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Enriching the hotel experience

The United Arab Emirates is on a rapid growth trajectory to secure its name as the most popular business and leisure tourist destination in the world. Every emirate in the country is ensuring that they do their own part not only to develop basic infrastructure, but also to increase their hotel room inventory.

 SHEHARA RIZLY



Faisal Al Moosa
AA Al Moosa Enterprises

“ With the opening of three hotels on the Palm, we are not only expanding our footprint in the UAE but also contributing to strengthening the tourism sector of Dubai. These three projects will bring additional 1,500 hotel rooms that will support our government's Tourism Vision for 2020. The hotels will cater to varied

market segments across diversified source markets and will further strengthen the city's reputation as the region's leading tourist destination. Our partnership with Hilton, Taj and Marriott is part of our mission to offer unique products and services that will meet the expectations of travellers while maintaining the high standard of tourist destinations. ”



Maryam Al Sayegh
Deputy Vice Chairman
Roda Hotels & Resorts

“ Jewel of the Creek project has been going on for quite some time. We've recently got news that the contractors will hand it over to the owners by early next year. This makes it closer to our timeline to open it up. The property actually consists of 18 F&B outlets, as well as three-star, four-star, as well as serviced apartments and a large five-star hotel. We have serviced

apartments, which is more feasible for families with many children. Given the occupancy in Dubai, it is very hard to find rooms that are close to each other or even on the same floor. What we realised is a lot of guests are more comfortable in taking an apartment while travelling with younger children. We've also got guests who prefer to have their own home cooked meals. ”



Markland Blaiklock
Deputy CEO
Centara Hotels & Resorts

“ The joint venture between Nakheel and Centara to open a themed property in the heart of Dubai in time for Expo 2020, will take inspiration from the hugely successful property, Centara Grand Mirage Resort in Pattaya. This will enable guests to have a similarly engaging experience and deliver a family-centric lifestyle destination at Deira Islands,

Nakheel's new, 15.3 sq km waterfront city set to become Dubai's newest tourism hotspot. This resort is the first Centara establishment in the UAE and will cover an area of almost 300,000 sq ft featuring a waterpark, multiple restaurants including alfresco rooftop dining options, kids' club, spa and fitness centre and business facilities. ”

“ The wait is over as 179-key Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche is all ready to welcome guests! We have been actively promoting the property in various exhibitions and roadshows in Europe and Asia and have received utmost enthusiasm. The property ticks all the right boxes in attracting both holidaymakers and business travellers with its superb views, excellent room features, modern facilities and sumptuous dining options. Our passionate team is all eager to provide the top-level of service to everyone who will set foot at Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche. ”



Iftikhar Hamdani
Cluster GM, Ramada Hotels & Suites Ajman, Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman & Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche

“ Central Hotels is poised to be opening and operating two new hotels in the next few months, namely 207-key Royal Central The Palm and 284-room Canal Central in Business Bay. Focused on both business and leisure travellers, the hotels will aggregate digital paperless technology, modern designs, unobstructed views of Dubai's iconic sites like The Palm and Burj Khalifa, as well as exclusive access to the Beach or the Dubai Canal. Revolving on our 'Stay Fresh' concept, Central Hotels brings to the table fun, relaxing, easy and fresh hotel stays that guests experience through our personalised services, facilities and exciting dining concepts. ”



Ammar Kanaan
General Manager
Central Hotels

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Hospitality Associate



15,000 attendees at ITB China

The second ITB China held in Shanghai was bigger and better with 15,000 buyers and visitors. Compared to the inaugural event in 2017, the gross exhibition space as well as the number of attendees rose by 50 per cent this year.

 TT Bureau

Around 800 buyers marked their participation at ITB China this year, marking an increase of more than 30 per cent in the number of buyers compared to 2017. Chinese buyers from over 300 companies from across the country represented the full range of China's largest industry players. 73 per cent of the Chinese Leisure, MICE and corporate buyers came from mainland China (outside Shanghai), 24 per cent from Shanghai province and the remaining 3 per cent from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. More than 15,000 pre-scheduled appointments maximised the business opportunities of both exhibitors and buyers. The organisers launched a completely new match-making system perfectly catering to the needs of both exhibitors and

buyers using desktop, mobile, APP or WeChat interfaces.

"With 700 exhibiting companies from 80 countries as well as 15,000 attendees and China becoming the driving force for the growth of the global travel industry, ITB China is establishing itself as the must-attend event for anyone looking to establish a strong presence here. The results are remarkable considering it is only the second show. The performance is a strong base which promises even more growth next year", said **Dr Christian Göke**, CEO, Messe Berlin.

Lu Jun, Managing Director, China Travel Group Shanghai said, "ITB China set high standards in terms of the quality of both exhibi-



tors and buyers. As a member of the China National Travel Service, I felt honoured to attend this year's show. I believe that this will lay a solid foundation for future communication and cooperation with domestic and foreign counterparts, which we expect will come very soon".

Lin Yan, Senior Vice President, Utour Group Co said, "ITB China expanded 50 per cent over the last year and the event has developed rapidly. Both exhibitors and buyers are highly dedicated, especially buyers, which shows that the organisers of ITB China boasts in-

depth knowledge on the Chinese market. Exhibitors presented highly differentiated products."

ITB China 2019 will be held from May 15-17, 2019 at Shanghai World Expo Exhibition and Convention Centre. 

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TRAVELTALK

EDITORIAL

Trending highlights of the Middle East

The past two months were the busiest in terms of international trade exhibitions with Arabian Travel Market closing with a successful business turn out, followed by IMEX and ITB China with their own success stories. In Dubai, the Airport Show also witnessed an active presence from industry leaders this year with various programmes about the future of the industry with a great focus on security in terms of the newly introduced technology. The Blockchain Summit in Dubai is one of the world's leading events in terms of innovation and as Dubai strives ahead to become the first smart city in the world, the event included all the relevant details required to be in tune with the new technology inputs.

The Middle East market has leapfrogged in technology and currently secures a leading spot in terms of bookings made last minute over smartphones. This has been a trendsetter for the past few years. The smart airports in the near future will no longer have passport officials; technology is set to take its place.

The recently-concluded 25th Arabian Travel Market 2018 was attended by over 100 new exhibitors with over 400 main stand holders. Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah and Fujairah were busy with their new projects whilst Oman Air took the opportunity to display their latest business class suite to viewers for the first time.

The second edition of ITB China in Shanghai also witnessed a record participation of visitors. Once again, the presence from the Middle East was strongest from Abu Dhabi tourism and Sharjah tourism boards. At the same time, IMEX, the most anticipated MICE event took place with Dubai taking centrestage.

As we come towards the end of the first two quarters of the year, we can see an upward inclination in terms of business worldwide. In all the travel trade exhibitions, a notable recurrence is the number of new destinations participating especially in the African and Latin American regions. Middle East will still remain resilient with all geo-political issues that may happen around them, yet strive to achieve their stand on being the most sought after destinations in the world.

Action plan for compliance

The new GDPR will have a profound impact on all organisations processing EU citizen data. **Gregg Petersen**, Regional Sales VP—MEA, Veeam Software, lists a few things for the final countdown.

You've probably heard a lot about the new EU General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). The run up to it has been a long, drawn out process – beginning way back in 2012, when the European Commission proposed a comprehensive reform of the 1995 data protection rules. These proposals turned into plans, and now finally into reality. After all the talk, advice and debate, the grace period for the new regulations recently came to an end and penalties are just around the corner.

Remember, the fines are colossal – up to 4 per cent of annual global revenue, or EUR20 million – whichever is higher. With just weeks to go, it's worth making sure your business is prepared. The risk of non-compliance and the fine is too great to take your chances on.

Ensure everyone is aware

Some business and organisations are appointing or have appointed a designated Data Protection Officer in the run up to the launch of the GDPR. Even if some are a little behind the curve, this is smart thinking, as not only can a DPO be a useful expert, they can also be a GDPR advocate – getting the entire company on board with GDPR best practice. Moreover, they'll be able to recommend the right kind of tools to bring on board that will aid with data backup. Even for those business who aren't making a DPO hire, it's worth remembering that the GDPR is a company-wide issue.

Conduct a data audit

By now, every business should know what personal data it holds, where it's stored, how and where it came from. All these questions might be asked by lo-

“One of the big changes the GDPR is bringing about is greater citizen rights when it comes to data. To put that into context, over the past three years, that number is going to rise rapidly when people understand more about their right to be forgotten”

cal GDPR enforcement agencies. You will need to justify the legal basis behind your data processing activities. The authorities are not going to be lenient on business that suffer breaches and are unable to back their data.

Review privacy rights

One of the big changes the GDPR is bringing about is greater citizen rights when it comes to data. To put that into context, over the past three years, Google received 2.4 million requests for the deletion of search engine results – that number is going to rise rapidly when people understand more about their rights to be forgotten. People will also be able to access data or to request it for themselves. To ensure this right doesn't

become a time sink for your organisation, you should make sure you have a way to tag the location of each data point so you can access it when necessary.

Plan for data breaches

Under the rules of GDPR, organisations must report data breaches within 72 hours of discovery. That doesn't leave long, especially when you consider that the hours after a breach will be fraught time. It's key to make sure you have the right plans in place, which will allow for the detection and tackling of a data breach. Tools which allow businesses to add clarity to the location of backup repositories can save time with compliance reporting.

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



Gregg Petersen
Regional Sales Vice President—
Middle East & Africa, Veeam Software

Centro Sharjah hosts Iftar for the elderly

In line with the Centro Sharjah Corporate Social responsibility, the hotel hosted Iftar for the residents of the Old People's Home in Sharjah. The hotel management was involved in serving Iftar as well as inspiring a sense of belonging among the elderly. Centro Sharjah has served in several community initiatives as well as supporting non-governmental organizations. This initiative affirms the hotel's commitment in its core values of respect and integrity towards giving back to the community.



Sofitel is largely for MiCE business

Gaze over the Arabian Gulf from Sofitel Abu Dhabi Corniche blended with French luxury and style. **Wesam Khouran**, Director of Operations of the property, speaks with **TRAVTALK** on the plans ahead.

TT Bureau

What is the USP of the property?

The hotel's location by the Corniche and near to the Sheikh Zayed Complex is unique for the hotel. It's distinctive interior designs, blended with French and Arabic cultures also makes the property a great place for travellers. All our suites, with floor to ceiling windows, have beautiful views of the Corniche and Arabian Gulf.

Could you share the general feeder markets to the property?

Sofitel Abu Dhabi Corniche has an established position in the market for corporate and MiCE business. We also have groups from the GCC focused on business meetings as well as from Europe

and Asia. We maintain the market share for leisure segments from the UK, France and Germany.

Abu Dhabi is on its way to making a mark with new attractions. How will this contribute towards gaining different markets?

The opening of new attractions like the Louvre and the upcoming Warner Brothers is set to witness an increase in traffic. We are looking forward to welcoming more leisure and tourist guests that can cater to the increasing supply of rooms in Abu Dhabi. Local tourists from other emirates will also increase footfall in the capital.

What are the latest trends in terms of trade in the UAE?

The diversification of the UAE's economic platform and reducing reliance on its oil revenues gives us an overview of the direction of the country. We're seeing many mega infrastructures being built, as well as plans for tourist attractions that focus on both culture and enjoyment. There are also plans to connect Abu Dhabi and Dubai which will be a positive change for residents and tourists alike. For hotels, we will continue giving importance to the rising markets such as China and India and cater to the needs of these markets.


What are the strategies used to gain more business to your property?

We align our strategies along the Abu Dhabi Tourism authority

“The opening of new attractions like Louvre and Warner Brothers is set to witness an increase in traffic. We look forward to welcoming more leisure guests”

target market and actions as this is a great benefit to combine the destination with the hotel. With the ongoing changes in the global market, we continuously align change and improve our methods to target new opportunities. The corporate industry has constant changes with new or revised projects and new openings or existing developments. We ensure that we focus on these and



target all upcoming opportunities, as we do have a core business of corporate and meetings. 

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Seal(ed) the deal at Airport Show

The 18th edition of the Airport Show concluded recently with participants reporting signing of substantial deals worth millions and collaborations. The largest annual event-of-its-kind hosted over 350 exhibitors from 60 countries, with the largest number of dedicated pavilions ever.

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This year's Airport Show witnessed the largest number of buyers with 190 of them from 34 countries, representing 75 airports, ground handling, police, immigration, customs, air traffic control and aviation authorities. Since the inauguration of the show by His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President of Dubai Civil Aviation Authority, Chairman of Dubai Airports and Chairman and Chief Executive of Emirates Airline and Group, the world's largest annual B2B airport industry event saw the highest number of exhibitors, hosted buyers and participants.

Daniyal Qureshi, Group Exhibition Director, Reed Exhibitions—Middle East, said, "This year felt like a true industry showcase. The dedicated events for security and air traffic control complemented the trade show perfectly and we are looking forward to offering further content aligned with industry trends in 2019."

His Excellency Mohammed Ahli, Director General, Dubai Civil Aviation Authority (DCAA) and CEO, Dubai Air Navigation Services (DANS), remarked, "The quality of global participation and the increased number of exhibitors are testimony to Dubai's growing importance as a global hub for civil aviation industry."

The global appeal of the show was expanded by adding exclusive add-on forums like Global Airport Leaders' Forum (GALF), Women in Aviation (WIA), Air Traffic Control (ATC) Forum and Airport Security—Middle East.

Farid Al Bastaki, Director, ENOC Aviation, said, "Initiatives like the 'Women in Aviation General Assembly' are great platforms to highlight the achievement of women in society. Investing in women is one of ENOC's top priorities which falls in line with supporting the UAE's vision to empower them in the workplace. Aviation is a key driver of a nation's socio-economic growth and we encourage all stakeholders in this sector to support women and engage with them. Aviation is a dynamic sector that requires qualified professionals and women need to be encouraged to take up jobs within this industry that underpins economic growth."

The Aviation Security Centre of Dubai Police will host the 16th Directors' Meeting of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) in Dubai in 2019 during the 19th edition of the Airport Show in 2019, according to Eng Marwan Mohammad Singel, Director, Dubai Civil Aviation Security Centre, Dubai Police. The

mandate was given to Dubai at the 15th Directors' Meeting in Hong Kong last month a week before the Airport Show. "Three countries were in the list to host this prestigious meeting, but when Dubai showed its interest, they withdrew in our favour. The meeting will facilitate showcasing of the latest in airport and aviation security," Singel said.

Major deals signed during the show include Dammam Airports Company (DACO) signing strategic agreements with Vanderlande and Serco Middle East. Honeywell, a global leader in connected airports, launched a new smart software suite Honeywell Navitas that helps enhance the safety and efficiency of airside operations. Sharjah International Airport has awarded Frequentis and its UAE partner Bayanat Engineering UAE a contract to modernise its voice communication infrastructure and replace the existing Schmid Telecom system.

Sameh Gaafar, Director, Airport Security—Europe, Middle East & Africa, Rockwell Collins, said the company is in discussion with Jazeera Airways for its new requirement for a dedicated terminal. "Our participation at the show was very rewarding as we could get good enquiries from key players in the market," he said.



Daniyal Qureshi
Group Exhibition Director
Reed Exhibitions—Middle East

“This year felt like a true industry showcase. The dedicated events for security and air traffic control complemented the trade show perfectly and we are looking forward to offering further content aligned with industry trends in 2019”

Todd Donovan, Vice President—Strategy, Air Traffic Management, Land & Air System, Thales Group, said, "The show is a great forum to bring together key stakeholders in the region to hold meetings with our current customers and prospective clients and be able to discuss what is materialising and happening in the industry today."

Tom Squier, Managing Director, Smiths Detection—Middle East, said, "This is my first Airport Show here in Dubai. Lots of companies invested heavily in it. The representation from the region is good."

For the first time this year, the event saw the launch of the Innovation Awards, with winners selected from a global pool of submissions and industry jury.



Farid Al Bastaki
Director
ENOC Aviation

“Aviation is a key driver of a nation's socio-economic growth and we encourage all stakeholders in this sector to support women and engage with them. Aviation is a dynamic sector that requires qualified professionals”

Dieter Heinz, President, German Airport Technology & Equipment, won the 'Aviation Personality' award for his contribution towards the development of the industry globally; the 'Revolutionary' award was bagged by Beumer for a ground-breaking product and service that transformed the industry; Hungaro Control received the Sustainability award, Materna received the award in 'Smart' category and Avventura was presented the 'Customer service' award. Dubai Aviation Engineering Projects (DAEP), Dubai Airports, Dubai Civil Aviation Authority (DCAA) and dnata are the key supporters for Airport Show, while Dubai Police and Dubai Customs are supporting Airport Security Middle East and ATC Forum is supported by DANS and GALANS, in addition to the four key supporters. 



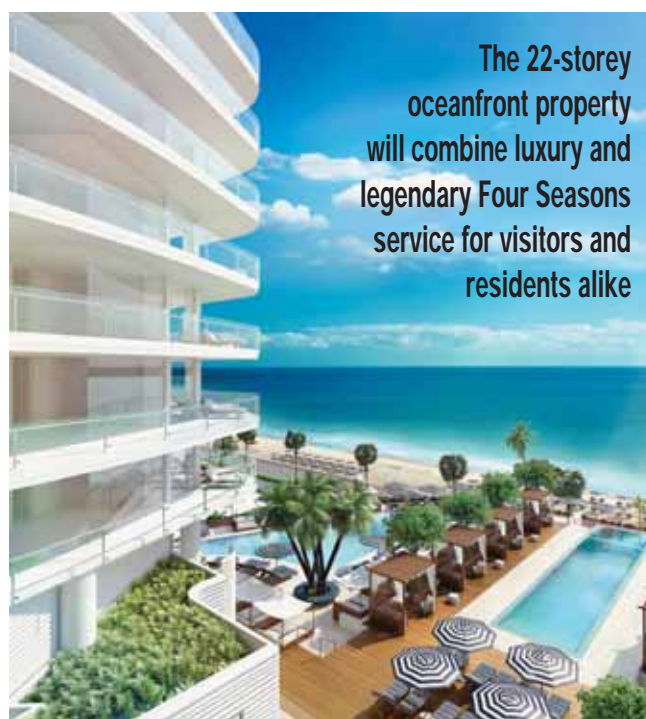
Four Seasons in Fort Lauderdale

Positioned along the Atlantic Ocean and the beaches of Fort Lauderdale, Four Seasons Hotel and Private Residences Fort Lauderdale, developed by Fort Partners, broke ground recently to become the newest iconic global destination for Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts.

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Set to offer unmatched access to a lifestyle of leading amenities, the development of Four Seasons Hotel and Private Residences Fort Lauderdale will include 90 private residences and 130 guest rooms. The hotel will mark the third collaboration between Four Seasons and Fort Partners, joining Four Seasons Resort Palm Beach and Four Seasons Hotel and Residences at The Surf Club in extending the luxury hospitality brand's presence in South Florida. Homeowners of the hotel will have special access as preferred guests to Fort Partners' portfolio of Four Seasons properties in South Florida.

"We commissioned a team of global minds to create an exemplary hotel and residential prop-



The 22-storey oceanfront property will combine luxury and legendary Four Seasons service for visitors and residents alike

erty unlike any other in Fort Lauderdale," acclaims **Nadim Ashi**, Founder, Fort Partners. "Four Seasons defines Fort Lauderdale as a global destination. We are committed to developing a world-class hotel and lifestyle."

The 22-storey oceanfront property will combine luxury and legendary Four Seasons service for visitors and residents alike. The rooms will reside on the fourth through the eleventh floors while the Private Residences begin on floor five. Of the residential portion, the developer has achieved more than USD 100 million in sales to date, a record in Fort Lauderdale that has elevated fully-serviced residential offerings in the city. The Private Residences have been sold to an international

mix of buyers from across the Americas and Europe.

"Four Seasons has a history of entering into markets and setting the standard for luxury lifestyle experiences. We look forward to opening our doors in the vibrant city of Fort Lauderdale," says **J Allen Smith**, President and CEO, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts.

Smith continues, "Four Seasons will manage both the Hotel and Private Residences, delivering our world-class service to guests and homeowners on a permanent basis." With a commitment to delivering quality and culture, the team of global visionaries is led by Fort Partners' Founder Nadim Ashi and Principal Ramzi Achi.

AA Al Moosa on the Palm

AA Al Moosa Enterprises revealed three iconic hotel projects with an opening date of Q1 2019.

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Located on the Trunk of the Palm, 13-storey Hilton The Palm will feature 608 rooms and suites, and a Presidential Suite. The hotel will offer seven world-class restaurants and lounges and provide a range of excellent amenities. Marriott The Palm Dubai, a beachfront hotel with 608 rooms and suites, is situated at the trunk of

Hilton The Palm, Taj Exotica Resort & Spa and Marriott The Palm located on the Palm Jumeirah will add 1,500 rooms and suites to the current inventory of hotel rooms in Dubai which is projected to reach 132,000 by the end of 2019 as the UAE's most populous city gears up for the Dubai World Expo with the government's Tourism Vision forecasting 20 million visitors a year by 2020. Featuring 25 dining outlets, the three hotels are set to make the properties a culinary destination offering diverse cuisines created to impress even the most sophisticated traveller.

Palm Jumeirah and in close proximity to the business districts of Dubai Internet City and Dubai Media City. Situated on the eastern crescent of Palm Jumeirah, Taj Exotica Resort & Spa features 325 rooms and suites, an Italian themed all-day dining restaurant, a gastropub, a rooftop restaurant and a lounge overlooking the views of the Arabian Gulf.

With the opening of the three properties, Al Moosa Enterprises is contributing a total of 4,735 rooms to Dubai's hotel room inventory.

AMADEUS

Amadeus Gulf organized Smart Solutions Forum in Muscat

On April the 16th 2018, Amadeus Gulf had the honor and the pleasure to host The Smart Solutions Forum in Muscat, Oman.

The purpose of this extraordinary event was to share with our travel partners the products updates and the best ways to simplify work process, reduce Airline Debit Memos, save time and increase profit for travel business with significant added value and recognition.

In addition to the presentations and demos, fun and exciting competitions were organized to win great prizes.

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Costa marks 70 years of cruising

This year, Costa Cruises celebrates its 70th anniversary milestone with its Costa fleet ships sailing the seas all over the world. **Alessandro Bottaro**, Sales & Marketing Director—Mediterranean New Markets, UK, East Europe, Africa and Middle East, Costa Crociere S.p.A shares with **TRAVTALK**.

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Costa Cruises is celebrating 70 years of cruising this year. How important is this to the cruise industry?

We thank the millions of clients who chose Costa and will continue to select them for their holidays. The Costa Cruises fleet has a total of 14 ships in service, all flying the Italian flag. Two cruise ships powered at sea by Liquefied Natural Gas will be delivered in 2019 and 2021. The Costa Group is the leading cruise company in Europe, headquartered in Genoa (Italy). The 26 ships of the brands Costa Cruises, AIDA Cruises and Costa Asia have a total capacity of almost 75,000 beds. The fleet will be further strengthened by seven new vessels by 2023. The company has a global workforce of 27,000 employees working on-board in 14 countries.

Do you have new itineraries for 2018-19?

Each year, Costa's ships offer a chance to guests to enjoy 140 different routes to visit 250 destinations. Our ships for 2018-19 will operate in the Mediterranean, Northern Europe, the Baltic Sea, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, the United Arab Emirates, the Indian Ocean, as well as Around-the-World Cruises and Grand Cruises. A variety of opportunities for guests to enjoy our 'Italy's finest' cruise concept includes Italian culinary traditions, specialty restaurants and an elevated level of cuisine.

What measures have Costa taken to provide guests with better connectivity at lesser costs?

While onboard, our guests



have the opportunity to fully enjoy their vacation by truly remaining "connected". Different internet packages are available onboard suited to each customer's needs.

“Our ships for 2018-19 will operate in the Mediterranean, Northern Europe, the Baltic Sea, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, the United Arab Emirates, the Indian Ocean, as well as Around-the-World Cruises and Grand Cruises”

For example, with the new 'I Love Surfing' offer, guests have access to have a valuable internet connection, so they can share updates on social media about their experiences of the cruise holiday.

What added benefits will Costa use to attract summer bookings from ME?

North Europe from Stockholm, Amsterdam or Hamburg are really appreciated by customers. We cannot forget our wide offer in the Mediterranean with a lot of different embarkation opportunities like Barcelona, Civitavecchia (Rome), Venice and Savona, to name a few.

Can clients from Dubai expect anything different for Winter 2018-19 itinerary?

We are going to have Costa Mediterranean with homeport in Dubai and port calls in Abu Dhabi, Sir Bani Yas Island and Muscat from November 2018 to March 2019. For Costa ships, the Arabic Peninsula, is now a firm point on our product offer. 

Dubai to boost maritime traffic

Dubai's maritime industry has significant potential to grow by expanding into the lucrative luxury yacht sector and ensuring leisure maritime pursuits, aiming to broaden Dubai's tourism offering.

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As per the latest report by Dubai Tourism, Dubai is the world's fourth most visited city. Following the announcement of the economic stimulus by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai to reinforce Dubai's economy in the presence of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai, the Dubai Maritime City Authority (DMCA) supported by the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Dubai Tourism) organised a workshop at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) for key government entities, yacht operators and manufacturers as part of wider efforts to develop Dubai's maritime industry.



The workshop on leisure maritime traffic was attended by **HE Helal Saeed Almarri**, Director-General of Dubai Tourism; **HE Amer Ali**, Executive Director of Dubai Maritime City Authority (DMCA), and senior officials from Federal Transport Authority, Department of Naturalisation and

Residency, Ports, Customs and Free Zones Corporation, Dubai Coast Guard and Dubai Sports Council, as well as operators and manufacturers of luxury yachts.

"At DMCA, we continuously work hard to improve, enhance and develop all those aspects that help

create a competitive maritime sector in Dubai. The forward-thinking vision of Dubai Tourism is in sync with ours in creating a world-class marine leisure sector in Dubai. We are working to develop business friendly services to foreign super-yachts and other watercrafts to guarantee that Dubai waters enjoy

marine safety, operational efficiency, and safe navigation," Ali said.

The leisure maritime sector is expected to continue an upward trend due to ease of regulations, encouraging recreational boating activities. However, local stakeholders have highlighted a number of challenges that are being addressed to facilitate easier access and to enhance increased visits from maritime enthusiasts who seek sea-based experiences.

Speaking about the workshop, Almarri said, "With an advanced marine leisure industry including infrastructure that is on par with international standards, Dubai is well-positioned to capture the mega yachts market and become the region's preferred yachting hub," he added. 

Is the World Cup fever hitting?

With the FIFA World Cup starting from June 14, early searchers are already planning trips to cheer on their team during the games. Post Ramadan, MEA travellers opt to either return to their families or gear up for the World Cup.

Moscow scores a place

This will be the first World Cup held in Europe since the 2006 tournament in Germany, and the first ever to be held in Eastern Europe. All the stadium venues are in European Russia and the opening match between Russia and Saudi Arabia will be held at the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow on June 14. Moscow has already entered the list of top ten destinations searched for June, currently in the ninth position.

Early planners to Europe

We observe that travellers are considering exploring Europe prior to the games, extending their trips to take in all that Europe has to offer. Both Paris and London appear in the most

“Both Paris and London appear in the most searched destinations for the Middle Eastern and African travellers in June, placed at the third and fifth positions respectively”

searched destinations for Middle Eastern and African travellers in June at the third and fifth positions respectively. We are also seeing MEA travellers searching for trips with a longer duration that they did in the beginning of the year with 41 per cent of long-haul searches planning a duration of 12 days or more.

Trophy for travel marketers

For travel marketers, understanding the trends around events that drive tourism such as the World Cup can allow you to shape

your marketing campaigns to better engage with your audience with only relevant and personalised content. Using actual intent data to understand which travellers to target with the right message and on the right channel or device is paramount to driving bookings.

Brands can now look beyond demographics and target those travellers who they know are in market for their service at exactly the right time in the path to purchase. The travel marketers who are going to benefit from the surge in World Cup tourism will be the ones who

steer away from assumptions and base their strategies on insights fuelled by actual data.

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



Stewart Smith
Regional Director
MEA at Sojern

White-Label launches at ATM



Myconciierge.com tied up with White-Label Technology to introduce a full-service on-line marketing and operations platform for tour companies, DMCs, concierges, hotels, airlines, limousine companies and other travel companies. The software integrates a white-label website with members area enabling secure login for customers.

Mark Wallis, CEO, White Label Concierge Technology, commented, "ATM is the ideal platform for us to be introducing our software focused on companies working within the luxury market. We feel it will be a game-changer as it facilitates personal care and attention through a robust platform that provides a complete operations solution."

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Transforming tech trends in travel

Experts from Sabre, Wego and tajawal came together at the Arabian Travel Market to discuss the top three trends transforming the travel industry. Jorge Vilches, Senior Vice President—Air Line of Business, Sabre; Ross Veitch, CEO and Co-founder, Wego and Muhammad Chbib, CEO, tajawal, identified three main shifts in the travel industry in the region – evolving consumer behaviour, digital transformation and changing airline distribution models.

TT Bureau



Moderator	Participants		
Topics	Jorge Vilches, Senior Vice President— Air Line of Business, Sabre	Ross Veitch CEO and Co-founder, Wego	Muhammad Chbib CEO, tajawal
Consumer behaviour	The number of people travelling has doubled in the last 15 years, and is expected to double again in the next 15 years. In the Middle East, we are seeing double the amount of growth than any other region. Supply is outstripping demand. Travellers' needs are also becoming more complex. The number of groups and types of travellers is increasing – and to win business, it is essential that travel companies understand how to create value for each of these travel groups.	The Middle Eastern population is very young. We are witnessing that change being driven by the habits of younger travellers. For example, PC as a platform is declining and mobile is increasingly gaining prominence. Growth in bookings is accelerating rapidly as people start to travel more often.	he younger population is demanding more from travel; these travellers are looking to do new things that they haven't done before. The focus is shifting from routine to experience. A lot of this is down to the influx of information they are seeing on social media sites – they want to be able to experience and broadcast their own unique travel stories. As a result, addressing value for these travellers has become more complex.
Digital transformation	The Middle East is in the midst of a massive digital transformation with regional governments expected to spend over US\$15 billion in enabling technologies in 2018, thereby making it ideally positioned to meet the demands of the modern, digitally-savvy consumer. Travel agents can leverage the power of technology to offer a high level of personalisation and new experiences to customers. Sabre is constantly investing in developing technology that can make this possible, such as the new Sabre Red Workspace. This includes new tools to help suppliers display their fares in innovative ways and help agents offer a higher level of personalisation to travellers.	Today's digitally-connected consumer wants simplicity and the ability to shop the entire online travel marketplace in one place. This is why metasearch has been embraced in the Middle East, in addition to the highly personalised experience it offers. In today's world, consumer expectations for what their online services should deliver are being dramatically elevated by the almost magical experiences made possible by the application of new technologies such as machine-learning, neural-networks and deep-learning applied to very large data sets.	With the rapid evolution of consumer expectations, the industry has taken a tremendous leap towards digital transformation. Holistic data gathering to understand consumer preferences and identify behavioural patterns is crucial to designing wholesome and personalised travel experiences. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and augmented reality will help pronounce these efforts and unlock new avenues for consumer engagement. The challenge for industry players will be to perform the delicate balancing act between personalisation and automation, while continuing to provide convenient travel solutions and curate superior experiences.
Changes in distribution models	The impact of low cost carriers on traditional airlines is enormous. Traditional airlines are pressured to reduce costs and differentiate; previously, the only capability to segment was on cabin class. However, that is changing, and companies like Sabre are working on new functionalities – for example, NDC – which will enable suppliers to deliver tailored offers to different segments of travellers. There will always be the need for transparency and comparison. That's why the value of the GDS will remain throughout this industry transformation as it enables any agency to book any flights all over the world.	One major shift we're seeing is being driven by the introduction of NDC. However, there is still a gap between the promise of NDC and the reality. Each NDC integration we have done is still different from one to the next. At the moment, NDC does make it slightly easier to sell ancillaries through our platform. But in the future, after it becomes more widely adopted, it has the potential to make things a lot simpler.	The changes we are seeing now in travel distribution represent a major opportunity – quite similar to the transformation of the TelCo industry 20 years ago. Just like the way you are now able to pick and choose components of a mobile phone contract, you are now becoming able to do the same with your airfare. However, change leads to fragmentation, so standardisation such as NDC is valuable for the industry. Standardising and automating processes will make it much easier for travellers to find and book what they want.
Advice for the travel industry	The first piece of advice would be to always focus on creating value for your travellers. In order to achieve the first, make sure you understand each of your traveller segments. Third, invest in your technology and online platforms. This will give you the edge over your competitors.	Look to advanced digital ecosystems like China for a glimpse of how the future is going to be – their digital ecosystems are at least five to ten years ahead of that of the Middle East. Also, focus on the speed of your technology rather than the way it looks. Always benchmark your performance against that of other companies.	Focus on data and insights. Also, don't jump on every new technology – around 95 per cent of new technologies are fads and don't amount to anything. Lastly, always focus on the consumer and understanding their unique individual needs.

Turkish soars high in ME

Turkish Airlines reveals Q1 traffic results and sheds light on the most recent aviation trends. The number of passengers who travelled from the Middle East increased by 22 per cent in Q1 2018.

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The Turkish aviation and tourism is predicted to be catapulted to a new league with the opening of the new Istanbul Airport on October 29, 2018. The airport will have three runways and a capacity of 90 million passengers per year, along with additional flights and better connection time.

Commenting on the results, **Muhammed Fatih Durmaz**, Vice President—Sales, Middle East & Cyprus, Turkish Airlines said, "2017 was a successful year for Turkish Airlines in terms of our global fleet and network expansion and we have high expectations of 2018 as we continue to build momentum for our in-flight and customer service. Our network expansion has also been

“2017 was a successful year for us in terms of our global fleet and network expansion, and we have high expectations of 2018”

a pivotal step in supporting the increasing customer demand in all our markets. Through innovative features, our aim is to provide customers with the best possible options, both in terms of new destinations and innovative products and services."

During the first quarter, increase in demand and total num-

ber of passengers was 22 per cent higher than the same period of last year. The total number of passengers from the Middle East region was 5.6 million last year. The airline seat capacity also grew by 11.4 per cent.

Turkish Airlines also unveiled the results of a recent commissioned study conducted by Nielsen research on '2017 Aviation Trends in the UAE' during Arabian Travel Market. Internet and mobile phone connectivity, fewer queues at check-in and even on-board gyms are just some of the items on the wishlist of the UAE's airline travellers.

Commenting on the study results, Durmaz said, "It is interest-

ing to see how the travel and airlines industries are shifting with the transformation into the digital era, and how travellers are now relying more on automated services and convenience provided by technology. At Turkish Airlines, we continue to work closely with our different partners to provide our customers with the best travel experience and hospitality that make their journeys memorable."

As Turkish Airlines strives to understand and consider the demands of its passengers, the airline's last results are a proof of its

success. In addition to providing convenient travel experiences to passengers, the top five image attributes given to Turkish Airlines increased significantly compared to previous period. According to the UAE travellers, its "safe airline" perception ranked equal first with its good reputation, while good service onboard, value for money, and flying to many destinations are the primary dynamics that made the airline an optimum preference for them.



Muhammed Fatih Durmaz
Turkish Airlines Vice President—Sales, Middle East & Cyprus

Rewarding biz travellers

Sheikh Majid Al Mualla, Divisional Senior VP—Commercial Operations, Emirates speaks about the revamped Business Rewards programme.

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Can you brief about the Emirates Business Rewards programme?

Emirates Business Rewards is our corporate loyalty programme which is open to organisations of all sizes around the world. The organisation earn Business Rewards points, whenever its employees or guests travellers fly on Emirates, which can then be spent on Reward flights and upgrades. Individuals also earn Skywards Miles on the same flight, if they are an Emirates Skywards member.

Who is eligible for it and what benefits does it have?

Emirates Business Rewards



Sheikh Majid Al Mualla
Divisional Senior Vice President—Commercial Operations, Emirates

is open to any organisation but is designed to offer benefits to small and medium-sized organisations that don't have a corporate travel agreement with Emirates. It can also be used to complement any travel agreements that may be in

place. Members will earn 1 Emirates Business Rewards Point for every USD 1 spent on the base fare plus fuel surcharge, which can be spent on future flights or upgrades on Emirates.

How is this scheme important to the business traveller?

The Emirates Business Rewards programme is about improving the way of rewarding the companies that choose Emirates for corporate travel. The programme helps our industry customers to get more value from their business travel – right across the spectrum of small businesses and large corporations.

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Personality of the month



Human touch is the real element

A passionate professional and a hotelier hailing from a family that's steeped in the hospitality industry, **Sherif Madkour** spearheads Media Rotana as the General Manager in providing a new strategy in leadership to ensure effective management.

 Shehara Rizly

An Egyptian national with a degree from Helwan University's Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management in Cairo, Egypt, Sherif Madkour went on to complete his post graduate studies from Brighton College in the UK.

Henceforth, his hospitality career took off to a flying start in the UK. Madkour then moved to Germany and worked in various brands such as Lindner Congress Hotels and Best Western Hotels Frankfurt before moving to UAE in 1999 where he joined the Hyatt Regency. Later, he moved in to the Hilton and was at the opening of Hilton Dubai Creek as Assistant Department head in 2001. He joined Rotana in 2005 as the department head and carried out different assignments with bespoke properties of Rotana. In 2007, he had the opportunity to lead the opening of the Centro brand Al Barsha, a widely recognised business hotel in Dubai. Thereafter, he completed a stint in Rotana Abu Dhabi with brands such as Al Maha Arjaan by Rotana in revamping the properties.

Travellers from Europe

His experience in the hospitality trade in some of the most respected cities gives him an edge to provide the necessary strategic plans to further develop and sustain the property. Related the differ-



“Online bookings have become the latest pattern in travel. In this part of the world, last minute travels are more prevalent than the carefully planned travels such as the Europeans. A hotel without internet cannot survive. Technology has had a great impact over the last 15-20 years in hospitality”

ence in terms of travellers from the European region and Middle East,

Madkour said, “Europeans in general and Germans specifically love travelling and planning ahead. They have already started planning for 2019 holidays now, booking and even making advance payments. The Middle East travellers are more last minute with their bookings and depend on technology with bookings made through smart phones.”

Impact of technology

Madkour notes, “Social media is the new trend in almost every sector. Online bookings have become the latest pattern in travel. In this part of the world, last minute travels are more prevalent than the carefully planned travels such as the Europeans. Travel has become very fast paced; a hotel without internet cannot survive. Technology has had a great impact over the

last 15-20 years in the hospitality business.”

Personalisation & human interaction

Although technology plays a pivotal role in the hospitality industry, the human element will still be of utmost importance. Guests who enter a hotel expect a warm smile from a human welcoming them. Madkour shares, “The human element is the real factor in hospitality. Hospitality is based on one to one service, interaction with guests and personalised services.”

With personalities such as Madkour, heading home-grown brand Media Rotana, Dubai is surely going on a rapid growth trajectory towards achieving the results for not just Expo 2020, but way beyond. Dubai has become a hub for business, incentives and corporates with all international companies showing a keen interest to have a footprint in the city. Madkour commends the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum in establishing a solid growth of all sectors. 

Dubai Parks partners with DXB

DXB Entertainments and Dubai Airports announced a partnership to create an unparalleled airport experience while showcasing Dubai's position as the ultimate destination.

TT Bureau



The partnership between DXB Entertainments and Dubai Airports will showcase the latter's efforts to make Dubai International (DXB) a destination in its own while promoting the breadth of offer at Dubai Parks and Resorts to over 88 million passengers travelling through Dubai Airport annually. The agree-

ment will see Dubai Parks and Resorts promoted at all DXB concourses with access to over 65 airlines flying to and from over 240 destinations in 170 countries around the globe. Dubai Parks and Resorts will delight airport passengers by providing branded family zones and dedicated retail

locations selling Dubai Parks and Resorts products while enticing them to experience the full offer by conducting direct marketing.

Mohamed Almulla, CEO and MD, DXB Entertainments said, "Our dedicated media solutions and immersive concepts will be strategically positioned throughout Dubai International passenger concourses, adding an element of entertainment to passengers' journey through the airport."

"This partnership demonstrates Dubai Airports' commitment to showcase world-class hospitality and entertainment options available to visitors of this city, while also creating unique airport experiences," said **Eugene Barry**, Executive Vice President—Commercial, Dubai Airports.

Oman Air unveils First Class suite

Oman Air has unveiled its new First Class Mini Suite of its Dreamliner 787-9 fleet at the recently concluded Arabian Travel Market(ATM) in Dubai. The new suite offers unparalleled levels of comfort and ultimate luxury with one of the longest lie-flat seat available on any commercial airliner, electronically controlled privacy divider, à la carte dining as well as an in-suite minibar.

HE Maitha Al Mahrouqi, Undersecretary, Oman Ministry of Tourism who unveiled the Mini Suite at the Oman Air stand, said, "Oman Air works hard to maintain high levels of guest satisfaction, and attention to detail in the First Class Mini Suite highlights this. We want visitors to our country to experience the

very best of Oman culture from the moment they board our aircraft. Travelling with Oman Air, in all classes, offers a real flavour of Omani warmth and hospitality."

Abdulaziz Al Raisi, Acting CEO, Oman Air, said, "The launch of the new suite on board our Dreamliner 787-9 fleet comes as a result of responding to the needs of our travellers and providing them with industry leading luxury. We are confident our guests will enjoy the ultimate experience travelling with us to Oman and beyond."

Oman Air is currently undergoing a network expansion programme, which will see the airline operate up to 70 aircraft to around 60 destinations by 2022.

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25th ATM concludes successfully

Arabian Travel Market 2018 concluded its 25th silver jubilee anniversary on a positive note. The 2018 edition, on the theme of responsible tourism, boasted of more than 400 main stand holders with over 100 new exhibitors making their debut. The number of countries represented at ATM 2018 totaled over 140 with 20% more exhibition space than the previous year and an increase of 40% visitors since the 20th edition in 2013.



Growth in global travel insurance

With advanced digital technologies flying into every possible work sphere, a disruption in the way people search, plan and buy air travel is imminent.

 Sonali Brahma

The poster boy for travel innovation, today, is the New Distribution Capability (NDC) programme that IATA is leading. According to the trade association representing the world's airlines, NDC will enable the travel industry to transform the way air products are re-tailed to corporations, leisure and business travellers by addressing the industry's current distribution limitations.

While the NDC will facilitate a mix of amenities and services in air travel buying, it lacks a specific mention of travel insurance. While the traveller places travel insurance at the bottom of his 'travel-dos' list, studies show a growth in global travel insurance. In 2015, Europe led the industry, followed by Asia-Pacific. This could be due to emergency situations like

the Ebola epidemic, Nepal earthquake and the Paris attack. These emergencies threw traveller plans and safety in a disarray, making travellers more aware of the need for travel insurance. Travel insurance provides an extensive range of benefits for events, such as trip cancellation due to a medical emergency, loss of baggage, evacuation due to a medical condition or hijack, and loss of travel documents among the more prevalent ones.

When asked for his views on travel insurance, **Rajendran Vellapalath**, CEO TPCconnects said, "Travel is trending globally, but it pays to be mindful of travel-driven emergencies. The 'what ifs' deserve an equal space in the minds of travellers, as much as other aspects like comfort, price, service,



Rajendran Vellapalath
CEO
TPCconnects

speed, etc. With the help of travel insurance experts like Tune Protect, we can start working on an action plan for the same."

Vellapalath added, "The IATA NDC standard B2B and B2C




Arijit Munshi
General Manager
Tune Protect - EMEA

platforms will help travel agencies to service their customers better and offer them a rich mix of travel-related services including travel insurance and ancillary options. Travellers will be able to have their preferences recognised

on a travel agency's website or an online travel site similarly to an airline's website – a service that may not be directly available to agents today owing to technology limitations."

Arijit Munshi, General Manager, Tune Protect - EMEA, said, "Tune Protect will be more than willing to discuss and work with IATA to build a better travel protection programmes. Together we could work on how to customise and embed travel assurance products or travel protection programmes within the NDC Standard to offer better peace of mind to the travellers of today."

NDC is off to a flying start, the key question is to the travel industry professional, "Have we got it all covered?" 

Wego inks deal with Sharjah tourism

Wego launched a destination co-marketing campaign in collaboration with Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) to boost tourism in the emirate of Sharjah. The campaign will promote authentic tourist experiences and hidden gems exclusive to the emirate.

By showcasing some of Sharjah's biggest tourist attractions through innovative online marketing activities, the new campaign seeks to position the emirate as a destination of choice amongst global travellers. Sharjah's delightful mix of fun attractions, traditional hospitality and old-world charm, which resonate with a variety of audiences from around the world, will be promoted through this campaign. Additionally, the

initiative will focus on promoting the emirate's events and activities beyond the Sharjah International Book Fair, Sharjah Calligraphy Biennial and Sharjah Traditional Crafts Forum.

"Sharjah is the perfect Middle Eastern city for travellers who wish to explore a 'fresh' destination packed with unique history and rich heritage and traditions," said **Mamoun Hmedan**, Wego Managing Director—MENA and



India. "In order to boost the emirate's image as a family-friendly and culturally-charged destination, Wego will harness online tools such as high-impact display advertising, Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and unique content marketing tactics. To-

gether, these digital marketing tactics seek to further strengthen SCTDA's ongoing marketing efforts," he added.

"Wego is the largest online travel marketplace across the MENA region, which presents

Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) with an opportunity to engage with millions of travellers," Mamoun added. "DMOs are increasingly partnering with Wego to gain an unparalleled advantage for their destination marketing activities through our strategically positioned and individually tailored online campaigns. Our constant endeavour is to empower DMOs to capture the interest of potential travellers and attain high-conversion rates while they shop for travel."

The co-marketing campaign comprises a series of multi-device and multi-channel promotional activities that will enable SCTDA to engage with millions of travellers across the globe.

“Wego is the largest online travel marketplace across the MENA region, which presents Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) with an opportunity to engage with millions of travellers”

Mamoun Hmedan
Wego Managing Director—MENA and India

Over 100 exhibitors debut at ATM

► Contd. from page 14



Sri Lanka tourism focuses on ME

In 2017, Sri Lanka received a total of 107,635 tourists from the Middle East region with 6.5 per cent growth with UAE as one of the fastest growing tourism market from the region. Currently, there are 70 direct flight services a week connecting UAE to Sri Lanka.

 TT Bureau

A delegation of 51 Sri Lanka-based tourism and hospitality companies visited Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in Dubai to develop the country's tourist arrivals. As part of their participation at this year's ATM, a press conference was attended by **John Amaratunga**, Sri Lankan Minister of Tourism; **Felix Srimal Rodrigo**, Advisor to Minister; **L Madiwela**, Media Secretary to Minister; **Mohan De Silva**, Ministry of Tourism; **HE Charitha Yattagoda**, Sri Lankan Consul General-Dubai; **Sutheash Balasubramaniam**, Managing Director, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau; **Ajantha Rathnayake**, Assistant Director, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau; **Sasanga Gunathilaka**, Assistant Director, Sri Lanka Tour-

ism Promotion Bureau and **Meriyan Warnakulasuriya**, Management Assistant, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau and members of GCC media.

Amaratunga stated, "Sri Lanka has much to offer visitors from the region with our distinctive, adventure-packed, eco-friendly, family-focused experiences and offerings, as well as our rich nature, heritage and culture, year-round schedule of festivals and special events, numerous parks and eco centres, luxury resorts and wellness centres, romantic settings for honeymooners and couples. Our mission has done much to put Sri Lanka on the map and in the hearts and minds of Middle East-based travel part-



John Amaratunga
Hon'ble Minister of Tourism
Sri Lanka

ners. In combination with future promotions planned for the country, I'm confident we will witness many more visitors from the region making Sri Lanka their next



HE Charitha Yattagoda
Consul General - Sri Lanka
Dubai

holiday destination of choice in the coming months."

He further reiterated that the ministry will be pursuing a digital

advertising campaign to ensure more tourists to the destination as technology has taken over the traditional forms of advertising.

Yattagoda stated, "We have witnessed a very good growth of tourists from the Middle Eastern region, a 6.5 per cent increase from last year. We hope that it will further increase in our efforts as just before ATM, we organised several roadshows in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah so that more agents are aware of the diversity of our country. Over 70 flights fly in a week to Sri Lanka from Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. We work together with the Sri Lanka tourism board and have planned many activities for both locals and expats living in the UAE." 



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SCTDA lauded as visitors throng

Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) revealed at ATM 2018, that Sharjah hotels recorded an occupancy growth rate of 70% in 2017 following the government's tourism campaigns and initiatives.

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The occupancy rate of Sharjah hotels attained 70 per cent last year, indicating an exponentially rising number of regional and global travellers visiting the emirate. Commenting on the results, 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 intensive tourism campaigns hit its targets in 2017, further boosting the local tourism sector and enhancing its repu-



tation at the local, regional and global levels."

He further added, "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. Furthermore, Sharjah is famous among travellers who want to explore ancient monuments, with visitors from Russia, China and different parts of the globe descending on the emirate to experience its beauty and rich traditions. All of these are helping drive our economic, social, cultural and environmental growth."

In 2017, SCTDA said that Sharjah welcomed 1.7 million visitors who stayed in 102 accommodations, 56 of which were hotels and 46 were hotel apartments. Hotels and hotel apartments generated AED 694 million in revenue during the same period, up from AED 668 mil-

lion in 2016. Hotels accounted for about 75 per cent of the total revenue receipts.

The new statistics showed a remarkable increase in the number of Russian tourists at 26,606 following the move to allow visa on arrival entry to the UAE. Additionally, the number of Chinese tourists during the same period accounted for a massive 45 per cent of the total visitors, while the number of European tourists climbed at an unprecedented rate of 36 per cent.

Launch of new website

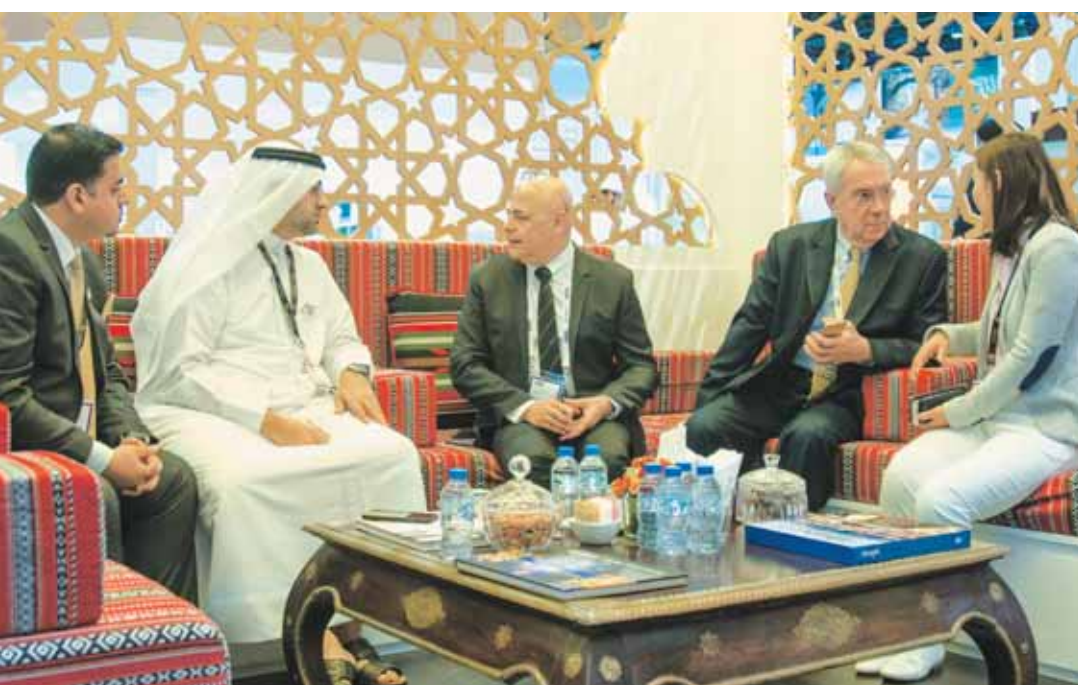
Stepping up in its efforts to consolidate the emirate's position as an ideal



H E Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman, SCTDA

“Sharjah is famous among travellers who want to explore ancient monuments, with visitors from Russia, China and different parts of the globe descending on the emirate to experience its beauty and rich traditions”

global tourist destination SCTDA launched its new website Visit-Sharjah.com at the recently concluded Arabian Travel Market. As the emirate of Sharjah is steadily going towards its goal to drive 10 million tourists to the emirate



to Sharjah hotels



by 2021, the launch of this new website will support to position the emirate as a global destination for tourists and will allow local, regional and international tourists to learn more about what Sharjah has to offer, from essential destinations to exciting activities catering to all types of travellers.

Midfa commented, "We are proud to announce the launch of the VisitSharjah.com, consolidating Sharjah's position as a 'must-see must-visit' tourist destination. The new website will help increase awareness about the emirate's tourism infrastructure and innovative

services, which in turn, will reinforce its growing reputation as a highly preferred destination for millions of visitors from around the world."

Midfa added, "The website allows visitors to plan their itineraries prior to arrival in a bid to make their experience in Sharjah exceptional from start to finish. Through this website, we are looking to introduce our visitors to the emirate's distinctive touristic attractions and highlight what makes Sharjah one of the leading cultural, adventure and family destinations in the UAE." According to the SCTDA, visitors accessing VisitSharjah.com will be able to plan their itineraries according to their budget and interests.

Sharjah's tourism partners, including hotels, tour operators and restaurant owners

can upload and promote their products and services on the dedicated tourism portal within the website. "We intend to adopt the latest technologies to attract more visitors to Sharjah. We reaffirm our commitment to continue to expand our initiatives and development programmes to enhance the local industry," concluded Al Midfa.

Expansion plans

The tourism sector's steady expansion in line with Sharjah Tourism Vision 2021 is also the result of SCTDA's innovative initiatives and tourism programmes launched in cooperation with all concerned institutions, which are also working towards implementing a range of tourism projects to enhance the emirate's status as the capital of culture.

The Authority has also been rolling out high-quality services and organising distinguished events to showcase Sharjah's rich history,



culture and religious heritage. The emirate continues to maintain its identity and traditions as evidenced by its architectural monuments that not only embody the splendour of

Islamic architecture and the history of the country but tell the story of Sharjah and the UAE's glorious past, bright present and promising future as well. 🇦🇪



Maximising business opportunities

Over 15,000 visitors, 800 buyers from 80 countries marked their participation at the 2nd ITB China. Chinese buyers from over 300 different companies throughout China represented the full range of China's largest industry players. 73 per cent of the Chinese leisure, MiCE and corporate buyers came from mainland China (outside Shanghai).



Meraas launches 'Hala China'

The new initiative aims to attract Chinese visitors to the UAE in line with Dubai's Tourism Vision 2020 strategy. Launched in collaboration with Dubai Holding and DXB Entertainments, Hala China aims to organise events and create tourism packages.

TT Bureau

'Hala China' is set to complement Dubai's rich calendar of events by creating an annual schedule of exciting events hosted at the destinations of these three companies that aims to showcase Dubai and the UAE to Chinese tourists. The novel initiative will also see the creation of new tourism packages that cater to Chinese visitors in seven categories – stay, shop, eat, play, explore, wellness and concierge. The unprecedented initiative will focus on exploring opportunities that encourage and facilitate economic development through both tourism, trade and investment. 'Hala China' will see key government ministries and companies in Dubai and China team up to organise events and incentives, which will play a role in further



strengthening bilateral relations.

The yearlong pipeline of activities includes a mix of events and programmes spanning food festivals and fashion shows, sporting events, music festivals and Chinese cultural pageants. The various sectors that are expect-

ed to witness a positive impact from this initiative include luxury fashion, retail, hospitality, dining, education, sports, photography and weddings.

His Excellency Abdulla Al Habbai, Group Chairman, Meraas, said, "Leveraging the phenomenal

'Hala China' will see key government ministries and companies in Dubai and China team up to organise events and incentives

opportunity to share the story of our city with an increasingly mobile Chinese audience, while extending an invitation to explore the possibilities we are creating for a whole new generation."

'Hala China' will begin by focusing on some of key drivers for Chinese visitors to Dubai, such as culture and heritage, entertainment and leisure, and luxury retail. Meraas has created a modern portfolio that includes some of the most fashionable destinations in Dubai. Through 'Hala China', Meraas will seek to capture the imagination of Chinese visitors to City Walk, The Beach, Boxpark, Last Exit, The Outlet Village, Al Seef, as well as upcoming destinations like Dubai Arena and Dubai Harbour. 🇦🇪

Kwality

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International Congress and Association (ICCA)

► Middle East Chapter

Mubarak Al Shamisi, Director, Abu Dhabi Convention Bureau, has been appointed Chairperson of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)—Middle East Chapter. Al Shamisi will oversee efforts to strengthen the association's presence in the region in line with the rapid expansion witnessed by the congress and conferences sector. The Middle East Chapter of ICCA offers workshops and training programmes for event organisers in collaboration with ICCA's Middle East region office and head office in Amsterdam.



Wyndham Hotel Group

► Dubai

Wyndham Hotel Group has announced the promotion of **Ignace Bauwens** to Regional Vice President for Middle East, Eurasia and Africa (MEA). His newly expanded role underlines the company's strategic plan to unite the broader region, in recognition of the strong economic ties between India and the Middle East. In this new role, Bauwens will be responsible for driving Wyndham Hotel Group's growth in markets across this region. Bauwens has been a catalyst in expanding Wyndham Hotel Group's portfolio of hotels across the Middle East and Africa, including GCC states.



Manzil Downtown

► Dubai

Emaar Hospitality Group has appointed **Ahmed Elnawawy** as General Manager for Manzil Downtown. With 18 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Elnawawy is responsible for strengthening the positioning of the hotel while striving to further enhance service quality and brand value. He will focus on delivering creative strategies to drive higher levels of operational performance, customer satisfaction and exceptional service standards. Prior to his current appointment, Elnawawy has demonstrated commendable leadership and effective management in his role at Address Dubai Mall.



Fairmont The Palm

► Dubai

Fairmont The Palm has designated **Steven Stefaniuk** as its new Hotel Manager. Stefaniuk brings a wealth of experience to this position with over 16 years in the hospitality industry. Prior to his new role, he worked at Fairmont Dubai as Hotel Manager from 2016, where he managed the 600-room property for the last two years. Stefaniuk will oversee the overall resort operations, performance of each department and support the wider strategy of Fairmont The Palm. A Canadian national, Stefaniuk attended Fanshawe College in London, Ontario as well as the University of Western Ontario for Business Administration.



Sheraton

► JBR Dubai

Sheraton JBR has appointed **Tijana Pavkovic** as its new Marketing Manager to oversee and coordinate communications and overall leadership of the Marketing department. With over seven years of experience in the hospitality industry, Pavkovic joins the team from a luxury hospitality consultancy within the market where she was handling Marketing & Public Relations. She will be responsible for overall leadership of the marketing department of the hotel. Before coming to Dubai, she worked as Marketing Manager at the stock market in Belgrade, Serbia.



Golden Tulip

► Sharjah

Golden Tulip Sharjah has appointed **Mohamed Mabrouk** as Director of Sales & Marketing. Mabrouk will be responsible for the continuous development of Golden Tulip Sharjah's strategies in the local and international markets. He brings a wealth of experience to this position with a career spanning over 20 years in the hospitality industry. Previously, he worked as Sales Manager at the Taj Palace Hotel, followed by Four Points by Sheraton, in addition to the InterContinental Hotels Group wherein he obtained a valuable experience in the industry with international hotels chains.



Hyatt Regency Dubai and Galleria & Hyatt Palace Hotels

► Dubai

Amit Biswas has been appointed as Cluster Director of Sales & Marketing for Hyatt Regency Dubai and Galleria & Hyatt Palace Hotels in Dubai. In his new role, Biswas will execute strategies to drive business performance, revenue, brand awareness in key markets and segments to support business goals and profitability for the three hotels. He began his hospitality career as part of the pre-opening team at the Ritz-Carlton, Doha in 2002.



Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts

► Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts has appointed **Abdul Rahman Al Harbi** as its new Director of Saudisation, effective immediately. He will liaise with all hotel HR departments in Saudi Arabia and ensure training programmes are delivered according to Mövenpick's Saudisation strategy. He will also spearhead the company's ongoing Saudi National recruitment drive. An accomplished HR expert with more than 14 years of experience, Al Harbi is now responsible for leading the Swiss hospitality firm's Saudisation Strategy.



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