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Recognition for true leaders

Arabian Travel Awards are back with their 5th edition on 16 November 2022. A night to remember, the awards will recognise industry leaders and brands that have made a difference and honour the heroes within tourism and hospitality.

Shehara Rizly

The most sought-after awards in the region, Arabian Travel Awards will once again host the industry winners in Dubai.

SanJeet, Mentor, Arabian Travel Awards, shares, "Our awards, this year, are very special as it recognises the untiring efforts of the industry experts. This year, as the borders open, travel, tourism and hospitality experts were able to restore business and match the pre-pandemic volumes and growth. Most had to redefine the way forward



SanJeet
Mentor, Arabian Travel Awards

in the post-COVID era, as we can confidently call it."

The Arabian Travel Awards are for the industry, by the industry and of the industry. Applications are still open to vote for those in the industry

and who has been in the forefront promoting and working to go over and beyond the general norms of the industry. Middle East has always been the most resilient region, especially the UAE set an example to all the destinations of the world on how to move forward and achieve excellence in every possible way. The public and private partnership in the GCC region provided the industry a much faster comeback ensuring their commitment to move forward. Now, it is time to reward the industry experts and their establishments to advance ahead through all

obstacles and challenges to a new era in the region.

If you are yet to nominate and vote, this is the right time to do so. Check the website



www.arabiantravelawards.ae and vote for your hero of the year. Make a difference in the industry and carry forward all the positive trends that has been witnessed.

Travel industry ready for crypto revolution?

Industry leaders speak to about what they think about crypto currency use in the Middle East.

"We live in a fast paced world and technology is leading the change. Among the new developments cryptocurrencies are gaining more space in our daily lives and travel is no different. So, we are seeing an increase in the number of travel businesses and destinations where crypto payments are allowed. Always more options and easier ways to do things are good and positive. But companies should be aware of the risk, especially those smaller ones with less resources and knowledge. Cryptocurrencies are expanding, but we have seen it's a volatile asset and therefore entails risk consideration. Therefore, crypto's demand will continue to grow, but given the challenges it poses and the upcoming economic situation, this growth will be at a slow pace. What crypto can add to the travel industry, which has historically been fragmented and paper base, is a single and transparent system for travellers to pay in a direct, faster and safer way."



Daniel Rosado Bayón
Director - Spain Tourism Office - Tourism Counsellor GCC

Contd. on page 4 ▶

KSA to woo tourists in droves

Saudi Tourism Authority welcomes the Ministry of Tourism's decision to allow residents of the GCC countries to apply for an electronic tourist visa (eVisa) to enter the Kingdom.

TT Bureau

Visitors will be able to enjoy and explore Saudi's many unique tourist destinations, its stunning diversity of landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and the unparalleled hospitality of its people. The new eVisa announcement, and the extension of the visa on arrival is a solid step forward in making it even easier for tourists from all over the world to



visit Saudi. **Fahd Hamidad-din**, CEO and Member of the Board at Saudi Tourism Authority, commented: "The facilitation of a tourist visa for millions of GCC residents and the visa on arrival extension supports our ambition to welcome 100 million visitors

a year by 2030." UK, US and EU residents with an eligible passport can now get their visa on arrival, while GCC residents are required to apply for an eVisa on the official website 'Visit Saudi' and view all the requirements and procedures on the site.

Hike in Dubai tourism revenue

The Cabinet reviews the six-month achievements of the tourism sector in the country. The results show an increase in tourism's contribution to the national economy by 12 per cent.

TT Bureau

His Highness Sheikh **Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum**, Vice President, Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, chairing the recent Cabinet meeting, said, "Our tourism sector's revenues surpassed AED 19 billion in the first half of 2022. The total number of hotel guests reached 12 million, achieving 42 per cent growth, and we expect a strong tour-



HH Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum
Vice President, Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai

ism performance in this winter season. During the Cabinet meeting, we approved a new

law enhancing partnership between government and private sectors... Also, we approved the licensing of the first electric cargo aircraft in the region fully powered with clean energy."

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid noted, "I chaired the Cabinet meeting at Qasr Al Watan in Abu Dhabi. We reviewed the UAE's competitive and development indicators. Our commercial

Contd. on page 9 ▶

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Accor's commitment to sustainability

Everyone is a stakeholder when it comes to sustainable development. Therefore, actions at the individual or organisational level will no doubt lead to positive impact for the hospitality industry as a whole, says **Marc Descrozaile**, Chief Operating Officer, India, Middle East and Africa, Accor. He shares with **TRAVELTALK** the recent trends in the sector in the region.

TT Bureau

What are the short-term and long-term sustainable development plans and the way forward in hospitality?

Everyone is a stakeholder when it comes to sustainable development. Therefore, actions at the individual or organisational level will no doubt lead to positive impact for the industry as a whole.

In the case of a hotel, they are ecosystems, which we are able to influence to a certain degree by choosing more sustainable alternatives, such as conscious use of resources; water and energy conservation; reduction of food waste; the objective



Marc Descrozaile
Chief Operating Officer
India, Middle East and Africa, Accor

to reach net zero emissions; and ongoing dialogue with manufacturers and suppliers for responsible sustainable alternatives.

At Accor, our main goal for 2022 is eliminating all single-use plastic from our hotels, we are already working closely with our procurement teams to find sustainable re-

placements that match our brand requirements to not impact the guest experience or expectations during their stay. Furthermore, we have strong partnerships in place, such as the Dubai Can initiative, which was rolled out this year.

What initiatives are made to incorporate it in the day to day operations in sustainability?

At Accor, we have implemented a number of day to day activities to assist our teams to work with a more sustainable mindset such as Sustainability Onboarding training for all Heartists (team members) in all our hotels; use of eco-label led chemicals; water and energy saving units; emphasis on using local produce and services when possible;

strong waste segregation and recycling objectives; and guest engagement (towel and linen reuse programme, recycling, sustainable food menus). Furthermore, we are also moving forward with a num-

❖ ALL Connect: Hybrid meeting solution launched in partnership with Microsoft Teams

❖ Digitalisation of restaurant and in room dining menus: usage of QR codes, so

for small to medium sized events and the trend is to organise these virtually through online portals such as Teams and Zoom. However, big events are recovering at a faster rate and, therefore, we are seeing an increase in demand.

How is FIFA World Cup looking overall for the hospitality in the region?

Winter in the GCC region is indeed a high demand season traditionally, which sees our hotels reach high occupancies. This year, with the World Cup taking place in the region, we are expecting to see even more demand, not only in Qatar, but also in the neighbouring countries as well. ▶

At Accor, our main goal for 2022 is eliminating all single-use plastic from our hotels, we are already working closely with our procurement teams

ber of digital programmes, which include the below:

❖ Accor Key: keyless door solution that offers guests the opportunity to unlock their rooms through an application on their mobile phone

guests can view the menu offerings directly on their mobile phones

What are the current trends in the region?

This year, we have seen a slowdown in the demand

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Tourism News

DAL Group and Air Arabia to launch a new airline in Sudan

Etihad and UTU partner to reward guests

Marriott to add 20 hotels in GCC by 2023

Visitors across UAE through SCC summer promotions

Radisson to open 25 new hotels in the Middle East by 2027

Abu Dhabi national hotels to invest one billion AED in RAK

Rotana announces two Edge by Rotana hotels

Qatar Airways A380 to fly daily from Doha to Perth

Metaverse in Travel and Tourism

While the metaverse has gone beyond being a buzzword, it still is in its nascent stages in the travel and tourism industry. **Dr. Ross Curran**, Assistant Professor at Edinburgh Business School at Heriot-Watt University, Dubai, looks at some of the trends in the metaverse world and shares insights.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revolutionised many sectors and forced them to think out of the box. Technological adoption accelerated quickly in tandem with the closure of tourist sites and the grounding of aircraft around the globe. As we resume our physical engagement with our workplaces, leisure practices, and each other, technological acceleration's legacy continues. While the travel industry was one of those most affected by the pandemic, we have witnessed a rapid sector recovery, showing the people's continuing appetite for leisure experiences.

Looking towards the metaverse, we know it outlines new advances for digital

experiences, social networks, and interactions in digitally connected virtual spaces. It, therefore, follows logically that the tourism industry can benefit from engaging with the metaverse to enrich and enable rewarding tourist experiences. Therefore, using

These developments also offer potentially lucrative opportunities for tourist industry actors to differentiate themselves from the competition.

For example, Immersive Virtual Traveling and Virtual Reality Tourism are already

logical advancements are a positive step in contributing to the actions against climate change. Furthermore, as the metaverse develops and new technologies emerge, the industry can expect to offer full multisensory travel experiences through the metaverse. Metaverse can, in the future, have the capability to provide sensory experiences such as being able to be in the presence of family or friends on the other side of the world, or being able to smell the street food being dished out in India while on a virtual walk in the bylanes of Mumbai.

Pilot cases such as the Seoul Metaverse project, which intends to become the first major city to enter the metaverse with a tourist

route duplicating the city's main sites are already underway. As a result, tourists can feel as though they are walking through Gwanghwamun Plaza, Deoksugung Palace and the Namdaemun Market, without having to travel there physically.



Dr. Ross Curran
Assistant Professor at Edinburgh Business School at Heriot-Watt University, Dubai

(The views expressed are solely of the author.)

We know metaverse outlines new advances for digital experiences, social networks, and interactions in digitally connected virtual spaces

metaverse concepts in tourism can serve the sector advantageously. Several travel organisations are turning to VR and AR technologies to elevate customer experience and enhance their offerings.

being adopted. While the pandemic has been a big reason for the change in the industry, climate change and sustainability have also been key drivers for change within the industry. These techno-

Crypto to revolutionize travel business

► Contd. from page 1



Saleem Sharif
Deputy Managing Director - ATS Travel

currencies, this is in early stages. There is also a concern on its legality. Most countries have not legalized crypto payments except for those like El Salvador and Estonia.

Over the past decades, technology has brought about major changes to the travel and hospitality industries. This has basically led to smart tourism, and we can expect crypto and blockchain technology to revolutionize the travel industry in the coming years, enhancing the user experience tremendously. Although a few airlines and travel brands like Expedia have started accepting crypto-



Bruce Bromley
Chief Financial Officer and Deputy CEO of Soneva

While any payments made using Bitcoin or Ethereum are 100 per cent non-refundable, credits can apply in line with Soneva's flexible Payment and Cancellation Policy.

At Soneva, we have always endeavoured to be a pioneer in the hospitality industry, hence accepting cryptocurrencies as a payment method is another example of enabling our international guests to easily make payments from anywhere in the world. Bookings can be made directly with Soneva's reservations department and payment links can be arranged securely, from anywhere in the world.



Eric Barbier
CEO of TripleA

any risk. Used in conjunction with Pomelo Pay, a single frictionless payment platform, it facilitates cryptocurrency payments using secure QR code and payment link technology.

TripleA is thrilled to partner with Pomelo Pay to allow businesses like Soneva to accept cryptocurrency payments. With our partnership, businesses get to tap into the spending power of more than 300 million crypto owners globally, without bearing any price volatility risk. As a licensed cryptocurrency payments solutions provider, TripleA enables Soneva's guests to make crypto payments without

We are excited to embark on this journey with TripleA and enable Soneva to accept cryptocurrency as a form of payment from travellers across the globe. Importantly, TripleA is a reliable crypto payment solution provider. So, it is the perfect working partnership for all of us. As more businesses look to innovate how they make and take payments, this is the perfect opportunity to move with the times. It not only gives consumers the choice to pay the way they want, but also facilitates the way businesses accept payments.



Vincent Choi
CEO of Pomelo Pay

As the global tourism industry becomes more digital, cryptocurrencies and other blockchain technologies are becoming more prevalent. It is interesting to note that as per a study conducted by Traders of Crypto, travel currently ranks first among the top 10 crypto-friendly industries, with several travel giants, agencies, and even airlines accepting digital assets and crypto payments. Among other things, cryptocurrencies endeavour to enable travel and tourism players to offer secure payments.



Antoine Medawar
Founder & Angel Investor - ExploreTECH.io

There are some travel companies that are now starting to accept crypto. But you need to understand that in almost all cases they are using some kind of intermediary platform to handle the payment such as Coinbase or BitPay. In other words, they are adding crypto as they might add any other non-major currency they do not currently accept or operate in, just like they might add South Korean Won or Singapore Dollars – and almost certainly they are converting that cryptocurrency into 'fiat currency'.



Matthew Chapman
Co-Founder and CTO of Vibe

PATA reconnects global travel stakeholders

Global stakeholders will meet at PATA Annual Summit 2022, scheduled in the UAE on the theme 'Reconnecting the World Sustainably'. **Liz Ortiguera**, CEO, PATA, shares with **TRAVELTALK** about the importance of this year's conference, as they select Ras Al Khaimah, an upcoming destination in the UAE, as the venue for the summit.

Shehara Rizly

Could you share the theme and focus of PATA conference this year?

The theme of the PATA Annual Summit 2022 is "Reconnecting the World Sustainably". The theme is derived from three points. First, reconnection of global travel stakeholders. For many stakeholders in the Asia-Pacific region, this may be the one of the first events that they will be attending in person and very likely the first that is connecting them with partners/stakeholders from across broader Asia as well as the Middle East, Europe, and the US. Our network connects East and West. Second, a focus on our industry recovery. Conversations and workshops will address the challenges and solutions

to our complex and stage-wise recovery - which is particularly true for Asia-Pacific. And third, sustainability. While we are beginning to recover from the pandemic, we need to rethink travel and tourism to ensure that it is more resilient, sustainable, and responsible.

Why was RAK chosen as the venue?

Ras Al Khaimah is a lesser-known destination with many things to offer from the desert to the beach, as well as the Jebel Jais and the world's longest zipline, and the pearl farm. In addition, the rich culture and heritage of the destination are just some of the other assets of the destination that would be attractive to our delegates. Most importantly, the Ras Al Khaimah Development Authority (RAKTDA) expressed a

commitment to driving sustainability. They plan to be the regional leader in sustainable tourism by 2025. Sustainability and social



Liz Ortiguera
CEO, PATA

responsibility are foundational to the mission of our organisation and we share these common values with RAKTDA CEO Raki Phillips and his team at RAKTDA.

Will you be able to share with us the objectives of the event?

Our objective is to host an experiential, engaging event that supports RAKTDA's, PATA members' and the greater industry's critical needs and goals at this juncture in the recovery and everyone's drive for sustainability.

How will the event promote the destination?

We have been promoting Ras Al Khaimah through our various communication channels to bring greater awareness to this destination to industry leaders, our members, and the broader industry. From Ras Al Khaimah's convenient access from Dubai Airport to the many facets of the destination (desert, beach, mountain, adventure, culture and heritage, etc.). Just like our membership base, our speakers represent the entire spectrum of the travel and tourism industry

from governments, NGOs to hoteliers, marketing agencies, and educational institutions.

How important is the Middle East market to the world?


PATA's mission is to act as a catalyst for the responsible development of travel and

the world's population is within an 8-hour flight from Dubai. The Middle East market is critical to the recovery of the global travel industry.

What is the potential for the GCC/ ME region in terms of conducting MICE and events?

Ras Al Khaimah is a lesser-known destination with many things to offer from the desert to the beach, Jebel Jais and the world's longest zipline

tourism to, from and within the Asia-Pacific region. The Middle East is a key part of the Asia mega-region as well as the centre of the most critical crossroads connecting the East and West. Two-thirds of

With the development of new, state of the art facilities with strong adherence to sustainability principles, the growth potential of MICE and events located in the Middle East will be strong. 

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Ireland as a luxury destination

The luxury business-to-business event, TFest, will be held in Atlantis the Palm from 2 to 6 October 2022 with specialised networking sessions between the trade partners. Tourism Ireland will be participating this year at the event, **Olivia Frawley** – Executive Pan Market Luxury, Tourism Ireland shares with **TRAVTALK**.

TT Bureau

Could you please share the importance of participating in TFest this year?

Tourism Ireland is excited to elevate our presence at TFest 2022 and partake as a Preferred Partner in the Global Village. As an organisation we see the immense value in this unique tradeshow format that allows for relationships to be cultivated and enhanced through shared experiences and meetings. After a difficult few years, the industry and Tourism Ireland realise the importance of meeting in person and deepening existing relationships and growing the awareness of Ireland as a Luxury destination.

What do you plan to showcase this year?

We are delighted to be joined by 14 iconic luxury Island of Ireland industry partners. These partners include:

❖ Adare Manor, Ashford Castle, Cashel Palace Hotel, Galgorm, Culloden Estate, Hayfield Manor, K Club, The Merrion Hotel, The Shelbourne Hotel, MHL Collection, Trump Hotel & Golf Resort Doonbeg, Ire-

lands Blue Book, By Appointment DMC and Luxurious Ireland

❖ As part of our afternoon Experiences on the Tourism Ireland stand in the Global Village we are excited to bring our concept to life, as we are showcasing Ireland through



Olivia Frawley
Executive Pan Market Luxury, Tourism Ireland

As an organisation we see the immense value in this unique tradeshow format that allows for relationships to be cultivated and enhanced

unique experiences this year - 'Awakening your senses in Ireland' and will be bringing friends from Ireland with us to bring this to life:

Monday & Tuesday Experience

Awaken your Irish senses through an immersive Taste & Tour experience!

Have you ever wondered why you gravitate towards a certain aroma or taste over another? Or how your senses can awaken your memories and transport you to a specific time in your life or a place you fell in love with? Please join us on an im-

mersive journey of Ireland with our friends from Sensorium in Ireland. Taste, tour & discover where on the Emerald Isle your senses align with! Explore why you like what you like through a series of sensory experiments! Guaranteed to be fun, immersive and you might be surprised with what you learn about yourself! Nobody leaves empty handed. Spaces are limited – Reserve your spot now!

Wednesday Experience

Expect the Unexpected with Keith Barry!

Tourism Ireland is proud to have the world's leading TV hypnotist, mentalist and brain hacker, Irish-born Keith Barry join us for a truly unforgettable experience! Keith has been able to blow the minds of audiences globally. Prepare to have your senses heightened and be left amazed at Keith's unique blend of brain hacking and visual magic up close and personal! All of this whilst experiencing what the Irish are known for – their welcoming hospitality. Not to be missed! Spaces are limited – Reserve your spot now! (<https://keithbarry.com>)

Circle Talk - Tuesday and Wednesday

How Travel Magically Awakens your senses with Keith Barry!



Tourism Ireland is proud to partner with world-renowned Irish TV hypnotist, mentalist, and brain hacker Keith Barry for a unique Circle Talk show-



Keith Barry
TV hypnotist, mentalist and brain hacker

what we do – it is important to take a moment and immerse ourselves in the sights, sounds, smells of the lands we visit! Experience a fresh approach to travel through Keith's very fun and engaging session – with a few mind-blowing illusions along the way! Spaces are limited – Reserve your spot now! (<https://keithbarry.com>)

Will you be able to share your expectations from the event?

This year Tourism Ireland is increasing its presence at TFest as a Preferred Partner in the

and give visitors a true 360-degree taste of Ireland through all their senses. Visitors will leave understanding what Ireland can offer their clients from luxury accommodation to exclusive experiences that are unique to the island of Ireland. We are confident that TFest will give us the platform to grow luxury holidaymakers to our island in 2023 and beyond.

In your opinion, what will be different in attending TFest from other events?

TFest is unique in that allows time for relationships to be forged, new learnings and concepts to emerge through shared experiences. It brings together pioneers of the travel industry in one setting over 3 days. For Tourism Ireland, this allows us to share our Luxury story in a natural and relaxed environment. Much like what Ireland is adored and loved for! 🍷

This allows us to bring more luxury suppliers from all over Ireland and give visitors a true 360-degree taste of Ireland through all their senses

casing How Travel can Magically Awaken your Senses. We, in the travel industry, love

Global Village. This allows us to bring more luxury suppliers from across the island of Ireland



Travel partners invited for Swiss program

Switzerland is promoting its Swiss Travel System's Excellence Program aimed at equipping travel agents, tour operators and media to understand and explore the different aspects of the Swiss Travel System, and finally reward them with a trip to Switzerland, **Andreas Nef**, Market Manager GCC, Swiss Travel System, shares with **TRAVELTALK**.

TT Bureau

Switzerland is promoting its Swiss Travel System's Excellence Program for partners from the Middle East. "Participants will get a profound knowledge of the Swiss Travel System and Switzerland as a tourism destination. There are lucky draws on a regular basis for participants who have successfully completed the programme with great prizes to win, such as Swiss watches. The whole



Andreas Nef
Market Manager GCC, Swiss Travel System

programme consists of several modules covering various topics. For completing a module, 5 to 20 minutes are

required. Participants will be tested to check on the progress of each of them," said **Andreas Nef**, Market Manager GCC, Swiss Travel System.

"Each participant can earn points in making progress in the programme, especially by completing the test. Additional points can be earned for participating in extra modules, e.g., the Excellence Talk. Our aim is to welcome every person interested to join in the programme," he added.

Speaking about the benefits of attending and completing the programme, Nef shared, "Once a participant has concluded the whole programme and passed all the tests, a certificate will be issued with the



title of "Swiss Travel Pass Excellence Expert". This certificate states that the person in possession of it is an expert of Swiss Travel System. Finish-

ing the programme does not mean you are done with everything. Regular updates are planned and special content available once participants

are registered. Our goal is to interact with the Excellence Program community and give them access to exclusive content and information."

Once a participant completes the programme and passes all the tests, a certificate will be issued with the title of 'Swiss Travel Pass Excellence Expert'

Japan to allow foreigners

Japan has announced a policy of resuming entry by individual travellers for tourism purposes beginning on October 11, says **KOBAYASHI Daisuke**, Executive Director, JNTO Dubai Office.

TT Bureau

JNTO looks forward to welcoming individual inbound travellers back to Japan with the long-awaited lifting of entry restrictions. The resumption of individual travel to Japan and visa waivers, and the elimination of the daily arrival cap will allow international visitors to enjoy Japan in more



KOBAYASHI Daisuke
Executive Director, JNTO Dubai Office

Tourism Organization (JNTO). Since the opening of the JNTO Dubai Office in November 2021, we have been eagerly awaiting, and busy preparing for, the day when international visitors can return to Japan with relaxed entry restrictions. 2022 marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and the United Arab Emirates. JNTO Dubai Office will engage in various promotional activities. I am looking forward to seeing as many people as possible from the Middle East visit Japan in the coming months and year."

Seino Satoshi, President, JNTO shared, "I am incredibly pleased to finally welcome back individual travellers after coping with the pandemic during a wait of two-and-a-half years."

Lifting of entry restrictions are long-awaited news for tourists around the world who have been looking forward to visiting Japan

ways than in the past two-and-a-half years. These measures are long-awaited news for tourists around the world who have been looking forward to visiting Japan.

KOBAYASHI Daisuke, Executive Director, JNTO Dubai Office, shared, "The Middle East is positioned as one of the 22 strategic international markets targeted by the Japan National

'Net zero' pledge by ATM

ATM, the leading travel and tourism event for professionals throughout the Middle East, has announced that 'Working Towards Net Zero' will be its official theme for ATM 2023.

TT Bureau

Arabian Travel Market (ATM) will be held at the Dubai World Trade Centre on 1-4 May 2022. RX (Reed Exhibitions), the organiser of ATM, will celebrate its 30th annual event by unveiling a dedicated sustainability pledge, not only to make the ATM 2023 event more sustainable, but also to announce 30 long-term goals.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director, ATM, said: "If the UAE and the wider Middle East are to achieve their net zero ambitions, the travel and tourism industry will play a vital role, given its share of regional economic activity and of course its growth potential. With COP27 being held in Sharm El Sheikh this year and COP28 in Dubai in 2023, it is essential that



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director, Arabian Travel Market

hotels, airlines, leisure resorts and all associated companies

net zero, ATM 2023 will also provide an ideal platform for industry players to engage with sustainability experts and their peers to address the challenges of achieving net zero."

According to a World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC) report, travel and tourism account for between 8 per cent and 11 per cent of the world's emissions. It also revealed that 42 per cent of the travel

If the UAE and the wider Middle East are to achieve their net zero ambitions, the travel and tourism industry will play a vital role

start to put their sustainability strategies in place. While unveiling our strategic path to

and tourism businesses analysed currently have publicly announced climate targets."

Ras Al Khaimah to host PATA conference

Ras Al Khaimah welcomed more than half million international and domestic visitors between January and June 2022, an increase of 21 per cent versus the same period last year. 'We are on track to reach over 1.11 million arrivals by the year-end and fully return to pre-pandemic levels in just two years,' says **Iyad Rasbey**, Executive Director, Destination Tourism Development & MICE, RAKTDA.

 TT Bureau

Could you share about how Ras Al Khaimah fared during this year as borders opened?

Ras Al Khaimah is one of the first destinations in the region to recover to pre-COVID levels thanks to the agility of our tourism community during the pandemic, recently announcing our highest visitor numbers since the onset of COVID-19. We have welcomed 521,085 international and domestic visitors between January and June 2022, a total increase of more than 21 per cent versus H1 2021 and a return to pre-pandemic figures from YTD June 2019 and we are on track to reach more than 1.11 million arrivals by the end of the year and to fully return to pre-pandemic levels in just two years. Boasting over 8,000 keys, the Emirate's strong performance in H1 2022 was bolstered by the opening of several new hotels and resorts including the InterContinental Mina Al Arab and Mövenpick Al Marjan Island, marking the debut of each brand in the Emirate.

Are there new hotels coming up in Ras Al Khaimah?

As a rapidly growing destination, we have 4,617 keys and several new hotel brands in the pipeline, including Marriott, Anantara, Conrad and Sofitel. We are also diversifying our portfolio with sustainable accommodation on Jebel Jais opening in the next few years:

❖ Earth Hotel Altitude, an eco-based pop-up hotel concept set to feature 16 fully fitted accommodation units, an activation center and swimming pool

❖ Saij, A Mantis Collection Mountain Lodge, comprising 70 luxury lodges, will provide a pure mountain retreat that focuses on nature as well as mind, body and soul with guided treks, mindful pursuits and creative experiences

❖ Cloud7 Camp Jebel Jais – the ultimate glamping experience with 30 accommodation units built out of sustainable material.

How will the Wynn hotels in Marjan Island attract visitors to Ras Al Khaimah?

Due to open in 2026 on Ras Al Khaimah's Al Marjan Island is the multi-billion-dollar integrated resort of almost



Iyad Rasbey
Executive Director, Destination Tourism Development & MICE, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority

As a global renowned brand and targeting the luxury travel market, Wynn is sure to attract well-travelled international tourists and expatriates. It will also create opportunities across numerous sectors, adding value to the economy, creating approximately 11,000 new jobs, and strengthening the Emirate's service infrastructure across tourism, aviation, hospitality, food and beverage, real estate, logistics, and entertainment, catalysing the growth of the economy.

As a global renowned brand and targeting the luxury travel market, Wynn is sure to attract well-travelled international tourists and expatriates

250,000 sqm - Wynn Resort on Al Marjan Island. The resort will have more than 1,000 rooms, shopping, meeting and convention facilities, spa, more than 10 restaurants and lounges, extensive entertainment choices, and a gaming area.

Ras Al Khaimah is the venue for the PATA conference this year. Could you share how important it is for the Emirate to host the global event?

We have experienced strong growth in the MICE segment thanks to our robust recovery plan that enabled us to emerge

resilient and become one of the fastest tourist destinations in the world to recover. Ras Al Khaimah has already hosted several large in-person events in the past year including the Arab Aviation Summit 2022 and the Global Citizen Forum 2021, bringing together over 400 guests from across 32 countries. We look forward hosting the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Annual Summit for the first time, bringing together international leaders, industry shapers and senior decision-makers, who are invested in driving tourism to, from and within the Asia Pacific.

What are the main objectives of the event? How many visitors do you expect? How will you get them to make it a leisure trip?

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority is focused

events such as these brings in thousands of visitors from around the globe to experience the Emirates unique tourism and hospitality offering.

Alongside our extensive MICE offerings, our Emirate also boasts several adventure, culture and luxury travel offerings for all to enjoy.

Will there be new flights for the event?

We are continuously exploring ways to further increase the direct connectivity to Ras Al Khaimah and have recently announced a series of strategic partnerships with airlines and leading tour operators to target emerging source markets such as Gulf Air and IndiGo.

To further boost connectivity, the Authority is developing the Emirate's burgeoning cruise

and activities such as mountain biking, hiking, abseiling and rock climbing, designed to test participants' abilities to thrive and survive under extreme conditions. Reopening this winter and the first of its kind in the world, BGEC offers accommodation on-site in the form of 16 sustainable cabins that can host up to three guests and caters to all those seeking a true outdoor experience.

What are the sustainable practices adopted by Ras Al Khaimah as a destination?

Under our all-encompassing banner of Balanced Tourism, the Authority is shaping tourism in the UAE by placing all aspects of sustainability (environment, culture, conservation and livability) at the centre of its investment and development strategy.



on promoting the Emirate as a leading MICE and sporting destination in the Gulf to boost tourism, and we have already announced a number of strategic event partnerships secured in the first half of 2022, including a three-year partnership with Global Citizen Forum to host its prestigious annual summit, and our selection by The World MiniFootball Federation (WMF) to stage its biennial international football competition in 2023. Hosting international

sector, with the aim of attracting 50 cruise ship calls each season, and over 10,000 passengers within the next few years.

Any new openings in terms of attractions and glamping and lodges for winter?

The region's first Bear Grylls camp, located on Jebel Jais and featuring the world's first Bear Grylls branded accommodation, offers a range of thrilling instructor-led survival courses

Is there a short term and long term plan for Ras Al Khaimah to promote the destination?

We have three key pillars; we are focused on to further drive visitor numbers, adding more hotel rooms and enhancing our unique tourism proposition, achieving our vision to become a leader in sustainable tourism and increasing our connectivity with key markets. We aim to triple the number of visitors by 2030. 🇦🇪



Inhouse dining key revenue source

During the pandemic, revenues for Park Regis Business Bay came from F&B, mainly due to the many novel options they offered to their guests, **Azhar Allauddin** - Food & Beverage Manager, Park Regis Business Bay, shares with **THAT TALK**.

TT Bureau

After rooms, the next big revenue generator for hotels is food and beverage, and enticing the inhouse guests to consume food within the hotel is a challenge, but not at Park Regis Business Bay. **Azhar Allauddin** - Food & Beverage Manager, Park Regis Business Bay, shares, "Our revenues come from food and beverage mainly due to the many novel options we offer to our guests.

Sometimes, guests request us to tailor-make menus for their private parties. This gives us an edge as we can offer them a wide variety of options

Sometimes, guests request us to tailor-make menus for their private parties and at times even in room dining. This gives us an edge as we can offer them a wide variety of options and they too are able to select the best possible options than just having an a la carte offer. When it comes to meetings and con-

ferences, it is somewhat similar; if the client wants to add something off the general menu, we can cater to their requirements, which gives us an edge. Similarly, when we have group bookings, they sometimes share their options, so that we can offer them what is required."

Before the pandemic, food deliveries coming into the hotel used to be frequent. If this has changed? Allauddin said, "Previously it used to happen quite



Azhar Allauddin
Food & Beverage Manager
Park Regis Business Bay

to ensure inclusion of food and beverage for their clients in the bookings, Allauddin mentioned, "Most of the travel agents are aware of our product and facilities and I must say that they are impressed, as we can cater to a high volume of guests up to 200 at the same time serving different cuisine. So, in order to attract and educate them, we invite agents and bookers for a site visit and food tasting, and also circulate our special winter and summer promotional meal rates to all corporate, DMCs and travel agent. Lastly, we have special incentive policy for agents and bookers."

Commenting on alternative ways of creating revenue for

the hotel, Allauddin shared that outside events, MICE and functions are channels of great importance. "We undertake special outdoor catering for special events. We also run food and beverage promotions online over social media, E-flyer, inhouse advertisement through roll up banner, digital marketing, tele calling, SMS and E-Mail blast. In certain cases, we sell packages to our inhouse guests for breakfast, lunch and dinner," he said.

Allauddin concluded, "Our main aim is to ensure that our guests are satisfied not just with the rooms, ambience, and facilities, but also with the food and beverage, as it is an integral part of their stay. We have a feedback system where guests can comment on their experience. If there are any complaints, we handle them professionally, offer attractive discounts. Most importantly, we go the extra mile whenever necessary to celebrate or wish them on their special occasions, let them feel home away from home."

Dubai hotels receive 12mn guests

► Contd. from page 1

and development sectors surpassed the pre-pandemic growth. Under the leadership of my brother Mohamed bin Zayed, the UAE has managed to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. Our country has become globally prominent for its significant economic growth and development."

His Highness further added: "The number of global indices topped by the UAE rose from 121 to 156 indicators. We ranked among top 10 in 432 global indicators, compared to 314 pre-pandemic. We are the first in the world in terms of security and safety, infrastructure, flexibility of regulations, and more."

His Highness said: "The UAE's foreign trade exceeded AED 1 trillion, compared to AED 840 billion pre-pandemic and this year's economic growth exceeded 22 per cent."

The Cabinet meeting reviewed the achievements of the country

288 global indicators this year, compared to 189 in 2020. The UAE has been among the world's top 10 list in 432 indicators, compared to 314 in 2020.

The Cabinet also reviewed the UAE's significant growth in economic and trade indica-

The number of global indices topped by the UAE rose from 121 to 156 indicators. We ranked among top 10 in 432 global indicators, compared to 314 pre-COVID

at the global level, where the UAE ranked first in 156 global indicators for 2022, compared to 121 indicators in 2020. Also, the UAE has ranked among the top five in

tors, as the Constant Price GDP growth rate for the first quarter of 2022 reached 8.4 per cent with a total of AED 399 billion, compared to AED 368 billion in

the same period of 2021. The UAE's foreign trade recorded a leapfrog of more than 50 per cent, with a total of AED 1.060 trillion during the first half of this year, compared to AED 702 billion in the same period of 2020.

The Cabinet approved the issuance of a federal law regulating the partnership between the federal authorities and the private sector in the UAE. The law aims at organising partnership between both sectors, encouraging the private sector to participate in development and strategic projects, increasing investment in projects of economic and social values, and enhancing the competitiveness of projects in the local, regional and global markets.

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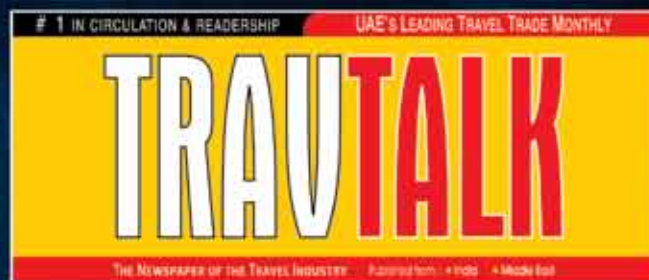
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food souk: خور سوک

St.Petersburg's roadshow in Dubai

St. Petersburg City Tourist Information Bureau and Committee for Tourism Development of Saint Petersburg organised a successful roadshow for the travel trade in Dubai. There were 10 partners who conducted B2B sessions with the agents from Dubai and shared information about the destination and their new attractions and programmes.





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St. Petersburg entertains Abu Dhabi agents

Leading travel trade agents in Abu Dhabi attended the first ever roadshow from St. Petersburg recently with partners from DMCs, hoteliers, cruise/ shipping companies and medical tourism. The roadshow was divided into three parts, the first being B2B sessions, followed by presentations by the partners and a grand dinner.



IndiGo begins Mumbai-RAK direct flights

IndiGo selects Ras Al Khaimah as its 100th destination and fourth airport in the United Arab Emirates. The new route not only connects Mumbai to Ras Al Khaimah, but beyond Mumbai to other parts of the world, and has been warmly welcomed by the customers and authorities, says **Pieter Elbers**, Chief Executive Officer, IndiGo.

TT Bureau

The inaugural IndiGo flight from Mumbai was welcomed by the operator and managing body of Ras Al Khaimah International Airport. The aircraft received a ceremonial water cannon salute as it taxied to the terminal to mark the occasion. **Sheikh Ahmed bin Saud Al Qasimi**, Chairman of the Public Services Department in Ras Al Khaimah; **Engr. Sheikh Salem Bin Sultan Al Qasimi**, Chairman of the Department of Civil Aviation Ras Al Khaimah & Ras Al Khaimah International Airport; **Atanasios Titonis**, Chief Executive Officer of Ras Al Khaimah International Airport; and **Stanislav Bujnovsky**, Director - Commercial & Business Development,



IndiGo already serves an unparalleled 74 cities and communities throughout the nation. This new route, warmly welcomed

from the Indian subcontinent. The driving force behind Ras Al Khaimah's economy lies in its thriving tourism and industrial

and the United Arab Emirates, these are the two key pillars of our relationship."

Atanasios Titonis said: "IndiGo is the right airline partner in our portfolio as we are on our way to move into a destination airport. This partnership will boost our business and will open a new channel to serve the tourism for Ras Al Khaimah as an Emirate."

racotta dunes, as well as fertile, green oases and the dramatic, awe-inspiring vistas of the majestic Hajar mountains including the UAE's highest

hiking opportunities. These flights are designed to cater to business and leisure travellers who are constantly on the lookout for new and affordable



welcomed **Pieter Elbers**, Chief Executive Officer, IndiGo, who travelled in the inaugural flight to Ras Al Khaimah.

Pieter Elbers, Chief Executive Officer, IndiGo, said, "We are very pleased to commence this first direct connection between Mumbai and Ras Al-Khaimah. For IndiGo, this is 100th destination in 6E network and our fourth Emirate. Ras Al-Khaimah, which is known for its bright agricultural surroundings, is also focused on becoming the regional leader in sustainable tourism, which aligns well with our overall focus on sustainability. In vast and diverse India, In-

by our customers and authorities, further enhances connectivity in the region as envisioned in IndiGo's strategy."

His Excellency Engr. Sheikh Salem Bin Sultan Al Qasimi

sector and IndiGo's approach is well aligned to our passenger needs."

Ambassador of India to the United Arab Emirates, His Excellency **Sunjay Sudhir** said,

It is our pleasure to welcome IndiGo airlines to Ras Al Khaimah International Airport

– His Excellency Engr. Sheikh Salem Bin Sultan Al Qasimi

said: "It is our pleasure to welcome IndiGo airlines to Ras Al Khaimah International Airport and to be able to acknowledge the increased passenger flow

"Connectivity is very important for both in the level of people or passengers and at a level of business. When it comes to the relationship between India

With over 7,000 years of fascinating history, traditions and culture, Ras Al Khaimah, promises an authentic and easily accessible Arabian experience. A haven of year-round sunshine and nature,

mountain peak – Jebel Jais. Known as the adventure hub of the Middle East, Jebel Jais is home to the Jais Adventure Park, a gateway to attractions such as Jais Flight, the world's longest zipline, Jais Sky Tour,

flying options to access destinations that help in building businesses and are known for their tourist attractions. Customers who wish to plan their travel can book tickets via the official website www.golndigo.in.

Connectivity is very important for both in the level of people or passengers and at a level of business

– **Sunjay Sudhir**, Ambassador of India to the UAE




Ras Al Khaimah Emirate features world-class hotels and attractions, pristine beaches, lush mangrove trees and ter-

a series of six exhilarating ziplines stretching 5km, Jais Sledder, the region's longest toboggan ride and numerous

golndigo.in. The introduction of these flights will further bolster the airline's domestic and international connectivity. 📌

St Petersburg's UAE roadshow a success...

St. Petersburg City Tourist Information Bureau and Committee for Tourism Development of St. Petersburg recently held a roadshow in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Leading travel trade agents from the cities participated in the roadshow with partners from DMCs, hoteliers, cruise and shipping companies and medical tourism experts.

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The partners in the St. Petersburg roadshow held in Dubai was a rip-roaring success. DMCs, hoteliers, cruise and shipping companies, and medical tourism specialists attended the roadshow. It kicked-off with B2B sessions where the travel agents spent time and got to know the destination. The event concluded with an authentic St. Petersburg entertainment, which included a ballet performance as well.

Addressing the gathering, **Ksenia Narvatkina**, Chief Specialist, Development Department, St. Petersburg City Tourist Information Bureau, and Committee, Tourism Development, Saint Petersburg, opening the presentation, said, "We would like to share

Andrei Dmitrievskii, CEO, Northern Empire Travel Agency, St. Petersburg, said, "We have collected here today as Dubai is an important market for us. We want to connect with new partners and know the preference of Arabic-speaking tourists. For them, we have tailor-made programmes that will interest them."

Valeria Globina, General Manager, Russian Empire Destination Management Company, said, "We are a decade-year-old agency. Over the past years, we had a good footfall from visitors from the Middle East. Before the pandemic it was a different ball game. We used to get several travellers, including from the UAE, along with families, to Moscow and St. Petersburg. We love to work with clients from the GCC nations and we

tions with more partners from here as our town is so nice, the beaches, the boat rides and the classical tours."

Natalia Yudina, CEO, St. Petersburg Medical Tourism Agency of the Government of St. Petersburg, said, "We are looking at new destinations, and Dubai is an important market for us. We are presenting travellers different offerings such as hospitals, spas, and wellness centres. At present, we have medical tourists from the Middle East, mainly for orthopaedic issues. Our level of medicine is of the highest level. We also provide medical education for those who wish to engage in medical studies. St. Petersburg is a unique destination for wellness and spa tourism. The city has more than 40 different wellness and spa resorts."



the pandemic. We are looking at resuming our partnerships in this region."

Solovei Nina, General Manager Northern Pearl travel company, said, "We are here in Dubai for this roadshow to discuss and to share about St. Petersburg and Russia as a country and invite all travellers from GCC to travel and experience our beautiful city and country. We invite the guests to spend one day with a Russian family in a country house to see how Russian people live and it is a very interesting programme much loved by travellers. St. Petersburg is open now for travelling but you only need a 72-hour PCR test before arriving in Russia."

Anton Bogorodov Resident Manager, Wavelberg Hotel, said, "We are introducing our premium five-star luxury hotel located in the city centre of St. Petersburg Russia today at the roadshow for the GCC clients. It was the only five-star property to open last year in 2021. We have 79 rooms with 28 suites and the rest are the deluxe rooms, all rooms equipped with high end technology. There are spacious terrace suites especially for big families, along with many facilities for the kids. There are also interconnecting rooms catering especially for GCC clients."

Charmaine Coutinho, Emirates Holidays, said, "I think

it's a fantastic platform to have so many partners come down for the event, it is quite a mix batch of segmented partners coming down and it is lovely to see that travel is picking up including destinations like St. Petersburg which we will look forward to."

Rajesh John James, Senior Key Account Manager, Sharaf Travel, said, "It was actually good because for the last two years it was held online and after the pandemic this is one of the main roadshows I'm attending and even after Expo

event was well organised. It included participation from the embassy itself, which was encouraging. Representatives of various DMCs, hotels, and medical tourism shared a lot of information. The information was so crisp and clear in terms of product knowledge and USP (unique selling points). I have warmed up to St. Petersburg and find that travellers from the UAE find the destination interesting and attractive."

Walter Rodricks, Manager, Royal Turquoise Travel and Tourism, said, "It was an

The roadshow held in Dubai concluded with an authentic St. Petersburg entertainment, which included a ballet performance as well

this is the one for travel agents and there are more DMCs from St. Petersburg with more time to interact and they are explaining very well. Nobody was promoting Russia, so this is a good move that they are promoting St. Petersburg and we at Sharaf do represent some Russian carriers. So, we will be promoting St. Petersburg soon when everything is back to normal."

Seema Baheti, Team Leader-Leisure Travel, Uranus Travel & Tours LLC, Dubai, said, "It was a wonderful evening. The

amazing event, showcasing the next best city to Moscow from Russia. I loved the cultural background of St. Petersburg, and looking forward to visiting this amazing place myself as well as promoting it with my clients. The roadshow in Dubai was a great event. It was an opportunity for DMCs, hotels, and medical tourism from Russia, who had come to Dubai to enhance their business relationship with the UAE. After a long time, it was great to have such an event in this part of the country." 



with you the tourism potential of St. Petersburg and hope that today's presentation will allow you to know more about our unique city and its many charms. In 2018, the committee for tourism development and city tourism bureau organised a roadshow to the cities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The presentation was held with great success and the event aroused great interest among people of the UAE."

are looking forward to welcoming them."

Evgenia Kondratieva, General Director Rossi Tour Business, said, "Our company is established in St. Petersburg Russia. We have been operating as an inbound tour operator for Russia for more than 18 years. It is important to find partners in this beautiful region, it is my first time here, it's a beautiful country and we would like to make connec-

Nina Shitina, Director, Sales and Marketing, Novotel St. Petersburg, said, "It is the only four-star property in St. Petersburg. I am delighted and excited to visit Dubai to represent our hotel, to explain more about our hotel, to impart knowledge to the travel trade and that we are open to all types of guests now. The countries that we are looking at are UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. Visitors from these countries travelled to St. Petersburg in the later part of

...engages travel agents in Dubai, Abu Dhabi

TT Bureau

The roadshow from St. Petersburg in Abu Dhabi, which commenced with feverish excitement, included one on one B2B sessions where the travel trade spent time and got to know the destination, followed by detailed presentations by partners. The roadshow concluded with a gala dinner to the accompaniment of authentic St. Petersburg entertainment, including a ballet performance.

Ksenia Narvatkina, Chief Specialist, Development Department, St. Petersburg City Tourist Information Bureau, and Committee for Tourism Development, Saint Petersburg, in her presentation, shared they were excited to showcase the offerings of St. Petersburg. She reiterated

The videos and performances at the event took the audience back to St. Petersburg for a short while. Travel trade agents, present at the event, shared it was a great opportunity to meet with partners on one platform. Different DMCs made tailor-made programmes for the guests from the GCC region. It was a great initiative.

St. Petersburg is one of the most beautiful and largely populated cities in the world, which travelers from all over the world come to see. The list of attractions in St. Petersburg is so impressive that it is impossible to describe all of them in detail. According to statistics, in pre-pandemic times, the number of tourists in St. Petersburg reached 10 million people. And even more than 10 million!

services to Russia, including St. Petersburg and Moscow. A traveler can fly with Emirates, flydubai and Etihad Airways to St. Petersburg from Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Apart from five-star properties, there are many halal restaurants."

Maria Ushakova, CEO, Art Travel, said, "It was an opportunity to introduce our company to the GCC clients. We connected with partners about different hotel accommodation facilities. Due to the Russia-Ukraine war, payments could be a challenge. But for this, we have set up a different gateway by way of establishing our own company away from Russia."

Mingalejeva Dinara - Senior Fleet Manager - from Astra Marine shipping shared, "We have been working in

partners, including cruise partners, this evening at the St. Petersburg roadshow. For

we wanted to find out more information about hotels and sightseeing among others. It

great to meet so many partners in person and to be able to see, first-hand, what new



travel agents in Abu Dhabi, it was an interactive event, which enabled us to meet many partners."

Kumar Jiandani, Business Development Manager, Overseas Travel, Abu Dhabi, a travel agency which handles 28 corporates in GCC, shared, "This is the first time I saw St. Petersburg Tourism come to the UAE market. They provided us with the information relevant to the travelers, which we shared with our clients. We hope to build on the relationship with St. Petersburg Tourism. The city is a good destination for UAE travelers with so many interesting places to visit in St. Petersburg."

was a well organised event and was helpful for us."

Ashish Paul, Travel Consultant, Mercator Travel and Tourism, said, "It was great that to connect with St. Petersburg Tourism during the roadshow, and we met a lot of different partners/suppliers from the destination."

Noufal Charan, Operations Manager, International Vision Travel—an Abu Dhabi-based semi government travel company—shared, "We normally conduct many here in Abu Dhabi as well as abroad. I am happy to be part of this event. It has been quite a long time since we had a roadshow in Abu Dhabi. It was good to

attractions or activities are taking place there. The event provided us an opportunity to regain the confidence that we can send UAE travelers to Russia. It was great to meet every partner from St. Petersburg, each of them had their own USPs. It was also great to meet the hoteliers as it is important to know where the UAE travelers will be able to stay once they go to St Petersburg to view the attractions." with all offers and options."

Dinesh Nair, Nirvana Travel Abu Dhabi, said, "It was an interesting and informative event as I was able to get contacts of many partners who attended the event. This was



the goal was to promote the potential of St. Petersburg as a world tourist centre, and to develop partnerships between St. Petersburg tourism enterprises and representatives of tour operators and travel agencies in Dubai. She said entry into the destination is free with COVID-19 cases having subsided. Currently, only a negative PCR test 72-hour before flying into the country is required. A plus point for other nationals, especially UAE travellers, is they will get a visa on arrival. Formalities to enter the country as a tourist also not cumbersome; in fact they are quite easy.

Sergei Azarenkov, General Director, St. Petersburg Convention Bureau, Committee for Tourism Development of St. Petersburg, said, "COVID had a strong impact on tourism for us. We have collected at the roadshow to invite tourists to visit our beautiful city. We look forward to welcoming them. Our objective is to unite tour operators in our country with GCC travel agents so that we can recover faster in this sector and move forward."

Natalia Savinova, COO, Grand Rus Tours, said, "For the past 16 years, I have been running my own company and we provide tailor-made

St. Petersburg since 1994, we provide tours in different areas in boats or small crafts within the city. We also cater to MICE and events as well. We have a variety of boats that can cater to seven people up to 140 plus people. Hydrofoil is a new type that is very cool, as you can pass under the draw bridge when it opens which is a very exciting experience."

Mahesh Perera, Travel Consultant, BCD Travels, Abu Dhabi, said, "After COVID effect reduced, although we held a few events, but the roadshow in Abu Dhabi was a well organised one. It was interesting to meet many

Absar Ahmed Siddiqui, Senior Manager, Orient Travels, Abu Dhabi, said, "We are looking forward to their presentations and I must say they did a great job. The DMCs representing St. Petersburg showcased what they can offer, and I am sure it will create many opportunities for travelers to visit St. Petersburg."

Maz Safi from Azar Tours and Travel, Abu Dhabi, said, "The arrangement is good at the St. Petersburg Tourism roadshow. We met many suppliers from DMCs to hotels and cruises, they shared with us so much information about the attractions. We came here as we conduct group activities for travelers, so

Travel trade agents, present at the Abu Dhabi event, shared it was a great opportunity to meet with partners on one platform

get to know what is happening in Russia and that places for tourism are now open. We also met many suppliers on one platform."

Rashida Ginwala, Director of Holidays Bin Ham Travel Abu Dhabi, said, "It was a good move from St. Petersburg Tourism. It is time to create awareness send travelers from UAE to see the attractions of St. Petersburg. It was

very important to meet them face to face in one platform. They provided us comprehensive product knowledge and shared about their new products and services on offer, especially to visitors from Abu Dhabi. As they get visa on arrival, the destination attracts the UAE nationals, the. There are many events coming up and it will be good to work together with St. Petersburg Tourism partners." 

Philippine Airlines network beyond ME

Shiela L. Yuliong, Regional Head - EMEA and Oceania, Philippine Airlines, shares with **TRAVTALK** their new programmes, especially designed for the frequent flyers and business class passengers onboard Philippine Airlines. Along with Mabuhay Miles, they have a special programme crafted for kababayans called Overseas Bayani Card, she informs.

Shehara Rizly

What are the new onboard product offers by Philippine Airlines?

Philippine Airlines and Mabuhay Miles have a special programme crafted for our kababayans; this is called the Overseas Bayani Card, which is a frequent flyer programme wherein they can avail of 2,000 sign up bonus miles and a one-time voucher for one free piece of baggage, which can be used to fly with Philippine Airlines. In addition to that, we also have the Balikbayani Programme, which offers our kababayans from the Middle East to fly to select destinations in the Philippines for free. Their baggage allow-



Shiela L. Yuliong
Regional Head - EMEA and Oceania
Philippine Airlines

ance is the same from the Middle East sector all the way to the domestic sector, and the baggage is tagged all the way to the final destination as well. Something to look forward to is that by December, we will be offering Middle East business class passengers a taste of the Filipino dishes, which are especially prepared by the famous chef, JP Anglo, so

everyone who flies business class can taste the flavours of the Philippines dishes.

Could you share information about the current operations and frequencies from GCC to Philippines?

At Philippine Airlines, we have restored our flights from the Middle East to the Philippines because we believe that we should be the link of the Filipinos, our fellow kababayans, to the whole country. So, now we fly daily from Dubai to Manila, and we also have daily flights from Riyadh to Manila five times a week to Dammam.

Has the flying capacity been restored to the pre-pandemic levels?

We have decided to sustain a

global international network. That is why we have kept our nonstop flights to the USA and Canada, restored our regular flights to Middle East, Australia and Japan. And to multiple destinations in Southeast Asia as well. We have, in fact, what we call the 2-in-1 Getaway to connect Middle East passengers to Southeast Asia leisure destinations via Manila. What is special is that they can avail of a competitive rate. For our kababayans, who live in other provinces all across the Philippines, we are operating not only in our hub in Manila, but also in Cebu. We have just expanded the network. Last September 12, we added more flights from Cebu to connect other domestic stations such as Clark, Bacolod, Iloilo,

Caticlan and Puerto Princesa. Those are in addition to the existing flights.

Since the opening of borders, how has tourist arrivals been to the Philippines?

Based on the statistics provided by the Philippines' Depart-

ment of Tourism, since the borders opened last February until the end of August, there has been about 1.37 million arrivals to the Philippines, of which 940,000 were foreign

How important are travel agents to Philippine Airlines?

We are grateful to our travel agency partners, who have

We have restored our flights from the Middle East to the Philippines because we believe that we should be the link of the Filipinos to the whole country

ment of Tourism, since the borders opened last February until the end of August, there has been about 1.37 million arrivals to the Philippines, of which 940,000 were foreign

given us the support and loyalty all these years. They are, in fact, the major contributors providing about 75 per cent in terms of share for the Middle East region. **D**

Embracing the future of hospitality

Three-day Arabian Hospitality Investment Conference was held in Dubai with a series of novel additions and outlook. Leaders in the hospitality sector gathered at the event to share their views. One of the key focus areas was sustainability, and for the second year the award for 'Sustainable Hospitality Challenge' was judged by three industry leaders.



Mantra to meet rising travel demand

Productivity is the name of the game right now. As demand for travel skyrockets, the industry has a new challenge: hiring, training, and upskilling enough people to keep things running smoothly. More self-service and more automation can alleviate travel's resourcing challenges.

For understaffed travel agencies, it is not just the surge in bookings, there is the knock-on volume of ticket changes, refunds, and other enquiries to manage too. And the risk is: if agencies can't resolve these issues quickly and accurately, they are less valuable to customers. Travel retailing software should be picking up the slack — yet many platforms still force agents to waste valuable hours on unprofitable, repetitive manual tasks. That is incredibly frustrating at the best of times. But right now, it is a deal-breaker. So, how can under-resourced businesses stay on top of everything and keep customers happy? Let self-service and automation do the heavy lifting.

Supporting travellers is tricky, but understaffing makes it even trickier

Modern customer support is all about finding solutions fast, and technology doing the hard work to keep people happy. But in travel, the reality is more complicated because the customer support journey is twofold:

❖ Travellers seeking support from agents

❖ Agents seeking support from suppliers to resolve travellers' queries

It is a fragmented industry where nobody 'owns' the whole customer experience, unlike how Amazon fulfils third-party orders from start to finish. Booking a trip is not like ordering a physical product; a

trip is the sum of many moving parts that are each fulfilled by different providers. And as a result, getting support often means dealing with multiple systems, platforms, or channels. This is a whole lot of hassle for agents.

It is a fragmented industry where nobody 'owns' the whole customer experience, unlike how Amazon fulfils third-party orders from start to finish

But the truth is: customers do not care about all this technical complexity. They just want their problems resolved..

Five ways travel can modernise its customer support

Consumers expect trips to be like any other purchase: fast, simple, and hassle-free if you change your mind. To stay relevant and meet these expectations, travel has no choice but to modernise, and offer a support service similar to the likes

of Amazon, Deliveroo, and Shopify. Here's what they can teach us:

Keep it simple

Consumers expect us to solve complexity for them.

Anticipate customers' needs

Customers expect smooth travel experiences. You need the right tools that consolidate all the information and options, and help match customer needs with the right offers.

Give people options

Customers expect support to be available through different mediums, i.e., phone, chatbot and email.

Customer-centric culture

The most successful brands do not just think of customer support in terms of help-desks, they keep service at the heart of every function.

Automate whatever you can

Offload manual tasks on technology, and claw back

valuable minutes for agents through automation.

Plugging the skills gap

Within MyTravelport, there is an online community where users can support each other, get answers to FAQs, and receive expert support.



Amile Samarakoon
Global Head of Customer
Support at Travelport

(The views expressed
are solely of the author.)

An aviation summit in Dubai by Amadeus

Amadeus conducted a specialised summit in Dubai focusing on the new era of opportunities in aviation sector. Leaders in aviation, airports, technology, along with a variety of supporting sectors to the travel industry from across the globe, attended the event. **TRAVTALK** captured some of the industry leaders at the event.



ASSILA JEDDAH
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Assila, a Luxury Collection Hotel in Jeddah, has appointed **NADER IBRAHIM** as General Manager. A seasoned professional, Nader brings with him over 20 years of hospitality experience and property management of luxury, award-winning hotels across the UK, USA, and the Middle East. Prior to taking on his current role, Nader enjoyed a four-year tenure as Senior Director of Operations across Europe, Middle East & Africa for Marriott International. His long-standing relationship with Marriott began back in 2000 in Atlanta, USA, where under a variety of management trainings he developed and honed new skills that would pave the way to a prosperous professional journey.

**LAPITA, DUBAI PARKS AND RESORTS, AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION HOTELS**
Dubai

Lapita, Dubai Parks and Resorts, Autograph Collection Hotels has appointed **AMIT BISWAS** as Director of Sales and Marketing. Amit brings a wealth of experience to this new role, having worked in some of the region's best properties for an impressive 16-year tenure. Amit kicked off his Dubai career in hospitality at Le Meridien Dubai Hotel Complex starting off as a Conference and Banqueting Sales Executive in 2003, scaling the ladder and being continuously promoted over the years, ending up as Complex Director of Sales in Marketing in 2015.

**HALA**
Dubai

Hala, the first partnership between the Public Transport Authority (RTA) and a private company (Careem), has appointed **KHALED NUSEIBEH** as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), following five years as General Manager for Emerging Markets and GCC at Careem. Pursuing his wealth of knowledge and interest in technology advancement, Khaled successfully led nine key markets including Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Lebanon, Algeria and Morocco as General Manager at Careem. He prompted unprecedented growth for ride-hailing in Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain. Under his leadership, Careem Qatar grew five folds in 12 months and achieved top service levels across Careem.

**JA THE RESORT**
Dubai

JA The Resort and Indian Ocean has promoted **WILLIAM-HARLEY FLEMING** to Vice President of Operations. William has been with JA Resorts and Hotels for more than 15 years and brings with him a strong foundation of dynamic and result-driven hospitality experience within the Middle Eastern, Asian, and European markets. With hard work, determination and passion, William was able to advance through the Group's ranks from Corporate Food and Beverage Concept Director in 2007 to his first General Manager role at the age of 30. Since then, he has developed steadily, holding General Manager roles at the JBR belt of properties in Dubai, which include the JA Ocean View Hotel, JA Oasis Beach Tower, and JA Manafaru.

**HUES BOUTIQUE HOTEL**
Dubai

DALIA KHALID leads Hues Boutique Hotel Salesforce. The hotel management has appointed her as the new Sales Manager in order to assist in the business expansion within UAE and Internationally. She has seven years of hospitality experience in multiple hotel chains all over UAE such as Gloria Hotels, Rotana, Crowne Plaza, Holiday Inn, and Bab Al Nojoom Beach Resort Hudayriyat. Her new role includes tying up Hues Boutique Hotel with the travel market, contracting new business sectors, and promoting property facilities and outlets around UAE and internationally. Hues Boutique Hotel is a 4-star elegant hotel located in Corniche Deira overlooking the new Deira Islands.

**SHANGRI-LA AND TRADERS HOTEL, QARYAT AL BERI**
Abu Dhabi

Shangri-La and Traders Hotel, Qaryat Al Beri, Abu Dhabi officially announce the promotion of **TAMER REFAAT** to Director of Sales & Marketing. Previously the Assistant Director of Sales & Marketing, Refaat continues his journey with Shangri-La, accumulating more than 20 years of experience across several international chains in the UAE. He is known as a passionate and result-oriented professional. During his ongoing tenure within the Shangri-La group, Refaat has been at the forefront of implementing an efficient and effective commercial strategy for both Shangri-La and Traders Hotel, Qaryat Al Beri, Abu Dhabi.



Sharjah's new waterfront destination in Kalba

The Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) has announced that construction work on Kalba Waterfront, the largest retail and first inclusive waterfront destination at Kalba in Sharjah's Eastern Region, is 100 per cent complete, while the units are in the last stages of finalising their interiors.



Developed by 'Eagle Hills Sharjah Development, a joint venture between Shurooq and Eagle Hills, the waterfront destination with integrated services is scheduled to welcome visitors in Q4 2022. A few investment opportunities are still available in the AED 119 million project, which has seen high investor demand owing to its status as a premiere tourism and retail destination in the Eastern Region. Shurooq's latest world-class development extending over 183,000 sqm, introduces new family-friendly concepts in retail and entertainment



H.E. Ahmed Obaid Al Qaseer
Acting CEO, Shurooq

sector, and provides a distinctive touristic experience.

H.E. Ahmed Obaid Al Qaseer, Acting CEO of Shurooq, revealed details of the project during 'Al Khat Al Mubasher Program' recently. He highlighted that Kalba Waterfront

is set in one of the most beautiful and tranquil areas in the country that overlooks a serene lagoon lined by mangroves, the go-to destination for nature lovers.

Al Qaseer remarked that the contemporary architectural de-

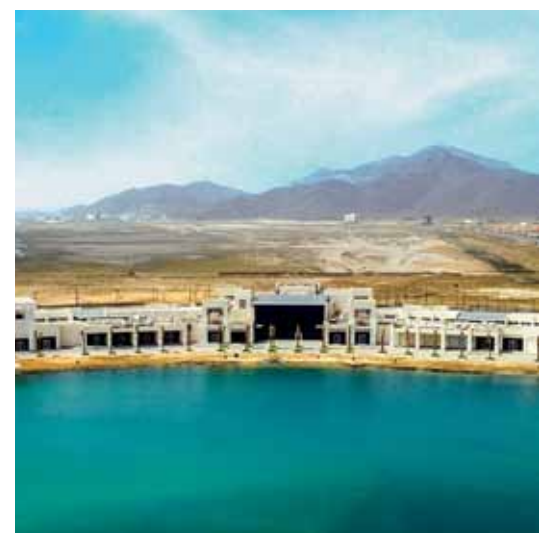
and residents. He also noted that the project will feature 80 units, a variety of indoor and outdoor dining outlets, as well as an expansive promenade that lines the lagoon.

The Shurooq's Acting CEO stated, "The project

Shurooq's world-class development extending over 183,000 sqm, introduces new family-friendly concepts in retail and entertainment sector

sign project offers a convenient and compelling shopping experience that caters to all guests

comprises a 1,600 sqm play area that caters to the interests of visitors of all age groups,



and features a trampoline, skating tracks, and free-fall platform. Extreme adventure enthusiasts will have a unique

experience testing their skills at rope walking, wall climbing, simulators, video games, and much more."



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is printed on behalf of
Durga Das Publications (Middle East) FZE
at Modest Print Pack Pvt. Ltd.,
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