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Special

Reconnect with Sharjah @WTM

Dr Shehara Fernando



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

Connecting the world for three days of intense networking, World Travel Market is bringing together travel professionals from across the world once again. Speaking with **TRAUTALK**, the media partner for the event, **H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa**, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA), shares how they are going to engage with industry colleagues and showcase the destination in a different light.

“World Travel Market is always a special moment for us at Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority, and 2025 is no exception. It gives us the chance to share Sharjah’s story with the world — a story rooted in our rich culture, natural beauty, and the values of sustainability that guide everything we do. This year, we are showcasing new eco-tourism experiences and cultural programmes that reflect the emirate’s character and our vision for the future. For us, WTM is not only about promotion. It is about building meaningful connections, learning from others, and working together with international partners to strengthen the global tourism community. We are excited to engage with our peers, exchange ideas, and explore new opportunities for collaboration. We will also be making some important announcements during the event, including updates on our efforts to attract more international visitors and enhance accessibility to Sharjah. Our aim is to continue positioning Sharjah as a welcoming, authentic, and forward-looking destination. We look forward to meeting with other peers in the industry world-wide, and to inviting the world to discover the uniqueness of Sharjah.”



Back to dazzle the Gulf region

The Arabian Travel Awards return with much aplomb for a new edition — to honour the hardworking people and businesses from the travel, tourism, and hospitality fraternity. Bringing under one roof industry stalwarts who have shaped, and continue to redefine, the way the world experiences travel, the 2025 edition promises to be the event of the season.

TT Bureau

Held as an exclusive, invitation-only event, the Arabian Travel Awards have become an

iconic event which celebrate the achievements of the region’s most influential travel, tourism and hospitality leaders. With each edition, the event

continues to raise the bar, highlighting individuals and organisations whose vision and commitment have transformed the way the world experiences the

ME. The platform honours the industry leaders for their dedication to innovate and achieve excellence in their fields. Tourism Malaysia joins

the 8th edition of this coveted event as Platinum Partner and Embassy Suites by Hilton as Hospitality Partner. The platform brings together

industry stalwarts from the GCC region. Whilst the voting process has begun, it is time to nominate your favourite brand, agent, or portal. ➔

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Jamaica eyes GCC luxury market

At the recently concluded JAPEX 2025, Jamaica unveiled ambitious plans to revive and expand its tourism sector. By 2030, the country expects to add more than 11,500 new hotel rooms, many of them luxury brands which international travellers, especially those from the Middle East, already know and trust. Meanwhile, the govt is upgrading infra to keep pace.

TT Bureau

Jamaica is focusing on new markets, such as the Gulf countries, Latin America, and India, and tailoring its tourism products to match their needs. **Donovan White**, Director of Tourism, Jamaica Tourism Board, in an interview with **TRAVEL**, pointed out that Jamaica has set a clear goal, to bring 11,500 new hotel rooms into the market by 2030. These projects are already in different stages, with some being planned and others, like Unico and Moon Palace, under construction. The aim is not just to build more rooms



Donovan White
Director of Tourism
Jamaica Tourism Board

— the government wants to focus on luxury and high-quality hotels that can appeal to travellers from new markets. Many visitors from Latin America, the Middle East,

and India prefer to stay in well-known brands. That is why Jamaica is working to attract these kinds of investments. The gov-

ties with top international brands, as part of our clear strategy to focus on luxury and attract new markets,” White said.

Our focus is on building world-class, branded hotels that resonate with the Gulf traveller seeking luxury, trust, and familiarity

ernment has also been building strong partnerships at events like the Arabian Travel Market to bring in new investors from the GCC region. “Our goal is not just to build more hotels, but to build high-quality proper-

Upgrading infrastructure
Jamaica is investing heavily in infrastructure to support the tourism growth, and airports are a big focus. Montego Bay Airport has already upgraded its departure area and is now making im-

provements on the arrival side. Kingston Airport has started expanding as well, with a longer runway and modern facilities to be ready in two years. There are also early plans for a third international airport to handle more visitors in the future. On the other hand, road projects are another priority. A new bypass in Montego Bay will cut travel time by about 45 minutes. Another bypass is planned for Ocho Rios, removing traffic bottlenecks in the town. The Southern to Eastern Coastal Highway will connect Kingston to Port Antonio.

ON AGENDA

❖ High-quality properties; projects like Unico and Moon Palace already under construction

❖ Infrastructure and connectivity; Montego Bay and Kingston airports being upgraded, plans for a third international airport, new bypasses in Montego Bay and Ocho Rios



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WTM = stronger ties, better business

WTM London continues to be a key business hub for Middle East tourism professionals. As the region accelerates its global outreach, the event offers a vital space to meet international buyers, negotiate partnerships, and position new products. With over 40,000 travel professionals attending last year; WTM remains a powerful driver of trade engagement. For GCC destinations and hospitality brands, it's a chance to showcase development, secure distribution, and align with top global networks. This year's edition is set to see even stronger regional representation, with participants aiming to expand business pipelines and strengthen B2B ties with Europe and beyond.



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

“Participation at WTM 2025 enhances Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Coral Beach Resort Sharjah's global visibility, strengthens partnerships, promotes UAE tourism, showcases sustainability and hospitality excellence, and positions our hotels among leading international players in the competitive hospitality industry.”



Ahmed Hasseb
CEO
Gewan Hotels and Resorts

“WTM London 2025 is an important event for Gewan Hotels & Resorts to participate in and connect with global travel and hospitality partners. We will showcase our newest luxury hotels, including recently signed properties, as well as our flagship resorts in the UAE, known for comfort, wellness, and personalised experiences.”



Rehan Sayed Ali
CEO
Tawfeeq Travel Qatar

“Tawfeeq's participation at WTM is crucial for visibility, business growth, and global networking. It is an investment in building international relationships, promoting destination appeal, and aligning with the future direction of the global travel industry. We will be showcasing our DMC skills as the leading provider in Qatar.”



Jiten Tolani
Director
Blueberry Holidays Group

“Participation in travel and tourism events is a strategic tool for growth, innovation, visibility, and collaboration. Whether you are a business, a destination, or a technology enthusiast, these events offer a platform to stay competitive, informed, and connected in a fast-evolving industry. As a DMC you showcase destinations and meet new people.”



Patricia Yates
CEO
VisitBritain

“WTM London is a flagship global travel trade event in the industry's calendar, a catalyst for new business for more than four decades, and we are delighted to be this year's premium partner as we gear up to welcome top travel buyers from around the world. We look forward to working with WTM to showcase our outstanding tourism offers.”



Hamed Al Kalbani
General Manager
Golden Tulip Media Hotel

“WTM is an event that brings together everyone directly and indirectly involved in the tourism industry, making it a great platform to connect and exchange ideas. This year, we will showcase our property and highlight the enhancements we have made to further improve our guest experience. Our team will meet partners and visitors on our behalf.”



Deepak Booneady
CEO
Sun Siyam

“WTM is one of the most important events for us as it brings together our key partners, media, and stakeholders, allowing us to strengthen relationships, explore new collaborations, and gain valuable market insights. This year is especially significant as, for the first time ever, we will have our own standalone stand at WTM, marking a milestone for Sun Siyam.”



Nadeem Ulde
General Manager
Ali bin Ali Qatar

“WTM is an excellent platform for us to connect with global suppliers, strengthen relationships with industry leaders, and explore new business opportunities. This year, Ali Bin Ali Holidays will proudly showcase what Qatar has to offer as a world-class destination, highlighting our role as a premier DMC in the country.”



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

“WTM London has always been a key platform for RezLive.com to connect with global partners and strengthen our presence across markets. Having exhibited for several years, this year we are excited to showcase RezTez, our new and advanced API distribution version, along with our recently launched products — Car Rental, Rail Europe Bookings, and Cruise.”



Freddy Farid
Managing Director
Two Seasons Hotel

“Our presence at WTM reaffirms our commitment to global growth and market leadership. The platform elevates our brand visibility, strengthens ties with international partners, and helps forge new collaborations with industry leaders and hosted buyers. We are proud to unveil a series of strategic upgrades — including our fully renovated ballroom and meeting spaces.”



Shaileen Jiwa
General Manager
QE2

“With the global travel ecosystem undergoing rapid transformation, WTM London remains one of the most important B2B platforms for forging strategic partnerships, structuring deals, and shaping destination strategies. The United Kingdom continues to be one of the top source markets for QE2, making our participation both timely and essential.”



Saleem Sharif
Deputy General Manager
ATS Travel

“I have been attending WTM London for over two decades — missing only the two pandemic years. For me, WTM remains one of the most influential global platforms to connect with our airline, hotel, DMC, and technology partners across every spectrum of the travel business. It's an event where ideas, innovation, and collaboration come together.”

The world's next great destination

As Saudi Arabia fast-tracks its Vision 2030 goals, one country that is rising to the forefront of its tourism strategy is India. With deep cultural ties, growing air connectivity, and a rapidly expanding outbound middle class, India is becoming one of Saudi Arabia's most promising source markets. **Ahmed Al-Khateeb**, Minister of Tourism, Saudi Arabia, shares more with .

 Devika Jeet

For Saudi Arabia, India isn't just another market, it's a natural ally. "India has been a close partner for decades, whether in trade, finance, or workforce development," says **Ahmed Al-Khateeb**, Minister of

They have been part of our growth story, and now they are also part of our tourism future."

As India's outbound travel demand surges, Saudi Arabia is making sure it's well positioned to welcome this wave. "With a growing middle class and

We developed AIUla as a venue where couples can celebrate their big day surrounded by nature, history, and unmatched beauty

Tourism, Saudi Arabia. "We have more than two million Indians living and working in Saudi Arabia.

rising disposable income, the number of Indian travellers is expected to double in the next 10 years,"



Ahmed Al-Khateeb
Minister of Tourism
Saudi Arabia

Al-Khateeb explains. "Saudi Arabia is only a few hours away (from India), and we offer everything Indian travellers look for, such as culture, heritage, hospitality, and authentic experiences."

The Saudi Tourism Authority has already opened a dedicated office in India and launched aggressive promotional campaigns under the Visit Saudi brand. Partnerships with leading travel agencies and OTAs, both Indian and global, are helping convert that interest into bookings. The results are beginning to show, with growing awareness and curiosity among Indian travellers about destinations like Riyadh, Jeddah, and AIUla.

The latter has, in fact, become a particular favourite for a unique segment, destination weddings. "Indian weddings are



a celebration of culture and family," Al-Khateeb says with a smile. "We developed AIUla as a venue where couples can celebrate their big day surrounded by nature, history, and unmatched beauty. It's becoming one of the most sought-after wedding destinations in the region."

Sustainability remains central to this expansion. "We are developing fast, but we are developing responsibly," Al-Khateeb stresses. "Our Red Sea resorts are designed with sustainability at their core. We have even preserved entire islands to protect local ecosystems."



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2026 to be driven by hobbies, passions

The Skyscanner Travel Trends report for 2026 has unveiled the seven biggest trends in travel, showing that the year will become ‘personal’ for travellers in the UAE. From literature escapes to supermarket tourism and skincare-fuelled itineraries, travellers are planning to curate trips based on their hobbies and passions for 2026, the report finds.

TT Bureau

According to the recent Skyscanner Travel Trends report, seven trends shaping the travel in 2026 are:

Destination Check-in

Hotels are no longer a place to just bed down — they are the destination itself. In 2026, travellers will be choosing where to go based on where they want to stay. Travellers are choosing a destination based on the accommodation because it offers good value for the whole trip, helps them relax in one place without moving around, and provides a complete escape



from everyday life. The report says that 82 per cent of travellers picked a destination based purely on accommodation.

Glowmads

Statistics show more than half (55 per cent) of adults in the UAE have bought beauty or skin-

care products on previous international trips while 45 per cent plan to visit beauty stores and get skincare/beauty treatments in 2026. Therefore, beauty rituals have the potential to shape how, not just where, beauty lovers travel. Furthermore, 37 per cent

said beauty-related activities are cheaper abroad than home.

Shelf Discovery

Travellers are searching for the most authentic bites in the food aisles with 83 per cent saying they often or always explore the local supermarkets or grocery stores on their trips, while 57 per cent say they learn more about local culture in food aisles. Furthermore, 44 per cent are keen to try local food on holiday.

Altitude Shift

Travellers are chasing year-round alpine escapes from snow to stillness. The data shows

more than three-quarters (92 per cent) are already looking into booking a summer or autumn trip to a mountain destination next year and 31 per cent are planning a hiking trip

Mamoun, Travel Expert at Skyscanner, said, “As 2025 comes to a close, people are already exploring where to visit next year. Our findings from Skyscanner’s annual

Data shows 92 per cent travellers are already looking into booking a summer or autumn trip to a mountain destination next year

with 59 per cent saying the clean air and cooler weather makes mountain trips more appealing.

Commenting on the trends, Ayoub El

Travel Trends Report have shown people are opting for different experiences based on their personal interests and hobbies, doing tasks that appeal to them or their families.”



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Single GCC visa to boost regional tourism

The upcoming introduction of a Unified GCC Visa stands to be one of the most transformative developments in the Gulf region’s tourism landscape, promising to make travel between member states seamless and convenient. This initiative is expected not only to boost tourist arrivals but also accelerate infrastructure development and create new job opportunities across the region.

The new visa system represents a win-win scenario for all participating countries. It will benefit those with already strong and mature tourism offerings, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as well as those aiming to diversify their economies further through tourism development. The UAE, for example, currently hosts the majority of the region’s major events and attractions, from world-class exhibitions and sporting tournaments to global entertainment and shopping festivals. With the Unified GCC Visa, the UAE’s tourism ecosystem is expected to continue thriving,

as visitors will find even more reasons to return. The tourism industry’s positive economic ripple

New visa initiative aligns with other regional projects that aim to enhance connectivity and strengthen economic integration

effect is vast and well-documented. It promotes a network of interlinked industries, from hospitality and aviation to food, retail, and entertainment. The Unified GCC Visa is expected to amplify this impact. While hotel and

travel providers will naturally benefit, the indirect gains will extend to restaurants, entertainment venues, tour operators,

and even infrastructure developers. The ease of cross-border movement is likely to encourage new travel itineraries, longer stays, and greater visitor spending, all of which contribute to sustainable economic growth.

Notably, the new visa initiative aligns with other regional projects that aim to enhance connectivity and strengthen economic integration. A prime example is the GCC Rail Project, which, once operational, will enable tourists to travel easily by train between GCC nations. The anticipated development of rail hubs and supporting facilities will spur job creation and encourage investment in surrounding areas. The success of the Unified GCC Visa will ultimately depend on how well tourism businesses and policymakers embrace cross-border col-

laboration. Tour operators, airlines, hospitality groups, and event organisers will need to collaborate to design multi-country packages and itineraries that showcase the unique strengths of each destination. Similarly, investment in digital infrastructure, sustainability, and workforce training will be crucial to support the expected rise in visitor traffic. What makes the Unified GCC Visa particularly promising is that it aligns perfectly with the region’s broader vision for economic diversification and integration. It supports the GCC’s shared goals of re-

ducing dependence on oil revenues and positioning tourism as a key pillar of future growth. More importantly, it underscores the region’s commitment to openness, collaboration, and forward-looking development.



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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Expedition cruises the next big thing

CruiseXplore Middle East recently hosted its highly anticipated Cruise Workshop 2025 in the UAE, drawing participation from over 80 travel trade professionals across the region. The annual event, exclusively designed for travel agents and industry partners, continues to build momentum as a premier platform for cruise education, engagement, and collaboration.

TT Bureau

The workshop showcased a diverse portfolio of cruise offerings — from premium ocean cruises and ultra-luxury voyages to culturally immersive expedition journeys and exciting regional cruise options — highlighting the breadth of cruise experiences available to the Middle East travellers.

Lakshmi Durai, CEO, CruiseXplore Middle East, inaugurated the workshop with a warm welcome, setting the tone for a day of interactive learning and meaningful networking. “The atmosphere at



the workshop was electric, filled with insightful discussions, dynamic networking, and a real enthusiasm for learning. A standout moment was our interactive Cruise Quiz, which saw active participation and rewarded attendees with exciting prizes — including

shopping vouchers and a complimentary cruise voucher,” said Durai.

The event featured exclusive insights from globally renowned cruise lines, including: Aroya Cruises, Celebrity Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL), Quark Expeditions

& Swan Hellenic. Representatives from each cruise brand delivered targeted presentations, providing travel agents with valuable tools, the latest updates, and practical selling tips to help them better serve their clients and grow their cruise business. “We are deeply

grateful to our partner cruise lines and media partners for their unwavering commitment and support to our mission of educating and empowering the travel trade,” added Durai.

Ibrahim Husainoun, Team Leader for Interna-

tional Markets at Aroya Cruises, talking about his participation at the workshop, said, “I had the privilege of being part of an insightful and fruitful workshop representing Aroya Cruises to showcase the Arabian experiences and offering in addition to launching our new sailing seasons.”



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Nestled in the southwest of Saudi Arabia, Aseer stands as one of the Kingdom's most breathtaking destinations - home to majestic mountains, 125 km of Red Sea coastline, and more than 4,000 heritage villages, including Rijal Almaa, Al-Yanfa, and Al-Qurayah. With its refreshing climate, cultural depth, and expanding infrastructure, Aseer invites travelers from all over the world to discover a Saudi escape that feels both near and new.

Unlike many Gulf destinations limited by summer heat, Aseer offers a year-round travel great experience. Summer temperatures average a pleasant 24°C, while its mountain towns enjoy misty morning and cool evenings. Whether hiking through the mountains, exploring the Tihamaplain, enjoying the Red Sea coast, or venturing into the desert, every season unveils a new wonder.

From the UNESCO Award-winning village, Tabab Village, to the colorful artistry of Al-Qatt Al-Aseeri, the region celebrates its centuries-old culture with pride. Aseer's cuisine - earning the 2024 World Culinary Arts Award - offers travelers authentic flavors through dishes like Haneeth, Asida, and Areekah.

Tabab Village in Aseer, has been named one of the world's Best Tourism Villages by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2024. This prestigious recognition highlights Tabab's cultural and historical significance and supports Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 ambitions to position Aseer as a global tourism destination.

Under Saudi Vision 2030, Aseer is set to welcome over 9 million annual visitors by 2030, contributing nearly SAR 26 billion to the national tourism GDP and creating 94,800 new jobs. Major projects, such as the Abha Valley Development and Souda Peaks, along with already direct access to 10 destinations - including Riyadh, Doha, Dubai, and Cairo - served by more than 9 airlines, such as Saudia, Flyadeal, Qatar Airways, and Air Cairo, will soon make the region more connected than ever, further enhanced by the new Abha International Airport. Aseer is witnessing rapid economic momentum that reflects its growing appeal as both a tourism and investment destination. Confirmed tourism investments exceed SAR 30 billion, while the number of tourism-related SMEs has surged by 151% - from 5,677 in 2020 to 14,289 in Q2 2025. Beyond tourism, other sectors such as sports, education, health, and real estate present more than SAR 30 billion in additional opportunities, with the total number of SMEs across the region rising by 115.3% - from 36,144 to 77,824 in Q2 2025. This trajectory underscores Aseer's rising role as a vital economic and tourism driver under Saudi Vision 2030.

Aseer's transformation embraces sustainability, home to 60% of the Kingdom's forests, preserving wildlife, and empowering local communities. Through reforestation, eco-tourism, and cultural inclusion, the region is becoming a living model of responsible development, further reinforced by its official membership in the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), making it the first destination in Saudi Arabia and the Arab world to achieve this milestone.



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When winter chills set in, find warmth in Aseer - through its vibrant culture, rich traditions, and unforgettable experiences.

Dubai eyes #3 spot globally with D33

Dubai tourism is working towards its next chapter with the Dubai Economic Agenda (D33), which aims to boost tourism by making the UAE city one of the world's top three tourist destinations. Key initiatives include diversifying the tourism offering, enhancing visitor experiences, and attracting global talent to the sector. **ANANTARA**, as media partner at the Future Hospitality Summit World, spoke with some of the industry leaders to hear their views on the future journey.



Wytze van der Berg
VP Int'l Operations, EMEA
BWH Hotels

“D33 reflects an inspiring vision for the future, one that resonates deeply with BWH Hotels. We are excited to play our part in shaping this next chapter for Dubai by expanding our portfolio to support the city's ambitions as a global hub for tourism, business, and hospitality. Establishing a dedicated BWH Hotels entity in Dubai marks a significant step in our journey to deepen our roots.”



David Thomson
Senior VP – Development
The First Group Hospitality

“As a company born and headquartered in Dubai, The First Group Hospitality is committed to supporting D33 goals. We are proud to sponsor a leading event such as the Future Hospitality Summit – FHS World that reinforces the emirate's position as a global player in the hotel industry. One of D33's transformational projects aims to integrate 65,000 young Emiratis into the job market.”



Bani Haddad
Founder and Managing Director
Aleph Hospitality

“FHS World is much more than an event; it's a catalyst for growth and real collaboration. It brings together global leaders and forward-thinkers on the topic of investment, supports D33, and helps drive investment and sustainable development. We are proud to partner with FHS World, confident that the event is instrumental in reinforcing Dubai's position as a global hospitality hub.”



Amith Khanna
Head of Franchise – India, MEA
IHG Hotels & Resorts

“D33 calls for collective action to shape the future of hospitality — not only through infrastructure, but through innovation, collaboration, and thought leadership. FHS World plays a pivotal role in driving that agenda. As Dubai strengthens its position as a global hub, forums like FHS World help translate ambition into action. They unite investors, operators, and policymakers.”



Dimitris Manikis
President EMEA
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts

“FHS World is a vital platform for showcasing how hospitality drives economic growth and innovation in Dubai. The event aligns closely with D33, highlighting opportunities for investment, collaboration, and sustainable development across the tourism and hospitality sector. Wyndham Hotels & Resorts is proud to participate, sharing insights on traveller expectations and hotel offerings.”



Ayman Ezzeldien
Director of Business Development
– Middle East, Egypt & Pakistan,
Radisson Hotel Group

“Events like FHS World in Dubai are important as they align with D33, which aims to double Dubai's economy over the next decade and cement its place among the world's top three cities. This event brings decision makers together who turn plans into investment, jobs, and stronger visitor experiences. As Radisson Hotel Group continues to grow, we are proud to be part of this journey.”



Vincent Miccolis
MD – MEA and Turkey
The Ascott

“Dubai is fast advancing its D33 to double the city's economy and cement its position among the world's top destinations to live, work, and visit, and platforms like FHS World play an important role in moving that vision forward. It has become the meeting point for our industry, where leaders come together to exchange ideas and forge partnerships.”



Eddy Tannous
Chief Operating Officer
Rotana Hotels

“FHS World is a great opportunity for investors, hotel operators, and service providers alike to engage in collaborations that will shape the hospitality landscape in our region for years to come. This impactful event taking place in Dubai holds great significance due to the impressive positioning of the emirate as one of the top worldwide destinations for tourism. This is further solidified by D33.”



Amir Golbarg
Senior Vice President
Minor Hotels Middle East & Africa

“The Future Hospitality Summit is an important catalyst in advancing the ambitions of D33, driving collaboration, innovation, and investment across our industry. For Minor Hotels, it's an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to Dubai's long-term growth — from our leading position as the largest operator on the trunk of Palm Jumeirah to maintaining Anantara.”



Mahir Julfa
Executive Vice President
DWTC

“Building on our strong performance in the first half of 2025, we will continue to attract international event organisers, exhibitors, and visitors, along with globally renowned events across both established and high-growth industries in the second half. The upcoming line-up of flagship events, such as GITEX Global, WETEX, and Big 5 Global, showcase our ability to convene the world's most influential leaders.”



Nicolas Nasra
Head of Hotel Advisory – MENA
Colliers

“FHS World remains one of the most influential platforms for shaping dialogue around the future of our region's hospitality and real estate landscape. By bringing together investors, developers, and operators, it directly contributes to D33. This year, I'm pleased to moderate a session on 'Investing in Mixed-Use Real Estate: Strategies for Maximising Value in Modern Developments'.”



Ahmad Al Room Almhairi
Acting CEO, Mohammed bin Rashid
Establishment for SME Development
(Dubai SME)

“This initiative is a testament to visionary leadership and our unwavering commitment to driving D33 forward by empowering Emirati entrepreneurs — the pioneers at the heart of Dubai's economic future. Through world-class acceleration practices, thanks to our partnership with Plug and Play, we will be supporting individual startups and building the foundation for making Dubai a top global destination.”

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Singapore Airlines honours partners

Singapore Airlines recently honoured its top-performing travel trade partners, including agents and OTAs, for their exceptional contributions over the past year. The event reflected Singapore Airlines' ongoing commitment to nurturing strong relationships with its valued partners while inspiring continued success and innovation within the travel and tourism industry.





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Redefining the Art of Arrival

Pullman Dubai Jumeirah Lakes Towers unveils its new lobby

In the ever-evolving world of hospitality, transformation is no longer just about design. It's about creating experiences that truly resonate with people. Pullman Dubai Jumeirah Lakes Towers has embraced this idea wholeheartedly, unveiling a bold new chapter with the launch of its reimagined lobby and guest-facing spaces.

TT Bureau

This is not just a re-design. It's a reinvention of the arrival experience, a space that blurs the lines between work and play, solitude and connection, function and art.

The Art of Arrival

Stepping into the newly unveiled Social HUB, as the lobby is now called, feels like entering a living space that tells the story of modern Dubai; dynamic, sophisticated, and deeply connected.

Designed by the award-winning Dubai-based studio DZ Design, the refreshed interiors bring Pullman's latest global brand identity to the region for the first time. The concept, described as 'Raw Meets Refined', plays beautifully with contrast. Natural wood and textured stone sit effortlessly alongside sleek glass and metallic finishes, creating a balance of warmth and modernity.

Every detail, from lighting to layout, has been carefully

considered. Transitional elements, such as the 'Space Between' portal, guide guests from the outdoors into the heart of the hotel, turning the simple act of arrival into an immersive experience.

A New Pulse for Connection

But the Social HUB is more than design. It's about people. Every corner has been created to encourage connection; whether it's a business traveller finding a quiet corner to catch up on emails, locals stopping by for a mid-morning coffee, or friends meeting before dinner at one of the hotel's restaurants.

"We are immensely proud to be the first Pullman in the region to showcase the brand's newest design aesthetic," says **Sushanth Nambiar**, Cluster General Manager, Pullman Dubai Jumeirah Lakes Towers. "It's more than a visual refresh. It's about uplifting the way our guests connect, unwind, and experience hospitality from the moment they arrive. With the introduction of Café 1859 and



our reimagined lobby, we are creating spaces that celebrate culture, community, and connection, turning every visit into a memorable experience for both our guests and the local community."

Café 1859: A Tribute to Timeless Craft

At the heart of the new Social HUB is Café 1859, the hotel's latest culinary concept and its social soul. Inspired by George Pullman, the visionary who revolutionised 19th century luxury travel, the café pays homage to his legacy of innovation and craftsmanship. Guests can enjoy specialty coffees, artisanal pastries, and globally inspired bites served in a setting that combines the charm

We are creating spaces that celebrate culture, community, and connection, turning every visit into a memorable experience

of a European café with Dubai's cosmopolitan energy. It's the kind of place where conversations flow easily, ideas come to life over a croissant, and time slows down just enough to savour the moment.

Design as a Lifestyle

Beyond its visual appeal, the new Pullman JLT lobby embodies the brand's spirit of connectivity, creativity, and cultural expression. Every texture, artwork, and furnishing has been chosen

to inspire curiosity and encourage dialogue. This thoughtful blend of design and emotion transforms Pullman JLT into a true social space.

With this transformation, Pullman Dubai Jumeirah Lakes Towers reinforces its position as both a business and leisure hub and as a lifestyle destination that welcomes connection, creativity, and community. Every arrival feels like the beginning of a story worth telling.



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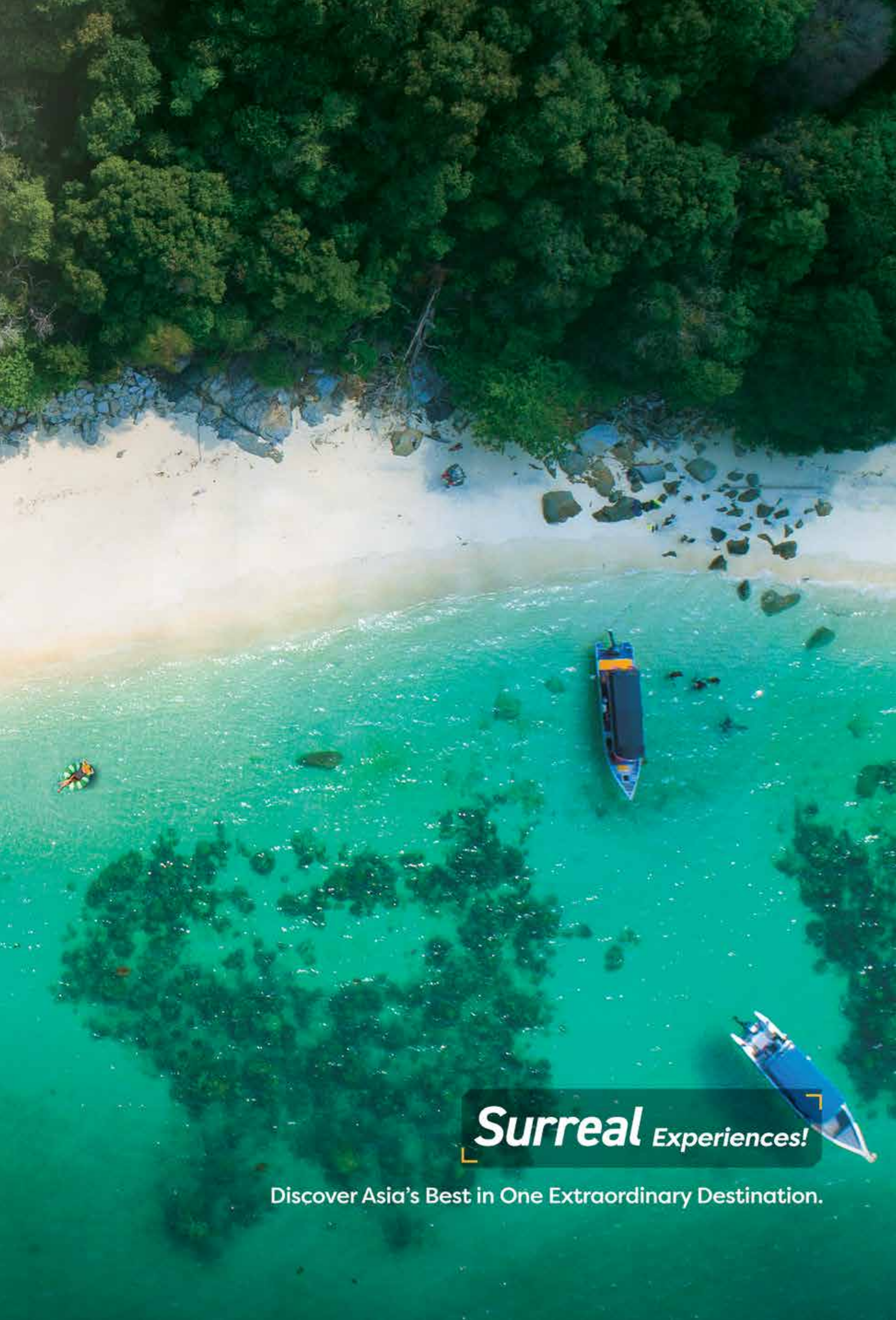


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Jamaica marked a major milestone in its tourism evolution with the successful hosting of JAPEX 2025, where over 160 international buyers from the Middle East, Latin America, Asia, and Europe gathered to explore new opportunities on the island. The event underscored Jamaica's dynamic tourism potential and its commitment to a 'local first' approach.



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Middle East travel holding strong: WTC

The Middle East is becoming one of the fastest growing regions for global travel and tourism, supported by new projects, strong investments, and efforts to grow economies beyond oil. Across the GCC, the sector is now a major part of growth, contributing between 7 and 15 per cent of national GDP and supporting millions of jobs.

In 2025, travel and tourism are expected to bring in more than US\$ 350 billion across the six main GCC countries, helped by rising visitor numbers, new airline routes, and modern hotels and resorts. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the largest markets, while Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait are expediting new tourism plans to expand income sources and reach more visitors.

By 2035, the total tourism GDP of the region is set to grow strongly, with higher international visitor spending, new jobs, and large infrastructure projects. From culture and heritage to luxury resorts and business travel, the Middle East is shaping itself not only as a travel hub but also as one of the world's top destinations.

GLOBAL DATA

Total Travel & Tourism GDP Contribution			
2019	10.5%	(Share of Global Economy) US\$ 10.3 TN	
2024	10%	Annual Change 8.5%	(6% vs 2019) Economy Change YoY @2.6%
2025 Forecast	10.3%	Annual Change 6.7%	(13.0% vs 2019) Economy Change YoY @2.5%
2035 Forecast	11.5%	CAGR ² (2025–2035) 3.5%	Economy CAGR (2025–2035) 2.5%

Total Travel & Tourism Jobs Contribution			
2019	10.7%	(Share of Global Jobs) 377.7 MN	
2024	10.6%	Annual Change 6.2%	(5.6% vs 2019)
2025 Forecast	10.9%	Annual Change 4%	(9.9% vs 2019)
2035 Forecast	12.5%	New Jobs (2025–2035) 90.6 MN	

BAHRAIN

Total Travel & Tourism GDP Contribution			
2019	12.2%	BHD 2.1 BN	(US\$ 5.7 BN)
2024	15.5%	BHD 2.9 BN	Annual Change 2.3% (37.7% vs 2019) Economy Change YoY @14%
2025 Forecast	15.7%	BHD 3.1 BN	Annual Change 4.1% (43.4% vs 2019)
2035 Forecast	16.2%	BHD 3.5 BN	Annual Change 1.4% (CAGR 2025–2035) 1.4% (Economy CAGR 2025–2035) 1.1%

Total Travel & Tourism Jobs Contribution			
2019	91.6%	(Share of Total Jobs) =12.2%	
2024	99.7%	Annual Change 6.5%	(8.8% vs 2019)
2025 Forecast	110.7%	Annual Change 11.1%	(20.9% vs 2019)
2035 Forecast	145.0	New Jobs (2025–2035) 34.3 (000s)	

KUWAIT

Total Travel & Tourism GDP Contribution			
2019	5.1%	KWD 2.5 BN	(US\$ 8.3 BN)
2024	6.6%	KWD 3.2 BN	Annual Change 9.2% (24.1% vs 2019) Economy Change YoY @-3.4%
2025 Forecast	7.0%	KWD 3.4 BN	Annual Change 8.3% (34.4% vs 2019)
2035 Forecast	8.0%	KWD 4.8 BN	Annual Change 3.4% (CAGR 2025–2035) 3.4% (Economy CAGR 2025–2035) 1.9%

Total Travel & Tourism Jobs Contribution			
2019	135.4%	(Share of Total Jobs) =6.3%	
2024	168.6%	Annual Change 7.6%	(24.5% vs 2019)
2025 Forecast	177.6%	Annual Change 5.3%	(31.2% vs 2019)
2035 Forecast	227.3	New Jobs (2025–2035) 49.7 (000s)	

OMAN

Total Travel & Tourism GDP Contribution			
2019	7.8%	OMR 3.0 BN	(US\$ 7.8 BN)
2024	7.7%	OMR 3.3 BN	Annual Change 6.7% (8.4% vs 2019) Economy Change YoY @1.9%
2025 Forecast	8.1%	OMR 3.5 BN	Annual Change 7.6% (16.6% vs 2019)
2035 Forecast	9.7%	OMR 5.2 BN	Annual Change 4.1% (CAGR 2025–2035) 4.1% (Economy CAGR 2025–2035) 2.2%

Total Travel & Tourism Jobs Contribution			
2019	191.3	(Share of Total Jobs) =8.9%	
2024	212.7	Annual Change 3.7%	(11.2% vs 2019)
2025 Forecast	224.6	Annual Change 5.6%	(17.4% vs 2019)
2035 Forecast	277.7	New Jobs (2025–2035) 53.0 (000s)	

QATAR

Total Travel & Tourism GDP Contribution			
2019	10.3% (of Total Economy)	QAR 77.2 BN (US\$ 21.2 BN)	
2024	15.1% QAR 121.1 BN (US\$ 33.3 BN)	Annual Change 12.4% (56.8% vs 2019) Economy Change YoY @3.1%	
2025 Forecast	15.0% QAR 124.2 BN US\$ 24.1 BN	Annual Change 2.5% (60.8% vs 2019)	
2035 Forecast	15.5% QAR 166.6 BN (US\$ 45.8 BN)	(CAGR 2025–2035) 3.0% (Economy CAGR 2025–2035) 2.6%	

Total Travel & Tourism Jobs Contribution			
2019	268.4 (000s)	(Share of Total Jobs) =12.8%	
2024	320.4 (000s) =14.4%	Annual Change 5.3% (19.4% vs 2019)	
2025 Forecast	350.7 (000s) =15.7%	Annual Change 9.4% (30.6% vs 2019)	
2035 Forecast	487.4 (000s) =20.8%	New Jobs (2025–2035) 136.7 (000s)	

SAUDI ARABIA

Total Travel & Tourism GDP Contribution			
2019	9.6% (of Total Economy)	SAR 355.7 BN (US\$ 94.9 BN)	
2024	9.9% SAR 403.1 BN (US\$ 107.5 BN)	Annual Change 7.0% (13.3% vs 2019) Economy Change YoY =14%	
2025 Forecast	10.6% SAR 447.2 BN US\$ 119.3 BN	Annual Change 10.9% (25.7% vs 2019)	
2035 Forecast	13.7% SAR 761.5 BN (US\$ 203.1BN)	(CAGR 2025–2035) 5.5% (Economy CAGR 2025–2035) 2.7%	

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Total Travel & Tourism GDP Contribution			
2019	11.8% (of Total Economy)	AED 204.2 BN (US\$ 55.6 BN)	
2024	13.0% AED 257.3 BN (US\$ 70.1 BN)	Annual Change 3.2% (26.0% vs 2019) Economy Change YoY @3.8%	
2025 Forecast	12.9% AED 267.5 BN US\$ 72.8 BN	Annual Change 4.0% (31.0% vs 2019)	
2035 Forecast	10.4% AED 287.8 BN (US\$ 78.4 BN)	(CAGR 2025–2035) 0.7% (Economy CAGR 2025–2035) 2.9%	

Total Travel & Tourism Jobs Contribution			
2019	760.3 (000s)	(Share of Total Jobs) =12.0%	
2024	898.6 (000s) =13.2%	Annual Change 2.0% (18.2% vs 2019)	
2025 Forecast	925.0 (000s) =13.2%	Annual Change 2.9% (21.7% vs 2019)	
2035 Forecast	1.0 MN (000s) =12.9%	New Jobs (2025–2035) 122.0 (000s)	

Total Travel & Tourism Jobs Contribution			
2019	2.0 MN	(Share of Total Jobs) =15.7%	
2024	2.6 MN =15.1%	Annual Change 5.7% (25.8% vs 2019)	
2025 Forecast	2.7 MN =15.0%	Annual Change 5.0% (32.0% vs 2019)	
2035 Forecast	3.6 MN =17.3%	New Jobs (2025–2035) 0.90 MN	



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SHARJAH UNVEILED

Eco-Tourism, Adventure, and Family Experiences at WTM 2025

Sharjah, the cultural capital of the UAE, is taking centre stage at the World Travel Market (WTM) 2025, showcasing its growing reputation as a premier destination for eco-tourism, adventure, and family-friendly experiences, highlighting the emirate's unique offerings that blend nature, heritage, and modernity, creating unforgettable experiences for travellers of all ages.



TT Bureau

As the world increasingly seeks sustainable and meaningful travel experiences, Sharjah stands out with its commitment to preserving its natural landscapes, eco-friendly tourism destinations, and offering activities that connect visitors with the emirate's rich heritage and biodiversity. From pristine deserts and mangroves to adrenaline-pumping adventures and family-friendly attractions, Sharjah is redefining tourism in the region.

A Journey into Nature's Heart

Sharjah's diverse eco-systems make it a haven for eco-tourism enthusiasts. The emirate is home to an array of protected areas and reserves that showcase its commitment to sustainability and conservation. Visitors can immerse themselves in

Sharjah's natural beauty while learning about the region's unique flora and fauna.

One of the highlights is the **Wasit Wetland Centre**, 4.5 sq km of salt plains on the outskirts of Sharjah. Home to over 200 species of migratory birds, it is a paradise for birdwatchers and nature lovers. Visitors can explore the wetlands through designated walking trails or enjoy a guided tour to learn about the importance of preserving these delicate ecosystems.

For those seeking a more immersive experience, the **Mleiha Archaeological Centre** combines eco-tourism with history. Located in the heart of the desert, Mleiha offers guided tours that take visitors through ancient archaeological sites, fossil dunes, and breathtaking desert landscapes. Guests can enjoy stargazing experiences under the clear desert skies, connecting with nature in a truly unique way.

Another must-visit eco-tourism destination is

For those seeking a more immersive experience, the Mleiha Archaeological Centre combines eco-tourism with history

the **Al Faya Palaeolandscape**, a site that was recently included in UNESCO's World Heritage List as one of the oldest and most continuous records of early human presence in arid desert environments. Spanning more than 200,000 years, Al Faya offers a fascinating glimpse into Sharjah's prehistoric past. This area is home to fossilised remains, ancient geological formations, and archaeological discoveries that date back thousands of years. Visitors can explore the palaeolandscape on guided tours that reveal the story of Sharjah's ancient environment and its transformation over millennia. The site also provides opportunities for

hiking and photography, allowing travellers to connect with the natural beauty and history of the region.

Sharjah's **Kalba Mangroves Reserve** is another gem for eco-tourism enthusiasts. This coastal ecosystem is home to rare species such as the Arabian collared kingfisher and provides opportunities for kayaking, paddleboarding, and guided eco-tours. The reserve's commitment to sustainable tourism ensures that visitors can enjoy its beauty while preserving it for future generations.

Thrills in the Great Outdoors

For adventure seekers, Sharjah offers a variety

of activities that cater to all levels of thrill and excitement. The emirate's rugged landscapes, from its towering mountains to its expansive deserts, provide the perfect backdrop for outdoor adventures.

The **Al Rabi Hiking Trail**, overlooking the coastal town of Khorfakkan, is a hotspot for hiking, rock climbing, and mountain biking. Adventurers can explore trails that wind through dramatic can-

KEY FEATURES

- ❖ Preserving natural landscapes
- ❖ Eco-friendly tourism destinations
- ❖ Activities that connect with the emirate's rich heritage





Sharjah Safari

yons and wadis, offering breathtaking views of the surrounding landscapes. Al Rabi tower and its trail provide a stunning view of what the city has to offer along the bay below.

The **Al Badayer Desert**, recognised as the ultimate adventure hub, is a favourite destination for desert enthusiasts. Visitors can experience the thrill of dune bashing in 4x4 vehicles, sandboarding down towering dunes, or enjoying a camel ride to soak in the beauty of the desert. Al Badayer retreat, a luxury desert resort, offers a blend of adventure and relaxation, making it an ideal spot for those who want to experience the desert in comfort.

Water sports enthusiasts will find plenty to do along Sharjah’s coastline. The emirate’s crystal-clear waters are perfect for activities such as snorkelling, scuba diving, and jet skiing. **Khorfakkan Beach**, located on the eastern coast, is a popular destination for water-based adventures, offering a mix of excitement and relaxation.

Family-Friendly Fun: Creating Memories Together
Sharjah is a family-friendly destination that offers a wide range of attractions and activities designed to entertain and educate visitors of all ages. Families can explore interactive museums, wildlife parks, and cultural landmarks that provide both fun and learning opportunities.



Meiha



Hiking - Wadi Shees

For a mix of education and entertainment, the Sharjah Science Museum and Sharjah Aquarium are perfect choices

Sharjah Safari, the largest safari park outside of Africa, is a must-visit for families. Spanning over 8 sq km, the park is home to more than 120 species of animals, including the iconic African lion and giraffe. Visitors can embark on guided safari tours that take them through different ecosystems, offering a chance to see wildlife up close in a naturalistic setting.

For a mix of education and entertainment, the **Sharjah Science Museum and Sharjah Aquarium**

ium are perfect choices. The Science Museum offers hands-on exhibits and interactive displays that engage young minds, while the Aquarium provides a glimpse into the underwater world of the Arabian Gulf, featuring over 150 species of marine life.

The **Heart of Sharjah** is another family-friendly destination that combines culture and history. Families can wander through the beautifully restored heritage area, explore traditional souks, and participate in workshops that



Sharjah Tourism



Hanging Gardens



Khorfakkan Beach



AlHefaiyah Mountain

showcase Emirati crafts and traditions.

A Vision for Sustainable Tourism
At WTM 2025, SCTDA is showcasing Sharjah’s

dedication to sustainable tourism, highlighting its efforts to provide unique experiences that honour cultural heritage and appeal to a wide range of travellers. With a focus

on eco-tourism, thrilling adventures, and attractions designed for families, the emirate stands out as a unique destination with offerings for all types of visitors. 🏝️

Women rewriting the book on tourism

At the WTTC Global Summit, a quiet revolution unfolded on stage. Three women spoke not just of policies and partnerships, but of purpose. The conversation was about power, balance, and the shared belief that the world's most human industry must now be shaped by empathy, collaboration, and inclusive leadership.

TT Bureau

Gloria Guevara, Interim CEO, World Travel & Tourism Council, known for her sharp understanding of public-private dynamics, opened talks with the words "We need to work together," setting the tone for a session that was more determination, less diplomacy; a clear signal that tourism's next chapter will be written by women who understand both policy and people.

For **Sheikha Al Nowais**, Secretary-General-elect, UN Tourism, this partnership is structural. "The private sector is very important to UN Tourism. I want to focus on the 500 organisations that represent the private sector. My goal is to stay close, listen, and act on their feedback."

That statement marks a significant shift in tone. Al Nowais is positioning UN Tourism as a bridge — an ally to entrepre-



(L-R): Gloria Guevara, Daniela Santanchè & Sheikha Al Nowais

neurs, destinations, and digital innovators alike. Her focus on inclusion and community upliftment reflects a generational change in how leadership is defined.

She drew on her recent Argentina visit to illustrate how small interventions can transform rural economies. "The 'Best Tourism Villages' initiative shows how cer-

tification can uplift communities. If we can work with online platforms to increase international arrivals to these villages, we create sustainable growth." Her message was clear; real impact begins when global recognition translates into local empowerment.

Guevara reinforced that point, recalling Mexico's pioneering 'Magical

Towns' programme. "Empowering communities to control their own destiny is how you make tourism sustainable." It was a nod to the grassroots energy now redefining global tourism, where women in leadership are building systems that balance economics with empathy.

Daniela Santanchè, Minister of Tourism, Italy, joined with a perspective rooted in national experience. "What the public sector cannot do, the private sector can, and vice versa." She also pushed for stronger financial support within the EU.

The discussion ended where it began; with

data, action, and accountability. Santanchè called for a "data lake" for tourism. Al Nowais emphasised the private sector's real-time insights. Guevara concluded with the words, "Together, we can take the sector to the next level."

Women leaders are no longer just participating in global tourism — they're defining it. They're insisting that collaboration, not competition, is the engine for growth. And as more women step into positions of influence, they're proving that travel, at its heart, is not only about moving people across borders but about moving the world forward. ▶

The grassroots energy redefining global tourism where women leaders are building systems that balance economics with empathy

Leading with purpose, not profit

At the WTTC Global Summit, Marriott International's President and CEO, **Anthony Capuano**, shared a rare inside look at what drives one of the world's most powerful hotel brands. His reflections were not about numbers or growth charts, but about people, purpose, and the timeless dignity of service that keeps Marriott's spirit alive across continents.

TT Bureau

Anthony Capuano's rise to the top of Marriott International marks just the fourth leadership handover in the company's 98-year history; mirroring its enduring belief that great hospitality begins with heart. Speaking with the composure of a man who has seen his share of crises and recoveries, Capuano traced Marriott's legacy back to its roots.

"For our first 30 years, we were a food and beverage company. The core values established by our founders have been the guiding principle." It is a founda-



Anthony Capuano
President and CEO
Marriott International

tion that still shapes how Marriott treats its people, partners, and guests. "Bill Marriott, after 93 years, says he's most proud of the opportunities we've created for people and their families." That ethos of putting people first has

been Marriott's compass through every disruption — from recessions to the pandemic. "Our true north has always been our people. When asked how one leads an empire of 9,600 hotels across 143 countries, he smiled, "Don't sleep, and drink a lot of sugar-free Red Bull." Then, turning serious, he revealed the real secret: empowerment. "We give our teams the tools and training, and

then we get out of the way." It's a lesson in leadership that many in the travel industry would recognise: trust breeds excellence far better than control ever can.

On the subject of luxury, Capuano had this to say, "The highest income consumer continues to prioritise travel and spend meaningfully on experiences." Marriott's expansion into ultra-luxury

— from Bulgari Hotels to The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection — reflects this mindset. "If we don't offer those experiences, we're sending our travellers into the warm, welcoming arms of our peers."

Central to Marriott's evolution is its loyalty programme, Bonvoy, now home to over 250 million members. Today, Bonvoy is more about offering members access to moments that forge genuine connection. "Recognition and personalisation are the true currencies of loyalty."

The most stirring moment came when Capuano spoke about service. Re-

calling his time in Italy, he described the quiet pride of a waiter who has spent 30 years at Harry's Bar in Venice. "There's such recognition of the dignity of careers in the service of others," he said. That, for Capuano, is the soul of hospitality — pride in serving, in creating joy, in treating every interaction as an act of care.

Growth may define success. But purpose defines hospitality. As Capuano reminded, this industry isn't built on buildings or brands — it's built on people. Because at its best, hospitality isn't just a business. It's an act of humanity. ▶

The real secret is empowerment. We give our continental teams the tools and training, and then we get out of the way

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Oman making room for more ME guests

According to Cavendish Maxwell, a leading real estate advisory group and property consultant, Oman is set to open 9,600 new hotel rooms by 2030, of which 2,600 are scheduled for completion by the end of 2025. With visitors from the Gulf region increasing every year, this 25 per cent increase in accommodation looks poised to meet the rising demand from customers.

TT Bureau

Cavendish Maxwell's latest Oman Hospitality Market Performance insight and analysis reveals that 3 to 5-star hotel revenues rose to OMR141.2 million (US\$ 367 million) in the first half of 2025, an increase

The strong hotel performance has led to 4.8 per cent growth in hospitality sector employment in the country, with 10,800 people now working in the industry. 3 to 5-star hotels welcomed 1.1 million guests between January and June, up 9.2 per cent from 2024.



Khalil Al Zadjali
Head of Oman
Cavendish Maxwell

Oman's hospitality sector is entering a new era, driven by population growth, evolving travel patterns, and govt investment

of 18.2 per cent over the same period last year. Room revenues contributed OMR83.7 million (US\$ 217.5 million) — up nearly 22 per cent.

Khalil Al Zadjali, Head of Oman at Cavendish Maxwell, said, "Oman's hospitality sector is entering a new era, driven by population growth, evolving

travel patterns, and strategic government investment. H1 2025 recorded impressive increases in visitors, hotel bookings, revenues, room rates, and employment, and we expect this trend to continue in the second half of the year, and beyond."



Oman's population grew by 4.5 per cent last year and 5 per cent in 2023, with similar increases predicted through the decade. Domestic travel has risen in line with population growth, with Omanis taking longer trips and spending more per visit. While Gulf visitors still account for more

than 25 per cent of arrivals into the country, the number of visitors from further afield, including Europe, India, and China, is increasing.

"With tourism expected to contribute 5 per cent to GDP by 2030 — and 10 per cent by 2040 — the sector is set to overtake

transport and logistics to become the second most important industry in Oman after hydrocarbons. To keep pace, Oman needs to continue to rejuvenate the hotel sector, build new hotels and resorts, and diversify tourism beyond Muscat, creating significant opportunities," he added.

ME's first polar expedition forum

Keeping in view the Middle East travellers' interest for unique and personalised experiences in cruising in the past few years, Cruise Master hosted the region's first dedicated trade event for expedition cruise travel. 'Polar Expedition' brought together selected travel trade partners from the UAE to find out the finer details of such unique cruises for their discerning clientele.

TT Bureau

The invitation-only forum brought together leading global expedition brands and the Middle East's key travel advisors. The programme featured immersive product presentations, targeted networking opportunities, and one-to-one business meetings, giving travel advisors unparalleled insights into selling and promoting polar voyages.

Ashok Kumar, Founder and Managing Director, Cruise Master, said: "Interest in polar exploration is gaining remarkable momentum, driven by trav-



Ashok Kumar
Founder and Managing Director
Cruise Master

ellers seeking not just a vacation, but a truly transformative experience. These journeys are not just about reaching the ends of the Earth, they are about discovery, sustainability, and memories."

Participating expedition companies included 66° Expeditions, Albatros Expeditions (soon to re-brand as Polar Latitude Expeditions), Celebrity Cruises, Oceanwide Expeditions, Silversea, and Swan Hellenic. Each showcased their latest itineraries, ships, and sales strategies tailored to the Middle East market.

An engaging panel discussion, "Charting New Waters: Your Gateway to the Polar Expedition Market", shed light on shifting traveller demographics, such as the rise of solo explorers alongside the traditional empty-nester couples



Polar exploration is gaining momentum, driven by travellers seeking not just a vacation, but a truly transformative experience

aged 50-plus, as well as the one-of-a-kind adventures only polar

voyages can deliver. "Both the North Pole and the South Pole

are destinations unlike any other — remote, pristine, and awe-inspiring. We believe that together we can bring the wonder of the Poles not only to adventure seekers, but also to families and curious travellers of every kind," added Kumar.



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Unravelling the charm of George Town

Established in 1786 by Captain Francis Light of the British East India Company, George Town in Penang, Malaysia, quickly became a thriving trading city. Its prominent position drew traders from all over the world, resulting in a diverse tapestry of cultures and traditions. George Town evolved over the years into a dynamic fusion of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and European influences.

TT Bureau

The city, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008, is a living museum of colonial architecture, temples, as well as mosques, with each structure telling a story about its illustrious history. Today, George Town is not merely a memorial to its rich past, but also a thriving, cosmopolitan neighbourhood. To fully immerse oneself in its charm, here are eight must-see destinations that combine the city's distinct attractiveness with its historical grandeur.

Pinang Peranakan Mansion

The Pinang Peranakan Mansion is a captivating museum dedicated to Pinang's Peranakan,

magnificent courtyard mansion. This mansion blends Peranakan with British colonial architecture, featuring intricately carved wooden panels, English floor tiles, Glasgow marble pillars, Scottish ironworks plus a mix of Chinese as well as European furnishings.

Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion

Erected in 1904, Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion (The Blue Mansion) — which was the former private residence, as well as commercial headquarters of the famed businessman Cheong Fatt Tze — displays his combined interests in Western workmanship and Chinese officialdom. Today, it is a quaint boutique hotel, with 18 meticulously renovated suites embellished with Cheong family artefacts.



Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion (Credit: Penang Global Tourism)

integral to the cultural fabric of George Town, were pivotal as entry points for Chinese immigrants during the city's heyday as a bustling entrepot. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008, the Clan Jetties today showcase a glimpse into local Chinese clan life.

Fort Cornwallis

Another significant landmark is Fort Cornwallis and its characteristic star-shaped form, which is a place of importance marking where Captain Francis Light and his crew from the British East India Company made a landing in Penang on 11 August 1786. This historic occasion represented the assertion of British rule over Penang Island, which was wrest-



Kapitan Keling Mosque

ed from the Sultan of Kedah — a massive event that has now spanned 238 years in history. The fort, named for Charles Marquis Cornwallis, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Malaysia's largest standing fort with notable features including the Sir Francis Light monument, an 1814 gunpowder room, and the renowned Seri Rambai Cannon, Malaysia's largest bronze cannon.

Little India

In the heart of George Town you will find Little India, pulsing with the vibrant legacy of Indian culture brought to the island during the 19th century under British colonial rule. Amid the lively atmosphere, visitors can immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of Indian festivals, such as

Deepavali, Thaipusam, and Navaratri, which are celebrated with fervour.

Kapitan Keling Mosque

Just a short distance from Little India is the Kapitan Keling Mosque, a historic edifice. Built in 1801 by Indian Muslim traders in George Town, the mosque stands majestically at the intersection of Buckingham Street and Pitt Street. Founded by Cauder Mohuddeen Merican, also known as Kapitan Kling, this mosque serves as the heart of the Tamil Muslim community with its architectural grandeur, blending Islamic, Mughal, and Moorish styles.

Chowrasta Market

For a lively market experience, head to the Chow-

rastra Market. Established in 1890 within the South Indian immigrant colony, the market takes its name from the Urdu phrase for 'four crossroads'. Today, it is Penang's largest and greenest market, including both wet and dry portions.

Hin Bus Depot

Hin Bus Depot, a thriving creative community hub in George Town, houses a diverse range of merchants, including food and beverage outlets, art and craft studios, galleries plus various event spaces. Originally a functional bus station built in 1947 by Hin Company Ltd, it ceased operations in the 2000s until it was revitalised by local artists in January 2014 as part of Ernest Zacharevic's 'Art is Rubbish is Art' exhibition. ▶

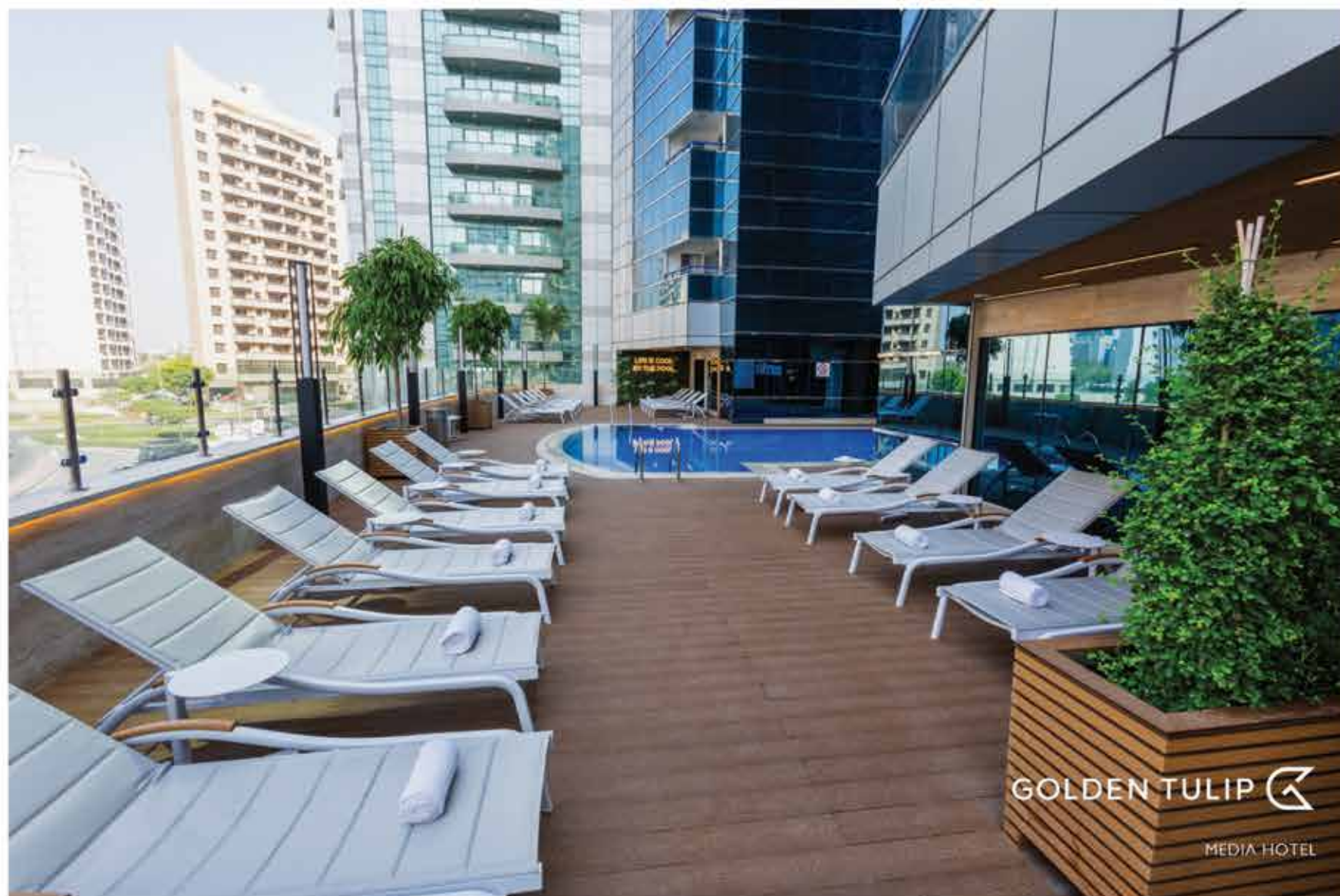
also known as Baba Nyonya, or the Straits Chinese heritage, who predominantly lived in the Straits Settlements during the 19th century. The museum houses thousands of exquisite Peranakan antiques and collectables within a

Clan Jetties

The Clan Jetties of George Town offer a glimpse into the city's maritime heritage. Built on stilts overlooking the sea, these jetties were established in the 1880s by early stevedores and fisherfolk. These jetties,



In The Beginning by Fong Sheeny, Hin Bus Depot



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AI, residences priorities for Radisson

Amid the unprecedented growth in the global hospitality sector, **Federico J González**, CEO, Radisson Hotel Group, says the next chapter of development will be about expanding its branded residences, wellness resorts, and AI-enabled efficiencies, with a focus on sustainability, which is not just a buzzword but a business philosophy.

TT Bureau

As the global travel and tourism sector surges ahead, Radisson Hotel Group is keeping its focus firmly on India. The company, which now operates over 1,500 hotels worldwide, continues to expand aggressively signing more than 300 new properties last year and 106 in just the first six months of this year. For **Federico J González**, Chief Executive Officer, Radisson



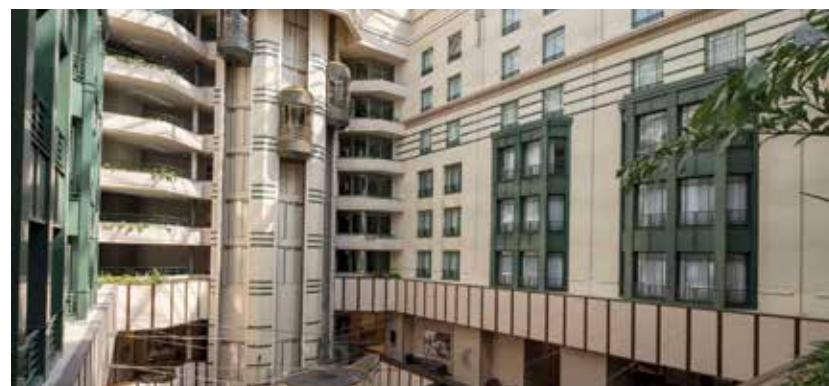
Federico J González
CEO
Radisson Hotel Group

Hotel Group and Board Director of Louvre Ho-

tels Group, this growth is not about speed, but substance. "The business is healthy, and our five-year roadmap is progressing exactly as planned," he said. "Markets like the Middle East, Spain, and Italy are performing well but India is where we see some of our strongest, most promising momentum."

Sustainability with purpose

González is equally passionate about sustainability not as a buzzword but as a business philosophy. "Our focus is built on three pillars: individuals, communities, and the environment. You can't claim to be sustainable if your own



people aren't growing," he explained.

Radisson is one of the first few hotel companies that introduced carbon-neutral meetings 15 years ago, and today it leads the Hotel Sustainability Basics initiative with the WTTC. The group's first Net Zero

pilot hotels, in Oslo and Manchester, are already operational. "We are measuring the actual returns on sustainable investments," he said. "We want to prove that being responsible is not only right but profitable."

Looking ahead

Radisson's next chapter

will focus on expanding its branded residences, wellness resorts, and AI-enabled efficiencies, blending human warmth with digital intelligence. "AI should help us do what we already do better," González said. "But hospitality will always be about people, not programmes."

One of the first hotels to introduce carbon-neutral meetings, today it leads the Hotel Sustainability Basics initiative with the WTTC

HSMIA's buzzword: Tech personalisation

The HSMIA Commercial Strategy Conference MEA 2025 takes place in Dubai on 25–26 November with **TRAVELTALK** as media partner. The conference covers no less than 56 topics, including unified commercial strategy, AI & automation in hospitality, modern marketing & storytelling, and data & personalisation. **Mona Faraj**, President, HSMIA ME & Africa, shares details.

TT Bureau

What are the new sessions at the conference this year?

The 2025 conference features a strong line-up of speakers and an extensive range of formats, including plenary sessions, lightning rounds, panel discussions, leadership hubs, interactive forums, trends & insights sessions, as well as the ROCKSTAR awards, networking lunches, and receptions. This year, for the first time, we are introducing inspirational and motivational speakers, such as **Nick Santonastasso**, Champion of Resilience; **Maha**



Mona Faraj
President, HSMIA
Middle East & Africa

Abouelenein, bestselling author and Founder & CEO of Digital and Savvy, and **Mimi Nicklin**, the Empathy Advocate. New to the programme is also a live podcast on stage with **Luca Allam**, Communication Coach and creator of

HSMIA MEA is equipping hospitality leaders with the tools, knowledge, and networks to thrive in an era of rapid change

the podcast Luca's Inside Track, in conversation with **Aida Al Busaidy**, Associate Vice President of Consumer Advocacy, DTCM. AI will feature prominently on the agenda, focused on the latest learnings and perspectives. In addition, we will have two Research in Motion sessions that will include an automation study by h2c and research by RateGain and HEDNA on the state of distribution in the sector.

How is HSMIA MEA helping hospitality leaders in the region to adapt to fast-changing guest expectations, especially with the rise of AI, sustainability, and digital first approach? HSMIA MEA is equipping hospitality leaders with the tools, knowledge, and networks to thrive in an era of rapid change. Through our conferences, advisory boards, and educational

initiatives, we spotlight how AI, sustainability, and digital-first strategies are transforming guest expectations. By bringing together global experts and regional innovators, we translate these trends into practical, actionable insights — empowering hoteliers to anticipate shifts, personalise experiences, and build commercially sustainable businesses for the future.

Message for the year?

At HSMIA Middle East & Africa, our purpose has always been clear — to support our industry, region, and commercial community in staying relevant, recent, and con-

nected. We exist to facilitate open conversations among peers at every level because we believe education today extends far beyond classrooms. It thrives through shared experiences — and we are committed to creating more of these opportunities across our region.





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MSC Cruises all set for winter sailing

MSC Cruises brings luxury back to the Arabian Gulf with the return of its award-winning ship, MSC Euribia, to Dubai for the winter season. From 8 November 2025 to 1 April 2026, the ship will offer travellers a mix of cultural discovery, modern luxury, and family-friendly experiences. Guests can choose from short mini-cruises or full seven-night voyages.

TT Bureau

The cruises explore some of the Gulf's most iconic destinations, from Abu Dhabi's futuristic skyline and wildlife-rich Sir Bani Yas Island to Doha's blend of tradition and modernity, Manama's historic souks,

four-night mini cruises or enjoy the full seven-night Arabian Gulf voyages, allowing them to explore at their own pace.

A highlight of the experience is the MSC Yacht Club, MSC Cruises' signature ship-within-a-ship concept. Guests booking

A highlight of the experience is the MSC Yacht Club, MSC Cruises' signature ship-within-a-ship concept

and Muscat's dramatic landscapes and forts. Travellers can choose from short three and

this exclusive package enjoy spacious suites, 24-hour personalised butler and concierge service,



private lounges, and exclusive sun decks and pools, all while having full access to the ship's entertainment, dining, and activities.

Angelo Capurro, Executive Director, MSC Cruises, said, "The MSC Yacht Club is one of our most highly regarded

products, loved by guests for its outstanding service, elegant spaces, and exclusive facilities."

MSC Euribia, the second LNG-powered ship in MSC Cruises' fleet, combines state-of-the-art technology with visionary

design. Onboard, guests can enjoy 10 dining venues, including speciality restaurants such as Le Grill and Kaito Sushi & Robotayaki, alongside 21 bars and lounges. Entertainment is centred around the Delphi Theatre, offering nightly live

performances, while five pools and the Ocean Cay AquaPark, featuring three water slides, promise endless fun.

AT A GLANCE

- ❖ Season runs from 8 November 2025 to 1 April 2026
- ❖ Roundtrip departures from Dubai
- ❖ Cruise options include 3-night, 4-night mini cruises or 7-night Arabian Gulf voyages

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ME to get ‘Tourism Law Observatory’

The World Tourism Organisation is set to establish a Tourism Law Observatory for the Middle East. This initiative will support the development and harmonisation of legal and regulatory frameworks for tourism across the region. It aligns with the broader mandate of UN Tourism’s Tourism Law Observatories, a flagship initiative endorsed by the 25th General Assembly.

 TT Bureau

The Tourism Law Observatory for the Middle East will serve as a knowledge hub and digital platform that systematically collects, organises, analyses, updates, and

academic collaborators. It will also issue publications, recommendations, and organise conferences and seminars on topics of special interest. These observatories represent a long-term, large-scale initiative led by UN



Development reflects UN Tourism’s commitment to support Member States of the Middle East in addressing key challenges

disseminates tourism-related laws and regulations in the region, with the support of a network of individual experts and

Tourism to be developed across its five different regions, with a view to fostering the progressive harmonisation of Tour-

ism Law at the international level, thus enhancing legal security and benefitting all tourism operators. As the first of its kind in the region, the Tourism Law Observatory represents a milestone for UN Tourism, reflecting its commitment to support Member States of the Middle East in addressing key challenges

and complexities of tourism legislation.

Key objectives
Development and Improvement of Legal Frameworks: To optimise legal frameworks applicable to tourism, encouraging progressive regulatory harmonisation in areas requiring supra-national intervention.

Fostering Regional Regulatory Cooperation: To foster effective communication among all tourism stakeholders, by providing a platform for regional dialogue and allowing countries to share experiences, learn from each other, and address common challenges.

Optimisation of Governance Models: To optimise governance models of the tourism sector, by promoting the active participation of various stakeholders throughout the regulatory process.

Regional Milestone
Following the successful launch of the first Tourism

Law Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) — a collaborative effort with the Inter-American Development Bank and currently operating in the UN Tourism’s Thematic Office hosted in Montevideo, Uruguay — UN Tourism is now advancing similar efforts in the Middle East.





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ARABIAN TRAVEL AWARDS

Oman showcases MICE opportunities

Strengthening its presence in Asia's thriving business events market, Oman showcases its tourism and MICE potential at ITB Asia in Singapore. Oman aims to position itself as a destination that blends modern infra with authentic Arabian culture. **Ibrahim Nasser Al Mahrouqi**, Senior Tourism Promotion Specialist, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman, shares details.

Dr Shehara Fernando

Oman's participation at ITB Asia in Singapore highlighted its ambition to capture a share of the expanding global MICE segment, particularly from Asian companies seeking new and culturally rich destinations for meetings and corporate gatherings. With Singapore recognised as one of the world's most active business hubs, Oman sees significant opportunity to attract investment, host events, and showcase its evolving tourism landscape to global audiences.

Ibrahim Nasser Al Mahrouqi, Senior Tourism Promotion Specialist, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman, said,



Ibrahim Nasser Al Mahrouqi
Senior Tourism Promotion
Specialist, Ministry of
Heritage and Tourism, Oman

"The demand for business meetings and corporate gatherings continues to grow globally — and Oman is well positioned to serve this market with its modern facilities, world-class connectivity, and deep-rooted Arabian hospitality. We are here to explore partnerships and encourage companies to experience Oman's potential as both a leisure and business destination."

Al Mahrouqi emphasised that Oman's tourism strategy has evolved in line with global trends. "We are moving from being a purely leisure-based destination to one that embraces MICE, cruise, adventure, and cultural tourism. This diversification is key to achieving our Vision 2040 goals," he added.

Major urban developments reflect this for-



ward-looking approach. Under the leadership of Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Oman has launched four major sustainable city projects, including the new Haitham City in Muscat — a modern urban centre designed to blend culture, sustainability, and innovation. The landmark AIDA development, a US\$ 2 billion investment, will further elevate Oman's hospitality sector with luxury villas, apartments, hotels, and retail experiences.

Infrastructure enhancements are also driving tourism growth. In Musandam, a new circular road and expanded airport will enhance regional access, while Oman's cruise sector continues to flourish, connecting Muscat, Khasab, and Salalah with leading Gulf and international cruise lines. The upcoming unified GCC visa will further simplify regional



travel, boosting multi-country itineraries for both leisure and business travellers.

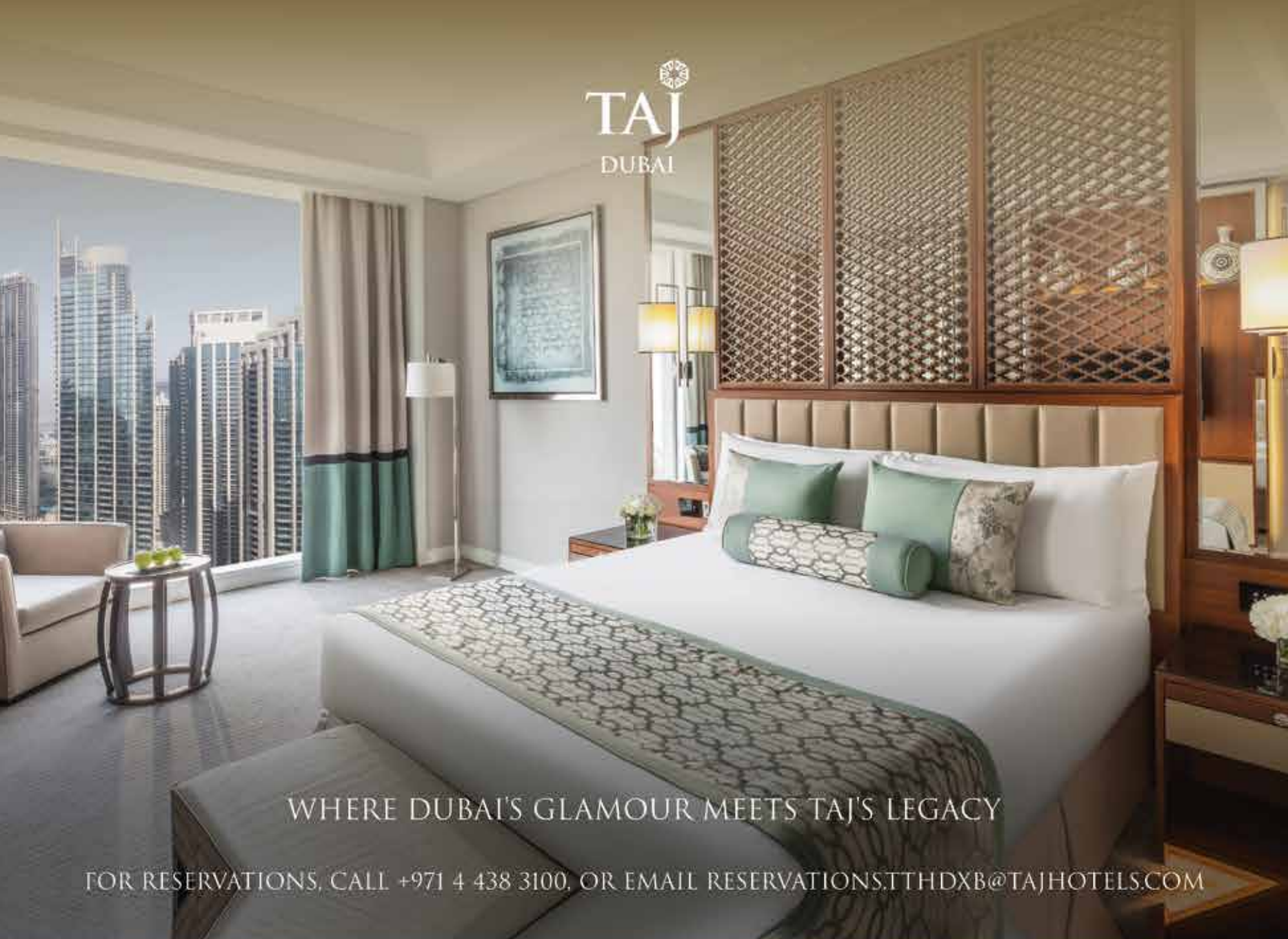
Oman's focus on sustainability and authentic experiences remains central. "We want visitors to see the real Oman — its culture, people, and natural beauty," Al Mahrouqi noted. "Our development philosophy ensures that as we grow, we protect our environment and

Oman is well positioned to serve this market with its modern facilities, world-class connectivity, and Arabian hospitality

preserve our identity." At ITB Asia, Oman secured new partnerships with leading Asian travel and MICE operators, paving the way for greater connectivity and inbound opportunities in 2026. With

expanding infrastructure, strategic vision, and global collaboration, Oman is poised to emerge as a preferred destination for sustainable business, leisure, and cultural tourism in the Gulf. 🇦🇴





A luxurious hotel room in Dubai featuring a large bed with white linens and green and patterned pillows. A patterned runner is at the foot of the bed. To the left, a seating area with a beige sofa and a small round table is visible. Large windows offer a panoramic view of the Dubai skyline. The room is decorated with a framed artwork and a floor lamp. The headboard area features a wooden lattice screen.

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A modern hotel room in Dubai with a large bed and white linens, accented with yellow and patterned pillows. A large abstract painting is on the wall above the bed. To the left, a seating area with a brown sofa and a glass coffee table is visible. Large windows provide a view of the Dubai skyline. The room features a wooden headboard and a wall-mounted lamp.

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Dubai gets a taste of Malaysia

Tourism Malaysia recently hosted a vibrant Malaysia Food and Culture Promotion at Shangri-La Dubai, bringing together top partners for an immersive cultural evening. Guests savoured authentic Malaysian dishes, such as Laksa Penang, Beef Rendang, Mee Goreng Mamak, and Chicken Satay, highlighting the country's diverse culinary heritage.



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Green Key for Two Seasons

Two Seasons Hotel & Apartments has achieved the Green Key certification, highlighting the hotel's commitment to sustainable operations and environmental stewardship. Green Key is instrumental in verifying the hotel's environmental performance, focusing on its sustainable practices, environmental awareness among stakeholders, and efforts to reduce utility consumption.

TT Bureau

Two Seasons Hotel & Apartments adheres to a sustainability policy and action plan that guides its activities annually. In addition, a monthly meeting with the sustainability committee ensures that objectives and activities remain on track and up-to-date.

Relevant information about sustainability is shared with guests through various channels, including social media, the hotel's website, pre-stay emails, check-in interactions, elevator screens, and

guestroom TVs. The hotel also encourages guests to use green transportation and visit green areas.

Environmental facilities & activities

Among the hotel's environmental facilities are a water bottling station to reduce plastic bottle usage, a composting machine that transforms food waste into fertiliser, and an online system designed to reduce paper usage. As a corporate member of the Emirates Environmental Group, the hotel participates in environmental activities, including recycling, clean-up



Green Key is instrumental in verifying the hotel's environmental performance

efforts, and tree planting campaigns. The hotel actively contributes to the 'UAE's Zero Food Waste' goal by donating Ramadan food boxes to

the UAE Food Bank and Dar Al Ber Society. Signage in the restaurants reminds guests to take only the amount of food they can consume. Veg-

etarian options offered in the restaurants are locally sourced, and food is served in bite-sized portions and small containers to further minimise food waste. Guests who book for meetings and social events are given the option to host green events.

Guest feedback and recognition

The hotel encourages participation in sustainability activities and welcomes feedback and suggestions from guests and staff. Guest feedback is gathered from online reviews, including TripAdvisor, Google, and the post-stay survey.

AWARDS

- ❖ It earned sustainability recognition in 2023 Arabia CSR Awards – Hospitality category
- ❖ The 2024 Emirates Recycling Awards for the e-waste, glass, and mobile phone categories
- ❖ The 2020 Green Globe Gold, and 2025 TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice Awards

Advertorial

Fujairah's scenic coastal gem

Nestled between the pristine sands of Al Aqah Beach and the rugged Hajar Mountains, Royal M Hotel & Resort by Gewan Al Aqah Beach, Fujairah, offers a luxurious escape for families, couples, and leisure travellers alike. **Diana Kornilakis**, the General Manager, highlights the property as a combination of stunning views, private beachfront access, and world-class amenities.

Bureau

Can you give us an overview of the property?

The resort is located on Al Aqah Beach in Fujairah, offering a prime beachfront spot with the Hajar Mountains as a stunning backdrop. It's just a two-minute walk from Sandy Beach and about 500 metres from Al Aqah Public Beach. Fujairah city is roughly 53 km away, while Dubai is around 153 km, making it accessible for both local and international travellers.

Guests can expect a 5-star luxury experience, complete with private beach access, an infinity pool, outdoor pool, spa & well-



Diana Kornilakis
GM, Royal M Hotel & Resort by
Gewan Al Aqah Beach, Fujairah

ness centre, as well as a fully equipped fitness centre. Families are well catered for with a kids' club, children's pool, and playground. Dining options are diverse, with four themed restaurants (Asian, Italian, seafood, and all-day dining), two bars, a pool bar,



and a coffee shop. Rooms range from superior sea or mountain view rooms to suites and multi-bedroom villas with private pools, all offering Wi-Fi, air-conditioning, private bathrooms, and balconies.

The nearest major airport is Ras Al Khaimah International Airport, around 70 km away, with convenient access via car

transfers, private taxis, or airport shuttles.

What makes this property stand out?

The resort's charm lies in its combination of stunning coastal and mountain views, premium beachfront access, family-friendly facilities, high-end spa offerings, and diving experiences at Snoopy Island. It delivers

luxurious yet intimate accommodations that feel personal and exclusive rather than sprawling.

How important are travel agents and corporate bookers for Royal M Hotel & Resort?

Travel agents, tour operators, and corporate bookers are key to driving occupancy, especially for group

bookings, travel packages, and business events. They help leverage seasonal peaks and maintain steady revenue through long-term partnerships.

STANDOUT FEATURES

- ❖ Stunning coastal and mountain views
- ❖ Private beachfront access
- ❖ Family-friendly facilities and high-end spa
- ❖ Diving at Snoopy Island
- ❖ Luxurious yet intimate accommodations



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CruiseXplore hosts 80 trade partners

CruiseXplore Middle East hosted 80 travel trade professionals from the region at its Cruise Workshop 2025 in the UAE. The annual event showcased a diverse portfolio of cruise offerings — from premium ocean cruises and ultra-luxury voyages to culturally immersive expedition journeys and exciting regional cruise options — highlighting the breadth of cruise experiences.



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GCC tourism all about family travel

Travel patterns are changing, with families now choosing to travel together across generations. At ITB Asia 2025, travel trends across the GCC took the spotlight. In an interview with **Jarrod Kris**, Head of Destination Partnerships – APAC, Skyscanner, highlighted how travellers from Saudi Arabia and the UAE are shaping the next phase of experiential tourism.

TT Bureau

How do you see cross-generational travel shaping in GCC?

We have seen a sudden surge in cross-generational travel across the GCC. It's not just parents and children travelling together but it's also grandparents joining in. These trips are about making meaningful memories, especially

with people these days becoming more conscious about spending quality time with family.

When you are in your twenties or thirties, you often travel for yourself or your partner. But as families evolve, need to connect across generations becomes more important and that is what we are seeing across Saudi Arabia and other Asian markets.



Jarrod Kris
Head of Destination
Partnerships – APAC, Skyscanner

Which destinations are popular with GCC travellers?

Mountain escapes are becoming popular. Traditionally, destinations like Hokkaido in Japan or Sapporo were associated

with winter and ski seasons, but travellers are now discovering how different and beautiful these places can be in summer or spring.

We have also seen a shift in trending destinations. Shanghai recorded a 285 per cent increase in searches, followed by Da Nang in Vietnam with 260 per cent, showing that travellers are looking for destinations that combine culture and adventure.

Are there differences between travellers from GCC and APAC?

There are some. Family travel is slightly higher in the Middle East — about

38 per cent travel with their families and 46 per cent of Gen Z travellers have done trips with their parents.

However, when it comes to self-discovery travel, exploring local markets to immerse in local culture, the Middle East shows slightly lower engagement at around 34 per cent, compared to 73 per cent globally.

How influential is Gen Z in shaping decisions?

Gen Z and millennials definitely drive these trends. They have more disposable income and are willing to spend on unique experiences.

That said, when families travel together, it becomes a collective decision. In the Middle East, family-based travel remains dominant.

Do you see these trends continuing?

Yes, these will remain the leading trends for the next 12 months. The focus on family travel, adventure, and offbeat destinations will hold strong.

As new data comes in, we will have clearer insights, but for now, mountain escapes, cultural discovery, and multi-generational travel are defining what GCC travellers are looking for.

Shanghai recorded a 285 per cent increase in searches from Saudi travellers, followed by Da Nang in Vietnam with 260 per cent

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

EVENT TALK

The Magazine of the Travel Industry Founded in 1984

NOVEMBER 2025

Date	Event	Venue
3-5	Deluxe Travel Market Turkey	Antalya, Turkey
4-6	World Travel Market London	London, UK
5-6	IATA: World Financial Symposium (WFS) & World Passenger Symposium (WPS)	Istanbul, Turkey
6-9	The Luxury Travel Fair	Olympia London, UK
9-12	ICCA Congress	Porto, Portugal
9-12	Connections Luxury Americas	California, USA
11-13	Tourise	Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
11-14	DEMA Show	Orlando, Florida, USA
12-13	World Golf Awards Gala Ceremony	Madeira, Portugal
13-16	INTUR - International Tourism Fair	Feria de Valladolid, Spain
14-16	Philoxenia	Thessaloniki, Greece
16-18	BITAC Owners Fall	Florida, USA
17-19	Halal Trade Expo	Dubai, UAE
17-20	IAAPA Expo	Florida, USA
17-21	Dubai Airshow	Dubai, UAE
18-19	IATA Wings of Change Europe (WoCE)	Brussels, Belgium
18-20	IBTM World	Barcelona, Spain
25	Arabian Travel Awards	Embassy Suites by Hilton, Dubai

'80 per cent agents opt for NDC'

Asia is an important market for Oman, says **Ameer Al Balushi**, Sales Manager Muscat – Commercial Sales, Oman Air, in an interview with **EVENT TALK**. He reveals that 80–90 per cent agents are opting for NDC, as it gives them more flexibility and ability to generate revenue.

TT Bureau

Ameer Al Balushi, Sales Manager Muscat – Commercial Sales, Oman Air, said that ITB Asia has been “quite a good platform” for them to connect with the world. “We see many opportunities in this market. We are covering the Far East with daily flights with destinations such as Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Bangkok, Jakarta, and Manila.”

When asked about new routes, he shared that “it is something still on the cards” as Oman Air will study the important destinations that will help its customers. One of their latest additions is Amsterdam. Balushi said, “More destinations will be added,



Ameer Al Balushi
Sales Manager Muscat –
Commercial Sales, Oman Air

but it is a decision that will be announced once the study is complete.”

Travel agents are an integral part of the aviation industry as they provide many opportunities for customers to enjoy the benefits with the airlines and other partners. Balushi shared that partner-

ships are an important strategy as they look at expanding their services. For airlines, if the demand is high then there is an opportunity to probe into that particular destination.

NDC has been the way forward in the industry with many benefits to

more incentives to our customers,” he said.

When asked about the economy of routes, Balushi confirmed that this was a strategy, especially for their domestic routes, which has proved to be “quite good”. Their main focus is the re-

We (Oman Air) are covering the Far East with daily flights to destinations such as Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Bangkok, Jakarta, and Manila

the travel partners. Balushi said that they see a huge interest for NDC as 80–90 per cent agents already adhere to NDC, reaping benefits. “We are focusing more on NDC, so that we can offer

quirement of their customers. “Where there is a demand, we will serve the destination with what is required to ensure that the customers are content with their services,” he concluded.

UAE sales simplified for agents

Dubai-based Travel Assistance Tourism LLC is scaling up operations with stronger tech integration, a growing fleet, and multi-destination itineraries linking Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Ras Al Khaimah. **Ahmed Khan**, Founder and COO, Travel Assistance Tourism LLC, says the DMC’s goal is to empower Indian agents with direct access and faster, smarter solutions.

Janice Alyosius

In a market crowded with DMCs, Travel Assistance Tourism LLC is carving a distinct identity through technology-driven solutions and complete in-house control of its products. The Dubai-registered DMC, which has already served over 50,000 travellers, is now focusing on expanding its fleet, assets, and destination reach to meet growing demand

from India and beyond. “Our biggest USP is direct supply with owned assets,” says Ahmed Khan, Founder and COO, Travel Assistance Tourism LLC. “This gives agents flexibility on pricing and timing, because they are not dependent on third-party suppliers. Buses, 7-seaters, and 350-passenger dhow cruise, are all owned by us. That is why we can deliver on time and adapt easily to agents’ needs.”

Direct supply gives agents more flexibility on pricing and timing, because they are not dependent on third-party suppliers



Ahmed Khan
Founder and COO
Travel Assistance Tourism LLC

The company also holds its own immigration card, enabling it to issue visas directly. “When you control your assets and visa processes, you are able to give faster, more reliable service,” he adds.

Technology at the core

Beyond logistics, Travel Assistance has invested heavily in B2B tech designed for travel agents across India, Bali, Vietnam, South Africa, and the Philippines. “We focus on technology that helps agents customise packages instantly. They can book transfers, hotels, or visas in real time, without waiting for manual quotes. Everything is automated and integrated — it’s a mix of à la carte and full packages,” says Khan.

Evolving Indian market trends

The company has noticed a clear shift in the prefer-

ences of Indian travellers. “Earlier, most packages included the classic trio — Dhow Cruise, Desert Safari, and City Tour. Now, travellers are demanding Museum of the Future, Burj Khalifa, Global Village, and Dubai Frame — all part of more experiential itineraries. The average family package that used to cost ₹3–4 lakh has now doubled,” explains Khan.

Looking ahead

Travel Assistance is in expansion mode, scaling up assets from seven to 12 buses and strengthening supplier contracts. “2025 is shaping up to be another success story. The market re-

sponse has been positive. We are investing ahead to make sure our partners have everything they need to sell UAE seamlessly and profitably,” Khan concludes.

IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Own assets: Fleet of buses, vehicles, and 350-passenger dhow cruise
- ❖ Direct visa facility: In-house immigration card for faster processing



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MOVEMENTS

BAHI AJMAN PALACE HOTEL AND CORAL BEACH RESORT SHARJAH UAE

Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Coral Beach Resort Sharjah have appointed **Mayda Solatre** as the Cluster Director of Sales & Marketing. With over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Solatre brings a wealth of expertise in sales, marketing, and operations. She has previously worked with renowned international brand — Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, particularly Ramada by Wyndham and Wyndham Garden.



ROTANA Iraq & Turkey

Rotana has appointed **Ghassan Dalal** as Country General Manager for Iraq & Turkey, in addition to his continuing role as General Manager of Babylon Rotana, Baghdad. With over 27 years of global hospitality experience across the Middle East, Africa, North America, and the GCC, Dalal brings a wealth of expertise in managing diverse hotel categories and navigating complex market environments. His career spans leadership roles in Iraq, Qatar, Sudan, Egypt, Nigeria, Canada, and Lebanon.



FAIRMONT HOTEL RIYADH Saudi Arabia

Fairmont Hotel Riyadh has appointed **Muhieddine Zok** as General Manager. With over 25 years in the hospitality industry, including a decade of leadership in Saudi Arabia, Zok is recognised for combining operational excellence with a deep understanding of authentic, locally inspired hospitality. In his new role, he will further strengthen Fairmont Hotel Riyadh's position as a premier destination for luxury, comfort, and memorable experiences for both business and leisure travellers.



SONEVA GROUP Dubai

With the launch of their new global headquarters in Dubai, Soneva Group has appointed **Joanna Flint** as Chief Commercial Officer. Flint brings over 20 years of leadership experience in the luxury hospitality and technology sectors, including notable tenures at Mandarin Oriental and Google. Her expertise in global commercial strategy will enhance Soneva's presence in existing and new markets.



YAS PLAZA HOTELS Abu Dhabi

Yas Plaza Hotels appoints **Fabien Chesnais** as General Manager. With more than two decades of international hospitality experience, Chesnais has held leadership roles with recognised hotel brands, successfully managing large-scale operations, pre-opening projects, and guest experience initiatives. His career is marked by a consistent focus on operational excellence, team development, and delivering strong commercial performance.



THE CHEDI AL BAIT Sharjah

The Chedi Al Bait, Sharjah appoints **Ahmed Kamha** as Director of Sales & Marketing. With close to two decades of experience in luxury hospitality, Kamha brings extensive expertise in strategic sales, market development, and brand positioning. In his new role, he will oversee the resort's commercial strategy, driving key initiatives to elevate The Chedi Al Bait's presence as Sharjah's most exceptional cultural retreat.



Chris Whitehouse joins Soneva as Chief Financial Officer, bringing over 20 years of board-level global leadership experience across luxury real estate, student accommodation, investment management, and hospitality. His expertise spans financial strategy, risk management, corporate financing, M&A, fundraising, ERP transformation, and global finance operations across the US, Europe, Dubai, and Asia. At Soneva, he will play a pivotal role in strengthening financial foundations and supporting the company's sustainable growth and expansion.



HILTON BAHRAIN CITY CENTRE HOTEL & RESIDENCES Bahrain

Ahead of its highly anticipated opening, Hilton Bahrain City Centre Hotel & Residences has appointed **Hassan El Wahidi** as General Manager. With a distinguished career spanning more than 35 years, El Wahidi is a seasoned hospitality leader with a wealth of expertise in pre-openings, luxury resorts, and complex mixed-use developments across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.



JA PALM TREE COURT, JA BEACH HOTEL, AND JA LAKE VIEW HOTEL Dubai

Russell Dillon takes on the role of Cluster Director of Sales at JA Palm Tree Court, JA Beach Hotel, and JA Lake View Hotel, Dubai. Dillon is an accomplished commercial leader with over 20 years of hospitality experience. He has held senior sales and marketing roles with leading hospitality organisations, building a deep understanding of both local and global markets.



Further strengthening its leadership team, Soneva has promoted **Abhishek Sharma** to the position of Chief Operating Officer. With over 25 years of experience in luxury hospitality across the Maldives, India, Egypt, and Mauritius, Sharma brings a wealth of global expertise to the role. In his previous position as Group General Manager, he successfully oversaw all three Soneva resorts. His background includes pre-opening projects and managing remote locations. He remains focused on achieving a sustainable balance between commerce and community.



CIEL DUBAI MARINA, VIGNETTE COLLECTION BY IHG Dubai

Ciel Dubai Marina, Vignette Collection by IHG, set to debut in November 2025 as the world's tallest hotel, appoints **Heinrich Morio** as Managing Director. In this role, Morio will oversee all operational and commercial strategies, guiding the property towards its vision of becoming an international icon. With more than 35 years of global hospitality experience, including 16 years in the Middle East, Morio has held senior executive positions.



Lara Abou Harb joins JA Palm Tree Court, JA Beach Hotel, and JA Lake View Hotel as Cluster Director of Revenue. Bringing over 12 years of experience in the luxury hospitality sector, she offers extensive regional expertise and a proven track record in revenue optimisation and business growth. In her new role, Lara will oversee revenue management across the three Jebel Ali Beach properties, working closely with sales, marketing, and operations teams to enhance profitability, drive sustainable growth, and elevate guest experiences.



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is printed on behalf of
Durga Das Publications (Middle East) FZC
at Modest Print Pack Pvt. Ltd.,
C-52, DDA Sheds Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I,
New Delhi-110020
UAE : Z1-02, P.O. Box 9348, Saif Zone, Sharjah, UAE
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IBTM @ATM back with broader view

Building on the success of its inaugural edition in 2025, IBTM @ATM will return to Arabian Travel Market (ATM) next year, which takes place at the Dubai World Trade Centre from 4–7 May, with a dedicated business events hub in Hall 3.

Claudia Hall, Exhibition Director, IBTM World, added: "As the global business events landscape evolves, the Middle East stands out as a powerful hub for growth and innova-

and regional leaders to collaborate, exchange insights, and unlock new opportunities that will define the next decade of meetings and events.” 🍷

A collage of 15 photographs capturing various moments from the ITB Asia 2019 event. The images show a diverse group of professionals, including men and women in business attire, some in traditional Middle Eastern clothing. They are seen posing for group photos, standing in front of branded backdrops for 'ITB ASIA', 'MICE SHOW ASIA', and 'TRAVEL TECH ASIA', and interacting at various exhibition booths. Specific booths visible include 'OMAN AIR', 'JUMEIRAH HOTEL MUSCAT', and 'KAZAKHSTAN'. The photos depict a professional and social atmosphere at the trade show.

Singapore eyes MICE business

Chi Chuan, Executive Director – Exhibitions & Conferences, Singapore Tourism Board (STB), in a conversation with **MICETALK** at ITB Asia in Singapore, highlighted the growing significance of the Middle East market and its contribution to the MICE sector. With Singapore positioned as a strategic hub in the heart of Asia, the country continues to attract international business events.

Dr Shehara Fernando

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) aims to deepen engagement and foster two-way growth between Asia and the Middle East, as the region invests heavily in infrastructure and tourism. Since ITB Asia's inception in 2008, Singapore has solidified its position as a premier global meeting point for the MICE industry.

"When we brought ITB to Singapore, it was a recognition that Asia needed its own market-



Chi Chuan
Executive Director – Exhibitions & Conferences, STB

place. Positioned between the world's three most populous nations — China, India, and Indonesia — Singapore has become a natural

hub for global business and travel," said **Chi Chuan**, Executive Director – Exhibitions & Conferences, Singapore Tourism Board. The optimism surrounding

senger handling capacity. "This expansion reflects our confidence in Asia's future and Singapore's role in connecting the region to the world," he added.

Middle East is the cradle of civilisation, and countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE are making remarkable progress in developing tourism and business infrastructure. We are excited about that market," he said.

Singapore's multicultural fabric also makes it particularly appealing for Middle Eastern visitors. "With our strong Muslim community, we offer halal dining options, prayer facilities, and excellent air connectivity to Dubai, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia," he explained. Looking ahead, STB aims to triple its MICE num-

bers in the next 15 years, driven by Asia's expanding industries such as logistics, aviation, maritime, finance, and advanced manufacturing.

Singapore's strength lies in its access to 7,000 multinational headquarters, giving organisers connections to decision-makers

Asia's growth has inspired major infrastructure investments, including the upcoming Changi Terminal 5, which will double Singapore's pas-

Turning to the Middle East, Chuan emphasised its strategic importance as both a source market and a destination for MICE growth. "The

NEXT DECADE CHANGES

- ❖ Mice growth to triple
- ❖ **7000** multinational headquarters in Singapore
- ❖ Middle East key source market for Asia

ATM Travel Tech to explore travel trends

Technology is dominating how people plan, book, and experience their travel. From AI to immersive reality and fintech, numerous tools are shaping a smarter, more connected future. Recognising this shift, Arabian Travel Market (ATM) will launch a new feature at ATM 2026, which will take place at the Dubai World Trade Centre from 4–7 May 2026.

TT Bureau

Anchored in the theme 'Travel 2040: Driving New Frontiers Through Innovation and Technology', ATM Travel Tech will run as a dedicated co-located event during ATM 2026, showcasing the most advanced technologies redefining the global travel sector. Bringing together over

180 exhibitors from more than 30 countries, it will serve as a global platform for innovators, start-ups, and established tech leaders to exhibit solutions that are shaping the future of tourism and hospitality.

Designed to showcase the technologies expected to transform global travel by 2040, ATM Travel Tech will focus



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director ME ATM



on key areas, such as AI, VR/AR, robotics, fintech, and sustainability. Visitors will be able to explore the latest tools redefining how travel is sold, managed, and

experienced. However, the spotlight of the new event is the Tech & Innovation Hub, an 850 sqm immersive zone. The Future Stage, located within the hub, will host a series of expert-led sessions, featuring over

25 talks, 30 technology demos, and two Start-up Pitch Battles. Topics will include AI, immersive commerce, cybersecurity, robotics, and next-gen customer experiences. **Danielle Curtis**, Exhibition Di-

rector ME, ATM, said, "Technology is now central to how travel is imagined and delivered. ATM Travel Tech will bring together the people and ideas pushing boundaries and creating smarter, more sustainable journeys."

ATM Travel Tech will bring together the people and ideas pushing boundaries and creating smarter, more sustainable journeys



GITEX 2025 concludes in Dubai

The Gulf Information Technology Exhibition (GITEX) 2025, held recently in Dubai, witnessed visitors from across the globe over five days. Tourism boards announced various tech engagements that ensure that travellers get the best and smoothest service. The event focused on sustainability and innovation to define the next era of technology.



AI, data & airlines in focus @WTM

WTM London is framing this year's Technology Summit around the critical role that technology can play in supporting sellers and suppliers during the current period of disruption and emerging new challenges. The summit, taking place on 5 November on the Purple Stage, will see a global line-up of carefully selected technology experts, including C-suite executives and investors.

 TT Bureau

The Technology Summit agenda supports WTM London's decision to align all stages and sessions under the unifying theme of 'Re-imagining Travel in a Changing World'. Twelve different sessions have been curated by **Timothy O'Neil-Dunne**, WTM's technology advisor and an established industry commentator and observer. He was a founding management team member at Expe-



dia in the 1990s, and is currently a Principal at T2Impact, a global consulting and venture firm laser-focussed on aviation, travel, and tourism.

WTM London's official Technology Partner, Holafly, will feature CEO **Pablo Gómez Fernandez-Quintanilla** in a dynamic 20-minute conversation with Timo-

thy, titled 'Connected Futures: Tech, Data and the Power of eSIMs'. The session will take place on 5 November. One of

from Magpie Travel. AI is likely to be referenced across the sessions, directly and indirectly. **Rhys Griffiths** and **Fa-**

Nau from Ennea Capital Partners and **Min Liu** from Cambon Partners will share their frontline experience of how the investment community is responding to the AI-driven disruption.

One of the highlights of the event will be a debate around whether Artificial Intelligence (AI), despite the hype, is travel's enemy

the highlights is a debate around whether Artificial Intelligence (AI), despite the hype, is travel's enemy. He will be joined on stage by **Stephen Joyce** from the Prospect Group and **Christian Watts**

rina Azam, partners at travel law specialists Fox Williams, will outline the legal and regulatory implications of widespread AI adoption for travel businesses. Meanwhile, **Andreas**

