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Industry stars dazzle @ ARABIAN TRAVEL AWARDS

It was an evening of glitz and glamour at the 7th edition of the Arabian Travel Awards (ATA), which honoured leaders from the industry for their significant contribution to the Middle East’s travel, tourism, and hospitality sectors. **Adnan Kazim**, Deputy President and Chief Commercial Officer, Emirates Airline, and the Chief Guest, graced the occasion with his presence.



(Left to right) Sumeera Bahl, Director, DDP Group; Mohamed Jassim Al Rais, Executive Director, Al Rais Travel; Nasir Jamal Khan, CEO, Al Naboodah Travel & Tourism; Mohd Faharuddin Hatmin, Director, Tourism Malaysia (TM) Dubai; Adnan Kazim, Deputy President and Chief Commercial Officer, Emirates Airlines; SanJeet, Mentor, Arabian Travel Awards; Jamal Abdul Nasar, CEO, Cozmo Travel and Michael Schmitt, GM, Conrad hotel.

Dr Shehara Rizly

SanJeet, Director, Arabian Travel Awards, addressing the event, lauded the efforts made in the Middle East region for tourism promotion. “Middle East has become a global leader in luxury and experiential tourism, offering everything from high-end resorts to unique cultural experiences like desert safaris and historic sites. Visitors are drawn to the region’s rich blend of modern luxury and authentic local experiences. At the same time,

Middle East has become a global leader in luxury and experiential tourism, offering everything from high-end resorts to unique cultural experiences

there is a big focus on sustainable tourism. The Middle East is working hard to protect heritage sites, promote eco-friendly travel options, and create a balance between growth and environmental responsibility,” he said.

“Enjoy your success, but please make sure you innovate, improve and develop the travel industry. I’m sure everyone will be watching you very carefully. These awards are just not a reward but a responsibility on you all to grow this industry, and I’m

sure with all your efforts, the Middle East will soon become the world’s most prominent Travel hub,” he added.

Addressing the audience, **Adnan Kazim**, Deputy President and Chief Commercial Officer, Emirates Airline, said, “It’s a pleasure to join you tonight. After 32 years in this industry, I’m inspired by the incredible growth here, especially in aviation and hospitality. Dubai has set a global example, from handling over 90 million passengers annually to offering nearly 250,000 hotel rooms,



Adnan Kazim, Deputy President and Chief Commercial Officer Emirates Airline, Chief Guest at the Arabian Travel Awards

enabling it to host major events. Surrounding cities—Abu Dhabi, Doha, Bahrain, and Kuwait—are

also thriving, embracing Dubai’s visionary model.”

Contd. on page 5 ▶



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AI: an ally more than a technological aid

The continual advancements in technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are not just reshaping, but fundamentally transforming the hospitality industry. It was a hot topic for the industry at this year's HSMAI Middle East & Africa Commercial Strategy Conference. Four industry leaders agree that AI is rapidly evolving from just a tool to a powerful work partner.



Michael J. Goldrich
Founder & Chief Advisor
Vivander Advisors LLC

“ AI is a force multiplier. In revenue management, AI analyses real-time market trends, enabling dynamic pricing and demand forecasting. For marketing, it personalises guest communications and optimises campaigns based on granular data insights. Leading brands will leverage AI to anticipate guest needs and personalise at scale, while still delivering warmth and authenticity through frontline staff. Ultimately, successful hotels will make the human-AI collaboration invisible. AI will likely redefine roles such as data entry, basic customer service, and routine reporting in hospitality. ”

“ Applied in revenue management solutions specifically, AI and automation play a critical role in processing forecasting-related data to detect shifts in demand and quickly responding with recommended pricing and inventory management decisions. A strong brand identity is key. If using AI-enabled tools like an online chatbot or a voice-activated virtual assistant to interact with guests, ensure that they reflect your brand's personality and tone of voice. This consistency across all touchpoints, from online to in-person, creates a more seamless and memorable guest experience. ”



Michael McCartan
Area Vice President EMEA
IDeaS



CS Ramachandran
CRME, VP, Hotel Revenue Optimization,
Preferred Hotels & Resorts

“ In sales, AI's predictive analytics and automation lead to better performance and higher deal closures. Overall, AI reduces workload and stress, contributing to higher job satisfaction and employee retention. HI (Human Interaction) will trump AI (Artificial Intelligence) in the fast-evolving landscape of AI especially in hospitality. Hotels must differentiate by blending automation alongside personalised guest experiences. Some steps in this direction include creating a unique brand identity, ensuring exceptional human interaction, while utilising innovative technology to enhance services. ”

“ The real question is that how we are using AI in preparation for the future. This is what I call the 'AI opportunity radar' which has four quadrants: the internal and external realms of AI application as well as the differentiation between today and tomorrow. Many organisations focus on just the internal applications of AI for today, without planting the seeds for tomorrow's work. In fact, that is just 25 per cent of the opportunity that exists. We need to move from a focus on AI as a tool to AI as a partner to transform an organisation's core offering, to revolutionise the industry, or even establish a new one. ”



John Sanei
Global Futurist, 5x bestselling author and
2x award-winning podcast co-host

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RAK, Fujairah to drive UAE tourism in 2025

The UAE has long been a premier global destination known for its luxury, culture, and innovative attractions. With 2025 on the horizon, the UAE is ready to adapt to new tourism trends, ensuring it remains a top choice for visitors. One of the significant transformations in the tourism landscape is a growing interest in quieter, more authentic experiences, diverging from the traditional 'bucket list' destinations.

Industry reports from key players like Booking.com indicate that travellers are increasingly favouring lesser-known, quieter locations over the traditionally popular, crowded spots. As global tourist hubs become oversaturated, many vacationers are seeking destinations that offer serenity, peace, and a chance to unwind away from the typical hustle and bustle. This trend is likely to influence how tourists view the UAE, encouraging them to explore beyond Dubai and Abu Dhabi's famous landmarks to lesser-visited emirates like Ras Al Khaimah (RAK), Umm Al Quwain, and Fujairah. These areas offer unique natural landscapes, historical attractions, and an opportunity to escape city crowds.

Today's travellers are no longer satisfied with the standard travel itineraries. Instead, there is a growing desire to discover



Many tourists now prefer to explore destinations that remain undiscovered

hidden gems that have not yet been popularised by mass tourism. This shift is rooted in the desire to experience something new, fresh, and off the beaten path. Many tourists now prefer to explore destinations that remain undiscovered and, therefore, more authentic. In the UAE, this could translate into a rise in interest in destinations like Al Ain's desert landscapes, Sharjah's rich cultural heritage, or Khor Fakkan's coastal serenity. These lesser-known spots provide travellers with an opportunity to explore a side of the

UAE rich in culture and blessed with natural beauty, while being away from the bustling urban districts.

Sports and music tourism are also emerging as a significant trend poised to drive growth in the tourism sector. These niche markets cater to enthusiasts who travel for large-scale events, boosting the local economy and attracting diverse audiences. Sports tourism has seen a sharp rise, with world-class events, such as the Dubai World Cup, Abu Dhabi Grand

Prix, and high-profile tournaments gaining international attention. The UAE's investment in state-of-the-art stadiums and sports facilities has further enhanced its reputation as a leading sports hub. Interestingly, this investment is also increasing the popularity of the UAE as a sports-tour destination at the grassroots level. Amateur and youth sports groups are increasingly opting to visit the UAE to develop and nurture the

and participants from around the world.

Similarly, music tourism is gaining traction as the UAE continues to host top-tier concerts and music festivals.

As we look toward 2025, the UAE's tourism landscape is transforming. Travellers are moving away from crowded, well-trodden destinations and are instead seeking quieter,

embrace these trends. By offering travellers new experiences and undiscovered gems, the country will continue to attract a new generation of tourists seeking more meaningful journeys. This evolution in tourism preferences will not only benefit visitors but also contribute to the sustainable growth of the UAE's tourism sector, ensuring it remains a global leader in the years to come.

Many tourists, with desire to experience something new, now prefer to explore destinations that remain undiscovered and, therefore, more authentic

next generation of sporting talent. The country's ideal climate and infrastructure make it a preferred destination for hosting sporting events, drawing in fans

more unique, and authentic experiences. The UAE, with its diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and commitment to innovation, is well-positioned to



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

2024: year of growth & opportunities

This year has felt like a whirlwind, passing by in what seems like the blink of an eye. Yet, it's been a period of remarkable growth and opportunity, especially with new markets emerging globally. The Middle East, in particular, has experienced a boom, setting an inspiring example for other regions with its proactive and dynamic culture. **TRAVTALK** connects with industry leaders to know their views.



Paul Griffiths
CEO
Dubai Airports

“ This year has highlighted the very best of DXB, showcasing its continued growth, resilience, and commitment to service excellence, qualities that have become synonymous with the airport. At the heart of this success is our people, whose dedication and collaboration have driven our record-breaking numbers. ”



John Bevan
CEO
dnata Travel Group

“ At the dnata Travel Group, 2024 has been a time of extensive product development and innovation across our multiple businesses, as we strive to go beyond traveller expectations. Some highlights include for leisure travel business, dnata Travel. We opened stores and enhanced the customer journey on dnataTravel.com. ”



Mohamed Jassim Al-Rais
Executive Director
Al-Rais Travel and Shipping Agencies

“ This year has been remarkable, with the travel industry nearing a full rebound in seat capacity. Many airlines have returned to pre-COVID operations, and the industry is witnessing a strong recovery. It's been an excellent year so far, and I expect this positive momentum to continue. In 2025, I see sustained growth in demand. ”



Spencer Wadama
General Manager
SLS Dubai

“ It has been a rewarding year full of growth and achievement. While we faced seasonal challenges, we turned them into opportunities, enhancing both our guest offerings and operations. The highlights of this year are the second edition of Taste of SLS and achieving the Green Key Certification. ”



Arijit Paul
Director - Sales and Marketing,
Movenpick Grand Al Bustan

“ 2024 has been an interesting year for us because we came on board at end of 2023. So, 2024 was a big projection. We have done a lot basically, starting with the weddings. Weddings have been an amazing thing for our property. We have also been promoting among the expats for smaller weddings in our open air venue. ”



John Raffoul
General Manager
Cheval Maison the Palm

“ 2024 has been a successful year for us and there are a lot of things to celebrate, starting from achieving our results and keep driving our performance until year-end 2024. We have also been gaining online reputation. We have been number one year to date on our platforms in terms of guest reviews. ”

Inputs by: Dr Shehara Rizzy

ATA recognises industry leaders

► Contd. from page 1

Sharing tourism numbers from the region, Kazim added, "In 2023, tourism contributed AED137 billion to Dubai's econ-

possible. Your efforts shape not only today but the future of this region. Thank you for being part of this journey, and I wish you all continued success."

and Madinat Jumeirah Conference & Events, was honoured as the DDP Gourmet Tourism Ambassador and **Khaled Shaker**, Director of Investment



(Left to right) SanJeet, Mentor, Arabian Travel Awards; H.E. Tengku Dato' Sirajuzzaman Tengku Mohamed Ariff, Ambassador of Malaysia to the UAE; Adnan Kazim, Deputy President and Chief Commercial Officer, Emirates & Sumeera Bahl, Director, DDP Group

omy, created 631,000 jobs, with 185,000 more expected by 2030. This growth owes much to strong leadership, particularly **His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum**, who set high standards across sectors. Our region is now a benchmark for quality, thanks to the dedication of people like you. Tonight, I'm honoured to recognise those whose hard work has made this

Anil Chandirani, Founder, Chairman and CEO, Satguru Group of Companies, entered the Gallery of Legends whilst **Jyoti Panchmatia**, General Manager, Travco Gulf Region, was recognised as the DDP Gamechanger. **Mamoun Hmidan**, Chief Business Officer, Wego got the title of DDP Trailblazer. **Andy Cuthbert**, General Manager, Jumeirah Creekside Hotel

and Strategic Projects at Dubai Developments, emerged as the DDP Face of the Future.

As the Arabian Travel Awards celebrated its 7th year, this gathering reaffirmed the Middle East's position as a world-class tourism destination, setting an inspiring path forward for sustainable growth and continued excellence. 📌

Qatar sees 4 mn visitors this year

Qatar Tourism has kept its momentum of attracting different markets to their destination. Four million people visited the destination till end of October this year, which is 26% increase from the previous year.

📌 Dr Shehara Rizly

Qatar Tourism announced that the number of international visitors to the destination by the end of October 2024 reached a new high of 4 million, representing a 26 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2023. This is an indication that the number will be even higher by the end of 2024, especially with the kick-off of the winter season and the array of activities that has been planned for this period.



GCC nationals make up 41.8 per cent of the visitors, with the remaining 58.2 per cent from international markets. The top

10 visitor markets include Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Republic of India, United Kingdom, Kingdom of Bahrain, United States of America, State of Kuwait,

Sultanate of Oman, Federal Republic of Germany, United Arab Emirates, and People's Republic of China.

To date, 56.2 per cent of visitors arrived by air, 37.84 per cent by land, and the remaining 5.96 per cent by sea. Additionally, Qatar's hospitality sector has grown significantly, surpassing 40,053 hotel keys (as of September 2024) as part of Qatar's enhanced tourism infrastructure. 📌

Citizens from Gulf Cooperation Council countries make up 41.8% of the visitors (to Qatar), with the remaining 58.2% from international markets



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512K GCC residents visit UK in H1 2024

A record 512,000 people visited the United Kingdom from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region from January to June this year, which was up 25 per cent compared to the same period last year, according to latest official statistics. Visitors from the GCC region also spent a record £1 billion on their trips in the UK in the first half of 2024, up 6 per cent during the same period in 2023.

TT Bureau

As Britain's national tourism agency VisitBritain gears up to host top travel buyers from across the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries on its 'Destination Britain Middle East and Asia' trade mission, latest official statistics show travellers from the GCC region are vis-

iting the UK in record numbers, and spending more on their trips.

Latest official statistics, for the first six months of 2024, show there were a record 512,000 visits from the GCC to the UK, up 25 per cent on January-to-June last year. Visitors from the GCC region also spent a record £1 billion on their trips in the UK in

the first half of 2024, up 6 per cent on 2023.

To harness this growth and compete for visitors, VisitBritain hosted 20 buyers from the GCC at its 'Destination Britain Middle East and Asia' trade mission in Bengaluru, India, recently. The three-day event saw dozens of UK tourism industry suppliers



Tower Bridge, London

meet with more than 70 top buyers from China, the GCC, Japan, India and South Korea, to drive business to Britain.

Speaking ahead of the trade event, **Carol Maddison**, Deputy Director - Middle East and Asia, VisitBritain, said: "With the grow-

ing airline connectivity through regional gateways alongside the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme, travel to the UK is now easier and more accessible for GCC nationals. Working with our trade partners, including at our Destination Britain Middle East and Asia trade event, we are

harnessing the strong growth we are seeing, showcasing Britain's latest tourism products and experiences to drive bookings. We want visitors to explore outside of London through our regional gateways, staying longer and discovering exciting destinations across our nations and regions, spreading visitor spending across more of Britain."

The Bengaluru trade mission comes as VisitBritain gets set to roll out its international 'Starring GREAT Britain' campaign. Launching early 2025, the campaign will use the powerful draw of film and TV locations and places seen-on-screen to inspire GCC visitors to discover more of Britain. Latest forecasts from VisitBritain estimate 1.3 million visits from the GCC to the UK in 2024 with those visitors spending £3.1 billion on their trips. ▶



Big Ben houses, London

Middle East travellers pivotal for Asia

ITB Asia concluded successfully, witnessing a large number of exhibitors and buyers from the Middle East region. Oman and Jordan tourism boards enjoyed a good number of visitors from the Asia region. Exhibitors from around the globe praised the event for its ability to bring together the travel industry's key players under one roof. It is poised to expand its highly popular Travel Tech Asia cluster next year.

Dr Shehara Rizly

Joyce Wang, Executive Director, Messe Berlin Asia Pacific, in a special conversation with **TRAVELTALK**, shared that this edition of ITB Asia has been one of the most successful ones, which attracted a record number of exhibitors and buyers, not just from Asia but across the Middle East region as well. "For ITB Asia, it's the 17th show where we saw an immense growth not only in the Asia sector but also internationally in Europe and the Middle East as well. I would particularly like to mention about the buyers' programme; we brought down over 1,000 high quality buyers to Asia. Asian outbound has always been a pillar of ITB Asia, that is why we have been successful over the past couple of years. Revenge travel is big now, everyone is looking at not just short haul, but the trend now you see is they are going for further destinations, those destinations which offer more cultural heritage, even for



Joyce Wang
Executive Director
Messe Berlin Asia Pacific

FTTs and adventure travel. This has become a big topic for us now as well," she said.

On the key takeaways from this year's show, Wang said, "The

two main focus areas this year would be the digital transformation and sustainability." She reiterated the necessity of not just simply gathering data at exhibitions of this nature but also ensuring that the focus is more data driven, which could help the visitors to the event further in discovering topics and areas that interest them most, and as an organiser of the event they are able to cater to the needs and requirements of the 13,000 plus visitors who explore the exhibition.

ITB Asia is poised to expand its highly popular Travel Tech Asia cluster next year, providing deeper insights into cutting-edge hotel technology. The

Asian outbound (travel business) has always been a pillar of ITB Asia, that is why we have been successful over the past couple of years at the event



dedicated platform will showcase the latest advancements in reservation systems, equipment, AI tools, CRM platforms, design, and sustainability initiatives — set to redefine the future of accommodation and guest experiences.

Exhibitors from around the globe praised ITB Asia for its ability to bring together the travel industry's key players under one roof.

Ingunn Sakshaug, Market and Travel Trade Specialist at Visit Norway, expressed her enthusiasm: "ITB Asia provides us with a unique opportunity to connect with travel organisers from multiple countries in one place, and this year's event exceeded our expectations." Expressing similar sentiments, **Thorleifur Thor Jonsson**, Senior Manager, Trade Delegations, at Visit Iceland, said: "ITB Asia is an invaluable

platform for Iceland to engage with the Southeast Asian market. The highly efficient meeting system ensures we maximise results." **Xiaolong Wu**, Marketing Manager – APAC and MENA Market, at the Malta Tourism Authority, added: "ITB Asia is one of the best platforms for connecting with Asia-Pacific travel trade partners. We look forward to deepening these relationships further." ▶

Satguru honours key partners

Satguru Group organised a memorable evening of appreciation to honour and celebrate their valued partners. The event, designed to express gratitude for the unwavering support and collaboration over the past year, provided an elegant setting for fostering connections and reflecting on shared achievements. More than 500 valued partners of the company attended the event.



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QTM sees 300 exhibitors from 60 nations

Qatar Travel Mart 2024 brought together over 300 exhibitors from 60 countries, offering an unparalleled platform for industry professionals to network, collaborate, and explore the latest trends in travel and tourism. The focus was on fostering partnerships, sharing knowledge, and exploring emerging trends, such as sustainable tourism and experiential travel.

TT Bureau

The third edition of Qatar Travel Mart concluded successfully at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center (DECC) recently with a bigger exhibition area than the previous year. There were many tourism boards from Eastern Europe, which is the emerging market for Qatar. The main travel agents in Qatar shared a wide space together providing the visitors an

opportunity to connect and network with them. Asian tourism boards, including Korea Tourism, had brought in many partners with them this year.

A premier travel and tourism exhibition of the region, Qatar Travel Mart 2024 (QTM 2024) aligns with Qatar's National Vision 2030, which prioritises economic diversification and sustainable development. Tourism is central to this vision, and



Qatar is already seeing results, with 2.956 million visitors in

the first seven months of 2024, representing a 26.2 per cent growth compared to last year. **Rawad Sleem**, Co-founder and General Manager, NeXTfairs, the organisers of QTM 2024, stated: "We are thrilled to open QTM 2024, which represents a milestone in Qatar's journey to become a global tourism hub. This year's expanded event, covering 15,000 square metres, reflects the rapid growth of Qatar's tourism sector and its increasing importance on the world stage. QTM 2024 is not just an exhibition; it's a catalyst for innovation, partnerships, and

A premier exhibition, QTM 2024 aligns with Qatar's National Vision 2030, which prioritises economic diversification and sustainable development

sustainable growth in the travel industry, aligning perfectly with Qatar's National Vision 2030. This is clear to see with the support of **His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani**, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Af-

fairs and the presence of **His Excellency Sheikh Faisal Bin Thani Al Thani**, Minister of Commerce and Industry in Qatar (MoCI), and **His Excellency Saad bin Ali Al Kharji**, as Chairman of Qatar Tourism, as well as other distinguished guests." ▶



Qatar to get 430k cruisers in 6 months

Qatar is expected to welcome more than 430,000 cruise travellers from November 2024 to April 2025. During the season, renowned cruise ships, such as Minechef 4, MSC Eurebia, Aida Prima, Costa Esmeralda, Norwegian Sky and Celestial Journey, will dock at Doha Port, reinforcing Qatar's growing position as a leading global cruise tourism destination.

TT Bureau

Qatar Tourism has launched cruise season 2024-25 with the arrival of its luxury cruise ship, Resorts World One. The luxury cruise ship is expected to become the largest in the history of the industry, with 95 cruises, including 33 partial turnovers, 11 departure and return flights, and four flights arriving in Qatar for the first time. Resorts World One has launched its first voyage to Qatar and is scheduled to make 23 scheduled visits, carrying 72,000 visitors.



sition as a leading global cruise tourism destination.

Building on the success of the previous cruise season (2023-24), during which Qatar welcomed 73 cruise ships and more than 347,000 visitors, the new season is expected to continue the pace of growth witnessed by the cruise sector, with a new record performance

expected. During the previous season, Doha Port welcomed world-renowned vessels, such as MSC Vertusa, Seaborne Encore, Aida Prima, Artania, Minechef 2, Azamara Gerney, MS Riviera, MS Hamburg and Norway Down.

His Excellency Saad bin Ali Al Kharji, President, Qatar Tourism, said: "Stimulating

the growth of Qatar's cruise sector is a key component of our National Tourism Strategy 2030, and the 2024-25 cruise season is expected to see a 30 per cent increase in the total number of vessels, as well as a 24.5 per cent increase in the total number of visitors compared to the previous season, reflecting the growing demand for cruises in the region. With new

partnerships and the increasing number of international cruise ships visiting our shores, Qatar continues to strengthen its position as a leading destination for cruise passengers from around the world."

His Excellency Captain Abdulla Mohammed Al Khanji, Chief Executive Officer, Mwan Qatar, said: "Following last season's record level of visitors, we look

an unforgettable experience for visitors to 95 scheduled cruises during the new season 2024-25. The significant growth in the number of visitors and cruises confirms the growing interest of cruise operators in docking at Doha Port and reflects Qatar's position as a major cruise destination in the region. We are proud to work alongside Qatar Tourism and stakeholders to maximise

Resorts World One has launched its first voyage to Qatar and is set to make 23 scheduled visits, carrying 72,000 visitors in the cruise season

forward to welcoming another record number of visitors from around the world and reinforcing Qatar's position as a leading cruise destination, as Doha Port stands ready to ensure

the growth of Qatar's cruise tourism sector and strengthen its global footprint in the travel industry, in line with the National Tourism Strategy 2030." ▶

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Singapore Airlines acknowledges

Singapore Airlines celebrated its top-performing travel trade partners in the UAE at a gala event in Dubai recently. The event brought together industry leaders, partners, and stakeholders to honour the best in the travel trade sector. The awards highlighted the airline's commitment to fostering strong relationships within the travel industry while acknowledging the pivotal role the partners play in driving growth and excellence.



its partners at gala event in Dubai






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Immersive experiences @The Mandrake

The Mandrake is a luxury boutique hotel that combines design, art and immersive experiences. Centrally located off Oxford Street in Fitzrovia, the property offers guests a unique atmosphere, characterised by its eclectic style. Middle East is a key market for the property due to its distinctive, sophisticated features and special offerings to the discerning guests, says **Martijn Mulder**, MD, The Mandrake.

 TT Bureau

Tell us about The Mandrake and its facilities.

Opened in 2017, the hotel has gained attention for its bold interior, lavish décor, and curated ambiance, making it a destination for travellers who appreciate immersive, experiential stays that go beyond traditional luxury. The hotel currently features 33 rooms, including four signature suites and three junior suites that embody The Mandrake's distinctive style and sophistication. Starting January 2025, the property will have three new three-bedroom apartments, designed for guests who seek both privacy and an expansive, home-like experience during their stay.

How important is the Middle East market for it?

The Middle Eastern market is a key area of growth for The Mandrake. Guests from the region present a significant opportunity, as they tend to bring higher spending power, extended stays, and strong brand loyalty:

❖ **High Spending Power:** Middle Eastern travellers, especially those from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, are known for their high spending on luxury accommodations, fine dining, and high-end shopping. This has made them a valuable market for luxury and premium hotels in London.



Martijn Mulder
Founder & CEO
TIP Hospitality

❖ **Extended Stays:** Middle Eastern visitors often stay longer than average visitors, especially during summer months when the weather in the Middle East is very hot. Extended stays drive up average room occupancy and revenue, mak-

ing this segment a priority for hotels targeting higher Average Daily Rates.

Guests from the Middle East present a significant opportunity, as they tend to bring higher spending power, extended stays, and strong brand loyalty

ing this segment a priority for hotels targeting higher Average Daily Rates.

❖ **Loyalty and Repeat Visits:** London has long been a favoured destination for the Middle Eastern travellers due to its rich shopping, cultural attractions, and Arabic-friendly

What is the importance of travel agents, how do you work with them and what is the amount of business you receive from them?

Travel agents are a vital part of our business, contributing significantly to our success by enhancing our marketing reach, driving bookings and managing key customer relationships. They play an especially crucial role in connecting us with international travellers who may not discover us on their own.

Through our partnerships with travel agents, we are able to

boost occupancy rates and drive higher revenue. We work with agents individually through preferred programmes, as well as through major consortiums, offering exclusive packages and ensuring a tailored experience for their clients. Over the past three years, working with travel agents has been a strategic



priority for us, helping to expand brand exposure, build

guest loyalty and increase our Average Daily Rates.

cated audience aged 21+ with experiential offerings that resonate with younger travellers.

What are The Mandrake's Unique Selling Propositions?

The Mandrake's USPs include its unique, art-driven environment, prime location and boutique luxury experience. Our curated offerings of live music, spiritual wellness, and an Artist in Residence programme distinguish us from traditional luxury hotels.

How do you position yourself in the market? Luxury or private luxury?

We position ourselves as a luxury boutique lifestyle hotel that emphasises spiritual wellbeing, art (our Artist in Residence programme) and music to create a transformative guest experience.

Are you millennial-friendly?

Yes, The Mandrake is millennial-friendly, attracting a sophisti-


What type of client reaches out to The Mandrake? Leisure or business and what demographic?

Our clientele is mostly high-end leisure travellers, with some corporate business and event clientele, including corporations, event planners and private clients.

Will you be offering a special promotion to attract the Middle Eastern Market?

While we offer competitive rates, we are open to targeted promotions to increase our brand presence in the Middle East.

Important trade events that you plan to attend next year?

LE Miami, ILTM NA, TFest, SET, Connection New York, Connections LA, InVoyage. 



(Advertorial)

KSA 12th in global tourism receipts

According to the latest UN Tourism report, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) advances 15 positions in international tourism receipts to rank 12 among top 50 countries. This reaffirms the Kingdom's strong focus on the European and American markets – in the first half of 2024, the country welcomed 1.3 million visitors from Europe and Americas, a 37 per cent increase from the same period last year.

TT Bureau

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) ranked 12th in international tourism receipts in 2023, making a significant improvement from its 2019 ranking, according to the UN World Tourism Organization. Saudi Arabia led G20 countries in growth on the UN Tourism Barometer, achieving a 73 per cent increase in international tourist arrivals and a 207 per cent rise in international tourism receipts, based on the latest data from the first seven months of 2024 compared to the same period in 2019.

These impressive gains reflect the Kingdom's success as a leading tourism destination. The steady increase in international tourist arrivals further



His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb
Minister of Tourism
KSA

Recently, at the World Travel Market in London it was revealed that the Saudi Tourism Authority has concluded three successful days, following a year of unprecedented growth. During the event, the destination further cemented its position as the fastest-growing tourism destination in the G20

STA harnessed rising interest from the global travel trade, signing strategic partnerships with world-leading travel organisations. These partnerships are set to boost Saudi's tourism sector, propelling it towards unprecedented sustainable growth and further solidifying the Saudi's place as a leading global tourism destination. More than 11 Saudi tourism MoU signings were held in the Saudi Pavilion, including pivotal partnerships with Expedia, Trip Advisor, eDreams, Wego, TBO and Dida Travel to strengthen Saudi Arabia's presence across major global markets and support it to become a prime travel destination.

His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb also hosted a Saudi Tourism Reception on the sidelines of WTM at the Saatchi Gallery, inviting partners from the global travel and tourism sector to collaborate on the Kingdom's new super destination - the Saudi Red Sea. The 1,800-km undiscovered coastal marvel, home to stunning coral reefs, pristine turquoise waters, and one of the richest biomarine diversities in the world, is set to be a unique and sustainable destination in the Heart of Arabia. At the reception, His Excellency also reinforced the power of tourism as a force for good, and invited guests to experience the upcoming Winter Season in Saudi Arabia - Where Winter Lights Up.

Commenting on KSA's captivating presence at this year's WTM London, His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb, also the Chairman of Saudi Tourism Authority, said: "Aligned with Vision 2030, the Saudi Pavilion at WTM London 2024 highlighted the significant growth and transformative progress



of Saudi's tourism sector. This year, we were thrilled to unveil the Saudi Red Sea, an extraordinary 1,800 km coastal marvel that underscores our commitment to sustainable development, showcasing Saudi's diverse, year-round, beauty and rich heritage."

Commenting on the London event, Fahd Hamidaddin, also a Board Member at the Saudi Tourism Authority, said: "Saudi's presence at WTM London was our most successful and energetic yet. The unforgettable Saudi Pavilion showcased the diverse range of destinations and offerings that are transforming the Saudi tourism sector, including our new super destination, the Saudi Red Sea. Following a record-breaking year in tourism, Saudi's air connectivity has grown twice as much as the rest of the world, with a 27 per cent increase from Europe and the Americas since 2023. Thousands of WTM visitors experienced the warmth of our Saudi hospitality, and we strengthened our global strategic partnerships with the

signing of 11 MoUs, elevating the Heart of Arabia to even greater heights. "

On the final day, **Alhasan Aldabbagh**, President - Asia Pacific at STA, participated in a panel discussion with industry leaders on 'Understanding the power of Chinese travellers: Trends to capitalise on and pitfalls to avoid'.

Reflecting on the growing appeal of Saudi Arabia to Chinese travellers, he spoke about how the Kingdom has focused on the Chinese market within its broader tourism strategy, in line

The Saudi Pavilion was a must-visit experience for the attendees at WTM London, who were offered a glimpse into Saudi's Winter Season tourism offerings and unique cultural heritage. Visitors were able to engage with a BETA version of SARA, an AI-powered digital human that interacts with users to create personalised travel experiences.

The visitors at WTM London were also able to explore the Saudi Red Sea through virtual jet ski rides and interactive maps, enjoy performances by traditional Saudi musicians and dancers, and workshops in crafts like flower crown making – further immersing themselves in the country's vibrant culture. Renowned MDLBEAST DJ Leen, a popular female DJ who fuses traditional Saudi sounds with contemporary music, performed live while a mocktail experience offered guests a selection of refreshing beverages, showcasing Saudi's blend of modernity and tradition.

The event reaffirmed Saudi's strong focus on the European and American markets – in the first half of 2024, the country

Saudi Arabia led G20 countries in growth on the UN Tourism Barometer, achieving a 73 per cent increase in international tourist arrivals

underscores the trust visitors place in Saudi Arabia's rich and diverse attractions.

Globally, international tourist arrivals reached 96 per cent of the pre-pandemic levels in the first seven months of 2024, totalling an estimated 790 million tourists – an 11 per cent increase over the same period in 2023. The Middle East maintained the lead as the strongest-growing region, with international arrivals rising 26 per cent over 2019 levels.

The Kingdom keeps strengthening its global partnerships.

after jumping 15 places in the UN Tourism destination ranking for international receipts - the largest upward movement in the Top 50.

Led by His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb, the Minister of Tourism, and joined by Fahd Hamidaddin, CEO, Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), the Saudi Pavilion hosted 61 partners across Saudi's tourism ecosystem, spanning its diverse regions and offerings, including destination managers, tour operators, hotels, entertainment companies, airlines, and cruise companies.

Saudi Pavilion was a must-visit experience for WTM attendees, who were offered a glimpse into Saudi's Winter Season tourism offerings

with Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to diversify the economy and transform Saudi into a global tourism hub.

During the panel discussion, Aldabbagh underscored how China is a core strategic market, with Saudi aiming to attract 5 million Chinese tourists by 2030. He detailed how Saudi's enhanced technology infrastructure is ensuring a seamless experience for Chinese tourists from start to finish. Aldabbagh also emphasised the importance of cultural experiences for Chinese tourists, noting how the Kingdom's abundance of activities and events are drawing more travellers from China every year.

welcomed 1.3 million visitors from Europe and Americas, a 37 per cent increase from the same period last year.

Saudi Arabia's air connectivity is growing twice as much as the rest of the world, with a 27 per cent increase from Europe and the Americas since 2023 and 60 flights a week from the UK to Saudi Arabia. This is indicative of the rapid growth of Saudi tourism sector, which continues to make strides towards its ambitious goals. The country remains committed to collaborating with valued partners to boost tourism growth, while prioritising technological innovation and sustainability initiatives. ▶



Travel Caravan in the Middle East

The concept of 'Travel Caravan in the Middle East' was reimagined in Dubai recently, which drew inspiration from the ancient trade caravans that once crisscrossed the Arabian deserts, connecting cultures and economies. Travel trade executives in the Middle East were able to take advantage of the event by meeting up with many representatives from various tourism boards, hotels and airlines.



Dubai expo centre to get ready in Q1 2026

AED10 billion Dubai Exhibition Centre (DEC) Phase 1 expansion project is now underway, with 140,000 sq mt of exhibition space set for completion by Q1 2026. The project is moving at a rapid pace with main contractor and key subcontractors already been appointed. The DEC's expansion represents a major milestone in DWTC's growth strategy and supports Dubai's vision as a global MICE destination.

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Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), the global events and exhibitions industry leader and business enabler, has initiated the Dubai Exhibition Centre (DEC) Phase 1 expansion project at Expo City Dubai, with enabling works and piling contracts now completed, and main contract works underway.

The AED10 billion expansion masterplan, approved by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai, in September this year, will transform the centre into the region's largest indoor events venue upon completion. The expanded DEC will serve as the new home for mega exhibitions, allowing Dubai to double the number of large-scale events hosted annually from around 300 today



Mahir Julfar
Executive Vice President
Dubai World Trade Centre

new urban centre, encompassing Expo City Dubai – the UAE's first 15-minute city – the overall Dubai South community, and Al Maktoum International Airport (DWC), in line with the ambitious goals of the Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan.

Phase 1 of the construction project is unprecedented in scale, beginning with foundation work

with 78,000 square metres of roof sheeting, an area comparable to 62 Olympic-size swimming pools. The development will also include a dedicated car parking facility and expanded marshalling yards to enhance event turnaround times. A team of internationally renowned consultants, including Mace and Egis, have been appointed to manage the first phase of Dubai Exhibition Centre expansion, Building on over four decades of sustained economic value gen-

eration, the DEC expansion is set to significantly boost DWTC's share of the multi-billion-dollar MICE industry, aiming to triple the sector's economic contribution to AED54 billion annually by 2033. The first phase will introduce 64,000 square metres of

permanent exhibition halls, plus around 30,000 square metres of temporary halls, adding on to the venue's existing 46,000 square metres. This expansion will bring the total indoor events hosting capacity to an expansive 140,000 square metres by 2026, enabling a daily visitor capacity of 50,000 people.

DEC Phase 1 completion will allow Dubai to double the number of large-scale events hosted annually from around 300 today to over 600 by 2033

benchmarks for exhibitions and conferences. With this state-of-the-art facility, we are building a next-generation venue to meet the evolving demands of the global events industry, reinforcing Dubai's

pivotal step towards the future of Dubai's flagship mega exhibitions and events. The first phase alone will increase our purpose-built indoor event hosting capacity to 140,000 square metres. The venue is designed to elevate



DEC expansion marks a transformative era for Dubai's MICE sector, solidifying the city's standing as a global powerhouse for mega events

to over 600 by 2033, reinforcing the emirates' status as a leading hub for international exhibitions and business events.

The DEC masterplan supports the establishment of Dubai's

involving 515 piles to support the structure, 14,000 tonnes of structural steel - equivalent to the weight of two Eiffel Towers and 48,000 cubic metres of reinforced concrete. The expanded exhibition centre will be covered

eration, the DEC expansion is set to significantly boost DWTC's share of the multi-billion-dollar MICE industry, aiming to triple the sector's economic contribution to AED54 billion annually by 2033. The first phase will introduce 64,000 square metres of

a transformative era for Dubai's MICE sector, solidifying our city's standing as a global powerhouse for mega events. The expanded venue will enable us to double the number of events from 300 to 600 by 2033, setting new international

leadership as the destination of choice for world-class mega events and exhibitions."

Amer Al Farsi, Acting Vice President of Real Estate Development at Dubai World Trade Centre, said: "The DEC expansion is a

both the exhibitor and visitor experience while embedding sustainability into every aspect of its design and operations. Beyond its physical footprint, this development serves as a catalyst to redefine the global events industry, with Dubai leading the way."



The expanded DEC will feature enhanced flexibility for diverse event configurations, ranging from exceptional connectivity and accessibility to state-of-the-art digital infrastructure. DWTC's commitment to sustainability is evidenced by its LEED certification from the US Green Building Council, incorporating numerous environmentally conscious design elements. The expanded facility will optimise operational efficiency while minimising environmental impact, setting new standards for sustainable exhibition venues.

Construction work continues to progress in parallel to ongoing events at the existing DEC facility, ensuring Dubai's MICE sector maintains its momentum throughout the development period. 📍

Sharjah's tourism offerings draw global

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) showcased the emirate's vibrant tourism offerings at the annual World Travel Market London 2024 (WTM 2024), accompanied by a delegation of 20 public and private sector entities. The event served as a key platform for Sharjah to highlight its diverse attractions and cultural heritage to a global audience, with a focus on European market.




attention at World Travel Market London



GCC's travel bounty for Germany

With GCC visitors contributing €2.6 billion to Germany's economy in 2023, the Central European country has reaffirmed the strategic importance of the GCC countries as one of its leading tourism markets following a high-profile media and trade event co-hosted by the German National Tourist Office (GNTO) and visitBerlin. The event showcased exciting developments in Germany's travel sector.

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In 2023, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) travellers contributed €2.6 billion to Germany's economy, marking a 24 per cent increase over the previous year—a testament to Germany's appeal and deepening ties with the region.

Germany has recently expanded its direct flight options from the GCC region to accommodate the growing number of tourists, reinforcing its commitment to

Eurowings, prominent low-cost carrier of the country, launched flights from Berlin to Dubai and Jeddah, alongside new routes from Cologne-Bonn airport and Stuttgart. This enhanced connectivity aims to streamline the travel experience for visitors from the Gulf, fostering seamless access to Germany's diverse regions, historic sites, and cultural landmarks.

Burkhard Kieker, CEO, VisitBerlin, said: "Berlin is more accessible than ever for GCC



Representatives from the German National Tourist Office, visitBerlin, Eurowings, and Condor at the event.

rich cultural heritage, diverse neighbourhoods, and renowned medical facilities. Our goal is to offer seamless, enriching travel experiences tailored to the unique preferences of GCC tourists, strengthening our bond with the region." In 2025, Berlin will celebrate key anniversaries, including the 200th anniversary of its renowned Museum Island and the reopening of historic sites, including Peacock Island's Lustschloss. With its blend of modern attractions and herit-

age sites, Berlin offers Muslim-friendly amenities, halal dining, and premier healthcare facilities, making it a popular destination for GCC tourists seeking a mix of leisure and wellness.

Yamina Sofo, Director - Sales and Marketing, GNTO, said: "Our approach to tourism is deeply rooted in offering diverse, immersive experiences tailored to the unique preferences of GCC travellers. Through our targeted campaigns, such as 'Simply Feel Good', 'CultureLand Germany', and 'Tourism for All', we

aim to highlight the breadth of Germany's cultural and natural beauty. Each initiative reflects our commitment to inclusivity and accessibility—whether by promoting eco-friendly destinations, celebrating Germany's rich historical landmarks, or ensuring every traveller can fully engage with our offerings. We invite GCC visitors to explore Germany's dynamic blend of modern attractions and timeless heritage, crafted with their needs in mind for a truly enriching journey." Berlin's vibrant culture, featur-

ing a range of family-friendly activities, Michelin-starred restaurants, and historical sites, continues to attract GCC visitors. Known for its cosmopolitan and welcoming spirit, Berlin is home to a thriving Muslim community. The city has about 80 mosques and prayer rooms, concentrated in the Kreuzberg, Wedding, and Neukölln neighbourhoods. Iconic sites like the Omar Ibn al-Khattab Mosque and the Şehitlik Mosque, adjoining Germany's first Islamic cemetery, highlight Berlin's respect for diverse faiths. 

Germany has recently expanded its direct flight options from the GCC region to accommodate the growing number of tourists from the region

accessible and convenient travel for GCC visitors. German airline Condor introduced direct flights between Berlin and Dubai, while

travellers, thanks to enhanced flight connectivity to the region. These connections allow visitors from the GCC to explore Berlin's

Amadeus Gulf hosts NDC workshops

Amadeus Gulf recently hosted a series of exclusive NDC workshops, engaging travel professionals in the latest advancements reshaping airline distribution. Held in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the workshops provided a comprehensive platform for attendees to interact with NDC-enabled airlines, explore emerging strategies, and gain first-hand insights into how NDC technology can transform their business.



Resorts World One debuts in Dubai

Resorts World Cruises, the World-Class Cruise Line that Knows the Gulf Best, had arrived in Dubai with the Resorts World One commencing her first sailing from 1 November 2024 onwards. The 1800-passenger cruise ship departs from the Port Rashid Cruise Terminal 2 in Dubai three times a week to the Gulf destinations. Guests can look forward to special benefits with the inaugural sailing.

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A special celebratory event was held on the ship with close to 600 invitees to commemorate the milestone event. **Michael Goh**, President, Resorts World Cruises, along with other senior management officials, welcomed onboard regional dignitaries, authorities, members of the press and key influencers. The port-stay event included a series of special memento presentations with invitees having the chance to experience the onboard live performances, the wide array of cuisines and a guided tour of the ship's accommodations, facilities and offerings.

As part of the inaugural sailing celebration, guests can look forward to special added-value promotions. This includes receiving complimentary F&B On-board Credits valued at AED700 or US\$190 per cabin for sailings in November for the 3-Night

Oman Cruise and the 2-Night Qatar Cruise. During the deployment, the Resorts World One will provide new vacation options from Dubai for the weekend with the 2-Night Sir Bani Yas Weekend Cruise departing Fridays. Guests can also look forward to the 2-Night Doha (Qatar) Cruise departing Wednesdays and the 3-Night Muscat-Khasab (Oman) Cruise departing Sundays. For longer cruises, guests may combine the itineraries to become a 4, 5 and 7-Night cruise.

We are looking forward to bringing unique experiences to the Gulf region and we are excited to launch our first cruise

– Michael Goh

Goh said: "We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the local and regional governments, authorities, travel business partners, media and our guests

for the support. We are looking forward to bringing unique experiences to the Gulf region and we are excited to launch our first cruise with a special on-

board Diwali celebration for the entire week."

Saud Hareb Almheiri, Cruise Tourism & Yachting Lead at the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), said: "Dubai extends its warmest congratulations to Resorts World Cruises on the successful launch of its new services, which it is proud to be the homeport for. This significant development underscores Dubai's ongoing growth

as a premier cruise destination, attracting world-class operators, and providing exceptional experiences for global travellers seeking to explore the region, as envisioned by our leadership, and in line with the goals of the Dubai Economic Agenda, D33, to further consolidate Dubai's position as a leading global city for business and leisure. As we embark on an exciting new season, we would like to extend our gratitude to our part-

ners and stakeholders, whose unwavering support has made this possible. Together, we look forward to further reinforcing Dubai's position as the cruise hub of the region."

The Resorts World One is certified by the highly reputable Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and The Standards and Metrology Institute with the ship offering certified Halal cuisines, including vegetarian cuisine. 🍽️



(Left to right): Naresh Rawal, SVP-Sales, RWC; Michael Goh, President, RWC; Hamza Mustafa, COO, DPWorld; Tan Sri Lim Kok Thay, Chairman, RWC; Saud Hareb Almheiri, Cruise Tourism & Yachting Lead, Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism & Colin Au, CEO & Executive Director, RWC

RoyalJet spreads wings to Asia

Abu Dhabi-based premium private jet operator positions its Bombardier Global 5000 A6-RJD aircraft for private charter out of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Aiming at both business and leisure travel with its combination of luxuriously classic interiors and cutting-edge technology, the spacious and versatile aircraft seek both individuals or corporate entities who demand exceptional levels of safety, comfort, privacy, and

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RoyalJet has taken a significant step forward in expanding its presence and reach across the Asian market by operating its Bombardier Global 5000 A6-RJD aircraft from Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. This move is in response to the increasing demand for private charters in Asia-Pacific countries following the strong re-

This move is in response to the increasing demand for private charters in Asia-Pacific countries following the strong rebound of its economies after

bound of its economies after the pandemic and increased foreign investments in the region. Industry reports have indicated that an increasing number of high-net-

worth individuals (HNWIs) and ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs) in the area have spurred the appetite for comfort, privacy, and time efficiency that business jets offer.

This trend makes RoyalJet's Bombardier Global 5000 A6-RJD the perfect aircraft to not only meet such demands but also go beyond expectations, offering unparalleled service and comfort. With classically designed interiors, developed and crafted utilising premium material, such as high-end leathers and beautiful wood veneers, perfectly complemented with state-of-the-art technology that



includes Swift Broadband Wi-Fi, an iPad-controlled In Flight Entertainment (IFE) System, mood lighting, and a high-quality sound system with overhead speakers and subwoofers. In addition, the aircraft features some of the lowest cabin altitudes in the industry, along with HEPA

filters, which optimise health and comfort, leaving passengers more relaxed and fresh upon reaching their destination. This truly represents an unparalleled way to travel, whether you need to do business or simply catch your breath or that movie you missed!

The aircraft offers a versatile layout for passenger comfort, featuring 13 seats, a galley, a club grouping, a mid-cabin conference area, and an aft VIP lounge with a VIP lavatory. For relaxation or overnight, it includes a sleeper divan, four VIP seats, and six additional seats. 🍽️



ITA starts Dubai-Rome Fiumicino flight

ITA Airways officially launches its inaugural route to the United Arab Emirates, introducing a nonstop daily flight connecting Dubai and Rome Fiumicino. To mark its entry into the UAE market, the Italian flagship carrier hosted an exclusive event at the Grand Hyatt Dubai in collaboration with the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism recently. ITA Airways highlighted its extensive network at the event.



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MOVEMENTS

EMIRATES UAE

Emirates has appointed **ADIL AL GHAITH** to the role of SVP-Commercial Operations (Centre), overseeing the Gulf, Middle East, and Africa regions. He is currently the SVP-Commercial Operations for the Gulf, Middle East, and Central Asia. With 24 years of working in the Emirates, he has worked in a commercial executive role for various markets in the Middle East. He also previously served as Vice President in Pakistan and Senior Vice President for North and West Africa. Emirates places competent and ambitious UAE talent in key leadership positions across markets in its network through the National Commercial Outstation Programme, equipping them with unmatched industry knowledge.



SHERATON DUBAI CREEK HOTEL & TOWERS Dubai

Sheraton Dubai Creek Hotel & Towers has appointed **NALEEM ARIFF** as the General Manager. With a career spanning nearly three decades in the hospitality industry, Ariff brings an exceptional record of operational leadership, transformative growth, and a commitment to unparalleled guest experiences. He joins Sheraton Dubai Creek after a highly successful role as Multi-Property General Manager for Sheraton Jumeirah Beach Resort and Aloft Palm Jumeirah. His strategic vision and innovative approach have consistently transformed hospitality destinations, achieving impressive milestones in guest satisfaction, revenue growth, and award-winning initiatives. Ariff holds a range of industry certifications, reflecting his dedication to professional growth and excellence.



NEOM SPORTS CLUB Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Following a successful start to the season, NEOM Sports Club has named **ALEX LEITAO** as its new Chief Executive Officer. Formerly the CEO of Brazilian football team, Club Athletico Paranaense, Leitao's appointment reaffirms NEOM's commitment to engaging the best athletic and coaching talent to champion the continued growth of the club. Building on his experience with renowned sports clubs across the globe, including Major League Soccer team Orlando City, Leitao's role will prioritise driving forward the club's growth, performance and brand across the region. In line with NEOM and the Kingdom's ambitions under Saudi Vision 2030, NEOM Sports Club will continue engaging with the local community, building on its talent development initiatives to increase overall sports participation.



DOUBLETREE BY HILTON RESORT & SPA MARJAN ISLAND Ras Al Khaimah

DoubleTree by Hilton Resort & Spa Marjan Island, the idyllic holiday destination nestled on the shores of Marjan Island, has appointed **STASYA RAKHMANOVA** as the Director of Sales. Rakhmanova brings over 16 years of experience in the luxury hotel industry to the team, with a strong focus on leisure sales, having worked with numerous prestigious brands. Prior to her new role, she served as Cluster Director of Sales Leisure at an established hotel group, where she received many accolades, including the Most Valuable Player Award in 2022. Her career highlights also include playing an active role in the successful rebranding of two properties in addition to the launch of seven distinctive destinations.



PULLMAN RESORT AL MARJAN ISLAND Ras Al Khaimah

Pullman Resort Al Marjan Island appoints **EVAN HARRINGTON** as the General Manager. With over two decades of experience in hospitality leadership, Harrington brings deep industry insight and a commitment to elevating the guest experience, in line with Pullman's vibrant approach to modern hospitality. Harrington's distinguished career spans management roles across renowned properties in Africa and the Middle East. Most recently, he served as General Manager at Hilton Garden Inn Ras Al Khaimah, where he led operations since January 2023. With past experience at esteemed brands like Hilton, Radisson Collection, and Fairmont, he has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to guest satisfaction while nurturing high-performing teams.



HSMIAI Middle East & Africa

BRIAN HICKS has been appointed as the President and CEO of Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMIAI). Hicks, a distinguished hospitality leader with more than 30 years of international experience, steps into this role as the 5th CEO in HSMIAI's nearly 100-year history, marking a new chapter in the organisation's legacy of leadership. His proven track record of driving growth, innovation, and leadership across major hotel brands and regions positions him well to continue building upon the foundation laid by the late Bob Gilbert, who served as President and CEO for 30 years. Hicks' appointment comes at a pivotal time for HSMIAI as the organisation continues to expand its global presence and deepen its impact on the hospitality industry's commercial disciplines.



Tech & easy planning priority for pax

According to IATA Global Passenger Survey – 2024, travellers continue to prioritise convenience and speed. For a smoother travel experience, they are eager to use biometric identification and complete some travel processes before reaching the airport, the survey reveals. However, a higher percentage book their flights through a channel where human interaction is involved than in most other regions.



IATA Global Passenger Survey – 2024 reveals that Middle East passengers are most likely to choose an airport for movement due to its facilities and services. A higher percentage book their flights through a channel where human interaction is involved than most other regions. They are enthusiastic about using smartphones to store digital wallets, digital passports, and loyalty cards for booking, payment, and airport navigation. Over half of them have used biometrics instead of a passport for airport processes in the past 12 months, with nearly all reporting satisfaction with the experience. **Nick Careen**, Senior Vice President of Operations, Safety, and Security, IATA,

Regional Trends		Global	AFI	AsPac	EUR	NrIA	ME	LatAm
Choice Airport	Convenience	70	53	64	73	77	55	57
	Price	25	23	28	22	25	24	21
	Preferred airline	22	25	27	17	21	26	16
	Positive Experience	14	20	15	13	15	20	8
	Minimal Travel Time	33	23	31	37	36	27	26
	Airport Facilities	17	24	22	12	13	29	12
	No alternative	16	21	16	15	14	15	26
	Other	2	1	1	2	2	2	3

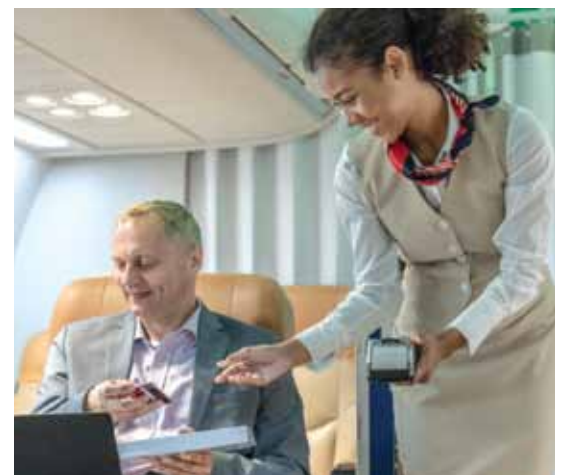
said: "Passengers want flexibility and transparency when planning and booking travel, plus speed and convenience at the airport. More are embracing biometrics, digital wallets, and off-airport processes to make it happen."

Planning, booking and payment Passengers prioritise convenience in the planning, booking and payment phase of travel.

For this convenience, they may accept some higher costs, and they are increasingly willing to use technologies such as digital wallets. **Muhammad Albakri**, Senior Vice President for Financial Settlement and Distribution Services, IATA, said: "Technology continues to change the way people plan, book and pay for travel. Travellers expect the same conveniences when

shopping for travel that they get in any other online shopping experience. That means simplicity, clarity, and with options to meet their preferences while keeping their data secure."

Airport Careen said: "The clear message from travellers is that they expect to board their planes faster with technology and smarter



processes beginning well before they reach the airport."

Youth prefer digital solutions Under-25 travellers are proactive in using technology to improve their travel but want assurances on security. About 51 per cent

would choose digital wallets for payment; 90 per cent expressed interest in using a smartphone with a digital wallet, passport, and loyalty cards for booking, payment, and airport navigation, surpassing the global average of 77 per cent. 📱



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