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Slow travel: New way to explore

Slow travel is the new way of travellers to explore on their own terms and in their own time in order to create lasting memories and connections. It seems to be the future of tourism. In the Middle East, the trend is being particularly driven by the younger generation, who prioritise sustainable ways of travel and tourism. Experts from hotels, tourism boards and travel trade share their views with **TRAVTALK**.



Yamina Soto
Director, Marketing & Sales Office
GNTO GCC

“The emergence of slow travel in the region reflects a growing recognition of sustainability and mindful travel practices. It encourages immersion in local cultures, minimising environmental impact by favouring sustainable experiences and transportation choices. This is something the GNTO has been focusing on intensively with the ‘Simply Feel Good’ campaign, directed at prioritising quality over quantity and encouraging travellers to slow down, stay longer, and truly appreciate their destinations.”



Aga Pytlík
General Manager
Pan World Travel & Tourism

“The rise of slow travel in the GCC outbound market underscores the importance of sustainability and mindful travel. This trend is particularly resonant with the younger generation, who prioritise sustainable tourism. As Gen Z begins to travel, sustainability will likely become even more integral to the travel industry’s future. Within the GCC, travellers are increasingly focusing on wellness and well-being, reshaping the industry with new perspectives. AI and data-driven technologies revolutionize the travel experience.”

Contd. on page 10 ►

Indispensable travel agents

Amid the debate over the necessity of travel agents in the modern-day high-tech world, Middle East still holds on to its travel and tourism partners, while European countries follow suit.



Eugene Ko
Marketing Director
Phocuswright

“Booking travel has become increasingly complex. This is not even so much to do with the ‘pandemic effect’ anymore – there is a colossal amount of information and inspiration available online, through countless different sources. Although most people do enjoy an element of research and choice when booking travel, using a travel agent can eliminate the need for extensive online trawling, as the agent can handle all the details and bookings on behalf of the customer. This convenience saves time and effort, especially for complex itineraries or group travel. Certainly there seems to be a consensus that the quality on offer

from retail travel agents has increased in recent years and one reason is that they can now offer ancillary extras for the in-destination experience.”

Contd. on page 21 ►

Unified visa to boost GCC biz

Ministers from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain discussed the streamlining of GCC Tourism at ATM 2024. According to policy makers, tourism is projected to account for 12% of the UAE’s GDP.

TT Bureau

GCC policymakers gathered at Arabian Travel Market 2024 in Dubai to discuss the future of regional travel and tourism. Some of the key highlights from the session was Gulf-wide collaboration, ease of inter-regional travel and infrastructure development. According to the policymakers, tourism is projected to account for 12 per cent of the UAE’s GDP this year.



H.E. Abdullah bin Touq Al Marri, Minister of Economy, UAE, underlined the tourism sector’s growing contribution

to the country’s economy in his opening comments on the global stage. “According to the

Contd. on page 21 ►

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Harnessing India's tourism potential

Addressing a session at Arabian Travel Market 2024, **Alhasan Aldabbagh**, President APAC, Saudi Tourism Authority, says that they have introduced a 96-hour visa for Indians possessing the US, UK or Schengen visa, while **Markus Tan**, Regional Director, India, South Asia, Middle East & Africa, Singapore Tourism Board, asserts that they keep updating their offerings to attract more Indians.

 Dr Shehara Rizly

One of the most compelling sessions held at the Arabian Travel Market, Dubai, was 'Strategies to entice Indian tourists'. The session, moderated by **SanJeet**, CEO, DDP Group, involved **Alhasan Aldabbagh**, President APAC, Saudi Tourism Authority and **Markus Tan**, Regional Director, India, South Asia, Middle East & Africa, Singapore Tourism Board.

During the session, it was mentioned that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has received international recognition from UN Tourism and World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) for its remarkable achievement of welcoming over 100 million tourists in 2023, way before 2030, the time set for achieving the target. This has been possible, thanks to the Kingdom easing visa for leisure tourists since 2019 and



Alhasan Aldabbagh, flanked by Markus Tan and SanJeet at the Arabian Travel Market

then on a more aggressive note after the pandemic. Now, the Kingdom has renewed its target to 150 million visitors by 2030.

Speaking at the session, Aldabbagh shared that India is an important source market for the KSA, as they share a range of

similarities and the convenience of travel - it's just a four-hour flight journey between the two countries.

He reiterated that it is one of the most lucrative markets for them after they opened for tourism. When it comes to travellers

from the two destinations, they both possess somewhat similar expectations from their travels and that the middle class in India has seen a rapid growth, which brings in a new set of travellers to the Kingdom. Hence, they are more than happy to welcome Indians to explore the rich culture,

history of the KSA. Aldabbagh said that diverse offerings in the KSA will amaze the travellers from India, as they enjoy great mountainous region with cooler areas, then the desert experience and the most talked about

lucrative market for them over many years in terms of leisure, business and even MICE travellers. Singapore is a hub in the Asian region and is well known for its infrastructure, diverse offerings to travellers. It keeps

After welcoming over 100 million tourists in 2023, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has renewed its target to 150 million visitors by 2030

Red Sea. "India is just four hours away from Saudi Arabia and we can see the growth of the middle class is very strong. We have a diverse offering for travellers from India from mountains to desert lands to the Red Sea," he said.

Addressing the gathering, Tan shared that India has been a

updating its offerings. It attracts more visitors from India and across the world with all its international travel trade exhibitions as well. Aldabbagh emphasised on simplifying the process of entering the Kingdom. He said the new 96-hour visa, especially for Indians, which is a stopover visa, could be obtained if one has a valid US, UK or Schengen visa.

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Tech investment in tourism to rise by 14%

Amadeus recently released its report on ‘Travel Technology Investment Trends 2024’, which included key players in the travel and tourism industry. In an interview with **TRAVELTALK**, **Ernesto Sanchez Beaumont**, Managing Director, Amadeus Gulf, shares the purpose behind the study, new findings from it and how it will benefit the industry in future.

TT Bureau

What is the Travel Technology Investment Trends study?

Amadeus has commissioned an online survey with 1,253 senior technology decision makers across the industry (airlines, airports, travel sellers, corporations, payments and hospitality) to understand their technology investment priorities. The research was undertaken in 10 markets - UK, France, Germany, UAE, US, Mexico, Brazil, India, China and Korea - to provide a globally representative sample. The research provides insight into technology budgets; investment priorities; business and technology challenges; as well as on some specific topics, e.g., NDC, disruption, modern retailing.

Why did Amadeus undertake this study?

This study is one of many ways



Ernesto Sanchez Beaumont
Managing Director
Amadeus Gulf

that we gain an understanding of our different customer groups' priorities, and how they are looking to use technology to address travellers' needs. This, in turn, helps Amadeus to develop innovative products and services to meet the industry's current and future needs. We are also aware of the considerable change across the industry, e.g., Modern Retailing in the airline

industry, transformation of the way airports operate, and new protocols in travel distribution. In this context, we hope this study helps travel companies benchmark their own plans against an average of their peers. To the best of our knowledge, this is the only research project that benchmarks the technology investment priorities of such a broad set of sub-sectors of the travel industry.

What are the key findings?

The study contains a wealth of insight into the plans of airlines, airports, travel sellers (retail, business, online), corporations, hospitality companies and travel payments departments. We plan to release individual reports on the key findings for each area mentioned above throughout the first half of 2024.

Across the industry for the areas mentioned below, our study shows investment in technology

Sector	Average increase
Airports	17 %
Corporations	15 %
Hotels	14 %
Airlines	13 %
Travel distribution	13 %
Travel payments	12 %

is expected to increase by 14 per cent on average this year, compared to last year.

ChatGPT burst on to the world stage less than 18 months (about one and a half years) ago (November 2022) and it quickly

This year - most technologies	By 2029 - most important technologies
Machine Learning	Machine Learning
Data Analytics	Generative AI
Digital Payments	Cloud Computing
Digitalization	Digital Payments
Cloud Computing	Data Analytics

won the people's hearts and minds. Amadeus was already using Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence, but now the world's focus has been put on advances like Generative AI, we can also see why Machine Learning is expected to be the most important technology this year and will remain so in five years of time. Although Generative AI is not among the top technology for this year, it will rise to second position in 2029.

How will Amadeus act on the findings of this research?

Our product development and

product marketing teams are keenly interested in the priorities of our customers. We believe, it is important for technology companies to adopt an outside-in approach. That means us-

Although Generative AI is not among the top technology for this year, it will rise to second position in 2029

ing research such as this and customer insights to steer the development of new solutions. In fact, we see our work with driving customers on new solutions as a very collaborative process. 



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RezLive celebrates partnerships at ATM

RezLive.com took centre stage at Arabian Travel Market 2024, held recently in Dubai. The event served as a platform for the company to showcase its innovative solutions and reaffirm its dedication to empowering travel professionals worldwide. The company's pavilion captivated attendees with its infectious enthusiasm and unwavering commitment to fostering strong partnerships.

TT Bureau

With the resounding chant of "Get More with RezLive.com", echoing through the halls, RezLive.com made a bold statement at Arabian Travel Market 2024 (ATM 2024). The event served as a platform for the company to showcase its innovative solutions and reaffirm its dedication to empowering travel professionals worldwide.

The spirit of ATM 2024 was truly alive at the RezLive.com stand, where travel agents, service providers, hoteliers, tech partners, and channel managers congregated to explore new opportunities and synergies. The dynamic atmosphere was a testament to the vibrant energy that permeated throughout the event. On 7 May 2024, RezLive.com took the excitement to new heights by hosting a special



Jaal Shah
Group Managing Director
RezLive.com

cocktail party for its preferred partners at The Den McGettigan's Dubai.

The evening was not just about business; it was a celebration of the invaluable partnerships that drive RezLive.com's success. "We are thrilled to have been part of the Arabian Travel Market 2024 and to have had the opportunity to connect with

our valued partners," said Jaal Shah, Group Managing Director, RezLive.com. "Our cocktail party was a token of appreciation for their continued support and dedication. Together, we are shaping the future of travel," he added.

We are thrilled to have been part of the ATM 2024 and to have had the opportunity to connect with our valued partners

The event saw an impressive turnout from attendees across the region, fostering an atmosphere brimming with camaraderie and excitement. It served



as a pivotal moment to not only celebrate past achievements but also to cultivate new connections and collectively envision the boundless possibilities that await in the constantly evolving travel industry.

As RezLive.com looks back on its participation in ATM 2024, it extends its heartfelt gratitude to all travel partners, hoteliers, and attendees who contributed to making the event a resounding success.

With unwavering enthusiasm and a steadfast commitment to excellence, this year RezLive.com remains poised to revolutionise the travel industry and redefine the concept of partnership. 🌟





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Mallorca shines in GCC tourism spotlight

Spain tourism in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) brought in almost 30 partners for the Arabian Travel Market to showcase the diverse offerings to the existing clientele and also meet new clientele. The NTO focussed on 4 Balearic Islands - Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza and Formentera. For the first time, Mallorca tourism board participated to showcase its diverse offerings to the global partners.

Dr Shehara Rizly

Daniel Rosado, Director, Spain Tourism shared, "In this edition of Arabian Travel Market, we have about 30 partners that came to Dubai to promote their different products. We have destinations, DMCs, hotels and shopping experiences and this year we are focusing on the 4 Balearic Islands Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza and

We are focusing on the 4 Balearic Islands Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza and Formentera and for the first time

– Daniel Rosado



Formentera and for the first time Mallorca is participating with us to showcase their diverse offerings to the GCC clientele and global partners. Arabian Travel Market becomes the perfect

platform to connect, network and seal business deals, apart from listening to the buyers and their clientele and the many requirements they have so that our partners (exhibitors) can tailor

ATM saw rise in interest from agents eager to learn about and connect with new destinations

– Namratha Rose

make solutions according to their many requirements."

Namratha Rose, Manager, Marketing & Trade Relations, Spain Tourism, reiterated, "The Arabian Travel Market (ATM) is pivotal for all exhibitors, especially destinations, hotels and DMCs offering a platform to showcase their of-



ferings and for partners to forge valuable connections. This year, ATM saw increased interest from agents eager to learn about and connect with new destinations and suppliers from Spain. In line with this, Granada Tourism hosted an insightful presen-

tation and lunch for travel trade professionals, while Mallorca Tourism organised an event to thank stakeholders. These initiatives underscored the importance of ATM in promoting Spain and strengthening partnerships within the travel industry."



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Seychelles, Emirates strengthen bond

Tourism Seychelles showcased their diverse offerings at the Arabian Travel Market, held recently in Dubai. **Sylvestre Radegonde**, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tourism, Seychelles, led the contingent of nine partners from the country, which included hotels and DMCs. Among some of the strategic collaborations they made was the renewal of the Emirates Airline partnership.

TT Bureau

Seychelles' participation was reinforced by the support of distinguished Destination Management Companies, such as 7 South, Luxe Voyage Holidays, Luxury Travel, Masons Travel, Ocean Blue Travel, Summer Rain Tours, along with renowned hotels, including Berjaya Resorts Seychelles, Eden Bleu Hotel, Savoy Seychelles Resort & Spa, and Coral Strand Smart Choice Hotel.

Highlights of the event included the signing of two Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with key industry partners. The first MoU was signed with Emirates Airlines, enhancing partnerships to strengthen connectivity and accessibility to Seychelles. The second MoU was signed with dnata Travel to



provided an exceptional platform for Tourism Seychelles Middle East to foster existing relationships, explore new opportunities, and reinforce Seychelles' allure as a premier travel destination. The engagement with key industry stakeholders and media has amplified our efforts

to continuously work together to promote the destination and further develop the route. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Emirates for its continuous support."

At the event, Radegonde highlighted Emirates' role as a key ally, noting its significant market share in the industry. He thanked Emirates for their enduring partnership, recognising its positive impact on Seychelles' visibility and accessibility. The minister also expressed excitement for future collaborations, aiming to use Emirates' expertise to boost Seychelles' global tourism reputation.

Furthermore, Emirates has committed to assisting travel agents and tour operators in key strategic markets, empowering them to effectively promote Seychelles as a premier leisure destination. This commitment

Commenting on the airline's commitment to promoting Seychelles to its customer base, Khoory said, "Seychelles is a key leisure destination in our network that we have proudly been oper-



foster joint collaborations and further promote Seychelles as a premier travel destination. Additionally, bilateral meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives further strengthened regional collaboration and cooperation.

Ahmed Fathallah, Tourism Seychelles' Middle East representative, commented, "This event

to showcase Seychelles' unique offerings and commitment to sustainable tourism."

Tourism Seychelles and Emirates once again reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing tourism flows throughout the extensive network of the airline. This dedication was underscored by the renewal of their strategic partnership at the renowned Ara-

bian Travel Market in Dubai. During the event, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was inked by **Ahmed Khoory**, Emirates' Senior Vice President Commercial - West Asia & Indian Ocean and **Sherin Francis**, Principal Secretary of the Tourism Department. The MoU was signed

"Emirates' presence enables us to showcase Seychelles' unparalleled beauty, rich culture, and diverse attractions to a vast international audience. Simultaneously, their operations facilitate the influx of visitors, contributing to the growth and prosperity of our tourism sector. As we reflect on the partnership with Emirates, we recognise the invaluable impact it has had on our destination's visibility and accessibility. We are delighted with the renewal of this agreement," said Radegonde.


Emirates has reiterated its unwavering support for Tourism Seychelles, aiming to bolster the island nation's endeavours in promoting tourism and trade. The newly established agreement delineates a range of mu-

Second MoU was signed with dnata Travel to foster joint collaborations and further promote Seychelles as a premier travel destination

entails the development of tailored holiday packages, provision of incentives, marketing support, and organisation of familiarisation trips aimed at showcasing Seychelles' allure to a global clientele.

During the signing, Francis, the Principal Secretary for Tourism, said, "The renewal of the partnership is a testament of our shared vision and commitment

ating in since 2005. Our partnership aimed at promoting tourism to the nation goes back to 2013, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to supporting its tourism industry. Seychelles is a tourist destination which is highly popular among travellers from key markets in our network, and we are proud to play a role in driving traffic flows to the island through our efforts."

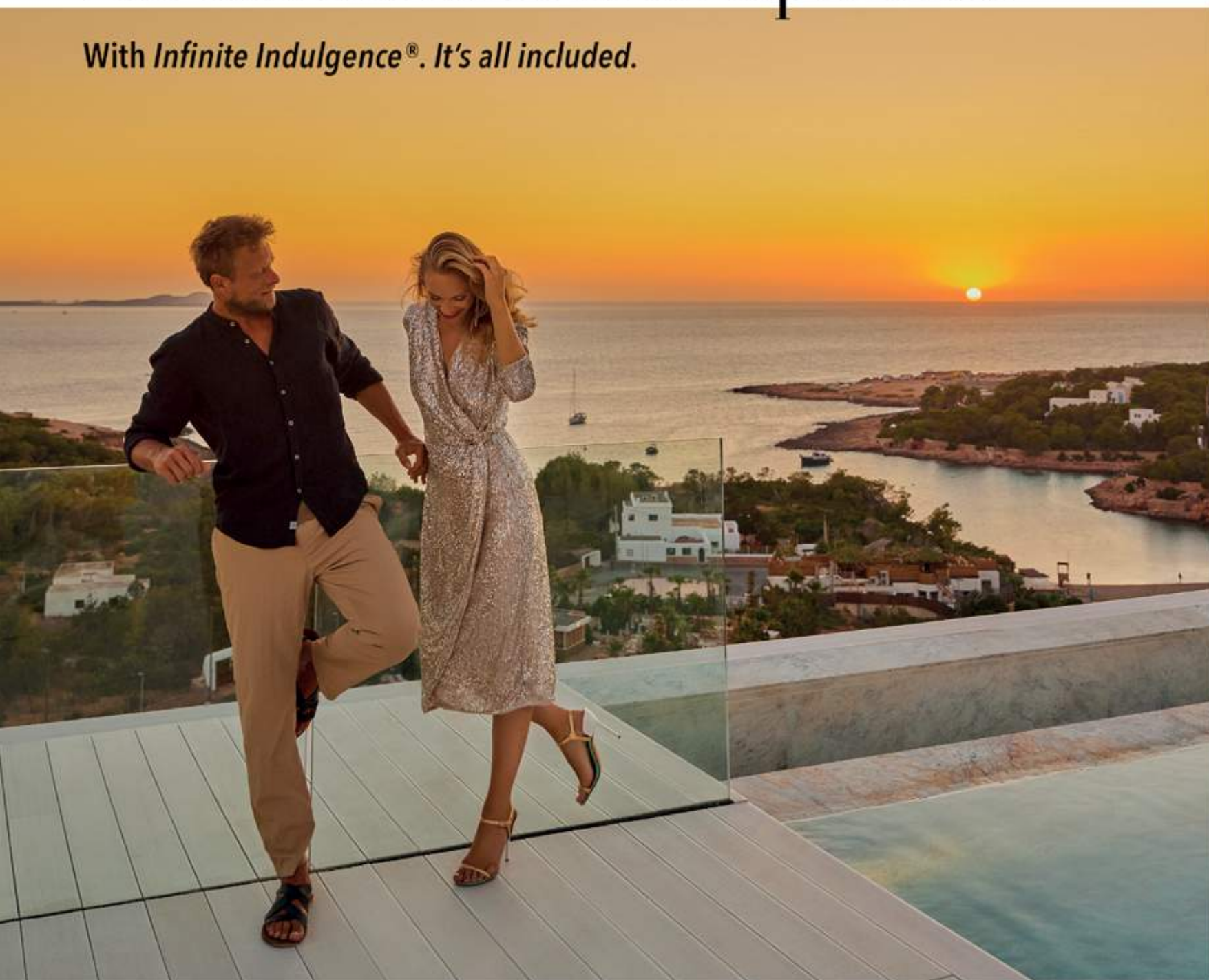
With only a four-hour flight from Dubai to Seychelles, Emirates provides seamless connectivity to this idyllic Indian Ocean destination. Operating a double daily flight, Emirates serves as a vital link, connecting travellers from around the globe to the enchanting paradise of Seychelles. As the partnership between Emirates and Seychelles continues to flourish, it not only enhances tourism but also strengthens the bonds between nations, fostering cultural exchange and economic growth. 



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► Contd. from page 1



Mohamed Al Rais
Executive Director
Al Rais Travel Group

“Al Rais will be promoting Latin America for the UAE travellers. Key outbound destinations booked by travellers from the UAE this summer will reflect a blend of cultural exploration, iconic landmarks, and diverse experiences. Paris, London, Barcelona, Rome, and Istanbul consistently rank among favourites. Additionally, destinations like Japan and South Korea attract travellers with their unique blend of traditional heritage and modern innovations.”

“Slow travel is a trend that is picking up in the Middle East market and worldwide and it goes hand in hand with the new approach to travel in a more respectful and sustainable way trying



Daniel Rosado
Director
Spain Tourism

to preserve the communities and destinations in order to be less invasive. This new way allows communities to be able to preserve their culture, economy and essence and at the same time showcase it to the tourists.”



Livio Goetz
Director GCC
Switzerland Tourism

“Mindful travel is a must nowadays. This is why we created ‘Swisstainable’, where not only Switzerland Tourism, but the entire Swiss tourism industry promotes Switzerland as a sustainable travel destination. Already now we can utilise AI to make a traveller’s life easier or in marketing. The main strategy for any business in travel should be: Don’t miss out on trends that can make a traveller’s life easier; but also to keep it real.”

“COVID-19 has changed the way generations choose travel, with outdoor adventure now taking the No. 1 spot away from ‘beach, sun and sand’. The private sector needs to mirror the vision of



Haitham Mattar
Managing Director MEASWA
IHG Hotels and Resorts

their respective tourism authorities and work together to ensure appealing spending packages for those markets. AI will be critical for us to get a clear idea of how to enhance consumer preferences.”



Paul Stevens
COO - MEA and Türkiye –
Premium brands, Accor

“Travellers are seeking more than just a vacation; they crave for meaningful experiences that honour local culture and protect the environment. This awareness drives demand for eco-friendly accommodations and data-driven personalisation solutions. Our hotels and brands are deeply rooted in their surroundings, aiming to contribute to a ‘Nature Positive’ world. In Middle East, we have eliminated single-use plastics across 90 per cent of properties.”

“We are witnessing a move away from check-the-box sight-seeing towards a desire for deeper connections and authentic experiences. This aligns perfectly with the unique cultural richness of



Samir Mehta
COO
Desert Adventures

our destinations - UAE, Oman, and Jordan. By prioritising experiences that immerse travellers in our local traditions and hidden gems, we are not just catering to a trend; we are building a sustainable tourism industry.”



Enrique Espinel
COO
Civitatis

“Middle Eastern travellers are demanding and look for high quality in everything they book, and this is something that fits perfectly with our curated business model. We are selective in choosing which suppliers we work with, and we can proudly say that the 6,500 we do so with are the best in their respective fields. Our platform offers a careful selection of activities around the world—over 90,000—but that allows customers to have an excellent user experience.”

“Experiential travel is gaining popularity and is very much here to stay, thanks to social media. People want to experience not only what is unique and different but they also want to be part of a journey where every



Basel Atassi
Travel Counsellor
Travel Counsellors



Varsha Pherwani
Travel Counsellor Associate,
Travel Counsellors

moment is an opportunity for discovery, every encounter a chance to connect, and every destination a doorway to a world of possibilities. We support community based tourism which goes hand in hand with responsible tourism.”

“Responsible tourism promotes understanding, tolerance, and appreciation of diverse cultures. Sustainability plays an important role in the elevation, whether through environmental conservation that implements positive practices, adherence to eco-friendly initiatives or through powerful contribution to the conservation of biodiversity. Another key role of the industry evolution is the great potential to empower local communities by providing opportunities.”

“Recognising the invaluable role of travel agents as partners, we continuously seek ways to acknowledge and reward their support through training initiatives and exclusive member rates. Addition-



Kerry Healy
CCO - MEAAP - Premium Midscale
and Economy brands Accor

ally, our ALL-Meeting Planner offer allows professional organisers to earn points based on event value, facilitating a swift path to elite status within our programme. We are committed to staying ahead of market demands.”



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

“Minimising water usage not only helps preserve this precious resource but also presents an opportunity for hotels to showcase their commitment to sustainability. The management of waste is yet another area where sustainability practices can generate positive impacts. Hotels are implementing recycling programmes, reducing single-use plastics, and embracing composting initiatives. These cost savings create a virtuous cycle.”

“Our focus for 2024 is Far East, which includes China and Asia, although majority of our bookings generate from India. We are excited about the new 4-star property we will open in the heart of Bur Dubai soon. This



Praveen Kumar Shetty
Chairman and Managing Director,
Fortune Group of Hotels

reflects our commitment to growth and long-term plans, extending even to our food and beverage offerings. Thanks to our dedicated team, Fortune continues to thrive, and we look forward to the journey ahead.”

Compiled by Dr. Shehara Rizly

Balancing tourism & biodiversity

UN Tourism, a specialised agency of the United Nations, is strategising innovative ways to educate and take forward the sustainable development practices around the world. **Basmah Al-Mayman**, Regional Director for the Middle East, UN Tourism, shares insights on policies carried out by way of education, investment, innovation and technology to transform the livelihoods of people across the globe.

 Dr Shehara Rizly

Could you share how UN Tourism is reshaping the industry?

The UN Tourism is a UN specialised agency with a mandate to promote tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development, and environmental sustainability. In order to anticipate, address and overcome the new challenges and trends of the tourism sector, UN Tourism is focusing on a strategy on innovation, education, digital transformation and investments as the keys to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 while maximising the sector's potential in terms of economic growth, job creation, sustainable development, women, youth and local community empowerment, and efficient resource management. The UN Tourism Data Dashboard provides statis-



Basmah Al-Mayman (left) at Arabian Travel Awards

tics and insights on key indicators for inbound and outbound tourism at the global, regional and national levels. Two special modules present data on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism, as well as a policy tracker on measures to support tourism.

How does UN Tourism work on sustainable practices? There was a chart introduced a few years ago, how does it work in the travel, tourism and hospitality industry?
Tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indi-

rectly, to all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, it has been included as targets in Goals 8, 12 and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and

UN Tourism is focusing on innovation, education, digital change and investments to achieve the UN's SDGs by 2030

production and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively. Sustainable tourism is firmly positioned in the 2030 Agenda.

Achieving this agenda, however, requires a clear implementation framework, adequate financing and investment in technology, infrastructure and human resources.

Are there any training sessions for those engaged in tourism related fields?

Yes. Actually, through our UN Tourism Academy, we are helping UN Tourism Member States by offering them a comprehensive portfolio of products and options to address their needs among a variety of programmes and training courses.

Will there be an impact with AI?

No doubt that when planning the development of tourism human capital, it is important also to note that the human capital needs of the tourism sector in 2030 will differ from those of the industry today. We will see the emergence of new types of

We will see the emergence of new types of tourism businesses, products, services, and professions

tourism businesses, products, services, and professions, requiring different competencies, knowledge, and personality attributes. AI might replace some employees working for analysing travel behaviours or other related back-office jobs. Meeting the new demands will require concerted efforts and the UN Tourism Academy is taking a leading role in addressing emerging needs. ➔



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ATM 2024 sees record turnout,

Arabian Travel Market 2024 in Dubai saw in attendance more than 46,000 industry professionals from over 160 countries – including 33,500 visitors, registering a 15 per cent year-on-year increase in attendees compared to the previous edition. The event, showcasing interesting products and services from travel, tourism, hotel and technology sectors, also saw signing of important business deals.



15% rise in attendees this year



Maldives looks beyond luxury

Maldives witnessed a 15.3% surge in tourist arrivals in Q1 2024 compared to the same period last year. It is the most popular destination for Middle East travellers post pandemic.

TT Bureau

According to the Ministry of Tourism, Maldives, tourist arrivals to the country surged by 15.3 per cent in the first quarter of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023. The tourism authorities of Maldives expressed gratitude at Arabian Travel Market 2024, held recently in Dubai, and thanked the industry for its support.

Ibrahim Faisal, Minister of Tourism, Maldives, said, "Today, our vision extends beyond luxury. We recognise the importance of striking a balance between economic growth and environmental responsibility. Sustainability is not just a buzzword for us; it is a core principle that guides our development." **Fathmath Thaufeeq**, CEO & MD, Maldives Marketing & Public Relations Corporation, said, "The tourism industry of Maldives is flourishing, thanks to the diligence of our travel and tourism industry, and the continued support from our government, which prioritises sustainable and respon-



Ibrahim Faisal
Minister of Tourism
Maldives

sible tourism development. This commitment ensures our islands thrive now and continue to do so for generations to come."

Ayesha Nurain Janah, Chairperson, MMPRC Board, said, "Through these efforts, we are redefining luxury tourism, paving the way to show that unique and cutting-edge experiences go hand-in-hand with sustainability." **Ahmed Shaheen**, Director, Sales and Marketing, Crown and Champa Resorts, spoke about the Maldives Association of Tourism Industry

(MATI) and diversification of the tourism industry. **Abdulla Giyas Riyaz**, President, Maldives Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators (MATATO), said, "The greatest promise our future holds is embodied in the very slogan our current administration ran on, 'Dhiveheenge Raajje', and I hope we stay true

Sustainability is not just a buzzword for us; it is a core principle that guides our development

to this motto, as this is what makes us different. Highlighting that we stand at the crossroads of a new era in tourism, it is crucial to not only celebrate our past triumphs but also embrace the opportunities and challenges ahead."

Aiming 27.3 mn visitors in '24

Malaysia, one of the most sought-after destinations by GCC travellers, continue to focus on the region. GCC region is a lucrative global market in terms of high spending travellers.

Dr Shehara Rizly

The official contingent of dignitaries arriving from Malaysia to participate at the Arabian Travel Market last month reiterated the importance of the Gulf Cooperation Council region. They stated that in 2024, Malaysia aims to welcome 27.3 million international tourist arrivals and generate RM102.7 billion in tourism receipts. One of the key regions that fuel their economy is the Gulf region, as Malaysia caters to every single requirement of the travellers from this region ticking all the boxes. Led by **Datuk Yasmin Mahmood**, Chairman, Malaysia Tourism Board, Tourism Malaysia, and accompanied by Dato' **Shaharuddin bin Abu Sohot**, Deputy Secretary General (Management), Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Malaysia, the delegation comprised a good mix of 75 organisations, including hotels and resorts, travel agents, tourism product owners, and representatives from state tourism boards.



The Malaysia Pavilion engaged with Middle Eastern buyers, while highlighting its tourism products and services tailored to their specific needs and preferences, thus underscoring the importance placed on West Asia as a key source of

Malaysia Pavilion engaged with Middle Eastern buyers, while highlighting its tourism products tailored to their needs

TOURISM
MALAYSIA

tourists, especially during its summer vacation.

During the launch of the Malaysia Pavilion, **Datuk Yasmin Mahmood** said, "With the upcoming launch and celebration of Visit Malaysia Year 2026, we strive to attract more West Asia tourists. We recognise the immense potential of this market, not only in terms of outbound tourism but also trade and investment. We are confident that Malaysia's position as a top destination for Muslim travellers, coupled with our efforts, will enable us to achieve our target."

15 mn tourists visit Egypt in 2023

In spite of the conflicts in neighbouring countries, Egypt welcomed record 15 million tourists in 2023. It was announced at ATM 2024, held in Dubai recently. Egypt showcased its commitment to enhancing the tourist experience and attracting new visitors from the UAE, GCC, and other parts of the world by highlighting the country's tourism potential, forthcoming projects, and future initiatives.

TT Bureau

Ghada Shalaby, Egypt's Vice Minister of Tourism and Antiquities for Tourism Affairs, said: "Egypt is gearing up to attract a wide range of travellers based on its commitment to diversifying its tourism offerings. The ministry has worked to unveil a group of new products that meet the evolving preferences of travellers, from health tourism to Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism, all the way to the innovative Umrah Plus product and the attractive Cairo City Break program."

Ghada noted that cooperation lies at the heart of Egypt's tourism strategy. By strengthening partnerships between tourism entities in Egypt, the Far East, and GCC countries, among other Arab countries, the ministry aims to combine efforts in



Ghada Shalaby, Vice Minister for Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Egypt and Amr El-Kady, CEO, Egyptian Tourism Authority at ATM 2024

promoting Egyptian destinations and ensuring unparalleled experiences for visitors. Through collaborative endeavours, the tourism sector is ready to flourish and grow. "Egypt's commitment to infrastructure development remains steadfast. From enhancing transportation networks to enhancing airport facilities and expanding railway systems,

significant investments are being made to improve accessibility and connectivity across the country. These initiatives play an essential role in facilitating smooth travel experiences for visitors to Egypt, she said.

Amr El-Kady, Chief Executive Officer, Egyptian Tourism Authority, mentioned that Egypt is

witnessing a qualitative shift in its approach to tourism, as by embracing the dynamism of the private sector, the country is embarking on a journey of liberation and promoting an enabling environment for investment and innovation in the travel sector. "From this standpoint, the Arabian Travel Market, held in Dubai, constitutes an essential

platform to complete these efforts and raise its status at this level," he said.

Al-Kady pointed out that the Egyptian Tourism Authority is taking advanced steps to enhance customer experience at archaeological sites. A prime example of this is the opening of the new visitor centre, planned as part of the upcoming transformation of the Giza Pyramids in a few weeks.

Egypt's tourism sector continues to chart a path of growth and resilience. After a record-breaking year in 2023, with 15 million visitors flocking to its shores, compared to 4.9 million in 2021, further expansion is expected in 2024. With a firm focus on enhancing visitor experiences, strengthening partnerships, and investing in infrastructure, Egypt is well-positioned to keep its economy on an upward trajec-

tory in the tourism landscape. The newly launched Cairo City Break programme will reshape the capital's appeal by promoting Cairo as a long weekend destination. Egypt presents the emerging destination of Ras El Hekma. Eco-friendly Hop-on Hop-off buses will be launched,

Egypt is well-positioned to keep its economy on an upward trajectory in the tourism landscape

enhancing tourism accessibility and sustainability. A new road will be opened this year to reduce the travel time from Luxor to Hurghada."

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South Africa impresses ME travel trade

South African Tourism board conducted several workshops with travel trade in the UAE and a special press conference for media at the Arabian Travel Market in order to showcase their diverse offerings most suitable for the region's travellers. **Neliswa Nkani**, Hub Head – MEISEA, South African Tourism, presented a 360-degree view of the destination to impress upon the Middle East travellers.

 Dr Shehara Rizly

Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head – MEISEA, South African Tourism, presented the allure of South Africa as a travel destination with a passionate heart at various workshops and at the press conference organised at the Arabian Travel Market. She reiterated that Middle East is an important market for South African Tourism, as it has many offerings that can be enjoyed by the clientele in the Middle East.



There are many DMCs in South Africa that cater to this (the Middle East) market, offering unique experiences



Explaining the reason for lack of awareness among travellers about the destination, Nkani said that Africa continent has 54 countries and that there are so many hidden gems in her part of the continent, which is South Africa. Travel agents and media

were interested in discovering more about the destination, as it has not just the big 5 on offer to travellers, but has hidden factors to engage adventure travellers, families, MICE and

even business travellers. Her comprehensive presentations at the events answered all the questions the media and travel trade in the region had, as it was the first time that South African Tourism board spent so much of time to share their story with the Middle East region.

to this market, offering unique experiences. She requested the agents to connect with the flight operators in order to further grow the numbers from the region. There is also MICE and incentive travel, a new trend coming up in the nation, she added.

Agents asked her about various challenges that can be addressed by the tourism board, to which Nkani said that as the tourism board they will readily help to ease out all concerns.

It was the first time that awareness was created by South African Tourism board. Nkani said



that the Arabian Travel Market is the stepping stone for them to reach out to the GCC and Middle East, as currently they do receive enough numbers from the United Arab Emirates. She


conducted a comprehensive virtual tour of the destination within 30 minutes, which made the media and the travel trade



Her special workshop for 50 top agents in the UAE shed light on air connectivity, which plays a pivotal role with all the major Middle East carriers, including Emirates and Qatar Airways, bringing in travellers from the region. She reiterated that there are many DMCs in South Africa that cater



ATM is the stepping stone to reach out to the GCC and Middle East, as South Africa receives enough numbers from the UAE

stay back and request for information on the beautiful nation in South Africa. 



FHS focus on KSA's green initiatives

FHS Saudi Arabia 2024, organised with **TRAVALTALK** as media partner, focussed on Environmental, Social, and Governance. The three-day event saw a range of panel debates, expert opinion and initiatives on Saudi Arabia's focus on sustainability. Since the launch of Saudi Green Initiative in 2021, 77 initiatives, worth US\$186 billion, have been activated in the Kingdom to drive sustainable growth under Vision 2030.





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TAT drive for 'unforgettable experiences'

Thailand has announced a rapid growth in the number of tourist arrivals from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region during 2023, an increase of 28 per cent from the previous year. Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has also launched 'Amazing Thailand: Your Stories Never End', a new campaign aimed at ensuring that travellers not just carry their memories back but cherish them.

Thapanee Kiatphaibool, Governor, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), shared that 2023 witnessed an increase of 28 per cent travellers from the GCC region. "In 2023, we welcomed approximately 868,000 visitors from the Middle East, a notable 28 per cent increase from previous year. For 2024, we are projecting that this number will rise to over a million, as we continue to strengthen our marketing efforts and enhance the travel experience tailored to Middle Eastern tourists," she said.

"The Tourism Authority of Thailand is actively engaging with the Middle Eastern market through strategic partnerships, tailored promotional campaigns, and participation in regional travel exhibitions, including this ATM event. We are focused on cultural exchange programmes and have initiated marketing efforts that highlight Thailand's diverse attractions, specifically catering



Tourism Thailand with dnata team

to Middle Eastern travel preferences, such as halal tourism initiatives," she added.

This year, TAT has launched a new communication concept, 'Amazing Thailand: Your Stories Never End'. Kiatphaibool said, "This concept underscores our commitment to creating unforgettable experiences for every traveller visiting Thailand. Our goal is to instil lasting memories and meaningful journeys that inspire visitors to become storytellers, sharing their unique

tales of Thailand with the world. To engage Middle Eastern travellers in crafting their never-ending stories in Thailand, we will leverage Thailand's '5F Soft Powers'— Food, Film, Festival, Fight, and Fashion. These elements will add value to our tourism products and services and offer meaningful experiences to Arab travellers."

She added, "We have observed a significant interest in health and wellness tourism from Middle Eastern tourists.

With over 300 international standard hospitals and clinics, many equipped with Arabic interpreters, highly trained nurses, and doctors, Thailand offers advanced medical technology, reasonable costs and excellent hospitality. For post-treatment recovery, patients and their families can enjoy a relaxing holiday in Thailand at affordable prices. Alongside this, there is a steady demand for luxury and family-oriented experiences. Capitalising on these trends, TAT is enhancing its offerings

their interests across the country, with attractions in Chiang Mai, Pattaya, Koh Samui, and Phuket. Notable attractions include the recently opened Columbia Pictures Aquaverse Water Park in Pattaya and the Andamanda Water Park and Carnival Magic Show in Phuket, which have been major draws for family travelers." TAT has also launched targeted promotional campaigns in

TAT has also launched several targeted promotional campaigns in collaboration with key Middle Eastern airlines, travel agencies and OTAs

in health and wellness packages, family-friendly activities, and exclusive luxury experiences to meet the high standards expected by travellers from the region. Additionally, families can find plenty of options to suit

collaboration with key Middle Eastern airlines, travel agencies and OTAs, such as Emirates, Qatar Airways, dnata Travel Group and Wego travel booking platform. ▶

130 agents from GCC attend Marhaba '24

After its successful first edition in Oman last year, Marhaba France-Spain's second edition took place in the capital of the United Arab Emirates – Abu Dhabi – a few weeks prior to the Arabian Travel Market, Dubai. About 80 exhibitors from both destinations took part in the event with over 130 buyers from across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

TT Bureau

France and Spain are most popular among the GCC travellers, as they have diverse offerings catering to the requirements of the GCC market. **Daniel Rosado**, Director, Spain Tourism, shared, "At the Spain tourism office, we believe that the best way to promote the destination is by mixing both private and public companies. Hence, we have nine destinations, including Mallorca and Granada this year, as well as hotels, DMCs and shopping centres partnering this year to provide that perfect combination to sell the destination with all its diverse offerings. This B2B event brings together buyers and suppliers and they connect to learn from each other about the way to go forward. Our partners are provided the opportunity to participate both in Marhaba and at the Arabian



Daniel Rosado
Director
Spain Tourism

Travel Market, so that they can conduct more lucrative networking opportunities as we had a pavilion to accommodate our partners."

Namratha Rose, Marketing Manager, Spain Tourism, said, "We are thrilled to participate in the second edition of Marhaba France and Spain. These focused gatherings play



Namratha Rose
Manager Marketing and Trade Relations
Spain Tourism

a pivotal role in fostering connections, nurturing networks, and sustaining crucial B2B relationships within the travel and tourism industry. Spain has witnessed a surge of interest from the GCC region, and events like Marhaba, as well as the Arabian Travel Market, highlight the significance of catering to this growing market. With its diverse attractions, rich cultural



Karim Mekachera
Director
Atout France ME

heritage, and unparalleled hospitality, Spain offers something for every discerning traveller from the GCC. I am confident that this trend will only continue to flourish in the future, as we remain committed to providing unforgettable experiences and forging enduring partnerships."

Karim Mekachera, Director, Atout France ME, concluded,

"This is the second edition of Marhaba France-Spain, first was held in Oman last year and it was a success. As you know, both France and Spain complement each other as they both have luxury experiences to showcase to be added to the itineraries for agents. Our event is one of the best targeted events for the travel trade in the region. This year is a special one as the summer Olympics takes place in Paris, which has created quite a

working platform to our partners who specially fly in for this event, some already known in the market and some who are new."

Marhaba France-Spain facilitated networking opportunities for over 80 partners from the two countries, who met 130 plus travel agents from across the Middle East – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, fostering great

This B2B event brings together buyers and suppliers on one platform and they connect to learn from each other about the way to go forward

lot of interest and we are looking forward to welcoming more visitors from this region. This two-day event provides a great net-

connections within two days of discovering the various offerings and opportunities to diversify their business. ▶

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Siddhalepa promotes wellness tourism

On the sidelines of the Arabian Travel Market, Siddhalepa Ayurveda Hospital, a Sri Lankan hospital providing Ayurveda treatments to ailments, conducted a power breakfast for travel agents and selected media interested in promoting health and wellness in the Middle East region. The event was graced by **Alexi Gunasekara**, Consul General of Sri Lanka for Dubai and Northern Emirates.

 Dr Shehara Rizly

Opening the event, **Alexi Gunasekara**, Consul General of Sri Lanka for Dubai and Northern Emirates, shared that Sri Lanka is on its way to promote wellness tourism with their pioneer in “ayurveda” holistic authentic wellness partner to provide the Middle East travellers not just a few days of a quick fix but a plan to enjoy a healthy and balanced lifestyle. “Sri Lanka is now open for tourism and takes special interest in promoting wellness tourism, as the learnings of the pandemic for travellers and people across the world was an eye opener that living a healthy lifestyle brings in more happiness and balance in life,” he said.

Dushan Wickremasinghe, Director, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, reiterated that Sri Lanka is attending the Arabian Travel Market to showcase their wide variety of offerings to the multitude of people living in the UAE and the rest of the world. “This year started off with tourists flocking to see the beautiful pearl in the Indian Ocean and one of the key driv-



ers were that Sri Lanka was recognised as a safe country to travel for female travellers,” Wickremasinghe added.

Explaining the objective of the meeting, **Asoka Hettigoda**,

Chairman and Managing Director, Siddhalepa Ayurveda Health Resort, said that their main goal is to ensure that travellers from this region get a taste of the



cient methods of wellness and therapeutic treatment, which is slowly rising its head, especially after the pandemic.

Siddhalepa holds its position as the pioneer of ayurveda in Sri Lanka with its signature product “the balm”, which is popular among most travellers. Their services are currently available in Europe, with Germany is a key source market for them and now they have ventured out to the Middle East as they see a great potential. “Our purpose is to educate the travellers from

“Most often the customer has to make the choice what they prefer, but we go one step further and get a personal consultation with a registered doctor who will recommend the treatment plan best suited for you. Wellness tourism is not

recommendations. It will also consists of specialised meditation and yoga sessions, herbal baths, and massages. Our medicinal herbal garden will allow you to inhale all types of medicinal herbs as you walk in the garden. Sea breeze on one

Main goal is to ensure that travellers from this (Middle East) region get a taste of the natural and time tested ways of healing

natural and time tested ways of healing by spending at least 7 to 14 days at their purpose built resort in Sri Lanka. Sharing the journey of his ancestors, Hettigoda revealed that the resort on the beach was a way to help travellers discover the an-

the Middle East region about our specialised Siddhalepa Ayurveda Health Resort, which is purpose built for those who want to lead a balanced and healthy life. Our treatment plans cater to various conditions of the travellers,” Hettigoda said.



a mere word for us but a way of life and we want to provide this same message to our special clients in the GCC region. Our approach is a holistic one, where you will mentally, physically attend to all the requirements to go ahead and lead a better life. In our resort, after the consultation the meals will also be according to the

side, herbal garden surrounded by a lovely pool to dip in provides you an experience like no other to cure and heal at the same time,” Hettigoda said.

At the end of the event, a lucky winner was announced who would be treated to a seven-day treatment at the Siddhalepa Ayurveda Health Resort. 🎉

Resurgence of 'the retail travel agent'

► Contd. from page 1



Gareth Matthews
Chief Marketing Officer
DidaTravel

“Gone are the days when travel agents booked flights and hotels via a green screen. Distribution companies and intermediaries have long since evolved to offer far more advanced retailing technology, giving agents the ability to find personalised deals for customers. Travellers are returning to the experience of booking travel in a physical store.”



Janis Dzenis
Director Communications and
Public Relations, WayAway

“Whilst there is always a market for retail travel agencies, lots of people still want their online version and sometimes the best value can be found for the more adventurous types searching for cheap trips, discounts or to purchase with loyalty points. It doesn't have to be all about the big three OTAs or the high-street retailer, there is something in-between.”



Craig Everett
Founder and CEO
Holibob

“Agents have upped their game a lot overall to remain competitive and one very successful strategy has been to start cross-selling or including in packages all the little in-destination extras such as activities, tours and theme-park tickets. But not only do you need to offer this, you need to have an intuitive and integrated booking flow that agents can easily use.”



Sami Doyle
CEO and Co-Founder
TMU Management

“About two years of chaos that COVID unleashed on travel plans for people was a bit of a wake-up call for anyone who would book direct, suddenly discovering that customer service was non-existent, cancellations and refunds were hard if not impossible, and in some cases bankruptcies were leading to people not getting what they had paid for.”



Koert Grasveld
Vice President Payments
TerraPay

“Not only does the agency have to take payments from the consumer but then they have to settle with suppliers, perhaps many of them just for one booking, via a B2B payment too. Technology that used to be available to just the biggest players, for example virtual credit cards, is now available to even independent agents working from home.”



Juan Socas
Commercial Director
PriceTravel

“Travel agent never went out of fashion in Latin America, with estimated 75 per cent of travel sold face-to-face or by telephone. Do not make the mistake of thinking that Latin America does not have a sizeable middle class and that all the travel sold is cheap, local trips – that's far from true. There is a huge demand for international travel to the US and Europe.”

Compiled by Dr. Shehara Rizly

New York tops Eid getaways

Ahead of the Eid Al Adha break, Skyscanner reveals some of the popular destinations for this short getaway. New York, Tokyo and Athens cities are top searches for the UAE travellers.

TT Bureau

As residents look ahead to planning their holidays for the upcoming Eid Al Adha break, global travel marketplace, Skyscanner reveals the top trends and insights among UAE travellers. Findings reveal that 14 June 2024 is the most popular travel departure date during this period, and more than half of UAE travellers (53 per cent) are searching for trips that are one week or less. At the same time, 33 per cent of



travellers are looking for trips that are over 1-2 weeks long, and 14 per cent are looking to book holidays for up to a month. Skyscanner unveils five destinations experiencing a surge in popularity among travellers from the UAE. From the vibrant streets of New York to the pristine shores of Malé, these are the trending destinations witnessing the highest

year-on-year spike in searches for June departures.

5 Trending Destinations

- ❖ New York (525%)
- ❖ Tokyo (330%)
- ❖ Athens (257%)
- ❖ Dublin (212%)
- ❖ Malé (205%)

Skyscanner also revealed the most searched destinations by UAE travellers ahead of Eid Al Adha. Offering a glimpse into the travel preferences and trends shaping the region, the data sheds light on where UAE residents are looking to escape during this holiday season.

5 Most Searched Cities by UAE travellers

- ❖ London
- ❖ Athens
- ❖ New York
- ❖ Cairo
- ❖ Manchester

Ayoub El Mamoun, Travel Expert, Skyscanner, comments: “As the Eid Al Adha break approaches, we are witnessing a dynamic shift in travel prefer-

ences among UAE residents. The surge in popularity of these five trending destinations showcases the adventurous spirit of UAE travellers, from the vibrant streets of New York to the serene shores of Malé. It's inspiring to see such a diverse range of destinations capturing the imagination of travellers, with

Findings reveal that 14 June 2024 is the most popular travel departure date during the Eid Al Adha breaks

each offering its unique blend of culture, history, and experiences. At Skyscanner, we remain committed to empowering travellers with comprehensive insights and seamless bookings, ensuring they make the most of their holiday journeys.”

UAE Tourism creates 809k jobs

► Contd. from page 1

World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC), our tourism sector has been a dynamic force within our economy, contributing an impressive 11.7 per cent to GDP (in 2023), amounting to AED 220 billion,” H.E. Al Marri told attendees. “For 2024, the forecast is set even higher, with an anticipated contribution of 12 per cent to the (UAE's) GDP, equating to AED 236 billion,” H.E. Al Marri added.

In 2023, tourism created 809,000 jobs in the UAE - 12.3 per cent of the total employment in the country - and the number is expected to rise to 833,000 in 2024.

H.E. Al Marri's speech was followed by a panel discussion between **H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA); **H.E. Fahd Hamidaddin**, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Saudi Tourism Authority; **H.E. Azzan Al Busaidi**, Undersecretary of Tourism, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman; and **H.E. Sarah Buhijji**, CEO, Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority. The session was moderated by **Richard Dean**, Presenter, Dubai Eye.

During the in-depth discussion, panellists explored the importance of inter-regional initiatives in elevating the GCC tourism industry to the next level, while striking the right balance between collaboration and competition between destinations and nations. The planned GCC Unified Tourist Visa was cited as a key facilitator for the region, alongside factors like sustainability, infrastructure and culture.

Panellists said that the planned unified visa would allow member

Gulf nations. In addition to ongoing investment in new and existing airports and cruise terminals, the ministerial speakers highlighted the central role of the upcoming GCC Railway in facilitating and optimising region-wide access for both domestic and international visitors.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said: “While it's clear that healthy competition will continue to play an important role in strengthening the GCC's

For 2024, the forecast is set even higher, with an anticipated contribution of 12 per cent to the (UAE's) GDP, equating to AED 236 billion

nations to present the GCC as a connected destination, boosting accessibility and driving KPIs, such as length of stay, average spend and employment.

Participants also explained that current and future infrastructure will complement the GCC Unified Tourist Visa by enhancing accessibility within and between

world-class tourism offering, it was also encouraging to hear how collaboration is enabling the region to become more than the sum of its parts in terms of attracting global travellers. We are immensely grateful to this year's ministerial participants, who provided a diverse range of valuable insights into the region's unified tourism future.”

MOVEMENTS

MINOR HOTELS Dubai

Minor Hotels has appointed **LOKESH KUMAR** as the Vice President of Development for the Middle East. Kumar brings over 23 years of strategic business leadership experience. He joins Minor Hotels from his recent management consulting role, where he demonstrated his prowess in developing tourism offerings along the 1,600 km Coral Highway from Jazan to NEOM, whilst creating futuristic hotel concepts for the tourism authority in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In his new role, he will oversee development strategies and management of assets across Minor Hotels' portfolio of hotels, including Anantara, Avani and NH Hotels. His expertise in business process enhancement will contribute to commercial effectiveness across all the brands' projects.



ONE&ONLY THE PALM IN DUBAI Dubai

One&Only Resorts has appointed hospitality veteran **RAHUL SHARMA** as the General Manager of One&Only The Palm in Dubai. In his new role, Sharma will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of the ultra-luxury resort's operations, leading the resort team to ensure the delivery of exceptional guest experiences. He brings over 25 years of experience in luxury hospitality to One&Only The Palm. Having been a part of the Kerzner International group since 2016, he has held key positions that have contributed significantly to the success and evolution of the brand. Sharma commenced his journey with the group as Resident Manager at The Palace, One&Only Royal Mirage. His outstanding performance led to a swift promotion to Hotel Manager, overseeing operations and upholding the One&Only brand standards.



DAMAC HOTELS & RESORTS Dubai

DAMAC Hotels & Resorts has appointed **AKSHAY SOOD** as the Senior Director Commercial – Sales, Revenue & Distribution. With over 15 years of experience in the commercial sector of the hotel industry, Sood brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to his new role. Starting his career at Radisson Edwardian hotels in London, Sood has held key positions as a revenue leader for renowned hospitality brands, such as Emaar, Radisson, Hilton, IHG, and Accor. His approach to commercial strategy focuses on driving sales, optimising revenue, and enhancing distribution channels, achieving positive results even amidst challenging market conditions. DAMAC Hotels & Resorts is excited to have Sood on board, leading commercial efforts with passion, innovation, and a dedication to driving growth and success.



SUN SIYAM RESORTS Maldives

Sun Siyam Resorts promotes **AHMED NAUFAL** to the role of Group Director of Sales & Marketing. Previously, serving as Cluster Director of Sales & Marketing at the company, Naufal will now spearhead the strategic sales and marketing initiatives across all six Sun Siyam Resort properties in the Maldives and Sri Lanka. In his new capacity, he will be responsible for developing robust sales and marketing growth strategies, fostering global partnerships, and driving business success for the entire Sun Siyam Resorts portfolio. Based at Sun Siyam Olhuveli, Naufal brings a wealth of experience and a proven track record of excellence in the hospitality industry. Naufal's journey with Sun Siyam Resorts began in August 2021.



HILTON LONDON METROPOLE London

Hilton London Metropole has appointed **NANCY DACCACHE** as the new Commercial Director. With an impressive background in the hospitality sector spanning over 15 years, including nine years of dedicated service within the Hilton family in the United Arab Emirates, Daccache brings a wealth of experience to her new role. Daccache will bring her experience of the GCC domestic travel market from her previous positions as the Cluster Commercial Director at Hilton Abu Dhabi Yas Island, The WB™ Abu Dhabi, Curio Collection by Hilton, and DoubleTree by Hilton Abu Dhabi Yas Island Residences, along with her recent role as Senior Regional Revenue Manager for several hotels in the Arabian Peninsula and Türkiye, showcasing her exceptional skills and deep understanding of the industry.



TIME HOTELS Dubai

NURAN KILANI joins Time Hotels as Corporate Director of Commercial. She has 20 years of experience in commercial management. She has worked with renowned hospitality brands, such as Hilton, Hyatt, Shangri-La, Emaar, Louvre, Rixos, and Millennium. Throughout her extensive career, Kilani has consistently demonstrated exceptional commercial acumen and market intelligence, making her a valuable asset to the team. Her diverse background and deep understanding of the industry will undoubtedly contribute to the continued success and growth of TIME Hotels. She is not only experienced but also highly qualified, holding certifications in Hotel Business Administration and an MBA in Digital Marketing.



RADISSON DUBAI DAMAC HILLS Dubai

SHANNON SOMAZA joins Radisson Dubai DAMAC Hills as Marketing, PR, and Social Media Manager. Somaza embarked on her hospitality journey with a solid academic background, completing her Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration with a focus on the food industry at the renowned Le Cordon Bleu school. There, she pursued the Grand Diplôme, specialising in high cuisine. Building upon this foundation, she furthered her education with a Master's degree from IE University. With a background in marketing and corporate communication within the F&B and hospitality sectors, Somaza has cultivated her expertise through diverse experiences across Europe. Her passion for the industry is evident in her relentless pursuit of excellence, having achieved certifications like WSET level 2.



RITZ-CARLTON RAS AL KHAIMAH Ras Al Khaimah

The Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah, Al Hamra Beach, promotes **JOHN HALLIDAY** to the position of Hotel Manager. With over 28 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Halliday brings a wealth of expertise and a proven track record of success to his new role. His expertise spans across various luxury hotel groups, including notable hotels such as Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara and Desert Palm Dubai, as well as across a variety of other luxury hotel and resort brands in the UAE, Oman, and the UK. Having joined The Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah, Al Hamra Beach, in January 2023 as the Director of Operations, Halliday has consistently demonstrated exceptional leadership and operational skills. In his previous role, he oversaw 32 private pool and beach villas.



NOVOTEL RIYADH SAHAFI Saudi Arabia

HESSA ALMAZROA, the trailblazing General Manager of the newly opened Novotel Riyadh Sahafa, has redefined the Saudi Arabian hospitality landscape. With over two decades of experience, she stands as the first Saudi female to launch a hotel in the Kingdom. Hessa's innovative leadership and strategic marketing have significantly boosted guest experiences and operational efficiencies. Her journey is marked by breaking gender barriers, setting new standards in a traditionally male-dominated industry, and championing women's leadership. Beyond her role at Novotel, she actively shapes the future of hospitality as the Deputy Vice Chairman of the Hotels Committee at the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Novotel Riyadh Sahafa is located Riyadh near the KAFD, Riyadh Exhibition Centre, Riyadh Boulevard.



PARAMOUNT HOTEL Dubai

Paramount Hotel Dubai welcomes **DADIRAI MUTASA** as the Executive Producer, Marketing & Communications, overseeing its portfolio of seven hotels, including Paramount Hotel Dubai, Paramount Hotel Midtown, and Aykon City. With a career spanning over 18 years, Mutasa brings a wealth of experience and strategic expertise to her new role. Beginning her journey at Jumeirah Group, she played a pivotal role in pioneering Jumeirah's cluster marketing team, overseeing six prestigious hotels and resorts in the UAE. Her expertise extends to digital marketing, PR, brand transformation, and pre-opening projects, with notable contributions at renowned hospitality brands, such as Emaar Hospitality, Wyndham Hotels, Accor, and Marriott. She has set new standards in luxury hospitality marketing with her strategic approach.



RADISSON DUBAI DAMAC HILLS Dubai

PREET SANDHU has joined Radisson DAMAC Hills as Assistant Front Office Manager. Sandhu, a seasoned professional in hospitality, brings a wealth of experience and a genuine commitment to crafting memorable guest experiences. Beginning her journey in India, she graduated from WGSMA, Manipal, a prestigious hotel school, before launching her career with Taj Hotels and Resorts. With a thirst for growth, she embraced opportunities in scenic locations like the Himalayas and Goa, swiftly climbing the ranks at JW Marriott Mussoorie and W Goa. Transitioning to Dubai in 2022, Sandhu's dedication to exceptional guest service continued at FIVE Hotels and Resorts. Now, as Assistant Front Office Manager at Radisson Dubai DAMAC Hills, she channels her expertise and passion into her role.



IHG HOTELS & RESORTS Dubai

IHG Hotels & Resorts has appointed **FRANCESCO PANTALONE** as General Manager at InterContinental The Red Sea Resort. Pantalone brings with him an exceptional track record of results and a wealth of experience in luxury and leisure hospitality, spanning over 30 years across Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Pantalone's resilience, drive, and goal-oriented nature have been key attributes throughout his career. He has extensive experience in Saudi Arabia with a history of running international hotel operations whilst creating unique and innovative guest experiences. In his new role, he will oversee all aspects of the new luxury resort, which includes a architecturally designed hotel, exclusive club InterContinental and a wealth of unique dining and lifestyle experiences.



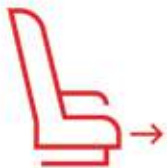
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