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New vision for new year

Setting new goals and aspirations every year, the Middle East has become one of the most rapidly growing destinations in the world. Of late, the UAE has forged ahead as a much sought-after country due to the collaboration with public and private sectors. Key strategists share their outlook for 2019.



HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority

“The positioning of Sharjah as the ideal global destination for family holidaymakers and a global cultural hub for historical and natural heritage remains our priority. The development of unique ecotourism products, outdoor activities and more branded hotels in Sharjah, in collaboration with our partners and with the integration of innovative solutions, is set to further raise the standards of the emirate’s hospitality and tourism products in 2019. The strategy complements the achievement of the goals set by Sharjah Tourism Vision 2021 that aims to attract at least 10 million tourists to the emirate by 2021.”

SHEHARA RIZLY



Freddy Farid
Managing Director
Two Seasons Hotel & Apartments

“All our efforts this year are directed to our new brand as Al Ghaith Holdings, owner of Gloria Hotel & Hotel Apartments has decided to change the hotel name to Two Seasons Hotel & Hotel Apartments. The rebranding will come to effect from January 2019 when the hotel will start off a new era with the completion of the room renovation programme, new marketing initiatives and our own rewards programme. We are primarily eyeing the India, China markets whilst achieving a good result from the emerging markets like Belgium and Scandinavian countries. We are also targeting the stop-over programmes and the transit business in addition

to new projects in the surrounding area.”



Nasir Jamal Khan
CEO
Al Naboodah Travel

“We are very optimistic about our growth this year as we will be opening a new branch in Sharjah very soon, whilst the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia operation is already successfully underway, yet we are looking for further expansion. In addition, our newly-implemented travel management system (VIATI) is now fully operational, and is currently being used by our corporate and trade partners for online bookings. We have plans to bring more airlines on board and represent them as their official GSA. We will be sharing more details on this soon once everything is finalised. In terms of GSA business expansion, we would like to congratulate Turkish Airlines for adding seven weekly flights from Sharjah to Istanbul (Sabiha Airport). We are also focusing on facilitating the

further growth of our existing GSA airlines.”

Contd. on page 3 ▶

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Matka to draw 70k attendees

Anna Suominen, Sales Group Manager, Messukeskus Helsinki, sheds light on Matka Nordic Travel Fair set to be held from Jan 16-20, 2019, at Messukeskus Helsinki, Finland.

TT Bureau

What will Matka Nordic travel fair offer this time?

At MATKA, the initial two days are only for travel industry professionals comprising workshops and presentations, while the last three days are primarily for consumers looking for travel deals and inspiration.

Which are the major areas covered?

Professional days focus on workshops and networking to boost sales, and on presentations relevant to industry professionals. Sustainable travel and modern sales will also be highlighted in Matka 2019.

How important is this event for participants from the Middle East?



Anna Suominen
Sales Group Manager
Messukeskus Helsinki

As the appeal of Nordic destinations is growing among the Middle Eastern travellers, Matka offers a chance to take a look at Nordic destinations and the travel experiences that are offered to visitors.

How much revenue is expected to be generated this year?

Every year, new interesting destinations decide to exhibit at Matka. 2019 has a strong focus on responsible and sustainable travel as well as food tourism.

How many visitors are expected this year?

For 2019, we expect some 70,000 visitors and are hoping for more consumers to come back to Matka through extensive marketing.

How many exhibitors are expected from the Middle East?

In 2019, we have destinations such as Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah from the UAE. Sharjah is a new destination at Matka.

New strategies for 2019

Contd. from page 1



Arijit Munshi
General Manager
Tune Protect

“Today, we have more than 10 different travel protection products right from Schengen/EU compliant to adventure travel, catering to different lifestyles. Our objective is to better understand the evolving needs of travellers with the help of the travel industry. We are also looking at venturing into new countries as well as introducing new travel products that correspond to the changing requirements of travellers and 2019 will be no exception. It is important for us to keep up with our discerning clientele, establish new partnerships with the insurance community and travel providers in the region as they help support our vision.”

“We’ve helped our clients travel smart and achieve more with our experienced team. A testament to this is the fact that we have maintained the regional industry’s most consistent client retention rate (95 per cent over the past 10 years being in operation in the GCC). Whilst 2018 revenues are modest compared to last year, our strong partnerships are indicative of an exciting 2019 and beyond. We have had another great year and are hopeful about the future as we build our global network with a consistent value proposition that includes continued focus on innovation, collaboration and unrivalled customer satisfaction.”



Rafeeq Mohammed
CEO
ITL World

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Optimism ahead!

Starting off the year with the much coveted Dubai Shopping Festival, shoppers can revel as the dates for the festival this year were further extended on popular demand. Having received the billionth passenger at the Dubai International Airport once again proves the prowess of the nation. The United Arab Emirates still holds out as the strongest hub connecting the east and the west with almost five main airports in each emirate.

The outlook for 2019 is optimistic as everyone is preparing themselves for Expo 2020 which is now just one and half years away.

Every emirate has its own agenda on different markets so that they can convey the message to a wider audience. The untapped market potential still lies high in Scandinavian and Balkan countries. Hence, the emirate of Sharjah, under the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority, has taken it upon themselves to introduce their emirate at the Matka Nordic Travel Fair to be held from January 16-20, 2019 in Helsinki. The first two days of the event are entirely B2B, while the other days are open to B2C segment. flydubai's new connection to Helsinki, Finland is slowly but steadily growing as an important outbound touristic destination for the Middle Eastern travellers.

Dubai is readily progressing towards ensuring that all infrastructural developments are completed well in time. The new Deira Islands project, yet to be completed, will most definitely be among the many interesting destinations for families.

The UAE is not just a seasonal destination during winter but an important hotspot throughout the year. Many events are organised to ensure that the numbers remain intact.

Turkey's ambitious targets

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director—ME, ATM & IBTM Arabia, talks about how Turkey's figures for the third quarter of 2017 show it's well on track to achieving its goal of becoming a major global tourism market by 2023.

Turkey's tourism industry is recovering, with a strong focus on the MICE sector and, without a doubt, there's a long list of compelling reasons to choose Turkey for your next business event. The bounce back is clear evidence that travellers have renewed confidence in Turkey following

infrastructure and transport networks in preparation for increased visitors. Major airports - Dalman, Bodrum and Antalya - have received private funding for modernisation and upgrades. Getting between the many attractions of these cities is now quicker and easier than ever before.

tourism ambitions is the intention for the airport to become one of the world's busiest aviation hubs. When fully operational, it will serve 3,000 flights daily and is expected to be the largest airport in the world.

Turkey has its sights set on welcoming 50 million tourists to the country every year by 2023. To achieve its ambitious targets, a core aspect of the country's tourism strategy is to capitalise on the opportunities afforded by its excellent location and cutting-edge venue facilities.

“The recently-opened Istanbul International Airport has added even more capacity offering flights between 350 destinations and handling 150 million passengers per year”

the implementation of successful security initiatives and political stability. This government action is supported by copious competitive advantage, market strengths and vehement determination to deliver excellence. From raising visitor numbers, Turkey's tourism sector is forecast to see revenues grow to \$30 billion in 2018. In an aim to raise numbers further, the government's initiative offers incentives to tour operators and up to 38 million are expected to visit the country this year. This is a position of strength the Turkish government is keen to expand on in its 2023 Turkish Tourism Strategy.

Additionally, the country's tourism centres - Istanbul and Antalya - have received billions of dollars in investment, with an overhaul of their

Turkey's advantageous geographic location as a natural bridge between Europe and the Middle East, makes Istanbul an excellent choice for international conventions and exhibitions. It's a central meeting point for international conference delegates, coming from Asia and Europe. Istanbul was ranked 23rd in the 2017 ICCA rankings, based on the number of international association meetings hosted here.

As a global tourism magnet, getting to Turkey has always been easy with plentiful connections from worldwide destinations. The new Istanbul International Airport - opened in 2018 - has added even more capacity offering flights between 350 destinations and handling 150 million passengers per year. A telling indicator of Turkey's

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



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director—ME
ATM & IBTM Arabia

RJ ensures ease of travel experience

Introducing a 60 second self-check-in service at the Queen Alia International Airport, Royal Jordanian tends to prevent queuing at check-in counters with Common Use Self Service (CUSS) that eases travel procedures. Passengers flying on Royal Jordanian and departing from Queen Alia International Airport can self-check-in for all routes, except for flights to North America and London due to security reasons. The kiosks also provide other services like passport details verification, flight number and time of departure, seat selection, Royal Club mileage calculator and the accruing awards.



'Konnichiwa' Ishikawa! greets Cathay

One of the first announcements for 2019 by Cathay Pacific is the expansion of its network to Japan with the introduction of the new route to Ishikawa from April 2019. The new twice weekly service will enable the UAE travellers to access the destination easily via Hong Kong.

 TT Bureau

The new year will bring forth new routes for Cathay Pacific as it will add Ishikawa Prefecture from April 2019 further expanding its network in Japan. This new seasonal scheduled service to Komatsu next spring will definitely provide more accessibility to the UAE travellers to discover the beautiful natural landscapes and rich cultural attractions of Japan's Ishikawa Prefecture via Hong Kong. It will be a new twice weekly service which will be operated on Wednesdays and Saturdays between April 3 and October 26, 2019 using Airbus A330-300 aircraft featuring both Business and Economy Class cabins.



Mark Sutch
Regional General Manager—South Asia, Middle East and Africa, Cathay Pacific

Cathay Pacific has operated charter flights to Komatsu, the

gateway to Ishikawa, in central Honshu, at peak holiday periods over the past two years, and the introduction of the new scheduled

service underlines the airline's commitment to its key Japanese market. Tickets to and from Komatsu are now available to pur-

chase at www.cathaypacific.com. With the addition of Komatsu to the network, Cathay Pacific and its regional airline Cathay Dragon will soon fly to a total of nine airports in eight cities across Japan – including the recent one at Tokushima. Together, the two airlines operate more than 150

services per week between Hong Kong and Japan during the summer months, providing unrivalled convenience to passengers.

hub. It is no secret that Japan is an extremely popular destination for the UAE travellers and those from further afield – and for good reason. It is a place that offers something for everyone."

“Our expansion strategy has been focused on growing new destinations, which gives our customers more choice, allows us to open up new revenue streams and strengthens our Hong Kong hub”

Ishikawa's capital Kanazawa is known for its spectacular Edo-period architecture, with Kanazawa Castle and the adjacent Kenrokuen Garden as among the region's main attractions. The natural beauty of the Noto Peninsula and Wajima, home to the famed coastal terraced rice fields of Shiroyone Senmaida, will delight lovers with great outdoors, while Kaga is noted countrywide for its hot-spring onsen. Ishikawa is also known as the 'Food Treasury' for its gastronomic diversity. 

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Your dose of retail therapy

The year-long retail calendar enables a growth of the AED 128.45bn sector projected to grow further at 5.6 per cent to reach AED 160.7bn by 2021. Read on for an overview by industry insiders...

TT Bureau



His Excellency
Sami Al Qamzi
Director General
Department of Economic
Development (DED)

The retail sector makes up a considerable volume of Dubai's GDP. We are committed to consolidating efforts across Dubai to offer exceptional experiences in infrastructure, initiatives and incentives, in collaboration with the public and private sector, for the growth of retail industry. The DED, in collaboration with Dubai Tourism, will continue to build on Dubai's already successful position as a favourable shopping destination.



His Excellency
Helal Al Marri
Director General
Dubai Department of Tourism
and Commerce Marketing
(Dubai Tourism)

As one of the core pillars of destination offering, retail sector is on high priority for Dubai Tourism. In addition to increasing the number of international visitors to the emirate, we are also focused on enhancing the economic value. The strategic revisions made to the 2019 Retail Calendar mark a significant investment from Dubai Tourism to further enhance the wider domestic economy.



Fuad Mansoor
Sharaf
Managing Director
Majid Al Futtaim Properties,
Shopping Malls
(UAE, Bahrain and Oman)

We support the vision of our industry partners at Dubai Tourism and are unified in our goal of making Dubai a leading shopping destination. In line with our aim to revolutionise the retail sector, we welcome an extended retail calendar and will leverage the additional events to create world-class in-mall entertainment to attract residents and visitors alike.



Ahmed Al Khaja
CEO
Dubai Festivals and Retail
Establishment (DFRE)
Dubai Tourism

We are constantly looking for ways to support and promote the retail sector within Dubai; from large retailers and mega global brands, to the smaller high-potential SME segment. Following detailed analyses with our strategic retail partners, we have introduced noteworthy changes to the new retail calendar. We have worked with DED to design a special incentive to take advantage of the myriad opportunities.



Patrick Chalhouh
Co-CEO
Chalhouh Group

The strategic direction of Dubai's retail calendar has allowed for distributors and retailers of luxury fashion to be aligned with global trends, thereby shifting the vision from being a traditional company to a more agile organisation that is constantly responding to customers' needs. As a result, this leads to driving footfall and overall expenditure, thereby helping us realise the potential of our growing range of retail and entertainment destinations.



Omar Khoory
Managing Director
Nakheel Malls

Dubai Festivals and Retail Establishment's efforts to diversify and evolve the retail landscape in Dubai are aligned with our own objectives at Nakheel Malls. As we expand our malls portfolio, we look forward to more collaborations with exciting new shopping and leisure destinations like The Pointe and Nakheel Mall. We are proud to be a partner of the retail calendar and are busy setting out our strategy for 2019.



Patrick Bousquet-
Chavanne
Chief Executive Officer
Emaar Malls

With a gross leasable area of over 6.7 million square feet in Dubai, Emaar Mall Group assets include not only The Dubai Mall, but also Dubai Marina Mall, Souk Al Bahar and Gold & Diamond Park. With such an extensive portfolio, it's crucial for us to work in close partnership with Dubai Festivals and Retail Establishment to create exciting events and promotions that attract local customers as well as international tourists.



Renuka Jagtiani
Chairwoman and
Chief Executive Officer
Landmark Group

With over 50 brands within the Landmark Group, from homegrown retail concepts to international offerings, new and additional Retail Calendar Event initiatives are welcome developments. We will leverage the new Home Festival through our own brands Home Centre and Home Box, thereby activating an enriched programme of customer events and experiences.

\$3.9bn hotel deals by 2023: SHIC

Set to be held at Marriott Riyadh Diplomatic Quarter from January 22-23, 2019, the second edition of Saudi Arabia Hotel Investment Conference (SHIC) will provide a forum for more than 300 hotel investors, owners, developers and operators to discuss the growth of the hospitality industry in the Kingdom.



Abdullah Al Dawood
Group CEO
Altayyar Travel Group



Jonathan Worsley
Chairman, Bench Events
and Co-Founder, SHIC



Philip Wooller
Area Director—Middle
East and Africa, STR



His Royal Highness Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
President, Saudi Commission for Tourism & National Heritage



Jay Rosen
Head of Investment
& Finance, Red Sea
Development Company,



Mike Hernandez
Executive Director—Real
Estate Development,
Quiddiya Investment
Company



Ahmed Bin Madhi
Director of Asset
Management, Rua Al
Madinah Holding Company



The Saudi Arabia Hotel Investment Conference (SHIC) will feature keynote sessions from the Kingdom's leading industry experts, headlined by **His Royal Highness Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud**, President, Saudi Commission for Tourism & National Heritage, including interviews with **Eng Abdullah bin Mohammed Al-Issa**, Chairman, Dur Hospitality Company and **Abdullah Al Dawood**, Group CEO, Altayyar Travel Group. The event is being organised by Saudi Event Management and Marketing (SEMARK), in partnership with Bench Events, MEED and Dur Hospitality.

Curated in response to demand for information on the multitude of investment opportunities arising in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, SHIC will feature keynote addresses, interviews, data presentations, panel debates, masterclasses and round-table sessions designed to provide delegates with valuable insights into the evolving Saudi Hospitality market at a pivotal time.

Al Saud will deliver his address on 'Realising Travel & Tourism's part of Vision 2030', sharing

insights into the government's framework for supporting investment into the hospitality sector, as well as an update on plans for visas. **Jonathan Worsley**, Chairman of Bench Events and Co-Founder, SHIC, said, "The commitment to SHIC by prominent speakers on our programme is testament to the wealth of opportunities in the Kingdom and commitment from

Young people and female entrepreneurs will take centre stage at SHIC, with the launch of the first SHIC Young Leaders Award, recognising the impact on the hospitality industry of a Saudi National aged under 30, and a panel session on businesswomen in the Saudi Hospitality World

government and industry alike to delivering on Vision 2030."

According to data from SHIC's partner, MEED Projects, the outlook for hospitality investment in the Kingdom is strong, with \$3.9bn worth of hotel deals set to be awarded over the next five years. The Kingdom has already seen new hotels worth in excess of \$10bn built since 2012.

Data and analytics specialist STR forecasts that the room inventory in Saudi Arabia is set to almost double by 2024. There

are 273 properties in the pipeline comprising 90,449 rooms. Currently, 403 existing hotels comprise 93,814 rooms.

Philip Wooller, Area Director—Middle East and Africa, STR, who will be presenting 'Trends and Pipeline - Threats and Opportunities in the Kingdom' at SHIC said, "The Saudi hotel industry has a pivotal role in

achieving the Saudi Vision 2030 goals. We are already seeing development and construction accelerating across a number of hotel projects as steps are taken to attract more visitors to the Kingdom. The branded as well as independent hotel pipeline will certainly provide future visitors, as well as local residents of all demographics and budgets with diverse offerings and plenty more choice."

Ahead of SHIC, Al-Issa said, "As Saudi Arabia witnesses a historic period of transformation,

with tourism being one of the growing key sectors, it calls for a wide range of hospitality solutions to meet the future needs of both domestic and international visitors. Dur Hospitality, with more than 40 years of local market experience, is well aligned to this blueprint for growth, with a portfolio of 20 completed projects and 21 more under development, including hotels

developed in partnership with major global brands and our very own Makarem."

Other new speakers at SHIC 2019 include **Jay Rosen**, Head of Investment & Finance, Red Sea Development Company, who will review new areas in the Kingdom that are open to investment following Vision 2030; **Mike Hernandez**, Executive Director—Real Estate Development, Quiddiya Investment Company, who will discuss investment opportunities related to key demographics; and

Ahmed Bin Madhi, Director of Asset Management, Rua Al Madinah Holding Company, who will share updates on developments in the Holy Cities.

Worsley commented, "The Madinah hotel market is going through a fundamental change due to the huge supply and new product offerings. The Rua Al Madinah Project will bring massive scale to this market and we will hear Ahmed Bin Madhi address the power of religious tourism as a driver for the hospitality industry and the economy".

Female entrepreneurs will take centre stage at SHIC, with the launch of the first SHIC Young Leaders Award, recognising the impact on the hospitality industry of a Saudi National under 30.

New Feature

- ◆ 10 hotel operators will take part in an invitation-only 'Three Minute Pitch to Owners', presenting mid-market brands such as La Quinta, Radisson Red, Shaza Hotels, Campanile, Hampton by Hilton, Rove Hotels, etc to 100 investors

Celebrate winter at Al Noor Island &

Sharjah with its rich heritage and culture boasts of the most amazing family touristic destination hotspots like Al Majaz Waterfront and Al Noor Island. As winter sets in, Al Noor is the perfect place for visitors to witness first-hand five of the most unique and exciting experiences while Al Majaz brings in a host of new fun-filled activities for families and tourists alike visiting the emirate over the next few weeks.

Al Noor Island, one of Sharjah's prominent destinations is rolling out new and revamped education packages, which combines nature, art, and entertainment by introducing five unique experiences. Visitors will be able to learn about butterflies, plants, trees, birds, photography and even practise yoga and learn more about sky objects. In addition to being able to enjoy sky watching, nature, art-focused island tours and much more.

"With the winters at our doorstep, Al Noor Island has customised experiences for visitors to explore and appreciate nature in all its forms. From pure adventure to relaxed leisure, or wondrous discoveries about our environment,

I encourage all the UAE citizens and residents to visit and enjoy the new immersive and educational natural experiences at the destination. This will be a part in raising the community awareness when it comes to green and eco-friendly programmes and activities at the island," said **Mahmoud Rashid Al Suwaidi**, Manager, Al Noor Island.

The five new and exciting activities that are being rolled out for visitors of all ages and experience levels are:

Tropical Labyrinth

Visitors will be led on a guided experience to explore the island and learn about the plants, trees and birds as well as engage in a practical work-

shop on butterflies which will be conducted in the butterfly house. The facility provides special packages that are catered to individuals, families and schools.

Sky Watch

Visitors can spend time viewing the moon, visible planets and engage in a basic star-gazing session by using the centre's powerful professional telescopes.

Bird watching and photography

Visitors can engage in bird watching and photography during the early hours of the morning or late evening hours. The island is home to an incredible variety of birds (visibility subject to season).

Yoga at sunrise workshops

These purposefully designed workshops will encourage visitors to learn and practise yoga at

sunrise with goals to stimulate senses, enhance flexibility, balance, mobility and tone muscles. This will be a recurring workshop to be booked in advance once announced.

Nurture nature workshops

Families, schoolchildren and individuals can learn about various indoor gardening techniques (including the Japanese art of Kokedama) with experts at the



Al Majaz Waterfront

island. The eco-educational activities will be hosted from October until December. All the workshops can be viewed on the island's social media platforms. This will be a recurring workshop which will have to be booked in advance once it is announced.

In addition to getting a chance of going home in a brand new GAC GS8 2018 car, visitors from all

ages are welcomed at Al Majaz Waterfront to enjoy the special times with remarkable stage shows, roaming entertainment including still walkers, acrobats, jugglers and musicians.

Marwah Obaid Al Shamsi, General Manager, Al Majaz Waterfront, states, "The 'Winter Fun' festival is our opportunity to use the cool weather for bringing in a feeling

of winter to visitors with a theme that mimics their homeland. As we gear up for the new year, Al Majaz Waterfront brings up a mix of wonderful activities and shows catering to every individual in the family by creating an entertaining atmosphere. We encourage everyone to experience the entertaining activities lined up at the destination and be a part of the festive fun-filled month at Al Majaz Waterfront."



Sharjah forays into new markets in 2019

His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA), shares some of the new markets in focus for 2019 whilst promoting the many interesting travel hotspots.

 Shehara Rizly

Could you share some of the international events where Sharjah will participate in during this year?

This year, the main new exhibition we are participating in will be Matka Nordic Travel Fair to be held in Helsinki, Finland, from January 18-20, 2019. Apart from that, we have planned to participate in SATTE Delhi, ITB Berlin, MITT Moscow, Riyadh Travel Fair, ATM Dubai and WTM London in 2019.

How relevant is your participation in SATTE in January 2019?

Through our participation at SATTE in Delhi this year, we aim to reach out to more international visitors and build new partnerships. The participation is of great significance as SATTE is the launch platform for many countries and tourism products from across the globe to conduct business in and with India. In addition, the event is supported by World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

and the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), among many other leading associations.

What are your expectations from SATTE 2019?

We aim to achieve further growth in terms of the number of international tourist arrivals in 2019 and beyond, whilst looking forward to capitalising on SATTE's popularity to further build the emirate's tourism profile and reach out to major markets and global cities.

Finland is a new market that Sharjah will focus on. Could you share its importance please?

The participation at Matka Finland will add great value to our efforts in promoting Sharjah as an ideal destination before a global audience as the biggest travel industry event in Northern Europe and the Baltic region. We are confident that our



His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman
Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority

products and offerings will woo Finnish tourists and encourage them to come and explore our tourism sector's offerings.

As debut participants, what are your expectations from MATKA?

SCTDA's participation at MATKA Finland is a valuable opportunity to meet and establish connections with travel trade professionals around the world, and to learn about innovative tourism products and services offered by other global tourism destinations. 



In addition to the entertainment, visitors who spend AED 100 or more at any outlet, claim a coupon from customer service to enter a raffle for a GAC GS8 2018 car, in addition to free access to the waterfront attractions. Furthermore, 10 lucky random visitors will have their car washed with a 'Thank You' note placed on the windshield as part of a 'Happy Moment' activity from Al Majaz Waterfront. With emphasis on developing children's skills in a fun setting, a 'Kids and Art Craft' workshop is scheduled during the festival, where the younger ones can take part in stone painting, learn craft designs on bags, create flower-based accessories, and candle decorations using dried leaves and flowers. Fun rides are part of this month's activities, as families are invited to take their kids to jump on the Trampoline World, take a ride on a Space Ship, Dolphin Run and Carousel at the Happy Land Games section.

Show Timings

❖ Al Noor Island's working hours are from 9:00 am to 11:00 pm on weekdays and 9:00 am to 12:00 midnight on weekends. The Butterfly House is open daily from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm.

“ Our participation at SATTE is of great significance as it is the launch platform for many countries and tourism products from across the globe to conduct business in and with India ”



Celebrate the season of giving

Novotel, ibis World Trade Centre and ibis One Central recently organised an event to share the spirit of the festive season with children of determination as they invited and hosted them for an evening of great cheer to spread love, joy and happiness at a special Christmas tree-lighting ceremony.



Pullmantur marks debut in Dubai

Reaffirming Dubai's position as the cruise hub of the region, Dubai Tourism alongside its public and private sector partners, welcomed 'Horizon' into Dubai, marking the debut of Pullmantur in the region.

TT Bureau

At 208 meters long and weighing 46,811 gross tonnes, 'Horizon' is the first Spanish cruise line to be deployed in the region. A traditional 'Plaques and Keys Exchange' ceremony was hosted onboard in the presence of the President and CEO of Pullmantur Cruises and the ship's captain, as well as key industry stakeholders to commemorate the occasion. Reaffirming Dubai's position as the cruise hub of the region, 'Horizon' was one of the five cruise ships to arrive in port recently, bringing in a total of over

25,000 cruise tourists to the emirate in a single day.

With Dubai as its official winter home port, the ship is set to conduct 14 calls throughout the season, with regular itineraries around the Arabian Gulf. During each call, the ship will dock for over 36 hours, offering both its passengers and the crew the opportunity to explore the city and its wide range of attractions and experiences. The recent re-fit and upgrade to the ship's interior has also ensured that this classic

vessel offers world-class facilities including spacious public areas, a theatre lounge and a variety of restaurants.

Jamal Alfalasi, Director, Dubai Cruise Tourism said, "Dubai is fast becoming a favoured destination among global cruise tourists with travellers choosing to begin their experience from the emirate. We are delighted that Pullmantur has launched its inaugural Arabian Gulf itinerary for the 2018-19 season and welcome Horizon to Dubai, its

official home port this season. As a popular winter cruise destination, our ongoing partnership supports the promising future of the emirate's cruise tourism industry, and we will continue to work collaboratively with our public-private sector stakeholders to position the city as the most viable gateway for both regional and international cruise itineraries, and the perfect pre-post cruise stay destination."

Dubai Tourism welcomed the ship's captain and crew to Dubai

alongside dignitaries. During the ceremony, Richard Vogel, President and CEO, Pullmantur, thanked the city for its continued support in making the deployment of Horizon in Dubai during the winter a reality. Dubai's cruise industry is set for a strong performance throughout 2018-19 season, with an anticipated 725,000 cruise tourists travelling into the emirate. Throughout the season, seven ships from six different cruise lines will operate regular itineraries from Dubai across the Arabian Gulf and India.





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Redefining travel experiences

Matthew Webb, Data and Analytics Manager, Travelport, explains how by understanding the customers' changing needs and building personalised offers and marketing plans, previous 'return-on-trip' measures of success will become a thing of the past, while 'return-on-customer' model will retain customers and win their loyalty.

To win in the online travel space, agencies must show customers that they are valued, and treat them personally. This all starts with the right data. With the right data capabilities, we can gather insights from across all six stages of the traveller lifecycle and deliver a relevant, personalised service that matches the individual's needs and desires, using data to shape your customer engagements and drive business growth. Here's how.

Inspire customers

By analysing data like industry shopping trends, web data and customer-buying histories, we can create offers that inspire customers from their very first search. We can also push personalised offers to them at a time when they are most likely to book – typically around 80 days before they travel. Inspiring customers early can help reduce overspending on Google ads and other blanket advertising media. We can also understand when to deliver offers and make better 'start-stop' decisions for campaigns. And that means lower overall customer-acquisition costs for your business.

Deliver the best shopping experience

To enhance customers' online shopping experiences, we need to treat our travellers individually. Through in-depth persona analysis, relevant content applying to flights, hotels, cars and more can be displayed. Also increasing conversion rates, this approach allows travellers to simply se-

“Travelport research has found that travellers accepting just one marketing offer before they travel could generate half a billion dollars in revenue each month”

lect their travel options from the right kind of suggestions you've provided them. This takes the friction out of the shopping process, saves time, increases convenience and helps you win their loyalty.

Enhance the booking experience

By analysing industry data and using it to inform your pricing, you can create "best value" offers for customers, and in return, create trust and confidence. You

can analyse historical price points to forecast and predict where pricing is going, so that your customers know whether they should wait, buy now or get a better recommendation. Becoming a trusted adviser to your customers and saving them money helps build strong, trust-based relationships that last a lifetime.

Add more value for travellers

Travelport research has found that travellers accepting just one marketing offer before they travel, could generate half a billion dollars in revenue each month. This is equal to a \$6 billion-dollar market that is not currently being fully exploited. To tap into the opportunity, create exciting pre-trip marketing campaigns that re-engage your customers with authentic relevance.

Shape and improve travellers' in-trip experiences

With right data, strategy and partner, we can target travellers with personalised offers while they're away. This means we can tap into travellers' holiday spending budgets, which are now worth an average of \$5,000+. Specifically, we should be recommending local activities, events and even restaurants that are appropriate based on their persona needs and preferences, enhancing their travel experiences and opening up new revenue streams, all the while collecting the usage data to better shape the next experience.

Build profitable customer relationships

Streaming services like Netflix show us what we should be watching next; Amazon recommends what we should be buying; Spotify suggests what we could be listening to. They can do this because they use data to analyse our interests and can see what others like us are doing. Today, we can do the same with travel. Based on customer personas and travel intent while capturing what is and isn't work-

ing, we can be armed with the intelligence to inspire, excite and engage our customers.

The key to delivering this vision is to engage with customers post-trip to understand their detailed feedback about their search, booking, pre-trip and travel experiences. Based on this feedback and a range of other insights, we can build a trusted customer profile that can help businesses stay relevant as personal situations and travel need change.

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



Matthew Webb
Data and Analytics Manager, Travelport

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Millennial brings Pluto closer

Personality of the month



Having joined the family-owned travel business 11 years ago, **Sapna Aidasani**, Manager—PR & Marketing, Pluto Travels, has elevated her company to a next generation of personalisation. Over the past years, she has carved a niche for herself as well as the company that places it on an entirely different pedestal in the business.

 Shehara Rizly

Sapna Aidasani, Manager—PR & Marketing, Pluto Travels, is one of the most alluring strengths behind the company. Travel and tourism, according to Aidasani, is one of the most dynamic industries. She shares, "My key role is to ensure the satisfaction and happiness of each of our clients. Over the years, I have also worked on developing our corporate image and identity and met several corporate travel managers to discuss the benefits of working with our organisation."

“When I meet my clients after their holiday and I see joy on their faces, that for me is the ultimate form of job satisfaction. It's also a privilege to plan memories of a lifetime for clients”

Focus on personalisation

The key to success in any business is to ensure customer satisfaction and this is where Aidasani steps in to ensure that every client is able to experience personalised service which they yearn for when they book with Pluto Travels. "The best thing about working in Dubai is that people are very welcoming and accepting as we all come from different countries and cultures. My first client, an Azerbaijan company, had booked a holiday package in Jordan with us and when they came back, they called me up and personally thanked me for arranging a memorable travel experience."

Exciting journey in travel

Aidasani has mastered the art of the game in this competitive world of travel by staying ahead of others due to her strong skills of networking and influencing many specialists from all different types of industries. "The travel industry has maintained a steady growth graph over the last two years. Also, the sector has expanded and spread to other industries such as business, medical, leisure, incentives, adventure and many more. Being a part of this wonderful industry has

given me the unique opportunity to meet people from various backgrounds and nationalities. It's also a matter of great privilege to plan and organise holidays and memories of a lifetime for our clients. When I meet them after their incentive travel or holiday and I see joy on their faces, that for me is the ultimate form of job satisfaction," says Aidasani.

Adapting to changes

For the past 11 years, Aidasani has witnessed growth, challenges and development phases in the industry. She explains, "I have witnessed a sea change in my 11 years in this profession in how the travel and tourism industry works. Nowadays, when considering a bid for a new travel management company (TMC), there are many factors that clients consider apart from pricing. Agent experience and tenure, technological innovations and strong data collections, all lead to a more compliant travel programme ultimately providing more savings and a better business travel ROI. An experienced TMC will provide you with the data needed to decipher your current costs and how money can be saved while providing them security, technology and traveller tracking

capabilities. I have also observed that the client invests in developing a relationship with their travel company."

New era of travel management

Talking about how OTAs are fast becoming a major travel trend, Aidasani relates, "Every option has its own benefits and conveniences. OTAs offer the opportunity to make quick comparisons between a number of different airlines and accommodation providers. On the other hand, travel companies have their own niche market for specialised travel. At the end of the day, we are committed to creating the experience clients expect, based on the budget they are providing."

Millennials take centre stage

Travel and millennials are a match made in heaven, feels Aidasani. "Social media plays a vital role here as most of them follow travel brands online and therefore they are much more aware of unexplored destinations," she says. Aidasani's roles are many at Pluto Travels as recently, she took up a new role as a luxury travel influencer which has provided her a host of opportunities to be invited by tourism boards of many countries for educational trips and travel fairs. With her social media accounts, she's been able to reach out to people all across the globe and share her experiences with them as a luxury traveller. 📸



Head to Al-Ula this winter

The archeological jewel of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Al-Ula will play host to a special season of events and festivities over the next few weeks. Winter at Tantora festival will be the first-of-its-kind to be held in this UNESCO World Heritage site.

 TT Bureau

Al-Ula, which lies in the north of the Arabian peninsula, is home to numerous archeological sites, and is a point where many civilisations meet. Winter at Tantora Festival reflects this herit-

age and showcases the historical depth of the region to the world, which has been witness to the development of Al-Ula society on many different levels including agriculture, astronomy and construction. During the festival, feature weekends included the Tantora Festival, The Wonder of Winter – a celebration of light and life from December 20-27, 2018. Moreover, now on the cards are the Hot Air Balloon Festival from January 31 to February 9, 2019, and Fursan Festival.

The festival began on December 21 with a series of eight

weekend concerts from some of the world's greatest musicians. Under the dazzling night skies of Al-Ula, tourists were able to experience the transcendent power of virtuoso talents such as Mohamed Abdo and Majida El Roumi during the last month while Renaud Capuçon, Omar Khairat, Lang Lang, Um Kulthum, Andrea Bocelli and Yanni will be taking place from January onwards till February. Each will perform in a purpose-built concert hall which showcases the natural majesty of Al-Ula's scenery, thus bringing together the beauty of music and nature. To add to the

already memorable event, Egyptian legend Um Kulthum will give her world-first 'performance', via a hologram show. The reception area inside the halls will have visual shows of classical artworks by renowned painter Van Gogh.

Winter at Tantora is also a local festival where Al-Ula's proud residents will welcome you to discover the wonders of their region and culture. With a name inspired by a sundial located in Al-Ula's old town, Winter at Tantora, is a celebration of life, culture, heritage and beauty. 



Winter at Tantora

❖ Guests coming here can take part in an exclusive visit to the archeological and heritage sites that are closed for renovations and will be open solely to the select group of Winter at Tantora ticket holders



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NEW HOTELS

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

★ Abu Dhabi EDITION

Rooms/Suites inventory:
198 guest rooms & suites and 57
exclusive residences

Opening Date:
December 2018



The Middle East's first EDITION hotel has opened doors within the landmark Bloom Marina mixed-use development in Abu Dhabi, offering a new kind of resort environment and breath-taking beauty and serenity of Marina Bateen. The Abu Dhabi EDITION blends the form and details of traditional architecture as well as natural local patterns that are the inspiration for the materials, colour palettes and details that feature throughout the hotel.

★ Royal M Hotel
Abu Dhabi

Rooms/Suites
inventory: 225

Opening Date:
December 2018

Located a few minutes away from the shopping malls in Abu Dhabi and other attractions in the emirate, Royal M Hotel will be a unique experience for the discerning leisure traveller. The most unique property of the hotel is not just the infinity pool or the larger bedroomed areas but the very exclusive laser generated show provided at the pool side every night to enthrall guests.

★ Grand Plaza
Mövenpick Media City

Rooms/Suites
inventory: 235

Opening Date:
December 2018



Grand Plaza Mövenpick Media City, a five-star business hotel, located in the hub of Dubai Media and Internet City, faces the upcoming Innovation Centre. The hotel features 235 rooms and suites, with a minimum of 46 sqm rooms, state-of-the-art convention centre, four restaurants and lounges, a spa, gymnasium and outdoor swimming pool.



★ Andaz Dubai La Mer

Rooms/Suites
inventory: 156

Opening Date:
2020

Hyatt Hotels Corporation announced that a Hyatt affiliate has entered into a management agreement with Wasl Asset Management Group for the development of an Andaz-branded hotel at La Mer—a vibrant lifestyle district in the coastal area of Jumeirah. Expected to open in 2020, the property will become the first Andaz-branded hotel in Dubai and the second Andaz hotel in the UAE, joining Andaz Capital Gate Abu Dhabi. Andaz Dubai La Mer will feature 156 rooms and suites, with 409-square-foot residential-style guestrooms.

Millennium Atria now
in Business Bay

The latest development to be introduced in the Business Bay area is the new 30-storey Millennium Atria Business Bay hotel apartment tower.

TT Bureau

Slated to open by February 2019, Millennium Atria Business Bay with 336 units consists of studio; one, two and three-bedroom penthouses, and three-bedroom duplex in five-star category. The hotel has been designed by the internationally-acclaimed interior design YOO Studio, founded by John Hitchcox and Philippe Starck, who are known for their cutting-edge designs for landmark signature residences and hotels across the globe.

Ali Hamad Lakhraim Alzaabi, President, Millennium Hotels & Resorts Middle East & Africa (MEA), said, "It is thrilling to see that our first hospitality partnership with Deyaar



has come into completion. The Business Bay district is a flourishing destination in Dubai and opening another Millennium property within this area further expands our portfolio of diversified brands."

The hotel will be the largest fully-furnished and equipped serviced apartment in the area. The hotel is equipped with a podium terrace having dining options, retail outlets and kids' club. The Infinity Pool overlooking the Dubai Canal and Burj Khalifa is a major attraction.

Although the property is still in the construction stage, planning for business once it opens, is underway. It will be promoted at all international exhibitions to attract key markets such as GCC, India, China and Europe.

Saeed Al Qatami, Chief Executive Officer, Deyaar, said, "The opening of the Millennium Atria Business Bay property marks our first foray into the hospitality industry, which represents the realisation of our portfolio diversification goals in line with the ambitions of the UAE's growing economy."

Sharjah hosts 5th Hospitality Forum

Aimed at the vision of receiving 10 million tourists to the emirate of Sharjah, the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) conducted its 5th Hospitality Forum under the patronage of His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, SCTDA. The day was a learning experience of best practices from various professionals from around the globe.



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MOVEMENTS

Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham JBR

► Dubai

R Hotels appointed **Binu Varghese** as the new hotel manager of Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham Jumeirah Beach Residence. In his role, Varghese will lead the 188-key property and head its overall operations and strategies. He brings in more than 20 years of hospitality experience, consisting mainly of sales and marketing roles with international hotel brands. Prior to joining Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham, he was the director of sales and marketing at Millennium Airport Hotel Dubai and Copthorne Hotel Dubai, managing nearly a thousand keys. He was previously affiliated with Wyndham Hotel Group.



Tourism Malaysia

► Malaysia

Datuk Musa bin Yusof has been appointed as the Director General of Tourism—Malaysia. Yusof joined Tourism Malaysia on July 7, 1990 as Assistant Director of Enforcement & Facilitation Division. During his tenure at Tourism Malaysia, he took on several key positions including the Special Officer (Tourism) to the Minister of Culture, Arts & Tourism of Malaysia, YB Dato' Sabbaruddin Chik (1997-98). His experience in Tourism Malaysia includes market development, corporate, international promotion, promotional support and domestic marketing. He was Senior Director, International Promotion Division (Asia/Africa) prior to his appointment as Director General.



Millennium Atria Business Bay

► Dubai

Millennium Hotels & Resorts, Middle East and Africa (MEA), has named **Christian Palacin** as General Manager of Millennium Atria Business Bay, slated to open soon. A seasoned hotelier with over 25 years of experience, Palacin will oversee the day-to-day operations of the 336-key Millennium Atria Business Bay Hotel Apartments and will position it to become the preferred city accommodation for both short-term and long-term visitors to the UAE. With a master's degree in Hotel Management from Cornell University, Palacin has held senior management positions with international hospitality brands.



Qasr Al Hosn

► Abu Dhabi

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) appointed **Salama Nasser Al Shamsi** as Director of Qasr Al Hosn. Al Shamsi will oversee the management of the newly renovated Qasr Al Hosn Fort, Abu Dhabi's most significant historic landmark. Al Shamsi, who joined DCT Abu Dhabi in 2009, is responsible for leading its pre-opening team and has been instrumental in the development of the project. Prior to this role, Al Shamsi held the position of Senior Project Manager for the Zayed National Museum project, where she was a key member of the team in overseeing its progress.



Sofitel Dubai Downtown

► Dubai

AccorHotels has welcomed the return of **Klaus Assmann** as General Manager at Sofitel Dubai Downtown, the brand's flagship hotel in the UAE. With an extensive repertoire of hotel management experience, Assmann joined AccorHotels in 2013 where he was appointed General Manager to lead the pre-opening team of Sofitel Dubai Downtown. Prior to his appointment, Assmann spent 10 years with the Jumeirah Group, where he was integral to the development of the Madinat Jumeirah project. He was previously assigned in the company's regional office in New York.



The Ritz-Carlton Dubai International Financial Centre

► Dubai

The Ritz-Carlton Dubai International Financial Centre has welcomed **Tareq Derbas** as its General Manager. With experience spanning 26 years, Derbas brings a wealth of expertise in leading luxury resorts and residences across the US and the GCC. A highly experienced luxury hospitality veteran, Derbas will direct all operations for the hotel, elevating the already exemplary guest experiences throughout the property and continuing to provide guests with memorable experiences.



Rixos Saadiyat Island

► Abu Dhabi

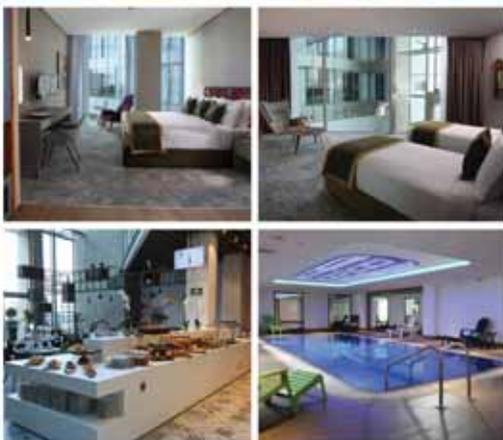
Rixos Saadiyat Island introduced **Hakan Petek** as General Manager of Abu Dhabi's first all-inclusive, all-exclusive resort and Rixos Hotels' fourth property in the UAE. With a career that spans over 30 years in the luxury hospitality industry, Petek brings a vast amount of experience to the role. His current role Following the resort's highly anticipated opening last month, Petek will be responsible for managing all commercial, financial and operational aspects of the property. This will include successfully positioning the resort as Saadiyat Island's fully integrated resort in the Emirates and delivering the Rixos promise.



Aloft Palm Jumeirah

► Dubai

Aloft Palm Jumeirah appointed **Neleem Arif** as General Manager of the four-star property. Arif has over over 15 years of experience in hospitality leadership, which includes managing and motivating property teams to ensure they achieve high performance results. In his role, he will oversee the offerings of the hotel, ensuring that all are seamlessly provided, over and above supervising operations of all departments and the Aloft Palm Jumeirah team. Neleem brings years of expertise from Marriott International having worked across esteemed Marriott properties.



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Chic 'hometel' in Downtown Dubai

Movenpick Hotel Apartments Downtown Dubai, the perfect 'Hometel' experience in the business precinct of Downtown Dubai, is the most sought-after brand of Movenpick's plush hotel apartments.



 TT Bureau

Catering to both leisure and business segments, this new Movenpick Hotel Apartments Downtown Dubai has become the talk of the town with guests being able to club their holidays with leisure. The hotel is the brand's sixth property in the city and its first property in the 'Burj Khalifa' district. Luxury comes with all its added benefits and for Movenpick Hotel Apartments Downtown Dubai, the key element of success is its location. Indulging yourself in a modern skyscraper

amidst the neighbourhood within walking distance to the world's tallest building Burj Khalifa, the iconic destination Dubai Mall and the famous dancing fountain which comes alive every evening.

Revamp your lifestyle

Experience 244 units with deluxe rooms, serviced hotel apartments with one or two bedrooms, as well as a kitchen with a cooker, fridge, freezer, microwave, washing machine and dryer. The hotel features an international all-day

restaurant, swimming pool, pool lounge, sauna and gym couple with four meeting rooms with natural daylight where one can host events in Dubai.

Mövenpick Hotel Apartments Downtown Dubai offers a vibrant contemporary fully-serviced studios and apartments with fully fitted kitchen. Each apartment includes a fully-equipped kitchen with an induction cooker, oven, microwave, washing machine, and cooking utensils together

with a HD LED TV and a work desk.

Taste of diversity

An all-day dining restaurant offering international cuisine to satisfy the most diverse of tastes, a pool lounge that's perfect for a quick oasis getaway offering light-hearted meals and quick drinks. Guests are treated to a very healthy breakfast in their all-day dining restaurant while



other meals such as lunch will be served a-la-carte. You can either unwind at the Oasis Pool Lounge along with an inviting option of a refreshing swim or colour-topping suntan, you can enjoy delicious mocktails, snacks and ice cream in the outdoors. 

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