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Sharjah's light fest returns

One of the most visited touristic attractions in the emirate of Sharjah, the Sharjah Light Festival returns with the Light Village running from 2nd to 19th February and the light festival shows to be organised from 8th to 19th February.



His Excellency Khalid Jassim Al Midfa
Chairman - Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority

Shehara Rizly

H.E. Khalid Jassim Al Midfa - Chairman - Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority, shared, "The Sharjah Light Festival is a mesmerizing display that transforms the skies of the emirate, showcasing the brilliance of our culture, art, and authentic heritage. Now in its 12th edition, this event is a testament to the tireless efforts of all those involved in making Sharjah a pre-

mier destination for tourists from around the world. Each year, the festival brings a new theme to life, bringing buildings across the emirate to life with spellbinding light shows that leave visitors captivated. Partnerships with public and private sector entities, as well as SMEs, play a vital role in making the festival an annual success. This year, will see the addition of a Light Museum featuring light themed activities for all the family to enjoy. We invite visitors and tourists to join us."

Dammam port greets first cruise

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recently welcomed the first cruise ship to Dammam's King Abdulaziz Port, MSC World Europa.



MSC World Europa

TT Bureau

The Saudi Red Sea Authority, The Saudi Ports Authority (Mawani), and

Cruise Saudi recently welcomed the first cruise ship to Dammam's King Abdulaziz Port, MSC World Europa. Saudi Red Sea
Contd. on page 13 ▶

Making travel accessible to all

Joint international efforts are required to make travel facilities accessible to the People of Determination. **TRAVTALK** speaks with various industry leaders to know their views over the issue.

“The inclusive service training programme at DCT is aligned with the National Policy for Empowering People of Determination, launched by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. A key aim of our mission is to inspire and nurture the tourist-facing-workforce by educating them on the importance of how to provide inclusive service, and to empower and enhance the quality of life of People of Determination. We are also an inclusive college and welcome students of determination who are interested in being part of the tourism and hospitality industry.”



Essa bin Hadher
General Manager, Dubai College of Tourism (DCT)



Aisling McDermott
Manager, Middle East & Asia, Tourism Ireland

“Universal accessibility in tourism is about human rights and the access of all people to tourism infrastructure, products and services. The tourism sector must meet the requirements of travelers with needs and consider it an ethical responsibility and a legal obligation. The number of end users of accessible tourism is constantly increasing from developed and emerging economies. By 2050, it will be one of every six people at the age of 65 years or more, while suffering almost half of people over the age of 60 years of different disabilities.”

More on page 4 ▶

Dubai gets new tourist site

In its attempts to woo more visitors, UAE recently unveiled its latest attraction, The Viewing Point, in Dubai Creek Harbour, which provides the visitors a spectacular sight of the city.

TT Bureau

The eye-catching, 70-metre structure spans out over Dubai Creek, with a 26-metre cantilever projecting out over the water giving unobstructed views across the creek towards Downtown Dubai and back inland between the Address Grand twin towers. The new focal point is one of the key elements of the Dubai Creek Harbour masterplan, and has been designed to seamlessly blend in with its surroundings. Its positioning at the end of one of the area's most populated pedestrian walkways will ensure significant footfall to one of the city's most creative structures and one that will allow time for stunning photography and videos clips –



it is perfect for anyone looking for that idyllic Instagram post, whether you are an in-demand influencer or someone who simply loves snapping on a phone. Standing 11.65 metres above the water level, the walkway offers a magnificent vista of the Dubai

Creek and surrounding areas, and unique views of Downtown Dubai's incredible skyline.

Its innovative design has already proved a talking point with residents and visitors alike, and is

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Gearing up to welcome Chinese visitors

China is an important source market to the UAE. Already the travel between UAE and China has been on the rise, especially business travel. With Etihad and Emirates announcing additional flights to both Beijing and Shanghai due to the high demand, it's a positive comeback after over two and a half years to welcome this important source market.

 Shehara Rizly

When it was announced that Chinese travellers will be able to start their outbound destinations, Riyadh Airports Company (RAC) started to work on Chinese standards to be implemented at King Khalid International Airport (KKIA) to make it friendly for the Chinese tourists. Chinese travellers view the "Welcome Chinese certification" as the global standard for hospitality services for international travel.

Chinese travellers view the 'Welcome Chinese certification' as the global standard for hospitality services for international travel



Raki Phillips
CEO – Ras Al Khaimah Tourism
Development Authority

An E-visa is already available for Chinese travellers to Saudi Arabia and KKIA is enhancing its welcome to all Chinese



Anson Lau
Managing Director
Shiji Distribution Solutions

travellers and carriers to Riyadh. From UAE, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority conducted a special workshop for their stakeholders on how best they can receive the Chinese travellers to the destination. **Raki Phillips** – CEO – Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority, shared, "With China lifting travel quarantines for inbound travellers, we will



Martin Drew
Senior Vice President, Global Sales & Cargo
Etihad Aviation Group

no doubt see a positive impact on Chinese tourists travelling abroad too. With the recent hotel openings and new attractions, Ras Al Khaimah is well positioned to actively attract Chinese travellers."

Orhan Abbas, Senior Vice President - Commercial Operations, Far East, Emirates, added, "We have been serving mainland



Orhan Abbas
Senior Vice President - Commercial Operations
Far East, Emirates

China since 2004. We are proud to contribute to China's travel and tourism sector, and help build trade and tourism links between the UAE and China. We are optimistic about China's international travel recovery and are proud to play a major role in facilitating air connectivity that drives both inbound and outbound traffic via our Dubai hub, while keeping our 'fly bet-

ter' promise of offering a world-class service and industry-leading products to our customers."

Martin Drew, Senior Vice President of Global Sales & Cargo, at Etihad Aviation Group, explained, "Etihad is committed to developing operations to China, and we look forward to welcoming more travellers onboard in the new year to experience our award-winning hospitality."

Anson Lau - Managing Director – Shiji Distribution Solutions, said, "Travels between China and the Middle East region looks promising in 2023 and beyond. UAE has always been uniquely positioned to attract travelers from China. Our leisure travellers want to see and experience the Arab history & culture."



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Accessible tourism takes centre stage

“The island of Ireland is a welcoming and friendly destination for people with special needs and reduced mobility. Wheelchair-accessible taxis and car rentals are available across the island of Ireland that have been specifically modified with specialist equipment including ramps, wheelchair anchorages and suitable seat-belts. There are many accommodation options that offer disabled-friendly facilities from hotels to guest houses and self-catering, including Centre Parcs in Longford and Cuisle, and a holiday centre built for disabled visitors.”



Abdulla Al Abdulla
Group Chief Operating Officer
Central Hotels and Resorts



GB Srihar
Regional Director, India, Middle East, South Asia -
and Africa, Singapore Tourism Board

“As one of the world's most modern metropolises, Singapore's urbanity makes it accessible to travellers from all walks of life, whether for people of determination or elderly individuals. With its host of easy-to-access attractions, wheelchair-friendly infrastructure, and world-class public transport, Singapore has always made inclusive tourism a key priority. One of the best community spaces to experience Singapore's approach to inclusive design is The Enabling Village, a food, beverage, and retail complex designed by award-winning Singapore design firm WOHA Architects.”

“Travelling without barriers or accessible travel is not only important to people with physical disabilities but to the elderly and aged as well. It is a common misconception that people with disability do not travel – they do, and most people plan to travel extensively once they are retired and free of responsibilities. Countries, travel companies and facilitators are increasingly realizing the importance of improving their services to accommodate this lucrative market. Cruise ships for example, have specially equipped cabins and silent call devices.”



Myron Pincomb
Board Chairman - International Board of Credentialing
and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES)



Yamina Soto
Director
German National Tourist Office (GNTÖ)

“Germany has made accessibility a firm priority over the past few years. We recognised the gaps in accessibility within our cultural and touristic experiences which led us to work with policymakers, accommodation providers and site managements to develop our offerings. This led to changes such as the introduction of building ramps to historical sites, ensuring braille and audio descriptive text was available, widening corridors, created disabled parking and toilets and more. Our revisions have opened up a vast range of activities to visitors with restricted mobility.”

“People of determination need a vacation too, they should not be confined to their home walks. They should be able to still enjoy their life as much as possible which means travel, discover and take a vacation. But how should they do it? They need to depend on a travel curator who is well versed with the needs of a special traveler. The key is to find a suitable destination which is sensitive to their needs and understands these travelers. Most airlines, hotels, attractions etc are now disable friendly.”



Manju Manchanda
Director
Venture Planet FZE



Nuran Kilani
Director, Sales and Marketing
The Tower Plaza Hotel

“Many hotels in Dubai are well equipped to accommodate guests with restricted mobility and special needs. The Tower Plaza Hotel Dubai Guests can expect spacious rooms, bathrooms with roll-in showers, as well as step-free access to lobbies, restaurants, and pool decks. Accessibility features at the hotel include a step-free entrance to the lobby, some of the restaurants, fitness centre, and poolside, as well as spacious elevators. The guest rooms are chic, with bathrooms featuring grab bars next to the toilet, roll-in showers, and shower benches attached to the wall.”

“Having worked with South Travels in the Philippines and Dubai, I can say that we always provide special care for our customers with special needs. We always ensure that, up to the last detail of the arrangement, ease of access is always the top priority. We always inform our team that a person of determination has confirmed bookings with us. That way, our team knows what to do when they contact our customer service to get more information. As for our commercial partners such as the hotel, the tourist guide and the establishments, client information is always necessary to relay. Most importantly, we always let the people of determination feels like a regular tourist.”



Alan Torres Orong
Travel Manager
South Travels DMC



Zayem Mohtisham
General Manager
Tour Planner

“We do get requests from families who travel with people of determination who struggle to find the right destination. This is where we come in to make their travel experience more memorable. Our company guides & makes them aware of how they can travel to most of the destinations worldwide comprehensive hassle-free thanks to our customised options. We start the experience right from the airport where a special staff member stands waiting for the guests with a sunflower badge/lanyard. Then once they arrive at the destination our ground arrangement suppliers book their transfers with special cars/ vans with compatible requirements that can take them to their hotels rooms in the most comfortable manner possible.”

“In accordance with the goals of our beloved country UAE, one of the friendliest countries, with accessible tourism as one of its pillars. By offering a variety of accessibility features, such as wheelchair-accessible rooms, routes throughout the hotel, elevators, ramps, public restrooms, parking spaces, and transportation, our hotel is collaborating with all stakeholders and entities to improve the various services and facilities needed by people with determination in order to give them the chance to enjoy all the country's attractions. Additionally, all of our team members have received excellent training in providing outstanding customer service to guests of determination.”



Nawaf Hasan
Director of Operations
Fairmont Dubai



Rochell Saleem
Manager Holidays and MICE -
Travco

“At Central Hotels and Resorts, we practice inclusivity regardless of the physical conditions they have. All employee members receive proper training from Central Hotels & Resorts Management – to assist accessible tourists, especially the people of determination. The employees of Central Hotels & Resorts are proficient in sign language. All the employees can communicate with visitors who have hearing impairments. Additionally, Central Hotels and Resorts ensures that its staff should make sure that people with disabilities can utilize our facilities and services in a complete and easy manner and offer accessible rooms that adhere to accessibility guidelines.”

“At the recent accessibilities expo called upon the Arab world to follow the UAE as a good model of accessible destination and prioritise overall development with inclusion of people with disabilities in the society in coordination with their respective ministries to realize the concept of Living Independently, employment of people with disabilities and offer them decent jobs. Governments should accept actionable recommendations to achieve employment, tourism without borders and inclusion. The Arab world's most diversified and dynamic economy took a quantum leap towards promoting accessible travel and tourism in the 22-nation region by hosting the global summit.”



HE Ahmed Aboul Gheit
Secretary General
League of Arab States



Daniela Bas
Director, Division for Inclusive Social Development,
United Nations Department of Economic
and Social Affairs, USA

“Disabled people have the right to economic and social security and decent levels of living. They face discrimination and barriers that restrict them from participating in society on an equal basis with others. Therefore, the UN member states have the obligation to adopt the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that had been ratified by 185 countries. The world should consider people with temporary disabilities, like old age, pregnancies and obesity, to enjoy tourism, sports and leisure trips. As they get flooded with tourists again, destinations are working to become safe, secure and easy to explore by the disabled.”

Inputs by Shehara Rizvi

Easing travel for determined tourists

As more destinations become aware of the importance of accessible tourism, and airlines, tourism boards and hotels make provisions for the same, **Basma Al Mayman**, Regional Director, ME, UNWTO; **Sandeep Walia** COO, Marriott International, ME, and **Iftikhar Hamdani**, Area General Manager – Northern Emirates - Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel, express their views on the issue.

What is the mandate by UNWTO to support travel and tourism industry to facilitate for travellers with determination?

UNWTO works to make tourism accessible to everybody. We advocate for both the public and private sectors to make accessibility a central part of any responsible tourism policy. UNWTO also works with tourism civil society stakeholders and destinations themselves to improve accessibility.

Does UNWTO encourage or plan out specialised training programme suited for industry staff?

UNWTO works with our Members to provide tailor-made training for the staff of NTAs and DMOs to improve accessibility strategies. Additionally, in September 2021, UNWTO organised a webinar on accessibility. At



Basma Al Mayman
Regional Director, ME
UNWTO

present, the focus is on civil society and government staff.

Are there any guidelines provided on travel, accommodation and other facilities?

UNWTO's has released a number of norms focused on accessibility within tourism. These include guides to placing accessibility at the centre of tourism's recovery and inclusive development in nature tourism destinations.

How does the Marriott hotel chain provide or facilitate for travellers with determination?

Marriott International is proud to welcome guests of determination and is committed to providing them with an outstanding experience, with full and equal access to all facilities and accommodation. Our hotel websites like this at Marriott Resort Palm Jumeirah provide information of what is available so that guests have the maximum information before they book.

Do you conduct special training programme for staff?

All our employees are trained to put our guests' needs first, including making adjustments and changes where necessary to make sure all guests can ensure every aspect of our hotels.



Sandeep Walia
Chief Operations Officer
Marriott International, Middle East

Reservation staff are trained to protect accessible rooms.

Accommodation and other facilities wise, how do you provide for these clients?

We recognise that every guest has different needs, from accessible parking or travel arrangements, mobility features in showers, access ramps for pools or the spa, or alternative modes of communication.

How does the hotel chain provide or facilitate for travellers with determination?

At Coral Beach Resort Sharjah we ensure that we facilitate travellers with determination. One of the initiatives we had launched in 2022 to ensure that individuals with hearing loss or hard of hearing can fully enjoy our facilities and service is the implementation of AMSAAN technology. Gulf People of Determination Information Technologies launched their platform AMSAAN that allows hard of hearing guests to select any of the available sign languages on the tablet and immediately connect with an online interpreter. We are on our way to adopt the same technology.

Do you conduct special training programme for staff?

Primarily, GPDIT trained our



Iftikhar Hamdani
Area General Manager – Northern Emirates - Coral
Beach Resort Sharjah | Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel

Front Desk team on how it works and what is good about the AMSAAN technology is that it is user-friendly.

Any special services for them?

People with determination can expect a range of special services both at Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Coral Beach Resort Sharjah. We continually enhancing our services in order to serve equally our guests with special needs. 🇦🇪



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Winter cruises on the rise in Qatar

Ayman Al Qudwa, General Manager, Falcon Travel, Qatar, shares with **TRAVTALK** the many aspects post the FIFA World Cup as to how the destination attracts visitors. The World Cup showcased Qatar as a bucket list destination with many different activities to experience. This winter, Qatar expects cruise tourism to go one step further.

Shehara Rizly

What is the current situation post World Cup in Qatar?

We can see a lot of international visitors still experiencing Qatar after the World Cup. If you look at the souk areas it has changed leaps and bounds, making it a place for both domestic and international visitors to spend their leisure time partaking on the cultural side of Qatar. Souq Waqif is a beacon of more than wonderful activity and movements, especially from the tourists of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Do you see the cruise season picking up in Qatar?

It is expected that the current cruise season will be the most successful and best of all, due to the completion of the infrastructure and the completion of

the development and modernization operations of Doha Port, which is Qatar's global gateway to marine tourism, as well as the development of marine tourism work mechanisms that ensure the achievement of ease and flexibility in receiving and leaving ships that take Doha as a departure and return station.

What are the new cruises and the expected visitor numbers?

As announced by Qatar Tourism and Mwan Qatar, The Winter Cruise Season for 2022-23 started December 25, 2022, with the first Cruise Ship Le Bougainville carrying 294 tourists. Since then the second cruise was on December 29, 2022, with 5,650 tourists, MSC World Europe and thirdly with Cruise Artania on January 8, 2023, with 1011 Tourists.

It is expected that the current marine tourism season will witness the arrival of a large



Ayman Al Qudwa
General Manager
Falcon Travel Qatar

number of international ships that will take Doha as a starting and return station, which contributes to stimulating local tourism and enhances the operational work of all local service facilities related to the tourism sector.

What are the main reasons for cruise tourism to pick up in Qatar?

Well, we are witnessing huge improvement after the new developments with Old Doha Port, compared to last year's (2021-22) only 34 cruises with 100,500 tourists. The opening of the passenger terminal at Doha Port contributes effectively to the influx of cruise tourists, as it is characterized by a large capacity and facilitates the smooth entry and exit procedures for tourists. A year of distinguished and comprehensive development, it has become an important tourist destination visited by many tourists at the local and international levels, as it has the latest restaurants and shops, in addition to picnics by the sea. This season

Qatar Tourism expected more than 50 cruises with almost 200,000 tourists.

What do you see in terms of new trends in cruise bookings?

We can see that the short-term cruise bookings average between one night to a maximum of five to seven nights. Another important factor is transparency and honesty between all the

How will you attract customers, especially from the ME?

By participating in more roadshows within GCC and the Middle East and most importantly, planning in advance for Arabian Travel Market.

Will you be able to attract the Gen Z travellers?

Yes, in Qatar we have huge trust in the vision of Qatar Tourism to

It is expected that the current cruise season in Qatar will be the most successful and best of all, due to the completion of the infrastructure

parties and countries to avoid the huge damage which impacts negatively our industry and the world economy.

attract all types of travellers and tourists from all regions, as per Qatar's 2030 vision to reach 6 million tourists every year.

Accessible tourism for everyone

The exponential growth of the tourism sector over recent decades offers numerous opportunities for socio-economic development. However, the sector has identified that many segments of society are yet to equally enjoy tourism attractions, facilities, and services at tourist destinations.

Hence, accessible tourism is emerging as an important sector that significantly contributes to the economy by providing unique business opportunities for countries to connect with a diverse range of tourists. According to the World Economic Forum, over 1.3 billion people live with some form of disability representing 17 per cent of the global population. It is crucial to make travel accessible for everyone and the responsibility lies collectively with the government, industry stakeholders and businesses.

By providing the right services and universally designed tourism solutions, businesses can attract new guests and harness the potential of accessible and responsible tourism.

Regional outlook

The countries in the Middle East are working towards creating an inclusive travel ecosystem to make travel hassle-free for everyone. This includes people of determination, people with invisible disabilities or with temporarily reduced mobility due to

pregnancy or minor injuries. The UAE has established itself as an inclusive travel destination. For instance, Dubai has introduced an accessible travel and tourism team to provide ease of access and support to people requiring it. Furthermore, they are working towards improving the existing facilities at airports, airlines, hotels, shopping centres and other tourist destinations to make them inclusive and accessible. Abu Dhabi hosted the Special Olympics, in which more than 7,000 athletes and support team members travelled to the emirate from around the world. Egypt offers us another regional example, having specifically designed the first beach in the region for visually impaired and blind people. The El-Mandara beach allows wheelchair ac-



cess to water through a path for swimming enthusiasts.

Opportunities in hospitality

The enactment of comprehensive laws in many regions clearly defines the rights of people of determination and promotes social integration. Despite this, the hospitality sector acknowledges there are existing gaps related to accessibility. Some tourists regularly experience distinctive barriers to access within hotels.

Accommodation providers have a significant role in creating equal opportunities. Embedding accessibility through the design of hotel facilities to include space for wheelchairs, ramps, and lifts, as well as appropriate heights of beds and mirrors can make them accessible for all.

Roadmap for ecosystem

The tourism industry can become an inclusive sector by defining comprehensive legisla-

tion that can protect the rights and needs of tourists with additional travel-support needs. The existing and future workforce providing tourism-related services must be prepared to engage with, and understand, the challenges faced by tourists with disabilities.



Dr. Ross Curran
Associate Professor - Heriot-Watt University Dubai
(The views expressed are solely of the author.)

By providing the right services, businesses can attract new guests and harness the potential of accessible and responsible tourism

New generation of travellers

As we step into another year, a new set of travellers are also stepping in for the first time to discover their own new destinations and experiences. The new age travellers think differently and select destinations that connects them to a story, a way far different than what has been done in the past. Here's what the experts say about the new age travellers...

“In my opinion, to attract the Gen Z market, we must work with content creators and influencers to build trust by the following steps: emphasize on eye-catching visual content, experiment with interactive content, tap into their FOMO with time-sensitive posts, leverage tags for engagement, display your brand's sense of humour, and respond to followers in a timely manner.”



Ahmed Najib
Director of Sales
Ishraq Hospitality

“Gen Z is looking to be inspired and wants an easy-going experience. The next generation of travellers is looking for more than just a hotel room or a flight ticket. They want an experience that will inspire and excite them, and is more digital. Musafir.com is a travel platform that believes in delivering a holistic experience to its travellers.”



Spencer Wadama
General Manager
SLS Hotel and Residences

“Gen Z is a unique segment and has to be managed in the same unique manner. Whilst there is no secret formula for attracting this community, there are a few important points we need to bear in mind. Gen Z do not splurge money on luxury. They look to explore Instagram postable, experiential, “out of the ordinary” destinations that are sustainable.”



Raif Agzibuyuk
Cluster General Manager
Itis Salmiya & Sharq Kuwait



George El Hawi
Sales Director
Grand Millennium Dubai Barsha Heights

“After the pandemic, many travel studies showed a significant rise in Gen Z travellers, who prefer budget-friendly stays and are willing to pay extra for better facilities. Dubai is one of the top three desired cities worldwide for Gen Z travellers, due to the level of security, attractions, restaurants and hotel options. Ishraq Hospitality operates eight hotels in Dubai.”



Raheesh Babu
COO
Musafir

“At SLS Dubai, we fully understand that we need to stay relevant to stay attractive for this generation. Gen Z like change and fresh new concepts – as a brand, at SLS we are always coming up with new ways to be able to surprise guests and bring them unique experiences. We will continue to take this approach and keep things fresh when it comes to our offerings.”



Saleem Sharif
Deputy Managing Director
ATS Travel

“The very first generation to have wholly grown up along with the Internet will be Gen Z; and they have also truly seen the complete evolution process of the system. One of the means for any successful business to create meaningful connection with them will be through dynamic and highly engaging visual content in short and precise format.”

Inputs by Shehara Rizly



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Getting ready for the travel season

A recent survey by Skyscanner reveals that bookings by UAE travellers for this year are up by more than 35 per cent compared to the corresponding week in January 2019, when comparing redirect volumes for all economy, return flights from UAE between 31 December 2018 and 6 January 2019 versus 2 January 2023 and 8 January 2023. Travel trade shares its plans with **TRAVELTALK**.

“We are seeing demand for holidays is extremely high going into 2023, and bookings in the first week in January exceeded the volume during the corresponding week in 2019, pre-pandemic, by over a third (35 per cent). This large wave of interest shows that travellers are eager to make plans, as well as continuing to make up for lost time. Skyscanner surveyed over 2000 UAE consumers and the responses show that people are making experiences a top priority in 2023.”



Ayoub El Mamoun
Travel Expert
Skyscanner



Yamina Sofo
Director - German National Tourist Office (GNTB),
Regional Office of GNTB

“It is imperative to focus on what the travellers seek from travel destinations, and Germany thrives on its narrative ‘Germany Simply Inspiring’, which was set in stone in 2017 and will continue to do so in the next year as well; this is aimed to further elevate Germany’s positive image as a travel destination and its wide-ranging tourism experiences to a global audience. In this recovery phase, the German National Tourist Board (GNTB) is re-launching ‘Germany Simply Inspiring’ as a new narrative.”

“At Vistara, we strive to keep our customers engaged and connected with the brand through various marketing initiatives. Club Vistara, our exclusive loyalty programme, recently launched Club Vistara Escapades, an ongoing campaign to provide all levels of CV members, specially curated vacations and immersive experiences via Instagram contests or raffle draws across Vistara’s social media platforms. We are exploring partnerships with like-minded brands.”



Deepak Rajawat
Chief Commercial Officer
Vistara



Saleem Sharif
Deputy Managing Director
ATS Travel

“We have not factored any new or unique marketing initiatives for 2023. We would rely on our time and tested channels of marketing which is a mix of social media push and personal Customer Relationship Management initiatives. We would be growing organically on these initiatives like engaging with social media influencers to promote each of our business segments and sponsoring travel bloggers to boost our luxury holiday segment.”

“In 2023, as the post-COVID recovery is faster, we are looking at attracting travellers with some of the key events that take place such as arts, culture, the sciences, education, fairs, trade events, touristic festival, sports events and car shows and activities. They are organized by the state-of-the-art centres and landmarks that can be found across the country. We are looking at making it more attractive for a variety of travellers including Gen Z.”



Raif Agzibuyuk
Cluster General Manager -
Ibis Salmiya & Sharq Kuwait



Anoop Dhondoo
Cluster General Manager - Novotel & Ibis World
Trade Center and Ibis One Central

“2022 has been an outstanding year for the cluster hotels: Novotel & Ibis World Trade Center and Ibis One Central with results across the board exceeding pre-COVID levels. In particular, key events at the Dubai World Trade Center, have contributed to this success. This is mainly due to the fact that, Dubai has made doing business accessible and safe during recent years and now the majority of the world has reopened, people are ready to travel for business.”

Inputs by TT Bureau

Singapore welcomes 42k UAE visitors

Middle East continues to be an important market for Singapore, as it is a popular family leisure destination, as well as a world renown MICE hub. At a recent event hosted by Singapore Airlines and Singapore Tourism Board it was revealed that travellers from the UAE had been on the rise as much as 35 per cent of the 2019 levels in 2022.

Shehara Fernando

GB Srithar – Regional Director, India, Middle East & South Asia – Singapore Tourism Board, said that international visitor numbers had exceeded their own forecast. Srithar shared, “I’m happy to say that Singapore Tourism Board remains engaged in this market. Singapore international visitor numbers reached 6.3 million in 2022, which is 33 per cent of 2019, exceeding our own forecast of last year, which was between 4 and 6 million. So at 6.3 million we have exceeded our own forecast. Tourism receipts estimated to have reached \$13.8 to \$14.3 billion, which is above 50 to 52 per cent of 2019



GB Srithar
Regional Director, India, Middle East, South Asia
and Africa - Singapore Tourism Board

TR. Looking at Middle East market, overall GCC, we welcomed

79,630 visitors, which is about 61 per cent of 2019’s IVA and UAE, specifically we welcomed 42,970 visitors, which is about 35 per cent of 2019 IVA, so those are the numbers and the peak months have been July and August last year, which registered very strong visitor arrivals and the average length of stay was about 3 to 5 days. In terms of importance of the market, UAE is our number one source market in the region.”

Singapore international visitor numbers reached 6.3 million in 2022, which is 33 per cent of 2019, exceeding our own forecast

He further reiterated, “We continue to welcome visitors from the Middle East, the good thing is that Singapore is very much open, it is quarantine free and you can come to the country and moving around in various places like in Dubai is the same as before. My key overarching message is that Singapore is not only welcoming leisure travellers, as Singapore continues to be a family holiday destination, the Middle East travellers when they come to Singapore learn that it’s easy to enjoy in terms of experiences and it’s a different kind of feel. With the diverse culture Singapore has, there is much to be enjoyed by the visitors and lots of places have been spruced up. It is not only the big attractions



Renjie Wong
Area Director
India, Middle East & South Asia

in the past but more are coming up very soon to provide those diverse experiences. What we have noticed during this post covid travellers look for authentic experiences from the destination.”

Renjie Wong, Area Director, India, Middle East & South

Asia, shared, “Singapore is constantly changing and opening up the Museum of Ice Cream in Singapore, the first outside of the United States of America, is now a tourist attraction, which opened in the middle of the pandemic. It is an exhibit-based attraction set in one of the most historical places in Singapore Dempsey Hill, its one of the examples which puts Singapore in the map.” **Aswin K**, General Manager, Singapore Airlines, reaffirmed, “As you know last year has been an exciting year for all of us. Srithar was mentioning about the in-visitor arrivals and I’m happy to share that Singapore Airlines had a major play in that as well.”

Hiring the right talent

One of the key elements to generate revenue is finding the right talent. After two challenging years the industry is on its way back setting the key elements for talent acquisition, says **Nausheen Hasib**- HR Manager, Park Regis Business Bay.



Shehara Rizly

Are there any changes in terms of hotel HR practices, especially after the pandemic?

Like many industries the hospitality industry was hit hard by the pandemic. It was time for talent transformation; reassessing, aligning and restructuring the

needs of the business and then matching those with the current workforce talent was not an easy call. With reduced resources, we had to identify our multitaskers and upskill them to manage the fluctuations in occupancy and meet the demand of the business. Back office had to adapt the new trends, such as flexible work environment and remote



Nausheen Hasib
HR Manager, Park Regis Business Bay

Due to the market uncertainty, there was not a single solution which could cater to everyone's stress. One-on-one and group coaching and counselling sessions were delivered to empower employees. Soft skills and technical trainings aided in developing habits as per the trending guest service demands.

With reduced resources, we had to identify multitaskers and upskill them to manage the fluctuations in occupancy and meet business demand

working. With the distance we had to ensure that all aspects of the business were always aligned, and the show went on. Reframing SOP and aligning them with the new normal was essential for front office, housekeeping and restaurant.

What are the most important aspects necessary to join hospitality?

Academic education in the field of hospitality is required but most essential is the right attitude, someone who is always prepared

How will you attract the younger generation to pursue hospitality as a career?

Offering internship opportunities, so that they can experience the friendly yet challenging work environment. Offering more flexibility, a positive work life balance.


When it comes to HR in hospitality what would be the key criteria to focus on?

Hiring the right talent, implementing training and development needs, and the list goes on, but most important of all

Most important of all (HR practices) is to connect and communicate with every employee, encouraging interaction outside the workplace

to handle emergency situations while remaining calm and responding quickly and efficiently.

Could you share the training and mentoring support shared by HR?

is to connect and communicate with every employee, encouraging interaction outside the workplace. Getting to know the real people we work with aligning their values with the hotel's values. 





HAPPY valentine's day

This love day, give your better half a sweet romantic evening at **Food Souk Restaurant, Park Regis Business Bay Hotel.**

AED 199
per couple

from 6:30 PM till 11:00 PM
4 Course Set Menu

Sparkling Non-Alcoholic Wine
Hot & Cold Beverages
Mini Heart-shaped Cake
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Dubai, the global hub for superyachts

Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism (DET) announced upgrades to marina facilities, new legislation, cruising permit extensions, the expansion of professional yachting and maritime academies for new industry talent, and more seamless processes for obtaining charter permits, further amplifying Dubai's appeal as a global superyacht hub.

TT Bureau

Dubai's position as a leading yacht tourism destination has been further reinforced by a range of factors with year-round sunshine and cool ocean breeze combining with unmatched aquatic sporting facilities and offerings, including self-drive boat tours, island hopping, jet ski tours, water skiing, paragliding and more, to create unforgettable experiences for yacht tourists.

The recent soft launch of P&O Marinas Sailing Academy adds an important facility to host the sport of sailing. Watersports companies throughout the emirate offer a package of experiences that can be provided directly to private yachts, giving thrill seekers the chance to

Watersports companies throughout the emirate offer a package of experiences that can be provided directly to private yachts

jet ski or waterski past some of Dubai's most iconic landmarks. Dubai-based travel companies are well-equipped to provide a range of water-based pursuits, including diving experiences, fishing trips, snorkeling, scuba diving, and kite surfing, offering guests the chance to explore the magical marine life below the ocean.



Yousuf Lootah
Acting CEO of Corporate Strategy and Performance sector, Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism

A vibrant events calendar

The city's offering extends beyond luxury marinas and water sports, with many yacht tourists having the opportunity to enjoy Dubai's action packed calendar of events, with exciting activities across sports, music, arts, culture, and food. With a natural interest in yachting activities, yacht tourists are likely to Dubai Boat Show which will be hosted



Hamza Mustafa
Chief Operating Officer of P&O Marinas

ment venues including Dubai Opera and Coca-Cola Arena.

Yachting destinations in city

Dubai Marina is one of the city's most popular neighborhoods and marinas, home to an array of restaurants, attractions, shops and more. Pier 7 is one of the marina's many distinctive dining destinations, with seven different eateries within the building, all of which offer sweeping views of the city. P&O Marinas is already looking after some of the most exclusive and advanced yachts at Mina Rashid Marina, which boasts 454 wet berths, 160 dry berths, and the capacity to accommodate 60 superyachts without any size restrictions.

Yousuf Lootah, Acting CEO of Corporate Strategy and Performance sector, Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism, commented: "Dubai continues to grow in stature as a leading marine tourism destination and a global superyacht capital



Abdulla Binhabtoor
Chief Portfolio Management Officer, Shamal Holding

through the combined efforts and support of our valued stakeholders. Inspired by our visionary leadership to position the UAE as the best destination in the

gateway that delivers a premier, vibrant and multifaceted yachting experience. Providing a full home port solution in one of the world's most spectacular cruising grounds, Dubai Harbour enables direct access to the open waters of the Arabian Gulf with Dubai Harbour Yacht Club as a reference point for the future of yachting and Dubai Harbour Marinas offering the region's largest marina, featuring close to 700 berths that can accommodate yachts up to 160m in length. We are positive that the superyacht industry holds an exciting future ahead,

nas has invested to enhance the UAE's yachting infrastructure. We recently announced a joint venture with Al Seer Marine and MB92 Group to develop a new service centre and refit shipyard in Dubai, and hosted Sail Grand Prix, for the first time in the region. We look forward to collaborating with key industry players as we increase our footprint and reinforce the city's position as a global hub for superyachts and sailing enthusiasts."

Mohamed Alshaali, Gulf Craft Chairman said; "Gulf Craft is proud to have been a key con-



world to live in, work and visit, we remain committed to investing in facilities and infrastructure, whilst ensuring that the process for docking in Dubai's marinas is smooth and seamless. We also strive to inspire people by creating new experiences and will continue to play a pivotal role in showcasing the city to the globe as an international superyacht hub and a magnet for marine leisure tourists."

with a wide range of opportunities available for not only Dubai but also for the nation. We look forward to continuing to play our role in Dubai's ambition to become the most visited city in the world."

Hamza Mustafa, Chief Operating Officer of P&O Marinas, a DP World company said: "Dubai

tributor to Dubai and the UAE's marine manufacturing industry and a supporter of the government's ongoing commitment to cementing the emirates reputation as an international yachting destination. 92% of all of our boats and yachts designed and built locally at our fully integrated, state-of-the-art manufacturing facility are exported

Dubai Marina is one of the city's most popular neighborhoods and marinas, home to an array of restaurants, attractions, shops and more

is fast emerging as an ideal global superyacht destination. The emirate has already developed its reputation as a luxury yachting hub with the creation of several high-end marinas, making a key contribution to the nation's economy. P&O Mari-

to proudly fly the UAE flag in ports and marinas around the world. As a UAE born and based manufacturer, our international clients can benefit from a wealth of support services and enjoy the peace of mind when visiting the UAE." 



Umrah bookings up from Indonesia, Pak

Hajj and Umrah tour operator Mawasim, part of Almosafer, Seera Group's travel platform, has recorded strong growth in Umrah bookings, with its new offices in Indonesia and Pakistan driving significant growth in pilgrim arrivals. The two countries are also the top international markets for Umrah bookings for Mawasim in 2022.

TT Bureau

Unveiling the new trends in Umrah travel at the 2023 Conference & Exhibition for Hajj and Umrah Services (Hajj Expo), the largest conference and exhibition for Hajj and Umrah services, Mawasim forecasts exceptional growth for the coming year, with pilgrim arrivals from many focus markets, including Egypt, Algeria, India, Turkey, Malaysia, Iraq and Jordan, in addition to Indonesia and Pakistan.

At Hajj Expo, organised by the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, Mawasim is showcasing its competencies and proven track record in delivering seamless Umrah services for pilgrims from around the world. The



Muzzammil Ahussain
Executive Vice President, Almosafer

company reported strong growth in the last two quarters of 2022, despite the late start of Umrah, welcoming nearly 31,000 pilgrims from 43 countries and working with more than 214 agents.

Pilgrims accounted for a total of 81,730 room nights across 114 hotels with the largest number of bookings coming from Pa-

kistan, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Singapore and Egypt.

With travel restrictions limiting Umrah arrivals from inbound markets during the pandemic, pilgrims have returned to make the most of their spiritual trips to Makkah and Madinah with

perform Umrah on any visa, in addition to general visa policies that have eased access to the Kingdom with residents of the GCC now being able to obtain a visa on arrival. Mawasim's successful integration of Maqam, the official global distribution platform of

At Hajj Expo, Mawasim is showcasing its competencies and proven track record in delivering seamless Umrah services for global pilgrims

group trips averaging 8 days and 40 passengers per booking.

The increase in Umrah travel follows recent reforms in Saudi Arabia permitting visitors to

the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, has led to an increase in online adoption from its customers, with Mawasim's online portal offering users a seamless experience.



Muzzammil Ahussain, EVP of Almosafer, said: "Hajj Expo 2023 is an excellent opportunity to connect with stakeholders in the industry and to work together to enhance the Hajj and

Umrah travel experience. We look forward to strengthening our role as a strategic partner in enhancing bookings, and our latest data reveals that demand for Umrah travel continues."



Tune Protect brings travel technology solutions to travel agencies in EMEA region.



Flight Watcher:
Flight Monitoring & Notifications Service



Automated Check-In & Mobile Pass Issuance Service



Automated Rebooking:
Alternative Flight Arrangement Service



Shurooq further expands its offerings

With the emirate of Sharjah introducing new attractions, destinations, leisure sites, and hotels as part of its development plans, Shurooq has been instrumental in the emirate's transformation. **Ahmed Obaid Al Qaseer**, CEO, Shurooq, shares about their contribution to the development of Sharjah and more in a conversation with **TRAVTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

Could you share an update of 2022 and how it was for Shurooq?

2022 was an incredible year for Shurooq and has set the pace for an even more successful year in 2023. We showed an impressive recovery as the world surfaced from the pandemic, and have been successful in welcoming a large number of visitors, thanks to Sharjah's reputation as a safe destination with an abundance of attractions, strong infrastructure, and logistics capabilities. Shurooq has proved that through our careful planning and sustainable investment strategies we

as well as in the development of infrastructure to support these industries. Additionally, Shurooq has played a key role in attracting investment and promoting development in the hospitality industry by identifying and developing new hotel, resort and accommodation projects. These efforts have not only helped to attract more visitors to the emirate, but also helped to promote a more sustainable future for Sharjah and its residents.

Sharjah saw a major increase in guests last year and this was evident early in the year with a 4 per cent increase in the second quarter of 2022 alone,



will further add to the attractive offerings of Sharjah and promote business in the emirate. These include the Kalba Beach project, which will enhance the emirate's eastern region into

and a ballroom, is scheduled for completion in 2024.

Another exciting development that opened in December 2022 was the Al Heera Beach project, which includes retail units, restaurants and cafes, a promenade, and sports facilities. The first stage is already proving to be an attractive destination for visitors and investors, and we are excited to complete the project by the end of the first quarter this year. Shurooq's participation in the World Travel Market in November was also highly successful and reinforced our mission to promote sustainable tourism and investment in Sharjah.

landscape of Khorfakkan, on the coast of Sharjah. It offers Cabins, Clubhouse & Restaurant, Gym & Spa, Reception, all connected by pedestrian routes, in a prime beach-facing hillside setting created by a hidden Heart Beach between two peaks.

Another project we are proud of is the Serai Wing, Bait Khalid Bin Ibrahim, it's the conver-

Badayer Retreat, located in the picturesque desert of Central Sharjah, surrounded by endless striking dunes. Another addition to Shurooq's 'Sharjah Collection' brand is the extension of the Mysk Kingfisher Retreat, which offers an opportunity to explore a unique world of conservation in one of the UAE's most diverse ecosystems, Kalba, and will be completed soon.

Many new areas are being promoted in Sharjah, which will be the main focus areas for the next five years?

Sharjah is home to a myriad of pristine locations that offer a prime destination for tourists and investors alike, Shurooq aims to increase the activity and prosperity of the entire emirate, our main focus is to provide tailored investments and developments to various regions of Sharjah, in accordance with the guid-



can continue to strengthen our emirate's position in a number of key industries.

Shurooq's work in the transformation of Sharjah has been instrumental in promoting vari-

compared to the same period in 2021. Many developments and investment opportunities were completed in 2022, including the Kalba Waterfront, Sharjah Sustainable City and the Adventure project in Khorfakkan,

becoming a leading hub of tourism and investment, and a large-scale development project in the eastern enclave of Khorfakkan, which will include a 5-star hotel, the first waterpark in the Eastern region, and more than 200 residential units. The hotel, which will be operated by Marriott International and will have 75 deluxe units, pools, restaurants,

What are the key luxury hotel projects to be completed this year? Could you share some details about them?

We have two major projects that are managed by Singapore's LUX Collective and will provide guests with world-class hospitality in a truly unique setting. The LUX* Al Jabal resort is located in the picturesque Mountain/ Sea

sion of a pearl merchant's 19th century family home, into a luxurious 12-key boutique hotel in the Heart of Sharjah district. This endeavour also aims to raise Sharjah's profile as a top destination for heritage-inspired travel in the region.

Other noteworthy projects that will be completed soon are the extensions on the Mysk Al

ance of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah. This covers a diverse range of projects.

Looking at the type of travelers, which source markets are you looking at this year?

In addition to our focus on hospitality, we are excited to promote our existing and upcoming ecotourism, sporting and adventure destinations, adding to our existing portfolio of luxury and leisure.

Which will be the key international exhibitions that you will participate in?

The Arabian Travel Market, WTM and ITB Berlin are some of the key events we will be participating in this year.

Shurooq has proved that through careful planning and sustainable investment strategies we can strengthen our emirate's position

ous forms of sustainable development, particularly in sectors such as ecotourism, hospitality, sports and adventure tourism. The organisation has made significant investments in conservation and preservation of the natural environment,

which brings together entertainment, sports, leisure, and adventure, all at one destination, appealing to a great number of interests from around the globe.

We also announced a number of new projects in the works that



Historic moment for KSA's cruise industry

► Contd. from page 1

Authority facilitated regulatory arrangements to ensure the arrival of MSC World Europa, as the regulator that enables the private sector to practice marine and maritime activities in collaboration with Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mawani, Saudi Tourism Authority and Saudi Cruise to resolve all challenges to attract investment and highlight the rich coastal tourism in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Red Sea Authority, which enables the private sector to practice marine and maritime activities in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mawani, Saudi Tourism Authority and Saudi Cruise to resolve challenges, attract investment and highlight the rich coastal tourism in Saudi Arabia, facilitated regulatory arrangements to ensure the arrival of MSC World Europa.

Throughout the current season of Cruise Saudi, the ship will

make weekly calls at King Abdulaziz Port on its seven-day cruise round trip. The itinerary also includes the ports of Doha – where it homeported during November and December last year hosting football fans – Dubai and Abu Dhabi. These visits are in line with Cruise Saudi's efforts of developing world-class port's infrastructure to welcome global cruise ships and passengers to explore the country's diverse offering – by working in conjunction with Saudi Arabia's Port Authority, Mawani. The occasion was celebrated with the tradi-

tional Plaque & Key Exchange Ceremony on board MSC World Europa, attended by representatives of Cruise Saudi, Mawani, and the key authorities whose efforts and cooperation drove this milestone, including Saudi Red Sea Authority, and Zakat, Tax & Customs Authority, as well as the ship officials, including Captain of the vessel Marco Massa.

Lars Clasen, CEO, Cruise Saudi, commented: "As we welcome the first cruise ship and first group of passengers to King Abdulaziz Port, we open a new and impor-



tant gateway connecting Saudi Arabia to the rest of the world – via the Arabian Gulf. Cruise Saudi was established to develop and create the cruise industry in the country and welcome tourists to explore the unique and rich Saudi history, heritage, culture and offering. And this moment marks another step toward our goal of establishing Saudi Arabia as a premier regional and global cruising destination."

Cruise Saudi offers passengers a range of shore excursions in the Eastern Province. **Mohammed Asiri**, Acting CEO, Saudi Red

Sea Authority, comments: "It is our absolute pleasure to participate and cooperate with our partners in the marine tourism sector to make history in Saudi Arabia, while working on devel-

cruise ship hotels for football fans from which best practices can be derived, and measuring the experience of tourists to apply this to the Red Sea during the upcoming seasons, where the



Throughout the current season of Cruise Saudi, the ship will make weekly calls at King Abdulaziz Port on its seven-day cruise round trip

oping regulatory arrangements for the navigational and coastal activities of the Red Sea, the opportunity came to have MSC

organisational and procedural challenges were analyzed early and started to be addressed with our colleagues." 📌

Cruising back on track

It is apparent that cruising will emerge with a brand new outlook. **Marta Cambiaggi**, Business Development Manager New Markets, Sales & Marketing, Mediterranean New Markets, UK, East Europe, Africa and ME, Costa Crociere S.p.A, shares views with **TRAVTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

How do you see cruise tourism picking up in this year?

Cruising is coming back a lot after COVID years, people want to travel and the possibility to do it departing from a port close to home is very convenient. Cruising is like travelling without having to pack and unpack your luggage, travelling on a 5-star hotel, all included, top food, super service, and different entertainment every night.

What new trends do you see in terms of booking patterns?

Cruising is not anymore for old couples only, it is something that young couples, families, singles and group of friends do consider as well. Booking curve has become very lastminute and short cruises are more and more popular.

Could you share the lessons learnt and what will be different post pandemic from the side of the cruises?

Ah we learnt a lot of lessons in these two years. First of all, hygiene, that was at a maxi-



Marta Cambiaggi
Business Development Manager New Markets,
Sales & Marketing, Mediterranean New Markets, UK,
East Europe, Africa and Middle East, Costa Crociere

mum standard onboard before as well, but now we have the cleanest environment that one can imagine. Then space: we have built larger ships that even when they are full, you have your own space. You can join one of our marvelous guided excursions on the Ramblas or decide to explore Barcelona on your own, away from the other guests. Choices are a lot, each one of our

guests decide how to live their cruise holiday.

How will you attract customers, especially from the ME?

We have Costa Toscana in Emirates this year, our flagship, the most beautiful and big among our fleet and the most sustainable one (LNG fuelled). She will be docked in Dubai Marina Harbour, right aside Palm Jumeirah and in front of the heart of Dubai. Can you imagine spending the New Year's Eve or any other night in such a position? The view is stunning even if you live there. You can cruise seven days or decide to take a mini break for three or four nights as well, visiting Doha and Muscat. Have you compared the rates of a 5 star Hotel in Dubai and the rates of Costa Toscana? Notwithstanding the fact that on Costa eve-



rything is included, breakfast, lunch, dinner, entertainment and top service onboard.

You sell through agents from ME, what sort of new marketing initiatives will you both be working on together to get the industry back on track?

Costa is not known in this area, therefore, the aim is to create brand awareness, organise

ship visits while the ship is here, reaching out media partners and work a lot with influencer marketing. The ship is a perfect location for bloggers and influencers.

Will you be able to attract the GenZ travellers?

Of course! We are planning to explain our ships in the most possible modern way. 📌

Cruising is not anymore for old couples only, it is something that young couples, families, singles and group of friends do consider as well

Sustainable LUXURY

Luxury cruising to further rise in 2023

Cruises used to be known as the more exclusive discerning mature traveller experiences, but over the past few years cruises have been changing their course of action to ensure that they tap different market segments, especially the GenZ market, setting their mark on boarding cruise ships. **Lakshmi Durai**, CEO, CruiseXplore, shares the latest trends in cruise tourism with **INDIA TALKS**.

Shehara Rizly

Cruise tourism used to be a niche segment, mainly one that was enjoyed by more mature travellers. However, this has changed by leaps and bounds over the past few years as the cruise tourism industry started to attract more younger generation travellers with their new excursions.

The pandemic did dampen the industry for a short period of time. However, the cruise industry planned a more sustainable approach by in-

troducing new trends for the industry, including adopting new technology that would continue with its connectivity onboard no matter wherever they cruise.

According to **Lakshmi Durai**, CEO, CruiseXplore, cruise tourism has made an amazing return with a new game plan for its travellers. "The comeback of cruising was much more than our expectation in 2022. Though the year started with some geo-political challenges in addition to the pandemic, the summer demand for cruising started



Lakshmi Durai
CEO, CruiseXplore

picking up well by around April 2022 and we had a great return to cruising last summer. It was a welcome return and we expect more of the pent-up demand to come in 2023," says Durai.

Luxury cruising experiences

She reiterates that among the key trends that she has witnessed and foresees is the increase in bookings of both luxury and ultra-luxury segments. "Luxury and ultra-luxury cruise segments are doing very well and we have excellent forward bookings for the year 2023 for both luxury and ultra-luxury cruises. Also the passionate cruisers opt for longer cruises of even more than one week, which is a new trend. Another trend we notice is that travellers want to experience new and unique destinations. So, the

Though 2022 started with COVID-19 and geo-political challenges, the summer demand for cruising started picking up well by around April 2022

cruise liners are coming up with new itineraries for the travellers to explore new and unique destinations," says Durai.

Social media promotion

When it comes to exploring new destinations, cruise operators had to think of modern and unique ways to not

only attract the niche market but also to attract the younger thrill seekers, millennials, who will post every single escape on social media. According to Durai, cruise liners have upped their technology to include specialised wifi packages that will encourage the younger generation. 📱

Middle East the centre stage of luxury

Luxury travel has been evolving over the years, especially in the Middle East region, where it is a way of life. The past two years brought out new trends in the luxury segment with the new generation of travellers also stepping into this niche segment. They are ready to pay a premium in order to receive better quality of service and experience hassle-free stays.

Shehara Rizly

In the Middle East, customers are willing to pay a premium in order to receive better quality of service that will provide them a hassle free experience. Today, there is an increase of luxury brands that enter the market in travel, tourism and hospitality sectors. Airlines promote their luxury cabins, hotels have their brand story revealed with ultimate luxury. In the arena of tourism, there are more luxury and ultra-luxury events which provide B2B clientele luxurious experiences. Travel curators in the Middle East serve their clients with the most hassle-free holiday experiences. The Red Sea has



Candice D'Cruz
Vice President & Continent Brand Leader, Luxury Brands, EMEA - Marriott International

joined the exclusive Serandipians network of luxury travel and hospitality organizations.

Candice D'Cruz - Vice President & Continent Brand Leader, Luxury Brands, EMEA - Marriott International, shares, "The Middle East is a globally renowned



Tamara Salha
General Manager
Crowne Plaza Dubai Marina

epicentre of luxury and post pandemic there has been increased demand for premium rooms and suites. We have seen a shift in values across luxury consumers, with a move towards spending more on travel and experiences, with this conscious or even unconscious focus on creating



Matthew Clark
Regional Director of Sales for Asia Pacific and the Middle East - Shiji

memories." **Tamara Salha** - General Manager - Crowne Plaza Dubai Marina, reiterates that luxury has really picked up over the past two years. "And the results are evident. Since October last year, our occupancy has been in its high 90s with majority of November being on full occupancy.

Our standard rooms for most of Q4 were sold out and we have not seen any hesitance from our guests for paying extra for higher category rooms," she said.

Luxury will continue to grow in its own way, adopting and trans-

Matthew Clark - Regional Director of Sales for Asia Pacific and the Middle East - Shiji, shares, "Luxury travel needs to continue to be able to adopt and embed the latest technology and privacy technologies whilst continuing to offer what feels

In the arena of tourism, there are more luxury and ultra-luxury events which provide B2B clientele luxurious experiences

forming as and when required, from private luxurious jet experiences to private villas on private islands, experiential travel and curated travel.

like a premium and personalised offering. Luxury travel must continue to be capable of adopting and implementing the most recent technologies. 📱

Kuwait's Waldorf Astoria ready for GCC

Connected to The Avenues, the country's largest retail, entertainment and lifestyle destination, the ultra-luxury Waldorf Astoria Kuwait is excited to welcome GCC travellers. When staying at the property, guests can treat themselves to an impressive array of shops, restaurants and entertainment options, Waldorf Astoria Kuwait is an unrivalled destination for prestige and luxury.

TT Bureau

Just 11km and a 15-minute drive from Kuwait International Airport, the property's prime location offers guests convenient access to beloved local attractions such as the Kuwait Opera House, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre, and the Grand Mosque.

Sleeping up to four guests, the Presidential Suite boasts panoramic views high above the city, two spacious king-size bedrooms, two bathrooms and a large living and dining area. Guests will feel at home with a fully equipped state-of-the-art kitchen featuring an espresso machine, microwave, oven, stovetop, and dish-

Sleeping up to four guests, the Presidential Suite boasts panoramic views, two king-size bedrooms, two bathrooms and a living and dining area

washer perfect for entertaining and hosting loved ones. Those travelling for business

can catch up with work at the in-room office area, or retreat to the Ikaros Club, where they



can enjoy breakfast, snacks and drinks with access to high-speed internet, the library, business centre and a private meeting room.

Alternatively, guests can relax and unwind in the spacious bathtub before settling in to enjoy a movie on one of the three HDTVs found throughout the suite. From the signature Wal-

dorf Astoria Spa, a Technogym-equipped fitness centre and the family-friendly Waldorf Astoria Kids' Club, to an eclectic array of first-class restaurants such as Mediterranean restaurant, AVA, and Roka, award-winning Japanese Robatayaki, Waldorf Astoria Kuwait offers an incredible, tailored exclusive experience to guests of all ages and interests.



Spain Tourism entertains Riyadh trade

Spain Tourism, along with Turkish Airlines and Valencia Tourism, organised two special events to promote the destination and their favourite sport football to the travel trade in Riyadh. This was in conjunction with Spanish Super Cup, which was held in Riyadh from 11 to 15 January this year.



Qatar flights to bring Kazakh tourists

With a target to attract over six million international visitors a year by 2030, Qatar Tourism (QT) has partnered with Kazunion, one of Kazakhstan's largest tour operators, to operate four commercial charter flights a week from two cities in Kazakhstan (Almaty and Astana) to Qatar via FlyArystan from January to March 2023.

TT Bureau

Kazakhstan is one of 15 target markets identified by Qatar Tourism as a primary source for tourists looking to relax, rejuvenate and soak



Kazunion, which include flights and beach side accommodation for travellers looking to explore Doha's rich arts, culture, and retail offerings.



Berthold Trenkel
Chief Operating Officer
Qatar Tourism

in Qatar's vibrant culture. The commercial charter flights from Kazakhstan to Qatar are part of a travel package deal formed by

Celebrating this important milestone, **Berthold Trenkel**, Chief Operating Officer, Qatar Tourism, said: "We are delighted to partner with Kazunion to launch Qatar's first commercial charter flights to and from Kazakhstan. Our agreement will help sustain the growth of Qatar's tourism sector by promoting the country as a family-friendly, cosmopolitan, and culturally rich destination for travellers from Kazakhstan."



Qatar Tourism's 2030 strategy aims to increase the number of visitors to Qatar by threefold, increase spending by three to four times, and grow the GDP contribution of the tourism

sector to 12 per cent by 2030. Kazunion is actively promoting these travel packages among its business-to-consumer and business-to-business targets using various advertising chan-

nels across digital, broadcast, cinemas, billboards, and professional events that gather the country's travel agents. Founded in 2009, Kazunion currently has six offices in Kazakhstan,

Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. In Kazakhstan, the tour operator has four offices located in Astana, Almaty, Aktau and Ak-tobe. Kazunion also has a wide network of partners.

Sustainability and luxury key travel trends

Travellers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia are planning to spend more on holidays in 2023, with most in both markets (93 per cent) planning to go away, and more than two-thirds in each market (66 per cent in Saudi Arabia and 69 per cent in the UAE) planning more breaks than in 2022, finds a research by Marriott Bonvoy.

TT Bureau

Luxury will also be a key theme, with around 25 per cent people planning to stay in luxury accommodation whilst being away, says the report by Marriott Bonvoy's 2023 Travel Trends. The research analysed the 2023 travel plans of 14,000 travellers across Europe and the Middle East.



Neal Jones
Chief Sales & Marketing Officer, Marriott
International - Europe, Middle East & Africa

The increase in trips and spending is, in part, due to the decline of the pandemic, and the fact that travel remains a priority for the Middle East consumers. Sustainability also plays an important role in 2023 travel plans, whilst 'having a break from it all' is key for holidaymakers.

Wellbeing Warriors Seeking Authentic Travel

Wellbeing-led holidays that al-

low people to get away from it all will be the predominant type of break those in the Middle East go on. More than six in 10 from the UAE (61 per cent) plan to, whilst the figure is even higher for Saudi Arabia (73 per cent). Authentic travel is also key, with many wanting to immerse themselves in a complete change of culture, with over half in both markets (55 per cent in the UAE and 56 per cent in Saudi

Arabia) wanting to explore new destinations and cultures. Forty-eight per cent of those from the UAE and 44 per cent from Saudi Arabia going on extended holidays highlighted that being able to work remotely allows them to take a longer holiday without having to take annual leave for the whole break.

Premium Experience

In 2023, the majority of travellers plan to spend more on their holidays compared to the previous year - 74 per cent in the UAE and 69 per cent in Saudi Arabia say that they will. Around a quarter in each market (26 per cent in the UAE and 25 per cent in Saudi Arabia) plan to splash out and stay in luxury accommodation, whilst all-inclusive resorts will also be popular (17 per cent in the UAE and 12 per cent in Saudi Arabia).

Accompanying booking data from Marriott Bonvoy reveals how resilient luxury demand in the Middle East is, with bookings from April this year for luxury properties up 13 per cent compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Spend on Holiday

With more than nine in 10 respondents planning to go away, the majority of travellers

per cent in UAE say they will be going on more holidays in 2023 compared to the previous year, whilst far fewer say they will be travelling less frequently, suggesting a continued upwards trajectory for the industry post pandemic.

The Sustainability Factor

Sustainability is now a key factor when it comes to travel plans, with 85 per cent in the

Neal Jones, Chief Sales & Marketing Officer, Marriott International - Europe, Middle East & Africa, says: "Travel trends for 2023 are more interesting than ever due to the unique situation we are in, as we look ahead to the way consumers plan to travel this year. What comes across very clearly is a resurgence in the sector based in large part on increased confidence among travellers, with most planning to spend more than last year and the demand for luxury with travellers in the UAE and Saudi Arabia remaining strong. This clearly shows great optimism, but also that people will be ring-fencing holiday spending.

"We are also seeing other, existing trends come into sharper focus. I'm delighted to see the priority that so many travellers are putting on sustainability."

In 2023, 74 per cent in the UAE and 69 per cent in Saudi Arabia travellers plan to spend more on their holidays compared to the previous year

are clearly trying to ring fence spending for holidays. Overall 66 per cent of those planning to go away in Saudi Arabia and 69

UAE and 80 per cent in Saudi Arabia saying environmental considerations now have some impact on their arrangements.

'ME footfall climbs 83% of 2019 levels'

According to new data UNWTO, more than 900 million tourists travelled internationally in 2022 – double the number recorded in 2021, though still 63 per cent of the pre-pandemic levels. Every global region recorded notable increase in international tourist numbers, even as the Middle East enjoyed the strongest relative increase.

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The Middle East enjoyed the strongest relative increase as passenger arrivals climbed to 83 per cent of the pre-pandemic numbers. Europe reached nearly 80 per cent of the pre-pandemic levels, as it welcomed 585 million arrivals in 2022. Africa and the Americas both recovered about 65 per cent of their pre-pandemic visitors, while Asia and the Pacific reached only 23 per cent, due to stronger pandemic-related restrictions which have started to be removed only in recent months. The first UNWTO World Tourism Barometer of 2023 also



Zurab Pololikashvili
Secretary-General
UNWTO

analyses performance by region and looks at top performers in 2022, including several destinations which have already recovered 2019 levels. After stronger than expected recovery in 2022, this year could see international

tourism arrivals return to pre-pandemic levels in the Middle East and Europe. Tourists are nonetheless expected to increasingly seek value for money and travel closer to home in response to the challenging economic climate. Based on UNWTO's forward-looking scenarios for 2023, global international tourist arrivals could reach 80 per cent to 95 per cent of pre-pandemic levels this year, depending on the extent of the economic slowdown, the ongoing recovery of travel in Asia and the Pacific and the evolution of the Russian offensive in Ukraine, among other factors. UNWTO anticipates a strong year for the sector even in the face of diverse challenges including the economic situation and continued geopolitical uncertainty.

UNWTO Secretary-General **Zurab Pololikashvili** said: "A new year brings more reason for optimism for global tourism. UNWTO anti-



pates a strong year for the sector even in the face of diverse challenges including the economic situation and continued geopolitical uncertainty. Economic factors may influence how people travel in 2023 and UNWTO expects demand for domestic and regional travel to remain strong and help drive the sector's wider recovery."

UNWTO foresees the recovery to continue throughout 2023 even as the sector faces up to eco-

nomie, health and geopolitical challenges. The recent lifting of COVID-19 related travel restrictions in China, the world's largest outbound market in 2019, is a significant step for the recovery of the tourism sector in Asia and the Pacific and worldwide. In the short term, the resumption of travel from China is likely to benefit Asian destinations in particular. However, this will be shaped by the availability and cost of air travel, visa regulations and CO-

VID-19 related restrictions in the destinations. By mid-January a total of 32 countries had imposed specific travel restrictions related to travel from China, mostly in Asia and Europe. At the same time, strong demand from the United States, backed by a strong US dollar, will continue to benefit destinations in the region and beyond. Europe will continue to enjoy strong travel flows from the US, partly due to a weaker euro versus the US dollar. ▶

After stronger recovery in 2022, this year could see international tourism arrivals return to pre-pandemic levels in the Middle East and Europe

GCC trade seeks luxury leisure holidays

FITUR 2023, the 43rd edition of the international tourism fair, was organised in IFEMA Madrid, Spain, from 18 to 22 January. The largest tourism networking event in the world brought together more than 120,000 professionals and 90,000 visitors from 131 countries. Travel trade from GCC present at the fair targeted luxury leisure holidays for UAE tourists.

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Spain's King Felipe and Queen Letizia inaugurated the 43rd edition of the International Tourism Fair, FITUR 2023, in IFEMA Madrid, Spain, on January 18. The Turespaña stand in Pavilion 9 of IFEMA had two auditoriums, four large format screens and an exhibition area, where a wide range of presentations, forums, debates, exhibitions



Daniel Rosado
Director Spain Tourism GCC

and other activities were showcased. **Daniel Rosado**, Director, Spain Tourism GCC,

shared, "Most of the Arab countries are present and exhibiting their tourist attractions at FITUR, but it is worth highlighting the wide variety of opportunities offered by both the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in the framework of their Vision 2030, has started to take historic steps such as the e-visa. For its part, the UAE is exhibiting at FITUR the boost it has given to the tourism sector over the last five years. IFEMA expects participation figures to be close to its all-time record, when it reached a total of 255,000 visitors in 2020, just before COVID-19. Specifically, growth of 32 per cent is estimated in

all its parameters, rising to 50 per cent for the international area. In relation to international participation, the strongest growth is recorded in Asia-Pacific (163 per cent), Africa (88 per cent) and the Middle East (60 per cent)."

Balaji Ramgopal, COO, Al Arif Sons Travel, said, "Greetings



Balaji Ramgopal
COO, Al Arif Sons Travel

I am thankful to the United Arab Emirates Spain Tourism team for the support extended in my trip to attend FITUR event 2023

from Madrid! I am thankful to the UAE Spain Tourism team for

the support extended in my trip to attend FITUR event 2023. Our

company Al Arif Sons Travel is one of the agencies specialized in curating luxury leisure holidays for UAE national families. Today is the first day of FITUR and I was very happy to witness such a mega event after the pandemic. The entry had very long queues. There were more than seven large pavilions of various destinations, flooded with exhibitors and buyers. South American destinations are in big focus due to Spanish speaking travellers. However, there are big exhibits of Asian and European countries as well. It was a great opportunity to meet some new and unique destinations' partners. There were many cultural and gastronomical events during the show." ▶

It is worth highlighting the wide variety of opportunities offered by both the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia (at FITUR)

SIA, Tourism Malaysia showcase offers

Singapore Airlines, along with Tourism Malaysia Dubai office, organised a special workshop recently to showcase their latest offerings to leading travel trade partners in the UAE. Fawad Khan, Commercial Director, GCC/ME region, Singapore Airlines, shared that the travel trade could now offer a lot more to customers in Asian destinations.



HSMAI Thirsty Thursday returns to UAE

Thirsty Thursday, the popular networking event that brings together leaders in the hospitality sales and marketing sector, was once again organised by the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI) at two venues in the UAE - Dubai and Abu Dhabi - at the beginning of the New Year.



Qatar Tourism expects 200k cruisers in '23

Qatar Tourism (QT) and Mwani Qatar announce the return of the 2022-23 cruise season and forecast more than 50 cruise liners with approximately 200,000 visitors from now to the end of April 2023. Over the season, cruise liner passengers will be welcomed at the Cruise Terminal, a newly designed infrastructure that pays homage to classic Arabian architecture.

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Docking in Doha Port, passengers will witness the newly renovated port that recently stood home to major international cruise liners offering 'floating accommodation' for thousands of international fans during the tournament, including the MSC World Europa, MSC Opera and MSC Poesia.

Located at the port is the Mina District, one of Qatar's latest tourism destinations whereby

international passengers, the port is ideally situated within walking distance to iconic landmarks, including the National Museum of Qatar, Souq Waqif, Msheireb Downtown Doha, and the Doha Corniche, where visitors can take in stunning views of the city's skyline.

Commenting on the new cruise season, **Maryam Saoud**, Head of Tourism Product Support at Qatar Tourism, said: "Qatar's cruise sector has a history of less than a decade, yet the sec-

ence for Qatar as a destination for both regular cruise calls and cruises with turnaround calls. Indeed, Doha Port's strategic location in the heart of the city is truly unique and offers our visitors an excellent opportunity to make the most out of their time in Doha. We are ready to welcome thousands of new travellers, who are guaranteed a distinct tourism experience in Qatar through the different tourism products on offer and in collaboration with our strategic partners."

For his part, **Hamad Ali Al Ansari**, Manager of Public Relations and Communications at Mwani Qatar, said: "Qatar continues to strengthen its position as a leading tourism destination in the region, in line with the goals of the Qatar National Vision 2030. At Mwani Qatar, we are proud to work with our stakeholders and cruise lines to ensure that these goals are



Qatar continues to strengthen its position as a leading tourism destination in the region, in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030 goals

achieved and work toward making Qatar the most sought-after cruise destination in the region." He added: "As part of the renovation work undertaken in Doha

Port's infrastructure, and after further expanding and dredging the navigational channel and port docks to reach deeper depth, we are now able to re-

ceive mega cruise vessels. Indeed, Doha Port is being developed to become one of the main tourist attractions in the region." Al Ansari continued: "We look forward to another successful tourism season that will contribute to strengthening the cruise industry and maintaining Qatar's position as a leading tourism hub in the region. In every cruise season, we always make sure that travellers are receiving the best services."

Qatar's cruise sector has a history of less than a decade, yet the sector has grown tremendously and now an important pillar of tourism strategy

residents and visitors alike can enjoy a diverse offering of restaurants and retail outlets or a refreshing stroll by the sea. For

tor has grown tremendously and now an important pillar of our tourism strategy. We are witnessing increasing prefer-

News in pictures



RAK welcomes 1.13 million visitors in 2022



UNWTO reveals Middle East as strongest recovered market



Mina Rashid welcomes MSC World Europa in the Middle East



Elaf Hotels ready to greet Hajj and Umrah travellers



Four Points Sheraton opens in Production City



Sabre and PIA renews pact to enhance travel technology

Digitalisation eases cruise operations

Technology plays a pivotal part in cruise operations ensuring that the time to conduct certain mandatory drills manually could be made by the touch of a button saving more time and providing a smooth experience onboard, shares **Mohamed Saeed**, Managing Director for Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises, Azamara & Silversea Cruises – Middle East, with **TRAVELTALK**.

Shehara Rizly

What is your forecast for cruising this year in the Middle East?

2022 has drawn a positive forecast and growing drive for 2023, with ease on restrictions and now all ships are back at sea. We expect 2023 to be a record year for us (Royal Caribbean Int'l) out of the Middle East market.

Do you see any new trends coming in terms of booking patterns in cruises (long term, short term etc)?

It's been an ongoing norm for Middle East guests to book "Last minute" (2-3 months

prior), a difficult adaptation for cruise industry as the global market book way in advance (8-12 months prior) and as such reduces availability in desired European summer sailings as an example, which is a hot product for GCC market.

How has digitalisation contributed towards cruises?

Lots of innovation came into play and learnings due to the pandemic (on a positive note), example the muster drill, which is the day 1 safety drill mandatory to attend, is now an e-muster drill, which is so interactive. Check-in times are now enforced and done on the app



Mohamed Saeed
Managing Director for Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises, Azamara & Silversea Cruises – Middle East

prior to boarding. So, the digital processes are in trend.

How will you attract customers, especially from the ME?

Royal Caribbean Arabia has been in the ME market since 1997 providing the necessary support and marketing to travel trade partners across the Middle East to sell cruise vacations apart from creating public relations and brand awareness to GCC consumer markets. With its strong presence and dedi-

cated efforts, Royal Caribbean Arabia has been retaining its position as the market leader in the Middle East cruise industry.

As you sell through agents from ME, what sort of new marketing initiatives will you both be working on together?

Trade partners play a pivotal role and we are thankful for their continuous support and commitment to spread the joy of cruising to ME consumers through planned trade marketing activations such as digital, social media, in-mall activations and sponsorships.

Will you be able to attract the Gen Z travellers?

For the travel industry, Gen Zs are important cohort. They exert a strong influence on their parents, and a generation that cares about experiences than possessions. Royal Caribbean International has done just that, delivering a family adventure holidays at sea.



In 2018, Royal Caribbean has enlisted its first Gen Z expert panel, called the 'Little Extraordinaires' to help shape the holidays of the future. New research from industry experts has revealed the powerful influencer children now have on the shape of family holidays, with nearly 70 per cent of parents now consulting their children booking a holiday. The research shows that almost every parent believes their children's holiday happiness is more of a priority than their partners (95 per cent of

parents). And while over 60 per cent of parents admitted relaxing on the beach was one of the main things they enjoyed about being on holiday, over half conceded that waterslides and action-packed activities were top of their children's wish-lists. Aged between seven and 11, the Little Extraordinaires act as consultants on future Royal Caribbean ships. The Little Extraordinaires will share feedback with Royal Caribbean International's president and CEO Michael Bayley.

The Viewing Point adds to Dubai's beauty

► Contd. from page 1

perfect for friends and families to gather and take in the beautiful surroundings, or bask in the sensational sunsets to be enjoyed from Dubai's newest vantage point. The design and build of the bridge have been executed using a painted steel to give its final effect and the unique overall appearance of this one-of-a-kind architectural piece. The Viewing Point at Dubai Creek Harbour is now open and can be enjoyed free of charge by both residents and visitors.

In Abu Dhabi, another mega development is on its way, known as Seaworld Abu Dhabi by Miral, which will open this year on Yas Island. Miral, Abu Dhabi's leading creator of immersive destinations and experiences, in partnership with SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, announced it has reached 90 per cent construction

completion of the next-generation marine-life theme park, SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, Yas Island's latest mega-development. The develop-



ment, which is due to open this year as the latest addition to Yas Island's tourism offering, includes the UAE's first dedicated marine research, rescue, rehabilitation and return center. To be located next to the marine-life theme park, the research and rescue center

will open this year. It will support regional and global conservation efforts, providing an advanced knowledge hub with a focus on

indigenous Arabian Gulf and marine life ecosystems.

Commenting on this milestone, **His Excellency Mohamed Khalfan Al Mubarak**, Chairman, Miral, said: "Abu Dhabi and the UAE has delivered longstanding ma-

rine conservation, and SeaWorld Abu Dhabi signifies the start of a new chapter in regional and global marine life knowledge, conservation, and sustainability. Our partnership with SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment to bring this next-generation marine-life theme park to the capital will help further position Abu Dhabi as a global tourism hub and contribute to its economic growth and diversification vision."

Scott Ross, Chairman, SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, said, "On behalf of the Board of Directors of SeaWorld, I would like to thank Miral for their partnership as we work together to bring SeaWorld to Yas Island. We are honoured for the unique opportunity to be a part of Abu Dhabi's innovative vision for economic diversification and growth as well as the Emirate's commitment to marine-life

conservation. SeaWorld brings a legacy of inspiring love and conservation for the ocean and marine animals. We look forward to celebrating the UAE's history and deep-rooted connection to the ocean through the many incredible and immersive experiences at SeaWorld Abu Dhabi." **Mo-**

and rehabilitation. This is an important and transformational addition to Yas Island's immersive experiences, which is yet another testament to achieving our vision for the island, positioning it as a top global destination." **Marc Swanson**, CEO, SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, said: "It

In Abu Dhabi, another mega development is on its way, known as Seaworld Abu Dhabi by Miral, which will open this year on Yas Island

ammed Abdalla Al Zaabi, Chief Executive Officer, Miral, added, "We are proud to mark this significant milestone in the development of SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, in partnership with SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, leveraging its legacy of marine animal rescue

is a privilege to partner with Abu Dhabi's leading creator of experiences Miral as we bring to life another extraordinary SeaWorld experience for guests with our first marine-life theme park in over 30 years and our first outside the USA."

HOLIDAY INN & SUITES DUBAI SCIENCE PARK Dubai

IHG Hotels & Resorts has appointed veteran hotelier **SAYED TAYOUN** as General Manager of Holiday Inn & Suites Dubai Science Park. With over 20-year experience in hospitality operations and commercial leadership in the region, Sayed has been leading teams across different IHG brands to excel in operational standards. A Graduate in Hospitality Management from Notre Dame University in Lebanon, he is an achiever in online career enhancement programs from Cornell University and Harvard Business School. His career in IHG began back in 2005 at InterContinental Doha. He was named Cluster Hotel Manager of the InterContinental Hotels at Dubai Festival City recently.



JUMEIRAH GROUP Dubai

Jumeirah Group has named **AARON KAUPP** as Regional Vice President Jumeirah Group and General Manager of Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab. Kaupp will oversee all aspects of the new lifestyle resort, which includes an avantgarde hotel, exclusive residences, a superyacht marina and a wealth of unique dining and lifestyle experiences. His appointment will build on a rich background in luxury hospitality and three-year experience within the Group as Regional Vice President Northern Europe and General Manager of The Carlton Tower Jumeirah. With an exceptional reputation in the industry, Kaupp has been recognised on numerous occasions for his incredible service.



ITES Dubai

DHIRAJ BAGAI joins the Al Khoory team to drive the next phase of the operator's growth. Seasoned Hotel Manager, Bagai will utilise nearly 20 years of hospitality experience to lead the recently launched Al Khoory Courtyard Hotel, where the focus will be on showcasing the quality accommodation, facilities and amenities twinned with exceptional value, and the Urban Al Khoory Hotel, where he will underscore the brand's innovative, vibrant and modern credentials. An Indian national, Bagai has vast experience in Dubai and across Asia. He has held numerous senior management positions, most recently as General Manager of La Verda Suites & Villa in Dubai Marina.



AL KHOORY HOTELS Dubai

Corporate hospitality stalwart **NAJI MOUKHACHEN** joins the Al Khoory team to drive the next phase of the operator's growth. Moukhachen, who takes up the position of Head of Sales for the Hospitality group, is a Graduate from Cornell University and an MBA from the Swiss Business School. He has more than 12 years of hospitality experience in senior sales positions, having established numerous successful strategies for a series of hospitality brands in the UAE and internationally. His career includes senior management positions within Rotana Hotels and Hilton, where he was recently Commercial Manager for Hilton DoubleTree Al Jadaf.



YAS PLAZA HOTELS Abu Dhabi

Hospitality veteran **FREDRIK REINISCH** has been appointed by Yas Plaza Hotels as its new Managing Director. Taking the helm at Yas Plaza's six international hotel brands, Fredrik is bringing with him over 20 years of experience with leisure properties in the UAE region. Prior to his appointment at Yas Plaza Hotels, he has served as Complex General Manager for Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection and General Manager of Habtoor Grand Resort Autograph Collection, along with his stint as Regional General Manager of JA Resorts & Hotels for the UAE and Seychelles. An ambitious and strategic business executive, Fredrik has proven abilities in strategic planning, revenue management, and project management.



ETIHAD AIRWAYS Abu Dhabi

Ethiad Airways has appointed **RAFFAEL QUINTAS** as Chief Financial Officer. Prior to joining Ethiad, Quintas served as Chief Financial Officer at Infracommerce, the largest e-commerce enabler and solution provider in Latin America. He also previously held the Chief Financial Officer role at Portuguese flag carrier TAP Air Portugal and the Corporate Treasurer position at Brazilian airline Azul Linhas Aéreas, where he took on roles of increasing financial responsibility during a nine-year tenure. Quintas holds a degree in Business Administration from Fundação Getulio Vargas and an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. Quintas will be succeeding Adam Boukadida, who has left Ethiad after nine years.



VALOR HOSPITALITY Dubai

Valor Hospitality Partners Middle East has appointed hospitality veteran **THIERRY PERROT** as the Cluster General Manager to oversee the four hotels that have transitioned to be managed by Valor Hospitality Partners while continuing to work under their existing brands. Perrot's most recent role as Cluster General Manager for the Wyndham Dubai, Deira, Days Hotel by Wyndham and Super 8 by Wyndham, saw responsibility for 515 keys for the three properties located in the Deira Enrichment Project, adjacent to Dubai's historic Gold Souk area. The successful transition will see his role as Cluster General Manager for the Wyndham Deira hotels evolve to include the Radisson Blu Dubai Deira Creek.



LAPITA, DUBAI PARKS AND RESORTS Dubai

FAIEK EL SAADANI has been appointed as the new General Manager by Lapita, Dubai Parks and Resorts, Autograph Collection. With more than 24 years of hospitality experience, El Saadani's career has taken him across the globe. He has worked in the UAE, India, Thailand, Azerbaijan, Germany, and Poland. Prior to joining Lapita, El Saadani held the role of General Manager at W Abu Dhabi - Yas Island, where he oversaw the overall rebranding and repositioning of the first W in the Capital of the Emirates. Continuous exposure to this thriving and ever evolving facet of hospitality solidified his roots in Food & Beverages and Operations. He joined Marriott in 2003.



Ethiad Airways has appointed **ARIK DE** as its Chief Revenue Officer, who will oversee a new organisational division focused on revenue. Since April 2022, De has served as Vice President of Revenue & Commerce at Etihad Airways, responsible for revenue management and e-commerce. Having started his career over 20 years ago in finance at the International Monetary Fund, De has spent the last 15 years working within the aviation industry. He has previously held leading positions at WestJet, Air Asia, Aeroméxico, and most recently, TAP Air Portugal, where he was the Chief Revenue & Network Officer. In the newly created role, De will oversee key revenue-related functions including Revenue Management, Distribution & E-commerce, Network Planning and Alliances & Joint Ventures.



PINAS TRAVEL Dubai

GEOFFREY SALATAN has joined Pinas Group as Managing Director and Co-owner of Pinas Travel. With more than two decades of proven history of growth and expertise in the travel industry, he will oversee the entire operations, sales, and business development of the company. Prior to his current role, he pioneered the Philippine Support Desk that generated a multi-million cash sales of one of the renowned travel agencies in the UAE. His remarkable dedication towards work, earned him several key positions on his previous company. Geoffrey has secured a long-term customer loyalty, built strong trade relations, and reputed in his community. Recently, he received an award as The Global Filipino Star Icon on top of previous recognitions.



ISHRAQ HOSPITALITY Dubai

Ishraq Hospitality, the asset management and hospitality division of Mohamed & Obaid AIMulla Group, has appointed **RICHARD HADDAD** as its new Chief Executive Officer. Prior to Ishraq Hospitality, Richard was the CEO at Jannah Hotels and Resorts, where he led in remarkable double-digit growth in profits within his first year, opened a new branded hotel and finalized the acquisition of new property openings among a plethora of other achievements. Over the course of his extensive career in the Middle East, Richard has also held managerial positions across renowned hotel groups in the Middle East, including the Director of Product Development in Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority.



HILTON GCC

Hilton has appointed **ALIGI GARDENGHI** as Vice President, Operations, Arabian Peninsula. Gardenghi, who has been with Hilton for more than 20 years, will lead luxury and full-service operations across more than 45 hotels in the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait. He has 15-year experience with Hilton in the Middle East working across business development, revenue management and marketing. Recently, Gardenghi has been an instrumental in driving performance for over 6,000 hotels as Vice President, Americas Marketing. He has a wealth of experience across marketing, commercial and revenue management and held a range of senior positions at Hilton.



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