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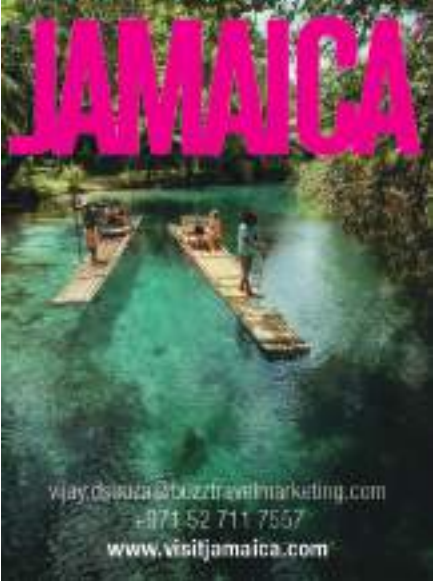
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Sustainability leads tourism transformation

The Middle East has become one of the most active regions in reaffirming its stance on tourism and sustainable transformation. This year’s World Tourism Day theme, ‘Tourism and Sustainable Transformation’, connects well with the region.

Dr Shehara Fernando

This year’s theme for World Tourism Day is a reminder that tourism is more than just about destinations and experiences — it is stewardship of cultural heritage, preservation of natural landscapes and, most importantly, empowerment of local communities. Over the years, we have witnessed how

the Middle East has been setting new benchmarks by aligning tourism with green mobility, renewable energy, eco-conscious hospitality and digital innovation, all while remaining rooted in heritage and traditions. The Middle East has set an example as a catalyst for sustainable transformations. speaks with industry leaders about their plans for the year.

Julia Simpson
President & CEO
WTTTC

“World Tourism Day is a celebration of Travel & Tourism’s power to inspire, connect and create lasting prosperity. This year’s host, India, embodies the spirit of ‘Tourism and Sustainable Transformation’, showing how investment in sustainable infra, digital innovation and resilient communities can drive growth that endures. By uniting vision and action, we can protect cultural and natural treasures.”

Fahd Hamidaddin
CEO, Saudi Tourism Authority
& Vice Chair, TOURISE

“This year, on World Tourism Day, we reflect on our achievements and consider the path ahead. Tourism is, now more than ever, fundamental to building understanding. It inspires and transforms, showing us that we exist in symbiosis with our surroundings. From AIUla to the Red Sea, Aseer to NEOM and beyond, sustainability is at the heart of our developments.”

Natalia Bayona
Executive Director
UN Tourism

“Tourism is growing at a remarkable rate, most notably in the Middle East, where arrivals are up by more than 40 per cent from pre-pandemic numbers. But growth alone is not enough. It needs to be sustainable, and by that we mean it must deliver decent jobs for all and drive long-term change for both economies and communities.”

Contd. on page 10 ▶

Dubai gets 10 mn visitors in H1 2025

Dubai’s evolving destination offerings resulted in the city welcoming 9.88 mn international overnight visitors from January to June 2025 — a 6% increase vis-a-vis H1 2024.

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According to the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET) data, markets in the proximity to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions had a combined 26 per cent share of overall visitors to Dubai from January to June 2025, with 1.51 million (15

HH Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum
Crown Prince of Dubai, Deputy PM, Minister of Defence & Chairman, The Executive Council of Dubai

As we advance the goals of Dubai Economic Agenda D33, tourism will remain key to driving GDP growth and cross-sector value creation

per cent) and 1.12 million (11 per cent) arrivals respectively. Western Europe was the largest source market to Dubai, with 2.12 million visitors (22 per cent), followed by CIS and Eastern Europe (15 per cent), South Asia (15 per cent), Northeast and Southeast Asia (9 per cent), the Americas (7 per cent), Africa (4 per cent) and Australasia (2 per cent).

Contd. on page 16 ▶

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Powering the next chapter of tourism

On 25 November 2025, the Arabian Travel Awards will turn the spotlight on the visionaries transforming travel across the Middle East. This edition promises a powerful gathering of leaders, disruptors and unsung heroes from tourism and hospitality across the region. Over the past 7 years the event paid tribute to resilience and innovation.

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At its core, the Arabian Travel Awards has always been about people — the dreamers, implementors and disruptors who have reimagined travel. This year, as the Middle East cements its place as a global tourism powerhouse, the awards return with deeper purpose and stronger emotion. It's not just another event, it's a tribute to resilience, innovation and the sheer will to keep going in an industry that is always on the move.

Each year, the awards recognise those who shape



San Jeet
Mentor
Arabian Travel Awards

the way we experience the world. **San Jeet**, Mentor, Arabian Travel Awards, says, "These awards are not about fame. They are about impact. They honour those who show up, step up and bring change, no matter



Ziad Tantawi
Cluster General Manager
Embassy Suites by Hilton

the odds. And that is what makes them special."

Winners are chosen through a transparent, digital voting process. The 2025 edition will present honours across Personal, Business,

Trending and Partner categories, each spotlighting a different kind of contribution — each one equally powerful. And while the voting has begun, the call for nominations is still open. From Best City Hotel to Best B2B Travel Portal, this is the moment to put forward the names that deserve to be celebrated.

The venue adds another layer of pride. It reflects the Middle East's rising stature, not just as a destination, but as a driver of global travel trends. The event also marks the entry of Embassy Suites by Hilton into the UAE, joining as



this year's Hospitality Partner. **Ziad Tantawi**, Cluster General Manager, Embassy Suites by Hilton, adds, "As Embassy Suites by Hilton makes its debut in the UAE, we are proud to partner with the Arabian

Travel Awards to mark this milestone. This collaboration helps us amplify visibility, build strategic industry connections and solidify our position as a key player in the region's upscale hospitality segment."

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Decoding the overtourism dilemma

‘Threat’, ‘Hidden Cost’, ‘Great Danger’; these are just a few of the words recently featured in headlines around the world, highlighting one of the main challenges facing the global tourism industry today — overtourism. Increased affordability and accessibility of international travel, rise of low-cost airlines and proliferation of digital platforms are some of the factors contributing to overtourism.

While tourism is frequently celebrated as a driver of economic growth and cultural exchange, high visitor volumes can lead to a range of environmental, social and economic challenges. These challenges undermine the very assets that make destinations attractive.



Several factors contribute to overtourism. The increased affordability and accessibility of international travel, the rise of low-cost airlines and the proliferation of digital platforms like Airbnb have all made travel easier and more affordable. Furthermore, traditional causes such as seasonal concentration of tourists

into peak periods, creating pressure on destinations and infrastructure. Social media content, both organic and induced, has also played a significant role in attracting visitors to destinations worldwide, increasing numbers not only to well-established tourist hotspots but also to emerging and lesser-

known locations. While positive economically, there is evidence from across the world of how unsustainable numbers can create tension and detrimental impacts for people, places and the environment. For example, destinations like Italy, Venice, Barcelona, Santorini and Amsterdam have famously struggled

with this phenomenon, facing daily influxes of tourists far beyond their local population sizes.

One of the major consequences of overtourism is its detrimental impact on the environment. Nat-

kuta and Seminyak, becoming overwhelmed by litter. At the same time, local waste management systems struggle to handle the growing volume of garbage. Further evidence of overtourism’s impact can be seen in

tourism profoundly affect local communities, whose daily lives and cultural spaces become increasingly strained. Governments are responding to overtourism and public pressure by implementing strategies to ease the pressure of overtourism.

It is crucial to recognise and address the complex challenges of overtourism, preserving the world’s treasured destinations for years to come


ural landscapes, in particular, are affected by trampling, pollution and the depletion of natural resources. For example, overtourism in Bali has resulted in its fashionable beaches, such as

the fragile ecosystems of the Galápagos Islands and Machu Picchu, both of which have historically suffered from high visitor numbers, resulting in habitat destruction. The consequences of over-



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

L’AZURE boosts ops with Shiji tie-up

Nuran Kilani, Chief Operating Officer, L’AZURE Hospitality, speaks with  about how their recent strategic partnership with Shiji marks a transformative leap in the group’s operational capabilities. Far beyond a technology upgrade, the integration of Shiji’s cloud-based Property Management System is shaping a smarter, more agile hospitality ecosystem for L’AZURE.

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The system unifies data, streamlines interdepartmental coordination and enhances guest personalisation in real time. As L’AZURE expands across NEOM, Riyadh and Dubai, this scalable, API-first platform is poised to support growth, innovation and elevated guest experiences — aligned with Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 ambitions, including attracting 5 million Chinese visitors by 2030.

For L’AZURE Hospitality, the partnership with Shiji is a strategic enabler designed to future-proof



Nuran Kilani
Chief Operating Officer
L’AZURE Hospitality

operations and deliver exceptional guest experiences. The cloud-based PMS provides a centralised data platform, allowing Commercial, Front Office and Revenue teams to work in perfect sync. This translates

into real-time decision-making, enhanced personalisation and operational efficiency across all touchpoints.

Nuran Kilani, Chief Operating Officer, L’AZURE

The system’s API-first, event-driven architecture supports seamless integrations with CRM, POS, payment gateways — including UnionPay

Hospitality, said, “The system’s API-first, event-driven architecture supports seamless integrations with CRM, POS, payment gateways — including UnionPay — and mobile check-in/

check-out solutions. This flexibility allows L’AZURE to meet evolving traveller expectations, especially for high-growth markets like China, where tech-enabled and personalised service is be-

coming the norm. The phased rollout began with flagship properties, with Phase One already live in three hotels. Full implementation across NEOM, Riyadh and Dubai is scheduled for



completion by Q4 2025, ensuring consistent operational standards and guest experience across the portfolio.”

Beyond technology, Kilani sees this as a cultural shift toward smarter, more responsive hospitality — where innovation is not optional, but essential.

- CORE BENEFITS**
- ❖ Unified data across departments
 - ❖ Real-time decision-making
 - ❖ Scalable, API-first infrastructure

GNTO launches halal guide for GCC

The German National Tourist Office (GNTO) has launched the Germany Halal Travel Guide, a dedicated resource designed to support Muslim travellers in planning seamless, culturally respectful journeys throughout Germany. The guide can be downloaded free of charge from a dedicated microsite hosted on the official Germany Travel website.

TT Bureau

The German National Tourist Office (GNTO) has launched the Germany Halal Travel Guide, a dedicated resource designed to support Muslim travellers in planning seamless, culturally respectful journeys throughout Germany. Available in both English and Arabic, the guide can be downloaded free of charge from a dedicated microsite hosted on the official Germany Travel website. Created with the expectations of GCC visitors in mind, the guide features practical information and curated recommendations.



Yamina Sofo
Director – Marketing & Sales Office
GNTO GCC

It highlights halal dining, prayer spaces and culturally considerate stays that help visitors from the region feel comfortable while exploring Germany. Germany continues to grow as a preferred



destination for travellers from the GCC, supported by a well-developed infrastructure, strong hospitality standards and an inclusive approach to tourism. In cities such as Berlin, Dresden, Düsseldorf and Munich, visitors can enjoy a wide selection of halal restaurants,

Arabic-speaking staff and accessible prayer spaces, all contributing to a sense of ease and belonging. The Germany Halal Travel Guide offers valuable insights for Muslim travellers seeking experiences aligned with their life-style and travel prefer-

ences. Whether visiting for leisure, medical care, education or retail tourism, the guide introduces options that support spiritual needs and cultural expectations. It also showcases Germany's natural beauty, cultural landmarks and world-class wellness facilities in a format that makes trip planning both efficient and rewarding. **Yamina Sofo**, Director of the Marketing and Sales Office, GNTO GCC, said: "The launch of our Halal Travel Guide reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring Muslim travellers feel informed and welcomed in Germany."

GUIDE'S BENEFITS

- ❖ Highlights Muslim-friendly experiences and culturally considerate stays across Germany's cities and scenic regions
- ❖ AI-powered chatbot supports Muslim travellers with real-time answers
- ❖ Created with the expectations of GCC visitors in mind

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Family trips find favour in KSA

Saudi Arabia is rapidly emerging as a vibrant family-friendly destination, blending its rich cultural heritage with world-class modern attractions. As part of Saudi Vision 2030, the Kingdom has placed strong emphasis on creating inclusive tourism experiences that cater to visitors of all ages. From immersive cultural festivals and interactive museums to expansive entertainment zones, waterparks and natural wonders, families can explore a wide variety of activities designed to educate, entertain and inspire. Iconic destinations such as AlUla, Riyadh and Jeddah now host family-centric events that celebrate Saudi traditions while offering modern leisure and adventure. With an increasing number of safe, engaging and well-curated experiences, Saudi Arabia is redefining family travel in the region, positioning itself as a destination where heritage, hospitality and happiness come together for unforgettable shared memories. Industry experts share their views with .



Samir Mehta
Chief Operating Officer
Desert Adventures

“Saudi Arabia offers families a rare blend of adventure, culture and comfort. When curating a family-friendly package, our focus is on safe and engaging experiences — from immersive storytelling tours in Riyadh, with vibrant souqs and the UNESCO-listed Diriyah, to Hegra’s tombs and Old Town in AlUla.”



Naouphale Mohammed
Director – Commercials
ITL World

“One of the greatest strengths of Saudi Arabia as a destination is its natural alignment with family-friendly travel. Apart from a few extreme adventure activities, nearly every offering caters to families. In addition to the historical sites, cultural experience offer engaging experiences for all age groups.”



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

“When curating family-friendly packages for Saudi Arabia, the key is to balance cultural experiences with comfort and convenience with a focus on attractions suitable for all age groups, family-friendly accommodations, seamless transportation and engaging activities like heritage tours.”



Meerah Ketait
Head – Retail & Leisure
dhata Travel

“For families, the priority is a mix of age-appropriate activities, year-round comfort and easy access. Saudi Arabia offers this across several regions: Riyadh and Jeddah pair cultural sites with seasonal events like Riyadh Season’s Boulevard World and Jeddah Season’s music and sports shows.”



Ayman Al Qudwa
General Manager
Falcon Travel

“When curating family-friendly packages for Saudi Arabia, focus on cultural immersion, safety and diverse activities. Include visits to historical sites and family-oriented attractions. Prioritise accommodations with family suites, halal dining and child-friendly amenities.”



Prem Sagar
Group General Manager
Al Rais Travel Group

“When curating family-friendly packages for Saudi Arabia, the priority is to create a balance between cultural exploration, leisure and comfort. Families appreciate itineraries that combine heritage sites, with modern attractions like theme parks and festivals.”



Emily Jenkins
Head – Product & Digital Solutions
DW Travel

“When curating a family-friendly package for Saudi Arabia, we focus on three pillars: Age-appropriate experiences from heritage sites to theme parks. Convenience — does the accommodation offer family suites and interconnecting rooms? Accessible dining, keeping in mind kid-friendly options.”



Sanaf Rahman
Travel Consultant
Aldar Travel & Tours, Kingdom of Bahrain

“When creating a family-friendly package for Saudi Arabia, focus on safety, comfort and cultural sensitivity. Prioritise family-oriented attractions, such as theme parks, heritage sites and natural landscapes like the Red Sea coast. Ensure accommodations have family suites, kids’ amenities and accessible dining.”



Nada Mohamad
Marketing Manager
Cozmo Travel

“The core focus for our holiday packages is creating a holistic experience. This means ensuring a seamless blend of enriching cultural visits, like historic Jeddah, with engaging leisure activities. It is also crucial to select family-friendly accommodations and build itineraries with flexible pacing.”



Reji Kurup
Head – Leisure
ATS Travel

“Curating family-friendly packages involves designing itineraries that balance entertainment and memorable journeys. Key areas to be focused for such package designs are: Choose attractions that appeal to all age groups, include a mix of cultural and recreational experiences and family-oriented hotels.”



Aga El Khatib
General Manager
PanWorld Travel

“When designing family-friendly packages for Saudi Arabia, it’s essential to look at the entire journey through a traveller’s eyes. From smooth airport arrivals and hotel check-ins to thoughtfully curated attractions for parents, children and even grandparents, every detail matters.”



Malith Chamika
Supervisor Holidays
E-Travel and Tours

“Saudi Arabia is a safe and culturally rich destination where families can enjoy nature, history, entertainment and adventure together. Curating a family-friendly package requires focus on comfortable accommodations, seamless transportation and age-appropriate attractions.”

92% travel professionals like their job

The Gulf Cooperation Council has the strongest share of travel professionals who joined the industry recently; one in five respondents joined within the last 3 years, while 60% of respondents have worked for up to 10 years, according to the latest research by RateHawk. Only 18% have worked in the field for 11 to 15 years and 21% for more than 15 years.

TT Bureau

Travel professionals around the globe demonstrate a strong long-term commitment to the industry and report high levels of career fulfilment. Their purpose-driven mindset, fuelled by a passion for travel and human connection, continues to shape the sector and helps specialists navigate the increasing complexity of the post-pandemic environment. These are the findings of RateHawk's latest report, 'What Supercharges Travel Professionals', which explores travel professionals' perspec-



tives on the ever-evolving travel industry. GCC has the strongest share of professionals who joined the industry recently; one in five respondents joined within the last 3 years, while 60

per cent of respondents have worked for up to 10 years. Only 18 per cent have worked in the field for 11 to 15 years and 21 per cent for more than 15 years. **Astrid Kastberg**, Managing Director, RateHawk, said, "Today, the

travel industry continues to draw new specialists, making it one of the fastest-growing career sectors, according to global reports. Our study also showcases the growing popularity of the travel advisor profession in the

last 3 years. It is driven by the transformation of the economy after the pandemic and the desire of next-gen travellers to rely on travel agents while planning their trips."

Job satisfaction is remarkably high in the travel industry, with 92 per cent of professionals describing themselves as satisfied or very satisfied in their roles. Travel professionals worldwide are most motivated by the opportunity to create memorable experiences for their clients (51 per cent), explore new destinations (42 per cent) and receive positive client feedback (39 per cent), the survey finds.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

- ❖ Over 90% travel professionals worldwide are satisfied or very satisfied with their roles
- ❖ Their careers are mainly driven by human connection and a passion for travel
- ❖ Creating memorable experiences and receiving positive feedback are their favourite perks



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TOURISE names its board members

Global tourism platform TOURISE has announced the members for its cross-sector Advisory Board, a powerhouse of industry titans guiding the platform’s strategic direction and shaping the agenda of the inaugural global summit taking place in Riyadh from 11–13 November 2025. The 14-member board brings together experts from various fields.

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TOURISE is where cross-sector convergence begins. It is a platform where leaders and visionaries debate, collaborate and take action to shape the future of tourism. Together, the experts, coming from the fields of tourism, technology, aviation, entertainment, education, sustainability and media, will champion TOURISE’s vision and ensure that high-impact global issues, such as equity, geographical representation and sectoral diversity, are in the spotlight and influence the long-term value of the platform.



His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb
Minister of Tourism
Saudi Arabia

Chaired by **His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb**, Minister of Tourism, Saudi Arabia, the Advisory Board recently assembled to elevate tourism on the global stage and shape a bold new vision for the sector’s fu-

ture. “TOURISE is driving cross-sector global collaboration, and the formation of the Advisory Board ensures we are uniting diverse perspectives from representatives across the global tourism ecosystem,” His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb said. “Their visionary thinking and deep expertise will be essential in transforming TOURISE from ambition into action, ensuring the platform becomes a catalyst of innovation, investment and sustainability in tourism for decades to come.”

Julia Simpson, President & CEO, WTTC, said,

“TOURISE is more than a summit; it’s a catalyst for global transformation in tourism. I joined the Advisory Board because I believe in the power of cross-sector collaboration to drive sustainable growth, foster innovation and set new standards for responsible travel.”

Leading up to the TOURISE summit, the Advisory Board will meet regularly to advise on the TOURISE programme, ensuring global views and insights shape the agenda. Their stewardship ensures that TOURISE is not just a moment, it’s a movement.

TOURISE Advisory Board Members

- ❖ **Julia Simpson**, President & CEO, WTTC
- ❖ **Randy Durband**, CEO, Global Sustainable Tourism Council
- ❖ **Luis Maroto**, CEO, Amadeus
- ❖ **Blake Chandlee**, former President of Global Business Solutions, TikTok
- ❖ **Neil Jacobs**, Founder, Wild Origins and ex-CEO, Six Senses
- ❖ **Stephane Lefebvre**, President, Cirque du Soleil Entertainment Group
- ❖ **Jordi Carnes**, President, Leitat Technological Centre and CTEC-NO and ex-Director General, Turismede Barcelona
- ❖ **Mario Enzesberger**, Founder and CEO, Liberty International Tourism Group
- ❖ **Patrick Andersen**, CEO, Carlson Wagonlit Travel
- ❖ **Mo Gawdat**, Founder, One Billion Happy
- ❖ **Thomas Woldbye**, CEO, Heathrow Airport
- ❖ **Fahd Hamidaddin**, CEO, Saudi Tourism Authority and Vice Chair, TOURISE
- ❖ **Fabien Fresnel**, CEO, Riyadh School of Tourism and Hospitality
- ❖ **Jean-Philippe Cossé**, International Events Specialist

Riyadh Air signs pact with Amadeus

Riyadh Air signed a global distribution agreement with Amadeus to enable the airline access to one of the largest global networks of travel sellers, supporting its ambitious growth plans and playing a key role in Saudi Arabia’s broader transformation agenda under Vision 2030. The airline will now be able to connect with travel agencies and sellers in more than 190 countries.

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Riyadh Air’s partnership with Amadeus will be instrumental in attracting inbound tourism, promoting Saudi Arabia as a compelling global destination and positioning the Kingdom as a leading aviation and tourism hub. **Vincent Coste**, Chief Commercial Officer, Riyadh Air, commented, “Our mission is to create a truly world-class airline that reflects the ambition of Saudi Arabia. Partnering with Amadeus gives us the global reach, distribution power and retailing capabilities needed to support our goal of flying to over 100 destinations by 2030. This partnership is not only about enabling



Maher Koubaa EVP Travel Unit & MD EMEA, Amadeus with Vincent Coste CCO, Riyadh Air sealing the partnership

seamless travel experiences, but also about contributing to the broader national vision of economic diversification, tourism growth and enhanced global connectivity.”

As part of the agreement, Amadeus will also dis-

tribute Riyadh Air’s future New Distribution Capability content, allowing the airline to deliver more dynamic and personalised offers to travellers and take greater control of its indirect sales strategy. These advanced capabilities will further optimise

Riyadh Air’s ability to deliver modern, flexible and customer-centric retailing.

Maher Koubaa, Executive Vice President, Travel Unit and Managing Director – EMEA, Amadeus, said, “The launch of Riyadh Air represents a ma-

major milestone for the Kingdom’s aviation industry, and we are proud to be their trusted technology partner from the very beginning. Amadeus brings not only global reach, but also advanced retailing, merchandising and data-driven tools that will help Riyadh Air differentiate itself on the global stage. We are excited to support Riyadh Air’s contribution to Vision 2030 and the Kingdom’s aspirations to become a global tourism and travel leader.” Backed by the PIF and unveiled by His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz in 2023, Riyadh Air is set to play a pivotal role in advancing Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030.

QUICK FACTS

- ❖ Riyadh Air is expected to generate 200,000 jobs
- ❖ Airline will contribute US\$ 20 billion to non-oil GDP
- ❖ Airline to add 100 destinations by 2030
- ❖ Amadeus will help the airline connect to travel agencies and sellers in 190 countries

Commercial strategy meet in November

The 8th Annual Commercial Strategy Conference MEA of the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International Middle East and Africa will take place on 25–26 November 2025 at the Conrad Dubai Hotel, with  as the media partner. The event will gather the region’s leading hospitality experts for discussion.

 Bureau

Started in 2018, the Commercial Strategy Conference MEA (CSC), has been the only conference of its kind in the region, and the go-to event for hospitality peers to discuss the industry’s most pressing issues and hottest topics. This year, the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAL) Middle East and Africa (MEA) and its Advisory Board of experienced industry veterans are taking it up a notch with a jam-packed programme aimed to educate, inspire and create connections

among hoteliers and thought leaders. The 2025 conference will focus on expert-led sessions by industry leaders on revenue optimisation, sales strategies and marketing trends, as well as the latest tools and technologies shaping the future of hospitality.

A standout segment of the conference is the much-anticipated annual ROCKSTAR awards, designed to celebrate exceptional on-property professionals for their bold initiatives and outstanding contributions to the Middle East hospitality industry that pushed the boundaries of com-



Mona Faraj
President
HSMAL MEA

mercial success. Prizes for the winners include an HSMAL certification course, event attendance and annual membership, a 50 per cent scholarship on the Executive Master’s programmes at Glion and Les Roches, along with a

complimentary executive course or select e-Academy certificate, as well as two free tickets anywhere in the world in partnership with Wego.

The last date for submissions was 15 August.

Mona Faraj, President, HSMAL MEA, said, “This year’s conference is shaping up to be our most ambitious and dynamic event yet — with record-breaking attendance, a broader spectrum

(ROC) in the USA two decades ago, we have continually expanded and adapted, staying ahead of the curve to equip hotel leaders with the tools, insights and strategies needed to address key challenges and capture new possibilities.”

Since the launch of the ROC in the USA two decades ago, we have continually expanded and adapted, staying ahead of the curve

This year, HSMAL MEA is offering specially reduced delegate passes for university and college students and faculty, priced at just US\$ 75.

of topics and unparalleled opportunities for meaningful connections. Since the launch of the Revenue Optimisation Conference





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Trade focus on eco stays & local ties

►Contd. from page 1



Yamina Sofu
Director – Marketing & Sales Office
GNTO GCC

“We will use the occasion of World Tourism Day to spotlight Germany’s sustainable travel offerings to GCC travellers through our regional channels. Our focus will be on showcasing eco-certified stays and low-impact travel options that combine memorable experiences with environmental responsibility. For GNTO, sustainability has always been a core pillar in shaping our strategies.”



Paul Stevens
COO – Middle East, Africa and Turkey
(Premium, Midscale & Economy), Accor

“World Tourism Day is a chance to reaffirm our commitment to responsible hospitality. This year, we have launched ‘Skip The Clean’ across all Premium, Midscale & Economy hotels in MEA, empowering ALL members to opt out of daily housekeeping in exchange for reward points, reducing water and energy use. From Dubai to Jeddah, across our network, Heartists are leading sustainability activations.”



Carlos Ruiz González
Director, Spain’s Tourist Office
for GCC Countries

“In Spain, we know you love travelling and we celebrate tourism every day by warmly welcoming our visitors. We are also aware that a responsible environmental approach is something tourists look for more and more in their holiday destinations. Spain is committed to transitioning towards fully sustainable tourism, so that you can learn about our cultures, explore our villages and breathe the pure air.”



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

“In celebration of World Tourism Day 2025, Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel and Coral Beach Resort Sharjah will open its doors to inhouse guests for a special showcase of its leading sustainability initiatives. Guests at Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel will have the opportunity to witness the hotel’s air-to-water technology in action — an innovative solution to reduce single-use plastic by generating drinking water from air.”



Darren Seah
Executive Director – ITB Asia
Messe Berlin Asia Pacific

“As we celebrate World Tourism Day on 27 September under the theme ‘Tourism and Sustainable Transformation’, it is a reminder of our collective responsibility to shape a resilient and forward-looking tourism ecosystem. At ITB Asia, our vision has always been to serve as the leading platform for the Asia Pacific travel industry — fostering meaningful connections.”



Dinkar Dasaur
General Manager – UAE
Satguru Travel

“This year, Satguru will celebrate World Tourism Day by highlighting the importance of responsible and mindful travel. We aim to encourage travellers to see tourism as more than just visiting destinations, a way to build connections, appreciate diversity and create meaningful experiences that enrich both people and places. Sustainability in tourism begins with awareness and conscious choices.”



Anna-Marie Dowling
GM, Nofa Riyadh, A Radisson
Collection Resort, Saudi Arabia

“At Nofa Riyadh, a Radisson Collection Resort, we believe true luxury lies in responsibility. This World Tourism Day, we proudly celebrate ‘Tourism and Sustainable Transformation’ by showcasing the many ways we embed sustainability and community care into every aspect of our operations. From greywater recycling to food drives, we go beyond hospitality — we create a positive impact.”



David Allan
Cluster GM – UAE
Radisson Hotel Group

“Radisson Hotel Group is marking World Tourism Day by spotlighting the real power of travel — its ability to connect people, protect the planet and support local communities. The focus is on sharing real stories that inspire responsible tourism, celebrating team efforts in sustainability and encouraging guests to travel consciously. We are taking ‘Tourism and Sustainable Transformation’ theme to heart.”



Emre Kocamustafaogullari
General Manager, Radisson Blu
Hotel, Doha, Qatar

“World Tourism Day is a perfect time to reflect on how hospitality can support a sustainable future. At Radisson Blu Hotel, Doha, we are celebrating ‘Tourism and Sustainable Transformation’ theme with meaningful initiatives. We are partnering again with Seashore Recycling and Sustainability Centre for a beach clean-up, helping keep Qatar’s environment clean and raising recycling awareness.”



Saleem Sharif
Deputy Managing Director
ATS Travel

“World Tourism Day 2025 reminds us that tourism is not just about where we go, but how we get there — and what we leave behind for future generations. This year’s theme, ‘Tourism and Sustainable Transformation’, is especially close to our hearts at ATS Travel. We are proud to be among the first TMCs in the region to turn sustainability from a vision into practical action.”



Nadeem Ulde
GM, Ali Bin Ali International
Travel & Tourism

“World Tourism Day is a powerful reminder that tourism is not just about destinations it is about creating meaningful impact. This year’s theme, ‘Tourism and Sustainable Transformation’ reflects the path we must all take. At Ali Bin Ali Travels, based in Qatar, we are committed to promoting travel that supports local communities, preserves cultural heritage and respects the environment.”



Petr Dubsky
GM, The Diplomat Radisson Blu
Hotel, Residence & Spa, Bahrain

“World Tourism Day is a meaningful reminder of why we are proud to call Bahrain home. At The Diplomat Radisson Blu Hotel, Residence & Spa, we shall be celebrating by sharing the Kingdom’s story with our guests, from the warmth of its people to the blend of rich culture, stunning landscapes and traditions, creating memorable moments as they explore the island’s vibrant atmosphere.”

Redefining the art of arrival

Sushanth Nambiar, Cluster General Manager, Pullman Dubai Jumeirah Lakes Towers, Novotel, and ibis Gate Abu Dhabi, speaks with  about the highly anticipated re-opening of the Pullman JLT lobby. ‘This refurbishment is more than a facelift — it’s a strategic reimagining of the guest arrival experience, blending sophisticated design, tech and hospitality.’

 TT Bureau

The upgraded space aims to create an inviting environment that captures the Pullman spirit while enhancing functionality for both leisure and business travellers. From the elegant reception zone to the dynamic café concept, every element is designed to inspire connection, comfort and convenience.

With the transformation scheduled for completion in September 2025, the new lobby promises to be a destination in itself — a place where guests can meet, relax and immerse



Sushanth Nambiar
Cluster General Manager, Pullman
Dubai Jumeirah Lakes Towers,
Novotel and ibis Gate Abu Dhabi

themselves in Pullman’s signature style.

Nambiar said, “At Pullman Dubai Jumeirah Lakes Towers, we are completely revamping the guest arrival experi-

ence, starting with the lobby and extending to public areas. This includes the reception zone, lobby lounge,

premium design with a warm, inviting atmosphere, merging modern luxury with subtle local influences. Expect

We are also integrating tech upgrades for faster check-ins and introducing Social-Hub — a café-style lounge designed to foster connections

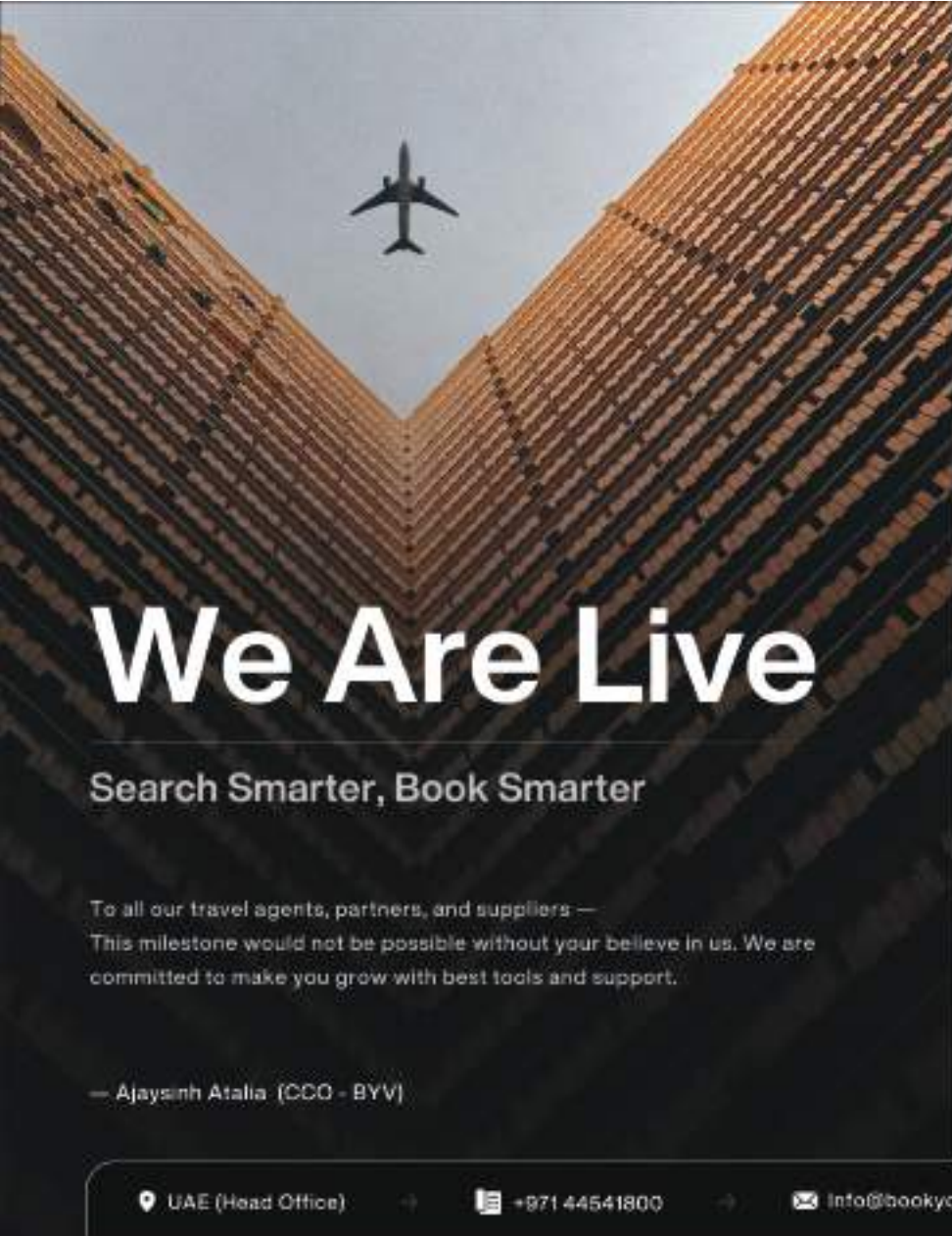
seating areas and connecting corridors. The aim is to make these spaces welcoming, functional and visually striking so that guests feel the Pullman signature from the moment they arrive. The new lobby will blend

airy, light-filled spaces, curated art pieces and comfortable seating ideal for relaxation or work. We are also integrating tech upgrades for faster check-ins and introducing Social-Hub — a café-style lounge designed to foster connections.”



The wait for the opening of the refurbished property will soon be over. “We are on track to wrap up the transformation by September 2025. Throughout the process, our operations will continue as usual,” concluded Nambiar.






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Emirates bans use of power banks onboard

Using any kind of power bank is prohibited onboard Emirates' flights, effective 1 October 2025. Flyers are permitted to carry one power bank onboard on one specific condition — don't plug it in.

TT Bureau

After a comprehensive safety review, Emirates is taking a firm and proactive stance to mitigate risk when it comes to power banks onboard flights. There has been a significant growth in customers using power banks in recent years, resulting in an increasing number of lithium battery-related incidents onboard flights across the wider aviation industry.

Power banks primarily utilise lithium-ion or lithium-polymer batteries for their function as portable battery packs. If the



battery is overcharged or damaged, it may result in 'thermal runaway' — a process where heat generation within a battery cell exceeds its ability to dissipate heat, leading to a rapid and uncontrollable temperature increase. This can result in dangerous consequences like

fire, explosions and the release of toxic gases. To avoid any mishap, Emirates will allow passengers to carry one power bank onboard — on the condition that it not be used to charge any device, nor should it be plugged into any charging point.

Kuwait Airways starts self-service check-in

As part of ongoing efforts to facilitate travel procedures for passengers, Kuwait Airways has announced the launch of a self-service check-in system at Terminal 4 (T4).

TT Bureau

"Kuwait Airways is pleased to announce the launch of the self-check-in service, which enables passengers to weigh their baggage and get their boarding passes without the need for staff assistance, thereby completing the procedures quickly," said Captain Abdulmo-hsen Salem Al-Fagaan, Chairman, Kuwait Airways. This initiative is part of Kuwait Airways' ongoing efforts to facili-



tate the check-in process for passengers, ensure the smooth completion of travel procedures and reduce congestion, par-

ticularly with the onset of the busy travel season. "The company will soon release an instructional video to guide passengers on how to complete the procedures easily and conveniently," Al-Fagaan added.

Al-Fagaan emphasised Kuwait Airways' commitment to ensuring a seamless travel experience for its valued passengers — beginning from the moment they enter the terminal, through the efficient completion of all travel procedures, and continuing onboard.

DXB hits 46 mn guests in H1 2025

Dubai International Airport (DXB) welcomed 46 million guests in the first six months of 2025, marking its busiest first half on record. The 2.3% year-on-year growth underscores DXB's resilience, the continued strength of Dubai's aviation sector and the airport's ability to maintain high performance despite temporary regional airspace disruptions in May and June.

TT Bureau

The achievement reinforces DXB's vital role in connecting Dubai to the world and supporting the city's broader economic progress. In the second quarter alone, DXB served 22.5 million guests, an increase of 3.1 per cent over the same period last year. April emerged as the busiest month of the quarter and the most active April on record, with 8 million guests passing through the terminals. Paul Griffiths, CEO, Dubai Airports, said, "DXB's continued growth through a period of regional chal-



lenges highlights the strength of Dubai and the UAE, the agility of our operations and the commitment of our airport community. The oneDXB mindset once again enabled us to manage disruption while elevating the guest experience and ensuring seamless global connectivity."

Performance and efficiency

Average monthly traffic in H1 stood at approximately 7.7 million, with daily volumes averaging 254,000. January was the busiest month of the period, and also set a new monthly record, with 8.5 million guests. DXB handled 222,000 total flights

during the first half of the year, while the load factor reached 76 per cent. A total of 41.8 million bags were processed, with 91

travel and events, with DXB playing a central role. From the late-summer travel rush related to reopening of schools,

Dubai Airshow 2025 is expected to be a landmark event, reflecting not only the scale of aviation in the region but also the vision shaping its future

per cent delivered within 45 minutes of arrival. The mishandled baggage rate remained low at just 2 bags per 1,000 guests.

Outlook

With the second half underway, Dubai is preparing for a surge in global

to a packed winter calendar, activity is set to intensify. The upcoming Dubai Airshow 2025 is expected to be a landmark event, reflecting not only the scale of aviation in the region but also the vision shaping its future.

KEY MARKETS

- India largest source market for Dubai with 5.9 million guests
- Saudi Arabia second highest with 3.6 million guests
- London busiest city destination with 1.8 million guests
- Riyadh second busiest city with 1.5 million guests

Red Sea Health to transform tourist care

Red Sea Global (RSG), the developer behind regenerative tourism destinations The Red Sea and AMAALA, introduced its new dedicated healthcare brand, ‘Red Sea Health’. This coincides with the launch of the firm’s Airport Clinic at Red Sea International Airport (RSI), which officially began operations last month.

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Red Sea Health represents RSG’s commitment to establishing a comprehensive healthcare ecosystem across its destinations. Built on a philosophy of excellence, empathy and patient-centred care, the new brand embodies the developer’s vision to provide unwavering support, compassionate care and high-quality, integrated healthcare solutions to all. “The unveiling of Red Sea Health reflects our deep-rooted belief that exceptional healthcare is a key part of the luxury tourism experience. It provides the ultimate as-



Officials at the ceremony

urance that wherever you are within our destinations, world-class care is always close by, delivered with both unparalleled expertise and profound empathy,” said **John Pagano**, Group CEO, Red Sea Global.

The Airport Clinic, the first asset under the new Red Sea Health brand, officially commenced operations at Red Sea International Airport (RSI) in August. This comprehensive facility offers a full suite of outpatient

services — including walk-in consultations, urgent care, vaccinations and travel-related medical support — for travellers, staff and local residents. Fully constructed and equipped with 133 units of advanced medical

technology, the facility has been granted a full license with the Saudi Ministry of Health (MoH).

The Airport Clinic marks the beginning of RSG’s vision to build a comprehensive healthcare ecosystem across The Red Sea and AMAALA, cementing the firm’s position as a world-leading multi-asset developer. Over the next 12 months, RSG will expand its healthcare network with the opening of two hospitals, six pharmacies and its emergency medical services provision for rapid emergency response and hospital transfers.

AT A GLANCE

- ❖ The Red Sea welcomed its first guests in 2023
- ❖ At present, it has five hotels open
- ❖ Located within 3-hour flying time of 250 million people
- ❖ RSI is the gateway to the destination for guests and residents



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Nuran Kilani
Chief Operating Officer
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NEOM

Rotana takes lead with digital strategy

With more hotel rooms opening in the Middle East, it is important to ensure that the service standards remain not only relevant but also exceed the requirements of today’s travellers. In an interview with , **Eddy Tannous**, Chief Operating Officer, Rotana, talks about their latest digital transformation strategy and the way forward.

 TT Bureau

Why did Rotana’s digital transformation have to be led from the top, with full organisational buy-in?

Digital transformation at Rotana is about redefining the way we serve our guests and operate as a business. This initiative formed part of our new strategic roadmap, with executive commitment ensuring every decision aligned to a clear vision for the future. By leading from the top, we were able to unite our entire organisation, from on-property teams to cor-



Eddy Tannous
Chief Operating Officer
Rotana

porate departments, behind a shared goal. This approach ensured that when the new platform launched, it reflected the combined expertise and passion of every team across the business, making it a true company-wide achievement.

What was the real business case for rebuilding the group’s platform, loyalty programme and guest experience?

The hospitality market in the Middle East is evolving rapidly. The business case for rebuilding our platform was clear: to remain competitive, strengthen our direct booking channels and deliver experiences that meet and exceed these rising expectations. By investing in AI-driven search, mobile-first design and a unified booking platform for rooms, dining and events, we are not just meeting expectations, we are creating the conditions for stronger guest rela-

tionships, higher direct bookings and long-term brand loyalty.

How are internal systems, people and digital journeys more aligned now?

This transformation has been as much about our internal operations as it

ing technology with their expertise has created a more agile, responsive and guest-centric organisation. The platform also unifies hotel stays, restaurant reservations and event bookings into a single, intuitive interface, removing barriers and making it easier for

demand in more competitive markets?

The next era of hospitality leadership will demand a deeper integration of technology, personalisation and purpose. Guests today expect experiences that feel tailored to them, delivered at speed and available across devices and channels.

The business case for rebuilding our platform was clear: to remain competitive, strengthen direct booking channels and deliver experiences

has been about the guest-facing experience. Our people are at the heart of delivering the Rotana experience, and align-

guests to plan their entire Rotana experience.

What will the next era of hospitality leadership





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THIS IS APPLICABLE FOR ALL TRAVEL AGENTS

DCT Abu Dhabi to host TAAI meet

The DCT Abu Dhabi will host the 68th Annual Convention & Exhibition of the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) from 17–19 September 2025, further deepening its partnership with the India market. The convention aligns with DCT Abu Dhabi’s Tourism Strategy 2030, which aims to welcome 39.3 million visitors annually by the end of the decade.

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The convention, to be organised under the theme ‘Business with Goodness’, will bring together a cross-section of India’s travel trade — including travel agents, tour operators, airlines, hospitality leaders and tourism boards — to explore new growth avenues and reinforce bilateral ties. As one of the year’s most significant industry events, the convention highlights Abu Dhabi’s rising profile as a global hub for tourism, trade and business events. **Abdulla Yousuf**, Director – International Opera-



Abdulla Yousuf
Director – International Operations
DCT Abu Dhabi

tions, DCT Abu Dhabi, said, “India continues to be a key priority market for us, not only in terms of visitor volume but also in long-term strategic collaboration. We are honoured to welcome TAAI’s esteemed mem-



Sunil Kumar
President
TAAI

bers to Abu Dhabi and look forward to showcasing our destination’s remarkable evolution across world-class cultural icons, family attractions, luxury, adventure and business travel offerings. This convention

is an opportunity to build shared values and lasting partnerships across both our markets.”

Sunil Kumar, President, TAAI, said, “It is a proud moment for TAAI to bring the 68th Annual Convention to the dynamic city of

meaningful partnerships rooted in trust, purpose and progress. This convention will not only provide an enriching platform for knowledge-sharing and networking but also offer our members an immersive experience into Abu Dhabi’s diverse

TAAI Business Buzz (B2B sessions) will be a key opportunity for networking and commercial engagement between exhibitors and delegates

Abu Dhabi in collaboration with DCT Abu Dhabi. Our theme, Business with Goodness, reflects our shared vision of building

cultural, leisure and business landscape. We look forward to a highly engaging and impactful gathering.”

CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Grand Opening Ceremony on 17 September, followed by a welcome dinner with live entertainment
- ❖ Plenary Sessions on 18 & 19 September, featuring high-level discussions on tourism innovation, collaboration and sector growth







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EVENT TALK		
SEPTEMBER 2025		
Date	Event	Venue
1-5	From Recovery to Resilience: Sustainable Pathways for Transforming Tourism	Sandton, South Africa
2	Texas Tourism Women's Conference	Fort Worth, USA
2-4	ITB India 2025	Mumbai, India
3	Travursity Travel Showcase	Boston, USA
3-4	Tourism, Hotel Investment & Networking Conference (THINC Indonesia)	Bali, Indonesia
3-4	International Conference on Sustainable Development	Colombo, Sri Lanka
3-6	Unique Travel Fair	Abu Dhabi, UAE
4	Travursity Travel Showcase	Philadelphia, USA
4-5	Wellness Tourism Summit	Byron Bay, Australia
4-6	International Travel Expo Ho Chi Minh City (ITE)	Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam
5-7	Matta Fair	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
5-7	36 th Philippine Travel Mart (PTM)	Pasay, Philippines
5-7	Diving & Resort Travel Expo (DRT Show)	Pasay, Philippines
10-12	International Russian Travel Market (OTDYKH) 2025	Moscow, Russia
11-12	Mice Meeting Point	Beijing, China
17-18	WTE Miami 2025 (US & International Travel Market)	Miami, USA
22-24	JAPEX	Montego Bay, Jamaica
23-25	IT&CM Asia and CTW Asia-Pacific 2025	Bangkok, Thailand

OMRAN Group launches GIFTED 2.0

OMRAN Group, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development, has launched the second edition of the ‘GIFTED’ programme — one of its flagship social investment initiatives to provide training and employment to persons with disabilities.

TT Bureau

The GIFTED programme of Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group) forms part of its #IAmTourism strategy, which aims to empower national talent and strengthen its presence in the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

This edition builds on the success of the first phase, which was implemented at dusitD2 Na-seem Resort in Al Jabal Al Akhdar and achieved positive outcomes in both training and integration. The current edition includes 13 participants with disabilities who are undertaking a six-month intensive programme designed to provide them with the practical skills

and knowledge required to work in the tourism and hospitality industry.

The programme represents a practical step toward inclusive employment, offering promising opportunities for participants to join a number of OMRAN Group’s leading hospitality assets in Muscat Governorate, including W Muscat, In-



Hilal bin Rashid Al Mukhaini, Assistant Director, Department of

enables persons with disabilities to fully integrate into the labour market, in line with its developmental vision to promote independence and self-reliance. The ‘GIFTED’ programme, launched in partnership with OMRAN Group, stands as an important practical model of this approach, by providing tailored training and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the tourism sector, in line with their abilities and potential.”

#IAmTourism aims to empower national talent and strengthen its presence in the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman

terContinental Muscat, JW Marriott, Crowne Plaza at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and Barceló Mus-sanah Resort.

Specialised Rehabilitation Centres, Ministry of Social Development, said, “The ministry is committed to developing a comprehensive framework that

Western Europe top market for Dubai

Contd. from page 1

HH Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Chairman of The Executive Council of Dubai, said, “Dubai continues to set new records in international visits, reinforcing the strategic vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to make the city a major global business and tourism destination.”

This milestone reflects Dubai’s steady growth as a focal point for trade, investment, talent and opportunity and its rise as the world’s most connected city.



“As we advance the goals of the Dubai Economic Agenda D33, tourism will remain key to driving GDP growth and cross-sector value creation in the emirate’s economy. By continually anticipating the needs of travellers and exceeding their expectations, we are strengthening Dubai’s position as

the world’s best city to visit, live and work in. Partnerships, global campaigns, events and a series of new openings showcased the city to both new and returning international visitors, while DET’s bespoke market strategy, working in collaboration with more than 3,000 global and domestic

partners, led to growth in key regions.”

His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General, DET, said, “Dubai’s strong tourism performance in the first half of 2025 reflects the enduring strength and adaptability of our economic model, even amid persistent global

headwinds. Inflationary pressures, shifting traveller behaviours and wider macroeconomic uncertainty continue to challenge destinations worldwide. Yet Dubai remains on an upward trajectory, an outcome shaped by the long-term vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum and the precision of the Dubai Economic Agenda, D33.”

Campaigns and partnerships

Showcasing Dubai’s ever evolving and diverse destination offering, the Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DCTCM), part of DET, launched a series of campaigns in H1 2025. HH Issam Kazim, CEO, DCTCM, said, “Our residents, businesses and visitors have played

a supporting role in our tourism success, with their authentic voices and genuine advocacy promoting the city and its unique experiences.”

GROWTH STRATEGY

- ❖ Dubai’s strong tourism performance reflects the enduring strength and adaptability of its economic model
- ❖ PPPs and the power of community have been instrumental in showcasing Dubai’s destination offering to the world

Tips to optimise hotel operations

One of the biggest challenges for all properties — especially for smaller properties which are forced to do more with less staff, a lower budget and new challenges — is how to increase the efficiency of their operations, revenue management and marketing strategies to boost bookings. **Benjamin Verot**, Founder, HotelMinder, shares 4 key tips with .

 TT Bureau

Benjamin Verot, Founder, HotelMinder, has been a trusted hospitality industry resource for hoteliers, offering an in-depth Knowledge Hub, an unbiased Technology Marketplace and a curated network of industry experts to solve hoteliers' pressing operational problems. In his 15+ years in the industry, Verot has provided consulting services to 100+ hotels and groups, so he knows what strategies will work best for properties of all types and sizes. "I'm excited about the opportunity to share

my thoughts on this important topic because, contrary to popular opinion, the most impactful tips are not always the biggest ones. In reality, you often get the best results from small, properly planned and implemented updates, supported by the right strategy and technology. So, let's jump right in with a quick and easy tip that you can implement and see results," Verot says.

Implement Length of Stay restrictions
Your property should be using LoS controls strategically during high-demand periods to maximise occupancy and



Benjamin Verot
Founder
HotelMinder

revenue by prioritising longer, more profitable bookings over shorter stays that can break-up valuable inventory. Implementing LoS restrictions reduces operational costs, as longer stays often result in lower house-

keeping frequency, savings in energy, improved front desk efficiency and savings on restocking of in-room amenities.

Define granular room types
Think beyond standard room types. Create and market specific, targeted room types (i.e., Family Suite with Balcony, Business King with Desk, etc). By clearly communicating the value proposition that each room offers to the target demographic, you can showcase your unique offerings more effectively. This allows for more precise, value-based pricing.

Invest in right tech
While technology is not always the answer for all hotels or operational problems, it can be game changer when properly implemented. I consulted for a 90-room property in Dublin that was experiencing a bottleneck at check-in. To resolve this issue, we implemented a multi-channel AI chatbot to proactively engage guests, pre-arrival, regardless of what channel they booked through and guided them through a seamless online check-in process.

Data-driven help
Collect data to understand what different

guest segments need and expect from their hotel stay. Use this knowledge to update your offerings and marketing messaging to effectively communicate to each demographic exactly how you can meet their needs. This will result in more bookings.



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MOVEMENTS

RAKTDA

Ras Al Khaimah

The Government of Ras Al Khaimah appoints **PHILLIPA HARRISON** as the CEO of Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA). Harrison, the ex-MD of Tourism Australia, will spearhead the emirate's vision to become the 'Destination of the Future', bringing decades of international tourism expertise across Australia and other global markets. Harrison's appointment will help advance Ras Al Khaimah Government's objectives.



FAIRMONT

Ajman

Fairmont Ajman has promoted **AHMED GAAFAR** to the position of Hotel Manager. The promotion comes in recognition of his leadership, operational acumen and unwavering commitment to crafting exceptional guest journeys. With over 23 years of experience in luxury hospitality, Gaafar brings a unique combination of strategic vision, people-first leadership and hands-on operational expertise. He joined Fairmont Ajman in November 2021 as Director of Operations.



ACCOR

Dubai

Accor has appointed **RAKI PHILLIPS** as Regional President for the Premium, Midscale & Economy (PME) division across the Middle East & Africa & Türkiye, effective November 2025. He succeeds Paul Stevens in leading one of Accor's most strategically important regions. Phillips will oversee hotel operations performance across a network of over 250 hotels in 27 countries and a robust pipeline of over 85 openings further anchoring Accor's presence across the region.



BANYAN TREE DUBAI AND BANYAN TREE ALULA

Dubai

Banyan Tree Dubai and Banyan Tree Alula have appointed **LAURA CHRISTIAN** as Cluster Director of Marketing & Communications. In this strategic dual-resort role, Christian will oversee all marketing, brand and communications activity across two of the region's most distinctive destinations. With over 15 years of experience in luxury hospitality and marketing, she brings a strong track record of shaping brand narratives and driving performance-led campaigns.



CHAPMAN FREEBORN

Saudi Arabia

Chapman Freeborn, part of the Avia Solutions Group, has appointed **VILMA VAITIEKUNAITE** as Vice President Passenger – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. With over 20 years of experience in commercial aviation, sales, marketing and corporate communications, Vaitiekunaite brings a proven track record of leadership. She joins Chapman Freeborn from her position as CEO of Skylence, a boutique international air charter brokerage within Avia Solutions Group.



JANNAH HOTELS & RESORTS

Abu Dhabi

Jannah Hotels & Resorts appoints **MARK WHITLOCK** as Group General Manager, marking a strategic step toward a bold new era of growth, innovation and operational excellence. With over 20 years of international hospitality experience across the UK, Middle East and Southeast Asia, Whitlock brings a unique blend of strategic vision, commercial acumen and people-focused leadership. His track record spans from on-the-ground operations to steering complex portfolios, consistently driving performance.



RAFFLES JEDDAH

Saudi Arabia

Raffles Jeddah has appointed **FREDRIK BLOMQVIST** as General Manager. With over 25-year global luxury hospitality experience and a proven track record of success across the Middle East, Europe, Asia and the US, Blomqvist's ability to blend operational excellence with cultural authenticity positions him to elevate Raffles Jeddah as the Kingdom's newest destination along the Corniche, overlooking the Red Sea. He brings a wealth of global experience to Raffles Jeddah.



KHALIDIA PALACE HOTEL DUBAI BY MOUROUJ GLORIA

Dubai

Khalidia Palace Hotel Dubai appoints **SENOL SARISEN** as General Manager. Sarisen brings with him decades of global hospitality experience, having held leadership roles with several prestigious international hotel brands. His expertise in luxury hotel operations, with a strong foundation in F&B management, aligns seamlessly with Khalidia Palace's commitment to delivering elevated guest experiences.



HYATT

Riyadh

Hyatt appoints **NIZAR WESHAH** as Area Vice President of Saudi Arabia, reinforcing the brand's commitment to accelerating growth and delivering elevated guest experiences across the Kingdom. Weshah now takes on a wider role overseeing Hyatt's operational strategy, performance and expansion plans across the Saudi market, while continuing to lead as the General Manager of Hyatt's flagship property, Grand Hyatt Al Khobar Hotel and Residences.



DESERT ADVENTURES

Saudi Arabia

LUC DELCOMMINETTE has been appointed General Manager for Desert Adventures, Saudi Arabia. Delcomminette is a passionate hospitality professional with over 30 years of international experience in senior leadership roles across the tourism and hospitality sectors. He specialises in complex operations, business development and general management. A graduate of the Hotel Management School in Belgium, he began his hospitality career in various operational roles in Belgium and Portugal.



GLOBAL HOTEL ALLIANCE (GHA)

Dubai

Global Hotel Alliance (GHA) promotes **KATHARINA DEIN** to the position of Vice President Commercial. Dein was the first member of the GHA Commercial team back in 2013, overseeing a growing portfolio of brands and building strong relationships. In her new role, Dein will broaden her scope of responsibilities, placing emphasis on optimising the performance of newly integrated properties during critical launch phase.



THE ST REGIS SAADIYAT ISLAND RESORT & AL WATHBA, A LUXURY COLLECTION DESERT RESORT & SPA

Abu Dhabi

ARUN NARAYANAN has been appointed as Multi-Property General Manager for The St Regis Saadiyat Island Resort, Abu Dhabi and Al Wathba, a Luxury Collection Desert Resort & Spa. With two decades of proven leadership in luxury hospitality, Narayanan brings fresh perspective, a passion for innovation and an unwavering commitment to enriching guest experiences.



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DWTC team celebrating their success in serving half a million guests in H1

DWTC serves 527k guests in H1 '25

The Hospitality Division of Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) served more than half a million guests across 1,401 events in H1 2025 — an 11.8 per cent and 6.7 per cent year-on-year increase respectively. The performance reflects DWTC Hospitality's agility and ambition to reimagine the guest experience, says **Mahir Abdulkarim Julfar**, Executive Vice President, DWTC.

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Mahir Abdulkarim Julfar, Executive Vice President, DWTC, said, "In a dynamic and rapidly evolving landscape, our H1 2025 performance reflects DWTC Hospitality's agility and ambition in reimagining the guest experience. By combining operational scale, culinary creativity and strategic partnerships, we are proud to support Dubai's growing events economy with hospitality experiences that set new benchmarks."

Exhibition catering witnessed standout growth,



Mahir Abdulkarim Julfar
Executive Vice President
DWTC

serving 132,146 guests across 50 events — more than double the number of guests served in H1 2024 — marking a 105 per cent increase. This surge reflects DWTC's ability to cater to increasingly complex and large-scale exhibi-

tions, reaffirming its status as the region's leading exhibition catering provider. The conferences and associations segment also recorded strong growth, with DWTC Hospitality serving 57,289 guests across 30 events, marking a 23 per cent increase from 46,500 guests in H1 2024. While event count remained consistent, the rise in attendees underscores DWTC's growing appeal as a preferred partner for business events focused on networking and knowledge exchange.

DWTC's diverse catering portfolio continued to deliver strong

results as non-exhibition DICEC events increased 38 per cent, with 477 events catered while external events rose 4 per cent to 687, including high-profile events, such as the Dubai International

as well as external sites. DWTC Hospitality achieved notable industry recognition at the Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025, securing 51 medals across categories. For the third consecutive year, the

In a rapidly evolving landscape, our H1 2025 performance reflects DWTC's agility and ambition in reimagining the guest experience

Boat Show and Meydan Dubai World Cup. The figures highlight the division's capacity to deliver seamless, high-volume catering across both DWTC venues

team was honoured with the prestigious Best Effort by an Individual Establishment award, reinforcing DWTC's leadership in culinary innovation.

IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Exhibition catering more than doubles YoY, serving 132,000+ guests
- ❖ Conferences & associations post 23% increase, serving over 57,000 guests
- ❖ Outstanding culinary performance earns 51 medals at Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025

Seamless tech powering business events

Spanning over 1,000 sqm of versatile meeting and event space in the heart of Deira Dubai, Pullman Deira Creek City Centre has been a preferred MICE destination for almost two decades.  sat with **Laura Nicli**, General Manager, Pullman Deira Creek City Centre, to find out more about their unique facilities and offerings.

 Dr Shehara Fernando

What key facilities at Pullman Deira Creek City Centre attract MICE business?

Pullman Deira Creek City Centre is a preferred destination for MICE events, offering a total of 1,000 sqm of versatile meeting and event space. The hotel features nine meeting rooms, ranging from an executive boardroom to a grand ballroom and various functional spaces, all designed to adapt to the needs of

corporate events, conferences and private gatherings. Located on the second floor and directly connected to Deira City Centre Mall, the meeting facilities offer convenience and accessibility for attendees. A spacious pre-function area and dedicated breakout rooms enhance the flexibility of the venue.

What tech and support services do you provide for MICE clients?

Pullman Deira Creek City Centre provides cutting-edge technol-



Laura Nicli
General Manager
Pullman Deira Creek City Centre

ogy and professional support tailored to the demands of modern business events. Under its 'Connectivity by Pullman' initiative, the

hotel offers complimentary high-speed Wi-Fi throughout the property, ensuring uninterrupted digital access. A dedicated IT Solutions Manager is available on-site to troubleshoot and support technical requirements, while teleconferencing capabilities, panoramic screens and advanced audiovisual equipment help deliver impactful presentations and virtual connectivity. The hotel also guarantees high levels of data confidentiality and security. For each event, setups can be

fully customised, including podiums, stages, wired and wireless microphones and other technical enhancements to ensure a seamless professional experience.


How do you work with travel agents and booking partners to promote your MICE facilities?

Pullman Deira Creek City Centre collaborates actively with travel agents and booking partners to promote its MICE facilities, which contribute approximately 20 per cent to the overall MICE business.

BENEFITS OFFERED

- ❖ Exclusive perks designed to enhance the delegate experience
- ❖ Attendees benefit from preferred room rates
- ❖ Complimentary upgrades are available for selected VIPs or frequent guests

MICE Meeting Point to kick off in Beijing

The Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism and ITB China's new strategic partnership to advance international cooperation in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions sector is scheduled to unfold at 'MICE Meeting Point 2025' from 11–12 September in China's capital, Beijing, with  as the media partner.

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MICE Meeting Point is a curated two-day ConfEx event that brings together MICE decision-makers from across China and the world, including event organisers, industry associations, corporate buyers and conference planners to connect face-to-face with global destinations, venues, service providers and tech solution partners. Exhibitors and some keen buyers from the Middle East region will attend the event.



David Axiotis
Managing Director
Messe Berlin China

The agenda features keynote speeches, panel forums, executive dialogues, product showcases, dedicated business booths and curated network-

ing sessions — all designed to provide participants with comprehensive insights into the latest trends across both China's and global MICE markets, foster cross-border collaboration and seize emerging opportunities.

Following the event, ITB China will also co-ordinate a customised familiarisation trip for international buyers and media. This trip will offer first-hand exposure to iconic meeting facilities, cultural landmarks and emerging MICE and business travel projects.

It will further enable attendees to gain deeper insight into Beijing's dynamic and evolving MICE landscape.

Talking about the event, **David Axiotis**, Managing Director, Messe Ber-

empowering global industry stakeholders to seize the growth opportunities of both China's inbound and outbound MICE markets.

"We are honoured to work closely with the

real connections and long-term partnerships between international suppliers and China's MICE leaders."

Guo Huaigang, Director General, Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism, said, "As the capital of China, Beijing plays a leading role in advancing the country's opening-up and driving integration between culture and tourism. We recognise the MICE sector's powerful contribution to city branding, international engagement and economic growth. 

The agenda features keynote speeches, panel forums, executive dialogues, product showcases and curated networking sessions

lin China, said, "ITB China's MICE Meeting Point is more than an event. It's a gateway between China and the world,

Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism and to provide a platform that fosters meaningful dialogue,

EPEX & ICCA expand partnership

Experiential Planner Expo (EPEX), the region's leading B2B platform for the MICE, weddings and luxury events industry, has announced the expansion of its strategic partnership with the International Congress and Convention Association – Middle East Chapter (ICCA ME). This renewed alliance marks a significant evolution in EPEX's engagement strategy.

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In 2025, EPEX and ICCA ME are jointly bringing a select group of international association leaders to participate in the show. Majorly from medical associations, these representatives have expressed interest in hosting future congresses and events in the Middle East. Their presence will provide EPEX exhibitors and destination partners the rare opportunity to understand the deeper requirements of international congresses and the decision-making dy-



Agents and partners networking

namics behind destination selection.

The partnership will also feature an ICCA-led Leadership Session during EPEX 2025, where invited association

leaders will engage in a panel discussion titled 'More Than Meetings: How Association Congresses Drive Impact, Legacy and Destination Strategy'. Moderated by **Anju Gomes**, Senior

Regional Director, ICCA ME, this session will uncover the real priorities of associations — from aligning with national development goals to achieving long-term impact in knowledge and

community exchange. Attendees will gain valuable insights into how destinations, venues and local stakeholders can position themselves

dimension to EPEX," said **Karishma Hundalani**, Head – Brand and Content, POW WOW Marketing, organisers of EPEX. "As the region

The partnership will also feature an ICCA-led Leadership Session where association leaders will engage in a panel discussion

not just as hosts, but as long-term partners in delivering transformational outcomes.

"This expanded partnership with ICCA ME brings a crucial new

grows its credentials as a global hub for international meetings and congresses, it's important that we also enable real conversations around legacy, collaboration and value co-creation."



Hospitality betting on agility & diversity

Over the past two decades, Future Hospitality Summit (FHS) has evolved into the region's most influential hospitality and tourism investment event, serving as a vital platform for leaders, innovators and investors to connect, collaborate and shape the industry's future. As media partner, **MCEtalk** invited The Bench to speak with six industry leaders.

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How has hospitality investment evolved over the past decade?

Elie Milky, Chief Development Officer – Middle East, Cyprus & Greece, Radisson Hotel Group: Hospitality investment has become more agile, diversified and data driven. Investors today seek value beyond location, prioritising adaptability, operational efficiency and long-term sustainability over short-term gains. Also, there is a rise in alternative asset classes like resorts, serviced apartments, lifestyle hotels and budget hotels, along with increasing partnerships between soft brands and boutique operators.

Hala Matar Choufany, President – Middle East and Africa, HVS: Investors increasingly favour experience-led, lifestyle-driven brands that cater to evolving guest expectations, who are seeking authenticity, personalisation and local relevance. There is a shift from pure Hotel Management Agreements (HMAs) to franchise, lease and white-label models, backed by more active private equity and institutional capital.

Duncan O'Rourke, CEO, Accor Premium, Midscale & Economy, MEA APAC: Hospitality investment has shifted from traditional asset-heavy models to branded, experience-focused approaches driven by long-term partnerships. Governments like Saudi Arabia and Indonesia



Elie Milky
Chief Development Officer – Middle East,
Cyprus & Greece, Radisson Hotel Group

now actively support growth through national agendas. Sustainability has become essential for long-term growth.

Guy Hutchinson, President – Middle East & Africa, Hilton: Hospitality investment has diversified significantly to meet evolving guest expectations and shifting demographics. There is a strong growth in lifestyle brands, mid-market demand and mixed-use developments. Hilton's lifestyle portfolio in the Middle East is expected to more than double in the coming years.

Hassan Ahdab, Chief Hospitality Operations Officer, Taiba Investments: Now, it is all about agility, tech integration and catering to the new age traveller. AI and sustainability are major drivers. Luxury has got a reboot.

Aboudi Asali, Executive Vice President – Head of Hotels Advisory MENA, JLL: Hospitality investment has evolved from traditional hotel models to diverse assets, including serviced apartments, co-living spaces and experiential venues.



Hala Matar Choufany
President – Middle East and
Africa, HVS

What is the one element of hospitality investment that has changed the most?

Elie Milky: The mindset. Investor priorities have shifted from chasing luxury trophies to building resilient, performance-focused portfolios, as well as different hospitality asset classes. Today's investor is more



Guy Hutchinson
President – Middle East & Africa
Hilton

rational, focusing on RoI, brand strength and regional expertise rather than just brand prestige.

Hala Matar Choufany: The biggest shift is from commoditised room sales to delivering high-value, emotionally resonant experiences that drive both guest loyalty and diversified revenue streams. Flexible man-



Duncan O'Rourke
CEO, Premium, Midscale &
Economy, MEA APAC, Accor

agement structures have given owners greater control, cost-efficiency and adaptability.

Duncan O'Rourke: Value is now defined by platform strength, brand trust and long-term relevance rather than just financial returns. Branded residences are thriving, especially when paired



Hassan Ahdab
Chief Hospitality Operations Officer
Taiba Investments

with lifestyle or wellness propositions.

Guy Hutchinson: Investment has expanded beyond traditional destinations like New York, Paris and London, and is growing towards emerging markets.

Hassan Ahdab: Hospitality is no longer just about beds; it's about

owning the vibe travellers want. Investors are chasing unique, high-margin concepts fuelled by tech and authenticity.

Aboudi Asali: Previously dominated by specialised investors and hotel groups, the sector now attracts property developers, sovereign wealth funds, private equity, institutional investors and family offices.

What key trends, opportunities or challenges do you foresee shaping the industry in 2026?

Elie Milky: There will be a continued rise in secondary cities, demand for experience-led travel and sustainable development models, alongside opportunities in serviced apartments and cluster-riding strategies.



Aboudi Asali
Executive Vice President – Head of
Hotels Advisory MENA, JLL

Hala Matar Choufany: The next era will be defined by deeper experiential integration, stronger ESG alignment and smarter operating models. AI and data will be central to guest engagement. Rising costs and global talent shortage could pose challenges.

Duncan O'Rourke: The three 'Is' — intentional-

ity, integration and innovation — will be key components in hospitality investment. Mixed-use projects, sustainability, conversions and lifestyle brands will be strategic growth drivers.

Guy Hutchinson: At the heart of every great trip is a great stay and that is why the guest experience continues to be front and centre. Focus will be on sustainability, airline network expansion and technology's role in enhancing service without replacing the human touch.

Hassan Ahdab: By 2026, hospitality investment will hinge on a tech-driven revolution where AI, IoT and blockchain don't just enhance operations but redefine them.

Aboudi Asali: Going ahead, technological integration, sustainability and adaptive reuse will be key trends while labour shortages and economic uncertainty could be major challenges.

FUTURE FOCUS

- ❖ Asset-light strategies
- ❖ Emerging markets to branded residences
- ❖ Experiential travel
- ❖ Tech integration
- ❖ Agility
- ❖ Vision