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# TRAVTALK



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## Empower travel, transform the world

As the world convenes at World Travel Market in Excel London from 6 to 8 November, the focus this year is on responsible travel or balancing travel amid the challenges of climate change. Sharjah participates with its key partners at the event. **HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA), shares more on their participation.



Dr. Shehara Rizly

**H**is Excellency **Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**, Chairman, SCTDA, said: "Sharjah has been pushing the boundaries of sustainable tourism in the region, offering destinations and travel options that enable the world's growing community of eco-conscious travellers truly meaningful

opportunities to experience the emirate and its diverse offerings in ways that allow them to not only enjoy world-class tourism in Sharjah, but also contribute positively to the environment. Imbuing leisure, hospitality, adventure, sports, art and culture with a nature-tourism balance, and launching over 10 nature-based destinations in the past few

years, Sharjah has given us tangible examples of ecotourism good practices that can be replicated and adapted across the region."

He added, "As SCTDA participates in the World Travel Market under the theme 'You have the power to change travel. And travel has the power to change the world,' we deeply echo this

sentiment greatly, believing that tourists - side by side with nations and cities - wield the power to transform travel into a force for sustainability, aligning with global goals. After successfully attracting about 1.4 million tourists in 2022, we are working for becoming the region's leading ecotourism provider."

Contd. on page 6 ▶

## Tech-powered personalization

**Mamoun Hmedan**, Chief Business Officer, Wego, in a recent interview with **TRAVTALK**, reveals that one of the key travel trends in the region in this age of digitalization is technology empowered personalization.

TT Bureau

**C**ould you share some of the key trends in the region regarding bookings etc?

❖ Sustainable and Responsible Tourism: Wego recognizes that sustainability is not just a buzzword; it's now a defining factor for travellers. Environmental concerns are driving a shift from niche sustainability to a fundamental expectation among modern travellers. Today, travellers actively seek eco-friendly op-



**Mamoun Hmedan**  
Chief Business Officer  
Wego

tions like eco-conscious hotels and carbon-neutral tours, aiming

to make a positive impact on local economies.

❖ Tech-Empowered Personalization: In the digital age, technology is reshaping the travel industry. From AI-driven travel planning and virtual reality previews to blockchain-based secure bookings and personalized recommendations, technology allows travellers to customize every aspect of their journeys. Wego envisions even greater

Contd. on page 16 ▶

## Abha airport to serve 250 nations

Saudi Arabia's Abha International Airport is expected to enhance the prominence of the Aseer region as an attractive tourist destination by increasing air connectivity to 250 destinations.

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**H**is Royal Highness Prince **Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud**, Crown Prince, Prime Minister & Chairman, Council of Economic and Development Affairs, has announced the launch of the master plan for the new Abha International Airport.

The airport aims to embody a consistent architectural identity with the heritage of the Aseer



region, transforming it into a prominent landmark. Its terminal area will expand to 65,000 sq.mt., as planned to complete the first phase by 2028, compared to the current 10,500

sq.mt. of the existing airport. This expansion includes the construction of passenger boarding bridges, self-service facilities for travel procedures, and high-capacity parking facilities.

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# Manama, GCC's tourism capital for '24

Manama, the capital of Bahrain, will be the capital of Gulf tourism for 2024. This was decided at the 7<sup>th</sup> GCC ministerial meeting. The decision is a testament to Bahrain's exceptional contributions to the growth of Gulf tourism sector and will boost the Kingdom's position as a premier global tourist destination, says **Dr Nasser Ali Qaedi**, CEO, Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority (BTEA).

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Bahrain's foresight in recognizing tourism's potential as a vital sector capable of driving economic growth and ensuring sustainable development played a pivotal role in securing the honour. The Kingdom is committed to nurturing a thriving and dynamically expanding tourism sector, with the aim of not only enhancing its reputation as a prominent hub for

regional and international tourists but also fostering stronger tourism cooperation within the GCC region.

**Dr Nasser Ali Qaedi**, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority (BTEA), said, "We take immense pride in this achievement in the Kingdom's tourism sector, which stands as a testament to a series of successful tourism endeavours at local, regional, and international



**Dr Nasser Ali Qaedi**  
CEO, Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority (BTEA)

levels. The Kingdom has positioned the tourism sector at the forefront of its developmental agenda. This strategic position acknowledges the sector's pivotal role in driving sustainable development. Under this vision, substantial investments have been channelled into expanding tourism infrastructure, refining tourism services, and establishing high-quality facilities. These endeavours are aimed at attracting a greater influx of tourists worldwide."

Dr Qaedi added, "Collaborating closely with its public and private sector partners, BTEA persistently crafts success stories, aiming to fulfil the ambitious tourism goals outlined in the 2022-2026 strategy. This intensive effort has transformed Bahrain into a beacon of adaptability, diversity, and consistent tourism growth within

the launch of several high-quality tourism initiatives and an array of exclusive travel packages tailored for GCC citizens and residents, these offerings are meticulously designed to attract a broader audience, enhancing tourism appeal across all sectors." The Kingdom of Bahrain has always been a gem of the Arabian Gulf, offering a blend of

**It shows that Bahrain's tourism sector stands as a testament to a series of successful tourism endeavours at local, regional, and international levels**



a remarkably brief timeframe. This achievement was evident last year when the Kingdom welcomed approximately 10 million tourists, surpassing the targeted numbers by an impressive 20 per cent. We assure our GCC visitors of an exceptional tourism year ahead. Anticipate

rich history, vibrant culture, and stunning natural beauty. With this recent recognition, Bahrain aims to draw the attention of tourists from around the world and to embark on a journey filled with unique experiences, warm hospitality, and unforgettable memories. 🌟



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# Kanoo expands reach with new tie-up

Kanoo Travel announces its association with Travel Leaders, a division of Internova Travel Group, one of the world's largest travel service companies. The strategic alliance amplifies Kanoo Travel's international reach, leveraging its deep domain expertise to ensure continued premium service to its clientele and paving the way for future expansion opportunities within the global network.

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Kanoo Travel has announced its association with Travel Leaders, a division of Internova Travel Group, which is one of the world's largest travel service companies and a top-tier corporate travel management company in North America. The strategic alliance amplifies Kanoo Travel's international reach, leveraging its deep domain expertise to ensure continued premium service to its clientele and paving the way for future expansion opportunities within the global network. This partnership was announced at a gala event, which took place at the Museum of the Future in Dubai on October 5.

The fusion of Kanoo Travel's personalized approach with Travel Leaders' extensive state of the art technology offerings promises an unparalleled travel management experience. As part of the Internova Travel Group, Kanoo Travel will now have access to



Travel Leaders' broad suite of services, including online booking platforms, marketing tools, a global destination marketing company network and exclusive hotel programs. Furthermore, a comprehensive technology suite will bolster the servicing of both international and local clientele, providing tools for profile management, trip authorization, consolidated data analytics, ad-

vanced meetings technology and in-depth customer reporting.

Ali Abdulla Kanoo, Chairman - SBU Trading Divisions, commented, "I believe this partnership with Travel Leaders International will be another milestone step for Kanoo Travel. It synergizes with our recent digitalization efforts and opens new doors, giving us new opportunities to

better serve our client base. He added, "Kanoo Travel has taken another step forward, reflecting on our continued dedication to elevate the travel experience. Earlier this year, we introduced Kanoo Travel MORE, expanding our offering with targeted solutions. And today with this alliance, we are even more equipped to provide our clients with an unparalleled travel platform."

Zaeem Gama, Divisional CEO, Kanoo Travel said, "We are thrilled about this collaboration with Travel Leaders, a renowned and revered brand within the Internova Travel Group portfolio. This partnership presents a unique opportunity for Kanoo Travel to further enhance the service experience for our travellers in the GCC. The wealth of tools, innovative solutions and industry

our growth, our core principle remains unchanged. Our clients will consistently experience the superior personal attention and service they have always known. With advanced digital tools at our disposal, we can elevate our offerings across Corporate Services, MICE, and Leisure. We are excited for what the future holds with Travel Leaders International by our side," he added.

## Fusion of Kanoo Travel's personalized approach with Travel Leaders' tech offerings promises an unparalleled travel management experience

best practices that Travel Leaders brings to the table will empower our travel advisors to deliver even more value and broader services to our clients."

He added, "While this partnership marks a pivotal moment in

Gabe Rizzi, President, Corporate Travel Division, Internova Travel Group, stated, "We are excited about our exclusive new partnership with Kanoo Travel and the opportunity to expand our services to travellers across the MENA region."



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# Maldives – ME's favourite getaway

Maldives was one of the first destinations that opened after the pandemic, which created an advantage for the Middle East travellers, who were eagerly on the lookout for exclusive, luxurious destinations with privacy for the entire family. **Thoyyib Mohamed**, CEO and Managing Director, Visit Maldives, speaks to **TRAVEL** on their expectations from the region and plans to attract the guests.

**Dr. Shehara Rizly**

**How important is the Middle East/ GCC market?**

The Middle East comprises some of our major sources who seek the niche and luxury travel experiences that the Maldives has in abundance, making it a perfect destination for any traveller from the region. This region presents a lucrative growth opportunity, aligning perfectly with Maldives' brand. It continues to be one of the most profitable markets to the destination, with a large number of tourists visiting high-end, luxurious properties. Visit Maldives conducts a variety of activities to promote the Sunny Side of Life in the Middle East, from participation in major fairs and exhibitions like Arabian Travel Market, to joint marketing campaigns with travel agents, tour operators, airlines, media publications and broadcasters, because we understand the



**Thoyyib Mohamed**  
CEO and Managing Director  
Visit Maldives

prospective growth numbers of this market.

**Maldives became the most sought-after destination as soon as borders opened. How will you keep the same momentum two years after?**

The Maldives' success story serves as an inspiration to other tourism dependent economies worldwide, highlighting the importance of resilience, innovative

destination marketing, and a commitment to sustainability. The Maldives only closed for a few months during the worst of the pandemic, and since reopening of our borders for tourists in July 2020, we have not looked back. Our arrival numbers improve year by year despite the dip in 2020, and we have not yet failed to achieve the arrival targets set for the year since then.

**What is the USP of Maldives?**

The Maldives has many offerings that set it apart in the eyes of tourists from the Middle East and beyond. Comprising a collection of scattered islands, the Maldives boasts of a distinctive 'one



island, one resort' concept, promising an exclusive vacation experience for visitors. We are

known worldwide as the epitome of luxury, catering exceptionally well to couples, honeymooners, families, and halal travellers, but the Maldives is so much more than just luxury. The destination's allure extends to the MICE and local experiences segments.

**Could you share the initiatives taken to attract more visitors from the ME/ GCC region?**

To attract more visitors from the ME/ GCC region, we consistently strengthen the presence of Maldives in the market through a 360-degree marketing approach. We conduct various PR activities, joint promotions with key partners, participate in major fairs such as ATM & ILTM, conduct Maldives roadshows in different ME/GCC cities, and host familiarisation trips from the region. We maintain a strong presence on social media and digital marketing platforms to ensure the Maldives remains a top-of-the-mind destination.

**Will you be able to share your expectations from ME/ GCC to Maldives this year?**

In general, post the COVID-19 lockdowns, the UAE region has shown a significant increase in the arrival numbers compared to previous years. We had 79,963 visitors from the ME/ GCC region in 2022, and 64,246 by the end of September 2023. **TRAVEL**

**Maldives continues to be one of the profitable markets to the destination, with a large number of tourists visiting high-end, luxurious properties**



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# Europe most favoured by GCC

► Contd. from page 1



**Jamal Abdulnazar**  
CEO  
Cozmo Travel

“The European outbound market stands as a cornerstone of the travel industry, offering diverse opportunities and customer segments, making it indispensable for the global travel market. The primary challenge lies in securing visas, particularly for Schengen states, which can be daunting unless planned

well in advance. In our market, last-minute travel decisions are common, making visa procurement a significant bottleneck. Recent trends reveal a surge in online bookings and a heightened interest in sustainable and experiential travel, reflecting evolving preferences among travellers in a dynamic travel landscape.”



**Aga Pytlík**  
General Manager  
ParliWorld Travel

“Europe is a preferred destination for GCC travellers due to its rich culture, stunning landscapes, luxury shopping, diverse cuisine, and historical significance. This makes it a top choice for people looking as well for exciting adventures and quality. It's a place where you can experience so much in one continent with high-

end shopping districts in cities like Milan, Paris or London, which are the magnets for luxury brands and exclusive designer. Planning European holidays is an exciting prospect, driven by high demand. However, this excitement often goes hand in hand with a significant challenge – the visa application process. This issue has been a topic of discussion, yet we have seen little to no improvement.”



**Akram Adel**  
General Manager  
Al Tayer Travel

“As we all know that the European travel market is the most important outbound tourism segments in the world, not only because of the number of European tourists but also the nature of the European tourists' movements between beach, leisure and culture adding the spend and repeat tourists. United Arab Emirates as a desti-

nation is keen to target the European markets through all the channels between airlines, tour operators, OTAs, B2C channels and that how to reach with all activities such as travel and road shows. And all marketing activities which are adopted by all the tourism authorities in UAE. WTM has been an important travel exhibition and reach for the UK markets and others.”

“From Qatar, European market is one of the core markets for the high-end travellers, and year on year we see the surge in number of travellers from Doha. There are different segments of travellers, predominantly leisure, followed by business, education, and VFR. Italy, France, Switzerland, UK are the key destinations. There is a huge investment from Qatar into these markets in different hospitality sectors. Some of the European countries with good healthcare system do attract many Qataris and other nationalities for further treatment. The biggest challenge is getting the visa in time, although Qatari citizen can avail the e-visa facility to UK but generally the visa is quite time consuming and same is the case with Schengen visa.”



**Rehan Ali**  
CEO  
Tawfleeq Travel

“The European inbound market is indeed crucial for The Tower Plaza Hotel and the Dubai tourism industry as a whole. European travellers provide a vital contribution to the diversity of our guest base and help us maintain a steady flow of visitors throughout the year. Therefore, the European market is a vital segment that we actively target and cater to. European tourists are seeking personalized experiences and flexible booking options that combine accommodation with other services like airport transfers, tours, and meals. Historically, Dubai is already a favourite spot for European tourists. But now, even more European visitors are coming to Dubai. This shows that Dubai is becoming an even more popular place.”



**Haitham Galal**  
General Manager  
Tower Plaza

“The European inbound market is significant for Dubai's tourism industry. Here are some reasons why it is important: European tourists represent a substantial portion of Dubai's visitors, they also make a considerable economic impact with their spending by staying in hotels, dining and shopping. European tourists also add to the diverse mix of nationality to Dubai. Air connectivity is also another major reason that makes Dubai a convenient destination for European travellers. Business and trade also have a major role in the inbound traveller numbers since European countries are significant trading partners with Dubai. European travellers increasingly favour online booking platforms to book their trips to Dubai.”



**Issam Slaimi**  
General Manager  
Golden Tulip Media Hotel



**Dinkar Dasaur**  
General Manager - UAE  
Satguru

“Europe is a major source market for outbound tourism from the UAE. Both locals and residents enjoy its cool weather, natural beauty, snow mountains and historical landmarks apart from the shopping experiences. Lengthy delays in obtaining interview slots for Schengen visa restrict the travel options to Europe. As the national

carriers of these countries are expanding, we hope the visa procedures are also relaxed to promote these destinations. Travellers today want ease, speed and comfort in planning their vacations. Due to capacity restraints the fares are at peak during the travel season. Technological advances have changed the way we travel.”



**Srijit Nair**  
General Manager, EMEA & India  
Rail Europe

“The outbound European market is important, given our focus on European train travel encompassing both point-to-point tickets and passes. Rail Europe, a prominent European train booking platform with a rich 90-year history, collaborates with over 200 rail providers, serves more than 15,000 partners across 70+ countries, and

annually sells approximately 5 million train tickets. And, of course, we look forward to meeting new customers and partners at WTM London to further expand our offers. Interestingly, the United Kingdom and more specifically the London to Paris route is our top route at Rail Europe, for our markets in general, and the IMEA market in particular.”



**Ahmed Soliman**  
Managing Director  
Travel Connections

“Incredibly important, it is the mainstay of travel from the Gulf, and you see by the frequency of flights from the hubs in this area that it remains the biggest region for travellers from the GCC. Some issues still remain, such as visa access. However, these things are changing fast and for some Gulf travellers the introduction of the

ETIAS system and the UK's ETA programme for GCC citizens will ensure freer access to these markets. We have noticed shorter hotel booking windows for travellers from this region, and certainly travelling in smaller groups, and to multiple locations, rather than the traditional habit of de-camping to a single destination.”



# UK, Spain & Germany top choices

“The GCC market is vital for UK tourism, both in terms of visitor numbers and revenue. In Q1 2023, the UK received 196,000 GCC visitors, accounting for 91 per cent of 2019’s visitor numbers, and they spent £518 million, a 5 per cent increase from 2019. Spending is expected to return to pre-pandemic levels in 2023, with visitation anticipated to do the same by 2025, according to forecasts from June 2023. For the full year 2022, the UK welcomed 791,000 GCC visitors, a 35 per cent drop from 2019, but they contributed £2 billion in spending, down 22 per cent from 2019. Importantly, GCC visitors spent an average of £2578 per trip in 2022, which is three times higher than the overall market average, highlighting the market’s significance for UK tourism. GCC travellers tend to have extended stays, averaging around 16 nights, in contrast to the global market average of eight nights. Furthermore, an impressive 82 per cent of holidayers from the GCC region make repeat visits, surpassing the global average of 63 per cent. It’s also worth noting that GCC travellers exhibit a strong loyalty to London, where about half (46 per cent) of their nights spent in 2019 were in London.”



Carol Maddison  
Deputy Director - APMEA CNEA  
VisitBritain

“If we look at the numbers, in 2023 so far we have a 23.7 per cent increase in the number of visitors to Spain, compared to last year, which also showed an increase of 21 per cent in comparison to 2019. This means that the growth trend towards Spain is strong. We are witnessing a 60 per cent increase in expenditure compared to last year, which also experienced an important growth from 2019. This means that GCC residents see Spain as an attractive destination to travel, with numbers growing by the year. As the shopping experience is great in Spain, due to the variety, quality and price of the items in Spanish shops, more and more people decide to make their shopping in Spain. Not to forget the gastronomy and other unique experiences, where expenditure is on the rise. The average long stays for families have been for 7-10 days with quite a few extending up to two weeks. Many stay long periods while some do short visits, like extended weekends, but the average is one week. The main challenge from GCC is the rush for Schengen appointments, especially during summer season. The EU is working on digitalizing the visa process.”



Daniel Rosado  
Director  
Spain Tourism GCC

“This year in H1, the GCC travellers’ overnight stays to Germany were 478,715, showing a 41 per cent growth from 2022 that accounted for 335,000. The GCC region is now the third-largest Asian source market for inbound tourism to Germany. As of the latest data we have, in 2022, we witnessed a revenue of €2.1 billion from GCC guests, a 110 per cent increase as compared to 2021. To breakdown, it was recorded that €4,443 was spent per trip/ per GCC guest, and €405 was recorded for per night/ per GCC guest. As recorded in 2022, there have been long stays from the GCC, with an average of 10 nights per guest. Further to this, we have also recorded a 25.3 per cent rise in H1 2023 as compared to 2022, and an 81.5 per cent increase from H1 2019. We would not call it as challenges but more of enhancing the traveller experience. By this we mean that we have relaunched our sustainability focussed campaign as ‘Simply Feel Good’ as well as nature-friendly campaign called ‘Embrace German Nature’. We also introduced an initiative called ‘Stay a little bit longer’ that allows travellers to explore the country in a much better way.”



Yamina Sofo  
Director  
German National Tourist Office



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# Summer rush at Louvre Abu Dhabi

Louvre Abu Dhabi has welcomed more than 200,000 visitors between June and August this year, setting a record in number of summer visitors since the art museum's opening in 2017. Among other attractions, the museum's summer offerings focused on participatory learning and engagement, as young adults took part in the Art Lab, where they collaborated with UAE-based artists in engaging workshops.

TT Bureau

Louvre Abu Dhabi reaffirmed its position as an internationally renowned cultural institution with more than 200,000 people visiting the art museum between June and August this year. This was the highest visitor turnout since the opening of the museum in 2017, as individuals and families engaged with artworks alike, explored immersive exhibitions, and sought inspiration from the museum's architecture.

To engage the community over the summer period, the museum opened its latest Children's Museum exhibition 'Picturing the Cosmos' to the public on 20 July inspired by the human fascination with the cosmos. As part of the exhibition's programming, the museum also hosted an interactive live call from the space with Emirati astronaut Sultan Al Neyadi, in partnership with Mohamed Bin Rashid



Manuel Rabaté  
Director  
Louvre Abu Dhabi

Space Centre, on 3 August. In just two months, the exhibition welcomed over 30,000 visitors.

The museum's summer offerings also focused on participatory learning and engagement, as young adults took part in the Art Lab, where they collaborated with UAE-based artists in engaging workshops. Using the theme of 'In with the Old and Out with the New', participants explored sustainability through the lens of

the museum. In anticipation of the new school year, Louvre Abu Dhabi also welcomed teachers and children for a free exploratory visit to the museum. Visitors were also able to enjoy a wealth of community activities such as free yoga on International Day of Yoga, which saw yoga enthusiasts gather under the iconic museum's dome.

Manuel Rabaté, Director, Louvre Abu Dhabi, said: "We are thrilled to see the surge in visitation figures this summer on the back of Abu Dhabi's strong tourism numbers. Our exceptional collection, thought-provoking exhibitions and immersive cultural and educational programming have captivated the hearts and minds of visitors from around the world. Louvre Abu Dhabi stands as a beacon of cultural diversity and artistic expression, and we take immense pride in our role as a global platform for cross-cultural dialogue. As we continue to strive for excellence, we remain dedicated to



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enhancing the visitor experience, fostering a deeper connection between our guests and the rich tapestry of human creativity. This summer's resounding success only fuels our commitment to presenting the world's artistic heritage in ways that inspire, educate, and resonate with all who walk through our doors."

The museum also unveiled its collection of new loans and acquisitions, including Les Marionnettes by Jean-Honoré Fragonard (France, 1775 – 1778), Femme à la mandoline (Mademoiselle Léonie assise) (France, 1911) by Pablo Picasso, and more. Visitors also saw exceptional loans from Musée du Louvre, Musée na-

tional des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Musée d'Orsay, Centre Pompidou – Musée national d'art moderne, Musée d'Archéologie Nationale – Saint Germain en Laye, Musée des Arts décoratifs, and the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta, Malta. ➔

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# RSG launches seaplane flights in KSA

Red Sea Global (RSG), the multi-project developer behind the world's most ambitious regenerative tourism destinations, The Red Sea and Amaala, has celebrated the start of its first seaplane flight operated by its subsidiary company, Fly Red Sea. Created to transport guests across crystal-clear waters to The Red Sea's island resorts, it is the first seaplane company launched in the Kingdom.

TT Bureau

The Red Sea is welcoming its first guests this year. Red Sea International Airport is now operational, receiving its first flights last month, and the first two hotels are taking bookings. Upon completion in 2030, the destination will comprise 50 resorts, offering up to 8,000 hotel rooms and more than 1,000 residential properties across 22 islands and six inland sites. The destination will also include luxury marinas, golf courses, entertainment, F&B, and leisure facilities.

"As a pilot myself, I was deeply invested in the efforts to build



John Pagano  
Group CEO  
Red Sea Global

Fly Red Sea. Our goal was to create a company that would allow us to maintain high standards across every guest touchpoint, that would give us the

platform to explore technologies to reduce the aviation industry's carbon footprint, and which would prioritize giving skilled, rewarding career opportunities to the Saudi people. Fly Red Sea achieves this on every level," said **John Pagano**, Group CEO, Red Sea Global.

Managed by a team of aviation specialists, Fly Red Sea's initial fleet of four Cessna Caravan 208 seaplanes are each equipped with boutique, luxury interiors. The fleet will expand in line with the destination's development phases, growing to nine seaplanes by 2028 and is expected to increase to more than 20 by 2030.

Each aircraft can accommodate a pilot and up to six guests with luggage for guest transfers to water-based resorts, or up to nine guests for scenic tours across the entire destination. As a subsidiary of RSG, sustainability is at the core of Fly Red Sea's ambitions. RSG has chosen to




fuel its fleet of seaplanes using Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) from day one. It is also exploring the possibility of fully electric seaplanes, and is continuing to work with ZeroAvia to trial retrofitting Cessna Caravan Seaplanes with hydrogen-electric propulsion technology. RSG is similarly committed to employing national talent, with the first Saudi seaplane captain's license already issued to Fly Red Sea, and the

**Managed by a team of specialists, Fly Red Sea's initial fleet of four Cessna Caravan 208 seaplanes are each equipped with luxury interiors**

first seaplane-specific engineers now hired at the destination.

At Red Sea International Airport, which is the homebase of Fly

Red Sea, a dedicated seaplane runway runs in parallel to the main terminal at RSI and eventually will encompass a dedicated seaplane terminal. 

**Upon completion in 2030, the destination will comprise 50 resorts, offering up to 8,000 hotel rooms and more than 1,000 residential properties**



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# Commitment to sustainability

Coral Beach Sharjah, on the occasion of World Tourism Day, unveiled a bottling plant system, which aimed to stop plastic bottle usage at the property. The launch of the bottling plant reinforces the commitment to sustainability and environmental conservation of Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, which is managed by Hospitality Management Holding (HMH).

TT Bureau

**ftikhar Hamdani**, Area General Manager, Northern Emirates, Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Coral Beach Sharjah, under the patronage of **His Excellency Khalid Jassim Al Midfa**, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA), unveiled a bottling plant at Coral Beach Sharjah on the World Tourism Day. The launch of the bottling plant, aimed to stop plastic bottle us-

age, reinforces the commitment to sustainability and environmental conservation of Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, which is managed by Hospitality Management Holding (HMH). The initiative, first of its kind among hotels in the Northern Emirates, will stop 300,672 plastic bottles from entering the environment annually, the hotel authorities said.

Praising the hotel's unwavering commitment to sustainability, **His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al**



resort's ongoing sustainability efforts. In March 2021, HMH launched "Be Green, Go Green" across all its managed hotels, energizing its CSR programme and took positive actions for environment. Some of the activities that Coral Beach Resort Sharjah performed are planting of 110 trees around the world, the resort even has its own Coralganic Farm. The resort also converted the discarded linen into reusable bags and distributed them to its staff.



**Midfa** said, "Let me congratulate Coral Beach Resort Sharjah for taking a leap in sustainability as a property in Sharjah. I would like to commend everyone in your team for believing in the importance of sustainability, its impact in our day-to-day life in general. We are glad that you started this and looking forward to having more companies to follow the initiative."

Plastic waste reduction has become a primary focus at Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, with

plastic bottles constituting a significant portion of the property's plastic waste, particularly in food & beverage outlets and guestrooms. By implementing this unique water bottling plant, the resort is on its way to eliminating single-use plastics, contributing to a cleaner and greener future.


Hamdani said, "We are dedicated to reducing our overall environmental footprint while maintaining exceptional guest experiences. Our water filtration system ensures the

**The initiative, first of its kind among hotels in the Northern Emirates, will stop 300,672 plastic bottles from entering the environment annually**

production of high-quality water, meticulously bottled in our onsite bottling plant room, and made available in hotel guestrooms and food & beverage outlets." The plastic-free project is part of the

On waste management system, the resort reduces waste to landfill through collaboration with local organisation who help convert recyclable wastes like cans, cartons, gadgets and used oil. 🌱

# Experts share trends at TravelTech meet

TravelTech Middle East Summit & Awards 2023, organised with  as the media partner, concluded in Dubai recently. Experts participating at the event shared latest trends and insights on the way forward in the travel and tourism sector. The special keynote session was delivered by the Saudi Ministry of Tourism, where it was shared that digitalization would be the way forward.





# Two Seasons gets design upgrade

Two Seasons Hotel & Apartments, the 4<sup>th</sup> largest hotel inventory in Dubai and a renowned name in deluxe hospitality, has just completed significant renovation projects that will elevate the guest experience to new heights. With an investment of US \$1.8 million, the project has transformed both the hotel's inner lobby and three apartment floors with 96 apartments consisting of one bedroom and two bedrooms.

TT Bureau

The extensive renovation reflects Two Seasons Hotel's commitment to provide the highest standards of comfort and innovation to its guests. The centerpiece of this renovation is the hotel's inner lobby, which features contemporary and elegant aesthetics, state of the art lighting, stylish furniture and colour palette that blend with the hotel's overall theme creating a welcoming and stylish atmosphere for guests. Guests are provided with ample seating in a relaxed, shared space.



**Freddy Farid**  
Managing Director  
Two Seasons Management Company LLC

living space, with the long-stay guest satisfaction in mind.

The three apartment floors' renovation includes the installation of new flooring, new fixtures and modernized décor to provide guests with enhanced living experience during their stay. The modern interiors are clad in blue and gold accents complemented by a magnificent view of the city and the sea. The new interior design creates a refreshing yet warm

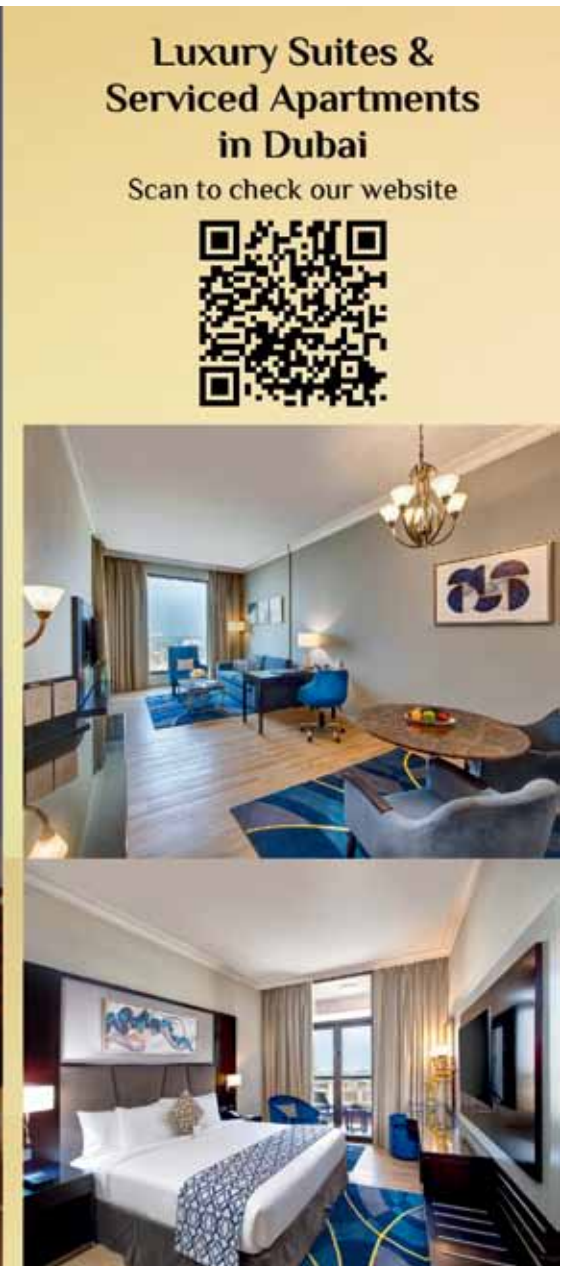
**Freddy Farid**, Managing Director, Two Seasons Management Company LLC, said, "This renovation project which constitutes the second phase of our commitment to offering exceptional guest experience is unwavering, and reflects our dedication to maintain our position as a premier deluxe hotel. We will continue our quest for further upgrades and renovation plans, which will conclude the third phase. It will include five apartment floors with 160



**This renovation project reflects our dedication to maintain our position as a premier deluxe hotel. We will continue our quest for further upgrades**

tion plans, which will conclude the third phase. It will include five apartment floors with 160

apartments of one bedroom and two bedrooms, ballroom, meeting rooms and foyer in 2024."





# Sustainability takes centre stage

**TT** together with Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Ajman Department of Tourism Development, conducted a special panel discussion on the theme ‘Shaping the sustainability future in businesses’ to celebrate World Tourism Day. During the discussion, experts highlighted the challenges and suggested ways to take the sustainability move forward.

**TT** Bureau

**Iftikhar Hamdani**, Area General Manager, Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, moderated the event with seven panellists. Among the panellists were **Khadija Mohammed Turki**, Tourism Marketing & Promotion Expert, Ajman Department of Tourism Development; **Roxana Jaffer**, CEO, Sovereign Hotels; **Sanith de Silva Wijeyaratne**, Director, Climate and Conservation Consortium; **Shubhojit Mahalonobis**, Director and Managing Partner, Danube Home and Hospitality Solutions; **John Horgan**, Director, Eco Burner; **John Whaley**, CEO, Integrity Business Solutions, and **Amish Choksey**, Partner and General Manager, Green Gold Eco Tech Fzco.

The keynote speaker opening the floor was young sustainability advocate Sarim Hamdani, who said that sustainability is the need of the hour. “If we don’t take any action at this point of time, there will be severe consequences for the next generation,” he emphasized.

Iftikhar Hamdani, who has been an advocate for sustainability over the past many years, said that it was key to get all businesses involved in making a change. “It is not just a project, but a passion to make that simple change in life to prepare for the future,” he said.

Khadija Mohammed Turki shared the sustainable tourism practices carried out by the Ajman Department



**I think we need to lead by example, and not on a corporate level. It goes down, it boils down to the individual and what we do at homes**

– Khadija Mohammed Turki

sation of water from the atmosphere and how they are looking at supplying water to the African region, which suffers from water scarcity. In terms of their hotels, they reduced the carbon footprint in their 15 properties by 150 tonnes and are looking at further reducing the carbon footprint

and to understand your personal carbon impact,” Wijeyaratne said. He shared various ways that can be measured in terms of the carbon footprint and how they need to be managed.

John Horgan reiterated that over the years there has been

ment of Tourism Development as a government entity and the collaboration with public and private sector, which is an important aspect in order to promote the sustainability goals. “I think we need to lead by example, and not on a corporate level. It goes down, it boils down to the individual and what we do at our own

homes and on our daily aspect. It’s not on a corporate level and the solution we come up with, the challenges we face on an industrial aspect. But what do we do individually when we are in our own homes? We are looking at reducing the lights, switching off the lights, switching off the water, remembering not to waste water when we are gardening and all these things. I personally started myself at home. I segregated my trash. It’s an effort and it takes an effort to do that, but I personally make sure that we have different plans for different types of trash. And I make sure everyone follows the rule and that’s where we leave our impact on the young ones,” she said.

**If we don’t take any action at this point of time, there will be severe consequences for the next generation**

– Sarim Hamdani

Roxana Jaffer reiterated the necessity to focus on people, planet and profit, which are three impor-

Shubhojit Mahalonobis shared their global campaign on aero water, which promotes conden-



tant aspects to focus on, especially in the hospitality industry.

over the next year. “All this is a possibility with the collaboration of both the public and private sectors,” Mahalonobis said.

Amish Choksey spoke about various programmes that he has been working on to ensure sustainable practices, especially with different hospitality projects across the UAE. Sanith de Silva Wijeyaratne emphasized on the urgency to address the issues at hand with climate change. “The need of the hour is future thinking

many challenges, yet they are addressing the issues. “The main fact is change, as it is important that people change now. not in another five years,” Horgan said.

John Whaley and Amish Choksey talked about the forgetting curve, which means when you are small all the good practices are shared with you. However, as you get older you forget those important factors that you once held important. 📌







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# Sustainability future in businesses

**WORLD TOURISM DAY**, together with Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Ajman Department of Tourism Development, conducted a special panel discussion on World Tourism Day on the theme 'Shaping the sustainability future in businesses'. Leaders from various businesses across the globe participated in the session and discussed the contemporary issues and shared valuable inputs with the audience.





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# Tech helping in customized trips

► Contd. from page 1

integration of technology in the travel sector in 2024, with personalization as the bedrock of exceptional travel experiences.

❖ Effortless Travel with Automation: Waiting anxiously for the best travel deals is a thing of the past. Automated bookings have simplified the travel planning

also in terms of people bringing relatives with them on work trips. It is important for Wego to promote a wide range of travel offers and activities to cater to the various travel preferences.

**Tell us more about your acquisition with Travelstop.**

Through this acquisition, Wego aims to address the unique



## From AI-driven travel planning to blockchain-based secure bookings, technology allows travellers to customize every aspect of journeys

process, ensuring a hassle-free experience from start to finish. From securing unbeatable deals to creating automated travel itineraries, automation streamlines travel, enhancing the overall journey for individuals. Wego is leading this paradigm shift.

❖ Bleisure is happening in the Middle East, too. And not just in terms of extended stays where the business traveller decides to stay for the weekend, but

challenges faced by businesses operating in emerging markets, such as fragmented travel options and manual expense reporting. The combined platform will provide businesses with a one-stop solution, enabling them to seamlessly manage their corporate travel needs while gaining greater visibility and control over expenses.

As Wego and Travelstop join forces, both companies are

excited about the opportunities this acquisition brings. By leveraging each other's strengths, the combined entity is well-positioned to redefine business travel and expense management in emerging markets and empower companies to navigate the challenges of a rapidly evolving global economy.

**What are the top destinations for travellers from Saudi, Egypt and India for 2023?**

**Top International Destinations from Saudi:** As more avid globetrotters are taking to the skies this year and travellers from Saudi are no exception, Wego data found that Cairo, Istanbul,

Dubai, Jakarta, and Lahore take the lead as the most popular international destinations from Saudi Arabia in 2023 so far.

**Top International Destinations from Egypt:** According to Wego's 2023 data so far, Kuwait and Jeddah are highly favoured by Egyptian travellers as top international destinations due to convenient accessibility and wide range of attractions. Following these two cities are Dubai, Doha, and Muscat.

**Top International Destinations from India:** According to Wego's data on the preferred international destinations for

Indian travellers in 2023, Dubai and Kuwait top the list, offering

a good example of making booking travel easier with the best price, enriching the whole travel experience, analysing data and recommending the optimal personalized experience. The creation of AI with the use of chatbots is helping assist users to access information 24/7, with machine and deep learning allowing AI to collect and understand information on consumer preferences to better serve them. AI and immersive technologies possess immense potential to elevate consumer experiences

## Artificial Intelligence and immersive technologies possess immense potential to elevate consumer experiences within the travel industry

accessibility and diverse attractions. Finally, Riyadh, Doha and Muscat complete the list.

**Technology has become a way of life for travellers. Would AI be the same in travel?**

AI (Artificial Intelligence) is

within the travel industry. At Wego, we are deploying AI in almost every department. AI-powered assistants or chat bots/ enhanced search engines are becoming an important new gatekeeper for any booking business. ▶

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# Soudah gets masterplan

HRH Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Prime Minister & Chairman, Soudah Development Company (SDC), has launched the masterplan to develop Soudah and parts of Rijal Almaa into Soudah Peaks, which represents a new era of luxury mountain tourism. SDC is owned by the PIF of Saudi Arabia.

TT Bureau

**H**is Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Chairman, Board of Directors, Soudah Development Company, has launched the masterplan to develop Soudah and parts of Rijal Almaa into Soudah Peaks – a luxury mountain tourism destination situated 3,015 metres above the sea level on Saudi Arabia's highest peak. Situated within an extraordinary natural and cultural environment in the Aseer region (southwest Saudi Arabia), the project is a key part of the Public Investment Fund (PIF)'s efforts to diversify the economy by expanding vital industries such as tourism, hospitality, and entertainment, and supporting Aseer development strategy.

HRH Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said that Soudah Peaks represents a new era of luxury mountain tourism by pro-



viding an unprecedented living experience while preserving the natural environment, cultural, and heritage richness. It is strategically aligned with Vision 2030 goals of expanding tourism and entertainment, supporting economic growth, attracting investments, contributing more than SAR 29 billion to the Kingdom's cumulative GDP, and creating thousands of direct and indirect job opportunities. "The masterplan reaffirms our commitment to global efforts

in preserving the environment and natural resources for future generations and aims to contribute to diversifying national income sources and building a strong economy that attracts local and global investments," the HRH said. "Soudah Peaks will be a significant addition to the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia and place the Kingdom on the global tourism map, whilst highlighting and celebrating the country's rich culture and heritage. Visitors will

have the opportunity to discover the beauty of Soudah Peaks, explore its rich culture and heritage, and experience the authentic hospitality of the local community. Soudah Peaks will offer unforgettable experiences amid lush greenery, above the clouds," the HRH added.

Soudah Peaks aims to offer high-end luxurious hospitality services to over two million visitors throughout the year by 2033.

The masterplan is being designed to reflect the local traditional, and architectural styles, and will promote both the cultural and landscape heritage of the region. The destination will be home to six unique development zones: Tahlal, Sahab, Sabrah, Jareen, Rijal, and Red Rock. Each will offer a range of world-class facilities

keys, 1,336 residential units, and 80,000 sq.mt. of commercial space for Soudah Peaks by 2033. The masterplan will be developed over three phases, with 940 hotel keys, 391 residential units, and 32,000 sq.mt. of retail space expected to be completed in 2027, within Phase one. Soudah Peaks is set across more

**Soudah Peaks aims to offer high-end luxurious hospitality services to more than two million visitors throughout the year by 2033**

including hotels, luxury mountain resorts, residential chalets, villas, premium mansion sites, entertainment and commercial attractions, as well as outdoor attractions dedicated to sports, adventure, wellness and culture.

Soudah Development Company will deliver 2,700 hospitality

than 627 sq.km. of awe-inspiring nature, with less than 1 per cent of the land being acquired for building, reflecting Soudah Development Company's commitment to protecting and preserving the environment, following best-in-class sustainability standards, and contributing to the efforts of the Saudi Green Initiative. 🌱



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# Explora Journeys to call in KSA in 2024

Starting November 2023, MSC Cruises will open its first office in Saudi Arabia and also launch a brand-new itinerary from Jeddah, as a part of its commitment to Saudi Vision 2030. EXPLORA II, the second ship of Explora Journeys, will sail in the Middle East in 2024 and visit Jeddah to enable its passengers to visit the city, as well as Al Ula and Hegra.

TT Bureau

The new office of MSC Cruises will be based in Jeddah and house the commercial, sales and marketing functions for both MSC Cruises and its sister company, Explora Journeys, a new luxury cruise brand that began operations in July this year.

MSC Cruises stated that it will start its third season of Red Sea voyages from Jeddah in two months with a new sailing itinerary for international and Saudi Arabia-based holidaymakers. The 294-metre-long 16 deck MSC Orchestra can accommodate up to 2,550 passengers and will operate from Jeddah for six months and offer 20 separate 7-night sailings to Aqaba in Jordan to visit Petra and three destinations in Egypt - Sharm El-Sheikh, Sokhna Port for Cairo and Safaga for Luxor - before returning to the Saudi port. Explora Journeys' second ship EXPLORA II will sail in the Middle East in



2024 and visit Jeddah to enable its passengers to visit the city, as well as Al Ula and Hegra.

Pierfrancesco Vago, Executive Chairman, Cruise Division, MSC Group, said, "We are honoured to have played an important role partnering with the key government bodies to stimulate the establishment of the cruise industry in Saudi Arabia. Initially starting with local cruises

during the pandemic and then international passengers from 124 different countries. We look forward to our third season of cruises from Saudi Arabia for local and international visitors to support the Saudi Vision 2030 and we are pleased to be able to work together to establish the Kingdom as a popular cruise destination. Thanks to our global distribution, we are able to bring international passengers to

Saudi Arabia to experience the richness of the country's heritage and its ability to preserve its traditions and culture all whilst enjoying the incredible experience on board the cruise ship."

Vago further explained why the Cruise Division of the MSC Group, the leading privately held shipping and logistics conglomerate, was opening its first office in Saudi Arabia in Novem-

ber. "MSC has had a presence in the Kingdom since 1996 and our shipping business here has grown exponentially and been an important contributor to the local economy. We are pleased that on the leisure side of things cruising is growing in popularity in Saudi Arabia and as such playing an increasingly important role for us. We are seeing more of the Kingdom's citizens

to selling MSC Cruises and Explora Journeys for our local customers," Vago said.

MSC Cruises has seen its passenger numbers soar by 40 per cent for Saudi Arabia voyages in a 24-month period with visitors from 124 international nationalities experiencing the Kingdom when its ships are berthed in the country. The top five overseas visi-

## MSC Cruises' third season of Red Sea voyages will start from Jeddah in two months with a new sailing itinerary for Saudi Arabia-based holidaymakers

and residents attracted to the great proposition that cruising offers and as such it is important for us to have a physical presence within the country. We are looking forward to opening the doors of our new office that will be dedicated

tor nations for cruises in the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf were Italy, Germany, Spain, France and the USA. The company says it will bring up to 200,000 tourists by sea to Saudi Arabia by this year end, which goes with the Kingdom's Vision 2030. ➔

# ETA for ME travellers soon

Join VisitBritain and the UK Government's Home Office for a webinar on 13 November to find out about the new ETA scheme and why 2024 will be another 'GREAT year' in Britain. The ETA, launched for Qataris in October this year, will be launched for the nationals of all other GCC countries and Jordan in February 2024. It will open boundless opportunities for travellers.

TT Bureau

VisitBritain, the national tourism board of Great Britain, and the UK Government Home Office will conduct a special webinar titled, "Visit Britain with the new Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)" to inform about the ETA, which will replace the Electronic Visa Waiver (EVW) in Qatar from October 2023 and



throughout the GCC in February 2024. The webinar will be conducted on 13 November 2023, 12pm (UAE Time).

2023 has been an important year for Britain with the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III,

Liverpool hosting the Eurovision Song Contest, London's luxury hotel boom and a year-round calendar bursting with festivals and events. 2024 is set to be another "GREAT year" in Britain - from innovative cutting-edge entertainment venues and world-class sporting events to wellness retreats and luxury hotels, there has never been a more exciting time to discover Britain's vibrant cities and lush countryside.

Travelling to the UK is set to be even easier and more affordable for GCC nationals, with the new ETA scheme.

Launching for Qatari nationals in October 2023, followed by nationals of all other GCC nations and Jordan in February 2024, the new ETA scheme will open up boundless opportunities for travellers. For a nominal fee of only £10 per applicant,



## With the new ETA scheme, travelling to the United Kingdom is set to be even easier and more affordable for nationals from the GCC region

the ETA grants multiple entries to the UK over two years or until the holder's passport expires - whichever comes first. The process to apply for the visa


under the scheme is simple and ensures a seamless experience, with most applicants expected to receive a response within days or even sooner. ➔





# PATA promotes 'Travel for LiFE'...

PATA Travel Mart 2023 successfully concluded in New Delhi recently. The three-day event, hosted by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, attracted over 1,000 participants from 46 destinations, including buyers, sellers, industry leaders, as well as youth involved in tourism. The participants involved in networking, valuable sessions on developing tourism strategies.

 Dr. Shehara Rizly

**V**idyavathi, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and Chairman, PATA India Chapter, welcomed the guests at the inauguration of the PATA Travel Mart 2023. She highlighted India's special 'Travel for LiFE' initiative, which aimed to promote sustainability.

"It's a very opportune moment for the Ministry of Tourism to organise this very well acclaimed international event, which is a catalyst for development of tourism in the Asia Pacific region. It's an honour and a very warm welcome to all of you," she said.

She added, "This is one of the most opportune moments because India is just about to complete its G20 Presidency. Tourism is one of the greatest unifiers, and I think PATA symbolizes that. And I think all of us here recognise the importance



Dignitaries at the ribbon cutting ceremony at PATA Travel Mart 2023, organised at IECC, Pragati Maidan in New Delhi

of tourism in bringing hearts and minds together."

Elaborating on the government's initiative, Vidyavathi said, "Travel for LiFE initiative has been inspired by our Honourable Prime Minister's 'Mission for Life', which is lifestyle for environment, which encourages tourists and tourist businesses to take simple yet impactful actions for environmental protection and climate action. The Ministry of Tourism has taken 'Travel for LiFE' as

its motto to promote a cleaner, greener and a more harmonious development of all the tourism institutions. Over the next three days, we are hopeful that we are going to learn from all of you, we learn from each other. But please do immerse yourself in India's hospitality in all its diversity. When you go back home make sure that you take a piece of India in your heart and soul."

Addressing the participants, **Peter Semone**, Chair, PATA,

stressed on the need to focus on five Ps - People, Planet, Prosperity, Partnership and Peace. He reaffirmed the importance of India's 'Travel for LiFE' initiative.

"I just wanted to add that I had the opportunity as the Chair of PATA to do quite a bit of traveling around the Asia Pacific region, and I have to say that the 'Travel for LiFE' program that India has established is the most comprehensive, kind of self-elected

**I think all of us here (at PTM 2023) recognise the importance of tourism in bringing hearts and minds together**

— V Vidyavathi

programme around it. I think that it really encourages people to be responsible. And for me, it's great because it addresses some of my five themes. You know, people, planet, prosper-

ity, partnership and peace. So, I just want to take this moment to congratulate India for the initiative and it's part of the G20, and I think it's a wonderful initiative." 🇮🇳

## ...unites global travel leaders

PATA Travel Mart 2023, organised at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi, brought together international exhibitors and attendees from diverse sectors, offering a unique platform for networking, learning and collaboration. Knowledge sessions during the event highlighted the sustainability trends in tourism, besides providing stats on Indian wedding industry. The event felicitated outstanding performers on the last day.





# Kanoo strengthens its global presence

Kanoo Travel and Travel Leaders signed a strategic alliance to strengthen Kanoo Travel's global reach. This partnership was announced at a gala event attended by travel leaders from across the Middle East. The fusion of Kanoo Travel's personalized approach with Travel Leaders' extensive state of the art technology offerings promises an unparalleled travel management experience.





# Cebu Pacific celebrates 10 yrs in Dubai

On the completion of its 10-year journey in Dubai, Cebu Pacific recently hosted a special thanksgiving dinner for its travel agency partners and Philippine government officials. The event was a celebration of CEB's long-standing history of servicing the Dubai-Manila route and its partnership with the travel trade. CEB currently flies twice daily between Dubai and Manila.

TT Bureau

Cebu Pacific, the Philippine low-cost airline, completed 10 years in Dubai. On this occasion, the airline hosted a special thanksgiving dinner for its travel agency partners and Philippine government officials. The event was a celebration of Cebu Pacific's (CEB's) long-standing history of servicing the Dubai-Manila route and its partnership with the travel trade. It is also CEB's way of expressing gratitude to its travel partners and Philippine government stakeholders for their support in the last 10 years.

Renato Dueñas Jr., Philippine Consul General to Dubai, graced the event, along with representatives from the Al Rais Travel & Shipping Agencies LLC, and CEB's General Sales Agent (GSA) in Dubai and Northern Emirates. CEB flew its maiden Dubai-Manila flight on October 7, 2013, making it the airline's first ever



long-haul flight. It was also the first local carrier to land in Dubai in 15 years.

"Cebu Pacific remains committed to continuously provide our kababayans in the UAE the easiest and fastest connectivity to the Philippines, and link tourists from all over the world to the best destinations in our country," said

Xander Lao, President and Chief Commercial Officer, CEB.

Arlene Tena, Director for Passenger Sales and Distribution, CEB, recalled how the airline's operation in Dubai has helped thousands of Filipinos to find greener pastures in the UAE and be reunited with their families and loved ones in the Philip-

pines. "Indeed, Dubai holds a special place in our hearts. It is a city that embodies the spirit of adventure and the pursuit of dreams, and Cebu Pacific is proud to be a bridge that connects people to our beautiful homeland," Tena said.

CEB currently flies twice daily between Dubai and Manila. The

**Cebu Pacific remains committed to continuously provide our kababayans in the UAE the easiest and fastest connectivity to the Philippines**

airline also flies to 35 domestic and 24 other international des-

tinations spanning across Asia, Australia, and the Middle East. ➡



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# Sustainability key to hospitality

We all have a responsibility to take care of our planet and people, and there are so many processes in hotels that can be vastly improved with regard to sustainability. Monitoring and analysing energy and water consumption, using eco-friendly cleaning products, recycling used products and promoting locally sourced food in the restaurants can be of great help in this direction.

When I founded Aleph Hospitality seven years ago, I was determined to create a sustainable development programme for the hotels under our management in the Middle East and Africa. I sincerely believe that we all have a responsibility to take care of our planet and people, and there are so many processes in hotels that can be vastly improved in regard to sustainability. So, I was thrilled when we were finally able to launch a well thought-out and comprehensive programme in 2022, named Aleph CARES. In this context, CARES stands for Community, Aleph, Responsible, Environment and Sustainability. The programme is based on five pillars: management approach, energy & water consumption, waste management, product selection and CSR & solidarity. All new team members at our hotels receive training in Aleph CARES as part of their induction.

Under the Aleph CARES programme, each hotel in our portfolio is obliged to appoint an Aleph



Cares Pioneer, who is passionate about and responsible for raising awareness of sustainability and finding solutions in his/ her hotel, as well as able to educate their team members in best practices.

We have also made it mandatory for all hotels to monitor and analyse energy and water consumption, have a recycling programme in place, use eco-friendly cleaning products, promote locally sourced food in the restaurants and create

a plan and take action around Corporate Social Responsibility. We are also setting measurable sustainable objectives for all our hotel General Managers (GMs).

On a corporate level, an example of Aleph Hospitality engaging with humanitarian projects is the group's management agreement for three Boma hotels in Kenya, whereby we donate 5 per cent of our fees to the Kenya Red Cross. We are also committed to raising

guest awareness at all the hotels under our management, so guests know how they can do their part to help during their stay.

Across our portfolio of hotels, we already have notable examples in place across the five pillars. At Ramada by Wyndham Addis in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, we are

Green competition where each department will be submitting their plans to be more sustainable. Furthermore, we are growing an organic kitchen garden, recycling water bottles, as well as donating and offering cleaning services to a children's home and a local hospital. At the Best Western Plus Westlands in Kenya, the hotel has

restaurants, we use certified paper for printing, eco-designed materials in the rooms, dispensers and eco-friendly packaging for amenities and offer Fairtrade products.

Other long-term CSR efforts include encouraging the hotels to find and offer sustainable trips and activities close to the hotel, to support local associations that share our moral and ethical values, to donate products being phased out for reuse, such as towels and linen.

## Other long-term CSR efforts include encouraging the hotels to find and offer sustainable trips and activities close to the hotel

planting trees, outfitting the hotel with eco lighting and a water management system, as well as doing much needed community clean-ups. At Century Park Kigali in Rwanda, we have banned all plastic cups, introduced an extensive recycling programme and switched to straws made of rice. At The Boma Nairobi in Kenya, we are currently driving a Go

switched to low-flow showers, introduced a recycling programme, as well as started buying locally sourced products. And the list goes on.

Hotels have many and better options as far as product selection goes. Embracing this, we have banned endangered seafood species from the menus of our hotel



**Bani Haddad**  
Founder & Managing Director of Aleph Hospitality  
(The views expressed are solely of the author.)

# Cebu reconnects with travel partners

Cebu Pacific hosted a special dinner for their travel agency partners and Philippine government officials in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to celebrate the airline's 10 years in Dubai. The event was a great evening of networking and a celebration of CEB's long-standing history of servicing the Dubai-Manila route and its partnership with the travel trade.





# Qatar Tourism trains beachgoers

Qatar Tourism has launched a ‘Beach Expert’ training course, which aims to provide beachgoers with the expertise needed to visit Qatar’s growing beaches, desert camps, hotels and resorts. The training programme, available in Arabic and English, is part of the successful ‘Hospitality Qatar’ programme, which is the country’s first national tourism training programme.

TT Bureau

The ‘Beach Expert’ training course allows applicants to choose the times that suit them. The course is available in Arabic and English and takes about 30 minutes to complete. Upon completion, participants receive a certificate from Qatar Tourism stating that they have acquired the necessary knowledge and experience regarding the latest information about Qatar’s pristine beaches.

Commenting on the course, **Moza Al Maadadi**, Human Resources Specialist, Qatar Tourism, said: “Qatar has beautiful coastlines and crystal clear waters that are admired by residents and many of our international visitors. The Beach Expert course is an opportunity to highlight the refreshing atmosphere that Qatar offers to its visitors, such as the bright sun, clear sea water and soft sand, especially as new beaches are being developed and included in Qatar’s growing hospitality

offerings. We are delighted with the success and growth of the Moyadaf Qatar programme, and invite beach staff who interact directly with the public to explore the latest training courses and be provided with the latest relevant information.”

The flagship programme is part of Qatar Tourism’s Academy of Service Excellence and has accredited more than 35,000 customer and visitor professionals, including hotel concierge staff, shopping mall security staff,



**Beach Expert course is an opportunity to highlight the refreshing atmosphere that Qatar offers to its visitors, such as the bright sun, and clear sea water**

restaurant staff, taxi drivers and service workers. The recent expansion of the Modyaf Qatar programme reflects Qatar Tourism’s


keenness to provide memorable global experiences for visitors and residents alike. The latter addition will also be integrated into exist-

ing initiatives, such as the Qatar Professionals Programme (a training program provided by Qatar Tourism to its overseas partners), as well as the Tour Guide Training Programme. Qatar Tourism invites tourism experts in Qatar to obtain accreditation provided by the Medyaf Qatar programme. To register for the new course, please click on the following link [www.beach-expert.qa](http://www.beach-expert.qa).





# Hospitality leaders meet in Abu Dhabi

Future Hospitality Summit, organised recently in Abu Dhabi, was attended by **HE Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri**, Minister of Economy, UAE; **HE Dr Ghada Shalaby**, Vice Minister, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Egypt; and **HE Mohamed Ali Rashed Alabbar**, Founder, Emaar Properties and Noon.com, and Chairman, Eagle Hills and Americana Group, among others.  partnered for the three-day event.





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# A journey through central **SHARJAH**

The largest safari in the world outside Africa, mighty red dunes, rocky mountains, prehistoric archaeological sites - all in one place - make the emirate's central region a haven for both adrenaline and history junkies who champion sustainable tourism.

 TT Bureau

Sharjah is the third largest and third most populous city in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with a warm and

welcoming multicultural population from over 100 countries worldwide. A tourism hotspot in the UAE and wider Arab region, Sharjah has built for itself a formidable reputation of being one of

the most culturally rich, naturally diverse and family friendly destinations. In central Sharjah, the emirate's biodiversity and wide ranging natural terrains spanning breathtaking mountains and

unspoiled desert offer incredible tourism hotspots for adventure and nature lovers.

Comprising three areas - Al Dhaid, Al Badayer and Mleiha



**Sharjah has built for itself a formidable reputation of being one of the most culturally rich, naturally diverse and family friendly destinations**



- Sharjah's central region has played a formative role in shaping the region's civilisational past. Ancient caravan routes once crisscrossed Sharjah's central region, connecting the east and west coasts for the trad-

ing of dates and pearls. Today, these sandy and rocky terrains that have been guarding the region's prehistoric past have been opened to visitors and tourists worldwide - developed by Sharjah in ways that allows both





## Comprising three areas - Al Dhaid, Al Badayer and Mleiha - Sharjah's central region has played a formative role in shaping the region's civilisational past

small villages, where Bedouin culture is still prominent. There are several desert safari tours that come to Sharjah's central region, where guides will show their guests the best spots to set up camp.

### Adventure and sports

Fossil Rock or Mount Mleiha is a breathtaking vista surrounded by Sharjah's expansive desert. The nature preserve offers plenty of opportunities to experience the UAE's natural landscape through mountain trail hikes, dune bashing, desert camping and stargazing. An absolute haven for adventure seekers and sports enthusiasts who like to pursue their hobbies in nature, the Mleiha Fossil Rock Hiking trail is a must-visit. One of the UAE's most popular hiking trails in Sharjah's Mleiha region, the scenic 10 km trail offers sweeping views of dunes, rocky formations and the stunning desert and mountains of Mleiha from a distance.

130,000-year-old Palaeolithic site, offering insights into early human life in Mleiha. Nearby, 1000cc dune buggies await thrill-seekers, with unique experiences like FatBoy desert bike tours, extreme off-road adventures, and horse riding.

Combining paragliding, natural beauty and the thrill of flying at high altitudes up to 5,000 feet, "Sky Adventures" is also one of the Sharjah's most exciting adventure sport offerings, and a venture that is deeply committed to sustainable tourism.

### Nature and wildlife

A unique natural destination in the UAE, Sharjah Safari is a world-class destination that offers a unique adventure of being in the largest safari outside Africa. The principles guiding the development of the project were that it must involve sustainable land



## Sharjah Safari in UAE is a world-class destination that offers a unique adventure of being in the largest safari outside Africa

use, be respectful of the environment, and have a distinctively African feel.

Located south-east of Al Dhaid, Sharjah Safari is host to more than 50,000 animals, birds, reptiles and mammals representing

120 African and local species. Among them are endangered species like the baby Scimitar-horned oryx. Classified as Extinct in the Wild by the IUCN Red List Authority. The safari leads captive breeding programmes for several such endangered species

it is home to, which is playing a crucial role in preserving them and supporting reintroduction programmes in their former range. Sharjah Safari offers many family-friendly amenities, including playgrounds, drinking water fountains, and African-themed eateries.

The Buhais Geological Park and Fossil Rock in Mleiha are ideal destinations for history and archaeology buffs. Fifty kilometres south-east of the city of Sharjah in a region of exceptional prehistoric and geological significance, Buhais Geological Park features an abundance of marine fossils from over 65 million years ago, spectacular mountain ranges

and ancient burial sites from the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages. The park features five interconnected pods of varying sizes that accommodate exhibition areas, an immersive theatre, a café offering panoramic views of the dramatic Jebel Buhais ridge rising some 100 metres above, a gift shop and other visitor facilities.

Central Sharjah truly stands out as a prime ecotourism destination in the region, thanks to its distinctive landscapes, diverse ecosystems, and unwavering dedication to sustainable development.

history and adventure seekers to experience these sites in sustainable and responsible ways, providing a shining example of how popular tourist hotspots can indeed be built on the foundations of sustainability and innovation for the growing community of conscious travellers and adventurers around the world.

### Al Dhaid, Al Badayer and Mleiha - three jewels of central Sharjah

Less than an hour's drive from Sharjah city, one will find the country's most important archaeological sites at Mleiha, mighty sand dunes like Big Red at Al Badayer, and farming towns like Al Dhaid that reflect the rich heritage and history of UAE.

One might delve into pre-Islamic history, or go trekking, dune bashing, or quad bike riding through open desert. The centre of the emirate is also home to





# SCTDA hosts meet on green tourism

Under the leadership of **His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA), conducted a special panel session to celebrate World Tourism Day, in Sharjah recently. Important stakeholders and partners from private and public sector attended the session and discussed the way forward with sustainability.



## A big step towards sustainability

Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, managed by Hospitality Management Holding (HMH), reinforced its commitment to environment conservation by launching an onsite water bottling plant system. This is the first of its kind among hotels in the Northern Emirates, aiming to eliminate the use of plastic bottles. **HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**, Chairman, SCTDA, commended the resort's commitment to sustainability.





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# Experience Sun Siyam Resorts

Sun Siyam Resorts has an array of accommodation and facilities catering to varied audiences, from families or couples, to Gen Z travellers, especially from the Middle East. The Maldives isn't just the perfect setting for romance - it's also a dream destination for multi-generational families and groups of friends hoping to make long-lasting memories, as it ensures comfortable stay and activities to suit every age.



### Sun Siyam Iru Fushi

It is more suited for families and couples looking for pure relaxation, rejuvenation and reconnection. It offers multiple dining options, and high level service with their personalized experiences guaranteed to guests. Ringed by a whiter-than-white sand beach offers the height of affordable luxury for families, as up to two children aged under 15 can stay - and dine - for free. Feel pampered every day courtesy of the personalized butler service, which helps you to arrange truly special excursions and activities. Learn how to whip up local delicacies during a Maldivian cooking class or give back to the island's breathtaking natural landscape with a tree planting experience. Go on a guided snorkelling 'safari' in the vibrant reef that rings the resort, or spot dolphins on an incredible sunset cruise. Ideal for Finding Nemo fans, kids can go snorkelling and spot clown fish in the Nemo Garden or drop little ones off at the Koamas Kidz Club and take your pick from more than 140 treatments at the award-winning The Spa by Thalgo France, a restorative oasis set among the perfumed greenery at the heart of the island.



### Sun Siyam Vilu Reef

Most suited for couples seeking the true Maldives experience with one of the most pristine house-reefs and repeat guest factor. Guests can stay at the water villas of Sun Siyam Vilu Reef Maldives and enjoy 5-star luxury with the sand beneath your feet. The ultimate haven for honeymooners, sink into new levels of relaxation with the waves as your soundtrack. You'll soon see why we welcome back so many familiar faces year after year. The water villas at Sun Siyam Vilu Reef are surrounded by some of the best coral reef in the Maldives, we have shared the resort's island home with exotic flora and fauna for over 20 years. Coconut palms sway in the breeze, and don't be surprised if you spot a neighbouring heron or hermit crab en-route to breakfast. Slow down the pace and enjoy decadent treatments in our spa, or choose to unwind in the comfort of your own suite or villa. Come evening, join our chefs as they dish up plates with artistry and flair, before ending your perfect day with a private cinema under the stars.



### Siyam World

One of the most energetic resorts catering to groups of friends, families and couples looking for an active holiday with multiple dining options, highlighting world sports arena, water park, horses and ponies, villas with pools as well for multi-gen families. The resort is an unbeatable destination for football fans - special football camps are run by sporting legends like Italian former professional footballer Marco Materazzi, who played for Everton in the Premier League and Inter Milan. And you can also hone your skills at one of the skills clinics hosted by stars like Esteban Cambiasso - a former star footballer for Argentina, Inter Milan and Leicester City - and Walter Samuel, the talented assistant coach for Argentina. There is epic fun to be had at Siyam Water World, the largest inflatable waterpark in the Maldives. Ride a revolutionary seabreacher, dipping over, under and around the water at speed. Or zoom across the waves on the resort's hydrofoil e-bikes - a radical cycling experience on water, these bikes can race at speeds of 11 knots. Or go below the surface with a thrilling underwater jet pack, the first of its kind.



### Sun Siyam Iru Veli

It is said that "chemistry" is the name at Sun Siyam Iru Veli as it is dedicated for couples celebrating something special with one of the best AI propositions out there. For laid-back luxury in an authentic Maldivian setting, choose Sun Siyam Iru Veli, an idyllic island retreat perched in the cyan-blue South Nilandhe Atoll. Plump for the resort's Premium All-Inclusive Signature Plan and you can switch off completely, your every whim catered to from dawn till dusk. The fun begins when your seaplane touches down from Male - you'll be handed a welcome drink and ushered to your glamorous beach villa or overwater villa, each one of them complete with a private pool. As part of the package, start the day with a stand-up paddle-boarding session in the warm waters that lap the island. Feel the sea breeze on your skin with a complimentary windsurfing lesson or go kayaking through the vibrant blue of the sea. Even jet ski credit is part of your stay. For a gentler way to explore the ocean, go snorkelling and discover the kaleidoscopic coral reefs lying beneath the water's surface.



### Sun Siyam Olhuveli

Most suited for adventure seekers, divers - couples and families alike looking for affordable luxury. At Sun Siyam Olhuveli, spanning three paradise islands, there is a wealth of activities to enjoy, whenever you decide to visit. In addition to thrilling subaquatic explorations of secret shipwrecks and world-class water sports, there are opportunities to do some good with local island cleaning sessions and tree planting. Or dive into the sea for a coral planting session where you can help build an artificial reef. The watersports centre offers snorkelling, paddleboarding, kite surfing, windsurfing, jet skis and kayaks, and there is an excellent dive school on site with access to more than 50 dive sites including a secret shipwreck. The ultimate experience for many, is the three point snorkelling tour to get up close and personal with nurse sharks, manta rays and dolphins.




### Sun Siyam Pasikudah

Located in the beautiful pearl of the Indian ocean, Sri Lanka. Pasikudah caters for culture seekers who would like to explore Sri Lanka and seek maybe a quick getaway in Pasikudah and recharge. There is nowhere on Earth quite like Sri Lanka, with its enchanting ancient ruins, exotic wildlife, welcoming locals and butter-scotch beaches. To experience the island nation at its most magical, stay somewhere authentic, friendly and steeped in the natural beauty Sri Lanka is famous for. Lying on the island's sun-warmed eastern coast, the boutique 5-star resort is reopening its doors later this year, after undergoing a stunning renovation. It's part of the Sun Siyam Resorts family, a collection of Indian Ocean retreats known for their unique activity offerings, making for holidays that stay with you forever. Sun Siyam Pasikudah is an ideal base from which to explore the cultural jewels of Sri Lanka, while also offering laid-back beach days and activities galore. This haven for affordable luxury suits every kind of traveller, from honeymooning couples to mixed-generational families and adventurous groups. It is reopening in November.



# Launching



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# MOVEMENTS

## SHANGRI-LA GROUP Dubai

Shangri-La Group has announced the promotion of **HAKAN OZEL** as the new Area General Manager, Operations, for the Middle East, Europe, India, and Americas (MEIA) region. Ozel's career spans over 25 years in luxury hospitality, covering a prolific spectrum of roles—from operating signature hotels and mixed-use properties in prime locations to achieving record milestones in benchmark openings, takeovers, and turnaround assignments. His vision for merging boutique experiences with global standards and disciplined yet bold approach to risk-taking for strategic directions and performance sets him apart in the industry both as a pioneer and a lauded change-maker. In addition to his new role, Ozel will continue to serve as the General Manager of Shangri-La Dubai.



## GEOFFREY TRAVEL Dubai

**GEOFFREY SALATAN**, an industry luminary with 20-year experience, spearheads Geoffrey Travel, a Dubai-based travel agency. As President and Chief Executive Officer, Geoffrey manages all facets of the company, leveraging his history of achieving sustained customer loyalty, cultivating a vast network, and robust trade relationships. One of Geoffrey's hallmark achievements is the Philippine Support Desk, an innovative retail business model that generated multimillion-dollar sales for a prestigious UAE travel agency. This ground-breaking initiative underscores his remarkable capability to deliver exceptional results. Under Geoffrey's astute guidance, Geoffrey Travel is primed to expand its presence and offer unparalleled services to its clientele throughout the region.



## WYNDHAM HOTELS & RESORTS Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts has appointed **MOHAMAD HAJ HASSAN** as Country Director for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In his new role, Hassan will be responsible for driving the company's strategic growth in the Kingdom, while delivering operational excellence across properties and supporting owners. He brings with him a wealth of industry expertise, with a career spanning over 25 years in leadership positions in the Middle East and Africa's hospitality sector. He will oversee the delivery of operational strategies across a growing portfolio of 14 hotels and continue to build upon the projects in Wyndham's pipeline for development in the Kingdom. Parallel to this, he will also work with the teams in Türkiye, Middle East, and Africa functional leadership.



## KEMPINSKI Corporate Office

Kempinski Hotels has appointed **JAD MOUKHEIBER** as Chief Legal Officer (CLO) and Member of the Management Board. In the new role, he will lead the overall legal function of the luxury hotel group overseeing all areas of Legal, Compliance, Risk Management and Corporate Governance and providing legal counsel to all stakeholders. As an experienced professional, Moukheiber has worked with the United Nations Environment Program as a Legal Advisor at the Regional Office for West Asia, based in Bahrain. In 2021, Moukheiber associated with Banader Hotels Company BSC, Bahrain as General Manager, where he has overseen the holding's activities, budget and strategy, while having board advisory and secretarial functions.



## THE RITZ-CARLTON RIYADH Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Ritz-Carlton Riyadh has appointed **MAZEN ALLAM** as its new General Manager. Allam brings a distinguished career in luxury hospitality and a rich understanding of the Saudi Arabian market to his new role, making him a valuable addition to the hotel's leadership team. Allam's journey in the industry began at Le Meridien Jeddah in 2002, where he started at the Front Desk and swiftly rose through the ranks, eventually becoming Assistant Director of Sales in 2009. In 2011, Allam joined the Rosewood Jeddah. A graduate from Prince Sultan College in Jeddah with a degree in Hotels & Tourism Management, Allam's extensive experience and track record of success make him a valuable addition to The Ritz-Carlton Riyadh.



## AFYAA HOLDINGS Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Afyaa Holding has appointed seasoned hospitality professional, **OLIVIER HARNISCH**, as the Chairman of its Advisory Board. Harnisch, a well-known hospitality leader with more than three decades of industry experience spanning operations, management, and investment, will provide strategic guidance for the company's real estate developments in the Al Ahsa region and across Saudi Arabia. As the former CEO of Emaar Hospitality in Dubai and Head of Hospitality for the Public Investment Fund (PIF) of Saudi Arabia, Harnisch is expertly positioned to advise on Afyaa Holding's direction, as it cements its position as a hospitality leader in Al Ahsa. Harnisch is the founder and CEO of Lunasole Hospitality. He also serves as a board member for various companies in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain.



## News in pictures



Amadeus Gulf unveils its new state of the art office in Dubai to accelerate travel and tourism growth



Cozmo Travel inaugurates office in Muscat, Oman



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has achieved Approved Destination Status (ADS), elevating tourism sector cooperation with China



RAK Properties partners with Nikki Beach Global to open first branded resort in Mina Al Arab, Ras Al Khaimah



Kanoo Travel Abu Dhabi and ADDC sign an agreement on travel services



SMC and Partner Ship Design will be the designers for Cruise Saudi's new cruise line, AROYA Cruises



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