

TRAVTALK

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Published from : ★ India ★ Middle East

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Media Partner



Where meetings converge

As one of the biggest MiCE networking platforms, IMEX Frankfurt 2019, to be held from May 21-23, will be attended by most of the Middle East's tourism boards, travel agents, tour operators and hoteliers. Here's what's in store at IMEX and how participants are preparing for it...



SHEHARA RIZLY



Carina Bauer
Chief Executive Officer
IMEX Group

“IMEX in Frankfurt is a melting pot of ideas in the industry calendar. Participants from Middle Eastern destinations have an opportunity to do business with highly qualified buyers representing everyone from large-scale association conventions to high-end corporate events and luxury incentive travel programmes. The unique IMEX hosted

buyer programme guarantees the quality of buyers, over half of whom have budgets in excess of \$1 million per year with more than 10 years industry experience. Countries from the Middle East exhibiting this year include Egypt, Oman, Ras Al Khaimah, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Qatar and Jordan. We expect around 3,500 exhibiting companies to attend this year, representing approximately 160 countries. The event also offers free premium learning opportunities for exhibitors and buyers alike.”



Haitham Mattar
Chief Executive Officer
Ras Al Khaimah Tourism
Development Authority

“We plan to showcase the recent expansion in Ras Al Khaimah's MiCE portfolio, in addition to highlighting key additions to our MiCE calendar. The new Al Hamra Convention Centre will be our main focus during the fair. As IMEX is one of the largest worldwide exhibitions for incentive travel, meetings and events, it is essential for us to participate and network with key decision makers. Moreover, as Germany continues to be the leading international source market for Ras Al Khaimah, it is imperative that we amplify our destination awareness even further, reinforce existing relationships with key partners, and secure new wins ranging from high-level incentives to global conferences. As we aim to become a thriving MiCE destination of choice in the Middle East, we hope to host more events, conferences and incentives in Ras Al Khaimah.”



Issam Abdul Rahim Kazim
CEO, Dubai Corporation
for Tourism and Commerce
Marketing

“As the city's official convention bureau, Dubai Business Events' (DBE) participation at IMEX Frankfurt 2019 aims to showcase Dubai's dynamic and state-of-the-art business event offerings and services to global event professionals. DBE will further discuss the Dubai Association Conference, set to take place in Dubai on December 9 and 10, 2019 at Dubai World Trade Centre. We will further enhance Dubai's position as the host city for international meetings and conferences. We are currently developing an online venue directory for the city and will be able to share further details during IMEX Frankfurt this year. The directory – which will be accessible to users via visitdubai.com – will offer a new city-wide tool for meeting and conference planners to search for suitable venues for events of all kinds and sizes across Dubai.”



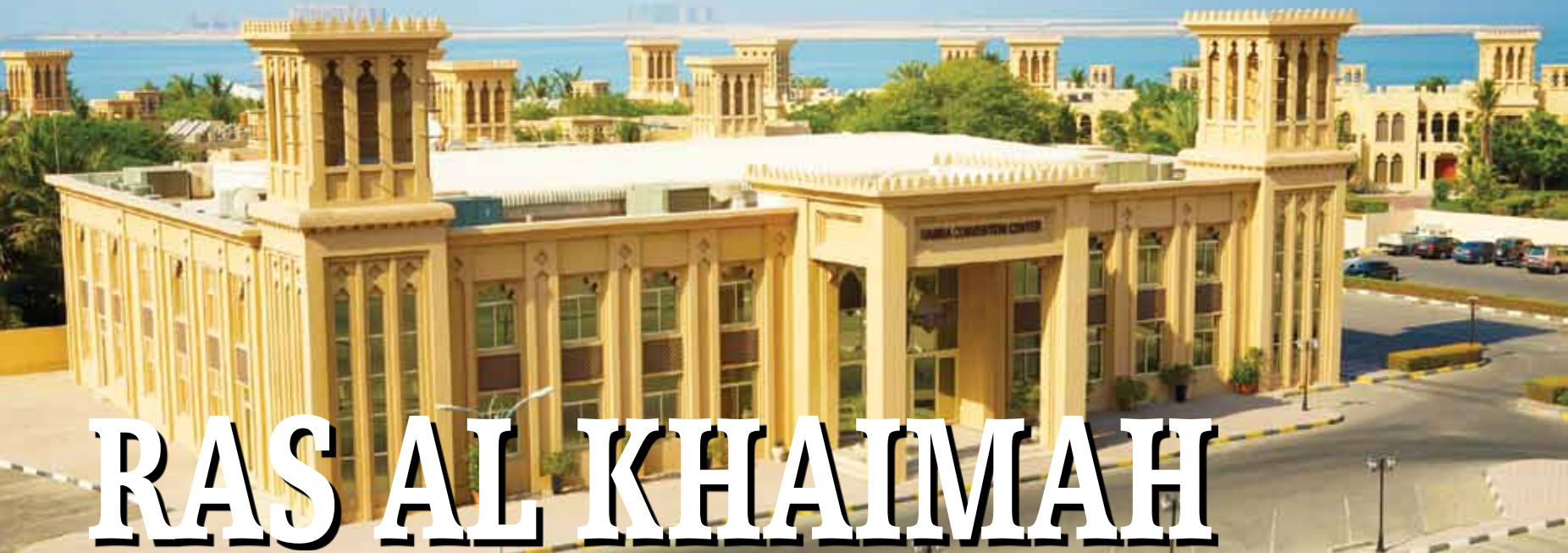
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RAS AL KHAIMAH

gains popularity as a rising MiCE destination

From mountains, deserts, to beaches and forts, Ras Al Khaimah offers the perfect backdrop for different events in the MiCE tourism sector. As the fastest growing destination in the Middle East, the emirate's growing appeal in MiCE has attracted many key conferences and events over the years.



Boasting a rich culture and long-standing history dating back to 7,000 years, Ras Al Khaimah is the fastest emerging tourism destination in the region. The emirate boasts an array of archaeological sites and breathtaking natural vistas, from golden sand beaches and awe-inspiring terracotta dunes to a green belt of date palms and Jebel Jais, the highest peak in the UAE.

The emirate is building resounding credentials as a convention and meetings destination for key events such as Arabian Hotel Investment Conference (AHIC), Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO), and World Travel Awards 2018 - Middle East Gala Ceremony in VOYAGE: Luxury MiCE held last year. Upcoming events set to take place in Ras Al Khaimah include Belgian Travel Summit in 2019 and PATA Annual Summit 2020, as talks continue to bring future international conventions into the expanding events calendar.



Through its growing portfolio of branded hotels, the emirate is home to a highly competitive inventory of meeting facilities including three convention centres, five-star hotels, two 18-hole golf courses and a marina.

On the hospitality front, plans are in place to add 6,200 rooms to the 6,700 currently available in the emirate with the introduction of major global brands including Marriott, Movenpick, Sheraton, Anantara, Rezidor, InterContinental, Hampton by Hilton, Crowne Plaza, Radisson Blu and Conrad already in the pipeline.

Meetings in Ras Al Khaimah are complemented by the ever-increasing array of post-meeting and team building offerings that can range from mountain trekking and adventure activities, kayaking, golf, pearl farming, water sports and desert activities.

In response to growing visitor numbers to Ras Al Khaimah, further development is planned including a 47-room luxury mountain camp, a survival training academy, 64.72 km of hiking trails and the Jebel Jais Adventure Park in partnership with Toroverde UAE, featuring several new adventure products expected to launch this year such as 'Zipline Tour', 'Bull Maze' and 'Climbing Tower' at Jebel Jais Viewing Deck Park.

Alongside the growing investment in accommodation and leisure products, RAKTDA is working hand in hand with all the necessary government and private sector entities to ensure that the emirate's infrastructure meets its growing demands. As part of its long-term plans to improve travel experiences in the emirate, Ras Al Khaimah International Airport had recently upgraded its airport retail space. Extending a warm welcome with its authentic Arabian culture, Ras Al Khaimah is increasingly becoming an ideal MiCE partner for international meetings.



ATM as a ground for discovery

Thousands of travel, tourism and hospitality professionals connect at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) to share ideas, discuss businesses and identify potential markets.



TT Bureau



Mark Gsellman
Vice President—Theme Parks
Farah Experiences

“From thrill rides and record-breaking rollercoasters to the region’s most beloved waterpark – Yas Island’s theme parks offer unparalleled guest experiences that can’t be found anywhere else. With a constantly evolving calendar of events, we look forward to welcoming guests from across the region and beyond at all three parks during the upcoming year.”



Tareq Derbas
General Manager
Ritz Carlton DIFC

“Dubai’s tourism numbers keep growing every year, and with the ever-changing landscape of tourism and hospitality we are expecting more businesses to join, which will certainly drive business to Dubai and to the region. With Flair No.5 being a huge success, we will come up with an innovative solution to keep it open in the summer.”



Melville Gracias
Director of Sales & Marketing
Gulf Court

“Dubai is no longer a seasonal tourist destination but a year-round destination. The change in consumer demands reflects how our clients’ demands are also changing. Since our location is convenient for both business and leisure guests, our focus would be to connect with key partners worldwide to understand their needs and cater to meet them.”

“Keeping inbound tourism as our focus point, we would try to make ourselves available on all platforms in the UAE and around the globe to showcase our properties in a diverse range of accommodations as well as the tourist attractions in the city. We hope to serve guest needs better and explore the latest technologies that would help us in lead generation.”



Thameem Razick
Director of Sales and Marketing
Rose Park Hotel Apartments

“This year we are teaming up with a responsive and stronger team. As we are focused on high-quality guest satisfaction, acquiring ideas from this event are prime tools to increase the ability to provide the experience that is expected by our guests. In the previous year, we had been appreciated by our guests and web partners and got high scores in reviews.”



Yusuf Mallimar
Director of Operations
Rose Park Hotel Apartments
Bur Dubai

“We are looking at the Dubai summer season whilst expecting guests from both leisure and business to visit us. Our properties are located in key areas where guests are exposed to true Arabian culture amidst modern environs. We are all gearing up for Expo 2020, as we can see the government preparing its infrastructure to ensure the high number of visitors to the UAE.”



Ravi K Nair
General Manager
Best Western Hotels & Resorts

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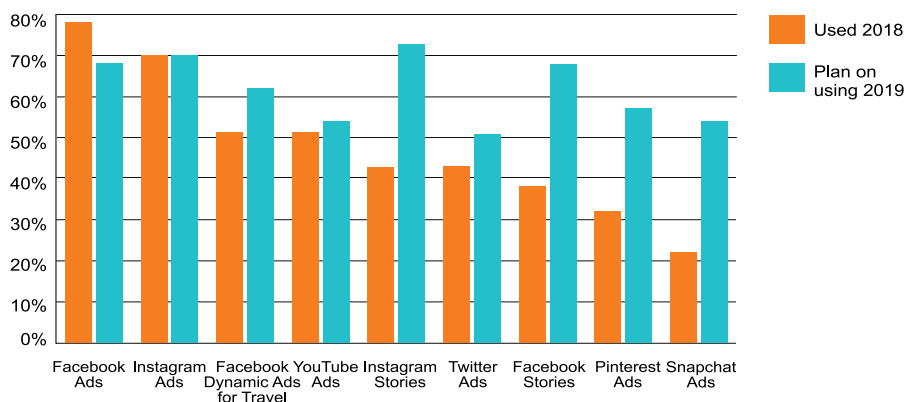


Trade invests in social media

In the words of Mark Zuckerberg, CEO, Facebook, 'Stories are on track to overtake posts in feeds as the most common way to share across all social apps.' And he's not wrong! Instagram only introduced ads in stories about two years ago, but it could generate over \$2 billion in revenue for Facebook this year and \$7.5 billion in ad revenue for Facebook by 2021, up from an estimated \$750 million last year.

According to Sojern's latest State of the Industry Report, Middle Eastern travel marketers dedicate more budget towards Facebook and Instagram stories this year with over 68 per cent of marketers planning on using Facebook stories and almost three quarters of marketers (73 per cent) intending to use Instagram stories this year. This is extremely significant given that less than half (43 per cent) of travel marketers in this region used Instagram stories last year and a rather low 38 per cent used Facebook stories.

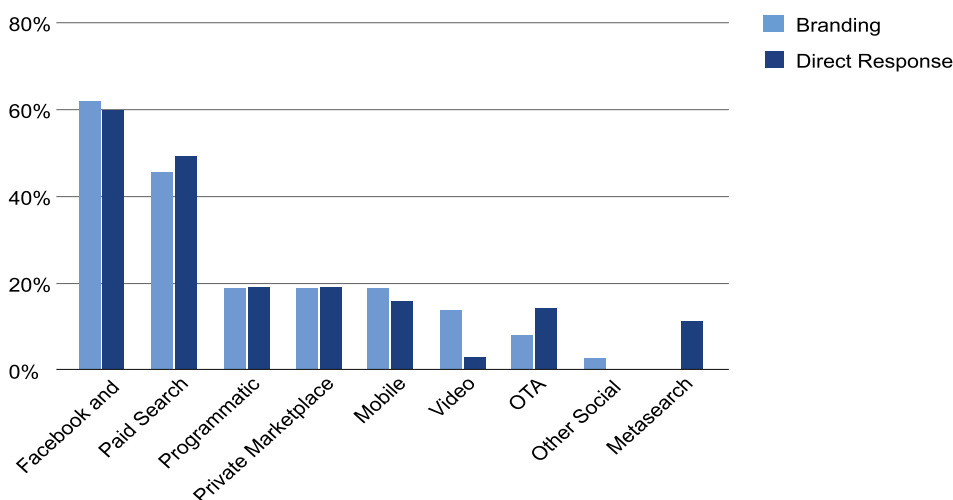
How Travel Marketers are using and anticipate using Social Ads



Approximately what percentage of your/travel client's advertising dollars was spent across the following media channels in 2018? Source: Sojern, 2019

Facebook & Instagram are no longer just for branding

Historically, marketers often believed that Facebook and Instagram were best for purely branding and were not the best channels for driving conversions. This is clearly no longer the case and over half (56 per cent) of travel marketers in this region said that Facebook and Instagram were best for direct response. Almost a quarter of marketers (22 per cent) said that Facebook was most effective at targeting new audiences and 19 per cent said it was most effective at personalising messages and promotional offers. Facebook and Instagram have notably been introducing new ad products over the past several years so actively change this perception so it's reassuring that we are seeing this shift within the marketing world.



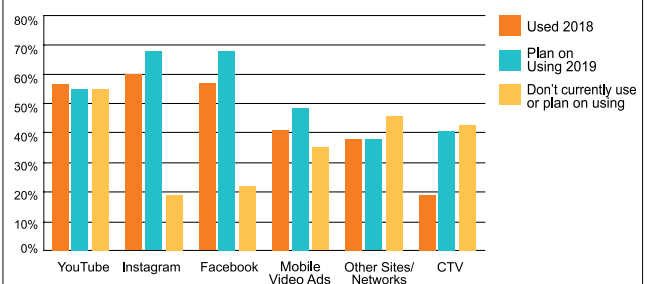
Video on the rise

There has been what can only be described as an explosion in the growth of video on social media in recent years. Views of branded video content have increased 99 per cent on YouTube and 258 per cent on Facebook between 2016 and 2017. On Twitter, a video tweet is 6x more likely to be retweeted than a photo tweet. In fact, around 100 million hours of video are watched every day on Facebook and over 1 billion hours of video are watched daily on YouTube in 88 countries and 76 languages!

Middle Eastern travel marketers are well aware of this trend and we are seeing two-thirds of marketers planning to shift their ad budget towards Instagram and Facebook video in 2019. The top three channels these marketers are planning to invest for video this year are, not surprisingly, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram with at least 68 per cent of travel marketers in this region planning to use them this year. There has been a leap in the planned usage of Connected TV with 41 per cent of marketers planning on using this platform this year -- up from only 19 per cent last year.

For travel marketers, video ads can be a great way to inspire travellers higher up the funnel in the dreaming phase of their path to purchase. Many travel brands use video to showcase their properties or experiences and inspire travellers in a very visual way in their decision-making process. Marketers are following the trend of user behaviour moving towards video and as a result are using visual storytelling to inspire and influence purchasing behaviour.

How Travel Marketers are using and anticipate using Digital Video Ads



Which types of digital video advertising are you currently using in 2018 and/or considering using in 2019? Source: Sojern, 2019

Shift towards stories

Travel marketers are moving their thoughts and budgets towards video ads and stories, in particular. This trend is an indicator of the ever-changing consumer and is validation that the traveller path to purchase is becoming increasingly complex. As a marketer, one needs to be actively keeping up, if not staying one step ahead, of consumers by embracing their changing behaviour and adapting marketing strategies as necessary. And the way to adapt right now is by creating the relevant video assets and engaging with customers where they are - and right now they are spending their time on Facebook and Instagram stories!

Source: Sojern



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Decode market trends at ATM

► Continuation...



Antoine Medawar
Senior Vice President—
Middle East & Africa
Amadeus

“With each passing year, we have worked on providing unprecedented solutions for the travel sector and met evolving requirements for the region’s traveller. As the traveller becomes more aware and inquisitive, we have invested in emerging elements that enhance their travelling experience. The development of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, 5G and blockchain have resulted in not just smart cities but also smart travel and smart travellers. This year is all about the way we see travel going forward. The Amadeus Live Travel Space vision will revolutionise the way travel is sold and booked, while most importantly guaranteeing sustainability for all. This vision should be developed in conjunction with all key players in the travel sector. We are excited to share this concept with our customers.”



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

“ATM is one of the most important events on the global exhibition calendar and is an ideal industry platform to showcase Emirates’ business developments and superior onboard products to the travel and tourism industry. It also brings together key industry stakeholders from around the globe to discuss new deals as well as identify areas of growth. For Dubai, ATM continues to expand in line with the city’s growth, cementing its status as a global tourism and business hub. Emirates is a vital player in growing Dubai’s connectivity, and we are seeing a major ramping up of infrastructure enhancements for aviation development, all paving way for the airline to carry a large portion of the 25 million targeted visitors and support this event.”

“ATM has always been a venue which has initiated many niche ideologies and this year will be no different. For technology companies, it’s an opportunity to showcase their capabilities to a wider audience of both traditional and online aspirants. With the new enhancements, we are very confident that our system is one among the best in performance and scalability. Our USP for this ATM is a New Business Intelligence Module Prototype.”



Jauhar Abdul Gafoor
Chief Executive Officer,
Oneview Group of Companies

“As Cozmo Travel, we have been there with Sharjah Tourism since our inception in 2010. As our business expanded in other countries, we felt the need to be with Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) too and for the last three years including this current year, we have booths under both Sharjah and Dubai. Fundamentally, trade fairs and exhibitions are important because they offer a platform to market different products to our customers.”



Jamal Abdulnazar
Chief Executive Officer
Cozmo Travel

“Satguru Travel’s focus will be on emerging as the favourite DMC locally as we are present in 20 other countries. Our highlight will be on showcasing our competitive holiday products from these countries as well our latest DMC booking engine. We expect to make new business partners, enlarge our global share and promote Satguru as the preferred DMC. We also expect to understand the new products and services available through the exhibition.”



J V R Fernando
Commercial Director—
West Africa, ME & Asia,
Satguru Travel and
Tourism



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Modernise business to beat disruptors

Due to unparalleled digital landscape, a range of external influences impact hospitality business. To face these 'disruptors', industry experts should address these issues in the early stages to be on a par with competition.

TT Bureau

A special session, held recently at Arabian Hotel Investment Conference (AHIC) in Ras Al Khaimah, addressed prevalent issues on the theme 'Day of Disruption' with experts from PwC, Google, Coca Cola and Accor. **Jonathan Worsley**, Chairman of Bench Events and Founder of AHIC, said, "The 'Day of Disruption' flagged a huge number of thought-provoking viewpoints on potential disruptors to the industry and how hoteliers should react to these. The advice from speakers both within the industry and outside of the sector was to revolutionise our way of thinking. It's no longer enough to respond to change; we need to anticipate it, alter our vision and commit to delivering on it."

Julie Hamilton, Senior Vice President—Chief Customer and Commercial Leadership Officer, The Coca-Cola Company, explained why and how the company decided to dramatically change its business model. "We



Jonathan Worsley



Julie Hamilton



Sébastien Bazin



Maria de la Fuente Corrales



Chinmay Shukla

could wait for someone to disrupt us or we could disrupt ourselves. We chose the tougher path, the riskier path, the one that was most uncomfortable, to disrupt ourselves. So it may not seem like a big thing but when for 109 years we primarily focused on one brand in three packages to move to a vision of being a total beverage company, that's big. It doesn't sound big, but it's like turning the Titanic around."

Maria de la Fuente Corrales, Travel Industry Analyst, Google,

spoke about the need to analyse and make use of data in order to tap into what customers want. She revealed that 80 per cent of the total searches for hotel accommodation are related to destination while 70 per cent of total travel searches come from mobile. "In mobiles, if your site takes more than three seconds to load, more than 50 per cent of people will just leave. They will not wait for the site to load. You are missing more than 50 per cent of your traffic to your website because you have

not optimised your site," she asserted, highlighting the Uber app as an excellent example of real-time digital service.

At PwC, Senior Manager **Chinmay Shukla** said that mobile search was relevant when it comes to millennials, two-thirds of whom search for a hotel room on their smartphone device and make their bookings through a smartphone. "Millennials are the disruptors to watch; impacting hospitality businesses through every single element of the value

chain. Millennials are expected to make up more than 50 per cent of hotel guests worldwide by 2020. If there is one segment that needs to be targeted, it's the millennials. Based on studies for the next 15 years, millennials will be at peak spending power."

The 'Day of Disruption' also featured interviews with leading hoteliers. In an insightful session led by Nick van Marken, Managing Director, van Marken Limited and **Sébastien Bazin**, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Accor, said it was time the industry moved away from being 'product-centric' and focused on being 'client-centric'. He said that his next focus in the transformation of Accor was to compete with digital players like Facebook and Amazon by "enlarging the net and increasing frequency with our clients". Bazin explained that the advantage these companies had was their weekly, if not daily, contact with customers. 📱

Media Rotana & its MiCE offerings

Located in the business precinct in Dubai is Media Rotana, a home-grown brand personifying a truly Arabic experience in a modern sophisticated setting. The hotel is also one of the most sought-after MiCE venues.

TT Bureau

The luxury five-star hotel complements the values of contemporary Arabian culture and superb leisure facilities with warm hospitality the guest receives from the moment he steps into the hotel. **Sherif Madkour**, General Manager, Media Rotana shares, "We adapt to the changing demands of the market and deliver services that meet the changing requirements of our customers. We aim not only to satisfy but also exceed our customers' expectations."



Sherif Madkour
General Manager
Media Rotana

Apart from the ideal location, what makes Media Rotana different from other hotels is its ambience and the enthusiastic team who goes the extra mile for clients to ensure their stay will be memorable. Guests are mainly from the GCC countries including UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and additionally from China, UK, Germany, Russia, France, Italy, etc. Madkour notes, "We are striving to create a complete guest experience starting with what our room offers to restaurant, relaxation and

entertainment options. UAE is one of the world's fastest-growing destinations for business and leisure visitors because of different factors ranging from location, weather, touristic attraction investments along with its welcoming environment."

Media Rotana has the maximum number of meeting rooms, and this what makes it one of the most sought-after MiCE venues in the area. Madkour states, "Our 16 meeting rooms with their friendly and modern atmosphere

are set to provide business travellers with everything they need to conduct successful events and conferences. Our facilities offer state-of-the-art equipment, latest technology, on-site technical assistance and complimentary wireless internet access."

In terms of food and beverage, the list of different outlets caters to millennials, business clients as well as leisure travellers. Prego's, Channels, Nelson's, Connexions and The Terrace offer a variety of options. 🍷



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H E Marwan bin Jassim Al Sarkal
Executive Chairman, Shurooq

Sharjah is en route to become one of the most sustainable cities in the world with its green economy policy. Ecotourism is not only the future for Sharjah but also the answer to its social, economic and environmental goals.

Sharjah has been presciently laying the foundations for cultural and family tourism over the years. It has embarked on several ambitious ecotourism projects aimed at reinforcing the sector.



ing across a total area of 11.74 million square metres," said H E Marwan bin Jassim Al Sarkal, Executive Chairman, Shurooq.

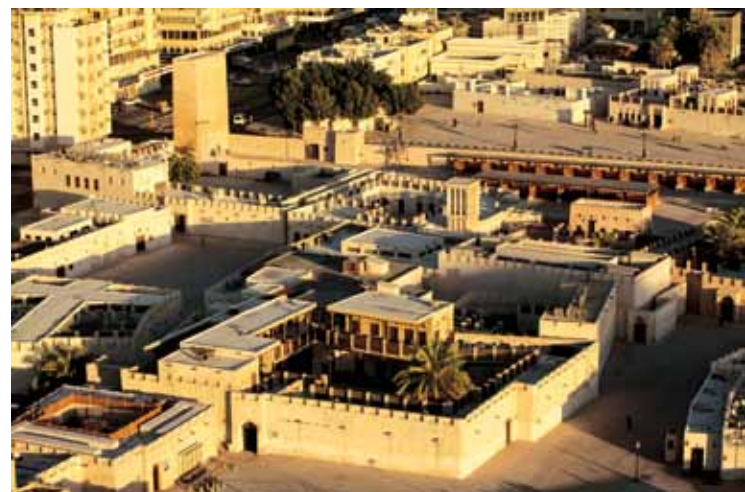
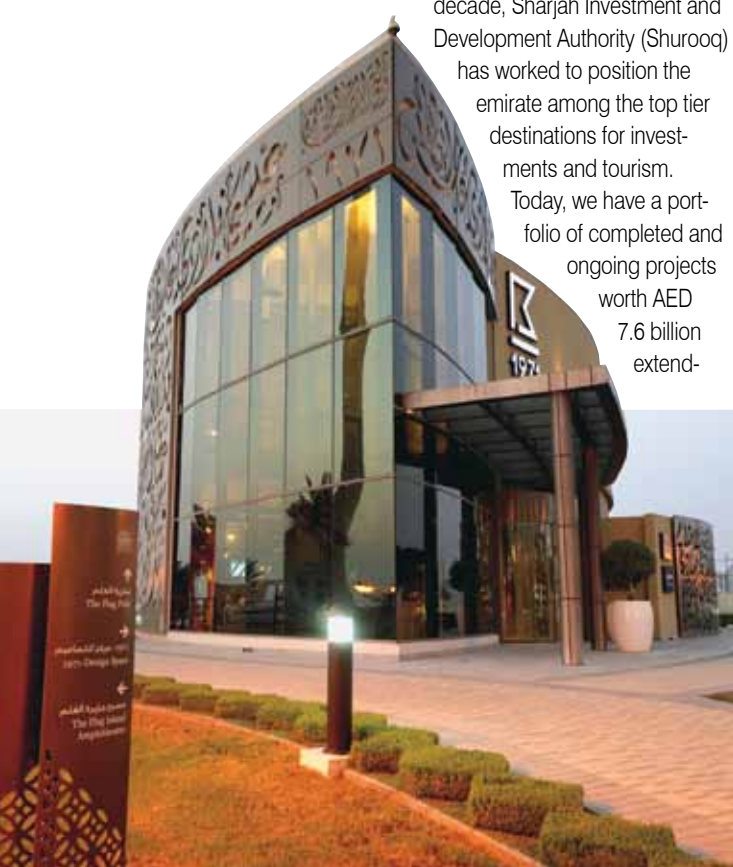
The exclusive developments include Al Noor Island, Flag Island, Mleiha Archaeological and Ecotourism project, Kalba Ecotourism project and Heart of Sharjah project. Each of these destinations encompass culturally rich culinary and entertainment experiences.

Shurooq invested around \$1.4bn in hospitality and attractive projects between August 2015 and 2018. It has been positioning the emirate as an investment hub to the world at venues like World Travel Market London, ITB Berlin, and other international shows.

Al Sarkal continued, "Shurooq's commitment towards developing projects focuses on the inclusion of diversified sectors such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, educational tourism, archaeological tourism and more."

He noted, "To deliver such qualities and experiences, we have partnered with global brands such as Shaza Hotels for its Sharjah Collection lodges and GHM for Al Bait Hotel respec-

ing the sector. "Over the past decade, Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) has worked to position the emirate among the top tier destinations for investments and tourism. Today, we have a portfolio of completed and ongoing projects worth AED 7.6 billion extending



tively. During ATM 2018, Shurooq signed a partnership with Emaar Hospitality Group, announcing the debut of the VIDA brand into Sharjah and unveiling of the first Al Qasba VIDA."

The central region of Sharjah is home to some of the most adventurous ecotourism experiences, including the Mleiha Archaeological and Ecotourism project, and two of Sharjah Collection boutique lodges - Al Faya Lodge in Mleiha and Al Badayer Oasis at Al Badayer desert.

Nestled within the Kalba Ecotourism Project is Kingfisher Lodge, a collection of tented lodge-style accommodations surrounded by mangroves and diverse ecological zones. The ongoing Khorfakkan Beach development project also promises a one-of-a-kind experience for both the domestic as well as international tourist. These high-end ecotourism projects, set to transform the emirate into a major player in the luxury eco-resort sector, are a strategic approach to elevate the standards of Sharjah's hospitality.

Thailand earns 11m THB from ME

Thailand has witnessed an influx of travellers from the Middle East over the past few years and generated over 11 million in Thai baht. **Pischaya Saisengchan**, Director—Dubai & Middle East, Tourism Authority of Thailand, provides an account of the lucrative markets for Thailand.

TT Bureau

How important is the Middle East market for Thailand tourism?

Thailand is one of the leading destinations for visitors from the Middle East, with many of those being repeat visitors. Our presence at Arabian Travel Market generates more than \$2.5 billion of travel industry deals besides attracting visitors from the region. Throughout the year, we will be working with partners to ensure we are targeting our key markets and increasing footfalls from the Middle East. Islam is the second largest religion in Thailand and the country is packed with Muslim-friendly hotels, activities and halal restaurants for travellers from the Middle East.



Pischaya Saisengchan
Director—Dubai & Middle East
Tourism Authority of Thailand

Do you have any figures on the number of visitors over the past year from the Middle East?

The top three countries in

“In 2018, Thailand welcomed 128,271 UAE nationals, generating 11,135.47m THB of revenue. Oman came second with 97,724 visitors generating 7229.34m THB”

terms of the number of visitors are the UAE, Oman and Kuwait. In 2018, Thailand welcomed 128,271 UAE nationals, generating 11,135.47m THB of revenue. Oman came second with 97,724 visitors generating 7229.34m THB. Statistics show that a majority of travellers from Oman travel to Thailand for health and medical tourism. Finally, 74,665 Kuwait nationals visited Thailand, generating 7,649.29m THB of revenue.

What will you be promoting for the Middle East market for summer?

Our destination focus will be on Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket, Koh Samui and Chiang Mai. Our current campaign, 'Open to the New Shades' projects that Thailand offers an insurmountable number of off-the-beaten-track destinations. Koh Chang, the third largest island in Thailand after Phuket and Koh Samui, is a serene

and still island with untouched nature. Salak Khok Fisherman Village is a highlight – you can sit in the traditional paddleboat and cruise along stunning mangroves. In the north as well as in Chiang Mai, globetrotters from the Middle East can recharge in the Nan Province, a slow-paced city full of cafés, rice fields and centuries-old temples. ICONSIAM, a new shopping mall in Bangkok, situated by Chao Phraya River inspired by Thai art, serves the luxury taste of Middle Eastern visitors, combining high-end brands. Sooksiam, an indoor market and floating market delivers tasty food and high-quality products from all regions across Thailand.

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Explore Germany BarrierFree

In a move to promote accessible tourism, German National Tourist Board (GNTB) has launched an online database for BarrierFree (accessible) travel, the first of its kind to include an 'Accessibility Checked' identification seal.

TT Bureau

The database 'Travel for All' enables users to search for a wide range of accessible holiday facilities throughout Germany including accommodation, restaurants, activities, shopping centres and essential services such as accessible transport and local tourism offices. It includes an online map that shows the location of the item and links directly to each supplier and the relevant certification. Detailed information about BarrierFree travel in Germany can be accessed via www.germany.travel. The 'Travel for All' project has been funded by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy; it was developed by the German Seminar for Tourism (DSFT) in co-operation with the Tourism for



Petra Hedorfer
Chief Executive Officer
GNTB's board of directors

All Germany (NatKo) organisation and co-ordinated with a wide variety of tourism partners.

Petra Hedorfer, Chief Executive

“ We are launching our new database with over 1,500 fully certified BarrierFree service providers currently included and this information will be expanded on an ongoing basis ”

Officer of GNTB's board of directors, said, "BarrierFree tourism services are indispensable for about 10 per cent of visitors to Germany. We are launching our new database with over 1,500 fully certified BarrierFree service providers currently included and this information will be expanded on an ongoing basis. The database is highly useful for both consumers and tour operators. It is an aid not only to the actual travel planning but also researching for example, activities or

accommodation from a trusted source that provides up-to-date information from certified partners in BarrierFree travel."

Each company included in the database is documented by trained researchers and evaluated using clear quality control criteria. Detailed information about each listed entry can be viewed by the guests – providing more transparency and reliability – and which bear the 'Accessibility Checked' seal.

Rolf Schrader, Managing Director, DSFT explains, "The 'Travel for All' project developed in co-operation with GNTB and other partners is the first to offer nationwide labelling for accessible travel. Our system enables a comprehensive database for BarrierFree tourism over a wide cross-section of accessible tourism service providers; in addition, these companies can be directly involved in their certification process. The interest to date has been tremendous." 🇩🇪



Diverse experiences of the Philippines

The Department of Tourism (DOT), Philippines hosted roadshows in Kuwait and Riyadh with over 75 and 100 travel agents respectively. As a platform to promote the outbound destination, the event provided an opportunity to network and meet some of the industry specialists.



RIYADH



KUWAIT



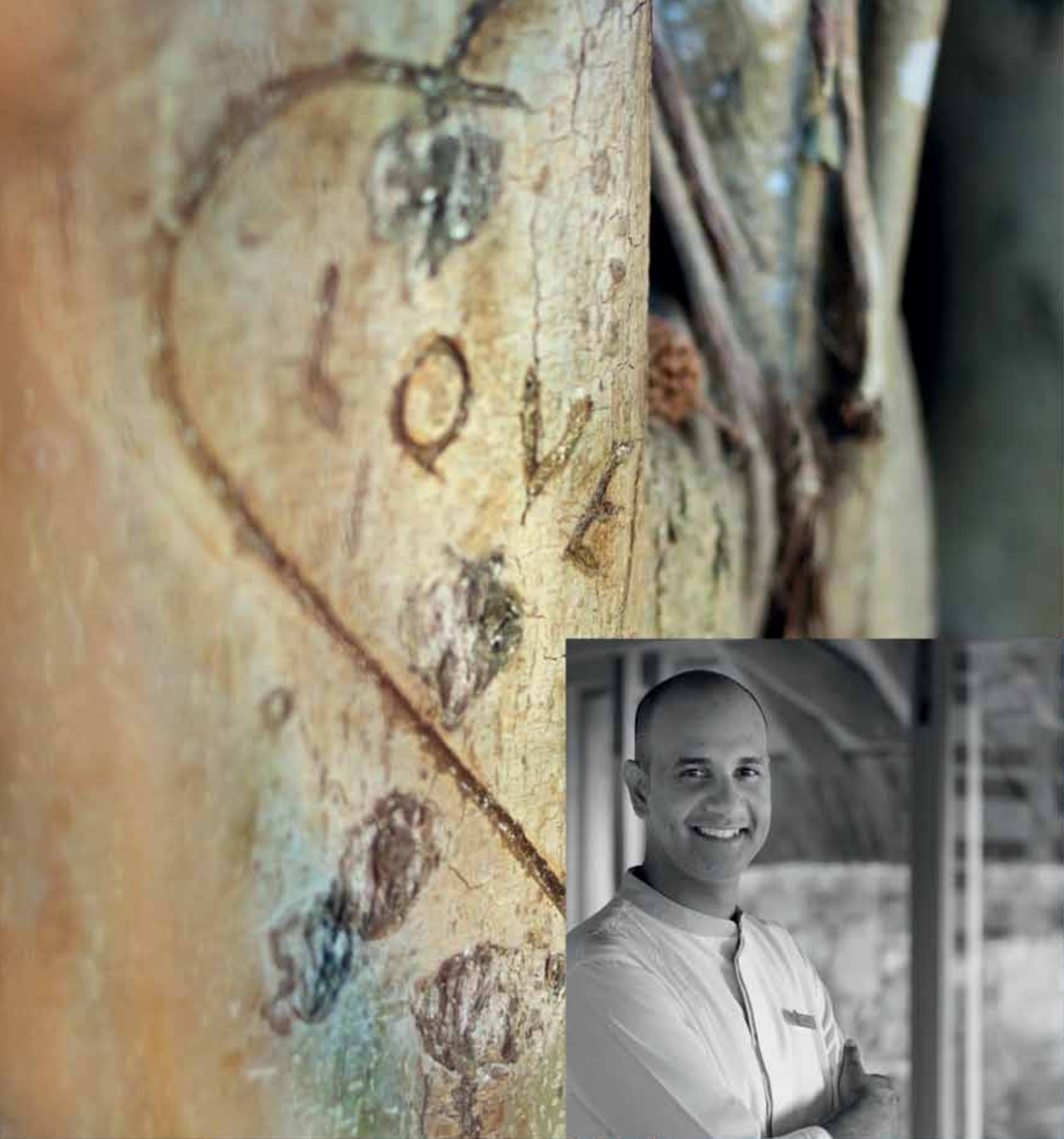
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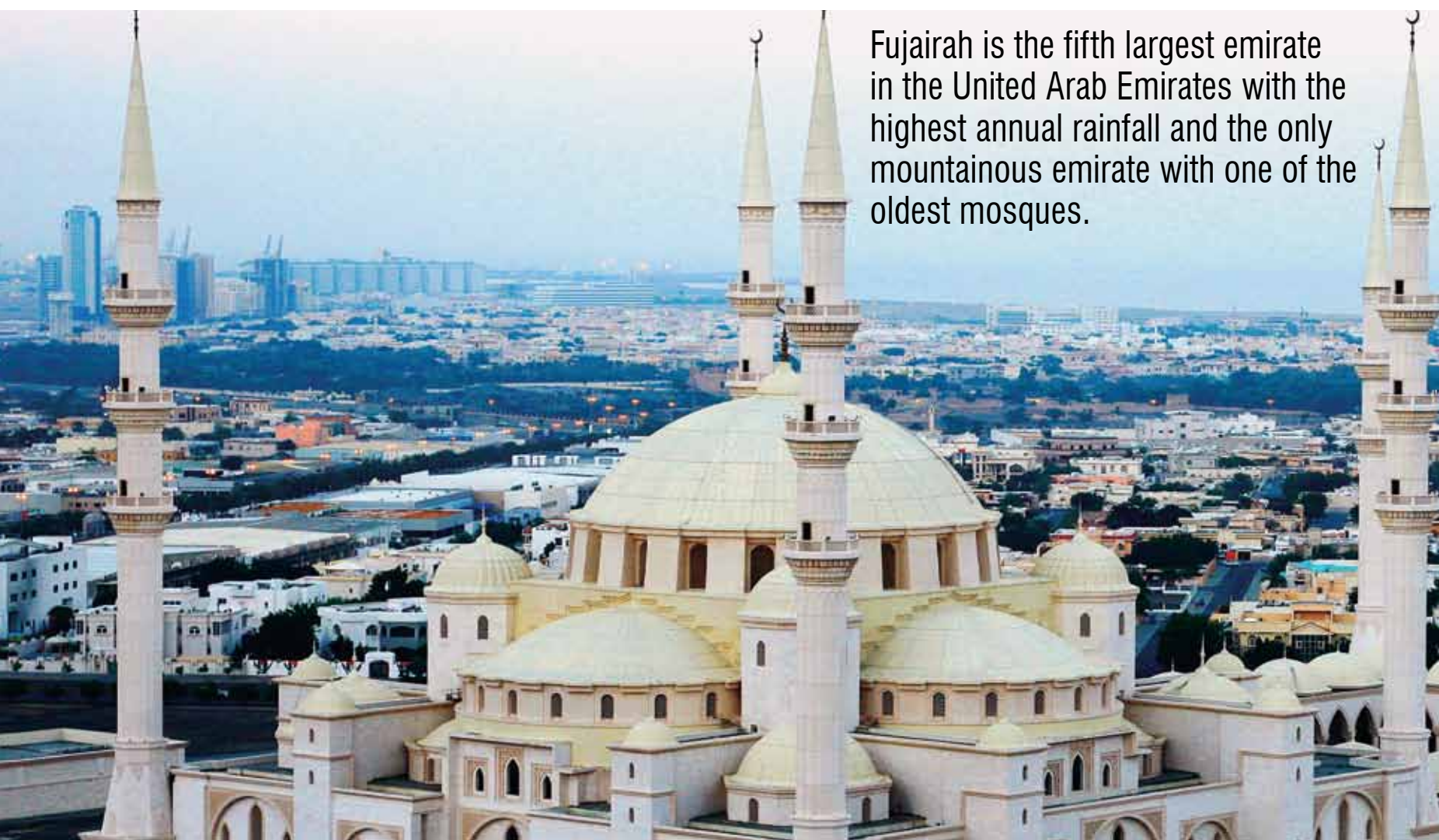
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Witness the archaeological collection in FUJAIRAH



Fujairah is the fifth largest emirate in the United Arab Emirates with the highest annual rainfall and the only mountainous emirate with one of the oldest mosques.

The destination is popular for coral reefs, adventure sports and diving. Popular cities and villages in Fujairah are Dibba, Murbeh, Qidfa, Al Bidyah, Masafi, Al-Siji and Al Bithnah.

Nestled between the Hajar Mountains and the Indian Ocean, this picturesque town is the perfect holiday destination for anyone looking to enjoy nature

due to its location overlooking on Gulf of Oman and the stunning Indian Ocean. In its drive to attract more tourists to the emirate, the public and private sector enterprises have been working closely in terms of hotels and other alternative accommodation availability to accommodate the influx of tourists that visit the emirate especially during the winter season. Some must-do activities in Fujairah include:

❖ **Al Bidya Mosque:** Al Bidya Mosque also known as Ottoman Mosque was constructed in the 15th century. It is situated in a small village in North of Fujairah and considered one of the oldest mosques of the UAE.

❖ **Fujairah Corniche Bull Butting:** Every Friday

evening, an exciting cultural heritage show for Arabian Bull Butting is arranged in a fenced muddy field opposite to the Fujairah Corniche by locals. It is a just a tug of war contest between two bulls, where one bull has to push the other bull outside the circle.

❖ **Fujairah Historic Fort:** Fujairah Fort is the oldest historical fort in United Arab Emirates built in the 16th century. Historical record shows it was a defense building for ruling royal family of that time.

❖ **Fujairah Museum:** Established in 1991 by the Ruler of Fujairah, the Fujairah Museum provides visitors an image of its cultural background and archaeological evidence to prove its inheritance since 3rd Millennium BC.

❖ **Ain Al Madhab Garden:**

The Ain Al Madhab Garden is a popular relaxation spot located near the foothills of huge Al Hajar Mountains. It is more than just a mineral spa where people come for swimming in the warm sulphuric water.

❖ **Fujairah Friday Market:**

Fujairah's Friday Market is situated at Masafi. It is a great place



for tourists to stop by a point on the road and buy some fresh fruits and vegetables which are grown by the locals. There are some stalls of carpets and pottery shops, which allow tourists to buy cultural art pieces of Fujairah.

❖ **Snoopy Island:** This rocky marine island has immense natural beauty and abundant sea life. Named after a cartoon

tional floodlight tennis courts and a tennis stadium with the seating capacity of 2,000 persons.

❖ **Century Mall:** Century Mall is the biggest mall in the eastern emirates of UAE. This mall is situated on the New Al Anjimat Road next to Al Shabab Club in Al Mazmar Area of Fujairah.



dog character, this island resembles it in shape. It is situated about hundred meters offshore from the Sandy Beach Hotel & Resorts at Al Aqah in Fujairah.

❖ **Tennis & Country Club Fujairah:** People of all age groups come here not only for relaxation but also for enjoyment. The club has five interna-

❖ **Al Hajar Mountains:** The Al Hajar Mountains are the highest mountain range in the eastern Arabian Peninsula that run through both the UAE and Oman. The highest named point in the UAE is located there, measuring 1,527 metres high and is called Jabal Yibir. This wild and beautiful mountain range stands proudly to the west of Fujairah.



Coral gardens for sustainability

The Ministry of Climate Change and Environment (MOCCA) launched the Fujairah Cultured Coral Reef Gardens, the largest project of its kind in the UAE, in collaboration with Fujairah Municipality, Dibba Fujairah Municipality and Fujairah Adventures. At the launch event organised by MOCCA under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Mohammed Al Sharqi, Crown Prince of Fujairah and Supreme Council Member, **His Excellency Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi**, Minister of Climate Change and Environment, said, "Protecting and preserving the sustainability of the environment and of our natural resources is integral to the legacy of the founding father of the UAE, Late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. The preservation of the country's biodiversity is also a prime area of focus for the UAE leadership today as outlined in the UAE Vision 2021. The Ministry of Climate Change and Environment has put in place multiple programmes that aim to carry out the country's national strategy for biodiversity in collaboration with other local environmental authorities in the country."

The Fujairah Cultured Coral Reef Gardens project that spans 300,000 square meters will include the cultivation of 1.5 million coral reef colonies and significantly boost the sustainability of the fish stocks, thereby safeguarding food diversity and food security in the country. "The protection of fish within the coral reefs will allow it to breed and grow. The ministry is keen on promoting the project as an ecotourism destination. It is also

anticipated to encourage the spirit of volunteerism and community work as the cultivation of the coral reefs will depend heavily on the volunteering efforts of the youth," he said.

Al Zeyoudi also said that the ministry has organised several specialised workshops for young volunteers to offer insights on the cultivation of coral reefs and their sustainability. All participants were awarded certificates by the Ministry.

Spanning an area that equals nearly 60 international football stadiums, the gardens will be home to 1.5 million colonies of coral species, meticulously selected based on feasibility studies and research undertaken by MOCCA. The gardens will provide a safe haven for a large number of local fish species as well and boost their populations by protecting their eggs and larvae from predator fish and strong water currents that threaten their survival. As a result, it is set to drive the sustainability of fish stocks, which is among the key objectives of MOCCA. In doing so, it will contribute to directly increasing the income of the fishermen – nearly 7,000 fishermen in 1,700 fishing boats work in the area.

The diving sites in the gardens will contribute to strengthening the UAE's status as a leading ecotourism destination – a prime area of focus for MOCCA. As part of this priority, the destination will play an important role in the success of the Ministry's 'The UAE's Natural Wonders' initiative launched in 2018.



MiCE agents explore Oman

As one of the most frequent travel hubs for travellers in GCC countries, Oman is set to welcome more tourists with its new ease of visa process. Salam Air, which started operations from Salalah to Dubai, hosted key agents to discover and explore the aircraft as well as the destination.

TT Bureau



Mudassir Dhanse
Country Manager—UAE
SalamAir

“We wanted to promote Oman as a diverse destination for leisure, MiCE as well as weekend gateway. As SalamAir entered the market recently, it was essential that we present our valuable agents the services and product offerings of the airline. In close collaboration with our partners Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara and Al Bustan Palace, we were able to organise a familiarisation tour for some of the dnata agents who look after leisure, MiCE, business and events in the UAE so that there can be a stronger connection of even weekend getaways to various locations within Oman.”



Siraj Memon
Director of Sales
Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara

“Everyone knows how beautiful Oman is. However, not many venture out to Salalah to explore this hidden gem which is just 1 hour and 30 mins away from Dubai; specially the corporate companies who look at other destinations for their offsite meetings and conferences. With dnata team handling these requests from the corporate accounts, it only made sense to introduce the destination to the people behind the scenes who recommend destinations to these corporate houses. I am looking forward to a great partnership with dnata and their clients to be our guests.”



Rahil Khan
Director of Sales
Al Bustan Palace

“In collaboration with Anantara, we showcased our authentic palace to the corporate world of Dubai. From families to business events, corporate stays, launch events for clients, we are geared to handle a plethora of activities that are well suited for our clientele. Our property has the space and ambience required for both locals who will travel from Dubai and even the expats. Oman and Dubai are in close proximity to each other and our intention is to promote the destination especially as a weekend getaway hub for expats and locals alike. It was a pleasure to have partnered with SalamAir to host these agents.”

“SalamAir seems like an efficient and functional product. The aircraft was quite fresh with good legroom space. The new Muscat airport adds to the overall flying experience with SalamAir. Both Anantara Hotels in Oman are quite spectacular. The Jebal Akhdar property up in the mountains is a very good fit for mid-sized conferences and



Aamir Faisal
Regional Business Manager,
dnata Travel

incentive groups. Team activities like group trekking are quite novel for this region. Anantara Al Baleed in Salalah is a hidden jewel. The pool villas are aesthetic and create a truly memorable experience for guests.”

“The flight check-in, boarding and in-flight services at SalamAir were easy, modern and comfortable. Coupled with the flight, we had a unique adventure during our stay at Anantara Resort, Al Jabal Al Akhdar with spacious rooms and high-quality facilities. The resort offers fabulous restaurant choices and a



Alex Locke
Regional Business Manager HRG
dnata Travel

beautiful spa to relax. What followed was also the opportunity to stay with Anantara Salalah, with our own private villa and pool. Oman is a diverse country with mountains, coastlines, beaches and the most welcoming people.”

“Our trip to Oman was an eye opener with its beautiful beaches, mountains and above all else, its warm-hearted people. I believe that the people of a country are its true treasures, and Oman has it in abundance. The beautiful beaches and greenery in Salalah to the rugged terrain in Al Jabal and the cosmopolitan city of Muscat,



Ratish Menon
Business Manager, HRG—UAE
dnata Travel

Oman has it all and more for a relaxing family holiday as well as for corporates who are on the look-out for newer avenues for its corporate events. The Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort in Nizwa and Al Baleed Resort in Salalah are the perfect getaway you want with your family.”



Caroline Harroff
Cash Back Manager—VAT Reclaim
for Corporates, dnata Travel

“SalamAir was a seamless and very friendly experience with faultless service. With four flights in four days, the experience and service delivery were consistent right from the check-in counter to the crew. As for Anantara properties, I never knew these gems existed in both locations. Anantara Resort in Al Jabal Al Akhdar has a unique location overlooking a canyon and high-class accommodation; not to mention the fantastic activities suggested by the hotel from walking through old villages to biking. We then moved to the second paradise in Oman, Anantara Al Baleed Resort Salalah with crème de la crème accommodation. Once we got out of this paradise, we enjoyed this magnificent city too.”



Hirnakshi Mahadevia
Business Development Manager—
Corporate Travel, dnata Travel

“SalamAir is a true reflection of their tag line ‘Simply Omani’. Right from the moment we stepped into Terminal 2 Dubai International Airport, the holiday mood was set. The check-in was a breeze at all the airports – Dubai, Muscat and Salalah. The seats were quite comfortable and the baggage claims were very quick. The Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort is perched scenically overlooking the valleys, tiered farms and the three abandoned villages. The resort blends so beautifully into the surroundings and is spread wide to give every area perfect views of the mountains. The rooms were spacious and comfortable.”



Jayshree Ranganathan
Key Account Manager
dnata travel

“Within a limited number of days, we were able to discover some of the most exclusive areas in Oman and experience first-hand flying in SalamAir A320 NEO. SalamAir and Anantara Resorts put together a fantastic Fam trip for the dnata Key Account Managers. We went in without knowing what to expect but were simply awestruck by the natural beauty of Oman. The efficiency and comfort of SalamAir flights (not to mention the new Muscat airport and lounge) impressed us, while the luxurious properties of Anantara resorts, bowled us over completely! The rustic mountain beauty of Anantara Jabal Akhdar and the calm serenity of Anantara Al Baleed villas at Salalah will remain etched in our memories forever.”

Gearing up for summer

It is once again time for summer surprises in Dubai and Ghaya Grand Hotel in Dubai is preparing for the season by focusing on its long-term contracts to secure its business.

TT Bureau

Located in one of the upcoming areas in Dubai, Ghaya Grand Hotel is an ultimate escape from the bustling city in a modern hideaway. The property was the first to be built in this area with 765 rooms; both hotel rooms and apartments catering to all guests from long stay to short stay. It is one of the most newly developed areas where one can easily access Dubai's most prominent attractions such as Dubai Miracle Gardens and Butterfly Garden. Apart from the same it is also within very close proximity to the newly-opened Me'aisem City Centre Shopping Mall, International Cricket Stadium, Motor



Olwin De Souza
General Manager
Ghaya Grand

City, Sport City, The Els Club, Jumeirah Golf Estates and Dubai Marina-the Ghaya Grand

Hotel is considered a local gem offering unparalleled service.

The hotel boasts of 12 meeting rooms that can be reserved by guests with state-of-the-art features that complement with them. An exceptional banquet offering both indoor and outdoor facilities with contemporary design makes it stand out with distinction.

Olwin De Souza, General Manager, Ghaya Grand shares, "The first quarter was very challenging in terms of Average Daily Rate. In terms of the second quarter, focus will be on long stay customers and

groups will enjoy competitive rates to secure business. Advance purchase rates will be offered for now while the rates will be higher closer to the dates. In terms of markets for summer, we are looking at Vietnam, China, India, Expo 2020 markets and airlines as we are in close proximity to Al Maktoum airport. The tag of Arabian Travel award winner gave us good exposure with the apartment services we have in the hotel and this year's focus is more to secure the long-term apartment business."

He goes on to share the importance of the travel agents in

today's competitive market. "We are focusing on long-term relations with them since ours is a large property with 765 units to sell. They are the ones who provide us the numbers to ensure that we grow. In turn, we offer them great incentives and work together on long-term relationships not only to secure the business but way beyond."

Through the unique ambience, personalised service and energising amenities, Ghaya Grand Hotel's goal is to create an awakening experience that helps refresh and de-stress the mind and body. 🌟



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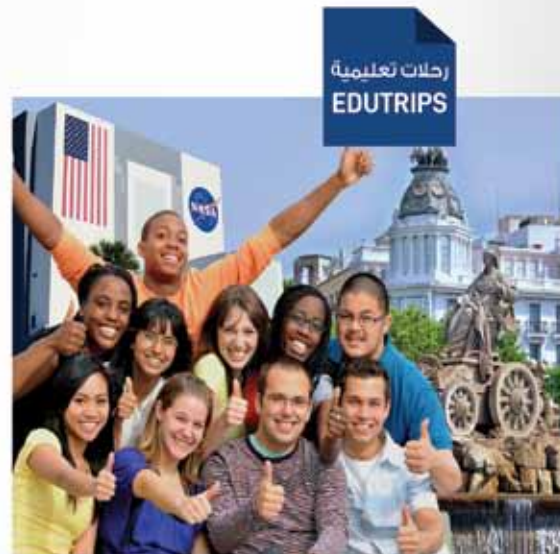
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*Europe's next culture hotspot***FINLAND**

With an interesting cultural heritage and innovative tourism offerings, Helsinki, the Finnish capital, provides ample opportunities to explore its design, architecture, culture and shopping along with its large park areas, forests, lakes and the coastline to ensure there's no dearth of natural presence.

Rich heritage buildings that speak volumes of an era gone by interspersed with new age modern architecture is what defines Helsinki, the southern capital of Finland. For those seeking a taste of rich culture, ancient design such as museums with rich historical stature to the present day, Helsinki offers a diverse European experience. Middle Eastern travellers seek a destination which offers diversity in all forms, and there has been a steady growth of travellers

from the region visiting Helsinki over the past few years.

What appeals to tourists

Helsinki has some of the most prominent architectural works within the city, dating back to the 18th century. Some noteworthy architectural marvels that amaze visitors are Parliament House, Kiasma - Museum of Contemporary Art, the famous cathedral which overlooks the harbour and long-standing hotel buildings. Relaxation and rejuvenation are vital factors for all travellers. The experience of a Finnish spa treatment is like no other as it contains different elements of treatment as per the needs of every individual. In terms of adventure, the sledge ride is an experience which is unmatched, especially during the winter. Many companies organise such trips to give a local feel to the travellers. From Helsinki to the woodlands is only about 30 to 45 minutes.

Gastronomical experiences

The culinary scene in Helsinki is becoming popular as it uses fresh produce from urban gardens. The restaurant offerings in the city

are better than ever before. Chapter uses mostly the best of Finnish seasons. The young and talented team at Chapter tries to find the perfect balance between the flavours. Grön is a Michelin star restaurant that wants to show respect to creativity, nature and to all of us by offering excellent food made from locally produced ingredients. Latva offers great and rich flavours with the twist of chef Benjamin's own style. Ora plans their menu according to the Finnish seasons, with rapid changes to enjoy the harvests of the short but extremely rich growing season.

An old warehouse at Katajanokka Harbour gives shelter to friends of good food and drink. Ultima is taking hyperlocal produce to a new level by combining Finnish, top-of-the-world food technology and circular economy know-how. The customers can see their meal literally growing around them. Vinkkeli is founded by three experts, sharing more than 10 years' history at Helsinki's legendary restaurants. Wino is a cosy wine bar and restaurant offering local flavours in the heart of Kallio. Yes Yes Yes is a bustling bar and restaurant in a former McDonald's offering vegetarian food. Way is a combination of bakery and wine bar offering natural wines and sour dough bread.



Innovation for future airports

Prominent aviation industry players from Saudi Arabia will participate at the 19th Airport Show from April 29-May 1 at Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre (DICEC). **Daniyal Qureshi**, Group Exhibition Director, Reed Exhibitions, shares the country's ongoing efforts to develop airport facilities.

TT Bureau

Could you share an overview of this year's Airport Show?

The Airport Show 2019 will have two co-located events — Air Traffic Control (ATC) Forum and Airport Security Middle East, as well as the Global Airport Leaders Forum (GALF), Women in Aviation (WIA) General Assembly CAPA's Middle East & Africa Aviation Summit. A new Smart Airports Conference will take place during GALF and the new Innovation Hub will be showcasing breakthrough technologies set to shape the future airport experience. Then there is a dedicated 'Live Stage' featuring CPD accredited industry presentations for all visitors for free.

The ATC Forum is important as the fleet of passenger and freighter aircraft in the Middle East region will almost treble to over 2,950 by 2034. The Airport Security Market is projected to hit US\$16 billion by 2024.

How many exhibitors are participating this year?

We will have a record 375 exhibitors from 60 countries this year. 7,500 attendees are expected to attend the B2B show, with 75 per cent exhibitors returning after the highly-successful participation last year. The 19th year of Airport Show will see 143 international companies, of which 42 are new exhibitors. Leading exhibitors at the event will



Daniyal Qureshi
Group Exhibition Director
Reed Exhibitions—Middle East

include Ulma Handling Systems, ADB Safegate, Honeywell, L3 Security, Smiths Detection, DFS Aviation and Vanderlande.

“ We will have a record 375 exhibitors from 60 countries this year. 7,500 attendees are expected to attend the 19th year of Airport Show ”

How different is this year's edition from the last?

Our tag line this year is 'The Future of Airport Innovation Starts Here'. We are accelerating business and innovation for the future airports. This year the focus is on smart airports, along with ATC and Airport Security. The global smart

airport market is expected to reach close to US\$13 billion by 2019 and US\$14.87 billion by 2021. In the Middle East, the smart airports market will be worth US\$850 million by 2019. Airports in the UAE lead in smart technology adoption.

What has been the reason to advance the Airport Show date this year?

It is taking place a day after the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) starts this year and also almost a week before the Holy Month of Ramadan begins. This has been done keeping in view the sentiments of our industry members some of whom participate in ATM too, especially overseas exhibitors. 🇦🇪

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Personality of the month

The magic of human relations

An award-winning professional with over seven years of experience in hospitality, **Deveekaa Nijhawan** excels in implementing creative Public Relation strategies. She was recently promoted as Cluster Director of PR & Communications of four properties offering some of the most exclusive private islands.

 Shehara Rizly

Most hotels get stellar clients or customers who are always a joy to serve but very few would go that extra mile for guests to ensure that they well catered to. **Deveekaa Nijhawan**, Cluster Director of PR and Communications, Anantara Dhigu Maldives Resort, Anantara Veli Maldives Resort, Naladhu Private Island Maldives and Niyama Private Islands Maldives, strives to deliver superlative experiences to her guests and believes in the holy grail of the customer is king. She is always at the forefront of fostering relationships with international and local media in strategic markets and leveraging synergies whilst identifying opportunities for betterment of the group.

Tracing the beginnings

"I happened to join the industry by chance and it didn't take long for me to realise how much I loved it and wanted to continue pursuing it. The industry seems glamorous from the outside and that's precisely one of the reasons I love it so much; but it also entails a lot of hard work," Nijhawan reveals.

She started her career at Le Méridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre in 2012. She recalls, "I grew from joining the hotel as a Public Relations and Communications Executive to head the department within two years. I launched a new hotel wing, one of the largest ballrooms in the UAE, fostered several strategic partnerships and re-launched 10 of the 18 F&B restaurants. This experience helped me significantly at Niyama as Middle East is one of our key strategic markets. Having been successful in garnering extensive PR coverage for Niyama and helping with the brand's repositioning strategy, my caliber and efforts were recognised by the group and the corporate office resulting in my recent promotion."

Strong roots

The choice of a career is inadvertently dependent on a very good support system that may have been responsible for the

way things turn out to be. Nijhawan explains, "My father was the GM with Oberoi Hotels & Resorts. As he took over different hotels, we travelled a lot and I learnt to embrace different cultures early in my life. When I was very young, I had told my father I would follow his footsteps and join the industry. No one took me seriously then and now I am here...life does come full circle indeed! Getting into PR happened by chance as I initially thought I would get into the business side of things, but it seemed destiny had other plans for me."

Awards & accolades

One of the most exciting aspects of her career, Nijhawan mentions, was winning the Hotelier Middle East Award for the Best PR and Marketing Person, where she was chosen out of 500 nominees in the MENA region. "This was a great validation for all my hard work and passion during my time at Le Meridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre.

“In less than a year, I managed to grow the social media following of Niyama Private Islands Maldives exponentially; Instagram from 25,000 to 160,000 (540%) and Facebook from 19,000 to 32,489 (71%)”



Deveekaa Nijhawan
Cluster Director of PR and Communications, Anantara Dhigu Maldives Resort, Anantara Veli Maldives Resort, Naladhu Private Island Maldives and Niyama Private Islands Maldives

I continued this streak at Niyama Private Islands Maldives, wherein I successfully repositioned the brand as a luxury lifestyle destination in the international media. In less than a year I also managed to grow the social media following of the resort exponentially; Instagram from 25,000 to 160,000 (540%) and Facebook from 19,000 to 32,489 (71%)," Nijhawan says.

Wave of change

Hospitality in the Middle East has undergone substantial transformation over the past few years. While the industry has evolved, guest's needs have also changed and become more sophisticated. Immediate accessibility, mobile fixation, personalised experiences and contradictory preferences are just some of the challenges that hotels face daily. "However, this makes it more interesting as I am always trying to find ways to be more creative. When I am told something is challenging to achieve, I am even more determined to deliver results and rise to the challenge," shares an excited Nijhawan.

Key challenges

Moving from the comfort zone in Dubai to a totally different market may seem a rocky path to trod on but Nijhawan has her own story to reveal. "While the region was new to me, I was able to adapt very quickly; thanks to the complete support and empowerment entrusted in me by my General Manager, DOSM and the Corporate Office. Their confidence and trust instilled in me a great degree of motivation to execute my job responsibilities and deliver beyond their highest expectations. One doesn't really stop working in an island and many times I find myself working 18 hours a day but I am not complaining as only few get the opportunity to live and work in paradise!" 🌴



Sharjah promotes ecotourism at RTF

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) participated at the 11th Riyadh Travel Fair (RTF) to highlight tourism, cultural and leisure attractions in Sharjah and promote the emirate as one of the most significant local and international tourism destinations. Sharjah focused on ecotourism and outdoor activities with a strong emphasis on new branded hotel projects, in line with SCTDA's commitment to promoting the emirate's tourism market in the Arab markets.





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How green is your hotel?

Iftikhar Hamdani, Cluster General Manager, Ramada Hotel and Suites Ajman, Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman & Wyndham Garden Ajman, has not only initiated sustainable projects but shared his findings with other stakeholders and clearly showed the profits it could reap in the industry.

 TT Bureau

For the past few years, there has been one voice communicating and initiating sustainability projects in Ajman.

Iftikhar Hamdani, Cluster General Manager, Ramada Hotel and Suites Ajman, Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman and Wyndham Garden Ajman, who listened, observed and did his research before executing a process, today manages three properties reaping profits for his owners whilst ensuring that sustainable methods are utilised for future generations.

Waterless car cleaning

Everything revolves around water for cleanliness. Over the years, the special team

working with Hamdani looked into the types of wastage and found that a lot of water is required to wash vehicles, resulting in wastage. Hence, they compiled a programme to find the right party to assist them in saving water. Last year, the transport department of the three hotels started waterless vehicle cleaning and saved 272,000 litres of water.

Biodiesel and waste

Another project which has been very profitable is the oil converted to biodiesel. The main saving is the wasted oil, over 12,000 liters of which would have just been thrown emitting more carbon to the



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


environs. The team developed a method to convert and use it as biodiesel which will be used

in the properties. One of the earlier projects since 2012 is the waste diverted from the landfill at Ramada Hotel and Suites by Wyndham Ajman. 2,190 tonnes of waste has been diverted from the landfill year-on-year.

Soap for hope

This is a programme which needs no introduction as today Hamdani and his team continuously send over 240 kg of soap to be sanitised and used in underprivileged countries under the 'Soap for Hope' programme. Another charitable programme developed is the donation of over 400 kg of linen (including towels, bed sheets, pillows) from 2014 onwards up to date.

Glass over plastic

Plastic bottles have a very short shelf-life but over the years, various findings suggest that one must replace them for health reasons. He states, "We are in the process of replacing plastic bottles with glass bottles aiming to save financially and create a campaign against plastic bottles. Currently, Ramada Hotel and Suites by Wyndham Ajman's annual consumption of plastic bottles is approximately 320,662 bottles. With this campaign, there will be no more plastic bottles at the hotel. Our 650 staff are reusing reusable bags for shopping instead of using plastic." 



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IHG rides on a rapid growth plan

The InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) has witnessed a steady growth in the Middle East over the past few years along with an increase in market share. **Rajit Sukumaran**, Chief Development Officer—Asia, Middle East and Africa (AMEA), IHG, shares an insight into the plans for the next five years.

TT Bureau

Could you share a brief about the strategic growth in the Middle East region over the past few years?

InterContinental Hotels Group established itself in the Middle East over 50 years ago and has since established itself as a significant operator within the region, with 91 hotels across six brands in the GCC, Levant and Egypt. As the Middle East continues to grow as a business hub and tourist destination, we are confident of our long-term growth in the region, having seen increased market share over the last couple of years. In the coming years, you will see a continued focus on mid-scale and our established

brands in the Middle East, as we grow by 29 per cent (by number of rooms) over the next three to five years, opening the 37 hotels (9,325 rooms) in our pipeline in the Middle East.

What are your thoughts on KSA seeking investment in the tourism sector?

IHG has a strong legacy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, home to our largest footprint in the GCC with 33 hotels currently operating. The Kingdom also makes up 32 per cent of our development pipeline in the region, offering incredible opportunities in terms of both domestic and inbound tourism. Since the inception of the Kingdom's na-

“In the coming years, you will see a continued focus on mid-scale and our established brands in the Middle East, as we grow by 29 per cent (by number of rooms) over the next three to five years”

tional Vision 2030, we are seeing positive investor sentiment, which will see IHG build on its strengths within the country.

There has been an increase in mid-scale offerings across the region over the past two years with Dubai taking a lead. What is the brand performance that you have seen subsequently?

With the increasing demand for

mid-scale branded accommodation as a result of increased regional travel and decreased cost of airline travel, IHG remains focused on the mid-market segment. The Holiday Inn brand family is well established in the region. Last year saw both the landmark opening of the largest Holiday Inn hotel in the UAE, Holiday Inn Dubai Festival City, as well as the management development agreement with Al Hokair Group to roll out a mini-



Rajit Sukumaran
Chief Development Officer
Asia, Middle East & Africa
InterContinental Hotels Group

mum of 10 Holiday Inn Express over 15 years. We have also seen great interest in extend-stay brand Staybridge Suites. 🏠



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Claviger unlocks the unexplored

The GCC traveller is defined as a high spender who seeks exclusive and personalised travel experiences. A veteran in the field of sales and marketing in the hospitality sector, **Ahmed Baki**, Founder & CEO, Claviger, identified this segment and ventured out to establish his company which mediates business for this market.

TT Bureau

What does the term Claviger mean?

The term Claviger means the one who holds the key. We believe that as the holder of the key, we have gained access to multiple segments in the outbound market of the GCC mainly due to the fact that we cater to the main necessity of the clientele language 'Arabic' – this provides an edge in the key markets we are focused on.

Could you share the reason for venturing into a hospitality sales and marketing consultancy?

Having served in various positions over the past 25 years in multinational hotel brands, I saw an opportunity for the outbound



Ahmed Baki
Founder & CEO
Claviger

luxury market from GCC for hotels based in Europe, Asia and the US. Everyone was looking for luxury high-end clients such as the senior government of-

ficials as well as clients from the private sector to experience hotels in the US, Europe and Asia, but accessibility to these kinds of clients was not easy. Initially, we identified this gap and saw a very good opportunity in the market as we had the expertise of serving in multinational hotels in the UAE. Thus came about the vision for Claviger. As we celebrate three years, we have grown exponentially in terms of our team as well as the number of clients we handle.

What are the areas managed by Claviger? How do you differentiate from other players?

We work on multiple areas such as corporate, travel agencies,

wholesalers, government, semi-government, private, royalty, incentive, luxury concierge in multiple markets. Our clients are interested in our services due to our experiences, know-how and network we have in this part of the world. What we actually started was to create the best talent, hence Claviger acquired and recruited top talent in the GCC market. Our assets are essentially our talents. We have the best directors of marketing in Riyadh, Jeddah, Kuwait, etc from different markets in the GCC. Today, we cover 100 per cent of the GCC countries where we have great talent on ground.

Each person employed at Claviger comes with his/her

expertise from various backgrounds and markets. There is a good network of clients with each team member boasting about a wealth of knowledge of the various markets we cater to. Having multilingual speakers also helps us reach out to different markets seamlessly.

Our Vision

❖ Claviger is one of the fast-moving luxury hotel sales and marketing consultancy, which works as an extended arm of the sales and marketing team at various properties based outside the GCC countries

Bleisure at ibis Jumeira

Situated in a mixed precinct of business and leisure, ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira Hotel is a uniquely designed property connecting old and new Dubai.

TT Bureau



Muhammad Mujtaba Haider
General Manager
ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira

For travellers, accessibility of the property plays a key role in terms of a repeat guest apart from other necessities to drive them to stay at a specific property. The mid-scale brands such as

ibis Styles Jumeira have continued to grow as it caters well to the needs of today's traveller. Celebrating three years, the property has continued its momentum of a good 85 per cent occupancy.

Muhammad Mujtaba Haider, General Manager, ibis Styles Dubai Jumeira, states, "We have the biggest share from UAE, India, CIS, Saudi Arabia, France, Great Britain, Germany, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Egypt, Italy, Oman, Ukraine, China and the US. We might see a similar trend this year as well in nationality mix. Over the past year, we

have achieved 89 per cent occupancy while we plan to touch 92 per cent this year. For 2019, the hotel will look at enhancing its ranking on OTAs and social media platforms by using new digital marketing techniques. We are encouraging our associates to gather innovative ideas, implement the selected ones and convert these into unique guest experiences."

The hotel is located at a point juxtaposing new and old Dubai and is in close proximity to Sheikh Zayed Road, La Mer Beach, Etihad Museum and World Trade Centre. 📍

Personalise your stay

Cassia Phuket has gained popularity among visitors from the GCC for its many offerings to discerning families by catering to their needs and requirements.

TT Bureau

Cassia Phuket, that caters to those who value personalisation at its best, has a total of 309 suites and boasts of

two different views such as garden and lagoon views consisting of one-bedroomed and two-bedroomed suites.

Sriram Kailasam, Area General Manager, Banyan Tree Phuket & Cassia Phuket shares, "Cassia Phuket is an all-suite hotel and more than the sum of its parts. We let you custom-make your stay your way – it's our mantra. From breakfast to housekeeping and laundry to activities – pick what you like and stitch it together for your ideal holiday! We celebrate all travellers, from singles to small families to tightknit friends, but whether you've come alone or with pals, we've got a great hangout zone for you to meet other like-minded globetrotters." 📍



Sriram Kailasam
Area General Manager
Banyan Tree Phuket & Cassia Phuket

Themed travel to take centre stage

ITB China, to be held from May 15-17, 2019 in Shanghai, has witnessed an increase in the number of exhibitors from the Middle East this year. **David Axiotis**, General Manager, ITB China, shares his views on the future of Chinese travel.



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What will be the focus at ITB China this year?

In order to better understand the new demands of Chinese travellers, we have defined of-the-moment topics that will significantly impact the Chinese travel and tourism industry. These are customised and themed travel with special focus on island travel, adventure travel, sports travel and culture travel. The ITB China Conference will feature dedicated sessions on customised and themed travel. The recognised travel think-tank, running parallel to ITB China, will see business leaders and experts from both China and abroad share their expertise and ideas on this year's topic.



David Axiotis
General Manager
ITB China

How many Middle Eastern countries will participate at the event?

The high demand from the Middle East countries is

“The high demand from the Middle East countries at ITB China 2019 is clearly reflected in the large number of bookings with around 25 exhibitors in total”

reflected in the large number of bookings with around 25 exhibitors in total. New exhibitors include Iran Pardisan Tour & Travel Company, Jordan Tourism Board, Qatar National Tourism Council as well as methabook and TBO Holidays from the UAE. Exhibitors from Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates will highlight their tourism products at this year's ITB China.

How will this year be different from the last?

We have launched the ITB China Buyers Circle in 2019. It is a nationwide buyers' community for all professional Chinese travel buyers. In cooperation with Kairos Future and exclusively based on insights and data from our national Chinese buyers' community, we determine Chinese travel trends in our newly launched ITB China Travel Trends Report. In order

to attract more Chinese travellers at ITB China 2019, destinations and countries can learn how to provide more individual travel experiences, give better access to more online information, make their destination visa-free for Chinese travellers and leverage all new media platforms to engage and connect with Chinese travellers.

The Germany and Brand USA pavilions will debut this year. The rising demand for exhibition space by European destinations reflects the trend of Europe as the number one long-haul destination for Chinese tourists. The Italian National Tourism Board will also have a major presence.

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