

Youth steering travel's tomorrow

As the New Year begins, travel, tourism and hospitality sectors will be venturing into a whole new world. Sustainability, cultural experiences, investment in the industry of travel, tourism and hospitality within the Middle East region with UAE and KSA taking a leap will be a year to look forward to. Experts from the industry share their views on trends and expectations with **THAMBLE**.



Khaled Shaker Director of Investment and Strategic Projects Dubai Developments

Embarking on the journey of embracing the challenges presented by our diverse world, we remain steadfast in showcasing, and upholding our mission and vision to focus on sustainability and the future. The preceding years stand as a clear testament of our collective resilience. The evolving and growing businesses, travels, and tourism signify the creation of new opportunities, the pursuit of dreams, and remarkable achievements. In the coming years, we foresee that UAE, and the global business investment landscape continues to evolve, driven by transformative technologies.



Daniel Rosado Director GCC Spain Tourism

In 2024, Spain's travel trends showcase a blend of cultural exploration and eco-conscious choices. Tourists seek authentic experiences, favouring lesser-known regions. Sustainable tourism gains traction with a focus on eco-friendly accommodations and responsible travel practices. Digital nomadism continues to rise, drawing individuals to Spain's vibrant cities and picturesque landscapes. Culinary tourism remains a highlight, celebrating diverse regional cuisines. The use of advanced technology, like augmented reality, enhances the overall travel experience.

KSA gets 53.6mn tourists in H1'23

Saudi Arabia's 53.6 million tourists included 14.6 million inbound tourists. It indicates the Ministry of Tourism's efforts like enhancing its tourism products and quality of services are paying off.

🔐 TT Bureau

audi Arabia received 53.6 million tourists (overnight visitors for all purposes) in the first half of 2023, according to the preliminary tourism data released by the Ministry of Tourism. This confirms effectiveness of the efforts of the ministry and its partners in attracting visitors by enhancing the tourism products and quality of services, in addition to improving visa structures. Of the 53.6 million visitors, 39 million were domestic tourists and 14.6



million were inbound tourists. The total tourism spending reached (SAR150 billion), of which (SAR 63.1 billion) came from domestic tourism and (SAR 86.9 billion) from inbound tourism, that indicates a new historical record for Saudi tourism.

Inbound tourism achieved historical record numbers in the first half of 2023, recording an increase of (142 per cent) in number of tourists and (132 per cent) in total tourism spending versus the first half of 2022. With the continuous development of the tourism sector, there has been an increase in the number of tourists for all purposes with leisure tourists showing the highest growth (347per cent) verus the first half of 2022. Domestic tourism recorded a 16 per cent growth in spending.

Dubai gets 450k Chinese visitors

China was No. 4 source market for Dubai before the pandemic. From January to September, the emirate received 450,000 visitors from the dragon country, indicating that the market is in revival mode.

Tr. Shehara Rizly

oor Al Khaja, Senior Vice President - International Operations, Dubai Economy and Tourism, highlighted the importance of China as key source market, which has immensely benefitted the emirate in terms of visitor numbers, which have returned to the pre-pandemic levels.

Al Khaja said, "China has always been one of Dubai's key source markets. If we look at pre-pandemic, it was Dubai's number four



Hoor Al Khaja Senior Vice President - International Operations Dubai Economy and Tourism

biggest source market. Obviously, it's one of the markets that post-

pandemic took the longest time to come back online. Air capacity took a long time to ramp up. But now the market is open again. And we are seeing Dubai as one of the top markets for Chinese travellers in terms of being on their bucket list and wanting to travel."

She added, "If we look at January to September months of 2023, we welcomed around 450,000 visitors from China. So, we are well on our way to going back to those

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Stamp of sustainability for hotels

WTTC and Sustainable Hospitality Alliance have launched 'Hotel Sustainability Basics', a verification (or stamp) for hotels and lodging accommodations to meet nine out of 12 criteria, including water, energy and employee treatment, it was revealed on the sidelines of COP28 held in Dubai recently. This is aimed mainly at small and medium hotels, as the bigger names already have their own schemes.

n. Shehara Rizly

peaking on the sidelines of COP28, held in Dubai from 30 November to 12 December, Julia Simpson, President and CEO, WTTC, shared, "I'm proud to say that with the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance we have launched 'Hotel Sustainability Basics' stamp. It is a verification that a hotel or a lodging accommodation that is used by tourists has met a certain standard and the reason we are doing that is some of the big companies like Hilton's and Intercontinental, the Marriotts have their very sophisticated sustainability schemes that look at water as well as other energy uses, but 80 per cent of our sector we think are small and medium hotels. They don't necessarily have access to the know-how or the resources. Some are very advanced but not all of them do so. Hence, we wanted to create



Julia Simpson, President and CEO, WITC (third from left), Glenn Mandziuk, CEO, Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (second from right) and other dignitaries at the launch in Dubai

something created by the industry, for the industry.

"So, we reached out to the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance and created a stamp called the basics and part of that is a hotel will have to meet nine out of 12 criteria in different categories. One of them is water the other is energy use, another is how they work

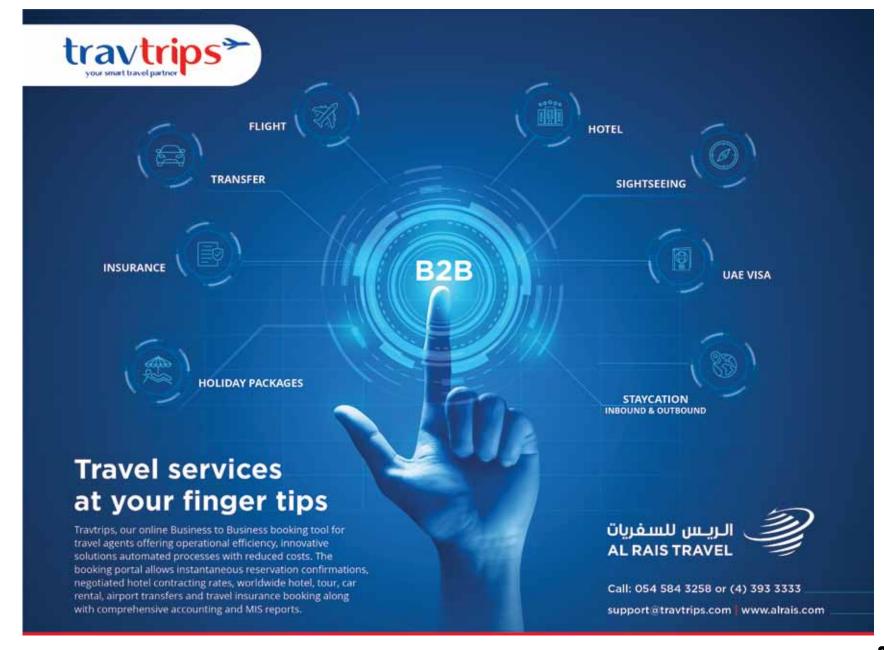
with their suppliers and their communities, and another really important part is how they treat their employees. So, it's a really useful tool but it's only a stepping stone and we want people to get that stamp stay in that scheme, work on that scheme for two years and then move on to some of the more sophisticated schemes that are out there."

Glenn Mandziuk, Chief Executive Officer, Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, said, "Fundamentally, Sustainable Hospitality Alliance's philosophy is around this notion of net positive hospitality. We want to give back more to the destination for which we have the privilege to operate within than we take out. Our partnership

with WTTC is that we see it as a way to decarbonize the sector much more readily for companies of all sizes. Something that isn't approachable let's say within the industry on a PPA you must have real energy consumption needs in order to access that type of a framework by partnering together and pooling around a

common PPA on behalf of the whole sector is something that will enable any organisation to actually access in a much more meaningful way.

"Another big area of focus for us is accelerators. It's applying the actual tools, the approaches on the ground in different jurisdictions around the world, understand where the challenges are in the use of that tool and then looking to scale. Employability work we do, we help disadvantaged youth, for example, in India and in Egypt and other places access employment opportunities, provide essential training and ensure that there is a long-term future for those families that are with those youth. We have a program on supply chain and responsible resourcing across Africa and in India as well. So, those are areas that we are looking at how they can buy local." 🤰



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Personalization to be key in 2024

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2022 and 2023 have been years of recovery for many airlines with a strong focus on restoring operations. As the industry recovers and sets its sight on growth, 2024 should be a year where airlines innovate and plan for the years ahead. Customer



Aswin K General Manager - Gulf & Middle East

centricity is the cornerstone of any successful business. I am excited to be a part of this evolving aviation landscape, and look forward keenly.

Service Despite global challenges, Switzerland Tourism GCC anticipates high demand for travel in 2024. ST gears up for an exciting year, celebrating the GCC's elevation as a priority market, driven by surging overnight stays post-COVID. Focus remains on UAE and KSA



regions. Whilst summer is still the strongest in July and August.



Founder & CEO Elaxiom Travel and Tourism Agency

Industry is poised for exciting transformations, especially for young explorers. Anticipate a surge in sustainable and experiential travel, as eco-conscious choices and immersive cultural encounters take centre stage. Technology will continue to enhance personalized journeys, from Al-driven trip planning to virtual travel experiences. The younger generation's desire for unique and Instagram-worthy destinations pushing us. >>

Amore Travel and Tourism anticipates a renewed wave of adventure and exploration. Guided by optimism, we foresee a surge in immersive travel experiences, a revitalized focus on sustainable tourism, and a celebration of diverse cultures.



With our dedication to curating the finest travel plans worldwide, we aim to create countless memories and unforgettable stories.

Our mission is to

promote and inspire

sustainable practices

that support the well-

the planet. We aim to

being of both people and

create a positive impact

on the environment, so-

ciety, and the economy

through our actions and

General Manager Swissotel Al Murooj

be leaders and change-

makers in our industry,

business can be a force

for good. We have set

objectives for this.

demonstrating that

initiatives. We strive to

Director Akbar Travels

In 2024. Akbar

Travels expands globally,

opening new offices in

Kenya and Tanzania in

Africa, with upcoming

launches in Australia,

Canada and the Philip-

pines. Leveraging our

established reputation,

partnerships and cater to

travel enthusiasts world-

wide. In Asia, Africa and

Europe, we offer diverse

experiences, embracing

technology for stream-

personalized service.

lined operations and

we aim to form key



Director, Marketing & Sales Office - Gulf

As we look ahead to 2024, we are filled with a sense of excitement and anticipation, especially in light of the recent findings from the World Travel & Tourism Council's 2023 Economic Impact Research. This report projects Germany's Travel & Tourism to reach nearly 95 per cent of its pre-pandemic levels, underscoring the rapid rebound and our country's unwavering appeal as a prime destination. "

The emerging trend in luxury and lifestyle travel revolves around experiential and personalized journeys. Travellers now crave for authentic experiences tailored to their individual tastes. As a hotel provider, our task is akin to that of cultural innovators.



Cluster Director of Marketing Communications, Raffles and Fairmont Doha

We are entrusted with embracing the diversity inherent in our destinations and spotlighting immersive and authentic experiences. >>



Director of Marketing & Communications Shangri-La Dubai

Given the rapid tech advancements, a surge in automated and mobile bookings heralds a techdriven era. With personalized experiences taking centre stage, our industry needs to adapt to cater to individual preferences. We could expect bleisure trips, blending business and leisure into a stay, whilst there will also be emphasis on more 'transformative' travel experiences. Marketing strategies must align with this trajectory.

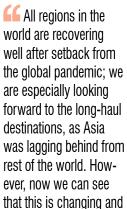


Malith Chamika

2024 will witness conscious focus on sustainability, culture, wellness and adventure. Travel trends that will shape the year ahead are bleisure. Mobile bookings are on the rise. Hence, there will be a drastic growth in automated bookings. Travellers nowadays seek a personalized and effective booking that involves a short window from SEARCH to the BOOK button, VISA application process is



much convenient.





returning to 2019 levels as well. We expect that in the year 2024, there will be a total capacity return to the pre-pandemic levels.



Saad Arsanious Cluster Director of Sales & Marketing, Grand Mercure Dubai City & ibis Styles Airport

In 2024, hospitality sector is poised for growth in Dubai and the UAE, with visitors aligning with Dubai Tourism's strategic focus on niche source markets. The Grand Mercure Dubai City, strategically located next to the bustling Dubai Airport, anticipates heightened demand. The influx of passengers, driven by Dubai Airport's vision to reach 130 million travelers by 2024, positions the hotel at the forefront.



Sustainable, experiential travel in-thing



Hoor Alkhaja Senior Vice President – International Operations Dubai Economy and Tourism

Dubai has a vision that we call D33, which is Dubai's economic strategy in the next 10 years to double the GDP of Dubai and also make it one of the best places in the world to live and to work. Part of this vision includes tourism. We want to be one of the top three most visited cities globally. And so we are well on our way to achieving this vision.



Meerah Ketait Head of Retail & Leisure dnata Travel

There continues to be a pent-up demand for travel, with GCC travellers seeking to explore more of the world than ever before. In 2024, our outlook for dnata Travel is a focus on enhancing the customer experience on www.dnataTravel. com and expanding our retail footprint, with local one-stop travel shops across the GCC – particularly in KSA.



Arik De Chief Revenue Officer Etihad Ainways

We have a lot of ambitious growth plans for 2024, we already announced around five new destinations that we are going to start in 2024. We are getting new aircraft, which are enabling us to maintain our commitment to sustainability. In 2024, we will be able to see the benefits of our new home in terminal A in Abu Dhabi.



Prem Sagar Group General Manager Al Rais Travel & Shipping Agencies LLC

In 2024, UAE travel agencies are expected to adapt to the evolving landscape, integrating advanced technologies for personalized customer experiences. Anticipated trends include increased reliance on artificial intelligence for itinerary customization, seamless booking processes, and enhanced customer service through chatbots.



Sapna Aidasan Director PR and Marketing

2023 was a great year for travel industry but the trends and traditions changed drastically in this year. We all know change is constant but one trend which we saw in 2023, which will grow more in 2024 is companies spending on staff incentive travel. Yes, the biggest challenge after COVID which every industry is facing is human resource.



Renjie Wong Area Director, India, Middle East & South Asia

up to be an incredibly exciting year for the Middle East travellers to visit Singapore. With the world's destinations increasingly at our fingertips, thanks to ever-strengthening flight connectivity, we expect that 2024 is the year where experiential travel will become the norm. We see more visitors coming.



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Sun Siyam Pasikudah reopens

Sun Siyam Pasikudah in Sri Lanka, which underwent a rebranding in 2020 and became a proud member of the boutique collection under Sun Siyam Resorts, is thrilled to announce its reopening after having undergone an extensive transformation and renovation. It is now offering guests a breathtaking experience that combines affordable luxury with the cultural richness of Sri Lanka.

🏗 TT Bureau

rshed Refai, General Manager, Sun Siyam Pasikudah, expressed his enthusiasm as the resort reopens its doors to the public on 17 November 2023. He emphasized on the group's commitment to supporting and providing opportunities to local communities, particularly in the fields of woodwork and carpentry. Refai highlighted their extensive use of locally made and sourced products, showcasing their collaboration with local

riences rooted in the beauty of Sri I anka.

Originally launched in 2014 as Sun Aqua Pasikudah, the property underwent a rebranding in 2020, becoming part of the Sun Siyam Resorts collection and adopting the name Sun Siyam Pasikudah.

Deepak Booneady, CEO, Sun Siyam Resorts, commented: "The resort's temporary closure and its subsequent hiatus during the global pandemic allowed us the valuable opportu-



This reopening marks a new chapter in Sun Siyam Pasikudah's dedication to offering unforgettable experiences rooted in the beauty of Sri Lanka

artisans and communities to create bespoke furniture, chandeliers and joinery items.

Despite significant changes, everything about the resort has been transformed, from colour concepts and equipment to fittings and offerings, while preserving the property's original structure. This reopening marks a new chapter in Sun Siyam Pasikudah's dedication to offering unforgettable expe-

nity to embark on a comprehensive journey of rebranding and property enhancement. Collaborating with Studio Sixty7, we meticulously redesigned the entire property, preserving its structural integrity while elevating every facet."

"From the offerings and facilities to the level of service, we have refined the experience, aligning it with the renowned Sun Siyam vision. We take immense pride in reopening the resort as a distinguished member of the well-known Sun Siyam Resorts boutique collection portfolio and extend a warm invitation to all guests to discover the magnificence of this remarkable part of Sri Lanka for themselves," he added.

The five-star boutique retreat is located on the unspoiled eastern coastline of Sri Lanka, a six-hour scenic drive from Colombo's Bandaranaike Airport. Boasting of just 34 spacious and contemporary, 1-2-bedroom, garden or beach pavilions, with or without pools, Sun Siyam Pasikudah ensures an exclusive coastal experience, whether travelling as a couple, a family, or a group of friends.

Lee McNichol and Jose Rivero, founders and creative directors at Studio Sixty7 who played a crucial role in the interior design revamp, stated: "Studio Sixty7 are excited to showcase the rebirth of Sun Siyam Pasikudah, working alongside Sun Siyam Resorts, in the enchanting and richness of the Sri Lankan landscape. Our design philosophy for this incredible project was to create a boutique 5-star interior with bold monochromatic interiors balanced with rich golden tones. For us, when designing this project, we wanted to create a unique, sophisticated, and chic interior on the magnificent and vibrant coastline of Pasikudah.



"We were lucky to work with many local artisans and communities in creating bespoke furniture and joinery items throughout the resort, making sure we embrace and showcase the beauty that Sri Lanka has to give. The project was truly a labour of love for all involved and has re-energised the resort to be 'the' place to be seen in Sri Lanka. We can't wait for everyone to see," they mentioned.

Sun Siyam Pasikudah invites travellers to embark on a remarkable journey, promising an adventure, a cultural immersion, and a sanctuary of serenity. Take advantage of fantastic opening, family, and festive offers and visit the website for more information or reservations www.sunsiyam.com/sunsiyam-pasikudah/.







(Actiontor

Up in the air: Anticipating air taxis in 2024

Dubai and Saudi Arabia are at the forefront in terms of air taxis in the world. Arrival of Generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) in 2023 has further widened the scope of improvement in the air taxi services. As a result, 97 per cent of airlines are planning programs based on Generative AI, which has, for the time being, taken away the limelight from Metaverse, which was in focus during 2022.

TT Bureau

rban Air Mobility (UAM) has also seen surging interest from airlines and airports, with the first flights due to take off in 2024. As a result, investment in the space across all stakeholders (including OEM, infrastructure, and systems) is projected to accelerate from \$5 billion in 2022 to \$28 billion in 2030.

These are some of the key findings of SITA's updated "Meet the Megatrends" report, highlighting the industry's rapidly changing innovation landscape.

Investment in UAM space across all

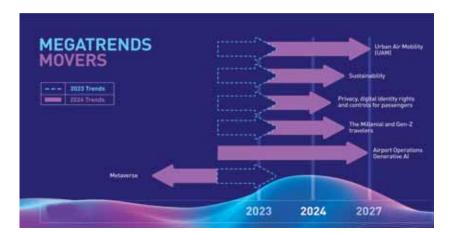
stakeholders (including OEM, infra,

\$5 bn in 2022 to \$28 bn in 2030

and systems) is projected to rise from

The report examines 12 emerging technological, societal, traveller, and economic trends that will significantly morph the travel landscape by 2033.

While some megatrends identified in 2022 have witnessed rapid growth in the last 12 months, others also continued to develop, including Digital Travel, with the emergence of digital identities. According to SITA's 2023 Air Transport IT Insights, by the end of 2026, 82 per cent of airlines will use biometric-enabled digital identity technologies for aircraft boarding, a further 67 per cent



confirmed using touchless and 50 per cent single token.

Meteoric rise of Generative AI in 2023

New data from SITA's 2023 IT insights shows that 86 per cent of airlines are collaborating with innovation partners to make advancements in AI, machine learning, and computer vision. 39 per cent of these have already been implemented, while

another 47 per cent confirmed plans by the end of 2026. Only 3 per cent of airlines stated having no plans to invest in Al technologies. In comparison, 97 per cent confirmed major programs and R&D. Looking at airports, 16 per cent of airports already use Al and ML for improved decision-making, with another 51 per cent confirming plans to implement such solutions by the end of 2026.

UAM's rapid evolution

Increased demand for short-range routes, advances in batteries and electric propulsion systems, and the increasing efforts to reduce aviation's carbon footprint and operational costs have all contributed to the UAM transportation sector's impressive growth in 2023. Taking to the air rather than the road may soon be possible in Paris: an electric air taxi service is in the

pipeline and could be launched during the 2024 Olympic Games. Airlines show increased interest in UAM, with 32 per cent confirming major programs and R&D in UAM services and infrastructure. 33 per cent of airlines invest in VTOL integration technologies for airline operations.

Patrik Svensson Gillstedt. Senior Vice President, Strategy and Growth Enablement, SITA, said: "It's an exciting time for travel with new technologies transforming our industry at rates previously unseen. While Al is a key example of this, it's encouraging to see other innovations like UAM, Digital Travel, and intermodal travel also gathering pace. "At SITA, we have cultivated a more open approach to innovation jointly with our customers and industry groups to try many things to relieve difficult problems in agile-lean ways." 🤰



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Partners in life & hospitality biz

Meet a millennial couple who kicked off their careers together and are now running a resort in Maldives. The couple began from scratch one year prior to the opening by developing the concept, and offering experiences that are unique. The couple, Sara Siyam and Ausy Waseem, Creative Director and Resort Manager of Siyam World, talk about their venture in an interview with

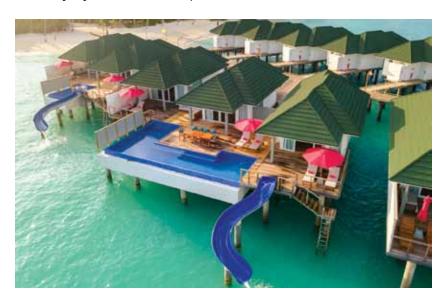
ell us a bit about yourselves and how you both decided to start a resort together?

Sara: Ausy and I got married when we were quite young, in 2012 when we were 20 years old. After getting married we

departments when brainstorming ideas, that way when the idea or experience comes to life, all the departments have a hand in it and its development and execution. Being a resort manager for resort of this scale is no easy task, but together with the team, we have accomplished wonders.

Running a hotel can be demanding. How do you manage to maintain a work-life balance as both business partners and a couple?

Sara: It is very hectic; at the beginning it was difficult living on the island and working together we tend to bring the work home but overtime



moved to Singapore and did our Bachelor's and Master's together at James Cook University. After we graduated, we moved back home to work for Sun Siyam Resorts. So, you could say we grew up together. We started our careers in 2017. I worked as a PR executive at the Sun Siyam head office while Ausy started his training in resort operations and moved to Sun Siyam Iruveli for the pre-opening as a front office manager. When we got the opportunity to work together to open one of the biggest resorts in Maldives, we immediately packed our bags and headed to Sivam World. We were there one year before the opening date, and developed the concept, the experiences and the marketing of the property. We created a whole new trend on social media where we started doing teaser trailers with transitions and effects that no other property in Maldives has done and this started creating the buzz.

Ausy: Sara and I work collectively, she handles the marketing, social media and concept development with her team while I handle operations and carry out the execution of the experiences and events. Here at SW, PR and creative work closely with operations and Sara involves all the head of

How do you divide responsibilities when it comes to managing the hotel operations?

Ausy: I have an amazing operations team, strong leaders who manage their team well. To man-

we learned how to cope. So, we have a rule, after coming home from work Ausy and I will not discuss work, it's our own time as a couple and this helps keep work separate from our own personal lives. Ausy

Being a couple and working together is never easy and it's important to find the balance and not let it interfere personally - Sara Sivam

age a resort of this scale, I, and all head of departments have to be at the top of the game.

rarely takes off days, he is so passionate about his work, he loves what he does but once





in a while when he does, we travel out of the island together. see our families.

Ausy: Sara and I started playing padel tennis together on weekends if operations is not so busy, and sometimes we a balance to let loose and also have fun together.

What advice would you give to other couples who are considering going into business together, especially in the hospitality industry?

how far each of us can go. But there needs to be a balance: at work, I'm the creative director and Ausy is the resort manager, I report to him and the general manager, when we are at home, I am his wife, and he is my husband. The posi-



head to the watersports and try out the new toys that come in. I think over time we have found

Without her (wife Sara Siyam) pushing me, I would not be where i am today. And Siyam World wouldn't be what it is today - Ausy Waseem

Sara: Being a couple and working together is never easy and it's important to find the balance and not let it interfere personally. Ausy and I have an understanding, when we are at work, Ausy is my resort manager and whatever he asks me to do, I give my opinion and we collectively work together to finalize everything. And we are tough on each other when it comes to work, we push each other because we know

tive side is I can talk to him about anything, and he gives me the best advice, especially when it comes to work. There is a lot of moral support. At the end of the day, he is my rock, and I am his, we ground each other.

Ausy: She is the love of my life, and my best friend, without her pushing me, I wouldn't be where I am today. And Siyam World wouldn't be what it is today.

Chinese tourists make a comeback

pre-pandemic figures. We are making a lot of efforts, whether it's with all of our trade partners in China or their global marketing efforts. We just hosted a China conference earlier this year where we flew in our top travel trade and also tech partners, partners like Ali Pei and WeChat Pei. We hosted them here in Dubai. They all came in. They met the industry from hospitality industry to retail sector. So, really all the efforts are in place to take China back to its positioning as one of Dubai's top five source markets. And we expect to see more of that in 2024 and beyond."

Dubai Economy and Tourism went a step further and had an interaction with Dida Travel on their outlook about the post-COVID Chinese traveller. Jinyan Li, Vice President-Global Account Management, Dida Travel, said, "Although this was already a trend pre-COVID, there has been an acceleration in the demand for luxury accommodation and experiences post-COVID from the Chinese



Vice President-Global A Management, Dida Travel

market. Dubai and the wider GCC have been growing in demand all the time for the Chinese traveller. Group travel is still popular booked through the traditional channels, although FIT is a fast growing and relevant segment. Due to the fast-growing market segment demanding luxury experiences those destinations that can fulfil this need are in high demand."

On the flipside, for those expats living in the GCC looking at exploring China, the recent announcement by China of a new visa-free policy for passports holders from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Malaysia comes at a crucial time. This policy took effect on 1 December 2023 and will last for one year. It applies to trips of up to 15 days for business travel, tourism, visiting relatives and friends and for transitioning within China. The aim of this policy is to create convenience for passport holders from these countries in order to stimulate inbound tourism.

Based on Dida Travel's booking data, since the implementation of the recent visa-free policy, hotel bookings from the six countries named have grown by over 50 per cent from 1 December to 7 December in comparison to the previous week. In fact, hotel bookings for travellers from Spain to China have jumped by more than 100 per cent compared to the same period last week. Bookings from Italy and Malaysia to China saw an impressive increase of 50 per cent and 67 per cent week on week, respectively. Meanwhile, although the wider Chinese inbound market has not yet recovered to the prepandemic levels due to the fact



GCC has been growing in demand all the time for the Chinese traveller. **Group travel is still popular booked** through traditional channels – Jinvan Li

that China's borders fully opened in early 2023, Dida Travel's year to date inbound hotel sales to China have seen a remarkable 151 per cent growth versus the same period in 2019. This highlights Dida Travel's ability to outpace wider

market dynamics and capture

significant new market share.

According to Dida Travel's year to date total transaction value, Spain, Malaysia, and Italy have been among the top 20 source markets for inbound China travel in 2023. The most booked destinations

in China are Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hangzhou, Xiamen, Suzhou, Langfang, Dongguan, and Wuhan.

Rikin Wu, Founder & CEO, DidaTravel, said: "We were really excited about the growth opportunity for China's inbound tourism sector as result of this news and these initial figures are very encouraging. Thanks to proactive policies like this, which create a strong business environment for tourism, we are able to unlock the full potential of the demand."



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Uniting for climate change

On the sidelines of COP28, ATS Travel and Amadeus partnered with Goumbook to conduct a workshop on 'Climate Fresk', which aimed to create awareness among the travel trade and corporate professionals in the UAE on the current climate situation in the world and the impact it has, not just on nature but on humans as well, and to understand the various plans carried forward to make it a better future.





Networking & knowledge exchange

The 6th edition of the two-day annual ROC Middle East Commercial Strategy Conference, held recently in Dubai, presented a unique opportunity for the participants to reestablish professional connections and participate in valuable discussions. Mona Faraj, MD, HSMAI Middle East and Bob Gilbert, President & CEO, HSMAI, welcomed the participants, including key people from the hospitality sector.











Thrills of being a travel agent

A travel agent's world is an exhilarating and captivating one, offering a multitude of exciting experiences and opportunities. It allows you to delve into the vast realm of travel, where every day holds the potential for discovery and exploration.

ne of the most thrilling aspects of being a travel agent is the constant evolution and dynamism of the industry. It is an ever-changing landscape with new travel trends, emerging destinations, and evolving regulations and requirements. To thrive in this environment, you continuously expand your knowledge and stay at the forefront of the latest developments. This ongoing learning and adaptation make the role intellectually stimulating and ensure that you are always equipped to provide the best possible service to your clients.

Being a travel agent allows you to immerse yourself in the wonders of travel, and create unforgettable experiences for your clients

Building relationships with your clients is another aspect that makes being a travel agent truly rewarding. You have the privilege of getting to know them on a personal level, understanding their preferences, aspirations, and travel dreams. By forging

strong connections, you are able to tailor their travel plans to their specific needs, delivering customized experiences that exceed their expectations. Witnessing their excitement as they embark on their journeys and hearing their stories upon their return is an immensely gratifying experience.

Additionally, being a travel agent opens doors to a vast network of industry professionals. Through collaborations with hotels, airlines, tour operators, and other travel-related entities, you establish valuable connections that enhance your knowledge and elevate the level of service you provide. These partnerships not only benefit your clients but also enable you to stay informed

about the latest offerings, ensuring that you can offer unique and exclusive experiences.

In summary, being a travel agent offers an exhilarating and fulfilling career path. It allows you to immerse yourself in the wonders of travel, create unforgettable experiences for your clients, and continuously learn and adapt in a dynamic industry. The joy of exploring destinations, connecting with people, and making dreams come true is what makes a travel agent's life extraordinary.

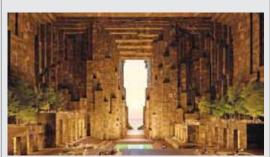


Utamo, the destination for art and entertainment

he Board of Directors of NEOM unveiled Utamo, its immersive destination for art and entertainment. An innovative event space to host global artists, Utamo is the latest destination to be announced by the sustainable regional development evolving in northwest Saudi Arabia. Cocooned in a mountain located along the Gulf of Aqaba coastline, Utamo creates a unique backdrop for music events, exhibitions, and

Guests will arrive at Utamo via an extended pathway of a garden promenade, featuring more than 50 species of shrubs, herbs and flowers, before reaching the grand hall. The 64-metre-high entrance, which pays homage to art and design, sets the scene for the awe-inspiring experiences awaiting guests inside.

A theatre of the future where reality and the digital realm converge, Utamo will host events



art activations that will transform traditional entertainment experiences. Combining natural beauty and technology, the venue has been designed to be a place where art and architecture blend harmoniously, providing visitors with a truly unique experience.

that redefine the benchmark of entertainment. Its multipurpose performance space, VIP lounges, and signature restaurants will make it one of the world's most exclusive event spaces, as it plays host to performances from the globe's greatest artists.



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McArthurGlen Group honours star

McArthurGlen Group, a global leader in luxury outlet shopping, honoured its top trade partners in the Middle East at a glittering function, organised at Park Hyatt Dubai – Creek Resort recently. Selected trade partners were presented with Certificates of Appreciation and McArthurGlen Tourism Award trophies for their exceptional contribution and promoting the brand in the region.











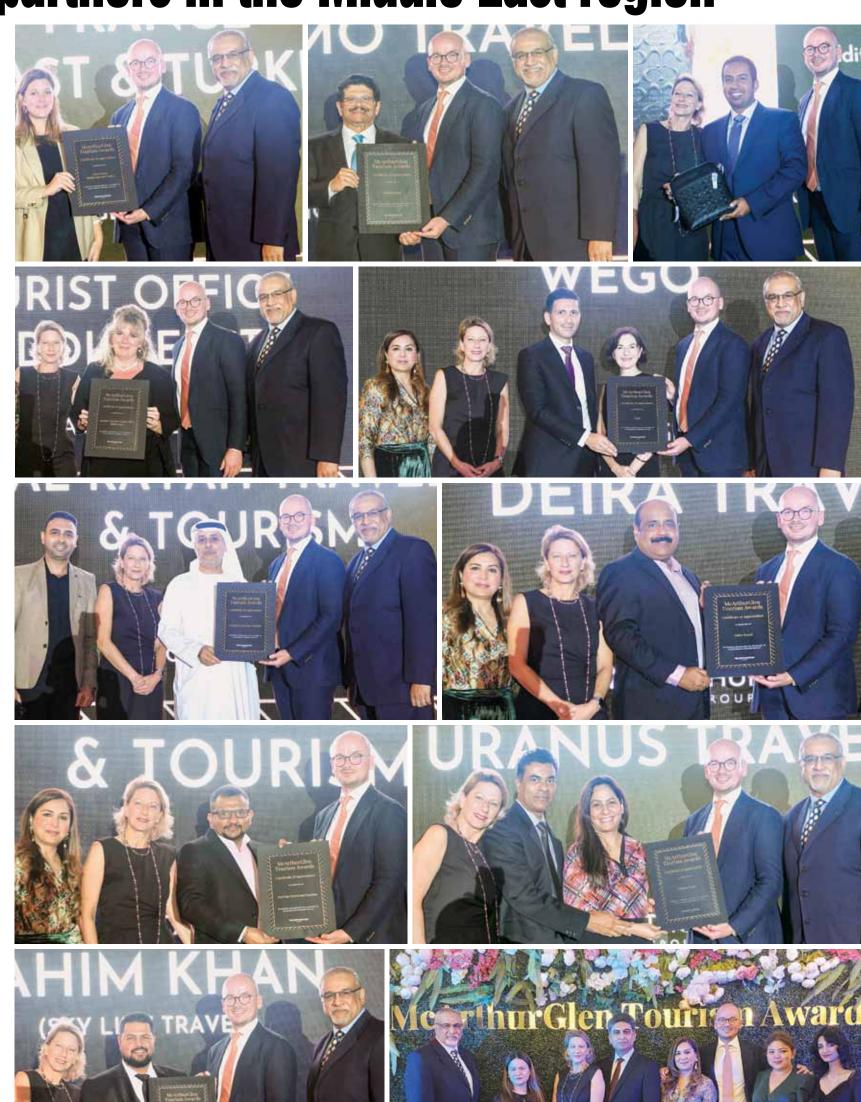








partners in the Middle East region



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JANUARY 2024 ______**15**

Event Talk 🚄

JANUARY

Arabia Luxury Dubai Date: 15-18 January

Venue: Atlantis the Royal, Dubai, UAE

ASEAN Tourism Forum

Date: 15-19 January Venue: Vientiane, Laos

Pivate Luxury Dubai Date: 17-21 January

Venue: Royal Atlantis the Palm Dubai, UAE

Matka Nordic Travel Fair Date: 18-21 January Venue: Helsinki, Finland

Venue: Jaipur, India

Travel M!CE & Corporate Show (Logo) Date: 20-21 January

Fitur

Date: 24-28 January Venue: IFEMA, Madrid, Spain

Thai International Travel Fair

Date: 25-28 Janaury Venue: Bangkok, Thailand Jeddah International Travel and Tourism Exhibition

Date: 28-30 January Venue: Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

FEBRUARY

Saudi HORECA

Venue: Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Sharjah Light Festival Date: 7-18 Februar **Venue:** Sharjah, UAE

STE Race to Switzerland

Date: 9-17 February

Venue: Riyadh, Kuwait, Dubai, Abu Dhabi

Tehran International Tourism Exhibition (TITE)

Date: 12-15 February Venue: Tehran, Iran

ΔIMF

Date: 19-21 February Venue: Melbourne, Austrailia

Makkah Expo for Hotels and Restaurants

Date: 19-21 February Venue: Mecca, Saudi Arabia

Date: 22-24 February Venue: India

The Luxury Show Date: 22-24 February

Venue: Kuwait City, Kuwait

Luxury Travel Mart

Date: 23 February Venue: Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Danish Travel Show Date: 23-25 February Venue: Denmark

Connections Luxury Middle East

Date: 25-28 February Venue: Muscat, Oman

International Conference on Economic, Business, Tourism and Social Sciences

Date: 25 February Venue: Bangkok, Thailand

Routes Asia

Date: 27-29 February **Venue:** Langkawi, Malaysia

Saudi Travel Mart

Date: 27-28 February Venue: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

International Boat Show Date: 28 February-3 March Venue: Dubai, UAE

MARCH

Abu Dhabi Air Expo Date: 4-6 March Venue: Abu Dhabi LIAF

MRO Middle East Date: 5-6 March

Venue: Dubai, UAE

ITB Berlin

Date: 5-7 March Venue: Messe Berlin, Berlin

Routes Americas Date: 19-21 March Venue: Bogota, Colombia

Private Luxury Copenhagen Date: 24-27 March Venue: Copenhagen, Denmark

IBTM Arabia

Date: 25-27 March Venue: Abu Dhabi, UAE

Rendez-vous en France Tradeshow

Date: 26-27 March Venue: Toulouse France

APRIL

ILTM Africa

Date: 7-9 April

Venue: Cape Town, South Africa

WTM Africa Date: 10-12 April

Venue: Cape Town, South Africa

WTM Latin America

Date: 15-17 April Venue: Sao Paulo, Brazil

Uzbekistan International Travel Market

Date: 16-18 April Venue: Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Gulf Travel Show-M!CE

Date: 20-21 April Venue: Dubai, UAE

German Travel Mart

Date: 21-23 April Venue: Chemnitz, Germany

Connections Luxury Europe Date: 21-24 April Venue: Costa Brava

Routes Europe

Date: 22-24 April Venue: Aarhus, Denmark

Future Hospitality Summit - Saudi Arabia Date: 29 April-1 May Venue: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

MAY

Marhaba France Spain

Date: 2-5 May Venue: Abu Dhabi, UAE

Discover Europe Travel Summit Date: 4-5 May

Venue: Dubai LIAF

Arabian Travel Market

Date: 6-9 May Venue: Dubai, UAE

ILTM Latin America

Date: 7-10 May Venue: Sao Paulo, Brazil

ROC Asia Pacific Date: 9-10 May

Venue: Singapore

Airport Show Date: 14-16 May Venue: Dubai, UAE

♦ IMEX

Date: 14-16 May Venue: Frankfurt, Germany **Australian Tourism Exchange**

Date: 19-23 May Venue: Melbourne, Australia

ITB China

Date: 27-29 May Venue: Shanghai, China

Riyadh Travel Fair

Date: 27-29 May Venue: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

JUNE

Travel Wedding Show

Date: 1-2 June Venue: India

Hotel Show

Date: 4-6 June Venue: Dubai, UAE

HORECA Oman

Date: 4-6 June Venue: Muscat Oman

Business Travel Show Europe

Date: 19-20 June

Venue: Excel London, United Kingdom

JULY

ILTM APAC

Date: 1-4 July Venue: Singapore

Arabian Travel Awards

Venue: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Travel Meet Asia

Date: 3-4 July Venue: Jakarta, Indonesia

Travel M!CE & Corporate Show

Date: 20-21 July Venue: India

AUGUST

IBTM America

Date: 21-22 August

Venue: Mexico

India Cargo Awards-West & South Date: 28 August Venue: Mumbai, India

India Travel Awards-West & South

Date: 29 August Venue: Mumbai India

SEPTEMBER

Thailand Amusement and Attractions Park Expo (TAAPE)

Date: 3-5 September Venue: Bangkok, Thailand

Gulf Travel Show-Weddings Date: 7-8 September Venue: Dubai, UAE

ITB India

Date: 11-13 September Venue: Mumbai, India

Connections Luxury UK & Ireland

Date: 22-25 September Venue: London. UK

Incentive Travel and Conventions Meetings Asia (IT&CMA/ CTW APAC)

Date: 24 - 26 September Venue: Bangkok, Thailand

Corporate Travel World Asia Pacific

Date: 24-26 September Venue: Bangkok, Thailand

Food and Hospitality Oman

Date: 24-26 September Venue: Muscat, Oman

Future Hospitality Summit Dubai

Date: 30 September-2 October Venue: Dubai, UAE

OCTOBER

Private Luxury Boutique

Date: 2-5 October Venue: Portugal

Routes World 2024

Date: 6-8 Octobe Venue: Bahrain

IMEX America

Date: 7-10 October Venue: Las Vegas, Nevada. USA

World Aviation Festival

Date: 8-10 October

Global Luxury Travel Expo Date: 11-13 October Venue: Bangkok, Thailand

❖ GITEX

Date: 14-18 October Venue: Dubai, UAF

China Outbound Travel and Tourism Market Date: 16-18 October

Venue: Beijing, China Switzerland Travel Mart - Autumn

Date: 17-22 October Venue: Switzerland Arabian Cargo Awards

Venue: Dubai. UAF Arabian Travel Awards

Date: 22 October Venue: Dubai, UAE

ITB Asia Date: 23-25 October Venue: Marina Bay Sands Singapore

APG World Connect

Venue: Malta

German National Tourist Office GCC Roadshow Date: 27 October-1 November Venue: Riyadh, Jeddah, Kuwait, Doha, Muscat, Dubai (TBC)

WTTC Global Summit

Date: [Venue: Perth, Australia

Date: 27-30 October Venue: Mexico

NOVEMBER

Date: 5-7 November Venue: Excel London, United Kingdom

Connections Luxury Americas

Date: 10-13 November Venue: Hollywood, USA Bahrain International Airshow

Venue: Sakhir Airbase, Bahrain

IBTM World Date: 19-21 November Venue: Barcelona, Spain

Date: 13-15 November

Qatar Travel Mart Date: 25-27 November Venue: Doha, Qatar

DECEMBER

ILTM Cannes

Date: 2-5 December Venue: Cannes, France

India Cargo Awards-North & East Date: 10 December Venue: Delhi, India

India Travel Awards-North & East Date: 11 December

◆ MEBAA

Date: 10-12 December Venue: Dubai. UAE

Venue: Delhi India

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MOVEMENTS

TIME HOTELS

The UAE-headquartered hospitality company TIME Hotels announced MAJD HAMAMOUCHI as Director of Business Development in a move to expand its presence across the MENA region,

leading strategic growth initiatives and fostering partnerships to drive TIME Hotels' expansion. With a background in business development. Hamamouchi previously excelled in similar roles, contributing to the success of renowned organisations. He brings a wealth of expertise in business development, backed by a relevant educational background. In his current role, he spearheads business

development efforts, identifying opportunities, building key relationships, and implementing growth strategies.

TIME Hotels has also announced the strategic expansion of its Human Resources Department team with the recruitment of highly skilled

professionals. **PATSY KRUGER** assumes the role of Director of Human Resources, overseeing personnel management and fostering a positive workplace culture. With a background in HR leadership, Kruger brings with him valuable experience from prestigious organisations. He holds a degree in Human Resources and boasts of extensive experience, ensuring that strategic HR practices align with TIME Hotels' goals and values. In her current role, she spearheads HR initiatives, ensuring employee engagement, talent development, and adherence to industry best practices at TIME Hotels.

KHALIDIA PALACE HOTEL

Kḥalidia Palace Hotel Dubai by Mourouj Gloria appoints MOHAMMED IQBAL as the General Manager. Iqbal has assembled a team of esteemed



of Sales. Khulaif brings nearly 24 years of hospitality expertise and a strong track record in hotel preopenings to the team, with substantial experience in leading Sales & Marketing for esteemed brands like Millennium, Rotana, IHG, Taj, and Dusit. Her deep market knowledge and strategic acumen are invaluable assets in driving the sales trajectory forward. Gloria Hotels & Resorts is an internationally recognised hospitality consulting firm specialised in hotels' management in the GCC, MENA region. Its headquarters is strategically located in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Khalidia Palace Hotel Dubai by Mourouj Gloria, the soon-to-be-unveiled 5-star oasis of luxury, has appointed **RULA KHULAIF** as the Director

ATLANTIS THE ROYAL

Atlantis The Royal appoints **JEREMY B KERSCHEN** as Account Director, Sales. Kerschen will oversee high-end leisure sales, driving luxury business

from the Americas, across both Atlantis The Palm and Atlantis The Royal. As a tri-national and tri-lingual with over a decade of experience in various markets and segments across the US, UK, Europe, and the Middle East, Kerschen brings a wealth of knowledge to his new position. In this new role, Kerschen will be responsible for the management and development of new business, strategically driving luxury sales for Atlantis Dubai Resorts. His focus will be on international leisure markets, with a particular emphasis on the USA and South America, in addition to consortia markets.

SUN SIYAM

Sri Lanka

Maldivian hospitality group Sun Siyam Resorts has appointed **DULANKA** DE MEL as Sales and Marketing Manager at Sun Siyam Pasikudah in Sri

Lanka, which re-opened after undergoing a comprehensive renovation and assuring guests a captivating experience that harmoniously blends accessible luxury with the cultural opulence of Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan national De Mel will be leading all marketing and sales efforts of Sun Siyam Pasikudah, as he comes with over 13 years of progressive experience in the country's hospitality sector. Having previously worked with ANI Private Resorts, Onyx Hospitality, UGA Escapes, Resplendent Ceylon, Aman Resorts and Cinnamon Grand, he will also be

key in driving destination and product positioning.

GRAND MERCURE DUBAI CITY

Passionate about revenue management, HESHAM ELHALWAGY assumes the role of Cluster Revenue Manager at Grand Mercure Dubai City and

ibis Styles Airport. With 12 years of experience, Elhalwagy's journey, spanning leadership roles at Emaar Hospitality, Tower Plaza Hotel Dubai, and Sheraton Grand Hotel Dubai, underscores his commitment to excellence. Tasked with overseeing revenue management, distribution, and pricing strategy for the cluster, Elhalwagy's unique blend of self-motivation and teamwork, coupled with high-powered presentation skills, sets him apart. Throughout his career, he has consistently delivered exceptional results, establishing himself as a true asset in the competitive field of hospitality revenue management.

AMADEUS

Gulf/ EMEA

MAHER KOUBAA has been appointed as Executive Vice President - Travel, Amadeus and Managing Director, EMEA. In this newly formed

and expanded role. Koubaa will make use of his more than 20 years of travel industry experience to lead the implementation of Amadeus' strategic vision in Europe, Middle East and Africa region. Having successfully grown Amadeus' business in EMEA during his fiveyear tenure as Head of Airlines in the region, Koubaa's expanded role will see him taking a similarly customer centric approach with travel sellers in addition to airline customers. He holds a Master of Science in Industrial Engineering from Centrale Supélec. Université Paris-Saclay and is currently based in Dubai.

ROTANA Abu Dhabi

Rotana appoints KIMBERLEY SCHÖPS as the Director of Pre-Opening Operations and Housekeeping. In her new role, Schöps will be responsible for

developing and implementing pre-opening strategies, housekeeping management, and ensuring quality control and guest satisfaction. She will oversee a team of 70 employees across Rotana's existing and growing pipeline of properties in the region and beyond. Her responsibilities collectively contribute to the successful pre-opening of new properties and ensuring the effective management of housekeeping operations. With over a decade of expertise in the Middle Eastern hospitality, the German national has held diverse positions, including the past seven years within Rotana properties.

RIXOS THE PALM DUBAI HOTEL & SUITES

Rixos The Palm Dubai Hotel & Suites promotes BIRLES BIZHKENOV as the Director of Rooms. From his early role as Front Office Manager. Bizhkenov's

excellent service has reflected in his character as an "all-rounder" along with his ability to adapt to lastminute changes. In his new role, Bizhkenov will be leading a team of more than 170 individuals in multiple departments, continuing his contribution to the prestigious Rixos brand. His 14 years of consistent performance as a member of the Rixos family has resulted in outstanding quest retention and he also actively participated in the development of the resort's Suite Collections. He previously worked with one of Rixos' properties in Russia.

The luxury resort also promotes IBTISSAM DOUBAJ as the Cluster Director of Sales. After serving as the Director of Sales for one year, Doubaj's incredible contribution to the launch of the All-Inclusive

Concept has ultimately led her to be appointed as the Cluster Director of Sales. She has over 16 years of experience, working with a series of 5-star hotels in the UAE. With her fluency in four languages - English, Arabic, French, and Italian - she fosters meaningful connections with clients and associates, whilst also continuing her passion for training and inspiring her team members. Doubaj also led the hotel to surpass last year's performance, beating the competition.

BARKIN KARTAL has been promoted as the Director of Operations. Working at Rixos The Palm Dubai Hotel & Suites for nearly five years, Kartal's

remarkable career development is a result of his dedication as a manager and his approachable personality. Starting as a Director of Housekeeping in 2019, Barkin has long been one of the resort's key leaders in navigating the intricacies of managing staff. His unique character, which combines discipline and kindness, helps encourage his team to always work diligently while being open and understanding. Armed with a Master's degree from HTMI Switzerland, his extensive experience in hospitality spans over a decade. He has worked with luxury hospitality brands for years.



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