

# Seven Wonders Ras Al Khaimah

RAK Hospitality launches its ambitious Seven Wonders series of events with an audiovisual spectacular at the Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah Al Wadi Desert, headlined by Dutch DJ and producer, Armin van Buuren, who brings his iconic *Pillars of Creation* show to the region for the first time.





The recent news that Wynn Resorts has been granted the UAE's first ever commercial gaming licence for an integrated resort on Al Marjan Island has catapulted Ras Al Khaimah into the global consciousness, with the northern emirate suddenly becoming a hotbed of international investment and development. Aiming to position Ras Al Khaimah as a premier events and entertainment destination, RAK Hospitality partnered with some of the world's leading event organisers – Backbone International, TWOFIFTYK, and Tribe Company – to launch Seven Wonders: a series of seven events, with seven artists, set to take place over seven weekends in 2025, across seven spectacular locations showing off the very best that the emirate has to offer.

To announce the extraordinary Seven Wonders initiative, RAK Hospitality hosted an exclusive launch event at the Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah, Al Wadi Desert on 24 October, with 1,000 lucky attendees treated to an immersive four-hour audiovisual experience, culminating in a spectacular finale featuring renowned DJ Armin Van Buuren's *Pillars of Creation* live performance.

Catching up with TPiMEA after the dust had settled on the opening event, RAK Hospitality COO Donald Bremner recalled the origins of the project and explained the rationale behind it. "The entry of Wynn Resorts into Ras Al Khaimah

is set to have a monumental effect, transforming RAK from a predominantly all-inclusive tourism location to a destination that welcomes high discretionary spend customers who will expect a variety of dining, cultural and entertainment options," he commented. "Hosting world-class events not only amplifies our marketing capability and allows us to promote the emirate to a wider global audience, but it gives us a greater platform to build the infrastructure required to deliver these experiences."

With precious little experience in delivering large-scale events, Bremner realised immediately that expert guidance would be required if the organisation's goals were to be achieved. "We knew that we needed production capability and to bring people in who understand how to build the infrastructure required for events," he explained. "My dear friend and colleague, Thijs van Rhoon, who has been running this project with me, had prior experience of working with Backbone International, so he introduced me to Pieter [Lubberts, Managing Director Europe, Backbone International] and from the very first meeting, he and his team were awesome."

Bremner recalled how the project took shape, with Lubberts advising against an initial idea to host a significantly larger launch event, instead favouring a much more measured approach. "I gave Pieter the grand speech about our plans

to host massive events as soon as possible, and he wasted no time in telling me all the reasons why that wouldn't work," he laughed. "Of course, we have ambitions to have 20,000-capacity events and it is possible, but without the proper infrastructure, it would be no more than a flash in the pan that leaves no legacy."

Lubberts concurred: "We love taking on crazy challenges and producing the biggest and best events all over the world that have never been done before, but before I take on any project, I must see that it is serious and being done for the right reasons," he stated. "I explained to Donald that organising events at scale is a totally different ballgame, and to go massive straight away without any proper infrastructure would be a recipe for failure and of no benefit for the long-term goals."

Happy with this more long-term approach, RAK Hospitality engaged Backbone International not only for this launch show, but to come up with an overarching strategy for its calendar of events. "We had some extremely constructive conversations with Donald and Thijs, and the vision of RAK Hospitality is a beautiful one that I believe in," Lubberts stated. "They're creating an entire hospitality ecosystem, and that is going to take time."

Backbone International joined forces with TWOFIFTYK and Tribe Company, and together

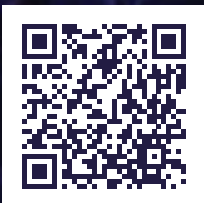


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the consortium wrote a long-term event strategy, which kicks off with the Seven Wonders concept. “We are extremely comfortable on all technical aspects of events, and we love to work with creatives to produce a turnkey solution,” Lubberts commented. “The creativity of both TWOFIFTYK and Tribe Company were vital to the success of this project.”

**‘A one-of-a-kind creation’**

With the official sign-off coming in June, the team was left with just four months to put together the launch event, transforming the empty desert site into a fully fledged show venue. This meant finding the right technical suppliers who could meet the high expectations was crucial.

“There is plenty of quality available in the Middle East, but it’s important to put the right processes in place to find the best partners who can deliver for each project,” Lubberts explained.

After an extensive tender process, Backbone International went with Al Laith for the infrastructure and PRG to supply the technical solution. “It was an easy working relationship with both Al Laith and PRG,” Lubberts reported. “We are very exacting in our way of working and

include an extremely high level of detail in our technical designs, which can be difficult to deal with if a supplier isn’t used to such precision. However, everyone was very open to our way of working and happy to receive feedback, which made the dynamic very smooth.”

Al Laith’s brief was to provide comprehensive support in constructing the main infrastructure, collaborating with the Backbone International team to turn its vision into reality, and supplying all the necessary equipment and infrastructure to bring the ambitious concept to life.

Al Laith’s Production Manager on the project, Yana Alexandrova, described the company’s process: “Once we received the initial designs, we began by developing detailed technical designs and creating working, or ‘shop’, drawings. These were essential for translating the creative vision into actionable construction plans,” she explained. “From there, we went through a rigorous engineering process, particularly because this project pushed the boundaries of traditional scaffolding design. The unique circular layouts required us to innovate and adapt beyond standard scaffolding practices.”

After the engineering was approved, the Al

Laith team prepared the materials and procured the custom, project-specific items. “Mobilisation to the site followed, where we conducted highly accurate mark-outs,” Alexandrova stated. “Unlike traditional scaffolding, which thrives on right angles, this project demanded precision in circular layouts, requiring base jack placements before construction could commence.”

During the build, collaboration was required to navigate the challenges of constructing in a desert environment. “The soft sand made it difficult to manage heavy equipment like forklifts and truck deliveries, requiring us to plan logistics carefully and adjust operations to suit the terrain,” Alexandrova recalled.

Another significant challenge was the engineering of the towers surrounding the main arena. “Typically, scaffolding follows a general guideline where the base width and depth are proportional to the height. However, these towers had much smaller bases and were fully clad, creating additional challenges due to wind loads,” she explained. “Achieving a safe wind speed rating of 25 metres per second was particularly difficult in this scenario.”

To overcome this, the Al Laith team had

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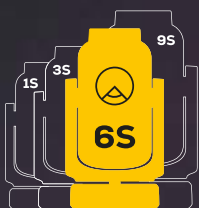
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to think outside the box. “Solid connections between towers were not an option, as they would detract from the striking aesthetics of the event’s design. Instead, we used thin steel cables to connect the towers at the top. This solution provided the necessary rigidity, strength, and stability without compromising the visual integrity of the event. The cables were nearly invisible, maintaining the sleek and unique design that the client envisioned.”

Equipment utilised on the project included ring lock structures, Al Laith’s proprietary LionDeck system, steel truss delay towers, platforms, and custom-designed elements, as well as VIP guest bathroom facilities. “Each element was deployed with precision to match the challenging desert environment and the unique event design,” explained Alexandrova.

“The ring lock system formed the structure, providing stability and flexibility, while the LionDeck system ensured durable and reliable decking. The delay towers were strategically positioned to optimise sound distribution, and the DJ booth was custom built to complement the event’s high-profile production standards. The VIP toilets were installed in accessible locations, maintaining the luxurious feel of the event.”

Once the structures were completed, a thorough inspection was conducted to ensure everything met stringent safety standards. “The structures were then handed over to the client, ready to bear heavy loads like LED screens, PA systems, and scenic elements,” she said, noting that the Al Laith team remained on standby to maintain the integrity of the structures and provide support for any client needs.

“After the event concluded successfully, we dismantled the equipment, ensuring every component was carefully packed into stillages and returned to our yard for future use. This practice not only streamlines our operations but also aligns with our commitment to sustainability.”

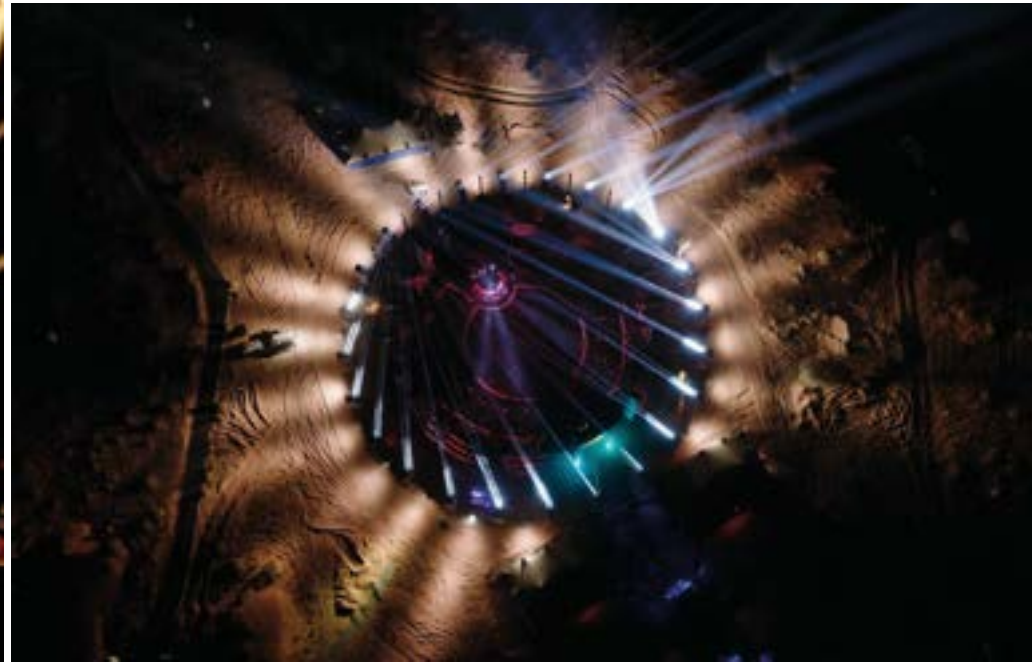
The Production Manager was particularly pleased with the overarching completion of the entire structure. “Even though we had worked extensively with detailed 3D technical construction drawings, it was impossible to fully grasp the scale, uniqueness, and impact of the design until it was physically built,” she described.

“Once everything came together – the scenic elements, LED installations and technology integrated into our structures – it was breathtaking. What stood out the most was how the final structure far exceeded the look of even the best renderings.”

Alexandrova continued: “Seeing it realised on-site brought a sense of awe and accomplishment that no digital visualisation could capture. It was a one-of-a-kind creation that embodied the spirit of innovation and imagination, and we were proud to have been a part of bringing it to life.”

Al Laith’s Operations Director is Michael Clark, with Jozef Hrinko serving as Project Manager. Draftsman, Jay Son, played a pivotal role in translating the design into actionable plans, while further Structural Engineers, Malcolm Wynn-Reese and Wynand McKenzie provided the expertise needed to ensure the integrity and safety of the structures.

“We were truly honoured to be part of this unique and groundbreaking project,” Alexandrova concluded. “We extend our heartfelt thanks to Backbone International for their unwavering trust and collaboration, and



also to Ras Al Khaimah and RAK Hospitality for the opportunity to contribute to such an extraordinary event. We look forward to continuing this partnership and working on more innovative and inspiring projects in the future.”

#### ‘An incredible experience’

Upon receiving the initial brief from Backbone International, the PRG team began evaluating the most suitable equipment for the project while considering the unique challenges posed by the environment. Project Manager, Terence Collings talked TPiMEA through the early stages of the project. “During our initial onsite meeting with Backbone International, we gained a clear understanding of the obstacles we would face, including the logistics of building a large-scale event in a barren desert,” he commented. “At the same time, it was inspiring to envision the transformation of the space into the vibrant arena outlined in the brief.”

Following the site visit, significant logistical planning was undertaken. “This included organising the transportation of equipment to the site, devising efficient methods for constructing the LED structures, and determining the optimal

setup for cabling to ensure seamless operation,” Collings specified. “The Backbone International production team provided a precise site plot with GPS coordinates for the orientation of the event space. This level of detail allowed us to install the equipment with pinpoint accuracy.”

To ensure a smooth workflow, the PRG team implemented a staggered deployment schedule, beginning with rigging, followed by lighting, and finally completing the video and audio setup. “This structured and collaborative approach allowed us to overcome challenges and deliver a successful, visually stunning event,” Collings said.

The concept was based on an outdoor arena enclosed by 46 LED towers. The design included 22 towers measuring 10m high and 1m wide, along with 24 towers measuring 6m high and 1m wide. At the centre was a main screen, standing 10m high and 6m wide, while the entrance to the arena was lined with 12 LED towers, each 6m high and 1m wide, arranged with six on each side.

“Each tower featured an LED screen on the front, while the other three sides were clad with printed fabric provided by Backbone International, enhancing the overall aesthetic,” Collings recalled, noting that the company

deployed its Atlas 4.9mm LED product to fulfil the creative brief.

“Beyond their visual impact, these towers also functioned as lighting structures, adding both functionality and ambiance to the arena.” The lighting setup featured what Collings described as “a robust range of high-performance fixtures” that aided in the production of “dynamic and immersive visuals”. This included: IP65-rated Astera AX7 SpotLites, CLF Lighting Ares Washes, SGM Q-7s, GLP Impression X5 IP Bars and X4s, and Ayrton Cobra, Domino Profile and Domino LT fixtures, all controlled via an MA Lighting grandMA3 console.

Audio meanwhile was delivered by an L-Acoustics K-Series system, with a main PA including K1s, K2 down fills, KARA II side fills, and KS28 subwoofers, with SYVA and SYVA Low covering DJ fills. DiGiCo consoles were at both FOH and monitors, with an SD12 handling the former and an SD7 taking care of the latter. “The audio setup was tailored for exceptional clarity and coverage, meeting the demanding requirements of Armin van Buuren’s performance,” Collings noted.

“This integrated AVL solution ensured that



every aspect of the event – from visual effects and sound clarity to lighting dynamics – met the highest production standards, creating an unforgettable experience.”

According to the PM, the environmental conditions provided the biggest challenge. “The intense heat took a toll on the crew, affecting stamina and efficiency. Additionally, the vast, uneven terrain of the site made moving gear and equipment logistically difficult,” Collings shared.

“However, once coordination was established between the various suppliers and internal departments, operations became much smoother. Clear communication and a well-structured plan facilitated the transportation of gear to the site and the efficient rigging of the LED panels onto the scaffold structures. This collaborative approach ensured the project stayed on track despite the very challenging outdoor conditions.”

Having worked closely with the Backbone International technical team throughout the project, Collings described the collaboration as “a pleasure”. He added: “Their professionalism and in-depth industry knowledge ensured a smooth and efficient process. This project was an incredible experience to be part of.”

Reflecting on the transformation of the site from a barren stretch of desert to a fully realised,

vibrant event space, Collings was delighted with the achievement. “It was a privilege to work alongside such a strong and dedicated team at PRG, both onsite and in the office,” he summarised. “The final event was not only visually stunning but felt like it was naturally integrated into its surroundings, as if it truly belonged in the desert. Seeing the vision come to life and witnessing the impact of our collaborative efforts was immensely rewarding.”

**‘Something magical is happening in RAK’**

Special effects and lasers were provided by AVM-SFX, which has a long history with the event producers. “As we know Backbone International and TWOFIFTYK very well, we instantly understood that they wanted something spectacular, something next level,” recalled AVM-SFX co-founder, Emerson Wellens.

“We knew from the beginning that good planning and mutual agreements and understanding was needed. There was a lot that had to be done in a tight time window, and we managed this perfectly.”

The company’s experience of working with the artist was also beneficial. “We often do Armin Van Buuren shows and we know how much he likes to embrace the crowd,” Wellens stated. “That’s where the idea to place the flames on the

pillars all around came from. Having flames on both the inside and outside pillars gave the whole setup more depth as well,” he added.

“Also, their idea to integrate the lasers seamlessly in the video content was totally out of the box and was a magical combination.” Flash Art also brought its expertise in pyro to the event. Working in close collaboration with AVM-SFX, the team combined modern technology with advanced special effects, creating a unique and immersive visual experience. “Positioning the effects in a 360° closed pattern surrounding the audience made for an extremely powerful, impressive, and impactful show,” stated Managing Partner, Jakub Michalik. “It was a pleasure to be involved in such an important and exciting project for Ras al Khaimah.”

MTD provided wastewater management solutions for the event. “MTD is incredibly proud to have supported the Seven Wonders event at Ras Al Khaimah with our wastewater management solutions and provision of VIP and VVIP restroom facilities, stated Jesse van den Boomen, Account Manager Middle East for MTD. “Collaborating with Backbone International, we ensured quality and reliability for our valued guests in this stunning desert setting. We’re excited to see what wonders lie ahead in this series.”

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temporary power solution to support the event, including power for all AV and stage elements, as well as BOH operations. “Our team ensured seamless power integration, enabling smooth production across all facets of the event,” stated Brian Marshall, Head of Commercial, FLOW, explaining the company’s brief for the project. “The vision for this project was ambitious and inspiring: to contribute to making Ras Al Khaimah a global entertainment hub,” Marshall commented, looking back on the feat.

“Set against the backdrop of Al Marjan Island, near the upcoming Wynn property, this event aligns with Backbone International’s long-term vision for transforming the entertainment landscape in RAK. This partnership not only enhances the events industry across the region but also has significant potential for boosting the economy and attracting more tourism.”

Reflecting on the project, Marshall praised the collaboration. “It was a pleasure working with Backbone International, a true leader in high-end

production. Their global experience and expertise were instrumental, and together, we were able to introduce innovative technologies and ideas that elevate the region’s standards for event production,” he concluded. “The future of events in RAK is incredibly promising. With the emirate’s ambitious goals and strategic developments, both the industry and audiences can look forward to world-class events and entertainment experiences. It’s an exciting time to be part of this journey, and we’re thrilled to help bring such dynamic projects to life.”

Backbone International’s Lubberts shared Marshall’s enthusiasm. “We’re working on the 2025 Seven Wonders shows already,” he said. “The RAK Hospitality team are very enthusiastic, they have a great vision, and they want to move forward. Something magical is happening in RAK and it’s a great honour to be a part of it.”

For RAK Hospitality’s Bremner, the opening event achieved its goals. “This first event was all about demonstrating that we have the

capability to host world-class events here in Ras Al Khaimah,” he stated. “We drew a total global reach of 45 million across all platforms, making it 10 times more visible than any other event in the history of RAK.”

Bremner concluded with a look to the future: “By building the Seven Wonders series, we are aiming to fulfil our medium-term objectives, but looking further ahead, events are a cultural creation, and I would love to provide a platform and the inspiration for the people who are living in RAK to get more involved in the arts and boost the homegrown interest in this sector.” ■

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