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SanJeet receives PATA Award of Merit

SanJeet, Director, DDP Publications, becomes the first Indian to be conferred with the 'PATA Award of Merit' at the PATA Annual Summit 2025. **Dr Chris Bottrill**, Associate VP, International, Capilano University, receives the PATA Life Membership Award.

TT Bureau

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) honoured two distinguished leaders in the Asia Pacific travel and tourism industry during the PATA Annual Summit 2025 (PAS 2025) in Istanbul, Türkiye.

SanJeet, Director, DDP Publications, was honoured with the prestigious PATA Award of Merit. The award recognises his longstanding service and significant contributions to Asia Pacific's travel and tourism industry. The PATA Life Membership Award was bestowed upon **Dr Chris Bottrill**, Associate Vice President, International, Capilano University, at the event.

The awards ceremony took place during the



SanJeet, flanked by PATA Chair Peter Serrone and PATA CEO Noor Ahmad Hamid, with the award

The awards ceremony took place during the PATA Annual Summit 2025 Welcome Dinner Reception and PATA Awards Presentation

PAS 2025 Welcome Dinner Reception and PATA Awards Presentation on April 22, hosted by the

Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency. **Noor Ahmad Hamid**, CEO, PATA, con-

gratulated the two individuals on this recognition, stating, "These honours reflect not only the remarkable dedication, passion, and leadership of the recipients, but also the profound and lasting impact they have made on the association and the wider travel and tourism community."

Sharjah welcomed 1.6 mn guests in '24



His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa
Chairman, SCTDA

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority at the Arabian Travel Market in Dubai announced that Sharjah attracted 1.6 mn hotel guests in 2024.

TT Bureau

Sharjah attracted approximately 1.6 million hotel guests in 2024, reflecting an 11 per cent over 2023. This announcement was made at the Arabian Travel Market, where the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) participated, alongside more than 25 govern-

ment and private entities at the "Sharjah Pavilion".

The authority revealed key statistics for Sharjah's tourism sector in 2024, noting that Russia ranked as number one market with over 270,000 guests, representing an 18 per cent increase compared to 2023. Indians were second with over 170,000

Contd. on page 24 ▶

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dnata appointed GSA for Air India

Air India and Air India Express have announced the appointment of dnata Representation Services as their GSA and Representative Agency (RA), respectively, in the UAE. The agreement, signed at the Arabian Travel Market 2025 in Dubai, reflects Air India Group’s focus on enhancing reach and customer engagement in the strategically important UAE market.

TT Bureau

Strengthening presence in one of their largest international markets, Air India and Air India Express expand their sales and distribution network through a strategic partnership with dnata Representation Services.

Under this partnership, dnata Representation Services will provide comprehensive sales, marketing and distribution support to both carriers across the UAE, excluding Abu Dhabi and Al Ain for Air India. This localised approach will improve accessibility



Air India and dnata signed an agreement at the Arabian Travel Market 2025

for travellers and trade partners while supporting the Air India group’s broader growth plans in the region.

Air India operates 82 weekly flights from the UAE to India, while Air India Express connects five cities—Abu Dhabi, Al Ain,

Dubai, Ras Al Khaimah and Sharjah—with over 240 weekly flights from the UAE. The UAE represents the single-largest international market for Air India Express and remains one of the most significant global markets, serving millions of Indian expatriates and other travellers.

Kaizad Postwalla, Head of International Sales - GMEA & North America, Air India, said, “The UAE is a key market in our international network. We are pleased to partner with dnata Travel Group, whose deep understanding of the region and proven track record in

travel services will help us better connect with customers, drive demand and enhance service delivery in the market.”

Dr Ankur Garg, Chief Commercial Officer, Air India Express, added, “Our collaboration with dnata Travel Group marks another step in expanding our commercial presence in the region. As our network and fleet grow, this partnership will help us stay closer to our customers and offer them even more reliable and seamless travel options to and from India.” **Simon Woodford**, Vice President - Global Air Services, dnata Travel Group, com-

mented: “This partnership builds on our shared commitment to delivering outstanding travel experiences and strengthening connections between the UAE and India.

MARKET EXPANSION

- ❖ UAE is top market for Air India Express
- ❖ 240+ weekly flights by Air India Express
- ❖ dnata to boost sales, distribution reach

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Upskilling: Master key for hotels

Travel & Tourism sector is expected to create nearly 126 million new jobs within the next decade, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council's latest Economic Impact Report. With 1 million new tourism jobs predicted in Saudi Arabia by 2030, the Kingdom's hospitality sector requires more talent.  speaks to experts to know their views on talent retention and job creation.

 Dr Shehara Fernando

With  as the official media partner, the Future Hospitality Summit Saudi Arabia 2025 served as a vital platform for an in-depth exploration of the challenges and opportunities shaping the hospitality industry. A key focus at the NextGen Investment Forum was Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which is expected to generate one million new tourism-related jobs by the end of the decade, highlighting the sector's pivotal role in the Kingdom's economic transformation. The central theme focused on the importance of investing in human capital, tackling talent shortages and making hospitality careers more attractive to young people. Discussions consistently highlighted the need for strong collaboration among the stakeholders.



Nuran Kilani
Group Director of Commercial
Lazure Hospitality, part of Tabuk
Investment and Tourism

“Hospitality organisations can ensure continuous upskilling by integrating regular training programmes, leveraging technology-driven learning platforms and fostering a culture of adaptability. Organising workshops on emerging trends, digital tools and personalised guest experiences helps employees stay ahead. Cross-functional training plays a crucial role.”



Mohammed Iqbal
General Manager
Khalidia Palace Hotel Dubai

“Khalidia Palace Hotel Dubai believes that continuously improving skills of our staff is essential to remain competitive and meet guest expectations in today's tech-driven environment. The hotel uses various strategies to train employees effectively. Regular training sessions and cross-trainings are organised to keep staff informed about latest trends.”



Muin Serhan
CEO
Amsa Hospitality

“Since its launch, Amsa Hospitality Academy has signed agreements with some of the best universities and colleges across the Kingdom. One notable collaboration is with King Khalid University, which allows students to enrich their academic learning. Other agreements include those with Princess Noura University and King Saud University.”



Dr Fabien Fresnel
CEO, The Riyadh School of
Tourism and Hospitality

“There is no tourism strategy if there is no talent capability building strategy. The purpose of The Riyadh School of Tourism and Hospitality and its affiliates is to serve the country and the younger generations, deliver outstanding customer journeys to trigger repeat business, and ensure a bright future for millions of young Saudis.”



Hameed Ali
General Manager
Mercure Khams Mushait

“To be honest, I have achieved the platinum grade for employing Saudi nationals in my hotel. Right now, 50 per cent of my department heads are Saudi, and my goal is to increase that to 80 per cent within the next two months. There is a misconception that Saudi nationals are not willing to work, but that is not true. They do work—and work hard.”



Levent Tashas
General Manager
Mercure Dubai Barsha Heights

“At Mercure Dubai Barsha Heights, we believe continuous upskilling is key to staying ahead in a fast-paced industry. Through regular training, digital learning tools, and cross-functional exposure, we empower our teams to adapt to evolving guest expectations and technologies. Cross-training helps our staff understand the bigger picture.”



Bassam Zakaria
Area General Manager
Dusit International

“Upskilling starts with understanding what guests truly value—because training only works when it's aligned with evolving needs. Across all our properties, we always monitor guest feedback, industry trends, and lead AI-focused trainings. We also organise workshops to foster creativity and send associates to other properties.”



Dr Abeer Atallah Alamri
Skills Development and Talent
Optimisation Expert

“Investment in hospitality education is crucial for cultivating future leaders by equipping them with essential skills, knowledge, and a professional mindset. Challenges include bridging the gap between academic curricula and real-world industry needs, attracting students amid perceptions of long hours and lower pay.”



Layla Alamri
Senior Manager – Education
Red Sea Global

“As the hospitality sector experiences rapid growth in Saudi Arabia, a key challenge is building a strong pipeline of talent. To address this, we have initiated training to empower young Saudis with the skills they need to thrive, with many graduates securing job with the company. This includes educational, vocational and on-the-job training.”



Samer Homsi
General Manager
Metropolitan Hotel Dubai

“We believe continuous upskilling begins with a culture of learning. We integrate training modules, industry certifications, and exposure to new technologies into our operations. Emphasis is placed on soft skills, digital tools, and guest engagement trends. We also collaborate with educational institutions and tech providers to stay current.”



Fadi Ammache
General Manager
Grand Millennium Al Wahda Abu Dhabi

“We believe that continuous learning is essential to exceed evolving guest expectations and embrace innovation. By investing in ongoing training, embracing new technologies and fostering a culture of adaptability, we ensure our team remains agile and future-ready. We regularly assess market trends and take feedback.”

Spain plays up Madrid to boost footfall

Spain witnessed a 17 per cent increase in visitors from the GCC region in 2024, shares **Carlos Ruiz González**, Director, Spanish Tourist Office – GCC Region, in a special interview with **TRAVELTALK**. They brought in 20 key partners from Spain at the Arabian Travel Market this year with a view to securing top-of-mind call for travellers from the Middle East region.

 Dr Shehara Fernando

Travellers from the Middle East have a special connection with Spain due to its cultural influence. Last month, two special events - Discover Europe meets Marhaba 2025 and Arabian Travel Market - saw 35 and 20 partners respectively from Spain in Dubai connecting with GCC travel trade.

Elaborating on their plans to promote the destinations, **Carlos Ruiz González**, Director, Spanish Tourist Office – GCC Region, said: “This time we brought in partners from different regions in



Carlos Ruiz González
Director, Spanish Tourist Office – GCC Region

Spain, DMCs, hoteliers from key chains and brands, which provided a good representation. We are focusing strongly on sustainable tourism, which is our main strategic direction moving

forward. Among the key regions being highlighted are Madrid—not just the city, but the entire region, which has many attrac-

Spanish Tourist Office – GCC Region is focusing strongly on sustainable tourism, which is their main strategic direction moving forward

tions and is well connected. We also have a strong presence from Andalusia, including Marbella, and from the Balearic Islands with Mallorca.”

During 2024, Spain witnessed over 17 per

cent increase in visitor numbers from the GCC region, with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates contributing 80

per cent of the total numbers, followed by the rest of the GCC.

González shared, “We are awaiting Q1 2025 final numbers in terms of visitors, but 2024 was a great year as 515,000 tourists

arrived in Spain from GCC countries. Spanish destinations like Costa del Sol are quite popular with the GCC travellers.”

The tourism board of Spain in GCC have been conducting many presentations, roadshows and familiarisation trips for the travel trade over the past few months and increasing its awareness, especially in the two key markets of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Some of the areas in Spain are known to the GCC travellers. However, Spain tourism is expanding its awareness campaign to include more

lesser-known areas in the destination with the travel trade.

TOURISM NUMBERS

❖ In 2024, 515,000 tourists arrived in Spain from GCC countries


❖ Saudi Arabia and the UAE contributing 80 per cent of the total numbers, followed by the rest of the GCC



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194k ME tourists visit Malaysia in '24

The Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, through its agency Tourism Malaysia, announced that the country welcomed 194,440 tourists from the Middle East region in 2024. Malaysia is eager to welcome 45 million international visitors to achieve RM270 billion (US \$60.8 billion) in tourism receipts by 2025, the authorities stated.

TT Bureau

Malaysia welcomed 194,440 tourists from the Middle East region in 2024, Tourism Malaysia announced at a press conference in Dubai re-

Tiong King Sing, Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Malaysia, who was accompanied by **Datuk Manoharan Periasamy**, Director General, Tourism Malaysia. The delegation comprised 82 different organisations, including five



Mohd Faharuddin Hatmin, Director, Tourism Malaysia and Mohd Fadly Amri Aliaman, Consul General of Malaysia in Dubai

VM2026 provides a framework to boost Malaysia's visibility, enhance destination accessibility and elevate their tourism offerings

cently. It also launched a video of 'Visit Malaysia 2026' (also VM2026) on the occasion, which highlighted surreal experiences in Malaysia. The Malaysian delegation was led by Dato Sri

state tourism boards, 34 tour operators, 35 hotels and resorts, five tourism products, two tourism associations and an airline.

Tiong King Sing said: "Our multi-pronged VM2026

strategy provides a comprehensive framework to boost Malaysia's visibility, enhance destination accessibility and elevate our tourism offerings."

The VM2026 logo, a symbol of Malaysia's vibrant culture, natural beauty

and global appeal, served as a visual representation of the country's readiness to welcome tourists from around the world. Adopted as the campaign's official icon, the Malayan Sun Bear, a proud and endangered species, reflected Malaysia's deep

commitment to wildlife conservation. Designed in an animated style, the mascot intended to resonate with audiences of all ages, evoking a sense of warmth and joy while enhancing Malaysia's image as a welcoming and family-friendly destination.

Official VM2026 theme song, titled 'Surreal Experiences' captured the essence of Malaysia's unique offerings.


VM2026 CAMPAIGN

❖ 'Surreal Experiences' video officially launched

❖ 82 organisations join Malaysian delegation

❖ Sun Bear mascot symbolises warmth, conservation

Curated family stays in summer

Dubai has evolved from a winter destination to an all year round hotspot with many immersive indoor experiences introduced by Dubai Economy and Tourism. Located in one of the most picturesque areas in Dubai, the Jumeirah Beach Residence offers a plethora of activities. **Michael Goetz**, GM, Mövenpick Jumeirah Beach Residence shares with  their offerings.

TT Bureau

As summer sets in, what plans do you have to attract visitors to the property?

Dubai has truly evolved into a year-round destination, with a wide range of indoor attractions and immersive experiences. The perception of Dubai being only a winter hotspot is shifting—thanks in large part to the efforts of the Department of Economy and Tourism. More travellers from Europe, the GCC and beyond are now open to visiting during the summer months. We are focusing on delivering best-in-class service combined with tailored



Michael Goetz
General Manager
Mövenpick Jumeirah Beach Residence

itineraries through our in-house concierge. From curated cultural tours to indoor family-friendly entertainment, we are ensuring guests enjoy an engaging and comfortable stay.

Will you be looking at attracting new source markets this year?

Yes, we are actively targeting emerging markets like Australia, New Zealand and Latin America, which show strong growth potential for both leisure and business travel. At the same time, we are working to strengthen our share in key European markets. My team and I are participating in major international trade shows and roadshows, which allows us to stay connected with global partners, showcase Dubai's year-round appeal, and highlight Mövenpick Hotel Jumeirah Beach as an Urban Lifestyle Hotel. Our

unique blend of beachfront leisure, vibrant dining and city connectivity resonates well with modern travellers seeking both relaxation and a dynamic city vibe.

We are targeting markets like Australia, New Zealand and Latin America, which show strong potential for leisure and business

Could you share the importance of upskilling talent in the property?

Talent development is at the heart of our success. While finding the right skillsets remains a global challenge, we believe in

growing from within. Accor offers structured development pathways for team members at every stage from high-potential leaders to those just beginning their hospital-

intrapersonal skills. These initiatives not only elevate service standards but also boost morale, loyalty and long-term retention—ensuring we are not just filling roles, but building a future-ready, empowered team.

How AI is supporting the hospitality industry?

AI is transforming hospitality by enhancing efficiency and delivering more personalised guest experiences. At our hotel, AI supports everything from dynamic pricing and guest communication to customising stays based on preferences. Sustainability is another area where AI plays a vital role. ▶

Direct flights, diverse offerings for GCC

The German National Tourist Office GCC announced that GCC visitors to Germany have grown steadily to over 489,689 in 2024, a steady year-on-year increase of 1.2% and an impressive 21% increase when compared with the total number of visitors in 2022. These figures underscore Germany’s increasing post-pandemic popularity with GCC visitors.

TT Bureau

GCC visitors to Germany have grown steadily to over 489,689 in 2024, a steady year-on-year increase of 1.2 per cent and an impressive 21 per cent increase when compared with the total number of visitors in 2022. The overnight stays by GCC visitor in Germany have also increased by 1.2 million, according to the German National Tourist Office GCC (GNTG GCC), an affiliate of the German National Tourist Board (GNTB).

Yamina Sofo, Director, GNTG GCC, said, “We have now witnessed



Yamina Sofo
Director
GNTG GCC

considerable growth in visitor numbers from the GCC countries since the end of the pandemic. These figures underscore Germany’s increasing post-pandemic popularity with GCC visitors and

bodes well for 2025. With direct flights from the GCC countries to Munich, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Berlin, Hannover, Stuttgart, Cologne and Hamburg, this year we want to encourage GCC residents to visit Germany and experience our diverse year-round tourism offering.”

Luis Monreal, Senior Director Sales Middle East, Lufthansa Group Airlines, said: “Lufthansa Group is proud to team up this year with the DZT (GNTB) as their official carrier. We connect the GCC with Germany non-stop since 1960 with its flights to Saudi Arabia. Lufthansa and Eurowings both offer German

hospitality to our passengers on board. Lufthansa, as a premium carrier, offers stable and year-round connections to Frankfurt

lin, Stuttgart, Cologne and Hanover.” They meet their GCC customers much closer to their homes, as they offer departures

offer over 120 connections per week between the GCC and Germany,” said Monreal.

This year we want to encourage GCC residents to visit Germany and experience our diverse year-round tourism offering

and Munich from Dubai, Riyadh and Dammam.”

Monreal added, “Our value-airline Eurowings is expanding substantially since 2023 in the GCC by offering more direct connections to other German destinations, such as Ber-

also from Dubai World, Abu Dhabi and Jeddah. “The strong increase in demand for these new routes show that we cater to the need to reach different cities in all parts of Germany. Starting from October 2025, the Lufthansa Group airlines will

VISITOR STATS

1.2 million
Overnight stays by GCC visitors (2024)

489,689
GCC visitor arrivals (2024)

1.2%
Year-on-year increase over 2023

21%
Increase compared to 2022

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Purpose-built wellness infra in focus

SanJeet, Director, DDP Group, moderated an insightful session on 'Wellness and celebratory tourism' with three industry experts at the Arabian Travel Market. **Paul Stevens**, COO, MEA and Turkiye, Accor Hotels and Resorts Management; **Eddy Tannous**, COO, Rotana Hotels and **Kathryn Moore**, MD, Spa Connectors, shared their viewpoint on the wellness industry.

 Dr Shehara Fernando

Opening the session on 'Wellness and celebratory tourism' at the Arabian Travel Market, **SanJeet**, CEO, DDP Group, said that today, wellness tourism in its broad perspective includes activities like yoga, meditation trips, fitness, detox holidays, stress management retreats and even healing experiences in nature like the desert and the mountains.

"Wellness tourism's goal is not to treat sickness but to prevent it. To feel fresh, calm and healthy. Celebratory tourism, on the other hand, is different. It means travelling to celebrate big moments of life, your weddings, anniversaries, birthdays,

Wellness tourism's goal is not to treat sickness but to prevent it. Celebratory tourism means travelling to celebrate big moments —SanJeet

engagement parties and everything. People want to make these special moments in beautiful places. They often combine sightseeing, culture and holidays for this. Now, how big is this market? In 2024, the Middle East and Africa wellness tourism market is worth US\$16.3 billion," he said.

Paul Stevens, COO, MEA and Turkiye, Accor Hotels and Resorts Management, shared, "One of the new trends that we have seen, and whether it's a trend that has been going on for a while and we just have not noticed, is things like this where the celebrity part of my answer comes in, like a Coldplay concert that we had in Abu Dhabi this year. You know, if you looked at any of those concerts, if you looked at the people in



(From L to R) SanJeet, Paul Stevens, Kathryn Moore and Eddy Tannous at the session on wellness

the audience, yes, some of them were certainly from this region, UAE, but many were travelling in groups, celebrating either the music, cel-

evated. In a way, we look at that style of celebration and the tourism and travel that goes around with it. And now integrating the wellness part of that, I guess, hotels can have spas or wellness areas."

Eddy Tannous, COO, Rotana Hotels, commented, "I was in a conversation with someone from one of the big credit card companies recently. She shared something very interesting, and it kind of connects our wellness discussion with the celebratory travel discussion. First of all, being in this part of the world, we are blessed. Business is strong right now in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Riyadh. So, you cannot attribute that success to one market sector. But she said, one of the trends that are surging recently is fami-

We are seeing cross-border movements, bigger groups, I think, that is something that really needs to be elevated —Paul Stevens

seeing bigger groups come in, and I think that is something that obviously, with billions of dollars at play now, is something that really needs to be el-

lies travelling together. So, you have the different generations between boomers, Generation X, and then what I call Generation Z onwards.

And she was saying that Generation X right now is travelling and spending money on wellness retreats with family."

Tannous added, "They want to bring their parents with them, but they also want to bring their kids with them. So, we are the generation that, if we are lucky enough, our parents took us to these places at some point. So, there

They (Generation X) want to bring their parents with them (on trips), but they also want to bring their kids with them —Eddy Tannous

is kind of a going back to roots with the family but also wanting your kids to experience what you have experienced with your parents. And that is creating that link with people."

Kathryn Moore, Managing Director, Spa Connectors, also contributed with her expertise. "There are so many things that fit underneath it, whether it's spa, whether it's meditation, all the way to medical, well-being, retreats, etc. Fitness, going and joining a boot camp or something in a hotel. This all fits under the umbrella

of well-being or wellness," said Moore, adding, "So,

We have got primary wellness travellers who are travelling just for wellness. Their purpose is to achieve certain results —Kathryn Moore

what we are seeing now is a rise in wellness travellers. We have got primary wellness travellers who

macros. It might be a yoga mat in the room. It might also then be a running track that they are made aware of. It's just incorporating well-being throughout their stay."

She further added, "What we are seeing is that spend from a primary and a secondary wellness traveller far outweighs an average traveller. So, I think from an economic standpoint, it's really important to think, how am I targeting a wellness traveller, whether it's primary or secondary, in my hotel? And I think a lot of hotels are missing the mark in being able to offer something

for these secondary wellness travellers, because the number of them are growing dramatically."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ❖ The session underscored that hotels and resorts have an opportunity to enhance their offerings by incorporating purpose-driven wellness and celebration-oriented programs.
- ❖ By responding to customer feedback and expectations, properties can increase revenue, extend guest stays, and drive repeat business.



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Delivering excellence in service

The Tower Plaza Hotel on Sheikh Zayed Road has been the most sought-after hotel by both leisure and corporate travellers from across GCC, Europe and CIS countries. **Ahmed Ibrahim**, Commercial Director and Acting General Manager, Tower Plaza Hotel, shares with  some of their unique experiences and initiatives to attract new source markets.

 TT Bureau

What are the main source markets at present, and are you looking at attracting new source markets?

Currently, our primary source markets include the GCC, particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, as well as strong inbound travel from Europe, Russia, and CIS countries. Given Dubai's position as a global hub, we also see consistent demand from corporate travellers and transit guests. Moving forward, we are strategically expanding into emerging markets, such as China, India and



Ahmed Ibrahim
Commercial Director and Acting
General Manager, Tower Plaza Hotel

Southeast Asia, leveraging Dubai's growing connectivity and tourism appeal. Additionally, we are enhancing our digital marketing and partnerships with travel platforms to capture more

leisure and business travellers from these high-potential regions.

Guest experiences seem to be making waves in the UAE. What unique experiences do you offer?

As the Acting General Manager at The Tower Plaza Hotel, I prioritise personalised and memorable experiences. Our prime location on Sheikh Zayed Road offers guests' seamless access to Dubai's business and leisure hubs, but what truly sets us apart is our commitment to tailored hospitality. We offer exclusive dining experiences with curated menus at our in-house restaurants,

bespoke city tours for leisure guests, and flexible meeting solutions for corporate clients.

Are you looking at attracting corporate or MICE sectors?

Our flexible event spaces, high-speed connectivity and tailored F&B offerings make us a competitive choice for business events

Absolutely. The corporate and MICE sectors are key focus areas for us. With Dubai's thriving business landscape, we are positioning The Tower Plaza Hotel as an ideal choice

for corporate travellers, small to mid-scale conferences and corporate retreats. We are actively collaborating with travel management companies, global booking platforms and local event organisers

to strengthen our corporate clientele.

If you have any tie-ups or loyalty programmes?

Yes, we have a dedicated loyalty programme de-

signed to reward our frequent guests, especially business travellers, with exclusive benefits, such as discounted rates.

MARKETS AT A GLANCE

Current source markets

- ❖ GCC
- ❖ Europe
- ❖ Russia
- ❖ CIS

Emerging source markets

- ❖ China
- ❖ India
- ❖ Southeast Asia



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India, China top markets for Yas Island

Miral announces record-breaking visitors on Yas Island and Saadiyat Island in 2024. Yas Island recorded over 38 million visitors in 2024, up 10% compared to 2023. Saadiyat Island saw a 10% growth in the numbers across its hotels and museums compared to 2023. In terms of source markets, top performers included India (+44%) and China (+81%).

TT Bureau

Yas Island and Saadiyat Island witnessed a record number of visitors in 2024, announced Miral, a leading Abu Dhabi-based leisure and entertainment company focused on developing and operating

ble 10 per cent increase compared to 2023.

Achieving the highest performance since 2019, hotel occupancy in Yas Island reached 82 per cent, peaking up to 90 per cent in August 2024. There was an annual 9 per cent growth in hotel

These results are testament to Miral’s commitment to contributing to Abu Dhabi’s vision of becoming a leading global destination

attractions and destinations, recently. Yas Island recorded over 38 million visitors in 2024, a nota-

occupancy alongside a 17 per cent increase in the Average Daily Rate (ADR) compared to



2023. Similarly, Saadiyat Island saw a 10 per cent growth in visitors across its hotels and museums compared to 2023.

Dr Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi, Group CEO, Miral,

said, “These exceptional results are testament to our commitment to contributing to the achievement of Abu Dhabi’s vision of becoming a leading global destination, in alignment with the

Emirate’s Tourism Strategy and broader ambitions for sustainable growth and economic diversification.” He added, “Through the development, we are not only attracting visitors from around the world

but also creating joyful moments that leave a lasting impact.

YAS ISLAND IN 2024

38 million
Total visits

+10%
Visit growth versus 2023

82%
Hotel occupancy

+9%
Hotel occupancy growth

+17%
Average Daily Rate (ADR) Growth

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Arabian Travel Market witnesses

The world convened once again for the 32nd edition of the Arabian Travel Market in Dubai this year, with a record breaking 55,000 plus attendees from 161 countries participating over four days. One of the key travel trade events that showcases the cutting-edge trends of the world at one platform, ATM keeps growing from strength to strength year on year.



55k attendees from 161 countries



Minor Hotels Sri Lanka targets ME

From connectivity, to offering personalised guest experiences to halal cuisine, Anantara in Southern Sri Lanka has become a much-valued destination for travellers from the Middle East. In an interview with **TRAVEL TALK**, **Keith Tomkies**, Cluster General Manager, Minor Hotels Sri Lanka, shares that they are seeing a shift in preferences of travellers.

TT Bureau

Do you see the Middle East as an important source market?

Absolutely. The Middle East is an important and rapidly growing market for us. We are seeing a shift in traveller preferences from the region, with guests increasingly seeking luxury, privacy, wellness, and authentic cultural immersion—the core pillars of our resort experience.

Connectivity plays a big role in this growth. From Colombo to the UAE, the travellers have access to multiple flight options, including direct routes with Emirates, as well as inter-line agreements through SriLankan Airlines and flydubai, making the journey seamless and convenient. With visa-on-arrival access and a travel time of four to five hours, Sri Lanka is emerging as a top short-haul destination for GCC nationals and expat families alike, especially during summer holidays, Ramadan, and winter breaks.

The preferences align perfectly with what we have to offer—from private pool villas and halal-friendly cuisine to family-oriented activities and bespoke wellness



Keith Tomkies
Cluster General Manager
Minor Hotels Sri Lanka

programmes. Whether it is a romantic getaway, a wellness retreat, or a culturally rich family holiday, Anantara Kalutara offers the Middle Eastern travellers a unique blend of comfort, privacy, and meaningful experiences.

Are there any unique activities, which will interest Middle East clientele?

Yes, several of our experiences are aligned with preferences of the Middle Eastern travellers. Our private pool villas are popular with families and couples who value space, privacy, and a sense of exclusivity. For those guests looking to celebrate special moments, our Designer Dining offerings from secluded Tree House dinners to beachfront setups provide the perfect romantic backdrop.

Wellness is also a key focus, and our Anantara Spa & Wellness centre offers personalised Ayurveda treatments, spiritual rituals, herbal workshops and retreats.

For families and younger travellers with a sense of adventure—zipline, rock climbing, and water sports—provide exciting ways to stay active. Cultural authenticity is woven throughout the experience, with private folk performances, meaningful welcome rituals, and batik art and handloom craft exploration offering a deeper connection to Sri Lanka's vibrant cultural influence.

We run targeted digital campaigns on platforms, Instagram and Google, during summer and winter and also offer curated packages

Our Garden to Gourmet and Spice Spoons culinary journeys are interactive and halal-friendly, blending immersive learning with exceptional cuisine in a way that is respectful and inclusive.

Will you be able to share how you promote your property?

The Middle East is an important market for



Anantara Kalutara Resort

us, and we have taken a multi-channel approach to build awareness and drive bookings from the region. We partner with

How do you position yourself in Sri Lanka? Is it more resort/leisure or MICE/wedding destination?

Anantara Kalutara is positioned as a luxury resort with focus on leisure, while also offering versatile potential for destination weddings and MICE events. Our unique location, between the Kalu River and the ocean provides an exclusive natural setting that makes us ideal for resort leisure travellers, including couples, families, and explorers seeking authentic experiences. At the same time, the expansive gardens, 141 luxurious keys, including pool villas, and secluded venues such as the Tree House and Designer Dining pavilions make us a preferred venue for destination weddings and intimate events. While we do cater to corporate and MICE groups, our primary positioning leans strongly towards leisure and destination weddings.

What are the USPs of the property?

We are positioned as the only luxury resort in Sri Lanka offering 360° views of both the Indian Ocean and the Kalu River, creating a breathtaking natural setting that our guests consistently fall

in love with. Architecturally, we are deeply rooted in Sri Lankan heritage, with our designs inspired by the legendary Geoffrey Bawa. His signature tropical modernism is reflected throughout the resort, seamlessly blending open spaces, nature, and cultural artistry. Our guest experiences are distinctive. One of the highlights is our Garden to Gourmet journey, where guests handpick ingredients from our organic garden and cook Sri Lankan meals in a traditional mud house kitchen. For the adventurers, we offer something rare for a luxury resort—an In-house Adventure Tower with rock climbing, ziplining, and extensive list of at-resort activities which is not found in the area.

MIDDLE EAST APPEAL

- ❖ Easy access with a short travel time
- ❖ Private villas, halal cuisine, wellness
- ❖ 360° ocean and river views
- ❖ Immersive cultural experiences



Anantara Kalutara Resort lobby view Family with drinks

We run targeted digital campaigns on social media platforms such as Instagram and Google, especially during the peak travel periods such as summer and winter, and offer Arabic language materials and curated packages, including family escapes and romantic getaways. During Ramadan, we provide flexible offerings that cater to the cultural sensitivities and travel habits of the Middle Eastern guests.

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Big ticket events boost tourism

SanJeet, CEO, DDP Group, moderated a session on 'Big ticket events: Global impact and learnings' at the Arabian Travel Market 2025. The panel included **His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**, Chairman, SCTDA; **Sebastien Doussin**, SVP, Global Travel Services and Destination Management, dnata; **Noor Ahmed Hamid**, CEO, PATA and **Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO, Asego Global Assistance.

 Dr Shehara Fernando

SanJeet, CEO, DDP Group, opening the session on 'Big ticket events: Global impact and learnings' at the Arabian Travel Market 2025, noted that the industry has experienced a significant growth in job creation, revenue generation and overall contribution to the economies of host destinations. The panellists, **His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**, Chairman, SCTDA; **Sebastien Doussin**, SVP, Global Travel Services and Destination Management, dnata; **Noor Ahmed Hamid**, CEO, PATA and **Dev Karvat**, Founder and CEO, Asego Global Assistance, emphasised on the importance of staying informed and be aware of the evolving landscape to understand what is relevant, and which tools are most effective in delivering success at large-scale events. Awareness on global trends and technological advancements is critical, as older methods may no longer yield the same results.

SanJeet highlighted the growing impact of



(From LtoR) SanJeet, Dev Karvat, Noor Ahmed Hamid, His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa and Sebastien Doussin at the session on big ticket events tourism

big-ticket events on the global economy, spanning sectors, such as hospitality, aviation and food. He pointed to the Middle East's strategic pivot towards non-oil-based revenues, with the UAE serving as a strong example of success. "The GCC exhibition market alone is currently valued at approximately US\$656 million, and by 2029, it is projected to grow to US\$827 million. If we include event management and the associated ecosystem, we are looking at a market worth US\$85 billion today, with forecasts of reaching US\$131 billion by 2030. That is the scale we are dealing with," he elaborated.

Events like Expo 2020 in Dubai and FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar have led to industry growth of 15 per cent to 40 per cent, drawing massive global attention. These mega events drive infrastructure development—metros, hotels, even new cities. For instance, Qatar developed Lusail from scratch, while Dubai established Expo City.

H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa provided a strategic perspective, "We must differentiate between big events and direct sales. Consider the Olympics—when Coca Cola invested around US\$780 million, they were asked about the impact on sales.

These events are about positioning, visibility and sustaining reputation in a highly competitive global environment." He further noted, "Every destination and compa-

experience and distribution. Take the World Cup in Qatar—ticketing was fully digital. The Paris Olympics went further, creating a ticket resale marketplace. The F1

As the world continues to evolve rapidly, it is imperative to adapt and embrace emerging technologies to remain competitive

ny needs to find its own formula, aligned with government visions and strategic goals."

Doussin spoke on the transformative role of technology. "Technology has completely reshaped big events, particularly in customer

app in Abu Dhabi now offers flexibility like splitting multi-day tickets or upgrading. AI will play a major role in creating seamless, personalised experiences. That said, while tech enables remote viewing, it does not diminish the live event appeal. Events to-

day are multifaceted—concerts, festivals, and sports rolled into one, creating immersive experiences," he said.

Hamid added a regional perspective and said, "The ASEAN region, with a population of 670 million and a GDP of US\$10 trillion, presents unique dynamics. What qualifies as a 'big-ticket' event is subjective—5,000 attendees may be significant for one destination, while 500,000 may be the norm for another. Looking ahead, the definition of 'big ticket' must evolve to include more than just sports or concerts."

Karvat reflected on the evolving insurance needs of modern travellers. He said, "During my 25 years in the industry, post-2020 world has shifted dramatically—geopolitical tensions and climate change have introduced both challenges and opportunities. Traditional travel insurance models are outdated. Today's travellers demand flexibility. We created customised products to address risks associated with big-ticket events." 

Future Hospitality Summit 2025 sees

Future Hospitality Summit Saudi Arabia recently concluded in Riyadh with over 1000 senior decision-makers, 200 investors and 150 expert speakers over three days. Centred on the theme, “Where Vision Shapes Opportunity,” the event brought together hospitality leaders, investors and decision-makers to discuss hotel performance and development.



over 1000 key senior decision makers



RezLive.com launches ‘Smart Match’

RezLive.com has launched Smart Match, an advanced AI-powered feature, set to redefine the way travel agents compare and book hotel rooms. With the travel industry constantly evolving, Smart Match represents a pivotal innovation—transforming the room selection experience by using AI to intelligently group, compare and present hotel room options in a consolidated view.

TT Bureau

RezLive.com has announced the official launch of Smart Match, an advanced AI-powered feature that is set to redefine the way travel agents compare and book hotel rooms.

From real-time supplier data processing to board type consolidation, the new AI-powered feature enables travel professionals to make faster, more confident decisions without the clutter of repetitive listings.



Jaal Shah
Founder, RezLive.com and Group
Managing Director, Travel Designer Group

“Smart Match is not just a feature—it is the future of hotel booking intelligence,” said Jaal Shah, Founder, RezLive.com and Group Man-



aging Director, Travel Designer Group. “Our mission has always been to empower travel agents with smart tools that save time, reduce booking errors and enhance their overall experience. With Smart Match, we are offering intelligent decision-making at scale—blending technology with trust,” he said.

Key benefits of Smart Match:
❖ All-in-One Com-

parison View: Compare room types, board inclusions and prices in a single snapshot

❖ **Cleaner Results, Faster Decisions:** Eliminates irrelevant or duplicate listings;

ongoing commitment to enhancing the B2B travel ecosystem with modern, AI-driven capabilities.

Our mission has always been to empower travel agents with smart tools that save time and reduce booking errors

❖ **AI-Powered Merging:** Consolidates similar room options for streamlined selection;

❖ **Smart Defaults & Visual Intelligence:** Highlights top-value options based on preferences and booking behaviour;

❖ **Intelligent Accuracy:** Takes into account cancellation policies and room configurations

This innovation underlines RezLive.com’s

BOOKING ADVANTAGES

- ❖ Agents can compare booking prices
- ❖ Eliminates duplication of bookings
- ❖ Supports agents with booking cancellations

Biz travel spending to grow 6.1%

The Middle East’s business travel spending is projected to grow 6.1 per cent this year, reaching US\$18.1 billion, as changing global economic conditions and the increasing impact of regional economic strategies continue to reshape the business travel sector, say experts at the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2025.

TT Bureau

The experts, while analysing the region’s thriving business travel market and its adaptation to global shifts at the session on ‘State of the Nation: Navigating the Future of Business Travel in the Middle East’, provided a thorough analysis of the market dynamics influencing corporate travel budgets and decision-making processes today.

The session was organised in partnership



with the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA). Catherine Logan, Regional Senior Vice President EMEA

and APAC, GBTA, said: “In general, the argument for business travel in 2025 is strong, but transformational

change will continue to influence how we travel for work around the world. These include economic stability, budget factors, technology implications, and the evolution of sustainability in business travel.

Logan also highlighted that sustainably managed business travel is a force for good, driving progress for businesses, governments, economies and people.

Ciaran Kelly, Managing Director, Middle East & Africa, FCM Travel, said:

“There is a positive outlook for business travel in the region, backed by trends we are seeing from our customers, surveys, and what our forecasts are for the year ahead. A lot of the growth is due to the public and private projects taking place – it is almost impossible to get a seat on a plane from Dubai to Riyadh, for example, and once you land, hotel availability is limited. Hotel occupancy across the region is the highest globally, around 70-80 per cent mark putting a lot of pressure on hotels,

but in general, everything is positive.”

ME OUTLOOK ON BIZ TRAVEL

- ❖ Economic conditions, to technology, sustainability, and traveller expectations are reshaping travel
- ❖ Business travel in 2025 remains strong

RezLive.com shines at global stage

RezLive.com made a remarkable presence at Arabian Travel Market 2025, drawing global attention from agents, hoteliers, suppliers and travel professionals. The event served as the perfect platform for RezLive.com to showcase its vision, meet face-to-face with valued partners and unveil its next-generation travel services, such as the Smart Match.



Disneyland coming to Abu Dhabi

The Walt Disney Company and Miral announced an agreement to create a landmark Disney theme park resort in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The waterfront resort will be located on Yas Island, a world-class destination for entertainment and leisure, connecting travellers from the Middle East and Africa, India, Asia, Europe and beyond.

TT Bureau

The Walt Disney Company and Miral, Abu Dhabi's leading creator of immersive destinations and experiences, announced an agreement to create a landmark Disney theme park resort in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The waterfront resort will be located on Yas Island, a world-class destination for entertainment and leisure, con-



Officials at the announcement for setting up a landmark Disney theme park resort in Abu Dhabi

necting travellers from the Middle East and Africa, India, Asia, Europe and beyond. This seventh Disney theme park resort

will combine Disney's iconic stories, characters and attractions with Abu Dhabi's vibrant culture, stunning shorelines and breathtaking architecture. **H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak**, Chairman, Miral, said, "Abu Dhabi is a place where heritage meets innovation, where we preserve our past while designing the future.

The collaboration between Abu Dhabi and Disney demonstrates the remarkable results of combining visionary leadership and creative excellence."

The new resort will be fully developed and built by Miral. Disney and its Imagineers will lead creative design and operational oversight to provide

a world-class experience. **Robert A Iger**, CEO, The Walt Disney Company, said, "This is a thrilling moment for our company as we announce plans to build an exciting Disney theme park resort in Abu Dhabi, whose culture is rich with an appreciation of the arts and creativity." **Josh D'Amaro**, Chairman, Disney Experiences, said, "This groundbreaking resort destination represents a new frontier in theme park development." **Mohamed Abdulla Al Zaabi**, Group CEO, Miral, said, "Bringing a Disney theme park resort to Yas Island marks a historic milestone in our journey to further

advance the island's position as a global destination for exceptional entertainment and leisure."

GLOBAL TIE-UP

- ❖ Disney and Miral announce landmark partnership
- ❖ Seventh Disney resort set for Abu Dhabi
- ❖ Combines Disney magic with Emirati culture

Abu Dhabi is a place where heritage meets innovation, where we preserve past while designing the future

-H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak



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VFS opens largest visa centre in Dubai

VFS Global has launched its Visa Application Centre at Wafi City in Dubai, which has been claimed to be the largest visa application facility in the world. Designed to meet the surge in outbound travel and rising expectations for security, accessibility, and convenience, the state-of-the-art Dubai centre sets a new global benchmark.

TT Bureau

VFS Global the global leader in trusted technology services, has announced the launch of its flagship Visa Application Centre in Dubai's Wafi City, marking the opening of the largest visa application facility in the world. The centre was inaugurated by **His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri**, Director General, Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism; **His Excellency Mohammed Ahmed Al Marri**, Director General, General Directorate of Identity and Foreigners Affairs - Dubai and **Zubin Karkaria**, Founder and



(L-R); H.E. Helal Saeed Almarri, Zubin Karkaria and H.E. Mohammed Ahmed Al Marri

Chief Executive Officer, VFS Global Group.

His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri said, "This milestone is more than

an infrastructure achievement — it reflects the strategic direction Dubai is taking to enhance global mobility, unlock access to opportunity, and acceler-

ate growth across our visitor and business economy." His Excellency Mohammed Ahmed Al Marri said, "This achievement embodies a true reflec-

tion of the directives of our wise leadership towards strengthening the nation's position as a global hub for smart services and establishing a unique model for delivering government services with high efficiency and quality." Zubin Karkaria said, "In line with the rapid development of Dubai, today we are pleased to launch the world's largest Visa Application Centre, serving over 200 nationalities in this Year of Community."

The VFS Global's visa application centre is spread in nearly 150,000 square feet area and equipped to handle up to 10,000 visa applications daily.

KEY FEATURES

- ❖ Tech-enabled self-service kiosks, secure lockers, photo booths, and photocopy stations
- ❖ Touchscreen info kiosks, QR code-based check-ins
- ❖ More than 400 on-site staff equipped with tablets to assist applicants at the centre

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Madagascar wows travel trade @ATM

Madagascar, for the first time, participated at the Arabian Travel Market with their destination offerings. It brought the strongest contingent of women, who wowed the Middle East travel trade at a special evening at the event. Facilitated by Travmarq, Madagascar is a unique destination offering rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes and exceptional biodiversity.



Al Rais appoints India representative

Al Rais Travel has appointed Footprints Worldwide as its representative office in India. The initiative reaffirms Al Rais Travel’s commitment to expanding its global network and building new partnerships with travel agencies and tour operators across India, and significantly increase the number of Indian visitors to Dubai and the UAE.

TT Bureau

As part of its strategic expansion plan to strengthen inbound tourism to the UAE, Al Rais Travel announced the appointment of Footprints Worldwide as representative office in

came in conjunction with Al Rais Travel’s participation at Arabian Travel Market 2025 (also ATM 2025).

Mohamed Jassim Al Rais, Executive Director, Al Rais Travel, said: “Establishing a Repre-



Mohamed Jassim Al Rais and Mamta Pall, along with other officials

for all of these agents who are under the bespoke and luxury segment.”

Establishing a representative office in India is a strategic move to enhance our presence in one of the most vital tourism markets

India. This initiative aims to significantly increase the number of Indian visitors to Dubai and the UAE. The announcement

sentative Office in India is a strategic move to enhance our presence in one of the most vital tourism markets for Dubai

and the UAE. We aim to forge strong partnerships with the Indian travel trade and offer tailored, high-quality travel solutions that meet the expectations of Indian travellers.”

Mamta Pall, Founder and CEO, Footprints Worldwide, said, “The partnership with Al Rais Travel is all about increasing bespoke and luxury segment from India and also

niche groups in the MICE and special group segment. As you know, India is number one market for the UAE at this point in time, so we are planning a lot of training programmes

KEY FOCUS AREAS

- ❖ India top source market for UAE tourism
- ❖ Targeting North, West & Tier II cities
- ❖ Strong push in MICE and weddings
- ❖ Customised packages for Indian travellers



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Jamaica expands tourism outreach

Hon. Edmund Bartlett, Jamaica’s Minister of Tourism, together with the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) and its partners, solidified its presence in the GCC market through its participation at the Arabian Travel Market 2025. The minister and the delegation from JTB engaged in strategic meetings with key stakeholders in aviation and tourism.



Why upskilling is non-negotiable

According to a recent report by Cavendish Maxwell, Dubai welcomed a record 18.72 million overnight visitors in 2024, a 9.1% increase over the previous year, marking a significant milestone in the emirate’s tourism journey. This surge has led to unprecedented demand for hotel accommodation and a corresponding rise in hospitality and employment opportunities.

With 69 per cent of the upcoming hotel supply in 2025 falling within the luxury and upper-upscale segments, the need for skilled professionals to deliver high-end, personalised service is greater than ever. Beyond hotels, the ripple effects of this growth are evident across Dubai’s broader tourism ecosystem, from transportation and retail to food and beverage and event management.

As the sector evolves to meet rising global expectations, strategic positioning, competitive pricing and sustained demand from key source markets will be critical in reinforcing Dubai’s sta-



tus as a world-leading hospitality hub.

Amid this momentum, the UAE’s hospitality sector, long admired for its iconic hotels and service excellence, is transforming. This shift is not solely about expanding infrastructure or enhancing guest experiences; it’s equally about

reimagining how talent is nurtured, upskilled and retained. As travellers demand hyper-personalised, tech-enabled interactions, traditional skillsets and one-time training no longer suffice. The industry must embrace the “Learning Economy”—a new paradigm where continuous upskilling is essential

for resilience, innovation and long-term success.

Building a culture of upskilling

In the UAE, Dubai and Abu Dhabi are strategi-

ty and digital readiness, so the hospitality sector must evolve from reactive service to anticipatory guest engagement. To meet this demand, the talent behind the sector

and cultural fluency to AI-driven guest management and food safety innovation. Embedding this growth mindset at all levels is challenging. Digital learning platforms like LinkedIn are playing a crucial role in reshaping hospitality training.


The skills matrix rapidly expands from sustainability compliance and cultural fluency to AI-driven guest management and food safety innovation

cally positioning themselves as a hub for leisure and business tourism, attracting over 17 million visitors annually. Mega-events like Expo 2020 Dubai and COP28 underline the importance of sustainability, inclusiv-

ity and digital readiness, so the hospitality sector must embrace lifelong learning. Upskilling is no longer a remedial or optional strategy but a proactive, continuous pursuit that drives competitive advantage. The skills matrix rapidly expands from sustainability compliance






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



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Discover Europe Travel Summit

Germany, Spain, France and Austria recently came together to organise the first ‘Discover Europe Travel Summit meets Marhaba 2025’ in Dubai with 150 buyers from within GCC, Levant and India, including destinations, hotels, DMCs, attractions and retail outlets. A total of 5,720 pre-scheduled meetings took place over the two-day event.



meets Marhaba 2025 in Dubai



EVENT TALK		
JUNE 2025		
Date	Event	Venue
2-3	Destinations Exchange Europe 2025	London, The UK
2-4	LATA Expo 2025	Windsor, The UK
2-6	Africa Showcase- South Africa 2025	Namibia, South Africa
5-8	Seoul International Travel Fair (SITF)	Seoul, South Korea
11-12	Travel Meet Asia	Jakarta, Indonesia
12-15	Hong Kong International Travel Expo (ITE Hong Kong)	Hong Kong, China
17-19	Global Travel Marketplace West (GTM West)	Palm Springs, California USA
25-26	Business Travel Show Europe	London, UK
30 June- 3 July	International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM) Asia Pacific	Marina Bay Sands, Singapore

Hotel guests in Sharjah up 11 %

►Contd. from page 1

guests, marking a 6 per cent rise compared to 2023. European guests saw a 16 per cent increase compared to 2023, reaching over 100,000 guests, while Chinese guests surged to over 60,000 guests, an exceptional increase of 828 per cent compared to 2023.

Among Arab countries, Oman topped the list of hotel guests in Sharjah, accounting for 6 per cent

brand campaign “Visit Sharjah”. The campaign focuses on showcasing Sharjah’s diverse tourist destinations, blending heritage, adventure, natural beauty and modern experiences. It emphasises the emirate’s ability to offer varied experiences, catering to different types of travellers seeking adventure, tranquillity, family entertainment or cultural immersion. The campaign also throws light on major events, such as the Sharjah Light Festival and other an-

We will continue investing in the development of tourism infrastructure and diversifying products and services

of total guests in 2024, followed by Saudi Arabia at 5 per cent, Egypt at 4 per cent, and Syria and Iraq at 3 per cent each.

His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, SCTDA, highlighted the latest developments from the authority, including the official launch of Sharjah’s new tourism

nual highlights that create memorable moments of connection and wonder for visitors.

Commenting on the tourism results, His Excellency Al Midfa said that Sharjah continues to witness consistent growth in the travel and tourism sector year after year, driven by the vision of its leadership. ▶

Healthtrip & Satguru join hands

Healthtrip and Satguru Travel Group have entered into a strategic partnership to promote UAE, India, Turkey, Germany and Saudi hospitals across Africa, targeting its \$11 billion medical tourism market. Africa is a growing source market for hospitals in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Germany and India.

TT Bureau

Healthtrip, the world’s largest digital health travel platform with a strong presence in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and other markets, has announced a strategic partnership with Sat-

guru Travel Group, a multi-award-winning travel management company with a strong footprint across the globe, including Africa, Europe, India and the Middle East, to

promote UAE, India, Turkey, Germany and Saudi hospitals across Africa, targeting its \$11 billion medical tourism market.

Healthtrip & Satguru Travel Group will jointly offer integrated service packages for African patients seeking care across specialties

leading healthcare providers in the UAE, India, Turkey, Germany and Saudi Arabia. Africa is a growing source market for hospitals in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Germany and



Anil Chandirani, Founder and Chairman, Satguru, at the signing ceremony

India, offering advanced treatments, proximity, shorter wait times, and cost-effectiveness.

“Healthtrip’s mission is to connect patients with trusted healthcare providers globally,” said **Danish**

Ahmed, CEO and Founder, Healthtrip. **Anil Chandirani**, Chairman, Satguru Travel Group, said, “Combined with Healthtrip’s tech-powered platform, this partnership brings added value to African health travellers.”

Important AI tools for business

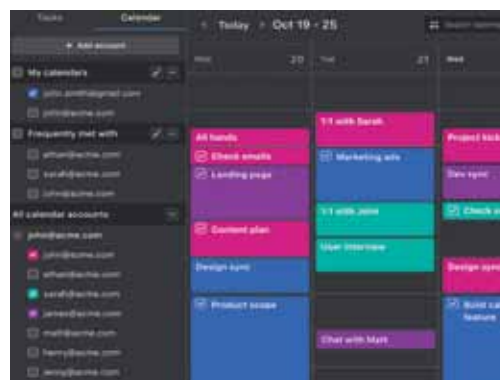
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❖ **Smart task management:** Say goodbye to scattered to-do lists. Add tasks, set priorities and



deadlines, and AI will find the best time to work on them.

❖ **Integrated calendar experience:** Motion

syncs with your existing Google or Outlook calendar, so you do not need to switch platforms. See your tasks and meetings in one unified view.

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❖ **Collaborative work planning:** Assign tasks to teammates, track progress and avoid bottlenecks. Motion helps teams stay aligned, productive and focused on high-impact work—even in hybrid or remote setups. ▶

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RADISSON HOTEL GROUP

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

DAALIAH MEYER joins Radisson Hotel Group as Cluster Director of Marketing & Communications in Saudi Arabia. With a background in neuropsychology and a career forged at the intersection of creativity, data and human behaviour, Meyer brings a powerful perspective to hospitality marketing. She began her career in Cape Town, launching her own marketing agency that handled everything from photoshoot styling to digital campaigns for local fashion brands.



TAJ JUMEIRAH LAKE TOWERS

Dubai

Taj Jumeirah Lake Towers has elevated **FARAH BOOTWALA** to a cluster leadership role. The strategic move comes in recognition to her proven ability to scale success, build cohesive brand narratives and drive performance across multiple venues. Beyond her professional accomplishments, Farah is admired for her dedication and collaborative leadership. She ensures every brand touchpoint reflects Taj's core values of authenticity and excellence.



GRAND MILLENNIUM DUBAI

Dubai

Grand Millennium Hotel Dubai has appointed **GIACOMO PUNTEL** as the General Manager. With over 30 years of international hospitality experience, Puntel brings proven leadership, operational expertise and a strong track record in guest satisfaction. He has held key roles at renowned brands, including IHG, Rixos, Anantara and Grosvenor House Dubai. Most recently, he served as General Manager at Voco Bonnington Dubai, where he led a team of over 200 members.



SOVEREIGN PPG QATAR

Qatar

Sovereign PPG has appointed **MINDY TAN** as Business Development Manager in its Qatar office. This strategic hire supports Sovereign PPG's continued focus on driving business set-up in Qatar while enhancing support for Asian investors entering the Middle East market. Born in Singapore and having spent many years in Australia, Tan brings a global perspective and deep industry expertise to the team. With financial services background, she has a unique blend of commercial insight and client advisory skills.



RAFFLES HOTELS & RESORTS AND FAIRMONT HOTELS & RESORTS

Dubai

Raffles Hotels & Resorts and Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, Accor's leading luxury brands, have appointed **ROLF LIPPUNER** as Vice President of Operations for the Middle East. In this role, he will oversee the strategic direction and operational excellence of 19 Raffles and Fairmont hotels and resorts across the region, including Fairmont Dubai, Raffles The Palm Dubai, Fairmont Doha and Raffles Doha.



SHANGRI-LA JEDDAH

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Shangri-La Jeddah appoints **GHADA ADDAS** as the Director of Marketing & Communications. Addas has built an impressive career by showcasing her versatility across various industries in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Starting as a copywriter and account assistant at Leo Burnett, she moved on to roles, such as Page Editor at Arab News, Marketing Senior Manager at Sephora Saudi Arabia, Tawkilat Automotives, Ministry of Culture, Jeddah Yacht Club, and most recently Sela.



SIX SENSES SOUTHERN DUNES, THE RED SEA

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Six Senses Southern Dunes, The Red Sea has appointed **BENJAMIN KREUZ** as the General Manager. With over 20 years of global experience in luxury hospitality, Kreuz brings with him a deep-rooted passion for wellness, sustainability and refined gastronomy, alongside a proven track record in operational excellence, guest experience innovation and multicultural team leadership. Kreuz has held various senior roles at some of the world's prestigious luxury resorts.



FAIRMONT HOTELS & RESORTS

Dubai

Fairmont Hotels & Resorts has appointed **EMMA DARBY** as Global Vice President - Spa & Wellness. In the new role, Darby will assume overall responsibility for spa and wellness operations across Fairmont's global portfolio of 92 properties. The diverse collection of luxury properties and flagship spas in iconic destinations worldwide includes Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, Canada, Fairmont Century Plaza, Los Angeles, Fairmont Mayakoba, Mexico and Fairmont Riyadh, KSA, delivering a holistic wellness experience.



ACCOR

Dubai

JOBIN JOYKUTTY has been promoted to the position of Cluster Director of Revenue at Accor. Joykutty's promotion marks a significant milestone in his decade-long journey with Accor, where he has been driving commercial KPI. Started as a Groups Coordinator and rising steadily through roles in analytics and management, his progression reflects a deep understanding of the business. He currently oversees seven hotels with a combined 1,667 keys.



THE CHEDI AL BAIT

Sharjah

The Chedi Al Bait, Sharjah has appointed **MARILU OLVERA** as the General Manager. A seasoned leader in the luxury hospitality sector, Olvera brings over two decades of international experience, strategic acumen and a passion for delivering exceptional guest experiences to her new role. During her career, she has held leadership roles at some of the world's most prestigious hospitality brands across the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Costa Rica, Jamaica and Mexico.



HILTON DOHA THE PEARL

Qatar

Hilton Doha The Pearl has appointed **AHMET ANTEPLI** as the General Manager. With a career shaped by years of hands-on work in hotel operations across the Middle East and Europe, Antepli steps into the role with a focused mindset, aiming to ensure every guest journey reflects the high standards of the hotel. He will also lead on various strategic initiatives and re-position the property's identity as a leisure-focused destination. Over the years, he has held significant leadership roles at renowned properties.



HASARA FERNANDO has been promoted to the position of Cluster Director of Digital Marketing. She brings over a decade of experience within Accor and the hospitality industry. Fernando is a core member of the commercial team, leads the digital strategy and online commercial performance for 12 hotels under the Pullman, Novotel, ibis and Adagio brands. She has been instrumental in enhancing direct revenue channels.



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