

Experts highlight vital role of innovation at ATM 2024

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Dubai: As passenger numbers in the Middle East are predicted to reach 429 million this year, representing a 5.4pc increase on 2019 figures, a panel of aviation experts convened at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) yesterday to discuss how the market is changing, outlining their predictions for the future of air travel.

The session, 'Looking Skyward for Innovation: How Technology is Disrupting Aviation', was moderated by travel expert Mark Frary and included panellists from Cirium, IATA, AviationXLab, and Riyadh Air.

Research from IATA shows that international passenger traffic increased by 20pc in March 2024 compared with the same month last year.

According to Kashif Khalid, Regional Director, Africa & Middle East, IATA, innovation is essential for enabling the industry to accommodate

this significant growth in air traffic.

Khalid said, “Without innovation, the future will be very challenging. We cannot continue building bigger infrastructure with the level of passengers we anticipate, so we have to look at how we manage passengers and cargo differently through digital solutions and innovation.

On the ground, the industry is working on several innovations, not only to make aviation more sustainable but also to use infrastructure more efficiently. One of these solutions is One ID, where we digitalise tokens for passengers, which enables us to facilitate passengers seamlessly. How we use the traditional infrastructure of airports is going to change dramatically.”

IATA One ID is a digital identity initiative that aims to streamline and enhance passenger travel. The groundbreaking system consolidates a variety of travel documents, such as passports, tickets, and boarding passes, into a single digital token, eliminating the need for multiple physical documents. By providing a unified and efficient identity management solution, IATA One ID enhances security, simplifies check-in processes, and facilitates seamless travel across airports.

During the panel discussion, Kevin Hightower, Vice President of Product, Cirium, stated that data sharing is the key to increasing efficiency in the aviation space and helping the industry accommodate increased demand. Hightower said, “That which is measured can be improved. As we share more data across boundaries, we will start to see the benefits today. Where a decision used to take hours, technologies such as Generative AI enable us to make decisions in seconds.”

Riyadh Air, Saudi’s new national carrier, will launch in 2025 and will be the first digitally native airline, according to Abe Dev, Vice President, Digital and Innovation, Riyadh Air. He said: “Technologies such as AI and cloud computing have matured in the last few years, and so have customer expectations, so we have a unique opportunity to deliver a technology-enabled guest experience that has never been seen before.”

Dev also outlined that Riyadh Air would provide a solid platform for startups to collaborate with the airline, providing further opportunities for innovation. Aviation X Lab, part of Emirates Group, is an aviation-specific incubator based in the UAE, which is already making a

significant impact in this area.

Aviation X Lab brings together industry leaders, startups and experts to collaborate on solving key challenges and driving innovation in the aviation sector. Focusing on sustainability, safety, passenger experience and operational efficiency, Aviation X Lab aims to transform the future of air travel through cutting-edge technologies and collaborative partnerships.

“When we look at the travel experience, we look at the passenger journey holistically and try to map out the various touchpoints where technology and innovation can bring advancements,” said Amna Al Redha, Manager, Aviation X Lab.

She added: “We can’t talk about the future without having a sustainability focus - it’s not about being the fastest and biggest anymore; it’s about which aviation companies are going to operate in a sustainable way.”

Arabian Travel Market concludes on 9 May. ATM 2024 is centred on the theme ‘Empowering Innovation - Transforming Travel through Entrepreneurship’, spotlighting the pivotal role of start-ups and entrepreneurs in shaping the sector’s future. Held in conjunction with Dubai World Trade Centre, ATM 2024’s strategic partners are the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), Destination Partner; Emirates, Official Airline Partner; IHG Hotels & Resorts, Official Hotel Partner; and Al Rais Travel, Official DMC Partner.

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