

Business Traveller

MIDDLE EAST

APRIL 2024

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DOHA KICKS OFF

Qatar's capital is scoring big in transport, tourism, and culture

WIDEN THE SKIES

Meet the trailblazers reimagining gender equality in aviation

RISKY BUSINESS

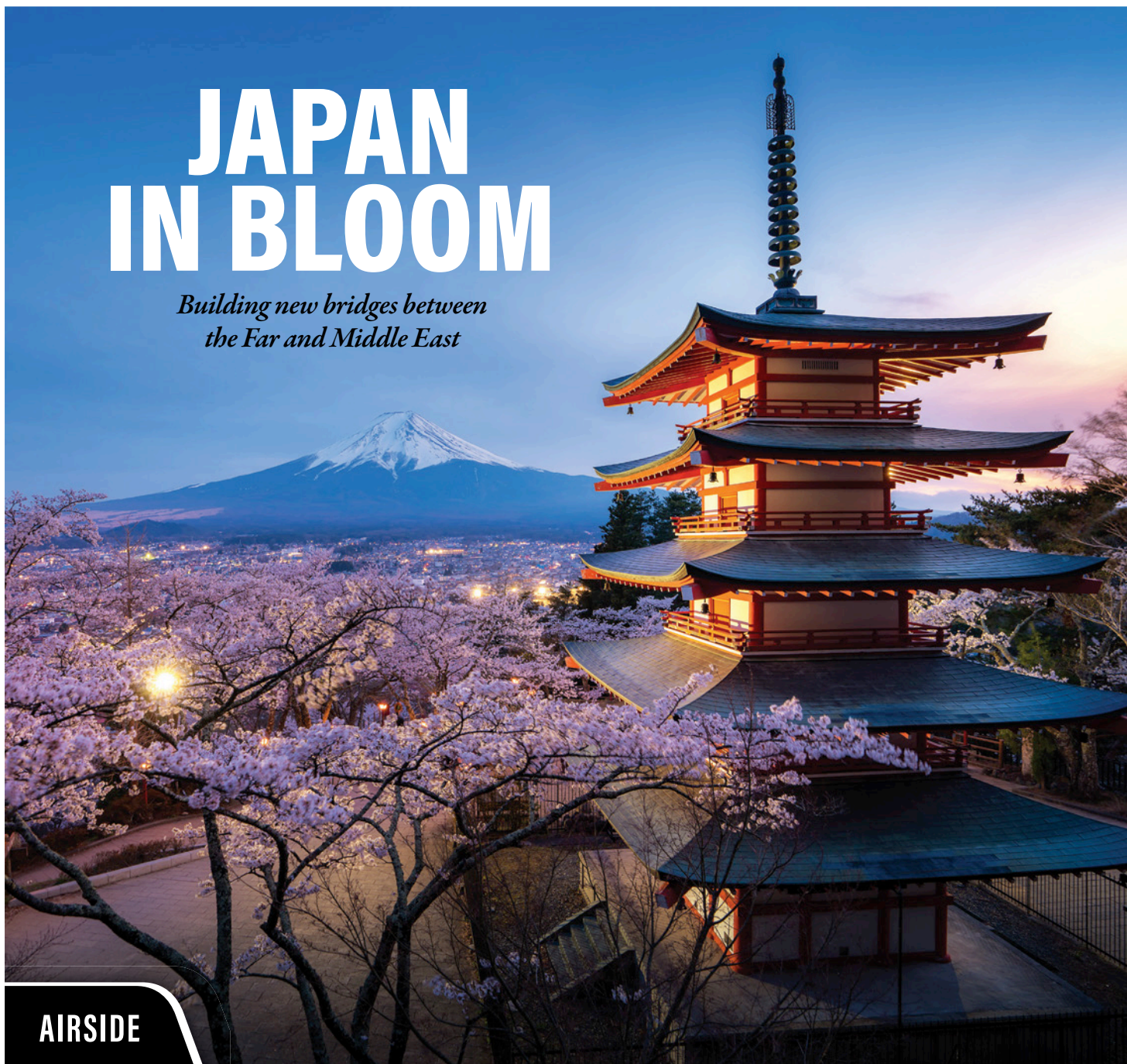
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JAPAN IN BLOOM

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WELCOME



There is something about springtime and new beginnings that goes together like a perfectly-matched tie and watch strap, or finding the perfect film on a long flight – in other words, an ideal pairing.

As Q2 and the new season begins, there is plenty to look forward to. New flight routes are opening up a world of novel destinations, with major regional airlines expanding their networks with exciting new locations on practically every continent. Freshly-inked partnerships for the region's major airlines continue to strengthen the scope of what's available to travellers in the region, including a new codeshare between Qatar Airways and Japan Airlines that has made the latter the first Japanese airline to operate a

nonstop service to and from the Middle East. Combined with key changes in legislation for visitors from the GCC over the past few years, and the return of Japan's famed cherry blossom season, it's a prime time to visit the Land of the Rising Sun. In this month's cover story (p16), we explore the factors leading up to the country's tourism boom, and what makes it such an attractive destination for the Middle East – including business travellers – right now.

Qatar has also been experiencing rapid growth, with an extensive list of renowned hotel brands opening up in its capital, as well as the groundbreaking first foray from Our Habitas in the country. We caught up with the brand's co-founder and chief executive officer, Oliver Ripley, to learn what makes the country such a special place for artists, culture vultures, and serenity-seekers the world over (p30).

Still, just as the growth of major cities tends to coincide with an increase in the number of risks one might face on a daily basis, as travel starts to surge again in the post-pandemic era, it's important that we stay sharp should the unexpected, or dreaded, happen. For the business traveller, that could mean handling anything from flight delays, lost luggage, and missed connections to navigating destinations fraught with political tensions, or protecting ourselves from cybersecurity risks. But don't fret – we've got you covered (p50) so you can go forth and conquer with confidence.

Last but certainly not least, at *Business Traveller Middle East* HQ, we've been tallying up all of your votes for the most outstanding hotels, airlines, and airports before we gear up to usher in a new set of winners at our annual awards in May. I'm already looking forward to seeing many of you there next month. Until then, enjoy the issue!

Yi-Hwa Hanna

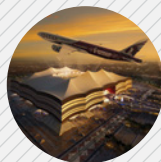
Yi-Hwa Hanna
Editor

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Business Traveller MIDDLE EAST

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NEW MARRIOTT MARQUIS DUBAI OPENS AT JEWEL OF THE CREEK



MARRIOTT HAS OPENED its latest hotel at Jewel of the Creek, a landmark development in the heart of Dubai's bustling and historic Creek area that has been described as the city's "cultural crossroads and business epicentre". The new Marriott Marquis Dubai will encompass four towers, the design of which is inspired by the fluidity of water and nearby waterfront and iconic Dubai skyline. It is owned by West F5 Investments LLC and managed by Aleph Hospitality, the largest independent hotel management company in the Middle East and Africa. The five-star property has 434 modern rooms and suites designed to act as a retreat amidst the vibrant cityscape of the busy surrounding area, which is a stone's throw from Dubai's financial district, along with three restaurants. The property also encompasses 156 serviced apartments with expansive living areas, fully-equipped kitchens, floor-to-ceiling windows, and private balconies. Each residence also offers first-class facilities for leisure seekers, including a sun-soaked pool overlooking the Dubai Creek and city skyline, as well as a gym with state-of-the-art equipment.



Turkish Airlines has launched its first-ever flights to Australia

TURKISH AIRLINES is already renowned for flying to an impressively large number of countries, and now, Melbourne has become the latest addition to its impressive roster. The new route takes its operational network up to six continents, with a total of 346 destinations in 130 countries so far. This will be the airline's first flights to Australia.

The inaugural flight took place on 5 March 2024, and will continue to operate on a thrice-weekly basis.

The capital of Victoria, Melbourne is the most populated city in Australia, and the new flight offering makes Turkish Airlines the sole European airline currently flying to Melbourne airport. The airline hopes to contribute to trade and tourism value in both countries each year by flying thousands of passengers through the new Istanbul-Melbourne route from now on.

Stirling Hospitality Advisors green-lights new wellness hotel in Abha, Saudi Arabia

UPON THE SUCCESSFUL completion of a comprehensive feasibility study by Stirling Hospitality Advisors, the Tourism Development Fund of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has approved The Wellness Hotel Abha by Cloud7, a new 100-key property in Abha, the capital city of Saudi Arabia's Aseer province famed for its majestic mountains, dense forests, and avian life.

The assessment of the project's feasibility involved extensive market research and analysis, as well as ground visits to the area that included interviews with the owners of branded and unbranded hotels in both Abha and Khamis Mushair, a nearby town in Aseer Province. The property – which will be operated by Kerten Hospitality – is set to launch in 2025, and aims to be the "ultimate retreat destination for wellness, detox, and regeneration," with stunning mountain landscape views, organic food, multiple pools, a gym and spa, and a fully equipped wellness centre with practices such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, stress alleviation, and more.





Aman Resorts to launch its first hotel in Dubai within the next few years

AMAN RESORTS, renowned for their unique approach towards relaxation and tranquility, will be making its debut in the UAE with the launch of Aman Dubai. Designed by Kerry Hill Architects, the new property will be located in a prime spot on Jumeirah Beach, boasting unobstructed views of the coastal surrounds and the city's skyline. Kerry Hill Architects has designed a number of other Aman properties, including the Aman Tokyo, Aman Niseko, and Aman Kyoto – which has been described as a masterpiece – as well as the Amanyangyun in Shanghai. The design firm is known to take inspiration from a resort's surroundings, seamlessly weaving in natural materials with the Aman brand's ultra-luxurious, minimal, and contemporary aesthetic, and the all-suite Aman Dubai – which is owned by Bright Start and being led by leading real estate developer H&H Development – will follow suit.



Beond Airlines to launch return flights between Dubai and Maldives

BEOND, THE WORLD'S FIRST premium leisure airline, will be launching flights between Dubai and the Maldives from 8 April 2024. The new route will run between Dubai's Al Maktoum International airport and Malé's Velana International airport, featuring the airline's signature all-business class cabin with luxury amenities, including 44 all-lie-flat seats, gourmet dining, immersive entertainment featuring cutting-edge technology, and personalised service.

"With our launch service from Dubai, we aim to offer our customers not just a journey to the stunning Maldives but an invitation to experience luxury from the moment they board. At Beond, we're not just transporting passengers; we're crafting unforgettable experiences," said Tero Taskila, chairman and CEO of Beond.

Qatar's Hamad International airport introduces dedicated security lanes for families with children

ALREADY CELEBRATED for its family-friendly amenities and attention to detail, Qatar's Hamad International airport has introduced dedicated security and screening lanes for families with children – in particular, those with younger children – while they transfer through the airport.

The decision has come in line with the airport's commitment to improving wait times, in an effort to minimise stress and make the travel experience as seamless as possible for all passengers. Doha's principal airport since its opening 2014, the airport won the title of "World's Best Airport" in both 2021 and 2022 and "World's Second-Best Airport" in 2023 among its many accolades, while also having been named "Best Airport in the Middle East" at the SKYTRAX World Airport Awards for the ninth consecutive year in 2023.

In addition to reducing wait times – wherein the goal is for 95 per cent of passengers to wait for less than five minutes to go through security checkpoints and the security process – the new lanes will also offer staff assistance to help families with their personal belongings.



Marriott Bonvoy offers members exclusive chances to win Taylor Swift tour tickets

GOOD NEWS FOR Marriott Bonvoy members who are fans of pop superstar Taylor Swift: the programme has teamed up with Taylor Swift | The Eras Tour as a touring sponsor in select cities, giving fans the chance to nab seats at the highly sought-after concerts through exclusive sweepstakes. The sweepstakes are open to all Marriott Bonvoy members, giving them the chance to win one of three unforgettable experiences in cities across Europe and North America during 2024.

Alternatively, Marriott Bonvoy members can also redeem their Marriott Bonvoy Moments points – which can be earned through stays at Bonvoy brands including The Ritz-Carlton, St. Regis, JW Marriott, Sheraton, Westin, and Renaissance Hotel – for tickets in select cities in Europe, the US, and Canada.



Qatar Airways outlines plans for new Qsuite and first class cabins

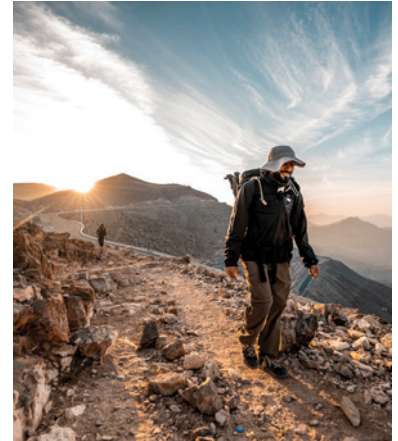
QATAR AIRWAYS is set to unveil new first class cabins and a redesigned Qsuite business class product in the coming months. The carrier's group CEO Engr. Badr Mohammed Al-Meer – who replaced the long serving Akbar Al Baker in November last year – gave an interview to CNBC, details of which have also since been shared to other media by the airline's press office. Al-Meer confirmed that Qatar Airways is 70 to 80 per cent near completion of designs for new first class cabins, which will be introduced "on some of its fleet", and hoping to be announced soon. The news differs from previous assertions from Al Baker who questioned the future of the carrier's first class, which is currently only available on a handful of the airline's A380 aircraft.

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority and Oman Ministry of Heritage and Tourism come together for unified summer travel campaign

RAS AL KHAIMAH Tourism Development Authority and Oman Ministry of Heritage and Tourism have teamed up for a unified summer travel campaign titled "See Double". Created in collaboration with OMRAN Group, it invites travellers to discover both locations in a single trip.

This is the first joint promotion from the two tourism authorities, which focuses on the appeal of both of their nature and adventure-filled experiences. It also highlights a "Kids Go Free" offer available at many of the hotels and attractions.

Ras Al Khaimah and Musandam are within a 90-minute drive of each other, and both share an easy border crossing as well as a rich, intertwined history and cultural heritage. Some of the key attractions in each destination that are being promoted in the campaign include dolphin spotting in the Arabian Gulf in Musandam; Jais Flight, the world's longest zipline on Jebel Jais and the Musandam zipline, the world's longest over-water zipline; Suwaidi Pearls – the region's only working pearl farm; Dhayah Fort and Khasab Fort; hiking on Jebel Jais; and mountain tobogganing at Jais Sledder on Jebel Jais. The campaign will run from 15 June to 15 September.





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Lagardère Travel Retail has opened L'Éclair de Genie in DXB's Terminal 3

IN ITS FIRST-EVER airport location, globally-celebrated pastry brand L'Éclair de Genie has opened in Dubai International Airport's Terminal 3, adjacent to gate B15. Created in partnership with Lagardère Travel Retail and acclaimed French pastry chef Christophe Adam, the café will serve up a range of fine pastries, including their famous éclairs – which have been described as some of the world's best – as well as various viennoiseries and macarons that are crafted fresh daily, speciality coffees and organic teas, salads, sandwiches, and naan wraps.



Red Sea Global and Four Seasons to launch new luxury wellness resort and residence

RED SEA GLOBAL, the developer behind AMAALA and The Red Sea, is creating a new luxury wellness resort and private residences at Triple Bay AMAALA. Four Seasons Resort and Residences AMAALA at Triple Bay will feature 220 rooms and suites, and villas with their own private pools, as well as 26 branded residential villas. Facilities include a tranquility garden and sculpted waterfall, high-performance training with celebrity fitness trainer Harley Pasternak, a spa with halotherapy and cryotherapy, and 300 hectares of hills, wadis, cliffs, beaches, plus a golf course.

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The Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah, Al Wadi Desert, unveils new ultra-luxury villas

TUCKED AWAY in the dunes of Wadi Khadeja, The Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah, Al Wadi Desert, is surrounded by a 1,235-acre private-gated nature reserve. The expansive property has positioned itself to redefine the concept of opulence and luxury, and now, it has unveiled eight new ultra-luxury two-bedroom Signature Villas as part of its offering.

Each villa will cover a 900sqm space, with 490sqm of that considered liveable space, encompassing a master bedroom with floor-to-ceiling windows, a free-standing bathtub, and an en-suite and outdoor shower, as well as a private terrace with panoramic views of the desert landscape. The second bedroom includes twin beds and terrace access. Both rooms come with a 65-inch TV and separate vanity area.

Outside each villa is a private dining area alongside an infinity pool and a pool deck with four private sunbeds. The villas can also be served by a private butler, as well as a personal chef, and there is also a fitness studio available, featuring state-of-the-art TechnoGym equipment.

Bateel Boutique and Café Bateel to be opened at InterContinental Al Ahsa

BATEEL INTERNATIONAL, an iconic luxury retail, gourmet food, and F&B brand that is the world's only gourmet organic date grower, producer, and seller, is opening a Bateel Boutique and Café Bateel at the InterContinental Al Ahsa, part of the IHG Hotels & Resorts luxury and lifestyle portfolio, to meet evolving consumer preferences for more premium hospitality experiences. Combined as a unified space, it will be located adjacent to the hotel's grand staircase to tempt guests with their selections of gourmet dates, pastries, and premium coffee and tea. Guests will also be able to purchase everything from dates to date syrup, date balsamic vinegar, and olive dates to sparkling date drinks, condiments, and more.



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MARRIOTT RECOGNISED FOR SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS WITH GREEN KEY CERTIFICATION FOR EIGHT OF ITS DUBAI HOTELS

MARRIOTT HAS BEEN awarded Green Key certification for the W Dubai – Mina Seyahi, The Westin Dubai Mina Seyahi Beach Resort & Marina, Le Meridien Mina Seyahi Beach Resort & Waterpark, Le Meridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre, Aloft Dubai Airport, Aloft Al Mina, Element Dubai Airport, and Element Al Mina.

Green Key is the leading standard for environmental responsibility and sustainable operations within the tourism industry. To be eligible, hotels are rated against a set of criteria examining factors such as staff involvement, food and beverage, water, waste management, energy use, and more.

Kerten Hospitality to launch new urban eco resort in Riyadh

Global hotel operator Kerten Hospitality, in partnership with RIKAZ and RAFAL, and with the support of the Saudi Ministry of Tourism, will be launching a pioneering new urban eco resort in Riyadh. Named The House Urban Eco Resort Riyadh, the new project aims to redefine urban living in an environmentally-friendly, sustainable, and luxurious environment that harmoniously blends leisure, wellness, and business in the heart of the city.

The resort will offer guests a tranquil escape from the buzz of the city through wellness experiences including modern spa and therapeutic treatments, and lush green spaces. Kerten Hospitality specialises in integrated living, taking an innovative approach towards developing this through bespoke hotels, residences, and lifestyle destinations that seamlessly blend work, life, and leisure, and the new resort will follow this same ethos. It will feature both outdoor and indoor working spaces, along with integrated dining and event spaces that can host everything from intimate gatherings to the chance to pop behind the scenes with local chefs, all bound together under the theme of green living.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Emirates Global Aluminium, one of the UAE's largest companies that is a leader in global aluminium production, is collaborating with Sciencetech, one of the region's top integrated technology solution providers, to create the Middle East's first industrial data centres that are entirely powered by renewable energy. The new centres will integrate advanced artificial intelligence and automation technologies to optimise power and cut EGA's total IT energy consumption in half.

Radisson Hotel Group has appointed its first responsible business coordinator

AS PART OF RADISSON HOTEL GROUP'S mission to achieve Net Zero by 2050, the company has appointed a responsible business coordinator to lead all related initiatives across the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, and Qatar. The role will be filled by Neeraja Rahul, who hails from within the Radisson Hotel Group as chief engineer at Radisson RED, Dubai Silicon Oasis.

Rahul is dedicated to enhancing the group's practices in sustainability, female empowerment, and community engagement. The group's upcoming responsible business will include initiatives such as providing and arranging iftar for delivery drivers, running activities for Earth Hour, holding a community action month, and rolling out sustainability verification efforts across all hotels.

MILLENNIUM HOTELS AND RESORTS MEA AND THE STOREY GROUP PARTNER FOR TREE-PLANTING INITIATIVE

IN A JOINT ENDEAVOUR to combat climate change and promote environmental stewardship, Millennium Hotels and Resorts MEA and The Storey Group, a renowned consulting firm dedicated to environmental sustainability and social impact, have come together to plant 100,000 trees worldwide over the next five years, to combat climate change and restore ecosystems. This ambitious project seeks to restore 65 hectares of land and capture more than 32,000 kg of carbon dioxide annually. Trees will be strategically planted in 16 countries, selected based on optimal planting seasons. Through advanced technology provided by The Storey Group, Millennium Hotels and Resorts MEA will be able to track the carbon impact of each tree, as well as learn about the species, the farmer, and its location, which will help to engage employees and customers in the process.

Across the world, Millennium Hotels and Resorts is finding innovative ways to minimise the impact of its operations on the environment and has entered into a number of strategic partnerships with entities who share the same vision of a greener future.



HILTON DUBAI PALM JUMEIRAH GIVES BACK THROUGH GREEN RAMADAN INITIATIVES

HILTON DUBAI PALM JUMEIRAH is carefully monitoring its food waste, and educating guests about where their food comes from and where any waste might end up. The hotel's all-day dining venue, Mowsem, is taking a green stance on its Ramadan initiatives by taking care to incorporate as many sustainability-directed leads as possible.

The hotel is promoting plant-based dishes, restricting plastic use across operations, and partnering with local food banks. It will be paying special attention to its food waste and trying to reduce this by implementing Winnow's AI technology, to precisely digitally monitor waste, and collect data to forecast future procurement and help minimise long-term environmental impact.

Jumeirah Zabeel Saray launches new Sustainability Talks series

JUMEIRAH ZABEEL SARAY is launching a new monthly event series called Sustainability Talks, that will offer guests a chance to hear from some of the region's leading voices on green and environmental initiatives and sustainable practices. Held at Arcadia, the in-house open-air hydroponic farm on the grounds of the five-star resort on the Palm Jumeirah, the series is intended to support the brand's commitment to a greener approach to food production and farm-to-table concepts, while paying homage to the UAE's Year of Sustainability theme.

Commenting on the launch, Jumeirah Zabeel Saray's general manager Mark Herir said: "Offering unmatched experiences while also developing more sustainable practices is central to our operations at Jumeirah Zabeel Saray, and Arcadia is testament to that ethos. We are delighted to welcome Azraq board members, where they can share their in-depth knowledge from their work with Azraq while discussing how we can maximise our efforts to drive sustainability. Our resort is leading amongst other properties in its sustainable approach to hospitality, and Arcadia presents an ideal venue to inform and engage our guests in responsible production and consumption."



ZERO-WASTE MENU

OSTERIA MARIO, an Italian family restaurant in Dubai Hills and Dubai Marina from Tigris Holding, has launched a zero-waste specials menu in partnership with Duo Gastrobar. The new menu aims to create something new using mainly existing ingredients and offcuts, served alongside a non-alcoholic wine and spritz for its beverage options. Food waste and production are two of the largest contributors to environmental damage, and Osteria Mario, Duo Gastrobar, and Tigris – which was founded by global restaurateur Henrik Winther, and operates 53 restaurants across the world including in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia – are committed to following sustainable and eco-friendly philosophies that help to restore and maintain the planet's resources.





1 Air France rolls out new cabins to Chicago, LA, and Tokyo

Air France has outlined plans to introduce its latest economy, premium economy, and business class cabins onto several new long-haul routes this summer, including to Chicago, Los Angeles, and Tokyo Narita. The new premium economy seats feature 96cm of legroom and a 124-degree recline, and an integrated noise-reducing headset.



2 UK government wants to see flying taxis by 2028

The UK government has published what it is calling the "Future of Flight" action plan, which it hopes will lead to regular flying taxi services by 2028. The plan sets out a roadmap for drones and novel electric aircraft in the UK, with the first piloted flying taxi flight by 2026 and regular services two years later, as well as regular drone deliveries by 2027.



3 NUMA group to launch its first London hotel

European hospitality group NUMA has announced plans for its first UK property. It will be rebranding an existing property at Bedford Corner Hotel, close to London's Tottenham Court Road and Goodge Street stations. The hotel, NUMA Bloom, will be housed in a Georgian building with 86 rooms, an artisan bakery, and a co-working space.



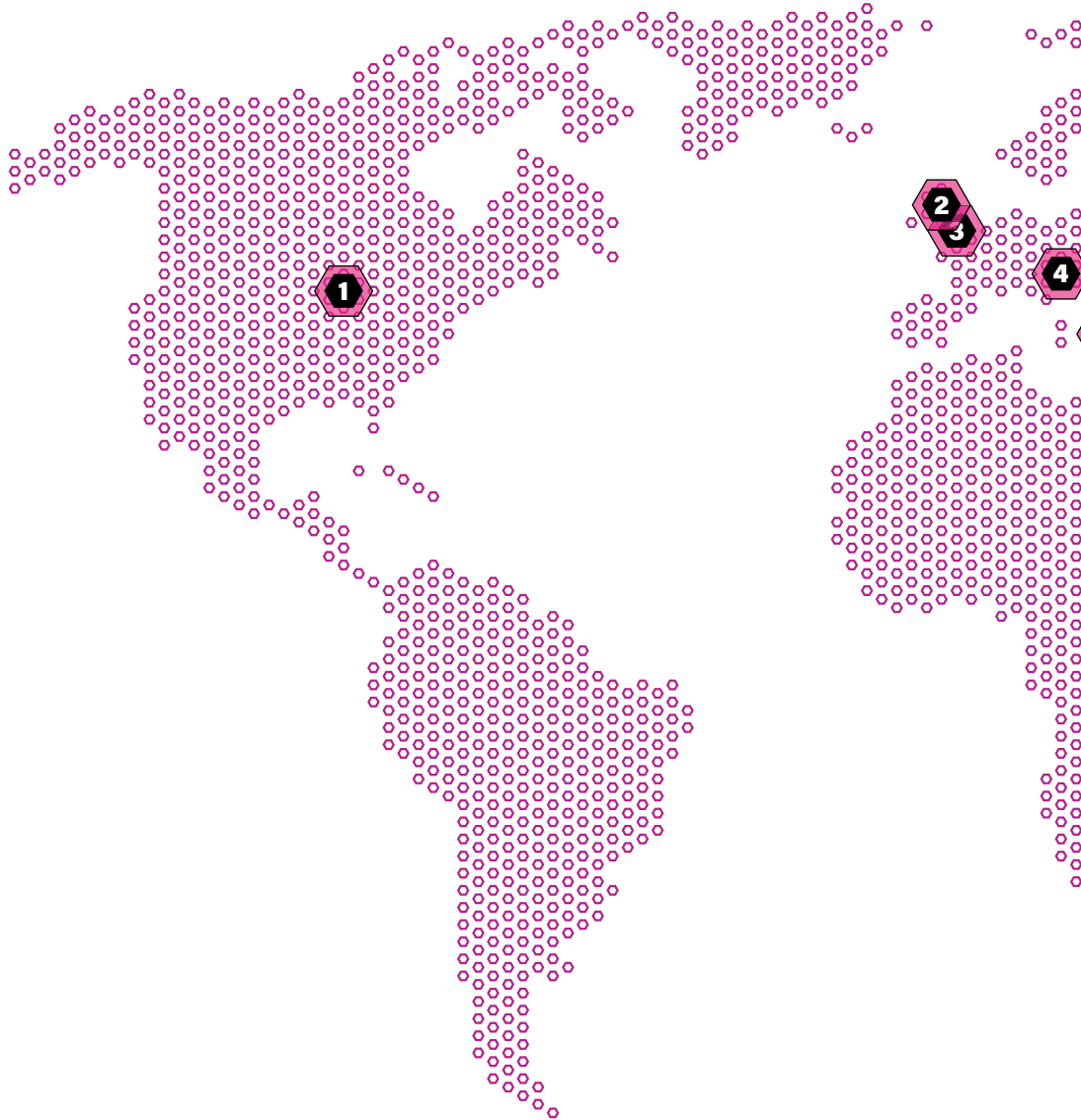
4 Aman at Sea launches with steel-cutting in Italy

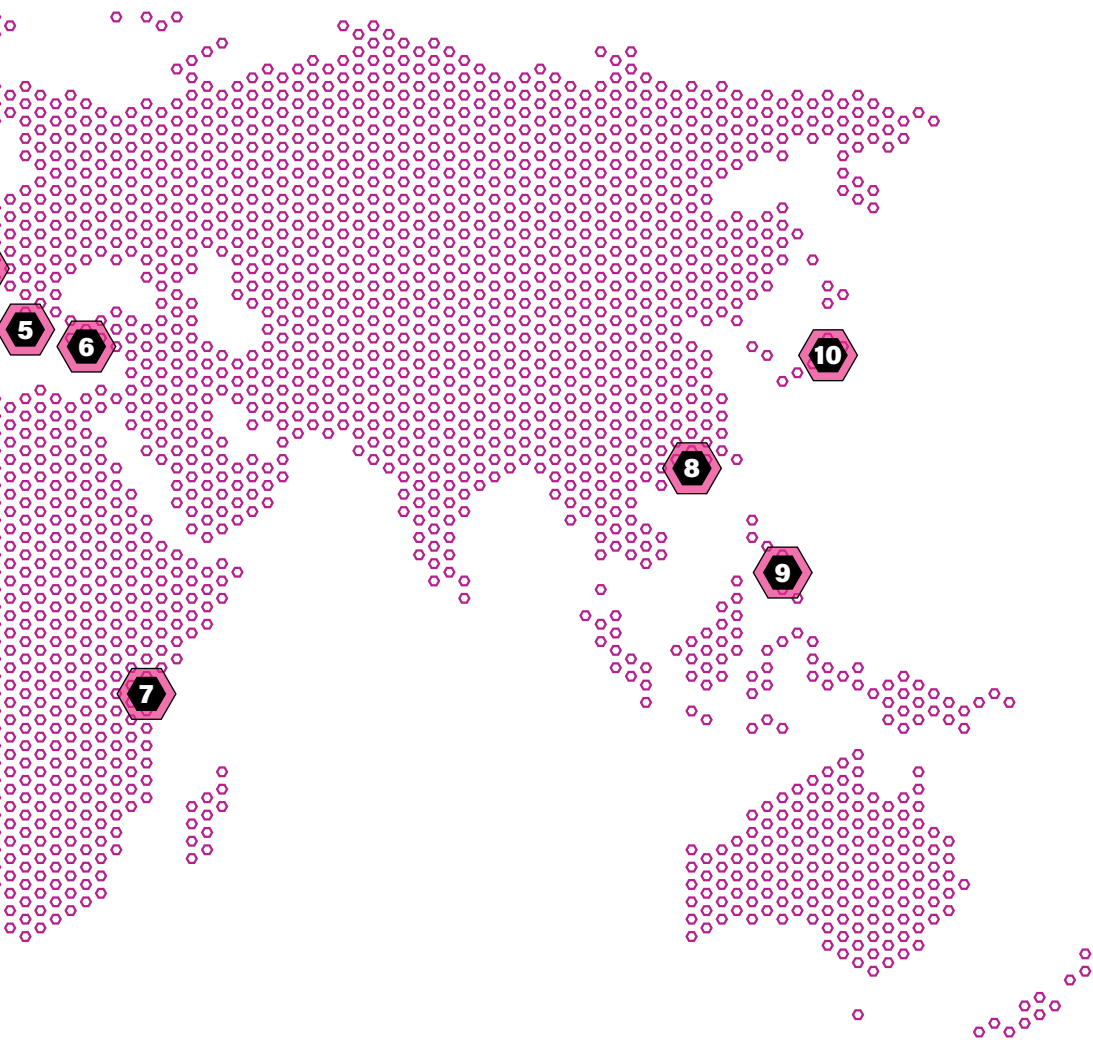
Set to launch in 2027, construction on Aman at Sea – a luxury motor yacht created in partnership with Cruise Saudi, that aims to set a new standard in waterborne voyages whilst bringing the spirit of the Aman brand to the world's seas and oceans – was commenced with a steel-cutting ceremony at the T.Mariotti shipyard in Genoa, Italy.



5 IHG's Kimpton brand to debut in Italy

IHG Hotels & Resorts plans to bring its Kimpton brand to Italy next year. Kimpton will debut on the island of Sicily in the second half of 2025, as part of a management agreement with partner Società Turistica Alberghiera Taorminese. The hotel will feature 59 rooms, "destination dining" spots, and panoramic views.





8 Emirates unveils fresh Hong Kong lounge

Emirates has unveiled its latest revamped airport lounge, located next to gate 40 on level 7 of Hong Kong International Airport. The 643 sqm facility now offers an expanded seating capacity for 132 guests, and includes shower facilities, free wifi, a prayer room, and buffet dining services offering “classic Hong Kong desserts.”



9 World’s largest Pullman to open in the Philippines

Accor has announced plans for what will be the largest Pullman property to date. The beachfront Pullman Mactan Cebu Hotel & Residences will feature 200 guest rooms and 900 branded residences across three towers. It is currently due to open by 2028, with world-class restaurants, collaborative leisure zones, and corporate spaces.



6 JW Marriott to open its first hotel in Greece this year

Marriott International has announced plans to open the first Greek property under its JW Marriott brand. The new JW Marriott Crete Resort & Spa is expected to open in 2025, situated along Marathi Beach in the outskirts of the town of Chania. It will include 160 rooms, suites, and villas, five F&B options, and multiple swimming pools.



7 Le Méridien to open new Zanzibar resort

Marriott International and Morogoro Mishama Company have signed an agreement to open a brand-new property by Le Méridien hotels & Resorts in Zanzibar in 2025. Le Méridien Zanzibar Resort will be located in Bweju, on Unguja island on the East Coast, with 75 contemporary rooms and villas.



10 Japan Airlines orders more A350s and first A321neo

Oneworld member Japan Airlines is growing its Airbus fleet, with new orders for 21 A350-900s and its first-ever order for Airbus single aisle aircraft, with a commitment for 11 A320neo aircraft. The airline recently also partnered with Qatar Airways to launch a new daily direct flight from Doha to Tokyo Haneda airport.

IN 2024, THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN ISN'T JUST A BOOMING TOURISM HOTSPOT - IT'S ALSO A POPULAR DESTINATION FOR CORPORATE AND BUSINESS TRAVELLERS, WITH EVOLVING TRADE AND TRAVEL REGULATIONS CREATING INCREASINGLY STRONG TIES TO THE MIDDLE EAST

WORDS YI-HWA HANNA

JAPAN IN BLOOM



On any given year, from late March to around mid-May, all over Japan you will find groups of people huddled together in parks and public gardens, with a picnic blanket and food and drinks, enjoying an intimate moment with nature as they pause to enjoy the crisp spring air, and the delicate scent of cherry blossoms on the breeze. This centuries-old practice is called hanami, or “flower viewing”, and it is a treasured part of the annual cherry blossom season that Japan has become famous for during the springtime season.

The cherry blossom, or sakura as it’s known in Japanese, is the national flower of Japan, and the flower has now become almost synonymous with Japanese culture. Hanami is the name used for its viewing by day; at night, the practice is called yozakura, and both customs have been celebrated since the Nara period in 710 to 794 CE, when it is said that members of the imperial court and elite classes of Japan would gather to enjoy poetry and fine beverages underneath plum blossom trees at the turning of the season. Over time, the cherry blossom began to attract more attention than the plum blossom, and the practice

ABOVE: Cherry blossoms at night in Tokyo

BELOW: Chureito Pagoda and Mount Fuji

OPPOSITE PAGE: Chidorigafuchi Park

has since evolved into the one that is still followed in modern times. In fact, in the current day, this season is so widely appreciated that each year, an estimated 63 million people travel to view these flowering trees both domestically and internationally – and in doing so, spend around US\$2.7 billion within the country.

With recent statistics showing that Japan’s tourism is flourishing – it’s now officially back at its pre-pandemic levels, with an estimated 2,688,100 international visitors predicted in 2024 – it seems





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that cherry blossoms are not the only things that are blooming in the country right now. There has been such a large influx of tourists in recent years that in order to counteract potentially negative side-effects on local infrastructure and services, and to preserve quality of life for residents, new measures have been introduced in popular cities including Tokyo and Kyoto. The tourism ministry's overtourism prevention plan includes an increase in bus and taxi fleets – particularly in busy areas during their most popular seasons – while also encouraging travellers to visit some of the country's lesser-known areas, to distribute the spread of people. New initiatives have also been introduced for “Hands-Free Tourism”, through luggage storage and delivery services that enable tourists to travel from place to place more easily without the need to schlep heavy luggage with them – and in doing so, reducing the time they take to move around public transport, and lessening its knock-on effect on congestion.

So what can this meteoric comeback be attributed to? To start with, despite the event being pushed

Cherry blossoms are not the only things that are blooming in the country right now

back by a year due to the pandemic, city-wide investments for the 2020 Summer Olympics left behind improved infrastructure that had been in the works for years since the hosting designation was announced, including multiple new skyscrapers, green spaces, and sport and education facilities. Work on a new Shinagawa Station, which began in 2017, is still ongoing, and its completion date is currently being planned for 2027 or 2028, to coincide with the opening of the ultrafast Chuo Shinkansen Line that will connect Tokyo to Nagoya, Mie, Nara, and Osaka. When complete, the Shinagawa Station project will transform the surrounding area into a bustling urban neighbourhood with offices, hotels, a large pedestrian deck, and an international exhibition hall.

The pandemic pause rebounded with a later surge, with many



international visitors having shifted their travels from 2020 and 2021 to 2022 and 2023. In a world where travel-related online content is often dominated by quirky, unusual, and “won't-see-it-anywhere-else” experiences, many of Japan's unique offerings, served with its stunning backdrops that seamlessly blend both modern city vibes and plenty of lush nature, have easily gone viral on social media. And while Japan once had a reputation of being prohibitively expensive for many, this too has changed in recent years – in fact, the 2024 annual *Holiday Money*



Longing for epic views of sweeping pink trees? Here are some top-rated spots for viewing cherry blossoms across Japan



- ❁ Mitsuike Park, Yokohama
- ❁ Hirosaki Park, Aomori, Hirosaki
- ❁ Arakurayama Sengen Park, Fujuyoshida City in Yamanashi
- ❁ The Philosopher's Path, Kyoto
- ❁ Mirajima Island, Hiroshima
- ❁ Kintaikyō Bridge, Yamaguchi
- ❁ Mount Yoshino, Nara
- ❁ Kenrokuen Garden, Ishikawa
- ❁ Takada Castle, Niigata



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Osaka Castle with cherry blossoms; Intersection in Ginza, Tokyo; A selection of traditional Nigiri and Maki sushi; Red Torii gates in Fushimi Inari shrine in Kyoto

Report from the UK Post Office, which creates a Worldwide Holiday Costs Barometer by calculating and comparing the average costs of visiting tourist attractions and dining out, among other factors, has named Tokyo the fourth most affordable place to visit in the world this year.

And it's not only tourists who are benefiting – these changes have also made Japan's capital city more appealing and accessible for remote workers and business travellers. In 2023, Tokyo was named the fastest-growing destination for digital nomads, following a whopping 369 per

cent increase in remote workers since 2022. Business travel to the country took a hit due to the pandemic, with the number of international travellers coming to Japan for business having dropped to 0.02 million in 2021 – a dramatic decrease from 2019's 1.76 million – but in 2022, this figure crawled back up to 0.42 million, and a number of forward-thinking changes in legislation suggest that this will keep rising in the years to come.

Japan's ties to the Middle East, in particular, are only set to grow due to a series of recently-changed regulations that are strengthening business and

economic ties between the two countries, while also making it easier to visit the country for tourism purposes. As of winter 2022, UAE nationals no longer need an entry permit to Japan, and in spring 2023, Japan commenced visa waiver arrangements for short-term stays for Qatari nationals. Also in 2023, Japan announced that residents of 10 countries could now easily apply for an e-visa, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia joining Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Singapore, South Africa, Taiwan, the UK, and the US on that list. And 2024 welcomes two new direct routes between the GCC →



QUICK TIPS ON JAPANESE BUSINESS ETIQUETTE

Punctuality is highly valued in Japanese culture – be on time, or early, for meetings.

Modesty is also valued, both through minimalistic clothing in simple colours, and by avoiding excessive flattery and undue loudness.

Privacy is also held in high esteem – try to avoid asking people overly-personal questions.

Following a first name with the honorific “san”, e.g. “Khaled-san”, is a sign of respect.

When presenting your business card to a recipient (or receiving one), do so with both hands.

Age, status, and hierarchy are traditionally taken into consideration in both social and business interactions alike, with the most senior in position greeted first.

Bowing is a sign of respect – if you are bowed to, you may mimic the motion to be polite.

TOP RIGHT: A cup of matcha, a popular Japanese green tea

and Japan, with Qatar Airways having resumed its daily nonstop service to Osaka Kansai International airport in March, and Japan Airlines launching daily flights between Doha’s Hamad International airport and Tokyo Haneda in April, as the first Japanese airline to operate a nonstop service to and from the Middle East.

The Japanese government is reportedly working on increasing the amount of multi-lingual support options available for foreigners visiting the country, by relaxing old rules around which individuals can provide tour guide or interpreter services. Upon arrival in the country, foreign visitors can now ease their journey through immigration by preparing a QR code through the Visit Japan website, to speed up the process. Meanwhile, the Suica, an IC card issued by JR East that allows users to ride public transport such as trains and buses, and at a number of shops and dining venues, with just a single tap, is constantly working to open up to more foreign payment methods, and to make its app version available to foreigners with Apple Pay. In January this year, the IJ – Internet Initiative Japan Inc. – also announced seven new plans for its Japan Travel Sim (eSIM) services, which will provide easy mobile data communication options to visitors for up to 30 days.

It isn’t just Middle Eastern visitors heading to Japan, either – the number of visitors from Japan to the GCC has also been increasing, with 30,000 more heading from Japan to the UAE in 2022 than in 2021. A recent survey conducted by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) found that more than 90 per cent of GCC citizens would like to visit Japan, but haven’t had the chance to do so yet – so in late 2023, the JNTO launched a “Japan Travel House” in Qatar, to help provide more people in the GCC with information about the country, from details of tourism attractions to education on the country’s culture and traditions.

The last few years have seen a series of new developments take place to foster greater understanding and



friendship between Japan and the Middle East, through bilateral ties in both tourism and business. In 2023, Japan deepened its relationship with the region through multiple new partnerships and initiatives that are set to bolster ties through bilateral trade and investment across various sectors. The signing of 23 major new initiatives with the UAE centered around green and clean energy aim to combine the strengths of both countries through advanced technology, geography, investment, and renewable energy resources. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and Japan finalised 14 new agreements for cooperation in the healthcare, water, energy, and financial sectors, notably including the opportunities for Japanese banks surrounding the kingdom’s many giga-projects.

Japan is a country that has, historically, expertly managed to sweep into modernity while holding onto its many traditions, striking a delicate and successful balance between the two. A walk through the bustling capital can take you from the

dizzily busy subterranean world that encompasses its metro system and the shops and restaurants that have sprung up around it, and its various modern districts featuring cutting-edge technology and all of the latest fashions, to those that still hold true to the retro charms of historical traditions, complete with old temples, zen gardens, and quiet winding lanes. It’s a destination that seems to have it all, and for the many visitors that insist no amount of time in the country ever seems to be enough, a return trip is often dreamed of before they’ve even left. This dynamic land has already been popular for commercial travel from surrounding countries for decades, and with plenty more to look forward to in the coming years – including major landmarks such as immersive theme parks and art museums, distinctive and multi-faceted commercial districts, major hotel openings, and some jaw-dropping architecture – it’s a prime time for it to be discovered by new tourists and business travellers from across the world. **BT**



Business Traveller

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AWARDS 2024

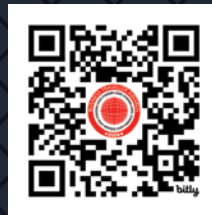
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Embracing the non-alcoholic drinks market

Low or no-alcohol drinks have created a major buzz in the beverages market in recent years, and the hospitality industry is taking note. It's clear the trend is here to stay, marking a permanent place on menus across the world



ERIKA DOYLE
FOUNDER OF DRINK DRY STORE - THE REGION'S FIRST FOR PREMIUM NON-ALCOHOLIC DRINKS

The non-alcoholic drinks category has come a long way in the last five years here in the Middle East. Like with any new category or more niche product offering, the first step is always to get the consumers onboard. You must excite the consumers to try it and to believe in it.

If you take a closer look at the type of content alcohol-free brands globally are releasing and are associating themselves with, it is all about socialising, inclusion, diversity and most importantly fun. Not drinking alcohol should not and does not mean that people can no longer have fun. For those who are well versed in the world of alcohol and know their wines, spirits, and beers, and even for those who have only dipped their toes in trying some alcoholic beverages, it is much easier to understand low- and no-alcohol drinks and how to place them in a relevant and appropriate social occasion. There is a strong point of reference there.

But what has contributed the most to this current buzz of non-alcoholic drinks is

that finally, the hospitality sector here in the Middle East is seeing the benefits of including a strong alcohol-free offering in their venues. Non alcoholic drinks have another unique selling point – they are very low in calories and they are low in sugar. This could not be more topical right now here in the Middle East, with obesity rates amongst children and adults going up at an alarming rate. These new drinks additions are therefore relevant to the local Muslim population, who are not familiar with the alcoholic drinks, but are looking to cut back on their sugar intake and lead a healthier lifestyle.

Being seen as an inclusive place to be is of course great and to be encouraged; however, more than anything else, the operators are now seeing a strong commercial benefit of having a wider choice of drinks.

Let's take a look at a real life example and look at

simple maths. Venue A sells an alcoholic beer for Dhs40 and an alcoholic cocktail for Dhs45 on their menu; soft drinks – Dhs10 for a glass of Pepsi, Coca-Cola or orange juice, for example, and Dhs25 for a traditional sugar-laden mocktail. How many soft drinks can one customer have during a lunch or dinner? No more than two, usually. So, at best, Venue A is looking to make Dhs35-50 from a non-alcohol-drinking guest on drinks. Meanwhile, Venue B sells alcoholic beers and cocktails at the same price point as Venue A, but instead of soft drinks, they have a selection of premium non-alcoholic drinks: a selection of non-alcoholic beers priced at Dhs35 and sophisticated

non-alcoholic cocktails that are using non-alcoholic spirits instead of just syrups, for instance, and they are priced at Dhs40. Using the same assumption that a non-drinking consumer will have maximum of two drinks, Venue B is looking to make a minimum of Dhs77-80 from that same non-drinking consumer. Now multiply that difference by 1,000 guests and voila, you have yourself a winning argument for adding sophisticated non-alcoholic drinks on each and every menu.

And this is just the beginning. The category is here to stay and it is here to grow. The quality of the products is forever evolving and improving. If I was to make a prediction, I would say that each and every licenced and non-licenced venue in the Middle East will have a solid non-alcoholic drinks offering by 2030. **BT**

I predict that every venue in the Middle East will have a solid non-alcoholic drinks offering by 2030



Women in Hospitality

With Saudi Arabia's tourism and hospitality experiencing unprecedented growth and evolution, women have a crucial role to play in the sector's success. It's time to shed new light on what women bring to the sector, how females account for an increasing share of the workforce, and how the industry can seize the opportunity to turn Saudi's young women of today into the hospitality leaders of tomorrow



TANJA MILLNER
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR AT THE BENCH,
ORGANISER OF FUTURE HOSPITALITY SUMMIT

The role of women in leadership is frequently overlooked and underestimated, not only in the hospitality and tourism sector, but across all industries.

One only has to look at the list of Fortune 500 companies to realise this: just 10 per cent of companies listed have a female at the helm and, while more companies are acknowledging and embracing the concept of female leadership, there is still a long way to go.

Research consistently shows that diverse leadership teams lead to better decision-making and innovation, and enhances the overall success of any business. It's therefore vital to break down these barriers and foster an inclusive environment in hospitality where everyone, regardless of gender or background, can thrive and contribute their best.

At the moment, nearly 80 per cent of people working in the Saudi hospitality sector are male. The proportion of women in the industry – currently at 22 per cent – is set to grow considerably as more businesses and hospitality brands recognise the pivotal role that women play, and embark on female-focused recruitment and retention schemes to build female headcount.

I've recently been talking to several leading female industry experts about their views on women in the sector, what the hospitality sector is doing to bring more women on board and the opportunities –

and potential challenges – presented with the rise of female forces in hospitality.

Marie-Louise Ek, Hilton's vice president of human resources for the Middle East and Africa, says that as gender diversity is a key objective for Hilton, significant steps have been taken to recruit and upskill more female team members.

The company has its own Women in Leadership programme across the kingdom to help train and nurture the next generation of female leaders and hotel GMs. In addition, 200 of the 250 trainees who joined Hilton in the last two years are female, and the number of women in heads of department roles has tripled since 2021.

Empowering women is also a priority for Rotana. According to Shaikha Al Nowais, corporate vice president of owner relationship management, Rotana is committed to advancing gender diversity across all departments and levels of operation. Several females are currently participating in the company's TAROT (The Accelerated Refinement of Talent) programme, which offers a fast-track career development path.

Women leaders in hospitality all agree that females bring an array of qualities and skills to the sector, enriching the industry and enhancing guests experiences.

Aseel Bondagjy, hotel talent development manager at NEOM, believes that women bring a unique perspective on the warmth of Saudi culture to the table, having played, among other roles, a crucial part in

Research shows that diverse leadership teams lead to better decision-making and innovation

welcoming and hosting pilgrims during Hajj and Umrah. Meanwhile, Saudi Icon architect Eng. Orobah Filfilan feels that women have the acumen and capability to view all issues and concerns with thorough lenses and from various perspectives, in turn providing insight and feedback to tackle important aspects of given situations.

I also asked female industry peers about potential challenges associated with working women, such as motherhood and cultural dynamics. All agree that flexibility, open dialogue, and post-natal support are fundamental to tackling these challenges. Marloes Knippenberg, CEO of Kerten Hospitality, says Kerten employees are encouraged to openly communicate their needs, and that agile, adaptable solutions empower the workforce to balance their professional responsibilities with their personal obligations, in turn enabling them to thrive at work and in their personal life.

One thing is certain when it comes to the future of women in hospitality: With over 60 per cent of the KSA population under 30 years old, the industry has a golden opportunity to bring young Saudi females into their business and turn them into future leaders.

As Norah Al Tamimi, chief executive officer at Baheej Company, says, the kingdom's hospitality sector has hit 21.7 per cent Saudization, with more than 11 per cent being female. Recognising hospitality as an emerging field for both talented young men and women and leveraging the ongoing hospitality projects in Saudi Arabia creates pathways for female leadership by breaking down cultural barriers and providing equal opportunities for professional growth and advancement. **BT**

Discover a new journey

between the Middle East and the Far East



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Japan Airlines, a SKYTRAX 5-Star airline and member of the **oneworld**® alliance, is now the first Japanese airline to operate nonstop service to and from the Middle East, with its new daily service between Tokyo's Haneda Airport and Doha's Hamad International Airport. The inaugural flight launched on 31 March 2024, and will also enable customers to seamlessly connect to Africa, Europe, and South America through its partnership with Qatar Airways, a fellow **oneworld** member.

A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES

The flight is operated with JAL's Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners with a two-class configuration, and opens up a new world of possibilities to passengers travelling between the two travel hubs. Haneda Airport is an ideal base from which to connect to numerous other international destinations across East Asia – not to mention domestic

destinations from Hokkaido to Kyushu – and will take travellers into Tokyo with ease, connecting them directly to the Keikyu Line and the Tokyo Monorail Line.

Meanwhile, through the international network of Qatar Airways, connections throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and South America will be possible at Doha's Hamad International Airport. This will enable smooth travel to more destinations, expanding customers' options for travel while also allowing them to visit the city of Doha during layovers, or spend time in the lounges of the multi-award-winning airport.

CONNECTING CULTURES

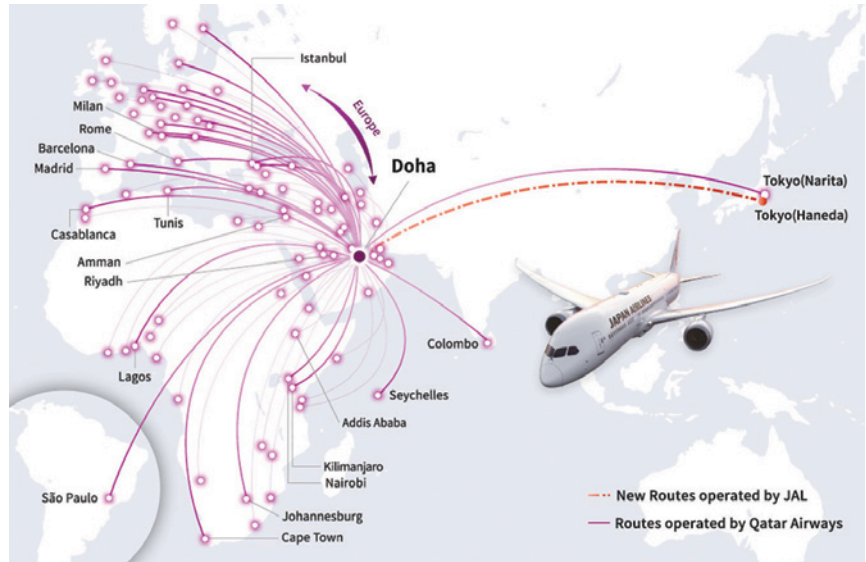
Both Doha, the capital of Qatar, and Tokyo, the capital of Japan, are cities that seamlessly blend historical traditions and cutting-edge modernity, embracing their rich heritage while offering modern facilities and infrastructures for travellers from across the world. Both destinations have witnessed a remarkable bounce-

back in terms of tourism recovery levels in recent years, even surpassing pre-pandemic visitor levels – and forecasts predict that these figures are only set to rise.

As the financial, cultural, and industrial centre of Japan that is also a major international financial centre, Tokyo is one of the world's most popular tourism destinations that continues to be an important destination for global corporate and business travellers. Ties between Japan and GCC countries have been steadily increasing over the past few years, and with recent changes in legislation enabling easier travel for GCC residents to Japan – including visa waiver arrangements for short-term stay for Qatari nationals, visa-free entry for UAE nationals, and easy e-visa applications for residents of the UAE and Saudi Arabia – the addition of this new route by Japan Airlines is the next step in strengthening the scope of what is possible for, and between, these two destinations.

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE HOSPITALITY AT 30,000 FEET

Japan Airlines prides itself on its commitment to constantly enhancing and improving customer convenience and comfort, and the overall quality of its products and services. The airline offers gourmet flavours at 30,000 feet, with premium beverages and authentic and chef-curated seasonal menus, including renewed vegan and vegetarian menu options. Japan Airlines also remains committed to its sustainability efforts, having declared its intention to recycle 100% of its food waste into fertilizer through composting by 2025, along with a goal of reaching net-zero CO2 emissions by 2050.



The airline, which is renowned for its punctuality as well as exceptional service that pays homage to traditional Japanese hospitality, will be offering the new flight on a codeshare basis with Qatar Airways with both Economy and Business class seats available. The flight's Business class is fitted with staggered fully-flat JAL SKY SUITE III seats with direct aisle access, retractable privacy screens, premium amenities, an entertainment system featuring the latest movies and programmes, and an award-winning chef-designed inflight dining menu.

"Our new Doha service is the first direct flight to the Middle East operated by a Japanese airline. It perfectly complements JAL's global network and enables customers to seamlessly connect to Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and South America through our partnership with Qatar Airways, a member of the same **oneworld** alliance as JAL," said Ross Leggett, Japan Airlines' managing executive officer and senior vice president of route marketing. "The demand for business and leisure travel from Doha to Asia continues to grow, and we are excited to offer JAL's renowned five-star service and unique approach to hospitality to even more travellers," Leggett added.

As the JAL Group continues their mission to create social and economic value by fostering relationships and connections through travel, contributing to the progress and development and society while enhancing its network, the new route is bound to be a success.

THE ELEVATOR PITCH

Business Traveller Middle East gives Paul Stuart Sykes Riquelme, general manager of Banyan Tree Dubai, five minutes to pitch his property to prospective guests



“In the heart of the thriving city of Dubai, a hub for global commerce and innovation, Banyan Tree Dubai welcomes you to a modern beach sanctuary steeped in the art of Asian hospitality. Opened last December, the resort has a full suite of recreational facilities, beckoning business travellers, tourists, and residents to immerse themselves in a world of world-class hospitality and beachfront rejuvenation.

Set against the serene shoreline of Bluewaters Dubai, Banyan Tree Dubai is imbued with a strong sense of place, fitting in seamlessly among the buildings of the gleaming Dubai Marina in the background. This location puts the property in a unique position, blending the vibrant ambience of Dubai and the tranquillity of the ocean. With a 500m stretch of pristine, private beach, guests can bask in the warm embrace of the sun and the gentle caress of the Arabian Gulf.

The accommodations at Banyan Tree Dubai introduce a touch of soft minimalism with a warm, organic feel and handcrafted textures that are instantly welcoming and liveable. Featuring a wide range of rooms and private apartments, each space comes with floor-to-ceiling windows, offering panoramic ocean views and absorbing natural light all day long.

In addition, the property also boasts a dedicated 10-bedroom villa spanning an area of 4,465 sqm, which has its own pool and private beach access.

The culinary experience is just as unique, catering to every palate and preference. For chic, beach-side dining, Alizée serves Mediterranean dishes with a Southern French flair, while its pool and beach extensions immerse guests in a coastal-inspired holiday mood. Guests seeking a more elegant affair can visit Tocha, which embraces Japanese craftsmanship and teahouse rituals, where diners can also



“Guests can bask in the warm embrace of the sun and the gentle caress of the Arabian Gulf”

enjoy unforgettable ocean sunsets like nowhere else in Dubai. Other venues include Demon Duck by celebrity chef Alvin Leung, presenting a playful twist on Chinese cuisine; TakaHisa, which brings a wealth of Japanese classics to its diverse menu; and much more.

Business and leisure travellers can delight in a wealth of recreational facilities, including outdoor swimming pools, a state-of-the-art fitness centre for well-being activities, a beauty salon with aesthetic treatments, and the award-winning Banyan Tree Spa for a personalised holistic experience.

We eagerly welcome everyone to Banyan Tree Dubai, where every stay promises a harmonious blend of bespoke hospitality, oceanfront serenity, and a plethora of experiences catering to every discerning taste. **BT**



The CEO of Emirates Literature Foundation and director of Emirates Airline Festival of Literature is on a mission to connect the Middle East with the rest of the world

What drives your purpose? Stories are how we connect as human beings, which is why we need to make sure that the narratives and voices of this region are heard across the world and included in global conversations. Each year, the Foundation curates the annual Emirates Airline Festival of Literature, and over the last 16 years we've built relationships with the many international authors, publishers, and agents who attend. This helps us support the UAE's talented community of writers, and creates connections that would otherwise be difficult for them to access. By connecting the right people, the world can discover Dubai's homegrown talent.

This year, the LitFest announced a joint partnership with the Investment Corporation of Dubai, Dubai Business Associates, and flydubai to sponsor trips bringing students from across the region to the UAE for youth programmes. What is the aim of this collaboration?

Our festival is unique because it's the only one that has a balance of Arab experts and thought leaders being featured in conversation alongside international ones, especially when it comes to topics that impact all our lives like AI, science, and the future of the Arabic language. So we wanted to bring students from across the Arab region to the LitFest because it's a unique opportunity and it's important

to involve youth in discussions that will affect them. Our partners understood our mission and we're grateful because it was hugely successful and we hope to build on it next year.

How do you think your prior work in marketing and events for Dubai Tourism and Jumeirah Group has enhanced your current role?

Festivals and events have been at the core of all my jobs, whether they were in food, comedy, music, or even theatre. And while skills like copywriting can come in handy, my marketing experience has helped me understand what different demographics want, how to speak to them, and what grabs different audiences' attention. So I've been able to draw on all these experiences to shape the Festival in a way that appeals to new generations of the different communities in the UAE, while also raising awareness of all the work the Foundation does.

What three things do you always pack?

Comfortable shoes, because I love going on long walks whenever I travel. My Kindle, so I



INTERVIEW YI-HWA HANNA

can bring everything I'm reading at the time with me. And finally, a baby carrier. It's really helpful to get your hands free at the airport!

What are your top three packing tips?

Buy compartments, Apple AirTag your bag, and roll your clothes for more space!

What is your earliest childhood holiday memory?

Renting a big family van and going on road trips across the United States.

What's been your most memorable trip so far?

Definitely Positano in Italy. I loved driving along the Amalfi Coast, and then just sitting at the shore at night, and looking back at all the colourful houses on the mountain under a sky full of stars. The food was also incredible. The lasagna at Chez Black was the best one I've ever had!

What is your go-to in-flight entertainment?

I love a good podcast, so flights give me a chance to discover new ones.

How do you spend your air miles?

Upgrading my seat when travelling to and back from the US. That's my most frequent long flight so I always keep my miles for that.

What's one trip you'd rather forget?

Probably the first trip I took without my daughter. She was 11 months then, but the three days apart from her felt like a month, so it was a really difficult trip. I also got food poisoning while on it, so I'd love to forget that experience.

What's your ultimate bucket list destination?

I'd love to see the Northern Lights. I'm just super fascinated by anywhere you can see stars or celestial phenomena like that. **BT**



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Fairmont Doha introduces Fairmont Gold:

A premium offering redefining luxury and personalisation

Fairmont Doha has launched the Fairmont Gold programme, an elevated luxury experience with personalisation at its heart

Five-star Fairmont Doha proudly announces the launch of Fairmont Gold, a “hotel within a hotel” where exceptional service is elevated to create an exclusive, personalised experience from check in to check out and beyond.

Whether travelling for business or pleasure, Fairmont Gold embraces a consistently high quality of personalised service and exclusivity, that is designed to cater to the needs and expectations of discerning travellers.



Fairmont Gold guests will have exclusive access to the Fairmont Gold Lounge, a serene sanctuary where they can unwind in privacy and luxury. The lounge offers a wealth of amenities, including complimentary breakfast and drinks, which is all served in an elegant ambiance conducive to relaxation and productivity. The Lounge will ensure all guests feel immediately at home, where they are well looked after by a specially trained, dedicated Fairmont Gold team who pride themselves on their service intimacy and discretion.

Guests will also have access to the dedicated Fairmont Gold pool, exclusively for Fairmont Gold guests, which has its own bar with dining area and offers unrivalled panoramic views of the Gulf and city, under a canopy of palm trees.

Fairmont Gold is more than just a designated area in a large hotel with better service and amenities. While Fairmont Gold does offer both upgraded amenities and an enhanced level of service, it is also designed to be a home away from home, with intimate spaces meant for living, working and thriving.

Central to the Fairmont Gold experience is the dedication to personalised service. Guests will



enjoy the attentive care of a dedicated concierge team, committed to fulfilling every request and anticipating every need. Whether arranging bespoke excursions, securing exclusive dining reservations, or attending to any special requirements, the Fairmont Gold concierge is poised to ensure a flawless and unforgettable stay.

The dedicated concierge team puts guests first by discovering their preferences before their stay as well as touching base with them during their stay. The Fairmont Gold team make sure they know who their guests are and what they'd like to experience, even if they don't yet know it themselves.

"At Fairmont Doha, we continuously strive to exceed the expectations of our discerning guests by offering experiences that resonate with sophistication and exclusivity," said Anna Olsson, executive commercial director of Raffles and Fairmont Doha. "The introduction of Fairmont Gold represents our unwavering commitment to delivering unparalleled luxury and personalised attention, setting a new standard for hospitality in Doha."

Enhancements included in a Fairmont Gold membership:

- A global concierge that can be contacted remotely ahead of booking and throughout a guest's stay
- Pre-arrival questionnaire to determine a guest's preferences
- Personal amenities based on a guest's requirements from exercise equipment, to curling irons to guide books
- An on-site dedicated Fairmont Gold contact
- Advanced reservations on a guest's favourite pool loungers or favourite restaurant table
- Exclusive menus at all Fairmont Doha restaurants
- Invitations to exclusive social events
- Curated libraries
- Exclusive tours
- Branded mementos



Guests can book a Fairmont Gold stay via Fairmont's website ahead of their trip, or choose to upgrade on arrival.

Prices start at £303 per night for a Fairmont Room, or £518 for a Junior Suite

Promotion valid from 20 January - 30 September 2024

For reservations and enquiries, please visit [fairmont.com/doha](https://www.fairmont.com/doha)



Sand and Serenity

It is said that the desert tells a different story each time one ventures out into it, and for Our Habitas Ras Abrouq – the company’s second project in the region after their award-winning property in AIUla – this one is about to tell a unique tale of nature, culture, and adventure

WORDS YI-HWA HANNA

An hour outside of Qatar’s bustling capital, Doha – on the edge of the UNESCO-protected Al Reem Biosphere Reserve – a new world has sprung up in the desert. The very first property of its kind in the country, Our Habitas Ras Abrouq is a sprawling 42-villa resort that peeks out onto the Arabian Gulf. It joins eight other properties in Our Habitas’s existing portfolio of resorts, which includes three in the Americas (in Chile, Costa Rica, and Mexico), two in Africa (in Morocco and Namibia), two in Asia (in Bhutan and Indonesia), and its award-winning property in AIUla, Saudi Arabia.

The resort, which was actually created in partnership with Qatar Airways, the country’s national airline, opened its doors to guests in mid-January this year, with 42 one-to four-bedroom tented villas, each with a private pool and generously-sized outdoor deck, along with a restaurant, infinity pool, beach club and bar, wellness centre, terrace lounge, gym complete with state-of-the-art equipment, and plenty of sporting facilities including padel tennis courts and a water sports adventure hub.



Our Habitas co-founder and chief executive, Oliver Ripley, explains that his company owns the design and decoration of the project, true to the Habitas ethos of focusing on social architecture, layout, local community sourcing, and collaboration, that flows from inspiration from the surrounding area's rich culture, nature, and heritage. He was inspired by the people, the place, and the immense local creative talent, as well as the region itself: its warm and innovative people, and the untouched landscapes.

"In Ras Abrouq, we found a very special place to create a home for creative expression and adventure," he says. The culture to be found in Ras Abrouq, and Qatar as a whole, was a key draw in what attracted him to open the project here.

"When I first came to Qatar, it was the people that made me fall in love with the country," he says. "The kindness, the Qatari hospitality, the warmth, and the humility. Qatar is going through an incredible transition, and it's the young people of Qatar that are changing the narrative in art, in music, in fashion, and it's an amazing thing to witness and also to discover, when visiting the country," he says.



"When I first came to Qatar, it was the people that made me fall in love with the country"

OLIVER RIPLEY, Our Habitas co-founder and chief executive

"The Middle East has arguably become one of the most dynamic places in the world for hospitality growth. The once-overlooked region continues to be a cradle for culture that is evolving with unbound potential and reminds us that travel plays an integral role in reframing how we understand the world. The breadth of places and experiences emerging appeals to the global tourist. The region is evolving at a rapid pace, and is at the forefront of new destinations being opened in an intentional way, with Our Habitas as a brand integral to shaping and driving sustainable and experiential travel growth within the Middle East," Ripley says.

He's right: Qatar's vision for a bolder future already won it the chance to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, and it continues to rise with booming tourism numbers, strong economic growth, and plenty of dynamic

new empowerment programmes to inspire, educate, and provide opportunities for its enterprising youth. Now, Qatar's natural wonders, from sweeping dunes that "sing" under one's feet to mysterious caves, lush mangroves, and unique flora and fauna are the next star to shine.

"I was also lucky enough to travel across the country and witness quite how diverse this place is. It's a small country and yet so varied in its nature," Ripley says. "Ras Abrouq really stuck out to me as a UNESCO biosphere and all its natural beauty visually with its diverse fauna and flora, and both on land and in the sea. It's a very unique place with the most magical sunsets in the whole of Qatar," he adds.

When building the resort, they had to consider how to seamlessly harmonise their offering with the "region's awe-inspiring natural beauty, with an immersive experience that highlights Qatar as a leading hub of creative culture in the Middle East." Ripley explains that: "The UNESCO-protected Al-Reem Biosphere



Reserve is an integral part of our inspiration with its unique wildlife, including birdlife and a breeding centre for native gazelles and oryx – it has pioneered reintroduction programmes in the country. The site also creates opportunities for adventure, biking, hiking and visiting the East-West/West-East art installation by Richard Serra."

Nature is only half the appeal, however – it's the resort's deep focus on culture that makes it even more unique, with everything from pottery-making to calligraphy classes, Al Sadu weaving workshops, and more for guests to indulge in – not to mention film screenings and art exhibitions at the nearby museums. Our Habitas collaborates with Qatar Tourism, Qatar Museums, and other creative institutions to curate exclusive itineraries that can help guests easily discover Qatar's emerging cultural scene, while spotlighting local talent. The roots of the Our Habitas brand have been said to spring from the renowned art and music festival Burning Man, and the new resort will pay homage to this in its own way too. "Music is one of our core programming pillars and we are looking to expand these experiences in Ras Abrouq, providing a stage for local, regional, and international talent to inspire creation and perform as we further establish this property – watch this space," Ripley says.

When they've had their fill of culture, there's plenty for guests to do in terms of active and well-being pursuits, including inner journeys such as a recalibration frequency journey, vital energy awakening treatment, and desert meditation, and



bodywork such as vibroacoustic or tuning fork massages and zen garden compress massages. Ancient heritage also comes through in the form of a Pink Qatari Clay heritage ritual or a “fire and ice” desert journey, or one of numerous beauty treatments with a touch of local flavour such as a camel milk deep cell regeneration facial. When hungry, refuelling can be done at Qissa, a restaurant that blends the essence of local Qatari, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean flavours.

“Our Habitas conducted extensive market research and worked with cultural creative partners – it is important that all homes are fully embedded with the local scene from design and artists through to the wider programming across the six pillars: Art and Culture, Wellness, Adventure, Learning, Food and Beverage, and Music,” Ripley says. He tells us that its villa furnishings, tapestries, and fabrics were sourced from local souqs and artisans, whom they learned stories from along the way – “for example, Sadu Weavers and Clay Pottery, which now are part of the on-site programming as workshops.”

“[We] partnered with Atlas Bookstore, founded by Qatari sisters Fatma Al Sehlawi and Reem Al Sehlawi on cultural advisory, who assigned Studio Imara (a sister

company, founded by Fatma Al Sehlawi and Nasser Al Emadi) to support specific design elements. This allowed Habitas to source pieces throughout the property from up and coming and established local artists. At the resort’s entrance is a sculpture by Khalid Shahin – the piece is stainless steel with a polished and matte finish. [We are] also working in collaboration with Qatar Museums on showcasing significant artworks; additional installations are joining the property in the coming months,” he says.

Sustainability is always at the heart of any Our Habitas project, and the company – which was awarded the Oceanic Champion Badge for adopting The Oceanic Standard – works to be kinder to the environment wherever possible, including by printing as little as possible (or using recycled paper and locally-sourced and crafted wooden signage when needed), and eliminating single-use plastic through all villas. The kind of customer the brand attracts certainly values these efforts, along with a desire for a truly experiential type of travel experience that feels like more than the average holiday. “Our Habitas attracts a global traveller who is curious, adventurous, seeking new experiences, and wants to understand new cultures and meet diverse people, while

creating lifelong memories and making new friends. Our team are referred to as family and welcome our guests as an extension of this, providing a home for human connection where kindness and genuine intent embraces a variety of cultures,” Ripley says.

“Travellers are constantly evolving in the kind of expectations they have from a destination. There is a desire amongst our community to enjoy a level of comfort, yet go beyond the superficial elements of a place and explore it more comprehensively. In the face of such an evolution, hoteliers are tasked with curating travel experiences that provide their customers with new, authentic ways to understand places better and provide unique experiences,” Ripley explains. “At Our Habitas we aim to create spaces where like-minded people can connect, grow, play and learn; we seek to change lives through deeper human connection. Our homes are intentionally located and designed places where strangers become friends and friends become family,” he adds.

It’s a sentiment that is paralleled by the brand’s partnership with Qatar Airways, which Ripley says is intended to allow travellers, on a larger scale of reach and accessibility, to seek out new destinations to discover the natural wonders of Qatar, creating authentic experiences that uncover its history and rich culture.

“With growth and expansion comes our ability to reach more people,” he says. “Ultimately, the Our Habitas community – the like-minded individuals who choose to participate in our experiences – is at the heart of our transformation over time. The unique perspective hospitality provides is often an ‘overlooked opportunity’ when inspiring change. Redefining the concept of traditional luxury in hotels, [our] mission is to change people’s lives by creating deeper human connections, and to make a lasting impact on local communities through education, employment, and the creation of sustainable micro-economies.” **BT**

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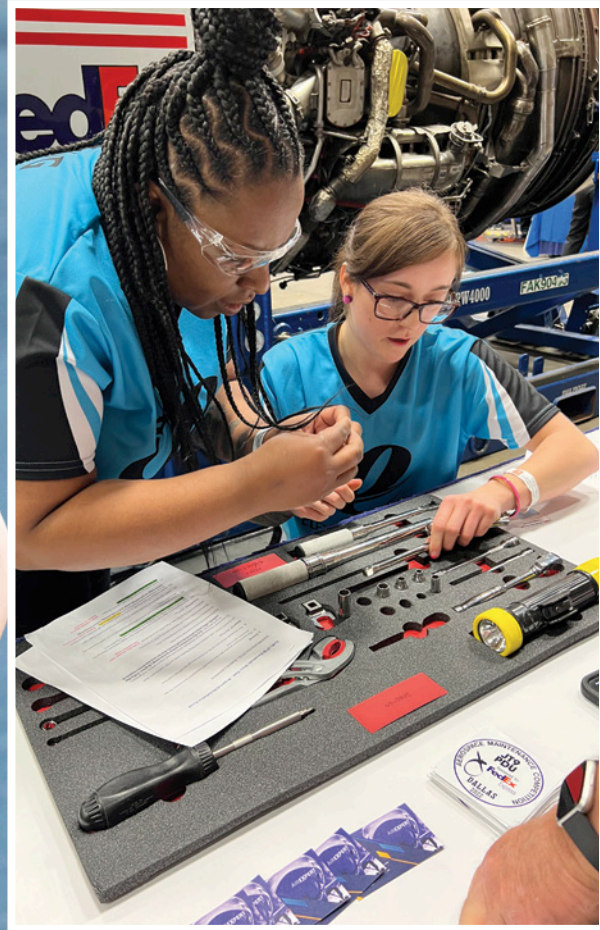


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WIDEN THE SKIES



34



WORDS HANNAH RALPH

The urgent need for more women in aviation far exceeds some basic box-ticking. We spoke to the trailblazers reimagining the industry and pushing for essential gender equality

THIS PAGE:

The drive to open up aviation to women has been slow coming, but times are changing thanks to communities such as Elevate(her)

It's 2018. At the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) annual conference in Sydney, Qatar Airways' former CEO Akbar al Baker declares that only a man could lead his airline, "because it is a very challenging position". That same year, journalist Angela Epstein appears on one of the UK's most watched morning shows to discuss the topic: 'Would you trust a female pilot?' "If there's someone in a position of absolute power and control," she said, "then I'd like it to be a man". TUI Airways, meanwhile, takes heat for handing out "future pilot" stickers to boys and "future cabin crew" ones to girls.

More than ever before, cases are being made for the necessity of a bigger, balanced talent pool

And while it's true that no formal barriers prohibit women from pursuing commercial or military careers in aviation, a patriarchal cloud still lingers over the industry. Despite constituting half of the population, various sources reveal that women make up only 5 per cent of commercial pilots, 18 per cent of flight dispatchers, 26 per cent of air traffic controllers and less than 9 per cent of aerospace engineers. Additionally, of the directorate, women hold only 14 per cent of C-suite roles and account for just 3 per cent of CEOs across the world's top 100 aviation organisations. In fact, the only aviation career where women are not currently outnumbered is within cabin crew.

The truth is, ever since the Wright Brothers took that first flight in 1903,

women have remained largely erased and discouraged from aviation. How many of us can say we knew their sister, Katharine, who was instrumental in running the company? But here's the good news – the tide is turning. And not just under the pressure of do-gooding corporate targets, but thanks to passionate, vocation-led trailblazers and increasingly credible business cases that weigh in favour of diverse teams.

SOARING DEMAND

"Forecasted levels of demand in air service means we're looking at a fairly imminent shortage of pilots, air traffic controllers and engineers," explains Katherine Moloney, director of Transair Flight Equipment and founder of Elevate(her) – an online community dedicated to helping women into aviation. "Aviation has some really big challenges ahead. To meet them, it'll need access to the full breadth of talent available from the largest possible pool – that way everyone gets the opportunity to be a part of this incredible industry, and ultimately, the right people end up filling those jobs."

With air service demand set to double in the next 20 years, aircraft manufacturer Boeing has suggested 649,000 new pilots and 690,000 new technicians will need to be hired before 2042 in order to maintain the global fleet. More than ever before, cases are being made for the necessity of a bigger, balanced talent pool and its benefits. Last year, SMBC Aviation Capital won IATA's first Diversity and Inclusion Datathon when it managed to prove a correlation between gender-balanced leadership teams and improved financial





and ESG (environmental, social and governance) metrics.

But a *Harvard Business Review* report on the topic, published in 2020, said it best: “Why should anyone need an economic rationale for affirming the agency and dignity of any group of human beings?” With this in mind, it’s clear to see the current challenge for what it is: ensuring that women view aviation as a viable career within a welcoming industry. And making sure that’s the case once they get there.

There are currently many women – and indeed, men – who are dedicated to creating this reality. Just look at Moloney, who, like many, experienced an entirely male-led training environment on her journey to a private pilot licence. “As amazing as my male mentors had been, when I finished my PPL [Private Pilot Licence] training there was a sort of loneliness to it. A lack of connection. It was a natural feeling, I think, of just wanting to share my experience with other women like me. I knew I couldn’t be the only one out there feeling it.” This was Moloney’s motivation to set up Elevate(her), which offers free membership access to essential resources, online articles (“Why Imposter Syndrome is a load of BS”) and in-person events around the UK. Her first, a lunch at Brighton City airport for which she nervously bought sandwiches, welcomed 40 attendees; her second had 70. Now, her community is in the thousands.

TOUGH AT THE TOP

Moloney may embody the kind of activism happening at the grassroots end of the industry, but what’s going

on at the top? “It was 2019, and the first Diversity and Inclusion awards we’d ever held,” begins David Berger, assistant manager of diversity, equity and inclusion at IATA. “Air New Zealand had won ‘Team of the Year’ and Christopher Luxon – then CEO, now the country’s PM – went up to give his speech.” Luxon, who had declined to participate in panel discussions that did not include female speakers, went on to decry ‘the elephant in the room’: “If we want to be honest with ourselves, IATA and the global aviation industry has an abysmal record on diversity and inclusion.” On the flight back to Geneva, Jane Hoskisson, Berger’s director, knew they had to do something huge. “She challenged us to address this and that’s how 25by2025 was born,” adds Berger.

25by2025 – which aims to improve female representation in the industry by 25 per cent by 2025 – now has 200 signatories committed to bettering the gender balance, with help from IATA itself. From 2021 to 2022, these signatories counted more than 1,000 new pilots (up by the desired 25 per cent), 28 women in CEO positions (up by 20 per cent), plus a 7 per cent increase in technical roles, and a 4 per cent rise across senior positions.

Since 2019, IATA’s annual awards for diversity and inclusion have honoured many firsts. Women like Poppy Khoza, the first female president of the International Civil Aviation Organization General Assembly; Harpreet A de Singh, India’s first female chief of flight safety and accident investigator; and Güliz Öztürk – the first female CEO in the history of Turkish civil aviation.

More and more appointments are seating women at the top table: Qantas recently hired its first female CEO and managing director, Vanessa Hudson; JetBlue announced Joanna Geraghty this year as its new CEO – the first woman to lead a major US airline. Mitsuko Tottori was just named Japan Airlines’ first ever female CEO after starting as a flight attendant nearly 40 years ago. At IATA itself, Yvonne Manzi Makolo marks the first female chair of the board as of last June.

CLEAR VISION AHEAD

In Vancouver, Canada, aviator Teara Fraser founded the first 100 per cent Indigenous woman-owned airline, Iskwew Air, which flew its inaugural flight in 2021. Fraser, a proud Métis

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Iskwew Air in Canada; Elevate(her); a still from Kendra Kincade’s *Only Up* documentary



woman and single mother of two children, rerouted all her savings into becoming a pilot after her life-changing experience in a small aircraft over Africa's Okavango Delta. "Back in BC [British Columbia], my instructor really pressed me to perform. He said to me: 'Teara, you're going to have to operate at 200 per cent, 100 per cent of time, just to be considered equally competent.' And I knew that was true." Fraser went on to gain her commercial license in under a year.

Now, Fraser's mission is to "rebuild, rematriate and reimagine an air transportation system that centres around equity and sustainability". The airline is named after the Cree word for 'woman', and its launch was blessed by the Musqueam people,



Put a number on it and men start thinking women are only hired on account of their gender

upon whose unceded territory Vancouver airport operates. During Covid-19, Iskwew Air also delivered essential goods to Indigenous communities in BC; it runs alongside Fraser's foundation, Give Them Wings, which helps Indigenous youths get into aviation.

Fellow Canadian, air traffic controller turned Elevate Aviation CEO and activist, Kendra Kincade, was a homeless teenager until a pivotal tour of the air traffic control centre in Moncton, New Brunswick, ignited her career. "I knew I wanted to work there the second I walked in the door,"

she says, looking back. "It's one of the best paying jobs in aviation, the work/life balance is fabulous, and the sense of pride is tremendous – we're the guardians of the sky." Kincade's new documentary *Only Up* tells her story and that of several women breaking stereotypes in the industry. "Aviation has always just felt like a man, you know?" The documentary, along with Kincade's growing number of Elevate Aviation Learning Centres, is all part of the new fight: making sure everyone can "show up as themselves".

This doesn't mean Kincade agrees with corporate targets. "Put a number on it and men start thinking women are only hired on account of their gender." Joanne West, engineer of more than 30 years and maintenance team leader at British Airways' engineering HQ in Cardiff, agrees. "Unfortunately, these kinds of targets have allowed females into engineering who might not demonstrate the skills needed, which ultimately affects the reputation for the other females who do. Things like 'International Women in Engineering Day', to me, promote the suggestion that if you're achieving something in the industry, it's not because of your capabilities."

West postures that women who want to work in engineering will make it happen, like she did, but this is where we lose Kincade: "So many women just don't know the careers are out there in the first place," she argues. "Once we bring them in and show them the possibilities, they all go, 'Oh my God, I want to be in this.'"

And so, while the Global Gender Gap Report tells us pay gaps, unfair maternity leave policies and workplace discrimination may be around for some time yet (full gender parity being a whole 131 years away, so they predict), we can fly knowing that the rocky runway navigated by our female predecessors is being smoothed.

"There are some amazing women out there doing fantastic things for sustainability and innovation and community," Moloney says. "When I look at them, I know the future of aviation is very bright indeed." **BT**



WORDS GEMMA GREENWOOD

THIS PAGE: The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, the first World Cup staged in the Middle East, attracted 3.4 million stadium spectators



Doha kicks off

Building on the momentum of its World Cup success, Qatar's capital is scoring highly across transport, tourism, and culture projects as it looks to net its long-term goals for economic diversification

The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 will go down in history as far as football firsts are concerned. Not only did football legend Lionel Messi lift the World Cup for Argentina for the first time, but he also set the new FIFA World Cup appearance record at some 26 matches.

The tournament saw 172 goals scored, attracted 3.4 million stadium spectators (up from 3 million in 2018) and the final captivated some 1.5 billion global viewers according to FIFA, topped up with six billion social media engagements.

At that point in time, the eyes of the world were on Doha and its impressive 89,966-capacity Lusail Stadium – the largest stadium in the Middle East and one of seven built for the tournament. They were part of a whopping US\$229 billion investment pumped into World Cup preparations in the decade leading up to the largest sporting event on earth.

This remarkable outlay also gets etched in the record books, with FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 not only marking the first World Cup to be staged in the Middle East, but also the most expensive, with the amount spent postulated to exceed the cost of all other World Cups combined, according to 2023's Skift Advisory Thought Leadership Report.

So, the question is, was it worth it? What has Qatar, and more specifically, its

economic powerhouse, Doha, gained from this mammoth investment, and will the legacy match expectations?

A national tourism vision

Staging the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 wasn't a one-off boost, but part of a much larger masterplan for long-term economic development. Like many of the Gulf States, Qatar has ambitions to rapidly diversify its non-energy economy and its Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030) sets out a roadmap to achieve this.

Goals have been set around four pillars – environmental, human, economic and social development. They include establishing Doha as a regional tourism hub by tripling 2019 tourist numbers to reach seven million a year by 2030, and developing infrastructure to improve the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

World Cup-related infrastructure ticked all these boxes, with significant investment in transport, including the Doha Metro (also due for further expansion) and tram service, the expansion of Hamad International airport, and the construction of a cruise terminal port.

More than 117,000 hotels rooms were made available for the tournament, and this growth continues, with 56,000 additional rooms to come online by 2025.

By the end of 2023, Qatar had welcomed more than 4 million visitors in the year, not only surpassing the full-year arrivals figures witnessed in 2022, but exceeding all historic annual visitor numbers while setting a new visitor record, according to Qatar Tourism.

Hospitality giant Accor says Qatar Tourism's promotional efforts, combined with the introduction of new infrastructure and leisure attractions, have led to a "noticeable increase" in leisure and group travel to Doha.

"Efforts to showcase the destination and the addition of new recreational options have made Qatar more appealing to a wider audience," confirms Paul Stevens, the group's chief operating officer for the premium, midscale, and economy division in the Middle East, Africa, and Türkiye.

"This growing interest is especially evident among leisure travellers looking for diverse experiences and group segments attracted to the expanding array of attractions and events such the Deaf International Cricket Council World Cup, Asian Tennis Junior Championship, Qatar International Cup Grand Prix in Weightlifting, and more."

Doha was on the traveller map pre-

World Cup, he says, but the event "amplified awareness in new source markets".

Accor's premium, midscale and economy division played a role in delivering a successful World Cup, he adds, launching three properties in the run-up to the event – Pullman Doha West Bay, Adagio Doha and Ibis Doha C-ring. Adding another 464 keys to the mix are Swissôtel Corniche Park Towers Doha and Swissôtel Residences Corniche Park

Towers Doha, both located in West Bay, with the latter meeting pent-up demand for extended-stay options.

Stadiums reinvented

Anyone who watched the World Cup would have been impressed by the seven →

Doha aims to triple 2019's tourist numbers and reach seven million visitors a year by 2030



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: National Museum of Qatar; a Qatar Airways plane flying over Al Bayt Stadium; Lusail Stadium

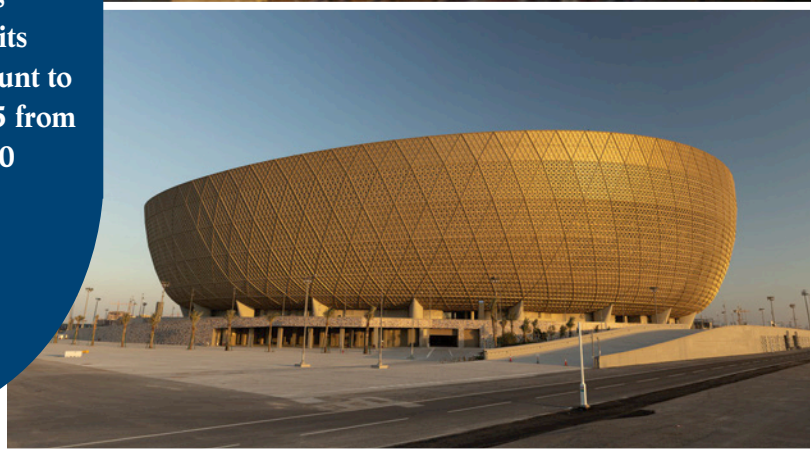
new stadiums built for the tournament (the eighth, Khalifa International Stadium existed pre-World Cup). Now deemed global architectural icons, each is being used or repurposed under the Qatar Supreme Committee legacy plan.

The World Cup might be over, but Qatar remains a growing sports hub, and most of the stadiums will be used for other events, including the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2024, which began on 12 January and ran until 10 February.

The Khalifa International Stadium continues to be the home of Qatar's national team and hosts other large sporting events, while Stadium 974, built from 974 shipping containers, is being dismantled and donated.

Lusail and Al Bayt stadiums are being repurposed into community hubs. A sports medicine hospital is being built on part of the Al Bayt Stadium, which will retain its traditional Qatari tent design, and Lusail Stadium remains a focal point of the mega Lusail City development, which will include 22 hotels, golf courses and an amusement park when complete. It also includes the Lusail Boulevard business hub with integrated commercial components and the iconic sword-shaped Lusail Towers, which houses the Raffles and Fairmont hotels.

Qatar Airways plans to grow its destination count to more than 255 from the current 170



Lusail City was recently designated the 'Capital of Islamic Culture' for 2030 at the Islamic World conference, recognising its status as a "historical cultural beacon".

Construction picks up

The construction sector is also on track to grow 9.5 per cent between 2023 and 2030, according to Turner & Townsend's Qatar Market Intelligence Autumn Q3 2023. The government's QNV 2030 targets for transport and culture are driving this growth, it says, bolstered by multiple strategies including the 2050 Transport Plan.

The initiative encompasses the development of a long-distance and national rail network, which alongside the aforementioned Doha Metro, will form the backbone of a robust public transport

network, supported by secondary systems ranging from automated people movers to water taxi services.

Ramping up Hamad International airport's role as a regional aviation hub is another focus, and the goal is to boost capacity from the current 53 million to 70 million passengers annually. This will help facilitate the expansion ambitions of national carrier Qatar Airways, which plans to grow its destination count to more than 255 from the current 170. Alongside this, a new cargo terminal capable of handling 3.2 million tonnes per year is also under construction.

Aligned with QNV 2030, Doha will also witness a notable surge in sustainable construction initiatives over the next few years, incorporating cutting-edge technologies designed to minimise

DESTINATION

HOT HOTELS

New Doha properties worth checking out - or checking into

Andaz Doha

The brand's first hotel in Qatar, Andaz Doha is a lifestyle hotel located in West Bay, one of the city's major arts hubs. Close to most embassies, financial institutions, and luxury shopping malls, it looks set to be a foodie hotspot, with signature restaurants including Salt Road, a venue showcasing South African cuisine with a salty edge; Mr. & Mrs Hawker, serving Singaporean street food; and Mumble Jungle, an Afro-Cuban inspired bar. There are 256 rooms, 36 suites and for longer stays, 56 residences, plus a spa, fitness centre, pool and meeting facilities. Pets are welcome too.

[hyatt.com](https://www.hyatt.com)

Rixos Qetaifan Island Doha

Arguably one of Doha's most anticipated hotels, the now-open Rixos Qetaifan Island North Doha is the first Rixos resort in Qatar. Aside from playing host to the Meryal waterpark with 21 rides and the highest waterslide in the world at 80 metres, true to the Rixos brand, the 345-room property is a hub for entertainment, home to a souq (market), beach club, spa and fitness concept, plus a tasty gastronomic offering including a steakhouse and French brasserie.

[rixos.com](https://www.rixos.com)

Waldorf Astoria Doha West Bay

Hot off the heels of the Waldorf Astoria Lusail opening its doors in November 2022, just in time for the World Cup, the Hilton brand's second property opened in 2023, but this time in the heart of Doha's diplomatic area in West Bay.



Housed in a 44-storey tower, the 283 rooms and suites are Art Deco inspired, while Peacock Alley of Waldorf Astoria New York fame is immortalised, serving signature dishes such as red velvet cake and Eggs Benedict. For more bites of the Big Apple in Doha, there's a New York-inspired mixology bar and Tribeca Market, a gourmet food emporium. A four-floor wellness sanctuary includes a fitness centre, swimming pools and a spa.

[hilton.com](https://www.hilton.com)

Riviera Rayhaan by Rotana Doha

Also recently opened, this four-star property, just 20 minutes from Hamad International airport and close to Doha's key business districts and major tourism attractions, offers 185 rooms and suites; four dining venues, including Mediterranean restaurant Salvia; Rotana's signature Bodylines Fitness and Wellness Club with gym, spa, and rooftop pool; and three meeting rooms for up to 100 guests. Conveniently, Bin Mahmoud station on the Doha Metro system is just a two-minute walk away.

[rotana.com](https://www.rotana.com)

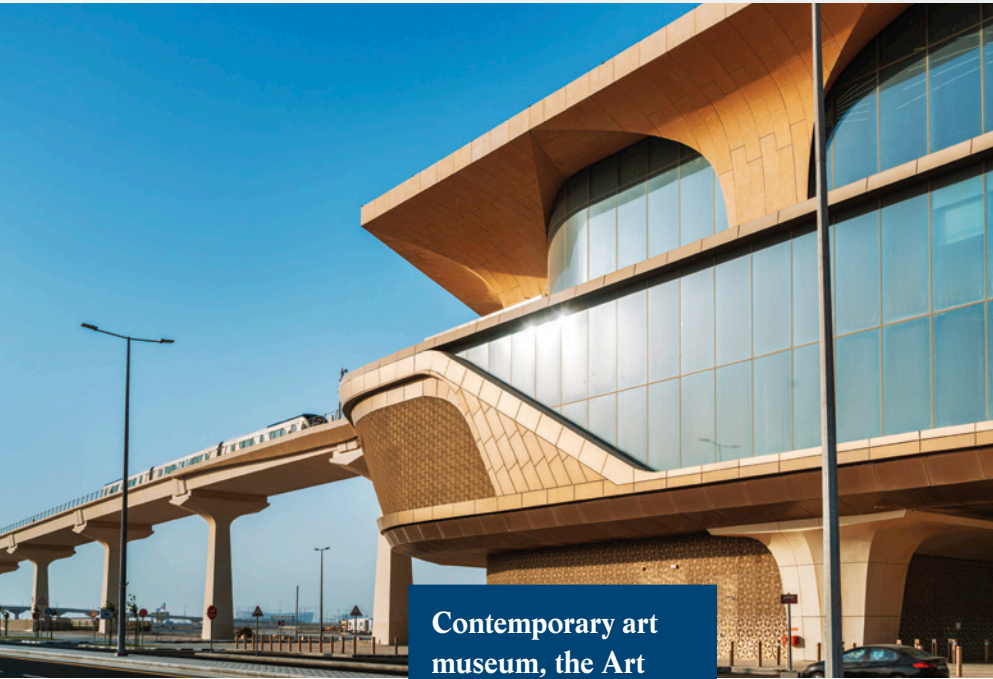


environmental harm, Turner & Townsend's report notes. Public sector organisations are setting the example it says, using digitisation to develop a green building industry.

The destination offering

Doha remains a hotbed of hotel development too, with more than 13,841 rooms across 49 hotel projects currently under construction, according to STR data. Many will be located in new destinations under construction including the West Bay North Beach Project, a landmark development in Doha, featuring more than 12 beaches, plus restaurants, cafés, playgrounds, and sports facilities. It aims to create a unique tourist destination, connecting West Bay to the Corniche waterfront. Others include Al Maha Island, an entertainment hub with attractions such as Lusail Winter Wonderland and a high-end dining district that's home to Zuma and Nammos Beach Club, among →





Contemporary art museum, the Art Mill by Elemental, will be twice the size of the Tate Modern

FROM LEFT: Doha's metro serves 37 stations over 37km; Flags advertising the Expo 2023 event

others; plus Qetaifan Island where Qatar's largest waterpark will open soon. Meryal Waterpark, featuring the world's highest waterslide, is part of the hotly anticipated Rixos Qetaifan Island North Doha.

Qatar's culture sector, integral to its national identity, continues to be enhanced and diversified, with infrastructure plans ranging from museum development and preserving UNESCO heritage sites, to building creative incubators that will host international talent, all of which is likely to leave a legacy that lasts for much longer than a month-long festival of football.

The city is already renowned globally for its Museum of Islamic Art and the National Museum of Qatar, both prominent heritage landmarks that reflect Qatar's rich history and cultural evolution, and several new institutions are planned.

They include the Lusail Museum by Herzog & de Meuron, showcasing Orientalist art; the Qatar Auto Museum by OMA, dedicated to cars; and the Art Mill by Elemental, a museum of modern and contemporary art around twice the size of London's Tate Modern. This trifecta will cement Doha's position as a hub for arts, innovation and cultural exchange.

So too will the capital's flourishing cultural events scene, which grows every year



and includes festivals for food, films, fishing, books, kids, and even beauty pageants for animals. Perhaps the best known is the Doha Cultural Festival held in March, celebrating Qatar's heritage and culture with poetry readings, dance performances, and more.

New on the agenda and a coup for Qatar, is Expo 2023 Doha, a six-month event making history as the first A1 international horticultural exhibition staged in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Developed under QNV 2030, the six-month-long event, which ran until 28 March, 2024 and coincided with COP28 in Dubai in December, was themed 'Green Desert, Better Environment', and aimed to promote sustainable innovations and combat desertification. It was staged at the

1.7 million sqm Al Bidda Park, and three million visitors were anticipated.

In with a sporting chance

Major sports events remain firmly on Qatar's radar and it hopes the World Cup, which proved the Gulf State is capable of staging a huge world-class event, will be a springboard for hosting the biggest sporting event of all – the 2036 Summer Olympics.

Earlier bids for this event have failed, with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) doubting Qatar's capability to host 10,500 athletes across 32 sports along with millions of spectators, but its World Cup success and continued investment in infrastructure may now up its chances.

In the meantime, Doha will continue to notch up other global sports events,

ranging from the opening race of the World Endurance Championship in 2024 and the World Table Tennis Championships in 2025 to the Asian Games in 2030, while the F1 Grand Prix is now an annual fixture.

Of course, its neighbour, Saudi Arabia, is now a major contender for mega sports events too, ramping up the regional competition, but with a World Cup in its pocket, Doha is certainly in the running.

With 'brand' perceptions of the destination enhanced post-event – 35.2 per cent of respondents to the Skift survey said their sentiment towards the country had improved following the football tournament, and 35.4 per cent indicated they were more willing to travel there – spectators won't be in short supply. **BT**

The inside scoop

A changing consumer mindset has led to a new definition of luxury – but what does this mean for luxury travel and tourism companies? We talk to Rob Arrow, director at Cherry Travel, to find out

Do you think the definition of luxury has changed?

It has evolved. Before it was all about thick fluffy towels and robes, gold taps, formal service. Now it is still about the high touch, instant and bespoke service, but in a relaxed, warm and most importantly authentic atmosphere. Information has never been more accessible, experiences of before are now more attainable, and elevated service is the new norm. Luxury today is about being somewhere for the first time, or the first one to immerse yourself in an experience, and with the time to emotionally engage. This is why we are seeing more and more clients looking for trips off-the-beaten-track, whether to Antarctica or a new luxury resort in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea.

Why do you think this is?

I believe as people's lifestyles and desires have changed, so too has the way we engage with luxury especially on the travel front. We are privy to more information, and an emphasis on higher engagement has led to new ideals of indulgence. Those that really want "nu luxury" are seeking more and more the luxury that is time, space, and mindfulness.

What is your personal definition of luxury?

Being able to really immerse myself in an experience, culture or even a brand. As I've lived across different cultures for 12-13 years, my identity has evolved, and my definition of luxury with it. I still love a bespoke approach from a guide, hotel, or experience that moves my emotions somehow. That, to me, is luxury.

What is the difference between luxury and "ultra-luxury"?

Luxury for me is more about the tangible: the high-touch service or support in a hotel or on the ground. Comfortable beds and strong

powerful showers, a sense of security and location when travelling – something many luxury hotel brands and experiences offer today. Ultra-luxury is delivering all of this but in the nu-frontier, taking me to a hard-to-reach destination, where I can experience its true culture but with my needs comfortably met. This balance of straddling two worlds, whether alone or in a small group, is ultra-luxury today.

What are the biggest trends you're seeing in luxury travel?

It's all about personalisation, and truly being able to connect with a brand or destination. Technology, wellness, and mindfulness are playing a bigger role in this aspect of luxury travel, enabling guests to switch off as soon as they arrive, and indulge in experiences curated for their individual peak conditions.

What travel and tourism trends are you noticing in the Middle East?

Traditional destinations and experiences, such as London, Paris, Maldives, although still loved, are making way for further exploration as people grow more courageous and informed about new options. We've seen an increase in bookings for South America, Southern Asia, and even ski in Europe. Many clients will book one week static in Europe or the US, and a second week on a cruise or train travel to see more of the region. Domestic travel, especially in Saudi Arabia, is also on the up.

What do you think truly makes a luxury experience stand out?

It has to be attention to detail – the proactive thought process, and anticipating the needs of the client when immersing themselves in the experience. I want to leave feeling I have not just learned something, but that I'm also emotionally engaged, left with a feeling of

warmth and belonging and thus sharing this with others to then engage too.

What makes a hotel top-notch?

The two key elements are personalisation and recognition. I don't mean as in a loyalty scheme, but in terms of customer service, and inciting my emotional engagement. And of course, nowadays, the accessibility of charging points, good entertainment technology, and a swift arrival and departure experience are very important too. This is where a high-quality app counts for me.

What are your top three tips for planning a stress-free trip?

Don't overdo it – give yourself time and the flexibility to pause or do something you may not have known existed. Do a little research to know what the destination looks like, or be aware of key timings and places prior to a trip. And have a good travel agent (like me!) to take care of all the different elements and plans so you can have peace of mind and on-call support, and free up your own time.

What are three things you would never travel without?

Health vitamins, a universal charger or power bank, and lavender-infused pillow mist.

What trends do you anticipate in the near future of luxury travel?

Sustainability as a core value, tech-driven personalisation, remote and exclusive destinations, hyper-personalised luxury, and culinary adventures. The future of luxury travel will be characterised by a shift towards meaningful, personalised, and sustainable experiences. Capturing the essence of these evolving trends and conveying the stories of transformative journeys will be essential for captivating clients in the dynamic world of luxury travel in the years to come.

ROB ARROW
DIRECTOR OF CHERRY TRAVEL



Cherry Travel is a leading boutique consultancy of travel experts that creates luxury travel experiences for clients worldwide.

The summit of Table Mountain emerged as our plane descended into Cape Town, its rugged features and magnificent cloud-reaching stature a rather daunting introduction to the hike scheduled for the following morning. Capetonians in our cabin remarked on the rarity of such a crisp, clear view of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, which is normally cloaked by the 'tablecloth' – the nickname for the mist and cloud formations that drape over the plateau.

Grateful for the clear weather conditions and free from jetlag – Cape Town is only two hours ahead of the UK – we set our alarms for 5.30am to avoid the heat of the day, and readied our stamina for the summit. There are several hiking routes, but the two-hour Platteklip Gorge trail offers a scenic staircase up the front face of Table Mountain and much of the ascent is in shadow at this early hour. The experience is tremendously meditative, with body and mind laser-focused on the steep climb and surrounding nature, and we were rightfully rewarded once we reached the flat top, 1,085 metres

44



The charms of Cape Town

Catch some winter sun in the South African capital, a hotspot for adventurers, foodies and wine connoisseurs

above sea level, complete with a bird's eye views of the toy-like city and glistening ocean.

Aside from the scenic vista, the national park features more than 1,500 floral species – some of which are endemic to the area – while its crevices are home to fauna such as cute rock hyraxes, small mammals otherwise known as 'dassies'. For an ache-free ride to the bottom of the mountain, the Aerial Cableway boasts a rotating floor offering 360-degree views of the cliffs, city and coastline.

Attractions aplenty

Should you be averse to heights, the cosmopolitan city has countless other adventures on offer, not to mention 300 days of sunshine per year – a particular draw

FROM TOP: Cape Town showing Devil's Peak and Table Mountain; a bird's-eye view of the city

The Platteklip Gorge trail offers a scenic staircase up the front face of Table Mountain

for those fed up with dark and drizzly winters. Options include kayaking down the coastline, soaking up the rays at pristine sandy beaches (some of which are populated by African penguins) or wining and dining your way through the city at remarkably affordable prices.

Another highlight is the lively V&A Waterfront, a 132-hectare marina development brimming with shops, restaurants, and glittering views of the Atlantic Ocean – plus Blue Flag certification thanks to preservation of the marine ecosystem.

The working harbour attracts more than 24 million visitors annually, with open-air concerts, art exhibitions and street food stalls during the summer months (October-April). Save room in your suitcase for purchases at the Watershed, an indoor market featuring bespoke ceramics, textiles and products from more than 150 South African designers.

From the Waterfront, you can also educate yourself on the country's



WORDS HANNAH BRANDLER



sombre history of Apartheid, with a 20-minute ferry departing the Nelson Mandela Gateway for Robben Island. Now a living museum and UNESCO World Heritage Site, Robben Island was a site of exile and imprisonment from the 17th to the 20th centuries, but most notorious

FROM TOP: The V&A Waterfront is the oldest working harbour in the Southern Hemisphere; the winelands are just an hour from the city

for the incarceration of thousands of freedom fighters in its maximum security prison from the mid-1960s until the 1990s. Tours conducted by ex-prisoners include visits to areas such as the house where Pan Africanist Congress leader Robert Sobukwe spent nine years in solitary confinement, the lime quarry where prisoners endured hard labour, and Nelson Mandela's 2x2-metre cell in the B-Section of the prison.

Weekend in the winelands

No visit to Cape Town is complete without a trip to South Africa's famous winelands, located just an hour's drive from the city. We spent our last night in the quaint town of Franschhoek, named 'French Corner' by the Dutch due to the settlement of French Huguenots in the 17th century. Today the valley features rows of verdant vines surrounded by majestic movie-set-like mountains.

To make the most of the offerings, we boarded the double-decker open-air Wine Tram (winetram.co.za), which stops at various estates and gives visitors the opportunity to take part in tastings, tours, strolls and wine-paired lunches – it's advisable to secure reservations at least 24 hours in advance. The tram operates along tracks originally built in 1904 for farmers to transport produce to markets, and was transformed into a swish wine adventure in 2012 after lying dormant for two decades. There are five routes available and if you're feeling brave, then you can manage up to nine wineries in a day. Suitably merry, our experience culminated with sparkling wine in each hand at the 325-year-old Grande Provence Heritage Wine Estate, whose lush gardens double as a beautiful gallery showcasing sculptures by South African artists.

Our trip in the Mother City may have come to an end, but we left prepped for the winter, with the clinking bottles in our suitcases thankfully staying intact on the return flight home. **BT**

WHERE TO STAY

One&Only Cape Town

This luxury hotel offers 133 rooms and suites in the city's marina, with its refurbishment in 2022 involving local designers, artisans and suppliers. Highlights of the property include a lobby with magnificent views of Table Mountain, a wine studio where you can create your own blend, and an island dedicated to spa facilities. See our review at businessstraveller.com/tryed-and-tested. oneandonlyresorts.com



Mont Rochelle, Franschhoek

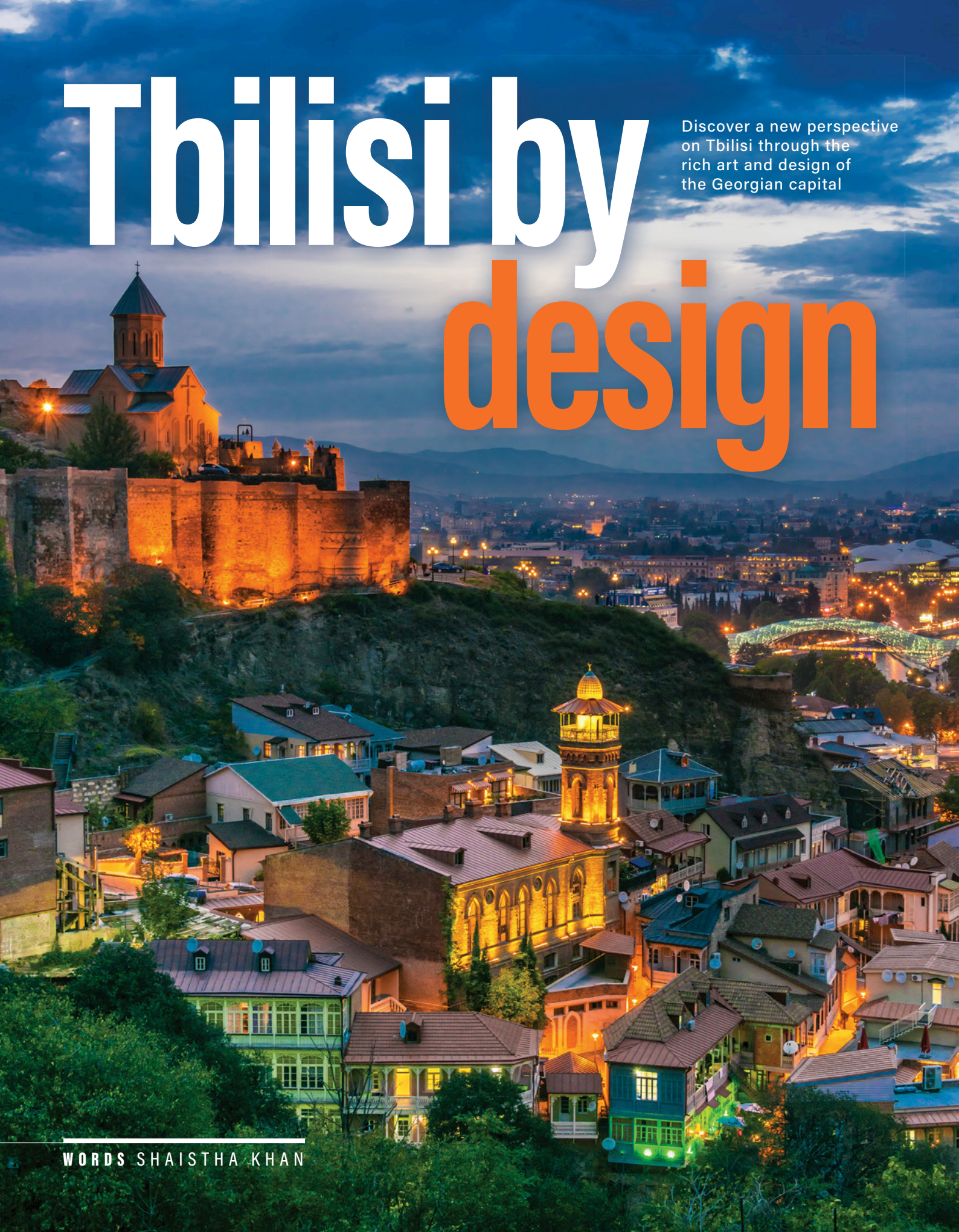
Located at the foot of the Klein Dassenberg Mountain Range, the 26-room hotel and vineyard belonging to the Virgin Limited Edition collection is a picturesque retreat for wine lovers. On-site activities include a tour of the cellars with winemaker, Michael Langenhoven, or a gourmet picnic in the scenic grounds. Larger groups, meanwhile, can book the 740 sqm four-bedroom Manor House villa, complete with two heated swimming pools, a games room and, naturally, an outdoor kitchen. virginlimitededition.com/en/mont-rochelle



ALEXOPT, HENRIQUE NDR MARTINS, KONSTANTIN KALISHKO/GETTY IMAGES

Tbilisi by design

Discover a new perspective on Tbilisi through the rich art and design of the Georgian capital



WORDS SHAISTA KHAN



“Georgians have an eye for beauty,” my guide, Ketevan Akhobazde, tells me on the first day that I arrive in Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia.

Arriving smack in the middle of winter – with overcast skies and constant showers – it was difficult to imagine that this was the same Tbilisi of brightly-coloured rooftops and resplendent chapels that Google had been showing me.

But by the end of the week, and with some help from Ketevan, my eye was trained to see the famed Georgian design aesthetic that I had heard so much about.

Preserving the past, building a future

One could, of course, start with the obvious architectural wonders of the city.

Likened to the Stonehenge of England, the Chronicles of Georgia monument sits atop a hill overlooking the northern district of Tbilisi on one side, and the Tbilisi Sea (an artificial lake reservoir) on the other. The monument features 16 stone pillars, each nearly 35m tall, chronicling the 3,000-year-old history of Georgia and the religious backbone to the country’s social construct, the Christian faith. Personalities from Georgian history – like Shota Rustaveli, the renowned poet, and King Davit IV Aghmashenebeli (David the Builder), known for his long and successful reign – are carved into the lintels or

horizontal bars of the monument. Meanwhile, the columns or lower panels feature biblical scenes like Adam’s solitude in the Garden of Eden and The Last Supper. The sheer size and scale of the pillars, the ornate scenes carved into the columns’ façade, and their depictions of tales of love and lore are Instagram-worthy on a bright day, but make for an equally dramatic setting on a cold, rainy one too.

Alongside preserving history, there’s also a keen desire – especially following the country’s liberation from the Soviet Union in 1991 and the Rose Revolution of 2003 – to build a distinct Georgian identity. Built completely of glass, Tbilisi’s Ministry of Justice building

ABOVE: View of Tbilisi from Narikala Fortress

BOTTOM: Statue of King Vakhtang Gorgasali

OPPOSITE PAGE: Tbilisi, Georgia, has a vibrant arts and cultural scene that’s a dream for lovers of design, architecture, galleries, and more



is meant to demonstrate reforms and transparency in bureaucratic organisations.

Nearby, the wave-shaped Bridge of Peace connects Old Tbilisi to the central district. It symbolises the union between the old, historical area and Tbilisi's aspirations as a hub for tourism and business. One aspect of it is the country's bid to be a part of the European Union, and during the week I was there, Georgians across the city were celebrating having obtained candidate status.

As the sun sets over the Mtkvari river, the 150m-long glass and steel bridge lights up with nearly 50,000 LED lights. Within the same purview, you will spot the conical tube and glass structure of the Music Theatre and Exhibition Hall.

Walk through Tbilisi's neighbourhoods

Owing to its strategic location between Europe and Central Asia, Tbilisi was captured, destroyed, and rebuilt more than a dozen times over a period of 1,500 years. This confluence of cultures brings a distinctive character to Tbilisi, and its real treasure lies in its quaint neighbourhoods.

The Abanotubani district – with its Persian styled balconies and woodwork, sulphur bathhouses, and inhabitants of various Muslim ethnicities – is colloquially known as the Persian Quarters. The Shota Rustaveli Avenue, which houses the Parliament of Georgia and several museums and cultural institutions, is known for its neoclassical architecture. There's also the Bank of Georgia's

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: Ananuri Castle on the Aragvi River in Georgia; Tbilisi old city; Georgian dumplings Khinkali with meat



headquarters, which resemble stacked blocks – evidence of the Soviet era’s brutalist concrete architecture.

Close by, near the Dry Flea Market, you can catch a view of the lively flower market or stroll through a colourful display of artwork by local artists.

A former German neighbourhood, Aghmashenebeli Avenue is a pedestrian area lined with vibrant outdoor cafés, and a smattering of high-end stores and boutiques, somewhat reminiscent of a Parisian life.

At the Meidan Square, step into the Caucasian Carpet Gallery to learn about one of Georgia’s national crafts, kilim, or carpet weaving. Characterised by embroidered animals, ornaments, and names of weavers, here you will find kilims from the Kakheti region in eastern Georgia, as

well as those from across Central Asia. Azerbaijani kilims, for instance, are identified by their prominent use of the deep indigo colour.

The carpet industry is seeing a bit of a revival, with many boutique hotels and hostels purchasing kilims as old as 60 years to bring authentic Georgian style and flair to their establishments.

Housed in a former caravanserai (a resting place for traders along the Silk Route) that dates back to the 1650s, the Tbilisi History Museum takes you through the end of the 4th millennium BC to present-day Tbilisi.

Here you will find archival photographs, artifacts, attire from different times, and scale-model size replicas of communal spaces like the chaikana (tea house) and a traditional Tbilisian house.

After learning of traditional Tbilisian life, head out to actually see the remnants of these buildings. In the Lado Gudiashvili Square, for instance, you will find the Blue House, the former headquarters of the Russian Army. Painted in a bright, resplendent blue, its most prominent features are stained-glass windows, mashrabiya-style corridors, an indoor courtyard that is a mainstay of Moorish architecture, and a European-esque spiral staircase.

Dine in style

Dining out in Tbilisi can be akin to an adventure.


Take for example, Keto and Kote, a World’s 50 Best-listed restaurant, that is housed in an assuming, rickety building. There’s no signage, and one has to walk through a residential alleyway before getting to the entrance. And yet, Ketevan tells me, everyone knows of it.

The name of the restaurant and its location is inspired by Georgia’s first comedy opera – a 1948 story of young lovers Keto and Kote. Inside, you will find the restaurant to be bright and airy with ample sunshine (thanks to its large patio windows) and low-hanging candelabra-style chandeliers.

Also hiding in plain view is Barbarestan, a family-run restaurant that recreated Georgian recipes found in a 19th-century cookbook. The interiors are moody, with velvet fringed lampshades that are evocative of the 1940s, ceiling-to-floor crockery cabinets, and crystal tableware sourced from the flea market.

Ketevan tells me it’s somewhat of a fashion statement to scour for a hodgepodge of vintage relics, lending these establishments an old-world charm.

The Stamba Hotel is no secret, but no less alluring. A former printing press of the communist newspaper, the five-story building has been transformed into a complex featuring a restaurant, library, and co-working space.

You may even stumble upon Tbilisi’s oldest underground bakery, firing up some of the 50 varieties of khachapuri that can be found across Georgia. Lobiani, the Tbilisian variety, for instance, is a flatbread stuffed with mashed kidney beans. Sample it with some freshly squeezed orange juice from the konka tramcars that were in operation during the 1900s, but now converted into street food stalls, and savour the view. 



If you have a few days to spare, head out of the city to the Kakheti region to view the Tsinandali Estate. Once a meeting place for Georgia’s literati, the estate was the property of Georgian prince, diplomat, and poet, Alexander Chavchavadze. The estate now features a memorial house, vineyards, an underground wine cellar, and a café.



GETTING THERE

flydubai operates direct daily flights from Dubai to Tbilisi, starting from Dhs1,300.

RISKY BUSINESS

Business travellers need their wits about them more than ever these days - with strategies in place should the worst happen

Seasoned travellers know it's not a question of if things go wrong, but when. From flight delays to lost luggage, travel is full of unexpected hiccups.

In extreme situations, a missed connection could be the least of your worries. And as travel starts to surge again post-pandemic, so too do the risks. International SOS recorded a 16 per cent increase in security and medical alerts issued in 2023 compared to 2022.

Michael Rogers, chief security analyst at International SOS, says: "The resurgence in global travel comes at a time in which the travel security landscape is increasingly complicated by geopolitical events, natural disasters, emerging diseases, social unrest, and evolving crime dynamics. Today, more than ever, travellers need to remain informed of prevailing risks and mitigation measures."

Risk and security management companies act as both morbid fortune teller and guardian angel. Analysts pore over forecasts and trends to assess existing and emerging risks, and create strategies to mitigate against these threats and enable business travellers to get their jobs done. Should things hit the fan, they are also poised to execute emergency protocols that cover everything from hostage situations to volcano eruptions.

Saskia Veldhuizen, senior security coordinator at international risk management firm Healix, explains: "Our job is different every day. One day we might be providing intelligence reports on political elections, the next day we're conducting full-scale evacuations from Khartoum, or dealing with a kidnapping in Haiti."

BE PREPARED

Forewarned is forearmed when it comes to risk. Experts stress the importance of doing your background research and having situational awareness. Are there any political tensions? Is it monsoon season? Are there cultural or religious dress codes to be observed?

Simple preventative measures, such as making sure your vaccinations are up to date and booking a meet-and-greet service at the airport can go a long way to making sure you don't encounter issues.

Online tools like International SOS's 2024 Interactive Risk Map can help, with a guide to risk assessments across the world on everything from weather events to ongoing conflicts.

The rating is determined by analysing multiple factors from security concerns, such as crime rates and political stability, to medical considerations such as healthcare infrastructure or disease outbreaks.

For the first time ever, the 2024 Risk Map also included an outline of climate change risks as a result of extreme weather events getting, well, more extreme.

In 2023, Bangladesh, India, and Laos all saw record-high temperatures, with Thailand reaching a blistering 45.4°C and China's Xinjiang hitting 52.2°C. Cyclone Freddy displaced half a million people in southern Africa and a sandstorm shut down Beijing. The US had 28 separate billion-dollar (at least) weather and climate-related incidents in 2023, including wildfires, cyclones, and floods.

Veldhuizen agrees that natural disasters are increasingly affecting business travellers: "If you're not aware of the season, you might be going to Florida and two days later you're in a Cat 3 hurricane. Or if a traveller has asthma and they go somewhere with wildfires, the smoke and decreased air quality →

Experts stress the importance of doing your background research



WORDS TAMSIN COCKS

could mean a potential medical issue arising.”

Even if you're not actually in the destination affected, knock-on flight disruptions can mean significant delays and missed meetings.

Climate change is also increasingly being linked to medical concerns, with rising temperatures, for example, likely to increase outbreaks of mosquito-borne diseases such as Zika, dengue fever, or malaria. According to the World Health Organization, there were 249 million cases of malaria in 2022 – up from the pre-pandemic level of 233 million in 2019.

EVERYDAY RISK

Thankfully, most business travellers are likely to be avoiding the most high-risk and extreme situations, but that doesn't mean they are out of harm's way.

Veldhuizen says: “One of the biggest risks for business travellers are just the routine risks that get overlooked. Things like road traffic accidents, stomach illnesses, pickpocketing. Something simple like having your wallet stolen is so widespread that sometimes we forget to use mitigation strategies. But these things can be hard to deal with when you're in an unfamiliar country.

“Again, some of the solutions can also be overlooked, things like: maintain a low profile and avoid sharing personal information. If you're on social media, maybe wait for 24 hours before posting your location.”

There's also what World Travel Protection calls “negative behaviours” around things like gender, race, or religion. An Opinium online survey,

commissioned by the international travel risk management provider, revealed that 57 per cent of business travellers have experienced or witnessed negative behaviours when travelling abroad for work.

According to the report, 20 per cent of travellers had received unwanted attention or been sidelined because of their race or gender – with women reporting this twice as much as men. One in seven (14 per cent) have hidden or seen colleagues hide their sexuality, while ten per cent have refused to travel to countries with anti LGBTQ+ laws.

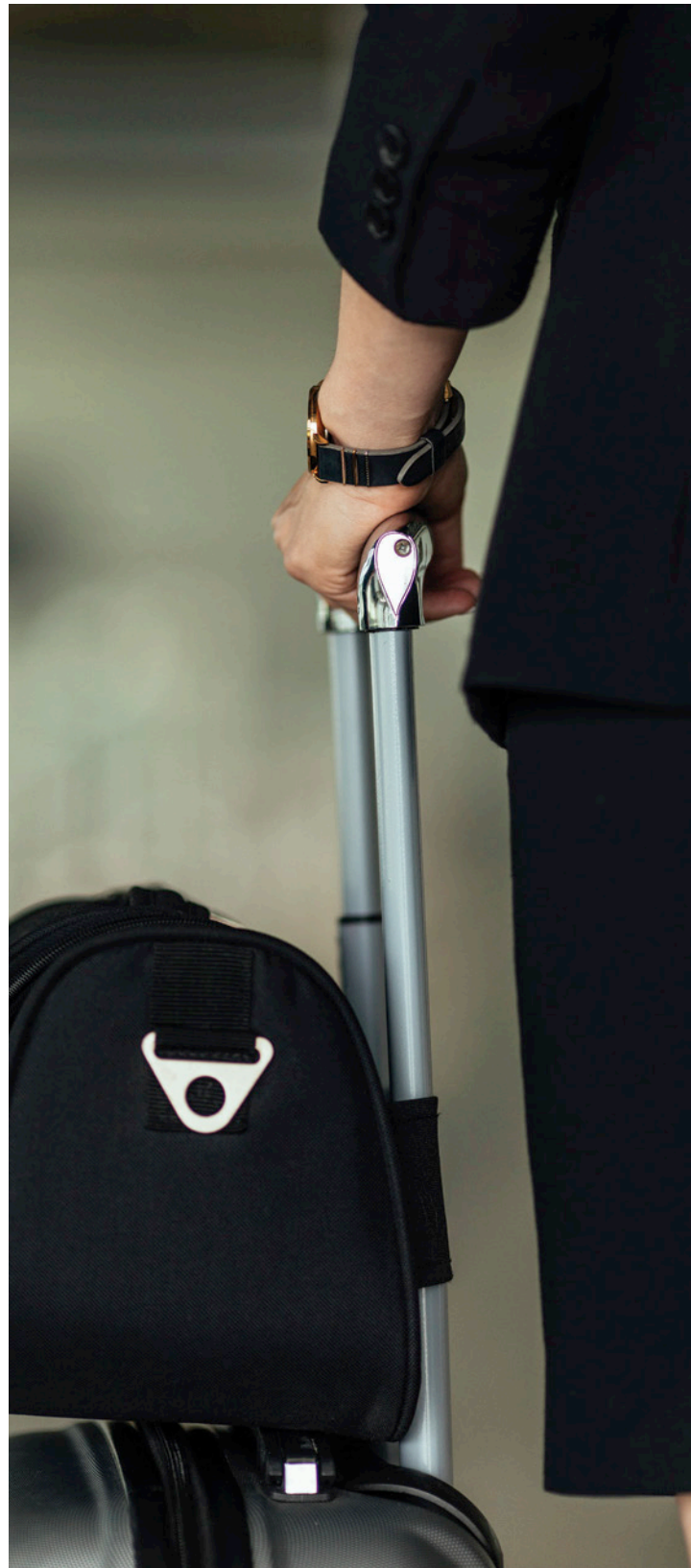
“Witnessing incidences of prejudice and abuse is still too prevalent for business travellers, and when you're in a different country with a different culture it can be difficult to know how to respond in order not to put yourself or your travelling party at risk,” says Kate Fitzpatrick, regional security director, EMEA, at World Travel Protection.

The survey also highlights the need for organisations to understand the individual risk profile of each business traveller, which should consider things like gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, and physical and mental health.

Female travellers are more likely to face sexual harassment, so more advice and strategies in place should be offered. Then there's being aware that some cultures might frown upon physical contact between genders, so shaking hands at a meeting might be better avoided.

Veldhuizen remarks: “The more information a client gives us, the more bespoke advice we can give. For example, perhaps the hotel you've chosen is frequently used by politicians, which might raise your profile unnecessarily or attract

20 per cent of travellers had received unwanted attention because of their race or gender





to avoid connecting to an ‘evil twin’ network. Use a VPN service to encrypt your data and prevent third parties from intercepting it. It’s always a good idea to enable a firewall while using public wifi – and disable your devices from making automatic connections.”

Veldhuizen adds: “Make sure you are downloading from reputable sites, using VPNs and two-factor authentication as well. You might also need to consider whether you should bring your business laptop on a trip – and whether it should get checked for spyware by your IT department when you get back.”

While cyber crime may seem borderless, some countries are better protected than others. According to NordLayer’s Global Remote Work Index, the top five safest countries

protests – is there another hotel you can use? We’ve also got a rating of public transport options and can tell you to avoid a particular bus if it has a poor safety record.”

CYBER ATTACKS

One of the growing threats to business travellers is the risk to cybersecurity. Unsecured public wifi networks are prime stalking grounds for digital highwaymen, and hacker groups such as DarkHotel are known to target high-profile business travellers with sophisticated phishing emails, malware, and botnet automation.

According to NordVPN’s cybersecurity expert Adrianus Warmenhoven, hotel rooms can be one of the most dangerous places of all. He points to “evil twin” wifi connections, where hackers create fake, unprotected wifi hotspots with an unsuspecting name like “Guest Wifi” or “Free Hotel Wifi” to steal private information, while “juice jacking” is where malware is installed on public USB charging ports to steal passwords, credit card information, and other sensitive data.

To avoid these traps, Warmenhoven says: “Ask reception for the exact name and password for the wifi

INTERNATIONAL SOS RISK DESTINATIONS 2024

Most dangerous destinations

South Sudan
Afghanistan
Syria
Libya
Somalia

Lebanon, Palestinian Territories and Russia were also flagged as high concern in December 2023.

Safest destinations

Iceland
Luxembourg
Norway
Switzerland
Denmark

The report also highlighted improvements in access to quality medical care in Bolivia and Côte d’Ivoire, and lower security risks in parts of Nepal.



for cybersecurity are Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, Germany, and Saudi Arabia. (China is 30th, while the UK is 36th.)

A little common sense goes a long way, but ultimately there’s only so much you can do before a professional needs to step in. More and more corporations are seeking professional risk management to protect their travellers – according to Transparency Market Research, the global corporate travel security market is anticipated to grow to US\$15.3 billion over the next seven years.

Companies might wince at the thought of ploughing extra resources into defending against the “what ifs” – but the ultimate cost of not planning ahead could be much higher. **BT**

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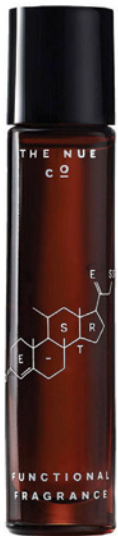


Jerseywear
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54



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A travel exclusive inspired by nature: The Macallan Harmony Collection Green Meadow

The Macallan has announced a collaboration with Stella and Mary McCartney, one that is united by curiosity, respect and admiration for the natural world, for the third edition of The Macallan Harmony Collection. The collection is a limited annual release series of single malts driven by the brand's inherent curiosity and innovative and creative mindset, and it includes the global travel exclusive The Macallan Harmony Collection Green Meadow, which is available for purchase in Dubai International Airport as well as several other airports around the world.

The third release in the Harmony Collection celebrates the lands of Scotland that connect all those who have stood upon them for generations. This partnership with The Macallan also marks the first time Stella and Mary McCartney are working together, combining their creative talents to collaborate on a project that allows them to reminisce and celebrate their memories of Scotland. The McCartney sisters' love of the country goes back decades and their emotional ties with Scotland have never wavered. For them, Scotland is a place of comfort and nostalgia, a homecoming. Their work with The Macallan stems from memories of their Scottish home on the west coast and their time spent at The Macallan Estate, transporting consumers to Scotland's natural beauty. Their creations are inspired by the forests, the sea, the wide-open spaces and the beauty and strength of the River Spey. This collaboration celebrates the shared values of The Macallan and The McCartneys, with love and respect for the natural world at the forefront.

A Global Travel Exclusive: The Macallan Harmony Collection Green Meadow

The Macallan Whisky Mastery Team took inspiration from natural Scottish grasslands to create this distinctive, single malt whisky aged in both sherry seasoned oak and bourbon casks, which is strongly reminiscent of wild meadows, with a vibrant, primrose scented finish.

The Harmony Collection Green Meadow also has a distinctive packaging; both the presentation box and bottle labels are made using discarded meadow cuttings, embracing the re-use of natural materials to create beauty from resources at the end of their lives. Each side of the presentation box also includes a photograph of The Macallan Estate, captured by Mary McCartney and selected by Stella McCartney to feature on the packaging.

WHISKY MAKER'S NOTES

THE MACALLAN HARMONY COLLECTION GREEN MEADOW

ABV: 40.2%

Colour: Spring Morning.

Aroma: Fresh orange and lemon, wild primrose, petrichor, honeydew melon, bluebells.

Palate: Rich lemon, barley sugars, creamy vanilla, almonds, fresh oak

Finish: Sweet, fragrant, long and creamy



**INSPIRED
BY NATURE**
TRAVEL EXCLUSIVE

Crafted without compromise. Please savour The Macallan responsibly.

The MACALLAN
SMC
STELLA & MARY MCCARTNEY

CONSCIOUSLY

From low-impact styles to feel-good formulas, discover labels that are actively driving the slow fashion and clean beauty movement

Drama Mascara
Dhs140 SKIN STORY
skinstory.me



Liposomal
Vitamin B12 + B6
Dhs190
CYMBIOTIKA
cymbiotika.ae



Rejuvenation
Night Balm
Dhs1,710
NOBLE
PANACEA
ounass.ae

Rio Branco Leather
and Suede Sneakers
Dhs537 VEJA
mrporter.com



X Globe Trotter
Cabin Trolley
Dhs8,631
SLOWEAR
slowear.com

COMPILED CAMILLE MACAWILI

CRAFTED



Woven Kaftan
Dhs3,289
LISA MARIE
FERNANDEZ
net-a-porter.com



Hopper Stripes
Pyjama Shirt
Dhs620 TEKLA
goodhoodstore.com

Hopper Stripes
Pyjama Pants
Dhs480 TEKLA
goodhoodstore.com



Rebecca
Leather Slides
Dhs3,350
CHLOÉ
net-a-porter.com



Super Serum
Skin Tint SPF40
Dhs176
ILIA
iliabeauty.com

Complete Starter Kit,
Fragrance-Free
Dhs299
ROOTED REGIMEN
rootedregimen.com



Smooth Operator Face Moisturiser
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the report

**Tried,
Tested,
Tasted.**

FLIGHT

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A330-900neo
Los Angeles-London

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airport luggage
collection services

Delta Air Lines, Delta One suite A330-900neo, LOS ANGELES-LONDON

BACKGROUND Delta launched its Delta One (business class) product in 2017, with suites introduced on the A350-900, followed by the A330-900neo aircraft. On aircraft such as the A330-200/300, and Boeing 767-300/400, you will instead find Delta One seats.

The A330-900neo is configured with 281 seats across three cabins. The flight leaves LAX at 20:25 and arrives into LHR at 14:50.

Delta has invested US\$2.3 billion into improving its facilities at LAX Terminal 3. Features include a dedicated Delta One check-in area, a new lounge, and moving walkways between T3 and the Tom Bradley International Terminal, replacing the bus.

CHECK-IN The glossy Delta One check-in area on Level 2 of T3 has kiosks for bag drop and boarding passes. Customers get access to a private TSA screening lane and direct access to the Delta Sky Club.

THE LOUNGE An expansive 3,350 sqm Delta Sky Club opened in April 2022 on the departures level between T2 and T3, with high-tech facilities, sleek design with floor-to-ceiling windows and locally inspired art.

BOARDING Gate 133 has digital gates that scan your face to permit boarding. A screen showed the availability of seats in each cabin, with upgrade opportunities at the desk (though Delta One was full).

Boarding began at 19:45 for those that needed extra assistance, followed by active duty members of the US military, and then Delta One passengers.



THE PRODUCT There are 29 fully-flat seats, known as 'suites' due to their enclosed design. All have direct aisle access and a sliding door. There are seven rows in a staggered 1-2-1 configuration (centre seats have privacy dividers) while the eighth row has a single window seat. I would avoid the first row and seat 8A as these can be noisy.

Seats come with a soft duvet and pillow crafted from recycled plastic bottles and packaged in a reusable bag. It's a shame that there's no mattress cover, but I still found the fully-flat seat comfortable.

The controls have pre-set options and you can also personalise your posture with various buttons, adjust the lighting, and set a 'do not disturb' button.

The service concluded with Delta's famous dessert cart, and its ice cream sundaes

Storage space is limited, but the side table is a decent size. A tray table swings out from the end of the armrest, which also conceals a remote control and a mirror. There's a 110-volt outlet, two USB ports, and excellent noise-cancelling headphones. The Delta Studio IFE system has more than 500 movies and 80 TV shows to enjoy on the cinema-like 18.5-inch touchscreen.

There is free messaging and two packages for browsing (US\$9.95 for the flight, and US\$69.95 for a monthly plan).

Further amenities include slippers and a beautiful woven amenity kit handcrafted by Mexican company Someone Somewhere containing a bamboo toothbrush and toothpaste, Grown Alchemist hand cream and lip balm, a pen, eye mask, and ear plugs. One downside is that there are only two toilets, so you may have to queue.



FOOD AND DRINK Sparkling wine was served and food orders were taken before take-off, with the table set at 21:00. The three-course dinner is served on one tray. I had a watery lentil soup, accompanied by a green salad plus a rosemary red onion focaccia for starter. The vegetarian baked rigatoni with béchamel sauce and broccolini for the main dish was far tastier.

The service concluded with Delta's famous dessert cart, from which you can build your own ice cream sundae, order a plate of fruit and cheese, or a slice of cake.

Refreshments included Champagne Duval-Leroy Brut Reserve, red and white wines, SweetWater 420 Extra Pale Ale, Miller Lite, a range of spirits, soft drinks, Starbucks coffee, and Thrive Farmers tea.

Breakfast was offered 90 minutes before landing, with the choice between cheddar scrambled eggs with chicken sausage, or the vegetarian courgette and red pepper pizza with kale and walnut salad.

VERDICT Delta One is a private way to travel, conducive to a cosy few hours' sleep plus great IFE facilities should you want to do an all-nighter. *Hannah Brandler*

FLIGHT DURATION

9 hours 33 minutes

CONFIGURATION

1-2-1

SEAT WIDTH

22.5 in/57cm

SEAT PITCH

79-80 in/201-203cm

PRICE

Internet rates for a round-trip Los Angeles-London flight in April start from US\$7,458 (£5,908) in Delta One

CONTACT

delta.com



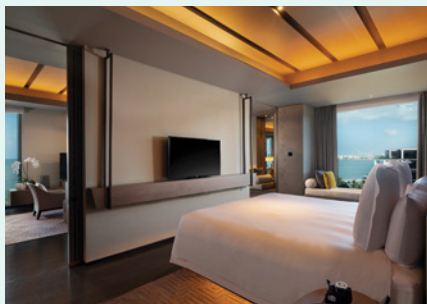


Banyan Tree Dubai

BACKGROUND In the shadow of a giant wheel that has, for the moment at least, stopped turning, a very different sort of revolution took place along the beachfront of Bluewaters Island earlier this year. Banyan Tree, a luxury and earnestly eco-conscious leisure brand took over operations of what used to be Caesars Palace Dubai. The guest-facing renovation project hasn't been dramatic, but it has noticeably targeted key impactful elements.

WHERE IS IT? Bluewaters Island, the man-made peninsula running along one side of Dubai Marina. It has a gleefully peaceful pace to it – a fitting home for Banyan Tree, a brand probably best-known for its footprint on Asian islands. Because it faces away from much of the familiar skyline, and has a private beach combed by churning waves, it feels world away from the usual Dubai stay.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? At just 178 rooms and suites, it feels like a community. There are no labyrinthian unending corridors. Whilst it has inherited its thoroughly modern fit-out from Caesars Palace, the vast glass frontage looks out over organic tones. The blue hues of sea and pool, the serene greens of tree and leaf, and terracotta-white candy stripes adorn the textiles of the main pool complex. It subtly communicates unfussy luxury and warmth.



ROOMS We stayed in a Harmony Oceanfront Master Suite. The 110sqm private space highlights include a sea-facing balcony, and a large bathroom with a walk-in wardrobe and a statement free-standing bath; and the amenities are all environmentally-sensitive. The living room module is decorated in timber hues, and

includes a dining table, sofa and chaise longue. Wifi is free and open to all guests. Plugs and charging ports are conveniently located in desk-adjacent positions throughout the room, and the bed configuration is available in king and twin format.

FOOD AND DRINK

When the previous tenant moved out, they took certain restaurants with them. Still present, however, is the acclaimed Japanese omakase specialist TakaHisa; and Demon Duck from the beautiful mind of multi-Michelin-awarded Alvin Leung. A new restaurant rushing into the vacuum left by Hell's Kitchen is Alizée, named after a trade wind, and appropriately so – it is a breath of fresh air. It serves a Mediterranean menu with a selection of Asian dishes, offering à la carte breakfasts for guests, and a special grill menu for lunch and dinner.

BEST FOR

A mix of business, leisure, and pleasure

DON'T MISS

The slow-roasted duck at Demon Duck

PRICE

Rooms start at around Dhs1,300 (breakfast included), or about Dhs5,455 per night for a Harmony Oceanfront Master Suite

CONTACT

Bluewaters, Dubai.
+971 4 245 2100;
banyantree.com

It feels a world away from the usual Dubai stay, and subtly communicates unfussy luxury

MEETINGS There are three dedicated meeting rooms on site, a 750sqm modern ballroom, well-equipped business centre, and access to an events team.

LEISURE Banyan Tree Dubai's star attraction is undoubtedly the sprawling infinity pool deck – framed by cabanas and with adults-only and kid-friendly options on the side. There's a luxurious spa here, an activity-focused kids' club, fitness centre, wellness facilities, and watersports.

VERIDICT The Banyan Tree feels like it's always been a Banyan Tree: a shaded, tropical escape with roots that tap right into the essence of great hospitality.

Miles Buckeridge



StreetXO

BACKGROUND For the unacquainted, StreetXO is the brainchild of chef Dabiz Muñoz. Renowned for his illustrious Three Michelin Star Madrid establishment, DiverXO, Muñoz has been heralded as the Best Chef in the World by Best Chef Awards for three consecutive years. His newest culinary canvas, situated on the fourth floor of the newly-opened One&Only One Za'abeel, offers a more casual and accessible dining experience compared to its elusive Madrid counterpart.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? Chef Muñoz's creative expression is evident in all aspects, not just with the menu but with the design, the music, and the cocktails too. Take a seat at one of the coveted spots at the kitchen counter, order a spicy margarita (Dhs80), and get ready to witness the culinary magic unfold before your eyes.

THE VENUE The spacious restaurant is a punk-rockers paradise – a riot of chaos and surprise – spread across a single floor. It features a standout bar, adorned with neon lights proclaiming, 'candy is dandy but liquor is quicker', which immediately catches the eye; an impressive and inviting open kitchen; a main dining area featuring suspended tables and whimsical acrobatic sculptures; as well as an outdoor terrace with an urban jungle feel.

FOOD AND DRINKS We shared a selection of starters so we could experience a range of the avant-garde dishes. The sweet and sour Hamachi tiradito (Dhs125) is a



perfect way to start the meal, with thin slices of Hamachi bathed in a passion fruit leche de tigre balanced with a spicy Peruvian mojo. With each bite, the textures, flavours, and heat intensified, making it a truly memorable dish.

The taco de pulpo (Dhs75) is another must-try. From the rich buttery notes of the morita mole to the juicy freshness of the tree tomato gazpacho, the salty kick of Parmesan cheese, and the Robata-grilled octopus, every element worked in perfect harmony. Not all the wacky creations hit the mark, though. The paella with chicken (Dhs150) disappointed with an overpowering richness of black garlic, saffron, and excessive caviar. Instead, order the wonton kebab (Dhs90): a soul-satisfying warm deep-fried lamb

The spacious restaurant is a punk-rockers paradise – a riot of chaos and surprise

wonton served with corn ribs on a bed of mint yoghurt cream and drizzled with sweet and sour sauce that exemplifies Muñoz's creativity and ability to combine flavours. One of the most memorable parts of our StreetXO dining experience was the interaction with the chefs, with the opportunity to meet a different chef with every course. As the night progresses, the fun RNB soundtrack gets louder but never distracts us from the stars of the show: the food and drinks. On that note, we order another cocktail; this time we try the ceviche sour (Dhs95), tequila-based 'liquid ceviche' with red onion and coriander cordial and served with a crispy salmon skin. It may sound fishy, but it's oh-so-delicious.

Just when we thought we couldn't eat any more, our eyes make room for the Fluido dessert (Dhs75). I'd go back solely to eat this again. It was just so good. A warm white chocolate and egg yolk lava cake with Tom Cha ice cream and coconut crumble transported us back to our childhood and polished off the evening in the most magical way.

VERDICT You might not love every single thing you try, but you will love the fun and inimitable dishes, the chefs, the infectious vibe, the enthusiastic service, and one of the best cocktail menus in the city.
Tamara Wright

HOURS

Daily, 6pm to 12am

LOCATION

Level 4, Garden,
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Our guide to... airport luggage collection services

Many business travellers swear by hand luggage when they travel abroad, keen to bypass long check-in queues and waits at the baggage carousel upon arrival in the destination. This proves difficult, however, when it comes to multi-trip itineraries, long-haul hops, or the need for various outfit changes and equipment – not to mention the ever-stricter size and weight regulations for cabin luggage.

To address this, there's a growing number of companies who have partnered with airlines to streamline the process. Services include collecting passengers' luggage from various locations and loading it onto their flight, allowing customers to skip the check-in queue and travel baggage-free to the airport.

AIRPORTR

What does it offer?

Airportr will collect bags of up to 32kg from any home, hotel, or office within its service area and check them in for your flight. Note that this does not include major train stations, but passengers can instead select a nearby address such as a café or hotel. The company can collect bags up to 36 hours before check-in. Airportr also offers an arrival service at select airports, delivering bags from the plane straight to an address, and a door-to-door option for those that want the full package.

Where is it active?

Airportr works with carriers such as American Airlines, Austrian Airlines, British Airways, easyJet, edelweiss, KLM, SWISS, Singapore Airlines, and Virgin Atlantic. Its departures package is on offer at London Gatwick (LGW), London Heathrow (LHR), Vienna (VIE), Zurich (ZRH), and Geneva (GVA). The arrival option is only applicable at Geneva and Zurich airports, and the door-to-door option can only be used by those travelling between London and Geneva with BA, or between Geneva and Zurich with SWISS.

How does it work?

Customers must book a collection slot online with an address that is located within the company's service areas. Passengers must be checked in and have their boarding passes and passport ready for the driver to scan when they arrive. The bags will be sealed, secured and transported to the airport for check-in. Airportr notifies passengers by email and text when the bags are checked in, complete with digital airline bag receipts. Passengers simply collect their bags at the carousel upon landing.

How much does it cost?

The website has a pricing calculator, with the total cost depending on the pick-up location and time slot, number of bags, and flight route. As an example, a BA flight from LHW to ZRH costs £30 for one bag. airportr.com

ALLTHEWAY

What does it offer?

French tech start-up Alltheway transports guests' luggage from Paris hubs to Paris Charles de Gaulle (CDG) airport, provided they are travelling with Air France. There is an additional service for check-in at a customer's chosen private address, though this is more expensive.

Where is it active?

The service is only active in the French capital at the moment, but the website says that the "list of pick-up points is gradually expanding". At the moment, there are baggage check-in kiosks at Accor properties such as Novotel Les Halles, Novotel Paris Centre Tour Eiffel, Mercure Centre Tour Eiffel, Mercure Paris Gare Montparnasse TGV, Pullman Paris Centre



Bercy, Novotel Paris Est, and Pullman Paris La Défense. During major international events, there are also pick-up points at Parc des Expositions Villepinte, Le Bourget, Paris Expo Porte de Versailles, and Palais des Congrès – which would be of particular use to business travellers attending meetings and events.

How does it work?

To book the service, passengers must visit the website at least four hours before the flight departure, enter flight details, and choose a ten-minute slot plus the location for the luggage check-in. Note that you can book this service up to a year in advance of flight departure.

Before meeting the Alltheway agent at the pick-up point, customers must have checked in for their flights and have a boarding pass and valid ID, along with the Alltheway booking confirmation email with a QR code. The agent will assist with weighing luggage, checking in, and labelling the baggage, ensuring it is sealed. The seal is assigned a unique number, which is provided to passengers and allows the company to check for any signs of tampering when your luggage is loaded into the airport's baggage handling system.

The bags are then loaded into a secured and tracked van for transportation to the airport. Travellers will be able to track the progress of their bags throughout their journey using the website. The process is also validated by the French Civil Aviation Authority, and all agents are vetted.

How much does it cost?

The service costs from €25 for the first bag, and €10 per additional bag. This increases to €65 for two bags from a private address for a four-hour delivery window (or €85 for a two-hour delivery window).

Bookings can be cancelled or amended free of charge up to two hours before the drop-off slot. alltheway.io

LUGGAGE FREE

What does it offer?

This door-to-door shipping service transports luggage, including golf clubs, bikes, and ski and snowboard gear, to customers' hotels, cruise ships, and private residences.

Where is it active?

Luggage Free picks up and delivers anywhere in the US, and ships to more than 150 countries around the world. Partners

include private jet firms, hotel groups such as Accor, Aman, and Four Seasons, and travel advisers such as Virtuoso.

How does it work?

Customers must enter details online including a pick-up location (which can be a home or office) to receive a quote and process an order. Once processed, customers will receive detailed instructions on how to package the luggage and affix their own label, and will also receive a link to track the luggage in real time. The company advises choosing a delivery date of one to two business days prior to arrival, and there is no restriction on bag size or weight. Luggage Free also completes all customs documents on guests' behalf.

How much does it cost?

The price depends on the luggage and pick-up/drop-off locations. As an example, a checked bag from Aman New York to Aman Kyoto starts from £214. luggagefree.com

DUBZ

What does it offer?

This at-home luggage check-in service works with airlines including Saudia, Emirates, Kuwait Airways, and flydubai, picking up customers' luggage up to seven hours before their flight from their home or office.

Where is it active?

The service is available for all non-transit passengers travelling from Dubai International airport or Zayed International airport. Note that home check-in is not available for passengers travelling to the US.

How does it work?

Customers must fill an order form on the company's website/app and a DUBZ van and agent will arrive to weigh bags, check passengers' into the flight and provide a boarding pass. Agents will then load the baggage onto the flight. Customers can track the luggage throughout the journey with SMS notifications informing them of its location. Same-day bookings are possible as long as it is done two hours before pick-up time.

The provider also offers another service, delivering your luggage from the carousel to your home or hotel in Dubai within approximately two hours.

How much does it cost?

Rates for pick-up start from Dhs279 (£60) and cover up to four bags. You can also change/cancel your booking for free up to four hours before your scheduled pick-up. The delivery service starts from Dhs249 (£54). dubz.com



DELIVERY

FRAME THE STORY

66



Life on cloud nine

With the results of recent studies showing that 24-25 per cent of consumers name romance as a top motivator for travel, it seems that when business isn't on the books for an upcoming trip, then a romantic escape with loved ones could be on the cards instead. And it turns out that this is especially true among Four Seasons guests, for whom 57 per cent have named romance as a top motivator for travel – and not just during Valentine's season. As a result, the brand is ready to play Cupid with a series of curated experiences that celebrate evergreen romance. From intimate private meals on a secluded rooftop terrace at the Four Seasons Hotel Firenze, or 300m above-ground at the Four Seasons Riyadh's Sky Bridge with its panoramic views – to the chance to have your union blessed by elephants and local monks at the Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle, or experience a personalised couple's temazcal ceremony in the House of Heat at Naviva, A Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita, Mexico – the sky's the limit for moments you won't soon forget.



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