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Silver lining waits ahead

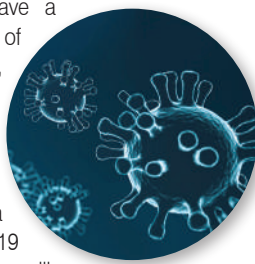
Travel and tourism sectors is facing an unprecedented amount of uncertainty due to COVID-19 outbreak. While the government implemented measures to ensure the safety of all citizens, so did the private sector and all the industries. Post-crisis brings with it hope for the industry, **TRAVTALK** shares the views of travel fraternity on the global pandemic.



Nasir Jamal Khan
Chief Executive Officer
Al Naboodah Travel

“The COVID-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have a devastating impact on businesses and people across the world. In particular, the pandemic has adversely impacted the travel and hospitality industry. Many countries have closed airspace for passenger traffic to reduce the spread of COVID-19. However, most of the cargo operations are still running to

date. It's clear that we all have a responsibility to control the spread of the virus. As we monitor COVID-19, the health and wellbeing of our colleagues, customers and trade partners remain our top priority. We have implemented several health and safety measures as a precaution. I believe that COVID-19 issue will get over soon and things will get better. Even after the darkest night, the sun will rise again, this is not just a feeling, this is what I believe.”



Jamal Abdul Nazar
Chief Executive Officer
Cozmo Travel

according to the government regulations and hope that this temporary situation will soon pass over and a new positive outcome is assured very soon. Communication is utmost important at this point of time and we have ensured that our customers know that we are there to help with their queries. We have also seen a surge in new inquiries at this point of time from those who have booked online or directly with a property; the need of the travel agent to ensure a smooth cancellation or rescheduling has brought in the value of the travel agents.”

“Our industry has been the most affected however, we are confident that with this will follow a high surge of business in time. During this time, we are ensuring that the company and its employees survive hence every measure is being taken to ensure that risk level is minimised and safety of employees is a priority for the continuity of business. We work



JVR Fernando
Commercial Director
(West Africa, Europe
Middle East, Asia)
Satguru Travel & Tourism (L.L.C)

practices and identify areas of improvement. We are also conducting professional development and crisis management sessions on a regular basis. The market trends are also closely monitored, and we are gearing up for the hopeful surge in traffic as soon as situations turn normal. In short, we are taking the current slump as an opportunity to emerge better with sharpened skills and a better outlook. Stay safe and positive!”

Contd. on page 3 ▶



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Tackling the crisis head on

► Contd. from page 1



V Jayaram
Managing Director
Sharaf Travel

“The COVID-19 crisis has been unprecedented in its scale and reach firstly as a crisis response we have put together three internal task forces to respond to immediate challenges, one focused on supporting its customers; another on its own employees; and a third concentrating on business stability and figuring out where to invest and where to pull back during unusual times. We have started cutting all variable costs, and focusing on the ‘Duty of care’ for all our clients and setting up a task force to handle all rebooking’s/rerouting at one contact point thereby maximising our customers faith in us. Post-crisis there will be an inherent desire to travel and we are working hard at the backend fine tuning all our product to ‘handle this surge in demand by using this crisis as an opportunity to really build scalability and also re-training our team on different skill sets to improve efficiencies.”

“Remember the ‘ash cloud?’ Or ‘SARS!’ A few months from now, ‘remember COVID -19!’ I am sure many surely will - especially those who had access to their travel agents’ whose help they relied upon and benefitted from. The financial impact is huge for airlines, hotels and all associated with the industry, and therefore by default also of travel agents, as countries’ lockdown to prevent the further spread of the virus and travel is curtailed. But as a great poet once said ‘if winter comes, can spring be far behind?’, and so this unprecedented crisis too will pass and we hope and pray with the least casualties, and the preventive measures will succeed in containing and eliminating this outbreak. Encouraging signs are already there in the Far East and China and the rest of the world too will be soon free of this pandemic and we will be there to ensure travel will recover and bounce back, stronger and more resilient - and will stay a relevant and thriving industry.”



Manu Mehrotra
General Manager
Al Tayer Travel Agency

Inputs by Shehara Rizly

RAKTDA launches Skatepark at SaqrPark

As Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA) launched a brand-new skatepark at Saqr Park, its latest outdoor attraction in the emirate’s largest recreational park, at a fun-fueled family event last month.

Raki Phillips, CEO of RAKTDA, shares, “It caters not only to people who love adrenaline sports, but also to those simply looking for somewhere fun to spend time with their family and friends. To reinforce the inclusivity of the new attraction, we invited leading international skateboarders such as Isabelly Avila and Virginia Fortes to take to the ramps, promoting the sport to all

guests, regardless of age or gender. A key differentiator of our strong active tourism portfolio is its sustainable nature, in this case showcasing the stunning flora and fauna in the emirate, thanks to its unique

“This project was completed in conjunction with a number of other development projects for the park with the aim of meeting different aspirations of the ever-growing visitors and residents of the emirate. With the



nature inspired design and position within Ghaf Tree reserve.”

Eng. Ahmed Al Hammadi, Director General of Public Services Department, commented,

aim of increasing sports facilities for the youth, the recreational space spans an area of 620 metres and is centred around greenspace in Ghaf Tree reserve within Saqr Park.”




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Tourism Breaking News

- Etihad to move all Beijing flights to Daxing in June
- IATA welcomes EU suspension of slot use rules until June 2020
- Mirdif City Centre attracts GCC visitors
- Umm Al Emarat Park marks five-year milestone since reopening
- Accor partners with 'She is Arab' to advance women's leadership in MENA
- BTEA cancels Bahrain Food Festival
- Lufthansa Group announces flight cancellations in EAME for April 2020
- WIT Middle East 2020 moves to November 24
- Air Arabia introduces modification fee waiver policy
- Rixos Hotels Egypt announces holiday packages for UK residents
- ATM postponed; to be held from June 28 to July 1, 2020
- Accor to takeover Muscat airport property and debut Novotel in Oman
- Lufthansa Group Airlines introduce flexible rebooking options

Frictionless online travel experience

Technology has not just transformed the booking process for travellers – it has changed the very face of travel businesses, creating an 'always on' relationship which starts even before a customer has booked, and never really ends. **Arthur Chapin**, Senior VP - Product and Technology, Expedia shares some insights on customers online travel experience.

Influential factors for customers during the booking process often centre around technology, such as whether a hotel offers free Wi-Fi, digital facilities for corporate travellers, or the increasingly popular 'concierge in your pocket' concept. For travel brands, it means they have had to get smarter and adapt as consumer expectations rise. Travellers have become accustomed to immersing themselves in technology, which often provides an easier, faster, smoother and more convenient experience. As such, accommodation providers are responding to these demands by evolving their offer to enable better connectivity, personalisation and flexibility for guests.

Below are some of the key customer pain points during the online travel experience

Disconnect between the hotelier and the traveller's needs – a research shows that corporate travellers prioritise productivity and

flexibility above all else when it comes to their journeys, but there is a disconnect between how business travellers want to book their trips and what

“62 per cent of consumers are comfortable with an AI application responding to their query, which provides fast and efficient results”

amenities are in place to make this possible. Findings from the EyeforTravel Digital Strategy Summit in May revealed that 76 per cent of customers will switch from a business that doesn't meet their needs – seems harsh but that's the reality.

Lack of instant responses from hoteliers – customers expect instant responses, answers and solutions to their queries or complaints, due to their growing digital impatience. In fact, 40 per cent of EMEA website visitors abandon a site after a three-second delay. Underscoring this is the growing adoption of digital assistants. Today,

62 per cent of consumers are comfortable with an AI application responding to their query, which provides fast and efficient results.

Key factors in reducing friction

Our recent Online Travel Friction Index research identified key factors in reducing traveller friction through a 'Friction Reduction Index'; a weighted average numerical score rating over 15 experience attributes that nearly 850 online travel users used to assess their experiences related to research, shopping and booking of travel products on various travel websites.

Technology is the solution for removing friction

It goes without saying that technology can improve travel experiences by re-

ducing pain points and stressors along the journey, and as a global tech platform, Expedia Group offers a wealth of tools and services to support lodging partners in making this happen. Even more personalisation is on the horizon: soon the in-room entertainment system will play guests' favourite Spotify playlist, or video calls will pop up seamlessly on the in-room TV.

Personalised travel is a key trend that comes hand-in-hand with technology, with examples including using browsing history to adapt search results, and utilising geolocation data to help customers navigate in unfamiliar surroundings. Even proactively re-booking when trips are disrupted, is now possible.

Reducing friction for customers and hoteliers

Expedia will soon roll out a trip assistance function on the app, that will alert the hotel when a traveller will be checking in, if the traveller is experiencing a flight delay. We are also piloting a

shuttle tracking technology programme built by Track My Shuttle into the Expedia App, allowing hotel guests to see exactly where to find shuttle pickup for their hotel, and follow along with a live route map. For our partners, we encourage them to utilise the different tools on our platform such as our Partner Central Chatbot. We also help to improve our partners' personalisation efforts with our new recommendation engine, which identifies potential actions they can take to reap rewards in terms of revenue opportunities.



Arthur Chapin
Senior Vice President -
Product and Technology, Expedia

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

A word from stalwarts



“The Saudi Entertainment Ventures Company (SEVEN) has announced the expansion of new entertainment complexes to prime locations across the Kingdom. These will delight residents and tourists alike and contribute to positioning Saudi Arabia as a hub for entertainment and leisure. The entertainment complexes will meet the fast-growing tourism sector and contribute to realising the goals outlined in Saudi Vision 2030. They are being developed in key strategic geographic locations, providing large resident populations with innovative leisure choices that will appeal to all the family. Each complex will feature several entertainment and leisure choices including cinemas, play areas, rides, F&B, attractions and more.

“We have a clearly structured development plan to build 20 entertainment destinations, 50 cinemas and two large theme parks in prime locations across the Kingdom. We are committed to realising the goals of Saudi Vision 2030 to accelerate the creation of world-class entertainment assets in the Kingdom that support economic diversification, create new jobs, and contribute to socio-economic progress. Our complexes will position the Kingdom as an entertainment, culture and tourism hub of the region. At SEVEN, we believe in promoting and creating opportunities for the private sector to thrive in the fast-evolving entertainment landscape of the Kingdom. We are inviting the most ambitious and creative business partners and vendors to join us in our remarkable step forward to shape the entertainment landscape of the Kingdom.”

— Abdullah Al Dawood, Chairman, SEVEN

Sharjah tourism records 1.8 mn guests

Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) revealed that the emirate recorded a 3% growth in the number of hotel guests in 2019 as compared to 2018. The sector welcomed approximately 1.8 mn guests last year with a hotel occupancy rate of 66 per cent. In terms of nationalities, guests from the Russian Federation topped the list, followed by GCC countries.

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Continuous tourism inflows

H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, SCTDA, said that the emirate witnessed robust inflows of tourists throughout last year, thanks to the emirate's major achievements in terms of the launch of new recreational facilities, tourism initiatives and related activities.

Al Midfa noted that by the end of 2019, the emirate had more than 10,000 hotel rooms, comprising 1,331 rooms in nine 5-star hotels; 2,733 rooms in 21 4-star hotels; as well as 31 in one to three-star hotels; and 2,485 apartments in 40



H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and
Tourism Development Authority

hotel apartment facilities. Furthermore, six new 5-star and 4-star hotels were inaugurated last year, and more than seven new hotel projects are expected to be unveiled in 2020.

Tourism projects & initiatives

As part of its continued efforts to promote tourism, attract more tourists and visitors, and boost the emirate's tourism competitiveness, SCTDA launched a package of innovative services last year. These include the 'Smart Mirror' and the 'AI Tour Guide Chatbot'.

Furthermore, the 'Hotel Statistics System - Business Intelligence' (HSS-BI) solution provides hotels with access to real-time guest data and statistics. The 'Smart Vehicle Permit System' service enables tourism agencies to finalise registration procedures, pay the fees and print-out permits within a few minutes.

The most notable environmental projects are the Al Faya Retreat, Al Badayer Retreat, Kingfisher Retreat, and Al Rafisah Dam Rest Area. With the recent inauguration of Buhais Geological Park, Sharjah is also placing great emphasis on the development of adventure tourism.

Promotional campaigns & tourism related activities

Through 2019, SCTDA conducted several promotional

campaigns with the aim of attracting ever greater numbers of tourists and visitors to the emirate. In addition, the Authority participated in various international exhibitions and conferences inside and outside the UAE. Thanks to these efforts, SCTDA was able to launch into new markets such as the Nordic Countries, through its participation at the MATKA Nordic Travel Fair. In terms of recreation-

al and tourism activities, SCTDA organised the famed Sharjah Light Festival in 2019, attracting over 1.2 million visitors.

"Moving forward, we are planning to develop tourism experiences and attractions to enrich our visitors' experiences and provide them with exceptional services that will make them return to Sharjah. Great focus has also been placed on familiarising audiences with our tourism activities, attractions and events in addition to highlighting adventure tourism and the new chain hotel brands by running promotional and advertising campaigns," Al Midfa concluded. 🌟

“ SCTDA is planning to develop tourism experiences and attractions to enrich the visitors' experiences and provide them with exceptional services that will make them return to Sharjah ”



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Personality of the Month

Silent achiever in hospitality

Multi talented **Kimberly Pasco**, Marketing and Communications Manager, Movenpick Hotel Apartments in Downtown Dubai fondly known in the industry circles as 'Kim' is a professional hotelier, serving the hospitality industry for almost a decade both in the Philippines and Dubai. Pasco shares the highlights of her journey in the hospitality industry with **TRAVTALK**.

 Shehara Rizly

Pasco started off her career in Boracay Philippines as a reservations agent for almost two years at the Boracay Regency Beach Resort and Spa, thereafter moved to the IHG chain as Account Manager for the IHG Club in Makati, Philippines.

Venture to Dubai

In 2013 she ventured in



Kimberly Pasco
Marketing and Communications Manager
Movenpick Hotel Apartments in Downtown Dubai

Dubai, where she joined Time Hotels as a reservations coordinator and from there on, she dedicated herself learning and experiencing different areas in the hospitality industry. By 2015, Pasco joined in the lines of creative and marketing arm in the hotel trade, hence she kept developing her skills not just graphic designing but also in ecommerce and digital marketing which paved way for her to be the opening Marketing and Com-

munications Manager at the Movenpick Hotel Apartments in Downtown Dubai.

Passionate about the industry

Although she joined Movenpick just two months before its opening, she developed a marketing and PR plan that gave the property visibility and recognition in the whole Middle East region. Pasco shared, "I joined two months before the actual opening of the property and there were so many things that needed to be done, the only solution available with all the hectic schedule was to use my time wisely and to organise everything as much as possible."

Proactive strategist planner

Pasco has an inborn talent to think beyond and out of the box, in her spare time

she will check the trends, speak with guests as to what their requirements would be to make their stay more comfortable and to ensure a return visit, she develops various plans with the help of the other departments for the success of the property.

Now that the property completed a year, we asked her what she intends next for the property, "The property is a great product that can cater different kinds of travellers whether it is leisure, business, family or even extended stays. The services that the property offers complements in making such an extensive home-like feel stay. We have recently unveiled a three-family-bedroom unit which is massively perfect for families seeking extra space whilst staying next to Burj Khalifa. Our F&B is starting to make its



way to the dining scene of Dubai as we open our new Italian restaurant located at the pool terrace area as well as our new Onsen Spa that offers various relaxing massages," she said.

Remarkable straits in life

She has many remarkable achievements right throughout her life yet she says that opening Movenpick Downtown Dubai, was a leap of faith for her knowing that it will be her first time handling a pre-opening property within a limited time period which did have an impact as there was tremendous pressure categorically elevated, but

she achieved this challenge quite well. Her networks managed to keep them above the rest hence today it has become an amazing property.

Goals in time

Pasco has a long way to go to in terms of her career, finishing a decade and starting off another will open more doors than ever to her in this field of hospitality. Her passion lies in this trade and it will be difficult to picture her otherwise, but she is destined for something greater in life and all her efforts and expertise will continue to flourish in life. 🌟

“Movenpick is a great product that can cater different kinds of travellers whether it is leisure, business, family or even extended stays. The services that the property offers complements in making such an extensive home-like feel stay”

Expedia records growth in Saudi visitors to UAE

According to the latest data compiled by Expedia Group from the fourth quarter of 2019, the number of travellers visiting the UAE from Saudi Arabia grew significantly.

The data shows that Saudi Arabia is one of the highest traffic volume generators for the GCC with over 1.25 mn visitors.

With the GCC as a whole, and KSA as its lead contributor, being key priorities on Dubai Tourism's strategic agenda, investments in deepening alliances with the country's travel ecosystem continue to increase, reflecting the value of such partnerships – particularly via integrated marketing and sales activations.



Paula de Keijzer
Senior Director Market Management,
Africa, Indian Ocean, Middle East and
Turkey at Expedia Group

With its luxury hotels, service apartments, and residences, Dubai is able to accommodate large families and groups of people travelling together. According to data released by Arabian Travel Market 2018, the UAE has 7 per cent of the region's luxury properties and will continue to lead the


GCC's luxury segment to 2022.

Paula de Keijzer, Senior Director Market Management, Africa, Indian Ocean, Middle East and Turkey at Expedia Group said, "With upcoming Expo 2020, UAE is expected to see a major boost in visitors from the GCC

countries, with a majority from Saudi Arabia. By making revenue management more accessible which is free to all our lodging partners, Expedia Group's revenue management tool Rev+ will help hoteliers make informed decisions and potentially increase their revenue performance."

VFS Global eases visa process

Still heading away on an amazing adventure this spring? Although preparing for a holiday is not without its challenges, VFS Global wants to make sure you get to your destination smoothly without much stress. **Vinay Malhotra**, Regional Group COO - South Asia, MENA, Americas at VFS Global, explains how to beat the rush this travel season with simplification of visa application process.

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How early before travel dates should a traveller apply for visa?

Expatriate residents in the UAE are advised to plan their travel itinerary and visa application as early as three months prior to the planned departure date to avoid delays in processing entry permits during the peak travel season. Most countries accept visa applications up to 90 days before the date of travel. According to the revised Schengen Visa Code, effective February 2, 2020, you can apply for a Schengen visa up to 6 months before your date of travel.

What is the typical turnaround timeline for visas?

Each country has a different timeline for its visa processing, and these timelines are clearly mentioned on their websites, providing you the information required to apply for your visa well in advance. In general, it can last 15 working days. During peak season visa processing can take longer than anticipated, hence apply early. It is important to know that during peak season the appointment slots can be easily fully booked soon due to high demand. That's why we encourage customers, to apply for their visas as early as possible.



Vinay Malhotra
Regional Group COO - South Asia, Middle East & North Africa, Americas at VFS Global

Tell us more about your value-added services. How they help travellers to beat the peak?

VFS Global make the visa application process more convenient, exclusive, personalised, time saving and hassle-free. The personal-

ised attention and step-by-step assistance make the Premium Lounge suitable for first time travellers and senior citizens.

The 'Visa at Your Doorstep' technology-enabled service brings the visa application process to remote locations (home or office) giving the luxury of an easy application process. Students, working professionals and other individuals who may not be able to visit the visa application centre during regular work-


ing hours can immensely benefit from the prime time service – which allows individuals to apply for their visas, outside of regular work hours, without interrupting their schedules.

Does availing any of the value-added services guarantee a faster visa outcome?

Opting for any optional, value-added services (such as prime time services or form-filling, or any other service) does not guarantee a quicker

or a positive decision by the concerned embassy/consulate. Customers can choose to expedite the process by availing services like priority and super priority visa, available for only UK visa customers.

What is VFS Global's role in the visa process?

VFS Global manage non-judgmental and administrative tasks related to visa application. This allows diplomatic missions (i.e. embassies/consulates) to effectively manage their time and resources and focus on the critical task of assessing visa applications and making decisions on whether to grant a visa or not. 

“VFS Global make the visa application process more convenient, exclusive, personalised, time saving and hassle-free”

269-room Hotel Indigo Dubai Downtown to open soon

Slated to open in Summer 2020, Hotel Indigo Dubai Downtown is a stone's throw from a number of iconic landmarks and attractions, including one of the world's largest retail hubs, The Dubai Mall. Hotel Indigo properties offer a gateway to discover some of the world's most inspiring locations. Hotel Indigo Dubai Downtown is no exception, taking inspiration from the story of its neighbourhood areas to help guests feel part of the destination.

Each of the 269 rooms are inspired by the story of Dubai Creek— whether that's through the

surrealist wallpaper exclusively created by local artists, bespoke shisha lamps or the wardrobes with carved wooden doors, hand-crafted in Mashrabiya style with a modern twist. The spa inspired mother-of-pearl bathrooms pay homage to the country's proud heritage of pearl diving,

while eye-catching vibrant Moroso designer furniture adds a contemporary touch to the interior. Floor to ceiling windows overlook envy-inducing views; be it over the Dubai Canal or the Dubai Skyline.

Laura Eggleton, General Manager, Hotel Indigo Dubai Downtown, said, "As our first opening in the region, Hotel Indigo Dubai Downtown combines the city's heritage with the new, fresh buzz of the ever-evolving landscape through local collaborations. We're looking forward to sharing our neighbourhood story with you."



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RAKTDA records 4% growth in arrivals

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA) announced stellar visitor figures for 2019 with arrivals up almost 4 per cent to 1.12 million and RevPAR recorded at an impressive \$114.90, amongst the highest in the region. This was reflected by the strong yearly occupancy rates, averaging at 74 per cent.

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Last year's inbound growth was spurred by the variety of activities undertaken by the emirate, inclusive of the launch of the Jais Sky



Tour, and hosting of the Ras Al Khaimah Fine Arts Festival, Ras Al Khaimah Half Marathon, Tough Mudder and the prestigious UAE Tour. In addition, corporate activity and MICE participation further contributed to the growth in visitor numbers, with RAKTDA conducting 122 familiarisation trips, participating at 20 exhibitions and completing 34 roadshows across 16 countries. Cementing its market presence, a further 63 workshops were held across in 12 countries, with the UK, Germany, Russia, CIS, Nordics, Central and East

Europe retaining their positions as key target markets. Growth in footfall from these key source markets was also noted, with visitors from Russia, India and Kazakhstan up by 13 per cent, 10.5 per cent and 15 per cent respectively, in comparison to 2018 figures.

Raki Phillips, CEO of RAKTDA, commented,

“RAK's key focus has been on higher yield visitors such as MICE delegates, as well as prioritising sustainable nature-based adventure and culture driven activities and experiences”

“2019 was a positive year for Ras Al Khaimah, as we saw increased footfall from key markets resulting in the overall arrival growth of almost 4 per cent. Ras Al Khaimah is in the midst of its three-year destination strategy which aims to broaden its reach through increased segmentation. A key focus has been on higher yield visitors such as

MICE delegates, as well as prioritising sustainable nature-based adventure and culture driven activities and experiences.”

2020 kicked off with key trade events that showcased the emirates' offerings to international industry leaders and delegates from the travel and hospitality sector including FESPO in Switzerland and Vakantiebeurs 2020. This year's busy calendar will see RAKTDA mark its trade debuts at IBTM in Barcelona in November, ITB Berlin and IMEX Frankfurt, a major MICE event in Germany, between May 12-14.



Raki Phillips
CEO, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority

RAKTDA is targeting 1.5 million visitors by 2021, supporting which the emirate has identified the supply of new hotel rooms as a primary focus moving forward. 

Pullman Hotel opens in Sharjah

Pullman Hotel Sharjah officially opened under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Salem Al Qasimi, Deputy Ruler of Sharjah, and in the presence of HE Khalid Jassim Al Midfa, Chairman of SCTDA; Hassan and Abdul Mohsen Al Hammadi, CEO of Manazil Real Estate Group, the owner of Pullman Hotel Sharjah, Mark Willis, CEO -- Middle East & Africa, Accor, and many VIPs, businessmen, guests and media representatives.



IATA on COVID-19's financial impact

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) updated its analysis of the financial impact of the novel COVID-19, a public health emergency on the global air transport industry. IATA now sees 2020 global revenue losses for the passenger business between \$63 billion and \$113 billion (in a scenario where COVID-19 is contained or spread respectively).

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IATA's previous analysis issued on February 20, 2020 put lost revenues at \$29.3 billion based on a scenario that would see the impact of COVID-19 largely confined to markets associated with China. Since that time, the virus has spread to over 80 countries and forward bookings have been severely impacted on routes beyond China. Financial markets have reacted strongly. Airline share prices have fallen nearly 25 per cent since the outbreak began, some 21 per cent points greater than the decline that occurred at a similar point during the SARS crisis of 2003. To a large extent, this fall in prices is a shock to industry revenues much greater than our previous analysis.

To take into account the evolving situation with COVID-19, IATA estimated the potential impact on passenger revenues based on two possible scenarios.

Scenario 1: Limited spread

This scenario includes markets with more than 100 confirmed COVID-19 cases (as of March 2) experiencing a sharp downturn followed by a V-shaped recovery profile. It also estimates fall in consumer confidence in other markets (North America, Asia Pacific and Europe).

The markets accounted for in this scenario and their anticipated fall in passenger numbers, due to COVID-19, are as follows: China (-23 per cent), Japan (-12 per cent), Singapore (-10 per cent), South Korea (-14 per cent), Italy (-24 per cent), France (-10 per cent), Germany (-10 per cent), and Iran (-16 per cent). Additionally, Asia (excluding China, Japan, Singapore and South Korea) would be expected to see an 11 per cent fall in demand. Europe (excluding Italy, France and Germany) would see a 7 per cent fall in demand and Middle East (excluding Iran) would see a 7 per cent fall in demand.



Globally, this fall in demand translates to an 11 per cent worldwide passenger revenue loss equal to \$63 billion. China would account for some \$22 billion of this total. Markets associated with Asia (including China) would account for \$47 billion of this total.

Scenario 2: Extensive Spread

This scenario applies a similar methodology but

“Many airlines are cutting capacity and taking emergency measures to reduce costs, they are doing their best to stay afloat as they perform the vital task of linking the world's economies”

to all markets that currently have 10 or more confirmed COVID-19 cases (as of March 2). The outcome shows a 19 per cent loss in worldwide passenger revenues, which

equates to \$113 billion. Financially, that would be on a scale equivalent to what the industry experienced in the global financial crisis.

Mitigation

Oil prices have fallen significantly (-\$13/barrel Brent) since the beginning of the year. This could cut costs up to \$28 billion on the 2020 fuel bill (on top of those savings which would be achieved as a result of reduced operations) which would provide some relief but would not significantly cushion the devastating impact that COVID-19 is having on demand. And it should be noted that hedging practices will postpone this impact for many airlines.


Impact

“In little over two months, the industry's prospects in much of the world have



Alexandre de Juniac
Director General and CEO
IATA

taken a dramatic turn for the worse. It is unclear how the virus will develop, but whether we see the impact contained to a few markets and a \$63 billion revenue loss, or a broader impact leading to a \$113 billion loss of revenue, this is a crisis. Many airlines are cutting capacity and taking emergency measures to reduce costs.

Airlines are doing their best to stay afloat as they perform the vital task of linking the world's economies. As governments look to stimulus measures, the airline industry will need consideration for relief on taxes, charges and slot allocation,” said **Alexandre de Juniac**, Director General and CEO, IATA. 

Region-wise impact on passenger numbers and revenues

Market	Impact on passenger numbers	Impact on passenger revenues
Australia, China, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam	-23%	-\$49.7 billion
Rest of Asia Pacific	-9%	-\$7.6 billion
Austria, France, Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, the United Kingdom	-24%	- \$37.3 billion
Rest of Europe	-9%	-\$6.6 billion
Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates	-23%	-\$4.9 billion
Rest of Middle East	-9%	-\$2.3 billion
Canada and US	-10%	-\$21.1 billion

Note: Revenue loss figures are not additive due to overlaps of some markets, e.g., revenues for China and Germany both contain the revenues for the China-Germany market. Revenues are base fare revenues for all airlines flying to, from and within the country.

Africa and Latin America/Caribbean regions are not explicitly included in this market-based analysis, because there are currently no countries in either region with at least 10 COVID-19 cases.

The Bicester Village Shopping

The first-ever GCC roadshow conducted by Gulf Reps was held in Kuwait, Dubai and Abu Dhabi from February 11-13, 2020 with over 150 travel agents from the GCC. Each roadshow offered many opportunities for travel agents to directly speak with the partners from the shopping villages, tourism boards and hotels in the heart of Europe.



Nina Farrimond
Head of Market
GCC

“This is the first time that we arranged this type of event for the Middle East region and it was very well received. Although in Kuwait there were other ongoing events, over 50 agents participated. We have been travelling around with about 20 partners. Tourism Ireland was very well received in Kuwait and they managed to seal some bookings at the event. We are also introducing new villages.”

“It was very interesting for us, as we are one of the nine European villages and it was the first time that we participated in a sales mission in the GCC. My first perception is that people are very interested in the GCC. We are happy with the results that we managed to get and the contacts that we were able to make.”



Jeroen Van Der Velde
Tourism Director
Maasmechelen Village,
Brussels



Julio Montes del Pino
Director of Sales - VP Plaza
Espana Design Hotel

“It was a very well organised event. We saw quality in terms of the agents that visited us. They were interested in knowing about the location of the property and availability of bigger/connecting rooms. For those in the GCC, the perfect time to travel is from spring to end of the summer.”

“I am representing two German villages and it has been a wonderful experience in the GCC countries. In Kuwait they were interested to know more about what we could offer to their clients. Dubai and Abu Dhabi were more familiar with the village hubs like Munich and Frankfurt and wanted to know more about the other parts of Germany.”



Andreas Laepple
Assistant Destination
Marketing Manager -
Wertheim Village and
Ingolstadt



Daniel Rosado Bayon
Tourism Counsellor
Embassy of Spain, UAE

“Whenever a travel agent came, he saw the full experience that he can share with his client which was the whole package with hotels and shopping as well. Kuwait had lots of questions about shopping in Spain, which offers much by way of high street brands, VAT exemptions, shopping nights and various other experiences.”



Michelle Bullens
Sales Manager
La butte aux bois

“It is the first time we are representing La butte aux bois in Belgium here in the GCC. Personalisation is one of the key features in our five-star property. We want to give our guests ‘a home away from home’ experience and offer them relaxation amidst natural environs.”

“We had a great experience in Kuwait. People had many questions about the city and the shopping destinations. The peak season starts by end of May, so we are ready for the GCC clients. The clients want to be updated with the latest information and this is the platform that agents can learn about. We are in the process of opening a new restaurant and some agents even asked me when it will be open.”



Patrick Allais
Business Development
Manager - La Vallee Village



Veerle Boonen
Sales Manager - La butte
aux bois

“It was a very interesting day in Kuwait, the people were very friendly. They were looking for a hotel with a spa and in a green environment. They know Brussels very well, so it was a pleasant surprise. Many activities to do in the area.”

“We had a great time in Kuwait where we met over 50 travel agents. We had the opportunity to showcase how shopping tourist destinations are important. They are looking for dedicated and exclusive services and the good thing about our company is that we can offer the best in terms of hospitality services.”



Stefano Rizza
Business Development
Manager - Fidenza Village



David Escolar
International Market Director -
Middle East and North Africa
NH Hotels Group

“It went very well as you know people are very educated and well-travelled. They are very sensitive in terms of brands and fashion. UAE is a large market for us and we have many connections so this roadshow gave us an opportunity to further highlight the new products and services available and also to connect with new agents.”

Collection GCC Roadshow 2020



Clive Doble
Tourism Director
Bicester Village, UK

“It was an amazing experience, we had over 50 agents in Kuwait. Some of them knew what the Bicester Village Shopping Collection was, but many of them didn't, so it was a great opportunity to share some of the success stories we had while looking after the Middle East market and working and building relationships directly with those agents.”



Jonathan McDonagh
Sales Manager – K Club
– The Kildare Hotel, Spa
and Country Club

“K Club is a five-star luxury resort on the outskirts of Dublin. We have 134 guest rooms and also private residences in the property. We offer numerous activities ranging from kayaking, horse riding, falconry, equestrian and much more as we are in Kildare. We have been here for a few days and the sales calls we made were very engaging and clients were interested in the products that we presented.”

“It was lovely to join this event and welcome different suppliers and partners from around the world. In the tourism industry we always look for trends, fashions and products that we can introduce in our portfolio. Such events allow customers to find new experiences which combine fashion, travelling and shopping. Also, we met a lot of new partners and can develop new products and itineraries for our clients in different destinations.”



Aga Pytlík
General Manager – Pan
World Travel and Tourism

SHOPPING Destinations

“We have lots of trade partners here promoting their properties and shopping villages in Europe on one platform. We learnt about what they offer to the premium clients and how we can put together new packages.”



Varsha Pherwani
Travel Counsellor Associate
– Travel Counsellors



Namratha Rose
Holidays Manager
Nasser Travel

“The Bicester Village Shopping Collection roadshow by Sammy and the team at Gulf Reps has been very well represented. Roadshows like this give us, as travel agents and as travel management companies a better opportunity to interact with partners directly to get some insights and updates about the offers, services and facilities. Shopping villages from this market are an integral part of tourism.”



Sheran Peiris
Sales Executive
Dubai Leisure Holidays

“As I promote destinations, this was really a great opportunity to meet so many suppliers in one area. This roadshow was well organised as each one of us had time to have a very good meeting with each of the suppliers; they were from destinations to hotels and the shopping villages. Our clients prefer destinations where they can engage themselves in shopping so in this market the Bicester Village Shopping Collection is already known. We managed to get more details on what they will introduce for this season and the new deals on offer.”

“The main reason which attracts the UAE travellers is that everyone in Dubai wants to shop so the discounts and special offers have been quite popular. I have been selling them not only for leisure but also for MICE and incentive groups over the years. There are many things that they provide, catering to different kinds of travellers – Arabs, Indians, Asians, all prefer the experience.”



Qais Jairaj
Assistant Manager Sales
and Operations – MICE –
Akbar Holidays

“I work for American Express Dubai in the travel part, handling the platinum card members. It has been an amazing event and it should happen regularly so that we can provide our card members with more deals. The fact that we could connect with them directly under one roof was very good.”



Bharat Batra
Travel Account Manager –
AMEX Middle East



TAT turns 60 in style with 'Luxperience'

Marking its 60th anniversary, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) celebrated a glamorous event at CE LA VI Dubai under the theme 'Luxperience' in partnership with Siam Kempinski Hotel Bangkok, the five-star resort-style property located at the heart of the city. The event highlighted luxury travel in Thailand, and in parallel, saw the launch of seven animal-themed family suites that have been added to Siam Kempinski Hotel Bangkok.



Al Naboodah to enhance global footprint

The Al Naboodah Group with over 60 years' experience in business and more than 45 years in the travel industry, will take steps to expand its business opportunities across KSA, UAE, UK, Canada, Turkey and Azerbaijan over the next few years. **Nasir Jamal Khan**, CEO of Al Naboodah Travel shares his plans with **TRAVTALK**.



Shehara Rizly

Could you share your plans for boosting inbound tourism?

The main focus will be on enhancing inbound travel to the UAE. We are expecting a reasonably impressive number of travellers to the UAE due to the urge to discover Dubai. Over the years we have seen the number of visitors rise in terms of inbound travel to the UAE. Airlines, hotels, travel agents and tour operators have been enjoying a good market share of business over the past few years and the numbers are growing. In terms of visitors, we have seen a number of emerging markets visiting

the UAE and Dubai in particular. The campaigns run by all of the emirates have proved that the UAE is definitely a hub for tourism in the Middle East.

Al Naboodah recently opened a new office in KSA; could you share some details?

Saudi Arabia has the highest outbound potential in the Central province in Riyadh, which is why we started off there. We undertake corporate business, outbound leisure, packages, tours, and represent one airline at present. We are working towards representing more airlines and tapping outbound business to Dubai. People



Nasir Jamal Khan
CEO
Al Naboodah Travel

coming from Saudi Arabia have the opportunity to travel by road as well. With a large population, there is significant potential for online business, but they will take time to move towards ecommerce as the older generations still

prefer face-to-face interactions when booking their travel requirements.

Could you share your expansion plans in Europe?

Apart from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, UK, Canada, Turkey and Azerbaijan are on the cards for the next two years. We are working on timelines to start operations by the end of this year in the UK, and by the end of this year or beginning of

next year in Canada. Next year we are also looking at Turkey and Azerbaijan. This will provide an opportunity to enhance both inbound and outbound business. The offices opening in other countries will complement our business here. The UK and Turkey are some of the high-potential inbound areas. Our presence in these countries will enhance the quality of our services, and as wholesalers we will

sell products, both inbound and outbound, from those countries.

How is the GSA business at present?

Currently representing 11 of the world's most renowned international airlines, Al Naboodah Travel has established a name for its service to the airlines, and the numbers keep growing every year. Before taking on representation of an airline, Al Naboodah Travel carries out a feasibility study based on specific criteria, and the same is done by the airline as well. Last year GoAir and SaudiGulf entered the GSA portfolio and we are yet to see how many will be on-board this year. 🚀

“We are working on timelines to start operations by the end of this year in the UK, Canada, Turkey and Azerbaijan which will provide an opportunity to enhance both inbound and outbound business”

5G transforming air travel

SITA predicts how ultra-fast 5G networks will bring major change for airports, airlines, and passengers. As per CSS Insight data, 5G will be a game-changer for the aviation industry with projected growth to reach around USD 4.2 bn by 2026.



TT Bureau

The potential for innovation is huge and airports, airlines, and passengers will feel the force of 5G in very different ways. SITA's predictions are based on unique IT insights and emerging air transport industry technology trends.

Gilles Bloch-Morhange, VP SITA Platform, said, “5G is already enhancing our existing applications at airports, for aircraft communications, airport operations, baggage management, and passenger processing. And it's impossible to talk about 5G without discussing Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the other

applications it enables.” According to CSS Insight data, there will be 340 million 5G connections globally by 2021 and a staggering 2.7 billion by 2025, mostly in developed markets. In money terms, in the aviation industry 5G amounted to just USD 0.2 billion in 2019 but is projected to reach USD 4.2 billion by 2026.

5G will be the life-blood of IoT

5G will soon be commonplace at airports and the idea of everything intelligently connected to everything will be viable. The Internet of Things (IoT) brings the inherent need to manage increasing amounts of objects and therefore data.

Multiple objects at airports will interact with people and objects will interact among themselves.

5G will power air transport-specific AI applications

5G connected AI will solve major pain points at airports and borders. AI-assisted computer vision will continually scan boarding gate areas and intelligently predict capacity issues for hand luggage on flights and enable staff to act accordingly before boarding.

5G will drive operational efficiency, increase ancillary revenues & cut costs

Putting IoT and 5G together will offer great opportunities for airlines and airports to unlock the value of all their data to deliver tangible business benefits. All airport assets will be connected, making monitoring efficiency and optimising usage much simpler.

5G will mean exploitation of the potential of 'flying data centres'

5G will enable the next-generation aircraft to exchange vast amounts of data around the airport and at the gate. The fast transmission of aircraft data, and analysis of that data, will en-



able pro-active maintenance, quicker aircraft turn-around, more on-time departures and, most importantly, an improved customer experience.

Airports will control Wi-Fi quality and have improved disruption management capabilities

Airports will have more control of quality of ser-

vice in their private and public spaces, converging 5G with Wi-Fi networks to create a seamless mobile experience, with continuous connectivity. 5G is likely to replace the commonly used digital radio communications service TETRA, which is only voice-enabled, for operational and mission-critical services, providing a secure network for running airport operations. 🚀

Rotana's 7th hotel soon in Riyadh

Strengthening its portfolio in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Rotana adds another property set - DAMAC Towers Arjaan to be open soon in Riyadh. The twin tower featuring 448 luxury rooms is company's seventh property in the Kingdom and is one of the finest architectural landmarks of the region, offering travellers a luxurious home-away-from-home experience.

 TT Bureau

DAMAC Towers Arjaan in Riyadh, the twin-tower architectural landmark offers a total of 448 luxurious rooms, suites and penthouses. The hotel features state-of-the-art amenities such as meeting and events facilities, a wellness and fitness centre, separate temperature-controlled swimming pools for men and women, and a well-equipped gymnasium, among others.

Guy Hutchinson, President and CEO of Rotana, said, "This exciting new property marks the Saudi debut of



Guy Hutchinson
President and CEO
Rotana

the Arjaan Hotel Apartments by Rotana brand, further enhancing our diverse portfolio in the Kingdom and bringing elegant city living to the heart of Riyadh. Offering the finest in

extended-stay, we have no doubt that this hotel will become a preference for travellers looking for a luxurious home-away-from-home experience."

The new property brings Rotana's total tally in the Kingdom to seven hotels and 2,087 keys with a strong development pipeline including Centro Corniche, Al Khobar and Dana Rayhaan by Rotana, Dammam. The two properties are also scheduled to open during the first half of 2020 and will add further 807 rooms to the hotel operator's total inventory.

"Despite the current global situation, we remain optimistic about the Kingdom's tourism performance and the region as a whole. Governments in various countries are focusing strongly on economic diversification, and with tourism playing a central role in these efforts we look forward to a bright future for the hospitality industry," added Hutchinson.

Driven by a thriving MICE sector, increased infrastructure investments and the development of touristic attractions and major real estate and entertainment projects, including the Red



“Despite the current global situation, we remain optimistic about the Kingdom's tourism performance and the region as a whole”

Sea Project, the Kingdom's hotel market is projected to exceed \$24 billion by 2025. The government has set an am-

bitious target of new 56,106 hotel rooms between 2019 to 2021, in line with the goals of Saudi Vision 2030. 

MOVEMENTS

MILLENNIUM HOTELS & RESORTS MEA Saudi Arabia

Millennium Hotels & Resorts MEA has appointed **Hamid Sidine** as its Managing Director for Saudi Arabia. The industry professional, who has 30 years of regional and international experience, including leadership roles with global hospitality brands, will head up the company's Riyadh office, responsible for achieving its recently announced goal of operating 25 hotels countrywide by 2025. Given his broad-ranging expertise across three continents, Sidine has also been appointed COO for Turkey and Africa, two fast-growing regions where the hospitality company has identified strong development potential.



MILLENNIUM HOTELS AND RESORTS MEA Dubai

Millennium Hotels & Resorts MEA appointed **Shahnaz Hassan** as the Group Director of Human Resources. The move comes in line with the company's restless endeavors to empower qualified and talented women in the hospitality sector. With 25 years of experience and a diversity of skills, Shahnaz will lead the human resources to support the robust expansion plan of the group and accelerate the learning and development process. Before this, Shahnaz held the position of Human Resources Director at Union Properties, Uptown Mirdiff.



THE CHEDI AL BAIT Sharjah

The Chedi Al Bait has elevated **Nezha Aanou** to the role of Director of Operations. Now overseeing the daily operational tasks to ensure the delivery of the highest service standards to guests, while cultivating a healthy work environment for colleagues, Nezha brings 18 years of experience in the hospitality industry to her role. In her current role, she closely tracks current travel trends and global events, making her an in-house advocate for climate change awareness, designing best practices for her team to further establish the property as a heritage resort that lives in harmony within its destinations.



PARK INN BY RADISSON Dubai Motor City

Park Inn by Radisson has appointed **Caroline Jonsson** as the new Cluster Head of PR & Marketing responsible for all communications. Jonsson brings with her a decade of experience in the trade and will be responsible for overseeing all public relations and marketing projects for the property as well as taking the lead in organising various strategic campaigns of the hotel. She will also be responsible to identify areas for improvement to increase and communicate the Park Inn brand objectives.



PARK INN BY RADISSON Dubai Motor City

Park Inn by Radisson, the city's only motor themed hotel has appointed **Tim Reynolds** as the new Cluster Hotel Manager. He has extensive knowledge of the market with over 14 years' experience in the hotel sector and will be a great asset to the property. Reynolds will be overseeing the entire hotel operation, working with the relevant departments to drive top-line revenue, guest satisfaction and employee engagement.



GRAYTON HOTEL Dubai

Recep Pamukcu has been appointed as General Manager at Grayton Hotel Dubai effective January 2020. Turkish by nationality but has perfect blend of European culture, Recep possesses 20 years of hotel and hospitality experience which consist of almost four years in Dubai and 16 years of overseas. He is an accomplished, result oriented GM with experience in leading the team to a higher performance and productivity. Pamukcu attains an excellent customer relation and is successful in defining strategic goal and company direction. His aim would be to take Grayton Hotel to a new level in terms of revenue & reputation and establish it as a brand that excel in service and hospitality.



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

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