



TRAVTALK



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

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Outlook for the year of Expo 2020

UAE will be focusing on new markets in 2020, starting off with the Nordic travel fair—MATKA—to be held from January 17-20 in Helsinki, Finland. The two other important exhibitions to kick off in the upcoming year are Vakantiebeurs in Netherlands and FESPO in Switzerland.



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

“2020 is expected to be a banner year for us as we have a lot of exciting things planned, including B2B and B2C activities with travel and tourism companies that are aimed at increasing awareness about Sharjah and promoting it as an ideal travel destination across thriving international markets. We are very excited with our coming participation at the 2020 edition of the MATKA Nordic Travel Fair, which is widely recognised as the largest travel fair in Northern Europe. This fair is attended by over 50,000 consumers and almost 20,000 travel trade professionals over a course of three exciting days. Our participation will allow us the opportunity to make Nordic travellers more aware of what Sharjah has to offer as a travel and tourism destination. Our goal is to be able to reach out to a wider audience of potential tourists and increase awareness of what Sharjah offers as a travel destination – from related products to top spots to visit. We want to package Sharjah as a highly-preferred vacation spot for the Nordic market.”



Jamal Abdunnasser
CEO
Cozmo Travel

“In 2020, Cozmo will focus and promote all our 10 markets. Consistency and sustainability in all our existing markets is the key focus. We launched a new bedbank division called iByta and we were awarded representation of Travel Leaders International in five markets – Oman, Qatar, KSA, Bahrain and India. iByta will function like an independent unit which will consolidate all land contracts which includes small & large chain hotels, sightseeing & transportation. We will grow our B2B network through iByta. Travel Leaders Network is a diversified, multi-line, 25 billion dollar company in the North America, specialising in corporate and leisure travel, with more than 52,000 travel advisors, 6,000 locations in USA and presence in over 80 countries around the world. So I believe Travel Management & leisure B2B is going to be our key areas of interest to grow.”



Rifaat Salih Sabet
Cluster General Manager –
Golden Tulip Al Jazira Hotel
and Resort Ghantoot

“We are taking over the Private Beach Club which was run by Blue Marlin Ibiza previously, we will be putting up some water sports and do slight renovation in rooms and public areas including the lobby. Our focus will be on quality of service. We are investing in Human Resources and Training and Development of our new staff and existing team. This year we will be attending ITB Berlin, ATM Dubai and Leisure Exhibition in Moscow to increase our share of tourism arrivals from these countries so that we diversify our business mix in order to showcase our property and present it to the Travel and Trade along with our services such as Private Beach Club and Water Sports Activities. Property exposure and awareness to the local and international market and new business sources are the main way forward for us this year.”

Contd. on page 3 ►



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Creating brand awareness

► Contd. from page 1



Sarah Wisler
Cluster Director of Marketing
- Delta Hotels by Marriott
Jumeirah Beach, Four Points
by Sheraton Sheikh Zayed
Road and Downtown

“There's no doubt that 2020 is going to be a very challenging and competitive year in the market. Delta Hotels by Marriott Jumeirah Beach is the first property of the brand in the Middle East and our focus in Sales & Marketing this year is going to position the hotel in the market and increase brand awareness. Our efforts will concentrate on driving direct bookings and gaining digital room nights shares. A strong digital marketing strategy is absolutely vital for maximising bookings and increasing revenue. The rest of our efforts will focus on mobile marketing and experiences, such as mobile check-in, influencer marketing, and a robust PR strategy. Key European markets will be Germany and the UK, CIS, GCC and Scandinavia for long stays as the hotel boasts spacious 2, 3, and 4-bedroom suites.”

“In the first half of 2019, we welcomed over 58,000 visitors from Middle East to Singapore, a growth of 6.1 per cent over the same period in 2018. We remain positive about the growth potential for this market and look forward to welcoming more visitors to Singapore. We will continue to foster meaningful partnerships with regional airlines and tour operators. On the consumer front, we will continue to promote family and single travellers as well as actively promote MICE offerings to potential corporates and intermediaries. We recently announced the global launch of the In Singapore Incentives & Rewards (INSPIRE) which invites MICE groups to experience over 60 complimentary local experiences in Singapore, which will be part of Expo 2020. The Singapore Pavilion, titled 'Nature. Nurture. Future' will pay tribute to Singapore's journey towards growth, sustainability and resilience. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) will lead Singapore's participation in Expo 2020.”



Beverly Au Yong
Area Director (Middle
East), International Group

Inputs by Shehara Rizly

Jumeira Rotana invites children with determination

Jumeira Rotana Dubai kicked off the holiday season with its traditional Christmas tree lighting. The annual tree lighting ceremony has grown enormously with the presence of special children invited every year. This year

mination organisation. Entertainment was provided by Babyshop and the hotel's team choir sang famous Christmas carols. The annual event also featured Santa Claus arriving with his goodies and gifts for the kids.

event that we eagerly await every year. And we are proud of the growing presence of our special guests from different non-government organisations.

I am really pleased that such a big crowd has



the celebration was attended by 60 children of which the majority joined from the SNF Children with Deter-

Ulrich Hoffmeister, General Manager of Jumeira Rotana, commented on the event, "This is our traditional

participated. I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank Babyshop for their continuous support for our activities."

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Tourism Breaking News

- Nepal's CG Corp Global opens its first luxury hotel in Dubai
- Ras Al Khaimah declared as Gulf Tourism Capital
- Alshaya Group to bring Canopy by Hilton to Kuwait
- Abu Dhabi Convention Bureau sets up first MICE Advisory Committee in China
- Turkey draws 264,138 medical tourists in first half of 2019
- 304-room Premier Inn opens at Dragon City in Dubai
- Digital experiences key to winning bookings from young UAE travellers: Travelport
- Sharjah World Championship Week celebrates 20 years of success in sports tourism
- World's first Warner Bros. Hotel to open in Yas Island in 2021

Keep data safe while travelling

Airport Wi-Fi, public USB charging stations, and location sharing can undermine your cybersecurity. **Barry Cook**, Privacy and Group Data Protection Officer, VFS Global, shares top tips on how to keep your data safe while on the move.

Snoopers, lurking on public networks at airports, tampered USB charging points, and personal updates across our social media platforms can all pose risks to the security of our personal data. So, it's important to stay safe, not just at home, but while you're on the move, and to plan ahead, if possible. You need to take care of the following while on the move.

Password-protect your devices

Most smartphones, laptops, and tablets come equipped with security settings that will enable you to lock the device. Do this on every available device. While travelling, change the PIN numbers you use to access your data. Once home, change it again.

Don't ignore the OS update prompt

Before you set off on your travels, be sure to update the operating systems across your devices. This includes apps on your phone – and it is worth considering disabling or even deleting those that



“Free Wi-Fi access can be appealing, while waiting in an airport or train station, but it also carries security issues. It is also worth avoiding internet cafes and free Wi-Fi hotspots, unless they carry password requirements. If you must use it, it is best to avoid accessing personal accounts or sensitive data on their network”

carry your personal and financial information, till the trip is over.

Be cautious of public Wi-Fi networks

The laws and regulations that govern online security vary from country to country. Free Wi-Fi access can be appealing, while waiting in an airport or train station, but it also carries security issues. It is also

worth avoiding internet cafes and free Wi-Fi hotspots, unless they carry password requirements. If you must use it, it is best to avoid accessing personal accounts or sensitive data on their network.

Treat unknown USB charging ports as strangers

Publicly accessible USB ports carry real risk to your devices and data.

This threat is termed as 'juice-jacking', which has grown considerably in recent years, and allows criminals to load malware into the phones and other electronic devices of unsuspecting users at power stations. This malware can lock devices and export data, such as passwords, directly to the scammer. It is therefore advisable to carry your own personal power bank.

Not everyone needs to know where you are...

It's very common to update social media while travelling to new cities and countries. However, the problem with this is that it creates a security threat. By signalling your location, you can make it easy for a criminal to determine that you're not in your hotel room or at your home. Limit the information you post online about your specific whereabouts to just your followers and close friends.

...Except your bank

This is a simple step that's

invariably overlooked by most of us while travelling – yet it's one that's become so much easier to perform, thanks to the rise of mobile and internet banking applications.

Most banking apps carry an encrypted chat or messaging feature, which allows you to notify them of your movements. This quick and largely painless action before a trip can help nip potential credit or debit card fraud in the bud and allow you to access your money without the fear of limitations being imposed on your account.



Barry Cook
Privacy and Group Data
Protection Officer, VFS Global

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

A word from stalwarts



“Now in its fourth edition, Culture Summit Abu Dhabi continues to build its reputation as a world-leading forum for addressing the key issues affecting cultural forces in the UAE, the region and the world at large. We will once again be collaborating with esteemed global partners, meaning we can look forward to an event packed with thought-provoking discussions that we hope will lead to concrete and impactful outcomes.

This year's theme strongly resonates with us at the Department of Culture and Tourism, responsible as we are for overseeing and developing the emirate's culture sector and creative industries. As Abu Dhabi continues to diversify its economy, we have been focusing on culture as a major driver of growth. While certainly a global issue, the outcomes of this year's summit will be of particular relevance to us locally, as we come together to discuss the impact of innovation on the economies of cultural output”

— HE Saif Saeed Ghobash, Undersecretary of DCT Abu Dhabi

22% more UK visitors to GCC in 2024

The UK has been a consistent and key top source market for the GCC. According to research carried out by Colliers International, on behalf of ATM, as many as 2.8 million UK residents will travel to the GCC in 2024, an additional 500,000 travellers when compared to 2018 arrival figures.

 TT Bureau

Research by Colliers International states that UK tourists travelling to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are expected to generate an estimated US\$ 6.3 billion in travel and tourism revenue by 2024, an increase of 34 per cent when compared with figures from 2018. Building on this, total tourism spends in the GCC, reached US\$ 70.2 billion last year, with the UK travellers average spend during trips to the region, 27 per cent higher than the average spend of any other visitor. Arrivals from the UK to the GCC will increase 22 per cent over the period

2018 to 2024, driven by new and direct flight routes, competitive air fares and a growing number of leisure travellers, ahead of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2020, which will take place at Dubai World Trade Cen-

ter of delegates, exhibitors and attendees interested in doing business with the UK increased by 5 per cent.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said, "The

tourists, welcoming a projected 2.23 million visitors by 2023. Saudi Arabia will follow with 251,000 visitors, while Oman will welcome 165,000, Bahrain 159,000 and Kuwait 5,000. The UK, as a consistent and key top source market for the GCC, continues to present significant growth potential for travel and tourism revenue across the region."

ATM 2020 will welcome an array of UK exhibitors to the show, such as Visit Britain Shop, Warner Bros Studio Tour London – The Making of Harry Potter, Chelsea FC, Lancaster Landmark Hotel Group, Blenheim Palace and Historic Royal Palaces,



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director ME
Arabian Travel Market

East's outbound operators and travel professionals, who continue to play a key role in the UK's tourism industry," added Curtis. ATM 2020 will build on the success of this year's edition with a host of seminar sessions discussing the impact events have on tourism growth in the region while inspiring the travel and hospitality industry about the next generation of events.

“Arrivals from the UK to the GCC will increase 22% over the period 2018 to 2024, driven by new and direct flight routes, competitive air fares and a growing number of leisure travellers, according to the latest data released by Colliers International ahead of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2020”


tre from April 19-22, 2020. Adding to this, figures from ATM 2019 show the num-

UAE is expected to continue to be the preferred GCC destination for British

to name a few. "But it is not just about inbound tourism to the GCC, ATM provides a perfect platform for UK destinations, hotels, attractions, tour operators and travel agents, to market their proposition to Middle

FactFile

■ Figures from ATM 2019 show the number of delegates, exhibitors and attendees interested in doing business with the UK increased by 5%

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Personality of the Month

Stalwart in the travel industry

Arijit Munshi, General Manager of Tune Protect, EMEIA, is no stranger to the travel and hospitality industry within and out of the region. The winner of Arabian Travel Awards for two consecutive years, Munshi ensures that the Tune Protect brand presence is felt throughout the region.

 Shehara Rizly

Taking reins as the General Manager for Tune Protect EMEIA Commercial Brokerage LLC since 2014, an online facilitator of travel protection products via strategic partnerships within the region. Munshi has been in the forefront promoting travel protection to meet the needs of today's travellers.

Face of Tune Protect

Fondly known as 'Ori' in the travel fraternity, he has been instrumental in setting up Tune Protect within the region encompassing Europe, Middle East, India and Africa.

He states, "Tune Protect EMEIA strives to become a leading digital protection facilitator within the region offering unique value propositions to clients and business partners through its avant garde approach and robust use of digital technology.

With the help of our local partners, we are able to customise SMART travel protection plans to meet the needs of discerning travel-

“Tune Protect EMEIA strives to become a leading digital protection facilitator within the region offering unique value propositions to clients and business partners through its avant garde approach and robust use of digital technology”

lers in the region. Tune Protect EMEIA travel assurance products are available through a network of authorised travel business partners in the Middle East, India as well as other parts of the region."

Travelport

Before joining Tune Protect EMEIA, Munshi was part of the commercial team of Travelport for both Global Distribution Systems (GDS) i.e. Galileo and Worldspan, covering Middle East, Levant and Pakistan. From 2007 to 2014, his stint included managing GDS as well as online business.

Marriott International

Munshi also held major responsibilities during his tenure at Marriott International for a little over five years right before joining Travelport. His career started there with being responsible for Electronic Distribution (e-Commerce) & Travel Management Companies for the Middle East Africa & Sub-continent based in Dubai, UAE.

Experience at dnata

And before Marriott International, Munshi was working for almost one-and-a-half years at dnata, where Munshi's core responsibilities involved looking after the relationship with the regional

partners, giving them support in marketing, branding, product development, development of corporate segment related to global & regional corporate accounts, as well as support in the area of e-Commerce.

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines

Munshi's stint in the Middle East, started with KLM Royal Dutch Airlines a year later after he joined them in India in 1995. He moved to Kuwait a year & a half later and ultimately settled in Dubai, UAE. In his career at one of the most prestigious airlines in the world, Munshi gained valuable experience over the five years he was with KLM serving various Commercial, Revenue Management roles.

Taking into consideration the experience in the wide spectrum of travel, Munshi has been a silent achiever for the past 20 years in the region. 🇦🇪



Arijit Munshi
General Manager
Tune Protect EMEIA

Tantora festival of culture and heritage in KSA

The second Winter at Tantora Festival in AlUla in North West Saudi Arabia starting from December 2019 is a three-month celebration that will showcase the very best in international music, art and culture, connecting East and West as the AlUla county has done for thousands of years. It comes just months after Saudi Arabia introduced tourist visas for citizens from 49 countries making the

Kingdom more accessible than ever with the UNESCO World Heritage site at Hegra in AlUla among those featured in a global marketing campaign. The festival is part of the Cultural Manifesto that was launched by the festival organisers, the Royal Commission for AlUla, in Paris in October as part of a long-term strategy to transform and open the region as a global living museum and place of culture, heritage and the



arts. Winter at Tantora will cover 12 weekends from December 19 and host a wide range of events from the world-famous Dakar Rally; international ballooning festival; the

world's second longest endurance horse race; the world's first desert polo tournament and welcome pop-up restaurants from globally renowned restaurants.

The spectacular mirrored wall Maraya theatre with its 500-seat capacity and operatic sound quality will be home throughout the festival to some of the world's leading performers who range from Omar Khairat to Andrea Bocelli.

Amr AlMadani, CEO, Royal Commission for AlUla, says, "Festival visitors will be given a unique opportunity to visit and experience one of the world's undiscovered

places and its spectacular heritage sites before we reopen them to the world in October 2020. They will get a tantalising glimpse of a place that been at a cultural crossroads for thousands of years and the chance to see it from the serenity of a hot air balloon; the adrenaline of soaring over the desert and mountains in an open seater biplane or exploring hidden canyons in traditional vintage Land Rovers."

Emirates' global growth plan

Emirates is adapting quickly to ensure it is ahead of the curve via digital and mobile channel design and functionality. **Adil Al Ghaith**, Senior Vice President, Commercial Operations for Gulf, Middle East and Central Asia, Emirates, shares with **TRAVTALK** plans and strategies for the year 2020.

TT Bureau

Could you give us a brief about the plans for 2020?

In 2020, Emirates will strengthen our global network, and continue to work with our airline partners to connect our customers to even more cities around the world. On the product side, we expect to debut our premium economy cabins in November next year on the A380, along with a host of other product and service enhancements across the fleet. On the ground, we continue to pilot innovative initiatives including the use of biometric technology to provide more seamless

airport experiences for our passengers. As we inch closer to Expo 2020, Emirates will be ramping up activity through marketing activities and ensure they are well equipped to support Expo visitors travelling on Emirates.

Will there be any new routes? Which part of the world will the focus be on this year? Or is it in multiple areas?

As a global carrier, we are constantly analysing trends and demand patterns for travel across the world. We will make decisions about new routes based on demand and other operational consider-

ations, so watch this space for 2020.

The partnership between Emirates and fly-dubai has been growing over the years. What can we expect from this partnership in year 2020?

Our partnership with fly-dubai continues to generate immense value for both sides, and most importantly, our customers. In 2020, we will continue to ramp up our strategic partnership when it comes to schedule coordination and enhanced connectivity, competitive pricing, network planning and seamless journeys at DXB.

“In 2020, Emirates will strengthen its global network, and continue to work with the airline partners to connect our customers to even more cities around the world. Inching closer to Expo 2020, Emirates will be ramping up marketing activities and ensuring full support to visitors travelling on Emirates”

As the official carrier for Expo 2020 what initiatives is Emirates taking to promote the Expo?

Emirates is working very closely with the Expo 2020 team on commercial product support and marketing across the airline's network which includes special discounts on air tickets for participants, in addition to

specialised trade packages for industry partners and dedicated Dubai ground products, which are currently under development.

What other key areas will Emirates focus on in 2020?

Along with growing our connectivity and introducing new products and services for our custom-



Adil Al Ghaith
Senior Vice President, Commercial Operations for Gulf, Middle East and Central Asia, Emirates

ers, there will be an even bigger focus on use of technology and how we engage with potential customers and design the passenger experience around their evolving preferences.





Happy New Year

Let's travel not to escape life, but for life not to escape us.
Wishing you all a happy, healthy prosperous New Year

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Ras Al Khaimah to host FESPO & Vakantiebeurs

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority kicks off the new year by becoming the host destination for two main exhibitions, Vakantiebeurs in Netherlands and FESPO in Switzerland. Another exhibition, MATKA, is also on the cards. **Raki Phillips**, CEO of RAKTDA, speaks to **TRAVTALK**.



Could you share about your participation as host destination at Vakantiebeurs and FESPO?

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority will be exhibiting at Vakantiebeurs, the largest travel trade and consumer fair in Utrecht, Netherlands, for the third consecutive year. In addition to this, 2020 will see the fair celebrate its 50th anniversary, announcing Ras Al Khaimah as the host destination. The prestigious event will welcome the participation of several key stakeholders including Emirates airlines.

FESPO, the largest consumer fair in Switzerland, is celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2020 and Ras Al Khaimah has been appointed as the host destination. The Emirate will exhibit with several hotel partners, inclusive of the Department of Antiquities and Museums and Emirates airlines.

RAKTDA will also be exhibiting at MATKA, the largest travel trade and consumer fair in Nordic region, for the

third consecutive year. Our participation will include activations highlighting the diverse offerings of the Emirate, including a golf competition spanning the four days of the fair. Al Hamra Cluster Hotels and flydubai will be present as our partners.

It is a testament to be selected as the host destination for events of such a high caliber in their respective markets, as this not only positions Ras Al Khaimah well within the tourism industries in the relevant regions, but also underscores our efforts to further strengthening the destination as a regional MICE hub.

How important are these events for RAKTDA?

It is important for us to maintain a strong presence at such internationally recognised exhibitions, as we aim to highlight the varied offerings of the Emirate to an international audience. Hosting Vakantiebeurs 2020, is a significant opportunity to augment awareness, as the event brings together tourism authorities, travel agencies and cultural associations from around the world to introduce their travel destinations and tour-



Raki Phillips, CEO, RAKTDA

ism products to consumers and fellow trade partners. Taking on the role of the host, allows the Emirate to reinforce our messaging, from the scenic views of the diverse landscapes to the strong MICE portfolio currently possessed.

The events and their primary audience are a sound fit for Ras Al Khaimah, with its unique combination of authentic Arabian hospitality, pristine beaches and outdoor adventure pursuits, which appeal to holidaymakers from all over Europe. We have seen a significant growth in visitor numbers from Europe over the last couple of years, and therefore, the region

continues to be a key focus for our tourism promotion strategy, to attract 1.5 million visitors by 2021.

We are delighted to be the partner country of FESPO 2020 as this offers yet another opportunity to showcase all that Ras Al Khaimah has to offer key international industry leaders and delegates from the travel and hospitality sector. With over 7,000 years of fascinating history and magnificent landscapes, Ras Al Khaimah is the perfect getaway for leisure, business and adventure travelers, which guests to the fair will be able to experience firsthand.

RAKTDA has increased its focus on the Nordic mar-

kets, marked by its first appearance at the MATKA Travel Fair in Helsinki in January 2018. We further invested in the Nordic markets, through opening a RAKTDA representative office in Nordics in 2018, to welcome more visitors from the Nordic countries.

In which capacity will RAKTDA be participating?

RAKTDA will exhibit with our main hotels and destination activities. Toro Verde, Adventurati, Al Hamra Golf Club and Department of Antiquities and Museums are the main partners, alongside our hotels Rixos Bab Al Bahr, Al Hamra Cluster and Doubletree. Additionally, Emirates airlines and flydubai will also be exhibiting with us.

Will it be the first time to be participating as the host country?

This will be our first time to be the host destination at Vakantiebeurs and FESPO. This without doubt, will provide great visibility among all the visitors. The enhanced presence of Ras Al Khaimah at the fairs will be recognisable throughout the channels, offline and on-

line, before, during and after the fair.

Do share your key objective and expectations at each of these events

Ras Al Khaimah's objective is to maintain a strong presence in our main source markets and emerging ones. These exhibitions are one of the primary platforms driving increased awareness of Ras Al Khaimah amongst end consumers and develop further collaboration with our trade partners.

We look forward to enhancing our existing partnerships with suppliers and travel specialists across the markets, as well as to forging new relationships with operators within the tourism industry during their visits to Ras Al Khaimah for the fairs. We have so far been well aligned with efforts to reach our destination tourism goals, having witnessed a 5 per cent growth in overall visitor arrivals, with the peak reaching 117,995 visitors in August 2019, and look forward to maintaining the momentum supported by our participation in such events. 🇦🇪



Showcasing Turkey's modern art

A selection from the Istanbul Modern Collection can be seen at the Turkish Airlines lounge in the airline's brand new hub, Istanbul Airport. Turkish Airlines and Istanbul Modern have entered into a partnership to introduce Turkey's modern art to the world.

TT Bureau

Flying to over 311 destinations in 124 countries, Turkish Airlines has made its mark in its newest hub to ensure that travellers witness the great works of art from Turkey. As Turkey's first modern and contemporary art museum, a special selection from the Istanbul Modern will be displayed in Turkish Airlines Business Lounge at Istanbul Airport. Spanning 130 square metres, the exhibition titled "A Selection from the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art Collection", will bring significant examples that represent four main dispositions of



M. İker Ayçi
Chairman of the Board and the Executive Committee
Turkish Airlines

modern art of Turkey together. Made possible with the collaboration of Turkish Airlines and Istanbul Modern, collection selections will be renewed three times annually within the project.

From landscapes to abstract paintings

Within the exhibition there will be varied type of artworks ranging from the early 20th century landscape painting tradition to the abstract paintings of artists looking for a synthesis between eastern and western arts during 1950s. Housing the works that illustrate the daily life presence of figure painting, the exhibition will also display compositions that interpret cultural values of Anatolia with a new perspective. There will be artworks of Şeref Akdik, Hakkı Anlı, Fethi Arda, Feriuh Başağa, Hasan Vecih Bereketoğlu, Aliye Berger, Nurullah Berk, Adnan Çok-



er, Nejad Melih Devrim, Abidin Dino, Neş'e Erdok, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Hoca Ali Rıza, Hikmet Onat, Selim Turan and Fahrelnissa Zeid in the selection.

An exclusive cultural experience

M. İker Ayçi, Chairman of the Board and the Executive Committee, Turkish Airlines, stated the following on the exhibition, "As the national flag carrier airline

of Turkey, we continue our contributions to the national values of our country. Thanks to our collaboration with Istanbul Modern, we enable our passengers who depart from Istanbul Airport to see the impressive works of Turkish modern art in our lounge, and turn their waiting time before their flights into an exclusive cultural experience. Adding an artful touch to our exceptional travel experience, we will

circulate the artworks of the exhibition during the year in order to show our passengers the different examples of Turkish modern art before their flights."

Oya Eczacıbaşı, Chair of the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, highlighted the importance of Turkish Airlines' passenger lounge as a display of Turkey since it will host passengers from all corners of the world. He said, "With our collaboration with Turkish Airlines, we are happy to introduce modern arts of Turkey to the local and foreign tourists waiting for their flights in the Turkish Airlines Business Lounge at Istanbul Airport."

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People
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Know how
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Expedia's human touch in AI

Expedia Group has invested in technology to make things seamless. From AI-powered Partner Central Chatbot, to an algorithm in place to inform partners of revenue opportunities, **Scott Crawford**, VP-Product and Technology, Brand Expedia, says while AI and ML help in reducing friction, they need humans to understand the problem.

 Peden Doma Bhutia from Las Vegas

In the recently-released Online Travel Friction Index report Expedia Group brands consistently ranked higher in all five areas than other OTAs or branded chain sites that were included in the research. In 2018, Expedia spent 1.6 billion on technology, with this result do you feel the investment has paid off?

As the customer goes through a journey it's a

continuous conversation that we have with them from helping them find the perfect stay and the perfect trip to supporting them when they are actually going on the trip and making it as easy and as possible for them to contact us when they need to, and then making that available to our partners who can make the best experiences available to our customers. So, what we have seen over the last year or so is that some of the things that we have invested in, have seen really good reactions and some of the areas that we have invested in are virtual agent platform and that enables customers to be able to text us if they have a question as opposed to picking up the phone and calling us. What we have seen there is that customers who

interact with us over a virtual agent or human agent through text have a twice as high NPS (net promoter score through which we measure customer happiness) as opposed to customers who call us. So, we really want to invest in making as easy and as possible for our customers to spend their time in enjoying their holidays and then also investing in making as easy and as possible for our partners to provide great experiences for their guests.

Beyond 'traveller friction', the group has also been working to reduce 'partner friction'. Do tell us more about how you are working to reduce partner friction.

One of the ways we manage this is through our real-time feedback. When we met partners and we shared with them our feedback from customers, one constant remark was: 'I wish I knew this at that time, then I could have done something.' So, our real-time feedback tool enables that communication between customers and partners. When a customer checks in they get an instant message asking about their check-in experience and in that moment partners can react immediately to a feedback. Another way is helping partners manage their day-to-day business, so we invested a lot in machine learning to share predictive trends on demand. On our platform we have 1.4 million properties, over 500 airlines and 750 million customers coming to our site every single month, so we have an amazing richness of data and we can use that data to help our partners manage

our business and help them realise what might be happening in terms of demand over the next few months. We also have Rev+ tool, which helps them to understand what might have happened to prices in the market where they are and predict what may happen to prices in the future. What's really important for both our partners and customers is that we want to make it as easy as possible for people to be able to engage, so we invest a lot. We have user labs in Singapore, London and Seattle, where we can get real-time feedback from partners and customers

helps activity providers get more reach. It also helps customers to discover things that they wouldn't have otherwise.

John Kim in his address at the Expedia Summit said, 'AI will drive the platform, humans will power the travel experiences.' How can we get this done without compromising on job loss?

For me, everything starts with humans, when we think about AI and technology, we see some amazing trends in the place that we work in and

will be some problems that need a human touch. So, at Expedia we are using technology and humans depending on what the situation demands.

The deployment of technology may seem daunting for independent hoteliers. But travel firms like Expedia can bridge the technology gap. How are you doing that?

We recently invested in building up a portfolio for owners who may have a couple of hotels and they might want to compare to see how those hotels are performing. We've invested very heavily in understanding what's working for them, how we can help them understand customers' feedback, what customers want, and help build technology to build that bridge. The hotels that have been engaging with Rev+ have seen a 20 per cent increase in their returns. You'll always need that human element, providing that data would help them make more informed choices.

Data breaches expose the personal information of millions of people as well as information on payment cards. Data from session replays may not be sufficiently masked to protect sensitive data. How does Expedia meet this standard?

Data security is a huge area of focus for us, data's very important. We've talked about a lot of experiences and data's crucial for that experience, but it's something that we've invested heavily in to secure our customers' data. 

“We want to invest in making as easy for our customers to spend their time in enjoying their holidays and then also investing in making as possible for our partners to provide great experiences for their guests”

to make sure that the experience we are building for them is as easy as possible to use.

At tours and activities the information is so fragmented and complex and decisions are made at the last minute, how can AI and machine learning help?

People travel for experiences, the things that take you out of your comfort zone. We want to make that as easy for our customers to find those experiences and also for activity providers to be able to show that, so what we have seen over the last few years is a huge rise in people using our app and engaging in it. AI can help make predictions and recommend activities, so those are the areas that we are investing in and that

everywhere around us. But everything starts with really understanding the human need and the problem that you are trying to solve, empathy is essential. For us, at the Expedia group everything starts there, understanding the problem that we are trying to solve. The user labs are examples that we have, we have sophisticated tools that help us better understand customer needs, when they are on the website we can track where they are looking at and the things that catch their attention, it gives us a more rounded view of the problems that we are trying to solve, but we need humans to understand that. So, I think both play a really important part in the ecosystem. We did talk about a virtual agent but there



Scott Crawford
VP-Product and Technology
vBrand Expedia

Pegasus' flight from Istanbul to RAK

A new commercial route operated by Pegasus was launched recently between Istanbul and Ras Al Khaimah. Turkey is one of the leading outbound destinations for the UAE and this new route option will further enhance the traffic between the two cities and beyond.

TT Bureau

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA) welcomed the inaugural flight operated by Pegasus from Istanbul to Ras Al Khaimah recently. H.E. Engr. Sheikh Salem bin Sultan bin Saqr Al Qasimi, Member of the Government of Ras Al Khaimah Executive Council, shared, "We are proud to announce the new route between Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen International Airport and Ras Al Khaimah International Airport. Ras Al Khaimah is a key player in the local aviation market, and this is just one of the many developments we have planned for



the airport in the coming months and years."

Ras Al Khaimah International Airport has seen an increase in the number of inbound tourists to the emirate from key international markets over the past 18 months. The emirate of

Ras Al Khaimah has also witnessed a five per cent growth in overall visitor arrivals from January to October this year, with a peak of 117,995 visitors in August 2019. Raki Phillips, Chief Executive Officer of Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority, com-

mented, "The route from Istanbul to Ras Al Khaimah opens up our beautiful emirate to key markets in Turkey and beyond. The new route is just in time for one of our busiest seasons, as the weather cools down, tourists are able to take full advantage of Ras Al

Khaimah's many great outdoor assets, inclusive of the beaches and mountains."

Sanjay Khanna, Chief Executive Officer of Ras Al Khaimah International Airport, added, "The new route from Istanbul to Ras Al Khaimah is a fantastic

achievement for our airport and I cannot wait to see the many new travellers who will pass through our airport. We have world-class facilities, allowing tourists to travel with convenience. Our partnership with Pegasus will further connect Ras Al Khaimah with 26 European destinations including the UK, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, the Nordics and Russia via Istanbul."

FactFile

■ Ras Al Khaimah has witnessed a five per cent growth in overall visitor arrivals from January to October this year, with a peak of 117,995 visitors in August 2019

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The Bicester Village Shopping

In order to create trade awareness of The Bicester Village Shopping Collection, shopping villages in the nine European cities as well as places to stay and things to do, a special roadshow will be held across the GCC from February 11-13, 2020. Some of the partners share their plans and provide insights into what they expect from the upcoming event.



Karim Mekachera
Regional Director Middle
East and Turkey, Atout France

“ France offers its tourists a unique experience of discovering the world in a country. A multifaceted destination, France invites its travellers to begin their journey at iconic monuments in Paris and continue their voyage to the amazing ski resorts of French Alps passing by the beautiful French Riviera without forgetting typical villages of Alsace or the famous coast of Normandy and so much more to discover. Atout France, the France Tourism Development Agency, contributes to strengthening the appeal of France as a destination and the competitiveness of its companies, sectors and destinations through various promotional actions. ”



Patrick Allais
Business Development
Manager, La Vallée Village

“ Just 40 minutes from Paris on the road to the Champagne region, La Vallée Village is a key shopping destination for Middle Eastern tourists. The GCC Roadshow allows the Village to showcase its more than 110 boutiques from leading brands and develop relationships with this growing market. ”

SHOPPING
Destinations

“ Easily accessible from Brussels and Antwerp, both just an hour away, Maasmechelen Village should top the itinerary of discerning Middle Eastern tourists. The GCC Roadshow, therefore, provides an invaluable opportunity to highlight the Village as a must-visit destination – and to put Belgium on the map for this important market. ”



Jeroen van der Velde
Corporate Sales and
Tourism Director,
Maasmechelen Village

“ From the moment you arrive in Lanaken, the alluring combination of nature and wellness casts its spell over you. Surrounded by verdant woodlands, yet close to vibrant centres of cosmopolitan life, the Domaine La Butte aux Bois is a sanctuary of total luxury. Every room at Domaine La Butte aux Bois exudes elegance, luxury and utter sophistication. Dinner is served at the two Michelin-starred gourmet temple, Restaurant La Source. ”



Veerle Boonen
Sales Manager,
Domaine La Butte aux Bois
(Brussels)



Stefano Rizza
Business Development
Manager, Fidenza Village

“ The GCC Roadshow allows us to showcase Fidenza Village, with its more than 120 boutiques and beautiful location in the midst of Verdi country, to this key market. It also allows us to gather valuable insights so that we can better cater to the needs of the Middle Eastern guest. ”



Riccardo Santi
Director of Sales
Grand Hotel Et De Milan

“ This original 'Milanese mansion' is located right in front of 'via Montenapoleone', a few steps away from the most luxurious fashion and design brands. Our guests from the Middle East will experience an authentic and discreet Italian jewel far from stereotyped international 5-star hotels. Special attention is paid to individual needs. One can enjoy impeccable culinary experiences through our two restaurants – Caruso and Don Carlos. Gerri's bar is the perfect location for a sumptuous Club Sandwich before a supreme shopping experience. ”

“ A member of Preferred Hotels & Resorts Legends Collection and Ireland's first AA Five Red Star property, The K Club boasts 134-bedrooms, a grand Irish country retreat, set amid 550-acres of pristine parkland on a mile-long private stretch of the river Liffey. Located only 30 minutes from Dublin Airport and City Centre, The K Club is an elegantly restored 19th century Georgian mansion estate, set on the former site of Straffan House. Converted into a luxury hotel and country club in 1991, the opening of The K Club was a landmark moment in the Irish hospitality industry, creating new standards of Irish décor and service that have not been surpassed. The K Club resort offers guests a selection of facilities including two Arnold Palmer designed championship golf courses, a resort spa, several restaurants and bars and a host of country estate activities including falconry, fly fishing, kayaking, horse riding, archery, tennis and much more. ”



Johnathan McDonagh
Sales Manager
The Kildare Hotel, Spa and
Country Club

“ The GCC is a very important tourism source market for VisitBritain. It is second globally for inbound tourism spend in the UK with visitors spending an average of almost £2000 per visit, more than three times the all-market average. Visitors from the GCC also stay longer in the UK, an average of 13 nights compared to an all-market average of seven. We know that GCC visitors enjoy Britain's cooler climate as well as its world-class shopping and dining experiences. We look forward to taking part in the 'The Bicester Village Shopping Collection Roadshow' to showcase new and unexpected experiences to our GCC visitors, inspiring them to discover more and travel further, supporting our drive to boost tourism right across Britain and across more of the year. ”



Sofia Santos
Country Manager GCC
Visit Britain

Collection Roadshow in GCC



Siobhan Naughton
Marketing & Trade Executive
Middle East & Asia
Tourism Ireland

“Through our participation in The Bicester Village Shopping Collection Roadshow, Tourism Ireland hopes to further increase awareness of the island of Ireland as the perfect travel destination for GCC visitors. Tourism Ireland estimates that approximately 71,000 Middle East travellers visited the island of Ireland in 2018. A key factor influencing the growth of visitor numbers from the GCC to Ireland in recent years is the significant advances that have been made on access through daily flights from across the region. In January 2018, the Irish Government lifted visa requirements for citizens of the UAE travelling to Ireland – this was a historic step for Ireland-Emirati relations and a great boost to help grow tourism from this important emerging market.”

“Located in the heart of the picturesque Oxfordshire countryside, Bicester Village is home to more than 160 boutiques. Providing opportunities to build relationships with key partners across Kuwait, UAE and Qatar, the GCC Roadshow supports the Village in achieving its target of attracting more Middle Eastern visitors.”



Clive Doble
Tourism Director
Bicester Village



Julio Montes
Director of Sales and
Marketing &
VP, Plaza Espana Design
Hotel (Madrid)

“The goal of the VP Group was to design a 5-star hotel that becomes an icon of design, art and architecture in Madrid. The philosophy ‘Design’ has art as its main protagonist and allows VP Hotels, to differ from other companies, to develop its own concept of accommodation, accompanied by commitment to sustainability, incorporating good practices in the categories of location, water, energy, materials, indoor environmental quality and innovation.”

“The recently renovated NH Collection Gran Calderon in Barcelona is the perfect spot to stay in the city because of its walking distance to many key tourist sights. Take a stroll around Barcelona or simply enjoy the views of the city basking in the sun at the rooftop pool or with a drink at Bar Eleven BCN by World Class located on the eleventh floor.”



Dennis Thievensen
Director of Business
Development – International
Markets, NH Hotel Group &
NH Collection Barcelona Gran
Hotel Calderon



Alison Johnston
Head of Tourism
Kildare Village

“An hour from Dublin in the heart of racing country, Kildare Village is home to 100 boutiques with up to 60 per cent off the recommended retail price. Establishing face-to-face relationships with our travel partners at the GCC Roadshow allows us to give Middle Eastern guests the best shopping experience possible.”

“The Spanish Tourism Board (Turespaña) in Abu Dhabi, the governmental body responsible for the promotion of Spain as a tourism destination in the Gulf region, is happy to partner with The Bicester Village Shopping Collection to increase awareness and position Spain as a luxury shopping destination. With dedicated shopping zones like Madrid’s Serrano district, the Paseo de Gracia boulevard in Barcelona and Puerto Banus in Marbella or the shopping villages of La Roca and Las Rozas offering international brands to Spanish designer labels like LOEWE or Manolo Blahnik, combined with the advantage of claiming VAT refunds with no minimum limit, Spain is a true shopper’s paradise.”



Daniel Rosado Bayon
Spanish Tourism
Counsellor, Turespaña,
Abu Dhabi

GCC Roadshow Dates and Timings

11 th February, 2020	Kuwait JW Marriott	10 am – 3 pm
12 th February, 2020	Fairmont Dubai Sheikh Zayed Rd	10 am – 3 pm
13 th February, 2020	Sofitel Corniche Abu Dhabi	10 am – 3 pm



Andreas Laepple
Assistant Destination
Marketing Manager,
Wertheim Village &
Ingolstadt Village

MUNICH

“The GCC Roadshow is key to strengthening our relationships with our travel partners, highlighting Ingolstadt Village, in the heart of the beautiful Bavarian countryside, to prospective Middle Eastern guests. The Village offers these guests unprecedented levels of service and, with more than 110 boutiques, an extraordinary luxury shopping experience.”

FRANKFURT

“Positioning Germany top of mind for Middle Eastern travellers will be a key outcome of GCC Roadshow, where we will be able to foster deeper connections with our travel partners. This is vital for promoting Wertheim Village, which is located just 50 minutes from Frankfurt in the picturesque Tauber valley.”



Monica Cecconi
Deputy Tourism Director LRV
Value Retail Management
Spain S.L.U

MADRID

“Understanding and better engaging with the Middle Eastern market is among the many benefits of the GCC Roadshow. It also provides the perfect opportunity to introduce these guests to the stylish Las Rozas Village, with its more than 100 boutiques and savings of up to 60 per cent off the recommended retail price.”

BARCELONA

“The collaboration of tourism boards, travel partners and travel-trade media represented by the GCC Roadshow provides an outstanding opportunity to promote La Roca Village in the idyllic Mediterranean, just 40 minutes from Barcelona. This 360 approach ensures we deliver relevant content at the right moment via the most appropriate channel.”

Stellar's unique kaleidoscope

Winners of the title of the fastest growing Destination Management Company at the Arabian Travel Awards, Stellar Destination Tourism caters to all types of clientele. **Atica Rehman Shamsi**, Co-Founder and Managing Director of Stellar Destination Tourism shares insights with **TRAVTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

What was the reason to start a DMC?

Our main aim was to bring together expertise, knowledge, professionalism, creative ideas and offer high-quality services. Our goal remains to present a unique kaleidoscope of magical places, people, experiences, celebrations and holidays.

Could you share a brief about the company?

Stellar Destination Tourism LLC is an UAE-based DMC registered under Dubai Tourism & Commerce Marketing (DTCM). As a full-fledged inbound tour opera-



Atica Rehman Shamsi
Co-Founder and Managing Director
Stellar Destination Tourism

tor, we provide services to incoming passengers visiting UAE. Primarily based in India by appellation, Stellar Destination Management Services functions on a B2B module assisting agents and tour operators, we pro-

What are the key areas you are currently focusing on?

Our service portfolio encompasses Leisure FIT, Leisure Groups, MICE, Special Interest Groups & the complete spectrum of services across the DMC

value chain. The company is equipped to serve individuals, incentive groups, and organise events.

Do you focus more on outbound or inbound?

As of now we are well known for providing reliable & quality service for inbound tourism. Equipped to handle both individual leisure travellers & groups in Dubai & other emirates

of UAE, we work with our clients to offer some of the sought-after services in our operations. Very soon we will be establishing an outbound division for our clients in Dubai to avail our worldwide packages at competitive prices, with flawless service.

What would you say the key forte or USP of your company is?

What makes us different is that we are continuously learning about the target market and taking feedback to check what our clients did and did not like to exactly know where we are and what can be done better.

What are your key plans for 2020?

In the year 2020 we see ourselves becoming the world's most trusted and innovative DMC. We aim to maintain our vision of high-class travel services at reasonable prices. Also, we will be participating in roadshows in collaboration with DTCM.

Will the company play a key role at Dubai Expo 2020?

Our Dubai Expo 2020 packages include well-planned activities. Our Itineraries will be designed in such a way that every minute will be utilised to enjoy Dubai Expo as well as the wide array of attractions for which Dubai is famous. 🇦🇪

“ Our service portfolio encompasses Leisure FIT, Leisure Groups, MICE, Special Interest Groups & the complete spectrum of services across the DMC value chain. We are equipped to serve individuals, incentive groups, and organise events ”

Over 87,000 visitors at Dubai Airshow 2019

Dubai Airshow 2019 was officially opened by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai, and His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of UAE Armed Forces. Also in attendance was Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai. The show welcomed 1,288 exhibitors and more than 87,000 trade visitors.



Cover for adventure travellers

There cannot be a better piece of news for adventure lovers than this programme – Tune Protect, Travel Adventure Assurance. Ditto for the families and loved ones of this adventurous tribe. **Toshita Chauhan**, Business Head – Holidays, Holidayme, shares how the policy will benefit adventure travellers.



Toshita Chauhan
Business Head – Holidays
Holidayme

What does Tune Protect, Travel Adventure Assurance cover?

Tune Protect, Travel Adventure Assurance offers a range of inclusions with a substantial cover

of up to USD 200,000. It covers accidental and sickness medical reimbursement, follow-up treatment in home country, inconvenience expenses, emergency medical evacuation, repatriation of mortal remains, loss/theft/damage to own equipment/hired equipment and many more benefits.

What is special about this cover that a standard travel protection plan does not cover?

A standard travel protection plan is meant for travellers on leisure or

“Tune Protect, Travel Adventure Assurance covers ‘adventure travel’ or travellers engaging in non-professional sports when on the move, such as bungee jumping, skiing, paragliding, mountain climbing, white water rafting and many others. It protects the traveller against the risks that are associated with adventure activities and sports”

business travel and does not cover any adventure activity. Tune Protect, Travel Adventure Assurance covers ‘adventure travel’ or travellers engaging in non-professional sports when on the move, such as bungee jumping, skiing, paragliding, mountain climbing, white water rafting and many others.

It protects the traveller against the risks that are associated with adventure activities and sports.

Tune Protect, Travel Adventure Assurance is meant for whom?

Tune Protect, Travel Adventure Assurance is meant for adventure travellers, who travel to different places

in the world for adventure sports and activities. Be it skiing on the Alps or bungee jumping in Georgia or white-water river rafting in Sri Lanka. Adventure travellers is a growing segment; these are regular holiday makers who choose adventure holidays or adventure sports activities for a holiday. It becomes important to note that the Tune Protect, Travel Adventure Assurance does not cover professionals’ sports or paid or sponsored activities.

Should travellers be made aware of such a specific travel protection plan?

Travellers should be made aware of such a travel protection programme since it will give peace of mind to adventure lovers, travelling to various destinations against a range of possible untoward happenings, we recommend them to choose Tune Protect, Travel Adventure Assurance. Adventure travellers and adventure sport lovers live on the edge, Tune Protect has its finger on the pulse of the adventure traveller segment and its Travel Adventure programme is well designed to take care of this segment’s needs.

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A look at airports of the future

SITA has unveiled predictions about how technology will shape the way in which passengers will move through the airports of the future based on unique insights, driving industry forces and emerging technologies over the next decade. Here are a few trends to look forward to...

 TT Bureau

The airport experience has morphed dramatically in the past 10 years with the introduction of technology. Benoit Verbaere, Business Development Director, SITA, says, "Passenger numbers are set to double in the next 20 years, according to IATA. And passengers, quite rightly, want a smooth and easy journey through the airport. The future of airports lies in connected, highly intelligent and efficient operations that offer passengers pain-free and frictionless travel and rich, personalised experiences."

The following trends will be visible in airports of the future:

Security will be integrated into a frictionless journey

Over the next decade, going through security will mean walking along a corridor. Passengers and their bags will be recognised automatically as they go through automated checkpoints.

Passengers will be in control of their digital identity

The adoption of digital self-sovereign identity and persistent travel tokens will put passengers back in control of what aspects of their identity should be revealed,

for what purpose, as they travel. In future airports, risk will be constantly assessed by Artificial Intelligence (AI) specialists, using the passenger's digital identity.

Travel steps will be decentralised

Everything will have tags – people, bags and cargo. And they will be tracked throughout their entire journey, whatever mode of transport they are using. This will mean travel authorisation and customs checks can be made in advance of the flight, saving time.

The airport will be highly connected


Our new era of connected

airports will be driven by increasingly cheap sensors, less dedicated hardware and new data lakes, fed by every device over 5G. High-speed mobile connectivity at the airport will be central to mission-critical performance. Airports will increasingly run just-in-time operations, with automation and self-service making everything more efficient.

The airport will adapt to passengers' needs

Personalisation will be the key, providing passengers with what they

want, when they need it at any point throughout their journey from start to finish, not just at the airport. Innovations such as air taxis will be emerging by 2030 to provide much more efficient transport to and from the airport.

ports will need to be digital natives themselves. This technologically literate environment will result in airport complexity being sliced into a set of data services that can be shared as application programming interfaces (APIs). 

There will be an API for everything

Since tomorrow's travellers will be digital natives, people running air-





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Travelport unveils trends for 2020

Travelport has unveiled 2020 trends which will shape travel experiences over the next decade. These trends were derived through independent research with thousands of global travellers, hundreds of travel professionals and interviews with leaders of some of the world's biggest travel brands.

TT Bureau

Travelport has come up with the following insights into major forces that will become technology enablers of travel in the next decade.

Customers in control

Several trends highlight that customers are moving towards self-service options,

“Insights into the forces which will shape travel experiences as we start a new decade show we're seeing rapid change in content retailing, particularly online, and an evolution of mobile travel as we all increasingly depend on our devices to help us navigate the world”

with 55 per cent of those surveyed preferring to hear about travel disruption via digital communications rather than speak with a person over the phone. This is especially important when it comes to Gen Z, the future business traveller, and managing their

high expectations through technology.

Mobile takeover

'Super apps' are spreading West from their established base in Southeast Asia. Super app tech giants such as WeChat, Grab and Go-Jek give their users a one-stop shop to communicate, shop online, book travel,

bank, find a date, get food delivery, and pay for anything with a single, unified smartphone app. Travel brands that want to deliver holistic mobile customer experiences need to think about how they engage travellers within these super apps as well as on their own mobile channels.

Retail accelerated

Research shows that in the next year we will see an accelerated rate of change in the way travel is retailed and purchased online. This includes wider and more complex multi-content reach, more enriched and comparable offerings, more focus on relevance than



Fiona Shanley
Chief Customer and Marketing Officer
Travelport

magnitude, and increase in automation that enables customer self-service.

Commenting on the trends, Fiona Shanley, Chief Customer and Marketing Officer at Travelport, said, "These

insights into the forces which will shape travel experiences as we start a new decade show we're seeing rapid change in content retailing, particularly online, and an evolution of mobile travel as we all increasingly depend on our devices to help us navigate the world. It's clear that customers are driving change across the travel industry with new topics, such as, the environmental impact of travel, and when an agency could successfully employ a 'bot'. Our role is to help our customers be ahead of these trends to make the experience of buying and managing travel continually better, for everyone."



Best-in-class services

Shahab Al Awadhi, Head of Marhaba Global, shares insights on how Marhaba is going all out to deliver a seamless travel experience.

TT Bureau

Do give us a brief about the current Marhaba lounge facilities

Marhaba is a premium passenger services provider launched at Dubai International Airport in 1991. We offer meet & greet services in the UAE, and operate airport lounges in four countries, UAE, Singapore, Pakistan, and Australia. In all Marhaba lounges, we deliver best-in-class services for both business and leisure travellers.

What are the airports that are currently being served by Marhaba lounge?

We currently operate five Marhaba departure airport lounges at Dubai Interna-



Shahab Al Awadhi
Head
Marhaba Global

tional and one each at Dubai World Central, Singapore Changi Airport, Jinnah International Airport (Karachi, Pakistan) and Melbourne Airport (Australia).

Are there any expansion plans for 2020?

In 2020 we will significantly expand the global capac-

ity of our airport lounges by expanding one of our flagship lounges in Dubai, and opening an additional facility in Geneva (Switzerland). We will also refurbish and rebrand existing dnata lounges at the airports of Geneva, Zurich (Switzerland) and Singapore.

What has changed in terms of customer expectations?

As consumer expectations rise, transitional customer touch-points such as airport lounges are increasingly important and contribute to shaping a positive and pleasant travel experience. Previously, lounge access was a premium privilege reserved for those flying first and business class, but this is no longer the case.

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THE HEART OF ASIA

Colours of Taiwan

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For more information about Colours of Taiwan: <http://bit.ly/ColoursOfTaiwan>

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www.facebook.com/ttbmiddleeast
Email: farisj@vtsglobal.com




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

SHARJAH

Authentic Arabian experiences in the emirate

Sharjah has been busy carving a name for itself on the global tourism stage. Judging by its rising popularity among foreign tourists, its efforts have been paying off. The emirate is all geared up to showcase to the world what it has to offer.

 TT Bureau

Sharjah is a fast-rising star in the GCC region's tourism sector, attracting travellers from afar who are looking to experience its diverse offerings that promise to inspire and awe. Every experience you have in the emirate will leave you yearning for more.

As part of the Sharjah Government's economic diversification policy, it has been reinforcing the tourism industry, one of the key pillars of its sustainable development. Since then, local tourism has grown by leaps and bounds. Its mesmerising beauty and warm and friendly people are

by far its strongest suits. Sharjah's nature and hospitable citizens and residents always leave its visitors breathless and wanting for more.

Banking on Sharjah's cultural heritage, tourism campaigns have also revolved around the city's rich history and traditions – highlighting its timeless souqs, or marketplace; its many museums that house priceless and rare artifacts; heritage buildings and the streets in the Heart of Sharjah that bring you back to the past; unique archaeology and ancient sites situated deep in the desert; beautiful mosques, and so much more.

Recognised by UNESCO as the Cultural Capital of the UAE in 1998, Sharjah is well-known for its efforts to preserve the history and heritage of the land. From ancient archaeological sites that are thousands of years old, to cutting-edge contemporary art exhibitions; Sharjah not only champions authentic Arabian life, it also works hard to integrate it into its modern landscape. The many heritage sites, museums, art galleries, and preserved traditions; collectively make this emirate a treasure trove for the history lover. Sharjah offers some enriching experiences just waiting to be discovered.



“The emirate of Sharjah comprises incredibly diverse terrains, making it a dream destination for the adventure lover. So, if you are a fan of high octane, adrenaline-fuelled thrills, Sharjah is where you should head to for your next vacation”



The emirate of Sharjah comprises incredibly diverse terrains, making it a dream destination for the adventure lover. So, if you are a fan of



high octane, adrenaline-fuelled thrills, Sharjah is where you should head to for your next vacation. Here you can spend your days paddling the calm coastal waters amid lush mangrove forests; or diving to the depths, swimming with some incredible marine life. On land, you can hike past historic forts on rugged mountain trails, go birdwatching at one of many nature reserves, or get your adrenaline pumping as you slide down a towering sand dune.

In 2018, more than 578,000 European visitors travelled to Sharjah, up 24 per cent from the previous year. To accommodate the influx

of tourists, top-notch hotels, including international brands, have been built in the area, offering facilities and services that are second to none. To date, 10,883 hotel rooms are available in Sharjah. Moreover, a total of 18 hotels and 16 hotel apartments are expected to be finished over the next five years, which will add 5,679 rooms to the current number. 🇦🇪



Tourism volumes surge over 12 mn

In recent reports India, KSA and the UK maintain their status as Dubai's dominant traffic generators with Oman and China continuing their impressive double-digit trajectory, propelling GCC and Asian region visitation. Dubai welcomed 12.08 million international overnight visitors in the first nine months of 2019.

TT Bureau

The latest visitation figures released by Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Dubai Tourism)



states a surge in arrivals over the summer months accelerated Dubai's tourism momentum, as the city welcomed 12.08 million international overnight visitors in the first nine months of 2019. The strong 4.3 per

cent increase in volume growth compared to the same period last year was supported by highly participatory contributions from both traditional and emerging markets. The positive

performance, which drew over 1.23 million visitors to the city in September, an above market average increase of 7.3 per cent over the same month in 2018, coincided with Dubai being ranked the fourth most vis-

ited city in the world for the fifth year in a row in Mastercard's Global Destination Cities Index 2019.

Dubai Tourism's multi-dimensional market-specific strategies, and customised campaigns continued to yield tangible results particularly showcasing the city's ability to reinvent itself and remain 'top-of-mind' to both new and repeat audiences across regular strongholds – India, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom and Oman. Together with China that remained the world's largest tourism volume driver, these five leading feeder countries surpassed the 5 million threshold for the first nine months of 2019.

India retained its position as Dubai's leading source market, with over 1.39 million visitors during the first nine months of 2019, reaffirming the effectiveness of various innovative promotional activities launched by Dubai Tourism. There was an increase in travel share of Indian families with children by a substantial 13 percentage points from 32 to 45 per cent during the nine-month period in 2019 over the same period last year. Solidifying its position as the highest traffic volume generator for the GCC, Saudi Arabia registered a two per cent year-on-year growth for over 1.25 million visitors.

UK remained Dubai's third largest source mar-



His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri
Director General, Dubai Tourism

ket with 851,000 visitors. Dubai retained high demand from families with children, one of the focus segments of the tourism strategy in the UK, accounting for 25 per cent of the share during the first nine months of 2019, up by five percentage points compared to the same period in 2018.

His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General, Dubai Tourism, said, "The ongoing consolidation in traditional strongholds and a concerted outreach in tapping the vast potential in emerging markets, yielded further dividends especially at a regional-level across Europe and GCC, in addition to the very encouraging performances from our Asian and African markets. As we head into 2020, our efforts will remain focused on attracting new, first-time and repeat visitors from emerging, as well as established markets, to ensure that Dubai stays at the forefront of the world's widely recommended travel destinations."

Four decades of UAE-Sri Lanka diplomacy

Commemorating the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and the UAE, the Consulate General of Sri Lanka in Dubai & Northern Emirates, hosted 'Sri Lanka Tourism Promotional Evening and Cultural Night' at the most sought-after location in Dubai – Armani Hotel housed in Burj Khalifa.



SCTDA's classification for hotels

Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) announced its new standards for classification of hotel establishments in the emirate. The standards were announced following a workshop organised by SCTDA for representatives of hotels and other hospitality establishments in Sharjah.



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► Sri Lankan Airlines

Colombo

Ashok Pathirage has been appointed as Chairman of SriLankan Airlines Group by its principle shareholder, the Government of Sri Lanka. Pathirage is a leading businessman and founder of Softlogic Holdings PLC, of which he is the Chairman and Managing Director. He is also Chairman and Managing Director of a number of reputed companies including Asiri Hospital Holdings PLC, Softlogic Capital PLC, Softlogic Life Insurance PLC and Odel PLC, all of which are public companies listed on the Colombo Stock Exchange. He is also Chairman of NDB Capital Holdings and Deputy Chairman of National Development Bank PLC.



► Le Méridien Al Aqah Beach Resort

Fujairah

Nouman Irshad has been appointed as General Manager at Le Méridien Al Aqah Beach Resort, Fujairah. He has over 10 years of experience in the hospitality industry. His well-rounded experience of leading hotel teams, social initiatives as well as an inherent understanding of a multicultural environment will help Nouman bring out the best in his associates whilst exploring new revenue opportunities for Fujairah's favourite beach-side luxury resort. Owing to his unique combination of sales and extensive operations backgrounds, he will be a vital asset contributing to the success of Le Méridien Al Aqah.



► Ritz Carlton

Abu Dhabi

The Ritz-Carlton Abu Dhabi, Grand Canal has appointed **Christian Hoehn** as General Manager effective December 2019. Joining the luxury property from the W Paris where he served as General Manager since February 2018, Hoehn has been appointed to lead the team of exceptional 'Ladies and Gentlemen' as they deliver unparalleled service to their guests. Hoehn joins The Ritz-Carlton Abu Dhabi, Grand Canal with over 23 years of experience in the hospitality industry. At his most recent position as General Manager for the W Paris, he led the team to great success, significantly increasing the hotel's revenue and occupancy rates in less than two years.



► Radisson Blu Hotel Apartments, Dubai Silicon Oasis

Dubai

Radisson Hotel Group has appointed **Aldert van Zyl** as General Manager of Radisson Blu Hotel Apartments, Dubai Silicon Oasis effective 24 November 2020. The South African national joined the Radisson Hotel Group in 2014, as Director of Food & Beverage. Throughout his career, he has held numerous positions within the company. Zyl makes 'every moment matter' to guests by empowering his team to put their own 'fingerprint' on service and creating unique personalised experiences. His service philosophy is to get to know your guests and let them get to know you as this will make them feel at home every time they visit your hotel.



► TRYP by Wyndham

Dubai

TRYP by Wyndham Dubai has appointed **George Farouk** as Operations Manager. In his new role, Farouk will oversee operations across all departments throughout the hotel including its 650 rooms, three food and beverage outlets and NEST, one of the region's first full service co-working space within an international hotel brand. Farouk joins TRYP by Wyndham Dubai from Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort where he worked as the Director of Rooms Division for over three years. With more than 20 years' experience in the Middle East, Farouk has worked for Anantara, Four Seasons, Ritz-Carlton, and InterContinental Hotel Group.



► Movenpick Hotel Apartments Downtown

Dubai

Youssef Hebbo has been appointed Director of Sales & Marketing at the Movenpick Hotel Apartments Downtown. Hebbo brings with him a wealth of experience in hotel sales counting 13 years of international sales and marketing experience. He is known for his reputation in customer service excellence, client satisfaction and proven sales strategies in increasing overall hotel performance. Hebbo has been with Accor for many years and has handled both corporate and leisure sales predominantly in Fairmont Hotels and Resorts across the emirates. Hebbo aims to amplify Movenpick Hotel Apartments Downtown Dubai's key message which is the 'home away from home' experience across all segments.



► St. Regis

Abu Dhabi

The St. Regis Abu Dhabi announced the appointment of **Maria Tsiomou** as Director of Marketing in the best address of the capital city. Tsiomou is a passionate marketer, professional and true brand ambassador bringing with her an extensive knowledge around luxury brands, hospitality, operations and guest experiences. In her new role, Tsiomou will oversee the brand, marketing and communication strategy of The St. Regis Abu Dhabi. She will work closely with Abu Dhabi's Department of Culture & Tourism (DCT), further exploring opportunities to support the destination. One of her main responsibilities will be to work with key partners to further enhance the positioning of The St. Regis Abu Dhabi.



► Fairmont Bab Al Bahr

Abu Dhabi

Mouna Ouni has been appointed as Director of Marketing at Fairmont Bab Al Bahr. In her new capacity, Ouni will be working closely with the hotel's director of sales and marketing to ensure that Fairmont Bab Al Bahr maintains its competitive positioning in the industry. Ouni will take charge of the luxury hotel's PR and communications strategies, goals and budget in order to develop a media relations strategy. She has 16 years of international marketing and communications experience. She will play a pivotal role in getting key messages across to the media, the public and partners about the hotel's news, CSR initiatives and much more.



► Delta Hotels & Four Points by Sheraton

Dubai

Nikhil Nair has been appointed as Cluster Marketing Communications & Public Relations Manager for Delta Hotels by Marriott Jumeirah Beach, Dubai, Four Points by Sheraton Sheikh Zayed Road, Dubai and Four Points by Sheraton Downtown, Dubai. Nair brings with him over five years of experience in the field of Marketing Communications & PR. Prior to moving from India to Dubai about three years back, he was the Assistant Manager Marketing Communications at JW Marriott New Delhi India. He is a post graduate diploma holder in Marketing from Les Roches International School of Hotel Management, Switzerland.



Qasr Al Watan, an aesthetic marvel

Qasr Al Watan, a cultural landmark housed within the Presidential Palace in Abu Dhabi, opened its doors to the public for the first time on March 11, 2019, offering guests access to a vast collection of artefacts and resources which explore UAE's political, social and cultural journey. The stunning façade of Qasr al Watan is the first feature of the palace that gives it a majestic and timeless allure. Visitors to the Palace can spend hours surveying the intricacies of this national landmark, from doors embroidered with French gold and hand-carved patterns within



the Great Hall, to one of the largest domes in the world measuring 37 metres in diameter. This intricate craftsmanship reflects the region's rich complexions of golden desert, white sky, and blue sea.

The Qasr Al Watan Library houses an impressive collection of more than 40,000 titles, documenting the nation's history,

focusing on archaeology, culture, literature and the arts. A digital collection of more than 16 million items is also available. At the House of Knowledge, visitors will be able to see a unique collection of invaluable manuscripts that document the contributions of individuals from across the Arab world in the fields of astronomy, humanities, science, art and literature.



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