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HOSPITALITY | 📖 ISSUE 188 | OCTOBER 23, 2025 | 5 MIN READ

Les Roches opens its first hospitality school in the Middle East, aiming to elevate the Emirates' luxury industry

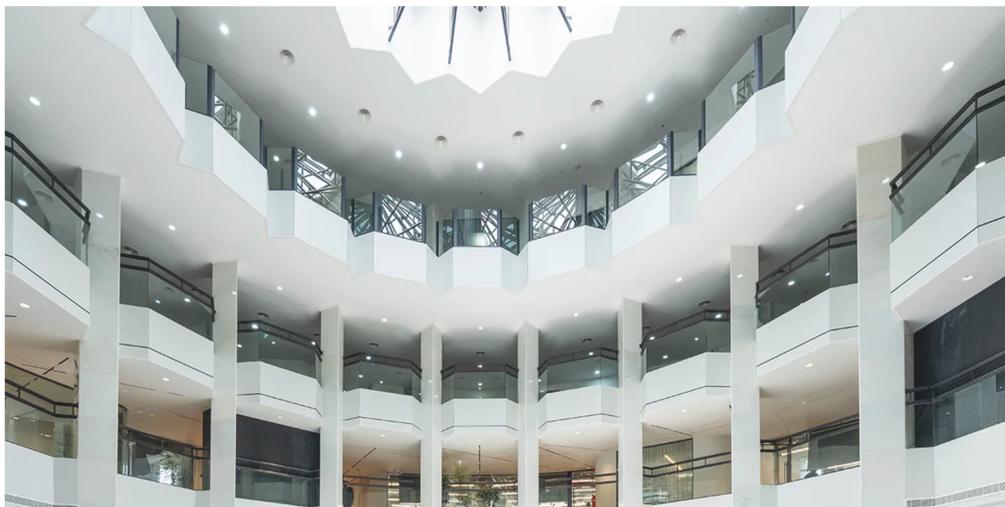
Through its new school, the Swiss hospitality academy is giving a local voice to a sector that has long been defined by imported talent.

WRITER Isabella Craddock

PHOTOGRAPHER Paulius Staniunas

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“When guests arrive, they should feel an Emirati welcome,” says Scott Richardson, the academic dean of Les Roches Abu Dhabi. We’re sitting in the sleek rotunda of the Swiss hospitality school’s new campus, where students in chef whites are bustling around us. Richardson’s phrasing distils a big shift in how the UAE wants to present itself. For decades, [luxury hospitality here](#) was an import. It was delivered, sometimes falteringly, with European precision and Filipino and South Asian resilience – but rarely with a local voice. Things, however, are changing.



RECOMMENDATIONS



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In an industry with a novelty
addiction, restaurants



Lobby of Les Roches Abu Dhabi

In a country known for building big and thinking bigger, a quiet back-of-house revolution is under way, complete with a well-choreographed turndown service. Abu Dhabi might be a capital more commonly associated with museum-scale statements but with Les Roches' Middle East campus, it is betting on a different kind of soft power: fluency in five-star service, with an Emirati accent. Minutes by car from the Louvre and the forthcoming Guggenheim, the new campus is designed to back talent from within the region, not import it. While the original institution in Switzerland boasts alumni in top-tier hotels in cities from Singapore to New York, its UAE outpost is trying to localise leadership in an industry that has long been defined by transience.

“Being in Abu Dhabi is absolutely crucial to the success of this academy,” says its managing director, Georgette Davey. “Students can experience so much here.” She points to Abu Dhabi’s expanding cultural footprint – from global museum collaborations to the arrival of Disney – as part of a broader movement. “We’re teaching them about the diversity of the world of hospitality. It’s not just a hotel any more. It’s also about luxury retail and theme parks. It’s about corporate head offices too.”



A culinary student gets hands on



Learning the art of coffee



Baking in Les Roches' Pastry Lab

Alumni and students are embedded across the capital and hospitality here is beginning to feel more elevated – and more Emirati. The next time a visitor checks in at a luxury hotel or enters a restaurant, the person greeting them might just be a local – fluent not only in service standards but also alive to cultural nuance. “We couldn’t just copy-and-paste a European model,” says Richardson. “Hospitality is cultural. It’s about how you make people feel.”

Davey agrees. “In our first intake, about a third of the students were uae nationals,” she says. “Now it’s closer to 95 per cent. We’ve even had requests to launch summer camps for 15-to-17-year-olds.”

Among those leading the shift is Abu Dhabi native Tahnoon Al Qubaisi. “As Emiratis, hospitality runs in our blood,” he says. “From an early age, we are taught to welcome, serve and honour our guests as a reflection of who we are.” Now on placement at Emirates Palace Mandarin Oriental, Al Qubaisi says that he sees hospitality not only as an industry but also as a cultural inheritance.



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Students learn five-star standards for maintaining hotel rooms

Richardson has plans to have more Emirati professors. “Up to this point, local professors were in engineering and petroleum but things will change,” he says. “We already have an Emirati professor teaching our hospitality culture course. He teaches respect for elders, open-door policy and being welcoming.”

There’s a business case for this shift in emphasis. “Abu Dhabi wants to provide 178,000 tourism-related jobs by 2030,” says Emirati student Mohammed Al Hammadi. “I want to see at least 78,000 of those being filled by Emiratis.”

“We’re already seeing the ripple effect,” adds Al Qubaisi. “Emirati and non-Emirati students are gaining experience at top five-star hotels, government tourism entities, museums, historical attractions and more. This is the beginning of something truly powerful.”

lesroches.edu



Students are embedded across Abu Dhabi

Les Roches in numbers

The Swiss-founded hospitality and hotel management school offers bachelor’s degrees and postgraduate qualifications, as well as tailored courses, in-work placements and internships.

1954: Founded in Switzerland

16 to 1: The ratio of students to staff

100: Total nationalities represented among the students

1995: Les Roches opens its campus in Marbella

98 per cent: The proportion of students employed after graduation

192: The number of companies represented by recruiters on the most recent career day

2024: Les Roches admits first batch of students at its Abu Dhabi campus

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