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London  
2019

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY Published from : ★ India ★ Middle East

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# Middle East bets big on WTM

At World Travel Market (WTM) in London, tourist boards, travel companies and hotels from the MENA region will have a diverse new range of opportunities to connect and reap more business through the networking sessions.



HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa  
Chairman, SCTDA

“ Our participation in leading global events such as WTM forms part of our efforts to promote the emirate of Sharjah regionally and internationally as an ideal destination for family tourism, in line with the vision of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah. Thanks to our relentless efforts to diversify tourism offerings by focusing more on sports and adventure activities as well as cultural offerings, we have been able to position the emirate as the family destination of the region. Through our 17<sup>th</sup> consecutive participation at WTM, we will showcase Photography Mirror, Sharjah Boat, and VR experience. Furthermore, we will draw attention to Sharjah Tourism Vision 2021 and SCTDA's collaboration with European travel trade to meet targets. The emirate's eco-tourism products, key developments such as airport expansion, Khorfakkan projects, and new marine connectivity between Sharjah and Dubai will also be highlighted. ”



HE Saeed Al Samahi  
Director General  
Fujairah Tourism and  
Antiquities Authority

“ This year at WTM, we are participating with our key partners to showcase the diversity of our emirate. UK is an important source market for the UAE, hence, we attend not only to network with our existing partners but also to seek new partners and opportunities. The emirate received a considerable number of visitors last year and this year, we expect an increase in visitor numbers as we have new properties. We continue with our marketing strategy to promote the destination in every possible manner. ”



Raki Phillips  
CEO  
Ras Al Khaimah  
Tourism Development  
Authority

“ WTM is a great vehicle for promoting our breadth of offerings. We hope to expand our sales base, educate and excite potential future partners, and showcase a destination that we are immensely proud of. Ras Al Khaimah has significantly increased its adventure and sustainable tourism offering in recent years. With 12 partners participating, we will unveil news on international hotel partnerships, the Bear Grylls Survival Academy, new hiking trails, and Jebel Jais adventure products among others. ”



Ahmed Al Qaseer  
Chief Operating Officer  
Shurooq

“ Shurooq has been a participant at WTM for over 10 years, and this year we are focusing on eco-tourism, with flagship destinations and hospitality projects such as Mleiha Archaeological and Eco-tourism, Al Noor Island, Sharjah Collection brand and its three fully operational eco-retreats: Al Faya Lodge in Mleiha, Al Badayer Oasis in Al Badayer Desert and Kingfisher Lodge at Kalba. We will showcase how these destinations have redefined the meaning of authentic and eco-tourism for Sharjah and the region. ”

Inputs by Shehara Rizly



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**Ras Al Khaimah**  
Tourism Development Authority

# Middle East ups the tourism ante at WTM London

With 2019 being touted as a record year for WTM London, the Middle East is being considered as a significant contributor to it. The region's recent strides in both inbound and outbound tourism are being felt across the world.

**T**T Bureau

Organisers predict 2019 to be a record year for WTM, boosted by a strong contingent of exhibitors from the Middle East region. Several Middle Eastern companies have been shortlisted for the International Travel & Tourism Awards (ITTAs) as well, and nominations include Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism, Azerbaijan Tourism Board, and The Jordan Trail Association.

**Simon Press**, Senior Director, WTM London, says, "Part of the growth in tourism can be attrib-



**Simon Press**  
Senior Director  
WTM London

uted to the Middle East, in particular to the UAE and Saudi Arabia's large expatriate population. Relaxation of tourist visa requirements has also provided an additional incentive for Middle Eastern tourists. Over the last

decade, the tourism industry in the region has grown ten-fold and developments have been incredible with the tallest buildings and tallest hotels, revolutionary transport infrastructure, as well as theme parks and leisure attractions."

He adds that it should come as no surprise then that five outstanding campaigns from the MENA region have been shortlisted for the ITTAs. "Both volume and quality of entries received from the region reaffirm the Middle East as one of the most dynamic travel destinations in the world," Press shares. 

# Biometrics to replace boarding passes at Dubai airport

The latest project implemented by General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs (GDRFA) Dubai under the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship is the seamless passenger experience with Emirates airline. The soon-to-be-

ney for the passenger who would not need to carry even a boarding pass to enter the aircraft or even the lounge.

**Major Ghalib Abdulla Hassan Al Majed Al Marri**, Director, Business Management Depart-

be sent from the airline to the GDRFA for confirmation. Hence, when the passenger arrives on the day of departure, all he or she should do is walk through the smart tunnel with no boarding pass. He adds, "Biometrics will provide access not only



implemented walk-in biometrics system or tunnel for all classes - Economy, Business, and First Class - allows a seamless jour-

ment Smart Services, says that three days prior to the passenger starting the journey, details about the passenger will

through the gates but also to the lounge and the flight, so that the customer has a much better passenger experience."

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**Tourism  
Breaking News**

- Abu Dhabi Airports signs MoU with Beijing Daxing International for sharing best practices
- VFS Global inaugurates Abu Dhabi Joint Visa Application Centre
- Azerbaijan tourism partners with Arabian Travel Awards
- Marriott signs deal with Assila to introduce luxury collection to Saudi Arabia in 2020
- Accor partners with Oman Air to enrich members' travel experiences
- Al Safeer Travel and Tours inks deal with Sabre
- BTEA receives an all-female delegation of Saudi travel agencies and tour operators
- St. Regis to bring 271 luxury rooms and 170 branded residences to Muscat

# Travelport's tech quotient

**Kathryn Wallington**, Country Manager for the UAE, Travelport, says that in 2020, they aim to enhance their offerings while keeping their commitment of exceptional service.

**TT Bureau**

The technologies that we are building are central to the evolution of the platform economy, which is growing in significance at a time when experience is everything and demand for personalisation is forcing the travel industry to think and do things differently. A blockchain solution developed by Travelport, IBM Services, and BCD Travel could drive transparency, trust, and ultimately booking volume by putting the lifecycle of hotel booking and commission processing on the blockchain. Together with easyJet, we have also been developing a voice search tool called "Speak Now" in its mobile App, enabling travellers to find flight options by mentioning their destination, dates of travel, and airports they want to fly from.

Continually enhancing distribution capabilities is also integral to our roadmap. Our travel commerce platform processes more than one air shop request for every person on the planet every month, and powers over US\$ 83 billion



**“In 2020, we will continue to invest in the speed and quality of our search, shopping, travel management and robotics capabilities”**

of travel spending annually — giving us access to a huge amount of data and insights. These insights are being used to inform how we approach the supply side of our business, including how we integrate and support major industry initiatives like New Distribution Capability (NDC) and Next Generation Storefront (NGS).

Having been the first GDS to make a live NDC booking in 2018, Travelport has connected to six airlines' NDC content. We have also stepped up coopera-

tion with Qantas, for whom we have handled bookings in a live production test environment, as well as Singapore Airlines on the implementation of its KrisConnect programme – the airline's initiative to leverage NDC standard.

The launch of our Global Digital Traveler Research results and a couple of destination insights – such as the GDS booking data ahead of Hajj pilgrimage – could give travel agencies, airlines and other players in the industry a real competitive advantage, con-

sidering the importance of staying on top of the evolving traveller demand.

Year 2019 has been a uniquely rewarding year for Travelport, as we have been experiencing a transition phase with the changing ownership of the company. We have ambitious new owners with a big vision and a new CEO with the experience to deliver it. The transition has been very smooth and successful. We have made considerable investment in our employees, helping them explore the

opportunities unlocked by the changes within our company.

In 2020, we will continue to invest in the speed and quality of our search, shopping, travel management and robotics capabilities and as we have always done, look at ways to use new technologies to make the process of buying and managing travel continually better for everyone. One thing we won't change is our commitment to providing the same exceptional quality, innovation, support, and service our customers expect.



**Kathryn Wallington**  
Country Manager for the UAE  
Travelport

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

**A word from stalwarts**

**“**We have launched the visitor visa for 49 countries with an option to book the visa online within just three minutes, or take the visa upon arrival. For the remaining countries, travellers can still go to the Embassy and apply for the visa. There are four different travel purposes under this scheme – Umrah, leisure, visit family, and MiCE. It is a 300 Riyal visa with multiple entry for 90 days and valid for one year. We are now strengthening the communication element with a strong campaign to get people to feel the beauty of Saudi Arabia, as a first step, and end the misconception that Saudi is just a desert region.

**We are starting with four key destinations and have developed 15 sites around each of the four destinations which include Riyadh, Jeddah, Medina, and the eastern province. Three more destinations are to be added and a total of 38 sites are to be part of this project by 2022”**

— Her Highness Princess Haifa Mohammed Al Saud, Vice President of Strategy and Planning, Saudi Commission for Tourism & National Heritage (SCTH)



# Travel at ease with Jetex

Adel Mardini, CEO & Founder, Jetex, shares the role of private aviation in ME and how it is gaining prominence. He also elucidates the role of his company in encompassing needs of the potential traveller.

 TT Bureau

## How does private aviation bode for the Middle East?

Private aviation in the Middle East is growing and evolving, and this is due to an incredible infrastructure provided by the local authorities. Aside from the GCC, other markets are also growing significantly; Morocco and Egypt are two great examples.

## Enumerate on the types of travellers. Is this seasonal? Please share more details.

Regarding the types of people who travel, we recognise a mix of governmental authorities, families, business people and

celebrities, and the experience we offer them is always tailored to meet each of their individual needs. Although different markets will see an increase in travel due to seasonal trends, majority of us are constantly on the move not only for personal, but also for business travel. Due to the global network we operate within at Jetex, it is always high season somewhere that we are located.

## Is travel more business or leisure based? Do families travel more now?

As mentioned above, we can see a variety of travellers. In the past, travel was more associated to



Adel Mardini  
CEO & Founder  
Jetex

business, but nowadays we can see a growth in the number of families travelling. According to Global Business Travel Association, business travel is expected to grow to \$1.6 trillion in annual spend by 2020 and with Expo coming to Dubai next year, we look forward to

seeing an increase in business travel to the region.

## Are there travel agents who specialise in this? If so, what is their role?

At Jetex, we offer an extended service that

includes support for the aircraft, crew and the passengers. We take care of all the small details and create not just unique travel for our VIP customers, but also unique

experiences. Whilst our ground handling team cares for the aircraft, our expert team of concierge can assist with ensuring that a seamless agenda of unique experiences is in place on arrival. These can include cruises, tours

and event ticket bookings amongst many more. Especially when travelling for business, we understand that time is often money, so whether a traveller needs a quick business lunch reservation or a tailor-made agenda, we can accommodate.

## Your thoughts on the growth of this industry?

We see an exponential growth in regions such as the Middle East, Africa, Russia as well as CIS countries, South America and Southeast Asia.

## Define the importance of hospitality in private aviation.

Private aviation and hospitality work together as partners to leverage each other. The introduction of so many new restaurants and activities in the UAE is appealing to the potential traveller. 

**“ Global Business Travel Association says that business travel is expected to grow to \$1.6 trillion in annual spend by 2020, and with Expo coming to Dubai, there will be an increase in business travel to the region ”**

includes support for the aircraft, crew and the passengers. We take care of all the small details and create not just unique travel for our VIP customers, but also unique

and event ticket bookings amongst many more. Especially when travelling for business, we understand that time is often money, so whether a traveller needs a quick busi-






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# Aviation boosts jobs & GDP

IATA, in its study on the importance of air transport to the UAE, shows that ongoing prioritisation of aviation as a key strategic asset could generate an additional 620,000 jobs and an extra US\$ 80 billion in GDP by 2037.

 TT Bureau

Air transport's contribution to the UAE economy is already significant. The industry, at present, supports nearly 800,000 jobs and contributes US\$ 47.4 billion to the economy, accounting for 13.3 per cent of the UAE's GDP. If the government continues to pursue a positive agenda for aviation, the UAE's aviation market will grow 170 per cent by 2037, support 1.4 million jobs and contribute US\$ 128 billion in GDP to the nation's economy.

"Over the past 25 years, the UAE has experienced an economic transformation, and aviation has been at the heart of this evolution. Few states have a better understanding of the economic benefits that aviation's connectivity provides than the UAE. Government policy supporting the development of aviation has paid great dividends. Today, the UAE is ranked number one globally for air trade facilitation, tops the Middle East region for visa openness, is an aviation powerhouse, and its air-

## How government action can promote the sector's growth

**Increase airspace capacity to ease congestion and meet future demand:** Airspace capacity in the region has not kept pace with the growth in demand, which is leading to significant delays particularly in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) member countries. Governments in the region must replace political fragmentation with collaborative cross-border decision-making to ensure that the global competitiveness of the region's hubs is not affected.

**Align infrastructure investments with expected growth:** The UAE is well-known for the foresight of its government

in developing airport infrastructure that is affordable. Future infrastructure investments must provide enough capacity to meet market demand and ensure airline technical and service level needs are aligned and remain affordable.

**Continue to leverage new technology and process innovation to enhance efficiency and passenger experience:** The UAE is a pioneer in using innovation to improve the passenger experience. Fast adoption of new technology and initiatives to integrate aviation with future modes of transportation will enhance the competitiveness of the UAE as an aviation hub.



lines carry the country's flag to all corners of the globe," says **Muhammad Ali Albakri**, IATA's Regional Vice President for the Middle East. He shares that to maintain the country's competitiveness as a leading global aviation hub, "sufficient air space capacity to meet demand,

infrastructure investments aligned to growth and rapid implementation of new technology are essential."

To this, **Robin Kamark**, Chief Commercial Officer, Etihad Aviation Group, adds, "As the national airline of the UAE, Etihad Airways is evolving and continuously looking for ways to provide its guests with more choice and a superior travel experience. We achieve this by

having a robust innovation agenda that challenges the industry status quo, and leverage opportunities that come from new and improved technologies. We are proud of the significant role we play in continuing the evolution of the Middle East region as a tourism and travel hub, as well as our contribution to the UAE's vision to become a leader in the global aerospace industry." 

## Belarus visa centres in Dubai & Abu Dhabi

Expatriate residents of the UAE can apply for a visa to Belarus at the new Visa Application Centres in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, jointly launched by Consulate General of Belarus in the UAE and VFS Global. Customers can now submit their visa applications through VFS Global without having to visit the Consulate General of Belarus. The new centres provide outbound travellers from the UAE a convenient visa application platform, ensuring enhanced



quality of services and seamless procedures. Managed by professionals trained to provide secure services in an efficient manner, the centres offer premium personalised service, doorstep delivery of passports, online tracking of

applications, dedicated contact centre, etc.

**Vinay Malhotra**, Regional Group COO for Middle East, South Asia & China, VFS Global, says, "The opening of the centres will increase convenience and enhance the quality of visa services for customers travelling to Belarus. Travellers applying for Belarus visa would be able to submit visa applications and enrol their biometrics under one roof."



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## Etihad and Air Arabia launch Abu Dhabi's 1<sup>st</sup> LCC



**E**tihad Aviation Group and Air Arabia have signed an agreement to launch 'Air Arabia Abu Dhabi', the capital's first low-cost carrier. Etihad and Air Arabia will establish an independent joint venture company that will operate as a low-cost passenger airline with its hub in Abu Dhabi International Airport.

**Tony Douglas**, CEO, Etihad Aviation Group, said, "Abu Dhabi is a thriving cultural hub; travel and tourism play a vital role in the economic growth of the capital and the UAE. By partnering with Air Arabia and launching Abu Dhabi's first low-cost carrier, we are serving this long-term vision".

**Adel Al Ali**, CEO, Air Arabia, said, "Home to the first low-cost carrier in the MENA region, the UAE has developed over the years to become a world-leading travel and tourism hub. We are thrilled to partner with Etihad to establish Air Arabia Abu Dhabi that will further serve the growing low-cost travel segment locally and regionally."

The MENA low-cost air travel model was first introduced in the UAE in 2003 and has been rapidly growing since then. Low-cost carriers accounted for 17 per cent share of seat capacity to and from the Middle East in 2018, compared to only 8 per cent in 2009.

## Personality of the Month

# 10 sustainable years...

**Iftikhar Hamdani**, Cluster General Manager of Wyndham's three properties in Northern Emirates, is referred to as the pioneer of sustainability. As he completes 10 years in the role, his efforts and initiatives continue to be recognised and rewarded.

Shehara Rizly

**I**ftikhar Hamdani has revolutionised the hospitality industry of Northern Emirates by making it a revenue-generating giant, ensuring that sustainability remained at its core. No surprise then that Hamdani can be called a champion of the region, a helmsman of its growth. He joined R Hotels as Director of Sales 10 years before he be-



needs time to take off, but keeping it out of hot water and reaching new heights every year is a continued process, in my opinion."

### Unmatched expertise

When Hamdani joined the 365-room Ramada Hotel and Suites Ajman, within a year he turned it into a profit-making property and the story hasn't changed since.

This helped him earn the trust of the owners, who then decided to entrust him with a second property – Ramada by Wyndham Beach Hotel in Ajman - and then came Wyndham Garden, which was carefully planned to become a leading property in Northern Emirates.

## Sustainability at the core

Hamdani feels that all properties must have sustainability at the core. Among his other projects, Hamdani helmed the recycle of all waste, which in turn helped reap revenue for the hotels he worked at. To step up Wyndham's CSR programme, Hamdani joined the United Nations Global Compact in 2016, the largest corporate social responsibility initiative in the world. He was recognised as 'Brand Ambassador' of Wyndham Hotel Group in 2012, which signifies Wyndham's appreciation of all his efforts towards

the environment and the community.

Over the years, Ramada Hotel and Suites Ajman, led by Hamdani, has been actively leading sustainable tourism initiatives within the UAE's hospitality sector. The hotel has earned several citations and certifications, including Green Globe. Hamdani is known for his groundbreaking environmental initiatives like the launch of Zero Landfill Project in 2012, which was essentially a waste management system of the property.

In 2013, Hamdani led the Go Green painting exhibition and raised awareness among 100,000 students and parents in Northern Emirates. In December 2016, he organised an environmental awareness conference – the International Roundtable Conference by Future Leaders - on the subject of climate change, where young speakers from 22 countries took part in the interactive discussion that aimed to share best practices carried out by their countries.

needs time to ensure that all efforts are taken to reap revenues for the company. This cannot be done within a few months; it requires years of careful and meticulous planning and building strong relationships with travel agents and tour operators. A long-standing relationship ensures continuous business. We attend international exhibitions and roadshows all year around, then seal business deals. It is also equally important to earn a client's trust. Any business

came part of the Ramada Hotel and Suites Ajman family, and soon rose to being the Executive Assistant Manager and later the General Manager of

the property. The revenue the property earned during this period surpassed all expectations, and Hamdani was soon entrusted with the task

of leading the team at a new property.

### Relationships ensure success

The core ingredients of Hamdani's success story are commitment, loyalty, honesty, and integrity. Hamdani says, "When a person is entrusted with a task, he or she

**“Revenue cannot be earned within a few months; it requires years of careful and meticulous planning and building strong relationships with travel agents and tour operators. A long-standing relationship ensures continuous business”**



**Iftikhar Hamdani**  
Cluster GM, Ramada Hotel & Suites  
by Wyndham Ajman, Ramada by  
Wyndham Beach Hotel Ajman and  
Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche



# End-to-end travel assurance

A comprehensive travel assurance plan is meant to completely change the way travel protection is looked at. **Juliet Irwin**, General Manager, Fahad Express Travel and Tourism, shares how the extremely well-thought-out plan ensures clients have nothing to fear when away from home.

## What is the Travel Assurance Plan all about?

Tune Protect's Travel Assurance Plan comes in four variants – Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Silver Plus. All these plans are Schengen-compliant, including USA/Canada, or excluding USA/Canada, and cover both inbound and outbound travel.



**Juliet Irwin**  
General Manager  
Fahad Express Travel and Tourism

The plan covers a string of benefits like accidental death and permanent disablement, accidental and sickness medical reimbursement, follow-up treatment in home coun-

try, compassionate visit, emergency medical evacuation, and repatriation of mortal remains. It also covers the more regular ones like loss of travel docu-

ments and of personal money, or delay on arrival. The plan also goes on to include 'home away' protection and mugging. The Platinum, Gold, and Silver plans come with a value-add, that is free coverage for one accompanying named infant per insured person, with a 10 per cent limit of applicable benefits of the regular plan.

## What is unique about this travel protection product?

This comprehensive plan from Tune Protect is extremely well-thought of. It takes care of almost

“What differentiates this plan from most others is its unique inclusions, like 'home away' protection, mugging, and compassionate visit. It takes care of almost all eventualities”

all eventualities that travellers might face. What differentiates this plan from most others are its unique inclusions, like 'home away' protection, mugging, and compassionate visit. While we always hope that none of our travellers face such a calamity, if an event does happen, travellers can stay secure with the knowledge that they are well-covered.

## What is the need for a comprehensive policy in today's time?

The need for a comprehensive policy exists especially today, because you never know what might happen. People want to ensure that their hard-earned belongings are protected in their absence. People travel to unknown lands where they are not fully conversant with the sur-

roundings or even with the risks of staying and travelling there. An end-to-end cover, therefore, is a must for them. Travel Assurance Plan fits the bill perfectly.

## Are travellers aware of this plan?

A considerable percentage is mindful in choosing the right travel protection plan, as they plan for their desired holiday. Travellers, including adventure enthusiasts, prefer to take calculated risks. 'Better safe than sorry' is the mantra, as is evident from the popularity of the plan.

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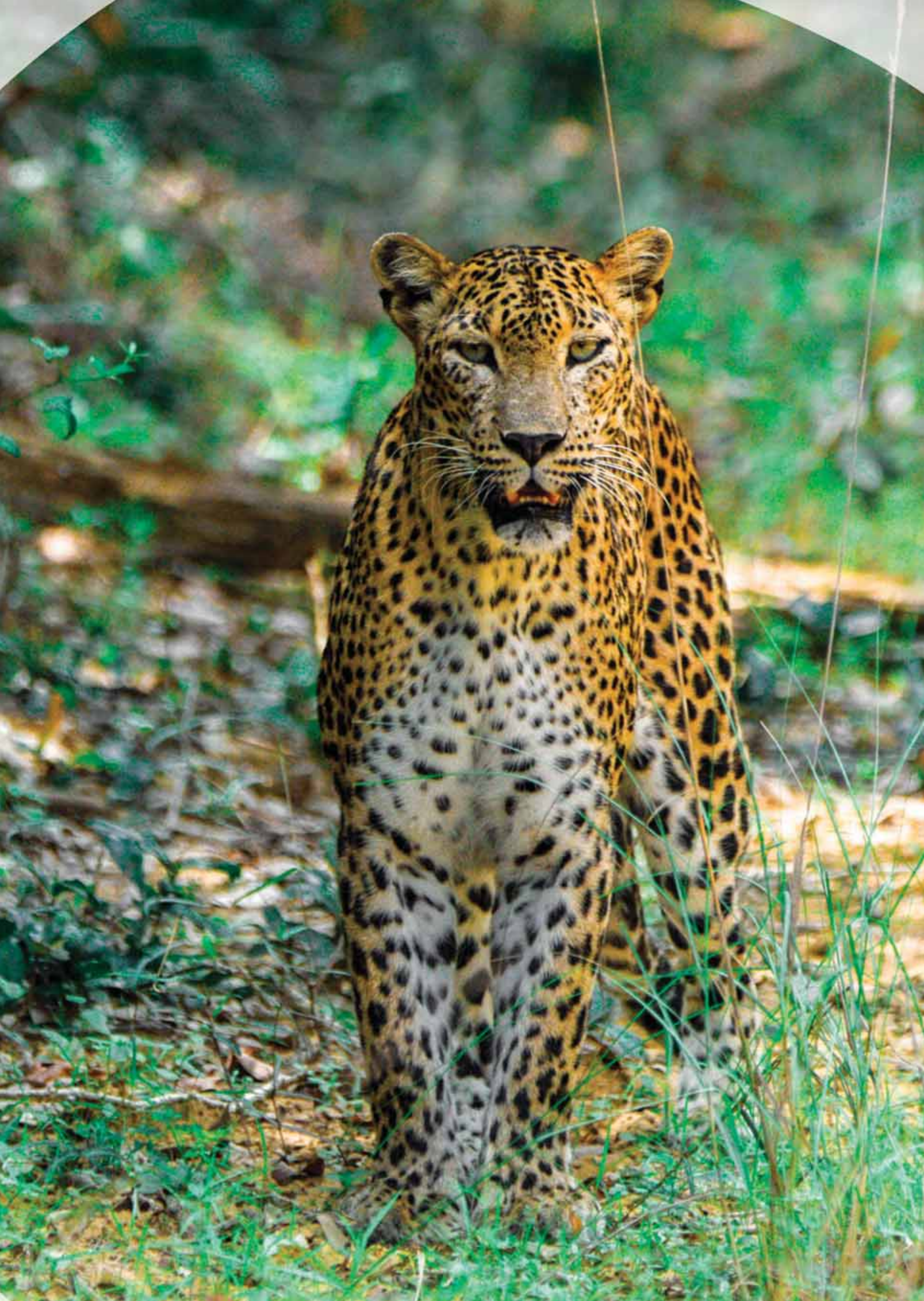
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# WILD AND UNTAMED SRI LANKA

The need to conserve the environment was deeply ingrained in traditional Sri Lankan society: in the 3rd c. BC, the country's first Buddhist monarch established the world's first wildlife sanctuary. Today, this tradition continues with 13% of Sri Lanka conserved as national parks, reserves, sanctuaries and jungle corridors.

Sri Lanka possesses a high degree of biodiversity and has been identified by Conservation International as one of 34 biodiversity hot spots in the world.

A safari in one of the 14 national parks offers the chance to see some of Sri Lanka's 91 mammals (16 endemic) elephant, leopard, sloth bear, sambhur, spotted deer, hog, mouse and barking-deer, wild boar, porcupine, ant-eater, civet cat, loris, giant squirrel, and monkeys such as the macaque, purple-faced leaf monkey and grey langur.

The island is an ornithologist's paradise, with over 233 resident species, (33 endemic) – but migratory species stretch the number to an astounding 482. There are 171 reptiles (101 endemic including two crocodile species). Thankfully, only five of the 83 snake species are lethal. In recent years, there has been a surge in the discovery of amphibians, and by the time you read this, the figure of 106 (90 endemic), will no doubt have risen.





# Turkish onboards Dreamliner

The induction of the 787-9 Dreamliner to its fleet will open new routes for Turkish Airlines, reinforcing its status as the carrier that flies to more countries than any other in the world. Flying 7,635 nautical miles in addition to carrying more cargo will ensure that the Turkish flag carrier continues to grow profitably.

**T** Shehara Rizly

Turkish Airlines, which has one of the youngest and fastest-growing fleets, has added the latest Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft.

miles (14,140 km) in addition to carrying more cargo and allowing the airline to profitably grow its routes. The new aircraft will offer passengers refined comfort during the longest journeys

“The aircraft’s advanced technology, fuel efficiency, and passenger-centric cabin design will help us remain the first choice for travellers and provide our loyal flyers across the globe with a best-in-class experience for years to come”

Regarded as one of the most advanced aircraft for its fuel efficiency and range flexibility, the 787-9 Dreamliner will open new routes for Turkish Airlines. As part of the 787 Dreamliner family, the 787-9 is powered by a suite of new technologies and a revolutionary design. It can fly 7,635 nautical

across 311 destinations in 124 countries.

“Turkish Airlines has been committed to continuously expanding its range of services on and off-ground, as it grows in reach and flies to more international destinations than any other carrier in the world. With this goal in mind, we’re thrilled to reach new horizons with the addition of the 787-9 Dreamliner to our fleet flying from our new home, Istanbul Airport,” says **Milker Ayci**, Chairman of the Board and the Executive Committee, Turkish Airlines. “The



aircraft’s advanced technology, fuel efficiency, and passenger-centric cabin design will help us remain the first choice for travellers and provide our loyal flyers across the globe with a best-in-class experience for years to come,” he enthusiastically adds.

Commenting on the Dreamliner’s performance and its contribution to the Turkish carrier’s reputation, **Ihssane Mounir**, Senior Vice President of Commercial Sales and Marketing for The Boeing Company, says, “We are honoured that Turkish Airlines is em-

## Travel Classes

**Business Class:** The 30 Business Class seats enable travellers to enjoy more space and privacy. The full flat-bed, unique in-flight entertainment, and lighting inspired from the colourful sunsets of Turkey’s central Cappadocia region and turquoise beaches offer an unmatched experience. A modern, traveller-friendly 1-2-1 layout offers aisle access to Business Class passengers, while enhanced privacy panels, personal closed stowage space, self-care mirror, and a wide cocktail table maximise space to offer the ultimate comfort. Increased seclusion comes from the adjustable privacy panel between the paired middle seats and newly-designed seat shell, while an 18-inch HD video display and touchscreen remote control offer entertainment.


**Economy Class:** Produced by local and national Turkish suppliers, the 270 Economy Class seats offer passengers a pleasant journey with 12-inch HD screens, new functional literature pocket design, six-inch recline, and 31-inch legroom.

barking on its next chapter of expansion with the 787 Dreamliner. We are confident that the Dreamliner’s unmatched fuel efficiency and passenger-pleasing comforts will contribute to the airline’s reputation as a five-star airline.”

## Business Class lounge

A journey begins with check-in counters, hence, the new airport in Istanbul has carefully planned out every little detail to

ensure the comfort and convenience of the passenger. Passengers can be seated instead of standing when being checked in and provided with the boarding pass.

From quick massages to an international spread of food and beverages, passengers have plenty to indulge in. There is ample seating and a silent area for a power nap, as well as a whole section of modern art for art lovers. 



**Milker Ayci**  
Chairman of the Board and the  
Executive Committee, Turkish Airlines



# Mövenpick Downtown for families

With a year of successful operations behind it, Mövenpick Hotel Apartments Downtown Dubai is all set for the upcoming tourist season, adding a new room type that caters to families. Eric Seso, the hotel's General Manager, shares that the property also has a number of guest-friendly facilities in the pipeline.

**T** TT Bureau

## How has the first year been for Mövenpick Hotel Apartments Downtown Dubai?

Overall, it has been an interesting experience. In its first year, Mövenpick Hotel Apartments Downtown Dubai kept on evolving, growing as a company and as a hospitality service provider in general. The hotel recently welcomed a new salon service which expands the amenities we offer to our guests. We revamped the menu at all outlets to ensure that we match the culinary preferences of our guests with a hint of Mövenpick signa-

tures, bearing in mind that we take pride in our culinary roots.

## Location being key to your property, how do you get the maximum benefit out of it?

The property is close to the world's tallest tower, Burj Khalifa, and a few minutes' walk to The Dubai Mall, which gives our guests something more to experience and explore. Downtown is considerably an upbeat environment to be in; there's always something new to do, something new to see, and something new to experience. Although the property is a mere walking distance to



**Eric Seso**  
General Manager, Mövenpick Hotel Apartments Downtown Dubai

the Burj Khalifa and The Dubai Mall, Mövenpick offers complimentary shuttle service to the mall every two hours and some other key business and leisure destinations such as LaMer and Kite Beach.

“A three-bedroom family room has been included as part of our new room type; guests can also indulge in fun activities that the location has to offer”

## With the peak season for tourism approaching, how do you plan to attract more GCC and UAE residents?

We have a diverse guest profile, but in general, families love to stay with us. With the season approaching, we felt a need for creating a more comfortable place for our guests. Resultantly, a three-bedroom family room has been included as part of our new room

Are there any other key markets that you will be targeting this year?

One of the key markets that we are planning to tap into is the Chinese market. In the past, we've seen how solid the relationship is between China and the UAE, which has resulted in a positive outlook in the tourism sector within the city and in the UAE.

*Some of the developments in the pipeline include the creation of a spa and a new mini mart which perfectly matches one of the key advantages the property has - a fully-fitted kitchen in each unit.*

*The addition of a mini mart is meant for guests who wish to create their own meals inside the comfort of their own rooms. The hotel is also preparing to be Green Globe-certified as part of its commitment to be a sustainable commercial setting.*

## Sharjah Tourism introduces 'AI Tour Guide Chatbot'

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) unveiled four innovative projects designed to further boost the competitiveness of Sharjah's tourism sector at the premier GITEX Technology Week 2019 at Dubai World Trade Centre. The 'AI Tour Guide Chatbot,' a 24x7 voice and text-based chatbot, has been developed to provide the latest information about Sharjah to tourists. The interactive tour guide chatbot, which is accessible via WhatsApp, a mobile App, SCTDA's website and Facebook messenger, shares accurate details about the emirate's top tourist destinations, must-do activities,



**HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**  
Chairman, SCTDA

world-class accommodations, leading restaurants, and much more.

The project is the result of SCTDA's initiative to incorporate the latest technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), into its tourism programmes to better highlight Sharjah's renowned beauty and hospitality while enhancing visitor

experience. The 'AI Tour Guide Chatbot' supports five languages, including Arabic, English, German, Chinese and Russian, and can recognise various Arabic accents.

The other projects are 'Smart Hotel Licensing and Classification' system, 'Smart Vehicle Permit System' and 'Hotel Statistics System- Business Intelligence (HSS - BI) solution.'

HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, SCTDA, says, "These latest projects reflect our commitment to introducing technology-driven ideas that will promote Sharjah as a world-class tourist destination with a wide range of leisure, cultural, and entertainment activities."

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# Living Paradise SRI LANKA

There is little that the island nation of Sri Lanka does not possess. Exquisite scenery for weddings, untouched nature, mountains and sports for adventure enthusiasts and exotic wildlife are just slivers of the pie. Visitors to Sri Lanka can also expect a warm welcome by truly hospitable people.

## TT Bureau

Fondly known as the "Pearl of the Indian Ocean", Sri Lanka's rich heritage and culture make it one of the most unique destinations in South Asia. With a myriad of experiences round the year for every kind of traveller – be it business, leisure, MICE or students and millennials – the country is home to pristine beaches, exotic wildlife, adventure destinations, and mouth-watering cuisine to liven up any day.

### Short-haul getaway for the UAE traveller

A four-hour flight from the United Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka, with easy accessibility from one region

to another and a vivid diversity of locations, is one of the most sought-after destinations. With not a moment to spare when in the country, visitors can make the most of its adventure offerings that include hiking and mountain climbing, spend some idle time among exotic birds and rare species of wildlife, or simply laze at one of the pristine beaches, whiling away time by the magnificent Indian Ocean.

### Rich heritage and culture

Home to eight UNESCO World Heritage sites, Sri Lanka has a unique offering for the eager traveller who's willing to explore unique destinations of the world. Its documented history spans 3,000

years and so, the country is home to some of the most noteworthy sites in the history of the region.

Adam's Peak is located in the southern reaches of the Central Highlands, in the Ratnapura district and Nuwara Eliya district of the Sabaragamuwa Province and Central Province. The mountain, believed to be sacred, is climbed by every traveller to witness its great splendour. The Sigiriya caves, which honeycomb the base of a rock fortress, are another heritage site known for their religious significance during the reign of a powerful king who built the fortress for himself. The rock is an interesting climb and depicts ancient frescoes showcasing the richness of art at the time.

### Picturesque splendour

With its romantic locations and storybook

sceneries, Sri Lanka is sought by many for hosting destination weddings. Be it a beachside arrangement or one by the mountain, the splendid vistas make for perfect backdrops. For a perfect beach holiday, Sri Lanka has a golden coastline which spreads continuously along the southern and northern coasts, where travellers can relax in the palm-fringed beaches while sipping on a king coconut, or surf at Arugam Bay. Up in hill country, one can enjoy the soft, cool breeze drifting through the hotel room in Nuwara Eliya, or enjoy a cup of freshly brewed, world-renowned Ceylon tea. Visitors can also head down to St. Clair's or Bambarakanda Falls in this picturesque hill capital fondly called 'Little England'.

Sri Lanka has gained popularity as an adventure tourism destination, as it offers a horde of opportunities and experiences to hikers, trekkers, and outdoor enthusiasts in Horton Plains and Riverston, water rafting in Kitulgala, and dolphin watching in Mirissa and Kalpitiya. The four natural harbours also give the country an edge for cruise tourism.

### Festivals and parades

One can witness some of the most colourful festivals and parades in Sri Lanka at different times of the year. 'Kandy Perahera' in the central region, 'Gangarama Perahera' in Colombo, and 'Kataragama Perahera' in the southern region are some of the most looked-forward-to festivals and parades here. They attract many a traveller from different parts of the world, who are awed by their beauty as they depict the rich culture of the country.



❖ The island nation boasts of a rich cultural heritage as is evident from Pali Canon, the first known Buddhist writings of Sri Lanka, which can be traced way back to the Fourth Buddhist Council in 29 BC.

❖ By virtue of its deep harbours and geographic location, Sri Lanka became a region of great strategic importance from the time of the ancient Silk Road through to the modern Maritime Silk Road.



# Tamil Nadu for medical tourism

With the objective of promoting the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu for medical tourism from the Middle East, the recent CII Tamil Nadu Travel Mart welcomed 100 exhibitors and over 500 visitors from across the world. As many as 350 buyers were selected from 800 applications received. The exhibition also had the Medical Value Travel Mart running as a parallel event.



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Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche is operated by R Hotels under a franchise agreement with Wyndham Hotels & Resorts.

# UAE's top agents discover MiCE

The Department of Tourism Philippines recently organised a familiarisation trip for leading travel agents in the UAE. They share their views with **TRAVTALK** on the archipelago and the six-day tour, which included some of the most beautiful and luxurious areas of its islands.



**Nasir Jamal Khan**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Al Naboodah Travel and Tourism

“ The Philippines has improved its infrastructure, facilities, hotels, sightseeing and tourist attractions, and is emerging as an attractive and cost-effective tourism destination for travellers from across the world. The archipelago offers some of the best islands in the world, Banwa being one of the most exclusive ones. ”

“ The Philippines truly matches up to other world-class destinations. The vibrant city of Manila is an excellent destination for MiCE and corporate events. Boracay, Palawan, and Banwa islands offer sandy beaches, rainforests, and mountains for all to discover. ”



**Jamal Abdunnasser**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Cozmo Travel



**Mohammed Haneefa**  
Managing Director  
Delta Travel and Tourism

informed about it as well. ”

“ The Banwa Island visit and the accommodation were a remarkable and unforgettable experience in the Philippines. The country has some remarkably elegant spots for tourists from across the world. We were sufficiently

“ The warm hospitality and friendliness of Filipinos makes a big difference to tourism in the region. What makes the Philippines more fun is great weather and year-round sunshine, so visitors can travel light and enjoy its beaches and islands any time of the year. ”



**V Jayaram**  
Managing Director  
Sharaf Travel



**Sumit Acharya**  
Managing Director  
BCD Travel

of Boracay and Palawan were a revelation. ”

“ We packed in a lot and had the opportunity to experience the variety that the Philippines has to offer, both for MiCE and leisure travellers. Superb accommodation and entertainment options in Manila and the beauty

“ The deservedly celebrated islands of the Philippines are truly magnificent. The pristine sands of the beach fringed by palms and the clear turquoise waters are ideally suited for a restful and rejuvenating holiday. The welcoming nature of the people makes it great. ”



**Manu Mehrotra**  
General Manager  
Al Tayer Travel Agency



**Suresh Ahuja**  
Managing Director  
Trans Arabian Air Travel

can draw up some great itineraries. ”

“ I visited the Philippines after several years and enjoyed my stay there, especially the luxurious stay at Banwa Island. The whole experience was wonderful; it is a very pleasant place to visit with some great stay facilities. One

Inputs by TT Bureau

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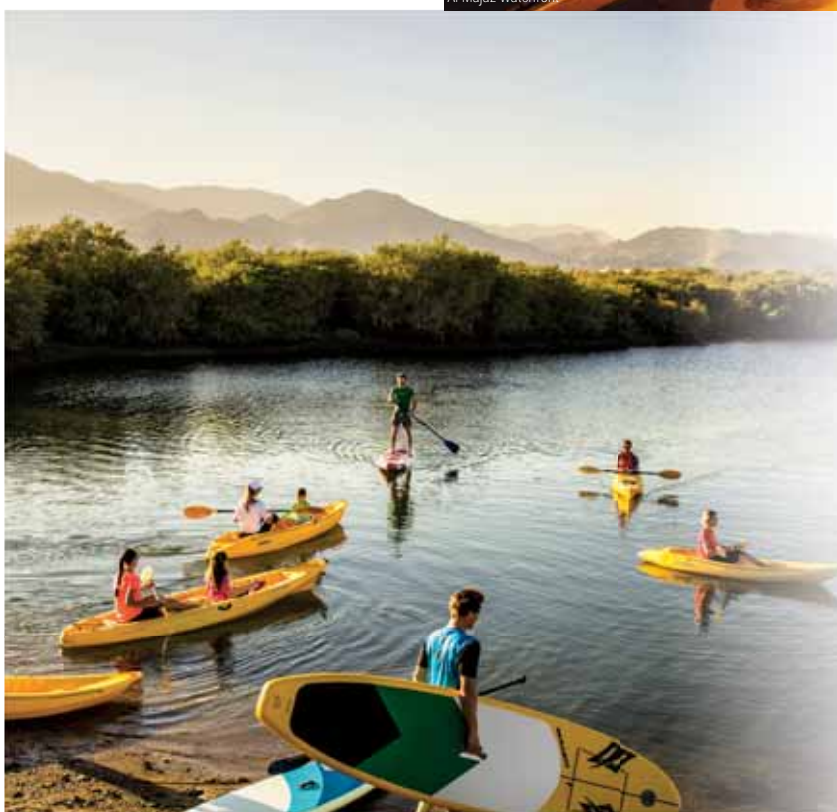
# SHARJAH

## A treasure trove of culture

Far from the glitz of bustling cities and madding crowds, the emirate of Sharjah adopts a more modest approach in showcasing its splendid heritage and cultural richness, while remaining deeply rooted in its identity and traditions. It has recently added some outstanding tourism projects and world-class hospitality ventures to its repertoire.



Al Majaz Waterfront



Kalba - Kayaking

### TT Bureau

A clear vision and well-thought-out strategies drive Sharjah's tourism industry, as recent additions to its touristic offerings enhance its appeal as an ideal family vacation spot.

#### Art Connoisseurs

Art lovers on a visit to Sharjah will be thrilled to discover that the Sharjah Art Foundation holds year-round exhibitions besides showcasing a substantial permanent collection that represents one of the region's most

important art collections. The 'Rain Room' is a permanent installation created by Germany-based Random International for the Foundation, located in Al Majarra. Its responsive environment allows visitors to walk through a downpour of continuous rain without getting wet. The art installation explores how mankind's relationship with nature is increasingly facilitated by intangible technologies.

While that's not all, Sharjah is also home to over 20 state-of-the-art museums that allow visitors to explore the rich history of

the emirate, which dates back more than 6,000 years. Classic and contemporary masterpieces depicting both the traditional and modern way of life of the Arabs are on display at these museums located in different parts of the city. In fact, the UAE's first art museum is the Sharjah Art Museum, which features arts and crafts made over the past centuries.

#### Alluring tourist spots

After feasting their eyes on some of the most exquisite pieces of art and crafts at Sharjah's famed



Al Qasba



Al Noor Island



museums, visitors can head to Al Qasba, a canal-side complex packed with cafés, restaurants and shops, best suited for casual dining amidst panoramic views. Al Majaz Waterfront is another spot thronged by tourists, thanks to its breathtaking landscapes, and a lively fun-filled atmosphere. It is famous for its spectacular dancing fountain that lights up the night sky wonderfully. Meanwhile, the tranquil Al Noor Island offers travellers some respite, allowing them to disconnect and unwind at their own pace. A must-visit with the family is the Butterfly House that has more than 500 jewel-coloured butterflies.

### Mleiha for desert adventures

Mleiha, an archaeologically-rich destination that carefully embodies history, nature and culture, has now become an established tourist hub that offers an array of family-oriented events and exceptional experiences that allow visitors to explore the secrets of the Mleiha desert in a fun, interactive way.

### The natural retreat of Kalba

A fishing village located 120 km east of Sharjah city, Kalba is home to historic buildings and mangroves that shelter a wide array of rare birds. Keeping binoculars handy when visiting Kalba is a must, as visitors get to spot some extremely rare species of birds such as the Arabian-Coloured Kingfisher and the Sykes's Warbler, as well as endangered turtles. Visitors can also kayak through the mangroves.



Sharjah Art Museum



Al Bail Hotel



Mleiha - Al Faya Lodge

## Flourishing hospitality sector

Currently, the number of hotel rooms available in Sharjah stands at a whopping 7,878 units spread across 3,005 apartments. Over the next five years, 18 more hotels are estimated to add 3,039 new rooms, as well as 16 hotel apartments with 2,640 rooms, to its hospitality sector. Altogether, a total of 5,679 rooms are expected to be added to the current number in the coming years.



Centro Hotel



Sheraton Hotel

# An eco-retreat in Al Badayer

Al Badayer Oasis by Mysk, the third gem in Sharjah Investment and Development Authority's (Shurooq's) Sharjah Collection, is nestled in the emirate's lively Al Badayer Desert. Nature lovers, adventure seekers, and those looking for a taste of true Emirati culture can head to the 21-room property managed by Shaza Hotels.

 TT Bureau

Inspired by traditional Emirati heritage, Al Badayer Oasis by Mysk is the ultimate desert experience nestled in Al Badayer's burnt-orange dunes. A perfect place for relaxing after a day of adrenaline-fuelled desert excitement, guests have the option to choose from the hotel's 21 rooms, which include 11 deluxe-king and 10 deluxe-twin rooms in addition to seven 1-king bedroom and three 2-bedroom twin tent accommodations. Each accommodation is quintessentially Arabian, fitted with the best of modern comforts.

hotel management brand known for its vast hospitality experiences based on the region's authentic culture and heritage. With Al Badayer Oasis now open, all three of the Sharjah Collection's high-end boutique destinations – the Kingfisher Lodge in Kalba, Al Faya Lodge close to the Fossil Rock area in Mleiha, and Al Badayer Oasis in Al Badayer Desert – have met Shurooq's projected two-year completion timeline.

## World-class dining, amenities and entertainment

Al Badayer Oasis' 58-seat Nizwa restaurant offers authentic and traditional



**HE Marwan bin Jassim Al Sarkal**  
*Executive Chairman, Shurooq*

**"Al Badayer Oasis offers a fully-integrated hospitality experience in the heart of a tranquil desert. The resort offers the truest reflection of the landscape in which our ancestors set out to build their earliest settlements and begin the Emirati way of life.**

Through this eco-oasis, Shurooq aims to advance responsible tourism practices and wildlife conservation in the UAE and Sharjah, and to support the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Au-

thority's (SCTDA) Sharjah Vision 2021, which is to attract 10 million tourists into the emirate. These non-traditional tourism projects perfectly align with Shurooq's vision to set new benchmarks for eco-luxury destinations and exceed expectations of the most discerning traveller. The AED 60 million destination has been designed to offer citizens, residents and tourists an incredible variety of experiences and activities to indulge in – a different kind of relaxation and bringing to life meaningful connections to their surroundings inspired by ancient caravanserai. Tourism is a top source of income for Sharjah and the UAE. The sector has been playing a leading role in diversifying our post-oil economy and influencing growth of other sectors"

In 2017, Shurooq (Sharjah Investment and Development Authority) began an ambitious AED 130 million project to enhance Sharjah's profile as a destination for luxury eco-tourism and its vast natural diversity through the 'Sharjah Collection' managed by 'Mysk by Shaza', a leading

dishes influenced by destinations along the Silk Route, served in a contemporary and stylish setting. The all-day dining restaurant, Al Madam, can serve 88 diners at once and is a modern-day eatery serving international and regional fare in a setting that exudes a distinct local character.

The Oasis also features a luxurious indoor swimming pool as well as a state-of-the-art health club packed with amenities and operated under the supervision of professional lifeguards and trainers. A business centre, meeting rooms, direct dial phones, and voicemail are also available to meet every



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

**"We are delighted to expand our presence in the UAE with a unique property like Al Badayer Oasis, another successful project with Shurooq.** We are thrilled for this partnership and look forward to delivering unparalleled experiences to Sharjah. It is a superb addition to our growing portfolio of hotels in the Middle East and will be the perfect choice for travellers looking for novel and immersive experiences amid nature and wilderness. This

latest opening, that joins two other fabulous properties – Kingfisher Lodge and Al Faya Lodge in the Sharjah Collection – creates a unique 3-in-1 travel circuit for visitors to discover the culture, traditional Arabian hospitality, and natural beauty of the emirate"

requirement of busy professionals. Al Badayer Oasis can be booked fully for destination weddings or other private occasions, which can be hosted at its spacious amphitheatre and courtyard areas. A 50-seater meeting room can be booked by corporates to host workshops or meetings in varied seating arrangements.

## Thrilling desert activities

Al Badayer Oasis of-

fers customised desert experiences featuring dune bashing, buggies, quad biking, horse riding, desert safaris and camel tours. Expeditions to observe wildlife in its natural state, stargazing under a clear desert night sky, and night-time theatre can also be enjoyed. Breakfast at the dunes and dinner atop the Al Bury Tower allows guests to cut-off completely from the bustle of the city and

enjoy tranquillity in the lap of nature. A true taste of Emirati culture is offered to guests by arranging falcon shows and archery games, henna art, and much more.

## FactFile

■ In 2017, Shurooq (Sharjah Investment and Development Authority) began an ambitious **AED 130 mn** project to enhance Sharjah's profile as a destination for luxury eco-tourism



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# FUJAIRAH When adventure comes calling



In the lap of the majestic Hajar Mountain range is the emirate of Fujairah, home to centuries-old mosques and forts that add to the picturesque landscape. Those heading to Fujairah, less than an hour's drive from Dubai, are in for real adventure and some exotic marine life.

## TT Bureau

The fifth largest emirate of the UAE, Fujairah is home to the oldest mosque in the region, Al Bidiyah Mosque, constructed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The region receives the highest annual rainfall in the country and is one of the most picturesque destinations known for its coral reefs, adventure sports, and diving. The main cities and villages in Fujairah are Dibba, Murbeh, Qidfa, Al Bidiyah, Masafi, Al-Siji, and Al Bithna.

Today, with business, tourism, and infrastructure developments steaming ahead, Fujairah's transformation into a globalised city of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is well underway. In its drive to attract more tourists to the emirate, both public and private sector enterprises have been working closely and have witnessed an exponential growth in terms of hotels and alternative accommodation facilities owing to the influx of tourists, especially over the winter season.



## Getting to Fujairah

Fujairah has its own international airport with seasonal flights and daily domestic flights. By road, the best way to travel would be to take the Masafi route on the new Sheikh Khalifa Street, which connects Fujairah with Sharjah and Dubai. The emirate also enjoys a comprehensive port which receives cruise ships.

## Key attractions & activities

Every Friday, an exciting cultural heritage show of Arabian bull fighting is arranged by locals, in a

fenced muddy field opposite Fujairah Corniche. Unlike Spanish bull fighting, this version is a tug of war between two bulls and ends when one of them is pushed outside the circle.

Visitors to the emirate can also visit the Fujairah Historic Fort, built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the Fujairah Museum that unravels the region's best-kept secrets. Visitors can also head to the Fujairah Friday Market situated in Masafi, for fresh fruits, art pieces, carpets, and pottery.

When in Fujairah, travellers cannot miss the majestic Hajar Mountains, the highest mountain range in the eastern Arabian Peninsula, running through both the UAE and Oman. It stands tall to the west of Fujairah,

and offers many a scenic hiking tours. On the foothills of the Hajar Mountains is a popular relaxation spot called the Ain Al Madhab Garden, which features a mineral spa and makes for a good day trip. Visitors can also head to Snoopy Island, an incredible rocky marine island with immense natural beauty and abundant sea life, and named after the cartoon character 'Snoopy' because the island resembles it in shape.

Wadi Wurayah is another 12,700 hectare area situated between Masafi, Khor Fakkan, and Bidiyah in the UAE. The first mountain protected area in the country, the region is home to more than 100 species of mam-

mals, birds and fish, and more than 300 species of plants.

## Accommodation

International hotel chains have marked their presence in the emirate, and staycations during the summer are a preferred holiday medium. Brands such as Fairmont, Rotana, and Marriott take the lead in hotel accommodation providers, while alternative stay options are also gaining popularity.



# GITEX focus on digital transformation

The GITEX 2019 held in Dubai drew attention to the ongoing digital transformation in the hospitality and tourism industry. With the increased connectivity of devices, the industry is taking advantage of Big Data to enhance customer experience.



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# Unique Heritage in the MALDIVES

Aitken Spence Hotels, a subsidiary of Sri Lankan blue-chip conglomerate Aitken Spence, has taken its premier brand - Heritage - beyond the shores of Sri Lanka for the first time with the introduction of Heritage Aarah in the Maldives. The new property embraces the brand promise of the Heritage chain of hotels, where tradition is alive.



## TT Bureau

Nestled in the Raa Atoll and a 40-minute sea-plane ride away from Malé's international airport, Heritage Aarah is the latest resort from Aitken Spence Hotels. With five successful Heritage properties in Sri Lanka, each boasting of inimitable stories of culture merging with hospitality and comfort, the new resort is part of the group's extensive expansion plans.

### Accommodation

Operating as a premier all-inclusive resort, Heritage Aarah consists of 150 villas including 26 intimate luxury duplex ocean suites, 56 sun-

set ocean villas and 68 land villas ranging from beach villas to pool beach villas, family beach villas and family pool beach villas.

### F&B options

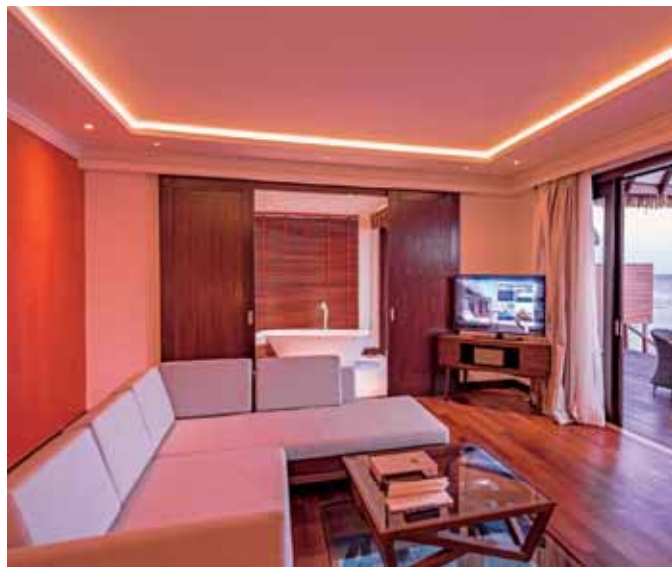
Designed to inspire and custom-built to immerse guests in the scenic sights and soothing sounds of the ocean surrounding the island, Heritage Aarah is adorned with earthy hues and vibrant blues. Guests can indulge in the many charms of the island at a poolside bar and an open-air rooftop venue, while ocean suite guests can enjoy a more exclusive space with three separate bars. With nine outlets for guests to experience diverse cui-

sines, the culinary culture at the resort is intended to promote exclusive gastronomic delights from around the world. The six restaurants offer a wide range of flavours from Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America.

### Wellness facilities

Accentuating this impressive offering are the over-water infinity pool and the medi-spa, equipped to cater to the rising demand in the wellness segment, with state-of-the-art treatments and equipment. The spa, with six treatment rooms set over the lagoon with views of the eastern coast of the island, provides a range of high-end wellness and pampering





treatments, salon services, beauty treatments and programmes. From weight loss to anti-ageing treatments, massage therapy to body care, and facial care to revitalisation programmes, Heritance Aarah is set to become a destination for those pursuing wellness combined with leisure and luxury.

### Experiences aplenty

The resort hosts a dive and water sports centre, a range of excursions and adventures, an interactive and engaging kids club, and traditional local activities to present a unique luxury holiday experience to guests. Keeping with the brand promise of Heritance to promote culture and tradition, the resort has an exciting calendar of daily activities including coconut leaf art workshops, cookery demonstrations for traditional sweets and dish-

es, traditional Maldivian Bodu Beru drumming, and a memorable local island dinner.

The resort also follows the ingrained ethos of sustainability and ethical commitments of the Aitken Spence Hotels group. Heritance Aarah has drawn the best practices from the group

and has successfully implemented many an initiative which include (but are not limited to) reduction of single-use plastics, coral reef restoration, and sustainable sourcing with close integration with the local

communities. Heritance Aarah is the first property in the Maldives to attain the LEED Gold Certification (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), the most widely-used green

building rating system in the world. With its opening, Heritance Aarah has established itself as a differentiated Maldivian experience, giving discerning guests a holiday like none other. 🌿

Aitken Spence Hotels was the first Sri Lankan resort operator to venture overseas for hospitality services with its entrance to the Maldives with the Adaaran hotel chain. The well-established Adaaran Resorts includes the stunning Adaaran Prestige Vadoo, Adaaran Select Meedhupparu, Adaaran Club Rannalhi, and Adaaran Select Hudhuranfushi. Heritance Aarah joins this group of properties with a unique proposition of quintessentially traditional, curated experiences delicately woven into a five-star luxury resort.





# SriLankan partners with Sharaf Travel

SriLankan Airlines' 40-year anniversary celebrations continue with their recent partnership with Sharaf Travel to promote the holiday section. The event was attended by **Asiri Wickramasuriya**, Country Manager, SriLankan Airlines in the UAE; **Kishu Gomes**, Chairman, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau and **V Jayaram**, MD, Sharaf Travel among others.



# Family stay at TIME Dunes

Geared to accommodate families looking for at least a five-night stay, TIME Dunes Hotel Apartments Oud Metha and Al Qusais are popular among travellers from the GCC, India, and Europe. **Ghassan Farhat**, Hotel Manager for the two properties, says that proximity to the airport plays to their advantage.

 TT Bureau

## What makes the two properties unique?

Location plays a key role for both properties. They are both in close proximity to Dubai's international airport as well as leisure and business districts. In addition to this, the personalised service that we offer to guests makes us a preferred stay option, evident in the increasing numbers of our repeat guests.

## Could you describe the Oud Metha property?

TIME Dunes Hotel Apartments Oud Metha has a total inventory of 108



**Ghassan Farhat**  
Hotel Manager, TIME Dunes Hotel Apartments Oud Metha and Al Qusais

units, including studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom apartments stretched across an 11-storey building. The property also has two levels of underground parking, a gym, and

an outdoor swimming pool located on the first floor. Spice Fusion, the 40-seater restaurant, serves a buffet breakfast and continues to open for

à la carte for the rest of the day. Needless to say, we also have a 24-hour reception service as well as airport pick-up and drop services.

**“We plan to tie-up with select operators that cater to families wanting to spend a minimum of five to seven nights per stay”**




TIME Dunes Hotel Apartments Oud Metha is only 15 minutes' drive from Dubai International Airport and a 15-minute walk from Oud Metha metro station. It is centrally located at a five-minute walk from Dubai Healthcare City and a short drive from Wafi Mall, BurJuman Mall, and Dubai Creek Park.

## What about the Al Qusais property?

TIME Dunes Hotel Apartments Al Qusais is only a 15-minute drive from Dubai International Airport and located quite close to Dubai Free Zone. It drives in more corporate business due to this location,

but at the same time, the component of family stays combining business has also seen an increase over the past few years. The property houses a total inventory of 80 units of studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom apartments. It also has a gym and an outdoor swimming pool. That said, both properties receive a fair share of leisure and business travellers.

## What is the plan for the last quarter?

We plan to tie-up with select operators that cater to families wanting to spend a minimum of five to seven nights per stay. 





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## 'Because We Care' turns 10

Sharjah Airport Authority (SAA) recently celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 'Because We Care' customer feedback programme. In recent years, more than 1000 suggestions and ideas from customers have been implemented to improve the quality of Sharjah Airport's services for passengers and customers. SAA has implemented many of the suggestions received as a result of the programme, while many other suggestions are still being studied and others will be implemented at a later date. The Authority continues to provide the best services and to adopt the suggestions and opinions that customers and passengers submit through various



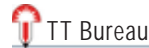
**HE Ali Salim Al Midfa**  
Chairman  
Sharjah Airport Authority

channels. These help to improve the services provided, enhancing the Airport's competitiveness.

HE Ali Salim Al Midfa, Chairman of Sharjah Airport Authority, said, "This is an important initiative that has achieved positive results, as it is an effective tool for those who share opinions and suggestions about the airport's services and facilities."

# SATA expands client portfolio

Arshard Munir, General Manager, Sharjah Airport Travel Agency (SATA), shares that at WTM this year in London, SATA will be showcasing a multitude of offerings, from flight bookings to accommodation and visa.



For Sharjah Airport Travel Agency, an agency owned and operated by Sharjah Airport Authority, Eastern Europe has continued to gain popularity with Air Arabia's direct flights to Vienna and Prague receiving tremendous response. Arshard Munir adds that while Croatia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania have also received good response as affordable holiday destinations that provide value for money, certain parts of Africa have also witnessed an increase in bookings.

Sharing recent developments at the agency, Munir says, "SATA provides



**Arshard Munir**  
General Manager  
Sharjah Airport Travel Agency

the full package with competitive flight and hotel rates as well as a very active and professional global visa section that handles all visa requests. SATA has been appointed the General Sales Agent (GSA) for Peace Air (Ni-

**“At WTM this year, we will be showcasing active holidays, MiCE and educational tours, as well as an online booking portal”**

gerian airline) along with Passenger Sales Agent (PSA) Northern Emirates for Flynas, Egypt Air, and Uzbekistan Airlines. The ticket sales to these destinations have shown an upward trend due to an active sales promotion by SATA staff."

At the World Travel Market this year, SATA aims to showcase its professional, competitive, and reliable services that range from air tickets and hotels to transfers, local attractions, and visas. Munir

shares, "WTM is an ideal platform to meet various suppliers looking for a reliable and professional partner in the UAE. With the world moving towards a digital arena, distance and time no longer pose a hindrance to international business deals. SATA has also proven to be a reliable MiCE operator, effectively raising the quality of service. At WTM this year, we will be showcasing active holidays, MiCE and educational tours, as well as an online booking portal."



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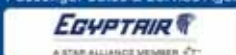
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AL Jazirah Al Hamra

Ras Al Khaimah  
Tourism Development Authority

# The emirate for adventure

A hidden gem in the northernmost part of the UAE, Ras Al Khaimah is a dream destination. The emirate boasts of magnificent landscapes featuring breathtaking coastlines, terracotta desert planes, and the towering Hajar Mountain range that has the UAE's highest peak – Jebel Jais.



Camel Ride in the Desert

coffee served with a side of mountain views. For a more grounded experience, visitors can try spotting a flock of flamingoes, as they kayak through the mangroves and salt flats, explore the desert on horseback, or simply enjoy a falcon show.

start with the National Museum of Ras Al Khaimah, which once served as the residence of the ruling family and now houses archaeological treasures of the emirate.

era of pearling, and experience pearl diving, oyster opening and a traditional lunch cooked by Emirati women in the village.

### Claim your own piece of paradise

Travellers can expect uncrowded and pristine strips of soft golden sand that are cooled by the emerald embrace of the Arabian Gulf. What's more? Enjoy a wide range of traditional Arabic activities with entertainment, Tanoura dancing, camel riding, and an Arabic barbecue. RAK's desert camps also provide facilities to experience an overnight stay.

Perhaps the most visited archaeological site in the emirate is Dhayah Fort, a 16<sup>th</sup> century mud-brick fort and the only hilltop fort still existing in the UAE, with a fantastic view of the lush palm gardens, the sea, and the dramatic mountain range.

A tour through the Suwaidi Pearl Farm will help visitors learn about the country's incredible

### TT Bureau

With year-long sunshine and 64 kilometres of white sandy beaches, Ras Al Khaimah offers an entirely unique experience and is the perfect getaway from everyday life. What adds to the dramatic vistas are the stark Hajar Mountains and the country's highest peak, Jebel Jais, where the average temperature is around 10 degrees lower than the UAE norm.

### Bucket list for adventure

Jebel Jais Flight, the world's longest zipline as certified by Guinness World Records, is an exhilarating experience visitors must definitely

tick off their bucket list. Those willing to take the spectacular ride from the UAE's highest mountain peak that gives visitors a magnificent aerial tour of the Hajar Mountains, can expect to soar with unparalleled speeds of up to 150 kilometres an hour and land on a breathtaking transparent platform that is completely suspended in air.

Jebel Jais also offers hiking trails or mountain climbing routes, offering the perfect setting for outdoor enthusiasts.



Falcon Show

ast. The experience is made even more special with a 30-kilometre scenic drive up the mountain, with a pit-stop at Viewing Deck Park for

### Relive 7,000 years of history

Ras Al Khaimah's rich history and culture will keep visitors spellbound and busy. Visitors can



Suwaidi Pearl Farm

### Getting to Ras Al Khaimah



Fly in via Dubai International Airport or Sharjah Airport, both of which are an hour's drive, or straight into Ras Al Khaimah Airport which has several charter and scheduled flights.



Those visiting from Dubai can try Seawings – a luxurious seaplane experience that also offers a tour around the vast landscapes of Ras Al Khaimah.



For those who wish to hit the road, take the E311 Emirates Road, passing Sharjah en route to Ras Al Khaimah. Alternatively, take the E611 bypass road and follow signs to Ras Al Khaimah.



Comfortable taxis and frequent bus services also link Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah.

# A cup of Indonesia's best coffee

A special networking event was hosted by the Consul General of Indonesia in Dubai and Northern Emirates, to showcase 'Wonderful Indonesia in a Cup of Coffee' brought in all the way from the Republic to promote coffee bean development centres in Indonesia, a potential tourism sector, among UAE's travel fraternity.



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# Maiden WTTC Forum in Ras Al Khaimah

His Highness Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi, UAE Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah, delivered the keynote speech to open the inaugural World Travel & Tourism Council Middle East & North Africa Leaders Forum 2019, held in partnership with Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority at Al Hamra International Exhibition & Conference Center.





# Bluewaters: A modern benchmark

Bluewaters has become the latest island destination and home to Ain Dubai, with its panoramic views, hospitality offerings, residential and retail options with open walkways. It will add new vantage points to the Dubai skyline, while establishing a benchmark in the world of modern design.

**T**T Bureau

**B**luewaters, the island destination by Meraas, boasts residential, hospitality, lifestyle and leisure, and entertainment spaces set to offer new vantage points and a stunning addition to Dubai's skyline.

**His Excellency Abdulla Al Habbai**, Group Chairman of Meraas, says, "We are set to achieve many

engineering feats at Bluewaters and are delivering a destination which will establish a new benchmark for modern design. It will bring people together and create enriching experiences to support the growth of Dubai as a global hub."

### An international tourist destination

A world-class island destination built to Meraas' exacting standards in

terms of magnitude, design and aesthetics, Bluewaters will add to Dubai's competitive advantage among global cities. Apart from the spectacular Ain Dubai, it provides comprehensive residential, retail and hospitality options, making Bluewaters a leading tourist destination as well as a preferred place to live, work and play. Bluewaters is right across Jumeirah Beach Residences;

both Dubai International Airport and Al Maktoum Airport can be reached in 30 minutes, while Abu Dhabi Airport is just 45 minutes away.

### Urban buzz

The Wharf, Bluewaters' lifestyle retail area set against the backdrop of Ain Dubai, will have 132 retail and dining outlets dotted across the boulevard in low-rise structures. Food and beverage at The Wharf range from licensed fine-dining concepts to an eclectic mix of cafés, restaurants and bistros. A 265-metre pedestrian bridge, The Wharf Link, connects

this area to The Beach on the coast of mainland Dubai. Bluewaters Wharf Station will serve as a dock for water transport. It also boasts over 2,000 parking bays.

### Statement residences

Bluewaters Residences comprise 10 elegant mid-rise towers featuring 698 apartments, four penthouses and 17 townhouses, set over a podium that offers stunning views of the sea or Ain Dubai. Each penthouse enjoys unparalleled 360-degree views of the Arabian Gulf, Dubai Marina, Ain Dubai and Dubai's skyline.

### Hotels

Meraas aims to pull out all stops to deliver Bluewaters' unique promise of an island luxe vibe, with unparalleled experiences brought to the region for the first time at the Caesars Palace Bluewaters Dubai, The Residences at Caesars Palace Bluewaters Dubai and Caesars Resort Bluewaters Dubai. These five-star accommodations comprising 495 luxury rooms and 80 serviced apartments, will be flanked by a 500-seat theatre, The Rotunda, at one end and a state-of-the-art conference centre, Caesars Forum, at the other. 



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## ► Hilton

### Dubai

Hilton has announced that **Jochem-Jan Sleiffer** has been appointed to the position of Area President, Middle East, Africa & Turkey (MEA&T) in succession to Rudi Jagersbacher. Sleiffer takes on his new position following a three-decade career at Hilton, where he most recently acted as Senior Vice President Operations, Continental Europe, overseeing a portfolio of 57 Hilton-managed hotels across 26 countries and territories. Prior to this, he held a number of leadership roles across Europe, including Belgium, UK, France, and Greece. Sleiffer will relocate to Dubai in January 2020.



## ► Cathay Pacific

### Dubai

Cathay Pacific has appointed **Vishnu Rajendran** as Middle East Head, assuming the role of Area Manager. Succeeding Jonathon Ng, who held the position for the past two years, Rajendran has been associated with the airline for over 10 years and was previously Cathay Pacific's Country Lead for Sri Lanka and Maldives, where he steered the airline's transition from a pure GSA model to an established in-market ground team, oversaw the launch of direct flights from Hong Kong to Colombo, as well as introduced Cathay Pacific's services from the Maldives. Prior to his role in Sri Lanka, he spent six years in India.



## ► Ascott

### Dubai

The Ascott Limited (Ascott) has bolstered its leadership team by appointing **Sophia Berriane** as Director of Marketing for the Middle East, Africa and Turkey. Most recently, Berriane held the role of Marketing Director with a Dubai-based consultancy, working across a portfolio of brands including Jumeirah, Emaar, Burj Al Arab and Kempinski. Berriane's remit will include Ascott's 12 operational properties that span 11 cities and seven countries including KSA, UAE, Turkey, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and Ghana, and its strong regional pipeline. An additional 13 properties are currently under development at Ascott.



## ► Campbell Gray Hotels

### Beirut and Amman

**Georges Ojeil** has been promoted to the new role of Area Manager, Beirut and Amman, to oversee Le Gray, Beirut as well as Campbell Gray Living and the forthcoming Campbell Gray Hotel, both in Amman, Jordan. Ojeil joined Campbell Gray Hotels in 2015 as General Manager for Le Gray, Beirut, and has taken the management team from strength to strength. In the new role, he will oversee the introduction and implementation of the high standards of service and guest experience at Campbell Gray Living among other responsibilities.



## ► Action Hotels

### Dubai

**Christophe Landais** has been appointed Chief Executive Officer of Dubai-based Action Hotels Company, the leading owner, developer and asset manager of branded three- and four-star hotels in prime locations throughout the Middle East and Australia. Landais, former Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer of Accor in the Middle East, brings more than 30 years' experience in executive hospitality management to AHC. He will direct the group's strategy for its 13-strong property portfolio as well as the development pipeline, soon to offer a total of 2,256 rooms. In his new role, Landais will steer the opening of the group's next property.



## ► Atlantis, The Palm

### Dubai

Kerzner International Holdings, the owner of the iconic Atlantis Resort and Residences, ultra-luxury One&Only Resorts brand worldwide and Mazagan Beach & Golf Resort, announced the promotion of **Massimiliano (Max) Zanardi** as General Manager, Atlantis, The Palm in Dubai. Focused on guest experience, this key role is critical to delivering the vision of Kerzner International - Amazing Experiences and Everlasting Memories. Zanardi will drive the entire operations at the property.



## ► Campbell Gray Hotels

### Beirut and Amman

Campbell Gray Hotels has appointed a new Operations Director, **Simon Venison**, who has decades of experience in operations as well as development and asset management. Venison joins the group after substantial management experience gained at properties including St. James Club and Jumeirah Lowndes Hotel in London; Jumeirah Beach Club Resort and Spa in Dubai; and Grosvenor House Apartments for Jumeirah in London; and the Abu Dhabi Tourism Development Company.



## ► The Ritz-Carlton

### Bahrain

The Ritz-Carlton, Bahrain, has appointed **Agusti Curto Calbet** to the new position of Hotel Manager. In the new role, Calbet will direct hotel operations while overseeing the full rooms division and Royal Beach Club facilities. Bringing over a decade of hospitality experience, he re-joins The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company after working formally with The Ritz-Carlton Powerscourt in Dublin (Ireland) and Hotel Arts Barcelona in Spain where he served in many executive positions in the rooms division. Calbet's multilingual skills have seen him work across the globe with stints in Europe and the Middle East.



## ► DoubleTree by Hilton Resort & Spa

### Marjan Island

DoubleTree by Hilton Resort & Spa Marjan Island has appointed **Pieter van Beugen** as its new Hotel Manager. Beugen began his career in Salzburg Austria, and from there held several management positions in Austria, Doha, Switzerland and the UAE. Most recently, he served as Director of Operations of DoubleTree by Hilton Resort & Spa Marjan Island. The resort provides guests with a complement of services and amenities, including 723 guest rooms and suites spread over 650 metres of white sandy beach, seven outdoor and one indoor swimming pool, a spa with seven treatment rooms, and 13 restaurants and bars with a wide range of cuisines.



## ► Avani Deira Hotel and Oaks Hotels & Resorts

### Dubai

Avani Deira Dubai Hotel and Oaks Hotels & Resorts UAE, both part of the MINOR Hotels International group, have appointed **Santosh Koshy George** as the new Cluster Director of Sales. George has over 25 years' experience in the hospitality and travel sectors, having worked extensively in Dubai for most of his career. He has worked with several hospitality and tourism companies in the past. Prior to this, George was the Cluster Director of Sales at Millennium Hotels and Resorts.



## ► H Hotel

### Dubai

The H Dubai Hotel has appointed **Sherif El Mansoury** as Director of Sales. Moving from The H Resort Seychelles to Dubai, El Mansoury will be responsible for leading the hotel's sales team and will play an integral role in the development and implementation of strategic sales plans and initiatives to maximise all revenue streams. He will identify new business opportunities for The H Hotel Dubai and will represent the property at conferences and trade shows. El Mansoury was Regional Director of Sales & Marketing at Hakkasan Group, overseeing the Middle East & Asia markets, before joining the H Hospitality Collection.



## ► Mövenpick Hotel Ibn Battuta Gate

### Dubai

Mövenpick Hotel Ibn Battuta Gate has appointed **Hazem Aouad** as its new Director of Sales and Marketing. He will be leading the growth of the 396-key property with a steady focus on corporate business, strengthened leisure partnerships, and a strategic approach on meeting and events. The Lebanese national carries with him 20 years of hospitality experience from five-star luxury resorts to city properties across the Middle East. He obtained his bachelor's degree in Hotel & Tourism Management from the Notre Dame University in Lebanon and a Postgraduate Diploma at University Cesar Ritz, Brig, Switzerland.



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