

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

TRAVTALK

STAINLESS STEEL AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE SINCE 2005

ddppl.com TravTalkMiddleEast.com

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



- STM to strengthen European products 06
- Mauritius Golf Tours woo enthusiasts 08
- Sun Siyam flaunts 'longest pool' 09
- 5800 exhibitors, 100k visitors @ITB Berlin 2025.... 11
- UN adopts tourism jobs indicator as SDG..... 15
- Vision 2030 changing KSA's society 17

JAMAICA

vijay.dsouza@buzztravelmarketing.com
+971 52 711 7557
www.visitjamaica.com

Sharjah calls on Europe to see 'new' eastern coast

As many as 19 participants from the government and private sector of Sharjah participated at ITB Berlin, showcasing new developments taking place in the region. Sharjah's rich culture and heritage has been attracting European travellers to the emirate for years.

Dr Shehara Fernando

This year Sharjah brought in some of the key elements at ITB Berlin, highlighting them on the map. The pristine beaches of Sharjah have been an inherent decider for the travellers from the European destinations to holiday in one of the most intriguing places in the world.



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

Sharjah's eastern coast captivates visitors with its timeless charm, drawing thousands each year to its breathtaking landscapes and immersive experiences

With the development of Sharjah's eastern coast, they have just multiplied their reach to attract more visitors from these destinations which crave for adventure as well as rich heritage. Sharjah's eastern coast captivates visitors with its timeless charm, drawing thousands each year to its breathtaking landscapes and immersive experiences. Picture luxurious resorts nestled amid the towering mountains of Kalba, ancient rock formations echoing tales of civilizations over 2,000 years old, and serene lakes offering peaceful retreats. One can step into history as you explore centuries-old forts that reveal

the stories of the land and its people. Venture into nature reserves teeming with biodiversity, where adventure and tranquillity coexist. Whether seeking exploration or relaxation, Sharjah's eastern coast promises an unforgettable journey through its captivating beauty.

His Excellency Khalid Jassim Al Midfa, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority, shared onsite, "This is our 25th participation at the ITB, which is the biggest international travel and tourism exhibition, here in Berlin. This year we had 19 participants

from both the government and the private sector, and we always showcase and highlight the main new developments that we have in Sharjah and in different cities in Sharjah, from the main city of Sharjah to the east coast of Sharjah from Khorfakkan, Kalba and the central region of Al Dhaid and the surrounding areas.

"So, we focus on the new experiences, new developments and we are also showcasing the new projects that will take place in the near future like the airport expansion programme, the new hotels, the new hospitality products that we have in the destination, such as eco-tourism, adventure tourism, leisure, cultural tourism, exhibitions and so on. This is really important for us, as here we have decision makers from all around the world to see the opportunities that we have in terms of potential growth and collaboration with the private sector in this part of the world. We are always keen to participate at ITB to showcase the destination."

ME embracing digital payments

The Middle East's travel, tourism and hospitality industries are rapidly embracing digital payments, aligning with the region's vision for a tech-driven economy.



Jaal Shah
Group Managing Director
Travel Designer Group

"The Middle Eastern travel sector is witnessing rapid adoption of digital payments, driven by fintech innovation, BNPL (buy now, pay later) solutions, and mobile wallets. Travel agents are increasingly embracing secure, real-time payment platforms to enhance efficiency and customer experience.

Travel agents are progressing toward digital payments, but traditional credit models still play a role."

"In the Middle East, there is a noticeable shift towards mobile payments and contactless transactions. Digital wallets like Apple Pay and Google Pay are gaining traction, while local systems, such as Tabby, Tamara in UAE and some other Gulf regions are also on the rise. There is a clear movement toward cashless payments, especially in tourism and hospitality sectors."



Jyoti Panchmatia
General Manager - Gulf Region
Travco LLC

Contd. on page 4 ▶



EXPLORE EUROPE WITH RAIL PASSES



- Eurail Global Mobile Pass
- Eurail One Country Mobile Pass
- Interrail Global Mobile Pass
- Interrail One Country Mobile Pass
- Swiss Travel Pass
- Regional Berner Oberland Pass

Passes from 3 to 90 days covering 1 to 33+ countries.



Book Rail Europe with
www.rezlive.com

Connecting Africa to the world



Scan to explore our expanding network



(+971) 43555013

(+971) 561 886 615

sales.dubai@rwandair.com



RwandAir

Fly the dream of Africa

ATS Travel to accept crypto payments

ATS Travel and Payhound announced a partnership that will enable ATS Travel to accept cryptocurrency as a form of payment for all its services. The development marks a significant milestone in the Middle East's travel industry, making ATS Travel the first large-scale travel management company in the region to adopt cryptocurrency for both corporate and leisure travel transactions.

TT Bureau

Saleem Sharif, Deputy Managing Director, ATS Travel, on the sidelines of the travel industry's leading event, Private Luxury Barcelona, shared that ATS Travel will be the first travel management company in the region to adopt cryptocurrency for leisure and corporate travel transactions.

Under the historic arrangement, ATS Travel's clients – many of whom are High-Net-worth Individuals (HNIs) from across the Middle East – will now have the flexibility to pay for a wide range of travel services, including airline tickets, luxury travel, holiday packages, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Exhibitions, and Events) services, and more, using leading cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin and Ethereum. "This initiative is poised to be a game changer in the travel in-



Saleem Sharif and Melissa Lamb at Private Luxury Event Barcelona

dustry and reflects the region's growing interest in digital currencies and blockchain technology," Sharif said.

A first in the Middle East

The collaboration is the first of its kind for a company of ATS Travel's scale and prestige in

the Middle East, setting a new benchmark for the industry. With a focus on innovation and forward-thinking business solutions, the understanding with Payhound enables ATS Travel to meet the demands of a tech-savvy, digital-first clientele, particularly those accustomed

to high-end services. The implementation of crypto payments is expected to significantly enhance the customer experience by providing seamless, instant, and secure payment options while eliminating the delays and costs typically associated with traditional banking methods, informed Sharif.

Pioneering the future of payments

Melissa Lamb, Director of Sales - Luxury, Payhound, said, "We are excited about the prospect of collaborating with ATS Travel to facilitate acceptance of cryptocurrency as a form of payment for them."

Payhound, headquartered in Malta, is a fully regulated crypto payment provider with a proven track record of supporting businesses across multiple industries, including iGaming, financial institutions, e-commerce,

This initiative is poised to be a game changer in the travel industry and reflects the region's growing interest in digital currencies and blockchain technology

affiliate marketing, and more. The company specialises in crypto payment processing, settlements, and large volume trading, offering businesses a secure and efficient way to accept digital currencies for their products and services.

A strategic move for ATS Travel

The strategic collaboration with Payhound aligns with ATS Travel's ongoing commitment to providing innovative solutions to its corporate and leisure customers. **Khaled Ghubash**, Managing Director, ATS Travel, expressed excitement

over the proposed partnership, saying, "We are thrilled to be the first travel management company in the Middle East to integrate cryptocurrency payments into our services, once done."



ENJOY PHILIPPINES.. LIKE NEVER BEFORE!

Nothing feels better than coming home to family. With more Cebu Pacific flights from Dubai, book early to enjoy special fares and reunite with your loved ones. Create memories, share laughs, and embrace the warmth of home this summer. **Book early for special fares** and create unforgettable family moments.

cebu pacific
Let's fly everyone

For queries, please contact Cebu Pacific Air Office at +971 4 354 5777 or Al Rais Travel outlets

DUBAI (04) 393 3333, 352 0200, 393 4444, 351 1111, 396 0988, 508 6777, 393 6666
SHARJAH (06) 572 4421 **FUJAIRAH (09)** 223 1112 gsa@alrais.com www.alrais.com

GSA (Dubai & Northern Emirates)
 وكالات الريس للسفرات والبواخر
AL RAIS TRAVEL & SHIPPING AGENCIES LLC.

Digital payments make inroads

▶ Contd. from page 1



Armin Moradi
CEO & Co-Founder
Qashio

“The Middle East’s B2B travel sector is shifting from traditional payments to virtual corporate cards, driven by the need for greater efficiency and financial control. Growing demand for seamless integration and rebate incentives is accelerating the transition. Digital payment adoption among travel agents is growing fast. Agents are already leveraging card payments. The bottleneck is created when suppliers don’t accept digital payments.”

“Current trends highlight a transformative shift towards a cashless economy in the Middle East, driven by technological innovation, government support, and changing consumer preferences. While travel agents in the Middle East are making



Sushant Pliankar
Leisure/MICE Manager
Uranus Travel and Tourism

significant progress in adopting digital payments, they are not yet fully ‘there’. The travel industry is in a transitional phase.”



Mouna Ouni
Director - Sales and Marketing
Swissotel Al Murooj

“AI will enhance the guest experiences with chatbots for instant support, smart room controls, facial recognition check-in, personalised recommendations, and predictive maintenance—boosting satisfaction, and loyalty in travel and hospitality. Some hotels, use AI-powered facial recognition for seamless check-in, reducing wait times and improving convenience. AI reviews guest feedback and enhance service quality.”

“In Qatar and the Middle East region, digital payment trends in Travel and Tourism include seamless mobile payments, contactless transactions, and integrated booking platforms. Fintech solutions like e-wallets and blockchain are enhancing security,



Ayman Al Qudwa
General Manager
Falcon Travel

convenience, and personalised experiences for travellers and businesses alike. Agents in Qatar and ME are moving toward digital payments.”



Dinkar Dasaur
General Manager - UAE
Satguru

“Digital payments in the Middle East are booming, with contactless transactions, mobile wallets, and BNPL gaining traction. Travellers expect seamless, cashless experiences, pushing agents to adopt secure, instant payment solutions for bookings and services. Travel agents have come a long way in digital payments, but full adoption of digital payment is still a work in progress. Many people are embracing online transactions.”

“In the Middle Eastern travel sector, key digital payment trends include the rise of mobile and contactless payments, the adoption of local payment methods, increasing use of BNPL options, enhanced security through biometrics, and blockchain integration for



Ahmed Ibrahim
Director - Sales and Marketing
The Tower Plaza Hotel

cross-border transactions. Travel agents in the Middle East are progressing steadily with digital payments, but there’s still work to be done.”

“In the Middle East, digital payments are growing quickly, with mobile wallets and contactless payments. Governments are pushing for innovation, and local companies are focusing on making payments safer and easier to use worldwide. Travel agents are getting on board



Iqshita Sharma
Travel Tailor
SCN Travel & More

“I see digital payments evolving fast—contactless, mobile wallets, and BNPL are everywhere. But for us, bank transfers remain the norm, with credit card and global fees adding costs. As the region goes cashless, I hope for easier, cost-effective options. Unfortunately, we don’t seem to be there yet. Travel agents still depend on bank transfers. We would like the options of tabby made easier, but they all come at a cost. I personally think we need about 4 to 5 years more to catch up.”

“The Middle East is rapidly adopting digital payments, driven by fintech growth, mobile wallets, open banking, and government initiatives. Contactless payments, BNPL, and blockchain-based transactions are gaining traction, transforming consumer and business



Prem Sagar
Group General Manager
Al Rais Travel and Shipping

payment behaviours. While progress is evident, many travel agents still rely on traditional payment methods. Larger agencies integrating digital solutions.”



Tamer Nassar
Regional Director - Middle East & Turkey, Protect Group

“The region is seeing rapid adoption of alternative payment methods like BNPL and digital wallets, driven by mobile-first consumers and evolving regulatory frameworks. More payment providers are looking beyond transactions—seeking ways to add value, drive engagement, and unlock new revenue streams. Many agents are transitioning, but fragmentation, legacy systems, and costs create roadblocks. Payment providers have a key role in bridging this gap by offering solutions.”

“Digital payments in the Middle East region are growing rapidly, driven by contactless payments, e-wallets and virtual cards. This trend is supported by tech-savvy consumers, growing fintech adoption and AML regulation to discourage cashless economies. Travel



Salim Sikander
CFO
Desert Adventures

agents are progressing but not fully there yet. Legacy systems, credit dependencies, and market variations slow complete digital transformation.”



Ayşe Yaşar
Vice President - Sales
Prime Travel/ Bedsopia

“The Middle East region is embracing seamless digital payments with rising adoption of mobile wallets, real-time transactions, and blockchain based security. B2B travel payments are evolving with flexible options like virtual cards and BNPL, ensuring smoother transactions for travel agents and suppliers. Travel agents in ME region are transitioning to digital payments, with increasing adoption of virtual cards and e-wallets. However, reliance on traditional methods persists.”



Aga Khatib
General Manager
PanWorld Travel

with digital payments too, but they are not fully there yet. There is still a gap when it comes to integrating mobile wallets and handling payments across borders.”

HSMAI plans new content for partners

At a time when the Middle East's hospitality sector is at its highest point, it is crucial to have partners to support further growth in the industry. In today's dynamic hospitality landscape, a well-crafted commercial strategy is key to maximising revenue and sustaining long-term growth. **Mona Faraj**, President, HSMAI - Middle East & Africa (MEA), shares more on the topic.

TT Bureau

Can you share with us a brief overview of HSMAI MEA and the work it does in the region?

The Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI) Middle East is at the forefront of education and networking opportunities with curated insights. We facilitate connections within the vibrant community of hospitality sales, marketing, and revenue optimisation at national, regional, and international levels. The association provides hotel professionals and their partners with tools, insights, and expertise to fuel sales, inspire marketing, and optimise revenue.

What does 2025 look like for HSMAI MEA?

We have got a full calendar of educational and social events planned for 2025, including six



Mona Faraj
President, HSMAI - Middle East & Africa (MEA)

Executive Roundtables on trending topics for the industry, our popular monthly social networking events called Thirsty Thursdays, and the 8th annual Commercial Strategy Conference.

What are the key priorities for the year 2025?

Motivated by the success of last year's Commercial Strategy Conference, which featured 90

speakers, had a 15 per cent increase in attendees and a record 26 per cent of delegates from outside the UAE, we are in the early stages of planning new and exciting content for the 2025 conference. The annual event brings together the region's hospitality sales, marketing, revenue management and distribution community for two action-packed days of industry insights, networking, and awards.

In 2025, we will be bringing more GCC members onboard, showcasing the value of education, best practice sharing, networking and accessing industry insights. In April, we will open for nominations to the popular ROCKSTAR Awards with categories available for DMCs, hoteliers, tour companies and cruises from the Middle East. Finally, we will be enhancing our mentorship programmes so that hoteliers can advance in their respective fields.

How will HSMAI MEA continue to support learning and development for professionals?

For nearly 30 years, HSMAI has been offering certification for hotel professionals, and today we offer both training and certification in a multitude of disciplines, from digital marketing, revenue

our members to start anytime and study anywhere.

How relevant are AI and disruptive technologies in the hospitality industry?

AI and disruptive technologies are transforming the hospitality industry, making guest

the industry, as they enhance customer experiences and optimise revenue.

What is one message you would like to share with hospitality professionals as they prepare for the year ahead?

My best advice is to stay ahead, stay curious. Keep learning and growing, gain insights from our Advisory Board members and mentorship programmes, as well as network with like-minded professionals at our events.

For 30 years, HSMAI has been offering certification for hotel professionals, and today we offer both training and certification in a multitude of disciplines

management, business acumen, and sales leadership to courses in restaurant management, events revenue management and total revenue management. The HSMAI Academy has also partnered with Les Roches and Glion to present a range of self-paced courses, enabling

interactions more intuitive and operations more efficient. From AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants, powered by Natural Language Processing (NLP), to Machine Learning-powered personalisation and dynamic pricing, these innovations are all extremely relevant to





Flights Hotels Car Rental Holidays Cruises Activities

Few Cabins Left

Dreamy Long Haul

CRUISES LOADING



Starting from **AED 1,499**





Get, Set, Sail



+97145635801
www.travelwings.com
cruise@travelwings.com

STM to strengthen European products

Maher Azizia, Chief Executive Officer, STM Tours LLC International, in an interview with **TRAVEL MIDDLE EAST**, talks about the importance of the travel industry to be relevant and consistent to reap the benefits it seeks. He shares some of the key products they will be focussing this year. Asia, Middle East and Europe have been our strongest markets, but South Africa is our newest addition, he informs.

TT Bureau

What made you a regular partner for **TRAVEL MIDDLE EAST**?

Since I started partnering with **TRAVEL MIDDLE EAST**, I have been able to find many new bookings, especially from Dubai. Some of the bookings were groups which made it worthwhile. My real message is that one has to be consistent in order to achieve results and I'm sharing this experience with you as I would like to spread



Maher Azizia
Chief Executive Officer
STM Tours LLC International



Our focus is on the quality of products, also to increase products online. Some of the key areas we are focusing on is sustainable travel in Europe

with our clients at the necessary time, so that there is no miscommunication. Each client is

looked after very well as we offer bespoke experiences. There is a great deal of increase in terms of

leisure travel, as we have fixed departures, we witness this especially from groups. You could also say MICE groups too have seen a rise.

Which will be your main areas of focus this year?

Our focus is to work on the quality of our products on offer, especially in Europe, also

to increase our products online. Some of the key areas we are focusing on is sustainable travel in Europe where we are promoting travelling by train. Currently, we have travel to Italy by train, as well as Spain by train from east to west. But now we are going to connect multi countries by train.

Are you looking at new markets this year?

Our stronger markets are now Asia, Middle East and Europe with various other products. However, our newest addition is South Africa as we have them with new products. From Zanzibar and Kenya. This is an exciting market, as it offers many different products catering to our discerning clients. Lately, USA has also become a market that we like, especially as we have many clients from Dubai booking with us to the USA and vice versa. The UAE and Saudi Arabia are the two top travel markets. ▶

IN FOCUS DURING 2025

❖ UAE, KSA, Qatar and Bahrain – main feeder markets

❖ South Africa, Kenya and Zanzibar – new markets

❖ Quality of products on offer, especially in Europe

the word on the importance of working with the most important channel of support, B2B media which helps our businesses grow step by step.

How do you describe the nature of your business?

We are well versed in fixed departures, especially catering to German speaking travellers/clients. The details are shared

Abu Dhabi to greet 200 Polish agents

DCT Abu Dhabi has partnered with Polish travel company ITAKA to host 200 top travel trade professionals from Poland at the two-day Top Sellers Conference in Al Ain, UAE, beginning 11 April 2025. The conference is aimed at fostering deeper connections with the travel trade professionals and increase awareness about the emirate of Abu Dhabi in the Polish market.

TT Bureau

Al Ain, the "living oasis" of Abu Dhabi and home to the UAE's only UNESCO World Heritage Site and a growing culture, wellness and adventure destination, has been selected as the Gulf Capital of Tourism for 2025. The Top Sellers Conference in Al Ain will highlight Abu Dhabi's range of itineraries and travel packages for both summer and winter, and attendees will also be able to participate in expert-led training sessions. Following the two-day event, the 200 top travel trade professionals from Poland will embark on curated site visits and tours in Abu Dhabi city from 13 to 17 April, experiencing its leading cultural institutions and heritage sites, world-class hospitality infrastructure, and unique attractions firsthand.

H.E. Saleh Mohamed Al Geziry, Director General - Tourism, DCT



Mariusz Janczuk and H.E. Saleh Mohamed Al Geziry

Abu Dhabi, said: "Welcoming ITAKA's Top Sellers Conference to Abu Dhabi underscores our commitment to fostering strong ties with Poland's travel

trade community. Poland offers tremendous potential, and this partnership highlights the unique blend of world-class experiences, cultural heritage, and warm

Emirati hospitality that define Abu Dhabi as a destination. By offering leading travel professionals first-hand experience of Abu Dhabi, we strengthen their connection with the destination, inspiring more Polish travellers to explore diverse attractions and rich experiences."

client. We greatly appreciate the extensive support we receive from DCT Abu Dhabi, as well as smooth operation that allows us to finalise key aspects of the conference in a short time. We are confident that our common guests – the top Polish travel sellers – will play an integral

The Top Sellers Conference in Al Ain, the 'living oasis' of Abu Dhabi, will highlight Abu Dhabi's range of itineraries and travel packages for both summer and winter

Mariusz Janczuk, President, ITAKA, said: "It is extremely satisfying that ITAKA is working so closely with DCT Abu Dhabi to organise the prestigious Top Sellers Conference in Abu Dhabi. The cooperation between our organisations at every stage of preparing this event, has been highly professional and effi-

role in promoting Abu Dhabi in Poland by sharing their best travel experiences with clients and colleagues. Abu Dhabi is an extraordinary destination that is gaining increasing interest among Polish tourists."

The event being hosted in the emirate aligns with Abu Dha-

bi's Tourism Strategy 2030, which targets 39.3 million visitors, creation of 178,000 new tourism jobs, and a contribution of AED90 billion to the emirate's GDP by the end of the decade. The partnership reflects Abu Dhabi's commitment to fostering relationships with key international markets and investing in initiatives that promote tourism growth and cultural exchange.

GOALS OF TOURISM STRATEGY 2030

39.3 million
visitors

178,000
new tourism jobs

AED90 billion
contribution to the GDP
of Abu Dhabi

Emirates, Parsys to save lives in the sky

Emirates airlines has partnered with Parsys Telemedicine to introduce next generation equipment that will enable customers to receive high-quality, speedy medical care in the air. Emirates has invested more than US\$2.4 million in co-designing the new equipment set with Parsys, which will be rolled out to 300 aircraft over the next few years.

 TT Bureau

Emirates has joined hands with Parsys Telemedicine to introduce a groundbreaking in-flight telemedicine solution. The groundbreaking 'telemedicine station' developed through the joint effort has several advanced features, such as high-definition video conferencing, remote passenger assessment, secure data transmission and 12-Leads Telecardia ECG – enabling Emirates' highly trained cabin crew to save lives in emergency situations.

Emirates has always invested in high quality medical equipment, but the new Parsys kit is the result of a year-long collaboration between Emirates and Parsys to create a bespoke in-flight tool that is more efficient and reliable, more connected, and ultimately safer for Emirates' customers.



More safety, speed & reliability for Emirates' customers

The best-in-class new system includes the Parsys Telemedicine Kit for Emirates and the Parsys Cloud. The kit is an integrated, portable telemedicine station designed for cabin crew to gather important information and vital signs, which can then be transmitted to Emirates' Ground Medical Support – a dedicated team of

Emirates customers who need medical support onboard flights can now have their vital signs or readings transmitted to the key device via Bluetooth

medical professionals who sit in Emirates Group Headquarters in Dubai and are contactable 24/7.

The kit includes several medical devices like a pulse oximeter, thermometer, blood pressure

monitor, glucometer, and electrocardiogram (ECG). Emirates customers who need medical support onboard flights can now have their vital signs or readings automatically transmitted to the Medcapture© device via Bluetooth, eliminating any need for cabin crew to take notes and relay information manually.

The Medcapture© device is a tablet which contains a new software application, customised to align with Emirates' comprehensive medical procedures. The interface has an intuitive and easy-to-use design so crew members can operate it efficiently, even under challenging conditions. It also allows Emirates cabin crew to have real-time communication with the Ground Medical Support team, ensuring immediate access to expert medical advice while in the air. The tablet enables cabin crew to connect with ground-

based doctors for real-time assessment of passenger medical cases. In some instances, it allows doctors to visually evaluate injuries or medical concerns remotely, if required. Linked to the key device is the Parsys Cloud, a cloud-based platform for Ground Medical Support to receive in-flight data and communicate with cabin crew. It is safe and reliable and ensures that customer data is handled in compliance with data protection regulations.

TRAINING FOR CABIN CREW

- ❖ 1.5-hour online course
- ❖ 2-hour practical session for CPR, AED, severe bleeding, severe allergy management
- ❖ Annual flight simulation exercises



THE TOWER PLAZA
HOTEL

The gateway to elevated experience

THE MOST AWAITED,

ARABIAN TRAVEL MARKET

IS ALMOST HERE!

Enjoy our special rates and make your stay memorable.
LIMITED-TIME OFFER!

<p>10 ft away from Emirates Metro Station</p>	<p>1 km away from Museum of the Future</p>	<p>3 km away from Burj Khalifa / Dubai Mall</p>	<p>3 km away from World Trade Center</p>
--	---	--	---

 www.thetowerplazahotel.com
 +971 52 715 7819
  sales1@thetowerplazahotel.com



Mauritius Golf Tours woo enthusiasts

Mauritius has gained traction from Middle East travellers as one of the key golfing destinations over the past few years. Mauritius Golf Tours has become an increasingly important event for travellers from the Middle East. **Gert Puchtler**, General Manager, Constance Belle Mare Plage, shares with **TRAVEL TALK** their contribution towards the game for being the host hotel catering to the Middle Eastern guests.

 TT Bureau

How has golf tourism in Mauritius evolved over the years, from the past to the present?

The evolution of golf tourism in Mauritius has been remarkable over the years. In the past, the island was primarily known for its pristine beaches and tropical scenery rather than as a golfing destination. However, the development of golf tourism began to take shape in the 1990s with the establishment of a few notable golf courses. Today, Mauritius is firmly positioned as a world-class golf destination, attracting international players to its renowned courses. The growth of golf tourism has been significantly supported by global



Gert Puchtler
General Manager
Constance Belle Mare Plage

it a desirable choice for high-end travellers. Looking ahead, the country continues to focus on developing additional championship-level golf courses and refining golf tourism packages to attract even more international

particularly among visitors from the GCC region. Golf is a widely enjoyed sport in many countries, such as the UAE and Qatar, and Mauritius is gaining recognition as a premier golf destination due to its world-class courses, luxurious resorts, and breathtaking landscapes. GCC visitors appreciate the blend of golf, relaxation, and high-end hospitality that Mauritius offers. The island is home to several championship-level golf courses designed by renowned architects, making it an appealing choice for golf enthusiasts, not only from the GCC but from across the globe.

What are the key source markets for the hotel? Where does the Middle East market stand?

The Middle Eastern market,



market has been expanding, particularly among high-net-worth individuals seeking luxury destinations and golf-oriented vacations. With direct flights to Mauritius and its appeal as a year-round destination, the Middle East is becoming an increasingly important source market for our Mauritian hotels.

Are there any specialised facilities that cater to this market?

To cater to Middle Eastern guests, our hotels in Mauritius have adapted their offerings with specialised facilities and services. We provide halal-certified meals and private dining options to accommodate dietary requirements. For guests seeking privacy and exclusivity, we offer luxury villas and suites with private pools and gardens. Additionally, some of our resorts employ Arabic-speaking staff to enhance communication and create a culturally comfortable environment. We have also made adjustments

to room configurations to align with Middle Eastern guest preferences, such as installing bidet sprayers in bathrooms. Tailored spa and wellness programmes have been developed to meet the expectations of this clientele, along with luxury experiences like private catamaran trips and personalised excursions.

and Qatar to create tailored travel packages to Mauritius. Familiarisation (Fam) trips are organised to bring Middle Eastern travel agents and tour operators to experience the hotel first-hand. Our presence at major travel trade events, such as the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in Dubai, allows us to showcase our of-

Today, Mauritius is firmly positioned as a world-class golf destination, attracting international players to its renowned green fields and golf courses

Could you share some initiatives taken to engage the travel trade in the Middle East region to promote this property?

To promote the property to the Middle Eastern market, several strategic initiatives have been implemented. We collaborate with travel agencies and tour operators in the UAE, Saudi Arabia

ferings directly to key industry professionals. Additionally, we invest in targeted digital marketing and advertising campaigns on platforms like Instagram and Facebook, specifically aimed at Middle Eastern audiences. Partnerships with influencers and celebrities from the region also help to enhance brand awareness and engagement. Furthermore, we introduce exclusive promotions and packages tailored to significant Middle Eastern holidays, such as Ramadan and Eid, to attract travellers during key periods.



tournaments, such as the Mauritius Open, which is part of the European Tour, showcasing the island's golfing appeal on an international scale. Furthermore, Mauritius is increasingly recognised for seamlessly combining the golfing experience with luxury accommodation, making

visitors from Europe, the US, Asia, and the GCC region.

Is interest in travelling to Mauritius for golf growing among people from the GCC region and other parts of the world?

Interest in travelling to Mauritius for golf has been increasing,

particularly from the UAE and Saudi Arabia, has been gaining momentum in recent years. Although the key source markets for the hotel primarily include European countries, such as France, the United Kingdom, and Germany, as well as India and South Africa. The Middle East



CATERING TO ME GUESTS

- ❖ Engaging with travel trade to understand the needs of their clients
- ❖ Halal meals and private dining options
- ❖ Private luxury villas and suites with bidet sprays, private pools and gardens

Sun Siyam flaunts 'longest pool'

Sun Siyam Olhuveli, one of the favourite resorts for travellers from the Middle East due to its accessibility by speedboat, announces that it has the longest pool in the Maldives, with a whopping 210 metres in length. In an interview with **TRAVELTALK** at ITB Berlin, **Zulaikha Manik (Zuley)**, Deputy Managing Director, Sun Siyam Resorts, shared details about its new additions.

Dr Shehara Fernando

What are the latest developments for guests from the Middle East?

One of the most exciting news to convey to our Middle East guests is that we have just opened the longest swimming pool in the Maldives with a length of 210 metres. It basically runs from one end to the other in the island. Apart from this, we have revamped and restyled our deluxe rooms and renamed them as 'Beach Pavilions' and 'Sunset Beach Pavilions'.

Could you tell us what is different in the new rooms?

We have changed the placement of the facilities in the rooms, and it can accommodate up to two children, which is important for our guests from the Middle East as they travel with their families. Siyam World is our largest property known to our Middle East



Zulaikha Manik (Zuley)
Deputy Managing Director
Sun Siyam Resorts

guests as that is where the only horse barn in Maldives is, but recent introduction of our go-

kart track is also something very much enjoyed by the families and we are getting good reviews.

What are your summer plans for the ME travellers?

We are looking at introducing some fresh offers and discounts to our Middle East guests through the travel partners as we celebrate 35 years, which is a huge milestone for us. Our Chairman and Managing Director Hon. FDr. Ahmed Siyam Mohamed started the company in 1990. Hence, this is a special year of celebrations. He started the company as a small travel agency and today he owns the largest number of



rooms and beds in the country, so it's a 35-year-long successful journey. A true visionary behind the success of the group, he brings in innovation, keeping the strategy in place and making sure that the travellers can witness something new every time they visit. He understands the rapid changes in the market and aims to have the group as a top-of-mind destination for all travellers. We are really focused on the Middle East because we know that

it has a modest set of countries, and we also want the ladies to really enjoy themselves within the privacy. So, in all our resorts we have private swimming pools, some of them are within the confines of the courtyard, so that the ladies can also enjoy themselves.

Do you see a change in profile of travellers/ guests?

Traditionally, the Middle East has been a family market for us, but of recent, and this has been

mostly post-pandemic, we also have group of friends travelling together. Recently, when I was in the resort, there was this lovely group of ladies from the Middle East, around five or six of them, and they were really enjoying themselves. So, it's not just a couple's or a family destination anymore, there is a lot that you can do as a group of friends in the Maldives now.

QUICK PICKS

35 years

Sun Siyam celebrates

210 metre

pool at Sun Siyam Olhuveli, which is the longest in the Maldives

Only horse barn

in the Maldives at Siyam World



EMPOWER YOUR TRAVEL BUSINESS

MEET US AT ARABIAN TRAVEL MART 2025!

STAND : ME912

Event Date : 28th April – 1st May 2025

Venue : DWTC, Dubai, UAE

Car Rentals

Visa Assistance

Hotel Bookings

Holiday Packages

Airline Tickets

Travel Insurance

Activities

t3 hub | t3 hub Lite

+971 4 556 1010 | support@toptraveltrip.com | www.toptraveltrip.com |

THIS IS APPLICABLE FOR ALL TRAVEL AGENTS

SIA returns with First Class luxury

Luxury takes flight once again as Singapore Airlines (SIA) restarted First Class and Premium Economy Class on the Singapore-Dubai route since 30 March 2025. Operated seven times a week aboard Boeing 777-300ER, the service features a four-class cabin configuration, ensuring that every traveller—whether seeking ultimate luxury or elevated comfort—enjoys an exceptional journey.

TT Bureau

Premium Economy Class: A refined travel experience

Designed for travellers who seek extra space and style, Premium Economy Class offers a generous 38-inch seat pitch, an 8-inch recline, and a seat width of 18.5 to 19.5 inches. Each seat is equipped with a 13.3-inch full HD touchscreen monitor and active noise-cancelling headphones, creating an immersive entertainment experience.

Seamless travel with priority services

Premium Economy passengers enjoy priority check-in, boarding, and baggage handling, ensuring a stress-free airport experience. Luggage is tagged for priority delivery, reducing wait times upon arrival.

Elevated dining with Book the Cook service

Fine dining meets the skies with the Book the Cook service, allowing passengers to pre-select

their gourmet main course up to 24 hours before departure. From international favourites to regional delicacies, every meal is thoughtfully curated for an unforgettable in-flight dining experience.

Exclusive in-flight amenities for passengers

Sustainability meets sophistication with eco-friendly amenity kits by Out of the Woods, featuring biodegradable-packaged lip balm, recycled PET slippers, and soft eyeshades for enhanced comfort.

Stay connected with complimentary Wi-Fi

KrisFlyer members in Premium Economy enjoy unlimited complimentary Wi-Fi, making it easier to stay connected, work, or stream entertainment throughout the journey. Signing up is free, ensuring effortless access to this exclusive benefit.

First Class: The ultimate luxury in the sky

First Class redefines luxury with sumptuously upholstered leather



er seats, featuring ergonomically sculpted headrests, plush cushions, and a fixed-back shell design for enhanced privacy. With a 35-inch-wide seat that transforms into a full-flat bed, passengers enjoy unmatched comfort at 30,000 feet.

Intelligent lighting & premium entertainment

Personalised lighting settings allow travellers to create the perfect ambiance for work or relaxation, while a 24-inch HD LCD monitor and video touchscreen handset provide next-level entertainment. Discreetly placed USB and power outlets ensure devices stay charged throughout the flight.

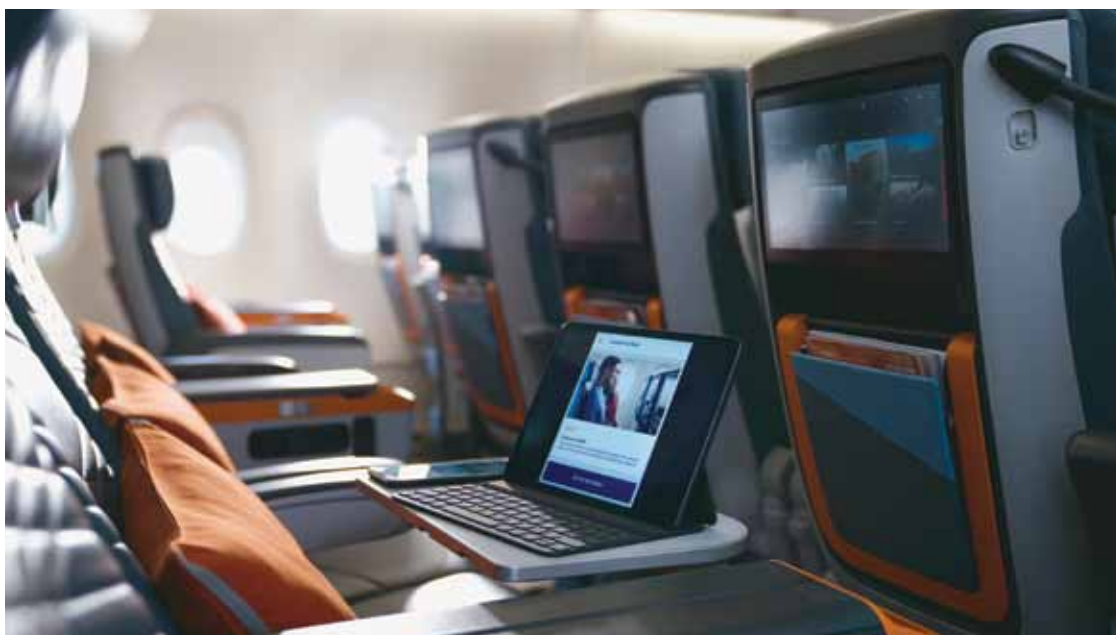


Exquisite dining at 30k feet

The Book the Cook service brings five-star dining to the

skies, offering gourmet dishes crafted by world-renowned chefs. Enjoy a curated selection of premium wines, champagne,

exclusive First Class amenities, ensuring a seamless and indulgent journey. With the return of First Class and Premium Econ-



With the return of First Class and Premium Economy on the Singapore-Dubai route, now is the perfect time to secure your clients' bookings

and artisanal beverages, complemented by full table service.

Priority treatment & exclusive amenities

From the moment travellers arrive at the airport, First Class passengers receive VIP treatment, including dedicated check-in counters, priority baggage handling, and access to

omy on the Singapore-Dubai route, now is the perfect time to secure your clients' bookings. Offer them an unparalleled travel experience where comfort, convenience, and indulgence come together in perfect harmony.

Reserve their seats today and elevate their journey to new heights. ➔

The business travel magazine

A DDP Publications

MICETalk®

micetalk.com

Meetings • Incentives • Conferences • Events

Stays Ahead

with


TRAVTALK

Scan for free subscription



email us at uae@ddppl.com

5800 exhibitors, 100k visitors @ITB

Deborah Rothe, Director, ITB Berlin, in an interview with , shares some of the key takeaways from the world's leading travel trade show which celebrates its 60th anniversary next year by kicking off ITB Americas in Mexico. This year's event saw a record number of 5800 exhibitors from 170 countries and 100,000 visitors over three days, 87% of them international trade visitors.

 Dr Shehara Fernando

Which areas had the biggest exhibition space this year?

The exhibition space saw significant growth, particularly from key regions such as the Middle East, Asia-Pacific (APAC) and Europe. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Thailand emerged as the largest exhibitors, highlighting their commitment to expanding tourism offerings. Saudi Arabia, in particular, has been steadily increasing its presence post-pandemic, with significant investments in infrastructure and heritage tourism. European nations like Italy and Greece also demonstrated strong growth, reinforcing their appeal as premier global destinations. ITB Berlin continues to serve as a vital industry barometer, reflecting these evolving travel trends.

Could you share some of the key insights of the show?

There were two dominant themes which emerged from ITB Berlin this year: sustainability and digitalisation. In terms of sustainability, industry leaders are actively seeking solutions



Deborah Rothe
Director
ITB Berlin

to balance environmental responsibility with affordability. There is a growing consumer interest in sustainable travel, yet a gap remains between interest and actual booking be-

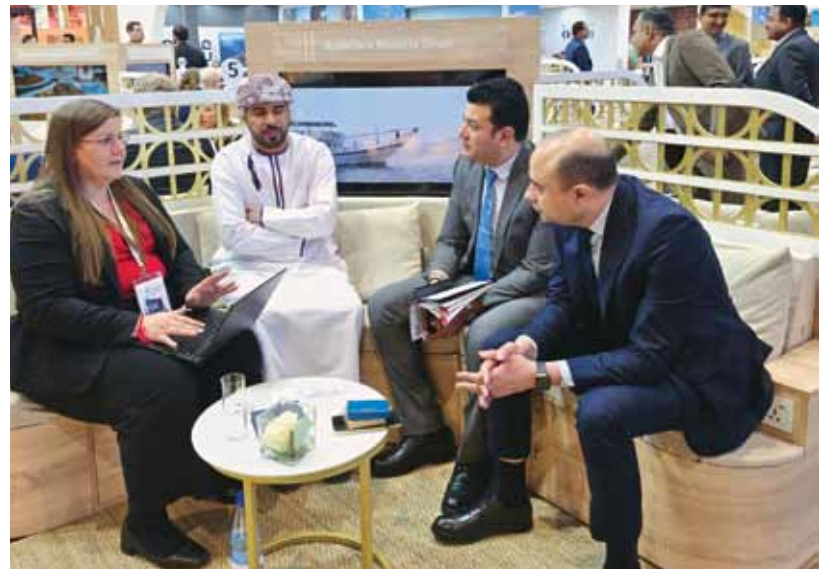
haviour. Investments in sustainable aviation fuels, eco-friendly hospitality practices, and green expansion into the Western Hemisphere will be our way of celebrating this milestone

How will you be celebrating your milestone year next year?
ITB Americas 2026 announcement, marking the show's

In terms of support for sustainability, industry leaders are actively seeking solutions to balance environmental responsibility with affordability

haviour. Investments in sustainable aviation fuels, eco-friendly hospitality practices, and green

expansion into the Western Hemisphere will be our way of celebrating this milestone



year. Looking ahead, ITB Berlin 2026 marks a significant milestone—60 years of shaping the global travel industry. The event plans to reinforce its identity as a “family gathering of the industry”, emphasising personal interactions and cross-cultural networking. Set to take place from 10-12 November 2026 in Mexico, ITB Americas represents a strategic move to strengthen ITB's global footprint. With successful editions in Asia (Singapore), China (Shanghai), and India (Mumbai), the new Americas event will cater to the growing demand from Western markets.

What are the key takeaways from the event?

ITB Berlin 2025 reaffirmed its position as the world's leading travel trade show, reflecting a resilient and thriving tourism industry. With participation levels nearly matching pre-pandemic figures, the event showcased a strong global appetite for travel despite inflationary pressures. Notably, travellers are prioritising experiences over



other discretionary spending, emphasising the industry's robustness. Among its new initiatives included expanded masterclasses focusing on best practices in sustainability, AI, and digitalisation, industry-specific workshops to facilitate knowledge-sharing and collaboration. In terms of regions, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific continue to be focal points of growth. Middle East: Increasing exhibition space, multi-story pavilions, and a strong

push toward luxury and infrastructure development. APAC: Thailand, Vietnam, and China demonstrated substantial growth, reinforcing their positions as tourism powerhouses. In response to this demand, ITB Berlin 2025 will host regional insight sessions, with a particular focus on the Middle East's rapid transformation into a world-class destination. Discussions will explore investments in airports, hospitality, and new tourism projects. ▶



Emirates signs 11 deals at ITB

Emirates concluded yet another successful ITB Berlin, reinforcing its commitment to the world's largest travel trade show while deepening strategic partnerships across the global travel eco-system. Over the event's three-day run, the airline signed 11 strategic agreements, held 270 high-level meetings and received over 6,000 visitors at its stand.

TT Bureau

Emirates featured its latest-generation A350 cabin products at ITB Berlin. The airline also showcased its signature Onboard Lounge and Shower Spa, besides its sustainability initiatives. It signed 11 strategic agreements over three days of participation at the event.

Ahead of its return to this year's edition of ITB Berlin, Emirates announced the launch of three new Asian destinations – Shenzhen in China (1 July), Da Nang in Vietnam (2 June) and Siem Reap in Cambodia (3 June). This move will establish essential connections that benefit both leisure and business travellers, delivering enhanced options, better connectivity, and greater access to Southeast and East Asian markets.



Kai Wegner, Governing Mayor of Berlin, experiencing the A350 Business Class seat, alongside Sir Tim Clark, President, Emirates

Promoting Central Europe and Mediterranean gateways Emirates also renewed its Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Austrian National Tourist Office (ANTO) on the sidelines of ITB Berlin, further reinforcing its ongoing commitment to attracting travellers from across its global

network to explore this European gateway. The renewal of the partnership coincides with Emirates celebrating 20 years of operations to Vienna last year, having carried more than 5 million passengers between Dubai and the Austrian capital so far. In a similar move to promote Malta, Emirates also signed an

MoU with the Malta Tourism Authority to boost inbound tourism to the Mediterranean gateway from across its global network.

Air-land-sea links

ITB Berlin this year served as a springboard for the airline's ever-expanding cruise partnerships. The airline's long-standing

commitment to promote Dubai as a preferred global cruise destination and hub was supported by the extension and expansion of its strategic partnerships with TUI Cruises, Costa Cruises and AIDA Cruises.

The airline's partnership extension with TUI Cruises is optimally timed with the addition of their second vessel homeporting its operations in Dubai for the 2025-26 cruise season. Emirates' extended partnership with Costa Cruises through 2027 will see both entities work even closer to explore enhanced transport solutions between Dubai International Airport and Dubai Harbour Cruise Terminal. These tie-ups will enhance connectivity between air, land and sea, offering cruise customers a seamless booking experience and convenience at every touchpoint of their journey.

Elevating the customer experience through OTAs

Emirates strategically used ITB Berlin as a platform to expand its partnerships with key global travel platforms as part of its continued commitment to customer experience excellence, from booking to boarding. The airline expanded its long-term partnership with Expedia Group to offer travellers the convenience of personalising their own trips on Emirates.



ITB China launches new trade event

MICE Meeting Point China, announced by ITB China in Beijing from 11-12 September 2025, is designed to cater to the evolving needs of China's rapidly changing MICE industry. The high-profile confex-style event will be co-located with the ITB China Business Travel Conference, offering its attendees a dynamic platform for networking, knowledge exchange, and business development.

TT Bureau

The MICE Meeting Point China event will feature a dynamic conference stage where leading experts and innovators will present cutting-edge insights, trends, and first-hand updates shaping the future of MICE and business travel. The event will also host a dedicated business mart area, enabling sponsors to showcase their products, solutions, and services to a highly targeted audience at branded sponsor booths and tables. Additionally, exclusive networking events will offer opportunities to connect with key industry players and decision-makers, fostering meaningful business interactions.

The MICE Meeting Point China event is supported by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism. "Beijing has always played a significant role in advancing the development



Lydia Li
Director
ITB China

of China's MICE industry. As a supporting unit for this event, we are deeply honoured to host such an international MICE gathering in Beijing. We look forward to fostering innovation and growth in China's MICE industry through this event and further deepening cooperation both domestically and internationally," said Sun Jian, Deputy Director, Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism.

These emerging trends and industry shifts will take center stage at the conference, where experts and innovators will delve into a wide range of pressing topics, including:

❖ **Bleisure Travel:** How is the bleisure travel rise creating opportunities in MICE industry?

❖ **Cost vs Quality:** Which destinations are preferred for balancing budget efficiency with high-quality experiences?

The launch of MICE Meeting Point in China's capital Beijing is a significant step in providing a tailor-made platform for China's MICE and business travel industry

❖ **AI-Driven Transformation:** How is AI reshaping personalisation and efficiency in the MICE sector?



❖ **Corporate Globalisation:** How can MICE activities drive

are personalised MICE experiences redefining the market?

❖ **Sustainability & ESG:** How can MICE events integrate green innovation and social responsibility?

❖ **5G & Virtual Reality:** How are emerging technologies enhancing hybrid meetings and live event experiences?

Lydia Li, Director, ITB China, said, "The launch of MICE Meeting Point in China's capital

Beijing is a significant step in providing a tailor-made platform for China's MICE and business travel industry, with the prospect of facilitating communication between domestic and international industry professionals, fostering innovation and creating new business opportunities."

DRAGON POWER

1st

China ranked with \$372.5 billion in business travel spending among the top 15 countries in 2023, as per GBTA

9%

increase in the business travel spending

\$2 trillion

China's business travel spending is expected to reach by 2028

Discover Saudi joins ICCA

Discover Saudi's appointment as the member of International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) is likely to boost the MICE sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The first fully integrated DMC from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Discover Saudi will collaborate with the global association to amplify Saudi Arabia as a destination of choice for meetings and events.

TT Bureau

Discover Saudi, a subsidiary of Almosafer, has been appointed as the first Destination Management Company (DMC) from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to become a member of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), the global community and knowledge hub for the international association and governmental meetings industry.

The move will enable Discover Saudi to leverage its status as the Kingdom's 'DMC of Choice' and enhance KSA's MICE sector, aligning with Saudi Vision 2030. As a member of the ICCA, Discover Saudi will gain access to a global network of event organisers, enabling them to boost KSA's flourishing convention and congress industry.

Discover Saudi will also leverage Almosafer's digitally advanced and integrated platforms to further engage ICCA's extensive network of partners and collaborators to provide various opportunities for travel and tourism services.

Elaborating on the status of Discover Saudi, **Senthil Gopinath**, CEO, ICCA, said: "We are delighted to welcome Discover Saudi as the newest member of ICCA in Saudi Arabia. Their commitment to enhancing the Kingdom's position as a premier business events destination aligns perfectly with ICCA's vision of fostering global collaboration and industry growth. As Saudi Arabia continues to expand its MICE sector, we look forward to supporting Discover Saudi in leveraging ICCA's global network, resources, and expertise



Muzammil Ahussain
CEO
Almosafer

to drive impactful and sustainable business events."

Talking about Discover Saudi's inclusion in ICCA, **Muzammil Ahussain**, CEO, Almosafer, said: "With our membership in ICCA we aim to redefine the landscape of interconnected businesses through collaboration and innovation to capitalise on Saudi Arabia's ever-growing

conferences and conventions sector. Supporting Saudi Arabia's ambition to lead the world in large-scale business events and exhibitions, Discover Saudi, as a leading provider of event

for enables them to offer data, education, and communication channels, as well as business development and networking opportunities for members. Discover Saudi will gain access

Discover Saudi's membership will enable them to grow the convention and congress business in the Kingdom.

Discover Saudi will gain access to a global network of event organisers, enabling them to boost KSA's flourishing convention and congress industry

logistics services in the Kingdom, will work with ICCA to further enhance our offerings, especially within the crucial MICE sector while driving more business inwards in keeping with our commitment to support Saudi Vision 2030."


ICCA's standing in the international association meetings sec-

to an extensive database of over 220,000 meetings, 20,000 regularly occurring meeting series, and 11,500 associations. With more than 1,100 members in almost 100 countries worldwide, ICCA helps organisations build long-term resilience and stability through events and meetings that help drive economic and social progress.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- Discover Saudi will gain access to a database of over 220,000 meetings, 20,000 regularly occurring meeting series, and 11,500 associations
- With over 1,100 members in 100 countries worldwide, ICCA helps organisations build long-term resilience and stability through events and meetings
- Discover Saudi's membership within this global network will enable them to further grow the convention and congress business in KSA.

AI improving pricing, distribution

Yogeesh Chandra, Chief Strategy Officer, RateGain, in an interview with , shares some of the key travel trends in the Middle East and Africa region, business outlook for 2025 and the strategies that can transform the industry. Investments in AI and digital transformation are expected to bring smarter pricing strategies, efficient distribution models and guest personalisation, he says.

TT Bureau

What are the key travel trends that you see in the region?

The Middle East and Africa (MEA) region is experiencing strong tourism growth, driven by major infrastructure projects, increasing international arrivals, and rapid adoption of AI and digital solutions. The UAE led global hotel occupancy in 2024 at 77 per cent, with a long-term vision to welcome 40 million visitors annually by 2031. Saudi Arabia, having already surpassed its Vision 2030 goals, saw US\$37.6 billion in international visitor contributions in 2023, reinforcing its position as a key global tourism player. Africa is also emerging as a high-growth market, with 95 million inbound travellers projected by 2027. Egypt alone recorded 15.7 million tourists in 2024, targeting 18 million in 2025—creating



Yogeesh Chandra
Chief Strategy Officer
RateGain

new opportunities for hotels, airlines, and OTAs. These trends highlight a shift towards personalised pricing, AI-driven revenue strategies, and automated distribution solutions to support the evolving needs of industry.

What is your outlook for the region in 2025?

With investments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital trans-

formation accelerating, 2025 is expected to bring smarter pricing strategies, more efficient distribution models, and enhanced guest personalisation. Hotels and airlines are leveraging AI for dynamic pricing, demand forecasting, and hyper-personalised guest experiences, ensuring greater profitability and operational efficiency.

Saudi Arabia's hospitality sector remains a focal point, with plans to add 250,000 hotel rooms by 2030, while major projects like The Red Sea Project and Diriyah Development continue to shape luxury and experiential travel. With the UAE gearing up for 40 million visitors annually, tourism-driven demand will further boost travel tech adoption.

Will RateGain be expanding towards the region? If so, please share some details.

RateGain has a strong and

growing presence in the MEA region, particularly in Saudi Arabia, where the demand for AI-powered pricing intelligence and automated distribution solutions is surging. With the Kingdom's hospitality sector expanding rapidly, RateGain is focused on

Hotels and airlines are leveraging AI for dynamic pricing, demand forecasting, and hyper-personalised guest experiences, ensuring greater profitability

supporting hotels, airlines, and OTAs in optimising market positioning, revenue strategies, and guest acquisition.

How are Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar positioning themselves?

While UAE and Saudi Arabia lead the region's tourism growth, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar are making strategic moves to

strengthen their positions. Qatar has witnessed a surge in tourism since hosting FIFA 2022. Oman is focusing on sustainable tourism and international partnerships. Additionally, Bahrain is investing in tourism infrastructure, and hospitality innovation.

Could you highlight the role AI's role in the industry future?

AI is revolutionising travel and hospitality by enhancing pricing intelligence, distribution efficiency, and guest personalisation. Dynamic pricing is now fully automated through AI-powered solutions, ensuring real-time rate optimisation and competitive positioning.

AI is also transforming guest experiences—hotels can now analyse booking patterns, preferences, and sentiment data to create hyper-personalised offers and loyalty programmes.

OCCUPANCY LEVELS

- UAE led global hotel occupancy in 2024 at 77% - long-term vision to welcome 40 million visitors annually by 2031
- Saudi Arabia surpassed its Vision 2030 goals, saw \$37.6 billion in international visitor contributions in 2023
- Africa is also emerging as a high-growth market, with 95 million inbound travellers projected by 2027.
- Egypt recorded 15.7 million tourists in 2024, targeting 18 million in 2025

DWTC-Infoma venture to start by Q4

Dubai World Trade Centre and Informa Group announced a strategic venture to create a global powerhouse in Exhibitions and Event Management, operating out of the Middle East, South Asia and Africa regions. The new entity, headquartered in Dubai, will be servicing super-regional MICE markets, besides leveraging their scale to export home-grown mega brands across the world.

TT Bureau

Dubai World Trade Centre and Informa Group announced a strategic venture to create a global powerhouse in Exhibitions and Event Management, operating out of the Middle East, South Asia and Africa regions. The partnership between two commercial equals with highly complementary assets and capabilities drives the creation of a new DWTC-Infoma company - Informa International - that will be fully operational by Q4 2025.

The new entity, headquartered in Dubai, will be servicing super-regional MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) markets, in addition to leveraging their scale to export home-grown megabrands across the world.



His Excellency Helal Saeed Al Marri
Director General, Dubai World Trade
Centre Authority

The move anchors DWTC's commitment to tripling Dubai's MICE Sector GDP contribution to AED54 billion annually by 2033, in line with targets in the D33 Dubai Economic Agenda. Equally, it will focus on cementing Dubai as the global epicentre for business and enterprise, even as the city gains in repute as the world's preferred MICE

industry hub. Informa International will include exhibitions, confexes, conferences, professional training and accreditation businesses of both DWTC and Informa in Dubai and connected partner markets, creating a market leader with revenues of more than US\$700 million.

Key objectives

Global MICE Powerhouse: Combines DWTC's global events with Informa Group's events business in the UAE and connected partner markets to own and operate more than 40 market-leading brands in highly attractive growth categories, such as Food (Gulfood), ICT (GITEX), Information Security (GISEC), Healthcare (WHX), Energy (Middle East Energy) and Aviation (Dubai Airshow);

Accelerated Global Expansion: Creates further scale and

opportunity to export DWTC's brands across the fastest global growth markets for B2B events, including the Indian Subcontinent, Asia, Middle East, Europe and Africa;

His Excellency Helal Saeed Al Marri, Director General, Dubai World Trade Centre Authority, said: "DWTC has anchored and enabled Dubai's leadership as a preferred global hub for the

economies." **Stephen A Carter**, Group Chief Executive, Informa PLC, said: "We have a great partnership in Dubai with DWTC and today's announcement will further expand our relationship, allowing us to create something quite unique and special together in what is a highly vibrant and fast-growing market."

Informa International will focus on cementing Dubai as the global epicentre for business and enterprise, even as the city gains in repute

Dubai as #1 Global Business Hub

Targets attracting marquee events from the 100+ specialist Informa global brands across wide ranging sectors into Dubai. This feeds into the city's economic strategy with significant venue infrastructure coming on stream from 2026, at Dubai Exhibition Centre (DEC).

MICE Sector. With the city's flagship events like GITEX and Gulfood expanding internationally, and Informa's portfolio of leading shows in complementary sectors across the super-region, this strategic partnership is set to be a transformation engine for cross-border trade and enterprise, co-creating sustainable value for the industries and

PARTNERSHIP IN FINANCIAL TERMS

AED 54 billion
Dubai's MICE Sector expected
GDP contribution by 2033

US\$700 million
revenue Informa International
will generate

40
market-leading brands the new
entity will own and operate

New Abu Dhabi Pass for travellers

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi has partnered with Etihad Airways to launch the new Abu Dhabi Pass at ITB Berlin. The free Abu Dhabi Pass unlocks a range of benefits for Etihad passengers and all visitors to the emirate. It will transform the visitor experience into a fully digital journey, simplifying access to the emirate's offerings.

TT Bureau

Etihad passengers will receive an email with a link to access the Abu Dhabi Pass through a dedicated website, with no additional cost or app download required. The free Abu Dhabi Pass unlocks a range of benefits for Etihad passengers and all visitors to the emirate. These include a tourist SIM card with 10GB data to stay connected, unlimited access to public buses, and 24-hour unlimited access to the hop-on-hop-off tourist bus network exploring key city attractions.

Abdulla Yousof, Director - International Operations, DCT Abu Dhabi, said: "The launch of the new Abu Dhabi Pass reflects our commitment to enhancing the visitor experience by providing seamless access to the emirate's diverse, world-class attractions, cultural landmarks, and entertainment offerings.



Aysha Al Kaabi, Saleh Mohamed Al Gezir and Abdulla Yousof at ITB Berlin

Through this partnership, we aim to introduce Abu Dhabi as a top global destination to a wider audience, making it easier for our travel and tourism stakeholders to showcase the very best the emirate has to offer." **Aysha Al Kaabi**, Vice President - Commercial Enablement & Engagement, Etihad Airways, said: "Our collaboration with DCT Abu Dhabi makes experiencing

the emirate's attractions more appealing than ever. By combining transport, connectivity, and attraction discounts in one digital pass, we are making it simpler for visitors to enjoy Abu Dhabi's diverse experiences, from cultural discoveries to family entertainment."

The agreement builds on the success of Etihad's stopover

programme, which welcomed 85,000 international visitors in 2024, compared to 12,000 in 2023. In 2025, the airline anticipates hosting more than 130,000 stopover guests, representing more than 50 per cent year-on-year increase. When

tan and Louvre Abu Dhabi, and special rates at Yas Island's entertainment destinations. This includes Ferrari World Abu Dhabi, Warner Bros. World™ Abu Dhabi, SeaWorld Yas Island, Abu Dhabi and Yas Waterworld. The pass also provides access

and improved connectivity, and it supports the strategy's goals of attracting 39.3 million visitors, creating 178,000 new jobs in the tourism sector, and contributing AED90 billion to Abu Dhabi's GDP by 2030.

It offers a SIM card with 10GB data, access to public buses and 24-hour access to the hop-on-hop-off tourist bus network to explore key city attractions

booking through etihad.com, visitors choosing to stopover in Abu Dhabi can also benefit from a complimentary hotel stay of up to two nights, turning their journey into two holidays in one.

Pass holders also enjoy exclusive discounts of 15 per cent at Abu Dhabi's premier cultural venues, including Qasr Al Wa-

to deals at over 200 restaurants across the emirate and savings on popular experiences like desert safaris and guided city tours.

The Abu Dhabi Pass aligns with the objectives of Abu Dhabi's Tourism Strategy 2030, enhancing the visitor experience through exceptional offerings

GOALS OF TOURISM STRATEGY 2030

85,000
international visitors
welcomed in 2024,
compared to 12,000 in
2023

130,000
stopover guests the airline
expects in 2025, over 50
per cent year-on-year
increase

15%
exclusive discounts pass
holders enjoy at Abu
Dhabi's premier cultural
venues

UN adopts tourism jobs indicator as SDG

The United Nations has adopted a new tourism employment indicator as part of the official Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicator Framework, which was approved at the 56th session of the UN Statistical Commission. With this decision, global data on tourism employment will be systematically monitored within the SDG monitoring process for the first time.

TT Bureau

The United Nations has taken a major step in recognising tourism's role in sustainable development by adopting a new tourism employment indicator as part of the official Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicator Framework. Endorsed at the 56th session of the UN Statistical Commission, the landmark decision means that, for the first time, global data on tourism employment will be systematically monitored within the SDG monitoring process. It also increases the number of official tourism SDG indicators from two to three, raising recognition of the sector's global contribution to economic and social progress.

Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General, UN Tourism, says: "What gets measured, gets done. As part of Goal 8,



Zurab Pololikashvili
Secretary-General
UN Tourism

we strive for sustainable tourism that creates jobs. The new tourism employment indicator goes beyond GDP to enhance our understanding of tourism's potential for social progress. Policymakers will be better equipped to identify gaps, address inequalities, and maximise tourism's social and economic benefits—ensuring no one is left behind."

UN Tourism's most recent survey of Member States' priorities revealed a strong preference for the organisation to work towards ensuring tourism contributes to the achievement of the SDGs. The new indicator, with UN Tourism as its custodian, delivers the evidence to advance on this priority.

Strengthening tourism's role in global development

The indicator responds to a critical policy issue in many countries. Together with the existing SDG indicator on tourism's GDP, the new indicator offers a broader perspective on tourism's sustainability that better considers social progress.

With this recognition, tourism employment will now be officially integrated into the deliberations of the United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, including the UN Sustainable

Development Goals Report. The data will be available on the SDG Global Database, as well as on the UN Tourism Statistics Database website.

The indicator was jointly advanced under the leadership of Austria, Spain, Saudi Arabia, CARICOM, ILO and UN Tourism.

and international levels, while minimising reporting burden on countries. Tourism represents 5.6 per cent of employed people

of global employment. In 2023 alone, 127 million people were employed in tourism worldwide, based on data reported by 89 countries and comprising 68 per cent of the world population. Tourism offers employment and income opportunities in developed and developing countries alike, even in remote areas.

The new tourism employment indicator goes beyond GDP to enhance our understanding of tourism's potential for social progress

It is fruit of extensive research and development through consultative and intergovernmental processes over several years. The inclusion of the tourism employment indicator is one of three new indicators endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission

and international levels, while minimising reporting burden on countries.

Tourism represents 5.6 per cent of employed people Between 2015 and 2023, tourism accounted for 5.6 per cent

TOURISM SHARE IN JOBS

5.6%

share of tourism jobs in global employment between 2015 and 2023

127 million

people were employed in tourism worldwide in 2023

89 countries

data was collected from, which covered 68% of the world population



IBM tech to elevate Riyadh Air's flight

Riyadh Air will leverage IBM watsonx and IBM Consulting solutions to drive its vision as the world's first digital-native airline, as per an agreement between Riyadh Air and IBM. The collaboration between the two conglomerates aims to help power the Saudi Arabian airline's mission to launch flights in 2025 while offering an elevated guest experience.

TT Bureau

IBM announced a new agreement with Riyadh Air, which will integrate watsonx, IBM's portfolio of AI products, and IBM Consulting AI solutions to establish an enterprise-wide AI capability to elevate Riyadh Air's guest and employee experiences. As Riyadh Air prepares for its inaugural flights in late 2025, the new Saudi Arabian airline sets another key building block of its journey in redefining air travel as the world's first digital-native carrier. The announcement took place at the third edition of The FII PRIORITY Miami 2025 Summit, where senior executives from both IBM and Riyadh Air, including **Adam Boukadida**, Chief Financial Officer, Riyadh Air and **Mohamad Ali**, SVP and Head of IBM Consulting, reaffirmed their commitment to driving innovation in the aviation sector.



Mohamad Ali, SVP and Head of IBM Consulting and Adam Boukadida, Chief Financial Officer, Riyadh Air, at the summit

Building a world-class airline requires more than just aircraft and infrastructure; it demands an intelligent digital foundation that anticipates passenger needs, streamlines operations, and empowers employees. Riyadh Air is embracing this challenge by making AI the driving force behind its transformation.

Boukadida said: "Riyadh Air is more than just an airline; it is a

gateway to new opportunities for travellers from the Kingdom and beyond. As we move closer to our first flight later in 2025, our vision is to deliver a seamless, world-class travel experience by expanding our reach, pioneering innovations, and redefining industry standards. By deepening our collaboration with IBM, we are harnessing the power of AI, from intelligent customer interactions to optimised flight

operations, to set a new benchmark for the future of aviation."

This agreement aims to strengthen Riyadh Air's position as a truly digital-native airline, building on IBM's AI-driven products and solutions together with IBM Consulting as its lead systems integrator.

IBM's watsonx, IBM's portfolio of AI products, will serve as

the foundation for Riyadh Air's AI platform, driving mission-critical functions and fostering open innovation with multi-model AI. The new platform will be built with a focus on data security, privacy, regulatory compliance, and responsible AI adoption. Riyadh Air will also leverage Agentic AI to deploy autonomous bots to enable seamless and personalised system interactions.

Ali, Senior Vice President and Head of IBM Consulting, said: "By embedding watsonx at the core of its operations, Riyadh Air is taking an AI-first approach to redefine air travel and set new industry standards as the world's first digital-native airline. Together, we are supercharging our teams with AI to enhance traveller experiences, optimise operations, and shape the future of aviation in Saudi Arabia and beyond."

The airline's decision to partner with IBM Consulting and watsonx was driven by IBM's strong track record in AI transformation, backed by successful past engagements with Riyadh Air that established trust and credibility. IBM's immersive engagement model played a key role in the expanded relationship.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Riyadh Air's AI-driven strategy aligns with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030
- ❖ The vision aims to serve 330 million passengers annually by 2030
- ❖ Use of IBM watsonx and IBM Consulting solutions to drive Riyadh Air's plan to become the world's first digital-native airline

'Together in Travel' initiative by WTTC

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) has announced **Andrea Grisdale**, Founder and CEO, IC Bellagio, as the Vice Chair of its new initiative, Together in Travel, alongside 13 founding partners. The new platform, offering innovative travel solutions, aims to transform how Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) operate and succeed within the global travel industry.

TT Bureau

Andrea Grisdale, Founder and CEO, IC Bellagio, has been appointed by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) as the Vice Chair of its new initiative, Together in Travel, alongside 13 founding partners. With more than 25 years of experience in crafting bespoke travel experiences, Grisdale will lead the initiative's mission to foster inclusivity, resilience, and sustainability across the sector.



Julia Simpson
President & CEO
WTTC

Travel & Tourism, and 'Together in Travel' represents an unprecedented collaboration that will equip SMEs with essential tools for success in our evolving global landscape. Under Andrea Grisdale's leadership, whose commitment to sustainable tourism is exemplary, this initiative will catalyse transformative growth across our sector."

Matthew Upchurch, Vice Chair, Chairman and CEO, Virtuoso,

said: "The 'Together in Travel' initiative, which I am proud to have spearheaded in my WTTC role, represents a transformative effort to support critical small to medium enterprises. By joining forces with an outstanding group of high-profile WTTC member founding partners, we are providing these businesses with the tools, resources, and opportunities necessary to not only survive but thrive in an increasingly complex and competitive market. This initiative is a vital step in ensuring that SMEs can scale, innovate, and contribute to a more resilient and sustainable global travel ecosystem. Along with the leadership of Julia Simpson and Andrea Grisdale, 'Together in Travel' is setting the stage for long-term, positive change, strengthening the sector's foundations and ensuring its future success."

Grisdale said: "I am deeply honoured to serve as Vice Chair of the 'Together in Travel' initiative.

This programme is a powerful opportunity to empower SMEs within the travel sector, providing them with the tools, resources, and support they need to thrive in an ever-evolving industry. By fostering inclusivity, resilience, and sustainability, we can help these businesses not only navigate today's challenges but also shape a more dynamic and sus-

'Together in Travel' provides SMEs with vital resources, including access to global markets and investment opportunities, and specialised training programmes

tainable future for global travel. Together, we are setting the stage for long-term growth and positive transformation across the entire travel ecosystem."

The distinguished founding partners represent leaders across the travel ecosystem:

Abercrombie & Kent Group, Accor, Diriyah Gate, FINN Partners, Hilton, Intrepid, Microsoft, MSC Cruises, OMRAN, Red Carnation Hotels, Trip.com Group, VFS Global and Virtuoso.

The partnership brings together diverse expertise from across the travel and hospitality sectors. Accor and Red Carnation

innovation, ensuring a seamless experience for travellers. OMRAN and Diriyah Gate offer invaluable insights into destination development. VFS Global and FINN Partners complete the ecosystem, offering visa services and marketing communications support.

DIVERSE EXPERTISE

- ❖ MSC Cruises brings unparalleled cruise expertise
- ❖ Virtuoso, Hilton, and Abercrombie & Kent Group offer extensive luxury travel knowledge
- ❖ Microsoft and Trip.com Group provide cutting-edge technological innovation, ensuring a seamless experience for travellers
- ❖ Accor and Red Carnation Hotels contribute their deep hospitality experience

Vision 2030 changing KSA's society

With Vision 2030 as a driving force, Saudi Arabia has unlocked unprecedented opportunities for women to lead, innovate and shape the future of tourism and hospitality. Yet, real progress means going beyond symbolic gestures – it's about creating lasting pathways for growth, mentorship, and leadership. **TRAVEL MIDDLE EAST** as media partner for Future Hospitality Summit - Saudi Arabia talks to woman professionals.

TT Bureau

How has the woman leadership landscape in Saudi Arabia's hospitality sector evolved, and what major challenges remain?

Dr Maryam Ficociello, Chief Governance Officer, Red Sea Global: "Vision 2030 is transforming Saudi Arabia's society. The woman workforce reached 35.4 per cent in 2024, surpassing initial targets. At Red Sea Global (RSG), some departments boast 44 per cent woman representation, and my own journey to becoming Chief Governance Officer demonstrates the leadership opportunities now available for women. Progress



Dr Maryam Ficociello
Chief Governance Officer
Red Sea Global

women thrive. A growing talent pipeline signifies a bright future for woman leaders. While representation evolves, emerging role models and focused devel-



Mashael Alnosayan
Marketing & Communication
Taiba Investments

leaders. It has never been such an exciting time to be a woman in Saudi Arabia, and it is so rewarding to see junior colleagues rise through the ranks and deliver impact."



Dr Sarah Gasim
Senior Vice President
Head of Hotels KSA, JLL

menting go beyond merely opening doors for women, fostering an environment where they can excel and lead with impact."

The sector is rapidly progressing towards women leading at all levels, with opportunities for them to excel in their careers and achieve their full potential."

Dr Ficociello: "The sector must champion inclusivity at all levels, and this principle runs through our entire people strategy. We use gender-neutral job adverts and diverse recruitment shortlists to boost woman representation. We are also committed to equal pay and career advancement through develop-

menting go beyond merely opening doors for women, fostering an environment where they can excel and lead with impact."

Alnosayan: "To every young woman aspiring to leadership in hospitality: start by embracing every challenge as a chance for growth, and every opportunity as a pathway to success. Vision 2030 is transforming Saudi Arabia's hospitality sector, driving rapid innovation and growth through AI-powered management, sustainability

While representation evolves, emerging role models and focused development initiatives are crucial, solidifying women's vital role in shaping the sector's future

– Mashael Alnosayan



Dr Abeer Alamri
Skills Development and Talent
Optimisation Expert

has been significant, but there is more to do. That is why we are investing in initiatives like our Female Leadership Programme, vocational training and schemes for elite graduates to provide more Saudi women with rewarding career pathways."

Mashael Alnosayan, Marketing & Communication, Taiba Investments: "Vision 2030 has driven a remarkable surge in woman leadership within Saudi Arabia's



Lama Kamakhi
Colleague Engagement Manager
Mandarin Oriental Al Faisaliah

opment initiatives are crucial, solidifying women's vital role in shaping the sector's future."

With the Kingdom's Vision 2030 emphasising gender inclusivity, what new opportunities are emerging for women in hospitality leadership?

Dr Ficociello: "Vision 2030's commitment to woman empowerment enables young Saudi women to participate in a rapidly growing hospitality sector,

How can the hospitality industry further accelerate diversity and create more leadership opportunities for women?

Dr Sarah Gasim, Senior Vice President, Head of Hotels KSA, JLL: "The advancement of women in Saudi Arabia's hospitality sector extends beyond breaking barriers; it is about establishing pathways for future generations to thrive. Meaningful progress is achieved when busi-

nesses go beyond merely opening doors for women, fostering an environment where they can excel and lead with impact."

Alnosayan: "Among Saudi Arabia's various sectors, hospitality is particularly noteworthy for its rapid advancement of women's roles. The Saudi government has prioritised women's empowerment, leading to faster growth in opportunities. Women in Saudi Arabia have proven to be strong leaders, especially in hospitality, with continued support, mentorship, and a commitment to diversity. This is a key part of the Kingdom's vision for a more inclusive economy.

ment, mentoring and leadership programmes. By recognising the essential value women offer, we can inspire change and build a society rich with opportunity."

Inspiring the Next Generation - What advice do you have for young women aspiring to leadership roles in hospitality?

Dr Abeer Alamri, Skills Development and Talent Optimisation Expert: "Develop your skills, seek mentors, and build a strong network. Embrace challenges as learning opportunities and don't be afraid to voice your ideas. Confidence and resilience are key. Stay passionate, adaptable, and always strive for excellence. Your unique perspective is invaluable to the future of hospitality."

Lama Kamakhi, Colleague Engagement Manager, Mandarin Oriental Al Faisaliah: "Connecting with mentors and industry professionals is vital for women aspiring leadership in the hospitality industry, offering essential guidance and networking chances. To remain competitive, consistently improve your skills through educational courses and practical experiences. Develop your leadership capabilities, focusing on effective communication, decision-making, and empathy. Encourage inclusivity by appreciating diverse perspectives within your team, which can drive innovation. Finally, have confidence in your abilities

initiatives, and advanced technology integration. The industry is evolving with cutting-edge advancements, creating exciting opportunities for future leaders. Equip and build yourself with skills and knowledge, celebrate wins, and find mentors. Leadership is an art; learn and shape the future."

Dr Ficociello: "An essential part of my growth journey has been mentoring. I would encourage any young woman to seek out mentors—people they find inspiring or who they have learned from in the past—and meet with them regularly. Mentors can be a brilliant sounding board for ideas and can provide invaluable advice on problems. At RSG, we have a range of initiatives designed to give female Saudi talent the opportunity to speak to more experienced colleagues and facilitate knowledge-sharing."

SPECIAL RATE PASSES FOR WOMEN

The bench, organisers of Future Hospitality Summit - Saudi Arabia, as part of its commitment and focus on women in hospitality, will be offering special rate passes to FHS - Saudi Arabia 2025 for Saudi national women working in hospitality. The #FHS-WomenPower campaign is an initiative to champion gender diversity and women empowerment in the industry in line with Saudi Vision 2030 and the region's social and economic aspirations. All senior woman professionals in hospitality are invited to join FHS on the journey towards an inclusive and progressive hospitality landscape. **Tanja Millner**, Production Director, The Bench, said: "International Women's Day in hospitality should be about action, not just awareness. True inclusivity means ensuring women have real access to knowledge, mentorship, and leadership pathways to embrace opportunities. We must move beyond token gestures to actively support career progression, equal pay, and recognition based on merit. A more inclusive industry benefits everyone—when we uplift women with tangible opportunities, we promote innovation, excellence, and a stronger future for hospitality."



Tanja Millner
Production Director
The Bench

At RSG), some departments boast 44% woman representation, and my own journey to becoming CGO demonstrates the leadership opportunities now available to women

– Dr Maryam Ficociello

hospitality sector. Women are increasingly empowered, taking on prominent roles and demonstrating immense potential. The sector champions equal opportunities and inclusivity, ensuring


which is generating new, exciting opportunities. At RSG, these range from roles dominated by men globally, such as security and fire and rescue teams, to hospitality managers and senior

ABOUT FHS SAUDI ARABIA

- ❖ FHS Saudi Arabia will be held at Mandarin Oriental Al Faisaliah, Riyadh
- ❖ Dates 11-13 May 2025
- ❖ Theme – 'Where Vision Shapes Opportunity'
- ❖ Over 1400 delegates are expected to attend

Summer travel visa tips with VFS

With summer round the corner, travellers from the United Arab Emirates are planning their outbound journeys earlier than anticipated. **Monaz Billimoria**, Regional Head - UAE, VFS Global, shares with  some important tips to simplify the visa application process for the travellers, which they could also do with the assistance of travel partners/ agents.

 TT Bureau

Summer is a peak travel season, which means higher volumes of travellers applying for their visas, resulting in delays. But by simply planning and being prepared, one can simplify the process and focus on the joy of travel. Here are the tips for a smart, stress-free and on-time visa application experience.

❖ **#ApplyInAdvance:** It is recommended to apply for visas as early as booking flights and stay. Keeping in view the expected higher demand this year, applicants should apply for their visa as early as possible. Most countries accept visa applications up to 90 days (3 months) before your date of travel. You can apply for a Schengen visa up to 6 months prior to departure.

❖ **Check for visa processing timelines:** It's peak season and



Monaz Billimoria
Regional Head - UAE
VFS Global

a common concern is how long processing a visa will take, especially when your travel dates are approaching. While VFS Global ensures that your official documents are passed on to the concerned Consulate/ Embassy within 24 hours of submission, it is important to know that each country has a different timeline for its visa processing. During peak season, visa processing

at the Embassy/ Consulate can take longer than usual. These timelines are clearly mentioned on the country-specific websites and the website of the respective Embassy/ Consulate.

❖ **Follow the checklist:** A checklist of the documentation required for visa applications for each country served by VFS Global is available on www.vfsglobal.com. Refer to this and be sure to carry all the requisite documentation to submit along with the duly filled application form. Also, check your passport's validity. Many countries require a passport valid six months beyond your return date.

❖ **Book an appointment:** Appointments to submit a visa application are available online on www.vfsglobal.com and availability is reflected in real-time. Once you choose your preferred date and time, it is recommend-

ed that you arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the appointed time to avoid missing your slot.

❖ **Track your application:** Once your application is submitted, you can track the progress of the application online. The status will be updated as and when

ware of fraudulent entities who charge fees from customers for scheduling appointments or providing any other services using VFS Global's name. VFS Global does not charge any fee for booking appointments on www.vfsglobal.com, which is the official website catering

By following these tips, you can ensure that your visa application process is stress-free and that you are able to enjoy your international travels with ease and peace of mind. Applicants looking for an enhanced experience can also choose from a range of optional services provided by VFS Global for additional comfort and convenience, such as premium lounge for end-to-end personalised help, doorstep visa services for an at-home solution, among many others.

Most countries accept visa applications up to 90 days (3 months) before your date of travel. You can apply for a Schengen visa up to 6 months prior to departure

your passport is ready for collection/ delivery. Please note, once your application reaches the Embassy, VFS Global has no influence on its progress and cannot track the status at this stage.

❖ **#DoNotFallForFraud:** Visa applicants are advised to be-

to visa applications. However, some governments require pre-payment of the service fee at the time of booking the appointment. This step is only to ensure genuine travellers use appointment booking and the system is kept safe from misuse by fraudulent entities.



Tech-driven steps streamline bookings

The travel and tourism sector in the Middle East region is experiencing a significant shift fuelled by cutting-edge technology and digital transformation. Digitalisation is at the core of this transformation. With the industry projected to generate approximately US \$39.57 billion in revenue by 2025, the region embraces innovations that enhance efficiency, convenience and sustainability.

From Artificial Intelligence (AI) revolutionising customer experiences to smart infrastructure optimising travel operations, emerging technologies are reshaping how travellers explore and interact with destinations. Digitalisation is at the core of this transformation, with advancements, such as biometric authentication, contactless services, and AI-powered personalisation, creating seamless travel experiences. As governments and private enterprises invest in futuristic solutions ranging from air taxis in the UAE to AI-driven booking platforms,



technology is driving the Middle East's tourism boom.

AI has been significantly contributing to modernising the travel industry. As travellers seek convenience, businesses leverage AI-powered chatbots, intuitive mobile apps, and personalised loyalty programmes to enhance the booking experience. These tools offer instant support, seamless navigation, and tailored recommendations, making online reservations

more efficient and user-friendly. For instance, companies like Expedia and Booking.com utilise AI to offer personalised itineraries and summarise guest reviews, streamlining the decision-making process for travellers. Furthermore, airlines like Emirates have been employing AI for tasks like rebooking flights, optimising routes, predicting meal preferences, and enhancing operational efficiency and passenger satisfaction.

Beyond front-end improvements, travel companies are also strengthening their back-end systems. Advanced booking engines streamline reservations by offering real-time availability and automated confirmations. Dynamic pricing tools analyse demand patterns and competitor rates to optimise pricing strategies, ensuring competitive yet profitable

These advancements improve customer engagement and drive operational efficiency—AI-powered preferences. Meanwhile, pricing and inventory management automation ensures businesses remain agile in fluctuating market conditions.

With Middle Eastern destinations experiencing a surge in digital adoption, travel firms prioritise

which uses AI to analyse customer data and personalise experiences, offering customised recommendations for meals, entertainment, seating preferences, and personalised promotions and offers. This has a positive impact on customer experience. For instance, in 2024, a survey by Travel Tech Innovations shows 75 per cent of Emirates passengers value the convenience of its digital services.

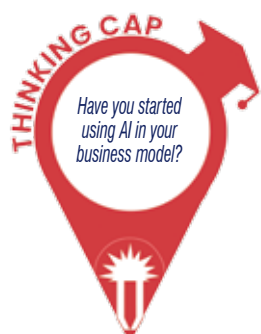
With Middle Eastern destinations experiencing a surge in digital adoption, travel firms prioritise seamless, tech-driven booking experiences

offerings. Additionally, wider distribution channels—integrating with Online Travel Agencies (OTAs), metasearch engines, and direct booking platforms, allow businesses to reach larger audience, increasing their visibility and revenue potential.

seamless, tech-driven booking experiences. For example, the Jumeirah Group is actively adopting digital solutions, including virtual gift experiences, language translation tools, and contactless check-in options. Emirates is another example



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



Nominations Open



ARABIAN
TRAVEL
AWARDS
— 2025 —

Nominate Now

sonia.butalia@arabiantravelawards.ae, devika@ddppl.com
www.arabiantravelawards.ae

Media Partners



Date	Event	Venue
1	SITE Incentive Summit Americas 2025	Stowe, US
3	CAPA Airline Leader Summit- Americas	Cayman Islands
3	Hospitality Leadership Summit	Boston, US
3	ABTA: Aviation Forum 2025	London, UK
6	ILTM Africa- International Luxury Travel Market Africa 2025	Cape Town, Africa
6-9	Connections Luxury Europe 2025	Catalunya, Spain
8	Deluxe Travel Market Georgia	Tbilisi, Georgia
8-10	Hotel & Hospitality Expo- Saudi Arabia	Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
8- 11	International Conference on Tourism and Hospitality - Lisbon	Lisbon, Portugal
9-11	WTM Africa	Cape Town, SA
13	Health Tourism Conference & Exhibition	Dubai, UAE
14-16	WTM Latin America	São Paulo, Brazil
15-16	Hospitality Vietnam Conference (HVC)	Saigon, Vietnam
16- 17	The Meetings Show- Asia Pacific	Marina Bay Sands, Singapore
16-17	Business Travel Show- Europe	Marina Bay Sands, Singapore
18-20	MATTA Fair Asia Pacific	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
18	Deluxe Travel Market- Uzbekistan	Navoi, Uzbekistan
23- 25	Kazakhstan International Exhibition KITF	Almaty, Kazakhstan
24-26	China Outbound Travel & Tourism Market	Beijing, China
27 Apr-1 May	Australian Tourism Exchange	Brisbane, Australia
28 Apr-1 May	Arabian Travel Market Show	Dubai, UAE

Bahi Ajman Palace signs new contracts

TT Bureau

ITB Berlin 2025 has proven to be a resounding success for Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, as it solidified its relationships with existing partners and secured new contracts, which will enhance the offerings of the two properties.

Ifkikhar Hamdani, Area General Manager, Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, said, "We are excited about the strong ties we have formed with both existing and new partners (at ITB)."

He added, "We are particularly proud of the success of Coral Beach Resort Sharjah, which boasts a remarkable 97 per cent recommendation rate on Holi-

dayCheck, making it a top choice among German tourists in the northern Emirates."

Despite a decline in demand to the Northern Emirates due to the recent bankruptcy of the giant FTI Group, which has left a void in mass bookings from Germany to the UAE, Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Coral Beach Resort Sharjah's partners have strategically managed to capture a significant share of the market. The two properties are confident to see an increase in tourists from Germany in the upcoming summer and the last quarter of 2025.

ITB Berlin continues to be the premiere event uniting the international travel community and connecting with so many visionaries in hospitality industry. ▶



Trendsetters of the month



Visit Abu Dhabi

Visit Abu Dhabi's video post showcasing the Ramadan as rich in culture and cuisine for tourists garnered **831K** views & **1.6K** likes.



Saudia Airlines

Saudia Airlines' video of the team that works behind every flight to make it seamless for travellers garnered **24.9K** views & **417** likes.



Emirates

Emirates Airlines' Ramadan Kareem wishes post with flights under the moon went viral on Instagram with **1.1M** views & **74.8K** likes.



Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's tourism community page's video of people on the rocky hill that faces Makkah went viral with **107K** views & **10.6K** likes.



Riyadh Air

The recent LinkedIn post by Riyadh Air, celebrating 2 years since its launch, received **3.6K** likes & **54** reposts.



Qatar Airways

Qatar Airways celebrated the women in aviation on their recent LinkedIn post that received **5.5K** likes & **136** reposts.



Important AI tools for business

Your video creation partner

FlexClip empowers travel agents with an intuitive platform that streamlines video creation. Whether you are crafting promotional content, virtual tours, or itinerary previews, it provides the tools to transform ideas into visually stunning videos.

What makes FlexClip unique AI tool? FlexClip distinguishes itself through a combination of innovative features and an extensive media library, all accessible directly from your browser. Key highlights include:

❖ **AI-powered tool:** Leverage artificial intelligence to automate and enhance your video creation. Features such as the AI Video Generator allow you to produce videos from text prompts, articles, or URLs, while the AI Text to Speech tool converts

written content into natural-sounding voiceovers.

❖ **Extensive template library:** Access over 6,000 professionally designed templates across various categories, including business, lifestyle, and social media. These templates provide a solid foundation, enabling you to create compelling videos quickly and efficiently.

❖ **Rich media resources:** Enhance your projects with a vast collection of media assets. FlexClip offers more than 4 million royalty-free videos and photos, 74,000 music tracks and sound effects, and 3 million dynamic elements, ensuring

you have the right resources to elevate your content.

❖ **User-friendly editing tools:** Perform essential editing tasks with ease. FlexClip's intuitive interface allows you to trim, merge, and adjust video speed effortlessly. Additionally, you can add text, music, voiceovers, and animated elements to keep your audience engaged.

❖ **Seamless collaboration and sharing:** Collaborate with team members in real-time, thanks to cloud storage that provides smooth access to your files and projects. Once your video is complete, export it in up to 4K resolution. ▶



OUR BRANDS

ARMANI

BURBERRY

COACH

GUCCI

PRADA

TORY BURCH



UP TO
70%
OFF, ALL
YEAR ROUND

Elevate your trip to Europe

DISCOVER ALL DAY JOY AT MCARTHURGLEN DESIGNER OUTLETS

Hello to a world of flavour

From quick bites to indulgent meals, our centres offer a diverse dining experience to suit every taste. Enjoy international cuisines, cosy cafes, and gourmet restaurants - perfect for a relaxing break between shopping.



Hello to the best of international luxury brands

From high-end fashion to must-have accessories, enjoy unbeatable savings in one of our 23 stylish shopping destinations, including Milan, Venice, Vienna, Paris and Dusseldorf.



Hello to shopping made easy

Enjoy a seamless shopping experience at McArthurGlen Designer Outlets with a range of services; including tax-free shopping for international visitors, guest lounges, free Wi-Fi and personal shopping assistance*. Take advantage of hands-free shopping* and convenient parking - everything you need for a stress-free, luxury shopping trip! (*where available)



SCAN HERE TO REDEEM YOUR 10% DISCOUNT TODAY

Contact GCC.sales@mcarthurglen.com to find out more

McArthur
Glen
Designer Outlets

MOVEMENTS

ACCOR Jeddah, KSA

Accor has appointed **ISLAM SAMAD** as Vice President Development, Middle East. Based in Jeddah, Islam will be instrumental in advancing Accor's ambitious expansion strategy, reinforcing the brand's position in the market and driving accelerated growth through strategic partnerships, high-value deals, and transformative development initiatives. A visionary leader with over 23 years of experience, Islam has played a pivotal role in shaping the hospitality landscape across the Middle East - the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and United Arab Emirates. In his new role, his focus will be on driving the group's expansion strategy, strengthening brand presence, and ensuring the execution of Accor's development plans, specifically in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Egypt among other countries.



25HOURS HOTEL ONE CENTRAL Dubai

25hours Hotel One Central has appointed **JAMES BERRY** as the General Manager. With nearly three decades of experience with esteemed hospitality brands, such as Accor, Marriott International, and Radisson Hotel Group, almost 20 years of which as General Manager, Berry brings a wealth of expertise and a deep understanding of hotel management to his new role. Originally from the UK, Berry grew up in the heart of the Midlands, just an hour North of London. His ability to foster exceptional employee engagement, improve guest satisfaction, and elevate hotel performance has been a cornerstone of his success. Berry, now 47, will play a pivotal role in delivering on the brand's promise of creating exceptional experiences for both travellers and locals alike.



BANYAN TREE ALULA Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Banyan Tree AlUla, the all-villa luxury resort nestled in the Ashar Valley, has appointed **BHAVESH RAWAL** as the General Manager. With over 25 years of experience in luxury hospitality across the Middle East and Canada, Rawal brings a wealth of expertise in operational leadership, strategic growth, and delivering exceptional guest experiences. Having started his career as a chef, his deep understanding of Food & Beverage operations has shaped his leadership style, with a strong focus on culinary excellence in hospitality. In his new role, Rawal will lead the management of Banyan Tree AlUla, overseeing daily operations, financial performance, and strategic alignment. His leadership is rooted in a unified vision, mutual respect and a collective drive for excellence.



HYATT REGENCY ORYX DOHA Qatar

Hyatt Regency Oryx Doha has promoted **SAMER KHEIR** to the position of Hotel Manager. With an exceptional track record in hotel operations, finance, and leadership, Kheir is a seasoned hospitality professional with over 19 years of experience across Lebanon, Oman, and Qatar. His new responsibilities will include spearheading initiatives to strengthen the property's standing as a premier choice for business and leisure travellers in Doha and ensuring alignment with Hyatt's global standards for innovation and hospitality. He will oversee daily operations with a focus on elevating service quality. He will also guide the development and execution of financial and operational strategies. Prior to this, Kheir held key roles, including Director of Operations and Director of Finance at Hyatt Regency Oryx Doha.



NOVOTEL DUBAI AL BARSHA & APARTHOTEL ADAGIO PREMIUM DUBAI AL BARSHA Dubai

Novotel Dubai Al Barsha and Aparthotel Adagio Premium Dubai Al Barsha announced the appointment of **JULIA SCHAMNE** as the Cluster General Manager. With an illustrious 17-year career that spans across several top-tier global hospitality brands, including Kempinski, Sofitel, JA Resorts & Hotels, and Radisson, Schamne is well-prepared to steer the properties towards new heights of success and operational excellence. Her professional journey within the Accor group is notable, having previously served in strategic roles, such as Director of Rooms at Sofitel Abu Dhabi Corniche, GM at Adagio Premium The Palm, Cluster General Manager at Adagio Dubai Deira, Ibis Styles Dubai Deira and Mercure Dubai Deira.



SHANGRI-LA JEDDAH Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Shangri-La Jeddah has appointed **BRICE LUNOT** as the General Manager. A cultivated hospitality leader with over three decades of experience in luxury hospitality, Lunot brings a wealth of expertise and leadership to the property. He joined Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts in 2019. His journey with the group includes serving as General Manager at Shangri-La Le Touessrok in Mauritius and later leading Shangri-La operations in Maldives. Most recently, Lunot served as Acting General Manager at Shangri-La's flagship property on the Red Sea. In his new role, Lunot is set to enhance the guest experience while reinforcing the hotel's presence in the region. His deep understanding of the Shangri-La brand, coupled with dedication to excellence, will drive innovation, exceptional service, and operational success.



GRAND MERCURE DUBAI CITY AND IBIS STYLES DUBAI AIRPORT Dubai

Grand Mercure Dubai City and Ibis Styles Dubai Airport promoted **NAWAF HASAN** to the position of Cluster Hotel Manager. He was currently serving as the Cluster Director of Operations Acting General Manager since 4 January 2024. With an illustrious career spanning over 23 years in the hospitality industry, Hasan brings a wealth of experience and leadership expertise. His extensive background includes key positions at globally renowned hotel brands, where he honed his skills in operations management and team development. In his new role, Hasan will lead the team in maintaining the highest standards of hotel operations, ensuring adherence to Accor Core Standards, operational controls, policies, and service excellence.



TABUK INVESTMENT & TOURISM CO. Saudi Arabia

Joining Saudi Arabia's distinguished leader in investment and hospitality, **NURAN KILANI** has been appointed as the Group Director of Commercial at Tabuk Investment & Tourism Co. With over two decades of extensive experience in the hospitality industry, Kilani has a proven track record of driving revenue growth, enhancing market presence, and implementing innovative commercial strategies. Throughout her career, Kilani has held key leadership positions at globally renowned hospitality brands, including Hilton, Hyatt, Shangri-La, Emaar, Louvre, Rixos, Millennium, and TIME Hotels. She has been instrumental in shaping commercial strategies, optimising revenue management and pioneering guest personalisation initiatives.



SUN SIYAM Maldives

Sun Siyam Resorts has promoted **AHMED NAUFAL** to the position of Group Director of Business Development. Naufal steps into the expanded role after his outstanding performance as the Group Director of Sales & Marketing. In his new role, Naufal will leverage his extensive experience to lead initiatives that foster long-term growth and solidify Sun Siyam Resorts' position in the market. He will work closely with cross-functional teams to develop innovative strategies, drive operational efficiencies, and support the company's efforts to expand into new markets, all while enhancing the brand's presence across its properties in the Maldives and Sri Lanka. He joined Sun Siyam Resorts in 2021 as Director Sales & Marketing at Sun Siyam Olhuveli.



HAMPTON BY HILTON MARJAN ISLAND Ras Al Khaimah

Hampton by Hilton Marjan Island has appointed **PRASANTH JANARTHANAN** as its first Commercial Manager since the hotel opening. Janarthanan, who has over 20 years of experience, currently served as the Complex Director of Sales & Marketing for Millennium Place Barsha Heights Hotel & Hotel Apartments. Among the key leadership roles, he has held Cluster Head of Sales and Marketing and Cluster Reservation Manager positions within global brands, showcasing his ability to drive results and foster growth. His new position will see him oversee the day-to-day operations of the commercial division within Hampton by Hilton Marjan Island and elevate its market's presence, aligning with its goals and providing exceptional guest service. His appointment comes as the hotel enters a transformative phase of growth, aligning with Ras Al Khaimah's dynamic tourism landscape.



RADISSON BLU HOTEL, DUBAI MEDIA CITY AND PARK INN BY RADISSON, DUBAI MOTOR CITY Dubai

Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Media City and Park Inn by Radisson, Dubai Motor City appointed **AFFRIN SHAIKH** as the Cluster Director of Marketing and PR. With over 15 years of hospitality experience, Shaikh brings a wealth of expertise in strategic marketing, brand positioning, digital campaigns, and public relations. Her career encompasses leadership roles at renowned hospitality brands in India and the UAE, including Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts and most recently, The H Dubai hotel. In her new role, Shaikh will oversee all brand, marketing, and communication strategies for both Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Media City, and Park Inn by Radisson, Dubai Motor City.



HILTON CORPORATE OFFICE Dubai

Hilton has appointed **ALESSANDRO REDAELLI** as the Vice President of Operations for North Africa and Levant, based at Hilton's office in Cairo. In his new role, Redaelli will be responsible for Hilton's dynamic portfolio across North Africa and Levant, overseeing operations at 35 hotels across seven of Hilton's market-leading brands, with almost 50 additional properties set to open in the coming years. With a hospitality career spanning over 30 years, Redaelli has held significant leadership positions across multiple markets in Europe and the Middle East. Most recently, he served as General Manager of Conrad Abu Dhabi Etihad Towers. Hilton recently announced plans to triple its portfolio in Egypt, including the introduction of the Curio Collection by Hilton and Tapestry Collection by Hilton lifestyle brands.



Director
Sumeera Bahl
Managing Editor Middle East
Dr. Shehara Fernando
Chief Editor
Nisha Verma
At the Desk
Sushil Kumar

Business Development Manager
Crisna De Guzman
Sales & Admin Assistant
Angelito Villeza
Manager - Advertising
Jaspreet Kaur
Design
Sudhir Mudgal

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
UAE : Z1-02, P.O. Box 9348, Saif Zone, Sharjah, UAE
Ph.: +971 6 5528954, Fax: +971 6 5528956
E-mail: uae@dpp.com

is a publication of Durga Das Publications (Middle East) FZE. All information in is derived from sources, which we consider reliable and a sincere effort is made to report accurate information. It is passed on to our readers without any responsibility on our part. The publisher regret that he cannot accept liability for errors and omissions contained in this publication, however caused. Similarly, opinions/ views expressed by third parties in abstract and/or in interviews are not necessarily shared by. However, we wish to advise our readers that one or more recognized authorities may hold different views than those reported. Material used in this publication is intended for information purpose only. Readers are advised to seek specific advice before acting on

information contained in this publication which is provided for general use, and may not be appropriate for the readers' particular circumstances. Contents of this publication are copyright. No part of or any part of the contents thereof may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system or transmitted in any form without the permission of the publisher in writing. The same rule applies when there is a copy or the article is taken from another publication. An exemption is hereby granted for the extracts used for the purpose of fair review, provided two copies of the same publication are sent to us for our records. Publications reproducing material either in part or in whole, without permission could face legal action.

The publisher assumes no responsibility for returning any material solicited or unsolicited nor is he responsible for material lost or damaged. This publication is not meant to be an endorsement of any specific product or services offered. The publisher reserves the right to refuse, withdraw, amend or otherwise deal with all advertisements without explanation. All advertisements must comply with the UAE and International Advertising Code. The publisher will not be liable for any damage or loss caused by delayed publication, error or failure of an advertisement to appear.

Innovating Travel, Elevating Experiences

Join Us @
Stand No:
ME912

28th APRIL - 1st MAY 2025

Honored to be named
Best Corporate Travel Management Company
2024 by the Arabian Travel Awards.

HOLIDAYS | HOTELS | VISA | INSURANCE | AIR TICKET
ACTIVITIES | TRANSFERS | MICE | CRUISES... AND MORE

www.satgurutravel.ae

📍Dubai

☎+971 4 556 1050 ✉tripsaver@satgurutravel.com

📍Abu Dhabi

☎+971 2 639 4277 ✉holidays.auh@satgurutravel.com

ITVAR

COME & MEET THE FASTEST GROWING GSA TEAM AT THE DUBAI ATM 2025!

STAND

ME912

EVENT DATE

Mon 28th Apr -
Thu 01st May 2025

VENUE

DWTC Dubai,
UAE

OUR PARTNERS



Awarded as the
Fastest Growing GSA

🕒 Monday to Saturday: 9:00 AM - 6:00 PM

✉ agents@itvar.com ☎ +91 70733 30030

FLY THE ALL-NEW AIR INDIA

DUBAI ✈️ INDIA*



Enjoy world-class features on our upgraded aircraft

3-Cabin Classes including India's only Premium Economy

Relaxing Full-Recline Flat Beds in Business Class

Engaging 3000+ hours of entertainment

Seamless in-flight Wi-Fi access

Delectable gourmet meals

EXPERIENCE THE DIFFERENCE

*India includes only Delhi and Mumbai on select flights

Visual is for representation purpose only. T&C Apply.