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Post Ramadan outbound travel surges

Post Ramadan outbound travel picks up once again, thanks to demand from locals and expats in the GCC region. Maldives and Thailand in Asia, as usual, secure top position while close by and visa-free destinations, such as Georgia and Azerbaijan, also follow the suit, and not to forget Istanbul and South Korea, which attract more youth to these getaways. Experts share their views with



Mohamed Al Rais
Executive Director
Al Rais Travel Group

“Key outbound destinations booked by travellers from the UAE post-Ramadan reflects a blend of cultural exploration, iconic landmarks, and diverse experiences. Austria, Paris, London, Barcelona, Rome, Saudi and Istanbul consistently rank among favourites. Additionally, destinations like Japan and South Korea attract UAE travellers with their unique blend of traditional heritage and modern innovations. Australia and New Zealand emerge as sought-after destinations for UAE travellers seeking outdoor adventures.”



Rehan Ali
CEO
Tawfeeq Travel Qatar

“Post Ramadan certain sect of people will start preparing for Hajj Pilgrimage. However, since we will be approaching summer in a couple of months, hence short break destinations, such as Turkey, DXB, Maldives, Thailand, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Georgia, will be the hot selling destinations. Most important reason is the ease of accessibility with visa on arrivals to most of the destinations. The beautiful weather serves as the cherry on the cake. These destinations work perfects for all kind of travellers.”

Contd. on page 4 ▶

Celebrating women in travel

celebrated International Women’s Day in Dubai with 11 insightful speakers from the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors. The event was first in a series of ‘Women leaders forums’.

Dr. Shehara Rizly

The event kicked off with **Devika Jeet**, Director, DDP Group, welcoming the audience with an inspiring note “inspire future generations to dream big and reach for the stars”. “When we as women stand together shoulder to shoulder each day, we gain strength together. This event marks the beginning of many more to come. We hope for your continuous support, as we strive



Maitha Gobash
CEO
Dar Alhai Tourism

to see the industry unite and stand together,” she said.

Maitha Gobash, Senior Manager, Dubai Economy and Tourism & CEO, Dar Alhai Tourism, delivered her message of striving to achieve what you set your sights on. “As an avid traveller I started my own business, as I loved to travel around the world, although it was COVID time. I managed to take many groups and travel to explore different destinations

Contd. on page 6 ▶

UAE M!CE to grow @8.5%

The M!CE industry in Dubai has been estimated to be worth Dh165 billion (US\$44.7 billion) in 2023 and grow at a CAGR of 25% from 2023 to 2027. Experts’ take on the issue.



H.E. Helal Saeed Almarri
Director General
Dubai World Trade Centre Authority

“DWTC’s diverse exhibitions and events portfolio, along with its allied businesses, continue to go from strength to strength. Our results underscore the robust dynamics of the emirate’s thriving economy and strategic focus on key industry sectors, reinforcing Dubai’s leading status as a global hub for knowledge, innovation, and business. The past year has been shaped by extraordinary momentum across the entire business and trade ecosystem, with DWTC emerging as a catalyst for agenda-shaping discussions and actionable agreements. Culminated by successful hosting of COP28,

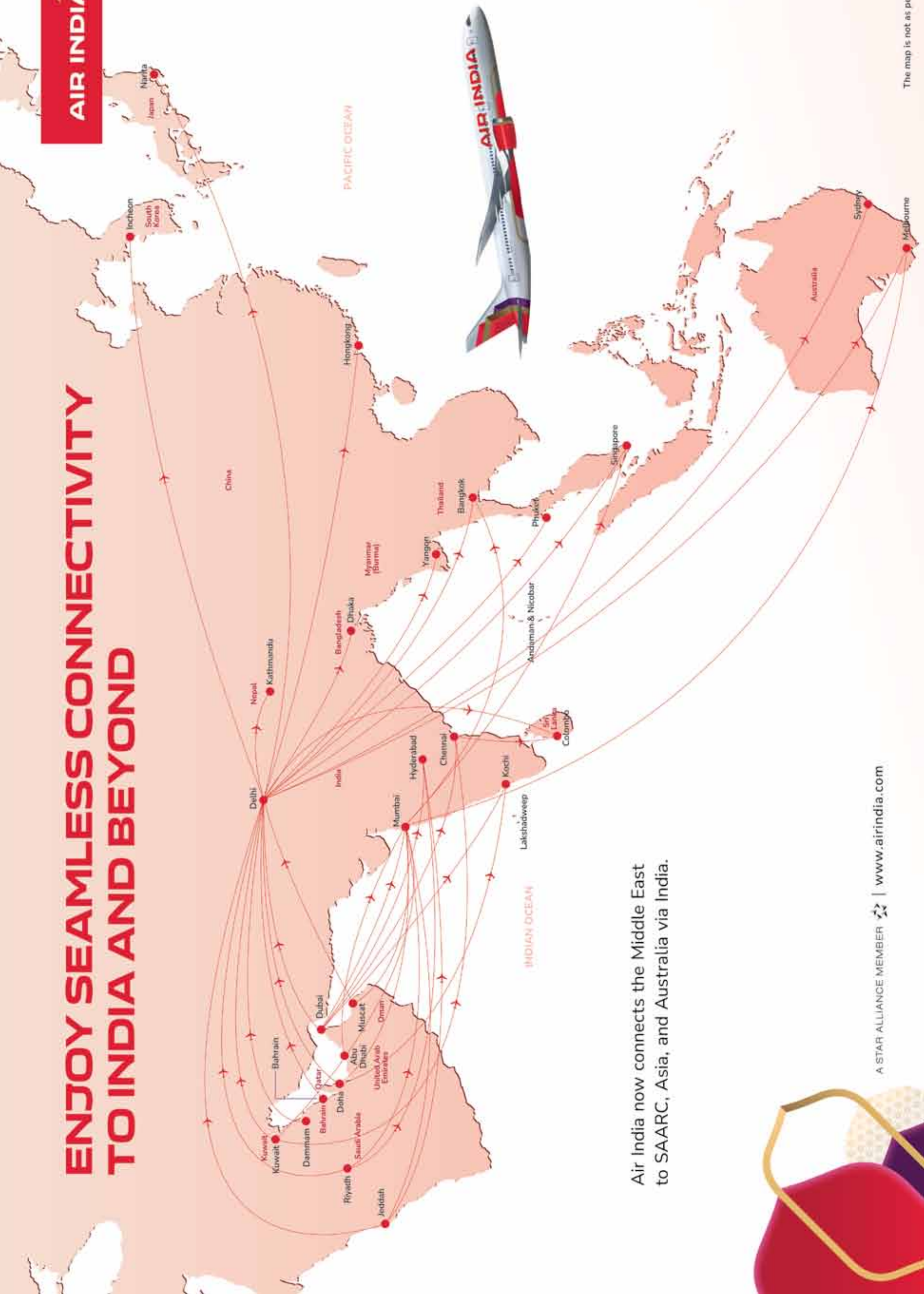
Dubai remains a frontrunner in the global events and exhibitions landscape, supported by DWTC’s leading role on the international stage.”

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Alliance for cruising in Arabian Gulf

The maritime and tourism authorities of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain and Oman have formalised the Cruise Arabia alliance – a strategic regional partnership that will promote the Arabian Gulf as a cruise ship destination globally. The partners will work together on enhancing the regional cruise ecosystem, improving stakeholder relations, and conducting joint marketing efforts regionally and internationally.

 TT Bureau

The Cruise Arabia alliance's key objectives include enhancing the cruise experience for passengers, attracting more cruise liners to the region, improving infrastructure at ports and driving economic growth in the regional cruise tourism sector. The partners will also work together on enhancing the regional cruise ecosystem, improving key stakeholder relations, and conducting joint marketing efforts regionally and internationally.

Dubai has been a significant player in the Cruise Arabia alliance, working closely with its partners to create interconnected and integrated regional cruise services. Previously, Dubai and the neighbouring countries have participated in international trade exhibitions under the banner of the Cruise Arabia alliance.



His Excellency Issam Kazim, Chief Executive Officer, Dubai Corporation for Tourism & Commerce Marketing (DCTCM), said: "The Cruise Arabia alliance will further reinforce Dubai's position as the cruise hub of the region, aligned with the Dubai Economic Agenda, D33, launched by our visionary leadership, to further consolidate Dubai's status as one of the top three global cities for business and leisure. The growth of our cruise tour-

ism has been largely shaped by the continuous support of our stakeholders and partners, and this alliance will result in more cruise operators seeking to anchor in Dubai, capitalising on its strategic location and promoting the city's diverse offerings, world-class infrastructure and superior air and sea connectivity. Dubai and its regional partners have already made significant strides in developing their cruise tourism segments, and collaboration will further elevate

the regional offering and make it more appealing to cruise lines and passengers."

Dubai is home to two world-class cruise ports, Mina Rashid (Port Rashid) and Dubai Harbour, which can accommodate a combined nine mega-cruise vessels at any one time. Boasting modern terminal facilities that can handle the biggest ships, Dubai is an ideal base for cruise tourists seeking to explore the city, the UAE and the wider

region. Dubai's 2023-2024 winter cruise season was launched on 28 October with the arrival of the luxury liner Mein Schiff 2, which docked at the Hamdan bin Mohammed Cruise Terminal at Mina Rashid.


A globally acclaimed cruise destination offering easy access to the historic Dubai Creek, Mina Rashid can handle seven mega-

to Port Rashid Marina, which offers a range of dining, shopping, and entertainment options.

Inaugurated in 2021, Dubai Harbour is a world-class maritime destination strategically located at the intersection of the iconic Palm Jumeirah and Bluewaters Island. It boasts of the region's largest marina and most advanced cruise facility. It

Dubai has been a key player in Cruise Arabia alliance, working closely with its partners to create interconnected & integrated regional cruise services

cruise vessels or 25,000 passengers simultaneously, while the port's Hamdan bin Mohammed Cruise Terminal is capable of handling 14,000 passengers a day. Mina Rashid is also home

has been purpose-built to provide easy access to and from the sea, allowing thousands of international passengers to explore some of the world's most outstanding tourist attractions. 



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Visa-free destinations take lead

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Jayaram Vaidyanthan
Managing Director
Sharaf Travel and Tourism Group

“ This year, post-Ramadan travellers from the UAE are drawn to Spain’s vibrant cities like Barcelona and Madrid, famed for their rich history and cultural offerings. Coastal escapes such as Balearic Islands

“ CIS destinations Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan are picking up due to their budget-friendly hotels and tours with visa-on-arrival for UAE residents. Destinations such as Sri Lanka, Japan, Kenya, Finland are also in demand. The focus is on ease of travel and budget, convenience of visa processing formalities, economical leisure travel pricing and trending destinations on social media that influence decision of travellers. ”



Daniel Rosado
Director
Spain Tourism GCC

and Andalucia also entice with their picturesque beaches and luxury resorts. UAE travellers opt for Spain’s diverse offerings due to its blend of historic charm, cosmopolitan cities, and coastal beauty. ”



Meerah Ketait
Head of Retail and Leisure – UAE
dnata Travel

“ International bookings from the UAE for the Eid al-Fitr break have doubled in volume compared to 2023. The most popular destinations include the Maldives, Thailand, Italy, Mauritius, and the USA. With an extended break anticipated for Eid celebrations, travellers are making the most of the opportunity, booking further in advance and to long-haul destinations, including Asia and the USA. The split is weighing heavier towards outbound. ”

“ Key destinations booked post Ramadan include Istanbul, Europe, Thailand, London and much more diverse destinations. They offer different climate and cultural experiences, luxury retreats, and



Jamal Abduinazzar
CEO
Cozmo Travel

historical landmarks, appealing to a variety of traveller interests. Travellers choose such destinations based on the experience they seek to have, be it cultural centric, luxurious or adventurous. ”



Emily Jenkins
Senior Manager - Product Development, DW Travel

“ DW Travel is seeing strong bookings in traditional destinations, such as Maldives, Sri Lanka, Georgia, Armenia, United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia and Zanzibar. Trending destinations include Poland, Kenya, South Korea and Bali for the upcoming break. Clients are booking longer stays and further in advance. We have attributed this to the rising airfares due to higher demand and capacity restraints, as well as delays in Schengen visa. ”

“ Exciting destinations such as Uzbekistan and Morocco are now within easy reach for UAE residents, making these as destinations of choice for UAE travellers post Ramadan. Other all-time favourites with our cus-



Varsha Pherwani
Travel Counsellor Associate
Travel Counsellors

tomers is the tropical paradise of Sri Lanka and the idyllic beach escape to the Maldives. These destinations offer hassle-free visa, with options like visa on arrival or straightforward E-visas. ”



Basel Atassi
Travel Counsellor
Travel Counsellors

“ Post Ramadan, the bookings have come only for the Western and Central European destinations which require Schengen visa, customer started factoring-in the long and laborious process-

“ Among trending destinations for Eid al-Fitr holidays are Mauritius, Morocco, Zanzibar, Egypt, Jordan, Japan, Saudi and new trending destination in Eurasia (Uzbekistan). Locally, Yas Island and Saadiyat continue to see an increase in demand, thanks to the variety of family attractions and hotels offering a good value. April marks as best time of the year to visit certain destinations like Japan, due to the most sought after and Middle Eastern destinations. ”



Ibrahim Nalkhande
General Manager
Business Travel

ing time. At the same time, we do the good old traditional customers travelling to UK, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Visa factor plays an important role in the selection process of destination besides other things. ”



Sapna Aidasani
Director - PR and Marketing
Pluto Travel

“ Central Asia and Turkey, especially Almaty in Kazakhstan and Tashkent in Uzbekistan, Turkey’s Antalya, snow holidays to Gudauri Georgia have become some of the most popular destinations post Ramadan. In the UAE, both, locals and residents, prefer destinations which grant them visa on arrival and select those as their short-haul destinations. They prefer to holiday in snow and cooler weather climates which are in close proximity. ”

“ In alignment with the preferences of our clients who prioritise quality, privacy, and sophistication, the chosen outbound destinations post Ramadan this year cater to these esteemed values. The Maldives



Aga Pytlík
General Manager
Panworld Travel

and Seychelles epitomise exclusivity while European cities like Geneva and Milan, along with London, provide access to refined experiences, including renowned Michelin-starred restaurants for culinary experiences. ”



Mariyam Kapasi
CEO & Founder
Amore Travel and Tourism

“ Post Ramadan, destinations such as Maldives, Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan are in high demand. Clients who are well organised with travel have booked Schengen countries. Easy visa requirements have made it easy for clients to book holidays last minute. People are booking solo holidays, looking for new destinations and out of the box things to do in destinations, guests are looking for more environmental friendly ways to travel. ”

“ The key destinations still seem to be Russia, Poland, Turkey and Thailand for Emirati travellers. The expats are keen to visit CIS countries, Kenya, Zanzibar, and the GCC cruising are going full. Visa



Asif Hussain
Manager - Outbound Leisure
Al Tayer Travel

free seems to be the key to a destination’s success, given the hassles expats go through to get visas for Europe, Canada, and USA. We have seen a change, the clients are inquiring early for summer. ”

Compiled by Dr. Shehara Rizly

Philippine Airlines' UAE revenue up

Josh Vasquez, Regional Head - EMEA Region, Philippine Airlines, reveals the airline generated \$53.8 mn revenue from passenger sales in UAE in 2023, 70% of which came from the travel agents.

TT Bureau

Philippine Airlines in the UAE held a night of gratitude and recognition of their partners in their journey to achieve a good revenue over the past year. The full-fledged flag carrier of the Philippines was founded in 1941 and its UAE operations began in 1982, first serving Dubai on 7 August. It was part of a growing Middle East route network that also connected flights between Manila and Doha in Qatar, Riyadh and Dammam in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Today, Middle East has become one of the most important regions for Philippine Airlines and their collaboration with all stakeholders in the region promises a whole gamut of opportunities.

Over the years, travel agents have become the most important partners for Philippine Airlines. At a recent event in



Josh Vasquez
Regional Head - EMEA Region
Philippine Airlines

journey to success over the past year. With travel once again hitting normal to exceeding levels, more travellers opt to explore destinations which they have not visited prior to the pandemic.

Josh Vasquez, Regional Head - EMEA Region, Philippine Airlines, said, "We are celebrating Philippine Airlines UAE Mabuhay Night, this is the second installment of this event, we will be recognising our top travel agents who have contributed to Philippine Airlines

We will be recognising our top travel agents who have contributed to Philippine Airlines UAE passenger sales for 2023

the UAE, titled 'Mabuhay Night', leading travel agents from across the UAE were invited to partake in celebrations on their

UAE passenger sales for 2023, we have also invited our Filipino community partners and our media friends." ▶

Germany's GCC overnights up 15%

Destination Germany is on a robust recovery trajectory with heightened appeal among travellers from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, says German National Tourist Office.

TT Bureau

With an impressive 15 per cent increase in overnight stays from GCC travellers in 2023, totalling 1,297,256, Germany reinforces its position as a premier global destination. The fourth quarter of 2023 alone showcased a remarkable resurgence to near pre-pandemic activity levels, with 263,985 overnight stays, mirroring 97.44 per cent of the figures from 2019. The success of 2023 builds on the momentum from 2022, when GCC visitors to Germany more than doubled, underscoring the region's growing fascination.

Germany's rich calendar of events, including the eagerly anticipated European Championship 2024 from June 14 to July 14, promises to further elevate its status as a premier cultural travel destination. The championship, along with more



Yamina Sofu
Director
Marketing & Sales Office, GNT0 GCC

sustainability, aiming to attract even more international visitors in the current year. **Yamina Sofu**, Director, Marketing & Sales Office, GNT0 GCC, says, "Our 2023 performance is a testament to Germany's magnetic appeal and our steadfast commitment to hospitality. Our growth from the GCC region, our third-largest overseas market, highlights the multifaceted appeal of Germany. Germany's allure for travellers from GCC is multifaceted, offering an enrich-

Germany's allure for GCC travellers is multifaceted, offering an enriching blend of natural scenery, shopping experiences, and urban environments

than 300 cultural events themed around football, exemplifies Germany's innovative approach to blending sports, culture, and

ing blend of stunning natural scenery, exclusive shopping experiences, and dynamic urban environments." ▶

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United we stand and progress...

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and experiences. There are different experiences by various ladies and families who have been travelling with me and it's always a pleasure to create new and unique experiences according to the clientele," Gobash said.

Mariam Farag, Vice President - Corporate Communications, DAMAC, started off her inspiring note with the quote of Maya Angelou, "Each time a woman stands up for herself without knowing it possibly without claiming it she stands up for all women." She further reiterated the importance of building confidence and achieving your goals. "When I look at all the amazing names of speakers and guests attending the event, I wanted to share something for these em-

sometimes we don't know our worth, we don't know our value. So, if I'm going to leave you here today with something it's that you must really know your value, add to your worth and don't be afraid to have a voice, you should always have a voice, no matter what, give your opinion even if they don't ask for it, be assertive. If you don't know something it's okay to say that you don't know," Farang said.

Eight panellists from travel, tourism and hospitality sectors 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.



Mariam Farag
Vice President - Corporate Communications, DAMAC



Elmira Heshmati
CEO & Founder Elaxiom Tourism



Sapna Aidasani
Director Pluto Travel

help in different verticals to take it to the next level.

Namratha Rose, Marketing and Partnership Manager, Spain Tourism GCC, shared that the travellers today are more open to discover and explore new destinations than before. "There has been a significant development in GCC and from 2022 there has been a massive increase of travellers seeking different experiences, people are not restricting themselves and this opens us more opportunities," Rose said.

Meerah Ketait, Head of Retail and Leisure at dnata Travel, shared that the visionary leadership enables the growth of the tourism sector. "GDP contribution from tourism to be 12.4 per cent just proves what kind of visionary leadership we have in place to really drive the growth of this industry and the importance of this industry with regards to

of tourism trends for younger generation. They prefer experiential holidays, as what really excites them is something out of the box or the regular itinerary, like a bread baking experience in France. The next trend we see is purpose tourism where the

and travelling the world and also focus on personal benefits like building confidence, there are many points that we need to link the benefits by source of inspiration like social media or internet," Khatib said.

Nina Kubik-Cheng, Vice President, Media Solutions & Partner Marketing, Wego, said, "Female entrepreneurs do not get the

about, and that's my opinion. I think, in hospitality and travel industry, we are typically slow adapters of technology. Airline does it way before us and so does other industries but when it comes to hospitality and travel, we are slow adapters. Yes, we are all about the human interaction and we are all about being hospitable as a human, but AI or technology in general



powered women. My mother taught me strength, drive and resilience, and that everyday is a new day and everyday you have a chance to renew yourself, you have a chance to start over even if you fall a thousand times a day,

Elmira Heshmati, CEO & Founder of Elaxiom Tourism, shared that post COVID has taught the world that tourism is the way forward and the most resilient. "Today we see the results as travel bounces back

client will take a trip to receive an award of achievement, and this could be a three or four-day break where they can network with likeminded individuals, as well as experience the localities. Lastly, the main trend is "detox holidays" where travellers just want to kick back and relax and stay away from all things digital or technological, including their mobiles which has become part and parcel of life," Aidasani said.

Aga Khatib, General Manager, Panworld Travel, spoke on the importance of attracting next generation to join the travel, tourism and hospitality industry. "I can see shifting values. I think it's also important to recognise that the values are changing and how we can close the gap between the generations and how we can attract the young generation to join our industry by increasing the net revenue which industries generate. Next, we need to create for them the surroundings or conditions that speak to their values by offering flexible timings, attracting them by pointing how the tourism and hospitality industry has a great positive impact in terms of the income, revenue, connections, learning about different culture



Mona Faraj
MD, HSMIA ME, CEO, ExploreTECH and Founder of Insight Out Consultancy



Namratha Rose
Marketing and Partnership Manager Spain Tourism GCC



Meerah Ketait
Head of Retail and Leisure dnata

same investment as male entrepreneurs in the travel and tourism sector, and I feel that is one area where change is required."

Mariyam Kapasi, Founder of Amore Travel and Tourism, shared about her journey as a female entrepreneur.

Artificial Intelligence and technology is making waves in the industry. **Mona Faraj**, Managing Director, HSMIA ME, CEO, ExploreTECH and Founder of Insight Out Consultancy, underlined the importance of technology and how it makes our work more efficient. A question she asked the audience was "how many of you came without using the google maps to the venue", to which she answered that a few years ago there may have been only a few hands but today in order to make our journey smoother we use the maps. "AI is there to make us better people, that is what it's all

is there to make us spend our time on serving the guest versus doing all the transactional, time consuming activities that we do day in day out. Did anyone come here without using google maps? If we would have

generating news jobs, attracting new businesses and opening doors for international collaborations as well. It's on a growth spurt, I would say and I think that the UAE has bounced back first post pandemic with regards to

'When we as women stand together shoulder to shoulder each day, we gain strength together. This event marks the beginning of many more to come'

asked this question 15 or 20 years ago, a few hands would have gone up," she said. She further reiterated that a recent article shared that even the watch industry is transforming. So, AI is moving in the same way but faster than we adapted to Internet of Things. She opined that in hospitality and travel, there are so many technology providers that can

this industry and it reflects the immense planning and strategic approach the country has in place to really lead the pack and take the industry to the next level," Ketait said.

Around a dozen leading woman from the travel, tourism and hospitality industry shared their insightful views with likeminded personalities at the event. ▶



Aga Khatib
General Manager Panworld Travel



Nina Kubik-Cheng
Vice President, Media Solutions & Partner Marketing, Wego

you can still regain your strength overnight because the sun will always shine. So, I have learnt a lot from her but mostly I have learnt to stand up for myself and I always like to say if they don't give you a seat at the table, then bring your own chair. As a woman in corporate and I'm sure that everyone in this room will agree with me that we have to fight not thrice but quadruple times as hard as men because

and it is the largest contributor, which not just helps boost the economy of every country but also provide job opportunities, benefit communities, as the infrastructure is also well planned out," Heshmati said.

It was shared that the new travellers of today require a different type of experiences. **Sapna Aidasani**, Director, Pluto Travel, shared, "There are three kinds

Ajman focuses on emerging markets

Ajman has become one of the emerging destinations in the UAE catering to families, couples, honeymooners and for weekend breaks with friends and female travellers. **His Excellency Mahmood Khaleel Alhashmi**, Director General, Ajman Department of Tourism Development shares about the source markets they are targeting and new initiatives they have taken to attract more visitors to the emirate.

TT Bureau

Which are the new source markets you are looking at this year?

We are actively exploring opportunities to attract visitors from emerging markets, with a specific focus on expanding our reach in the European market. While the UK remains a key source of tourism from Europe for Ajman, we aim to diversify our sources, considering potential markets with a growing interest in unique cultural experiences, wellness, and sustainable tourism.

What are the initiatives to drive more visitors to Ajman?

We are implementing a multi-faceted approach to drive more visitors to Ajman. Our initiatives include targeted marketing campaigns with German and international tour operators, designed to showcase the diverse experiences Ajman offers. Col-



H.E. Mahmood Khaleel Alhashmi
Director General, Ajman Department of
Tourism Development

laborations with travel trade partners, including airlines and hotels, play a pivotal role in promoting our destination. We continue to invest in sustainable tourism practices and innovate in our offerings to appeal to a broader audience.

How do you work with travel trade and other partners to increase tourists to the emirate?

Collaboration with the travel trade and other partners is essential for the success of Ajman's tourism. We engage in strategic partnerships with travel agencies, airlines, and hospitality providers to create attractive packages and promotions. By participating in international events like ITB Berlin, we strengthen our ties with the

Ajman is currently popular with families, couples, honeymooners and for weekend breaks with friends and female travellers. Sports favoured are watersports, including jet-skiing on the Corniche, kayaking (through the mangroves) and adventure sports, including hiking and mountain biking the trails. Golf is a big draw to Ajman with Al Zora

We engage in strategic partnerships with travel agencies, airlines, and hospitality providers to create attractive packages and promotions

global travel community. Additionally, our ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders ensures a coordinated effort to enhance the overall tourism experience and contribute to the growth of Ajman's visitor numbers.

Golf Club, a championship style 18-hole course, created by the famed Nicklaus Design group. The newly transformed Souq Msharif continues to uphold the city's rich heritage, celebrating its identity, and history. ▶

Ajman in numbers

- ❖ 50 hotels & resorts/ 4,292 rooms
- ❖ 11% growth in revenues in 2023 vs 2022
- ❖ 6% increase in occupancy in 2023 vs 2022
- ❖ 11% increase in number of visitors in 2023 vs 2022
(Those results are from closer of 2023.)

Smith Travel Research Report - STR


- ❖ According to STR – full year 2023 figures, Ajman continues to lead its competitors in volume, occupying #1 position in occupancy levels at 82%, with a 4% lead over its nearest competitor.

Forward Bookings

- ❖ Marketing campaigns with German tour operators, along with strong sales drives in 2023, have produced positive indications. Confidence that 2024 will continue showing growth. Ajman is pleased to report figures are back to pre-pandemic levels.
- ❖ Objective is to continue to grow the European market in general and the DACH markets in specific steadily each year.


Developments

- ❖ On 14 February 2024, His Highness Sheikh Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi, Supreme Council member and Ruler of Ajman, inaugurated the "Heritage Trail" in Ajman, which falls under Ajman's Heritage projects to embody the sustainable image of Ajman as a vibrant historical city. This project is led by Ajman Municipality and Planning Department as part of Ajman Vision 2030.


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celebrates Int'l Women's Day

TRAVTALK 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.



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Emirates sees strong demand post Eid

With GCC residents making travel plans for the Eid al-Fitr break, Emirates expects one of the busiest seasons this year. In an interview with **TRAVEL MIDDLE EAST**, **Adil Al Ghaith**, Senior Vice President - Commercial Operations, Gulf, Middle East and Central Asia, Emirates, shares about their successful participation at ITB Berlin last month, and new ventures and routes.

Dr. Shehara Rizly

How does post Eid travel look like so far from the airline's outlook?

Post Eid travel will be a strong period of demand, especially as we inch closer to summer. Travellers continue to have an undiminished appetite for venturing out and discovering new places, and business travel demand still enjoys a positive upward trajectory within the region and to major commercial centres.

Will you be looking at adding flights during this period for any specific destinations?

We are always adjusting capacity to demand, whether it's adding frequencies or increasing seat capacity, by introducing the A380, if it's operationally viable to certain routes. Right now, we are focused on the introduction of our A350s into the fleet, slated for early fall. The A350 will enable Emirates to serve a range of new markets, as well as layer on



Adil Al Ghaith
Senior VP - Commercial Operations, Gulf, Middle East and Central Asia, Emirates

additional frequencies, as our focus shifts to secondary and regional points, and later on, long-haul operations with the aircraft.

Could you share about the new routes and partnerships for the first quarter?

We just announced the introduction of services to Bogota, Colombia via Miami, launching this June. We are also reinstating services to Phnom Penh in May and Adelaide in Australia in October. Watch this space for more

announcements as we expand our network. We had a busy ITB this year, making a string of partnership announcements with other airlines, including ITA Airways, Icelandair and G07. We also strengthened our relationships with Tourism Ireland, the Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO) and Austrian National Tourist Office (ANTO) as part of our ongoing efforts to stimulate more inbound traffic to our European gateways. On the



Travellers continue to have an undiminished appetite for venturing out, and business travel demand still enjoys a positive upward trajectory

cruise front, we also renewed our partnerships with AIDA and TUI Cruises.

Are you planning to add new products onboard the aircraft?

Premium Economy, along with other our cabin refreshes will be an important part of our future, not only for the product mix we will offer, but also for the competitive advantage that it offers

across different markets and appealing to a wide range of customer segments. So far, 21 aircraft have been refurbished. We are making substantial progress in getting the newest product up in the air. The demand for Premium Economy has been incredible, with significant booking momentum that have exceeded our expectations and forecasts. When it comes to soft product, we have just introduced Business Class loungewear, which has positive feedback.

Do you see an increase in the number of MICE travellers?

Yes, and it all comes down to how Dubai has become a magnet for large events that attract professionals across numerous industries from all over the world. It has built the facilities and hotel infrastructure to accommodate large numbers. With an action-packed calendar, our teams have been busy catering for the special requirements of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions groups.

Circular Economy initiatives in Gulf Tourism

The global adoption of Circular Economy is increasingly crucial for countries worldwide, especially amid the growing challenges posed by climate change. The fundamental premise of a circular economy lies in the reduction, reuse, and recycling of resources to minimise waste, conserve energy, and reduce environmental strain, says **Dr Sean Lochrie**, Associate Professor at Heriot-Watt University Dubai.

In response to the urgent need to address climate change, nations have been actively pursuing various initiatives aimed at mitigating its effects and embracing more sustainable practices. The establishment of a Circular Economy (CE) plays a key role in advancing economic growth while simultaneously tackling climate change.

and reuse materials becomes apparent. Studies suggest that widespread adoption of CE practices could yield significant reductions in CO₂ emissions, thus aiding countries in meeting their climate objectives.

The CE concept is garnering growing global interest for its capacity to tackle environmental



Despite their heavy reliance on fossil fuels, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are leading efforts within the GCC to combat climate change

By reimagining the traditional linear economic model, the CE underscores the importance of resource efficiency, particularly as resources become scarcer, and the imperative to recycle

issues and advance sustainable development. Within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, countries are increasingly acknowledging the significance of embracing CE principles to foster

economic growth while addressing environmental and societal challenges concurrently. From an environmental perspective, GCC nations confront substantial environmental strains stemming from rapid expansion, population growth, and natural resource extraction. In response, the CE presents a viable solution by prioritising the reduction, reuse, and recycling of materials, thereby facilitating waste minimisation

and the preservation of natural resources. A recent report reveals that despite their heavy reliance on fossil fuels, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are leading efforts within the GCC to combat climate change across various critical sectors. In 2023, the UAE Cabinet gave its approval for the development of the UAE Circular Economy Policy 2031, which serves as a revised framework aimed at fulfilling the nation's

goals about the CE. This policy aligns with the objectives outlined in the UAE's Green Agenda 2030.

The Gulf region boasts of stunning landscapes, vibrant cultures, and luxurious amenities, attracting millions of tourists annually. However, the rapid growth of tourism in this region poses potential environmental challenges. As tourism destinations in the Gulf region strive for sustainability, integrating CE principles into planning, development, and management practices can help achieve a more resilient and environmentally friendly tourism sector. Furthermore, the integration of CE principles is crucial for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector, especially in regions like the UAE, to both address climate change and foster sustainable tourism development. This approach represents the

pathway for businesses to actively participate in and adjust to environmental challenges. The Gulf region stands at a critical juncture where balancing tourism growth with environmental sustainability is crucial. Embracing CE principles will be a holistic approach to address the environmental challenges associated with tourism.



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

135 exhibitors, 14k visitors @STM 2024

The inaugural B2B edition of Saudi Travel Mart (STM), organised in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from 25 to 27 February, concluded successfully. More than 14,000 people visited the mart, where 135 exhibitors from 20 countries showcased their products.  was the media partner for the event. It was for the first time a B2B exhibition took place in Riyadh, the cultural capital of Saudi Arabia.

 TT Bureau

Saudi Travel Mart 2024 (STM 2024) provided a platform for key exhibitors from Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world to showcase their offerings from 25 to 27 February. **Naif A Alrajhi** - Vice Chairman, Board of Directors, Riyadh Chamber of Commerce, graced the occasion as Chief Guest.

Addressing the audience at the inaugural ceremony, Naif A Alrajhi shared, "Today is an important event to have this first ever B2B event in Saudi Arabia, having 135 companies from 20 countries, which shows the importance of being in Saudi Arabia, and this is good for later stages as Saudi Arabia aims to achieve a high number of tourists from across the globe. Saudi Arabia has a lot of opportunities with the commitment of the government, as they have set a target with the Saudi



Vision 2030, aimed at attracting the highest number of tourists by 2030, and with all the foreign investments happening in the Kingdom, this will give rise to the tourism sector in the Kingdom."

Key person behind the event, **Mohamed Al Harbi**, Chief Executive Officer, Saudi Travel Mart, shared, "My intention is to position Saudi Arabia as one of the most visited countries in

the world and promote inbound travel to the Kingdom. We lacked a B2B platform for our travel trade partners to connect with the new companies that have risen in the kingdom over the past few years. Hence, my team and I planned this three-day exhibition with some of the big names in the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors, so that they will have an opportunity to connect, network and talk busi-

ness with new partners. We are thankful to all our partners who joined us and had faith in us as we started a journey together to position Saudi Arabia as one of the most sought-after destinations, and for the next edition we hope to bring in more players together. We consider the Saudi Travel Market to be one of the important exhibitions through which we intend to place the Kingdom on the list of major

tourist destinations in the coming years. As the first B2B exhibition in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we aim to attract the largest international companies to the Kingdom and make it the first and best choice for everyone."


Rezlive.com was the gold partner for the first B2B event. **Zaheer Jedly**, Vice President - Sales (GCC), Rezlive.com, reiterated, "Rezlive.com's partici-

opportunities to network with key industry players, showcase its services, and establish lucrative partnerships. This participation promises fruitful business prospects and enhanced market penetration."

Amsa Hospitality joined in as the hospitality partner. The organisers recognised all the partners who supported the first edition of STM by sharing

Saudi Arabia has a lot of opportunities, as they have set a target with the Saudi Vision 2030, aimed at attracting the highest number of tourists by 2030

pation in the Saudi travel market marks a strategic move to expand its presence in the region. By engaging in this B2B event, Rezlive.com gains invaluable

a token of appreciation, which was well received by all the partners and they looked forward to the next edition to be bigger and better in 2025. 

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China's outbound numbers to double in '24

Outbound travel from China is estimated to almost double this year, compared to 2023 and will only be 22% below its peak pre-pandemic numbers of 155 million tourists in 2019, according to research by Oxford Economics. Full recovery is expected to materialise in 2025, with the Middle East being the first region globally to recover its Chinese inbound market.

TT Bureau

Underscoring that prediction, Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2024, which takes place at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) from 6-9 May, is set to welcome twice the number of Chinese exhibitors and travel professionals, compared with its 2019 show. China lifted its COVID-related travel restrictions on 8 January 2023, allowing Chinese tourists to travel abroad, without having to quarantine upon their return. Bookings for overseas travel during Chinese New Year, soared by 540 per cent compared with the same period in 2022, according to data from the Chinese travel site Trip.com.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director - ME, Arabian Travel Market, commented, "Last year, some analysts were predicting that the Chinese outbound market would recover to around six million per



month by the summer of 2023, driven in part by the pent-up demand, especially from young, affluent Chinese. However, that rebound was not as great as many tourism professionals had hoped for, and now analysts are confident that this year, we could see Chinese visitor numbers double year on year, with

major destinations in the Middle East recovering quicker than any other internationally, especially for luxury travel. That sentiment has also been borne out by the latest spending data for the 2024 Chinese New Year. According to Chinese payment platform Alipay, the number of Chinese overseas transactions were 7 per cent

higher than those recorded in 2019. The most popular Middle East destinations include Dubai, Saudi's AIUla, Egypt and Jordan - Dubai alone welcomed more than one million Chinese visitors in 2019."

Chinese participation at ATM 2024 is expected to more than

double compared with ATM 2019, with new exhibitors that include private sector companies, such as Heytrip International, Ji-angsu Intelligence Equipment Co, Flightroutes24 Travel Company Ltd, Feeyo Technology and anticipated destination representation

Predicted Tourism Surge', in association with Huawei. This session, which takes place on 6 May, will explore the changing trends, cultural preferences and the role of mobile marketing and tourism predictions in the Chinese tourism market.

Bookings for overseas travel from China during Chinese New Year, soared by 540 per cent compared with the same period in 2022

from Macao Government Tourism Office, China Cultural Centre in the UAE and the Hongkong Tourism Board.

ATM is also organising a dedicated conference session on this key market in its Global Stage, entitled 'Capitalising on China's

In line with this year's show theme 'Empowering Innovation: Transforming Travel Through Entrepreneurship', other highlights at the 31st edition of ATM include entrepreneurship-focused sessions, as well as dedicated sessions for other key source markets like India. ▶

AIUla: A captivating story for agents

Signature events targeting travel trade and media partners in five major international cities - Dubai, London, New York, Paris, Shanghai, and Mumbai, AIUla will kickstart the 'Forever Revitalising' campaign to tell a captivating story. The campaign encapsulates the essence of AIUla, presenting a refreshing and authentic perspective crafted to captivate travellers worldwide.

TT Bureau

Forever Revitalising, the data-driven endeavour of AIUla that aims to be more than a traditional destination marketing campaign, debuts across nine core global source markets in six languages, and will be integrated across multiple channels.

Phillip Jones, Chief Tourism Officer at Royal Commission

ever-evolving journey. Through this campaign, we can open up the dialogue even further on a global stage and communicate the full depth of AIUla's appeal, attributes and ambition. The best is yet to come, and we extend an open invitation for all to be part of this extraordinary journey."

Melanie de Souza, Executive Director, Destination Marketing at RCU, commented, "Forever Re-



and be vested in its unique and evolving narrative.

Forever Revitalising encapsulates and delivers precisely what today's globetrotters seek: authentic and meaningful experiences, and an acknowledgment that niche is the new travel norm, alongside the growing trend of eco-friendly and culturally-conscious travel choices. This approach is firmly anchored in the AIUla Sustainability Charter, which exemplifies the destination's commitment to integrating economic prosperity with the preservation of its natural and cultural heritage. This is best demonstrated by a development approach that centres on the well-being and interests of the people of AIUla. As the city evolves as a destination, it does so in a manner that is both sustainable and enriching for its residents, with goals to create 38,000 new jobs, contribute SAR 120 billion (US\$32 billion) to the Kingdom's GDP. ▶

Forever Revitalising aligns with AIUla's vision of becoming a destination that is not only historically rich but eternally relevant for travellers

for AIUla (RCU), said, "In just a few years, AIUla has established itself as a destination on the global traveller's wish list. However, Forever Revitalising marks the next chapter in this

vitalising is not only about driving global awareness of a destination that till recently was relatively unknown to most travellers, but it is also about communicating the breadth and depth of the

programmes and initiatives designed to create a better future for all those who live, work and visit our ancient oasis."

She added, "We hope that the film and creative assets do justice to a truly unique destination, capturing the essence of AIUla across our rich heritage, vibrant

arts and culture, breath-taking natural beauty, thrilling adventures, and rejuvenating wellness experiences. This campaign, we hope, will not only resonate with travellers but also support and engage our travel partners who are critical to curating the unparalleled experiences of our evolving tourism landscape."

With an emphasis on renewal and transformation, Forever Revitalising aligns with AIUla's vision of becoming a destination that is not only historically rich but eternally relevant. With this global campaign, AIUla presents a revitalised cultural promise, inviting discerning tourists and partners to emotionally engage

RezLive.com puts up impressive show

RezLive.com announced its outstanding participation at the Saudi Travel Market (STM), held in Riyadh from 25 to 27 February 2024. The event saw an impressive turnout of industry professionals. With agents from KSA, Bahrain, Kuwait and across the UAE visiting RezLive.com's stand, it presented them an excellent opportunity for networking and forging valuable partnerships.

TT Bureau

At the Saudi Travel Market (STM), RezLive.com garnered significant interest from hoteliers across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), who expressed keen interest in tie-up with the company. Standalone and boutique hotels in KSA, Bahrain, and Qatar also showed a strong desire to connect with RezLive.com's platform, underscoring the company's reputation for excellence in the hospitality sector. In addition to engaging with hoteliers, RezLive.com welcomed Destination Management Companies (DMCs) from KSA, Turkey, Maldives and Egypt, further



solidifying business relationships and exploring collaborative opportunities in the vibrant travel market. One of the notable highlights of RezLive.com's participation at STM 2024 was the collaboration between Turkish Airlines and RezLive.com, as they jointly planned for a familiarization (Fam) trip in Europe. This partnership underscores

the company's commitment to providing unparalleled travel experiences and expanding its global footprint. RezLive.com's exceptional contribution to the travel industry was recognised at the event, as the company was honoured with the prestigious Gold Sponsorship Award by the organisers

of STM, presented by the CEO, Mohammed Al-Harbi. This accolade serves as a testament to RezLive.com's dedication to innovation and excellence in the travel sector. Moreover, RezLive.com took the opportunity to highlight its rewards incentives schemes and Mada bonus benefits, reaffirming its commitment to providing added value to its partners and clients.

Reflecting on the success of STM 2024, Jaal Shah, Group



Managing Director at RezLive.com, expressed gratitude to all participants and stakeholders for their unwavering support. Jaal Shah commented, "Our participation at Saudi Travel Market 2024 has been immensely rewarding, allowing us to strengthen existing partnerships and forge new alliances within the travel industry. We remain committed to driving innovation and delivering exceptional value to our partners and clients worldwide."

of STM, presented by the CEO, Mohammed Al-Harbi. This accolade serves as a testament to RezLive.com's dedication to innovation and excellence in the travel sector. Moreover, RezLive.com took the opportunity to highlight its rewards incentives schemes and Mada bonus benefits, reaffirming its commitment to providing added value to its partners and clients.

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STM 2024 concludes successfully

The inaugural edition of Saudi Travel Mart, organised recently in Riyadh with **TRAVELTALK** as the media partner, concluded successfully. The three-day event saw travel trade coming from around the globe to connect with 135 exhibitors from 20 countries. More than 14,000 people visited the inaugural edition, including some big names from the travel, tourism and hospitality industry.



GCC retains top spot at Sun Siyam

Sun Siyam has become a household name in the GCC region due to its activities and features. **TRAVELTALK** takes a trip down memory lane with **Zulaikha Manik**, Deputy Managing Director, Sun Siyam Resorts, on their journey over the years and then moves on to the importance of the GCC market and adapting changes necessary to cater to different markets, key trends and insights in the hospitality industry.

Dr Shehara Rizly

With humble beginnings many moons ago, Sun Siyam has undoubtedly become one of the most sought after getaways during Eid Al Fitr or any other short break periods to travellers from the GCC. One of the key factors that attract the GCC clientele is the activities and facilities catering to their needs and requirements. **Zulaikha Manik**, Deputy Managing Director, Sun Siyam Resorts, says, "I have been with the company for the past 25 years, the Founder, Mr Siyam, who is the face and ambassador of the brand Sun Siyam, made a humble beginning; it was a small travel agency and today we have the largest number of beds owned by a single shareholder. It's 100 per cent Maldivian company with deep roots in history and culture of hospitality, run from the house Mr Siyam started. This is why our service is heartfelt and genuine, this is seen from the gardener to the general manager in all the resorts we have."

Manik shared the importance of the GCC/ Middle East market, saying, "Middle East is an important market for us, especially now we have created our product profile to suit the customers of the Middle East. When some of the traditional Middle East clients come, they don't like to be outside, but as a family they want to enjoy themselves with family time. So, what we have done is we have created these indoor pools which are enclosed. So, it offers a lot of privacy to the whole family to enjoy as well. These are some of the contributing factors and,



Zulaikha Manik
Deputy Managing Director
Sun Siyam Resorts

of course, halal food is available. We ensure that we conform to all these standards and Eid is a big celebration for us, as a Muslim country when we do it, it doubles the celebrations when we

very much, if you look at 10 years ago, we did not have the Chinese market as strong as it is today, or the Indian market for that matter. We were traditionally very much based on our European markets, but now this is the new trend. Initially, we were not adept in handling the Chinese or the Indian market, but over the years we have understood their needs and wants, and we are very comfortable. Another aspect that we have seen a lot of growth in the Maldives is the local tourism aspect of it because synonymously Maldives was 'one island one resort' concept and it was exclusive but now it's inclusive, as guest house tourism has become a big contributing factor into the overall hospitality and



Explaining to us about technology and its pivotal importance in today's fast paced world, she shared, "Technology has played

by guests, they actually have access to pre-check-in, all that information is there for them, when they come to the resort it's

So, these are the advances that we have."

Staying relevant in the industry is key, as it's possible to lose face within a click of a button. Manik shares how this works for them as being passionate hospitality professionals. "For us the genuine hospitality that we offer as a Maldivian brand stands supreme over everything and our deep roots in the culture itself, our warmth and the hospitality, is what keeps us at the top of everything and we create a lot of new and unique experiences for each of the resorts. So, even though we share the same DNA with Sun Siyam Resorts as a group but each of the resort is unique in its way and we are constantly coming up with creative, innovative ways with which we can stand ahead of the rest of the world," she shares.

Speaking about the expansion plans, she says, "We are constantly looking to expand in key markets, such as UAE, Saudi, Bahrain. In terms of products also, we are refurbishing one of the properties in about one and half years to cater to this



have other Muslims celebrate along with us."

Speaking on the evolving world of hospitality, Mannik says, "The markets have changed

tourism of the Maldives. These are the main changes that you would see, but then again Maldives as a destination is growing and we are more open to what other offerings are."

a big part and as a group we have invested heavily in ensuring that we are on par with the advances on the technology side. We actually have a mobile app. Once reservation is made

a seamless process, they do not have to go through completing forms etc, it's so quick and easy. They can start their experience of holiday as soon as possible. It also gives them the flexibility and independence to book excursions to restaurants where they want to go, water sport activities




Markets have changed, if you look at 10 years ago, we did not have Chinese market as strong as it is today, or the Indian market for that matter

etc, as traditionally you had to go to reception to make these reservations, but now all this is available at your fingertips, you can make them from anywhere.

market. Ten years ago the guests who came are different to whom we get now. However, we have a high retention and continue to do well." **TRAVELTALK**

FHS enables effective networking

Future Hospitality Summit is scheduled in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from 29 April to 1 May 2024, with  as the media partner. The summit will focus on the rise of women leaders in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's hospitality and tourism industries, encouraging more women to embark on a career in the sector. Women leaders speak their minds on the issue.



Shaikha Al Nowais
Corporate Vice President of Owner
Relationship Management, Rotana

“Rotana is committed to advancing gender diversity and empowering women in the workplace, across all departments and levels of our operations. We introduced our flagship TAROT programme, which offers our employees a fast-track development path to be trained for 12 months with progressive growth opportunities.”



Marie-Louise Ek
Vice President - Human Resources
Middle East and Africa, Hilton

“We trained over 15 internal facilitators to run our ‘Women in Leadership’ programme across the Kingdom to help train and nurture the next generation of woman leaders and hotel general managers. We have welcomed more than 250 trainees through our doors, including over 200 women in the last two years.”



Eng. Orobah Filfilan
Architect
Saudi Icon

“Saudi Icon gives equal opportunities to all its employees and embraces a positive team culture. I believe that women possess the acumen and capability of viewing all sorts of issues and concerns with fresh lenses, which enables us to provide insight and feedback that tackles the most vital aspects.”



Aseel Bondagjy
Hotel Talent Development
Manager NEOM

“We are committed to promoting gender diversity and women empowerment in the hospitality industry. Our initiatives are aligned with Saudi Vision 2030 and include targeted programmes, which aim to empower Saudi women with the skills they need to achieve success in the hospitality sector.”



Marloes Knippenberg
Chief Executive Officer
Kerten Hospitality

“As a global enterprise, championing gender diversity and women empowerment is encoded in DNA of Kerten Hospitality, aligning closely with Saudi Vision 2030. Gender diversity in recruitment, implementing mentorship programmes, and cultivating an inclusive work environment is in our nature.”



Norah Al Tamimi
Chief Executive Officer
Baheej Company

“At Baheej, we believe in giving everyone, regardless of gender, a fair shot at success. While we are newly established, we have commitment to gender equality and the progressive values of our shareholders. We are not just talking the talk; we are walking the walk, sending a powerful message about our commitment.”

‘Mabuhay Night’ by Philippine Airlines

Recognising the contribution of top performing agents across the United Arab Emirates, Philippine Airlines hosted ‘Mabuhay Night’ recently in Aklan province of the Philippines. The airlines disclosed that in 2023, it posted US \$53.8 million revenue from passenger sales in the UAE, 70% of which came from the travel agents. Hence, it was perfect opportunity to take the partnership to the next level.



Dubai dominates in MICE business

► Contd. from page 1



Mohamed Al Rais
Executive Director
Al Rais Travel Group

“In Qatar, we have been witnessing a number of MICE events by large conglomerates. It is prudent that MICE industry plays a significant role in economic growth of a country, along with building

“Virtual and hybrid events have become prominent trends in MICE bookings, offering flexibility and accessibility, while sustainability initiatives gain traction among organisers. Destinations like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha have emerged as top choices for MICE events, offering state of the art facilities, luxurious accommodations, and diverse entertainment options to delegates. This is good for the MICE industry.”



Rehan Ali
CEO
Tawfeeq Travel Qatar

relationships globally. Sustainability is emerging with every corporate seeking eco-friendly venue, minimising waste, reducing emissions and importantly flights with flexible booking policies.”



Jayaram Vaidyanathan
Managing Director
Sharaf Travel and Tourism Group

“MICE has seen an exponential growth with UAE dominating the market in the Middle East due to world-class infrastructure and facilities for hosting global events. Even on the Outbound MICE, maximum number of travellers are from the UAE, followed by Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries. The MICE industry has diversified its offerings beyond traditional conferences and exhibitions to include niche events among other things.”

“MICE industry in the UAE continues to thrive, driven by its world-class infrastructure, strategic location, government support, and diverse economy. As the country positions itself as a global business



Issam Slaimi
General Manager
Golden Tulip Media Hotel

hub, the MICE sector is expected to further expand and contribute to its economic growth and development. The MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) industry is continually evolving.”



Hasa Al Harthi
Senior Manager Corporate Travel
DW Travel

“The MICE industry is experiencing a notable uptick in the region, driven by expanding business opportunities and a renaissance in corporate gatherings. We are witnessing a rise in demand for hybrid events integrating virtual elements with physical meetings, alongside a growing emphasis on sustainability and immersive experiences for MICE travellers. Destinations like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha continue to dominate.”

“MICE Industry started gaining momentum since 2023 for both Inbound and Outbound MICE activities. Visa is critical element in selecting outbound destination. The destinations from Caucasus and



Ibrahim Nalkhade
General Manager
Business Travel

East European countries started getting good chunk of MICE business from the UAE and Gulf region. It's good to see the amazing transformation of Uzbekistan into MICE destination with better air links.”



Sapna Aidasani
Director PR and Marketing
Pluto Travel

“We are seeing strong growth for 2024, with clients receptive to dual and undiscovered destinations. The UAE has a strong competitive edge with its diversity and immersive experiences. There

“Two of the most preferred destinations for MICE are Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Gala dinners and recognitions with exclusive entertainment activities, including desert drives and dinner in the sky is trending. Oil and gas, as well as medical and finance industries, are well getting along with these MICE trends. Some other emerging destinations include Zanzibar for all-inclusive packages, Georgia for ski based incentives and Ras al Khaimah for staycation incentives.”



Justine Thomas
Director, Arabian Adventures
Meetings, Incentives and Events

is more demand for sustainable, immersive, cultural, and CSR-based experiences. Incentives have shifted from the 'money can't buy' to an emotional connection with a destination and its people. Dubai stays strong.”



Mohamed Ali Amer
Head of Events
Al Tayer Events

“The MICE sector in the Middle East has experienced a significant surge in activity following COVID-19. We have observed substantial growth throughout 2023, which has continued into 2024, particularly in destinations offering hassle-free visa procedures and affordable airfares. Currently, MICE clients seek destinations and activities that offer excellent value for money. They prefer short programmes lasting no longer than four days.”

“MICE is on the upward trend in the region with insurance and pharma companies, along with automobiles, planning incentive trips for their employees and channel partners. MICE bookings have a new



Ghanishth Sahni
Regional Head - MICE
Cozmo Travel

trend wherein clients are looking for activities and experiences, instead of the regular tours. New destinations with different experience is the trend now. Germany-Spain-Portugal is in demand along with Japan.”



Christopher Kramer
HM, Movenpick Grand Al Bustan
Hotel & Convention Centre Dubai

“At Movenpick Grand Al Bustan Hotel & Convention Centre Dubai, we have seen a surge in demand, particularly for destination weddings and corporate conventions. This segment is our top performer. Our experienced team's mastery of the MICE industry has ensured exceptional experiences and lasting client relationships, fostering world class events. We are witnessing that MICE bookings, aiming sustainability, are poised for growth.”

“The MICE industry has seen significant growth in the region in recent year, particularly after the slowdown caused by the pandemic. Post-COVID, the industry jumpstarted, especially with UAE



Sumaira Isaacs
GM, Gulf Dunes (Desert Adventures'
sister MICE Operation)

leading the charge. Dubai and Abu Dhabi boasts of over 50 per cent share of the entire Middle Eastern market and events like the Expo 2020 Dubai and the FIFA World Cup, have acted as catalysts.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

Middle East exhibitors unveil

ITB Berlin 2024, held at the Berlin Exhibition Grounds from 5-7 March, was attended by the travel and tourism community from across the globe. The event provided them an opportunity to reconnect and network over three days. Middle East exhibitors showcased their unique offerings at impressive exhibition stands, which attracted many visitors to check on the destinations, airlines and hotels.



distinctive offerings at ITB Berlin



Strong relationship with agents key to biz

Timur Ilgaz, Cluster General Manager - Arjaan by Rotana Dubai Media City, Centro Barsha and DAMAC Hills2 Edge by Rotana & Vice President, Turkish Business Council, is one of the stalwarts of the hospitality industry in the UAE. The visionary leader, who has seen the transformation of the industry in the UAE, shares insights on the industry and the way forward.

TT Bureau

Have you seen new source markets coming to Dubai?

Dubai has been always a destination for a lot of countries and I've witnessed a delightful surge in new source markets. We are receiving a rising influx of guests from different regions with a notable increase in visitors for both, purposes of business and leisure.

Do you see new trends when it comes to customers? The way they book, the experiences they require, etc.

Digital booking platforms are booming, and guests are increasingly seeking personalised experiences. Today's travellers go beyond just luxurious accommodations; they desire attentive care throughout their stay, from pre-booking arrangements to a warm welcome and a



Timur Ilgaz
Cluster GM - Arjaan by Rotana Dubai Media City, Centro Barsha & DAMAC Hills2 Edge by Rotana & VP, Turkish Business Council

tailoring services to their individual needs at every touchpoint.

How important are travel agents and how do you incentivise them?

Travel agents play a vital role in connecting us with a wider audience, thus helping us in the business. We recognise their partnership and adapt to reach them in an effective manner. We believe in strong relationships with both, individual agents and agencies, through lucrative loyalty programmes, fostering long-term partnerships with our valued partners and guests.

memorable departure. This shift presents an exciting opportunity to exceed guest expectations by

We believe in strong relationships with individual agents through lucrative programmes, fostering long-term partnerships with our valued partners



What are the key expectations of your customers for a seamless customer experience?

Today's travellers prioritise a smooth and efficient experience throughout their journey. This encompasses aspects like:

- ❖ **Simplified booking processes:** Our brand.com online

platforms are user-friendly and offer clear information and the best-granted rate.

- ❖ **Prompt communication:** Timely responses to inquiries and concerns.

- ❖ **Flexibility:** Options to modify reservations or preferences.

- ❖ **Digital convenience:** Flexible check-in/ out for guests, easy access, and readily available property information.

- ❖ **Personalised service:** Recognition of guest preferences and catering to their individual requirements as per their wish and satisfaction. ▶

MICE sector fuels Dubai's growth

Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), the global events and exhibitions industry powerhouse and a leading business enabler, welcomed 2.47 million participants in 2023, marking a remarkable 25% increase in the numbers compared to the previous year. The results were driven by 301 meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions, business and consumer events, a 23% rise year on year.

TT Bureau

The impressive increase in visitors reflects the strength of DWTC's diversified content-rich calendar, led by 107 Exhibitions and International Association Conventions and Industry Conferences. These events collectively attracted 1.56 million attendees, marking a substantial 33 per cent increase compared to the previous year. Of these, over

ing companies, representing a remarkable 45 per cent increase over last year. An unprecedented 78 per cent of these exhibiting companies were international (41,864), further reinforcing DWTC's ability in consistently drawing both, new and repeat international participants. The surge in foreign business attendees furthers the aspirations of the D33 Agenda to propel Dubai to be among top-three global econom-



H.E. Helal Saeed Almarri
Director General
Dubai World Trade Centre Authority

The notable increase in international participation (in terms of MICE activities) underscores the global recognition of Dubai's significance

722,000 were international attendees, representing an unprecedented 60 per cent growth year on year. These industry-leading events and exhibitions saw a participation of 53,789 exhibit-

ic cities by 2033. The diversity of DWTC's robust events calendar was further reinforced with its consumer and leisure events portfolio growing last year to host a total of 35 entertainment, live,

and leisure events, collectively attracting over 850,000 visitors.

H.E. Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General of Dubai World Trade Centre Authority, shared, "DWTC is steadfast in its commitment to advancing Dubai's economic objectives and the D33 agenda, ensuring the emirate remains a forward-looking hub for emerging industries and technologies. The notable increase in international participation underscores



the global recognition of Dubai's significance. Looking at 2024, we are committed to building on these successes, driving forward our mission to position Dubai as a hub for pioneering ideas and transformative initiatives".

DWTC further solidified its appeal as the venue of choice with 33 new entrants to its events calendar, including 17 Exhibitions, 9 International Associations Conventions and 7 conferences. These events collectively attract-

ed nearly 95,000 participants and over 2,000 exhibiting companies.

New highs for DWTC-organised exhibitions and events

In 2023, DWTC organised 20 exhibitions and events, attracting a staggering 519,000 attendees, marking an impressive increase of 42 per cent year on year. Of these, 265,000 were international attendees, recording a massive jump of 108 per cent year-on-year. DWTC's own events attracted over 17,000 exhibiting

companies, up by a solid 45 per cent. Of these, over 13,000 were international, marking an impressive 68 per cent increase.

Top-performing MICE sectors

In 2023, DWTC continued to demonstrate its ability to meet the demands of the global MICE sector across a range of high-performing sectors, including health-care, science, food & beverage, hospitality, technology, consumer goods, leisure and travel, transport, energy and environment. ▶

Satguru pays gratitude to partners

Satguru Travel Group organised 'Gratitude Gala in the Desert', an event to celebrate the group's successful journey in 2023 and express gratitude to its travel partners, in Dubai recently. More than 100 partners from airlines, hotels, and travel technology companies, attended the event. Satguru also revealed their new brands to hit the market and growth plans for the year and beyond.



MOVEMENTS

JAZEERA AIRWAYS

Kuwait

BARATHAN PASUPATHI (BARA) has been named the new Chief Executive Officer of Jazeera Airways effective 26 March 2024. He replaces the current CEO, Rohit Ramachandran, who is stepping down after over seven years with the organization. Bara comes with over 30 years of experience in aviation, oil and gas, and supply chain management. His aviation industry experience spans key finance, management, and operations functions for airlines, as well as aircraft procurement and leasing. Bara, a former Jazeera Airways CFO, was instrumental in the setup of Sahaab Aircraft Leasing and served as its CFO from 2007 to 2010. Prior to Jazeera Airways, Bara's recent role was as CEO of Jetstar Asia. He was the founding CFO of Jetstar Asia in 2004 and served as CFO at Jazeera Airways and Jazeera Airport Services Company from 2007 to 2010.



TAJ EXOTICA RESORT & SPA, THE PALM

Dubai

Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, The Palm, Dubai, has appointed **NAYAN SETH** as its new General Manager. With over three decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Seth brings a wealth of expertise and leadership to his new role. Beginning his career with IHCL at Taj Mahal, New Delhi, he has steadily climbed the ranks, showcasing remarkable dedication and talent. His journey includes pivotal roles at esteemed properties, such as the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower, Mumbai, and Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur, India. In his most recent assignment, he served as General Manager of the Taj Palace, New Delhi. In his new role, Seth is poised to lead the premier luxury destination in Dubai towards continued excellence, with a focus on strategic direction, operational efficiency, and revenue optimisation.



MEETING POINT

Emirates & Oman

Meeting Point, a destination management agency-cluster headquartered in Dubai, completes a seamless handover of the baton in its leadership position.

As of now, **PAULA LACEY** takes over responsibility for the DMCs in the UAE and Oman from Josep-Antón Grases. With her background in partnership management, sales and marketing, the experienced General Manager enriches the focus of the subsidiaries. Throughout her career, Lacey has demonstrated her expertise in the tourism industry in various positions in the Emirates and Europe. Her previous roles include Group Commercial, Marketing and Membership Director at Advantage Travel Partnership, a number of senior roles at TUI UK and Global Franchise Director at Easy Hotel.



TRAVVISE TECHNOLOGIES

Qatar

Travvise Technologies appoints **YASIR BADAR** as a Senior Sales Executive. With over 18 years of experience in the travel and tourism industry, particularly in Qatar, he brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to his new role. Having worked in the Holidays Department at Ambassador Travels, he has developed a deep understanding of the market, customer preferences, and creating memorable travel experiences. His extensive industry experience and customer-centric approach make him a valuable addition to the Travvise Technologies team. The company management expects him to contribute to the company's success through a customer-centric approach, delivering bespoke solutions that not only enable customers to thrive but also establish the brand as preferred technology partner.



DAMAC HOTELS AND RESORTS

Dubai

AKSHAY SOOD has joined as the Senior Director - Revenue and Sales for Damac Hotels and Resorts Dubai. With over 15-year experience in the commercial sector of the hotel industry, Sood's career began in 2008 when he joined Radisson Edwardian hotels, a collection of 4 & 5-star luxury hotels in London, specialising in revenue management. Since then, he has had the privilege of working with managed, owned, and independent portfolios in both, the UK and UAE, gaining expertise that extends beyond revenue management. During his journey, he has held key positions as a revenue leader for renowned hospitality brands, such as Radisson, Hilton, IHG, and Accor. Recently, he was part of Emaar hospitality group, leading a cluster of luxury hotels under the prestigious Address & Vida brands in Dubai.



IDEAS

Dubai

IDEaS Revenue Solutions has appointed **IBRAHIM SABA** as Principal Sales Director. Based in Dubai, Saba will oversee the strategic growth of IDEaS in a region with one of the fastest-growing hospitality sectors in the world, the Middle East and North Africa. Before joining IDEaS, Saba worked with industry leaders, such as Frontline Performance Group and TSA Solutions, and has held senior commercial roles with IHG and Marriott, both on property and at the corporate level. Now based in Dubai, Saba will drive the company's growth and expansion in the market. Ibrahim Saba is a seasoned commercial leader with more than 25 years of experience in hospitality and hospitality technology. He is a passionate hotelier at heart. His extensive experience and knowledge will provide a perfect foundation for IDEaS growth plans in the region.



HILTON SALWA BEACH

Qatar

Hilton Salwa Beach Resort & Villas has appointed **ANDRE BORG** as the new General Manager of the iconic resort, which opened in February 2021 and is owned by Katara Hospitality. As the General Manager, Borg will lead the team in all aspects of hotel operations, from marketing and hotel administration to guest services and satisfaction, for the expansive 361-key resort, which includes a mix of guest rooms and suites, apartments, townhouses and private beachfront villas, 15 dining venues including seven signature restaurants, luxury spa, sports academy, water and adventure park, and over 12,900 square feet of flexible meeting space. A seasoned hospitality professional, Borg brings over 25 years of international hotel experience, including 16 years with Hilton at Hilton Ras Al Khaimah Beach Resort.



ATMOSPHERE

Maldives

Atmosphere Core appoints **EUAN BLAKE** as the Assistant Vice President of Communications. Based in the Maldives, he will be responsible for Atmosphere Core's three brands, The Ozen Collection, Colours of Oblu, and Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts. A seasoned hospitality professional, Blake brings to the role a holistic approach that taps into his multifaceted skill set spanning Public Relations, Sales and Marketing, and insights into hotel operations. He will be handling the company's Maldives portfolio of eight operational resorts within three brands, as well as positioning the latest property Raaya By Atmosphere, which is set to open in July 2024. Euan will lead the company's global communications strategy, and amplify brand stories, while also overseeing the company's network of PR agencies across the globe.



SABRE

EMEA

Sabre Corporation has appointed **ABDUL-RAZZAQ IYER** as the new Vice President of Operations and Strategy in EMEA. These changes are poised to drive Sabre's mission of redefining travel through advanced technology and innovation. In his new role, Iyer will spearhead strategic sales initiatives and forge key partnerships, focusing on significant opportunities within the EMEA markets to enhance Sabre's market presence and revenue. This leadership appointment is crucial for their focused efforts towards growth, investment, and success. With Sabre's strategic focus on empowering their partners for growth through innovative technology, alongside their investments and leadership team, they are firmly positioned for accelerated growth across the EMEA markets.



JUMEIRAH BEACH HOTEL

Dubai

Jumeirah Beach Hotel has appointed **RENE EGLÉ** as the new General Manager. Bringing with him almost four decades of luxury hospitality and hotel operations experience, his appointment is set to further strengthen the property's commitment to excellence, at a time when the Jumeirah brand is evolving as part of its Mission 2030 strategy. In his new role, Rene will lead the property and apply his background of working at some of the world's best-known hospitality brands in key global markets to ensure Jumeirah Beach Hotel continues to provide exceptional experiences for its guests. His career highlights include more than 20 years at Shangri-La spanning numerous countries, including China, Indonesia, UAE, Maldives, the Philippines, and Oman.



JUMEIRAH SAADIYAT ISLAND

Abu Dhabi

Jumeirah Group appoints **PAVLOS TSOCHANTARIS** as General Manager of SAL, Saadiyat Island, which opened in Jumeirah at Saadiyat Island Resort in February. Tsochantaris returns to Jumeirah with over 20 years of hospitality experience and a wealth of expertise in luxury F&B operations gained across the UAE and Europe. Tsochantaris previously excelled in managing renowned beach restaurant concepts, such as Shimmers at Mina A'Salam and the original SAL at Jumeirah Burj Al Arab. Prior to this, Tsochantaris worked across Greece and Spain, and most recently at Sunset Hospitality Group as the Regional Brand Manager for Ammos Dubai and Ammos Ibiza. The opening of SAL at Jumeirah at Saadiyat Island Resort follows four years of exceptional success at its Jumeirah Burj Al Arab location.



RAMZI AL-QASSAB has been appointed as the new Managing Director for the Middle East region of Sabre Corporation. Leading the Middle East region, Al-Qassab will focus on delivering Sabre's commitment to empowering travel buyers by leveraging next-generation technology applications, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and real-time data analytics. The appointment underscores Sabre's commitment to its strategic vision and its determination to remain at the forefront of the travel industry's evolution. This leadership enhancement will catalyze their growth and innovation efforts, aligning with their commitment to excellence and strategic development. Al-Qassab will be working with their highly specialised and customer-driven teams for growth.



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