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# Sharjah reconvenes at



Sharjah will once again present its unique offerings and reconnect with trade partners across the globe at Arabian Travel Market from 9-12 May 2022. Over the past two years the emirate has been on track developing the eastern coast, which will be a key highlight at the event.



HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa  
Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority

**Shehara Rizly**

**H**E Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA), sharing details about this year's Arabian Travel Market, said, "The spotlight will remain on Sharjah's distinct cultural and heritage elements, with an emphasis on our sustainable and eco-tourism offerings. Alongside, a multitude of projects on the east coast will be showcased. Sharjah is proud to have 24 participants from all segments of the industry under our umbrella this year and many esteemed higher-level as-

sociates will be in attendance with the objective to highlight our successful, collaborative projects and the unique attractions and spirit of the emirate."

HE Midfa reiterated the importance of special media gathering, which would be keen to learn more about the new attractions planned for the emirate. "The Sharjah Tourism Media gathering at ATM is not to be missed as we will certainly be giving special glimpses into new attractions in the emirate, especially the massive new destination in the Al Dhaid region, Sharjah Safari," HE Midfa said.

## Qatar gearing up for FIFA World Cup

After Expo 2020, football World Cup will be the next big attraction that brings the world to the ME region opening a plethora of opportunities.

**Shehara Rizly**

**F**ootball has been a much loved sport in the Middle East region, hence the enthusiasm for the event started fairly early much before the pandemic. However, with the pandemic almost away, and as

Contd. on page 9 ▶



Berthold Trenkel  
Chief Operating Officer, Qatar Tourism

## 1,500 exhibitors attend ATM 2022

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME – Arabian Travel Market, shares facts about the international exhibition with **TRAVTALK**.

**Shehara Rizly**

**W**hat will be the focus or theme of ATM this year?

The theme of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2022 is 'The future of international travel and tourism'. This year's show will shine a spotlight on the long-term trajectory of our industry,

Contd. on page 19 ▶



Danielle Curtis  
Exhibition Director ME – Arabian Travel Market

## Surge in Business and MICE travel


Expo 2020 brought in a good number of clients from the region for business and MICE trade. Top hoteliers share views with **TRAVTALK**.

**“**We have been increasingly encouraged by the recent growth in enquiries and pick-up of confirmed group business here in the UAE. We have noticed that it is clear that the MICE business demand is growing with the UAE being seen as a destination of choice by virtue of its accessibility, facilities and safety.**”**



Daniel Varadi  
Director of Sales - Wholesale & Leisure, Fairmont Bab Al Bahr, Abu Dhabi

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# Focus on ATM to reconnect with partners

Attending Arabian Travel Market onsite for the second consecutive year, **Iftikhar Hamdani**, Area General Manager - Northern Emirates, HMM Hospitality shares about its value to the trade and its power to reconnect with partners, and also meet new potential partners at the hybrid event.

 Shehara Rizly

## How important is ATM?

ATM is one of the biggest travel exhibitions in the region, its importance has increased especially at this time when most of the travel exhibitions were cancelled due to COVID situation. ATM is important for our upcoming summer season contracting and to find new partner in the region, to meet our existing partners in this mega show.

## What will you be showcasing from your area at ATM?

Coral Beach Resort Sharjah and Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel are definitely best resorts in the Northern Emirates. Our strength is ser-



**Iftikhar Hamdani**  
Area General Manager -  
Northern Emirates - HMM Hospitality

vice excellence, beautiful beaches, and our USP is quality food in both resorts.

## Could you share your expectations from this year's ATM?

We are expecting a successful ATM where we will hunt our new partners for the immediate summer season and long-term

partners for the winter period. Expecting to sign off new contract within our regional partners.

## During 2021, which were the noteworthy source markets that contributed to the revenue of the hotels?

2021 was one of the best financial years ever, despite all the challenges. CIS was on top of the ladder this year, even during the summer period. Secondly, we gain a good number of tourists from Germany, Balkans, GCC and the subcontinent in 2021.

## Will you be focusing on new source markets?

Our focus is to get new markets, we are working

to find partners in German speaking countries DACH, Baltic, Balkans, East Europe and UK to balance our major share, which is from CIS coun-

## do you work with them and incentivise them, especially in the wake of the pandemic?

We have very good relations with DMCs and we

ning year 2021 was not possible without support of DMCs, who played major role in leisure segment to fill the room with good TRevPAR.

**We had best ever year (for business in 2021) compared to the past. We had majority of bookings from families**

**Over the past two years what sort of behaviour did you notice from the travellers? How did they book? Were they with family and friends or were they just couples or singles, did they have the appetite to travel?**

As mentioned 2021, we had best ever year compared to the past. We had majority of bookings from families. At the same time, we had accommodated couples and singles as well from business segment.

tries. Although CIS will still remain on top compared to other markets, as Northern Emirates' major feeder market is CIS for two decades.

**Travel agents have always played a pivotal role in terms of bookings, how**

consider them as team rather a business partner. Our relations are very strong with all the partners and we give them respect on parity and support them with our room availability during the peak season when hotels remains full. Our win-

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# Expo redefines Dubai as tourism city

One of the world's biggest cultural and multi-faceted events, Expo 2020, ended in Dubai on March 31, 2022. The exhibition attracted an exponential number of local and international visitors, reinforcing Dubai's image as a truly global city and an important tourism destination.

**O**n March 2 this year, it was revealed that more than 24 million visitors attended Expo 2020 – a testament to the idea of the event of bringing the world together. Despite being delayed by a year, the UAE government has successfully managed and delivered this large and spectacular event through their initiatives and close monitoring to successfully manage the pandemic.

Through Expo 2020, Dubai has reinforced its image as a truly global city and a key destination for tourists seeking diversity in their leisure consumption. This diversity is evident through Dubai's many leading hotels and resorts, entertainment hubs, shopping malls, and other offerings such as desert experiences, beautiful beaches, magnificent mountains, and outdoor activities.

Expo 2020 has further strengthened Dubai and the UAE's place as an important global player in several fields, showcasing its key offerings to the world and attracting not just tourists but also business investments. Besides tourism, Expo 2020 has undoubtedly benefitted other sectors such as real estate, retail, construction, and investment. It has helped stimulate growth with increasing hotel occupancy and elevating residential real estate prices. Employment also rose in one of the strongest increases since the beginning of the pandemic. Furthermore, experts have forecasted that direct revenues from Expo 2020 will reach 16 billion USD.

The tourism industry has been one of main beneficiaries of Expo 2020. For example, Dubai hosted 7.28 million international overnight visitors between January and December 2021. Additionally, in January and February 2022, Dubai has already hosted over 2 million international guests. Hotel occupancy rates have also benefited. According to the latest report from hospitality analytics provider STR, during the week ending March 12, the UAE hotel occupancy rate of 85 per cent was the highest in the world.

While Expo 2020 has helped boost the country's economy and brought millions of visitors to the UAE, the main question is, 'What is next'? One thing the event has accomplished is identifying

**“According to the latest report from hospitality analytics provider STR, during the week ending March 12, the UAE hotel occupancy rate of 85 per cent was the highest in the world”**

factors which are at the core of the tourism industry and will influence its future – sustainability and connectivity.

Sustainability was one of the most prevalent themes and agenda for the event. The new era of tourism is more focused than ever on sustainability. The industry also needs to respond to the change in consumption patterns of travellers as the number of responsible tourists increases rapidly. From conscious travel to conserving and protecting its natural and cultural resources, the



UAE has endeavoured to place sustainability in the heart of its tourism offering. The use of the UAE's most prevalent resource, the sun, has seen solar power being used to develop and enhance sustainable practices in the industry. For example,

2021, Dubai Sustainable Tourism launched its 'Get into the Green Scene' initiative. This entailed a sustainability calendar that contained environmental days throughout the year when people could engage with eco-conscious actions to promote Dubai's natural spaces and to inspire collaboration towards enhancing the sustainability of the city and to reinforce the image of Dubai as a world class destination for sustainable tourism.

Smart tourism and connectivity are other concepts gaining popularity and worldwide attention. Expo 2020 was also driven by connectivity and technology – from countries showcasing their rich cultural heritage with the help of virtual tours, to discussions on touchless technology in the industry, technology brought the world together on one platform at the event. Smart tourism focuses on technology as an enabler to enhance the traveller experience and provide a positive and sustainable effect on economies. Smart tourism can stimulate environmental, socio-cultural and economic benefits.

This includes promoting local tourism, enhancing the consumer experience and journey, and elevating the global touristic outlook.

**“Smart tourism focuses on technology as an enabler to enhance the traveller experience and provide a positive and sustainable effect on economies”**

For example, working with VoiceMap and PocketGuide apps, Dubai's Department of Economy & Tourism created eight free multilingual culture and heritage-led tours for self-guided city exploration. This was in response to a growing need for audio tours and were created in line with Dubai's 'Smart City' initiative to empower tourists to explore the city in a flexible and active nature.

Within smart tourism, the use of big data and approaches to data processing have been key features in the digital transformation and sustainability of the tourism sector and can be used by industry stakeholders to enhance their offerings and operations. For ex-

ample, such data allows the sector to make evidence-driven decisions, helps predict the future behaviours, needs and trends of tourists, helps personalise services and experiences more accurately, helps plan and manage a destination's public services, and aids in tailoring marketing campaigns in existing and new markets. Furthermore, using technology to attract tourists either by use of social media, forums and events that are now streamed across the world are extremely beneficial to the industry.

The use of smart tourism and the advent of sustainable tourism will go hand-



**Dr Sean Lochrie**  
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.)*



# Travellers to splurge this summer

Wego reveals that travellers will be taking longer holidays and spending more on travel in summer this year. Their data shows that the average booking value for flights has increased by 57 per cent in comparison to the same period in 2019.

**TT Bureau**

It is a testament that people are looking to spend more and book leisure trips. We also see travellers opting for all-inclusive leisure travel, which gives them a safe experience during the pandemic.

**Mamoun Hmedan**, Chief Commercial Officer and Managing Director, Middle East, North Africa (MENA) and India of Wego, said: "Summer 2022 will be all about long holidays and travellers will be spending more on leisure travel to make up for the

lost time. There is a lot of pent-up demand, people have accumulated leaves and are ready to travel again in the new norm. Our data also shows that the average trip duration has increased by 80 per cent for some destinations." Wego also reveals that the overall trip duration for people



**Mamoun Hmedan**  
Chief Commercial Officer and Managing Director, MENA and India, Wego

travelling to MENA countries has increased by 73 per cent to 24 days, up from 14 days in 2019.

It has increased by 80 per cent for Oman for travel dates between May and July 2022. Saudi Arabia saw a rise of 62 per cent,

Egypt 58 per cent, Turkey 42 per cent, Lebanon 41 per cent, Morocco 31 per cent, India 28 per cent and 21 per cent for the UAE. **Mamoun Hmedan**, Chief Commercial Officer and Managing Direc-

tor, Middle East, North Africa (MENA) and India of Wego, said: "Summer 2022 will be all about long holidays and travellers will be spending more on leisure travel to make up for the lost time. There is a lot of pent-up demand, people have

**“We are seeing very positive signs for tourism recovery globally and soon we will hit the pre-pandemic levels”**

accumulated leaves and are ready to travel again in the new norm. Our data also shows that the average trip duration has increased by 80 per cent for some destinations. The average airfares will

eventually drop as more occupancy is added and more airlines open more flights to global destinations. We are seeing very positive signs for the tourism recovery globally and soon we will hit the pre-pandemic levels.”



## Tourism Breaking News

Germany to launch two new campaigns and support six national partners at ATM 2022

Sharjah Airport records footfall of over 3 million passengers in first quarter of 2022

RAKTDA focus on cruise tourism

W hotels unveils W Dubai Mina Seyahi

Kerzner International to manage Bab Al Shams Desert Resort

Ascott unveils refurbished 228 unit apartments in Somerset West Bay Doha

SAUDIA resumes direct flights to Mauritius



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# Sustainability the way to the future

Over the past few years, sustainability has become a key concern all over the globe, especially in hospitality, tourism and aviation sectors. Taking initiatives in this direction, the government of Dubai and Abu Dhabi have announced a ban of single-use plastic from middle of this year.

“The climate is constantly changing, and its environmental effects impact the tourism industry's future feasibility and sustainability. Young travellers' awareness about climate change will demand higher standards, positively influence travel decisions and spending habits. Our regenerative design concepts must strengthen efforts to combat plastic pollution from the world's oceans and other natural resources. Banning single-use plastic not only supports planetary health, but also the alarming discovery of micro plastics, recently found in human lungs.”



**Ana Ramirez**  
Senior Designer and Wellness Specialist, OBM International

“The new generation of travellers holds power to regenerate our environment. Driven by a cultural shift in perspective from an increased understanding of climate change, millions of travellers seek new, eco-positive destinations known as regenerative tourism. Leading new concepts for sustainable tourism, the UAE has been at the forefront of banning single-use plastics and requiring higher building standards. As architects in MENA for over 25 years, our approach explores new possibilities to design contextual, regenerative developments benefitting local communities and restore wildlife habitats.”



**Tim Peck**  
Chairman, OBM International

“Here at Radisson RED Dubai Silicon Oasis, we always seek ways of addressing the needs of our customers in the most sustainable ways possible while considering both the current and the future trends that could impact all of us. We also look to raise the awareness of our team on how we can all be more responsible when it comes to sustainability and how our business can have a positive impact on our environment. We're very proud of our Platinum LEED Certification as part of Dubai Digital Park here in Silicon Oasis.”



**Stuart Birkwood**  
General Manager, Radisson RED Dubai Silicon Oasis



**Firas Sharrouf**  
General Manager, Sofitel Abu Dhabi Corniche

“Sustainability is one of our top priorities and core values and a major part of our strategic plan. While ensuring a memorable experience for our guests, we are also committed to implementing long-term ethical practices at the hotel. We strictly follow the guidelines and requirements of both Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism and ACCOR to implement environment friendly practices such as but not limited to elimination of single use plastic, various forms of energy saving and recycling, sustainable procurement etc. Our goal is to reduce our carbon footprint on the planet and inspire our guests to also be environment-conscious.”



**Nathan Subramanian**  
Director of Engineering, Sofitel Dubai Jumeirah Beach

“Sofitel Jumeirah Beach Residence (JBR), has been committed to sustainable value creation and plays an active role in giving back to the planet and the community. Through our Planet 21 - Acting Here programme, we are committed to 'positive hospitality' and have set goals based on four strategic pillars: Working with our employees, engaging our customers, innovating with our partners, and engaging local communities. At present, we are working towards removing all single-use plastic items used in the hotel by the end of 2022.”



**Mahesh Rajapakse**  
Chief Engineer, Hyde Hotel

“Here at Hyde Hotel, sustainability represents a key pillar of our business. In order to support this, we have adopted some of the latest technology in Guest Room Management Systems. These GRMS are highly effective at using different types of sensors to adjust lighting, heating/cooling and other electrical systems when there is no movement detected within a guest room. Here at Hyde Hotel, some of the key sustainability initiatives we have invested in include LED lighting and solar water heating systems. LED lighting is low in energy consumption and support sustainability through reduced demand to the electrical grid.”

“Accor is committed to sustainable value creation, and plays an active role in giving back to the planet and community. Our Planet 21-Acting Here programme endeavours to act for “positive hospitality” and has set some objectives, structured around four strategic pillars: working with our employees, involving our clients, innovating with our partners, and involving local communities.”



**Daniel Varadi**  
Director of Sales - Wholesale & Leisure, Fairmont Bab Al Bahi, Abu Dhabi

“SLS Dubai is looking to set new trends in the way luxury travel is perceived and delivered in the Middle East. The 'new cool' is to focus on sustainability, and we are already working on several projects with our culinary team on farming our own vegetables on-site, producing our own honey from the beehives we will have on premises.”



**Spencer Wadama**  
General Manager, SLS Dubai

“Today's hospitality culture is more defined by sustainability. Educating everyone about suitability is key to making it a shared concern. Sustainability needs to be viewed holistically rather than focusing only on one dimension (protecting the environment). By doing so, society can develop conceptual and practical competencies related to sustainability.”



**Amery Burleigh**  
General Manager, Mövenpick Hotel Jumeirah Beach



**Stephanie Aboujaoude**  
Senior Area Director of Marketing & Communications Middle East & Africa, Radisson Hotel Group

“Radisson Hotel Group has a strong responsible business heritage built around three Pillars: Think People, Think Community and Think Planet, and includes a comprehensive range of initiatives. We see that the sustainable travel is the future and leading corporations have been announcing their plans to offset their carbon footprint. Radisson Hotel Group is making a strong commitment to decarbonize its business by setting ambitious emission reduction targets to be net zero by 2050.”



**Fabrizio Bigi**  
Hotel Manager, Radisson Blu Hotel, Riyadh Qurtuba, KSA

“Sustainable tourism is the only way forward. The hospitality sector is doing its best drills in its operations, so we collectively move towards the right strategies for sustainability in the tourism sector. This effort needs to be sustained over a few years to ensure a full recovery.”



**Panos Panagis**  
District Director Oman, Radisson Hotel Group

“When we think about sustainability, it's easy to think about the environmental aspects. Sustainability's basics criteria include reducing energy, water use, waste and carbon emissions, which Radisson Hotel Group aims at. As such, sustainability in the hospitality industry is an essential factor that needs to be addressed properly. By practicing sustainability, hospitality businesses can not only improve their guest experience, brand image, and customer loyalty as well as help sustain the local communities in the destination.”

# 'You deserve Spain' campaign revitalised

Having opened before the rest of the European destinations, Spain became the hotspot European getaway for the GCC travellers. This year, once again Spain will be on ground at the Arabian Travel Market to lure more guests towards the destination. **Daniel Rosado**, Director Spain Tourism Board GCC shares with **TRAVTALK**.

 Shehara Rizly

**It is great to hear that you will be once again exhibiting at ATM, could you share with us how important it is to be there, especially after the pandemic?**

We want to showcase all that Spain offers in terms of experiences. After two difficult years where travel has been badly affected by the pandemic, we see summer in the horizon with high expectations, and good trends of people wanting to visit Spain and enjoy all that our lovely country offers, and where you can experience life together with family and friends.

**What do you plan to present at ATM this year?**

We will be promoting Spain as a destination which is safe, friendly and offering a vast variety of activities where to enjoy a hassle free holiday. We will present various destinations and also continue to promote our current campaign "You deserve Spain". In addition to this, we will be signing up with an online platform for a campaign to promote Spain this summer.

**Will there be partners who will join you from Spain? If so, could you share about them?**

We have around 30 partners from across Spain representing various



**Daniel Rosado**  
Director  
Spain Tourism Board GCC

regions, DMCs, Hotels etc. The participants are Andalusia, Costa del Sol, Catalunya & Tenerife among destinations, DMCs - Travellers Operator Turístico, Smartworks Events, Spain Travel Express, Across Spain, BVIP, itravex, Nuba Incoming Spain, Spain Essential Travel, Restel & Avoris.

Under hotels, we have Paladium Group of Hotels, VP Plaza España Design, Gran Hotel Ibiza, Kempinski Hotel Bahía, Guadalpín Hotel Banús, Don Carlos Resort and Alanda Hotel Marbella, LU&BO Hotels, Shopping Outlets - Value Retail (La Roca Village & Las Rozas Village ) and El Corte Ingles, Europa-mundo and Rail Europe among others.

**In terms of business and network relationships, what will be your expectations from ATM this year?**

We had relatively good numbers from GCC in 2021 despite the fact that the country opened up only in June. We are



**Summer is around the corner, what will you do specially for the UAE and KSA markets?**

We will continue to educate and create awareness through marketing campaigns and events to B2B and B2C, for which we received a good response last year. We will have Fam trips from these regions and we will also be launching the updated version of our Spain specialist programme, which will enable the travel trade to learn more about Spain and use this information in designing and customising their travellers itineraries and travel requirements to Spain accordingly among other promotional activities. 



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# Emirates the gamechanger of ME aviation

As the main carrier in Dubai, Emirates has been the backbone of the travel industry. Its unstinted service excellence was seen during the pandemic. **Adil Al Ghaith**, Senior Vice President, Commercial Operations Gulf, Middle East and Central Asia shares with Shehara Rizly the recipe of success.

**Could you share an update about how the opening of borders and easing of restrictions impacted resumption of operations?**

The reopening of borders and a wave of travel restrictions easing in countries across our network have helped accelerate what was already there - tremendous pent-up demand for air travel. Traffic across all consumer segments, including premium leisure, VFR and business and corporate travel, continues to grow with a surge in bookings every time restrictions are lifted. Of course, there are still markets that lag behind, like a number of countries in the Far East, and recov-

surcharges. For Emirates, it strengthens our position as the airline of choice for agencies that use the Travelport GDS, and em-



**Adil Al Ghaith**  
Sr. Vice President, Commercial Operations  
Gulf, Middle East and Central Asia  
Emirates

powers them to offer better and more personalised offers to travellers, who want to tap into our extensive network of destinations.



ery continues to be patchy there, however, overall we are already experiencing a boom. With confidence to travel again, we are looking forward to a robust summer season at Emirates.

**There was a partnership signed between Travelport and Emirates, could you share more details on what it entails?**

Our partnership with Travelport delivers several benefits to the travel community. First, it enables travel agencies using the Travelport GDS platform to access Emirates' content without incurring any additional

**Premium economy is a product which was revealed, in which destinations will you introduce this class and what will be your expectations over the year?**

Our premium economy product was introduced in late 2020 with rave reviews and positive feedback from customers, and today we offer it on six A380s flying to London Heathrow, Paris, New York and Frankfurt. We hope to be able to deploy these aircraft to other major cities within our network. So watch this space for more updates.

**What will you showcase this year at ATM?**

We will definitely be focusing on our premium economy product again this year, and hope to introduce some additional propositions around this unique cabin to the industry. We are also working to tie up with and cultivate strategic partnerships with stakeholders across the travel eco-system to ensure we continue to support industry-wide recovery.

**One of the key issues faced was cancellations and rescheduling of bookings, could you share how at Emirates it was dealt with to make it easier for the customer?**

We are seeing less cancellations and rescheduling given high demand across our network, however throughout the pandemic as we operated through uncertainty we kept customers at the heart of everything we did, by prioritising choice and flexibility to help them make the most of the changes that came their way.

**Travel agents play a key role when it comes to bookings, how will you incentivise them and work together?**

Travel agents are an important part of our business, and they continuously add value when promoting Emirates directly to a motivated audience of travellers, helping to personalise their trips with us through our rich products and services on offer. We continue to work hard and nurture the relationships that we have built with our trade partners through the years.

**Kiosks and check-in ports were introduced recently to make it a seamless experience for the customer, could you**



**share how you intend on tapping all other touchpoints?**

Along with our biometric path and touchless check-in kiosks, we recently introduced 25 mobile check-in ports at Dubai International airport Terminal 3, and these portable units will be deployed throughout the check-in halls across Terminal 3 at DXB. We will continue to roll out cutting-edge technologies like biometrics, AI and robotics across our operational and customer touchpoints to ensure a touchless and seamless experience on the ground, and will be making announcements in the near future around changes to elevate the passenger journey.

**Summer is just around the corner, will there be new services to those most visited destinations?**

We just announced a ramp up of our global network this summer and until the end of the year with the restart of services to four destinations, including Bali (1 May), London Stansted (1 August), Rio de Janeiro (2 November), and Buenos Aires (2 November). We are also boosting services and directing capacity to key cities across our network where we see strong travel demand, including Nigeria, Mauritius and Singapore. There will

be more to come as we get closer to fully restoring our pre-pandemic network and uplifting capacity in cities where we see strategic opportunities to bolster our presence.

**Malaysia and Indonesia announced border openings, when will the flights start?**

In Malaysia, we restarted flights to Kuala Lumpur in June 2020, and in line with easing of travel restrictions and increasing travel demand, we have progressively grown our services and today fly there 11 times a week. With the full reopening of Malaysian borders on April 1, Emirates anticipates higher de-

mand from travellers, who are eager to reconnect with loved ones as well as to discover the world, given that this has not been possible for the past two years.

**Israel is a new route announced to be opened in June, what will be your expectations from this market? Will it be to Dubai or beyond as connector flights?**

We are excited about Tel Aviv, which we are set to launch on 23 June. We anticipate strong demand between Dubai and Tel Aviv at the beginning. From Tel Aviv, we anticipate strong demand potential for Thailand, India, the Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives,

**“ We just announced a ramp up of our global network this summer and until the end of the year with the restart of services to four destinations ”**

mand from travellers, who are eager to reconnect with loved ones as well as to discover the world, given that this has not been possible for the past two years.

We have been operating services to Jakarta since April 2020, and since then we have grown our services to double daily flights and will also be restarting Bali in a few weeks' time,

and into Tel Aviv, we are already seeing strong bookings from Brazil, India, Australia, Thailand, South Africa, and the Philippines, with many of these markets being home to large Jewish communities. We have tailored our flight schedules to ensure the best connections through Dubai for a seamless customer experience. 🌍



# 24 DMCs from Satguru at ATM

**JVR Fernando**, Chief Commercial Officer, Satguru Travel, shares that at this year's Arabian Travel Market they will be participating with 24 DMCs, as the COVID intensity goes down and travel restrictions ease.

 Shehara Rizly

**S**atguru Travel has been participating at the Arabian Travel Market with its own stand over the past years. As the travel restrictions have eased out, they are able to get onboard 24 DMCs this year, which will provide an opportunity to meet and network with all the visitors at the show. J V R Fernando, Chief Commercial Officer, Satguru Travel shared, "The world opening up after the pandemic is witnessing a huge surge in leisure traffic. Therefore, we are particularly looking for some mutually beneficial partnerships and opportunities in Tourism."



**JVR Fernando**  
Chief Commercial Officer, Satguru Travel

we are based in Dubai, it is bringing more opportunities to us for inbound and outbound travel," he said. This year Ramadan came early and summer

destinations are Georgia, Baku, Turkey, Maldives & Zanzibar."

The ease of restrictions and opening of borders was most positive in terms of travel impact as people are now looking at travelling more than before due to the pent up demand. "Leisure traffic picked up big time. Business travel is not much compared to pre-pandemic, but it will boom in a short span of time," he said.

**“ATM as an event connects the travel world. As we are based in Dubai, it is bringing more opportunities to us for inbound and outbound travel”**

Arabian Travel Market now in its 29<sup>th</sup> year has been the great connector between the north and the south, east and the west, bringing together visitors across the globe on one platform where they can network, meet and speak business face to face. Fernando further reiterated the importance of the travel trade exhibition. "ATM as an event connects the travel world. As

follows Arabian Travel Market, hence it is a period when leisure travel surge especially from the Middle East, where they look at exploring different destinations every year. When asked about the trends that can be seen, Fernando retorted, "by looking at the trend, people are opting for short breaks rather than long trips. Currently, the most trending

Expo 2020 Dubai played a pivotal role in attracting MICE travel towards Dubai and the UAE. Now that Expo is over, there are still some pavilions that remained in the UAE to ensure that their presence continues. With the ease of restrictions for MICE events, destination weddings will be another important segment that has emerged. "We are in discussion with many

companies that are planning MICE travel. Many groups are also coming up, especially wedding groups as per our sales point of view," he said.

End of this year brings in yet another first to the region as for the first time the football World Cup comes to the Middle East region and Doha Qatar plays host destination. This is a significant event, which will no doubt see traffic flowing in to the region. "Discussions are ongoing to represent FIFA in many African countries where we are already active. We are also expecting huge traffic from the far-east and other African countries. Our local presence in Qatar is an additional benefit to fulfill the needs, especially in terms of services," he said.

The DMC locations are: Egypt, India, Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Madagascar, France, UK, Brazil, Tunisia, Turkey, UAE, Singapore, Malaysia, Russia, Thailand, Cambodia, Morocco, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia & Ukraine. 🇸🇦



## FIFA World Cup next big event in ME

Contd. on page 1 ▶

restrictions ease and borders open, the traffic to the Middle East and Qatar in general will definitely pick up towards the latter part of the year. The 28 days of sporting extravaganza, bringing in players and tourists from across the world to Doha in Qatar, will be one of the most historical events post pandemic. **Berthold**

**Trenkel**, Chief Operating Officer, Qatar Tourism, said: "With sports fans from around the world travelling over for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, we are working to ensure that everyone has a safe and enjoyable trip to remember. Among the measures to accommodate fans are new hotels, desert camps, holiday homes and the

highly anticipated floating hotels on cruise ships. When visitors arrive they will find our state-of-the-art metro line offers a quick and affordable way to navigate the capital and explore the sights. The sophisticated, modern city of Doha is home to large green parks, iconic museums, rooftop skyscraper restaurants, ornate shopping malls

and the historical Souq Waqif. Surrounded by the warm and tranquil waters of the Arabian Gulf, we also have over 20 spectacular sandy beaches and rolling sand dunes to explore. With a wave of new events, restaurants, leisure centres, beaches and more, there is lots to do outside of watching the matches for everyone at all budgets." 🇸🇦



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# UAE tops list of travellers to Azerbaijan

As soon as the restrictions imposed in view of the pandemic started easing out, Azerbaijan became one of the first countries to welcome travellers from the Middle East region, especially from the UAE. **Florian Sengstschmid**, CEO, Azerbaijan Tourism Board, shares with **Shehara Rizly** the board's plans for the market this year.

## What will you showcase at ATM this year?

ATM Dubai 2021 was the very first trade exhibition we attended physically since the pandemic started. We are very happy about being back at ATM this year too. This time we are participating with our largest ever stand (230 m<sup>2</sup>) and more than 28 local partners. This is our commitment to the Middle East market, UAE in particular, with lots of new flight connections, partnership opportunities and tourism products available. We are very excited to meet our partners again face to face and look forward to strengthening our ties in this source market.

## In terms of business transactions, what are your expectations from ATM?

Every time we have participated at ATM Dubai, together with our local partners, we have had a great time and seized amazing opportunities to expand our network in the Middle East market. One



Florian Sengstschmid  
CEO, Azerbaijan Tourism Board

of our commitments here is to seek ways to work together with our partners in the Middle East for the recovery of our industry in this new era. As I mentioned, more than 28 local partners will be joining us

at ATM this year, which means this is the biggest stand we will ever have had at this and other international exhibitions. Therefore, we expect to build more connections due to the increased reach we will have together with our partners and our openness to discuss how we can best collaborate.

With the UAE placed in the top 10 countries we keep receiving travellers from, with more than 7,500 arrivals in 2022 alone, as well as perfect flight connections and easily accessible e-visas and visas on arrival, we look forward to more opportunities to keep the UAE at the top of the list.

## After the pandemic Azerbaijan was one of the first to open 'to receive

## ME travellers, especially those from the UAE. So, how important is this market for you?

Rightly mentioned, Azerbaijan opened its doors to the Middle East as soon as the gradual opening of its international borders started. GCC countries are very important source markets for the inbound tourism of Azerbaijan. We are already seeing incredible increases from some of the countries in this region. For example, arrivals from KSA during the first quarter of 2022 increased by 20 per cent with 7,751 travellers compared to the same period of 2019, which was the best tourism year for Azerbaijan with a record number of arrivals.

Seeing all the increased numbers of travellers from our target markets, we have defined 2022 and 2023 as a period of active recovery and expect to be back to the pre-pandemic figures by 2024. We are glad to see all these positive tendencies.

## Sustainable tourism has been one of the contributing key initiatives promoted by Azerbaijan over the past few months. How will you further promote this to ensure that it accounts

## in the end collectively involving all partners in various sectors?

Sustainable and responsible tourism is what we define as our natural approach to tourism development, as we support authentic and unique assets. Continuing from the perspective of building

bit of Azerbaijan closer to UAE agents. How will you work with them this year post Expo and what initiatives will you take to incentivize them? Now that the rest of the Middle East, and GCC in particular, are open, will you be conducting any promotions to agents

“One of our commitments here (at ATM) is to seek ways to work together with our partners in Middle East for recovery of our industry in this new era”

on existing natural and cultural heritage, we expect the opening of the Mud Volcanoes Tourism Complex by the end of 2022, as well as the arts and crafts settlement of Basgal village, located on the crossroads of the Silk Road with renovated hammams and mosques, this summer. You can also see infrastructure upgrades such as installation of signs and information boards at the Diri Baba Tomb in Gobustan on the way to Shamakhi, which is another natural haven in Azerbaijan.

## During Expo 2020 Dubai, you hosted the agents at various events in your pavilion bringing a little

## from these destinations?

Yes, Expo 2020 Dubai was an amazing platform for us to promote the destination as well as bring international and local partners closer. We had three main directions within our participation here. The first one was media engagements, which proved to be very positive with a reach of about 25 million people. The second direction was interaction with our trade partners, where we held multiple trade events and a networking session and participated at a panel discussion – all with the involvement of about 150 partners. Last, but definitely not least, the Azerbaijan Pavilion immersed its visitors into the sustainable





world being established in Azerbaijan while depicting its traditions, culture and history through interactive digital methods. This one earned us about 20,000 contact details,

While there, we are also planning to host a dinner with our key trade and media stakeholders.

As these markets remain as important as before,

ence the available opportunities here first hand, especially in this new era. We plan to host Fam trips for agents from three GCC countries, precisely the UAE, Saudi Arabia

One of them is the opening of the infinity swing at Tufandag Mountain Resort in Gabala, where a breathtaking view of the mountains is accompanied by an adrenaline-filled attraction. Ideal for photos and selfies, it is also safe for both children and adults.

As you know, Baku is home to some modern malls. One of them is Deniz Mall located on the Baku Boulevard, where there is a new Kinderland education and entertainment centre, which is a small model of Baku with streets, shops, a bank, a hospital and even an airport. So, while kids can have their own fun, parents can also enjoy the shops and restaurants at the largest mall in the Caucasus region.

Another place that is very interesting and educational is the world's first

oil tanker museum. The ship, home to this museum, was long used to transport oil across the Caspian Sea. From the moment you step aboard the ship, you feel like you are travelling in time. Interactive exhibition halls help visitors learn about the

joy themselves at the cafés and gift shops.

#### Will there be new hotels opening this year?

Yes, new hotels are planned to open this year. These will be the Ritz Carlton Baku, Hotel Indigo and Wyndham

“Recently, there have been some quite nice additions to the list of experiences that are attractive for travellers from the GCC”

history of global shipping, the Caspian Sea and the oil history of Baku. There is also a very nice restaurant serving delicious seafood and national cuisine.

Another place that is especially attractive for kids is Baku Zoo, which has been reconstructed and reopened in early 2022. There are some very interesting species kept here, and kids and adults alike can en-

Garden, scheduled to open in the second half of 2022. Speaking of hotels, I would also like to mention our National Hotel Star Classification system, launched last year. There are now more and more hotels that receive quality certificates within the system, following a comprehensive inspection to make sure they meet international quality standards. 🌟



which we use to reach potential tourists and attract them to Azerbaijan.

Following our participation at Expo 2020 Dubai, our first return to connect with our counterparts will be at ATM Dubai. Our partners consist of airlines, tour operators, consolidators, OTAs, etc., Wego, Flydubai, to name a few.

and considering the steady recovery from the pandemic, we are focusing on motivating agents in the GCC even more to promote Azerbaijan to their customers as an exciting destination. While one of our plans to do that is to organise some B2B events, the other is hosting travel agents in Azerbaijan so that they can experi-

and Qatar, until the end of this year.

#### Are there any new attractions developed over the past few months relevant to the GCC market?

Recently, there have been some quite nice additions to the list of experiences that are attractive for travellers from the GCC.

## WELCOME BACK TO THE HOTEL THAT CHANGED IBIZA FOREVER

*Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel, Palladium Hotel Group's iconic hotel located in the heart of Playa d'en Bossa, is an exceptional hotel in all senses. Its edgy, trendy and with a charming style all combined with its transgressive character and exquisite service, promises a truly unforgettable experience for all its guests.*

*Is dedicated to providing the best outdoor entertainment coupled with a modern, cutting-edge hotel experience. Designed for the discerning traveller seeking fun, exclusivity, entertainment, and VIP services associated with Ibiza, the hotel continuously raises the bar from Swim-Up room options to daytime parties hosted by celebrated DJs, ensuring that the entertainment never stops.*

**AWAIT TO SEE YOU THIS MONTH. WHO'S READY?**

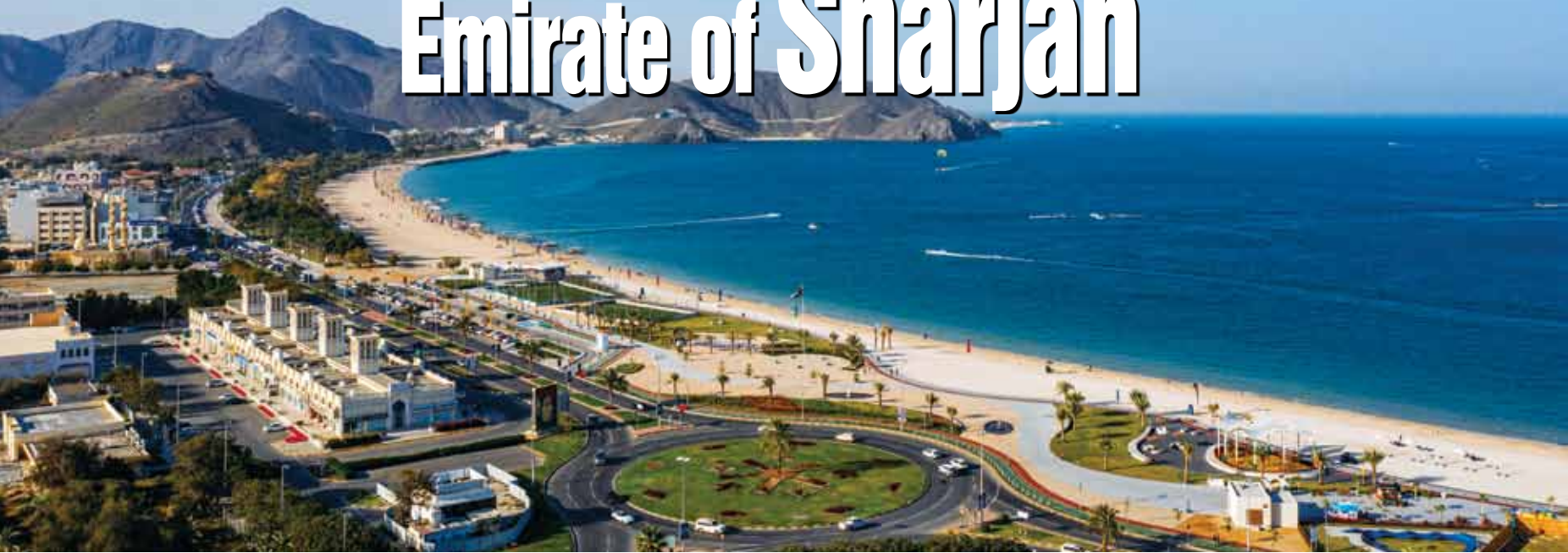
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# Unique Experiences in the Emirate of Sharjah



The Emirate of Sharjah offers visitors and residents plenty of sights, sounds and exciting activities. With its rich tapestry of culture, heritage and history, the emirate is one of the most dynamic and vibrant regions in the UAE. Sharjah is home to souks, wildlife sanctuaries, diving spots, museums, parks, a safari park and a multitude of cultural attractions, while providing a host of world-class facilities to visitors and tourists.

## Sharjah Safari

A new tourist destination, inaugurated by His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, on February 17, 2022, Sharjah Safari is the new spot for all adventure lovers.

A picturesque place nestled in the lap of nature, Sharjah Safari constitutes a rare opportunity for tourists and visitors to observe the endemic wildlife in Africa. Native African faunae roam without fences, in

an environment similar to their natural environment. Sharjah Safari is host to more than 120 species of animals, which live in Africa and up to 50,000 animals, ranging from birds, reptiles and mammals; such as lions, elephants, giraffes, black and white rhinoceros, crocodiles, deer, bulls and many other endangered animals.

## Al Dhaid Fort

Al Dhaid Fort is a testament to the ancient history of the city of Al Dhaid, which once formed a prosperous oasis with



fresh water, fruitful palms and defensive buildings that provide security and

safety for its residents. The fort, which dates back to 1820 during the reign of Sheikh Sultan bin Saqr Al Qasimi, then ruler of Sharjah, consists of a square-shaped building; 32 metres long and 26 metres wide and includes a number of rooms that have been converted into exhibition halls containing historical displays of the city of Al Dhaid and its heritage.

## Al Suhub Rest House

The highest point in Khorfakkan offers a charming panoramic view of the

**Al Suhub Rest is a recently built mountain-side rest stop that lies nearly 600 metres above sea level, offering panoramic views across Khorfakkan**

city, the new attraction centres around a distinctive circular structure, with a diameter of 30 metres. A unique way to explore Khorfakkan's mountains, Al Suhub Rest is a recently built mountain-side rest stop that lies nearly 600 metres above sea level, offering panoramic views across Khorfakkan. A range of wonderful facilities, including a

luxury restaurant, make Al Suhub Rest an ideal family attraction. The complex, built with a carefully-designed, safe road includes viewing points along the way.

## Wadi Shees and Shees Park

Shees park is located on the new Khorfakkan road and is considered a prominent ecotourism project





in the eastern region of Sharjah. Characterized by its unique location between tall mountains, providing visitors with an exceptional chance to explore the mountain ranges of the region, the park includes several paths of 506 metres surrounded by palm trees, a collection of native plants, a games area and shaded areas for families. Those looking to venture beyond

ski rentals, available in the huts near the centre of the corniche. Deeper into the water, there are several fishing spots to make a big catch. Choose from sailing, scuba diving, or snorkelling near Shark Island, which is just a short boat ride from the beach.

## Sharjah Mosque

More than five years in the making, the largest mosque in Sharjah

**Three-kilometre crescent-shaped Khorfakkan Beach is one of the most popular Sharjah tourist places and weekend getaways in the UAE**

the park can follow one of the tracks to Shees Valley for a scenic hiking trail. The path winds between the mountains and runs alongside a picturesque waterway, joining an old village and local farms.

## Khorfakkan Beach

This 3-kilometre crescent-shaped beach is one of the most popular Sharjah tourist places and weekend getaways in the UAE, with activities for every kind of traveller. Lined with palm trees and facing glittering waters, the sand makes a great playground for adults and children with swing sets and football goalposts. Explore the water with a relaxing swim or with boat and jet

opened its doors in 2019. The Dh300 million building occupies 185,806 square metres with a capacity to accommodate over 25,000 worshippers. An abiding symbol of faith, the structure is well worth visiting for the chance to view its grandeur; surrounded by gardens and water fountains, the domes, minarets and columns have been designed to reflect a unique Islamic architectural style. Home to a large library rich in Islamic works, the mosque is also equipped to welcome non-Muslim visitors and lovers of knowledge from around the world. The collection hall is a unique treasury of



books and antiques from different Islamic eras.

## The House of Wisdom

As part of Sharjah's newest award, UNESCO World Book Capital of 2019, celebrations, the



emirate opened a new library; The House of Wisdom, a high-tech library and culture centre is set to be a catalyst for a new cultural quarter in the emirate, featuring more than 100,000 books. The building sits amid landscaped gardens and features a large, cantilevered "floating" roof, with a 15-metre-wide overhang that provides shade during the day. The

**The House of Wisdom, a high-tech library and culture centre, is set to be a catalyst for a new cultural quarter in the emirate, featuring more than 100,000 books**

House of Wisdom is key in a reimagining of the role of libraries in community life of the future, a social hub for learning, supported by innovation and technology with facil-

ities including thousands of physical and digital books, exhibition spaces, a Fabrication Lab, Print-on-demand book stations, discussion halls and much more. 📖





# Turkish Airlines soars high in ME

One of the unique carriers in the Middle East that covers largest amount of destinations, Turkish Airlines has been popular for its product quality and service. The airline connects the world with its unstinted commitment to provide the travellers exactly what they require.

 Shehara Rizly

## Leading Airline in Middle East

Flying to every nook and corner in the Middle East, Turkish Airlines has become the leading European airline to operate in the region. Middle East alone has many airlines of its own, yet Turkish Airlines holds 11.2 per cent market share in 2021, according to sources. Ten years during the pre-pandemic period from 2009 to 2019, which were the golden years for Turkish Airlines, it increased its capacities by almost 3.2 times with an annual average increase of 12.4 per cent.

The pandemic did not deter the airlines from perform-

ish Airlines too will have the opportunity to increase its flights within the Middle East region.

From the service perspective, Turkish Airlines' usage of Arabic is another unique drive that helps confidence



**Bilal Eksi**  
CEO, Turkish Airlines

of the Middle East travellers. From its call centres, to social media and even its

its network and connectivity across the globe. One of the latest announcements was its partnership with GOL (GOL Linhas Aéreas, the leading company in the Brazilian market). Through this codeshare partnership, passengers will be able to purchase tickets to destinations in Brazil from flights departing from Istanbul and many other airports in Asia, the Middle East, Far East and Africa. Linking of two carriers' frequent flyer programs (FFP), will enable members of the Miles&Smiles and Smiles loyalty schemes to earn and redeem miles when flying on either carrier. Connectivity wise Asuncion, Santiago, Montevideo, Lima destinations in the region of Brazil will be accessible to travellers from Middle East, Africa, Asia and Far East. Currently, Turkish Airlines operates seven daily flights to GRU Airport, São Paulo's international airport in Guarulhos (GRU).

Commenting on the agreement **Bilal Eksi**, CEO, Turkish Airlines, said; "As Turkish Airlines, we are pleased to launch codeshare and FFP cooperation with GOL in Sao Paulo that will allow passengers unique travel alternatives via Istanbul to Brazilian domestic routes.



**“As two of the main airlines in Brazil and Turkey, GOL and Turkish Airlines offer the best experience to their passengers”**

ing, it just used a different strategy. In place of passengers, cargo operations surged during the pandemic, which gave the airlines options. However, by the end of 2021, Turkish Airlines added the number of cities in the region. As restrictions ease, 2022 seems to be the year of hope and Turk-

help desks, use of Arabic, Turkish and English has a great impact.

## Codeshare for more connectivity

The recent announcement of some codeshare partnerships and frequent flyer programmes, Turkish Airlines will further enhance

They will enjoy FFP benefits with the new flight options, along with a more convenient travel experience. By this opportunity, we also hope to make contribution to the commercial relations between our respective countries."

"As two of the main airlines in Brazil and Turkey, GOL and Turkish Airlines offer the best experience to their passengers. Enabling Turkish Airlines passengers to reach the largest number of flights and destinations in Brazil with this agreement is a pleasure for us," said **Paulo Kakinoff**, President, GOL. "This will be another opportunity for the world to get to know the beauties of Brazil through the various Turkish Airlines' connections to the GOL flights across the country," added the CEO.


Another such codeshare signed recently was the one with Air Serbia, which adds more destinations in its global network. Currently connects Belgrade to Banja Luka, Tivat, Ankara and from Istanbul: Ankara,

on several destinations in Serbia, Turkey and Balkans; passengers have started to benefit from an effective opportunity to enjoy more travel alternatives. We hope to provide further travel opportunities

**As restrictions ease, 2022 seems to be the year of hope and Turkish Airlines too will have the opportunity to increase its flights within the Middle East region**

İzmir, Adana, Antalya, Dalaman, Gaziantep, Kayseri, Konya, Trabzon, Gazipaşa, Bodrum, Odessa, Kiev, Amman, Cairo, Tel Aviv, Nis and Kraljevo.

"As Turkish Airlines, we are glad to expand our existing cooperation through this enhanced codeshare agreement with Air Serbia. With the introduction of new codeshare flights

for our customers with the enhanced bilateral rights in the forthcoming period. By this chance, I would like to thank Mr. Marek and his team for their efforts to put this enhancement into effect. Without a doubt, this step would also be a substantial added value for the bilateral relations of both countries," said Bilal Eksi, Turkish Airlines' CEO. 





# WingsWay adapts to new era of learning

**Shakir Kantawala**, Co-founder & Managing Partner, WingsWay Training Institute LLC (Dubai) & WingsWay Global Training Academy (India), shares with **TRAVELTALK** how aviation and travel are now more innovative with their new training techniques, among other things.

**Shehara Rizly**

## How will re-skilling and up-skilling with WingsWay Training Institute benefit the Travel & Aviation Industry in the wake of the pandemic?

The world is open. It is now essential that everyone possesses relevant skills to effectively serve their organisations and clients. Re-skilling existing talent and training new talent is the bridge between the current state of our industry and a strong, successful recovery. WingsWay is that Bridge!

Along with IATA Training, WingsWay Training Institute (IATA-Authorised

Training Center) offers innovative training solutions to develop professionals for tomorrow's travel and aviation industry. We offer training options from entry level up to executive level, with courses in Travel, Tourism, Airport Operations, Airlines & General Aviation. Our short skill-based courses, which can be completed in a few weeks or couple of months, are designed by industry experts, so learners can immediately deploy their skills and knowledge in their workplace.

Most of the GCC and wider Middle East region have re-established links to their primary markets creating demand for quali-



**Shakir Kantawala**  
Co-founder & Managing Partner, WingsWay Training Institute LLC (Dubai) & WingsWay Global Training Academy (India)

fied and certified professionals. At WingsWay Training Institute, we teach Skills for 'career-growth' and enhance 'employability opportunities' for working professionals and young career-seekers. We offer Virtual Instructor Led Training Courses for learners, from across

the world. Physical classroom options are also available. IATA training is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. WingsWay, along with IATA, strives to be the first point of reference worldwide for aviation professionals and students. We train more than 100,000 professionals each year in subjects across aviation, airports, travel and tourism, with access to industry best practice and international standards. .

## What are the USPs of WingsWay and why should one select you?

Our institute is founded and managed by senior professionals from the Aviation & Travel industry, who

are committed to produce a reliable and skilled workforce. Our Trainers are industry professionals, who happily share case-studies and market realities. Our guaranteed internships and job assistance programme ensures career growth and success!

## What potential exists for younger generation or GenZ and others to consider careers in the travel and aviation industries?

There's tremendous potential for GenZ, Millennials and for existing professionals. Annually, five billion passengers will board flights across the world, 52 million tonnes of Cargo will be moved,

nearly 70 million commercial flights will be operated on 32,000 commercial aircraft, using 3,800 airports, on 1,300 airlines. By the time you finish reading this article, over 100,000 people across the world would have safely landed. These volumes will annually contribute almost \$9 trillion towards the Global GDP utilizing 330 million jobs. Forecasts indicate that there will be 100 million additional jobs created across the world over the next 10 years in the travel, tourism and hospitality industries. All this brings about very exciting careers and job opportunities for GenZ and the Millennials. 🌍



## Impeccably Plush



**Bahi Ajman Palace** is set on its own private beach with inspiring views over the Arabian Gulf. Experience a beach hotel where unsurpassed luxury meets with contemporary facilities to ensure an unforgettable stay. Boasting 254 luxury rooms, suites, and residences, Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel is a stunning example of traditional architecture blended with contemporary design.

Our luxury hotel rooms & suites combine the convenience of modern designs and the rich feel of the Arabian architecture.



# An ideally profound getaway



One of the top luxury hospitality chains in Egypt, Sunrise currently owns and manages 20 resorts and seven cruises in the most exclusive hot spots in the country, including some of the most exclusive cities such as Sharm El Sheikh, Hurghada, Ain Sokhna, and Alexandria, offering guests a unique sea-side vacation experience.

## TT Bureau

The group takes pride in offering a beautiful collection of world class hospitality, catering to all the needs of today's travellers.

Featuring a wide array of rooms and suites, the resorts lay out the options for lodging befitting their guests' needs, including superior and deluxe rooms, family rooms, as well as upscale Jacuzzi

cation destination that cannot go undiscovered with it being located in an unmatched spot overlooking the Gulf of Aqaba and Tiran Island. The family-friendly resort has multiple adults-only venues, making it the perfect place for anyone demanding absolute rejuvenation.



AB Beach Overview

## From fun family resorts to exclusive adults-only resorts, Sunrise luxury hospitality chain aims to deliver excellent service throughout its journey

From fun family resorts to exclusive adults-only resorts, it aims to deliver excellent service throughout the whole journey. Sunrise is considered a haven for all gastronomes. With its extensive all-inclusive concept, guests can enjoy one open buffet restaurant and a minimum of five à la carte restaurants free of charge.

zi, swim up, and pool rooms and suites. Situated perfectly between the golden-drenched desert of Sinai and the mesmerising Red Sea shore, lies the beautiful Sharm El Sheikh, a location with some of the best coral reefs.

Sunrise Montemare Resort is a boundless va-

Sunrise Arabian Beach Resort is your go-to if you fancy your vacation a little differently. You get the exclusive opportunity to discover the spirit of Arabian ambience when you revel in its six-terraced architectural beauty, located in a breathtaking location in Sharks Bay. You only spend quality time there, with it being a suitable snorkelling spot for its dazzling coral reefs and extensive schemes.

Sunrise Diamond Beach Resort is the perfect

choice for a family vacation where you get to have the complete experience and get the most of everything. From the multiple and all-day activities for the young, such as the Kids Club, the kids pool and the magnificent Aquapark, to the nightlife and adult-only ventures such as the spa, the gym and the pub. Your vacation can also have a

serving of royalty with our Royal Club programmes.

The neighbouring sister hotels, Sunrise Remal Resort and Sunrise Remal Beach Resort, are the newest additions to the Sunrise Group in Sharm El Sheikh.

Located in Ras Nasrani, you get to experience the incredible views of the mountains and the seren-

ity of the desert combined with the shallow coral reefs and marine fauna, making it a famous and matchless international diving spot. The location and surroundings of both resorts are designed to grant you exceptional tranquility.



Infinity Pool





# SUNRISE

Resorts & Cruises  
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SUNRISE renders 5 of the best resorts in Sharm El Sheikh, exclusively scattered upon intricately selected spots within the heart of the vivid city.



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# Business and MICE travel pick up pace

Contd. on page 1 ►

“Expo 2020 had a major contribution towards creating additional awareness about Dubai. As economies around the world begin to relax travel restrictions with UAE's excellent reputation, a boost in MICE and corporate travel business is expected in the region. The outlook for 2022 and beyond remains positive, DTCM continues its global campaigns showcasing the city as the perfect destination for travellers from all demographics and segments supported by the city inter-connection network, with 198 destinations covered through 89 national and international carriers.”



**Bianca Nastase**  
Director of Sales and Marketing, Sofitel Dubai Jumeirah Beach

“Q3 2021 showed excellent growth to previous quarters in both business + MICE travel as corporate clients got back on the road/into the air. Omnicron meant a slight drop off in early Q1 2022, but we saw an extremely strong pick up in both segments in March that boosted total monthly hotel occupancy to over 95 per cent. Corporate business on the books for May through July is already pretty strong and just this week we have had confirmation from our main corporate client that they will be booking a high number of rooms with us here at Radisson RED Dubai Silicon Oasis for the remainder of 2022.”



**Stuart Birkwood**  
General Manager, Radisson RED Dubai Silicon Oasis

“As COVID-19 restrictions in the United Arab Emirates ease, the business and MICE travel sector started bouncing back with numerous organisations from GCC countries like Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Oman opting to host their conferences in the country. Ras Al Khaimah also continues to be a popular destination among European countries and India, with numerous business travellers arriving from these destinations. Rixos Bab Al Bahr has the largest conference room in the emirate and with its Ultra All-Inclusive packages, business trips often double as work and pleasure where guests take time to enjoy the resort facilities.”



**Ipek Dem**  
Assistant Director of Sales for MICE, Rixos Bab Al Bahr



**Mark Kirby**  
Head  
Emaar Hospitality Group

“Our region has cemented its place as a major economic player through forward-thinking development policies and strong investment. With the success of global events like Expo 2020 Dubai in the region, we have experienced an upward trend in MICE travel, and this has been further accelerated with the launch of world-class destinations like Museum of the Future, and the highly anticipated FIFA World Cup. This year, we are expecting to achieve 50-60 per cent level of MICE travel that we experienced in 2019. With the quick revival of industry, business travellers are back, and Emaar Hospitality's properties are equipped to deal with such travellers.”



**Kevin Dsouza**  
Regional Director of Sales,  
Radisson Hotel Group

“Overall business since Q4 LY has picked up extremely well not only in the Middle East but in Africa too. MEA region for us has had an absolute amazing Q4 and Q1. Although international MICE business has been rather slower, the regional MICE business has shown a great improvement. Not only our hotels in Dubai witnessed great demand due to the Expo, our other hotels as well in the region, including KSA, have seen this business recovering. Thanks to the efforts of all our great leaders in the region and government entities. With the lifting of all restrictions recently and travel made simpler we anticipate the international MICE business to bounce back much sooner than anticipated.”



**Luke James**  
General Manager, Hyde Hotel

“At Hyde Hotel, all of our rooms and suites offer large balconies, with views overlooking the Canal and Burj Khalifa, perfect for guests to sit, relax and enjoy the stunning views overlooking the impressive Dubai skyline. With the addition of five thriving F&B venues, all offering deliciously diverse cuisines, and our state-of-the-art Cinq Mondes Spa, guests never feel the need to leave the hotel. When they do, our prime location ensures they have some of Dubai's greatest attractions on their doorstep. The Dubai Tourism board continues to do a stellar job showcasing Dubai to the world, ceaselessly working to educate travelers on the endless reasons to visit, which makes our job much easier!”

“Located in the heart of the vibrant corniche, Sofitel Abu Dhabi Corniche is a 5-star luxury skyscraper in the urban capital – the perfect destination for business or leisure travellers. Blending modern details and Arabian elements with the authentic French 'Art de Vivre', our hotel promises a world of luxury and French elegance for guests. Designed for ultimate comfort, the 280 rooms and suites and the two floors of meeting and event venues – including two ballrooms for above 1000 delegates – are the perfect combination for any business or MICE requirement.”



**Firas Sharrouf**  
General Manager  
Sofitel Abu Dhabi Corniche

“After the pandemic, which has disrupted most of the incentive travel, the corporate clients are looking forward to re-energize, re-charge, reward and recognise their teams by organising incentive trips to safe destinations around the globe. Through its leadership and vision, the UAE government has firmly set the country as one of the safest destinations on the tourist map. Aside from the UAE, there has been a host of new destinations in the Middle East, which have recently emerged as attractive holiday hotspots for high-net worth individuals. Destinations such as Oman, KSA, Bahrain and Qatar have gone through tourism drives to increase their luxury tourism credentials.”



**Spencer Wadama**  
General Manager, SLS Dubai

“The Middle East is gaining popularity among business and MICE travellers, especially with the latest advancements in the UAE's digital economy. This is especially true with the country's virtual initiatives on NFT. As the UAE embraces, it has become increasingly a haven for business and MICE travellers, and Accor also will play an active role in aligning guest experiences with the UAE's vision for its digital economy.”



**Amery Burleigh**  
General Manager, Mövenpick Hotel Jumeirah Beach



**David Allan**  
Cluster General Manager,  
Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Waterfront, Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Canal View and Radisson Resort Ras Al Khaimah, Marjan Island

“We've been increasingly encouraged by the recent growth in enquiries and pick-up of confirmed group business here in the UAE. We have noticed that it is clear that the MICE business demand is growing with the UAE being seen as a destination of choice by virtue of its accessibility, facilities and safety.”



**Petr Dubsky**  
General Manager Diplomat  
Radisson Blu Hotel,  
Residence & Spa Bahrain

“The pandemic strongly affected Bahrain market. Government created 'Traffic Lights' system with different limitations. Yellow Zone restrictions were imposed till almost end of February '22, with many MICE cancellations as a consequence. All limitations were removed during March and we can slowly see a pick-up in inquiries. Most of our MICE business comes from private events, while business segment still needs major improvement.”



**Panos Panagis**  
District Director Oman,  
Radisson Hotel Group

“We have seen a significant increase in several confirmed events in Q4 of last year. This segment is safe to say started to recover much faster than rooms or F&B. The need of face to face interaction in current days can not be replaced by technology. We have also started to see big international events being confirmed and taking place in our country as well as our neighbouring countries. This drives additional footfall and confidence in the local market.”



# ATM to focus on future of travel & tourism

Contd. on page 1 ►

exploring trends, opportunities and catalysts for change along the road to frictionless travel and transportation, and seamless tourism and hospitality experiences.

## With the new weekend, what changes have been made in terms of days and timings?

In line with the UAE's new Monday-to-Friday workweek, the upcoming edition of ATM will run from 9 to 12 May. This is great news for us as we expect it to result in greater alignment with international markets, the majority of which also follow the Monday-to-Friday workweek.

## How will this year's ATM be different to last year?

Our revamped and rebranded ATM Travel Tech event (previously known as Travel Forward) will be a must-attend fixture, featuring seminars,

debates and presentations focused on this year's theme. Industry professionals from around the world will be on hand to provide expert insights and perspectives on where our sector is heading and how we can take advantage.

Our inaugural ATM Draper-Aladdin Start-up Competition is also generating a huge buzz. The initiative will see 15 travel, tourism and hospitality innovators pitch for up to \$500,000 of funding – not to mention the opportunity to compete for an additional \$500,000 of investment as part of the hit TV show, Meet the Drapers. On top of this, ATM 2022 will include in-depth buyer forums dedicated to India and Saudi Arabia.

## Could you please share some details about ATM virtual?

Following the success of ATM's hybrid approach dur-

ing the global pandemic, we were keen to ensure that ATM 2022 included a virtual component, ensuring those who are unable to join us in Dubai can nevertheless benefit from everything we have to offer. The third edition of ATM Virtual, which will take place from 17 to 18 May, will feature speed networking events, a session dedicated to digital influencers, plus a wide range

**“ This (Monday-to-Friday workweek) is great news for us as we expect it to result in greater alignment with global markets, the majority of which also follow the Monday-to-Friday workweek ”**

of business opportunities. In addition, our virtual briefings will offer industry professionals the opportunity to showcase their destinations to our global audience of travel buyers.

## Can you update about the number of exhibitors this year? How many visitors do you expect this year?

Every year, ATM offers an opportunity for thousands of industry professionals from all over the world to gather face-to-face in the UAE, and the 2022 edition will be no exception. Held in collaboration with Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) and the emirate's Department of Economy and

travel trade and tourism professionals expected to visit, 2022 looks set to go down as one of the most exciting editions in our 29-year history.

## Are there any new exhibitors, especially post-Expo?

Absolutely. This year, we cannot wait to welcome and reunite in-person with our new and returning exhibitors, which include Qatar Tourism, Qatar Airways, Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Jamaica Tourist Board, Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (SHUROOQ), dnata, Zagreb Tourist Board, Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, Istanbul Convention & Visitors Bureau and Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority, Taipei International Convention Center (TICC), Dubrovnik & Neretva County Tourist Board, Waldorf Astoria Kuwait, among others

– many of whom had to join us remotely in 2021.

## What sort of business transactions are you looking at this year?

We expect to see transactions across the full spectrum of our industry, from travel and transportation to hospitality and attractions.

## Could you share an update about the special speaker programmes for this year?

ATM 2022 will see a diverse range of industry leaders. Our opening session, which will be moderated by CNN's Eleni Giokos, will feature Issam Kazim, Chief Executive Officer of Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing; Scott Livermore, Chief Economist at Oxford Economics; and Jochem-Jan Sleiffer, President – Middle East, Africa and Turkey at Hilton. 🇦🇪






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# UAE sets example for recovery of travel trade

Recovery, resilience, development, sustainability, responsibility and innovation are values that will serve as a catalyst for the responsible development of travel and tourism in present times. The Middle East presents the right model for recovery of the travel business with these embedded values.

I have watched and personally experienced a glimpse into the remarkable recovery of the travel and tourism industry in the UAE and the wider region with great interest, especially in the lead up to our first-ever PATA Annual Summit taking place in Ras Al Khaimah in October this year.

Originally planned for late March 2020, we have had to reschedule the event twice because of the global pandemic. While navigating these uncertain times one thing was sure, our next PATA Annual Summit was going to take place in the UAE no matter what. We selected this destination purposely and for many reasons.

Firstly because of the Emirates' bold and engaging tourism strategies that have made headlines around the world for their rich cultural heritage, spectacular scenery, famous landmarks, high-quality tourism experiences and abundant indoor and outdoor attractions, securing the country's reputation as an exciting travel destination.

Secondly, the UAE is highly accessible, making it a very convenient destination for our Asia-Pacific organisation members from East and West to convene.

Last, but most certainly not least, we are delighted to partner with the Ras Al Khaimah Tourism

Development Authority (RAKTDA) as the host for our event. The Emirate's holistic approach and commitment to responsible and sustainable tourism with a focus on cultural preservation, employee well-being and in-

**Emirate's holistic approach and commitment to responsible and sustainable tourism with a focus on cultural preservations... is what we applaud**

dustry-wide protocols and carbon emission goals is what we applaud.

Fast forward, today we are busy planning the content and logistics of the event. I was lucky to have the opportunity to visit Expo 2020 and meet

with our local partners, members and government officials. Having watched the developments in the region from afar and then walking the grounds of Expo 2020 right after the opening in October made one thing

very clear, this region is a true model for the travel and tourism industry in the recovery from the global pandemic.

Recovery, resilience, development, sustainability, responsibility and innovation are values that are

symbolic for the travel and tourism sector in the Middle East. Values that are also core to PATA in serving as a catalyst for the responsible development of travel and tourism to, from, and within the Asia Pacific region. We are excited to be holding our 2022 Annual Summit in Ras Al Khaimah, bringing the world on one platform with a conference, leadership forums and travel mart components. This is especially relevant as the Middle East has also become an important source and destination market with China currently closed and the crisis in the Ukraine.

The PATA Annual Summit will be held from October 25-27 in Ras Al Khaimah.

The event will be the first time that the travel trade association will host its annual summit in the Middle East. The PATA community and partnerships bridge across the full spectrum of the travel sector. Its membership base spans every facet of the travel ecosystem from government leaders and MNCs to SMEs and universities.



Liz Ortiguera  
Chief Executive Officer of PATA

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

# Blue World brings first sports cruise in ME

It will be quite exciting to be onboard a cruise that caters to all your requirements throughout the year. Blue World Voyages has the most unique cruise, which will undoubtedly revolutionize cruising especially in the Middle East. Gene Meehan - Founder of Blue World Voyages shares more with **TRAVTALK**.

**Shehara Rizly**

**Could you share about the vessel and its unique features? How many could be accommodated comfortably?**

Using a strategy Blue World created that we call Adaptive ReFit™, we are converting an existing ship to the first ever Sports & Wellness themed cruise vessel. Originally built for 1,500 passengers, the ship will sail with only 520. Accommodations will include 40 one and two-bedroom Owners Residences, plus 225 passenger suites. Blue World is one of the first cruise lines

ever to downsize a ship in terms of passengers.

**What was the purpose behind creating such a cruise line?**

On so many cruise lines, passengers tend to eat and drink excessively, not everyone wants to spend their hard-earned vacation time in the middle of this crowd. We believe that you should return from your vacation feeling better than ever, after seeing new parts of the world, and meeting like-minded new friends. More and more people all over the world understand that when you live an active, healthy life, this becomes



Gene Meehan  
Founder  
Blue World Voyages

an important part of who you are – no matter where you are. We have created a 5-star 'casual' cruise line catering to active, healthy adults, as well as those looking to improve lifestyle choices. "Active Lifestyle Cruising."

**This would act as a home for those who want it for life and a cruise to those who want to try it out?**



That's right. Our Residence owners can come and go as they choose. They can also offer their Residence to family and friends, or for business or charity pur-

poses. In addition, we have 225 passenger suites, 200 designed for double occupancy and 25 for singles.

**Since it's on sports and wellness, could you share more?**

Our entire cruising experience, plus the design of our ship, is focused on

active healthy lifestyles, seeing new places in the world, and having fun. This includes the

food choices we serve, our programming both on and off the ship, our educational and cultural programs, and our spa operations. 🌊



# IHG Hotels charts growth plans for region

**Haitham Mattar**, Managing Director, IMEA IHG Hotels and Resorts, share their growth plans and strategies for the next 10 years in an interview with **TRAVTALK**. Always proactive in his approach, Mattar also shares details on their new rewards and loyalty programme, which will provide more benefits for their clientele.

**Shehara Rizly**

## What is your growth strategy for the region in 2022?

With a number of significant socio-economic changes across key markets in the Middle East, the region is transforming, and the economy is diversifying. This presents great opportunities for the tourism and hospitality sector, and we are committed to accelerating

growth and expanding our presence in the region. The majority of our growth in the Middle East will continue to be driven predominantly by the UAE and KSA. We also see opportunities more broadly

across the region, particularly in Oman and Egypt. We have exciting times ahead of us whether that is in facilitating the establishment of Saudi Arabia as one of the world's top tourism destinations or expanding our footprint across the rest of the Middle East. We are also com-

mitted to supporting development of various new destinations across the region to further strengthen the region's appeal to both domestic and global travellers.

As we develop and grow, it's important to us and our stakeholders that we operate in the right way for our people, communities and planet, and we have a series of ambitious commitments to help us achieve this through our

especially see a huge potential to introduce our global luxury brands such as Regent, Kimpton, and the recently launched Vignette Collection.

## In your opinion, what will you say the key changes/highlights were in 2021 for IHG MEA?

2021 saw the emergence of the tourism and hospitality sector from the shadow of the pandemic. As vaccines were rolled out globally and border re-



**Haitham Mattar**  
Managing Director, IMEA  
IHG Hotels and Resorts

## in the kingdom?

With the introduction of Vision 2030, Saudi's Tourism Development Strategy and the following socio-economic reforms, the Kingdom is poised for a new era of travel and tourism. We are witnessing a historic period of growth

and transformation in the country which is conducive to both domestic and international tourism.

As a global hospitality player with the largest hotel room inventory by a variety of brands that cater to all travel segments across the country, we are well placed to cater to these new segments. In the mid to long term, we expect the hospitality market in Saudi Arabia to do well and, as a result, we are expanding our footprint across the Kingdom with a number of new signings.

## Could you please share about the new rewards and loyalty programme?

As the world continues to evolve, so do we. With much anticipation, we are ushering in the next chapter for the rewards brand that defined hotel loyalty programs. IHG One Rewards celebrates individuality – giving members more control with the ability to choose to be rewarded in their own way. The programme's new benefits, launching in early June 2022, are the result of extensive research into what guests truly want. The reimaged programme encompasses IHG Hotels & Resorts' 17 brands and 6,000 hotels around the world, and now offers more choice and value than ever before.



growth and expanding our presence in the region. The majority of our growth in the Middle East will continue to be driven predominantly by the UAE and KSA. We also see opportunities more broadly

10-year action plan called the Journey to Tomorrow.

## Will you be bringing in new brands to the UAE and KSA in particular?

While we will continue expand the footprint of

strictions were lifted, customer confidence to travel saw a resurgence to even pre-pandemic levels.

Over the past year, we continued to elevate and promote our core competencies, providing visitors a variety in offerings, price and experience. We also signed more hotels to further strengthen our offering, including voco Dubai Palm Jumeirah, voco Bonnington Dubai which is now open to guests, InterContinental Resort Red Sea, InterContinental Riyadh King Fahed Road, Holiday Inn Najran in Saudi Arabia, four Hotel Indigo properties in Egypt and many more.

## How do you see the growth strategy for KSA in keeping with all the different developments

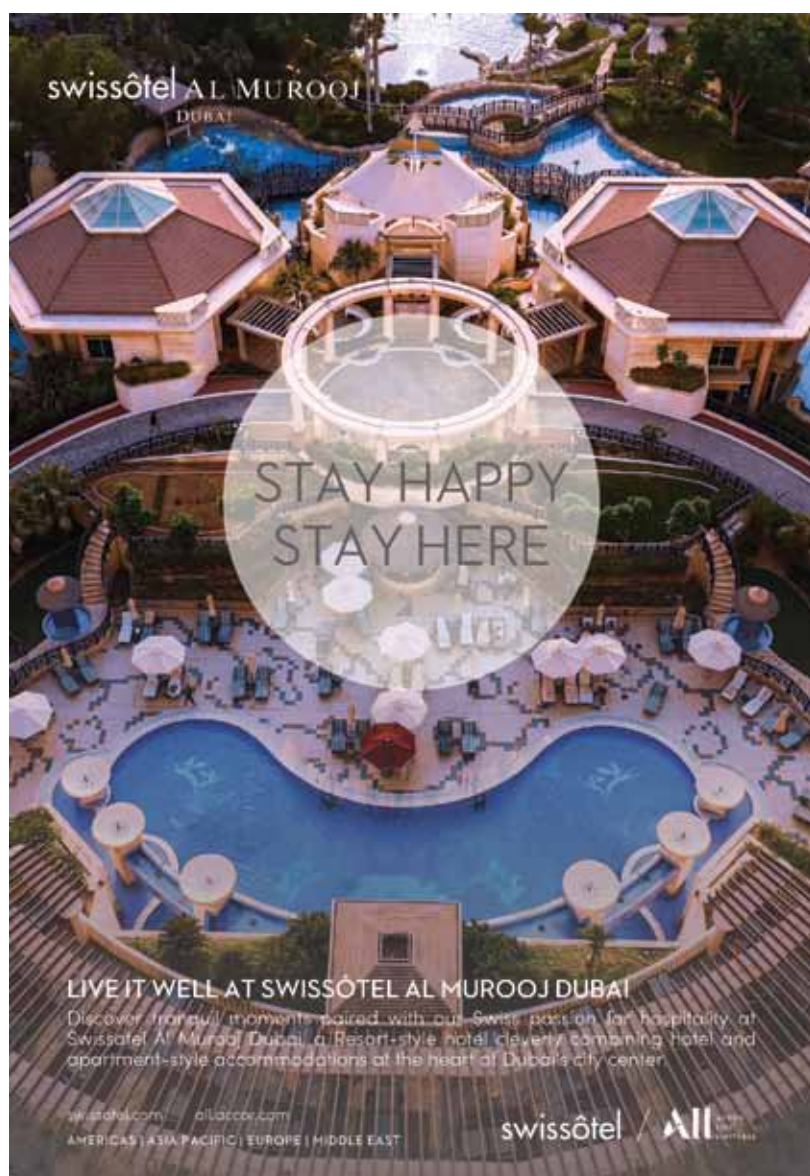
our established brands in the region to cater to an increasing number of travellers, we see an opportunity to bring the new brands to the market, especially in growing tourism destinations such as UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Given the demand for luxury experiences, we

**Majority of our growth in the Middle East will continue to be driven by the UAE and KSA. We also see opportunities more broadly across the region**

across the region, particularly in Oman and Egypt.

We have exciting times ahead of us whether that is in facilitating the establishment of Saudi Arabia as one of the world's top tourism destinations or expanding our footprint across the rest of the Middle East. We are also com-





# The rise of an iconic hotel brand

The Tower Plaza Hotel, a property with 401 rooms and suites rebranded under the new management and leadership of General Manager **Wael El Behi**, is a bleisure destination in the best location a tourist can think of while being in Dubai.

 Shehara Rizly

## Location – a key driver for guests

One of the key drivers of visitors or tourists to any hotel is the location and accessibility of it. The Tower Plaza Hotel has both these key elements that determine the visitor numbers or guests to the hotel. Wael El Behi, General Manager, The Tower Plaza Hotel, shares, "We have a prime location on Sheikh Zayed road with direct access to Emirates Towers Metro station and this is a unique selling point to attract tourists from different nationalities, who wants to take the Metro from Dubai International Airport directly to the hotel. Also, another major advantage is our proximity to The Museum of The Future, DIFC, DWTC as well as other key landmarks in the city."

## Rebranding and vision for future

Currently operational with an inventory of 401 rooms and suites, the hotel, after its rebranding, has a new vision to add more into its inventory and ensure more luxury and comfort for the guests. El Behi shares, "The Tower Plaza Hotel is a new brand created from inception with the objective to position the property as an iconic hotel among its competitors on Sheikh Zayed

road. At present, we have a total of 401 rooms and suites and by the next winter season we will increase the room inventory to 417 units by adding 16 studios and then by early next year to 431 by adding 8 panoramic premium rooms and 8 panoramic duplexes. We also have Metro, our all-day dining restaurant, Views@61, our panoramic restaurant and lounge on the 61st floor, Le Café Coffee and Bake Shop, Cooper Chimney Indian



**Wael El Behi**  
General Manager  
The Tower Plaza Hotel

restaurant, a state of the art health club, a dedicated SPA, ladies beauty salon, an infinity pool, 16 banquet and meeting rooms, and retail shops."

## Unique Bleisure hotspot

A few steps away from the business precinct and the iconic hotspots in Dubai, the hotel has all the ingredients ready made for delivery. El Behi with his exper-



tise shares the way in which he will attract the business and leisure, or bleisure visitors as the term goes, and the varied markets he targets this year. "Location, accessibility, room size, room inventory and meeting space are the key USPs of our hotel. Our strategy is to focus on our neighborhood to attract more corporate business from DIFC, Sheikh Zayed road business buildings, and also to attract exhibitors and trade visitors to DWT Convention Centre. We are looking at developing new source markets to the hotel to add them to the classic and key performing markets such as CIS, German, French, Indian and other markets."

## Travel agents key revenue drivers

Middle East market is still essentially a market that believes in the human el-

ement when it comes to making their domestic or international trips. Before the world came to a standstill,

is pioneer. I have developed a professional and friendly relationship with the major players in this market over

travel exhibition that we will use as a platform to market and showcase our hotel. We are hosting during the



there were various predictions on how the personal touch or the relationship with the travel trade such as agents, operators and bookers will be of the past. However, studies just before the pandemic showed the importance of the human touch to make it better. Come pandemic and the world saw the need to have the human element incorporated in everything they engaged in. El Behi has been working together with the travel trade for many years in his previous stints and he shares his thoughts on the role played by the most important people behind the scene, the agents. "Travel agents will represent the base business for the hotel and no doubt their contribution to our business

the past 20 years and this will definitely have a positive impact on the business flow to the hotel."

## ATM followed by summer

As the world meets in one platform annually at the Ara-

ATM some key potential partners, who are showing interest to work and develop business with us."

Right after the great meeting will come summer. El Behi responds, "For the international markets

**A few steps away from the business precinct and the iconic hotspots in Dubai, the hotel has all the ingredients ready made for delivery**

bian Travel Market, it is one of the most important international exhibitions for the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors and will always be followed by summer. El Behi reiterates, "Arabian Travel Market is a major

we have in place attractive rates and promotions with a decent room inventory to push traffic. With regards to the domestic market, we will put in place attractive staycation packages too." 





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# Travel firms to direct contract or to connect?

Pandemic has accelerated a long term trend for travel companies sourcing their accommodation. When it comes to the word 'direct' in relation to sourcing hotel accommodation, as many of you may know 'contracting' is not quite the same as 'connecting'.

**B**efore the pandemic hit, tour operators, OTAs and wholesalers were increasingly linking to hotels via direct, dynamic connections such as channel managers and switches – and moving away from the more traditional method of securing direct, negotiated contracts with individual properties.

This was initiated by hotel industry people as they used new technologies and looked to reduce the complexity of managing direct contract pacts. But will this trend continue to roll now the pandemic is largely over?

If anything the recent pandemic has led to an acceleration of this trend for direct connections as both demand and supply of this type of agreements have increased.

But why? Firstly, both the travel companies and the hotels have found themselves in a position where they no longer have the resources to manage and maintain a complex relationship due to resources possibly being reduced due to the pandemic.

Direct contracting can be labour intensive from loading as well as maintenance as new rates and offers are released. And if you need to

consider multiple markets, brands and channels then the effort increases proportionately.

Meanwhile, channel managers and switches have the technology to connect travel compa-

**Channel managers and switches can link to relevant properties worldwide quickly and efficiently, giving the travel companies the flexibility they need**

nies to hotels accessing similar products and commercials but with less resource and effort, while allowing them to retain the direct relationship with the hoteliers.

Secondly, tour operators, OTAs and wholesalers want to be more flexible and have had to react quickly to changing conditions. As the pandemic evolved, travel companies found themselves having to make strategic

decisions around destinations and hotel chains. What we know for sure is that channel managers and switches can link to relevant properties worldwide quickly and efficiently, giving the travel

companies the flexibility they need. This trend is likely to continue, as travel companies look at how they can help drive efficiencies, increase productivity and reduce operational costs. The great news is that people are ready to travel again. Tour operators and OTAs need to be ready and have the flexibility, so that they can maximise this opportunity.

Direct contracting still has a role to play, particularly for travel companies that have a smaller portfolio, or where they drive high volume to a selection of properties. Being able to negotiate bespoke agreements

that match the operator's demographic and that work for the hotel can unlock genuine value for all parties. In that respect the necessary simplification of a channel manager connection will not offer many more such possibilities.



**Andy Keeley**  
Commercial Director at intuitive, the travel technology provider

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

## Istanbul is MENA's popular flight destination

According to a new survey by leading online travel agency, Wingie, Istanbul was the MENA region's popular tourist destination in the first quarter of 2022. Driven by increased vaccination rate and lifting of travel restrictions, the tourism and aviation sectors appear to be making a rapid recovery.

**TT Bureau**

**I**stanbul has emerged as a leading flight destination in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, according to leading flight-booking website Wingie.



"Despite continued concerns over Omicron, international air travel in the MENA region showed major signs of recovery in this year's first quarter," Wingie Commercial Director **Orkun Ozkan** said.

According to first-quarter data compiled by Wingie, most of the flight tickets purchased in MENA region were to Istanbul, followed

by Khartoum, Manila, Dhaka, Baku, Lucknow, Entebbe and London. "Istanbul, meanwhile, topped the list of the most preferred destinations among MENA travellers," Ozkan said.

Wingie's survey also found that most flights originating from the MENA region departed from the Saudi Arabian cities of Riyadh, Jeddah,

Dammam and Abha. During the first several weeks of the year, numerous flights also departed from cities such as Dubai, Kuwait City and Cairo.

"The travellers from Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan and Oman mostly travelled to Istanbul," Ozkan said. The three most popular air routes

were Riyadh-Khartoum, Jeddah-Khartoum and Riyadh-Baku.

Wingie's survey found that following Istanbul, the most popular destinations among the same demographic were Khartoum, Manila, Baku and London. "More than 15 million people use Wingie each month in order to book their

flights, so it can provide a good picture of overall travel trends and consumer preferences," Ozkan said.

The average age of those booking tickets through Wingie is 34, and roughly

airlines are generally unable to provide. "Thanks to its algorithm, nine out of 10 users reached their final destinations by way of a single stopover, and with an average cost advantage of 36 per cent," he said,

**Despite continued concern over Omicron variant, global air travel in the MENA region showed major signs of recovery in this year's first quarter**

half of them have travelled alone during this year's first quarter. Ozkan highlighted that Wingie can offer route and transfer options that

adding that, "Wingie will continue to develop its services to shape the future of the air travel and pass on the benefits to customers."



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# Atomize gives tech boost to hotel industry

Atomize, a lean revenue management software (RMS) for hotels, witnesses exceptional demand in the Middle East as hoteliers look to boost their revenues and grow their market share in the fast paced recovery. The tool automatically sets optimal rates for hotel rooms.

TT Bureau

Just in the last three months, Atomize has expanded its Middle East footprint with the addition of three prominent hotel groups. Last month, the 270-room Gulf Court Hotel Business Bay became the first of seven Gulf Court Hotel properties to choose

announcement by Dubai-based Suha Hospitality in March to deploy Atomize in all four of its luxury hotel apartment properties in Dubai, with several more in the pipeline.

Earlier this year, JA Resorts & Hotels appointed Atomize as its exclusive revenue management software partner for its

with the exceptional response we have received to our market entry here in the Middle East and are grateful to have had the opportunity to welcome many fantastic hotel partners across the region," said Atomize CEO **Alexander Edström**. "At Atomize we help hoteliers boost their revenues and maximise their profitability by automatically setting optimal rates for hotel rooms through our lean RMS solution that is sophisticated, yet very easy to use," Edström added.

The need for an automated revenue management tool that supports reliable, real-time price optimisation, yet doesn't require



hours of training to use, has been among the key criteria for the selection of Atomize by hotel partners in the Middle East.

Hotels are increasingly asked to do more with less, they need to protect their cost base while maximising their

revenue potential. Commenting on the partnership with Atomize, **Rochelle Castillejos**, Group Director, Revenue, Distribution & Optimization, Gulf Hotels Group, said: "In a fast-paced market like Dubai it is essential to use an RMS that supports real-time price

optimisation. In Atomize we have a revenue management tool that we trust to make these data driven decisions for us and increase our revenues and operational efficiency at the same time." **Kamal S. Lohar**, Cluster Director, Finance, Suha Hospitality said: "In a dynamic market like Dubai there is simply too much data to process manually to ensure that our hotels are optimally priced at all times. Atomize helps us detect subtle changes in demand and adjusts our rates accordingly, thus capturing greater revenues and providing us with more time to invest in strategic analysis and planning."

**Need for an automated revenue management tool that supports reliable, real-time price optimisation is the key to Atomize's popularity**

Atomize, with the ambition to do a full roll-out planned across the group's portfolio. This followed the

10 luxury properties representing 1,500 rooms in Dubai, Maldives and Seychelles. "We are delighted

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## New hotels in the region

The number of hotels in the Middle East keeps growing, mainly due to the fact that the region has become a hub for both business and leisure travellers. We present a few properties that have opened and some expected to open soon.

### DoubleTree by Hilton Dubai – Al Jadaf

Location – Al Jadaf, Dubai | Number of Rooms/ Suites – 326

Located in Al Jadaf and boasting with 326 guest rooms and suites, the recently converted DoubleTree by Hilton Dubai – Al Jadaf is a stone's throw away from the Al Jadaf metro station. Just 10 minutes away from Dubai International Airport, the hotel makes it the perfect accommodation choice for both business and leisure travellers. It also features two restaurants, including StrEAT Culture.



### Palace Beach Resort

Location – Fujairah, United Arab Emirates | Number of Rooms/ Suites – 167

A palatial beachfront oasis where contemporary grandeur, natural beauty and Arabian heritage blend between the cityscape and Indian Ocean. Where the City meets the Sea, Palace Beach Resort Fujairah is set to open its doors in Q2 of 2022. Designed with a majestic sense of style and developed by Eagle Hills, Palace Resort Fujairah is set to become the brand's ultimate beach getaway.



### Copthorne Lakeview Hotel & Executive Apartments

Location – Dubai | Number of Rooms/ Suites – 165 Rooms and 43 apartments



Overlooking a picturesque lake, the Copthorne Lakeview Hotel & Executive Apartments Dubai Investments Park encompasses 165 rooms and 43 apartments of one and two bedrooms. It offers an outdoor pool area. The hotel adjoins a shopping mall that consists of a large grocery shop, Choithrams, a nail salon, a hairdresser, a kids play area, and several restaurants.

### Four Seasons Hotel Diriyah

Location – Diriyah Gate Development Authority, KSA | Number of Rooms/ Suites – 150



Four Seasons Hotel Diriyah will include approximately 150 luxuriously appointed rooms and suites, expansive meeting and event spaces, a wellness spa with seven treatment rooms and a fitness centre. The Diriyah development will become one of the Middle East's most walkable, pedestrianized cities, and upon completion will be the world's largest cultural and heritage site.

# A Doha hotel with multi-faceted appeal

Hilton Doha The Pearl Hotel and Residences offer business and leisure travellers from across the globe a stay suited for their vacation. From a hotel room to a home away stay in the residence, it provides facilities for both, short and long-term guests, and has a diverse F&B offering to suit all tastes and ages.

Shehara Rizly

**H**assan El Wahidi, General Manager of Hilton Doha The Pearl Hotel and Residences shares, "Our main USP is multi-faceted appeal. We are a hotel, and a residence, so we can appeal to short and long-term guests and have a diverse F&B offering to suit all tastes and ages. Our hotel offers 359 contemporary studios and suites featuring kitchens or kitchenettes, but guests also have access to inviting restaurants, including our cosy and award-winning Mulberry Tavern gastro pub, the casual but chic The Kitchen restaurant and the signature Levantine restaurant serving contemporary Lebanese cuisine. The Lobby Café offering coffee and pastry selec-



Hassan El Wahidi  
General Manager  
Hilton Doha The Pearl Hotel and Residences

tion, and La Pergola Pool Bar featuring refreshing summer beverages and all-time favourite snacks. We have a temperature-controlled outdoor pool, a fully equipped unisex and ladies only gym, and a cosy Kids' Club. Those seeking total relaxation and wellbeing can head to our signature and reinvigorating eforea spa, which is inspired by traditions from around the world. Guests needing to

work from the hotel are aided by our 24-hour business centre and can choose to host business meetings in any of our six, hi-tech meeting rooms."

Over the past few months there has been a rise in tourists to the region, especially to Qatar, and this has many underlying reasons, El Wahidi explained, "The

rise of tourists to Qatar. We are optimistic that we will continue to see a recovery in travel."

Source markets bring in the bulk of business but in the Middle East region, inter regional travel is also one of the key contributors. Speaking on the traditional source markets El Wahidi reiterated, "Our



and Oman. While markets such as Europe, Turkey, India, US and again Kuwait do visit for business."

The past two years has seen new entrants to the market and it is not just by air or land transportation but also the many cruise ships, which also contributes towards bringing in travellers from across the world. El Wahidi shared, "With Qatar borders now open we are seeing many leisure travellers from KSA and business

travellers from UAE. In 2022 as well, Doha has also welcomed a total of 18 cruise ships and we are expecting 12 additional cruise calls by the end of the season which is June 2022."

Travel agents have been the backbone of the industry, especially in the Middle Eastern region. Every experience can be enjoyed if it is tailor made to suit the traveller and the travel agent ensure that this is a possibility. 🌟

**Those seeking total relaxation and wellbeing can head to our signature and reinvigorating eforea spa, inspired by traditions from around the world**

progress in curbing the spread of the pandemic and the easing of local COVID safety precautions as well as the lifting of international travel air corridor bans, all had an impact on

hotel guests are divided between leisure and business travellers. Our leisure travellers have been usually firstly from our local market and neighbouring countries such as Kuwait



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## THE TOWER PLAZA HOTEL

### Dubai

**Nuran Kilani** joined The Tower Plaza Hotel as Director of Sales and Marketing. She will be responsible for the overall positioning of the hotel, brand communication and maximising hotel's revenue by developing strategies and business plans to increase revenue. She worked for Emaar as Cluster Director of Sales responsible for 12 hotels and new openings, spent 4 years with Grand Hyatt, 6 years with Conrad, did the opening for Shangri La Abu Dhabi, Rixos Premium JBR Dubai and for the Louvre hotels group.



## GRAND MERCURE HOTEL & RESIDENCES AND IBIS STYLES DUBAI AIRPORT

### Dubai

Grand Mercure Hotel & Residences and ibis Styles Dubai Airport, the brand new ACCOR complex celebrating the local culture heritage, is pleased to announce the appointment of **Cyrine El Klifi** as Cluster Marketing Manager. Hailing from France, El Klifi brings 6 years of marketing experience to the hospitality team. Using her expertise, she will play an integral role in leading, developing and driving strategic marketing campaigns and initiatives to maximise the property's revenue streams.



## DOUBLETREE BY HILTON DUBAI – AL JADAF

### Dubai

**Iman Syami** has been appointed as the first Marketing Manager of DoubleTree By Hilton Dubai – Al Jadaf, Hilton's latest addition to their portfolio. With six solid years of hospitality experience in multiple brands ranging from city to luxury hotels and a self-learned marketer with multiple skill sets, Iman will be taking charge the PR and marketing activities of the recently converted 4 star hotel. Iman was previously with SOL Properties overlooking the marketing activities for the real estate, holiday home SOL Living as well as luxury hotel The Dubai EDITION during the pre-opening phase.



## CATHAY PACIFIC

### Hong Kong

Cathay Pacific has appointed **Rakesh Raicar** as the new Regional General Manager for South Asia, Middle East and Africa (SAMEA). Raicar, who has over 30 years of experience working with Cathay Pacific, will take over from his predecessor, Mark Sutch. Based in Mumbai, India, Raicar would be responsible for the growth of the airline's business and operations in the said regions. He began his career with Cathay Pacific in 1992 and has held several roles through the course of his tenure, including Regional Marketing & Sales Manager, South Asia and Sales and Country Manager, South Africa and Indian Ocean.



## SOFITEL DUBAI THE PALM

### Dubai

Sofitel Dubai The Palm has appointed **Antonio Ostuni** as its Director of Operations, transitioning from a successful tenure as Director of Food and Beverage. With more than 20 years of experience, Ostuni has a proven track record in a variety of specialties within the tourism industry across Asia Pacific, Europe, Africa and the Middle East, in Luxury and Lifestyle properties alike. Under his leadership, Sofitel Dubai The Palm is focusing on enhancing its offerings with a spark of innovation and a solid entrepreneurial spirit. Having worked at flagship properties across the globe, Ostuni has the international knowledge and expertise to drive new and exciting projects related to the industry.



## STUDIO M AL BARSHA

### Dubai

Studio M Al Barsha, the chic urban hotel concept by Millennium Hotels & Resorts, announced the appointment of **Dani Moaccad** as Hotel Manager. With more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Moaccad enjoys a strong track record in hotel management, operations and customer satisfaction having worked with leading hospitality brands across the Middle East region. He is a highly motivated leader with significant experience in hotels' pre-opening and boosting the overall performance of operating hotels. His new role includes introducing Studio M Al Barsha brand to the market and promoting the property in the UAE and Gulf region among other things.



## GLOBAL HOTEL ALLIANCE

### Dubai

**Franck Kermarrec** comes on board as Chief Commercial Officer of Global Hotel Alliance (GHA). Kermarrec will be based at the GHA's headquarters in Dubai and report to the CEO, Chris Hartley, as part of the senior management team. He will be responsible for strategic growth of the company and accelerating its development plans. He will initially be focusing on growing the portfolio of brands and partners across all geographies. Originally from France, Kermarrec brings to the role extensive hospitality industry experience, having worked in Europe, North America, and Australia.



## CROWNE PLAZA DUBAI DEIRA

### Dubai

Hotel Crowne Plaza Dubai Deira is pleased to announce the promotion of **Emad Ramzy** to Hotel Manager. Joining the hotel in 2019, Ramzy brings more than 14 years of hospitality experience to the role. He has had an extensive career with roles spanning Egypt, Lebanon and the UAE. He has been at the helm of several successful restaurants and banquet operations, and is committed to driving luxury service, quality standards and developing teams. Earlier, he worked as a Director of Banquet Operations at InterContinental Hotels at Dubai Festival City.



## CROWNE PLAZA DUBAI JUMEIRAH

### Dubai

**Martijn Zengerink** was promoted to Hotel Manager at Crowne Plaza Dubai Jumeirah. Keeping pace with the trends in the hospitality industry, Crowne Plaza Jumeirah is privileged to be led by Zengerink, a budding hospitality leader. Zengerink's formula to success is an amalgam of being adventurous with calculated risks and self-development through experience. Fresh from Hotel Management School Maastricht in The Netherlands, he has put his Business Administration Degree into use by embarking on various management roles.



**Nicolas le Roux** takes on as the new Head of Marketing and Digital Strategy at GHA. le Roux will also be based at the GHA's headquarters in Dubai and report to the CEO, Chris Hartley, as part of the senior management team. Starting 1 April 2022, he will focus on generating revenues through the reimagined GHA Discovery loyalty programme, leveraging the company's extensive customer database, optimising the loyalty programme's digital presence, and driving higher member engagement. Le Roux will also be responsible for leading the marketing team, encompassing owned channels, including email, push, website, app and social media, besides branding, design and content strategy.



## KEMPINSKI HOTELS

### Dubai

Kempinski Hotels announced that **Timur Sentuerk** has been appointed Chief Operating Officer, Europe, Middle East & Africa as well as member of the Management Board. Bringing a 30-year impressive track record of delivering operational and financial performance to his new position, Sentuerk is a strong hospitality leader who has worked with iconic hospitality brands such as Langham Hospitality Group, Pan Pacific Hotels Group, Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Oberoi Hotels & Resorts, and Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group. A passionate, dynamic and entrepreneurial hotelier, his expertise spans new business development, operational excellence, and asset management.



## OCCIDENTAL SHARJAH GRAND HOTEL

### Sharjah

Occidental Sharjah Grand Hotel announced the appointment of its new General Manager, **Asier Baquero**, who will oversee all operations at the iconic hotel destination located on the coast of Sharjah, overlooking the Arabian Gulf. Baquero began his career over 22 years ago in his native home of Spain. A seasoned professional in hospitality operations, Baquero has served as General Manager and Deputy Manager across several resorts and city-based hotels under various international chains in the United Kingdom, Spain, Guatemala, Cuba and Mexico. He has an extensive record of managing various properties throughout his career, with substantial experience in leading teams.







# Eid al-Fitr

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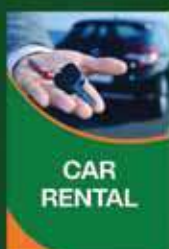
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