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THE NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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2,000 meetings @ GULF TRAVEL SHOW RELOADED

It was two great days of networking with the travel trade in the Middle East at the Gulf Travel Show 2022, organised with Tourism Malaysia as platinum partner.

Shehara Rizly

“We are very happy to announce that we will be opening our borders from 1st April 2022 this year to all international travellers and those fully vaccinated do not need to quarantine. Gulf Travel Show provided us the opportunity to connect and engage with partners from the Gulf region and promote our destination and keep them up to date about the latest information on Malaysia. We are hoping to physically meet our travel partners very soon in Malaysia or when we attend Arabian Travel Market in May. We will also be conducting our own roadshow this year. Some of the main strategies we are working on will be to work with airlines and travel agents.”



Manoharan Periasamy
Senior Director, Tourism
Malaysia's International Promotion
Division for Asia & Africa

Contd. on page 5 ►

Malaysia opens doors

The big news was revealed at the recently concluded Gulf Travel Show 2022 when the country announced that its borders are now fully open for global travellers.

Middle East has always been one of the most important source markets for Malaysia pre pandemic, generating the highest revenue. Last November, Malaysia started off with a pilot project by opening Langkawi to international visitors, but it was with a few days in quarantine. **Dato' Haji Zainuddin Abdul Wahab**, Director

General of Tourism Malaysia, said, “Starting 1 April 2022, Malaysia will allow quarantine-free entry for fully-vaccinated travellers, ending almost two years of border controls. As Platinum Partner of GTS 2022, Malaysia is thrilled to welcome back Middle East tourists to experience our country again. It is a timely opportunity for us to net-



Dato' Haji Zainuddin Abdul Wahab
Director General of Tourism Malaysia

work with travel agents and tour operator partners from the Gulf region.”

‘Dubai Expo gave boost to events industry’

Expo became the greatest event in the wake of COVID, bringing hope and positivity, say industry experts.

Shehara Rizly

Could you share the impact Expo had on MICE and events sector over the last few months?

Expo 2020 has given a great boost to the events industry and truly brought the world to Dubai, this is reflected in the visitor numbers. Given the UAE's brilliant handling of the pandemic, people are comfortable travelling here,



Jonathan Worsley
Chairman, TheBench

whether it is for business, leisure or both. We also see

Contd. on page 14 ►

Staycations fill up hotels' coffers

As the Holy Month of Ramadan begins, staycations and daycations see uptick in demand, especially after Expo 2020. As agents are busy making the bookings, key hoteliers in the region share their views with **TRAVTALK**.

“It is the first Ramadan for the newly opened Radisson Hotel Riyadh Airport. However, we are quietly confident that we will attract a new Ramadan fan base with the village atmosphere and elegantly decorated surroundings. With an overnight package for two, including Iftar and Sahoor, we aim to attract younger couples from the local community looking to relax and enjoy the whole evening after breaking their fast. It is early to tell, but early booking suggests at least a 4 per cent uplift on existing occupancy during the Holy month.”



Christopher Pike
General Manager
Radisson Riyadh Airport, KSA

“As per the forecast, hotel occupancies in Northern Emirates will go down during the month of Ramadan. Good news is that all the hotels had a very good recovery in March, as we enjoyed high occupancy with high ADR throughout the month, thanks to Dubai Expo 2020. We drained millions of revenue due to heavy cancellations of confirmed bookings from Russia and Ukraine since the war has started. Staycation packages during the month of Ramadan with Sahoor and Iftar are big hope for the hotels, and everyone is trying to attract local crowd.”



Iftikhar Hamdani
Area General Manager, Northern
Emirates, HMH Hospitality

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THE BEST LOCATION IN THE BEST DESTINATION



THE TOWER PLAZA HOTEL

The Tower Plaza Hotel is one of the iconic hotels in Dubai. It is centrally located on Sheikh Zayed Road facing Emirates Towers metro station, is directly connected to Dubai International Airport, and has short driving distance to main landmarks of the city such as Dubai International Financial Centre, Dubai World Trade Convention Centre, Zabeel park, Dubai Frame, Dubai Mall, Burj Khalifa, Dubai Fountain, Souk Al Bahar, The City Walk, and Jumeirah Beach. It is surrounded by restaurants, nightlife, and similar attractions. The hotel matches the glamor of Dubai with its array of five-star amenities. Stay, dine, relax, rejuvenate, and explore Dubai; leave the rest to us.

For bookings, please contact us on : +971 4 387 7018 or reservations@thetowerplazahotel.com

Flash Horizon partners for Orange Army fans

At this year's Bahrain Grand Prix, Flash Horizon, a destination management company in UAE, was the official partner to handle all ground operations for 'Orange Army' 200 participants of Dutch driver Max Verstappen's fans. Mohamed Khater, Regional Manager and Managing Partner of Flash Horizon, shares his views with **TRAVTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

Flash Horizon in collaboration with Bahrain Tourism Exhibitions Authority and Bahrain International Circuit for the first time welcomed "Orange Army" of fans of the Dutch driver Max Verstappen.

Flash Horizon is part of Flash Group, established in 1985 as an Egyptian international company that owns various brands and sister companies in the field of tourism and hospitality. Flash Group operates in the Middle East, Africa and Europe offering full-fledged ser-



Mohamed Khater
Regional Manager and Managing Partner
Flash Horizon

vices for tourists. These range from hotel stays, Nile Cruises, transportation, desert camping, and restaurants. The company has a strong base in West European source markets, predominantly the Netherlands and France. The compa-

ny intends to diversify its business and segments.

Mohamed Khater, Regional Manager and Managing Partner, Flash Horizon, shared, "We are leaders in organising

were welcomed by the Bahrain Tourism Exhibitions Authority and Bahrain International Circuit with a traditional Bahraini welcome, which included traditional dancers, presentation of tokens from

In Bahrain, Flash Horizon has been instrumental in handling all ground operations from booking of hotels, tours, transfers etc for Orange Army

the Formula F1 Groups to Abu Dhabi for the last few years. This year we ventured to the Bahrain Grand Prix with a contingent of 200 fans, who

the destination to the fans, who visited Bahrain for the first time."

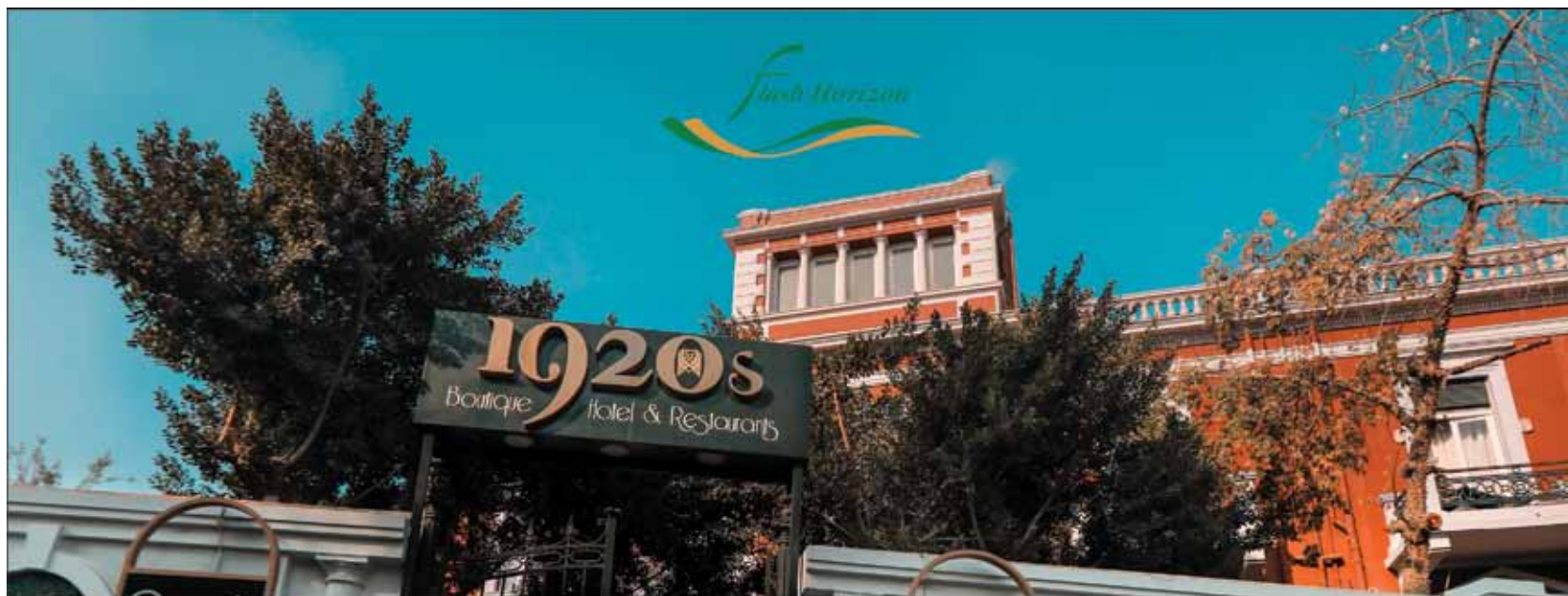
Working together with the government authorities



in Bahrain, Flash Horizon has been instrumental in handling all ground operations from booking of hotels, tours, transfers/transportation, meet and assist etc. for the Orange Army due to its long standing expertise over the years.

The 2022 Bahrain Grand Prix is a Formula One

race, which was held last month at the Bahrain International Circuit, a motor racing circuit in the west of Bahrain served as the season opener of the 2022 Formula One World Championship, and it was the eighteenth running of the Bahrain Grand Prix. It was held under the theme, "new era".



Tourism
Breaking News

Four Seasons and Diriyah Gate Development Authority announce plans for new luxury hotel in KSA

Accor signs new Sofitel property in Madinah KSA

Airport Show to be held in Dubai from 17 May focusing on latest technology for sustainability and 'green' airports

The Future Hospitality Summit returns to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

flydubai flights to select destinations from DWC will operate for a 45-day period from 9 May to 22 June 2022

Travelex launches 29th location at DXB

Riyadh Travel Fair returns to KSA after two-year hiatus – 22 to 24 May 2022

Solution to travel cancellations

Virtual credit cards or VCCs have been around for many years now, saving money of travel companies and providing them with a winning combination of speed and data reliability, particularly for reconciliations.

If the pressures of virtually endless rounds of travel cancellations – followed by hard to predict travel booking surges – has become unbearable, then you are not alone. We all hoped Omicron would be the last COVID wave. And perhaps it will be. But then along came more volatility with the conflict in Ukraine.

But how can you make the payments aspect of this problem – refunds, rebookings and reconciliations – become more manageable?

Unfortunately, as financial ecosystems go, B2B travel payments has changed little in decades. This means that the gap between where it is and where it could be is immense, requiring in some cases a complete digital transformation and optimisation strategy.

Step forward virtual credit cards: In these uncertain times this B2B payment method has really come into its own, allowing agents to claim refunds via both the refund and the card dispute process when merchants don't provide the service.

In contrast, without cards in play, agents are more at the mercy of the respective airline or hotel policies for refunds (or at worse the whims of the insolvency administrator). Alternatively, they can

take weeks to be refunded as each dollar passes through multiple bank accounts.

Virtual credit cards (or VCCs as many call them) are not some new-fangled inven-

are less blended. This is very important to understand, as the complete collapse of confidence by acquirer is what has led to many of the B2B payments and refunds problems seen over the last nearly two years.

Sadly, we are living through a time of unprecedented volatility in many aspects of our lives. But the good news is that, with the right planning, your finances need not be one of those.

Virtual credit cards have allowed agents to claim refunds via both the refund and the card dispute process when merchants don't provide the service

call on protection provided by government schemes, but these are primarily focused on consumers (think of ABTA/ATOL in the UK). Meanwhile, legal recourse is expensive, risky and, worst of all, very slow.

All of this in a travel distribution chain, which can sometimes involve several parties, meaning that even with the best will in the world payments can

tion that COVID drove into existence. In fact, they have been around for many years now, saving travel companies money and providing them with a winning combination of speed and data reliability (particularly for reconciliations).

Their efficiency and reliability also reduces acquirer's risk by giving greater confidence to everyone in the distribution chain because the monies



Spencer Hanlon
Global Head of Travel Payments,
Head of EME (Europe and the
Middle East) at Nium

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

Expo 2020 Dubai ends, creates history

Expo 2020 Dubai reached the remarkable milestone of 20 million visits – an amazing achievement making history against the odds while bringing the world together in the United Arab Emirates for the largest global gathering since the start of the pandemic.

TT Bureau

Displaying huge resilience in the face of unprecedented challenges, the biggest event ever to be held in the Arab world has combined unparalleled cultural, educational and entertainment experiences, with 192 countries coming together to showcase the best their nations have to offer. World leaders, cutting-edge innovations, sporting heroes, Grammy-award winning artists, incredible architecture, Arab superstars, innovative forums, global cuisine and

the guarantee of something new and surprising every single day are among around 32,000 events and myriad attractions at the region's first World Expo that have spurred Expo 2020 Dubai to this monumental achievement.

His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President, Dubai Civil Aviation Authority, Chairman and Chief Executive of Emirates Airline and Group and Chairman of the Expo 2020 Dubai Higher Committee, said: "When we started this journey in



2013, and even before then as we prepared the bid for Expo 2020 Dubai, we had a dream to welcome the world to Dubai and the UAE for an unprecedented global gathering that would live long in hearts and minds.

That we have fulfilled this dream is already beyond doubt, but to achieve such a landmark number of visits is true testament to how the world has responded to what we have worked so long and hard to create."

His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al Nahayan, UAE Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence and Commissioner General of Expo 2020 Dubai, said: "The opportunity to safely unite the world in the wake of the pandemic to deliver an experience with real significance is one which we have not taken for granted, and we are thrilled that Expo 2020 Dubai has proved so impressively popular.

"In the spirit of optimism, millions of visitors and participants have come together, not only to witness and enjoy

something truly remarkable, but to also work together to drive positive social and environmental impact. Expo 2020 Dubai has demonstrated exceptional capability and agility in achieving a consistently high turnout amid continuing global challenges, and as we begin our bittersweet countdown to the final curtain, we are proud of the collective efforts of all those involved."

This success was scheduled to be celebrated on March 26 with a special projection on Al Wasl dome and spectacular fireworks. 🎆



gave opportunity to engage partners

► Contd. from page 1



Anush Gasparyan
Managing Director
Karavi Tour Armenia

“The Middle East is the place where extraordinary civilizations, cultures of wonderful people with different faiths and traditions meet. Being so close culturally we too have a great motivation to welcome travellers from the Middle East and we presented at GTS 4.0 the wonders of Armenia ensuring excellent unique services and stays with unforgettable impressions. We had effective professional meetings with representatives of the Middle East travel trade, especially with buyers, who are motivated and interested in the destination of Armenia.”

“Participating at GTS 4.0 is of utmost importance for us as we are intensively working on the Middle East travel market since 2018 and particularly because this year we have intensified, in cooperation with some tourism stakeholders from Western Balkans, the promotional activities, so you will soon hear us at Arabian Radio Network channels, as well as on other important media. I see this participation as an opportunity to meet both existing and future partners in order to raise awareness of Western Balkans' market as well as us as one of the best connoisseurs of that travel destinations.”



Ivana Karanikic
General Manager
Prolingua Travel DMC



Catherine Tan
Director of Sales,
New World Petaling Jaya
Hotel, Malaysia

“We showcased New World Petaling Jaya Hotel to the Middle East market, which is suitable for both leisure and MICE stays. Middle East is very important, as prior to pandemic we have been receiving very good response from this market. We are located in the heart of Petaling Jaya, near to one of the best theme park in Malaysia, Sunway Lagoon. We met more people to widen our networking and to know the updates for this market as well as had a fruitful discussion with all the potential buyers.”

“Sabah Malaysian Borneo is the hidden jewel of Malaysia, and Sabah Tourism Board is proud to promote Sabah as a preferred holiday destination for families, honeymooners and adventure travellers. Mt Kinabalu in Sabah is Malaysia's first World Heritage site and Sipadan Island is renowned as among the top dive sites in the world. These are Sabah's top iconic tourism products.”



Humphrey Ginibun
Senior Marketing Manager,
Sabah Tourism Board



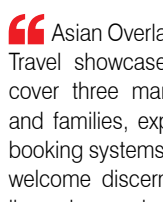
Ahmad Faizal Iskandar bin Mohd Ghazali
Director of Sales Wholesale
Sunway Resorts

“Sunway showcased in GTS 4.0 our latest transformation of Sunway Resort hotel. We deliberately closed and made a US\$60 million upgrades and transformation to be relevant and attractive to our guests. The transformation is about the improvement and enhancement of Sunway Resort facilities to ensure our guests will have joyous and enjoyable time. Sunway City Kuala Lumpur after over two years of undergoing renovation, reimagining and transformation works is eager to make a comeback, re-entry to give the best hospitality ever for our customers.”



Dato Sri Yeat Siew Chuong
Executive Chairman
Gembox Holdings Sdn. Bhd.

“Malaysia introduced a new destination, Gembox@Nilai, which is a place where tourists will experience the moment of “Wow Malaysia”. There are a variety of food products, handicrafts, cultural performances, heritage arts and fashion from all 13 states in Malaysia. It can be said that Gembox@Nilai is like Mini Malaysia and tourists can carry out “ice breaking” activities to learn all about Malaysia here. GTS 4.0 was an excellent platform to introduce Gembox@Nilai to the international market and connect with tourism industry players especially from the Middle East.”



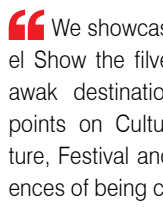
Yap Sook Ling
Managing Director
Asian Overland Services
Tours & Travel Sdn. Bhd.

“Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel showcased our products to cover three market segments: FIT and families, expatriates and online booking systems. We look forward to welcome discerning FITs and families, who are looking to experience Malaysia intimately. Over the quiet period of COVID-19, we have spent our time to re-look at all our products and improved them. We have incorporated some of the trends that we anticipate customers would like, such as going to places that are not crowded and could offer private experiences.”



Olga Vekhlis
Tour Manager
Dolores Travel Group

“Dolores Travel participated for the first time at the Gulf Travel Show 4.0. We showcased our company as a full service DMC catering to all tourism services in Uzbekistan and the Central Asian countries. Dolores Travel offers excellent professional services with our new fleet of vehicles, par excellence guides, interesting and unique programmes, all at a very competitive cost for the GCC market.”



Mary Wan Mering
Director, Marketing
Sarawak Tourism Board

“We showcased at the Gulf Travel Show the five pillars of the Sarawak destination's unique selling points on Culture, Adventure, Nature, Festival and Food. The experiences of being close to tropical rainforest and wildlife will give the memory of a lifetime. The ethnic cultures and lifestyles are uniquely found in Sarawak. Met buyers who are interested in experiential holidays.”



Mirza Ghalib
Deputy Director
Tourism Malaysia
Dubai office

“The fourth edition of the most popular show, the Gulf Travel Show, was a success for our partners from Malaysia on the virtual Business to Business sessions with buyers from the Middle East region. We are very much satisfied with the contacts and inquiries that we have received during the event, and our partners have been full with appointments since the announcement of Malaysia is re-opening on 1 April 2022. This is a good sign for us and we hope to see you in Malaysia soon.”



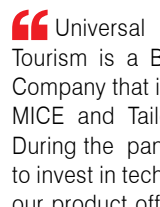
William Tan
Director, Corporate Marketing
& Communications
Berjaya Hotels & Resorts

“Berjaya Hotels & Resorts showcased 10 hotels and resorts located at various holiday destinations in Malaysia. We emphasised on promoting three most sought-after island destinations in Malaysia, which are the Langkawi Island, Redang Island and Tioman Island. Potential buyers or travel distributors can find our hotels in Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Penang and Bukit Tinggi too. Malaysia will transition into the endemic phase and will reopen to international travellers on 1 April 2022. There will be more travellers looking forward to visit the country.”



Darshana Mangani
CEO, Phoenix International
Marketing Services

“We attended Gulf Travel Show 4.0 to create awareness of our presence in the UAE and GCC markets and to form new partnerships with companies across the globe. We are a company that enables easy access and entry for new suppliers. We are here to support hospitality and tourism businesses to launch and enhance their brand in the region, thereby increasing their sales.”



Zahira Tahir
CEO & Founder, Universal
Holidays Travel & Tourism

“Universal Holidays Travel & Tourism is a B2B Inbound Travel Company that is specialized in FIT, MICE and Tailor-Made Solutions. During the pandemic, we decided to invest in technology and expand our product offering. We now give a complete solution for Malaysia and Bali and has reliable partners in Thailand and Singapore. Middle East and The GCC region is an extremely important part of Malaysia Travel Business.”

Buyers speak at GTS

“Gulf Travel Show created a platform over the past two years to connect with suppliers from various parts of the world in one safe virtual space. Every edition of the GTS has brought in different suppliers to meet, engage and collaborate. Another interesting fact is insightful panel discussions and presentations by experts.”



Sanaf Rahman
Travel Consultant
Aldar Travel & Tours Bahrain

“The Gulf Travel Show is really a good avenue for us, being a travel agent, to reconnect with our business partners in Malaysia, who due to the COVID restrictions, are still unable to travel physically. Furthermore, through this platform I was able to get updates, and one of those is that Malaysia will be opening its borders.”



Alan Orong
Senior Travel Manager
South Travel DMCC

A fresh beginning for tourism industry

As international borders are steadily opening and COVID-19 restrictions being lifted from most destinations, it is almost akin to a new era for travel and tourism industry. At the recently concluded fourth edition of the Gulf Travel Show, **Nasir Jamal Khan**, CEO, Al Naboodah Travel moderated an interesting session on business reaching pre-pandemic levels.

 **Shehara Rizly**

The UAE set an example for other countries in the Middle East by opening its borders early and ensuring that all safety measures were taken. The leadership in the UAE opened its doors to visitors not only so that they have a destination with many offerings, but also to ensure that it is a safe haven for every visitor. The development drew praise at the fourth edition of the Gulf Travel Show (GTS).

Nasir Jamal Khan, CEO, Al Naboodah Travel, shared, "Last time we met we discussed about the losses in the industry, but today we are happy to be speaking on the positive changes for both inbound and outbound destinations. Although IATA shared earlier that recovery may take time as far as 2024/2025 to reach pre pandemic levels, we have seen a fantastic improvement reaching way beyond expectations."

Khand thanked three panellists, who also shares their views with the travel trade at the GTS.


Daniel Rosado, Director Spain Tourism for GCC Countries, said, "I would say old is the new as we

are happy to announce that we reached or exceeded pre pandemic levels in 2021. Our numbers when compared to 2019 July with 2021 were far greater as we placed the GCC countries such as UAE, KSA and Qatar in the safe

Switzerland is fully open for GCC and UAE for all travellers. Over the past few months we saw Emirates restarting double daily flights, followed by Etihad and Swiss. I must also add that from July to December 2021 we wit-

also open during the pandemic, at first since flights were not in operation we had visitors from our neighbouring countries, thereafter we witnessed growth especially from the GCC region in summer 2021. Expo was the plat-

caught the attention of the UAE travellers. We are now looking at promoting different packages targeting the luxury high-end market and the women travellers who seek bespoke experiences."

Albrecht shared that in Switzerland they have been able to decide what is best for the country with people engagement, which gave them the advantage of staying open. The strong relationship between the UAE and Switzerland ensured a much higher visitor numbers in the past year. Rosado reiterated, "We are changing from pandemic to endemic, we kept on adapting to measures. Spain and UAE was in the top three destinations in terms of vaccinations and it has well paid off." Karanikic shared, "We see a lot of last minute bookings from this region and they opt for outdoor and cruising packages not in big groups but smaller ones." 



Nasir Jamal Khan
CEO
Al Naboodah Travel



Daniel Rosado
Director
Spain Tourism for GCC Countries



Matthias Albrecht
Director
Switzerland tourism



Ivana Karanikic
General Manager
Prolingua Travel

are going back to the previous activities that were halted due to the pandemic and now restart our promotions more actively. However, I must add that Expo provided us an opportunity to once again meet the trade physically and conduct programmes for the trade partners. Opening the destination earlier just like Dubai, we

list, which brought us many visitors over the summer. Another factor is our vaccination drive, which is on the same level as the UAE vaccinating over 90 per cent of the population."

Matthias Albrecht, Director, Switzerland tourism, talked about the initiatives taken to welcome the GCC market. "We are lucky that

nessed better figures than 2019 pre pandemic times. We expect a strong summer this year as borders are now fully open and we can welcome more visitors to our destination."

Ivana Karanikic, General Manager, Prolingua Travel, said, "We share the same sentiments from western Balkan region as we were

form that provided us an opportunity to promote all our offerings to the travel trade in the UAE. Over the past year Montenegro and Albania had exponential growth in terms of visitors from the UAE, mainly due to air connectivity with flydubai's direct connection. Bosnia and Herzegovina are two other such destinations which

Wego to promote Egypt tourism

Wego and Egypt Tourism Authority launched a campaign to promote Egypt's 'hidden gems', including the world's oldest intact temples, museums and pyramids, among tourists of all seasons.

 **TT Bureau**

The campaign focuses on promoting Egypt as the most preferred destination of choice for Middle Eastern travellers showcasing the various elements of Egypt, including warm weather, scenery, and a wide array of activities. The country will be marketed and retargeted on all Wego

platforms through both the website and application, including online promotions, and other additional contributions.

Mamoun Hmedan, Chief Commercial Officer and Managing Director, MENA and India at Wego, said: "Over 2.43 million flight and hotel searches from MENA to Egypt were performed on Wego in March, where

the country ranked the second most searched destination. We are delighted to partner with Egypt Tourism Authority, to promote Egypt's hidden gems, including the world's oldest intact temples, museums and pyramids."

Amr Al-Kady, CEO of Egypt Tourism Authority, said: "Egypt is intensifying its efforts to boost the tour-

ism sector in the country and attract more tourists through promotional campaigns that highlight the country's tourist destinations. Through our partnership with Wego, the largest online travel marketplace in the region, we will attract more travellers from the Middle East to explore the best of Egypt. The country has been following stringent measures to provide a



seamless and safe experience for travellers." **Suzan Mostafa**, General director of Tourism Promotion at Egypt Tourism Authority, said: "We are thrilled

to partner with Wego and promote our country through this joint campaign. We will benefit from Wego's large user base in the MENA region." 

UAE among best countries for remote working

As more people embrace flexible working environments and set sights on next ‘workation’, KAYAK, a leading travel search engine, reveals best countries in the world to work remotely from, with Portugal topping the list. United Arab Emirates landed in third place in the Middle East and Africa ranking and in top 50 globally.

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KAYAK’s first Work from Wherever Index is the ultimate source for those looking to set up a new office away from home temporarily, or for a longer period of time. To develop the index, KAYAK closely analysed 111 countries and ranked each against 22 factors across six categories: Travel costs and accessibility; local prices; health & safety; remote working capabilities; social life; and weather. Ultimately, the index reveals countries that are easiest to work from, while having a lot of fun in your off hours.

The top 10 best countries worldwide and in the

Middle East and Africa region for combining productive working conditions and opportunities for travel adventures according to KAYAK are (see table):

The UAE took an impressive 3rd spot in the Middle East and Africa region and 41st worldwide, outrunning countries like France, New Zealand and the US. The UAE performs well in the ‘Remote work infrastructure’ category as it has one of the highest number of co-working spaces per 100,000 population in the world. It also offers a digital nomad visa for those who are looking to stay here longer. As many expats live and work in this country, English is commonly

Top 10 Best Countries for ‘Workation’			
Worldwide Ranking		Middle East and Africa Ranking	
Rank	Country / Region	Rank	Country / Region
1	Portugal	1	Mauritius
2	Spain	2	Seychelles
3	Romania	3	The United Arab Emirates
4	Mauritius	4	Cape Verde
5	Japan	5	South Africa
6	Malta	6	Réunion
7	Costa Rica	7	Kenya
8	Panama	8	Jordan
9	Czech Republic	9	Tanzania
10	Germany	10	Tunisia

Data Source: KAYAK Work from Wherever Index

used for communication in all household and business areas of life, which helps adaptation and socialisation process to run more smoothly. Portugal was ranked the all-round best country to work remotely from world-

wide, scoring high across the board in all categories, including great weather, high abundance of places for going out, low-crime rates, and relatively low cost of living. Portugal also offers a digital nomad visa, and many locals have a high English proficiency,

which is something that attracts many expats.

Travellers from the UAE can find the best ‘workation’ for their team’s time zone thanks to KAYAK’s new feature

In addition to the Work from Wherever Index, KAYAK features a new time zone ranking to help users quickly and easily find out the time differences for their trip - ideal for those looking to swerve 2am conference calls whilst working abroad. The time zone-focused rankings take key factors and categories from the Work from Wherever Index into account but display them according to your work country of origin

- so the countries that have time zones closest to your own work time zone will be featured higher up on the list of country destinations. The tool also provides information on the latest travel restrictions and local vaccination rates per country. Before planning your journey, be sure to check the latest travel restrictions in your destination. KAYAK’s travel restrictions map provides real time updates on COVID-19 restrictions and entry requirements of individual countries around the world. All sources have been accessed and data retrieved between September 1, 2021 and October 20, 2021. The numbers collected are based on the latest available data.

Top Travel Trip

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Happy Ramadan Kareem



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Hotel Booking

Visa Services

Travel Insurance

Air Ticket

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Airport Transfer

Medical Tourism

www.toptraveltrip.com

Sojern sees spike in travel to Qatar

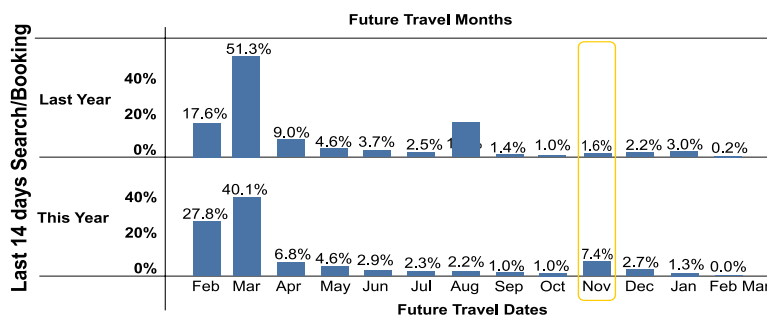
This winter, the eyes of the world will be on Qatar for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the first ever to be held in an Arab country. This international football tournament is scheduled to run from 21 November to 18 December 2022. Despite being over half a year away, we are already seeing a surge in travel intent to Qatar over that period.

Here is the initial look at Sojern's data for World Cup travel | **Searches to Qatar for the World Cup in November is Growing:** We looked at the top travel dates for the next 12 months from our flight search event data in the last 14 days for Qatar. Even in

February, we see a higher interest to travel this November compared to last year, the period that covers the tournament. We expect this trend to continue and grow as the schedule of matches unfolds and we get closer to the World Cup.

Flight searches to Qatar in the last 14 days, by future travel date

Flight SEARCH volume by future travel date
SEARCH events from Last 14 days (2/15/2022 to 3/1/2022)

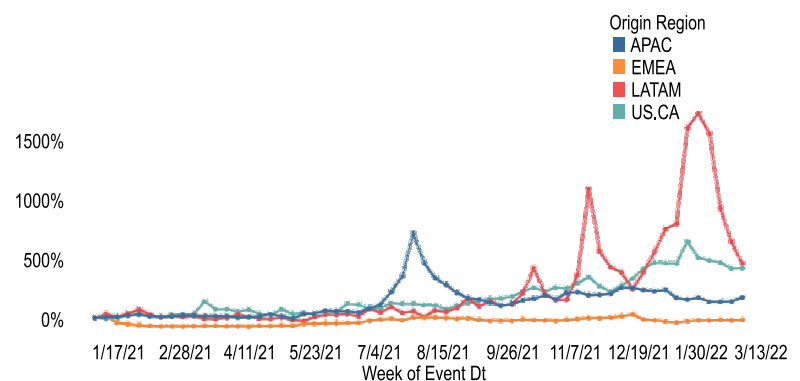


Latin American Countries Some of the Top Origins Looking for Travel to Qatar

When we look at the top origin markets interested in travel to Qatar, it is dominated by the Latin American (LATAM) region. LATAM is a region that is widely considered to be full of football fanatics. For the most part, this region never features in Qatar's top origins. When we compare flight search trends from early January 2021 with what we saw for January 2022, you'll see top origins are dominated by LATAM countries overtaking other regions starting at the end of 2021 into early 2022.

Travel intent to Qatar by region

Weekly Flight SEARCH | All region; Country; Qatar; Metro: All Origins: All



When we zoom into LATAM in greater detail, we see that expressed interest in travelling to Qatar in the last 30 days is driven by Brazil and Argentina in particular.

Top origin countries in Latin America

Origin Country	events
1. Brazil	86.46%
2. Argentina	7.49%
3. Costa Rica	3.46%
4. Colombia	1.15%
5. El Salvador	0.58%
6. Chile	0.29%
7. Uruguay	0.29%
8. Ecuador	0.29%

Intraregional travel a potential during this period

We predict that with the short travel times between Qatar and the likes of Oman, Saudi Arabia, or the UAE, the World Cup period is also going to be big for travel within the Middle East. Below are the year-on-year per cent change in flight searches in the last 14 days to Qatar for November 2022, of which Middle East and Africa shows the third largest year-on-year increase, up over 1000 per cent on last year. We will be keeping an eye on our insights as we get closer to the World Cup.



Year over year changes in search to Qatar for travel in Nov 2022 in the last 14 days

Origin Regions To Qatar	YOY % Change in Search For November 2022 Travel
Europe	+3,519%
LATAM (South, Central America, & The Caribbeans)	+2,150%
Middle East & Africa	+1,192%
US and Canada	+672%
APAC	+332%

We will be sure to keep you posted on all the latest World Cup travel trends.

*THIS DATA WAS PULLED 28/02/22

Ramadan trends in KSA & UAE travel

As Ramadan begins, travellers have already started planning their Eid travel. According to Sojern, there have been searches to longer-haul destinations, meaning people are feeling comfortable travelling again.

In terms of booking trends pre-Ramadan, there has been a shift in the Middle East. Sojern saw the booking searches as early as mid March this year. In terms of destina-

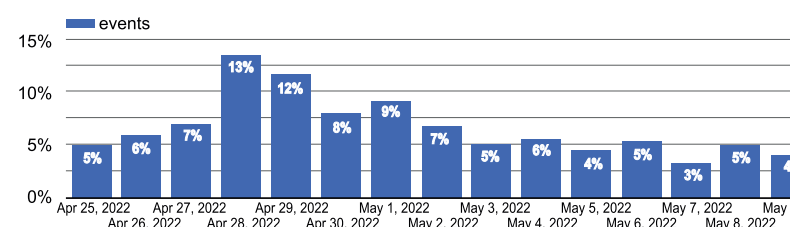
tions, this year travellers looked for more long-haul destinations. The restrictions and regulation changes played a pivotal role in these changing patterns.

Top destinations for international flight bookings from MEA

2021		2022	
Destination Country	events	Destination Country	events
1. United States	17.69%	1. United States	28.19%
2. Egypt	15.38%	2. India	9.72%
3. Saudi Arabia	9.69%	3. Egypt	7.76%
4. France	8.42%	4. France	6.93%
5. Jordan	6.17%	5. Italy	6.26%
6. Turkey	5.64%	6. United Kingdom	6.02%
7. United Arab Emirates	5.22%	7. Turkey	5.67%
8. India	4.56%	8. United Arab Emirates	4.84%
9. Philippines	4.52%	9. Philippines	4.76%
10. Germany	3.93%	10. Jordap	4.33%

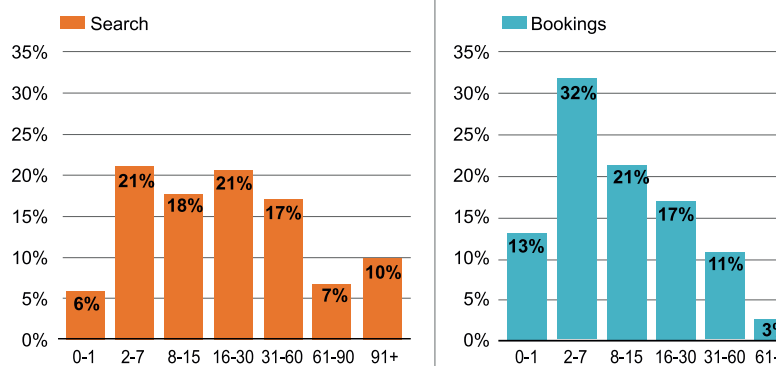
In 2021, the USA was the most popular destination for Eid travel. In 2022, it is still the USA but the share of bookings has significantly increased, alongside India, which suggests people have more confidence with travelling further distances as we recover from COVID.

Top travel dates for international flight bookings from MEA



The most popular days for travelling internationally for Eid are the 4 days leading up to the celebration.

2021 lead time for international flight travel



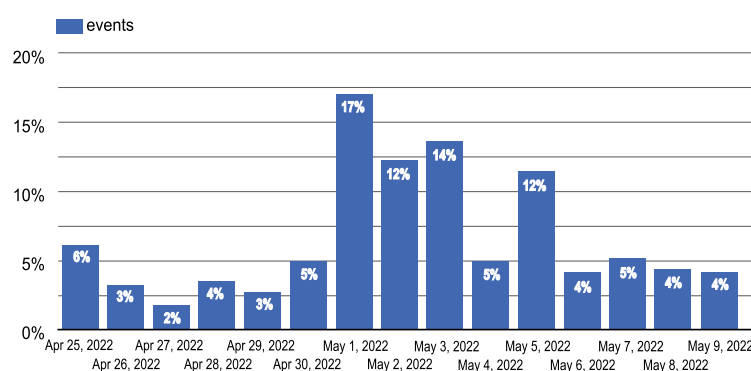
In 2021, we see that 45 per cent of bookings were made within seven days of travelling, whereas searches were distributed more evenly. This was likely to be people waiting to see if there was any changes in COVID restrictions before committing to travelling.

Top destinations for international hotel searches from MEA

2021		2022	
Destination Country	events	Destination Country	events
1. United States	40.13%	1. Turkey	14.33%
2. United Arab Emirates	13.26%	2. Egypt	13.49%
3. United Kingdom	11.98%	3. United States	10.88%
4. Egypt	8.25%	4. United Arab Emirates	10.83%
5. Turkey	6.32%	5. India	8.79%
6. Saudi Arabia	2.55%	6. France	6.76%
7. India	2.33%	7. Thailand	5.01%
8. France	1.58%	8. United Kingdom	4.76%
9. Jordan	1.3%	9. Philippines	3.3%
10. Morocco	1.2%	10. Oman	2.93%

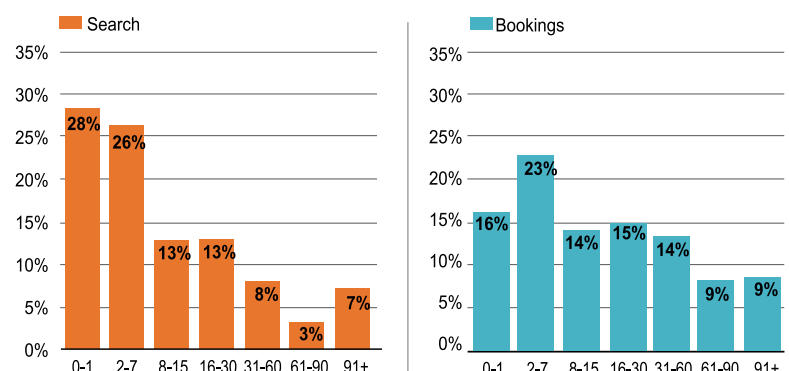
In 2021, the USA was the most popular destination for Eid travel. In 2022, this has changed to Turkey.

Top travel dates for international hotel searches from MEA



The most popular days for search of hotels are before the three preceding days of the Eid celebrations.

2021 lead time for international hotel searches



In 2021, we see that 39 per cent of bookings and 54 per cent of searches were made within seven days of travelling, this is probably due to people waiting until the last minute on deciding on booking accommodation.

ATM focus on Saudi strategy

As the countdown begins for the biggest Arabian Travel Market, to be held from 9-12 May this year, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will be a key focus with the specialized forum.

Shehara Rizly

The first, 'From strategy to reality: Saudi Arabia's tourism vision comes of age', part of the ATM Saudi Forum, will focus on infrastructure progress, niche markets and fresh opportunities, as the country works to attract 100 million annual visitors by 2030. The second 'Saudi Arabia's blueprint for responsible tourism development' will explore how sustainability, community inclusion, education and training, and the legacy impact of KSA's broad-ranging tourism vision can offer a best-practice model for other global destinations.

The ATM Saudi Forum will feature high-level ex-



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director, ME
Arabian Travel Market

perts including **Mahmoud Abdulhadi**, Deputy Minister for Investment Attraction at the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Tourism, **Captain Ibrahim Koshy**, CEO, SAUDIA, **Amr AlMadani**, CEO, the Royal Commission for AlUla, **Majed bin Ayed Al-Nefae**, CEO, Seera Group Holding, **Fawaz Farooqui**, Managing Director, Cruise Saudi and **John Pagano**, CEO, Red Sea Development Company & AMAALA.

ATM 2022 will welcome a range of high-profile exhibitors from the kingdom, including the Saudi Tourism Authority, as well as Saudia Airlines, Flynas, Seera, RED Sea Project, NEOM, Dur Hospitality, and first-time participant Al Hokair Group. "While religious tourism will remain a



mainstay for Saudi Arabia, the global travel community is also excited about new prospects that are opening up thanks to the country's growing investment in other segments," shared **Danielle Curtis**, Exhibition Director ME – Arabian Travel Market.

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'We expect business during Ramadan'

► Contd. from page 1



David Allan
Cluster General Manager
Radisson Blu Hotel,
Dubai Waterfront

“As per the trend of the past couple of years, we expect that staycations will contribute significantly to our occupancies across our three hotels during Ramadan. Besides, we see demand coming from key markets, particularly Western Europe, aided in part by Easter. We are confident that we will be as busy as ever over these special weeks in the UAE.”



Binu Varghese
General Manager
Ramada Hotel & Suites
by Wyndham Dubai JBR

“Ramada Hotel & Suites by Wyndham Dubai JBR has witnessed excellent occupancy during the first quarter and we aim to sustain this momentum even during Ramadan. The hotel has started rolling out exciting deals for the upcoming summer season, including stays and entertainment deals for April. We expect bookings for staycation during Ramadan.”



Ravi Santiago
Cluster General Manager
Wyndham Hotels Ajman

“Our three hotels are taking proactive strategies to encourage staycation during the Holy Month. The first half of Ramadan this year also coincides with the spring break in schools, thus we have launched various family-friendly offers for residents. We are optimistic that we will achieve an average of 85 per cent occupancy across three properties.”

“Radisson hotels in Oman have created exciting staycation promotions to attract the families and groups wishing to experience the Holy Month of Ramadan in contemporary luxury settings. We expect that this Ramadan will get more business than the last two years as residents wish to travel, but within their region, close to home.”



Panos Panagis
District Director Oman
Radisson Hotel Group

“Hyde Hotel Dubai is perfectly situated given our proximity to Dubai Mall, Burj Khalifa and other Downtown hotspots. We are already seeing strong forward bookings primarily from the UAE, wider GCC and parts of Europe. The hotel is gaining a reputation as a popular hangout, so we expect our pool, spa and daycation offers to be booked up.”



Luke James
General Manager
Hyde Hotel Dubai

“Through an endless stream of award-winning worldly cuisines, luxurious stays in scenic accommodations with loads of amenities, including fun-packed activities and an unparalleled display of Turkish hospitality, Rixos Hotels UAE celebrates the Holy Month inviting you and your loved ones to get together for an iftar at A La Turca restaurant.”



Murat Zorlu
General Manager
Rixos The Palm
Dubai Hotel & Suites



Horst Walther-Jones
General Manager
Rixos Bab al Bahr

“We see an increase in guests from the GCC region and UAE residents visiting us during Ramadan to spend time with their family and loved ones in peace and tranquillity at Rixos Bab al Bahr in Ras al Khaimah. Our iftar and suhoor packages along with discounts on staycations entice them.”

“SLS Dubai has earned a reputation as the place to be in the city and we expect our rooftop pool, Privilege, Ciel Spa and our daycation offers to be booked up throughout the month. Ahead of Ramadan we are already seeing an uptake in bookings for April, primarily from the US, Israel and Western Europe.”



Spencer Wadama
General Manager, SLS Dubai
Hotel and Residences

“As Ramadan and summer season approach, we expect demand will rise. Historically, daycations/staycations have been a strong suit of beach/resort properties; however, we see growing interest of local residents to try out city hotels with leisure entertainment options.”



Alfio Bernardini
General Manager – Grand
Plaza Mövenpick Media City
Inputs by Shehara Rizly

Sharjah highlights Al Dhaid's rich history

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) announced a new event called 'Celebrate Al Dhaid!' in collaboration with the Sharjah Institute for Heritage to shed light on the historic Al Dhaid Fort in Sharjah's Central Region.

TT Bureau

The announcement comes as His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, inaugurated a host of development projects in the Central Region, including Al Dhaid Fort and Sharjah Safari.

The five-day event witnessed dazzling light shows. The displays shed light on the Al Dhaid Fort's intricate features and designs, retelling the stories of the region's



people, accompanied by folk performances that embody the rich and authentic cultural heritage of Al Dhaid and Sharjah in general.

His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman of SCTDA, said:

“The wise leadership of Sharjah is committed to developing and advancing the tourism sector in the Emirate, supporting landmark projects that reflect its cultural heritage and rich history, all the while maintaining the great diversity of

Sharjah's tourism sector, which has turned the Emirate into a benchmark in the international tourism industry and a leading destination offering innovative products and experiences for all categories of tourists.”

The history of Al Dhaid Fort dates back to the second half of the 18th century; it is the oldest historical landmark in the

as well as delegates from neighbouring countries. Several rooms have been converted into exhibition halls displaying a collec-

The dazzling event shed light on the Al Dhaid Fort's intricate features and designs, retelling the stories of the region's people

region and predates the establishment of the city of Al Dhaid. The square-shaped fort, 32 metres in length and 26 in width, has played host to several meetings in the past that brought together Sheikhs from around the region,

tion of historical artefacts from the city of Al Dhaid and its rich heritage. A hall inside the fort houses important documents related to the Al Dhaid region – and to the fort, in particular – that originate from historic sources.

ME's tourism trade could be \$246 bn in 2022

A recent research shared by World Travel & Tourism Council reveals that the travel and tourism sector in the Middle East could reach up to US\$246 billion this year, just 8.9 per cent behind pre-pandemic levels. As the region continues to recover, employment in the region could also reach beyond pre-pandemic levels by the year-end.

 Shehara Rizly

Over the past few weeks, governments started easing of restrictions and opening borders, which could result positively for the travel and tourism industry. In the Middle East market, it not only ushers in profits in terms of the industry supporting non-oil based economy, but also provides employment, thus contributing to the region's economy.

According to the latest research by WTTC, if countries continue to roll out the inoculation programme at the given pace this year, and restrictions to international travel are eased



Julia Simpson
President & CEO, WTTC

around the world, 6.8 million people could be employed in the sector by the end of 2022, just 40,000 behind the pre-pandemic level.

In 2019, before the pandemic struck and began to devastate economies around the world, the Travel & Tourism sector in the

Middle East was booming, generating US\$270 billion to the region's economy. However, in 2020, when COVID-19 brought international travel to an almost complete standstill, its contribution more than halved, plummeting 51.1%, suffering a brutal loss of more than US\$138 billion.

Julia Simpson, President & CEO, WTTC said: "COVID-19 caused significant losses to the Middle East's

Travel & Tourism sector, but we now have reason for real optimism. Since the start of the pandemic, governments across the Middle East have shown real commitment to travel and tourism. Saudi Arabia, in particular, has shown strong leadership throughout the crisis and is making a major investment in Travel & Tourism. 2022 is poised for a strong recovery if governments across the region continue to



open up their borders and remove restrictions to travel, which will have a massive positive effect on both the economy, the society and jobs."

There are many areas that still needs to be addressed in order to reach close to the pre-pandemic levels this year. It is the opinion of WTTC that governments around the world must

continue focusing on the vaccine rollout and allow fully vaccinated travellers to move freely. The global tourism body also urges governments in the Middle East and around the world to ditch the patchwork of restrictions and enable international travel using digital solutions that allows travellers to prove their status in a fast, simple and secure way. 🇲🇪

“ Saudi Arabia has shown strong leadership throughout the (COVID-19) crisis and is making a major investment in Travel & Tourism. 2022 is poised for a strong recovery ”



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'Austria premium family destination for GCC'

With countries easing restrictions and opening up, Austria tourism board introduces one of the most interesting destinations for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) market, a premium family destination where one can discover and indulge in both summer and winter 365 days a year.

 Shehara Rizly

Robert Groblacher, Director, Austria tourism board, said that from now on there is no requirement for PCR test in Austria, except in Vienna, where if vaccinated only with Sinopharm one may have to present a negative PCR test in certain areas. However, following its opening to the GCC last summer, there has been a optimistic vibe as they were able to receive many guests from the region.

Groblacher reiterated, "Connectivity is good for summer as the flights are back from all leading airlines in the Middle East, from Emirates to flydubai, Etihad, Air Arabia Abu Dhabi,



Robert Groblacher
Director
Austria tourism board

bi, Saudia to Vienna and flynas to Salzburg too and Qatar Airways with certain routes are double daily, especially during summer.

"August 2021, was actually better than August 2019 as when the borders were open we saw the interest in travellers to visit destinations and we experienced good numbers. We want



Kathrin Baumann
Press and Communication
Zillertal tourism board

to share that Austria has so much more to offer in terms of experiences and many destinations to explore. Zillertal tourism is a premium destination especially for families and one of the areas we wish to promote for not just summer of this year, but also for winter. Visitors can experience a true winter wonderland and it is an all year round destination



tion as I said catering to the entire family."

Located in the Alps, Zillertal is one of the leading family holiday destinations, especially with their special ski pass, and offer a mix of adventure, enjoyment and relaxation for every member of the family. There are also numerous public transport

connections from major neighbouring countries.

Kathrin Baumann, Press and Communication, Zillertal tourism board, shared about the offerings of the destination, which is still a very new area for the Middle East visitors and she was confident that this will become one of the most visited destinations

as it has something for every member of the family. Zillertal is famous for its fascinating mountains, action-packed activities and much more. "At the foot of the mountain is summer and the top of the mountain is winter, so travellers from the Middle East can experience two seasons together at the venue," she said. 

UAE railway links Dubai, Abu Dhabi

One of the 50 key infrastructure projects launched in the UAE was the national railway programme with an investment of AED 50 billion linking all seven emirates. This programme is also expected to create economic opportunities amounting to AED 200 billion.

 TT Bureau

H.H. Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Deputy Ruler of Dubai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and **H.H. Sheikh Theyab bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan**, Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince's Court and Chairman of Etihad Rail witnessed the connection of Abu Dhabi and Dubai with a direct railway within the "UAE National Rail Network".

Their highnesses installed the final piece on the rail-

way track, marking the start of a new phase of logistic and economic integration between the two emirates, and in preparation for linking the rest of the emirates to an integrated national railway network in the UAE.

The completion of the main railway between Abu Dhabi and Dubai comes within the framework of "The UAE Railway Programme", which was launched as a part of the 50 projects, with an investment of AED 50 billion. The UAE Railway Programme includes a national network of railway projects that would




link the seven emirates. The programme is expected to create economic opportunities amounting to AED 200 billion.

H.H. Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum affirmed that "The UAE Railway Programme" reflects UAE's

ambitions and aspirations to start the next 50 years with huge development projects that enhance its position as a leading regional and global centre in the sectors of trade, economy and logistics services. H.H. Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohammed added: "The completion

of the main railway of the "UAE National Rail Network" project between Dubai and Abu Dhabi represents an important pivotal phase that shows the great benefits of this national project in linking all the emirates of the country and enhancing the transportation pro-

cess between industrial and economic centres, and facilitating transportation within the UAE."

H.H. Sheikh Theyab bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan said the importance of completing the main railway of the "UAE National Rail Network", which connect the emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai to Sharjah, is in connecting the cities and industries to a safe and sustainable rail network. The completion of the main railway will enhance the strategic position of the project at the transport and infrastructure levels. 

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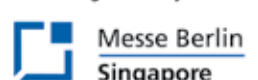
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Expo brings hope for events industry

► Contd. from page 1

families moving to Dubai while their home countries continue with tough and impractical quarantine regulations. It makes the region a very attractive place to live and work.

But it is not just Expo 2020, there are plenty of other events taking place such as the opening of the Museum of the Future and the recent an-

nouncement from Wynn Resorts about the development of their first beachfront resort in Ras Al Khaimah, all these events will change the shape of tourism in the UAE.

Will there be a new era for MICE and events industry, post COVID and Expo?

After two years, in some parts of the world, with no

travel there, is an almighty bounce back with people wanting, or at least trying, to travel again and Expo 2020 has been a great testament to that.

When it comes to the MICE and events industry, we all know that networking is better in-person. What we discovered at AHIC 2021 was

that delegates were more focused than ever on stealth networking and productivity. I believe going forward, in-person events will become highly sought after but also a luxury. The cost of transport is going up as a result of the Ukraine War and then there are the challenges for companies on the environmental impact of travel. Organisers will

need to be the 'best in class', nimble and embrace technology. Perhaps this makes for more dynamic events going forward.

There will continue to be a rise in 'bleisure' travellers that combine business and leisure travel in one trip. With different testing and other preventative meas-

ures in place in countries around the world, people are looking to make the most out of each trip. Accommodating the bleisure trend, we are activating destination visits around our conferences at The Bench to give attendees the opportunity to get even more out of their experience when they attend one of our events.

'Demand for hotels continues unabated in Dubai. New record made on February 24'

Could you share the impact Expo had on MICE and events sector over last few months?

Hotel demand continues unabated for Dubai in 2022. The 131,745 rooms sold on 24 February was a new all time record with the city close to selling out its 138,346 rooms available that day. It is both unusual and fascinating to encounter daily demand so smooth, while operating so close to



Kostas Nikolaidis
Middle East, Africa & Greece Executive - STR

full capacity and over such a long time-frame. For most destinations - like London - demand tends to follow

a "herringbone" pattern, rhythmically fluctuating between weekdays/weekends and between events. In Dubai, the overarching effect of Expo 2020 has undoubtedly helped generate that consistent demand. Further boosted by the plethora of parallel events taking place throughout the city. All masterfully weaved into the calendar to fill any demand gaps and keep the destination buzzing.

Dubai keeps selling more hotel rooms than London

Daily hotel room demand, 1 January - 7 March 2022



Source: STR ©2022 CoStar Group

Dubai keeps selling more hotel rooms than London

Daily hotel room demand, 1 January - 7 March 2022



Source: STR ©2022 CoStar Group

FIFA is scheduled towards winter this year, do you see UAE hotels getting any business from this? If so, please explain.

We have come a long way in the COVID recovery. The Middle East, in particular, has been leading that recovery with Expo 2020 Dubai boosting the performance. There is more to come especially with events such as the

FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 around the corner.

Any stats to share with us about 2019 to 2022 with a special focus on Expo?

As for MICE performance during Expo 2020, group occupancy is a good proxy tracker. The chart shows the group occupancy in Dubai luxury and upscale hotels returning. Interestingly, in mid-November group

occupancy even briefly surpassed 2019 levels. There is some leisure groups included in these stats but Expo has obviously been the main driver. It might not seem like much getting back to 2019 group occupancy levels, but let us not forget hotel inventory in 2021 has increased by 16,487 rooms compared to 2019. That's 12 per cent more rooms to be sold.

Mauritius tourism partners with dnata

According to a recent report from dnata it was revealed that travel bookings to the Indian Ocean has doubled in 2022, in comparison to booking figures in Q4 2021. With Mauritius fully re-opening for tourism

post pandemic the demand for travel continues to increase. With Ramadan around the corner followed by summer ensures that there will be travel from this region. UAE has always been an important market when it comes to travel and

Mauritius tourism promotion authority has set its heart and soul on it.

Arvind Bundhun, Director at Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, commented: "We have always seen strong demand

for travel to Mauritius from the UAE and it remains one of the most important source markets for us globally. In 2022, we are partnering with dnata Travel to bring our experiences closer to UAE travellers than ever before."

Emily Jenkins, General Manager, dnata Travel Leisure, added: "Traveller demand from the UAE to Mauritius continues to increase, and the country has quickly climbed back into our top 10 most sought-after international

destinations in terms of search and bookings since its full reopening, with bookings approaching close to pre-pandemic levels in 2022. Our travellers are keen to get back to nature and Mauritius offers all of the beauty."

Sell travel? Reconsider your strategy

Historically many travellers flew to New York to ascend the Empire State Building or Statue of Liberty, but rather bizarrely only bought the entrance ticket once they arrived in the city. Could we see a world where travellers start their travel planning by first buying the experience tickets?

Had we, as a travel industry, been selling things in the wrong order? People travel to a destination, but for some reason the plane ticket is the first thing they often buy. Thankfully, this is quickly changing.

Last week we published some research that showed that 46 per cent of travellers now buy their entrance tickets for tours, activities and attractions more than a week in advance. This is included in a report from us called 'Are you experienced?' and you can download that here. Travellers demand certainty and convenience more than ever,

especially for the biggest attractions and shows where there is a risk of sellouts. Airline tickets, hotel rooms, and even transfers are all bought first and almost exclusively online, perhaps because close to 100 per cent of all flights and 80 per cent of all hotel rooms around the world are bookable online. But when it comes to activities in-destination, only around 21 per cent of the total entrance tickets, tours and activities are available online.

There is a long way to go, but the sector is catching up quickly because the opportunity

is huge. Estimates vary, but a consensus figure for entrance tickets, tours and activities is that the market is worth around €250bn world-

the London Eye or smaller ones like a hiking operator in Turkey? What kind of technology are we talking about to digitalise the whole travel journey?

“A consensus figure for entrance tickets, tours and activities is that the market is worth around €250bn worldwide, meaning almost €200bn is still offline”

wide, meaning almost €200bn is still offline. A vast digitalisation is underway. In just a few years from now the landscape will look remarkably different. So, what is the barrier when it comes to traditional attractions such as the Eiffel Tower,

You might be pleased to hear this won't depend on anything futuristic. The distribution and sales model can work in very much the same way GDS, bedbanks, PMS and channel managers do for aviation and hospitality. First, we need operators

of all sizes to embrace reservation systems and APIs, which connect them to major OTAs, distributors and travel technology providers. Thanks to the cloud and a new generation of software, this is quickly becoming a reality. Second, we are seeing many providers focused exclusively on the in-destination experiences pop up in recent years, including B2B services. Third, these technologies open new options in a sector that needs to offer more and better products.

They will allow the parts of the chain that are in contact with the end customer, airlines, hotels, tour

operators, travel agencies, rail operators, etc, to offer a new vertical of products without resorting to white label solutions where all the control on the customer experience is handed over to a third party.



Xavier Boixeda
CEO & Co-Founder of Globick, a global B2B platform for in-destination experiences

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

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Switzerland calls agents to Lugano region

Travel agents from the UAE were hosted by the Switzerland tourism board at the pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai for an evening with Lugano, a destination with many offerings catering to the UAE market. The travel traders had a great evening of fun, food, laughter and most importantly networking with the regional marketing team.



Sabre and Tawfeeq celebrate launch in Qatar

Sabre Corporation and Tawfeeq Technologies and Services (TTS) officially launched its operations in Qatar. A ceremony was held on the occasion, which was attended by government officials, executives from the travel and tourism industry, including travel companies and airlines, partners and media.



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The Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) has announced the appointment of **Ahmed Obaid Al Qaseer** as its Acting Chief Executive Officer. In his new role, Al Qaseer will continue the ongoing efforts to achieve Shurooq's vision of developing world-class projects and bolster efforts to drive national and foreign investments into the emirate. He will also oversee the management and operational execution of multi-sectoral projects under Shurooq's portfolio.



ISHRAQ HOSPITALITY

Dubai

Ishraq Hospitality announced the promotion of **Joseph Karam** to Director of Operations. This move is in line with the Group's expansion of its strategic objectives in the hospitality sector to foster growth and consolidate its position as one of the leading hospitality management companies in the region. Karam's leadership abilities and experience make him an effective player in the hospitality industry. As Director of Operations for Ishraq Hospitality, Karam will oversee the Group's eight properties in the United Arab Emirates.



IHG HOTELS & RESORTS

KSA

IHG® Hotels & Resorts announced the appointment of industry veteran **Maheer Abou Nasr** as Vice President of Operations for KSA. Nasr has been with IHG for over 10 years and recently as Head of Operations Finance for IMEA, overseeing the Middle East, Africa and South West Asian markets. As VP Operations, Nasr will be responsible for the performance of the hotels in KSA, driving operational excellence, building stronger owner relationships, driving greater owner returns and developing the national talent.



MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

Kuwait

Marriott International has appointed **Andreas Wissdorf** as the new multi-property General Manager for four hotels and the iconic Arraya ballroom in Kuwait. With hospitality leadership experience of over 30 years in International hotel operations, Wissdorf, a German national, brings a wealth of experience in having served at different levels of the Marriott organisation. Starting his career in the hospitality sector in 1988, he has won several awards, including the General Manager of the Year Award.



MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

Riyadh KSA

Marriott International announced the appointment of **Marina Krasnobrizhaya** as General Manager of St. Regis Riyadh Hotel, slated to open this summer. In her new role, Krasnobrizhaya will lead the hotel's pre-opening efforts and spearhead a new era of luxury in the Kingdom by introducing the style, innovation and cherished traditions of St. Regis to the country. She is the first woman to be General Manager at Marriott International in Saudi Arabia and the country's first woman to lead a luxury hotel.



IHG HOTELS & RESORTS

MEA

IHG® Hotels & Resorts appointed industry veteran **Charbel Boutros** as the Vice President of Development for MEA. Boutros joins IHG following a 17-year tenure at Roya International with a career spanning across different roles, including development strategy, hotel development, hotel portfolio strategy, asset management, M&A, tourism, master planning, F&B services and franchising. He contributed to growth of Roya's services, increasing the team size from 5 to over 50 team members.



New hotels in the region

The past few weeks saw many new partnerships by hotels within the region. We look at some of the brands that are venturing with their signature brands across the Middle East.

voco Doha West Bay Suites

Location – Qatar | Number of Rooms/ Suites – 396 Rooms and Suites

IHG Hotels & Resorts has rebranded voco Doha West Bay Suites, the first voco property in Qatar, and is introducing guests to new and refreshed dining and stay experiences in the coming months. The 46-floor hotel has The Social, Serenitea, Sky Lounge on the 35th floor, an exclusive helipad and facilities, including a pool deck, a 24-hour gym with steam, sauna and Jacuzzi and a spa.



Moxy Hotel

Location – Turkey | Number of Rooms/ Suites – 168 Rooms

Marriott International signed an agreement with Venue International to debut Moxy Hotels in Turkey. Slated to open in 2024, the Moxy Istanbul Beyoglu will be located in the heart of the city within walking distance from Taksim Square. Istanbul Beyoglu is expected to offer 168 stylish and cozy, yet smart bedrooms that have been designed to maximize every inch for today's young-at-heart travellers.



InterContinental Ras Al Khaimah Mina Al Arab Resort & Spa

Location – Ras Al Khaimah | Number of Rooms/ Suites – 351 Rooms



IHG Hotels & Resorts announced the opening of InterContinental® Ras Al Khaimah Mina Al Arab Resort & Spa, the first property for the luxury brand in the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah. Located on the shoreline of Hayat Island, a 45-minute drive from Dubai International Airport, the five-star property brings the InterContinental life to the Arabian Peninsula, combining idyllic island style living.

Holiday Inn Najran

Location – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia | Number of Rooms/ Suites – 82 rooms & 5 villas



IHG Hotels & Resorts announced the signing of a Management Agreement with Al Rabea Hotels and Trading Co. for Holiday Inn Najran, a conversion property in Najran city in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The hotel is returning to the IHG family having operated as a Holiday Inn hotel from 1995 to 2015. With this signing, IHG is continues to diversify its portfolio in the country.



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**Happy
Ramadan Kareem**

Wishing a blessed Ramadan to all of you, and
may this holy month bless you with happiness,
joy and success.

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