

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 oustanding 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 **Fditor** 





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