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Lighting up the landscape

Drawing 1.3 million visitors in 2020, Sharjah Light Festival returns for 11th consecutive year with renowned artists celebrating science, creativity and heritage in dazzling display at Sharjah's landmarks from Feb 9 to 20, 2022.

Shehara Rizly

His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, SCTDA, said, "The 11th Sharjah Light Festival, under the theme, 'Echoes of the Future,' blends with dazzling light shows and stirring music to transport audiences on an evocative journey. Illuminating the



His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman, SCTDA

emirate's most prominent buildings and struc-

tures with radiant multi-coloured beams, the festival shines brightly on the emirate's key attractions, in the process creating a stunning new landscape. Focusing on Sharjah's architectural marvels and popular tourist spots, Sharjah Light Festival accentuates the emirate's rich culture and artistic heritage for residents and

visitors. By bathing its key attractions in vibrant light to accompanying musical compositions, the festival aims to support and advance the tourism sector in Sharjah, drawing attention to an array of attractions and destinations Sharjah has to offer, highlighting its illustrious past, its dynamic present, and its bright future."

New UAE work week: Dates of ATM changed

Arabian Travel Market will begin from May 9 to 12, 2022 in line new Monday-to-Friday working week.

TT Bureaueu

Taking place at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), the revised dates are expected to complement international markets, majority of which also follow the Monday-to-Friday working week. Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said, "We are



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director ME
Arabian Travel Market

Contd. on page 13 ►

Racing to celebrate #DubaiDestinations

DCR announced 7th race meeting at Meydan Racecourse to highlight events, activities offered by emirate.

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Sheikh Rashid bin Dalmook Al Maktoum
Chairman
Dubai Racing Club

The move is part of the Dubai Racing Club's (DCR) efforts to support the initiative, which was launched in line with the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to enhance the UAE's profile

Contd. on page 13 ►

Summit for global co-op

Dubai Accessible Tourism International Summit has recommended 20 measures for smooth travel of People of Determination worldwide, as per vision of Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai.

TT Bureaueu

Dubai Accessible Tourism International Summit (DATIS), which called for international cooperation, was attended by His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President, Dubai Civil Aviation Authority, President, Dubai Airports, President and

CEO of Emirates Airlines and Group. It recommended 20 measures for smooth travel for travellers of determination to face challenges faced by People of Determination in terms of movement, residence and travel worldwide.

Issam Kazim, CEO, Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce



His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum
President, Dubai Civil Aviation Authority,
President, Dubai Airports, President and
CEO of Emirates Airlines and Group

Marketing opened the summit. In his speech, he said, "Within the framework of the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to make Dubai the best city in the world to live, work and visit, many initiatives and

Contd. on page 10 ►



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Air Arabia new services to 3 emirates

In line with group's efforts to ease restrictions imposed following COVID-19, Air Arabia, Middle East and North Africa's first and largest low-cost carrier (LCC), has resumed its city check-in services in Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah and Ajman.

TT Bureau

Air Arabia's City Check-ins was established in 2012 to provide passengers the added convenience and flexibility by enabling them to drop off their bags at a location near them and collect their boarding passes before travelling in Air Arabia.

The city check-in service allows the passengers to select seats and receive their boarding passes and baggage claim tags. They can then immediately proceed to the flight upon arrival at the airport.



The new service allows passengers to select seats and receive their boarding passes and baggage claim tags

Located at Sharjah, Safer Mall, and at Air Arabia Sales Shop in Ras Al Khaimah and Ajman, the three centers will oper-

ate seven days a week, from 9am to 9pm, with a break between 11am and 2pm on Fridays for prayers. The three cent-

ers will accept baggage from 24 up to eight hours before departure which is then transported straight to the Sharjah International Airport.

Ensuring the highest standards of safety and security at every step of the journey by following all health and safety

protocols, Air Arabia has also added to the convenience and confidence of passengers by introducing free COVID-19 insurance coverage. The insurance is automatically included as part of the booking and no additional documents are required from the passengers.

Tourism Breaking News

Marjan to develop a multibillion-dollar integrated Resort in Ras Al Khaimah with Wynn Resorts

Russia becomes Dubai's second-largest source market in 2021

Shurooq signs agreement with Marriott International to bring its iconic Autograph Collection to Sharjah

RAKTA forms new division to regulate integrated resorts in the emirate

Accor to open Sofitel Cairo New Capital Hotel & Residences, Egypt in 2026

Aleph Hospitality partners with Medallia to power the guest experience across the company's growing hotel portfolio





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Enhancing smart tourism PayBy way

To achieve a cashless, contactless payment system across hospitality, retail and tourism sectors, Department of Culture and Tourism, Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) has announced signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with PayBy, an innovative financial technology platform.

TT Bureau

In support of the UAE government's vision to create a secure financial ecosystem for merchants and consumers and its drive towards digital transformation across all sectors, PayBy's widely accepted, user-friendly, and secure platform will now be in use across hotels, malls and other tourism establishments. With the current global concerns around hygiene and safety, the use of PayBy's system will play a key role in minimizing touch points across the emirate.

Saeed Al Dhaheeri, Acting Tourism Products Development Director, DCT Abu Dhabi, said, "Our MOU with PayBy is an important step towards a seamless and innovative financial ecosystem throughout Abu Dhabi in line with the national digital transfor-



DCT Abu Dhabi signing of an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with PayBy

With the concerns around hygiene, PayBy's system will play a role in minimizing touch points across the emirate

mation which will benefit consumers, visitors and other stakeholders. At DCT Abu Dhabi, we are committed to the use

of state of the art technology to improve the experience for tourists and residents, so that the implementation of

PayBy is another important measure in achieving this objective."

Financial transactions on PayBy are protected by advanced technologies, including an Artificial Intelligence-based fraud management system to detect unauthorized activities comply-

ing with Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI-DSS), the international gold standard in this sector. By offering security to guests' payments at participating establishments and entities across the emirate, PayBy will support Abu Dhabi's efforts to be a 'smart' tourism destination equipped with leading digital infrastructure.

PayBy was launched to offer safety, convenience and efficiency to consumers and businesses, and to support the UAE in its digital transformation. The necessity of social dis-

tancing has accelerated the growth of contactless payment solutions, such as PayBy, and has led to increased use of similar systems. The PayBy App can be downloaded from Google Play, App Store and Huawei AppGallery, or by visiting <https://www.payby.com/download>.

FACTFILE

■ PayBy was launched to offer safety, convenience and efficiency to consumers and businesses

■ Financial transactions on PayBy are protected by AI-based system to detect unauthorized activities

Diving experiences at Abu Dhabi aquarium

National Aquarium at Al Qana, Middle East's largest aquarium with more than 46,000 sea animals and 300 different species, is now offering visitors breathtaking diving experience. There are many options available for both certified and non-certified divers and anyone eager for an adrenaline-pumping adventure.

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Paul Hamilton, General Manager at The National Aquarium says, "We are absolutely delighted to be offering our visitors an extraordinary diving experience with our vibrant selection of sharks and rays among others. Unfortunately, the reality is that the sharks are grossly misunderstood, and many of them are currently endangered due to over-fishing. Through our immersive experiences, we hope to dispel this fear and celebrate these magnificent and fascinating creatures."

Visitors or divers without prior diving experience or certification can delve into the depths of the National Aquari-

Certified scuba divers, on the other hand, get to immerse themselves in this one of a kind adventure, which includes a

All the divers will be accompanied by a guide as they interact with the variety of marine life while learning underwater sign language and taking part in feeding demos

um's main tank, which houses the largest shark and ray collection in the Middle East, including the infamous hammerhead sharks, zebra sharks, eagle rays and a variety of other shark and ray species.

bonus two in one experience diving with 2.5m long sand tiger sharks and lemon sharks, as well as an opportunity to cross over to dive with one of the world's only school of hammerhead sharks. All the divers



will be accompanied by a guide as they interact with the wide variety of marine life while learning underwater sign language and taking part in live feeding demonstrations. To top it all, divers will also get the chance to commemo-

rate the unforgettable experience by having their photographs taken with the iconic underwater scenery on the sea grass bed, next to the submarine, beneath a shipwreck, and inside the megalodon bite, all of which are sur-

rounded by magnificent creatures that add to the experience. Prior to the exciting dive adventure, the instructor will conduct a brief theory lesson to ensure that basic safety guidelines for shallow water diving are followed. 🐠

Tourism strategy of Azerbaijan for 2022

Azerbaijan Tourism Board hosted an event in Expo 2020 Dubai for agents from United Arab Emirates to experience first hand culture, offerings and cuisine especially for GCC market. Agents from across UAE attended event and met with some partners from Azerbaijan who shared various offerings for GCC region.



Omran Group's tourism masterplan for Oman

With a vision to transform tourism and real estate sector in the Sultanate in accordance with Oman Vision 2040, Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group) has revealed the Masterplan and brand identity of 'Yiti' — the largest integrated tourism developments in Oman.

TT Bureau

The new master plan of the development sets a new model for urbanisation as it connects and extends Muscat, enriching its offerings and possibilities,

sive venture, strategically located overlooking the Sea of Oman. The master plan is designed as per placemaking principles that ensures establishment of innovative standards in urban development and archi-

Yiti Development Masterplan emphasizes on creation of an integrated mixed use residential and resort-oriented community that includes tourism

through a multi-phased expansion approach. Spanning over 11 million square meters, the Yiti Development is a mas-

terpiece as well as activation of valleys, plateaus and coasts that are in harmony with the topography of the site.



The Yiti Development Masterplan, spread over four phases, offers opportunities for domestic and FDIs alike. This approach takes into consideration the accessibility to infrastructure, connection to main roads and ease of development to promote

an organic expansion. Putting sustainability at the heart of its vision, the master plan emphasizes on creation of an integrated mixed use residential and resort-oriented community that includes tourism, commercial and business spaces and resi-

dential areas. This is in addition to leisure and entertainment attractions, educational and health facilities.

Commenting on it, Hashil Bin Obaid Al Mahrouqi, CEO, OMRAN Group, said, "The Yiti Development Masterplan is an



epitome of progression, embodying components complementing each other, and based on a vision of balanced land use and urban design as key elements of its ethos. We have created a master plan that will be executed through holistic partnerships with world-class expertise." With the Sultanate's economic diversification plans in full swing, the Yiti Development Masterplan will play role in increasing the contribution of the tourism sector to the nation's GDP.

Marriott's luxury offerings for GCC

Known for its luxurious and unique facilities, Marriott International reveals their unique offerings to GCC region with three of their key brands in Mauritius. **Sydney Pierre**, Chief Sales and Marketing Officer, Marriott Hotels Mauritius reveals more details in a candid conversation with **TRAVELTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

Share about the presence of Marriott International in Mauritius.

Managed under a license agreement from Marriott International, The JW Marriott Mauritius Resort, The Westin

JW Marriott Mauritius Resort is a five star luxury resort with 172 guest suites. It is situated on the south-western side of the island. The white sands of Le Morne Beach and its warm turquoise lagoon create a magical setting where lavishly appointed accommodation help you relax



Sydney Pierre
Chief Sales and Marketing Officer
Marriott Hotels Mauritius

on the North West coast of the island, Le Méridien Ile Maurice has a long history of reference in the Mauritian hospitality landscape. Featuring a unique design, the resort maintains its rich heritage while surprising its guests with inspired multi-cultural local artwork and

spiration. The resort boasts 261 rooms stylishly spread along the beach, giving an exceptional feeling of space and relaxation.

The Westin Turtle Bay Resort & Spa, Mauritius is in the peaceful spot of the historical Balaclava area,

Have you seen a trend of different bookings from ME clients? Do they book directly or through agents or OTAs?

We would not say that our customer behaviour has changed, but the pandemic has forced our customers to find their ways to book. We

Mauritius should be rated as one of the best destinations of the world. We showcase brands with unique attributes and we can't wait for our markets to recover. We are already in the New Normal and the daily events are shaping that New Normal

Turtle Bay Resort & Spa, Mauritius, Le Meridien Ile Maurice are among the best in their respective categories and are set individually on unique locations.

amidst the many charms of Mauritius. Surrounded by breathtaking coral reefs and a backdrop of the majestic Le Morne Brabant Mountain, a Unesco World Heritage site, it of-

fers to reconnect to the beauty around you boasting panoramic views of the Indian Ocean.

Le Meridien Ile Maurice unlocks the destination with chic design and cuisine curated for the curious and creative traveler. Recently renovated with an investment of US\$60 million, it is situated on the North West coast of the island and will be opening on February 1, 2022. Beautifully situated alongside the sandy beach



sensory experiences, creating a stimulating environment and an inspirational hotspot for travellers from all continents and lovers of art in search of tropical in-

spiration. The resort boasts 261 rooms stylishly spread along the beach, giving an exceptional feeling of space and relaxation.

believe that the customers still trust their travel agents but will automatically book OTAs or even direct based on circumstances. It is too early to establish consistent booking patterns, but it will be interesting to review those patterns once we are more settled.

Post - pandemic how are you marketing your property to the ME clients?

It is clear that travelling during such uncertain times creates challenge, especially in terms of planning. Offering flexible booking terms to our guests has become more of a necessity than a marketing item. Regular communication through our social platforms, training of our agents networks, regular update on sanitary protocol of the destination are a few initiatives that have proven effective than any usual marketing campaigns. We have also appointed Elev8 Representation & Consulting, founded by Seema Pande as our Sales and Marketing arm in the Middle East market.

Any new marketing strategies to attract the Middle Eastern travelers this year?

Communication, especially social media platforms, has proved to be successful and will continue to dominate. Our ability to showcase experiences to our customers with proper collaterals such as innovative videos, testimonials do the job much more than any type of marketing strategy. New experiences are always welcome, especially when combined with the destination on offer. The real actors such as chefs, and various performers are always more effective in showing the real character of the hotels and destination.

What are the USP of the properties?

JW Marriott Mauritius Resort

- 24-Hour Butler Service for all suite categories
- JW Garden (our own grown small garden) and Secret Spot (quiet space/cozy/hidden place)
- Spacious and Luxurious Suites
- Manor House Spa Suites — a private residential experience with en-suite spa facilities
- Exclusive and biggest villa in the Indian Ocean
- Soft white sand 800 meter stretch beach
- Colonial Style resort
- Pure Spa with 12 spa Suites, including two couple suites
- Luxury private cinema, conservatory and library
- Five exclusive dining venues with five restaurants
- 24-hour in-room private dining
- ION Club Prestige for Kitesurf-

ing. One Eye spot among the top 10 in the World

- Located next to the Unesco World Heritage Site, Le Morne Brabant Mountain
- Two swimming pools
- JW Marriott Mauritius Sea lounge Pontoon Boat

Le Meridien Ile Maurice -USP

- Located within 10 km from the city center, in the North West of the island
- Comfortable Room Inventory — 261 Rooms and Spacious Room Product
- Fully refurbished sea view rooms
- Exclusive dedicated wing — Nirvana Section adult zone only
- Three exclusive pools
- One of the biggest conference venues on the island
- Dining experiences with four themed restaurants
- Extensive outside venues for events

- Dedicated accommodation — family beachfront rooms close to our Le MeridienKids Club

The Westin Turtle Bay Resort & Spa -USP

- Located within 10 km from the city center in the North West of the island
- Within the proximity to historical site Ruins of Balaclava
- Directly situated on Turtle Bay, famous marine park in Mauritius
- Spacious and well appointed rooms, including rooms with direct beach access
- Comfortable room inventory — 190 rooms, including 49 twins
- Westin pillars of wellness deliverables within the resort
- Dining experiences within five themed restaurants included in the meal plans
- State of the art conference facilities
- Extensive outside venues for events

Resilient and diversified tourism in UAE

International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) increased by 58 per cent in July to September 2021, as per UNWTO. Rise in demand was due to an increase in traveller confidence due to lifting of restrictions in many countries. Following Omicron, world is seeing many curbs and COVID-19 tests once again.

As COVID-19 continues to affect the world, the tourism industry remains steadfast in its commitment to recover. As one of the most affected sectors, it has seen major changes over the past two years. In 2020, a report by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) showed that global international arrivals dropped by 74 per cent. However in 2021, according to the newest edition of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) increased by 58 per cent in July to September 2021 compared to the same period of 2020. The uplift in demand was driven by in-



creased traveler confidence amid rapid progress on vaccinations and the easing of entry restrictions in many destinations.

However, due to the onset of new COVID-19 variants, the world is again seeing some restrictions, including regular RT-PCR tests, quarantine rules, and isola-

tion periods. Focusing on tourism as an industry that profoundly impacts global economies, growing COVID-19 concerns continue to affect its recovery. Closer home, the success of Expo 2020 Dubai continues to showcase tourism industry's resilience as the return of tourists and local visitors are reassured by COVID-19

safety measures. The UAE's response to the pandemic has been exemplary, as it continues to launch accelerated vaccination drives

by 2028. Although post-pandemic recovery will be long for most countries, its revival in the UAE will ben-

developing cultural heritage tourism attractions continue to make great strides. The archaeological and artistic sites offer visitors a chance to gaze into its and heritage. Its appeal as a diversified tourist destination will play a role in the industry's COVID-19 recovery.

“Although the recovery will be long for most countries, its revival in the United Arab Emirates will benefit from being supported by a diversified tourism and travel offering”

while offering hassle-free PCR testing access.

In the UAE, the tourism industry has proven itself as a major contributor to economic development. As per the latest research by Statista, the sector is projected to contribute about AED 280.6

bilion to the country's GDP by 2028. Although post-pandemic recovery will be long for most countries, its revival in the UAE will benefit from being supported by a diversified tourism and travel offering.

Diversification of tourism offerings in the UAE has contributed to opportunities for sector growth, while also enhancing its resilience. The UAE's efforts towards



Dr. Ross Curran
Assistant Professor, School
of Social Sciences at Heriot-Watt
University, Dubai

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87% of travellers keen on 'family time'

Travellers from UAE are hoping to head abroad this winter to make up for lack of summer holidays over more than two years. Most people would like to go away with their extended families to make up for lost time. This is according to research from Marriott Bonvoy, travel loyalty programme.

TT Bureau

The figures show that over eight out of 10 (83 per cent) people in the UAE are planning to head away on a holiday over winter this year, with a vast majority (87 per cent) saying they would like to travel to a differ-



ent country. For many, a winter holiday will be breaking away from the tradition – 24 per cent of those planning to go away this winter say they usually go away at this time of year. Nearly one

in five (19 per cent) say this would be the first time they have ever gone on a holiday in winter.

COVID-19 impact on travel

Winter holidays are a result of the pandemic — a third (32 per cent) say they are planning to go away as they could not over summer, while a 36 per cent say they are wanting to go on holidays to make up for not being able to go away during COVID-19. Turkey (9 per cent), Egypt (8 per cent) and Maldives (7 per cent) are the key destinations people from the UAE would like to head to this winter.



Taking the whole family along

The research reveals another trend due to the ongoing pandemic — a surge in people who would like to go away with their wider family. Nearly nine out of 10 (87 per cent) of those planning to go on holiday say they

would like to go away with wider family members. This compares to a quarter (25 per cent) who say they regularly go on holiday with generations of their family. Siblings (40 per cent), parents (41 per cent), cousins (25 per cent) and aunts and uncles (14 per cent)

are those from the UAE are hoping to travel with in future. Nearly 96 per cent of those planning to go away with family members this winter say this is to specifically make up for not being able to see as much of each other during the pandemic.

FACTFILE

- 83% want to go on a winter holiday this year, and for 19% this would be the first time
- Just 24% of those planning to go away say they normally go on a winter holiday
- Making up for missed summer breaks is the reason people will be going away on a holiday
- 87% are hoping to go away with their wider family members. This is to make up for the time lost
- Marriott Bonvoy explored the holiday plans of travellers from the UAE this winter

UNWTO shifts Americas HQ office to Brazil

Decision was taken at UNWTO's 24th General Assembly held last month. Announcement was made at conclusion of 114th meeting of UNWTO Executive Council held on following day. Location of office will continue to strengthen ties between UAE and Brazil and open up more opportunities for emiratis to visit Brazil.

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The new office is tasked with attracting investments; carrying out commission studies on the tourism sector; developing a Tourist Support Portal; fostering start-ups operating in tourism; and supporting the activities and projects developed by the UNWTO worldwide. The office is intended to start operations this year.

Headquartering the office of the Americas in Brazil was a natural choice for the tourism organisation — owing



largely to the nation's status as an economic powerhouse in the LATAM region, and its thriving tourism sector supported by Embratur — its International Tourism Promotion Agency.

Through Embratur, Brazil continues to promote itself as a friendly destination to UAE-based travellers.

The location of the office will continue to strength-

en ties between the UAE and Brazil and open up more opportunities for emiratis to visit Brazil. To attract more visitors from the Gulf, UAE, Asia and Europe, Brazil is expanding its Halal tour-

ism to cater more to the needs of Muslim tourists. The shift to accommodate the preference will see the introduction of Halal-certified hotels. "We have approved a new UNWTO office in

Carlos Brito, President, Embratur and all those who took part in this win. I want to thank President Jair Bolsonaro for his support and pursuing the idea of opening the office here," said Zurab

Headquartering the Americas office in Brazil was a natural choice for the UNWTO, owing largely to Brazil's status as an economic powerhouse in LATAM region

Brazil. I congratulate Gilson Machado Neto, Minister of Tourism and President, Embratur Deliberative Council,

Pololikashvili, Secretary General, UNWTO. He was re-elected Secretary General during the 24th General Assembly. 🇧🇷

Lego-themed hotel with record breaking rides

Apart from being largest Hollywood-inspired theme park, MOTIONGATE™ Dubai will soon have world's fastest spinning rollercoaster inspired by Lionsgate's global hit action John Wick franchise and Dubai Parks & Resorts will have LEGOLAND® Hotel, all set to transform LEGOLAND Dubai into a LEGO® themed resort.

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MOTIONGATE™ Dubai, the region's largest Hollywood-inspired theme park, will become home to the world's first rollercoaster inspired by

popular twists and turns of heist thriller franchise Now You See Me, both in the Lionsgate Zone.

Fans of Lionsgate's major motion picture franchises John Wick and Now You See Me, will be



Legoland Hotel Room Interior Pirates



Launch of the two rollercoasters will earn the MOTIONGATE™ Dubai an impressive record for the two rollercoasters in a single theme park in the Middle East

Lionsgate's global hit action John Wick franchise and the world's fastest single-car spinning rollercoaster inspired by the

able to experience the two record-breaking new rides later in January. Launch of the two rollercoasters will earn the

MOTIONGATE™ Dubai an impressive record for the two rollercoasters in a single theme park in the Middle East.

Dubai Parks and Resorts will also become home to the region's only LEGOLAND® Hotel, set to delight families and transforming LEGOLAND Dubai into a LEGO® themed resort

offering an all-encompassing LEGO adventure, including a LEGOLAND Theme Park, a LEGOLAND Water Park and a hotel offering 250 fully themed rooms.

Fernando Eiroa, CEO, Dubai Holding Entertainment, said, "The opening of the world's first John Wick rollercoaster, the world's fastest

spinning rollercoaster and the region's only LEGO themed hotel will contribute to enhance

Dubai's competitiveness as one of the leading international tourism destinations in the world."

Shurooq: Al Hira beach to have pro skatepark

Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) announces development of newest pro skatepark attraction in Sharjah, part of its much anticipated and upcoming beach destination, Al Hira Beach. All types of skaters, sports persons and children can skate to their heart's content here.

TT Bureau

Scheduled for completion in Q1 of 2022 along with the opening

champion, who for the first time in the UAE will bring his professional design concept of the perfect pro skatepark accessible to all types



Khalid Ibrahim Al Qaseer
Director of Operations, Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq)

Officially named as KOTA Skatepark, it will have ramps for all levels and roller sports which include skateboarding, roller skating among others

of Al Hira Beach, the new attraction comes as part of a partnership between Shurooq and Dakota Schuetz, also known as "Kota", four-time world scooter rider

of skaters, sports enthusiasts and children. Officially named as "KOTA Skate Park", it will feature different ramps for all levels and different roller sports which include

skateboarding, roller skating, riding scooters and bicycle motocross (BMX). The skatepark will have a pump track outside the skatepark as a dedicated section for children of all ages replete with all safety and security regulations.

Commenting on the announcement, Khalid Ibrahim Al Qaseer, Director, Operations, Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), said, "With the new attraction under development, the Al Hira Beach is all set to become one of the most popular ones for visitors and tourists. It will offer a set of unique beach tourism experiences contributing to reinforcing Sharjah as a focal destination for investments." He added, "The new partnership translates our vision to create strategic JVs with global experts to introduce unique ser-



vices and experiences to visitors and tourists of all ages across all our destinations."

Dakota Schuetz said, "I am excited to collaborate with Shurooq on the AED87 million KOTA

Skate Park project on Al Hira Beach which will allow people to be active and have fun in a safe environment. We look forward to welcoming visitors and all riders in the UAE to experience the skate park."

Travel hurdles addressed at summit

► Contd. from page 1

steps have been taken to enable everyone to enjoy distinctive experiences and tourism components that take into account all needs." The presentations given by experts indicated that the volume of missed opportunities on the economy and global tourism amounted to 142 bil-

lion euros per annum, as a result of the reluctance of millions of People of Determination to travel due to the lack of facilities in many cities of the world. The summit also stressed the need to adhere to Universal Design standards to accelerate the process

of preparing cities to become friendly, and respond to the needs of People of Determination in mobility and decent living. The session in which the People of Determination shed light on the challenges facing millions of tourists of determination during their travel, noting that their recommen-

dations to government and private stakeholders around the world include 20 recommendations for smooth travel without obstacles. The participants called for strengthening international co-operation to provide for the needs of People of Determination on the

move, the need to adopt smart solutions and provide professional staff to provide a smooth travel experience that meets the needs of different categories of physical,

audio-visual disabilities and autistic children. The summit comes in the wake of rapid recovery of travel and tourism sectors worldwide after the intensity of the pandemic lessened, to discuss the challenges facing the industry and the lessons learnt from the crisis, especially with regard to the Tourists of Determination.

Twenty speakers and experts from government and private agencies and IATA representatives, Airports Council International, World Tourism Organization and World Health Organiza-

tion (WHO) took part in the summit which was held in both personal and and visual formats. This is in addition to dealing with travellers and hotel guests. HE Majid Al-Usaimi, President, Asian Para-



His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum in a group photo



HE Issam Kazim delivering his speech during the 2nd DATIS

At a special session in which a group of People of Determination participated, which was moderated by Majid Al-Usaimi, the participants stressed several challenges are faced by People of Determination in terms of movement, residence and travel worldwide.

They stressed the importance of strengthening international cooperation to remove these challenges, the most prominent of which are the following:

- ❖ Professional staff for dealing with Travellers of Determination at check-in points, security checks, passports, and other points inside the airports, and dealing with them as ordinary travellers.
- ❖ Guiding plates in sign language (indicative video) in the airport premises to help travellers from the owners of motivation and guide them to the right area to complete the travel procedures.
- ❖ Sign language interpreters at the airports to assist those passengers with hearing impairments.
- ❖ A special vehicle to check-in for passengers with mobility disabilities to enable them to enjoy the airport experience like any normal passengers, and to have the opportunity to roam the duty-free mar-

ket and taste food and drinks in airport restaurants and cafes instead of placing them in a special lounge pending the time of their flight.

- ❖ Inspection devices for People of Determination to avoid inconvenience that the traveller may be exposed to at some airports when he or she is removed from the wheelchair for security checks.
- ❖ A mechanism to allow Travellers of Determination collect their luggage quickly to avoid them waiting for a long time at the baggage claim area.
- ❖ Allocating seats with foldable handles to enable People of Determination to move freely.
- ❖ Generalizing the automated system to open the doors of toilets at airports for travellers with mobility disabilities, because the doors in some airports are heavy and require physical strength to open them.
- ❖ Allocating a site for People of Determination at airline reservation centers to facilitate the booking process with the need to fulfil the services they requested to be provided on board the aircraft during the booking process.
- ❖ Ensure proper transportation from airport to their destinations and back.

- ❖ Providing an adequate number of wheelchairs inside the flight cabin as carriers usually provide only one chair, while more than one passenger with a mobility disability may be present in the same flight.
- ❖ Allocating toilets inside the aircraft suitable for those with mobility disabilities in terms of ability to move and rotate.
- ❖ Sign language to explain safety instructions during flights.
- ❖ Providing aircraft with landline for passengers with visual disabilities. Providing them with their own white cane, apart from providing Braille language inside the aircraft.
- ❖ Providing programmes and series translated into sign language so that travellers with hearing disabilities can enjoy watching them during the flight.
- ❖ Providing iPads equipped to serve passengers with hearing disabilities to facilitate the task of the flight attendant in serving passengers of this category.
- ❖ Design documents to include technical details of the equipment used by people with disability for easy identification.
- ❖ Provide special friendly toilet facilities, especially in the aircraft.

facilitated People of Determination tourism as a mission, which discusses the travel and tourism of People of Determination who represent 15 per cent of the total travel and tourism movement.

He said the UAE has become a global destination for tourism in line with the vision of the "wise leadership" to make the UAE a preferred destination for People of Determination." He praised the UAE's efforts to enhance the services of tourists of People of Determination, as the country has become a model in empowering this category. As per WHO estimates, between 10 and 15 per cent of the world's population has some need for assistance. About 50 million people with special needs in the Middle East look forward to visiting cities and tourist destinations that provide them with facilities that meet their needs. 🇦🇪

Germany's diversified offerings for GCC

Kick-starting New Year with their hidden gems in region of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, German National Tourist Office for GCC countries along with Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Tourist Board held their first comprehensive webinars for region.

 Shehara Rizly

Yamina Sofo, Director Sales and Marketing, GNTO for GCC shared the latest update about travelling to Germany for Gulf countries. Over the past years, Germany has received an exceptional number of tourists from the GCC and has been one of their key markets. Sofo shared about the latest tourism campaigns for the year starting off with

Birte Zielasko from the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Tourist Board and in charge of International Marketing shared her presentation with the 10 important reasons to visit the destination. About 2,000 km of Baltic Sea with coastlines and bays, world famous chalk cliffs and the white sandy beaches will be the first reason to visit the destination. Having 30 per cent of protected nature as UNESCO natural heritage would be the second reason. This



Yamina Sofo
Director Sales and Marketing
GNTO for GCC



Birte Zielasko
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Tourist Board
and in-charge of International Marketing

Vorpommern has a lot to offer for those visitors who opt for halal options. As it is a seaside destination, one can have fresh fish in abundance. The travellers are able to enjoy more than 200 farm shops and cafes with one of the most interesting high in Vitamin C fruits known as the Sea Buckthorn.

visiting Mecklenburg-Vorpommern can experience the spring awakening, golden autumn or as a winter wonderland.

As a most sought-after destination in the bucket list of travellers from the GCC, Germany still holds its position as one of the most luxurious, leisure and family holi-

“Two more campaigns are due to be launched this year, the FEEL GOOD campaign and the Embrace German Nature campaign”

— Yamina Sofo

the German campaign which started in 2021 and wanted the same to continue in 2022. Two more campaigns are due to be launched this year, the FEEL GOOD campaign and the Embrace

entails some amazing discoveries such as the dance of the cranes which enables you to capture over 50,000 photo opportunities and be one with nature. Third reason is that there are 2,000 glistening

famous to truly immerse yourself in a different experience. Fourth reason to visit Mecklenburg-Vorpommern are the activities you can do in the nature. There are many unique cycling and hiking areas with natural landscapes. For golfing enthusiasts, there are 17 golf courses to experience.

Zielasko said the best time to visit the federal state is during spring and summer, adding it is an year round destination offering many activities that attract the GCC market. Healthy holidays



National Park Jasmund on the Island Rügen

inspiration throughout the centuries for many artists. The seventh reason to visit this great nation is the architectural gems that are present in abundance. The visitors

“Having 30 per cent of protected nature as UNESCO natural heritage entails amazing discoveries such as the dance of the cranes which captures 50,000 photo opportunities and be one with nature”

— Birte Zielasko



Schwerin Palace and Palace Island

German Nature campaign, another interesting way to discover the various escapes in the destination, with focus on sustainability.

lakes in this federal state that you can enjoy. There are various sailing areas where you can rent a sailing boat especially the traditional ones are quite

where you can revitalize your body and soul is the fifth reason, with number six about the art and culture of the destination where you can relive the

can enjoy them to their heart's content.

When it comes to cuisine just like other parts of Germany, Mecklenburg-

The GCC travellers opt for unique stays and Zielasko shared that there are more than 2,000 hotels to select from between the Baltic Sea and the Lake District regions. Three main hotels that take the stage are Im Jaich hotel, on the island of Rugen a different type of a holiday experience ranging from floating homes to pile house suites. Grand Hotel Helligendamm is a five star property with golf courses to be enjoyed, while Schlosshotel Fleesensee has a golf course, spa and wellness and staying here will be a unique experience. The last reason is the travellers

day destinations that attract many visitors year on year from the GCC. The hidden gems in the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has many reasons for the travellers to put it on top of the list of locations to visit and enjoy all year round.

FACTFILE

- It is an year round destination with healthy holidays where one can revitalize one's body and soul
- There are 2,000 glistening lakes in this federal state that tourists can enjoy

Hungary Tourism's strategy for ME market

Making their presence felt at Expo 2020 Dubai, Hungary Tourism continues to attract GCC market with their strategy to welcome more visitors in 2022. Continuing their activities, a special workshop was held targeting agents from the region. Speakers shared their insights with **TRAVTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

Ivan Ljubinkovic, Tourism Development Manager, Hungary National Tourism Organisation (HNTO) highlighted the importance of the market and their strategies for the year. "It is an important market for us even before the pandemic. But now many things have changed. Our focus on the GCC market is important as it brings a lot of diversity to our tourists. In November 2021, we organized a FAM trip with travel agencies and tour operators and it was a big success. It was our first event after the intensity of the pandemic has lessened. We are happy to have people from the GCC region explore the many offerings in Hungary and Budapest. We are organizing this workshop now which was a success."

He added, "It is a two-sided project for both B2B and B2C media. One week for Budapest is necessary because that way you can discover the city in depth. It is a city where walking

Hungary and Budapest. We are talking about hot water spas, and also architectural and cultural heritage. Spas offer one a cultural experience—

tourism sector more appealing to the younger generation. We wanted to bring back people to the tourism sector and get the regional tourism

health and safety measures to protect visitors, without compromising on the holiday experience. Similarly, people are increasingly con-

dapest and the country's other landmarks as part of a wider journey by road or train across different parts of Europe. One of the factors which

key to keep the destination right in front of travelers' eyes. While workshops targeting local women's groups and clubs showcasing



some of the spas were built in the beginning of 19th century. There are baths that were built during the rule of the Ottomans in 16th and 17th centuries which you can bathe in today."

Ljubinkovic said, "Every season has something new to offer to travellers in Hungary. However, winter and spring are the

involved. We are looking at increasing numbers from the GCC market, especially due to the flights we have between Dubai and Budapest so that we have a constant traffic from this region."

Nasir Jamal Khan, Chief Executive Officer Al Naboodah Travel shared "There are endless reasons to visit Hungary. Hungary as a destination boasts potential for the UAE and Middle Eastern markets. The luxury lifestyle experiences of castle stays, spas, designer shopping and natural landscapes as well as options for hunting and culinary adventures are tempting options for visitors. In short, Hungary has an abundance of experiences that will captivate tourists. In the current climate, it is reassuring to know that Hungary has swiftly implemented all the newly required

cerned about health and safety, preferring to travel privately. There has been an increase in private jet bookings over the last few months, with business increasing by almost 300 per cent. Middle Eastern travellers spend an average of seven to 10 days at one destination. Tourists from the GCC look for safety, medical facilities, and Halal food. Hungary as a destination enjoys more awareness in the GCC than many other destinations."

Emily Jenkins, Head of Leisure UAE at dnata Travel said, "At dnata Travel, we have seen recent bookings coming through for Hungary. There are a lot of people in the region seeking new destinations to go to, particularly across Europe. Hungary is an excellent place to travel to for a holiday. But now travellers are adding Bu-

we consider as important when attracting travellers from the GCC is building local awareness of the destination. We have worked on many partnership marketing campaigns with Tourist Boards, which support in building travellers' awareness of the destination of the region. As part of these tailor-made campaigns, many of our decisions are driven by data in terms of who to target, and how to drive bookings."

Naouphale Mohammed, Head – Product Development & Global Contracting, ITL World "Relatively less promoted in GCC than its well established as well as newly marketed neighbours, Hungary has the right ingredients to attract and welcome all types of audience from the region. Continuous promotional initiatives featuring relevance is

culture, food and shopping can penetrate the family crowd, conducting wellness-oriented events for reputed medical practitioners and prominent personalities would result in medical movements. Engaging social influencers, corporate decision makers, government officials and importantly media and the travel fraternity can help increase interest in the country, provided the tourism promotional plan is a collective effort between Hungarian Tourism Board, Tourism companies and Hungarian Embassies and is based on a long term vision."

It is a city where walking is good to discover the architecture in Budapest — the cultural sites are hardly within 20 minutes from either sides of the city center

is good to discover the architecture in Budapest — the cultural sites are all within 20 minutes from either sides of the city center and find amazing spots. One important attraction is the spas; thermal baths that we have all over in

best seasons here: We have colourful Christmas markets and ice skating and, of course the baths. During the COVID-19, we had to change our tourism strategy. We focused on data, stats-driven marketing and focused on making the

FACTFILE

- Some spas were built in the beginning of 19th century and some during the rule of the Ottomans
- Hungary has the right ingredients to attract and welcome all types of tourists from GCC

Increasing Dubai's profile

► Contd. from page 1

as a leading global destination and make Dubai the world's best city to stay and visit.

The first race night of the New Year featured a total

Frame', with both races being dedicated to purebred Arabian horses.

The races will begin with the Al Jaddaf Mile presented by 'Museum of the Future', followed by

support the #DubaiDestinations initiative as part of its efforts to raise Dubai's profile as a leading global destination, in line with the vision of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum.

HH Sheikh Rashid bin Dalmook Al Maktoum added that Dubai's position in the equestrian field globally has enabled it to become a sports and tourist destination. The various sports events hosted in Dubai attract visitors annually to the emirate. The Meydan Racecourse is one of Dubai's distinctive destinations, Sheikh Rashid said. The racecourse has a 1.6 km long grandstand that can put up 60,000 spectators. It features 100 metre long screens, allowing spectators to have a clear view of the races. 🏇

“Dubai's position in the equestrian field globally has enabled it to become a sports and tourist destination. The various sports events hosted in Dubai attract visitors annually to the emirate”

— Sheikh Rashid bin Dalmook Al Maktoum

of seven races, including the 'UAE 1000 Guineas Trial', with the total prize money exceeding AED800,000. Each of the day's seven races will be named after one of Dubai's iconic destinations, beginning with 'Etihad Museum' maiden race followed by the second maiden race 'Dubai

four races bearing the names of tourist destinations in Dubai such as 'Ain Dubai', 'Burj Al Arab', 'Burj Khalifa', and 'The Palm Jumeirah'.

Sheikh Rashid bin Dalmook Al Maktoum, Chairman, Dubai Racing Club said that Dubai Racing Club is keen to

Pvt firms hail transition

► Contd. from page 1

looking forward to welcoming the global travel and tourism community to the UAE on May 9, 2022. Made possible by the UAE's forward-thinking decision to transition to a 4.5-day Monday-to-Friday work week, we are confident ATM 2022's new timings will benefit exhibitors and

companies welcomed the initiative. Now in its 29th year and working in collaboration with the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) and Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), the ATM 2022 will feature a broad selection of show highlights. ATM buyer forums and speed networking events



Association (GBTA) participate live in Dubai. The forum will cover current and future trends of tour operators and attractions by focusing on growing through marketing, technology among others. GBTA will deliver the latest business travel content to assist in the sector's recovery and support growth of business travel.

“Made possible by the UAE's decision to transition to a 4.5-day Monday-to-Friday workweek, we are confident ATM 2022's new timings will benefit exhibitors and attendees”

— Danielle Curtis

attendees by offering improved alignment with global markets.”

According to a poll conducted by the management consultancy Mercer, overall 84 per cent of the private sector

will take place during the four days of the travel market.

After joining remotely for ATM 2021, this year will see the ARIVALDubai@ATM forum and the Global Business Travel

ATM will play an integral role in Arabian Travel Week (May 9 to 19, 2022), a festival of events dedicated to enabling travel professionals from all over the world to collaborate and shape the recovery of the Middle East travel industry. 🌍

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Sarawak's strategy focussing on ME



Mulu National Park (UNESCO World Heritage Site)

Sharzede Salleh Askor, Chief Executive Officer, Sarawak Tourism Board shares their latest campaign where visitors can experience Sarawak, located on the Northwest coast of Malaysia, through the five-pillar strategy Culture, Adventure, Nature, Food and Festival in an exclusive interview with **TRAVTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

Give us a brief about Sarawak tourism?

Sarawak is home to one of the largest rainforests in the world with 27 ethnic groups living harmoniously against a backdrop of age-old heritage and elements of modernity, a destination where the distinctiveness of its culture, adventure, nature, food and festival is unlike anywhere else. Our total population is 2.9 million as of 2020, and being the biggest state in Malaysia, it is a comfortable population density for its people to enjoy the quality of life, and for our visitors to have

a satisfactory and stress-free travel experience without overcrowding. Our geographical landscape and impressive biodiversity are always the main attraction to visitors all over the world. Our visitors can experience Sarawak through the five pillars of Sarawak Tourism – CANFF.

Sarawak is blessed with bountiful green treasures

waiting to be explored and it is our duty to continue to protect and conserve its diverse ecosystem so we are able to preserve it for future generations to come. The STB's efforts in promoting responsible tourism echoes the Sarawak State Government's agenda of making Environmental Sustainability as one of the main pillars in Sarawak Economic Action Council

(SEAC) under its Post-COVID-19 Development Strategy 2030. STB is determined to making RT an integral part of all our tourism practices. As a sign of our commitment to build a mindset among industry players and visitors alike, in November 2021, about 200 players from Sarawak's tourism industry took a Responsible Tourism pledge, committing to reduce their environmental footprint, support local communities, and protect culture and heritage

“Our tourism players adopt eco-friendly practices in tourism products such as encouraging bicycle rides in rural areas or enjoy birdwatching in the rainforests”



Sharzede Salleh Askor
Chief Executive Officer, Sarawak Tourism Board

Adventure: The perfect place for adventure lovers as you can do many activities such as biking, caving and trekking among others.

Nature: For the pandemic fatigue — to go back to nature for healing, a great spot for birding, a haven for nature lovers.

Food: Sarawak is a destination of gastronomic abundance due to the diversity of cultures, bringing together so many different flavors for everyone to enjoy.

Festivals: Our iconic Rainforest World Music Festival and Borneo Jazz Festival are the most anticipated by visitors.

Last year, in 2021, we held the RWMF Virtual Experience where about 402,865 online viewers tuned in from 79 countries. The Borneo Jazz: A Virtual Journey 2021 was watched online by 244,637 viewers from 43 countries.

As we embark on the almost post COVID-19 era, what are the initiatives or new tourism strategies to re-introduce this destination to the ME travelers?

STB will pro-actively participate in the marketing activities by Tourism Malaysia in this region. Among the trade marketing events

Sarawak entails all interesting natural areas in Malaysia and the rich culture, so could you share more details on which areas you will focus on?

Our visitors can experience Sarawak through the five pillars of Sarawak Tourism – CANFF.

Culture: Sarawak's cultural diversity allows visitors to have an authentic experience with the locals. For example, staying in homestays in rural areas and sampling their food, and taking part in their cultural celebrations.



Sarawak Borneo Backyard, Bako National Park



are such as Arabian Travel Market, Dubai (May 2022) and Post-ATM Engagement, Dubai (May 2022).

How will you proactively promote this destination among agents?

By continuing to engage and collaborate with the industry partners in the Middle East. Provide marketing support to the industry partners in the Middle East and by supporting the marketing initiatives by Tourism Malaysia.

If the destination opens what will be the rules/regulations to be followed? Will it be quarantine-free PCR tests/vaccinated travelers what will be the procedure?

As per other countries, Malaysia has the SOPs for international travelers, which are as follows (the most latest): For overseas travellers entering Sarawak:

FULLY VACCINATED: Seven-Day Quarantine (RT-PCR Test Day 5), Risk Assessment on the last day of quarantine (Quarantine order may be extended if symptoms arise).

PARTIAL / NON-VACCINATED: 10-Day Quarantine ((RT-PCR Test Day 8), Risk Assessment on the last day may be extended if symptoms arise) Take note that all overseas travellers must undergo the RT-PCR Test two days before departure (two days validity).

Other requirements for Non-Malaysians: My TravelPass approval,

RT-PCR Test upon arrival at First Point of Entry, Home Quarantine is NOT ALLOWED.

A travel ban is currently on against: Botswana, Namibia, Eswatini, South Africa, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi. To further details on travellers' SOPs, please check Sarawak's State Disaster Management Committee (SDMC) website - <https://sarawakdisaster.mcm.com/> Note: For reference on the SOP

Any guidelines about obtaining visa for ME travelers?

Holders of passports from the Middle East are granted visa-free entry to Malaysia for 90 days. However, due to COVID-19, all foreigners are still banned

from entering Malaysia until further notice. At present, visa issuance is still suspended and any individual traveling to Malaysia still have to get a specific approval from the Malaysia Immigration Department before obtaining a visa.

Week 13 at the Dubai Expo is aptly named as "Ecotourism Week", so what is STB's insight on this?

STB's participation in Dubai Expo is a golden opportunity to put Sarawak at visitors' top of mind when it comes to eco-tourism and responsible tourism in the ASEAN region. STB aims to strengthen Sarawak's visibility worldwide and to showcase as the leading and preferred eco-tourism destination.



Orangutans in Semenggoh Wildlife Centre near Kuching-Lela



When it comes to Sustainability and Responsible Tourism (RT), can you elaborate on STB's efforts in promoting RT?

Responsible tourism is about making a positive impact on the places that we visit – by being responsible for the environment; people as well as tangible and intangible heritage. It means creating awareness and helping in the conservation of old monuments. The STB highlights three UN Sustainable Development Goals which are Quality Education (SDG 4), Responsible Consumption and Production (SGD 12), and Partnerships for the Goals (SGD 17). The STB has taken various steps to create a sustainable tourism industry since 2011. Our tourism players adapt eco-friendly practices in their tourism products such as encouraging bicycle rides in rural areas or enjoy birdwatching in Sarawak's rainforests.

We promote homestays, encourage consumption of local food, and highlight local handicrafts and arts.

Such community-based tourism can be found in areas such as Nanga Sumpa in Batang Ai where travellers can gain an insight into the lifestyle of the various tribes of Sarawak. These efforts can generate economy for its residents. Sarawak's biggest orangutan rehabilitation centre, Semenggoh Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, is a sanctuary for the conservation of the orangutans in their natural habitat. The STB takes environmental issues seriously and together with tourism players, we embark on activities such as waste management. We encourage tourism players in Sarawak to participate in initiatives such as banning of single use plastics, upcycling used materials and exploring innovative solutions to waste management. These initiatives include the hotel industry turning food waste into compost or rural homestays operators converting used oil into soap products.

What are the STB's significant achievements in 2021?

STB's efforts in promoting RT has been recog-

nised by WTM Responsible Tourism Awards 2021 in which our Rainforest World Music Festival and Borneo Jazz Festival virtual experiences were named as 'One to Watch'. The awards acknowledges excellence in RT and selected these festivals in the in the Destinations Building Back Better Post-COVID-19 category.

We are proud to say that the City of Kuching has recently been included as one of the 49 new cities under UNESCO's Creative Cities Network (UCCN) under the field of gastronomy. We invite foodies everywhere to experience our food culture and feast on Sarawak's gastronomic abundance.

It is our duty to continue to protect and conserve Sarawak's diverse ecosystem so we are able to preserve it for future generations to come



FACTFILE

■ 27 ethnic groups live in a destination where the distinctiveness of its culture, adventure, nature, food and festival is unlike anywhere else

■ It is a perfect place for sports lovers as you can indulge in many adventure activities

Langkawi: An island of great escapes



Skybridge - Panorama Langkawi

One of the first areas to open in Malaysia for domestic visitors and then international travellers, Langkawi has repositioned itself as safe and adventurous destination with many offerings for the Middle East tourist. **Nasaruddin Bin Abdul Mutalib**, CEO Langkawi Development Authority shares with **TRAVELTALK**.

 Shehara Rizly

Do share with us about Langkawi Development Authority?

Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) is the leading agency on the island together with the stakeholders are committed in making sure the island unleash its true potential. LADA envisions to brand

ing tourists to explore the island's varied attractions, heritage and natural beauty logging the trip with the high spots of a visit the northern Malaysian island.

- **Langkawi Skycab:** The perfect photo spot set against the Machinchang Mountain, Langkawi Sky-Bridge brings you to the best viewing point on Langkawi. The spectacular

walk along a wooden platform through a mangrove swamp while admiring the natural beauty of the overhanging Bogak tree, tree crabs, macaques and unique limestone formations. The path leads you directly to a bat-filled cave! You can also explore the forest reserve via boat and learn all about its ecology and migratory birds.

- **Mangrove Tour at Kubang Badak Bio Geo Trail:** A perfect blend of a rich river estuary ecosystem, mangrove forests, high geological diversity and a history of early Thai community settlement pushes the path to develop a new geotour-

ism around the village. The concept of biogeotrail expands based on the idea of conservation and sustainable management of natural resources.

- **Island hopping at Dayang Bunting Marble Geoforest Park:** Most tourists visit the Lake of the Pregnant Maiden as part of an island-hopping tour, unaware there is more to explore in Dayang Bunting's populated north. Those who sail around to the island's northern jetty can spend a day exploring marble rock and terra rosa (red clay) formations, caves filled with stalactites and stalagmites, local villages, and unique flora



Nasaruddin Bin Abdul Mutalib
CEO Langkawi Development Authority

and fauna, including hornbills, kingfishers, and macaque monkeys.

- **Paradise 101:** Tourists who want to spend the day

relaxing, enjoying some watersports activities or even spend the night at a private island party, this island caters to all. Located near Telaga Harbour at Pantai Kok in Langkawi, Paradise 101 can be accessed via boat shuttle which gets to the island in minutes.

- **Eagle Square:** This 12m tall eagle is the most iconic landmark of Langkawi, and of course, it is on the top of the list! The best time to take a picture with this majestic eagle is in the morning with the big blue sky as the background. Folklore has it that Lang-

“Tourists visit Lake of the Pregnant Maiden as part of island-hopping tour, unaware there is more to explore in Dayang Bunting's populated north”

Langkawi as a world-class tourism destination. To this end, LADA will mobilize the implementation of tourism industry development in Langkawi to benefit the community, state, and country through strategic planning and governance.

What are the top tourism products available in Langkawi?

Langkawi is encourag-

view of Langkawi is all at a glance. The suspended bridge challenges you to stride proudly 100m above ground and at 660m above sea level while still striking Instagram-worthy poses.

- **Mangrove Tour at Kilim Geoforest Park:** Experience the wonders of nature at Langkawi's coastal mangrove forest. Stopping at the jetty, you can then



Eagle Square

kawi got its name from two Malay words: 'helang' – eagle and 'kawi' – reddish-brown. This eagle, specifically Brahminy Kite, can be seen around Langkawi.

- **Waterfalls:** This is the most picturesque waterfalls on the island consists of three main waterfalls which is Seven Wells, Temurun Waterfall and Durian Perangin Waterfall. While it requires some hiking, the view is all worth it once you witness the grandeur of the waterfall. Get your bathing suit ready and have a refreshing bath after the hike.

- **Jet ski ride island tour:** Doing a jetski tour is a completely different experience - you can get up close to the islands, and spend more time appreciating the environment.

- **Underwater world:** It's the amazing Underwater World! Walk beneath the underwater tunnel and take



Kilim Karst Geoforest Park

free chocolate, swaying coconut trees, and beautiful sunsets.

- **Sunset Cruise:** Enjoy waterways of Langkawi Island for a memorable occasion. A leisurely cruise around the world-famous islands, and other iconic landmarks while enjoying fabulous food, entertainment, and spectacular views is the perfect

Upcoming Products

- **Maha Tower:** One of the best things in life is a stunning view, hence with this in mind, the Maha Tower was conceptualised. Visitors can rise up and take in the beauty of Langkawi Island within the same tower that adds a unique and impressive presence to the existing landscape.

- **Eco Marine Park:** The Perdana Quay Eco Marine Park is Asia's First Interactive Seawater Theme Park located in Pantai Kok, Langkawi. Set to open in the first quarter of 2021, the Perdana Quay Eco Marine Park will be an exciting new addition to the island.

What are new tourism strategies to re-introduce Langkawi to the Middle East travelers?

- **My Safe Langkawi** - 'My Safe Langkawi Campaign, where we accredited premises and business owner of accommodation, F&B, travel agent, tourism attraction and shopping outlet that adhere to the SOP. Upon qualification, they will be awarded with the Certificate of Compliance COVID-19 SOP and Travel Quality Best Practices. These premises will be promoted by LADA, Tourism Malaysia and National Security Council.

- **Langkawi International Travel Bubble (LITB):** The Malaysian Government launched its first International Travel Bubble by reopening Langkawi Island to fully-vaccinated international tourists beginning November 15 last, with no quarantine requirements. LITB packages launched on December 30, 2021 include Langkawi International Travel Bubble Tour Packages sell to Middle East tourists.

- Other than that, LADA also offers MICE incentives to DMC / travel agents who brings the MICE group to Langkawi. The group will stay a minimum of 3 nights in Langkawi with maximum

“Those who want to spend the day relaxing, enjoying some watersports activities or even spend the night at a private island party, this island caters to all”

50 pax and above will entitled to get a welcome dinner / high tea, a cultural performance / welcome ceremony upon arrival and goodies bags.

How will you proactively promote this destination among agents?

We will regularly promote Langkawi both domestically and internationally. Promoting through Langkawi Travel Fair that organized by LADA with the joint promotion by the travel agents to promote Langkawi. We are also in line with Tourism Malaysia while promoting Langkawi to the international market together with travel agents. We also do the FAM tour to familiarize the agents about Langkawi's tourism products. Similar to reopening of Langkawi for domestic, LADA are working closely with MOTAC (Ministry of Tourism) in coming out with the complete SOP for International Market. The plan is

to first open up via Charter Flight Arrangement by this year. This is to allow a more sustainable and manageable environment, where the tourists are made compulsory to purchase their holiday packages prior travelling to Langkawi. Having said that, LADA has spoken to Langkawi Industry Players, and they look forward to offer a personalized itinerary to cater for the international tourist. Coming back to the Charter Flight Arrangement, there are a few interested parties that has reached to us thus far such as, Russia, China and Singapore. They are ready to fly to Langkawi once our borders are open for tourism purposes. We also look forward to welcome international tourist via scheduled flight early next year. Prior

to this, Langkawi enjoys the international connectivity to more than 160 destinations worldwide via Qatar Airways that fly directly from Doha.

Are there any new features to attract the Middle East visitors?

Mostly, the Middle East market love beaches, waterfalls and nature. They would love to come with family and friends to Langkawi. Majority of them come for honeymoon. They also like to spend to stay at the luxury accommodation while having the private nature tour in Langkawi.

FACTFILE

- LADA offers MICE incentives to DMC / travel agents who brings the MICE group to Langkawi

- Made up of 99 islands, Langkawi is the perfect beach getaway destination in Malaysia



Payar Island

a breathtaking shot with the sharks. Or you can opt for the cuter and chicky penguins! With three different climatic themes – Tropical Rainforest, Temperate and Sub-Antarctic, you get to see all about marine lives around the world.

- **Beaches:** Langkawi is the perfect beach getaway destination in Malaysia. Made up of 99 islands on the northwestern coast of Malaysia, this sunny tropical paradise is filled with jungle-clad hills, sandy beaches, duty-

way to celebrate a special event – or make any day one of a kind.

- **Splash Out:** Designed with a classic coastal architecture at the forefront, Splash Out Langkawi, set amidst 12 acres, offers 12 slides and rides with a never-ending escapade of spills and thrills for everyone. Located in Kuah Town, 8 minutes from the Jetty Point Duty Free and 23 minutes from the Langkawi International Airport, Splash Out is the isle's latest attraction.

Envisioned as a new landmark public space with a performance stage to boot, the Dataran will serve as the hub of a neighbourhood masterplan containing world-class retail, residential zones, hotels, and entertainment facilities. The Maha Tower and Square will support the goals of the Langkawi Local Plan 2030, which is aimed at establishing the island as a modern tourism centre without compromising its traditional elements.

HABTOOR GRAND RESORT, AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION

Dubai



Aziz Sharipov has joined Habtoor Grand Resort, Autograph Collection as a Director of Sales. He will overlook the sales activity at the property. With 12 years of experience in sales handling leisure and corporate, he has worked with Sheraton Grand, Grand Hyatt Dubai and Hyatt Regency. At the resort, Sharipov will ensure business development of the resort's established image in the local and the International markets.

COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT WORLD TRADE CENTER

Dubai



Munish Sharma was appointed as the new Hotel Manager at Courtyard by Marriott World Trade Center, Abu Dhabi. With an experience of 12 years in managing hotels and driving sales and operations, Sharma has a good track record in the industry. He started his career with Oberoi Hotel in India. Later, he joined Marriott Goa in 2012 and moved to Courtyard Green Community Dubai as Housekeeping Manager.

HILTON SALWA BEACH RESORT & VILLAS

Doha, Qatar



Rishab Sahney joined Hilton Salwa Beach Resort & Villas as the new Commercial Director from January 1, 2022. He recently served as the Director of Revenue Management at the resort. He will be responsible for managing the resort across sales and marketing, revenue management, business development, and project management. Prior to joining Hilton, he served as the Area Director formulating revenue strategies at five Qatar properties.

INTERTOUCH HOSPITALITY

Dubai

Niraj Nadkarni has been appointed as the Vice President, Sales and General Manager, Middle East and Africa by interTouch, the leading provider of cloud-based Internet and guest-facing technology to the international hospitality industry. Nadkarni will be responsible for the growth and business strategy of the company in the regions. With more than 25 years of experience in the fields of sales and business development in the luxury hospitality industry and nearly all of it in the Middle East, he has held different senior management positions in important hospitality technology vendors.



LEVA HOTELS

Dubai

Thomas Kurian has joined as the new hotel manager of LEVA Hotels. Armed with 24 years of experience in the industry, Kurian brings a fleet of strategic skills across Sales, Marketing and Revenue fields to the table. A passionate hotelier, he has previously served at reputable establishments ranging from the Byblos Hospitality in Dubai to Flora Hospitality and Al Khoory Hotels. With two certifications from Cornell University and decades of hands-on experience, Kurian has embarked on his latest role at LEVA Hotels.



MARRIOTT HOTEL AL FORSAN

Abu Dhabi

Jayadev Nakka has been appointed as the new Assistant Director of PR & Marketing of Marriott Hotel Al Forsan in Khalifa City, Abu Dhabi. Nakka is experienced in marketing, communications and design while delivering successful campaigns. He joined Marriott International in 2013 as a Marketing and Communications Executive and worked at many Marriott International hotels in UAE and India during his career. Previously with Aloft Abu Dhabi, Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa, Four Points Mahabalipuram, Courtyard by Marriott, Madurai among others.



ST.REGIS DUBAI, THE PALM

Dubai

Antoine Nassrallah has joined as the Director of Sales and Distribution of The St. Regis Dubai, The Palm with specialized experience spanning 10 years working with luxury hotels across the country. Hailing from the small island of Friday Harbor, Washington, the US, his career in hospitality was ignited from summer jobs working at his family restaurant. In 2010, Nassrallah graduated with a BA in International Hospitality Management from the Swiss Hotel Management School, backing his passions with a strong educational background.



THE CHEDI AL BAIT

Sharjah, UAE

Fabio Marigliano has been appointed as the General Manager by General Hotel Management Ltd (GHM) for The Chedi Al Bait, Sharjah, UAE. Marigliano brings 20 years of experience to the award-winning team at The Chedi Al Bait. His expertise in the GCC region puts him in good stead to curate more memorable guest experiences. Recently, Marigliano served as the executive assistant manager at Minor Hotels and Resorts in Doha, Qatar with pre-openings of The Vyra Suites NH Collection Doha office and The Plaza Doha by Anantara.



THE CHEDI KATARA HOTEL & RESORT

Doha, Qatar

Morton Johnston is appointed as the General Manager this year by General Hotel Management Ltd (GHM) for the opening of The Chedi Katara Hotel & Resort in Doha, Qatar. His role will support GHM's growth strategy in the GCC region and provide service excellence as the group celebrates its 30th anniversary. A familiar name at GHM, he served as the GM at The Chedi Muscat, Oman. Johnston's experience includes positions at Regent Hotels & Resorts in Taipei and The Leela Palaces & Resorts in India.



New hotels in the region

The year kick-started with some brand new hotels opening in UAE and Morocco in some of most prestigious areas aimed at different types and budgets of tourists. We have shared some of the hotels to be opened in upcoming months.



Paramount Hotel Midtown
Dubai | Number of Rooms/Suites – 281

Set in the heart of Business Bay Dubai, the hotel offers a timeless guest experience and brings to life the Californian magic with its design, upscale dining experiences and celebrity spa and fitness centre. The hotel's elegant rooms are enhanced by balconies overlooking the Dubai coastline or Burj Khalifa.



Conrad Rabat Arzana
Morocco | Number of Rooms/Suites – 120

Featuring 120 spacious guest rooms, Hilton's first luxury hotel in Morocco overlooks a spectacular and tranquil lagoon and beach. Guests will be able to experience the breathtaking surroundings while enjoying locally inspired food at Hilton's two restaurants. The hotel also offers a fully appointed spa and salon.

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and be a winner of Arabian Travel Awards!!



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