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UAE'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE MONTHLY

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Setting the pace for 2017

The dawn of 2017 will focus on every possible opportunity for growth. Industry professionals share their views with **TRAVTALK** on the new strategies to be utilised to ensure a stable growth plan for the New Year.

SHEHARA RIZLY

“Low oil prices have continued to curtail global economies and in turn demand for travel. In addition, the strong US dollar continues to eat away at our revenues. In spite of all these challenges, we remain optimistic and are focusing on looking at pockets of opportunity around the globe, recreating consumer segments, and shifting our operations where we see strong demand. In 2016, Emirates became the only airline in the world to operate an all Airbus A380 and Boeing 777 fleet. We are set to take another 28 aircraft in 2017, and we will continue to work hard to enhance our products on our existing fleet, as well as on our next generation aircraft.”



Sheikh Majid Al Mualla
Divisional Senior Vice President
- Commercial Operations Centre,
Emirates Airline

“Dubai will see moderate growth, while Abu Dhabi is expected to perform more robustly through the year. Rotana is constantly seeking to expand its business in its stronghold markets while targeting additional geographic source markets. Poland has lately emerged as a key feeder market for Rotana, and we are gearing up to host a series of roadshows and Fam trips throughout the country to drive more traffic to our properties. Despite the tough economic environment, Rotana continued its aggressive expansion in 2016, opening eight properties across major markets. We are bringing that momentum into 2017 – a year that will see a further 14 Rotana hotels opening for business, including three in the UAE.”



Amin Dakkak
Corporate Director of Marketing
& Communications, Rotana



Graham Nichols
Managing Director
Amadeus Gulf

“The travel market including the Middle East is poised for enormous growth in the next two years, both online and off. Amadeus Gulf launched in 2016 a suite of leading-edge solutions, which is set to reduce operational costs and increase profits while boosting productivity of travel agencies by allowing more efficient use of time and resources. In 2016, there has been a significant growth of online travel business. 93 per cent of MENA online travel agencies’ bookings are mainly from Amadeus web services and superior fare search tools.”



Ishrat Ali Khan
Group Managing Director
Al Wasl Yachts

sunset dhow cruise tour. Our R&D team is working on the emerging tourist market. We sense the pulse of the market and plan promotions accordingly.”

“We anticipate the upward projections for 2017. Dubai and the entire UAE will set new levels in tourism both in volume and guest pleasure. We expect higher inflow of guests from new markets. We, from our planning perspective, are the followers of Vision 2020 and plan extensive expansion in next two years. We launched the biggest and first ever brand new, Al Wasl Dhow in Marina. Our new product is sunset dhow cruise tour. Our R&D team is working on the emerging tourist market. We sense the pulse of the market and plan promotions accordingly.”



Ali Mohammed
Area Manager Gulf
Ethiopian Airlines

Moroni Comoros joined our network. We took delivery of ultra-modern aircrafts including Africa’s first Airbus 350.”

“Conakry, Victoria Falls, Oslo, Singapore, Jakarta, Chengdu (China) will join Ethiopian’s ever expanding network in 2017. Moreover, frequency will be increased to Cape Town, Djibouti, Seychelles and capacity will increase to Dubai. We will be increasing our presence in Africa and beyond. 2016 was a successful year for us as Ethiopian continued the double-digit growth; new destinations including New York, Windhoek and Moroni Comoros joined our network. We took delivery of ultra-modern aircrafts including Africa’s first Airbus 350.”

Contd. on page 3 ▶

Dubai airport opens VIP terminal

His Highness Sheikh Ahmed Bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman of Dubai Civil Aviation Authority and Chairman and Chief Executive of Emirates Airline Group inaugurated the largest purpose built facility in the world poised to be a game changer in the business aviation sector, offering VIP customers seamless travel experience coupled with time and cost efficiencies within a thriving aviation eco- system. The launch of the VIP terminal is a significant step towards realising Dubai’s vision of becoming the aviation capital of the world. The 5600 sq mt VIP terminal will cater to heads of states, ministerial portfolios and the business travellers. It currently hosts two FBOs including Falcon aviation, Jetex and Jet Aviation. The VIP terminal saw its first private jet take off in April this year, since then the terminal has witnessed 1000 flight movements and anticipates that in 2017 it would grow up to 4000. It offers a wide range of products from the arts, culture, paintings, sculptures, priceless artifacts to cars, watches, real estate, super bikes, etc., to make it a more immersive experience.



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Seeking better opportunities

▶ Contd. from page 1

“2016 was a very successful year for our airline in terms of the fleet and network growth as we continued to build a momentum thanks to our excellent in-flight service. In 2016 alone, we have successfully launched several key flights, which include Dubrovnik, Croatia; Bogota, Columbia; Panama City; among others. As we enter into the New Year, we will stay committed to continuously providing our passengers with the best possible services, which is also evident in our fleet growth.”



Adem Ceylan
Vice President of Marketing & Sales, Middle East & Cyprus
Turkish Airlines



Rajeev Gandotra
Chief Executive
Versatile Tourism

“The year 2017 looks bleak for inbound operators, since Indian economy has gone into demonetisation spin. We, as inbound tour operators, do not expect much traffic to come from India for 2017. We are working with few European agencies to bring in European/American tourists into Dubai. We are educating them that we can offer world class entertainment amusement parks, hotels and the wonders DTCA-Dubai has created, especially for the tourists who are flying to Southeast Asia from Europe and America. They should make Dubai as their transit base.”



Mahesh Mirchandani
Managing Director
Horizon Tours

“We are a small DMC and look forward to the tourist boom in 2017 leading up to Expo 2020. Dubai is one of the best cities in the world today and very proactive. One must be positive and the future will surely be good. We are exploring new markets all over although our main market is presently India. We plan to travel and get more business as people from all over the world want to visit Dubai. The opening of the Dubai Canal and new theme parks is a bold step forward toward new horizons.”

Rail Europe chooses Elaf in KSA

Rail Europe has expanded its sales network across the region by appointing Elaf Travel and Tourism Company, as their GSA partner.

TT BUREAU

Elaf Group has been a trusted GSA partner of a number of distinguished airlines and has retail outlets throughout the Kingdom to cater to a wide network of customers across the country. Elaf particularly specialises in facilitating international tours, MICE, overseas English language course and Medical Tourism to address the unique needs of their diverse clients.



Mohammed Mahfouz Bin Mahfouz
VP
Elaf Travel Tourism Company

There is a huge demand for rail travel within Europe from leisure and business travellers from the UAE

Waleed Ahmed, Regional Manager of Rail Europe's office in Dubai, said: "With Saudi Arabia seen as a key market in the region, Rail Europe is keen to extend the maximum support for travellers and travel trade in Saudi market by this new appointment of Elaf Travel & Tourism which operates through a wide network of many travel shops across Saudi Arabia. We are very delighted to strengthen

our presence in Saudi Arabia. Elaf Travel & Tourism has an excellent reputation in the region and has shown a great interest in facilitating the sale of Rail Europe products to their clients and travel trade in the kingdom. We foresee Saudi

Arabia as a key market in GCC and integral to our long-term growth strategy.”

Mohammed Mahfouz Bin Mahfouz, VP, Elaf Travel Tourism Company, acknowledged the strategic move by Rail Europe to expand its network, and by appointing Elaf as their GSA Partner hence providing multiple selling channels through the wide network of Elaf's outlets. Bin Mahfouz also shared that the customers of Elaf will be delighted to learn about this partnership as there is a huge demand for rail travel within Europe from leisure and business travellers from this part of the world.

Rail Europe and Elaf Travel Tourism Company will strive to deliver perfect gateways to Europe through train journeys to ensure that customers enjoy their holidays in beautiful destinations with a single rail pass and/or ticket.

Rise in UAE visits to Seychelles

The Seychelles Tourism Board Office in Dubai confirmed that visitor numbers from the GCC region surpassed 2016 targets with a record of 25,293 visitors as of Oct 2016.

TT BUREAU

The Seychelles islands has shown continuous growth in visitor arrivals from the GCC region over the past two years, building on its consistent status as a top feeder market and dream holiday option. In 2014, the destination welcomed a total of 18,668 visitors to the Island, growing to 27,089 visitors in 2015. Today, the Tourism Board Office in Dubai has noted that in the first 10 months of 2016, figures have already surpassed 2016 targets with a record of 25,293 visitors from the GCC as of October 2016. The figure is a testament to the passion and dedication that the Seychelles Tourism Board Office in Dubai has in imagining and delivering a schedule of highly engaging activities and events.

The Seychelles Islands recently demonstrated its status in the UAE with a high



Sherin Naiken
CEO
Seychelles Tourism Board



Ahmed Fathallah
Regional Manager, Seychelles
Tourism Board Office in Dubai

profile reception for the CEO of the Tourism Board, **Sherin Naiken**. Naiken says, "The UAE will remain a very important market for Seychelles as we move into 2017. 2016 has been another remarkable year for us and we are very pleased to have been able to grow our market share in the UAE in a significant manner. I would like to extend my heartfelt thank you to all of our partners and collaborators. We are a firm believer that it is in

working together that we can guarantee success.”

Ahmed Fathallah, the Seychelles Tourism Board Office in Dubai Regional Manager and initiator of the event said, "We have reached our targets for the second consecutive year, an achievement that inspires the team and me to arrange even more events of this nature as a way of acknowledging and thanking our valued partners.”

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En route to an era of digitalisation

During the latter part of 2016, various resource panels, white papers and workshops were held as a first step towards the digitalisation of the travel, tourism and hospitality industry. According to a Sabre report, one out of five US dollars spent on travel are spent on a smartphone device with one third of bookings been carried out on smartphones. When you look at millennials and other travellers within the age groups of 16 to 44 years almost 95 per cent own and actively use a smartphone daily. The 'apps' deliver a 120 per cent higher conversion rate than the regular website according to the latest reports.

With UAE reaching 100,000 hotel rooms just a few weeks ago, the competition for 2017 is going to be really interesting as the hotel sector has to constantly adapt to the changes to remain successful in the market. Today, technology has become an important asset to the hotel sector to increase revenues and ensure the return of the guests; RevPAR (revenue per available room), GOPPAR (gross operating profit per available room) and TrevPAR (total revenue per available room). In order to ensure these, hoteliers need to focus on selling different products at the property to the guests so that they can ensure good revenues.

Dubai is on a rapid growth trajectory to position itself as retail tourism, entertainment and shopping destination and an aviation hub among many others such as establishing as a cruise and cargo hub, business capital, etc. The opening of the new VIP terminal will place Dubai as one of the most sought after destinations for the discerning 'VIP or business' traveller. Diversifying into the mid-market sector earlier on this year with the emergence of niche brands and the opening of the entertainment destinations such as IMG Worlds and Dubai Parks and Resorts will ensure the number of visitors to Dubai, soon to reach their target of 20 million tourists by 2020.

Future of online hotel distribution

Even if it may seem that OTAs are ruling the markets, they can't afford to be complacent in these times of evolving technology as sooner or later other entities will challenge their dominance.

Hotels were guilty of sleeping on the job when it came to the rise of online travel agencies (OTAs). Stepping in when they saw the opportunity, OTAs took a huge chunk of the online distribution method and it's only now that hotels are belatedly trying to catch up. However, going forward, both distribution platforms will need to cooperate and co-exist for their own benefit and for that of the guest.

Hotels are fighting back against the OTAs' clout in various ways, such as advertising, e.g., Hilton's clever tagline 'Stop clicking around' or IHG's 'You always get a better rate when you book direct'. They also try to redirect OTA booking guests to book direct. For example, when I have used an OTA to book, the hotel will invariably suggest at reception that I sign up to their frequent guest programme or say, "The next time you book direct, we'll give you a room upgrade, a free breakfast, whatever." And they will remind you that you can't earn programme points when you book through an OTA.

Similarly, experienced travellers know that they can log onto an OTA, check out the location, type and the price of where they want to

stay and then phone the hotel, tell them what the OTA is offering and ask what they

can offer. Invariably the hotel will better the OTA offer, either in terms of price, room upgrade or other amenities added on, as by booking directly the hotel doesn't need to pay the 12 to 20 percent OTA commission.

The pendulum, so long trending the OTAs' way, has begun to swing back in favour of the hotels through legal challenges to 'rate parity' clauses in contracts, which prevents a hotel selling below the price of the OTA. Such clauses have been challenged in the courts throughout the EU and overturned on competition grounds

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The two leading OTA groups, through their various subsidiaries, now hold about 80 to 90 per cent of the market and that kind of con-

centration could make them subject to competition laws going forward, which could

reduce their negotiating power with hotels in the future. So, who is to say the OTAs' strong position today will remain so in the future? The Internet wasn't here 20 years ago and neither were the OTAs some 10 years ago; who's to say the OTA model may not be replaced by evolving technology or at least something that reduces their current dominance?

With this in mind, more nimble and customer-specific OTAs may develop, such as boutique or lifestyle OTAs — the 'green traveller' or 'gourmet traveller'. These are already developing and may chip away at the dominance of the bigger OTAs. The same is likely to happen in response to the consolidation of the larger brands and the inevitable so-called 'McDonaldisation' that comes with large scale, despite

the rollout of endlessly new and diverse lifestyle brands. Many guests — particularly at the higher end— will be turned off by the association with the behemoth brand and opt for something more personal and tailored to their likes. The \$10 to \$20 distribution savings that the larger brands can offer, while an advantage for the budget product, will not matter to this higher-end guest.

As hotels learn to offer a more individually tailored service to their guests and when OTAs evolve to appeal to more niche customer groups, they will both learn through adaptation to collaborate and co-exist.

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



Scott Antel
Hospitality and Leisure Partner
Berwin Leighton Paisner LLP

Golden Sands' networking dinner with partners

Golden Sands Hotel Apartments, part of A.A. Al Moosa Enterprises and pioneered the concept of hotel apartments in the region, recently organised a successful dinner gathering to recognise its key partners in Abu Dhabi for their continued support of the property. The networking dinner held at the Hilton Grand Capital Abu Dhabi was attended by the sales team and management headed by Mohammed Khoori, General Manager and Nives Deininger, Director of Sales, who updated the partners of the property's latest news and developments including the completion of the refurbishment at Golden Sands Hotel Apartment 3.



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Amadeus' travel technology show

Amadeus Gulf hosted a technology show in Abu Dhabi exclusively for travel businesses in the region with an objective to educate customers with the newest solutions.



The travel industry is growing significantly and rapidly. In order to be able to be on a par with the demands of this industry, it is crucial to adopt the latest technologies across businesses. Keeping this objective in mind, the technology show focused on educating and providing personalised solutions to travel agents.

Jauhar Abdul Gafoor, Sales Director - Abu Dhabi, Al-Ain & Oman, Amadeus Gulf, said: "Amadeus Gulf always focuses on the requirements of our key stakeholders and make available the right solutions that will benefit the travel industry. Amadeus Technology Show falls aptly in line with this objective and provides the ideal platform to showcase the wide array of technology products that are available to our partners and customers."



Jauhar Abdul Gafoor
Sales Director - Abu Dhabi
Al-Ain & Oman, Amadeus Gulf

The company also talked about Amadeus Selling Platform — its state-of-art booking platform. Amadeus Gulf also demonstrated solutions such as Amadeus Agency Insight which provides the easy way to monitor, manage and optimise performance of the travel agencies business. Also, e-commerce products such as e-Power, Mobile Traveller and web services, as well as robotics solutions such as Touchless Solutions were showcased, which helps

agents reduce their manual work and eliminate errors.

Apart from that remote ticketing solution — a fully automated solution designed to manage pricing, price comparison and ticketing in the remote points of sale, simplify cooperation between non-IATA locations making bookings (Subagents) and the IATA travel agencies in charge of fulfillment activities (Consolidators), was presented. Amadeus Voice — a communication channel which brings latest information to travel agent's computer every day was also promoted during the event.

The show had over 150 attendees including owners, decision-makers, and managers including travel agents. The event took place on December 8, at Marriot Hotel and Apartments, Abu Dhabi.

UAE's 1st Wyndham Garden in '17

R Hotels and Wyndham Hotel Group have agreed to open the first Wyndham Garden in the UAE. The Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche is expected to open by Q4 2017.



The 17-storied, four-star hotel will feature 179 guest rooms, including 138 standard rooms and 41 suites, as well as an executive lounge on the top floor with panoramic views of the Arabian Gulf. Additional facilities will include two restaurants, an outdoor swimming pool, gym and spa, separate health clubs for men and women, and a kids' play area. Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche, with a total investment of AED200 million (\$54.5 million), will be the fifth collaboration between R Hotels and Wyndham Hotel Group in the United Arab Emirates, and the third in Ajman. R Hotels presently owns two Wyndham-branded hotels in the emirate: Ramada Hotel & Suites Ajman and Ramada Beach Hotel Ajman.

Sumair Tariq, R Hotels' Managing Director, com-

mented: "The group is fully on track of its development and expansion plan, with the opening of our seventh property. The country's hospitality sector continues to grow and our group set sights on



capitalising on these developments and increasing our portfolio. The franchise deal cements our long-standing partnership with Wyndham Hotel Group and R Hotels is honoured to pioneer and set the standards for the Wyndham Garden brand in the UAE."

Ignace Bauwens, Regional Vice President - Middle East and Africa, Wyndham Hotel Group, stated: "Ajman has one of the most vibrant and thriving business and leisure tourism economies in the UAE, with visitor numbers continuously growing at a rapid pace. R Hotels is an incredibly important and strategic partner for Wyndham Hotel Group in the Middle East."

Iftikhar Hamdani, Cluster General Manager of the two Ramada hotels in Ajman, is spearheading the pre-opening of the Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche. He enthused: "This hotel is geared to accommodate the influx of guests as Ajman continues to attract more bookings, both from tourists and UAE residents, year after year. We are already working on partnerships in various markets, including North and East Europe, to market our new hotel."

Indonesia Fam trip for UAE agents

Visit Indonesia Tourist Office (VITO) Middle East recently organised a Fam trip to Indonesia. It was by invitation from the Ministry of Tourism of Indonesia in Jakarta and VITO Middle East based in Dubai with Country Manager Nour Aridi. VITO chose a group of travel agents from the UAE (Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah) The selected group of agents were represented by Nirvana Travel, Dnata, Across Borders Travel and Cosmo Travel. The Fam trip was supported by Emirates Airline.



Turkish adds Havana and Caracas to its network

Turkish Airlines has just added flights to Havana and Caracas as its 16th and 17th destinations in the Americas. Its existing services are Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, Bogota, Panama, Toronto, Montreal, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Washington, Boston, San Francisco, Miami and Atlanta.

The inaugural flight from Istanbul got water cannon salutes in both airports with a ceremony graced by Mehmet Büyükekçi, Member of the Board of Turkish Airlines and the senior bureaucrats both from Republic of Cuba and Republic of Venezuela.

Beginning from Dec 20, Havana and Caracas flights will be operated 3 times per week on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays in both directions. Introductory roundtrip fares are available from Istanbul to Havana and to Caracas. Additionally, for the first 6 months of operation to these new destinations, there is a special offer for Miles&Smiles members, with a 25 per cent reduction in the miles needed to redeem either award tickets or upgrades.

Two international wins for Dunes Hotel Apartments



Dunes Hotel Apartments celebrates two major international wins this month with the title of 'Best Serviced Apartments' on a global level from Haute Grandeur Global Hotel Awards 2016 and a country level accolade from World Luxury Hotel Awards under the 'Luxury Serviced Apartments' category. This is the third time that Dunes has swept a trophy at the World Luxury Hotel Awards, after winning titles in 2013 and 2015. **Faisal Abdul Rahman**, General Manager - Dunes Hotel Apartments, receiving the award from **Marinique De Wet**, CEO - Haute Grandeur Global Hotel Awards, at the gala ceremony in Abu Dhabi.



Desirable Dubai

Based on air traffic, the **MasterCard Global Destination Cities Index** reports Dubai as the fourth most popular destination city for tourism worldwide in 2015.

Retail brings Dubai closer to Vision 2020

According to published figures, the size of Dubai's retail market is expected to expand by 7.7 per cent in 2016, with sales turnover expected to surpass \$52 billion in 2020. Keeping up with its strength, this year Dubai retail has released a brand new yearly calendar to draw more traffic from targeted international destinations.

SHEHARA RIZLY
In the creation of this 'first-of-its kind' initiative, the Dubai Festivals and Retail Establish-

ment (DFRE) agency of the DTCM and the Department of Economic Development (DED) have worked integrally with the city's major retail groups,

brands, and mall operators to define the type of events, timings, and durations, aligning with the global retail and fashion cycles, as well as evaluat-

ing the largest retail spend drivers across best-in-class global shopping destinations. Stemming from a thorough assessment across sector-relat-

ed criteria and an exhaustive competitive benchmarking, this Retail Calendar reflects a well-considered three-pronged approach to combining re-

gional market buying cycles and preferences, and nuanced needs of tourists from specific markets with the seasonality of the global retail supply chain.

“Retailing remains the dominant economic activity in Dubai with a share of up to 30 per cent in the emirate's GDP and the sector will play a key role in Dubai achieving its tourism vision of receiving 20 million tourists a year by 2020. It's important to consolidate efforts across Dubai to offer exceptional and high quality shopping experiences in terms of infrastructure, initiatives and incentives. Along with implementing varied initiatives to enhance ease of doing business and make shopping in Dubai a pleasant experience, the Department of Economic Development has been working closely with public and private sector entities to evolve innovative strategies that would reinforce Dubai as a preferred place to shop for visitors and residents alike.”



H.E. Sami Al Qamzi
Director General, Department of Economic Development (DED)

“Dubai has been continuously growing its standing as a leader in global travel, ranked number four today with the highest average spend per tourist within the economy compared to any other city in the world. Beyond growing tourist volumes, one of the mandates of Dubai Tourism is to significantly enhance the economic value created across all travel related industries to our GDP. Retail is one of the core pillars of our destination proposition, and one that is a key driver of spend within the economy — hence the incredible support from the Department of Economic Development has been paramount to the success of this project. In undertaking this exercise, our aim was to work with the industry towards making Dubai the world's leading destination for retail tourism, attracting more traffic and fueling consumption across the shopping precincts, and ultimately accelerating domestic retail industry growth. It has been through exemplary collaboration and joint ownership between the private and public sector that DTCM has been able to deploy a comprehensive list of initiatives to be taken forth to implementation by relevant stakeholders. And today, we are pleased to announce one of the most strategic components — the annual Retail Calendar for Dubai.”



H.E. Helal Saeed Al Marri
Director General of the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM)



Omar Bushahab
CEO-Registration & Licensing Sector, Department Of Economic Development

“As the government entity that sets the strategic direction for economic policy in Dubai, the DED is happy to partner with DFRE in ensuring the success of this new retail initiative. The retail sector is one of the crucial engines of Dubai's rapid economic growth, and continues to be driven by the visionary leadership of Dubai to position the emirate as a unique retail hub, an achievement that would not have been possible without the strong collaboration between government entities and the private sector. We are confident that the Dubai Retail Calendar will further invigorate the emirate's retail sector by paving the way for more global brands to capitalise on Dubai's potential to offer unique shopping experiences at any time of the year.”



Saeed Mohammad Mesam Al Falasi
Executive Director, Retail and Strategic Alliances, DFRE

“With tourism and retail industries being key pillars of Dubai's economy, the Dubai Retail Calendar initiative combines the strategic objectives of both, driving retail growth domestically, and enhancing the value of Dubai's shopping experience for tourists. With this calendar of very strong festivals, events and promotions, we expect to incentivise overseas visitors to consciously plan trips to Dubai around these periods. For our residents, as well as regional market travellers, this is a critical step towards creating a year-round range of rewarding shopping and family experiences to incentivise more frequent visits to retail districts and greater spends. Today, Dubai is unrivalled in the region in terms of our retail offering and ranked only second to London in terms of representation of international brands. Our success is thanks to the unique model of public-private partnership that has yet again been instrumental in the development of this flagship programme for Dubai, and will flourish even further under Dubai Retail Calendar.”

Retail Calendar 2017 DUBAI



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Universal Maldives comes calling

Universal Resorts Maldives held a special evening for travel agents and tour operators at the Sofitel Hotel Dubai. At the event a presentation was made about the different resorts under the Universal Resorts umbrella which consists of Kurumba, Velassaru, Kuramathi, Kandolhu and Maafushivaru.





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IndiGo goes live on Travelport

Travelport's Travel Commerce Platform has recently added Indian LCC, IndiGo Airlines to its clientele. This will help agents using the Travelport system to access the airline's content and ancillaries in a seamless manner.

 NISHA VERMA

Celebrating the launch of IndiGo's fares and ancillaries to all travel agencies on Travelport's integrated platform, **Aditya Ghosh**, President & Whole Time Director, IndiGo, and **Gordon Wilson**, President and CEO, Travelport, discussed the opportunities that they can offer to travel agents and consumers alike.



Aditya Ghosh
President & Whole Time Director
IndiGo

"With IndiGo going live on the Travelport platform, it means that travel agencies in India can have access to IndiGo with the same fares, content and ancillaries on Travelport as they can on IndiGo's website or IndiGo's API. What is progressive about this move is that we are taking it international and making IndiGo available to all travel agencies online or offline using the Travelport system in 180 countries, from where they can generate sales," says Wilson.

However, IndiGo did take its time to come on board as Ghosh explains, "LCCs traditionally were not on the GDS, but Travelport was the first GDS to be able to bring on board Ryanair and easyJet.

I believe Southwest Airlines is also on another GDS platform, which makes three of the largest LCCs in the world in the last couple of years to have figured on

tant part of our business and more than two third of our business comes from travel agencies, both online and offline. This will help travel agents access

Wilson adds, "People usually book packages with travel agencies, which involves hotels, tours and comparison and consultation. Customers go to the travel agents for a variety of reasons. In fact, the international travel agencies can advise their customers about IndiGo and its connections in India, which is now available on the Travelport platform."

Gordon, also said he is bullish on the Indian market. "We have been here for 20 years and that helps in building new opportunities.

an acceleration in this market because a huge number of Indian population is moving from trains to planes. There is an increasing investment from India, which is causing trade to come into India and is boosting outbound travel from



Gordon Wilson
President and CEO
Travelport

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We are taking it international and making IndiGo available to all travel agencies online or offline using the Travelport system in 180 countries from where they can generate sales

This will help travel agents access IndiGo content around the world at more than 68,000 customer touch points, and in a much more seamless manner

a GDS. This gives us the confidence to sign up with a GDS and Travelport itself has undergone a change and evolution, which works in our favour."

IndiGo content around the world at more than 68,000 customer touch points, and in a much more seamless manner they will be able to see the inventory on the same screen. They don't have to toggle through different screens. We don't have any differential pricing and all the ancillary products are available. Thus, life is much easier for travel agents."

Speaking on how travel agents are going to benefit from this, especially when the prices on IndiGo's website and the GDS are same, Ghosh says, "Travel agents are a very impor-

India is the third biggest GDS market by air bookings in the world today, much bigger than the UK and very close to Germany, which is Number two. We are only seeing

India as well. IndiGo has been at the forefront of this growth and offering international connections as well. Thus, we are very positive on the Indian market overall!"

Musafir.com partners with Visa

■ UAE's first premium-experience travel website, musafir.com announced a partnership with Visa across the UAE, Qatar and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and launch of dedicated websites for Qatar and KSA. The move is a breakthrough in Musafir.com's regional expansion and to the continuous increase in online travel bookings in the region.

"At Musafir.com we like to exceed our traveller's expectation. The travel marketplace is very competitive. Our partnership with VISA. Visa is a significant step for the rapidly growing travel industry in the UAE and GCC. We anticipate this to make an even more scalable business with the expertise to change the booking experience for travellers. The



Sachin Gadoya
Managing Director and Co-founder
Musafir.com

Our partnership with Visa is a significant step for the rapidly growing travel industry in the UAE and GCC

idea is to focus on getting people to move from offline booking to online booking. This association will be our next chapter of high-growth in this dynamic industry," commented

Sachin Gadoya, Managing Director and Co-founder of Musafir.com. Musafir.com also announced a special offer for all the travellers. Customers across the UAE, Qatar and

Saudi Arabia, can receive their discounted air tickets in three easy steps. Once the destination is booked, customers will be redirected to the GOVISA page where the service will SMS a security code. After typing the code into checkout section, AED 200 will automatically be deducted from the original price.



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FITUR attracts new markets

37th International Tourism Trade Fair organised by IFEMA, FITUR will be held at Feria de Madrid from January 18-22. **Ana Larrañaga**, Director, FITUR, speaks to **TRAVTALK**.

SHEHARA RIZLY

The trade fair will kick off with the intent and means to beat expectations, which keep rising every passing year. The last trade show broke a new record in participation, with a total of 231,872 visitors, of whom 124,659 were trade professionals, representing a 2 per cent increase over 2015. The number of companies participating in the trade fair amounted to 9,605, coming from a total of 165 countries.

Larrañaga shares, "While it is still early for making a comprehensive balance of all the exhibitors due to be present at FITUR, I can tell you that each year we work towards boosting yet further the high international participation that the trade fair usually enjoys and, in this regard, the presence of countries from the area you mention will once again have



Ana Larrañaga
Director
FITUR

considerable importance at the Event."

Prominent among the novelties at this staging of FITUR is the designation of the Trade Fair by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) as the venue for the kick-off celebrations of the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development declared by the United Nations Organisation. Another of the novelties is the FITURTECH specialised section which this year will adopt a new approach, with

four independent forums associated with technology and tourism revolving around enterprise, destination, sustainability and future trends.

For its part, FITUR KNOW-HOW & EXPORT will again promote expertise, knowledge and higher-quality tourist services and products among buyers from international markets. This is all rounded off with the rest of the specialised sections such as FITUR SHOPPING, FITUR HEALTH and FITUR GAY (LGBT). The expectations which FITUR generates among stand holders, trade and visitors are ever increasing. What is more, for trade professionals and exhibitors, the fair is clearly focused on generating business, multiplying opportunities also thanks to the professional workshops and meetings which we organise as well as the professional pre-arranged B2B appointments, etc. 🍷

Tulip Inn focuses on millennials

Tulip Inn Ras Al Khaimah is focusing on a range of new feeder markets which include the millennials and the mid-market tourists.

TT BUREAU

Tulip Inn Ras Al Khaimah offers 102 spacious and modern rooms and suites along with state-of-the-art business facilities and an elegant selection of restaurants and cafes to meet the needs of families as well as business travellers. It offers guests comfortable and well-equipped rooms and a comprehensive range of business facilities including three meeting rooms equipped with the latest audio and video technologies, complemented by top-quality dining options and impeccable service. With facilities and services that go beyond segment standards, Tulip Inn Ras Al Khaimah is poised to enhance the midscale value proposition as guests now have a modern and affordable hotel that ticks all the boxes for a comfortable stay.

Hani Shahwan, Hotel Manager, Tulip Inn RAK,



Hani Shahwan
Hotel Manager
Tulip Inn RAK

stated, "At Golden Tulip we have loyalty cards Flavors and Ambassador. Flavors is basically for F&B discounts where in once a guest is a member they can avail of certain discounts in any of the Hotels with in the chain anywhere in the world. Ambassador is the card given to the bookers in companies where in they can earn points and redeem it against points and gifts. This has given a significant boost to the bookings with in the corporate

market. Business travellers are the most frequent flyers and our rewards programme is designed to ensure these guests become repeat bookings, especially when the competition is growing in the mid-market hospitality sector. Business and trade shows play an important role in the UAE too, and in my opinion they will continue to attract more mid-market business travellers to this trade hub in the Middle East region."

Tulip Inn is the first hotel within the brand to Launch RISTRETTO CAFÉ. The Food and beverage outlets also include FRESH the multi-cuisine all day dining restaurant and CHAMPS Sports BAR where in you can catch up with all the sporting events live. In order to cater to the corporate offices around FRESH And Champs have various dining offers and we do send flyers and updates periodically to the corporate offices around. 🍷

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Central's 2017 expansion plans Hurawalhi opens in Maldives

Central Hotels has plotted out its upcoming projects across Dubai that will cater to a diversified market of both business and leisure travellers.

TT BUREAU

According to their expansion plans, there will be three new properties in Business Bay, two in Palm Jumeirah, and one in Deira Islands — all of which are strategically located and carefully designed to offer an array of services

ening the reach to other Gulf regions in the future.

Ahmad Alabdulla, Chairman, Central Hotels, said: "Central Hotels always has an eye for expansion. With property development at the core of our business, our upcoming projects will cater



Ahmad Alabdulla
Chairman
Central Hotels

Our upcoming projects will cater to a mix of travellers looking for genuine and authentic Arabian hospitality



to leisure, business, corporate and MICE markets. The management team of Central Hotels is focused on this year's expansion within the emirate, with further plans of broad-

to a mix of travellers looking for genuine and authentic Arabian hospitality fused with International standards. Created and based in Dubai, Central Hotels will offer a full

spectrum of choice in terms of hotel categories, comprising 5 distinct hotel brands in order to deliver a comprehensive selection of accommodations and services to suit all budgets and clientele." 🌟

TT BUREAU

Offering 90 villas including 60 Ocean Villas and 30 Beach Villas, Hurawalhi Island Resort is a sanctuary of serenity for grown-ups who are seeking luxury and innovation. The residences are stylishly and beautifully conceived featuring soothing décor,

Resort gives back to the Maldives as much as it gets. Using solar panels, its own water bottling plant, energy saving solutions, hot water recovery and an in-house marine biologist, Hurawalhi Island Resort's eco credentials are the finest in the Maldives. In addition, Hurawalhi Island Resort is collaborating with WiseOceans,

dish blends the best ingredients with innovation and style, resulting in a showcase of imaginative modern cuisine, combined with an incredible location, wine and service. Coming up for air, above the water, the Aquarium restaurant offers staggering sea views by day and a romantic flicker of candlelight by night.



sumptuous linens on king size beds, bleached wooden floors, and private terraces with panoramic views.

With a strong environmental focus, Hurawalhi Island

the marine conservation and education specialists.

The scene-stealer is the undersea restaurant, named '5.8 Undersea,' located 5.8 meters beneath the sea. Each

Private beach dining al fresco under the stars is also encouraged, allowing guests to create once-in-a-lifetime memories in a romantic setting second to none, enjoying signature lobster and wagyu beef created by a personal chef. The seductively lit bar is directly on the beach with al fresco decking overlooking a glimmering pool and lagoon, and includes a comprehensive shisha selection. Hurawalhi Island Resort's blissful Duniye Spa brings visitors closer to nature overlooking the vibrant turquoise water. 🌟

Seychelles' night of fun

Ending the year on a positive note the tourism board of Seychelles in Dubai organised a get-together for travel trade partners at the Treehouse Taj Dubai to mingle and interact in a social setting. It was hosted by the CEO of the Tourism Board, **Sherin Naiken** and **Ahmed Fathallah**, the Seychelles Tourism Board Office in Dubai Regional Manager and initiator of the event.



NEW TRENDS IN 2017

From mobile research to bookings

As we begin the year, our thoughts naturally turn to what lies ahead — clearly a lot! The dynamism of our industry coupled with an ongoing technology evolution ensures that no entity/trend will be the end-all or be-all. Here we analyse certain factors that could swing the pendulum in the year 2017.

Over the last few years we have borne witness to the incredible rapid growth of the travel and tourism sector and we expect this industry to continue to grow faster than the global economy and most other major industries. In fact, WWTC predict global growth rates of 3.8 per cent annually over the next 10 years to \$11.4 trillion — that's over four times the total size of the UK economy! The travel industry has and is going through an unprecedented period of change. This transformation is fuelled by an explosion of digital channels, proliferation of devices and changing consumer behaviour.

Impact of oil crisis on travel

There is a distinctly more frugal climate in the

Middle East at the moment. One more clouded by fragile consumer confidence and a precarious economy as Saudi Arabia reels from the plunge in oil prices and the impact of government austerity measures. This has, as you would expect, had a knock-on effect on consumer spending including in the retail and travel sectors. There are definitely expectations for recovery in 2017 and 2018 in terms of continued growth however it is expected to be subdued and sluggish. Although Dubai is still better off than most of the region as the oil blow is much softer than in hydrocarbon economies such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, we still expect to see a continued impact on travel across the region as a whole.

OTA market going for growth

Despite the economic concerns in the region, I expect to see significant growth in the Online Travel Agent (OTA) market as more users come online and switch to booking their own travel instead of relying on agents. The consumers we deal with today are savvier than ever and are becoming more independent in the way they research and book travel. The travel market has been moving at a rapid pace and online is changing booking patterns, consumer behaviour and business models in travel. It is, and will continue to be, a huge area of growth. With Amadeus forecasting that the regional online travel market will almost double in value within in the next two

years, rising from \$18 billion to \$35 billion by 2018 we will continue to see OTAs coming into this region to capitalise on the huge market potential.

Mobile research to mobile bookings

The Middle East is the fastest-growing region for travel with the UAE being the dominant market. One of the key reasons for this is the young population. In the Middle East, 44 per cent of the population is under 20 years old, technology savvy, and some of the world's most active and dedicated smartphone users. One in six customers in the Middle East use the Internet as the booking platform of choice and 60 per cent of airline booking and ticketing in Dubai comes from e-commerce. Mobile book-

ings in the region are amongst some of the highest in the world accounting for 21 per cent of bookings with some travel companies. Whilst we have traditionally seen more consumers research their trips on mobile devices before moving to a desktop or offline to book, I expect to see a significant shift towards bookings on mobile devices.

Increased focus on data ownership

Programmatic is evolving within the region with more of the larger travel brands looking to invest in their own data management platforms as they try to take more ownership of their own data. Big data has been a hot topic for some time but we have reached the point where all brands are aware of the importance of

data but are still struggling to turn it into actionable insights. 2017 will be the year where brands make the leap to utilising data in order to maximise marketing budgets.

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



Stewart Smith
Senior Director of Sales
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Aiana Hotels in ME and India

Backed by a professional team, Aiana Hotel and Resorts is on a rapid expansion plan in the Middle East and India. **Amruda Nair**, Joint MD and CEO, reveals latest plans for the region.

 SHEHARA RIZLY

Q Do give us an overview of the properties.

Aiana Hotels & Resorts currently have eight properties under its portfolio. The first being 'Aiana Suites and Residences, Doha'; a 180-key serviced apartment, located



Amruda Nair
Joint Managing Director and CEO
Aiana Hotels

in the prestigious West Bay district in Doha scheduled to open by the second quarter of 2017. The second property

We are currently working towards the opening of two of our hotel properties, Aiana Makkah set to be open by Q1 2017 and Aiana Doha Residences to be opened by Q2 2017

is Aiana Hotels' first property in India — 'Aiana Munnar – A Moonriver Resort' in Verdant Kerala scheduled to open in 2017. In addition, our strategic expansion plans include a recent agreement with India's Ferns Estates & Developers to manage and operate four new resorts in the Southern Indian state of Karnataka, of which the first resort is scheduled to open in 2019.

Another milestone for Aiana is the Aiana Makkah, scheduled to open in Q1 2017. A 611 room hotel in the Holy City of Makkah, designed specifically to provide comfort by anticipating the needs of families and groups that visit Makkah for pilgrimage. Great care has been taken to provide travellers

with adequate amenities, efficient and friendly service as well as a varied cuisine featuring signature dishes from the Middle East, Indian Sub-continent, the Far East and North Africa.

We have also recently signed a deal to open Aiana Agra — a 150 room hotel in one of the most visited leisure destinations in India. Spread across a six acre site in the historical city of Agra is likely to open in 2019.

Q What are the feeder markets to the property/properties? Will you be tapping into any new markets?

In India our key source markets are the UK, USA, Germany and France; KSA remains the biggest source market for Qatar. Indian tourists were the second highest in 2015 followed by the UK, Bahrain, UAE, Oman and Kuwaiti tour-

ists among the top 10 source markets. For Makkah, GCC, Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, India, Bangladesh are strong markets.

Q Any new properties planned for 2017 especially in the UAE?

We are currently working towards the opening of two of our hotel properties, Aiana Makkah set to be open by Q1 2017 and Aiana Doha Residences to be opened by Q2 2017. We are also in the final stages of launching hotels in Kerala under the Aiana brand. We have also entered Phase 2 of our plan, where we are now looking at opportunities in other GCC markets such as Dubai and Oman to convert existing hotels to the Aiana brand. 

Taj Dubai

Dubai

Ranjit Phillipose has joined Taj Dubai as its General Manager. Phillipose comes with over 20 years of experience in the industry. He has been associated with luxury hotels across five countries and three continents. An Indian-born British national, Phillipose started his journey in 1993 with the iconic Taj Hotels, Resorts & Palaces in Chennai (India). He moved to St. James' Court, A Taj Hotel, London where he worked for six years. Subsequently, he moved on to work with Taj Hotels in New York and Boston and also opened Taj Camppton Place, San Francisco under his purview.



Art Rotana

Amwaj Islands Bahrain

Lilian Roger joins ART Rotana Amwaj Islands as its new General Manager. Backed by over 20 years of experience in the hospitality sector, Roger worked with various international hotel chains across three continents. He will be working with the team to enhance its reputation and to continue their efforts in offering guests an enjoyable experience. A core element of the hotel's strategy is to appoint talent that will enhance their growth plans and further strengthen the company's footprint in Bahrain.



Downtown Rotana

Bahrain

Patrice Cornee has taken over as the General Manager of Downtown Rotana, located in the heart of Bahrain's capital, Manama. Cornee has over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry. Prior to joining the Rotana Group, Cornee held senior positions in luxury five-star properties across the UK, US, Korea, Hong Kong and most recently in the Gulf Region.



Emaar Hospitality Group

Dubai

Emaar Properties has appointed **Olivier Harnisch** as the Chief Executive Officer of Emaar Hospitality Group. Harnisch brings to Emaar over 30 years of international experience in the hotel and tourism industry. He joins Emaar from Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group in Brussels, where he was Chief Operating Officer. Harnisch has acquired in-depth expertise in all aspects of the hospitality business through multiple leadership roles across four continents. His experience will be a significant asset for Emaar in delivering ambitious growth plans for its hospitality business.



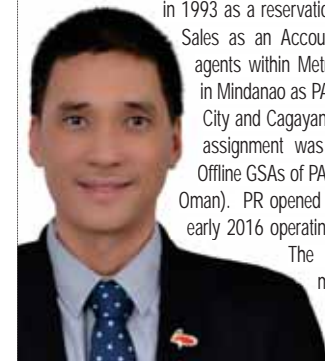
Philippine Airlines

Dubai

Agnes F. Pagaduan has been appointed as Philippine Airlines' Area Manager for Dubai. She has been with the airlines for the past 25 years and served in different areas of the airline from sales to reservations. She was promoted as District Sales Manager in 2014 and Area Manager in Indonesia in 2015.



Paolo Diaz De Rivera has been appointed as Area Manager for Abu Dhabi by Philippine Airlines. Rivera started his career at Philippine Airlines in 1993 as a reservations agent. He then moved to Sales as an Account Executive covering travel agents within Metro Manila. He was assigned in Mindanao as PAL Branch Manager of Butuan City and Cagayan de Oro City. His first foreign assignment was in Dubai as Manager for Offline GSAs of PAL (Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman). PR opened new destinations in the GCC early 2016 operating Doha, Kuwait and Jeddah. The expansion of operations moved him to Doha as Area Manager on February 2016.



Grand Millennium

Dubai

Kristina Savchenko has been appointed as new Sales Manager-Leisure at the Grand Millennium Dubai. Savchenko started as Sales Executive in Dubai and was working in the same field for the last four years. Originally from Russia, she completed her certification from Omsk State University. Before joining Grand Millennium Dubai, she was working with Golden Tulip Hotel in Al Barsha, Dubai.



Centara Grand Beach Resort and Villas

Hua Hin, Thailand

David Martens has been appointed as new General Manager of Centara Grand Beach Resort and Villas Hua Hin (LHW). Martens is an Australian national with over 25 years of experience working in the hospitality industry in various countries including Maldives, Egypt, Vanuatu and Fiji. He joined Centara Hotels & Resorts in March 2012 as General Manager of Centara Grand Beach Resort and Villas Krabi. In 2014, he was promoted as Area General Manager.



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