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Dubai propels tourism growth

Dubai Tourism exempts 2,000+ travel agencies from furnishing bank guarantees, injecting a quarter billion dirhams liquidity into its economy.

TT Bureau



H E Helal Saeed Al Marri
Director General
Dubai Tourism

Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Dubai Tourism) has initiated efforts to release approximately AED250 million

in bank guarantees that have been furnished by tourism-related service providers, following the waiver of this prerequisite regulatory requirement to start a travel and tour business in the emirate. The new deregulatory measure allows for instant liquidity to be injected into Dubai's economy, lowering the cost of doing business and supporting further investment in the sector ecosystem. Dubai Tourism seeks to directly benefit over 2,000 travel and tour operators and agencies in Dubai.

H E Helal Saeed Al Marri, Director General, Dubai Tourism, said, "As we head into 2019 with a commitment to significantly boost tourism arrivals in line with our 2022-25 tourism strategy, relaxing regulations in support of the

Contd. on page 3 ►

Revenue drivers in hospitality

Key hoteliers in the UAE's hospitality sector speak on three specific drivers, standards required and technology which optimises revenue.

Shehara Rizly



James Britchford
Vice President Commercial—
India Middle East and
Africa, IHG

“Some of the key revenue drivers in the hospitality industry are pricing, direct bookings, loyalty programmes and systems and tools. It is important for professionals to stay updated with proprietary tools, training and certification, and also keep abreast of the latest technology that is increasingly playing an important role in revenue optimisation. At IHG, we have the tools and talent to maximise revenue and profits for our owners. As one of the largest international hotel companies, we have the benefit of scale, which gives us the ability to develop world-class delivery systems.”

“The key drivers at Marriott International include the understanding of total revenue per available room (TrevPAR) to support total hotel strategies across all revenue generating segments, the ongoing shift of focus to mobile and the increasing focus on booking direct and investment in revenue management systems. Owning the customer data is incredibly important to enable targeted marketing and in-depth customer analytics. As a part of that, rate integrity across all channels and all segments is critical to supporting customer loyalty.”



Sarah Allen
Vice President—Revenue
Strategy & Analytics,
Middle East & Africa
Marriott International

Contd. on page 3 ►

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Ease of doing business

► Contd. from page 1

business community, especially supporting start-ups and SMEs, is fundamental for sustained sector growth. Tourism is a strong contributor to Dubai's GDP and we intend to ensure that we sustainably enhance our economic value and aid the diversification agenda


it easier to grow a business in Dubai. Releasing of the bank guarantees generates an immediate cash injection of nearly a quarter billion dirhams for travel and tourism-related service providers to invest back into their businesses and truly drive future growth, in addition to being a very positive signal

“Releasing of the bank guarantees generates an immediate cash injection of nearly a quarter billion dirhams for travel and tourism-related service providers to invest back into their businesses”

H E Helal Saeed Al Marri

for the wider UAE. As such, this deregulatory measure that has been delivered with the support of the Department of Economic Development (DED), complements many of our other initiatives to provide much-needed impetus to the industry, based on the landmark economic stimulus initiative launched by the visionary leadership of Dubai earlier this year to make

for prospect investors and new ventures to launch tourism projects by taking advantage of the hassle-free processes.”

Previously, tourism companies including inbound and outbound tour operators were required to furnish a bank guarantee ranging from AED100,000 to AED600,000 to Dubai Tourism. 

Ingredients of hospitality

► Contd. from page 1



Olivier R Harnisch
Chief Executive Officer
Emaar Hospitality Group

“The quality of service, personalisation and online presence are the key drivers. The first decreases dependence on market forces and leads to positive online reviews, the second establishes a direct communication with each customer, while the third enhances the findability and ease of booking of a property. A relentless focus on associate happiness and individual customer needs remain the essential elements of successful hospitality. Happy and engaged team members lead to delighted customers who are willing to pay a commensurate price for the experience they receive. It is as simple as that. **”**

“A key driver for the hotel industry currently is the right price for the right product that the customer is willing to pay, which is accentuated by the right service at the hotel in order to increase customer loyalty and value for the customer. This in turn also helps in driving direct business to the hotel and reducing the distribution cost. It is important for every hotel to have diverse distribution channels in order to reach different customers at different point of sales. Every hotel should clearly lay out their offerings across all these channels for guests to understand the hotel well during the journey of booking their stay. **”**




Nevil D'souza
Commercial Director
R Hotels




Sherif Madkour
General Manager
Media Rotana

“The key revenue drivers in hospitality is different nowadays with the advent of technology where the main source of revenue for any hotel is online bookings. In hospitality, success is dependent on standards and having extraordinary service. Guests always remember the experience and not the place and this is what we strive to give them right from the moment they enter our doors to make sure they have a memorable experience. Technology support in revenue optimisation of the hotel exactly as it does with any other field is the new strategy to compete with the environment around. **”**



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EDITORIAL

Dividends and revenues

Technology is fast becoming an asset to the extent that the dividends or revenues sometimes will rise in great magnitude. However, everything has its own limitations. So, treading on it must be done in a more methodical manner. In the UAE and Middle East, revenue optimisation is quite prevalent in the hospitality trade at large, especially because hotels seem to be rapidly expanding new projects in this region.

In the earlier days, Europe was the connector between the east and the west, which also required them to obtain a visa for certain countries just to link from one flight to another. The Middle East was clever to start off their own operations first in Sharjah to cater to some of the countries and today Dubai and the other Middle Eastern countries have all developed their infrastructure to ensure that travellers around the world have a shorter travel time to get from east to west or vice versa or north to south and vice versa. The 72-hour stop-over holiday visa for those connecting from Dubai permits more time and more travellers to witness some of the modern-day wonders of the world and many Guinness' world records.

Hospitality today is looking at employing more robots in certain Asian countries, whereas in the Middle East, strategy remains much stronger and sustainable. The clever and intelligent use of technology has worked well for the Middle East region. Most travellers once setting foot in the UAE or any other Middle Eastern country will realise how efficient and hospitable this region stands out. According to a recent STR report, Dubai ranks well among the more matured markets such as the US, the UK, Italy, France, etc.

The secret behind the success of the Middle East is that it is resilient, adaptive to changes and open to new thoughts.

Dubai: New York of GCC?

With the volatility of the global economy, some economies are thriving due to strong GDP growth but others are going through trying times due to dismal performance, observes **Shan Saeed**, Chief Economist, IQI Global, Malaysia.

In the past 10 years, tourism and travel has become an important sector to bolster government revenue and generate momentum in the domestic economy. If you analyse the overall GDP equation, you have four major variables, namely, consumption, investment, government and net off exports. The major variable that contributes significantly to the overall GDP growth is consumption. Wherever consumption patterns are strong and solid, GDP is on the upsurge and healthy. Wherever consumption is dismal, GDP remains low and weak. Investors would like to park funds and invest in those countries where governments are tourist-friendly, entertainment and recreational facilities are plenty, government's focus is towards attracting global tourists and is committed to local investors.

GCC has attracted lot of global tourists in the last 30 years. In particular, I would like to mention Dubai, Emirates, wealth management hub and the UAE in general. I still remember how Emirates started its operation by taking two planes on lease from Pakistan International Airlines in 1985 and how it transformed into one of the top airlines in the world after 33 years. One of the factors why tourists preferred to visit Dubai is because Emirates extended its wings and reached many destinations of the

“Wealthy people from Pakistan, India, Russia and the United Kingdom prefer to stay in the city due to its super luxurious lifestyle combined with strong financial market for wealth protection”

world. Today, Dubai has become a major tourist spot and destination of the world just like London, New York, Tokyo, Singapore, Paris or Kuala Lumpur. In my opinion, Dubai is the New York of GCC, full of attractions and entertainment that caters to all segment of the tourism market. Brand Dubai has become a powerful symbol of rich and famous as well as for its healthy lifestyle and entertainment.

If I were to analyse the branding strategy that Dubai pursued, it was based on the following:

- ❖ Global aviation hub
- ❖ Convenience for travellers
- ❖ Mall as tourist spot
- ❖ Wealth management for rich and famous
- ❖ Lifestyle
- ❖ Modern infrastructure.

The nutshell of Dubai's success can be epitomised in one word — life-

style. Wealthy people from Pakistan, India, Russia and the United Kingdom prefer to stay in the city due to its super luxurious lifestyle combined with strong financial market for wealth protection.

The rich and wealthy are looking for comfort, lifestyle and global arena. Dubai continues to remain on the global investor's radar and major tourist hub globally providing lifestyle and comfort. With Expo 2020 arriving next year, Dubai will draw an investment of over \$50 billion for the event.

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



Shan Saeed
Chief Economist
IQI Global, Malaysia

In the pursuit of excellence: Wyndham



Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche has received the HolidayCheck 2019 Award and has been named one of the most popular hotels in the UAE. The hotel has earned its first review-based recognition in less than a year after its opening. **Ifikhar Hamdani**, Cluster General Manager, Ramada Ajman, Ramada Beach and Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche, lauded the team and said, "We are honoured and delighted for this achievement as HolidayCheck is one of the top and trusted travel sites in Germany. The German market is on top of the nationality mix at Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche and the award attests that we are indeed meeting the demands of this particular group. We will continue our pursuit of excellence and we set sights on attaining the highest recognition from HolidayCheck."

ONEVIEW manages services for TMCs

Oneview has been serving the travel industry in the Middle East for the past seven years. **Jauhar Abdul Gafoor**, who recently took up reins as Chief Executive Officer, Oneview IT Solutions, shares his plans and aspirations for the year ahead.

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Tell us about your key plans for Oneview.

This year, we plan to support the agents interested in expanding their consolidation business. We have a system in place that can help them to consolidate their services through one portal and serve their clients better.

Apart from that, we are concentrating more on managed services, which means we are go-

Agent Reach

Oneview IT Solutions has introduced a ready-to-deploy kiosk and sign-up with a couple of large TMCs

ing to work closely with the travel companies that already bought the technology from other companies. There are many TMCs who got the technology from different companies, but adoption is one of the biggest challenges for everyone. Our aim is to help them with their requirements.

What solutions do you provide to online travel companies?

We provide entire solutions for online travel companies through our managed services — from a customer calling to contact centre till they use the services, credit card fraud management and digital marketing to boosting the traffic and materialise the booking.

What are your major goals for 2019?

Our main goal for 2019 is to bring GDS, NDC and all LCC into one platform to enable travel agents to have access to various channels to have full content and choose the best for better yield. This will enable travel agencies to choose the right content according to their needs and requirements.

How accessible are you to the agents?

We have introduced our ready-to-deploy kiosk and sign-up with a couple of large TMCs to implement the unit for the preferred location around the UAE, including malls and other public

“Our goal for 2019 is to bring GDS, NDC and all LCC into one platform to enable travel agents to have access to various channels and choose the best”

places. We have introduced a new support centre in Abu Dhabi to help our customers from Middle East and Africa. We operate 24*7*365 and our customers can get level-1 and level-2 support immediately as and when required.



Jauhar Abdul Gafoor
Chief Executive Officer
Oneview IT Solutions

It's business before leisure for Dubai

According to Dubai Business Events (DBE), Dubai secured a total of 261 successful bids for meetings, conferences and incentives in 2018. This is set to attract an additional 153,640 delegates to the city over the coming years and further cements the emirate as an attractive global business destination.

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The number of event bids won represents a 24 per cent increase from 2017 and will deliver an estimated economic impact of approximately AED 1.2 billion to Dubai. This success also marks a 62 per cent increase from the previous year in the number of delegates set to visit Dubai due to event bids won, signifying a shift towards larger-scale events. Throughout 2018, Dubai submitted 557 business event bids, up from 354 in 2017, and among the wins awarded were those for bids submitted in previous years. 2018 also marked DBE's 15-year anniversary, and the results are testament to the efforts of stakeholders and partners across the city who worked with the bureau towards the shared aim of



Issam Kazim
Chief Executive Officer, Dubai Corporation
for Tourism and Commerce Marketing

growing and developing the city's business events sector.

Issam Kazim, Chief Executive Officer, Dubai Corporation for



Steen Jakobsen
Assistant Vice President
Dubai Business Events

Tourism and Commerce Marketing, said, "Our goal in 2019 is to attract events that leave a lasting legacy for delegates and the city. To achieve this, we will

continue to engage with business events professionals globally, while working with stakeholders and partners in Dubai to pursue opportunities to bid for major business events."

Key bid wins from 2018 include the World Congress of Gastroenterology set to take place in 2021 with a total of 6,000 delegates in attendance, the Mary Kay China Incentive in 2019 with 800 delegates in attendance, as well as the World Nut and Dried Fruit Congress in 2020, which will bring 1,000 delegates to Dubai. Other notable wins in 2018 include the World Chambers Congress in Dubai in 2021 with 1,500 delegates set to attend and the Congress of the Societe International

D'Urologie that will bring in 2,000 delegates to Dubai in 2021.

Steen Jakobsen, Assistant Vice President, DBE, said, "One of Dubai's strengths when it comes creating compelling bids for major events is team work and collaborative approach by stakeholders across the city. The monumental growth in the number of delegates set to attend business events in Dubai as a result of 2018 bid wins is testimony to the emirate's increasing appeal as a global business hub."

In 2018, Dubai hosted the 57th edition of the ICCA Congress, that saw 1,156 meeting industry professionals from 79 countries gather in the Middle East.

Ultimate Maldivian experience



Set across two private islands, Niyama Private Islands Maldives is a Maldivian resort in the south-western atoll of Dhaalu. **Hafidh Al Busaidy**, General Manager of the property shares his plans for the new year.

TT Bureau

Share a brief about Niyama Islands.

Niyama is synonymous with luxury and is ideal for luxury travellers. Niyama Private Islands Maldives is an independent brand and the sister property of Anantara — a part of Minor Hotels. We specialise in curating bespoke experiences like private island dining, watching your favourite movie under the stars and much more. Also, we have 11 deluxe room categories ranging from spacious beachfront villas and one-bedroom water pavilions to three-bedroom family beach pavilions with two private pools, jacuzzi and a personal spa treatment room.

With nine dining destinations, including a tree house restaurant and the world's first underwater playground, guests can enhance their stay with surreal gastronomic experiences.

What is the USP of the property?

Surrounded by the Indian Ocean's azure waters, Niyama offers guests the tranquil and paradisiacal surroundings synonymous with the Maldives as well as a refreshing sense of discovery, stimulation and fun. The twin islands offer a multitude of once-in-a-lifetime luxury experiences for the stylish aspirational traveller. In addition to the islands' silvery sands and crystal-line waters, guests are encouraged to explore the numerous activities available across the two islands. From dining in the treetops at Nest to underwater partying at Subsix — a restaurant and bar beneath the ocean — Niyama provides ample opportunity to expand on the traditional Maldivian itinerary. The beauty



Hafidh Al Busaidy
General Manager
Niyama Private Islands Maldives

of a dual island setting is that space at Niyama is in abundance.

The jewel in the resort's crown is the magnificent Crescent, a playground of five ultra-chic villas,

closest major market to the Maldives with well established routes. Also, the Maldives offers a lot of things that this market loves — personal service, water sports options from diving to surfing and kite surfing, high-quality food and phenomenal hotels. Niyama Private Islands with its family-friendly and laid-back luxury vibe is large, but private — as it is built keeping privacy in mind.

Please share your 2019 outlook.

Whilst the market in 2018 was quite turbulent, Niyama performed well and our growth has been excellent. Our focus on delivering the best services and working closer with our partners will enable us to continue our planned growth. The market is growing in the Maldives and as the curve appears to be moving more towards oversupply of rooms, there is a great opportu-

“Privacy and flexibility are key requirements of the Middle Eastern clientele. The Middle East market has a significant role to play as it is the closest major market to the Maldives with well-established routes”

all with private pools, for up to 14 adults and eight children. Boasting a private chef, two butlers, a housekeeper and a host of complimentary activities including movie under the stars, this over water sanctuary is the perfect paradise treat for the discerning Middle Eastern traveller with extended families.

Since the Middle East clientele requirements differ from others, how do you cope with the requests?

Privacy and flexibility are key requirements of the Middle Eastern clientele. The Middle East market has a significant role to play as it is the

nity for those that offer something different and compelling.

What should the itinerary be for those visiting Niyama Islands for the first time?

Niyama in its small space has so much to offer from delicious dining options to sport and leisure options — an incredible spa, indoor and outdoor gym area, the only surf spot in the Island you can reach from our beach, diving snorkelling, sailing deep sea fishing as well as a multitude of excursions around the island and to neighbouring islands. We are happy to tailor-make experiences for our guests.



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Personality of the month

'Customer is the king'

Serving the travel industry for the past two decades, **Kathryn Wallington**, Country Manager—UAE, Travelport, shares how she realised her fascination for travel, to explore the world and its many cultures, and her vision and growth plan for the company.

 Shehara Rizly

Kathryn Wallington took the reins as Country Manager UAE for Travelport over a year ago and works with a highly-talented team to deliver best-in-class technical solutions that meet the evolving needs of their local customers. She states, "We truly believe our success is defined by our customers' success. So, we are always focused on helping them achieve their goals and identify new growth opportunities in the market."

Riding high on success

Starting off her career in 1990 at Thomas Cook Retail as a Sales Consultant, Wallington quickly worked her way up through various levels of management including team leader, Customer Service Manager and Branch Manager. She reminisces, "During this period, I had many opportunities to travel the world, which fulfilled my dream as a young girl to work in the travel industry. Following this, I joined Travelport to develop my experience within the travel industry in 2005. I was interested in GDSs and technology,

“ Our investments are focused in key areas that differentiate us like our industry-leading travel content; our search, merchandising and shopping capabilities ”

them to success in the UK and across the region. About 14 years later, I accepted the role of Country Manager for the UAE."

Pursuit of passion

From an early age, she wanted to get into the travel industry. "I was fascinated by travel and wanted the opportunity to travel the world and experience new cultures. I feel lucky to have been able to achieve that goal. It's often said that it is difficult to find a job that you love, but I did, and I feel privileged," she happily shares.

Remarkable achievements

Being customer-focused, Wallington's proudest moments, which will always stand

available today has enabled us to transform how the industry is engaging with travellers. I believe that one of the biggest changes is that travellers do not want to just book a flight any longer. They are looking for an enhanced experience, and for us to be able to meet their demands, we must adopt technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, big data and mobile applications."

Working in the UK and Middle East

In her words, "the biggest similarity between the industry in the UK and the UAE is the willingness to embrace technology. Similar to the UK, the UAE travel agents are

plan. She stated, "We continue to reap the benefits of our transformation from a GDS to a travel commerce platform and remain well-positioned for long-term growth given our commercial wins and the ongoing investments we're making. Our investments are focused in the key areas that differentiate us like our industry-leading travel content; our search, merchandising and shopping capabilities; and our leading mobile, data and payments solutions. We are also proud to have been the first travel commerce platform to be certified by IATA as a 'Level



which made my transition exciting, and my parents have always encouraged me to take on new challenges in areas that I'm passionate about. I have always viewed Travelport as a progressive company with diverse areas of interest, allowing me to gain experience and knowledge as Head of UK Sales, Operations Manager for Europe, Global Customer Advocacy Senior Director and Strategic Customer lead for Europe. These roles enabled me to broaden my outlook on the business and gave me opportunities to develop my management skills across a number of teams while leading

out for her, are winning awards voted and judged by customers. She says, "One was a prestigious award I received as Sales Manager of the Year at the TTG Business Awards and the second was Travelport being awarded the Best Technology Partner and Best Travel Technology provider for the second year running at the Arabian Travel Awards 2018."

Changes in the industry

Wallington shares about the many changes witnessed over the years in the industry that she holds dear to her heart. "The technology

enthusiastic to adopt new technologies to better serve their customers. They also face the same challenges when dealing with experienced travellers. In both countries, our customers are passionate about what they do. I believe that there aren't major differences between the two. However, the culture in the UAE presents a greater focus on the development of relationships with customers."

Travelport makes a mark

Working for over two decades at Travelport, Wallington shared her thoughts on its growth

3' aggregator under its New Distribution Capability initiative. In November 2018, we achieved another milestone as the first travel commerce platform to process bookings through NDC."

Millennials & technology

According to 'Travelport's Digital Business Traveller Research 2018', millennial business travellers in the UAE are driving an evolution in corporate travel by demanding both cutting-edge digital support throughout their trips and on-demand advice from consultants. 



Future of global economies

More than 500 business leaders and 30 industry experts, chief executives and decision makers attended the fourth edition of Sharjah FDI Forum themed on 'Shaping the Future of Economies'. The two-day event explored the latest in solutions, innovations and best practices within the global economy.



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'In-destination services' at Tryps.Tech

Nabil El-Shafeay, CEO, Tryps.Tech shares information and special aspects of the first and only online distributor specialised in the in-destination tours, activities, attraction tickets, transfers and airport lounges, etc, worldwide fully localised in Arabic.

TT Bureau

Share a brief of the ventures undertaken by Tryps.Tech.

Tryps.Tech is the first and only online distributor specialised in the 'in-destination services' for tours, activities, attraction tickets, transfers and airport lounges. Also, it is the first online distributor worldwide to provide thousands of tours and activities fully localised in Arabic. With our innovative technology, we help resellers from online and offline travel agencies, hotels and airlines connect with more than 2000 providers of tours and activities at more than 600+ destinations in 130 countries. We are empowering online travel agencies through our API and white-label solutions in the region and in Europe. Besides, we are also in discussion with some local carriers who are interested in selling 'in-destination services' to their clients.

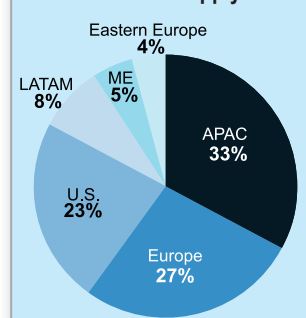
Please explain about the online tours and activities market in the Middle East.

Tours and activities in the Middle East generated US \$3 billion by 2018. Our region is the fifth in terms of numbers of providers of tours and activities right after Europe, LATAM and APAC, but is bigger than eastern Europe.

The Middle East is diverse, big and is the fastest growing worldwide in terms of outbound. The number of tours and activities in the region is less than 2000, but if we add the rest of the

Global Tours & Activity Suppliers*	U.S.	Western Europe	APAC	LATAM/ Carb.	Eastern Europe	Middle East
122,436	26,000	41,362	36,179	7,670	7,014	4,214
	21%	34%	30%	6%	6%	3%

Global Travel Activities market from the supply side:



'in-destination services' like attractions, lounges and events, then the number could reach the 3000 things to do. On one hand, the number of tours and local experiences is growing while on the other, with most of the suppliers still working offline, bookings are taking up to 24 hours to get confirmed, as they can't grant access to real-time availability and thus, instant booking confirmation.

Does it earn enough revenue?

Absolutely! The travel industry tends to focus on what is happening in aviation and hospitality since they drive 75 per cent of the global travel market, but the reason why we travel is the experience on the ground. After air and hotels, tours and activities segment is the third largest in the

travel industry. It's estimated to generate US \$250 billion by 2020 globally. Also, margins are up to 50 per cent but in most cases, it's 20 per cent to 25 per cent, which is much higher than what online travel agencies could earn from selling flight tickets or hotel bookings.

What are the key challenges faced?

Resellers of tours and activities from online and offline travel agencies, hotels and airlines have no reliable way to contracts for tours and activities from services providers worldwide. They deal with a fragmented and mostly, offline sector, with multiple currencies, complex contracting terms, different payment conditions, several booking processes, continuous content updates and a gap of real-time availability and thus, lack of instant booking confirmation. At the same time, thousands of service providers need an online hub where they could reach the final customer and increase their sales. These are the major hurdles that we are solving right now.

Could you share some of the travel behaviours of ME?

Middle Eastern travellers are

last-minute bookers; 70 per cent of them are booking their things-to-do from 3 to 1 day before the activity date. Some other services like skip the line are mainly booked on the same day of the activity. The average booking value is US \$100 and it's for 2 travellers per booking, 60 per cent of the region outbound comes from the GCC. Their top destinations are London, Barcelona, Paris as for Europe; Dubai, Istanbul, Cairo as for ME; Bangkok,

Singapore, and Hong Kong as for Asian destination.

What are their requirements and are the operators able to provide them the same?

Resellers of tours and activities must adapt their services to the customer's needs and profile (age). Since 80 per cent of online travel bookings are made through App, mobile or tablet, they must be mobile-friendly. Also, technology advancement has contributed to making the middle eastern travellers become more demanding. They want to book tours and activities with instant booking confirmation and with access to real-time availability. The reseller must support the last-minute

bookings and offer personalised service and experience to the travellers such as localised content, match of service expectation and price sensitivity.

Do these tech-savvy travellers get enough technical help?

Middle Eastern travellers are heavily into technology. They are into all tech trends — food is ordered online, goods are bought online, people are engaged into social networking with a daily average of three hours, especially on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat followed by Twitter. So, as they get more into technology, online resellers have to work hard to match their expectations.



All you bookworms, rejoice!



The 37th Sharjah International Book Fair, recently held at Expo Centre Sharjah, opened under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah. This edition hosted more than 20 million books from 1.6 million titles, 80,000 of which are new titles and 1,874 publishing houses from 77 countries. The fair also curated 1800 events and featured over 450 guests from around the world with 200 book-signing ceremonies for authors from 19 countries.



Innovate & inspire with Champions Club

Following the successful launch of the Amadeus Champions Club in the Gulf in 2017, Amadeus has expanded the remit of its knowledge-sharing initiative. The club connects local travel agents and other industry leaders to review new policies and develop mutually-beneficial market intelligence.



In the year ahead, Amadeus will be offering more advanced topical seminars to club members. Dedicated members groups including social media forums are also being launched, with members gaining access to the new Amadeus Live Travel Community to engage with global peers. Team-building and other social activities are also

being weaved into the club programme for the coming year. A special focus will be placed on enhancing member's access to—and capabilities around—Global Distribution Systems (GDS). According to an IATA report, many of the rigid shopping processes the industry relies upon date back 50 years or more and reflect a different



way in which products were sold. This is especially relevant as the combination of mobile devices, big data and Artificial

Intelligence is set to revolutionise the retail experience. One recent report commissioned by Amadeus and conducted by the London School of Economics notes that the pressure to deliver more, differentiated travel content faster and in a digestible format brings great technical challenges.

Graham Nichols, Managing Director, Amadeus Gulf, said, "The Amadeus Champions Club is a unique programme for those

who seek to constantly sharpen their skills and go beyond their daily duties to push the industry

forward. We are committed to growing this initiative and continuing to innovate with club members in the years to come."

Cristian Sucu, Director Operations, Amadeus Gulf, said, "The Amadeus Champions Club is a unique platform for representatives of the Gulf's travel sector, enabling them to expand upon their knowledge and create new synergies within the travel market. It is evolving with more initiatives for the members as they gain more skills and expertise".

Members offered a space within the Amadeus Champions Club are recognised for their exceptional knowledge of history within the region's travel industry.

Advertorial

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Over 1,000 exhibitors at ITB Asia

Top industry leaders gathered at Marina Bay Sands in Singapore to witness and network during the largest annual travel show in Asia themed on 'Travel Reimagined'. ITB Asia is one of the top business platforms connecting exhibitors and partners with key decision makers in the MICE, corporate and leisure travel industry. This year saw a 49 per cent rise in the MICE sector.



NEW HOTELS

As we kick-start 2019, we take a peek into the properties scheduled to open and the ones that have already opened.

★ **Waldorf Astoria Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC)**

Rooms/Suites inventory: 275

Opening Date:
Spring 2019



Evoking the elegance of the early 1960's New York jet-set era, Waldorf Astoria DIFC promises an urban retreat in the Gulf's metropolis and presents an unparalleled service synonymous with the Waldorf Astoria brand. Featuring a dedicated business centre, ballroom and library among three other flexible meeting spaces, Waldorf Astoria DIFC provides an all-encompassing experience for the discerning travellers.



★ **The Palm Tower**

Rooms/Suites
inventory: 289 rooms & 43 luxury
residences

Opening Date:
Q4 2019

Nakheel has started constructing the rooftop infinity swimming pool at The Palm Tower, its 52-storey, luxury hotel and residential complex at the heart of Palm Jumeirah in Dubai. Perched 210 metres above ground and covering 775 square metres, the infinity pool – one of the highest in the world – borders all four sides of the building with panoramic views across Palm Jumeirah, the Arabian Gulf and the Dubai skyline.

★ **Zabeel House The Greens**

Rooms/Suites
inventory: 200 rooms & 10 apartments

Opening Date:
December 2018

Moving into The Greens with a bang, Zabeel House by Jumeirah, The Greens is the third hotel to open as part of Jumeirah Group's upscale casual brand launched earlier last year. Opening in Tower 3 of the Onyx Towers, the hotel is high on design synonymous with other hotels within the Zabeel House by Jumeirah collection; but inspired by New York loft living, with contemporary and yet quirky art and design throughout the hotel, representing the spirit of the Zabeel House by Jumeirah brand perfectly.



★ **Four Points by Sheraton Sharjah**

Rooms/Suites inventory: 225

Opening Date:
Q1 2019

This will be the brand's first hotel in the emirate and will complement the existing sister brand, the Sheraton Sharjah Beach Resort & Spa. Ideally located at the centre of Sharjah on King Faisal Street, the newest city hotel will have easy access for leisure with Al Majaz Waterfront in the south and for business in the north with the Bank Street. The hotel has a sizeable inventory of interconnecting and twin rooms.

Rixos The Palm Dubai announces a rebrand

2019 marks an exciting milestone for Rixos The Palm Dubai as it receives a brand-new name to mark the launch of its new Luxury Suite collection.

TT Bureau

The rebranded Rixos The Palm Dubai Hotel and Suites will expand its offering on February 25 to launch an exquisite selection of suites, bringing the total number of rooms and suites in property to 316. The expansion builds on its renowned success in the region as the UAE's first luxury multi-concept resort by further diversifying its offering. The Luxury Suite collection will comprise 82 suites, featuring four distinguished categories providing the ultimate luxury lifestyle experience by combining the homely comforts of a private residence, alongside the unparalleled service and amenities that Rixos The Palm Dubai is known for. Conveniently located in a dedicated building adjacent to the existing



hotel, guests looking for exclusivity and privacy can choose from a collection of two, three-, four- and five-bedroom family suites, ideal for larger groups

and multi-generational families seeking the ultimate holiday sanctuary. Guests staying in the new luxury suites can also take advantage of the property's pioneering ultra all-inclusive holiday package allowing them to indulge in an extensive selection of culinary delights and over 70 international premium beverages across all restaurants and bars.

The Luxury Suite collection also extends exclusive benefits to its guests including private check-in, special spa treatments, VIP amenities on arrival, in-suite breakfast, complimentary afternoon tea, a private BBQ dinner experience, a complimentary local tour and two-hour use of non-motorised watersports, plus much more. In addition to dedicated amenities, which include private pools, a dedicated beach bar, and an authentic Turkish all-day dining restaurant, guests staying in the luxury suites can enjoy the added benefits of having world-class dining, entertainment and leisure facilities on their doorstep. With access to the private white sand beach, a comprehensive watersports programme, a private helipad, a newly renovated and enhanced Rixy Kids Club, and the secluded Anjana Spa, every family member is catered for. 🏖️

Your complete travel protection plan

Saroj Kumar Sinha, Manager – Relationship & Destination Management, Al Rostamani Travel & Holidays; and **Arijit Munshi**, General Manager, Tune Protect share insights into the necessity for obtaining a comprehensive travel protection cover.

Saroj Kumar Sinha

Manager – Relationship & Destination Management, Al Rostamani Travel & Holidays

Why would you recommend a travel protection plan?

Often, travellers begin the journey uninsured because travel insurance seems like a superfluous expense to them where money spent is money wasted. Leisure travellers are usually price-sensitive and business travellers are too focused on meeting deadlines. However, if flight delays, cancellations, lost baggage, medical emergencies or misplaced travel tickets do happen before, during or after they return, the realisation of the missing insurance dawns on the traveller; and it is then too late. There is nothing worse than sending a traveller to experience an amazing holiday or on a business trip only to have them contact us about lost luggage or being stuck at an airport. It's an unfortunate mishap but can happen; hence we always

advise travellers to take the precaution available that is Travel protection plans for a peace of mind.

When is the correct time for purchasing a travel protection cover?

The right time to purchase travel protection plans is when a traveller has finalised the holiday or business trip and not a mere afterthought. A standard travel protection cover is generally during the journey of the traveller for business or leisure; it should come into effect even before the traveller starts the journey from home. In fact, cancellation costs under defined circumstances are one of the key benefits of the 'before' element embedded within the 'travel assurance' products. Such benefits cover emergency-related events that might take place even before the journey.



Arijit Munshi

General Manager, Tune Protect EMEA

For business travellers if they are already covered under the company's Global Corporate Medical plan, what further benefits do they need to evaluate?

Travellers with a corporate medical cover often have the misconception that they are covered for all unforeseen events while travelling abroad. However, the fact is that in such a corporate or individual medical cover provided in the country of residence, the traveller may not have international cover until and unless the need has been specified to the provider. The local medical cover will often not extend the peace of mind to the travellers when it comes to lost baggage, travel cancellations, delayed flight and more. The right thing a



corporate traveller should do is take a travel protection with broad range of benefits to cover as much as possible unforeseen events that might happen.

While travelling to EU countries, Georgia, Turkey, travel insurance should be compliant. What benefits travellers can look at for these countries?

In this case, a traveller will require Schengen compliant travel insurance cover as majority of European countries come under the ambit of Schengen regulations. As many as 26 countries under the Schengen mark would require travel cover with a set of benefits as a mandate without which one would not be able to obtain a Schengen visa.

Advertorial

Insights into revenue optimisation

Over 180 sales and marketing professionals in the hospitality industry came together at Madinat Jumeirah in Dubai for 'Revenue Optimization Conference (ROC)' hosted by Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association (HSMIA). The conference brought together revenue management, distribution, sales and marketing executives from the hotel industry.



MOVEMENTS

Norwegian Cruise Line

► UK, Ireland, Israel, South Africa & Middle East

Norwegian Cruise Line has announced the appointment of **Eamonn Ferrin** as Vice President & Managing Director for its UK, Ireland, South Africa and the Middle East markets. Ferrin will oversee the sales, marketing, public relations and office operations for Norwegian Cruise Line, heading up the key regions of the UK and Ireland as well as the growing and developing markets of South Africa and the Middle East. Prior to joining Norwegian Cruise Line, Ferrin was the Founder of Ferrin Consulting, providing consultancy services to travel brands in the airline, tour operator, cruise and hotel industries. He holds a Masters of Science degree in Tourism, Finance & Marketing from the University of Surrey.



The Regency Hotel Kuwait

► Kuwait

Abdul Razzaq Al Sane & Sons Group of Companies announced the appointment of **Otto Kurzendorfer** as General Manager for its flagship hotel, The Regency Kuwait in Salmiya district. Kurzendorfer joins the hotel with a well-established career in hospitality management and operation, spanning three decades and three continents. From humble beginnings in the kitchen, he worked in prestigious Leading Hotel of the World and Relais & Chateaux trophy hotels such as the Savoy in London and the Munich Mandarin Oriental before attending a German higher hotel school in Dortmund.



Emirates

► Sudan

Khalfan Al Salami will hold the role of the airline's Manager—Sudan. Salami joined Emirates in 2015 as part of the UAE National Commercial Management Programme, taking on further training and development in Emirates' station in Madrid and most recently held the role of Commercial Support Manager Kuwait. Some of the positions he held were Country Manager—Sudan and Commercial Manager—Kuwait with market experience in Kuwait, Dubai and Madrid.



Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar

► Oman

Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort has appointed **Sajeev Vasudevan** as the Director of Sales. In his new role, Vasudevan will be responsible for the overall positioning of the hotel, developing sales strategies to support business objectives across all sales market segments, and ensuring the hotel continues to deliver a high level of customer service. With over 10 years of expertise in the field of sales management, he brings with him a solid understanding of the luxury hospitality industry. Vasudevan most recently held the position of Director of Sales at Shangri-La Hotel, Dubai.



Hyatt Regency Dubai and Galleria

► Dubai

Hyatt Regency Dubai & Galleria welcomed **David Harb** as the new General Manager of the hotel. Harb is responsible for managing a complex of 421 hotel rooms and 388 residences that are apt for a business stay as well as for a relaxing getaway. He has held several notable positions within Hyatt. As a graduate in Hospitality Management, Harb started his career with Hyatt Regency New Orleans in Louisiana as Assistant Manager of Food and Beverage in 2002. He later held several roles across Hyatt Hotels in Georgia, Florida, Illinois and Washington, USA before moving to Hyatt Regency Dubai as Director of Food and Beverage in 2012.



Millennium Airport Hotel Dubai

► Dubai

Millennium Airport Hotel Dubai has appointed **Purnima Sunil** as the Director of Sales and Marketing. With over two decades of widespread experience in the hospitality industry, Sunil's previous employment was with Bonnington Hotel Dubai, where she held the role of Director of Business Development. An Indian national, Sunil began her career in Mumbai before moving to Oman at Al Sawadi Beach Resort Rotana in 1995. Her next stop was at the Sanna Sheraton in Yemen before returning to Oman in 1997.



Time Hotels

► Dubai

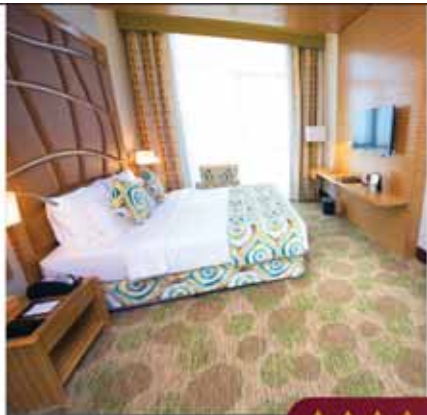
Time Hotels appoints **Prasanth Janarthanan** as Director of Sales. With more than 18 years' experience, Janarthanan has worked with a range of global hospitality brands including Starwood Hotels & Resorts, Habtoor Hotels, Carlton Hotels and most recently for TIME Hotels where he was Director of Sales for both TIME Oak Hotel and Suites as well as TIME Grand Plaza Hotel, before being promoted to his new position where he will oversee sales for the TIME Hotels Portfolio.



Time Hotels

► Dubai

Shawn Anthony Vaz has been appointed as Digital e-commerce Manager at Time Hotels Dubai. Taking charge of all TIME Hotels' website and all social media requirements Vaz comes with 14 years of digital experience in the hospitality industry. He will be responsible for website redevelopment and branding, social media management and content development. Vaz has previously held roles at Emirates Palace Hotel, Kempinski Hotels – Mall of the Emirates and JA Resorts & Hotels.



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Etihad leads with sustainable flying

Research has shown that jet fuel can be produced using desert land and sea water through an innovative agricultural process. Khalifa University, Etihad Airways, Boeing, ADNOC, Safran, GE and BAUER Resources celebrate a major milestone in developing a sustainable aviation fuel value chain.

TT Bureau

The Sustainable Bioenergy Research Consortium (SBRC), a non-profit entity established by Masdar Institute that is part of Khalifa University of Science and Technology, recently announced the world's first commercial flight using locally produced sustainable fuel on an Etihad Airways Boeing 787 powered by GE's GENx-1B engines. The flight from Abu Dhabi to Amsterdam marked a major milestone in the development of a clean, alternative aviation fuel to reduce carbon emissions. The initiative also addresses food security in the UAE through the farming of seafood as a core element in the process. The SBRC partners have been working together to prove

the concept of a comprehensive value chain that is centered around the Seawater Energy and Agriculture System (SEAS). This is a synergistic industrial platform that supports the aviation sector, the oil and gas industry, food production and the creation of a new agricultural alternative in the UAE.

His Excellency Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, Minister of Climate Change and Environment, said, "Productive cross-disciplinary public-private partnerships are crucial to fuelling development efforts and creating game-changing innovations that enable a more sustainable future. Deep decarbonisation of energy-intensive industries has a




ripple effect on food security and climate action. Clean, alternative aviation fuels are an innovative and sustainable solution to significantly reducing harmful carbon emissions. The UAE is proud to be a pioneer in this domain."

Etihad Airways has been at the forefront of aviation biofuel research in the region and this marks the first time that a flight

has been operated on fuel derived from plants grown in saltwater. Sustainable fuel for the flight was derived from oil in Salicornia plants, which were grown on the two-hectare SEAS farm in Masdar City. The SEAS is the world's first desert ecosystem designed to produce fuel and food in saltwater.


Tony Douglas, Group Chief Executive Officer, Etihad


Aviation Group, said, "This is a significant milestone for the UAE and its key industries. Etihad is fully committed to this project which demonstrates a successful proof of concept that is local, cost-effective and sustainable. Decarbonisation is important across the aviation industry and Etihad is proud to be at the forefront of this pioneering new research."




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