



TRAVTALK



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THE NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY Published from : ★ India ★ Middle East

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GTS kicks off for 2021

Two days of collaboration between the travel trade on March 31 and April 1, 2021, once again promises a great line-up of speakers at insightful sessions about the industry.

Shehara Rizly

Tourism Malaysia will be the Diamond partner at the Gulf Travel Show 2021 with some of their key partners

in their very own pavilion. Great success in 2020 with 30 plus exhibitors, 6000 one-to-one meetings, and 2,500 visitors from 59 countries which included travel agents, tour operators, tourism boards, airlines, hotels, travel management companies and international agencies encouraged

the emergence of a second edition.

Shahrin Mokhtar, Director of Tourism Malaysia –Dubai, shared, "Tourism Malaysia is pleased to participate in GTS 2021 for the second year. Last year we have witnessed the success of GTS as

an excellent networking platform that brought together the tourism industry virtually. This year Tourism Malaysia is back stronger as GTS' Diamond partner with synergy between the three regional offices (TM Dubai, TM Jeddah & TM India),

Contd. on page 9 ▶



Putra Hilmy Elias
Director of Tourism Malaysia, Jeddah

“Gulf Travel Show is very important to show our continuous commitment in promoting and profiling Malaysia as the foremost holiday destination in the Middle East and North Africa markets. We will firstly pick up from our promotion activities which were halted last year. Then we will collaborate with

partners in developing new holiday packages to Malaysia. Obviously there are new norms such as social distancing, avoiding unnecessary gatherings, and conducting virtual conferences and webinars. So our objective is that we need partners to convert our marketing efforts into sales.”



Multiple-entry tourist visa



His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum
Vice President and Prime Minister UAE and Ruler of Dubai

The new resolutions are among several initiatives approved by the cabinet during a meeting chaired by Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, to position the UAE as an ideal work and

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Ireland meets the ME

The maiden virtual roadshow 'Ireland meets the Middle East' saw two days of fruitful meetings with over 350 agents from the Middle East.

“We are delighted about how our first virtual roadshow went, it was a huge success and we received a lot of positive feedback from the buyers and suppliers that took part. They really felt that they received very useful information to take them forward to support their clients in their holidays in the future. So our aim at the event was to further strengthen our relationship with the travel trade and to showcase the very best that the island of Ireland has to offer.”



Nasir Jamal Khan
CEO
Al Naboodah Travel

“It has been very informative to attend 'Ireland meets the Middle East', the first virtual annual trade event. It was impressive to see island of Ireland offering something totally unique to the Middle East and implementing all the newly required health and safety measure without compromising the holiday experience. The virtual annual trade event was well organised by Tourism Ireland and the TravTalk team.”



Aisling McDermott
Manager Middle East & Asia, Tourism Ireland

Contd. on page 5 ▶

Sharjah's new offerings

Majid Al Futtaim has opened a variety of world-class entertainment experiences.

TT Bureau

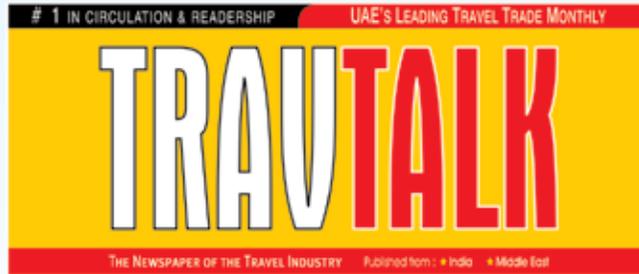
We are thrilled to be adding to our portfolio with an all-encompassing entertainment venue which features a dynamic selection of interactive and immersive attractions for the whole family. The family entertainment category is evolving and, as a customer-centric brand, Majid Al Futtaim is continuously diversifying its offering to ensure that guests' expect-



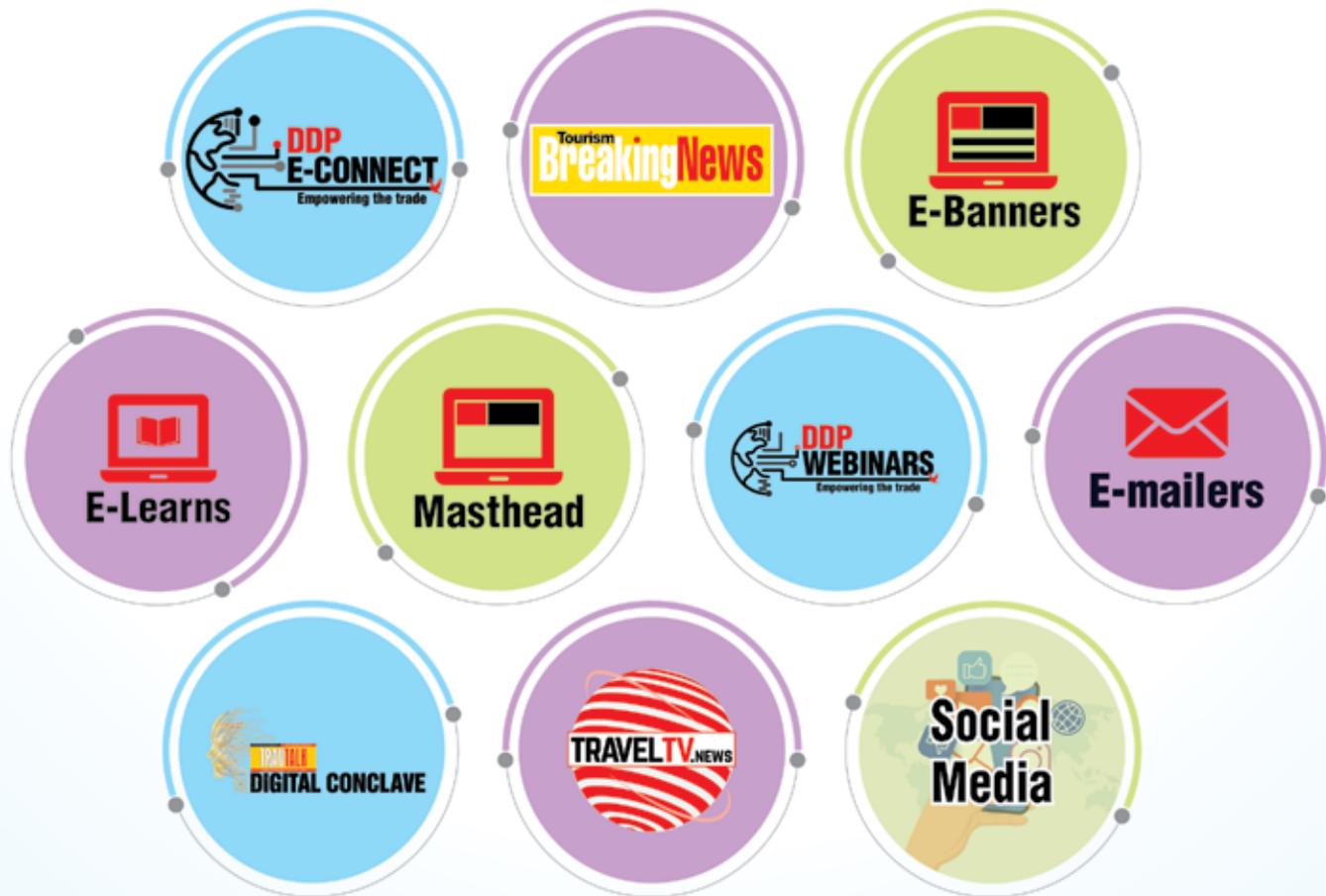
Cameron Mitchell
Chief Executive Officer
Majid Al Futtaim Cinemas and
Majid Al Futtaim Leisure & Entertainment

tations are exceeded. Our new concepts, such as a first-of-its-kind interactive

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DIGITAL OFFERINGS



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Become a qualified expert

Swiss Travel System has launched an e-learning platform for future Swiss public transport experts. This is a unique opportunity where agents can broaden their knowledge in an entertaining way and acquire essential public transport know-how. **Andreas Nef**, Market Manager, Swiss Travel System for UAE shares more details.

 Shehara Rizly

Could you share the reason to launch a Swiss travel programme?

Swiss Travel System didn't have a dedicated e-learning programme so far as such. There was an e-learning and incentive programme, called the Swiss Travel Pass Super Star running in a few selected markets, also in the Middle East. However, this programme

was very basic, not interactive at all and not up to date anymore. Swiss Travel System's goal was to launch a sophisticated, interactive e-learning programme which is state-of-the-art and can be accessed worldwide.

Who are your target audience?

Our target audience are travel agents and travel industry related staff who are interested in Switzerland and its public transport system,

the Swiss Travel System. They could be selling Swiss Travel System products already or may want to sell them in the future.

Do share the key objectives and expectations from the programme.

Selling public transport and especially rail requires a certain basic knowledge. Especially in Switzerland, the public transport system is very sophisticated which many people around the world are not aware of.

The objectives of this new e-learning programme are to transfer information about the Swiss Travel System and the benefits of travelling by public trans-

port in Switzerland to the target audience. By using a lot of interactivity, animations and movies, this should happen in a fun way. But the programme should also increase the popularity of Switzerland as a holiday destination.

How can the Middle East travel fraternity benefit by attending the programme?

The goal of learning is to motivate, to be fun and, not the least, to promote sales. In addition to various incentives such as souvenir pictures and awards, attractive prizes are in store for participants several times a year. After successfully passing

the tests, specialists may officially call themselves Swiss Travel System Excellence Expert.

What are the key focus areas for the programme and will there be a certification at the end of it?

The programme covers the entire public transport system of the country. In the individual courses, participants learn everything about the characteristics of the Swiss Travel System – from tickets and passes to premium panoramic trains to luggage transport. This achievement also merits a diploma, which can be downloaded at the end. But that's not



Andreas Nef
Market Manager
Swiss Travel System for UAE

all – participants collect points with every learning progress. Those with the highest scores will be rewarded with a visit to Switzerland – travel, hotel and Swiss Travel Pass included. So, the learning effort is absolutely worth it. 🇨🇭

“ Our target audience are travel agents and travel industry related staff who are interested in Switzerland and its public transport system, the Swiss Travel System ”

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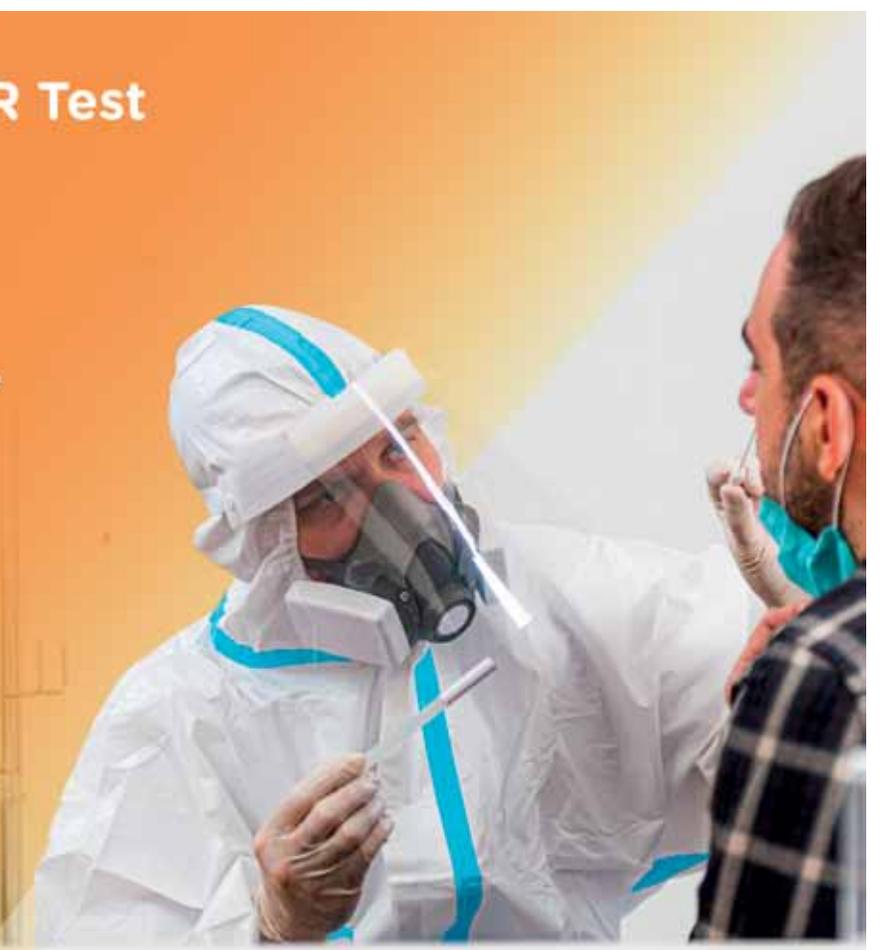
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Revisiting Andalusia & Costa del Sol

The first session in a tri-series webinar was concluded with over 180 agents across the Middle East region attending the one-hour webinar focused on Andalusia and Costa del Sol. **Daniel Rosado Bayon**, Director, Spain Tourism GCC was joined by partners from the four destinations.

 Shehara Rizly

Starting off the session, **Daniel Rosado Bayon**, Director, Spain Tourism GCC stated how the first webinar will take place focusing on four key areas; Malaga, Cordoba, Granada and Seville. "Spain

site. Many precautions and measures have been taken by Spain focusing on summer travel upon confirmation by EU. Connectivity wise, before the pandemic Spain had the best connections over the national carriers from UAE, Saudi and Qatar etc. There are certain excep-

be filled, the QR code on arrival and negative PCR test 72 hours before boarding. However, the situation is in control in Spain, almost 70 per cent of the country will be vaccinated soon. We are helping agents as much as we can to obtain the knowledge necessary before the borders open and after they open, we hope to conduct fam trips, of course keeping safety and security regulations in mind."

Costa del Sol was presented by Belen Perez Gascon, Business Development Manager, Costa del Sol Tourist Board and Pilar Carrión, Executive Consultant Turismo Promotion, Costa del Sol Tourist Board, followed by Andalusion



Daniel Rosado Bayon
Director
Spain Tourism GCC

Soul with Antonio Montejo Romero, Tourism Promotion Department – Tourism and Promotion Area of the City, Malaga City Council and Seville presented by Diego Juárez, International Promotion & MICE, Seville Tourism. Next in line was Granada presented by Daniel Galán, Tourism

Technician, Granada City Council and Cordoba was presented by Isabel Calvache, Area for Promotion – Municipal Institute of Tourism of Córdoba.

During the presentation 10 reasons were shared as to why one should visit the destination. It is a country which could be visited throughout the year due to weather, food, culture, history, nature and landscapes, hospitality, shopping, sport, quality and infrastructure. It was also recommended that seven days would make for an ideal visit to Costa del Sol where one can enjoy no matter which age group you belong to. It gives an opportunity to connect with people and experi-

ence the lifestyle which is very much anticipated by the GCC clientele.

Costa del Sol-Malaga speakers mentioned that over the past 20 years they have been promoting the destination and thanked Daniel Rosado Bayon and the team in Tourism Spain in Abu Dhabi for all the support extended. From cultural spaces to gastronomy, shopping, live experiences, beach clubs, night life, Mediterranean soul, outstanding hotels that are very good and promise a real experience of the destination with hotels such as W soon to be opened. Health and wellness play a key role, checking out the sunsets in the destination is another must do activity.

“We are helping agents as much as we can to obtain the knowledge necessary before the borders open and after they open, we hope to conduct fam trips, of course keeping safety and security regulations in mind”

developed a travel safe campaign and all information pertaining to it could be accessed via the web-

tions where people can still travel to Spain. They must show a health control form which needs to

Partners@ Spain Webinar

“Costa del Sol and Marbella have been popular destinations for GCC in the last 20 years and with the introduction of direct flights, we have seen an increase in numbers and we are hoping to continue this trend once the borders open up and direct flights to the airport of Malaga will be re-connected to Qatar, Riyadh, Bahrain, Kuwait and Abu Dhabi.”



Belen Perez Gascon
Business Development
Manager
Costa del Sol Tourist Board

“Costa del Sol-Andalucía, is indeed one of the most fascinating areas in Spain thanks to its multi aspects, from luxurious hotels to the authentic historic cities; fashion design, shopping, outstanding gastronomy, a great variety of options for halal food; Mediterranean lifestyle, and nightlife. Malaga, Costa del Sol, is no doubt a go-to destination in the GCC.”



Pilar Carrión
Executive Consultant
Turismo Promotion, Costa
del Sol Tourist Board



Antonio Montejo Romero
Tourism Promotion
Department – Tourism and
Promotion Area of the City –
Malaga City Council

“Malaga is a Mediterranean city that enjoys the best climate in Europe, ideal to live, feel and enjoy. Internationally connected by air and also by land thanks to the Spanish high-speed train AVE, Costa del Sol’s capital is currently one of Spain’s largest cultural cities, boasting around 40 world-class museums, being the birthplace of Picasso and home to such important cultural icons as the own Picasso, Thyssen, Pompidou, the Russian art museum in Saint Petersburg. But Malaga also offers excellent five-star properties, fine and rich and careful gastronomy (for example, the espetos), and a spectacular monumental heritage from Roman, Arab and Catholic times dated centuries ago.”



Diego Juárez
International & MICE
Department, Sevilla Tourism
Board

“Sevilla Cathedral, Alcázar and Archivo de Indias in Seville – together these three world heritage buildings by UNESCO form a remarkable monumental complex in the heart of Seville. The cathedral and the Alcázar – dating from the Reconquest of 1248 to the 16th century and imbued with Moorish influences – are an exceptional testimony to the civilization of the Almohads as well as that of Christian Andalusia. However, the main attraction is Plaza de España, full of tiles and ceramics. But once you have seen these you will see that Sevilla has pleasant weather, tasteful gastronomy and offers great value for money, perhaps that’s why more than 60 per cent of people come back again and again.”

“Located in the south of Spain, between the highest mountain range in the Iberian peninsula and the tropical and Mediterranean coast, we find the jewel city of Granada. Granada has the Alhambra fortress and the gardens of the Generalife. But Granada is more than this mesmerizing construction. Granada is the Muslim neighborhood of the Albaicín, the Gypsy Sacromonte cave district where the most authentic Flamenco is to be found, and the old Christian town presided the majestic Cathedral, the finest form of Renaissance architecture in Spain which are all sure attractions for clients from GCC.”



Daniel Galán
Tourism Technician
Granada City Council

“Córdoba is a medium-sized city – a city whose streets are a delight to stroll through and whose climate is benign throughout the year, full of charming spots and unique historic treasures, where the people are cheerful and friendly, and give a warm welcome to visitors, to whom they proudly show their impressive cultural heritage, their unique accolade of four World Heritage Sites (the Mosque of Cordoba since 1984, the Historic Quarter since 1994, the Patios’s Festival since 2012 and the Caliphate City of Medina Azahara since 2018), Córdoba is this and so much more and we hope the agents enjoyed the webinar as much as we did and we can’t wait to welcome you and your clients from the GCC.”



Ana Marcos
Director / Manager –
Department of Tourism,
Cordoba City Council

Rave reviews for Ireland roadshow

The maiden virtual event organised by Tourism Ireland concluded attracting over 350 agents from the Middle East who networked in one platform for two days with 28 Irish partners from across the island of Ireland. Comments were shared by buyers and exhibitors about the event.



Jamal Abdulnazar
CEO
Cozmo Travel

“We have been working very closely with Tourism Ireland and I must say they have always come out with some very good programmes to enhance and build the confidence of the traveller by conducting these virtual events. They have always come out more than expected and we have always seen them going beyond expectations”



Eóin McGrath
Luxury Leisure Sales
Manager, Hastings Hotels
Group

“It was a superb event – the buyers were hyper engaged in Ireland. The quality of the buyers was A-class, and the majority were familiar with Ireland, and indeed Belfast. Buyers were mainly interested in access – how to get to Northern Ireland. They were also interested in knowing about visa requirements and our vaccination rollout campaign.”



Nour Aridi
Account Manager GCC,
Kildare Village

“Participating in the Tourism Ireland virtual roadshow was a great opportunity for Kildare Village to showcase our extraordinary shopping destination with not only our existing partners across the GCC region but also with potential partners. We have seen a lot of positive feedback. Our luxury outdoor shopping offering has been very well received.”

“Everyone I have met was very interested in hearing more about Dream Escape, which is a leading luxury travel design company and destination specialist offering travel experiences to Ireland. They have all requested for some sample programmes that they can use to promote the company and destination, so it's a win-win for Ireland Inc.”



Emer Mortell
Head of Sales
Dream Escape

“It was a wonderful show. It was great to meet people online and I had fantastic chats with some buyers and they showed a lot of interest in Ireland. On the whole it was very good.”



Filip Robinson
Owner
Giant Tours



“We have been asked about what our visitor experience is, information on our factory tours and what our rates are. We will be sharing further information by email. The event has been great – I think the virtual platform and booths will be very popular going forward with trade-shows. It's great to have something so interactive while being virtual.”



Emma Rose Power
Sales and Marketing
Coordinator
House of Waterford Crystal



“A lot of the agents that I was talking to were aware of Ireland, they knew about Dublin but they didn't know outside of Ireland.”

Evan Butler
Director Sales and Marketing
Trump International Golf Links and Hotel Doonbeg



“Overall, it was a very good event. Their main requirements seemed to be green areas, mountains, lakes and not city destinations, which is fantastic, as that is what we offer.”

James Hayde
Business Development Manager, Sheen Falls Lodge

Inputs by Shehara Rizly

Britain targets GCC - an important market

Britain has always been a second home for GCC travellers. **Patricia Yates**, Director of Strategy and Communications, Visit Britain shares her views with TRAVELTALK.

Shehara Rizly

We want to tell people about the destination and encourage the buzz that people still want to come Britain, while being careful with that message for the future. So we are doing that through a lot of social media, fun and competitions. We are working on the basis that people want a lot of fun in their lives. We are working very closely with the travel trade because we want the travel trade to be ready to sell when the borders open. GCC market is really important to Britain,



Patricia Yates
Director of Strategy and
Communications, Visit Britain

there is tremendous loyalty there as many people come back and holiday in Britain year on year, however that pattern has been broken over the past year,

so we need to re-establish that and re-establish Britain for all the things that people like doing, for instance, activities like shopping, going to great hotels & the theatre and enjoying great night life have been subdued, and we are definitely looking at GCC coming over and visiting us once again.”

FactFile

■ We are working very closely with the travel trade because we want the travel trade to be ready to sell when the borders open. GCC market is really important to Britain.

Promoting Philippines as a diving destination

Philippine International Dive Expo (PHIDEX 2021) was conducted digitally for three days by the DOT to help support and sustain the country's diving industry.

Shehara Rizly

As COVID-19 has hit the local diving industry and those who depend on it, this year's PHIDEX, themed 'Our Sea, Our Story,' aimed to raise awareness and discuss solutions into accelerating the industry's recovery. In her opening remarks,

Tourism Secretary, **Bernadette Romulo-Puyat** from the Department of Tourism in the Philippines stated, “With the gradual activation of dive travel and tourism in various parts of the country, such world events are crucial for the recovery of the diving industry. As the Philippines is widely recognised by scientists as the centre of



Bernadette Romulo-Puyat
Tourism Secretary
Department of Tourism, Philippines

“As the Philippines is widely recognised by scientists as the centre of marine biodiversity it is befitting that we lead the region in marking an event that reflects the world-class diving destinations we are promoting”

marine biodiversity it is befitting that we lead the region in marking an event that reflects the world-class diving destinations we are promoting; with the theme Our Sea, Our Story.

Green lists and new measures in MEA

With regards to travel, Abu Dhabi recently updated the green list of destinations which do not require quarantine upon entry. Countries include Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Saudi Arabia. In Dubai, multi-entry tourist visas for all nationalities have been approved and the UAE Cabinet has approved a new remote working visa.

In the past few weeks safety measures have been announced in order to limit the spread of COVID-19 during the month of Ramadan. Families in the United Arab Emir-

ates (UAE) have been advised against evening gatherings between different households, only family members living in the same house will be allowed to share meals, and no Iftar tents will

Restrictions remain in place across the region whilst the vaccine is being rolled out with Oman's curfew set to continue until the April 3

be permitted. The UAE has now administered

more than seven million COVID-19 vaccine doses

and free vaccinations are available to all residents

aged 16 and above. However, restrictions remain in place across the region whilst the vaccine is being rolled out with Oman's curfew set to continue until the April 3.

Travel Intent for Eid al-Fitr

UAE Global Hotel Searches for Eid al-Fitr 2021 - Top Destinations Compared to 2019

Destination Country	2019
1. United Arab Emirates	34.21%
2. India	12.86%
3. Egypt	7.08%
4. United States	6.49%
5. France	6.25%
6. United Kingdom	5.26%
7. Philippines	5.01%
8. Italy	4.05%
9. Thailand	3.8%
10. Turkey	3.24%

DestinationCountry	2021
1. United Arab Emirates	68.74%
2. India	7.2%
3. United States	5.06%
4. United Kingdom	2.87%
5. Egypt	2.52%
6. Philippines	2.17%
7. Italy	1.69%
8. Turkey	1.38%
9. Indonesia	1.12%
10. Oman	1.02%

Travel behaviour has undoubtedly shifted a great deal as a result of COVID-19. It is interesting to see how this has changed trends during periods which are usually considered popular for regional and international travel. When compared to 2019 (before the pandemic had an impact on travel), there has been a shift towards domestic travel for Eid al-Fitr 2021 in line with current restrictions in the region. Looking at travel searches ahead of Eid al-Fitr made by those in the UAE (comparing searches made between 1st August 2018 to 18th March 2019 with 1st August 2020 to 18th March 2021) the highest volume of intent is for the UAE, highlighting the shift towards domestic travel and staycations. All other destinations mentioned in the table above have seen a decrease in travel intent. This is a perfect opportunity for hotels to adapt their messaging and offering to appeal to the local market.

UAE Domestic Hotel Searches for Eid al-Fitr 2021

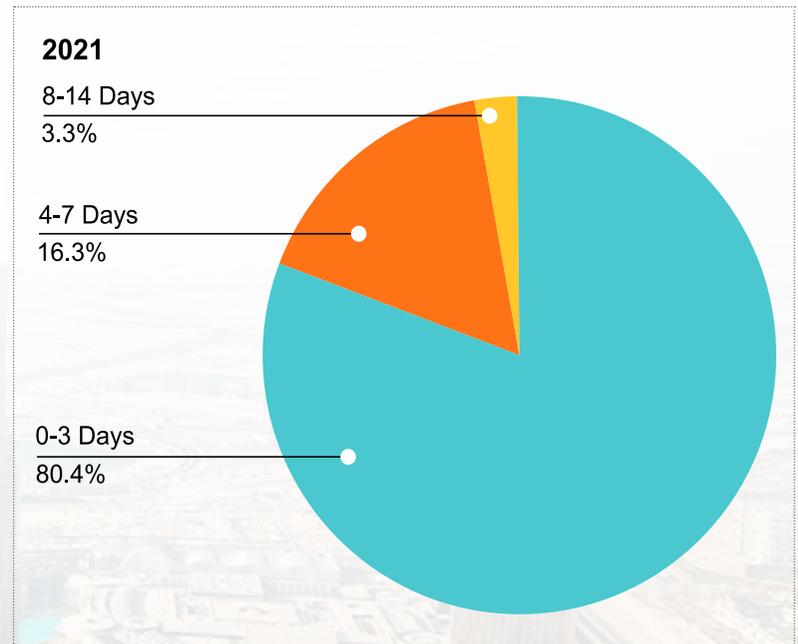
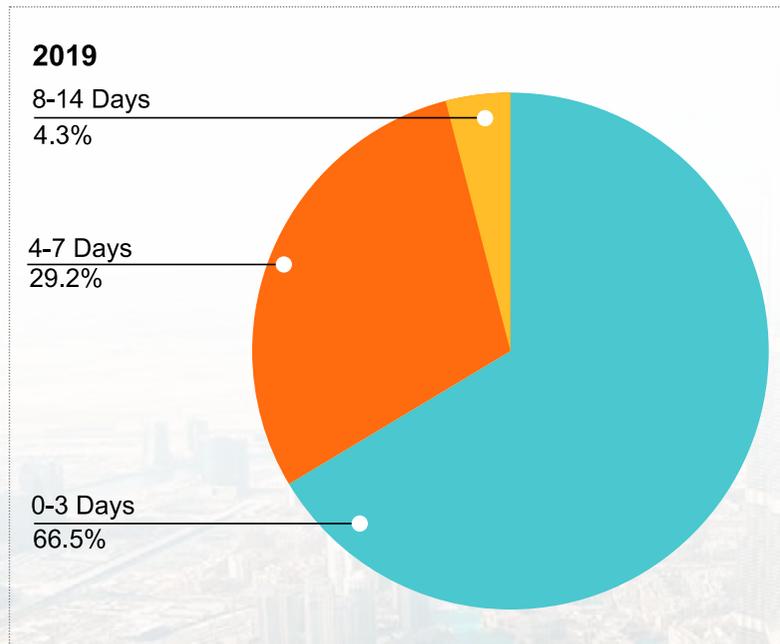
Split by Emirate Compared to 2019

Destination Country	2019
1. Dubai	57.53%
2. Ras al Khaimah	17.67%
3. Abu Dhabi	14.36%
4. Ash Shariqah	5.22%
5. Ajman	5.05%

Destination Country	2021
1. Dubai	65.81%
2. Abu Dhabi	17.66%
3. Ras al Khaimah	9.64%
4. Al Fujayrah	4.4%
5. Ajman	1.23%

Taking a closer look at domestic travel within the UAE for Eid al-Fitr this year, Dubai sits at the top with the highest volume of searches at 66%. One difference to note is that in 2019 Abu Dhabi was the third most popular emirate with regards to domestic travel intent, and has now risen to second place, taking the place of Ras al Kaimah.

UAE Global Hotel Searches for Eid al-Fitr 2021 Trip Duration Compared to 2019



It appears that the majority of travellers are also looking for shorter stays this year, with 80% of searches being for a duration of zero to three days in 2021. When comparing to 2019 this is a 21% increase in travel intent for trips of this length

With Eid al-Fitr approaching we can see a clear change in traveller behaviour compared to the trends seen pre-pandemic for this holiday. In summary, domestic travel is in higher

demand this year, reflecting travel restrictions and local COVID regulations, with Dubai being the most popular emirate for staycations this year. Trip durations have also decreased which is no surprise with the distance of travel being shorter. Based on the current guidelines and restrictions in place to slow the spread of the virus during the holiday period these trends were to be expected. People will generally continue to book for shorter periods of time, closer to home, until there is more certainty around travel across the globe.

Courtesy: Sojern

Dubai as a safe destination

At a recent interview, **Issam Kazim**, CEO, DTCM shared the many strategies undertaken by Dubai and UAE in terms of building confidence of the travellers and residents and making sure that every touch point is covered not just within the country but would also serve those countries waiting to open their borders.



Tourism recovery I think will be a gradual process. From our side of course we have all the measures in place and we have the confidence in the way that Dubai and UAE has managed this overall – the safety procedures we have from the airports to all the touch points from the RTA, their

efforts with public transport at the hotels, at the restaurants at the malls, and every single point of interaction for any guests or resident of the emirates. We are very confident and happy from that perspective.

Our regular dialogue on a G2G level ensures that the federal ministries along with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and others are en-



Issam Kazim
CEO
DTCM

“We need to work towards building confidence not just locally and among the guests who are frequently visiting Dubai but also in those countries that are next in line to open up and can add Dubai on to the list for outbound travels”

gaged in constant conversation with other countries, because us being safe is one thing but opening up more and more countries depends on their readiness to travel outbound as well. So I think that two-way conversation and dialogue



is necessary, we should continue what we are doing and make sure that we are communicating very clearly at the highest level. This

is very important because we need to work towards building confidence not just locally and among the guests who are frequently

visiting Dubai but also in those countries that are next in line to open up and can add Dubai on to the list for outbound travels.

Driving new cost efficiencies

The COVID-19 pandemic has refocused IT spending priorities for airlines and airports in 2020 as revenue plunged and the industry faced new health and operational requirements needed to keep flying. Making the check-in process completely touchless is now the main priority for airports and airlines to help protect passengers and staff, improve the passenger experience and drive efficiency.

 Shehara Rizly

In a recent report, among the key findings from SITA's 2020 Air Transport IT Insights, published was an accelerated investment in automated passenger processing focusing on touchless and mobile services. There was also a strong focus on virtual and remote IT services that allowed em-

ployees to work from home while ramping up communications with passengers. Cybersecurity and cloud services – that helped automate operations and drive new efficiencies – were key. In 2020, SITA data showed that flight volumes plunged 44 per cent year-on-year due to the pandemic. As a result of this impact on demand, IATA forecast the airline industry's full-year loss at \$118 billion.

David Lavorel, CEO, SITA at Airports & Borders, said, "The severe slowdown in 2020 forced the air transport industry to focus on driving new cost efficiencies. Adding to the pressure, airlines and airports had to rapidly incorporate new health measures such as touchless passenger processing and the handling of new health information and protocols, includ-

ing PCR testing in many destinations. These efforts have been made in a market that continues to face rapid changes in air travel regulations that make op-

and airports were able to capitalise on existing trends to automation and have made significant strides in implementing new solutions that will

“The severe slowdown in 2020 forced the air transport industry to focus on driving new cost efficiencies. Adding to the pressure, airlines and airports had to rapidly incorporate new health measures”

— David Lavorel

erational planning volatile and last minute.

To solve these challenges, the industry has turned to technology and, in many cases, reprioritised where they invested in 2020. The good news is that airlines

bring new improvements for the passenger now and into the future.”

Data and automation are key

Making the check-in process completely touchless is now the main priority



David Lavorel
CEO
SITA at Airports & Borders

for airports and airlines to help protect passengers and staff, improve the passenger experience and drive efficiency. Biometric technology is the focus for airport investment with 64 per cent of airports aiming to roll out self-boarding gates using biometric & ID documentation by 2023. 🇦🇪



Restoring passenger confidence

Starting off 25 years ago with just four aircrafts, today Cebu Pacific's fleet has grown to 74 serving many domestic & international destinations with Dubai as a key long-haul point for eight years reaching over 190 mn passengers. During the pandemic Cebu Pacific has been tirelessly working to ensure the confidence of the travellers. **Alex Reyes**, Vice President – Commercial, Cebu Pacific speaks with **TRAVTALK**.

 Shehara Rizly

Please share about the anniversary celebrated by Cebu Pacific.

Cebu Pacific celebrated its 25th year this March, commemorating its commitment to enable passengers to fly in the Philippines and various parts of the globe. It began with four planes, and has now grown to 74 in its fleet—steadfast progress in over two decades of being the country's largest national flag carrier. It has also been operating flights to Dubai—the airline's first long-haul route—for eight years already. Overall, the

number of passengers CEB has served since inception has already reached over 190 million passengers.

How has this market been over the period?

Proving further its unyielding commitment to provide ease of travel for passengers amidst the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic,

“One of the new undertakings CEB has introduced in order to restore passenger confidence in air travel includes permanently removing change fees, allowing travellers now to rebook their flights as many times as needed”

CEB has been operating 20 per cent of its pre-COVID domestic network as of February 2021, operating flights to 28 Philippine destinations—of which, six destinations are already open for non-essential or leisure travel. As of this date, the airline has already restored flights to 86 per cent of our domestic destinations. Frequencies may be less than before, but it



Alex Reyes
Vice President – Commercial
Cebu Pacific

is also important to note that we are now providing access to more local destinations. We remain keen to make travel easier by providing flexibility in the hope of restoring passenger confidence in air travel.

How did Cebu Pacific handle the pandemic?

CEB has remained unwavering in its mandate to provide the highest level of aviation service for passengers and tourists, even amidst the hurdles of the pandemic. We continue to implement a multi-layered approach to safety, in accordance with global aviation standards.

What are the new products and services introduced?

One of the new undertakings CEB has introduced in order to restore passenger confidence in air travel includes permanently

removing change fees, allowing travellers now to rebook their flights as many times as needed. Apart from unlimited rebooking, we also offer travel fund valid for two years in a bid to provide our passengers utmost flexibility in booking. In addition, CEB has also introduced its newest add-on to CEB Travelsure called COVID Protect. This service provides coverage for COVID-19-related hospitalisation and treatments for as low as AED21. This newest top-up provides passengers who test positive for COVID-19 up to AED76,459 coverage for hospitalisation and medical expenses. 🇦🇪

UAE hotels on path to recovery

Recent hospitality industry reports and analysis published by STR and Colliers International have revealed that hotels in the UAE have put up a sterling performance, given the challenges of operating during the pandemic last year. The Hotel Summit being organised by ATM on May 18 will address and debate the trends and key drivers that will support the Middle East hotel sector's recovery.

TT Bureau

To support the hotel industry still further during the vaccine rollout, Arabian Travel Market (ATM), which will take place in-person at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) from May 16-19, 2021, is organising a Hotel Summit on May 18. The event will address and debate the trends and key drivers that will support the

Middle East hotel sector's recovery as the vaccine rollout gathers momentum and herd immunity takes effect. Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said, "According to STR data, the Middle East region was a top performer globally during 2020, with average occupancy of 45.9 per cent. One of best performing countries was the UAE with an average occupancy of 51.7 per cent and



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director ME
Arabian Travel Market

an average daily rate (ADR) of \$114. Although these figures were 29.3 per cent & 16.5 per cent down Y-on-Y, given the challenges presented by the pandemic, it is a remarkable achievement and proves just how resilient the hotel sector is in the UAE and wider Mid-

dle East. Furthermore, if we drill down on these figures, ADR in Fujairah and RAK actually rose last year by seven per cent and one per cent respectively, compared with 2019 and over the New Year's celebrations hotels in Dubai were running average occupancies of 76 per cent with an ADR of \$300."

"I am certain that many hoteliers in the Middle East are now preparing for a V-shaped recovery, especially with the successful rollout of the vaccine and the ensuing herd immunity," added Curtis. Indeed, more positives can be drawn from a recent YouGov luxury survey which revealed that



more than half (52 per cent) of the respondents said they were planning to take a domestic holiday or staycation during 2021 and a further 25 per cent were planning to make a business trip, either domestically or internationally, with only four per cent having no plans to travel anywhere in 2021.

"Moreover, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has also indicated that British nationals may be allowed to travel without any restrictions as soon as June 21, which, given their close ties, would be a major boost for business and leisure travel throughout the Middle East," shared Curtis. 🇮🇪

“The ME region was a top performer globally during 2020, with average occupancy of 45.9%. One of best performing countries was the UAE with an average occupancy of 51.7% and an average daily rate (ADR) of \$114”

GTS, an excellent networking platform

▶ Contd. from page 1

seven hotels and three tour operators. Tourism Malaysia is keen to keep the communication open with the trade partners in order to revive travel once Malaysia opens its borders. In GTS



Shahrin Mokhtar
Director
Tourism Malaysia - Dubai

2021 we are glad to announce our first unique digital press conference where the media will have the opportunity to interact with Tourism Malaysia senior officers and get updates on the latest products." 🇲🇾

World-class immersive experiences

▶ Contd. from page 1

mini golf, are designed to capture the growing experience-seeking consumer base and allow for strong transversal users including adults.

We're extremely excited to open the largest cinema

in Sharjah, which offers audiences an exceptional cinematic experience with advanced technology that can't be replicated at home. VOX Cinemas City Centre Al Zahia marks our fourth cinema opening across the region. 🇦🇪

Visa can be issued for all nationalities

▶ Contd. from page 1

tourist destination. The new remote work visa will enable employees from all over the world to live and work remotely from the UAE even if their companies are based in another country.

Also, a multiple-entry tourist visa can now be issued for all nationalities, in a step

that aims to facilitate the process for tourists.

The five-year visa enables tourists to enter multiple times on self-sponsorship and remain in the country for 90 days on each visit, which can be extended for another 90 days." 🇦🇪

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NEW HOTELS

Over the past few weeks there have been quite a number of hotel openings in the UAE and Middle East in general. We take a look at some of them.



Rixos Premium Magawish Suites & Villas

Location - Hurghada, Egypt
Number of Rooms/Suites – 410 suites

Rixos Premium Magawish Suites & Villas has taken over Hurghada as the brand-new property opened its doors on the Red Sea coast. The iconic sights are accompanied by the signature Rixos services, alongside first-class suites and villa facilities, meeting halls, vast food and beverage options, world-class leisure, sports, entertainment facilities, and a spa.

Residence Inn by Marriott

Location - Al Jaddaf UAE
Number of Rooms/Suites – 134 rooms and suites



Residence Inn by Marriott, part of Marriott Bonvoy's portfolio of 30 extraordinary brands, has announced its debut of the longer stay brand in the UAE with the opening of Residence Inn by Marriott Al Jaddaf. Located in a prime city district and boasting spectacular views of the Burj Khalifa, the hotel offers convenient access to key areas including Downtown Dubai and Business Bay. The hotel features 134 modern residential suites.



Waldorf Astoria

Location - Kuwait
Number of Rooms/Suites – 200 rooms and suites

Located within The Avenues, Kuwait's largest retail, entertainment and lifestyle destination, the prestigious Waldorf Astoria Kuwait is preparing to make its grand debut later this year. The stunning property features 200 contemporary, spacious and sun-drenched deluxe rooms and suites with panoramic views of the glittering Kuwait City skyline. Guests will enjoy a transformative journey of the senses at this ultra-luxurious property.

Chedi Katara Hotel and Resort

Location - Doha, Qatar
Number of Rooms/Suites – 59 rooms and suites; 32 chalets and villas



GHM has announced plans to open a new luxury resort comprising of 59 rooms and suites as well as 32 chalets and villas at Katara Cultural Village in Qatar's capital city, Doha. The Chedi Katara Hotel & Resort, Doha, Qatar shall house a lobby lounge with 180° views of the sea, an expansive spa and fitness facility, and rooms and suites with terraces and views over the Arabian Gulf and Doha skyline.

Promoting tourism with Turkish cuisine

Rizgar Sak, founder Chairman of Dives Holding, has a vision of establishing the brand's name and presence as one of the leading F&B companies in Dubai.

Shehara Rizly

Could you share a brief about the company and its many offerings?

Dives Holding is a foundation operating in the food and beverage sector. We have partnered with CZN Burak and opened our first restaurant in Dubai. Meanwhile, we are planning on expanding in the same sector in GCC by incorporating other brands in our business.



Rizgar Sak
founder Chairman
Dives Holding

You started with a restaurant specialising in Turkish cuisine and within a few months opened an outlet in Dubai Mall as well. How are they both doing?

The feedback we have got since the opening of CZN Burak Restaurant is just incredible. Hence, we developed CZN Burak

How will food and beverage be a driver to promote tourism and travel between the two destinations?

We have actually seen the ongoing impact of the success of CZN Burak brand in terms of tourism between UAE and Turkey. We have observed the increase in Turkish tourists in the UAE, the reason being that CZN Burak is a Turkish brand. This also means that when

“ We have observed the increase in Turkish tourists in the UAE, the reason being that CZN Burak is a Turkish brand. This also means that when we open an outlet in a new location, we end up promoting Turkey too ”

Burger project and we are opening our first outlet very soon in Dubai. This project is going to allow us to expand faster in other locations.

we open an outlet in a new location, we end up promoting Turkey too.

What are the key priorities for 2021?

As you can imagine, we haven't achieved what we wanted to due to the pandemic. In 2021, I believe things will look up and we will make it through this period with just a few mild complications. Two more CZN Burak restaurants and more than one CZN Burak Burger joint in GCC are among our expansion plans in 2021.

Could you describe the clientele that patronise the restaurant and the burger outlet?

CZN Burak brand really appeals to people from all walks of life, especially kids. Firstly, Turkish cuisine is not just familiar but is loved in this part of the world. However, for CZN Burak Burger outlet, we focus more on kids.

Succeeding as a female leader

The travel and leisure industry is rich with female talent, yet research shows that when it comes to leadership positions, they are still the minority; but this is set to change. According to a Middle East report by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Ministry of Tourism of the KSA, great strides are being made to further advance gender equality in the sector.

This progress is being led by the public sector, where ministerial positions in the region are held by 21 per cent women com-

pared to the global average of 23 per cent, and the roll-out of integrated policies and partnerships with public sector entities. What's more, and consist-

ent with the findings of the Global Tourism Report II, women's under-representation is tied to few role models within the sector. Therefore, networking and

mentors are also essential for promoting women's leadership and empowerment and supporting more deliberate career guidance and career planning. With

a rich and diverse make-up of female spearheads at Abu Dhabi's premier leisure and entertainment hub, formidable leaders from Yas Island spanning

leisure, hospitality and business share their advice on how to succeed as a female leader in the travel and leisure industry as part of women's month.



Melanie Leitgeb
Welcome Desk Manager
W Abu Dhabi - Yas Island

“Women's month highlights what women had to go through in the past and celebrates empowerment. I am proud to be able to see a lot of women nowadays in management positions, although we still have a long way to go, we are on the right track. I couldn't be happier to be in this position which gives me the opportunity to inspire other women. I would say to young women to go pursue your passions despite the challenges and what others may say – it will pay off if you remain focused on why you started in the first place.”



Nancy Daccache
Cluster Commercial Director, Hilton Abu Dhabi Yas Island

“We should celebrate women's achievements and give a nod to all women who are embracing opportunities. I am fortunate enough to work with leaders who inspire us on a daily basis. The pandemic has taught me to become more agile and swift to change – I had to accept, adapt and acknowledge that the traditional ways are no longer effective. These key learnings can also be used as a basis for women who want to be successful in any industry. It is also important for women to surround themselves with people who would uplift, challenge and support them.”

“All women should have the power to embrace who they are, define their future and believe that they can change the world and make a difference. My greatest inspiration is my mother, who has worked and sacrificed all her time and money to make sure she raised three women who are proud of themselves. This has developed a lot of confidence in me during difficult times. As a woman, it is important to believe in yourself and have the confidence to take risks even if it means that you might fail along the way – ultimately you will learn from those experiences.”



Imane Akechchar
Front Office Manager
Rotana Yas Island & Centro Yas Island

“Women's month is all about forging gender equality in workplaces where women's careers can thrive and leaders drive positive change. My source of inspiration is my maternal grandmother who was given up for adoption and not formally educated because of her gender. Despite this, she asked the neighbour's kids to teach her to read and do basic maths to start her food stall, selling food door to door. She believes education is the key to freedom and taught me never to feel sorry for myself. As women, we can do anything if we put our minds to it and we need to be resilient to recover quickly from adversity.”



Hozaimah Hosain
Area Director - Revenue Management
Yas Plaza Hotels



Shayne Monasterio
PR and Marketing Manager
Yas Plaza Hotels

“We should honour the women who have paved the way before us and be grateful to the rights we enjoy today. My late parents and grandmother have inspired me throughout my journey in achieving my goals. One of my aspirations is to travel the whole world with my daughter and watch her grow to be an independent, empowered, well-educated, and most importantly, a kind woman. Women should embrace what they love to do and take every opportunity to educate and equip themselves in order to achieve their goals unapologetically.”



Samah El Houffy
HR Manager
Etihad Arena

“During women's month we celebrate and acknowledge all the wonderful women in our lives, from our family to friends, as well as the remarkable women in the UAE who are shaping the future. We have more opportunities than ever before with more support and encouragement – it's a great time to be a woman. I would say to young women who are starting their careers to listen and learn. You can never have too much knowledge – it opens so many doors. Listening is probably the most important tool and by actively listening to people, we learn so much about them, which is very important in any job. I love listening to my team and understanding what motivates them, how I can help them be the best they can be and support them on their journey to success.”

“During women's month, we shine a light on women globally, their achievements and their aspirations to inspire the women of tomorrow. I've been lucky enough to have been helped in life and my career by some amazing women and I truly believe that when women work together they can achieve anything. I believe it is important for young women to dream big. There is a wealth of support for women in the region, from government initiatives to private networks to mentoring programmes. The UAE is constantly innovating, always improving and never-ending in its quest for excellence – as a woman, it's a great place to be in and probably the only place in the world where you really can make your dreams come true if you work hard enough. We're very lucky to be here with the opportunities we have, so grasp them with both hands and run towards the future.”



Tracey Boux
Head - Marketing & Communications,
Etihad Arena

“We should appreciate how much has been achieved by many incredible women both past and present. As part of women's month, we should keep supporting other women and continue paving the way positively for young women wherever they are in the world. It is really important that the lens through which we view our collective achievements is as wide as possible, success is personal and shouldn't be viewed from one perspective. As a woman, it is important to believe in yourself, focus on your goals and keep working towards them, whilst also being mindful of the other women around you and supporting them too. We are stronger when we are united.”



Christine Nicholas
Marketing Director
Yas Marina

Malaysia's hidden gem for a luxe getaway

Positioning itself both as an international halal hub and a world-class medical tourism destination, Malaysia is also renowned for the country's vibrant cultures, eco-tourism attractions, pristine beaches, and Malaysia's moniker as a shopping paradise especially for the GCC clientele.

Middle East travellers are known to be discerning as they personalise and make it a worthwhile experience. Generally, most tourists from the region set their sights on exclusive destinations situated within vast plains, away from bustling crowds. This is precisely what the 17 km of quiet, and unspoiled beachfront of Desaru Coast at the southern tip of Peninsular Malaysia offers.

can fly directly into Senai International Airport located just an hour's drive from the resort, while travellers flying via Singapore are just a two-hour ride away. The destination is also accessible via land and ferry. Desaru Coast's soon-to-be-launched ferry terminal will also provide direct access, boosting connectivity and facilitating cross-border travel between the destination and the surrounding islands.

As the country's first integrated premium beach destination in Malaysia, Desaru Coast is set to change the tourism landscape in southern Malaysia. Connectivity wise, you

Spanning over 3,900 acres, Malaysia's trendiest beach destination is home to a unique blend of world-class, luxury resorts and villas. Among them are Hard Rock Hotel Desaru



Truly luxurious lodgings with private plunge pools and large teak decks like Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villa's double storey one and two-bedroom lagoon villas

Coast, The Westin Desaru Coast Resort, and Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas – the first Anantara branded property in Malaysia. Desaru Coast's allure and appeal to internationally recognised brands is further cemented with the recent opening of One&Only Desaru Coast, the award-winning luxury resort brand's first property in Southeast Asia.

Desaru Coast's allure and appeal to internationally recognised brands is further cemented with the recent opening of One&Only Desaru Coast, the award-winning luxury resort brand's first property in Southeast Asia

Health and safety are also of paramount importance at Desaru Coast. The destination's Stay Well @ Desaru Coast initiative is part of its continuous efforts to strengthen precautionary measures prioritising the health, safety and well-being of the holiday-makers, workforce and entire value chain.

Catering not only to the family-leisure market, Desaru Coast is also poised to attract the growing Meetings, Incentives, Convention and Exhibition (MICE) market and corporate clientele in the region. Desaru

Coast's MICE centrepiece is the Desaru Coast Convention Centre, a world-class facility equipped with top-notch facilities managed by The Westin Desaru Coast Resort. This coupled with the destination's 27-hole championship golf course – The Els Club Desaru Coast, truly provides an indulgent getaway for discerning leisure and business travellers. Thrill-seeking families can also look forward to endless fun-filled and pulsating activities at Adventure Waterpark Desaru Coast – one of the world's biggest waterparks. Set against the

backdrop of a traditional Malaysian fishing village, guests can immerse themselves in over 20 wet and dry rides, slides and attractions, some of which cannot be found anywhere else in the country, such as the region's first water coaster and one of the biggest wave pools in the world.

Finally, no shopaholic would want to miss out on the golden opportunity for some quality retail therapy at Southeast Asia's first premium outlet centre, Johor Premium Outlets (JPO) located just an hour's drive away from Desaru Coast.



Located at the southern tip of Peninsular Malaysia, Desaru Coast offers you 17km of quiet and unspoiled beachfront



Enjoy splashing great time in one of the biggest wave pools in the world when you are in Adventure Waterpark Desaru Coast



Desaru Coast's MICE centrepiece is the Desaru Coast Convention Centre, a world-class facility equipped with top-notch facilities



Perfect your swing at the 27-hole golf course designed by Ernie Els, The Els Club Desaru Coast



The Westin Desaru Coast Resort features rooms and suites overseeing the South China Sea

Strong pent-up demand for travel

The Cleartrip and Flyin Travel Insights Report delves into people's views and readiness to travel in a post-COVID world. The report also highlights the impact of COVID-19 on the travel industry, the trends currently being witnessed and initiatives being undertaken to increase customer confidence in travel.

Cleartrip, the leading OTA platform of the region, has released new research findings and travel trends through its Travel Insights Report, disclosing an optimistic consumer sentiment for travel despite the current challenging environment.

The extensive survey was conducted with 5,678 respondents residing within the UAE and Saudi Arabia and highlights their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour surrounding travel.

► 35% of respondents admitted that easy quarantine rules and affordability will be the popular combination this year when selecting a destination. This will bring further attention to the top five popular destinations that respondents are looking forward to visit which includes Singapore, Maldives, Georgia, Turkey and India.

Short airline route travel on rise

While most travel has been put on pause because of the COVID-19 pandemic,

With the average price drop of hotel tariffs by 35-40% within the UAE, residents are opting for quick staycations within the luxury hotels of the UAE. Booking data showcases that 39% of hotels booked in the UAE were luxury 5-star resorts

Key findings from the survey (participants were allowed to choose more than one answer) were:

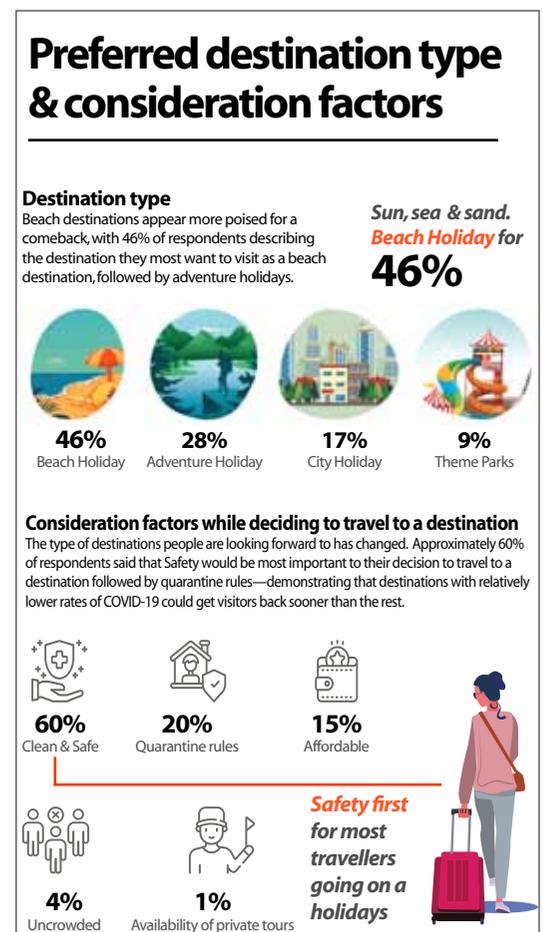
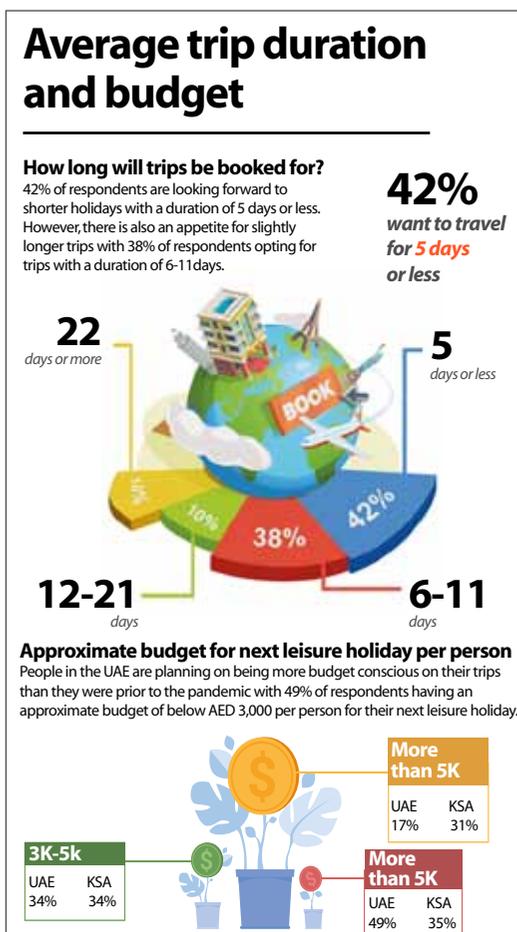
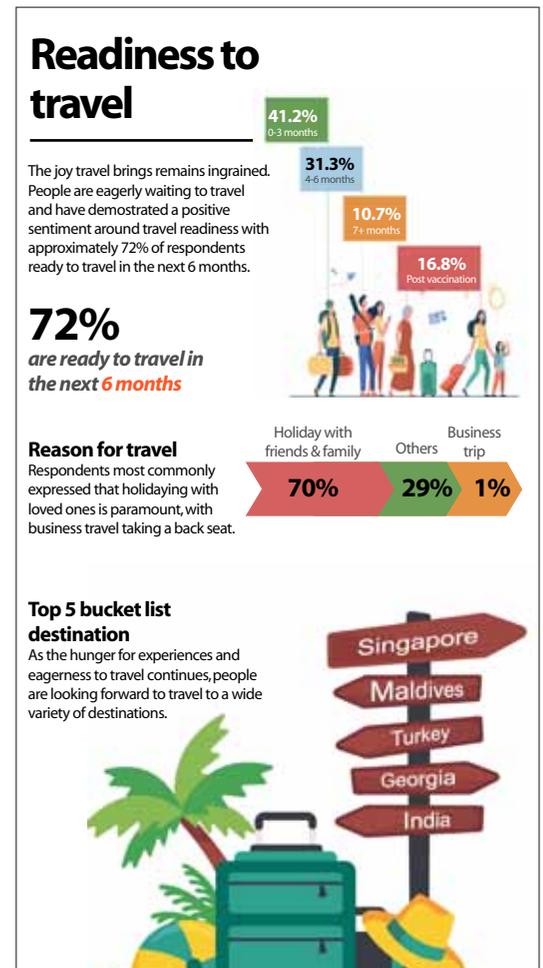
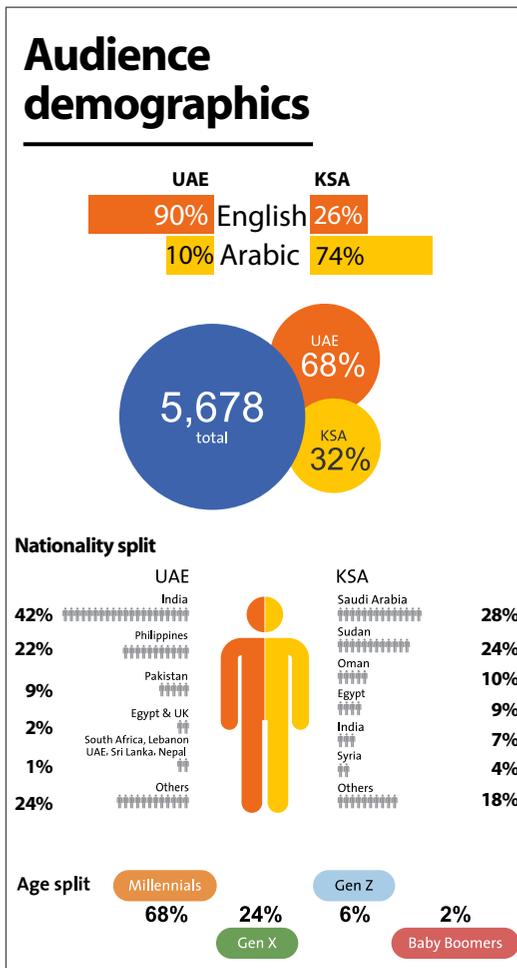
► 72% of respondents are ready to travel within the next six months under the presence of safety measures. While 16% of respondents are comfortable travelling only once they get vaccinated.

► Another interesting finding was that 42% of respondents stated that the duration of their next trip would be five days or less. However, there is also an appetite for slightly longer trips with 38% of respondents opting for a duration of 6-11 days.

► Close to 65% of respondents identified confidence measures such as safe travel enablers and lower rates of COVID-19 cases, as the key consideration factors when planning their travel.

Cleartrip's Travel Insights Report indicates new travel trends leaning towards short flight trips. Combined with efficient safety measures and easy quarantine rules, destinations like Singapore, Maldives, Turkey, Georgia and India were amongst the top destinations that respondents are looking forward to travel.

The destination types that travellers today prefer are changing. 46% of respondents selected beach destinations as the most preferred for their next trip, followed by adventure holidays. Another rising trend is -- Staycation! With the average price drop of hotel tariffs by 35-40% within the UAE, residents are opting for quick staycations within the luxury hotels of the UAE. Booking data showcases that 39% of hotels booked in the UAE were luxury 5-star resorts.



Shurooq opens new family destinations

The Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) announced the opening of two new parks in the Al Rahmaniayah neighbourhood in Sharjah including a female-only park.

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The adjoining Kshisha and Shaghrafa parks feature social, entertainment, sports, and educational facilities, and have a combined built area of 147,700 sqm. Dedicated to families, the Kshisha Park hosts football and volleyball courts, a library, amphitheatre, fitness hub, jogging and cycling tracks, playgrounds, skateboard range, and spe-



Ahmed Obaid Al Qaseer
Chief Operating Officer
Shurooq

cially designed halls for holding workshops.

Designed exclusively for females, Shaghrafa Park has dedicated halls for

conducting workshops, and features play areas, a theatre, jogging track, gym, and basket and volleyball courts.

Ahmed Obaid Al Qaseer, Chief Operating Officer of Shurooq, said, "The development of the two parks was carried out under the directives of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, and reflects His Highness' vision to enhance the quality of life of Sharjah's residents, citizens and visitors through the provision of high-quality entertainment and recreational destinations."



ME's first adventure tourism platform

The newly launched Sharjah-incubated Mughamer.com is making a splash in the adventure tourism space. This first-of-its-kind website in the ME will curate the best adventure activities.

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Co-founded by Mohamed Al Musharrkh, and Sarmad Al Zadaly, the project is supported by the Sharjah Entrepreneurship Centre (Sheraa) and the Sharjah Angel Investors Network – a Sharjah Research, Technology and Innovation Park (SRTIP) initiative. Mughamer.com is designed as a comprehensive platform to



aid travel enthusiasts plan their trips by exploring adventure activities at their chosen destinations at an affordable price.

Speaking at the launch, **Hussain Al Mahmoudi**, CEO of SRTIP, said, "It is a part of SRTIP's mission to collaborate and support innovative initiatives such as Mughamer. The recently launched Sharjah Angel Investors Network is one of our most important initiatives aimed at supporting innovative startups and entrepreneurs."

“It is a part of SRTIP's mission to collaborate and support innovative initiatives such as Mughamer. Our initiatives are aimed at supporting innovative startups and entrepreneurs”

— Hussain Al Mahmoudi

Tourism Ireland hosts golf tournament

Tourism Ireland hosted their annual golf tournament at Dubai Creek Golf Club. The event was attended by corporates and leaders in the travel and tourism industry.



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