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Special**

March 4-8, 2020

TRAVTALK



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ME focus on tech @ITB Berlin

All roads lead to ITB Berlin as the world meets on one platform in the city from March 4-8, 2020. Travel trends have witnessed different changes over the past year with technology and digital mobility taking centre stage, and the contingent from ME will be focussing on how this contributes towards travel and tourism businesses.

“ We are looking forward to our coming participation at ITB Berlin, the ideal platform to shine the spotlight on the emirate's latest plans and strategies, driving in more growth for the local tourism industry, including the strong focus we have placed on outdoor leisure, eco-tourism and the growth of the hospitality industry. In fact, the main objective of our presence is to showcase Sharjah's unique tourism product and distinctive projects, reinforcing the emirate's position as an ideal regional and global family-friendly destination as we head towards our target of attracting 10 million visitors by 2021. ”



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



Raki Phillips
CEO, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism
Development Authority

“ We very much look forward to participating in ITB again this year as it provides a great opportunity to engage with the industry in one of our strongest source markets. Germany continues to be one of our leading international source markets, driven by a strong appetite for the destination's year-round offering. Our presence in Berlin will serve to reinforce the diverse appeal of Ras Al Khaimah as a destination to existing and potential trade partners through on-stand collaborations with some of our activity, adventure and hospitality providers as well as local tour operators. ”



Ifitikhar Hamdani
Cluster GM- Ramada Hotel &
Suites by Wyndham Ajman,
Ramada by Wyndham Beach
Hotel Ajman and Wyndham
Garden Ajman Corniche

“ ITB Berlin has always been an excellent platform to reinforce our presence among the German and western European markets and our participation this year is exceptionally significant due to Expo 2020. Apart from networking, ITB Berlin presents opportunities to learn the latest trends in travel and hospitality and gain valuable knowledge and insights from our industry peers. Our properties have attractive and competitive offers especially designed for the German visitors, throughout the year. We ensure to provide them the best value for money. ”



Ahmed Al Qaseer
Chief Operating Officer
- Shurooq

“ We are excited to grant international visitors a first look at two of our recently opened eco-retreats, Al Faya Retreat in Mleiha and Al Badayer Retreat in Al Badayer desert, along with our Kingfisher Retreat at Kalba, exhibiting for the first time all three world-class hospitality properties under our Sharjah Collection brand, at ITB Berlin this year. Exhibiting alongside our nature-inspired eco-retreats, we aim to push our agenda on sustainable and responsible tourism investments and experiences through our eco-tourism and heritage tourism projects, in the MENA region. ”

Inputs by Shehara Rizly



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3.6 mn overnight stays by GCC to Germany

GCC market has been increasing their number travelling to Germany year on year. This year the German National Tourist Board (GNTB) launched its global campaign celebrating the famous Beethoven's 250th birth anniversary. **Nermin Abushnaf** - Communications Manager – GNTO, Gulf countries shares with **TRAVTALK** the importance of the GCC market and their initiatives for the year.



TT Bureau

How was 2019 for GNTO in terms of traffic from the Gulf region?

The GCC travelling audience is of major importance for the German tourism industry and the local hospitality industry is very well-equipped to cater to visitors from the region. According to the latest forecast from the GNTB, the Gulf region

showed greatest growth among overseas market and GCC nationals visiting Germany are expected to increase to 3.6 mn overnight stays by 2030, compared with 1.8 mn guest nights from Gulf nationals recorded in 2018 with key

markets being UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

What is the theme for this year to attract travellers from the GCC? GNTB launched in 2020 its worldwide campaign 'Discover Beethoven' and ini-

ated numerous activities to market this important event on a cultural tourism level. In addition, further global campaigns are launched in various markets by GNTB featuring 'German Summer Cities', showcasing the country's diverse summer activities as well as 'Wanderlust Germany' as a top destination for adventures. Moreover, GNTO launching 'Destination Germany' with its different angles including nature, sightseeing, entertainment, culture, shopping as well as health, recreation and wellness to the GCC nationals.

Gulf region is to promote 'Germany as a year-round travel destination' for the GCC nationals as well as inspire travellers to explore the diversity of the country. Germany has great cities from Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg and Cologne to the breath-taking natural landscapes of the North Sea Coast.



Nermin Abushnaf
Communications Manager – German National Tourist Office, Gulf Countries

Could you share any other plans and initiatives for this year to attract the travellers from the Middle East with a focus on the Gen X, millennials, etc.?

The Millennials and the Generation Z in the Gulf region are more adventurous and keener to explore the lesser known parts of

Germany. Furthermore, sustainable experiences have become essential for them when travelling and we are proud to offer cultural landscapes in unspoiled nature, environmental-friendly transportation links throughout the entire country.

“GCC nationals visiting Germany are expected to increase to 3.6 mn overnight stays by 2030, with key markets being UAE, Saudi Arabia & Kuwait”

Are there any specific areas in Germany being promoted this year?

The aim for GNTO for the


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Tourism Breaking News

- DCT Abu Dhabi partners with Sojern and Spark Foundry to drive tourism in the Emirate
- Wyndham Hotels & Resorts introduces La Quinta to EMEA market with hotel in Istanbul
- Sabre and dnata Travel renew GCC Partner Network agreement
- TIME Express Hotels makes its debut in Sharjah
- Sabre collaborates with Accor to create technology platform for more personalised services
- GCC tourism spend in Egypt will increase by 11% in 2020 generating \$2.36 bn
- 39% increase in vacation rental income during Dubai's events: GuestReady
- Ireland organises its 10th UAE Sales Mission

Personalised travel experiences

As we ring in this new year, we will also be welcoming a new decade. It's a time to not only place bets for the years ahead, but for a retrospective to show how far our industry has come. **Abhijit Pal**, Head of Research, Travel Partners Group, Expedia Group, shares some predictions to help remove friction for travellers.

While the 'OK Boomer' meme may be a bit extreme, it does illustrate a widening gap among the ages – unique perspectives, interests and values define the generations, changing the face of travel and how travel providers are expected to engage with each other.

According to Expedia Group Media Solutions research, younger travellers crave unique experiences and adventure, fully embracing the #YOLO mentality. In a decade, members of Gen A – which is expected to be the most formally educated and wealthiest generation – will be turning 20 years old.

In college and/or working, they'll be making their own travel decisions. Expect them to crave a fully digital, frictionless travel experience – exploring new destinations via their virtual reality sets at home as they shop for their next trip.

Changing face of work

While the 9-5 desk job may still be a norm for many, it's increasingly becoming less of an occurrence for employees. As companies invest more

resources into employees' well-being and provide more flexible travel and 'work from anywhere' policies, employee satisfaction and productivity are getting a boost. The art of business travel will become more important as companies grow and look to carve out a competitive advantage.

Diversity in accommodation

Business travel to leisure, family travel to those trav-

elling for healthcare – all factors drive diversification in accommodations. With travel demand on for houseboats, yachts, RVs and airstreams up 30 per cent year-over-year, the next wave of unique accommodations has arrived. Diversification is important, as travellers should always have the choice in what best fit their travel needs.

Redefining the airport experience

It's the age of the swing traveller – people who prioritise better fares and airport amenities, like shorter security lines and better dining options, even if it means passing on a (much) shorter drive to the

local airport in their town or city. As such, to lure these travellers, airports in the coming years will increasingly reevaluate their offerings – ultimately redefining the airport experience.



Abhijit Pal
Head of Research, Travel Partners Group
Expedia Group

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

“It's the age of the swing traveller – people who prioritise better fares and airport amenities, like shorter security lines and better dining options”

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A word from stalwarts

Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) continues to demonstrate its long-standing commitment to reducing its environmental footprint and contributing positively to society. As such, Green Globe, the highest standard for sustainability worldwide, has awarded DWTC its inaugural certification in recognition of its dedication to sustainable management and operations.

“This award marks DWTC as the first and only event venue in the Middle East to be certified by Green Globe. In line with Dubai's strategic initiatives and tremendous strides in transitioning towards a green economy, the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) is proud to be the first convention and exhibition centre in the region to be certified by Green Globe. DWTC has been an advocate in implementing viable sustainable strategies and continues to remain agile in developing initiatives that contribute to the green transformation of the MICE sector in the Middle East.

Today, we stand at a crucial stage, where sustainability and environmental impact are among key priorities globally – and with growing demand for a shift towards sustainable practices, our efforts continue to support Dubai in its journey towards a greener future.”

— His Excellency Helal Saeed Al Marri
Director General, Dubai World Trade Centre Authority (DWTCA) and Dubai Tourism



Philippine Airlines serving the nation

Philippine Airlines has been serving to secure better connections all around the globe for almost 79 years, ever since the airlines' first flight took off in March 1941. The airline now aims to expand its network with additional flights and is seeking to attain the goal of putting the Philippines in the world map as one of the most well-connected destinations in the far east.

TT Bureau

Founded by a group of businessmen in February 1941 and then a month later March 1941, the first Philippine Airlines

year, the government of Philippines invests in Philippine Airlines making it the national carrier known as "PAL". The first service starts on September 2, 1941 to Cebu and then

ing overseas, gives the airline an edge as the national carrier.

In United Arab Emirates there are over one million workers from the Philip-

Manager, UAE, Philippine Airlines, 2019 proved to be a good year with a significant increase of 8 per cent in passenger traffic in comparison to 2018.

Their network keep expanding every year with additional flights to destinations that are popular, so this year there will be two international flights one from Manila to Perth flying four times daily and another from Cebu to Los Angeles

thrice weekly and a domestic service from Manila to Pagadian as a daily flight.

Pagaduan states, "Philippine Airlines as the heart of the Filipino will continue to serve our countrymen by giving a service that no other can. Philippine Airlines will play a major role in ensuring bilateral relations between the UAE and Philippines as we are closely collaborating with several government agencies to help



Agnes Pagaduan
Country Manager UAE
Philippine Airlines

boost and promote Philippines as another holiday destination in the region. With the help of our trade and hotel partners there is no doubt that we will attain our goal in putting our country in one of the best destinations in far east."



flight takes to the skies with a twin-engine, five-seater Beech Model 18 aircraft from Nielsen airfield in Makati to Baguio. By September of the same

the story continues up to date where they have become an income earner for the government of Philippines. Having almost three fourth of the country work-

pines and every year the number keeps growing which ensures that the airline has continued business every year. According to the Agnes Pagaduan, Country

“Philippine Airlines will play a major role in ensuring bilateral relations between the UAE and Philippines by closely collaborating with several government agencies to help boost and promote it as a holiday destination”



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KSA to invest SAR 5 bn in cinemas

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in keeping with its 2030 vision will add a total of 140 cinemas in 30 malls across the region. According to Cinema Build KSA report, supporting and enhancing the fast-growing cinema sector will not only contribute to more inbound tourism to the destination but will also create more than 5,314 job opportunities in the Saudi market.

TT Bureau

Cinema investment in Saudi Arabia is expected to generate an estimated SAR 5 billion in construction, with 140 cinemas planned to open in 30 malls, during 2020, according to data published ahead of Cinema Build KSA 2020, which takes place at Fairmont, Riyadh from February 19-20, 2020.

The Saudi cinema industry will see enormous growth and is set to become the leader in the region and has already gained attention from cinema stakeholders across the globe. With an equivalent to 1,323 of total screens



planned across the country, the demand for materials and resources to build cinema has increased. The Cinema Build KSA report reveals an estimated number of 158,760 cin-

ema seats and more than 5,953,500 square feet of cinema carpet will be required to execute 2020 growth plans, in addition to more than 18,852,750 sqft of gypsum boards,

wall panels, mass barrier ceiling and 1,250 air handling units.

One of the main goals of the Vision 2030, is to increase Saudi household spending

on domestic entertainment from 2.9 to 6 per cent of total expenditure, considering that Saudi nationals spend about \$30 billion annually on tourism and entertainment outside the Kingdom. Supporting and enhancing the fast-growing cinema sector will not only recover Saudi investments abroad but will also create more than 5,314 job opportunity in 2020 in the Saudi market according to Cinema Build KSA report.

Cinema Build KSA provides enormous networking and business opportunities to international brands and serves as a one-stop-shop for the local cinemas. Being the largest gathering of cinema stakeholders in Saudi, Cinema Build KSA 2020 will

serve as a learning centre for building world-class cinemas. The event is organised by Eyes of Cities in association with The Great Minds Group. Boasting more than 300 attendees, and more than 30 sponsor and exhibitor as well as 25 international speakers, the second annual Cinema Build KSA conference will cover a broader aspect of the burgeoning cinema industry in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

FactFile

■ The Cinema Build KSA report reveals an estimated number of 158,760 cinema seats and more than 5,953,500 square feet of cinema carpet to execute 2020 growth plans



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Sri Lanka Tourism to get a boost

Taking reins as the chairperson of Sri Lanka Tourism, **Kimarli Fernando**, an attorney-at-law, is a well-known corporate professional. With over 30 years of professional experience, she serves as the new energy to propel the tourism sector to a new level. Fernando talks about her plans to reach out to industry stakeholders in Europe at ITB and create awareness about Sri Lanka.

 Shehara Rizly

What are the objectives of the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotions Bureau for this year?

The main objectives of Sri Lanka Tourism Promotions Bureau include signing up of proper marketing agencies, launching a three-year global marketing campaign, streamlining services of the institution, and maintaining inter-ministerial cooperation. Last year was tough for all tourism industry stakeholders' due to Easter Sunday attacks, and our immediate concern is to get back to 2018 level and progress from there onwards.

Middle East, especially UAE has a good potential of visitors to Sri Lanka with over 200 different nationalities living together, so how will you attract this large market segment to the beautiful island?

The ME region is an important market for Sri Lanka. As per the current statistics, the highest number of tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka is from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Nationals of UAE consist of approximately 10 per cent of the population while the vast majority consist of a vibrant expatriate community. The diverse population has diverse expectations. Greater col-



Kimarli Fernando
Chairman, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotions Bureau

laboration with destination management companies, hoteliers, airlines and other key industry stakeholders are important to grow this market. The connectivity between the two countries

has grown with over 90 direct flights (Sri Lankan, Etihad, Emirates, Fly Dubai, Air Arabia) a week with 5 airlines operating from Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah and Colombo. From the Middle East region there are 190 direct flights a week. The important aspect is to study the market and understand the behavioural patterns of the potential tourist Sri Lanka wishes to attract to its shores. A well-structured targeted campaign on digital and social media platforms are key to grow this market. We work very closely with international journalists and bloggers to reach this audience. We are currently in the process of appointing a destination representation company to this region to tailor-make our promotional efforts. With the World Expo 2020 scheduled to commence in October, Sri Lanka will use the World Expo as the gateway to brand this great island nation as a tourist destination.

With the change of the President in the country, many new changes in terms of visa to attract more visitors may have been implemented, could you share some of them with us please?

As we prepare for ITB Berlin issue, we know that Sri Lanka will also participate as it is one of the main feeder markets; hence could you give us a brief about the importance of participation at ITB Berlin this year and the expectations?

At ITB, we expect to address the international media at Sri Lanka Press Conference and announce new promotional plans of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Pavilion is designed with many tourist attractions of the destination. The pavilion is expected to attract visitors giving 68 hoteliers and tour operators from Sri Lanka the opportunity to network with industry stakeholders.

“ Sri Lanka Tourism Promotions Bureau include signing up of proper marketing agencies, launching a three-year global marketing campaign, streamlining services of the institution, and maintaining inter-ministerial cooperation ”

around seven million tourists. Unfortunately, the tourism industry in Sri Lanka has been too dependent on offering the same tourism products and catering to the same source markets for too long. For tourism sector to reach its full potential we are looking into implementing new initiatives and it's critical that we attract tourists from new source countries.

Europe has traditionally been Sri Lanka's biggest tourism source market with the top contributors being UK, Germany and France.

The European segment accounts for about half of all tourists who have made Sri Lanka their destination of choice. Sri Lanka has been an active participant at ITB almost from its inception. Over the years, ITB has helped Sri Lanka tourism to reach out to the industry stakeholders in Europe and create awareness on our island paradise while also helping to create a platform for local industry stakeholders to build close links with the international travel and tourism community.

FactFile

- We are looking at a five-year timeline with over \$10 billion earnings, and around seven million tourists
- The connectivity between the two countries has grown with over 90 direct flights a week with 5 airlines operating from ME



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43.6% growth in Oman's cruise tourists

Oman's Ministry of Tourism has revealed that the Sultanate posted a significant 43.6 per cent growth in cruise ship tourists from January to December 2019 to reach 283,488 passengers from 193,467 recorded during the same period last year. The highest arrivals are expected during the winter season that begins in October and ends in April.

 TT Bureau

The Ministry attributed the surge to the government's relevant initiatives, including infrastructural developments, and the ongoing and reinforced tourism campaigns that focus on Oman's civilisation, culture, heritage, diverse adventures, and popular attractions. The Ministry said a total of 284 cruise ships, which will carry thousands of tourists from all over the world, are already scheduled to anchor at the Sultanate's three main ports in season 2019-2020, namely Sultan Qaboos Port (162 cruise ships); Port of Khasab (75 cruise ships); and Port of Salalah (47

cruise ships). The highest arrivals are expected during the winter season that begins in October and ends in April.

The Ministry has been collaborating with relevant government and private sector entities and ship owners and operators to enhance cruise tourism in Oman as well as help develop the capability and efficiency of local ports to handle giant cruise ships.

Part of the Ministry's initiatives is faster license and permit, application processes and approvals.

Abdullah Saif Al Saadi, Head of Cruise and Charter Flights, Ministry of Tourism, said, "We aim to attract international cruise ships as part of our overall travel and tourism campaigns. To achieve this, we have been improving our ports, implementing the best practices and in-



Abdullah Saif Al Saadi
Head of Cruise and Charter Flights
Ministry of Tourism

ternational standards, and enhancing our facilities, to name a few. We are also planning to invest in the facilities of Sultan Qaboos Port to entice more cruise ships to make a stopover in Oman. Furthermore, we will continue to participate

in relevant forums and exhibitions as well as carry out promotional campaigns in collaboration with leading cruise lines."

"The Ministry of Tourism is making efforts to attract giant cruise ships in line with our national tourism campaigns. Cruise ships are an essential part of our efforts to promote winter tourism. For a long time, the Ministry has been coordinating with local authorities to ensure that the country's ports remain capable of meeting the needs of cruise ships of all sizes. This year, we are confident that we will surpass our previous accomplishments thanks to the Ministry's ongoing

partnerships with relevant institutions to make Oman one of the world's popular cruise ship destinations. By the end of 2019, Oman welcomed 283,844 cruise tourists. We expect the number to reach 300,000 in 2020," he further stated.

Moreover, MSC company has been adding MSC Bellissima ship to Oman ports during this season 2019-2020. MSC Bellissima is the fifth cruise ship of MSC to make a stopover in Oman after MSC Lirica, Splenida, Magnifica, and Orchestra. During the winter season, MSC Cruises will carry out 49 visits to Sultan Qaboos Port, Khasab Port, and Salalah Port. 

“We aim to attract international cruise ships for which we have been improving our ports, implementing the best practices and international standards, and enhancing our facilities, to name a few”

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Turkish Airlines soars high

Flying to almost 319 destinations around the globe Turkish Airlines has established itself as the airline with the maximum number of destinations. The year 2019 was a fruitful year with the launching of flights from Sharjah to Istanbul and the opening of the new airport in Istanbul. **Emre Ismailoglu**, General Manager, Dubai & Northern Emirates, Turkish Airlines talks to **TRAVTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

How was 2019 for Turkish Airlines with the transition to the new airport?

2019 was a year of progress for us due to several reasons. We underwent a complete upgrade, expanded our unrivalled route network further, enhanced our service offering, and refined the interiors of our 787 Dreamliner fleet. The transition of Turkish Airlines' operations to the new Istanbul Airport was also a big success, and it presented us with new opportunities to upgrade our offering. We also opened a 130 sq m art exhibition curated from the Istanbul Modern Collection at the Turkish Airlines Business Lounge.



Emre Ismailoglu
General Manager, Dubai & Northern Emirates, Turkish Airlines

There were many codeshares signed over the past year, how have they contributed to the growth of the network?

Partnerships are central to the continued growth of Turkish Airlines' global network. Through a fleet of 351

aircraft, the network has been expanded further and therefore passenger carrying loads and cargo volume have been increased.

Turkish Airlines carried approximately 68.8 million passengers last year with a load factor reaching 81.7 per cent. Cargo capacity increased by 9.5 per cent to reach 1.4 million tonnes.

Last year, Turkish Airlines started operations in Sharjah, could you please give us a brief on this and how the traffic has been?

Flying to more countries than any other airline in the world, Turkish Airlines has been developing its activities in Sharjah as a growing tourism centre in the UAE and therefore added it to the company's flight

Istanbul's Sabiha Gökçen Airport. Providing safe, comfortable and advantageous flights operated by experienced Turkish Airlines' cabin and cockpit crew, the introduction of 26 new destinations across 16 countries will increase AnadoluJet's passenger capacity by 22 per cent, offering an additional 1.2 million seats to travellers with competitive fares. These routes include Istanbul to Dubai, Abu Dhabi, London, Paris, Milan, Berlin, Vienna, Jeddah, Baku, Manama, and others. This expansion will offer 30 per cent better connectivity to domestic and international routes from Turkey – a testament

year. By operating the latest and most cost-efficient aircraft in the world, we are able to constantly improve our world-class services and offerings.

What are the upcoming plans for AnadoluJet?

Turkish Airlines' AnadoluJet brand goes global on March 29 with its new international flights from Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen Airport. Since its foundation in 2008, AnadoluJet has been carrying over 100 million passengers between the airports of Turkey and now it is set to carry its service quality abroad with its new flight network. Operating its flights with 87 years of experience of Turk-

“The introduction of 26 new destinations across 16 countries will increase AnadoluJet's passenger capacity by 22 per cent, offering an additional 1.2 million seats to travellers with competitive fares”



January 2020 traffic results for Turkish Airlines

❖ International load factor increased by 1.6 percentage points to around 80% and domestic load factor decreased by 0.3% to around 87% compared to the same month of last year.

❖ International-to-international transfer passengers (transit passengers) increased by nearly 4% and international passengers excluding international-

to-international transit passengers increased by around 19% compared to the same period of last year. The total number of international passengers increased by 10% in January compared to the same month of last year.

❖ In January, we realised increases in the number of passengers in Far East, Africa, Europe, North Amer-

ica and Middle East, by 13.6%, 11.8%, 8.7%, 7.1% and 3.2%, respectively.

❖ In January, cargo/mail volume increased by 8.4%, compared to the same period of 2019. Main contributors to the growth in cargo/mail volume are Far East with 19.6 %, Domestic with 12%, Europe with 6.4% and North America with 4.3% increase.

network as the third destination in the country alongside Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Demand has continued to rise for the route, which is why we now operate seven flights a week between Istanbul and Sharjah.

Dubai has daily flights to Istanbul covering many destinations around the world, will there be any additions this year especially as we celebrate the year of Expo 2020?

We are excited to announce that from March onwards Turkish Airlines' AnadoluJet brand will launch globally with new international flights from

to our goal of bringing the world closer together.

Could you share the plans and initiatives for 2020 by Turkish Airlines? Are there any new codeshares, new destinations in the offing?

In 2020 we plan to build on the momentum of 2019 with further growth of our route network. This year we'll carry passengers to a number of exciting new destinations, namely Osaka, Japan; Newark, USA; Malabo, Equatorial Guinea; and Tokyo Haneda, Japan. We are also planning to launch a service to Vancouver, Canada later this

ish Airlines, AnadoluJet will add international flights covering 26 destinations in 16 countries to its routes in Turkey according to the new plan.

With its fleet set to reach 57 aircrafts in total, the brand will carry the flight satisfaction provided by Turkish Airlines to its new flights. With its whole operational processes such as the ground services and technical maintenance covered by the Turkish Airlines assurance, the international flights will also put comfort at the forefront. The on-board catering by Turkish DO&CO will continue free of charge. 

VFS Global packages for Expo 2020

VFS Global, an official ticket reseller for Expo 2020 Dubai, to be held in the UAE between October 20, 2020 and April 10, 2021, has come out with packages that it will be offering visitors from March 2020, in an official ceremony held in Riyadh. VFS Global will also be offering single and three-day passes at the Expo, as well as a range of other packages with lucrative discounts.

 TT Bureau

Customers travelling to the UAE during Expo 2020 will be able to either visit vfsglobal.com, or head to a VFS Global Visa Application Centre in Riyadh or Jeddah, and reserve their Expo 2020 tickets from the Dubai Travel Shop on site. VFS Global will be offering single and three-day passes at the Expo, as well as a range of packages.

Customers who opt to submit their visa application through the Premium Lounge can also enjoy discounts on the packages they purchase.

Open seven days a week for a period of 173 days and featuring over 190 country pavilions, Expo 2020 Dubai is set to be the biggest show in the UAE. Dubbed the 'World's Greatest Show', the event is a reflection of human



Eng. Khaled Jadallah, Senior Advisor, Expo 2020 (right) and Halit Halip, Senior Manager - International Ticket Sales for South Asia, Africa, GCC and ME, Sales and Marketing, Expo 2020 (centre)

brilliance and achievement, and thus organised under the theme 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future'. It will have three sub themes – Opportunity, Mobility and Sustainability, and feature more than 60 live events each day, celebrating arts, architecture, culture, music, gastronomy and much more.

VFS Global has been associated with the government of the UAE since 2003, and provides visa application services on its behalf in 15 countries worldwide. Additionally, it extends e-Visa services for Dubai, via a mobile app, to residents from over 180 countries travelling on Emirates Airlines.

Customers travelling to the UAE during Expo 2020 will be able to either visit vfsglobal.com or head to a VFS Global Visa Application Centre in Riyadh or Jeddah, and reserve their Expo 2020 tickets from the Dubai Travel Shop on site.

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Regardless of what your interests may be, book a tour around our National Parks and witness a variety of wildlife from one part of the country to the other.

Each Park around the country is famous for various types of wildlife. When you feel like you want to see the majestic elephants, Udawalawe National Park and Minneriya National Park are the places to be, with the latter boasting of the famed 'gathering' by the water during the dry season. Watch baby elephants splash water at each other as their mothers and grandmothers observe them closely.

The spirit of family is truly visible in these herds as they protect their own no matter what.



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Personality of the Month

1st lady GM in KSA at Radisson

As Saudi Arabia explores the opportunities of obtaining more inbound tourism by relaxation of its visa regulations in keeping with its Vision 2030; Radisson becomes the first group in the hospitality trade to announce the appointment of Maram Kokandi as the first lady General Manager at Park Inn by Radisson, Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

 Shehara Rizly

Maram Kokandi has been appointed General Manager (GM) of Jeddah's new Park Inn by Radisson Hotel, setting another precedent for Saudi women as the first to hold such a position in the hospitality sector.

Plethora of opportunities

Kokandi states that she grew up in an open-minded environment where she was always encouraged by both her parents to explore her potential and follow her dreams. "Travel was something I did a lot from my childhood days with

my parents, allowing me to be exposed to different cultures – both here in Saudi Arabia and abroad," she said.

She reiterates, "Landing a job in hospitality was not at all a coincidence. I started off my career as a spa coordinator and moved on to sales manager at Rosewood hotel – again a first as it was when I broke the glass ceiling for the first time and became the first female sales manager in Saudi Arabia. Being appointed as the first lady GM, gave me a chance to hold one of the pioneering positions in the hospitality sector in Saudi Arabia and will go down as a remarkable success in the history of Saudi women."

Kokandi wants to maximise her opportunities in the coming years as she derives a lot of satisfaction from empowering the younger generation to excel in the field of hospitality.

Most remarkable achievements in her career

She has already gone down in history as the first female GM in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. She shares, "As much as being able to hold the title of the first Saudi

Jeddah market in such a way that makes us stand out in terms of affordability, convenience and being a design-led hotel. My property boasts of 84 rooms, casual dining spaces, meeting facilities, dedicated spa and fitness facilities for

the culinary arts. I'm a very detailed-oriented person and I love to cook. Most of my leisure time is spent trying out new recipes or meeting friends and family over food. Food is always in the equation! So, I guess I would have chosen to pursue a career as a chef."

“To be appointed as the first Saudi lady general manager, gave me a chance to hold one of the pioneering positions in the hospitality sector in Saudi Arabia and will go down as a remarkable success in the history of Saudi women”

lady GM is a remarkable achievement for me, I would consider the upcoming challenges that I will tackle and overcome successfully once the property is up and running, to add to my list of achievements."

Kokandi shared some of the plans for her property. "Having to head the first Park Inn property in Jeddah – which is another first – allows us to position ourselves in the

male and female separately and a runway lounge with a pool. Perfectly catering to frequent travellers looking for pocket-friendly hotel."

Passion for culinary arts

We asked Kokandi which career she would pursue if not in hospitality and she replied about her second passion which is cooking. "If this was not an option, I would have ventured in

Impact of Saudi Vision 2030

Saudi vision 2030 is now on full swing with the relaxation of visa regulations to enter the country, this will create more opportunities for both the tourism and hospitality sectors. Kokandi shared her opinion about the same, she said, "The new visa regulation influences a significant leap on the kingdom's tourism – with its long-term development goals under the Vision 2030 - to not just boost the religious tourism but increase the kingdom's appeal as a wider tourist destination."



Maram Kokandi
General Manager at Park Inn by Radisson,
Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

MEA's largest Marriott to open in KSA by 2023

Marriott International Inc. signed a landmark agreement with Nahdet Al-Mashaer to open a 2,600-room Fairfield by Marriott property in Makkah. The agreement is expected to deliver the first Fairfield by Marriott property to the Middle East and Africa region, creating the largest Fairfield hotel in the world and bringing one of the largest hotels to the growing religious destination of Makkah.

The Fairfield by Marriott Makkah Al Naseem is set to rise in five towers in the Al Naseem district, located in close proximity to the Grand Mosque. Plans call for 2,600 well-appointed spacious, modern suites that would separate areas for working and sleeping. Construction for the Fairfield by Marriott Makkah Al Naseem has already commenced, and the hotel is slated to open in 2023.



Jerome Briet, Marriott International, Chief Development Officer, Middle East and Africa, said, "We expect this hotel will become a popular destination, es-

pecially given the strong demand for high-quality lodging in the Holy City. "The brand's Fairfield guarantee delivers a simple promise to provide each guest with an

inviting and effortless experience all at a great value. The Fairfield by Marriott brand currently has more than 1,000 open hotels in the U.S., as well as Latin America, Mexico and Asia."

"As a company, we remain focused on developing projects that further enhance Makkah as one of the most important destinations in Saudi Arabia while supporting the overall growth

and development of the Kingdom," said Emad Hejazi, Chairman of Nahdet Al-Mashaer. "We are excited to collaborate with Marriott International to open the Fairfield by Marriott Makkah Al Naseem, which will be one of the largest hotels in the holy city. The reliability of the Fairfield by Marriott brand, will make it an ideal hotel destination for those visiting for Umrah and Haj when the property opens in 2023," he added.

Amadeus, Seera renew partnership

Amadeus and Seera Group have strengthened their partnership to drive technology innovation in the region's tourism sector. This follows a year of collaboration that led to significant digital transformation of travel and tourism services. Amadeus is also supporting Seera in expanding its omni-channel consumer travel business, Almosafer, across Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and beyond.

 TT Bureau

With the renewed partnership, Seera Group works closely with Amadeus to strengthen its online business further, integrating digital touchpoints across all its operations, including its flagship corporate and government travel business, elaa. As the travel tech provider across Seera's diverse portfolio of services, Ama-

deus brings cutting-edge innovation and state-of-the-art tech tools that enhance customer service standards and bring higher operational efficiency across the Group. In other highlights of the successful partnership, Amadeus is supporting Seera Group in expanding its omni-channel consumer travel business, Almosafer, across Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and beyond.

“As Amadeus renews its partnership with Seera, we are committed to continue providing product and service excellence, and we look forward to evolving the travel experience in the region even further”

Stephane Durand, Senior Vice President, Business Travel Western Europe, Middle East and Africa of Amadeus



At the ceremony to announce the renewed partnership of Amadeus and Seera Group, seen are (from left): Nashat Bukhari, Managing Director Amadeus Saudi Arabia; Muzzamil Ahussain, EVP consumer Travel; Abdulrahman Mutrib, CTO, and Abdullah Al-Dawood, Group CEO of Seera Group; Antoine Medawar Senior Vice President and Managing Director, Amadeus Middle East and Africa; and Tarique Khatri, EVP Centre of Excellence, Seera Group.

Amadeus has been an ongoing strategic partner of Seera Group and has provided a host of technical support that helped consolidate the group's online business through tools such as Touchless that scaled up its efficiency of operations. With over 30 years' experience in providing travel technology solutions and helping clients

to optimise their business, Amadeus will provide all the businesses of Seera with greater access to an unrivalled breadth of content, enabling Seera to better serve its clients in Saudi Arabia and across the region. Seera will implement the latest Amadeus solutions relating to hotel content, virtual credit card payment capabilities,

fare optimisation solutions and content via NDC (New Distribution Capability) connectivity.

Abdullah Al-Dawood, Group CEO of Seera Group, said, "We pioneered the digitisation of travel and tourism services in the region to bring enhanced customer service standards that meet

the aspirations of today's travellers. Across all our businesses, we have integrated digital solutions that have created added value for our customers while enabling us to achieve more productivity."

Stephane Durand, Senior Vice President Business Travel, Western Europe, Middle East and Africa of Amadeus, said, "As Amadeus renews its partnership with Seera, we are committed to continue providing product and service excellence, and we look forward to evolving the travel experience in the region even further through innovation and our long-standing expertise."

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Nordic spend to reach US\$ 810 mn

Nordic tourists travelling to the GCC from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland, are expected to generate an estimated US\$ 810 million in travel and tourism revenue by 2024, according to data published ahead of Arabian Travel Market to be held from April 19-22, 2020.

 TT Bureau

The latest Colliers International research, commissioned by Reed Travel Exhibitions, the organiser of Arabian Travel Market, predicts the UAE will witness the highest growth, with total tourism spend by Nordic visitors projected to reach US\$ 718 million by 2024, an increase of 36 per cent when compared with figures from 2018 and tourism spend per trip to reach US\$ 2,088. Building on this, Saudi Arabia is expected to witness the second largest increase followed by Bahrain, with total Nordic tourism spend estimated to reach US\$ 86,670,000 and US\$

53,000,000 respectively, by 2024.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said, "The Nordic countries' outbound tourism market has experienced incremental growth over the last five years, with 50.5 million overseas visits made by residents during 2018 alone. And, with Nordic citizens enjoying one of the highest average incomes in the world and being amongst the world's highest spenders while travelling abroad, the GCC is looking to capitalise on their spending power over the next five years. Adding to this, ATM is witnessing



“The UAE will continue to be the preferred GCC destination for Nordic tourists, welcoming a projected 342,200 tourists by 2024, followed by Saudi Arabia and Oman with 17,300 and 16,500 tourists respectively”

this growth first-hand with the number of delegates, exhibitors and attendees interested in doing business with these countries

increasing by 35 per cent between 2018 and 2019.”

Looking at Nordic outbound tourism figures,

arrivals from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland to the GCC will increase 23 per cent over the period 2018 to 2024, driven by an increasing number of new and direct flight routes, relaxed visa requirements and the vast number of unique travel experiences that the region has to offer.

According to the Colliers data, approximately 383,800 Nordic citizens will travel to the GCC in 2024, with Swedish tourists leading the number of arrivals, totalling 191,900. Visitors from Denmark will follow with 76,700 arrivals, closely followed by Norway, Finland and Iceland with 62,800, 47,200 and 5,200 arrivals, respectively.



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director ME
Arabian Travel Market

Curtis said, "The UAE will continue to be the preferred GCC destination for Nordic tourists, welcoming a projected 342,200 tourists by 2024. Saudi Arabia and Oman will follow with 17,300 and 16,500 tourists respectively."

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An escapade to Indonesia

Travel from Dubai to Indonesia to discover the wonderful hidden treasures in the many islands that adorn the country. Ubud in Bali, Seminyak, Lombok and Gili Terawangan are some of the key attractions of this picturesque destination.

Ubud – mixture of culture and adventure

Ubud is a town in Bali, considered as a picturesque one as it enthralls in nature with rainforests and terraced rice paddies, at the same time with Hindu temples and

travellers would pay a visit to the Tampak Siring temple and Panglipuran village. Among the ancient holy sites, the intricately carved Goa Gajah or 'Elephant Cave' and Gunung Kawi with its rock cut shrines are not to be missed out.



shrines an entwining culture in a very naturally beautiful environment. White water rafting, ATV ride and swing are three of the much-loved activities. Cultural or religious

Seminyak – area of the pristine beaches

Located in the southern end of Bali with many luxury hotels,

villas, spas, high end shopping areas and restaurants it is a paradise for the discerning travellers. Kuta beach is known as the tourist mecca of Bali. Seminyak and Petitenget beaches are wide west facing stretches of Indian ocean with grey sand and good surfing condi-

tions, are some of the key activities one can embark on.

Ende Village (Sasak Tribe)

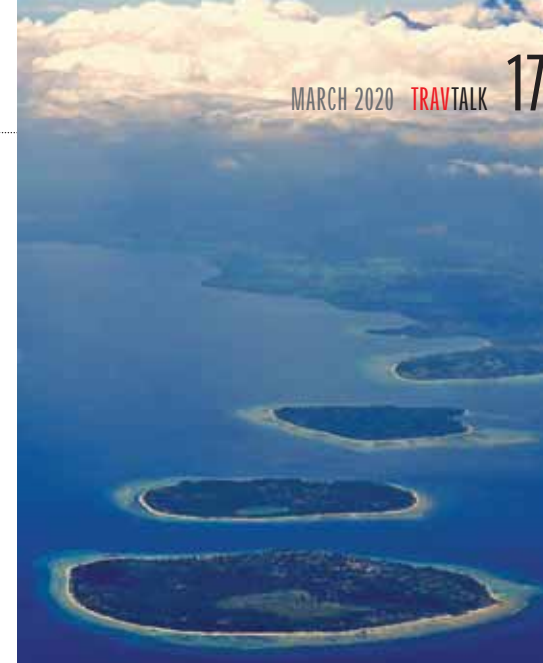
The people live mainly on the island of Lombok which has won many awards and accolades for its natural beauty of resplendent nature. The

'Sasak' people are predominantly Muslim and relate to Balinese language and artistry. According to some the word 'sasak' was derived from 'sak-sak' which means 'boat'.

Gili Terawangan – tourist hotspot

Belonging to an archipelago of three small islands or Gili island triplets - Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno and Gili Air are just off the north-west coast of Lombok. Each island consists of small resorts usually with collection of huts for tour-

ists, a small pool and restaurant. Automobiles and motorised traffic are prohibited on the islands by local ordinance which keeps the place well-preserved. Most preferred method of transportation is either by foot or bicycle or the horse drawn carriage called 'ci-domo'. The abundance of marine life gives provision for scuba diving and free diving in and around the Gilis. The many attractive corals, diving spots such as Shark point and Simon's Reef are some must visit areas.



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

SHARJAH

emerging as the 'go-to' holiday destination for adventure buffs

Sharjah's popularity as a sought-after tourism destination in the region is rising day-by-day, and the emirate is currently competing with the world's top luxury travel destinations. The emirate's rich culture, heritage and diversity of outdoor leisure activities are being highlighted across global markets.



Led by the insightful vision and directives of H.H. Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammed Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) continues to climb new heights in its efforts to position Sharjah among the best travel and tourism destinations in the world.

Memorable experiences

Sharjah never ceases to surprise its visitors with its tourism offerings and services that continue to evolve in line with global standards. Unique experiences await tourists from different countries and age groups in this lively emirate. Thanks to its advanced tourism infrastructure and an array of fun-filled activities, visitors return to this destination time and again.

An endless variety of adventure activities make the emirate of Sharjah an attractive destination for thrill-seekers. History enthusiasts and adventure buffs will surely enjoy learning about and exploring the rich culture and heritage that the emirate offers, as reflected by its diverse range of museums.

Sharjah has something for everyone, and given this, it comes as no surprise that the emirate is increasingly sought-after by families seeking memorable holiday experiences. The ongoing development of uniquely designed eco-friendly tourism projects such as the Kalba Kingfisher Lodge and Al Faya Lodge in coastal areas also reflects the pace of the emirate's economic growth. These projects are garnering a lot of attention from the residents and tourists alike.



Sharjah is ideally placed to meet the growing demand for outdoor tourism as travellers look for adventures, while also exploring the geographical, historical and archaeological monuments only the emirate can offer.

Outdoor activities

Sharjah's desert continues to be one of the top destinations sought-after by adventure amateurs and outdoor enthusiasts. With the onset of the winter season every year, visitors and tourists flock to the desert for outdoor activities. Sharjah is ideally placed to meet the growing demand for outdoor tourism as travellers look for adventures, while also exploring the geographical, historical and archaeological monuments only the emirate can offer. A perfect example is Mleiha, an archeological destination that embodies the history, nature and culture of the emirate.

Outdoor enthusiasts who arrive in Sharjah enjoy plenty of adventure activities, including four-wheel driving between tall sand dunes, spectacular rock climbing and sand skiing. Along with a number of wildlife sanctuaries in Sharjah, nature lovers are sure to enjoy a trip to Kalba, which is located 120 km east of Sharjah city, as it is home to mangroves that shelter a wide array of rare bird species.

Aqua tourism

Furthermore, those who seek tranquility and

serenity might find Sharjah's attractive beaches and blue waters both rejuvenating and refreshing. One can enjoy the depths of these oceans by embarking on a wide variety of activities such as scuba diving, snorkeling, fishing and canoeing and understand why Sharjah is also a popular aqua tourism destination. The emirate's coastal stretch features the pristine Khorfakkan beach and some of the most popular diving sites as well. Here, visitors will be able to revel in the white sandy bay with a wonderful view of the sea while relaxing under the shade of palm trees. Top spots such as Al Khan beach, Khorfakkan beach and the mangroves of Khor Kalba offer excellent opportunities for kayaking and paddle boarding too.

SCTDA continues to organise activities that are designed to promote the emirate's touristic and cultural attractions and present the emirate as a preferred destination for visitors and tourists alike, adding much value to its position as an unforgettable tourism destination in the region.





A perfect getaway in the Middle East

Ras Al Khaimah is a destination beyond the resorts and hotels with a diverse array of landscapes promising rewarding experiences and adventures for all kinds of guests. The emirate has a lot to offer from tribal traditions, top bird-watching spots, outdoor adventures to international events in MICE spectrum and sporting field.

Ras Al Khaimah offers visitors a destination experience unlike any other, with a diverse array of landscapes promising rewarding experiences and adventures for all. Spanning 64-kms of pristine beaches, luxury resorts, culture, heritage and outdoor adventures in the mountains, the emirate ensures a varied suite of activity appealing to all guests.

Guests can delve head first into the emirate's history with the chance to observe tribal traditions and ancient ways of life. This is complemented by rich archaeological sites spanning 18 historic fortifications, castles and towers dating

back to the bronze age. For a more in depth understanding of this, the Ras Al Khaimah National Museum offers insight into the emirate's cultural heritage.

The diverse Arabian wildlife is another point of allure for travellers, with Ras Al Khaimah recognised as a top spot for migratory and resident birds, gazelle, oryx, wild cats, sand cats and foxes. The surrounding coasts, sea and wetlands are home to turtles, black tip reef sharks, flamingos, cormorants and more. Outdoor enthusiasts can head to the mountains, along with many of the certified adventure providers who can guide them through rock

climbing, mountain biking and hiking at hotspots such as the Wadi Showka.

The past year saw Ras Al Khaimah increase its focus on nature-based outdoor adventures centred around Jebel Jais, the UAE's highest peak. The newly launched Jais Adventure Peak allows visitors the chance to take on thrilling attractions such as the Jebel Jais Flight,

which opened just over a year ago. Thrill seekers will delight in reaching speeds of 120 kph to 150 kph at a height of 1,680 metres above sea level on top of Jebel Jais mountain, as they take on the zipline. The impressive and more recently opened Jais Sky Tour gives guests a bird's eye of the incredible local area. Already cementing its place as one of the more popular public at-

Ras Al Khaimah has also marked its place on the global stage via a series of international events hosted across the year, both in the MICE spectrum as well as the sporting field.

tractions at the site, it consists of seven ziplines in total, and a 15-metre-long sky bridge which is the highest of its kind in the UAE. In total the ziplines

both in the MICE spectrum as well as the sporting field. Ras Al Khaimah is increasing its focus on the sports tourism event segment with the



cover 5 km and range from 337 metres high to just over 1 km. The route pauses by the sky bridge before the final zipline of the journey.

On the other hand, Ras Al Khaimah has also marked its place on the global stage via a series of international events hosted across the year,

introduction of a range of outdoor events that take advantage of the diverse natural landscape. This diverse appeal of the emirate ensures that travellers of all kinds are enthralled during their visits and is what has placed Ras Al Khaimah as the regions 'Adventure Capital' as well as the 'Gulf Tourism Capital'.



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Palladium Hotel Group

expands its portfolio in 2020

Palladium Hotel Group continues its international expansion with the announcement of three new hotels for 2020. Representing an investment of more than 57 million euros, the Spanish hotel group is opening new properties in Spain and Italy this year with the aim of continuing to grow and strengthen two of its most important brands: Grand Palladium Hotels & Resorts and Palladium Hotels.

TT Bureau

Palladium Hotel Group is set to launch three all-inclusive hotels this upcoming summer. Grand Palladium Sicilia Resort & Spa and Grand Palladium Garden Beach Resort & Spa located on the Italian island of Sicily, and Palladium Hotel Menorca is situated on the Balearic Island of Menorca. The announcement was followed by the opening of Palladium Hotel Costa del Sol, BLESS Hotel Ibiza and BLESS Hotel Madrid, all of which launched across 2019. These openings show Palladium Hotel Group's efforts to expand its brand portfolio in new destinations while also continuing to offer guests the ultimate all-inclusive experience.

Abel Matutes Prats will be the new President and Jesús Sobrino the new CEO of Palladium Hotel Group, manager and owner of the hotel brands. Sobrino has until now held the position of deputy director general, which will now go to Carmen Matutes Prats.

For his part, Abel Matutes Juan, Founder and President of the company since its inception, will maintain the presidency of the holding company Grupo Empresas Matutes to which Palladium Hotel Group belongs.

Growing in the Mediterranean

In 2020, Palladium Hotel Group will continue to consolidate its expansion strategy with important openings.

The first will be Palladium Hotel Menorca that will be one of the Group's

most ambitious projects in the Spanish market and in which the company will invest 26 million euros for its renovation. Also in the Mediterranean,

specifically in the north of the Italian island of Sicily, Palladium Hotel Group will open Grand Palladium Garden Beach Resort & Spa and Grand

party of the new Grand Palladium Costa Mujeres Resort & Spa and the TRS Coral Hotel in the new destination of Costa Mujeres, north of Cancun.

Palladium Hotel Group : Sicily



Palladium Hotel Group has evolved to now have 48 hotels, more than 14,000 rooms, about 14,000 employees and 10 brands with hotels in six countries around the world: Spain, Italy, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Brazil.

Palladium Hotel Group : Menorca



Palladium Sicilia Resort & Spa with Azora as a strategic partner.

2019: A key year

2019 has been one of the most important in recent years for Palladium Hotel Group. During this year, the group's priority has been to boost its expansion with new openings and brands, as well as consolidating its business model based on hotel management and operation with external partners and investment funds.

As the main milestone of the year, it has highlighted the launch of the Bless Collection Hotels brand with Bless Hotel Madrid and Bless Hotel Ibiza. Another main event for the Group in 2019 was the opening

50 years of turning customers into fans

Palladium Hotel Group has managed to become one of the most relevant and successful companies in Spain's hotel industry. Yet, the true start of its success goes back to the end of the 1960s, when Abel Matutes Juan decided to go into the hotel business with the aim of creating quality accommodation and offering the best service and unique experiences to travellers. Palladium Hotel Group has evolved to now have 48 hotels, more than 14,000 rooms, about 14,000 employees and 10 brands with hotels in six countries around the world: Spain, Italy, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Brazil.

Top 5 tips for a smooth visa process

To help GCC travellers enjoy their wanderlust and make the most of their adventures, VFS Global has put together five most important tips the travel agents need to advise travellers to keep in mind before they jet off. Some administration tips for preparing documents related to visa application while travelling overseas is a must.

TT Bureau

There is nothing more thrilling than an exciting overseas trip. All travellers want to do is read blog posts, watch YouTube videos and plan their adventures. But every overseas trip should involve some administration, in the form of preparing all the important documents, especially for their visa applications.

Create a checklist

A destination-specific, customised list is available on the VFS Global information pages, enlisting all the documents required for a visa application to that particular country. Even a single missing document could render the applica-

tion incomplete and lower your chances of obtaining a visa. And it does not end there; a checklist is also useful when you organise your passport (which needs to be valid for at least six months beyond your date of return), flights, hotel reservations, itineraries, travel insurance policy, ID, medical information and vaccination records.

Get the right photo

Most countries request a current passport-style photo – a colour photo of the face, free of sunglasses, hats or other head coverings, typically 2 square inches in dimension, although details may vary depending on the respective government's



requirements. Ensure that the photos are recent and comply with the specific photo requirements of the respective embassy.

Get all the statements in order

Evidence that your customers have enough money to support themselves financially throughout their stay

is imperative. This can be one of the following:

Bank account statement – that shows there is enough money in the account for the trip. The statement shall be no older than three months.

Sponsorship Letter – by another person that confirms

they will be financially supporting the trip. In order for this letter to be valid, it must be accompanied by a bank statement of the sponsor, no older than three months.

A combination of bank account statements and a letter of sponsorship.

Apply for visas on time

Every country has a different turnaround time for processing a visa application, which in turn varies depending on the peak travel seasons. Often, travellers leave their visa applications to the last minute, leaving themselves very little wiggle time to meticulously follow the checklist and ensure every requirement

is met. Most countries accept applications up to 90 days prior to travel, with Schengen countries now accepting applications up to six months in advance. Applying for a visa early allows enough time to deal with any unforeseen delays.

Keep copies of documents

Ensure that copies of your customers' passport, visa, identification and itineraries are on them at all times and have one copy entrusted to someone staying home. Should the originals get lost, the copies may act as a temporary measure while getting things sorted out. Ensuring that your documents are in order will save you trouble and make your trip a memorable one. 📁

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Cozmo gets new brand identity

Cozmo Travel unveiled its new corporate logo and brand identity that reflect its futuristic vision in the UAE and across the region. Coinciding with Cozmo's 10th anniversary celebrations, the new move aims to support the company's strategy by aligning its diversified service portfolio and providing added value to its customers. The new identity was revealed at the opening of its 37th branch in the UAE, in Karama, Dubai.



Nominations are open



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MEDIA PARTNERS



150 top agents attend maiden

The first roadshow for the GCC took place in Kuwait, Dubai and Abu Dhabi last month in partnership with Emirates Holidays. There were 60 top agents from Kuwait, 52 from Dubai and 50 from Abu Dhabi who attended the event and got an opportunity to speak to every partner from the shopping villages, hotels, tourism boards, etc.



GCC Roadshow




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ABU DHABI



DXB retains number one title

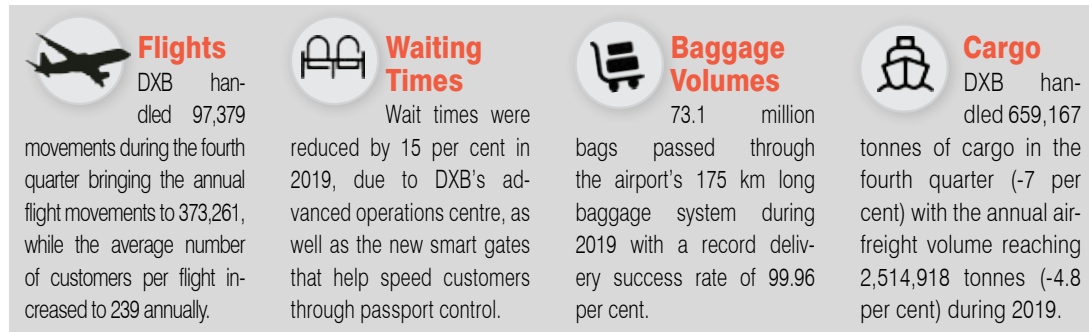
Dubai International (DXB) retained its position as the world's number one hub for international passengers for the sixth consecutive year with annual traffic for 2019 reaching 86.4 million, 6 million more than the nearest rival London Heathrow. India retained its position as the top destination country for DXB by passenger numbers, followed by Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom.

 TT Bureau

The year was also exceptional for DXB in terms of customer service with shorter wait times, record-breaking baggage performance and new retail and food & beverage offerings as summarised in the report by **Paul Griffiths**, CEO, Dubai Airports.

Key facts and figures

DXB welcomed a total of 86,396,757 for the full year of 2019 (-3.1 per cent) as numbers were affected by a series of challenges throughout the year, including the 45-day closure of the airport's southern runway to enable its refurbishment, global market conditions, as well as the worldwide grounding of Boeing 737 Max aircraft. During the fourth quarter of 2019, DXB welcomed 21.9 million customers (1.3 per cent), taking the average monthly passenger numbers at the hub to 7.2 million for the year. The airport also breached the 8-million customer mark



twice during the year (July and August). Expressing satisfaction with DXB's performance in 2019, Griffiths said, "While customer numbers in 2019 were lower than the pre-

ceding year, the impact of the 45-day closure of the runway, the bankruptcy of Jet Airways, as well as the grounding of the Boeing's 737 Max accounted for an estimated 3.2 million passengers over the course of

the year, indicating an underlying growth at DXB."

Top destinations India retained its position as the top destination country for DXB by passenger numbers, with traffic for 2019 reaching 11.9 million, followed by Saudi Arabia with 6.3 million customers, and the UK finishing a close third with 6.2 million

customers. Other destination countries of note include China (3.6 million customers) and the U.S. (3.2 million). The top three cities were London (3.6 million customers), Mumbai (2.3 million customers) and Riyadh with 2.2 million customers. 



Paul Griffiths
CEO
Dubai Airports

“In 2019, there was an estimated 3.2 million passengers, indicating an underlying growth at DXB”

Private view of autodrome

Park Inn by Radisson in Motorcity is strategically located with views to the autodrome track in Dubai. The property connects to the mall, which makes it a very convenient shopping destination for leisure travellers and is also well received by business travellers.

If you are an autodrome enthusiast this is the perfect spot to enjoy

first-hand view of the engines that rev up a good training field or in certain times racetrack for events. As you enter motorcity it is cooler, greener and welcomes you to a totally different city in itself. Watching the speed engines from the comfort of the room or on the rooftop enjoying a dip in the pool is an opportunity that is a rare treat.



James Berry
General Manager, Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Media City & Park Inn by Radisson Motor City

The cozy city somewhat reminds you of a street that you will find in Europe with cobblestones and boutiques on either side of the street. The mall which connects to the property is an advantage, as a guest you can get all your shopping done in one perfect place plus dine in some of the most exclusive restaurants. The property and the surrounding areas have the perfect tools to keep the young, happy and engaged.



Ibis Styles Jumeira enters Guinness World Records

Under the leadership of Muhammad Haider General Manager of Ibis Styles Jumeira, Executive Chef - Hadi Mosfi and Pastry Chef - Leonora Dsouza, the food and beverage team participated in the

coveted Guinness world record at the "Most Varieties of Desert on Display" conducted by World Food Abu Dhabi.

The event had very strict guidelines which made it in terms of what

can and cannot be used as the end products. Every item had to be written in English and in the name of that particular country language as well, which was a very good learning process for all participants.



FESPO 2020

RAKTDA official partner destination

FESPO celebrated their 30th anniversary this year with Ras Al Khaimah participating as the host destination. RAK exhibited with several hotel partners along with the Department of Antiquities and Museums and Emirates airlines. The main objective was for them to have strong presence in their main source markets and the emerging ones, and to further develop collaboration with their trade partners.



SO SRI LANKA

The land of unexplored wonders

Golden sun-kissed beaches, picturesque locations, lush greenery, an island compact with all the gifts of nature and an ancient culture and heritage dating back 2,500 years, an amazing and exotic wildlife to indulge your adventurous side, spicy cuisine to liven up your taste buds — Sri Lanka is all this and more. Get ready to experience the thrill...



One can have all these experiences within one day, making it a 365-day destination, providing the best of experiences all-year-round. Easy accessibility for reaching one destination from another and the vivid diversity of locations make Sri Lanka one of the most sought-after and popular destinations.

With its romantic locations and story book sceneries, Sri Lanka is a preferred destination for holding wedding ceremonies. Also, having four natural

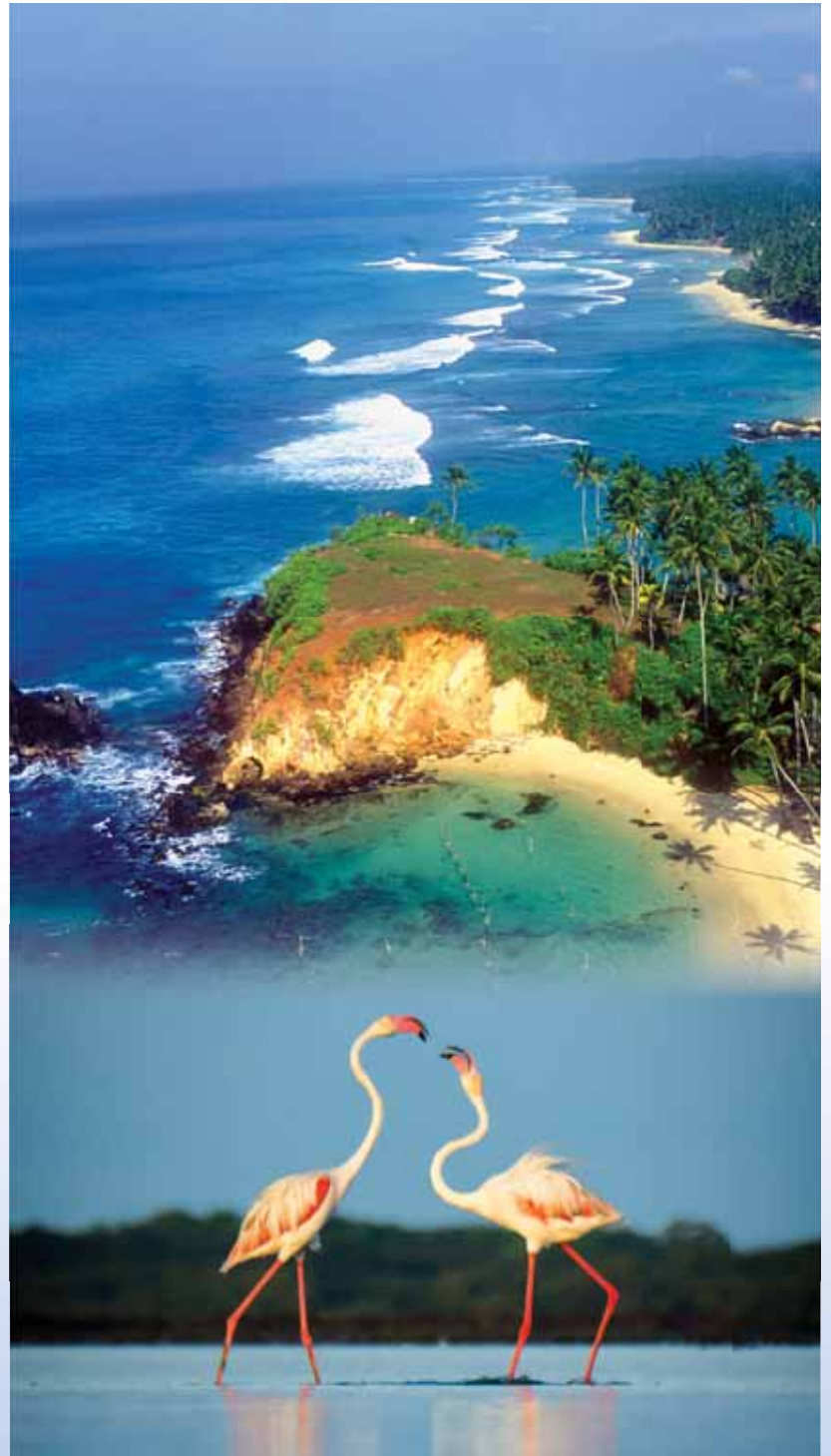
harbours gives it a sophisticated touch as a cruise tourism destination.

Sri Lanka is also known as the 'Land of Smiles' with its hospitable and friendly people who are keen to help when needed. For a perfect beach holiday, Sri Lanka has a golden coastline which spreads continuously along the Southern and Northern coasts, where you can relax in the palm fringed beaches while sipping a king coconut and do some surfing at Arugmbay. Up in the hill country you can enjoy

the soft, cool, breeze drifting through your hotel room window in Nuwaraeliya, whilst you are enjoying a hot cup of freshly brewed, world renowned Ceylon tea. St. Clare's waterfall and Bambarakanda are some of the beauties which you find in this picturesque hill capital which is also referred to as 'Little England'.

As an adventure tourism destination, Sri Lanka has gained its popularity by offering tourists an experience worth cherishing with hiking, trekking and other adventure activities

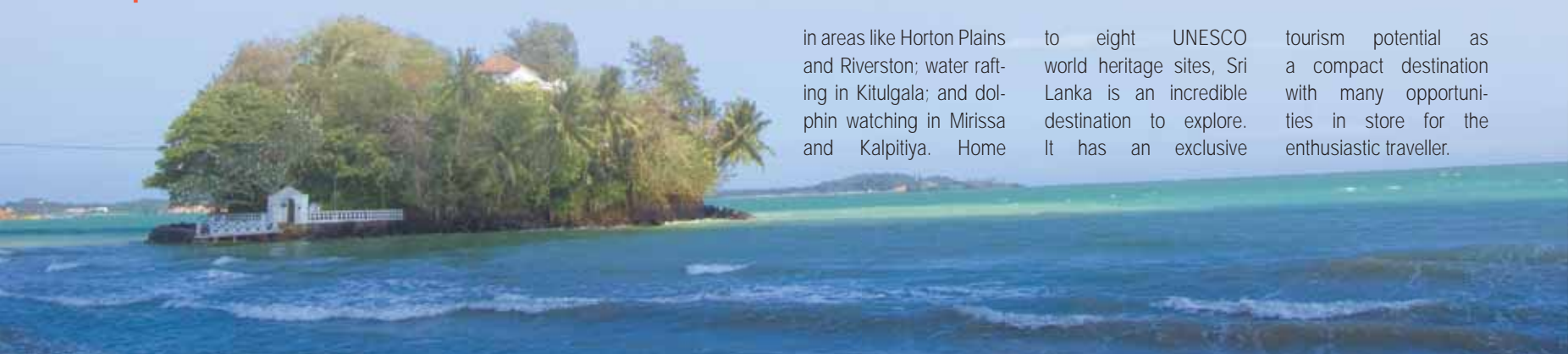
With its romantic locations and story book sceneries, Sri Lanka is a preferred destination for holding wedding ceremonies. Also, having four natural harbours gives it a sophisticated touch as a cruise tourism destination.



in areas like Horton Plains and Riverston; water rafting in Kitulgala; and dolphin watching in Mirissa and Kalpitiya. Home

to eight UNESCO world heritage sites, Sri Lanka is an incredible destination to explore. It has an exclusive

tourism potential as a compact destination with many opportunities in store for the enthusiastic traveller.



Smart tourism at ITB Berlin

Gearing up this year for the biggest travel trade show in Europe, ITB Berlin expects an incredible increase in terms of visitors and exhibitors from the Middle East. Around 150,000 visitors, 10,000 exhibitors from over 180 countries and 1,000 senior buyers are expected to attend this important travel event. **David Ruetz**, Head of ITB Berlin shares some insights with **TRAVTALK**.

T TT Bureau

What is the theme and focus for this year's edition of ITB Berlin?

Under the theme 'Smart Tourism for Future' we are placing the spotlight on sustainability, a pressing issue, at this year's ITB Berlin. This is where the industry must push for a plan of action so that in the fu-

ture people can still explore the world with a clear conscience. As an industry we want to be part of the effort to minimise the effects on our planet's resources. Digitalisation is an aspect that we will also feature prominently. This topic is globally relevant and concerns the entire industry.



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How many countries from the Middle East will participate this year?

All the main countries from the region are represented - UAE, Bahrain, Israel, Qatar, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Oman is represented on two stands in three fair-ground areas, Hall 2.2, Entrance South and now also in Hall 4.1. The Sultanate is also the partner country for this year's ITB Berlin and will co-organise both the opening event and grand finale.

What will be different from last year at ITB Berlin?

shape of a house, rooms, a garden and patio.

What are the expectations for this year in terms of business revenue?

In actual numbers, we expect 10,000 exhibitors from over 180 countries, 1,000 senior buyers, around 150,000 visitors, industry turnover to reach around 7 billion euros, and more than 31,000 business meetings to take place using the show's networking tools.



“For millennials, a visit to the Adventure Hall (4.1) will be especially worthwhile as they experience nature and gain insights into the culture of the host country”

Could you share the area covered by the Middle East?

Countries from the Middle East are occupying over 5,000 square metres, nine per cent more than last year. Saudi Arabia, which in 2019 introduced electronic visas, is exhibiting in a new two-storey pavilion behind the CityCube.

Millennials play an important role, hence is there anything specific for them?

For millennials, a visit to the

Adventure Hall (4.1) where the focus is on activities and adventure holidays, will be especially worthwhile. The emphasis here is on trips where visitors can experience nature and gain insights into the culture of the host country besides benefiting the environment and the welfare of local inhabitants.

Digital presence is trending around the world, so are there any special programmes for it?

We are presenting digital innovations in the eTravel World which in recent years has been one of our fastest-growing segments. One part of it is TTA, i.e. Technology, Tours and Activities, which is taking place for the second time this year. At the enlarged ITB Virtual Reality Lab in Hall 10.2, companies and startups will present trendsetting AR and VR developments and show how they can be used in the tourism industry.

What are some of the main events focused on travel agents and tour operators to make their business easier?

As mentioned above, the eTravel World is presenting digital innovations for both travel agencies and operators. The ITB Berlin Convention is also the travel industry's leading think tank. Numerous innovative sessions will address global travel and tourism industry topics which in the years to come will have a long-term, dominant influence on the industry's structures.

There is currently an outbreak of Coronavirus; will this affect some of the participants from Asian destinations?



Fortunately, as far as we are concerned the effects are still limited. A very small percentage of exhibitors and visitors are from China. However, since restrictions have been imposed on outbound travel and commercial flights, this will naturally lower the number of visitors from that country. We are closely monitoring the situation and are in contact with the relevant authorities. 



David Ruetz
Head, ITB Berlin

Bleisure hub in the city

Issam Slaimi, General Manager of Golden Tulip Media Hotel, joined the property in 2015. Slaimi has over 17 years' experience in hospitality. Under his leadership, the hotel went through a complete renovation and re-opened in 2018.



Issam Slaimi
General Manager
Golden Tulip Media Hotel

Fully re-furnished and renovated Golden Tulip Media Hotel re-opened in May 2018, with 288 rooms composed of 40 Standard rooms, 132 Deluxe Kings rooms, 100 Deluxe twin and 16 Executive Suites. The

4-star Golden Tulip Media Hotel is a 5-minute walk from Dubai Internet City Metro Station and next to Dubai Internet City, Dubai Media City and the Knowledge

Village. Facilities include a swimming pool, fitness centre - which features cardiovascular equipment, a spa with massage service and steam room. Other facilities are a prayer room, banqueting, meeting rooms, business centre, and 24 hours room service, travel desk and concierge. Meals can be enjoyed at Symphony Restaurant, multi cuisine prepared with fresh seasonal ingredients and fresh coffee is served at Ristretto coffee shop.

Property agents are very important as they drive in the business to our property. We work with many agents on our B2B and B2C channels. Apart from special rates and commissions, we also have lounge group incentive programme flavours for our bookers.



Premium lounge opens at DXB

Catering to serve the individual, business and family travellers, the niche Plaza Premium Lounge Dubai opened its doors at the Dubai International Airport. The 1,260-square-metre facility with a maximum capacity of 300 guests is the largest independent pay-per-use airport lounge in Terminal 3 at the busiest transit hub in the Middle East.

Dubai, a world-class destination for leisure, business and events, attracted nearly 16 million tourists in 2018. "With Plaza Premium Lounge Dubai opening in Dubai International Airport at the busiest transit hub in ME, Concourse A expecting annual capacity of 19 million, and Expo 2020 coming in October, we promise to make travel better for millions



of travellers departing Dubai International Airport," says **Song Hoi See**, Founder and CEO of Plaza Premium Group.

Dubai lounge is the sixth Plaza Premium Lounge in the Middle East, joining existing locations in Abu Dhabi (two), Dammam, Riyadh and Salalah. It is also the latest addition to the brand's global network of more than 70 locations in Greater China, Asia Pacific, Americas,

Europe and India. Hong Kong-based designer of the lounge, Kinney Chan, has incorporated elements to interpret the waves of desert and ocean in movement. Beginning at the reception area is a blue backdrop portraying Dubai's city skyline, while rounded corners applied throughout the space exhibit the idea of sand dunes, and feature walls mimic - the movement of sands in the wind.


A decade of Sharjah light festival

The 2020 edition of Sharjah Light Festival presented an exciting line-up of globally renowned artists during its 11-day run, marking the famed event's 10th anniversary. Magnificent display of colour, images and lights, inspired by creativity, art, science, knowledge and culture, enthralled visitors at 19 locations. The University of Sharjah, University City Hall and the Sharjah Mosque were among this year's locations in the emirate.



RAKTDA unveils Jais Adventure Peak

Jais Adventure Peak, located in the Hajar mountain range of UAE, was officially unveiled by Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA). This iconic place will not only provide sports and thrilling activities for all the adrenaline junkies, but will also give a chance to explore the canyons and spectacular views through the exhilarating Jais Sky Tour.

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Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA) officially unveiled the Jais Adventure Peak, a collection of iconic adventure attractions perched atop the UAE's highest mountain, Jebel Jais. The emirate's latest adventure tourism offering includes the Jebel Jais Flight, Jais Sky Tour and Jebel Jais Viewing Deck Park, in addition to the brand new Jais Adventure Center and Jais Sky Maze. Set amidst the magnificent Hajar mountain range, the grand opening took place in the presence of His Highness Sheikh Saud Bin Saqr Al Qasimi, UAE Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Ras

Al Khaimah, top hospitality industry professionals and VIP guests. Following the official opening ceremony, guests were treated to an exclusive first-look at the new Jais Adventure Center

“Jais Adventure Peak will not only add to the emirate's diverse hospitality offering but will also capture RAK's adventurous spirit through a series of adrenaline-pumping experiences that will leave a lasting impression on guests”

and Jais Sky Maze as well as the chance to explore the canyons and spectacular views through the exhilarating Jais Sky Tour.

The event also included a series of sport activations

by local adrenaline junkies, including wing suit diving by Khalifa Alghafri and a BMX show by Abdul Rahman Al Abadli. Jasim Bin Darwish Al Shamsi, the youngest Barista in the UAE

and owner of Jeon Coffee, was also on hand to provide guests with his signature blends. Strengthening the emirate's reputation as the fastest growing tourism destination in the Middle East – due in large part to

its diverse landscape and the growing popularity of its cultural and adventure offering – the Jais Adventure Peak will further support Ras Al Khaimah in attracting guests of all ages with a love for exploration and adventure. It will also heighten anticipation to experience all that Ras Al Khaimah has to offer, through a host of family-friendly outdoor activities.

Raki Phillips, CEO of Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority, commented, “The Jais Adventure Peak captures Ras Al Khaimah's adventurous spirit through a series of adrenaline-pumping experiences that will leave a lasting impression on our



Raki Phillips
CEO of Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority

guests and unforgettable memories; everything from the views they will take in as they make their way up to the Adventure Peak to the welcoming staff on-hand with information, and most importantly the sustainable yet unique adventure attractions themselves.”

The newly launched Jais Sky Maze – the latest addition to the Jebel Jais Adventure Peak's suite of attractions, promises a thrilling experience suspended 10 metres above ground. Spanning two levels, the Jais Sky Maze calls out to adventure seekers of all ages to take to the sky and navigate through several obstacles including rope swings, wobbly bridges, swinging loops and more.

Toro Verde's skilled team ensures the highest safety standards are adhered to across the suite of activities, adopting international best practice regarding stringent safety measures and equipment inspections. 

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SOFITEL DUBAI JUMEIRAH BEACH

Dubai

Sofitel Dubai Jumeirah Beach has appointed **Hussein Al Kurdi** as General Manager effective January 1, 2020. Hussein will be responsible for the strategic vision of the hotel and overseeing the daily operations of Sofitel Dubai Jumeirah Beach. Hussein has a wealth of experience in Middle East region. Prior to moving to the UAE, he worked for luxury brands such as Kempinski and Four Seasons. During his early career, Hussein gained invaluable experience within the Food & Beverage department. As a dedicated hotelier, Hussein is passionate and is an advocate in building and developing his team with integrity and transparency.



IHG

Riyadh

To lead IHG's business in Saudi Arabia, **Bastien Blanc** has been appointed as Managing Director, KSA and Bahrain effective March 1, 2020. In his current role with IHG, Bastien is responsible for leading the operations across IHG's portfolio of hotels in the ME and Africa, including KSA. In his new role, Bastien will be responsible for driving both growth and performance for IHG in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. With extensive experience of working in KSA, Bastien has been deeply ingrained into the market. He has also been leading IHG's Saudization efforts which he will continue to drive further in his new role.



MINOR HOTELS

Middle East Regional Office

Minor Hotels appoints **Rachid Benwahmane** as Group Director of Finance – Middle East & North Africa. He joined the Minor Hotels regional team in July last year, bringing a wealth of experience, managing multiple properties and brands in various countries across the ME and Africa, as well as having worked on the owner's side and in asset management. He joined the company from MERAAS where he held the position of Group Finance Director in the Hospitality Division. Rachid has hospitality focused project management and strategic business skills in both resorts and luxury hotels.



RITZ CARLTON

Ras al khaimah

The Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah announced **Adrian Hearn** as the new Director of Sales and Marketing. Hearn has more than 17 years of experience working in luxury hospitality and has recently returned to The Ritz-Carlton brand following a three year period as Director of Sales at the Sheraton Mall of the Emirates property in Dubai. He is now responsible for directing and developing the overall commercial marketing and sales strategies of The Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah, Al Wadi Desert and The Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah, Al Hamra Beach. He looks forward to working closely with the various stakeholders and tourism boards to maintain the strong positioning of the Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah.



MILLENNIUM HOTELS AND RESORTS MEA

Dubai

Millennium Hotels & Resorts MEA announced the promotion of **Mohanad AlHuniti** to VP Technical Services. He will be directly reporting to Kevork Deldelian, Chief Executive Officer of Millennium Hotels and Resorts MEA. AlHuniti joined Millennium Hotels and Resorts MEA in June 2015 as Director of Technical Services. He holds a BSc in mechanical engineering from the Hashemite University in Jordan and master's numerous skills and expertise. AlHuniti will be in charge of all technical related strategies in terms of planning, implementing, testing and maintaining the consistency of standards across all properties of Millennium Hotels and Resorts MEA.



MINOR HOTELS

Middle East Regional Office

Minor Hotels Middle East appoints **Stefan Geyser** as Group Director People & Culture – Middle East & Africa. Stefan joins Minor Hotels this month from his most recent position as Area Director of Human Resources, Gulf, Levant & Pakistan for Marriott International. Prior to working in the Middle East, Stefan held two Director of HR positions since 1999, both at Starwood properties, at Turnberry Resort in Scotland and in his native South Africa at the Sheraton Pretoria Hotel & Westin Grand Hotel, Cape Town. A highly experienced human resource professional, Stefan has particular expertise in international markets and multi-cultural environments.



TRAVEL COUNSELLORS

Dubai

Travel Counsellors has appointed **Kieran Hartwell** as its first Managing Director for Travel Counsellors for Business. With over a decade of corporate travel experience in senior positions, including recent roles as chief commercial officer for US-based Travel and Transport, and president at global travel management company Radius Travel, Kieran's proven track record is set to drive Travel Counsellors for Business growth plans. Kieran's role as new Corporate MD will include shaping strategy to scale Travel Counsellors for Business over the next five years.



PARK INN BY RADISSON MOTORCITY

Dubai

James Berry has been appointed Cluster General Manager for Park Inn by Radisson Motor City and Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Media City. From Northamptonshire, England, James began his management career as General Manager in 2008 and brings with him over 20 years of experience in the hotel and hospitality industry. Prior to joining Park Inn by Radisson, Dubai Motor City, James was the General Manager for Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Media City since April 2018. Before moving to Dubai and Radisson Hotel Group Berry had been serving as GM at Sofitel London Heathrow Hotel.



ARJAAN DUBAI MEDIA CITY AND CENTRO BARSHA

Dubai

Rotana Hotel Management has appointed **Timur Ilgaz** as the Cluster General Manager for Arjaan Dubai Media City and Centro Barsha in Dubai effective February 2, 2020. He has been associated with Rotana for over 13 years. He has more than 35 years of experience in the hospitality industry where he worked previously in different countries. In his new position, Ilgaz will oversee the two properties, focusing on commercial growth and strategic directions in conjunction with the Rotana brand's strategy.



MILLENNIUM CENTRAL MAFRAQ

Abu Dhabi

Millennium Central Mafraq announced the appointment of **Osama Ibrahim**, as the General Manager of the hotel. A Jordanian national, Osama joins Millennium Central Mafraq with a wealth of 25 years of experience in hotel management and operations in which he has worked for many international hotel chains such as Hilton, Starwood Hotels & Resorts and JW Marriott in the Middle East region. In his new role, he will be focusing on consolidating Millennium Central Mafraq position as a preferred destination for both leisure and business travellers and will be responsible for elevating service levels, maximising profitability and managing all aspects of the operation at Millennium Central Mafraq.



AL MAHA AND LE MERIDIEN AL AQAH

Fujairah

Asif Haider joins the team as Complex PR & Marketing Manager for Al Maha and Le Meridien Al Aqah. Born and raised in Dubai, Asif was always fascinated by the hospitality industry. Working as a PR executive, he was involved with the implementation of PR strategies during the pre-opening stage for three properties, including two Marriott International brands - Sheraton Oman Hotel and Four Points by Sheraton Sharjah. Combining his industry insights from his PR days with his understanding of resorts' legacy, what it symbolises and its unique selling points, he endeavours to catapult the success of both these unique properties.



RADISSON BLU HOTEL

APARTMENTS DUBAI SILICON OASIS

Dubai

Yana Bandurko announced as Rooms Division Manager of the Radisson Blu Hotel Apartments Dubai Silicon Oasis. Yana joined the Radisson Hotel Group in 2012, she started her journey at the Radisson Blu Hotel Kyiv Podil as Assistant Front Office Manager. In 2013 she was promoted to Front Office Manager and in 2015 she was selected by the company to participate as part of the first group in the STEPS programme, which was key in Yana's development as she later became F&B Manager.



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