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THE NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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Growing connections virtually

The maiden Virtual Roadshow by Singapore Tourism concluded with a record number of over 280 buyers from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar who were able to meet virtually with 15 exhibitors from Singapore.



GB Srithar
Regional Director
Singapore Tourism
Board IMESA

“ The STB Virtual Roadshow held on August 31, was an excellent opportunity for STB and our Singapore tourism stakeholders to deepen our ties and discuss business with our valued partner-friends in Middle East. We organised meetings seamlessly between 14 Singapore tourism stakeholders and over 280 outbound travel agents/tour operators from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. The region's travel trade professionals not only virtually connected with the service providers in Singapore but also received latest updates on tourism happenings in the city. ”



Beverly Au Yong
Area Director
Singapore Tourism
Board Middle East

“ During the STB Virtual Roadshow, the GCC travel trade partners were able to engage in live business discussions with the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) ME team. In addition, they were able to view and download digital versions of the destination updates from STB. During the virtual roadshow, STB engaged in over 140 fruitful interactions with regional travel trade stakeholders. The trade partners' feedback was positive. This unique platform allowed the local travel trade partners to connect with tourism stakeholders in Singapore and receive latest updates about the tourism activities. ”



Keeping the faith

In a bid to ensure that the industry stays positive in these trying times, **TRAVTALK** ventured into another vertical that has now become a regular platform to discuss the new normal.

The first session themed 'Regaining Trust and Confidence' saw the participation of three experts – **Kimarli Fernando**, Chairperson, Sri Lanka Tourism; **Gerald Lawless**, Ambassador WTTC and Former CEO Jumeirah Group; and

Tim Cordon, Area Senior Vice President Middle East and Africa, Radisson Hotel Group. The second session opened with **Mamoum Hmedan**, Managing Director MENA and India for Wego; **Suresh Dissanayake**, Assistant Vice President Sales and Marketing, Heritage

Aarah and Adaaran in the Maldives; and **Nuria Pizarro**, Global Brand and Marketing Director, Palladium Hotel Group sharing insights on their main challenges and the new way forward to attract the travellers to 'increase customer spend'.

Inputs by Shehara Rizly

Session 1



Kimarli Fernando
Chairperson
Sri Lanka Tourism



Gerald Lawless
Ambassador WTTC
and Former CEO
Jumeirah Group

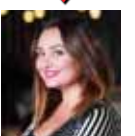


Tim Cordon
Area Senior Vice
President ME and Africa
Radisson Hotel Group

Session 2



Mamoum Hmedan
Managing Director
MENA and India
for Wego



Nuria Pizarro
Global Brand and
Marketing Director
Palladium Hotel Group



Suresh Dissanayake
Assistant Vice President
Sales and Marketing
Heritage Araah and
Adaaran in the Maldives



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”

By showing how countries can consistently comply with hygiene and safety measures, Singapore is a pioneer in organising events for a new era.

– Ms Katariina Rohrbach
Managing Director,
Hannover Fairs Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd



PLAN YOUR NEXT BUSINESS EVENT IN SINGAPORE WITH PEACE OF MIND



As the world transitions to a new normal beyond COVID-19, health and cleanliness have become key priorities for international travel. Singapore – crowned the Top Meeting City in Asia-Pacific for 18 consecutive years – has long had a global reputation for cleanliness and safety, and is a gateway to access the Asia market

Singapore continues to solidify its position with SG Clean – a national mark of excellence for tourism businesses adhering to the highest standards of cleanliness and hygiene

What is SG Clean?

An initiative supported by various agencies of the Singapore Government and audited by third party assessors, the SG Clean quality mark is a stamp of assurance that establishments are upholding rigorous, sector-specific sanitation and hygiene practices. While businesses across the island have adopted Safe Management Measures – such as social distancing, minimising physical touchpoints and enhanced cleaning of premises – SG Clean goes a step further, promoting collective action to make Singapore a cleaner and more pleasant environment for all.

Since March 2020, more than 5,000 local establishments such as hotels, attractions, restaurants, retail outlets, and prominent business event venues like the Singapore Expo and MAX Atria, Suntec City Convention & Exhibition Centre, Sands Expo and Convention Centre at Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World Sentosa Convention Centre have been awarded this certification. With SG Clean being adopted across more establishments around Singapore, event organisers, delegates and business travellers can be at ease as they return to the city to do business.

Plan your next business event at
[VisitSingapore.com/MICE](https://www.visit-singapore.com/mice).



RAKTDA records strong performance

RAKTDA announced a strong upturn in the emirate's tourism and hospitality performance during the initial phase of recovery post the pandemic. The Authority had launched a range of far-reaching support initiatives, aimed at its hospitality, leisure and development partners, during the peak of the COVID-19 crisis to lay a strong foundation for future recovery.

TT Bureau

Stringent safety measures were implemented across the emirate to safeguard guests and residents, leading to internationally renowned certifications and a quick bounce-back of its tourism industry.

Ras Al Khaimah's key performance highlights during the initial phase of recovery include:

- ❖ Ras Al Khaimah reported an average ADR increase of 12.9 per cent over Eid Al Adha break, the highest average room rate compared to the last three years under normal (non-pandemic) travel circumstances.

- ❖ Despite the regional effects of the pandemic, Ras Al Khaimah leads in RevPAR in the UAE.

- ❖ The ongoing 'Shortcation' campaign, which was launched in early June targeting domestic travel, drove bookings of almost 7,000 nights during the first eight weeks.

- ❖ During Eid Al Adha holiday, Ras Al Khaimah hotels and resorts welcomed over 18,000 guests who chose

the emirate as their preferred staycation destination.

- ❖ The Jais Adventure Peak which has welcomed over 52,000 thrill seekers to date, reopened with strict sanitary measures and continues to receive visitors.

- ❖ Ras Al Khaimah became the first city in the world to be certified as safe by Bureau Veritas and the first emirate to receive the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Safe

Ras Al Khaimah reported an average ADR increase of 12.9% over Eid Al Adha break, the highest average room rate compared to the last three years under normal (non-pandemic) travel circumstances.



Travels Stamp. RAKTDA has partnered with the National Crisis & Emergency Management Authority and Ras Al Khaimah Preventive Medicine Department to provide free COVID-19 PCR testing for all hospitality staff in the emirate.

- ❖ All 45 hotels in Ras Al Khaimah have received the Bureau Veritas certification.

- ❖ Al Hamra International Exhibition and Conference Center, the 50,000 square foot meeting facility, became the first conference center in the Middle

East to be certified by Bureau Veritas.

- ❖ Since April 2020, the Authority has conducted a series of destination focused webinars which showcased the emirate's diverse offerings and resulted in training more than 4,000 travel partners.



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550
COMPANIES CERTIFIED

27

SOURCES OF INFORMATION
AND TRAINING



100
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Singapore Tourism strengthens outreach

The first Singapore Tourism roadshow was enjoyed by the travel trade fraternity in the GCC with key stakeholders from Singapore meeting with them on a one-on-one basis ensuring they had enough time to get the relevant knowledge required. Some of the exhibitors and buyers shared their comments with **TRAVELTALK**.



Buyers



Louis Fernandes
Director
Holidays – Bin Ham Travel

“It was a remarkable and magnificently organised event. The follows-ups, emails and WhatsApp reminders did contribute, ensuring participation. Unfortunately, the COVID restrictions and directives of governments has negatively impacted tourism until the next quarter. Although the eagerness of the UAE citizens is encouraging, the restrictions are a dampener. We hope that regular flights will resume and tourism bounces back in Singapore and the neighbouring countries soon. Coordination at the event was excellent.”



Muhammad Idrees
Manager – Saudi Wings
Holidays Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

“Technology is really a blessing that even in this difficult & depressing COVID time, it becomes productive and positive. The roadshow was a big success. It was very informative and very fruitful. I connected with many suppliers and established relations and got thorough knowledge of the destination Singapore. Market sentiments are very positive towards business and leisure travel, people are really eager to travel as soon as its open, hopefully the industry will recover soon. Coordination at the event was exemplary, especially follow-ups and reminders.”



Zaki Ahmed
Officer VIP Luxury Concierge
– Almosafer

“It was a pleasure to attend the STB Virtual Roadshow; all the exhibitors were very enthusiastic. It's really very important for us to have a new experience for our guests while sending them to Singapore and keep in mind that our associates (DMCs, Hoteliers, Airlines) will be providing everlasting experiences for VIP guests so that they will visit again and again without any complaints. It's our responsibility to select the destination carefully for our guests. Also, we update our clients on a regular basis, informing them via visits, emails & messages that we are there for them in the market for any kind of travel services.”

Exhibitors



Fawad Khan
Sales Manager Gulf & Middle
East – Singapore Airlines

“It was a good opportunity to virtually interact with travel trade partners. We shared the latest updates about Singapore Airlines' safety measures at each touch point, current flight operations to selected networks and waiver guidelines. We have focused on ensuring the highest level of health precautions as this is a top priority for us and restoring customer confidence to travel with Singapore Airlines. Business travel segment is mostly relying on digital platforms hence there is not much demand. At the same time there is a segment of leisure travellers who would like to get onboard, however options are limited. We expect that travel will revive once countries open their borders and travel restrictions are eased.”



Alvin Yeoh
Assistant General Manager
Sea Wheel Travel

“Considering it was the first time for a virtual event, it was fine. We showcased our capabilities and how we can help outbound agents in the Middle East to sell better and more by delivering hassle-free services for ground handling in Singapore. We also updated them on the situation in Singapore with regards to safety protocols and the cases here. I think the Middle East market is ready and people want to travel; the only hurdle is border restrictions. They are confident of Singapore's handling of the pandemic.”



Lawrence Lau
Director
Victoria Travel

“Our regular tour packages for luxury and affordable itineraries were showcased at the roadshow. As there will be changes happening before the market reopens, we are exploring with prospective partners in the Middle East on using Singapore as a stop-over to China and making Singapore as a 'value for money' destination so as to appeal to more Middle East people to consider coming to this part of the world for their next travel destination. General sentiment is that businesses are down and when should we be expecting the market to recover. As this is the first time, all of us are taking part in this virtual roadshow.”



Siti Nurhuda
Senior Manager, International
Sales – Wildlife Reserves
Singapore

“The Middle East has been a growing market with great potential for Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS). The virtual roadshow organised by STB allowed us to reach out to the in-market travel partners with all the latest updates and offerings. We also took this opportunity to share some of the exciting new developments that are in the pipeline. We are happy to share that our attractions provide halal dining options for our Muslim guests. We offer an exclusive culinary experience in the Wild, personalised guided tours for guests who require the added privacy & convenience and an up-close encounter with our animal friends.”



Kathryn Loh
General Manager
SingExpress Travel DMC

“We gave a brief introduction of our company and shared about our services according to their business segments, for example, leisure holidays, family travel or incentives. Presently there is only domestic travel and we don't foresee any recovery till the end of 2020 or beginning of 2021 considering the pending government directive on the opening of international gateways.”



Regina Koh
Sales and Marketing
Manager – Fareast Hospitality
Management

“I would like to thank Singapore Tourism Board for arranging this event despite the situation right now. It's was eye-opening event and a very great exposure for us to reach out to the Middle East market. I do hope that this event will bring greater heights for everyone else.”



Yvonne Low
Executive Director
The Traveller DMC

“We showcased the credibility of our DMC, the new norms and the new tours in Singapore. The Middle East market is very buoyant and ready to bounce back for business, especially to the Far East, namely Singapore. Clients, especially those from Saudi hope for visa relaxation and more direct flights. Governments can keep the borders closed, but the travel trade's connections transcend borders. The coordination at the event was really good.”

Seven unique gems of the UAE

Dubai's location, huge population of expats, riches, traditions and vibrant culture are just a few reasons why so many people are drawn to this dynamic city. Living in this desert city for over 12 years, my time off from work is spent visiting unique places in the UAE, says **Sapna Aidasani**, Manager – PR & Marketing, Pluto Travels.

Let's take a look at the seven gems of the UAE which you cannot afford to overlook while making your travel bucket list.

Gem 1: Qasr Al-Waṭan

Qasr Al-Waṭan is the Presidential Palace in Abu Dhabi, UAE. One of the finest examples of Arabic architecture and craftsmanship, its design features UAE's story in three acts – Past, Present and Future – in the form of a beautiful Sound & Light show.

“One of the finest examples of Arabic architecture and craftsmanship, Qasr Al-Waṭan's design features UAE's story in three acts – Past, Present and Future – in the form of a beautiful Sound & Light show”

Gem 2: Louvre Abu Dhabi

This art and civilization museum is designed as a 'seemingly floating dome structure'. It is the largest art museum in the Arabian Peninsula. Artworks from around the world are showcased at the museum, with special focus being placed upon bridging the gap between Eastern and Western art.

Gem 3: Hatta Mountain Safari, Kayak & Glamping



Fujairah Retreat

UAE offers beautiful white mountain safari located just an hour-and-a-half drive from Dubai, making it the perfect weekend road trip for tourists seeking adventures. Hatta is the inland exclave of the emirate of Dubai in the UAE. Another adven-

ture you can enjoy in Hatta is Hatta Kayak. You can also experience Hatta Glamping.

Gem 4: Fujairah Retreat

Experience an organic retreat with heritage Arabic hospitality, located in Fu-

jairah with beach & mountains – a sustainable and eco-friendly property where one can enjoy activities such as hiking, cycling or simply be one with nature. A highlight of Fujairah retreat is the 'Sunset Hike'.

Gem 5: Moon Island

Taking on the unmistakable shape of the crescent moon, Moon Island is a prime holiday spot where guests can bask in the sun, take an unforgettable dive and enjoy the sand. The island is 70 kms away from Dubai's shoreline. The only way to get there is by a boat/ferry.

Gem 6: Jebel Al Jais

Jebel Al Jais is UAE's highest peak, towering at 1,934

m above sea level. The world's longest zip line is located here.

Gem 7: Luxury Safari

The Royal Safari is not only a traditional desert safari but a combination of Dubai's lavish hospitality & traditional experience.



Sapna Aidasani
Manager – PR & Marketing
Pluto Travels

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

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Sailing through the pandemic

As borders and airports start opening slowly, Rezlive.com has been initiating their new strategies. **Jaal Shah**, Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group says that they tracked the pandemic right from early stages and had plans for different scenarios. As a result, when the lockdowns began, they were prepared.

 Shehara Rizly

Q What are the main issues you faced during the lockdown and what kind of impact has Travel Designer Group seen on their business?

Travel industry is one of the heavily impacted industries during the COVID-19 pandemic and Travel Designer Group is not immune. As an organisation, we went through one of the most challenging times throughout our existence since 1999. Fortunately for us, we started tracking the de-

business left was from stranded travellers and quarantine requirements. It is all behind us now and we are seeing green shoots in some of our major markets. We should see more recovery in the coming months.

Q How did you keep clients confident during lockdown?

Looking back, we are quite happy with what we achieved in the last few months. We launched REZ2020, redesigned Rezlive.com booking engine to suit the new age requirements. Our operations and



we had been profitable since inception. Further, over the last two years, we analysed all risks associated with our business model such as currency exchange, credit and business disruptions and strategically worked on strengthening our organisation on all these aspects. These efforts paid off during the pandemic. As I mentioned earlier, we tracked the pandemic right from early stages and had plans for different scenarios. Hence, when the lockdowns began, we never had a moment of indecisiveness.

I would classify our pandemic response into four stages.

Rest: The entire senior management took few days break during the initial phase of lockdowns to introspect on how we will handle the pandemic.

Refund: Our first goal was to refund travel agents in their original mode of payment, and we were clear that we will not issue credit notes. Fortunately, many of our supplier partners stepped-up and announced force majeure. This helped in quick resolution of reservations affected by COVID-19. As we speak, we have refunded all the affected reservations and our client feedback is testimony to our efforts.

Restructure: In my assessment, I think the earlier expectation of a V shaped recovery is no more realistic. Looking at the modest rebound in some of the markets, where business is opened to near normal, I think that the recovery will be steady but slow and it

will be at least a year and a half to two years before we can rebound to 2019 levels. With that assessment, we also had to restructure our organisation set-up to reduce our cost, align it to current business levels and strengthen it for sustainable business. We had to take some tough decisions and let go of some wonderful talent we had. However, we ensured that we were transparent right from the start and tried to minimise the impact in all possible ways.

Rebound: This is where we are now. In the last two months, we worked on every little feedback that we received from our clients about our product to bring many new innovative features that made our platform more robust and user-friendly. Our sales teams across all markets are working closely with clients, educating them about possible travel trends post-COVID and how we can together emerge with a sustainable business model.

Q When do you think inbound tourists will start their journeys to the UAE?

The UAE has done remarkable work in its COVID-19 response. As we speak, the country is completely open, and most restrictions are removed. With visa restrictions also removed, we are expecting to welcome

inbound tourists from September and have a good inbound winter season from October. Of course, there will be a significant reduction in numbers compared to 2019 as travellers' confidence for air travel is still low. However, the UAE is currently one of the safest destinations in the world and we believe, will be a sought-out destination this winter.

Q Do you think travellers will be different in terms of their requirements after or during the pandemic?

Safety and hygiene will become a key point. Recently, we reached out to a number of hotel chains, standalone hotels and attractions to gather information about their safety and hygiene practices during this time and we are heartened to know that a lot of thought and effort has gone into making guests feel safe and comfortable. Cleaning procedures, social distancing and contactless service has taken centerstage. This might also prompt guests to choose well-known brands, where they can feel comfortable. We can also expect many safety precautions followed by airlines and airports to become a norm post-COVID.

Q Will domestic tourism become a better revenue earner at this point in time?


Right now, domestic tourism looks attractive. With international border restrictions prevalent in majority of the countries, we have seen a surge in domestic bookings. We are also seeing some support by governments to encourage domestic tourism. Case in point is the success of



Jaal Shah
Group Managing Director
Rezlive.com

staycations in the UAE in the last two months. After the huge downturn, the staycation business during Eid holidays was like a breeze. Having said that, domestic tourism cannot replace outbound tourism by volume as we move towards normalcy.

Q When will tourism bounce back?

This depends on multiple factors. First, international borders must open and then the restrictions related to COVID testing and self-isolation must be relaxed for leisure travellers to comfortably take vacations. Availability of a vaccine would remove these pain points. Then it is down to economic conditions and disposable income of people. Global economy is expected to shrink this year and would most likely recover over the next two years. Tourism will also recover steadily, and I am confident that we can see pre-pandemic levels in a year to year and a half. 

“ Our sales teams across all markets are working closely with clients, educating them about possible travel trends post-COVID and how we can together emerge with a sustainable business model ”

velopments of COVID-19 as early as January. When some parts of the world started going into lockdowns, we started preparing, in early March, for a similar scenario in the countries where we operate. This ensured that we did not face any major issues to our operations and helped us to settle seamlessly to work from home.

In terms of business impact, I think it is similar to all other organisations in the industry. The main characteristic of this pandemic is the steep fall in business starting mid-March. The drop was sudden, and no one could have done anything, considering that it was induced by government-led travel restrictions around the world. With leisure, business and MICE restricted, the only

accounts team worked tirelessly to refund all COVID affected reservation to our clients in their original mode of payment. And, our sales team engaged with all of our clients updating them about COVID impacts, travel advisories, health and safety precautions by hotels and attractions and new product updates from Rezlive.com. Personally, I spoke with over 400 clients globally via video conferencing to thank them and to learn about their post-COVID business expectations and how we can work together to emerge stronger. I intend to reach out to many more clients in the coming weeks.

Q What steps have you taken for Travel Designer Group to deal with the pandemic?

Travel Designer Group is founded based on strong financial fundamentals and

FactFile

■ Recovery will be steady but slow and it will be at least a year and a half to two years before we can rebound to 2019 levels.

■ UAE is currently one of the safest destinations in the world and we believe, will be a sought-out destination this winter.

Regaining customers' trust

How can we invite customers to follow health and safety rules without creating a negative emotion which in the worst-case scenario can lead to avoiding your business? It's now more than ever before crucial to win your (potential) customer's trust says **Dr. Marcel de Roos**, Psychologist PhD, the Netherlands.

The coronavirus crisis has been an enormous challenge for the travel, tourism and hospitality industry. The industry has worked hard on health and safety measures regarding COVID-19. At the same time, we know the importance of an optimal customer experience. The questions

that arise are – As a business, what should you do when people start to travel again? How and what should you communicate and which psychological insights and tools can you use?

Psychological insights and tools that can be helpful

You need to be very clear in your communication about how you have implemented the new health and safety measures in your organisation. That generates trust.

Emotional design is quite a novel field in psychology. We might think that we are rational beings but emotions are central in how we interpret real-

ity. Emotional design can be used while designing your website, the actual hotel building, and also in how you communicate. It's used to formulate your communication in such a way that it evokes positive emotions with your (potential) client and mitigates negative ones. This is very important in order to prevent escalations and to maintain the trust of your customer.

In order to create a positive emotional engagement, your website should have a 'friendly presence' in its design plus lots of other emotional reinforcers in addition to happy customer testimonials and pictures of your team.

If a customer has a problem with your product or service then the most effective technique is to take responsibility.

“One important insight is that 99 per cent of our decisions and behaviour is influenced by factors which we unconsciously notice and more or less ‘automatically’ react to”

ity, even if due to circumstances it's not your fault. Show empathy to prevent escalations. The customer feels that you understand him and that is exactly what most humans want. Prioritise your customer and his questions. It's of paramount importance to know what the customer wants, and you should be digitally

proactive. This also means that you must have an excellent customer service with representatives who

by factors which we unconsciously notice, and more or less 'automatically' react to. One of these signals is called 'social proof' – when you see that other people do something and you trust these people then this is an incentive to do the same.



Dr. Marcel de Roos
Psychologist PhD
the Netherlands

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

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■ Emotional design is quite a novel field in psychology. We might think that we are rational beings but emotions are central in how we interpret reality.

■ It's of paramount importance to know what the customer wants, and you should be digitally proactive.

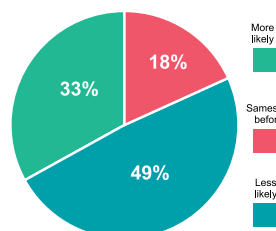
Travellers more likely to book through a travel agent

Since the beginning of the crisis, travel agencies have played a key role in acting as trusted advisors in a rapidly changing situation by providing updated policy information, facilitating journey changes and cancellations, and providing information on the supplier safety and hygiene measures.

When thinking about booking travel today, how likely are you to consider using a travel agent to help you book your trip?

Traveller research - Key findings:

33% of people are now more likely to book using a travel agent, with **82%** being either more likely or the same as before.

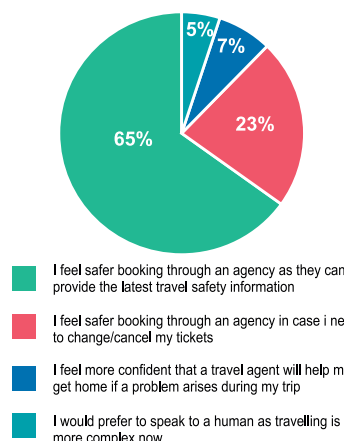


Why are you more likely to use a travel agent now?

65% say the information and insight agents can provide is their most crucial draw.

This was mirrored by our qualitative research with our supply-side partners, who confirmed that travel agencies will be instrumental in communicating their safety measures and policy updates.

Almost a quarter (**23%**) of travellers are drawn to agents for their ability to change a ticket.



Source: Travelpoort



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Exploring Southwest Germany

'Lake Titisee ©Hochschwarzwald Tourismus GmbH'

A special webinar is scheduled on September 21, 2020 at 11:00 am (UAE standard time) to explore Southwest Germany. **TRAUTALK** was able to discuss about the objectives with **Janina Wittmann**, Marketing & Sales Manager, State Tourist Board Southwest Germany; **Christian Gross**, Head of Incoming/MICE, Black Forest Highlands (Hochschwarzwald Tourismus GmbH); and **Angela Rieger**, Sales & Tourism Manager, Outletcity Metzingen.

 Shehara Rizly

What are the key areas/destinations in Southwest Germany that you will focus on in this webinar?

The webinar will be focusing on:

- ❖ Main regions such as the Black Forest, Swabian Alb, Lake Constance and the region around the capital city Stuttgart (home of Porsche and Mercedes-Benz)
- ❖ Key cities such as Baden-Baden, Heidelberg, Freiburg and Mannheim
- ❖ Where to stay: private luxury hotels called the best of hotels in Southwest Germany
- ❖ Live at the webinar: the shopping destination Outletcity Metzingen
- ❖ Live at the webinar: nature destination Black Forest Highlands

Please share a round-up of each destination.

Southwest Germany

The sunny Southwest Germany marks a very special destination for holiday seekers with its diverse attractions and facilities. Starting with its historic cities, Heidelberg is one of Europe's most romantic cities with its castle, river and university, while Stuttgart, the region's capital, boasts art museums, opera and two of the world's best car museums; Porsche and Mercedes-Benz. After all, this is where the automobile was patented almost 135 years ago! For travellers looking for elegance and relaxation nowhere surpasses Baden-Baden with its natural mineral spas and stylish facilities.

Here, in Southwest Germany, high-quality dining doesn't get any better as no other area in Germany can match the number of Michelin-starred restaurants and better Gault Millau guidebook ratings that Southwest Germany offers to its visitors.

Furthermore, the unspoiled countryside is perfect for hiking and biking, from the Black Forest to Lake Constance; while Europa-Park, one of the world's top theme parks, offers family fun and entertainment. www.tourism-bw.com

Black Forest Highlands

Breathtaking nature, a wide range of leisure activities and lively culture are some of Hochschwarzwald offerings to its guests, located around 'Feldberg', the highest peak (1,493 metres) in Baden-Württemberg that guarantees snow for winter sports enthusiasts. With the world-famous Lake Titisee, the idyllic Schluchsee as well as countless hiking trails and mountain bike trails, the region in the heart of the Black Forest is one of Germany's most popular travel destinations for nature lovers and active vacationers. Recreation seekers also get their money's worth in the Upper Black Forest: switching off and refuelling is not difficult in one of the region's high-class hotels with an almost unlimited range of wellness



Janina Wittmann
Marketing & Sales Manager
State Tourist Board
Southwest Germany

offers. Children are welcome to explore the diverse leisure activities, where nine Hochschwarzwald communities have already been awarded the coveted seal of quality 'Family Holidays in Baden-Württemberg'. www.hochschwarzwald.de

Outletcity Metzingen

Internationally renowned designers such as Valentino, Karl Lagerfeld, Versace and the world's largest BOSS outlet, Outletcity Metzingen is on a par with major fashion capitals around the world and was rated as Europe's Outlet No. 1 in 2020. The outstanding selection of over 130 brands of major designers is represented



Christian Gross
Head of Incoming/MICE,
Black Forest Highlands
(Hochschwarzwald Tourismus GmbH)

in flagship outlet stores. Reductions of up to 70 % make a visit worthwhile all year round. The cosmopolitan customers fit right into the sophisticated urban setting of this high-end shopping destination, where the history of textile industry is combined with award-winning architecture, sophisticated events and unique services. In addition to fashion brands the latest opening of a redeveloped former soap factory added a selection of brands in the home and living range to the outlet and a health and safety concept is in place to ensure a safe shopping experience for all visitors. www.outletcity.com



Angela Rieger
Sales & Tourism Manager
Outletcity Metzingen

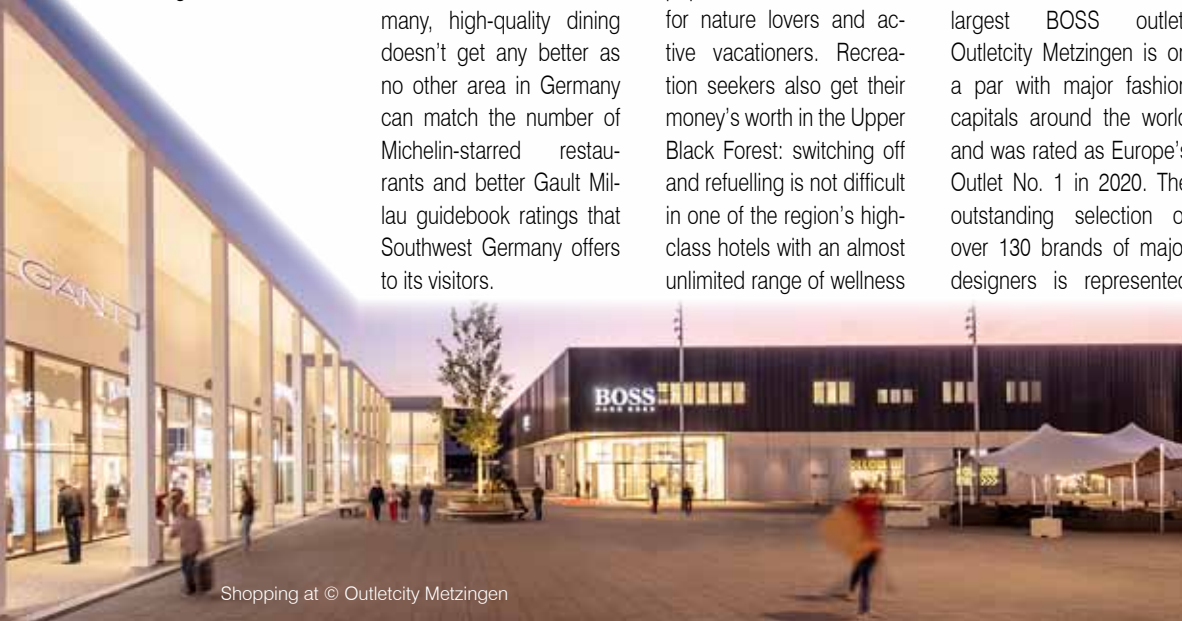
partners representing Southwest Germany, Black Forest Highlands and Outletcity Metzingen.

In Southwest Germany, GCC guests will explore a variety of halal restaurants offering a wide range of halal culinary options. Furthermore, GCC travellers can enjoy exclusive and private chauffeur service from SIXT.

The Black Forest Highlands offer hotels with extraordinary first-class service with a great range of spa and wellness options. Titisee, the home of the cuckoo clock, is a unique place for souvenir-shopping and German culinary highlights. An additional benefit at the Black Forest Highlands is the special red card with more than 100 attractions (leisure offers) that the guest receives for

Why will travellers from GCC visit these areas?

A wide range of the GCC travellers requests are accommodated by the three



Shopping at © Outletcity Metzingen

free, he stays for more than one night.

gual staff understand the guests needs.

A day out at Outletcity Metzingen is about so much more than just the shopping – it is a luxury break. A variety of services ensure a seamless shopping experience. From tax-free shopping with direct tax refund on site to a childcare centre and a Muslim prayer room, Outletcity Metzingen caters to all needs of international shoppers. A variety of restaurants offer food for every taste and multilin-

Visitors from abroad will also be happy to hear that Metzingen is just a short distance from Stuttgart Airport. Convenient and comfortable shuttle services take visitors straight to Outletcity and nearby hotels. For a more individual and luxurious experience private transfers by limousine or helicopter can be arranged. Just two hours' drive from Munich and

WEBINAR

Frankfurt, Metzingen is also easy to reach by car.

Will the three partners have joint promotions for agents, or promotion for every partner or will they offer any other programme?

The State Tourist Board of Southwest Germany offers a free online training for agents called 'The Cuckoo Training'. To make things



Hiking at the Swabian Alb ©TMBW Dengler

easier for the agents the cuckoo training will provide them with relevant information about Southwest Germany. It combines essential facts and background information with interactive activities and unique insider knowledge. These courses are not only fun, but are also designed to increase the agents sales and commissions. Quite simply, the better informed the agents are, the better they can inform their clients (www.going-cuckoo.com).

The Black Forest Highlands encourages all GCC agents to work together with the State Tourist Board of Southwest Germany as both entities are

partners in their marketing strategy. The Black Forest Highlands team is happy to answer any questions by the GCC agents about details and advises that a direct cooperation is also possible.

The VIP Shopping package is an exclusive benefit offered by Outletcity Metzingen which can be booked with partner hotels in the region. It includes a variety of services for the clients' individual needs, e.g. additional discounts. It will be a great add-on to any tour in Southwest Germany. An exclusive driving experience in luxury cars combines

shopping in Metzingen with a tour around the Black Forest. Packages can be booked via outletcity.com. There are also direct cooperations opportunities for tour operators with Outletcity Metzingen.

The Black Forest Highlands organise incentive trips several times a year – together with the State Tourist Board of Southwest Germany and the German National Tourist Board (GNTB). With a little luck, agents will have the chance to take part in one of the trips. Individual inquiries from travel agents are always welcome too. 🇩🇪



The spa town Bad Urach ©TMBW Dengler

Germany
The travel destination

#Discover Germany FromHome

Join the SouthWest Germany webinar
21st September @ 11:00am (UAE standard time)
***Exciting raffle prizes**



Opportunities amidst adversity



The first session of the third edition saw **Kimarli Fernando**, Chairperson, Sri Lanka Tourism; **Gerald Lawless**, Ambassador WTTC and Former CEO Jumeirah Group; and **Tim Cordon**, Area Senior Vice President Middle East and Africa, Radisson Hotel Group speak about the luxe market, staycations, safety protocols & initiatives, action plans for the new normal.

 Shehara Rizly

At a time when the silver lining is still not within reach, keeping the faith, gaining the confidence of the travellers and the new definition of luxury are core elements that ensure the industry offers its best. In most cases, proactive governments were able to tackle the situation and as the saying goes, nipped it in the bud.

The luxury market

In her opening remarks, **Kimarli Fernando**, Chairperson, Sri Lanka Tourism, stated, "The government took immediate action with regard to handling the COVID pandemic, this has resulted in us opening up the market already for domestic tourism.

With regards to the luxury market, we have identified Middle East and India as key markets going forward. Slow tourism, wellness, adventure, wildlife, everything that Sri Lanka has to offer is something that we need to work on further. Luxury market requires a particular kind of product, a particular kind of experience; the government has identified them, and we have got expertise involved to assist us. We are focusing on how we will improve the product. Having said that, there are several luxury brands already in Sri Lanka and this is an area that we will further build on."

Talking about charter flights and private jets, she said, "There are several flights, there are about 600 private jets in India alone, so we get several requests

on the private jets side, so I am confident about the luxury market for Sri Lanka. We didn't have a lot so we are starting with a lower base. I think that there is opportunity for us as we have five airports in our small island; you can not only come in your private jet, you can take a domestic flight all over Sri Lanka in 45 minutes if you take a seaplane, so I am quite confident that we will be able to work on something.

At the moment it takes 72 hours to bring a charter flight, but we will be changing it to 24 hours for the charter flights and private jets and so on. We have also reduced the pricing at the new Mattala airport to encourage charter flights as well as private jets. Very close to Colombo we have opened an airport exclusively for private jets and small aircrafts which is about 15-20 minutes away from the city."

Gerald Lawless, Ambassador WTTC and former CEO of Jumeirah Group, started off by saying, "In order to get luxury or any type of travel going I would personally like to see a lot more coordination between governments on the protocols as there are too many different protocols in too many different places. I do believe that we need to have the facilities to make it easy for people to travel, and to make it possible for them to travel in a very safe environment, so lots of initiatives are being taken and one I am aware of is the initiative by WTTC with Safe Travels which has over 90



Kimarli Fernando
Chairperson, Sri Lanka Tourism

“With regards to the luxury market, we have identified Middle East and India as key markets going forward. Slow tourism, wellness, adventure, wildlife, everything that Sri Lanka has to offer is something that we need to work on further”

destinations with safe travels as their protocol to offer confidence to the travelling public that when they come to a destination, stay in a hotel, fly in an airline, they would be safe."

"I hear a lot as well about how private jets have really literally taken off in the past several months in terms of the amount of the increase of year-on-year 300-400 per cent usage increase from 2020 over 2019 which is one of the segments that is showing a huge growth but I think once the airlines continue to open up as we see now with Emirates in Dubai, their very fine first and business class will have a big growth in that area as well," he added.

Rapid testing at airports

Talking about the testing procedures at airports, Lawless said, "We need to develop a testing system that is more instantaneous, almost like a litmus test to show on the spot, like testing negatively for COVID-19. What I would really like to see is that the testing procedure is very much part of the check-in procedure at the airport. So the traveller will go to the airport, the first step would be the test, 30 seconds or two minutes later he/she would have their test results and can proceed to the check-in, then everyone would know that everyone on that aircraft tested negative and then the receiving country could also do the testing. Also,

since the testing protocols are so rapid they can also be shared with the receiving country and you don't need to be in quarantine. If you don't have quarantine, I believe more travellers will have the confidence to travel again, go on vacation etc. Rapid result testing in my opinion is one of the takeaways."

Fernando shared, "Building trust is critical. Currently we have purchased the latest testing system which gives results in one-and-a-half hours. The technology is from Denmark and we are using it at airports. Testing I think is important, the fact that hotels are ready since April, and we opened for domestic tourism by end of May, so hotels have been practicing all the guidelines. KPMG is doing the auditing and certification process for us so we are taking all the necessary steps. We are not only building confidence with the consumer, travel agent & the tour operator but with everybody who has contact with Sri Lanka. Everybody wants safety, this is something we are looking at and we are getting some international aid agencies to assist us with capacity building on PCR testing. Our government health officials are not very happy about the rapid test which is available now, so we are continuing with PCR testing."

Tim Cordon, Area Senior Vice President Middle East and Africa, Radisson Hotel Group, said, "I fully agree with what Gerald said, rapid testing is absolutely the key to any kind of tourist busi-

Updates

“We are getting some international aid agencies to assist us with capacity building on PCR testing. Our government health officials are not very happy about the rapid test which is available now, so we are continuing with PCR testing.”

— **Kimarli Fernando**

“There is a spike in staycations. We can see that people are rediscovering their own country. I think that's an area of tourism perhaps that has not been addressed so seriously in the past.”

— **Gerald Lawless**

“I would like to congratulate WTTC for trying to get a global standard. I think the industry is leading when it comes to implementing a global standard, but we have work to do in communicating that to our customers.”

— **Tim Cordon**

ness, luxury tourists are in the same situation as everyone else right now. We can't get things moving in a meaningful way until people have the confidence to travel. As a hotel operator we are doing a lot of things to try and give people that confidence to travel, we have partnered with a testing agency called HGS while it's my job to promote Radisson. I'd say all hotel companies are doing

Spike in domestic staycations

Lawless shared, "There is a spike in staycations. We can see that people are rediscovering their own country. I think that's an area of tourism perhaps that has not been addressed so seriously in the past. It's a great source of business as well for all of us and I think this is particularly the case in the luxury side as well within

accommodation, like large rooms, individual chalets and villas will continue to be popular within integrated resorts.

Reiterating the comment made by Lawless on staycations and individual products, Cordon said, "We have an amazing Radisson luxurious resort just outside of Riyadh Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which is a collection of 18 private villas and very private pools in an integrated resort, that's one of the few businesses we have that is doing far better than it did in the previous year. So that really demonstrates the strength and the demand is there and that people really want to go and have great experiences but in a safe environment. In terms of the offering I will touch on a few things, there are redefined 20 very straightforward protocols for every hotel we need to implement to ensure the safety of our guests and our teams during this difficult time.

For the guest experience we really aren't going to change too much, fundamentally hoteliers are there to provide great service and memorable experiences, and it's never been more true than in the luxury sector. One of the things that COVID-19 has given us is the opportunity

to look at how we do that, sadly our hotels are operating at a lower occupancy than they have done previously but that gives us the opportunity to take more time and provide a more individualised service to our customers. We can really take a lot more time and adopt a personalised approach for each guest, that's not something that has been really possible to do in a sustained way, so whether it's personalised toilet amenities in the bedroom with the guest name on it or an individual welcome and finding out a lot more about customers and tailoring experiences specifically around them – these options are available to us, that's how we are going to alter our offering.

Of course we have also embraced technology, particularly artificial intelligence, especially around the business traveller, so online check-in, contactless experiences at the hotel are more important. Right now we are focusing on how we individualise our guest experiences to give them something that blows them away and that's what hospitality should do and always has been around doing."

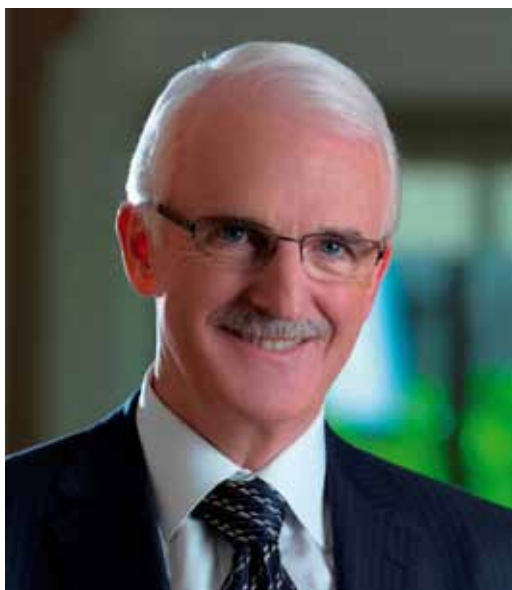
WTTC initiatives

Lawless said, "When it comes to the safe travel protocols of the WTTC, Gloria Guevara, President

and CEO of the organisation is trying to achieve through them some form of consistency on a worldwide and international basis within the travel industry so that people can recognise, okay, that airline, that hotel, that destination, they have now committed that they will apply all the protocols that have been listed out, which has been drawn up in consultation

Session 1

protocols do apply. This has given a sense of security to many people. Also my former company Jumeirah Group has been involved with Bureau Veritas with their system called safeguard which they have



Gerald Lawless
Ambassador WTTC and Former CEO Jumeirah Group

“Private jets have really literally taken off in the past several months in terms of the amount of the increase of year-on-year 300-400% usage increase from 2020 over 2019, which is one of the segments that is showing a huge growth”

a great job in working with various testing organisations to ensure the hotels are clean and safe and the right protocols are in place.

But that only goes so far when governments and countries are able to close borders and reopen again very quickly and put you on notice as we have seen in Europe. The fear and concern around travelling tends to outweigh the desire to go and experience a new destination or have that amazing trip our hotels can provide so the fundamental issue right now is how do we get over that hurdle. Rapid testing would be a massive step towards that."

the UAE. I serve on the advisory board of the Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority and I can see how successful Ras Al Khaimah has been in encouraging staycations and getting people to explore their own country to find out what it has to offer. I believe, in the luxury side we are going to see people looking for safety, looking for a certain amount of isolation when they are on vacation, so we can see the independent villas, chalets and parts of resorts becoming extremely popular. I think this will continue to grow very strongly in the luxury sector. Individual types of



Tim Cordon
Area Senior Vice President Middle East and Africa
Radisson Hotel Group

“Rapid testing is absolutely the key to any kind of tourist business, luxury tourists are in the same situation as everyone else right now. We can't get things moving in a meaningful way until people have the confidence to travel”

with the WHO and UNWTO has also been involved to ensure that they are relevant, that they make sense and will help prevent infection in an area, on an aircraft, in a hotel, wherever it might be. So therefore the establishment agrees to within these protocols to allow themselves to be open for orders but most importantly they sell forward what they have to promise their guests that they are complying to these protocols so when it comes to how the room is disinfected, how it is used or not in between occupation between guests, everything that's going on throughout, all the various

applied to many of their hotels and Ras Al Khaimah has also been involved with WTTC and Bureau Veritas. I think that these protocols will continue to be really important to give guests the opportunity to feel comfortable coming in."

Cordon added, "I would like to congratulate WTTC for trying to get a global standard and it is important to get a global standard that everybody complies with and understands. I think the industry is leading when it comes to implementing a global standard, but we have work to do in communicating that to our customers." 🍷

Updates

► In the past Sri Lanka Tourism looked at countries such as India, Middle East or Germany etc., but now we will be focusing more on the type of tourists and what they are looking for and what we have to offer them.

— **Kimarli Fernando**

► The G20 meeting will be held on November 21-22, 2020, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The two-day summit will focus on travel and tourism this year. Gloria Guevara, President of WTTC has been very effective in linking in with the G20 nations.

— **Gerald Lawless**

► COVID-19 has been a catastrophe but one of the opportunities that exists is to re-profile our industry. It doesn't have the profile that it should be given – our industry was hit hard, and this gives it a better voice to be heard at the G20 summit.

— **Tim Cordon**



Connecting GCC to Amazing Thailand virtually

The countdown has begun for the maiden Amazing Thailand virtual roadshow to take place on September 9, 2020 from 10 am to 6 pm (UAE time). This digital B2B meeting platform will connect travel professionals across the GCC to hospitality and tourism establishments in Thailand. **Pichaya Saisaengchan**, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand – Dubai and Middle East Office shares the details with **TRAVTALK**.

 Shehara Rizly

What are the expectations from the event?

We expect to have over 2,000 appointments between our travel partners from the GCC and tourism establishments in Thai-

land. This will generate awareness of Thailand's latest tourism offerings in order to maintain a top-of-mind approach once Thailand's borders reopen to welcome visitors and enable our travel partners in the region to promote the destination.

“The roadshow will generate awareness of Thailand's latest tourism offerings in order to maintain a top-of-mind approach once Thailand's borders reopen to welcome visitors and enable our travel partners in the region to promote the destination”



Pichaya Saisaengchan
Director of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Dubai & The Middle East Office

Do explain the reason/s agents should participate in this event?

As travel has been restricted due to the current pandemic, tourism establishments have had to adapt and reinvent their offerings, taking into consideration new health and safety protocols. The Amazing Thailand Virtual Roadshow 2020 is an ideal platform for our travel partners in the region to know more about the measures taken to ensure the safety of visitors, as well as new offerings that will be avail-

able once we start to welcome visitors.

How many partners will there be from Thailand?

The Amazing Thailand Virtual Roadshow 2020 will host 48 tourism stakeholders from Thailand, including hotels & resorts, health & wellness, shopping establishments & attractions and tour operators & DMCs. Thai sellers with GCC buyers will do one-on-one meetings via VDO call. The first session will comprise GCC Buyers Group A, while the sec-





ond session will have participants from GCC Buyers Group B. For both groups, 10 minutes will be allotted per appointment.


What are the areas covered at the event?

The 48 tourism stakeholders from Thailand will represent a variety of regions and major cities across

the Kingdom including Bangkok, Pattaya, Krabi, Koh Samui, Phuket and more. We will highlight our new products & services in all major cities in Thailand including nearby cities such as Bangkok & Beyond, Phuket & Beyond, Chiang Mai & Beyond, Pattaya & Beyond, etc. as well as highlight our SHA Certificate that has been

given to all qualified Thai private sectors (<https://www.tatnews.org/2020/07/amazing-thailand-sha-certification-steps-up-information-sharing-and-outreach/>)

How should one register?

Registration is now available for GCC travel partners via www.HalaThailandVirtualMart.com. 

THE SHOW MUST GO ONLINE

SAVE THE DATE 09.09.2020 (10.00 GMT+4)

amazing
THAILAND

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AMAZING THAILAND VIRTUAL ROADSHOW 2020
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Shifting gears in car rentals



Lumi is a reputed car rental and leasing brand with 12,000 vehicles in their fleet with 24 branches that cater to corporate and government to suit their needs with a wide range of solutions. However, the past few months had many new revelations and **TRAVELTALK** spoke with Azfar Shakeel, Vice President, Lumi about the new era in car rentals.

Shehara Rizly

Could you explain how car rentals will change post COVID-19?

The car rental sector, no doubt, is heavily dependent on domestic travel, and supported by international tourist arrivals. The shift in the car rental market will be directly related to the performance of the domestic travel market, which is showing strong signs of recovery led by massive government stimulus. In fact, Seera Group, our parent company, is taking concerted efforts to promote domestic tourism,



Azfar Shakeel
Vice President, Lumi

which will also support the car rental industry.

Further, according to a study by Almosafer, the leading omni-channel travel brand under Seera Group, appetite for travel, especially domestic leisure, is strong among Saudi nationals, with 73 per cent – nearly three in four – confident to travel once all

restrictions are lifted. More than 35 per cent are keen to discover the Kingdom through domestic leisure trips, with experiential destinations such as AlUla, Taif and Abha of rising interest. Of direct relevance to Lumi is that nearly half – 48 per cent – prefer journeys by car, which again underlines the strong prospects for our business.

A critical shift for car rental companies will be to focus, more than ever before, on ensuring the best standards in hygiene. But most importantly, going digital will be of strategic importance for car rental companies as people will increasingly turn to bookings and payments online. Innovative solutions must be developed, and companies that thrive will be those that integrate effectively with travel

“According to a study by Almosafer, of direct relevance to Lumi is that nearly half – 48 per cent – prefer journeys by car, which again underlines the strong prospects for our business”

service providers. Being part of Seera Group also offers a strong advantage as we can serve our clients through the Group's integrated offering.

Will travellers prefer self-rental vehicles or cars with a driver?

People typically prefer self-rental vehicles; chauffeur-driven cars will also mean having to follow social distancing rules, which will mean lesser number of occupants. While business clients might prefer it, others are most likely to drive themselves.

In your opinion how will car rental companies attract the travellers?

The two critical factors are the hygiene standard assured – such as regular sanitisation of the vehicles – and the digital transformation, whereby customers can make bookings online with minimal visits or interaction with showroom staff – contactless will be the way forward.

Providing attractive packages with the support of travel companies will be another step forward. 🇸🇦

Decoding trends with Travelport

The past few weeks have seen an upward trend in terms of bookings for hotels and flights. Travelport has been developing a confidence index to help travel agents, airlines and other stakeholders to understand the trends. **Kathryn Wallington**, Head of Account Management, Middle East & Africa for Travelport shares some of the key drivers.

Shehara Rizly

Could you share some of the latest trends after the ease of lockdown and opening of borders?

We recently developed the Travelport Confidence Index, which is designed to help travel agents, airlines and hotel operators understand where confidence in travel is starting to return across the world. The proprietary algorithm calculates weighted metrics covering air and hotel search patterns and flight bookings. Scores are a relative measure of travel demand, comparing each individual country's proclivity to travel relative to other countries. These

are updated weekly, based on the past seven days of data from a total of 90 countries.

Looking at July 2020 as a whole, the countries in the Middle East and North Africa that had the highest Travelport Confidence Index Scores were Iraq (34), Turkey (33), Lebanon (32), Iran (31), Tunisia (30), UAE (25), Qatar (21), Egypt (20), Bahrain (18) and Morocco (17). While it's impossible to predict exactly what the future will look like, the travel industry is incredibly resilient, and it will recover. Business travellers will return to

visiting customers, and leisure travellers will find that urge to explore, and the data is bearing this out. We are continuing to invest in our business so that we are poised to take full advantage when travel returns.

Are there more bookings on inbound or outbound travel?

Looking at outbound travel from Dubai, in July 2020, the destinations that recorded the highest volume of flight bookings were Lahore, Karachi, Dhaka, Islamabad and Manila. When it comes to inbound trav-

el to Dubai, in July 2020, the cities with the highest volume of flight bookings to the emirate were Islamabad, Lahore, Manchester, Manila and London.

Any recent traveller behaviour patterns that are different than before?

One of the most prominent changes we are seeing is a shortening of the flight booking window. For example, in the UAE, the booking window shortened from 22 days in July 2019 to 12 days in July 2020.

Are travellers today more conscious about safety?

Safety is understandably front of mind for travellers right now. To have the confidence to travel, especially internationally, we're seeing that travellers



Kathryn Wallington
Head of Account Management
Middle East & Africa for Travelport

want to know a wide variety of safety measures are in place throughout the travel journey. This means the industry needs to work together to not only implement a wide array of measures but to ensure they are collectively communicated to travellers. 🇸🇦

“One of the most prominent changes we are seeing is a shortening of the flight booking window. In the UAE, the booking window shortened from 22 days in July 2019 to 12 days in July 2020”

Storytelling in every mode

The importance of museums in every walk of life has evolved over the years. The magnitude of this evolution has led the likes of Dubai Future Foundation (DFF) to believe that museums have the potential to help people transition into an optimistic future. The DFF and govt have worked together in bringing a powerful experience to a wider audience.

TT Bureau

In the recent Ramadan Pioneer Series webinar titled "Shifting the Notion of Museums: From Past to Future" hosted by the Dubai Future Academy, **Lāth Carlson**, Executive Director of the Museum of the Future, took this idea forward. He explored the role of museums in helping people transition into new eras as we move forward into the future.

Six years ago, the Dubai Future Foundation (DFF) started creating pop-up museum experiences in coordination with the World Government Summit in Dubai, UAE. Each year, a

different theme was chosen. Within that theme, the DFF created an immersive environment where guests could truly experience what an optimistic future looked like around a subject. This culminated into a very powerful experience for the guests and it steered the thoughts of the DFF and the government towards bringing this experience to a wider audience in the form of the Museum of the Future.

The concept of the Museum will play to the strengths of



Lāth Carlson
Executive Director
Museum of the Future

what museums have done over the years, which is to become effective storytellers. The environment pro-

“The Museum of the Future will surround people with an array of visual elements, sounds, smells and textures, so that the tactile experiences come to life”



vided by the Museum will be distinct because we can tell a story in every mode, in every sense available. The Museum will surround people with an array of visual elements, sounds, smells and textures, so that the tactile experiences come to life. Another aspect that makes the Museum unique is its physical and perma-

nent space. For instance, as soon as the pandemic grew consequential and people were asked to stay indoors, many museums pivoted to online platforms. There was a study carried out which showed that people were interested in visiting a museum online only for four days – it was a very brief peak, because the ex-

perience is not satisfying. Going to a museum is a social experience and one that surrounds an individual with people, art, incredible exhibitions. It is necessary to have a physical space, especially when an institution wants to communicate an optimistic possible future and allow people to really feel it. 🏠

Al Naboodah Travel resumes work

In the current context, following the regulations and new normal standards is key in the UAE as in every part of the world. Hence at the entrance everyone who steps in to the office premises are checked for their temperature and allowed and special cubicles are also in place in keeping with social distancing methods and the use of sanitiser at all points of time.



On the way to recovery



Middle East is a resilient market with an appetite to travel and explore different experiences. As staycations rise in the Middle East, Maldives has already welcomed travellers from the region after the lockdown. Europe is focusing on the domestic market and ensuring that they first build the confidence of their travellers.

Shehara Rizly

Summer in the Middle East is a time when everyone gets to travel on their long awaited vacations with their family and friends. As school holidays spread out to over three months, the locals and expats living in the Middle East would always take their breaks out of the country. However, this year brought in a new kind of tourism to the fore. It was the norm during Eid holidays for people to take staycations and travel around the neighbouring cities.

Domestic tourism looking up

Starting off the third edition of the **TRAVTALK** Digital Con-

clave, **Mamoum Hmedan**, Managing Director MENA and India for Wego, shared, "It has been a very challenging year for us. Travel and tourism in this part of the world has seen double-digit growth year-on-year, unfortunately this year the entire industry suffered. However, we are seeing a good comeback especially in the countries which opened up earlier than the rest of the world. I'm talking about the UAE, Dubai specifically and to a certain extent, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with their domestic flights. Demand is back, bookings are back. In some areas in the UAE, for staycations the occupancy was 100 per cent in hotels. Ras Al Khaimah reported over the Eid break a few weeks

ago that they had 100 per cent occupancy rate, and Dubai is seeing over 60 per cent occupancy in hotels. Saudi which opened its domestic flights in June slowly but steadily with 70 per cent of the capacity available, saw 60 per cent recovery in terms of bookings, which is promising. There is lot of talk about the Saudi international market opening and flights resuming by September, it is expected that they will see 20-30 per cent recovery. Egypt is a very interesting market to look at right now, it was one of the first countries to open their borders and welcome people, it also waived off quarantine which helped a lot."

"Staycations and domestic travel have grown to a great extent with 20 per cent plus year-on-year and 50 per cent plus inbound travel recovery year-on-year. From what we are seeing it's 10-15 per cent of the capacity and booking ratio from last year. We can close the year overall in the region with a ratio at 50-60 per cent of 2019 numbers – talking about bookings, capacity and total – which is good in a year like this," he opined.

Nuria Pizarro, Global Brand and Marketing Director, Palladium Hotel Group talked about their efforts behind the scene in the European and Caribbean properties she handles. She shared, "In Europe, in the current situation, we have to relook at the way to travel and the way to approach the market. We are dealing with the unknown and don't how the situation will be in the future. As of now, the focus



Mamoum Hmedan
Managing Director MENA and India for Wego

“Travellers from the GCC like to go for long trips in big groups. Now because of the obvious reasons they are choosing the nearby destinations. And, when the climate is not helping in GCC they will usually plan foreign trips, it will always be on their agenda”

is on the domestic market. Economies of countries like the UK, France, Italy, Germany have to grow and that's why we are focused on preparing all their hotels to welcome guests and provide them a worry-free vacation in the different destinations in Europe.

One of the most important things we communicated to our customers while they made their booking was to reassure them that they would be able to cancel the booking anytime. Another thing was to prepare our properties in six destinations, most of them in Spain, Italy and the Caribbean, Mexico and Jamaica. As of now, we have insurance care along with 24/7

medical care to cater to all our guests free of charge."

Suresh Dissanayake, Assistant Vice President Sales and Marketing, Heritage Aarah and Adaaran in the Maldives, said, "We are a nation heavily dependent on tourism, directly or indirectly 80 per cent of the country depends on tourism. When the lockdown was announced in March, it gave us an opportunity to stop for a while, rethink and re-strategise. From the month of April, Maldives Tourism as well as resorts in the Maldives have been very actively marketing the destination digitally to the consumers. We have also been conducting lots of webinars for the trade

so that Maldives will be on top of their mind. This has helped us to be one of the first countries in South Asia to open the destination. We opened the borders on July 15, and so far we have catered to around 8,000 guests. We started with a campaign called 'The sun will shine again' which worked really well for the destination. Around 60 resorts are in operation now, and we are hoping that another 40 resorts will open next month. As a destination, the Maldives is slowly picking up."

Booking trends and patterns

Hmedan stated, "In general there are some noticeable changes, we are not yet seeing families and groups travelling from the region, what we see is solos, young travellers. The usual trend that you see from GCC, i.e. big groups, big families travelling together, is not happening this year. There are lots of repatriation flights to India, Egypt etc., and we are seeing an increase in one-way tickets. In general, we are not seeing long trips of 14 to 20 days being planned from here, there are only short trips of two or three days and staycations. In terms of average spend on the hotels, at some point of time prices dropped dramatically so the average booking value went from US\$500 per night to US\$300 but it recovered quite quickly especially in the regional and domestic hotels. As for flights, prices are pretty much at the same level but for some routes they are lower."

Updates

“In some areas in the UAE, for staycations the occupancy was 100% in hotels. Ras Al Khaimah reported over the Eid break a few weeks ago that they had 100% occupancy rate, and Dubai is seeing over 60 per cent occupancy in hotels.”

— Mamoum Hmedan

“Economies of countries like the UK, France, Italy, Germany have to grow and that's why we are focused on preparing all their hotels to welcome guests and provide them a worry-free vacation in the different destinations in Europe.”

— Nuria Pizarro

“We opened the borders on July 15, and so far we have catered to around 8,000 guests. Around 60 resorts are in operation now, and we are hoping that another 40 resorts will open next month. As a destination, the Maldives is slowly picking up.”

— Suresh Dissanayake



Nuria Pizarro
Global Brand and Marketing Director, Palladium Hotel Group

“Middle East is an important market for us and we are waiting to welcome travellers from there once the borders open. Our aim is to send the message across that it is safe to come to our properties as we have trained our staff & maintain stringent safety protocols”

Talking about the need for sharing information with travellers, he said, “We should play a key role when it comes to information. Today the information being given

especially intra GCC travel is down but we expect this to recover quickly once intra travel happens. Travel corridors are working, and recovery will be fast. We

for next summer. When it comes to luxury travel booking patterns, we have noticed that most of the clients are looking for a long stay. Earlier, clients from the Middle East were looking at weekend getaways with a four-hour flight but now we see a trend, they try to book for a longer stay like four to six nights as they face difficulties while travelling to a destination due to the different protocols at the airports in different countries. Some markets are very resilient, even from the Middle East market we had lots of tourists coming in especially during the Islamic new year and the Eid break. We are hopeful and I'm sure that we will bounce back soon.”

Pizarro commented, “Domestic tourism has picked up and there is ample flexibility when it comes to bookings. I hope that by the end of this year all international borders will open. GCC, India and US are important markets for us. One of the things is consumer perception on how to market for the new normal situation. We prepare

Repositioning luxury

Dissanayake opined, “The luxury traveller is looking to slow down and is seeking simplicity, less distraction and purity. Luxury travellers are coming to the Maldives especially with their families and are looking at digital detoxification for their kids who have become addicted to digital experiences due to the pandemic. Most of the guests travelling to the Maldives are opting for long stay holidays, they are looking at places with lots of activities for kids, so resorts are focusing on this.

At the time of opening the destination the Maldives Tourism gave us clear guidelines on how to run the hotels. For the luxury traveller we all make sure it's a safe holiday. The Maldives is one of the few destinations where the guest doesn't need to go to the medical centre, a doctor comes to the villa and collects the sample and gives the report, that's the kind of convenience Maldives gives for the luxury traveller – it's a hassle-free holiday.”

“When it comes to spending patterns, it depends on how we convince luxury travellers to spend for their experiences, gone are the days when people spent a lot of money on luxury villas. Today the travellers are looking for experiences, for instance, a water villa with a slide is a dream holiday in the Maldives for a client. When we opened Heritance Aarah we built a 100 per cent over water public pool. We are looking at enhancing the customer experience, if you take the product Heritance Aarah, as a premier, all-inclusive platform, we give variety to a client. We are giving the luxury traveller more convenience, we are creating experiences for them to spend money. We are looking at going back to basics where the luxury traveller is looking for such experiences, especially a rustic experience. We believe the trav-

ellers have changed, their patterns have changed. Nowadays a lot of hotels in the Maldives are using Artificial Intelligence to collect information to identify customers' needs and wants prior to their arrival so that they are prepared when the traveller arrives,” he added.

“Luxury travellers want instagrammable destinations more than anything else. First, the destinations that will be able to offer more

Session 2

local experiences will always win. The second aspect is pricing, travellers are going to always look for unique yet affordable experiences. Even five-star resorts in the region and across the world are looking at offering authentic experiences,” concluded Hmedan.



Suresh Dissanayake
Assistant Vice President Sales and Marketing, Heritance Aarah and Adaaran in the Maldives

“Safety is paramount and with one hotel in one island social distancing is not an issue. As per government guidelines resorts in the Maldives need to have isolation facilities. So around 10 per cent of our inventory is isolated rooms right now”

Updates

► Luxury travellers want instagrammable destinations more than anything else. The destinations that will be able to offer more local experiences will always win. Even five-star resorts in the region and across the world are looking at offering authentic experiences.”

— Mamoum Hmedan

► Our objective is to convince customers to come to Europe. And for this to happen, we need to offer personalised experiences. As of now, we are trying to give the message that we have everything to cater to their personalised needs.”

— Nuria Pizarro

► Earlier, clients from the Middle East were looking at weekend getaways with a four-hour flight but now we see a trend, they try to book for a longer stay like four to six nights as they face difficulties while travelling to a destination.”

— Suresh Dissanayake



to travellers is vague, so we are looking at developing a platform for disseminating important information. Until that happens it will be a big constraint towards restoring leisure and luxury tourism especially for families.”

“Business travel is down especially by 30 per cent plus travel from the region

expect it to happen within the next two months, we are going to see UAE – Saudi, UAE – Bahrain, Bahrain – Saudi, opening up again,” he added.

Dissanayake shared, “We are hoping to recover 40-50 per cent by the end of this year. We are getting good bookings especially

the hotels in terms of health and safety. Our objective is to convince customers to come to Europe. And for this to happen, we need to offer personalised services and experiences. As of now, we are trying to give the message that we have everything to cater to their personalised needs.”

Tourism Breaking News

- Dubai's desert safari ranked world's top tourism experience
- Radisson signs Pakistan's first internationally branded 'Serviced Apartments'
- Texel Air welcomes arrival of Boeing 737-700 Flexcombi in Bahrain
- Ministry of Economy discusses plans with SCTDA to boost tourism
- ADIHEX's 18th edition to be extended to 7 days international fair
- Dubai safest destination to host global exhibitions and conferences
- Ajman Tourism engages Emirati youth to attract more visitors to the emirate
- The Helicopter Company expands fleet to promote scenic tourism
- RCU and Habitas partner to construct resort in Ashar Valley
- First Grand Millennium debuts in Tabuk, KSA
- Tiri Consultancy to represent crossroads Maldives throughout the GCC
- CLYMB Abu Dhabi breaks two Guinness World Records titles
- Etihad Airways expands air-rail partnership with AccesRail in Europe

EVENT TALK

SEPTEMBER 2020

Amazing Thailand Virtual Roadshow
9 (Wed) 10 am-6 pm (UAE)
www.halathailandvirtualmart.com

German Tourism Board Webinar
21 (Mon) 11 am-12 pm (UAE)
<https://event.webinarjam.com/register/150/5v7qwi22>

Remaz Tours focuses on ME

Remaz Tours was founded in 2017 in Berlin to provide inbound tourism services for Middle East and GCC travellers to Germany. Today, the company provides high-quality services from ground operations, logistics, to sales and marketing. **Maher Azizia**, Managing Director, Remaz Tours Germany, shares with **TRAVELTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

What are the main services offered at Remaz Tours?

Our main services are focused on inbound tourism to Germany and Central Europe from Asia, ME, GCC and North Africa. Also, our inbound services vary from FIT leisure, small groups to MICE and business travel.

How important is the ME market and how will you attract travellers to the destination?

The Middle East market has witnessed remarkable growth in the last five years, which encouraged the tourism authorities in

European countries including Germany to pay attention to this growth and to allocate a large budget to promote its destinations in this market. Our key goal is to attract the ME travellers who appreciate authentic cultural, artistic, historical, natural and social heritage.

What happened during lockdown at Remaz Tours?

During the lockdown our focus was on book-

ing flights for those who were stuck in Europe and helping them to safely travel back to their home countries.

Has domestic tourism picked up due to the ease of lockdown?

Limited domestic travel was allowed after lockdown restrictions eased, for example in Germany I have suddenly seen a demand for holiday homes and camping tourism.



Maher Azizia
Managing Director
Remaz Tours Germany

When will inbound pick up and which countries will be the first to come in? There was a list put forward for Schengen countries so from them do you feel that UAE will have an edge over others?

International borders for

Schengen area have been opened from July 1, the list of countries started with 15 and according to the European Union the list will be reviewed every two weeks and new countries will be added consecutively.

As per the Federal Government of Germany, those countries' borders will be opened who have been able to prevent the spread of the virus. The UAE health system has proven its capacity by dealing with the pandemic and I have a feeling that UAE will be at the forefront of the GCC countries that will open borders with Germany. 🇦🇪

“The UAE health system has proven its capacity by dealing with the pandemic and I have a feeling that UAE will be at the forefront of the GCC countries that will open borders with Germany”

Domestic tourism to the fore

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been working towards ensuring a safer destination for all its residents. Earlier a stimulus package of 50 billion riyals for the private sector came into effect and lately the promotion of domestic tourism shows signs of progress. **Waeil Alharthi**, General Manager, Sama Al Mosafer Travel and Tourism shares with **TRAVELTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

What are areas the company works on?

Our business is both inbound and outbound, catering to leisure and corporate clients. We have many customers for entertainment and many contracts with companies to facilitate their travel.

As an agent what are the main challenges faced in the pandemic era?

Customer satisfaction is the biggest challenge we faced, but it was not difficult. When we first heard



Waeil Alharthi
General Manager
Sama Al Mosafer Travel and Tourism

about the spread of the virus, we provided advice to customers to postpone their travel, which reduced our number of reserva-

tions. However, we did not face any problem regarding cancellations and retrieving financial amounts from suppliers.

Could you share the strategies taken to maintain relations with your clients?

Dealing with customers is very similar to dealing

with friends, so we persuaded customers who made reservations to postpone their travel and provided documents that preserved their rights to enjoy the same trip at another time after the pandemic ended. In this way we overcame many of the problems of cancellations and returns.

“UAE and the State of Bahrain are destinations which travellers in the KSA will find safer to travel to post the pandemic due to the existence of government coordination between these countries”

What are the countries that you feel those in KSA will find easier or rather safer to travel post COVID?

UAE and the State of Bahrain are destinations which travellers in the KSA will find safer to travel to post the pandemic due to KSA's proximity to these destinations and also the existence of government coordination between these countries that guarantees the safety of citizens. In addition, some tourist islands that did not face the problems of coronavirus significantly could be the preferred destinations. 🇦🇪



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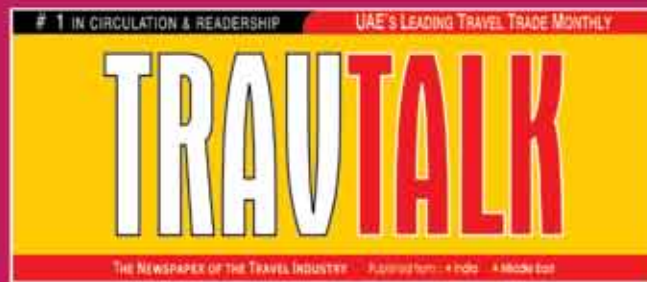
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Nestled in the northern most part of the UAE, Ras Al Khaimah is a dream destination for all types of holiday seekers. The Emirate boasts year-long sunshine, 64 kilometres of white sandy beaches, historical landmarks and the majestic Hajar mountain range culminating in UAE's highest peak – Jebel Jais.

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Board is the first tourism authority to partner with Bureau Veritas, a global leader in testing, inspection and certification, for all its hotels. Part of the 'Stay Safe Hotel Certification', this program is aimed at rebuilding trust in tourism.

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