah Hotel offers a choice of five great restaurants and bars - Atrium Cafe, CuiSines, Ginger Asian Restaurant, Sama cafe and The Docks, serving cuisines from all over the world.

Meet at Ramada Jumeirah Hotel

Ramada Jumeirah Hotel is an ideal venue for events, conferences and seminars. The hotel offers a choice of 2 meeting rooms and 2 boardrooms offering the latest in conferencing facilities. Themed coffee breaks, state-of-the-art audio visual equipment, high speed Wi-Fi internet connectivity and adjoining business centre with secretarial services.

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TRAVTALK

EDITORIAL

Health is wealth

Medical and wellness tourism is the emerging trend around the world for 2017. Whilst securing its position as the most luxurious destination, Dubai is once again branching out to include various types of markets. As the emirate explores opportunities in the healthcare sector, Dubai is aiming to attract 500,000 medical tourists by 2020.

In 2014, His Highness Sheikh Hamdan Bin Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and Chairman of the Executive Council of Dubai, launched 'Dubai, a Global Destination for Medical Tourism' initiative. Guided by this ambitious initiative, Dubai Health Authority (DHA) launched Dubai Health Experience (DXH) as a brand in April 2016 to position Dubai as a global hub for medical tourism. Today many partnerships are being developed in order to achieve this target with both the government and the private sector each playing their relevant part in leading up to this score. The travel agents or medical tourism facilitators are important in this exercise as they need to coordinate with travel and hospitality.

Even at the Arabian Travel Market, this year there will be a special focus on health and wellness tourism. Currently, Dubai is using all sources to educate themselves and be among the few countries to achieve this target market. The private sector is lending their hand by organising various medical conferences with experts from around the world to discuss the roles, responsibilities and the initiatives to finally attract the type of tourists to the destination. Last year, DHA partnered with a private medical hospital as the official suppliers for the famous La Liga (Spanish football) league. This year they will be focusing on orthopedic, wellness, fertility treatments, cosmetic and aesthetics procedures. The introduction of the special 90-day visa in cooperation with General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs in the UAE is another positive step forward. The insurance for inbound travellers is another aspect under the same programme.

Setting sail for strong season

Dubai Cruise Tourism is going all out to develop and position Dubai as a top cruise destination. Cruise tourism, today, stands as a major component of Dubai's tourism proposition.

By the end of 2016, almost 24 million tourists would have taken to the high seas to explore and enjoy destinations around the globe. Cruise tourism has historically enjoyed a cult following, but over the past decade the industry has found new wind in its sails thanks to the emergence of new markets such as China and India, as well as a resurgence of interest in cruise tourism among families and millennials. At the same time, cruise lines have trained their focus on offering a more bespoke experience, incorporating diverse cultural elements into their offerings, increasing opportunities for community engagement in destination itineraries, encouraging rich intergenerational family as well as luxury experiences, and improving on-board connectivity.

In tandem with the changing demography of travellers and the transformation of the cruise experiences, Dubai has made its growing presence felt on global cruise maps. Dubai is emerging as a luxurious, laid-back cruise destination with a deep-rooted affinity to its Arabian heritage. For the modern seafarer — sun- and beach-loving young families, couples as well as older travellers — the long coastline, sunny climes, cosmopolitan buzz and cutting-edge infrastructure of Dubai have a strong appeal.

Dubai Cruise Tourism has been tasked with devel-

oping and positioning Dubai as a top cruise destination. Thanks to these efforts, cruise tourism is a major component of Dubai's tourism proposition today, contributing to the delivery of Dubai's Tourism Vision for 2020, which aims to welcome 20 million visitors per year by 2020.

To build on existing strengths, we have forged collaborations with Emirates Airline, DP World, Dubai Customs, Dubai Immigration and other relevant stakehold-

ers to provide comprehensive support and increase flexibility to both cruise lines and travellers. Through increased air-lift and more streamlined visa processes, we have also improved the city's accessibility, opening up emerging source markets with high growth potential such as India, China, South America and Russia. Dubai also boasts an attractive entry point for tourists through Mina Rashid, the most modern and largest dedicated port facility in the Middle East for cruise operations, spanning over 36,500 square metres on a pier stretch of 2,200 metres. The facil-

ity allows Dubai to comfortably handle complete passenger turnaround of five cruise ships simultaneously, and is equipped with essential facilities ranging from ATM machines to complimentary shuttle buses to the city's malls.

Dubai is looking forward to welcoming 23 of the world's leading cruise liners accounting for 157 ship calls. The roster of ship calls includes 10 maiden calls from Norwegian Cruise Line, Thomson Cruises, Celebrity Cruises, Royal Caribbean, Princess Cruises, Seabourn, MSC's Fantasia class ship, and TUI's new Mein Schiff 3

will range from overnighters to two-night stop-overs. The roster of ship calls includes 10 maiden calls from Norwegian Cruise Line, Thomson Cruises, Celebrity Cruises, Royal Caribbean, Princess Cruises, Seabourn, MSC's Fantasia class ship with 4,500-passenger capacity, and TUI's new Mein Schiff 3.

As people seek new ways to explore the world, the global cruise tourism industry is experiencing a surge in interest from new segments ranging from young millennial professionals to retirees. We aim to

attract these travellers by firmly positioning Dubai on the cruise map, leveraging our first-rate amenities and adopting best practices from the city's hospitality sector, which has perfected the art of balancing premium in-house experiences with singular destination experiences. Thanks to this strategy, we have been able to ensure that cruise tourists arriving in the city have a seamless experience and are greeted with a high level of convenience, comfort and efficiency, be it while catching a concert or show, or shopping in one of Dubai's iconic souqs. We have already established a natural synergy with Dubai's aviation industry, and by boosting our capabilities, we want to help travellers discover the best of the Arabian Gulf with ease, comfort and peace of mind.

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



Jamal Humaid Al Falasi
Director
Dubai Cruise Tourism

Aiana Hotels & Resorts opens regional sales office in Dubai

■ Aiana Hotels & Resorts, a global hotel management company, continues to strengthen its position within the Middle East region with the appointment of **Arshad Sayed** as the Regional Director of Sales for the GCC. In line with the upcoming launch of their first property in

Saudi Arabia – Aiana Makkah, this new appointment solidifies Aiana's commitment to create a globally respected hospitality brand that represents the best of Indian hospitality through exemplary service, design and operating concepts. Aiana Hotels & Resorts'

regional sales office will be based in the Jumeirah Lake Towers vicinity, one of Dubai's largest free zone areas. **Amruda Nair**, Joint Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Aiana Hotels & Resorts said, "With three properties opening



in the next year in the GCC there is no doubt that Arshad will work closely with our strategic leadership team and be a key player in establishing AIANA Hotels & Resorts as a leading hotel brand in the region."



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Creativity in hospitality design

Hotel interior design is quintessential to ensure travellers have a unique and memorable experience. Shaza Hotels tries to create such experiences to meet guest expectations.

Interior design can sometimes be mistaken for interior decoration, and this becomes very problematic in hotels where design is directly related to guest experience. Brands like Shaza Hotels, which are heavily design-focused, have a very different approach to cookie-cutter brands or classic brands. Each property is very distinct and the designing of such hotels requires that all stakeholders first understand: whom are we designing for?

Knowing your target market allows you to create experiences where space, form, architecture, and design speak the same language that meet the needs and expectations of guests. Shaza is also very rooted in the cultures of the region, but whilst they all have commonalities, each culture also has its own distinctive elements. Thus, we have to take

a deep dive in understanding those differences so as not to fall into clichés. Authenticity is indeed one of our values, and we must represent the culture in its truest and most genuine form. This becomes particularly important to achieve when working with designers who are used to working on classic or western-inspired hotels.

We work closely with them to ensure that our hotels truly reflect the DNA of the brand and the culture of the destination. We are now seeing architects who study the interrelationship between environments and guest behaviour to see how they are impacted by the hotel's social and cultural requirements, and how to align such requirements with those of the owner and the brand. This is an exciting shift in the industry

where offering a clean room and comfortable bed alone don't do it anymore. Guest experiences are at the core of Shaza's design philosophy and this is how we conceive all our hotels. A good example is our upcoming resort in Salalah, Oman: Salalah is a destination famous for its Khareef season where GCC families visit to experience the monsoon rainy season in summer. Whilst this market makes up a good portion of guests, our study showed that two other markets can also be tapped into: the honeymoon market, and the MICE market.

How do you design a hotel that appeals to three such distinct markets each with their unique requirements and diverse expectations of experiences? We have worked very closely with

the architects and designers to ensure that our resort seamlessly caters to each one of them, and I invite you to visit us there at the end of the year as we gear up for the opening of our first Shaza resort.

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



Christian Nader
Vice President Development Middle East & Africa, Kempinski and Shaza Hotels*

*Kempinski and Shaza Hotels are the sponsors of the 13th Arabian Hotel Investment Conference, scheduled from April 25-27, 2017, at Madinat Jumeirah

Rehlat on Sabre platform

Rehlat joins a growing number of agencies in Kuwait / Middle East to choose Sabre's online technology solutions. Bader Al Bader, President and Founder, Rehlat Travel, stated, "It's only been a couple of months since we

Last month, Sabre and Rehlat.com were part of e-Travel; an industry event dedicated to the online travel industry in the Middle East which brought regional leaders and experts together to discuss the



launched our operations on Sabre, but we have already seen the positive impact on our sales and performance. We look forward to rolling out new capabilities in mobile and social media to meet the expectations of our tech-savvy travellers."

"Online travel has doubled in the Middle East since 2013 and online travel agencies, like Rehlat, are exceeding growth expectations as more and more consumers head online to shop for travel. We share Rehlat's passion to provide a seamless travel experience and believe that technology can simplify the complexity of today's travel, and unlock greater value, revenue and efficiency," said Daniel Naoumovitch, CEO, Sabre Travel Network Middle East.

trends and developments in online travel.

Nabeel Sheikh, Sabre's Online Business Development Manager, for Middle East, Turkey and Cyprus, talked about the importance of the online travel industry and embracing latest technologies. "Consumer needs are rapidly changing in the region, fueled by faster and more accessible technology. Online travel agencies have been quick to respond to this, using the latest Web Service and API technology. As this becomes the norm, more traditional travel agencies need to look at online and mobile strategies to stay competitive regionally and drive long-term, sustainable growth. The shift online is no longer just an emerging trend, it's happening now and it's happening fast."

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Ramada hosts meet on climate change

Ramada Hotel & Suites Ajman and Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman recently organised the International Roundtable Conference (IRC) for future leaders on climate change.

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His Highness Sheikh Dr. Abdul Aziz Bin Ali Bin Rashid Al Nuaimi, also known as the Green Sheikh graced the event and shared his expertise on environment missions. Sumair Tariq, Managing Director of R Hotels, and Ignace Bauwens, Regional Vice President Middle East and Africa of Wyndham Hotel Group, were also among the guests for the conference.

The students, aged between 12 to 16 years, from 21 different nationalities took part in the interactive discussion, which aimed to gather insights, identify the ecological challenges, and share the best



Iftikhar Hamdani
Cluster General Manager
Ramada Hotel & Suites Ajman
and Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman

We hope that they will grow up to become environmental advocates to spread awareness, act on the issue of climate change, and serve as role models of their generation



practices that are being carried out by their respective countries to address the pressing subject.

Iftikhar Hamdani, Cluster General Manager, Ramada Hotel & Suites Ajman and Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman, commented, "Our team has learned several valuable and innovative ideas from these young, brilliant minds. As our future leaders, we are placing our trust on them; we hope that they will grow up to become environmental advocates to spread awareness, act on the issue of climate change,

and serve as role models of their generation."

Some of the crisis mentioned during the conference were drastic changes in temperature globally especially in desert regions of the Middle East; melting glaciers in the Himalayas and Caucasus which result to flooding and landslides; environmental challenges of countries which large population like China and India; excessive use of natural resources in the US and all parts of the globe; and the worldwide air, land and water pollution.

They also shared ideas on how to combat climate change including using public transport and eco-friendly cars to minimise carbon dioxide emissions, providing incentive for sustainable companies, and planting trees on a large scale, among others.

The event concluded with the students' commitment to do their share, even in simple ways like recycling, water conservation and proper waste disposal. 🌱



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Rotana to oversee Cayan Cantara

Cayan Group has appointed Rotana Hotel Management as the hotel operator for the Cayan Arjaan Hotel Apartments project.

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The project comprises two towers, the residential and hotel apartments tower with 700 units in the form of studios, one to three bedroom apartments and penthouses. It will also contain retail spaces such as restaurants, meeting rooms, gym, spa and lounge. The project was launched in two stages at the strategic Umm Seqiem Road in Dubai which is fast becoming a major connection to roads, malls, recreational centres, residential areas, and educational institutes.

Cayan Cantara is located two minutes away from each Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Road, and Al Khail Road, and 6 minutes away from Emirates Road; the Mall of the Emirates and Dubai Mall is only a 5 and

18-minute drive respectively; situated near recreational areas such as Miracle Garden, IMG Worlds of Adventure, and Global Village, and 20 minutes away from the Dubai Al-Mak-



tour International Airport the location offers convenience, ease, and holistic living.

The press conference was attended by **Ahmed Alhatti**, Chairman, Cayan Group; **Nasser Nowais**, Chairman, Rotana; **Omer Kaddouri**, President & CEO, Rotana; **Mohan Saini**, MD & CEO, Shapoorji Pallonji International and **Ziad Kanaan**, Real Estate Director, SHUAA Capital.

At the press conference, Alhatti, Chairman, Cayan Group, stated, "It is a great feeling to work with such renowned brands in the hospitality and construction sectors.

We want to showcase to our clients that at Cayan Group, the grandeur of our projects is more than just what meets the eye: we want to reassure both our existing and potential clients that their Return on Investment is our priority too."

Nowais, Chairman, Rotana, said, "We are excited to partner with Cayan Group on yet another one of its iconic masterpieces. With Cayan Cantara Towers we are sure the project itself will marvel the visitors, and it is truly exciting to be a contributing partner in promoting quality, luxury, and an experience in Dubai."

Targeting 7000 room nights in '17

Ibis Styles Jumeira Dubai is on a well-planned agenda to ensure more numbers from emerging markets like Mexico, Brazil, Spain, Korea, etc.

SHEHARA RIZLY

Networking at international trade exhibitions is an essential part of the marketing calendar. Apart from the regular trade exhibitions, most hoteliers opt to also engage in roadshows and other events organised together with tourism boards. **Muhammad Mujtaba Haider**, Hotel Manager, Ibis Styles Jumeira Dubai, sheds light on the yearly plan in terms of trade exhibitions. He says, "We will be actively participating at EMITT (Istanbul, Turkey), AITF (Baku, Azerbaijan) and ATM (Dubai, UAE). We would like to penetrate the Turkish and Azerbaijan market aggressively because the length of stay is between 3 to 4 nights and the fact that they mostly move with families to spend vacations (looking for a hotel providing family atmosphere)."



Muhammad Mujtaba Haider
Hotel Manager
Ibis Styles Jumeira Dubai

Some of the new emerging markets focused this year by Ibis Styles Jumeira would be Mexico, Brazil, Spain, Korea, Iraq and Pakistan – both groups and FIT businesses. For 2017 we are confident to generate approximately 7000 room nights in total from these markets. In terms of trends for 2017, Haider stated that mid-scale hotels will have a considerable amount of business but 4 and 5 star hotels may just be looking at a rate war. Therefore hoteliers will push

to maximize RevPAR rather than focusing ARR.

Dubai has recently reached 100,000-room inventory; elaborating on the strategies hoteliers in the region are employing, Haider says, "Firstly you need to control room cost (having minimum amenities in rooms/suites), next control manning, then introduction of 'Help Yourself' concept to guests (specifically during breakfast time), lastly monitoring utility usage and controlling the same by providing training to staff."

With online portals like Airbnb coming up, we asked Haider how hoteliers can ensure the market segment will still focus on the traditional hotel. "It is true that Airbnb have started aggressively and captured share of hotels but tourists will remain loyal to hotels specifically leisure and corporate segments."

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Half a decade of making connections

The GCC's exclusive B2B luxury travel platform is all set to bring together a stellar list of global suppliers and corporate organisations to Dubai this March. Building on the tremendous success of the past four editions, Dubai-based QNA International will host the 5th edition of the MICE Arabia and Luxury Travel Congress at the illustrious Palazzo Versace Hotel "the official host sponsor."

TT BUREAU

Emphasising on the potential of luxury travel from the GCC, **Sidh NC**, Director, QNA International, says, "When it comes to luxury travel, the challenges are more intense. Keeping in line with global changing tastes and attitudes, luxury travellers too



Sidh NC
Director
QNA International

Since 'doing business' has been synonymous with the congress, we make sure that we build on the success of our previous editions and make the congress more productive

are looking for more value for their money. While this does not necessarily mean cheaper, it does mean more benefits such as personalisation, simplification, and seamless services which is the key objective that the congress will focus on."

The Middle East MICE sector has come a long way in a very short span of time and the GCC's \$1.3 billion



MICE industry is set to experience further robust growth, with the UAE, Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia driving its expansion through economic diversification.

The value of outbound travellers from the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) has been estimated at \$64 billion, according to a study conducted by Frost & Sullivan and Insights Middle East for Amadeus. The study further estimated the average spend in GCC countries for inter-regional travel at \$4,980 and for international business travel at \$9,920. These statistics clearly reflect the immense potential for business and meetings, incentives, conferences, and events (MICE) travel from the region.

The congress now completes half a decade and will provide a premier platform for regional and international hotel chains, team building companies, DMCs, tourism

People will be somewhat more selective in choosing events and destinations, but their desire to witness top global sporting events is strong and they will travel

Dustin Kaylor
Business Development Director, RoadTrips

boards, cruise companies and other travel and hospitality suppliers to meet over 150 of the top GCC corporations that plan business and MICE travel for their organisations. The fifth edition will focus on the tremendous potential for outbound MICE and luxury travel from the Middle East.

From Tourism Boards such as Switzerland Convention Bureau, Taiwan Tourism Bureau, Tourism Promotions Board Philippines, Greater Fort Lauderdale - CVB, Singapore Tourism Board to five star luxury hotels like GrecoTel Hotels & Resorts, Fairmont Baku, Esplanade Zagreb

Hotel, Sofitel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills, Al Faisaliah Hotels amongst many others joining the congress from across the world to meet the highly sought after GCC MICE and luxury travel buyer.

We will see more bespoke travel with more demanding visitors travelling as individuals or in smaller groups

Dag Kastensson
CEO, SNE Northern Europe

The congress taking place on the 1st and 2nd of March 2017 will host the ultimate specialist on sports travel, RoadTrips. **Dustin Kaylor**, Business Development Director, RoadTrips, comments, "The year 2016 was clearly a challenging year for global travel. At the same time the travel market, and particularly the upper end of the market sees travel as integral part of their lifestyle. Combine ones love of travel with their passion for sports create a strong motivation to travel and experience these events. People will be somewhat more selective in choosing events and destinations, but their desire to witness top global

sporting events is strong and they will travel."

Speaking about business trends that 2016 has witnessed and what should the industry expect in 2017 for MICE and luxury travel, **Dag Kastensson**, CEO of the Swedish destination management company SNE Northern Europe, says, "We will see more bespoke travel with more demanding visitors travelling as individuals or in smaller groups. Scandinavia has a lot to offer these demanding clients, and the timing

with faster and more efficient flight connections to Scandinavia is perfect. There are no indications in Scandinavia of any fiscal or economic changes that will effect luxury and business travel."

The fifth edition of the congress will emphasize the opportunities for inbound and outbound business and luxury travel, unlike exhibition format events, the congress is all set to provide unparalleled networking opportunities for doing business during the one to one pre-arranged business appointments. It is the regions premier event focused on getting 100 per cent corporate and luxury travel

buyers from GCC to meet with global MICE and luxury travel specialists.

The 2016 edition of the congress, held over 1,800 meetings with over 50 destinations represented at the event. "Since 'doing business' has been synonymous with the congress, we make sure that we build on the success of our previous editions and make the congress more productive for the delegates as well as the sponsors, thereby creating more opportunities to seal deals," commented Sidh N.C while speaking about his expectation from the event.

The congress will feature numerous panelists and keynote speakers, covering topics such as redefining MICE, global trends and challenges in MICE and the intricacies when dealing with luxury travel and how technology has transformed the world of luxury travel to name a few.

Congress Agenda

- The fifth edition of the congress will focus on the opportunities for inbound and outbound business and luxury travel
- The congress will feature numerous panelists and keynote speakers, covering topics such as redefining MICE, global trends and challenges in MICE



Oman focuses on MICE

Oman's Tourism Ministry is going all out to enhance its MICE sector. Business travel to Oman will get a major boost with the opening of the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

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MICE Tourism in the Sultanate will witness a major shift over the next couple of years as many important projects such as the Oman Convention Center will be inaugurated. The Oman Convention Center will include

International Airport, which is undergoing renovation and expansion. The airport will increase its passenger capacity in three phases. First, it will increase its capacity to hold 12 million passengers, then 24 million passengers and move to a passenger capacity of 48 million. There are also other

said, "The Ministry's initiative in establishing the Oman Convention Bureau under its supervision is a milestone towards building a foundation and achieving our objectives in the MICE tourism sector. We will be working as a specialised team to enhance this sector and regulate the processes, and use various external channels to promote MICE internationally. The bureau also aims to maintain a healthy atmosphere that supports all institutions and organisations working in the sector to host events and promote the Sultanate. The Bureau will also market tourism packages to the global corporates."

The Sultanate was ranked 9th in terms of safety and security by the World Economic Forum in its latest biennial Travel and Tourism report. In total, Oman saw about 2.4 million tourists visit the country in 2015. 🇦🇪

theaters, conference rooms, four hotels with almost 1000 rooms, and major exhibition halls to cater to thousands of participants at the same time.

Another important upcoming project is the Muscat

infrastructure and tourism projects within the 9th five-year development plan 2016-2020 that the Oman Tourism Strategy will reinforce.

Khalid Al Zidjali, Head, Oman Convention Bureau,



Mövenpick debuts in RAK

Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts has finalised a deal to operate the Swiss hospitality firm's first property in Ras Al Khaimah, scheduled to open in 2019.

TT BUREAU

Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island, Ras Al Khaimah, will have 550 rooms and boasts a prime beachfront location, offering guests views of the Arabian Gulf and Ras Al Khaimah coastline. Al Marjan Island is Ras Al Khaimah's first man-made project, built to the tune of \$1.8 billion, and features a cluster of coral-shaped islands, creating a destination that is fast emerging as a top Middle East holiday hotspot.

Mövenpick's upcoming five-star resort, comprising 430 rooms and suites and 120 serviced apartments, will cater to the increasing number of local and global leisure travellers heading to this idyllic beach destination. Visitor numbers to Ras Al Khaimah are expected to surge 11 per cent to reach



Andreas Mattmüller
Chief Operating Officer, Mövenpick
Hotels & Resorts, Middle East and
South Asia

Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island, Ras Al Khaimah, is a valuable addition to our portfolio and will provide leisure travellers with another

more than 820,000 in 2016, according to the Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Develop-

ment Authority, which has set a target of one million arrivals by the end of 2018.

"Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island, Ras Al Khaimah, is a valuable addition to our portfolio and will provide leisure travellers with another compelling reason to visit one of the UAE's most stunning holiday destinations," said **Andreas Mattmüller**, Chief Operating Officer, Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts, Middle East and South Asia.

Al Marjan Island is close to RAK International Airport, served by scheduled carriers such as Qatar Airways, Air Arabia and Air India Express, as well as numerous European and Russian charter airlines, while the world's busiest airport, Dubai International, is just 45 minutes by road. 🇦🇪

Qatar's A380 on Melbourne route

Qatar Airways has marked its 7th anniversary in Melbourne, Australia, by announcing plans to ply its superjumbo A380 aircraft to the city from June 30, 2017.

TT BUREAU

The 517-seater A-380 aircraft will increase Qatar Airways' current daily capacity by 44 per cent on this route to meet the growing travel and trade demand, connecting Melbourne-based passengers and freight to more than 150 destinations globally.

H.E. Akbar Al Baker, Group Chief Executive, Qatar Airways, said, "As we continue to grow apace in Australia, we have seen a clear need to inject additional capacity on the Melbourne service. We are delighted to introduce our A380 aircraft to Melbourne after seven years of operation to the world's most livable city. Well-travelled Melburnians will find our seamless and quick connections via Doha's Hamad International Airport a great and easy travel option. And our expansive European network provides plenty of homecoming options for one



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

of Australia's most culturally diverse cities."

Melbourne is the original home for Qatar Airways in Australia, with the airline adding services to Perth, Sydney and Adelaide thereafter. The airline first started flying to Australia's second largest city on December 6, 2009, with a 259-seater B777 aircraft. With the introduction of daily A380 services, capacity on the Melbourne route will have increased two-fold since 2009.

The A380 aircraft features a luxurious and exclusive First Class Cabin with ultra-wide seats, which recline into a flat bed, two-passenger table extension dining, and designer sleeper suits, flight slippers and amenities. Passengers travelling in Qatar Airways' award-winning Business Class can also enjoy direct aisle access with the 1-2-1 seat configuration and a suite of entertainment options, including Wi-Fi, keeping them fully connected while up in the air.

For travellers who would like to turn their transit into a stopover experience, they can also take advantage of the new 96-hour transit visa offered in partnership with the Qatar Tourism Authority. Transiting passengers can explore the various highlights Doha has to offer – from the world-renowned Museum of Islamic Art to the Katara Cultural Village or desert safaris to bustling and cosmopolitan cityscape. 🇦🇪

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The 3rd Annual Health & Medical Tourism Conference, held at Dusit Thani Hotel, Dubai, was organised by the Gulf Medical University (GMU) in association with Thumbay Medical Tourism. The conference was a get-together of industry experts from healthcare, travel and medical education sectors, to discuss the latest trends and developments in medical tourism.



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Travelport signs deal with Saudi agency

Travelport and Saudi Arabia-based Al Hashim Travel have announced a new, exclusive, long-term agreement, which will let the agency benefit from the industry leading merchandising and desktop technology, Travelport Smartpoint.

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Travelport and Al Hashim Travel have announced a new, exclusive, long-term agreement. Al Hashim Travel



Asgar Khan
General Manager
Al Hashim Travel

is located in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia, with 10 branches in the region. The agency is also set to expand across in Saudi Arabia in 2017. The agreement with Travelport will see Al Hashim Travel benefit from the industry leading merchandising and desktop technology, Travelport Smartpoint. Travelport Smartpoint allows travel agents to not only sell airline tickets, but also the branded fares and ancillaries of over 400 of the world's leading

airlines, including network and low-cost carriers. Additionally, over 650,000 unique hotel properties and 36,000 car rental locations are available

exclusive deal with Travelport provides a great opportunity for our business to advance our operations. We strongly believe that Travelport's pio-

said: "Travellers are increasingly expecting a more personalised travel experience. They want more choice and flexibility when they book.

Travelport's technology is cutting edge in enabling us to meet and exceed our customers' expectations around new travel trends."



Ibrahim El Mohandes
Country Manager
Travelport Saudi Arabia

Technology News

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We are delighted that Al Hashim Travel has seen the value in our Travel Commerce Platform. Our solutions will not only help them boost their online presence but also increase their brand awareness

Travellers are increasingly expecting a more personalised travel experience. They want more choice and flexibility when they book. Travelport's technology is cutting edge in enabling us to meet and exceed our customers' expectations

through Travelport's Travel Commerce Platform.

Commenting on the new agreement, **Abbas AlSaleh**, Chief Executive Officer, Al Hashim Travel, said: "This

neering technology will support our business to work smarter, grow revenues and enhance our online presence."

Asgar Khan, General Manager, Al Hashim Travel,

Ibrahim El Mohandes, Country Manager, Travelport Saudi Arabia, said: "We are delighted that Al Hashim Travel, a leading travel agent in Saudi Arabia, has seen the value in our

Travel Commerce Platform. Our innovative technology solutions will not only help them to boost their online presence and grow sales but also increase their brand awareness both within the Kingdom and internationally."

'UDrive for free' launches in Dubai

UDrive, a Dubai-based pay-as-you-go rental service launched the 'UDrive for free' campaign, offering residents and visitors to Dubai free membership for one month as well as a complimentary one hour free drive, that is inclusive of parking and fuel costs. With UDrive, commuters can drive a car from anywhere to everywhere in the city, at any time and only PAY as you drive. As one of Dubai's mobility programs with maximum flexibility, UDrive offers its members an opportunity to spontaneously rent vehicles anytime and



Hasib Khan
Managing Director and Founder
UDrive

anywhere without having to specify place of return or time in advance. **Hasib Khan**, Managing Director and Founder, UDrive, commented, "Car sharing

has evolved into sustainable mobility with potential for strong growth worldwide. We believe that Dubai's Smart Vision, the transient nature of life and the prevailing costs of car ownership makes car sharing an excellent mobility solution. For those who don't want to commit to ownership, or don't have the need for everyday car accessibility, UDrive makes the perfect option, whilst being also a reliable connector to the public transport. We are pleased to be the first public car sharing provider in the Middle East and to be a part of Dubai's Smart Vision."

RezLive.com appoints GSA in Ghana

RezLive.com, a product of Travel Designer Group, has appointed African Origin Travels and Sports Tourism as its exclusive General Sales Agent (GSA) for Ghana.

Jaal Shah, Group Managing Director, RezLive.com, says, "Our increasing presence in Africa region will help us boost trade from the region which will eventually generate good amount of business in the near future, looking at the potential of the market. So, through our GSA in Ghana we will be able to reach out to local travel partners in the most convenient manner. Wherein



African Origin Travels & Sports Tourism, which has its presence in the Ghana travel industry for quite sometime now, has been offering best deals to its clients, be it domestic or international.

The partnership with African Origin Travels & Sports Tourism and the experience they bring to the table will help us to mutually accelerate our success in this market." RezLive.com is a B2B global reservation system offering single feed to 250,000+ international rooms around the world, with real time access to rooms that are available at the best net rates.

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7 new destinations by June '17

Ethiopian Airlines is working to add seven new destinations to its network from February to June 2017. It's targeting 120 international destinations by 2025.

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The airline is looking to launch new service to Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe), Antananarivo (Madagascar), Conakry (Guinea), Oslo (Norway), Chengdu (China), Jakarta (Indonesia) and Singapore. With the addition of these destinations, Ethiopian Airlines will have service from Addis Ababa to 98 different international cities across the world and just 22 short of their goal of 120.

Tewolde GebreMariam, Group CEO, Ethiopian Airlines, said, "Africa's share of the global aviation is the smallest which is only around three per cent. As the largest airline group in the continent, we are highly concerned on the low base of air connectivity in the continent and we are setting record expansion to enable Africans enjoy safe,



Tewolde GebreMariam
Group CEO
Ethiopian Airlines

We are highly concerned about the low base of air connectivity and we are setting record expansion to enable Africans enjoy safe, reliable and economical air connectivity

reliable and economical air connectivity both within the continent and between

the continent and the rest of the world.

"Looking beyond the current economic slowdown especially in the oil export dependent economies of Africa, we firmly believe that the continent will become the magnet for foreign direct investment, trade and tourism, which are the engines of air travel growth and in turn efficient air connectivity also drives socio economic development and we are happy to contribute our share in the 21st century African transformation. In the just ended calendar year alone, new flights to Moroni (Comoros), Windhoek (Namibia) and Newark (United States) were launched, as well as three cities in Ethiopia: Hawassa, Kebridhar and Dembidolo. Ethiopian is one of the fastest growing airlines in the world, and we are expanding our wings every year."

Turkish's baggage transport App

Turkish Airlines' Mini Port is a daily passenger baggage transportation service between Taksim and Atatürk Airport in Istanbul.

TT BUREAU

Ahmet Olmştur, Chief Marketing Officer, Turkish Airlines, said, "Turkish Airlines has been confirmed as one of the companies implementing this modern passenger processes. It is hoped that passengers will experience the service and will not have any difficulty in complying with the future Off-Airport services. The purpose of this unique passenger service is to utilise the period of time up until flight departure to discover and enjoy the city. It is of mutual benefit for our passengers while also indirectly contributing to the Turkish tourism economy."

This brand new app has been created in accordance with the Off-Airport concept which is now very much preferred by modern airlines. Passengers who have to check out early from their

hotels would like to spend their day comfortably without carrying their baggages. The Mini Port Office in Istanbul Atatürk Airport is located on the metro floor.

The scope of services was expanded and within the cooperation with the contracted hotels in Taksim region, passenger baggage will be transported from these hotels to Atatürk Airport.

► How the App works

The passenger comes to the Mini Port Service Point and submits flight information to the officials. The Mini Port Service Officer welcomes the passengers and receives their baggage.

The Mini Port officials comply with the transport pro-

cedures of baggage arriving by the vehicle of the transportation company. This occurs three times a day to the Mini Port Office in AHL International Lines metro floor from Taksim Mini Port Office. The passenger, who is travelling from Istanbul and receives his baggage from AHL Mini Port Office, delivers his baggage to the counters in check-in area as complying with normal flight check-in procedures and the service is offered from Airport to Taksim and from Taksim to Airport.



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DINE IN & CATERING

Langham luxury now in Jeddah

Langham Hospitality Group and Advanced Hotels Company will manage a luxury urban hotel in Jeddah, expected to open in the summer of 2018.

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Strategically located within the downtown core directly across a new shopping complex and with a 360-degree view of the city and Corniche, The Langham, Jeddah will have 238 rooms and 39

searching for the ideal location in the Kingdom to add to our portfolio," says **Robert Warman**, Chief Executive Officer, Langham Hospitality Group. "The creative design of the hotel's façade and interiors along with the luxury facilities of The Lang-

are proud to partner with Langham Hospitality Group to bring the impeccable service standards and unrivalled heritage from Europe's first grand hotel to the city of Jeddah."

The Langham, Jeddah will house a Mediterranean-inspired seafood restaurant; a grill concept with a chef's table and a dry-aged meat locker display; Palm Court; a specialty lounge featuring a cigar humidor and a specially designated, air-conditioned smoking room; and the all-day dining restaurant featuring international cuisine.

The Langham, Jeddah will feature extensive banqueting and meeting space totaling in excess of 3,500 square metres. These will include a 480-seat grand ballroom that is linked by a private elevator to a 380-seat ballroom and a variety of adaptable conference rooms. 📍

ham, Jeddah, underlined by our legendary award-winning service, will provide an exceptional destination for our guests."

Mohammed Yousef Al Hasan, Chairman and Founder, Advanced Hotels Company, stated, "We



suites. The agreement was signed in the presence of **His Excellency Mohammed A. Al-Amri**, General Manager, Jeddah, Makkah Province for the Saudi Commission for Tourism & National Heritage. "We are delighted to introduce the Langham brand to Jeddah as we have been

Centara's resort in Dubai

UAE developer Nakheel and Thai hotel group Centara Hotels and Resorts have signed an agreement to create a 550-room beachfront resort at Deira Islands in Dubai.

TT BUREAU

Under the agreement, cemented in Bangkok by Nakheel Chairman **Ali Rashid Lootah** and Centara Chairman **Suthikiat Chirathivat**, the two companies will deliver an upscale

Nakheel's joint venture with Centara is the latest development in the company's aggressive expansion into Dubai's hospitality sector and its second international joint venture for Deira Islands. The first, an 800-room, AED900 million all-inclusive resort

club, spa and fitness centre. The resort is anticipated to have soft opening in 2019 and grand opening in 2020.

Centara Hotels & Resorts is part of Central Group, one of Thailand's family-owned conglomerate holding companies



resort on a prime stretch of beach on Deira Islands – Nakheel's new, 15.3 sq km, world-class tourism, leisure, retail and entertainment hub that will contribute significantly to the Government of Dubai's tourism vision.

and waterpark with Spain's RIU Hotels & Resorts, was confirmed in February last year. As the first Centara establishment in the UAE, the new resort will cover an area of 295,900 sq ft. Features include a waterpark, dining facilities, business centre, kids'

that is involved in merchandising, real estate, retailing, hospitality and restaurants. Centara's portfolio currently includes around 14,000 room keys across 65 hotels and resorts under six distinctive brands in Asia, Indian Ocean, and the Middle East. 📍

Hotel apartments at Business Bay

Fourzone Décor, a UAE-based company, has recently signed an AED30 million hotel apartment project with construction company, Shine Properties.

TT BUREAU

The hotel apartment project located in Business Bay will be managed by a leading international hospitality brand once completed and will target luxury travellers from the Middle East looking for premium furnished apartments. **Ajish Nambiar**, Marketing Director, Fourzone Décor, said, "We are proud to begin 2017 with a new project for Shine Properties. We are extreme-

ly proud to be associated with Mr. Mohammed Salem Al Menhali who is such a reputed builder in the market. We look forward to working with him in other projects in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Dubai."

Nambiar says that the construction sector is booming in this part of the world with Dubai being the most active construction market. "So we are optimistic that the region's interior and fit-

out contracting industry will also grow. This is a situation that will continue this year as investors push ahead with projects to ensure delivery before Expo 2020 so we are on track and we plan to keep it that way till the years to come."

Recent reports indicated that the region's interior and fit-out contracting industry will grow by nearly 20 per cent and the market is expected to cross \$12.5 billion by end of 2017. Hospitality segments hold majority of the total spends on interiors, followed by commercial and residential sectors. As the fit out contracting company for the hotel apartment project, Fourzone Décor will be handle all interior finishing work like flooring, ceiling, woodworks, furniture, furnishing and decorative lights. 📍



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Royal Continental debuts in Deira

With a unique combination of traditional Arabic design and modern architecture, Royal Continental Hotel's debut in Deira, Dubai, promises a technologically-advanced experience through innovative in-room facilities.

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Strategically located minutes from Dubai International Airport, the hotel aims to target business travellers and tourists alike. The property houses 168 rooms and suites with modern leisure facilities and multi-cuisine dining options spread over 11 floors. It offers a relaxing stay to its guests that perfectly suits everyone's needs,

and offers a variety of plush deluxe rooms, superior rooms with extra space for single guests or families, and a sophisticated luxury of a presidential suite to choose from.

Royal Continental Hotel features extensive dining options from the extensive in-room dining menu, or one of the two outlets, Oasis, offering multi-cuisine buffets for breakfast, lunch and dinner

and All The Perks Café, suitable for business needs.

Sultan Al Menhali, CEO, Royal Continental Hotel, said, "We are delighted to announce the launch of our first hotel in the Middle East. Aligning ourselves with His Highness' vision of focusing on family, Royal Continental Hotel is Sharia compliant and designed keeping in mind the importance of families spend-



Sultan Al Menhali
CEO
Royal Continental Hotel

Aligning ourselves with His Highness' vision of focusing on family, Royal Continental Hotel is Sharia compliant

ing leisure time together. Accelerated towards Dubai's vision for 2020 and with our expansion plans we are positively looking forward to contribute to the key objective of attracting 20 million visitors



Wajeed Bagwan
General Manager
Royal Continental Hotel

Royal Continental Hotel is introduced with an aim to cater to the guests looking at the region for business and holiday needs

per year by 2020 and position Dubai as the 'first choice' for the international leisure and business traveller."

Wajeed Bagwan, General Manager, Royal Continental

Hotel, said, "Royal Continental Hotel is introduced to the Middle East region with an aim to cater to the growing numbers of guests looking at the region for business and holiday needs offering them with a relaxed contemporary surrounding, perfectly suited to both a short city break or an extended vacation. We are enthusiastically looking forward to our regional growth in the coming years. This is the soft opening of the first property and there will be two more coming up; one near Dubai water canal and the other in Jeddah but we will keep you updated soon. Most of the rooms are with facility to interconnect targeting the families. The investment was approximately AED120 million expecting Y-o-Y of 10 per cent. We have a special introductory rate starting from AED350 to 700. We are looking at India and China markets with others like KSA, Vietnam, Europe etc."



Cultural Tourism Middle East 2016

In partnership with Architectural Heritage Society and IQPC, the Cultural Tourism Middle East 2016 was held at Al Murooj Rotana. This brought together high level officials from tourism, cultural development & antiquities, heritage & arts, cultural activities, and architectural heritage community to showcase their latest developments and discuss ideas and strategies to boost tourism through culture, heritage, arts and festivals.



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Sharjah's Al Jawaher hosted 120,000 in 2016

■ CAI Jawaher Reception and Convention Centre (JRCC) attracted more than 120,000 visitors and guests in 2016. This brings the total number of visitors who participated in some of the most prestigious and high-level events, organised and hosted by the Centre to 388,420 visitors, since they opened their doors in early 2013.

events. JRCC forecasts a 10 per cent growth in events organised in 2017, thanks to its high-quality services and a dedicated team of professionals contributing directly to the emirate's events industry.

Hanan Al Mahmoud, Director, JRCC, said, "Since its inception, JRCC has worked in line with the vision of Her Highness Sheikh



JRCC was home to more than 300 events in 2016, bringing the total tally to more than 1,000 events since its inception – 25 per cent of which were characterised by government conferences, business forums and exhibitions.

The remaining 75 per cent were taken up by unique and memorable social

Jawaher bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, Wife of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah and Chairperson of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, to offer an outstanding destination that contributes to attracting major local and international events, as well as to strengthening Sharjah's phenomenal growth in the MICE industry."

Inaugural ITB China in May

Nearly 20 exhibitors from the Middle East region are expected to attend the event, scheduled to take place from May 10-12, 2017, at the Shanghai World Expo Exhibition and Conference Center.

TT BUREAU

The three-day event gathers international destinations, service and travel technology providers in Shanghai connecting them with hand-picked Chinese buyers. In terms of the Middle East, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Boards have already registered with several other exhibitors from the region. ITB China is an international offshoot of one of Messe Berlin's most successful trade fairs.

Interest in ITB China is high. Leading Chinese travel industry companies including Ctrip, Alitrip, Utour, Caissa and many others have already confirmed participation to the event in mid-May this year. Exhibitors are also pressing ahead with preparations.

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) is the strategic



partner of the first ITB China. This was announced by ITB China's organisers, Messe Berlin, and PATA, one of the world's leading tourism associations. **Mario Hardy**, CEO, PATA, said, "We are very excited about ITB China and happy to be part of it right from the first event in 2017. We are confident that the PATA Pavilion at ITB China will be a great opportunity for our members to enhance their business relations with China."

Jane Sun, Co-President and COO, Ctrip, will be the keynote speaker at the official opening of the first ITB China. Sun said, "We are very ex-

cited about ITB China and happy to be part of it right from the first event in 2017. We are confident that the ITB China will be a great opportunity for Ctrip to enhance its business

relations with global destinations and travel service suppliers." Ctrip is a leading provider of travel services including accommodation reservation, transportation ticketing, packaged tours and corporate travel management in China. The company last attracted global attention in 2015 when it acquired a stake of Qunar, its rival company, and thereby strengthened its leadership in China's online travel space.

One of the early committed exhibitors is Visit Finland. "China is one of our main focus markets and we are looking forward to ITB China to meet old and new partners

to sell Finland together with us. We have great expectations of this new business event," says **Heli Mende**, Head of Global Sales Promotion, Visit Finland.

"ITB China is designed as the B2B platform interconnecting the Chinese with the international travel industries. Fully leveraging widely used channels in China such as WeChat therefore is one of our core activities just as it is for destinations, travel service and travel technology provider offering their products and services at ITB China," says **David Axiotis**, General Manager, ITB China.

Board Game

➤ Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Boards have already registered for ITB China

WTM Latin America from April 4-6

Charlie Cracknell, Senior Exhibition Director, WTM Latin America, WTM Connect Asia & International Golf Travel Market, discusses with **TRAVTALK** the expectations they have from the event this year.

TT BUREAU

QHow many exhibitors and buyers are you expecting at WTM Latin America this year?

WTM Latin America 2017 will be held at Expo Center Norte, a great convention center in the city of São Paulo which offers more than 75,000 square meters for ex-

QWhat is new at WTM Latin America this year?

The focus remains in generate business deals, but for 2017 we will have the partnerships and improvements in technology and partnerships with speakers that have several backgrounds.

We have invested also in technology and partnerships



Charlie Cracknell
Senior Exhibition Director for WTM Latin America, WTM Connect Asia & International Golf Travel Market

alliance of the biggest 15 airlines in the world that brings together more than 1,000 destinations. With regard to technology, the exhibition will have in 2017 My Event platform, that will connect buyers, media and visitors encouraging business, with the features to schedule a meeting, that can also be used by journalists. The platform is also able in identifying what the exhibitor is looking for. It creates a potential list with buy-

ers and other exhibitors after the exhibitor has answered some questions.

QKindly explain the expectations of the event and the total value as well.

We expected the event will be a great success, overcoming the \$371 million of new business generated in 2016. We are working in partnerships and making changes in the Press Centre to have the best WTM Latin America ever. We create the My Event platform and invested in partnerships with Hotel Map and oneworld to meet the expectations of buyers, exhibitors and travel professionals that will attend the event. Thinking in the journalist, we hold a survey to listen from them what can be better in WTM Latin America and now we are putting the suggestions into practice. 🍷

Belgium visa centre opens in Abu Dhabi

■ Residents of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) can now apply for visas to Belgium at the new VFS

Application Centre is a step forward in Belgium's goal to serve our clients in a better and quicker way. Abu Dhabi

is the first step and Dubai will follow. Our collaboration with VFS Global is also part of a more global plan to promote Belgium as an interesting country for tourism and business. Our collaboration with VFS Global is a long lasting and based worldwide, and I



visa application centre launched in Abu Dhabi. The centre was inaugurated by **H.E. Dominique Mineur**, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium to the United Arab Emirates. VFS Global currently serves the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium in 10 countries from 45 visa application centres, globally. The new centre in Abu Dhabi is located at the Joint Visa Application Centre, Level 25, Shining Tower, Mubarak Bin Mohammed Street, Adjacent to Khalidiyah Mall, Abu Dhabi.

H.E. Mineur said, "The launch of the new Visa

am convinced that together we can achieve these goals."

Vinay Malhotra, COO – Middle East & South Asia, VFS Global, "We are honoured to partner with the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium and further extend visa services in Abu Dhabi. It is also a great privilege to be a part of the journey towards advancement of travel between the beautiful country of Belgium and the UAE. We are confident the centre will help us achieve our common goal of providing added convenience and accessibility to UAE residents applying for a visa to Belgium."

Africa's share of the global aviation is the smallest which is only around three per cent. As the largest airline group in the continent, we are highly concerned on the low base of air

hibitions. For 2017, WTM Latin America will be even better. The focus remains on generating business. We predict to have at least 50 countries and regions represented, 650 exhibitors, more than 6,540 unique visitors and more than 500 members of the press.

to improve participation. Now we have Hotel Map as a partner, that will offer discounts in hospitality, with the possibility to custom the offer, according to visitor's profile. Discounts are also the proposal of the partnership between WTM Latin America and oneworld,



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Thailand's golf club for ME

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) recently announced its Golf Ambassador to promote the kingdom as a leading golf destination.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

The Tourism Authority of Thailand has appointed Thongchai Jaidee, a professional Thai golfer ranked at number 54, as the brand ambassador for golf tourism in the country. **Chattan Kunjara Na Ayudhya**, Deputy Governor for Marketing Communications, TAT, stated, "The brand ambassador partnership with



Chattan Kunjara Na Ayudhya
Deputy Governor for Marketing Communications, TAT

The brand ambassador partnership with Thongchai Jaidee will help achieve a key strategic objective to better link tourism and sports and increase the number of long-staying, high-spending visitors from the Middle East and Europe

Chattan Kunjara Na Ayudhya
Deputy Governor for Marketing Communications, TAT

Thongchai Jaidee will help achieve a key strategic objective to better link tourism and sports and increase the number of long-staying, high-spending visitors from the Middle East and Europe. Thailand has over 260 world class golf courses nationwide, with superb facilities and services including experienced, friendly caddies, wonderful accommodation and

Country Club Pattaya Old Course which attract a large number of professional players and spectators."



excellent side activities, such as shopping and spa treatments. Thailand also holds many international golf tournaments every year including Honda LPGA Thailand 2017 will be hosted on February 23 to 26, 2017 at Siam

TAT hopes to attract more golfers from the Middle East to enjoy their different courses. Jaidee will work very closely with TAT in order to attract more 'golfing visitors' to the destination. Jaidee stated, "I will work together with the Thailand tourism board in all their activities to promote our country as a superior golfing destination during this year."

Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham

JBR Dubai

Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham Jumeirah Beach Residence has appointed **Samer Rafie** as its new Hotel Manager. An Egyptian national, Rafie has more than two decades of hospitality experience within the GCC region, having worked in UAE, KSA, Kuwait and Bahrain. Prior to joining Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham, he was with Fraser Suites Dubai for seven years. He was also affiliated with City Seasons Dubai, Chelsea Tower Hotel Apartment, and Jood Palace Hotel Dubai. In his new role, Rafie will be in charge of the hotel's daily operations.



Air India

Dubai

Sandeep Kumar joined Air India as Marketing Manager for Gulf, Middle East and Africa. Kumar joined Air India in 2004 and has 13 years of experience in the airlines industry. In his last assignment he was posted in Commercial Headquarters and was Executive Assistant to Director Commercial & Board Member Air India. He was also heading the Social Media of Air India independently. Kumar's key focus area will be launching, promoting and consolidating Air India's operations in GMEA markets. He received his BBM Degree from Bangalore University and MBA degree from IMT, Ghaziabad.



Marriott Hotel

Dubai

Dubai Marriott Harbour Hotel & Suites welcomes **Brian Hashkowitz** back as the new Hotel Manager, responsible for all hotel operations. Hashkowitz has more than 17 years of experience in the hospitality industry with Marriott International, having worked at hotels across New York, Florida, Bristol, London and Dubai. In 2006, Hashkowitz was promoted to his first executive role as Director of Rooms and has since assumed various positions as Director of Operations, Director of Food & Beverage and Hotel Manager. In 2010, Hashkowitz moved to Dubai and joined the Dubai Marriott Harbour Hotel & Suites. In 2012, he joined the JW Marriott Marquis Dubai as part of the pre-opening team.



Grand Hyatt

Dubai

Grand Hyatt Dubai has appointed **David Harb** as the Hotel Manager, promoting him from his previous position as Executive Assistant Manager. In his new role, he will be in charge of the general hotel operations and report directly to General Manager Fathi Khogaly. David has held several notable positions within the Hyatt Hotels Corporation. As a graduate in Hospitality Management, Harb started his career with Hyatt in 2002 when he joined Hyatt Regency New Orleans in Louisiana as Assistant Manager of Food and Beverage. He undertook various roles like Assistant Banquet Director and Assistant Executive Steward as he progressed.



Travelport

Dubai

Travelport has appointed **Kathryn Wallington** as Country Manager for United Arab Emirates. With almost 12 years Travelport experience, Wallington joins the UAE team from Travelport's UK headquarters in Langley where she most recently headed business development for Southern Europe and North Africa. She takes over the role from Ghulam Al Balooshi who will remain on the Travelport MESA management team with a clear focus on Bahrain.



Musafir.com

Dubai

Musafir.com has appointed **Rajesh Pareek** as its new Group CEO. Pareek joins the company from Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), where he had served as Chief Financial Officer. In his new position, Pareek will lead Musafir.com with a focus on international expansion and the company's next round of fundraising activities. He spearheaded the refinancing of the \$1.25 billion DIFC Sukuk in 2012. In 2014, he led issuance of \$700 million DIFC's award-winning investment grade rated Sukuk.



Le Meridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre

Dubai

Le Meridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre welcomes **Sara Barakat** as Director of Events. Barakat is a highly-educated executive arriving from an international background spanning Africa, Europe and the GCC. Her experience includes events-focused positions at luxury properties in Egypt and Abu Dhabi as Conferences & Events Sales Manager and Director of Conferences & Events, respectively. Barakat holds an MBA in International Hospitality Management from International Hotel Management Institute in Switzerland.



Khodr G. Elmasri has been appointed as Associate Director of Events. Elmasri brings nearly a decade of GCC hospitality experience to Le Meridien Dubai along with extensive F&B knowledge and a track record encompassing substantial opening and pre-opening occasions at various high-end properties. Elmasri is a SIX SIGMA and HACCP certified manager. His career consists of significant Marriott International, Inc. experience, including five years at W Doha Hotel & Residences in Qatar. His latest Marriott role, and most recent position, was Complex Associate Director of Events/Groups at Al Habtoor City Complex in Dubai.





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Anantara debuts in Saudi Arabia

Minor Hotels has announced the debut of its luxury Anantara brand in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, scheduled to open in 2019.



Anantara Jeddah Resort will be located on the waterfront in Obhur in the city's upmarket northern district and will offer 226 guest rooms and 102 two to five bedroom villas. The property is owned by SAB Group and was previously a luxury residential compound, which will undergo a renovation and

room, which is divisible by two, plus two further meeting rooms. The resort has two receptions and lobbies; one of which is dedicated for VIP arrivals.

Spa and wellness will be a major focus of the resort, which will offer a separate female and male Anantara Spa and an impressive wellness centre.

This venture subscribes to our Think Ahead philosophy and to our futuristic steps towards achieving Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030

Sheikh Salah al Belawi
Chairman, SAB Group

transformation. Facilities will include a selection of dining options with both indoor and outdoor seating, fitness and swimming pool areas, a kids' and teens' club and a library. For business guests there is a 500 square metre meeting

An extensive selection of wellness journeys will be available, as part of Anantara's 'Balance' programme. These will include detox, de-stress, weight management, anti-aging and rejuvenation, along with therapies such as



Sheikh Salah al Belawi, Chairman, SAB Group and William E. Heinecke, Chairman and CEO, Minor International

Ayurveda, hammam and reflexology. Guests will be able to enjoy wellness cuisine and healthy cooking classes, with activities including yoga, Pilates and Tai Chi.

The Obhur area is undergoing a significant transformation anchored by the development of the one kilometre high Kingdom Tower, which will open in 2020 and will become Jeddah's new city centre. The Anantara

Jeddah will offer stunning views of the nearby Kingdom Tower. Jeddah is one of the preferred destinations among domestic leisure tourists and religious pilgrims as it is the gateway to the holy cities.

William E. Heinecke, Chairman and CEO, Minor International, says, "We are delighted to announce Anantara Jeddah which represents Minor Hotels' debut in Saudi Arabia and grows our

presence in the GCC to four countries. Minor Hotels has been looking for the right opportunity to expand into Saudi

lands itself to such a concept. We, at SAB Group, are very delighted to partner with Minor Hotels and host the Anan-

Minor Hotels has been looking for the right opportunity to expand into Saudi Arabia and we are pleased to be partnering with SAB Group to launch our luxury brand in this market

William E. Heinecke
Chairman and CEO, Minor International

Arabia and we are pleased to be partnering with SAB Group to launch our luxury Anantara brand in this key strategic market."

Sheikh Salah al Belawi, Chairman, SAB Group, adds, "We are excited to bring the concept, experience and legacy of Minor Hotels through their flagship Anantara Hotels and Resorts to Jeddah. The concept of a health and wellness resort is long overdue in KSA and our Obhur property

tara brand. This venture subscribes to our Think Ahead philosophy and to our futuristic steps towards achieving Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030."

Major Inventory

Overall Minor Hotels currently operates 14 properties in the Middle East across four of its brands – Anantara, AVANI, Oaks and PER AQUUM

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