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# New destinations make the cut

GCC residents are planning their post Ramadan outbound travel not just to the usual destinations but to various new and upcoming destinations which has been offering a whole new suite of attractions. Destinations have been showcasing their latest offerings over various programmes for the GCC travellers. Here is what experts have to say on this:



**Nasir Jamal Khan**  
CEO, Al Naboodah Travel and Tourism

“ This Ramadan, there has been a spike in interest from UAE travellers for destinations, particularly in Europe, Africa and Asia, like UK, Canada, France, Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, South Africa and not to forget Rwanda, which is also coming up as a promising destination. Domestic travel is popular in the UAE for several reasons, including the high cost of airline tickets and the difficulty of obtaining visas in a timely manner. In addition, the UAE government has launched a number of projects and campaigns to encourage people to travel within the country and boost domestic tourism. Hence, while choosing a travel destination, elements like visa-free entry, the simplicity of acquiring a visa, and the length of stay authorized

without a visa are significant aspects to consider. Tourists from the UAE during Ramadan book their holidays for 3 to 7 nights for Eid holidays.”



**Ejaz Kazi**  
General Manager, E-travel and Tours, Oman

“ Post pandemic and after the opening up of nearly all borders, we saw a surge in travel in 2022, which will continue through 2023 and Inshallah 2024 too. The term used was 'Revenge Travel'. Whichever way you one looks at it, business was good in 2022 and hopefully that will get better in 2023. The most popular destinations post Ramadhan (summer holidays) this year will be Europe & the Far East (Thailand and Malaysia). Besides, the off-beat ones like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia will be the value for money destinations. Of course, Turkey will still hold top billing. Domestic travel will happen mostly for Umrah, Salalah for the Khareef, and Dubai for the shopping. The visa processes play an important role in deciding on the destination, as the Schengen visa take a long time to obtain and ours being a last minute .com market, the other destinations will benefit.”

Contd. on page 6 ▶

## KSA eases visa for GCC expats

The Saudi Tourism Authority welcomes the expansion of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) residents visa, which is now open to all professionals wanting to apply for a tourist visa.

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Announced by the Ministry of Tourism, the visa allows visitors to enjoy diverse tourist destinations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and perform Umrah throughout the year. This is the latest in a series of announcements across the Saudi tourism eco-system that aim to attract regional tourists and provide more activities for visitors coming from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. People desirous of visiting the Kingdom can view detailed information and apply for a visa on [www.visitsaudi.com](http://www.visitsaudi.com). The Visit Saudi app also provides a gateway for travelers to discover all the events, international festivals,



inspiring tourism experiences, and enjoy the country's climate, natural and cultural diversity, and the authentic generosity and hospitality of the Saudi people. The tourist visa was launched in 2019 to keep up with the growth

of the tourism sector. In 2022, the Saudi Tourism Authority, in collaboration with the Pilgrim Experience Program, launched the Nusuk platform, which is Saudi Arabia's first-ever official integrated digital platform. ▶

## Cruise Saudi sets aspiring goals

Cruise Saudi shares the vision for rapid expansion of Saudi Arabia's cruise sector with the tourism industry at the Saudi Tourism Forum 2023, held in Riyadh recently.

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Cruise Saudi, which is owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, updated the industry on the rapid expansion of the Kingdom's cruise sector at the forum.



Cruise Saudi, launched in 2021, works hand in hand with ministries and regulatory authorities to build the offshore and onshore cruise ecosystem with the aim of positioning the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) as a premier global cruise destination.

Cruise Saudi met a number of public and private sector companies at the forum. **Engineer Fawaz Faruqi**, Managing

Director, Cruise Saudi, praised the forum and the fruitful cooperation of all public and private parties involved in the Tourism System in providing an exceptional experience for tourists visiting the Kingdom, thus reflecting their contribution to achieve Vision 2030 goals and broaden the horizons of the Saudi cruise sector. Cruise Saudi also organised an aware-

ness workshop. **Mashhour Bashan**, Executive Director, Travel Experiences, said, "The cruise sector is a new industry for the Kingdom, it provides specific services, and our role in Cruise Saudi is to develop and enable the private sector. This workshop is one of several workshops on developing the sector to attract 1.3 million passengers by 2035." ▶





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# Oman tourism ventures into adventure

Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group) announces an 1,800-metre dual zipline project in the Wilayat of Khasab, as part of its plans to develop the destination for adventure tourism. The project, first of its kind in the Governorate of Musandam, will be an integrated adventure centre designed to offer tourists unique experiences that combine adventure and exploration.

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The Oman Adventure Centre was designed to accommodate a broad range of facilities, providing visitors with an integrated tourism experience. It has a waiting area and more facilities. Additionally, the zipline project will be managed and operated by LEOS, a specialist operator that runs adventure and entertainment projects on a regional and international scale. **Mubarak bin Ali al Rahbi**, Head of the Musandam Governor's Office said, "The Musandam Governorate has a wealth of tourism offerings that can be utilised to develop a wide range of tourism projects. This project illustrates our ongoing efforts to utilise these elements for tourism



development." He added, "We are confident that the zipline project will encourage businesses within and outside the Governorate to develop more tourism-related services."

**Said Hareb Al Obaidani**, Director General of Tourism

Development at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said: "The Ministry is working to stimulate development and investment in the various key tourist destinations in the Sultanate of Oman, especially the Governorate of Musandam. Our goal is to enhance the tourism services ecosystem with a variety of specialised multi-use projects that satisfy the desires and tastes of various tourist segments. Currently in its soft opening phase, the zipline project serves as a quality benchmark for developing tourism products and enhanced tourism experiences that we aspire to achieve."

ism experiences that we aspire to achieve.


all required safety and security standards," he said.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has allocated the necessary land and budget for the

**Eng. Maysar Al Kamzari**, Development Manager at OMRAN Group, said, "The zipline

**The Musandam Governorate has a wealth of tourism offerings that can be utilised to develop a wide range of tourism projects**

zipline project, which has been and implemented by the OMRAN Group in partnership with the Musandam Governor's Office. "We are also developing several hiking and mountain biking trails in the Musandam Governorate, installing informational and guiding signboards that meet

project falls within the framework of the Group's efforts to achieve tourism diversification in the Musandam Governorate. It will constitute a qualitative addition to the Group's projects in the region, which currently includes the Atana Hospitality branded assets." 



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# Heritage driving tourism in ME

With an aim to capitalise on the growing trend of experiential travel where visitors seek cultural and heritage experiences, rather than less context dependent leisure options, governments in the Middle East region are focussing on developing cultural destinations and promoting the region's heritage sites to attract global tourists and encourage inbound tourism.

The Middle East region's rich culture and heritage is a testament to the maturity of its tourism industry, which is continuing to increase its resilience to external shocks. Governments in the Middle East region are increasingly directing their efforts towards developing cultural destinations and promoting the region's heritage sites to attract global tourists and encourage inbound tourism.

This move is aimed at capitalising on the growing trend of experiential travel where visitors seek cultural and heritage experiences, rather than less context dependent leisure options. As a response to globalization and perceived homogenization of tourist experiences, tourists have increasingly sought to

satiate their cultural curiosity through unique tourist experiences. Cultural activities are now an integral part of many travel itineraries. Furthermore, the revival of the Middle East's tourism sector is benefitting from growing diversification and increasing popularity of cultural tourism. This has led to significant economic benefits and increased investment in cultural tourism and world heritage sites. Cultural tourism also provides economic benefits to local communities and drives the growth of sustainable tourism. In countries like the UAE, it supports domestic tourism, which is uniquely lucrative given the large expat population in the region. It also encourages the development of small and medium-sized enterprises offering cultural experiences, such as

homestays, cultural tours, and artisanal markets.

The development of cultural tourism requires the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. It involves the protection of historical and archaeological sites, as well as the conservation of traditional

that the tourism industry in the region recognises the value of cultural tourism. For instance, Saudi Arabia aims to double the number of its UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) sites over the next 10 years as part of its Vision 2030 framework. Countries like the

as the gateway for Muslims on their way to Mecca, for those arriving by sea from Africa. Emirates such as Abu Dhabi in the UAE not only reflect their contemporary ethos but also demonstrate traditional culture, which makes it a preferred choice for tourists keen on cultural exploration. For instance, the Cultural District of Saadiyat Island is a contemporary cultural hub, recently developed in Abu Dhabi. The site includes the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Zayed National Museum. Saadiyat Island is also home to Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, one of the largest mosques in the world. Another popular destination in the UAE is Al Ain Oasis. It is the largest oasis in the city of Al Ain and is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The UAE's herit-

age is also reflected through various annual festivals such as the Qasr Al Hosn Festival, Sheikh Zayed Heritage Festival, Sultan bin Zayed Heritage Festival, and Sharjah Heritage Days, which provide a valuable opportunity for visitors to appreciate and experience the region's culture.

**Govts in the ME region are increasingly directing their efforts towards developing cultural destinations and promoting the region's heritage sites**

art, crafts, music, and other cultural elements. The fact that the Middle East region has a rich cultural heritage that is being preserved and promoted for tourism purposes indicates

UAE and Saudi Arabia host many ancient and historical sites. For example, Al Balad, the old part of Jeddah is a UNESCO World Heritage site. It was established 1,300 years ago



**Dr Ross Curran**  
Assistant Professor at the School of Social Sciences at Heriot-Watt University, Dubai  
(The views expressed are solely of the author.)

## ME travel recovery well on course

The Middle East continues to build on the 2022 travel recovery and it looks like that the strong travel intent to the region will continue into 2023, according to data released by Sojern recently. Owing to early recovery from the pandemic, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is better placed among the UAE countries to secure its place on the tourism map with an ambitious visitor push.

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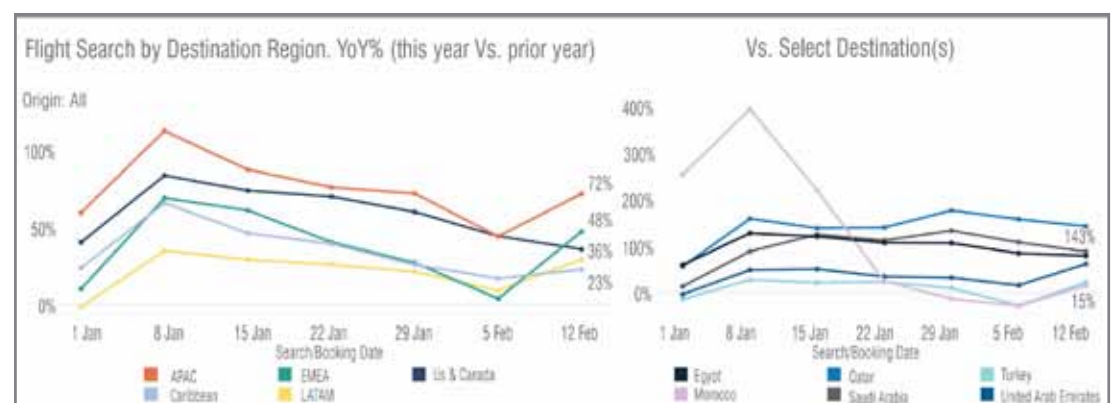
As of February, Sojern sees that 2023 flight searches are up year on year (YoY) globally; 72 per cent from Asia-Pacific (APAC), 48 per cent from Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA), 36 per cent from US and Canada, 30 per cent from Latin America (LATAM) and 23 per cent from Caribbean. With last year's FIFA World Cup boosting travel recovery in the region, Sojern looks at the current state of play for travel now that the tournament dust has settled.

### Demand for hotels up

Several recent reports highlight that Middle East destinations are leading global travel recovery, in part boosted by Dubai's 2020 Expo and last year's FIFA World

Cup. Sojern's latest lodging data supports this positive picture and sees that 2023 interest from most origins to the region is high and even above January 2019 levels. Inbound travel demand from Africa, APAC, and LATAM markets continues to grow with KSA showing one of the most marked increases in demand. The country sees a 541 per cent increase in 2023 versus 2019 international lodging searches from Africa, 358 per cent from Europe, 279 per cent from LATAM, 251 per cent from the United States and 2,547 per cent from Canada. This uplift suggests that their tourist ambitions to draw 100 million visitors annually by the end of the decade appear to be off to a strong start.

Qatar continues to ride the World Cup wave with par-



ticularly strong interest from LATAM. Lodging demand from regional Middle East travellers is up 123 per cent, while the rest of the world is also up on 2019 levels; Africa - 95 per cent, Europe - 71 per cent, APAC - 69 per cent, LATAM - 255 per cent, United States - 255 per cent and Canada - 172 per cent. With Formula 1 recently announcing Qatar

Airways as a new Global Airline Partner in a multi-year deal, it will see the return of the Qatar Grand Prix in October, as well as a host of leading tech and hospitality events taking place throughout 2023, Sojern will be watching closely to see if travel interest continues to grow.

Lodging searches for Turkey and Egypt have also seen a lift and

are currently hovering above 2019 volumes. Morocco's tourism industry has been slower to recover so far, but there has been considerable growth in 2023 thus far vs 2021/2022.

Compared to 2019, Sojern sees that global travellers are less likely to stay over two weeks in the same hotel in 2023. With global travel re-

strictions now largely lifted, it is possible that travellers are seeking to plan multiple short stays within a single trip to vary their experience. "With our latest data showing that travel intent to the Middle East is holding strong, it's heartening to see that the World Cup has given the region a boost," said **Stewart Smith**, Managing Director ME&I Sojern. ▶



# Spain's specialist program for trade

Turespaña has compiled a Spain Specialist Program to promote the hitherto known destinations in the country and familiarise travel trade partners in the Gulf region with a wealth of knowledge about the country, its rich history, culture, and gastronomy. The program offers a wealth of knowledge necessary to plan a vacation to Spain.

 Shehara Rizly

Under the Spain Specialist Program, Turespaña has designed different online training courses about Spain, so that the travel trade partners in the Gulf region can obtain the knowledge and expertise to present the country to their customers in an effective manner. These courses, including basic and advanced lessons on Spain, will help the travel trade discover everything about the destination.

The Spain Specialist Program offers a wealth of knowledge necessary to plan a vacation to Spain. Travel trade partners can learn about the different regions of Spain including islands, Mediterranean Spain, and the beautiful Green Spain,



also known as the Northwest regions. With popular itineraries that include the incredible gastronomy, scenic wine routes, and cities with World Heritage Sites, travel trade partners can become a certified expert on the one of the most

visited countries in the world. It is especially designed for travel trade professionals who want to deepen their knowledge about Spain and obtain the Certificate of Specialist in Spain. This is the perfect opportunity to discover everything about Spain: art, cul-

ture, gastronomy, infrastructure and tourist attractions.

## How does the program benefit the travel trade partners?

❖ Receive a "Spain Specialist" certificate on successful completion of the course.

❖ The first five participants to complete the course can walk away with shopping vouchers worth AED 200.

❖ All participants completing the course within three months will be eligible for the grand draw of winning a trip to Spain.

❖ Rights to use the "Spain Specialist" credentials in all professional communication.

❖ Priority for invitations to educational trips to Spain or Events organized by the Spain Tourism Office, Abu Dhabi.

❖ "Specialist in Spain" in the circulation of company's online communication and promotional material.

## What does the program entail?

There are four different courses with 41 modules and "1700 minutes" of training. One starts off with the basic course, which gives the opportunity to discover Spain containing essential, useful and up-to-date information about the country to help you, the travel professionals plan your clients' vacation in Spain. Once you get on the advanced content, you will further enhance your knowledge and tap into some of the more intricate areas, which will broaden your whole outlook and knowledge about Spain. Don't miss the opportunity, join the Spain Specialist Program and start enjoying everything it has to offer: Registration <https://www.spainspecialistprogram.com/en/>



## SPAIN Specialist Program

Comprehensive online training program on Spain for travel agents, designed by Turespaña.

- "Spain Specialist" certificate on successful completion of the course
- Win a trip to Spain
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- "Specialist in Spain" in the company's communication and promotional material
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# GCC travelers look for new destinations



**Rochell Saleem**  
Manager, Holidays and MICE – Travco

“When it comes to France and Spain, travelers, both expats and locals, are looking at off the beaten track destinations. New places offering health and fitness, nature, gastronomy, arts and culture, as well as entertainment, are some of the key criteria. Previously frequented places such as Paris, Nice, Barcelona, and Madrid have been fully explored and has less appeal to the avid traveller. Nevertheless, it is good to see that the traditional sites in these cities are inventing new USPs to attract the modern day Middle Eastern traveller, for eg. Galleries Lafayette is no longer just a department store but a destination offering variety in experiences.”



**Karim Mekachera**  
Regional Director, Middle East and Turkey – Atout France

“Once again this year, Marhaba France Spain has consolidated the position of our flagship destinations. This is particularly the case for ski resorts in the French Alps, where the number of Middle Eastern visitors is growing year on year. With its 16 exhibitors, the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region continues to surprise and seduce tourists from this part of the world. The Paris region also stood out, proudly represented by the iconic Eiffel Tower and the Château de Versailles, but also by new establishments such as the 5-star Hotel Bowmann or McArthurGlen outlets that will open in spring 2023.”



**Ayman Al Qudwa**  
General Manager, Falcon Travel, Qatar

“The State of Qatar would continue to be in very advanced ranks in the classification of the highest incomes at the Arab level and the global level in general, ahead of many other countries with a high per capita GDP as well. Therefore, it was observed, European Destinations, USA, and Turkey will continue leading the outbound travel top destinations from Qatar. After two years of closed borders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and reopening the borders, we are witnessing huge demand for inbound and outbound travel and tourism. Professional travel firms should provide complete solutions and services.”



**Daniel Rosado**  
Director, Spain Tourism

“The GCC countries are an important source of tourism, known for their high levels of disposable income and a growing interest in international travel, it is surely an attractive market for many countries, including Spain. Spain's tourism industry offers a range of attractions and activities that are particularly appealing to GCC tourists. These include cultural and historical landmarks, luxury shopping, high-end hotels and resorts, and scenic beaches. Considering all these, it was imperative to provide an opportunity to our partners across GCC to meet with the Spanish partners and Marhaba was the perfect place for that.”



**James de Silva**  
Senior Sales Officer, NBK Travel and Tourism

“As a Travel & Tourism company, NBK Travel & Tourism has organised the travel needs of many people on leisure and business travel, mainly to renowned destinations such as Paris, Cannes, Nice, Madrid, Barcelona, and Marbella. Subsequently taking part in Marhaba France Spain for the first time gave me the opportunity to meet and connect with some of the new destinations and its Hotel/DMC partners such as Andorra, Auvergne Rhone Alpes, and Megeve in France and Costa del Sol, Ibiza, Andalucía, and Galicia in Spain. It was a great accomplishment to meet partners under one roof.”



**Dr. Saf Mohammed**  
Board Member  
Private Office of HE Shaikh Abdul Aziz Al Khalifa

“Delighted to attend the Marhaba France Spain 2023 event. In summary, both countries offer diverse cultural experiences, picturesque landscapes, and delicious cuisine. France boasts iconic landmarks like the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre Museum, and the Palace of Versailles, along with charming countryside regions like Provence and Bordeaux. The country is also famous for its gastronomy, with delicious dishes like croissants, escargots, and steak-frites. Spain, on the other hand, offers a mix of modern and historic cities like Madrid, Barcelona, and Granada, along with stunning beaches, mountains, and forests.”



**Suresh Unny**  
Head Sales and Operations, TravelClub

“France and Spain are two popular European countries for Middle East tourists and business also. Both countries provide unique experiences to their tourists with culture, cuisine, atmosphere, accommodation and entertainment. France is the biggest country in Western Europe and it has many regions with historic cities, beautiful valleys, fantastic mountains and gorgeous French Riviera with Paris being the top city for Middle East and global travelers. Spain is the second largest country in Western Europe known for its food, flamenco music and dance, bullfights, horses, arts and literature among other attractions.”



**Aga Pytlík**  
General Manager, Pan World Travels

“UAE is very diverse country when comes to nationality what has influence on chosen destinations to travel for leisure with starting point of level of accessibility. Non-EU passport holders still looking for destination with e-visa or visa on arrival options. When comes to UAE nationals, there is wide range of options, however, the destinations with high score of competitiveness leading the sector. Since borders are open, we recorded that interest in KSA, Korea or Japan has increased, along with leading Thailand and Seychelles. Looking for summer, we are expecting interest in EU destinations, including Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, Poland and UK.”



**Elmira Heshmati**  
Founder and CEO, Elaxiom Travel and Tourism Agency, UAE

“Turkey, Europe (France, Spain, Switzerland, and Italy etc), Maldives, Jordan, Egypt and Sri Lanka are some of the popular destinations during post Ramadan travel. There is always demand for domestic travel and staycations. Economic and political stability, religiously and culturally tolerant population, a range of events and activities make the UAE an ideal tourist destination. For the nationalities who need a visa to visit a country, obtaining the visa can be the first step to process a trip. Hence, the ease of visa plays a pivotal role in deciding the destination that they wish to visit. We are expecting a 4-day weekend Eid Al Fitr holiday.”



**Sarita Fernandes**  
Manager, Travpak Travel, UAE

“From a Romantic cruise down the River Seine to meeting Mickey & Minnie and their friends at Disney to Adventure packed ski resorts to the fashionable & jet setting cities of St. Tropez and Cannes in France. To the very flamboyant flamenco dancers, to Gaudi's amazing work of art to the beautiful pristine sandy beaches of the Balearic Islands in Spain. And not forgetting the many designer shopping outlets, these countries have it all! The four seasons of Summer, Autumn, Winter & Spring bring these destinations alive with their beauty, vibrancy, and new beginnings. France and Spain both very popular destinations with the UAE market.”



**Malith Chamika**  
Holidays Supervisor, E Travel & Tours LLC, Muscat, Oman

“Tourism in France and Spain is undoubtedly attracting tourists from all over the world. In Oman, in general, our clientele here decides their destinations at the last minute, which affects the visa process. Owing to this, our clients are forced to opt for other destinations. If these two countries can introduce an alternative to speed up the visa process, we assure you that the volume of travelers will increase remarkably. Conduction of events and workshops in the GCC to enlighten the travel market about the latest tourism developments in Europe like the event 'Marhaba' recently organized in Oman made us aware of the developments.”



**Namratha Rose**  
Manager-Marketing & Trade Relations, Spain Tourism

“GCC travelers have become an increasingly important market for Spain's tourism industry in recent years. The Spanish tourism industry been actively promoting the country as a destination for GCC travelers through different activities, trade events, targeted marketing campaigns and participation in travel fairs in the region. One trend that was observed was the preference for domestic and regional travel, with travelers opting for destinations within the GCC region or nearby countries that were easily accessible by land or short flights. Another was the increasing popularity of nature-based tourism.”

Inputs by Shehara Rizzy



# opens four new routes

In line with the objective of the Saudi Air Connectivity Program (ACP) to enhance the Kingdom's point-to-point air connectivity to target international markets, SAUDIA, in collaboration with the ACP and Saudi Tourism Authority, has launched four new international destinations - Beijing (PRC), Birmingham (UK), Kano (Nigeria), and Johannesburg (South Africa).

TT Bureau

The route development by SAUDEA follows the national carrier's signing of an agreement with ACP. It is in line with the ACP's objective to enhance the Kingdom's point-to-point air connectivity to target international markets. "The opening of four new air routes across three different regions is the result of strong collaboration between the Saudi tourism and aviation ecosystems," said **Ali Rajab**, CEO of ACP. "We are proud to have been part of these efforts. These new routes offer a diverse mix of travel opportunities in the Kingdom, unlocking its rich cultural heritage and inviting travelers from around the world to experience the beauty and diversity of this remarkable destination," he added. "Air con-



nectivity will play an increasingly important role in enabling tourism growth and creating new opportunities for businesses and tourists alike. We look forward to building on this momentum to unlock new destinations, and create a brighter future for the Kingdom," he added.

**Capt. Ibrahim Koshy**, CEO, SAUDIA, highlighted the airline's ongoing commitment to invest-

ing in operational expansion. "We are dedicated to continue optimizing our modern fleet to meet current and future expansion requirements," he said. "In addition to the recent launch of the new service 'Your Ticket, Your Visa', which is the first of its kind in the world has increased airline's competitive position with a market share of 40 per cent for flights and seat capacity in the past year," he added.

**Fahd Hamidaddin**, CEO and Member of the Board of Saudi Tourism Authority, added that, "Today's announcement of four new routes demonstrates the power of the tourism ecosystem to work with airline partners to bring new capacity online. Through cross-government collaboration, we are continuing to build ease and connectivity to transform Saudi into a top tourism destination and meet our

ambitious target to welcome 100 million visits by 2030. This is significant as direct flight options are not only good news for international travelers, but also create growth, opportunity, and investment in Saudi and across the world." **Eng. Mohammed Al Maghlouth**, CEO, MATARAT, said: "At MATARAT, we are working with our ecosystem partners and airlines to enhance the airport

experience for both air carriers and passengers in Saudi Arabia. Our focus is on delivering world-class services that meet the highest international standards, thus improving the travel experience for everyone." Al Maghlouth added, "The inauguration marks a significant milestone in our efforts, as several airlines plan to introduce direct flights from Saudi airports to new international destinations."

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# ITB Berlin back on track after 2 years

After a hiatus of two years, ITB Berlin was back on track with a brand new theme, titled 'Open for Change'. More than 4,500 exhibitors from over 150 countries participated in the event. The Middle East countries once again showed their prowess with some of the most significant offerings from each of their destinations.







## to open hotels in ME, USA

**Shaji Abu Salih**, Corporate Director, Business Development Shaza Hotels and Mysk Hotels, shares the group's expansion plans with **TRAVEL TALK**. Shaza will launch a hotel at the Palm in Dubai by July and the glamping on wheels concept at Al Hamriyah in Sharjah by Q4.

**Shehara Rizly**

Shaza is expecting to open two new hotels this year. "The first hotel will be Mysk the Palm Jumeirah and then we are also opening Mysk Nomad, our first glamping on wheels concept and this will be in Al Hamriyah beach of Sharjah," shared **Shaji Abu Salih**, Corporate Director, Business Development Shaza Hotels and Mysk Hotels.

"So, we have two projects this year and four openings next year, which includes Salalah and Khorfakkan, which is a beautiful Mysk retreat on the mountains and the Mutra souk, Oman and our first hotel in Jeddah, Mysk Jeddah. Mysk Palm Jumeirah to open by July 1, end of Q2 or early Q3, and Al Hamriyah Sharjah in Q4," he added.

Speaking about the performance last year and expectations for this year, Abu Salih said, "2022 was a bridge year post-pandemic. It was a year where we rallied up to the pre-pandemic levels, and 2023 is off to a great start across all our hotels in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman and Doha, where we just opened for the World Cup (FIFA). UAE market is doing really well as it was one

**2022 was a year where we rallied up to the pre-pandemic levels, and 2023 is off to a great start across all our hotels in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman and Doha**

of the first to open up, thanks to its leaders. We hope this to continue in 2023."

He further revealed the hotel group's future plans. "We have 1,100 rooms currently across nine hotels, of which four are retreats that we opened in Sharjah, and retreats are more boutique in style, with 20 to 40



**Shaji Abu Salih**  
Corporate Director, Business Development  
Shaza Hotels and Mysk Hotels

rooms per retreat. By 2024, we hope to double the portfolio to 2,200 rooms across Shaza and Mysk brands," he said.

Focusing on expansion plans for the region, Abu Salih said, "Saudi Arabia is the next biggest destination the world is going to witness, and we are



also trying to get our market share from there and our expansion plans in Saudi Arabia are heavily focused on the

Saudi Arabia and Qatar and we have expansion plans in Kuwait and there is dialogue happening in Bahrain."

He added, "We are also looking at outside this region, we are opening our first Mysk and Shaza hotels in Orlando, right

**The first hotel will be Mysk the Palm Jumeirah and then we are also opening Mysk Nomad, our first glamping on wheels concept, in Al Hamriyah beach**

in front of Disneyland, we will be the first Arabian hospitality brand entering into the United States of America. We are also

having expansion plans across the Levant, Turkey, Egypt and Far East. We are expecting to open by 2026. Work is going on, as we are partnering with one of the developers from Canada, it will be a multi-property complex. So, by 2025-2026, we should be there with about 500 rooms."


Sustainability plays a key role in tourism and hospitality today. Abu Salih said, "Sustainability is a lifestyle. It's not just about reducing the carbon footprint, but also not reducing the guest experience. We have a perfect fit brand for sustainable tourism, which is called Mysk retreats. If you go to Sharjah, all the retreats under Sharjah Collection are perfect example of how an eco-sustainable re-

treats or hotels must operate, and based on that same philosophy, we will develop into Saudi market, and this is a perfect fit for the new emerging markets of Saudi Arabia."

Highlighting the importance of travel trade, Abu Salih said,

"Travel trade is not just partners but our extended sales team. We have a beautiful program called Shaza Select,

which is incentivising the travel agents and corporate bookers for the support they provide to all of our hotels. Travel trade, key corporate bookers, airlines and government are all part of our Sharjah Select programme and we incentivise them according to their performance and their relationship and loyalty, it is a completely B2B loyalty programme."

On the participation in international exhibitions, he said, "We are represented in all the major travel trade exhibitions such as ITB, ATM, WTM and ILTM. We also do roadshows quarterly in all our key feeder markets to meet travel agents, take our general managers and our sales team and engage with them, build relationship and nurture our future." 



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# Reducing carbon emissions top priority

Carbon emissions in travel and tourism has been a key concern over the past years. Today, there is more action in terms of reducing the carbon emissions in the industry, **Sanith de Silva Wijeyeratne**, Director & CEO, The Climate & Conservation Consortium (CCC) and its consulting arm CCC Consultants LLC based in Dubai, shares with **TRAVTALK**.

**Shehara Rizly**

**C**ould you share with us some insights regarding the significant emissions of carbon in the travel, tourism and hospitality industries?

If I were to bring all these areas under the heading of "Tourism", there have been some recent studies that show that Tourism is one of the key contributors towards global warming. Tourism activities are responsible for roughly 8 per cent of the world's carbon emissions (<https://sustainabletravel.org/issues/carbon-footprint-tourism/>). Within tourism, transportation is the main source of greenhouse gas emissions. Generally speaking, planes and cars generate the



**Sanith de S Wijeyeratne**  
Director & CEO  
The Climate & Conservation Consortium (CCC)

pools, and spas. Electricity used to power lights, TVs, refrigerators, laundry machines, and other equipment is also a big contributor, especially in areas with dated or inefficient systems. Another element is food. To cater to visitor tastes, many hotels and restaurants import

The first and most important step is to accurately measure the organization's carbon footprint. For too many years, organizations were not taking any effort to measure and report their emissions – stating that there was no business case to incur the expense. Today, most travelers are looking for more sustainable travel and stay options. It is vital that emissions are calculated accordingly to the globally accepted protocols (The Greenhouse Gas Protocol being the most accepted one), and it is better to have those calculations independently verified according to a global standard as well – the ISO 14064-1 is such a standard. Only once you have a proper accounting of the emissions can you put in place measures to significantly reduce them. Over the past 12 years, my team has been actively involved in this space, and we have seen time and again that measuring emissions enables between 5 per cent and 15 per cent reductions with simple adjustments to processes.

**Will you be able to offer solutions that will get them on track to offset the carbon footprint?**

Absolutely! The Team at CCC was behind the certification of Asia's FIRST CarbonNeutral®

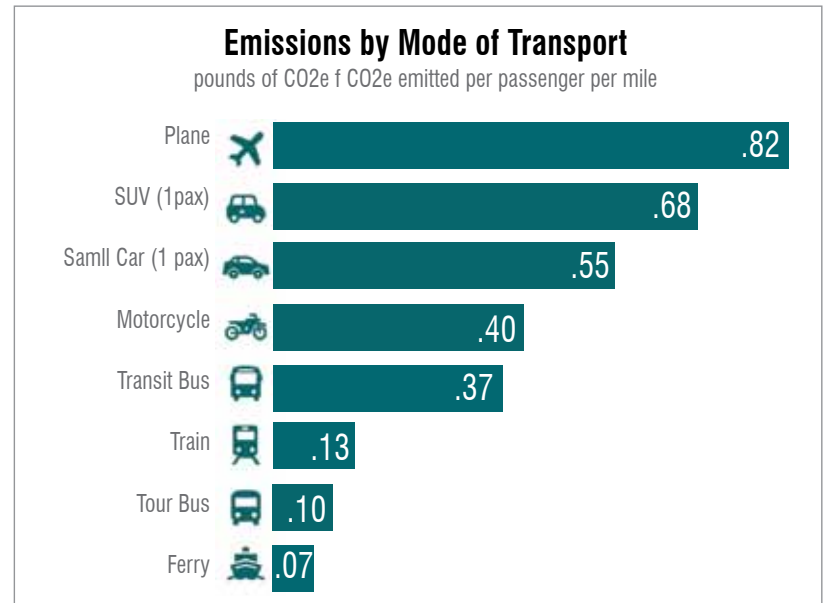
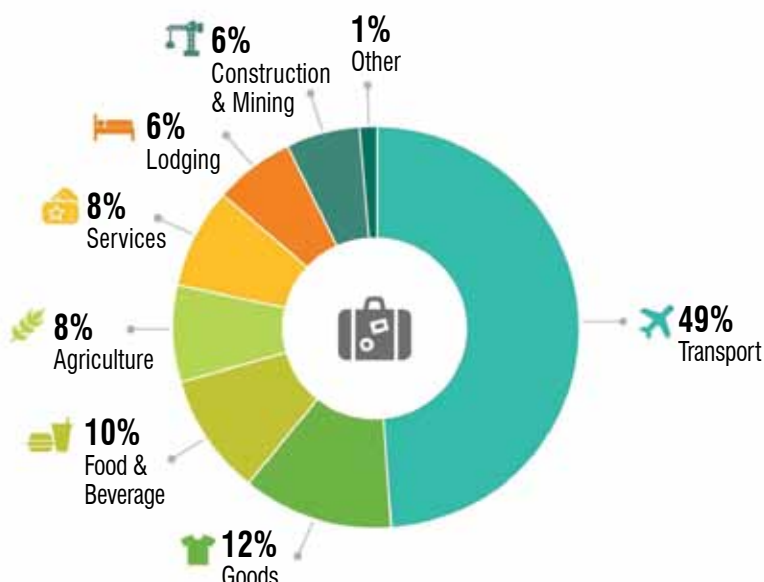
**Tourism activities are responsible for 8 per cent of world's carbon emissions. Within tourism, transportation is the main source of carbon emissions**

most emissions per passenger mile, with tour buses, ferries, and trains coming behind. When it comes to the hospitality industry, some key emissions are associated with heating and air conditioning, as well as water heaters used to warm showers,

the majority of their food products from other countries. The farther food travels, the more emissions are generated.

**How can an industry can play a role in reducing the carbon footprint?**

## Carbon Footprint of Global Tourism



Tourism Fleet for Walker Tours in Sri Lanka and also South Asia's FIRST CarbonNeutral® city hotel - The Colombo Court. We have worked with both travel and hospitality sectors extensively and are able to help them to accurately track and report their emissions. We also provide carbon management plans as an integral part of our solutions. Whatever emissions that can not be reduced immediately can be compensated for and offset using globally registered carbon credits.

**What will be the short-term and long-term benefits of the programme?**  
According to Booking.com's

**For too many years, organizations were not taking any effort to report their emissions – stating that there was no business case to incur the expense**

Sustainable Travel Report - which polled more than 29,000 travelers across 30 countries – 73 per cent of the US travelers think that sustainable travel is vital, with 46 per cent say the pandemic has made them want to travel more sustainably. The report also confirms that 42 per cent still believe that there are not enough sustainable travel options available (<https://gulfnews.com/business/analy->

sis/travellers-worldwide-are-ready-to-get-on-sustainable-tourism-rides-1.89403501). The tourism sector will have to change because its customers are now demanding that the change happens. Also, there are significant cost savings and other benefits associated with being greener. These can only be achieved with a solid Sustainability Strategy and Roadmap put in place. 📌



# Bleisure experience @Tower Plaza

For every thriving business, vision of the proprietors or owners plays a pivotal role. The recently rebranded The Tower Plaza hotel has a silent personality who likes to work behind the scenes and is the sole visionary of the hotel's success story. The refurbished hotel has been competing well with its rival properties to re-position itself as a property known for the bleisure concept.

 Shehara Rizly

The transformation of The Tower Plaza hotel started off just a year ago, today, it is one of the most lucrative hotels on Sheikh Zayed Road., **Fatima Al Attar**, CEO, The Tower Plaza, is responsible for overseeing all issues related to the property, or the property portfolio such as obtaining the necessary business licenses, ensuring the property is well-maintained, investing in improvements or expansions, and all core hotel operations. Al Attar is a great leader who has delegated responsibility to employees, General Manager and management teams. She is primarily concerned with the continued success of The Tower Plaza by building a success story being



a local brand she grew from the start. She oversees recruitment efforts, stays up to date with emerging hotel trends, and

ensures individual departments have everything they need. On a strategic level, she is competing with rival properties and

re-positioning the hotel to match the bleisure concept.

When asked her about how transformation helps the industry, she explains, "Today, source markets have changed, especially post-pandemic. With the new branding, we are also tapping into new source markets, 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. Saying this, we are capitalizing on our relationship we built with our top partners around the globe who are a crucial part of our success."


When asked about her contribution towards the tourism sector as the owner or pro-

prietor, she said, "Location, accessibility, room size, room inventory and meeting space are the key USPs of our hotel. As we step into summer soon, for the international markets we have in place attractive rates and promotions with a decent room inventory to push traffic.

elements for the hotel. "Currently working on full room enhancements, including full interior designs to cope with global trends, work on reshaping our signature outlet The View@61 and working on new concept, new General Manager on board with a new vision focusing on

**The Tower Plaza hotel is looking at developing new source markets to add to the key performing markets such as CIS, Germany, France, and India**

With regards to the domestic market, we will put in place attractive staycation packages too." She went on further about the key transformation/upgrade

elevating the guest experience. We have a prime location on Sheikh Zayed road with direct access to Emirates Towers Metro station," she said. 

THE TOWER PLAZA HOTEL

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# Tech at centre of revenue strategies

There are many instances the word 'data' is heard across the hospitality industry, but how exactly can we monetise that data? Post-pandemic, generating revenue is a great concern for all industry partners, hence **TRAVTALK** spoke to a few strategists on their thoughts of the most important matter in hand. Here are their replies on the issue.

 TT Bureau	Do you see a change in terms of revenue strategies in hospitality in the Middle East?	Data is considered key to generating revenue. How can data be monetized?	Post-pandemic do you see a shift in terms of revenue management?	Loyalty schemes have become an integral part in hospitality, how does it work for the agents?	Do you see hospitality adapting to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning to drive revenues?
 <p><b>Craig McDonald</b> Director, Account Management - Strategic &amp; Global Accounts, IDEaS</p>	<p>There is a lot of focus on how competitor sets are pricing, and addressing different markets. For example, Dubai has always well-served premium travellers, but there is now demand for mid-level accommodation with more trendy hotels targeting Millennials and Gen Z. We are seeing big brands addressing the needs.</p>	<p>There is an influx of data in all systems. Monetising it is really about personalisation - threading it through systems, so hoteliers can match data with the clients and address their individual needs and requirements. Personalisation is more than correctly using a name; efficient monetisation comes from using it for tailored upselling.</p>	<p>Revenue management has certainly shifted post-pandemic, not just in the Middle East but around the world. There is a lot more centralisation of the revenue management function, whether it be clusters, regional offices or completely centralised. There is not so many individual revenue managers on-property at hotels.</p>	<p>From an individual guest perspective, loyalty schemes are a big driver. A lot of big hospitality companies are re-inventing what they do from a loyalty perspective in a bid to encourage more guests to book directly. If anything, it is driving people away from booking with agents and online travel aggregators (OTAs).</p>	<p>I don't think hospitality has a choice! AI is already in some hospitality technology - hoteliers may just not recognise it or it is taken for granted. We are doing more and more with AI to help improve revenue management, taking the guesswork out and driving more automation. Hotels want AI but are not necessarily asking for it.</p>
 <p><b>Jon Eichelberge</b> Chief Marketing Officer, TrustYou</p>	<p>One of the big strategic changes is to focus on quality and overall approach to revenue management. Pricing remains quite dynamic but there is a greater focus being applied to the qualitative side of revenue management - in terms of guest experience. This has such a big impact in driving additional customer value and repeat visits.</p>	<p>Inherently, there is a lot of value in data. It's really about piecing together what is most relevant to hotels and thinking of data as a way to engage the customer and activate in line with their behaviour. Data can really power understanding how to best reach a customer and communicate your value proposition in a way that appeals to them.</p>	<p>First, it's about recovery after the pandemic. And that brings in consumer behaviour, which has drastically changed. We are seeing a strong rebound in travel but looking beyond the initial rush, companies are focusing on the guest experience and how to incorporate more experiential components into a holistic revenue management strategy.</p>	<p>Loyalty will become more and more valuable going forward for both agents and bookers. At present, too many schemes are fragmented and complex to administer. The challenge for hoteliers is to create loyalty schemes that contribute value to the booker, but somehow share that value across the whole booking chain.</p>	<p>Primarily, AI offers a cost-saving measure. It's easy to implement and reduces the overheads that go into addressing the guest. Used well, it can free up time for staff to focus on the guest experience instead of administrative functions. For revenue, it becomes valuable when used in marketing - scaling up teams and projects.</p>
 <p><b>Marieke Wisse</b> Head of Marketing, Oaky</p>	<p>Hospitality companies are now looking beyond just room operations and thinking about wider services such as late check-out and early check-in and different departments, applying revenue principles to multiple verticals. Now, hospitality companies are also making changes to address the needs of Millennials and Generation Z.</p>	<p>There is a lot of data out there, so you need to be clear what you are looking for. Data that states a 32-year-old woman with two children from London stayed at your hotel is not relevant. To leverage data, it needs to be more focused on what type of room the guest stayed in, what additional revenue they generated during their stay.</p>	<p>Not so much a shift as continual development. A lot of hotels are ramping up their technological stack and leveraging data and the tools they have to evolve their revenue management, which has led to improvements in the discipline. There is also a lot more focus on automation in revenue management systems.</p>	<p>Loyalty schemes can be a positive for bookers but only when hotels implement them properly! A hotel chain can have the perfect program but if individual hotels do not take it seriously, it does not help anyone. Loyalty schemes have to deliver real benefits, not just creating a loyalty program for the sake of having one.</p>	<p>With the release of ChatGPT, more companies are certainly seeing the urgency of using AI and machine learning. They want to do it now before their competitors do. Consumers are also now more accepting because they understand AI better - before ChatGPT, the impacts and benefits to them were too vague.</p>
 <p><b>Carsten Wernet</b> Chief Executive, SHOT</p>	<p>There is a global change in terms of revenue strategies - people are much more interested in revenue management as a whole. Even those companies which have been reluctant to consider tools such as an RMS are now looking into it. The technology has also advanced with solutions, such as IDEaS G3 RMS for better connectivity.</p>	<p>You have got to be sure you are handling data correctly and are not blinded in the quest to monetise it. One important way is to utilise Artificial Intelligence (AI) within revenue management, so that you are making quick and informed decisions, which will help refine your revenue strategy and drive enhanced financial performance.</p>	<p>The big shift we are seeing is a change from large complex technology to 'lighter' systems. Technology increasingly needs to be used at property level by more staff with less expertise, so using a solution that is easy to understand and utilise is key. There is a shift to looking beyond just the ADR and taking a broader approach.</p>	<p>The big shift we are witnessing is a change from large complex technology to 'lighter' systems. Technology increasingly needs to be used at property level by more staff with less expertise, so using a solution that is easy to understand and utilisation is key. I think moving forward loyalty schemes will be changing significantly.</p>	<p>Marketing within hospitality is already adapting - big players like Salesforce and SAP are already integrating AI into marketing tools, which are ultimately driving revenue. AI has already been used by a number of big RMS providers. It's not a matter of when it is coming, it's about how it can be used in all areas of the business.</p>
 <p><b>Nicola Graham</b> VP Marketing, Cendyn</p>	<p>There is a big drive towards using automation and how hoteliers can innovate their tech stack to reflect a deeper thinking about profitability. It is no longer just room revenue. Revenue is also more integrated with other commercial functions like sales and marketing, with a focus on how to drive demand.</p>	<p>Data is the most powerful tool any business has. The more you can access, the more centralised usage. And using it to drive loyalty through tailored experiences on-property is a key opportunity for hoteliers. It helps in creating lookalike models, retargeting guests, and creating personalised experiences to monetise services.</p>	<p>There has been a shift linked to automation; a lot of hotels still use spreadsheets but are finally realising the power of technology such as RMS. This is tied to a move towards a more holistic approach; revenue management is no longer just room nights. Automation in revenue management is helping hotels save on costs and be more efficient.</p>	<p>It really depends on how a loyalty scheme is set up. Hotels need to think about the type of guest they have - and the type of guest they want - to shape a loyalty scheme that works best for them. Knowing your audience is key to finding a solution that helps hotels achieve their goals, and makes agents and/or bookers feel valued.</p>	<p>Hospitality will adapt as their tech stack does. ChatGPT is certainly in the spotlight and now they have opened their API, hospitality technology providers need to look at how it can be implemented in solutions. Front desk can be made more efficient through AI, but concierge services also represent a way of driving revenue through AI.</p>



# Indonesia Night in Dubai

Under the patronage of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in the United Arab Emirates, a special evening was held in Dubai to showcase the heritage of Indonesia in the form of heritage textiles. Many dignitaries attended the event, who included Ministers from Ministries in the UAE and Ambassadors from ASEAN countries.



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# Over 100 trade partners from 9 nations

More than 100 trade partners from nine countries in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Middle East (ME) region and 70 partners from the two countries took part in the inaugural 'Marhaba France, Spain' event in Oman held recently. The collaboration saw more than 2,000 meetings being conducted over two days.





# attend 'Marhaba France, Spain' event





# Sharjah showcases present and future

Sharjah showcased a captivating vision of the present and future of tourism at ITB Berlin 2023. Led by the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA), the emirate's innovatively designed pavilion at the event, powered by latest digital technologies, was a popular hive of activity and business networking for three days.

 TT Bureau

SCTDA led a delegation of 15 public and private entities, tourist office representatives and travel agencies from Sharjah, who presented emerging investment opportunities in tourism to visiting business professionals, industry leaders and potential partners, in a series of meetings. At the event's various discussion forums, the Sharjah delegation representatives also turned the spotlight on the ef-

in promoting and preserving socio-economic history and our natural environment.

Sharjah's stunningly diverse natural beauty characterised by pristine beaches, rugged mountainous terrain - all enriched by the town's unique cultural heritage come together to offer tourists and visitors several opportunities to explore. In recent years, these opportunities have expanded considerably through the hosting of cultural events, new



forts and innovations in the sectors of sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, adventure and cultural tourism driven by their efforts. Over the years, Sharjah has emerged as one of the regional leaders in these sectors, which are playing a major role

adventure tourism and water sport activities, the opening of luxury hospitality destinations, as well as heritage attractions, which all contributed to Khorfakkan winning the prestigious award - an acknowledgement of the coastal town's dedica-

tion to promoting sustainable tourism options and providing exceptional experiences to residents, visitors and tourists.

From experiential virtual tours of emerging touristic assets like the Sharjah Safari - the

world's largest wildlife safari park outside Africa, to serving traditional Arabic dates and coffee, Emirati garments, and more, the Sharjah showcase at ITB Berlin 2023 was a fitting reflection of the emirate's modern outlook rooted in its authentic traditions.

On participating in this year's edition of ITB Berlin, **HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**, Chairman of the SCTDA, said: "This is a key global industry event in tourism, which brings together leading players in hospitality, leisure and tourism from around the world. Our presence here offers promising opportunities to reinforce Sharjah's position on the map of global tourism, particularly that the emirate has unique

potential in which tourists and travel professionals alike showed great interest."

He added, "Through our participation, which convened 15 public and private entities from our partners, we have successfully promoted Sharjah's diverse touristic landscape and offerings. We harnessed our presence at ITB Berlin to promote the natural diversity and sustainable projects in Sharjah, as well as the various entertainment options on offer. Moreover, we introduced the public to

at our pavilion. The pavilion's interactive design elements especially impressed our visitors. We look forward to translating the results of meetings held by the participating entities from the emirate into achievements and investment opportunities."

**HE Sheikh Fahim Al Qasimi**, Chairperson of the Department of Government Relations (DGR) in Sharjah, said: "The bond between Sharjah and Germany has been cemented over centuries through trade, personal relationships

**What Sharjah showcased at ITB Berlin 2023 was a fitting reflection of the emirate's modern outlook rooted in its authentic traditions**



unique tourism experiences and products, as well as the agenda of major events that enrich their experience in Sharjah. We also highlighted the authentic cultural aspects of its tourist destinations, given that the European market is one of the most important markets that exports tourists who are interested in culture, heritage and history to Sharjah. This makes the emirate an ideal attraction that meets the needs of European tourists in general and German tourists in particular. We aimed to take visitors in immersive digitally created tours across the emirate

and shared diplomacy. As the UAE's most important trading partner in Europe, Germany has played a vital role in developing the country's industrial sectors, but our relationship goes beyond trade and investment; it is grounded in deep cultural exchange, which has built a bridge between the East and West. For years, Sharjah has been popular among German tourists seeking an immersive cultural experience, and the steady increase of visitors year-on-year is a testament to this. The emirate's rich history, vibrant art scene, and



# tourism offerings @ITB Berlin 2023

luxurious hospitality offerings have attracted visitors from all over the world. German cities of Berlin, Munich, and Frankfurt have also long been popular among Emiratis, showing the strong connection between our two nations. Tourism has become a crucial aspect of our relationship, not only as an economic driver but also as a means of promoting mutual understanding and tolerance between countries, cultures and peoples," HE Sheikh Fahim Al Qasimi added.

On Sharjah's achievements and future plans on display at ITB Berlin 2023, **HE Ahmed Obaid Al Qaseer**, CEO of the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), said: "Shurooq is proud to be part of these collective efforts to raise the profile of Sharjah

partners, our people and for Sharjah," he added.

For her part, **HE Hana Saif Al Suwaidi**, Chairperson of the Environment and Protected Areas Authority (EPAA) in Sharjah, expressed the entity's keenness to participate in prestigious international events like ITB Berlin,

scientific, practical and academic disciplines to protect and preserve local heritage for future generations. "This participation stems from SIH's keenness to establish a strong presence on the world tourism map, and communicate directly with industry counterparts," he added.

**This (ITB) is a key global industry event in tourism, which brings together leading players in hospitality, leisure and tourism from around the world**

which focus their discussions on ways tourism and travel can serve as contributing factors to environmental, wildlife and heritage protection. EPAA joined this conversation by highlight-

Dr Al Musallam explained that the SIH's participation in this edition of ITB Berlin is distinguished, attractive and includes an important visitor station. A specialist team welcomed visi-



tors and provided various information and publications. In addition, craftsmen demonstrated traditional and popular crafts and Emirati food.

**HE Ali Salim Al Midfa**, Chairman of the Sharjah Airport Authority (SAA), said: "ITB Berlin serves as the ideal platform for showcasing our expertise as an aviation industry leader in the region and as a global gateway, used by millions of travellers each year. Through our participation, we have highlighted smart services that the Sharjah Airport offers to travellers, and shared our project expansion plans to attract more airlines."

He added, "This event creates key networking opportunities

with aviation experts, allows the exchange of ideas, and exploration of new avenues for collaboration. We aim to keep with all the advancements in the global travel market, cater to the needs of our customers, particu-

ing the Emirate's position as a preferred destination for travel and business."

**HE Issa Hilal Al Hazami**, Chairman of the Sharjah Sports Council (SSC), emphasised that their participa-

**The bond between Sharjah and Germany has been cemented over centuries through trade, personal relationships and shared diplomacy**

larly in the European markets, and enable entrepreneurs worldwide to learn about the diverse investment opportunities in Sharjah. This will further contribute to enhanc-

tion in ITB Berlin 2023 furthers SCC's plans to highlight the role of sports in touristic, social and economic sectors, as well as in enhancing the emirate's reputation in sports, in line with the directives of **HH Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi**, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah. "We have showcased SSC's new initiatives and events as well as its upcoming projects; ITB Berlin offers a vibrant platform to exchange ideas and share our future vision. It is an opportunity to showcase the emirate's constant progress and highlight its leadership in various fields, particularly in sports. The diversity of tournaments hosted in different cities and regions of the emirate reflects its diverse natural beauty and introduces guests to its rich history, monuments, and peoples," he said. ▶



as a growing global destination. We are honoured to highlight our contributions to this unique journey of sustainable development. Shurooq is showcasing a selection of world-class developments, including the 'Sharjah Collection' managed by 'Mysk by Shaza', the Mleiha Archaeological and Ecotourism Project, Al Noor Island, The Chedi Al Bait hotel, Sharjah and The Serai Wing - Bait Khalid bin Ibrahim, which have highlighted the beauty and limitless potential of Sharjah in wide-ranging sectors like ecotourism, luxury and heritage hospitality, and arts and culture. We are also giving visitors an insight into our dynamic plans and future visions for our

ing its Sharjah Safari project, which boasts 12 diverse natural environments and is home to endangered animal species who live freely on premises that extend over 8 square kilometres. Through this unique safari offering, Sharjah has consolidated its leading position as an attractive destination for lovers of nature and wildlife tourism, the EPAA Chairperson added.

**HE Dr Abdul Aziz Al Musallam**, Chairperson of the SIH, underscored that the entity's participation in ITB Berlin reflects on its mission to engage with global stakeholders as well as global audiences, as well as promote its strategies and programmes designed across





## THE TOWER PLAZA HOTEL Dubai

**HAITHAM GALAL** has been appointed as the General Manager of the Tower Plaza Hotel, Dubai. Galal will oversee the repositioning of the hotel including all recruitment. Engaging with the local community is a key focus for Haitham and the hotel. He will play an active part in promoting The Tower Plaza Hotel as a leisure destination. Prior to joining the hotel, Haitham, who has worked in the hospitality industry for over 25 years, was cluster operation manager at the Novotel Al Bustan Abu Dhabi, and prior to this he spent his time with IHG, Accor and Rotana in different positions. The Tower Plaza Hotel offers 415 spacious and elegant rooms with picturesque view of Dubai skyline, including Burj Khalifa and the Jumeirah beach.



## MILLENNIUM HOTELS AND RESORTS MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA Dubai

Dubai's Millennium Hotels and Resorts Middle East & Africa has appointed **FAHAD ABDULRAHIM KAZIM** as Chief Executive Officer to spearhead the brand's strategic growth in the region. Fahad brings with him more than 20 years of regional experience across the real estate and professional services industries, having worked in various leadership roles with prominent real estate developers in Dubai. Fahad has a deeper understanding of the brand from an ownership lens and with this wealth of knowledge aims to reinforce the Millennium Hotels & Resorts brand as a regional specialist with a strategic focus on community-driven initiatives.



## RIXOS BAB AL BAHR Ras Al Khaimah

Rixos Bab Al Bahr has appointed **GIACOMO PUNTEL** as the new Hotel Manager of the five-star resort in Ras Al Khaimah. Reporting directly to the General Manager, Ahmed Elnawawy, Puntel is the newest addition to a high-powered team, working to elevate guest experiences and enhance customer satisfaction. In this new role, Puntel will be utilising his nearly three decades of hospitality experience to oversee daily hotel operations and improve service delivery standards. In addition, he will work closely with Ahmed Elnawawy to improve the overall hotel offering. Puntel is a seasoned hospitality veteran, having won many awards including 'Hospitality Heavyweight of the Year' in 2021.



## MARSA MALAZ KEMPINSKI, THE PEARL Doha, Qatar

Kempinski Hotels has appointed **YAZAN LATIF** as the new General Manager of Marsa Malaz Kempinski, The Pearl – Doha. A well-seasoned hospitality professional, Yazan has more than 22 years of experience in luxury hotel chains. A role model for aspiring hoteliers, he started his journey in 1999 at the Oxford Belfry Hotel in the UK. He then joined the Four Seasons and remained with the renowned brand for almost 15 years. Expanding gradually his responsibilities in the rooms division, he became Director of Rooms at the Four Seasons Hotel – Jakarta, Indonesia in 2010. In 2014, Yazan joined as a Director of Rooms at the Yas Viceroy Abu Dhabi, while supporting as Hotel Manager Task Force the Viceroy Palm Jumeirah – Dubai and the Viceroy Istanbul.



## SABRE WorldWide

Sabre Corporation announced that **KURT EKERT**, currently President of Sabre, will also become the company's Chief Executive Officer, reporting to the Board of Directors. Ekert has also been nominated as a director for election at Sabre's 2023 Annual Meeting, to be held on April 26, 2023. Ekert joined Sabre in January 2022 as President, as part of the company's long-term succession plans, as it split the role of president and CEO. Ekert oversees all aspects of the company's business and technology operations. Over the last year, Ekert developed new growth strategies and successfully executed against the company's operating plans, including successfully reorganizing its travel solutions business.



## ACCOR MEA, Turkey and Asia Pacific

Accor introduced its new commercial organisation and executive committee, with **KERRY HEALY** taking the lead as Chief Commercial Officer for Premium, Midscale & Economy brands in Middle East, Africa, Turkey & Asia Pacific. An outstanding leader and skilled negotiator, Kerry has a proven track record of managing teams, building trust and designing robust strategies. Part of the Accor family since 2011, she previously served as Chief Commercial Officer for South East Asia, Japan & South Korea – a position she held with distinction since 2020. In her expanded role, Kerry will oversee the commercial functions for a diverse region.



## News in pictures



flyadeal partners with Saudi Tourism Authority to strengthen domestic tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



Almatour Travel Group signs a new technology agreement with Sabre to advance its travel payments strategy



RAKTDA and FTI sign agreement to launch two weekly flights from Munich to Ras Al Khaimah



Travelport acquires DEEM for corporate travel



Riyadh Air to be Saudi Arabia's new national carrier



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