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First woman to lead UN Tourism

Shaikha Al Nowais, Corporate Vice President - Owner Relationship Management, Rotana, has been nominated as the Secretary-General, UN Tourism for the 2026–2029 term. She becomes the first Emirati woman to be elected for the coveted post.

Dr Shehara Fernando

The UN Tourism Executive Council recently met for a milestone session to build on the legacy of the last eight years. Meeting for its 123rd session, the council assessed progress made around the priorities of innovation, investments and education and nominated **Shaikha Al Nowais** as the new Secretary-General. Upon confirmation by the UN Tourism General Assembly, Al Nowais will become the woman to hold the position. **TRAVTALK** celebrates the landmark achievement.

Vision for the future of global tourism

Al Nowais steps into her role as UN Tourism Secretary-General with a clear and ambitious vision. She aims to strengthen the connection between tourism and gastronomy,



Shaikha Al Nowais
Secretary-General, UN Tourism &
Corporate Vice President - Owner
Relationship Management, Rotana

promote sustainable and inclusive travel, and harness innovative technology



Gerald Lawless
Ambassador
World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)

aligning with global calls for responsible tourism that benefits communities,

Her leadership promises to be transformative, aligning with global calls for responsible tourism that benefits communities

gies to elevate the visitor experience worldwide. Her leadership promises to be transformative,

protects the environment, and fosters cultural exchange. Her appointment is being viewed as a major

achievement for the UAE and a testament to the country's ongoing efforts to empower women in high-level leadership roles, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Gerald Lawless, Ambassador, World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), said, "This is a proud moment for the United Arab Emirates and indeed for all those of us involved in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality. I am proud indeed that Shaikha Al Nowais has been nominated as the next Secretary General for UN Tourism. The United Arab Emirates certainly deserves this recognition and indeed so does Shaikha Al Nowais as, in her position as director of Rotana Hotels, we have seen how Rotana Hotels has developed

Contd. on page 20 ►

Redefining economy with tourism focus

The UAE's Ministry of Economy will now be known as the Ministry of Economy and Tourism. The announcement comes as part of UAE's roadmap to Vision 2031

TT Bureau

In order to reinforce the UAE's global competitiveness and future-readiness, **His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum**, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai, has announced a restructuring of the federal government, with the aim to enhance economic performance across tourism, trade and technology.

This strategic shift reflects the country's deepening commitment to positioning tourism as a cornerstone of its economic diversification efforts under Vision 2031. The Ministry of Economy and Tourism will remain under the leadership of **His Excellency Abdullah bin Touq Al Marri**, who continues to play a central role in advancing the UAE's global tourism

stature through innovation, strategic policy and global engagement.



H.E. Abdullah bin Touq Al Marri
Minister of Economy and Tourism
UAE

Central to the UAE's ambitions is the National Tourism Strategy 2031. Through the strategy, the UAE is focused on creating a tourism sector that is inclusive, digitally enabled and environmentally conscious, with clear emphasis on developing national talent and fostering SME participation. ►

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Malaysia targets 1mn ME tourists in '25

Datuk Manoharan Periasamy, Director General, Tourism Malaysia, in an interview with , shared that they expect to close 2025 with one million visitors from the Middle East region. Having received over 190k visitors last year, they are hopeful that alongside their new initiatives and enhanced connectivity, the numbers will rise further by the end of this year.

 **Dr Shehara Fernando**

Speaking on some of the key initiatives that Tourism Malaysia is currently working on, Periasamy said that the tourism board recognises the growing need to introduce more B2C-focused programmes tailored for the Middle Eastern market. “We have observed that younger travellers from this region are increasingly exploring destinations other than Malaysia—possibly due to a perception that Malaysia lacks activities or products that cater specifically to their interests and lifestyles. In response, we have initiated collaborations with

trusted local partners in the Middle East to develop ‘soft adventure’ and lifestyle experiences that appeal to the younger demographic. While families from the region continue to choose Malaysia as a preferred holiday destination, we aim to re-engage younger travellers who are currently exploring alternatives in neighbouring countries. Our industry discussions and trade events with Middle Eastern operators have highlighted a key challenge: accessibility,” he said.

Periasamy added, “While Malaysia receives a considerable number of Middle Eastern visitors—



Datuk Manoharan Periasamy
Director General
Tourism Malaysia

many of whom travel for religious purposes—the seat capacity between major cities in Saudi Arabia and Kuala Lumpur remains limited. To address this, we are actively working with key airlines,

including Riyadh Air and flynas. We are optimistic about launching direct routes from Saudi Arabia to Malaysia—potentially as early as the end of this year—which will greatly enhance travel acces-

Almosafer in Saudi Arabia and others who focus on niche tourism products. “Destinations like Sabah, Sarawak and Kuala Lumpur continue to hold strong appeal for younger visitors, particularly those

readily available. This is an advantage for Middle Eastern travellers seeking destinations that align with their dietary and cultural needs,” he said.

Sabah, Sarawak and Kuala Lumpur continue to appeal youth, particularly those interested in entertainment and urban culture

sibility and support our broader tourism goals.”

Tourism Malaysia is entering into strategic partnerships with travel specialists, such as

interested in entertainment, urban culture and experiential travel. Malaysia also offers extensive halal dining options, with halal-certified restaurants and food experiences

PROJECTIONS FOR 2025

- ❖ **1 million** visitors from the Middle East
- ❖ Increase connectivity from the ME region
- ❖ In talks with Riyadh Air and flynas to increase seat capacity

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Riyadh Summit to reboot tourism

Saudi Arabia’s Minister of Tourism, **His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb** has launched TOURISE, a bold new global platform designed to shape a new horizon and plot a shared roadmap for the next 50 years of tourism. Built for ambition and backed by vision, the new tourism planform will convene a cross-section of public and private sector industry giants for the first time.

TT Bureau

The inaugural TOURISE Summit will take place in Riyadh from 11 to 13 November 2025, announced **His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb**, Minister of Tourism, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Chairman, TOURISE, at the platform’s virtual launch. The programme, which will also be live-streamed, will focus on four core themes: The Future of AI-Powered Tourism – Innovate or Fade; The Great Tourism Reset – Disruptive Business Models and Investment; Rebooting the Travel Experience – Upgrade in Progress; and Tourism



His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb & Julia Simpson at the announcement of new tourism platform in Riyadh

that Works – for People, Planet and Progress. A dedicated Innovation Zone will showcase breakthrough technologies and solutions from SMEs and mid to large corporations spanning AI, mobility, sustainability, and more from innovators across both public

and private sectors.

Visionary leaders with tourism, technology, investment, sustainability and cultural expertise will be connected to tackle critical challenges, unlock transformative opportunities and set the agenda for a sector that is sus-

tainable, equitable and future-focused. Along with global partners from multilateral institutions to private sector leaders, TOURISE is designed to unlock major, unprecedented deal flow, with high-value investment opportunities and access to breakthrough technolo-

gies set to be announced and activated through the platform.

Julia Simpson, President & CEO, WTTC and TOURISE, Advisory Board Member, said: “We are delighted to be a part of this global initiative and continue our long-standing collaboration across the entire tourism ecosystem. For this industry to evolve and reach its full potential, public-private sector collaboration is critical to the continued success of Travel & Tourism worldwide. Together, we can address the challenges of today while co-creating a sustainable future for tomorrow.”

KEY FACTS UNVEILED

- ❖ TOURISE is the first global platform to unite public & private sector leaders across tourism, tech, investment and sustainability ecosystems.
- ❖ Accompanying TOURISE Awards programme will recognise best-in-class destinations delivering purposeful travel experiences

GCC anchors cruise tourism boom

Cruising has evolved into a global movement—and the Middle East has emerged as one of the fastest-growing cruise market actively shaping it. From luxury expeditions to family-friendly getaways and new homeports along the Arabian Gulf, cruising is becoming deeply embedded in the region’s travel culture. **TRAVEL TALK MIDDLE EAST** connects with experts in the industry to know their views.



Ashok Kumar
Founder
Cruise Master

“Agents are at the heart of cruise promotion in this region. Having launched Cruise Travel Mart shortly after the pandemic, we have seen first-hand the growing enthusiasm. In our very first year, we had around 150 travel agents attending.”



Mohammed Saeed
Managing Director
Royal Caribbean Arabia

“Since the pandemic, cruise travel has not just rebounded; it has roared back to life. We have seen year-on-year growth—ranging from 15 per cent to 25 per cent, depending on the brand. This double-digit growth clearly reflects increasing interest.”



Prem Sagar
Group General Manager
Al Rais Travel and Shipping Agencies

“Middle East cruises offer a unique blend of modern luxury and deep cultural heritage, with ports like Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha. The region’s mild winter climate makes it a perfect alternative during the European off-season.”



Asif Hussain
Manager - Outbound
Al Tayer Group

“We have been noticing increased participation from both expatriates and locals—Emiratis, Bahrainis, Qataris and Omanis. Dubai has been firmly established as a cruise hub. Cruise vacations are some of the easiest products to sell.”



Jasem Zaiton
Director
Zaiton Corp (Cruise Egypt)

“The Middle East cruise industry shows promising growth. A total of six established cruise brands and a homegrown line, “Aroya Cruise”. Egypt is a key destination with its rich history, offering a unique cruise experience.”



Crystal Pernici
Global Director - Cruise RMS
iDeaS

“Cruise operators are becoming aware of the potential—and the value—of revenue strategies guided by revenue optimisation technology. With data-driven decision-making, cruise leaders are opening up vessels to a new range of opportunities.”

Cabin crew as tourism ambassadors

In a first in the Middle East region, flyadeal has announced that Saudi cabin crew will be trained as certified tour guides in support of the Kingdom’s Vision 2030 to build a dynamic tourism industry. The programme will target 800 crew by 2030 for comprehensive tour guide training in which they will embrace wider learnings of Saudi Arabia’s culture and historical attractions.

TT Bureau

A training institute accredited to the Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Tourism will conduct the courses. flyadeal will invite applications for the courses, specifically designed for Saudi nationals, over the next few weeks.

Elaborating on the plan, **Steven Greenway**, Chief Executive Officer, flyadeal, said: “flyadeal continues to push the boundaries with employee initiatives designed to enhance their personal development and professional skills. This new training programme, the first of its kind in the Middle East,



Steven Greenway
Chief Executive Officer
flyadeal

will empower crew and equip them with the skills and confidence to engage with visitors as official tourism ambassadors.”

Upon completion of the training, the crew mem-

bers will receive a licence as tourism ambassadors enabling them to hone their skills as official guides engaging with passengers in a private capacity. “As licensed tour guides, the beauty of the programme allows our crew to use their new-found skills while interacting with passengers and also harness their experience by taking tourists on guided tours around the wonderful historic sites that the Kingdom is so renowned for,” Greenway added.

To kick-off the programme, flyadeal crew were given a guided tour of the fascinating Dirayah

district – the birthplace of Saudi Arabia – in the Kingdom’s capital, Riyadh. They explored and learned more about the traditional mud-brick architecture and cultural sites being restored to

To kick-off the programme, flyadeal crew were given a guided tour of the fascinating Dirayah district in the Kingdom’s capital, Riyadh

their former glory, but more importantly gained insights into what it takes to become a certified tour guide. Massive investment is underway in the Dirayah project being

developed as the nation’s historical, cultural and lifestyle destination.

With Saudi Arabia looking to welcome 150 million domestic and international visitors by 2030 as part of

map with large-scale projects, airport upgrades, and mega aviation cities being developed. flyadeal is already playing a key role in national efforts to promote tourism in the country. The Saudi-based airline operates a large domestic network.

COURSE INFORMATION
❖ flyadeal will invite applications for the courses, specifically designed for Saudi nationals, over the next few weeks.

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Qatar strengthens bond with China market

Qatar is making bold moves to deepen ties with China's travel market, spotlighting its growing importance at ITB China. With a 28% surge in Chinese arrivals in 2024, **Jassim Al Mahmoud**, PR Director, Visit Qatar, highlights the country's aims to build lasting partnerships and expand its presence in what it calls a Tier 1 source market.

 Dr Shehara Fernando

ITB China is an important event for Qatar's tourism industry for two reasons. "First, the exceptional quality and professionalism associated with the ITB brand; and second, the high calibre of exhibitors and potential partners participating in the show," said Jassim Al Mahmoud, PR & Communications Director, Visit Qatar.

"We are here to build meaningful partnerships, but most importantly, to deepen our engagement with the Chinese market—which we consider a tier 1 source market for Qatar. This is my first visit to China, and already it is



Jassim Al Mahmoud
PR & Communications Director
Visit Qatar

clear that the country offers immense opportunities. China's vast population and its growing appetite for international tourism make it a key focus in our global tourism strategy. But to truly attract Chinese travellers, we must understand their

preferences and expectations," Al Mahmoud said.

"We have already identified that gastronomy, shopping, cultural experiences and family-friendly attractions are particularly appealing to Chinese tourists. Fortunately, Qatar can offer all of these. From luxury shopping and world-class cuisine to rich

Chinese guests. We are seeing solid growth from this market. For example, in 2023 we welcomed 56k Chinese visitors, and in 2024 we have recorded a 28 per cent increase—a clear sign of rising interest," he added.

Also, Qatar is actively expanding its partnerships to support the mo-



we have experienced here, we are seriously considering expanding our presence next year. The market potential is undeniable, and the hospitality we have received

reinforces the importance of being here. To better serve Chinese travellers, we have already taken practical steps," Al Mahmoud concluded. 🇶🇦

China's vast population and its growing appetite for international tourism make it a key focus in our global tourism strategy

heritage and attractions suited for travellers of all ages, we are confident in our ability to cater to

mentum. "We brought 10 partners from Doha with us to ITB China this year. And based on what

Green Standards gain ground in UAE

Farnek, offering a comprehensive range of services to the hospitality sector, has witnessed a significant number of new business acquisitions in the UAE, valued at over AED 10 million so far during 2025. To service these contracts, 330 additional members of staff have been mobilised to sites across the UAE, bringing their total headcount now to over 10,000.

 TT Bureau

Tamer Bishay, Director - Business Development, Farnek, said the volume of contract wins underscores Farnek's strategic approach to business development, which is renowned for its innovative smart solutions, sustainability and value-driven Facility Management (FM) market proposition. "This is an exceptional performance, given we are not even halfway through the year. We have focused our efforts on the UAE's hospitality sector, given its rapid expansion and the integral role it plays in the UAE's



Tamer Bishay
Director - Business Development
Farnek

economy. We have managed to increase our market share in this vertical sector considerably over the past months, and this bodes well for the second half of the year," he said.

"Although the UAE hospitality sector is expanding at pace, competition is intense and hotels, residences, resorts and restaurants are always looking at ways to make their operations more efficient, sustainable and cost-effective without compromising on quality. Our fully trained, experienced and qualified staff can fulfil a variety of roles within the hospitality sector seamlessly," he added.

Overall, Farnek has signed multiple new contracts with premier hospitality brands, including Kempinski, Sofitel, JW Marriott, Millennium,



Emaar, Grand Hyatt and Atlantis Dubai. This new business growth follows an outstanding year in 2024 when Farnek secured new and retained hospitality contracts valued at AED 72 million mobilising 450 staff.

Farnek is a familiar service provider to most

hospitality professionals in the UAE. Besides operational support, it is the preferred partner for Green Globe Certification, a premier worldwide sustainability certification developed especially for the travel and tourism industry. Farnek audits and assesses properties which have to comply

with or exceed over 380 sustainability indicators. Farnek has certified over 100 hotels and leisure facilities in 38 cities across the MENA region.

GROWTH PATH

❖ **AED 10 mn**
Farnek's business value in Q1 2025

❖ **330** additional members of staff mobilised to sites across the UAE

❖ **10,000** total headcount of employees

Experiences drive ME outbound growth

Travellers, especially those coming from the Middle East region, are redefining the essence of travel, moving beyond mere luxury accommodations to seek immersive experiences. They are yearning for experiences beyond high-end resorts and 5-star amenities and looking for authentic interactions and curated adventures that resonate with their passions.

Whether diving deep into local cultures, exploring untouched natural wonders, or indulging in bespoke culinary tours, today's travellers desire exclusivity with authenticity. They seek seamless experiences that effortlessly combine the opportunity for technology facilitated personalisation that remains heavily rooted in meaningful human connections. Luxury for them is no longer about extravagance alone, they seek discovery, enrichment, and crafting unforgettable moments. As destinations strive to meet these evolving



expectations, they must focus on designing experiences that speak to these traveller motivations, co-creating stories and sensations that linger long after the journey ends. The future of travel is experiential, personal, and undeniably transformative for the traveller.

According to a report by Market Insights, the GCC outbound tourism market is poised for significant growth, projected to surge from US\$81.89 billion in 2025 to an impressive US\$139.53 billion by 2032. This upward trajectory highlights the increasing de-

mand for unique and premium travel experiences among Middle Eastern tourists, presenting lucrative opportunities for

ences. Unlike traditional sightseeing, experiential travel focuses on engaging with the local culture, nature, and heritage, pro-

However, a shift towards experiential and adventure tourism has become evident, driven by younger generations and affluent families seeking profound connections with new cultures.

GCC outbound tourism market is poised for significant growth, projected to surge from US\$81.89 billion in 2025 to an impressive US\$139.53 billion by 2032

destinations worldwide. In the evolving landscape of global tourism, experiential travel has emerged as a key trend, especially among Middle Eastern tourists who seek unique, culturally immersive, and tailored experi-

encing a deeper and more meaningful journey.

Middle Eastern tourists, particularly from the GCC countries, are known for their affinity for luxury, comfort and family-oriented travel.



Dr. Ross Curran
Associate Professor, Edinburgh Business School at Heriot-Watt University Dubai
(The views expressed are solely of the author.)



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Novotel Riyadh champions ‘Saudization’

Novotel Riyadh Sahafa, the ninth Novotel property in Saudi Arabia, has quickly risen to prominence within the past year, not just for its state-of-the-art facilities, but for making history. At its helm is **Hessa Al Mazroa**, first female Saudi General Manager for Accor Novotel Riyadh Sahafa, a remarkable milestone for the Kingdom’s evolving hospitality sector.

TT Bureau

Strategically located in the vibrant Al Sahafa district and within reach of King Abdullah Financial District, Riyadh Exhibition Centre and the bustling Riyadh Boulevard, Novotel Riyadh Sahafa hotel caters seamlessly to business and leisure travellers. Just 15 kilometres from King Khalid International Airport, it has become a preferred address for convenience, comfort and cultural connection.

A year of impactful leadership
Celebrating its first anniversary, Novotel Riyadh Sahafa stands as a symbol of visionary leadership



Hessa Al Mazroa
General Manager
Novotel Riyadh Sahafa

ship and progressive hospitality. Under Hessa Al Mazroa’s guidance, the hotel has achieved high guest satisfaction ratings and built a solid reputation for excellence. Speaking during the hotel’s one-year celebration, Al Mazroa shared,

“This year has been full of achievements and unforgettable moments. From the successful opening to the recent launch of our specialty restaurant ‘Cassa Myrra’, every step has been

Celebrating its first anniversary, Novotel Riyadh Sahafa stands as a symbol of visionary leadership and progressive hospitality

a testament to the dedication of our diverse and talented team.”

With over 50 per cent of the staff being Saudi nationals and a team representing more than 12 nationalities, Al Mazroa

has fostered a culture of inclusion, empowerment and service excellence. “We are proud to support the Saudisation initiative by nurturing future Saudi leaders. At the same time, our team’s diversity

enriches the guest experience,” she said.

Design, comfort and innovation
The four-star property blends contemporary design with traditional Saudi elements, offering

232 elegantly appointed rooms and suites with sweeping views of Olaya Street. Guests enjoy a wealth of modern amenities, including a fully equipped fitness centre, outdoor pool, jacuzzi, sauna, and nine flexible meeting rooms, the largest accommodating up to 200 guests. Dining is a standout feature, from the international buffet at La Cuisine and the relaxed Lobby Café to The Terrace’s al fresco offerings.

Smart & sustainable hospitality
From the start, sustainability has been a core value. “From day one, we committed to a zero-plastic policy,” noted Hessa. “We are also

implementing long-term strategies for reducing energy and water consumption. Sustainability is not just a trend—it’s a responsibility,” she added.

YEAR OF SUCCESS

- ❖ Zero plastic policy
- ❖ State-of-the-art rooms
- ❖ Personalised services with tech system
- ❖ 50% staff are Saudi nationals

200 hotels at Dubai Summer Surprises

The 28th edition of Dubai Summer Surprises, which kicked off on 27 June and will continue until 31 August 2025, with a host of new experiences for both residents and international visitors. Over 200 hotels and 4,000 retail outlets will participate with great deals, such as staycations, daycations, flash sales and discounts to attract the entire family.

TT Bureau

Suhaila Ghubash, Vice President - Events and Festivals, Dubai Festivals and Retail, talking about the event with **TTM**, shared that what started out as a simple children’s summer fun arena has changed its concept, as it offers non-stop summer fun with thousands of ways to shop, dine, stay and play at pocket-friendly prices for the entire family.

“This year’s Dubai Summer Surprises is our most dynamic and value-packed edition to date, with thousands of



Suhaila Ghubash
Vice President - Events and Festivals, Dubai Festivals and Retail

unbeatable offers, compelling retail promotions and endless experiences showcasing everything that makes the emirate a truly global, world-class, and diverse family destination. Promising a



summer well spent for everyone, DSS 2025 (Dubai Summer Surprises 2025) strengthens Dubai’s standing as a city brimming with unbeatable value, seamlessly bringing together every major tourism pillar – be it retail, hospitality, entertainment, gastronomy,

or leisure. Our packed programme offers compelling reasons for residents and visitors alike to stay and explore unique citywide experiences that are accessible, exciting, convenient and full of unforgettable moments at the best value time of the year,” Ghubash said.

In 2024, Dubai Summer Surprises conducted 45 concerts and events, gave away prizes valued at 10 million, over 344 hotel offers were available

ping seasons, each delivering fresh new offers, limited-time flash sales, the biggest prizes and unbeatable value across the city’s leading brands.

This year’s DSS is our most dynamic and value-packed edition to date, with unbeatable offers and endless experiences

with 140,000 Modesh World visitors. This year too, they anticipate many visitors, who can enjoy 66 days of non-stop fun. For the first time ever in DSS history, Dubai’s favourite summer festival will unfold in three curated shop-

This year’s line-up of iconic and only-in-Dubai summer experiences include the first-ever editions of DSS Gahwa Beats, 10 Dirham Dish, brand-new Modesh adventures, plus the return of iconic festivals. ▶

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Trenitalia & Italo (Italy)	Italy	High-speed Frecciarossa and luxury Italo trains
Renfe & Iryo (Spain)	Spain	AVE high-speed and Iryo's modern routes in Spain
Eurostar & National Rail (UK)	United Kingdom	London to Paris/Brussels and national UK services
SNCB/NMBS (Belgium)	Belgium	Belgium's hub for intercity and Thalys trains
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Malaysia's Global Meet to connect trade

Nuwal Fadhilah Ku Azmi, Director, International Promotion Division, North and East Asia, Tourism Malaysia and **Mohd Amirul Rizal Abdul Rahim**, Head of Secretariat, Visit Malaysia 2026, in a special interview with **TRAVEL**, share that the Middle East is their key target market and various efforts are being made to intensify business in priority markets like the GCC.

TT Bureau

Tourism Malaysia is planning a special event on World Tourism Day in September this year to connect Malaysian sellers with international buyers and media to promote Visit Malaysia 2026, a major initiative to promote the country as a premier tourist destination.

They have launched a series of sales missions and workshops for this, including recent promotional tours in India, China and the Middle East, such as the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) and missions to Jeddah



Nuwal Fadhilah Ku Azmi
Director, International Promotion Division,
North and East Asia, Tourism Malaysia

and Riyadh. Post-COVID, the push is clear: re-establish Malaysia's presence in under-engaged regions and aggressively market the country as a top tourism destination. With 2026 on the horizon, Malaysia is going



Mohd Amirul Rizal Abdul Rahim
Head of Secretariat
Visit Malaysia 2026

“all out” to ensure the campaign's success. Ku Azmi said that Malaysia is ramping up its preparations for the Visit Malaysia 2026 campaign, with major initiatives already underway this year. A national prior-

ity, the campaign brings together strategic partners from across the hospitality and tourism industry—including hotels, airlines and media platforms—to amplify Malaysia's brand on the global stage.

“Among the key highlights is Global Meet, a business-to-business (B2B) platform taking place later this year. The event will connect Malaysian tourism sellers with international buyers and media, aiming to boost global awareness and drive business opportunities ahead of 2026. Additionally, Malaysia will host World Tourism

Day in Melaka this September, further showcasing its readiness and commitment. Efforts are being intensified in priority markets. While neighbouring countries remain strong contributors to tourist arrivals, Malaysia is expanding its focus to China, India, and notably the Middle East—aligning with the Prime Minister's regional engagement efforts. Long-haul markets like Europe are also a renewed priority,” she explained.

As the head of the secretariat, Abdul Rahim, shared the importance of the Middle Eastern tourists, as they are the

ones who spend over one week in Malaysia, which is one of the main source markets.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

❖ Middle East key source market for Malaysia

❖ 11 days travellers from the Middle East spend in Malaysia

❖ 150 countries participating

UAE redefines global tourism playground

The United Arab Emirates is cementing its global tourism leadership through visionary planning, strategic connectivity and cultural innovation. The historic leadership role at UN Tourism for Shaikha Al Nowais underscores its influence, while data-driven insights show strong growth in arrivals and satisfaction. Mabrian shares some insights with **TRAVEL**.

TT Bureau

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is asserting its influence as a global tourism leader, marked by the historic election of Shaikha Al Nowais as the first woman Secretary-General of UN Tourism. As the region garners international attention, cutting-edge data from Mabrian, the global travel intelligence company part of The Data Appeal Company – Almwave Group, sheds light on how the UAE is redefining the global tourism playbook through smart strategies, infrastructure investments, and a deep understanding of evolving traveller preferences.



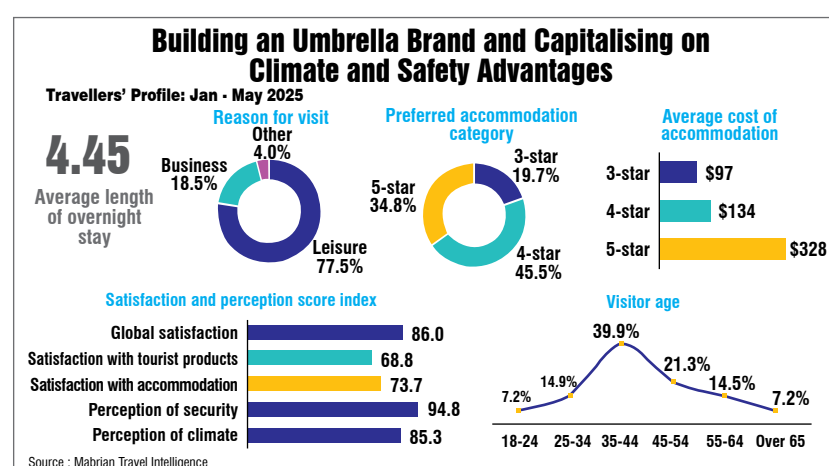
Carlos Cendra
Partner and Director of Marketing and Communications, Mabrian

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), travel and tourism contributed 13 per cent to the UAE's GDP in 2024, with a projected growth of 4 per cent by the end of 2025. Thanks to a sustained, long-

term strategy laid in the 1990s and beginning years of 2000, the UAE has positioned itself as a world-class destination, experiencing consistent growth in international tourist arrivals, significant investments, and diversification efforts; and it continues to pursue strategies for sustainable expansion.

Multi-segment tourism strategy

Carlos Cendra, Partner and Director of Marketing and Communications at Mabrian, says, “The UAE's spectacular tourism development results from a clear roadmap combining a smart connectivity strat-




egy—enhanced by low-cost carriers to serve specific segments and seasonal demand—with thoughtful product design, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and strategic use of unique advantages that are hard to replicate.”

Data suggests the next phase involves laser-focusing on opportunities arising from the UAE's vision and its alignment with current market and consumer trends, which were categorised as: Consolidating Western Europe and

Boosting Asia, Expanding Midscale Hotel Options to Broaden Market Reach, Concept Travel Itineraries, Building an Umbrella Brand for the UAE's Tourism Offering, and Capitalising on Climate and Safety as Strategic Advantages. **▶**

BWH Hotels to expand ME footprint

As global hotel brands race to establish a footprint in the Middle East, BWH Hotels is making significant moves of its own. **Ron Pohl**, President - World Hotels and International Operations, BWH Hotels, on the sidelines of Future Hospitality Summit in Riyadh, shared with  their regional ambitions and long-term strategy.

 TT Bureau

BWH Hotels has been a brand in the Middle East for many years. **Ron Pohl**, President - World Hotels and International Operations, BWH Hotels, said that the Middle East is the key focus market for them this year.

“We have established a legal entity here in Saudi Arabia, allowing us to do business differently and more effectively. Eventually, we plan to open a regional office as well,” said Pohl, adding that the region was not a new market for them. “We have been developing here for 15 to 20 years.



Ron Pohl
President - World Hotels and International Operations, BWH Hotels

But now we are scaling up in a focused and strategic way,” he explained.

Diverse segments
BWH Hotels is pursuing a multi-brand strategy, spanning luxury to economy. “We see this as a

long-term growth opportunity for all our brands,” Pohl said. “Riyadh and Jeddah are key focus cities, but our Best Western brands were originally built in secondary and

growth. “Luxury projects take longer and are fewer in number,” Pohl said.

“Our core brands—Best Western, Best Western Plus, Executive Resi-

BWH Hotels has 40 hotels in the Middle East region. The company plans to double that number in the next two to three years

tertiary markets—and we see plenty of opportunity across the region,” he added. While the luxury segment remains important, Pohl clarified that midscale brands will drive majority of their

expansion. “Luxury projects take longer and are fewer in number,” Pohl said.

“Our core brands—Best Western, Best Western Plus, Executive Resi-

Growth goals
BWH Hotels currently has around 40 hotels in the Middle East region, including pipeline projects. The company plans to double that number in the next two to three years. “If the market continues to grow as we expect, we have no concerns about reaching those goals,” said Pohl, adding that the number of keys will vary based on brand and property size.

Global expansion
Though the Middle East remains the company’s top priority, Pohl highlighted two additional key growth markets: India and South America.

GROWTH PLAN

- ❖ 40 hotels BWH Hotels currently has in the Middle East region
- ❖ The company plans to double that number in 2-3 years
- ❖ Best Western, Best Western Plus, Executive Residency by Best Western and SureStay are its core brands



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ONE BRAND, LIMITLESS EXPERIENCE



100 'Super 8s' to come up in KSA

Dimitris Manikis, President - EMEA, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, in an interview with **TRAVEL**, shares insights about the developments in the Middle East region. Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the iconic Super 8 brand, he recently announced that they are looking at bringing in 100 Super 8 hotels across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the next 10 years.

TT Bureau

As Wyndham Hotels & Resorts celebrates the 50th anniversary of its iconic Super 8 brand, the hospitality giant makes a bold statement in the Middle East — particularly in Saudi Arabia — with a major expansion plan that reflects the Kingdom's transformative Vision 2030.

"This year is even more special for us as we celebrate the 50th birthday of one of our most beloved and leading premium economy brands globally — Super 8," said **Dimitris Manikis**, President - EMEA, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts. "We are



Dimitris Manikis
President - EMEA
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts

thrilled to have launched a partnership here in Saudi Arabia to open 100 Super 8 hotels across the Kingdom within the next 10 years. This initiative, developed with a key local partner and supported by the Ministry of Development, is a testament to our belief

that hospitality should be inclusive, not exclusive," he said.

Empowering locals

Wyndham's ambitions in Saudi Arabia go beyond property count. The brand is deeply invested in developing local talent and embedding itself within the Kingdom's cultural and economic evolution. "One of the greatest things I notice every time I leave Saudi Arabia is the incredible passion of the youth for hospitality," Manikis noted. "Across Europe, the industry is wondering whether young people still see hospitality as a passion. That is not a concern here. The growing middle class and

dynamic young population in Saudi Arabia love this industry — they are eager to be part of this journey," he added.

KSA: A global hospitality pioneer

According to Manikis, Saudi Arabia is not mere-

food waste reduction, energy consumption and talent integration that will not become mainstream elsewhere for another five years. The Kingdom has the capital, the resources and — most importantly — the vision to create a globally relevant

nology in enhancing operational efficiency, its leadership remains clear: hospitality is, and always will be, about people.

"Yes, technology is important but let us not forget that people are the foundation of this industry," Manikis emphasised.

One of the greatest things I notice every time I leave Saudi Arabia is the incredible passion of the youth for hospitality

ly participating in the global hospitality race — it's leading it. "This market is the Formula 1 of hospitality," he said. "They are piloting innovations in sustainability,

model for the future of hospitality," he added.

People first, technology second
While Wyndham embraces the role of tech-

IMPORTANT MILESTONE

50 years

Wyndham's Super 8 brand completes

100 Super 8

hotels the company plans to build in Saudi Arabia in the next 10 years

DCT Abu Dhabi to host China summit

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) has announced that the China Visitors Summit (CVS) will be held in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain on 28-29 August 2025. The landmark event will bring together 150 elite Chinese travel industry buyers, making it the largest B2B gathering of Chinese outbound travel professionals ever hosted outside of China.

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China Visitors Summit Abu Dhabi (CVS Abu Dhabi), hosted by the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi), is a highly curated, by-invitation-only event. The attending Chinese buyers are carefully vetted and confirmed to be actively doing business with the UAE—specifically with travel products and services in the Abu Dhabi Emirate. Delegates include senior executives from travel agencies, tour operators, luxury agents, wholesalers, bespoke travel designers, MICE managers, corporate



DCT Abu Dhabi and CVS Abu Dhabi officials at the launch

travel planners, OTAs and niche specialists in adventure, culture, culinary and wellness.

Over the two-day workshop, participating Abu Dhabi travel suppliers—

including hotels, DMCs, attractions, museums, shopping malls and transportation companies—will engage in pre-scheduled B2B appointments. Each supplier will have the ability to personally

select the Chinese buyers most relevant to their product, whether focused on leisure groups, luxury FITs, or MICE and corporate segments. In addition to the business meetings, the CVS programme in-

cludes local experience days in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain, designed to give the Chinese delegates first-hand exposure to the products they may sell. These include hotel

This 2025 edition of CVS Abu Dhabi marks a return to the summit's roots. Originally launched in Abu Dhabi in 2013, CVS has since expanded globally. With its initial event since

Over the two-day workshop, participating Abu Dhabi travel suppliers will engage in pre-scheduled B2B appointments

site inspections, cultural experiences, F&B showcases and interactive destination briefings, allowing buyers to become more effective ambassadors for Abu Dhabi upon returning to China.

2008, CVS is now recognised as the longest-running and most impactful China-focused B2B travel event series in the world. Each participating buyer from China is individually approved. ➔

67% increase in sales @Dubai Safari Park

Dubai Safari Park, the emirate’s leading wildlife and conservation destination, registered a 16% visitor year-on-year growth and 67% increase in the travel trade sales this season

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Dubai Safari Park has announced a 67 per cent increase in the travel trade sales during its sixth season. Themed ‘Conservation for the Planet’, the season, launched in October 2024, has marked Dubai Safari Park’s most successful to date, achieving record visitor numbers and advancing its efforts to raise awareness about the importance of wildlife conservation, supported by growing demand for recreational and educational experiences in nature. For the



Muna Alhajeri
Director
Dubai Safari Park

first time, the park announced that a portion of all admission revenues will be allocated directly to wildlife rescue, care and research initiatives, ensuring that every guest

visit contributes to protecting the animals and ecosystems at the heart of its mission.

The sixth season saw the park’s highest ever visitor numbers with 16 per cent year-on-year growth. **Muna Alhajeri**, Director, Dubai Safari Park, said, “Season 6 marked a transformative chapter for us, not just in numbers, but in impact. We brought new life into the world, shared knowledge, inspired younger generations, contributed to science, and created meaningful experiences for all ages.”

Travel Designer expands technological operations

Travel Designer Group has relocated its Technology Division to a brand-new, state-of-the-art office at Mondeal Heights, which also houses the company’s corporate headquarters.

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This strategic expansion comes as part of Travel Designer Group’s ongoing commitment to innovation, operational excellence and delivering best-in-class solutions to its partners worldwide. The new tech office is designed to foster collaboration, boost productivity and provide a modern and dynamic environment for the company’s expanding tech team.

Commenting on the development, **Jaal Shah**, Founder, RezLive.com &



Jaal Shah
Founder, RezLive.com & Group MD,
Travel Designer Group

Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group, said, “As our business continues to scale across markets, this new office is a reflection of our com-

mitment to investing in people, technology and infrastructure. It marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter as we focus on developing cutting-edge travel solutions that power the future of our industry.”



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Tech drives Rotana's growth in KSA

Rotana Hotels is scaling up its footprint in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with four new hotel openings by year-end and 13 more in development, reveals **Eddy Tannous**, Chief Operating Officer, Rotana Hotels, in an exclusive interview with **TRAVEL**. With a sharp focus on Riyadh, Mecca and Medina, the group is aligning with Saudi Vision 2030 to meet surging tourism demand.

TT Bureau

Rotana Hotels has had a remarkable year, especially in Saudi Arabia where the brand currently operates 12 hotels and is preparing to open four more before the year ends. "Saudi Arabia is central to our regional strategy," said **Eddy Tannous**, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Rotana Hotels. "We have 13 more properties in the pipeline, mostly in Riyadh, with exciting projects also underway in Mecca, Medina and Abha."

The brand recently launched a 500-key property in Mecca's



Eddy Tannous
Chief Operating Officer (COO)
Rotana Hotels

Mukarramah district and is set to debut in other secondary cities. Tannous attributes this rapid expansion to the momentum generated by Vision 2030, which has significantly increased the government's focus

on tourism. "We have been present in Saudi for almost 20 years, but the last few years have opened a new chapter. Being an Arab-born brand, it's rewarding to contribute to the Kingdom's transformation," he said.

Beyond Saudi Arabia, Rotana is eyeing vertical growth in key adjacent markets. A development lead has been appointed in Turkey to explore opportunities across Eastern Europe and the CIS. Meanwhile, expansion into Africa is accelerating, with ongoing projects in Congo and Tanzania and a new

development director focused on the continent.

Rotana's expansion strategy remains grounded in sustainability and operational excellence. "Sustainability for us is not just about eliminat-

ing plastic—it's about efficient hotel design, the company is committed to reducing its environmental impact.

Technology, particularly AI, is another key area of focus. "Our mission is to enhance the guest

experience first and use technology to support that goal," he emphasised. Rotana recently hosted Microsoft at its leadership conference to explore relevant AI applications in hospitality. "We are already connected with all major distribution channels and are now exploring smarter systems to improve guest communication and service delivery," he added. Rotana's recent integration into the Global Hotel Alliance expands its loyalty programme reach, giving Rotana Discovery members access to over 1,000 hotels. "This partnership allows us to grow without compromising service quality," said Tannous, adding: "Our success lies in agile execution, owner partnerships, and staying true to our brand values." ▶

The brand recently launched a 500-key property in Mecca's Mukarramah district and is set to debut in other secondary cities

ing plastic—it's about embedding a sustainable mindset across every business decision," Tannous explained. From supplier accreditation to

experience first and use technology to support that goal," he emphasised. Rotana recently hosted Microsoft at its leadership conference to

'Green' hospitality moves draw praise

Glenn Mandziuk, CEO, World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, in an interview with **TRAVEL** on the sidelines of Future Hospitality Summit in Riyadh, lauded the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the efforts being made in sustainable hospitality and said that he was 'impressed by the leadership and vision being demonstrated at Red Sea Global' in terms of sustainability.

Glenn Mandziuk, CEO, World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, praised Saudi Arabia's progress and growing commitment to sustainable development, particularly during his visit to the Red Sea Global project. "Dramatic progress has been made in sustainability—from hotel operations to community integration. I was truly impressed by the leadership and vision being demonstrated at Red Sea Global," Mandziuk said.

A regional push for global standards

The alliance, representing over 8 million rooms — nearly 50 per cent of



Glenn Mandziuk
CEO
World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance

the global hospitality industry — has been at the forefront of establishing measurable sustainability standards. Mandziuk emphasised that during COP29 in Baku, industry stakeholders formally agreed for the first time on universal metrics for

carbon, water, waste and energy. "This is a major milestone. We are finally comparing apples to apples when it comes to

We are comparing apples to apples when it comes to sustainability data, and Saudi Arabia is already playing a role in this transformation

sustainability data, and Saudi Arabia is already playing a role in this transformation," he said.

Building talent: The World Academy

A major highlight of the alliance's efforts is the launch of the World Academy for Sustainable Hospitality, a first-of-

its-kind training platform designed for every level of the hospitality workforce — from front-of-house staff to general

managers. "The academy is created by the industry, for the industry. It provides practical, job-based training to embed sustainability in day-to-day operations. We are already working with several organisations in Saudi Arabia, and there will be some exciting announcements

coming out of this summit," Mandziuk said.

Driving change through investment

The alliance is also launching a Global Impact Fund — a venture capital initiative to accelerate sustainable innovation in energy, food systems and nature-positive solutions.

A future with passion & purpose

Reflecting on his time in Saudi Arabia, Mandziuk expressed genuine excitement about the direction of hospitality in the region. "What I witnessed at Red Sea Global—the passion, the commitment, the readiness—is remarkable," he said.

ALLIANCE AT A GLANCE

- ❖ Over 8 mn rooms World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance represents
- ❖ This accounts for 50% of the global hospitality industry
- ❖ The Alliance is launching Global Impact Fund — a venture capital initiative to accelerate sustainable innovations

Summer camp to nurture talent

The UAE’s Ministry of Economy recently launched the ‘Summer Hospitality Camp 2025’ to strengthen national talent in the hospitality sector, in line with the UAE Tourism Strategy 2031. Held in partnership with 35 leading hotels, tourism entities and academic institutions, the programme targets UAE nationals and residents aged 15 to 22, including students.

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The United Arab Emirates’ Ministry of Economy recently launched the ‘Summer Hospitality Camp 2025’ in the presence of His Excellency Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri, Minister of Economy & Tourism and Chairman, Emirates Tourism Council. His Excellency Shaikha Nasser Al Nowais, Secretary-General-elect, United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2026–2029), attended the event, along with nearly 100 people representing the country’s hospitality sector, student leaders and industry professionals.



H.E. Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri, Minister of Economy & Tourism and Chairman, Emirates Tourism Council

The comprehensive training programme places students in real-world hospitality settings, such as hotels and tourism facilities, to enhance national tourism capabilities, supporting broader efforts to develop human capital

in the UAE’s tourism and hospitality sectors. The initiative aligns with the UAE Tourism Strategy 2031 and is being implemented in strategic partnership with academic institutions, tourism and

hospitality companies and leading hospitality providers across the country. Speaking at the event, H.E. Bin Touq emphasised that tourism has become a key driver of sustainable development and economic competitiveness, thanks to the vision and support of the UAE’s wise leadership. Pointing out the sector’s outstanding performance,

he highlighted the importance of preparing leaders and developing national capabilities across tourism-related activities to ensure sustainable

The training places students in real-world hospitality settings to enhance tourism capabilities and supporting broader efforts

growth and enhance the sector’s contribution to economic and social development. The Ministry of Economy works closely with government and private sector partners to achieve this strategic objective.

THE INITIATIVE

- Supports ‘UAE Tourism Strategy 2031’ with 5 training tracks: Hotels, Culinary, Hospitality, Food Services and Event Management
- 35 leading hotel and tourism entities and academic institutions support the project



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Hospitality future lies in human capital

Future Hospitality Summit Saudi Arabia 2025, held recently at the Mandarin Oriental Al Faisaliah in Riyadh, offered a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities facing the hospitality industry, with a particular focus on Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the importance to modernise hospitality education to meet the growing demands of the sector.

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The overarching theme of Future Hospitality Summit Saudi Arabia 2025 centred on the critical importance of investing in human capital, addressing talent shortages and enhancing the appeal of hospitality careers to young people.

The discussions repeatedly emphasised the need for collaboration between educational institutions, industry operators and government bodies to create sustainable pathways for talent development and retention. Several insights emerged



FHS Saudi Arabia panel session

about the integral role of education, leadership and culture in shaping the future of hospitality in Saudi Arabia and globally.

A recurring theme was the urgent need to modernise hospitality education to meet the growing demands of the sector. Speakers highlighted the inadequacies of tradi-

A recurring theme was the urgent need to modernise hospitality education to meet the growing demands of the sector

tional educational formats and proposed innovative approaches, such as technology-enabled training, shorter courses

and integrating hospitality education into secondary schools. Vocational training and continuous professional development

were underscored as essential components for upskilling and reskilling the workforce. The discussions also stressed the significance of sustainability in attracting and retaining talent.

This calls for educational institutions to update their curricula to reflect modern sustainability

practices. Leadership and organisational culture were identified as pivotal factors in enhancing employee engagement and retention. The speakers emphasised creating work environments where employees feel a sense of belonging, respect and opportunities for growth. Transparent remuneration and development pathways were highlighted as vital in retaining talent, especially in competitive markets. The concept of inverting the organisational pyramid placing frontline employees at the top was introduced as a strategy to empower employees and improve guest experiences. ▶

Diriyah: Gearing up for global spotlight

Jerry Inzerillo, Group CEO, Diriyah Gate Development Authority, talks about the progress of the \$64 billion Diriyah Project with **THE TRAVEL MIDDLE EAST**. With 14 million sq mt of area under development, Diriyah is fast becoming a global cultural and hospitality destination—anchored in heritage, powered by Vision 2030 and to host iconic events like Expo 2030 & 2034 FIFA World Cup.

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“We are seven years in, on time and on budget,” says **Jerry Inzerillo**, the Group CEO of Diriyah Gate Development Authority, when asked about the progress of the \$64 billion Diriyah Project, which aims to transform the historic city of Diriyah into a global cultural, heritage and entertainment destination. “We have already welcomed over three million visitors—while the giga project is still under construction. That is unheard of,” he boasts.

Diriyah's transformation centres around the historic At-Turaif, a UNESCO



Jerry Inzerillo
Group CEO
Diriyah Gate Development Authority

World Heritage Site. This revitalised district is surrounded by luxury developments, including 42 hotels—among them are The Ritz-Carlton, Oberoi, Armani and Cheval Blanc. “We just opened the Bab Samhan Hotel under Marriott's Luxury

Collection, with 91 per cent occupancy this month,” he says. “People love it—it's walkable, it's authentic, and it's alive,” he adds.

A cultural heartbeat and culinary haven

The Bejeri district alone attracted 11,000 guests in a single evening. “It's our cultural heartbeat. We have 20 phenomenal restaurants right next to the heritage site,” informs Inzerillo. Another new attraction is Zallal, a vibrant district in soft opening. “The AOK Café was packed last night. Zallal is beautiful—another reason people are choosing to spend their weekends here,” he smiles. Domestic tour-

ism is thriving. “We are seeing families from Riyadh, tourists from Jeddah, and heavy GCC traffic—Kuwaitis, Qataris, Emiratis, Omanis. It's wonderful,” he adds.

Diriyah Project aims to transform the historic city of Diriyah into a global cultural, heritage and entertainment destination

Eyes on the future: Mega events and Vision 2030

With the 2027 Asian Games, 2029 Asian Winter Games in Neom's Trojena, Expo 2030, and FIFA World Cup 2034 on the horizon, Inzerillo emphasises that

Saudi Arabia is playing the long game. “We hit 100 million visits seven years early. Now the next milestone is 150 million by 2030,” he says. He credits the leadership of

Inzerillo concludes with excitement about Saudi Arabia's 300th anniversary on 22 February 2027, marking the tricentennial of the first Saudi state. “Expect hundreds of cultural activations across the Kingdom. What we are building here is not just infrastructure—it's identity, it's legacy, and it's the future.”



Cyber threats shadow travel growth

A recent analysis of the top 20 travel websites across the UAE, Europe, and the Middle East reveals worrying gaps in email security. While 85% of UAE sites have adopted DMARC—a protocol designed to prevent email spoofing—only 45% enforce the highest “reject” policy. This leaves travellers and businesses vulnerable to phishing attacks.

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The findings are based on a DMARC adoption analysis of the top 20 online travel sites in the UAE, and across Europe and the Middle East. DMARC is an email validation protocol designed to protect domain names from being misused by cybercriminals.

A recent KPMG study found that 77 per cent of UAE travellers use mobile apps or hotel booking services, which pose risk of fraud.

Key findings include:

❖ The UAE demonstrates stronger founda-



Matt Cooke
Cybersecurity Strategist
Proofpoint

tional email security adoption compared to its European counterparts, with 85 per cent of the top travel sites publishing a DMARC record, reflecting growing awareness of cybersecurity

best practices across the country’s travel sector.

❖ However, there is room for improvement with only 45 per cent of the UAE’s top travel sites using the policy at “reject” level, meaning 55 per cent are leaving their customers, staff, and partners more vulnerable to receiving fraudulent emails impersonating these brands.

❖ On average, 88 per cent of the top travel websites across Europe and the Middle East have published a basic DMARC record. However, only 46 per cent of all travel sites analysed

are at reject, meaning 54 per cent of the top travel sites across the regions are leaving customers at risk of email fraud.

Matt Cooke, Cybersecurity Strategist, Proofpoint, says, “Travel companies bear a social

responsibility to do everything they can to stop convincing scam emails being sent in their name to holidaymakers.”

Proofpoint advises consumers to follow these tips to stay safe when booking and managing travel online:

❖ Secure your bookings – and your accounts. Use strong, unique passwords for travel

accounts and booking sites. Enable Multi-factor Authentication (MFA) wherever possible to add an extra layer of security.

❖ Watch out for fake travel deals – and websites. Be wary of unsolicited offers that seem too good to be true.

❖ Navigate away from phishing trips – and smishing scams. Stay alert to phishing emails or smishing (SMS phishing) messages regarding flight changes, booking confirmations, or visa applications that demand urgent action or personal details.

❖ Don’t get detoured by suspicious links. Avoid clicking directly on links in unsolicited emails, social media messages, or pop-up ads. ➔

Travel firms bear a responsibility to do everything they can to stop convincing scam emails being sent in their name to holidaymakers

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FHS 2025 drives innovation and

The Future Hospitality Summit (FHS) 2025, held in Riyadh, underscored Saudi Arabia’s growing leadership in the global tourism and hospitality industry. The event, focussing on investment, innovation and sustainability, brought together industry leaders, investors and innovators to explore transformative opportunities across the Kingdom’s hospitality landscape.



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AI Nowais' clear & ambitious vision

► *Contd. from page 1*

throughout the region. I'm sure that Shaikha will bring her vast experience to the benefit of UN Tourism and indeed to the ongoing development of Travel, Tourism and Hospitality across the world and achieving the recognition of this great industry as a major contributor to social and economic success worldwide."

Champion of innovation

Throughout her career, Al Nowais has been a driving force in shaping more equitable and forward-thinking hospitality practices. “As we look ahead, inclusive tourism must be more than a concept—it must be the global standard,” Al Nowais said following her election. “From the local entrepreneur in a remote village to major international travel hubs, every stakeholder should

have a voice and a place at the table." She emphasises the critical role of technology in democratising travel experiences.

"Digital tools and AI can enhance accessibility, personalise journeys and connect travellers more meaningfully with destinations," she said.

Inspiring next generation leaders

With her appointment, Al Nowais not only breaks new ground as the first female Emirati Secretary-General of UN Tourism but also paves the way for a new era of leadership rooted in inclusion, sustainability, and innovation.

Her message is clear: "Empowering women, investing in local communities, and embracing technology are not just ideals—they are imperatives for the future of global tourism." 

Turkish Airlines spread wings

Turkish Airlines, the airline that flies to more countries than any other in the world, and TAP Air Portugal, the flag carrier of Portugal and the leading European airline flying to Brazil, are expanding their existing codeshare partnership to cover more destinations.



As part of the recently expanded agreement announced during the IATA Annual General Meeting held in New Delhi, Turkish Airlines & TAP Air Portugal will now provide their guests with a broader range of seamless travel options beyond their current global networks.

Brazil, Morocco, Qatar and Mauritius are new and exciting destinations entering the scope of co-operation. Additionally, Dalaman and Bodrum, Türkiye's prominent summer destinations, have also been added to the agreement, further augmenting travel op-



Bilal Eksi, CEO, Turkish Airlines & Luís Rodrigues, CEO TAP Air Portugal

tions between Türkiye and Portugal, enhancing access to sought-after leisure destinations. Commenting on the agreement, **Bilal Ekşi**, CEO, Turkish Airlines, said: "We are pleased to further strengthen our long-standing partnership with TAP Air Portugal. Enhanced scope of the new arrangement of-

fers greater flexibility and a wider range of travel options, while contributing to the development of commercial and tourism relations between our countries. We look forward to continuing this valuable collaboration in the years ahead."

Luís Rodrigues, CEO
TAP Air Portugal, said:

"Because of our network structure, we need to find intelligent ways to connect us to the east. Cooperating with great partners is our way forward to do that. This will provide our global passengers and our Portuguese community with increased options to visit new and exciting places using our Turkish Airlines partner."



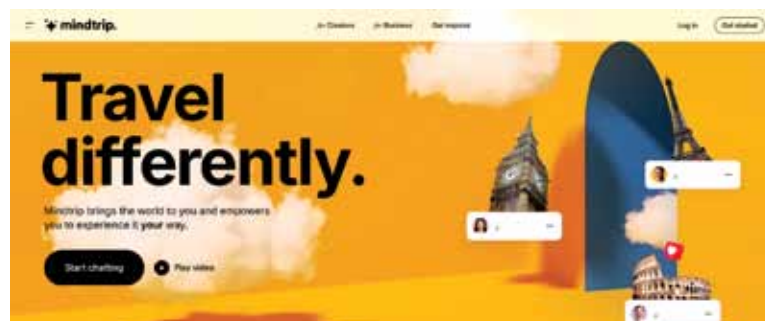
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❖ **AI-curated itineraries:** From flights and hotels to activities and restaurants, Mindtrip finds the best options, ranked by relevance, popularity and convenience, no more hours of googling.

❖ **Interactive itinerary builder:** Add or remove items, and watch as Mindtrip recalibrates your trip in real time.

❖ **Collaboration made easy:** Share your trip

with others, vote on experiences and build the dream vacation together.

❖ **Real-time updates & suggestions:** Mindtrip can help you by suggesting on-the-go options.

Middle East shines at ITB China

ITB China 2025 concluded on a high note, spotlighting the Middle East as a key focus region, with strong representation from DCT Abu Dhabi, Visit Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Morocco. Malaysia Tourism was the official destination partner. The exhibition floor expanded by 30 per cent compared to 2024, hosting over 700 exhibitors from 85 countries.



MOVEMENTS

CHEDI HOSPITALITY

Dubai

Chedi Hospitality has appointed **KARIM BIZID** as Chief Operating Officer, reinforcing its global growth strategy. Bizid will lead operations and brand standards across existing and upcoming properties, ensuring excellence and consistency in guest experience. With over two decades in luxury hospitality, he previously served as Regional Vice President of Operations and General Manager at The Chedi Muscat, where he drove award-winning success.



TIME HOTELS

Dubai

TIME Hotels has appointed **FARES SATLI** as the Director of Business Development. The announcement comes as TIME Hotels pursues a multi-brand expansion strategy, with 12 new openings planned by Q1 2026. A seasoned executive with over two decades of cross-sector experience, Satti brings a unique perspective to the role. He began his professional journey in the banking industry, where he held senior roles in retail, investment and private banking at top-tier institutions.



DOUBLETREE BY HILTON RESORT & SPA MARJAN ISLAND

Ras Al Khaimah

DoubleTree by Hilton Resort & Spa Marjan Island has appointed **ANSEN SOUSA** as the Director of Human Resources. Sousa is a seasoned professional with over 14 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Throughout his career, Sousa has built a reputation as a passionate, results-driven leader who always puts his team first. Prior to this role, he worked at several Hilton properties.



ONEWORLD ALLIANCE

Global

CHRIS KELLY SINGLEY has been appointed Vice President - Communications and Marketing at Oneworld Alliance. A highly respected communications executive with deep expertise in corporate reputation, stakeholder engagement and crisis management, Singley brings over 20-year experience in the aviation and aerospace sectors. She has held senior roles at JetZero, Boeing, American Airlines and Delta Air Lines, leading high-profile campaigns and initiatives spanning global media relations, employee engagement and CSR.



SOFITEL DUBAI DOWNTOWN

Dubai

Sofitel Dubai Downtown has promoted **SASINDU DON** from the position of Financial Controller to Director of Finance. Since joining the luxury property in the heart of Downtown Dubai 7 years ago, Don has been the force behind its financial finesse. Under his stewardship, the hotel has seen record-breaking gross operating profit, a streamlined procurement process that trimmed costs without compromising luxury, and the implementation of a model that transformed the decision-making process.



DoubleTree by Hilton Resort & Spa Marjan Island has appointed **MOHAMED HEGAB** as the Director of Engineering, to ensure the property's infrastructure continues to meet world-class standards. Always leading by example and maintaining open communication with his team members, Hegab has spent the past 13 years in hospitality engineering and facility management across the UAE, Oman and Egypt. Most recently, Hegab's role as Chief Engineer at Hilton Garden Inn Dubai saw him recognised as Hilton EMEA's Engineering Leader of the Year 2023, while overseeing a range of high-impact projects.



DUBAI LIMITED INVESTMENT LLC GROUP

Dubai

Dubai Limited Investment LLC appoints **BIMAL JAIN** as Chief Operating Officer. He will oversee the Apar Travel & Tourism division. A veteran C-suite executive, Jain brings over three decades of expertise in the travel industry, including 28 years of leadership in the Middle East. His extensive background spans airline and travel operations, having held senior roles at prominent organisations. Jain has been instrumental in launching and scaling businesses across the UAE, Iraq, and other key markets.



GRAND PLAZA MÖVENPICK MEDIA CITY DUBAI

Dubai

Grand Plaza Mövenpick Media City Dubai has appointed **NANDINI VOHRA** as the Director of Sales. A seasoned hotelier, Vohra moves into the role following a period of exceptional performance. Since her promotion, she has consistently surpassed budgets and exceeded revenue forecasts across all business segments. She leads a growing team overseeing corporate, leisure and groups. Meetings and events have been consistently fully booked under her leadership.



DoubleTree by Hilton Resort & Spa Marjan Island has appointed seasoned hotelier **ERICA QUINTERO** as Quality Manager. With more than a decade of experience working in front-of-office operations for some of the most prestigious luxury hospitality brands in the UAE and Qatar, Quintero tackles every challenge with empathy, adaptability and results in mind. Fluent in four languages, she thrives in fast-paced multicultural environments and has successfully led guest-facing departments. Her skills also span revenue generation, leading and developing teams and optimising operations.



FLYADEAL

Saudi Arabia

ROGIER VAN ENK has joined Saudi low-cost airline flyadeal as Chief Commercial and Customer Officer. Dutch national Van Enk brings with him a wealth of industry experience in Europe. He has significant commercial experience in roles covering revenue management, distribution, online sales, business analytics and ancillary product development. Van Enk joins flyadeal at a time when the carrier plans to more than triple its 38-strong fleet of aircraft to over 100 by 2030.



NOVOTEL & IBIS DEIRA CREEKSIDE DUBAI

Dubai

Accor Shared Services announced the promotion of **SUMIT GUPTA** to the position of General Manager of Novotel & ibis Deira Creekside Dubai, handling 553 keys, part of the Arencor Accor Cluster. With over two decades of expertise in hotel operations, business development and revenue management, Gupta has consistently demonstrated strategic leadership and a passion for operational excellence. Gupta has been an integral part of Novotel and ibis Deira Creekside Dubai since 2021.



As the final addition to the leadership team at DoubleTree by Hilton Resort & Spa Marjan Island, **MAHESH ARIYANATHAN** assumes the role of Recreation Manager, bringing with him a decade of experience in the UAE's hospitality scene across both lifestyle and luxury properties. Leveraging a strong understanding of local guest preferences, Ariyanathan will oversee and enhance operations across the hotel's spa, recreation and beach facilities. Always putting himself in the guest's shoes, he tackles each project with a focus on both creating standout experiences and driving operational performance.



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