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Saudi push for digital tourism

In a move to accelerate and future proof the kingdom's tourism sector, Saudi Arabia recently announced its digital tourism strategy for the next three years targeting 10 percent of GDP contribution from the sector.

Shehara Rizly

As the kingdom of Saudi Arabia sets to attract global talent, build the next generation of digital tourism skills and create job opportunities with the aim to become global leaders in digital tourism, this move has been endorsed by the UNWTO and



His Excellency Ahmed Al Khateeb
Minister of Tourism
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

World Bank. Over the past years, research carried out by various travel technology companies revealed that the kingdom of Saudi Arabia was ahead in the use of mobile technology for bookings pre-covid time. The Ministry of Tourism is pioneering nine innovative programmes consisting of 31 core initiatives by 2025 – positively im-

pacting residents, visitors, investors and the public and private sectors. These programmes will accelerate the Kingdom's National Tourism Strategy and Vision 2030 targets, including 100 million new visits, tourism's 10 per cent GDP contribution and 1 million new tourism jobs.

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Mohamed Al Rais is new DTTAG Chairman

Rais's appointment as Honorary Chairman of DTTAG came into effect from February 2022.

Shehara Rizly

Mohamed Jassim Al Rais is a young dynamic Emirati with extensive experience in the travel and tourism industry. He graduated from American University, Sharjah, in 2006. His initial introduction to the Al Rais Group of Companies was



Mohamed Jassim Al Rais
Honorary Chairman,
DTTAG

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Gulf Travel Show is back to redefine travel

Fourth edition of the two-day Gulf Travel Show will begin virtually on March 22 this year.

Shehara Rizly

After the success of three editions, held in November 2020, March 2021 and October 2021, the Gulf Travel Show is back on popular demand in 2022.

The timing of the virtual trade show will be between 10am and 3pm UAE time. It will be an opportunity to network with travel agents and tour operators from the



Middle East. Travel products from across the world have signed up to participate. Like last time, exhibitors and buyers can log in to the GTS platform from anywhere. Each exhibitor will be given own private virtual booth.

For more info, contact crisna@ddpl.com.

Celebrating women leaders

As International Women's Day approaches, TRAVTALK celebrates the women leaders in tourism and hospitality sectors, who are doing extraordinary work in their fields and inspiring coming generation.

Shehara Rizly

Inspiration to join travel tech

I've always been passionate about the next era of travel, and I quickly established that technology would play a significant role on how the travel industry will evolve. Simply put, I wanted to be a part of the evolution. As consumers become more advanced and



Kathryn Wallington
Head of Middle East, Africa, UK and Ireland
Travelport

discerning, technology can provide a tailored, customised solution at

scale. Today, together with my team, I am responsible for delivering best-in-class technology that meets the evolving needs of all Travelport's customers across the regions and I feel fortunate to sit on the frontlines of the travel tech evolution.

Journey in the industry

I knew from an early age that I wanted to go into

the travel industry. I studied Travel and Tourism and quickly established that the industry is extremely vast. I started as a Sales Consultant with Thomas Cook Retail, and after holding various positions over 13 memorable years, I left the organisation as a Regional Sales Manager. On reflection, I can truly say their training allowed me to develop both

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COVID-19: Emirates recovers 90% lost ground

As Dubai opened earlier in 2020 during the pandemic, Emirates Airline started off by adding more destinations to its network, and today the national carrier is on the path of full recovery. **Adil Al Ghaith**, Senior Vice President, Commercial Operations, Gulf Middle East and Central Asia for Emirates shares the success with **TRAVELTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

Could you share about the destinations that have resumed flight operations from Dubai?

For Emirates, 2021 was an opportunity to con-

print with a new destination - Miami - taking our passenger network to 128 destinations. We also boosted frequencies and capacity across our network, and expanded the list of destinations served by our A380 to 27.

hope to restart this year, both eastbound and westbound.

Are there any new products introduced for passengers at present?

We are always introducing new products and services, both in the air and on the ground. One launch we are particularly excited about is the full rollout of our premium economy hard and soft product, which will be an elevated experience that is truly in line with our 'fly better' proposition. On the ground, we continue to enhance our lounge offering for premium passengers, and we also recently introduced a newly upgraded unaccompa-



Adil Al Ghaith
Senior Vice President, Commercial Operations, Gulf Middle East and Central Asia, Emirates Airline

including biometric journeys and contactless technology, reducing contact and ensuring a safer on ground journey.

When will the premium economy class come in to effect and which destinations will you be looking at first?

Our premium economy product was introduced in late 2020 to much acclaim and positive feedback from our customers, and today it is currently available on six A380s flying to London Heathrow, Paris, New York and Frankfurt. We plan to retrofit 120 of our modern wide-body A380 and 777 aircraft with the Premium Economy product. The

18-month retrofit programme, scheduled to begin at the end of 2022, will be entirely conducted at Emirates' Engineering Centre in Dubai.

Will you be introducing any new schemes for corporate travellers?

With countries easing their entry restrictions, business travel has begun accelerating, and for our corporate customers, we are closely looking at their evolving expectations of the travel experience and what matters to them today. We work hard to deliver a premium experience to sets us apart from our competition because in short - our customers notice. 🇦🇪

“We restarted services to 17 more cities last year, and expanded our US footprint with a new destination - Miami.”

siderably recover our network, fleet and operations, as travel restrictions began to ease. We restarted services to 17 more cities last year, and expanded our US foot-

What will be your strategy to restart the routes?

We have already recovered over 90 per cent of our pre-pandemic network, and have a few more routes that we

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Tourism Breaking News

Emirates signs MoU with Thailand Tourism

Kuwait Airways to operate to Madrid from June 11

No PCR needed to travel onboard Etihad Airways

Dubai College of Tourism to train professional tour guides

KSA to build region's largest water theme park

Qatar Airways and Malaysia Airlines sign a deal

IHG opens first Crowne Plaza hotel in Egypt

Makkah and Doha expanding hotel inventory by 76% STR

Ayla and Kerten ventures into a new project in Aqaba

C Central Resort the Palm to attract more visitors from the UK

Dubai all set for business events

Dubai is a known leisure destination. With good connectivity, visa-on-arrival facility for people from 70 countries, and blended option of business and leisure travel, the city becomes an ideal place for those looking for a destination to organise their events.

Back to business! As the National Emergency Crisis and Disasters Management Authority (NCEMA) announces that all activities, events, and social gatherings in Dubai can gradually return to full capacity by February 15, there is a renewed fervour amid the local and global business community. The Dubai Government has worked closely with the public and private sectors to fight the pandemic. From vaccination availability to ease of vaccination appointment bookings, Dubai has indeed showcased resilience.

In 2020, the Dubai Department of Tourism & Commerce Marketing formed a new Business Events Stakeholders Committee. The group has key industry stakeholders. The committee, which will meet regu-

larly throughout the year, provides a platform for two-way dialogue around the continuous, strategic and operational development of the competitive position of Dubai as a host city for international business events.

Dubai is a known leisure destination. According to Global Media Insight (GMI), in 2020, 5.51 million visitors visited Dubai. The total number of visitors from January to May 2021 was 2.06 million. Although the pandemic has slowed down travel, Dubai's comeback has been phenomenal. As a result, the city is even more successful and presents an ideal spot for those looking for an ideal destination for their events. The city has witnessed considerable growth in MICE activities.

One of the biggest advantages of the city is its

connectivity. The airport is one of the busiest in the world, with nearly all major airlines flying to its two

According to Global Media Insight, in 2020, 5.51 million visitors visited Dubai. The total number of visitors from January to May 2021 was 2.06 million

terminals and Emirates Airlines - Dubai's flagship carrier - providing connectivity across global economies. Additionally, Dubai offers visa-on-arrival for nearly 70 countries, making travel hassle-free. What makes the city even more desirable for business events are the multiple business hotels and hubs across the city.

Another advantage of the city is its variety of appeal. Business and leisure travel motivations can blend together, allowing business

trips to incorporate a leisure component, providing families flexibility in their holiday planning. In addition, it of-

fers metro connectivity and restaurants within walking distance. A major addition to the city is also the Expo 2020 site. Not only has the event brought the world together, it offers a great venue for local and international corporates to hold their events. The city not only offers world-class facilities but also ensures safety of its people and tourists.

A significant milestone for the city is also the Dubai Remote Work Visa launched in 2021.

As business events play a significant role in building the economic development of a country, Dubai's major appeal as a business event hub will continue to emphasise its capabilities and offerings. Despite the pandemic limiting some major global events, the slow but steady pick up will indeed be welcome. With the various initiatives and post-pandemic recovery predictions, Dubai is well on its way to achieving that.



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

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

San Marino showcases its offers

The Republic of San Marino planned a host of activities over two days to celebrate their National Day at Expo 2020. The National Days at Expo 2020 Dubai give country pavilions an opportunity to celebrate their culture and achievements while showcasing the special features of their pavilion.

The San Marino pavilion highlights the country's unique attractions, treasures, natural resources and heritage elements. San Marino's presence at Expo Dubai reinforces the country's efforts to position itself as a resourceful country



with must-see tourist destination nestled within Northern Italy and easily accessible via key airports such as Rome and Bologna. San Marino is an independent country founded more than 1700 years ago

with 33 inhabitants. The San Marino Pavilion, located in the Opportunity District, is dedicated to the replica of the "Treasure of Domagnano" found in San Marino in late 1800. The most important

piece of the treasure, the fibula is now at Louvre Abu Dhabi. The pavilion tells the history and tradition of the country as well as its modern economic system based on tourism, but also in innovative companies.

Experience of Rais will be an asset: DTTAG

► Contd. from page 1

made in 2002 through a Management Development Programme and in 2008 he was given a leadership role in Al Rais Holidays, Al

Asim Arshad, President, DTTAG, said: "On behalf of the Executive Committee members, it is our sincere pleasure to welcome Mohamed Al Rais as our Chairman. Mohamed is a highly respected

On behalf of the Executive Committee members, it is our sincere pleasure to welcome Mohamed Al Rais as our Chairman

— Asim Arshad, President, DTTAG

Rais Online Services and Al Rais Rent - A - Car Company. Al Rais is now the Deputy Managing Director of Al Rais Travel & Shipping Agencies (Al Rais Group) and spearheads the Strategic Direction and Growth Plan of the organisation.

individual and is very actively involved in managing and running Al Rais Travel & Shipping Agencies (Al Rais Group). His experience and network will be an asset to DTTAG and we look forward to working with him in the near future." 🇦🇪

Spain Tourism signs MoU to lure UAE travellers

As the borders of Spain opened earlier in the European region, many travellers from the UAE benefited, as the entry requirements were flexible making it one of the most popular outbound destinations. **TRAVTALK** explores the relationship further by getting information first hand from the team from Spain and the UAE.

 Shehara Rizly

The United Arab Emirates and Spain relationship got further strengthened after Emirates and Turespaña, a Spanish tourism institute, signed a memorandum of understanding to explore joint activities to drive tourism to Spain, including trade familiarisation trips, workshops and marketing campaigns.

Reyes Maroto, Minister of Industry, Commerce and Tourism of the Government of Spain, shared, "For Spain, the market of the Middle East, in particular,

the United Arab Emirates, is a priority market. We are now talking about an increase in the travel flow to Spain from this region, es-

“For Spain, the market of the Middle East, in particular, the United Arab Emirates, is a priority market. We are now talking about an increase in the travel flow to Spain from this region”

pecially as the connectivity between the two countries witnesses an improvement.”

Maroto added, "And there is big reason that makes

Spain an attractive destination for Emirati tourists, which is the annual visit of the Royal Family to Spain. Moreover, there is an ele-

ment of connection, which is built on culture, friendship and also the roots that an Emirati can find in Spain, which consists of a heritage that we take very seri-

ously to protect, make Spain a very desirable destination.”

There are two elements that Spain and the UAE share with each other. "The first is the security; both countries have implemented very successful vaccination plans and that make us to be considered as safe destinations. This, in turn, should reflect in the increase in travel flow between both countries as tourist find confidence in the security measures of-



Reyes Maroto
Minister of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, Government of Spain

ferred. And we also offer experiences, that we are improving through focusing on sustainability, conserving

heritage, and having a focus on other destinations, not only sand and sun destinations, so that the citizens of this country are sure to enjoy visiting Spain," she said.

The minister further reiterated, "The presence of Spain at the Expo Dubai has given it the opportunity through its pavilion to showcase itself in the area of sustainability to a global audience and offer surprises and also through Chess."

Miguel Angel Sanz, Director General, Tourspain, Madrid, shared, "Spain is the leading destination in the world and before the pandemic in 2019, we received more than 83 million international visitors that made our country the second most visited country in the world and also second most important in terms of tourism income." Sanz added, "It is important for



Miguel Angel Sanz
Director General, Tourspain, Madrid

us as tourism represents 12.5 per cent of GDP and

almost 40 per cent of work force in tourism. It is also important to know that we have been steadily recovering from this pandemic. According to the last figures that we have in December, we have recovered more than 70 per cent of the visitors that we had in December 2019. So, we are on our way to a full recovery and beyond." So what is after recovery? "I think that

everyone, every destination, every travel company needs to focus on one single thing which is sustain-

is investing almost USD 4 billion in the renewal and in the transformation of the tourism system in Spain.

“I think everyone, every destination, every travel company needs to focus on one single thing — sustainability. Sustainability is not just a fashion word..; it is something that we have to do”

ability. Sustainability is not just a fashion word, it's not just something we have to talk about; it's something that we have to do. Spain

We are investing more than 2 billion Euros, almost USD 4.3 billion, in sustainable projects. In three years that will transform radically

the tourism and travel industry in Spain making it more sustainable, making it more reliable and making it more fun for our visitors," he said.

What is sustainability? "Of course it's environmental sustainability, but it's also social sustainability. So, we want our visitors to know that every time they come to visit Spain they are making a great impact, a positive impact in the local communities they visit," Sanz said.

Daniel Rosado, Director, Spain Tourism, GCC Countries, said, "We celebrated the national day at Expo

ister of foreign affairs and the minister of tourism. We are very happy in the sense that the minister of tourism

required from the ministry in Spain and how the travel trade in the UAE can help to improve the promotion of our destination in the country and the region."

Spain is leading in the vaccination effort in Europe same as the UAE leading in this region, Spain has 90 per cent and UAE with almost 100 per cent. "MICE is something very big in Spain, we have many worldwide events in Spain




Daniel Rosado
Director, Spain Tourism, GCC Countries

with Madrid and Barcelona leading the way followed

by other cities that are doing really great in MICE. In this pandemic obviously the MICE meetings have reduced, but we celebrated FITUR in January, which was a clear example of having measures implemented that provides certainty and safe way of doing events. We had more than 100 countries present at the FITUR fair and thousands of

people visited. The numbers were really big under the circumstances," he said.

"With the facilities we have, it is a place that we can really host safe events. For this year, we are going to retrieve some of the previous strategies we used in previous years, we are going to come back with fam (familiarisation) trips. We are also coming back for the ATM. We will be accessing according to the situation in all the countries in GCC," he added. 

“With the facilities we have, it is a place that we can really host safe events... For this year, we are going to retrieve some of the previous strategies we used in previous years”

and we are delighted to state that our President from the government of Spain graced the occasion with two other ministers; the min-

extended her stay in order to meet and greet the travel and tourism partners in the UAE to have a personal understanding of what is

Be consistent, success will follow

► Contd. from page 1

Inspiration to join aviation

I was initially inspired by my underlying passion for flying and discovering the beauty of the world. I also had a strong desire to learn new, different and interesting things.

Journey so far in the industry

My journey began when I first joined the industry as a flight attendant. After flying for a few years, I transitioned to other areas of the aviation sector—but this time on the ground. I started off in sales and worked my way up to Country Manager in Bahrain and within the GCC.



Madina Al Balushi
Country Manager - Bahrain
Oman Air

Achievements and challenges

Key milestones and achievements should always be viewed within the context of getting the job done successfully. Ensure customer satisfaction are always at the forefront of career milestones. Being consistent in your areas means that achieve-

ments and successes will inevitably follow.

Secrets to success in life

Success comes from the heart — as long as you have a deep desire to make your dreams come true, then anything is possible. As long as you follow your passion, and complement it with hard work, your knowledge will succeed in what you do.

Message to aspiring women

I would encourage women to begin their journey in aviation early on and to fully embrace the challenges of a dynamic and innovative industry.

Inspiration to join travel trade

As early as at 19 years of age, I felt I had a flair and passion to learn about new destinations, their customs, meet new people from different walks of life and so many such aspects within travel. I also knew that I had dedication, good research and organising skills, compassionate about people's need by understanding their requirement and above all I was yearning for adventure. All this paved the path for me to take up a career as a travel agent.

Journey so far in the industry

I believe I was destined to be in this industry.

During my early years of being a university student, I was recruited by Emirates to be a fare auditor within the airline where I served for over



Deepa Iyer
Director of Sales & Business Development
Cozmo Travel

three years. Thereafter, I moved the ladder to be a fraud prevention officer and then within the Holidays division. In 2008, my current CEO gave me an opportu-

nity to work with the Air Arabia Group where I got a chance to do multiple roles and also grew organically within the company. I made sure in all my journey, I never stopped learning and keeping myself briefed constantly about the industry, which is the reason I continuously moved through the positive direction.

Achievements and challenges

I started as a fare auditor to fraud prevention officer, to a travel consultant, to where I am today, leading Sales and Business Development for one of the largest TMC in the region. With God's grace and His blessings combined

Contd. on page 20 ►

Inspiration to join industry

I belong to a place in Ireland called County Kerry, which is often referred to as the home of tourism due to its beauty and the long established thriving tourism industry that exists there. Being from such a place people used to say that tourism is in my blood.

Journey so far in the industry

I started out working for Shannon Development, which is a regional development agency based in the South West of Ireland. This company established the first ever free zone in the world in Shannon and world's first ever Duty Free also at Shannon Airport. I then worked for the tourism board in the Republic of Ireland called Failte Ireland on the Wild



Siobhan Naughton
Marketing & Trade Executive ME & Asia
Tourism Ireland

Atlantic Way Team before joining Tourism Ireland here in Dubai six years ago. The Wild Atlantic Way is presumably the world's longest defined coastal touring route.

Achievements and challenges

The main milestones in my career have happened since I started working for Tourism Ireland here in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Ireland becoming visa-free for UAE nationals at the end of January 2018 was

definitely a highlight and I know that our upcoming Middle East Sales Mission, which is being led by Catherine Martin, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media, and Tourism Ireland's CEO Niall Gibbons, will be another highlights.

Secrets to success in life

As the oriental proverb goes "Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life". It ensures that whatever you do life, you will love to do it, which will ultimately take you miles in life.

Message to aspiring women

Go for it, it is such a lovely industry to work in, and the people are always so positive and supportive to each other.

Inspiration and journey so far

I was born in the hospitality industry as my father was the General Manager with the Oberoi Hotels & Resorts Group. As he took over different hotels, we travelled a lot and lived in 10 countries and travelled to over 50 cities. As a result, I learnt to embrace different cultures early in my life. I loved meeting people and interacting with different nationalities, making me fall in love with this industry. When I was very young, I had told my father I would follow in his footsteps and join the industry as well.

At that time no one took me seriously and today when I look back, life has come full circle indeed! Venturing into Public Relations happened

by chance as initially I thought I would get into the business side of things; hence I had graduated in Business Management from the University of Warwick in UK, but it seemed



Deveekaa Nijhawan
Global Lead for International PR & Communications, Qatar Tourism

destiny had other things planned for me.

Looking back, I couldn't have chosen a more befitting career path. I have received multiple promotions at the iconic Le Méridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre, head hunted as the Director

of PR & Communications for Niyama Private Islands Maldives, been promoted to the Cluster Director of PR & Marketing Communications for the entire Anantara Group in the Maldives and been awarded the coveted Hotelier Middle East Award for the Best PR and Marketing Person in the Middle East & Africa region amongst 500 nominees.

Last year I started a new journey with Qatar Tourism, leading the International PR & Communications Strategy. The transition from hospitality to the tourism industry has been very seamless, wherein I have been able to leverage my years of hospitality, media relations and communications experience to increase awareness and advocacy for

Contd. on page 20 ►

Expo, FIFA to drive business to the region

Over the past few months, Expo has impacted travellers into the UAE. **Mohamed Khater**, Regional Manager and Managing Partner of Flash Horizon, part of Flash Group, shares with **TRAVTALK** the latest inbound trends and their way forward to open a new division.

 Shehara Rizly

Has there been new inbound source markets to the UAE?

We have seen the rise of tourists from CIS markets such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the UAE. As soon

visited Dubai. The UK and France follows close to the five markets mentioned earlier.

What are the plans for Flash Horizon created in the UAE?

We opened the outbound division at Flash Horizon targeting our strong base destinations such

to be prepared and think and act differently to present something new to our clients. Very soon we will be looking at some unexplored destinations where it will be new and a different experience.

Has Expo impacted inbound travel?

Expo has a very positive impact to the travel trends to the country as it is a very important event, in fact the biggest almost post pandemic. Majority of the travelers coming to the UAE whether on leisure, business or even mixture of it bleisure are visiting Expo and we have booked them to attend it. We have welcomed many



Mohamed Khater
Regional Manager and Managing Partner,
Flash Horizon

groups and VIP delegations, students etc to visit Expo and not just for one day visit, in fact we have seen a lot of travelers visiting Expo for over two or three days and sometimes even more. So, Expo has made an impact on the visitors coming to the UAE some are in other emirates

yet they visit Expo as it is in their agenda.

How is MICE business at present in Dubai, as the capacity rules have now changed?

MICE is an important segment for us here in the UAE. Easing of rules has positively impacted the MICE industry. Over the past few weeks increasing the capacities in meeting rooms, concert halls and ballrooms returning to the normal. It gives global planners, associations the confidence to host their events in the UAE.

The more these are highlighted, the more ipositive

mpact it will have in drawing visitors to the UAE. It will not just include conferences and events but sports events, adventure visits, travel and trade events will have a combined positive effect in luring visitors to the UAE.

Are you working on any special arrangements for FIFA?

As a matter of fact FIFA is a world class sports event to be recognized and held within the region. The UAE is taking all steps to welcome fans, spectators and people supporting the teams to plan their stays to watch the matches. 

“The market is dynamic and we need to be prepared. Very soon we will be looking at some unexplored destinations where it will be new and a different experience”

as the UAE lifted restrictions, tourists from various new source markets

as Sharm El Sheikh, Sicily and Zanzibar. The market is dynamic and we need



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ADCEB, Miral tie-up to attract MICE to UAE

Abu Dhabi Convention and Exhibition Bureau announced a new partnership with Miral, Abu Dhabi's leading curator of magnetic experiences, to strengthen the emirate's position as a leading destination for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE), specifically targeting business events with more than 500 attendees.

TT Bureau

The partnership has resulted in the creation of the Abu Dhabi Convention & Exhibition Bureau and Miral Joint Business Event Fund, a first-of-its-

industry partners across different sectors aimed at attracting and generating larger meetings and inbound incentive groups to the emirate.

With global destinations increasingly attracting



course, budget. In Abu Dhabi, individually, there is a lot of competition, but collectively, we have a unique proposition to target niche groups where we can offer Abu Dhabi as a lucrative option to potential clients. Looking at Yas Island, with its increased hotel occupancy and venue availability, the island is now capable of hosting events of 500 delegates or more and is a strong contender globally, when it comes to attracting MICE events." Putting full force behind their bidding efforts, both ADCEB and Miral's sales and marketing teams will pitch the emirate as a leading MICE destina-

tion, locally, regionally and globally.

Taghrid Al Saeed, Executive Director, Marketing and Destination Strategy, Miral, said: "We are proud to be partnering with Abu Dhabi Convention & Exhibition Bureau to promote Yas Island and the UAE capital as a destination of choice for MICE travellers. Our strategic vision for Yas Island has delivered a premier location for leisure and entertainment, with 2021 seeing the addition of new world-class facilities. This partnership will attract both local and international business stakeholders to Abu Dhabi."

Individually there is competition in Abu Dhabi, but collectively we have a unique proposition to target niche groups and offer it as a lucrative option to potential clients

kind fund that aligns with the Tourism Strategy of the Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) to synergise efforts with

corporate groups by offering enhanced services, the Abu Dhabi Convention & Exhibition Bureau and Miral Joint Business Event Fund

will create a compelling proposition to attract corporate clients and will be an additional tool for local and international DMCs and meeting planners to promote the UAE capital. With the programme adopting a gradual rollout, which started on January 1, 2022, the pilot phase will focus on meetings and incentive travel only. Based on the suc-

cess of these two units, conferences and exhibitions are set to join at a later stage.

Mubarak Al Shamsi, Director, ADCEB, said, "When selecting a host city for any event activity, many factors come into play — accessibility, accommodation availability, venue capacity, meeting spaces, unique experiences and, of

Emirates flies high in UAE's travel ranking

Dubai's flag-carrier airline, Emirates tops YouGov Travel and Tourism Rankings 2022 in the UAE, receiving the highest Impression score of +63.3 among the residents in the country. YouGov's Travel and Tourism Rankings reveal the brands that generated the most NET positive impression among the UAE residents.

TT Bureau

Last year, during the summer months when many destinations eased their travel restrictions, Emirates responded to the strong travel de-

mands by ramping up its route to 90% of pre-pandemic coverage. Additionally, the continued emphasis on health and safety measures as well as making the process as contactless as possible with minimal interaction

with people, together with the extension of Tier status deadlines by one year

metrics. The Rankings were compiled using the Impression score, which is a meas-

Emirates' rival Etihad Airways is in second place with an Impression score of +40.5, while another popular airline Qatar Airways takes 10th (22.1) place in the rankings

were all very well received by the public, contributing to the brand's strong overall impression among the UAE residents.

YouGov's BrandIndex measures the public's perception of brands on a daily basis across a range of

ure of whether a consumer has a positive or negative impression of a brand calculated by taking the average net score for the year 2021 (January 1, 2021 - December 31, 2021).

Emirates' rival Etihad Airways is in second

YouGov Travel & Tourism Rankings 2022: UAE - Improvers

Rank	Brand name	2021	2020	Change in Score
1	Qatar Airways	22.1	17	5.1
2	Flydubai	19.5	17.1	2.5
3	Air Arabia	16.3	15.2	1.1
4	Hilton	25.9	25.1	0.8
5	Cathay Pacific Airways	12.9	12.4	0.5

Chart shows the brands with the highest average Impression score from 1st January 2021 to 31st December 2021 compared to 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2020

YouGov

YouGov Travel & Tourism Rankings 2022: UAE

Rank	Brand name	Score
1	Emirates	63.3
2	Etihad Airways	40.5
3	Burj Al Arab	32.6
4	Atlantis, The Palm	28.7
5	Hilton	25.9
6	Jumeirah	25.6
7	Emirates Palace	24.6
8	Marriott	23.6
9	Rotana	23.3
10	Qatar Airways	22.1

Chart shows the brands with the highest average Impression score between 1st January 2021 and 31st December 2021

YouGov

place with an Impression score of +40.5, while another popular airline, the Qatar Airways takes tenth (22.1) place in the rankings.

The rest of the list is dominated by Hotels & Resort brands. Dubai's most iconic hotel Burj Al Arab is placed third

(+32.6). Last year, for the first time, the hotel opened its doors to non-guests (residents and tourists) to discover its inaccessible spaces, which might have helped the brand create a stronger positive impression among the people in the United Arab Emirates.

Corporate travel spending to go up 32% in '22

A report of World Travel & Tourism Council mentions that business travel expenditure in the Middle East will rise by 32% this year, following a predicted 49% increase during 2021. This gives hopes for boost in travel and tourism business throughout the region.

 TT Bureau

Business travel expenditure in the Middle East is forecast to rise by 32 per cent this year, following a predicted 49 per cent increase during 2021, as per a re-

"This positive data (on travel expenditure) will provide a welcome boost for business travel and tourism professionals throughout the Middle East, as economies around the world begin to relax travel restrictions, despite the disruption



to have actually outpaced spending on leisure travel by 13 per cent, 10 per cent and 1 per cent in the Middle East, Europe and Africa, respectively," said **Danielle Curtis**, Exhibition Director ME – Arabian Travel Market, which will take place at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) from May 9 to 12 this year.

"Aviation experts, speaking at ATM 2021, had expected business travel


to lag behind leisure travel, but this estimated increase of 32 per cent comes on top of a predicted rise during 2021 of 49 per cent. The business travel segment is now accelerating towards pre-pandemic levels," he added.

In terms of business travel spending in 2021, the report ranks the Middle East region first with an increase of 49 per cent,

followed by Europe and Africa (36%), Asia Pacific (32%) and the Americas (14%). The report read, the Asia Pacific region will lead the world in 2022 with growth in spending of 41 per cent, followed by the Americas with a 35 per cent increase, the Middle East 32 per cent, Europe on 28 per cent and Africa with a 23 per cent rise.

"Business travel will also be under the spotlight this year on the ATM Global Stage, where Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), the world's premier business travel and meetings trade organisation, will discuss its latest business travel content

and research during two main sessions - 'The future of business travel' and 'Building a sustainable business travel programme'," said Curtis.

The WTTC report, 'Adapting to Endemic Covid-19: The Outlook for Business Travel', compiled in collaboration with McKinsey & Company, draws on research, analysis and in-depth interviews with travel & tourism business leaders to enable organisations to prepare for corporate travel in the post-pandemic era. "...our research shows room for optimism with Asia Pacific and the Middle East first off the starting blocks," the report concluded. 

This positive data (on travel expenditure) will provide a welcome boost for business travel and tourism professionals throughout the Middle East region

port by World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) published in November 2021. The report gives hope for the sector.

caused by the outbreak of the Omicron variant. During 2021, the increase in business spending for the full year is expected

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Spain tourism minister meets travel agents

In line with the Spain National Day celebrations at Expo in Dubai, Reyes Maroto, Minister of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, Government of Spain, graced a special event for the travel trade, where she personally met and spoke with the trade partners in the UAE. The event was attended by more than 70 leading travel agents.



Digital strategy to redesign Saudi tourism

► Contd. from page 1

His Excellency Ahmed Al Khateeb, Minister of Tourism of Saudi Arabia said: "The Digital Tourism Strategy will help us to redesign tourism in the Kingdom and achieve Vision 2030 objectives of having Saudi Arabia become a world-leading tourist destination. The Kingdom's execution of this strategy over the next three years will inspire the tourism sector globally."

The Digital Tourism Strategy aims to position the Kingdom as the global digital tourism leader. Application of the Strategy aims to provide stakeholders a more seamless experience, that enables a thriving tourism sector. The strategy focuses on a number of areas:

- Seamless Travel: Providing digital solutions to simplify travel procedures

Stakeholder impact

Residents and visitors:

- Creation of digital job opportunities in tourism sector
- Boosting workforce skills & strengthening tourism labor market
- Contribute to creating a more seamless travel experience for tourists through innovative & disruptive regulations
- Improve services and offering quality (Autonomous Inspection, Customer Centricity)
- Citizens & Local Community Engagement to capture voices for potential destinations and Points of Interest

Private Sector (Investors):

- Instant proactive digital licensing (OCR, seamless integration with governmental agencies)
- Optimised services & processes, resulting in a seamless experience
- Empower to provide innovative solutions for sustainable growth of the ecosystem.
- Increase digital tourism market demand through digital business models
- Create new tourism service offerings and enable creation of start-ups in digital tourism
- Leverage AI & data to matchmake investors and showcase investment opportunities
- Informed decision making, maximising the value of data, and creating new data services and products

- Ease of Doing Business: Launching a unified platform to connect tourism service providers and applications

- Innovation: Creating an experimental environment that will allow technology innovators to test new digital tourism solutions

- Digital Travel: Supporting tourism extended reality applications (e.g. virtual or augmented reality)

- Encouraging Sustainability: Rewarding tourists for eco-friendly behaviors

- Informed Decision Making: Building solutions that gather data and provide analytics for the tourism sector

- Skilled Digital Workforce: Creating a generation

of tourism professionals and entrepreneurs

- Investor Attraction: Establish & engage a network of tourism investors through digital platforms

To achieve this, the strategy will deliver programmes

ing the tourism workforce to increase the employability rate of Saudi Arabia and enable the next generation of entrepreneurs.

The Ministry of Tourism will pioneer new digital business models to increase market demand for service

“The Digital Tourism Strategy will help us to redesign tourism in the Kingdom and achieve our ambitious Vision 2030 objectives of having Saudi Arabia become a world-leading tourist destination”

— His Excellency Ahmed Al Khateeb

promoting a Kingdom-wide culture of innovation and future-proof curbs. It will boost workforce skills to strengthen the labor market and lure innovators by providing a safe environment. A dedicated programme will target upskilling and reskill-

providers. The new models will include disruptive regulations for smart hotels and streamlined methods of digital travel, thus creating a frictionless travel experience for tourists, business classes and governments. 🇸🇦



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Kuwait Airways adds 17 new destinations

Kuwait Airways announced launch of 17 new destinations, in addition to existing 40, bringing total number to 57. The new destinations will include Malaga, Moscow, Sarajevo, Nice, Salalah, Sharm El Sheikh, Sohag, Alexandria, Mykonos, Bodrum, Trabzon, Vienna, Madrid, Casablanca, Manchester, Kathmandu and Kuala Lumpur.

TT Bureau

Kuwait Airways is pleased to announce the operation of 17 new destinations to link Kuwait to the world, stated KAC's Chief Executive Officer Engineer **Maen Razouqi**.

"It comes within the framework of the Company's preparations for the summer season that will witness a remarkable



Maen Razouqi
Chief Executive Officer Engineer
Kuwait Airways

recovery in the movement of travel around the world," he added.

Razouqi said, "This is in addition to the fact that Kuwait Airways has selected a variety of destinations that are among the most important that the Company focuses on, due to high demand by our customers of all segments, including tourism, business, or education."

Razouqi added, "This is also part of Kuwait Airways' tireless efforts to provide passengers on its aircraft with more direct options to meet their travel requirements and to provide them better services by launching new destinations and various

services." Razouqi also stressed on the company's keenness to attain the best levels of services.

It is worth mentioning that the launch of new destinations by Kuwait Airways comes as part

of KAC's strategy and systematic research of the feasibility of these routes and their benefit to the company, in addition to meeting the growing requirements for these new sectors that are important to customers. Kuwait Airways

is also keen to assist its passengers and provide them with all means of comfort during their travel on its aircraft; from providing reservations for customers through all available channels and offering them appropriate services, to the check-in at Terminal 4 and completing their travel procedures with ease.

In addition to that, Kuwait Airways is fully equipped with diverse fleet of the latest types of different aircraft, which will enable passengers to enjoy the Company's services on board the Blue Bird. 🇰🇼



New destinations are part of the company's preparations for summer season that will witness a remarkable travel recovery

Montenegro hosts workshop for travel trade

Special tourism delegation from Montenegro hosted a special workshop for the travel trade in the United Arab Emirates on the day of their National Day celebrations at Expo in Dubai. The agents were given the opportunity to meet with partners from Montenegro.



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Natural phenomenon in Philippines

Philippines' Pavilion 'Bangóta' unveiled Puerto Princesa underground river, one of the new seven wonders of nature selected from across the world in a special voting campaign with over 600 million people. The occasion was graced by Philippine Ambassador to the UAE, **His Excellency Hjayceelyn Quintana**.

Shehara Rizly

In his opening, New 7 Wonders Director **Jean-Paul de la Fuente** shared, "Palawan is an area with lots of coral reefs. Today we are un-

The occasion was graced by Philippine Ambassador to the UAE, **H.E. Hjayceelyn Quintana**, Philippine Consul General to Dubai Honourable Renato Dueñas Jr., Philippines' Department of Trade and Indus-



"Wonder Marker". The unveiling activity honors and celebrates the Philippines' distinct status of being home to one of nature's "Wonder," and distinguishes this destination as one of the world's most beautiful landscapes and places to be.

“The expo has an amazing way of bringing people together to celebrate the wonders of the world”

— H.E. Hjayceelyn Quintana, Philippine Ambassador to the UAE

veiling one of the seven wonders of nature, "the Puerto Princesa", voted by over 600 million in a global voting campaign as one of the seven wonders of nature in the world."

try Assistant Secretary for the Trade Promotions Group and PH Expo 2020 Dubai Alternate Commissioner General Rosvi C. Gaetos, and New 7 Wonders Director Jean-Paul de la Fuente.

Philippine Ambassador to the UAE H.E. Hjayceelyn Quintana, in her remarks, welcomed those who joined in person at Expo 2020 Dubai and the many others who joined online over social media.

"The expo has an amazing way of bringing peo-

ple together to celebrate the wonders of the world both man-made and natural. We are standing at the plaza of the Philippine pavilion, this is named the 'Bangota', which in our language means coral reef. With the back drop of the Bangota, we unveil one of the seven wonders

of nature, "the puerto princesa underground river joining other marvelous wonders of nature in the world". The Puerto Princesa Underground River – an 8.2-km-long natural subterranean river with limestone karst landscape – is one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature – and a new

New 7 Wonders President and Founder Bernard Weber will lead the simultaneous unveiling that will take place in the Philippines and six other New 7 Wonders of Nature countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Peru, South Africa, Indonesia, Vietnam and New 7 Wonders of the World Jordan and Mexico. 🇵🇭

ATM to begin from May 9

Visitor from more than 100 countries to take part in the trade event. **Danielle Curtis**, Exhibition Director, ME-ATM, shares more details with **TRAVELTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

Could you share with us the theme, dates for Arabian Travel Market (ATM) this year?

Now in its 29th year, the upcoming edition of ATM will take place live and in-person at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) from Monday 9 to Thursday 12, May 2022. ATM Virtual will be held a week later, from Tuesday 17 to Wednesday 18, May 2022. In line with ATM 2022's theme, 'The future of international travel and tourism', this year's show will shine a spotlight on the growth trajectory of our industry, as travel and tourism professionals the



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director, ME-ATM



countries. As travel restrictions ease, we look forward to welcoming even more nations to our show floor from May 9.

What are the new countries that will be participating this year?

This year, we cannot wait to reunite with visitors from Austria, France, Iceland, Oman, Qatar, Portugal, Switzerland and the United States.

Can you share the objectives and expectations?

ATM 2022 aims to capitalise on the ever-improving international travel landscape by welcoming visitors and exhibitors from around the world to reconnect in Dubai. 🇦🇪

world over focus on the challenges and the opportunities that can be seized to move forward.

How many countries will take part this year?

Last year, ATM witnessed attendees from over 110

Passionate for travel tech

► Kathryn Wallington contd. from page 1

professionally and personally. I then entered the world of travel technology, joining Travelport as Head of Sales for the UK and Ireland. Since then, I have built strong operational, customer support and business development expertise across other roles, including Head of Customer Support for Europe, Global Customer Advocacy Senior Director and Head of Business Development for Europe. Advancing through a series of nine positions, I am now accountable for driving sales, identifying growth opportunities and building Travelport's profile for the Middle East, Africa, UK & Ireland.

Key achievements and challenges

There are so many key moments that stand out

to me, but two of my top achievements were receiving the Sales Manager of the Year award at the TTG Business Awards, and the DDP Gamechanger award at the Arabian Travel Awards. On a more personal note, I also took some time off to become a mum to a beautiful girl, who is now 11 and a gorgeous boy, who is eight. Additionally, when we left the UK (the only place we had ever lived) to move to Dubai was a key milestone.

Secrets to success in life

It is important to be confident and secure in who you are if you want to succeed. Never stop challenging yourself, but always be respectful. Be hungry to learn and always invest in your team

– you cannot do it alone. Build strong customer relationships based on honest dialogue and aim to put customers first whilst balancing this with achieving company goals. Enjoy and manage change effectively, as it's inevitable. Embrace it.

Message to aspiring women

One of the many wonderful things about the travel industry is how vast and varied it is. The industry is about education, marketing, entertainment, finance, cultural awareness, and so much more. These are all highly valuable skills that can be transferred to and from other industries. It tends to attract fun and outgoing people who are curious about people and places. 🇦🇪

Radisson's hybrid solutions for B2B meetings

Listening to the needs of B2B customers and travel agents, Radisson Hotel Group designed tailor made solutions. **Ayse Abbas**, Marketing Manager B2B and B2C, Radisson Hotel Group shares with **TRAVTALK** some of the initiatives taken during the pandemic and initiatives for this year to attract more small meetings in their portfolio.

Shehara Rizly

How important are the travel agents and bookers for Radisson Hotel Group?

In the Dubai office, we look after more than 100 hotels in Middle East and Africa with quite a few new openings this year. Especially during COVID and now if I can say almost post COVID, there has been some shuffles between market segments and channels but travel agents have been an important source and our clients. What we do with our travel agents and other different types of B2B customers we have different programmes

and solutions under the umbrella of the 'Radisson rewards' programme we try to serve the needs of different types of customers. One of the most important programmes for the travel agents is we incentivise them and we tell them if you enroll for the Radisson rewards programme for travel agents you earn the possibility

this big portfolio so when they enroll as a travel agent to the programme they earn points for every business booking.

What are the notable changes over the past years?

Especially when we look at the B2B customers what has changed over the years now we are



Ayse Abbas
Marketing Manager, B2B and B2C
Radisson Hotel Group

we have done and what I am proud of as a hospitality company we took the time to listen to the market and our customers and what their needs are, the way their bookings have changed and the way they organise meetings or groups have changed so we have to listen and understand the

customers understand their needs when booking an event or stay. I want to talk about B2B marketing solutions a very important focus has been around the Radisson Groups meetings concept for us and how it evolves around the feedback and the needs of our customers and especially during the covid time. As you know the digitalisation in events was a strong market trend even before covid 19. Even during the pandemic and post pandemic we were featuring hybrid events, it was seen in great demand than ever before because it pushed our planners and customers to be allowed to continue to have their

meetings even if the attendance had to increase despite all the regulatory restrictions on gatherings they still wanted to have the ambience and the possibility to organise their events as easy as possible.

What prompted the concept of hybrid rooms?

We make sure that our programmes are evolving and fitting the needs of the customers. So you know the markets have shifted the regulations have shifted at Radisson we design and evolve around the needs of the customers making it more flexible for our customers. Ease of regulations makes it easier. 🏠

“ If agents enroll for the Radisson rewards programme they earn the possibility to earn points across approximately 550 hotels ”

to earn points across approximately 550 hotels in Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia Pacific with

now almost over two years since the pandemic started, I can say one of the most important things

Changing face of travel in Middle East

With COVID-19 restrictions easing globally, border control authorities have added responsibility to review health credentials of travellers in the Middle East. While biometric identity management systems have helped reduce safety and security concerns, the sector demands frequent innovations.

TT Bureau

The pandemic has shifted the travel process, and it has brought the airport experience to the forefront. With travel restrictions easing globally, border control authorities are likely to spend more time scrutinising travellers' records, given the added need to review health credentials and vaccination statuses. While biometric identity management systems have helped improve the situation to some extent by enabling border gate officials to verify the identity of passengers at a faster rate,

the sector demands frequent innovations.

Innovations in biometrics

As Middle East governments focus on contactless travel experience, already there have been innovations in biometric authentication at airports. International passengers at the UAE's Dubai International Airport can use the biometric path in Terminal 3 for a contactless journey.

The technology, which uses facial and iris recognition, allows passengers to check-in, complete immigration forms and board in a contact-

less way, as well as reduces queue time and supports health and security measures. As part of the biometric pathway, Dubai's General Directorate of Residency and Foreign Affairs, in col-

“ In the near future, AI, ML and data analytics will fundamentally change border management, enabling Smart Borders, although adoption of these technologies is relatively limited ”

laboration with Emirates Airline, has developed a technology called Smart Tunnel, enabling passengers to be automatically cleared by immigration authorities while walking

through it. This process cuts out any document checks or queue.

In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Interior has plans to introduce an iris recognition biometric sys-

tem in order to identify passengers and ensure safety and security of the nation. The Ministry's National Information Centre will install iris recognition system.

Emerging technologies

A few years from now, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML) and data analytics will fundamentally change border management, enabling Smart Borders, although adoption of these technologies is relatively limited at present. These emerging technologies would provide enhanced judgement to border officials through AI-enabled intelligence in analysing biometric markers such as facial recognition. Wider acceptance of digital and intuitive technologies will be critical to regaining pre-pandemic momentum.

Mitigating measures

Adoption of advanced technologies for border control management have their share of risks, such as manipulation of machine learning systems. Similarly, data can be corrupted through targeted attacks.



Suraj Tiwari
Head- Information Security,
VFS Global

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

Sojern reveals trends in KSA & UAE

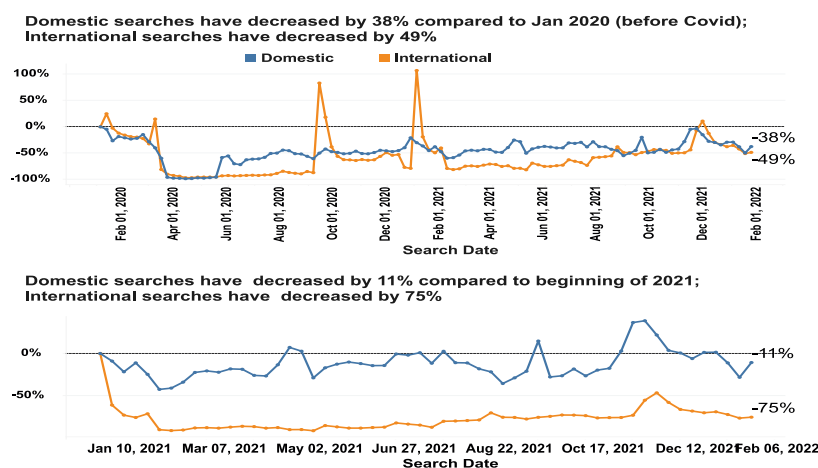
Sojern, a digital marketing platform for the travel industry, which utilises programmatic buying and machine learning technology, shares some of the key trends over the past few weeks in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in terms of flight searches, hotels and the upcoming destinations with relevant source markets.

With the Omicron variant of Caronavirus setting in, there has been change in trends in flight searches and hotel occupancy rates in the country. One of the significant trends seen is the emergence of new source markets where the demand for in-

bound travel has increased of late in view of COVID-19 restrictions. The following charts share a more in-depth analysis of the travel trends in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

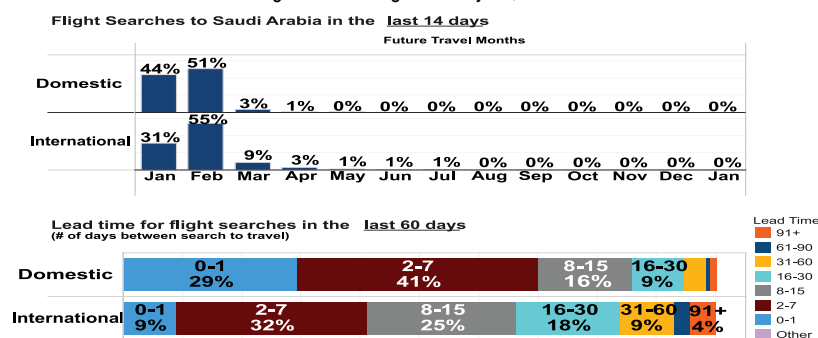
Flight searches to Saudi Arabia

Data through January 29, 2022



Future travel dates

Flight data through January 29, 2022



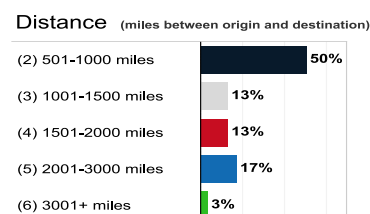
Top feeder markets to Saudi Arabia

Flight bookings from the last 60 days

Top origin countries			Top origin metros		
1	Saudi Arabia	64.0%	1	Unknown	26.2%
2	Pakistan	19.3%	2	Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	20.7%
3	Bangladesh	12.1%	3	Jeddah, Saudi Arabia	12.9%
4	Egypt	11.0%	4	Dhaka, Bangladesh	11.2%
5	United Arab Emi..	8.2%	5	Dammam, Saudi Arabia	10.5%
6	India	5.2%	6	Cairo, Egypt	10.2%
7	Philippines	2.7%	7	Dubai, United Arab Emirates	7.1%
8	Nepal	2.7%	8	Islamabad, Pakistan	5.0%
9	Jordan	2.5%	9	Lahore, Pakistan	4.6%
10	Kuwait	2.2%	10	Karachi, Pakistan	3.5%
11	Sudan	2.0%	11	Manila, Philippines	2.7%
12	United States	1.6%	12	Kathmandu, Nepal	2.7%
13	Malaysia	1.4%	13	Amman, Jordan	2.5%
14	Qatar	1.3%	14	Kuwait City, Kuwait	2.2%
15	United Kingdom	1.3%	15	Madinah, Saudi Arabia	2.1%
			16	Khartoum, Sudan	2.0%
			17	Delhi, India	1.6%
			18	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	1.4%
			19	Doha, Qatar	1.3%
			20	Mumbai, India	1.2%

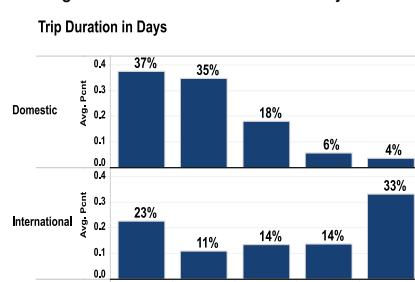
Top feeder markets to Saudi Arabia

Flight bookings from the last 60 days



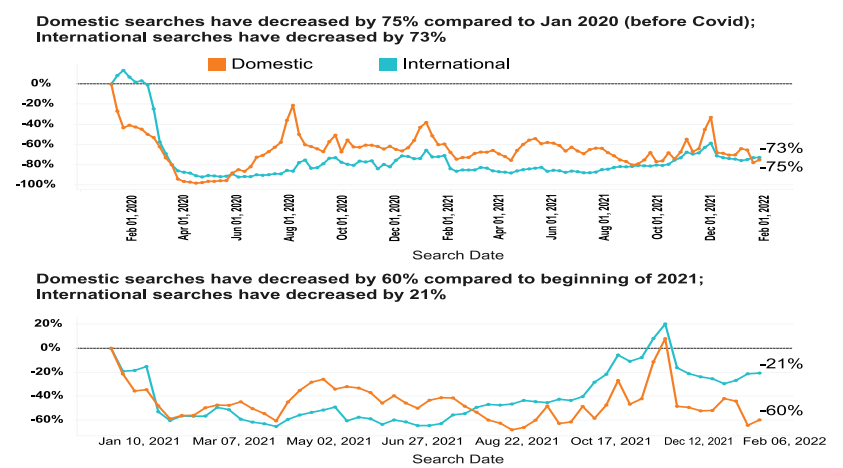
Trip duration to Saudi Arabia

Flight searches from the last 60 days



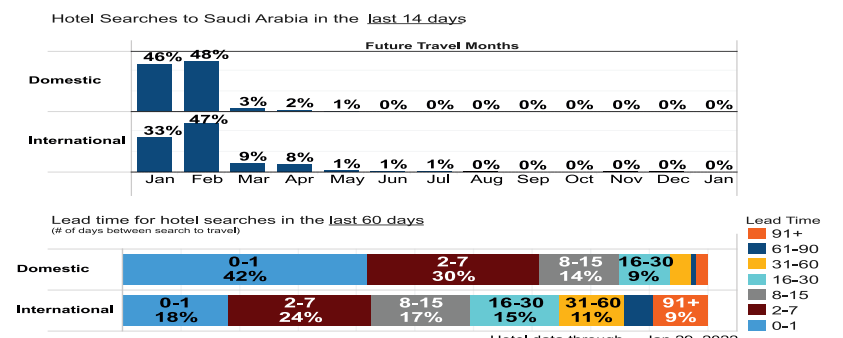
Hotel searches to Saudi Arabia

Data through January 29, 2022



Future travel dates

Hotel searches to Saudi Arabia in the last 14 days



Top feeder markets to Saudi Arabia

Hotel searches from the last 60 days

Top origin countries			Top 20 origin metros		
1	United States	72.4%	1	Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	6.9%
2	Saudi Arabia	13.2%	2	United Kingdom other	3.8%
3	United Kingdom	5.0%	3	Jeddah, Saudi Arabia	3.8%
4	United Arab Emirat..	1.3%	4	New York, NY	3.7%
5	Canada	1.1%	5	Los Angeles, CA	2.5%
6	France	0.8%	6	Atlanta, GA	2.2%
7	India	0.6%	7	Philadelphia, PA	2.2%
8	Malaysia	0.4%	8	Washington, DC (Hagersto..	2.2%
9	Egypt	0.4%	9	Chicago, IL	2.1%
10	Netherlands	0.4%	10	Dallas-Ft. Worth, TX	1.7%
11	Germany	0.4%	11	Houston, TX	1.7%
12	Australia	0.3%	12	Miami-Ft. Lauderdale, FL	1.6%
13	Kuwait	0.3%	13	Tampa-St Petersburg (Sara..	1.5%
14	Pakistan	0.3%	14	Charlotte, NC	1.4%
15	Singapore	0.3%	15	Orlando-Daytona Beach-M..	1.3%
16	Qatar	0.2%	16	Dammam, Saudi Arabia	1.2%
17	Japan	0.2%	17	Buffalo, NY	1.1%
18	Italy	0.2%	18	Charleston, SC	1.1%
19	Belgium	0.2%	19	Raleigh-Durham (F	1.1%
20	South Africa	0.2%	20	Detroit, MI	1.0%

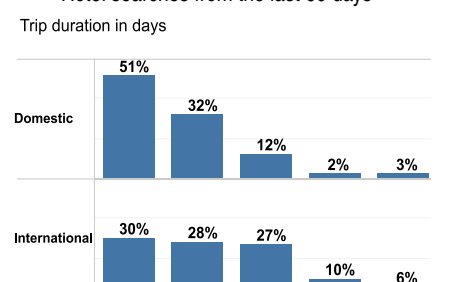
Top feeder markets to Saudi Arabia

Hotel searches from the last 60 days



Trip duration to Saudi Arabia

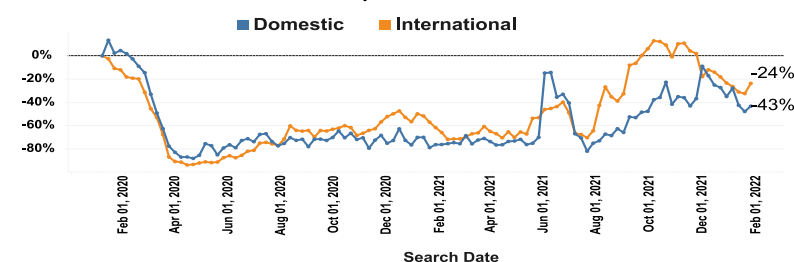
Hotel searches from the last 60 days



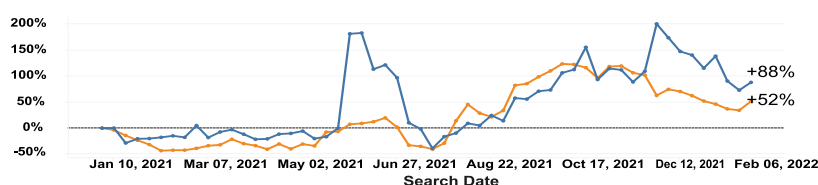
Flight searches to United Arab Emirates

Data through January 29, 2022

Domestic searches have decreased by 43% compared to Jan 2020 (before Covid);
International searches have decreased by 24%



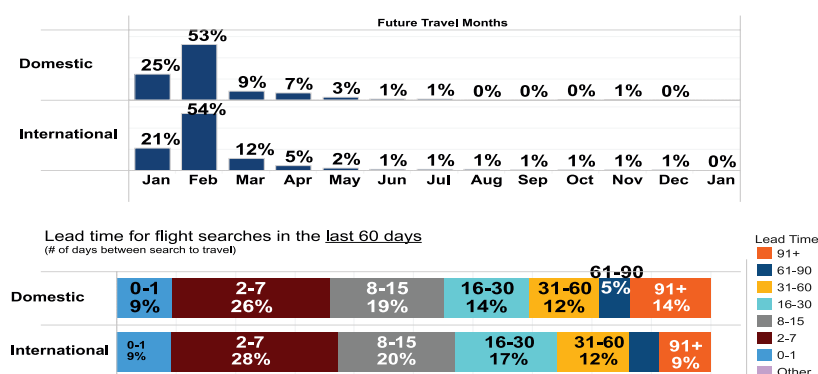
Domestic searches have increased by 88% compared to beginning of 2021;
International searches have increased by 52%



Future travel dates

Flight data through January 29, 2022

Flight Searches to United Arab Emirates in the last 14 days



Top feeder markets to United Arab Emirates

Flight bookings from the last 60 days

Top origin countries

1	Pakistan	16.5%
2	United Kingdom	14.3%
3	India	11.4%
4	Saudi Arabia	10.0%
5	Germany	8.2%
6	Bangladesh	7.2%
7	France	6.2%
8	Egypt	6.0%
9	United States	5.5%
10	Russia	4.4%
11	Lebanon	3.5%
12	Italy	3.4%
13	Jordan	3.3%
14	Philippines	2.8%
15	Kuwait	2.6%

Top origin metros

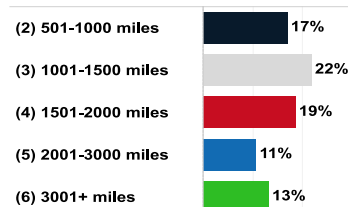
1	Unknown	12.8%
2	London, United Kingdom	10.0%
3	Dhaka, Bangladesh	7.1%
4	Cairo, Egypt	5.8%
5	Karachi, Pakistan	5.4%
6	Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	5.0%
7	Paris, France	4.4%
8	Beirut, Lebanon	3.5%
9	Amman, Jordan	3.3%
10	Islamabad, Pakistan	3.0%
11	Moscow, Russia	3.0%
12	Frankfurt, Germany	2.9%
13	Delhi, India	2.8%
14	Jeddah, Saudi Arabia	2.7%
15	Manila, Philippines	2.6%
16	Kuwait City, Kuwait	2.6%
17	Amsterdam, Netherlands	2.6%
18	Colombo, Sri Lanka	2.5%
19	Kathmandu, Nepal	2.3%
20	Lahore, Pakistan	2.3%

Top feeder markets to United Arab Emirates

Flight bookings from the last 60 days

Distance to United Arab Emirates

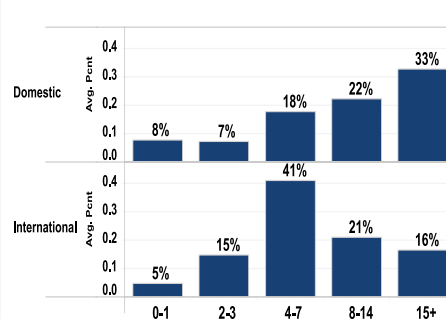
Distance (miles between origin and destination)



Trip duration to United Arab Emirates

Flight searches from the last 60 days

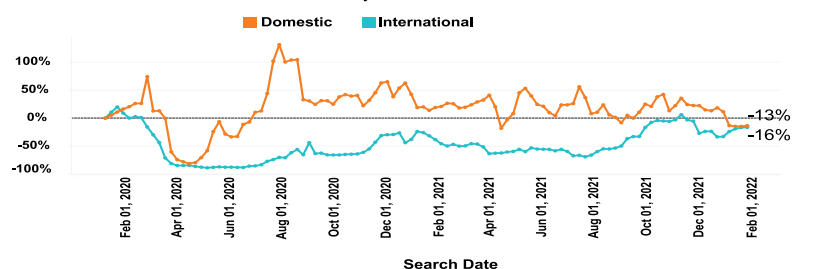
Trip Duration in Days



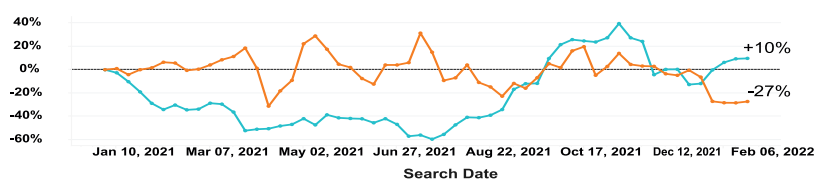
Hotel searches to United Arab Emirates

Data through January 29, 2022

Domestic searches have decreased by 13% compared to Jan 2020 (before Covid);
International searches have decreased by 16%



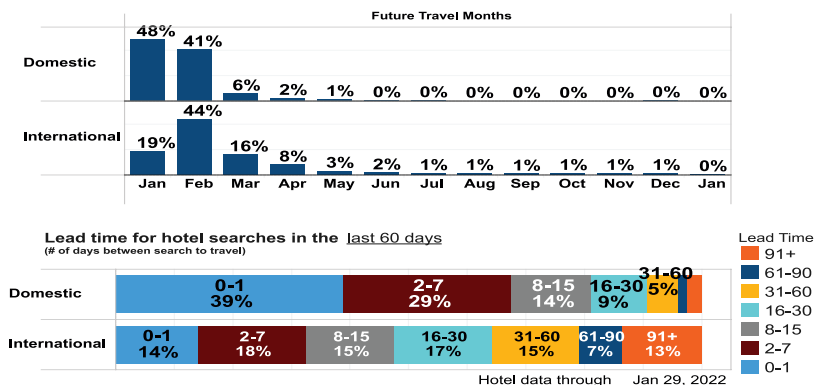
Domestic searches have decreased by 27% compared to beginning of 2021;
International searches have increased by 10%



Future travel dates

Hotel searches to United Arab Emirates in the last 14 days

Hotel Searches to United Arab Emirates in the last 14 days



Top feeder markets to United Arab Emirates

Hotel searches from the last 60 days

Top origins countries

1	United Kingdom	18.3%
2	United States	15.2%
3	United Arab Emirat..	12.5%
4	Germany	6.7%
5	France	6.6%
6	Russia	3.8%
7	Switzerland	3.0%
8	India	2.8%
9	Netherlands	2.5%
10	Italy	2.1%
11	Canada	1.8%
12	Belgium	1.8%
13	Saudi Arabia	1.6%
14	Ireland	1.4%
15	Brazil	1.4%
16	Austria	1.1%
17	Australia	1.0%
18	Spain	0.9%
19	Israel	0.8%
20	Poland	0.8%

Top 20 origin metros

1	United Kingdom other	13.1%
2	Dubai, United Arab Emirates	9.2%
3	France other	3.3%
4	Germany other	2.6%
5	Paris, France	2.3%
6	London, United Kingdom	2.3%
7	Abu Dhabi, United Arab Em..	2.1%
8	Moscow, Russia	2.1%
9	Switzerland other	1.7%
10	New York, NY	1.6%
11	Belgium other	1.5%
12	Netherlands other	1.3%
13	United Arab Emirates other	1.2%
14	Frankfurt, Germany	1.1%
15	Amsterdam, Netherlands	1.1%
16	Washington, DC (Hagersto..	1.0%
17	Dublin, Ireland	1.0%
18	Zurich, Switzerland	1.0%
19	Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	1.0%
20	India other	0.9%

Hotel data through Jan 29, 2022

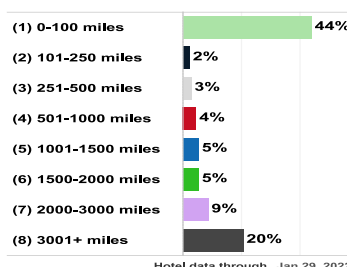
Top feeder markets to United Arab Emirates

Hotel searches from the last 60 days

Distance to hotel

Hotel searches from the last 60 days

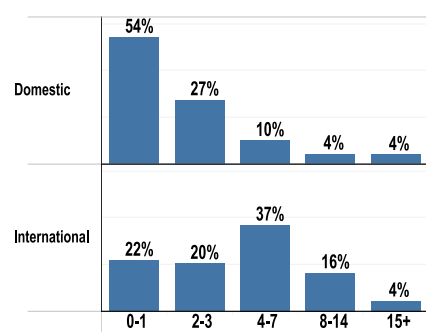
Distance (miles between origin and destination)



Trip duration to United Arab Emirates

Hotel searches from the last 60 days

Trip duration in days



Enjoy unrivalled views at Sekinchan

Selangor in Malaysia: Sekinchan is a small coastal town in the northwestern corner of Selangor. Situated in Sabak Bernam district, about 90 km from Kuala Lumpur, the town is packed with attractions. However, the main draw is, of course, its endless vistas of paddy fields that stretch right up to the border of Perak.

Don't let the size of the town beguile you, because Sekinchan is packed with attractions. The main draw is of course its endless vistas of paddy fields that stretch right up to the border of Perak. The paddy fields here are also popularly featured in blogs and social media posts for its picture-postcard views. Depending on the time of visit, the paddy stalks will be either green in colour (during the time of paddy growth) or brown (at the time of harvest). Either way, the sight of



paddy stalks swaying in the wind will leave a lasting impression in your mind.

For those who want to know more about this Asian staple food, the Paddy Gallery will be the best place to start.

The Paddy Galley is actually a paddy processing factory and museum. It gives a great insight into various aspects of the grain - such as the different types of rice, uses of rice and processing methods. Rice-lovers

will also be happy to know that they can purchase freshly produced rice straight from the factory!

Sekinchan's new village settlement rose to fame after it was selected as the setting of a Hong

Kong TV drama titled 'Outbound Love'. The town is also popular for its lip-smacking variety of seafood delights and

uniquely-styled accommodations, including "bus café". All the ingredients for a perfect, relaxing day trip!

What to do

Take a selfie against the backdrop of paddy fields

- Enjoy a slow drive along the scenic country route
- Cycle along the fringes of paddy fields and take a closer look at the grain
- Spend some time at the fishing village and get interesting souvenirs such as dried seafood
- Go on a tour of Sekinchan town which has a history that goes back to the communist insurgency
- Visit a paddy processing factory
- Savour fresh local fruits
- Spot migratory birds

Nearby attractions

- Kuala Selangor Fireflies
- Sky Mirror

The Hidden Gem of Terengganu

Redang Island, Malaysia: With turquoise blue waters and abundance of fascinating marine life, Redang is certainly one of the most beautiful islands in Malaysia. Located about 45 kilometres off the coast of Kuala Terengganu, it is the largest of the group of nine islands dotting the South China Sea off the Terengganu coast.



In 1985, waters up to seven nautical miles surrounding the Redang archipelago were gazetted as Marine Park to protect the beautiful marine life and environment there; hence, Redang is abound with magnifi-

cent corals and marine life, as well as crystal clear waters and clean white sandy beaches.

The island is a paradise for scuba diving, snorkelling and swimming. Other activities that can be enjoyed there include boating,

canoeing and jungle trekking. Every dive site on the island offers something different to see and experience.

Among the famous sites include Terumbu Kili, which has rocky seascape encrusted with both soft and

hard corals at about 15 metres, and slopes down to 20 metres at the sandy bottom. Big Mount offers divers a chance to observe macro lifeforms and possible encounters with the whale shark, while Mini Mount has numerous cowries,

also a famous site for night diving.

Tanjung Tokong is another site not to be missed. Large Napoleon wrasse, parrotfish, jacks and unicornfish are among the common sights here, besides chro-

Terjun and also the Marine Park Centre.

Redang also has two historic shipwrecks, namely the H.M.S. Prince of Wales and the H.M.S. Repulse, which were sunk at the beginning of World War II, setting the stage for the Japanese occupation of Malaya.

During the North-East monsoon season, the resorts on the island will be closed for a few months, normally between November and February; hence, the best time to visit Redang is between March and October.

The island is a paradise for scuba diving, snorkelling and swimming. Boating, canoeing and jungle trekking too woo tourists

spider shells and large aggregation of colourful Christmas tree worms carpeting coral blocks. It is

modoris nudibranchs and green staghorn corals. Other popular dive sites include Tunnel Point, Tanjung Cina

Antigua and Barbuda woos ME travellers

Tourism leaders from the Caribbean nation visit UAE as part of a week-long mission to deepen connections between the two countries and showcase the islands' extensive appeal and best environmental practices in a conversation with UAE's Green Sheikh at EXPO 2020 – including a nationwide ban on plastic.

TT Bureau

A high-level government and tourism delegation from Antigua and Barbuda visited the United Arab Emirates last week as part of a week-long promotional and development mission to deepen connections between the two countries and showcase the allure of the destination. Located at the heart of the Caribbean, the twin-island paradise is known for its 365 white and pink

International Airport providing convenient travel connections from key international hubs, including London, New York and Miami.

To highlight the exceptional range of experiences on offer, the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority has hosted a series of events across the UAE over the past week, including a culinary masterclass with the Antiguan and Barbudan chef Lejorn Hill, who is Executive



artists, while an exclusive dinner with CEOs from major travel corporations at the world's tallest restaurant, At.mosphere, at the Burj Khalifa, provided a meaningful and memorable networking opportunity. The team also hosted an insightful panel session at the Antigua and Barbuda Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai to discuss the destination and the positive social, economic and environmental impact of its wide-ranging approach to sustainable tourism.

Led by **Colin C. James**, Chief Executive Officer,

Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority, and supported by Patrice Simon, Executive Director, Antigua Barbuda Hotels and Tourism Association, the conversation also featured insights from **Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Ali Al Nuaimi**, known as 'Green Sheikh' and the official environmental adviser to Ajman Government.

APPEAL FOR ME TRAVELLERS

Antigua and Barbuda welcomes over a million visitors annually to its shores and is well positioned to meet and

exceed the needs of travellers from across the region. "There is undoubtedly a strong synergy between what we offer as a destination, and what visitors from the region are looking for when it comes to travel experiences," explained Colin James.

GETTING THERE TO GET EASIER

James said they have laid the groundwork for introducing air services. "We are continuing to have meaningful discussions with

TOTAL BAN ON PLASTIC

Patrice Simon explained how Antigua and Barbuda was the first country in the western hemisphere to ban plastic bags in 2016, followed by a total ban on all plastics and Styrofoam in 2018.

100% GREEN ENERGY

The island of Barbuda, was devastated by hurricane Irma in 2017. It has since been reconstructed, but with a

Over the past week, Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority hosted a series of promotional events across the UAE

sandy beaches, cheerful weather, and world-class resorts. While it has long been a favourite with affluent US and British travellers, it is now emerging as a must-visit destination for Middle East travellers, with its award-winning V.C. Bird

Chef at Dubai's Paramount Hotel, providing a taste of Antigua and Barbuda cooking experience. Fashion-loving Emirati women were also treated to a virtual fashion show by Antigua and Barbuda's iconic female fashion designers and



Emirates Airlines and are hopeful we will be at the top of their list, making it even easier to get to our little piece of paradise," he said.

small section of our total population living on Barbuda – with around just 1,500 permanent residents. 🌴

'Diamond team' of Bulgaria visits Expo



The "Diamond team" of Bulgaria - the Rhythmic Gymnastics Ensemble, which triumphed at the XXXII Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo last year, was greeted with joy and curiosity at the Expo pavilion in Dubai. Fans of the Ensemble had arrived

especially to the Bulgarian pavilion to meet Simona, Erika and Steffi. Local journalists interviewed the Bulgarian girls, and a crew from the Bulgarian National Television covered their participation in two consecutive evenings at Arena Sports Dubai, where their show was supported by the young gymnasts from "Aspire Gymnastics Dubai". The meetings of Olympic medallists with the teams of other pavilions at the Expo were quite exciting as they were especially organised for them; the girls were VIP guests to the hosts from the UAE, Japan and Italy.

Spain pavilion hits one-million mark

On February 15, Spain Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai exceeded one million visitors. On the occasion, Carmen Bueno, Executive Commissioner General of the Spain Pavilion, welcomed the millionth visitor, an Irish man living in Abu Dhabi, who was there with his family.

TT Bureau

The Spain Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai exceeded one million visitors since its opening in October 2021, nearly 9 per cent of the total visitors to the world fair till February 15. To celebrate the achievement, **Carmen Bueno**, Executive Commissioner General of the Spain Pavilion, welcomed the millionth visitor, an Irish man living in Abu Dhabi, who was there with his family.

The pavilion organised an exclusive guided visit of the permanent exhibition for the millionth visitor and gifted him with

a dinner for two in the exclusive Azotea restaurant and a gift bag full of souvenirs.

According to a survey carried out by the pavilion on how much visitors would recommend, on a

been one of the key attractions at Expo 2020 Dubai and has received great interest from visitors from all over the world (...) I am very proud of the staff having reached one million visits with such great feedback."

The pavilion organised a guided visit of the permanent exhibition for the millionth visitor and gifted him with a dinner for two

scale from 1 to 5 (5 being highly recommended) a stop by, the pavilion got an average score of 4.6. Speaking of the occasion, Carmen Bueno said: "The Spain Pavilion has

Under the motto, 'Intelligence for life', the pavilion aims to become an example of intelligent creativity, capable of uniting people around sustainable projects in the



fields of science, technology, education, and art.

Attractions

Commissioned to Amann-Cánovas-Maruri studio, the Spain Pavilion is an eco-friendly exhibition that seamlessly blends ancient heritage and cutting-edge innovation. The pavilion stands out for its enormous colourful

cones, partially covered with ultralight and flexible photovoltaic panels that led visitors to an airy ground floor containing several, naturally cooled plazas featuring, 'Glimpses', a series of exhibitions synthesizing some of the most relevant contributions of Spain to the global culture and highlighting some of the historical

links between the country and the Arab culture. Connecting the old and the new is, Dynamo, an audio-visual sculpture by renowned artist Daniel Cologar. At the pavilion theatre, visitors also have the opportunity to enjoy 'August Moon', an 8-minute movie by Spanish film maker Nacho Vigalondo. 🎬

Success mantra: Follow your passion

► Deepa Iyer Contd. from page 6

with sincere efforts, I definitely have come a long way and it feels privileged and honored.

Secrets to success in life

- Self-Belief
- Hardwork, spent long hours to study and complete the projects within given or early timelines
- Willingness to explore taking calculated risks
- Tried to keep myself motivated despite challenges
- Maintained a certain like of balance and discipline

Message to aspiring women

Each one of us as a WOMAN should follow our passion irrespective

of the different hats we wear and different roles in life we need to play. And if any of you have identified exploring your career in the industry as their forte, please do take the plunge and follow your dream. The good thing is that the industry is huge and one won't ever get bored with travel as a profession. There are various areas to explore one's interest and strength, and as women we have an amazing quality of being multi-tasking. We should take advantage of this and go all out. We would also observe that we could get acquainted with people all over the world who share the same passion for travel.

► Deveekaa Nijhawan Contd. from page 6

Qatar as a destination. It has been an exhilarating and exciting journey and 2022 is going to be a year like no other, with history being made with the first FIFA World Cup being held in the Middle East region.

Achievements and challenges

I have had a fascinating journey, with the last 15 years just flying by. Some of my key achievements have been launching new hotels, one of the largest ballrooms in the Middle East, rebranding iconic flagship brands, collaborating with various A-List Hollywood and Bollywood celebrities on unique and exciting concepts,

fostering several strategic global and regional partnerships, building a strong rolodex network of high-profile media relationships globally and launching exciting new experiences.

Ironically, throughout my career every challenge I have faced has always transitioned into an achievement. The hospitality industry is very competitive with new hotels and concepts regularly launching; hence it was always a challenge to ensure Le Meridien was still relevant and a top consideration for guests and media. However, I was able to leverage my media relationships and launch several exciting

concepts, I rebranded 10 of the 18 restaurants, launched a 200-room hotel extension project and repositioned the hotel to be the leading F&B, Events and MICE destination.

We are working towards hosting the first FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ in the Middle East and achieving our 2030 vision of attracting more than six million visitors a year.

We have a host of exciting new initiatives to announce in the coming year, which will include our biggest promotional marketing campaign "Experience a World Beyond" released in October 2021 in key

markets across the globe and will see its introduction in Middle East by the first quarter of 2022.

Secrets to success in life

Hard work, confidence and determination to create a difference are the secrets of my success. There are no shortcuts. Patience, persistence and passion are the prerequisites for success.

Message to aspiring women

Be focussed, resilient and undeterred by challenges, as you are bound to face them. My advice would be to be yourself, as everyone else is already taken.

UAE to be base for MSC cruises next winter

UAE will be the base next winter for environmentally high-performing passenger ship, MSC World Europa, to sail in the Middle East. Its Swiss-based owner and operator MSC will dedicate a second ship, MSC Opera, to Gulf region for 2022 and 23 sailing season to strengthen its position as region's number one line for holidays at sea.

TT Bureau

The announcement was made by MSC Cruises' CEO, **Gianni Onorato**, following the official opening this week by His Highness Sheikh Hamdan Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the ruler's representative in the Al Dhafra region, of a new jetty for passenger ships at Sir Bani Yas Island. This development, according to MSC, is welcomed by cruise holidaymakers visiting the incredible island off the coast of Abu Dhabi.

Onorato, hailed the cruise sector in the UAE as being an integral part of its dynamic tourism industry, paid tribute to

the health and safety measures throughout the country. It described MSC Cruises' business

going to deploy our newest addition to our fleet — MSC World Europa — and further increase



Gianni Onorato
CEO
MSC Cruises

"The MSC World Europa will redefine the cruise experience with a variety of never-before-seen features. The ship will attract many international passengers from around the world, especially Europe, and we hope to see the interest from guests of the Gulf Cooperation Council, especially the UAE.

"One of our newest ships, the MSC Virtuosa, is currently deployed in the Arabian Gulf, and although there are challenges ashore associated with the pandemic, we have worked closely with the relevant authorities throughout the region to ensure the health and safety of our passengers, crew and the communities that the ship visits.

The combination of on-board measures along with those ashore have been effective, as demonstrated by the fact that the MSC Virtuosa is one of our best performing ships during the winter season."

Deployment in Arabian Gulf

The MSC Virtuosa on March 26, 2022 will finish her scheduled voyages in the UAE and be replaced by the MSC Bellissima between April 2 and June 25, 2022. This is the first time that the MSC Cruises has extended its sailing season in the Gulf and offer spring break holidays at sea.

The MSC World Europa from December will be based in the UAE offering seven-night cruises from Dubai and Abu Dhabi to Sir Bani Yas Island, Dammam in Saudi Arabia and Doha in Qatar. 🇦🇪

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FLASH HORIZON

Dubai

Zahra El Zomor joins Flash Horizon, part of the Flash Group, as Deputy General Manager. Her role and responsibilities are in three areas - commercial, operation and contracting. Having 23 years of experience in the Travel and Tourism industry, El Zomor has worked with Seti First Group in Egypt from 1999 till 2012, moved to their Dubai office, from 2012 till 2016, then moved to Cozmo Travel part of Air Arabia for 4 years, and then moved to the current company Flash Horizon, which is part of Flash Group International.



THE TOWER PLAZA HOTEL

Dubai

Wael El Behi has been appointed as the new General Manager of The Tower Plaza Hotel Dubai from December 2021. In his role, Wael will oversee the operation and business strategies of the 401-room hotel primarily located on Sheikh Zayed Road. So far, Wael has been managing the taking over and rebranding of the hotel since his joining. Wael has 28 years of experience in the hospitality and tourism industry and was earlier General Manager of many brands and established hotels, including Grand Excelsior Hotel Bur Dubai and Ramada By Wyndham Jumeirah.



ALOFT DUBAI CREEK

Dubai

Zee Bassila, a seasoned professional with over 28 years of industry experience across the globe, has been named the newest Hotel Manager at Aloft Dubai Creek. Bringing years of expertise in hotel operations and business development, Zee's business acumen is expected to perk up Aloft Dubai Creek's strategic priorities and pioneering the hotel's success and competence in driving business. He will spearhead the hotel's operations and streamline processes to ensure guest satisfaction and quality standards.



New hotels in the region

Over the past few weeks, there have been a number of properties that opened in the Middle East region. Some new brands have entered the market in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Shangri-La Jeddah

Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia | Number of Rooms/Suites – 220



The opening of Shangri-La Jeddah marks the dawn for Saudi Arabia as a leisure destination, welcoming travellers to become one of the city's vibrant lifestyle and dining destinations. The hotel, with three restaurants, wellness facilities, and a dedicated kids' club, is near Jeddah Corniche Circuit, home to Saudi Arabia Grand Prix. The hotel forms part of the two-billion Saudi Riyal development project.

25hours

Dubai, UAE | Number of Rooms/Suites – 434



The 25hours hotel in the Middle East has opened near Dubai International Financial Centre. Relaxed, fun and packed full of things to do, guests will experience Bedouin traditions brought back to modernity. The hotel is a playground for travellers to enjoy and revel in. The guests to the hotel will be greeted by 'Fountain of Tales', a fountain with seating spaces and bookshelves featuring 5,000 books.

INK Hotel

Al Jaddaf Dubai | Number of Rooms/Suites – 63



INK Hotel is the latest 4-star boutique hotel in the area. It is a property focusing on sustainability and committed to honing hospitality excellence. It features splashes of vibrant colours to create a flashy ambience. The hotel has 23 square metre rooms and 30 square meter rooms, equipped with floor to ceiling windows, WiFi among others. The hotel also has a rooftop swimming pool, a gym and designated areas for pets.

Hyatt Centric

Jumeirah Dubai | Number of Rooms/Suites – 173 keys



Hyatt Centric Jumeirah Dubai, recognised for its contemporary style, debuts in the Middle East. The property is set to become a social hub in La Mer. The hotel showcases the city through juxtaposition of colours and textures. The hotel had its soft opening on December 15, 2021. Nestled in heart of Dubai, the hotel is the ideal for those looking to unwind in local hot spots and discover the city's hidden gems.



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