

# TRAVTALK

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

Published from : ★ India ★ Middle East

- Blueground: The new hospitality disruptor ..... 06
- Savour a slice of 'Culinary Germany' in UAE ..... 11
- Wyndham bridges room gap in Ajman ..... 18

March 7-11, 2018

Special

TravTalkMiddle

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## ME to lure German market @ ITB

The most lucrative networking arena, 52<sup>nd</sup> ITB Berlin is set to take place from March 7-11. The Middle East secures its position by occupying 3200 square meter in the exhibition area. Altogether, the show's management expects around 10,000 exhibitors and 160,000 visitors will attend the 26 halls on the exhibitions ground.

SHEHARA RIZLY



HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa  
Chairman  
SCTDA

“SCTDA's efforts in showcasing Sharjah's tourism experience at various exhibitions around the world have helped the emirate strengthen its share of market exposure. Sharjah has participated in ITB Berlin for 20 years now and the emirate continues to attract large numbers of German tourists. With more than 180 countries and 109,000 trade visitors, ITB Berlin is the ideal opportunity to meet industry professionals in the field. In addition

to enhancing our tourism portfolio, we will target the European markets and promote Sharjah as a year-round destination.”



Olivier Harnisch  
Chief Executive Officer  
Emaar Hospitality Group

“As a growing company with global ambitions, it's vital Emaar Hospitality Group has a presence at international gatherings such as ITB Berlin. We have participated at this mart for many years and regard it as a go-to hospitality exhibition. We will showcase our progress in the regional and global expansion of our brands in addition to the current superior guest experiences that we offer both leisure and business travellers. Catering to travellers from everywhere, Europe and specifically Germany is a key country for the group.”



Ishrat Ali Khan  
Group Managing Director, Al Wasl Yachts, Al Wasl Dhows, Asia Pacific Tourism & Oasis Palm Safari, Arabian Travel Award winner

“Our focus is on enhancing customer service to ensure guest delight. The German market is particularly important during the festive season. The year 2017 has been very encouraging for us as our dhow cruise outperformed in the market. We also got the growth trends in our desert safari, yachts charters and other tours as compared to previous years. Al Wasl provides parallel experiences to all reputable guests by providing the promised infrastructure, delicious food, customer service and experiences.”

“Germany is the main source market for Meeting Point Emirates. ITB Berlin is important to meet our top clients, new clients and partners as well as launch new projects. Last November, we had launched our first all-seasons daily flights operated by Condor to the UAE in a joint venture with FTI Group. So far, the programme has proven very successful where the German market along Germany was the single largest contributor in the region with 41,671 passengers to DWC according to a recently published data. It's gratifying to know that our initiative contributed to boost Dubai tourism.”



Khaled Jouni  
CEO  
Meeting Point International

“ITB provides us a global platform to showcase our destination and wide range of products and services along with an opportunity to meet our trade partners. Arabian Adventures has exhibited at ITB from our start of business over 25 years ago and will continue to do so. UAE, as a unique destination is constantly evolving with new products and experiences. The German-speaking markets including Austria and Switzerland are a key focus for Dubai, UAE and Arabian Adventures. Our management team will showcase our products and services at this key event.”



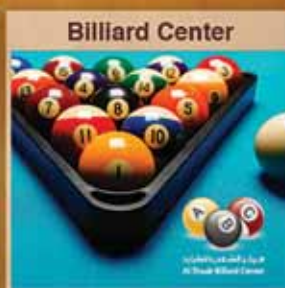
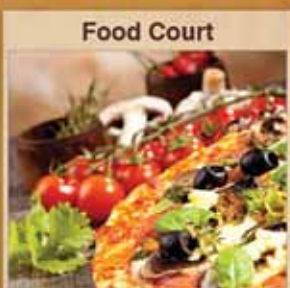
Samir Mehta  
General Manager  
Arabian Adventures

“Our focus will be on the culinary experience and the different flavours visitors can taste when visiting Germany. Our GNTD Dubai-based office will be attending ITB to connect with German partners like hotels, regional tourism boards or any other travel-related service providers to woo them to take part in our GCC-wide marketing activities like roadshows, press events and cross-media marketing campaigns. Our focus is to mainly promote Germany as a tourism destination, besides working closely with the respective stakeholders in the MICE segment.”



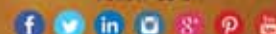
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## Sharjah Collection

*by* mantis

Nested in the Kalba mangroves, Kingfisher Lodge by Mantis offers authentic experiences and means to unwind in the midst of one of the last protected wilderness of the region.

\* The lodge is available on an all-inclusive package, full board including activities, spa treatments, beverages and Wi-Fi



ITB Berlin

# Emphasis on revolutionary ways of travel

This year, ITB Berlin will witness Middle East occupying 3200 square meter in total space, with Abu Dhabi and Ras Al Khaimah tourism authorities having expanded their booths. **David Ruetz**, Head of ITB Berlin, tells **TRAVTALK** about the vast line-up at the five-day long leading travel trade exhibition.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

**Q Can you give us a brief about what's new at ITB Berlin 2018?**

The Baltic Sea coast is the first federal state to occupy the role as partner region of ITB Berlin. For the first time in the history of ITB, the opening ceremony on the eve of the show will leave a zero carbon footprint, thereby setting an important example for the future. Luxury travel is an important focus area this year. The general attitude towards this market is changing. These challenges, as well as the opportunities, concern the industry and will be key topics at ITB Berlin. Together with a network of exclusive exhibitors, Loop, a unique trade show for luxury products, will be the place for buyers of luxury products. The first ITB Luxury Late

Night will represent an opportunity for visitors to cultivate contacts in this industry segment, thereby enabling providers to discuss topics at length with leading buyers from the luxury travel market. The eTravel Startup Day will also be held for the first time, providing newly formed companies with a platform, as well as the Special Hospitality Tech Forum as a new feature at the eTravel Lab.

**Q How important is the Middle East for this year's event? How many have confirmed their participation from this region?**

The ME countries play a very important role as a fast-growing tourism destination. Exhibitors from UAE, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan and Lebanon will be showcasing many products and services on their stands

which altogether now occupy 3,200 sqm in total. We have registered a very strong growth from Abu Dhabi and Ras Al Khaimah who have expanded their booth spaces this year and are certain to delight the visitors with their stands.

**Q Who are the new participants this year?**

After a period of absence, Belize, Guayana, Turks and Caicos Islands as well French Guayana will be back this year. C-Trip, one of the biggest online travel agencies in China, will also be exhibiting for the first time.

**Q What are the key areas of focus this year?**

ITB Berlin 2018 will lay special emphasis on revolutionary ways of travelling in the future such as driver-

**“Together with a network of exclusive exhibitors, Loop, a unique trade show for luxury products, will be the place for buyers of luxury products. The first ITB Luxury Late Night will represent an opportunity for visitors to cultivate contacts in this industry segment.”**

**David Ruetz**  
Head of ITB Berlin



less cabs and hyperloops, set to completely change the face of transport. In addition, we will take a close look at digitalisation, Artificial Intelligence and their potential impact on travel in the future. Another topic which the convention will focus on is overtourism. In recent times, rapid growth in tourism has begun to stretch accommodation and hospitality limits, par-

ticularly in major cities. As a result, the industry needs to find solutions for the future and minimise the effects on the environment.

**Q Do share the dates, venue and timings for B2B for this year.**

ITB Berlin, set to be held from March 7-11, should be marked in the calendar of every profes-

sional in the travel industry. More than 169,000 visitors are expected to attend the event, including the best 1,000 buyers, some 109,000 trade visitors and 10,000 exhibitors from all over the world. The exhibition is also open to the public from March 10-11. Don't miss out ITB China in Shanghai in May, if you want to reach hundreds of ITB-qualified Chinese buyers. 

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## TRAVELTALK

## EDITORIAL

## Embracing Technology

Technology has changed the way in which business is carried out in every scope of work. As all roads lead to Berlin to gather at the largest networking event, the new technological methodology used in the fields of travel, tourism and hospitality is shared by various seminars held to educate the industry partners. The world will unite at ITB Berlin to find solutions and address concerns faced by the industry.

A key component of the event will be the new areas in focus by trade experts like overtourism and lack of rooms. Earlier this year, a recent report urged tourists to avoid certain popular destinations due to constraints in accommodating them. The world is indeed a big place for everyone to explore; it is time for a change so that new places of interest are found for people to experience and enjoy. Experts at various tourism forums have shared that venturing into new destinations is a positive way forward while encouraging people to go that extra mile in achieving it. Dubai's vision of tourism is one which is way forward as it has already looked at tourism opportunities in another planet altogether in Mars. In various tourism forums, it has been shared that venturing to new destinations is a positive way forward, thereby encouraging people to go that extra mile in achieving it.

Hyperloops is set to be a game changer in terms of revolutionising the transportation sector in the next generation. Getting from point A to B should then be a matter of seconds or minutes as opposed to the many hours spent in getting to the final destination. Dubai and a few other destinations have already started working on driverless vehicles and flying car concepts for the future. Currently, at an initial stage of development, the concept will be much looked forward to and one that would save time. In this context, the introduction of artificial intelligence is another component that will ensure a more sustained path and change the human experience in every aspect of life.

## Inflight Wi-Fi is trending in ME

The airline industry is on the cusp of a connectivity revolution. Currently, only a quarter of planes offer onboard Wi-Fi, often of variable quality with patchy coverage, slow speeds and low data limits.

Until now, the aircraft cabin has not kept pace with change on the ground, where seamless high-speed connectivity is now an expectation. Although some relish the time to disconnect from the outside world, there's growing demand for Wi-Fi in the sky – our recent study of 9,000 airline passengers, in partnership with GfK, found that 60 per cent of passengers now see inflight Wi-Fi as a necessity rather than a luxury.

Luckily, change is afoot. With the advent of high speed inflight Wi-Fi services such as GX Aviation, we expect high quality inflight connectivity to be ubiquitous on airlines across the world by 2035. This will revolutionise how passengers experience flying, in turn opening up a wealth of previously untapped revenue opportunities for airlines. According to Sky High Economics, a recent report produced in association with the London School of Economics, this emerging market will be worth \$5.2 billion in the Middle East region alone by 2035.

Today, airlines earn an average \$17 per passenger from 'traditional' ancillaries such as duty free purchases and inflight refreshments. As more airlines adopt onboard connectivity solutions, there is a huge opportunity for revenue growth through commercialising passenger experience.

Middle Eastern carriers could earn an extra \$3.21 per passenger through new broadband-enabled revenue opportunities, amounting to a \$1.3 billion increase in revenues for airlines in the region by 2035.

The availability of quality inflight Wi-Fi will transform how time is spent and experienced during flight. Passengers' time in the air will be more valuable to airlines than ever before,

and there are four main ways in which this is expected to convert into added revenue. Internet access charges will become the main source of broadband-enabled revenue in the Middle East, worth \$724 million by 2035, and there will be a new range of inflight advertising opportunities - including adverts on free broadband packages and sponsorship deals - which will generate an extra \$261 million.

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Upgraded shopping and premium content services will improve inflight experience while growing airlines' broadband-enabled revenues. Whether it's ordering duty free shopping which is delivered straight to your hotel, booking a recommended restaurant for dinner or arranging a taxi to meet you at the gate, e-commerce and destination shopping platforms will make air travel more convenient and more dynamic. This will come at no small gain to airlines, which stand to make \$289 million in the Middle East through e-commerce opportunities. New possibilities for premium content, such as live sports coverage and on-demand video streaming, will generate an extra \$261 million.

ate airlines \$52 million, and give customers the ability to access the same content in the sky that they love watching on the ground.

Exploring what this means on a global level puts into perspective the scale of the opportunity. Overall, the inflight connectivity market is predicted to be worth \$130 billion by 2035, with connected ancillary revenue for airlines accounting for \$30 billion of that. That's more than IATA projected for the profitability of the entire global airline industry in 2017.

Growing demand for inflight Wi-Fi globally makes the opportunity harder to ignore - 44 per cent of passengers

say they would stop using their preferred airline within the next year if it did not offer high quality connectivity. Passengers want access to the same high-speed internet they are used to at home, and airlines that recognise this demand with investment in quality services will be more likely to retain customer loyalty now and in the future.

As an industry we have reached a key moment where technology has caught up with customer demand. It's now possible to give passengers a 'living room quality' Wi-Fi experience on the plane. By doing so, airlines will make tangible revenue gains, future-proof their offering and transform passenger experience for the better. It's an opportunity not to be missed.

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



David Cooley  
Vice President, Channel and Partner Relationships, Inmarsat Aviation

## JA endorses sustainability

On the occasion of UAE Environment Day, Goumbook, a social enterprise announced its partnership with JA Jebel Ali Golf Resort in Dubai, to plant Ghaf trees in the latter's premises throughout 2018. The 'Give a Ghaf Urban Forest' project is a unique initiative born from the passion and commitment of Goumbook to make the UAE more sustainable while adding an educational dimension to the planting experience.



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# Al Shaab's unique and myriad offerings

With a mixture of the Arab cultural architecture in a modern state-of-the-art inner space, Al Shaab Village has made its mark to be the number one leisure escape in the emirate of Sharjah.

TTC BUREAU

Housing the largest ice rink in Sharjah in a convenient location for all holiday makers in UAE, Al Shaab Village caters to the many needs of the modern day traveller. Most travellers prefer a one-stop shopping experience to save time on their busy itineraries. With its visionary leader **Abdulla Al Dah**, Chief Executive Officer, Al Shaab Village, the destination has been able to place itself at the centre on the map of Sharjah tourism sector.

Currently, their discount booklet especially made for travel agents, tour operators, hoteliers and other partners brings in a lot more value for visitors. The state-of-the-art exhibition centre has many offerings for the entire family. During the time of national holidays, special campaigns are run that offer valuable prizes and surprises to visitors.



Abdulla Al Dah  
CEO  
Al Shaab Village

Al Shaab's presence at international exhibitions along with the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority enables them to build and strengthen partnerships with many feeder markets that prefer to visit Sharjah. Residents from Sharjah, GCC and other emirates are regular visitors that keep soaring the numbers. Over the past few years, Al Shaab has witnessed over 250,000 visitors and its new refurbishment plan set to take place soon

will place them on an even higher level as there is nothing similar in the emirate.

The term 'village' is used to ensure that Sharjah's cultural identity is maintained and preserved. Housing the first and largest ice rink in the emirate of Sharjah with over 240 stands, 52 products on food, textile, cosmetics, accessories, etc, Al Shaab Village has an edge over all the malls in the emirate as it has both indoor and outdoor amusement parks. Once the outdoor park is turned to an air-conditioned indoor park with rides, the attraction is sure to receive a lot more visitors. The seven-screen multiplex cinemas operated by Oscar Cinema entertains visitors with a mix of Arabic, English and Hindi movies. Billiards, snooker, play station and computer games provide entertainment for all the tech-savvy youngsters



who wish to spend time with friends. For the younger kids, Fun House provides special care service while the parents shop at the venue. Al Shaab Village has been established as a family destination with products from different countries with additional products from India, China, among others.

**Al Dah** says, "We want the tourists and residents of Sharjah to be amazed by the offerings in store and

ensure that they return for more on their next visit. Our participation at roadshows with Sharjah tourism and international exhibitions like ITB Berlin, WTM London and ATM Dubai provides us more networking opportunities to ensure the growth of visitor numbers.

Most travel agents and tour operators who have brought in their clients have left with a very positive attitude.

I have a very good and supportive team that partakes in strengthening the facility." 🌟



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# Blueground: The new hospitality disruptor

Dubai-based start up, Blueground is an international corporate hospitality industry disruptor with over 150 fully-furnished rental apartments in various popular areas in Dubai. **Amine Housni**, Co-founder and Head, Blueground, UAE, tells **TRAVTALK** about its recent expansion in New York and future plans.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

**Q** Please shed light on this new venture for travellers.

Blueground is an internationally-awarded tech-backed hospitality company with presence in Dubai, Istanbul, New York and Athens. We offer furnished and equipped apartments to business travellers, for durations of one month or longer. Our specialisation is in corporate travel, covering the needs of both individual travellers and companies that look for accommodation for their executives. Currently, we operate more than 180 high-quality apartments in some of the most popular areas of Dubai including City Walk, the Marina, JBR, DIFC, Downtown, etc. Globally, we have reached 700 rental apartments.

**Q** What was the concept behind starting something of this nature?

We lease brand new or fully renovated properties from their owners, upgrade and convert them into best-in-class rentals, especially designed to meet the needs of modern business travellers. With the help of our in-house developed technology, we have managed to automate all aspects of our business, significantly simplifying the booking process among others. We have also launched a mobile app for guests to enhance their experience so that they can find important information about their property like access to Wi-Fi, extra services, locating important points of interest in the neighbourhood and many more. This business



Amine Housni  
Co-founder and Head  
Blueground, UAE

**For agents, either from relocation, travel or recruiting agencies, we can be their trusted partner, ensuring to meet travellers' needs**

model helps us to hold a cost and a convenience differentiation compared



to hotels and other serviced apartments of comparable quality.

Blueground was born out of one of the co-founders experience as a management consultant. He stayed in various hotels in Europe, Africa and Asia for stretches of 1 to 12 months at a time for more than five years. After extensive research, we found out that the business traveller and expat accommodation market globally is huge, estimated at \$135 billion. We spotted a gap in the accommodation market and decided to fill it in the best possible way.

**Q** Who is the target audience? Where are they from?

We target two main groups—corporate clients who handle accommodation for their personnel and individual business travellers as well as freelancers, athletes and artists who need accommodation for themselves, for mid to long-term duration. To date, we have welcomed more than 3000 guests from all over the world.

**Q** What are the reasons to target business travellers?

Business travellers are a notoriously demanding group to serve. Modern business travellers need an accommodation solution that is reliable, flexible and with very high service levels. Also, they look for efficiency in processes, including an easy-to-follow online booking process, instant customer support etc. At Blueground, we are in the position to serve them as anybody else. Specifically, unlike hotels we offer larger spaces, full privacy, fully equipped kitchen, and a homely environment, while compared to traditional serviced apartments operators, we offer ongoing guest

support, high-tech amenities and modern apartments. Our prices are 30-50 per cent lower as compared to hotels and other serviced apartments of similar standards.

**Q** Is there any benefit to agents as well?

For the agents, either from relocation, travel or recruiting agencies, we can be their trusted partner, ensuring to meet their travellers' needs in the best possible way. When an agent comes to us, they know they have nothing to worry about. We work with many agents from the region and abroad, while receiving more and more requests everyday. 📞



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# Are 'smart' hotels future of the industry?

Every hotel operator, who wants to remain competitive and relevant in this day and age of technological revolution, regardless of the size or type of property, will have to embrace devices powered by Internet of Things and related wireless innovations by next year to enhance guest experiences.

The problem with technology as a term in hospitality lies in its ubiquitousness so much so that it becomes difficult to single out the most important developments for the next five years. Hoteliers have been cautious of technology taking away the human effect from the guest service and experience. Rapid advances and disruptive technology is a constant challenge at an age where Artificial Intelligence (AI), wearable technology and Virtual Reality (VR) will soon become the norm. The smart 'hotel of the future' will have access to these technologies which can accelerate service, personalise guest experience and build resource allocations to support guest requests, enable preventative maintenance and improve employee productivity.

## Technology and Millennials

We all know reliable Wi-Fi and IPTV are now as vital to guests as much as hot water and clean sheets. But with millennials, the spending power increases with every passing year, which means more travel and hotel stays. The entire experience right from booking to check-out is expected to be seamless with as little direct human interaction as possible. Hotel operators will have to take this into consideration in the design stages of their hotels. A fully automated mobile payment system, via an online payment gateway using smartphones along with robust cyber security and tokenised payment methods ensuring complete security of guest credit card data, is becoming essential for an excellent guest experience at the booking stage.

## AI and Hotels

From booking engines to chatbots and voice command software for room allocations – this may seem like a scene right out of a sci-fi movie, but is in fact a reality today. Customers facing AI robotic concierges and luggage handlers (already operational in some Aloft hotels) are getting a lot of media attention. In Japan, cyborgs programmed to make eye contact and respond with multilingual ability check you into hotels.

The question here is that should technology totally replace personal interactions or should the two coexist? Digital assistants like Alexa and Siri lack human warmth, charm and personal connection, and yet perhaps this is what millennials want today.

## Location Awareness & BLE Beacons

Location-based services opens a world of delightful experiences. By deploying Bluetooth-enabled IoT Beacon sensors along with the latest location-aware mobility throughout the property, guests can be automatically recognised as soon as they step into the hotel premise. As they proceed through the lobby, they can receive an automated update, via the hotel's mobile app on the status of their room. Keyless entry via smartphone is the future. A "key" with an encrypted code is sent via a push notification by the hotel to the guest's phone, along with a message about the room number. The hotel room door unlocks when the smartphone with the code is held near it.

Advanced in-room controls are another technology

of the future. The moment the guest enters the room, sensors turn the lights and the air conditioning on. Once in the room, the hotel's IoT-enabled and location-aware infrastructure will work in other ways. Property owners can deploy navigation features within the hotel's mobile app to guide guests to food and beverage and all amenities in the property as an option, again using BLE beacons.

## Asset Tags

Luggage cart delay is often the case of guest frustration. Cost-effective asset tracking technologies via asset tags added to a location-based solution can enable hotel staff or even guests to locate carts for quick retrieval on the hotel's mobile app. Another use case could be that the asset tag is used to track how long an asset remains stationary, for example in a

guest room, and then alert staff so that they can take action like calling the guest to find out whether he/she has finished. The hospitality industry surely has an exciting future, given the continuous evolution of technology.

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



**Graeme Kane**  
Hospitality Business Development  
Manager—Middle East, Mediterranean  
& Africa, Aruba

# Proactive approach to capture markets

The German leisure market has been proven to be the most lucrative in the tourism sector. As pioneers of tourism, tourists from the German market have evolved over the years but their basic requirements when on holiday remain intact. Industry experts share their opinions with TRAVTALK.



“Figures show that the average length of stay of leisure visitors from the German market in Dubai is above 10 days. This offers considerable potential and fits well with other corporate and short stay business that we enjoy at the Ghaya Grand Hotel Dubai. DMCs have reported strong growth in meetings and events from Germany, as well as leisure travel. The staging of ITB Berlin will enable us to get across the message that our hotel enjoys an excellent location in new Dubai, close to shopping malls, golf courses, beaches and other landmarks. At this year's event, we will portray that for long-stay guests, this will offer a cost-effective alternative to full-service hotel rooms, without forsaking all amenities of a five-star property. ITB is a chance to understand business trends and give us an insight of 2018-19 expectations. We will continue to renew contracts with our existing suppliers and enter new partnerships.”



**Olwin Desouza**  
General Manager  
Ghaya Grand Hotel

“Discussing new business opportunities and meeting potential business partners during the upcoming exhibition will be our top priority. Germany is one of the top feeder markets for not only UAE but for us too. Having such a unique wellness concept is allowing us to target both the key German tour operators and niche wellness travel agents. This is our first ITB Berlin after the official opening of The Retreat Palm Dubai MGallery by Sofitel. Our goal is to create awareness about our holistic wellbeing concept and expand wider into key international markets.”



**Samir Arora**  
General Manager, The  
Retreat Palm Dubai  
MGallery by Sofitel

“ITB Berlin gives us the ideal opportunity to further enhance our relationship with key partners and establish ourselves in new markets. For many years, the German market has proved consistent for our hotel. However, due to the ever-increasing number of properties available in the marketplace, it's vital that we maintain our presence. The hotel's location is one of its key strengths, as it's centrally situated and very close to Mall of the Emirates. Although we're not exhibiting, we look forward to learning about the latest news from the international tourism industry, as well as meeting our fellow professionals and promoting our five-star luxury property. We're confident that our presence at the event will boost the productivity of our future endeavours.”



**Shahzad Butt**, General  
Manager, Coral Dubai Al  
Barsha Hotel

“Being involved in an exhibition like this helps us build new opportunities, gain more guests and open up new markets. The German market with our property is quite nominal because Rose Park Hotel is a new property in the market and this exhibition will be an edge to maximise this market share. Meeting new groups of people, involving business-to-business, exchanging knowledge and opportunities will be our main approach to the event as our presence is more important than the result. Expectations will remain high but we understand the ground reality that Rose Park Hotel is brand new in the market and will take some time to get the desired results.”



**Thameem Razick**  
Director of Sales &  
Marketing  
Rose Hotels & Hotel  
Apartments



# DTCM's drive to attract millennials

Premiering its first initiative to attract millennials to Dubai, the tourism arm of the emirate featured a popular song by a young Korean band for the first time at the largest choreographed fountain in the world in Emaar's Downtown Dubai known as the Dubai Fountain.

TT BUREAU

Millennials, over the past few years, have become the most important tourist segment especially to the emirate of Dubai and to some of the European countries. Entertainment tourism is one initiative which aims to attract millennials in this part of the world. With more millennial travellers seeking destinations that would provide them memorable experiences, many places are planning itineraries to accommodate this segment of tourism.

The Dubai Fountain is widely recognised as one of the most impressive musical fountains of the world, artistically interwoven with music, lasers and light. The 'must-see' attraction has a rich, dynamic collection of performances encompassing many musical traditions, each one be-



Issam Kazim  
CEO, Dubai Corporation for Tourism  
and Commerce Marketing

ing uniquely expressive in its interpretation. With its vibrant musical and visual experience set on the 23.81-acre Burj Lake within Downtown Dubai, The Dubai Fountain can reach a height of 140 metres and is equipped with powerful nozzles capable of shooting water higher than a 45-storey building. The beam of light shining upward from the fountain can be seen from more than 30 kilometres

away. Different combinations of water forms created by 6,000 WET superlights and 25 colour projectors perform to selected musical pieces—chosen from a range of classical to contemporary Arabic and world music.

The popular song 'Power' by Korean supergroup Exo recently introduced to the audience as part of a dancing performance aimed at attracting the growing millennial tourism market. The band members of Exo were present at The Dubai Fountain to witness the inaugural performance of 'Power'. The entire area was cordoned off as thousands of millennial tourists from the GCC flew over to witness the evening alongside the Dubai Shopping Festival.

**Issam Kazim**, CEO, Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Market-



ing, said, "We are dedicated to bringing world-class entertainment to visitors of Dubai. We are pleased to be able to provide our Korean visitors with a unique rendition of one of their country's most popular songs."

K-Pop boyband Exo made its debut in 2012 and the song 'Power' is Exo's newest hit; it was released in September 2017, and has topped the charts in various K-Pop markets. 'Power' will now stay

in rotation, as the first K-Pop song to ever be included as part of The Dubai Fountain's world-renowned repertoire. Describing their feelings on seeing the show for the first time, Exo, commented, "This ties in with the very essence of The Dubai Fountain itself, a place where visitors from all around the world gather to enjoy the truly spectacular fountain show." Commenting on the newest addition to The Dubai Fountain's playlist,

**Ahmad Al Falasi**, Executive Director—Group Operations, Emaar Properties, said, "The Dubai Fountain in Downtown Dubai offers visitors a truly uplifting experience. The fountain presents a diversity of musical choices that reflect the cosmopolitan outlook of our city. The addition of 'Power' adds to the repertoire of The Dubai Fountain's musical selection with the vibrant beats of the song set to appeal to a large cross-section of people."

## Tune Protect enhances insurance products

Regional online technology facilitator of travel insurance, Tune Protect partnered with Buruj Cooperative Insurance to unveil a new suite of international travel assurance products with benefits catering to the evolving needs of travellers to and from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

TT BUREAU

Tune Protect, the regional online technology facilitator of travel insurance has an exclusive partnership with Riyadh-based Buruj Cooperative Insurance. The new suite of international travel assurance products are designed to suit the needs of the astute travellers from or to Saudi Arabia, whether they are flying to or from

their destinations for holiday or business.

"Saudi Arabia is the 13<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world and the largest country in the Middle East. With a GDP per capita estimated at \$54,100 (in 2016), the partnership with Buruj combines their local knowledge and our technology that will enable travellers from or to Saudi Arabia avail the various innovative and smart travel protection products," says **Arijit Munshi**, General Manager, Tune Protect.

Munshi adds, "Keeping Buruj's customers' priorities and preferences in mind, our travel insurance products in partnership with Buruj is to protect both outbound and inbound travellers to the



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

Kingdom so that they can enjoy their travel with complete peace of mind."

"The partnership with Tune Protect, for travellers from or visiting Saudi Arabia can be assured that they have access to new and innovative travel protection products, whether they are travelling for business or on holiday or visiting family or friends within

**The partnership with Buruj combines their local knowledge and our technology that will enable travellers from or to Saudi Arabia avail the various innovative and smart travel protection products**

the Kingdom," said **Samer Kunj**, General Manager, Buruj Cooperative Insurance Company.

**This technology collaboration has resulted in Buruj offerings for the travellers from or to Saudi to avail various travel protection needs:**

- **Outbound and Inbound International Travel Insurance**, with options for protection before, during and after international travel. These plans are also Schengen-compliant and can be

availed for travel both worldwide or worldwide excluding USA and Canada.

- **Outbound International Travel Insurance for Travel Cancellation:** Travellers will be happy to know that they can insure their holiday packages, allowing them to recover the cost of the air fare, accommodation, tour packages, cruise, and other travel-related bookings if unable to travel due to insurable reasons. The cancellation can

be done before the travel, as well as during the travel, in case they need to cut short the travel due to insurable reasons approved by Buruj Cooperative Insurance.

- **Outbound & Inbound International Travel Insurance - Travel Safe:** Beneficial specifically for business or corporate travel, these offering covers travel and baggage delays, as well as loss or damage of baggage by the airline.
- **Inbound International Travel Visit Insurance:** Those visiting friends, relatives and business associates in the Kingdom from anywhere in the world can subscribe to the protection for 30, 60 or 90 days.





# Jet Airways celebrates a decade in the Gulf

India's premier private carrier, Jet Airways celebrates a milestone of having flown over 25 million guests over the past decade between the Gulf region and India. Connecting with some of the most important cities and states in India, Jet Airways aspires to further enhance their operations in the Gulf region.

TT BUREAU

The first Jet Airways flight 9W 592 landed in Bahrain in 2008, marking an important milestone for the airline, as it was the first privately-owned Indian carrier to provide direct air connectivity between the Gulf region and India. Over time, the airline expanded services to include Abu Dhabi,

having completed a decade of successful operations in the Gulf which have played a significant role not only in growing our business but also in the realisation of the airline's vision of connecting India with the world. Today, we are the preferred carrier on the Indo-Gulf sector and remain committed towards maintaining that position. We take this opportunity

“We are delighted at having completed a decade of successful operations in the Gulf which have played a significant role not only in growing our business but also in the realisation of the airline's vision of connecting India with the world. Today, we are the preferred carrier on the Indo-Gulf sector and remain committed towards maintaining that position.”

**Shakir Kantawala**

*Vice President-Gulf, Middle East & Africa, Jet Airways*



trade community, for their unstinted support that has stood us in good stead.”

Kantawala also added, “We would like to reiterate our commitment to providing guests from the Gulf region an exceptional flying experience, characterised by convenience, seamless connections to India and the world, and Jet Airways' trademark spirit of Indian hospitality. Our operations in the Gulf provide a unique gateway for connecting to not just 44 destinations in India but also onwards to Bangkok, Colombo, Dhaka, Hong Kong, Kathmandu, and Singapore in the East and the Far East. In addition, our codeshares and interline partnerships with leading airlines help us connect our guests to several other destinations in Africa, Europe and North America.”

With the Gulf accounting for over nearly 50 percent of the originating air traffic to/from India\*, the region represents a huge market in terms of passengers. Along with its strategic partner—Etihad Airways, Jet Airways

is the most preferred carrier on the Indo-Gulf sector. Additionally, with growing economic ties between India and countries in the Gulf, Jet Airways is expanding its cargo operations on this sector, in tandem.

The airline offers over 1700 tons of weekly cargo capacity on the India – Gulf – India route, using a mix of B-737 and Airbus A330 services. Commodity mix from India to Gulf includes perishables like fruits, vegetables, meat, and consignments like courier, garments, fabrics, pharmaceuticals. Valuable comprising of jewelry, as also leather and leather products are uplifted as cargo capacity on the India – Gulf routes. Out of the Gulf destinations, cargo items on shipment to India comprise of Courier consignments, unaccompanied baggage, and miscellaneous items. The percentage growth in the dense India – Gulf market has been rather impressive over the last ten years, where uplift/tonnage ex-India has notched up to 462 per cent and Gulf to India has been 365 per cent. This massive growth can be attributed to the airline's reliable services, coupled with customer service excellence and innovative marketing by

Jet Airways' Cargo.

India's No. 1 airline has also executed numerous guest benefit programmes under its 'Think India, Think Jet Airways' campaign to ensure the guests can avail the best flying experience at an unmatched value proposition. The airline has introduced several avant-garde solutions such as 'Priority Advantage', #JetAdvance, Fare Lock and Fare Choices aimed at expanding convenience for its guests. Offering its wide-body services on select flights, the airline's guests over the years have enjoyed its hallmark in-flight services, delectable menu options, carefully curated wine and liquor selection, endless hours of award winning in-flight entertainment and the warmth of our Indian welcome.

Dammam, Doha, Dubai, Jeddah, Kuwait, Muscat, Riyadh and Sharjah to its Gulf network. In the course of completing a decade of successful operations, Jet Airways has flown nearly 200,000 flights, carrying over 25 million guests between India and the Gulf region. Today, the airline operates 600+ weekly flights on 33 unique routes between India and the Gulf.

**Shakir Kantawala**, Vice President-Gulf, Middle East & Africa, Jet Airways, said, “We are delighted at

to express our sincere gratitude to all the regional Gulf Governments as well their national Civil Aviation authorities for constant

guidance and encouragement. We also thank all our patrons - the vast multitude of expatriate Indians who travel us while visiting families and friends, as well as the travel



## Flying High

Jet Airways provides a unique gateway for connecting the Gulf region to 44 destinations in India and also onwards to Bangkok, Colombo, Dhaka, Hong Kong, Kathmandu, and Singapore





# Savour a slice of 'Culinary Germany' in UAE

Since January 2017, the German National Tourist Office (GNTO) is represented through the German Emirati Joint Council for Industry and Commerce (AHK) in Business Bay. **Sigrid de Mazieres**, Director-Gulf countries, GNTO tells **TRAVTALK** about the great synergies they are leveraging on in the Emirates.

**SHEHARA RIZLY**

## Q What are the latest plans for UAE in terms of marketing strategy?

We are thrilled to kick off our central annual campaign 'Culinary Germany' to promote 'Destination Germany' in 2018 with special focus on Germany's food landscape. We look forward to taking travellers on a culinary journey filled with wonderful travel memories. 'Culinary Germany' will lie at the heart of all our GCC-wide cross-media marketing activities, aimed at raising Germany's profile as an attractive year-round destination.

## Q Which are the unique offerings that attract UAE tourists to Germany?

Germany has something for everyone – be it culture

and entertainment in Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg or Cologne, romantic river valleys, medieval castles and unspoiled nature. Throughout the country, visitors can enjoy amazing shopping facilities, excellent infrastructure and many gastronomic delights. As the birth place of Martin Luther, Albert Einstein and Karl Marx, Germany is also a replete with a lot of history.

## Q How important is the GCC market?

The GCC travelling audience is of major importance to the German tourism industry and the local travel industry is well equipped to cater to visitors from the region. In 2016, we had over 2,039,837 overnight stays from GCC nationals and we are positive about attracting more GCC travellers to Germany after demand slightly softened in 2017. 'Culinary



Sigrid de Mazieres  
Director-Gulf countries  
GNTO

**In 2016, we had over 2,039,837 overnight stays from GCC nationals. We are positive about attracting more**

Germany' has a strong appeal to a wide range of travellers and we expect it will steadily boost tourism numbers over the coming

months. Looking at the future, the GNTO forecasts 3.6 million overnight stays until 2030 from the GCC region.

## Q What is the average spend by the tourists from UAE to Germany?

The GCC is one of the top 20 source markets for Germany. GCC travellers tend to stay 11 nights on average and with 4,683 euro per person and trip, they spend comparatively more than other international travel audiences. Germany also remains a very popular destination for medical tourism, which results in longer stays with family members for medical treatments.

## Q What is the recommended itinerary and preferable months to visit Germany?

Southern Germany and particularly Munich has traditionally been the hotspot for most GCC travellers. Our aim as the National German Tourist Office is to highlight the great variety Germany has to offer all year round, be it the breathtaking natural landscapes of the diversity of the North Sea Coast with its quaint North Frisian islands, the stunning Thuringian countryside with its famous Wartburg castle or the less explored cities of Dusseldorf, Dresden, Leipzig and Stuttgart.

## Q Which segment of tourists mostly visit Germany?

The majority of visitors from the UAE come for leisure, especially during the summer months. It is a destination where you can easily spend one or two months without getting bored as it is

so diverse. Around 29 per cent is business travel and visitors often tend to extend their trips by a few days. Medical tourism is also a key driver as Germany is well-known for its high-quality health system and medical care.

## Q Will you be encouraging MICE tourism? If so, what are the incentives for agents?

In general, we have a strong line up of different events and educational initiatives in the pipeline for the travel trade this year. Travel events such as Arabian Travel Market (ATM) where we will have a strong presence along with roadshows and other activities will ensure that travel agents, tour operators and other industry professionals will be kept updated with the latest happenings in 'Destination Germany'.

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# Sharjah Collection to preserve heritage

Last year at the Arabian Travel Market, Shurooq unveiled the Sharjah Collection, the first local luxury hospitality brand to further strengthen the emirate's tourist sector and reinforce its position as one of the leading destinations at local and regional levels. **HE Marwan Al Serkal**, CEO, Shurooq, speaks with **TRAVTALK** about this initiative.

**SHEHARA RIZLY**

**Q Please share some information in the Sharjah Collection.**

The first phase of the Sharjah Collection portfolio, developed by Shurooq across the emirate, comprises Al Badayer Oasis at Al Badayer desert; Kingfisher Lodge in Kalba as part of the Kalba ecotourism project; and Fossil Rock Lodge at the Mleiha Archaeological. As far as the development progress is concerned, the Kingfisher Lodge is 90 per cent complete, while the Fossil Rock Lodge stands at 80 per cent. We will be looking to welcome our first visitors in the next few months. Last November, Shurooq appoint-

ed Mantis, a global boutique hotels brand and a management consultant to manage all hospitality facilities and lodges under the umbrella of Sharjah Collection, in a strategic partnership dedicated to preserving the spirit of local culture and heritage. Mantis has enormous expertise and experience in managing sustainable hospitality facilities worldwide and has won many prestigious international hospitality awards.

**Q Kingfisher Lodge would be the first eco lodge to be established in the region. Could you explain its importance and facilities?**

Kingfisher Lodge features 30 five-star luxury

tents, ten of which are allocated for the main building, spa and conference hall, while the remaining 20 are for guests. The construction of the tents and adjoining pools in each unit is already complete. The tents will deliver prime services to visitors with an opportunity to engage in the natural surroundings. Guests are also offered an array of outdoor leisure activities, such as kayaking around the mangrove reserves and walking along the beach of the Indian Ocean. The infrastructure of the Kingfisher Lodge is also complete, as is the space dedicated to fitness activities and conference hall. The spa, main reception tent, restaurant and other facilities are nearing completion.

**“The tents at Kingfisher Lodge will deliver prime services to visitors with an opportunity to engage in the natural surroundings. Guests are also offered an array of outdoor leisure activities, such as kayaking around the mangrove reserves and walking along the beach of the Indian Ocean.”**

**HE Marwan Al Serkal**  
CEO, Shurooq



As a luxury hospitality development, Kingfisher Lodge is one of Shurooq's flagship ecotourism projects with widespread international appeal. More and more tourists are seeking a five-star experience within a natural environment, and Kingfisher Lodge provides just that perfectly, making it

one of the region's most desirable vacation destinations.

**Q Shurooq was the initiator for ecotourism in Sharjah. What plans does it have to promote this concept in the years to come?**

Tourism has become a key driver in Sharjah's diver-

**Q Could you share some plans for 2018 by Shurooq on other projects to develop the emirate of Sharjah?**

There is a number of groundbreaking developments with projects such as the AED 2.4 billion Maryam Island, AED 155 Kalba Waterfront and the AED 107 million Palace Al Khan. These are set to change the residential, retail, commercial and community landscape in Sharjah. Eagle Hills, for example, is playing an extremely high-profile role in the real estate sector, focusing on niche projects that offer distinctive lifestyle options in the emirate. The aim is to celebrate Sharjah's unique history, heritage and culture. Maintaining, devel-



sified economy by attracting visitors who are looking for a different experience in terms of heritage, culture, luxury environmental facilities and adventure tourism. From five-star accommodation giving a glimpse into traditional Emirati living to historic desert lodges, the emirate's innovative ecotourism projects offer a unique experience within the region. As people become more concerned about the environment, local, regional and international tourism is changing towards a far more environmentally conscious experience. The Sharjah Collection reflects that in all of its projects and will continue to promote each development as an ideal destination to what is a fairly niche but constantly growing market.

oping and creating infrastructure around Sharjah is an ongoing process which will benefit communities around the emirate as cities such as Mleiha, Kalba and Khorfakkan.

## Maiden Eco Lodge

- Kingfisher Lodge is one of Shurooq's flagship ecotourism projects with widespread international appeal
- Kingfisher Lodge provides tourists with a five-star experience within a natural environment
- The emirate's innovative ecotourism projects offer a unique experience within the region with a glimpse of traditional Emirati living to historic desert lodges



# Dubai strengthens its association base

Strengthening its stand as the hub of regional and international associations, Dubai organised the inaugural Dubai Association Conference with over 300 delegates, including associations and industry experts from 32 countries.

TT BUREAU

The two-day event was hosted by the Dubai Association Centre (DAC), a joint initiative of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) and Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC).

**Hazel Jackson**, CEO, Biz Group UAE kick-started the event with an interesting dialogue with the founders—**His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri**, Director General, DTCM and DWTC, and **His Excellency Hamad Buamim**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry. They discussed their vision for growing the association market community in Dubai and the wider Middle East region.



HE Helal Saeed Almarri  
Director General  
DTCM and DWTC

Almarri said, "The inaugural Dubai Association Conference marks an important step in Dubai's journey to becoming a key hub for associations. The combination of international and local speakers provides a rich programme for all delegates while the strong attendance reflects the enthusiasm for knowledge sharing and professional development in this field. Almost 50 associations have already established a presence here through the Dubai Association Centre.



HE Hamad Buamim  
President and Chief Executive Officer,  
Dubai Chamber of Commerce  
and Industry

Each of these associations has the potential to work with Dubai Business Events to bring more major business events to the city and, in turn contribute to international visitor growth."

Buamim opined, "The premier event provided an ideal setting for association representatives to engage with public and private sector stakeholders, and address key issues of the global association community. We look forward to building on this

progress by using the conference and the Dubai Association Centre platform to attract more associations and international events to Dubai, and promote associations as an integral part of Dubai's economy and value proposition."

**Susan Robertson**, President, American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) Foundation, USA highlighted the unique opportunities on how associations can contribute towards the growth of their country's economy, competitiveness and quality of life in her session titled 'The impact of associations'. "The role we all play is to make the world better, smarter and safer – that is the work of associations around the world. We have the power to affect resources, knowledge and practices around the world."

The conference provided an excellent platform for



networking and knowledge sharing among delegates who attended the sessions as the number of associations steadily grow across the Middle East region. Held on the theme 'Building a Community', the Dubai Association Conference brought together association executives, government representatives, university faculties and students, as well as professionals interested in forming associations.

**Noah Raford**, COO and Futurist-in-Chief, Dubai Future Foundation and **Samir Hamrouni**, CEO, World Free Zones Organisation,

discussed how associations and governments can work together in embracing new technology. "Dubai and the UAE were 100 per cent oil-based economy 30 years ago; today oil contributes to just 30 per cent of the economy. So, the Dubai journey started by seeing what is happening outside and investing heavily to diversify the economy within the UAE," Hamrouni shared.

The second day of the conference focused on skills development for association executives and sharing of best practices from around the world to provide attendees with the required tools.



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# Personalised digital experiences on Yas

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 highly personalised digital journey, enhancing Yas Island's destination appeal to global leisure and business travellers.

TT BUREAU

The infrastructure across theme parks on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi was developed earlier this year to enable the launch of the platform's digital assets and deliver a wall-less resort vision. The digital transformation project represents the next chapter in Miral's wider plans to combine its portfolio of unique attractions with unrivalled visitor experiences as it seeks to attract domestic, regional and international visitors. The first phase of the project will roll out during the first half of 2018. The online and mobile visitor engagement is set to be transformed with the iconic Ferrari World Abu Dhabi theme park, Yas Waterworld, Yas Island and the new theme park and attractions planned for next year.

"Providing guests with immersive wall-less experiences has always been at the heart of Yas Island's vision," commented **Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi**, CEO, Miral. "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 enabled that will provide guests with unique experiences," added Al Zaabi.

As soon as the guests' journey starts with 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 wall-less experience will allow visitors to enjoy multiple immersive



Narayan Iyer, Vice President, Asia-Pacific, Middle East and India, Cognizant (Left) with Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi, CEO of Miral (center)

experiences seamlessly on their smartphone or digital device, with the opportunity to personalise their interaction with the family during their stay on Yas Island. The project is supported by an integrated cloud-based platform allowing Miral to meet the needs of Yas Island's visitors and business partners through customer ex-

perience management tools. Miral has partnered leading specialists in digital transformation as well as customer experience management. It has also partnered with SapienRazorfish, part of Publicis. Sapien and Cognizant who together have forged the backbone of the project with development teams deployed on-site at Yas Island.

"SapienRazorfish is excited to partner with Miral on its digital transformation journey, which will create and deliver value for the Yas Island destination and its global visitors," said **Nigel Vaz**, CEO, Publicis Sapient International. "In a world driven by the exponential pace of technology advancement and changing customer expectations, Miral has demonstrated the ability to reimagine the world-class theme park experience of the future. By bringing our expert capabilities in business consulting, creativity, technology and data science, we look forward to helping Miral truly transform the visitor experience to its unrivalled attractions through connected

and immersive experiences," added Vaz.

"We are pleased to leverage our analytics, cloud 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.

The platform provides Miral with a limitless opportunity to expand its guest experiences as it focuses on creating tomorrow's destinations in Abu Dhabi. Yas Island also offers a range of sporting and entertainment experiences such as Yas Marina Circuit, seven hotels, year-round events, a live performance and concert arena, an 18-hole championship golf course, a marina, a beach, Yas Mall and the Yas Bay. 🌊



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# Travelport launches airline offerings

Travelport unveiled its product roadmap to extend its content offering to airline customers using the International Air Transport Association (IATA) New Distribution Capability (NDC) standard. This will enable travel agency customers to access such content via Travelport's platform.



In December 2017, Travelport was the first and is still the only GDS operator to achieve IATA's highest certification as an NDC Level



Stephen Shurrock  
Chief Commercial Officer  
Travelport

**Building on our unique NDC Level 3 status, we are extending our range of products ready for the era of airline distribution**

3 Aggregator. The company is now consolidating and extending its lead by industrialising its NDC capability and incorporating NDC content within its suite of products for airlines and travel agencies. These products will allow travel agencies to connect through Travelport's platform in a single workflow combining traditional content and new NDC content. They will be optimised continuously based on the evaluation of users and customers.

Travelport plans to include NDC content within an initial set of products - an industrialised connection for airlines that connects via NDC-standard APIs and a point of sale companion application for travel agencies offering NDC-enabled content alongside the GDS workflow in Travelport Smartpoint desktop.

This integrated app will be launched from Travelport Smartpoint for ease of use alongside the existing processes and will be

This integrated display and search response will be the foundation for all future releases, both through API and desktop. The NDC-en-

abled content will augment already extensive API content within Travelport Merchandising Suite. Travelport already connects to 24 airlines through APIs and expects to announce the first of many NDC-enabled airline partnerships soon. NDC integration is being developed in collaboration with a select number of

agents and airlines who are providing continuous feedback. This group includes major agencies such as Travix and BidTravel. These partnerships will enable Travelport to ensure its NDC integration serves the needs of all its stakeholders.

"Building on our unique NDC Level 3 status, we are extending our range of products ready for the new mixed-economy era of airline distribution. With our NDC-enabled products, we intend to maintain this as we seamlessly, speedily and accurately deliver the broadest range of bookable content to our customers," says **Stephen Shurrock**, Chief Commercial Officer, Travelport.

**Yanik Hoyles**, Director—NDC Program, IATA added, "Following its achievement as



Yanik Hoyles  
Director—NDC Program  
IATA

**We congratulate Travelport on its continued progress in developing products for this new era and look forward to their initial launch**

the first GDS to become NDC Level 3 certified as an aggregator, we congratulate Travelport on its continued progress in developing products for this new era and look forward to their initial launch later this year." 📱

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# Mobile App for Rove Hotels

Rove Hotels launched its new mobile application to enhance guest experience by offering services accessible via smartphones.



Designed for the new generation traveller who recognises value, stays connected through technology and gravitates towards culturally inspiring environments, the new Rove Hotels mobile

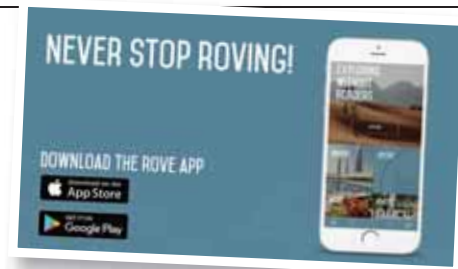
App offers users an unprecedented range of experiences, and enables them to discover the diverse amenities at each individual hotel. The App is integrated with the hotel reservation system, making booking rooms easier and hassle-free. In addition

to being connected to social media platforms, the App can send notifications containing relevant information about special offers. The 'Rove Around' feature gives users a glimpse of events happening in the city, while Dubai City Guide serves as a defini-

tive guide for exploring the city. There are 360-degree interactive video tours and image galleries too that will enable potential guests to gain informed insights about each hotel. **Paul Bridger**, Corporate Director of Operations, Rove Hotels, says, "The App

builds on our mobile-first digital transformation strategy through which we aim to offer our guests and visitors a seamless customer service experience. The Rove Hotels Mobile App is a perfect fit for the 'Rover,' the new generation of smart, tech-savvy

travellers." The Rove Hotels Mobile App will also include the six upcoming Rove Hotels properties in Dubai. The app is available for iOS and Android. Rove Hotels partnered with Go Find It Technologies SA for the development of the mobile application. 📱



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# Oaks Beirut all set to debut this year

Slated to open by mid-2018, Minor Hotels will unveil the Oaks brand in Beirut with 110 rooms located at Sodeco, a commercial area of Beirut, approximately five minutes' drive from the central downtown area and 15 minutes from Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport.

TT BUREAU

Previously operating as Hotel de Ville Beirut, the property is currently closed for a full refurbishment and is set to re-launch as Oaks. The group has signed a management agreement with Allied In-

vestment Group to operate Oaks Beirut. Bringing Oaks' smart simplicity to a new destination, the property will provide modern accommodation with a selection of guest rooms and suites, an all-day dining restaurant, a lounge bar and café, a roof-

top pool and bar, and dedicated conference facilities.

6,000 guest rooms under its management.

**Dillip Rajakarier**, CEO, Minor Hotels, said, "We are excited to announce the forthcoming debut of our Oaks brand in Lebanon later this year.

Adding Lebanon to Minor Ho-

tels' footprint has considerable strategic value and we are very pleased to be partnering with Allied Investment Group to launch our first hotel in the country. Beirut is a dynamic city with so much to offer and is widely regarded as one of the most influential trend-setters in the region."

**Joseph Nemer**, Owner and CEO, Allied Investment Group, said, "Allied Investment Group is delighted to partner with Minor Hotels to bring their Australian-rooted Oaks brand to Lebanon. The refurbishment of the hotel is underway and we look forward to launching Oaks Beirut later this year."



**Allied Investment Group is delighted to partner with Minor Hotels to bring their Australian-rooted Oaks brand to Lebanon. The refurbishment of the hotel is underway and we look forward to launching Oaks Beirut later this year**

**Joseph Nemer**  
Owner and CEO

**Adding Lebanon to Minor Hotels' footprint has considerable strategic value and we are very pleased to be partnering with Allied Investment Group to launch our first hotel in the country**

**Dillip Rajakarier**  
CEO, Minor Hotels



vestment Group to operate Oaks Beirut. Bringing Oaks' smart simplicity to a new destination, the property will provide modern accommodation with a selection of guest rooms and suites, an all-day dining restaurant, a lounge bar and café, a roof-

ments in central city locations and resort destinations. The brand's growing portfolio currently comprises 56 properties across five countries – Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, India and the United Arab Emirates, with more than

Minor Hotels currently operates two Oaks properties in the United Arab Emirates – the 165-room Oaks Liwa Heights in Dubai and the 54-room Oaks Liwa Executive Suites in Abu Dhabi. In total, across the

Middle East region, Minor Hotels operates 13 properties across four of its brands – Anantara, Avani, Tivoli and Oaks – and has a further strong pipeline in the region across these four brands. 📍

## Luxuriate at Park Regis

In its efforts to expand its brand, StayWell Holdings recently opened a second property in Dubai, one which is of an exclusive boutique caliber.

TT BUREAU

The 21-room Park Regis Boutique comprises a combination of elements ranging from tradition, history and arts with careful strokes of modern heritage. The property is located at the tranquil neighbourhood of Jumeirah. The décor is elegant yet simple in neutral and warm shades. The modern furnishings reflect local influences and are mostly made of natural fabrics, folkloric patterns, unrefined woods and woven rattan.

As it stands in one of the most prominent urban areas of Dubai, Park Regis Boutique makes the perfect oasis to unwind and relax. Situated right at Kite Beach and adjacent to many other local attractions such as Wild Wadi Water Park, Jumeirah Beach, Burj Al Arab, City Walk and the



iconic Burj Khalifa, the hotel makes a convenient setting for both beach goers and leisure travellers. Providing guests with a welcoming environment to make their stay comfortable, hotel facilities include a bakery and coffee shop, valet parking, laundry services, room service, 24-hour guest services, a travel desk and security. All guest rooms feature a complimentary soft mini bar, an interactive TV system, free Wi-Fi, in-room safe, air conditioning and room service.

The opening took place recently in the presence of **Abdulrazzaq Abdulaziz Ramadhan Almutawa**, Property Owner and **Simon Wan**, President and Managing Director, StayWell Holdings along with important stakeholders, dignitaries and government personalities.

### Strategic Location

📍 The hotel is adjacent to Wild Wadi Water Park, Jumeirah Beach, Burj Al Arab and Burj Khalifa

## Will Mysk be game changer?

Mysk by Shaza fulfils the requirement for more upmarket properties in the Middle East, claims **Simon Coombs**, President and CEO, Shaza Hotels.

TT BUREAU

**Q Can you explain the unique features of Brand Mysk?**

Mysk has been created to fulfill the need for more upscale hotels in the Middle East. We have often been asked by investors to introduce a brand like Shaza but one that can offer sustainable returns in locations where a luxury hotel would not be attractive. The cost in building an upscale hotel is obviously much less than a luxury one, but the difference in room rates between upscale and luxury is not necessarily very high. So, the investment model becomes very attractive. The idea being Mysk was driven by the change in the profile of tourists coming to the region and changes in the economic situation that have fuelled the demand for upscale hotels.



**Simon Coombs**  
President and CEO  
Shaza Hotels

**Q What is your opinion on the indispensability of technology in the hospitality industry?**

In our industry, we must always recognise that technology is a facilitator and not an end in itself. Gone are the days when operators developed priority technologies and systems aiming to achieve a competitive advantage. We are not technology companies, but must take best-in-breed

solutions that are scalable, have no cost of ownership, and assist our attainment of strategic objectives.

**Q Travel agents were the backbone of the hospitality industry sometime back. How has the scenario changed over the years?**

Operators need to stop complaining about online travel agencies and see how they best fit into the business model. Thereafter, they can be properly embraced within a wider strategy of acquisitions, engagement and retention. If you think that operators are going to invest the same amounts in technology, data, metrics and distribution technologies, you are misguided – let the experts do what they do, and better than we can, but view this channel as one element of the overall strategy. 📍



# Travel trade never rests on its laurels

The Middle East tourism industry is on fast track in preparing the next generation of travellers and partners to understand the focal points that would ensure profit in the future, say Arabian Travel Award winners.



SHEHARA RIZLY

## ► Face of the future – Kulwant Singh, Founder and Managing Director, Lama Tours

### Dubai enroute to new market strategies

**Kulwant Singh**, Founder and MD, Lama Tours, says, "2017 was a year of sustainability with a reasonable growth due to our visa business, tie up with Iventure card and several big group movements from India. We have also finalised a couple of tie-ups with local business and international agents. Our Palm Cruises and Lama Beach Club in Jebel Ali have been major attractions. We are expanding our business with online tools and satellite offices."



## ► Best Global Distribution System – Matthew Powell, Managing Director—EMEA, Travelport

### Personalisation is shaping the industry

**Matthew Powell**, Managing Director—EMEA, Travelport, says, "Investments made in areas such as intelligence, mobile, payments, merchandising and corporate travel continued to bear fruit. Personalisation, multi-source content and the continued pivot to mobile and voice commerce have continued to shape the industry. We are also using AI and Machine Learning to improve the speed and personalisation of our results."



## ► Best Cruise Professional – Lakshmi Durai, Chief Executive Officer, Travel Matrix

### Cruise tourism on the rise

**Lakshmi Durai**, CEO, Travel Matrix, says, "Late booking trend is continuing to be the challenge in this market. Booking early will help the guest to secure their preferred cabin category and sailing date especially while travelling in groups. A major portion of our business is generally for outbound cruises. The gulf cruise gives the Middle Eastern guests an opportunity to experience cruising at their backyard without having to take longer flights."



## ► Most Enterprising Sales & Marketing Hospitality Professional – Sona Rawal, Director of Sales, JW Marriott Hotel Dubai

### Focus on increasing market share

**Sona Rawal**, Director of Sales, JW Marriott Hotel Dubai, says, "Currently, the major source markets for our hotel are USA, Saudi Arabia, India, Great Britain and Germany. We are exploring more of the Chinese and African markets. We are looking to make tailor-made conference packages, personalised wedding menus and enhancing our Marriott Rewards customer experience to an even higher level."



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# Wyndham bridges room gap in Ajman

The first quarter of 2018 will witness the most awaited property in the Ajman corniche—Wyndham Garden. The four-star, 179-room property will add to the much-needed inventory in the emirate and boost the inventory of R Hotels to 600 rooms in its portfolio.



TT BUREAU

Ramada Hotel & Suites Ajman and Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman continue their momentum of success, even when faced with the toughest of challenges. Talking about the properties' development plans, **Iftikhar Hamdani**, Cluster General Manager, Ramada Hotel & Suites Ajman, Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman and Wyndham Gar-

den Ajman Corniche, shares that occupancy wise, they have achieved over and above the profit margins as they are very versatile in the way they carry out business.

From leisure to business guests, to accommodating sports teams and events, the two properties have set their benchmark over the years in offering exceptional service standards. The

continued commitment to carry on various projects, the Ramada team, with Hamdani at the helm, keep achieving great success.

## CSR/ Sustainability projects

Hamdani and his team achieved many accolades and went a step further in sharing the details of success with other hoteliers so that they too contribute towards reducing carbon footprint. In the second phase, they will be looking at further educating the hoteliers on the importance how they could benefit in terms of profit by adapting some of the methods that have been tried, tested and proven to be the success behind the two Ajman properties. He was appreciative of the valuable contribution made by First Central Hotel Apartments General Manager Wael El Behi, who had undergone training with his team and eventually practised the methodologies in their property.

Hamdani's proactive nature transcends to the team that works in tandem with him. As General Manager, he plays a pivotal role in marketing of the brand and the three properties under him. The new property due to open by the end of Q1, Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche is currently promoted as a unique property,

**We are already getting bookings from various agents across the world for Wyndham Garden as it is a unique upmarket property in the emirate that would give a boost to many types of travellers**

**Iftikhar Hamdani**  
Cluster General Manager  
Ramada Hotel & Suites Ajman,  
Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman and  
Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche

especially one that can host most of the requirements of the sports tourism sector in addition to the leisure and business clientele. Among the new markets, Hamdani explained that the Scandinavian region and Eastern Europe are some of the untapped markets that they are currently targeting for 2018.

Wyndham Garden will be the only property with all 179 rooms with a sea view. It will consist of state-of-the-art facilities with a special recreation floor catering to all the needs of the health conscious traveller, pool, spa, Jacuzzi, separate male and female sauna, steam room and health club. Several dining options include a specialty seafood restaurant.

Speaking about Wyndham Garden, Hamdani states that one of the main reasons to launch this

property is due to the lack of rooms in the emirate in terms of the mid-market travellers which has increased over the past few years. "We are already getting bookings from various agents across the world for Wyndham Garden as it is a unique up market property in the emirate that would give a boost to many types of travellers. In terms of oc-

cupancy, financial results and owners expectations, we have kept the name and delivered results."

## Did You Know?

Sports tourism is a growing market in the UAE as many sporting events are held, be it cricket, football, cycling, athletics, hand ball or even rugby. Ramada Ajman hosted ICC Blind Cricket World Cup which was a huge success, and in year 2018 Ramada Ajman will host Deaf World Cup Cricket Championship in Ajman.





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# Sharjah Airport targets international airlines

Being the first airport in the United Arab Emirates, Sharjah Airport has been developing its services for a much wider range of travellers. **His Excellency Ali Salim Al Midfa**, Chairman, Sharjah Airport Authority, shares the new development plans aimed at receiving over 20 million visitors by 2027 with **TRAVTALK**.

**SHEHARA RIZLY**

## Q How has business fared over the past year at Sharjah Airport?

Sharjah International Airport's passenger numbers reached 11.36 million, with an increase of 327,000 passengers for the year 2017 as compared to last year. Aircraft movements recorded 77,627 for the year 2017, with an increase in comparison with the same period of last year. Air Arabia based in SHJ flies to over 77 routes in 29 countries across the Mid-

airport in addition to a host of additional facilities which will develop significantly. The new expansion is estimated to cost AED1.5 billion and will increase capacity to 20 million passengers by 2027.

The expansion will be carried out progressively over phases and the contract granting the project management rights to Parsons Overseas Limited has already been signed. The project includes the phases of preparation before design, as well as the actual design, supervision and

There is also a short-term project to add additional concourse space and seating along with new boarding gates by the end of 2018. A dedicated new entrance to the airport and additional car parking spaces, along with additional passenger trolleys and enhanced facilities will also be operational in 2018.

## Q How important is ITB Berlin for Sharjah International Airport?

Sharjah International Airport's participation in ITB Berlin is part of its commit-

“Sharjah International Airport is in an excellent position as a strategic economic, business and tourist hub which, when added to the excellent services provided by the airport and the expansion in their destinations, makes it increasingly a preferred destination for travellers to the UAE.”

**His Excellency Ali Salim Al Midfa**  
Chairman, Sharjah Airport Authority



a leading tourism and trade destination in the region.

## Q What role do you play at international exhibitions?

International exhibitions play a vital role in promoting the latest services and facilities of SIA, with the opportunity to present and network with industry players and decision makers. Among the many trade shows we will participate this year are Air Cargo India, ITB Berlin, Arabian Travel Market, Leisure Moscow, World Travel Market, MITT, Routes Asia and Europe, TIACA as well as the 6th Pharma & Biosciences to showcase our pharma handling capabilities.

## Q How have the Smart Gates contributed towards providing a seamless travel experience to travellers?

Sharjah Airport Authority launched Smart Gates in collaboration with the General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs in Sharjah. The 16 Smart Gates available at the departure and arrival terminals mean that passengers can now



dle East, North Africa, Indian subcontinent, CIS and Asia. There are 12 other international passenger airlines operating from various points within the ME, Africa and Asia into SHJ.

## Q Could you brief us on the expansion plans of the airport?

Sharjah International Airport will see a new passenger terminal, expansion of roads to and from the

handover of the first phase of the project. As part of the expansion, Sharjah Airport Authority signed two commercial agreements with Gama Support Services, the first of which is to build and operate a new private jet terminal, while the second agreement grants Gama the right to provide ground handling services to business jet owners, business jets and crew members at the terminal.

ments towards the European markets, especially the German market. Sharjah has been keen to boost its presence in the European market to attract more tourists. It is also an excellent opportunity to showcase the airport's developments and its state-of-the-art services and facilities. Additionally, the exhibition will help the airport to cooperate with companies from aviation and tourism sectors, and enhance its position as

get through passport control within 20 seconds. The Smart Gates use a highly efficient system that reads and scans passport information, capturing biometric data using a high-accuracy camera and comparing the information given, with the passenger details saved in the

system. Low level immigration desks and Smart Gates are available for our disabled passengers. Over three million passengers have passed through the Smart Gates available at the departures and arrivals terminal in Sharjah International Airport for the year 2017. 







# focuses on emerging technology

OneView IT Solutions is focused on helping their customers on essential business requirements such as back office support, credit card fraud management solutions, business process outsourcing, Search Engine Optimisation, social media optimisation; needed to succeed in this competitive market.

Currently in its seventh year of operations, OneView IT Solutions has over 35 professionals who are dedicated to offer quality and precision. **Azima Chhuvara** began her stint with OneView IT Solutions in January 2016 as a Business Development Manager and today she is at the post of Executive Director. Chhuvara spent more than six months engaging with almost 30 different travel management companies in Middle East to understand their business processes and doing a gap analysis the complex processes of travel business. She has a team at OneView with extensive background in both corporate and leisure travel technology. "Our focus has been on emerging technologies and how they impact business practices in the

travel industry. At OneView we have managed to build a very sophisticated point of sale system to cater to the entire need of multiple business channels," Chhuvara says.

She reiterates, "Our aim is to serve corporates with a self-booking tool which empowers them to have a clear view of various options to choose from for their business travel. This is done by incorporating the corporate travel policy in a most simple way which included early prototypes of an expense management system. Our system is designed for selling complex leisure travel with dynamic packaging technology. This function will help for known holiday experts to sell packages worldwide for their offline customers as well as through their online portal."



Azima Chhuvara  
Executive Director  
OneView IT Solutions

As per a research conducted by OneView, the company has identified that in today's business model, measuring the productivity and performance of the staff is very challenging for the management. "After gathering all these requirements from multiple travel companies, we at OneView came up with a business management system which allows to cascade the over-

**We engage very closely with each and every prospects of ours to understand the real need and gap to grow their business. We offer two day consultancy sessions with experts who have experience helping travel companies and to gather the current process and suggest the best market practices**

all budget of the organisation at multiple levels. This will allow management to setup their objectives at the beginning of the year to branches, managers and their employees which configured with daily, weekly and monthly sales report against budget versus actual. This will help to identify and plug the gap in a short span of time," she says.

Retaining the profitability of the business is one of the key for the sus-

tainability of any business. Developing the existing business and acquiring new business are also equally important. In order, to maintain focus on all these key areas of business brings up the need for an efficient CRM. "We have designed an easy-to-use CRM for the sales team to manage their customers, prospects and suspects data base, providing the capability to use the data for various marketing activity for engaging with cus-

tomers. We engage very closely with each and every prospects of ours to understand the real need and gap to grow their business. We offer two day consultancy sessions with experts who have experience helping travel companies and to gather the current process and suggest the best market practices. We have helped many customers in the Middle East to simplify their processes and automate many of their manual processes to improve the efficiency," Chhuvara adds.

## Highlight

➤ OneView has designed an easy-to-use CRM for the sales team to manage their customers, prospects and suspects data base

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# Gearing up for talent acquisition by 2020

As Dubai hit over 100,000 hotel rooms last year, it expects a lot more to be launched this year. Human resources or talent search in the hospitality industry plays a pivotal role during this phase, insists **Judy Hou**, Managing Director, The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

## Q Do share a brief about The Emirates Academy.

The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management (EAHM) specialises in providing business management degrees with a focus on hospitality. The Academy offers a BBA and an MBA in International Hospitality Management with many of our graduates now holding senior positions around the globe. As an integral part of the Jumeirah Group, students at EAHM are able to gain first-hand experience through internships, part-time jobs and building relationships with people in the industry.

## Q Could you give a brief of the professional training and development programmes conducted at the Academy?



Judy Hou  
Managing Director, The Emirates  
Academy of Hospitality Management

The Professional Training department delivers a range of training, consulting and research services in both short course format or bespoke courses designed to meet specific training needs. Our experienced facilitators deliver programmes for a large range of organisations including airports, banks, hospitals, retail sector and government departments. Some of the courses currently being

run are Customer Service, Digital Marketing, Business Skills, Finance, Leadership, Spa Management, Kitchen & Restaurant Management, Butler programme, Cultural Awareness, Presentation Skills, Culinary, etc.

## Q What is the training you have deployed for medical tourism professionals in the hospital sector?

Many people would be hard pressed to discern the difference between the level of service at a five-star hotel and some of the hospitals in the UAE. The Academy has provided training into these facilities that covers everything from five-star customer service to food services to butler training. The landscape of hospital service has changed immensely and the days of

poor food and understaffed wards are a thing of the past. Our programmes for hospitals have developed significantly over the last two years and will only continue to expand as we see more health facilities keen to improve their level of patient services.

## Q Going up to 2020 where 20 million visitors are expected in Dubai, how do you train and generate talent?

Expo 2020 will be a brilliant platform for our students to launch their careers. The Academy is seeing quite an upturn in interest and enrollments as young people are realising the value of a career in hospitality. Within the hospitality industry, we are seeing a massive roll out of new hotel offerings. The



team at Expo 2020 is doing a brilliant job in managing manpower and the Academy is committed to supporting these initiatives through student involvement and training.

## Q How do you provide incentives with hospitality partners and others?

The Academy prides itself in maintaining its extensive network and reach-

ing out to new brands. We invite industry leaders to give presentations on a regular basis for students to be familiar with the landscape of the industry and expose them to the latest industry trends. We hold career fairs for students and businesses alike. The fairs attract luxury goods, hotels, online travel companies and consultancies from within the UAE and internationally. 🇦🇪



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# **Anchors aweigh for ‘Sailing Arabia’**

The Middle East is steadily progressing in terms of hosting various adventure tourism events over the past few years. 'Sailing Arabia' brings together sailing enthusiasts from around the world to network with each other whilst enjoying the spirit of sportsmanship.



**David Graham**  
CEO  
*Oman Sail*

“This year marks a historic moment for the EFG Sailing Arabia – The Tour, for the first time in the event’s history we have invited local and international sailors to experience the beauty of the Sultanate through an exclusively Omani event. Oman is blessed with fantastic sailing conditions and the Tour is an incredible opportunity to showcase the natural beauty of the diverse landscape at each stop

country and explore the diverse landscape at each stop along the coastline. ”

“EFG Sailing Arabia–The Tour (EFG SATT) is one of the most important sailing tours and a great sport adventure. Especially with the new format, EFG SATT brings a similar challenge like the Tour de Voile, which occurs in France each July. The entire crew and I are extremely happy with our time on the race. In Oman, we’re looking forward to returning next year and we would love to come back to discover more of Oman as a country. I love everything about Oman - from its dunes to the sunny weather which makes it an ideal place for sailing. Oman really is, if you pardon the pun, smooth sailing.”



**Riwan Perron**  
Co-skipper  
Lorina Golfe du Morbihan

“As a professional sailor, I believe sailing as a sport is an essential part of my life. I spend around 200 days a year sailing. EFG Sailing Arabia–The Tour is a perfect mix between sport and adventure. On the water, we have tight races but can also experience trips we have never been to before and simultaneously, enjoy the beautiful landscape of Oman. It is my first time in Oman participating in EFG SATT. I would love to come back in the coming years, as it is even better than what we expected. Oman provides better weather conditions at this time of the year and is ideal for sailing.”



**Mathieu Souben**  
Skipper  
Vivacar.fr



**Valentin Bellefleur**  
Skipper  
Beijaflor

“EFG Sailing Arabia–The Tour is an important event on the calendar. As a team, it allows us to improve and train for the year ahead, including the Tour de Voile in France. This gives an advantage over the competition. Since this is our first time in Oman, we have the opportunity to live a new experience and discover a country we never had the chance to discover before. There is good competition

here, and we would love to keep coming back each year as this would help us to progress and learn from each other and the teams involved.”



**Elodie-Jane Mettraux**  
Skipper  
DB Schenker

“EFG Sailing Arabia—The Tour continues to offer an incredible experience in a beautiful sea and country. Everyone who participated in previous years were happy about the race and the gorgeous weather in Oman, and I am pleased to be a part of it this year and experience it myself. SATT is a perfect way of beginning the sailing season. I believe all the teams are happy about the tour, degree of

organisation and the venues we get to sail in. One thing that would encourage me to join next year is the fact that we have the opportunity to be in this part of the world in February. ”



**Cedric Pouligny**  
*Skipper*  
*Renaissance*

“Most of us are experiencing Oman for the first time. However, our main goal is to be able to compete with other teams at a high level. The teams participating in this event are some of the best teams in Europe and therefore, this is a great opportunity for us to train before the sailing season in Europe starts. Since this year's edition has a new format, everything is new - from the boats to the nations allocated for this year's edition are allows us to discover and experience new



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# Travel Counsellors caters to aspirants

Travel Counsellors LLC has introduced a unique Travel Trade Programme designed specifically for individuals with travel and tourism industry experience, but in non-retail roles.



Open to professionals in the hotel, airline, tour operator, inbound tourism (Destination Management Companies) and tourism board sectors, as well as non-GDS trained in-house travel consultants, Travel Counsellors UAE targets commercially-

ness in partnership with an award-winning global company," said **Holly McCann**, Recruitment Executive, Travel Counsellors UAE.

"It provides executives from a wide range of sectors, from hospitality to tourism, with the opportunity to use their knowledge and skills to

Until recently, the induction courses were designed exclusively for travel agents. Non-industry professionals wishing to embark on a travel career were considered as Travel Counsellors franchisees. However, the company identified a large number of people in the UAE with relevant and transferrable skills who were ideal candidates to run a travel business for the homeworking group, particularly hoteliers looking for a career change.

"Many people in hospitality sales roles work for long hours; the flexibility of our model and the work-life balance it can offer is hugely appealing," explained McCann. "Women in particular find it difficult to return to the industry after maternity leave given the time demands and Travel Counsellors offers an alternative career within the industry they know and love." To become a Travel Coun-

sellor via the Travel Trade Programme route, set-up fees apply but include a raft of benefits including a three-week induction, access to the company's global booking system, PC equipment, collateral and marketing materials, plus ongoing business development support from the Dubai-based management team. The three-week intensive induction course is now staged four times annually in Dubai. Three hotel and hospitality professionals recently joined Travel Counsellors via the new programme — **Zaim Muhammad**, **Lucy Mousa** and **Roni Vargas** — while **Gillian McLornan**, who previously worked in sales for Jumeirah Group, has been a franchisee for five years.

"The skill set and experience required to be a Travel Counsellor are very transferable from hotel, airline, travel and cruise roles, all of which are customer-focused and



based on strong client and supplier relationships," said McLornan, whose business success has seen her earn Travel Counsellors 'Gold Status' for having achieved her revenue targets. "It has been the perfect move for me. Travel Counsellors is an incredibly supportive company that allows you to build a business based on your personal and professional goals." Roni Vargas, former Assistant Director of Sales at Yas Viceroy,

launched her Travel Counsellors business earlier this year and describes it as "the coolest job ever". "I had been in hospitality sales for eight years and always wanted to run my own travel business," she said. "I discovered Travel Counsellors and the set-up fits perfectly — there is no huge capital requirement, you manage your own time, meet a lot of people, experience different destinations and work when and where you want."

**The Travel Trade Programme, a first-of-its-kind initiative in the UAE, is ideal for experienced industry professionals who aspire to run a successful travel business in partnership with an award-winning global company**

**Holly McCann**  
Recruitment Executive, Travel Counsellors UAE

savvy executives with a passion for customer service.

"The Travel Trade Programme, a first-of-its-kind initiative in the UAE, is ideal for experienced industry professionals who aspire to run a successful travel busi-

sell travel and deliver the outstanding customer service for which Travel Counsellors is renowned," she added. "With unlimited earning potential and the flexibility to choose your own working hours, it's a rewarding way to take your travel career to the next level."

## Agents bowl the night away

Turkish Airlines and Amadeus Gulf in Abu Dhabi hosted over 100 travel agents from across the UAE for an informal bowling tournament to celebrate a successful 2017.





# Ryanair spreads ME wings

David O'Brien, Chief Commercial Officer, Ryanair tells **TRAVTALK** about the airline's network plans in the region and beyond.

TT BUREAU

## Q Tell us about Ryanair operations around the world?

Ryanair is Europe's top airline, carrying over 130m customers per annum on more than 2,000 daily flights from 87 bases, connecting 211 destinations in 34 countries on a fleet of 430 Boeing 737 aircraft, with a further 240 Boeing 737's on order. This will enable Ryanair to lower fares and grow traffic to 200m customers pa by FY24. In 2017, Ryanair became the first European airline to have carried over one billion customers. Ryanair operates a fleet of Boeing 737-800 series aircraft, each with 189 all-economy seats.

## Q How important is the Middle East market for Ryanair?

The Middle East market is currently a small one for Ryanair, but is an important



David O'Brien  
Chief Commercial Officer  
Ryanair

part of our network, and one we hope to develop in the coming years. We already operate a number of routes to Tel Aviv and Eilat (Ovda) in Israel.

## Q What was the reason to select Amman/Jordan?

Jordan is one of the most attractive tourist destinations in the world which is now open to new business and leisure travellers from 11 European countries on Ryanair's low fares.

## Q Will you be looking to expand at any other Middle Eastern areas?

Opening new routes is dependent on consumer demand, available aircraft capacity, a viable airport deal and required operational needs being met. Jordan and Israel must have Open Skies agreements with the EU, an important prerequisite as it means there are no restrictions on flights to/from the EU.

## Q Is there any loyalty programme launched with this new route?

Ryanair does not offer any traditional loyalty programmes, but offers a range of discounts – including travel credits with Ryanair Rooms to all customers via their 'MyRyanair' accounts on our website. Ryanair expects to carry 138m customers across our entire network in FY19, including 500,000 to/from Jordan.

# 2 new routes on RwandAir

The national carrier of the Republic of Rwanda announced plans to commence flight operations in Abuja in Nigeria and Cape Town in South Africa.

TT BUREAU

**Abuja and Cape Town come in as a boost to the different economies in terms of tourism and trade on one hand, and enhance bilateral partnership between our countries on the other**

Chance Ndagano Ag  
CEO, RwandAir

RwandAir will operate four weekly flights from Kigali to Cape Town with a stopover in Harare. The Abuja flight to be tagged to the existing Accra route, where Abuja will be the stopover point before reaching Accra. "This is yet another big milestone for RwandAir as we continue to expand our network. Our aim is to provide to our customers seamless and better connections on the continent and beyond. Abuja and Cape Town come in as a boost to the different economies in terms of tourism and trade on one hand, and

enhance bilateral partnership between our countries on the other", said Chance Ndagano Ag, CEO, RwandAir. Commonly referred to as the Mother City, Cape Town is a port city on South Africa's southwest coast, on a peninsula beneath the Table Mountain, one of the top tourist attractions of the city along with Cape Point, Cape of Good Hope and Robben

Island. Built in 1980s, Abuja is the capital city of Nigeria and is the only city in Africa built solely for the purpose of being the capital city. Abuja's top tourist attractions include Aso Rock, Gurara waterfalls, Millennium Park, National Ecumenical Center and the Abuja National Mosque, to name a few. The two new destinations will take RwandAir's destinations to 26.





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# Welcome to Dubai South's Aviation District

As the world's first master-planned airport city, Dubai South is concentrating on building state-of-the-art infrastructure around the Al Maktoum International, thus creating a thriving aviation ecosystem. The Aviation District provides a specialised business environment that meets all the needs of the aviation industry.

TT BUREAU

Aviation District, the integrated aerospace ecosystem within Dubai South, has added another phase – a Suppliers Complex to the development of its world-leading 'Aerospace Supply Chain' offering maintenance and manufacturing solutions to meet all aspects of the aviation and aerospace industries.

The Dubai South 'Aerospace Supply Chain' is a landside free zone development of multi-purpose buildings for businesses that are a part of the global aerospace supply chain which caters specifically from small to medium enterprises in the global MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul) sector. The development is aligned with the Dubai Industrial Strat-



Tahnoon Saif  
Vice President  
Aviation Dubai South

**We have earmarked a budget of AED 2.5 billion (\$685 million) up to 2018 for the development of maintenance, General Aviation, training and education sectors**

egy where the government has outlined 14 strategic initiatives to develop the

aerospace cluster over the next 13 years.

Dubai South: The Aviation District is divided into four business verticals – General Aviation which is home to the VIP Terminal, hangars, fuel farm, catering, ground handling, helicopter operations; Maintenance and Technical Support which includes a paint shop, MROs and the aerospace supply chain; Commercial Strip which has retail, hotel and exhibition area; and an Education and Training vertical that hosts the Emirates Flight Training Academy, simulators, universities and vocational training institutes. Aviation District's investment plan until 2018 of AED200 million in the 'Aerospace Supply Chain' includes two aerospace supply chain buildings and one Suppliers Complex.

The 'Aerospace Supply Chain' has successfully completed the Supply Chain Building which was launched as the inaugural project by Aviation District earlier this year. The building includes front offices and workshop spaces spread across 749 sqm of workshop and 149 sqm of office spaces per unit. The development of the second building is expected to commence in 2018. The supply chain zone is already home to Lufthansa Technik, GE Aviation and Advance Aerospace Industry. The Suppliers Complex is designed to allow for easy and quick start-up for aerospace companies. The G+3 complex development will offer over 12,000 sqm of light industrial space for companies providing support services such as fixed-based operations, maintenance, re-

pair and overhaul, supply of aircraft parts, chartering, freight forwarding and fleet management.

**Tahnoon Saif**, Vice President of Aviation at Dubai South, said, "The 'Aerospace Supply Chain' freezone at Dubai South's Aviation District is aligned with the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum to make Dubai the aviation capital of the world. We have earmarked a budget of AED 2.5 billion (\$685 million) up to 2018 for the development of maintenance, General Aviation, training and education sectors. We will continue to offer opportunities for companies to strengthen their base and provide sectoral knowhow in the aviation sector. The 'Aerospace Supply Chain' will also provide sufficient opportunities in the areas of MRO,

education, manufacturing, research and development and aerospace industries."

Aviation District has new partners in addition to existing ones such as GE Aviation, Lufthansa Technik, AAI, Emirates Flight Academy, STTS Paint facility, Falcon Maintenance Hangar, DC Aviation Al Futtaim, Emirates Catering, JETEX, Jet Aviation, Execu-jet and Dubai Duty Free. Announcements made so far include the new JETEX contract to build a hangar, opening of DC Aviation Al Futtaim's second hangar, launch of Emirates Flight Academy, Jet Aviation's opening of its FBO at the VIP Terminal and the agreement to open Dynamic Advanced Training's cabin crew training facility. Spanning an area of 7 square kilometres, the Dubai South Aviation district is the permanent home of Dubai Airshow. 🇦🇪

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# Maiden Mysk property in Kuwait

Shaza Hotels announced the signing of its first Mysk Hotel in Kuwait. The new property is set to welcome guests and visitors in the beginning of 2020.



**M**ysk, Shaza Hotels' new upscale brand, explores the modern Arabian lifestyle in a refined setting. The 200-room hotel stays true to the Mysk promise by putting people at its heart and soul to curate spaces where food, fashion and innovation come together.

"Al-Yousifi Group is thrilled to be an active player in shaping the new face of the Kuwait hospitality market. It's a promising and dynamic sector at the moment, with

renowned influencers and fashionistas in the GCC hailing from Kuwait, the hotel aims towards becoming their venue of choice. **Simon Coombs**, President and CEO, Shaza Hotels, commented, "The Mysk Hotel in Kuwait is going to add flair to the Kuwaiti hospitality scene. Our emphasis on fashion, social media and food will craft a bold new destination which we hope will become the favourite hangout for the sophisticated Kuwaitis. At the same time, we're curating meeting and banqueting spaces for our public sector



(L-R) Dr Adel Al-Yousifi, Owner, Mysk Hotel in Kuwait, with Simon Coombs, President and CEO, Shaza Hotels

several new developments in the offing. We are confident that Mysk Hotel in Kuwait will set itself apart from the crowd by emphasising on bold design, innovative marketing, social influence and world-class hospitality," said **Dr Adel Al-Yousifi**, Owner of the hotel.

Mysk Hotel in Kuwait will exhibit interiors filled with character to create a destination imbued with

and corporate clients. The aim is to offer a space where new ideas and connections flow - a space that belongs to everyone, be they corporate clients or young fashion enthusiasts."

Situated at a distance of 15 minutes from the airport, the hotel also hosts meeting and banqueting space to cater for conferences, exhibitions and weddings. In an ideal location away from the

**The Mysk Hotel in Kuwait is going to add flair to the Kuwaiti hospitality scene. Our emphasis on fashion, social media and food will craft a bold new destination which we hope will become the favourite hangout for the sophisticated Kuwaitis**

**Simon Coombs**  
President and CEO, Shaza Hotels

flair. The property's launch will coincide with a social media campaign to attract locals and visitors wanting to experience a new stylish venue in the city. With

hustle and bustle of downtown Kuwait, Mysk Hotel is one of the best destinations for the corporate market, staycationers and the local community alike. 🌟

## JA Resorts & Hotels

### Dubai

**Anthony Ross** joins JA Resorts & Hotels as its new CEO. The Australian hotelier and corporate strategist has over 30 years' industry leadership experience in the hospitality sector. Prior to joining JA Resorts & Hotels, Ross was CEO at the Indonesia-based Aryaduta Hotel Group and held the Executive Vice President position at Preferred Hotels & Resorts, where he oversaw 120 hotels in the Asia Pacific, Middle East and Africa region. Ross holds a bachelor's Degree in business, catering and hotel management from Victoria University in Melbourne.



## German National Tourist Office

### Dubai

The German National Tourist Office in Dubai has appointed **Sigrid de Mazieres** as Director for the Gulf countries. In her new role, Mazieres will be responsible for guiding the sales and marketing strategy, to promote 'Destination Germany' throughout the GCC region. Mazieres brings with her more than 15 years of experience in Marketing and Communications and extensive industry knowledge accumulated from her previous management roles with leading companies such as Qatar Airways. She holds an M.Sc. in Media and Communications from London School of Economics in the UK.



## FCS Computer Systems

### Middle East & Africa

FCS Computer Systems has appointed **Mansoor Khan** as Senior Director of Sales & Channels to lead the company's expansion in the Middle East and Africa. Khan, an accomplished business development strategist, has worked in Europe, America and the Middle East for over 20 years, with technology companies such as Infor, Al Futtaim Technologies, Oasys Infotech and Key Information Technology. Known for his in-depth knowledge of hospitality technology solutions, Khan will work closely with FCS' regional clients to assist them in leveraging FCS solutions to produce sustainable and profitable results.



## ME Dubai

### Dubai

ME Dubai, located in Opus by Zaha Hadid, has appointed **Haytham El-Sherbini** as its new Director of Sales & Marketing. After graduating in 2004 with a bachelor's Degree in business administration from the University of New Brunswick, Canada, El-Sherbini started his successful sales career by joining multinational and luxury hotel chains, such as Dusit International, Intercontinental Hotel Group, and most recently, Emaar Hospitality Group. The ME Dubai is set to launch in Q4 of 2018.



## Coral Dubai

### Al Barsha Dubai

Hospitality Management Holding has appointed **Shahzad Butt** as General Manager of the Coral Dubai Al Barsha Hotel. Butt brings over 30 years of experience in the hospitality industry worldwide and has run multiple award-winning hotels in UAE. He has considerable background in providing market-oriented strategies aimed at increasing sales and revenues while maintaining hotel standards. Butt began his career in 1988 as a management trainee and has since then worked closely in hotel and hospitality management, and held managerial positions focusing on customer satisfaction, sales and marketing.



## St.Regis

### Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi

Marriott International has appointed **Marwan Fadel** as the General Manager of The St Regis Saadiyat Island Resort, Abu Dhabi. With nearly two decades of hospitality experience across the Middle East, Fadel will oversee all management functions, hotel operations and new innovations. Fadel's appointment comes 18 months after he became Hotel Manager of The St Regis Saadiyat Island Resort, Abu Dhabi, home to six restaurants, an athletics club, and Abu Dhabi's only Iridium Spa. He began his career with Sheraton Hotels & Resorts. Seven years later, he became Area Director of Sales and Marketing for Starwood Hotels & Resorts' Dubai properties.



## W Hotel

### Amman

**Amjad Audat** has been appointed Director of Sales at W Amman. After pursuing his MBA degree in International Hospitality Management from Switzerland, Audat initialised his experience within the field between Switzerland and Spain before joining the Marriott family between 2006 and 2012. He then joined Anantara Hotels and Resorts in Thailand for three years. In 2015, Audat re-joined Marriott as the Cluster Director of Sales for Jordan Marriott Hotels for 2 years before being part of W Amman opening team.



**Zein Talhouni** took up the role of Director of Marketing at W Amman. Talhouni launched her experience within hospitality in Paris at the Four Seasons Hotel George V and Hotel Le Bristol. Upon graduating from the Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne, she returned to Jordan to work within marketing at establishments including the Four Seasons Hotel Amman and the Royal Film Commission. She took on her role as Director of Marketing at W Amman with the pre-opening team May 2017. Talhouni is accountable for the implementation of brand packages and practices, and the successful execution of special events and promotional programmes at the hotel.







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