



# TRAVTALK



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

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# Borders reopen for summer

As restrictions ease in Europe, most GCC travellers can look forward to resuming their travel plans once again this summer. The vaccination drive has expedited the process and travellers from the UAE can travel to almost 20 destinations including Europe. Travel professionals from tourism boards, airlines & travel agencies share their views with **TRAVTALK**.



**His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum**  
Chairman and Chief Executive Emirates

“Emirates is committed to keeping Dubai, businesses and communities around the world connected and we are working hard to rebuild our network and secure access to more destinations in partnership with various authorities and stakeholders. We are encouraged by the latest developments as many countries have begun to turn the page and reopen for international visitors.”



**Daniel Rosado**  
Director Spanish Tourism for the Gulf countries

“We are delighted to welcome all vaccinated travelers from GCC back to Spain with our usual warmth, the highest health & security measures, and with no quarantine. All EMA and WHO approved vaccines are valid, which is great. Spain is a tourism oriented country and one of the most visited in the world so great effort was taken to speed up vaccination to reopen assuring maximum safety.”



**Yamina Sofo**  
Director of Sales and Marketing German National Tourist Office, Gulf Countries

“We are looking forward to welcoming vaccinated leisure travellers back to Germany without any quarantine restrictions from June 25. We are optimistic that our German.Local.Culture and Feel Good campaigns – which offer fantastic access to Germany’s bountiful and sustainable tourism ventures – will enable us to reach 800,000 overnight stays this year.”

Contd. on page 3 ▶

## A new era of development

With development projects in the pipeline, some of the key leaders share their insights.



**HE Marwan bin Jassim Al Sarkal**  
Executive Chairman Shurooq

“The two new multi-purpose family-friendly beach development projects are in line with Shurooq’s strategy to offer authentic leisure tourism activities that meet the demands of residents and visitors in the emirate. Sharjah is well-poised to redefine the experiences of beachgoers and vacationers and meet the growing needs of its burgeoning community. By undertaking such infrastructural projects, Shurooq aims to support the diversification of Sharjah’s economy, boost GDP growth, and offer increased investment opportunities in various sectors ranging from tourism, hospitality, entertainment, and retail to F&B.”

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## Sustainable tourism in Dubai

Newly launched, Get into the Green Scene initiative focusses on sustainable activities.



The launch of the ‘Get into the Green Scene’ initiative includes a sustainability calendar, featuring a series of environmental days throughout the year and ways in which people can engage within the theme of that calendar day. Included are simple, but fun, eco-conscious actions that promote the city’s natural spaces and hidden gems,



**Yousuf Lootah**  
Vice Chairman Dubai Sustainable Tourism

as well as spotlights advocacy organisations, partners and stakeholders that are working towards a more

Contd. on page 5 ▶

## Booming summercations

Summer in the Middle East has a myriad of escapes from staycations, daycations to wellcations.

“This summer we are expecting to see a pick up at our leisure resorts in the region as a result from the rise of local staycations or summercations due to a number of travel regulations still being in place for key global destinations which would normally be the main pick for summer holidays. At Accor, we want to reward our guests while they enjoy a relaxing stay at one of our properties across the region. Accor’s lifestyle loyalty program ALL – Accor Live Limitless, is giving our members the opportunity to become a millionaire by offering them the chance to win 1 million loyalty points!”



**Mark Willis**  
CEO, MEAI and Turkey Accor

Inputs by Shehara Rizly

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# Planning foreign holidays without quarantine

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**Nasir Jamal Khan**  
CEO  
Al Naboodah Travel

“As UAE summer is stretching out ahead, many people are planning for a change of scenery, whether reconnecting with nature, visiting friends and family, or simply enjoying the luxury of being able to get away and, with a long break expected for Eid, plus the school holidays, travel is on the minds of every citizen and resident of the UAE. Travellers already have dozens of destination options from the UAE such as Maldives, Turkey, Georgia, etc. Also, with rapid vaccination drives being carried all over the world, European tourism is gradually reopening too. European destinations are highly popular in UAE. Al Naboodah Travel is offering customised summer packages for its customers.”

“As travel restrictions ease up, majority of citizens in GCC especially in the UAE (80%) already fall into the fully vaccinated category, while in other countries 60% to 80% have been vaccinated. Normally summer holidays mean family holidays especially among the citizens of GCC, and the good news is that children over 12 years also can get vaccinated, which means family holidays can be planned once again. Also, now UAE nationals and residents can travel to almost 19 countries without quarantine ranging from Europe, starting from Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Greece, Russia, Turkey. The USA is safe to travel and Mexico will open up, then in the



**Jamal Abdulnazar**  
CEO  
Cozmo Travel

Indian ocean there is Seychelles and Maldives already open and in Africa there is Kenya and Tanzania. In Asia there are new destinations offering quarantine free travel so this is a very positive sign for travel and tourism. In addition to this, Emirates announced last week that they will resume in July and August over 280 flights weekly which means

we will see a good number of families travelling to the countries that are safe to travel. Apart from this the re-opening of terminal one is another positive sign, and this year we hope to see leisure family holidays by residents and GCC nationals.”

Inputs by Shehara Rizly

# Robust plans for hospitality expansion

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**Haitham Mattar**  
Managing Director, India,  
Middle East & Africa, IHG

“We are pleased to announce the signing of a new Hotel Indigo in Saudi Arabia in partnership with RIVA Development Company, aligned to our robust expansion plans in the Kingdom over the coming years. As a result of the Saudi Tourism Development Strategy, there will be an increasing demand for hotels that offer authentic and refreshingly local experiences. Hotel Indigo Riyadh King Abdullah Road will seamlessly address these needs.”

“We are delighted to expand our Radisson Blu brand in the city of Riyadh, especially during these times. In line with Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030, we are excited to further grow our presence across the Kingdom, and work together to make Saudi Arabia a must-visit destination. Despite the challenges, Radisson Hotel Group has started moving towards normality with a host of expansions and opening announcements over the past months.”



**Tim Cordon**  
Area Senior Vice President –  
Middle East and Africa  
Radisson Hotel Group



**Ramsay Rankoussi**  
Vice President Development  
Africa & Turkey  
Radisson Hotel Group

“Morocco is a strategic bridge between Europe and the rest of Africa, and a key focus market in our African development strategy. We aim to grow our Moroccan portfolio to over 15 hotels within the next three to five years, and Casablanca is a key city where we are looking to expand our footprint to more than five hotels. Radisson Hotel Casablanca Gauthier La Citadelle is the Moroccan debut of our fastest-growing brand in Africa, and marks our third hotel in the country.”

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### Tourism Breaking News

- Alila Hinu Bay opens to guests in Oman
- Accor expands its luxury footprint in KSA with new Fairmont Ajdan Al Khobar
- HKBT launches summer campaign
- Emirates start flights to Miami 22<sup>nd</sup> July
- Wizz Air launches paperless flight deck
- Spanish tourism launches "You deserve Spain campaign" in the UAE
- Marriott appoints Michel Nader as Area VP for UAE
- HMM Hospitality appoints Iftikhar Hamdani as Chairman of the Green Council
- DCT Abu Dhabi extends Sojern partnership to help hotels drive direct domestic bookings
- SAUDIA successfully renews IATA Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) Certification

# Cybercrime pandemic in MENA

COVID-19 triggered a wave of digital transformation with companies across the globe. This has resulted in an increase in cybercrimes as attackers continue to take advantage of our greater reliance on the virtual world, says **Barry Cook**, Privacy & Group Data Protection Officer, VFS Global.

Now that organisations are planning and implementing their recovery strategies, there is one form of business that has exploded – the creation and use of malicious software. Users across the world have fallen victim to cyber-criminals. The most common attack being that of 'ransomware'. While ransomware is nothing new, the ways in which it is being used & spread is.

The change from in-person meetings to online video-conferencing calls was exploited by cybercriminals to launch ransomware attacks by crashing video calls and baiting users with malicious domains proposing to be the video-conference company. Of course, the links on the fake domains

download malware. A significant new cyber-tactic that has emerged is 'double extortion'. A technique in which cybercriminals, who are frequently part of a collective, extort additional money by threaten-

**“Cybersecurity firm Trend Micro revealed that it had prevented over 56 million attacks in the Gulf during the first half of 2020. 8.8 million of these attacks, around 15%, were COVID-19 related”**

ing to leak sensitive data that was extracted prior to encrypting the systems. The cybercriminals were merciless, attacking healthcare systems, hospitals, national infrastructure, as well as their 'traditional' targets of companies and individuals. No target is considered to be 'off limits'.

The Middle East region is facing a 'cyber pandemic' with COVID-19 related attacks skyrocketing in 2020. Cybersecurity firm Trend Micro revealed that it had prevented over 56 million attacks in the Gulf

during the first half of the year. 8.8 million of these attacks, around 15%, were COVID-19 related.

**Mohamed al-Kuwaiti**, Head of UAE Government Cyber Security, told a CNBC-moderated panel at the Gulf Information Security Expo and Conference in Dubai last year,

that the UAE has seen an "at least 250% increase" in cyberattacks in 2020 as the pandemic forced organisations around the world to reconsider how and where they work, and hackers and malicious actors took advantage of increased digital adoption.

Talking about the types of cyberattacks, phishing and ransomware are becoming more sophisticated and increasing in frequency. A phishing attack occurs when a cybercriminal masquerades as a legitimate person or business to extract sensitive information from a victim voluntarily. Any event that can exploit fear, confusion, or any high emotion to get potential victims to click on links or open attachments is used. Malevolent phishing is posted as health advice,

pandemic updates or even appeals for help from well-known organisations. Ransomware occurs when a hacker blocks access to a victim's files, then demands payment to restore access. New research by Trend Micro says critical public infrastructure and government IT systems were becoming a primary focus for hackers globally, with ransomware being their preferred weapon of choice.



**Barry Cook**  
Privacy & Group Data Protection  
Officer, VFS Global

*(The views expressed are solely of the author. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)*

# Reviving the aviation industry

The most disrupted industry during the pandemic was the aviation industry, however, the industry is adapting to new technologies that could help them to achieve a much faster recovery than expected. Greater collaboration across borders, technological development and commercial competition will secure the industry in these challenging times.

**TT Bureau**

Adoption of innovative technology, greater collaboration and commercialisation will play vital role in enabling air navigation service providers (ANSPs) to support a sustainable and efficient recovery of the aviation industry in the post-COVID era, according to **Yahya Abdalla Al Hammadi**, CEO, GALANS. Delivering the keynote address on the topic 'How

to Secure your Airspace in Digital Times' at the ATC Forum at Airport Show 2021, Al Hammadi said that COVID-19 has had a very significant global impact on the civil aviation industry as the industry has reported a loss of \$290 billion in 2020.

"Governments have taken unprecedented measures to manage the pandemic and the initiatives have made their impact on the industry which is confident of a faster

recovery," he said. "Greater collaboration across borders, technological development and commercial competition will secure the industry in these challenging times," he added. The relationships between ANSP, airports and airline customers need to be transformed to performance efficiency. Such transformation will help scalability which will be responsive to meet the need of customers in terms of efficient operations and



**Yahya Abdalla Al Hammadi**  
CEO, GALANS

cost effectiveness. "With the challenges we are currently facing as an industry, there is need for greater collaboration across borders in non-traditional areas such as regulation, standards and technology solutions.

More cooperation will benefit the wider industry. The strategy of economies of scale will drive costs down for operators," he said.

Today through innovative technology, superfast fibre network and high definition cameras, we are seeing a revolution in air traffic management. Remote digital towers are now being rolled out at an increasing rate around the world. With the greater acceptance of towers going digital, the key question is how we accelerate the adoption and implementation to reduce cost and unlock the addi-

tional benefit which can be realised from remote control towers.

Unified traffic management (UTM), which will see the integration of drones into the airfield, is another area of interest where regulatory support and greater industry collaboration is required to establish industry standards for service providers and original equipment manufacturers to support the growing industry. Remote digital standards and unified traffic management will help achieve sustainable recovery for the industry. 🇦🇪

**“There is need for greater collaboration across borders in non-traditional areas such as regulation, standards and technology solutions. More cooperation will benefit the wider industry”**

# Towards a more sustainable planet

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sustainable planet. The DST initiative is aligned with the recent announcement from HH Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE on the 'Year of the 50th' campaign, where sustainability is one of four strategic pillars that will advance the country, support well-being and livelihood as well as proactive development and opportunities.

**Yousuf Lootah**, Vice Chairman of Dubai Sustainable Tourism, commented on the

“Often the magnitude of what sustainability entails can be overwhelming, which is why we aim to simplify understanding with action for this initiative to make it more manageable and tangible to people of all ages”

— Yousuf Lootah

## 'Get into the GREEN Scene' Days

- 🌱 Earth Day : 22 Apr
- 🌱 World Arbor Day : 30 Apr
- 🌱 World Bee Day : 20 May
- 🌱 World Bike Day : 3 Jun
- 🌱 Plastic Free Bag Day : 3 Jul
- 🌱 International Coastal Clean-Up Day : 18 Sept
- 🌱 World Animal Day : 4 Oct
- 🌱 International Mountain Day : 11 Dec

launch of the initiative: “We are very proud to launch the

'Get into the Green Scene', which promotes the ease in which visitors and residents can embrace sustainability-minded behaviours. Often the magnitude of what sustainability entails can be overwhelming, which is why we aim to simplify understanding with action for this initiative to make it more manageable and tangible to people of all ages.”

# Tailor-made wellness & lifestyle experiences

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**Binu Varghese**  
Hotel Manager  
Ramada Hotel & Suites by  
Wyndham Dubai JBR

“Many UAE residents are still spending their summer holiday in the country instead of exploring new destinations. Given that they are looking for not just room offers but also fun activities to do, Ramada Hotel & Suites by Wyndham Dubai JBR has partnered with some of the top theme parks and attractions in the city including Laguna Waterpark, Dubai Parks and Resorts, IMG Worlds of Adventure, and more to provide staycation options with great value for money.”

“Summercations are now even more exciting with a range of fun activities in store for all to enjoy, in a relaxed home setting. From cycling around to a yoga session as well as basking under the sun, at Adagio Premium The Palm, we have it all. Take advantage of the warm temperature with family or friends and enjoy a much-needed blissful break in a private beach setting with sun lounges and cool down with summer drinks that we offer all day long.”



**Julia Schamne**  
General Manager  
Adagio Premium The Palm



**Samir Arora**  
Cluster General Manager - The  
Retreat Palm Dubai | MGallery by  
Sofitel, Ramada by Wyndham  
Downtown Dubai, and  
ibis Styles Jumeira Group

“Wellness tourism in Dubai has a huge potential for growth and our goal is to be a trailblazer in this niche market. Recently, The Retreat Palm Dubai has launched a detox and cleanse stay package which includes pre-arrival consultation and nutrition assessment, private sessions with tailor-made wellness and fitness activities, signature spa treatments, and curated healthy meals. Our hotel will soon launch new retreats.”

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\*COVID sample and analysis service available upon request in the Grand Palladium Palace Ibiza Resort & Spa

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# UAE travel trends for Eid al-Adha 2021

The KSA interest to travel to the UAE dropped by 74 per cent, but it is expected that the searches will grow in the next coming days leading to Eid since KSA lifted its travel ban. Here is a closer look at travel plans from the UAE around Eid. A detailed report by Sojern.

## UAE inbound travel during Eid al-Adha 2021

- Despite the UAE still being on the UK red list, UK residents are keen on travelling to the UAE.
- The interest from the US also increased significantly compared to 2019 by 251%.
- The KSA interest to travel to the UAE dropped by 74%, but we expect the searches to grow in the next coming days leading to Eid since KSA has now lifted its travel ban for the UAE.

Eid al-Adha: 2019-08-11 Aug 1, 2018 Jun 7, 2019

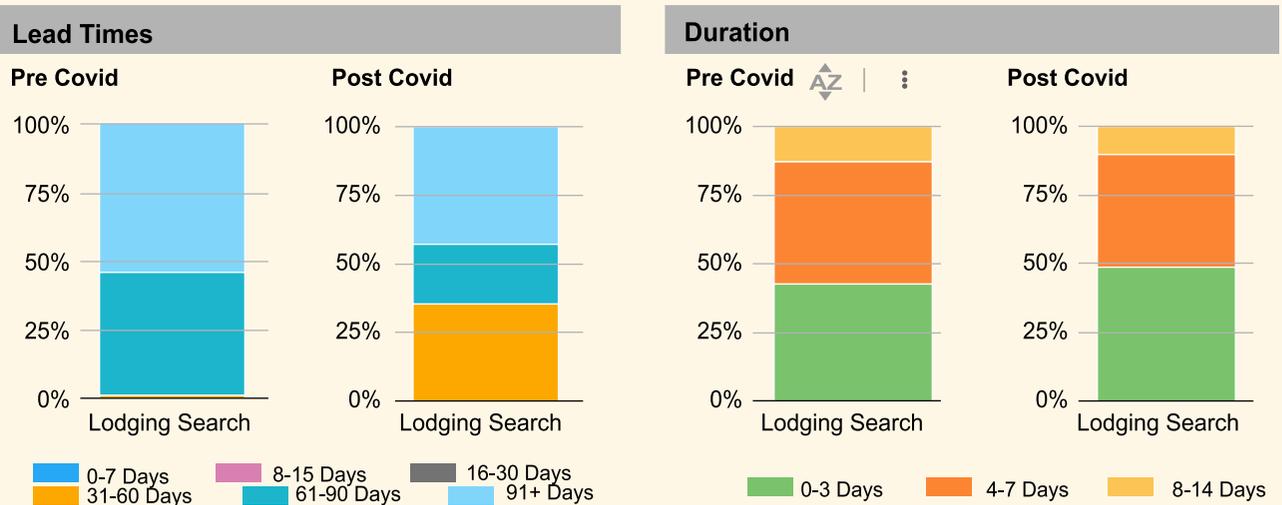
Origin Country	Pre Covid ▼
1. United Kingdom	25.92%
2. France	15.16%
3. United States	9.48%
4. Saudi Arabia	5.75%
5. Middle East and Africa - Other	4.82%
6. Italy	4.45%
7. Australia	3.88%
8. Germany	3.83%
9. India	3.24%
10. Japan	2.41%

Eid al-Adha: 2021-07-19 2020-08-01 Jun 7, 2021

Origin Country	Post Covid ▼
1. United States	33.28%
2. United Kingdom	21.39%
3. France	11.84%
4. Germany	8.11%
5. Italy	1.87%
6. India	1.85%
7. Switzerland	1.51%
8. Saudi Arabia	1.47%
9. Russia	1.31%
10. Netherlands	1.24%

## UAE inbound travel lead time and duration

- The majority of travellers are looking for a short stay (0-3 days increased by 13% and 4-7 days decreased by 7%), and the lead time has now reduced for those who typically book last minute.
- In 2021 we see travellers making plans 30-60 days prior to travelling.
- The longer stay period searches have also reduced slightly by 18% compared to 2019.



## UAE outbound travel during Eid al-Adha 2021

- Looking at where the UAE is planning to travel during the long weekend, the US is leading as a destination
- There is interest to travel to Thailand after the announcement from the Thai government on the reopening of Phuket for Covid-19 vaccinated tourists from July 1
- As Oman is extending its travel restrictions, UAE residents aren't keen to travel during Eid to Oman.
- Maldives is no longer a hot destination for the UAE residents as we previously saw, but Tanzania has become a destination of interest.

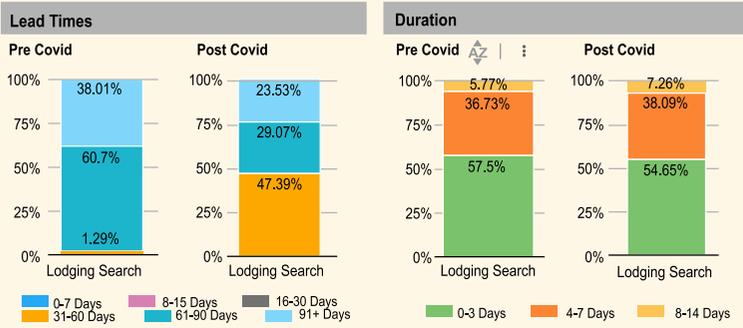
Eid al-Adha: 2019-08-11 Aug 1, 2018 Jun 7, 2019

Origin Country	Pre Covid ▼
1. United Kingdom	24.41%
2. United States	19.85%
3. France	8.37%
4. India	8.37%
5. Thailand	7.99%
6. Italy	4.65%
7. Germany	3.13%
8. Philippines	2.97%
9. Oman	2.81%
10. Indonesia	2.81%

Eid al-Adha: 2021-07-19 2020-08-01 Jun 7, 2021

Origin Country	Post Covid ▼
1. United States	36.3%
2. Thailand	8.75%
3. Italy	6.96%
4. United Kingdom	6.85%
5. Turkey	5.93%
6. Russia	5.65%
7. Egypt	5.22%
8. India	4.96%
9. France	3.02%
10. Tanzania	1.77%

## UAE outbound travel lead time and duration



- A massive shift in how people prepare for the holiday changed when comparing the lead time in 2019 vs 2021. In 2019, only 1.29% of potential guests started preparing for lodging whereas in 2021, the percentage has jumped to 47.39%.
- We noticed a shift in durations as well, as people now book longer stay durations.

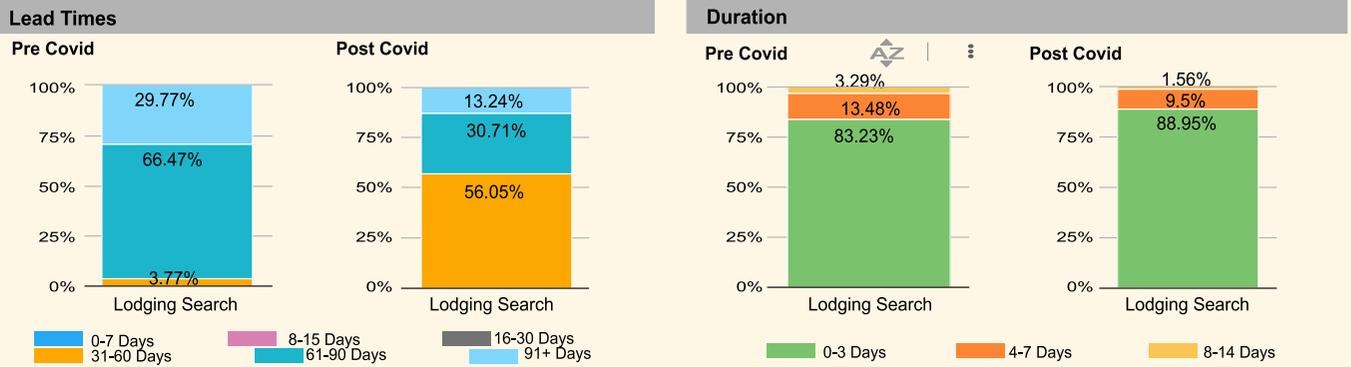
## UAE staycation (domestic travel) during Eid al-Adha 2021

Destination Provin...	Pre Covid	Post Covid
1. Dubai	51.68%	64.79%
2. Abu Dhabi	27.85%	19.31%
3. Ras al Khaimah	12.5%	6.6%
4. Ash Shariqah	3.8%	4.71%
5. Al Fujairah	2.36%	2.04%
6. Ajman	1.82%	2%
7. Umm al Qaywayn	0.54%	0.54%

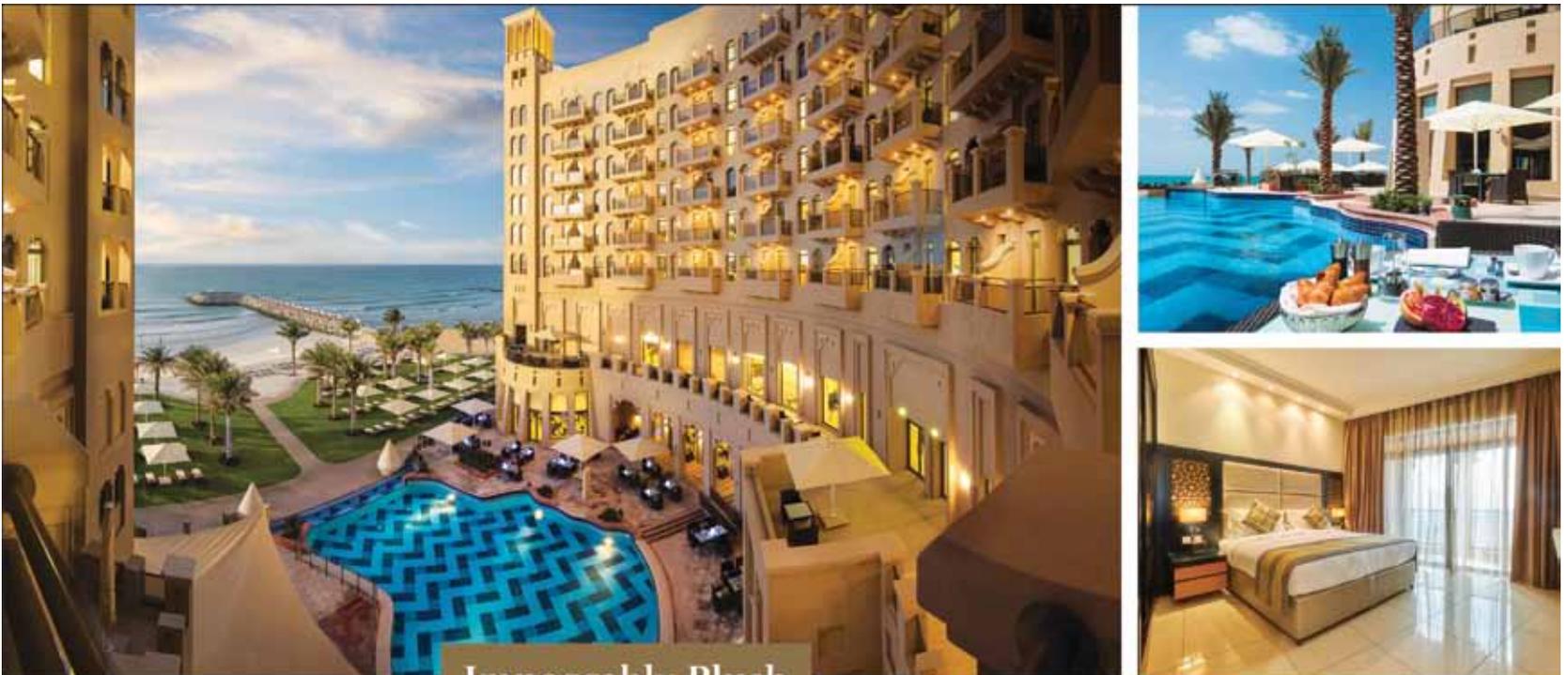
- Looking at domestic travel, Dubai is still sitting at the top, followed by Abu Dhabi.
- Umm al Quwain has now become one of the Emirates the residents now love to visit.

## UAE staycation (domestic travel) lead time and duration

- With some of the countries still not allowing tourists to enter, residents have shifted their mindset from last minute booking to looking for accommodation well in advance.
- The majority of nights hotel guests' book for is an average of 3 nights.



Source: Sojern



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Our luxury hotel rooms & suites combine the convenience of modern designs and the rich feel of the Arabian architecture.

# Karhoo launches in the UAE

More than 80 travel professionals attended the official launch of Karhoo in the GCC. **Vanessa Heydorff**, Senior Vice President, Karhoo shared with **TRAVTALK** their plans for the year and how they will collaborate with agents across the GCC. Working with Karhoo, travel companies gain a more efficient search and booking process, fair market prices for their customers, and revenue share on completed rides.

 Shehara Rizly

marked a milestone for Karhoo in the Middle East.

## Why did you select Dubai to launch Karhoo?

We have just joined the dnata Representation Services partner family, an extraordinary ecosystem of global travel and technology providers. As part of dnata, one of the world's largest air and travel services providers, based in Dubai, this made the city – a hub of innovation and creativity – an ideal place to announce our new partnership, which aims to bring Karhoo to the GCC region.

## Could you share details of the partnership with dnata?

Partnering with dnata Representation Services, Karhoo Mobility Marketplace has launched across the GCC. dnata

## What services entail Karhoo? You mentioned a suite of products/services for Dubai

Not only for Dubai but for the GCC region. Karhoo is the leading worldwide mobility marketplace for taxi and private driver services. Our mission is to connect hundreds of companies and their millions of end-users with millions of drivers around the world, and we are delighted to be launching our services in Dubai and the wider GCC working with dnata Representation Services. Karhoo aggregates 1,500+ taxi and private hire vehicle providers in most parts of the world, including covering 500+ airports. We connect these providers – via a



**Vanessa Heydorff**  
Senior Vice President  
Karhoo



**Sebastien Doussin**  
VP Ground Services  
dnata

Representation Services has been awarded as the exclusive distributor of Karhoo across the region. Brands under the dnata Travel Group's extended network can now offer taxis and private hire vehicles to their leisure and business customers travelling around the world, as well as their B2B partners. This partnership has

single contract and technical integration – to travel and hospitality brands who want to offer transfers and in-stay mobility to their customers to create better travel experiences and also generate ancillary revenues. We allow brand partners to access these suppliers via a range of technical interfaces and pre-built user experiences.

In the last few years, we have seen a significant increase in the importance of transportation in the holiday experience, as travellers look to explore more of the destination of their choice and seek a range of preferred transportation options. dnata Representation Services is very proud to have teamed up with Karhoo in the GCC, as they are filling a gap in the market with a solution which is going further than any existing ground transport provider, benefiting not only the agents but also guaranteeing a much better experience to the consumer.

— Sebastien Doussin

## How do you compare the services with other providers? Why should they select you?

We believe that we have a unique proposition in terms of the number of mobility partners – more than 2,500 fleets in 125 countries – and the modern experience that our technology platform can provide. Our platform aggregates and unifies a fragmented mobility market and enables state-of-the-art e-hailing or on-demand experience everywhere we operate, including loyalty integration, mobile payment, and vehicle tracking. We perform the financial settlement between travel and hospitality operators and fleet operators, in multiple currencies and in accordance with local tax regulations.

## Would you say that the services are aimed at B2B/corporate? Or is it more B2C?

Karhoo is not a consumer brand but instead enables other established brands to become leaders in mobility. Brand partners using Karhoo may offer our mobility services to their customers, either consumer or business. Our mobility providers offer a range of services, from small economy cars to premium chauffeured executive services.

## Dubai already has a wide range of players in different areas somewhat same as what is offered by you; how do you plan on competing with them? Or will you collaborate with them?

It is important to understand that we do not compete with transportation companies; we partner with them and allow them to have access to global brands. We actually support in helping them promote their service offering to international travellers that they may otherwise have a hard time addressing. We partner with powerful brands who have large customer bases and are able to promote mobility directly on their websites and apps, in a flight ticket or hotel room booking for instance. Using established brands increases the trust with travellers.

## Are there any criteria to be part of the services you offer?

We partner with any licensed taxi and private hire vehicle fleet that operates a quality service. We require our supply partners to operate a dispatch management system with which we can integrate to ensure that we can deliver a modern user experience. If you are a travel brand and want to distribute the

“ Through a single connection, travel agencies gain access to a global digital marketplace via Karhoo that, on average, delivers five service options per search request. In popular areas such as main cities and airports, the number of offers can be tenfold ”

— Vanessa Heydorff

Karhoo network, there are no acceptance criteria, except to be a registered business. We have even managed solutions that can be ordered online for small independent hotels and travel agencies.

## Do they require a guaranteed number of services/clients or how does that work?

Karhoo operates an open mobility market and wants to attract quality suppliers and brands to connect. There are no upfront connection costs and a range of connection options for brands to choose from. As a partner, once connected you can work with any of the connected brands or suppliers. You pay no fees unless you sell your services. Other than a commitment to promote and deliver quality services, there are no other obligations.

## What are the key benefits for the travel agents?

Through a single connection, travel agencies gain access to a global digital marketplace via Karhoo that, on average, delivers five service options per search request. In popular areas such as main cities and airports, the number of offers can be tenfold. This guarantees that agents can find the right service at the right price for their customers. As the service is 100% digital, there is no need to 'call to book' or make enquiries regarding the journey.

## How do you incentivize them?

Working with Karhoo, travel companies gain a more efficient search and booking process, fair market prices for their customers, and revenue share on completed rides. 🎉

Personality of the Month

# Venturing boldly into hospitality

Passion, dedication, commitment and versatility has been a way of life for **Ajay Bhatia**, CEO, SOL Properties. Over the years, he has worked in the construction industry before diversifying to real estate and now is into hospitality. Bhatia has been steadily creating businesses that enable Dubai to prosper as a regional hub for business. He shares his story with **TRAVTALK**.

 Shehara Rizly

 Do share with us a brief about the company.

SOL Properties is a home-grown, mixed-use real estate developer with a legacy spanning 40 years. SOL Properties' success and resilience is mirrored in Dubai's meteoric rise as a commercial, business, and residential hub. Fuelled by a passion for Dubai and a dedication to delivering residential, commercial, and hospitality real estate of the highest caliber, SOL Properties is committed to supporting Dubai's leading position as a regional hub.

With a hands-on approach, and appreciation for the finer details, SOL Properties delivers properties and experiences that reshape residential and hospitality expectations in Dubai. Leading with quality design and meticulous execution, SOL Properties continues to develop Dubai real estate of the highest quality in coveted locations without compromise.

 What was the reason to dive into the property business?

Property business has been an organic diversification from our main business, that is, construction. Once the freehold properties started in Dubai, we purchased land parcels and started development of townhouses in JVC. During the 2008 crisis, SOL developed the entire project irrespective of payment being received from our customers and successfully delivered all the projects to the satisfaction of our buyers.

 Could you share how it was like when you first established the business?

The main business that the group has been engaged in is general construction under the flagship company Bhatia General Contracting Company (BGCC). Over the years, BGCC has worked with government authorities, leading developers, and well-known architects. With all this successful construction of projects being delivered by BGCC, SOL was established as the real estate arm of the group to develop properties under the banner of SOL Properties Development LLC. Moving forward, SOL Properties have ventured into hospital-



### SOL Properties' chronology of achievements

- 2008-2010 – 125 townhouses in JVC
- 2011-2013 – 72 townhouses in Bloomingdale, Dubai Sports City
- 2014-2019 – 20 mansions in the Hillside Villas in Jumeirah Golf Estates
- 2017-2020 – SOL Bay, mixed used tower in Business Bay
- 2018-2020 – SOL Avenue, mixed used tower in Business Bay

ity development. This year is a milestone as the real estate developer has come up with a 5-star 275-key Dubai EDITION in Burj Khalifa, scheduled to open in 2021.

 Which is your most cherished achievement?

Moving from general contracting to residential development, and then from residential development to venturing into hospitality, our challenge has been to transition and to adapt to the different norms of various industries. Lately, apart from having successfully built luxury residential projects such as SOL Bay and SOL Avenue,

I can confidently say that we have developed a jewel in the heart of Downtown Dubai, The Dubai EDITION, which I can't wait to unveil to the city in October 2021.

 In your opinion, how has the landscape of your business changed?

There is a shift for our business due to a big diversification into the hospitality sector. From being general contractors to being residential developers, we're boldly venturing into the hotel industry with the upcoming opening of The Dubai EDITION, a luxury lifestyle hotel, located in the heart of Downtown Dubai. We're

also developing a new 4-star beachfront property in the Palm Jumeirah which is set to open in Q1 2022. We have entered into the short-term vacation rental sphere under the SOL LIVING brand giving travellers more flexible accommodation options that offer the privacy of a home with hotel-like services and facilities and 24-hour concierge services which is not available with any of our competitors or short-term rental operators. We are also embarking on a new venture under the SOL Kitchens brand. The brand will be a Cloud kitchen facility hosting 30 kitchens and is expected to open by October 2021. Moving forward, providing unparalleled services both in our existing and diversified business ventures is going to be the key for SOL.

ership of the UAE government and remained positive and addressed the challenges of these uncertain times on a case to case, day-to-day, week-to-week basis by being innovative and thinking outside the box in order to find solutions for our team and our customers during these unprecedented times. We continued with our developments without any halt to any of our projects. We also adapted flexible policies which have kept us afloat. For example, we have provided rent-free periods to our tenants due to the partial lockdown and also waived off or deferred receivables to the maximum possible time. This has reinforced strong relationships with our tenants and customers. 

 Markets undergo ups and downs and the past year had been challenging in many ways; how did you manage the situation?

We did what we do best – adapt! We followed the lead-



“Lately, apart from having successfully built luxury residential projects such as SOL Bay and SOL Avenue, we have developed a jewel in the heart of Downtown Dubai, The Dubai EDITION, which I can't wait to unveil to the city in October 2021”

Ajay Bhatia  
CEO, SOL Properties

# Developing Resilience to Thrive

UFI, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry Middle East and Africa Conference 2021 successfully concluded in Dubai with over 150 participants from across the globe.



## Attracting families during summer

► Contd. from page 5



**Rami Mashini**  
Vice President Sales  
Marketing and Strategic Partnerships  
DXB Entertainments

“Being one of Dubai’s leading tourist destinations, we are dedicated to continually think about ways to innovate and expand our incredible theme parks. We promise amazing experiences to our guests and this year will see Dubai Parks and Resorts launch record breaking concepts that will set the standard for theme parks in the region, and will raise the thrills at the park to new heights. It is an exciting time for everyone as people are able to move around Dubai more freely, and international travellers can start to plan their trips to Dubai. We couldn’t be happier to be launching these world-first rides, and an incredibly unique hotel destination for families this year, so we can look to the future together and have something exciting to look forward to.”



**Neeraj Seth**  
Director of Marketing and PR  
Kandima Maldives

“This period is a great time to take that long awaited break and nothing can be better than experiencing a game-changing lifestyle destination with limitless recreation options to suit individual needs. Our Kool Escape package offers Middle Eastern guests the ultimate hassle-free holiday of your choice in the Maldives, with nine villa types to choose from and an exotic 3 km long beach, 10 unique restaurants and bars, adrenaline-fuelled sports or aquatic programmes and even skydiving, not to forget an expansive kids club. It is a true lifestyle experience within the safety norms.”

# Sunway Resort undergoes US\$60 mn transformation



The transformation will elevate Sunway Resort to become one of Asia's leading integrated resort destinations. The revitalisation will embrace the latest design and cutting-edge technology, enhancing guest experience throughout the property.

Being its most extensive initiative in a 25-year history, Sunway Resort re-imagined spaces offer a bold, glamorous and interconnected vision for the future. The transformation process begins the moment guests walk into the lobby, where check-in and keyless room entry will streamline the arrival process. In every room and suite, travellers can stay connected with IPTV, IP telephones and complimentary high-speed Wi-Fi, along with motion sensor night lights. With all the latest cutting-edge technology in place, the hotel will also introduce trained 'Tech Butlers' who will be on hand to set up devices, offer demonstrations and deliver gadgets like the Harman Kardon headphones and nail dryer directly to the room. The high-tech environment even extends to the spa-inspired bathrooms, where each guest will be able to refresh their senses in a walk-in chromotherapy shower, which uses colour to stimulate positive feelings, or soak in a free-standing bathtub and comfortably watch the wall-embedded TV.

Commenting on the resort's safety and well-being,

Alex Castaldi, Senior General Manager, Sunway City Kuala Lumpur Hotels, says, "At our hotels, we have always prioritised a stringent cleaning protocol at all times to help ensure the comfort of our guests and colleagues. Whilst we are aware that the way people choose to travel moving forward has dramatically changed, for us, the essentials of a safe and protected stay will not change. We have implemented over 30 protocols since the onset of the pandemic that include the practice of highly visible and more frequent cleaning measures and different methods of handling events and food and beverage, all reinforced by our new Sunway Stay Safe commitment which ultimately focuses on the holistic experience of our guests with a special emphasis on their well-being."

### Iconic property in Kuala Lumpur

A spectacular world of business, leisure and culinary wonders await at Sunway Resort. This luxury 5-star hotel is located in the heart of Sunway City Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's premier entertainment and hospitality destination, just 35 minutes from Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and 25 minutes to the city centre. The vibrant 800-acre self-contained iconic landmark seamlessly integrates a cluster of three hotels, conference and convention centres, a theme park, a mega shopping and entertainment mall, medical centre, educational facilities and a multitude of distinctive business and leisure facilities for an all-inclusive experience and convenience.

### Specialized services for ME travellers

Sunway Resort offers Muslim-friendly facilities and services such as prayer rooms in public areas, Qibla direction, bidets and prayer mats in all guest rooms, halal certification for their kitchens, specialty Middle Eastern food, Arabic guest cards and brochures as well as Arabic guest relation officers to assist its Middle Eastern guests.

The resort presents 477 smart, environmentally-friendly and intuitively designed rooms and suites fitted with state-of-the-art technology, including specialty suites that are perfectly tailored for different types of guests; from business travellers and families to wellness and luxury seekers.



Alex Castaldi  
Senior General Manager  
Sunway City Kuala Lumpur Hotels

“ We have implemented over 30 protocols since the onset of the pandemic that include the practice of highly visible and more frequent cleaning measures ”



# Karhoo partners with dnata

Over 80 travel professionals attended the official launch of the partnership between Karhoo and dnata Representation Services in Dubai. Partnering with dnata, one of the world's largest air and travel services providers based in Dubai, Karhoo Mobility Marketplace is now available across the region. Brands in the region can now offer taxis and private hire vehicles to their leisure and business customers.



Media Partner



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LONDON  
1-3 November 2021

# Saudis prioritise safe destinations

Almosafer, the Kingdom's leading omni-channel travel brand, is revealing key insights into Saudi nationals' travel preferences one month after opening borders. Almosafer's study examined consumers' searches and bookings over the period of May 17-June 16, 2021 compared to the same period in 2019 and found promising signs of travel revival.

TT Bureau

The findings solidify the results of Almosafer's second extensive travel sentiment survey conducted earlier this year which unveiled that over 80% of Saudi respondents are planning to travel internationally within the first six months of the border opening. Since the resumption of international travel from the Kingdom last month, Almosafer has recovered 76% of total bookings compared to the same period in 2019 and expects this percentage to further increase by Q4 to exceed pre-pandemic booking volume as more travel restrictions are lifted and more destinations reopen for visitors across the world.

## Growing appeal of local destinations

The data also shows that domestic travel is in high demand due to the growing appeal of local destinations amongst Saudi nationals,



Muzammil Ahussain  
EVP  
Almosafer

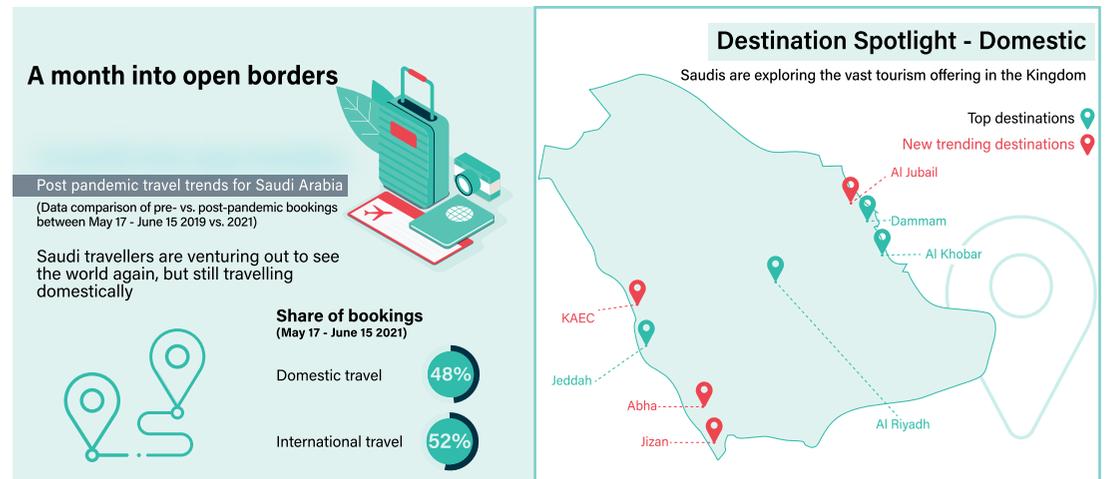
as well as the breadth of offer created by Almosafer from bespoke packages to a variety of bookable tours and attractions available on the brand's domestic activities marketplace. Almosafer has allocated significant funds, research, and product development efforts to boost its domestic offering, in line with the Kingdom's wider agenda to enhance the tourism sector's contribution to the national economy and will continue to do so with several innovative product launches planned in the coming months. Top local destinations include Jeddah, Riyadh, Al Kho-

bar and Dammam, while new trending destinations that gained popularity over the past year are Al Jubail, Abha and Jizan. Destinations of interest beyond

trending destinations have entered the top 20 list including Ukraine, one of Europe's least explored treasures which is known for its variety of attractions,

ence, and better social distancing options (16% increase in business class and 14% increase in first class bookings). With the ever-changing status of

sults we've seen through Almosafer's booking and searches during the last month, we feel very optimistic about the future of the travel sector in KSA.



KSA within the MENA region include UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Egypt topping the list due to their proximity and familiarity.

## International destinations

However, with Saudi international travellers prioritising quarantine free safe destinations, a few new

eccentric eateries, upbeat music and a dynamic art scene. Morocco has also emerged as a trending destination offering beautiful natural landscapes and beaches, rural and cultural heritage. Additionally, the Maldives are a top favourite amongst couples and families looking for a memorable beach escape full of relaxation. The data analysed also revealed that Saudi nationals are opting for shorter trips abroad, (5% shorter stays), and spending 5% more per booking to achieve higher levels of comfort, conveni-

travel restrictions at various destinations, travellers' booking window has reduced by 30%, Saudis are planning their trips less far ahead as they are making travel decisions based on current situations. Searches indicate an average of 2 pax per booking for international destinations compared to 2.5 pax during the same period in 2019.

## Travel preferences post the pandemic

Muzammil Ahussain, EVP at Almosafer, said, "Based on the initial re-

Because of our in-depth consumer survey which we conducted earlier this year, we were able to better understand Saudis' new travel preferences post the pandemic and offer them unparalleled travel advisory that enables them to plan their upcoming international and domestic trips with ease and convenience".

"Due to the various travel restrictions in place worldwide, it was interesting to see the changes in the top 20 destinations mix which saw a few new emerging destinations that weren't on Saudi nationals' travel lists before, such as Greece, Bosnia and Albania. Despite the opening of borders, we are pleased to see that domestic travel is still in demand and that our efforts in promoting domestic bookings are paying off. Through Almosafer's domestic activities marketplace and expert travel advisory, we will continue to develop a diverse range of local unique experiences that Saudis can discover in their home country, with a focus on cultural and adventure experiences".

“Through Almosafer's domestic activities marketplace and expert travel advisory, we will continue to develop a diverse range of local unique experiences that Saudis can discover in their home country, with a focus on cultural and adventure experiences”



# Air Charter: The future of travel

One of the myths of private flight is that luxury drives the decision to fly private. Right after that comes the notion that this service is only for the super-rich. Well, that is not entirely true. Time is the main reason people choose to fly private. Now more than ever, flying private have been the only means of travelling during the pandemic. **Aziz Ghorbani**, General Manager of Delta World Charter shares more with **TRAVTALK**.

 Shehara Rizly

**Do share with us a brief of the company and the services offered.**

Leading aircraft charter broker Delta World Charter provides tailored solutions for private jets, business flights, group charter, air cargo charter and commercial aircraft charter. Whether it is for entertaining private guests or business partners, planning exclusive travel or seeking critical delivery by cargo charter, Delta World Charter can provide professional on-demand air charter options.

The company offers bespoke solutions to fit clients' requirements and preferences – be it a low-price solution, aircraft inflight entertainment, or the quickest alternative for an unplanned situation such as emergency evacuation or repatriation flights. Headquartered in Dubai, UAE, Delta World Charter's breadth of coverage and global network of aircraft gives its clients access to over 60,000 aircraft. We have offices in Moscow, Russia; New York, USA; and Cape Town, South Africa.

**Are your main audience leisure or business travellers or both?**

We have a diversified client base ranging from business and leisure travellers as well as gov-



**Aziz Ghorbani**  
General Manager  
Delta World Charter

ernment entities. Some of our clients are UHNWI, government bodies, holiday-makers, global corporations, private Individuals.

**Charter services have been most used over the past year during the pandemic. What were the initiatives you took to take advantage of the situation?**

Pre-pandemic, charter flights were seen as a luxury rather than a necessity. This notion changed during the pandemic. They are no longer viewed as a luxury but an efficient, safe, and secure transportation tool that acts as a time machine to help achieve greater business success.

**As a percentage how have charter services changed before and during pandemic?**

Looking at past flight activities of business jets to and from the GCC (Jan-May 2019 and Jan-May 2020), the number of flights in the first five months of 2021 increased by 70% over 2020 and were over 35% higher than 2019. These numbers show that even though trips are limited to essential travel in 2020 and 2021, aviation business has shown significant growth in the number of flights taking off in the region.

**What are the plans for this year?**

UAE has done a good job containing the spread of the virus and has encouraged members of the public to join the COVID-19 vaccination programme. We believe our economy will soon recover. Also, since more people have realised the advantages of business jets, we expect that there will be a new group of users in the near future. Opportunities to expand are in the pipeline. Our expansion plan includes



G650

opening offices in Europe and Far East Asia.



A320-232 (LZ-MDK) - Seats

**Expo 2020 is around the corner, have you made any plans regarding collaborations?**

With its theme, 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future', Expo 2020 Dubai will illustrate that together we are creating brighter and smarter ideas for a better future for all. Expo 2020 is expected to transport visitors to new worlds through immersive pavilions where 180 participating countries will showcase the best each has to offer: their innovations, world-class architecture, captivating storytelling, live performances and much more.

Ultimately, business aviation is an exercise in simplicity. The fastest way to get from point A to point B. No

## Tailored Solutions

- We have a dedicated account manager that will be your point of contact from the time of inquiry until the flight is completed.
- We offer bespoke services which means we work as per the requirement of the client. Or in this case, the tour operator or travel agency.
- Based on the requirement, we can provide options of aircraft that will suit the budget.
- We offer customised catering as per dietary requirements of the passengers.
- Our flight rep gives live status updates and ensures a seamless process from the time of check-in.

complications. No delays. We are currently the GSA of Fly2Sky's fleet of Airbus A320 aircraft that has a capacity of up to 180 passengers which would be one of our unique selling points

for big groups for the upcoming exhibitions.

**How do you work with travel agents and tour operators? What are the collaborations and incentive schemes for them?**

We value our travel trade partners. We work on several commission schemes that are not limited nor fixed, ensuring a win-win situation between the parties involved. We protect your confidential information as well as the accounts through our non-disclosure agreement.

For charter bookings or inquiries, e-mail

passenger@dwc.aero  
or call +9714 887 9550.  
Our team is available 24/7/365.

“ Looking at past flight activities of business jets to and from the GCC (Jan-May 2019 and Jan-May 2020), the number of flights in the first five months of 2021 increased by 70% over 2020 and were over 35% higher than 2019 ”



A320-200 DWC

# The Future of Airport Innovations

His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President of Dubai Civil Aviation Authority, Chairman of Dubai Airports and Chairman and Chief Executive of Emirates Airline and Group, opened the 20<sup>th</sup> edition of the Airport Show. The three-day exhibition saw the participation of more than 95 exhibitors from 21 countries, 100-plus hosted buyers from over 20 countries & 36 exhibitors at five country pavilions.



# GCC, a key market for Malaysia

The bilateral relationship between the UAE and Malaysia goes back in time as the country offers Visa-on-Arrival to GCC Nationals, while major airlines such as Emirates Airlines, Etihad Airways, Saudi, Qatar Airways, offer direct flights to Malaysia. **His Excellency Mohd Tarid Bin Sufian**, Ambassador of Malaysia to the United Arab Emirates, shares with **TRAVTALK** their plans for 2021.

 Shehara Rizly

## Could you share the importance of the GCC market to Malaysia?

In 2019, Malaysia welcomed 309,224 tourists from the GCC. This amounted to a tourist expenditure of RM 3.2 billion (AED 2.8 billion) that year, signifying the highest (per capita expenditure) as compared to other tourists to Malaysia. Considering the current state of international travel, we are looking at the year 2025 for travel to return to normal and have earmarked the GCC as one of our important markets. In late December 2020, our Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, launched Malaysia's National Tourism Policy 2020-2030, giving concrete direction for the future of Malaysia's tourism industry over the next 10 years, emphasizing the importance of recovery, connections, and sustainability.

Malaysia was recently named the number one destination for Muslim travellers for the eighth consecutive year, based on factors such as the availability of halal food, access to prayer facilities, Muslim-friendly services in hotels, and overall safety and security. As increasing numbers of Muslims are travelling around the world, the demand for halal tourism offerings is expected to grow exponentially once the travel industry regains its foot-



His Excellency Mohd Tarid Bin Sufian  
Ambassador of Malaysia  
United Arab Emirates

ings. Malaysia understands the needs of the GCC tourists and therefore ensures that halal food is easily available with an array of local and international cuisines, including Arab food.

## How important was it to participate at the first travel trade physical event?

The relationship between Malaysia and United Arab Emirates goes back to many years and we have very strong diplomatic ties particularly at a very high level. Tourism is an integral part of Malaysia when it comes to strengthening bilateral relations. After 18 months of what the world has been facing, par-

ticipation at the Arabian Travel Market is very important to us not only to further bilateral cooperation but in terms of people to people contact to regain the confidence of the travellers as



Bohey Dulang - Sabah

well as to bring some sense of normality for the economy in Malaysia and for the people all over the world.

## What are the initiatives taken to open borders?

As Malaysia is on its way to a nationwide vaccination campaign as a pillar for a safe border reopening and prepares to welcome tourists to the country, Malaysia is excited to once again

showcase its stunning destinations and rich history and culture to travellers flying in. The country offers Visa-on-Arrival to GCC nationals, while major airlines from the region such as Emir-

ates Airlines, Etihad Airways, Saudi, Qatar Airways and more, offer direct flights to Malaysia. The country is already open for investors & business travellers. The approved short-term business travellers are exempted from the mandatory quarantine. Detailed information on the procedures can be found at <https://safetravel.mida.gov.my>.

Prior to the pandemic, tourists from all over the world visited

Malaysia to explore its beautiful landmarks and experience the warm hospitality as they immersed in its rich culture. Times have changed and the country cannot wait to once again wel-

come travellers to its bustling cities and tranquil islands. In line with this, Tourism Malaysia has launched the campaign #WeMissYou, especially for the Middle East region, to emphasize the nostalgia it has for the travellers wandering around the magnificent attractions that Malaysia offers.

## What will you showcase at Expo 2020?

The Malaysia Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, with the theme 'Energising Sustainability', serves as Malaysia's overall participation at Expo 2020, led by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation with Malaysian Green Technology and Climate Change Centre as the

implementing agency. Malaysia Ministry of Tourism is also set to fly in a cultural troupe to enthrall Expo 2020 visitors with daily cultural shows and craft demonstrations at the Malaysia Pavilion's amphitheatre, where visitors will get a captivating glimpse of how Malaysia is 'Truly Asia', with its diverse cultures and people of multi-ethnicities living in harmony, contributing to the nation's progress.

## Could you share with us your tourism plan for the ME market?

Tourism Malaysia has conducted consistent studies and research to better formulate an equipped tourism plan for the Middle East market. Its research has shown that post-pandemic travel trends will include tourists travelling in smaller groups to less crowded areas with preferences for personalised tours. Post-lockdown, Malaysia is banking on its majestic nature and highlands to attract tourists from the region. Set amidst a rich bio-diverse location, the Desaru Coast is a new integrated resort that features a portfolio of globally renowned hotels such as Hard Rock Hotel Desaru Coast, The Westin Desaru Coast Resort, Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas, and One&Only Desaru Coast where all the properties span a pristine beachfront. 🌅

“ Malaysia was recently named the number one destination for Muslim travellers for the eighth consecutive year, based on factors such as the availability of halal food, access to prayer facilities, Muslim-friendly services in hotels, and overall safety and security ”



## ISHRAQ HOSPITALITY

Dubai

Ishraq Hospitality, a division of Mohamed & Obaid Almulla Group, appoints **Alexander Suski** as Acting Chief Executive Officer.

Suski is moving up to Acting CEO from his role as Group Director, Commercial and Business Development, Ishraq Hospitality, where he was overseeing commercial operations and strategic expansion of seven hotel properties under InterContinental Hotels Group and Wyndham franchises. Suski has over 18 years of industry experience that spans Europe and MEA.



## QATAR NATIONAL TOURISM COUNCIL

Qatar

Qatar National Tourism Council (QNTC) has appointed **Deveekaa Nijhawan** to lead the International PR and Communications team, to assist in marketing the destination in key markets as part of the country's strategy to become a world-leading tourism destination. She has over 10 years' experience in PR & Communications in the hospitality sector. Nijhawan's remit covers key markets including India, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia and United Arab Emirates with a focus on engaging and penetrating travel trade and consumer media.



## AVANI IBN BATTUTA

Dubai

Avani Ibn Battuta Dubai Hotel announces the appointment of its new General Manager, **Yann Decaix**, who brings over 20 years of experience from around the globe to take the hotel into its next phase. He joins the Dubai property, which launched in late 2019, to take it forward with his visionary leadership, which has seen him work with brands including Novotel and Guoman & Thistle Hotels. With a background in revenue management, Decaix has progressed through the ranks across the fields of operations, sales and e-commerce.



## THE CHEDI AL BAIT

Sharjah

The Chedi Al Bait, Sharjah has rapidly built a robust reputation as one of the finest luxury hotels in the region. With an outstanding 17 years of experience in hospitality and a wealth of strong hands-on prowess in the industry, **Robert Nicolas Sahyouni** will be leading their sales, marketing, revenue and reservations activities as the newly appointed Director of Sales & Marketing. Sahyouni studied and graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration in Sales & Marketing – an achievement that subsequently led him to pursue the path towards hospitality as his preferred route.



## RITZ CARLTON DIFC

Dubai

The Ritz-Carlton, Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) is pleased to announce **Frida Audi** as Director of Sales and Marketing. She brings a proven track record having worked in luxury hotels across the region. Joining the Ritz-Carlton DIFC from the Habtoor Hospitality, Audi is no stranger to Marriott International. Landing at The Ritz-Carlton DIFC, she brings an impressive skill set and a successful tenure managing the sales department at the Ritz-Carlton Doha and Habtoor Grand Resort & Spa.



## DOUBLETREE BY HILTON AND

## HAMPTON BY HILTON

Ras Al Khaimah

Hilton announced the appointment of **Eduard Jimenez** as Cluster Commercial Director of DoubleTree by Hilton Resort & Spa Marjan Island, DoubleTree by Hilton Ras Al Khaimah, DoubleTree by Hilton Ras Al Khaimah Corniche Residences, and the highly anticipated Hampton by Hilton Marjan Island, which will be opening in Q3 2021. Jimenez has a career spanning nine years in the hospitality industry with Hilton.



# 1<sup>st</sup> Raffles Resort to open in Dubai

Accor, a world-leading augmented hospitality group with more than 600 hotels and resorts across India, Middle East, Africa and Turkey, is opening its first Raffles Resort in the Middle East, on the iconic Palm Jumeirah. Set to open in the last quarter of 2021, Raffles the Palm Dubai will be the first ultra-luxury addition to Accor's existing diverse portfolio in Dubai.

TT Bureau

**R**affles the Palm Dubai will be situated within 100,000 sqm landscape on the West Crescent of Palm Jumeirah, the world's largest man-made island and archipelago. Its privileged location boasts panoramic sea views and vistas of the Dubai's iconic skyline while offering a tranquil and private escape, just a short drive away from the city's vibrant attractions.

The resort will offer 389 luxurious rooms – starting from 65 sqm – suites and villas, each of them featur-

ing a balcony and terrace showcasing unparalleled sea views.

The group is partnering with Emerald Palace group (EGP), which has been successfully developing and constructing residential projects in Ukraine, UAE and Russia since 1996.

Guests looking to relax during their stay will be able to indulge in Cing Mondes Spa, an award winning 3,000 sqm Parisian brand with an iconic design, never before seen in Dubai, featuring 23 treatments rooms and two private spa suites, as well as the city's largest



indoor swimming pool. Rising above the cobalt blue waters of the Arabian Gulf, the property is flanked by a 500 metre private white sand beach offering the perfect scene for an ultra-luxurious beach experience. Guests and residents will be introduced to a brand-new concept beach club offer-

ing which will showcase Mediterranean cuisine, entertainment offerings and much more coming to the shores of the Raffles the Palm Dubai. "This is a very exciting opportunity for us" says **Mark Willis**, CEO of Accor India, Middle East, Africa and Turkey. "There are very few beach resort

plots left in Dubai and none on the Palm Jumeirah. The size of the property and its location perfectly lend itself to provide a prestigious address for the Raffles brand. We are confident that the new Raffles will compete with world-class luxury hotels across the globe. While being located in Dubai, one

of the most sought-after cities in the world, Raffles will open its door to provide an unprecedented and exclusive level of luxury. From the private villas on the beach and array of dining offerings, to the expansive outdoor areas ideal for weddings and events, Raffles the Palm Dubai is all set to become a destination in itself," adds Willis.

### FactFile

■ Accor currently operates 410 properties (89,116 rooms) in India, Middle East, Africa and Turkey with 222 more (50,690 rooms) in the development pipeline.



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# HONOURING EXCELLENCE

## IN COVID COMPLIANCE

ARABIAN  
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# GRAND MERCURE

HOTEL AND RESIDENCES  
DUBAI AIRPORT



## #EXPERIENCELOCAL

Feel, taste, smell and experience unparalleled Arabian hospitality with an upscale international hotel tailored by locals reflecting Dubai with an authentic design ideal for discerning travelers.

The Grand Mercure Hotel and Residences Dubai Airport Hotel is the first of its kind in Dubai offering a sense of an upscale and premium stay. The property is ideal for travelers seeking stays that combine indulgence and convenience at its finest. Boasting 257 discerning hotel rooms and 104 spacious serviced residences ranging from one, two, and three bedrooms.

257

Premium Guest  
Rooms

5

Locally Crafted  
Dining Outlets



104

Exquisite  
Residences

2

Dedicated  
Outdoor Pool  
one with glass bottom

## UPSCALE FACILITIES FOR A PREMIUM STAY

Grand Mercure Hotel & Residences Dubai Airport is equipped with facilities that complements an upscale premium feel whether traveling for leisure or business.

- Glass-bottom rooftop pool
- Rooftop terrace with 360 view of Dubai
- Mezzanine pool terrace

- Kids play area with fountain
- Mezzanine kids pool
- Misk spa with hammam

- Executive lounge
- Business centre
- Fitness centre

