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GCC's dynamic growth shapes MICE future

GCC has become the new hub for MICE events over the past few years. The diverse portfolio of world-leading infrastructure, hotels, state of the art event venues and cultural offerings has made the GCC a thriving and dynamic business and events centre. UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman with their ambitious planning of events are making heads turn. Experts share their views with **TRAVTALK**.



Rehan Ali
CEO, Tawfeeq Travel Qatar

“MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Exhibitions) has always been prospering year on year, specially with endemic. Corporates are looking for one to one engagement after a long disconnect. Lots of points are taken into consideration before finalising a destination, specially the ease of travel and the travel requirements. Important is what that destination has to offer for a minimum stay of three-four days. As an agent, we extend all options, including travel, logistics, site seeing, entertainment and full board plan. Morocco, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman have been some of the important destinations for MICE activities.”



Nasir Jamal Khan
CEO, Al Naboodah Travel

“In the era of AI, technology, and remote work, incentive travel holds even greater significance, as industries worldwide strive to sustain and appreciate their employees in ways that foster well-being and purpose. A notable change in MICE trends is the emphasis on sustainability, with responsible tourism practices like carbon offsetting and eco-friendly accommodations gaining prominence. Destinations that prioritise sustainable tourism, such as Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Canada, USA, UK, Japan, Ireland, and GCC countries, are becoming top preferences. The future of business travel is characterised by technological advancements, seamless integration of personal and professional aspects.”

Contd. on page 6 ▶

KSA go-to destination for Chinese

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Georg Arlt, CEO, China Outbound Tourism Research Institute (COTRI), shares with **TRAVTALK** latest trends, as Chinese travellers start visiting the Middle East destinations again.

TT Bureau

Efficient air connectivity between the UAE and China witnessed over one million travellers from China in 2019. Post pandemic as the region awaits the return of Chinese travellers, Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Georg Arlt, Chief Executive Officer, China Outbound Tourism Research Institute



Dr. Wolfgang Georg Arlt
CEO, China Outbound Tourism Research Institute

(COTRI), says that Chinese travellers are now on the lookout for new destinations. “Many Chinese now look for new destinations, they can include Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia,” he said.

The Middle East region's best season is always the last quarter and first quarter due to the

Contd. on page 10 ▶

Delving deep into sustainability

TRAVTALK, the first zero carbon certified publication of the Middle East, along with Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel, will be hosting a special panel discussion on the World Tourism Day on 27 September 2023.

Dr. Shehara Rizly

In keeping with UNWTO's commitment, UAE's dedication as the year of sustainability and COP28, which will be held in November this year, Bahi Ajman Palace and Middle East's first zero carbon certified publication **TRAVTALK** will be



Itikhar Hamdani
Area Manager, Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Coral Beach Sharjah



Sumeera Bahl
Director, TravTalk

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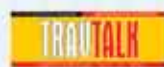
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Bleisure Travel: A rising market demand

This year witnessed a surge in business and leisure travel, benefitting the small and medium scale companies of the Middle East region. In an interview with **TRAVEL TALK**, **JVR Fernando**, Chief Commercial Officer, Satguru, shares the various new trends and the rise of bleisure travel. He underlines the fact that despite digital facilities, everyone wants to close a deal in person and not online.

Dr. Shehara Rizly

Face to face business meeting has become an important aspect in most companies across the Middle East region. There is a tremendous increase in intra GCC business travel, including Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain. **JVR Fernando**, Chief Commercial Officer, Satguru, says today business travel has become imperative, especially for the small and medium corporates. "People say now they have all types of digital platforms, so why travel, but the reality is different, everyone wants to close a deal face to face and not online. When we, as corporates, need to have a fruitful relationship, we ensure that we meet the client face to face," he says.

Digital platforms have been the way in making sure that the networking between companies and individuals remain intact, but



JVR Fernando
Chief Commercial Officer
Satguru

as soon as borders opened, we witnessed the enthusiasm, as every individual started travelling for both business and leisure. Fernando added, "Some impact was present earlier, as people had to switch onto digital platforms. For example, for business meetings, people are sticking to online sessions instead of travelling rather than keeping it as a last resort. Personally, I don't like to do any online meetings. If you ask, is it the best way? No. That can be used when you are

unable to travel, but when you are closing deals or having business relations, in-person is that takes you to a different level. For business travel, it mainly consists of small and medium businesses. Smaller businesses have grown interest in business travel after the pandemic. So, if you look at the budgets, they have gone up from 50 per cent to 100 per cent; that is really shocking to see that they are really looking into travel. Not only that, but they are also looking in areas where they are not



There is a tremendous increase in intra GCC business travel, including Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain

looking at the price, as they are more focused on the safety of the employees. Even when looking for places to stay, they are looking

at safe accommodation, paying a little more. They are focusing on safety measures, which they have increased the budget on."

Fernando reiterated on the new trends of outbound bleisure travel. "There are two types of travel, one is business, and one is leisure. If you look at it, this new trend is clubbing business with leisure. As people were not travelling during the pandemic, now the new trend is that when they would travel for business, their family would join them. Even when a person travels for business, they are

not in a hurry to return on the next flight. They want to extend their stay for a day or two. Moreover, people are not currently staying in big hotel chains; they are looking at alternate accommodation like Airbnb. They are not looking for just a place to stay, they are looking for a place that feels like home away from home. That is another trend that I think is coming up," he concluded.

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13K GCC nationals visit Japan in H1 2023

More than 13,537 GCC nationals visited Japan in the first half of 2023, which is almost close to the 2019 figures. One of the key reasons for this was the visa waiver arrangements and online visa applications in some of the GCC countries, shares **Kobayashi Daisuke**, Executive Director, Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) Dubai Office, in an interview with **TRAVEL FILE**.

TT Bureau

Could you share the latest numbers of visitors from GCC and what has contributed to this growth?

The figure of 13,537 GCC nationals visiting Japan in the first half of this year demonstrates a strong resurgence in interest. This number is remarkably close to the 2019 figure of 13,582, indicating a robust revival of interest in Japan among GCC travellers. Notably, countries such as Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain have surpassed their 2019 visitor numbers, underscoring the strong recovery of inbound tourism from these markets. The recovery in tourism from GCC countries can be attributed to several factors. The recent introduction of visa waiver arrangements and online visa applications in select GCC countries has played a pivotal role. Additionally, the complete lifting of COVID-related border control measures in April has



Kobayashi Daisuke
Executive Director, Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) Dubai Office

further facilitated travel. For comprehensive and up-to-date visa information, I recommend visiting the official website of Japan eVISA <https://www.evisa.mofa.go.jp> Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a video explaining step-by-step procedures how to apply eVISA, please visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRq1JWHza6A>

What are the plans for this region for the next 6 months to one year?

Since the opening of the Dubai Office in November 2021, JNTO

has been conducting various promotional activities in the GCC market, including joint campaigns with various travel companies and airlines, tourism seminars in the UAE and engaging in consumer events. By providing valuable insights, travel

them with essential tools, information, resources, and support to effectively promote Japan as a preferred travel destination. Our aim is to empower agents to curate enticing travel packages and experiences that resonate with their clients' preferences.

The recent introduction of visa waiver arrangements and online visa applications in select GCC countries has played a pivotal role

information, and assistance, we aim to ensure that the journey to Japan is seamless and enriching for every traveller from the GCC.

How do you work with agents? Do you incentivise them?

Collaboration with travel agents in the GCC region is integral to our approach. While we don't directly incentivise agents, we provide

How do they travel to Japan? With their families and staff or do you see young single travellers? Are they more leisure travellers?

Travel patterns within the GCC region are diverse, and we have observed a range of travel preferences. Families often embark on journeys to Japan, creating cherished memories and experiencing

the country's myriad attractions together, including visiting various theme parks, enjoying nature and historical sites. Additionally, we have seen a growing trend of young and solo travellers who are seeking unique cultural experiences and personal exploration, such as visiting anime or video game locations. It's important

to note that the resumption of certain airline routes has played a role in facilitating travel from the GCC to Japan. For instance, Emirates resumed the Dubai-Haneda route in April, and Qatar Airways reintroduced the Doha-Haneda route in June. These developments have contributed to the rising travel to Japan. **TRAVEL FILE**

Important info related to visa

- ❖ Since November 2022, UAE nationals are not required visas to visit Japan.
- ❖ All foreign nationals who would otherwise be required a visa to visit Japan and who reside in the UAE, and all Saudi nationals and foreign nationals residing in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, are now able to simply apply online for a short-term stay visa for the purpose of tourism travel to Japan. Applicants need to apply via the dedicated website Japan eVISA (<https://www.evisa.mofa.go.jp>).
- ❖ Qatari nationals can now apply at Japanese Embassies, Consulate-Generals or Consulates, to have their passport registered. Upon registration, applicants will then receive a 'Visa Waiver Registration' seal within their passport, which will entitle them to multiple short-term stays in Japan without a need for a visa for 3 years.

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'All-inclusive' concept gaining popularity

Travel patterns in the Middle East have been changing in the last few years and the 'all-inclusive' concept has become one of the emerging trends. International hotel chains have been promoting their offerings not just for leisure travellers, but also students and business travellers, sometimes in terms of daycations and staycations. We spoke to a few experts on this specialised concept.



Rochell Saleem
Manager
Holidays and MICE, Travco

“ The all-inclusive concept has become more popular in this region for very practical reasons. For individual travellers, it is easy to budget their expenses on a holiday and pay in advance in their local currency. For MICE and student groups, it allows them to pre-plan meals/restaurants to match the budget, cuisine, and dietary needs of the participants. It also eliminates any 'unexpected' charges at the destination and facilitates a smoother flow of the scheduled program. ”



Aga Pytlík
General Manager
Pan World Travels

“ The concept of all-inclusive hotels has not only gained traction, but also firmly established itself in the leisure market by offering great solution for those seeking complete resort experiences. Particularly ideal for families with kids, these havens ensure a worry-free vacation. They have become the preferred choice special for the European market. All-inclusive packages cover hotels, meals, drinks, and activities, eliminating the hassle of planning and budgeting. ”



Ahmed Einawawy
General Manager
Rixos Bab Al Bahr

“ The all-inclusive concept is not new to the market but has seen an increase in popularity following the pandemic. With a volatile economic landscape across the globe, all-inclusive packages offer travellers peace of mind, knowing exactly how much they will spend during their vacation. Even business travellers increasingly choose all-inclusive options for corporate retreats, conferences, and incentive programs, appreciating the convenience and value it provides. ”



Varsha Pherwani
Travel Counsellor Associate
Travel Counsellors

“ The all-inclusive concept has superseded previous statistics in terms of popularity. This is true especially in resort holidays where families wish to enjoy the facility they have booked to the maximum without venturing outside. The main areas included in this platform are the ever-popular Maldives, Zanzibar, and Turkey resorts. Being the sole agent of all-inclusive holidays by Club Med in the UAE we have seen significant rise in clients booking and rebooking this product. ”



Basel Atassi
Travel Counsellor
Travel Counsellors

“ Regionally, all-inclusive resorts are seen as a way to attract international tourists, while also catering to the preferences of the domestic market, which saw an increase in demand for all-inclusive concept, especially in the second year of COVID-19. These resorts often offer the convenience of a bundled vacation experience. This can be particularly appealing to travellers seeking a hassle-free and budget-predictable vacation, especially families. ”



Sapna Aidarani
Marketing Director
Pluto Travels

“ The all-inclusive concept is years old concept prevalent in island hotels of Seychelles and Maldives where passengers could not go out of the resort or hotel. The nature and purpose of the traveller is changing, they look for a relaxing long holiday where the main purpose is to disconnect from work and refresh. In such cases, they do not prefer a hectic itinerary, rather they prefer one experience in a day and rest of the time they prefer staying by the pool and enjoying activities. ”

Dr. Shehara Rizvi



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Adapting to change: MICE sector transforms

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“ MICE industry has undergone significant transformations, driven by changing preferences and the need for unique experiences. New trends in the MICE sector include the incorporation of sustainable practices, immersive technologies, and personalized itineraries. Emerging destinations such as Dubai, Lisbon, Tokyo, Cape Town, and Bali are gaining popularity for MICE



Paul Stevens
COO, Premium, Midscale & Economy Division, Middle East, Africa & Türkiye, Accor

“ The prevailing momentum of upward growth in the current year is reflecting heavily into the various segments of travel. Business Travel and MICE are correlated to each other, trade fairs, exhibitions, meetings, incentive trips, conventions, congresses, symposium, seminars and business events are back with full swing globally, including United Arab Emirates. Sur-



Barbara Mercier
Associate Director of Sales
Fairmont Bab Al Bahr, Abu Dhabi

“ The MICE industry has witnessed significant transformations in recent years. New trends have emerged, such as hybrid events combining in-person and virtual elements, sustainable practices, and immersive experiences. In terms of destinations, non-traditional locations like SLS Dubai have gained traction. SLS Dubai thrives by offering state of the art event spaces, luxurious accommodations, and



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



Jamal Abdulnazar
CEO
Cozmo Travel

“ The MICE industry has evolved, moving beyond face to face meetings to include virtual and hybrid events, merging physical and online experiences. This enables global participation, cost reduction, and enhanced communication. Sustainability plays a crucial role in event bookings, with eco-friendly venues and carbon offset practices gaining prominence. Accor supports its carbon commitment through tools like energy performance scorecards, a net zero carbon calculator, and other resources, reducing environmental impact, costs, and meeting customers' sustainability demands. Despite technological advancements, event planners remain pivotal in sourcing, logistics, and curating conference experiences. ”



Ibrahim Nalkhade
General Manager
Business Travel LLC, UAE

prisingly, the old known destinations are back in business of MICE such as Thailand, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Visa factor plays a vital role in selecting the destination besides the budget. Travel agents are busy attending MICE centric trade fairs globally. ”

“ The MICE landscape is evolving, shaped by the lessons of the pandemic. At Fairmont Bab Al Bahr, we are noticing shifts in behaviour and planning. While post-pandemic changes initially led to short lead times, we are now observing a return to longer planning windows for 2024 events. However, decision windows are closer to event dates compared to the pre-pandemic times. The incentive segment is resurging towards late 2023 and 2024. Notably, 2024 is marked by a rising demand for larger events, a departure from the mid-size focus in 2023. Flexibility in contracts has emerged as pivotal. Engaging agents and collaborating with DMCs remain vital, leveraging our destination's strengths. ”



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

cutting-edge technology, catering to the evolving needs of MICE travellers. SLS Dubai focuses on personalized service, collaboration, and technology integration. By providing tailored support, incentives, and efficient communication channels, we ensure a seamless planning process of events. ”

“ The MICE industry in the Middle East is experiencing a dynamic shift, with face to face events making a comeback, complemented by virtual or hybrid elements for broader reach. Thriving on responsible business practices and carbon neutral initiatives, sustainability is at the forefront of event planning, while safety still remains a top priority, ensuring attendees' confidence and wellbeing. Destination management companies and tourist boards are actively promoting cities and countries in the region to host large-scale events, fostering economic growth and cultural exchange. Embracing innovation, Radisson Hotel Group's newly relaunched Radisson Rewards loyalty program enhances agent engagements. ”

“ Ras Al Khaimah as a destination is rapidly growing in popularity, evident in its 15.6 per cent increase in overnight arrivals in 2022 compared to 2021. This transcends into our MICE segment, far exceeding our year till date budget. While the local market is interested in hosting their events at Rixos Bab Al Bahr, we predominantly focus on destination groups at the resort, especially from Eastern Europe, CIS and more recently the South African market. Rixos Bab Al Bahr's



Roman Lafner
Multi-Property Director of Sales, JW Marriott Marquis
Hotel Dubai | Al Maha, a Luxury Collection Desert Resort
& Spa | Le Meridien Al Aqah Beach Resort, Fujairah

“ In the MICE industry, there are some notable trends. Due to higher flight prices in several destinations, including Dubai, MICE planners are now opting for short-haul destinations or places in Asia with cheaper flights. Additionally, sustainability has become a critical consideration for corporate clients, and they prioritize destinations and hotels with strong sustainability initiatives. While there are not many confirmation bookings yet, we expect to see a future trend of bookings for large MICE events in fourth quarter of 2024 and 2025, as planners have started showing interest. It is also worth noting that virtual conferences seem to be declining in popularity, and corporate clients now prefer in-person programs once again. ”

“ MICE trends & destinations are constantly changing, allowing for hotel businesses to host unique and meaningful meetings and events. We have seen an increase in modern MICE trends and destinations that have revolutionized the industry and provided event companies with an unprecedented level of creativity and flexibility specially in rates, menu options and other events requirements. These changes offer a chance to



Sushant Pilankar
Manager Leisure
Uranus Travel

“ The popularity of online meetings has faded away, making way for hybrid models of meetings and conferences. Emerging destinations, technological advancements, a more connected world and a continuously growing consumer appetite are few reasons for MICE to have a strong recovery in post-COVID-19 times. These factors will allow us to offer something new to both first-time business travellers and repeat visitors. Most incentive travellers want to engage with local culture, e.g., enjoying local cuisine or celebrating regional festivals and holidays and local experiences becoming some of the top trends to watch in this segment. The traveller expects experiences that match their preferences, from destinations to accommodation and activities. ”

“ No doubt, MICE tourism in the GCC countries and the Middle East region has become a major event, especially with what it promises in terms of future growth of the economies of these countries. The reason for these exponential increases every year is due to the exponential growth of business activities such as client meetings, brand promotion, and employee training activities driving the growth of the global meetings and



Alfio Bernardini
General Manager
Grand Plaza Movenpick Media City

“ Dubai's rise as a leading MICE hub is a blend of strategic positioning and exceptional service, magnetizing businesses worldwide. The city's service standards and renowned hospitality, provide global companies unparalleled quality when selecting their event destination. Reflecting consistent annual growth, Grand Plaza Movenpick Media City hosted a myriad of international events by corporations with regional bases in Dubai, making our 750 plus capacity conference centre a favoured venue. Dubai's connectivity, infrastructure, and service excellence establish it as a crossroads for international business gatherings, making it an unrivaled meeting and connecting hub. ”



Ipek Dem
Assistant Director of Sales
MICE, Accor Hotels, Rixos Bab Al Bahr, Ras Al Khaimah

ultra all-inclusive hotel offering enables us to cater to various guest needs. Being the only property in the UAE with such an extensive offering, we have become a preferred destination for MICE activities with repeat clients. ”



Deepanshu Pandey
Commercial Director
Millennium Airport Hotel, Dubai

reinvent how hotels approach every event with a focus on client engagements. Whether it is a social or corporate themed, these new MICE trends and destinations are primed for success. ”



Ayman Al Qudwa
General Manager
Falcon Travel, Qatar

events industry. Moreover, increasing government initiatives to encourage small and medium enterprises is expected to increase the growth of the Gulf market in the short and medium term. ”

Higher interest rates pinch ME travel

With the global interest rates hitting historical highs – currently pegged at 5.4 per cent in the United Arab Emirates and similar in other countries around the world – and economists anticipating further increases in the coming months, many travel businesses in the Middle East are finding it harder to meet their debt commitments or raise further cash.

TT Bureau

One of the main credit needs for travel businesses, particularly hotels and airlines, is to fund the delay between the provision of services and receiving payment for them. However, this is often overlooked. While this may have been manageable in a low-interest rate environment, this can no longer be sustainable now. Many travel businesses in the Middle East are still paying higher than average interest rates for their credit, due to the poor credit records they gained during the global pandemic.

Spencer Hanlon, Global Head of Travel Payments, Nium, says: "We frequently see travel businesses waiting 60 days, and more, to get paid in the Middle East. At the same time, we see people funding that gap using credit cards, easily paying 12 per cent or more

in annual interest rates. That means they are losing 2 per cent, and more of the value of their services, in just waiting to get paid!"

He adds, "If your bank put transaction fees up by 2 per cent per transaction, you



Spencer Hanlon
Global Head of Travel Payments
Nium

would be angry, and rightly so. And with the current uncertain economic outlook, it is quite possible that even higher levels of interest rates are coming for the region.

What is the answer to this problem? Essentially getting paid more quickly, as slow collection affects the bottom line. "But why are so many travel companies so slow in collecting payments in the Middle East? This is a global phenomenon as far too many travel businesses are still using 1970s era legacy systems to collect payments, often arriving via old fashioned physi-

We see people funding that gap (of 60 days) using credit cards, easily paying 12% or more in annual interest rates. That means they are losing 2%

cal credit card payments or traditional bank transfers," Hanlon says. "In this day and age, there is simply no justifi-

cation for this. The secret to faster collection ultimately lies

with a mixture of automated processes and the use of virtual credit card payments, or 'VCCs'. This combination can significantly reduce costs and improve productivity by automating booking reconciliation and providing greater protection against failed and non-refundable supplier payments," he adds.

Remedial measures

Nium recommends that companies take the following actions to get paid more quickly:

- ❖ Have complete visibility of all transactions: reconciliations should not be time consuming
- ❖ Speed up your processes: no more twice weekly payment schedules, those days are gone
- ❖ Ensure everything is easily controllable: you need to be able to specify precisely the currency of use, where the transactions can occur, and control the dates on which transactions can be executed
- ❖ Adopt modern fintech payment methods that are both instant and low in cost, most probably in the form of virtual credit cards (but other options exist)
- ❖ In short: automate all financial payments processes or you will forever be at the mercy of volatility of all kinds, be that interest rates, inflation, or booking cycles.



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Tourism to create 3.6mn jobs in 10 yrs

Sustainable tourism has been gaining significant traction across the globe. Various destinations demonstrate notable advancements in adopting sustainable approaches, balancing economic growth alongside environmental and social obligations. This evolution in travel aims to balance present needs while safeguarding the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Initiatives such as eco-certifications, community-based tourism, and awareness campaigns, actively promote sustainability by encouraging responsible travel behaviours, and a move away from the mass tourism of the past. In recent decades, there has been a growing trend among tourists from high-income countries to seek out alternative travel options that offer fulfilling experiences and ensure the long-term sustainable development of destinations.

This evolution in travel aims to balance present needs while safeguarding the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Green tourism, also known as sustainable tourism or eco-tourism, has gained significant attention in recent years to combine travel and leisure with environmental responsibility. A recent market analysis conducted by Future Market Insights (FMI) sheds light on the current



and future landscape of the UAE Sustainable Tourism market. The study reveals that the market was valued at approximately US \$34.6 million in 2022. Furthermore, the analysis projects a robust growth trajectory for the UAE Sustainable Tourism market, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 15.2 per cent expected through the year 2032. This emerging trend goes beyond minimising negative impacts and aims to enhance environmental

protection and conservation while generating economic benefits for destinations and communities.

Green tourism can significantly foster sustainable development, stimulate local economies, and generate employment opportunities. Global studies indicate that ecotourism presently represents more than 20 per cent of the overall tourism activities worldwide. Embracing green tourism practices can enhance a destination's

appeal by showcasing its commitment to sustainability. Travellers are increasingly seeking authentic experiences that align with their values, including environmentally friendly options. By promoting sustainable practices, destinations can accentuate their distinctiveness from competitors and attract a growing market segment of eco-conscious tourists. This can lead to increased visitor numbers, longer stay, and higher spending, ultimately boosting

the local economy. Eco-tourism or green tourism has the potential to stimulate job creation, particularly in rural areas and developing regions.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) projections, over 3.6 million people will find employment within this thriving industry over the next decade. As the Middle East continues to witness remarkable growth and investment in tourism, the sector's potential to drive economic prosperity and provide job opportunities becomes increasingly evident. Communication of the long-term economic benefits associated with sustainable tourism will be critical.

Transitioning towards green tourism necessitates investment in sustainable infrastructure, such as renewable energy installations, waste management systems, and eco-friendly transportation networks. These in-

vestments not only contribute to environmental preservation but also create new business opportunities and attract private and public investment. Moreover, energy-efficient buildings and eco-certified accommodations can reduce operating costs for businesses, enabling them to reinvest in other sustainable practices and further contribute to local economic development.



Dr Ross Curran
Assistant Professor at
Edinburgh Business School at Heriot-Watt
(The views expressed
are solely of the author.)

Early cruise bookings up

Marta Cambiaggi, Business Development Manager New Markets, Sales & Marketing, Mediterranean New Markets, UK, East Europe, Africa and Middle East, Costa Crociere S.p.A., shares details.

Dr. Shehara Rizly

Could you share the winter plans for this year?

Given the success of last year of Costa Toscana in Emirates, we have decided to repeat the scheme. We will again have Costa Toscana, our flagship cruise ship, sailing in the Emirates area from mid December 2023 till March next year.

What plans do you have in terms of working with the travel trade?
Last year, we started promotion



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



Will there be any new routes/ships/ports this winter?

The itinerary is slightly different from last year, we spend more time in Dubai, we are also touching Qatar and Oman, with the possibility both of 7 nights cruises and 4/ 3 nights cruises from Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

Do you see any new trends?

The interest is growing. I think last year we put a milestone in the GCC for guests who never approached Costa and this year we are seeing the good result. The new trend is early bookings.

Which will be the main ports this winter in terms of home ports and routes?

Guests will be able to embark on every port we are touching, DXB, AUH, DOH and MCT. ➔

We have an ongoing campaign, which gives our trade partners the possibility to have a super commission if they book Costa Toscana Emirates

and marketing very late, as we were still recovering from the pandemic. This year, we already have a lot of advanced

which gives our trade partners the possibility to have a super commission if they book Costa Toscana Emirates.

Change for the green cause

► Contd. from page 1

celebrating this special day with a diverse panel of speakers, who will be bringing out their latest insights in the industry, along with some very important current discussion points that are crucial in terms of businesses at this point of time. This panel discussion further serves to be an action creator, taking its first steps to make and be the change that every industry requires at this point of time.

Iftikhar Hamdani, Area Manager, Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Coral Beach Sharjah, said, "In

This panel discussion helps in addressing environmental and social challenges, and contributing to long-term business success

— **Iftikhar Hamdani**

emerging trends and successful case studies related to sustainability. It allows experts to share insights on integrating sustainable practices into business strategies. This helps in addressing environmental and social challenges, fostering innovation, improving brand reputation, and contributing to long-term business success.

to a more sustainable future for our environment. Additionally, the discussion can shed light on regulatory changes, consumer preferences for eco-friendly products and how business can adapt and stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market."

We would like to take this opportunity to invite all our avid readers to be part of this very interesting panel session and share their thoughts

— **Sumeera Bahl**

essence, a panel discussion on "Shaping the Sustainability Future in Businesses" is an essential forum as it provides a platform for businesses to learn about the best practices, knowledge exchange,

The panel can provide diverse perspectives and practical ideas for achieving sustainable development goals and ultimately driving positive transformations across industries, contributing

Sumeera Bahl, Director, **NEW TALENT** concluded, "We have been working together with Iftikhar Hamdani for a long period of time sharing the same wavelength when it comes to saving the planet and making a simple change in the industry which is of paramount importance. We would like to take this opportunity to invite all our avid readers to be part of this very interesting panel session and share their thoughts as well with our team who will be on site to speak with you and listen and broadcast your views and ideas as well." ➔

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Hotels with bleisure offerings new craze

Leisure and business travellers from the Middle East are looking for alternative accommodations instead of regular hotel rooms. Tailormade accommodations or those that serve the purpose or suit the individual traveller's needs is a trend that has been emerging over the past few years. Technology has become part and parcel of such accommodation bookings as well.



Cam Dowski
Real Estate Mogul
WeBuyHousesChicago.Co

“With the rise of new work patterns and the flexibility to work remotely, business travellers are looking for accommodations that suit their needs. It's incredible how these new ways of working have transformed the landscape of business travel. It's no longer just about hotels; professionals are seeking unique, comfortable, and cost-effective rentals that provide a home-away-from-home experience. Among the latest trends, I believe, the most promising one is the integration of technology.”



Alyssa Huff
Founder
Sell House As-Is

“From my experience, new ways of working, such as remote work and flexible schedules, have indeed impacted business travel. Many professionals are opting for short-term rentals, like those offered by rental companies, to accommodate their needs during business trips. Regarding the latest trends, one promising trend is the emergence of smart homes in the rental market. These homes are equipped with advanced technology, allowing business travellers to enjoy convenience and comfort.”



Florian Hoven
Co-Founder
KeyWest

“The business travel rentals market has experienced exponential growth, largely influenced by the changing landscape of work. Since 2021, it has become evident, especially in major cities, that individuals now bring their work with them while travelling. Instead of settling for a cramped hotel desk, professionals prefer the convenience of a well-equipped home office setup in an Airbnb. This trend signifies the substantial impact of new ways of working on business travel.”



Mitchell G David
Founder
Beach Life Real Estate

“The exponential growth of the business travel rentals market is a result of various factors, including the increasing globalization of businesses, the rise of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and advancements in technology. The market has witnessed a significant expansion in recent years, driven by the demand for well-managed and cost-effective business travel solutions. The business travel market size, which became \$689 billion in 2021 may grow to \$2.1 trillion by 2031.”



James Thai
COO
Exotic Voyages

“Extended stay apartments have emerged as the most promising trend in the business travel rental market. These fully furnished apartments provide a home-like experience, combining the convenience of hotel amenities with the comfort and functionality of a private space. They often come with additional perks, such as high-speed internet access, fitness centres, and business facilities. Business travellers can enjoy a cost-effective and flexible accommodation solution by opting for such stays.”



Ron Wysocarski
CEO
Wyse Home Team Realty

“The exponential rise of the market for business travel rentals demonstrates the rising preference that business travellers have for flexible and convenient housing options. The dynamics of business travel have considerably changed by new modes of working, such as remote work and virtual meetings, which have led to a move towards visits that are both shorter and more purposefully planned. The most exciting opportunity presented is that of combining cutting-edge technologies like AI.”

Dr. Shehara Rizzy

Chinese tourist interest soars in KSA

► Contd. from page 1

weather conditions, especially for the Chinese travellers. However, this year the borders opened a little later than anticipated, leaving the hopes on the last quarter.

“After three long years, China's borders opened again in early 2023. Business travellers and students started to go abroad immediately, leisure tourists had to renew their passports and in many cases are currently waiting for the processing of their visa application. Not more than half of the air routes from and to China have been re-established and air ticket prices are only slowly falling,” Prof. Arlt said.

“As a result, in the first half of 2023, China's outbound travel restarted slower than expected; less than 25 million Chinese crossed the border, compared to 90 million in the first half of 2019. Fortunately, all surveys and forward booking numbers show that the 100 million Chinese citizens are affluent enough to travel long distance

and the 200 million Chinese who can afford a trip within the region are eager and willing to spend their travel budgets as soon as it becomes possible again. In 2024 China will be again the No. 1 international tourism source market in the world,” he added. “However, the needs and expectations as well as travel motivations and behaviour changed profoundly during the pandemic, with shopping, package tours and sightseeing losing out to activities, authentic experiences, local culture and gastronomy,

between 2020 and 2022. “Shopping is still important, but less so than before. Spectacular and authentic activities and fine dining are getting more important. Many Chinese were impressed by the architecture of the shopping malls, but not so much by the quantity and quality of products offered,” he added.

On how the travel agents could attract more Chinese travellers to this market, Prof. Arlt stated, “Understand the market much deeper, understand that differ-

offer training and consultancy for that, starting with a one day ‘China outbound tourism recovery day’ training and workshop. We are doing consulting and training in order to understand the requirements of the Chinese travellers. Concentration on smaller groups and FIT, product adaptation, new communication and distribution channels.”

diately, leisure tourists had to renew their passports and in many cases are currently waiting for the processing of their visa application. Not more than half of the air routes from and to China have been re-established and air ticket prices are only slowly falling. As a result, in the first half of 2023, China's outbound travel restarted slower

are affluent enough to travel long distance and the 200 million Chinese who can afford a trip within the region are eager and willing to spend their travel budgets as soon as it becomes possible again. In 2024, China will be again the No. 1 international tourism source market in the world. However, the needs and expectations as well as

Not more than half of the air routes from and to China have been re-established and air ticket prices are only slowly falling

special interest tours and the discovery of new destinations,” he further added.

Prof Arlt shared that the luxury segment has seen an increase, as money could not be spent

ent Chinese travellers (young/ old, experienced/ not experienced, and rich/ very rich) have different demands and want different kind of services and products. Adapt products and storytelling accordingly. We

In conclusion, he shared that in terms of the future of Chinese travellers, “After three long years, China's borders opened up again in early 2023. Business travellers and students started to go abroad imme-

than expected: Less than 25 million Chinese crossed the border, compared to 90 million in the first half of 2019. Fortunately, all surveys and forward booking numbers show that the 100 million Chinese citizens

travel motivations and behaviour changed profoundly during the pandemic, with shopping, package tours and sightseeing losing out to activities, authentic experiences, local culture and gastronomy. ▶



AI transforms business decisions

TT Bureau will once again partner with Future Hospitality Summit, to be held in Abu Dhabi from 25-27 September 2023. **Cenk Sidar**, Founder & CEO, Enquire.AI, talks about 'The Power of AI: How Artificial Intelligence is Transforming Business Decision Making,' which will enhance human efficiency, empowering destinations, businesses, workers and travellers to connect in unimaginable ways.

TT Bureau

Will ChatGPT be a bane or boon in the hospitality industry?

It's hard to imagine a scenario in which artificial intelligence (AI) is not a massive boon for the hospitality industry. It is a technology that enhances human efficiency, empowering destinations, businesses, workers and travellers to connect in ways that we have never imagined. At its core, the hospitality industry is far more than 'heads in beds'. It's about placemaking, storytelling, and crafting unforgettable experiences that leave lasting impressions. AI offers the opportunity to enhance every stage of that journey, empowering each individual to enjoy a personal slice of paradise.

Is GCC ready to welcome AI and digitalisation?

Like most regions of the world,



Cenk Sidar
Founder & CEO
Enquire

GCC as a destination is still somewhat fragmented in its digital infrastructure (fibre, compute power, etc.) to accommodate a seamless experience throughout the region. This will improve with time. Two areas that will help GCC fully leverage AI technology are:

- ❖ Continued investment in the workforce pipeline for both the hospitality and tech sectors. These tend to be opposite ends

of the salary scale, requiring a continuum of attainable workforce housing.

- ❖ Continued modernisation and liberalisation throughout the region. Saudi Arabia has demonstrated success with its Vision 2030 plan, which aims to make the Kingdom more business and tourism friendly.

What are the key benefits in terms of digitalisation or use of AI in the hospitality sector, as it is a more guest experience approach?

When fully realised, AI has the potential to transform every aspect of hospitality. It helps us to reconnect as humans using technology. While it's hard to know where AI's strengths and regulations will ultimately lie, we can already see that:

- ❖ Businesses are building new revenue streams with AI, target-



ing ways to delight their customers and solve problems;

- ❖ Workers who use AI are more efficient with their craft (especially remedial tasks), freeing them up to outperform on strategy and detailed execution;

- ❖ Travellers are using artificial intelligence to find and book accommodations, enjoy seamless experiences across multiple vendors, and connect better with locals on the ground.

technology, such as personal computers, social media and smartphones. Early adopters test the technology, doomers declare it dead, the technology improves, and eventually gains mainstream adoption. Gen Z will beta-test the best uses of the technology, then innovate and monetise ways to make AI ubiquitous. If AI follows adoption arcs similar to computers and cell phones,

Gen Z will beta-test the best uses of the technology (of ChatGPT and AI), then innovate and monetise ways to make AI ubiquitous

Whom do you see using ChatGPT and AI? Are they more Gen Z?

The short answer is Gen Z first, with older populations adopting AI over time. We have seen this pattern play out many times with

it will go mainstream in a few short years. If it's more like social media, younger generations may eventually abandon early brands like ChatGPT in favour of niche AI applications. ➤

200 exhibitors to attend QTM 2023

Qatar Travel Mart, to be organised from 20-22 November 2023 in Doha, Qatar, aspires to establish itself as a premier platform for travel and tourism, uniting the world's finest destinations to showcase the latest trends in sports, MICE, business, cultural, leisure, luxury, medical, and Halal tourism. **TT Bureau** will be media partner at this year's Qatar Travel Mart.

TT Bureau

Qatar Travel Mart (QTM) 2023, to be organised by NeXTfairs for Exhibitions and Conference, is proud to announce its esteemed patronage under the guidance of H.E. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Bin Jassim Al Thani, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Qatar Tourism has been revealed as the strategic partner for the second edition of QTM, inviting visitors to embark on a journey of discovery, exploring "Places, People, and Cultures" at the prestigious Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC). Positioned as the exclusive platform for Qatar's travel and tourism industry, QTM 2023 anticipates the participation of up to 200 exhibitors and over 9,000 visitors from more than 60 countries. Attendees can look forward to engaging in the event's illustrious three-day international conference, Global Village, Gala



Rawad Sleem
Co-Founder and General Manager
NeXTfairs for Exhibitions and Conferences

Dinner and Awards Ceremony, Hosted Buyers' Program, providing enhanced B2B opportunities, as well as media familiarization trips and cultural tours.

Rawad Sleem, Co-Founder and General Manager, NeXTfairs for Exhibitions and Conferences, expressed his excitement over QTM 2023, saying, "We extend a warm welcome to exhibitors and visitors for the second edition of Qatar Travel Mart, and we



Berthold Trenkel
Chief Operating Officer
Qatar Tourism

are deeply honoured to have the distinguished support and patronage of H.E. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Bin Jassim Al Thani, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Building upon the tremendous success of the inaugural event held in 2021, which witnessed the gathering of 150 exhibitors and 6,300 visitors from 34 countries, this year's exhibition promises to be even more remarkable. QTM 2023 endeavours to position Qatar as a



Fahad Saad Al-Qahtany
CEO, Mowasalat
(Karwa)

prominent travel and tourism hub, fostering the country's tourism industry growth. By inviting international buyers and visitors to discover the attraction of Qatar and consider it an integral part of their travel plans, the nation's tourism sector emerges as a vital pillar in boosting Qatar's development, transcending its reliance on the oil and gas sector."

Berthold Trenkel, Chief Operating Officer, Qatar Tourism, said: "At Qatar Tourism, we are proud to be

the Strategic Partner of this year's QTM, as part of our commitment to position Qatar as the unrivalled gateway to the Arabian Gulf. This prestigious platform serves as a powerful catalyst, fuelling the rapid growth of our flourishing tourism industry by inviting thousands of visitors from over 60 countries to immerse themselves in the captivating tapestry of Qatar's unique

"Celebrating Qatar's vibrant travel and tourism industry, Mowasalat (Karwa) is honoured to be the transportation sponsor for Qatar Travel Mart 2023. We take pride in paving way for seamless journeys and actively contribute to the local tourism sector. Our commitment extends beyond providing safe and high-quality public trans-


QTM 2023, positioned as an exclusive platform, anticipates the participation of up to 200 exhibitors and over 9,000 visitors from more than 60 countries


experiences. We look forward to forging new connections at this year's edition."

Fahad Saad Al-Qahtany, CEO, Mowasalat (Karwa), said:

port; we also play a pivotal role in the success of international events, offer logistical support to DMCS, and facilitate captivating excursions for the thriving cruise ship sector." ➤

Qatar steals the spotlight in GCC

Last year, Qatar made history by becoming the first nation in the Middle East to host one of the world's largest sporting events, the FIFA World Cup. Today, Qatar stands out as one of the most luxurious family and business destinations in this region and continues its legacy, shares **Bertold Trenkel**, Chief Operating Officer, Qatar Tourism, in an interview with .

 Dr. Shehara Rizly

What are the main focus areas for tourism?

In 2022, Qatar made history as the first ever Arab and Middle Eastern country to host one of the world's largest sporting events, the FIFA World Cup. The impact of the tournament on the country's tourism industry was extraordinary and the momentum has continued, with two million visitors welcomed to Qatar in the first half of the year. Building upon this sporting legacy, sports tourism has become a pivotal focus area for our country. This year, Qatar is set to host the upcoming Formula 1 Qatar Grand Prix. In 2024, we will be hosting the AFC Asian Cup and the World Aquatics Championships, as well as the FIBA Basketball World Cup in 2027 and the Asian Games in 2030.

Beyond sports, Qatar has emerged as an ideal destination for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) events. Our track record of hosting highly successful events in the past has paved the way for upcoming milestones, notably the Geneva International Motor Show in 2023 and the Web Summit Qatar in 2024. Additionally, we are actively expanding our presence in cruise tourism, having witnessed a staggering 152 per cent increase in the season just passed. We were delighted to receive five maiden calls over the 2022-23 season, including the Costa Toscana, Ocean Odyssey, AIDAcosma, Emerald Azzura and Le Bougainville. The steady rise in cruise ship arrivals

and passenger numbers over the years highlight the global interest and growth potential toward this sector in Qatar, and we anticipate even more substantial expansion of our cruise sector in the seasons to come.

Throughout the year, Qatar Tourism hosts world-class events that are a draw to international visitors and that allow the tourism sector to continue to thrive. Through



Bertold Trenkel
Chief Operating Officer
Qatar Tourism

Building upon the legacy, sports tourism has become a pivotal focus area for our country. This year, Qatar is set to host Formula 1 Qatar Grand Prix

multiple campaigns, including Feel Winter in Qatar, Eid in Qatar and Summer in Qatar, Qatar Tourism has hosted the likes of the 19th edition of the Doha Jewellery

program, to name a few. Visiting fans get to enjoy the events, as well as experience the expanded hospitality sector of Qatar, which includes a proliferation of new

By 2030, we aim to become the fastest growing destination in the Middle East. To reach our goal, we take a multi-faceted approach to our strategy, focusing on 15 priority markets that are further segmented to those best suited to point-to-point or stopover travel. Internationally, we are expanding our presence worldwide with representative offices that can promote the destination overseas.

Our strategy also identifies six demand spaces that cross Qatar's strongest tourism assets with traveller needs. Creating new attractions and exciting programs and events within these demand space will help to reach our 2030 goals.

We continue to attract travellers by bolstering a range of engaging marketing campaigns. Most recently, our 'Feel More in Qatar' brand platform has been a re-



and Watches Exhibition, the 11th edition of the Qatar International Food Festival, numerous music concerts featuring acclaimed local, regional and international artists as part of the Qatar Live

hotels and resorts that offer stunning beachside views and exquisite dining options.

How will you attract more travellers to Qatar?

sounding success, showcasing Qatar's rich culture, heritage, cuisine, and warm hospitality to the world. At the same time, we launched our stopover campaign with David Beckham to encourage transit passengers at Hamad International Airport to enjoy a quick 24 or 48-hour stopover and explore the wonders of Qatar.

Additionally, we have an active and diverse calendar that sees over 300 events taking place across the country and which attracts travellers from all corners of the world. Major upcoming events include the Geneva International Motor Show Qatar and Expo 2023 Doha, which are expected to see hundreds of thousands of visitors. At the same time, Qatar has unmatched experiences that make it truly unique. It surprises travellers to

know that we have lush landscapes amid our desert, or that we have a UNESCO-heritage site and the world's first contemporary wellness resort integrating traditional Arabic and Islamic medicine. These assets, among many others, allow Qatar to rise in its profile as a world-leading tourism destination and offer a holiday unlike any place else.

Travelling to Qatar is seamless, and the country ranks as one of the 8th most open in the world in terms of visa facilitation. We grant citizens of more than 100 countries visa on arrival free entry. And for those who need a visa, we have re-launched the Hayya platform to unify and simplify all tourist and business visa processes. To facilitate even smoother travel, Hayya has been enabled for e-gate entry at Hamad International Airport, and for GCC nationals, Hayya provides an option to apply for an entry permit for companions.

Will you be participating in any international exhibitions over the next few months?

Absolutely. We continue to participate in global exhibitions such as the Arabian Travel Market (ATM), the Riyadh Travel Fair, ITB Berlin, ILTM Asia Pacific, Seatrade Cruise Global and many others, to raise Qatar's profile internationally.

Looking ahead, we are proud to be taking part in upcoming international trade shows, such as the World Travel Market (WTM) in London, the Incentives, Business Travel and Meetings (IBTM) in Barcelona and the International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM) in Cannes.

Which source markets are you focusing on during the latter quarter of the year?

Our Tourism Strategy 2030 focuses on 15 priority markets all year around, including the GCC, as well as markets such as the United Kingdom, China, France and Spain. Through its presence in international trade fairs and collaboration with international cruise lines such as Tui and Mein Schiff, Qatar Tourism is able to raise awareness and familiarity of the destination to international audiences, bringing the latest developments to global travellers.

In addition, Qatar Tourism's promotional campaigns are tailored to various markets. For instance, Qatar Tourism launched 'Eid in Qatar,' inviting GCC residents to visit Qatar during the joyous occasion and avail of the attractive promotions across stays and leisure facilities while partaking in Qatar's exciting program of events. 



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Palladium elevates summer excitement

From Opera Spa Nights, a series of opera concerts that take place at the splendid Magness Soulful Spa, allowing guests and external visitors to unwind in the hydrotherapy circuit, aromatherapy showers, and jacuzzi whilst listening to live soprano music, so far has been a successful summer season for Palladium Hotel Group. Here are some of the highlights.

TT Bureau

BLESS Collection Hotels add exclusive luxury experiences

Located at the luxurious BLESS Hotel Madrid, Picos Pardos Sky Lounge by Martini reopens for the summer season on Madrid's Golden Mile reconverted on a tropical oasis tucked away above the hustle and bustle. With a brand-new menu for the season, this cosmopolitan bar known for its spectacular city views and Amazonian décor will play host to a series of events throughout the summer.

Meanwhile, the renowned BLESS Hotel Ibiza is hosting a groundbreaking concept for the season: Opera Spa Nights, a series of opera concerts that take place at the splendid Magness Soulful Spa, allowing guests and external visitors to unwind in the hydrotherapy circuit, aromatherapy showers, and jacuzzi whilst



Picos Pardos Sky Lounge by Martini, known for its spectacular city views and Amazonian décor, will play host to a series of events during the summer

listening to live soprano music. The Opera Spa Night experience takes place every other Wednesday

and is free for hotel guests, while non-guests can enjoy it for 75 euros.

Gastronomy at its best in Ibiza

One of only three restaurants on the White Isle to have been awarded a Michelin star, this summer Etexco Ibiza at BLESS Hotel Ibiza welcomed back Spain's most celebrated chef, Martín Berasategui, to present this season's new tasting menu together with the chef Paco Budia. Honouring both Berasategui's Basque roots and the fin-

est Ibiza flavours and locally sourced ingredients, the visual tasting menu takes diners on a gastronomic journey through both destinations. Standout dishes include lobster carpaccio on an emulsified fennel base; wild sea bass braised with sea-

erto Ruiz, the first Mexican to receive a Michelin star in Europe. The awarded chef, in collaboration with the executive chef of the hotel, introduced a very special menu crafted for The Beach by Ushuaia Ibiza. The culinary proposal combines Mediterranean



weed liqueur; and smoked Iberian pork with touches of oyster tar-masalata and mustard ice cream.

Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel, the iconic hotel part of Palladium Hotel Group's portfolio, welcomes this season renowned chef Rob-

and Pacific flavours, featuring dishes such as soft-shell crab tacos and grilled sea bass with poblano and guajillo sauce using local produce to honour traditional recipes. Sublimotion, located at Hard Rock Hotel Ibiza, is celebrating 10 years in Ibiza.

Women-led hotels tempt female travellers

Looking into a research that shows 87 per cent of woman travellers would give preference to a woman-led hotel and almost 50 per cent of them would pay more, travel metasearch website WayAway for the first time has launched a new category on its maps and listings called 'woman traveller approved points of interest', which caters to the needs of woman travellers.

TT Bureau

Travel metasearch website WayAway recently introduced a new category on its maps and listings called 'woman traveller approved points of interest'. These points of interest could include the fact that the owners, founders, or senior management of a hotel or restaurant or shop are women – or simply that the point of interest has a focus on women.

For example, a museum or monument celebrating women. More than 100 points of interest were included for the recent launch and WayAway aims to increase them by the year-end. Examples of inclusions might be hotels such as the Carpenter Hotel in Texas or the Peter & Paul hotel in New Orleans or the Saint Claude Social Club also in the same city, all of which are owned by woman founders.



Janis Dzenis
Director of PR
WayAway

Commenting over the initiative, Janis Dzenis, Director of PR, WayAway, says, "By launching the woman traveller approved points of interest service we hope firstly to open the door to those who wish to support woman-led businesses, but more importantly to allow woman travellers – whether they are from the Middle East or anywhere in the world – to choose travel experiences that are not only more relevant to them,



but also make them feel safe, particularly in the case of solo female. This is the feedback we hear regularly receiving from the Middle East and other markets around the world: not enough solo woman travellers feel safe when travelling when compared to men."

Dzenis added, "We would also like to point out that this is not

only morally very important, but also that businesses that are able to provide a relevant and authentic appeal to woman travellers would be tapping into a market that represents half the world's population – and an audience that is chronically underserved by the travel industry currently in the Middle East and elsewhere. In other words, there is money to be made here, woman en-

With relevant and authentic services businesses can tap into this market, which is underserved by the industry in the Middle East and elsewhere

trepreneurs (and those lending money to them!) take note. We are working hard to expand the female traveller approved points of interest listings as quickly as we can – with over 200 on-the-

ground WayAway representatives around the world, including in the Middle East looking out for more already – and hope to have around the low thousands of inclusions by the year-end."


What women look out for

WayAway has launched this new feature as a direct response to feedback from woman users, including a recent survey on its Instagram account that showed that

- ❖ 87 per cent would 'very likely' choose a hotel labelled woman-led over one where the ownership is unknown
- ❖ 67 per cent felt 'safety' would be the main advantage
- ❖ Nearly half would pay 10 per cent more for a woman owned or managed hotel

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Thailand's popularity gains momentum in ME

Thailand remains one of the most visited countries by both locals and expatriates from the Middle Eastern region. With unmatched hospitality, wellness facilities, adventure campaigns, and luxury accommodation, the country has everything to attract more visitors from the Middle East region. If you are planning to visit the Southeast Asian country, do not miss Khao Yai and Krabi.



Dr. Shehara Rizly

Bleisure in Bangkok Learn to cook Thai food

House of Taste offers an opportunity to cook Thai food in an authentic atmosphere. You will be taken to purchase fresh produce from the market and then invited to cook amazing Thai dishes that you can taste as well at the end of the class. It is a must try experience for all foodies.

Icon Siam River Cruise

The pier is just outside the famous Icon Siam mall that caters to high-end shopping, as well as local products, including clothes, toys, jewellery, handicrafts and souvenirs. The dinner cruise aboard the vessel is amazing as you would start off your evening with welcome drinks at the top deck and later move down inside to the lower deck for a scrumptious four course dinner.

Sidhorn Kempinski Bangkok

Ideally suited for the Middle

Eastern clientele, Sidhorn Kempinski is a one stop destination where a family can enjoy the shopping area adjacent, eateries across the place to dine or takeaway different types of cuisine and just go up to their luxurious suite for a relaxing evening. The high tea is a must try, as

Sofitel Bangkok Sukhumvit

Located just 10 minutes away from the Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre, where international exhibitions are conducted, the area is quite famous for its many shopping centres. If you stay in Sofitel, the shopping area is just a sky

Driving up the mountains to its lush escapes, one must add Khao Yai to their bucket list, as it is a replica of Tuscany, Italy, with its notable features

they have a unique presentation while the food and ambience is amazing. The gym has the latest machines where you will not feel that you are working out, but at the end of the session your calories are down. The spa is a must try experience as the ambience places you in deep relaxation and rejuvenates you from inside and out.

walk away as the hotel links to the shopping centre.

Hidden Gem of Khao Yai Tuscany - Italian escape in Khao Yai

Driving up the mountains to its lush escapes, one must add this destination to their bucket list, as it is a replica of Tuscany, Italy, with its notable features that bring out the best experiences. The replica is so real from the street you can witness a variety of Italian monuments recreated to give a feel of experiencing Italy.

Khao Yai night safari

For those wanting to experience adventure and the great outdoors, this is the perfect place. The night safari is a great experience, and if one wants to explore further, the camping grounds provide a true experience in the great outdoors.

Temata Hill Rock

The ideal home away from home experience, nestled in the mountainous area for the whole family. There are different types of villas



that one can select, either one with a pool, or one with a sauna at the top. The places are so close to each other that it will be ideal for a few families to spend quality time together. The breakfast is amazing along with the breathtaking views.

Emerald isle of Krabi Shopping, beaches and night life

The main factor is that 50 per cent of the locals are Muslim. Hence, it is an important destination for the Middle Eastern travellers. When it comes to shopping, it is the perfect place to shop for all the local products. From clothing, accessories, to footwear and household requisites,

it is ideal to shop for every age group. The services of a speed boat to hop in from one island to another is a must try activity and it is an amazing experience to be added on to the bucket list of travellers across the Middle East. Each island has a host of different experiences to offer and cater to the adventurous visitors. By night, the area becomes even more colourful with all the music and night shopping, which tempts the travellers to purchase

more, as the variety of products locally sourced is amazing and at unbeatable prices.

Ao Nang Princeville Villa Resort and Spa

This is one of the most convenient locations which can cover all the needs of a shopaholic, adventurous you, and one who would like to listen to music from different eras, or just walk on the beach checking out the depth of the water. 🌊



RAK welcomes 600K visitors in 6 months

Ras Al Khaimah welcomed 600,000 visitors between January and June this year, a 14.8 per cent increase vis a vis the same period last year, and generated the highest ever tourism-related revenue for a half-year period, setting a new record, announces **Raki Phillips**, Chief Executive Officer, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKDA).

TT Bureau

Reinforcing Ras Al Khaimah's position as a destination of the future, the results follow a series of strategic investments, partnerships and initiatives to boost tourism, setting a path for continued growth in 2023 and beyond.



Raki Phillips
CEO
Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority

Raki Phillips, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority, launched 'Get More', a brand-new digital-first summer campaign, which generated more than half a billion impressions and over 2.5 million clicks, exceeding industry benchmarks. "2023 is shaping up to be the emirate's best year to date, with our first half results proving the efficacy of moving fast, staying relevant and just getting things done," he said. "It's essential we remain agile and continue to develop Ras Al Khaimah's tourism offering and create diverse and inspiring experiences for all. We have big ambitions and are confident that we will exceed our targets for 2023," he added.

First half achievements include:

- ❖ International tourism rebound accounting for over 52 per cent of all visitor arrivals.
- ❖ Took a step closer to becoming the regional leader in sustainable tourism by 2025, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development

Authority achieved Silver Certification, becoming the first Earth-Check certified tourism board in the Middle East.

- ❖ Expanded its aviation strategy by partnering with Qatar Airways to leverage its 150+ country global network to provide direct access to the emirate.
- ❖ Signed an agreement with FTI GROUP, one of Europe's leading outbound tour operators, to drive inbound traffic from Germany and increase visitation from one of the emirate's top five visitor source markets.
- ❖ Unveiled the design vision for the US \$3.9 billion Wynn Al Marjan Island, the largest foreign direct tourism investment project, set to open in early 2027.
- ❖ Significant increase in demand (room nights) with year on year growth of +33.6, thanks to



the addition of new hotel brands in the emirate in 2022.

- ❖ Announced the addition of Earth Hotels, Le Meridien and Nobu Hotels to its growing hotel portfolio.
- ❖ Received six calls by four luxury cruise liners, welcoming over 2,500 passengers and crew.

❖ Increased MICE room nights by 26 per cent vis a vis H1 2022 driven by international incentive groups.

❖ Hosted several key events, including the 16th edition of the Ras Al Khaimah Half Marathon, Arab Aviation Summit, DP World Tour and Exotic Wedding Planners Conference (EWPC).

❖ Held the official draw for the region's first ever WMF Minifootball World Cup, taking place from 26 October to 4 November 2023.

❖ Introduced civil law marriage licenses, and new wedding incentive and certification programs to bolster the emirate's position as a wedding destination. 📌

FHS 2023 to discuss hospitality future

Future Hospitality Summit will be held from 25-27 September 2023 in Abu Dhabi. Organised by The Bench in partnership with **Accor Hotels**, the summit brings together industry leaders of the Middle East and Africa for discussions, deals and insight on the continued growth of the region's hospitality and tourism sectors. Technology will be once again at the forefront of the discussions during the meet.

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Leaders from some of the world's most dynamic hospitality brands who have confirmed to address the summit include **Sébastien Bazin**, Chairman & CEO Accor; **Camil Yazbeck**, Global Chief Development Officer, Accor; **Guy Hutchinson**, President & CEO, Rotana; **Kevin Jacobs**, Chief Financial Officer and President, Global Development for Hilton, and **Gilda Perez-Alvarado**, Global CEO, JLL Hotels & Hospitality.



Jonathan Worsley
Chairman, The Bench

Among the names representing the real estate, asset management, consulting, banking and investment community are **Mariam Al Musharekh**, Executive Director of Human Resources, Miral Group; **Raed Kuhail**, Executive Director of Digital & Technology, Miral Group; **Giuliano Gasparini**, Head of Hospitality Asset

This year again, the Future Hospitality Summit will be hosting the finals of the Sustainable Hospitality Challenge, a Hotelschool The Hague initiative

AHIC - Arabian Hospitality Investment Conference, will be making its debut in Abu Dhabi, thanks to our host sponsors, Abu Dhabi Convention & Exhibition Bureau, Miral, and Hilton Abu Dhabi Yas Island."

Management, Wasl Group; **Dale Qi Shen**, Vice President, Director - Real Estate Structuring & Advisory, Mashreq Bank; **Andrew Gilmore**, Principal Economist, The Economist Group, and **Nick van Marken**,



Managing Director, van Marken Consulting.

Technology will once again be at the forefront of the FHS 2023 program with leaders discussing the future of the hospitality and travel tech stack. Confirmed speakers include **Cenk Sidar**, CEO and Co-Founder, Enquire IA. **Taghrid Alsaeed**,

Executive Director, Group Communications and Destination Marketing, Miral, said: "We are proud to host the Future Hospitality Summit on Yas Island, bringing one of the leading hospitality summits to Abu Dhabi for the first time. Our partnership with the Abu Dhabi Convention and Exhibition Bureau marks an exciting chapter

in our journey to solidify Yas Island's position as a leading global business destination, defined by world-class assets and unparalleled experiences. We look forward to hosting a new record-breaking event in the Capital and welcoming industry leaders to explore the exceptional experiences this remarkable Island has to offer." 📌

"We are excited to announce our first speakers as part of what is set to be an exceptional line up of distinguished regional and global industry leaders, representing some of the world's most respected hospitality brands and investment organisations," said **Jonathan Worsley**, Chairman, The Bench. "FHS, alongside the 19th edition of our flagship event

MOVEMENTS

SATGURU UAE

DINKAR DASAUR takes up reins as General Manager, United Arab Emirates, for Satguru. He will strategically and structurally manage various travel businesses of Satguru through a focused approach across all verticals - Global TMC, T3 (b2b), Airline Relationships, GSA Management and DMC. Dasaur has more than 22 years of professional experience in the global markets such as India, UAE and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He has worked with renowned airlines and travel companies in different roles to establish, strategize and lead businesses in the most competitive environments. He will now spearhead the strategic alliances for the organisation and build collaborative partnerships to strengthen Satguru's brand positioning.

ANANTARA MINA AL ARAB RAS AL KHAIMAH RESORT Ras Al Khaimah

Minor Hotels has appointed **SARAH HAMMOND** as Director of Sales & Marketing at Anantara Mina Al Arab Ras Al Khaimah Resort. Hammond will be responsible for creating, driving, and overseeing all sales and marketing strategies to promote and position the property as a leading luxury resort within the region. She will lead a dedicated team to build successful relationships and an exceptional brand image with customers and partners, while creating outstanding awareness about the resort in key global markets. Sarah brings more than two decades of experience working with luxury hotels in the UAE, Indian Ocean, and properties around the world.

ALEPH HOSPITALITY Dubai

Aleph Hospitality has appointed **AHMAD YOUSRY EL BEHEIRY** as Development Director. He will be part of the Aleph Hospitality's development team to grow the company's hotel portfolio in the Middle East and Africa. In the coming months, Ahmad's primary focus will be on Egypt and Saudi Arabia to support the growing demand for independent hotel management in these countries. From sourcing new projects for appropriate properties and franchises to contract negotiations, he will also be in charge of developing and nurturing relationships with our existing and future partners. Ahmad has 17 years of experience in hospitality and consulting, most recently at HVS Middle East & Africa and Colliers International MENA.

SHERATON JUMEIRAH Dubai

Sheraton Jumeirah Dubai announces the promotion of **MOHAMED AFIFI** to the position of Director of Sales. An accomplished professional, Afifi brings a youthful vigour and a result-driven mindset to this crucial leadership role. His track record of driving growth and achieving exceptional results makes him a natural fit for this pivotal role. With a history of consistently surpassing targets, he has demonstrated his exceptional aptitude for sales leadership. His strategic insights, combined with a deep understanding of market dynamics and customer preferences, have propelled both his personal career and the success of the teams he has led. His exceptional communication skills and empathetic management style create a synergy that empowers his team to thrive both collectively and individually.

FAIRMONT BAB AL BAHR Abu Dhabi

Fairmont Bab Al Bahr has promoted **MOHAMED WAKEB** to the position of Director of Operations. With a deep understanding of the Fairmont brand and a proven track record of excellence, Wakeb will play a pivotal role in ensuring that guests' experience at the property exceeds their expectations. His hospitality career began in San Francisco, California. He has previously served as the Director of Sales & Marketing. With over 25 years of experience in the local market between Dubai and Abu Dhabi, Wakeb has honed his skills and demonstrated exceptional leadership throughout his career. In his new role, he will be responsible for ensuring that every aspect of the guest experience aligns with Fairmont's renowned standards.

ROTANA Abu Dhabi

Rotana has appointed **EDDY TANNOUS** as the new Chief Operating Officer. With over 20 years of experience in hospitality across the Middle East, Tannous has held senior roles with global brands, and most recently, he served as Senior Vice President, Operations overseeing the operational performance across Fairmont's Middle East and Asian properties. Tannous brings with him a proven track record of delivering success across various facets of hospitality including operations, customer satisfaction, strategic expansion, marketing and more. An award-winning city 5-star resort with a prime waterside location and an enviable selection of modern leisure, dining and business facilities, Beach Rotana Abu Dhabi is popular among discerning business and leisure travellers, as well as among UAE residents.

BURJ AL ARAB JUMEIRAH Dubai

Burj Al Arab Jumeirah Dubai has appointed **DELPHINE CRAVOTTO** as Hotel Manager. The move comes as Jumeirah Group ramps up its mission to become a global leader by 2030, with a focus on recruiting exceptional talent with the right expertise and skillsets to help drive forward a new era for the brand. Responsible for managing all aspects of the hotel operations, Cravotto will work alongside General Manager and Regional Vice President, Giovanni Beretta, to innovate and craft distinctive experiences that will further set the iconic hotel apart. Prior to joining Burj Al Arab Jumeirah, Cravotto spent much of her career working at Park Hyatt Vendôme, a hotel in Paris that holds the prestigious "Palace Label".

OMAN AIR UAE

Oman Air has appointed **SAJID KHAN** as Area Manager for the United Arab Emirates. In his new role, he will be responsible for both passenger and cargo operations. A trailblazer in Airline Sales and Business Development with more than 28 years of experience in the aviation industry, Khan is a seasoned Area Manager at Oman Air, leading their operations in the United Arab Emirates from Dubai. His journey is a testament to his unparalleled dedication, strategic prowess, and dynamic leadership. Khan's career began in 1995 when he joined Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising right after completing his studies in Business Management and Marketing at Somaiya Institute of Management Studies and Research. Since then, he has embarked on an illustrious journey in the aviation sector.

MILLENNIUM AIRPORT HOTEL Dubai

DEEPANSHU PANDEY has been promoted to the position of Commercial Director at the Millennium Airport Hotel, Dubai. In his new role, Pandey will lead Sales, Marketing and Revenue Team to ensure the proactive management strategies are in place and develop commercial strategies with the team covering all segments and channels to maximise total revenue and profit performance, as well as market share penetration of the hotel. He will also be responsible to ensure that all systems are used to their full potential to yield the highest possible amount of revenue from all available spaces whether in rooms, meeting spaces, outlets or other revenue departments. Deepanshu has a proven track record of delivering exceptional results in challenging markets.

WALDORF ASTORIA DUBAI PALM JUMEIRAH Dubai

Waldorf Astoria Dubai Palm Jumeirah appoints **DAVID WILSON** as the new General Manager. With over 30 years of experience, he will oversee operations at the resort, and lead on strategy and the implementation of operational practices. A native Englishman, Wilson studied Hospitality at the University of Manchester. His appointment is a welcome return to Waldorf Astoria Dubai Palm Jumeirah, where he previously held the position of General Manager from 2015-2020. Prior to that, he managed some of the finest resorts in the Middle East, Asia, Australia, and Europe, including Shangri-La, The Ritz Carlton, JW Marriott, Mandarin Oriental, and Raffles. He returns to Waldorf Astoria Dubai Palm Jumeirah from Emerald Palace Group.

SHANGRI-LA GROUP UAE

The Shangri-La Group has appointed **KATERINA DIXON** as Assistant Vice President for Marketing (F&B) and Corporate Communications for the Middle East, Europe, Canada, India and Indian Ocean region. With a remarkable international track record in the hospitality industry spanning over two decades, Dixon brings a wealth of strategic marketing and communication expertise to her new role. Her focus will be on leading the Shangri-La Group's marketing and communications strategies for the region and supporting the group's business goals and market growth across the board by facilitating exceptional consumer experiences across regions. Her valuable contributions will be instrumental in reinforcing both the Shangri-La Group's brand visibility and reach in the coming years.

HILTON MEA

GUY HUTCHINSON will return to Hilton early next year as the new President, Middle East & Africa. Hutchinson's appointment follows the demise of Jochem-Jan Sleiffer in April this year. Hutchinson will be based at Hilton's Regional Office in Dubai and report to Simon Vincent, Executive Vice President/ President, Europe, Middle East & Africa, Hilton. In his new role, Hutchinson will propel business forward in the Middle East and Africa region, as he has been with Hilton prior as Vice President Operations India for Hilton Worldwide, served as Regional GM China North, General Manager Hilton Shanghai, General Manager Cairns Australia, Director Operations in Japan and pre-opening Hotel Manager at Hilton Dubai Creek. Hutchinson was serving as President and CEO of Rotana.



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