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# TRAVTALK



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THE NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ■ Domestic travel will be a top choice ..... 04   | ■ KSA post COVID-19 ..... 10                         |
| ■ Getting ready for the new normal ..... 06       | ■ Travel industry to see rapid change ..... 11       |
| ■ Spain Tourism's spotlight on Andalusia ..... 08 | ■ Looking at business revival post lockdown ..... 12 |

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# Strategising a new normal

While the world stood still, the tourism boards were busy with various new plans, thus initiating their own strategies to weather the storm. Developing new strategies for the new normal and gaining confidence of their clientele were top on their list. The leaders share with **TRAVTALK** in detail.



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

“We have developed a number of initiatives for the post-COVID-19 return aimed at boosting guest confidence, solidifying new public-private partnerships and investing in digital transformation. Additionally, we are ensuring that any travel restrictions introduced in response to COVID-19 are continuously assessed. SCTDA have recently issued the Post-COVID-19 Guidelines manual to the hospitality sector of the emirate, detailing the safety protocols to be followed by the hotel establishments in Sharjah, assuring guests' health and safety. Our trusted partners in the hospitality industry work closely with the Authority to make sure precautionary measures are implemented in addition to the efforts of SCTDA inspectors. A carefully coordinated approach to reopening may lead us to receive in-bound visitors with travel approval sometime between August and the end of the year. Bearing in mind the challenges of long-haul destinations, our Indian and GCC visitors will likely be the first to visit Sharjah as a captivating option with ease of access.”



Raki Philips  
Chief Executive Officer –  
Ras Al Khaimah Tourism  
Development Authority

“Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority had announced a range of support initiatives in April, aimed at its hospitality, leisure and development partners, which in addition to real time support has aided recipients and continues to influence their operational strategy. A comprehensive contingency plan, mapping out short- and long-term solutions to navigate the reduced footfall to the emirate as a result of the

negative impact of coronavirus was shared. This included the Financial Incentive Package, open to non-government owned entities covering midscale and four-star hotels, golf courses and tourism attractions, in addition to wider tourism support initiatives, spanning a six-month waiver of all touristic licenses; waiver of tourism dirhams from March to May; 100 per cent waiver of tourism licensing fees for Q2/Q3 and tourism licensing fines until

September 30 as well as no participation costs for roadshows in 2020 and 2021. The Authority has further invested in training its travel partners over the course of the past two months, with more than 1,000 travel partners reached via destination webinars. Planning of co-marketing campaigns and leisure and MICE roadshows is also underway, which will be activated as the necessary restrictions are lifted. These

efforts are meant to ensure Ras Al Khaimah is placed as a destination of choice as and when travellers start booking their holidays again. Aligned with guest and employee well-being as the foremost priority, RAKTDA launched the RAK 'Stay Safe' Hotel Certification in conjunction with the Public Services Department. This involved an official assessment on full sterilisation programmes, outlines of appropriate guest

Contd. on page 3 ▶

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# DIGITAL CONCLAVE

## RESELLING TOURISM

On Tuesday June 30, 2020

Moderator



**SanJeet**  
TravTalk Middle East

## Tourism 2.0

The new restart strategy

10:00am to 11:00am



**Nasir Jamal Khan**  
CEO, Al Naboodah Travel



**Tarique Khatri**  
EVP - Centre of excellence, Seera Group



**Jamal Abdulnazar**  
CEO, Cozmo Travel LLC

Session

1

## The new league of hotels

11:15am to 12:15pm



**Ahmed Obaid Al Qaseer**  
Chief Operations Officer, Shurooq



**Alexander Suski**  
Associate Vice President Sales and Marketing  
Millennium Hotels & Resorts  
MEA and Turkey



**Philip Wooller**  
Area Director Middle East  
& Africa, STR

Session

2



# Staggered approach to reopening travel

► Contd. from page 1

interactions and employee engagement, as well as a detailed guide of operational and hygienic practices. To further strengthen the endeavour, the Authority partnered with Bureau Veritas Certification (Bureau Veritas), a globally recognised leader in testing, inspection and certification services, to support hospitality partners adopt adequate health, safety and hygiene measures to mitigate risks, promoting transparency and credibility. Bureau Veritas will certify 45 hotels in Ras Al Khaimah ensuring safety and hygienic procedures are in place and aligned with regulations and global best practices.



The Authority's four-step road to recovery places initial focus on the domestic market, followed by the GCC and wider Middle East, to then be extended to Asia and Europe. Over the course of time, it anticipates a staggered approach to reopening travel with the launch of 'fit to fly corridors', based on bilateral arrangements between the UAE and international travel markets. Currently

facing the onset of travel between emirates, the Authority has launched initiatives within the first step, whilst implementing strict sanitary and hygiene measures across its hospitality offering. ”



**Ahmed Obaid Al Qaseer**  
Chief Operating Officer –  
Sharjah Investment and  
Development Authority  
(Shurooq)

medical services, and daily comprehensive sterilisation of all our facilities across all our destinations, Al Qasba,

“ The safety and well-being of our guests and visitors is paramount. Complementing the mandatory preventive guidelines, we are enforcing other exhaustive measures such as enhanced cleaning protocols, use of disposable cutlery, minimal staff contact, limited capacity, frequent sanitisation of high-frequency touchpoints, emergency

“ To continue inspiring tomorrow's travellers, the German National Tourist Board (GNTB) launched the global campaign #DiscoverGermanyFromHome in 50 source markets of German incoming tourism through over 30 social media channels. The campaign provides inspiring, empathetic, and informative content with virtual experiences of Germany's 16 federal states, featuring a microsite, Spotify playlists, destination movie, an interactive map, quizzes, and recipes. Since its launch mid-March, the campaign reached 9.6 million users via the GNTB's channels and generated more than a million interactions in addition to 19,000 contributions on external channels, which in turn triggered 210,000 interactions. Furthermore, the German National Tourist Office, Gulf

Al Majaz Waterfront, Al Montazah Parks Al Noor Island, The Flag Island, Heart of Sharjah, Mleiha Archaeological & Ecotourism Project, Khorfakkan Beach, Maraya Art Centre and City Sightseeing Sharjah. From operating at 30 per cent capacity to physical distancing protocols, thermal temperature checks, walk-through sanitisation booths, regular disinfection of common areas, single entry and exit points, no entry without masks policy, and customised precautionary measures for each of our destinations, we are successfully addressing the heightened concerns of our staycation guests. We have worked closely with our partners from GHM Hotels, managing The Chedi Al Bait Sharjah hotel, UAE's first 5-star luxury and heritage hotel developed by Shurooq. ”

region has partnered with Wego, the largest online travel marketplace in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to promote the destination of Germany to the GCC travellers with the message 'dream now – visit later'. Prior to the restriction of movements measures, the Gulf region was among the Top 20 of the most important source markets to Germany and the third largest source market outside Europe. ”



**Yamina Sofo**  
Director, Sales & Marketing –  
German National Tourist Office,  
Gulf countries

Inputs by Shehara Rizly

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# Domestic travel will be a top choice

Almosafer has conducted a study amongst over 3,000 Saudi nationals to gauge people's travelling behaviour post COVID-19 and found that domestic travel will be a top choice once lockdown restrictions ease.

❖ The domestic travel leisure market is expected to see a boost with 35% Saudis keen on discovering the growing cultural, adventure and entertainment offerings in their home country, as they chose staycation as a preferred travel option post pandemic.

❖ The results in terms of domestic travel are consistent with searches across the Almosafer app and web searches as compared to the month of April. An 83% increase in domestic tourism was recorded from May 1 till date.

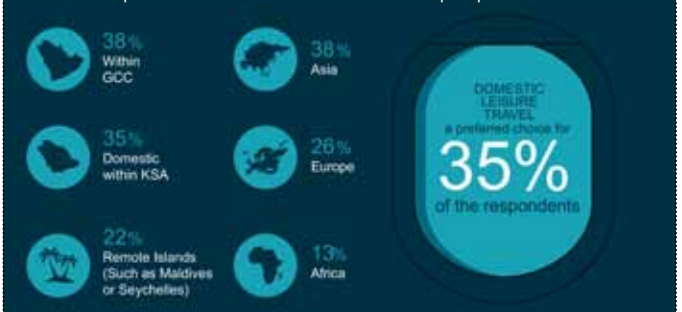
## Travel Companions

Who would Saudi Nationals travel with?



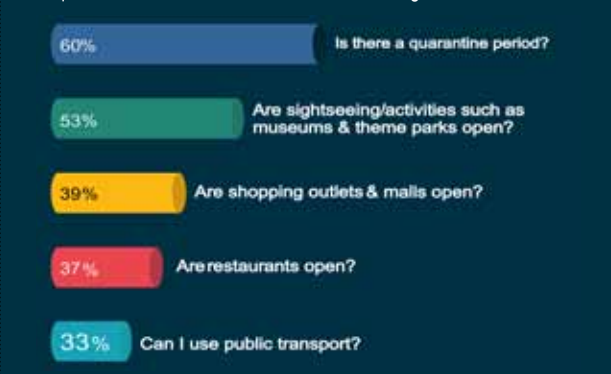
## Destination Focus

What are the preferred destinations for Saudi travellers post pandemic?



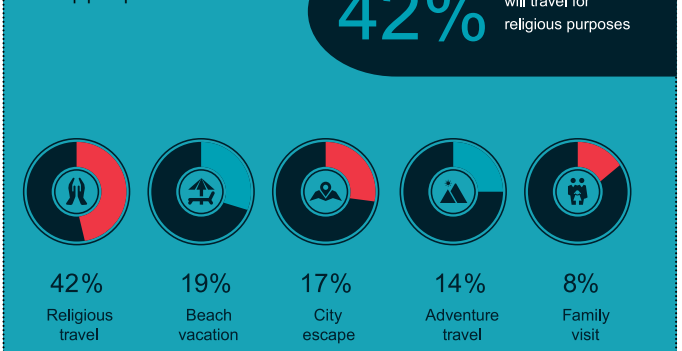
## Destination Drivers

What questions do Saudi travellers ask when deciding on a destination?



## Trip Types

What is the purpose of travel for the first trip post pandemic?



Source: Almosafer

# What will make a cruise ship safe again?

Microbe Marine, a well-established team of marine professionals with vast experience in hazardous materials and hygiene virus auditing on ships and rigs have the solution to help re-establish the cruise industry and rebuild consumer trust with its Oxygen Cluster Process (OCP) technology.



Citing the silent spreaders and viruses transmitted from surface contact as the main causes of virus transmission, the Oxygen Cluster Process (OCP) will

combat these main risks by producing a mass of oxygen clusters, which bombard and kill all viruses and bacteria on surfaces and in the air, disinfecting clothes and people without any impact 24/7, keeping pas-

sengers and crews safe. The directors at Microbe Marine have been working closely with the top specialists in the marine and science field to adopt a well-proven technology for the marine market.

"Cruise lines are currently looking at several operational changes to combat the coronavirus. They are considering drastic actions such as reducing the number of passengers on board and guests in show lounges, spacing out bar and restaurant seating and assigning fewer crew members. Some of the technical innovations proposed are wearable devices for crowd control, digital casinos, and robot crew members are just a few of the interventions being pursued by ship designers. These are all extreme initiatives and will make it very difficult for the industry to operate efficiently. Besides,

these are not cure but treatment, whereas OCP kills the viruses," says **John Chillingworth**, Senior Marine Principal, Microbe Marine.

The Oxygen Cluster Process can be easily installed to assist in the marine industry's requirements. The system kills viruses and eliminates microbes including SARS COVID 2, COVID-19, Norovirus and bacteria in the air and on surfaces throughout the ship, automatically and continuously 24/7. It also removes odours quickly and efficiently.

The clusters disinfect fabrics, people, floors, buttons, work surfaces,



**John Chillingworth**  
Senior Marine Principal  
Microbe Marine

buffets, anything the air touches, without any knowledge or residue. This combats the main risk of surface contamination and reduces the impact of silent spreaders. 🦠

“Cruise lines are considering drastic actions such as reducing the number of passengers on board and guests in show lounges, spacing out bar and restaurant seating and assigning fewer crew members”





# Reviving the industry with govt support

At a time when the industry needs a team of experts to get the ball rolling after a stringent lockdown for almost three months, it is quite a positive vibe to note that all the stalwarts in the industry have initiated a group that can revive the industry with the support of the government leaders. **Asim Arshad**, President of Dubai Travel and Tour Agents Group speaks with **TRAVTALK**.

**Shehara Rizly**

## Could you share with us the role of the Dubai Travel and Tour Agents Group?

The Dubai Travel and Tour Agents Group (DTTAG) was established in 2004 with an objective to create an environment conducive for interaction amongst travel trade members, achieve our business goals, and promote and foster cooperation, goodwill and better understanding within and outside the group.

## Will you be lobbying for a travel and tourism package from the relevant authorities?

We are not exactly lobbying for a travel and tour-



**Asim Arshad**  
President  
Dubai Travel and Tour Agents Group

ism package, but yes we are in discussion with the local government authorities especially the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Dubai Economic Department (DED) to secure whatever support they can offer, because the gov-

**“All efforts are being made for the audience to see Dubai as safe and a prepared city. The industry as a whole is remaining positive and resilient and we are confident that together we will navigate these tough times”**

ernment does recognise that our industry is the worst impacted.

## How will this group support the agents and operators post COVID?

This group offers a platform to discuss our concerns and to be together at this critical time, so as the world navigates these unprecedented times, DTTAG wants to ensure

our members of solidarity, now more so than ever before, so that no member is alone. For example, we are in constant coordination with the government authorities, with IATA Gulf, and different airlines to

garner as much support as possible.

## All the stalwarts in the industry are part of this group, so will it be only focusing on Dubai or will you also focus on Northern Emirates and Abu Dhabi?

DTTAG is established under the umbrella of Dubai Chamber of Commerce & Industry and therefore the main focus is the emirate of Dubai. However, we always work very closely with the travel agents in Abu Dhabi,

Sharjah and Northern Emirates. As a matter of fact, a number of the members of DTTAG have offices in Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Northern Emirates, so there is automatic support and coordination.

## Is there a registration for the group? If so, how can others be part of this group?

Any travel agency licensed in the emirate of Dubai can become a member of this group, for which the process is very simple.

## Constant Coordination

*We are in discussion with the local government authorities especially the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Dubai Economic Department to secure whatever support they can offer, because the government does recognise that our industry is the worst impacted*

# Seamless services during lockdown

**TRAVTALK** had a tête-à-tête with **Sumit Acharya**, Managing Director – BCD Travel LLC, Dubai about the current status of the industry and their many efforts to ensure the industry stays afloat at a time with challenges. BCD Travel focuses on corporate TMC although they have MICE and leisure divisions in their business.

**Shehara Rizly**

## What are the main issues you faced during the lockdown?

We were involved in managing health and safety issues for our colleagues; maintaining an effective service proposition like 'work from home' and meeting travel needs for our clients; and managing costs and cash flow required to meet our immediate needs to ensure long-term stability.

## How did you keep the clients confident?

We maintained seamless services, including after regular office hours supported by technologies and processes that enabled our teams to remain safe and virtually service clients when required. We also continued with ongoing investment in innovative solutions for servicing rapidly evolving travel programmes in the new future. Our global footprint and global reporting con-

tinued to provide simplicity and consistency of service. Moreover, we came up with various webinars, surveys, briefing documents etc. that involved our customers.

## Currently what are the main areas you focus on?

We are focusing on making our offices compliant with government guidelines and ready to deal with the new future effectively. We have also been adopting short-term cost-reduction measures to endure the pandemic. Globally, BCD Travel is investing in solutions for the new future of business travel which will be rolled out in our region in time. Trip authorisation solutions



**Sumit Acharya**  
Managing Director  
BCD Travel LLC, Dubai

that assess risks, tools that map global risks to traveller locations and capabilities to inform travellers of health & security requirements are some of the areas we are working on as a company. Also, technical, product and behavioural skills training for

our team has been an area of continuous focus.

## When do you think inbound tourists will start their journeys?

The UAE government, DTCM and other government departments are actively working towards facilitating a quick return of incoming tourists and I believe we are talking a few weeks. Intra Gulf travel would probably pick up quicker than long-haul.

## When will tourism bounce back?

A lot will depend on inbound quarantine requirements at destinations once scheduled flights resume, but travel trends/needs are dif-

ferent in our region due to the population demographics, so I'm hoping things will pick up soon.

A travel bubble or quarantine free travel corridor between the GCC countries might be something the authorities could consider depending on how the current situation/pandemic changes in the near future.

## FactFile

- The UAE government, and other govt departments are working towards facilitating a quick return of incoming tourists
- Intra Gulf travel would probably pick up quicker than long-haul

**“Trip authorisation solutions that assess risks, tools that map global risks to traveller locations and capabilities to inform travellers of health & security requirements are some of our focus areas”**



# Getting ready for the new normal

The outbreak of the pandemic has seen the emergence of a new normal for the travel, tourism and hospitality industries. Three industry leaders discuss the strategies, outcomes, regulations and standards which need to be implemented.



**Nia Niscaya**  
Deputy Minister for Marketing, Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, Republic of Indonesia

Middle East is a very important market for Indonesia as the length of stay and spends by a tourist from Middle East is above the average tourist coming to Indonesia. About 60 per cent of the Middle East arrivals are from Saudi Arabia. Also, Dubai is the hub of tourists coming to Indonesia from all over the world. As of now, we are facing a situation where the government is trying to cope with the COVID pandemic.

Today it seems like Jakarta has been hit the hardest but now the numbers are going down. Bali however, being the Capital of Tourism of Indonesia is not so bad as the number of people affected and death rate is really low. Bali is a role model for other areas.

## Rise of domestic tourism

Our marketing strategy at this point of time is focused on domestic first, the emphasis is on amplifying the government's message 'stay at home'. For international tourists we manage our presence or reconnect with the market with Visit Indonesia using marketing representatives; we have been discussing through the technology in the market through webinars to amplify what we are doing with the government in coping with COVID to regain the confidence of the travellers. Basically, we are doing what we call CHS implementation in health and safety protocol in all touchpoints of the destination and attractions. We will have a continuous programme with all players – online travel agents, airlines and sellers, and media to make sure this is a destination that is ready.

Since the destination Indonesia is so huge we have to prioritise, the minister has already decided, first is Bali and second is a domestic tourist destination and Batam Bintan is for those coming from Singapore. First the President is looking at safety of the people, domestic tourism will rebound first. As a government we have to go back to work, so we have to live with COVID. Currently we are very rigid when it comes to protocols for everyone.

## Strategising new plans

We have to change our marketing plans and the minister wants us to spend more on the budget for digital and social media so that there is more engagement with

“We believe that both expats and locals from the Middle East will start travelling very soon. We are going to tap all markets with new strategies to ensure that we regain the confidence of the travellers”



local players as they are the ones who need to know. We must also empower our marketing representatives as our ear and eye. Since budget is limited, we need to balance the customer, hence we keep inspiring the market.

As Middle East is a wide market and one of our important source markets, we believe that both expats and locals from the Middle East will start travelling very soon. We are going to tap all markets with new strategies to ensure that we regain the confidence of the travellers. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are different markets. Our main source markets are from these two countries and we believe that travellers will return very soon as we open the borders.

## Medical requirements and safety

Currently we are working on ensuring the medical requirements for domestic visitors as phase one, the next phase will be regional and thereafter international for every traveller. We need to ensure their safety in terms of hygiene and a cleaner environment.

As Indonesia is a vast destination with over 14,000 islands we are able to manage the curve. Window bookings will become shorter and then the demand will be lower but the supply will be higher so competition will be very hard. I would like to welcome travellers to a cleaner, safer and healthier Indonesia.



**Muzzammil Ahussain**  
EVP – Consumer Travel  
Seera Group

In the market the bookings have been remodeled and what we have done is – on a multi-platform we have decided to identify where we need to make investments in our technology platform. We have been growing fast and our customers are our partners. At this juncture we are focusing on cleaning up and working on amendments and cancellations. First, we are doing our best to prepare for the new normal; with our technology we provide our customers information, so we want to provide good information & good content, thus making our customers more involved. Second, we are understanding the customer needs, especially of our customers in Saudi

Arabia, Kuwait and UAE – the first market will be the domestic market that will pick up, so we our understanding their requirements, what kind of information they want to know, and destinations they want to know about as travel patterns are different. For example, one of the things we found out is that medical safety certificate is a requirement. So, before they travel to the destinations, unless they know about them as a travel agent, both online and offline we need to convey this information. Third, we have over 250 travel guides in Saudi Arabia and we will educate them about travel safety within the destinations.

## Tourism on the rebound

I think it will be life with COVID and airlines, travel agents, the entire tourism industry will survive, it may take 18 to 24 months without any other challenges. The best possible way is to connect with the new normal as soon as possible. What we are looking at is both qualitative and quantitative methods; in the quantitative method we deal with questions such as what are the issues with the destination they need to know about, all standard information but in terms of experience it will be different. For example, if someone is coming on vacation to Dubai and if the malls, beaches and parks are closed then we





will not advise them to come over, we will look for another destination, obviously the challenge would be you may come today and in a week things will change, so we need to provide the relevant information to our clients to help them understand what experiences they can enjoy in the destinations that they will select. Second is the journey, the amount of time spent to deter-

mine the safety records, if we provide information for pre-visit, time of visit and post-visit, it will be really helpful to our customers.

### Health and safety guidelines

During pre-COVID we used to work with hotels, tourism boards, where we brought our experts to understand the destination. We are not health and

**“People in the Middle East travel at least a few times during the year to outbound locations. It may take some time, but we can see that travel will pick up gradually in small groups at first”**

safety experts so what we do is obtain the relevant information and educate our clients, this is how we provide them with inputs on safety and regulations.

### Repatriation travel and domestic tourism

UAE is an 80 per cent expat market and 10 per cent Emirati market; the first phase of travel we are currently seeing is the expats leaving back for home. Staycations will be the way forward for both expats and locals. Saudi government announced the return of the domestic flights so this means that there will be a rise in domestic tourism. They are ready to travel now during summer – but passage should be open for them to come back, so hopefully once other countries open their borders there will be international travel as well, but it will take some time.

### Keeping the faith

One of the most important aspects is keeping our clients happy and informed, and engaging with them to ensure that they know what is taking place



as many travellers are keen to travel again. We keep updating the market, so we need to be creative with the tourism board. We need to work with tourism boards and all stakeholders. It will be easier for a traveller if there are more rules, there will be a few hiccups on the way, but coordination can be done easily, so we need to understand what a traveller wants.

We know that people in the Middle East want to travel and every year they travel at least a few times during the year to outbound locations. It may take some time, but we can see that travel will pick up gradually in small groups at first. In terms of hotels, the hygiene and safety standards will be much better than before, and it will be a new experience for the customers.



**Paul Wilson**  
Executive Vice President – Commercial  
Cross Hotels and Resorts

tries that closed down 70-80 per cent of their hotels.

When we look at occupancy, especially Saudi, the rate from 39 per cent went up to 49 per cent, so again we are seeing a lot of positive traits coming into the market from the region. For us, it is very straight forward why this market is so important to us. They spend when they come to the hotel and to be honest, they are the second highest spenders after the French. Their length of stay is more, we are just six hours away, Bangkok is the most visited city in the world, we see people coming for two to three days and even two to three weeks. Middle East travellers come with their families, which is good in terms of their spends in the destination and the properties.

### Travelling in the new norm

We have to live with the coronavirus and eventually it will become the norm. So I

**“When we look at occupancy, especially Saudi, the rate from 39 per cent went up to 49 per cent, so again we are seeing a lot of positive traits coming into the market from the region”**

would not say that the hotels will change. People don't want to get sick so there will be a difference. We have analysts checking facts day in and day out, now its domestic then it will be regional, lastly you will target international travellers. We have to focus on new destinations, people want to move away from crowded areas.

### Medical certification

The current situation is so dynamic, we have been educated on how to fight the virus. There was a time in Zambia when you had to get so many vaccinations just to travel there, yet it didn't stop people from travelling. So, it all depends on individual preferences, if you want to travel then you will do so.

### Asia to regain its lustre

People want to and need to travel; it is in their DNA. Asia has proven to be resilient and it is more affordable for travellers, so I believe that Asia will bounce back very fast. In terms of booking patterns, it will be a lot shorter and in terms of hotels we need to provide a better experience.

It should be more efficient and food will have to be served in healthier environments with more safety standards, the cooking itself might need to be a notch higher as people will look for a more healthier experience. They will also be more alert about the standards so that they can have a trouble free experience.

We need to learn to live with the coronavirus and the world must go on. We are seeing a lot of easing in laws so we started to see our occupancies grow. In the past few weeks in our three properties in and around Bangkok, we have seen occupancy going up to 90 and 100 per cent in mid-week, so this shows the changes in how people travel.

For instance, people don't have to work from office anymore, we see that on Sunday and Monday people are staying and working at the hotel, so these are the opportunities we need to focus on. We have also seen our tier-2 and tier-3 cities growing so we have seen a lot of growth in boutique areas as well. The Middle East has been resilient as it closed down only 36 per cent of the hotels as compared to other coun-





# Spain Tourism's spotlight on Andalusia



Cordoba es Patrimonio -Panoramica puente romano

The second in the tri-series webinar by the Spain Tourism Board was concluded successfully with participants from all over the United Arab Emirates and GCC. This webinar programme was divided into four sections with a focus on Andalusia.

**SPAIN  
WEBINAR**

 **Shehara Rizly**

As the programme was divided into four sessions; the first was conducted by Daniel Rosado Bayon – Director of the Spanish Tourism Office in Abu Dhabi, where he provided a general update about the country, connectivity, weather, tourist arrivals to the destinations etc. – the many things that you do need to know and must do if you travel to the destination. He also mentioned that they are getting

ready to open for foreign tourists in July.

The second session was conducted by Juan Manuel Ortiz Pascual, Promotion and Communications Director of Andalusía Tourism. This was a comprehensive presentation about Andalusia with several videos where visitors could take a closer look at the destination and its offerings. He shared about the many activities that can be done, the historical, cultural and entertainment options for

families and individuals travelling for leisure, honeymooners, youth, adventure and MICE visitors etc. He stated that there are four main cities with a rich Islamic heritage which are Sevilla, Cordoba, Granada and Malaga. The destination has seen Romans, Thracians, Phoenicians etc. during their times.

One of the main Spanish destinations in the GCC region is Malaga. This thousand-year-old Andalusian city offers a perfect combination of culture, sunshine

and beaches. It's right on the Costa del Sol, so you can enjoy its beaches and explore its seafront walks and the port. Susana Porras – Executive Consultant Visit Costa del Sol made her presentation on one

is high-end luxury, four-star etc. with some of the most popular chains already around the place.

Finally, Rosado shared two other important destinations, one is the quite famous Valencia and the

scenery etc. Some of the 'must visit' places are Caceres, Merida, Gaudalupe and Trujillo.

The country is diverse and has offerings for any type

**One of the main Spanish destinations in the GCC region is Malaga. This thousand-year-old Andalusian city offers a perfect combination of culture, sunshine and beaches**



Seville, Plaza de España

of the most famous areas in Spain. 'Costa del Sol' means 'coast of the sun' or the 'sun coast'. Marbella is the richest area in Malaga with a great shopping experience with small boutiques, souvenirs, some of the best beaches, most famous marina 'Puerto Banus' and about 10 other marinas that are quite well known. Ronda is another beautiful city to be visited with various types of accommodation depending on your budget, whether it

other is Extremadura. Valencia is the third-largest city in Spain with landmark buildings, family-friendly destinations with various activities for the entire family, and a perfect spot for relaxing in any of its multiple coastal towns facing the Mediterranean sea. Meanwhile Extremadura, located in the western part of Spain was quite well known during the Roman empire. The place has the most interesting activities, wild life, medieval tours, mountain

of tourist; for those from the Middle East, unique shopping expeditions, great areas of adventure, discovering rich culture with gastronomy, should be a 'must try' in your bucket list. There were a good number of agents who attended the webinar and raised few questions too about the time to be spent, important areas to visit and many others. At the end of the session the questions were answered by Rosado and the team. 🇪🇸



Valencia, Oceanographic



# IHG to open InterContinental in Rome

InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) announced the signing of a franchise agreement with Westmont Hospitality Group and funds managed by Oaktree Capital Management, for a captivating property in the heart of Rome. A multi-million-euro investment is behind IHG's plans to open InterContinental Rome in 2022.

**TT Bureau**

The luxury hotel will be set on the iconic Via Veneto, in the Ludovisi area of the city, close to the Villa Borghese. The existing property – which includes 160 rooms and suites, a restaurant, bar, spa and public areas – will be restored to create a sense of discreet, modern luxury for visitors and locals alike. Designed in the early 1900s by

architect Carlo Busiri Vici in the neo-Renaissance style, the palazzo building was originally home to ambassadors staying in Rome, opening as a hotel in 1993. Guests will benefit from its proximity to the city's wealth of art and history, thanks to a prime position less than a kilometre walk from the Galleria Borghese, the Spanish Steps and the Trevi Fountain. The hotel can be easily reached from Rome's

Ciampino or Fiumicino international airports and is less than 10 minutes from the city's main rail station.

IHG joins a strong consortium including the US-based fund, Oaktree; Westmont Hospitality Group, strategic investment partner and operator; and UniCredit S.p.A, the project's senior lending bank. The project is held by a newly established real estate investment fund managed by Milan-based Castello SGR, one of Italy's premier real estate management companies.

Willemijn Geels, Vice President of Development, Europe, IHG, commented, "The signing of an Inter-



Continental in Rome represents an important moment in the growth of our luxury portfolio and brand presence across Europe. In these challenging and unprecedented times, this signing shows the continued trust our owners and partners place in IHG and our brands."

Alfredo Maria De Falco, Deputy Head of CIB and Head of CIB Italy at UniCredit, stated, "Confirmation by primary international investors of their commitment to Italy even in this difficult time is a strong signal of the country's unimpaired attractiveness as a cultural, tourist

and business destination. UniCredit is a strategic partner for the development of large real estate projects and we are happy to support this important initiative in a sector, such as the luxury hotel industry, which can be a driving force for the recovery of tourism in Italy."

**“The signing of an InterContinental in Rome represents an important moment in the growth of our luxury portfolio and brand presence across Europe”**

Willemijn Geels

# Long stay homes at Radisson RED Dubai

The newly opened hotel, located at Dubai Digital Park, has now opened its 59 stylish long-term homes including studios, one bedroom and two bedroom apartments. Radisson RED Dubai Silicon Oasis, located in Dubai's first-ever smart city project built with the latest AI and IoT technologies, was the first of the Radisson RED brand to launch in the Middle East.

**TT Bureau**

The hotel, which opened in February this year has already earned a place as a favourite hub amongst the local community. Bringing forward-thinking style to the desert, the brand presents a playful twist on conventional hotel stays, offering a culinary hangout with a casual feel and a bustling social scene. Using integrated technology and

bold design personality, Radisson RED Dubai Silicon Oasis comprises of 104 contemporary designed rooms, eight suites and 59 apartments made with millennials in mind.

The new apartments are available for long-term stays as well as residential homes and with rates starting from AED 4,500 per month, they are an ideal option for those not wanting to renew a 12-month



furnished apartments include the hotel's distinctive features such as love me lighting, bespoke wallpaper designed by local artists and stream-from-your-mobile TVs.

Stuart Birkwood, Hotel Curator, said, "We are super excited to launch our new apartments. RED is all about community and this feels like the final piece in the puzzle for us. We've already got to know a lot of regular friendly faces and we can't wait to welcome our more long-term guests as well. This place really has its own unique vibe that I think will appeal to a lot of people looking for both comfort and style".

**“We can't wait to welcome our more long-term guests. This place has its own unique vibe that I think will appeal to a lot of people looking for both comfort and style”**

Stuart Birkwood

contract. Guests will also have access to all hotel facilities including a 24-hour gym and a rooftop pool. In addition, guests staying

at the new apartments can take advantage of 20 per cent off on food and drinks at both the OUIBar + Terrace and the Red Roof.

The pet-friendly hotel also extends its pet policy to apartments, meaning your favourite four-legged friend is welcome to join you. The



# KSA post COVID-19

Over almost three months, lockdown ensured to a certain extent the reduction of the pandemic spreading but the travel industry has been at the forefront managing the many issues that arose during the period. **Muzzammil Ahussain**, EVP Consumer Travel, Seera Group shares the challenges, strategies and future after the pandemic with **TRAVTALK**.

**There may have been bookings that got cancelled due to COVID-19 lockdowns, hence what will the travellers do? How will you help them to recover from the cancellations? Is there a rebate? Please explain in detail.**

There's no denying that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the travel and tourism industry due to the stringent travel restrictions in place across the globe as well as a slump in demand among travellers.

As soon as lockdowns were announced by the government, we received an influx of requests from travellers looking to reschedule or cancel their trips. We immediately focused our efforts towards supporting customers in their travel arrangements and changes thereof, for Almosafer, that meant consolidating our omni-channel efforts to provide travel advisory, and seamless cancellations, amendments and refunds to our customers.

To maintain the strong relationships we have had with our customers and to minimise the impact on traveller level, we have even issued a majority of refunds without or before receiving the reimbursements from airlines themselves on these cancelled trips. With our e-wallet offering in place, customers were also encouraged to reschedule their travel plans as and when they are comfortable to venture out following the ease in travelling and lockdown restrictions. This measure will be beneficial in the long run as it seeks to increase customer lifetime value by allowing travellers to use their trip value in the future.

**How do you see travel picking up post COVID-19?**

Our flagship consumer travel brand Almosafer has conducted a study amongst over 3,000 Saudi nationals to gauge people's travelling behaviour post COVID-19 and found that domestic travel will be a top choice once lockdown restrictions ease. As part of our first dedicated consumer study in the Kingdom, we found that most respondents are confident to venture out for staycations and holidays within the country. The domestic travel leisure market is expected to see a boost with 35% Saudis keen on discovering the growing cultural, adventure and entertainment offerings in their home country, as they chose staycation as a preferred travel option post pandemic. The results in terms of domestic travel are consistent with searches across the Almosafer app and web searches as compared to the month of April. We have recorded an 83% increase in domestic tourism from May 1 till date.

To support our customers with their preferences and in an effort to boost domestic tourism in the Kingdom post pandemic, we have taken the initiative to invest in the creation of a holistic domestic offering for Almosafer. This will include exciting packages and travel options to all major destinations in Saudi Arabia, as well as those that are lesser known but full of interesting things to explore. We believe that this time post pandemic will encourage Saudis to fully discover their own country and the vast touristic opportunities it offers.

For the UAE, we had always recorded an interest in staycations amongst our customers even before the pandemic hit the world. Our

Dubai-based online flight and hotel-booking platform, tajawal, is currently recording increasing domestic leisure bookings as residents are looking to explore options that do not require flight travel

that their first trip out of KSA will be to its neighbouring countries within the GCC. As for destinations further afield, 38% also chose Asia for a potential first trip post pandemic and even Europe was still an



Muzzammil Ahussain  
EVP Consumer Travel, Seera Group

**“The Almosafer consumer survey found that 58% of Saudi travellers would opt for trips shorter than seven days, with 42% planning to go for longer than a week”**

and are considerably safer like luxury hotels for a change in scenery and to spend time with their families.

**Could you give us an update about how the Saudi market will be post COVID-19?**

We believe that the travel and tourism industry is resilient and will pull through this pandemic successfully. We anticipate that the Saudi market will see an increase in domestic tourism at first as, based on our study, 73% Saudis are quite confident to venture out post COVID-19. This will be followed by international trips once travel bans are lifted, as people are quite confident to venture out with 38% of Saudis indicating

option for many. Judging by these statistics, we are confident that the travel industry will emerge resilient and will rapidly resume operations as it was before COVID-19.

We also expect a change in the way people will travel in terms of the kind of information they will need prior to booking, such as, safety and health information, travel advisory etc. – this will cause a change in mindset which means that customers will begin to approach travel differently. Crucial information necessary before making a travel decision will include safety information for airlines, airports, hotels and social guidelines in departing and receiving destinations.

**As Saudi is focusing on their 2030 vision, what do you think the changes will be in terms of their tourism plans in the online sector?**

There's no denying that digitalisation is among the most important changes in our rapidly evolving world. Technology has encouraged an age of DIY travellers who book, manage and plan their own trips as this is a much easier and cost-effective way. As part of our omni-channel strategy, we have seen the need to make sure that our customers can be served in a seamless manner through the channels that meet their needs – be it through our websites, mobile apps or offline in a store or over the phone. Through our study, we have found that the majority of Saudi travellers are most comfortable booking through online platforms and mobile apps, which is why we are going to continue investing in our technologies to better support and service them.

**Post COVID-19 what will be the focus of agents such as yourself?**

Although we can anticipate a change in travelling behaviour, we are yet to see that change; but we can certainly say that customers will require an added level of trust presented by us across their user journey. Quarantine measures and the certainty that travellers can actually come back and enter the country of initial departure without any restrictions will be crucial in making a decision.

The Almosafer consumer survey also found that 60% of Saudi travellers will want to be aware of the social distancing and PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) rules applicable in-destination before making a travel decision. Clarity on safety measures taken by hotels and airlines is considered



critical for 55% travellers to help in building confidence and come to a decision.

Travellers will also want to have clarity on procedures in terms of refunds and cancellation policies and travel providers will have to work with travel agents to create a more streamlined and automated process. Flexibility on refunds and cancellations will also play a significant role as travellers will be cautious to book without knowing they can potentially change their plans if needed.

Since travellers rely on us to provide them with the best and most accurate information, it is our duty as a leading travel brand to build on that trust and

provide them with all necessary information when it comes to the customers' needs. With our expert travel advisory in place, we can and will be able to provide customers with important information, from recommendations on safe destinations to the flexibility and safeguarding of their trips, which also includes details on cancellation, refund policies etc. We are responsible in cascading this information not only to our customers but also to our travel advisors who focus on providing travellers with personalised advice and support needed at every touchpoint – from in-depth information and guidance on safety regulations and restrictions in

place from travel providers as well as in-destination insights.

### Will the travellers prefer international chains to boutique luxurious resorts?

With regards to international chains versus boutique resorts, there's no saying what travellers will prefer post COVID-19. Many international hotel chains have already announced health and safety policies and guidelines and have taken the lead on implementing them. Boutique resorts will need to become quite vocal on the steps they have taken to prevent the spread of the virus and to safeguard their guests on all their properties. Such

resorts have the advantage of, well, being boutique. Room numbers and the number of guests at any given time is usually lower than with a big international chain property and staying somewhere with lesser exposure to others could go hand-in-hand with the mindset of social distancing.

### Do you think family travel will pick up soon?

Yes, family travel is expected to pick up post COVID-19 as predicted by our Almosafer consumer survey. The study found that 50% respondents preferred to travel with family, followed up by a considerable 29% who said that they would travel in smaller

groups with friends keeping the social distancing rule in mind. The survey also found that 58% of Saudi travellers would opt for trips shorter than 7 days. However, we also noted a particularly large appetite for trips that exceed the duration of a weekend getaway with 42% planning to go for longer than a week.

### What about the business and MICE travel? When will they pick up?

We anticipate a change in business travel moving forward as organisations are likely to take many factors into consideration such as the health and safety of its employees. They will also need to cover their employees in their travel poli-

cies and the knowledge of the risk factors in the destinations they are travelling to. We expect MICE travel pick-up to take some more time as, for example, most global tradeshows and exhibitions have been or are expected to be postponed to the second half of 2020 or early 2021, given the current situation.

### FactFile

- 60% of Saudi travellers will want to be aware of the social distancing and PPE rules applicable in-destination before making a travel decision
- 50% respondents preferred to travel with family, followed up by 29% who said that they would travel in smaller groups with friends

# Travel industry to see rapid change

While the world took a break for a period of time, the engines at travel commerce had been working double time to ensure that they will be ready for the new era in the industry post COVID-19. Kathryn Wallington, Head of Account Management – UAE, Travelport shares their strategies with **TRAVTALK**.

### The industry has changed over the past few months, what have you implemented in order to cater to this new era of travel?

To say that this has been a challenging time for travel – both for the industry as a whole, as well as at the individual level – would be an understatement. That's why we've been focused on letting our partners and customers know how we can support them; communicating frequently and through a variety of channels.

We are holding numerous virtual meetings with partners, where we discuss individual needs and challenges. Many of these are 'consultancy sessions', where our Solutions consultants analyse a partner's workflow and review their end-to-end



Kathryn Wallington  
Head of Account Management – UAE, Travelport

booking process, virtually. Our team then provides recommendations on how the partner can sharpen its operations and come out of this crisis stronger. We are also ensuring our customers receive access to all relevant data

and have the capabilities in place to understand that data.

About two-and-a-half months ago, we also became the first travel technology company to launch a COVID-19 re-

source hub ([www.travelport.com/covid19](http://www.travelport.com/covid19)). The hub houses a variety of helpful information including airline, hotel and car policy trackers, direct links to our support services and guides on the best way to use technology during the crisis. We've now had more than 60,000 visits to the hub.

### What will travellers require from the agent/hotel and/or tour operator while booking their vacations?

Agents can help travellers feel safe by proactively providing information on the safety measures travel suppliers are taking, the same way an agent would advise on things like the price of their ticket. Our rich content and branding capability allow airlines,

“About two-and-a-half months ago, we became the first travel technology company to launch a COVID-19 resource hub. We've now had more than 60,000 visits to the hub”

hotels and other suppliers to display important information to agents, including details on safety and security measures. While the information would need to be provided by the travel supplier; it can be facilitated in Smart-point and via our API.

### Where do you see technology in the next two years?

Post COVID-19, the travel industry will continue to experience rapid change. This transformation will be built on three foundational priorities for the industry – multi-source

content, retailing excellence and maximising the value of every trip. Multi-source content is all about ensuring ingesting, normalising and delivering access to a wide variety of content types, whatever the source. Retailing excellence is enabled through next generation tools creating an environment of easy up and cross-sell and flexible and customisable displays. And, by maximising the value of every trip, travel sellers will grow revenue or reduce the cost to serve at every point across the trip.



# Looking at business revival post lockdown

The past few weeks have seen the hospitality industry come up with new plans and strategies like never before. Today as hotels open their doors to travellers, it will be in an era of the 'new normal'. Stalwarts in the industry share their experiences on challenges and customer engagement during the lockdown and the current scenario amidst the pandemic with **TRAVTALK**.

**TT Bureau**

**Could you share some of the challenges faced due to lockdown?**

**Mark Willis**

**CEO, Accor Middle East and Africa**

"Our teams have been, and continue to, review our existing business models in order to look for new ways of operating during these uncertain times and especially look at ways in which our business can operate after the effects of COVID-19 on the travel industry start to diminish.

Some of these measures include an assessment of the projected spending for 2020 to ensure it is in line with business requirements, as well as a number of new commercial initiatives to attract the interest of travellers."

**Tim Cordon**

**Senior Area Vice President – Middle East and Africa, Radisson Group**

"There are many factors we've had to consider from an operational perspective, including repurposing some of our hotels for essential service use, adopting new strategies and approaches to secure a strong reopening once tourism restarts – from expanding hygiene, sanitation and precautionary meas-

ures to social distancing implementation."

**Darell De Cruz**

**Vice President – Sales & Marketing for Aitken Spence Hotel Managements (Pvt) Ltd.**

De Cruz heads the sales and marketing division across four destinations – Sri Lanka, Maldives, India and Oman for Adaaran properties. He shares, "This was an unprecedented black swan event which posed short to long-term effect on the global community. The challenge we saw was the heavy flow of cancellations and the drop in fresh new bookings.

For Sri Lanka especially, we were beginning to see progress post-Easter Sunday, and the disruption of COVID-19 halted the optimism, replacing it with a lull. Maldives too was affected post-Easter Sunday in terms of twin centre travel, and the steady increase in arrivals we were seeing, came to an abrupt halt."

**Ravi Santiago**

**Cluster General Manager, Ramada Hotel & Suites by Wyndham Ajman, Ramada by Wyndham Beach Hotel Ajman and Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche**

"The hospitality industry has been hit hard by the pandemic as people are required to stay home in order to curb the spread of the virus. We felt the impact and witnessed a drastic decline in revenues in all areas including rooms, Food & Beverage, and banqueting."



**Mark Willis**  
CEO, Accor Middle East and Africa

**“We are already seeing positive signs throughout our hotels globally, with less than 10 per cent of existing bookings being cancelled for the months of July and August”**

**How did you engage with your customers during the lockdown period?**

De Cruz shares, "At the onset of the COVID-19 spread, we developed a communication strategy which looked at each layer of relationship – travel and tour operators, partners and representatives, media, direct guests and our social media followers. In line with the strategy, we kept in touch with each stakeholder segment via constant communication. This included communicating our safety precautions at the onset as well as on post-COVID operations, liaising with international media on conveying our safety practices, our sustainable initiatives and lighter interactive pieces such as sharing recipes, wellness tips, and more. Even though our operations were scaled

down, we kept in touch with our direct guests by keeping the dialogue open and answering their queries."

Willis adds, "During this difficult period of quarantine and staying home, we have focused our communication line on our regional Instagram account (@ALL\_MEA). The activation has been revolving around ALL (Accor Live Limitless), which focuses on three main pillars: Food, Sport and Entertainment. The campaign has been designed to bring ALL to life in people's homes by creating tailored, themed content across our three key categories and delivering these across our social media platforms in a regular, programmed way."

Cordon went on to say, "There is no doubt that this has been difficult for eve-

ryone to watch, with life as we know it completely altering in such a short period. Looking at the bigger picture, we have all been reminded of what is important and that we are all in this together, regardless of industry and geography. Crucial times like these also remind us of the importance of human connections and it has been key to adapt our communications approach as one unified industry.

Brands were forced to reassess their digital marketing

tional and useful content. Social media platforms, which are often cluttered with advertisements, are now giving way to online conversations, travel inspiration, cooking tutorials and fitness challenges, all focused on uplifting the communities' spirits."

Santiago shares, "We started sending out communication to all our guests and partners even before the lockdown was enforced. We duly informed them on the health and safety pro-



**Tim Cordon**  
Senior Area Vice President – Middle East and Africa, Radisson Group

**“Safety has become a top priority for travellers. As a result, there has definitely been a staycation trend and it is expected to strengthen in the coming months”**

strategies and communicate with their consumers in new ways, which kept them busy during forced isolation at home. As consumers are social distancing and working from home, they're spending more time online. We have therefore been more creative with our online presence and have assumed the role as entertainers by sharing inspira-

ocols that we put in place, alongside the up-to-date information from the relevant authorities."

**What initiatives did you take in order to ensure safety for your clients before opening?**

Willis says that as a group that puts the safety of its guests and team mem-





bers first, Accor has recently launched the 'ALL Safe Programme', which will see a number of brand new operational and service standards, developed with hygiene specialist Bureau Veritas, roll out to its properties in the region. The ground-breaking 'ALL Safe Officer' programme, will see every hotel appoint a health and safety officer who will not only ensure cleaning and hygiene protocols are implemented to the highest standards, but will be available to handle guests' questions and concerns. These specially trained officers are the face of Accor's new ALL Safe Accor Programme – a set of rigorous measures designed to protect and reassure guests that are being implemented at its 300 properties region-wide.

"Our hotels already adhere to strict guidelines and highest standards when it comes to safety and hygiene, and we have stepped up all the measures and added the recommended practices including temperature checks, installing thermal cameras, wearing of protective masks, disinfecting all touchpoints in the hotel, and placing sanitisers in all areas. New initiatives will soon be rolled out including keyless check-in and using of QR codes for the restaurant and café menu," shares Santiago.

## FactFile

■ There are many factors we've had to consider from an operational perspective, including repurposing some of our hotels for essential service use, adopting new strategies and approaches to secure a strong reopening once tourism restarts – from expanding hygiene, sanitation and precautionary measures to social distancing implementation

■ At the onset of the COVID-19 spread, we developed a communication strategy which looked at each layer of relationship – travel and tour operators, partners and representatives, media, direct guests and our social media followers

Cordon states that Radisson Group has recently launched the Radisson Hotels Safety Protocol, a new programme of in-depth cleanliness and disinfection procedures, in partnership with SGS, the world's lead-

ary operational protocol at each level. We worked closely with both local and international health bodies in putting together our post-COVID operational plan and will continue to maintain our dialogues

when international borders will reopen. Whilst the behaviour or priorities might have changed, people will want to reunite with their families and friends and for that to happen, many will consider pursuing international travel. We can already see that countries are preparing to restart their travel economy, many nations are agreeing on the possibility of establishing 'travel bubbles' whereby groups of countries allow each other's citizens to enter freely," he adds.

Willis shares, "I believe that tourism demand will return in phases to our region, first phase being local travel, second phase regional travel and third stage being international travel. As we are currently in the first phase (until the borders reopen), our properties that are currently operational are focusing on staycations and offerings for residents. We have seen very positive signs and demand for stays in our resorts during the weekend in the UAE especially, such as the Eid weekend, as well as some mid-week stays in our city properties."

Santiago goes on to say, "We are relying on staycations throughout the summer period to boost revenues. We recently launched a staycation package, which is available until end of September. We are also going to launch a daycation package alongside F&B offers that are targeted to UAE residents." De Cruz states, "For Sri Lanka, we will focus on domestic market as Phase 1. We are also encouraging longer stays in one resort as part of our safety precautions. In the Maldives we are looking at buyouts."

## When do you feel the hospitality industry will bounce back?

Willis responds by saying, "The return to normalcy for our industry in our re-

gion is very dependent on borders reopening in order for people to be able to travel again, however that being said, we are already seeing positive signs throughout our hotels globally, with less than 10 per cent of existing bookings being cancelled for the months of July and August, which shows people are still willing to travel given the opportunity to do so. Following the opening of borders and the phased approach men-

globe will certainly be a lot more conscious and cautious, but it is our responsibility to reassure them and make our guests feel safe."

Santiago adds, "Our industry has always been resilient and previous events have proven how hospitality, travel and tourism businesses managed to bounce back. Different UAE-based airlines have already announced flights to different cities. There will always be a demand be-



**Darell De Cruz**  
Vice President – Sales & Marketing for Aitken Spence Hotel Managements

**“We are optimistic that domestic industry will pick up by July in Sri Lanka, followed by international arrivals in August when the airports and the borders open”**

ing inspection, verification, testing and certification company. These enhanced protocols, operational guidance and comprehensive health and safety procedures validated by SGS, are adapted based on local requirements and recommendations, to ensure guests' safety and peace of mind from check-in to check-out.

"Our primary objective was to ensure safety of guests as well as our associates. Due to our risk mitigation strategies in place, we were able to act promptly in heightening health and safety precautions across our hotels and resorts in Sri Lanka, Maldives, Oman and India. For the post-COVID operations, we have looked into each area of guest touchpoints and have devised a cohesive plan to ensure health and safety by enacting an elevated precaution-

ing inspection, verification, testing and certification company. These enhanced protocols, operational guidance and comprehensive health and safety procedures validated by SGS, are adapted based on local requirements and recommendations, to ensure guests' safety and peace of mind from check-in to check-out.

## Are you focusing on staycations or domestic tourism?

Cordon points out that although airlines are starting to operate, flights are predominantly repatriating stranded citizens and residents, making international travel difficult. Therefore, post COVID-19 recovery is expected to be driven by a rebound in domestic tourism. "We can see that travellers still want to go on holiday, especially after being isolated for such a long time, but safety has become a top priority. As a result, there has definitely been a staycation trend and it is expected to strengthen in the coming months. At the same time, we believe that as countries begin to ease lockdown measures, all eyes are on how and



**Ravi Santiago**  
Cluster General Manager, Ramada Hotel & Suites by Wyndham Ajman, Ramada by Wyndham Beach Hotel Ajman and Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche

**“We recently launched a staycation package, which is available until end of September and are going to introduce a daycation package alongside F&B offers that are targeted to UAE residents”**

tioned above, I believe the industry in our region will go back to previous levels within 18-24 months."

Cordon shares, "The travel industry has rebounded from numerous past crises and we strongly believe we will all bounce back again, with a fresh and innovative perspective. Whilst the industry is currently under pressure, it is relieving to observe that domestic travel is starting to open and beginning to pick up in various parts of the world. Going forward, despite the cabin-fever that kicked-in as a result of social distancing, travellers around the

cause it's in our nature to move around and explore. It will be a gradual recovery, but we are optimistic that by the fourth quarter, people will have more confidence to travel."

"We are optimistic that domestic industry will pick up by July in Sri Lanka, followed by international arrivals in August when the airports and the borders open. Similarly, in the Maldives, we are hopeful that with the airport opening up along with the borders, we will see a gradual increase in arrivals over the next few months," concludes De Cruz. 🇨🇪

# Virtually connected at ATM



The Arabian Travel Market is the most anticipated event in the Middle East, this year with all its barriers didn't really deter the organisers from running a successful show – connecting people across the world with 18,959 total registrations, 3,382 exhibitors, 490 media persons, 46 speakers and 12,058 trade visitors. **TRAVELTALK** caught up with a few comments from industry leaders.



## Raki Phillips

Chief Executive Officer, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority

“ RAKTDA respects and supports the decision of the organisers to host ATM virtually this year, keeping in mind the health and well-being of participants and attendees. As the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the travel and tourism sector, it is crucial that we continue to engage with our industry partners and find new ways to collaborate and share knowledge. ATM Virtual provided the ideal platform for industry leaders to share their insights and experience on the trends impacting the tourism sector during these difficult times. We look forward to next year's exhibition, and the opportunity to come together with the travel community and reinforce those all-important interpersonal connections with suppliers, consumers and industry experts. ”



## Tarique Khatri

EVP Centre of Excellence, Seera Group

“ The virtual Arabian Travel Market, organised in tune with the current times, added to the positive outlook of the industry, and inspired confidence on its revival, with green shoots already in sight. Seera Group, as a regular participant at the event in earlier years, showcased our view of the market and our confidence in how domestic tourism will first gain strength, followed by the region welcoming international tourists. This is underpinned in the first survey on post COVID-19 travel in Saudi Arabia conducted by our omnichannel travel brand, Almosafer, which highlighted our industry's resilience and predicts that a majority of Saudis are ready to travel once restrictions are lifted. ”

## Gaurav Bhatnagar

Co-Founder, TBO Holidays

“ It was very disappointing for the entire travel trade that the ATM couldn't happen this year. It is one event that all of us look forward to every year. So, it was heartening to see that the organisers made an effort to conduct a virtual ATM. We used the opportunity to connect with our suppliers, customers and partners using the online platform. The webinars were also interesting and engaging. While nothing can replace an actual in-person meeting, virtual ATM was as good as it could be in the given circumstances. ”



## Pichaya Saisaengchan

Director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand for Dubai and the Middle East

“ With ATM going virtual this year, it was very insightful to see how the travel and tourism community has reacted to the current pandemic. The sharing of strategy from the different tourism destinations is important as we aim to attract international visitors by addressing health and safety concerns. In Thailand, we have introduced the 'Amazing Thailand Safety and Health Administration: SHA' certification, which aims to elevate the country's hospitality industry standards and develop confidence among tourists, including visitors from the ME. ”



## Asim Arshad

Group Chief Executive Officer – Orient Travel and Tourism Agency LLC; Orient Tours LLC; Orient Cargo LLC

“ In its 27<sup>th</sup> iteration, ATM was held virtually over the first four days of June 2020 to acclaim and success. Our team was well represented to take advantage of 50+ meetings, but I would be remiss not to qualify it with a brief mention of the AV difficulties attendees faced. However, given the quality of buyers' present, especially and in surprisingly good numbers from Latin America, the overall feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Congratulations to Reed Exhibitions and DTCM for a terrific first effort. ”



## Nasir Jamal Khan

Chief Executive Officer, Al Naboodah Travel

“ ATM virtual was a new concept which became a really good networking platform. It was also a good opportunity this year to attend as a panellist and share ideas with like-minded professionals in the trade. We were able to have our meetings scheduled and attend them with ease thanks to the virtual platform. Overall, it was a successful event and a good experience in this new normal era. ”

## Daniel Rosado Bayon

Director of the Spanish Tourism Office in Abu Dhabi

“ The ATM, being a major exhibition for the region's travel and tourism industry, is the perfect place to meet with tourism professionals and foster relationships. This year, as result of coronavirus, we had the virtual ATM, which helped our partners to continue the contact with the travel trade in the region, and this time from home. Nothing can replace physical meetings, but the online system set up worked perfectly, being easy and convenient. Given the uncertainty of our sector at these times, webinars and live conferences were very useful to get a real picture of the actual situation and what is coming and how we can prepare for the new normal. ”



## Sapna Aidasani

Manager PR and Marketing, Pluto Travels

“ I am impressed the way Dubai shows leadership in all the industries especially travel industry. When I heard that ATM was going to take place in June amidst the COVID scenario, I was wondering when all the fairs across the globe have been cancelled how will ATM happen, and the news came that it would be a virtual ATM. Within the same day I registered myself and started getting meeting invites. On Day one, I had more than six meetings which was way too much with all the other webinars and panel discussions. Day two went smoothly and I was able to connect with many partners and hotels from Africa to Europe. I was glad they extended the ATM for Day four which gave me an opportunity to finish my meetings and connect with more participants. ”



Inputs by Shehara Rizvi



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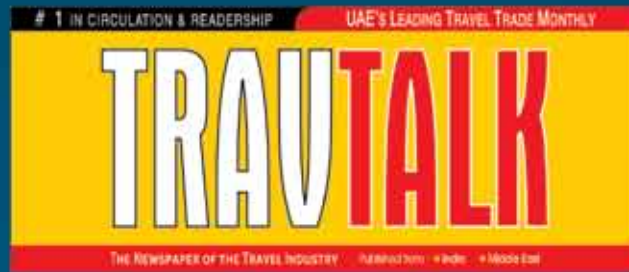
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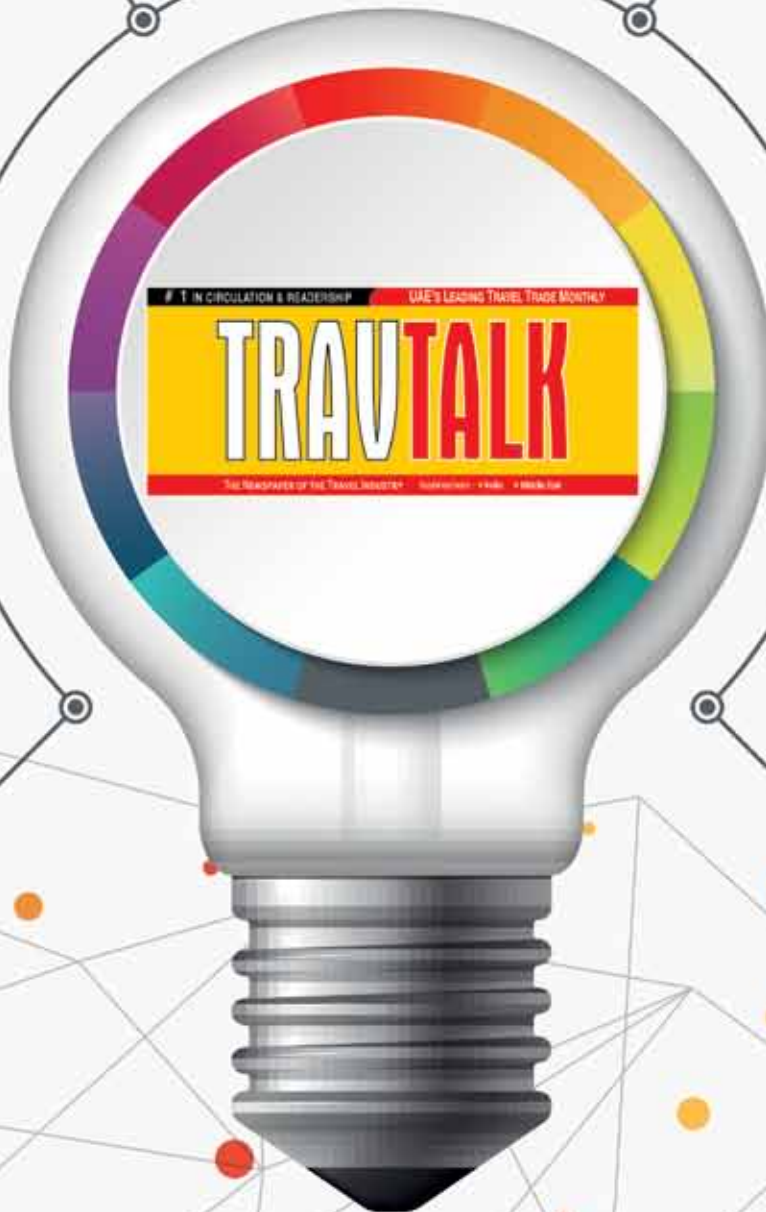


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