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# 20

Years & Counting

# 39mn tourist footfall in Abu Dhabi by 2030

DCT Abu Dhabi to deliver Tourism Strategy 2030 to ensure emirate's sustainable growth as global tourism destination. The strategy aims to attract 39 million visitors by 2030 and tourism sector to contribute AED 90 billion to UAE GDP. It will also boost global overnight visitors to 90 million.

TT Bureau

**H**is Royal Highness Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Chairman, Abu Dhabi Executive Council, approved the new Tourism Strategy 2030 for the emirate. Spearheaded by the Department of Culture and Tourism, Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi), the ambitious blueprint signals a new era of expansion and strategic development in the travel and tourism sector. The strategy seeks to boost visitor numbers from 24 million in 2023 to 39.3 million by 2030 (overnight and same-day), with a 7 per cent year-on-year growth.

Moreover, it plans to elevate the tourism and travel sector's contribution to the UAE's GDP, rais-



His Royal Highness Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Chairman, Abu Dhabi Executive Council, addressing EC meeting

ing it from approximately AED 49 billion in 2023 to AED 90 billion annually by 2030. The strategy will generate an estimated 178,000 new jobs by 2030 as the tourism infrastructure develops to meet this demand. It intends to almost double international overnight visitors from 3.8 million in 2023 approximately to 7.2 million in 2030,

expand hotel room availability from 34,000 in 2023 to 52,000 by 2030, and enhance the holiday home segment to diversify accommodation options. "The Tourism Strategy 2030 marks a pivotal moment in Abu Dhabi's transformative journey. Delivered alongside our key partners, the strategy underscores our commitment to fostering sus-

**In this regard, hotel rooms will be expanded from 34,000 in 2023 to 52,000 by 2030**

tainable growth and strategic development in the travel and tourism sector. Through crafted initiatives, which will unlock economic opportunities, amplify our distinctive culture, and enhance the emirate's value proposition, we are laying the foundation for a future that transcends generations," His Excellency Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman, DCT Abu Dhabi, said.

Contd. on page 8 ▶

# China to bring MICE into prominence

The mission is to serve as a platform for linking the global travel industry with China. Suppliers from the Middle Eastern destinations will put up country pavilions at prime locations, says Lydia Li, Deputy General Manager, ITB China. is media partner of the event.

Dr. Shehara Rizly

**W**hat is the theme and focus of ITB China this year?  
ITB China is set to play a crucial role in reconnecting global travel suppliers with the resurgent Chinese market, forging a collective path forward for the industry at the ATM. ITB China will once again reflect the entire travel trade spectrum, with suppliers from around the world covering Leisure Travel, MICE, Business Travel, and Travel Technology. In view of the rising demand from buyers, MICE will gain importance as a key topic, and more in-depth presentations and discussions

**MICE will gain importance as a key topic, and more in-depth presentations will take place**

will take place on stage of the ITB China Conference 2024. The China Inbound Tourism segment will be relaunched this year. The increasing popularity of Custom-themed Travel in the Chinese market and the profound impact of Travel Technology



guarantee a variety of content sessions, activities, and awards, complemented by insights from experienced travel professionals and forward-thinking opinion leaders.

**How will the Middle East section be allocated this time?**  
Suppliers from Middle East-

ern destinations make up a considerable part of our exhibiton this year, with country pavilions of Qatar, Jordan and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Kingdom of Bahrain, at prime positions in the very centre of the ITB China conference.

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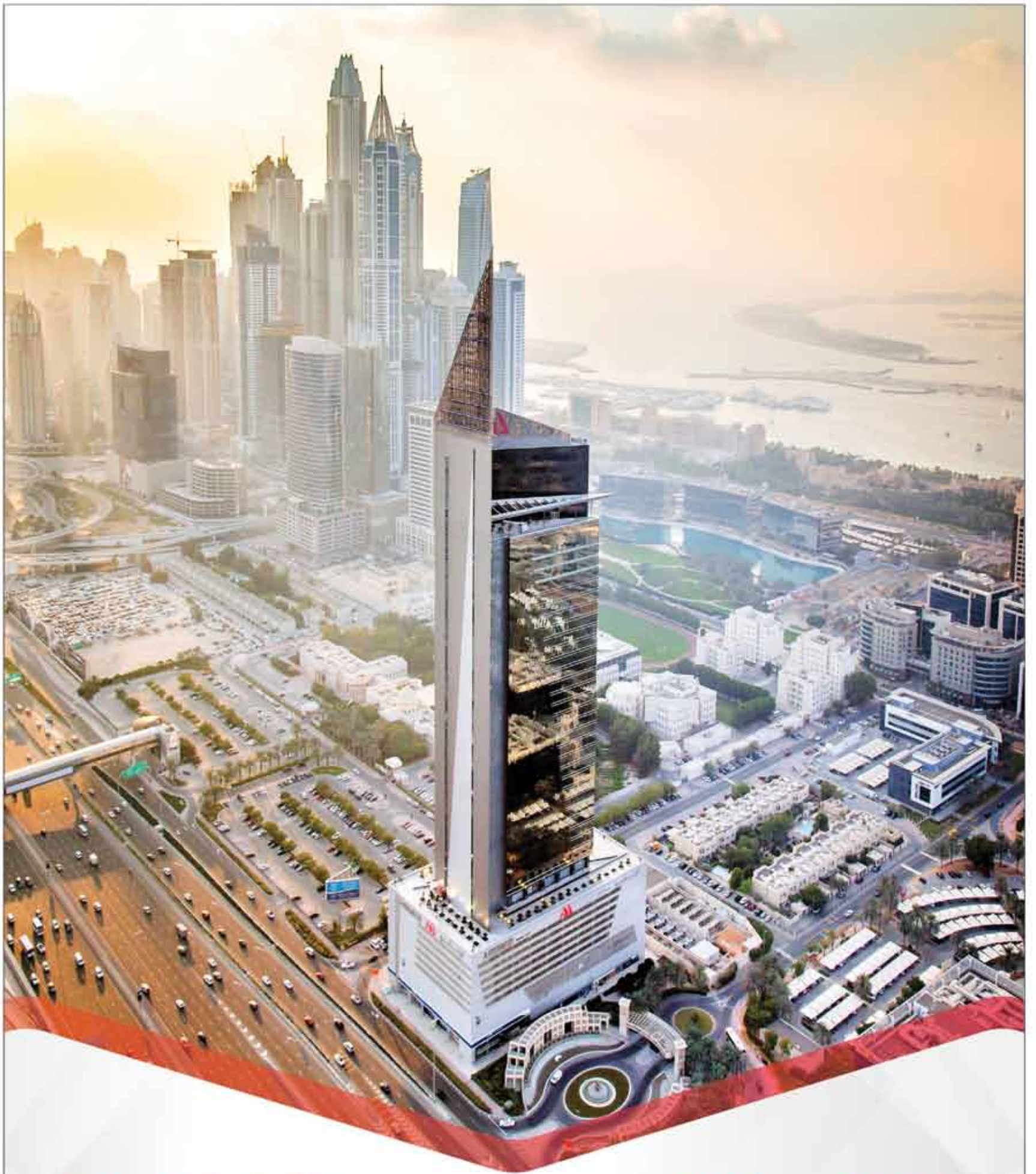
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# Eco-friendly hotels need of the hour

Travellers seek experiences in sustainability in hospitality, which is less harmful to the environment or in other words to reduce the carbon footprint. Hotels in the Middle East region ensure that their existing properties and the new ones will conform to all the guidelines to drive towards a better environment.



**Noushad Abdulrahim**  
Cluster DOSM, Millennium Place  
Mirdif & Copthorne Hotel Dubai

“Hotels are adopting LED lighting, smart thermostats, and HVAC systems to save energy. Water conservation is another crucial aspect in hotel operations. By implementing low-flow fixtures, guest engagement programs, hotels can reduce water consumption.”

“In budget hotel sector, sustainability is a focus area. With energy-efficient technologies, sustainable sourcing,



**Prachi P Shetty**  
Director - Ops & Marketing,  
Fortune Group of Hotels

and water conservation, these hotels are promoting eco-conscious travel. Fortune Group of Hotels is keen in implementing innovative practices to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> footprint.”



**Anna-Marie Dowling**  
GM, Nofa Riyadh  
A Radisson Collection Resort

“Sustainability has an impact on hotels’ operating costs. While investments are required to implement eco-friendly practices, they can lead to savings through water and energy savings. Hotels invest in sustainability to improve profitability and attract eco-friendly customers.”

“As hotels prioritise sustainability, there is a shift in costs. While investments in eco-friendly practices might increase expenses, benefits outweigh costs. Customers perceive



**Yasser Bahaa**  
Cluster GM, Radisson Blu, Cairo  
Heliopolis, Radisson Residences  
Cairo Heliopolis

sustainability as a valuable quality, influencing their spending habits.”



**David Allan**  
Cluster General Manager  
Radisson Hotel Group

“We are committed to sustainability in hotel operations, including sourcing seafood from certified suppliers and prioritising local items. We’re working to cut usage of single-use plastic, plan to install a water purification plant and are witnessing a positive impact from sustainability.”

“Demand for sustainable travel is increasing as awareness on climate change becomes apparent. Sustainable practices can cut costs,



**Emre Kocamustafaogullari**  
General Manager,  
Radisson Blu Hotel, Doha

while enhancing brand reputation. Radisson Blu Hotel, Doha has been recycling paper, water, and plastic.”

Compiled by Dr. Shehara Rizly

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Times weekly



# Spain Tourism to showcase new destinations

Participating once again at the Arabian Travel Market, Spain Tourism in the GCC will be displaying their multiple destinations. Welcoming guests, Spain Tourism achieved the highest number of visitors and enjoyed its place as it became the top destination. We will give all updates about the cities so that they do not cease to surprise visitors, says **Daniel Rosado, Director, Spain Tourism, GCC.**

 Dr. Shehara Rizly

## What will you be showcasing at ATM this year?

This year we will be having a wide representation of Spain's multiple destinations. We have well-established destinations such as Andalusia, Cataluña or Madrid, which have been coming to the market regularly. We will showcase all the news and updates about these vibrant destinations so that they do not cease to improve and surprise visitors.

At the same time, we are also happy to welcome new destinations to the market. We have, for example Mallorca, part of the Balearic Islands, located in the Mediterranean Sea and offering incredible experiences in a Spanish Mediterranean style. Curious about what that is, Spain stand at ATM will be a place to discover. We have the Basque country, a region up north in Spain, a place we call Green Spain, that will blow away the country's typical image and give it another dimension. We also have some other destinations, wide variety of hotels, destination management companies (DMCs) and shopping outlets. This will give you a complete overview of what is going on now in one of the most visited countries in the world.

## Could you share what is new from the Spain Tourism to the GCC?

Spain has been leading the tourism industry worldwide during the past decades. To do so we have developed the ability to change, to adapt to the different

circumstances given at any point and lead these changes. Some changes we have been working for a long time with them, such as sustainability, that has been at the core of our strategies and with a wide approach on the social, economic, and environmental side.



**Daniel Rosado**  
Director, Spain Tourism in GCC

We have developed a variety of new products that cater and market better the current demands. In urban tourism, we have examples such as Madrid, which has repositioned itself as a luxury tourism destination. With all the hotel main brands opening and expanding in the capital: they see an unexploited luxury side and by coming they also help that side to develop further. It was always there, but now it is becoming worldwide experienced.

This brings attached new restaurants, new boutique shops, new experiences and it becomes an ecosystem that its well managed and growing fast. Also, with the new demands on rural and experiential activities we have showcased more our offering in sports such as ski, nautical (Americas



## To do so, we have developed the ability to change, to adapt to the different circumstances

cup is this summer in Barcelona), golf, and many camps on different sports such as football or padel. On the rural side, we have showcased the gastronomy, the local experiences, the adventures you did not thought you could live with in Spain, but they are there waiting for you.

All in all Spain has adapted its products to the demand, making it more sustainable, more attractive, more experiential to bring

the visitor closer to that part of our country.

## Performance-wise, how has 2023 been so far from GCC? Who leads it and could you share some data/stats?

The consolidated data from 2023 shows an increase in the number of visitors from this region to Spain. The increase has been of over 50 per cent in number of visitors, which is setting an amazing growth pattern. On the expenditure side, the increase has been of more than 30 per cent. All of this shows that more and more people from the region are inspired to come and discover Spain.

The biggest increase in numbers have come from Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with double numbers, followed by Kuwait and Qatar and then the UAE. Our

strategy has been to increase the numbers and set the same on a new level from which they will continue to grow. The expenditure also shows that more are doing their shopping and investing more on experiences, including gastronomy and culture.

## Elaborate on the sustainability drive planned for the year?

Sustainability has always been on our strategy and plan, since long back. Given the early start in the tourism promotion in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (1908) we have been working hand in hand with local communities to create a positive climate where tourists and locals are in symphony.

Sustainability in a social and economic perspective is important so that we maintain the richness and authenticity of the places and its people. Good tourism is one that gives in return to the local community and fosters a deeper relationship between all the actors and enables it to keep growing and improving. Spain leads Europe in environmental protection of its land and seas. Our industry is implementing all the changes needed to make a trip to Spain a sustainable experience. We take this seriously as we want to preserve the legacy of our parents for our children.

## What are the activities planned to make Spain more attractive to the GCC visitors?

During this first half of this year, we have been promoting Spain in different ways. We have done several roadshows, includ-

ing a hosted buyers' event just before Arabian Travel Market, where more than 30 Spanish partners have had the opportunity to do business with the GCC agents and be present at ATM showcasing Spain.

Besides marketing campaigns online and offline, the B2C events and several more actions have been implemented and will be continuing so throughout the summer. After summer, we will proceed with our Winter in Spain campaigns, showcasing Spain as a year-round destination, with plenty of winter ac-

## The biggest increase in numbers has come from KSA, followed by Kuwait Qatar and the UAE

tivities, such as skiing, nature destinations, adventure travel, shopping, sports events and the like and finally, the enchanting Christmas markets in the month of December.

Last year has been a very great year for us. We recorded a huge increase in visitor numbers to Spain from this region and we are seeing an increase over those numbers in 2024. We are delighted to welcome more visitors from this region and share our culture, heritage, lifestyle, and friendship. 🇪🇸





# Holidayme B2B to launch at ATM 2024

Following the successful launch of the region's first B2C brand Umrahme that enriched the Umrah travel experience for over four million pilgrims, Traveazy Group is once again leading the way in the travel industry. It proudly announces the relaunch of its subsidiary, Holidayme, repositioned as a cutting-edge business-to-business brand.

 TT Bureau

Debuting at the ATM 2024 in Dubai from May 6 to 9, 2024, Holidayme positions itself as the top provider of innovative travel solutions and latest tools for travel enterprises worldwide. With advanced technology at its core, Holidayme equips partners with a digital platform designed to optimise their operations, drive deeper market penetration, and deliver a seamless end-to-end experience.

The outcome is a synergistic partnership that promises to elevate the value chain, set new benchmarks for customer satisfaction, and redefine what it means to be successful in the global travel market. Holidayme's B2B offering is centered around three products designed to elevate the capabilities of travel businesses. The first product, Global



**Geet Bhalla**  
Founder & Group CEO  
Traveazy

Access, offers partners access to a broad inventory of travel products at wholesale rates. This platform serves as a one-stop solution for all travel reservation needs, encompassing one million hotels, 100,000 sightseeing spots, and global attraction tickets, alongside airport transfers in 150 countries. With 20,000 direct static and dynamic contracts with major hotel chains, and a user-

friendly interface that simplifies the search-to-booking process, Holidayme ensures that agents can provide the best possible travel options to their clients.

The second key offering, Dynamic Package Building, allows businesses to craft tailor-made travel experiences for leisure and Umrah travel. Travel agents can design multi-product, multi-day itineraries including bespoke holiday packag-

ing special pricing fares and access to low-cost carriers.

Lastly, Customer Storefronts is a groundbreaking product empowering partners to establish their online presence with bespoke travel websites branded under their own names. This cutting-edge solution provides partners with tools to launch their platforms in multiple languages, manage and control

## Customer Storefronts empowers partners to set up their online presence with bespoke travel websites branded under their own names

es and Umrah pilgrimages with real-time pricing, leveraging Holidayme has an extensive network of international accommodations and flight options, including spe-


cial pricing fares and access to low-cost carriers. The website leverage on Holidayme's powerful booking engine, facilitating seamless digital



transactions, ensuring a superior user experience.


"The Holidayme's transformation into a B2B platform is not just a change of business model, but a commitment to excellence in the industry. At the Traveazy, we are excited to offer a platform that meets the diverse needs of travel partners worldwide and drives their growth and success. Their


success is our success, we are all in it together," Geet Bhalla, Founder & Group CEO, Traveazy, said. Traveazy, parent company of Holidayme, has set itself up as a leader in the travel sector, known for its customer-centric approach. This relaunch is expected to leverage Traveazy's infrastructure and extensive market presence to offer unparalleled service and value. 



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# Business outshines in Middle East

The past year witnessed some unique and new trends in business or corporate travel, which showed some of the gaps in the industry. With NDC launching their business portal brought in another new focus for the industry, however the business, MICE and corporate travel are rising ahead of what it was pre-COVID era. **TRAVEL TALK** spoke with industry experts to get their comments.



**Andres Fabris**  
CEO  
Traxo

“Business travel is back with a vengeance, with our corporate FIT segment surpassing pre-pandemic years, along with notable growth in MICE bookings. As with leisure guests, while stay durations vary based

“Global travel suppliers are upping their game with new distribution capability, launching airline for business portals, creating new personalised business and changing their loyalty programme policies to drive direct bookings. Data from an AmexGBT and GfK survey reveals 40% of corporate travellers are now sidestepping approved platforms. This trend is a wake-up call for the industry.”



**Philip Jones**  
Senior Vice President  
Operations, the Middle East  
& Africa, Accor

on location and travel purpose, the trend of 'bleisure' travel is apparent in destinations such as Dubai, where guests extend their stay to enjoy the city's attractions.”



**Shady Dawad**  
General Manager, Millennium  
Place Mirdif

“Business travel has evolved, leading to a surge in blended or bleisure trips and shifts in work dynamics. This transformation has sparked interest in secondary and resort markets and all-inclusive hotels. Dubai's hotel sector reflects this change, stressing on Extended stays are on the rise due to remote work, with guests seeking wellness retreats and cultural immersions.”

“The cost of travel has risen a lot since since COVID, so its return to pre-pandemic levels has been slow. 2024 has shown signs of rise in corporate travel compared to the past two years. Firms



**Anna-Marie Dowling**  
General Manager, Nofa Riyadh  
A Radisson Collection Resort

are prioritising sustainability in business travel, and efforts are made to cut emissions with firms having a higher commitment to sustainability targets.”



**Petr Dubsky**  
GM, The Diplomat Radisson Blu  
Hotel, Residence & Spa

“The corporate segment has been the hardest hit compared to pre-COVID times, with reduced travel. The length of stay has remained consistent—up to four nights, with a lead time for bookings of 10 days. Many firms have opted to reduce travel (i.e. cost savings) and replace face-to-face meetings with on-line alternatives. Many firms have adapted to remote work and virtual meetings.”

“Corporate and business travel in Cairo this year reflects an optimistic outlook amidst ongoing recovery post-COVID. New booking patterns underscore a blend of in-person and virtual meetings, with



**Yasser Bahaa**  
Cluster General Manager, Radisson  
Blu, Cairo Heliopolis, Radisson  
Residences, Cairo Heliopolis

focus on flexibility. As against pre-COVID, there is a trend towards shorter stays and demand for serviced apartments or extended accommodations.”



**Emre Kocamustafaogullari**  
General Manager  
Radisson Blu Hotel, Doha

“Business travel has witnessed a major boost for our city hotels, particularly after COVID. We are seeing a surge in new businesses and new ventures. Business Bay is a top-tier cluster for cor-

“Business travel is back. But it has not yet reached pre-COVID level, more so it has totally transformed. And there are businesses that decided to keep work-from-home set-up regular. Video-conferencing and virtual meetings have become a convenient option for corporates and business travellers. Biz travellers still prefer to stay in hotels for short stays, but they tend to opt for apartments if they stay for longer periods.”



**David Allan**  
Cluster General Manager  
Radisson Hotel Group

porates, and the high occupancy of office towers has supported our biz drive. The other factor supporting us is the hike in number of visitors per year versus pre-COVID.”



**Wael El Behi**  
General Manager  
Cophthorne Hotel Dubai

“After COVID, new business travel trends took shape. When, where and how people worked changed dramatically, resulting in rise of blended or 'bleisure' travel, shifts to the average length of stay and increased interest in secondary markets as well as resort destinations, especially all-inclusive hotels. These travel trends are expected to have the staying power and even strengthen in years to come.”

“Gewan Hotels and Resorts expands its portfolio with new destinations in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Fujairah, while venturing beyond UAE. Our booking patterns adapt post-COVID, offering tailored experi-



**Mohamed Hassan**  
COO  
Gewan Hotels & Resorts

ences. Stay incentives redefine hospitality, ensuring each stay is a personalised journey. From Abu Dhabi to Dubai and beyond, we invite corporates to explore new horizons.”



**Fabien Chesnais**  
General Manager, Mövenpick  
Resort Al Marjan Island

“Corporate and business travel in Ras Al Khaimah is witnessing growth, driven by master plan developments and major projects across various sectors. This surge has led to an uptick in demand for accommodations. Wayne Resort, which includes the ME's first casino, is a prominent attraction. Corporate stays tend to be more extended now, reflecting the appeal of the destination.”

“A surge in corporate bookings indicates a preference for in-person meetings over virtual ones. Major expos have resumed, signalling a desire to reconnect and engage face-to-face. Also, there is a notice-



**Alexander MUSCH**  
General Manager  
Pullman Dubai Downtown

able rise in bleisure travel. Pullman Dubai Downtown offers unique experiences blending innovative works and event spaces with vibrant atmosphere.”

Compiled by Dr. Shehara Rizly



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# 178k tourism jobs to be generated by 2030

► Contd. from page 1

## Fostering sustainable growth

To achieve the strategy's goals, 26 key initiatives have been identified across four strategic pillars: Offering and City Activation; Promotion & Marketing; Infrastructure & Mobility; and Visa, Licensing, and Regula-

**To achieve tourism strategy's goals, 26 key initiatives have been identified across four pillars**

tions. These pillars form the foundation of Abu Dhabi's comprehensive approach to realising its ambitious tourism targets and fostering sustainable growth in the sector.

The initiatives will be unlocked through the vision of DCT Abu Dhabi, the Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development, the Department of Municipalities and Transport,



Abu Dhabi Airports Company, among others, who play in bringing Abu Dhabi's tourism vision to life.

The first pillar, Offering and City Activation, looks to enhance the overall guest experience by unveiling cultural sites, theme parks, retail offerings and new hotel chains. The dining

landscape will diversify significantly, offering expanded options, including introduction of culinary schools and training programmes.

The DCT Abu Dhabi will more than double its Promotion and Marketing efforts, expanding its global reach from 11 to 26 markets and enhancing synergy

within tourism ecosystem of Abu Dhabi.

It will set up global partnerships with media outlets and well-known brands for high-profile collaborations, creating compelling, market-specific content across various touchpoints. The Infrastructure and Mobility pillar will increase hotel room avail-

ability across categories such as accessible and luxury options, glamping, and farm stays. Through valued collaborations, the emirate is set to enhance roads, public transport, and infra, simplifying travel within and boosting visitor inflow. Visitor experience and tourism ops will be enhanced with streamlined Visa, Licensing

**The emirate is set to enhance roads, transport, and infra to gear up for inflow of visitors**

and Regulation processes. In collaboration with relevant agencies, enhanced platforms and processes will reduce time frames for all applications and permits, to improve EoDB and attract investment.

## Building on success in 2023

Last year, Abu Dhabi's tourism sector saw a surge of 24 million visitors. The 27 and 54 per cent rise in hotel global guests contributed AED 49 billion to the UAE's GDP. Arrivals from markets such as India, Russia, UK, China and KSA, played a pivotal role in 2023, alongside the numbers attracted by the emirate's vibrant array of 150 events, its pristine beaches, natural landscapes, and cultural sites, which attracted 8.7 million visitors. ▶

# 'Conference an indicator of market's recovery'

► Contd. from page 1

## Will you share the number of exhibitors this year?

Around 650 tourism firms from 80 countries are likely to showcase their products and services and meet with over 1,000 pre-selected top Chinese buyers attending the event.

## Who are the new exhibitors this year?

Apart from welcoming back many of our previous exhibitors, we are delighted to welcome so many new countries and companies to our show. Among the most notable new destinations on the show floor this year are Kingdom of Bahrain, Georgia, Morocco, Peru, Romania, Uzbekistan, Almaty, Buenos Aires, Hawaii, and Sarawak. Participation from new players includes Artyzen Hospitality Group, CTG Travel, Egypt Air, Mize and Huawei.

## Share how this year will be different from last year?

ITB China's mission is to



Lydia Li  
Deputy General Manager, ITB China

**ITB China's mission is to serve as platform for linking the international travel industry**

serve as a platform for linking the global travel industry with the Chinese market. We aim to facilitate interactions, partnerships, and knowledge

exchange between industry professionals, exhibitors, and visitors, and driving growth and innovation in the Chinese travel market. The resurgence of ITB China to pre-pandemic levels this year serves as an indicator of the wider recovery underway in the Chinese travel market.

The participation of destinations such as the European Travel Commission, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Maldives, Malaysia, Portugal, Qatar, Spain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Beijing, and California, together with key commercial suppliers such as Expedia Group, Heytrip International, Jin Jiang International, Meliá Hotels International, Pan Pacific Hotels Group, Tongcheng Travel, Trip.com Group, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts in ITB China underline their confidence in the Chinese market's potential.

ITB China 2024 offers opportunities for growth and collabora-



tion. Suppliers can also benefit by nurturing existing business relationships and cultivating new partnerships with the Chinese buyers, leveraging the momentum of the recovery of the market.

## How many visitors do you expect this year?

We are confident that we will achieve a similar, if not higher, level of attendance than in 2019 due to the interest and demand from both the Chinese trade visitors and the travel trade com-

**It offers valuable insights into tech's changing role, including use of AI in travel industry**

munity, which is reflected in the high level of interest for the show this year. As the ITB China plays a significant role in reconnecting international travel

suppliers with the resurgent Chinese market.

## What will be the main stage of sessions one should attend?

With insights from industry leaders and partnerships with SITE and CBEIC, attendees can be likely to discuss on industry hot-spots and emerging trends at ITB China Conference, including the impact of recent visa policy changes on inbound travel recovery. A topic to resonate most with attendees is 'Travel Technology'. ▶



# Preparing to embark on new beginning

In the competitive landscape of hospitality, staying ahead of the curve requires vision, dedication, and a relentless pursuit of excellence. **TRAVEL TALK** had the privilege of sitting down with **Moussa El Hayek, Chief Operating Officer, Al Bustan Centre & Residence**, the driving force behind every decision, every initiative, to discuss the hotel's inspiring renovation plan and the strategies shaping its future.

**TT Bureau**

**W**hat inspired Al Bustan Centre & Residence to embark on this renovation journey?

In addition to enhancing guest satisfaction, the renovation was mainly conceived as a strategic move to stay competitive in the dynamic hospitality market of Dubai. We understand the im-



**Moussa El Hayek**  
COO, Al Bustan Centre & Residence

**Can you tell us some of the key enhancements, the guests can look forward to?**

Absolutely. One of the most significant highlights is the integration of modern furniture in all the guest rooms. We wanted to create spaces that are not only visually stunning but also functional and comfortable. By selecting contemporary furnishings that prioritise both form and function, we aim to elevate the overall guest experience.



**The renovation serves not only to maintain but also surpass the position of the hotel amidst stiff competition**

portance of staying relevant and this renovation serves not only to maintain but also surpass

the hotel's position amidst fierce competition.

We recognised the evolving preferences of travellers and saw an opportunity to exceed their expectations by reimagining our spaces to align with their needs and desires. The decision to undertake this renovation was deep-rooted in our commitment to providing an exceptional experience for our guests.

**How does the renovation reflect Al Bustan Centre & Residence's commitment to sustainability and responsible tourism?**

Sustainability is a core value for us, and it was a consideration throughout the renovation process. Moreover, we are enhancing the hotel's air-conditioning system in stages to contribute to our sustainability efforts. We further made an effort

to minimise our environmental footprint by choosing eco-friendly materials and implementing energy-efficient solutions wherever possible.

**What message would you like to convey to the guests and stakeholders?**

Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude for their continued support and enthusiasm. As we embark on this renovation journey, we are excited

to share our progress with our loyal guests and the wider community. We hope to build

**Sustainability is a core value for us and it was a consideration throughout the renovation**

anticipation for the unveiling of our newly renovated hotel and inspire travellers to experience the unparalleled hospitality

that awaits them at Al Bustan Centre & Residence. With a commitment to innovation, the

hotel is poised to set standards of excellence, inspiring guests to rediscover the property in a new light. 📍

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# UN advocates diversity and inclusion

At the Arabian Travel Market 2024, **Basmah Al-Mayman**, Regional Director, the Middle East, UN Tourism, shares some insights on policies carried out by way of education, investment, innovation, and technology to transform the livelihoods of people across the globe. Diversity and inclusivity are key elements in tourism, she adds. **TRAVEL TALK** delves deeper into the story.

**T** Dr. Shehara Rizly

**O**ver the past few years diversity and inclusivity have become key elements in tourism. How does UN Tourism work towards these key areas?

UN Tourism places inclusivity and diversity at the heart of tourism policies through

## UN Tourism promotes gender equality and women's empowerment in tourism sector

education, investment, innovation, and technology to transform livelihoods of millions, preserve our environment and our culture. It was a remark-

able achievement that under the leadership of the 2020 G20 Saudi Presidency, UN Tourism and the G20 Tourism Working Group have developed the AIUla Framework for Inclusive Community Development Through Tourism and the G20 Tourism Ministers Diriyah Communiqué to help fulfil the sector's potential to contribute to and achieve inclusive community development and the SDGs: AIUla Framework for Inclusive Community Development Through Tourism.pdf. I am so happy, as the UN Tourism Regional Director for the Middle East, the establishment of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East was an move launched by the Regional Commission of Middle East in 2020.

**Accessible tourism is another key aspect. Is UN Tourism taking steps to get it recognised?** UN Tourism has released many guidelines focused on accessi-



**Basmah Al-Mayman**  
Regional Director, the Middle East  
UN Tourism

bility within tourism with a view to outlining steps the tourism sector should take to build back better, become more accessible and more competitive. These include norms place accessibility at the centre of tourism's recovery, inclusive development in nature tourism destinations, a new set of user-friendly guides for destinations—ISO 21902 Accessible Tourism for All—and UN Tourism Recommenda-

## UN Tourism is developing investment norms to better know sustainable investments

tions on Accessible Information in Tourism.

### What part does UN Tourism play in promoting female leaders?

UN Tourism is dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the tourism sector. Since 2007, UN Tourism has collaborated with different partners to address gender issues in tourism policies. The 'Centre Stage' programme supports gender equality efforts in tourism institutions, businesses, and civil society organisations.

The programme, launched for the first time in 2022 in Jordan, aimed at boosting women's empowerment after COVID. Last March, on International Women's Day 2024, UN Tourism hosted a webinar for the Middle East region on the official theme of 'Invest in women: Accelerate progress'.

### UN established its regional office in the KSA. What are its key focus areas and how does it help industry achieve targets?

The Regional Office for the Middle East was inaugurated in Riyadh, capital of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is a hub for UN Tourism to coordinate policy and initiatives focusing on sustainable growth in the tourism sector, human capital development, and providing the organisation with a base for development. The office was inaugurated on 26 May 2021 because of the efforts of the Regional Commission for the Middle East to achieve growth in the tourism

sector. The office promotes the UN Tourism and Rural Development Programme, aiming to make tourism a driver of rural development and wellbeing. It supports innovation, education, and investments, focusing on supporting Small and Medium enterprises (SMEs), fostering startups, creating jobs, and promoting quality education.

### Does UN Tourism play a role in strengthening tourism investments in the region?

The UN Tourism stressed importance of investments in tourism for recovery and future development. We have focused on tourism and green investments on World Tourism Day 2023, held in Riyadh last, urging stakeholders to diversify from traditional investments to one prioritising people, planet, and prosperity. The sector's nature and consumer behaviour presents new opportunities for investors. **T**

# Real Madrid shows way to celebrate football

The Real Madrid World (RMW), the first ever Real Madrid-themed park celebrating football the Real Madrid way, opened at Dubai Parks and Resorts. The park will be home to 40 themed experiences and attractions, including the region's first wooden roller coaster, the tallest amusement ride in the world, Real Madrid trophies arena, themed restaurants and retail stores.

**T** TT Bureau

**D**ubai Parks and Resorts and Real Madrid C.F. opened Real Madrid World (RMW), the world's first ever Real Madrid-themed park at Dubai Parks and Resorts. The fascinating theme park will be home to 40 original Real Madrid-themed experiences and attractions.



## Bearnabeu Experience gives fans with access to the locker room containing cups & trophies

From visiting the locker rooms of the players and exploring the sanctuary guarding the club's trophies, to enjoying the attrac-

tions, captivating entertainment shows and topped by the first wooden roller coaster and tallest amusement ride in the world—guests are in for an adventure.

Fans and guests will explore a collection of official Real Madrid retail and merchandise in Dubai at RMW, where fans are invited to personalise the club's shirts and other collectibles to celebrate football and enjoy dining venues and carts offering flavourful treats, all with a Spanish twist.

"Dubai Parks™ and Resorts is the first theme park destination to announce a tie-up with Real Madrid. The world's first and only RMW presents a unique adventure never been seen before. The RMW will showcase the spirit of Real Madrid, embodying the club's passion," F. Eiroa, CEO, Dubai Holding Entertainment, said.

"We take pride in crafting experiences for guests of all ages. Our commitment contributes to Dubai's success by boost-



ing tourism and establishing the emirate as a captivating global destination," Eiroa added. Enthusiasts of all ages can explore the theme park's three zones: Champions Avenue, Celebration Plaza, and Stars Avenue—each zone paying tribute to the FIFA's Best Club of the 20th century.

The themed attractions and experiences at the Real Madrid themed park are as follows:

- The Hala Madrid Coaster is the region's first wooden roller coast-

er encapsulating the emotions of the Real Madrid journey

- The Stars Flyer, at 460 feet, is the tallest amusement ride dedicated to the Real Madrid stars
- The Bearnabeu Experience is an interpretation providing fans with access to the locker room having 14 football European cups and the 11 Basketball European Cups
- La Fabrica Training Pitch is a ground for guests of all ages with lots of footballs and mini-training equipment for the children

### RMW services

- ❖ Guests can get One-Day Pass starting from AED 295 online at [www.dubaiparksandresorts.com/realmadridworld](http://www.dubaiparksandresorts.com/realmadridworld) or at the gate. Tickets valid for three months from the date of purchase.
- ❖ **Location:** The RMW is 20 minutes away from Dubai Marina. RMW is accessible by car from Dubai on E11 Highway. The destination is accessible by car by taking Exit 5. Guests can use the RTA bus services that departs daily from the Ibn Battuta Metro Station.
- ❖ One can visit [www.dubaiparksandresorts.com/realmadridworld](http://www.dubaiparksandresorts.com/realmadridworld) for latest news and updates and follow RMW on Instagram @realmadridworlddubai and Facebook @realmadridworlddubai
- ❖ **Timings:** Sun to Thurs: from 12:00 noon to 9:00 pm  
Fri to Sat: 12:00 noon to 10:00 pm
- ❖ **Where:** Real Madrid World within Dubai Parks™ and Resorts



# Focus on MICE & destination weddings

Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel, attracting MICE and destination wedding due to its giant wedding spaces and state-of-the-art multi-optional meeting spaces, will be showcasing its solutions once again at the Arabian Travel Market from May 6 to 9, 2024. **Iftikhar Hamdani, Area General Manager, Northern Emirates, Coral Beach Resort and Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel**, shares insights with **TRAVEL**.

TT Bureau

## What will you showcase this year at ATM?

Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel is very popular among CIS and German markets and is now attracting MICE and Destination Weddings due to our giant wedding spaces and state-of-the-art multi-optional meeting spaces on

site. We are going to attract GCC market as our product is fit for the summer to attract families from GCC at our resort. Additionally, we have the best wellness facility to offer to our guests.

## Could you share a brief of the latest news from Bahi Ajman?

Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel is leading towards a commitment to

sustainability and environmental stewardship. Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel distributed 600 *Iftar* meals to individuals and families in Ajman during the sacred month of Ramadan. Revenue-wise, the hotel had a healthy occupancy.

## How has the year been for Bahi Ajman Palace?

The year for Bahi Ajman Palace



**Iftikhar Hamdani**  
Area General Manager  
Northern Emirates, Coral Beach Resort  
and Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel

Hotel was great, which resulted into a positive outcome in terms of hotel revenue. The success is due to our team's dedication, hard work, and commitment to excellence.

## Do you see new source markets coming in? If so, from which countries?

Bahi Ajman Palace had the busiest year ever since its opening.

The hotel enjoyed as much as 90 per cent occupancy throughout the year. The guests included Russians, Germans, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and the new markets such as East Europe, Western Europe, Germany and the United Kingdom. We are aiming to tap Scandinavians and Baltics by participating in road shows and travel fair with Ajman Tourism.

## As the sustainability champion, what actions have been taken in each property?

Sustainability strategy is firmly in place in our hotel. We are working on a scheme for waste management system through the Composter Machine to cut food waste by converting organic scraps into rich compost, diverting them from landfills and greenhouse gas emissions. Another initiative in the pipeline is implementing AirOWater, a sustainable drinking water solution. AirOWater will provide a source of clean drinking

water, thereby ensuring that the hotel guests and staff will have access to high-quality hydration throughout the length of their stay. This will reduce usage of single-use plastic bottles and minimise waste.

## The hotel is leading towards a commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship

## What are the general hotel trends you have witnessed?

In this year, the hotels are focusing on sustainability, technology integration, and personalised experiences. Offerings such as fitness activities continue to be popular among the travellers.





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# Immersive industry services to the fore

Tawfeeq Travel celebrating 15 years of operations will unveil the wonders of Qatar at the Arabian Travel Market to be held from May 6 to 9, 2024 at the World Trade Centre. **Rehan Ali, CEO, Tawfeeq Travel**, sat with **TRAVEL** to share some insights on the industry and summer travel as well as their full services.

**TT Bureau**

## What will you showcase at ATM this year?

We will be showcasing the various wonders of Qatar and how it can be explored through us. From humble beginnings with seven staff and a small office 15 years ago, Tawfeeq Travel Group has witnessed significant growth to emerge as a leading Travel Management Company (TMC)

in Qatar with a focus on offering industry-leading service to our customers. It is this singular focus that has made us win the Top Destination Management Company Award for Qatar continuously.

## How is ATM important year after year?

ATM is an important event in our yearly calendar as we get to meet our partners, airlines, vendors, and stakeholders from the travel industry. We also got an

opportunity to improve ourselves year-on-year by witnessing international and middle eastern trends and benchmarking.

## With summer approaching, any update on where people would like to travel?

In summer, we think short break destinations such as Turkey, Dubai, Maldives, Thailand, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Georgia will be the hot selling destinations. Tawfeeq Travel has already



Rehan Ali  
CEO, Tawfeeq Travel

sitive to the environment on treks and hiking tours, learning about the culture by staying at

**We are seeing trends in travel with customers wanting to go beyond just the tourist traps**

**ATM is a vital event as we get to meet our partners, airlines, vendors, and stakeholders from the travel industry**



sent many group tours to these destinations and many more are in the pipeline.

## Is experiential travel taking a leap now?

Yes. We are seeing emerging trends in experiential travel with many customers wanting to go beyond just the tourist traps. There is more interest in immersive experiences, such as going on walking tours with a local, food trails to experience the local cuisine, being sen-

small historic properties, and going the extra mile to learn the different facets of a destination or country.

## Do travellers seek sustainable travel sites and hotels?

Sustainability is the most emerging with corporates and travellers seeking eco-friendly venues, minimising waste, reducing carbon footprint, and most importantly, supporting the local small economic players. ▶

# Beond Airlines' maiden Dubai-Maldives route

Flying the world's first premium leisure airline, Beond Airlines in its maiden journey to Maldives was an absolute hassle-free experience. Last month just two days prior to the sacred festival of Ramadan, the inaugural flight departed from Dubai's Al Maktoum International Airport and four hours later touched down in Malé-Velana International Airport.

**Dr. Shehara Rizly**

Maldives became one of the most important out-bound destinations for travellers as it was one of the first nations to open for tourism across the globe. Last year, Beond Airlines announced they will be launching their direct flights from Riyadh and Dubai to Malé, which created quite a hype as this was no ordinary economy class, but a full-service carrier with business class seats and service. In GCC, as a last-minute market and a customer base, which prefer hassle-free connectivity and premium service, this is the way to fly to enjoy a great escape to a lovely isle in the Maldives.

## Convenience and comfort

Dubai's Al Maktoum International Airport is located away from the hustle and bustle and, passengers can check in without any



Tero Taskila  
CEO and Chairman, Beond Airlines

hassle. The lounge area managed by Marhaba has a staff who catered to all the passengers of the very first flight to Malé. Due to school holidays, there were many kids who were flying out with their parents.

## Travel agents

"They are working on creating awareness with the agents about their premium flight and they are looking at different compensation

structures such as providing their own booking platforms where they can book their customers to enjoy a seamless experience which will make them happy as well," Tero Taskila, CEO and Chairman, Beond Airlines, said.

**After studying the ME market, we found Riyadh as the luxury market, unlike other destinations**

"We are the first airline operating from Maldives to 60 destinations. After studying the Middle East market, we found Riyadh as the luxury market, unlike other Middle East destinations where there are many



frequencies and, travellers have access to the Maldives, but not with the product that they want. Most of the travel agents have the same needs, so it is about making them aware of the product, and how to package the service, but how we

can create a seamless service for the customers. "As a travel agent you must make sure your customer is happy and satisfied. We are looking at different compensation structures and are providing our own platforms where you can make bookings much

earlier than with the traditional inventories. For example, all airlines, apart from us, sell seats 360 days ahead, but we can do it three years ahead. When some people want to book for a special event, then they should do so 12 or 15 months ahead," Taskila shared.

## Dubai to Malé flight

"The launch of Dubai to Malé service provides customers with an unforgettable experience to the breathtaking Maldives, and with a wide selection of convenient flight options from which to choose," Taskila said. "Beond will operate six flights per week from Dubai airport to the Maldives. Four flights per week are available for purchase between today and July, with an additional two flights per week beginning in July," he said. Also, service from Milan, Italy begins later in the year. It offers flights across Europe, the ME, and APAC to the Maldives. ▶



# A 'renovated' hotel experience

Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan Hotel & Convention Centre Dubai is located near the Dubai International Airport. This five-star property, whose Phase II of renovation project draws near, provides guests with an exhilarating and indulgent experience. The cherished establishment in Garhoud, has stood test of time and witnessed numerous historical events and joyous celebrations throughout the years.

TT Bureau

From its pristine pool to its rejuvenating spa facilities, Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan Hotel, offers a range of amenities designed to cater to the needs of its guests. The hotel also prides itself on its exceptional dining options, including Makan All Day Dining Restaurant, Roda Grill & Bar, Bambooda Thai Restaurant, Hibachi Sushi & Teppanyaki, Taky Pool Lounge, and Gazebo Lounge. With 13 elegant venues for meetings and events,



**Christopher Kramer**  
Hotel Manager  
Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan

including the grand Rashidiya Grand Ballroom, the hotel is well-equipped to host weddings, conventions, and conferences.

Under the leadership of Christopher Kramer, Hotel Manager, Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan embarked on a significant renovation journey in 2023. Divided into three phases, the renovation project aimed to enhance



the hotel's offerings, while maintaining a minimalistic yet beautiful aesthetic.

As Phase II of the renovation nears completion, the Phase III of renovation is set to begin July, Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan Hotel remains committed to its

vision of uplifting and enhancing the guest experience. Plans are underway to further enhance the lobby and all restaurants by next year, ensuring that the hotel continues to meet the evolving needs of its guests. The Phase I of the renovation project, which commenced in August 2023, con-

cluded in November of the same year, marking the beginning of a transformative process.

Despite the challenges posed by the redesigning process, relocation, and meeting architectural requirements, the hotel successfully completed Phase I, making a

significant impact on the market. According to Kramer, "We made the changes so as to be the change in the market."

Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan Hotel & Convention Centre Dubai is not just a place to stay—it is a testa-

**Plans are underway to further enhance the lobby and all restaurants by next year**

ment to the hotel's dedication to providing a superior guest experience. As the journey continues, Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan Hotel invites guests to be a part of its transformation and to experience the beauty of change first-hand. 

**As Phase II of the renovation nears completion, the Phase III of renovation is set to begin July**



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# Aquaventures in coolest island @Kandima

Perfect getaway to indulge in the best-ever aquaholiday in one with nature, private yet secured, Kandima Maldives personifies sustainable luxury with all its offerings from the private island, which cater to the discerning guests to providing them a lifetime adventurous experience.



 Dr. Shehara Rizly

## How to get to the kool island

Everything about the island is spelt with a "K" as much as they can as that is their signature mark. There are two ways of getting to the island located about an hour from the Male International Airport. From Dubai or Riyadh, the best way to fly is through Beond Airlines, the latest carrier which started off operations, as it is a premium experience, which cater to a selected number of guests and all seats are business class. Their personalised service excels in standards and the product quality of utmost importance.

## Seaplane experience

From Male International Airport you are escorted to the special seaplane pier, which is also a specialised airport. It was the first time to experience a sea plane ride, with a male and female pilot

taking us through the beautiful, picturesque islands of the Maldives, landed on a pier and to be taken by a speedboat. The ride itself lasted 50 minutes, its com-

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**It was a first time experience going through the picturesque islands in a seaplane**

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pact but a quick way to get to the island of Kandima.

## Surrounded by natural beauty

Coming from an island destination itself in my native land, I was not entirely sure what to expect, but lo and behold! The moment I got off the seaplane and saw that



we were literally in the middle of the ocean gave me a sense of adventure and a spirit for exploration. When you step on the pier, you are surrounded by water and then see an island at one end of it, which brings you into private island. At the reception you are warmly greeted by the staff who also speak Arabic language, which is comfortable for the Middle Eastern travellers as they explain every detail of the stay.

## Accommodation

The types of accommodation available vary from luxurious villas overlooking the sea with your own swirl pool, garden, own private beach space, a day bed and an amazing jacuzzi to water villas for those who prefer a dip in the sea. For families from the Middle East, there are villas that can accommodate two or more families in the bigger villas with space for staff as well.

## Haven for aquaholics

It is certainly a haven for aquaholics,

whether you are a beginner or professional there is something for everyone and every member of the family. From platform snorkelling to scuba diving, glass boat kayaking to adrenaline driven jet ski riding, it is a must visit bucket list destination for all aquaholics in GCC nations.

The courteous staff at the hotel will tailor make, or bespoke as you want to call it any experience. I believe they have got the longest pool in an island with a private beach of three-and-a-half kilometres, remember it is a private island. The gigantic sperm sharks that rest on the lagoon to crabs running around their own little sand pit at the bay is quite interesting to watch and observe. Their entire concept of embracing nature has literally taken a step ahead of the rest.

## Leave your shoes behind

It literally means so, "get off your shoes and walk on the sand and feel the paradise

under your feet". The island is your own playground, no matter where you walk, you can either walk barefooted to experience natural sand underneath your feet or wear flipflops. The island is only for the resort hence safety is guaranteed, and you can cycle

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**Safety is guaranteed, one can cycle around the island or wait for the hop on hop off bus**

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around the island or wait for the hop on hop off bus service as they call it—a mini-van, which could take 20 passengers at a time and is available every 20 minutes, can take you from one end of the island to the other.

And the beauty is that its all open, hence you can get your insta friendly photo opportunities there.

## All inclusive concept

The all-inclusive concept is a great way to enjoy your space and spare time. All you need to do is ensure that you select to experience every single restaurant, café, beach bar across the island, which provides you with an array of food of drink that would literally take you to different parts of the world.

## Exciting ventures

From swinging on the swing within the water of the sea, to sunset yoga on the beach, a beach party by night with guest DJs or sometimes if you are lucky you get to witness Arabian nights where a renown magician and his crew takes over with belly dancers as well. The offerings in the island are remarkable and worth it every step of the way. 





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# Sri Lankan Ayurveda resort eyes Middle East

Siddhalepa Ayurveda Health Resort and Spa is now focusing on the Middle East market. Offering a range of treatment packages for clients, the resort organises business networking sessions, FAM tours to Sri Lanka, articles on various media platforms from B2B to B2C, **Asoka Hettigoda, CMD, Siddhalepa Group**, spoke to **TRAVELTALK** about their B2B strategies for the Middle East market.

 Dr. Shehara Rizly

## How important is the Middle Eastern market for you?

The Middle East clients understand the importance of Ayurveda and its therapeutic benefits of longevity, detoxification, rejuvenation, and stress busters. Health, wellness and leading a balanced life have become an essential part in today's world. The age-old Sri Lankan Ayurveda or natural medicinal system offers tremendous options throughout the year at affordable prices for locals as well as expatriates in

## The health resort got a licence in the UAE to sell its Ayurveda products in this important market

the region. To better serve the Middle East clientele, we recently obtained a medical licence in the UAE to sell our specialised Ayurveda products in this important market.

Our intention is to introduce Ayurveda, Yoga, and Meditation Programmes at Siddhalepa Ayurveda Health Resort. They also highlight the benefits of traditional Ayurveda on detoxification, rejuvenation, stress relief and longev-



ity and the health cuisine. The target audience will be prospective health and wellness travel agents, tour operators, journalists, among other interested parties.

## What are the key activities that attract visitors from the Middle East?

We are currently looking at conducting awareness campaigns in the Middle East region. We conducted an intimate session with a few travel agents in Sharjah and Dubai last month and we will be present at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) to expand our reach by conducting special meetings and a dedicated press and travel

agent event onsite. Being the only Sri Lankan company to celebrate the 90 years in 2024, Siddhalepa Ayurveda would be liaising and working together with the travel trade. We will be organising business networking sessions, FAM tours to Sri Lanka, articles on various media platforms from B2B to B2C.

Furthermore, we will be extending special offers for the visitors, paving the way for several more to come and experience the Siddhalepa's authentic treatment and products. Also, the resort strictly provides female therapists only for female visitors and does not

serve meat products, other than fish and chicken.

## Are you providing any training for travel agents?

We are extending special offers for the travel agents to encourage them to visit and experience the Sri Lanka-based authentic Ayurveda and its healing. Online training sessions will be conducted in a bid to increase awareness about our brand of Ayurveda. We will be visiting the Middle East market on a regular basis in order to conduct awareness programmes and special training sessions at the offices of travel agents/companies.

## How will you incentivise the promoters and travel agents?

Special introductory offers will be extended for Summer 2024 and Winter 2024/25, especially for the promoters and travel agents, aiming to develop the health and wellness travel market segment. Additionally, specially discounted packages and concessions are offered for the travel trade and airline staff. Also, the Sri Lankan health resort would participate at joint promotions conducted by the travel trade in the Middle East and invite the travel trade to visit us at the Sri Lankan pavilion stand number 54 at the Arabian Travel Market 2024.

## Can you share about the facilities available at the health resort in Sri Lanka?

Siddhalepa has a family heritage of more than 200 years of practicing Ayurveda. The largest Ayurveda company in Sri Lanka of international standard manufactures more than 600 medicines, operates Ayurveda Hospitals and clinics in Sri Lanka, Germany, Czechia, Slovakia, and Maldives, and has purpose-built Ayurveda health resorts and plantations. We offer a wide range of authentic treatment packages for most illnesses or health conditions.

Spread over a spacious seven acres of tropical and indigenous trees, herbal medicinal plants, vines, and bushes, our Ayurveda resort in Sri Lanka, overlooking the expansive Indian Ocean, of-



**Asoka Hettigoda**  
CMD, Siddhalepa Group

fers a holistic experience; all this under the expert care of resident physicians, visiting consultants and hospital trained therapists.

The resort's Ayurveda centre is the only one in the country affiliated with a Siddhalepa Ayurveda hospital with access to a range of medicines produced as per ISO standards by the Group in its factories. The resort offers Ayurveda treatment for stress release, detoxification,

## Online training sessions will be conducted in a bid to increase awareness about our brand

weight loss, rejuvenation, longevity and medication for body abnormalities such as orthopaedic issues, including arthritis, nerve disorders such as Parkinson's and paralysis, ailments in the digestive system, haemorrhoids, depression and other psychological disorders. The treatment based on natural ingredients are expected to entail long lasting results causing no side effects as well.

The resort has 50 rooms, pays individual attention to each visitor and they are daily monitored by the doctors. The special features of the Siddhalepa Ayurveda Health Resort include the inter-connecting rooms, a wide range of herbal plants, privilege to utilise experts of Ayurveda Hospital (in the group of companies), a range of herbal drugs of the company. Arabic speaking interpreters and airport transfers are arranged upon on the visitors' request. 





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# celebrates Int'l Women's Day

celebrated International Women's Day at Paramount Hotel in Dubai with 11 insightful speakers from the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors. The panellists shared their views on the current outlook of the Middle East, attracting youth to the industry, AI and its contribution to the sectors, as well as generating revenue in the sectors now that travel is back and how it impacts the balance sheets.





# JNTO showcases Japan's allure @ATM

Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO) will be participating once again at the Arabian Travel Market to engage with industry professionals and showcase Japan as a premier travel destination. They will be highlighting Expo 2025 in Osaka, Kansai, to the industry in the GCC.



TT Bureau

As the world transitions from Expo 2020 Dubai to Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, JNTO is eager to seize the opportunity to highlight Japan's unique cultural heritage, breathtaking landscapes, and diverse experiences to the Middle Eastern market. With a focus on fostering stronger ties between Japan and the GCC region, JNTO aims to capitalise on the momentum generated by the strong international travel demand from the region.

"We are excited to participate in the Arabian Travel Market 2024 and showcase Japan's rich cultural heritage and vibrant tourism offerings to the discerning Middle Eastern audience seeking luxurious experiences. With the increasing interest from GCC



**KOBAYASHI Daisuke**  
Executive Director of Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) Dubai office

nationals, we see tremendous potential for further collaboration and growth in the tourism sector. Given that Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai will be positioned between Expo 2020 Dubai and Riyadh Expo 2030, we anticipate heightened attention from the UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Through our par-

ticipation at ATM, we aim to strengthen partnerships with industry stakeholders and inspire travellers from the Middle East to

**JNTO is pleased to note the expansion of flight connectivity between the GCC region and Japan**

embark on memorable journeys to Japan," KOBAYASHI Daisuke, Executive Director, Dubai office, JNTO, said.

**Key highlights:**  
**Rising Interest from GCC Nationals:** In 2023 the number of GCC nationals visiting Japan



increased to 33,212 visitors, a notable 401.3 per cent increase compared to 2022 figures, which is also a robust 17.7 per cent increase against 2019 numbers, reflecting a growing appetite for exploration and discovery.

**Increased co-exhibitors at Visit Japan Stand:** JNTO is excited to announce that the number of co-exhibitors at the Visit Japan stand at ATM has grown from nine organisations in 2023 to 14 this year. This increased participation underscores the growing interest and collaboration between Japanese tourism stakeholders and their counterparts in the Middle East.

**Expanded flight connectivity:** JNTO is pleased to note the

expansion of flight connectivity between the GCC region and Japan. Airlines such as Emirates, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways have increased their flight frequencies and launched

**In 2023, GCC nationals visiting Japan rose to 33,212 visitors, 401.3% increase compared to 2022**

new routes, enhancing accessibility for travellers from the Middle East. Japan Airlines, in particular, made history this Spring by launching a daily flight from

Tokyo-Haneda to Hamad International Airport in Doha, Qatar, offering unparalleled Japanese-style customer service.

**Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai:** As Japan prepares to host Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, with its theme focus of 'Designing Future Society for Our Lives', JNTO will leverage its presence at ATM 2024 to promote this global event. The expo aims to serve as a platform for innovation and collaboration, offering opportunities for visitors to engage with cutting-edge technology and ideas. Notably, more than 150 countries and regions have officially announced their participation at Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, highlighting the significance of the event on the global stage. ➔





# Affluent travel increasing in GCC nations

More than half of HNI travellers in the GCC, compared to 43% of global total, say they are looking for more meaningful travel experiences rather than shopping and souvenirs. Of late, private yacht tours, luxury cruises, private jets and helicopters have all become part of the affluent travel, finds a perspective report by Mastercard.

**TT Bureau**

Although the parameters that define the rich and the super-rich can be hard to pin down, what remains constant is the fact the affluent category is driving growth in the travel and hospitality industry. While the world awaits the emergence of the first trillionaires, high-net-worth travellers contribute 36 per cent of the world's spend on travel and 70 per cent of the spend on luxury travel, while stressing on experiences rather than physical goods.

The hunger for new experiences in unexplored destinations, micro-trips, and a maturing tourism offering will drive growth in the global luxury travel market size, estimated at US\$1.38 trillion in 2023, and likely to grow at a CAGR of 7.9 per cent from 2024 to 2030. Half of the travellers as compared to 43 per cent of the global total, say they are looking for meaningful travel experiences

rather than shopping and souvenirs. Close to a quarter say they are willing to pay more for a remote destination experience.

From a generational perspective, millennials (aged 30 to 44) comprise the highest penetration of luxury seekers, followed by Gen Z (aged 15 to 29), as wealth

migrates to younger generations over the 20 years to 2040. Within the GCC, however, Gen X (aged 43 to 58) are expected to drive travel. They will be responsible for US\$11.1 billion, or 41 per cent of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's total outbound travel market value of US\$27 billion by 2028. In the UAE, Gen X is expected to spend

US\$18.2 billion, 60 per cent of the total value of US\$30.5 billion by 2028.

### Inbound & outbound

The MENA region is driving growth in affluent travel. It is the only region to show arrivals 22 per cent above 2019, while much of the world is barely touching

pre-pandemic levels. Istanbul, Dubai, Cairo, Jeddah, and Marrakesh have emerged as the top five most visited cities in the MENA region. The Middle East dominates the list of source markets. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with 27 per cent of respondents in a survey identified as luxury travelers, and the UAE with 25 per cent, are key outbound markets.

Quality luxury accommodation has become a priority, with 27 per cent saying they would pay more for villas and chalets in private locations and 21 per cent happy to splurge on luxury stays on a private island. Luxury seekers are digitally savvy with 74 per cent of those booking travel do so online. However, they also want their money's worth in the form of exemplary pampering. Private yacht tours and luxury cruises, private jets and helicopters are all part of the super rich travel.

Bleisure is resulting in remote-work vacations, as digital no-

mads change the face of travel. Affluents aged 18-34 are almost twice as likely as the global aver-

**Luxury seekers are digitally savvy with 74 per cent of those booking travel do so online**

age to have taken a vacation as an extension to a business trip. Hospitality spaces are responding to this by introducing study and office spaces.

**High-spending loyalty users**  
GCC tourists are some of the highest spenders on vacation. According to Mastercard data, Kuwaiti tourists, for instance, spend an average of US\$3,390 per card in Paris, five times the spending by American tourists. ▶



# Air India's session with travel trade

A special networking evening was hosted by Air India in GCC to break fast together. The evening provided opportunities for trade partners to share some of changes in the region, new emerging market trends and summer destinations, which will be popular as Air India expands its network to introduce new products such as A350, launched a few days ago likely to bring in more corporate travellers.





# Female aviators on the rise in Saudi Arabia

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia kickstarts its training programmes with its first intake of 27 pioneering ladies and high school graduates. They will join Aircraft Maintenance Engineering Programme as part of the Kingdom's Vision 2030. With a shortfall of qualified maintenance workers in the near future, Riyadh Air is harnessing on expanding talent pool of KSA females keen to enter non-traditional roles.

**TT Bureau**

This programme is another significant step on its road to its first flight in 2025 by Riyadh Air, the new national airline of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The first intake of 27 pioneering females commenced their 30-month diploma course on their path to become certified aircraft engineering technicians. In a first in the Kingdom, female engineers will study under the guidance of Aviation Australia and the International Aviation Technical College at Riyadh Airport, following an MoU between Riyadh Air and Colleges of Excellence in August 2023 and is the first collaboration of many between the organisations.

These budding engineers were chosen from thousands of applicants who wished to be part of the Riyadh Air story as it moves towards future operations. Ri-



yadh Air has chosen females for its first intake of trainee engineers to be placed on the apprenticeship programme. Tony Douglas, CEO, Riyadh Air, H.E. Mark Donovan, Australian Ambassador to the KSA, and Engineer Ajman Abdullah, CEO, Colleges of Excellence, met with the trainee engineers during a visit to the facility.

Currently, female aircraft maintenance engineers and techni-

cians account for 3.0% (\*ICAO statistics) of the global workforce. With a shortfall of qualified maintenance workers expected in the coming years, Riyadh Air is harnessing on expanding talent pool of KSA females keen to enter non-traditional roles.

"Riyadh Air will challenge perceptions while representing the modern, dynamic KSA. Ensuring that we are well represented in

terms of gender equality, introducing women to the technical side demonstrates that we are serious about creating an airline that meets the expectations of Vision 2030. We are fortunate our engineers are students at the International Aviation Technical College under the Colleges of Excellence banner and accredited by Aviation Australia, a one of the prestigious global aviation schools, and we expect them to

be part of the Riyadh Air's future leadership," Douglas said. "It is great for the CEO of Riyadh Air at the International Aviation Technical College to meet the first women who have joined the Aircraft Maintenance Engineering Programme. It is fantastic to know Australia's leading education sector OSS has once again enabled women's economic participation as KSA moves forward with Vision 2030," His Excellency

Mark Donovan, commented. "We are proud to support this batch in the field of aircraft maintenance engineering in partnership with Riyadh Air. The Colleges of Excellence provides them with an educational and training environment but also gives them the

**Riyadh Air is harnessing on expanding talent pool of females for entering non-traditional roles**

skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in their respective fields. We are keen to support the women national competencies in various fields and provide them with proper job opportunities," Engineer Abdullah averred. ▶

# Bespoke China visitors' summit returns to UAE

A B2B event, China Visitors Summit 2024 will take place from September 5 to 6 in Dubai and September 9 to 10 in Doha. With **TRAVEL** as its media partner, the event comprises face-to-face meetings between 150 suppliers and 150 buyers. The summit comes back to Dubai and Doha in 2024 after its success in the past year, says **Alexander Glos, CEO, China i2i Group**.

**Dr. Shehara Rizly**

**Could you share a bit about how it led you to found the China i2i Group?**

I hail from Manhattan. I graduated from Columbia College and Columbia Business School. After my Post-Graduation, I honed my skills at Merrill Lynch and The

Garter Group before venturing into the ITE Group in London and Moscow. The China i2i Group was inceptioned in 1999, propelled by my interest in China's dynamics and its global impact.

**What prompted the creation of the CVS?**

The genesis of the Chinese

Visitors' Summit dates to 2008 when our China-focused travel agents voiced frustration over excessive expenditures on exhibitions. They sought meaningful interactions with handpicked Chinese global travel buyers. We aimed to shift the paradigm towards quality and personalised interac-

tions, eschewing the 'bigger is better' ethos.

**What sets the CVS apart from other events?**

The CVS is not confined to exhibition spaces; it is entrenched in the market. Operating in Dubai, Doha, Europe, South East Asia, and North America, the CVS offers buyers an immersive experience of the destination, while facilitating face-to-face meetings with prospective partners.

**What can suppliers anticipate at the Summit?**

Customisation is the key. Suppliers—be it hotels, destinations, or attractions—can cherry-pick the buyers they wish to engage with. Whether targeting group and leisure travellers, luxury segments, or MICE, suppliers have the autonomy to curate their meeting roster.

**What distinguishes Chinese buyers at the CVS?**

Chinese buyer selection hinges on their existing business ties



**Alexander Glos**  
CEO, China i2i Group

Madrid, and Barcelona, we are poised to announce/organise an CVS for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

Moreover, we are introducing side discovery experiences in the Sultanate of Oman, Kingdom

**The CVS is not confined to exhibition spaces; it is entrenched in the market**

of Bahrain, and the Maldives this year. The journey is exhilarating—our inaugural CVS in the Middle East, Abu Dhabi in 2012, marked the dawn of a new era. Today, the Chinese buyers are well-versed with global destinations, and CVS serves as their conduit to the world. ▶





# Saudi Travel Market to return in 2025

In an official statement it was announced that Saudi Exhibition and Convention Authority has approved the second edition of Saudi Travel Mart (STM) to take place on February 10, 2025. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's first B2B tourism and travel trade show will be organised by Rent Exhibitions. **TRAVELTALK** takes a look at the 2024 edition held this month.





# Luxury experiences on rise in the UAE

The UAE's tourism industry is continuing to expand on its premium offering of luxurious experiences, which given their inimitability can support long-term competitive advantage. Travellers from several locations can enjoy tailored tours with opportunities to learn new skills and gain insights into a host culture, for example through culinary tours with hands-on cooking experiences.

Outstanding personal service, high-quality infrastructure, and an increasingly prominent focus on sustainability are central pillars of the luxury tourism industry. Luxury tourism continues to increase

## Luxury tourism facilitates a degree of personalisation that speaks to a tourist's needs

in importance within the hospitality industry globally, as a growing number of visitors seek high-end experiences supported through world-class amenities. Luxury tourism facilitates a degree of personalisation that speaks to the needs of the modern-day tourist, hoping for a more unique, and authentic tourist experience.



The 2022 valuation of the Global Luxury Travel Market reached US\$1.28 trillion, with projections indicating growth to US\$2.47 trillion by 2031.

The UAE is experiencing a rise in luxury tourism, with a luxury offering—marbled throughout much of the UAE's tourism offering—now expanding. The UAE's tourism industry is continuing to expand on its premium offering of luxuri-

ous experiences, which given their inimitability can support long-term competitive advantage. Investments in high-end accommodation, leisure activities, and fine dining in the region contribute to a luxury package that can be perceived as value for money by visitors entering the market with less-developed, lower-quality offerings. Research shows a focus on developing quality over mere quantity can facilitate

more enduring relationships. In the tourism sector this can be particularly prudent.

The luxury travel trend is evolving to meet the changing demands of an emerging millennial market in possession of disposable income enabling them to engage in luxury tourism experiences. Many choose to stay in resorts or opt for luxury cruises offering quality amenities. Millennials

are changing the way luxury travel is perceived. They value experiences more than material possessions. As a result, there has been a rise in unique travel experiences catering to their preferences, such as boutique eco-friendly resorts and cultural exchanges.

The UAE hosts many offerings such as the Casa Mikoko re-

tours with opportunities to learn new skills and gain insights into a host culture. As the segment continues to expand, it will play a vital role in shaping the industry's future. In a changing world, the tourism offers a route to widespread adoption of sustainable practices. It demonstrates experiences can suggest that tourists do have a pathway to continue participation in enriching luxury experiences.

## As the segment continues to expand, it will play a vital role in shaping the industry's future

sort in Umm Al Quwain, where guests can engage in water-based activities, while staying in a luxurious beach lodge. Travellers can enjoy tailored



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

# Fortune adds new property in Dubai

One of the biggest announcements at the Arabian Travel Market 2024 from Fortune Group is that they will be adding a new 4-star property in the heart of Dubai. **Praveen Shetty, Chairman, Fortune Group of Hotels, Dubai**, sits with  to share more details. It will help us to expand our reach, foster partnerships, drive business growth, and stay informed about hospitality industry trends.

 TT Bureau

## What is new from Fortune Group?

We are excited to announce the expansion of our Fortune Group family with a new addition—a 4-star hotel in the heart of Bur Dubai. This reflects our commitment to growth and long-term plans, extending to our food and beverage offerings. Thanks to our dedicated team, the Group

continues to thrive, and we look forward to the journey ahead.

## How important is the ATM?

It is instrumental for us as a group, helping us to expand our reach, foster partnerships, drive business growth, and stay informed about industry trends and market dynamics. One of the events we look forward to attending, as it showcases a diverse audience not only from the Middle

East, but other emerging markets such as North Africa and beyond. The event also offers networking opportunities with industry peers, potential partners, and suppliers.

## Will you be participating or attending the ATM?

This year, we will only be participating in the ATM as well as looking forward to some great conversations and potential business relations. Our ho-



**Praveen Shetty**  
Chairman  
Fortune Group of Hotels, Dubai

## How has business travel evolved?

We have observed a shift in business travel preferences towards budget-friendly accommodations. With firms prioritising expense optimisation, there is a demand for cost-effective lodging options without compromising on comfort. Flexible booking policies are also gaining traction to accommodate uncertain travel plans. Technology integration has become paramount, with guests expecting seamless digital experiences. Sustainability is important, with travellers seeking eco-friendly initiatives. Unique experiences beyond traditional stays are on the rise. Dubai's evolving business landscape presents opportunities for budget hotels to thrive. By prioritising adaptability, innovation, and sustainability, we can cater to the needs of modern business travellers, while offering memorable experiences.

## Any trends that you can share, which you saw this year?

Certainly. One noticeable trend is the increasing number of repeat and satisfied customers, whether visiting Dubai as

## We will be taking part in the ATM this year and looking forward to business opportunities

a stopover or returning for another visit. Dubai's changing attractions appeal to people of all ages, ensuring a diverse and engaged clientele. It is worth acknowledging that the efforts of the DTCM in creating dynamic happenings within the city play a significant role in our ability to cater to such guests. 





# Networking with industry leaders

Record breaking industry event, Arabian Travel Market returns with great expectations this year as industry leaders gather to generate further business. Technology-driven industries play a significant role this year as a record number of entities are seen showcasing everything which is technology-driven, from disrupting services to Artificial Intelligence-related ventures. Here are glimpses from ATM 2023.





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# Women spend 8% more than men on travel

As per the 2024 Women's Travel Consumer Insight Report released by Trip.com Group recently, average annual per capita travel expenditure for women exceeded that of men by 8% in the past year. Spending power of Chinese women in the tourism industry is evident, as millions of them realise their dreams to travel, with significant growth momentum seen in lower-tier markets.

 Dr. Shehara Rizly

Regardless of their age, travel is a strong desire for all women, according to the 2024 Women's Travel Consumer Insight Report, which looked at female users who travelled for non-business reasons over the survey period—data recorded between February 20, 2023 and February 20, 2024. Middle-aged women born in the 1970s and 1980s accounted for 62.2 per cent of the female travellers and were by far, the main force when it comes to consumption, the report stated. Women born in the 1990s and 2000s accounted for 28.5 per cent of tourism spendings, indicating their emerging potential as consumers. While the older generation born in the 1950s and 1960s constituted 9.3 per cent of female travellers, the report showed they preferred premium travel experiences.

"Women wield decision-making power in travel product bookings, and they excel at meticulous planning and having a good time for their money," said Sun Jie, CEO, Trip.com Group. Female users account for over 65 per cent of the agency's livestreaming audience and are looking for "cheap and cheerful" deals that can save 780 million yuan (US\$108 million) in travel expenses per annum. Moreover, they are more sensitive to travel trends, as per the report. Since the start of the year, daily average online visits by female users to view the agency's rankings of tourism service operators and new travel hot spots have increased by 42 per cent. Female travellers rely on such information to prepare their travel plans, Sun said, adding that for millions of women, travel is a way to overcome fatigue and pursue things they find beautiful. "The beautiful force of female travel is blossoming," Jie said.

"Data suggests Chinese travellers will return to the Middle East, surpassing pre-COVID visitation numbers for the first time in 2024 and in some cases surging 50 per cent higher than last

year. It is also shaping up to be another year of growth for outbound travel from the Middle East to Europe and beyond as traveller counts continue to grow toward a projected 61 million trips by



Craig Everett  
CEO, Holibob

## The Chinese travellers will return to the ME, surpassing pre-COVID level in this year

2030. What do these trends have in common? They are driven by younger and digitally-savvy travellers motivated to travel by their desire to discover and enjoy unique cultural experiences," Craig Everett, CEO, Holibob commented. Holibob's technology OTAs and airlines use to sell tours and experiences.

"Chinese outbound travel remains restricted due to ongoing pandemic measures. While recovery is expected, the Middle East faces competition from destinations with relaxed restrictions. Chinese tourists tend to prioritise cultural immersion, trying local cuisine, and outdoor experiences overcrowded tourist spots. The significance of the Middle East as a destination for Chinese travellers is up in the air, depending on the easing of travel limits and how well the region can compete in providing the experiences that travellers seek," Olga Borucu, Project Manager, Prime Travel, said.

Travel search comparison website, WayAway, is calling on the travel industry to place greater value on female audiences following a recent survey of 2,477 statistically relevant female travellers in the USA. The results of the survey showed that 82 per cent of travel decisions are made by women, with only 10 per cent saying that their partner has planned the whole trip. This



Olga Borucu  
Project Manager, Prime Travel

## Chinese outbound travel remains restricted due to ongoing COVID measures

matches other previous studies revealing the importance of females in the trip planning phase that is not reflected in how the industry creates and markets products. The results of the survey from WayA-

way—whose website provides discount and cashback travel options to travellers—provide more insights into the types of holidays females take, revealing half of them travelled at least once last year with children or their partner, while 29 per cent travelled alone.

While a majority report positive travel experiences, nonetheless 17 per cent reported not having enough time to themselves and, more worryingly, 13 per cent said they needed another vacation to recover and 8 per cent said they did not include any activities for themselves during their holiday.

"The current range of travel services and search and booking tools available to women do not 'inspire inclusion', the International Women's Day theme for 2024, in any way. This is despite what our research shows—82 per cent of family trips is booked by a woman. There is an economic and moral case for targeting female travellers here that almost our whole industry is ignoring," Janis Dzenis, Director, Communications, WayAway, said.

Equally it seems the concept of holiday and relaxation, in a family environment, seems to be somewhat unequal for women with 13 per cent saying they need another holiday at the end and 8 per cent not getting to include activities for themselves. "I do not think we need to survey the guys to find out they have a rather different experience. Travel service pro-

viders, tour operators and travel intermediaries should be thinking about how to create products that ensure female travellers, particularly those travelling with children, are able to have a more equitable experience. That is not an easy task, we know, but we do not see anyone trying to fulfill what would seem, to be more than just a niche," Dzenis added.

Jinyan Li, VP, Global Account Management, DidaTravel,



Janis Dzenis  
Director, Communications, WayAway

## I do not think we need to survey the guys to find out they have a rather different experience

"DidaTravel is a global travel wholesaler active in 100 source markets globally and distributing travel products worldwide. The GCC source markets were a focus

for the company in recent years and we are experiencing fast growth across all GCC markets. Year to date, compared to last 12 months, our outbound hotel sales from the UAE market have grown by 24 per cent, while Bahrain has grown by 103 per cent,



Jinyan Li  
VP, Global Account Management  
DidaTravel

## Compared to previous 12 months, our outbound hotel sales from the UAE have grown


Kuwait by 156 per cent, Oman 39 per cent, KSA by 202 per cent and Qatar by 199 per cent. The popular destinations booked from GCC markets include Thailand, UK, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Turkey. In terms of inbound growth into the GCC as the B2B leader, the Chinese market is the top market for most GCC nations. Year to date sales from China are registering 124 per cent growth on an average versus the previous year, pointing to the Chinese outbound market's recovery, even if the market has yet to reach pre-pandemic levels."




Female visitors are seen as new driving force in tourism, Chinese women are spreading their wings. More women are taking the driver's seat in making travel decisions, seeking personalised experiences and leaving male travellers' way behind when it comes to spending. 



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