WIT Phocuswright Middle East

April 25, 2025 | Grand Plaza Mövenpick Media City, Dubai

"Next Generation Mixers "The New #gcWrc)"

Programme

8:00 AM - 9:00 AM
Checking In, Coffee & Networking

9:00 AM - 9:10 AM
The Bridge Opener: The Trends Defining 2025

What are the ever-working trends that are driving online travel across the world; from developed to emerging markets? Jumbo eye view, combining Phocuswright intelligence and WIT insights.

Speakers:

Pete Comeau
Managing Director
Phocuswright

Yesh Dave Hoon
Founder
WIT

9:10 AM - 9:40 AM
Next Generation Tech in the era of The New #gcWrc)

It's been called the golden age of product in travel; this age of AI. Indeed, AI power Airbnbs Ny of recommendations, Booking.com's Smart Filters, Expedia's Chatbot, Trivago's Hotel Ai, and so on are unlimited. What a great time to build? Yesh Dave hosts the dilemma – what to build for now and what to build for the future, while managing the current business. And how do you overcome the technical debt and the cultural challenges that come with it? Hear from the leaders who have lived this yet facing the challenges of embracing them (we not in the era of the New #gcWrc).

Moderator:

Yesh Dave Hoon
Founder
WIT

Speakers:

Sanjay Sharma
Chief Technology Officer
Dreamers Hotels Management

Gale Akison
Chief Digital Technology Officer
Dubai Holding Group

Fahad Kamal
Head of AI Digital Excellence
Yum Hospitality

Reto Grenzmann
Director of Partnership, B2B Travel
Trivago

9:40 AM - 9:55 AM
Uncovering The Middle East Travel Market

A critical analysis of the Middle East travel market, and highlights of recent developments in the hospitality and travel industry as well as some key trends on slower customer preference, decision making and the consumer. Including an exclusive study on the UAE and Saudi markets to be released at the event.

Speakers:

Pete Comeau
Managing Director
Phocuswright

Virendra Jain
CEO
Yalsa

9:55 AM - 10:25 AM
Destination Transformation Effect: The Global Local Balance

With the Middle East travel market in full swing, global PTAs are ramping up their presence while homegrown ones are digging deeper into their roots. Do globals and regionals with their scale and resources have the advantage in this age of AI or do homegrown brands with their deep knowledge and local execution rule?

Moderator:

Yesh Dave Hoon
Founder
WIT

Speakers:

Carlo Olejniczak
Vice President & Managing Director EMEA
Expedia Group

Rony Gaon
CEO & Co-founder
Magic

Mazzamaal Ahsanain
Founder
Wheelchair Travel of Same Group

Albert Fernando
CEO & Co-Founder
Travelstrings

10:25 AM - 10:45 AM
Spotlight: Dubai

Dubai Dubai scene is rocket when we say "Next Generation" destination? After all, it's always been seen as a destination that is ready for the future, and now it is. Dubai is the place to be, and we shine a spotlight on our focus city and learn what we its plans as it transforms for the future and a dynamic, changing global scenario.

Interviewee:

Pete Comeau
Managing Director
Phocuswright

Speaker:

Mrs. Hoor Al Hajja
Senior Vice President of International Operations
Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM)

10:45 AM - 11:15 AM
Coffee Break hosted by Travelstrings

11:15 AM - 11:45 AM
Corporate Travel: The New Frontier for Disruption

If there is one sector that's rarely yawned, it's corporate travel and the stakes are high in the Middle East. Who are the players making a play for this billion dollar market and how are they embracing new tech to meet the changing expectations of corporate travellers?

Moderator:

Aurelia Rau
Senior Analyst, Travel
Juniper Research

Speakers:

Suzelle Tsarnist
Head of Corporate Travel Services
Al Futtaim

Alaghani Kalane
Founder
Magic's

Ben Dickerson
Head of Sales
Hub Travel

Aden Shaw
Chief Product Officer, President & Product Head
Wayaround

11:45 AM - 12:00 PM
Coffee Chat: Alaska Into The Future

With responsibility for 30 travel brands across leisure, travel trade, hotel technology, corporate travel and destination management sectors, in more than 25 countries, this executive has a lower overnight perspective than most on the future of travel and tourism. Hear from Alaska's CEO on how they see the future, how these groups sees the future and this industry sitrem 'a unique perspectives on the Next Age.

Interviewee:

Pete Comeau
Managing Director
Phocuswright

Speaker:

John Bevan
CEO
Alaska Travel Group

12:00 PM - 12:15 PM
Aviation, The Next 10 Years

A bird's-eye view of the aviation market and how it will shape up in the Next Generation.

Speaker:

Filip Filipov
Chief Operating Officer
OAG

12:15 PM - 12:45 PM
Aviation, Distribution & Payments: The Next 10 Years

Airlines and their partners share their plans and strategies to tap into the promise of the region. How are they thinking about their distribution, marketing and payment strategies and the dynamic shifts in customer expectations and expansions, as well as digital behaviour?

Moderator:

Filip Filipov
Chief Operating Officer
OAG

Speakers:

Steven Greenway
CEO
Travelport

Serdar Sarkisyan
Chief Product Officer
Travel Technology

Chiara Gazzo
Director, Strategy, Travel Industries
Mastercard

Wadhawan Kashish
Head of Global Business Engineering, EMEA
Sabre

12:45 PM - 1:00 PM
Coffee Chat: Global Vibe On Next Generation Digital Marketing

How will the generational change in technology and traveller behaviour influence the global digital marketing landscape? Hear from a leading global digital marketing agency on how they see it, what they can for the travelers attention and wallet? We get insights from this executive who comes with a bird's eye view of travel and the global digital marketplace.

Interviewee:

Yesh Dave Hoon
Founder
WIT

Speaker:

Rob Torres
Senior Vice President
Expedia Group Media Solutions

1:00 PM - 2:00 PM
Lunch

2:00 PM - 2:05 PM
Open Space

2:05 PM - 2:25 PM
Beyond Payments: Innovation and Expansion Can Drive B2B Travel Growth

Payments are the lifeblood of travel, seamless operations, value security, and global reach. Discover how the global digital payment leader leverages its powerful technology stack, deep industry expertise, and flexible global infrastructure to help travel businesses speed to market, enhance supplier payments, manage risk, and ultimately drive growth. Be part of the conversation from the executive on optimizing operations and unlocking new opportunities into the next generation of travel.

Interviewee:

Pete Comeau
Managing Director
Phocuswright

Speaker:

Tania Pati
Global Head, B2B Travel
Trivago

2:25 PM - 2:45 PM
Spotlight: Global Startup Pitch Showcase

The PhocuswrightWIT Global Startup Pitch was launched in 2022 to surface the most innovative startups in the travel industry. Since then, the pitch has grown into a global search for the best travel and non-travel tech startups from across the world with winners to be selected at the Phocuswright Barcelona conference. This Innovation Showcase is part of our ongoing commitment to supporting the tech community as WIT Barcelona, Phocuswright Startup Stage at HostMIN Startups Summit, and our ecosystem driving global network of leaders in the gleaming edge of innovation.

Moderator:

Pete Comeau
Managing Director
Phocuswright

Speakers:

Jeff Fox
CEO & Co-founder, Bell

Kristina Makeeva
Founder & CEO
Jetcrest

Salman Azam
Founder & CEO
Lovable Companions

2:45 PM - 3:15 PM
Funding The Next Generation

Our investors and dragons talk about the trends they are watching and the bets they are taking, plus a preview of the Global Startup Pitch 2025 by WIT Phocuswright and PitchLetter, whose winners will be decided at Phocuswright Europe in Barcelona, June 10-12.

Moderator:

Pete Comeau
Managing Director
Phocuswright

Speakers:

William Bao Bean
Managing Partner, Lightspeed
Managing Director, Gold Startups

Rebecca Hall
CEO
Karen Ventures

Amin Ismail
Managing Director
Wamda

Lisa Kalinowski
Advisor
Jerome Capital Partners

3:15 PM - 3:40 PM
The Next 10 Years: Tours & Activities

With the massive investments going into attractions, tours and activities in the region, this segment of the market looks promise for all who venture into it. What will the next generation of tours and activities, in destination experiences, look like as it plays out in this new region?

Moderator:

Yesh Dave Hoon
Founder
WIT

Speakers:

Martina Pauen
Regional Manager Middle East
GetYourGuide

Ola Stenal Andersen
Managing Director EMEA
Bookitnow

Samir Mehta
Chief Operating Officer
Desert Adventures Tourism

3:40 PM - 4:10 PM
Coffee Break hosted by Wayaround

4:10 PM - 4:15 PM
Open Space

4:15 PM - 4:35 PM
Coffee Chat: Destination Marketing In The New Age

As social media swings through the region, how are destination marketers thinking about how they should be reaching their audiences and what are the most effective channels and communications? How have experienced? How are they using data and insights to target travellers and delight them? We learn from a specialist in destination marketing.

Interviewee:

Yesh Dave Hoon
Founder
WIT

Speaker:

Julia Winter
Vice President, Marketing & Communications
Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority

4:35 PM - 5:05 PM
The Next 10 Years: Retailing, Direct & Loyalty

Global hotel groups are casting their net wide to catch as many customer types as possible and, in the process, have created multitudes of brands, which they are bringing to the Middle East. With it, they are also bringing their loyalty programme to capture a bigger share of their business. How are they managing the complexities of customer expectations, multiple brands, multiple loyalty programmes and new traveller aspirations and demands, and how will they manage their relationships with intermediaries? What value are they looking from their indirect channels?

Moderator:

L'Ouadrine
Partner & Managing Director, Hospitality & Travel
Insight Out

Speakers:

Barry Neely
Chief Commercial Officer, Premium, Midscale & Economy
Middle East, Africa, Turkey & Asia Pacific, Accor

Jitendra Jain
Vice President, Strategic Loyalty Partnerships & Commercial Intelligence, Europe, Middle East & Africa, Marriott International

Nicolas le Roux
EVP Marketing
Global Hotel Alliance

Hamdan Al Ali
Chief Operating Officer
Ritaba Hotel Management Corporation RJSC

5:05 PM - 5:35 PM
The Next Generation is Social

Social has become the new search, and soon, the new search might be something else. We find out the latest developments in social commerce, what's coming next, and examine them from different perspectives, including that of a digital creator and influencer.

Moderator:

Yesh Dave Hoon
Founder
WIT

Speakers:

Alessio Zeghetti
Global Director, Tourism & Events
TikTok

Rosiana Nicolescu
VP Brand Marketing & Social Media
Wego

Natalie Cracke Tietke
Senior Manager
ABC Studios

Ali Ahmedzai
Digital Creator | Co-founder & CEO
Saleem Travels

5:35 PM
It's A Wrap

6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Closing Cocktails hosted by Wego

Venue:
23 Rooftop Bar at Grand Plaza Mövenpick Media City
23 Floor, D - opposite Innovation Hub
Al Sufouh 2, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Programme correct as time of publishing
All times stated are in Gulf Standard Time (GMT +4)

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