

1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP MIDDLE EAST'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE MONTHLY

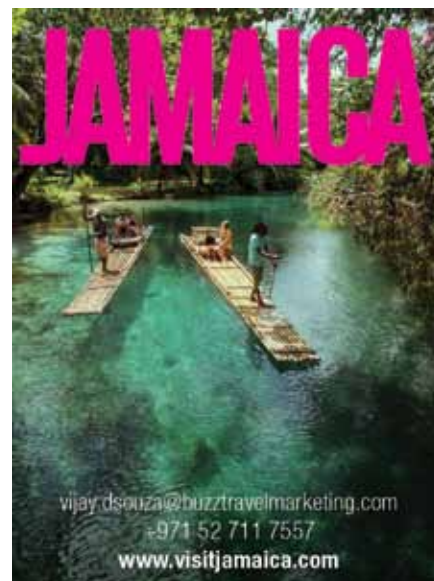
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THE NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY Published from : ★ India ★ Middle East



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Sharjah, a premier global destination @wtm[®] LONDON

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority will be promoting the emirate as a premier global destination when the world meets once again at the World Travel Market London from 5-7 November. The authority has taken a step further by adding its offerings for the winter season when visitors can explore an unforgettable experience.

Dr Shehara Rizly

World Travel Market (WTM) London is a premier global event for the travel and tourism industry, attracting professionals from all over the world. It offers networking, partnership opportunities, and insights into industry trends. The event plays a crucial role in shaping future travel strategies and showcasing innovations, influencing global tourism developments. The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) is promoting its special winter campaign at the event where travellers would find a destination tailored to their sense of adventure, relaxation, and culture. As the emirate proudly showcases its diverse tourism offerings at the World Travel Market (WTM) 2024, visitors are invited to explore Sharjah's hidden gems during the cooler months, from tranquil



His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman, SCTDA

eco-retreats to exhilarating outdoor adventures. Whether you are captivated by breathtaking natural landscapes, seeking adrenaline-packed activities, or eager to immerse yourself in rich cultural experiences, Sharjah promises an unforgettable winter getaway for all visitors and residents alike.

His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, SCTDA, expressed his excitement about the emirate's participation at the

the winter season. Our unique blend of natural beauty, cultural richness, and eco-tourism initiatives truly shine during this time, and we are proud to highlight how Sharjah continues to evolve with sustainability at the core of its tourism offerings. From our meticulously preserved heritage sites to innovative eco-tourism projects, we cater to a wide range of travellers seeking authentic experiences that balance adventure and tranquility.

Our goal is not only to attract visitors but also to inspire them with Sharjah's commitment to preserving the environment & embracing local culture

WTM 2024, saying, "Sharjah's participation in the World Travel Market this year underscores our dedication to positioning the emirate as a premier global destination, particularly during

Our goal is not only to attract visitors but also to inspire them with Sharjah's commitment to preserving the environment, embracing local culture, and delivering world-class hospitality."

300 exhibitors to attend Qatar Travel Mart

Rawad Sleem, Co-Founder and General Manager, Nextfairs, shares details about the 3rd edition of Qatar Travel Mart (QTM), scheduled from 25 -27 November 2024.

TT Bureau

What is the theme and focus for this year's Qatar Travel Mart (QTM)? What's different from last year?

The central themes for QTM 2024 revolves around sustainable tourism, luxury experi-



Rawad Sleem
Co-Founder and General Manager
Nextfairs

ences, and cultural exploration. Our goal is to position Qatar as a premier travel destination while emphasizing the increasing demand for environmentally responsible tourism. The event

aligns with Qatar's National Vision 2030, which seeks to harmonize economic growth with environmental sustainability. As luxury travel is expected



to reach a market size of \$546 billion by 2028, we are committed to blending luxury with authenticity, creating transformative travel experiences. Cultural exploration is also a key focus, particularly as 85 per cent of travellers now prefer destinations that offer immersive and genuine cultural experiences.

How many exhibitors, buyers, and media are expected this year?

This year, QTM 2024 anticipated to feature 300 exhibitors from 60 countries, a significant increase from previous editions, reflecting the event's growing influence. Our hosted buyers program is bringing in 300 high-value buyers to connect with exhibitors, enhancing networking

Contd. on page 34 ▶

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returns to woo industry leaders

Entering in its 7th year, the Arabian Travel Awards will take place on 12 November 2024 as an invitation-only event to honour and appreciate those in the travel, tourism and hospitality arena across the GCC. Conrad Dubai joins DDP Group as the hospitality partner to celebrate the hard work and dedication of the people behind the scene.

TT Bureau

SanJeet, Director, DDP Group, expressed his enthusiasm over the partnership with Conrad Dubai as the hospitality partner for the Arabian Travel Awards, which will be held on 12 November 2024.

“Celebrating our 7th edition this year with Conrad Dubai as our hospitality partner to go on a different journey. Every year, we ensure that there is an element which makes us stand out from the crowd. It is the hard work and dedication of the people behind the scene, travel agents, tour operators and hospitality partners whom we celebrate, as our purpose is to treat the award as a motivator to accomplish more than what won the award. In today’s travel, tourism, and hospitality landscape, many changes and emerging trends have taken shape. Voting is now open to



(From left to right) SanJeet, Director, DDP Group, His Excellency Datuk Seri Ahmed Fadil bin Shamsuddin, Ambassador of Malaysia and Sumeera Bahl, Director, DDP Group, at the Arabian Travel Awards

honour those who have been at the forefront of promoting and exceeding industry norms,” he said.

Sharing his view on the tie-up, **Michael Schmitt**, General Manager, Conrad Dubai, said, “I’m thrilled to partner with the Arabian Travel Awards. This event attracts top leaders in the travel industry and serves as the ideal platform to demonstrate our unwavering commitment to deliver-

ing exceptional experiences that embody Dubai’s dynamic spirit.”

Schmitt emphasised the strategic significance of the partnership, explaining that it provides a valuable opportunity to engage with key industry stakeholders, build new partnerships, and strengthen existing relationships. “By being involved in this event, Conrad Dubai is contributing to the promotion of Dubai and the wider Arabian

This perfectly aligns with Conrad Dubai’s mission to redefine luxury hospitality in this ever-evolving region, as well as with Conrad Hilton’s founding philosophy ‘to fill the earth with the light and warmth of hospitality.’”

The Arabian Travel Awards remains an exclusive event that gathers top leaders from across the travel industry to celebrate outstanding achievements. This partnership with Conrad Dubai

It is the hard work and dedication of the people behind the scene, travel agents, tour operators and hospitality partners whom we celebrate

– SanJeet

region as premier travel destinations. Bringing industry leaders together fosters collaboration and the exchange of knowledge.

highlights the hotel’s commitment to excellence and its pivotal role in advancing the region’s hospitality sector. ▶



Sharjah Alexandria Sharjah STARTING FROM AED **650** (O/W)

Sharjah - Alexandria		
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SM 510	12.00	14.30
SM 508	08.30	11.00
SM 510	08.00	10.00

Alexandria - Sharjah		
Flight No.	Departure	Arrival
SM 509	05.20	11.00
SM 507	01.50	07.30
SM 509	05.20	11.00

Days of Operation: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday

40kgs/2pcs*
7kgs hand carry

Starting from 03 Dec 2024

Sharjah Casablanca STARTING FROM AED **810** (O/W)

STARTING FROM AED **810** (O/W)

Connecting flight
Starting from 04 Dec 2024

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7kgs hand carry

*Luggage through check in

Sharjah Asyut Sharjah STARTING FROM AED **650** (O/W)

Sharjah - Asyut		
Flight No.	Departure	Arrival
SM 506	10.00	12.00
SM 506	Friday 12.00	14.30

Asyut - Sharjah		
Flight No.	Departure	Arrival
SM 505	Thursday 03.15	09.00
SM 505	Saturday 01.50	07.00

Days of Operation: Thursday, Friday

40kgs/2pcs
7kgs hand carry

Starting from 05 Dec 2024

Sharjah Cairo Sharjah STARTING FROM AED **600** (O/W)

Sharjah - Cairo		
Flight No.	Departure	Arrival
SM 502	10.00	12.40

Cairo - Sharjah		
Flight No.	Departure	Arrival
SM 501	04.30	09.00

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MICE tourism in upward trajectory

The past year has seen an exponential rise in the MICE tourism sector across the Middle East region. While the public private partnership has contributed to the rise, it is noteworthy that the infrastructure development has also played a pivotal role in the sector's growth.  speaks to experts to know their view on the sector and the various initiatives taken to support it.

 Dr Shehara Rizly

Today, we bear witness to all the new Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) offerings and not just the rise of the sector but how it has boomed to become one of the key contributors for tourism thereby serving the economy in every nation.

In the United Arab Emirates, from Abu Dhabi to Dubai, Ras Al Khaimah, Ajman, Sharjah to Fujairah and Al Ain, each has its own MICE facilities, which could cater to host travellers. If you take GCC as a whole, every GCC country is well equipped to handle the MICE travellers, as they have large convention centres which could host many travellers. Hence, the Middle East with all its tension across still attracts MICE visitors from across the world and is mesmerised by its captivating strength and resilience. Experts give their views and share various initiatives taken to support and boost the industry.

“MICE tourism in Dubai is on the rise due to several key factors. Firstly, Dubai has a hotel capacity of over 152,000 rooms, providing ample accommodation for large groups. Additionally, the city offers world-class



Mohamed Jassim Al Rais
Executive Director
Al Rais Travel

exhibition venues, such as the Dubai World Trade Centre, Expo Trade Centre, and the Northern Star at Dubai Harbour. These venues are well-equipped to host global events.”



Freddy Farid
Managing Director
Two Seasons Hotel & Apartments

“Hotels are adapting to the rise of business travel by updating their services, which include offering flexible booking options, easy reservation changes, and straightforward cancellations. These are the preferred choices for these travellers due to their changing schedules. Offering business guests with amenities tailored to their needs plays a significant role in balancing work and well-being.”

“We define our market and the strengths, as well as we do targeted marketing campaigns, partnerships and alliances, loyalty programmes, showcasing state-of-the-art facilities, networking opportunities, accessibil-



Fabien Chesnais
General Manager
Movenpick Al Marjan Island

“We recognise the evolving needs of the MICE industry in the Middle East and have enhanced our offerings accordingly. Our resort features versatile event spaces, including flexible meeting rooms and a grand ballroom, supported by cutting-edge technology, such as high-speed internet, advanced AV systems and hybrid event solutions. We provide tailored hospitality services.”

“Hotels in Dubai are enhancing facilities through tech integration, offering advanced audio-visual equipment to support virtual participation and hybrid events to extend audience reach. They also provide tailored



Lareina Zhao
Assistant Sales Director
SLS Dubai

services, with dedicated event coordinators, custom menus, and themed setups. Hotels also offer experiential add-ons to engage guests beyond traditional meetings.”



Bassam Zakaria
Area GM, dusitD2 Kenz Hotel, Dusit Princess Residences - Dubai Marina

“Managing a diverse portfolio of business hotels and holiday home apartments, we are uniquely positioned to cater to MICE delegates attending events across the city. The rapid growth of the ‘bleisure’ segment has shaped our approach, prompting the integration of experiential offerings, such as bespoke cultural experiences and eco-conscious initiatives, including comprehensive sustainability protocols.”

“We are enhancing our event spaces by incorporating advanced AV technologies, and tailor-made meeting packages to accommodate clients’ needs. Our flexible venues meet the rising demand for



Ahmad Ghosesh
Director - Sales and Marketing
Mövenpick Hotel Jumeirah Beach

grand-scale events in the region. We focus on personalised experiences and being best in class, while offering seamless connectivity. We attract international travellers and event planners.”



Christopher Kramer
Hotel Manager
Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan Dubai

“Several factors are driving the demand for corporate events in Dubai. Business expansion: As companies expand their operations into Dubai and the Middle East, the need for well-executed events that represent their brand becomes crucial. Global Appeal: Dubai’s international allure attracts businesses from around the world. Thriving in the Middle Eastern hotel market requires a multi-faceted approach.”

“As an agent, I focus on the region’s rapid infrastructure development, which has led to a proliferation of world-class venues equipped with cutting-edge technology and high-quality services. Key strategies



Nisha Sadhwani
Outbound Sales Manager
One Life Tourism

“As an agent in the Middle East’s thriving MICE sector, I prioritise tailored facilities and services that cater to large-scale events, ensuring seamless logistics and memorable experiences. To attract international business travellers, I leverage strategic partnerships with hotels and venues, offering bespoke packages and showcasing the region’s unique cultural offerings. Additionally, I balance MICE with sustainability.”

“I have witnessed first-hand how hotels in the Middle East are evolving to accommodate the rising demand for grand-scale events. We are seeing a surge in investments in cutting-edge conference centres,



Dariya Bushmakina
Director of Market Strategies and E-commerce, Mercure Hotel

adaptable meeting spaces, and top-tier audio-visual equipment. The industry is also embracing hybrid event formats, offering a seamless blend of in-person and virtual experiences.”

Investment in MICE infra & tech key

“Middle Eastern hotels, particularly Gewan Hotels & Resorts, have invested in advanced conference facilities and technology to accommodate MICE events, positioning the UAE as a leader in the sector.



Gokul Bajaj
Senior Director of Sales
& General Manager, Cvent

“We are committed to providing exceptional hospitality experiences that cater to the evolving needs of our guests. As the Middle East continues to witness a high demand in large-scale meetings and events, we have



Nico Nicholas
CEO, Trees4Events, Zeero & Trees4Travel

“Our extensive ground resources are among the most comprehensive in the region for managing large-scale meetings and events in the Middle East. In collaboration with our sister brand,



Aga Pytlík
General Manager
Pan World Travel



Mohamed Hasan
COO
Gewan Hotels and Resorts

Gewan offers flexible meeting rooms with high-speed connectivity and tailored packages for international corporate clients.”

“Dubai’s events industry continues to thrive. Event professionals are progressively embracing cutting-edge technology to improve efficiencies throughout the event lifecycle, spanning from procurement to post-event stages. They are aware that this uptake will not only fuel growth in the event-driven revenue but also propel them towards their desired goals.”



Haitham Galal
General Manager
Tower Plaza Hotel

invested significantly in enhancing our facilities and services. Our event spaces have been thoughtfully designed keeping MICE in view.”

“With sustainability being more crucial than ever, there is an intensifying need for our leaders to inspire positive change, educate, reduce and mitigate the impact of events. Events are a perfect platform to walk the talk when it comes to showcasing and implementing the sustainability goals. The impact of events on environment is definite.”



Samir Mehta
Chief Operating Officer
Desert Adventures

Gulf Dunes, which specialises in corporate programme, we have positioned ourselves as a premier provider of MICE services.”

“The MICE business in Dubai is growing fast, making it a top destination for international corporate professionals. With many high-quality hotels, room availability, and reputation as a safe place, Dubai is becoming a preferred choice for businesses worldwide. At Pan World Travel, we are seeing more interest from different industries, including technology and finance.”

Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan—a MICE hub

With over 13 different types of meeting rooms and 3,500 sq mt of space for conference facilities, Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan is one of the largest mixed-use properties in Dubai. **Arijit Paul**, the Director of Sales & Marketing for the property, in an interview with **TRAVEL**, shares the overall offerings of the large expanse of comfortable accommodation coupled with ample spaces for both private and corporate events.

TT Bureau

Do give us a brief of the hotel and its offerings?

Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan Hotel & Convention Centre Dubai is a prestigious five-star property conveniently located near Dubai International Airport, offering 279 luxurious rooms and suites. Guests can indulge in various facilities, including a well-maintained pool, health club, spa, jacuzzi,

and steam room. The hotel boasts exceptional dining options with Makan All Day Dining Restaurant, Howdy’s Sports Bar & Restaurant, Bambooda Thai Fusion Restaurant, Hibachi Sushi & Teppanyaki, Taky Pool Lounge, and Gazebo Café. Additionally, it features 13 elegant venues for meetings and events, along with the Rashidiya grand ballroom suitable for weddings, conventions, and conferences.

Could you share about your special MICE facilities?

Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan Hotel & Convention Centre Dubai offers exceptional MICE facilities, including 13 meeting rooms with more than 3,500 sq mt of exceptional meeting and conference facilities, high-speed internet access, business centre, reception, LCD projector and wireless microphones, unique lighting system, pre-function areas and



Arijit Paul
Director of Sales & Marketing
Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan

audio-visual equipment.

How do you see the rise of the MICE industry?

The Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry in the UAE is expected to grow at 8.5 per cent during 2023-30 from US \$5.21 billion in 2023 to US \$9.22 billion by 2030 due to increasing business events, exhibitions and conferences in the country, as per the Government data and trends of inquir-

ies and conversion. The event industry in Dubai is estimated to be worth Dh165.15 billion (US \$44.7 billion) in 2023, which is growing at a Compound Annual Growth Rate of 25 percent per year between 2023 to 2027, the recent data reveals. UAE MICE market is expected to grow to grow at 8.5 per cent due to increasing business events, exhibitions and conferences in the coun-

Al Bustan Hotel & Convention Centre has been actively participating with DET on multiple roadshows promoting business venues.

From the hotel’s perspective, what are the initiatives taken to promote this sector?

From the hotel’s perspective, our initiatives to promote the MICE sector include offering a flexible ballroom, state-of-



The MICE industry in the United Arab Emirates is expected to grow at 8.5% during 2023-30 from US \$5.21 billion in 2023 to US \$9.22 billion by 2030

try. Dubai Business Events, part of DET and the city’s official convention bureau, stated that it won a record 349 bids to host international conferences and congresses over the coming years. Mövenpick Grand

the-art conference facilities, ample parking, diverse F&B options, and a prime location. These features ensure a seamless and convenient experience for all event organisers and attendees. ☺

WegoPro streamlines business travel

Business travel market has grown exponentially across the Middle East in the last couple of years. According to recent researches, the global business travel market will surpass US \$1.6 trillion by 2027 with the travel spending to reach US \$1.48 trillion by end of this year. **Prashant Kirtane**, Chief Executive Officer & Co-founder, WegoPro, shares details with **TRAVELMIDDLEEAST**.

TT Bureau

How has business travel evolved over the years after the pandemic?

Post-pandemic business travel prioritises health, safety, and sustainability, with companies adopting modern travel management platforms like WegoPro for duty of care and policy compliance. "Bleisure" travel, combining business and leisure, has also gained popularity, reflecting more flexible work models.

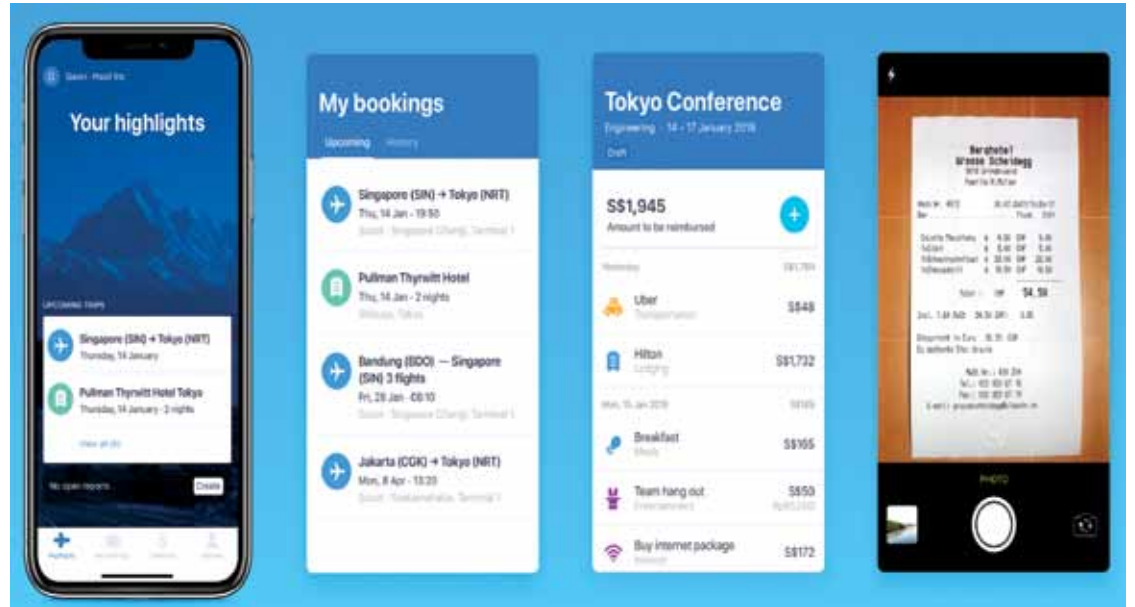
Are there any important aspects which WegoPro covers for business travellers?

WegoPro streamlines booking, approval workflows, and expense



Prashant Kirtane
CEO & Co-founder
WegoPro

its duty of care features and enforcing compliance with corporate policies. The platform also provides a user-friendly experience with easy onboarding and customisation options, making it



WegoPro provides a robust suite of business travel tools, including an all-in-one booking platform for flights, hotels, and airport transfers

management, making travel planning efficient for both travellers and administrators. It offers comprehensive travel management by covering every aspect, from booking and approvals to expense tracking. WegoPro ensures cost optimisation while prioritising traveller safety through

an efficient and flexible solution for managing corporate travel.

What is the estimated value of business travel and what is the expected timeline for recovery?

The business travel market is steadily recovering and is estimated to reach pre-pandemic

levels this year, with significant growth expected across key regions. Industry forecasts suggest that the global business travel market could surpass US \$1.6 trillion by 2027, and the travel spending will reach US \$1.48 trillion by the end of this year. WegoPro is well-positioned to support this growth.

Could you share more details about the WegoPro tools for business travel?

WegoPro provides a robust suite of business travel tools, including an all-in-one booking platform for flights, hotels, airport transfers, and more. It features

customisable approval workflows and integrated expense management for streamlined operations. The platform prioritises traveller safety through its duty of care features, ensures strict policy compliance, and offers easy onboarding and customisation to fit unique business needs. Additionally, WegoPro delivers valuable insights and analytics to help businesses optimise their travel strategies and efficiently manage costs.

Will you be participating at Qatar Travel Mart (QTM)? If so, please share details.

WegoPro will be participating



Our participation (at Qatar Travel Mart) underscores our commitment to supporting the travel needs of professionals across the region

at QTM, where we will showcase our latest innovations and services designed for the corporate travel sector. Our participation underscores our commitment to supporting the

travel needs of professionals across the region, and we look forward to engaging with partners and stakeholders to drive further growth in the business travel space. **▶**



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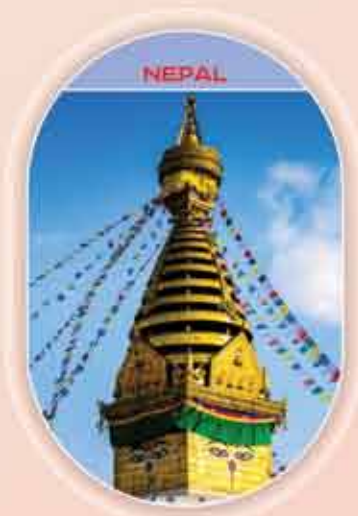
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Mirdif: a bleisure hub in Dubai

Located amid adventurous attractions, in close proximity to the Dubai International Airport and following the path to the airstrip, Mirdif is a hub of activities making it one of the most vibrant precincts across Dubai. **Shady Dawad**, General Manager, Millennium Place Mirdif, shares with **TRAVELTALK** a comprehensive take on the relaxing complex situated in an urban setting.

TT Bureau

Give us a brief of the offerings at Millennium Mirdif?

Millennium Place Mirdif offers a variety of experiences catering to both leisure and business travellers. The hotel boasts 248 rooms, including hotel rooms, suites, and apartments, and four diverse dining options, including international cuisine at B Social and Lebanese flavours at Layali Mirdif, Level 5 Rooftop Pool & Bar, The Urban Sports Bar, gym, and meeting facilities. Guests can enjoy nearby attractions like Mirdif City Centre, Dubai Crocodile Park, Dubai Safari Park, Mushrif Park with activities like horseback riding, zip-lining and cycling. Conveniently located, with just 10-minute driving distance from Dubai International Airport, it's a perfect hub for relaxation and exploration.

What are the key source markets that you focus on?

Millennium Place Mirdif focuses on the GCC, Middle East and Europe as key source markets. These regions drive both leisure and business travellers, contributing to a balanced mix of regional and international guests.

Could you share your USP?

❖ A new lifestyle hotel, offering rooms, suites, and apartments, complemented by a variety of F&B options and modern facilities. Conveniently located next to Avenue Hills Avenue, providing guests easy access to shopping and dining.

❖ Prime location: Overlooking Mushrif Park, close to Mirdif City Centre, Dubai Crocodile Park, Dubai Safari Park.

❖ Adventure activities nearby: Zip-lining, horseback riding, and other outdoor activities at Mushrif Park.



Shady Dawad
General Manager
Millennium Place Mirdif

How many rooms and F&B offerings do you have?

- ❖ 248 rooms, including hotel rooms, suites, and apartments
- ❖ Four F&B Outlets
- ❖ B Social
- ❖ Layali Mirdif Lebanese Restaurant & Café
- ❖ The Urban Sports Bar
- ❖ Level 5 Rooftop Pool & Bar
- ❖ The Café



❖ Convenient access: 10 minutes from Dubai International Airport.

❖ Dining & leisure: Enjoy dining at The Urban Sports Bar and Level 5 Rooftop Pool & Bar, popular with guests.

❖ Sustainability focus: Commitment to eco-friendly practices and guest comfort.

Is it located in the mall itself? Does this help you?

Millennium Place Mirdif is located alongside Mirdif Hills Avenue Shopping Centre, offering guests access to multiple restaurants, cafes, salons, and spas, which enhance their stay. The nearby Mirdif City Centre Shopping Mall also provides additional shopping options with international brands, add-

ing convenience and variety to the guest experience.

Do you work with the travel trade partners? How important are they?

Yes, Millennium Place Mirdif works with the travel trade, and they play a crucial role in promoting the hotel. Travel agencies and trade partners help educate

travellers about the hotel's facilities, which enhances awareness of the property and its unique offerings. This partnership brings business by guiding travellers to a relaxing staycation or a city exploration experience. These collaborations are important in ensuring that guests enjoy the seamless blend of comfort, convenience, and adventure that the hotel offers. **D**

(Advertorial)

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Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan Hotel & Convention Centre Dubai is a prestigious five-star property conveniently located near Dubai International Airport, offering 279 luxurious rooms and suites. Guests can indulge in various facilities including a well-maintained pool, health club, spa, jacuzzi, and steam room. The hotel boasts exceptional dining options with Makan All Day Dining Restaurant, Howdy's Sports Bar & Restaurant, Bambooda Thai Fusion Restaurant, Hibachi Sushi & Teppanyaki, Taky Pool Lounge, and Gazebo Café. Additionally, it features 13 elegant venues for meetings and events, along with Rashidiya grand ballroom suitable for weddings, conventions, and conferences.

Mövenpick Grand Al Bustan Hotel & Convention Centre Dubai
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movenpick.com

Two Seasons unveils 'new' ballroom

Keeping in view the winter season ahead, Two Seasons hotel has started refurbishing its ballroom. Dalma Ballroom is currently receiving an upgrade for the next big events in Dubai. In a conversation with **INTERIORS**, **Freddy Farid**, Managing Director, Two Seasons Hotel and Resorts, shares that the property's transformation is set to be completed by November this year.

TT Bureau

Dalma Ballroom has long been a venue of choice for numerous conferences, exhibitions, and weddings in Dubai. This 5,400 sq ft premium event space can accommodate a maximum capacity of 600 guests. It is the biggest venue of the hotel and can be arranged in a theatre, classroom, U-shape, hollow square, boardroom, cabaret, or banquet setup. It is located on Level 4 and has direct access to elevators and car parking.

Freddy Farid, Managing Director, Two Seasons Hotel & Apartments, said, "We are thrilled to announce the completion of our ballroom renovation, transforming it into modern, elegance with timeless charm, creating a perfect setting for our clients' corporate events, celebrations, and weddings. I take this opportunity



Freddy Farid
Managing Director
Two Seasons Hotel and Resorts

to thank all our clients for their continued support and look forward to welcoming them to our new ballroom. A big thank you to all my team and project team for their great contribution."

The contemporary creative design incorporates new marble flooring and carpet in the corridors and terrace area, full ceiling restyles complemented by

LED lights, and new wall panels. Natural daylight flows into the vast space. The atrium features a magnificent chandelier as its centrepiece. The elements of gold and blue tones accentuate the ballroom's stylish interiors. The venue also features an open terrace that is perfect for hosting an outdoor gathering. In addition to the aesthetics, the project introduces new audio-visual equipment and overhead projectors to enhance the guest experience.

The ballroom renovation reflects the hotel's dedication to elevating its standard of service in hosting



business and personal events, including grand wedding celebra-

tions. The makeover promises modern elegance in a welcoming and luxurious atmosphere.

Green events

Two Seasons Hotel showcases its commitment to sustainability when hosting events. The hotel strives to make its event as sustainable as possible by providing green options to its clients. The

green checklist includes local and healthy food choices, green transportation that offsets travel emissions, energy-efficient lighting, sustainable food consumption, and food waste management for a zero-waste event. In addition, a water filtration glass bottle station has been set up to eliminate plastic waste in guest rooms and restaurants. 🌱

Located next to Dubai Internet City metro and bus stations, the hotel is conveniently located and easily accessible to event attendees



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Bahi Ajman Palace is set on its own private beach with inspiring views over the Arabian Gulf. Experience a beach hotel where unsurpassed luxury meets with contemporary facilities to ensure an unforgettable stay. Boasting 254 luxury rooms, suites, and residences, Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel is a stunning example of traditional architecture blended with contemporary design.

Our luxury hotel rooms & suites combine the convenience of modern designs and the rich feel of the Arabian architecture.

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Beyond Seoul: discover Korea's hidden gems

While Seoul is the heart of South Korea, the country's true essence lies beyond its capital. For Middle Eastern tourists eager to immerse themselves in the richness of Korean culture, the nation offers a variety of lesser-known destinations that promise unique experiences. From coastal cities to ancient historical sites, here are six must-visit gems that reveal the soul of Korea.

Busan: Korea's Coastal Gem



As Korea's second-largest city, Busan perfectly blends urban life with natural beauty. Known for its pristine beaches, such as Haeundae and Gwangalli, Busan offers the ideal coastal escape. Beyond the beaches, the city captivates visitors with the Haedong Yonggungsa Temple, perched dramatically on cliffs overlooking the sea, providing one of the most serene temple views in Korea. Seafood lovers will enjoy the vibrant Jagalchi Fish Market, while the annual Busan International Film Festival adds a cosmopolitan flair. Busan also caters to Middle Eastern tourists with a growing number of Halal restaurants, making it a welcoming destination for Muslim travellers.

Gyeongju: The Ancient Capital

Known as "the museum without walls", Gyeongju is a treasure trove of ancient Korean history. Once the capital of the Silla Kingdom, this city is home to UNESCO World Heritage sites like Bulguksa Temple and Seokguram Grotto, which showcase the finest Korean Buddhist art. The Gyeongju National Museum and Tumuli Park, featuring ancient royal burial mounds, reveal the grandeur of the Silla Dynasty. For history buffs, Gyeongju offers an immersive journey into Korea's rich cultural past.



Jeju Island: Nature's Paradise

Jeju Island, South Korea's natural crown jewel, boasts volcanic landscapes, lush forests, and beautiful beaches. Known for its hiking trails, Jeju is home to Hallasan, Korea's highest mountain, and Seongsan Ilchul-bong, also known as Sunrise Peak. The island's Manjanggul



Lava Tube, a UNESCO World Heritage site, allows visitors to explore stunning volcanic formations year-round, thanks to its consistent cool temperature. Whether you seek adventure or relaxation, Jeju's natural beauty provides a peaceful retreat for all.

Incheon: Gateway to Korea



While Incheon is famous for its world-class airport, the city itself has much to offer. Songdo International Business District is a futuristic marvel, with sustainable green spaces like Songdo Central Park, where visitors can enjoy boat rides. Incheon also holds historical significance, as highlighted by the Incheon Landing Operation Memorial Hall, commemorating a pivotal event in the Korean War. For travellers, Incheon seamlessly blends modernity with history.

Daegu: A City of Culture and Tradition



Daegu, located in southeastern Korea, is a cultural hub known for traditional Korean medicine. Visitors can explore the Yangnyeongsi Museum of Oriental Medicine, or visit the peaceful Donghwasa Temple on Palgongsan Mountain for a spiritual retreat. With its vibrant festivals and serene landscapes, Daegu offers a unique blend of culture and nature.

Daejeon: Korea's High-Tech Hub

Known as Korea's "Silicon Valley", Daejeon is a hub for innovation. Home to Daedeok Innopolis, a major R&D centre, the city attracts tech enthusiasts. For nature lovers, Gyeryongsan National Park offers scenic hikes, while the Expo Science Park and National Science Museum



provide engaging, educational experiences. These cities showcase the diverse experiences South Korea offers, allowing Middle Eastern tourists to explore beyond Seoul and discover the country's beauty, history, and innovation.



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'Sustainable' Yanbu to open by 2027

Baheej, a diversified development and destination management company, was launched last year to transform the cities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia into sustainable destinations. Yanbu, one of the first projects that will be completed by 2027, will start its preparations with the travel trade from 2025, **Stefano Lopez**, Tourism Projects Director, Baheej Tourism Development Company, shares with .

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Could you share a brief about Baheej?

Baheej is a pioneering developer and destination management company formed through a strategic joint venture between AS FAR, the Saudi tourism investment company under Public Investment Fund (PIF) and the Tamimi-AWN Alliance. Launched in September 2023, Baheej is dedicated to transforming Saudi cities into thriving, sustainable destinations that celebrate the Kingdom's rich heritage, in alignment with Saudi Vision 2030. Our approach integrates innovative design and eco-friendly development to create vibrant urban spaces that foster cultural, social, and economic growth. With a focus on sustainable tourism, Baheej's projects are not just



Stefano Lopez
Tourism Projects Director
Baheej Tourism Development Company

built—they are crafted to be discovered, delivering compelling experiences that position Saudi Arabia as a global tourism leader.

What are the tourism projects and where are they located?

While Saudi Arabia boasts numerous mega-projects spearheaded by the PIF, we distinguish ourselves by prioritising



diverse developments, such as the upcoming Yanbu project. This diversity offers investors a spectrum of opportunities, ensuring a dynamic and inclusive investment landscape. And by utilising the existing infrastructure, we are able to seamlessly integrate new landmarks into the fabric of Saudi towns and cities.

Baheej's first project in Yanbu will cover an area of 82,000 square metres and feature three iconic leisure assets, including a Beach Escape, a Diving Centre, and a Lifestyle Hotel. Additionally, the project will feature a fourth component to be announced at a later stage. Each development emphasises sustainability and a deep respect for the local environment, inte-

bodies to highlight Saudi Arabia's unique offerings, utilising tailored campaigns that spotlight each city's distinct identity. Moreover, we will start deploying some activities and experiences that will start creating a buzz and attract visitation from nearby cities.

Who will be target audience?
At Baheej, our target audi-

boosting trade in local industries, arts, and crafts. With a population of 331,916, roughly 17 per cent of the province's total, Yanbu's community plays a crucial role in shaping its identity and economic activities. By involving the community in our planning and operations, we ensure that our projects not only attract foot traffic from around the globe but also sus-

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grating seamlessly into Yanbu's historical and cultural fabric.

When will they be opened?

The complete unveiling of our flagship Yanbu destination is set for the end of 2027. However, some of the components will be up and running before then. This phased approach will allow us to start building momentum and creating a buzz around the destination.

How will you market projects?

Baheej's marketing strategy will focus on leveraging strategic partnerships with local tourism entities, enhancing city aesthetics to position Yanbu and future developments as must-visit destinations on the global tourism map. We will also collaborate with international tourism

Baheej's first project in Yanbu will cover 82k sq mt area and feature three iconic leisure assets, including Beach Escape, Diving Centre, and Lifestyle Hotel

ence includes both the local community and international visitors. We are committed to delivering high-quality, accessible experiences that enhance the visitor journey while fostering inclusivity within the local community. Our efforts focus on attracting travellers in search of unique cultural experiences and local residents.

Our developments are designed to drive economic growth by creating job opportunities and

tainably benefit the local population, positioning Yanbu as a must-visit destination on the global tourism map.

Will you be looking at working with travel agents as you get the projects ready?

Most definitely, in 2025 we will announce our DMC (destination management company) and start deploying some exciting activities, we will need all the help we can get from travel agencies to drive visitors. 

Global sporting events rush to ME

The Middle East region has been on a journey to become a leading destination for sports tourism. From FIFA World Cup in Qatar to Formula 1 in Dubai, the region has been at the forefront to elevate its position as a sporting destination. Infrastructure wise the region has always been ahead of its times. **TRAVELWINGS** speaks to key stakeholders about the sector's growth in the region.



Prem Sagar
Group General Manager, Al Rais Travel
and Shipping Agencies LLC

“Planned infrastructure developments include world-class stadiums, sports complexes, transportation upgrades, and luxury accommodations to support major events like the FIFA World Cup and Formula 1 races. Strategies involve hosting high-profile events and creating fan experiences among other things.”



Iftikhar Hamdani, Area GM –
Northern Emirates, Coral Beach Resort
Sharjah and Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel

“The Middle East is boosting sports tourism with state-of-the-art stadiums, advanced training facilities, luxury accommodations, improved transport networks, and entertainment districts. It is continuously building cutting-edge sports venues, and leveraging extensive global marketing to attract fans.”



Ayman Al Qudwa
General Manager
Falcon Travel

“The Middle East plans infrastructure developments, such as state-of-the-art stadiums, transportation networks, hotels, and entertainment facilities to enhance accessibility and experience for sports tourists. The Middle East employs strategies like hosting high-profile events to attract fans.”



Sameh Muhtadi
CEO
RAK Properties

“RAK Properties announced its partnership with Arabian Warrior to champion obstacle course racing in the region, a sport set to be included in the 2028 Olympic Games. This tie-up establishes RAK Properties as the new Title Partner for the Arabian Warrior Schools National Championship.”



Dileep Nair
General Manager
Al Jaber Travels and Tours Qatar

“Sports tourism has become a major economic driver worldwide, with millions of people travelling annually to attend sporting events, competitions, and training camps. This trend has been particularly evident in football. Indeed, Qatar is a footballing nation and one of the giants in Asian Football arena.”



Lloyd McMillan
Managing Partner
Dune 23

“Permanent structures are being built across the region to accommodate major sports competitions, professional athletes and thousands of spectators. We have seen IPs from the UFC, NBA, WTA, FIFA and Formula 1 come to the region. There are also talks of hosting the Olympic Games.”

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DISCOVER SHARJAH'S winter destinations



Sharjah's winter season is the perfect time to explore its diverse natural and luxury destinations. Serene eco-tourism destinations like Al Hefaiyah Lake in Kalba, surrounded by rugged mountains and breathtaking views, offer a peaceful retreat for visitors, and provide memorable activities, such as hiking trails, maritime competitions, and a dedicated children's play area, making them ideal locations for families and nature lovers.

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Sharjah's Mleiha National Park provides a journey through 200,000 years of history. The site, focused on preserving Sharjah's rich archaeological heritage, offers perfect winter conditions for de-

tion, Kalba Hanging Gardens offers stunning landscapes with cascading waterfalls and lush greenery. Visitors can explore beautifully landscaped terraces, enjoy a scenic train ride, or challenge themselves on mountain climbing routes. For those wanting to connect

For those seeking picturesque vistas and immersive relaxation, Kalba Hanging Gardens offers stunning landscapes with waterfalls & greenery



sert safaris, stargazing, and hiking, making it a top destination for eco-conscious travellers.

For those seeking picturesque vistas and immersive relaxa-

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ideal for families and visitors who want to experience Sharjah's coastline while being close to cultural hubs.

Al Rafisah Dam is another eco-friendly gem within the emirate,

Sharjah's strong commitment to wildlife conservation.

Sharjah's winter events: A season of thrills, art, and light
Sharjah's winter season comes alive with a dynamic lineup of

Closer to Khorfakkan City, Al Heera Beach offers an urban but scenic escape, ideal for visitors who want to experience Sharjah's coastline



where visitors can enjoy several activities, such as kayaking, paddle boating, or hiking. Surrounded by picturesque mountain vistas, Al Rafisah Dam provides an excellent location for those seeking adventure and tranquility. For wildlife enthusiasts, Sharjah Safari Park, the largest safari park outside of Africa, spans 8 kilometres and is home to over 1,000 animals, including rare African species. Winter offers the perfect climate to explore the park's natural wonders and witness

events that cater to a wide range of interests. The F1H2O Grand Prix of Sharjah, held every December, brings high-speed excitement to the waterfront, attracting visitors from around the world to witness thrilling single-passenger powerboat races.

This adrenaline-pumping event is a key highlight of the emirate's winter calendar. For art lovers, the Sharjah Biennial is a cultural cornerstone, showcasing large-scale public installations, performances, and films

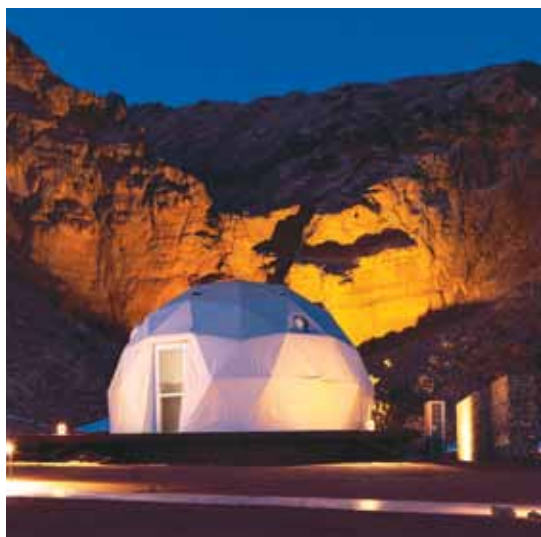
from international artists. Since 1993, the Biennial has transformed Sharjah into a hub for artistic experimentation and dialogue, making it a must-visit for creatives and enthusiasts alike. In February, the Sharjah Light Festival turns the emirate's iconic landmarks into glowing works of art, with vibrant light displays illuminating both historical and modern architecture. The festival blends art, culture, and technology, creating a magical experience for visitors. Meanwhile, the Sharjah International

Book Fair, held in November, is one of the largest book fairs in the world, attracting millions of visitors with its vast selection of titles, workshops, and cultural events. Rounding out the season, the Xposure International Photography Festival provides photography enthusiasts with a platform to engage with world-renowned photographers through exhibitions, workshops, and portfolio reviews, making winter the perfect time to explore Sharjah's vibrant cultural and creative scene. 📖

luxury amenities with cultural exploration. These renowned sustainably focused destinations form part of the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority's (Shurooq) "Sharjah Collection", offering truly unique experiences that blend luxury with nature and heritage.

For beach lovers, Khorfakkan Beach on Sharjah's east coast offers stunning views

of the Arabian Gulf, making it a perfect destination for those looking to enjoy water sports, sunbathing, or a stroll along its golden sands. The cooler winter weather enhances the beach experience, allowing visitors to make the most of outdoor activities, such as parasailing and diving. Closer to Khorfakkan City, Al Heera Beach offers a more urban but pristine and scenic escape,



Leveraging global events for tourism growth

Events drive economic growth by promoting different sectors and creating lasting opportunities. They draw millions of visitors each year, generate income, boost the hospitality and retail industries, and create many jobs. The United Arab Emirates is strategically leveraging mega events to strengthen its economy by positioning itself as a global hub for business, tourism, and innovation.

Abu Dhabi is focusing on building a robust MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) ecosystem in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). By partnering with government agencies, industry associations, and international stakeholders, the aims to create an environment conducive to knowledge exchange, networking, and innovation. This collaborative approach not only enhances the city's economic landscape but also establishes the UAE as a leader in hosting world-class events that contribute significantly to the region's prosperity.

Furthermore, the UAE's strategic location makes it a great place for hosting global events and attracting visitors from around the world. With excellent safety and security, the country is a welcoming hub. The UAE also boasts modern infrastructure,



The United Arab Emirates' strategic location makes it a great place for hosting global events and attracting visitors from around the world

including a cutting-edge international airport, an efficient transportation system, and a range of new hotels and resorts to suit different budgets. This makes it easy for all kinds of international

travellers to visit. Additionally, the UAE's rich cultural heritage offers many attractions, such as museums, art galleries, and historic sites. Visitors can enjoy Emirati hospitality, traditional

music, and local dishes, enriching their overall experience.

The UAE's commitment to hosting global events, such as the Dubai Expo, Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, and GITEX Technology Week showcases its dedication to leveraging such platforms for economic growth and development. The country has strategically leveraged these events to diversify its economy, boost tourism, and establish itself as a leader in the global

events industry. With a thriving calendar of events, such as the International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) Awards, Sharjah International Film Festival and concerts by international stars like Coldplay and Backstreet Boys, the UAE is creating new opportunities for local and international businesses to capitalise on the influx of tourists and trade opportunities.

To maximise the economic potential of these events, the UAE government and private sector work in tandem to promote the country as a must-visit destination during peak tourist seasons. This collaborative effort ensures that tourists not only attend the events but also engage in other leisure and cultural activities during their stay. Initiatives such as heritage tours, shopping festivals, and culinary experiences are designed to keep visitors engaged and spending, fur-

ther supporting the city's economic diversification agenda. Moreover, booking portals and travel platforms play a crucial role in promoting the UAE's mega-events. Recognising the significance of these events in driving tourism, these portals aggressively market them through various channels, offering exclusive deals and packages tailored to international and local travellers alike.



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

HSMAI MEA set to fuel hotel growth

The 7th edition of the HSMAI MEA's commercial strategy conference will be organised from 26-27 November 2024. With the Middle East and Africa thriving with new hospitality projects, it is the perfect time to work out on how to rework on the ROI and ensure that the numbers rise. **Mona Faraj**, Managing Director, HSMAI Middle East & Africa, shares details with **TRAVELTALK**, media partner for the event.



Can you give us a brief overview of HSMAI MEA and the work the organisation does in the region, and the upcoming Annual Commercial Strategy Conference, which is now in its 7th year?

The Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI) is at the forefront of driving intelligent and sustainable hotel revenue growth. We are committed to empowering hotels and their partners with tools, insights, and expertise to elevate their game in sales, marketing, and revenue optimisation.

Our 7th annual Commercial Strategy Conference (CSC), which takes place on 26 and 27 November 2024 at the Conrad Dubai, will be the biggest and boldest yet, with more attendees, an even wider range of topics for discussion and greater connection opportunities than ever



before. The programme features various formats, such as plenary sessions, the leadership hub, our interactive forum, roundtables, masterclasses, trends and insight sessions, as well as our networking lunches and receptions.

A highlight of the conference is the ROC(ing) Lightning Rounds where industry leaders unleash a whirlwind of wisdom under seven minutes. Also, much-anticipated are our Rockstar Awards.

We have eight finalists lined up to present their strategies and achievements on stage in under 2.5 minutes.

What are some of the key topics delegates can look forward to at this year's conference?

We have an action-packed programme addressing some of the industry's most pressing issues and hottest topics, such as AI, technology and innovation, as well

as sustainability, revenue management, F&B, and hotel profitability. This year's event also has a timely focus on talent attraction, retention and loyalty.

Who should attend?

Our attendees come from the region's hospitality sales, marketing, revenue management and distribution community, and include above property and property-level hoteliers, general

managers, marketers, operations, sales, revenue manage-

ment and distribution teams, partners, and educational leaders in hospitality. It's been incredible to see the event grow in size by nearly 400 per cent since its inception seven years ago, which is a great testament to our incredible and supportive hospitality community here in the region.

What is your favourite part/ element of the conference?

I have so many, but if I had to pick one, I would say the closing remarks, given by Jeff Strachan from Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism (DET).

Keynote speakers


John Sanei, Global Futurist, 5x bestselling author, and award-winning Podcast Co-Host is joining the conference for the second time and will be speaking on the topic: "HUMANtra 2.0 Orchestrating Value Creation in the Age of AI".

Sanjeev Loomba, Transformationalist, Author of The Ninth Gear, Thought Leader and Keynote Master Speaker, Valuepreneurship®, will discuss the topic of "The Valuepreneurship Advantage Roadmap to Immediate Impact".

Jason Smith, Vice President Marketing Communications, HSMAI, will take a deep dive into the HSMAI Foundation's State of Talent Report 2024".

Expedia's bold predictions for UAE & beyond

Expedia unveiled Unpack '25, the annual data-driven outlook for what is motivating travellers and where will they go next year. This is Expedia's first Unpack report that includes data from UAE residents following its expansion plans to the region. Expedia analysed first-party travel data, insights from 25,000 travellers, and the latest industry innovation to "unpack" the six noteworthy travel trends for 2025.

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Expedia has identified Detour Destinations, Goods Getaways and Set-Jetting as the leading travel trends for the coming year, with additional trends also expected to impact the way we travel in 2025. "Expedia continuously works to blend technology with travel, making journeys simpler and more enjoyable. The Unpack report is our opportunity to reflect on what travellers are seeking and how our partners are in-



novating," said **Rehan Asad**, Vice President of Global Markets

at Expedia. "From this year's trends, I'm eager to visit some Detour Destinations for my next vacation," Asad added.

Detour Destinations: Next year, travellers from the UAE and beyond, are not only visiting the tried-and-true tourist destinations – they are adding detours. Expedia's destinations of the year are near popular hotspots, making them ideal day trips while also being attractive as


main attractions. In the hunt for the less crowded and less well-known, 49 per cent of UAE travellers say they are likely to visit a Detour Destination on their next trip (See Box 1).

Goods Getaways: TikTok has inspired travellers to take trips in search of craveable (and share-worthy) specialty goods. Whether they are viral skincare products from Korea, butter from France, or Japanese

Box 2: 8 set-jetting locations in 2025

- ❖ Paris inspired by "Emily in Paris"
- ❖ Dubai inspired by "The Real Housewives of Dubai"
- ❖ Japan inspired by "Shogun"
- ❖ Thailand inspired by "The White Lotus"
- ❖ Madrid inspired by "Money Heist (La Casa de Papel)"
- ❖ Egypt inspired by "Tomb Raider"
- ❖ New York inspired by "And Just Like That (Sex and the City)"
- ❖ South Korea inspired by "Squid Game"

candy, travellers are making extra space in their carry-ons for unique treasures, even creating entire trips around getting the goods. When going on vacation, 78 per cent of UAE travellers chose a holiday destination based on getting an item they cannot find locally. They also opted for more organic and homegrown essentials, such as coffee from Costa Rica or sweet honey from New Zealand. While the report also shows that UAE women (60 per cent) seek out small mementos to reminisce on their trips later on.

2025 Set-Jetting Forecast: From binge-worthy streaming shows to thrilling movies, travellers keep turning to the screen for trip inspiration. Three-quarters of UAE travellers say movies, streaming services and TV shows have influenced their travel choices. Documentaries about competitive sports and nature lead the way, with 27 per cent of UAE travellers taking travel inspiration from them. Paris, inspired by Emily in Paris and John Wick: Chapter 4 was a standout for UAE travellers. (See Box 2). 

Box 1: 10 Trending Detour Destinations for 2025

- ❖ Reims, France (detour from Paris)
- ❖ Brescia, Italy (detour from Milan)
- ❖ Cozumel, Mexico (detour from Cancun)
- ❖ Santa Barbara, California, USA (detour from Los Angeles)
- ❖ Waikato, New Zealand (detour from Auckland)
- ❖ Girona, Spain (detour from Barcelona)
- ❖ Fukuoka, Japan (detour from Tokyo)
- ❖ Abu Dhabi, UAE (detour from Dubai)
- ❖ Krabi, Thailand (detour from Phuket)
- ❖ Canmore, Alberta, Canada (detour from Calgary)



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Yas sees 90% hotel occupancy in August

Miral Abu Dhabi announced that Yas Island and Saadiyat Island achieved a remarkable surge in visitors over the summer months, further solidifying their status as must-visit destinations for travellers from across the globe. Whilst Yas Island Abu Dhabi saw 90 per cent hotel occupancy in August, Saadiyat Island Abu Dhabi witnessed 73 per cent hotel occupancy during the month.

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This year, Yas Island, the UAE's leading leisure and entertainment destination, witnessed a significant increase in domestic and international guests, with a remarkable 72 per cent increase in the numbers to Yas Theme Parks from GCC countries, followed by a 24 per cent increase from India. Hotels on Yas Island enjoyed an impressive 83 per cent occupancy rate throughout the summer season with a 29 per cent increase in international hotel guests, and a remarkable 90 per cent hotel occupancy in August 2024 alone compared to the previous year. The combination of world-class attractions, thrilling experiences and exclusive offers made Yas Island the go-to destination for families seeking unforgettable summer adventures.

Saadiyat Island continues to captivate guests with its pristine beaches, luxurious resorts



and cultural experiences. These resorts along the shores of Saadiyat Island continued to draw visitors from around the globe, boasting an impressive occupancy rate of over 65 per cent over summer, 73 per cent occupancy in August 2024. Saadiyat Island's summer hotel occupancy rose by 13 per cent compared to 2023 with international hotel guest arrivals growing by 19 per cent.

Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi, Group CEO of Miral, said: "We

are thrilled with the success Yas Island and Saadiyat Island have achieved this summer. Their remarkable performance has truly elevated this season into one of the most vibrant and high-demand periods in Abu Dhabi's tourism calendar. The impressive occupancy rates and increase in the number of visitors reflect our ongoing efforts to position Yas Island as a global destination for entertainment and leisure, and Saadiyat Island as a leading beach, natural and cultural destination. We

remain committed to creating exceptional experiences for our guests while contributing to Abu Dhabi's economic growth."

In a major achievement for Yas Island, Hollywood superstar Ryan Reynolds has been named the destination's third Chief Island Officer (CIO), bringing his star power and signature charm to further elevate the island's appeal on the global stage. Additionally, for the second year in a row, Yas Island collaborated with the legendary Kuwaiti

group, Miami Band, to release a summer version of their hit song "AACHAW". The track has ignited a wave of popularity across the GCC, captivating audiences and drawing visitors from across the region.

periences, making Yas Island the ultimate hotspot for both tourists and locals in summer.

As the largest mall on Yas Island, Yas Mall offered a vibrant mix of entertainment, shopping

Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi continues to impress and captivate guests with its pristine beaches, luxurious resorts and cultural experiences

Over the summer of 2024, Yas Island has been the epicentre of unforgettable events, further cementing its status as a top-tier entertainment destination. The season kicked off with Yas Theme Parks buzzing with summer festivities, offering family-friendly fun through special events and interactive experiences. Yas Bay Waterfront also lit up with spectacular events, fireworks and vibrant dining ex-

and dining experiences attracting thousands of visitors with exclusive summer promotions, extended shopping hours and engaging family-friendly activities. With its diverse selection of retail outlets, including newly opened stores and unique dining experiences, Yas Mall was a key destination for both tourists and residents seeking a dynamic and refreshing summer experience. 📍

Air seats count up in China & Japan

A strong recovery of outbound air seats availability has been seen Asian markets, especially in China and Japan, shows a report by Mabrian, the global travel intelligence platform.

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Mabrian analysed the top 10 countries with the best international air connectivity during 2024. After China and Japan, Spain ranks third, after the US and the UK, and United Arab Emirates solidifies its position as connectivity hub for Middle East.

According to air connectivity data for 2024, Asia is gaining speed in rebuilding its international air connectivity network, growing strongly during 2024. As Mabrian data shows, China's international air seats availability increases 75.8 per cent compared to last year, reaching over 75.6 million seats capacity throughout 2024, while Japan adds up more than 35 per cent, offering more than 60.8 million seats in outbound flights connecting with foreign markets. Mabrian, part of The Data Appeal Company – Almwave Group, built this ranking based on seats

availability data on flights scheduled in international, one-way, direct flights throughout 2024. The total air seats for these 10 countries amount to 43 per cent of the global outbound air seats during the 12 months analysed.

Five European countries (the UK, Spain, Germany, France, and Italy) are featured in this ranking, all of them growing steadily.

followed by France, increasing international air seats by over 5 per cent since 2023. Notably, Turkey and UAE deserve a particular mention. Turkey grows outbound air seats availability by over 8.9 per cent year on year. "The performance of GCC countries' airports is worth to be monitored: 8 per cent of international air seats availability are concentrated in outbound

Air connectivity data for 2024 shows, Asia is gaining speed in rebuilding its international air connectivity network, growing strongly during 2024

Italy adds over 13.7 per cent air seats in international flights during 2024, and Spain, third on this ranking and key connectivity hub with Latin America, grows over 11.5 per cent annually. Germany holds the fourth position and grows over 8.2 per cent,

flights from, mainly, UAE, as well as from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain, even considering not all these markets grow uniformly," says **Carlos Cendra**, Partner and Director of Marketing and Communications at Mabrian. 📍

BluSmart: sustainable transportation

BluSmart provides an environmentally conscious transport options for those willing to invest in reducing their carbon footprint, says **Amin Aslam**, Group Chief Corporate Affairs Officer.

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Amin Aslam, Group Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, BluSmart, says sustainability is now central to every travel agent and hotel's agenda, with mobility being a key component. BluSmart is integral to these efforts by offering all-electric ride-hailing services that help reduce carbon emissions.

"BluSmart ensures your hotel can offer a limo service or ride-hailing option that offsets emissions and contributes to net-zero goals," said Aslam.

Launched in 2019, BluSmart operates a fleet of 7,500 fully electric vehicles across India and the United Arab Emirates, providing a luxury, sustainable travel alternative. "Our electric fleet is a testament to our commitment to sustainability," Aslam said. BluSmart also emphasises rider safety,



Amin Aslam
Group Chief Corporate Affairs Officer
BluSmart

Aslam explained BluSmart's comprehensive approach, including dedicated driver partners and proprietary EV infrastructure.

"Our 5,000 chargers are exclusively allocated to BluSmart, ensuring our fleet is always charged and ready for the next ride," he said. Additionally, the app tracks carbon savings for each ride, educating users on their environmental impact. BluSmart's B2B partnerships

BluSmart ensures that your hotel can offer a limo service or ride-hailing option that offsets emissions and contributes to net-zero goals

cleanliness, and punctuality, catering to the demand for premium services while reducing pollution in cities with air quality concerns.

with travel agents, hotels, and other partners support the UAE's sustainability goals, with Aslam teasing future announcements in this space. 📍

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SCTDA unveils 'sustainability' tool

Furthering its commitment to sustainable tourism, the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) has unveiled the Sustainable Tourism AI Assistant, an innovative virtual assistant designed to empower travellers, businesses, and institutions to make informed eco-friendly decisions. The forward-thinking tool was launched at GITEX Global, one of the world's largest and most influential tech exhibitions.

Launched at GITEX Global, one of the world's largest and most influential tech exhibitions, this forward-thinking initiative highlights Sharjah's dedication to environmental preservation while reinforcing its position as a leader in sustainable tourism. Supporting more than 40 languages, it offers tailored insights that promote responsible travel choices and support environmental stewardship on a global scale.



HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman
SCTDA

Commenting on the project, His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, SCTDA, stated: "Sharjah, through its practices, emphasises the importance of sustainability as a key pillar of its developmental operations, particularly in the tourism sector, which is one of the most vibrant sectors contributing to national economy. Amid global challenges related to

climate change, the 'Sustainable Tourism Smart Assistant' comes as a practical model for applying global sustainable development goals, aligning with the UN World Tourism Organisation's initiative 'Towards a Statistical Framework for Measuring Sustainability'. The application provides comprehensive information for travellers, tourists, and stakeholders to adopt the best sustainable

travel practices, enabling them to make informed decisions that protect the environment and reduce the ecological footprint." He added: "This project is an advanced technological tool that integrates the concept of sustainable tourism into daily practices. Its objectives are an integral part

of the emirate's status as a global sustainable tourism destination."

The Sustainable Tourism AI Assistant is designed to bridge the knowledge gap in sustainable practices. It draws on a vast, expert-curated global database compiled from leading sustain-



Sharjah, through its green practices, emphasises the importance of sustainability as a key pillar of its developmental operations

of Sharjah's identity, and we are confident that it will contribute to enhancing cooperation between the public and private sectors, attracting sustainable investments, and encouraging civil society to adopt environmentally friendly behaviours, thereby reinforcing

ability experts, offering innovative, eco-friendly solutions, allowing users to access strategies and practices that contribute to environmental protection and promote sustainable tourism. The assistant also empowers decision-makers in the sector

to make well-informed, scientifically based choices with an emphasis on sustainability.

encouraging ongoing user learning and improvement.

A key feature of the project is its crowdsourcing capability, which acts as a knowledge-sharing hub. This enables industry partners and individuals to upload their solutions and experiences, allowing all users to benefit from shared success stories. Each contribution is vetted to ensure its credibility and effectiveness,

The initiative also supports more than 40 languages to broaden its reach, making it a valuable tool for both tourists and residents. It offers tailored solutions that cater to the specific needs of each user, providing clear answers on a wide range of sustainability topics, such as energy efficiency, waste management, and sustainable mobility. 📲

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Cruise heavily reliant on travel partners

The cruise industry has shown a remarkable resilience globally, and the Middle East is no exception. As we move further into 2024, the expectations for the cruise industry in the region are high. In an interview with **TT Bureau**, **Ashok Kumar**, Managing Director, Cruise Master, shares his views on passenger numbers, new source markets, and diversified travel experiences.

TT Bureau

Emerging source markets and changing passenger demographics

Historically, the Middle East cruise industry catered to affluent seniors looking for leisurely vacations, but recent years have seen a surge in interest from younger travellers. Millennials and Gen Z, often drawn to immersive and experiential travel, are now key demographics for cruise lines. This shift can be attributed to several factors; the evolution of cruise experiences (such as themed cruises and adventure-based itineraries), the rise of social media, and the growing perception of cruises as fun, social, and affordable ways to explore multiple destinations.

Another emerging trend is the increasing participation of passengers from new source markets.



Ashok Kumar
Managing Director
Cruise Master

While the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar continue to provide strong customer bases, we are seeing growth from India, the wider GCC, and even some European countries.

Travel agents and the seasonal nature of cruises in the Middle East

The cruise sector remains heavily reliant on travel agents for

business in the Middle East, particularly as cruises are seen as a high involvement purchase that benefits from expert advice. In this region, the industry is seasonal, with most cruises operating from November to

agents to push cruise products varies. While some agents focus heavily on cruises and actively seek out partnerships with cruise lines, others tend to focus on more traditional land-based vacations. For cruises to



Travel agents play a pivotal role in promoting these seasonal offerings, often taking extra initiatives, such as creating personalised itineraries

March when the weather is more favourable. Travel agents play a pivotal role in promoting these seasonal offerings, often taking extra initiatives, such as creating personalised itineraries and running exclusive promotions to boost sales during the peak season. However, despite their efforts, the willingness of travel

agents to push cruise products varies. While some agents focus heavily on cruises and actively seek out partnerships with cruise lines, others tend to focus on more traditional land-based vacations. For cruises to gain further traction, there may be a need for additional training and education to demystify the cruise experience for both agents and their customers.

Incentive schemes in the cruise industry

Incentive schemes in the cruise industry are unique and tailored

to encourage agents to sell more cruise packages. Unlike other industries, where incentives might focus solely on financial bonuses, the cruise sector offers a mix of rewards. These include familiarisation trips (fam trips) and bonus commissions.

Dubai and regional growth

Dubai continues to be a major player in the cruise industry, with its two world-class cruise terminals acting as home ports for numerous international cruise lines. Passenger numbers have been on the rise, with Dubai welcoming around 900,000 cruise passen-

gers in recent years. This growth has been supported by the city's exceptional infrastructure, robust marketing campaigns, and its appeal as a global tourism hub.

Cruise's future in the ME

The cruise industry in the Middle East is poised for significant growth over the next five to 10 years. As Saudi Arabia opens its doors to international tourism, we expect to see more cruise lines establishing home ports there. Qatar and Oman, too, are likely to expand their presence in the cruise market as they continue to develop their tourism sectors. **D**

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RezLive.com enters Indonesia

RezLive.com announced its expansion into the Indonesian market through a strategic partnership with PT Pantravel as its official GSA. This collaboration is set to deliver enhanced services to travel partners.

TT Bureau

The partnership with Pantravel aims to empower Indonesian travel agents with seamless access to over 500,000+ hotel rooms, 45,000+ sightseeing options, and 5,000+ transfer services across more than 900 global locations. Agents will also be able to book cruises instantly.

Key features for Indonesian travel agents:

- ❖ **RezRewards:** Incentivising travel agents with rewards for booking more

- ❖ **Direct Hotel Connectivity:** Access to the best available rates from leading hotel chains



Jaal Shah
Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group

- ❖ **Flexible Cancellation Policies:** Ensuring customer satisfaction with adaptable booking terms

- ❖ **Same-Day Check-In:** Flexibility for last-minute bookings

- ❖ **Zero Payment Gateway Charges:** Cost-saving benefits

RezLive.com's robust platform combines global inventory with local expertise, enabling agents to deliver superior travel solutions to their clients

for travel partners

- ❖ **24/7 Support:** Comprehensive customer service, including live chat and ticketing options

Commenting on the partnership, **Jaal Shah**, Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group, said, "We are excited to offer Indonesian travel agents an easier, faster, and more profitable way to manage their clients' bookings through our collaboration with PT Pantravel. Our local presence in Indonesia underlines our commitment to expanding in key markets while delivering exceptional value to our travel partners." **Djalu Winarno**, Managing Director, Pantravel, said, "Pantravel is honoured to be appointed as RezLive.com's GSA in Indonesia and proud to partner with one of the leading B2B global travel wholesalers. We are committed to enhancing RezLive.com's presence and reach in the Indonesian B2B market." **D**




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Travel world assembles @WTM

World Travel Market London (WTM London) returns with new offerings, bringing the world on one platform. The United Kingdom is one of the most important markets for those in the GCC, as they consider it their second home and it goes vice versa. The most important impact was that now with its easier ETA, travel between GCC and UK is much easier. Experts share their views on the event with .



Jaal Shah
Managing Director
Travel Designer Group

“WTM and the UK market are important for us, as they offer excellent opportunities to engage with global travel professionals. We will be participating this year with the aim of strengthening our partnerships and exploring new business opportunities. At WTM, we are excited to highlight our new offerings.”



Noushad Abdulrahim
Director - Sales and Marketing,
Millennium Mirdif

“WTM and the UK market are significant for Millennium Place Mirdif’s business. As one of the largest travel trade exhibitions, WTM connects the hotel with key industry partners, helping to drive awareness and bookings. The UK market, known for both leisure and business travellers, is essential for the hotel’s global biz.”



Sarfaraz Ahmed Siddique
Head of Holidays & MICE
Piya Travel

“WTM is an important event for us as it serves as a key platform for connecting with partners, suppliers, and customers across the globe. It is important because of its strong outbound travel base. Our expectations are to further solidify our relationships with existing partners and explore new opportunities.”



Ahmed Hassib
CEO
Gewan Hotels and Resorts

“At WTM 2024, Gewan Hotels & Resorts will exhibit to strengthen international partnerships and promote our diverse portfolio. We will showcase luxury staycation packages, wellness retreats, bespoke dining options, and MICE capabilities, highlighting our commitment to eco-friendly initiatives.”



Iftikhar Hamdani, Area GM
- Northern Emirates, Bahi Ajman
Palace & Coral Beach Resort Sharjah

“Every year, we look forward to the event that brings the world together. We are participating in the WTM 2024. The WTM is a significant event for us and for those engaged in the travel and tourism industry, as it brings together key stakeholders from around the world. Participation in the event can be highly fruitful.”



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

“The World Travel Market serves as a dynamic platform for us to showcase Ajman Tourism’s unique offerings, rich cultural heritage, as well as the emirate’s burgeoning reputation as a leading tourist destination in the UAE. This endeavour is vital to bolstering Ajman’s global stature.”

Compiled by TT Bureau





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Sun Siyam Iru Fushi signs Glasgow pact

Sun Siyam Iru Fushi, a 5-star beach resort in the Maldives, announces its unwavering commitment to sustainability by becoming a signatory of the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism. This significant step aligns Sun Siyam Iru Fushi with global efforts to reduce carbon emissions and foster sustainable tourism practices, reinforcing the resort's dedication to responsible and eco-friendly operations.

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The Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism unites the travel and tourism sector behind a standard set of pathways to accelerate climate action. By joining this initiative, Sun Siyam Iru Fushi commits to reduce its carbon emissions by at least 50 per cent over the next decade and achieve Net Zero emissions as soon as possible, and certainly before 2050.

This commitment is part of the resort's broader sustainability strategy under the resort-wide Sun Siyam Cares programme. This programme prioritises environmental stewardship, community support, and the preservation of the Maldives' natural beauty and will guide the resort's efforts to meet climate action targets.

As a signatory of the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism, Sun Siyam Iru

Fushi commits to aligning its actions with the latest scientific recommendations to ensure a global temperature rise of no more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels by 2100. This includes delivering or updating climate action plans within 12 months, aligning

Goals: Cut emissions in half by 2030 and achieve Net Zero before 2050, in line with global climate targets.

❖ **Develop Climate Action Plans:** Deliver or update climate action plans within 12 months, aligning with the declaration's



The commitment is part of Sun Siyam Iru Fushi's broader sustainability strategy under the resort-wide Sun Siyam Cares programme

plans with the declaration's five pathways, reporting publicly annually, and working collaboratively to share good practices and solutions.

Key commitments by Sun Siyam Iru Fushi:
❖ **Support Global Climate**

five pathways: Measure, Decarbonise, Regenerate, Collaborate, and Finance.

❖ **Annual Reporting:** Annually report progress against interim and long-term targets publicly, ensuring transparency and accountability.

❖ **Collaborative Spirit:** Share best practices, solutions, and insights with industry peers, fostering a collaborative approach to achieving global sustainability goals.

The Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism combines the latest research and global expertise to galvanise climate action. Hosted within the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme's website, it is sup-

ported by Recommended Actions for tourism stakeholders worldwide to consider as part of their action planning. The declaration emphasises that a just transition to Net Zero before 2050 will only be possible if tourism's recovery accelerates the adoption of sustainable consumption and production, redefining future success to consider the regeneration of ecosystems, biodiversity, and communities. 🌱



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1500 industry leaders meet at Future

Leaders from all major brands attended the Future Hospitality Summit World 2024 in Dubai. Some of the key areas in focus included the branded residences, a progressive sector at present, followed by sustainability and innovation, which is paving the way for new industry norms. The summit attracted over 1500 industry leaders from across the world, marking it as one of the largest hospitality gatherings.



Hospitality Summit World in Dubai



Gewan takes big strides in hospitality

As a growing brand in the Middle Eastern hospitality landscape, Gewan Hotels & Resorts is taking big strides by delivering exceptional experiences across its seven distinct properties. In an exclusive Q&A session with **TRAVEL TALK**, **Ahmed Hassib**, Chief Executive Officer, Gewan Hotels & Resorts, shares inside view of their offerings, partnerships, and strategic approach to the travel trade.

TT Bureau

Gewan Hotels & Resorts operates a portfolio of seven diverse properties spread across the UAE, catering to a wide range of travellers. The group includes both traditional hotels and serviced apartments, offering a combined total of 1,326 keys. This collection includes 350 fully equipped apartments, designed to provide modern comforts and flexibility for long-term stays or vacationers seeking a home-away-from-home experience. Each property has been carefully selected for its strategic location, ensuring guests have access to both leisure and business hubs in cities,



Ahmed Hassib
Chief Executive Officer
Gewan Hotels & Resorts

competitive pricing makes this a popular option.

Royal M Hotel Abu Dhabi: A luxury offering in the heart of the UAE capital, this hotel is known



Gewan Hotels & Resorts includes both traditional hotels and serviced apartments, offering visitors a combined total of 1,326 keys

such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Fujairah, as well as Al Aqah.

Can you share details about the individual properties and their unique selling points?

MD Hotel: Located in a prime urban setting, MD Hotel combines convenience with competitive pricing, attracting both business travellers and vacationers.

HE Hotel Apartments: These modern, fully furnished apartments offer a seamless blend of comfort and practicality, perfect for long-term guests or those looking for more space. Again,

for its infinity pool, signature dining experiences, and lavish rooms. Its central location makes it ideal for both leisure and business travellers.

Royal M Hotel Fujairah: A key draw for this hotel is its strategic location next to Fujairah Mall and close proximity to the airport, making it a convenient choice for transit travellers or those exploring the east coast.

Royal M Hotel & Resort Al Aqah Beach: With stunning views of Snoopy Island, this property boasts luxurious rooms



and exclusive beachfront access, making it a haven for beach lovers and those looking for a scenic retreat.

Private Beach Villas: This offers a secluded getaway with villas featuring private pools and a variety of high-end dining op-

tions, perfect for those seeking a more intimate, exclusive stay.

Across all the seven properties, guests can expect excellent service, modern amenities, and excellent value for money.

How important is your relationship with the travel trade? Do they bring in a significant amount of business, and how do you support them?

The travel trade is vital to our success, as we collaborate with

travel agencies, tour operators, and OTAs to promote our seven properties. These partnerships significantly boost our international bookings, with a large percentage of guests coming through these channels. To support our partners, we provide marketing materials, and training, and participate in industry events like travel expos, enhancing their ability to confidently offer our accommodations. We also monitor performance and feedback to continuously improve our offerings and meet the evolving needs of both agents and their clients.

What key offerings do you focus on across your properties?

At Gewan Hotels & Resorts, we focus on staycations and daycations for local residents, diverse dining experiences, and wellness retreats at our beach-access properties. These offerings cater to both leisure and business travellers, providing a holistic experience that meets a wide range of guest needs and preferences.

Could you share the source markets you are targeting for 2025 and beyond?

We target key source markets to expand our reach, focusing on Europe (especially Germany, France, and the UK), Asia (notably India and China), CIS countries, and the GCC. Our diversified approach, strong travel trade partnerships, and commitment to guest experiences position us for continued growth in the competitive hospitality sector. 📈



(Advertorial)

90% occupancy in Sharjah, Ajman: Hamdani

Ifthikhar Hamdani, Area General Manager – Northern Emirates, Coral Beach Resort Sharjah and Bahi Ajman Place Hotel, in an interview with **TRAVALTALK**, shares that this year has been quite successful in terms of occupancy for their properties in Sharjah and Ajman. This uptick in occupancy also pushed the revenue higher while also attracting new source markets.

TT Bureau

How has been this year for the two properties in terms of revenue?

This year has been exceptionally rewarding for both Coral Beach Resort Sharjah and Bahi Ajman Place Hotel. We are thrilled to report a remarkable occupancy rate of 96 per cent at Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, coupled with a 15 per cent increase in Total Revenue Per Available Room (TrevPar) compared to last year. Similarly, Bahi Ajman Palace has also performed admirably with a 95 per cent occupancy rate and a commendable 5 per cent growth in TrevPar, building on last year's record-breaking financial achievements. These results reflect our commitment to excellence and our ability to adapt to the evolving market.

What are the key source markets this year?

This year, our key source markets remain strong, particularly



Ifthikhar Hamdani
Area General Manager – Northern Emirates, Coral Beach Resort Sharjah and Bahi Ajman Place Hotel

in the CIS and Russian regions, which continue to be our primary feeder market with no competition from other regions. We are observing a notable increase in interest from Belarus, Germany, and the UK, especially with sports teams, as we are hosting international cricket and football teams globally. We are also actively working to penetrate the DACH market, aiming not only to secure bookings from Germany but also to expand our reach into

other German-speaking countries as well.

Could you share some of the new initiatives towards sustainability?

Coral Beach Resort Sharjah and Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel are excited to announce new initiatives towards sustainability that aim at addressing critical environmental challenges: Air-O-Water Technology converts humidity from the air into clean, drinkable water at Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel. Our second initiative involves the deployment of state-of-the-art Compost Machine designed to convert organic waste into nutrient-rich compost. Both initiatives are designed to empower communities by enhancing access to resources and promoting responsible waste management.

Do you have a significant contribution from agents or corporate bookers? If so, could you share their importance.



Coral Beach Resort Sharjah and Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel are committed to collaborating with travel partners to enhance the overall travel experience

Coral Beach Resort Sharjah and Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel recognises the vital role that travel

agents, and corporate bookers play in the travel and tourism industry. Their contributions are in-

strumental in driving revenue, enhancing guest experiences, and shaping market trends, making them invaluable partners in our business network. As we move forward in the evolving travel landscape, Coral Beach Resort Sharjah and Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel are committed to collaborating with travel agents and corporate bookers to enhance the overall travel experience. 📌

Flyadeal tops ME with on-time flights

Flyadeal (F3), a newcomer to the Middle East & Africa region's top rankings, also emerges as the leading airlines with an On-time Performance (OTP) of 93.86% in September, about 9-point increase from August, according to the latest On-Time Performance Monthly Report by Cirium. Overall, On-time Performance for airlines and airports in the region varied significantly but increased their OTP by 3-15 %.

TT Bureau

The latest On-Time Performance Monthly Report by Cirium Flight reveals that cancellations in the Middle East & Africa region increased by 22 per cent in September, with a total of 2,141 flights cancelled during the month compared to 1,748 in August. On-time Performance (OTP) for airlines and airports in the region varied

significantly, but increased their OTP by 3-15 per cent.

Flyadeal (F3), a newcomer to the region's top rankings, is also the new leader this month with an impressive OTP of 93.86 per cent. This was a near 9-point increase from August's performance of 85.31 per cent. Jeddah King Abdulaziz International Airport (JED), a main hub for Flyadeal, ended the month with

an OTP of 86.21 per cent, an improvement of more than 4 points compared to August's OTP of 81.59 per cent.

Safair (FA) closely followed in second place with a notable OTP of 93.24 per cent, slightly down from 93.49 per cent in August.

With a minor decrease from August's performance, O.R. Tambo International Airport (JNB), a



74.79 per cent. Bahrain International Airport (BAH), a main hub for Gulf Air, turned in an OTP of 87.39 per cent. Similarly, the airport improved by almost 14 points from the previous month's OTP of 73.61 per cent. Royal Jordanian (RJ) concluded the month in fifth place with an OTP of 89.45 per cent, more than 5-point improvement over August's OTP of 84.31 per cent. Queen Alia International

hub for Safair, ended the month with an OTP of 86.98 per cent.

Safair (FA) closely followed in second place with a notable OTP of 93.24% in September, slightly down from 93.49% in August

Oman Air (WY) came in the third-place position and turned in an OTP of 93.02 per cent, a near 4-point increase from 89.26 per cent last month. Muscat International Airport (MCT), the main hub for Oman Air, achieved an OTP of 90.73 per cent, an increase of more than 3 points compared to August's OTP of 87.46 per cent.

Gulf Air (GF) took the fourth-place position with an OTP of 89.77 per cent, an astonishing increase of nearly 15 points over August's performance of

Airport (AMM), the main hub for the airline, delivered an OTP of 83.92 per cent, which was a 6-point increase from 77.91 per cent in August. 📌

The most on-time Middle East & Africa Airlines						
	On-Time Ranking	On-Time Arrival	Tracked Flights	Completion Factor	Total Flights	Summary of Top Performers
Flyadeal (F3)	1	93.86%	96.99%	100.00%	4,615	Total On-Time Arrivals 88.27%
Safair (FA)	2	93.24%	99.24%	99.83%	4,770	
Oman Air (WY)	3	93.02%	99.13%	100.00%	2,876	
Gulf Air (GF)	4	89.77%	81.59%	99.54%	4,564	
Royal Jordanian (RJ)	5	89.45%	99.38%	98.70%	2,622	Total Tracked Flights 97.10%
Saudia (SV)	6	89.40%	98.20%	99.90%	15,518	
Kuwait Airways (KU)	7	89.01%	96.93%	99.88%	2,417	
Qatar Airways (QR)	8	87.35%	99.94%	99.70%	16,241	Total Flights 75,386
Emirates (EK)	9	79.51%	99.85%	99.78%	14,291	
Ethiopian Airways (ET)	10	78.10%	99.70%	99.29%	7,472	

Türkiye to ease visa for expats in UAE

Turkish Airlines and Türkiye Tourism recently organised a special travel trade roadshow in Dubai, where it was announced that they will soon be looking at easing the visa process for expats living in the UAE. The Consul General announced that their focus for the year is to promote the hidden gems of Türkiye to the residents and locals in the UAE and they will be looking at promoting new areas.



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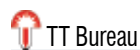


Hospitality Partner



Ancillaries: Adding value for travellers

A report from IdeaWorksCompany and CarTrawler says airlines made \$33.3 billion from baggage fees in 2023, a 15% increase from 2022. The fees were mostly for checking baggage, as well as added costs for heavy bags and larger carry-ons. Experts suggest the airline industry should be looking at pushing different types of ancillaries that can add value for travellers, whilst generating revenues for the industry.



Recently members of the European Union parliament called for the abolition of hand luggage fees and a similar motion is under consideration in the UK, whilst pressure on 'junk fees' has mounted in the US too. With such calls in many markets around the world perhaps the airline industry should be looking at pushing different types of ancillaries that can add value for travellers, whilst still generating revenues for the industry.

Eugene Ko, Director - Marketing and Communications, Phocuswright, says that the ancillary landscape is expanding, creating a growing opportunity for airlines to become retailers. "Higher airfares and steady demand have pushed passenger revenue up

of airline gross bookings, not only enhancing the customer experience but also catering to individual needs. Airlines are also touting results from new merchandising capabilities that show increased revenue from premium seating, retailing and expanded loyalty from ancillaries."

However, **Barry Klipp**, CEO, InterLnkd, the travel industry's intelligent shopping mall partner, believes this shift towards next-generation ancillaries is long overdue. "With inflation squeezing consumers and airlines scrambling to fill seats, yields are plummeting. Combine this with weaker currencies, looming debt, and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, and we have a perfect storm. To weather it, airlines must be prepared to go beyond traditional add-ons like car hire



Eugene Ko
Director - Marketing and Communications, Phocuswright



Barry Klipp
CEO
InterLnkd



Sergio Mendoza
Co-Founder and CEO
Airm guru



Jason Guan
GM Flight Business Unit
DidaTravel

individual customer preferences, says **Sergio Mendoza**, Co-Founder and CEO, Airm guru, a fare management, pricing intelligence, automation, and optimisation SaaS for airlines. "While many airlines are unbundling the air ticket, that usually means shifting part of the revenue from

Jason Guan, General Manager, Flight Business Unit, DidaTravel, agrees that ancillaries are a great opportunity to advance personalisation, but thinks there is an opportunity for airlines to think beyond the flight experience. "Traditionally, ancillaries focused on the 'en route' experience," he

passengers have ample idle time, airlines can offer a platform for planning and organising their activities. This not only enhances the travel experience but also provides a valuable revenue stream for airlines by facilitating bookings of local experiences and events. Furthermore, being able to secure these activities in advance is crucial, as it allows travellers to avoid wasting time at their destination searching for bookings, while also mitigating the risk of sold-out tours or events."

Sustainability could be another ancillary focus area. **Christian Sabbagh**, CEO, Travelsoft, explains: "The topic of carbon offsetting may be hotly debated, but sustainability-focused ancillaries represent a growing opportunity for airlines – in meeting carbon goals, strengthening brand image, and generating additional business. Travellers today are

Cloudbeds, the innovative leader in hospitality management technology, sees an opportunity to link the air and hotel experience. "What if your luggage could arrive at a hotel before you do?" says **Adam Harris**, CEO and Co-Founder, Cloudbeds. "Technology exists that can integrate third party innovators with airline booking systems, allowing passengers to book secure luggage delivery to their final destination. Imagine the convenience – travellers are no longer weighed down by luggage, which would transform the air travel experience. Airlines could also benefit by offering a unique value proposition and potentially generating revenue through partnerships with luggage delivery services and hotels," Harris adds.

But the ability to add and drop extra ancillaries depending on current trends depends heavily on having the right technology



Manuel Núñez
CEO and Founder
Servantrip



Christian Sabbagh
CEO
Travelsoft



Adam Harris
CEO and Co-Founder
Cloudbeds



Maxim Sevastianov
CEO
Trava

by 13 per cent to an impressive \$198.3 billion in 2023, according to our research. With strong leisure demand boosting airline performance, especially on long-haul and premium routes, airlines have a golden opportunity to capture additional non-ticket revenue opportunities. We are seeing ancillaries, such as extra legroom and early boarding, make up a greater percentage

and travel insurance to boost their bottom line. The smartest airlines are already tapping into their customers' lifestyles, such as fashion and beauty purchases, to drive ancillary revenues and build loyalty," says Klipp.

To fully harness the power of ancillaries, however, airlines must dismantle the traditional fare package and rebuild it around

the ticket itself to ancillary sales, the real opportunity lies in leveraging generative AI to dynamically rebundle these components, along with other ancillaries from a potentially limitless list of possibilities. By tailoring offers to each customer's needs and pricing them accordingly, airlines can unlock substantial demand and offer a better shopping experience," suggests Mendoza.

explains. "Now, we are seeing a surge in popularity around personalised post-booking add-ons. Imagine booking your flight and then seamlessly adding on local must-do experiences or exclusive access to events – all within the airline's booking platform. Airlines could partner with local activity providers, creating curated destination experiences for passengers. This caters to the growing desire for unique and authentic travel, while airlines can earn commission on each add-on booked," he adds.

Manuel Núñez, CEO and Founder, Servantrip, the world's leading B2B tours, activities, and transfer platform, points out a significant opportunity in the realm of on-board experiences. "The inflight environment presents a unique chance for passengers to discover and book destination activities and tickets before arriving. On long-haul flights, where

Higher airfares and steady demand have pushed passenger revenue up by 13% to an impressive \$198.3 billion in 2023, finds a research by Phocuswright

increasingly environmentally conscious, and airlines are recognising the value of offering solutions that align with this growing sentiment. Personalised carbon offsetting, for example, allows passengers to calculate their specific flight's carbon footprint and contribute directly to verified offset projects. This empowers travellers, potentially assisted by concerned intermediaries like tour operators and travel agencies, to reduce their environmental impact while airlines demonstrate their commitment to sustainability."

in place. "Airlines typically can be quite limited by old, siloed technology," comments **Maxim Sevastianov**, CEO, Trava, whose technology revolutionises post-booking processes for online travel sellers. "Although costly to upgrade, the growing significance of ancillary revenue could mean that now is the time to make that investment in smart, modern retailing technology. Systems need to be flexible, adaptable and data-driven, otherwise airlines will remain fairly limited in the products they are able to offer travellers." 📌



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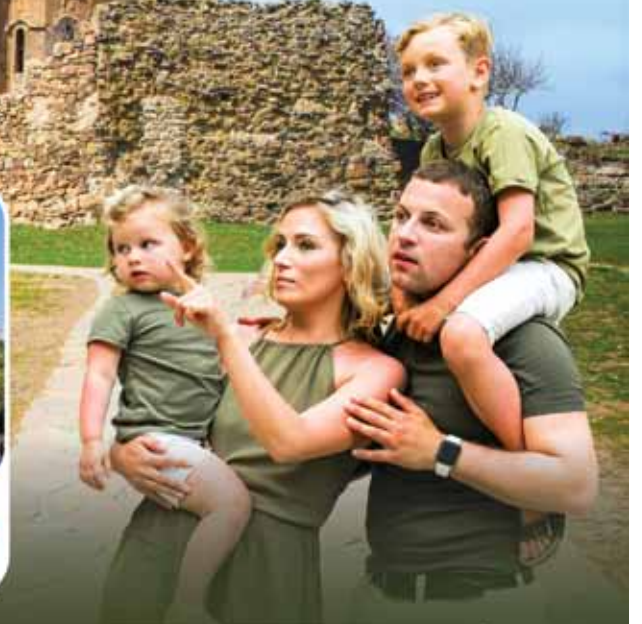
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MOVEMENTS

RX Dubai

RX, organisers of Arabian Travel Market (ATM), has appointed **HASSAN MERCHANT** as Marketing Manager for the leading international travel trade show. In his new role, Merchant will report to Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, managing the development and implementation of the marketing strategy for the Dubai-based exhibition, which welcomed a record 47,000 attendees last year. Merchant will develop and manage the marketing strategy for ATM across multiple channels, including digital, public relations and event management. He will also oversee all exhibitor marketing initiatives for the event and collaborate with a diverse group of stakeholders from government organisations to industry associations.



KERZNER INTERNATIONAL Dubai

Kerzner International appoints **THOMAS PERUZZO** as Cluster General Manager for One&Only One Za'abeel and SIRO One Za'abeel. A seasoned leader with over two decades of luxury hospitality experience, Peruzzo will oversee the strategic development and daily operations of both properties, ensuring they continue to deliver transformative guest experiences that define their status as standout destinations in Dubai. Peruzzo brings an impressive breadth of international expertise, having held senior positions at prestigious properties across Europe and the Middle East. Most recently, he served as Area General Manager for Armani Hotels & Resorts in Dubai and Milan, where he played an instrumental role in steering Armani Hotel Dubai to new heights of operational excellence, while also supporting the development of the upcoming Armani Hotel Diriyah Gate in Saudi Arabia.



ROTANA Dubai and Northern Emirates

Rotana promotes **TIMUR ILGAZ** to the position of Area General Manager - Dubai and Northern Emirates. In his new role, Ilgaz will oversee the operations of Rotana's properties in Dubai and the Northern Emirates, with a focus on commercial growth and enhancing operational excellence, while continuing in his current role as Cluster General Manager for Arjaan Dubai Media City, Centro Barsha, and Damac Hills 2 Hotel - Edge by Rotana. Ilgaz's promotion comes as a strategic move aligned with Rotana's ambitious growth plans in these principal markets. With over 38 years of hospitality experience, including 26 years in leadership positions at properties in Turkey, Canada, the Czech Republic, and Kazakhstan, Ilgaz brings an unparalleled level of expertise and insight to his new role.



WALDORF ASTORIA Kuwait

Waldorf Astoria Kuwait has appointed **SALEH BATAINEH** as the General Manager. With over 25 years of experience in the luxury hospitality industry, Bataineh brings a wealth of knowledge and a proven track record of success to his new role. Bataineh's career has spanned multiple global markets, including Jordan, Canada, the UAE, Egypt, Qatar, and China. He has consistently delivered operational excellence and outstanding guest experiences in his roles. His leadership style is grounded in a passion for service and a commitment to fostering a culture of integrity, care, and high standards. Before joining Waldorf Astoria Kuwait, Bataineh was General Manager of Sharq Village & Spa in Doha, where his tenure was marked by significant revenue growth, enhanced guest satisfaction, and numerous accolades.



ROYALJET Abu Dhabi

RoyalJet has appointed **SHAFIUL SYED** as the Chief Executive. Syed's areas of focus will be safety, customer service and strategy development. Syed comes with more than three and a half decades of aviation management experience, across many departments and functions. He has led major brand organisations through tough business and culture change with his inspired and passionate leadership, as well as an uncompromising commitment to safety, strategy and the customer as key success factors. Syed has worked across various locations in the world, specialising in starting-up new airlines, turning them around, or providing strategic management. Under his leadership, Aero FlightOps UK received one of the first Air Operator Certificates (AOC) to be awarded by the UK CAA post Brexit.



EMIRATES Dubai

KHALID AL ZAROONI, currently working as Manager - Kuwait and Iraq at Emirates Airline, has been appointed as Vice President - Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the airline. An accomplished Country Manager with over 18 years of distinguished performance at Emirates Airlines, Zarooni will manage six different teams, comprising Sales, Reservations, Finance & Admin, Airport, Cargo, and Engineering. He has a solid track record for increasing market share, revenue, outperforming competition, driving profit improvements and cost reduction initiatives. He is a proactive leader with the ability to lead diverse and multicultural teams. He contributed towards the growth for some of the airline's challenging hubs through a combination of initiatives, client relationships, and strong leadership.



Promoting Qatar as key travel hub

► Contd. from page 1

opportunities. We're expecting a total of 12,000 visitors which is a new attendance record for the event, along with local and international media personnel covering the event.

Can you share details about the total area and expected business this year?

QTM 2024 will span 15,000 square meters, marking a

significant milestone by doubling the size of last year's event. This expansion reflects Qatar's growing prominence as a global tourism hub and addresses the rising demand for international travel in the region. With 300 hosted buyers expected, exhibitors will benefit from numerous business opportunities and the potential for substantial business-to-business deals,



enhancing international connections and supporting the local tourism sector.

What are the key expectations for QTM 2024?

We have ambitious expectations from this year's event. Our goal is to exceed previous participation and business deal records, firmly establishing Qatar as a premier tourism hub aligned with the National Vision 2030. Important

The area of Qatar Travel Mart 2024 will span over 15,000 square meters, marking a significant milestone by doubling the size of last year's event

partnerships with organisations like Visit Qatar and Katara Hospitality will play a vital role in showcasing Qatar's unique offerings.

The event will emphasize the growing demand for both cultural and luxury tourism, further solidifying

Qatar's status as a top travel destination.

Any other important details or updates you want to share?

QTM 2024 aligns with Qatar's National Vision 2030, which prioritises economic diversification and sustainable development. Tourism is central to this vision, and Qatar is already seeing results, with 2.956 million visitors in the first seven months of 2024, representing a 26.2 per cent growth compared to last year. The event has established itself as a premier platform for innovation and business development within the travel and tourism sector. We are fostering strategic partnerships, offering a robust hosted buyers programme, facilitating business-to-business (B2B) meetings, and hosting engaging conferences that encourage collaboration and drive industry growth. 📩



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is printed on behalf of
Durga Das Publications (Middle East) FZE
at Modest Print Pack Pvt. Ltd.,
C-52, DDA Sheds Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I,
New Delhi-110020
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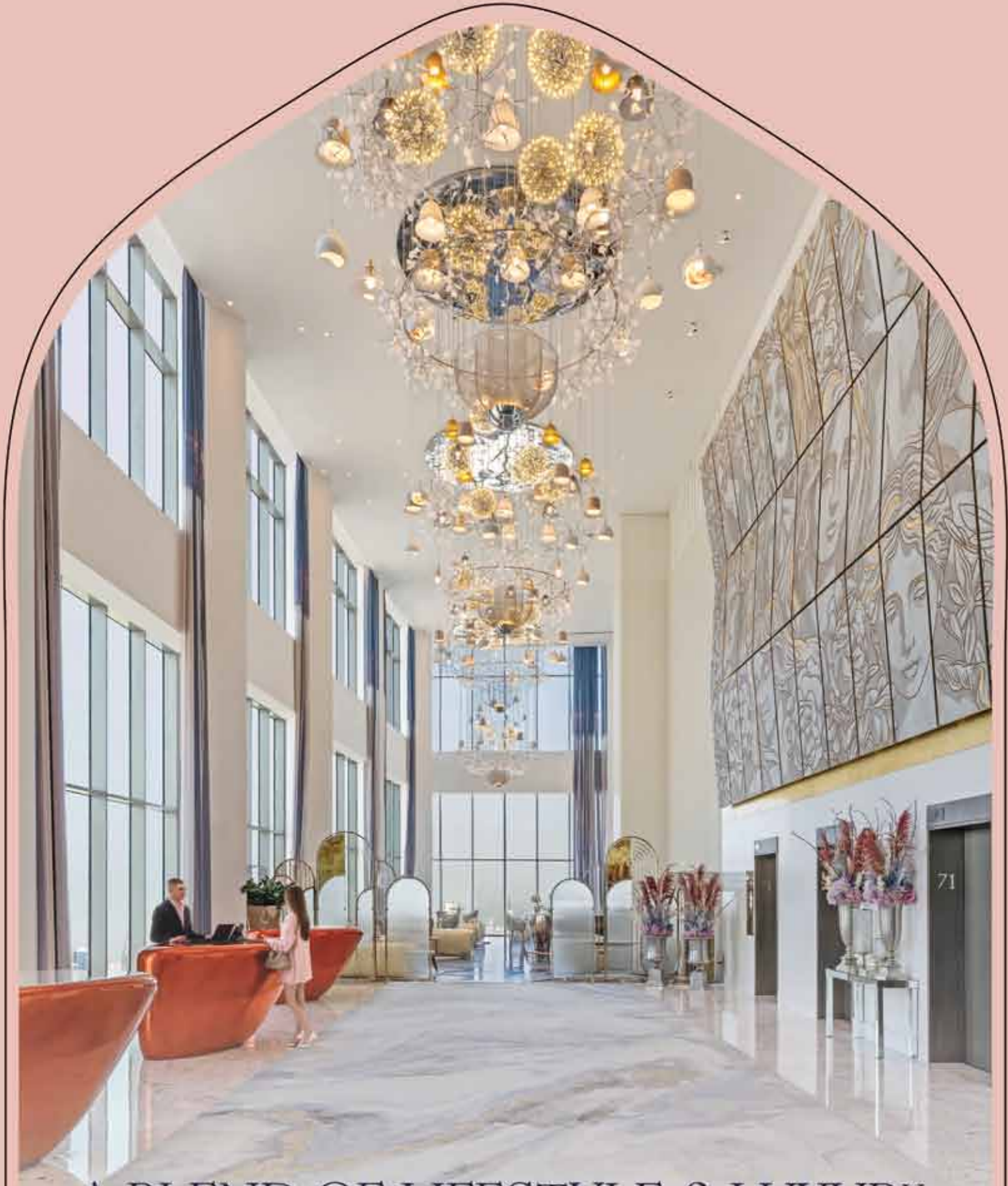
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