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Plan your summer sojourn

With the summer finally setting in the Middle East, schools being closed and another long holiday around the corner, a quick indulgent summer escape is the ultimate solution. **TRAVTALK** provides detailed insights into the destinations where locals and expats are headed to for spending their vacation.

SHEHARA RIZLY



Suresh Dissanayake
Assistant Vice President—
Sales & Marketing
Adaaran and Heritage
Aarah Resorts, Maldives

“Adaaran has a selection of resorts that provides privacy, incomparable dining experiences, mesmerising surroundings and curated experience for both adventure and relaxation seekers. Middle Eastern guests especially look at privacy and larger rooms for family accommodation. Adaaran Resorts not only offers world-class service and products but also presents attractive rates on an all-inclusive basis. The ease of access to the resorts is also an advantage for us. Our resorts have offerings to cater to the Middle Eastern market and their diverse needs through cuisine, accommodation and other services.”



Glenn Daniels
General Manager
Dhigali Maldives

“Dhigali is quite a contemporary resort in the Maldives that is operating for a year now. We cater to a wide range of guests; with 180 rooms, we have the capability to host large groups, families and honeymooners. We have a few rooms that are fairly well hidden to provide privacy to some of our guests from the Middle East market. Our Batuta Restaurant has a great story behind. The food comes from different parts of the world which I don't think is being offered in the other islands. We deal with different business partners in the Middle East and to create an ease, we make the booking system and reservation 24 hours a day. ME is an important market for Dhigali as it is a short haul flight for short breaks with regular flights from Dubai.”



Daks Fernandez Gonzales
Head—Office of Product
and Market Development for
India and the Middle East,
Department of Tourism,
Philippines

“The GCC is a growing market of great interest and strategic importance for the Philippines. Saudi Arabia is the most significant in terms of numbers and ranks within our top 15 markets, followed by the UAE. Great hospitality combined with stunning beaches, exciting urban adventures and breathtakingly beautiful natural settings are offered with exceptional value for money. Halal certified restaurants are expanding throughout the country. Many of the well-known four and five-star branded hotels, especially in the capital has full of Halal kitchens. The Philippine Department of Tourism (DOT) is looking to expand its marketing activities in Saudi Arabia to encourage travel trade engagement.”

Contd. on page 3 ▶

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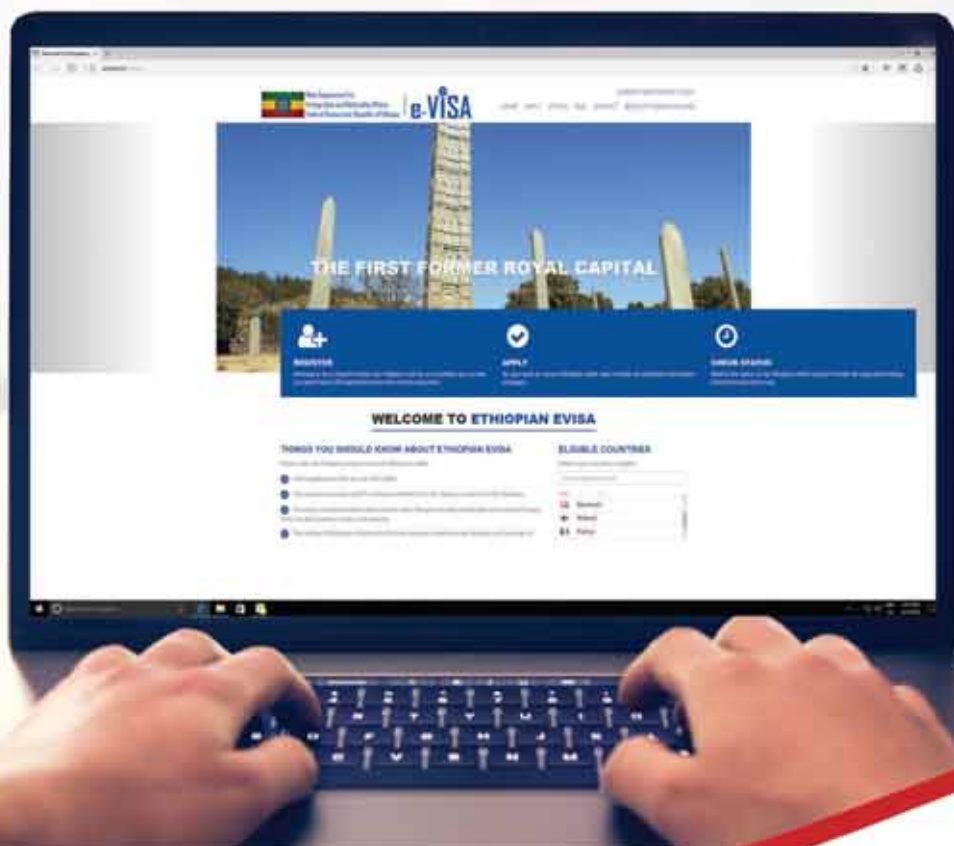
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ME makes the most of summers

► Contd. from page 1



Charitha Yattogoda
Sri Lankan Consul General
Dubai

“We have witnessed a rise of 6.5 per cent last year from the Middle Eastern region. All the Middle Eastern carriers and our national carrier have packages that attract the locals and expatriates from the Middle East. Sri Lanka is a four-hour flight from UAE with over 70 flights a week from Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The new e-visa system enables travellers to get the visa online, thereby making it a hassle-free experience.”



Jonas Sjostedt
General Manager
Centara Pattaya Hotel and
Centara Nova Hotel & Spa Pattaya

“Our Middle East guests travel not only for business and leisure, but also for big family vacations, a honeymoon, or even healthcare in Thailand. Their travel season helps smooth Thailand's tourism demand year-round. Our properties here not only offer attractively-designed accommodations at the most convenient locations but also a full range of amenities to match the demands of guests from all over the world.”



Darren Darwin
General Manager
Anantara Kalutara Resort, Sri Lanka

“The GCC market is an important segment for us, especially from May to October due to the two Eid holidays. This market loves to book private pool villas due to its privacy. All our outlets are halal certified and the resort is well equipped to offer facilities such as Qiblah direction, etc. To cut it short, a Muslim traveller can comfortably experience the resort with ease. GCC produced 1394 room nights in 2017 and 941 room nights till June 2018.”



Harun Dursun
General Manager
Mandarin Oriental
Bodrum Turkey

“As growing markets, the GCC and the Middle East are showing an increase in visitor numbers. Catering to all segments of travellers, Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum provides a range of activities, including a variety of sports and water sports, wellness offerings, wide selection of restaurants and bars to choose from. Our focus is also on providing our guests with the utmost in luxury hospitality from our legendary Mandarin Oriental service to stunning accommodation that include some of the largest rooms and villas on the peninsula. Our Arabic speaking butler team delights our guests and understands the needs and requirements without any delay at any time.”



Sandra Leibrock
Director of Sales and Marketing
Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah
Resort & Spa, Oman

“Oman is accessible from the UAE by road, air and sea. Along with visa on arrival, this convenience makes Oman the perfect destination for short-term vacations in GCC. Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa is an integrated beachside facility with 19 bars and restaurants, a private beach and five swimming pools. The hotel offers unique experiences native to the destination of Oman. As one of only five turtle nesting sites in all of Oman, we offer complimentary guided snorkelling tours with our dedicated turtle rangers. We have worked on creating specific experiences such as the introduction of a new water sports facility to attract more Middle East travellers.”

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TRAVTALK

EDITORIAL

Summer Getaways

Over the past few years, outbound travel to popular destinations has increased in terms of visitor numbers from the Middle East mainly due to the high volume of expat workers in the region. Whilst locals prefer to escape to destinations that are high-end and can accommodate bigger families, expats are more focused on value for money and time. Oman and Turkey are the shortest favoured spots among outbound destinations with Thailand and Philippines leading the way in long haul. India, Sri Lanka and Maldives are also fast becoming favourite short-haul destinations. Here again, Goa in India and Sri Lanka are sold as more affordable destinations for their ease of visa and connectivity, according to most outbound travel agents.

Over the past few months more African destinations have been easing their visa rules to welcome more travellers. Travel, tourism and hospitality are great contributors to the GDP of every economy. However, world terrorism has been responsible for stringent rules and policies to protect the sovereignty of any nation, hence the need for strict compliance of regulations.

Middle East has a combination of travellers including both locals and expats. When the count is made at the airport border control, the numbers are taken for granted in terms of passport and not in terms of the departed destination. A passenger holding a British or an Indian passport will also hold a residence visa from United Arab Emirates. In most cases it goes unnoticed that the person has actually started off the journey from Dubai or Sharjah or any other emirate; instead the categorisation will be British or Indian passport holder. Speaking to most of the tourism boards, this is a hindrance to the actual count from the Middle East. In fact, some officials said that with the amount of daily flights, it is hard to comprehend the disparity between the actual numbers, hence they are now implementing new procedures to understand the departed city and residence status instead of nationality based on passport.

Mixed developments in GCC

Serviced hotel apartments have now popped up in almost all major cities across the world. **Saad Audeh**, Founding Member & MD, Audeh Group and Chairman, Campbell Gray Hotels, shares insights...

The luxury end of the market in particular, has indicated an increase in demand for serviced apartments. These apartments, usually located in the same building or beside the hotel property, are serviced by the hotel with all amenities, luxuries and services available to a hotel guest. In the case of mixed-use properties, residents can also take advantage of the retail spaces, and sometimes even office space within the development.

“There is also the additional benefit of a higher return on investment while looking at renting out or reselling the apartments when compared to regular residences”

This is the reason why most investors and buyers are now seeking hotel residences for investment to meet the increasing demand in the GCC. This is particularly the case when looking at branded residences that are associated with a renowned hotel group, as it offers a level of assurance when it comes to quality and resale value. It can also offer innovative architecture, designer interiors and outstanding quality as a bonus for buyers and investors. Those looking into branded residences generally identify with a certain lifestyle and taste closely associated with that brand to then replicate the ethos within their own living space. There is also the additional benefit of a higher return on investment when compared to regular residences while looking at renting out or reselling the apartments.

Recent studies conducted by Colliers International show that luxury hotel chains are now expanding their portfolios and diversifying into boutique hotels, luxury resorts and designer branded residences to meet the changes in attitude within the market. Hotel residences have seen stronger resilience through tough times when compared to hotels. This business and investment model continues to evolve to provide investors with an increas-

growth. This will have a positive impact on the property market in making GCC attractive for investors.

Markets in the GCC are progressively growing due to increased tourism initiatives by governments; so demand for room nights will increase. Markets like UAE and Saudi Arabia have been growing rapidly over the years. Saudi Arabia is expected to be a hotspot in the region with many new opportunities opening in the tourism sector. The Kingdom's diversification plans, new visa programmes and large-scale projects are expected to contribute to the growth in tourism for both business and leisure tourism.

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



Saad Audeh
Founding Member & Managing Director
Audeh Group and Chairman
Campbell Gray Hotels

Ramada Ajman supports art tourism

Ramada Hotel & Suites Ajman unveiled a contemporary art exhibition by Ukrainian artist **Iryna Komar**. Titled 'Sima Miracle'. The collection's theme revolves around expressions of happy thoughts and feelings portrayed through various subjects including music, nature, family and more. Born in Ukraine, Komar is professional abstract artist based in the UAE.



Maximise revenue performance

Dubai Tourism has developed a training programme on revenue management led by prominent industry experts from 'Insights Out' to help ensure that Dubai's resilient hospitality sector continues to maintain global price competitiveness.

 TT Bureau

The Revenue Management Workshop will bring together hotel revenue managers, reservation managers, sales and marketing managers for a hands-on session to share fundamental best practices in yield management and forecasting, in addition to monitoring applications and tools. The comprehensive programme spread across 24 sessions, facilitated in partnership with 'Insights Out', specialises in both research and revenue management across the hospitality and service industry. With the aim of training 600 professionals, each session has been designed to host a maximum of 25 participants in a personalised and immersive learning environment. Trainees will be educated on key



aspects of revenue management, including data analysis, optimising and driving demand, and evaluating industry standards to set best possible pricing strategies. Workshops will offer immediate takeaways inclusive of templates, worksheets and monitoring tools with sessions hosted throughout July and August. InsightsOut provides revenue management best practice to help businesses across the hospitality and services industry maximise their revenue performance.

“Trainees will be educated on revenue management, including data analysis, optimising and driving demand, and evaluating industry standards”

Commenting on the programme, H E Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General, Dubai Tourism said, “A resilient hospitality sector that demonstrates sustainable growth is a key enabler to Dubai's competitive tourism proposition. We believe that there exists added potential for greater educational resources and professional training for members of the hotel sales, marketing and revenue management divisions. With hospitality roles quickly evolving to meet the needs of a fast-paced industry, understanding revenue management tools, processes, and how to apply the concepts to manage inventory and rates remain key to designing effective strategies to thrive in prevalent market conditions.”

Abu Dhabi's UK roadshows

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) has concluded its annual roadshow to the UK, following successful events held at Abode Chester and The Bulgari Hotel in London. The roadshow, co-sponsored by Etihad Airways and Yas Experiences, gave 120 agents, tour operator reservation staff and product managers the opportunity to learn about the Middle East destination from 15 stakeholders. Agents were given latest updates about the six immersive lands that will make up the new Warner Bros World Abu Dhabi theme park, along with news about exciting hotel launches and the emirate's different regions; Al Ain, Al Dhafra, and of course, Abu Dhabi city.

The roadshow kicked off in Chester before the promotional delegation headed down to London, with each event following a similar format of a drinks reception with Arabian-themed canapes, a presentation from the three sponsors, followed by networking with the stakeholders.

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Make it your ideal bleisure stop

Premier Inn Dubai Ibn Battuta Mall Hotel caters to the millennials with its combination of a convenient stay connected to the mall as well as the metro line in Dubai to avoid the hustle and bustle of traffic.

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Owned by master developer Nakheel, the 372-room property is a treat to both business and leisure travellers. Having started off his career in the same brand in the UK, General Manager **Roudi Soubra** stated that a few extra facilities has been added to the property to comply with the policies and regulations of the country. "Accessibility to the Expo area, Abu Dhabi and Jebel Ali do give us an edge over others; we are also the only mid-market property in the area," Soubra said.

Service par excellence

The moment you enter, the waiting area is large enough for you to relax and hop into the coffee stop whilst waiting for your turn. Right from the General Manager to the front office staff through to



the security, the hotel extends its services with a broad smile. Efficient in its service excellence, the staff has been trained to ensure that all guests are attended to so well that the second time you visit,



they will address guests by their name. Soubra shared, "We go that extra mile to ensure customer satisfaction and personalisation; for instance, if a guest requests for soy milk and we don't have it, we will go out and get it for the guest."

Passport to personalisation

Today, travel has become a way of life for all ages. Millennials dare to be different and take risks and experiment with

anything that is seemingly new to them. As a whole, every traveller seeks a seamless experience. Social media and the likes have gained popularity due to the constant usage of sharing experiences by millennials. The hotel's marketing team has created a passport which is given at the check-in point where travellers can benefit from various offers and discounts at different places, shared Soubra.

Mix of occupants

Being connected to a mall and the metro are two primary criteria for the GCC and residents from other emirates. Weekends are therefore, filled with locals, GCC nationals and residents while the weekdays witness more of bleisure stays from the UK, India, Germany, to name a few. Soubra shares, "Currently, we are looking at 85 per cent occupancy same as last year for the first half of the year." 



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Cebu's int'l flights from T2

Charo Lagamon, Cebu Pacific Air's Director, Corporate Communications, talks about the shift in the airline's international flights to Mactan-Cebu International Airport's new terminal.

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What was the reason behind the shift to Terminal 2?

All the international flights have been moved to the new terminal, in keeping with the growth plans of the Mactan-Cebu International Airport (MCIA). As the largest airline partner of the MCIA, Cebu Pacific provides great support to the growth of Cebu as an international hub, especially because of its unparalleled domestic network to and from the best tourist destinations within the country.

How many passengers does it serve currently?

The new terminal is looking to serve 4.5 million passengers per year, increasing the airport's capacity to serve at least 12.5 million passengers per year. In 2017, Mactan-Cebu




International Airport served 10 million passengers.

What are the services offered at the terminal?

Aside from a showcase of Filipino creativity and hospitality through its architectural designs, passengers can catch a glimpse of the Cebuano culture through the terminal's design. T2 has a variety of food, beverage and retail options as well as

lounge amenities including The Spa.

How many visitors does this airport receive from all over the world?

The MCIA is the second largest airport in the Philippines. In 2017, MCIA served 10 million passengers. With the opening of T2, it is expected to serve a minimum of 12.5 million passengers in a year. 

Is your baggage insured?

Today, although travelling from one destination to another has become convenient, **PNJ Kumar**, Chief Executive Officer, Caesars Travel Group and **Arijit Munshi**, General Manager, Tune Protect EMEA, deliberate over how travelling along with an insurance plan makes it a bespoke experience.



PNJ Kumar
Chief Executive Officer
Caesars Travel Group

Why did Tune Protect come up with an Electronic Travel Assurance product?

Kumar: While travelling, travellers often indulge in shopping,



Arijit Munshi
General Manager
Tune Protect EMEA

One of the items we see being purchased are electronic items from within the region but with regards to air travel, size does matter. Checked-in items are often prone to be damaged

or even lost when in transit. The recent upliftment of ban on electronic items from the region fuelled the introduction of the Electronic Travel Assurance package. An important guideline for travellers is that 'Electronics Assurance Plan' only covers checked-in items during air travel and not before or after you complete your air travel.

Do you see value in both the assurance products launched by Tune Protect - Travel Electronic Assurance & Travel Baggage Insurance for your travellers?

Kumar: Standard travel insurance plans have high limits for medical emergencies,

emergency evacuations and flight accidents. However, when it comes to electronics while travelling, the benefits are often limited. Furthermore, even 50 per cent of your electronic purchase value might not be covered. Having such a Travel Electronic Assurance programme that would insure their electronic items will fit the requirement and ensure ultimate peace of mind to the traveller.

What if the baggage is lost, stolen or damaged by the airline itself?

Munshi: Airline companies have tough limits on what they will pay for lost luggage and this limit varies from carrier to carrier. Further, it can take

days or even weeks before an airline will decide that the travellers' bag is permanently lost or completely damaged. The Tune Protect baggage coverage is intended to provide replacement value up to certain limits for the baggage that is lost, stolen or destroyed during air travel.

Is the claim process for these two products easy for your travellers?

Munshi: Our head office has offered travellers two ways of claiming: an upload functionality via an online claim wherein travellers must submit their travel assurance policy details along with other documents. They can also download a form and send via email.

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Driving the success of Oberoi

Personality of the month



 Shehara Rizly

Karim Bizid's love for meeting new people with diverse backgrounds and cultures has landed him up in this trade. "Since I enjoy meeting people, I have built an incredible family over the years and I consider having them close to my heart wherever I go," Bizid reveals.

Having graduated from Swiss School of Hotel and Tourism Management in Chur, Switzerland, Bizid studied at the Cornell University in Ithaca, New York and completed his MBA from the University of Economy and Management. In the UAE, he has served in senior positions at Jumeirah Group, Jebel Ali Hotel and Golf Resort, and as pre-opening General Manager for The Meydan Hotel.

Relationship with the Oberoi

From the pre-opening stage, Bizid served as the General Manager at Oberoi Dubai but he says that the relationship extends much beyond. "My relationship with The Oberoi Group started even before The Oberoi, Dubai came into existence. My fascination with the company started due to the inspirational interactions I used to have with our Executive Chairman PRS Oberoi during his visits to Dubai. The Oberoi Hotels' approach to hospitality is not only

legendary but also quite distinct as compared to other hospitality companies," he said.

In his role as General Manager, Bizid applied his local experience and market knowledge to successfully position the hotel amongst the best luxury hotels in the city and the first international city hotel for the brand in the Middle East. The successful story of the hotel has proved to be a stepping stone towards further growth of The Oberoi Group's portfolio in the region.

Changes in the industry

Bizid shares that Dubai as a city has seen immense growth and he has been lucky to witness this over the last two decades. "From humble beginnings, the hospitality platform is now a major GDP contributor. Dubai now has the sec-

ond highest number of five-star hotels for a single city worldwide, placed only after London and even ahead of New York."



ond highest number of five-star hotels for a single city worldwide, placed only after London and even ahead of New York."

He reiterates that this exponential growth has presented itself with new opportunities in terms of digitalisation of the distribution channels. Technology has made the process very simple and easy for consumers to not only purchase their products and services but also share their opinion and reviews publicly. All of this has made the industry extremely competitive, not just in terms of acquiring customers but also in terms of winning their genuine loyalty. Therefore, hotels which have the highest level of commitments towards developing a product and

“The Oberoi Hotels' approach to hospitality is not only legendary but also quite distinct as compared to other hospitality companies”

delivering warm hospitality are the ones which succeed.

Brand loyalty

Oberoi Hotels & Resorts is synonymous with providing the right blend of service, luxury and efficiency. These factors contribute towards attracting guests to The Oberoi, Dubai. The hotel enjoys almost 40 per cent of repeat guest ratio, placing it amongst the highest in the city in terms of customer loyalty, shares Bizid. Whether it is in Dubai or anywhere around the world, guests are more exposed

to many options and to drive them to a specific brand and ensure their loyalty is an exercise which needs to be conducted rather carefully.

Relook at the industry

Today, more properties turning to 'millennial friendly' ones due to the

growing demand for this segment. Bizid shares, "Millennials expect more convenience, and rely strongly on the internet and social media to stay connected globally."

Technology should be seen as an enabler but not as a replacement of the human element. Talking about OTAs, Bizid explains, "The popularity of online travel platforms is increasing due to its unique proposition to offer instant rates, availability and confirmation."

Customer Trends

Today's customers are better travelled and are more informed due to various reasons including social media

With the advancement of digitalisation, guests are likely to expect a greater involvement of high quality of technology supported by a warm human touch



Value of blockchain for travel

The 2017 Gartner Hype Cycle for Emerging Technologies categorised blockchain as being in the ‘Peak of Inflated Expectations’. But is this true for the travel industry? At Travelport, architects have been investigating the implications of blockchain, both for their business and the wider travel sector.

In an industry built on trust and strong relationships, we started with an important question: Is there a role for blockchain? To get to the bottom of this, we’ve been analysing the suitability of blockchain to manage on-boarding and management of travel content for secure distribution and selling. We have also been considering other potential use cases for the technology in our sector.

Travelport predicts that in the short term, most blockchain developments will happen in closed supplier groups on private and permissioned chains within the travel industry. In the mid-to-long term, we may see payments, inventory and order management disrupted by blockchain or distributed ledger technologies. Whole

Use case	Suitability for blockchain or distributed ledger & limitations
Whole trip, travel reservations	Currently not suitable for public blockchains, scalability and speed of transaction verification are limiting factors
Traveller identity	Suitable for blockchain or distributed ledger, needs robust access control mechanism and security model
Payments for travel transactions	Suitable for blockchain, requires financial partners and requires currency stability
Loyalty federation	Possibly suitable for blockchain, requires collaboration of travel suppliers and agreement on exchange mechanism
Guarantee of bookings and payment	Validating a booking on distributed ledger, suitable for blockchain as it does not involve keeping the whole reservation on the ledger
Ticketing	Similar to the above but risks transposing legacy process to distributed ledger technology
B2B Settlement	Suitable for distributed ledger in a closed business network
Shopping and inventory	Inventory control possible with distributed ledger but probably only within a limited access group or closed network due to performance and scalability
Travel exchange	Travel token or currency exchange capability, working across supplier’s ledgers. Will probably be a necessity to support some of the other models

trip management on blockchain, air settlement and combining of

air supplier journeys, we see as a longer-term opportunity, anticipat-

ing further evolution within blockchain technology. The evolution

of open standards around travel blockchains will drive advancements in these areas.

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



Andy Bell
Enterprise Business Architect
Travelport

Wego enables ROIs for airlines

Wego enables airlines to have a greater visibility online with access to a wider direct customer base. **Dean Wicks**, Chief Flights Officer, Wego, talks about how the travel search engine empowers airlines to sell more seats and showcase their brand offering to a much wider audience.

Wego is an aggregator and distributor of content for both flight and hotel providers. The travel search engine shops the marketplace of suppliers and OTAs (Online Travel Agents) with availability of carrier direct options for consumers to make an unbiased choice. “For flights, we combine all the information from different suppliers of the particular flight onto one rate card. This allows the consumer to have a choice of who they purchase various options from. An airline makes more revenue per passenger when the passenger comes to them directly from Wego rather than an indirect booking channel. That is because of the less fees involved in the cost of distribution and the cost of sale,” explained Wicks.



Distribution is one of the biggest costs that a carrier faces because of aircraft costs, fuel and human resources. When a con-

sumer books via a travel agent, the airline has to pay the agent commission plus the GDS segment fees. Studies have shown that the average network carrier pays approximately €14 per sector in the costs of distribution. Wicks shared, “By working with a metasearch player such as ourselves, the carrier gets to cut out a lot of these costs dramatically. In addition, the airline gets to own the customer directly. When purchasing a ticket via an OTA, the ancillaries the carrier wishes to sell may not be available for sale but we enable the carrier to sell.”

Marketing and distribution online via the world wide web requires specialist knowledge to keep costs down and increase global

“When purchasing a ticket via an OTA, the ancillaries the carrier wishes to sell may not be available for sale but we enable the carrier to sell”

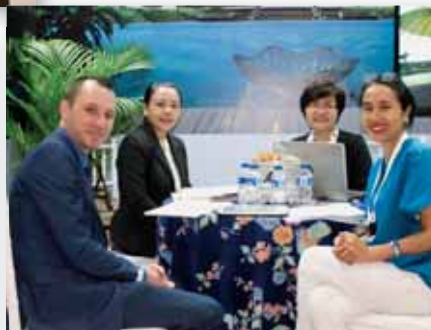
footprint. “We are able to showcase brands online and connect travellers looking for specific items with the right supplier for them. We have ample data on user intent,” he mentioned.

Talking about the current trends in airlines today, Wicks said that the prices remain high to travel from and around the Middle East. He said, “Most LCCs have luggage included in their airfares and those who don’t have only marginal differences between the cost of including your bags or flying without.” Low cost in the

Middle East is not the same as low cost elsewhere. Air Arabia, the largest of all Middle Eastern low-cost carriers has a bigger seat pitch in Economy class than a lot of European full-service carriers. “We have LCCs in Saudi Arabia or the UAE offering business class cabins and frequent flyer programmes. It is in the Middle East that we see the growth of the hybrid carrier, one that comes with services, products and popular brands. People want things to be cheaper but there are just some things that are not supposed to be unbundled,” he concluded.

Exploring the colours of Indonesia

The recently-held Bali and Beyond (BBTF) 2018 witnessed 320 buyers from 41 countries, 68 trade buyers and approximately 241 sellers. Bali's growth in Indonesia was recorded as one of the best in the world and among the top 20 fastest growing travel destinations. All efforts were choreographed by the Ministry of Tourism and supported by Indonesia's President who is committed to developing the tourism industry.



Pioneer in bespoke travel

Starting off in Singapore in 2009, branching to Hong Kong by 2011 and reaching Dubai by 2014, Lightfoot Travel has been gradually conquering the luxury travel sector. **Simon Cameron**, Founder & Managing Director—Middle East, Lightfoot Travel, shares plans ahead to grow in the ME, the UK and Asia.

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Could you define the luxury business model you promote?

We'd like to say we offer 'experiential luxury' by combining truly high-end properties and unique experiences. We work with the best suppliers worldwide, and we qualify these in a number of ways. Firstly, all of our travel designers have worked for leading tailor-made travel companies; so we have pre-existing relationships with these suppliers. Secondly, we are a member of some exclusive trade organisations such as PURE and Traveller Made where we meet up with the suppliers each year. Most importantly, we only work with destinations, hotels and suppliers which our sales and product team have ex-

perienced themselves. This 'tried and tested' model allows us to share first-hand experience of the destinations with our clients.

What are your key selling points?

The key difference between us and most local travel agencies, OTAs and concierges is we only hire people who have an extensive first-hand experience of the destinations and properties we use. We invest in sending our


travel designers out in the field for two to four weeks per year to visit the areas they specialise in. The other major difference to booking with a local agency or OTA is that the clients will deal with a subject matter specialist. So, for instance, if you wish to travel to Africa, you will deal with a travel designer who has over 15 years of organising luxury holidays exclusively to Africa. This in-house knowledge allows Lightfoot to have a very high repeat and referral rate.

Another key USP is the support which clients get on their holiday. Not only do we offer support through the travel designer but also through our local partner. This means that during an emergency, we are on the ground to deal with it swiftly. Another service we offer at an additional cost is an emergency response capability with access to a 24*7 emergency operations room.

Tell us about the new partnership with Gulf Aviation and Anantara.

Besides the exclusive new private jet journey in partnership with GI Aviation and Anantara Resorts, we are also launching an Oman and Abu Dhabi exclusive trip by private charter flight. The trip will take our



guests to Qsar Al Sarab, Salalah, Jebel Akhdar and Sir Bani Yas Island. Our initial target was the Asia market but based on our growth, our numbers indicate that it is well suited to a wider audience. 

“We only work with destinations, hotels and suppliers which our team have experienced themselves. This 'tried and tested' model allows us to share first-hand experience of the destinations with clients”



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Emaar enters Sub-Saharan Africa

Emaar Hospitality Group has partnered with Kalyan Group in its expansion to Sub-Saharan Africa to operate Address Hotel 2 Février Lomé Togo, an iconic hotel set in the tallest building in Togo.

TT Bureau

Located near the Monument of Independence, Address Hotel 2 Février Lomé Togo will open doors to welcome guests shortly following the rebranding of the property. The hotel will have 256 rooms and suites, and 64 serviced apartments as well as an array of themed restaurants, meeting venues and other attractions. Only 7 km from the Lomé-Tokoin International Airport, which connects Togo to key African cities as well as Europe and beyond, Address Hotel 2 Février Lomé Togo will be operated by Address Hotels + Resorts, the premium lifestyle hotel and serviced residences brand of Emaar Hospitality Group.



“In addition to boosting the hospitality sector, we will also contribute to the local economy by creating jobs for the Togolese and extend training on hospitality services”



We thank Kalyan Group and the Togolese government for their support to operate our first hotel and serviced residence project in Togo. Address Hotel 2 Février Lomé Togo is uniquely positioned to welcome business and leisure guests, led by its central location and its iconic status as the tallest building in Togo. We will also contribute to the local economy by creating jobs for the Togolese.”

The new project will be highlighted by the differentiating brand values of Address Hotels + Resorts, which offer a more personal and engaging experience to guests in a premium lifestyle environment. Address Hotel 2 Février Lomé Togo has six operational hotels in Dubai that are popular among African guests to the city. Togo marks

the sixth international destination for the hotel brand with upcoming projects in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Bahrain and The Maldives, in addition to several new openings in the UAE.

Olivier Harnisch, CEO, Emaar Hospitality Group and **Ashok Gupta**, CEO, Kalyan Hospitality

Development Togo SAU signed the management agreement. Gupta said, “Address Hotel 2 Février Lomé Togo is a prestigious asset in our real estate and hospitality investment portfolio. It is envisaged to bring a new dimension to hospitality services through our management agreement with Emaar Hospitality Group. Address

Hotels + Resorts has demonstrated clear industry leadership through its committed approach to enriching the guest experience.”

Harnisch remarked, “Our management agreement to operate Address Hotel 2 Février Lomé Togo is a significant landmark in our expansion to Sub-Saharan Africa.

Heritage beckons at Al Bait Sharjah

General Hotel Management (GHM) is set to introduce its second resort in the Middle East - Al Bait Sharjah on September 1, 2018, marking yet another significant milestone to celebrate Arabian heritage.

TT Bureau

Developed in partnership with the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), Al Bait Sharjah of-

fers an unrivalled dimension of luxury, sophistication and personalised service in the emirate. Located in the region's big-

gest restoration project known as ‘Heart of Sharjah’, the opening of Al Bait plays a key role in re-establishing Sharjah as the cultural hub of the United Arab Emirates. Paying homage to traditional Sharjah architecture, the 53-key heritage resort is constructed from the restored foundations of vintage homes that once belonged to noted Emirati families.

“GHM has taken the lead in pioneering luxury hospitality in the emirate, while connecting the modern traveller to Sharjah's rich past. We eagerly look for-

ward to welcoming guests to Al Bait for an experience comparable to no other,” states Patrick Moukarzel, General Manager, Al Bait Sharjah.

Al Bait, meaning home in Arabic, is carefully remodelled and designed to provide world-class hospitality services and luxurious experiences to its guests, through elements that are in harmony with culture, society, history and civilisation as well as quintessential Emirati hospitality and etiquette. Al Bait Sharjah is home to world-class gastronomy featuring Arabian and multi-

cuisine restaurants as well as The Café where diners discover the only remaining circular wind tower in the UAE, while sipping Arabic coffee and indulging in authentic European pastries or traditional Emirate desserts.

The Turkish-inspired Ice Cream Shop brings a characteristic charm and flavours that are hard to find anywhere else in the region. The Spa stays true to the GHM wellness heritage and offers guests a delightful combination of luxurious indulgences to relax and rejuvenate.



Sharjah's booming tourism sector

Tourism is the major contributor towards the economy of Sharjah. In 2017, hotel revenues and guest numbers increased significantly, according to the latest annual report of the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA).

 TT Bureau

With the ease of visa for Chinese and Russian tourists announced last year, there has been a continuous growth in both these nationalities to the emirate of Sharjah. The 2021 vision is based on promoting the destination as a family-oriented leisure spot

with improved tourist experience through innovation, ensuring that high quality tourism facilities are available through partnerships and collaborative efforts whilst improving the destination in cultural and heritage tourism.

Increasing trend in hotel occupancy

SCTDA revealed that Sharjah hotels recorded an occupancy rate growth in 2017 amid the government's tourism campaigns and initiatives. The occupancy rate reached 70 per cent last year, indicating an exponentially rising number of regional and global travellers visiting the emirate.

H E Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, SCTDA said, "Last year's positive developments were the

results of the initiatives to transform the emirate into one of the world's leading family destinations in line with the directives of H H Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Member of the UAE Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, and in support of Sharjah Tourism Vision 2021 which seeks to attract over 10 million visitors to Sharjah shores by 2021. Our strong performance last year helped catapult Sharjah into the ranks of the most innovative and competitive cities in the world. Our continuing achievements and successes are proof of the emirate's capability to provide an exceptional travel experience as well as high potential to attract tourists from around the world."

Shurooq's role
Sharjah Investment and Develop-

ment Authority (Shurooq) continuously highlights Sharjah as one of the region's fastest-growing and most attractive prospects to both tourists and investors. Some of its key hospitality and tourism projects include the developments, Al Majaz Waterfront, Al Montazah, Al Qasba, Flag Island, Al Noor Island, Heart of Sharjah, the Sharjah Collection and Mleiha Archaeological and Ecotourism project. These represent some of the most exciting destinations and reinforce the diversification of Sharjah's tourism and infrastructure, and its substantial contribution to the local economy and foreign investment.

His Excellency Marwan bin Jassim Al Serkal, Executive



H E Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman
SCTDA

Chairman, Shurooq stated, "We are focusing on developing investments for Sharjah, making it a hub for investors to diversify the economy of the emirate of Sharjah. During the past few months Shurooq signed a few MOUs for high end tourism development."

Role of Shurooq

Some of the key hospitality and tourism projects of Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) include developments like Al Majaz Waterfront, Al Montazah, Al Qasba, Flag Island, Al Noor Island, Heart of Sharjah, the Sharjah Collection and Mleiha Archaeological and Ecotourism project




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DINE-IN, DELIVERIES AND CATERING

Sharjah sees boom in retail tourism

City Centre Sharjah, developed by Majid Al Futtaim, is the latest family lifestyle and entertainment tourism destination to be refurbished and expanded with a cost of over AED 260 million.

 TT Bureau

City Centre Sharjah has been redesigned with a skylight roof to allow for more natural light and spacious storefronts that extends a fresh and contemporary feel to make every visit pleasurable. Keeping accessibility and convenience of shoppers at the heart of the project, City Centre Sharjah has revamped the carpark with 1,426 parking bays and easy entry and exit routes close to the mall's anchor stores. It has also transformed into a vibrant entertainment destination for the entire family with the opening of a 12-screen VOX Cinemas. Moviegoers have more choice than ever with the opening of CITY 101.6 FM MAX screen, with an over 20-metre-wide screen for an immersive experience and KIDS for younger guests who will



enjoy the vibrant ambience while watching their favourite children's films and animated content.

"We work very closely with hotels, agents and Sharjah tourism to ensure that we present a good


retail tourism destination which could attract tourists from all over the world. We are constantly working towards reimagining the retail and leisure landscape to meet the evolving demands of our discerning shoppers and retain

our position as their preferred shopping destination in Sharjah. The new, revitalised City Centre Sharjah is a result of valuable feedback from our long-standing customers who seek trendy international brands, exciting F&B

concepts that appease a plethora of tastes and a destination where they can spend hours with their loved ones enjoying the wide variety of entertainment options," said **Fuad Mansoor Sharaf**, Managing Director, Majid Al Futtaim Properties, Shopping Malls (UAE, Bahrain & Oman).

The enhancement project was undertaken last year to deliver a renewed and holistic shopping, dining and entertainment experience to residents and tourists visiting Sharjah from across the region. The expansion is part of Majid Al Futtaim's announcement made in June 2016 to increase its total investment in the UAE by AED 30 billion by 2026, taking its total investment in the country to AED 48 billion. 

Obtain your Oman visa online

The Sultanate of Oman, with its new e-visa system, now allows all tourists to apply for their visa online so that they can expedite the approval process of the visas. **Salem Adi Al Mamari**, Director General—Tourism Promotions, Oman Ministry of Tourism, shares more details with .

 Shehara Rizly

Please brief us about the new e-visa system.

The new e-visa system, which allows millions of tourists visiting Oman to apply their visa online and facilitate travel, is set to accelerate the processing and approval of visas. The Oman government has put in place one of the safest and most secure systems in the world certified by ISO standards, to implement the visa application and submissions with Royal Oman Police specialists who are available 24*7 to provide support. The new policy coincides with the opening of the new Muscat International Airport, which was expanded and transformed to accommodate the growing number of visitors in the Sultanate.

Any changes for GCC nationals?

The new visa system is not applicable to GCC nationals as they just need their citizens' ID or passport to enter Oman.

What is the period of the general tourist visa?

For general tourist visas, visitors are allowed to stay for a maximum of 30 days. However, visitors have another option which allows them a shorter stay of 10 days.

How will the payments be made?

Payments can be done through the website after the submissions are made and applicants are directed to a secure global payment gateway where they can use their

“The new online facility efficiently cuts the waiting time for visitors, simplifies the procedure for all and generates accurate statistics on the number of people visiting the Sultanate”

credit cards or debit cards to pay the fees.

How much will it cost?

The cost of the visa varies depending on the type of application being done; however, a general tourist visa is 20 OMR for 30 days and 5 OMR for 10 days.


What is the aim of the government to redo the tourist visas?

It has been an ongoing project in

line with our efforts to streamline our procedures following the digital transformation taking place worldwide. With the new online facility, this efficiently cuts the waiting time as visitors can now process their visas before travelling. The system automates and simplifies the procedure for all and generates accurate statistics on the number of people visiting the Sultanate. It also enhances the communication between visitors and authorities.



How many visitors are targeted for this venture?

The e-visa system was created to accelerate the process of getting a visit visa to Oman and not to target specific numbers. 

ME to invest \$58 bn in aviation

A report by Centre for Aviation (CAPA) estimates that the total value of 152 active aviation-related projects in the Middle East reached US\$57.7 billion. Saudi Arabia accounted for the largest share of project value, followed by the UAE and Kuwait.

TT Bureau

According to the Centre for Aviation (CAPA), up to US\$1.1 trillion is to be spent on airport construction globally. This is broken down by US\$255 billion being invested in the new (Green-field) airport projects around the world and US\$845 billion in new runways and terminal buildings. The total value of the global airport construction projects pipeline stands at US\$721.7 billion, with the US and China accounting for the largest shares and project pipelines valued at US\$90.4 billion and US\$76.7 billion respectively. Asia-Pacific has the highest value pipeline at US\$291.2 billion, followed by the Middle East and Africa (MEA) with US\$163.5 billion.

Topping the list is Beijing's new US\$12.6 billion airport, one of the world's largest when it opens in October 2019 with an eventual capacity of 100 million and seven runways. An international airport under construction in Chengdu boast of six runways and will handle 50 million passengers each year. By 2036, China's domestic air-travel traffic will quadruple to 1.6 billion passengers.

HE Saif Mohammed Al Suwaidi, Director-General, UAE General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), said. "Our airlines and airports have been ranking consistently among the best internationally. On compliance level, the UAE ranked as a top member state of the

International Civil Aviation Organisation. We hope to accommodate 118 million passengers by 2023 at the Dubai International Airport, and 120 million passengers upon completion of Phase-II of the Dubai World Central, in ultra-

national Airport, plans to increase the total capacity to handle 24 million international passengers yearly. The Sultanate of Oman, which earlier this year opened an US\$1.8 billion 'silent terminal' with robots directing passengers,

passengers at the airport to 24 million, 36 million and finally 48 million.

“We hope to accommodate 118 million passengers by 2023 at DXB, and 120 million passengers upon completion of Phase-II of Dubai World Central”

modern infrastructures that match the best in the world.”

In Saudi Arabia, the new Taif International Airport is expected to open in December 2020. By 2019, Riyadh's King Khalid Inter-

hopes it will be among the top 20 airports in the world by 2020. Three development phases are expected to boost the number of



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NEW HOTELS

TRAVTALK brings you some of the latest and upcoming properties operational in 2018.

★ QE2

Location : Dubai

Rooms/Suites
inventory : 200Opening Date:
October 2018

PCFC Hotels, part of the Dubai government's Ports, Customs and Free Zones Corporation, has reinvented the legendary vessel as the latest must-see tourism destination. Currently, 200 rooms and suites are operational with 600 planned in the pipeline for the grand opening. The property boasts of 25 meeting rooms and conferencing facilities. The 13-deck hotel has been thoughtfully restored to her former glory – maintaining her most loved interior design features - including her period furniture, paintings and famous memorabilia.



★ Form Hotel Dubai

Location : Dubai

Rooms/Suites
inventory : 136Opening Date:
May 2018

Form Hotel Dubai is centrally located in the heart of Dubai's Cultural Village in the Al Jadaf neighbourhood. This unique 15-storey pioneering new hotel also represents the latest addition to the prestigious Design Hotels collection. The property merges an emphasis on well-being with a carefully curated design concept. The hotel presents a commitment to living well throughout the guest journey, most prominently in its three food and beverage outlets, each of which offer wholesome menus crafted from sustainably sourced ingredients.

★ Flora Inn Hotel

Location : Dubai

Rooms/Suites
inventory : 228Opening Date:
June 2018

From the central skylight lobby to the refreshing design of the room, Flora Inn Hotel is a great choice for Dubai's travellers. Located at three minutes away from the Dubai International Airport, guests will enjoy the convenience of location and facilities of Flora Hospitality. Light and refreshing, a strong tone of orange and alternating turquoise brings a colourful element to the rooms. From a stopover to an extended stay in Dubai, guests can enjoy quality time at the hotel's restaurant, lobby café and unwind at its wellness centre.



★ Al Bait Sharjah

Location : Sharjah

Rooms/Suites
inventory : 53Opening Date:
September 2018

Developed in partnership with Shurooq, Al Bait Sharjah offers an unrivalled dimension of luxury, sophistication and personalised service. Located in the region's biggest restoration project known as 'Heart of Sharjah', the opening of Al Bait plays a key role in re-establishing Sharjah as the cultural hub of the United Arab Emirates. Paying homage to traditional Sharjah architecture, the heritage resort is constructed from the restored foundations of vintage homes that once belonged to noted Emirati families.



Emaar to build largest Chinatown

In a landmark development, Emaar is set to build the largest Chinatown in the UAE to expand the hospitality business of Address Hotels and Resorts in China.

TT Bureau

To honour Chinese expatriates in the UAE and further bolster business ties with China, Emaar will develop the Middle East's largest Chinatown within the retail district of Dubai Creek Harbour, its six-square-kilometre mega-development, only 10 minutes from the Dubai International Airport and the iconic Burj Khalifa. The retail precinct will occupy a central location within Dubai Creek Harbour: a destination which will be home to the world's new icon, Dubai Creek Tower, and


encompass vibrant lifestyle elements.



Mohamed Alabbar, Chairman, Emaar Properties, said, "The visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to the UAE has further strengthened UAE-China relations, underpinned by initiatives such as

the UAE-China Week announced by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai." He further said, "The development of the new Chinese retail and lifestyle district at Dubai Creek Harbour as well as Emaar's expansion into China highlight our commitment to the country and our focus on contributing to the strength and success of UAE-China relations."

Elegantly designed homes in Dubai Creek Harbour will offer spectacular views of the city's dramatic skyline, the waterfront and the Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary - home to over 450 animal species and migratory birds. Further strengthening Emaar's outreach to China, the company also announced that it will open three dedicated pavilions in China - Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, all served by direct daily flights to Dubai on Emirates.

In another significant announcement, Emaar will expand its premium luxury hotel and serviced residences brand, Address Hotels + Resorts to China. 

5 more reasons

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1

Recognition

Show off your achievements as an innovator and performer

The Arabian Travel Awards celebrates hard work and success and offers great PR opportunities as already mentioned. It is fantastic to be recognised so it is important to make sure that people know what your business has achieved. With recognition comes respect.



2

Stamp of Approval

Carry the logo for industry excellence

The Awards are given away in each category and there are also highly commended award categories which honour individual players.

All winners from the night will receive a logo and stamp that they can use in their email signatures, their websites or in their marketing and PR material.



3

Benchmarking

Proof that you are a market leader

See your organisation from a different perspective and compare yourself to your competitors. The Arabian Travel Awards entry process will make you think about how you stand out: whether it's through innovation, diversity, growth, customer service, investment in people and strategic thinking. It will help you think about ways you could be doing things better and identify areas for improvement. This could be just as valuable as the prize itself.

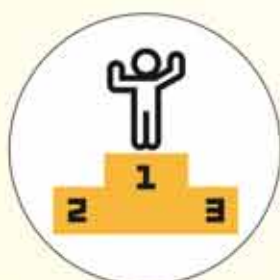


4

Return on Investment

Attract new business as an award finalist.

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5

Winning

The bragging rights are sensational

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MOVEMENTS

Shurooq

► Sharjah

His Excellency **Marwan bin Jassim Al Sarkal** has been promoted to the position of Executive Chairman of Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) by Royal Decree. Al Sarkal has played an exemplary role in realising the vision of establishing the organisation as the driving force behind the transformation of Sharjah as a key tourism and business destination. He has spearheaded several crucial projects and initiatives, turning them into runaway successes. He is at the helm of the 'Heart of Sharjah' project, a 15-year historical restoration project of the heritage areas of Sharjah.



StayWell Group Middle East

► Dubai

StayWell Group Middle East announced the appointment of **Colin A Baker** as Regional Director of StayWell Hospitality Middle East. Baker brings with him a wealth of hospitality management experience spanning New Zealand, Beijing, Papua New Guinea and Australia before moving to Dubai. His journey as a hotelier started when he worked as General Manager in Christchurch Airport Travelodge in 1991 before opening Holiday Inn City Centre Perth, being appointed as General Manager in various IHG hotels in Australia and taking on a corporate role as Resorts Operations Manager in Accor Premiere Vacation Club.



Anantara Sir Bani Yas Island

► Abu Dhabi

Anantara Sir Bani Yas Island announced the promotion of **Nico Vivier** to Hotel Manager. Vivier will oversee the operations across three unique and distinct properties – Anantara Desert Islands Resort & Spa, Al Sahel Villa Resort, and Al Yamm Villa Resort – on Sir Bani Yas Island, Abu Dhabi. He started his career in hospitality nearly two decades ago in Johannesburg in South Africa, and has been working in unique destinations such as Seychelles and Tanzania before joining the Sir Bani Yas team as Executive Assistant Manager in charge of F&B in August 2016.



The Retreat Palm Dubai MGallery

► Dubai

The Retreat Palm Dubai MGallery announced the appointment of **Francesco Pompilio** as its new Rooms Division Manager. In his role, Pompilio is responsible for streamlining the departments operations by working closely with front office, reservations, recreation, housekeeping, engineering and security. He is tasked to ensure high standards of service and top-quality guest experience at the property. With 16 years of experience in hospitality, Pompilio spent most of his years with InterContinental Hotel Group properties. He started his career in the UAE in 2010 as front office manager at Intercontinental Abu Dhabi.



Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts

► Dubai

Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts has promoted **Sabine Dorn-Aglagul** to President—Europe. Aglagul has extensive experience working in hotel management for organisations such as Hilton Worldwide and Starwood Hotels & Resorts, employed in a variety of roles in markets including Turkey, Germany and Austria. Prior to joining Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts, she worked in Istanbul as Area Manager Turkey for Starwood Hotels & Resorts. Her ambitions in her new role are to make Mövenpick "the brand and place of choice" for guests and talent in Europe. As President—Europe, she will join Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts' Executive Committee.



Pearl Hotels

► Dubai

Ravi K Nair has been appointed as Cluster General Manager of Pearl Hotels for two properties - Best Western Plus Pearl Creek and Pearl Park Hotel Apartment. With over 27 years of experience in hospitality, Nair has worked in some of the city hotels in the region. His wide background and experience will help him to manage the hotels and reach the targets for an excellent guest and member experience in his new role. He will ensure that the Pearl Hotels reaches success during his tenure along with excellent performance of the properties in terms of guest numbers coupled with the highest standard of service.



Four Seasons Bahrain Bay

► Bahrain

Jason Rodgers has been appointed as Hotel Manager for Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay. Counting 20 years as a veteran of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, Rodgers brings a wealth of international experience, specialising in luxury hospitality operations. In his new role, he will oversee the day-to-day operations of the 51-storey Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay, including managing 273 luxury guest rooms and suites, the spa and wellness centre, seven distinct restaurants and lounges, and the 160-metre long white-sand beach.



Baros

► Maldives

Baros has boosted its management team with the recent appointment of **Franz Alexander** as Executive Assistant Manager. Alexander brings to Baros a solid background in Food and Beverage, an area in which Baros excels. A Swiss citizen, he was educated in Guatemala before studying hospitality management for six years at the Swiss Hotel School in Lucerne. Prior to joining Baros, he was Executive Assistant Manager at Centara Grand, Bangkok. Alexander looks forward to utilising his wide international knowledge of food and beverage and management to enhance the hospitality experience for guests at Baros.



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