



TRAVTALK



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

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2-minute news capsule

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Gearing up for GTS 2021

The second edition of the Gulf Travel Show will take place on March 31 and April 1, 2021. The event will see extensive networking with the trade.

Shehara Rizly

Tourism Malaysia pledged its partnership once again with some of their key partners in their very own pavilion. Successfully concluded in 2020 with 40 plus exhibitors,



Shahrin Mokhtar
Director
Tourism Malaysia – Dubai

included travel agents, tour operators, tourism boards, airlines, hotels, travel management companies and international agencies, encouraged the emergence of a second edition.

Once again, the show promises some of the key travel, tourism and hospitality experts from across the Middle East

6,000 one-to-one meetings, and 2,500 visitors from 59 countries which

Contd. on page 9 ▶



Where is travel headed?

TRAVTALK Digital Conclave concluded with six experts sharing their valuable insights on some of the current travel trends and behaviours.

Shehara Rizly

Change has been a constant factor over the past almost 13 months, with the environment changing every single day. In order to obtain a customer's confidence it is important to note that the travel industry plays an integral part as it works on an ecosystem where each one plays his/her own part which has an impact on the traveller from the time of making the book-



ing to the time the traveller reaches home. Booking has become much easier and it is important to educate customers. Technology needs to disperse information about what you must do to go to a country. Technology needs to be nimble; it needs to adapt

to change, which is not just about the rules and regulations but product delivery too. Technology should be used for passing on relevant information to the customers. Also, a delivery system with digital adaptability and scalability is vital.

Contd. on page 12 ▶

STB roadshow a success

STB in collaboration with 15 of its partners successfully concluded the second edition of their virtual roadshow with over 400 travel agents from GCC & Turkey.

Shehara Rizly

The second edition of STB Virtual Roadshow was highly productive for STB and our Singapore tourism stakeholders to hold business and networking discussions with our Middle East & Turkey trade partners. The roadshow was attended by 427 travel agents from GCC to engage in a discussion with 15 Singapore-based



Beverly Au Yong
Area Director, Middle East
Singapore Tourism Board

meaningful discussions during the six-hour tradeshow of which 124 meetings were conducted by STB. We received remarkable feedback from all our partners on enabling this opportunity that allowed them to deepen ties, discuss business opportunities and get updates about the various services, offers and products available in Singapore following the pandemic.

tourism service providers. Our tourism partners from Singapore seamlessly conducted over 1,200

Contd. on page 3 ▶

Discover the best of Ireland

March 8 and 9, 2021, will provide an opportunity to the Middle East travel trade fraternity to meet 27 partners from the island of Ireland.

Shehara Rizly

The Middle East is a very important source market for a number of reasons. There is direct access from the UAE and Qatar to Ireland with Emirates Airlines, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways. UAE nationals can visit the Republic of Ireland visa-free. Other GCC nationals can avail of the Irish Short Stay Visa Waiver programme. Tour-

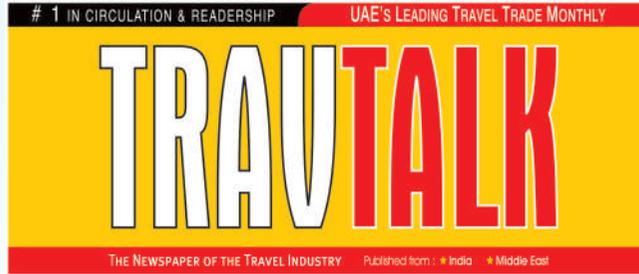


Niall Gibbons
Chief Executive
Tourism Ireland

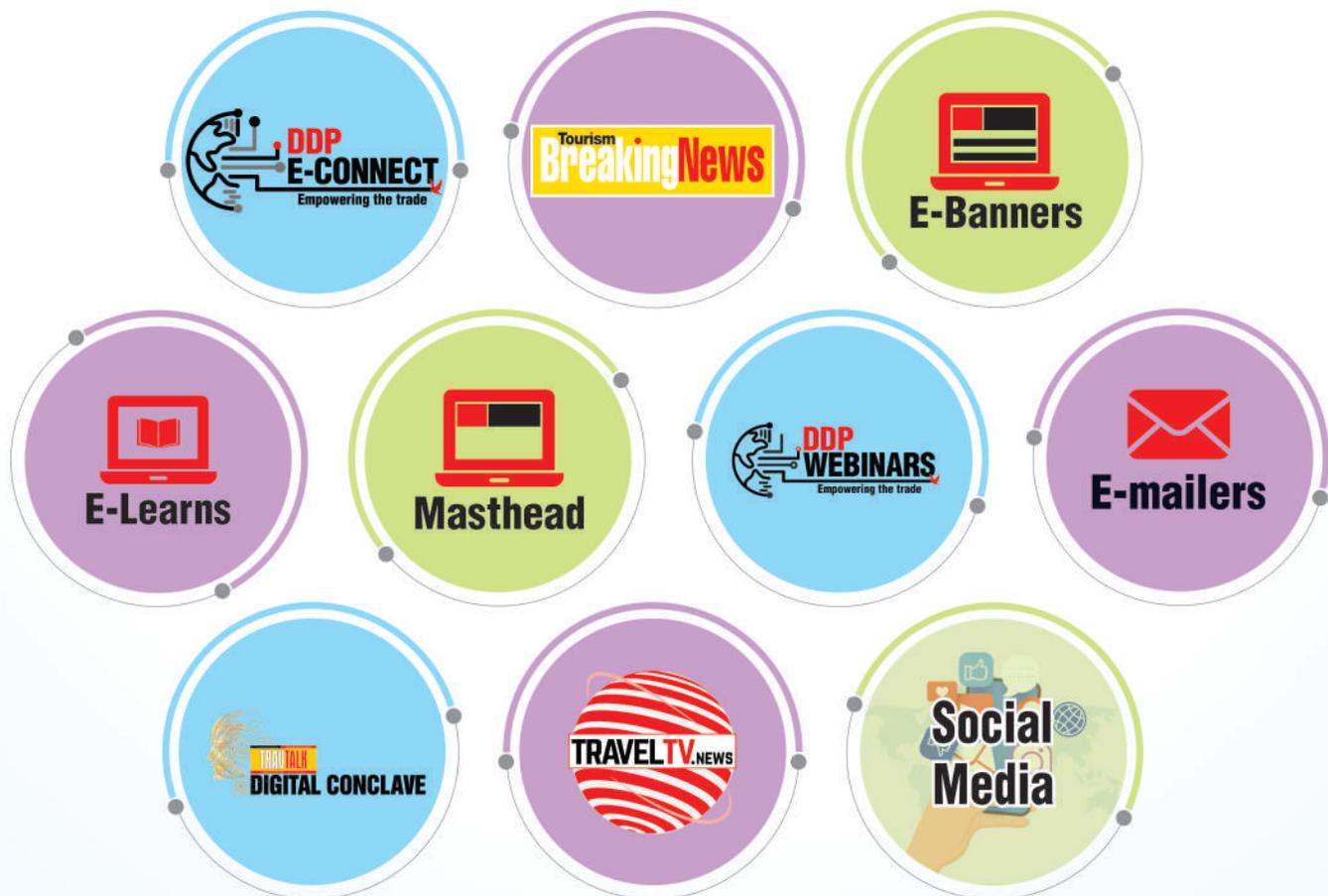
ism Ireland has a strategy to target the ultra-luxury tourism sector and is ensuring the island of Ire-

land is ready for the high net worth market. Through hefty investment we're re-thinking luxury by creating unique, authentic, only in Ireland experiences which will attract visitors from the Middle East to visit Ireland. The priority for 2021 will be to restart tourism to the island of Ireland through a kick-start campaign, which will be launched across 12 markets, including the GCC.

Contd. on page 6 ▶



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STB focuses on GCC markets

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Fawad Khan
Sales Manager – Singapore Airlines, Middle East

“Singapore Tourism Board is a strategic partner with Singapore Airlines, and we value this relationship. It is among our priorities to drive the traffic to Singapore. We really appreciate this platform, collaboration and the other travel trade partners for joining in the sessions. We had an overwhelming response from the trade partners. They enjoyed interacting with us virtually since we are in a new world now, virtual

is the way forward for the time being, so it was good to engage with all our trade partners. We spoke about what Singapore has to offer and as Singapore Airlines our updates about the network operating from Dubai. The biggest news we shared was the resumption of flights from January 18, 2021 and we are offering an all new A 350 900 operation, it's a brand new aircraft and the seats are more comfortable both in business and economy class. Overall, this session was a great success as we re-engaged with travel partners and it was great to be a part of the virtual session.”



Janet Moses
Tour Consultant – Al Tayer Holidays

“The STB Dubai Virtual B2B Tradeshow January 2021 provided a portal which was very user-friendly. We connected with the team, and it was so refreshing to hear from our partners on the current updates. Also, the team was very cooperative, they have shared the marketing tool which is very important and useful. Many thanks to the team.”



Mehtap Topcu
Sales Manager – Singapore Airlines, Turkey

“We are grateful that STB has organised this fruitful virtual roadshow. It helped to bring STB, airlines, DMCs, travel agencies and hoteliers together. Seeing Singapore being ready to welcome the visitors from all around the world, health & safety precautions were taken in Singapore at Singapore Airlines, Changi Airport, at the hotels and attraction places, which was very important for

all the participants. I am sure it helped a lot of companies to create new cooperation opportunities to select Singapore as a great MICE & leisure destination in the near future.”



Aga Pytlík
General Manager – Pan World Travel and Tourism

“It was my great pleasure to be part of STB GCC Virtual Tradeshow 2021 as a trade buyer. In spite of the fact that till today our tourism and travel industry is facing huge difficulties, it's important to be present, connect with the partners and maintain business relationships.

Thanks to STB organisers who brought Singapore closer along with exhibitors and all participants to create a unique event and wonderful occasion to reunite with overseas partners. We can't meet each other physically yet, but we can support each other and together develop a sustainable tourism industry for our generation.”

Your face is now your passport at DXB



he General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs in Dubai (GDRFA-Dubai) has launched a new fast-track passport control service that uses face and iris-recognition tech-

Airline Adel Al Redha, Assistant Director General of the Airport Immigration Department at GDRFA-Dubai Colonel Talal Al Shanqeti and several senior officials attended the launch event for the new service.



nologies. Director General of GDRFA-Dubai Major General Mohammed Ahmed Al Marri, Deputy CEO of Dubai Airports Jamal Al Hay, Chief Operating Officer of Emirates

Outbound passengers can avail of the new fast-track service at the smart gates located at the departure terminal after obtaining their boarding pass.

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Tourism Breaking News

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- Wizz Air Abu Dhabi enables passengers for refund in one week
- Akbar Travels and Sabre cement 20-year relationship with new partnership
- Tourism Malaysia Dubai & Jeddah launches "Malaysia Specialist Certified Programme" for ME Travel Agents
- Keep Ireland as number one in your travel wish list
- Wyndham launches La Quinta Brand in the ME in historic area of Dubai
- Travelport rebrands and reveals striking new identity
- Louvre Hotels Group inks deal with Sabre hospitality solutions to boost its strategic distribution
- flydubai expands its operations to Romania - Cluj-Napoca, from 20 March

How to attract more customers

Now that we think about human contact differently, hotels can rethink the guest experience so that guests feel comfortable again, says **Diane Thorsen**, Hospitality Regional Leader of Asia Pacific and Middle East and Design Director of Middle East, Gensler.

Here are four ways in which hotels can meet new expectations and deliver an exceptional guest experience in a post-COVID era:

Revive and rethink room service

Over the past few years, self-serve options and grab-and-go markets have reduced the demand for room service. With heightened focus on health, room service could be rethought into a wellness service that provides access to healthy produce and locally sourced ingredients.

Support safety through cleanliness and contactless technology

There are a number of strategies hotels can consider to demonstrate their commitment to safety through cleanliness. The industry is expected to increasingly



implement contactless or touchless technologies, such as self-service check-in, mobile room keys, and touchless faucets for a higher standard of cleanliness.

Require new standards for meetings and events

As we've become more accustomed to remote connectiveness, we won't rely on face-to-face meetings as much as we used to. What will this mean for meeting and event book-

ings — and the associated revenue? For one, hotels can position themselves as remote offices or as virtual event hosts. Video conferencing suites with purposeful lighting, green screens, and audio-visual infrastructure, and digitally fluent concierges could become

the new differentiators. To minimise physical contact between attendees, meeting spaces will need to be reconfigured to de-densify the floor space.

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Integrate digital experiences

With digital technologies,

hotels can customise the guest experience — from preset arrival lighting, music, and room configuration to content based on past behaviours or preferences. Digital experiences allow guests to monitor and adjust their own sound, temperature, and ventilation levels, while aiding communication between guests and hotel operators for room service and amenities reservations.



Diane Thorsen
Hospitality Regional Leader of Asia Pacific and Middle East and Design Director of Middle East, Gensler

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

A year of transition for Germany

Germany is readying for a year of transition in 2021 with a gradual recovery in international demand anticipated — including significant inbound visitation expected from the UAE and Saudi Arabia, according to the German National Tourism Board (GNTB).

TT Bureau

Utilising market research institutes and 2020 figures, the GNTB predicts that keen travellers already have their bucket-list destinations lined up for when international travel restrictions are eased. "The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting standstill in large parts of global tourism are reflected in the balance sheet for German incoming tourism in 2020. Simultaneously, international studies confirm the radiance of

the Destination Germany brand, and the increasing willingness of international guests to travel," **Petra Hedorfer**, CEO of the GNTB, said. "The industry has adapted and

created clear health and safety measures to provide additional traveller confidence once mass travel resumes. Along the adapting customer journey, many processes were digitised,

extensive hygiene concepts were developed, and tourist offers were aligned to the adjusted customer needs. This reinvented environment creates good conditions for a recovery phase."

Incoming balance of 2020: A decrease in overnight stays

As expected, inbound tourism to Germany suffered significant drops in 2020. According to preliminary information from the Federal Statistical Office, 32 million foreign overnight



Petra Hedorfer
CEO
GNTB

stays in accommodations with at least 10 beds and campsites were registered, resulting in a decrease of

64.4 per cent compared to the previous year.

Perspective for 2021: Gradual recovery of international demand

GNTB remains optimistic, particularly following research carried out by YouGov which revealed that 48% of UAE residents and 46% of Saudi Arabia residents plan to travel abroad in 2021. Travel for 'scenic places' is at the top of the reasons for travel, according to 45% of the respondents. 🌅



Iconic tourism landmark in Malaysia

Scheduled to reopen in 2021, Sunway Resort reveals the result of a historic transformation project, setting a new benchmark for authentic Asian business and leisure hospitality. London's Gordon Ramsay Bar & Grill is also set to open at Sunway Resort in June 2021.

Sunway Resort is a luxury 5-star hotel located in the heart of Sunway City Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's premier entertainment and hospitality destination. The resort is strategically located in a bustling suburb of Kuala Lumpur, just 35 minutes from Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and 25 minutes from the city centre.



The vibrant 800-acre self-contained iconic landmark seamlessly integrates a cluster of three hotels, conference and convention centres, a theme park, a mega shopping and entertainment mall, medical centre, educational facilities and a multitude of distinctive business and leisure facilities for an all-inclusive experience and convenience.

A complete destination

Being interconnected to the Sunway Lagoon

theme park and Sunway Pyramid shopping mall, guests will be able to hop from elegant boutiques to exhilarating rides within minutes. The 88-acre Sunway Lagoon multi-park destination offers over 90 rides and attrac-

tions spread across its six signature parks – Water Park, Extreme Park, Amusement Park, Wildlife Park, Scream Park and the Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon. Sunway Pyramid, the iconic mall located adjacent to the hotel, is

home to over 1,000 specialty stores, 170 food and beverage outlets, entertainment centres, and recreational facilities like an ice-skating rink, 48-lane bowling centre, 11-screen Cineplex and much more. For more

accommodation options, the 4-star Sunway Pyramid Hotel and Sunway Clio Hotel also provides comfort and convenience in Sunway City Kuala Lumpur, ideal for guests travelling for leisure or business.



Alex Castaldi
Senior General Manager
Sunway City Kuala Lumpur Hotels

“The Gordon Ramsay Bar & Grill at Sunway Resort will be the very first outlet in Malaysia and outside of Mayfair, London. Diners can expect a host of Gordon's signature dishes such as Beef Wellington, Sticky Toffee Pudding and more, to be enjoyed in a relaxed and stylish restaurant”

— Alex Castaldi

MICE first

Sunway City Kuala Lumpur is one of the region's leading leisure and meetings and events destinations, with more than 360,000 square metres of world-class spaces and vibrant venues, close to 1,500 rooms and suites, as well as indulgent dining options.

Sunway Resort presents 477 smart, environmentally-friendly and intuitively designed rooms and suites fitted with state-of-the-art technology, including specialty suites that are perfectly tailored for different types of guests; from business travel-

lers and families to wellness and luxury seekers. Guests staying in the Club Rooms and Suites will experience exclusive privileges at the 20th Club Executive and The Premium Leisure Club.

KL's Most Iconic Hotel

Families are in for a treat with rooms designed for them to stay and play together in style, featuring two queen beds that comfortably sleep two adults and two children, and with child-focused amenities to excite the little ones.

The Aquaventure Terrace room comes with a private terrace that leads directly to Aquaventure Playland, a children's play zone which features shallow pools, a water playground and an array of other exhilarating activities. To further entertain and educate the young ones, the Wonderland Kids Club takes the concept of 'funducational' to a whole new level. 🌟

Novel dining experience

Alex Castaldi, Senior General Manager, Sunway City Kuala Lumpur Hotels, says, “The Gordon Ramsay Bar & Grill at Sunway Resort will be the very first outlet in Malaysia and outside of Mayfair, London. Diners can expect a host of Gordon's signature dishes such as Beef Wellington, Sticky Toffee Pudding and more, to be enjoyed in a relaxed and stylish restaurant.”



Gordon Ramsay

elements from Gordon Ramsay's world-famous signature dishes. For a vibrant market-style buffet, head to The Resort Café featuring local, Asian and Western selections. Guests looking for laid-back dining will enjoy the lively poolside restaurant serving wood-fired pizza and international cuisine, all in an open kitchen concept, reflecting the hotel's casual beach vibe.

Sunway Resort elevates the country's entire dining scene with diverse and dramatic experiences. Dine at the Gordon Ramsay Bar & Grill, the world-renowned, multi-Michelin starred chef's first-ever restaurant in Malaysia.

From breakfast and lunch through afternoon tea to evening dinners and cocktail hours, diners can select from an impressive menu, specialising in premium ingredients and exceptional flavours, as well as the very best



Ireland meets the Middle East

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Gearing up to attend Ireland's maiden virtual roadshow in the Middle East, Irish travel partners talk about the immense potential of the Middle East market and their expectations from the event to be held on March 8 and 9 from 14:00 to 18:00 hours UAE time.

“There is no denying that 2020 was a devastating year with COVID-19 causing havoc to the travel industry across the globe, Ireland being no exception of course. We believe that maybe there will be some resurgence of travel at the end of 2021 and in order to do that we will be launching restart of our international travel. What we are doing at the moment is actively planning for the restart and it is a three-phased plan which will happen when the time is right, the idea is that we are keeping Ireland top of mind for the travellers at the moment. We will also present the potential traveller with some great opportunities to purchase again when the time is right and deliver a very clear message to create a demand for holidays across the island of Ireland. The key this year will be judging very carefully when things are ready to open up in Ireland and in other destinations.”



David Boyce
Head of New & Emerging
Markets
Tourism Ireland

“Tourism suppliers from all sectors across the island of Ireland have been implementing the new governmental health and safety measures, but does that mean that you will be compromising on the holiday experience that makes the island of Ireland so special and the great Irish welcome that we are also famous for. Tourism Ireland's research consistently highlights that it is one of the holiday destinations that people will be very comfortable to travel to when international travel resumes, and that is because of our great outdoors, wide range of things to see and do, golf, horse racing, loads of adventure and our great coastal driving route. While at tourism Ireland we don't underestimate the challenges that lie ahead, we do look forward to 2021 and beyond with hope and optimism that we will see travellers return and we look forward to welcoming our friends and visitors from the Middle East.”



Aisling McDermott
Manager Middle East & Asia
Tourism Ireland

“Over the course of these two days the travel trade will have the opportunity to have one-to-one meetings with 27 key island of Ireland industry partners who will showcase the accommodation, attractions and activity offerings across the island. There will also be an opportunity to meet the team from Tourism Ireland who are based here in the region and to discuss how we can all work together to help to promote this exciting destination to key GCC travel trade who are interested in educating themselves about the island of Ireland and hearing about all it has to offer as a luxury destination. Thus, this virtual roadshow will be a one-stop shop for GCC travel trade to learn all that they need to know about the island of Ireland and to meet with key island of Ireland industry partners who can assist them with all of their programming needs.”



Siobhan Naughton
Trade Executive Middle
East & Asia
Tourism Ireland

Partners@ Ireland's Roadshow

“I only work B2B and the experiences I create and deliver are not available to the general public. I operate at trade prices only offering buyers the opportunity to make their own profit margins. My experiences are delivered in a safe controlled environment, we can provide security if required and the experiences have become more exclusive, personal and harder to obtain since COVID. I see the Middle East as a growth marketplace that can be developed alongside our luxury and ultra-luxury experiences. I am a third-generation tour guide and we have guided on the North Coast of Northern Ireland for nearly 130 years.”



Mark Rodgers
Founder
Dairiada Kingdom Tours

“Dromoland Castle dates back to the 1500s and opened as a hotel in 1962, over these decades we have had a long-standing relationship with the Middle East market. The privacy and exclusivity our castle and our estate offer to our guests makes it the perfect country experience for our Middle East guests. Our very close proximity to Shannon airport is an extra bonus so access is made very easy for guests arriving to our property. As a member of Preferred Hotels & Resorts, AMEX Fine Hotels of the World, Virtuoso and other consortia we take great pride at being Ireland's leading five-star Luxury Castle Resort property.”



Marie Chawke
Director of Business
Development
Dromoland Castle

“The Irish National Stud & Gardens has worked hard to create a safe space for visitors. Visitors can expect to see hand sanitiser stations, screens at receptions, signage, etc. The attraction has also been awarded with the Failte Ireland Safety Charter. Middle East is a very important market and the industry has a huge link with the Middle East. We have been working with travel agents and tour operators in the Middle East to increase awareness of our product within the market by working with industry bodies, travelling to the area when possible and other various marketing activities.”



David Wardell
Tourism Development
Manager
Irish National Stud &
Gardens

“Emerald VIP Services is a luxury DMC, we own and operate our own fleet of premium vehicles. Our clients are assured of a high service standard when travelling with our professional chauffeur guides in Ireland. Our COVID Commitment policy ensures that our clients feel safe & comfortable at all times. Our primary concern is your safety and the safety of our drivers. Our enhanced vehicle sanitisation process ensures peace of mind for our clients and we are also committed to continuing to deliver a memorable travel experience. We have been welcoming guests from the Middle East for three years now and we strongly value the agent relationships which we have built during this time.”



Gillian Costelloe
Business Development
Manager
Emerald VIP Services

“We are delighted to have secured the COVID Safety Charter from Failte Ireland which means we have all the COVID protocols in place to ensure our clients have a safe and healthy holiday. Golf is an activity that takes place in the fresh clean air of Ireland in stunning natural surroundings. The safest place you can be in on a golf course where social distancing is easy to achieve. We made a strategic decision in 2019 to target the Middle East market due to excellent air connections and the profile of traveller. We are also launching a co-op marketing campaign with Orient Travel in the UAE as soon as the international travel situation opens up.”



Joe Shannon
CEO
G Golf Ireland

“They should expect the same private high end incredible award winning experience with Flip that was provided in 2019. Post-COVID-19 there is the requirement to wear masks inside the vehicle and use hand sanitiser regularly. This is the also law inside buildings The tour is mostly in wide open space so allowing the fresh air of the real world Westeros to be enjoyed. Middle East is an important market because I know that Game of Thrones reached the hearts of many in the region. I believe that I can provide a wonderful experience for visitors to Ireland.”



Flip Robinson
Owner/Operator
Giant Tours Ireland



Tourism Ireland's ME Roadshow



Avril Collins
Marketing Manager
Ireland's Blue Book

“ In the wake of COVID-19 the Blue Book created a safety charter to highlight our single-minded focus on the health and safety of our guests and employees. We will achieve that focus whilst still providing the exceptional hospitality and luxurious experiences with which the Blue Book is synonymous. The Middle East is a market we are exploring with our partner Tourism Ireland. With direct flights to Ireland with Etihad and Emirates we feel the market holds great potential. In February 2020, our team travelled to Dubai to meet travel agents and tour operators after attending TFest. ”



David Cronin
Group Sales and Marketing
Manager
Killarney Hotels

“ We have continued to invest in our hotel product, in terms of technology , fixture , fittings and experiences. For 60 years, Killarney Hotels has placed an unwavering focus on the health and wellbeing of our most valued guests and colleagues in each of our properties. Rest assured that this focus is especially important during the current Coronavirus crisis. We are continuously monitoring and following the changes in recommendations and guidelines from the government, local authorities and from the WHO, to continue working towards providing the best service possible, while safeguarding the welfare of our guests. ”



Tanya Dawson
Executive Director
Luxurious Ireland

“ Luxurious Ireland has expanded its offerings within Island of Ireland, working with more unique and private exclusive hire properties and experiences. Ireland is where you can escape from the hustle and bustle of cities, experience beautiful wide-open spaces, discover stunning landscapes and dramatic scenery. The Middle East market has been evolving for us over the last few years and we are excited to be expanding our connections with agents and operators seeking something a little different and exclusive for their guests. ”

“ The Merrion has had a long-standing relationship with the Middle East Market, while welcoming guests since our doors opened in 1997. As a member of Leading Hotels of the World, we pride ourselves on providing five-star luxury service to all our guests. The Merrion offers a number of accommodation options for our guests including spacious suites, connecting rooms, the largest Penthouse in Dublin city centre and the option for exclusive use of Floors. The Merrion houses one of Ireland's largest and most notable private art collections, the jewels of which are on view in the public rooms and suites. ”



Ruthie McGrath
Director of Sales
The Merrion Hotel, Dublin

“ When COVID-19 hit globally in 2020 Titanic Belfast reacted on how we could make changes to ensure our product would still deliver to the 5-star standard. When we did re-open in the latter part of summer 2020 we had great feedback and visitors felt they got more out of the experience with the changes made. This will continue into 2021. In January 2020 I spent a week on a Tourism Ireland Sales Mission in the Middle East. During this week I was very well educated on the market and got a great understanding of what the market would like to see. It is very important for Titanic to build on these relationships and to see these develop over the next few years. ”



Victoria Loy
Business and Leisure
Markets Manager
Titanic Belfast

“ We have enhanced our experience to ensure a safe and enjoyable welcome for our visitors. With the current pandemic and dependency of certain markets, the Middle East will be an important part of our strategy to grow visitors in 2021 and beyond. The luxury Waterford brand and experience is a good fit with the Middle East market. We are not currently working with travel agents or tour operators in the middle east, however, it is something we wish to explore with our existing tour operators and new potential operators. We do work with Tourism Ireland's offices in our target markets. ”



David Mc Coy
Director of Sales and
Marketing
House of Waterford Crystal



IRELAND MEETS THE MIDDLE EAST 2021

Tourism Ireland's ME Roadshow

Meet 28 Irish partners on a virtual platform, watch insightful panel discussions and get a chance to win exciting prizes.

8th and 9th March 2021

2:00PM - 6:00PM (Gulf Standard Time)

Register Now on

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Project regenerative tourism

As the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia pans out their course of action for Vision 2030, one of the most aspiring projects announced by His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince, Chairman of The Red Sea Development Company was the Coral Bloom concept in the kingdom which will include 11 hotels designed to suit the need of the hour post-COVID.

 TT Bureau

The Red Sea Development Company (TRSDC) together with architectural firm Foster + Partners created the concept and designed to blend in with the island's pristine natural environment. TRSDC, the developer behind the world's most ambitious regenerative tourism project, has since shared the striking vision for its main hub island at the destination, Shurayrah.

"We expect guests to be awed by what they see when they first arrive at The Red Sea Project, enjoying a truly immersive barefoot luxury experience. The Coral Bloom designs, taking



gateway to The Red Sea Project so it's important that it sets the standard in groundbreaking architecture and sustainable

take center stage, with the plan designed to avoid disruption of the island's mangroves and other habitats, providing natural defenses from erosion, while new habitats are created through landscaping to enhance the island's natural state.

The proposal also outlines designs for the island's 11 hotels, adapted to suit traveller expectations post-COVID-19 including more space, and immersed into the landscape to effectively form part of the sweeping dunes, allowing the island's natural beauty to reign supreme.

The design sees new beaches created on the dolphin-shaped island along with a new lagoon. These enhancements will contribute to raising the level of the land, providing a defensive layer from the global threat of rising sea levels. Importantly, the

“Shurayrah Island is the gateway to The Red Sea Project so it's important that it sets the standard in groundbreaking architecture and sustainable design, not just for our destination, but globally too”

— John Pagano

changes aim to preserve or enhance what already exists on the island, without damaging any habitats or natural shores.

Immersive hotel design

There will be 11 hotels on Shurayrah, which will be operated by some of the most distinguished hotel brands in the world. The island's natural landscape will be used to dramatic effect with all hotels and villas nestled within the landscape. The absence of high-rise buildings will ensure the spectacular vistas remain uninhibited, while

creating a sense of mystery for guests as the island slowly reveals itself.

The hotel designs have also been responsive to the changing world and traveller demands over the last 12 months. There will be no internal corridors for example, in response to a growing demand for space and seclusion following the coronavirus pandemic. The resorts themselves will be created using lightweight materials with a low thermal mass and manufactured offsite, meaning more energy efficient construction and less impact on the environment.

Gerard Evenden, Head of Studio at Foster + Partners, said: "Our vision for Shurayrah is inspired by the island's natural state, with the hotels designed to give the impression that they have washed up on the beaches and nestled among the dunes almost like driftwood. The materials we use and the low impact they have ensures that the pristine environment is protected, while the additions we make to the island serve to enhance what is already there – hence the name, Coral Bloom."

Regenerative tourism

The Red Sea Development Company is committed to delivering a 30 per cent net conservation benefit by 2040. It is creating the world's largest district cooling plant powered by renewable energy 24 hours a day to facilitate efficient centralised cooling across the destination. The entire destination will be powered by renewables, underpinned by the largest battery storage system in the world.

In line with this commitment, the destination's master plan is informed by an extensive marine spatial planning exercise and leaves 75 per cent of the project's islands untouched. Shurayrah is one of only 22 islands selected for development. 🌅



inspiration from the incredible flora and fauna found uniquely in Saudi Arabia, promise to make that vision a reality," said **John Pagano**, CEO of TRSDC.

"Shurayrah Island is the

design, not just for our destination, but globally too. This is achieved by going beyond simply protecting the environment, to applying a regenerative approach," he added.

Protect and enhance

Biodiversity considerations



Promoting Malaysia at GTS

► Contd. from page 1

sharing their insights on the industry through one-on-one sessions and panel discussions. **Shahrin Mokhtar**, Director of Tourism Malaysia – Dubai, shared, “Tourism Malaysia – Dubai, Jeddah & India will join forces with major tourism partners to spearhead the promotion of Malaysia at the virtual Gulf Travel Show 2021.

MENA and India markets. This time we are planning to showcase Malaysia with our 10 selected tourism partners who will engage with Middle East & India’s potential buyers during the two-day virtual show. This a great opportunity for us to interact with the industry players and plan for the new normal once Malaysia opens its borders to

and can’t wait to see them again at the Malaysian shore soon.”

Travel is in the DNA of the Middle Eastern travellers, the moment the lockdowns eased and hotels started welcoming guests, it was the UAE, KSA and other countries in the region that welcomed travellers and went on to boost domestic tourism or staycations which was a partly unexplored territory. However, these staycations became a regular feature, hence industry experts started building the confidence of the travellers since last summer, which actually saw the Middle East opening with great care and precaution to the world. At the Gulf Travel Show experts will add their predictions and research findings to ensure to build confidence of the travellers. 🌅

“**Tourism Malaysia - Dubai, Jeddah & India will join forces with major tourism partners to spearhead the promotion of Malaysia at the virtual Gulf Travel Show 2021**”

— Shahrin Mokhtar

Tourism Malaysia has become the Diamond Partner in GTS 2021 to further communicate the “Malaysia, Truly Asia” brand to the travel industry fraternity in

welcome tourists. For this year, we are promoting the hashtag #WeMissYou to the market indicating that we miss the tourists coming to our beautiful country

Rediscover Spain

Turespaña – Spain Tourism Office GCC will be hosting a tri-series webinar to showcase the many offerings of the destination.

Shehara Rizly

It was announced that Turespaña – Spain Tourism Office GCC is looking forward to showcase Spain’s amazing offerings to the travel trade in GCC. **Daniel Rosado Bayon**, Director, Spain Tourism GCC, shared, “The idea of this webinar series is to highlight Spain’s known destinations and showcase hidden gems like the North of Spain (also known as Green Spain) and the islands. Spain is an



Daniel Rosado Bayon
Director
Spain Tourism GCC

all-year round and popular destination among Arab travellers and expats alike

“**The recovery phase will last at least until the end of 2023, according to Tourism Economics. Travel to Germany from Europe will recover more quickly than from our overseas markets**”

from GCC and we have seen a trend reflecting interest to travel year after year. The webinar will have key destination partners from across Spain who will update the trade about the current situation and preparations on how each destination is prepping up to receive tourists when the borders open and the time is right to travel.

The webinar series ‘Rediscover Spain’ will take place on March 16 and 23 & April 7 and is open to all travel trade across GCC. The key focus will be on beaches, nature, shopping and luxury along with introducing few new destinations that would be ideal for the travellers from GCC looking to travel to different regions in Spain that are safe and secure. 🌅

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Vaccinations & preventive measures

Over the last month there have been more developments in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) region with regards to travel and local COVID-19 restrictions. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), new cases increased in January to around 3,500 per day, but by the end of January 2021, 33% of the population had been vaccinated.

If they continue to vaccinate at the rate they are going, it is thought that the UAE may meet the threshold for herd immunity by mid-year. With that said, due to the high number of cases in the country at the minute and to prevent the spread of the most recent COVID-19 variant, the United Kingdom (UK) has add-

ed the UAE onto the red list of countries meaning that entry is not permitted without following quarantine restrictions. Other countries featured on the list include Burundi and Rwanda.

Inbound restrictions have also been implemented, with all inbound travellers to the UAE now requiring a negative Polymerase Chain

Reaction (PCR) test prior to boarding a flight into the country. Saudi Arabia has also postponed the reopening of its land, sea, and air

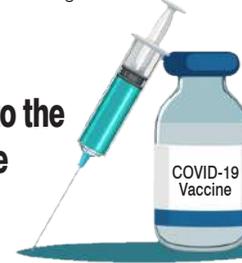
ports until May 17th 2021.

Dubai has also implemented restrictions on entertainment and activities including re-

duced table capacity in restaurants, increased distance between people in fitness centers and gyms, and only first degree relatives allowed

to meet in homes with no more than 10 people getting together. Live entertainment has also been suspended. South Africa is also experiencing tighter lockdown rules in order to curb the spread of the pandemic. They are currently following alert level 3 lockdown regulations which include curfews and various mandatory protocols when in a public place.

Inbound restrictions have also been implemented, with all inbound travellers to the UAE now requiring a negative Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test prior to boarding a flight into the country



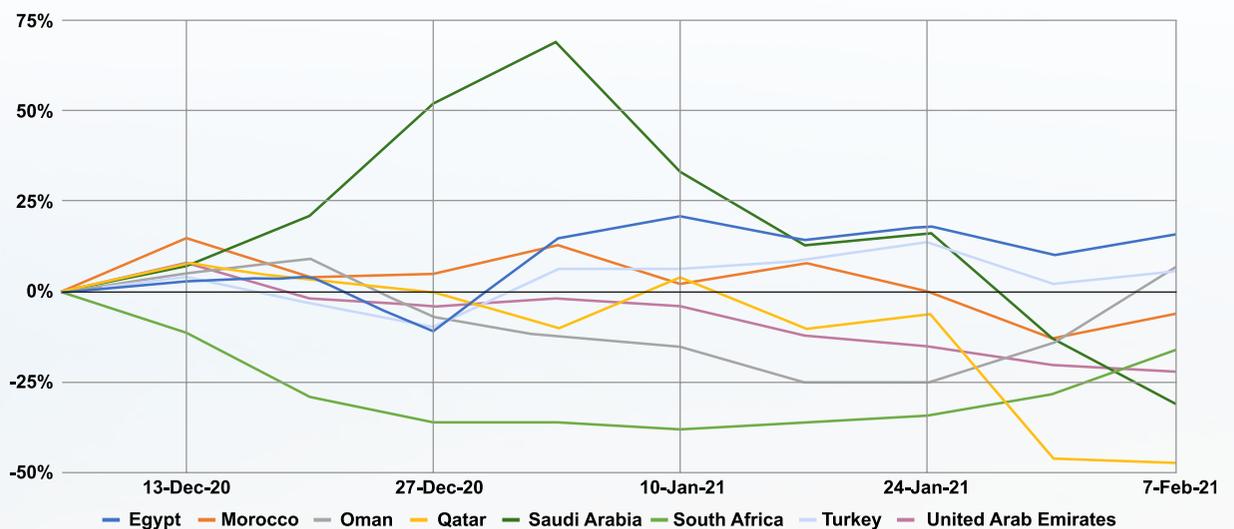
Travel intent to MEA declines

YTD percentage change in global hotel searches to key MEA destinations - indexed to w/c 6th December 2020

While there is optimism in the recent reports of vaccine rollouts, as mentioned above we do see various restrictions returning to the markets.

These include mandatory self-funded quarantines in government hotels, international border closures, and increased PCR testing, all in an attempt to contain the spread of the COVID-19 variants. Looking at the last couple of months, global travel intent and booking data highlight that hotel searches to MEA countries have declined across five out of the eight key markets displayed above.

Most notably, Qatar has seen a significant decline of 47% in inbound search volumes since the week commencing 6th December 2020. Similarly South Africa and the UAE have dropped by 16% and 22% respectively. In contrast, Egypt, Turkey, and Oman have all seen an increase in travel intent since early December.

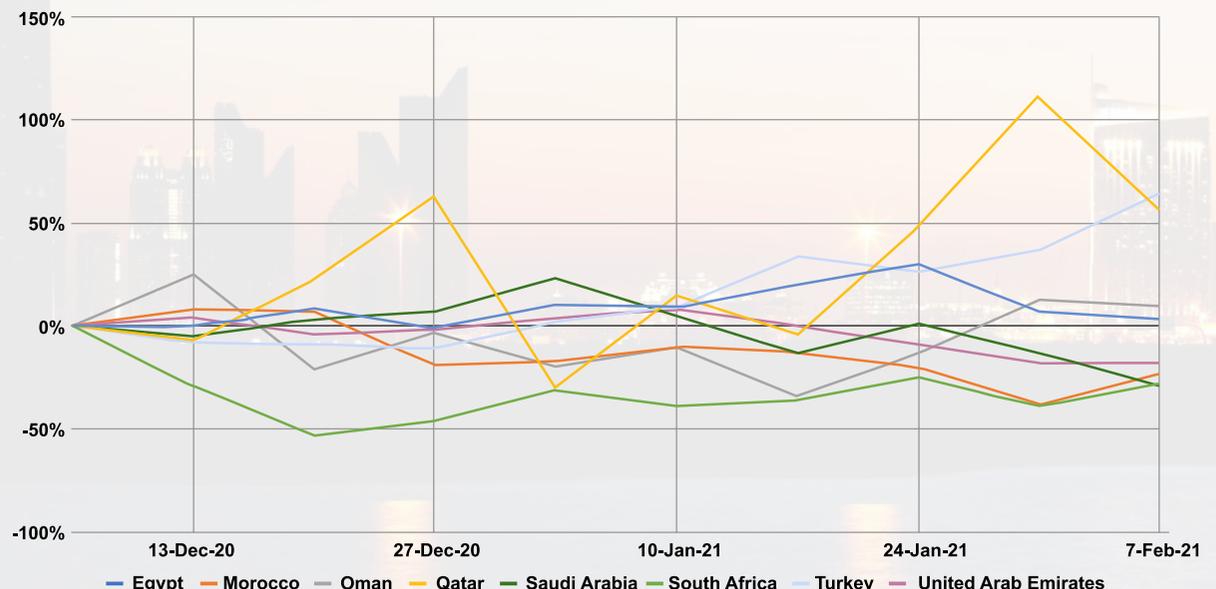


YTD percentage change in global hotel bookings to Key MEA Destinations - indexed to w/c 6th December 2020

We can see a very similar trend when looking at travel confidence. Global hotel bookings to Egypt, Turkey, and Oman have all grown since week commencing 6th December, whereas the other highlighted countries have seen a decrease in bookings. All with the exception of Qatar.

Global travel confidence to Qatar has grown significantly. However, it is important to note here that booking volumes are still low, and when volumes are low, a change in confidence can be reflected more dramatically due to the small data size.

The recent announcements of diplomatic relations being restored between Qatar and four Arab states in the weeks leading up to the positive uplift would likely have been a strong contributing factor to this growth in booking volumes.



Positive inbound travel intent from Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

Searches for Global Hotels from select origins - departure dates of up to 180 days searched over the last 60 days

Russia is historically a big feeder market for inbound travel to the UAE. Although Russian domestic travel continues to take lead, hotel searches to the UAE rank as the second most popular choice for Russian travellers. Taking a closer look at a select few CIS countries and the search trends we are seeing originating from them, the UAE currently accounts for a higher percentage of searches than the Maldives. As the Maldives is such a popular holiday destination, this is very positive for the UAE.

Russia searches

	Origin Country 1 ▲	Destination Country	Percentage of Events 2 ▼
1.	Russia	Russia	80.68%
2.	Russia	United Arab Emirates	7.44%
3.	Russia	Maldives	4.42%
4.	Russia	Turkey	1.67%
5.	Russia	Egypt	0.99%

Kazakhstan searches

	Origin Country 1 ▲	Destination Country	Percentage of Events 2 ▼
1.	Kazakhstan	United Arab Emirates	31.01%
2.	Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan	30.83%
3.	Kazakhstan	Maldives	17.39%
4.	Kazakhstan	Turkey	7.86%
5.	Kazakhstan	Russia	4.47%

Ukraine searches

	Origin Country 1 ▲	Destination Country	Percentage of Events 2 ▼
1.	Ukraine	United Arab Emirates	21.66%
2.	Ukraine	Maldives	20.21%
3.	Ukraine	Ukraine	11.82%
4.	Ukraine	Turkey	8.92%
5.	Ukraine	Russia	7.09%

Kyrgyzstan searches

	Origin Country 1 ▲	Destination Country	Percentage of Events 2 ▼
1.	Kyrgyzstan	United Arab Emirates	59.06%
2.	Kyrgyzstan	Maldives	30.63%
3.	Kyrgyzstan	Russia	9.38%
4.	Kyrgyzstan	Turkey	0.63%
5.	Kyrgyzstan	Hong Kong	0.31%

The UAE features within the top ten searched for destinations with emerging markets such as Israel and Qatar

Israeli searches for Global Hotels - departure dates of up to 180 days searched over the last 60 days

	Origin Country 1 ▲	Destination Country	Percentage of Events 2 ▼
1.	Israel	United Arab Emirates	20.11%
2.	Israel	United States	11.71%
3.	Israel	Maldives	10.12%
4.	Israel	Thailand	5.39%
5.	Israel	United Kingdom	4.96%
6.	Israel	France	4.25%
7.	Israel	Greece	3.92%
8.	Israel	Israel	3.81%
9.	Israel	Morocco	3.5%
10.	Israel	Germany	2.95%

Qatari searches for Global Hotels - departure dates of up to 180 days searched over the last 60 days

	Origin Country 1 ▲	Destination Country	Percentage of Events 2 ▼
1.	Qatar	Qatar	79.7%
2.	Qatar	Maldives	4.9%
3.	Qatar	India	2.85%
4.	Qatar	United Arab Emirates	1.93%
5.	Qatar	Thailand	1.7%
6.	Qatar	Switzerland	1.11%
7.	Qatar	Indonesia	0.88%
8.	Qatar	Egypt	0.86%
9.	Qatar	Philippines	0.83%
10.	Qatar	United States	0.77%

Since relations were restored between Qatar and four Arab states in January 2021 (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt) and the embargo was lifted it is interesting to see the top destinations being searched for by Qatari travellers. While domestic travel intent still dominates, the UAE and Egypt appear respectively as the 4th and 8th top searched destinations.

With the recent rise of COVID-19 cases across countries in the region, restrictions continue to be implemented, and lockdowns continue to be tightened. It seems, as a result, inbound travel intent to MEA has been negatively impacted, however this is not unusual when looking at global travel behaviour wavering in line with the ever-changing restrictions. It is also interesting to note that the UAE features high on the list of destinations for a selection of origin countries including Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Israel, and Qatar.

These forward looking insights help travel marketers across the region shape their strategies as the industry recovers.

In light of recent announcements around restored relations between the UAE and Israel, the UAE ranks as the number one searched destination for the next 180 days of departure dates by those currently in Israel.

While Israel still has restrictions on international travel, this is a very positive sign for the UAE, highlighting that travellers are dreaming of travelling to the country, and putting it ahead of countries such as Thailand and the Maldives which are hugely popular holiday destinations.

Searches for the UAE account for over 20% of total search events by Israel and demonstrates the strong interest Israeli travellers have in visiting the UAE.

What's trending in 2021



► Contd. from page 1

“ We are unlearning what we have learnt over the past 20-25 years in the travel industry. Earlier we were only offering and promoting a product or service, but now there are a lot of other things which we need to talk about. The most important thing is that you need to protect yourself and other travellers. I think the governments are taking a stand which is very good, you need to make sure that you are aware of rules and regulations. And, if you are vaccinated, you are welcome to the country and that is exactly the message that is going out to everybody. ”



Arijit Munshi
General Manager
Tune Protect EMEA

“ Over the past 13 months, we have researched traveller trends as well as travel behaviours of 54 million users. We have found that long vacations by bigger families would take more time to return. Today travellers comprise millennials, couples, and the travel period has shifted from two to three-week holidays to shorter holidays at a single destination rather than multiple destinations. Three to four-day vacations with short travel time as well as outdoor destinations are preferred. The momentum for travel still exists, but trends have changed. ”



Mamoun Hmedan
Managing Director EMEA,
Wego

“ Over the past few months, we have been going through many changes but we have also seen the emergence of a different kind of audience. Never has there been a period where the travel agent has become important in terms of disseminating information, giving right advice etc. While travel agents can use technology to make services seamless and efficient, human touch is important too. ”



Ramsumesh Menon
Chief Executive Officer
Go Gosaibi Travel, Bahrain

“ COVID-19 is a wake-up call for everyone as it has adversely affected the health and well-being of people across the world. Our resilience as individuals and a society is very vital for survival and we need to realise that it all starts with our health and well-being. So healthy minds, healthy habits, even strong family ties strengthen our fortitude to cope with this pandemic and its repercussions. According to a report by the Global Wellness Institute, wellness tourism is slated to grow at an average annual rate of 7.5 per cent by 2022. ”



Linda Abdulla
CEO and Founder, Olyx
Healthcare Consultancy

“ When you talk about wellness or well-being you need to look at what is available locally, who we are talking to and how we can adapt to it. Wellness can be relevant to every single occasion. Also, it does suggest that we have more wellness options because every destination, every region, every country, even property can have its very own response to the main challenge and that is a good thing especially from a leisure perspective. We need to think of alternatives for different segments and provide solutions for less affluent markets. ”



Laszlo Puczko
CEO & Co-Founder, Health
Tourism Worldwide

“ From an operational perspective we certainly need to look at how to implement wellness across all sectors, it's not just an offering for people with money and I'm seeing so many opportunities in the GCC market, as I'm based in Dubai at the moment. We are seeing opportunities in hotels, in standalone wellness facilities, in individual day packages – there are so many wellness services. So whilst knowing what is required in the industry, executing it and having the funds or the people on the ground understanding what to do is the biggest challenge. ”



Kathryn Moore
Founder and Managing
Director, Spa Connectors

Inputs by Shehara Rizly

Wellness, a major motivator

A pioneering study by Health Tourism Worldwide in cooperation with the Wellness Tourism Association shows the way to ensure a healthy future for wellness tourism, and point to areas with the highest growth potential. The research calls for a closer cooperation between industry and academia.

Shehara Rizly

The Wellness Tourism 2030 Post-COVID19 report is the first study to compare the perspectives of industry leaders with academic researchers, resulting in the refocusing of the main global and regional trends in wellness motivated travel in 2025-2030.

Travellers want to incorporate more 'wellness' into their trips and wellness is a main

motivation for travel. At the same time, it appears that any service and programme could have an angle that can be further 'wellnessified'.

Industry leaders are focused on the physical nature of wellness treatments and programmes, while academia point to the intended outcome and benefits of those treatments and programmes. **Laszlo Puczko**, CEO of Health Tourism Worldwide, said, "We are surprised that industry re-

spondents discussed treatments and services in terms of what is offered, whereas academia suggests that we should focus on the expected outcomes of those treatments and programmes."

During the global travel crisis brought about by the pandemic, the industry has looked for resources and approaches that can influence the future of wellness travel.

Based on our study, industry representatives estimate that:

- Spiritual practices and treatments based on local, natural resources represent the highest growth potential.
- Academic researchers find that sport & fitness



potential, whereas workplace wellness trips should not expect significant development. Industry representatives believe that de-stress, recharge and relaxation will lead the demand for wellness trips, whereas academia respondents stress the importance of self-healing, fitness.

The Wellness Travel 2030 Post COVID19 study results highlight that travellers want to know and understand more about wellness travel. They will actively seek out relevant services, hotels, resorts, retreats and destinations. Post-pandemic wellness-minded travellers will make decisions about their travels much closer to the actual date of travel, and it is likely that they will prefer destinations that are closer to home.

as well as medical wellness propositions also show potential through to 2030. Interestingly there is an agreement between both groups that alternative therapies and New Age approaches may not represent significant opportunities.

- The findings confirm that wellness has several facets and the industry should be open to new products and ideas, e.g. spirituality/wellness-oriented festivals. The results suggest that resort spas, lifestyle-oriented resorts and eco spas and wellness centres can represent great growth

Post-pandemic wellness-minded travellers will make decisions about their travels much closer to the actual date of travel, and it is likely that they will prefer destinations that are closer to home

Personality of the Month

Developing hospitality at Ishraq

The renowned brand Ishraq Hospitality has appointed hospitality doyen **Alexander Suski** as Group Director of Commercial and Business Development – a dual role to commercially develop hospitality plus the travel and tourism portfolio. Suski shares more insights on his role and the plans for 2021.

 Shehara Rizly

What responsibilities does your current role entail?

In December 2020, I was appointed Group Director of Commercial and Business Development for Ishraq Hospitality Dubai – part of Mohamed and Obaid Al Mulla Group of companies. In my current role, I oversee the short and long-term commercial strategies for the portfolio of seven owned properties under IHG and Wyndham franchises. In the dual role I am appointed to develop the further expansion of the Holiday Inn Express brand in the UAE and Oman, while continuing

to establish Ishraq Hospitality as a well-recognised Hospitality Advisory Services company for investors and hotel owners. Under the Ishraq Hospitality portfolio we also oversee the Al Mulla Travels and Tourism travel agency

A brief of the property/properties that come under your purview?

Currently, Ishraq's portfolio includes seven owned properties – Holiday Inn Dubai Al-Maktoum Airport, Staybridge Suites Dubai Al-Maktoum Airport, Holiday Inn Express Dubai Internet City, Holiday Inn Express Dubai Safa Park, Holiday Inn Express Dubai Jumeirah, Holiday Inn Express Dubai Airport and Ramada By Wyndham Jumeirah.

What are your marketing initiatives for the properties?

Since 2021 is a transition year for the hospitality industry,

our marketing initiatives are dedicated to maintaining a strong digital presence. We are currently enabling

“ Since we are anticipating that GCC and international tourism will start picking up slowly during Q2 and Q3, our mid-term efforts are targeted towards the development of both of GCC and selected international source markets ”

the growth of domestic travel and developing Food & Beverage revenues, the upcoming exciting developments at Muchachas Mexican restaurant or cantina is an example of that. Since we are anticipating that GCC and international tourism will start picking up slowly during Q2 and Q3, our mid-term efforts are targeted towards the development of both of GCC and selected international source markets.

Could you share their USP?

At Ishraq Hospitality we operate a diverse portfolio of properties, from 2 stars to 5 stars, which caters to a wide variety and diverse range of travellers in both

leisure and business. One of our portfolio brands, Holiday Inn Express, is the perfect fit for simple, smart travel. We deliver more

where it matters the most with the control given to the guest. You get greater value than expected with every stay. Our guests can expect unwavering consistency, including such essentials like complimentary breakfast. In addition, Holiday Inn Express is one of the largest hotel brands in the world that includes 2,920 hotels worldwide with 734 hotels in the pipeline, which shows the potential for its expansion in the region.

Do you think the industry can benefit this year as compared to last year due to the introduction of vaccinations etc.?

This year, guests are more confident to travel in

comparison to the previous year, especially, compared to Q2 and Q3 2020. Impressive vaccination initiatives by the UAE Government give us confidence and hope that tourism will pick up and fully come back in the future. In contrast to last year, this year we expect relatively slow pick up of source markets depending on the precautionary regulations set and agreed upon. At Ishraq we closely monitor these trends to be able to reach out to these markets through our marketing initiatives once the time is right.

Have the hotel industry's objectives changed over the past year?

As the world is adjusting to new travel norms, we are also enhancing guest experience by redefining cleanliness. In line with our commitment to cleanliness, we introduced new science-led protocols and service measures. All of our hotels are deep cleaned with hospital-grade disinfectants. We also strictly follow governmental guidelines when it comes to our F&B outlets, restaurants and bars.

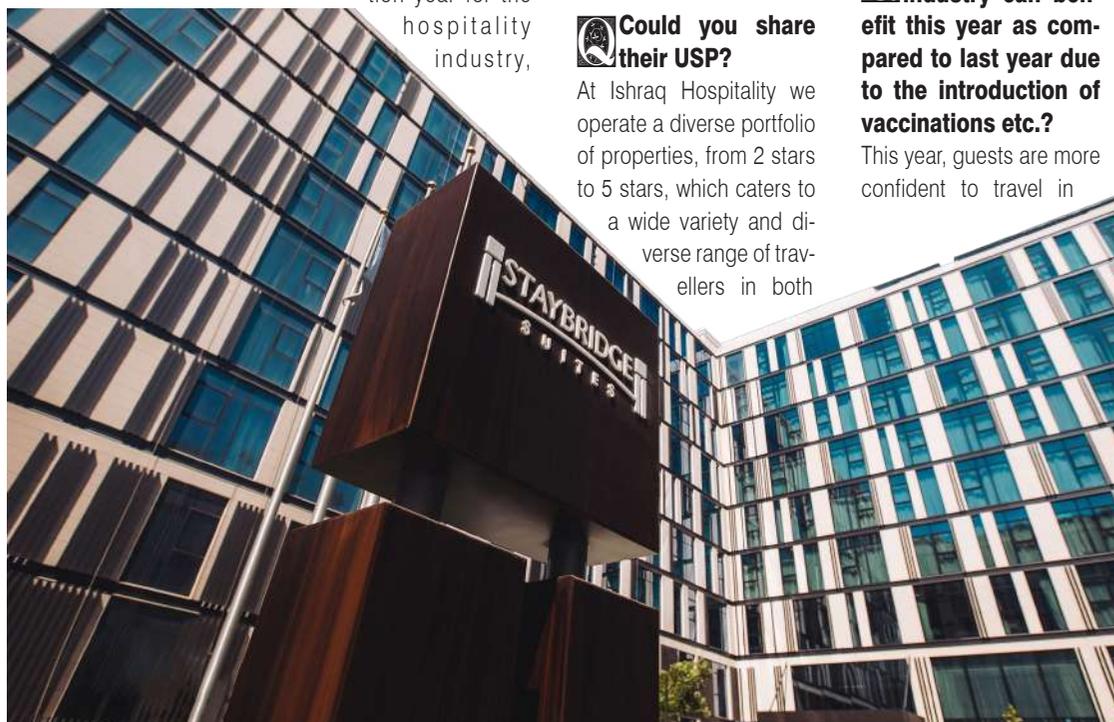
As an organisation and hotel management company we are very adaptable and flexible and adjust our strategy according to any emerging trends or event, making sure that our properties and revenue generating units remain profitable during these challenging times.

What are the new trends that you see in the industry? When it comes to the travellers, have their requirements changed?

As I have mentioned, there is a huge focus on domestic tourism all over the world from Australia to Europe and from the Americas to Middle East. There is a continuously stronger demand for staycations and weekend getaways as human beings are not made to stay put but rather explore and travel. There is also a big jump in the use of technology. The digital acceleration is more important than ever before. Guests are interested more in contactless experiences. 🌟

FactFile

■ Holiday Inn Express is one of the largest hotel brands in the world that includes 2,920 hotels worldwide with 734 hotels in the pipeline, which shows the potential for its expansion in the region.



Alexander Suski
Group Director of Commercial and Business Development

Creating the future of business

In these extraordinary times, Singapore continues to stand as a premier business events destination. While COVID-19 has altered the events landscape, the fundamentals that have made Singapore successful – our vibrant business environment, outstanding infrastructure and future-ready workforce – remain unchanged, says **Beverly Au Yong**, Area Director, Middle East, Singapore Tourism Board.

 Shehara Rizly

Raising the bar for health and safety

As international business travel resumes, you can trust that Singapore will safeguard the well-being of visiting delegates and staff. We remain committed to upholding the high-

est standards of health and safety and to giving all our visitors peace of mind when they come to the Lion City. Hotels, restaurants, exhibition halls and other establishments have adopted new safe management measures, such as social distancing and heightened cleaning of premises to ensure reduced public health risk. Beyond these, the Singapore Government also launched SG Clean, a national mark of excellence for cleanliness, hygiene, and infection control.

Innovating for the future of business events

Singapore's events industry is also implementing unique solutions to meet

the emerging demands of a new era of business travel. Local companies are reinventing themselves – from enhancing digital offerings to developing forward-looking concepts for hybrid and virtual events. For example, in June 2020, homegrown

global virtual summit. During the dinner break, WIT sent curated care packages to Singapore-based attendees and later even held a virtual dance party.

The recently concluded TravelRevive was Asia Pa-

solutions for the end-to-end visitor journey, TravelRevive was the first pilot tradeshow to trial the newly developed 'hybrid event' tradeshow prototype for safe business events, safe itineraries, and digital enablers in Singapore. This is part of a public-private collaboration under the Emerging Stronger Taskforce's Singapore Together Alliance for Action (AfA) on enabling safe and innovative visitor experiences. With close to 1,000 attendees on-site, the pilot hybrid event brought to life Singapore's vision for safe, trusted and innovative business events.

With this mindset of continuous innovation, it is no wonder that Singapore was

recently named the world's most competitive economy for the second consecutive year (IMD World Competitiveness Ranking, 2020). Singapore is where great minds converge, connect and create the future of business.



Beverly Au Yong
Area Director, Middle East
Singapore Tourism Board

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

FactFile

■ In June 2020, homegrown event organiser Web in Travel (WIT) engaged more than 750 tourism business leaders to discuss the future of the industry in a global virtual summit. During the dinner break, WIT sent curated care packages to Singapore-based attendees and later even held a virtual dance party.

“TravelRevive was the first pilot tradeshow to trial the newly developed 'hybrid event' tradeshow prototype for safe business events, safe itineraries, and digital enablers in Singapore”

event organiser Web in Travel (WIT) engaged more than 750 tourism business leaders to discuss the future of the industry in a

cific's first international travel tradeshow that was held in Singapore. Leading the way with rigorous protocols and innovative

Culture Summit Abu Dhabi on Mar 8-10

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) has announced that the next edition of Culture Summit Abu Dhabi, a leading global forum which explores creative cultural solutions to the most pressing issues affecting the world today, will take place virtually from March 8 to 10, 2021 and explore the theme of 'The Cultural Economy and the Economy of Culture'.

 TT Bureau

The fourth edition of the forum will bring together cultural leaders, practitioners and experts from the fields of art, heritage, museums, media and technology to generate new strategies and thinking, and identify ways in which culture can transform societies and communities worldwide.

“The global challenges of the past year have truly demonstrated the vital power of culture to improve our personal and collective well-being. Yet, cultural institutions worldwide continue to struggle to achieve funding structures to continue operating. It is now more important than ever

to shed light on the critical role that the culture sector plays as an essential driver of sustainable economic and social development,” said **HE Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak**, Chairman of DCT Abu Dhabi. “We are proud to collaborate with top global cultural partners to convene renowned professionals from a variety of fields, ensuring the level and breadth of expertise needed for fruitful discussions and effective, goal-oriented outcomes.

“This year's theme strongly reflects the focus on culture and creative industries as a major driver of growth. While addressing what is certainly a global issue, the outcomes of this year's summit will be of particu-

lar relevance as we come together to discuss the impact of innovation on the economies of culture,” he added.

HE Saood Al Hosani, Undersecretary of DCT Abu Dhabi, said, “A thriving creative ecosystem is the beating heart of a city, affecting and enhancing all facets of a society. Culture Summit's annual convening of world-class experts and professionals from interrelated fields con-

sistently puts forward innovative solutions in response to critical cultural and economic issues. Following a year of truly unprecedented challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, we look forward to the dialogue and innovations sparked by our esteemed global partners and participants at the event's virtual fourth edition, as we discuss ways to support the continuity of the cultural sector, both locally and worldwide.”



HE Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak
Chairman, DCT Abu Dhabi

In line with UNESCO's 2021 'International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development', Culture Summit 2021 will examine opportunities to renew the cultural and creative industries in a post-COVID environment and explore how the creative economy

can be a positive force for societies and economies.

Culture Summit's global partner organisations bring extensive expertise in diverse fields, spanning from culture and arts to media, technology and the economy. Existing partners include UNESCO, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation, the Economist Events, and Google. New partners for 2021 include the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Design Museum London, and the participation of UAE institutions such as Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation, Louvre Abu Dhabi, Berklee Abu Dhabi, Institut Français, Image Nation Abu Dhabi, twofour54, and Abu Dhabi Film Commission. 🇦🇪

“It is now more important than ever to shed light on the critical role that the culture sector plays as an essential driver of sustainable economic and social development”

Kyoto Tourism focuses on ME

Kyoto Tourism conducted a webinar on March 2, 2021 from focusing on the Middle East market titled “Discover the serene beauty of Kyoto prefecture, the must-see sights and unique experiences it has to offer” with a total of four partners. It was quite an interesting webinar session concluded by the partners of Kyoto Tourism as they presented the wide variety of offerings in each region.



Koji Kuriyama
Managing Director, Kyoto
Tourism Federation

“Middle East has become one of our key markets over the past few years. Over a period of one hour myself and three of our key partners will join in to showcase the beauty of our destination, the different offerings and experiences not to be missed out. We want the travel trade in Middle East to know more about the wide variety of sights in Kyoto prefecture and want to introduce our area to their customers.

I gave a brief at the beginning and the other speakers will share a more comprehensive presentation so that the trade partners can quickly learn the many interesting features and the must see areas such as Kyoto by the Sea, Woodland Kyoto, Kyoto Infused with Tea & Kyoto Otokuni Bamboo Grove. We are looking at mainly GCC and then Turkey and other countries in Middle East. We would like to invite the travel trade who would like to offer Kyoto or Japan for their customers. Our webinar provided them all the must-see sights, unique experiences, etc. of all over Kyoto prefecture.”

“Our main areas focus on woodland Kyoto, Kyoto Infused with Tea & Kyoto Otokuni Bamboo Grove. We provide unique tours not only in Kyoto but other areas in Japan. The most famous one is Mount Fuji (the highest mountain in Japan) climbing it is an experience not to be missed out for those who crave for adventure.

We have seen a keen interest in the Middle East travellers and they have become one of our key markets hence we want to take this opportunity to provide them maximum knowledge of the destination and the many offerings for the travel trade fraternity in the Middle East.”



Ken Fujimoto
Representative, Japan
Exploration Tours JIN



Ayumi Kimba
Director
J-Links Co., Ltd.

“We are a DMC specialising in inbound tourism to Japan. I can also say that I’m one of the registered specialist of Japan Tourism Agency, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. We have seen since 2016 that 80% of our customers are from Middle East as we’ve been participating in ATM (since 2016.)

Hence Middle East has become one of our key markets and our main objective is to ensure that the travel trade would be furnished with all the necessary information about the destination, its offerings, how to work in collaboration to ensure the promotion of the destination.”

“We are a DMO and one of the members of Kyoto Tourism Federation. We cover the northern part of Kyoto prefecture; by the sea.

Middle East has become one of our key markets and we want the travel trade in Middle East to learn about the wide variety of sights in Kyoto, its beauty and want to introduce our area to their customers.”



Jesse Efron
Overseas Promotion
Manager, Kyoto by the
Sea DMO



Inputs by Shehara Rizly

ATM to kick off in May 2021

This year Arabian Travel Market is to kick off from May 16-19, 2021, at the Dubai World Trade Center focusing on the recovery of Middle East tourism. According to the organiser Reed Exhibitions there will be a host of additional events in Dubai aimed at stimulating hotel, travel and tourism sectors under an ATM theme that has never been more relevant.

Shehara Rizly

This week-long festival of events is dedicated to travel professionals from all over world, to collaborate and shape the recovery of the Middle East travel industry, through exhibitions, conferences, breakfast briefings, awards, product launches and networking events,” **Danielle Curtis**, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market.

“There will in-person seminars for professionals, looking at the latest trends in technology, sustainability and profiling the next generation of global travellers”

“Essentially, Arabian Travel Week will provide a pivotal platform for the region’s travel and tourism industry, whether participating in-person at the events or virtually, over the course of 10 days – it will put a spotlight on Dubai, the UAE, GCC and of course the wider MENA region’s tourism sector,” she added.

Now in its 28th year and working in collaboration with Dubai World Trade

Centre (DWTC) and Dubai’s Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM), ATM 2021 will play an integral role in Arabian Travel Week.

“There will be a whole host of in-person seminars on ATM’s show floor specifically designed to support, inspire and innovate all travel and tourism professionals, looking at the latest trends in technology, sustainability and profiling the next generation of global travellers,” said Curtis.

There will also be an array of high-profile keynote speakers and world-class technology experts lined up for the Travel Forward Theatre, providing industry-leading



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director ME
Arabian Travel Market

insights and discussing the latest technologies and trends that will shape the future of travel.

Other notable features of Arabian Travel Week and in-person at ATM include ILTM Arabia 2021, buyer forums

with networking dedicated to key source markets including Saudi Arabia, India and China, a hotel summit, the responsible tourism programme and the International Tourism & Investment Conference (ITIC) summit.

Ibrahim Ayoub, Group CEO, ITIC & Invest Tourism Ltd said, “We are delighted to host in partnership with ATM, our ITIC Middle East Tourism Investment Summits, in-person on Wednesday, May 19 and followed by our virtual summit, a week later on Thursday, May 27. We will bring together hospitality, tourism and financial services leaders to discuss how the Middle East’s travel and tourism industry can position their businesses to be

ready for the post COVID-19 recovery, through instituting and making strategic investments to rebuild the sector.”

“This year’s theme of ‘A New Dawn for Travel and Tourism’ has never been more relevant nor important - this message of recovery will be integrated into all of the show verticals and planned activities,” added Curtis.

To complement the four-day in-person show, for the first time, a new hybrid format will mean a virtual ATM running a week after to reach a wider audience than ever before. ATM Virtual, which made its debut last year, proved to be a resounding success attracting 12,000 online attendees from 140 countries. 🌍

NEW HOTELS

Over the past few weeks there have been quite a number of hotel openings in the UAE and Middle East in general. We take a look at some of them.



★ **Vida Beach Resort**

Location - Umm Al Quwain UAE
 Number of Rooms/Suites – 135 rooms and suites

Emaar Hospitality Group announced the opening of its first resort under the Vida Hotels and Resorts brand in Umm Al Quwain. From sophisticated rooms and suites, captivating views of the sea and endless water sport facilities, to wholesome eateries, a vibey rooftop bar, sandy white beach access and an expansive pool, Vida Beach Resort, Umm Al Quwain is the ultimate destination to unwind.

★ **Citymax Hotel**

Location - Business Bay Dubai
 Number of Rooms/Suites – 348 rooms and suites



Citymax Hotels, the Landmark Group's award-winning mid-market hotel brand, gets off to a flying start in 2021 with the launch of their first 4-star hotel. Located conveniently in the heart of Downtown Dubai, Citymax Hotel Business Bay is a short 10-minute drive from The Dubai Mall, Burj Khalifa and the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), and a 15-minute drive from the Dubai International Airport.



★ **Hilton Salwa Beach Resort & Villas**

Location - Doha Qatar
 Number of Rooms/Suites – 84 beach villas

Hilton Salwa Beach Resort & Villas announced the opening of its highly-anticipated new hotel accommodation which features spacious, modern guest rooms and joins the resort's wide range of offerings, including its 84 beach villas and Qatar's largest theme park, Desert Falls Water and Adventure Park. Every guest is entitled to daily access to the waterpark, the hotel promises a relaxing yet fun filled experience for families.

★ **Residence Inn**

Location - Al Jaddaf Dubai
 Number of Rooms/Suites – 134 rooms and suites



This opening in Q2 2021 will mark the first Residence Inn by Marriott in the UAE. Perfect for those looking to work from anywhere in 2021, Residence Inn is a global leader in the extended-stay sector, providing a 'home-away-from-home' with separate living, working, and sleeping areas. Located with fantastic access to Dubai's major business and leisure hubs, the 134-guestroom hotel will feature unobstructed views of the Dubai Skyline from its rooftop.

Hybrid meetings: A sustainable option

In today's ever-evolving world, sustainability is becoming more important than ever; companies are looking at eco-friendly choices.



Whilst the future of meetings is yet to be written, it will likely include a combination of live and virtual meetings frequently combined in the same event. The past year has forced many companies to explore work from home options, relying heavily on Wi-Fi, streaming, and an increased demand for hybrid meetings. By curating intimate events in local areas with hybrid functions,

nating true human connection", says **Tim Cordon**, Area Senior Vice President Middle East & Africa, Radisson Hotel Group.

"The changes that we have gone through to adapt to the new norm have been significant. Over the past few months, companies have started to see the benefit of hybrid solutions and studies show that organisations are considering continuing the option of hybrid solutions, even after



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



Caroline Thissen
 Area Senior Director Sales & Revenue Optimization, Middle East & Africa, Radisson Hotel Group

that not only require less to no travel and are safer for attendees, it allows companies to reduce environmental impact at the same time.

"The demand for hybrid meetings has increased exponentially over the past months and we are pleased to be able to meet the requirements of our guests and partners within the new norm. Hybrid meetings are a great solution for many companies, as attendees can join the meeting from another country, their homes or even their local coffee shop. Hybrid solutions however, are not only convenient, but also provide a great opportunity for any organisation to progress its sustainability mission, as the carbon footprint is greatly reduced without completely eliminating true human connection

the pandemic ends. Moving forward we believe it will be very important for hotels to provide flexibility and offer solutions for both hybrid and physical events. Generally, we see that the virtual meeting elements can be a revenue source and also provide a new space for sponsor exposure in a more digital and creative way", says **Caroline Thissen**, Area Senior Director Sales & Revenue Optimization, Middle East & Africa, Radisson Hotel Group.

FactFile

Hybrid solutions however, are not only convenient, but also provide a great opportunity for any organisation to progress its sustainability mission, as the carbon footprint is greatly reduced without completely eliminating true human connection

The world's first and only Underwater Spa

It is pure indulgence if one can visit the world's first and only underwater spa which is located at Huvafen Fushi Maldives. This sanctuary is ideal for the discerning visitors from the Middle East as they keep looking at true indulgences for the visitors.

The Maldives is renowned for being a hidden oasis with mesmerizing surroundings that emulate picture-perfect postcards. Swaying coconut palms, soft powder white sand and clear turquoise lagoons. Reefs teeming with colorful marine life. Add a dose of luxury and pampering to this already dreamy bucket list destination, and you might say that you're already in vacay

heaven. But, what if it could get even better than this? Well, Huvafen Fushi offers just that...

A tiny jewel of an island with just 44 private dwellings cocooned amidst nature, 5-star Huvafen Fushi has the missing ingredient needed for a once in a life time indulgent experience. Introducing the world's first – and only - underwater spa. Step eight meters below the surface and find

The spa also features two couple's and four single treatment rooms above the water with breathtaking views of the lagoon, along an overwater yoga pavilion

yourself in an underwater sanctuary of relaxation and pure rejuvenation. A calming aura like no other, set in the middle of a coral garden and surrounded by hypnotic colourful fish

swimming around the 180 degree panoramic windows. This underwater haven features two underwater couple's treatment rooms with uninterrupted views of the ocean, as

well as an underwater relaxation area. The spa also features two couple's and four single treatment rooms above the water with breathtaking views of the lagoon, along an overwater yoga pavilion.

Ponder over an extensive choice of wellbeing rituals in the form of therapeutic and deep tissue massage, facials and signature treatments curated by none other than Beata Alekand-

rowicz and Teresa Tarmey, renowned pioneers in massage and skincare.

By night, the iconic underwater spa takes a whole new dimension, transforming into the 'SpaQuarium'. Sip on champagne while you witness the magic of the spa reef at night with the marine biologist, UV torches used to discover the enchanted bioluminescent colors of the corals and marine life. 🌅

About Universal Properties

There are six properties under the brand.



Dhigali:

- ❖ Have a 24 hour Premium All Inclusive package, from check in to check out
- ❖ Jungle walk to showcase an untouched island



Kurumba:

- ❖ 24 hr. accessible by speed boat, 10 min travel time from Male
- ❖ 8 Restaurants and 3 Bars, Shisha lounge with Arabic cuisine
- ❖ Has extensive conference facilities and a ballroom that can hold 200 pax sit down and 400 pax theatre style.



Velassaru:

- ❖ 24 hr. accessible by speed boat, 25 min travel time
- ❖ 5 Restaurants and 2 Bars. Have the Velassaru Indulgence package (all inclusive)
- ❖ All-inclusive package also includes Water activities besides F/B options.
- ❖ Over Water Spa with a Hydro Pool in the spa.
- ❖ Complimentary morning Cruise during your stay
- ❖ Complimentary Yoga sessions



Kandolhu:

- ❖ Small island with just 200 meters by 100 meters size
- ❖ Great meal plans including the A La Carte Dining (as a full board option so no buffets) and Ultimate Inclusions (includes wine chiller in room), All-inclusive Spa package

Kuramathi:

- ❖ Kuramathi is a large yet luxuriant island measuring 1.8km (the biggest island I believe), and offers great snorkeling just along the house reef.
- ❖ Has 2 Mosques and many Muslim friendly dining options.
- ❖ 21 Restaurants & Bars offering a la carte and buffet options.
- ❖ Select All Inclusive package which includes dining at all our 9 à la carte restaurants, and a selection of bottled wine during dinner.



- ❖ A range of watersports activities, fun filled sightseeing excursions, and world class diving spots within range. Great house reef.
- ❖ Have a proper Medical Centre with two doctors at all times.

Great Kids Club and activities for children. Kids club offers complimentary services for kids of 3-12 years from 8.30am to 7.30pm. Facilities include both indoor and outdoor play areas, splash pads and a shallow pool as well.

Huvafen Fushi:

- ❖ Underwater Spa, 'Huvafen Spa' - the first and only of its kind in the world. 2 underwater treatment rooms, 6 over water treatment pavilions.
- ❖ Underground wine cellar, 'Vinum' – with a capacity of 6,000 bottles and 650 labels in stock
- ❖ Top class dining including private underwater dining and an array of 'destination dining' options in idyllic locations, including underwater dining. 4 restaurants and 2 bars



TUNE PROTECT

Dubai EMEA

Jerastine Antia joins Tune Protect EMEA as Product & Customer Experience Manager. Her role includes Marketing, PR & Branding for the region. She has over 20 years' experience in the travel industry, expertise in sales, operations, digital marketing, product, and customer experience. Her responsibilities include among others, product development, as well as digital user experience and enhancement. Antia graduated with a bachelor's in business administration in Travel and Tourism.



CRUISE SAUDI

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Cruise Saudi is welcoming **Mark Robinson** (previously of Global Ports Holding & InterCruises Shoreside & Port Services) who will be joining the Cruise Saudi team in Jeddah as Chief Commercial & Operations Officer. The strategic hire follows the successful launch of Saudi Arabia's first-ever dedicated cruise and terminal developer in Cruise Saudi. Robinson will be guiding the infrastructure development and suite of cruise and ship and passenger services that will be scaled in the preliminary business phase.



Cruise Saudi is welcoming **Miguel Reyna** (previously of Royal Caribbean Group) will lead business growth and oversee asset development for Cruise Saudi as it continues to establish itself within the industry. Reyna joins as Chief of Development & Asset Management Officer. Reyna specializes in collaborating with governments, investors and local players in every market to establish win-win solutions that enable cruise infrastructure to promote long-term cruise industry growth while embracing sustainable cruise tourism principles.



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

Bahrain Bay

Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts announced the appointment of **Rami Z. Sayess** as Regional Vice President and General Manager at Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay. Sayess will be taking over from Richard Raab who transfers to Four Seasons Hotel Lion Palace St. Petersburg. With a proven track record in the hospitality industry, specifically with Four Seasons over the past 15 years, Sayess will be based in Bahrain with regional responsibilities overseeing several Four Seasons hotels and resorts in Europe, Middle East and Africa region (EMEA).



HILTON

Abu Dhabi Yas Island

Matthew Mullan, hailing from Ireland, will be overseeing all operations across three Hilton properties on Yas Island in his role as Cluster General Manager. The cluster comprises of Hilton Abu Dhabi Yas Island, The WB Abu Dhabi, Curio Collection by Hilton, and DoubleTree by Hilton Abu Dhabi Yas Island Residences. Mullan brings with him a wealth of experience in launching and leading key Hilton resort properties across the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas. His career in Hilton spans over three decades.



HYATT REGENCY ORYX

Doha

Hyatt Regency Oryx Doha, the first Hyatt Regency brand in Qatar, announced the appointment of **Julien Gonzalez** as General Manager. Carrying an extensive experience of managing Hyatt Hotels properties for years, Gonzalez will manage and oversee all the key aspects of the hotel and will be leading the planned renovation of the property. Born and raised in France, Gonzalez comes from a family of a hotelier. His career has taken him around the world including comprehensive experience in upper-upscale and luxury Hyatt properties in the UK, Australia, Asia and finally the ME.



REED EXHIBITIONS

UK (for ATM)

Reed Exhibitions announced that **Kerry Prince**, has been appointed as the new brand director of UK-based Reed Exhibitions. The newly formed brand team is the consolidation of the company's B2B and Reed Travel Exhibitions divisions and will be responsible for the curation of the portfolio of well-established event brands, including Arabian Travel Market (ATM). Prince has more than 20 years of experience in the corporate event sector, working on conferences, summits and trade shows around the world.



R HOTELS

Dubai

R Hotels announces the appointment of **Samir Arora** as Cluster General Manager of its three Dubai properties: The Retreat Palm Dubai MGallery by Sofitel, Ramada by Wyndham Downtown Dubai, and ibis Styles Jumeira Dubai. Arora was the general manager of both Ramada by Wyndham Downtown Dubai and Ramada Hotel & Suites by Wyndham Dubai before moving to The Retreat Palm Dubai to head its pre-opening in 2017. A seasoned hotelier with more than 25 years of industry experience, he is now in charge of the overall operations of the group's three hotels.



KEMPINSKI HOTEL

Jordan

Sébastien Mariette returns to the leading luxury escape of the Dead Sea, Kempinski Hotel Ishtar Dead Sea, as its Cluster General Manager joining after his most recent post in Egypt with Kempinski as an Area General Manager. He will be managing the iconic Kempinski property. In addition to his supervisory role at Kempinski Hotel Aqaba Red Sea. Mariette is a seasoned hotelier who has been with Kempinski for the last 14 years, where he has demonstrated a dynamic business approach that was certainly reflected in guests' experiences and maximised operational profits.



Ramada Ajman reinforces commitment to sustainability

As part of its continuous commitment to sustainable practices, Ramada Hotel & Suites by Wyndham Ajman recently harvested organic crops from its very own urban farm. The team yielded produce from the 430-square metre space, which grows seasonal herbs, fruits, and vegetables. **Ravi Santiago**, Cluster General Manager for three Wyndham properties in Ajman, commented, "We aim to impart a positive message and inspire the community to adapt eco-friendly habits, as each of us can make a contribution to the environment even through simple efforts such as planting trees or growing crops in pots or backyards. On top of sustainability, we also seek to promote a healthy lifestyle by encouraging consumption of home-grown and organic products. Corporate social responsibility is more important than ever, especially within the tourism industry and we will continue to find ways to boost these initiatives."



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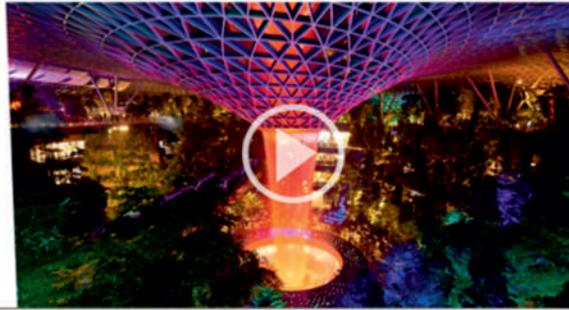
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