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ITB Berlin 2024: hub of networking

The world convenes again in Messe Berlin from 5-7 March 2024 to display latest products and services to various markets across the globe over three full days of business interactions. Industry leaders share their view on the exhibition.



H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and
Tourism Development Authority

“ At this year's ITB Berlin we are proud to showcase Sharjah as a comprehensive 360-degree destination for travellers from every corner of the globe, offering a truly experiential mix of cultural, adventure, natural, and seasonal experiences for all ages. In line with UAE's Green

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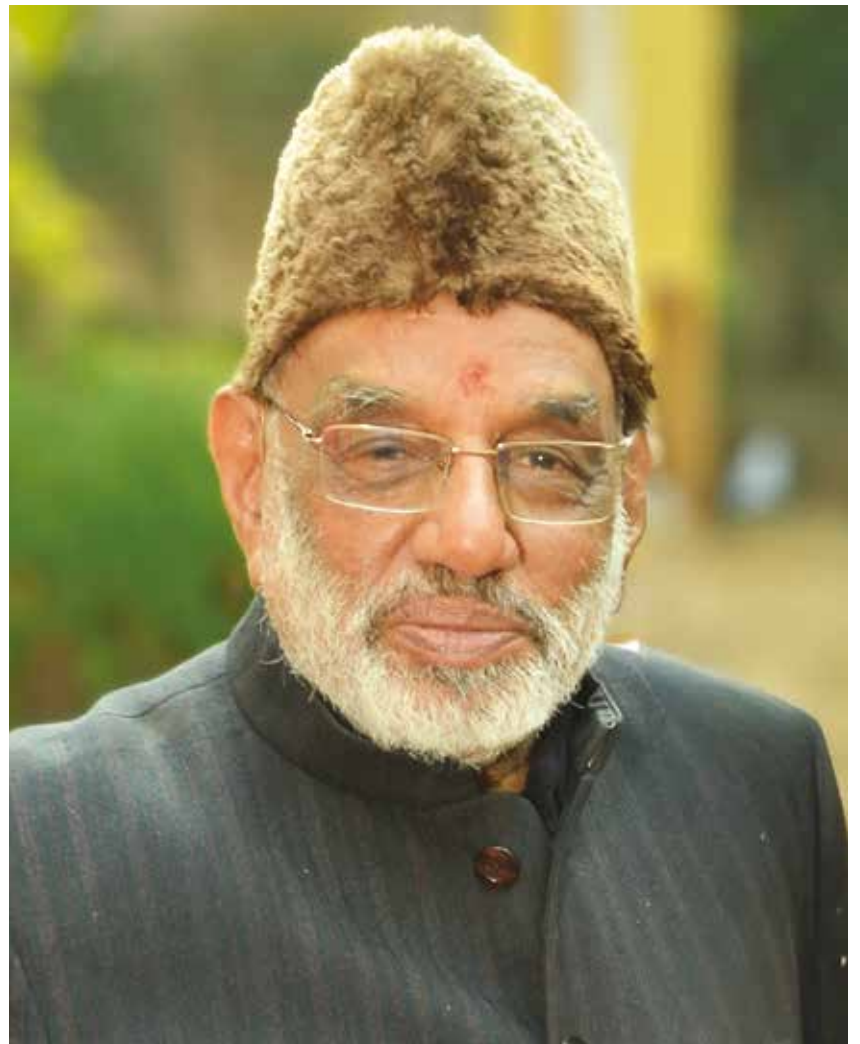
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Bidding farewell to our Chairman

DDP Group bids a solemn farewell to its esteemed Chairman, Vikramajit, as the organisation mourns the profound loss of a visionary leader, who left for heavenly abode on 21 January 2024.

The late Chairman, a distinguished Industrial Management Pool (IMP) officer, leaves behind an illustrious legacy marked by his instrumental role in steering the success of various public sector enterprises such as the Bhilai Steel Plant, Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals (IDPL), and spearheading impactful social marketing initiatives for the Ministry of Health. He was an alumnus of Modern School, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi and Shri Ram College of Commerce, University of Delhi. His remarkable career trajectory reached its pinnacle when he retired from the Ministry of Health and undertook a new chapter by founding Durga Das Publications Pvt. Ltd.

As we bid adieu to our leader, the entire DDP family pays homage to the life and contributions of Chairman Vikramajit.



Late Shri Vikramajit
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Marriott launches new brands in ME

Sandeep Walia, Chief Operating Officer, Middle East Marriott International, shared valuable insights on their latest research of 192 million global membership, their growth plans for the year with a special focus on empowering women in leadership in Saudi Arabia, as there will be more hotels coming up this year.

 Dr. Shehara Rizly

Marriott International in the Middle East, Egypt and Turkey counts for 233 hotels that are currently in operation. About 130 other projects are in different phases of construction. Starting off in the UAE, on 1 January was the announcement of Marriott International taking over operations of Vida Downtown Dubai, Manzil Downtown Dubai and Address Dubai Marina previously operated by Emaar. The three properties were owned by Abu Dhabi National Hotels (ADNH). The partnership went a step further to rename the properties as JW Marriott Hotel Marina (formerly known as The Address Dubai Marina), Hotel Boulevard, Autograph Collection (formerly known as Vida Downtown Dubai Hotel) and The Heritage Hotel, Autograph Collection (formerly



Sandeep Walia
Chief Operating Officer
Middle East Marriott International

known as Manzil Downtown Dubai Hotel).

Openings for 2024

Marriott International kickstarts the year in Saudi Arabia with the opening of the St. Regis Red Sea Resort. The St. Regis Red Sea Resort is the first private island to open in The Red Sea, one of the country's luxury regenerative tourism destinations on the west coast. The destination-defining

oasis features a collection of 90 lavishly appointed beachfront and overwater villas, offering one-to-four-bedroom accommodation, each with a private pool and sundeck.

Sandeep Walia, Chief Operating Officer, Middle East Marriott International, said, "Nujuma Ritz Carlton opens in Q2 in Red Sea which will be our first Ritz Carlton Reserve in this region – today its in six countries and this is the first one in Middle East. We have our first Edition Saudi opening in Jeddah in Q2 this year at the F1 track – this particular track has the highest circular turn and this the property is strategically at that turn."



Nujuma will be the first property from the brand in the Middle East and joins an exclusive collection of only six Ritz-Carlton Reserves worldwide. Next destination in

focus is Oman as they open The St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort by Q2. It will feature 250 impeccably appointed guestrooms and suites, all with their own private balcony, walk-in wardrobes and expansive balconies.

Commitment to Sustainability
Walia stated that sustainability is no longer a trend but a way of life as UAE extends the year

of sustainability to this year. "Sustainability is engraved into everything we do, everybody is asking about it, whether it is the traveller, booker or operator, everybody is getting into it and doing the right thing. It is no longer a trend, but it is the way forward and here to stay which is good. It is the part where we give back to the community," he said. 🌱

Nujuma Ritz Carlton opens in Q2 in Red Sea which will be our first Ritz Carlton Reserve in this region

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AL RAIS TRAVEL 

24% women came into tourism in 10 yrs

Travel & Tourism sector is providing more employment opportunities to women and young people around the world. The number of women engaged in the sector increased from 38.6 million to 47.8 million between 2010 and 2019, reveals a research initiated by the Ministry of Tourism of Saudi Arabia and carried out by the WTTC and Sustainable Tourism Global Center (STGC). Experts share views.

	How important is travel and tourism for women in the UAE/ ME region as a career? How should women secure their career in the sector?	Women in leadership in the travel and tourism sector is still at a minimal level, what do you think is necessary to get them interested in growth?	Talent retention is a key element in these two industries, what are your thoughts on this? How will technology impact this region in the next few years?
 Meerah Ketait Head - Retail and Leisure, UAE dnata Travel	Travel is an industry with tremendous growth opportunity for UAE-based women as a career option. As an example, in 2022, the contribution of the travel and tourism sector to the UAE's GDP was nearly AED 167 billion, equivalent to 9 per cent of the country's total GDP. In the same year, international tourists spent AED 117.6 billion in the UAE. Women have many opportunities to contribute to the continued growth in travel and tourism, and grow in their own career in this sector, as the country continues to enhance and evolve its offering.	With the region's variety of world-class hotels, restaurants, and attractions only continuing to grow across exciting natural and built landscapes, the skills the travel and tourism sector can embrace is massive, welcoming women with many different backgrounds and skillsets. Senior leadership in this sector in the Middle East can support in paving development pathways for mentoring and networking for women, to encourage their interest and growth. It is also important to acknowledge where there are gaps within skillsets and enable the right training.	Technology and AI will supplement the strategic vision and execution of what is required to push the hospitality industry to the next level. The talent driving the growth of this sector is what will further enable AI to serve the hospitality industry in elevating the traveller experience. Human interaction is essential across certain gateways in the industry; however, technology can ease certain steps to ensure a smoother customer experience across key touchpoints. This includes, for example, areas where customisation can be captured online in advance to personalise a travellers' stay.
 Aga Pytlik General Manager Panworld Travels	The travel and tourism industry, known for its dynamism and susceptibility to global events, presents abundant career prospects for women in the GCC/ME region. Achieving success in this field requires a dedicated focus on education and skill development, ensuring alignment with the industry's demands and trends. Essential to this journey are supportive networks, personal branding, exposure, mentorship programs, and ready access to professional development resources. These fundamental elements empower women and support their growth.	To increase women's participation in leadership roles within the travel and tourism sector, I believe proactive approach is a must. Firstly, organizations should conduct awareness campaigns highlighting the benefits of diversity in leadership and the unique contributions women bring to the industry. Implementing flexible work policies can boost interest in various career sectors, encouraging more women to take on leadership responsibilities without compromising work-life balance. Companies must also prioritize creating an inclusive workplace culture.	Maintaining talent in the travel and tourism sectors is very important, especially in the face of evolving technologies, however no technology or AI can fully replace the human personal touch, engagement, and emotions special in tourism and hospitality sector. AI, travel technologies are important and useful tools in terms of improving operations, reducing delays and increasing customer satisfaction but only when are driven with human support. Therefore, I believe, organizations should emphasize the irreplaceable value of human interaction and personalized service.
 Ashiya Nazar Director Akbar Travels	The industry outlook in the Middle East region is promising, with increasing tourism infrastructure and government initiatives supporting growth. The Middle East is witnessing a remarkable surge in tourist numbers, driven by its rich cultural heritage, stunning landscapes, and unparalleled hospitality. From the iconic skyscrapers of Dubai to the ancient wonders of Petra, the region offers a diverse tapestry of experiences for every traveller. Moreover, governments across the Middle East are making substantial investments in tourism infrastructure.	Yet, alongside this growth, we are also witnessing emerging trends that are reshaping the industry. The rise of digital technology is revolutionizing the way travellers plan, book, and experience their journeys. From AI-powered chatbots to immersive virtual reality experiences, technology is enabling greater personalization and convenience for travellers, while also presenting new opportunities for businesses to engage with their audience. Furthermore, sustainability is becoming increasingly important in the travel industry, with travellers seeking eco-friendly experiences.	Key training and upskilling needed for current staff include digital literacy, customer experience management, cultural competence, crisis management, sustainability practices, data analytics, and soft skills such as communication and adaptability. Continuous learning and development programs are essential to keep pace with industry trends and meet evolving consumer demands. In conclusion, as we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of the travel industry in the Middle East, let us embrace these emerging trends, and harness the power of technology.
 Namratha Rose Marketing Manager Spain Tourism	Travel and tourism offer women in the UAE/ME region a path to economic empowerment and professional growth. With the region's booming hospitality and aviation sectors, women can excel in various roles across the industry. To secure our careers, I feel women need access to education, mentorship, and equal opportunities. For instance, Fatima Saeed Al Jarwan, the first Emirati woman to become a commercial pilot, exemplifies how determination and support can break barriers. Supportive policies are essential for women to thrive.	Though women in leadership in the travel and tourism sector remain limited due to entrenched gender biases, lack of mentorship opportunities, and traditional gender roles, there has been a significant increase in these numbers as well. To further increase their interest in growth, targeted initiatives such as mentorship programs, leadership training, and advocacy for gender equality are crucial. These days we see a lot of entities and support groups encouraging women to challenge stereotypes, providing platforms for visibility and recognition.	In my opinion, talent retention is paramount in the travel and tourism industry for maintaining service quality and competitiveness. With AI and disruptive technologies entering hospitality, talent retention is sure to evolve in its own way. Businesses will need to invest in upskilling employees to adapt to technological changes. While automation may streamline operations, personalized service remains essential. Retaining skilled staff who excel in customer interactions will be crucial. Companies must balance technological advancements with preserving human touchpoints.
 Mouna Ouni Director Marketing Swissotel Al Murooj	Hospitality is a significant sector in the UAE/ME region, and women play a crucial role in it. The hospitality industry in this region values the unique qualities and skills that women bring, such as empathy, multitasking abilities, and attention to detail. Women hold various positions in the hospitality sector, from front-line staff to top management roles. To secure a career in the hospitality sector, women need to focus on building their skills and network. They should invest in their education and training related to the hospitality industry.	To increase the participation of women in leadership roles within the travel and tourism sector, it is essential to address the key areas, including leadership development programmes; promoting diversity and inclusion; breaking gender stereotypes; offering flexible work arrangements; and recognizing and rewarding women leaders. Acknowledging the achievements and contributions of women leaders can inspire other women. By showcasing successful female role models, organizations can motivate more women to pursue growth opportunities within the industry.	Talent retention is indeed a crucial aspect of the hospitality industry. In a sector that relies heavily on exceptional customer service and guest experience, retaining talented employees who possess specialized skills and knowledge is essential for maintaining a competitive edge and ensuring consistent quality standards. By focusing on talent retention hospitality businesses can create a supportive environment that encourages employee loyalty and long-term commitment. Furthermore, investing in training and engagement programmes can help workers feel valued and motivated.
 Pramukshi Kariyawasam Director Marketing Shangri-la Dubai	Hospitality is a great industry for women as its full of both challenges and opportunities. It demands multitasking, commitment, and service excellence regardless of which department you work in – but fortunately, these are qualities that are often naturally found in women. Of course, personal growth in this dynamic sector often hinges on effective mentorship and leadership. Being heard and recognized is foundational for advancement, making mentorship and leadership grooming essential. Support systems that foster inclusion are critical for their success.	While women in leadership roles within this industry remain underrepresented, the tide is shifting. More female General Managers and women in non-traditional roles are emerging, signalling a positive change. Companies play a pivotal role in driving this transformation by fostering inclusive environments. Additionally, showcasing successful female leaders as role models is crucial for inspiring the next generation of women, to pursue growth opportunities in the industry. Targeted initiatives such as mentorship programmes, leadership training, and advocacy for gender equality are key.	Talent retention is fundamental in the hospitality sector, necessitating competitive benefits, flexible work arrangements, and continuous professional development. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of work-life balance and adaptability, shaping new norms in talent retention strategies. While AI and disruptive technologies are revolutionizing the industry, the human touch and personalized service remain indispensable. While embracing AI for automation, leveraging technology to enhance guest experiences, the human element remains irreplaceable.

Women take lead in travel sector



Elmira Heshmati
Founder and CEO
Elaxiom Travel and Tourism Company

“ Tourism is a social, cultural, and economic component of importance in MENA region. The ‘Arab world’ lags behind in terms of the place occupied by women in the tourist industry. Tourism can offer women opportunities for growth, and cultural enrichment. Women can grow by getting relevant education, getting equal opportunities and government support among others. ”



Kathryn Wallington
Head - ME, Africa, UK, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Eastern Europe & Russia, Travelport

“ The conversation around women in travel and tourism has certainly progressed in recent years. Undoubtedly, there is more work to be done to recognize women who are moving the travel industry forward in the UAE/ME as well as other regions. It’s important for women - and men - across the industry to encourage women who are interested in travel and tourism as a career. ”



Marwa Fechtani
Senior Cluster Marketing Manager, Grand Mercure Dubai City

“ In UAE/ ME hospitality, women are thriving because the region values service and culture. To succeed, women should have mentors, build networks, and keep learning. Family and workplaces supporting fairness for women are essential. Putting women in leadership roles means creating a fair space, providing leadership training, and breaking gender stereotypes. ”



Mariyam Kapasi
CEO and Founder
Amore Travel & Tourism

“ Travel and tourism are pivotal for women in the UAE/ ME region, offering diverse career opportunities. To secure their paths, women should focus on continuous learning, networking, and seizing mentorship opportunities. To boost women leadership in the sectors, initiatives like leadership training programmes, and gender diversity quotas are key to inspire them. ”



Ginny Sethi
VP - Human Capital
Jazeera Airways

“ Jazeera Airways has committed to the IATA 25by2025 initiative, aimed at increasing female representation in the aviation industry by 25 per cent. In 2023, we surpassed this goal by achieving a remarkable 32 per cent representation. Despite women being traditionally underrepresented in aviation, Jazeera is committed to fostering equity and inclusion. ”



Nada Mohamad
Marketing Manager
Cozmo Travel

“ Travel and tourism present vast career opportunities for women in the region now more than ever; while emphasizing the need for ongoing learning, networking, and mentorship for career development. Establishing an inclusive and supportive environment within the industry through celebrating successful female leaders is crucial for generating interest among them. ”

Compiled by Dr. Shehara Rizvi



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Seeking new collaborations at ITB

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Dinkar Dasaur
General Manager UAE
Satguru

“Satguru is proud of its 30+ DMC destinations worldwide, ITB Berlin is an apt platform to meet our customers. This year we will be showcasing African Safari, Island Vacation, Desert Safari, DMC Holiday products of 30+ DMC Destination, DMC B2B Portal & API solutions. ITB is the best place to meet, network, learn, share & promote DMC Products & API solutions.”



Rehan Ali
CEO
Tawfeeq Travel

“ITB Berlin is the biggest Travel Show where the entire travel fraternity across the globe connects and unites. It is the perfect platform to explore the various new opportunities and technology enhancements in the industry. Attending this show helps to grow our business. Connecting with other suppliers from hotel industry, technology providers, tour operators will help in expanding business.”



Amro Nagah
General Manager
Swissotel Al Murooj

“This ITB Berlin exhibition is our first participation and we will be showcasing our services and facilities in the hotel and hospitality industry. This includes new initiatives and personalized travel experiences. We will also be highlighting our partnerships with leading industry players and demonstrating how can this help businesses streamline their operations and enhance customer satisfaction.”



Itikhar Hamdani
Area General Manager
Northern Emirates
(Coral Beach Resort Sharjah and
Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel)

“ITB Berlin served as a key platform for businesses, destinations, and stakeholders in the travel sector to network, showcase their offerings, and discuss trends and developments in the industry. The importance of ITB Berlin in 2024 would depend on various factors, recovery from the COVID, and developments or themes to be highlighted at the event.”



Issam Slaimi
General Manager
Golden Tulip Media Hotel

“We will be highlighting several aspects at ITB Berlin, tailored to our significant guest demographic from East Europe, Italy, Germany, and France: Location and Accessibility: Emphasizing our hotel's convenient location in Dubai, ensuring easy access for travellers from East Europe, Italy, Germany, and France. We will showcase nearby attractions to enhance the overall guest experience.”



Ravi Santiago
Cluster General Manager,
Wyndham Hotels Ajman

“Participating in ITB Berlin, we anticipate engaging in networking opportunities with industry peers, establishing business partnerships, highlighting our hotel's offerings, and acquiring market insights. Our goal is to engage with industry professionals and travellers alike, sharing our passion for hospitality and demonstrating why our hotel is ideal for memorable stays.”

Compiled by Dr. Shehara Rizly

Hotels outperform pre-pandemic levels

Dubai's hospitality sector, which is integral to the emirate's destination promise and overall growth of the tourism industry, continued to perform strongly, surpassing pre-pandemic levels across all hospitality metrics - Occupancy, Occupied Room Nights, Guests' Length of Stay, Average Daily Rate (ADR), and Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR).

TT Bureau

Average occupancy for the hotel sector in 2023 stood at 77.4 per cent, among the world's highest, increasing from 72.9 per cent in 2022 and exceeding the 75.3 per cent average occupancy in 2019. The high occupancy level is an exceptional achievement, given an overall 19 per cent increase in room supply in 2023 compared to 2019.

Milestone 150,000 room keys achieved

Dubai's hotel inventory at the end of December 2023 comprised 150,291 rooms at 821 establishments, compared to 146,496 rooms available at the end of December 2022 across 804 establishments and 126,120 rooms available at the end of December 2019 across 741 establishments. Last year's achievement reflects the growth in the hospitality industry.

Occupied room nights surge to record high

In 2023, occupied room nights soared to a record high of 41.70 million, marking a 11 per cent increase compared to 2022 (37.43 million). This

In 2023, occupied room nights in Dubai soared to a record high of 41.70 mn, marking a 11% increase compared to 2022 (37.43 mn)

growth also represents a substantial 30 per cent rise from the pre-pandemic figures of 2019, which saw 32.11 million occupied room nights.

Reflecting the commitment of the city and hospitality sector to offer competitive pricing, the 2023 ADR of AED536 matched the ADR in 2022. The hotel sec-

tor's robust performance is also evident in its RevPAR growth – an increase of 6 per cent compared to 2022 (AED415 vs. AED391) and a growth of 33 per cent over the pre-pandemic period of 2019 (RevPAR of

AED312). Guests' Length of Stay was 3.8 nights in 2023, a 10 per cent increase from 3.4 nights in 2019.

His Excellency Issam Kazim, CEO, Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DCTCM), said: “As Dubai continues its exponential growth in alignment with

the D33 Agenda set forth by our forward-thinking leadership, we remain committed to further elevating our standards and to advancing with innovative and distinctive world-class infrastructure, experiences and attractions. The extensive range of offerings and Dubai's reputation as a secure, inclusive and accessible destination have been consistently recognized across multiple global indices, culminating in the city being crowned \No.1 global destination for an unprecedented third year in a row in the Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards 2024.

Our partners have played a crucial role in achieving this top ranking through their contributions to Dubai's tourism expansion and the industry's rapid resurgence, especially with their active involvement in our global campaigns and marketing endeavours. The



sustained success will further enhance visitors' enduring trust, confidence and affinity for Dubai, as it accelerates towards the goal of becoming the best city to visit, live and work in, and ultimately converting visitors into long-term residents. We are strategically harnessing the significant

momentum generated during a highly successful 2023 to drive growth across all segments of tourism. As we look forward to welcoming more visitors in 2024, the unwavering support of our public and private sector partners will be pivotal in enhancing our capacity.”

Finally, a level playing field for women

With more inventory of hotel rooms in the Middle East, more women are engaging in the hospitality industry. The UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are in the forefront of ensuring that inclusivity is priority. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, over 50% of women have now embarked in a career in the hospitality sector.



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

“The industry had 19,000 jobs and by 2023 it increased to 300,000. So, we can see there is a balance when it comes to ratio of men and women. It is a fulfilling option to join the industry; it has become inclusive, and gives equal opportunities to women.”



Alaa Momenah
Field Marketing Activation Manager,
Saudi Arabia, Radisson Hotel Group

“Hospitality is gaining importance and career opportunities for women in KSA. Service excellence, interacting with people, and creating experiences in a dynamic, creative environment. Women can secure their careers by fostering skills, and seizing opportunities for growth.”



Abeer Alomari
Director - Human Resources, Assila,
a Luxury Collection hotel in Jeddah

“Women in KSA benefit from hotel industry, govt support, leadership opportunities, and financial independence, and career growth. The nature of the industry resonate by building a challenging career, enhancing skills, on-the-job training, and attending various industry events.”



Noura Mufti
Director - Marketing
The St. Regis Riyadh

“The Vision 2030 has recognized the industry’s potential to contribute to economic growth. Women, who represent 40% of the population, are a big part of that vision. The biggest support I received was being given the chance to open the first St. Regis in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.”



Hessa Almazroa
General Manager
Novotel Riyadh Sahafa

“Driven by evolving societal dynamics and govt initiatives, women get opportunities in KSA to excel in their careers. I embraced the industry propelled by a passion for service. Navigating the path to success requires learning, effective communication, and resilience.”



Nouha Aldigs
Director - Quality & Guest Experience,
The Ritz-Carlton, Jeddah

“Hospitality, an exciting choice for women in KSA, gives opportunities for personal and professional growth. My passion was inspired by my love of meeting new people, learning about different cultures, and creating experiences and focusing on relevant education and training.”

Compiled by Dr. Shehara Rizly



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Diversity in hospitality

Claudia Klingbiel, Director of Public Relations & Marketing, Sun Siyam Resorts, talks about various opportunities empowering women to become leaders in hospitality.

TT Bureau

Talking about the current global hospitality industry and the contribution of women in it, **Claudia Klingbiel**, Director of Public Relations & Marketing, Sun Siyam Resorts, says, "In today's global hospitality industry, the role of women is increasingly vital and celebrated. Hospitality offers a diverse array of career opportunities for women, making it an essential sector for female empowerment and professional growth. Hospitality is not only important as a career path for women but also serves as a dynamic and inclusive industry where women can thrive and excel. With its diverse range of roles spanning from management and operations to guest services and culinary arts, hospitality offers women the opportunity to showcase their skills, creativity, and leadership abilities."



Claudia Klingbiel
Director of Public Relations & Marketing,
Sun Siyam Resorts

She continues, "Over recent years, there has been a noticeable trend of more youth, including women, opting for careers in hospitality. This shift can be attributed to various factors, including the industry's reputation for offering dynamic and fast-paced work environments, opportunities for career advancement, and the increasing recognition of the importance

of diversity and inclusivity in the workplace. However, despite the growing interest from young women, there are still challenges when it comes to retaining skilled women leaders in hospitality. Issues such as work-life balance, gender bias, and limited opportunities for career progression can deter women from staying in leadership roles within the industry. To address these challenges, hospitality organizations must prioritize creating inclusive work cultures, offering mentorship and development programs, and providing pathways for advancement for women at all levels."

The various programmes to mentor and empower women is growing in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates etc. Klingbiel continued, "Supporting and empowering women in hospitality requires a multifaceted approach. Key criteria include promoting



Hospitality offers a diverse array of career options for women, making it an essential sector for female empowerment and professional growth

gender diversity in leadership positions, implementing policies and practices that support work-life balance, providing

access to professional development and training opportunities, and fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect."

In conclusion, Klingbiel reiterated, "The contribution of women to hospitality is significant and multifaceted. Women play vital roles in all aspects of the industry, from management and operations to guest services, culinary arts, and beyond. Their contributions bring unique perspectives, creativity, and innovation to the table, enriching the hospitality experience for guests and colleagues alike."

Amsaan promotes inclusivity at theme parks

Amsaan-MOTIONGATE Dubai will enhance theme park experience for hearing impaired visitors. This tie-up takes a leap towards inclusivity in entertainment industry, with Amsaan leading the charge in making such experiences accessible to everyone. Traditional methods of communication, such as signs or verbal instructions, are challenging and can often lead to misunderstandings.

TT Bureau

This initiative introduces on-demand Emirati sign language for ride descriptions, safety norms, and park instructions, allowing local hearing impaired visitors to access essential information by scanning QR codes linked to Amsaan's dedicated platform with Emirati sign language videos. These visitors will be able to navigate MOTIONGATE™ Dubai independently and make informed decisions about attractions, enabling a more self-reliant, barrier-free, and enjoyable experience. This project is not static, based on feedback from the community and park visitors, there will be continuous enhancement of these hearing impaired-friendly features.

"This partnership is not about making a theme park accessible; it is about fostering a culture of inclusivity. By combining technological innovation with



Vitalii Mykhalchuk
CEO
AMSAAN

a commitment to the hearing impaired community, Amsaan and MOTIONGATE™ Dubai are leading the way in transforming entertainment spaces into accessible experiences for everyone, setting a precedent for other industry players. With over 11 million individuals in the Middle East alone, this step will pave the way for more organizations to embrace inclusivity, creating a world where everyone, regardless of their abilities, can fully

experience any entertainment," Vitalii Mykhalchuk, CEO, AMSAAN said.

The implementation process was a collaborative effort between MOTIONGATE™ Dubai and Amsaan, with local Emirati hearing impaired employees playing a vital role in translating the text into Emirati sign language. A quality assurance process has been implemented

mutual understanding of sign language nuances optimising their accessibility as well as effectiveness.

"The collaboration between MOTIONGATE™ Dubai part of Dubai Holding Entertainment, one of the largest diversified entertainment groups in the region, and AMSAAN with this initiative leap towards inclusivity. By providing QR codes on



ments and is a measures toward a more inclusive world," Al Anood Al Hashemi, Vice President, Organizational Culture and Impact, Dubai Holding Entertainment, commented.

This collaboration showcases Amsaan's capabilities in innovative QR code integration and highlights its role as a leader in promoting inclusivity in the entertainment industry. The initiative's success will be measured through user engagement, increased visitation by the local hearing impaired visitors, heightened accessibility awareness, and of accessibility features.

Looking ahead, Amsaan and Dubai Holding Entertainment plan to expand the QR code system and upgrading the accessibility of destinations, including LEGOLAND Dubai Resort. Amsaan is committed to transforming tourism as it recognises that overlooking accessible tourism has led to a loss of US\$150 billion globally. By making numerous facilities friendly for the hearing impaired, the company is fostering a safer, barrier-free communication infrastructure, benefiting both the business ecosystem and the travellers, while syncing with the UAE government's Dubai Team for Accessible Travel and Tourism.

By making facilities friendly for the hearing impaired, the firm is fostering a safer & barrier-free infra, benefiting business ecosystem and the travellers

to review and verify the accuracy and relevance of the interpretations videos before generating the QR codes. Though there were complexities, Amsaan guided and trained the MOTIONGATE™ Dubai team to foster a

the signboards of our theme park into sign language videos, we are bridging worlds, making communication effortless for the hearing impaired community. This initiative showcases the power of technological advance-

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- Valid for stays during 10th May to 30 sept only
- Minimum length of stay 2 Nights
- Book by 15th April 2024
- Rate are Net / Non Commissionable
- Rates not valid for groups
- Offer cannot be availed in conjunction with any other discounts & promotion
- Offer valid for Single/Double occupancy basis

Treading on the 'green' path

Taking a step forward towards environmental responsibility in the hospitality sector, Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, managed by Hospitality Management Holding (HMH), announced the commencement of its comprehensive strategy towards achieving zero carbon emissions. It hosted carbon emission experts, conducted audits, and empowered its staff through awareness sessions.

TT Bureau

In a series of proactive steps, Coral Beach Resort Sharjah hosted carbon emission experts, conducted audits, and empowered its staff through awareness sessions. The journey towards zero carbon emissions began with a site visit conducting Greenhouse Gas assessment in accordance with the GHG Protocol Corporate Standard and level 1 energy survey and analysis audit by **Sanith de S. Wijeyeratne**, Director & CEO, The Climate & Conservation Consortium (CCC), and his team of experts.

Leveraging the CCC's expertise in energy, carbon management, and green buildings, their team meticulously assessed every aspect of the hotel's activities, from energy consumption and waste management to transportation and procurement practices.



Coral Beach Resort Sharjah's initiative demonstrates a commendable dedication to sustainability that will undoubtedly inspire change in the industry

— Sanith de S. Wijeyeratne

Their insights have laid the foundation for a targeted strategy aimed at achieving carbon neu-


trality. Furthermore, the initiative includes a series of informative awareness sessions for its staff,

delving into the intricacies of carbon emissions, exploring its impact, and mitigation strategies. "It is encouraging to witness Coral Beach Resort Sharjah's proactive stance on carbon emissions. Their initiative demonstrates a commendable dedication to sustainability that will undoubtedly inspire change in the industry," said Sanith de S. Wijeyeratne, during the awareness sessions.

"Our commitment to sustainability extends beyond words to tangible action," says **Itikhar Hamdani**, Area General Manager, Coral Beach Resort Sharjah.

Coral Beach Resort Sharjah has been recognized for its outstanding commitment to environmental sustainability. Its team has also received several awards, including the Hotel of the Year


2023 - Sustainable Initiatives, and Hotel Team of the Year 2021 by the Hospitality Group, highlighting their dedication and leadership in promoting sustainability initiatives. By embarking on this determined initiative, Coral Beach Resort Sharjah is reaffirming its commitment to environmental stewardship and paving the way for a more sustainable future for the hospitality industry. 🌱




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Escape the cliché winter landscapes and embrace an extraordinary adventure in Sharjah, where sun-drenched sands paint a unique canvas for the winter season. The jewel of the United Arab Emirates promises travellers a symphony of unforgettable moments against a backdrop of azure skies, towering sand dunes, and ancient fortresses.

Renowned for its rich culture and vibrant heritage, Sharjah becomes a haven for families, adventure seekers, and history buffs, and as temperatures dip and days shorten, a new unparalleled experience awaits in the enchanting embrace of Sharjah.

Sharjah's natural wonders
Swap your skis and snow-

inviting you to experience the adrenaline rush of quad bike adventures and the excitement of sandboarding. As the sun sets, immerse yourself in the serene ambiance of campfire evenings, surrounded by the beauty of the desert landscape. For those seeking a more contemplative experience, don your hiking boots and conquer the Al Rafisah Hiking Trail. This scenic trail

Sharjah welcomes world travellers through immersive cultural treasures and outdoor escapes to experience in winter

boards for the towering dunes of Al Badayer, where "Big Red," the largest sand dune in the desert engages your senses within the awe-inspiring setting. Here, the possibilities are as vast as the desert itself,

leads you to the breathtaking panoramas of Al Suhub Rest, perched 600 metres above the sea level. As you ascend, each step unveils a new perspective, making it an ideal journey for nature lovers and hikers alike.



Taking a more historical journey to expand your knowledge and wonder, immerse yourself in history at Al Rabi Tower in

Khorfakkan, a sentinel from 1915, offering panoramic views of the azure Gulf of Oman. Sharjah's diverse natural landscapes

promise a blend of adventure and tranquillity, inviting you to explore beyond the ordinary and create lasting memories.

As a tranquil oasis nestled in the towering Hajar Mountains, Shees Park offers a serene retreat surrounded by pictur-



esque landscapes. Visitors are greeted by a magnificent artificial waterfall, soaring over 25 metres, setting the tone for a peaceful experience.

With recreational facilities for children, shaded stone benches for relaxation, and designated areas for leisure and

picnics, Shees Park ensures a memorable visit for every family member.

Historic excursions and cultural activities

Embark on a captivating journey through the history of Sharjah, where each step unveils tales waiting to be unravelled. Begin



your historical exploration at Khorfakkan Fort, a bastion of the past that transports you to the original reign of the Al Qasimi family. The exhibits within its walls serve as portals to a heroic era, allowing you to immerse yourself in the rich narratives that shaped the region.

Continue your journey to Al Dhaid Fort, a marvel constructed in 1820 that stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of Sharjah's history. As you wander through its storied corridors, let the enticing aroma of freshly baked bread from the nearby market whisk you away to a bygone era, adding a sensory dimension to your historical immersion.

For a deeper dive into the cultural wonder of Sharjah, the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization beckons with its treasure trove of artefacts. Explore the museum's halls, brimming

with exhibits that illuminate the region's artistic achievements and scientific prowess, as you discover the layers of Sharjah's heritage, each telling a unique story waiting to be explored.

In the iconic 'Heart of Sharjah' district, historic houses transformed into museums and art galleries merge the past with the present. Among them is Bait Al Serkal, one of Sharjah's oldest and most significant historical landmarks. Converted into a museum in 2005, it houses a diverse collection of archaeological artefacts that reflect the history and culture of the UAE.

Bait Obaid Al Shamsi is another famous heritage house in the emirate, dating back to 1845, and transformed into an exhibition showcasing artworks by artists from around the world. Bait Khalid Bin Ibrahim is one of the most important historical houses of Sharjah's

families, converting this pearl merchant's 20th century family home into a 12 key boutique wing of the Chedi Al Bait, embodying the emirate's rich heritage, and offering a glimpse into the former daily life with contemporary touches filled with luxury and comfort.

Luxurious heritage accommodation perfect for winter vibes

Visitors can indulge in a range of accommodations, be it a lavish tent complete with a private pool, a charming historical retreat dating back to the 1960s, or an enchanting desert oasis amidst rolling dunes. In Sharjah, every traveller finds a haven that aligns with their taste and budget.

The Kingfisher Retreat is nestled in the heart of the picturesque mangrove island in Kalba and stands as a haven of luxury amid the tranquil embrace of mountains and mangroves. Visitors can also experience Al Badayer Retreat, situated

tion within its lunar styled dome structures. It is a sanctuary for those who relish in the fusion of comfort and adventure. It hosts a variety of accommodations, including standard tents for a classic experience, and luxury tents for a touch of opulence, and distinctive dome-shaped tents, each designed to suit different preferences and budgets.

And for those enchanted by the timeless allure of golden dunes, Al Faya Retreat in Mleiha presents a perfect sanctuary. This retreat, set in a significant archaeological hub of the emirate, whispers tales from the past, with its relics dating back to prehistoric eras. With its deeply rooted heritage, the retreat comprises two single-story, stone-built buildings from the 1960s, offering luxurious rooms with modern comforts. It enriches the guest experience with contemporary amenities, including a rejuvenating spa, treatment room, an inviting restaurant, an out-



Visitors can indulge in a range of accommodations, be it a lavish tent, a charming historical retreat, or an enchanting desert oasis amid dunes

in the heart of the Al Badayer Desert and renowned as one of the UAE's most exquisite desert landscapes; this retreat blends luxury and traditional Emirati elegance.

At the Moon Retreat, visitors are able to experience an extraordinary journey of desert accommodation, redefining the camping experience with a truly unique blend of innova-

door pool, a terrace for starlit evenings, a barbecue area for memorable gatherings, and a library for tranquil moments. Al Faya Retreat ensures a uniquely soulful stay amidst the desert's magic on Sharjah's enchanting winter nights.

So, pack your bags, trade the parka for a light jacket, and embark on a journey where memories are made and cherished. ➡

Seamless travel experience in Qatar

Nestled in the heart of the Arabian Gulf lies Qatar, a destination often overshadowed but bursting with treasures awaiting discovery. Ranked 31 out of 153 countries in the Global Peace Index, Qatar stands proudly as one of the safest and most hospitable nations globally, beckoning families and solo travellers alike to its shores.

TT Bureau

From its awe-inspiring landscapes to its storied past and vibrant present, Qatar enchants visitors with its myriad offerings. Whether marvelling at iconic artworks like Louise Bourgeois' Maman or tracing the evolution from ancient traditions to modern transport systems, from camels to sleek trams, Qatar ensures an immersive experience at every turn.

Tawfeeq Holidays, the distinguished inbound division of Tawfeeq Travel Group, emerges as the quintessential companion for those eager to uncover Qatar's splendour. With an intimate knowledge of the region and an unwavering commitment to excellence, Tawfeeq Holidays crafts tailor-made journeys to satisfy the desires of every traveller.



Rehan Ali Syed
CEO
Tawfeeq Travel

Go on board on a voyage of discovery with Tawfeeq Holidays as you dive into Qatar's vibrant culture. Explore Doha's iconic landmarks, from the majestic Museum of Islamic Art to the enchanting Katara Cultural Village and the bustling Souq Waqif, where Qatar's essence comes alive in a symphony of sights, sounds, and aromas. For the adventurous souls, Tawfeeq Holidays offers exhilarating

desert safaris, allowing you to marvel at Qatar's golden sand dunes and partake in thrilling activities like dune bashing, camel riding, and sandboarding. Alternatively, embark on a sunset cruise along the picturesque coastline, where breathtaking vistas and gentle sea breezes await. Rehan Ali Syed, CEO, Tawfeeq Travel, said, "When you choose Tawfeeq Holidays, rest assured your travel needs will be met with utmost professionalism and attention to detail. From airport transfers to guided tours and activities, we handle every aspect of your journey to ensure a seamless and stress-free experience."

Qatar's ascent as a MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) hub owes much to several factors. Its exceptional air connectivity through the award-winning Hamad International Airport en-




Tawfeeq Holidays emerges as the quintessential companion for those eager to uncover Qatar's splendour

ures easy access from major cities worldwide. Moreover, Qatar boasts a plethora of luxury

hotels and accommodations ideal for hosting MICE events. These venues not only feature

state-of-the-art meeting rooms and conference facilities but also offer impeccable service and exquisite dining options, ensuring a seamless and enjoyable experience for attendees. Complemented by efficient transportation systems and modern infrastructure, Qatar provides smooth logistics for event organizers and participants alike. ➔

Swissotel Al Murooj looks for partners

Swissotel Al Murooj will be participating at ITB Berlin for the first time. During the three-day event, they will be showcasing the hotel and its facilities to a global audience. The event will also provide them networking opportunities with their current and new partners.  speaks to Amro Nagah, General Manager, Swissotel Al Murooj, for more insights.

Dr. Shehara Rizly

Swissotel Al Murooj expects to connect with industry professionals at ITB Berlin in order to focus on potential business partners. Amro Nagah, General Manager, Swissotel Al Murooj in downtown Dubai, shared, "This (participation at ITB Berlin) will allow us to create new relationships, exchange ideas, and potentially collaborate on future projects. We expect to gain insights and knowledge about the latest industry trends, technologies, and best practices. This will help us stay updated and competitive in the rapidly evolving hospitality industry. Our aim is to showcase our hotel brand to a larger audience and increase our visibility in the market. The ITB Berlin exhibition provides an opportunity for us to present our unique selling points, services, and offerings to a wide range of visitors, includ-



Amro Nagah
General Manager
Swissotel Al Murooj in downtown Dubai

ing travel agents, tour operators, and potential guests. We hope to generate new leads, bookings, and partnerships through meetings and discussions with potential guests, travel agents, and other relevant stakeholders. This will help us grow our customer base and expand our business."

Speaking further Nagah shared, "We expect to be inspired by the

creativity and innovation showcased by other exhibitors. This can help us generate new ideas for improving our hotel services, guest experiences, and sustainability practices. Overall, our expectations from the ITB Berlin exhibition are to establish valuable connections, gain industry insights, increase our visibility, and seize new business opportunities in addition to showcasing Dubai as number 1 global destination."

The location of the property and the many facilities has a great impact in terms of achievements this year. Nagah reiterated, "The year has been filled with tremendous achievements and milestones for our hotel. First and foremost, we are delighted to have received several accolades and recognition in the hospitality industry. Our commitment to excellence and providing exceptional service has earned us

the prestigious 'Best Business 5 Hotel' award. We are humbled by this honour and grateful to be acknowledged for our efforts. In addition, we have successfully started a few soft renovation and enhancement projects, such as

The ITB Berlin exhibition provides an opportunity for us to present our unique selling points, services, and offerings to a wide range of visitors

our lobby that has transformed into a stylish destination. We have received numerous positive reviews and feedback from guests who have appreciated the new look and feel."

He added, "Furthermore, our commitment to sustainable practices and eco-friendly initiatives has been recognized with

a 'Green Certification' for our hotel. We have implemented energy-saving measures, reduced waste, and introduced environmentally friendly practices throughout our operations. This recognition highlights our dedi-

cation towards preserving our planet and creating a sustainable future. Another significant achievement for us has been the successful implementation of various guest-centric initiatives. We have introduced a personalized kids check-in arrival experience service, ensuring that each kid receives a tailored experience during their stay. Our goal is to

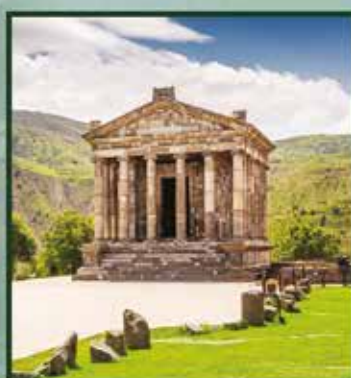
exceed expectations and create memorable moments for every individual who walks through our doors. Lastly, we are proud to have maintained a high level of guest satisfaction throughout the year. Our dedicated team has consistently delivered exceptional service, ensuring that each guest feels welcomed and valued. We believe in going above and beyond to create a warm and inviting atmosphere that feels like a home away from home. As we look ahead to the future, we are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. We remain committed to providing the best possible experience for our guests and will continue to evolve and innovate to meet their needs and preferences."

Talking about sustainability, he said, "In order to work towards sustainability in the property, there are several steps that we are looking at." ➔

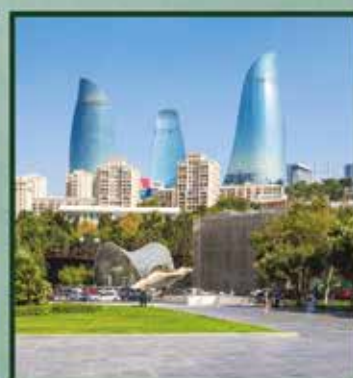
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KSA No. 1 market for Spain

Spain recorded a whopping 56 per cent increase in the number of visitors from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region in comparison to the 2019 numbers, according to the data released for 2023 by Turespaña at their recent roadshow in the GCC. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recorded the highest growth in visitor arrivals among the GCC countries.

TT Bureau

In 2023, Spain experienced a record-breaking year for tourism from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, with a 33 per cent increase compared to 2022 and a 56 per cent increase compared to 2019. These numbers have been recently published by the National Statistic Authority of Spain. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recorded the highest growth in visitor arrivals among the GCC countries, with more than 100 per cent increase between 2019 and 2023 and a 92 per cent increase between 2022 and 2023; the total number of Saudi tourists has surged up to 182,000, surpassing UAE as the main GCC market for Spain, and consolidating its status and the country's vision for 2030. The UAE, Qatar and Kuwait followed with the trend.

The total number of GCC residents visiting Spain in 2023 reached 434,000, with an average stay of 8.6 days and a notable increase in expenditure. Factors such as good weather, family-friendly environments,



and cultural resonance, including the great Arab legacy attract GCC travellers to Spain.

Looking ahead to 2024, Spain aims to further consolidate its position as the top destination for the Middle Eastern travellers through marketing campaigns, strategic alliances and multiple events. In line with this, Spain Tourism recently concluded a successful roadshow across

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE, showcasing various regions and offerings of Spain to travel trade partners. The event facilitated networking and collaboration opportunities, emphasizing Spain's commitment to providing unforgettable experiences for the Middle Eastern travellers.

Commenting on the success of the roadshow, **Daniel Rosado**,

Director/ Tourism Counsellor at Spain Tourism, expressed enthusiasm, stating, "We are delighted with the positive response and

engagement we received during our roadshow in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE. These regions hold immense potential

for Spanish tourism, and our collaboration with travel trade partners has strengthened our commitment to providing unforgettable experiences for Middle Eastern travellers."

Our collaboration with travel trade partners has strengthened our commitment to providing unforgettable experiences for Middle Eastern travellers

— Daniel Rosado

Namratha Rose, Manager - Marketing & Trade Relations, Turespaña, said, "We are delighted to wrap up a triumphant sales mission across the GCC! These networking events are

invaluable, fostering deeper connections and understanding within the travel trade. Engaging with stakeholders face to face enhances product comprehension and solidifies partnerships. Through these interactions, we gain insights, align strategies, and ultimately elevate our industry's standards."

The roadshow aligns with Spain Tourism's broader strategy to foster international partnerships, expand its reach, and enhance the global visibility of Spain as a premier travel destination. The collaboration between Spanish

ment on 10 February, bringing together travel trade professionals and polo enthusiasts in a relaxed networking environment. The event highlighted the elegance and premium aspects of Spanish culture, including equestrian activities, sports and experiences contributing to the promotion of Spain as a diverse and attractive destination.

Fall in love with Andalusia!
Juan Manuel Ortiz Pascual, Executive Manager, Andalusia Tourism, said, "Our focus this year is for our GCC travellers to fall in love again with

These networking events (at sales missions in GCC) are invaluable, fostering deeper connections and understanding within the travel trade

- Namratha Rose

partners and travel trade professionals from the Middle East marks a significant step forward in promoting cross-cultural exchanges and fostering mutual growth within the tourism industry. Additionally, Spain Tourism organised its first polo tourna-

Andalusia! We experienced a good growth from the GCC last year, but we want them to come and see our new offerings and experiences in Granada, Malaga and Marbella especially this year. We have many experiences from

sports activities and events to other recreational activities for the whole family. I was able to speak with the travel trade during the roadshow all that is new in Andalusia. GCC travel trade is extremely important to us and we have a good understanding between us as I have been travelling to this region for the past 13 years. We

always go one step further for our guests from the GCC as they have become our most frequent visitors."

Turespana or Spain tourism in the GCC has been conducting various events across the past year and the latter part of last year saw their focus on bringing more sports related activi-



ties which has a very good attraction from this market with SailGP and now with the polo tournament. Spain was one of the first countries to open and welcome travellers when the borders opened after the pandemic. Spain tourism in GCC has been proactive becoming one of the most visited countries by GCC travellers. The numbers have skyrocketed from this region with Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates heading the board with 100 per cent and Kuwait and Qatar with 80 per cent.

Rosado reiterated, "Today we had the first ever polo tournament in Dubai, we wanted to showcase all the different sports related experiences that Spain can offer as Spain is a country that has many events with horses which is related to the GCC market, as they too share the passion for those same sporting events. Horses

have become the main communicator between Spain and Arab countries for centuries and this is something that we want to highlight this year. Our focus is also to provide a whole new range of experiences for all travellers from the GCC. From sports tourism to experiences with nature, gastronomy, art, and culture we are looking at diversifying the experiences for this region. Number of travellers from the GCC have grown exponentially over the past few years and in 2022, the 2019 numbers were surpassed in GCC countries. Travel trade in the GCC is most important to us and we take extra special care to provide them all the information and assistance needed and conduct events if this nature so that our partners from Spain can have a very good rapport with them and make use of the opportunity to take it to the next level." D

Northern region of UAE attracts Germans

Northern Emirates witnessed exponential growth in the number of visitors this year with Germans taking the lead. 'Overall Northern Emirates is attracting more German guests due to our beautiful beaches in all the northern emirates destinations,' says Iftikhar Hamdani, Area General Manager, Northern Emirates (Coral Beach Resort Sharjah and Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel).

 Dr. Shehara Rizly

Northern Emirates is attracting more German guests due to its beautiful beaches. Sharing his views on this, **Iftikhar Hamdani**, Area General Manager, Northern Emirates (Coral Beach Resort Sharjah and Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel), shared, "Overall Northern Emirates is attracting more German guests due to our beautiful beaches in all the northern emirates destinations. We are expecting further growth in 2024, as business is back to normal or even better than the pre-pandemic era. We have record breaking occupancy at our two resorts. We surpassed all previous records in 2023. Both hotels are experiencing 96 per cent occupancy in first quarter of 2024. Being resorts, we are more attractive for the families."



Iftikhar Hamdani
Area General Manager - Northern Emirates (Coral Beach Resort Sharjah and Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel)

ITB serves as key platform

Talking about their presence at ITB Berlin, Hamdani said, "We will attract travel industry professionals, tour operators, travel agents, and potential guests who are seeking unique and memorable beach experiences in Sharjah and Ajman by offering our unique accommodation, beach activities, culinary

experiences, wellness and spa facilities, local experiences to emphasize the unique cultural experiences and local attractions near our resorts, such as visits to traditional markets, historical sites, or cultural events in Sharjah and Ajman."

Increase in travel spending

He added, "Our TRevPAR experienced a remarkable surge in 2023, soaring by an impressive 42 per cent compared to 2019."



This impressive increase in our TRevPAR (by 42%) vividly illustrates the robust spending power of our esteemed guests at the hotel

This impressive increase in our TRevPAR vividly illustrates the robust spending power of our

esteemed guests at the hotel. This substantial surge not only signifies their growing confi-

dence in our offerings but also underscores their willingness to engage with our diverse range of services and amenities. It is a testament to the exceptional experiences we provide, as well as the value they place on the premium hospitality and tailored experiences we deliver."

New markets and agents

Hamdani shared, "We are fo-

cussed to bring new markets. Ajman and Sharjah Tourism Department are working firm along with us to tap new markets. We are seeing the increase in West Europe, East Europe year on year and some new markets has increased e.g. Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, China, and Belarus. Some segments that are very active now are Leisure and Sports in both of our resorts."

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GenX driving GCC outbound

Generation X are leading the growth in outbound travel from the GCC countries, reveals a report. The report also highlights reasons for their dominant share in the growth.

 TT Bureau

The GCC outbound market is forecast to grow exponentially over the next five years, driven by Gen X travellers, according to findings by New York headquartered Research Nester. Commenting on the report, **Danielle Curtis**, Exhibition Director, Arabian Travel Market, said, "Within an age range of approximately 43 years to 58 years, many Gen Xers hold senior positions within companies and as such tend to travel overseas regularly on business trips. In addition, with responsibility comes reward and therefore many have high earning potential and disposable income. Many successful entrepreneurs at this stage in their careers also have built significant wealth and can afford to travel frequently. Many industry commentators are focused on Millennial and Gen Z travelers, but it is perfectly logical that Gen X would dominate the GCC outbound market value given the region's demographics."



Arabian Travel Market (ATM) will take place from 6-9 May 2024 at the Dubai World Trade Centre.

Members of Gen X are also changing their lifestyles, with considerable numbers now looking for a more sustainable work life balance. This often means spending more leisure time with their families, including holidays and combining business with leisure, which is significantly growing the leisure segment of travel. To illustrate these points, Gen X will be responsible for \$11.1 billion, 41 per cent of Saudi Arabia's total

outbound market value of \$27 billion by 2028 according to the report. It is a similar picture in the UAE. Gen X will spend \$18.2 billion, 60 per cent of the total market value of \$30.5 billion by 2028. "It is also worth considering that as this generation begins to age and subsequently retire, naturally it will be Millennials who will begin to dominate outbound market share in the decade ahead," added Curtis. Overall, Saudi tourists favour Europe as a destination, accounting for \$13.2 billion in market value by 2028, compared with just \$7.4 billion in 2019.

Accor, MoT tie-up to employ locals in hotels

Ministry of Tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia tied-up with Accor to nurture and develop Saudi talent in the hospitality industry. Through the ‘Tamayyaz by Accor’ programme, the collaboration seeks to offer graduates and individuals a clear path for career advancement, expedite nationalization, cultivate internal talent, implement onboarding programmes, and design career growth plans.

TT Bureau

Upon completing the six-month programme, 256 trainees will be employed in their preferred departments within hotels in the KSA. “This partnership with Accor marks a milestone in our efforts to grow Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s tourism sector and create job opportunities for our citizens. With ‘Tamayyaz by Accor’, we are confident that Saudi talent will be well-equipped to succeed in the ever-evolving world of hospitality,” Engineer Mohammed Muin Bushnag, Deputy Minister of Tourism for Human Capital Development, said.

‘Tamayyaz by Accor’ encompasses three distinct tracks: Hospitality Specialist, Hospitality Operations, and Hospitality Leadership. The Hospitality Specialist track exposes local

talent to the foundations of non-operating hotel departments such as Talent and Culture, Marketing, Finance, Business Development, and Guest Experiences. Meanwhile, the Hospitality Operations track targets departments such as Food and Beverage, Front Office, Housekeeping, Culinary, and Engineering. The Hospitality Leadership track concentrates on fostering leadership skills by applying the Accor Leadership Framework. This track includes leadership shadowing, global leadership programmes, and training initiatives funded by the Tourism Ministry.

Additionally, a supervisory development track will offer candidates a range of training programmes designed to enhance potential future growth and prepare them for the next level. “We are thrilled to collaborate with the Ministry of Tourism to em-



power local Saudi talent in the hospitality industry. ‘Tamayyaz by Accor’ shows our commitment to fast-tracking the nationalization of the hospitality sector, providing young Saudi nationals with an opportunity to develop the skills and expertise required to flourish in this dynamic industry,” Jean-Jacques Morin, Group Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Premium, Midscale and Economy Division Chief Executive Officer at Accor commented.

The Ministry was represented during the signing ceremony by the Deputy Minister of Tourism for Human Capital Development, Engineer Mohammed Muin Bushnag, while Accor was represented by Jean-Jacques Morin the Group Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Premium, Midscale and Economy division, in the presence of several officials.

“Accor’s pivotal strategic priorities in KSA encompass the

nationalization of the hospitality industry and nurturing local talents. As the leading hotel operator with an extensive pipeline in the Kingdom, we hold a significant role in advancing the 2030 Vision through developing and growing national talents. ‘Tamayyaz by Accor’ initiative, a cornerstone of our nationalization

well as fostering our talent acquisition, talent development and talent retention objectives,” Moustafa Manoon, VP, Operations, KSA, Premium, Midscale & Economy Division, Accor, said.

The Accor and the Ministry of Tourism tie-up signifies a stride in advancing the hotel industry

Accor and KSA MoT tie-up signifies a stride in advancing the hotel industry and generating opportunities for local talent in the Kingdom

strategy, epitomizes effective collaboration between the government, represented by Ministry of Tourism and Private Sector and Accor Group, harmonizing premier learning and development avenues as

and generating opportunities for local talent in the Kingdom, in line with Saudi Vision 2030. The programme will equip trainees with skills and know-how to excel in the hospitality industry. ➡



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Visitor turnout from Germany up 12%

Grand Mercure Dubai City, gearing up for participation in ITB Berlin 2024, has identified Germany as an important market, as they have witnessed an increase of up to 12 per cent year on year between 2023 and 2024. The property has been growing in terms of attracting varied international visitors from across the globe and intends to continue this upward trajectory.

TT Bureau

Grand Mercure Dubai City is gearing up for ITB Berlin 2024 with a sophisticated strategy tailored to capture specific markets in the ever-evolving hospitality landscape. This year's focus centres on Europe, a continent celebrated for its rich diversity. The comprehensive plan includes a broad European focus for universal appeal, a specialized approach targeting the robust UK market due to its resilient economy, and a distinct emphasis on Germany, acknowledging its travel-savvy population. This nuanced strategy aims to capture diverse audiences with unique preferences, ensuring an effective presence at the international event.

Identifying the German market as pivotal, the property has witnessed a substantial increase in business share from 7 per cent



to 12 per cent year on year, from 2023 to 2024. This growth underscores the market's undeniable influence on the property's success and revenue growth. The significance lies not only in its specificity but also in its adaptability, aligning with the evolving dynamics of the global travel landscape. Emphasizing on a family-oriented atmosphere,

Grand Mercure Dubai City offers a warm ambiance with amenities like pools and engaging activities tailored for children. Strategically catering to the needs of families aligns seamlessly with the growing demand for comfortable family stays. The year has been exceptionally positive for the property, with total revenue experiencing an impressive growth

of 16.2 per cent, surpassing the previous year. Concurrently, the Average Daily Rate (ADR) has increased by 20 per cent, solidifying the property's status as a premium 5-star hotel.

In the broader context of the UAE's hospitality landscape, the property observes the robust nature of the industry, particu-

larly during events like COP28, supported by government initiatives. The strategic focus on the European market has yielded remarkable success, boasting a substantial 25 per cent increase in market share compared to

age, contributing to its positive overall performance. Aligning with Dubai's commitment to sustainability, Grand Mercure Dubai City dedicates itself to eco-friendly practices and contributes to broader environmental goals.

The year has been exceptionally positive for Grand Mercure Dubai City, with total revenue experiencing an impressive growth of 16.2%

the previous year. Efforts are underway to attract visitors from emerging markets such as China and India, recognizing their increasing importance in the global tourism landscape. Active participation in Dubai Tourism campaigns, like "kids go for free," during the summer, fortifies the property's family-oriented im-

Engaging in initiatives aimed at reducing its environmental impact, the property emphasizes sustainability credentials.

A positive trend has been noted in business travel, indicating a potential recovery in business activities and increased confidence in professional travel.

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Travel fraternity bonds over cricket

Amadeus in collaboration with Turkish Airlines organized an exhilarating cricket event for the travel agency community in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain recently. The event, which brought together over 150 participants and their families, showcased a remarkable display of talent, sportsmanship, and community bonding. The day was marked by a series of cricket matches.



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17 million travellers visit Dubai in 2023

Last year was the most fruitful for Dubai as it achieved the best ever annual tourism performance with international tourists growing by 19.4 per cent to 17.15 million, exceeding the previous 2019 record of 16.73 million. Western Europe and South Asia accounted for 19 per cent and 18 per cent of arrivals respectively, followed by other regions.

TT Bureau

The growth aligns with the goals of the Dubai Economic Agenda D33 launched just over a year ago by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to further consolidate Dubai's position as one of the top three global cities for business and leisure, and the best city to visit, live and work in. His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Dubai Crown Prince and Chairman of The Executive Council of Dubai, said: "The best ever performance of Dubai's tourism sector in 2023 is a testament to the foresight of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. His Highness's commitment to fos-



tering resilience, excellence and innovation across economic sectors and encouraging meaningful public-private partnerships that deliver value has had a transformative impact on tourism development in the emirate. Dubai's ability to constantly generate

diverse and refreshingly novel travel and tourism experiences catering to a wide range of visitors has been a key factor behind this exceptional performance. With several indicators outperforming pre-pandemic levels, this year's results mark Dubai out as

a vibrant focal point of growth in the global tourism landscape."

The milestones are testament to the emirate's vibrant and diverse offerings, supported by world-class infrastructure, exceptional service at all touchpoints, and

continuous collaboration between the government and private sectors. The city caters to travellers of all budgets and preferences, and a year-round calendar of business, leisure and sporting events continues to attract international visitors. The tourism sector's performance closely parallels the emirate's

able 11.1 per cent growth, solidifying Dubai's position as a global tourism leader.

Dubai's international visitor performance has outshone global tourism trends, with the latest data from the UN World Tourism Organisation revealing that, overall, international tourism

Strong tourism performance in 2023 saw Dubai maintain its position as a first-choice destination for visitors from key traditional and new markets

3.3 per cent GDP growth in the first nine months of 2023, further highlighting the symbiotic relationship between tourism and economic prosperity. Accommodation and food services activities witnessed a remark-

reached 88 per cent of pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2023. The only region to overcome pre-pandemic levels with 22 per cent visitation growth above 2019, the Middle East led global recovery in relative terms. ➡

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Schengen visa demand soars 25% in UAE

Europe is the most visited region by the United Arab Emirates travellers during summer due to its proximity, connectivity and great outdoors. Obtaining a Schengen Visa is an important factor for most Asian expats living in the UAE. In a tête à tête with **Monaz Billimoria**, Regional Head – UAE, VFS Global, shares more on the issue.

Dr. Shehara Rizly

Schengen visa appointments are a great concern this year for the UAE travellers as Eid falls early and then summer. How can VFS help to get the appointments?
Owing to the UAE's close proximity to Europe, and with Europe being an aspirational destination

growth over 2019, which reflects the continued high demand for travel to Europe. As mentioned, visa appointments, processing timelines and decisions on visa applications are the sole prerogative of the respective Embassy/ Consulate. We urge travellers to book their appointments well in advance to avoid any delays.

process, and as external service provider to virtually all EU and Schengen governments, VFS Global looks forward to work with these governments to support them on their transformation journey although we are given to understand it's still in the very nascent stages and will take a while to be ready.

What is the key focus of VFS UAE?

A trusted partner to client governments, with an extensive global network and reach, VFS Global is focused on providing exceptional customer service to visa applicants, and ensuring convenient and seamless application submission experience. VFS Global is committed to making people's cross border mobility simple and convenient through highly secure, reliable, efficient, and innovative technology solutions in visa, passports and consular services.



Monaz Billimoria
Regional Head – UAE
VFS Global

Would you be able to give an account of the role played by VFS in terms of Schengen visa services?

VFS Global manages non-judgmental and administrative tasks related to applications for visa, passport, and consular services for its client governments, enabling them to focus entirely on the critical assessment task. Our role is limited to only front-end admin-

istrative tasks that include collecting the visa application form, checking the documentation as per the check list defined by the government and enrolling biometrics if applicable. VFS Global has no visibility in the decision-making process, timelines and outcome of decision.

How many countries does VFS help to formulate visa applications?

Globally, VFS Global serves 67 client governments. In the UAE, we serve 39 client governments through our network of Visa Application Centres, as well as Premium Application Centre for UK applicants through our tie-up with Radisson Hotels, and Visa At Your Doorstep services for select other Missions.

Could travel agents help/support with the application of Schengen visa? If so, how can they help their clients?

Travel agents remain a key partner in the travel ecosystem, and we are happy to extend assistance or information they may require to help their customers / clients. Please be aware that VFS Global's role is clear and as per the SLAs with the government we work with, appointment booking is as per the online booking system open to all and document submission has to be done at VFS Global centres.

Does VFS support travel agents to get their client appointments or documents sorted?

Visa appointments, processing timelines and decisions on visa applications are the sole prerogative of the respective Embassy/ Consulate. VFS Global only manages the non-judgemental and administrative aspect of the visa application process. Appointments that are available are reflected in real time on our website. ➡

The demand for Schengen visas from the UAE has seen 25% growth in 2023 v/s 2022, and an 18% growth over 2019, which reflects the high demand

for travellers across the globe, demand for visas to Schengen countries remains high. The demand for Schengen visas from the UAE has seen a 25 per cent growth in 2023 v/s 2022, and an 18 per cent

What is the latest on Schengen visa digitalisation? Do you feel that it will be successful? Are there notable concerns / changes?
We are fully aware the EU's plans to digitise the visa application



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Two Seasons offers Emirati cultural journey

Two Seasons Hotel & Apartments partners with Heritage Express to provide guests with an immersive Emirati cultural experience. This partnership aims to enhance hotel guest experience and create cultural awareness among residents, tourists and students. Guests can now book the experience at the hotel's reception desk. Trolley bus can be arranged with Heritage Express for group travellers.

 Dr. Shehara Rizly

Two Seasons Hotel & Apartments, a family-friendly hotel that actively supports initiatives aimed at preserving local culture and heritage and promoting cultural diversity, signed a mutually rewarding collaboration with Heritage Express to bring an immersive Emirati-led cultural journey to its guests. Experiential tourism is a part of the hotel's sustainability initiatives to promote UAE culture among its guests, employees and the community.



Heritage Express is the only tour provider that offers a unique and

inclusive Emirati cultural learning journey. This partnership aims to enhance hotel guest experience and create cultural awareness among residents, tourists and students. Guests can now book the experience at the hotel's reception desk. For guests coming in groups of 10 and above, the trolley bus can be arranged with Heritage Ex-

press for pick up and drop off back to the hotel.

The experience takes guests to a tour of Old Dubai in a customized Heritage Express trolley with fully trained and experienced Emirati Cultural Ambassadors. The route touches on the historical landmarks, from Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid




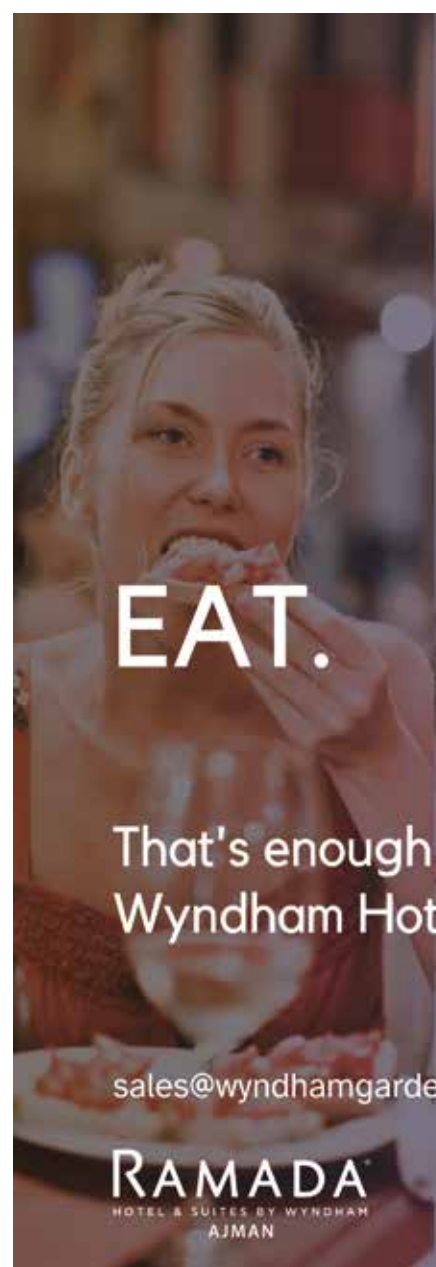


Al Maktoum Centre for Cultural Understanding, Al Seef, Al Fahidi Fort, Dubai Abra, Al Shindagha Museum, Etihad Museum: Union House to Jumeirah Mosque.

The cultural experience also includes a visit to the Bedouin camp to meet the camels and falcons, a taste of authentic Emirati dishes, and open conversations with Q&A where the Emirati Cultural Ambassadors share their stories too. Heritage Express guarantees the safety of the whole experience. The trolley bus is equipped with advanced


visibility, horizontal seatbelts, CCTV monitoring, first aid kit, first aid certified drivers, GPS tracking, fire extinguisher, and firefighting certified drivers. It has a dedicated door for people of determination and comfortably fits two wheelchairs. Two Seasons Hotel recognizes the value of educating guests about the local culture and highly recommends Heritage Express tours. The guests will gain valuable insights and understanding, familiarity and appreciation of the Emirati heritage by the end the tour. 📍




Experiential tourism is a part of the hotel's sustainability initiatives to promote UAE culture among its guests, employees and the community




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Generative AI in travel

Last year, speculation on the power of generative AI in the travel industry was the hype which somehow seems to have no real-world changes. However, 2024 seems to be taking a different turn of events as various industry leaders have their opinions on its strengths and delivery. We have some interesting insights shared.

TT Bureau

So as 2024 advances will the world slowly lose interest as the technology doesn't deliver results? In fact, some top analysts are already calling the technology 'over-hyped', even predicting it will get a 'cold shower' in 2024 because of unrealistic expectations, high costs and regulatory challenges. We asked technology experts from across the travel industry for their thoughts on whether or not generative AI will really change the travel experience in 2024, or whether we are getting too excited, too soon.

Mike Coletta, manager of research and innovation at Phocuswright, disagrees with the analysts who are negative about the potential for generative AI. "The travel industry is on the cusp of massive change, and there is huge potential for AI

to transform the travel experience for both travellers and the travel provider ecosystem. Phocuswright research shows that nearly half of travellers in most countries would be extremely or somewhat comfortable using a GenAI tool to help them plan a trip. Between 13-22 per cent of total traveller populations have used GenAI in some capacity," Coletta said.

The initial success of AI is likely to depend on the challenges people are applying it to. As **Haluk Kayhan**, CEO & Co-Founder of B2B accommodation booking platform Bedsopia



– which is powered by global distributor PrimeTravel – points out: "AI could be hugely transformative for travel in 2024, but

the industry needs to work out where it is most needed and avoid trying to solve problems that no one knows they even have. Focus on the real headaches or high-cost/ low return areas of your operations like staff shortages, flight disruptions, sudden waves of cancellations, payments processing and operational inefficiencies generally. These are areas where AI could catalyze the most change,

most quickly – perhaps even meaningfully in 2024. AI technology needs to be essential at this stage, not just a gimmick. Let's be realistic – it's not going to change the whole world overnight – people aren't ready for that."

Access to data is a key consideration and one of the most impactful use cases for travel. "The main way we will see AI

make an impact on travel in 2024 is around data," says **José Arozarena** from Tour Review, a platform for tours & activities providers to manage their online reviews.

According to **Sami Doyle** from TMU Management, a data-driven insurance intermediary specializing in travel, generative AI could transform how financial institutions service the travel industry. "The travel industry is inherently risk based and that risk extends to consumers paying for goods in advance of service and to financial institutions providing services to travel companies for future delivery products. AI could be a powerful tool to assist financial institutions in providing services such as credit card acquiring and financial protection in a sustainable manner that alerts stakeholders to potential exposures before they happen.," Doyle said. 📌

For Artificial Intelligence to be transformative in travel, we need to start with how it can be applied to the things we are already doing

Thirsty Thursday celebrates 2 years

The monthly networking event of HSMAI Middle East, which coincided with its second anniversary, brought together hospitality industry's key sales, marketing and revenue managers recently. It was a resourceful evening for all the leaders in sales, marketing and revenue as they learnt about the history of HSMAI, which is an important association, especially in the region.



‘Check into hotel, enhance cybersecurity’

Justin Borkovetz, Director of Operations, Zucchetti, in an interview with **TRAVEL**, shares his view on resort properties, water parks and cybersecurity, which play a pivotal role in the overall guest satisfaction and monetising the businesses. Cybersecurity takes centre stage, as it can be boon or bane when it comes to a bleisure holiday.

TT Bureau

How could a property improve the ticketing and reservations for its on-site waterpark to maximize revenue and guest satisfaction?

One of the best ways to improve the operational efficiency, profitability and guest experience for your resort's waterpark is to implement an integrated ticketing and reservation management solution—ideally, within the PMS — enabling easy monitoring of all room and waterpark reservations, payments and related activities. First and foremost, having the waterpark ticketing and hotel booking engine integrated is a benefit to guests as they can book and pay for their rooms and waterpark tickets at the same time. Centralized payment processing streamlines the check-out process for guests, which can lead to a drop



Justin Borkovetz
Director of Operations
Zucchetti

in cart abandonment rates. For hoteliers, it also enables more targeted and effective marketing, as they can promote the waterpark within the room booking process and/or offer discounted packages when guests buy both, driving additional revenue and further enhancing the guest booking experience. While improving the booking experience

for the guest, the integration of the two systems also makes it easier for your reservations team to make updates to either type of booking for the guest, as both are stored within your PMS, easily accessible from a single dashboard, reducing the need for manual data entry and minimizing errors.

How can hotels effectively manage operations of multiple on-site restaurants to ensure a variety of dining experiences?

When you have multiple restaurant or retail stores on-site, it can prove complicated to manage your operations and financial transactions without an innovative, integrated Point of Sale (POS) system. A sophisticated POS will offer customizable terminals for each restaurant and retail outlet, all of which are accessible via a single dashboard, enabling you

to toggle between each terminal for ease-of-use and overall visibility of each retail location. This innovative feature will streamline the check-out process and accentuate the visibility of the items being sold, ensuring

Having the waterpark ticketing & hotel booking engine integrated benefits guests as they can book and pay for rooms and waterpark at the same time

a more efficient and engaging transaction experience. In addition, you can create individual event specific menus or retail offerings in each individual POS terminal, making it simple to offer promotions or special offers through an individual restaurant or retail outlet, without any accounting confusion.

Finally, a robust POS will enable you to manage and oversee the performance and metrics of each individual terminal, as well as a holistic, 360-view of all purchases made, site-wide. This makes it easy to identify where

improvements could be made to maximize revenues or to identify new revenue opportunities, on a terminal-by-terminal basis, and from a high strategic level.

How can resorts maximize the cybersecurity defences of its operational technology?

While streamlining your reserva-

tion process, your CRS/ PMS will also strengthen your cybersecurity defences, minimizing the risk of your guests' data being compromised. Centralizing your reservation data, guest information and other booking engine data in one system makes it easier to protect guests' data. Of course, a CRS must connect to your PMS, channel manager, RMS and other operational systems, so the quality of the interface is an important consideration as well; a sophisticated CRS uses strong encryption to protect your guests' data during the transfer process. Your CRS/ PMS gives you the ability to control who has access to what type of data within your system, and by ensuring that you give full access to only necessary employees. Finally, your CRS/ PMS should offer secure payment processing through an integrated booking engine and POS. ➡



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Industry unleashes power of inclusivity

As the tourism and hospitality industry evolves, businesses must align with trends that foster expansion and innovation. However, a critical area requiring attention is gender equality. Women in the tourism industry face obstacles in career advancement and wage disparity, with the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) reporting significant salary gaps between genders for identical roles.

The tourism and hospitality industry demonstrated significant growth in 2022, with a valuation of US\$4,409,780.0 million. This sector is expected to continue its robust expansion, reaching US\$7,997,647.2 million by 2028, driven by factors such as a rising global population, increased disposable income, and a growing preference for

proximately US\$62.8 billion to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the UAE by 2028. Notably, tourism in the UAE is expected to offer nearly 400,000 jobs by 2028.

As the sector evolves, businesses must align with trends that foster expansion and innovation. However, a critical area requiring attention is gender



ing flexible work policies. This includes remote work options, flexible working hours, and family-friendly initiatives. Noteworthy initiative includes Conrad Abu Dhabi Etihad Towers hotel's partnership with Evolv'n Women, empowering women from developing countries through skill development in the hospitality sector.

The UAE's tourism sector is forecasted to contribute approximately US\$62.8 billion to the GDP of the UAE by 2028

travel and leisure activities, underscoring its pivotal role in fostering economic resilience.

The UAE's tourism sector is forecasted to contribute ap-

equality. Women in the tourism industry face obstacles in career advancement and wage disparity, with the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) reporting significant salary gaps between

genders for identical roles. The implications of this disparity extend beyond individual financial consequences into wider societal and industrial spheres. Economic inequality, intensified by the gender disparities reinforces systemic barriers for women seeking equal opportunities in the workplace. Such disparity limits the diversity of perspectives that could otherwise enhance the industry's innovation and growth.

Rectifying this wage gap is an imperative step toward fostering a more inclusive and prosperous future for the entire tourism and hospitality sector. Recognising the need for change, many corporations in the sector are introducing various initiatives and programmes aimed at empowering and supporting women in their careers.

One fundamental step is the implementation of robust diversity

and inclusion policies, eliminating gender biases in recruitment, promotion, and compensation to support women's work-life balance. Organizations ensure talented women can thrive in their careers without compromising their personal lives by accommodating diverse needs. For instance, acknowledging the unique challenges that women often face in balancing work and family responsibilities, progressive companies are adopt-



Dr. Jelena Janjusevic
Associate Professor,
Heriot-Watt University Dubai
(The views expressed
are solely of the author.)

Space for adult sections in flights

Dutch carrier Corendon Airlines has announced a dedicated section at the front of its planes on the route from Amsterdam to Curaçao in the Caribbean. The news offering adult-only areas on its flights garnered widespread attention around the world. Rightly so, as it seems that passengers have long been crying out for this service.

TT Bureau

Corendon's route from Amsterdam to Curaçao in the Caribbean will have a dedicated section at the front of the plane – where those over 16 years of age can enjoy “peace and quiet” – in a move that it says will improve the experience for both those travelling with and without children. While this move is likely to be popular among many passengers, what does the industry think? Could this trend actually “take off”? And what do buyers and suppli-

ers need to do to tap into it? We spoke with several experts from the travel technology distribution space for their reactions.

Pointing out that ‘adults only’ travel services currently exist in the hotel industry, several cruise lines offer ‘adults only’ sections or facilities on various ships, and there are tour operators that focus on adult-only trips, **Henry Hartevelde** from Atmosphere Research Group recommends that anyone entering into this space do their research first. “Do you have enough custom-



Gareth Matthews
CMO
Didatravel

ers to make this endeavour worthwhile? Is this profitable? Will this favourably distinguish your brand? Will you be able to sell and service this through all the channels you sell through – including travel agencies, if you use them? If the answers are favourable, a robust and comprehensive marketing strategy – and budget – will be critical. Relying just on search engine optimization and search and social media marketing to create

awareness and generate interest will not be adequate. You will need an integrated marketing campaign that encompasses PR, advertising in relevant media, targeted email, promotional activity – and, yes, SEO, SEM, and social media marketing,” Hartevelde said.

To be successful the idea will require investment from both sellers and B2B buyers of flights: “Travel providers and intermediaries need to think carefully about how they would sell and market this new service,” says **Janis Dzenis** from price-comparison website WayAway.

“Currently, adult-only flights are not a typical search term for consumers – many wouldn't know this is now a real option. A PR or marketing campaign would be needed, alongside new technology that can help adult-only flights appear in the booking flow. OTAs and metasearch companies should consider

adding a filter for this emerging service, and consider guiding people to it on their websites, as it's not something people will naturally know they can search for,” Dzenis added.

It's not just airlines that stand to benefit from this being a success, “travel sellers and buyers of accommodation too should think about how to maximise

modations around the world, said: “For retail travel agents sat their facing the client in person or selling over the phone this represents a unique opportunity to add value and personalize a trip – they can judge whether or not a traveller is likely to be interested in an adult only cabin experience in a way that an online seller can't do in the same way. So, we would recommend

Travel providers and intermediaries need to think carefully about how they would sell and market this new service

– Janis Dzenis



this new trend,” adds **Gareth Matthews** from global travel distribution provider Didatravel.

Broadly agreeing with this view, **Haluk Kayhan**, CEO, Prime-Travel, a fast-growing B2B travel distributor providing accom-

that airlines considering this explore the retail sales channel route above others. The prospect of adult-only flights therefore presents an exciting opportunity for both travellers seeking a serene journey and for the industry too.”

Wyndham focuses on Europe, APAC

As industry professionals meet at ITB Berlin, **TRAVEL** speaks to **Ravi Santiago**, Cluster General Manager, Wyndham Hotels Ajman (Ramada Hotel & Suites by Wyndham Ajman, Ramada by Wyndham Beach Hotel Ajman and Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche) on their focus this year at one of the most popular travel trade shows for the GCC region.

Dr. Shehara Rizly

Europe, CIS and APAC are key markets for the hospitality industry, especially in the Northern Emirates. Over the years, Ajman has been attracting different and new markets as they showcase their destination at international travel exhibitions like ITB Berlin. As one of the main travel trade exhibitions, ITB Berlin becomes the hub for networking and build relationships with new partners, as well as revisit and rekindle existing relationships with partners across the globe. Sharing insights on their participation at the upcoming



Ravi Santiago
Cluster General Manager
Wyndham Hotels Ajman

ing ITB Berlin, **Ravi Santiago**, Cluster General Manager, Wyndham Hotels Ajman (Ramada

Hotel & Suites by Wyndham Ajman, Ramada by Wyndham Beach Hotel Ajman and Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche), said, "We aim to enhance our current partnerships while also seeking opportunities to expand further within the European and Asia-Pacific travel markets. We believe these travel markets hold significant potential to enhance the value of our hotels."

Performance

Last year saw an exponential growth of travellers from various markets in the UAE. Santiago said, "In 2023, Wyndham Hotels Ajman achieved unprecedented success, setting new records. As we progress into 2024, our commitment to excellence remains unwavering. Despite anticipating challenges unique to the year ahead, we are confident in our ability to navigate the dynamic travel market successfully. Our con-



tinued dedication, coupled with strategic initiatives, positions us to maintain momentum and further elevate our performance, ensuring memorable experiences for our guests and sustained growth for our hotels."

Hospitality industry in the UAE is changing its course diversifying its offerings to various guests

from new markets as well as from the existing markets.

Sustainability

Sustainability is an important aspect today as it's a great concern in every single industry. With the UAE announcing its extension of the year of sustainability to this year, Santiago reiterates their stance. "In the northern emir-

ates, Wyndham Hotels Ajman is recognized for its sustainability efforts. Ramada Ajman leads the way as the inaugural hotel to introduce a compost machine and maintain an urban farm on-site, yielding fresh vegetables annually. Additionally, we implement sustainable practices, including monitoring electricity and water usage," he said.

We aim to enhance our current partnerships while also seeking opportunities to expand further within the European and APAC travel markets

Abu Dhabi eyes MICE biz from China

Abu Dhabi Convention and Exhibition Bureau, part of the Department of Culture and Tourism-Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi), reaffirmed its commitment for developing the emirate's MICE sector with the renewal of its Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the China MICE Advisory Group at Louvre Abu Dhabi.

TT Bureau

The China MICE Advisory Group, a committee of key Chinese MICE trade partners and media, was established by Abu Dhabi Convention and Exhibition Bureau (ADCEB) in 2019 to gain insights into MICE and business travel

tourism and MICE, reflecting a strong bilateral relationship. As the demand for outbound MICE in China increases, approaching levels comparable to the country's outbound leisure market, a substantial surge in outbound Chinese MICE is expected in 2024. "Our thriving partnerships with China and a proven track

As the first-ever advisory panel in China created in a tie-up with ADCEB, reflects the latter's approach in taking part with outbound Chinese MICE sector

trends unique to the dynamic Chinese market. As the first-ever dedicated advisory committee in China created in partnership with ADCEB, reflects the latter's proactive approach in engaging with the growing outbound MICE sector from China. The China market ranks among Abu Dhabi's top source markets for

record of attracting tourists and business travellers to Abu Dhabi underscores the strength of this partnership. This renewal will enable us to continue to share knowledge and strategically plan for our tourism future, in line with our commitment to promoting and preserving the emirate's heritage, culture and



tourism assets. Our continued collaboration empowers our efforts, while contributing to the growth of inbound visitors from China, solidifying Abu Dhabi as a destination of choice globally," His Excellency Saleh Mohamed Al Geziry, Director General, Tourism, DCT-Abu Dhabi, said.

As part of Abu Dhabi's efforts to boost global MICE arrivals from China, the partnership also

aims to incentivize MICE visitors to prolong their stays in the UAE capital. Simultaneously, it seeks to promote awareness of the capital's attractions and its exceptional capacity for hosting world-leading business events.

In August 2023, the UAE joined the BRICS group, amplifying its status and opening avenues for strategic trade partnerships, particularly with China. This

membership brings enhanced economic cooperation and global business recognition, acting as a catalyst for business events in Abu Dhabi. The benefits span increased trade and investment opportunities, participation in multilateral platforms, and a diversification of international partnerships.

Chinese tourists with a valid passport can enter the UAE visa-

free and stay for a duration of 30 days. Abu Dhabi businesses are incorporating an array of initiatives to support Chinese visitors, including seamless and convenient digital payment experiences. For example, the recent tie-up (October 2023) between WeChat Pay and Magnati has empowered businesses in Abu Dhabi to integrate WeChat Pay through the Magnati platform.

In another development, Alipay+ has been introduced in 7,000 taxis across Abu Dhabi in November 2023, courtesy a tie-up between Alipay+ and Payby/Astra Tech. This collaboration ensures Payby merchant network based in the UAE can accept six partner e-wallets of Alipay+, catering to tourists from China, the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, and Italy. Abu Dhabi's visibility on the global stage is on the rise, drawing businesses and investors and fostering knowledge and technology exchange.

MOVEMENTS

VFS GLOBAL Dubai

GB SRITHAR joins VFS Global as Head of Tourism Services. Srithar joins VFS Global from Singapore Tourism Board (STB), where he spent over 27 years in a career that spanned multiple functions, including Human Resources, Organizational Development, and International Marketing. He served as Area Director for South India & Sri Lanka and was instrumental in leading the International Marketing and Brand Campaigns teams at STB's headquarters. His last role as the Regional Director saw him responsible for STB's regional marketing, tourism development, and trade partnership work across India, the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. He will support client governments by offering specialised services in Travel, Trade, and Tourism Services.



ROTANA Abu Dhabi

Rotana appoints **PHILIP BARNES** as its new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), effective 1 March 2024. Completing almost 25 years as part of Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, Barnes has held several senior leadership positions worldwide, including Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Recently, he held the role of Regional Vice President of Southern California (2020 – 2022). He has also worked with leading hospitality brands, including Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts and Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts. In the Middle East, Barnes was Fairmont Hotels & Resorts' Regional VP of the UAE (2009 – 2011), where he oversaw the operations for around a dozen properties.



ABU DHABI AIRPORTS Abu Dhabi

ELENA SORLINI has been appointed as the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Abu Dhabi Airports. Sorlini transitions into the role permanently after serving in an interim capacity since June 2023. Since joining Abu Dhabi Airports, Sorlini has overseen the successful opening of Abu Dhabi International Airport's new state of the art Terminal A, which ranks among the largest airport terminals in the world. It has the capacity to host 45 million passengers annually and accommodate 79 aircraft at any given time. She has played an important role in maintaining the steady increase of passenger traffic numbers, which continue to experience year on year growth, as well as attracting new airlines and routes to Abu Dhabi.



AZIZI DEVELOPMENTS Dubai

Azizi Developments has appointed **SAURABH BAKSHI** as the Chief Operating Officer of Azizi Hospitality. Bakshi, a seasoned hotelier with a distinguished career, brings with him over 23 years of management experience in the hospitality industry. From his early days at the Grand Hyatt in New Delhi to his most recent role at Vinpearl Resorts, Bakshi has also held several other senior leadership positions across the world's most prestigious hotels and resorts chains, including Kempinski, St. Regis at Marriott International, Aldar Hotels and Hospitality, Sheraton Hotels, IHG, Radisson Hotels, and Rotana. His expertise in leading hospitality brands through periods of growth and innovation across the UAE and China, among other dynamic high-tourism markets, is among the key qualities he brings with him.



DNATA TRAVEL GROUP Dubai

dnata Travel Group has appointed **CHARLOTTE CODD** as Partnership Manager for dnata Representation Services, the GCC-based representation services partner of choice for multiple hotels, transport, and tourism board partners worldwide. In her new role, Charlotte heads up marketing and partnerships to support dnata Representation Services' global portfolio of brands in bringing latest news, exclusive rates, travel itineraries and more to travellers across the region. She brings with her over a decade of communications experience in the Middle East, having worked on strategic partnerships, events, public relations, digital marketing, and campaign production across the Gulf Cooperation Council for leading luxury brands.



IHG HOTELS AT DUBAI FESTIVAL CITY Dubai

IHG Hotels at Dubai Festival City appoints **PRANAV VOHRA** as the new Cluster Commercial Director. Vohra's distinguished career in commercial management, including senior roles at esteemed hotel properties, showcases a proven track record of exceptional performance. His extensive experience spans international markets, demonstrating a keen understanding of the nuances of diverse regions. IHG Hotels at Dubai Festival City's new appointment is marked by a significant title change from Director of Sales & Marketing to Commercial Director. Vohra will play a pivotal role, overseeing not only sales and marketing but also critical revenue-generating functions such as partnerships, distribution channels, and pricing strategies.



MILLENNIUM PLAZA DOHA Qatar

BASSAM BOU SLEIMAN has been appointed as the General Manager of Millennium Plaza Doha, Qatar. He was a key member of the Millennium Family as the General Manager of Millennium Place Mirdif Hotel & Hotel Apartments in Dubai. In his new role, Sleiman's responsibilities will be to manage the overall property and drive a strategic business development plan to ensure the desired profitability and take the hotel reputation to a new level. Sleiman's 28 years of extensive professional background extends across the GCC region, specifically in Kuwait, Jeddah, Riyadh, Khobar, Dammam, Bahrain, Doha, Amman and Beirut. During 2024, Qatar Tourism continues to grow at a steady pace. Despite the high market supply of the hotel landscape, demand has been on a positive outlook this year compared to 2023.



MILLENNIUM PLAZA DOWNTOWN HOTEL DUBAI Dubai

Millennium Plaza Downtown Hotel Dubai promotes **JAN ATTALLAH** to the position of Director of Sales & Marketing. In his new role, Attallah will lead the sales and marketing efforts, develop strategic client relationships and lead his teams to further elevate the hotel's presence in Dubai hospitality. With more than 18 years of industry experience and a knack for commercial strategy, market research, and competitor analysis, Attallah brings a wealth of knowledge to his new role, having previously served as Cluster Director of Sales at Millennium Plaza Downtown Hotel Dubai. During his career, he has held key positions in renowned hotel chains, including IHG and Hilton, where he and achieved remarkable results.



RADISSON BLU DUBAI MEDIA CITY Dubai

Radisson Blu Hotel Dubai Media City promotes **IZZAT MAMBETOV** to the position of Rooms Division Manager. He will play a pivotal role in overseeing and optimizing Front Office and Housekeeping Operations. His journey with the hotel began in 2019 as Guest Services Manager, where his dedication and leadership contributed significantly to the hotel's success. Continuing his impactful tenure, Mambetov served as Front Of House Manager from December 2021 to December 2023, further solidifying his expertise in managing guest services operations. His multifaceted role reflects his versatility and commitment to delivering exceptional guest experiences. His promotion is a testament to Radisson Blu Hotel Dubai Media City's commitment to recognizing and nurturing talent within the organization.



RED SEA GLOBAL Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Red Sea Global (RSG) appoints **SÉBASTIEN CARRE** as Group Head of Hospitality. He will lead the hospitality function for all RSG destinations and self-operated properties with the aim of elevating Saudi Arabia's position in global tourism. Carre brings more than 30 years of experience in luxury hospitality to RSG. A graduate of VATEL Hospitality & Tourism Business School in Lyon, France, his impressive background includes leadership roles in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Indian Ocean, and Pacific Islands. Before joining RSG, Carre served as Regional VP at Four Seasons. He oversaw hotels in the Seychelles, Abu Dhabi, Tanzania, Azerbaijan, and South Africa.



GRAND MERCURE DUBAI CITY & IBIS STYLES DUBAI AIRPORT Dubai

Grand Mercure Dubai City introduces **NAWAF HASSAN** as the newly appointed Cluster Director of Operations Acting General Manager. In his new role, Hassan will play a pivotal part in overseeing the comprehensive operations of the renowned hotel, ensuring excellence across all functions and striving for the highest levels of guest satisfaction. With an extensive background spanning over 22 years in the hospitality industry, he brings a wealth of experience, having previously held key positions with leading hotel brands. His track record of success and commitment to team development establishes him as a valuable addition.



MÖVENPICK HOTEL JUMEIRAH BEACH Dubai

Mövenpick Hotel Jumeirah Beach appoints **AHMAD GHOSHEH** as the Director of Sales and Marketing. He has more than 20 years of rich experience in the hospitality industry. He joins from Sofitel Dubai, Downtown. He has extensive knowledge and proven track record in driving revenue growth. In his new role, Ghosheh will play a pivotal part in devising and implementing innovative strategies to enhance revenue across all sectors. He will focus on elevating sales performance, cultivating strategic partnerships, and nurturing relationships with key stakeholders. His innovative approach and commitment to excellence align seamlessly with Mövenpick Hotel Jumeirah Beach's mission to create memorable moments through personalized service.





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