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Dubai welcomes 8.5mn visitors in H1

Driven by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's visionary strategy to enhance sustainable economic growth and raise global competitiveness, Dubai has emerged as one of the most attractive cities to visit.

TT Bureau

Dubai has welcomed more than 8.5 million international visitors during the first six months of 2023, showing renewed momentum in the tourism sector. His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of

Dubai and Chairman of The Executive Council, said that Dubai continues to reinforce its position as a major global economic hub, guided by the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. Reviewing a report

on Dubai's economic progress in the first half of 2023, HH Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed said: "Our economic accomplishments, as well as our future goals, have been shaped by rigorous strategic planning, the exemplary efforts of our institutions, and our remarkable resilience and adeptness in navigating global challenges and

the rapidly evolving economic environment. Such accomplishments are testament to the trust placed by major investors, international institutions and business leaders in Dubai."

Dubai has further consolidated its status as the world's leading tourist destination in the first half of 2023, he added.



His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum
Crown Prince of Dubai and Chairman of The Executive Council

16-fold increase in holiday rentals

Business travel in the Middle East has seen a new trend choosing non-conventional accommodations over hotel rooms. speaks to a few experts in the field to get their opinion on this.



Yuri Provkina
Co-founder, Colife

"The Dubai rental market is developing rapidly, as evidenced by our business indicators: we have grown 16 times in the past year. I consider the growth of the medium-term rental market to be an important trend. It has become crucial that the apartment already has everything you need because there is no time for arrangement: easy check-in and check-out. Because of the remote work, many began to combine work and travel, staying in a new country for several months. In global trends, there is a notable increase in the popularity of colivings among the working travellers, where you can stay for a period from a month to a year. Also in such places, there are coworking spaces for convenient work and their own communities."

Contd. on page 4 ▶

Qatar cruise passengers up 151%

Qatar Tourism reveals that the country welcomed more than 253,191 cruise visitors during 2022-23 cruise season, which is 151 per cent more compared to the last cruise season.

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Qatar continues to strengthen its position as a global tourism destination supported by a variety of leading tourist attractions and a range of exciting festivals and events. This significant growth in the visitors is particularly significant given that this year's cruise

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Measuring success the wrong way?

As the travel and tourism industry embarks on the path to recovery, the focus on responsible and sustainable practices has become paramount. In a recent panel discussion, hosted by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) in Nepal, challenges and opportunities for responsible tourism were brought forward by Industry leaders.

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The path to a responsible tourism industry presents both challenges and opportunities. Insights shared by industry leaders at a recent panel discussion, hosted by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) in Nepal, highlighted the importance of measuring success beyond arrival numbers and emphasized on the well-being of local communities and the environment. It was said that through initiatives like community-based tourism, infrastructure development, and responsible practices, destinations like Nepal, the Maldives, Ras Al Khaimah, and Azerbaijan are demonstrating their commitment to sustainable growth. By embracing responsibility across various sectors and influencing policy-making, the industry can contribute to a more sustainable and fulfilling travel experience for everyone.



(Left to right): Dr. Dhananjay Regmi, Dr. Abdulla Mausoom, Raki Phillips and Florian Sengstschnid

Rethinking measures of success

Dr. Dhananjay Regmi, CEO, Nepal Tourism Board, emphasizes the need to redefine how success in tourism is measured. Rather than solely focusing on arrival numbers, he suggested considering the standard of living for local communities and the state of the environment. Nepal has long embraced sustainability, with initiatives such as Tourism for the Rural Coordination and the preservation of ethnic group

cultures through homestays. "The country has also made significant efforts in protecting national parks and increasing tiger populations. It is important to find sustainable solutions to keep fragile environments free from pollution and encourage responsible behaviour from locals and tourists," he added.

The accessible & sustainable vision

Dr. Abdulla Mausoom, Minister of Tourism, Maldives, shared

the Maldives' commitment to becoming the world's leading sustainable tourism destination. "The Maldives' fifth master plan focuses on accessibility for all, including people with special needs and seniors, while ensuring the benefits of tourism reach the local population and protect ecosystems," he explains. The country is investing in infrastructure development across its islands, providing essential services like water, electricity, and internet access on all islands.



Supporting community & financial growth

Raki Phillips, CEO, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA), discussed Ras Al Khaimah's ambitious goal of becoming the Middle East's most

economic responsibility," he said. Ras Al Khaimah has partnered with Earth Check to develop a roadmap towards sustainability and has gained commitments from 30 corporate companies.

Quality and responsibility

Florian Sengstschnid, CEO, Azerbaijan Tourism Board, highlighted Azerbaijan's vision of resilient growth, emphasizing the significance of quality over quantity.

Measuring success beyond arrival numbers and emphasizing the well-being of local communities and the environment is important

sustainable destination by 2025. "Rather than solely pursuing sustainability, we must emphasize the importance of responsible tourism, which encompasses environmental, cultural, and eco-

"The destination aims to leverage its assets and enhance capacities to create a competitive advantage, while acknowledging that sustainability encompasses verticals beyond tourism," he said. ➔

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Business travel rentals show marked growth

► Contd. from page 1



Pete Evering
Business Development Manager
Utopia Property Management

“We are definitely seeing an uptick in business travel rentals, especially in high-growth cities like Austin. Compared to what we saw at the height of the pandemic, the numbers today are astounding. However, we have yet to approach pre-pandemic levels. New ways of working have definitely impacted business travel and rentals, especially STRs. Nevertheless, it is completely surprising and reassuring that people were eager to get back to business trips as soon as things started to open up a few years ago. Anyone invested in the rental industry would see this as a glimmer of hope. Technology-driven changes are reshaping the way business travellers experience their stays.”



Shri Ganeshram
CEO and Founder
Awinning

“The surge in remote work and flexible working arrangements have transformed business travel. Today, employees are blending business trips with leisure time, creating a trend we call ‘bleisure’. With digital nomadism on the rise, rentals of accommodations in the Middle East, which offer a homely experience, are in high demand. I find the rise of serviced apartments, especially for extended stays, quite promising. They offer a blend of the luxuries of a hotel and the comfort of a home. Companies are favouring this option for employees on longer assignments because it provides a home-like environment, enhancing productivity.”



Mueen Khan
Founder
Sell House

“New ways of working, such as remote and flexible arrangements, have significantly impacted the business travel rentals market. As professionals seek personalized and comfortable accommodations to balance work and travel, the demand for extended-stay rentals, co-living spaces, and serviced apartments has soared. Additionally, the latest trend of integrating technology into rental properties, such as smart home features and seamless digital experiences, is proving to be highly promising in attracting business travellers. These trends offer promising opportunities for rental companies to cater to the evolving needs of business travellers.”



William Bardosa
Marketing Director
Bedford Housing

“I have been working in the corporate housing and furnished rental market since 2014. New ways of working have had a significant impact on business travel. The most promising trend is the shift towards virtual meetings and conferences. Virtual meetings offer convenience, cost savings, and global connectivity. Flexible work arrangements and sharing economy platforms have also influenced business travel. Bleisure travel, combining business and leisure, is another emerging trend, where business travellers can enjoy a more cost-effective and flexible accommodations by opting for apartments that provide extended stay.”



Sara McDaniel
Founder
Simply Southern Cottage

“Tourism commission of our town set a goal for the development of short term, downtown rental space over the past few years to accommodate the increase in business travellers and tourists. As an Airbnb owner, feedback from business travellers includes the desire for a cozy, comfortable environment with quality workspace, a full kitchen for eating and cooking, as opposed to eating out three meals a day, as well as outdoor living space for relaxing, definitely a change in priorities after the pandemic lockdown. Our response has been to provide versatile accommodations, exceptional customer service and comfortable lodging options.”



Derek Morgan
Chief Real Estate Officer
Unreal Estate

“The exponential growth of business travel rentals is a testament to the evolving landscape of corporate travel. New ways of working, such as remote and flexible schedules, have revolutionized the business travel industry. Companies now prioritize cost-effective and convenient accommodations that cater to their unique needs. Among the latest trends, extended-stay options and coliving spaces stand out as the most promising. These trends offer a harmonious blend of comfort, functionality, and community, elevating the business travel experience to new heights. With these advancements, the future of business travel rentals is poised for even greater success.”

‘Buy, not build’ mantra for growth

While the rising interest rates and uncertain economic outlook raise concerns, investment banker **Morgann Lesne** from Cambon Partners says it could be the one-off opportunity for ‘brave’ buyers of travel companies, as prices now represent better value than anytime in the recent memory. ‘Buy, not build’ strategy could be the mantra for growth in **WIRETALK**, he adds.

TT Bureau

Rising interest rates, an uncertain economic outlook, concerns about what happens when ‘revenge travel’ ends, and the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank have resulted in a wave of write-downs in the valuations of not just travel startups, but also of mature travel businesses all over the world.

However, this presents an opportunity. “We are now entering into a buyer’s market, and this (write-downs in the valuation of travel companies) presents a one-off opportunity for the brave buyers out there – including in the Middle East,” says Morgann Lesne, an investment banker from Cambon Partners. “Buy, not build” strategy could be an answer for growth in the Middle East,” he adds.



Morgann Lesne
Investment Banker
Cambon Partners

Morgann has personally advised on more than 60 travel mergers and acquisitions over the last 10 years. “Prices now really represent better value than ever before for those out there with secured financing or sitting on cash – in fact not just prices are negotiable, but so are terms in general, including the payment schedule, we are seeing this in the Middle East and in all markets,” he says.

In the past, higher valuations had pushed investors and entrepreneurs to search for organic growth. But, Morgann says, “Perhaps this era is coming to an end, temporarily at least, as a buy, not build strategy looks like offering better and quicker returns. Now is the time to be courageous.”

Reflecting on the medium-term consequences of the current trend for lower valuations in the Middle East and elsewhere, Lesne points out that this could result in a wave of consolidation across the travel technol-

Perhaps this era is coming to an end, as a ‘buy, not build’ strategy looks like offering better and quicker returns. Now is the time to be courageous



ogy space, as “too many startups, and even relatively mature companies were based on fast growth and rapidly increasing valuations, which is not happening now, as investors are pulling the plug and looking

for quick exits.” He goes on to explain that the trend forces them inevitably into industry sales at a time when the underlying business is under pressure due to cuts in budgets and staff volatility. ▶

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Significant surge in corporate travel

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Savio Vaz
Vice President – Government and Corporate Travel
dnata Travel Group

“Corporate travel in the Middle East has witnessed sharp growth in 2023, as businesses accelerate recovery by adapting quickly to changing policies and innovations. The top travel destinations for us this year from corporates across the region remain the UAE, KSA and UK, alongside countries in Europe and Africa. As a TMC, we continue to drive cost initiatives for corporates, while there is an increased interest from customers to digitalize their end-to-end travel program, use of online booking tools, expense management and business intelligence solutions. Aligned to global trends, customers also continue to focus on duty of care and sustainability initiatives, such as the tracking of carbon footprint.”



Caroline Thissen
Area Senior Director Sales & Revenue Optimization
Middle East & Africa, Radisson Hotel Group

“We have witnessed a significant rise in business travellers embracing technology and personalized experiences. Today’s business travellers are empowered, leveraging digital platforms to make their bookings convenient and efficient. We have also observed a growing trend of direct bookings through our website and our Radisson Hotels App, showcasing the preference for seamless and personalized interactions. We continuously collaborate with agents and travel management companies to ensure we can offer quick and efficient booking turnaround, especially with travel being so last minute nowadays.”



Paul Stevens
Chief Operating Officer, Premium, Midscale & Economy
Division, Middle East, Africa & Türkiye, Accor

“The dynamics of business travel have transformed due to technology, leading to changes in booking habits and the role of corporate travel agencies. Online platforms have revolutionized the process, enabling travellers to effortlessly search, compare, and book accommodation with a few clicks. Mobile apps have further streamlined the experience, facilitating on-the-go bookings and hotel itinerary management. Despite these advancements, travel agents continue to be relied upon as trusted advisors, particularly for unfamiliar destinations and complex itineraries. Our sales team maintains a strong partnership through roadshows, product knowledge sessions, incentives, and personalized services.”



Jamal Abdulnazar
CEO
Cozmo Travel

“Post-COVID, in recent times, there has been a notable rise in business travel as various industries have adapted to the changing global landscape. Several new trends have emerged, reflecting the evolving needs of professionals on the move. One significant trend is the increased emphasis on sustainability, with businesses prioritizing eco-friendly accommodations and transportation options. Additionally, technology has played a pivotal role in simplifying travel arrangements. As for popular business travel destinations, cities like London, New York, Paris, Frankfurt, Riyadh and Tokyo continue to top the list due to their thriving economies and global connectivity.”



Nasir Jamal Khan
CEO
Al Naboodah Travel

“Some rising trends in business travel include a focus on sustainable and eco-friendly practices, an increased adoption of virtual meetings and remote work, and the integration of technology for seamless travel experiences. Popular business travel destinations varied, but a few countries like USA, France, Ireland, Germany, Spain, Turkey, Canada, Netherlands, UK, GCC, China and Japan are often favoured for their economic hubs and networking opportunities. Agent engagement has seen a shift towards personalized and curated travel experiences, as well as the use of chatbots and AI-powered tools.”



Rehan Ali
CEO
Tawfeeq Travel

“Sustainability and CO₂ emission have become a key factor determining the business travel by the corporate. Pre-trip reporting is essential for decision making for a business traveller. UK, France, Italy, India, China, Korea, Japan are the key destinations for the business traveller. As a TMC, we are completely engaged with traveller by providing MIS, along with online booking tools, to facilitate a seamless journey. Post-COVID, the premium travel has grown, even as the travellers still prefer to maintain safe distance with fellow travellers. With China and other countries opening up, we can expect a big surge in business travel soon.”



Ibrahim Nalkhande
General Manager
Business Travel LLC, UAE

“Post-COVID, 2023 is the first year which registered healthy business growth. It’s obvious from the recorded performances of H1 2023 that the travel industry will not only reach pre-pandemic sales level, but also registered phenomenal growth at the end of the year. The persistent and buoyant growth is glaring from the recorded performance of business travel, the corporate world has ditched the involuntarily imposed culture of virtual meetings, seminars and conventions, the good old conventional business practices have bounced back. People are travelling to conduct business to both short-haul and long-haul destinations.”



Adrian Nastase
Director of Sales & Marketing
SLS Dubai Hotel & Residences

“SLS Dubai has witnessed a significant surge in business travel, establishing its position as a highly sought-after destination in the region. The luxurious hotel and residence tower, nestled in the heart of Dubai, offers exceptional amenities and boasts a prime location for discerning business travellers. With its state-of-the-art meeting facilities, cutting-edge technology, and impeccable service SLS Dubai has emerged as the preferred choice for corporate events and executive stays. Key industries such as fashion, retail, and automotive have played a pivotal role in driving the success of this segment.”



Sushant Pilankar
Manager
Leisure Uranus Travel

“As the industry continues on its recovery path, business trips from UAE are increasing, with people eager to resume and reboot their business plans. The pent-up demand, coupled with increased confidence of travellers is helping to drive the recovery and, of course, the available seat capacity and connectivity of airlines out of UAE. With Uranus Travel, the outbound business travel is not dominated by any single destination, but intraregional travel is a noticeable trend and five of the 10 most popular destinations are located in Middle East. Stay time for leisure has reduced, but for business travel it has increased.”



JVR Fernando
Chief Commercial Officer
Satguru Travel

“We have seen an interest for business travel mainly from small and medium businesses. So, smaller businesses have grown interest in business travel after the pandemic. So, if you look at the budgets, they have gone up from 50 per cent to 100 per cent. It is really shocking to see that they are really looking into travel. Not only that, they are also looking into areas where they are not looking at the price, as they are more focused on the safety of the employees. Even when looking for places to stay, they are looking at plain accommodations, paying a little more. They have increased the budget on safety measures.”



Abdel Rahman Abdel Shafi
General Manager
Fairmont Fujairah Beach Resort

“According to recent studies, a significant number of individuals intending to embark on vacations this year will be unable to do so, with financial limitations being the primary cause. As the cost of living continues to surge, people are compelled to allocate their funds towards essential needs, resulting in a reluctance to travel during peak seasons. This financial strain is also affecting corporate budgets, making it challenging for businesses to accommodate travel expenses. About 20 per cent of consumers are refraining from travelling for work purposes altogether, while those who do engage in business trips are opting for shorter durations.”



Ahmed Abdraboh
Cluster Director, Sales and Marketing - Fairmont Dubai,
Fairmont Ajman and Fairmont Fujairah Beach Resort

“In recent times, the business travel industry has witnessed a significant transformation, particularly with regards to the growing number of attendees at exhibitions hosted in Dubai. Events have experienced a notable surge in both business travellers and overall attendance, surpassing previous years’ figures. This increase not only signifies the growing appeal of these events, but also highlights Fairmont Dubai’s rising prominence as a premier destination for business travellers and industry professionals. In line with the changing landscape, business travellers now increasingly rely on online booking platforms.”

Sustainability adds to business travel



Sandeep Walia
Chief Operating Officer, Middle East
Marriott International

“Dubai remains one of the better performing markets for Marriott International. We know there continues to be a strong demand for travel across the globe and Dubai is an attractive destination for all kinds of travellers. The market's strong performance continues to solidify Dubai's position as a global hub for business and leisure, while also supporting the overall D33 Agenda outlined by the visionary leaders of Dubai. Tourism is an integral part of the city's economy, and Marriott International remains committed to working closely with the Department of Economy and Tourism and organisations across the country to drive continued growth and success in this destination.”



Alfio Bernardini
General Manager
Grand Plaza Movenpick Media City

“At Grand Plaza Movenpick Media City, we have witnessed a significant rise in business and leisure travel, where both aspects seamlessly intertwine. Guests are increasingly seeking opportunities to extend their stay to explore and enjoy the city, making the most of their time in the city. Dubai's allure as a global economic hub attracts travellers, strengthen regional presence, or explore entrepreneurial opportunities. Guests increasingly prefer to book hotels directly, valuing flexibility, personalization, and access to benefits from the ALL - Accor Live Limitless loyalty program. Dubai has made us and the destination a top choice for repeat business travellers.”



Tarek Medhat
Director, Sales & Marketing
Shangri-La Dubai

“In recent years, business travel has witnessed significant changes and emerging trends. With the adoption of remote work, a hybrid approach combining in-person meetings and virtual interactions is becoming popular. Sustainable travel practices and eco-conscious choices are gaining traction to minimize the environmental impact. As for business travel destinations, certain locations have gained prominence due to economic growth and opportunities. Cities like Shanghai, Singapore, Dubai, London, and New York remain top choices for business travellers, offering vibrant markets and international connectivity. Agent engagement is crucial for seamless travel experiences.”



Nuran Kilani
Director, Sales & Marketing
The Tower Plaza Hotel

“Nowadays business travel shows no sign of slowing down as the world opens to a new era of travel. Even in this world of instant communication and social media, business travel is as necessary and advantageous as ever where Global Business Travel Association recently announced a surge in business travel demand. Business Travellers are hitting the road for meetings and conferences, and sales presentations. Therefore, business travellers are looking for service providers who can value add to their offerings with additional amenities, drinks, extra legroom, and other inclusions and services. Some of the key trends we witness is leisure travel, which has seen a significant increase.”



Rashida Ginwala
Director of Holidays
Bin Ham Travel Abu Dhabi

“Business travel trends indicate a heightened cost consciousness among corporates, with a keen awareness of expenses and a tendency to avoid unnecessary travel. To cut costs, businesses are increasingly opting for localized training sessions, reducing the need for extensive travel. Moreover, the popularity of online booking tools has surged, allowing companies to easily compare prices and secure the most cost-effective options. The travel industry is increasingly embracing technology as it moves towards greater efficiency. Notably, the Far East and Asia, including countries like Japan and Korea, have emerged as the most sought-after business travel destinations.”



Ayman Al Qudwa
General Manager
Falcon Travel Qatar

“Business travel bookings on global airlines this summer are close to 2019 levels, in a sign of recovery, according to the latest update and statistics. Business travel's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is lagging behind leisure travel. However, business flight forecasts from September 2023 to November 2023 are only about 10 per cent below 2019, the best percentage recorded. The speed-up of the broader recovery in the air travel sector, and the end of pandemic-related restrictions, have made it easier to plan business trips. In addition, both airlines and hotels are witnessing an increase in business travel from small and medium companies, compared to large companies.”

Compiled by: Shehara Rizvi



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'ChatGPT to drive future travel'

Matt Gibson, CEO, UpThink, highlights the impact of Conversational AI on tourism and the way people take travel decisions, at the PATA Annual Summit and Adventure Mart 2023.

TT Bureau

Generative AI is poised to revolutionize the travel industry. "Initially, technology-first companies will reap the greatest benefits, leveraging their in-house expertise to automate processes using AI. However, even smaller businesses and non-technical enterprises can greatly enhance productivity. We are witnessing the emergence of a new generation of travel planning tools, where conversational interfaces, voice commands, and interactive chats will transform the travel purchase experience," says **Matt Gibson**, CEO, UpThink.

With the automation of communication, travel companies can provide personalized and automated responses efficiently. "No longer will customers have to wait for a human agent to find information or solve their problems. AI-powered chatbots can seamlessly navigate product



Matt Gibson
CEO, UpThink

databases, present tailored flight options, direct users to relevant information, and elevate the overall customer experience," he adds.

Furthermore, ChatGPT plugins serve as invaluable tools, enabling one to harness AI's potential within their workflows. These plugins facilitate real-time retrieval of information from internal databases, significantly boosting productivity and empowering teams to create compelling content and copy effortlessly.

"Start-ups and established marketing companies are harnessing the power of ChatGPT-driven bots to analyse customer profiles and deliver tailored recommendations and communications. By leveraging this technology, travel businesses can curate itineraries based on individual preferences, allowing users to customize and refine their travel plans effortlessly," says Gibson.

When we envision the future of travel planning and purchasing, a fascinating amalgamation of technologies emerges. Combining ChatGPT's conversational prowess, the travel planning app's personalized recommendations, and the convenience of voice assistants like Siri, we can foresee a world where travellers have a virtual travel assistant on their smartphones. Simply by voicing their desires and preferences, they can receive an itinerary tailored to their needs, with the flexibility to modify and optimize it.

Qatar's cruising resilience

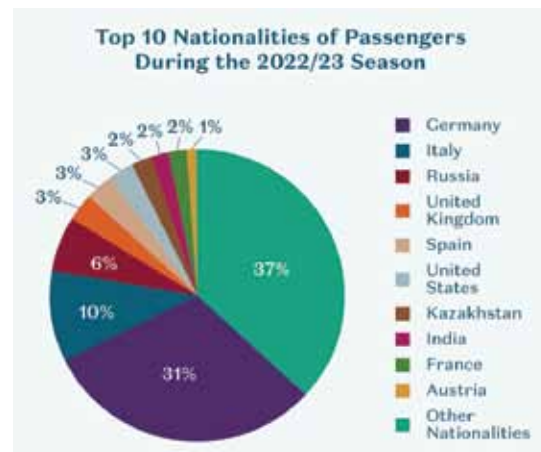
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season started later than usual (i.e. in December instead of October), as Doha Port welcomed floating hotels to accommodate visitors and fans coming to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™. Of the cruise ship visitors received this season, 20 per cent were part of the partial transformation flights from which Doha was the starting and returning point, an increase of 790 per cent compared to the 4,172 passengers who came on these cruises during the previous season. Qatar also received 54 cruise visits during the 2022-23 cruise season, whether transit or round trip, representing an increase of 59 per cent compared to last year.

Qatar's cruise sector has shown great resilience and remarkable growth. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Qatar has seen a steady increase in the total number of cruise ships received and the number of visitors on board, and the cruise sector promises further growth in the coming seasons.

Qatar's growing cruise sector has become an important pillar of the country's efforts to achieve the objectives of its long-term tourism strategy, as evidenced by the comprehensive refurbishment of Doha Port,

building the sector and supporting its recovery from the effects of the global pandemic, which included attracting operators of leading international cruise ships for the first time to Doha and introducing new cruise routes



which can now receive two superships at a time and up to 12,000 cruise visitors per day.

Commenting on the achievement, **Maryam Saud**, Head, Tourism Product Support, Qatar Tourism, said: "These figures are testament to the great efforts made by all stakeholders in re-

with Doha as the departure and return point. Doha Port's vital location in the heart of the city allows hundreds of thousands of visitors to quickly explore attractions such as Al Mina District, Museum of Islamic Art, Souq Waqif, National Museum of Qatar, Msheireb and Doha Corniche and more."

Crystal cruises to debut in GCC

Al Tayer Holidays, a division of Al Tayer Travel, will represent Crystal in the Middle East. They announced the partnership to a selected group of travel agents who cater to the niche market in the UAE at an event, where **Matthew Boutwell**, Senior Director, Charter & Incentives, Crystal, shared details on two new ships that will sail in the GCC by October.



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'All-inclusive' market approach

The Middle East market craves for entertainment, bespoke experiences, innovative and ultra luxury concepts when it comes to travel. Palladium's strength lies in all-inclusive premium luxury segment, which is a perfect blend for the clients from this region, says **Sandra Polo Canudas**, Asia & ME Commercial Director, Palladium Hotel Group.

TT Bureau

Could you share about the latest property that opened recently?

In Europe, TRS Ibiza Hotel, inaugurated last summer 2022, is the first premium, all-inclusive, adult-only hotel in Ibiza. In America, Palladium Hotel Group recently announced the opening of 45 Times Square Hotel, a boutique hotel located in the heart of New York City, managed by the company under an ephemeral brand and expectedly to soon convert into Only YOU Hotels.

How important is the Middle Eastern market?

Over the past decade, this region has observed an important incremental interest from the world's leading hospitality companies. Palladium Hotel Group is actively seeking for new growth opportunities in the Middle Eastern Market. We see a high demand and new hotel projects arising on



Sandra Polo Canudas
Asia & ME Commercial Director
Palladium Hotel Group

these markets in terms of luxury and lifestyle hospitality products, as well as in the all-inclusive premium and luxury segment, which is exactly what Palladium Hotel Group is specialized in and where we can make the difference. We

have also observed a strong appetite for the entertainment component, which is exactly where Palladium can bring its know-how and innovative concepts directly from Ibiza and the Caribbean. There is no doubt that the Middle Eastern market is and will be one of our preeminent target markets today and in the future.

What is the engagement planned with travel agents and corporate bookers?

Palladium Hotel Group collaborates closely with key travel representatives in the GCC and is keen to continue to grow. To do so, the group works with a representation agency - Akhom Consulting. Pal-



ladium Hotel Group has also been present in some relevant trade events, such as the ATM fair in Dubai, where the group will continue to be present at.

Are there any special facilities that cater to this market?

Palladium Hotel Group operates 40 hotels in seven countries: Spain, Mexico, Dominican

Republic, Jamaica, Italy, Brazil and the USA, and manages 10 brands, such as BLESS Collection Hotels, TRS Hotels, Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel, as well as the three properties managed by Palladium Hotel Group under the franchise brand Hard Rock Hotels, and which are located in Marbella - Puerto Banús, Ibiza and Tenerife. We consider these

are all very appealing propositions to the Middle Eastern Market.

What are the expectations from ME market this year?

We started the company in 2019. Right after, we all faced a break, but we are now back to work to grow brand recognition in the Middle Eastern market. We believe our brands have a lot to offer. 📌

Over the past decade, this (Middle East) region has observed an important incremental interest from the world's leading hospitality companies

Shangri-La Dubai celebrates 20 years

Shangri-La Dubai, the iconic luxury hotel on Sheikh Zayed Road in Dubai celebrated its 20 years of world-class hospitality. Since opening its doors in 2003, Shangri-La Dubai has been a home away from home for travellers from around the world, offering unparalleled comfort, style, and unforgettable memories.



Pep up your business through gifting

Gifting has become the essence of Middle East travellers and corporates and personalizing them is a trait used to ensure that there is a recognition for their brand presence and creates brand awareness among their clientele. RR Solution has established themselves as one of the most unique and out of the box corporate gifting companies catering to the niche clientele in Asia and the Middle East.

TT Bureau

RR Solution have been instrumental in creating bespoke corporate gifts, which can be tailor-made according to the necessities of each client. Corporate gifting in the Middle East has been a tradition for many years. Today, it has evolved to the extent of Next Gen committed to offering their clien-



Mukul Vashisht
Director
RR Solution

At RR Solution, personalising gifts have been a steady way for promoting the brands and positioning them as per their valuable client requests

tele something better and unique that could place them at a much higher position.

Personalisation

Gifting has become the essence of Middle East travellers and corporates and personalizing them is a trait used to ensure that there is a recognition for their brand presence and creates more brand awareness among their clientele. At RR Solutions, personalising gifts have been a steady way in terms of promoting the brands and positioning them as per their valuable client requests. Customising or bespoke gifting has become one of the key drivers to attract new clients in the Middle East.

Value addition

There are multiple ways in terms of adding an extra value to each corporate gift, ensuring that their client will not only remember



their branding, but also speak in great volumes if the gifts were custom made or bespoke. Retaining their clients on long time basis is a trait followed right throughout their journey of producing the best sellers in the corporate gifting market.

Accessibility

In today's world of technological brilliance, one can easily access and obtain their unique corporate gifts at a one stop destination, the RR Solutions website, where there is a different corporate gift for every client in keeping with their bespoke requirements. Their proactive nature in always



finding the niche in their products is one sure way of attracting

more customers from the Middle East market.

Trendy and tasteful designs

RR Solutions has a plethora of corporate gifts for every occasion, each design has its own voice which speaks in plenty with their sophisticated, chic designs coupled with an elegant and fashionable choice of unique gifts. From elegant vintage clocks to more modern corporate gifts such as tailor-made pen drives or apparels and travel accessories that would stand out against all other regular types of gifts found in the general market.

Quality over quantity

The experienced team at RR Solutions provides unique and one-of-a-kind products, where quality is never compromised even though there is a higher number of

items purchased by each company. Their commitment to offer a variety of corporate gifts for

each individual client requirement is key and it has become their strength of success over the years.

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AUGUST 2023

(Advertorial)

11

Berner Oberland unveils effortless travel

Rail Europe announces the addition of Berner Oberland Regional Pass to its comprehensive range of products. This new offering is now available on Rail Europe's B2B website and API. Beyond convenience, the pass offers a host of value-added benefits. Travel agents will be able to delight their customers with exclusive discounts and additional perks from 50 bonus partners.

TT Bureau

Rail Europe's commitment to extending its product offerings remains unwavering, as it introduces the Berner Oberland Regional Pass. This pass showcases the unique and captivating Berner Oberland region, renowned for its stunning landscapes, charming towns, and unparalleled alpine experiences. With the pass, travellers will gain the freedom and flexibility to explore this enchanting region at their own pace.

"As Rail Europe continues to expand its product range, we are delighted to offer the opportunity to introduce our B2B



partners' customers to the Berner Oberland Regional Pass,

one of the most visited areas in Europe. This pass provides an unlimited access to the captivating Berner Oberland region, allowing travellers to make the most of its breathtaking landscapes and iconic activities. We are fully committed to supporting our partners in delivering exceptional experiences to their customers and are very excited

to further collaborate with them to promote this unique pass and region," says Björn Bender, CEO & President, Rail Europe.

One of the standout features of the Berner Oberland Regional Pass is its seamless integration with other train travel services across Europe. Travellers can easily combine



this pass with their European itinerary, making it an ideal choice for those seeking to discover multiple destinations in one trip. As Switzerland remains a top destination for

travellers from all over the world, the Berner Oberland Regional Pass is also an ideal addition to the Swiss Travel System tickets and passes offered by Rail Europe.

Berner Oberland Regional Pass, Rail Europe's new product, provides travellers an unlimited access to the captivating Berner Oberland region

Key features of the travel pass

- ❖ Unlimited travel in the Bernese Oberland region, including for Swiss residents
- ❖ More than 25 attractive mountain excursions and cable cars included
- ❖ 50 per cent discount on numerous other mountain railways in the region
- ❖ Valid for 3, 4, 6, 8, or 10 days between 1 April and 31 October 2023

Adding to bleisure experience

Jumeirah Emirates Towers has been a landmark in Dubai for over two decades. Now, with the opening of the Museum of the Future adjacent to the property has brought in a whole new level of experience for the guests. Kirti Anchan, General manager, Jumeirah Emirates Towers, shares with **TRAVELER** what changes they have made to offer better experiences for the guests.

Shehara Rizly

Could you share the strategies that were utilised to attract different markets to your property?

At Jumeirah Emirates Towers, we understand that every market has unique needs and preferences. Therefore, we tailor our strategies to ensure that we provide exceptional service that meets and exceeds our guests' expectations for both business and leisure travellers. To achieve this, we provide appealing F&B experiences, maintain business facilities that are conducive to corporate guests, and ensure our rooms offer a relaxing stay. We also understand the significance of maintaining our visibility in both local and international markets. We leverage social media, email marketing, and other digital platforms to reach our target audience. Additionally, we also maintain effective inbound marketing



Kirti Anchan
General Manager
Jumeirah Emirates Towers

platforms, such as our website, to provide complete and updated information about our hotel, including our services, amenities, and events. Lastly, we recognise that effective product positioning is crucial in the market.

How has business or corporate travel served over the last few years? Do you see an uptake of it now?

Certainly, we are optimistic about the future of corporate travel,

and we have already seen positive signs of improvement this year. We have seen an increase in business travel as the world recovers from the epidemic, and we are sure this trend will continue. We eagerly anticipate hosting additional corporate travellers at our esteemed property, particularly with the eminent international event COP28 on the horizon.

As a hotel with mix spaces, how do you work with travel agents and corporate bookers?

We highly value our relationship with travel agents and corporate bookers, recognising their vital role in bringing business to our property. Consistent communication and transparency are essential to us, and our dedicated sales team regularly connects with our partners. This ensures we understand their needs and provide timely updates on our services and offers. Furthermore,



we provide regular feedback on their clients' experiences at our hotel, constantly striving to improve our services and exceed their expectations.

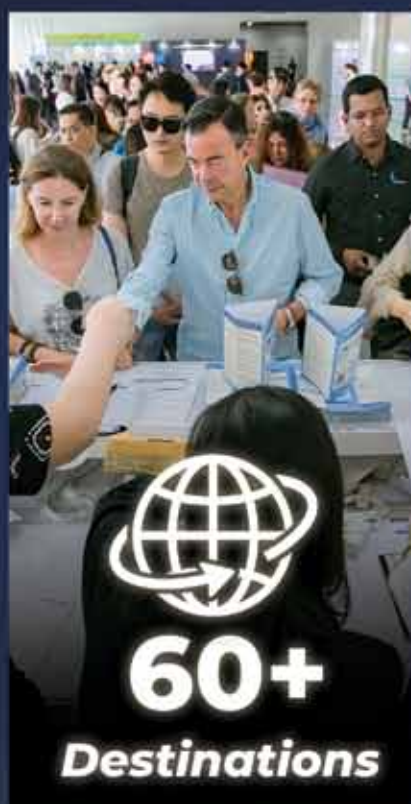
Our location's central proximity to DIFC is an added advantage

that we offer to our corporate clients. We understand that time is of the essence for business travellers, and our location gives them quick access to meetings and events within the DIFC area. We also extend the availability of leisure facilities in our sister prop-

erties to travel agents for their clients to enjoy. As a city hotel, we understand the importance of providing a complete experience to our guests. Lastly, we express our appreciation annually to our partners by arranging exclusive annual events. **TRAVELER**

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Experience premium shopping in Paris

McArthurGlen's new luxury and premium shopping destination, Designer Outlet Paris-Giverny, showcases its commitment to sustainability. The family-friendly centre caters to the different requirements of today's travellers seeking personalised luxury. **Matthias Sinner**, Head of Tourism, McArthurGlen, shares more about the centre in an interview with **VR-24**.

TT Bureau

Could you tell us more about the new MAG centre in Paris?

Designer Outlet Paris-Giverny is McArthurGlen's new luxury and premium shopping destination, located just to the west of Paris. The centre offers its guests the opportunity to experience the very best of French savoir vivre with a perfect combination of fashion, art and gastronomy from nearby Normandy.

Spanning over 20,000 square metres, the centre boasts of a thoughtfully curated mix of international fashion favourite brands, including Missoni, Stella McCartney, Moncler, Philipp Plein, Vivienne Westwood, BOSS, Furla, Karl Lagerfeld, Tommy Hilfiger, Maje, Angelo Vintage, New Balance, Adidas, Claudie Pierlot, L'Oréal and Roberto Cavalli at a minimum of 30 per cent off.

It also plays host to an exceptional line up of food & beverage options that include the globally recognised luxury Parisian establishments Ladurée and Angelina, famous for their delicate macarons and iconic hot chocolate, respectively. For guests looking to treat themselves further, French gelato brand Amorino and an elegant champagne bar offer the perfect places to pause and relax while shopping, and the popular American burger chain Five Guys caters to customers craving a quick bite between visiting their favourite stores.

How is this different to other centres?

Not only does Designer Outlet Paris-Giverny have the McArthurGlen DNA, delighting visitors and providing them with an extraordinary day-out experience, it is also home to an exclusive Maison des Métiers d'Art, GVRNY, launched in June.



Matthias Sinner
Head of Tourism
McArthurGlen Group

Conceived by the world-renowned designer Mathieu Lehanneur, the Maison des Métiers d'Art is an immersive space dedicated to showcasing the exceptional craftsmanship of the Normandy region. GVRNY combines the characteristics of a concept store and exhibition space, featuring a one-of-a-kind space managed by cultural concept-store experts, ARTEUM, where guests can peruse the many high-quality, exclusive products on offer. From ceramics to jewellery, glass and floral art, goods made

of leather, wood or linen, and even card making and soap, the Maison des Métiers d'Art seeks to celebrate the rich and diverse know-how of the region. In addition to the store, visitors can also spend time on the bright mezzanine and take part in scheduled practical workshops, events and demonstrations. Presenting a unique opportunity to interact directly with the expert artisans guests can discover exactly what goes into their purchases and how they are made. Developed in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (The CCI) and the Chamber of Crafts and Artisanry of the Eure (The CMA), GVRNY enables the centre to support its local area by stimulating the economic development of Normandy and highlighting regional excellence.

What is the USP of the centre?

Located just 45 minutes from the Arc de Triomphe, Designer Outlet Paris-Giverny provides

the ideal day out for discerning shoppers to explore the brands they love at irresistible outlet prices all year round. The centre is home to a desirable mix of high-end and premium brands, from Calvin Klein and Coach to Sandro and Zadig & Voltaire.

The luxurious proposition of Paris-Giverny is elevated by the centre's contemporary and elegant architectural style,

complemented by an expanse of green roofing and lush landscaping to create a real shopping oasis.

Is it family friendly?

Paris-Giverny boasts of a bespoke, covered outdoor children's play area, offering the centre's very youngest guests the perfect place to experience their own McArthurGlen adventure. With the centre's proximity to Monet's Giverny,

Spanning over 20,000 sq. mt., the centre boasts of a thoughtfully curated brand mix of global fashion favourites, including Missoni & Stella McCartney

providing visitors with beautiful surroundings in which to shop, eat and relax. Striking living walls by the French artist and botanist, Patrick Blanc, and expertly implemented by Biotecture, are

the playground's design takes inspiration from the Impressionist art movement to provide a visually stimulating and tactile environment for children of all ages to explore. ➤

Impressive start: making a striking debut

Located amid the lush green landscapes in Mirdif, Millennium Place Mirdif started operations amid a competitive landscape last year and attracting a good number of domestic and international guests, including GenZ travellers as well as families. **Bassam Bou Sleiman**, General Manager, Millennium Place Mirdif, shares the hotel's journey over the year with **VR-24**.

Shehara Rizly

You started operations almost a year ago, how has it been in terms of business?

It's almost a year now, the business has been progressing month on month and doing great. We have achieved a great result financially and a well-regarded customer satisfaction score. We have celebrated most of the local events and participated through themes that added value to our customers. I can confidently say that we have grabbed a good market share among our competitive landscape.

Which are the most important markets that you are targeting?

From Day one, we have been successful to identify our target markets and business segments. As a lifestyle-leisure hotel, we have positioned the property successfully and we target domestically,



Bassam Bou Sleiman
General Manager
Millennium Place Mirdif

regionally and international markets as well.

How important are travel agents/bookers for you?

We have a great partnership with all travel agents and bookers, as they are a main pillar for the hotel business. They contribute a major share of income to our hotel, and we take serious relationship management to maintain and pro-gress productivity.

Are there any new campaigns that you will be looking at to promote the hotel?

We do have upcoming campaigns that will be prompted in line with the DTCM vision, especially our long stay promotions, which we are currently targeting with the increased number of residents in Dubai and our goal is to attract more long stayer into our property, as we offer fully furnished apartments as well.

Summer is also a time for stay-cations, do you see an increase in this market?

Our hotel is situated in an urban location, but within the city and uniquely overlooking to the big-gest green landscape in Dubai, the Mushrif Park. The facilities we offer, such as an overlooking infinity pool to the park and a wellness and beauty centre where we capitalize our stayca-tion offering and value proposi-



tion in link with the wellness and leisure attraction of the hotel, enable us to offer guests take a break and enjoy a unique well-ness staycation at an affordable rate, whether during weekdays or weekends.

What are the plans and expectations for this year?

Well, our plans are all set for the rest of the year, and we expect to

We expect to continue our progression in developing the hotel business further, thanks to the demand, which has been promising since Q1 2023

continue our progression in devel-oping the hotel business further, thanks to the market demand,

which has been promising since Q1 2023 and is continuing with a positive outlook. ➤

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Chinese visitors: A potential goldmine

dusitD2 Kenz Hotel in Barsha Heights and Dusit Princess Residences in Dubai Marina have been witnessing huge visitor turnouts. The return of Chinese visitors provides an opportunity for the two properties to look forward to a more positive year ahead, says **Bassam Zakaria**, Cluster General Manager, dusitD2 Kenz Hotel & Dusit Princess Residences.

TT Bureau

What do you think about the business this year?

We are having a sunny outlook for the rest of the year for both dusitD2 Kenz Hotel and Dusit Princess Residences. With Dubai's well-planned calendar of events paired with the continuous increase in tourists and more businesses coming in, both properties are on a staggering growth track. It is also safe to say that both hotels are having strong post-pandemic rebound with performance on a steep trajectory as we course through 2023. We have also received numerous accolades from notable partners, who acknowledge the hard work and efforts of our team when it comes to delivering top-notch guest experiences. Both hotels ended 2022 with strong performances and one of our best years in business. With travel restrictions eased, and the



Bassam Zakaria
Cluster General Manager
dusitD2 Kenz Hotel & Dusit Princess Residences

government continuing to roll out game-changing and ambitious tourism plans, we were able to bounce back after the pandemic with above 80 per cent occupancy.

Are you tapping into new markets this year?

We are receiving grasping demand from the international and the GCC, including UAE markets, and the presence of Chinese market is infiltrating our stream of guests this year. With the influx of businesses follow-

ing relaxed COVID-related travel restrictions, the Chinese market presents a promising opportunity for growth in our commercial performance. On top of that, as the Emirate will be hosting COP28 this year, we have noticed a significant change in the type of travellers that Dubai is attracting. With global travel undergoing a paradigm shift, we are making every effort to remain competitive in delivering the best guest experience with an eco-conscious mindset.

It is also safe to say that both hotels are having strong post-pandemic rebound with performance on a steep trajectory as we course through 2023

How important are travel agents/bookers for you?

We are continuing to have a stellar and strong relationship with



them, as they contribute heavily to our occupancy and business around the year. The core benefits of having a travel agent

are access to exclusive fares, offering specialist expertise, and helping travellers plan and coordinate their trips.

What are the new initiatives for this year?

One of our major initiatives this year is ramping up our sustainable initiatives in line with UAE's announcement that 2023 is the "Year of Sustainability". Key priorities include mindful energy

consumption, reducing waste, and sustainable food production by supporting UAE's growing local production. We also live in an era of tech-empowered travel, as technologies proved to be crucial in the post-pandemic world. We recognise that existing and emerging technologies will continue to influence travel in many ways and are important for building trust among travellers. 🌱

Celebrations infused with 'Hawaiian' flair

Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, managed by Hospitality Management Holding, celebrated their Annual Staff Party 2023. **Iftikhar Hamdani**, Area General Manager for the two hotels, said that the occasion was 'particularly important' as it celebrated the outstanding contributions of the staff during the past year.



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MOVEMENTS

THE TRAVEL CORPORATION (TTC) India & Middle East

The Travel Corporation (TTC) announces **SANJAY TEMKAR** as its new Country Manager for India and Middle East, effective 1 July 2023. He succeeds Darshan Maheshwari, who has been the Country Manager since 2012. Prior to this, Temkar served as the Director of Sales and has been with TTC for 10 years. He has a demonstrated history in leadership, industry knowledge and has helped achieve a strong track record of growth in the region. "On behalf of the team at The Travel Corporation, we would like to thank Darshan for his service and long-standing commitment to the company," said Nicholas Lim, Chief Executive Officer (Asia), TTC. "With the leadership change, we are thrilled to have Sanjay as the new Country Manager," Lim added.



MINOR HOTELS EMEA

Minor Hotels has announced the appointment of **IAN DI TULLIO** as the company's new Chief Commercial Officer, effective from June 2023. He joins the Bangkok-based group from his recent position as Chief Commercial Officer Europe at Accor, where he led the commercial management and marketing efforts for Europe and North Africa across a portfolio of nearly 3,000 hotels. On top of his proven record in driving commercial success, Di Tullio brings to Minor Hotels a deep expertise in loyalty, analytics, customer engagement and digital, having overseen groundbreaking innovations in customer loyalty, digital marketing and distribution during previous roles at Accor, Qatar Airways and Air Canada. He has extensive global management experience with multinationals.



ATLANTIS THE PALM Dubai

Atlantis announced the appointment of **KYM BARTER** as the new General Manager and Senior Vice President, Operations at Atlantis The Palm, Dubai. With over three decades of experience in luxury hospitality and food and beverage, Barter's appointment follows an impressive two-year tenure as Vice President, Food & Beverage across the Atlantis destination. Joining Atlantis at the height of the global pandemic and just ahead of the launch of Atlantis The Royal, Barter cultivated a high-performing team of culinary professionals, culminating in a record year for the resort's F&B operation. Under his leadership, the destination also secured three Michelin stars and a spot for Ossiano on The World's 50 Best Restaurants list 2023.



CHOICE HOTELS EMEA

Choice Hotels EMEA has appointed **MARIELLE VROEMEN** as its Director of Franchise Performance and Revenue Management. Based in Amsterdam, Marielle will lead Choice Hotels EMEA's Franchisee Performance Department, which combines the company's revenue and operational expertise to enhance and help drive revenue performance for franchisees. The department works to support franchisees on revenue management, brand training and performance optimisation. Marielle has over 15 years of experience in hotel revenue strategy and optimisation. She joins Choice Hotels EMEA from Marriott International, where she held various senior positions most recently serving as the company's Market Director of Revenue Strategy, based in Doha.



EMIRATES Iran and Central Asia

The Emirates Group, to support its future expansion plans, ensures a steady pipeline of future commercial managers by continuously recruiting UAE National fresh graduates to join the programme. In its steadfast commitment to its Emirati talent and investment in their career development, the Emirates Group also recently began a collaboration with the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (AGDA) to equip its UAE national managers stationed around the world with vital diplomatic skills under its Commercial Ambassador Leadership Program. **MOHAMED ALHAMMADI**, currently Area Manager Bangladesh, will become Manager Iran & Central Asia.



EMIRATES Singapore & Brunei

Emirates has announced commercial management rotations across its outstations in West Asia, Central Asia, Indian Ocean, and East Asia. The organisational moves are aligned with the airline's strategy to place UAE talent in commercial roles and strengthen the airline's presence in key markets across its network. Effective 1 August 2023, **RASHED ALFAJEER**, currently Country Manager Iran & Central Asia, will take on the role of Country Manager Singapore & Brunei. One of many career paths offered by the Emirates Group to UAE nationals, the Emirates commercial outstation program supports the airline's objective to develop the skills and careers of UAE Nationals in its talent pool.



News in pictures



Wego and Azerbaijan Tourism Board join hands to promote summer travel



Cozmo Travel signs an MOU with Mbank to offer customers Next-Gen personalized travel experiences via Mbank wallet



IHG debuts voco brand in Lebanon with signing of voco Beirut Central District



Wyndham continues to expand in Saudi Arabia with new hotel in Al Khobar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



Almosafer and Klook launch Almosafer activities platform in a joint venture



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