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Venturing into newer markets 10

Reconnecting with trade partners 11

Shift in booking patterns 18

'Scouting for new partners in Germany' 21

ITB helps to grow business by 15-20% 22

Glorious Spain: offering the luxe life 24

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SCTDA displays tourism prowess

Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) will showcase its many offerings to German market and European region after a hiatus of three years due to the pandemic at ITB Berlin, beginning 7 March 2023.



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

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His Excellency Khalid Al Midfa, Chairman, SCTDA, said, "As the driving force behind Sharjah's thriving tourism industry, our vision is to position the emirate as a destination of choice on the global map. It is a step in this direction and we are committed to showcasing Sharjah's history, cultural heritage, and boundless opportunities to a global audience. We will provide an

authentic experience, combining tradition and modernity, where visitors can immerse themselves in the best of both worlds and create memories lasting for a lifetime. We will lead the charge and elevate Sharjah's tourism to the next level. We are committed to promoting Sharjah as a leading family-friendly destination. We stress on safety and security, along with the emirate's cultural heritage, world-class facilities, and range of activities. ▶

Dubai records 14 mn visitors in 2022

Tourist footfall reflects YoY growth of 97%, as per latest data of Department of Economy and Tourism (DET).

TT Bureau

The growth, which enabled the emirate to surpass global and regional tourism recovery levels, contributes to the goal of the Dubai Economic Agenda D33 launched by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to consolidate Dubai's status as one of the world's top three cities for travel and business.



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

and travel sector contribute to the leadership's aim of making Dubai a model for excellence in the global economy."

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



His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri
Director General
Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism

"Dubai's ability to accelerate tourism growth has marked it out as a frontrunner in the global industry, demonstrating the vision to transform the emirate into a global player. The rise in international visitation in 2022 supports the goal of the Dubai Economic Agenda D33 to double the size of the emirate's economy by 2033. The tourism

Continuing, His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum said, "The growth in the inflow of visitors reflects Dubai's rise as one of the world's most connected cities and its determination to lead the world in hospitality infra. The high growth shows the world we never rest on our laurels and work to raise our benchmarks. I am confident Dubai will be a catalyst of growth for global tourism and travel linkage."

By closing in on its pre-COVID visitation of 16.73 million in 2019, Dubai's 2022 tourism performance validated its ranking as the top global destination in the Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards 2023 for the second year in a row. Dubai is the second city in history to achieve the feat. The Middle East saw the relative increase,

Contd. on page 4 ▶

42k UAE tourists visit Singapore

At an event hosted by STB and Singapore Airlines recently, **GB Srithar**, Regional Director, India, Middle East, South Asia & Africa, Singapore Tourism Board shared that the footfall of international visitors from UAE in 2022 had their expectations.

Shehara Rizly

GB Srithar, Regional Director, India, Middle East, South Asia & Africa, Singapore Tourism Board shared, "I am 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 to 6 million. So at 6.3 million we have exceeded our expectations. On a rough estimate, Tourism receipts have reached US\$ 13.8 to 14.3 billion reflecting a rise of 50 to 90 per cent of 2019 TR. Looking at the Middle East market and GCC countries,



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

we welcomed 79,630, which is about 61 per cent of 2019's IVA and UAE specifically from where we welcomed 42,970 visitors—about 35 per cent of 2019 IVA—and July and August last year registered international traveler footfall and the average length of stay was about three



Renjie Wong
Area Director, India Middle East & South Asia

to five days. In terms of importance of the market, United Arab Emirates (UAE) is our number one source market in the region."

He 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 move around freely in various places like in Dubai. My overlapping 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 is very easy to enjoy in terms of experiences and it is 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 in the past, but more are coming up soon to provide those diverse

Contd. on page 18 ▶



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'Marhaba France, Spain 2023' in Oman

Two of the most visited countries by the GCC, France and Spain have collaborated to bring out a special event titled, 'Marhaba France, Spain 2023', which will take place from 6-9 March 2023. The on-site event will bring in 70 suppliers from the two countries to meet 100 buyers from nine countries in GCC and Middle East and expects to conduct as many as 2,000 meetings.

 Shehara Rizly

Karim Mekachera, Regional Director, Middle East, and Turkey, Atout France, "We will be organizing Marhaba in collaboration with Spain and will be named as "Marhaba France, Spain 2023". We have an array of 70 suppliers that will come over to meet with the travel trade from the region coming from nine different countries and of course this year we wanted to make something new and something different and as we



Karim Mekachera
Regional Director
Middle East, Turkey and Atout France

work in the tourism industry, we thought to organize this event in very popular in France—the Sultanate of Oman. Over three



Daniel Rosado
Director
Turespana, Spain Tourism in GCC countries

days we will have more than 2,000 meetings, along with a special entertainment program, a special press corner for journalists to meet with all the different stakeholders and promote both destinations.

France and Spain remain as the two first destinations in terms of tourist arrivals in the world, so with this collaboration we also

intend to introduce our travel trade to make the most of this event and partnership as they will be able to design new itineraries which can cover both countries France and Spain as they plan for their clients. The travel trade must think out of the box and give their Middle East clientele something new and exciting to look forward to.

Daniel Rosado, Director, Turespana, Spain Tourism in GCC countries reiterated, "Turespaña is aiming to continue as a leader in the tourism sector, and we do that throughout a strong presence in the Middle East market and through innovative tools and channels. This is the first time that an event of this type is organized. The two biggest tourist countries worldwide get



Kempinski Hotel Muscat

together to promote their countries in a very special location—the Sultanate of Oman. This event, from 6-9 March 2023 at the award-winning beachfront Kempinski Hotel Muscat will host buyers from across GCC and Levant countries. In this special venue, B2B interactions and networking events will help to strength the ties between offer and demand. The Spanish

delegation will comprise around 25 tourism related companies and destinations that will showcase all the variety that Spain has to offer to the region and will inspire travel to known and less known destinations within the country. The aim is to reinforce the main destinations and to showcase and open new options to the trade of all that Spain offers."

An array of 70 suppliers will come over to meet with the travel trade of the region coming from nine different countries to the Sultanate of Oman



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Cruise Saudi bestows offerings

Ragda Bakhorji, Corporate Communications Director, invites Global Cruise Lines to visit Saudi and explore its excursions as they present their attractions at ITB Berlin this year. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia offers much more than that. It features unique nature, heritage, culture, culinary experiences that can be explored through high-quality excursions, she adds.

Shehara Rizly

Could you give us an introduction on Cruise Saudi and its mandate in developing the Saudi Tourism?

Cruise Saudi is an entity driving the development of a fully integrated, world-class cruise industry in Saudi—an industry that did not exist prior to our launch in 2021. We are working with local and global partners, including government entities, to develop the infrastructure required to attract cruise lines, and curate destination experiences and high-quality shore excursions for passengers visiting Saudi, in line with our vision of becoming a world-class cruise port and cruise line operator.

What is the aim of Cruise Saudi's participation in ITB Berlin this year?

Cruise Saudi is responsible for scaling cruise services, from marketing to Shorex coordination and vessel operations to ensure we build an offshore and onshore cruise ecosystem in Saudi. In ITB Berlin, we are participating in conjunction with the Saudi Tourism Authority, positioning Saudi as a cruise destination to be included in global cruising itineraries, and a unique and unexplored destination in the Middle East full of unforgettable and authentic experiences.

After three years, ITB Berlin is back, so what are your expectations this year?

ITB Berlin is a leading travel trade show that brings together diverse



Ragda Bakhorji
Corporate Communications Director, Cruise Saudi
invites Global Cruise Lines

sectors evolving around travel and tourism, showcasing their latest innovations, technologies, products, and services, to build up a comprehensive tourism ecosystem. As a new player in the cruising arena, Cruise Saudi is keen on exploring all type of related offerings as well as networking and partnering with the other industry players to achieve

its objectives in developing Saudi Cruise industry, in line with Vision 2030.

Since the business will resume in 2023, how do you intend to bank on this?

Last year was a transition period for the industry. The same goes for Cruise Saudi as well. We are looking forward to an exciting year ahead.


After two successful cruising seasons 2021 and 2022 on Saudi's coastline on the Red Sea, we have started this year with the exciting and historical occasion of opening the first maritime gateway to visit Saudi from the Arabian Gulf, with the inauguration of our Cruise Berth and terminal in King Abdulaziz Port in Dammam. Now with gateways on both

coastlines, we aim to welcome more cruise lines to explore Saudi and increase the number of global and local tourists to live unique nature, heritage, culture, and culinary experiences.

Since you have been instrumental in promoting Saudi's cultural heritage, how will you implement this in the cruise tourism sector?

Cruise Saudi invites global cruise lines to visit Saudi and explore the excursions the country has to offer, that can be included in their itineraries, for cruise lovers who are constantly on the lookout for new destinations and exceptional experiences. Saudi is a unique and unmissable destination with six United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World

Heritage Sites, which have rarely or never been seen by tourists; three of these are now accessible from the sea and available to be included as part of cruise itineraries—Al Hasa Oasis, Hegra Archaeological site in AlUla, and Al Balad (Historic Jeddah).

If you have never visited the country; whenever you hear 'Saudi' you think of deserts and a hot climate. Well, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia offers much more than that. It features unique nature, heritage, culture, culinary experiences that can be explored through high-quality excursions. The diversity of the kingdom offers deserts, marine ecosystem, including snorkelling to explore the Red Sea's coral reef, and a vibrant and warm culture. 

Dubai the most revisited destination

► contd. from page 1

with arrivals climbing to 83 per cent of pre-COVID numbers. Dubai exceeded both global and



His Excellency Issam Kazim
CEO, Dubai Corporation for Tourism and
Commerce Marketing

regional barometers of recovery with visitors in 2022 reaching 86 per cent of pre-pandemic levels.

His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism, said, "Aligned with the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and

Ruler of Dubai, to make Dubai the world's most visited and re-visited destination, the performance of our industry in 2022 shows the progress made by the city over the past two years. Dubai's robust performance is testament to its growing role at the vanguard of global tourism recovery. The growth also shows tourism contributes to the city's economic growth and sustainable development, driving the goal of the Dubai Economic Agenda D33 to reinforce Dubai's status as one of world's top three cities."

His Excellency Almarri said, "The effectiveness of our strategies gives us the confidence to tap growth opportunities in the travel and business sectors over the next few decades. As the fastest growing city in the Middle East, Dubai's growth has been made possible by the unwavering support of our stakeholders, partners, strategic investments, and federal policy reforms lead-



ing to global entrepreneurs, talent, investors, and business and leisure travelers."


His Excellency Issam Kazim, CEO, Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing, said, "As Dubai continues to grow in line with the Dubai Economic Agenda D33, it is committed to moving to the next level with new and unique world-class infrastructure, experiences, and attractions. Dubai's

The rise in international visitation in 2022 supports the goal of the Dubai Economic Agenda D33 to double the size of the emirate's economy by 2033

growing profile as a safe, open, and accessible destination saw the city being chosen as the top global destination for the second year in a row in the Tripadvisor awards. Our partners played

a vital role and their participation in all our campaigns and marketing activities that have driven consideration for Dubai as the destination of choice for global travelers."

Hospitality achieves growth

Dubai's hotel sector continued to perform strongly across all hospitality metrics. Average occupancy in 2022 stood at 73 per cent, highest in the world, rising from 67 per cent in 2021. The figure is shy of the 75 per cent occupancy in 2019. The high room occupancy is noteworthy as it achieved a 16 per cent increase in 2022 as compared to 2019. 

McArthurGlen's Paris outlet to open in April

In a recent interview with **Sabina Piacenti**, International Markets Manager, McArthurGlen Group shared their latest outlet mall of the future is slated to open by April this year conforming to sustainability. Further to this announcement was the fact that they will be setting up a permanent representation in the **TRAVELTALK** to ensure stronger market presence and commitment to the market.

 Shehara Rizly

Sabina Piacenti, International Markets Manager, McArthurGlen Group, said "We are excited about the opening of our Paris-Giverny outlet, a new centre located only 45 minutes from downtown Paris on the way to Normandy, it is going to be a disruptive outlet in terms of architecture because it features a sustainable way of thinking of the outlet mall of the future, lot of greenery, huge windows and really cozy relaxing atmosphere."

The outlet is slated to open by end of April with 100 shops of premium luxury brands and soon we will be organising some FAM trips to the trade partners to showcase all our outlets and the new one in Paris as well."



Sabina Piacenti
International Markets Manager
McArthurGlen Group

McArthurGlen is a pioneer of designer outlet retailing in Europe. The company manages 25 designer outlets across 8 countries namely Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the UK. With 695,000 sq. mt. of retail space, McArthurGlen caters to 90 million fashion-loving customers delivering total portfolio revenues of 4.5 billion

euros a year. The company is planning its on-going expansion with two new designer outlets in Paris-Giverny (France) and Remscheid (near the German cities of Cologne and Düsseldorf).

She said, "The Middle Eastern market was a strong market in 2019, prior to COVID. After the pandemic, thanks to the connectivity that never failed Middle East into Europe, we managed to convert a lot of our guests to McArthurGlen and the first market to return strong. We started our activities and promotions through our representative in the market just one year ago, but the response of the market was strong. We understand that shopping outlets is one of the main reasons and motivation for travellers from the Middle East and that our proposition

matched their needs, especially our McArthurGlen outlets can offer a bespoke experience because our centers are particularly beautiful and caters to all the requirements of the Middle Eastern travelers. We have multilingual staff, a good number are Arabic speaking and when it comes to lounge services, it is only accessible on invitation basis, which is only available through our trade partners.

Piacenti said, "For us, the trade line is so important we want to promote our offers but also reward the trade partners that work with us. In the lounges the customers can have a conciergerie experience, our trained staff can cater to the needs and requirements of the Middle Eastern travellers in the lounges. There are some private areas that can be booked in ad-



vance especially for those families with children for the full day for shopping, it's a way to welcome our bespoke travellers. Among our other services each and every centre can organise special limousine services from the nearest town so our staff is at the disposal of our trade partners as they have already established a relationship

by agreement of a nett rate to get the best from these services."

"Thanks to the help of our partner, we are now working on a stronger relationship with the trade partners, tour operators, travel agencies, airlines, we are building our network of contacts/network of relationship," she said. 



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SAUDIA contributes to KSA's tourism drive

SAUDIA is setting the pace to welcome different types of travelers to the kingdom, apart from the general tourists, sports tourism is a key area pursued by the airline, says **Ibrahim Binaquil**, Advisor, Corporate Marketing & Communications, SAUDIA, while speaking to **TRAVTALK** about the airline's role in contributing to drive the sports sector.

 Shehara Rizly

How is SAUDIA contributing for developing sports tourism in KSA?

Sports Tourism is one of the biggest growing sectors. It brings fans from across the world for events rooted in multi-culturalism, unity and celebration. We have created key partnerships and sponsorships with globally popular and acclaimed sporting events to Saudi Arabia. This process aims to amplify KSA as a destination for sports tourism and a hub for games and matches. Our ambassadors reflect these values as well. We have officially announced Formula E champion Stoffel Vandoorne as our ambassador for Season 9 of the Championship; this partnership builds



Ibrahim Binaquil
Advisor, Corporate Marketing & Communications, SAUDIA

on shared values of progress, sustainability, innovation, and bringing the world together for exhilarating motorsports.

Is SAUDIA ready to welcome the influx of tourists to the kingdom?

Absolutely. Saudia Arabia is a relatively undiscovered destination in the industry, and that is what is so exciting. We have

some of the world's most beautiful landscapes, an incredible heritage, culture, and first-class service. We have seen post-pandemic travel trends that global travelers are looking for adventure, and the KSA has it all. We are excited to be at the forefront of this development, to be able to transport travelers from across the world to the KSA and back.

Since seamless travel is looked forward to by all travelers, how does SAUDIA move forward with this?

SAUDIA is committed to progress and innovation. We listen to what the consumer needs and we reflect these demands in our product, our routes, and our services. For example, our commitment to sustainability is



in line with what today's traveler is looking for. We are committed to decarbonisation, and ferrying guests to a sustainable destination and trailblazer for regenerative tourism.

Sustainability is a big drive across the GCC. How is the airline working towards it?

Sustainability is important to SAUDIA, and we are committed to aligning ourselves with

the KSA's efforts and goals. For example, last year SAUDIA operated the world's longest net positive flight. The airline offset a total of 346 tons of CO₂ emissions for commercial passenger flight, SV227, from Jeddah to Madrid thus making the flight net positive. The journey contained the world's first in-flight sustainability lab, where passengers gave ideas on how air travel can become

'greener'. In honour of the 2022 London ePrix, the airways offset the emissions from the whole weekend of scheduled flights from Riyadh and Jeddah to London Heathrow to amplify the airline's commitment to a greener future. We are always listening to what customers are looking for. It is important for our team to meet the customers' demands and needs throughout the journey. 

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Water parks drive tourism in GCC nations

Over the past few years water parks have become an essential element and tourism driver for the GCC countries. **Jeremy Gray**, Vice President, Business Development, WhiteWater shares with **INDUSTRIAL TALK** the actual shaping of this key revenue driver over the years. The water parks can also be a perfect vacation spot for parents and children, he adds.

TT Bureau

Water Parks as a tourism driver

Providing a space where the entire family can spend time together, water parks are a major tourism driver for countries around the globe. With a wide variety of attractions, these venues can offer something for everyone from grandparents to toddlers. For instance, a multi-level aquatic play structure's ground level interactives enable older family members to participate without having to climb stairs, whereas tricky teens can enjoy racing water slides or a thrill-seeking Aqua-Loop drop slide to challenge their bravery. Water parks can be the perfect vacation spot for parents and children as they offer a balance of relaxation and excitement giving parents the chance



Jeremy Gray
Vice President, Business Development
WhiteWater

to sit and relax with the family's belongings while the children explore and enjoy the rides.

The rising trend of hotels & resorts

Over the past few years there has been a surge of hotel water parks as the staycation trend grows and online bookings become the norm. To stand out from

the competition, hotels have turned to aquatic amenities to draw in guests looking for extra benefits. Hotel & Leisure Advisors partnered with WhiteWater to analyze data on the performance of various market segments of hotels against benchmarks. The research revealed hotels with aquatic equipment generated 119.9% more ADR than those without and created US\$100 more RevPAR. With these proven ongoing financial benefits, the hotels will continue to invest in water amenities beyond the swimming pools.

Future predictions

The KSA has the opportunity to create the advanced water parks in the world as it builds its developments from the ground up. This gives operators the



ability to add technology from the beginning to make the water parks easier and safer to run. For instance, WhiteWater's software arm, Vantage, can be integrated with the attractions to create personalization so that while the guest is riding the water slide their favorite song is played and

they ride through 'rings' of their favorite color.

Parents can use tech to their benefit and work to put parameters on which rides their kids can ride, ultimately limiting access to scarier rides not suitable for children. It will be interesting to see how the

opening of mega-projects like Qiddiya shape the water park industry. With 23 rides, the venue will be revolutionary in the aquatics industry. Qiddiya could set the precedent for water parks to have a mix of wet and dry attractions and leads to the revolution of surf parks within the GCC.



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Women scaling new heights in tourism

Over the years, the Middle East has seen women in leadership positions in travel, tourism, and hospitality. Today women are pursuing their careers in their industries, while contributing to the development of the industry as well as setting up their own goals of development. The industry stalwarts have their say.

“Women leaders play a role in shaping the direction of travel and tourism as they bring a perspective and their skillset to the industry. It has helped drive innovation, growth, and social and environmental responsibility. I am proud to say women’s scope in travel and tourism has seen an increase, reflecting the recognition of their contributions. We play a vital role in shaping the industry, driving innovation, advocating for diversity and inclusiveness, promoting sustainability, and improving customer experience.”



Namratha Rose
Manager, Marketing & Trade Relations
Spain Tourism, GCC

“Looking back to when I first moved to Amman, it was challenging to fulfil a role in travel and tourism. There is potential for women in the tourism sector in Jordan, but there are misperceptions that need to change. It is evolving in its acceptance of women leaders, but there is much work to be done to normalize them in senior positions. There are women-centric initiatives, including Movenpick Hotels & Resorts, Jordan as a signatory of UN Women Empowerment Principles for the private sector.”



Layali Nashashibi
Cluster Director, Community & Public Relations,
Movenpick Hotels & Resort, Jordan



Yamina Solo
Regional Director, Sales & Marketing,
German National Tourist Board

“Germany has been progressive with its stance on female empowerment and encouraging women leaders. Petra Hedorfer, CEO, German National Tourist Board, has led remarkable developments for the sector and spearheaded campaigns focusing on driving tourism, but making travel in Germany sustainable. With gender equality being one of the 17 SDGs, it is prudent that the travel sector ensures it is attentive to ensure the industry is balanced and fair, while opening doors for talented, passionate professionals, regardless of their gender.”



Estelle Chambost
VP, Human Resources
Aleph Hospitality

“At Aleph Hospitality, 40% of our hotel GMs are women. There is no discrimination as this would be derogatory to them. We look for the best individual for the job—the best fit for the property, the owner, and our company culture. I believe that gender doesn’t define who you are and what you are capable of. In my 30-year career, I used to be the only woman or one of two around the table. Even though this has improved, women are still underrepresented in top management in areas such as finance and culinary. I believe the younger generation must change that.”

“Women of the industry have access to an array of opportunities. With flexible schedules, valuable skills and experience, chances for career advancement into leadership as well as personally rewarding experiences working with customers are more. It is an ideal choice for women looking to make their mark. As many firms are striving towards creating diverse workplaces where female employees can take advantage of extra development initiatives. Working in hospitality a chance to grow your professional path, while making meaningful connections along the way.”



Paromita Ohri
Director,
Marketing & Communications, Waldorf Astoria RAK

“There is no limit to what we, women can accomplish. A decade ago, I began working in the hospitality sector as a guest associate and today I manage the housekeeping division for a 448-key hotel in Doha. Most women in the hospitality are capable of achieving their career goals. I see several women advancing in hospitality industry and setting an example for the younger ones, many of whom would prefer to choose to be working as women leaders. Why? We are also compassionate and can take care of others.”



Lily Hungyo
Executive Housekeeper
La Maison Hotel Doha



Lucille Georget
Manager, Marketing & Communications, Alwadi
Doha, MGallery Hotel Collection

“We strive to make travel better for women. The ‘Inspired by Her’ program at MGallery Hotels is dedicated to making women travelers feel welcome. This includes amenities that address women’s needs, while traveling. For example, bathrobes and slippers come in various sizes, a make-up mirror, a quality hair dryer, a choice of teas, and infusions are available in all rooms. We offer healthy comfort food on the room service menu and provide tailor-made services and experiences for all women. Females only take service attendants and special amenity set-ups to make their stay extra memorable.”



Jennifer Pettinger-Haines
MD, Middle East
The Bench

“Working on the Arabian Hotel Investment Conference and Future Hospitality Summit, we strived to give women leaders who fit our speaker profiles, but the conferences reflect they are nowhere near a balanced ratio. For years, Hala Matar Choufany, President, HVS Middle East, Africa & South Asia and I were the only ones in a sea of suits at advisory board meetings and regional briefings. Today, I am thrilled to see women leaders—Katerina Giannouka, new CEO, Jumeirah Group, Marloes Knippenberg, CEO of Kerten Hospitality etc making waves in the industry.”

“Progress of women in leadership positions has improved in recent years, but the gender gap is still wide. Though women make up a majority of the workforce in the industry, they are under-represented in senior leadership and executive roles. There has been a rising trend of women-owned and operated firms in the sector, and organizations are trying to promote diversity at the workplace. The industry and the society have a long way to go to achieve gender equality in leadership. We Mövenpick Hotel Amman, work to promote gender equality to grow career prospects.”



Raghda Yaghi
Manager, Digital Marketing
Movenpick Hotel Amman

“Travel, tourism and hospitality are evolving, and women have to be part of this evolution. Opportunities encourage the women empowerment and help them realize their full potential and applaud their problem-solving abilities. They cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset. Improvement in gender/wage/ethnic equality, professional development, organizational levels through mentoring will contribute to enhancing their ability to take control in a male-dominated sector and give wings to their aspirations, and once they realize this, they can come out stronger than ever.”



Tahera Sultana
Executive Housekeeper, Movenpick Hotel &
Apartments Bur Dubai



Dr. Huda Mirza
Director, Talent & Culture, Thalassa & Wellness,
Sofitel Bahrain Zallaq Thalassa Sea & Spa

“Women leaders have progressed in recent years. Women are taking on leadership roles across the industry—from executive positions to ownership of destinations and attractions. Their influence can be seen in marketing campaigns, corporate culture transformation, and a push for workplace diversity initiatives. Women bring strategic thinking to their roles as decision-makers, critical for success in today’s competitive landscape. Progress toward equality has been made, more must be done to ensure all the twin genders have an equal footing in the travel and hospitality industry in the future.”



Christina Rymbai
Sales and Marketing Executive
Mercure Gold Hotel Dubai

“The travel, tourism and hospitality made greater strides towards gender parity in many ways to accelerating women’s career. Women in hospitality take up leadership roles in accounting, human resources, or sales and marketing. Women leaders bring talent, new views, structural and cultural diversity to the firms they work for, resulting in successful solutions. Along with that, they stand to generate impact on pay equity, changing workplace policies in ways that benefit both men and women.”

Breaching new frontiers

“Women are perceived to be adept while dealing with challenges. Our industry allows us to experience the world and give us a platform to be creative and empathetic, utilizing our strengths to make people aspire to actuate their dreams. While I cannot speak for all women, for me our industry affords me the opportunity to utilize my innate nature to inspire female travelers and excite them what the world has to offer. Having been in the industry for the past 15 years, I am in awe of the changes I have seen in the region—women entering, growing, thriving, and excelling at what they do.”



Annel Parilla
Duty Manager
Park Regis Hotel Business Bay

“There is nothing more attractive than to be able to interact, socialize and to work in a multi-cultural environment. I love the idea of having an opportunity of learning different cultures and personalities with people representing a wide range of nationalities, in an even wider range of places all around the world. As I embarked on my journey, I have started to realize this is not just a career to earn money to survive for a living, but is something that allows us to develop ourselves. It is a blessing in disguise to choose to be part of this industry, as it teaches me up to these days a lot of positivity's that leads me to a person that I am today.”



Nour Aridi
Founder & Managing Director
Tini Consultancy

“I am dedicated to delivering value to our guests. Our core value lies in turning moments into memories, and we achieve this by providing customer experiences. By understanding our guests' needs and proposing activities that cater to their interests, we aim to elevate their stay with us. This personalized approach not only enhances their travel experience, but also justifies the investment they have made in selecting our hotel. We strive to be their travel guide, making every moment of their stay memorable and worth every penny. The result is not just a satisfied guest, but also positive online reviews that bring more business to the hotel and the destination.”



Irada Khon
Director, Revenue Management,
Fairmont Bab Al Bahr



Zulaikha Manik
Deputy Managing Director, Sun Siyam Resorts

“When I started out 25 years ago, there were hardly any women in the industry, especially within the operations side of the business. It was a male-dominated industry and women, perhaps, felt less than adequate to take up these jobs. There is also the social and cultural stigma that was and is there to some extent. But today I see a gender shift, with women, especially school graduates taking interest in seeking and finding employment in the two sectors. Women are bolder and more career oriented now as they continue to contribute towards the development of the industry and their personal development.”

Inputs by TT Bureau

RAKTDA to host aviation summit

10th edition of Arab Aviation Summit will be hosted along with RAK Tourism Development Authority from 14-16 March at Al Hamra International Exhibition and Conference Centre under the theme ‘Impactful sustainability in modern-day travel and tourism’.

TT Bureau

H.E Raki Phillips, CEO of Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority, said: “Hosting the summit for the third consecutive year not only solidifies the Emirate as a leading MICE destination in the region but also examines the case for sustainability in tourism. As Ras Al Khaimah gears up to become the Regional Leader in Sustainable Tourism by 2025, we strongly believe that the entire tourism ecosystem, where aviation plays a leading role, must work hand-in-hand with destinations to deliver a sustainable future for the industry.”

Commenting on being chosen as the sustainable partner for



the summit, Emad AlMonayea, Chairman & President at Vaayu Group, said: “As a company dedicated to rethinking solutions for future challenges within the aviation industry, the sustainable focus of the 10th Arab Aviation Summit is strategically in sync with our purpose and mission. AAS has today emerged as the world's first aviation and tourism event to calculate carbon emis-

sions and we are proud to be a sustainable partner for this prestigious summit in 2023.”

Frederico Fernandes, Arab Aviation Summit Director, said: “As a critical meeting point for the industry to discuss collaboration as well as opportunities and challenges to advance the sector, the 10th Arab Aviation Summit is an ideal

platform to showcase industry insights and best practices as we move in earnest towards making a tangible commitment to sustainable transformation. At the Summit, leading players will outline scalable solutions that address the key interdependent pillars of the aviation ecosystem to accelerate pathways to a sustainable future.”

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Venturing into newer markets



Satguru, an industry leader with a wide network of offices across 80 countries, is venturing to introduce new services and products for its customers. Europe is a vital market as an inbound standpoint and outbound too, hence, the perfect place to meet its partners is ITB Berlin, which hits the boards again this month, and so does our partner Satguru to get their share from the market.

Shehara Rizly

JVR Fernando, Chief Commercial Officer, Satguru shares the importance of once again meeting their partners, surging new partners and networks at ITB Berlin. "We will be participating this year and I will be there in person this time at ITB Berlin, as we intend to meet over 100 countries on a single platform and 10,000 plus exhibitors from all over the world. It would provide great exposure for all travel partners, which will pave way for business development and new opportunities."

ITB Berlin will be the first global exhibition of the year to take place with all borders open without curbs and hence, it is expected to lure in the crowds



JVR Fernando
Chief Commercial Officer
Satguru

from across the world. Expectations run high for all those in travel, tourism, and hospitality sector. Furthering opportunities and partnerships year on year, Fernando reiterated, "Attending ITB Berlin this year, our objectives are to strengthen existing partnerships, forge new business relations and increase the inbound business to our 25 DMC locations, which we will be showcasing during the event."

Venturing into different areas order to ensure that each touch point is taken care of, Satguru is on a journey perfecting and adding products, services, new

highlight the new look and feel of B2B business 'T3'. Other new ventures include our charter division, medical tourism, cargo, cars in Africa (our rent a car divi-

with their new campaigns. Fernando explained, "Itvar is our GSA Wing representing all our air and non-air products. ITVAR has been launched to provide

In conclusion Fernando adds how they have been actively opening offices across different parts of the world, from the far east to the Middle East, Europe



platforms, and verticals to create an entire new suit of services. Highlighting the new B2B venture, Fernando said, "We would like to highlight our brand 'ITVAR', which is the flagship of our group. We would also like to

sion) and Visa done (our online visa portal)."

Their new GSA wing has caught the attention of many B2B partners over the past few weeks, as they started venturing out

a more cohesive and consistent representation service to clients and ensure that clients' representation needs are met in a timely, efficient and effective manner. Currently, Itvar holds 65 GSAs around the world."

and South America too. "This year we have opened our offices in Manila & Vietnam in the Far East, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan & Israel in the Middle East and Madrid in Europe, Argentina and Mexico in South America."

An array of strategies to hike business

As part of Kuwait Airways' relentless endeavours to provide the best services to its valued customers, the airline has organized an event to mark the launch of numerous new and diverse services for the current year. The event was held in the presence of various prominent personalities and distinguished guests, at KAC headquarters recently.

TT Bureau

The Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) presented an array of the latest customer services, including new menus onboard, launching home check-in services, limousine services, diverse destinations for the 2023 summer season, in addition to updating the uniforms of the flight crew and launching new classes with different seat designs on the Airbus A330NEO aircraft.

Captain Ali Al-Dukhan, Chairman, KAC, said, "Kuwait Airways is keen on developing its systems by launching new services and products for the comfort of our customers. This announcement is a continuation of programs launched a year ago, which include transformation,

development, and access to the best levels of beyond excellence in services as well as achieving its desired strategies."

He added, "Kuwait Airways is steadily moving towards its set plans, as it launched new services under the title 'The Blue Bird Reveal', to bring about a transformation in all

per cent as against 2021. The profit margin improved to 40 per cent in 2022 as compared to 2019 and to 37 per cent compared to 2021. Also, the passenger traffic in Terminal-4 grew by as much as 26 per cent in 2022 compared to 2019 and by 229 per cent as against 2021, he said. Al-Dukhan said, "Kuwait Airways launched new

Kuwait Airways will design new and comfortable seats for different travel classes on Airbus A330NEO, as per the preferences of the customers

services provided to customers." The KAC also achieved positive results in 2022, as revenues grew by 10 per cent as compared to 2019 and 115

routes to Manchester, Madrid, Casablanca, Trabzon, Mykonos, Kuala Lumpur, and Hyderabad. KAC achieved on-time performance of its flights by 86 per



The new elite lounge

cent in 2022, and the Blue Bird achieved the third position in the Middle East and North Africa."

Forecasting growth in passenger traffic by 4.5 million passengers in 2023, he said Kuwait Airways will receive two Airbus

A330NEOs this year. He said the Blue Bird is committed to implementing social responsibility programs such as training 100 high school students and graduates participating in the Balsam project with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society.

New Style of Uniforms

Al-Dukhan revealed that the launch of KAC's new uniforms for flight crew, in cooperation with the Italian designer Ettore Bilotta. The uniform has new features such as diamonds with desert colours.

Reconnecting with trade partners

It is time for travel, tourism and hospitality to network together on a single platform at ITB Berlin. **Rehan Ali**, CEO, Tawfeeq Travel Qatar shares with **TRAVTALK** the importance of the event and what they are currently working to reconnecting with suppliers and customers at the show.

TT Bureau

German market is an important source market in the GCC as many locals and residents enjoy the beautiful outdoors, full of natural beauty. **Rehan Ali**, CEO, Tawfeeq Travel Qatar said, "ITB Berlin, which has made a comeback after a hiatus of three years, is one of the main Travel Trade events that Tawfeeq Travel will be attending to connect, network and do business with key travel industry partners worldwide. We are looking forward to reconnecting with supplier, customers at this show. ITB is a place of where all the industry leading minds come together, which gives us numerous networking and business opportunities to exchange ideas, share knowledge, rethink concepts, and

offer solutions too. Expectations are way too high."

Sustainable travel and tourism play an important role today across the globe, in fact every single industry is transforming to suit the need of the hour. Explaining about their clients, Ali said they prefer to adapt to incorporate a sustainable role. "Our clients are conscious about traveling sustainably. Most partners that we work with invest heavily on sustainable travel and our clients appreciate being a part of the process of making this world better for generations to come."

In terms of booking patterns, the Middle East region is seen as a last-minute booking market, however, word from the industry is that image is also



Rehan Ali
CEO
Tawfeeq Travel Qatar

changing. Ali reiterates, "It is still majorly a last-minute booking market. However, we are seeing a gradual shift towards early bookings too, especially with big families who have specific requirements. Passengers are spending quite a lot of time in doing R&D on their travel plans to ensure seamless travel."

Over the past few years Qatar has been making significant changes to bring in more visitors in luxury and other sectors. Ali added, "The FIFA World Cup has helped to change the perception about Qatar in a big way. People from all over the world got a first-hand experience about the wonderful experiences and world-class infrastructure Qatar offers. We have seen an increase in interest for Qatar as a MICE destination. We managed a few MICE groups as well as weddings in Qatar. Positioning as one of the safest countries in the world, Qatar has given a big boost to inbound business."

MICE tourism rose steadily over the past two years amidst all obstacles. Ali shared, "It is exciting to see our efforts in promoting Qatar

at various trade fairs and roadshows across the globe has gained good traction. We see huge interest from India for MICE and weddings, Nordics and Italy for leisure & MICE, Kazakhstan, Iran and Bela-

gage storage services. Our B2C booking app 'Click n Travel' will be launched soon. We will also be focussing Wellness and Cruising experiences, especially on luxury yacht and river cruises. We want

In terms of booking patterns, the Middle East is seen as a last-minute booking market, however, word from the industry is that image is changing

rus for leisure charters, and Japan & Korea for stopover packages. We also see a huge interest from cruise companies in adding Qatar as a key destination."

"We at Tawfeeq Travel, are always keen to innovate and evolve. We have recently introduced bag-

to be a leading TMC / DMC in the region hence we are looking at expanding our reach in the region. We just started our operations in Hyderabad, India last September. We are investing heavily on providing online solutions for our customer in different verticals."

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Hidden gems of Sharjah's eastern coast

The emirate exudes a charm that draws visitors from all over the globe to its shores. Its unique heritage and beautiful nature combined with modern infrastructure and hotel facilities add to Sharjah's overall international appeal. Renowned for providing an unparalleled experience, the emirate is a cultural metropolis and incubator of thought, art, and literature, boasting picturesque heritage neighborhoods, beautiful museums, and bustling cultural centers, among others.

 TT Bureau

Part of Sharjah's unique characteristic is its terrain. This is especially evident as one drives along the eastern coast, where charming beaches, towering mountains, and lush oasis meet. On this side of the emirate, which is less than two hours' drive from the city, tourists flock to

famous attractions such as Dibba Al-Hisn, Khorfakkan, Kalba, and other areas.

The east coast, known for its breathtaking views and mountains, brings relaxation and peace to visitors who are looking to escape the hustle and bustle of the cities. Its quaint islands reserves carry secrets of nature well-worth exploring,

The east coast's breathtaking views and mountains bring peace to visitors who are looking to escape the hustle and bustle of the big cities



being the center of biodiversity and habitat for many species of birds, wild animals, and marine fauna.

Shark Island: Habitat for birds and marine life

Located off the eastern coast

is one of the emirate's most important tourist attractions. On the island, which is scattered with anemones, different types of fish and marine fauna cohabit, including sea turtles, moray eels, stingrays, and Arabian angelfish. Huts are

This island, famous for its rocky nature and diverse ecosystem, is considered one of the emirate's most important tourist attractions

of Sharjah, Shark Island can be accessed via boats. This island, which is renowned for its unique rocky nature and diverse ecosystem, is consid-

ered one of the emirate's most important tourist attractions. On the island, which is scattered with anemones, different types of fish and marine fauna cohabit, including sea turtles, moray eels, stingrays, and Arabian angelfish. Huts are available for rent on the island, where tourists can explore a range of enjoyable recreational activities, including swimming, diving, and fishing.

A haven for mountain and desert animals

Al Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation Center, located on the Hajar Mountain, is adjacent to the city of Kalba, and extends over an area of 12 square kilometers. The center has a diverse ecosystem and is home to 30 species of mountain and desert animals that have made the area their natural haven. The animals in this vast reserve include the Arabian leopard, wolves, Tahr, the caracal (desert lynx), snakes, lizards, hedgehogs, and scorpions, among others.

Providing visitors with a comfortable experience, the center offers golf carts to facilitate movement around the reserve. Tourists are accompanied/guided by teams having expert knowledge about the history of the reserve and wildlife in general. Al Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation Center also features a night exhibition, allowing visitors to closely observe



Combination of tall trees and beautiful waterfowl

Located within the coastal area of Kalba, the Al Qurm Nature Reserve covers an area of 4.9 square kilometers. The reserve is considered one of the UAE's most unique ecological sites thanks to its diverse plant,

bird. The beach next to the Al Qurm Nature Reserve is a refuge for marine reptiles, including loggerhead sea turtles and green turtles.

The ecosystem here is divided into two main environments—the mangrove tree forest and the marine environment. The mangrove trees in the area, some of which reach a height of eight meters, are characterized by their own beauty and hardiness. Growing naturally in the region, these trees can withstand seawater salinity and low oxygen levels. The trees further provide a valuable layer of protection that reduces the impact of storms, currents, tidal factors, and soil erosion.

The marine environment consists of an artificial lake, a

haven for algae that play an important role in the photosynthesis process that provides food for marine life. The Mangrove Reserve is an excellent destination for tourists, local and foreign, looking to embark on fun outdoor activi-

ties such as kayaking, hiking, and birdwatching.

Fusion of beauty of nature & engineering creativity

Al Suhub Rest House, which is located in the city of Khorfakkan at an altitude of 600 meters

reflect the latest innovations in forest architecture and landscape design. These green spaces include 8,700 trees that give an extra touch of beauty inspired by nature. It also includes indoor and outdoor balconies to enable all visitors to fully enjoy the wonder of nature. Furthermore, is the rest house is connected to the Al Rafisah Dam by a mountain path. This trail is a favorite destination for lovers of mountain sports and adventures, allowing them to enjoy hiking and exploring while enjoying a panoramic view of the city of Khorfakkan.

As part of its ongoing efforts to improve the experience of visitors and advance the local tourism sector, the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) continues to highlight the unique beauty of the east coast while showing off Sharjah's natural, environmental, cultural, and urban heritage. The SCTDA is committed to strengthen-

Al Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation Center features a night exhibition, allowing visitors to observe the life of desert animals and the environment

the life of desert animals and their close inter-relationship with the surrounding environment. Furthermore, it organizes activities to promote the protection and conservation of endangered animals, biodiversity, and nature.

bird, and animal species. At the heart of this reserve are the mangrove trees.

The reserve is home to several rare waterfowl, notably the Arabian collared kingfisher, which is classified as an endangered




One of UAE's projects features a two-storey rest house with a restaurant, a café, separate prayer rooms for men and women, a children's play area

above sea level, represents the true combination of natural richness and engineering creativity. One of the United Arab Emirates' pioneering projects, it features a two-story, 2,788-square-meter rest house with a restaurant, a café, separate prayer rooms for men and women, a children's play area, and other exceptional facilities.

Al Suhub Rest House is surrounded by green spaces, which

ing Sharjah's position as a leading regional and global tourist destination.

It is also working towards enhancing the emirate's presence in the global tourism markets, attracting more international tourists, and enticing more foreign investments to the local tourism and hospitality sectors, which play an important role in the economy of Sharjah and the UAE. 



Switzerland Tourism's gala for UAE agents

Switzerland Tourism Board in the GCC conducted its Race to Switzerland where 80 leading travel agents specialize about the new destinations in Switzerland. The event kicked off this year in Yas Island of Abu Dhabi. Matthias Albrecht, Director, Switzerland Tourism GCC shared about the event's importance.



Targeting the European market

Germany is a key source market for both Ajman and Sharjah tourism since both emirates share pristine beaches and properties. **Iftikhar Hamdani**, Area Manager, Northern Emirates who looks after two of the most prestigious properties, Bahi Ajman Palace in Ajman and Coral Beach Resort in Sharjah speaks with **TRAVTALK** about his plans to attract more visitors from Germany.

TT Bureau

Iftikhar Hamdani, Area Manager, Bahi Ajman Palace in Ajman and Coral Beach Resort in Sharjah said it is important for us to participate in ITB Berlin this year after a period of almost three years. "This year we are participating in ITB Berlin under the umbrella of Ajman Tourism and Sharjah Tourism. ITB Berlin since these years kept its position as one of the most important travel fair for us. We are all set to meet our existing partners and find new partners from Europe, particularly Germany."

"We will showcase our two resorts during the show. At the same time, ITB is a forum to see new trends in technology that are transforming our industry



Iftikhar Hamdani,
Area Manager, Bahi Ajman Palace in Ajman and
Coral Beach in Sharjah

faster. This is a perfect platform to meet the best of the industry minds and to forge partnership with them," he said.

Hamdani said, "Traditionally, northern emirates are heavily dependent on the CIS market; Germany is important for the beach properties. Our market-share has increased year-on-year since 2021 from West

Europe, particularly from the Germany. The GCC, the UK, Belarus, Czech Republic, and Scandinavian countries, and Baltic have made their contributions (marketshare) to our hotels in Sharjah and Ajman."

In the UAE, Hamdani is known for his efforts to bring in sustainable practices to the hospitality

staff is well trained, taking part in new initiatives, and creating more activities to involve local communities to take part along with us. We will announce more initiatives soon."

He reiterated, "In-house training is important and our EHS team is working actively in imparting training to our staff at our HMH



We are all set to meet our partners and find new ones from Europe, particularly Germany. We will display our two resorts during the show

industry. He said, "We will soon start zero plastic at our properties. We are actively taking part in accessible tourism, our

level properties. Green certification checklist is a blessing to implement practical lessons than take only theory classes. We

make sure that we are in practice to maintain our sustainable actions during operation at our both properties, on job interaction with guests and continuous monitoring by team leaders."

Another focus area is accessible tourism, although we have

the necessary infrastructure, training of staff is imperative, Hamdani concluded, "Our staff makes sure our guests enjoy equally their stay in the hotel. The EHS team imparts training to keep our staff well trained and updated with new techniques to serve our guests."

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Germany still a key source market

Stakeholders from travel, tourism and hospitality sectors will come together to share their expectations after COVID at ITB Berlin. Since Germany is one of the key markets for the Middle Eastern region, the event will be organized at the biggest halls so that all of them have the opportunity to interact with trade partners. It will be an exciting time for to see the business that will be transacted from this years' exhibition.

“We are thrilled to reunite with the travel industry at ITB Berlin. This renowned event is back with opportunities for us all to come together and explore what's new in our field. It is a great event that serves as a beacon of creativity, innovation and growth for the travel industry. It provides unparalleled networking opportunities with key players in hospitality from around the world and to reconnect and forge lasting connections. By attending this global gathering, companies have a chance to explore innovative markets that could be beneficial long-term, while being informed on sudden shifts within their own sector. Hotels will have a chance to capitalize on the world's travel industry, connecting with key decision-makers and obtaining up-to-date information that will help navigate today's swiftly changing sector.”



Adrian Stoppe
General Manager
Walderia Astoria RAK

“Renowned ITB Berlin acts as the lynchpin or hinge of our travel event calendar and is very important for our continued development as a tourism board. Participating in the much-awaited event ensures the sought-after access to the travel professionals from across the world and enables us to propel and spread our message directly to our esteemed travel partners and build lasting and meaningful partnerships. The theme of this year is 'Change' so that things could be arranged in a parallel manner with our ongoing mission to make the travel industry as sustainable as possible and accessible by conducting ongoing campaigns such as 'Tourism For All' and 'Feel Good'.”



Yamina Soto
Regional Director
Sales and Marketing, German National Tourist Board



Issam Slaimi
General Manager
Golden Tulip Media Hotel

“ITB Berlin is considered as the largest international show for the travel and tourism industry. ITB Berlin gives an opportunity to meet more than 10,000 exhibitors from as many as 180 countries. ITB Berlin gives a unique possibility for the hoteliers concerned to meet and interact with important producers in once place. It serves as a networking opportunity for colleagues of the travel industry to network. Our hotel's objective will be to be present at the fair in order to increase the awareness of Louvre Hotel Group brand and especially Golden Tulip Media Hotel in particular. There is also an opportunity to meet the significant partners, especially from Europe, as Dubai is the most sought-after destination and in this regard, our hotel enjoys a majority marketshare.”



Deepak Boonedy
CEO
Sun Siyam Resorts

“Sun Siyam Resorts has been participating in ITB Berlin for many years. The show is the best platform where players from the global travel and tourism industry come together and interact. The event is all about networking, meeting old friends, colleagues, old bosses, and meeting people from all sorts of different geographical areas, technical backgrounds, and cultural experiences. It is a great place to share ideas, get valuable feedback, connect with relevant industry experts, and understand what our competitors are doing in the market. The famous event is perfect for expanding our knowledge and innovate our products, as well as discover market trends or features that are of importance to our own destination, the Maldives. Within our fast-paced industry, it is crucial for us to stay on top of the game. It is like an endless vessel of inspiration.”

Inputs by Shehara Rizly

Tourism Malaysia at Tehran tourism expo

Tourism Malaysia boost its promotion activities in Iran by participating in the 16th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition (TITEX), which was concluded recently. This provided a platform to reconnect and further develop more partnership in positioning Malaysia as a preferred destination for Iranians. TITEX will also gave visitors an insight to the many exciting packages and to promote some of the country's latest attractions.



This four-day exhibition features networking sessions between travel experts, tourism and hospitality sectors that are based in Iran. Tourism Malaysia's participation in the exhibition this year sees as many as six tourism industry players from Malaysia, including travel agents, hotels, and airlines namely Better-Booking Travel & Tour, Toranj Tour and Travel Company, Gulliver Tour and Travel Company, Siahrood Holiday Sdn. Bhd., IOI Cluster Hotels and Air Arabia.

Malaysia's participation in the Tehran tourism exhibition has provided an avenue for the players of the Malaysia tourism industry to network and solicit for new business with Iranians.



Rosnah Mustafah
Director
Tourism Malaysia Dubai

developments and strengthen awareness on Malaysia as an ideal holiday destination for this market. Also destinations such as Kuala Lumpur, Genting Highlands and Penang for shopping, family fun and theme parks. Last year's roadshow to Tehran, which was led by Dato' Hj Zainuddin Abdul Wahab, Director General, Tourism Malaysia, in May

Malaysia's participation in the exhibition provided an avenue for Malaysia tourism industry players to network and solicit for new business

The exhibition has also served as platform to update the players of Malaysia's latest tourism

2022, along with the Malaysian travel trade players and officials validated that Malaysia



maintains as one of the top of the mind travel destinations for this region.

The promotion campaign of Tourism Malaysia as such is a continuous effort to boost inbound tourism to a greater height in the hope to achieve 15.6 million international tourist

arrivals with MYR 47.6 billion in tourism receipts for 2023. Iran remains one of top international tourists of Malaysia generating markets in the Middle East region before COVID.

Iran's strong arrival of tourists numbering 46,559 in 2019 shows that Malaysia is a value-

for-money destination for them.

Currently, the Iranian travelers will have the opportunity to travel to Malaysia from other cities such as Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, Tabriz and Shiraz using airways such as Qatar Airways, Emirates, Etihad Airways and Air Arabia.



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Shift in booking patterns

German tour operator and DMC Remaz Tours GmbH is now able to connect with travel trade once again after they assemble after a hiatus of three years in Berlin.

TT Bureau

Maheer Azizia, MD, Remaz Tours GmbH, said how this year's ITB Berlin will be special to the travel trade across the world. "Middle East region and GCC is an important market for us, as well as the USA, South America, and Europe. In terms of summer, GCC/Middle East clientele seek Europe thus we have our inbound travelers. Come winter other markets such as Europe, the USA, South America turn towards GCC/Middle East to enjoy their winter in those destinations. This year's ITB Berlin will be the first time that the travel trade can finally meet in Berlin



Maheer Azizia
Managing Director
Remaz Tours GmbH

without any restrictions as all the borders are now open and ready to explore the world."

He further reiterates that MICE and business travel is picking up with all challenges around, "In fact, MICE

and business travel is picking up, but the rising of global prices slowed down this development and the MICE organizers are required to adapt to this situation in presenting their offers and deals." In terms of the current booking patterns, there has been a shift and he said. "Most customers are now turning to online booking where we have adapted this situation to satisfy them. The most destinations the customers want to go depends on which market you traveling from, for example, the European preference is Europe destinations in summer and GCC and Middle East in winter time, on the other hand, the Middle Eastern/GCC customers are willing to be in Europe for summer and Far East in winter."

He explained how the sector is developing year-on year, "Tourism business has already improved last year, and I am expecting to continue more effectively in this year."

Come winter, Europe, the USA, South America turn towards GCC/ME to enjoy winter in those destinations

(Advertorial)

'Singapore constantly changing'

► contd. from page 1

experiences. What we have noticed during this post COVID travellers look for authentic experiences from the destination. "

the middle of the pandemic. It is an exhibit-based attraction set in one of the most historical places in Singapore Dempsey Hill, it is one of the examples which puts

ing year for all of us. Srithar was mentioning about the in-visitor arrivals and I am happy to share that Singapore Airlines had a major play in that as well as we have been re-



Renjie Wong, Area Director, India, Middle East & South Asia said, "Singapore is constantly changing and opening the Museum of ice cream in Singapore, the first outside of the United States of America (USA) is now a tourist attraction, which opened during

Singapore in the map. The only Avatar experience in the world is at the Cloud forest in Gardens by the Bay Singapore."

Aswin K, General Manager Singapore Airlines, reaffirmed, "As you know last year has been an excit-

ally active in this space and we have been increasing the capacity a lot, so as back of December 2022, we are back at 75 per cent as you know China was a major market for us and within the next few months we hope to register an increase."

Atout France launches e-learning platform

Atout France kicks off the year with a tailor-made e-learning program designed for travel trade in Middle East, called 'France Connoisseur'. This platform consists of 19 modules that provides content relevant to travel trade to think out of the box and design packages and itineraries combined with areas in France that are hitherto unknown.



YAS, Saadiyat islands focus on B2B biz

Managing a diverse portfolio with unique destinations and experiences, Miral Destination's strategy is to work with the travel trade, which is an integral part for the destinations. In an exclusive interview with **TRAVELTALK**, **Liam Findlay**, CEO, Miral Destinations shared their programmes, especially curated for the travel trade.

Shehara Rizly

What initiatives are you taking to get the trade agents to drive more business to both Yas Island and Saadiyat Island?

We manage a diverse portfolio of world-class destinations and experiences, and a core part of our success has always been building solid relationships with like-minded partners. The travel trade market is a central pillar of our corporate strategy, and we work closely with our B2B partners to drive consistent interest and package sales for our destinations. At present, we have dedicated sales teams stationed in India, the UK, Russia, and China to help facilitate efforts on the ground in key target markets. We are also planning to add Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to that list soon. As such, our



Liam Findlay
CEO, Miral Destinations

tive educational and marketing tools in order to further position both the islands as destinations of choice.

Do you have a specialization program for the B2B agents, and if so, how do they enter the same?

It is our mandate to ensure that our partners and colleagues are equipped with the latest training programs to stay ahead of the curve. To this end, we



their knowledge will be tested, and earn valuable rewards along the way. As they become in-market destination experts, they get to grow their own product offerings and study at their own pace. Yas Experts can also join the incentive program, which includes FAM trips, gift vouchers, exclusive events, and Yas Expert discounts.

How often do you engage with trade partners and trade media to update new features in the two areas?

Yas Island and Saadiyat Island encompass a diverse spectrum of world-class leisure and entertainment attractions that attract visitors and adventure-seekers from all over the world. Much of this demand derives from regular engagement with our

partners and media representatives in the United Kingdom, Europe, Russia, and China. As we also look to widen the horizon of

(ATM), the World Travel Market (WTM) and ILTM Cannes, where we can ensure that our presence across these leading

for leisure and entertainment. So, we are working diligently with our sales teams to reinforce Saadiyat Island's position

We have dedicated sales teams stationed in India, the UK, Russia, and China to help facilitate efforts on the ground in key target markets

growth formula relies on showcasing attractive offerings that appeal to a wide set of audience and the latter has helped us retain and sustain our partnerships with every trade agent. We also provide our agents with regular FAM trip opportunities and reward programs as well as effec-

introduced 'Yas Expert', our B2B online training platform designed for travel professionals. The program provides them with the right tools and skills to offer their clients a one of a kind experience as certified Yas Experts. Agents who had enrolled in the program can learn and



our activities with offices in the GCC, it is pertinent to our expansion to communicate daily with our partners in each office. This can be displayed by our ongoing presence in tier-1 international trade events, by organizing seasonal FAM trips and providing the right training support to ensure consistency across all our operating offices.

Which global trade events will you participate in this year?

As with every year, we target leading trade events where we can grow and sustain our connections with the international travel industry. This year, we will be on ground at the ITB Berlin, the Arabian Travel Market

Yas and Saadiyat islands encompass a diverse spectrum of leisure and entertainment attractions that attract visitors from across the world

events resonate with the B2B and B2C travel market. Our aim resides in connecting with international travelers to position Yas Island and Saadiyat Island as must visit destinations.

Before COVID, you used to cover Yas Island. Will Saadiyat Island be covered in 2023?

Yas Island has matured over the years as a leading destination

on the global map of culture and tourism. Its landscape, pristine beaches, hospitality and cultural offerings make it an unbeatable offering for leisure seekers. Our partners have begun addressing travel requests from various markets. We will soon be hosting our first FAM trip to the island and we are looking forward to welcoming many more in the near future.



Fiji Airways strengthens ties in ME

With Itvar as the GSA Fiji Airways officially launched in the Middle East recently. As an offline carrier, Fiji Airways has codeshare partnerships currently with Emirates, Singapore Airlines and Cathay Pacific with Singapore and Hong Kong as the connection points for guests traveling from the Middle East.



'Scouting for new partners in Germany'

As borders open and world meets in Germany for ITB Berlin, Cluster General Manager of Ramada Hotels & Suites, Ajman, Ramada by Wyndham Beach Hotel Ajman and Wyndham Garden Hotel Ajman, **Ravi Santiago** said Germany is one of their key markets. Closing January 2023 with 97% occupancy for all three hotels, they stress summer is the key factor for reaching annual targets.

TT Bureau

ITB Berlin is one of the biggest platforms where the world tourism connects over a period of three days. For Wyndham Hotels Ajman, Germany is one of the key year-round source markets, with major patronizing taking place during the summer. The pristine beaches and a variety of culinary options draw visitors towards the emirate.

Ravi Santiago, Cluster General Manager, Wyndham Garden Hotels Ajman said, "Certainly Germany is one of the most important source markets for us. We get major demand during the summer season. Some of the key criteria for our valued customers to select our prop-



Ravi Santiago
Cluster General Manager
Wyndham Garden Hotels Ajman

erties are mainly due to the pristine private beach, which includes the hotel-managed water sporting activities. Finally, our wide range of culinary delights include fresh seafood and the fresh grills."

Attracting the markets that would go hand in hand requires you to be well informed about

the guests and their expectations, Santiago explained, "Partnerships are key when seeking market share. Our relationship with our partners, tour operators from different markets help us achieve our targets and provide us the exposure needed to show the wide variety of our offerings to their guests. We work very closely with key tour operators from all markets, in Germany we are hoping that we could venture out and scout for new partners at ITB Berlin this year."

While Germany and CIS are key markets, there are other markets who should also be given the opportunity to discover the places across the region. Santiago reiterates, "we are exploring



opportunities with our existing partners to extend boundaries to new countries and looking for partners in new markets. We are now in the verge of consolidating our position to increase our market share in countries such as Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Uzbekistan among oth-

ers in Eastern Europe and Baltic countries as well".

MICE market seems to have risen across emirates in the UAE, Santiago said, "For the first time, we have seen the MICE market improve in the last quarter of 2022, after it detracted after

pandemic. We have seen good growth in numbers and continuing to see an upsurge in inquiries in this potential segment. Sustainability is a key element in the hospitality sector today, and Wyndham Hotels Ajman takes pride of having their own compost machine. ➔

Fillip for Riyadh downtown

HRH Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Prime Minister and Chairman of the New Murabba Development Company announced the firm's for developing Riyadh downtown.

TT Bureau

The New Murabba project will be built around the concept of sustainability, featuring green areas and walking and cycling paths that will enhance the quality of life by promoting healthy, active lifestyles and community activities. It will also feature an iconic museum, a technology and design university, a multipurpose immersive theater, and 80 entertainment and culture venues.

The project will be situated at the intersection of King Salman and King Khalid roads to the North West of Riyadh, over an area of 19 sq. km., to accommodate hundreds of thousands of residents. The project will offer more than 25 million sq. mt., of floor area, featuring 104,000 residential



units, 9,000 hotel rooms, and 980,000 sq. mt., of retail space, 1.4 million sq. mt., of office space, 620,000 sq. mt., of leisure assets, and 1.8 million sq. mt., of space dedicated to community facilities.

Inspired by the modern Najdi architectural style, the "Mukaab" will be the world's first immersive destination offering an experience created by digital and virtual technology with the latest holographics. The "Mukaab" will encompass

a tower atop a spiral base, and a structure featuring 2 million sqm of floor space that will be a premium hospitality destination with a multitude of retail, cultural and tourist attractions, along with residential and hotel units, commercial spaces, and recreational facilities.

The project will offer a unique living, working and entertainment experience within a 15-minute walking radius and will have its own internal transport system. ➔

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ITB helps to grow business by 15-20%

As the world meets in Berlin for the first time in three years without fear of restrictions, Al Tahadi Travel and Tourism expects to gain 15 % to 20% more business by attending this year's ITB Berlin. This would be the first mega event which connects the travel, tourism, and hospitality partners for the year, says Iyad Ali Elqirem, CEO, Al Tahadi Travel and Tourism.

Al Tahadi Travel and Tourism is a private Jordanian company established in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 2004. Iyad Ali Elqirem is the CEO of Al Tahadi Travel and Tourism, which offers a range of integrated tourism services that seek to provide all customer needs through an experienced and knowledgeable staff.

across different regions. "We have branches in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Germany, and in the United States of America and as a group we are on the way to venturing out into new branches soon."

Under the holding company, they have ventured out into different verticals to serve the market's



Iyad Ali Elqirem
CEO
Al Tahadi Travel and Tourism

outbound business as well as leisure travel. Al Tahadi Travel is an inbound, Hajj, and Umrah specialist. Lastly, in keeping with the latest trends is Theta Technologies, it is a specialized company for IT travel solutions in the travel industry-supported program (NDC Program) launched by IATA for the development and market adoption of a new, XML-based data transmission standard (NDC Standard). El-

qirem reiterated the importance of participation at ITB Berlin this year, as they will be attending in order that they can derive business from some of the key markets that they focus on.

Elqirem shared, "We want to meet all the suppliers that we are interested in working with and create new opportunity for cooperation with new partnerships all around the globe. It will give us a chance to promote the company's products, such as Information Technology solutions for travel agents and our platform (Click2Book), which allows travel agents to book hotels, transfers, sightseeing activities, and flight tickets and as always find new partners from a wide variety of destinations that will be present. Our aim is to increase nearly 15

per cent to 20 per cent in sales compared to last year."

Currently, the important source markets are Middle East, GCC, Turkey and Europe. Speaking on the impact of the industry and

In terms of MICE and business travel, the CEO is of the opinion that 2023 will be the year where companies are once again allocating budgets for business and MICE travel. "2022 had a good recovery compared with



where it is headed now, he said their ME markets have recovered with more than 70 per cent of total sales prior to the pandemic, which is a promising figure for the future prosperity of travel and leisure traffic, he asserted

the 2019 figures in terms of sales. We expect this year will have booming business traffic because of the COVID curbs released as most of the corporates have a budget for this year to arrange MICE traffic."

Advertorial

We have branches in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, UAE, Germany, and in the USA and are venturing into new branches soon

Elqirem shares their presence in multiple branches of the company within Jordan and outside the country, giving them an edge to be on top of the game serving the most prominent markets

many requirements. Al Sadeq Travel is a specialized company for airline representation and GSAs managed by qualified staff in the aviation field. Al Tahadi Travel specializes in inbound and

Qatar showcases offerings@TITE

Qatar Tourism represented the State of Qatar in the 16th edition of the Tehran International Tourism Exhibition (TITE) 2023. Visitors to the Qatar pavilion were invited to learn about Qatar's unique culture, beautiful outdoor spaces, and warm hospitality, all while exploring some of the newest attractions and favourable travel regulations that are set to boost the visitor experience.

TT Bureau

As the first participation, Qatar Tourism's booth included trade partners Qatar Airways, as well as The Torch Doha, Travel Designer WLL, Rixos Gulf Hotel Doha, and Banana Island Doha Re-

in its tourism industry and showcase its newest tourism and hospitality offerings. In addition, it provided a platform for Qatar to network with prominent travel operators, agencies, and airlines in Iran, to increase business-to-business and business-to-con-

15 target markets identified by QT as a primary source for visitors looking to relax, rejuvenate and take in the Qatar's vibrant culture

sort. The tourism exhibition, which concluded at the Tehran International Permanent Fairground, presented the ideal opportunity for Qatar to highlight the latest developments

sumer awareness on Qatar and provide an update on the destination's offering.

Berthold Trenkel, CEO, Qatar Tourism, said, "Iran is one of



15 target markets identified by QT as a primary source for visitors looking to relax, rejuvenate and take in the Qatar's vibrant culture. Participating in

TITE allows us to share with sellers in Iran the information they need to expand and promote tourism opportunities to Qatar for their local, resident

population. Initiatives such as these are important to help Qatar Tourism achieve its 2030 strategy, which aims to increase the number of visitors

to Qatar by threefold, increase spending by 3 to 4 times, and grow the GDP contribution of the tourism sector to 12 per cent by 2030."

Supporting agents, to service customers

In terms of technology, travel agents are at a stage when they need support on varied new solutions that come into effect on a regular basis. Travelport has been providing necessary knowledge and training for agents to optimise revenue and offer better service options to their clientele over the years, says **Kathryn Wallington**, Head of Middle East, Africa, UK & Ireland, Travelport.

 Shehara Rizly

What are the new revenue building areas for the agents?

A better, modern travel experience means giving customers the best choices across multiple suppliers, products, and ancillaries. It has further improved transparency so that customers know what they are purchasing no matter where they booked their trip. We believe the agents need access to more supplier options that will fuel their ability to sell more air, hotel, and car offers.

With progress in areas such as NDC for airlines, we can support simplified access to more options and offers, more ancillaries and servicing capabilities,



Kathryn Wallington
Head of Middle East
Africa, UK & Ireland, Travelport

which will push the needle for agents and allow them to better service their customers with the best trips options.

How does NDC work for the betterment of the agent?

We support the NDC standard to normalize travel content, and as a result, its intent makes comparison and personalization easier in travel retailing. We

aspire to be a marketplace that is fair and transparent. That is why NDC was created because there is a lack of trust in the marketplace. At Travelport, we are focused on working with our airline partners to manage the complexities for our TMC and agency customers.

Could you share the new areas developed by Travelport for travel experience for traveler and agent that assists them?

The evolution to Travelport is all about making travel retailing experiences work (and feel) more like the internet. We do this by enabling self-service and automation that will allow the customers to activate their own modern digital retail experiences. Over 75 per cent of the global customers have com-

pleted their upgrade to Travelport, allowing us to accelerate delivery of the latest modern retailing tools. We are focused on providing agents the ability

Travelport+ will have access to modern retailing capabilities that will help make their workflows more efficient, as we continue to roll out automation tools that

To help agents get a modern retailing experience so that they benefit from lower costs for travelers, we continue to evolve our Travelport platform

to automate task, giving them time to serve their travelers and expand our robust portfolio of travel content.

Travelport+ is also focused on making the process of managing exchanges easier for agents. Those who have upgraded to

support complex manual ticket-change tasks and simplify trip management. In order to help the agents deliver a modern retailing experience so that they benefit from lower costs and time saving for the agents as well as the travelers, we continue to evolve our Travelport platform.

Since sustainability is focus area in UAE and KSA, how do you work to achieve this?

Travelport recently became the first GDS to join GBTA's sustainability program as a founding partner on the sustainability leadership council to support the corporate travel sector. Travelport is making strides in modernising travel retailing with our Travelport+ platform, which can help retailers determine the best eco-friendly travel itineraries. Travelport has joined Travalyst, as part of our commitment to drive sustainability forward in travel retailing. Travelport will implement the Travalyst data methodology and build capabilities to help its travel management firm and agency customers to accelerate sustainable travel. 

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Sustainable LUXURY

Glorious Spain: offering the luxe life

Luxury travel market, which is on the rise recently, is driven by increasing wealth and a desire for travel. Luxury is an industry that has been dominated by men, but in recent years there has been a growing recognition of women. The push for representation of women in leadership positions within luxury companies. The country has something to offer for visitors from across the globe.



Daniel Rosado
Director, Spain Tourism GCC

“ Spain offers a wide range of luxurious experiences for visitors looking for a high-end holiday. Whether you are looking for a relaxing beach holiday, a cultural getaway, or a more active adventure, Spain has something to offer for everyone seeking a high-end travel experience. The country is home to some of the finest hotels in the world, with many of them offering top-notch amenities, including spa services, gourmet restaurants, and private pools. There are also a wide range of private villas where visitors can enjoy Spain's most scenic locations, such as the Costa del Sol or the Balearic Islands. Spain is about experiences that will make the stay a unique holiday: Fine dining, Spain is known for its exceptional cuisine, High-end shopping, the shopper's paradise, with numerous luxury shopping areas offering a range of high-end boutiques and designer shops and cultural experiences, immersing in a vibrant history and culture experience and sports such as golf or sailing. Spain offers a range of luxurious experiences for visitors looking for a high-end holiday. Whether you are look-

ing for a relaxing beach holiday, a cultural getaway, or a more active adventure, Spain has something to offer for everyone seeking a high-end travel experience. The country is home to some of the finest hotels in the world, with several offering top-notch amenities, including spa services, gourmet restaurants, and private pools. From visiting the world-famous Prado Museum in Madrid to exploring the historic city of Seville and Golf-Spain is a popular destination for golf enthusiasts, with several world-class golf courses and luxurious golf resorts. ”



Namratha Rose
Manager
Marketing & Trade Relations, Spain Tourism

“ The role of women in the luxury segment is multifaceted. Women are key consumers of luxury goods and services, driving demand for high-end products and experiences and many luxury brands are now targeting consumers through marketing campaigns, product design, and retail experiences. The luxury travel market has been on the rise recently, driven by increasing wealth and a desire for experiential travel. Luxury is an industry that has been dominated by men, but in recent years there has been a growing recognition of women. There has been a push for representation of women in leadership positions within luxury firms. Luxury offerings in Spain include high-end fashion, jewellery, leather goods, fine wine, and gastronomy. ”



Maria Parrilla
International Promotion Area
Barcelona Tourism Board

“ Barcelona offers a variety of luxurious, exclusive, and tailor-made experiences in a personalized, unique, and different way. We offer neutral advice and our knowledge about the best professionals and amazing and unusual experiences so that your clients can enjoy an authentic, exclusive, and full of 'local flavor' experience: personalized visits, accommodation in unique hotels, unique gastronomic tastings, wide commercial offer based on quality that combines innovation and local products, exclusive transport among others. ”



Ana Sostres
Market Manager Travel Trade, Madrid Tourism Board

“ If there is one truly captivating thing about Madrid, it is the city's personality. The city's energy wins over everyone who spends time in it. A taste for outdoor living gives it a fantastic, lively atmosphere. Fun, vibrant and cosmopolitan, it is said to be a city that never sleeps. Madrid city is also renowned for being a safe and friendly city where nobody feels like a stranger—it is

easy because you feel like you are just another Madrileño. In recent years, Madrid has garnered global recognition for its friendly, open nature lifestyle that its residents pride themselves on. Unparalleled cultural and leisure offerings and sunny weather most of the year end up winning over even the most demanding visitors. ”

“ Bless Hotel Madrid, the best of living the Madrid experience. As an oasis for the most cosmopolitan and exclusive travelers. It is located on the sophisticated 'Golden Mile' among the most exclusive shops. Experience Madrid from its emblematic Salamanca neighbourhood in a hotel that breathes glamour and sophistication. Bless Hotel Madrid is an icon in the city where one can enjoy a dynamic experience in a historic building featuring the works of top interior designer Lázaro Rosa Violán. This is a meeting point for citizens of the world, curious travelers, lovers of culture, art, music, fashion, and gastronomy. ”



Sandra Polo Canudas
Asia & ME Commercial Director, Bless Hotel Madrid

“ Hotel Arts Barcelona is an iconic urban resort situated where the city meets the sea. With three levels of accommodation—luxury guestrooms, club-level accommodations, and the penthouses—Hotel Arts Barcelona tailors its service to fulfill the needs of each guest. The club combines the comfort of a private lounge offering its own dedicated team and an exclusive dining area. The penthouses, premium and spacious two-story apartments located on the top floors, give a magnificent view of the sea and city. Featuring beautiful interiors and flooded with natural light, the penthouse offers a roster of exclusive services, including a specialized concierge service. ”



Andreas Oberoi
GM, Hotel Arts Barcelona
Barcelona



Juan Manuel Ortiz Pascual
MENA & Asia Marketing Executive, Andalusia
Tourism Board

“ Andalusia has a wide and varied offer, of the highest quality, in various destinations, with first class tourist products and services respond to the most demanding demand. Our visitors seek the essence of the territory, without losing sight of tradition, authenticity and respect for the land they are visiting. With its own personality that is revealed in a glass of generous wine, in the smell of orange blossom, in the touch of tanned leather or in the sound of flamenco singing. Andalusia is a destination, located between Europe and Africa, meeting Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea. Andalusia has been coveted by different cultures throughout history. It is an area in terms of surface than countries such as Austria, Switzerland and Holland. Landscapes and terrain give rise to changes in the environment from the heat of Guadalquivir River Valley through to luxuriant mid-mountain areas, Tabernas desert, and Sierra Nevada.”



Lola Giner
Product Manager
València Tourism Board

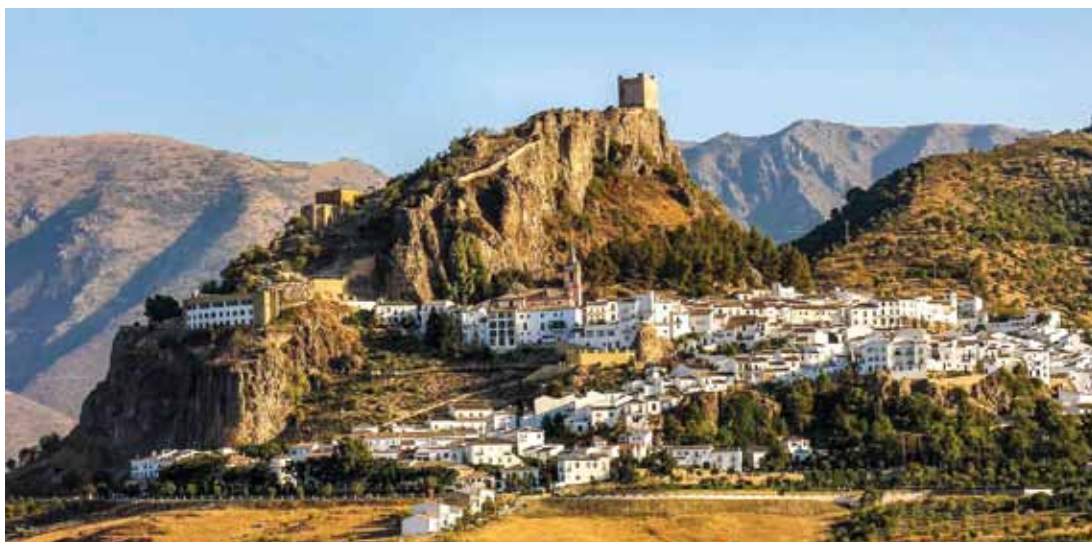
“ Recently voted the best city in the world to live in, València is a perfect combination of tradition and the avant-garde. Its privileged location next to the Mediterranean and its mild climate allow you to practice nautical activities and enjoy outdoor sports such as golf all year round. It offers a rich and varied gastronomy based on local products thanks to the surrounding orchard. Luxury, grand luxury, and boutique hotels; a wide cultural offer with treasures such as La Lonja de la Seda, the Cathedral or the City of Arts and Sciences, and the most authentic shopping combined with major firms make València an exclusive destination.”

“ The Hotel Las Arenas Balneario Resort, the first five-star Grand Luxury Hotel in the Valencian Community is committed to opening to the sea in Valencia. The hotel is located a few minutes from the city centre, occupying a privileged location on the seafront of Las Arenas Beach. A majority of its 253 rooms and suites, which have large terraces with view of the Mediterranean Sea, are equipped with various amenities such as shower and bathtub, plasma, and satellite television, Wi-Fi internet access. Currently, these two colonnades are home to the Las Arenas Convention Centre, which has lively and flexible spaces for organizing all kinds of events. It has as many as 14 halls with a capacity for up to around 2,000 people, equipped with the latest technological design. Furthermore, it has an auditorium that can hold up to as many as 500 people. All the hotel rooms have natural light with views of the imposing sea and no columns to impede their visibility. The Las Arenas SPA offers personalized treatments, according to the requirements of the hotel guests. A majority of the facilities available at the hotel include facial and body treatment cabins, hand and foot care, alternative therapy cabins, Vichy shower, hydro-massage bath, relaxation room, themed stainless-steel pool with chromotherapy, steam bath, sauna, cold pool, ice fountain, sensation shower, alternating Jacuzzis, relaxation garden, hairdressing salon fitness centre, paddle tennis court, indoor heated swimming pool, children's pool and outdoor swimming pool, and the like. At the Hotel Las Arenas Balneario Resort, the hotel guests can enjoy their stay in the spacious rooms blessed with natural sunlight coupled with ideal relaxing atmosphere for your stay in Valencia.”

“ The Hotel Las Arenas Balneario Resort, the first five-star Grand Luxury Hotel in the Valencian Community is committed to opening to the sea in Valencia. The hotel is located a few minutes from the city centre, occupying a privileged location on the seafront of Las Arenas Beach. A majority of its 253 rooms and suites, which have large terraces with view of the Mediterranean Sea, are equipped with various amenities such as shower and bathtub, plasma, and satellite television, Wi-Fi internet access. Currently, these two colonnades are home to the Las Arenas Convention Centre, which has lively and flexible spaces for organizing all kinds of events. It has as many as 14 halls with a capacity for up to around 2,000 people, equipped with the latest technological design. Furthermore, it has an auditorium that can hold up to as many as 500 people. All the hotel rooms have natural light with views of the imposing sea and no columns to impede their visibility. The Las Arenas SPA offers personalized treatments, according to the requirements of the hotel guests. A majority of the facilities available at the hotel include facial and body treatment cabins, hand and foot care, alternative therapy cabins, Vichy shower, hydro-massage bath, relaxation room, themed stainless-steel pool with chromotherapy, steam bath, sauna, cold pool, ice fountain, sensation shower, alternating Jacuzzis, relaxation garden, hairdressing salon fitness centre, paddle tennis court, indoor heated swimming pool, children's pool and outdoor swimming pool, and the like. At the Hotel Las Arenas Balneario Resort, the hotel guests can enjoy their stay in the spacious rooms blessed with natural sunlight coupled with ideal relaxing atmosphere for your stay in Valencia.”



Moisés Martínez
Sales Manager
Las Arenas, Valencia



“ Puente Romano Beach Resort is the award-winning 5-star destination a Mediterranean setting with views across the sea to the mountains of North Africa. With a prestigious beachfront location on the emblematic Golden Mile between Marbella and Puerto Banús, this Leading Hotels of the World property is a 45-minute transfer from Malaga airport's private jet terminal. This Andalusian property has 162 spacious suites. For the utmost in privacy and security, guests can choose from three villas with private pools, gardens, and personalised services and tailor-made destination experiences. Savour the extraordinary line-up of 15 restaurants, including internationally renowned Nobu, COYA and Cipriani, as well as sensational nightlife.”



Henrique Oliveira
Associate Director
Sales, Puente Romano Beach Resort, Marbella

“ Enjoying the ideal holiday with an average temperature of 23°C all year round is possible only in Tenerife. The region's extensive and diverse premium offer guarantees travellers a perfect stay where you can combine rest with a diversity of activities available. Tenerife region has the best four-and five-star accommodations on offer in Europe, consisting of extraordinary four-and five-star hotels near the sea, along with boutique hotels and rural accommodation in the old towns of the emblematic villages in the north. They are also available among banana plantations where tranquillity and peace reigns supreme.”



Elena Mastora
Premium Tourism, Health & Wellness coordinator
at Tenerife Tourism Board

“ In the Canary archipelago, on the island of Tenerife, famous for its climate and landscapes of nature and pure air, is located the Hotel Botánico & The Oriental Spa Garden, a 5-star Grand Luxury hotel and member of the prestigious seal of The Leading Hotels of the World. It is the ideal place for a holiday that combines comfort, exclusivity, impeccable service, and haute cuisine. Its facilities include five à la carte restaurants, an exclusive floor with seven luxury suites of up to 420 m2 and 25,000 m2 of lush gardens, and an oasis of relaxation in The Oriental Spa Garden, with a select programme of yoga retreats and cosmetic surgery by famous Dr. Krulig.”



Kika Luczak
Sales and Marketing Director, Hotel Botánico,
Tenerife, Canary Islands



Travel trade go on a desert safari

Singapore Airlines and Singapore Tourism Board hosted 126 travel partners from UAE for a desert safari as the year's first engagement. It was graced by Consul General, Republic of Singapore, Dubai Raziff Aljunied and GB Srithar, Regional Director, India, Middle East, Africa & South Asia, STB and Renjie Wong Area Director, India, Middle East & South Asia.



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Media Partners



ChatGPT: hype or reality for travel?

Hype about ChatGPT got UAE ministerial forum to investigate reality of nitty-gritties of bringing them into the different industries. Whether it is students using it to do their homework or creating works of art comparable to Picasso prepared in a flash, news is full of stories about ChatGPT or similar AI systems, and their seemingly limitless powers.

TT Bureau

Simon Goddard, CIO, travel search and booking technology provider Vibe, believe that while ChatGPT is a step forward for Artificial Intelligence (AI), any major impact could still be a long way off yet. "I would urge everyone in travel to try and plan a weekend break or family holiday using ChatGPT. For sure, this is much better than anything to date and the potential applications are enormous, but for now do not believe the hype: what you are seeing in the news will not be a reality in travel for a while yet—and to some extent the human element will never be 100 per cent replaced."

Aside from a need for the software to evolve further, Vibe,



Simon Goddard
CIO, travel search and booking technology provider Vibe

which is UK-based but has clients all around the world, including the Middle East—highlights five important factors that mean the roll out of ChatGPT in the travel space will be slower than perhaps some estimate.

Firstly because of a massive barrier to entry in the form of cost that will exclude all but the very biggest of travel compa-

nies. Currently only mega-businesses have the R&D budgets and computing power to make true AI possible. For example, Microsoft is set to invest US\$10 billion in OpenAI as part of a funding round that would value the company at US\$29 billion.

Secondly because without access to personalised data about the user, ChatGPT (or other AI for that fact) cannot recommend anything personalised—meaning that everyone gets offered the same results regardless of age, gender, location, or multiple other basic factors that would be necessary to tailor results. In travel, this is crucial as most good travel agents know their top clients personally. For example, they can build on previous trip knowledge to recommend places and proper-



ties that are immediately suited to the traveler. More advanced factors such as budget, ages of children, birthday milestones and so on would all add further to planning the perfect holiday.

When it comes to travel, as opposed to picking a birthday

present or recommending a restaurant, there is also still too much risk around getting basic but essential data wrong. For example, imagine if AI gives wrong information on what vaccinations are required for a trip or incorrect advice on visas and immigration rules? Or does not allow enough time for a stopover resulting in missed flights. An additional problem is that currently, Chat GPT only knows about information available until 2021 – and more than ever we are now acutely aware that geo-politics, terrorism, pandemics, and disasters can make whole regions no-go areas overnight. This means human checks are necessary and that not only defeats the object of using ChatGPT it also undermines confidence which in turn reduces uptake until it can have

less lag time on knowing about 'current' affairs.

Serious concerns also exist that any at-scale provider who offers an affordable version would monetise this by proving biased results to lead people to their adverts or products. ChatGPT is exploring a subscription model for revenue generation, but it is difficult to see consumers paying for yet another monthly subscription on top of Netflix and countless others. More likely is that Google or Microsoft Bing will take full advantage of more lucrative advertising models with their offering, especially as these are better aligned with their search engine commercial models. At the moment, we understand when adverts are presented to us in the search engine results. ▶

AITF makes a comeback in 2023

The 19th Azerbaijan International Travel and Tourism Fair (AITF) 2023 is back at Baku Expo Center from 4-6 April. Traditionally one of the leading events in the tourism sector, the AITF brings together the leading players in the industry, providing them with the opportunity to establish new contacts and expand the geography of sales and learn about the latest innovations and trends in the tourism industry.

TT Bureau

The AITF exhibition will bring together companies from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cuba, Lithuania, Malaysia, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, the Czech Republic, Switzerland among others.

The exhibition will cover the following areas:

- ❖ Outbound tourism
- ❖ Domestic tourism
- ❖ Inbound tourism

The visiting card of the AITF exhibition are national stands, this year such countries as Belarus, Croatia, Poland, and others will exhibit them. Bulgaria, which is a permanent participant of the exhibition, will be the general sponsor of AITF 2023 this year.



AITF 2023 will feature sectors such as medical tourism, educational tourism, overseas real estate, sports tourism, IT in tourism, hunting and fish-

ing, cruise ships, airlines, national and regional tourism authorities, ministries, embassies, travel agencies, and tour operators.

A rich business program awaits participants and visitors. Traditionally, within the framework of the exhibition, bilateral business meetings (B2B) will be held, at



which representatives of domestic and foreign companies will discuss ways of cooperation and other forms of partnership in person.

AITF is a long-awaited event for professionals in the tourism industry, as international and local companies will have the oppor-

tunity to meet and interact for the development of the tourism sector and present their proposals. They will also be able to assess the needs of the market and the interest of consumers, study the competitive environment and develop a strategy for developing the tourism potential of their country. ▶

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WEGO Dubai

NADINE ABDELKHALEK has been promoted to PR Director at Wego. She is passionate about public relations and storytelling and brings 14 years of experience in the PR and corporate communications industry. She has worked in-house and agency for government and MNCs and is known for leading large-scale PR campaigns, thought leadership programs, and managing high visibility publications. AbdelKhaalek drives the communications and PR for Wego across MENA, and APAC markets and ensures the best exposure for the brand. She has been with the company for four years and is looking forward to another exciting chapter with the largest online travel marketplace in the MENA region.



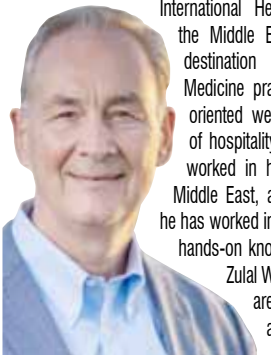
FOUR SEASONS Global Operations

RAINER STAMPFER has been promoted to President, Global Operations of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. He brings experience from longstanding careers with Four Seasons to his new role, demonstrating his talent that will help lead the organization into the future. He joins Four Seasons Executive Leadership Team, reporting to President and CEO Alejandro Reynal, overseeing a diverse and growing portfolio of hotels, resorts and private residences as the company continues to expand its global presence. He is focused on ensuring today's luxury consumer, from travelers to locals alike, experience the quality and personalized service that they have come to expect at every Four Seasons touchpoint.



ZULAL WELLNESS RESORT BY CHIVA-SOM Qatar

HEINRICH MORIO as General Manager of Zual Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som, the newest wellness destination set up in Qatar by Chiva-Som International Health Resorts. The Zual resort is the Middle East's first full immersion wellness destination incorporating Arabic & Islamic Medicine practices and the world's first family-oriented wellness offering. He brings 30 years of hospitality experience to his new role, having worked in hotels across Europe, the USA, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Over the years, he has worked in many roles in operations, giving him hands-on knowledge across a variety of areas. At Zual Wellness Resort, Morio will oversee all areas of operations, sales, commercials, and marketing.



IBIS AL RIGGA Dubai

EMMANUEL UDDIN is appointed as the Hotel Manager of Ibis Al Rigga, Dubai. Prior to joining the ibis Al Rigga, he worked as the Director, Revenue Management at the Novotel, and Adagio Abu Dhabi Al Bustan. In his previous role, he functioned as the co-primary strategic business leader, overlooking performance, growth, and consistent tangible y-o-y RevPAR improvement. He implemented total revenue management with improvement in F&B and contributed to the overall hotel performance strategic meetings by revising actionable plans geared towards enhanced guest experience, cost effectiveness and topline growth. He took on more operational roles with inclusion of Room Service and Telephone Operations, along with Reservations to create the 'All You Need department'.



QASR AL SARAB DESERT RESORT BY ANANTARA Abu Dhabi

Internationally versed GM **JEAN-PAUL DANTIL** has taken the helm of one of the world's most iconic resorts—Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara. With 30 years of experience in the luxury hospitality industry in General Manager and Managing Director roles, Jean-Paul Dantil brings a wealth of commercial, operational and brand knowledge to the resort. After starting in Front Office management at hotels and resorts in Micronesia and Turks & Caicos, Jean-Paul became a Managing Partner at Chris Garrod Partnership, one of the world's leading hotel procurement companies. From 2011, he applied his expertise to managing Ritz Carltons in Vienna and Bahrain, and a cluster of Almanac Hotels across European region.



PREMIER INN DRAGON MART Dubai

ERIC MASALAWALA has been appointed as the Operations Manager of Premier Inn Dubai Dragon Mart Hotel. Eric has 15 years' experience, working with major international brands including, Radisson Hotel Group, Ramada Hotels and Hilton Hotels & Resorts in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Ajman. Born and bred in the UAE, Eric has a bachelor's degree in hospitality from Swiss Hotel Management School in Montreux, Switzerland and an MBA in General Management from Dubai's Emirates Aviation University. The 304-room Premier Inn Dragon Mart opened in 2019 and welcomed 156,000 guests last year. The property is a stone's throw from Dragon Mart—the world's largest Chinese trading hub outside China.



SUN SIYAM Maldives

DEEPAK BOONEADY has been promoted to CEO of Sun Siyam Resorts. He will oversee the company's operation, work closely with the group GM, the resort management teams and with the head office board of directors to create, communicate, and implement the organization's vision, mission, and overall direction. With his recent position as Vice President, Commercial, he was instrumental in taking the company on the path of progress thanks to his vision. During the pandemic, he led his team through challenging times, while restructuring the brand and exploring new methods of business management. With 25 years of experience, he first joined Sun Siyam Resorts as the Group Director of Business Development in 2019.



COLLIERS MENA

Colliers announced the appointment of **RAJA ALAMEDDINE** as Chief Executive Officer in the MENA region, with immediate effect. Colliers partnered with Eltizam Group, the region's largest physical asset management company, early in 2022 and now strategically sits under the IREC Holdings division, part of the Eltizam Group. Alameddine joins Colliers with 30 years of experience in the real estate industry and is an expert in various asset classes, including master-planned cities and large-scale mixed-use communities. With a background in real estate development and investment banking, Alameddine's expertise will be instrumental in accelerating the growth in the region and taking the business to new frontiers.



ACCOR

MEA, Turkey & APAC

DUNCAN O'ROURKE has been appointed as the new CEO, Middle East, Africa, Turkey & Asia Pacific of Accor Group. As announced in July 2022, Accor's new organization is now being implemented throughout the first quarter of the year depending on local legislations. The new structure will allow the group to accelerate growth, address market developments, facilitate accurate and effective fulfilment of guest needs and expectations, and providing clarity and performance to its partners. Under the leadership of Sébastien Bazin, Group Chairman & CEO and Jean-Jacques Morin, Group Deputy CEO as of 1 January 2023.



FAIRMONT Worldwide

MARK WILLIS has been appointed CEO, Fairmont. As announced in July 2022, Accor's new organization is now being implemented throughout the FY, depending on local legislations, regarding the obligations to consult staff. The new structure will allow the group to better address market developments, deliver the highest possible levels of service for all its stakeholders, facilitating effective fulfilment of guest needs and expectations, and providing clarity and performance to its partners. The Luxury & Lifestyle division is structured around collections such as Raffles & Orient Express; Fairmont; Sofitel MGallery & Emblems and Ennismore.



ACCOR

MEA & APAC region

SARAH VILJOEN FERNANDEZ BOKHARI has joined as the VP, PR & Communications, Middle East, Africa & Asia-Pacific for Premium, Midscale & Economy brands at Accor. She is a Marketing, PR, and Communications specialist, with 15 years of experience in the hospitality industry across Europe, Middle East, Turkey, Asia, India, and Africa. In her new role, she will be liable for PR and Communications in the region for 1,000 operating hotels across 47 nations for 12 brands. Overlooking internal communications, external communications, influencer relations, media relations, media monitoring, C suite profiling and crisis communications.



AL ROSTAMANI TRAVEL & HOLIDAYS Dubai

SANJAY THAMBY has joined as the Head, Business Development, Corporate & MICE, Al Rostamani Travel & Holidays (ART). This is a critical role within the ART, as they continue to diversify and grow their product portfolio, with a focus on delivering the best travel experiences to their customers. Thamby will play an important part in managing corporate and MICE businesses. With an experience of 20 years in travel industry, Thamby brings with him an established business network, making it a great combination for success in this role. He has travelled to 55 countries and is an expert in leading and managing all types of Corporates, Leisure, MICE and Sports events businesses. He has worked with several leading brands.



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