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MIDDLE EAST'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE MONTHLY

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# 2025: Year of greater sustainability

The tourism and hospitality sectors are gearing up for a transformative 2025, driven by optimism and a renewed focus on sustainability. The industry is now prioritising climate action as an important agenda to future-proof its growth. Experts predict a dynamic year ahead, marked by shifting travel patterns and a wave of innovative projects.

**Dr Shehara Rizly**

Taking the whole of Arabia, as everyone refers to the Middle East, the nations have already come together to solve the pressing problem of climate change. Individually as countries and collectively as a region, they have become more aware, not just by talking about the situation at large but by taking simple actions to ensure that the small planet earth we live in can look at much brighter years in future. Many plans

have been announced over the last few months collectively on the subject but individually their focus on sustainability is another element that helps the whole well-being of every industry. As a resilient region combating various challenges over the past years, Middle East is positive to enjoy a much better year with all its new projects slowly opening to the visitors. The experiential tourism sector in the region will grow even better, share some of the industry experts with



**Ageel Alshaihani**  
Deputy Minister of Strategic Planning & Monitoring, MoT, KSA

initiatives are designed to empower governments, businesses, and communities alike to take bold steps.

“Tourism has a unique opportunity to lead in advancing sustainable development. Through Sustainable Tourism Global Center, we are committed to creating a tourism sector that contributes positively to the environment, strengthens local communities, and provides a model for responsible growth. Our

“As you all know, the air travel industry has been experiencing strong growth this year, and this trend is expected to continue into next year. We are seeing a significant growth rate, and we are planning for an even bigger year in 2025. What we are adding now are a range of extra services and value-added offerings. For example, customers can now purchase eSIMs, book car rentals through Wego.”



**Mamoun Hmidan**  
Chief Business Officer  
Wego

Contd. on page 8 ▶

# Transforming retail into travel experiences

Retail tourism is reshaping the global travel landscape, with the Middle East emerging as a key player in this dynamic sector. Industry experts share their views with

**TT Bureau**

Home to iconic shopping destinations, cultural markets, and luxury retail experiences, the Middle region is leveraging transformative initia-

tives like Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's economic diversification strategies to attract a growing number of international visitors. Globally, retail tourism has evolved beyond traditional shopping, becoming a

fusion of culture, entertainment, and lifestyle. The Middle East, with its unique blend of heritage and innovation, is setting new benchmarks in this space, solidifying its position as a global hub for experiential tourism.



**Saleem Sharif**  
Deputy Managing Director  
ATS Travel

“The Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF) plays a pivotal role in boosting tourism, attracting millions of visitors annually. In 2023, DSF welcomed over 3.35 million tourists, with a 10 per cent increase in footfall. The festival drives demand in retail, hospitality, and gastronomy, with Dubai's hotel occupancy rates exceeding 85 per cent. DSF's timing during the UAE's ideal winter weather makes it an attractive destination for international shoppers, offering exclusive deals, raffles, and cultural experiences. The event strengthens Dubai's position as a global hub for leisure and retail tourism.”

Contd. on page 10 ▶

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# KSA to build 250k hotel rooms

Driven by Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia is redefining global tourism with its rich cultural heritage, modern attractions, and forward-thinking strategies, establishing itself as a must-visit destination for travellers seeking diverse and unforgettable experiences. At a recent event, **His Excellency Ahmed Al Khateeb**, Minister of Tourism, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, shared that tourism has become the most important sector in the economy.

**TT Bureau**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ranked third globally in the growth rate of international tourist arrivals with over 61 per cent of the arrivals in the first eight to nine months of 2024 compared to the same period in 2019, according to a press release issued by UN Tourism in December 2024. The consistent performance and continued success in the tourism sector underlines the efforts of all stakeholders in the tourism ecosystem, including the plans and strategies of the Ministry of Tourism, which aims to achieve the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030. The significant increase in the number of inbound tourists also reflects the confidence of travellers in the Kingdom's attractive and diverse tourism offering, thereby enhancing Saudi Arabia's standing as a leading global tourist destination.

Earlier, Saudi Arabia had advanced 15 positions in the global ranking of inbound tourist spending, leading the upward movement among the top 50 countries and ranking 12th globally in 2023 compared to 2019. Additionally, the Kingdom led the G20 countries in the growth of international tourist arrivals in the first seven months of 2024 compared to 2019. Through

**His Excellency Ahmed Al Khateeb**, Minister of Tourism, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, said, "As the Minister of Tourism and Chairman of the Executive Council of the UN Tourism Organisation, I would like to shed light on the global tourism industry. We are finally recovering from the devastating impact of the pandemic, and I am optimistic that by the end of this year, we will see full recovery. Let us hope we never



**His Excellency Ahmed Al Khateeb**  
Minister of Tourism  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

experience another crisis of such magnitude."

His Excellency added, "Tourism is not merely a sector; it is a vital engine for economic growth and job creation. Globally, tourism accounts for 10 per cent of jobs, and 80 per cent of tourism businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—entities that often cannot withstand major crises. Importantly,

45 per cent of the workforce in this industry comprises women, making tourism an essential driver of social and economic progress. The World Travel & Tourism Council predicts that tourism will almost double over the next decade—a testament to its potential. In alignment with Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia

His Excellency reiterated, "Tourism is transformative. It creates jobs, empowers women, boosts rural economies, and drives GDP growth. In 2019, we launched our National Tourism Strategy, and since then, we have witnessed double-digit growth across jobs, GDP contribution, and tourist numbers. We set a

among the top five most-visited countries in the world."

Tourism's contribution to Saudi GDP has grown from 3 per cent in 2019 to 5 per cent today, with a clear path to reach 10 per cent by 2030.

**We set a goal of 100 million tourists by 2030—a milestone we reached last year. We have now raised the target to 150 million tourists by the targeted time**

recognised this opportunity and pivoted from its historical focus on oil and gas. Today, under Vision 2030, we are unlocking new sectors: tourism, culture, sports, and entertainment. The results speak for themselves."

goal of 100 million tourists by 2030—a milestone we reached last year. We have now raised the target to 150 million tourists, including 55 million international arrivals by 2030. This ambitious target will position Saudi Arabia

## IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS

**61%**  
Growth rate

**12<sup>th</sup>**  
Ranking in inbound tourists

**15**  
Positions advanced globally

**80%**  
SME tourism businesses

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# Fitur highlights UAE's tourism potential

Fitur 2025, to be organised by IFEMA MADRID from 22 to 26 January 2025 with **TRAVOTALK** as the media partner, will highlight the potential of tourism business between Spain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Around 10 companies, mainly tour operators and Dubai's iconic Atlantis Hotel, will be exhibiting their tourism products at the trade fair.

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The recovery of the Persian Gulf has been faster and stronger than that of other markets, with an economy that is growing above the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average and with higher spending and disposable income per consumer. Thus, the tourism sector in both territories has significant potential for developing specialised products. Spain experienced a record year for tourism in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region in 2023 with unprecedented growth in both the number of travellers and tourism expenditure.



Last year, FITUR attracted 9,000 companies, 152 nations and over 250,000 visitors

the countries of the Persian Gulf, both in terms of frequency and new routes. In the forecasts for flights from the UAE between 1 October 2024 and 31 March 2025, capacity to Spain has

**AT A GLANCE**

**140,000**  
UAE visitors travelled to Spain

**37.8%**  
growth

**€2,668**  
average spend

**The total number of GCC residents visiting Spain in 2023 reached 434,000, 33 per cent more than in 2022, with an average stay of 8.6 days**

The total number of GCC residents visiting Spain in 2023 reached 434,000, 33 per cent more than in 2022, with an average stay of 8.6 days. Specifically, visitors from the UAE totalled more than 140,000 and spending grew by 37.8 per cent, with an average spend of Euros

2,668, 26 per cent more than in 2022. According to industry sources, around 200,000 Spanish tourists visit Dubai every year.

In 2023, tourists from the Gulf region spent more than Euros 1.138 billion in Spain, 64.7 per cent more than in 2022, ac-

ording to Turespaña estimates based on INE data (Frontur and Egatur). These travellers are considered as "large consumers", with spending well above their European counterparts.

Connectivity with Spain is good and airlines have increased in all

grown by 33.2 per cent, consolidating the increases in summer, which are around 40 per cent.

In 2024, FITUR attracted 9,000 companies, 152 countries and more than 250,000 visitors. ➔

# ME records 29% visitor growth over 2019

In spite of several economic, geopolitical and climate challenges, Middle East has emerged as one of the strongest regions in terms of increase in visitor numbers during the first nine months of 2024, recording 29 per cent growth vis-à-vis the 2019 numbers. Some key initiatives, including ease of visa and improved connectivity, have contributed to the region's success.

**TT Bureau**

According to the latest report shared by UN Tourism, around 1.1 billion tourists travelled internationally in the first nine months of 2024, as the global tourism sector recovered 98 per cent of the pre-pandemic levels. Despite economic, geopolitical and climate challenges, a full recovery from the biggest crisis in the sector's history is expected by the year end, predicted the UN Tourism World Tourism Barometer report.



Around 1.1 billion tourists travelled internationally in the first nine months of 2024

The Middle East (+29 per cent compared to 2019) continued to enjoy record growth during the nine-month period, while Europe (+1 per cent) and Africa (+6 per cent) also exceeded the 2019 levels. The Americas recovered 97 per cent of its pre-pandemic arrivals (-3 per cent over 2019). Asia and the Pacific reached 85 per cent of 2019 levels as com-

pared to a 66 per cent recovery in 2023. Asia and the Pacific has experienced a gradual though uneven rebound in arrivals since the region reopened to international travel in 2023. The summer season in the Northern Hemisphere was strong, with arrivals worldwide reaching 99 per cent of the pre-pandemic values in Q3 2024. A total of 60 out of 111 destinations surpassed the 2019 arrival numbers in the first 8-9 months of 2024. Some of the strongest performers in arrivals during this period were Qatar (+141 per

**The fact that visitor spending is growing even stronger than arrivals has a direct impact on millions of jobs and small businesses**

cent versus 2019) where arrivals more than doubled, Albania (+77 per cent), Saudi Arabia (+61 per cent), Curaçao (+48 per cent), Tanzania (+43 per cent), Colombia and Andorra (both +36 per cent).

Four years after the COVID-19 outbreak, which brought global tourism to a standstill, the report reflects the sector's remarkable recovery, with most regions already exceeding the 2019 arrival numbers

between January and September 2024. The report also shows outstanding results in terms of international tourism receipts, with most destinations with available data posting double-digit growth compared to 2019.

**Zurab Pololikashvili**, Secretary-General, UN Tourism, said: "The strong growth seen in tourism receipts is excellent news for economies around the world. The fact that visitor spending is growing even stronger than arrivals has a direct impact on millions of jobs and small businesses and contributes decisively to the balance of payments and tax revenues of many economies."

**Tourism receipts show extraordinary growth**  
A total of 35 out of 43 countries with available data on receipts exceeded the pre-pandemic values in the first 8-9 months of


2024, many reporting double-digit growth compared to 2019 (in local currencies), well above inflation in most cases.

**Challenges remain**  
Despite the generally strong results, several economic, geopolitical and climate challenges remain. The tourism sector is still facing inflation, resulting in higher transport and accommodation prices, as well as volatile oil prices. Major conflicts continue to impact consumer confidence, while extreme weather events are also critical challenges for tourism performance.





# ‘Trade partners key to tourism promotion’

In an exclusive interview with , **Abdulla Yousuf**, Director, International Operations Destination Marketing, DCT Abu Dhabi, highlights the strategies being implemented to engage the travel trade and advance Abu Dhabi’s 2030 vision. He discusses key focus areas, emerging markets, and the role of trade partnerships in driving tourism growth.

 Dr Shehara Rizly

## What are the key initiatives to engage the travel trade in promoting Abu Dhabi?

We have a comprehensive list of trade promotion activities. From a strategic standpoint, the 2030 vision mandates initiatives that elevate destination marketing to the highest level. Our approach is market-specific, driven by a deep understanding of consumer behaviour—how they search, decide on destinations, and their booking preferences. Each market is evaluated to determine its focus—whether B2B or B2C-driven. For B2B-heavy markets, tour operators, project managers, and travel advisors play a pivotal role in influencing decisions. Our plans are then tailored, combining strategic marketing and joint promotions with partners who are optimistic about Abu



**Abdulla Yousuf**  
Director, International Operations  
Destination Marketing, DCT Abu Dhabi

Dhabi’s potential and its ROI. These collaborative efforts involve co-investing in marketing campaigns to maximise impact.

## Can you elaborate on trade promotion plans?

Our trade promotions include virtual webinars, familiarisation (Fam) trips, and events like marketplace gatherings. Accessibility to agents is key,

achieved through newsletters, e-learning programmes, and tools designed to reach agents globally. This year, we have a presence in over 25 countries through roadshows and

product managers with the knowledge to become certified Abu Dhabi destination experts. It’s designed to be simple, interactive, and comprehensive. The platform features nine

MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions), and wedding tourism. New modules and additional languages are rolled out annually to meet growing demand. The platform also includes sales toolkits, downloadable resources, and opportunities to interact with experienced agents. It serves as a one-stop hub for learning about Abu Dhabi’s products and experiences.

the highest in the region, as per a recent Smith Travel Research (STR) report..

## What are the emerging markets for Abu Dhabi?

Aligned with our strategy to expand from 14 to 44 markets, emerging markets have been identified on the basis of air connectivity. Central and Eastern Europe, along with the CIS region, are key growth areas. The introduction of low-cost carriers like Wizz Air and Air Arabia has further fuelled growth by attracting a new segment of travellers from these regions.

## We have a comprehensive list of trade promotion activities. The 2030 vision mandates initiatives that elevate destination marketing to highest level

activities, strategically distributed across source markets. Our plan aims to expand from 14 source markets in 2019 to 44 markets, each addressed uniquely based on its needs.

modules covering Abu Dhabi’s offerings, such as theme parks,

## How has Abu Dhabi performed in terms of occupancy rates?

Year-to-date, Abu Dhabi’s occupancy stands at 77 per cent,

### Highlights

- Active trade promotions in over 25 countries with plans to expand to 44 markets
- Achieved a year-to-date occupancy rate of 77%, highest in the region

### Key focus areas

- Tailored marketing for B2B-heavy and B2C-driven markets behaviour
- Partnering with optimistic stakeholders through joint campaigns and co-investment

### Goals

- Increase from 14 markets in 2019 to 44 with unique strategies for each one
- Equip agents through the Experience Abu Dhabi Expert platform to make them certified experts

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# Connecting Africa to the world

As the slogan goes, connecting Africa to the world, RwandAir has been connecting many destinations over the past few years through their direct operations, codeshares and interline agreements. In an interview with **TRAVEL TALK**, **Ivan Mugisha**, Country Manager UAE, RwandAir, share some of their important plans, including the launch of direct flights to Mombasa, Zanzibar, Maputo and Luanda, going ahead into 2025.

**Dr Shehara Rizly**

## Will you be looking at new routes or code-shares in 2025?

Growth is very critical and of paramount importance to us. We continue to exert our footprint on the globe by expanding our network and connecting to under-tapped destinations through direct operations, code-share and interline partnerships. This will remain our key focus for a wider and inter-continental reach for our customers next year. We will also be launching direct flights to Mombasa, Zanzibar, Maputo and Luanda enhancing our intra Africa network and tapping into the continent's booming population and rising



**Ivan Mugisha**  
Country Manager UAE  
RwandAir

middle class, which is a trigger for the surging demand for air travel in Africa.

## How important are the travel agents for RwandAir?

The travel agents' fraternity is instrumental to our growth and success to-date. Their patronage over the years remains invaluable and has helped us sustain our operations and services. We cherish our existing relationship and remain indebted to their unwavering support as we continue to grow by leaps and bounds.

## What is the percentage of business from agents?

Travel agencies are an important sales channel for us and maintain a wider reach and presence as our partners in the market commanding over 60 per cent of our sales. Heavy investment in digital sales platforms by agencies compounds their sales



scope giving them more leverage for business support.

## Are there any new products/services on offer by RwandAir?

We just launched two new products; the 'RwandAir e-sim' for over 150 countries that curbs hassle-free travel for our customers by ensuring that they stay in touch with family and friends wherever they travel. 'Time to think' is also a newly launched product on our website which allows passengers the flexibility to book their flights and hold their fares for up to 72 hours. The feature empowers our customers to plan their travel with confidence, ensuring they never miss out on our fantastic deals while finalising the details of their trips

early next year, as we are set to deploy A330s on the route, a product deemed fit and preferred by passengers in the market. This should be a boost for us in winning more market share and competing more evenly with our competitors.

## Could you give us a demography of travellers? Are they more leisure, business or a mix of travellers?

Our traffic is a mix of various market segments but mainly business and trader traffic, followed by leisure, MICE, labour and corporate travellers. We see potential for sports and medical



## We plan to maintain daily flights to and from Dubai but will increase our capacity from early next year, as we are set to deploy A330s on the route

## Sustainability is a key factor in every industry, how does RwandAir work towards it?

Aviation industry is one of the top global contributors to greenhouse gases and sustainability is one of our top priorities. We are mindful of climate change impact by emissions and noise pollution by purchasing and deploying modern aircraft with the right technology to ensure fuel efficiency and limited CO2 emissions. Alternate aviation fuel is something being discussed broadly for the future.

tourism in the UAE and should start diversifying and promoting this traffic.

## Any plans to cross promote Rwanda and RwandAir with United Arab Emirates?

RwandAir continues to partner with Dubai Economy and Tourism to promote Dubai as a holiday destination and Rwanda as transit point with its own unique tourist attractions. We recently brought in 45 agents and staff from eight different countries in Africa to give them first-hand experiences on attractions Dubai has to offer. This will initiate collaborations with local destination management companies for tailor-made holiday packages for leisure travellers from each country stimulating inbound traffic for Dubai on RwandAir. 🇩🇪

## Has there been any increase in terms of frequency? Will you be looking at increasing the frequency?

We plan to maintain daily flights to and from Dubai but will increase our capacity from



(Advertorial)



# Focus on innovation & personalisation

Each year, Arabian Travel Market (ATM) addresses issues reshaping the international travel landscape. The 32<sup>nd</sup> edition of the global event, to be organised at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) from 28 April to 1 May 2025 under the theme, 'Global Travel: Developing Tomorrow's Tourism Through Enhanced Connectivity', will focus on key industry trends, including innovation, connectivity and customisation.

TT Bureau

Under the theme 'Global Travel: Developing Tomorrow's Tourism Through Enhanced Connectivity', ATM 2025's extensive conference programme and exhibition will explore how contemporary shifts in technology and traveller behaviour can both contribute to and benefit from enhanced connectivity.



**Danielle Curtis**  
Exhibition Director ME  
Arabian Travel Market

Commenting on the changing face of global travel, **Danielle Curtis**, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said: "Connectivity through technology is obviously a key growth area in travel and tourism, but it is also about the seamless flow and interaction of people, goods and ideas, which support businesses worldwide. So, if you are looking to engage with the global trends, cultural shifts and traveller behaviours shaping the future

of the tourism sector, there is no better place than ATM."

One of the trends expected to shape the market in 2025 and beyond is so-called nostalgia travel. From remakes of 1990s films to early 2000s music acts on tour, the pull of the past is strong for the millennials. Many of today's travellers, including those from the UAE, are



One of the trends expected to shape the market in 2025 and beyond is so-called nostalgia travel

**Connectivity through technology is obviously a key growth area in travel and tourism, but it is also about the seamless flow of people, goods & ideas**

seeking to reconnect with their youth by recreating special trips or childhood dreams. Some are

also looking to connect with their own children by sharing nostalgic experiences in famil-

iar places, providing myriad opportunities for enterprising travel companies.

Sports and music tourism is also experiencing significant growth, with the former expected to be worth \$1.33 trillion and the latter forecast to reach \$13.8 billion by 2032. Fans are not only travelling more to see their favourite teams and artists but are also increasing their budgets to do

so. Regional markets are already capitalising on this trend, with Saudi Arabia welcoming 2.5 million overseas tourists across 80 international sports events in the last four years alone.

Travel to and from the APAC region is expected to see a resurgence from 2025, with numbers of arrivals on track to exceed the pre-pandemic levels by the end of next year.

## VALUABLE MARKETS

**\$1.33 trillion**  
Market value of Sport Tourism

**\$13.8 billion**  
Market value of Music Tourism

**2.5 million**  
Overseas tourists

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# Growth to continue in near term

▶ Contd. from page 1



**Amro Nagah**  
General Manager  
Swissotel Al Murooj Dubai

“I believe, 2025 will be a year of greater sustainability and a stronger focus on being green. We will prioritise taking care of every individual and ensuring satisfaction across all aspects—whether for our owning company, operator, management, or team members. For me, 2025 will be a continuation of our achievements and success. Dubai has always been a market leader, and, it remains at the forefront.”

“In 2025, our main focus is expanding into Saudi Arabia. We are planning to open our offices there soon, as it's a market where our clients are actively encouraging us to establish a presence and launch our travel services. Another key focus for 2025 is the



**Sapna Aidasani**  
Head of Marketing & PR  
Pluto Travels

cruise industry. Dubai has been thriving in the cruise sector, and we look forward to welcoming more clients for MICE groups on cruises.”



**Michael Goetz**  
General Manager  
Movenpick Jumeirah Beach

“In 2025, we will build on the success of 2024, with a strong focus on further investing in ESG initiatives to minimise our hotel's environmental impact. We are making significant investments in state-of-the-art room technologies, which will enable us to further reduce energy and water consumption, as well as our CO<sub>2</sub> footprint. Additionally, we will continue to invest in the development of our teams to ensure excellence in everything we do.”

“At dnata Travel, we reported in 2024 an increasing interest from UAE travellers in more complex itineraries. We anticipate continued interest in unique, experiential, and adventurous destinations this year, supported by the ever-growing network of direct



**Matthew Vlemmiks**  
Leisure Manager  
dnata Travel

flights from the region to new and trending locations. This kind of travel often requires high levels of customer service and personalised destination knowledge.”



**Anabela Radosevic**  
Manager Sales & Services,  
Arabian Adventures

“At Arabian Adventures, a growing trend we are witnessing with global travellers is a need for immersive destination experiences, such as tours that discover local gastronomy or that can discover a destination's 'hidden gems' through unique accommodation, educational, entertainment, or shopping options. Our projections for 2025 remain positive and in line with Dubai's overall growth trajectory, fuelled by new destination offerings.”

“For 2025, we are excited about Coldplay's upcoming concert in Abu Dhabi, which will be a major boost for the tourism sector, attracting a large number of visitors. Additionally, at Gewan, we are working on implementing our first hydro plant at our hotel



**Elias Saad**  
Hotel Manager, Royal M Hotel By  
Gewan, Abu Dhabi

in the UAE. This plant will use seawater, helping us manage water resources more sustainably. In 2025, we are also focusing on the installation of solar panels.”

“We will continue building on the success stories of 2024, focusing on maintaining strong online reputation and consistently driving performance, aligning with both our concept and market trends. Our goal is to keep our stakeholders satisfied by delivering outstanding results and,



**Arijit Paul**  
Director - Sales & Marketing,  
Movenpick Grand Al Bustan

“We aim to continue on the same path, expanding our efforts to make them even bigger and better. We are projecting a 15 per cent rise in demand and a nearly 20 per cent growth in deliveries. This includes hosting similar types of events, such as MICE events, product launches, and activities across sectors like pharma, automotive, beauty, and weddings, ranging from small to large scale. We are witnessing a growing interest from diverse nationalities.”

“In line with Dubai's aim to be budget-friendly, we foresee growth in value-driven offerings, like extended-stay options and family packages, without compromising on quality and the unique Dubai experience. We project increased demand for affordable accommodation



**Dean Rossilli**  
Senior Vice President  
DAMAC Hospitality

“In 2025, our key focus will be on sustainability and really looking internally at our gateway to developing our overall guest-centric return ratios and working alongside partners like Kabinsky, Pan Pacific, and so forth. As we move throughout 2025 again, we will focus on our sustainability, on our people development, who are our key asset, and focusing on you, the clients. We see increased demand for affordable accommodation and immersive experiences.”



**Ahmed Ibrahim**  
Director - Sales & Marketing  
The Tower Plaza Hotel

and bundled experiences. This includes attractive packages, accessible dining options, and streamlined booking processes.”

“In 2025, Qatar and the wider Middle East are poised for significant growth in tourism, fuelled by mega projects and prestigious events. Qatar's 'Land of Legends' in Sumaisma and the anticipated Expo 2030 in Riyadh are expected to attract global visitors, enhancing re-



**Ayman Al Qudwa**  
General Manager  
Falcon Travel

gional collaboration. The excitement surrounding the FIFA World Cup 2034 in Saudi Arabia will also drive interest in neighbouring countries.”



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

“In 2025, personalised travel experiences, eco-tourism, and technology-driven solutions will dominate. Travellers will prioritise cultural immersion and environmentally viable options, favouring destinations that offer authentic local experiences and sustainability. The integration of AI, contactless services, and dynamic pricing models will reshape customer interactions. Direct connectivity will increase demand, while proximity will play key role in destination selection.”




**John Raffoul**  
General Manager  
Cheval Maison The Palm, Dubai

hopefully, exceeding expectations. Sustainability will remain a core priority for us; we will continue to advance our sustainability initiatives.”



# Emirates inducts A350 to its fleet

Emirates unveiled Airbus A350-900 at an exclusive event in Dubai recently. Emirates A350, the first new aircraft type to join the Emirates' fleet since 2008, features three spacious cabin classes, accommodating 312 passengers in 32 next-generation Business Class lie-flat seats, 21 Premium Economy seats and 259 generously pitched Economy Class seats.

 TT Bureau

The induction of Airbus A350-900 to the fleet of Emirates reflects the airline's commitment to delivering a premium passenger experience while optimising operational efficiency. His Highness **Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum**, Chairman and Chief Executive, Emirates Airline & Group, said: "Today is an exciting milestone for Emirates as we showcase our first A350 and usher in a new era for our fleet and network growth. This aircraft sets the stage for Emirates to spread its wings farther by offering added range, efficiency and flexibility to our network, enabling us to meet customer demand in new markets and unlock new opportunities in the cities that we serve. On-board, our updated interiors and seating configurations will help us deliver a more elevated and



Sir Tim Clark, President, Emirates Airline and His Excellency Abdulla Bin Touq Al Marri, UAE Minister of Economy

comfortable experience to travellers across every cabin class. The 65 Emirates A350s joining our fleet in the coming years fit into the airline's broader plans to support our visionary leadership's Dubai's D33 Strategy,

which will transform the city into a pivotal hub in the global economy by expanding its connectivity and reach."

**Phillipe Mhun**, Executive Vice President - Programmes &

Services, Airbus, said: "We are proud to further expand our strategic partnership with Emirates, which has flourished nearly four decades ago with the A300, the A310, the A330, the A340 and the A380. Marking a new chapter

**Apart from its newly delivered A350, Emirates operates 2 other aircraft types to 140 destinations - Boeing 777 and the 'double decker' Airbus A380**

for Airbus, we expect the A350 to become an integral member of the Emirates' fleet and support its continued growth and sustainability ambitions."

**Omar Ali Adib**, SVP Customer – Middle East and Africa, Rolls-Royce, said: "The collaborative effort between Emirates, Airbus and Rolls-Royce exemplifies what can be achieved when we share a commitment to excellence and build a long-term partnership that makes us all stronger. With our £1bn investment in durability across our Trent engine family, we are committed to continuing to evolve and improve in the years ahead."

Apart from its newly delivered A350, Emirates operates two other aircraft types around the world to 140 destinations - the widebody Boeing 777 aircraft and the iconic 'double decker' Airbus A380 aircraft.

## AT A GLANCE

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Airports served

**78**

Countries covered

**112,406**

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# Retail tourism key to destination appeal

▶ Contd. from page 1

“The Dubai Shopping Festival, a flagship event, will undoubtedly attract a massive influx of retail travellers seeking world-class shopping, entertainment, and cultural experiences. We foresee



**Jamal Abdulnazar**  
CEO  
Cozmo Travel

“GCC visitors are a key audience across McArthurGlen outlets year-round, drawn by luxury shopping, premium experiences, and world-renowned designer brands. Our



**Jawad Saade**  
General Manager  
Hilton Dubai Creek Hotel & Residences

“Dubai Shopping Festival attracts more passenger from Sub-Continent & China focusing on shopping. For the Europeans, UAE is a winter Sun destination they like to visit when



**Ahmed Al Khaja**  
CEO, Dubai Festivals and Retail Establishment



**Mohamed Al Rais**  
Executive Director  
Al Rais Travel

“Dubai Shopping Festival significantly boosts tourism, drawing global visitors with its shopping deals, entertainment, and cultural events. This surge increases hotel occupancy, benefiting Dubai's hospitality sector. As a travel agent, we craft tailored packages combining flights, hotel stays, shopping tours, and festival highlights, ensuring convenience for travellers. This year, expectations are high with new attractions and exclusive discounts.”



**Sabina Piacenti**  
International Markets Manager  
McArthurGlen Designer Outlets

open-air architecture, family-friendly services, and tailored offerings enhance their experience. July and August peak as GCC travellers seek Europe's cooler climates. Additional spikes occur during Eid holidays.”

“The Dubai Shopping Festival has a tremendous impact on the hospitality industry, driving significant demand for hotel rooms during the event. As one of Dubai's premier destinations, Hilton Dubai Creek Hotel & Residences at Jewel of the Creek sees an increase in both leisure and retail-driven travellers, looking to experience the city's vibrant shopping scene. This event boosts occupancy and highlights the city as a retail hub.”



**Jyoti Panchmatia**  
General Manager - Gulf Region  
Travco LLC

Europe is very cold and wet. Shopping can be a byproduct but not the main purpose. Tourists are also attracted to visit Dubai during the shopping festival as the entire city has festive atmosphere with fireworks.”

“The 2025 Retail Calendar is structured around a full year of carefully selected seasonal festivals and campaigns. By enabling Dubai to make the most of the anticipated increase in visitor footfall, this approach not only supports the growth of local businesses through essential partnerships, but also reinforces Dubai's appeal as a premier shopping, tourism and entertainment destination.”

a boom in retail and leisure travel, particularly in regions like the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Africa, as airlines expand routes and connectivity improves. A significant shift will also occur in business travel.”

“Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF) has a significant and multifaceted positive impact on travel industry in the UAE. It attracts millions of visitors from around the world, particularly during the first quarter of the year to give great start



**Hayssam Hajjar**  
Director - Asset Management UAE  
Al-Futtaim Real Estate

“Mercato and Town Centre Jumeirah are proud to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dubai Shopping Festival. We look forward to contributing to yet another successful edition of this event in the iconic city. This year,



**Jaal Shah**  
Managing Director  
Travel Designer Group, Rezlive

“The Dubai Shopping Festival significantly boosts Dubai tourism and hotel occupancy. As a peak season, it drives demand, often reaching near full capacity, optimising revenue, and benefiting the entire tourism sector with its diverse



**Dinkar Dasaur**  
General Manager UAE  
Satguru



**Sushant Pilankar**  
Manager - Leisure & MICE Travel  
Uranus Travel & Tours LLC

“This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of DSF, a milestone that highlights its significant contribution to scaling tourism and increasing resident engagement. For Al-Futtaim Real Estate, DSF presents a chance to create integrated experiences across our properties. We offer immersive activations, like pop-up shops, exclusive product launches, and entertainment events. DSF Nights at Dubai Festival City Mall showcases regional talent and global shows like X Factor.”



**Nisreen Boustani**  
PR & Corporate Communication Manager  
Mercato and Town Centre Jumeirah

we expect achieving positive results from the event, including increased footfall of shoppers and sales across available stores in Mercato and Town Centre Jumeirah.”

“The Dubai Shopping Festival significantly boosts visitor inflow, driving high demand for hotel rooms, as tourists flock to enjoy the festival's unmatched shopping, entertainment, and cultural experiences. As a leading B2B OTA, we empower travel agents with seamless access to book hotels, sightseeing, transfers, and cruises through our platform, enabling them to curate exceptional itineraries. Expectations are high this year.”



**Haitham Galal**  
General Manager  
The Tower Plaza Hotel

offerings. Our Sheikh Zayed Road location is ideal for DSF. We offer dedicated packages with shuttle services, exclusive discounts, curated city experiences, and concierge services.”


“Dubai Shopping Festival greatly boosts hotel bookings. As the city becomes a shopping paradise, demand for hotel rooms rises, especially in areas close to major malls like Downtown Dubai. Hotels often see higher occupancy rates, particularly for premium properties. The festival also increases room prices during peak shopping days, as more tourists flock to Dubai for the sales and the festive atmosphere. As a travel agent, we would create tailored packages.”

for the year. Also, DSF is not just about shopping; it includes a wide range of events and activities. The Global Village hosts more than 70 countries and offers numerous fun rides and events.”



# Events trigger UAE travel rush

With the announcement of numerous international concerts, events, and shows, searches for travel to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have grown exponentially. It is not just the international tourists flocking to the cities like Dubai and Abu Dhabi, but domestic travellers too are planning staycations around the events, as the emirates ups its offerings for the winter season.

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The UAE has established itself as an epicentre for world-class entertainment with recent concert announcements from global superstars, including a multi-award-winning rapper hailing from Boston to the iconic British band behind “Yellow” and “Fix You”. Demand for overseas performances like the long-awaited reunion of the legendary Mancunian brothers are increasing. “The UAE has become a top destination for some of the world’s biggest entertainment acts. This demand is driving more visitors to cities like Dubai and Abu Dhabi to enjoy international concerts, events, and shows. But it’s not just international tourists taking advantage. Our data shows a rise in UAE residents planning staycations around these performances as well. We are seeing a growing trend of ‘tour



**Rehan Asad**  
Vice President-Global Markets  
Expedia

tourism’, where travellers plan entire trips around concerts by their favourite stars, which is reflected in our latest search figures,” said **Rehan Asad**, VP-Global Markets, Expedia.

### Charm of global superstars

As some of the world’s most celebrated stars descend on Dubai and Abu Dhabi, it is little surprise that many fans flock to see their idols perform live. Inter-

est among international travellers and UAE residents soared, with searches for trips increasing by a staggering 75 per cent on 16 November compared with the same period last year to see their favourite rapper.

### World-class sporting events

The UAE offers a heart-pumping selection of motor racing events which attract petrol heads from around the world for the event in December. The race takes place at a critical point in the sport’s calendar and Expedia reported a 65 per cent surge in travel searches between 1-8 December compared to



the same timeframe in 2024, as fans from around the world scrambled to make sure they witness the exciting event. As the UAE’s list of events peaked from 6-8 December with motor

racing and concerts, so have searches in the UAE with an astounding 210 per cent increase. This matches the anticipation levels of fans eager to see their favourite artists for a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

### 2025 starts with a bang

Figures from Expedia have seen a remarkable 335 per cent jump in travel searches from 9-14 January, for the concert happening in Abu Dhabi, where fans of “Yellow” and “Fix You”

can hear their favourite songs. This reflects the global nature of the event and further reinforces the UAE as a must-visit destination for 2025.

## TOP TRENDING HOTELS

### Dubai

- One & Only One Za’abeel
- FIVE LUXE
- The First Collection Waterfront
- Holiday Inn Dubai Business Bay, an IHG Hotel
- Rove Downtown Dubai

### Abu Dhabi

- Dusit Thani Abu Dhabi
- Bab Al Qasr Hotel
- Marriott Hotel Downtown, Abu Dhabi
- Jannah Burj Al Sarab
- Grand Millennium Al Wahda

**UAE has become a top destination for the world’s biggest entertainment acts. This demand is driving more visitors to cities like Dubai and Abu Dhabi**



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# SCTDA hosts int'l tourism meet

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) recently hosted its annual international travel and tourism forum. It was attended by distinguished guests from the UN Tourism and various other international organisations, as well as domestic travel agents, tourism professionals and hoteliers. Renowned speakers from across the globe spoke on the latest industry trends at the event.





# Accor unveils Mercure Dubai Deira

Accor's Mercure Hotels celebrates its 1,000<sup>th</sup> property across the globe with the opening of Mercure Dubai Deira recently. On this occasion, the flagship hotel, a part of the the Deira Enrichment Project, offered the brand's innovative 1000-Hours of Local Flavours (42-day) concept, offering a unique culinary experience that highlighted local food and beverages.

 Dr Shehara Rizly

**M**ercure Hotels commemorated its 1,000<sup>th</sup> address worldwide with the opening of Mercure Dubai Deira recently. The flagship hotel unveiled the brand's innovative 1000-Hours of Local Flavours (42-day) concept, launching at select Mercure hotels worldwide, offering a unique culinary experience that highlights local food and beverages. This concept emphasises Mercure's



**Paul Stevens**  
COO, Premium, Midscale & Economy Division, ME, Africa and Türkiye, Accor

dedication to discovering and sharing the authentic tastes of each destination, with unique dishes and beverages available for a limited 1,000-hour period.

Since 1973, Mercure has encouraged travellers to explore the world and feel local everywhere. Now present in 65 countries with 1,000 addresses, Mercure ensures guests are

immersed in locally inspired atmospheres with high standards of hospitality. At the Dubai event, special guests, ALL members, journalists, and influencers gathered to experience this vibrant showcase of local cuisine. Each dish and beverage were thoughtfully curated in collaboration with local producers and suppliers, including Fresh on Table.


As part of the 1000-Hours of Local Flavours, Mercure Dubai Deira treated a selected group of guests to an enchanting Abra ride, a traditional weaving workshop, an in-house cooking class featuring traditional Arabic Luqaimat and a lunch focused on sustainability. Guests also visited Dubai's iconic Gold Souk and Spice Souk, exploring hidden gems within Deira while engaging with local artisans and experiencing the city's rich cultural heritage.



**Now present in 65 countries with 1,000 addresses, Mercure ensures guests are immersed in local environment with high standards of hospitality**

**Paul Stevens**, Chief Operating Officer, Premium, Midscale & Economy Division, Middle East, Africa and Türkiye, Accor, said,

"Reaching 1,000 addresses is not just a milestone, it's a testament to Mercure's dedication to delivering authentic, locally

inspired hospitality across the globe. The 1000-Hours of Local Flavours embodies a dedication to cultural immersion and community connection, offering guests a unique and memorable culinary journey that celebrates the heart and soul of each destination." Mercure Hotels serves as a portal to the destination, offering a warm invitation to discover and explore the local surroundings. 



## Cruise Saudi welcomes 'AROYA'

After a comprehensive transformation, AROYA Cruises' inaugural ship is now ready to call Jeddah its homeport. It offers an exceptional cruising experience featuring a fully reimagined interior.

 TT Bureau

**A**ROYA, the refurbished ship, is equipped with an array of world-class facilities, such as a souq-inspired shopping district – the largest retail area ever built on a cruise ship – luxury spa facilities, a wellness centre, 29 restaurants, lounges and cafes, 20



**The arrival of AROYA marks the beginning of a new chapter for Cruise Saudi, and tourism in Saudi overall, in line with Saudi's Vision 2030**

Saudi overall, in line with Saudi's Vision 2030. Cruise Saudi was only launched in 2021 and witnessing the arrival of our first owned ship just three years later is a huge milestone. We are so grateful to the whole Cruise Saudi team."

entertainment venues, and one of the largest children's play areas at sea.

Jeddah Islamic Port offers all services to handle international and local guests, as well as logistics services to cruise vessels. The port has long had great historical significance, with Jeddah being the principal gateway to the Two Holy Cities of Makkah

and Madinah. Cruise terminal facilities have been upgraded to accommodate the largest cruise ships, and new bollards and fenders have been installed to serve cruise ships.

**Lars Clasen**, Chief Executive Officer, Cruise Saudi, commented: "The arrival of AROYA marks the beginning of a new chapter for Cruise Saudi, and tourism in



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# Air Canada meets UAE travel trade

Counting successful years in the UAE, Air Canada recently hosted some of the valued travel trade partners for an evening of networking. Senior officials of the airline attended the event. Middle East is becoming one of the most important hubs for Air Canada over the years, hence the carrier has been increasing its frequency on the route to keep up with the fast-paced times.

 TT Bureau

**R**ocky Lo, Managing Director - International Sales, Air Canada, addressing the gathering at the event, narrated the airline's journey in the UAE and how the emirates has become an important hub for the airline. "Last year, we successfully launched our Dubai-Vancouver route. Building on that success, we are excited to reintroduce this service for the winter season, connecting Dubai to Western Canada with up to four flights per week on our state-of-the-art Boeing



Air Canada officials pose for a photograph at the networking evening



Orient Travel was honoured at the event

777-9 aircraft. This is in addition to our year-round, non-stop Dubai-Toronto service. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your continued support, directly or indirectly, in helping us operate these crucial routes during the winter season," said Lo, apprising the travel trade about the key developments at Air Canada.

Sharing the fleet expansion plans, Lo said, "Regarding our fleet, I am delighted to share our ambitious five-year expansion strategy. We plan to acquire 90 new aircraft over the next five years. This significant growth will allow us to expand our operations, especially in high-demand regions, such as the Middle East and the UAE.

As we await timely deliveries from Boeing and Airbus, these new additions will enable us to



Nasir Jamal Khan, CEO, Al Naboodah Travel with Margaret Skinner, Senior Director-Sales EMEA, Air Canada

to other destinations outside the region as well. "This past week has been particularly exciting

capital of India—to Canada. This winter, we will operate up to 24 weekly flights between India and

## FLIGHT PLANS

**4**

Weekly flights to Vancouver

**90**

New aircraft acquisition plan

**24**

Weekly flights from India

**4**

New route networks

Montreal to Naples, Italy; Montreal to Porto, Portugal; Toronto to Prague, Czech Republic; Toronto to Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago; Ottawa to London Heathrow, which many



Satguru Travel with the management of Air Canada at the event

**We plan to acquire 90 new aircraft over the next five years. This growth will allow us to expand our operations, especially in high-demand regions**

optimise our network and enhance operational efficiency." He further explained their reach

for Air Canada. We officially launched a new route connecting Mumbai—the financial

Canada, a 40 per cent increase in capacity. We are immensely grateful to our partners in this region who have supported this expansion," he said.

The most exciting time of the evening was the announcement of the new routes for the year. "Looking ahead to next summer, we are thrilled to announce several new routes, including

diplomatic and government organisations have been eagerly awaiting. Lastly, we recently unveiled plans to launch a non-stop service from Vancouver to Manila, Philippines. This new route will be our third Southeast Asian destination introduced in the past few years, underscoring our commitment to serving this fast-growing region," he concluded. ▶



dnata team honoured by Air Canada





# KOREA

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# Curating experiences beyond London

With a sharp focus on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Middle East markets, VisitBritain aims to promote the UK's cultural richness, regional beauty, and unique experiences. The recently held Destination Britain Middle East and Asia (DBMEA) event in Bengaluru, India, proved to be a landmark occasion for fostering deeper connections between international buyers and Britain's diverse offerings

 Nisha Verma

VisitBritain's strategies for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Middle East markets reflect a nuanced understanding of traveller preferences and a commitment to showcasing Britain's multi-faceted charm. Through campaigns like Starring Great Britain and robust trade engagement, the UK is poised to captivate visitors with experiences that are as diverse as its landscapes. **Patricia Yates**, Chief Executive Officer, VisitBritain, and **Tatiana Khoreshok**, Country Manager-GCC, VisitBritain, shared their insights on how the UK is catering to these pivotal markets.

**Promoting Regional Britain**  
Yates said, "We have brought international buyers from the



**Patricia Yates**  
CEO  
VisitBritain



**Tatiana Khoreshok**  
Country Manager-GCC  
VisitBritain

District to the cultural hubs of Manchester and Glasgow.

**A campaign to remember**  
VisitBritain's upcoming Starring Great Britain campaign, set to launch in January, underscores the UK's cinematic allure. "We are telling the story of major

tapestry of history and modern culture," shared Yates.

**Elevating experiences**  
Khoreshok emphasised the evolving preferences of GCC travellers. "We have seen a 25 per cent increase in visitors from GCC markets in the first



GCC visitors, known for their loyalty and high spending, are increasingly exploring destinations beyond London. "Destinations like Scotland's Edinburgh and Glasgow, the Lake District, and Newcastle are gaining popularity. Football and music are key draws, especially in Manchester," Khoreshok shared.

**Empowering travel trade**  
Yates claimed that engaging with the travel trade is a focal point of their strategy. "Our team works closely with trade

partners, organising buyer visits to lesser-known regions," she said. Khoreshok added, "DBMEA is a platform for educating tour operators and travel agents about Britain's diverse offerings, inspiring them to create new packages and itineraries." This collaborative approach ensures that travel agents are equipped to promote Britain's regional attractions effectively.

**Role of visa**  
Visa facilitation has played a significant role in boosting travel.

**BRIGHTER SPOTS**

**25%**  
increase in visitors from GCC markets to the UK in the first half of 2024

**£32.5 billion**  
VisitBritain's projected tourism spend this year, making them optimistic about sustained growth. In 2025, they will focus on regional Britain



Gulf and India to meet suppliers from across the nations—from Newcastle and the North East, Manchester and Cumbria, down to Bath and Bristol, Wales, and Northern Ireland. We are encouraging suppliers to build on itineraries to get more of regional Britain sold in these growth markets. The goal is clear: longer stays and greater spend."

This push to expand beyond London, highlights Britain's hidden gems, from the serene Lake

## The push to expand beyond London highlights Britain's hidden gems, from the serene Lake District to the cultural hubs of Manchester and Glasgow

films and TV shows shot in Britain, inviting visitors to step into the landscapes they have seen on screen. Whether it's Bridgerton or Peaky Blinders, this campaign showcases Britain's rich

half of 2024. The introduction of the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) has made travel seamless, offering multi-visit access within 24 hours for just £10," she said.



"In the Middle East, the ETA is a game-changer, while in India, UKVI's efficient processing ensures confidence in delivering visas within the 15-day window. This reliability is critical for attracting both leisure and business travellers," Yates explained.

**Way forward**  
With a projected tourism spend of £32.5 billion this year, VisitBritain is optimistic about sustaining growth. "In 2025, our focus will be on regional Britain,

encouraging visitors to explore more than just London. We are telling a compelling story—from history and heritage to modern experiences—to stay ahead in this competitive landscape," Yates concluded.

Expressing similar sentiments, Khoreshok said, "We are keen to show visitors the Britain they have never seen before. The GCC market's potential is immense, and we are committed to unlocking it." 





# Unlocking revenue potential in hospitality

In an increasingly competitive landscape of the hospitality industry, optimising revenue streams is paramount for hotel organisations to ensure long-term success in the business. **Ibrahim Saba**, Principal Sales Director – Middle East and Africa, IDeAS Revenue Solutions, outlines four ways through which hoteliers can optimise their revenues, as well as improve their profitability.

The hospitality industry is a dynamic ecosystem, constantly evolving to cater to ever-changing guest experiences. And in an increasingly competitive landscape, optimising revenue streams is paramount for hospitality organisations to ensure long-term success. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, focusing on a few key areas can significantly enhance a hotel's financial performance. Here are four ways in which hoteliers can not only optimise their revenues but also improve their profitability.

## Strategic group business evaluation

Group bookings offer substantial revenue potential, but careful evaluation is necessary to maximise profitability as not all group revenue is equally valuable to a hotel. A robust evaluation process should consider the group's market segment, specific servicing needs, and

forecasted demand. Advanced Revenue Management Systems can be invaluable in this process by providing data-driven insights to optimise pricing and helping teams quickly understand the potential impact of displacement of individual bookings.

## Leveraging technology for informed decisions

The hospitality industry thrives on data. A well-implemented RMS empowers hoteliers to make informed decisions by analysing market trends, competitor pricing, and historical booking patterns. This data can

be used to implement dynamic pricing strategies, ensuring rates remain competitive while maximising revenue. Furthermore, advanced RMS features can automate tedious tasks like forecasting and generating reports, freeing up valuable staff time for guest interaction and strategic planning.

## Optimising beyond room rates

While rooms typically generate the most significant revenue stream, other departments play a crucial role in a hotel's overall financial health. Food

**While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, focusing on a few key areas can significantly enhance a hotel's financial performance**

and beverage services, meeting and event spaces, and ancillary services like spa treatments all contribute to the bottom line. Upselling and cross-selling strategies can encourage guests to spend more on these amenities, while loyalty programmes can foster repeat

business and generate long-term value.

A solid ancillary strategy, especially for services that require little-to-no employee oversight such as paid parking or setting a price for electric vehicle charging, can help your property quickly turn up profits with little overhead. In addition, ancillary services offer your visitors a more inclusive experience. Although not everyone will take advantage of these services, those who do will be more likely to pay higher-than-average prices for convenience. Thinking outside the box with ancillary services will do more

than just boost your bottom line: it can set your property apart from the competition.

## Continuous improvement

The hospitality landscape is constantly evolving. Regularly monitoring KPIs like occupancy rates, ADR, and RevPAR allows hoteliers to identify areas for improvement. Staying informed about market trends and guest preferences is crucial for effective revenue management.



**Ibrahim Saba**  
Principal Sales Director – Middle East and Africa, IDeAS Revenue Solutions  
(The views expressed are solely of the author.)

### Core approaches

- Upselling and cross-selling strategies
- Motivate guests to utilise additional amenities
- Loyalty programmes build repeat business and create lasting value


### Game plan

- Strategic group business evaluation
- Leveraging technology for informed decisions
- Optimising beyond room rates

### Target

- Maximising group business profitability
- Using technology for data-driven decisions
- Boosting overall profit of the company

# Dubai's new tourism concept

As Dubai celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its shopping festival, the organisers take a different approach to the event by introducing local partners and their work to the tourists and residents in the UAE.  spoke with **Mahra Al Khaja**, Senior Associate, Dubai Festivals and Retail Establishment, to know about the concept behind Canteen X and other offerings.

 TT Bureau

**Can you tell us a little about the concept behind this Canteen X?**

This is the second edition of Canteen X, and we wanted to create something fresh and unique for tourists visiting Dubai for the 30<sup>th</sup> shopping festival and residents in the community around Musharraf Park. We aimed to make it special, introducing a concept with four distinct zones. Each zone has its own mascot. The first is Savory Farid, where you will find an array of international cuisines, including Asian-style dishes, American classics like burgers and fries, Levantine favourites, and even Emirati traditional dishes or those infused with local ingredients for a fusion twist. Next is Matcha Mania, inspired by the trending matcha drink. This zone includes two standout features: a main stage hosting entertainment, such as outdoor performances and music to



**Mahra Al Khaja**  
Senior Associate, Dubai Festivals and Retail Establishment

enhance the atmosphere, and a workshop area offering activities like sushi-making and matcha ice cream workshops for adults and young adults alike. The third zone, Bliss Treat, caters to those with a sweet tooth, featuring various dessert vendors. Lastly, there is the Kiddie Kingdom, a fun space for kids with inflatable play areas and workshops. Adjacent to these zones is a unique seating installation adorned with

marshmallow-themed decor and lights—perfect for Instagram moments. The area also includes a screen displaying engaging content. This year, we have also introduced a platform for six homegrown SMEs. These retailers, who primarily operate on Instagram and TikTok, can now interact with customers in a physical space, offering a fresh experience for shoppers.

## How does this align with the evolving concept of Dubai Shopping Festival, particularly for Gen Z?

As we celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we have seen significant growth and innovation.

**The event is designed to appeal to all age groups. Everyone loves food, creativity, music, and inspiring spaces, so there is something for everyone**



Technology plays a huge role, and we ensure to stay ahead by studying global and local trends. This event is designed to appeal to families, friends,

Gen Z, millennials, and even Gen Alpha—essentially, people from all age groups. Everyone loves food, creativity, music, and inspiring spaces, so there's something for everyone here.

## What are the timings, and is there an entry fee?

The canteen is open from 4 pm to 12 am on weekdays, and until 1 am on weekends. Entry is free of charge. For conveni-

ence, we offer valet parking, along with a self-parking option where golf carts can transport guests to the venue.

## What kind of visitor turnout are you expecting?

We anticipate a large number of visitors, especially as the winter season in Dubai is perfect for outdoor events. With the combination of tourists and residents eager to enjoy the amazing weather and unique experiences, we are optimistic about the turnout.





# An all-inclusive era for UAE travellers

With the New Year beginning, there are some key trends that will matter to the UAE travellers. According to the latest research by Expedia, three main trends to be seen this year, to be followed even by the Gen Z, will be all-inclusive, restaurant renaissance and the phenomena list. Trips to visit phenomenally captivating areas will continue to trend in 2025.

 TT Bureau

In 2025, UAE travellers will look at maximising their trips across the board, according to the latest research by Expedia. There are some key trends that will matter to the UAE travellers this year, as Ramadan comes in the first quarter.

## TOP NATURAL PHENOMENA

International Dark Sky Park - Arches National Park, Utah

Synchronous firefly season - Great Smoky Mountains, Gatlinburg, TN

Penguin parade - Phillip Island near Melbourne, Australia

Bioluminescent plankton - Vero Beach, Florida

### All-inclusive era

This concept returns as more families prefer fun in the sun by opting for all-inclusive resorts. Today's all-inclusive concept is attracting Gen-Zers from across the world and similarly, UAE residents, who are looking for stress-free stays and a good deal.

In the UAE, over 90 per cent of travellers are likely to stay in an all-inclusive resort in 2025. About 47 per cent say their perception of all-inclusive hotels has changed for the better, and over half agree that an all-inclusive resort would be their preferred hotel choice.

The top three reasons Gen Z globally is embracing their all-inclusive era are minimal stress (41 per cent), ease of booking (39 per cent), and because staying at all-inclusive hotels feels luxurious (38 per cent).

### Restaurant renaissance

When booking hotels, travellers are not just making room reservations, they are making dinner reservations, too. Hotels around the world have opened critically acclaimed restaurants featuring Michelin-starred chefs and rotating seasonal menus to attract guests. Over half of UAE travellers to global destinations prefer hotels with room service from a famous restaurant in their hotel. Local residents have proven to be bold and daring with their dining choices, as over 40 per cent are looking forward to menus that have a seasonal rotation instead of a la carte.

### The phenomena list

Year 2024 saw droves of travellers head out to catch a glimpse of the total solar eclipse, proving people will travel great distances to see natural phenomena in real life. Trips to



Secrets Playa Blanca Costa Mujeres is popular for all-inclusive experiences

**Top three reasons Gen Z is embracing their all-inclusive era globally are minimal stress (41%), ease of booking (39%), and stay at luxury hotels (38%)**

visit phenomenally captivating areas will continue to trend in

2025, with global survey data revealing that the Northern

Lights (61 per cent) are the top phenomenon travellers want to see, followed by geological phenomena (30 per cent) like volcanos, geysers and hot springs. Phenomena-seekers from the UAE are particularly interested in flowering seasons (45 per cent), such as cherry blossoms and flower fields (32 per cent).

# KSA's foray into business and MICE

The inaugural International MICE Summit took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, last month, bringing together business leaders and MICE management professionals from around the globe.  engaged in an exclusive discussion with Kai Hattendorf, former Chief Executive Officer, UFI, to explore the state of the industry and its future prospects, particularly in Saudi Arabia.

 TT Bureau

## How do you see the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a MICE destination?

The introduction of the e-visa has been a game-changer for Saudi Arabia. It has simplified travel for citizens of 66 countries, allowing them to obtain a visa on arrival in mere minutes. For instance, during one of my visits earlier this year, the entire process took just three minutes. This ease of access has opened the country to the world, enabling people to experience its offerings first-hand. Each time I visit Saudi Arabia — this being my third trip in 18 months — I am struck by the energy, drive, and ambition fuelling its growth and transformation. The MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) industry, particularly business events, plays a pivotal role in this evolution. It serves as a powerful tool for the govern-



Kai Hattendorf  
Former CEO  
UFI

ment and key stakeholders to facilitate and accelerate this transformative journey.

### What role do industry stakeholders play?

As stakeholders, we hold a significant responsibility in shaping the industry's future. For example, during my visit to Saudi Arabia last August, I met with His Excellency the Chairman of SCEGA (Saudi Conventions and

Exhibitions General Authority). Together, we launched an educational programme in partnership with Tahaluf to train the next generation of industry talent. It's inspiring to see some of those participants attending this event. Furthermore, UFI is committed to bringing a delegation of exhibition industry leaders to Riyadh. Fast forward a few months,



**Event professionals are highly sought after in corporate marketing, and event planning, that require bringing people together for meaningful interactions**

and this delegation visit has culminated in a major industry conference attended by 1,000 professionals. This is a testament to the power of events and SCEGA's commitment to using events as a strategic tool to drive growth in the Kingdom.

### How do you view the youth entering the MICE sector?

Each generation brings its unique perspective and energy, particularly in its youth. However, as individuals mature, their priorities and inspirations evolve. The MICE industry is uniquely

positioned to benefit from this youthful drive, as it requires diverse skill sets and thrives on innovation and adaptability. While the sector is often linked closely to tourism — incorporating hospitality, travel, and related services — its scope extends far beyond that. It's one of the few industries where a wide array of skills can be applied successfully. The agility, purpose, and ambition required in the MICE sector make it an excellent platform for individuals from various professional backgrounds to contribute and excel. Globally, retaining

talent in this industry remains a challenge. The post-pandemic workforce increasingly seeks purpose-driven roles, and many industries recognise the value of skills developed in the MICE sector. Event professionals are highly sought after in corporate marketing, internal event planning, and other roles that require bringing people together for meaningful interactions. This growing demand underscores the versatility and value of the expertise cultivated within the business events industry.





# DCT Abu Dhabi begins Retrofit Summit

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi hosted the inaugural Retrofit Summit, bringing together key stakeholders from the hospitality industry, financial institutions and government agencies, alongside industry experts. The event enabled industry leaders to exchange best practices, explore new retrofitting technologies, and discuss the growing role of sustainability in hotel operations.

TT Bureau

The Retrofit Summit addressed the need for retrofitting existing hotels and venues in the emirate to enhance their energy efficiency. The event also served as a platform for industry leaders to exchange best practices, explore innovative retrofitting technologies, and discuss the growing role of sustainability in hotel operations.

**HE Saleh Al Geziry**, Director General of Tourism at DCT Abu Dhabi, said: “The Retrofit Summit is an important milestone in supporting the emirate’s journey towards a more energy efficient future, in line with the ambitions of the Abu Dhabi Department of Energy. As Abu Dhabi’s hospitality sector continues to evolve, this summit accelerates the adoption of solutions that reduce energy consumption and lower carbon emissions. By fostering industry-wide collaboration



Stakeholders from the hospitality industry, financial institutions, and government agencies in discussion at the summit

and drawing from data-driven insights, we are paving the way for the transition to energy-efficient hotels and venues, while advancing our mission to protect and preserve Abu Dhabi for future generations.”

The hosting of the Retrofit Summit stemmed from an extensive Energy Audit Assessment project launched by DCT Abu

**Representatives from over 20 organisations and six exhibitors participated in the event, sharing their success stories in sustainability**

Dhabi last year, which assessed energy consumption across all hotels and five venues in

the emirate, offering tailored recommendations for energy efficiency improvements. Each

establishment received a detailed report outlining actionable steps to enhance their sustainability, underscoring DCT Abu Dhabi’s ongoing efforts to support the green evolution of its hospitality sector.

Representatives from over 20 organisations and six exhibitors participated in the event, sharing success stories from initiatives that have already delivered notable sustainability gains in Abu Dhabi. The summit featured speeches and panel discussions that highlighted the importance of energy efficiency in hotels and venues, with experts discussing how cutting-edge technologies like data analytics, AI, and energy service companies are transforming energy management. Sessions also covered the role of green financing, sustainable development, and other innovative methodologies in accelerating the creation and

retrofitting of energy-efficient set-ups. Coming at a time of increasing global focus on sustainability, the Retrofit Summit aligns with the Abu Dhabi Department of Energy’s Demand Side Management and Energy Rationalisation Strategy 2030 and reflects DCT Abu Dhabi’s commitment to supporting the goals of Abu Dhabi’s Environment Vision 2030 and UAE’s Green Agenda 2030.

**BRIGHTER SPOTS**

**20**

Number of organisations

**6**

Exhibitors

**UAE Green Agenda 2030**  
Vision

# A new desert experience @Ras Abrouq

Visit Qatar launched a first-of-its-kind desert activation at Ras Abrouq, a premium destination that caters to the entire family, offering adventure, relaxation and cultural enrichment. Situated on the edge of the UNESCO-protected Al-Reem Biosphere Reserve in north-west Qatar, these activations present a new desert experience for visitors and residents alike.

TT Bureau

The Visit Qatar activation at Ras Abrouq, running from 18 December to 18 January 2025, offers a collection of immersive zones. Families can enjoy a harmonious blend of adventure and tranquility, complemented by premium offerings that are accessible at affordable prices. Highlights include Our Habitas Resort, The Desert Escape, Film City, Wildlife Park, and the Glamping Zone.

**Ahmed Hamad Al Binali**, Director of Festivals and Events at Visit Qatar, said, “At Visit Qatar, our goal is to diversify our offering ensuring that every visitor,



The Visit Qatar activation at Ras Abrouq runs from 18 December to 18 January 2025

regardless of age, can enjoy a range of interactive and engaging experiences. From entertaining activities at the Film City zone, to the excitement of the Desert Escape with hot air bal-

loon rides and a wide range of activations, every element is tailored to offer something for everyone.”

He added, “We have also incorporated cultural installations, live performances, and educational workshops and daily camel parades enabling families to connect with Qatar’s heritage while immersing themselves in its desert landscapes. This activation reflects our commitment to of-

fering premium experiences that create unforgettable memories for families.”

The Film City zone offers a variety of family-oriented activities, including a coffee shop, a gift shop, and an exhibition in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Visitors can also enjoy wildlife park rides, camel, pony, and horse rides, as well as a unique photo activation. Children’s

workshops, traditional Qatari installations such as the Al Hosh majlis, and engaging live performances ensure that there is something for everyone. Performances include an illusionist show, mystic storytelling, and the Desert Mirage Dance.

The Wildlife Park includes safari-like experiences, with camel and horse routes allowing guests to explore the animal zones. The Glamping Zone provides a luxurious yet affordable, family-friendly desert camping experience, featuring private tents, outdoor lounges, and serene settings for relaxation.

The Desert Escape offers a variety of activities, including hot air balloon rides, trampolines, archery, and stargazing. Visitors can also enjoy live performances, such as acrobatic shows and falcon demonstrations. Interactive activations include a roaming parade, kids’ treasure hunts, and

cultural installations. This zone will also include a restaurant and a food lounge. In addition to its extensive range of activities, Our Habitas offers a variety of affordable packages, including options for weekdays, weekends, half-day passes, one-day passes, and wellness passes. Specialised packages featuring stargazing, hot air balloon rides, and more are also available.

**IMPORTANT FEATURES**

Families can enjoy a harmonious blend of adventure and tranquility

Premium offerings accessible at affordable prices

Highlights include Habitas Resort, The Desert Escape, Film City, Wildlife Park, and the Glamping Zonet

**This activation reflects our commitment to offering premium experiences that create unforgettable memories for families**



# Iconic Hard Rock, Reverb hotels to open in KSA

Palladium Hotel Group is set to charter new territories following its agreement with Hard Rock International to operate hotels under the two brands in Saudi Arabia.

**TT Bureau**

Palladium Hotel Group will be infusing the region's hospitality market with over 50 years of expertise, following a record-breaking 2023 with an annual revenue of Euros 1 billion. The group is actively seeking in-

guest experiences while fostering sustainable growth and meaningful local partnerships. Aligning with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, we see great potential in bringing our expertise in hospitality management to this dynamic market, adding value through innovation and authenticity."



**Jesús Sobrino**  
CEO  
Palladium Hotel Group



**Carlos Ortega**  
Corporate Global Development Senior  
Director, Palladium Hotel Group

vestors and real estate partners with properties that align with the Hard Rock International brand's bold, lifestyle-focused appeal.

Palladium Hotel Group's impressive portfolio spans over 40 hotels and 13,000 rooms across seven countries, managed under ten distinctive brands, including TRS Hotels, Ushuaia Unexpected

Carlos Ortega, Corporate Global Development Senior Director, Palladium Hotel Group, added, "Our strategic expansion plans focus on bringing world-class hospitality to new markets, supported by our exclusive rights to implement the Hard Rock Hotels brand in the region. This initiative allows us to collaborate with hotel owners and invest-

## The collaboration builds on a decade-long relationship, with Palladium Hotel Group already managing three standout Hard Rock Hotels in Spain

Hotels, and BLESS Collection Hotels. The collaboration builds on a decade-long relationship, with Palladium Hotel Group already managing three standout Hard Rock Hotels in Spain - Ibiza, Tenerife, and Marbella. The expansion into Saudi Arabia aims to merge Hard Rock International's world-class entertainment and cutting-edge designs with Palladium Hotel Group's hospitality managing expertise.

Jesús Sobrino, CEO, Palladium Hotel Group, said, "At Palladium Hotel Group, our vision revolves around creating exceptional

ment partners seeking a management company and lifestyle brand that aligns with their vision. With our proven expertise in operating high-end hotels, we are uniquely positioned to bring dynamic growth opportunities to the Kingdom."

The timing of this partnership aligns perfectly with Saudi Arabia's exponential growth in the hospitality sector. Major cultural and sporting events have resulted in a surge in hotel developments, with over 300 projects reshaping areas like the Red Sea, Riyadh, and Jeddah. 📍



## Trendsetters of the month



### RwandAir

RwandAir's post of flight taking off, specially featured on 'Fly Day', was trending on Facebook with **3k** likes and **149k** views.



### Emirates

Emirate's Instagram reel of flight attendant exploring Colombo's vibrant streets went viral with amassing over **1.3m** views



### Emirates

Emirates' LinkedIn post went viral with over with over **12.9k** likes and **663** reposts that showcases the construction of their first Airbus A350.



### Wego

Wego's Facebook post went viral with over **1.4k** likes and **1.6m** views, offering an immersive experience of Egypt's breathtaking adventure.



### Ethihad Airways

Ethihad's Instagram post announcing the launch of **10** new destinations, expanding the reach of travel options to **90** cities got **172m** views.



### Qatar Airways

Qatar Airways got **7.1k** likes & **746** reposts, highlighting a groundbreaking call with Elon Musk via Starlink's fastest in-flight Wi-Fi.



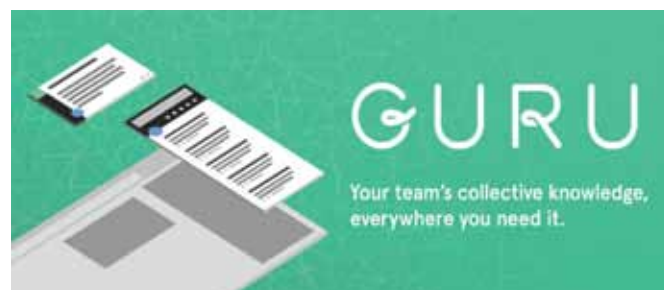
# Important AI tools for business

## Guru: Your knowledge hub

Ever found yourself digging through emails, Slack threads, or shared drives just to locate that one vital piece of information? Or worse, getting bogged down by repetitive queries from your team? Start using Guru—the knowledge management tool.

Guru centralises your team's knowledge, making it instantly accessible where and when you need it. No more silos, no more wasted time. Here's why teams love it:

- ❖ Smart knowledge at your fingertips: Consolidate and update details about tour packages, hotel partnerships, and travel guidelines.
- ❖ Contextual information delivery: Seamlessly integrates with tools like Slack, Zoom, and CRM platforms, ensuring your team has the information they need when and where they need it.
- ❖ Automated content verification: Keep itineraries, pricing, and com-



pliance details up-to-date with reminders for periodic reviews.

❖ Search that works: Guru's AI-driven search helps teams instantly find the best local activities, travel tips, or regulatory requirements.

❖ Enhanced collaboration: Easily share FAQs, customer preferences,

and operational processes across teams, boosting transparency and efficiency.

### For teams that run on precision

From tour operators planning seamless vacations to travel agents checking international regulations, Guru empowers your team to focus on creating unforgettable customer experiences.



# Event Talk 2025

## JANUARY

- ❖ **Outbound Travel Roadshow – Asia Pacific**  
Date: 8-13 January  
Venue: Mumbai, India
- ❖ **TravelXpo Europe**  
Date: 10-12 January  
Venue: Lillestrom, Norway
- ❖ **ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) 2025**  
Date: 15-20 January  
Venue: Johor, Malaysia
- ❖ **Thai International Travel Fair- Asia Pacific**  
Date: 16-19 January  
Venue: Bangkok, Thailand
- ❖ **Matka Nordic Travel Fair 2025**  
Date: 17-19 January  
Venue: Helsinki, Finland
- ❖ **IITM (India Int'l Travel Mart) Kochi**  
Date: 17-19 January  
Venue: Kochi, India
- ❖ **FITUR 2025**  
Date: 22-26 January  
Venue: Madrid, Spain
- ❖ **Connections Luxury Tokyo**  
Date: 26-29 January  
Venue: Tokyo, Japan
- ❖ **32<sup>nd</sup> International Tourism Fair Tourest 2025**  
Date: 31 January - 2 February  
Venue: Tallinn, Estonia
- ❖ **OTM Mumbai 2025**  
Date: 30 January - 1 February  
Venue: Mumbai, India

## FEBRUARY

- ❖ **CONNECT 2025**  
Date: 3-5 February  
Venue: Girona, Spain
- ❖ **28<sup>th</sup> East Mediterranean International Travel & Tourism Exhibition 2025**  
Date: 5-7 February  
Venue: Istanbul, Turkey
- ❖ **Outbound Travel Roadshow – Middle East 2025**  
Date: 9-13 February  
Venue: Riyadh, Kuwait, Bahrain, Dubai, UAE
- ❖ **Saudi Travel Market (STM) 2025**  
Date: 10-12 February  
Venue: Riyadh, KSA
- ❖ **HI Design MEA 2025**  
Date: 12-15 February  
Venue: Ras Al Khaimah, UAE
- ❖ **IMM - Australia 2025**  
Date: 13-14 February  
Venue: Sydney, Australia
- ❖ **Aviation Festival Asia 2025**  
Date: 18-19 February  
Venue: Singapore
- ❖ **SATTE Travel Mart 2025**  
Date: 19-21 February  
Venue: New Delhi, India
- ❖ **MALT Congress (MICE Arabia & Luxury Travel)**  
Date: 19-20 February  
Venue: Abu Dhabi, UAE
- ❖ **International Tourism Fair Belgrade**  
Date: 20-23 February  
Venue: Belgrade, Serbia

- ❖ **Riyadh Travel Fair 2025**  
Date: 24-26 February  
Venue: Riyadh, KSA
- ❖ **Connections Luxury ME**  
Date: 23-26 February  
Venue: Doha, Qatar

## MARCH

- ❖ **HOTELEX Shanghai 2025**  
Date: 3 March - 2 April  
Venue: Shanghai, China
- ❖ **ABTA Travel Finance Conference**  
Date: 4-5 March  
Venue: London, UK
- ❖ **ITB Berlin 2025**  
Date: 4-6 March  
Venue: Berlin, Germany
- ❖ **INTOURMARKET Moscow 2025**  
Date: 13-15 March  
Venue: Russia
- ❖ **International Conference on Tourism and Hospitality - Tokyo 2025**  
Date: 17-18 March  
Venue: Tokyo, Japan
- ❖ **IBTM Asia Pacific**  
Date: 19-20 March  
Venue: Hong Kong, China
- ❖ **Deluxe Travel Market Poland 2025**  
Date: 21 March  
Venue: Warsaw, Poland
- ❖ **DRT Show Shanghai 2025**  
Date: 21-23 March  
Venue: Shanghai, China
- ❖ **Routes Asia 2025**  
Date: 25-27 March  
Venue: Perth, Australia
- ❖ **IHIF EMEA 2025**  
Date: 31 March - 2 April  
Venue: Berlin, Germany

## APRIL

- ❖ **WTM Africa**  
Date: 9-11 April  
Venue: Cape Town, SA
- ❖ **WTM Latin America**  
Date: 14-16 April  
Venue: São Paulo, Brazil
- ❖ **Future Hospitality Summit**  
Date: 14-16 April  
Venue: Riyadh, KSA
- ❖ **MATTA Fair Asia Pacific**  
Date: 18-20 April  
Venue: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- ❖ **China Outbound Travel & Tourism Market (COTTM)**  
Date: 24-26 April  
Venue: Beijing, China
- ❖ **Arabian Travel Market Show (ATM) Dubai**  
Date: 28 April - 1 May  
Venue: Dubai, UAE
- ❖ **Australian Tourism Exchange 2025**  
Date: 27 April - 1 May  
Venue: Brisbane, Australia

## MAY

- ❖ **ILTM Latin America**  
Date: 5-8 May  
Venue: São Paulo, Brazil
- ❖ **Dubai Airport Show**  
Date: 6-8 May  
Venue: Dubai, UAE
- ❖ **International Mediterranean Tourism Market (IMTM)**  
Date: 7-8 May  
Venue: Tel Aviv, Israel
- ❖ **Guangzhou International Travel Fair (GITF)**  
Date: 15-17 May  
Venue: Guangzhou, China
- ❖ **IMEX**  
Date: 20-22 May  
Venue: Frankfurt, Germany
- ❖ **ITB China**  
Date: 27-29 May  
Venue: Shanghai, China
- ❖ **The Leisure Show Dubai**  
Date: 27-29 May  
Venue: Dubai, UAE

## JUNE

- ❖ **Seoul International Travel Fair (SITF)**  
Date: 5-8 June  
Venue: Seoul, South Korea
- ❖ **Travel Meet Asia**  
Date: 11-12 June  
Venue: Jakarta, Indonesia
- ❖ **Hong Kong International Travel Expo (ITE Hong Kong)**  
Date: 12-15 June  
Venue: Hong Kong, China
- ❖ **Global Travel Marketplace West (GTM West)**  
Date: 17-19 June  
Venue: Palm Springs, California, USA
- ❖ **Business Travel Show Europe**  
Date: 25-26 June  
Venue: London, UK
- ❖ **International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM) Asia Pacific**  
Date: 30 June - 3 July  
Venue: Marina Bay Sands, Singapore

## JULY

- ❖ **Global Travel Marketplace (GTM)**  
Date: 10-12 July  
Venue: Florida, USA
- ❖ **Arabian Travel Awards**  
TBC

## AUGUST

- ❖ **International Conference on Tourism and Hospitality - Tokyo 2025**  
Date: 16-17 August  
Venue: Tokyo, Japan
- ❖ **PATA Travel Mart 2025**  
Date: 26-28 August  
Venue: Bangkok, Thailand
- ❖ **India Travel Awards - West & South**  
Date: August, TBC  
Venue: Mumbai, India

- ❖ **India Cargo Awards - West & South**  
Date: August, TBC  
Venue: Mumbai, India

## SEPTEMBER

- ❖ **ITB India**  
Date: 2-4 September  
Venue: Mumbai, India
- ❖ **Connections Luxury UK & Ireland 2025**  
Date: 21-24 September  
Venue: London, UK
- ❖ **IT&CM Asia and CTW Asia-Pacific 2025**  
Date: 23-25 September  
Venue: Bangkok, Thailand
- ❖ **Corporate Travel World Asia Pacific 2025**  
Date: 23-25 September  
Venue: Bangkok, Thailand

## OCTOBER

- ❖ **WTTC Global Summit 2025**  
Date: 7-9 October  
Venue: Italy
- ❖ **ITB Asia**  
Date: 15-17 October  
Venue: Marina Bay Sands, Singapore
- ❖ **FHS World 2025**  
Date: 27-29 October  
Venue: Dubai, UAE
- ❖ **TFest**  
Date: 26-29 October  
Venue: Mexico

## NOVEMBER

- ❖ **WTM London**  
Date: 4-6 November  
Venue: London, UK
- ❖ **Dubai Airshow**  
Date: 17-21 November  
Venue: Dubai, UAE
- ❖ **IBTM World 2025**  
Date: 18-20 November  
Venue: Barcelona, Spain
- ❖ **Qatar Travel Mart**  
Date: 24-26 November  
Venue: Doha, Qatar
- ❖ **Arabian Cargo Awards**  
Date: November, TBC  
Venue: Dubai, UAE
- ❖ **Arabian Travel Awards**  
Date: November, TBC  
Venue: Dubai, UAE

## DECEMBER

- ❖ **India Cargo Awards - North & East**  
Date: December, TBC  
Venue: New Delhi, India
- ❖ **India Travel Awards - North & East**  
Date: December, TBC  
Venue: New Delhi, India
- ❖ **ILTM - International Luxury Travel Market**  
Date: December, TBC  
Venue: Cannes, France
- ❖ **Karavanist**  
Date: December, TBC  
Venue: Istanbul, Turkey

For more details, contact: [events@ddppl.com](mailto:events@ddppl.com)

The dates shown on the annual event calendar are subject to change. Please refer to Event Talk in  to track the changes in dates.



# MOVEMENTS

## SOFITEL BAHRAIN ZALLAQ THALASSA SEA & SPA Bahrain

Sofitel Bahrain Zallaq Thalassa Sea & Spa has appointed **VIVEK BRAGANZA** as the Director of Operations in charge of Sales & Marketing. With over 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Braganza will be in charge of the hotel operations. He will be responsible for managing accommodation, F&B, spa services, and recreational activities, in addition to spearheading sales and marketing strategies designed to improve guest experiences and achieve operational excellence. Prior to this, Braganza held a crucial position at Shangri-La Group, where he oversaw Global Sales Offices in both India and the Middle East. His leadership spanned major cities, including Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Dubai, and Riyadh.



## ME BY MELIÁ DUBAI Dubai

ME by Meliá Dubai appoints **GYUNAY ALIEVA** as the Director of Sales & Marketing. With an impressive background in luxury hospitality and a proven track record of driving significant growth, Alieva brings with her over 15 years of experience and is poised to further drive the hotel's position in the competitive market with her fresh perspective and strategic vision. With a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Public Relations, Alieva's journey began in 2009 as a Sales Executive at Miramar Al Aqah Beach Resort & Spa, followed by her role as Senior Sales Manager at Meydan Hotel & Bab Al Shams Desert Resort and Spa. Alieva has excelled in diverse roles, including Business Development Manager at The First Group.



## RADISSON DUBAI MOTOR CITY Dubai

Radisson Hotel Group has appointed **STUART BIRKWOOD** as the Cluster General Manager for Radisson Blu Hotel Dubai Media City and Park Inn by Radisson, Dubai Motor City. With a career spanning over 30 years in the global hospitality sector, Birkwood brings an extraordinary track record of innovation, operational excellence, and leadership to his new role overseeing two of Dubai's prominent properties. In his new role, Birkwood will spearhead the strategic operations of the hotels, which boast a combined total of 400 rooms, diverse award-winning dining venues, state-of-the-art meeting and event facilities, and a stellar reputation for hosting large-scale catering events.



## ROCCO FORTE HOTELS United Kingdom

Rocco Forte Hotels has appointed **ELENA BLACK** as the Senior Vice President of Marketing. With extensive experience in luxury and lifestyle marketing, she has been an invaluable addition to the company. With over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, she brings a wealth of expertise in brand development, marketing strategy, and customer engagement. Prior to this, she spent more than 13 years at Six Senses. After further integration of Six Senses into IHG Hotels & Resorts, Elena was promoted to Head of Global Luxury & Lifestyle Marketing. She was tasked with elevating luxury marketing for the company and a broader portfolio of luxury brands, including Regent, InterContinental Hotels & Resorts, and Vignette Collection.



## STEIGENBERGER HOTELS Dubai

**STEPHAN HUNGELING** has been appointed as Chief Transformation Officer and Managing Director of Steigenberger Hotels GmbH. Hungeling joins Steigenberger Hotels GmbH after six years with Christ where he led the transformation of the company into a digitally driven and multichannel brand. Before that, he contributed to the success of various German and European market leaders across different retail/ FMCG industries, including Douglas GmbH, a multinational perfumery and cosmetics brand for which he served as CFO for more than three years. Hungeling is a leader with a deep understanding of business strategy and transformation, digitisation and financial excellence. He has demonstrated the ability to build segment leading businesses.



## VISITBRITAIN Dubai

VisitBritain has appointed **MIRNA TAMIMI** as the Communications Manager. In her new role, Tamimi will focus on promoting Britain's visitor offer across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, working with media to profile the latest tourism products, experiences and attractions. This ranges from hosting media visits to destination promotion, encouraging visitors to explore Britain through its regional gateways. VisitBritain is the British Tourist Authority (BTA), operating under the brand names VisitBritain and VisitEngland. As the national tourism agency, VisitBritain works to raise Britain's profile, increase the volume and value of tourism exports and develop England's visitor economy, working with organisations of all sizes and specialities.



## KEMPINSKI HOTEL Muscat, Oman

Kempinski Hotel Muscat promotes **NADINE AL BULUSHI** to the position of General Manager. Al Bulushi's journey to the milestone began in 2019 when she joined Kempinski Hotel Muscat as Executive Assistant Manager and subsequently promoted to Hotel Manager in 2020. Her extraordinary contributions, particularly during the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak, went above and beyond her responsibilities. Her exceptional leadership, dedication and passion for the hospitality industry have consistently distinguished her. Her extensive experience spans multiple countries. In her new role, Al Bulushi will continue to guide Kempinski Hotel Muscat towards success, with a focus on delivering exceptional guest experiences.



## INTERCONTINENTAL ABU DHABI AND INTERCONTINENTAL RESIDENCES ABU DHABI Abu Dhabi

IHG Hotels & Resorts has appointed **SAYED TAYOUN** as the Cluster General Manager for InterContinental Abu Dhabi and InterContinental Residences Abu Dhabi. With over 20 years of experience in hospitality, Tayoun is celebrated for his visionary leadership, innovative approach to elevating guest experiences, and operational expertise. Known for his unwavering dedication to guest excellence, he is an ideal fit for leading two of Abu Dhabi's most established properties. He is also committed to driving commercial success, optimising technology, building high-performing teams, and engaging with local communities. In his new role, Tayoun will oversee two distinguished properties.



## TAJ DUBAI Dubai

Taj Dubai promotes **ASHOK KAPUR** as Area Director - Sales & Marketing, Middle East & Director - Sales & Marketing, Taj Dubai. The elevation recognises Kapur's exceptional contributions, innovative leadership, and commitment to excellence, which have significantly shaped the growth and success of Taj Hotels in the Middle East. Kapur is a seasoned professional with over two decades of experience in luxury hospitality, having successfully navigated diverse markets across South-East Asia, India, and the Middle East. His expertise reflects a deep understanding of the industry, blending strategic foresight with operational excellence. He has worked with renowned brands.



## AL HABTOOR GRAND RESORT, AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION Dubai

Al Habtoor Grand Resort, Autograph Collection appoints **RUSSELL DILLON** as its new Commercial Director. With over two decades in global hospitality markets, Dillon is set to lead the resort into a year of growth, innovation, and unprecedented guest experience. Dillon's extensive career has been marked by record-breaking achievements with prestigious brands across regions. Known for his forward-thinking strategies, he has consistently maximised occupancy rates, elevated revenue streams, and driven guest satisfaction. Under his leadership, the resort will focus on dynamic revenue optimisation by adopting cutting-edge analytics to identify emerging trends and capture new market opportunities.



## HOLIDAY INN & SUITES DUBAI SCIENCE PARK Dubai

IHG Hotels & Resorts has appointed **SOHA ZAHAR** as the General Manager of Holiday Inn & Suites Dubai Science Park. With over 20 years of experience in hospitality management across the Middle East and Africa, Zahar steps into her role with a focus on creating exceptional guest experiences, fostering community partnerships, and championing sustainable practices. She brings over two decades of experience with IHG Hotels & Resorts. She began her career at InterContinental Le Vendome Beirut and InterContinental Phoenicia Beirut in reservations and revenue management. In her new role, she aims to enhance guest experiences.



**KALPESH SHANGVI** has been promoted to the position of Area Financial Controller and Director of Finance at Taj Dubai. With over 27 years of experience, Shangvi has been a driving force behind the financial success of Taj Hotels, and his strategic leadership has set benchmarks in financial operations, particularly during his tenure as Director of Finance at Taj Dubai over the past three years. His commitment to excellence has consistently delivered outstanding results, establishing him as a visionary in his field. Under Shangvi's leadership, Taj Dubai has achieved remarkable financial milestones. In 2024, the hotel experienced an impressive increase in revenue, driven by innovative strategies.



**Director**  
Sumeera Bahl  
**Managing Editor Middle East**  
Dr. Shehara Rizvi  
**Chief Editor**  
Nisha Verma  
**At the Desk**  
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