

The UAE and China: shaping global progress



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The UAE and China are building a deep strategic partnership, anchored in trade, investment and shared priorities. High-level diplomatic engagements and strategic agreements across diverse policy areas have driven significant progress towards common goals.

In November 2024, President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and President Xi Jinping of China exchanged congratulations to mark 40 years of diplomatic relations. Over four decades, the ties between the UAE and China have evolved into a cornerstone of both nations' global strategies. Bilateral trade reached a record \$101.8 billion in 2024, according to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, around 800 times the volume when ties were first established in 1984. The UAE is firmly established as China's largest export market in the Middle East, and second-largest trading partner in the region, while China remains the UAE's largest trading partner – a relationship that has only strengthened since the agreement of a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2018.

Investment ties have also deepened. Over 15,000 Chinese firms now operate in the UAE, according to Ministry of Economy figures, while the recent formation of the UAE-China Investment and Economic Cooperation Working Group is designed to pave the way for new areas of cooperation. Major projects under China's Belt and Road Initiative – such as COSCO's terminal at Khalifa Port and the China-UAE Industrial Capacity Zone – position the Emirates as China's Gulf gateway, facilitating seamless logistics and industrial capacity that underpin regional supply chains and global trade routes.

A wealth of recent high-level diplomatic engagements demonstrates the growing depth and scope of UAE-China ties. In May

2024, Sheikh Mohamed paid a two-day visit to Beijing to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping, during which wide-ranging agreements spanning areas including energy, technology and joint Belt and Road investment were announced. That was followed, in September, by Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang's visit to Abu Dhabi, where he met with the UAE President to discuss further efforts to boost the two countries' strategic partnership and attended the China-UAE Business Forum.

In 2025, two visits to the UAE by China's Special Envoy for Middle East Affairs, Zhai Jun, have seen further advances in the relationship. During his January visit, Zhai met with key UAE ministers to discuss strengthening bilateral cooperation, while his April engagement included talks with senior officials where he underscored China's commitment to implementing previously agreed accords and accelerating cooperation in energy, infrastructure and technology. Beyond these headline exchanges, regular diplomatic delegations at all levels have maintained a robust and ongoing dialogue between the two countries.

Financial collaboration is also advancing. Abu Dhabi Global Market's roadshow in Shanghai and Hong Kong attracted more than 75 Chinese financial institutions, spotlighting efforts to deepen regulatory cooperation, develop capital market synergies and expand bilateral investment flows. The follow-up UAE-China summit, held as part of Abu Dhabi Finance Week in December, brought together policymakers and sector

Ties between the UAE and China have evolved into a cornerstone of both nations' global strategies.

experts in a show of further economic and financial cooperation. Underpinning all of this are the people-to-people connections that reinforce

diplomatic and commercial ties. "UAE-China relations are based on mutual trust, mutual respect and common interests," Sheikh Mohamed said during his 2024 visit to Beijing. With those common interests extending across strategically critical areas from energy and infrastructure to digital innovation and green technologies, the partnership is set to shape a new era of mutual development that will deepen economic integration and foster sustainable growth, exemplifying a model of international cooperation in a shifting geopolitical landscape.



Photo : Unsplash

见解 (INSIGHTS)

The UAE's dynamic economy and forward-looking vision are driving a comprehensive strategic partnership with China – one characterised by alignment in key policy areas and a shared commitment to innovation, technology and sustainability. Here, leaders across education, entrepreneurship and real estate highlight the strength of bilateral ties and the factors driving the UAE's global appeal.



“We are enriching the academic experience and strengthening ties between the UAE and China.”

H.H. Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, President & Chairperson, Board of Trustees, American University of Sharjah



“Considering the ties between China and the UAE, it is clear that China is a strategic partner at all levels.”

H.E. Sara Belhaif Al Nuaimi, CEO, Sharjah Entrepreneurship Center (Sheraa)



“People are drawn to the UAE because it is peaceful, safe and governed exceptionally well.”

P.N.C. Menon, Founder, Sobha Group

PRIME HEALTHCARE



“We want everyone who interacts with us to feel like they are part of a family.”

Dr. Jamil Ahmed, Founder and Managing Director, PRIME Healthcare Group

when caring for a patient from a different culture or nationality is establishing a sense of trust. Patients can be confident that when they walk into any of our facilities, they are placing their health in safe hands. Language plays a critical role in building trust as well. That is why we have made it a priority to recruit physicians who can communicate effectively with our diverse patient base in their native language.

Q: What is your final message to readers?

The healthcare sector is rapidly evolving and here in the UAE, we have benefited from tremendous opportunities that have enabled us to grow. Given the remarkable growth and innovation taking place in China, this is an ideal moment for deeper collaboration between the UAE and the Chinese diaspora.

Q: How has your vision for PRIME Healthcare evolved?

We have been in operation for 26 years, since 1999. From the start, our motto—and the very DNA of our organisation—has been: “Personalised care, personally.” This is far more than a tagline. It holds deep meaning for every stakeholder in our ecosystem, whether patients, employees or partners. At the heart of it, we aim to build trust. We want everyone who interacts with us to feel like they are part of a family.

Q: How does your emphasis on personalised care shape the way the group is perceived?

Any relationship that is truly personalised must be long-term. We make a conscious effort to stay connected with our patients through various channels. One key channel is direct follow-up by our nursing staff. This builds continuity and trust.

Q: How are you catering to the Chinese market in the UAE?

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Why invest in the UAE



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UAE 领域投资上

Became a BRICS member Jan 2024

N°1	UAE's trading partner
40+	Free Zones
4.5% ↑	Non-oil GDP growth (2024)
14.6% ↑	Non-oil trade growth (2024)

‘Today, three quarters of our GDP is non-oil and the sector continues to grow in a strong and sustainable fashion.’

Abdulla Bin Touq Al Marri, Minister of Economy

The UAE has emerged as one of the Middle East’s leading investment destinations, underpinned by political and economic stability, world-class infrastructure and a diversified economy. The country’s visionary leadership has set the goal of doubling GDP to AED 3 trillion –

around \$800 billion – by 2030, driven by economic and policy reforms. “The overarching strategy is to position the future sectors and emerging industries as the key pillars of our future economy based on knowledge and innovation,” explains UAE Minister of Economy Abdulla Bin Touq Al Marri.

A well-developed ecosystem supports that goal. The UAE offers more than 40 free zones designed to streamline foreign trade and investment, alongside advanced logistics hubs and trade links that leverage the UAE’s geographic position as a gateway to Asian and African markets. Membership of the BRICS group was confirmed in January 2024, providing a platform for the UAE to further expand its international partnerships.

Key policy reforms aim to facilitate economic diversification and inward investment. That includes the granting of 100% foreign ownership, long-residency programmes to attract and retain global talent and strengthening trademark protections to encourage innovation. The results are already visible. Non-oil GDP grew 4.5% in the first nine months of 2024, outpacing overall GDP growth over the same period. “Today, three quarters of our GDP is non-oil and the sector continues to grow in a strong and sustainable fashion,” says Al Marri.

Foreign trade is on a similar trajectory. According to government figures, non-oil trade grew 14.6% to a record high of \$815 billion in 2024 – with China, the UAE’s largest trading partner, accounting for 11.2% of the total. With each emirate bringing its own signature offering, such as Dubai’s ‘City of the Future’ positioning based on sustainability and innovation, or Sharjah’s reputation as a hub for technology and education, the opportunities on offer are vast. Says Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism: “From an investment perspective, the message is clear: invest now before it is too late.”



H.E. Abdulla Bin Touq Al Marri, Minister of Economy

UAE Minister of Economy Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri discusses the drivers behind the nation’s surging economic growth.

Q: How does the Ministry support the UAE’s economic growth and investor appeal?

Thanks to its geographic location, our country has always been a strategic global hub facilitating trade and logistics between different corners of the world. Today, it serves as a gateway to a vast consumer base exceeding two billion people in Asian and African markets. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) programme, led by the Ministry of Economy, has had a tremendous impact on the unprecedented growth in the UAE’s non-oil trade. We have signed CEPA deals with 15 countries so far. As we pursue more deals, we expect further growth, moving closer to our goal to increase non-oil trade to AED 4 trillion (\$1.1 trillion) by 2031.

Q: What role does the UAE’s partnership with China play in national economic development?

Our two countries share a historical and strategic relationship characterised by continuous development of fruitful cooperation across all fields, particularly in the economy and investment. I attribute this growth to the shared commitment of both leaderships to

advancing constructive cooperation, stimulating investment exchanges and enhancing the growth of Emirati and Chinese companies in both markets. In 2024, memoranda of understanding (MoU) were signed between CCPIT Tianjin and the Abu Dhabi Chamber, Tianjin Pilot Free Trade Zone and JAFZA, and Tianjin Port Group and DP World, further deepening our economic collaboration. All these agreements facilitate trade and improve logistics, unlocking new investment opportunities and underscoring the pivotal role of both public and private sectors in our economic engagement.

Q: How does the UAE encourage Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI)?

The Chinese business community is a key economic partner of the UAE’s business sector. Today there are more than 15,000 business licences fully or partially owned by Chinese companies or individuals. Their investments in the UAE economy total \$6 billion, primarily in the retail, financial services, real estate and construction sectors. We are working in cooperation with our partners in the Chinese government to broaden collaboration in areas of shared interest, such as the new economy, entrepreneurship, tourism, aviation and logistics. We are also working to enhance dialogue between the business communities of the UAE and China, alongside establishing frameworks for the advancement of SMEs in both markets. The opportunities for economic collaboration between our two countries keep growing as the UAE continues to enhance its business environment and economic openness through progressive policies and global partnerships.

Q: How are you exploring cooperation in green investments?

The UAE’s growing investments in green and circular economies are creating more opportunities for collaboration. The latest partnership in this regard is the MoU between Masdar and China’s Silk Road Fund to explore potential co-investment opportunities in renewable energy projects in Belt and Road Initiative countries, primarily in the developing world and Global South.

UAE’s leading voices

UAE leaders share how innovation, research, and global partnerships — including fast-growing ties with China — are driving growth and opening new doors for international investors.

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF SHARJAH



“We are ensuring that AUS remains a leader in global academic and research excellence.”

H.H. Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, President & Chairperson, Board of Trustees, American University of Sharjah

President of the American University of Sharjah (AUS) Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan Al Qasimi highlights how research, AI, and partnerships with China are shaping the university’s global profile.

Ranked among the top ten Arab universities for over a decade, AUS has become a cornerstone of the Emirate’s innovation economy under the leadership of Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan Al Qasimi. “Education is at the heart of Sharjah’s progress,” she says. “AUS is not only an institution of higher learning but also a catalyst for research-driven solutions that address global challenges.”

This international focus extends to fostering academic part-

nerships that amplify AUS’s global impact. “Our collaborations with Chinese institutions are testament to this vision,” Sheikha Bodour says. The University has signed agreements with Tianjin’s leading institutions to promote joint curricula, exchange programmes and collaborative academic research, and launched a trilateral innovation partnership with the Shenzhen Institute of Advanced Technology and the Sharjah Research, Technology and Innovation Park (SRTI Park), which Sheikha Bodour also chairs. “By strengthening ties with institutions in China and beyond, we are ensuring that AUS remains a leader in global academic and research excellence,” she adds.

These links span high-impact sectors including artificial intelligence, robotics, biotech and smart infrastructure, aligning with Sharjah’s positioning as a regional hub for technology, research and innovation. Sheikha Bodour’s leadership roles within SRTI Park and Sheraa, the Sharjah Entrepreneurship Center, have facilitated an integrated approach, which also includes AUS’s newly launched AI Hub. The result is an ecosystem that encourages collaboration between academia, industry and government, provides greater market and investor access and enables startups to scale effectively. “Together, these initiatives are shaping a knowledge-based economy, attracting investment, and positioning Sharjah as a hub for innovation,” Sheikha Bodour says.

DUBAI DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE



“We are happy to see the involvement and presence of the Chinese in different sectors.”

H.E. Abdulrahman Saleh Al Saleh, Director General, Dubai Department of Finance

Dubai’s Department of Finance plays a central role in advancing sustainable growth, economic diversification and investor confidence across one of the world’s fastest-evolving economies.

As Director-General of Dubai’s Department of Finance, Abdulrahman Saleh Al Saleh oversees the financial framework behind one of the region’s most diversified economies. Rising to the long-term goal of moving beyond oil, Dubai’s growth model is built on a multi-sector strategy based on sound fiscal management and strategic public investment. “To build a growing economy and establish it as a hub, different sectors must complement each other,” Al Saleh says.

With infrastructure development as a central pillar of that strategy, the Department serves as the financial engine for flagship projects like Dubai Airport and Jebel Ali Port, ensuring budgets match national priorities such as the D33 Economic Agenda. “We always support the plans for Dubai’s growth,” Al Saleh says.

Chinese engagement has become a key element of those plans. Al Saleh highlights how leading Chinese banks already have a significant presence in the emirate, including in the retail sector through hubs like Dragon Mart – one of the largest trading centres for Chinese products outside mainland China – and through Dubai’s range of free zones that facilitate the involvement of Chinese businesses in industries from finance to logistics. The specialised Dubai International Financial Centre, for example, is home to leading global institutions and an innovation hub that hosts over 1,200 growth-stage firms. “We are happy to see the involvement and presence of the Chinese in different sectors,” Al Saleh says.

High-level delegations to Shenzhen have also expanded cooperation with Chinese business leaders, particularly in FinTech. This outreach is helping to shape plans including the Cashless Dubai initiative, which aims for 90% of transactions to be digital by 2026. “We have to learn from the experiences of other countries, with China being on top in this space,” says Al Saleh.

DUBAI FUTURE FOUNDATION



“China and the UAE are investing in creating the most fertile ecosystems for talent.”

H.E. Khalfan Belhoul, CEO, Dubai Future Foundation

Dubai Future Foundation CEO Khalfan Belhoul outlines how foresight, innovation and partnerships with China are shaping Dubai’s position as a global innovation hub and ambitions for the future.

Dubai Future Foundation (DFF) sits at the heart of Dubai’s positioning as the City of the Future. Through collaboration with both public and private sector partners, DFF is designed to foster forward-thinking across multiple sectors. “Our leaders had the vision, 10 years ago, for an entity that owns the future foresight and pushes Dubai to be 10 years ahead,” explains CEO Khalfan Belhoul.

DFF operates as both a think tank and implementation arm, combining research, testing and policy development to help

shape Dubai’s economic trajectory. Key platforms include the Museum of the Future, which attracts global visitors with its experiential vision of what lies ahead, and the Dubai Future Forum – held at the Museum – which has become one of the largest gatherings of futurists in the world. A core pillar is DFF’s Sandbox Project, a proving ground where startups and industry leaders work with government to fast-track pilot programmes across a diverse array of sectors. “The Sandbox Project promotes the city as an agile testbed for the world,” says Belhoul. “Whether it’s autonomous mobility, biotech, or smart infrastructure, we provide innovators with support in areas from regulation to funding.”

China has become an increasingly important partner in DFF’s work. A 2024 memorandum of understanding with China’s National Innovation Center par Excellence paves the way for knowledge transfer between the two organisations and collaboration in innovation and tech adoption, while joint R&D institutes and centres of excellence are on the agenda, aiming to attract and support innovators. “What excites me is the like-mindedness of where the two countries are heading,” says Belhoul. “Human capital is the most important asset in focusing on the future. China and the UAE are investing in creating the most fertile ecosystems for talent to thrive.”

INVEST IN SHARJAH



H.E. Mohamed Juma Al Musharrakh, CEO, Sharjah FDI Office (Invest in Sharjah)

Headed by CEO Mohamed Al Musharrakh, Invest in Sharjah is leading the city’s transformation into a global investment hub. “Last year, we successfully attracted \$2.75 billion in FDI, and in 2025, we are striving to double this figure,” he states. The agency supports investors via the Saeed Centre – its one-stop shop – across seven specialised free zones, with strong activity in manufacturing, ICT and agriculture.

The agency is also gaining global recognition for digital innovation. “One of our landmark achievements was the launch of the world’s first AI trade licence, issued in under five minutes,” notes Al Musharrakh. Developed alongside Microsoft and the Sharjah Publishing City Free Zone, “this initiative represents a significant step in enhancing business efficiency,” he adds.

China, in particular, is a strategic priority for the agency. “Currently, more than 1,200 Chinese companies are registered with us, and we aim to double this number,” Al Musharrakh says. Invest in Sharjah promotes opportunities through roadshows, UAE–China CEPA engagement, and an active partnership with Shanghai-based Pan Asia Capital. With advanced infrastructure, federal

alignment and sectoral diversity, Invest in Sharjah offers clients speed, scale and long-term potential.



www.investinsharjah.ae

Abu Dhabi’s unique appeal



Photo: NCT&H

The National Corporation for Tourism & Hotels (NCT&H) was established to promote the UAE in general—and Abu Dhabi in particular—as an international tourist destination. It has four divisions—hotels, catering services, transport and retail—each led by a skilled management team, with the aim of providing travellers with an extraordinary experience in this asset-rich region.

The market for luxury travel in the UAE is growing, especially in Abu Dhabi, a city known for its high-end hotels and for the warmth of its welcome to visitors. While Dubai is a dynamic, fast-paced megacity, Abu Dhabi provides a more relaxed, culturally rich experience rooted in tradition—its focus on preserving its unique identity and emphasising memory-making opportunities grounded in nature and heritage. With the global market for luxury tourism and hospitality expected to reach US\$391 billion by 2028, up from US\$239 billion in 2023, the burgeoning appetite for high-end experiences is helping to shape the future of travel and tourism in the UAE.

Abu Dhabi has long been a magnet for affluent travellers drawn to its blend of traditional Arabian heritage and sophisticated contemporary infrastructure, including world-class hotels, Michelin-starred restaurants and exclusive ad-

NCT&H has been proactive in its efforts to attract more visitors from China.

ventures. Its culture is shaped by diverse landscapes: the sea, the desert and the mountains. NCT&H properties reflect these elements—Al Wathba in the desert, Saadiyat by the sea and Al Ain near the mountains. Each highlights a distinct aspect of UAE tradition while offering a cohesive experience that embodies the UAE’s cultural DNA. The Emirate’s emphasis on privacy, security and exclusivity has traditionally appealed to high-net-worth individuals and celebrities, but Abu Dhabi’s investment in sustainable tourism is also drawing luxury travellers seeking authentic and responsible experiences.

Chinese tourists and business travel-

lers are an increasingly important market. NCT&H has been proactive in its efforts to attract more visitors from China, aligning closely with the UAE’s national carrier and tourism departments, investing in Mandarin-language content and staff and embracing the nation’s culture and cuisine. The integration of Asian principles into NCT&H properties has further enhanced their appeal, attracting both Chinese and global travellers who use Abu Dhabi as a hub. Chinese investors are also seeing potential in the region: NCT&H’s latest hotel was designed, built and furnished by Chinese partners. The Corporation’s extensive land bank offers further opportunities for collaboration on resorts that blend Emirati and Chinese cultures, combining the strengths of both heritages.



H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak
Chairman, Department of Culture and Tourism, Abu Dhabi

Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman, Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism, discusses deepening ties with China.

Q: How does the UAE’s approach to tourism reflect its vision to foster connections with China?

For China, the UAE is not merely seen as an economic, cultural or political partner; it is regarded as an essential partner in global growth, contributing across all sectors and touchpoints. The relationship between President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and President Xi Jinping of China is deeply rooted in a sense of family. This bond is reflected in the numerous high-level visits, both by UAE leadership to China and by Chinese leadership to Abu Dhabi and the UAE. We have meticulously designed our tourism infrastructure to cater not only to Chinese tourists but also to key source markets worldwide. Our goal is to provide tailored experiences that meet the specific needs of our visitors. We maintain a long-term perspective on China, both as an economic power and a key tourism market. Much of our infrastructure planning is informed by insights gathered through surveys and partnerships in China. We aim to position Abu Dhabi as a home away from home.

Q: What sets Abu Dhabi apart from other emirates?

We are deeply rooted in our values, traditions and heritage. These are not just aspects of our identity; they are principles we share with the broader Abu Dhabi community. From a business perspective, one of the key points is the diverse opportunities emerging across various sectors, which continue to grow daily. The consistent year-on-year growth in development sales is another compelling factor, as is the rise in recurring revenue streams. These trends, com-

bined with strong ratings from agencies like Moody’s, highlight the trust and stability embedded in the market. When you add Abu Dhabi’s robust soft infrastructure – such as the Abu Dhabi Global Market and fiscal policies designed to safeguard investments – it becomes clear that this is an attractive and secure investment destination. Looking at Abu Dhabi and the UAE on a larger scale, the diversification beyond oil is not simply for the sake of diversification. It is a deliberate focus on high-growth, future-ready sectors that benefit not just the UAE but the global economy. The UAE’s investments over the past 24 months – not just the last five years – demonstrate a clear vision and commitment to long-term growth and innovation.

Q: What opportunities would you highlight to Chinese investors and businesses?

I would start with real estate, as the opportunities there are extensive. Beyond real estate, however, logistics stands out, largely due to our strategic global positioning. Healthcare and food security are also a major focus.

What sets Abu Dhabi apart is our forward-thinking approach to renewable energy. We prioritised this long before it became a global trend. Since then, we have made significant investments in wind and solar energy worldwide, with tangible benefits here in Abu Dhabi.

We are also pioneering in cutting-edge areas like autonomous infrastructure. Collaborating with our Chinese partners, we are exploring innovations such as autonomous vehicles. From an investment perspective, the message is clear: invest now before it is too late.



Photo: Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi

UAE’s industry voices

KAIZEN PAINT MIDDLE EAST (KPME)

Kaizen Paint Middle East, one of the region’s leading paint manufacturers, is built on its reputation for quality. “Paint, especially in automotive, is about aesthetics – there is no room for imperfection,” says CEO and Founder Ameer Hamza Hasan. “That commitment to perfection defines us and is the DNA of the company.”

Composed of five companies, the Group continues to expand, making strategic acquisitions to enter new markets while also strengthening internal systems and integrating AI. But even as it grows and consolidates, Kaizen’s central ethos remains the same. “For us, paint is a vehicle to add even a small, infinitesimal value to people’s lives. When a room is well-painted, it feels better,” explains Hasan. “Transforming a dull space into something finished and beautiful – that is the goal.”



Ameer Hamza Hasan
Group CEO,
Kaizen Paint Middle East



STORM SWIMMING ACADEMY

The UAE’s Falcon Economy—introduced at the World Economic Forum—is a strategic model of resilience and innovation, making Abu Dhabi an ideal destination for forward-thinking Chinese investors. Storm Academy has aligned closely with the UAE’s National Sports Strategy 2031, becoming a preferred partner for government-led athletic development. “Our expansion into sustainability through PRJCT Abu Dhabi, launched during the UAE’s Year of Sustainability, underscores our commitment to national priorities,” says Founder William Walker. With 2025 declared the Year of Community, Storm’s focus remains on embedding impact and inclusivity across all their programmes. “In the UAE, long-term success isn’t just about presenting great ideas—it’s about aligning with the national vision, building trust, and contributing meaningfully to the future,” Walker adds.



William Walker,
Founder & CEO,
Storm Swimming Academy



storm-academy.com

“In the UAE, long-term success isn’t just about presenting great ideas—it’s about aligning with the national vision.”

JANNAH HOTELS & RESORTS



Ossama Charrouf,
Corporate Director of Commercial and Development,
Jannah Hotels & Resorts

Jannah Hotels & Resorts has earned its trusted reputation on a clear premise. “Our focus remains on quality rather than quantity,” says Ossama Charrouf, Corporate Director of Commercial and Development. The company has built a strong presence in UAE hospitality by prioritising superior furnishings and service to ensure guest comfort. A centralised commercial model underpins consistency and

efficiency across its properties.

Building on this foundation, Jannah is now undertaking a strategic programme of renovation and expansion. Three existing hotels will be refreshed, and the group has just launched its sixth property, the 230-key Jannah Executive Hotel Apartments in Abu Dhabi. Further launches in the UAE and Saudi Arabia are planned.

Recently recognised as the World’s Leading Luxury Halal Hotel Brand, Jannah’s targeted growth is matched by strong international engagement. Close partnerships with Chinese tour operators have brought a steady stream of guests – a strength the group is keen to build on. “We remain committed to expanding our reach and ensuring Jannah Hotels remains a trusted name,” says Charrouf.

RAS AL KHAIMAH TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (RAKTDA)



Raki Phillips,
CEO, Ras Al Khaimah
Tourism Development
Authority (RAKTDA)

Q: What is your vision for RAKTDA?

Tourism makes up 12% of the UAE’s GDP. A focus on tourism helps improve liveability and opportunities. We are blessed with natural assets like Jebel Jais, the highest mountain in the UAE, 64 kilometres of white sand beaches, and the Suwaidi Pearl Farm. There are great opportunities here. Our vision is to be one of the fastest-growing tourism destinations globally,

with 3.5 million tourists annually by the end of the decade.

Q: What collaborations do you see with China?

Our connection dates back centuries. RAK signed a strategic partnership agreement with Guangdong Province, and His Highness’ recent trips to China show the importance of that partnership. For us, it is a relationship that we are looking to expand. In 2024, China became one of our top 10 markets, and we have 10% growth year-on-year in our visitor numbers from China.

Q: How do you want RAK to be perceived globally?

RAK is extremely safe. Very few countries can offer that. It is also a place where every nationality can work and thrive together. You are safe here as an individual and as an investor.

Breaking new ground in UAE property



Photo: Reportage Group



Andrea Nucera
Group Managing Director,
Reportage Group

Reportage Group is one of the largest private developers in the UAE, focused on innovative, modern and affordable housing solutions. With a strong track record of delivering robust returns for investors, the Group's unique market approach is fueling its expansion across the Middle East and beyond.

For over 10 years, Reportage Group has been a transformative

force in the UAE property market, guided by a singular vision: "Our focus is on creating opportunities for our investors, ensuring their returns exceed market expectations, and building an ecosystem in which we can thrive," explains Andrea Nucera, CEO and managing director of Reportage Group.

The Group's innovative approach centres on developing eye-catching properties with premium finishes at mid-market prices. This is coupled with disruptive marketing strategies, embodied by the groundbreaking 'buy one, get one free' offer used to unveil the company's first one-bedroom villa townhouses in Dubai. "Operating in the middle and upper market segments with premium finishes provides resilience against market corrections," Nucera continues. "Investing with us delivers substantial value."

That confidence is borne out in the Group's results. Sales grew by more than 50% in 2024, topping \$1.5 billion, with an additional \$500 million recorded in the first 45

Sales grew by more than 50% in 2024, topping \$1.5 billion.

days of 2025 alone. "We anticipate breaking through \$2 billion in sales this year, with none of our land under mortgage and without relying on bank loans," says Nucera, underlining the firm's robust financial position.

With a host of projects in progress – including three in Abu Dhabi slated for completion in 2026, a luxury development of apartments and villas in Al Raha Beach, and seven in the flagship sustainable urban community Masdar City – the firm offers significant opportunities for outside partners. On this topic, Nucera states: "We have many Chinese clients investing locally rather than through direct investments. China is a vast market, and we're keen to collaborate with interested investors."

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Building on firm foundations

Stevin Rock is owned by the government of Ras Al Khaimah. With a yearly turnover exceeding \$500 million and employing almost 4,000 workers, it operates one of the largest, safest and most modern quarries in the region, delivering the highest levels of quality while committing significant resources to environmental control measures. Naser Al Bustami has been CEO for the past 20 years. As the UAE and China celebrate 40 years of bilateral ties, Bustami explains why Ras Al Khaimah is an ideal destination for Chinese investors seeking strategic industry partnerships and expands on his vision for the company's growth through innovation.



Interview
Dr. Naser Al Bustami
Board Director & CEO,
Stevin Rock

Q: How have the company's goals evolved over the years?
Stevin Rock started in 1975 as a small quarry. Today, the market for concessions in the UAE and surrounding countries is around 200 million tonnes. Our target is to capture 50% of the regional market, which we hope to reach in the next three to five years, while looking for new markets.

Q: How is Stevin Rock forging closer connections with China?
The majority of the engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) firms in the UAE are Chinese. These companies have the capability, volume, knowledge and infrastructure to execute huge projects. I want to make sure Chinese companies are already acquainted with Stevin Rock because it would give us an advantage when they are asked to work with local suppliers.

Q: What attracts Chinese investors to the UAE?
Trade between the two countries is expected to exceed \$200 billion by 2030. Chinese investors are attracted to investing in real estate in Du-

‘Our target is to capture 50% of the regional market.’

Dr. Naser Al Bustami
Board Director & CEO,
Stevin Rock

for Bangladesh Airport with Cemcoa, a Hong-Kong-based company, and Korean ready-mix concrete supplier JSL. It is a good model of how three or four companies can collaborate and execute an important job. Dubai's planned \$35 billion Al Maktoum International Airport will need a reliable ready-mix cement and aggregate supplier to build the runway and infrastructure for the airport.

Q: How does Stevin Rock harness innovation?
As part of our sustainability drive, we have found a way of making beach sand out of quarried or mined rock to replace dredged sand from the sea, offering an improved aesthetic solution that preserves marine life. We supply this to the new Ras Al Khaimah's Wynn Casino and multiple five-star hotels in Dubai. In addition, green concrete is a huge topic globally. We are working with Ireland's Ecom on creating a replacement for cement with a special binder using limestone fines.

bai, Abu Dhabi and Ras Al Khaimah. The relaxation of visa requirements allows Chinese nationals to come to the UAE as if they are travelling from Shanghai to Beijing, which makes it more appealing. There is a strong educational exchange program, and currently, the Chinese language program is being taught in all UAE schools.

Q: What are your current priority projects?
We have just finished a project

The global investment gateway



Photo: Sharjah Airport International Free Zone (SAIF)



H.E. Saud Salim Al Mazrouei
Director, Sharjah Airport
International Free Zone (SAIF)

Occupying a strategic location and benefiting from modern, purpose-built infrastructure, Sharjah Airport International Free Zone (SAIF Zone) offers unparalleled mixed-use business and warehousing space with easy access to sea, land, and air transport links. SAIF Zone's state-of-the-art facilities for manufacturing, assembling, and packaging—together with visa, customs, financial, and immigration services that accommodate investors across diverse industries—have already made it a magnet for around 8,000 organisations, representing the

commercial, light industrial, and service sectors.
As such, SAIF Zone is the ultimate destination for entrepreneurs aiming to grow in the Middle East. “We prioritise the happiness of our customers and their agility in doing business—if they need help to expand their businesses, we are there to support them,” explains Director Saud Salim Al Mazrouei. “We ensure we are always aligned to solve any problems; we understand what investors want and provide for them within the free zone.”
One of the zone's main goals is to ensure that customers can focus their resources on growing and operating their businesses without being hindered by red tape. “We consider our investors as partners,” the director says. “We want to develop harmony among the industries to allow more synergy between them, creating advantages, minimising risks, and attracting more projects within the region.”
As SAIF Zone's expansion continues, the Far East is expected to become an increasingly important market. The agency is

SAIF Zone is the ultimate destination for entrepreneurs aiming to grow in the Middle East.

working with its government counterparts in China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, exploring different ways to support businesses by providing a platform to access the Middle Eastern and African markets. “We see significant potential and opportunity here,” says Al Mazrouei, “and are targeting industries that will complement and add value to our investors.” Naturally, innovation goes hand in hand with new growth. “We are aligning an AI strategy with new innovations while maintaining the importance of the human element in our relationship with clients,” he adds. “We are excited about what comes next.”



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Powering Dubai’s public transport

With Dubai’s status as one of the world’s fastest-growing cities, the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) plays a crucial role in facilitating economic development. “The public transport network in Dubai serves as the backbone of mobility for residents and visitors alike,” Director General Mattar Al Tayer said, underscoring the authority’s work in ensuring seamless connectivity in a dynamic global business and travel hub.

Established by the government in 2005, the RTA’s strategy spans a range of pillars designed to improve safety, reliability, sustainability and traveller comfort. Significant investment has taken place across the city’s transport infrastructure under the authority’s remit, including the development and expansion of the Dubai Metro system – the region’s first rapid transit train network – the adoption of sustainable public transport vehicles, prioritisation of active transport and the imminent introduction of new technologies such as self-driving and aerial taxis. These efforts are central to advancing Dubai’s long-term mobility goals and reflect the government’s determination to ensure infrastructure is fit for both present and future demand.

With the city’s daytime population forecast to increase by 55% by 2040, continued innovation, investment and collaboration are key to maintaining Dubai’s status as a transportation pioneer and model for global peer cities. In this interview, Al Tayer outlines the evolution of RTA’s transport strategy under his leadership, the authority’s contribution to economic growth, and how public-private partnerships and sustainability initiatives are shaping the future of mobility in Dubai.



Photo: Pexels

Q: As head of the RTA since its establishment in 2005, what was your initial vision for transport in Dubai, and how has that vision evolved over time?

When the RTA was established in 2005, we set our vision as “Safe and Smooth Transport for All.” This vision guided our efforts to achieve our key objectives. Improving road safety was paramount, and we have reduced fatalities from 22 per 100,000 population to 1.8 per 100,000 today. We also introduced more mobility choices by developing the Dubai Metro and through the addition of new modes of transport, growing public transport’s share from 6% to 21.6% today. In addition, we expedited the implementation of transportation infrastructure projects to support annual population growth of over 6%.

In 2020, we adopted a new and challenging vision to become “The World Leader in Seamless and Sustainable Mobility.” This vision aims to strengthen our global leadership in mobility, including self-driving modes and flying taxis; adopt the latest technology trends for seamless mobility, such as

advanced AI-based traffic management systems, control centres and data-driven tailored services; and achieve financial sustainability – we have already reached breakeven and now generate a surplus. We have also contributed to Dubai’s Economic Agenda, D33, by successfully listing four companies – Salik, Parkin, Dubai Taxi and Mada Media – on the Dubai Financial Market, with a total value of \$18 billion. In terms of infrastructure, our road network maintains the world’s highest Pavement Condition Index at 97%.

Q: With more than AED 150 billion in transport projects delivered since 2005, how does the RTA’s work contribute to Dubai’s economic growth?

We recognise that investment in infrastructure is the main driving force behind economic and urban growth. Such investment was essential to support Dubai’s rapid expansion, with an annual population growth of 6% and tourism growth of 7% – compared to 2 to 3% globally. RTA’s projects have generated significant

economic benefits. Between 2006 and 2024, cumulative savings in time and fuel amounted to around AED 320 billion. The Red and Green Line Metro projects reached breakeven in 2016 – less than six years after operations began – and are forecast to achieve a cost-benefit ratio of 4.3 by 2030. In addition, the value of properties located near metro stations has increased by up to 11%.

These projects have also improved mobility for people and freight while helping Dubai maintain a globally competitive position in the TomTom Travel Time Index – recording a travel time index of 1.23 in 2024, compared to 1.18 to 1.36 in peer global cities.

Q: With a significant number of projects planned for the coming years, what role do public-private partnerships (PPP) and other collaborative models play in attracting private-sector investors?

According to the Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan, the city’s daytime population is expected to reach around eight million by 2040 – a 55% increase compared to the current figure. To support this growth, we will implement more than 32 strategic pro-

jects over the next three years. We currently have active partnerships with companies from around the world to support the future of transportation. For example, Chinese firms such as Baidu’s Apollo GO and WeRide will begin operating robotaxis within a year, as part of our self-driving strategy aimed at achieving 25% of trips via autonomous modes by 2030. We have also partnered with Joby and Skyports to launch aerial taxi services by 2026. These partnerships are enabled by our business-friendly policies and regulations, including the PPP Law, and we are keen to build further collaborations with global companies. We also support startups and work with academic institutions to explore cutting-edge mobility solutions. We have attracted over 100 startups to date.

Looking ahead, potential partnerships with private-sector firms include the construction of major road and rail projects, the introduction of new mobility modes and business models, smart traffic systems and AI-based solutions and the electrification of public transport using renewable energy sources.

Q: How does China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation securing the \$5.6 billion Dubai Metro Blue Line contract boost UAE-Chinese cooperation and the development of Dubai’s transit systems?

This multidisciplinary megaproject strengthens our relationship with Chinese companies. The project spans 30 kilometres and includes 14 new stations, representing a 30% expansion of our current rail network. It will serve a new urban planning centre and key areas expected to accommodate approximately one million residents by 2040. The project is expected to deliver substantial economic, social and environmental benefits, with total anticipated benefits exceeding \$16 billion by 2040. The estimated cost-benefit ratio stands at 2.6. Furthermore, the project will help reduce congestion by 20% in adjacent areas.



“Our plans focus on enhancing urban connectivity, promoting active and public transportation, reducing the environmental footprint of our infrastructure and supporting compact, people-focused development.”

H.E. Mattar Al Tayer,
Director General, Roads and Transport Authority

Q: How are RTA’s initiatives helping to transform Dubai into a more sustainable city, and what opportunities do your projects create for foreign investors?

We are fully aligned with the Dubai Urban Plan 2040 and the UAE’s Net Zero 2050 strategic direction. Our plans focus on enhancing urban connectivity, promoting active and public transportation, reducing the environmental footprint of our infrastructure and supporting compact, people-focused development.

As a regional pioneer, we take pride in being the first public transport authority in the Middle East and North Africa to introduce a net-zero emissions public transportation strategy. Some of our key achievements include: 71% of our taxi and limousine fleet are now hybrid, 12% are fully electric, and this year we will introduce our first 40 electric public buses – developed by Chinese manufacturer Zhongtong Bus. By 2040, all taxis and limousines in Dubai will be electric or powered by hydrogen, with all public buses to follow suit by 2050.

Many of our sustainability-related projects offer strong potential for foreign investment, ranging from public transport systems to street lighting initiatives. As a result of these projects and initiatives, we have successfully reduced carbon emissions by nine million tonnes. Our sustainability efforts have also received international recognition, including ISO certification for sustainable procurement and a BS certificate for circular economy practices.



Photos: Pexels.