



Creating a template for hospitality excellence

Ishraq Hospitality refines the guest experience with consistent connectivity

Personal touch is highly prized in the hospitality industry. One of Dubai's leading hotel operators, Ishraq Hospitality, is optimizing its digital network to capture as much guest insight as possible. This insight will be used to create the next generation of guest services.

Designing smarter, more adaptable hotel spaces

Over the past 20 years, Dubai has created an enviable travel and tourism industry. As each year passes, outsiders predict the market must be reaching its peak.

That peak has yet to materialize. In 2022, hotel occupancy rates reached their highest point in 15 years, topping 90% in March and averaging 70% across the year, second only to Los Angeles in global rankings. The industry is expected to grow 25% by 2030, with 40 million visitors staying at hotels in Dubai by 2031.

It is within this buoyant, forward-looking market that Ishraq Hospitality operates. Ishraq is the Asset Management and Hospitality Division of the Mohamed & Obaid AlMulla Group. It is the owner and operator of eight hotels, under the Intercontinental Hotel Group's Crowne Plaza and Holiday Inn brands. There are plans to open a further 15 in the coming years, across the region.

"We have a massive opportunity," says CEO Richard Haddad. "Historically, the region has grown in the luxury and midscale segments. The express segment has exceptional potential."



Industry: Hospitality

Region: Dubai, UAE

Vision

Streamline hotel operations, elevate the guest experience, and create new revenue opportunities as the business pursues regional growth

Strategy

Establish a high-performance network template, with data-driven centralized management and a single view of network activity

Outcomes

- Ensures consistent connectivity experience for guests across four properties
- Gathers data to inform personalized incentives, discounts, and services
- Slashes network deployment times for new properties to days

Ishraq is working with IHG to develop the next generation of Holiday Inn Express hotels. The idea is to create hotels that are smarter and more adaptable.

“Technology will play a big role, but it is technology in the service of the customer journey,” says Haddad. “How can we digitize processes, what might you be able to order through the app, how can we reconfigure the dining room through different phases of the day? For guests, we want to personalize their experience.”

Whatever the future design may look, Haddad continues, it is inevitable it will require Ishraq to work with multiple, third-party specialist service providers. Ishraq’s expertise is hotel management; it wants to cherry-pick the very best payment, door lock, AV, wayfinding, and property management solutions.

“It needs to be simple to integrate these new solutions,” Haddad explains. “When we invest in a network, we need that investment to be for the long term.”



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Creating revenue and personalization opportunities

The new Ishraq Hospitality network is built on HPE Aruba Networking ESP architecture. It creates a consistent network experience across the current four properties to date, and establishes a template for future openings.

There are now access points in every room, and the bandwidth capacity to allow for growth. Connecting to the network is unfussy, and all corners of the hotels are covered. “The reality is that today’s guests connect 2-3 devices each, they want to stream content from their devices, and they run their lives through apps,” says Stacy Samuel, corporate director of IT, Ishraq Hospitality. “We see this trend continuing, and we have the headroom to accommodate growth. Today, you can connect 30 personal devices, no problem.”

The upgraded network is central to an improved guest experience. There is IPTV in every room, guests can check in digitally, and room service can be ordered via an app. However, Ishraq accepts, these features soon

will become standard. What is exciting, says Vanchippara, is that the network creates revenue and personalization opportunities.

“This is where HPE Aruba Networking Central plays a big role for us. It consolidates multiple wired and wireless networks and allows us to see exactly what’s going on across our entire network. This 360° view of our operations, to see spikes in usage or spot new trends, will help us create new services. The more we learn about our guests, the better we can tailor offerings, discounts, or appropriate services.”

Establishing a network template to accelerate growth

The engagement with HPE Aruba Networking future-proofs Ishraq Hospitality’s network architecture.

“We have the hardware in place that won’t need to be touched for at least five years, and the ability to update the software as needed,” says Vanchippara. “Plus, integration with third-party platforms is simple and secure. It’s a big jump from where we were.”



The HPE Aruba Networking architecture includes HPE Aruba Networking Central as a cloud-native, AI-driven management platform, campus distribution and edge switches, and more than 1000 Wi-Fi 6 access points. Upgrading four properties, plus the Ishraq head office, took less than three months. The properties are Wi-Fi-first, with the option of wired connection if needed.

The template is endorsed by the \$4 billion, 6000-property IHG business.

“IHG does an annual technology assessment of all properties. Its report does not insist on a particular vendor, but it benefits us to be in line with IHG standards,” says Haddad. “We’re managing a huge amount of guest data. Security-wise, the HPE Aruba Networking approach is the strongest.”

The HPE Aruba Networking template can be adopted by franchisees as Ishraq looks to open new Holiday Inn Express properties across the region. Once the network hardware is shipped, new properties can be online within days and managed remotely.

The engagement is foundational, says Haddad. It establishes a platform on which Ishraq can accelerate its regional growth.

“Digital transformation is not a project we finish today,” says Haddad. “It is a continuous journey. Historically, the hospitality industry has perhaps not been the best at adopting new technology. We want to change that. HPE Aruba Networking will enable us to bring together streams of data from different departments, to create a live, detailed picture of our operations.”



About Ishraq Hospitality Group

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