

# TRAVTALK

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

Published from : ★ India ★ Middle East

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a very  
PROSPEROUS  
&  
HAPPY NEW YEAR  
**2018**

## 2018 seems to be a year of optimism

As 2018 opens with new regulations in the UAE, there would be a relative shift in the way business would be carried out. More hotel rooms will join this year in the race to Expo 2020 and by the end of the year, there may be some positive changes that can contribute towards the growth of all industries.

 SHEHARA RIZLY



H.E. Sheikh Faisal bin  
Saoud Al Qassimi  
Director  
Sharjah Airport Authority

“Sharjah International Airport has continued to grow in capacity year on year. The total number of passengers that passed through the airport in the first 11 months of 2017 grew to 10,481,751 passengers, up from 10,100,249 during the corresponding period last year. The new expansion process of Sharjah International Airport is estimated at approximately AED1.5 billion. It includes many facilities such as the expansion of the passengers' building, which is expected to increase the capacity to hold up to 20 million passengers by 2027. The new expansion will be carried out progressively over a number of phases, the most important one being the expansion of roads to and from the airport in addition to a host of additional facilities.”



H.E. Khalifa Suhail  
Al Zafin  
Executive Chairman -  
Dubai South - Dubai  
Aviation City Corporation

“Aviation District's investment plan until 2018 of AED200 million (US\$55 million) in the 'Aerospace Supply Chain' includes two aerospace supply chain buildings and one Suppliers Complex. We are looking at developing three key areas in Dubai South-residential city, golf city and commercial city. The Emaar/Dubai South project expects 500,000 residents and currently, Dubai South is developing nearly 1,200 plus housing units apart from this project. In terms of hospitality, there will be about 2,000 hotel rooms with three or four international hotels being constructed in the premises. The Dubai South general aviation is one component, MRO is another component. Roads and other infrastructure facilities are being completed including the extension of the Etihad Rail as we prepare for Expo 2020.”



Linda Lewis  
Vice President - Global  
Sales MEASA & ASPAC,  
Jumeirah Group

“Jumeirah continues to strengthen its position as one of the most successful UAE home-grown brands on a global scale. Our strong performance in 2017 is evidence of our robust and progressive business strategy. We are confident of continuing the success story in new markets in 2018. We believe that our strength lies in our ability to understand the needs of our guests and in creating bespoke luxury inspired by Arabic hospitality and charm. This achievement comes with the support and vision of the UAE's leadership whose continued focus on building the tourism and hospitality sector has helped us to deliver business success.”

“2018 is set to be an incredibly exciting year for Tourism Authority Thailand (TAT). Last month, TAT announced the opening of the Michelin Guide Bangkok 2018. The guide positions Thailand as a world-class dining destination, therefore food will be a huge focus for us throughout 2018. With food and medical tourism industries booming in Thailand, we continue to dominate the growing market. What sets Thailand apart from other countries are factors such as low cost of medical treatment, high quality of treatment provided by private medical centres and the highly developed tourism industry. We hope to increase the number of people visiting Thailand for medical treatments and procedures via various initiatives this year.”



Pichaya Sais  
Director, Tourism  
Authority of Thailand  
Middle East, Arabian  
Travel Award winner

“As we put together the final touches to the programme for AHIC 2018, it is clear from our conversations with hotel investors, owners and operators alike that there are opportunities across the Middle East hospitality sector for more diverse product. There is a focus on the mid-market, serviced apartments and branded residences in the UAE, while in Ras Al Khaimah, where AHIC will take place from April 17-19, there are numerous investment opportunities, for example on Al Marjan Island. Our global project showcase at AHIC will present such developments to investors and we predict that there will be further initiatives like these throughout the region to expand the offering for leisure travellers, thus compensating for the decline regional economies have witnessed from the corporate segment.”



Jonathan Worsley  
Chairman, Bench  
Events and Co-founder,  
Arabian Hotel Investment  
Conference

“This year has been a positive one for Amadeus as we maintained growth in the first three quarters of the year and all of our businesses performed well. We had important developments in our client relationships as we signed and renewed significant deals with leading industry players such as Al Tayyar Travel Group, flydubai and others. Around 15 airlines from the Middle East and North Africa entered into a 10-year framework agreement with Amadeus for distribution services, led by the Arab Air Carriers Association (AACO). The airlines participating in the framework agreement will serve over 1 billion passengers during the 10 year duration of the agreement that follows a previous 10 year contract with 13 AACO airlines, signed in 2008. Given the steady progression of our MENA businesses and wider confidence in the region's travel industry, we look forward to optimism into 2018.”



Antoine Medawar  
Vice President, Middle  
East and North Africa,  
Amadeus



Matthew Powell  
MD - ME and South  
Asia, Travelport, Arabian  
Travel Award winner

“Travelport will remain tightly focused on delivering the fastest, easiest to connect to and the most seamless omni-channel experiences available for travel providers, travel agents and end-users. Our best-in-class mobile solutions will play a pivotal role in helping us achieve this in 2018, as smartphones become the tool of choice for booking as well as researching travel, serving as increasingly powerful aids for enhancing experiences throughout the trip lifestyle. This trend, which will escalate faster in the Middle East than most regions due to its large pool of tech savvy, travel hungry millennials; will ultimately give travel agents and travel providers more opportunities than ever before to engage with customers, build satisfaction and drive revenue. Travelport will also continue to invest in OTA technology next year. Our investments will be centered on enhancing our machine learning capabilities, market carrier analytics, industrialised cache solutions in the Cloud and asynchronous search, so we can deliver improvements in speed, 'bookability' and optimisation.”



Nizar Abdul  
Manager  
Gold Medal

“Our focus is to deepen customer engagements, enhance technology and most importantly, release sensible commercials for our trade partners! On a positive note, Gold Medal has recorded the highest ever topline growth in the current financial year. On the other side, the increase in document count signifies that there's more travel happening with customer demographic remaining unchanged! The only challenge lies in making every customer experience personalised, offering value for money and showing a true passion to travel business. Knowing this, we keep fine-tuning our commercials often, conduct more customer engagement programmes and interesting frontline incentives for agents. Gold Medal's strategy is to invest more on technology aspect to enhance our B2B booking engine time to time. In proportionate to the business growth, it is our commitment to provide a hassle-free customer experience with our 24/7 customer care centre.”



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## Retail therapy ups tourism

**Slim Zaine**, General Manager, Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates, talks about retail tourism segment in light of the upcoming Dubai Shopping Festival.

TT BUREAU

**Q**Over the years, retail tourism has always provided many opportunities to the industry. What are the key programmes which support this initiative?

The shopping malls in Dubai are major contributors to retail tourism and have become famous globally for offering experiential features such as indoor ski slopes and aquariums in addition to a massive selection of branded showrooms. As Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates is directly linked to Mall of the Emirates, we naturally support and take part in key programmes by Dubai government.

**Q**How does one contribute towards the progress of tourism?

Creating attractions and events, staying on top of new trends, highlighting your his-



**Slim Zaine**  
General Manager  
Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates

tory and aligning promotional packages with ongoing events are some initiatives to enhance tourism in a country. The UAE has successfully positioned itself as a luxury retail and leisure destination due to the extensive shopping possibilities as well as a large variety of five-star hotels.

**Q**What are the initiatives by the Dubai government to enable this programme?

Examples of Dubai Tourism's initiatives are extended shopping sale events promoted as tourist activities such as the recurring Dubai Shopping Festival and Dubai Summer Surprises as well as weekend flash sales with up to 90 per cent discounts. Launched in 2017, the annual retail calendar is a key part of the strategy to attract regional and global visitors to Dubai.

**Q**Please share strategies to develop a better technology.

Large scale retail developments with onsite hotels and mall experiences are becoming increasingly successful. The fact that some shopping malls have evolved into tourist destinations in their own right is adding significant value to the tourism industry and hospitality. 📶

## FITUR focus on technology

**Ana Larrañaga**, Director of FITUR speaks with TRAVTALK about this year's staging of FITUR, to be held from January 17-21, 2018, at Feria de Madrid, Spain.

TT BUREAU

**Q**Could you give us a brief summary of the highlights of this year's FITUR?

Three working lines will be especially promoted this year. Among them is FITUR's internationalisation with a greater presence of countries, official representations and companies, as well as India's leading role as FITUR partner. Another highlight is to be found in the topics of sustainability and technological innovation. In this context, another major novelty will be the presentation of a series of prototypes based on 5G technology which will offer exhibitors and visitors valuable information on applications that will change the way tourism is experienced. Another novelty will be the FITUR Festivals' monographic section devoted to music events.



**Ana Larrañaga**  
Director  
FITUR

**Q**Who are the key participants from the Middle East at FITUR this year?

The Middle East presence grew by 6 per cent at FITUR 2017 and accounts for 10 per cent of international representation at the trade fair. Beyond these figures, the Middle East's participation has always been very important, particularly with regard to the countries of the Mediterranean Basin.

**Q**What are the main objectives of this year's event?

Providing the industry with the best platform for trade meetings and business, we work to bring together the broadest representation and participation of the international tourism industry.

**Q**Could you share this year's key areas?

We will feature activities on January 16, a day prior to the opening, with Exceltur Forum and the Latin American Conference for Tourism Ministers and Businessmen, CIMET. Moreover, FITUR will host different activities organised by the UNWTO, Investur Africa and Casa Asia as well as sessions and presentations by various business associations and tour operators, carriers, technology companies, etc., among many others. 📶

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## TRAVELTALK

## EDITORIAL

## Bracing for Expo 2020

As we welcome 2018, the countdown begins for the much anticipated Expo 2020. This year will witness many infrastructure projects in full swing gearing up to accommodate the vast number of tourists to Dubai. Hotels, hotel apartments and even new cities are being developed in the emirate.

VAT will reap the necessary funds towards development and very soon, there will be a much smoother flow in business acumen as well. VAT will ensure that there is proper record of all the transactions enabling more transparency.

Dubai has yet again witnessed steady growth in cruise tourism. Last season saw a total of 625,000 cruise tourists with 157 ship calls and an increase of about 15 per cent more than the previous year. This year the expectations are much higher especially because Russians and Chinese have the privilege of obtaining visa on arrival which has proved very positive in terms of air transportation tourists hence the same can be expected for sea or cruise tourists as well.

The main attraction for Dubai this month will be the Dubai Shopping festival which started off on December 26, 2017 and will go on until January 27, 2018. The ease of visa to the emirate will serve as a main contributor to obtain more visitors than the previous year. Emaar hitting a record of 10,000 hotel rooms last year only goes to prove the strength of not just the international hotel chains in Dubai but also the fact that the home grown brands are optimistic and striving to get their fair share of the business.

An iconic city in the world, Dubai will be stepping in to their smart solutions this year aimed at ensuring a better touristic experience to the millions of nationalities that travel every year. At the recently concluded Dubai Airshow, it was revealed that they are on the track to plant palm trees on another planet. Although it is still at an initial stage, Dubai will undoubtedly achieve these feats.

## Is AI more than just a buzz?

With worldwide digital travel sales expected to reach \$817.54 billion by 2020, there are clear trends driving that growth and the UAE is no exception. Data science is one of the most promising technology fields that is changing the way many people travel.

## Acceleration of payment technology to ease e-commerce growth

We are seeing the convergence of two industries booming at the same time here in the GCC - credit cards and e-commerce. Credit card applications grew 65 per cent year over year in Q1 2017, whilst we see a comparative growth in a nascent e-commerce sector, which still accounts for only 2 per cent of retail in the UAE vs 15 per cent in more developed markets. That being said, the GCC eCommerce industry is expected to massively outperform the high street by growing at 30 per cent CAGR vs 4 per cent for traditional retail in the run up to 2020.

It can only be good news for the travel industry to see more advanced and future proof online payment technologies reaching our shores, such as the introduction of Apple Pay. In a travel market still experiencing a lower than average online share of bookings, more ease of use, security and confidence in spending online can

only help accelerate the inevitable march towards online travel sales.

## Rise of robots

It seems that today you can't open a marketing industry magazine or attend a travel conference without being bombarded by buzzwords like machine learning and artificial intelligence, and in most cases the use of these words doesn't go far beyond the buzz. However, for the GCC, this is accelerated by the incredible initiative 'One Million Arab Coders' which received 500,000 applications in the first week alone!

The travel sector simply can't afford to be slow to adopt the opportunities that ML and AI can bring. If done right, it can transform everything from customer service, revenue management and dynamic pricing, load forecasting, market analytics, UX and marketing optimisation. So far, we've only touched the surface of AI and early adopters may well find that it provides capabilities which save costs, accelerate growth and distance their competitors.

## Time to capitalise on an optimistic year ahead!

The IMF is predicting the UAE's economy to grow 3.4 per cent in 2018 compared to 1.7 per cent during this year. In 2018, MENAP (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan) growth is expected to increase to 3.5 per cent. This indicates a healthy margin of increased economic activity that will find its way into our sector.

Looking ahead, we need to ensure that we are taking full advantage of this increased activity in our region and not being left behind. Be ready for fluctuation - how can you leverage predictive analytics to ensure you're best placed for increases and decreases in traffic by source market? Be it China, Russia or the UK, are you optimised in price, product and marketing to be as effective at the right time and in the right place? 2018 is going to see travel brands continuing to improve and perfect the personalisation of engagements with consumers.

If the stars all align in 2018, our industry could see a consumer who is better enabled and more comfortable shopping online for high value items, a market which is getting back to growth and presenting more opportunities to scale revenue and a travel business model which is better powered and optimised by bleeding edge technology across marketing, service and operations. So roll on 2018!

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



Josh Beckwith  
Sales Director MEA  
Turkey & India at Sojern

## Novotel ushers in a special Christmas



The festive celebrations kicked off at Novotel Dubai Al Barsha with a Christmas tree lighting ceremony. A musical performance of Christmas carols was held in partnership with Safa Community School. This year featured new treats, such as a la minute hot chocolates, mince pies, and many more home-made sweets. "The ceremony brought alive the festive state of mind, heralding and unveiling the spirit of the holiday season in all its grandeur," said Souffian Zaeraoui, Director, Novotel Dubai Al Barsha.



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# ONEVIEW improves process for travel

Partnering with Oneview IT solutions, Airborne Travel and Tourism launched their full-service online portal making the website — [airbornetrip.com](http://airbornetrip.com) — a single point for all travel requirements.

The new portal features an array of travel related services ranging from flights, hotels, tours, car rentals and insurance, to mention a few. Airborne has been one of Oman's premier travel service providers catering to corporates, government departments and leisure travellers alike for the past 14 years.

**Raitha Al Sulaimani**, Director, Airborne Travel & Tourism mentioned during product launch, "Our advent into the online world opens up vast and varied opportunities to our business. Our focus of business was predominantly corporate-oriented and now with this new initiative, we have the opportunities to serve a larger customer base. She also said that this is the beginning of a long journey – 'a journey of

transformation' - process of regular assessment and adapting to the needs of our customers."

Sulaimani assured that they would be bringing in more content from around the world to their customers as they moved forward towards making [airbornetrip.com](http://airbornetrip.com), a single point for all travel requirements.

As per Oneview's technical team, "Each interaction with Airborne's stakeholders not only provided them an opportunity and great experience, but also helped them gather insights that can be used to improve processes and mature into the travel industry, taking them a step ahead to

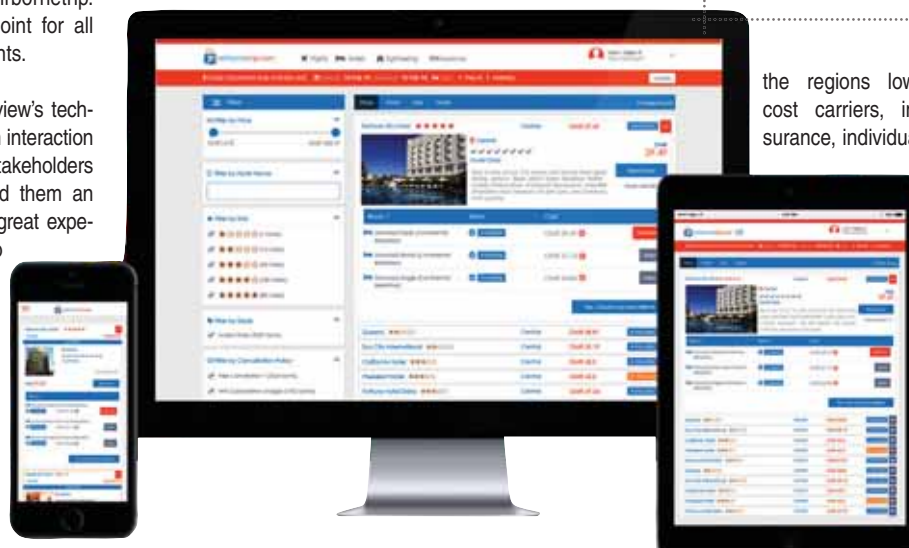
produce an stabilised system to Airborne".

The system is powered by Amadeus for flight searches and is integrated with multiple hotel consolidators. "We will soon be adding more feeds to the system whereby airbor-

netrip.com will be Oman's first single point search engine for travel services. Today, we offer you a sub second search on flights and look forward to bring in more enhancements as we move forward with our upcoming releases where we bring you more content from

**Each interaction with Airborne's stakeholders not only provided Oneview an opportunity and great experience, but also helped them gather insights that can be used to improve processes and mature into the travel industry, taking them a step ahead to produce an stabilised system to Airborne**

**Raitha Al Sulaimani**  
Director, Airborne Travel & Tourism



the regions low-cost carriers, insurance, individual

tours, group departure bookings and more," Sulaimani added.

Airborne's team is collaborating with their IT partner Oneview IT Solutions to serve the agility of travel business. They are planning for the latest innovation to be incorporated on a monthly basis, so that their customers can eagerly look for the new features and enhancements in their upcoming releases. 📱

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# Dubai sees the dawn of cruise season

As this year's cruise season begins, Dubai is targeting new markets from Europe and India to join in as the 9-month seasonal venture is one of the most lucrative tourism strategies, says **Jamal Humaid Al Falasi**, Director, Dubai Cruise Tourism, Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Dubai Tourism).

**SHEHARA RIZLY**

**Q**When does the real cruise season begin for the ports in Dubai?

Dubai's cruise season typically lasts for around nine months from October to June. The 2017-18 season commenced on October 25 with the arrival of luxury cruise ship Seabourn Encore and is expected to conclude on June 27, 2018 with the departure of cruise liner Sea Princess.

**Q**What are the expected numbers this year?

During 2016-17, Dubai witnessed a 15 per cent increase in visitor numbers and 18 per cent increase in ship calls compared to the previous season. Moving forward, we expect to maintain this momentum as we work towards achieving Dubai Cruise Tourism's strategic goal of attracting one million cruise tourists per season by the 2020-21 cruise season. In the current season, Du-

bai Cruise Terminal expects to host ships from 22 cruise lines from around the world.

**Q**How will this season be different from others?

We are optimistic about the new season in view of recent federal government policy reforms that have made it easier for visitors from various markets to enjoy cruise trips from Dubai. These include the granting of free visa-on-arrival access to Chinese and Russian citizens and to Indian nationals holding a valid US visa or Green Card. This is in addition to visas-on-arrival already offered to nationals from 47 countries, as well as the introduction in 2014 of a UAE multi-entry cruise visa and a simplified online visa process for visitors from other countries. Our existing partnerships with cruise lines, as well as the continued collabo-



Jamal Humaid Al Falasi  
Director, Dubai Cruise Tourism,  
Department of Tourism and Commerce  
Marketing (Dubai Tourism)

**Our existing partnerships with cruise lines, as well as the continued collaboration with other Dubai public and private sector, are bound to support our efforts**

ration with other Dubai public and private sector stakeholders, are bound to support our efforts to attract more visitors.

**Q**What are the projections for 2018 in terms of cruise tourism promotion?

Thanks to concerted promotional and marketing initiatives undertaken by Dubai Tourism in collaboration with public and private sector stakeholders locally and regionally – such as the formation of the Cruise Arabia alli-

ance – Dubai is now included in the itineraries of over 22 world-class cruise lines. We are working in collaboration with several cruise lines and with our 20 overseas offices, conducting multi-city roadshows, trainings and other destination promotion activities in various international markets. We are also spearheading the activities of Cruise Arabia, a synergy of regional tourism authorities, participating in a unified way at major industry events.



## Key Highlights of 2017

The 2016-17 season was a great success for Dubai Cruise Tourism, as we saw over 625,000 cruise tourists arrive in the city via a total of 157 ship calls, reflecting increases of 15 per cent and 18 per cent respectively when compared to the previous season. The season also saw operations by Thomson Cruises, the first UK-based cruise line to home port in the region, two cruise lines making their debut in the region, and several maiden ship calls.

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With past events held in Thimphu, Bhutan, Chiang Rai, Thailand, and Luoyang, China, the event's choice of host destination reflects the growing importance of dispersing tourists to emerging destinations.

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# Indulge in Niyama's azure luxury

Going beyond conventional concepts of lavish accommodation, Niyama presents visitors with myriad opportunities to create their own experience, says **Deveekaa Nijhawan**, Director of PR and Communications - Niyama Private Islands Maldives.

TT BUREAU

Each of Niyama Private Islands' 134 accommodations provide a secluded retreat, even at full capacity. With twin islands Play and

to discover new depths of relaxation at The Drift Spa, or take in a movie under the stars at the outdoor cinema. Just off the coast, Edge prepares elegant entrées from freshly caught seafood, while

are only just the start the experiences to be had at Niyama Private Islands.

Niyama specialises in curating bespoke experiences such as private island dining,

pavilions to three-bedroom family beach pavilions with two private pools, jacuzzi and a personal spa treatment room. With state-of-the-art amenities, this is the ultimate solution for those in quest of luxury. Guests can enjoy a high level of privacy in beach pavilions facing the lagoon with the added bonus of an in-villa spa.



“With its pristine twin island concept- Chill & Play; it provides something for everyone, making it a perfect getaway for families, active travellers, couples and honeymooners. Niyama offers guests the opportunity to live every moment to the fullest with unforgettable memories lasting for eternity; making it a must-visit destination.”

**Deveekaa Nijhawan**

Director of PR and Communications  
Niyama Private Islands Maldives



Chill, Niyama offers the true luxury of choice, with everything expected from an island resort and much more. True to its name, Chill allows guests

Subsix will delight with its underwater panoramas. Play provides delightful diversions for those looking for more active pursuits. These

watching movies under the stars and much more. Its 11 deluxe room categories range from spacious beachfront studios and one-bedroom water

Middle East is one of the fastest growing emerging markets for Niyama Private Islands Maldives. At present, we receive 15-20 per cent of market share from the Middle East market. UK, Russia and Germany remain among the top feeder markets.

The jewel in the resort's crown is the magnificent Crescent, a playground of five ultra-chic villas, all with private pools, for up to 14 adults and eight

children. Boasting a private chef, two butlers, a housekeeper and a host of complimentary activities including a sunset dhoni cruise and movie under the stars, this over water sanctuary is the perfect paradise treat for the discerning Middle Eastern traveller with extended families. Our culinary adventure knows no bounds at Niyama, home to nine unique restaurants in Maldives with distinct destination dining experiences appeals to every taste and palate. “Having been

working here for the past 4 months, I still can't believe I am fortunate enough to work in a paradise like Niyama Private Islands, Maldives. With its pristine twin island concept- Chill & Play; it provides something for everyone, making it a perfect getaway for families, active travellers, couples and honeymooners. Niyama offers guests the opportunity to live every moment to the fullest with unforgettable memories lasting for eternity; making it a must-visit destination,” Nijhawan says. 🌴

## Four Seasons in Kuwait

With a collection of 217 guest rooms, 67 suites and five restaurants, Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait at Burj Alshaya will cater to leisure and business travellers.

TT BUREAU

Representing Four Seasons were Four Seasons executives **Isadore Sharp**, Founder and Chairman and **J. Allen Smith**, President and CEO. Offering his welcome, as representative of the Alshaya family, was **Mohammed Alshaya**, Executive Chairman of the Alshaya Group of Companies, who owns the property.



Speaking on behalf of the Alshaya family, Mohammed Alshaya thanked the Prime Minister and the government of Kuwait for its support throughout the planning, building and pre-opening of the hotel and expressed his gratitude for the presence of senior government representatives at the opening.

Reflecting on the contribution of Four Seasons Kuwait at Burj Alshaya to Kuwait's economy, Alshaya commented, “World-class infrastructure and hospitality is the mark of a progressive city and we are delighted to support Kuwait's 2035 Vision through our investment in this iconic development which reflects Alshaya's commitment to Kuwait and to the growth of a vibrant private sector. This iconic hotel has redefined modern luxury and is a wonderful new addition to Kuwait's hospitality.” 🌴

“We are honoured to welcome **Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah** to the grand opening celebrations of Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait at Burj Alshaya, and extend our deepest gratitude for his presence,” said Smith.

“The significance of the opening goes beyond our commitment to expanding our presence in

the Middle East region. This property is a special celebration of the close relationship we share with our guests in the region who have come to appreciate the Four Seasons experience for its personalised service, attention to detail and warm care. We are humbled by the initial response to this property, which holds an important place in our growth story in the region,” added Smith.

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After ten years of meticulous planning, the Louvre Abu Dhabi was unveiled in November with a week-long series of celebrations. With its steady promotion as a hub for art and cultural tourism, Abu Dhabi's Louvre becomes the latest landmark to tap a niche visitor market to the emirate.

# LOUVRE ABU DHABI

## The new cultural landmark

 SHEHARA RIZLY

Over the years, the emirate of Abu Dhabi has established itself not only as the capital city of the UAE but also as a cultural heritage hub which attracts many visitors from all over the world. Referred to by many experts as the "most ambitious cultural project of the 21<sup>st</sup> century", Louvre Abu Dhabi is the first universal museum to have opened in the Arab world. Although art and cultural tourism shares only a very niche segment of the market, it is definitely a higher contributor to the tourism budget.



Located on the waterfront in Abu Dhabi's cultural district on Saadiyat island, Louvre Abu Dhabi has gained its touch of class and finesse by the Pulitzer prize winning French Architect **Jean Nouvel**. The iconic architectural masterpiece has a combination of both traditional and contemporary design with cutting edge energy efficient engineering. The museum contains 23 permanent galleries, special exhibition spaces, a children's museum, auditorium, restaurants, retail and a research centre. The inaugural installation, in its spacious collection galleries, will present

600 works of art, half from its own rich holdings and half consisting of stellar works visiting from its 13 partner museums in France.

### Birth of the museum

Opening a new era of dialogue between two of the richest cities in cultural heritage, Abu Dhabi and France signed an inter-governmental agreement to share the universal story with the world. The museums' permanent collection and some important collections loaned by various prestigious institutions forms a historical narrative which enables visitors a journey from ancient times to the contemporary world.

### Exquisite work of art

Externally, the iconic structure is seen in the shape of a dome. This eight layered dome made up of four outer stainless steel layers and four inner layers is separated by a steel structure which is five meters in height. A ray of light penetrates the eight layers before appearing or disappearing, thereby creating a cinematic effect over the sun's path throughout the day.

### Journey of mankind

In the first wing of the gallery, you can witness the ceiling which will open and close at a particular time for the light to transcend. As you look down, you will find yourself standing on the world map, which is a summary of the lands covered by the museum. Some of the main artworks on display portray the long and difficult journey of mankind from age immemorial to the modern era. Visitors can start on a chronological journey from prehistory to present day encompassing 12 chapters including the birth of the first villages, universal religions, cosmography, magnificence of the royal court and the modern world. Louvre Abu Dhabi also features a 270-seat auditorium, restaurant, boutique and café.

### Artefacts

Many ancient masterpieces are presented from various collections from all over the world. A Bactrian Princess created in Central Asia at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE, a Grecian sphinx from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE and an Iranian gold bracelet in the shape of a lion are just a few to be named. As you proceed to other wings of the museum, you encounter works from universal religions, including sacred texts such as a leaf from the 'Blue Quran' and a Gothic Bible, as well as a Standing Bodhisattva from the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century and a white marble head of Buddha from China. Highlights from later periods include an ancient astrolabe, part of a display showing the science of cosmography; a red Chinese lacquer chest of drawers produced in France by Bernard II van Risenburgh, and Giovanni Bellini's Madonna and Child, representing the emergence of religious art and iconography.

A series of iconic paintings captures the emergence of the modern world, including Gustave Caillebotte's Game of Bezique, Edouard Manet's The Gypsy, Paul Gauguin's Children Wrestling, Osman Hamdi Bey's A Young Emir Studying, Piet Mondrian's Composition with Blue, Red, Yellow and Black, René Magritte's The Subjugated Reader and Pablo Picasso's Portrait of a Lady. The museum's contemporary art collection has nine canvases by Cy Twombly and a monumental sculpture by renowned international artist Ai Weiwei. As part of an ongoing programme of commissions, Jenny Holzer and Giuseppe Penone have created monumental site-specific installations, exhibited under the dome in open air and embedded in Louvre Abu Dhabi's architecture.



“Louvre Abu Dhabi sets a benchmark for the region, attracting the next generation of talented museum professionals. It has reinvented the 18<sup>th</sup> century premise of the universal museum for a demanding contemporary audience. By exhibiting works from diverse cultures in the same space, our curation shows the interconnectedness of different ideologies, aesthetics and artistic techniques. The museum story transports visitors through a history of humanity illuminated by our collection of exceptional treasures.”



Manuel Rabaté  
Director  
Louvre Abu Dhabi



Jean Nouvel  
Architect  
Louvre Abu Dhabi

“Louvre Abu Dhabi embodies an exceptional programme in the literal sense of the word. Its vocation is now to express what is universal throughout the ages. Its architecture makes it a place of convergence and correlation between the immense sky, the sea-horizon and the territory of the desert. Its dome and cupola imprint the space with the consciousness of time and of the moment through an evocative light of a spirituality that is its own.”



View overlooking the sea © Louvre Abu Dhabi, Photography Mohamed Somji





# Dream Dubai comes closer to Germany

The first arrivals from Leipzig was welcomed at Al Maktoum Airport (DWC) by Meeting Point Emirates in an initiative to strengthen the inbound traffic from German-speaking market. DWC will be receiving 255 passengers daily for a year with the new programme between Meeting Point Emirates and FTI Germany.

## TT BUREAU

The flight programme is set to complement the high-end product that Emirates is currently offering from Vienna, Zurich, Geneva, Frankfurt, Munich, Berlin and Hamburg. The only charter programme will fly to Dubai throughout the year. The programme includes daily, year-round direct flights which depart on a weekly basis from Leipzig, Hannover, Cologne, Munich and Stuttgart. In winters, weekly flights are scheduled from Berlin and Basel, while in summer weekly flights are scheduled from Nuremberg and Dresden. This initiative makes Dubai directly accessible from most of these cities for the first time, thereby, exposing Dubai to new potential travellers, with a market reach like never before.



**Khaled Jouni**, CEO, Meeting Point International, said, "We are thrilled with this launch; adding over 100,000 arrivals per year from the German speaking market is certain to have a positive augmentation on the destination and our local hotel partners alike. We, as a market leader in the UAE, saw a substantial increase in volume of guests compared to the same period last year."

Dubai Tourism's Saud Hareb, Market Lead for Germany, said, "We are excited for the increased connectivity between Dubai and both Germany and Switzerland that this initiative offers. Germany continues to be an important source market for us, and has consistently remained in the top ten worldwide. Dubai has seen strong growth and enthusiasm among visitors as a safe,

family-friendly destination with a variety of attractions to be enjoyed year round, from theme parks, beaches, water parks, cultural offerings, and authentic desert safari experiences."

The connections to Al Maktoum Airport (DWC) complements FTI Group's current offering with Emirates and are carried by Condor on a Boeing B757-300

aircraft and offer value-for-money packages that include airline tickets of economy or premium seats and six or 13-night hotel stays. With the combined routing FTI GROUP now covers the entire German speaking market with 77 non-stop weekly flights to Dubai and access from 13 airports. **Lorne Riley**, Director Corporate Communications and Business Development Dubai

Airports expressed that they were looking forward to this regular movement.

**Kerstin Nestler**, Head of Destination at FTI Germany, explained the decision of FTI Group Director **Dietmar Gunz** to expand the tour operators' Dubai offering and confirmed the statement of the Dubai Department of Tourism & Commerce Marketing (DTCM) that the UAE is currently among the top ten holiday destinations for the German speaking market. "Therefore, we are increasing our capacities for the upcoming winter and will proceed operating the Condor charter in the summer of 2018. As a market leader for the UAE, we can provide our customers now with even more flexibility throughout the entire year and can grow even further."



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## Personality of the month

## Customer is the king: El Waary

A passionate and true hotelier to the core, **Nael El Waary**, Cluster General Manager of Roda Hotels and Resorts in Dubai, is on a journey to steadily take Roda to a new level of training to enhance staff service quality and ensure memorable guest experiences.



"If you look after the welfare of your staff well, you can be rest assured that they, in return will serve the customers well," believes Nael El Waary, Cluster General Manager, Roda Hotels and Resorts, Dubai. Taking up the position three months ago, El Waary explains the strategy, "Training the staff will be a key area which I will be focusing on. For this, there are several international services and training programmes to be introduced to ensure that every staff member is well trained to exceed expectations so that they remain loyal to the brand. I would also be look-

development. "I remember when I told my late father that I was selected to the university and I have decided on hotel management. He asked me if I was going to be a waiter or a cleaner. At that time, the perception of hospitality or hotels was totally different. It was always an industry to serve people but at the time, there was no adoption of it and clearly a misunderstood career."

Expressing satisfaction at his chosen field, El Waary instantly fell in love with his job as it helped him bring out his true personality. Having started off his career in New York city, he travelled to vari-



ing at structural changes to the property as my main objective is to drive Roda to the next level in terms of high service standards."

El Waary added, "In order to ensure customer satisfaction, you need to have staff who are happy and passionate about their jobs."

Having been selected to Cornell University, El Waary pursued hotel management as it involved meeting new people from diverse surrounding and provided opportunities to travel around the globe. At the time, his father was not in agreement with the decision as old school required one to become a doctor, lawyer or engineer and hotel management was not even considered a proper vocation for

ous other destinations and had the opportunity to work and get trained in London, Amsterdam, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New Orleans and a few countries in the

again to a home-grown chain to deliver his magic.

Apart from the local and international awards and accolades received

El Waary's style is to be accessible all the time to his customers both internal and external. "You will not find me at my desk. Although I have to over-

**You will not find me at my desk. Although I have to oversee three other properties, I have divided my time and trained and implemented a very strong management present in public areas to interact and be so available to deal with any unexpected challenge. Being in a service-oriented industry and passionate about the business, it is important to follow the principle 'simply lead by example'**

Middle East such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia spearheading various hotel renovations and extensive pre-opening experiences in the Gulf and international too. El Waary steps in once

at various properties during his 30 years of career, the ability to work locally and internationally and of course, meeting and learning about so many cultures from all over the world.

look three other properties, I have divided my time and implemented a very strong management in public areas to be available to deal with

any unexpected challenge. Being passionate about the business, it is important to follow the principle 'lead by example'.

Speaking about the prominence of technology in hospitality, he said, "I agree that technology eases out many administrative procedures but hospitality is an industry

which exists because of the human element of finding someone who could speak with you." El Waary's cordial and hospitable smile assures

that Roda is on the right track to achieve its goals of becoming a respected brand and the future hospitality.



**Nael El Waary**  
Cluster General Manager  
Roda Hotels and Resorts, Dubai



# Tune Protect your travel

Over a period of two years, Tune Protect has been steadily growing its presence in the EMEA region. Starting off in June 2015 with UAE, today Tune Protect has already established their presence in over 10 countries from Jordan, Lebanon to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and India with their travel assurance portfolio products.

## TT BUREAU

Complementing their regional strategy, Tune Protect EMEA, alongside Tune Protect Re, Malaysia—can facilitate close to 55 countries across the globe with regards to travel protection needs for travellers. The feedback and ideas received from the travel industry has helped them in facilitating between Tune Protect Re and local insurance partners in the region to come up with new innovative travel protection products. Engagement with regional or local business partners, be it airlines, OTAs or travel management companies, coupled with Tune Protect Re and the local or regional insurance partners, they have been instrumental in launching new smart travel



Arijit Munshi  
General Manager, Tune Protect EMEA,  
Arabian Travel Award winner

protection across the region, such as Travel Safe, Travel Cancellation, catering to the inbound segment of travellers or visiting friends and relatives in the region with Visit Assurance product.

Tune Protect EMEA has the ability to innovate and bring in new smart products into the market.

Combined with their in-house technology capability, they have been able to seamlessly cater to different countries and type of travellers. In 2017, Tune

Protect's in-house technology capability, Arijit Munshi, General Manager, Tune Protect EMEA said, "We have embarked upon

**The strategy has been to customise the products to meet different types of travellers of today—be it corporate travel, adventure seekers, golf lovers or ski enthusiasts—with a host of innovative smart travel protection products, for the traveller to understand the value of travel protection**

Protect launched Travel Safe to cover corporate or business travel, Travel Electronic Assurance and Travel Baggage Assurance. All the products were designed based on feedback given by the travel industry which they received from their travellers.

a number of online projects across the region with our partners to service their travellers. With our local insurance partner in India, we are looking at growing our product portfolio to cater to both domestic and international travellers. A key highlight of 2017 is when we

were awarded 'Best Travel Insurance Facilitator' at the first Arabian Travel Awards, held in Dubai."

As a facilitator, Tune Protect's strategy has been to apprise the travel industry of the importance of educating travellers about the importance of travel protection. "The strategy has been to customise the products to meet different types of travellers of today—be it corporate travel, adventure seekers, golf lovers or ski enthusiasts—with a host of innovative smart travel protection products, for the traveller to understand the need of value of protection before, during and after his travel," Munshi adds.

Another key role played by Tune Protect as facilitator

is to remain an innovator within the travel protection segment. "Catering to both global and regional travellers, bringing in customised bespoke products based on the strong foundation of partnership with Tune Protect Re and our local insurance partners across the region. As a facilitator, we will continue to bring to the region innovative smart products from across the globe as well as customise it for the region, to offer a better peace of mind to the travellers from the region or even coming into the region," Munshi said.

## Highlight

Tune Protect was awarded 'Best Travel Insurance Facilitator' at the Arabian Travel Awards in Dubai

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# Strong ME wind beneath SQ's wings

Buoyed by over four decades of operations in the Middle East, Singapore Airlines boasts strong numbers of both inbound and outbound customers. **Christian Stenkewitz**, General Manager Gulf, Singapore Airlines, says they are optimistic about the airlines' growth in the region and are constantly improving their products to enhance customer experience.

## TT BUREAU

The year 2017 has been very important for Singapore Airlines as the airline celebrated its 70th anniversary network-wide with a wide range of activities, promotions, customer and trade events, as well as the launch of new cabin products on-board Airbus A-380 super jumbos. The first of the recently-delivered aircraft began scheduled operations on December 18 between Singapore and Sydney.

In terms of their daily flights between Dubai and Singapore, the airline deploys state-of-the-art Boeing 777-300ER aircraft in a four-class cabin configuration. Customers have the choice between

legroom, priority baggage, 'Book the Cook' menu, and much more.

Premium Economy is priced attractively and has proven particularly popular among corporate travellers from both multi-national companies as well as SMEs. On the leisure front, they see encouraging demand from the premium FIT segment to destinations in Australia and New Zealand. "Notwithstanding the growth we witness, Premium Economy is a relatively unknown product in this region, as most airlines are currently not offering this cabin which is positioned between Economy and Business Class. As a result, the product awareness is limited and the team



"With more airlines introducing Premium Economy globally, it is becoming a commonly known product and we are sure that competitors will follow Singapore Airlines in featuring Premium Economy onboard of their planes in the future too. Premium Economy brings great value to both customers as well as to the airline."

**Christian Stenkewitz**  
General Manager Gulf, Singapore Airlines

two USB ports, personal in-seat reading light, cocktail table and more stowage space for personal items.

## Economy Class

Economy Class seats offer more space and greater comfort through an improved design. Leveraging on advanced technology and ergonomics, seats offer more legroom and back support, with a six-way adjustable headrest with foldable wings. An 11.1-inch touchscreen monitor

made personal, experience the difference, the new cabin products offer more space and privacy across all classes, with elements exclusively designed for Singapore Airlines' customers. These new cabin products will be fitted progressively to SIA's Airbus A380 fleet, featuring six SIA Suites, 78 Business Class seats, 44 Premium Economy seats and 343 Economy Class seats. The extensive

## New Suites

With six suites tucked spaciouly within the front cabin of the upper deck, customers can experience a sense of exclusivity and intimate privacy onboard the A380. Behind the artistically designed sliding door lies a personal oasis complete with lavish furnishing and finishes. Each suite is furnished with a separate full-flat bed with adjustable re-



Premium Economy

First Class, Business Class, Premium Economy and Economy Class, all of which feature the latest seat design. Complimented with Singapore Airlines' unparalleled cabin crew and outstanding service, their flights prove very popular among locals and expats likewise.

## Trendsetter

With the launch of the new Premium Economy Class seats in early 2016, Singapore Airlines has been a trendsetter in Dubai and they are the only airline offering this product from Dubai to Singapore and one among very few carriers offering Premium Economy to destinations in Australia, New Zealand, South East and North Asia. Premium Economy is the ideal product for customers who are willing to pay little extra for a more exclusive and personalised travel experience that comes with additional comfort and perks, such as more

is making it a point to promote and communicate the Premium Economy proposition aggressively to both trade partners as well as to end consumers. With more airlines introducing Premium Economy globally, it is becoming a commonly known product and we are sure that competitors will follow Singapore Airlines in featuring Premium Economy onboard of their planes in the future too. Premium Economy brings great value to both customers as well as to the airline," says Christian Stenkewitz, General Manager Gulf, Singapore Airlines.

## Personalised experiences

Following four years of development, Singapore Airlines unveiled its highly-anticipated new suite of cabin products redefining premium air travel on November 2, 2017, at a global media launch held in Singapore. With the theme 'Space



Double Bed in Suites

research, design, development and installation of the new products onboard all of SIA's A380s represents an investment of about USD850 million.

Through offering best-in-class products and services across a wide global network, Singapore Airlines is continuing to position itself as the premium full-service airline of choice. SIA's continuous investment in customer service, new cabin products, upgraded lounges and the new Premium Economy Class, for example, help strengthen their leadership position. Singapore Airlines is confident about the results of four years of product development, involving extensive customer research.

cline and plush leather chair, enabling customer to either lounge comfortably in the chair or rest in bed without the need to convert the bed from a sitting position.

Each suite also has a 32-inch full HD monitor that can swivel for different viewing angles in seat and bed modes, a full-sized personal wardrobe, customised handbag stowage compartment, amenity box lined with soft leather, specially designed carpet and a feature wall with mood lighting - all exquisitely crafted to give a touch of luxury and intimacy.

## Business Class

A unique feature of the new Business Class seat is that it has a carbon fibre composite shell structure,



Double Bed in Business Class

as compared to conventional aircraft seats which use metal as the primary support structure. This thinner base structure allows for better optimisation of the seat and creates more under-seat stowage space to accommodate a full-sized cabin bag and laptop bag or handbag. A larger back shell on every seat creates a cocoon-like feel for more privacy while the centre divider can be fully lowered to form double beds, making the two centre seats an ideal choice for families travelling together. Seats are arranged in a forward-facing, four-abreast (1-2-1) configuration that offers all customers direct access to the aisle.

## Premium Economy Class

Premium Economy Class comes with a contemporary and stylish design. Each seat is 19.5 inches wide, with eight-inch recline and seat pitch of 38 inches. Customers will be treated to an enhanced in-flight entertainment experience with the provision of active noise-cancelling headphones and a sleek 13.3-inch full HD monitor. Other features include a full leather finishing, calf-rest and foot-bar for every seat, individual in-seat power supply,

eliminates the need for handsets and offers more convenience to customers who wish to catch the latest movies on KrisWorld, Singapore Airlines' award-winning in-flight entertainment system. Other features include a patented non-intrusive reading light installed underneath the seat-back screen, personal storage space for small personal items, a coat hook, in-seat power supply and ergonomically designed footrest with adjustable positions.

## The Way Forward

Looking ahead, 2018 promises to be another exciting year for Singapore Airlines, as they embark on expanding and leveraging their group airlines' combined route networks and products. Together with SilkAir, their full service regional airline and Scoot, their low-cost arm, SIA will be able to offer customers more destinations than ever before with the convenience of a single ticket. The year 2018 will see numerous product and service innovations being rolled out, which their customers can truly look forward to. SIA is confident that all these developments will reinforce their position to remain the airline of choice for the deserving international traveller. ✈️





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# Rwanda: An oasis for ME travellers

For the first time at Arabian Travel Market 2017, Rwanda Tourism Board presented their offerings to industry leaders. Few months down the line, the Consulate of Rwanda is fine-tuning the collaterals necessary to support this venture to attract more Middle East travellers to visit the destination.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

The Middle East travellers are constantly on the look-out for new destinations that can cater to their many requirements. Having authentic experiences is key to travellers from this region and lavish in their spending for their kith and kin. **Yasmin Amri Sued**, Chargé d'Affaires, Consulate of the Republic of Rwanda, shares the new initiatives from Rwanda consulate in Dubai in order to promote tourism between the two destinations.

## Visa-on-arrival for all

"We are happy to announce that from January 1, 2018, any person living anywhere in the world is entitled to receive a 30 day-visa-on-arrival for Rwanda for USD30. Most people don't travel due to hassle



"We offer authentic experiences and there is no hunting in Rwanda as the communities living close to the conservation areas have taken up the responsibility to ensure that the primates are safe and not disturbed by visitors."

**Yasmin Amri Sued**

*Chargé d'Affaires  
Consulate of the Republic of Rwanda*

of obtaining visa to enter a country. In terms of tourism, ease of visa actually can contribute to the revenue of the country," states Amri Sued.

## Conservation is pivotal

In developing tourism, conservation is at the center in Rwanda. "We offer authentic experiences and there is

no hunting in Rwanda as the communities living close to the conservation areas have taken up the responsibility to ensure that the primates are safe and not disturbed by visitors. Especially in gorilla trekking (which we are known for), guides give proper conduct details before the journey begins on how to behave and respect the gorillas. As humans we must respect

them and their environment," she says.

## Optimum connectivity

Apart from the direct daily flights on RwandAir from Dubai to Kigali there are other flights that connect other parts of the GCC. The connections are available via Mombasa or Addis Ababa or even Nairobi. The

direct flight take about five hours to get there while a connecting flight may take an hour or two more.

## Unique in Rwanda

Amri Sued says that they have eight families of gorillas, multitude of flowers, birds etc. different trails in the Nyungwe Forest, volcano expeditions and hiking etc. that many travellers can enjoy. She adds that the climate will either be wet or dry but the best time to travel is between June and September. For the people living in the Middle East, some may prefer to see the wet climate as it is different from the desert climate. In terms of accommodation, many well-known international brands are present besides other local options.

## Strategies from the consulate

Any destination needs the support of the consu-

late in order to have more visitors enjoy their stay in the country. Hence the consulate of Rwanda and Tourism Board have now taken on themselves to prepare various collateral about the destination specifically for the Middle East market, organise Fam trips for travel agents, DMCs and media to explore the destination and create awareness about this upcoming outbound destination. This will be done in partnership with RwandAir.

## Connections

➤ Apart from direct daily flights on RwandAir from Dubai to Kigali there are other flights that connect other parts of the GCC. The connections are available via Mombasa or Addis Ababa or even Nairobi



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# Personalisation of digital experiences

Miral has embarked on a major digital transformation project to create a seamlessly connected destination of world-class theme parks and attractions on Yas Island. The project will take visitors on a personalised digital journey, enhancing the island's destination appeal to global leisure and business travellers.

TT BUREAU

The infrastructure was developed earlier in 2017 to enable the launch of the platform's digital assets across its theme parks on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi and deliver a wall-less resort vision. The first phase of the project will roll out during the first half of this year, and will transform online and mobile visitor engagement with the iconic Ferrari World Abu Dhabi theme park, Yas Waterworld, the Yas Island destination and the new theme park planned for next year.

"With the support of our partners, this project will play a major role in reinforcing Yas Island's position as a global entertainment and leisure

destination of choice, and will allow us to combine our attractions with personalised technology to provide guests with unique experiences," said **Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi**, CEO, Miral.

As soon as guests enter Yas Island, they will receive a personal ID that becomes their digital 'key' to open a connected 'wall-less' destination experience tailored to their needs. The experience will allow visitors to enjoy multiple immersive experiences seamlessly on their smartphone to personalise their interaction with the family during

their stay. Miral announced its strategic partnerships with SapientRazorfish, part of Publicis. Sapient and Cognizant together have forged the

"In a world driven by technology advancement and changing customer expectations, Miral has demonstrated the ambition and ability to re-

abilities in business consulting, creativity, technology and data science, we look forward to helping Miral truly transform the visitor experience," said

uniting the physical and virtual aspects of its leisure and entertainment offerings across channels. We are pleased to leverage our analytics, cloud

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**Nigel Vaz**, CEO, Publicis.Sapient International. "Together, we have created a digital platform that enables Miral to lead the way in smart, personalised and immersive experiences by

and agile development capabilities to help Miral unlock the power of its technology environment and drive market differentiation based on superior insights and delighted visitors," said **Narayan Iyer**, VP, APAC, ME and India, Cognizant.

backbone of the project with development teams deployed on-site at Yas Island.

imagine the world-class theme park experience of the future. By bringing our expert capa-

## MeliaPro: New online B2B Portal

MeliáPro, the recently-launched online B2B portal by Meliá Hotels International allows users flexible management and control of their business activity, reinforcing the brand's commitment to professional partners.

TT BUREAU

In line with its ongoing digitalisation process, Meliá Hotels International's new portal is expected to enhance sales and relationships with professional partners. Previously serving as the company's booking tool for travel agents, the portal has now been updated to provide online services for a variety of different B2B segments, including corporate travellers, meeting and event organisers, travel agencies and tour operators. The

company has also created a new website, meliapro.com, that allows users flexible management and control of their professional activity.

**Rafael Soria**, Director, Global B2B Digital Sales & Marketing, Meliá Hotels International, said, "The evolution of MeliáPro enforces our commitment to all our B2B partners, who play such a fundamental role in our business development. It is our priority to meet their expectations and improve the customer

**The evolution of MeliáPro enforces our commitment to all our B2B partners, who play such a fundamental role in our business development**

**Rafael Soria**

*Director, Global B2B Digital Sales & Marketing, Meliá Hotels International, Arabian Travel Award winner*

experience, offering our best service with the most advanced technology."

For corporate travellers, Meliá Hotels International offers maximum flexibility and up to 20 per cent discount

on a wide range of hotels in prominent business cities around the world. The new website provides customers with easy access to specialist hotels, listing diverse choices for hosting meetings. For event organisers, MeliáPro offers

a simple system for reviewing the best hotels for different types of event alongside different offerings provided by each hotel brand in the MICE segment. MeliáPro also allows event organisers to submit RFPs, manage costs and create websites for each event, allowing attendees to make direct bookings. Travel agents can make bookings for their clients through MeliáPro, allowing them to receive instant commissions as well as guaranteeing the best rate for their customers. MeliáPro has

already registered more than 100,000 travel agents and increased sales by more than 15 per cent in 2017.

Finally, tour operators and destination management companies can also easily make bookings in their contracted hotels with real-time room availability. To reward the loyalty of its professional partners, Meliá Hotels International has also created the MeliáPro Rewards loyalty programme, offering exclusive discounts on their personal bookings.

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## Gold Medal Super Sixes for trade partners in Dubai



Gold Medal in association with Oman Air organised a first-of-its-kind cricket tournament 'Gold Medal Super Sixes' for its trade partners in Dubai. 12 teams with 6 players each participated in this fast-paced six overs match. After the initial round, Sharaf Travel, Riya Travels, Euro Travels and Trusty Travels made it to the semi-finals. The finals saw Sharaf Travel and Trusty Travel in close match to the last over. The latter who won the toss, elected to field and took home the trophy. The Man of the Match and Player of the Tournament also from the winning team went to Yassir and Tanweer respectively.

## Med-View lands in Dubai

Nigerian airline Med-View started its maiden flight to Dubai few weeks ago. Three weekly flights will operate on the Lagos-Abuja-Dubai-Abuja-Lagos route.

TT BUREAU

The inaugural flight had about 80 per cent passenger capacity with leading ministers of Nigeria- Hajia Aisha Jumai Al Hassan, Minister of Women Affairs; Alhaji Muneer Bankole, Managing Director, Med-View Airline; Odion Igalo, Super Eagles striker and representatives of the Oba of Lagos, aviation Journalists, among other dignitaries. The introduction of Nigerian menu onboard consisted of jollof rice, pounded yam, semovita among other foods.

Bankole thanked the passengers for patronising their own Nigerian airline. He assured that the airline will not fail the passengers for making it their preferred choice on the route. The airline based in Lagos Nigeria will serve visitors arriving from Dubai to various des-



tinations in the region. At the launch event in Dubai, they stated that the airline founded in 2007 was first serving as a charter airline for Haj pilgrims; thereafter, it offered domestic passenger services since November 2012 and by 2015 to international destinations as well. Today, the airline serves nine domestic and nine international destinations with the addition of the latest hub in Dubai.

As there are two different aircrafts that would operate, each will consist of different seat configurations; B767-300 will consist of 30 Business Class and 191 Economy Class while

B777-200 will consist of 24 Business Class and 302 Economy Class. In terms of baggage allowance, it will remain same onboard both aircrafts Business Class can enjoy three pieces totaling 75kg while Economy Class could have two pieces totalling to 50kg. VL 207 will depart on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday from Lagos at 13:45 and arrive in Abuja at 14:45. It will then depart Abuja by 16:15 and arrive in Dubai by 02:10 on the following day. The other aircraft VL208 will depart Dubai on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 04:20 and arrive in Abuja by 08:15, thereafter depart Abuja at 09:45 and arrive in Lagos by 10:45. 🇳🇮

## Air Canada celebrates 80 years

A special gala dinner was organised by Air Canada on the occasion of celebrating the big 80 at Palace Downtown Dubai. The event was attended by over 150 travel agents, industry experts and trade partners from all emirates. The evening kicked off with an entertaining tap dance performance. Around 10 agencies were recognised as top players at the event, namely, Dnata, Orient Travels, Nirvana Travels, Kanoo Travels, Al Naboodah Travels, SNTTA, Akbar Travels, Omeir Travel Agency, ATPi, Al Rostamani Travel and Holidays.





# Ghaya Grand: Hidden gem in the oasis

Located in close proximity to the business and leisure precincts of the International Media Production Zone (IMPZ), Ghaya Grand prides itself in being one of the pioneer properties in the area to offer unique services and facilities to guests.

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In recent times, Ghaya Grand Hotel has become one of the most sought-after places for locals, expats and tourists from all over the world. Located just a few minutes away from the Dubai Miracle Garden and Dubai Autodrome, the hotel's vast inventory of rooms and apartment options drives a lot of GCC clientele, especially during long weekends. General Manager **Olwin Desouza** shared that their financial figures depict an upward trend as 2017 proved to be a good year.

Ghaya Grand has a total of 765 rooms which are categorised such as Deluxe, Executive, Ghaya Club Floor, Ghaya Suite, Ambassador Suite and Senator Suite. The agenda for 2018 will be on MICE activities as the location provides an ideal venue for business meetings and social occasions. Desouza says, "We believe in the value of creating unforgettable experiences that excite and engage the senses. The conference room offers functional and technologically advanced meeting facilities,

with a total capacity of 200 and four breakout rooms with a total capacity of 10 to 40 each."

He further states, "The distinct, luxury hotel is inspired by the culture of modern Emirati society, where attentive service meets modern design. Through our unique ambience, personalised service and energising amenities, Ghaya Grand Hotel's goal is to create an awakening experience that helps refresh and de-stress your mind and body. We have three outlets in our hotel which offer a wide variety of cuisine with spectacular dining experiences. We have recently introduced theme nights such as Arabic street food night, movie night at the Al Mawal Terrace, seafood night and Friday brunch in Fusion Restaurant."

According to Desouza, guests at the hotel usually spend an average of five days, indulging in recreational and wellness facilities which include spa treatments, jacuzzi, sauna, steam room, gym and pool access. The hotel also has convenient access to retail, beach

and sports attractions with great quality service to the satisfaction of guests.

**Ossama Kachkouche**, Director - Sales and Marketing, stated, "Ghaya Grand Hotel's main feeder market are the long-term corporate and government contracts of six months to one year. The flow of our groups is throughout the year, though the peak season is between October to May when we host tourists from Russia, China, Germany and the Netherlands.

Travel agents play a pivotal role in bringing the majority of business to Ghaya Grand. Their attractive offers for various value additions on spa or meals and various other incentives to not only traditional travel agents but also OTAs ensure regular flow from both parties. However, direct bookings from travellers are minimal, stated Kachkouche. "Most clients prefer to book through travel agencies or online channels. Direct bookings are not more than 5 per cent of our business mix." In terms of the new markets, he explained, "this year, we are targeting African, Indian and Iranian



**Olwin Desouza**  
General Manager  
Ghaya Grand



**Ossama Kachkouche**  
Director - Sales and Marketing  
Ghaya Grand



**Amgad Zaki**  
Executive Chef  
Ghaya Grand

**The conference room offers functional and technologically advanced meeting facilities, with a total capacity of 200 and four breakout rooms with a total capacity of 10 to 40 each**

**The hotel's main feeder market are the long-term corporate and government contracts. The peak season is between October-May when we host tourists from Russia, China, Germany and the Netherlands**

**I am very passionate about learning different cuisines and making people experience. I enjoy the process of creating, licensing and promoting beautiful kitchen products which reflect my diverse experience**

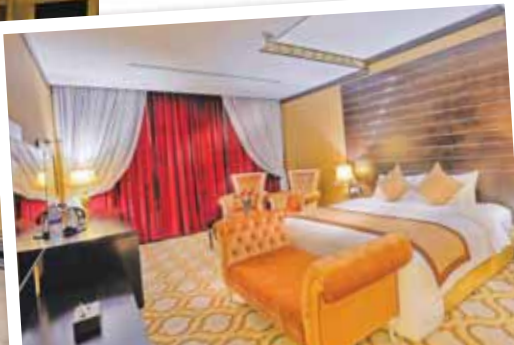
market. Our dedicated sales team will also ensure strong presence in the Swiss, French and Scandinavian market too." Like most partners, Ghaya Grand too has exposure in international travel trade exhibitions to obtain more business from ATM in Dubai, ITB in Germany and WTM in London in the coming year.

Food and beverage is an important part of the hotel experience apart from other facilities. Executive Chef **Amgad Zaki** with his

24 years of experience in different hotel chains in Dubai joined Ghaya Grand as the pre-opening team and ensures that he offers different cuisine to his clients. Having started his career with Cairo Marriott Hotel, Amgad moved to Dubai in 1993 to join JW Marriott. For over 20 years, he has worked with different chains like Marriott, Renaissance and Crowne Plaza before joining Ghaya Grand Hotel. He explains the reason for his entry to the industry, "I am very passionate about

enjoy the process of creating, licensing and promoting beautiful lifestyle and kitchen products which reflect my diverse experience both in and out of the kitchen."

In the hospitality industry, being passionate about one's work is very crucial as it is about providing services to guests. Amgad joined Ghaya Grand because he wanted to experience his dreams in reality just like Ghaya Grand's vision. He says, "I want to explore myself against the world and I think this industry is the best way to do so as we have to interact with a variety of people! In 2018, I will be focusing more on signature dishes in the outlets and on introducing new theme nights to attract the local market."





## SpecialFeature

## Upcoming properties

**TRAVTALK** brings you some of the upcoming properties which will be operational in the New Year 2018 in the Middle East region.

## Central Hotels to open 2 properties

**Royal Central The Palm**

Location - The Palm

Rooms/Suites inventory - 208 rooms

Expected opening: May 2018

**Central Canal**

Location - Business Bay

Rooms/Suites inventory - 284 rooms

Expected opening: May 2018

## Marriott International

• **W Dubai The Palm**

Location: Dubai

Rooms/Suites inventory: 350

Expected date/time of opening: Q2 2018

• **Aloft Me'aisam**

Location: Dubai

Rooms/Suites inventory:

Expected date/time of opening: Q1 2018

• **Element Me'aisam**

Location: Dubai

Rooms/Suites inventory:

Expected date/time of opening: Q1 2018

• **Aloft Palm Jumeirah**

Location: Dubai

Rooms/Suites inventory: 208

Expected date/time of opening: Q1 2018

• **Aloft City Centre Deira**

Location: Dubai

Rooms/Suites inventory: 304

Expected date/time of opening: Q2 2018

• **Aloft Dubai South**

Location: Dubai

Rooms/Suites inventory: 150

Expected date/time of opening: Q3 2018

• **Four Points by Sheraton Sharjah**

Location: Sharjah

Rooms/Suites inventory: 225

Expected date/time of opening: Q2 2018

• **Courtyard by Marriott Al Barshal**

Location: Dubai

Rooms/Suites inventory: 216

Expected date/time of opening: Q2 2018

• **W Amman**

Location: Amman, Jordan

Rooms/Suites inventory: 280 (including 44 suites)

Expected date/time of opening: Q1 2018

• **The St. Regis Amman**

Location: Amman, Jordan

Rooms/Suites inventory: 260

(including 40 branded residences)

Expected date/time of opening: Q2 2018

• **Al Manara, A Luxury Collection Hotel, Aqaba**

Location: Aqaba, Jordan

Rooms/Suites inventory: 207 (including 38 suites)

Expected date/time of opening: Q2 2018

• **St. Regis**

Location - Cairo

Rooms/Suites inventory - 286 rooms &amp; 80 serviced apartments

Expected opening - Q1 2018

**ME Dubai**

Location - Dubai

Rooms/Suites inventory - 93 rooms and suites

Expected opening - End of 2018

## IHG

## Dubai

**Bastien Blanc** has been designated as the Vice President Operations-Middle East. A veteran in the hospitality industry, Blanc has over 25 years of experience in managing international hotel operations, with senior management experience in North America, Europe, Russia, India, Middle East, Africa and the Indian Ocean. He also specialises in revenue management, rate structuring, hotel finance and project management. Based in IHG's office in Dubai, Blanc will be responsible for leading the operations across GCC countries and Levant.



## Ramada Downtown

## Dubai

R Hotels appoints **Mark Fernando** as new General Manager of Ramada Downtown Dubai. In this role, he will head the overall operations of the 181-key hotel. Fernando has more than 30 years of hospitality experience with a proven track record on hotel operations, revenue management and business development. He worked with Starwood Hotels and Resorts for more than 25 years, spanning roles across various properties including Le Meridien Abu Dhabi; Le Meridien Mina Seyahi Resort and Marina; and Le Meridien Dubai Hotel and Conference Centre.



## Air India and Air India Express

## Dubai

**Mohit Sain** has recently taken over as Regional Manager Gulf, Middle East and Africa for Air India and Air India Express. With an aviation experience spanning three decades, his recent key assignments within Air India include overseeing Revenue Management, Frequent Flyer Programme, serving as Country Manager in Oman and as Airport Manager in Bengaluru. Sain was part of the core team which was responsible for Air India's integration into the prestigious Star Alliance network of 28 global airlines. He is a Graduate in Law with an additional Masters' Degree in Business Administration.



## Mandarin Oriental

## London

**Paul Massot** has been appointed Group Development Director of Mandarin Oriental. Based at the Group's London corporate office, he will be responsible for driving the company's global development strategy and development pipeline. Paul joined the Group's flagship, Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong in 1990, before moving to the corporate office in Hong Kong as Vice President of Sales & Marketing for Asia Pacific. In 2001, he joined the Group's corporate office in London as Senior Vice President of Sales Worldwide. With more than 25 years' experience in hospitality, Massot has previously worked with Trust House Forte Hotels and Southern Sun Hotels.



## ONYX Hospitality Group

## Bangkok

ONYX Hospitality Group has appointed **Craig Bond** as Executive Vice President of Operations. He joins the group from Oakwood Asia-Pacific where he held the role of Vice President of Operations, overseeing the Group's portfolio across the region as well as supporting the opening pipeline. Prior to joining Oakwood, Bond held leadership roles with Pan Pacific Hotels, Mirvac and Saville Hotel Group across Australia and the Oceania regions. Based in Bangkok, the Group has a growing regional portfolio of 44 operating properties across three core brands in eight countries.



## Vida Downtown

## Downtown Dubai

Emaar Hospitality Group has appointed **Eliza Artiaga** as General Manager of Vida Downtown under Vida Hotels and Resorts. With 17 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Artiaga is responsible for implementing creative strategies that align with Vida Downtown's brand image, and ensuring the guests continue to receive unrivalled service. She will also drive the business strategy for the hotel and manage the overall operations. Artiaga holds a degree in Hospitality Management and Psychology from Florida International University in Miami, USA.



## Sabre

## EMEA

Sabre Corporation has appointed **Ibrahim Marmoush** as Air Commerce Director, EMEA. In his new role, Marmoush will be responsible for growing the company's GDS customer base across the region, with a special focus on Middle Eastern carriers and maintaining successful, trusted partnerships with existing airline customers. Through his 20-year career in commercial and technical positions within the industry, Marmoush has developed an intricate understanding of intersection between travel and technology. He has held positions at Sabre for more than 10 years, most recently as a senior project manager for the Middle East.



## Dubai Airports

## Dubai

Dubai Airports, operator of Dubai International and Dubai World Central, has announced the appointment of **Majed Al Joker** as Executive Vice President, Corporate Affairs. Al Joker takes on responsibility for a new Corporate Affairs unit that comprises Dubai Airports' Excellence Programmes and Government Relations, Corporate Resilience, Security and Legal departments. Prior to his promotion, Al Joker was Senior Vice President, Assurance & Control Authorities. Majed Al Joker joined Dubai Airports in 2008 as Vice President - Terminal Operations before serving as Senior Vice President - Operations for Dubai World Central (DWC).





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