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Budget: Cautiously optimistic

It's that time of the year again when Travel and Tourism industry unites to raise its demands in unison seeking government's support for its amelioration. **TRAVTALK** spoke to industry leaders about their expectations from the Union Finance Ministry's Budget 2016-17 and found out issues ailing the industry, such as Goods and Services Tax (GST), industry status for Tourism, better connectivity and infrastructure.

TT BUREAU



Service tax: a spoiler

- ❖ Tourism industry should be treated at par with exporters
- ❖ Like exporters, based on foreign exchange earnings, tour operators should also get exemption of service tax on package tours as the payment is received in foreign exchange
- ❖ With the service tax added at present, India packages lose on account of price competitiveness and cannot match the prices on holiday packages, which are on offer by our competitive countries

Karan Anand

Head - Relationships, Cox & Kings Ltd



Skill development

- ❖ There is significant scope for expansion of both transport infrastructure and the hotel and accommodation sector
- ❖ The travel and tourism is a highly taxed industry making it an expensive destination. This is an important issue that needs to be dealt with
- ❖ Enhancing the skills & handicrafts of the rural folks

Rajan Dua

Managing Director, UDAAN India and India Travel Award Winner (Best Visa Facilitation Company)



Strengthen infrastructure

- ❖ The initiatives taken so far to promote tourism have yield noteworthy results and I hope that the Budget 2016-17 will be in favour of the travel and tourism industry. Provisions to strengthen the infrastructure, increase connectivity and tourist safety, convenience in visa processing, favourable tax reforms etc. will definitely catalyse the development of tourism services.

Dev Karvat

MD, TrawellTag Cover-More India



Wider tax net

- ❖ As a citizen, I would like to see a wider tax net rather than a deeper one for individuals and corporates. The Income Tax department's KPIs need to change from revenue targets, as this tantamounts to harassment.

Varun Chadha

COO, TIRUN Travel Marketing



Surprise me!

- ❖ To be honest, I have stopped expecting anything from the budget. They have not given any indications of what they are doing. Last year we had very high expectations. So now I just want to leave everything and get surprised if they give us anything.

Anil Madhok

Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels



Maximum 8% GST

- ❖ If GST is coming into effect, it should not exceed eight per cent.
- ❖ If the GST is not in place, the service tax should be reduced and made more flexible and easy
- ❖ Since a lot of foreign exchange is earned by the travel agents and tour operators, there should be an export credit facility also available
- ❖ Income tax exemptions and rebates to be given to travel companies, investing in tourism industry
- ❖ It's time that tourism also gets an industry status as we employ over 10 per cent of the workforce and are one of the top five revenue and Forex earners in the country

Jay Bhatia

National Treasurer and Chairman (Tourism Council), TAAI



Industry status

- ❖ FAITH has been invited to participate at this year's pre-budget discussion. We hope having taken this initiative to involve FAITH, Govt. will give some kind of relief to tourism industry. Indian tourism expects an industry status. Infrastructure needs immediate attention.

Jyoti Kapur

President, ADTOI



Tackle airport taxes

- ❖ The government needs to look at serious issues such as insufficient infrastructure and connectivity, high airport taxes, state tax reforms and above all ATF prices to truly drive growth in the aviation sector.

Wolfgang Will

Director - South Asia, Lufthansa



Focus on smart cities

- ❖ Attention to the newly unveiled smart cities where a lot of focus on infrastructure, hotels and airport development is leading to a big boost to the tourism and travel industry
- ❖ Tax breaks and tax holidays would further provide a fillip to corporate India in order to invest in such smart cities
- ❖ Effective implementation of the new civil aviation policy, security of the travelers, better road and rail connectivity

Anil Parashar

President and CEO, InterGlobe Technology Quotient and India Travel Award Winner (Best Global Distribution System)



Single-window clearance

- ❖ This year's budget seems to have set the bar higher with the hospitality industry in India expecting a growth-based budget. From rationalisation of tax structure to single-window clearance, the industry's expectations this year is wide and varied.

Kunal Sampat

General Manager - India, MSC Cruises



Exemption from service tax

- ❖ Based on foreign exchange earnings, tour operators should be exempted from service tax, just like Gems and Jewellery traders.

Subhash Goyal

President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO)



Develop world heritage sites

- ❖ We are quite hopeful that the upcoming Budget will focus on infrastructure development be it hotels, world heritage sites, road or railways
- ❖ The new initiatives should further complement previous initiatives

Amit Agarwal

Senior Marketing Manager, Hotels.com



Simplify taxes

- ❖ The travel and tourism sector has been growing fast globally, and in economies like ours, tourism is a significant contributor to economic growth. For the industry, the big expectation is rationalising and simplifying the tax structure.

Paul John Maliekkal

Deputy CEO - Visa Services, VFS Global



India on international radar

- ❖ We hope that the government will focus on the overall environment of the tourism industry and help drive the industry towards its projected growth. It is time to showcase Brand India globally and provide sufficient impetus to put India firmly on the international tourist radar and we are hopeful that the government will consider effective solutions for the same.

Ankur Bhatia

Executive Director, Bird Group

e-Medical Visa on the cards

With a slew of initiatives to ensure smooth stay, experience and security of tourists, **Vinod Zutshi**, Secretary, Tourism, Government of India, tells **TRAVTALK** that the coming months will see MOT in a very aggressive mode.

 **NISHA VERMA**

Optimistic about reaping the benefits of e-Tourist Visa (eTV) facility and the upcoming National Tourism Policy, Zutshi says, “Domestic tourist visits in 2015 was a mind-boggling 1.45 billion, while the Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) have seen a 4.4 per cent average growth rate, which is almost the aver-



Vinod Zutshi
Secretary, Tourism
Government of India

od to three to four months instead of the current 30 days. Also, he added that the MOT is working towards changing eTV from single entry to double or multiple entry and also considering extending the validity from 30 days to 60 days. “Compared to 40,000 people who availed the eTV facility in 2014, in 2015 it has expanded to 4.45 lakh, which is more than a thousand times. This is the kind of effect that eTV has had on tourism,” he said.

Compared to 40,000 people who availed the eTV facility in 2014, in 2015 it has expanded to 4.45 lakh, which is more than a thousand times. This is the kind of effect that eTV has had on tourism

age growth rate that is being registered the world over.” In order to make the eTV regime more facilitative, he said that the government is trying to make the application time peri-

Zutshi also revealed that among the many initiatives proposed at the first meeting of the National Medical and Wellness Tourism Promotion Board, chaired by **Dr. Mahesh**

Boost to tourist support system



“Through the Incredible India Helpline, tourists from different countries will get the communication in the language of their choice. We have proposed that as soon as an international tourist comes to the immigration counter at any airport in India, they should be given a small welcome kit, may be with a SIM card for some emergency calls to his parent country or within India.

We propose to give E-to-E tourism (End-to-End tourism) for those visiting India. As soon as we receive our tourist friends from different parts of the world, we propose to give some sort of connectivity and escorting to their different destinations. We have even proposed to have separate tourist coaches in trains frequently boarded by tourists, which might have different colour, better facilities, etc.”

Dr. Mahesh Sharma
Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism and Culture and Minister of State for Civil Aviation

2016 Initiatives

- MOT has invested almost ₹ 1,500 crores (approx. \$300 million) in various circuits under Swadesh Darshan and PRASAD scheme and will organise investors’ meet to attract private companies
- Buddhist conclave will be organised in 2016 from September to November in Varanasi and Sarnath
- Conception of national tourism advisory board and national tourism authority in plans to quicken decision-making and project implementation

Sharma, Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism and Culture and Minister of State for Civil Aviation, one was the introduction of the e-Tourist Medical Visa facility. “Most of the members of the board were of the view that in order to give a big push to medical tourism in India, we need to streamline the visa facility for the same. We are talking to the concerned ministry to work

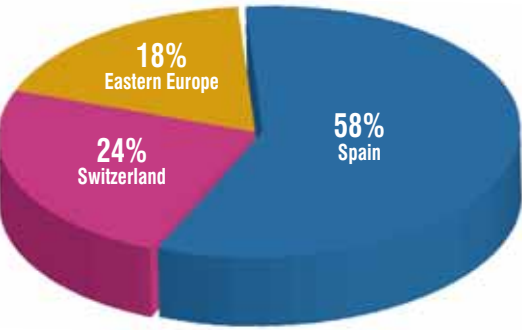
on the possibility of having e-Tourist Medical Visa as well. So, we are working on it, and if possible we can combine it with eTV,” he said.

Big on business

He further stressed that the government is making sure that private investors get involved in big projects, which would further boost inbound numbers. “The government

has opened 100 per cent FDI in the hospitality sector. The Ministry of Finance has already included the hospitality industry in the harmonised list, with more than ₹ 200 crore of investment, which will bring it under infrastructure sector status. In fact, Dr. Sharma is making all efforts that the hospitality industry gets the infrastructure status,” he said.

Spain: Sizzling this summer



With the onset of the summer season for travel and tourism industry, **TRAVTALK** conducted a poll to find out which European destination will be most popular this season. 58 per cent of the respondents identified Spain as the leading summer destination, followed by Switzerland with 24 per cent and Eastern Europe with 18 per cent. Spain witnessed nearly 70,000 Indian tourist arrivals by September 2015 while Switzerland witnessed a 26.7 per cent growth in arrivals from India during the first half of 2015. With the Eastern European countries aggressively marketing their Old World charm to the Indian market, they are at No. 3 as solid entrants.



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2nd OTOAI Convention from March 17

Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) is all set to host its 2nd Mega Convention from March 17-21, 2016 in Bali, Indonesia.

TT BUREAU
OTOAI announced its second Mega Convention to be held in Bali, Indonesia,

Pan Pacific Nirwana Bali Resort and around 300 delegates are expected to attend the convention," Munshi said.

ucts on table tops at the convention, so that our members can get complete knowledge of Indonesia. In addition, we want to showcase

members engaging in business sessions, networking, shopping and local sightseeing. This will be followed by a day trip to Ubud.



from March 17-21, 2016. **Riaz Munshi**, Vice President, OTOAI, was declared as the Convention Chairman at the curtain-raiser of the convention in New Delhi. The theme of the convention is 'India Outbound - The Game Changer.' "The venue of the convention will be

Guldeep Singh Sahni, President, OTOAI, said, "After a lot of deliberations, we have zeroed in on Bali for our 2nd convention, and our intention is to promote Indonesia as a complete destination beyond Bali as well. We will also be selecting B2B buyers, who will be showcasing tourism prod-

that we have the real outbound tour operators selected by OTOAI from India. Our intention is to take serious players with us who are interested in business."

The first three days of the convention will be at the venue in Bali, and will see

Bali Packages

OTOAI offers early bird discount of ` 3,500++ till February 20

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Allied Members - ` 49,900++

Non Members - ` 59,900++

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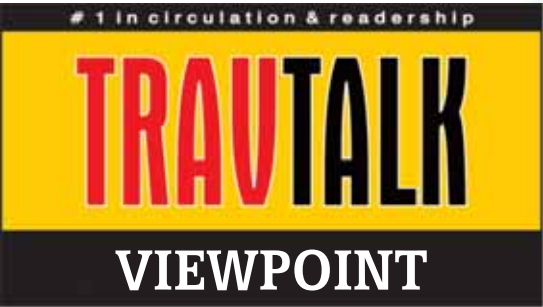
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Budget for Brand India

There are many issues to be addressed in the upcoming Budget, like prioritising key issues such as safety, cleanliness and infrastructure, ease of doing business with a single clearance window and rationalisation of the tax system which is leading to very high costs, making our neighbouring countries far more attractive for foreign and domestic visitors.

The efforts of the government to restore investor confidence needs to be established in this Budget to put tourism in India in the right direction. A healthy tourism sector, both domestic and international, can only be a thrust for direct and indirect employment, sustaining a large segment of the population and the region.

Other than granting some of the necessary demands of the industry, a realistic Budget needs to be sanctioned to market 'Brand India' internationally in a positive light, showing not only the historical grandeur but also the modern contemporary real India, where transportation, hotels, airports actually match any other in the world.

Love thy neighbour

With PM Narendra Modi calling for countries under South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to aim for a common goal of growth, the same spirit is transcending into the tourism industry. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan—comprise 21 per cent of the world's population and contribute about 9 per cent to its economy. Since it allows the best opportunity for short-haul travel, intra-regional tourism can only get better. However, for that to happen, SAARC nations need to work on liberalising the visa regime and explore business opportunities within the region. In fact, religious tourism can perhaps be the best bet to take things forward. With a Buddhist circuit between India, Nepal and Sri Lanka already being talked about, there are discussions on Ayurveda trail between India and Sri Lanka as well. In addition, IATO is organising its first outbound convention in Sri Lanka; while TAAI and UFTAA are in talks with SAARC travel trade associations for intra-regional tourism.

NOVEL CONCEPT OF TOURISM POCKETS



Late Madhavrao Scindia
The then Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation

In 1991, Madhavrao Scindia, the then Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation proposed the tourism policy, which would bring in the concept of special tourism pockets.

- ❖ These pockets will be developed as complete destinations in themselves.
- ❖ It will involve one or more entrepreneurs with whom the government will enter into a contract.
- ❖ The ministry is considering the creation of a single area development authority with adequate powers for a single window clearance of projects.

Stalwart speaks

O.P. Ahuja, President, IATO in 1991, shared his suggestions to boost tourism in India.

- ❖ The minister himself should lead delegations to major destinations and provide some reassurance
- ❖ Promotional seminars in Europe and America should be organised.
- ❖ India is outpricing itself with respect to its neighbouring countries.



O.P. Ahuja
Former President IATO

From the archives



HE MUST BE TRAVEL AGENT



Shashank Warty
Area General Manager
Taj Palace Inter-Continental

Shashank Warty has come a long way after his stint with Taj Hotels to now working with Sotheby's International Realty

With 40 years of experience in luxury hospitality, Shashank Warty has worked with some of the biggest luxury hotel chains. He has even chaired New Delhi Luxury Hotelier Forum as President for three consecutive years and board member for leading hospitality chains. Today, he works as Head-Marketing & Communications-North India at Sotheby's International Realty, New Delhi.



Shashank Warty
Head-Marketing & Communications-North India
Sotheby's International Realty

ARRs inch upward in 2014-15

Indian hotels recorded an average rate of ` 4,789 in 2014-15, a modest improvement over last year (` 4,729). Hotel occupancy, too, increased to 61.3% after two years of stagnation at 60.4%. The last few years witnessed a steady decline in the contribution of revenue from Rooms while that from F&B continually improved; this trend was observed in the current year too.



Sample size: 1368 respondents



Source: HVS-FHRAI Survey



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Domestic tourism thriving in Maharashtra

Valsa Nair Singh, Principal Secretary-Tourism & Cultural Affairs, Government of Maharashtra, highlights the importance of the domestic market, the draft tourism policy and the need to leverage the benefits of having a major port for cruise tourism.

 **HAZEL JAIN**

Q*When will the new tourism policy see the light of day?*

The draft tourism policy will be out by mid-February this year. We have received more than 80 comments from the industry which we have incorporated as much as we could. The draft policy has been sent to all the concerned departments for their comments. We expect this policy to give us direction.

Q*What new products can the trade look forward to?*

We have been introducing a lot of products for domestic tourists. They are our mainstay comprising almost 80 per cent of the total tourists visiting Maharashtra. Currently, we are working on introducing certification program for city guides that will be certified by the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) from this April. We will



Valsa Nair Singh
Principal Secretary-Tourism & Cultural Affairs, Government of Maharashtra

start with Mumbai and introduce it in five other cities in the state such as Aurangabad, Nagpur and Nashik. This was done at the behest of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) because agents face a huge scarcity of trained guides, specially German and Japanese speaking ones.

Q*What is the state doing to get cruise liners into Mumbai?*

The Cochin Port Trust has completed infrastructure work on one of the best cruise terminals. Maharashtra now needs to have a cruise terminal separate from a normal port because one cruise liner brings in so much business to the destination. I have written to the Mumbai Port Trust chairman and discussed with him to step up our infrastructure in the Mumbai terminal. We will work out an upgrade plan for this and MOT will fund it under the Swadesh Darshan scheme. The

short-term plan is to ensure easy immigration and customs with the current infrastructure. We had a series of meetings with some of the biggest cruise liners when we were at WTM London last year that led us to think in this direction. There is a high-powered committee set up by the Ministry of Shipping to promote cruise tourism.

Q*How are you promoting the state's Buddhist Circuit?*

We want to improve connectivity into Aurangabad, now that the airport has been upgraded. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis has taken up this issue with the Civil Aviation Minister to re-start the Jaipur-Aurangabad flight which we had as well as the

Pune-Aurangabad one. We are also looking to start a new route from Aurangabad to Bodh Gaya to cater to the heavy Buddhist tourist traffic. It's still in discussion though and we are looking at a couple of airlines for this.

Q*Are you doing any activities and events internationally?*

We have partnered with Baden-Württemberg state in SouthWest Germany this year for a festival they are organising in Stuttgart in July. It will be a big Bollywood movie festival and they have invited us to attend it and leverage the event to our benefit and promote Maharashtra there.

Buddhist Connection

- Maharashtra Govt. has urged the Ministry of Civil Aviation to re-start flights from Jaipur and Pune to Aurangabad
- They are also looking to start a new route from Aurangabad to Bodh Gaya to cater to Buddhist tourists

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PATA CEO comes calling

■ PATA CEO **Mario Hardy**, and **John Koldowski**, Member Tourism Action Group, Thamassat University Thailand, will deliver a seminar on April 5, 2016, at The Park New Delhi, to help prepare tourism stakeholders for future growth, opportunities and challenges.



Mario Hardy
CEO, PATA

While Hardy is optimistic about the growing role and contribution of tourism in world economies, he will focus on how markets can get their fair share of this growth as well as address, both present day and futuristic challenges and opportunities. Hardy leads PATA's charge at the Global Travel Association Coalition. Koldowski, who was

former Deputy CEO of PATA, specialises in analysis and interpretation of information regarding movements and trends in the tourism sector based on emerging consumer preferences and destination development. Koldowski will share his in-depth knowledge of the impact of global trends on Asia Pacific tourism.

IIPT facilitates MBA in Tourism

The International Institute for Peace through Tourism (IIPT) India Chapter has helped create an MBA program in Tourism at Mumbai-based SVIMS institute.



TT BUREAU

The International Institute for Peace through Tourism (IIPT) India Chapter has facilitated the launch of a one-year MBA program in Tourism at the Mumbai-based institute Sir M Visvesvaraya Institute of Management Studies & Research (SVIMS). **Ajay Prakash**, President, IIPT

India, said, "SVIMS is part of the IIPT Consortium of Collaborating Universities and this MBA program will be in association with LivingStone International University in Zambia, which is also part of this consortium."

The 30-year-old institute also celebrated the first anniversary of its India

Chapter. Prakash adds, "One of the things we are working for is creating a sustainable tourism product which is where the trade comes in. The idea is to encourage the tourism industry to look at sustainability which is going to be a critical need in the future. We want to inculcate this idea among the young."



Ajay Prakash
President,
IIPT India

IIPT will be holding its first global awards for empowered women in tourism at the upcoming ITB Berlin show on March 11 to be presented by **Taleb Rifai**, Secretary General, UNWTO. "We are also working with universities across India. We have created the first IIPT centre of excellence at Central University of Jammu. We want to create centres of excellence at various



Kiran Yadav
Executive Director & Dean,
Entrepreneurship Development, SVIMS

universities across the country. By the end of 2016 we hope to have 100 such centres across India," Prakash adds.

Explaining the course, **Kiran Yadav**, Executive Director & Dean, Entrepreneurship Development, SVIMS, says, "It is designed to allow students to work and study in India, Zambia, UK and Finland. We have also invited people from the trade to guide us on how we can make it relevant. We want to focus on creating managers and entrepreneurs for the future."

The advisory board will have representatives from the government, travel and hospitality associations, senior executives from the industry including the e-commerce companies and major hotel chains in India as well as the academia. It has CEOs on its advisory council from companies who are looking to enhance the quality of future workforce.



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Trade demands industry status

► Contd. from page 2



Tax-free holidays

❖ It would be beneficial for all if people are tax-incentivised to develop facilities at pre-determined tourist destination

❖ If the cost of a family's annual holiday in India is made tax-free with a cap on value or days, then people will start moving more within the country, creating demand for tourism along with job opportunities

Prakash Bang
Managing Director, roomsXML Solutions and India Travel Award Winner (Best Innovative Product)



Improve infrastructure

❖ The government should look at tax restructure

❖ Development of infrastructure, new recreational sites, and issue like safety of tourists should be on the agenda

Jagrut Thakkar
Director, JJs Tours & Travels and India Travel Award Winner (Best Innovative Product of the Year)



Allocate funds for promotion

There is a need for tax reduction for the travel and tourism industry. The hospitality sector in India is highly taxed, and this has to be checked. There is also a need for higher allocation of funds on marketing and promotional activities for India as a destination.

Amit Aggarwal
Managing Partner
Wish Bone India and India Travel Award Winner (Best MICE Operator)



Create business environment

❖ Reduce luxury hotels barriers and create a business environment

❖ As hoteliers, our biggest need is rationalising multiple taxes that are paid

❖ Additionally we are hopeful that the introduction of GST will streamline things.

❖ Hospitality and tourism are dependant heavily on infrastructure, so I am hoping for a good budgetary allocation

Rohan Sable
GM, Novotel Goa Shrem Hotel and Grand Mercure Goa Shrem Resort & India Travel Award Winner (Best Spa & Wellness Resort)



RBI's 5:25 scheme

❖ Rationalisation of taxes and early implementation of GST

❖ Lower the minimum project cost mandated for inclusion of hotels in the Reserve Bank of India's Infrastructure Lending List from ` 200 crore to ` 20 crore

❖ Eligibility to avail the 5:25 scheme of RBI

❖ The Union Govt should ensure that all states must recognize tourism as an industry so that hospitality establishments can avail incentives and concessions

Luv Malhotra
Vice President, FHRAI



Standardise taxes

Curtailment and standardisation of taxes nationally can play a significant role in balancing costs for the travel industry. This initiative alone can boost both occupancies and ARR's for the hospitality industry. Additional charges like Public Performance License (PPL) and Indian Performing Rights Society (IPRS) tariffs increases costs for events. A parity has to be brought in place to streamline this grey area.

Manish Dayya
Area General Manager, AccorHotel's – Lavasa Hotels & Convention Centre and India Travel Award Winner (Best Mid Market Hotel)

Contd. on page 12 ►



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Know IATA's new programs

TAAI members were witness to intense training sessions regarding IATA's NDC and NewGen ISS in Mumbai and New Delhi as part of the association's Member Empowerment Program.

TT BUREAU

Members of the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) are reaping the benefits of having their president heading the United Federation of Travel Agents Associations (UFTAA) Global as well. Through his recent appointment, Sunil Kumar was able to get Yossef Fatael, Vice President and Chairman of Air Matters, UFTAA, to visit India from Israel and address members on matters most urgent – IATA's New Distribution Capability (NDC) and its NewGen ISS.

TAAI Western and Northern Region Chapters had invited Fatael to conduct an in-depth presentation titled 'Changing Trends in the

"In a fast-evolving market, unless we emerge pro-active and take our skills to newer levels, we may not be guaranteed sustained growth."

Sunil Kumar
President, TAAI &
President, UFTTA



Federation of India (TAFI), who were also invited to be part of this.

Kumar said that this was part of TAAI's Member Empowerment Program, under which it will organise frequent

change their approach. This presentation on NDC and NewGen ISS programs being launched by IATA will be made throughout the country in all the 20 Regions and Chapters of TAAI," he adds.

New challenges bring new opportunities

Yossef Fatael, Vice-President, UFTAA, explains how NDC and NewGen ISS will have to be dealt with in the near future.

Please explain NDC and NewGen ISS?

NDC will create a totally new environment in distribution facilities as they are today. Instead of having major GDSs, we'll see many new IT companies coming into the market and providing information and facilities to the public and travel agents. New Gen ISS, on the other hand, will dramatically change the

agency program as well as the contract that the agents have with the airlines today.

How will it change the dynamics of the industry?

It will totally transform the way of paying the airlines through the IATA system for the purchases. There will be new accredited agent models, which will create new opportunities for small agencies to come back to the arena. The field itself is changing and will in turn change the infrastructure, rules of the industry, create opportunities and will make many of us adopt moves to modify the business model we are running.

Travel will become more of a commodity. We will move from a reservation system to a trading system. Decision-making process will be a paramount skill that travel agents would need. Unlike today, where every agent gets the same price on GDSs, airlines will offer personalised prices for agents and customers. It is going to be much more complicated and if it is implemented as planned by IATA, it will create a new profession and a new industry.

Selling the design of the experience or being expert in a niche is the new business model that many agents would have to move to. We will see collaboration between agents across countries and groups, just like airlines and hoteliers are doing today.

How would you advise travel agents to handle this situation?



Travel Industry and its Impact' that highlighted the travel agents' perspective on these two important subjects. TAAI conducted a similar workshop in New Delhi on January 30. Present at the workshops were Kumar, a few members of the Managing Committee, as well as some members of the Travel Agents

sessions. "In a fast-evolving market, unless we emerge pro-active and take our skills to newer levels, we may not be guaranteed sustained growth. UFTAA has expertise on future trends and IATA matters and the presentations gave members an idea about the changes that are coming and how they need to evolve and

Opportunities Galore

- There will be new accredited agent models, which will create new opportunities for small agencies to come back to the arena
- Agents will move from a reservation system to a trading system

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*KTM-DEL	RA 217	1655	1835	MON, WED, FRI

EX-BOM (3 times a week)

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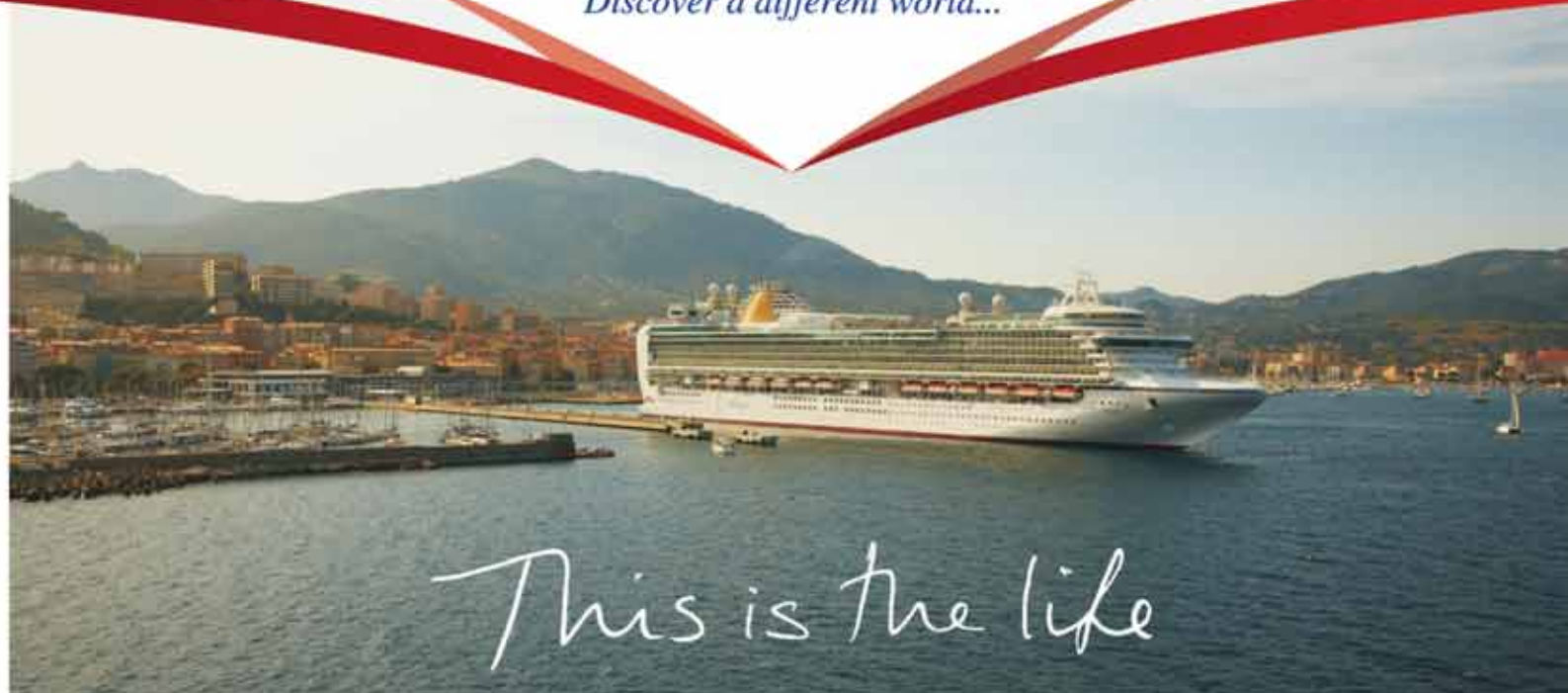
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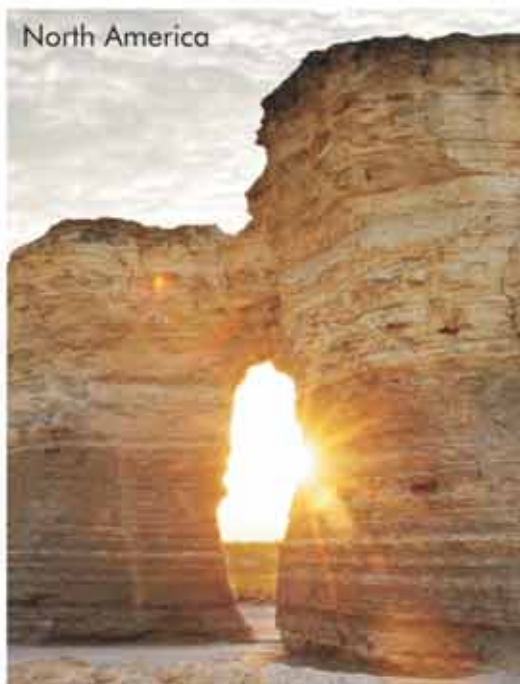
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Favourable tax reforms to boost revenue

► Contd. from page 9



Bridge gaps in travel facilities

♦ Areas where we need to focus are bridging gaps in travel facilities, improving infrastructure, working on safety norms and introduce a better tax regime

♦ The government needs to put in place a budget that helps and promotes tourism resulting in better industry revenues and employment opportunities

Jaal Shah

Founder, RezLive.com and India Travel Award Winner (Best Online Travel Product)



ATF should be declared goods

♦ Exemption from Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT)
♦ Exemption from withholding tax on aircraft / engine lease rental payments and obligations arising out of lease agreements

♦ We need to allow our financial institutions to purchase aircraft and lease it to airline operators

♦ ATF to be considered as declared goods

Kiran Koteswar

CFO
SpiceJet and India Travel Award Winner (Best Airline)



Better internal connectivity

Tourism should be a key focus with a push on infrastructure development to improve domestic and inbound tourism. The Finance Minister should invite private investments and focus on segments like adventure, MICE, cruise, heritage and culture. We also need rationalisation of taxation. There is also an urgent need to solve internal connectivity issues and need to showcase the culture of India to the world.

Rajat Bagaria

National Managing Committee Member and Co-Chairman Convention Committee, TAFI



Hospitality: Infrastructure status

♦ Exemption limit on Service tax from ` 10 lacs to ` 25 lacs

♦ Treat travel industry at par with exporters based on its foreign exchange earnings

♦ Services which are not rendered in India should be exempt from service tax

♦ Tourism industry is currently highly taxed and makes India an expensive destination in spite of weaker Rupee.

♦ Infrastructure status to the hospitality industry

Jagat Mehta

President, Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA)



Priority to global contracts

Service Tax should be relaxed. Industrialists who intend to develop 3 star and 4 star guest houses should be incentivised with tax deductions. Better infrastructure (road, transport etc.) for tourist destination is required. Implementation of the contracts signed with the tourism fraternity globally should be a priority.

Sanjeev Mehra

Director, Aaryan Leisure and Holidays and India Travel award Winner (Best MICE Consolidator)



Encourage PPP model

♦ The roll out of the GST bill will be welcomed with open arms by all players of the industry. We hope that hotels will be placed under the lower slabs of GST

♦ The current taxes are very high and need to be checked.

♦ We hope to see progress in infrastructure and connectivity issues

♦ Public Private Partnerships need to be encouraged more

Harikumar B

General Manager, Radisson Blue, Mysore and India Travel Award Winner (Best Debut Hotel)

Contd. on page 16 ►

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New Apps to ease agency's business

Sandeep Dwivedi, Chief Commercial Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient, tells **TRAVTALK** about their new initiative, set to launch in March, that promises to boost the functioning of the travel industry.



KANCHAN NATH

Talking about the product, **Sandeep Dwivedi**, Chief Commercial Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient said, "Recently we have started working on a new initiative which we are going to launch sometime in March 2016. This is related to providing a financial package which will boost the functioning of the travel industry. We have done a tie-up with Tally, which is one of the best accounting packages available for travel fraternity. We have created a layer in-between from GDS, or from LCC carrier that will communicate with the system, automatically pushing the required information in the accounting package. From the agency point of view, it will not lose any revenue because all the postings will happen automatically into the system. Also there will be an ease of use and reporting will be available to the travel agent. Plus the resources especially on the travel agencies side are a challenge. Because of Tally the resources will be easily available to the travel agencies in the market itself."

He added, "We have released Smartpoint 6.5, which comes with a lot of changes, keeping in mind the Indian requirements especially from the travel agent's viewpoint. Smartpoint offers branded fares from over 400 leading airlines from around the world and over 650,000 unique hotel properties. It is designed to increase the productivity of everyday jobs such as Queue and PNR management."

About the Travelpart Universal API, he said, "UAPI is gaining a foot in the Indian market especially the OTA space. This Application Programming Interface aggregates content from GDS, accommodation providers, LCCs and merchandising and ancillary services through a single connection. It enables travel consultants to gain access to multiple content sources by writing code for only one solution, decreasing the time required to launch new travel applications."

The company's travel app, Trip38, has real-time access to travel content and

branded ancillary services that assists the travellers on unknown grounds. "It manages a traveller's itinerary-starting from check-in alerts, baggage allowance, flight details, terminal info, airport facilities and so on," Dwivedi said. The App offers unique feature of professional services and branding for the agents. He added, "If as a travel consultant you incorporate this App and register in it with your

credentials (which is a onetime action) you can do your company's branding free of cost. The only thing you have to do next is ask your customer to download the App and register himself. After that, during his journey he has to open the App and get detailed information about places he is visiting with your company's branding on it. And you get to increase your brand and service loyalty."



"Trip38 also offers a unique feature of professional services and branding. If as a travel consultant you incorporate this App and register in it with your credentials (which is a onetime action) you can do your company's branding free of cost."

Sandeep Dwivedi

Chief Commercial Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient



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Tech Talk

➤ A new financial package, with support from Tally, will make resources easily available for travel agencies in the market

NEWS

- ❖ Biennial IATO elections on April 23
- ❖ Indian visitors top Dubai market with 1.6 million
- ❖ Kozhikode-Ras Al Khaimah 4 times a week on AI Express
- ❖ SQ's Scoot to start India operations from March
- ❖ 33-room Lords Inn hotel launched in Jammu
- ❖ Now, AirAsia X from New Delhi to Kuala Lumpur
- ❖ HRANI Conclave in Delhi on Feb 27
- ❖ Mauritius records 18% growth in Indian tourist arrivals
- ❖ 'Genting Dream' to dock in Mumbai on Oct 29
- ❖ Kashmir tourism bounces back with 75,000 visitors in Jan

Ushering in the e-Passports era

Passports haven't changed much in a century, but all that is changing, albeit rather slowly.

Since the first hand-written passport emerged in a recognisable form around 1915 there have only been two major revisions to the way they look and work. The first came in 1980 when the now familiar Machine Readable Zones started to appear at the bottom of the biographic page.

The second came in 2004 with the introduction of the first chip-bearing ePassports. Both are steps in a gradual but planned transition away from paper toward digital passports.

Directing the transition from behind the scenes is a UN agency called ICAO (the International Civil Aviation Authority). ICAO sets the standards that ensure passports will be accepted anywhere in the world. It remains the absolute prerogative of individual sovereign states to issue passports; however it is in everyone's best interests if the same standards are implemented at the same time, hence there is broad acceptance of ICAO's role.



The micro-chip in an ePassport contains biometric details that can be used to identify the traveller. The biometrics used in this are facial recognition, fingerprint recognition, and iris recognition. From the traveller's perspective, ePassports with readable chips containing biometrics are good news. Border control is usually a trade-off between security and ease of passage: the higher the security, the slower the passage. ePassports buck that trend by allowing for both improved security and greater efficiency. The chip adds an

extra layer of security making the passport harder to defraud, but it also allows for more efficient checks.

You will be able to take advantage of special channels available only to ePassport holders, usually leading to some form of automatic gate. As ePassport holding is still relatively low, you'll probably be joining a much shorter queue in the arrival hall. This is a great reason to become an early adopter.

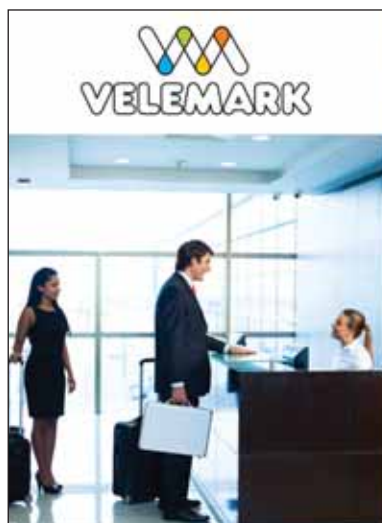
Automatic gates work by authenticating the traveller against the biometrics stored on the ePassport chip. If the face of the traveller at the gate matches the face stored digitally on the chip the gate opens. Although the time to complete this process may be about the same as a check by a human border guard, there can be more automatic gates per meter which means shorter queues. The alternative is

building bigger arrival halls, which is more expensive and not always feasible.

As of this year, 120 out of 191 ICAO member states now issue ePassports and about 500 million have been issued worldwide. So a tipping point in uptake has definitely been reached. Almost all the major flight hubs have some form of 'eGate', usually tucked over to one side in the hall with conspicuously tempting shorter queues.

Looking toward the future, ICAO already has plans to implement fully electronic passports, where the booklet format is replaced with a smart-card on which all your identity details, visas and travel history will be stored in the chip. This will be the next revolution in the rather uneventful history of the passport, but given the slow pace of change this is still some decades away. For now, and for some years to come, the ePassport remains the state of the art.

The author, William Sillery, is the Head of Transitions at TT Services



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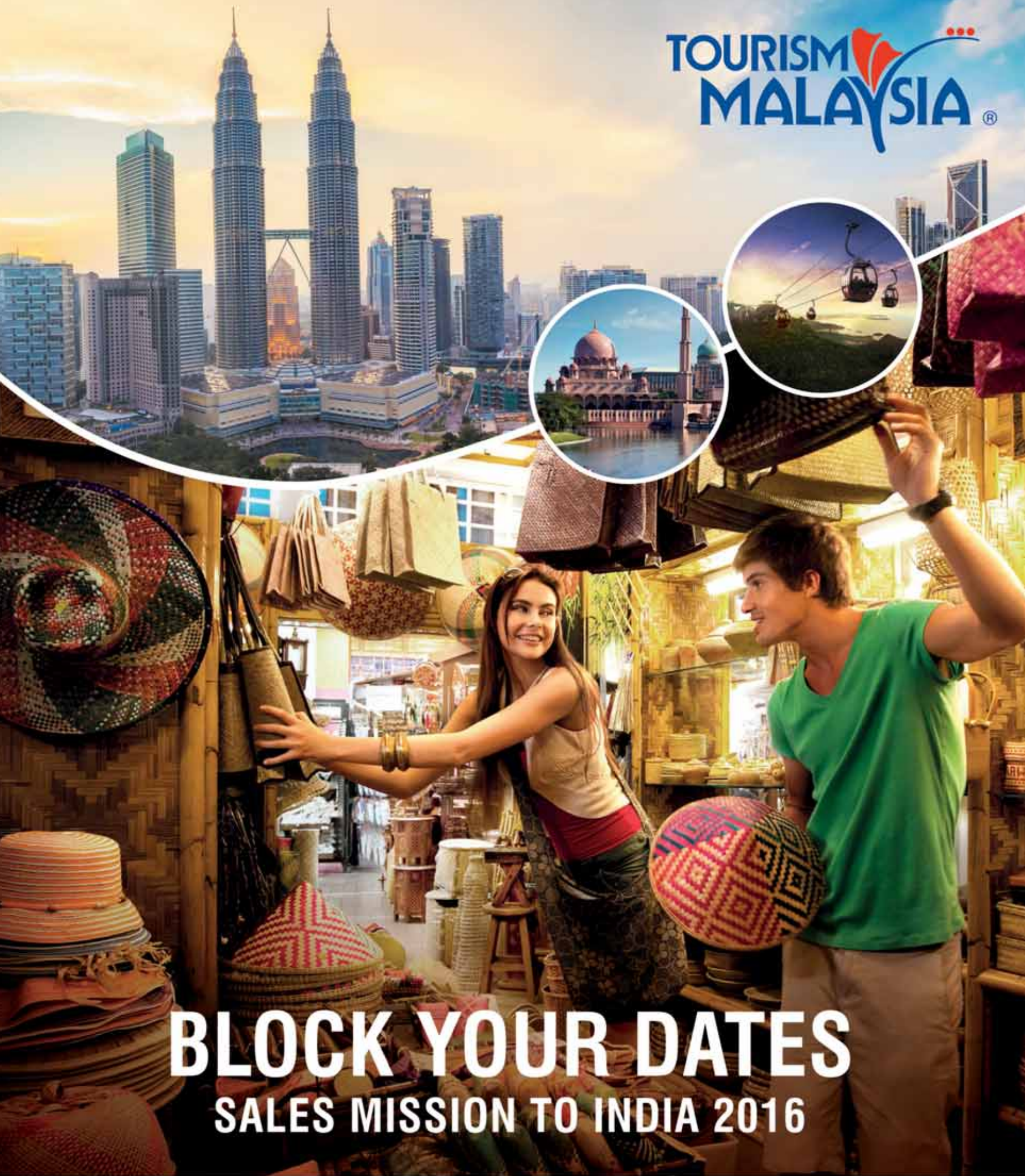
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Better infrastructure, safety paramount

► Contd. from page 12



Scrap double taxation

- ❖ There should be a definite budget for better connectivity by building new airports, improving airport facilities and building better roads to key tourism destinations in the country
- ❖ A reduction in airport fees and the taxes on airline fuel
- ❖ Indian tour operators have to pay double taxes for the arrangement for outbound tours
- ❖ ATF prices needs to be slashed in order to boost tourism industry

Tadesse Tilahun

Regional Director - India Sub Continent, Ethiopian Airlines



Multitudes of taxes challenging

- ❖ Try and bring the GST
- ❖ Multitude of taxes is challenging
- ❖ Rationalising the tax structure

Dilip Puri

Managing Director India and Regional Vice President South Asia, Starwood Hotels & Resorts



Infrastructure status

- ❖ We definitely are looking for the infrastructure status for our industry
- ❖ Taxes have to be rationalised. They are completely out of the way.

Naveen Jain

President, Duet Hotels



Tax rebate on forex

- ❖ Service tax ought to be levied at only one point for air tickets - not upon the airlines and the agents separately.
- ❖ Abolition of service tax for services provided overseas i.e. on international outbound tours.
- ❖ Withdrawal of the 'Swachh Bharat' cess.
- ❖ Restoration of the tax rebate for earnings in foreign exchange
- ❖ Mandatory merging of the bizarre fuel surcharge with the basic fare.

Ajay Prakash

President, IIPT India and Immediate Past President of TAFI



Ease luxury tax

- ❖ A levy on taxes would be a huge relief especially for the inbound sector, where foreign exchange revenue is applicable.
- ❖ Apart from the service tax, ease in luxury tax would also be a huge welcome that would definitely help further the growth of the tourism industry in India.

Amit Malhotra

Director, India Operations, Bestway Tours & Safaris



Set off service taxes

- ❖ The government should do something about the service taxes -- even if there is no waiver, they should have a set-off.
- ❖ As wholesalers, the retailers buy from us and sell it to clients who have to pay double due to the service tax.

Shyam Upadhyay

Director, U&I Holidays



Promote Brand India

- ❖ We need waiver of service tax on tourism services
- ❖ The FM also needs to allocate budgets for better infrastructure to back the vision of the Hon PM of promoting tourism in India.

Subhash Motwani

Director, Namaste Tourism



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Registration Charges – INR 3,500 + GST

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Cost on Twin Sharing – INR 39,900 + GST
Single Occupancy – INR 49,900 + GST (for second delegate)
Registration Charges – INR 3,500 + GST

Package B

for Allied Members

INR 49,900 + GST

Cost per person on Twin Sharing -
Single Occupancy – INR 59,900 + GST
Registration Charges – INR 3,500 + GST

Spouse/2nd Member from the same company with Air Ticket
Cost on Twin Sharing – INR 49,900 + GST
Single Occupancy – INR 59,900 + GST (for second delegate)
Registration Charges – INR 3,500 + GST

Package C

for Non Members

INR 59,900 + GST

Cost per person on Twin Sharing
Single Occupancy – INR 69,900 + GST
Registration Charges – INR 3,500 + GST

Spouse/2nd Member from the same company with Air Ticket
Cost on Twin Sharing – INR 59,900 + GST
Single Occupancy – INR 59,900 + GST (for second delegate)
Registration Charges – INR 3,500 + GST

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Registration Charges – INR 3,500 + GST

Package D

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Cost per Person

Betting big on Australia

The Ministry of Tourism (MOT) has initiated a unique event to tap the international markets, specially Australia and has involved state governments and key industry associations.



TT BUREAU

In order to create more awareness about India among the long-haul international markets, especially Australia, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

ernments as well as industry associations like the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Association of India

are definitely looking at Australia as a market where this run will be telecasted in a big way. We would like more Australians to come to India and explore our offerings. We are working very closely with the state tourism departments for this like Kerala, Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Jammu & Kashmir. We also have good cooperation from the hotel industry."

Talking about how this event can help the travel trade, **NS Rathore**, Chairman, IATO (Western India), says, "We hope that with the publicity created by this event, business from Australia will increase. This documentary will help potential travellers in Australia realise that India is safe to travel in. A lot of international tourists, especially women still feel India is not safe. That is why we are involved, and every chapter from Chennai to Gujarat and J&K will be involved and provide the drivers. Accommodation and meals will be taken care of by the state governments."



Vikas Rustagi
Regional Director, India Tourism,
Mumbai, Ministry of Tourism,
Government of India



NS Rathore
Chairman
IATO (Western India)

is supporting a 'Spirit of India Run' by former member of Australian Parliament and marathon runner – **Pat Farmer**. This was flagged off from Kanyakumari on January 26 and will conclude in Kashmir on March 30. The event is being supported by various state gov-

(FHRAI), and Hotel Association of India (HAI).

Vikas Rustagi, Regional Director, India Tourism, Mumbai, MOT, Government of India, said, "We want to expose India's tourist attractions to the domestic and international markets and

Gujarat hosts International Kite Festival



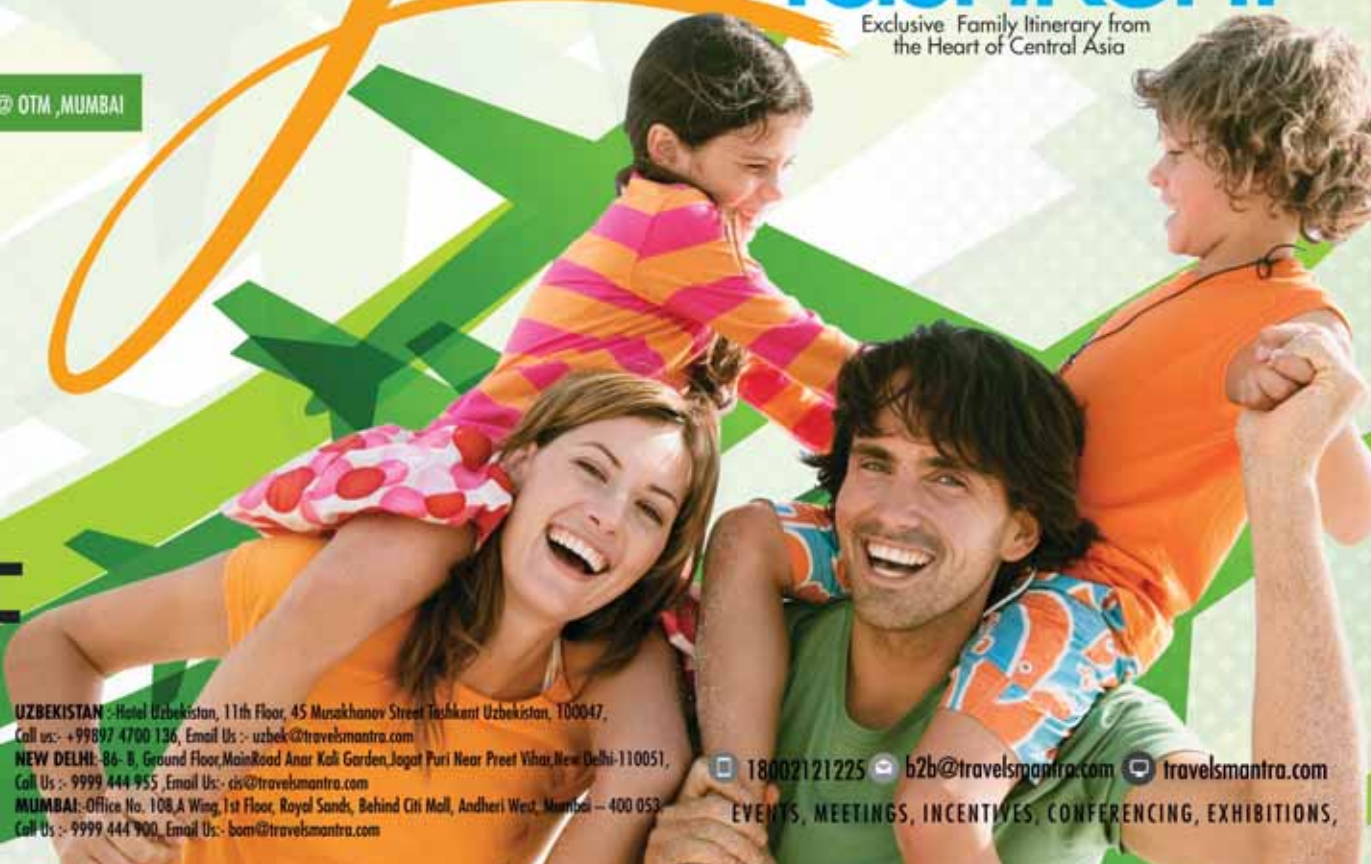
The International Kite Festival, which took off on the right bank of River Sabarmati, was inaugurated in the presence of **O. P. Kohli**, Governor of Gujarat, and **Anandiben Patel**, Chief Minister, Gujarat, among other dignitaries. Kiteists from 31 countries, 27 Indian states and Gujarat were seen flying kites of different sizes and shapes and myriad colours. **Jayesh Radadia**, Minister of State (Tourism), said that the Kite Festival, organised by the Tourism Department of Gujarat, is a center of attraction for both Indian and foreign kiteists.

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Swiss training for agents

The Swiss Travel Pass Superstar 2016 program will act as an incentive tool for the trade to get more Indians to Switzerland and make them stay longer. Registrations start from March 1.



Switzerland Tourism, Swiss Travel System, TVG Lyria and Rail Europe recently launched the Swiss Travel Pass Superstar Program 2016 in Mumbai and several other Indian cities, through a joint initiative to promote brand aware-

About Swiss Travel Pass Superstar program

It will be a six-month program in which every month agents have to answer 7 out of 10 questions correctly and sell maximum number of travel passes to stand a chance to win exciting prizes monthly. Also, agents will have to upload the number of passes being sold by them and score a minimum of 80 per cent to qualify for the grand prize at the end of six months. The top 30 performers will win a week-long holiday to Switzerland which will include airfares, stay, sightseeing, meals etc.



Ritu Sharma
Deputy Director & Media Manager- India, Switzerland Tourism

ness and enhance knowledge of various Swiss Travel Passes among travel agents and tour operators in India. Registrations for the Swiss Travel Pass Superstar program will start from March 1, and

the modules will begin from April 1, 2016.

Ritu Sharma, Deputy Director & Media Manager-India, Switzerland Tourism, says, "The idea is to increase awareness of the Swiss Travel Pass among the trade while giving them a chance to win prizes. In 2015, we gave prizes like Apple iPhones, iPads and Swiss watches. We want to incentivise the person selling the maximum number of passes. Last year, the program witnessed around 850 participants and this year Switzerland Tourism along with its partners expects to double the number of participants."

Switzerland Tourism Board recorded a 21 per cent growth in 2015. The thrust is on encouraging agents to sell more travel passes with longer durations to customers. The minimum number of days is three to four but with this program agents are expected to sell travel passes of eight days. Switzerland Tourism along with its partners organised training sessions in Mumbai, Chandigarh, Delhi and Ahmedabad. Mumbai saw 62 attendees while Chandigarh and New Delhi recorded 45 and 108, respectively.

Creating demand for Crete

Having made its first official presentation in India in Mumbai, the Greek island of Crete is happy to start low but reach big tourist numbers.



Recognising the dynamism and influence of the India outbound market, a senior three-member team from the Island of Crete was in Mumbai to interact with the travel trade. In what can be considered its debut visit to the country, the Island of Crete in Greece is keen to tap the potential of India tourism market. **Michailis Vamiedakis**, Commissioner of Tourism, Island of Crete, who led the delegation, said, "We believe in the Indian market; it is evolving with a promise of big numbers. The arrivals in Greece and specially Crete from India are still very small. But we perceive a lot of scope and expect growth in middle to long-term – not right away. We want to have a long, stable presence here."



Michailis Vamiedakis
Commissioner of Tourism
Island of Crete

We'll participate in travel fairs in India, conduct presentations and roadshows in other cities, and organise Fam trips

"The response in Mumbai was overwhelming specially because this is the first time that Greece and Crete have tapped the India market. Currently, we see only a few thousand Indians coming into Crete but that is also where we see a lot of scope for growth and improvement. We will participate in travel fairs in India, conduct some more presentations and roadshows in other cities, and organise Fam trips for agents and tour operators," Vamiedakis added.

The Tourism Commissioner has set the target low for now, since it is starting from scratch. "We just want to have stable growth and a serious presence here. Our plan is also to organise workshops between the trade of both countries in the second half of 2016. We will also introduce our specialist training program in 2016 that includes educational kits locally as well as virtually via Skype," Vamiedakis revealed.

Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Kolkata. Its target audience includes FITs, families, GITs, MICE, weddings and youth.

Kerala targets 10% rise in arrivals in 2016

Kerala Tourism is upbeat about seeing growth in tourism arrivals despite competition from similar destinations. It aims for 10 per cent growth in tourist arrivals in the state this year.



TT BUREAU

The annual Kerala Tourism roadshow in New Delhi saw the state showcasing its tourism products with 60 exhibitors (including hotels, resorts and attractions) and more than 200 buyers from the travel fraternity. Outlining the aim behind the event, **Nandakumar K. P.**, Deputy Director, Kerala Tourism, said

this period." However, he said that they are not satisfied with only this, and claimed that the state is aiming for about 10 per cent growth in tourist arrivals in Kerala in 2016.

Revealing other marketing efforts, he added, "We are coming up with different tourism products like cuisine and Ayurveda at various places. Apart from traditional

markets we would like to concentrate on new markets, which could grow in future. China and Russia are important for us. Also, East Europe is an emerging market. We are planning to participate in international exhibition and shows including MITT in Moscow, ITB Berlin, TUR Gothenburgh, etc."

However, amidst concerns over passenger traffic

shifting from Kerala to Sri Lanka, Nandakumar says, "Kerala and Sri Lanka have similar products, whether it's the natural greenery, beaches or Ayurveda. However, our USP is the quality and we want to concentrate on that."

Adding that the MICE and wedding sector is very important for them, and contribute to numbers in a big way, he said,

"We have big plans for MICE in 2016, and we will be putting in place new projects after the new government in Kerala comes in May." He further said that they are expecting more budgets once the political change in the state comes into effect. "Last two years, we have been running with almost the same budget, but now we expect it to change," added Nandakumar.

Quick Facts

- Number of FTAs to Kerala: 7,75,390 (from Jan-Oct, 2015)
- Number of domestic visits in Kerala: 76,71,277 (from Jan-Aug, 2015)
- In 2016, Kerala has big plans for the MICE & wedding sector



Nandakumar K. P.
Deputy Director
Kerala Tourism

Apart from traditional markets we would like to concentrate on new markets. China and Russia are important for us. Also, East Europe is an emerging market

"The national capital is very important for us, and we have a huge market share from Delhi. Hence, we do this roadshow every year."

He added that despite the industry expecting a slump in 2015-16, Kerala has not felt it. Supporting this with numbers, he said, "In 2014, we achieved 7.6 per cent and 7.7 per cent of international and domestic tourists respectively. However, in 2015, we only have figures from January to October, and we have achieved 6.6 per cent of international arrivals and 7.6 per cent of domestic arrivals in

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Entertainment cruise kicks off in August

Ark Travels has launched the Big Bang Nautical Fiesta on SuperStar Gemini Ex Singapore, an entertainment cruise, scheduled to kick off in August 2016.



TT BUREAU

"We have launched a new concept on Star Cruises, an entertainment cruise. These sailings will add more fun, entertainment and food in addition to the normal inclusions on board," says **Anju Tandon**, Director, Ark Travels.



Anju Tandon
Director, Ark Travels

Elaborating on the schedule of the cruise, Tandon says, "The sailing on August 10, 2016 is a normal two nights cruise from Singapore to Port Klang and back, and the cruise on August 14, 2016, will be a three nights sailing from Singapore to Penang and Port Klang and back."

Discussing the entertainment activities on board, Tandon says, "Additional entertainment activities have been introduced like performance by Bollywood and

Tollywood celebrities on board, all day carnival with party games and all night musical extravaganzas on an open deck. A special food festival on board will serve popular Indian cuisines."

Talking about the support from the travel trade partners, Tandon adds, "All our packages are commissionable to our partners. We are educating our trade partners about the product and are looking forward for their support."

Cruise commission on gross fare

Cruise Professionals has re-launched the British cruiseliner P&O Cruises to the India market, opening doors to a revenue generation opportunity for travel agents and provide their clients with a high demand and enriching cruise product.



TT BUREAU

With a fleet of eight superliner ships, P&O Cruises offers itineraries of various durations ranging from short Cruise Breaks to Round the World Cruises. Talking about the product, **Nishith Saxena**, Director, Cruise Professionals, says, "We aim to provide the best holidays afloat, combining British cruising with contemporary style and innovation. In the last two years we witnessed a substantial demand for premium UK based cruise products and we feel this is the perfect time for re-launch of P&O Cruises."

In the summers, the ships operate from Southampton, cruising to the Mediterranean, the Atlantic Isles, the Baltic and Scandinavia, Canary Islands, Norway and Iceland. During the winters, the ships sail to the Caribbean, and some undertake World Voyages, journeying to Australia, New Zealand, South America, the Far East and the US. Saxena adds, "The world of choice, combined with

"While most agents were familiar with the name, we are engaging them by providing training tools, brochures and point of sales material. Also, P&O Cruises offers commission to travel agents on the gross fare."

Nishith Saxena

Director, Cruise Professionals



experienced, professionals and friendly staff, accounts for P&O Cruises' continued popularity with international and Indian travellers. The dining, entertainment, style, décor of our ships reflects a high-end British sophistication which is highly appreciated by Indian passengers."

Talking about the facilities on the ships, Saxena says, "Along with a range of facilities available, there are additional activities to choose from like a modern spa, well-equipped gymnasium, multiple theatres

and lounges, Internet café, libraries or kids activity area."

With an advantage of familiarity of the product, Cruise Professionals is involving and encouraging the travel agents to promote P&O Cruises to their Indian clients. Saxena says, "While most agents were familiar with the name, we are engaging them by providing training tools, brochures and point of sales material."

Discussing the pricing policy for P&O Cruises, Saxena

says, "We have a unique pricing mechanism which provides passengers a choice to pay a lower fare for a guaranteed accommodation with lesser benefits and stricter cancellations. By paying a higher fare they can choose the cabin, more benefits and relaxed terms. With a standard pricing policy across the globe, our agents need not worry about differential rates in different markets. Also, P&O Cruises offers commission to travel agents on the gross fare. If compared to any other cruise line, the commission offers would be at least 2-3 per cent higher."



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More private sector participation

In light of MOT's continued efforts to promote the tourism potential of the Northeastern states, **Parvez Dewan**, Advisor to J&K Governor & former Secretary, Tourism, reiterates his ongoing support and says that the domestic market needs to be tapped effectively.

AHANA GURUNG

Former Tourism Secretary **Parvez Dewan** is well-known for his considerable contribution to the promotion and development of the North East region. During his tenure at the Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Govt. of India, the ministry initiated aggressive campaigns to advocate tourism in the seven states, along with the Darjeeling region in West Bengal, and launched the three-day International Tourism Mart (ITM) in 2013.



Parvez Dewan
Advisor to J&K Governor, and
Former Secretary, Tourism, MOT

Once Sikkim's airport is functional, the number of tourist arrivals will surely grow by at least 20%, owing to its existing strong infrastructure and variety of tourism products

"The response to ITM has been phenomenal so far," enthuses Dewan. "After the first edition of ITM was launched, a considerable growth of 28 per cent in tourist arrivals to the North East was registered during 2013 over 2012. The year 2014 saw a high growth of 40 per cent and witnessed an increase in domestic tourist visits to 68.90 lakh as compared to 66.77 lakh during 2013."

Apart from ITM's success, the past year has seen concentrated efforts by MOT to develop infrastructure and connectivity in the North East for which substantial funds have been allotted to various states. "With a major chunk of challenges addressed, the Northeastern states will definitely see exponential growth

in tourist arrivals," comments Dewan. "Once Sikkim's airport is ready and functional, the number of tourist arrivals will surely grow by at least 20 per cent, owing to its existing strong infrastructure and variety of tourism products. Assam already has a relatively high footfall, so the growth will not be as prominent, but I expect a

double digit growth for Arunachal Pradesh."

While Dewan agrees that the North East's vast tourism potential is not being used to its full extent, he is of the opinion that the change will not happen overnight. "To be able to effectively promote the states, the private

sector needs to be equally involved as well," he states. "I feel that culture plays a major role in attracting tourists, something the North East has no dearth of. Their vibrant culture should be displayed in the architecture and in any other way, for which the private sector has to actively be a part of."

New Sikkim-West Bengal railway line underway

■ A new 45-km-long railway line connecting Pakyong in Sikkim to Sevoke in West Bengal has finally been approved by the Supreme Court and is under progress, according to **Dr. Jitendra Singh**, Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER). The project had been curtailed since 2009 after wildlife activists and environmentalists opposed it. Singh said that funds to the tune of ₹ 4190 crore have been allotted for the railway line, which will also include 14 tunnels and 28 bridges. "This railway line will offer an exclusively picturesque and scenic journey while passing through the foothills of the Kanchenjunga mountain range and the Teesta river valley," the minister said.

Referring to the ongoing Greenfield Airport project at Pakyong, he said that it is expected to be ready by 2017 at a revised cost of ₹ 605.59 crore. Singh revealed that 183 projects supported by the Ministry of DoNER have been completed in Sikkim at a cost of ₹ 487.91 crore under the Non Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR). Furthermore, 41 additional projects worth ₹ 721.89 crore are underway.

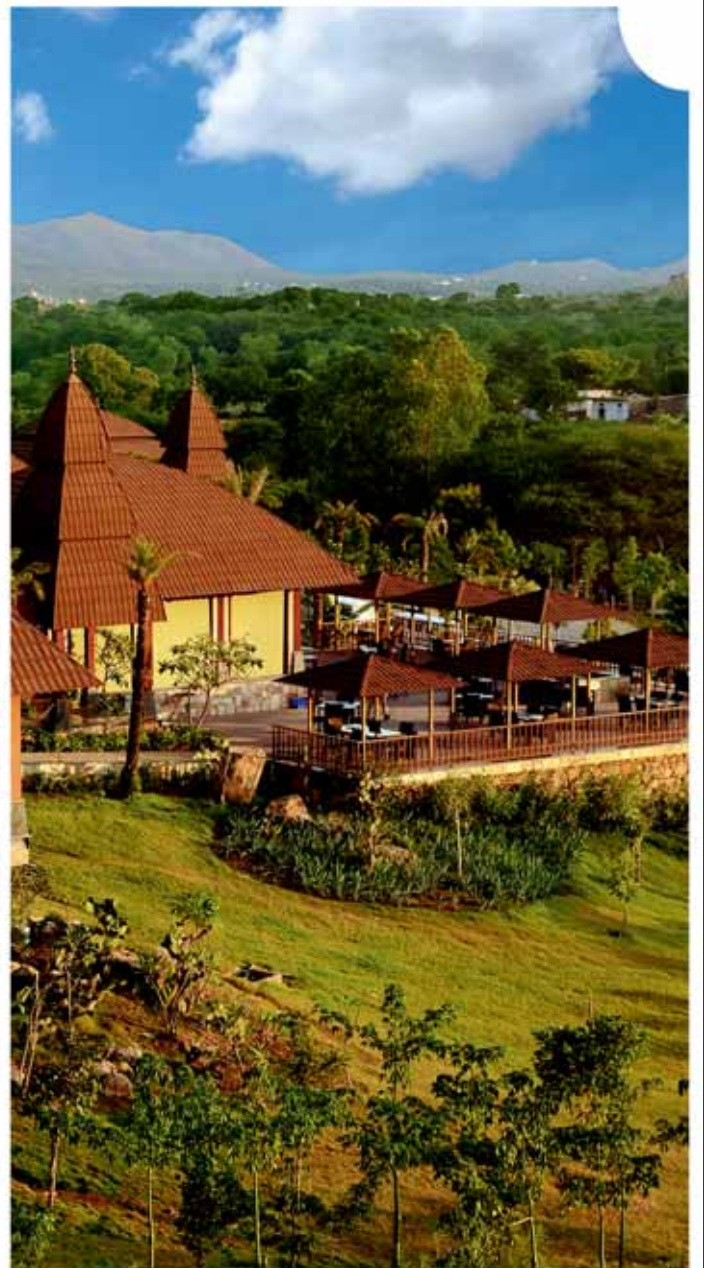


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Standing together in adverse times

Terrorism as a global phenomenon has affected tourism business in several parts of the world. Can a unified tourism industry help counter this issue? TRAVTALK finds out from industry stakeholders.

HAZEL JAIN



Terror can't take away the tourism value of any destination. The best way to overcome the problem of terrorism is by carrying on business as usual. Maharashtra as such does not face any problems regarding this but some of the tragic incidents that have happened against women in India have in fact had a larger impact on tourism than anything. However, there are initiatives undertaken by a few such as peace tourism which is a fairly new concept and it can work if encouraged properly.

Valsa Nair Singh

Principal Secretary-Tourism & Cultural Affairs
Government of Maharashtra



No country is immune to terror and we have had our share of attacks. We made visas free for Indians and established better air connectivity to ensure that those incidents don't affect numbers from one of the biggest source markets – India.

H.E. Saut Sriringoro

Consul General of Indonesia



Sri Lanka has repeatedly experienced direct attacks on tourism. In those times, we had to offer our destinations below its price specially targeting repeat tourists. But the local travel trade helped us a lot and was willing to sell the destination below par and our national carrier continued to fly. Dealing with terror has now become part of our coping mechanism.

H.E. Saroja Sirisena

Consul General of Sri Lanka



Memories of terror attacks are still fresh in France. But actions were taken swiftly and we continued to remain closely in touch with our trade partners. This put things at ease for tourists. Agents used social media to reach out to their clients who were in France at the time.

Communication played a key role in subduing the situation. The trade in India in turn showed a lot of solidarity with us at the time.

Sheetal Munshaw

Director, Atout France in India



Despite having an efficient security system in place, terrorism is our challenge in the tourism industry. However, when tragedy hit us recently, we had minimal cancellations from India as Indian tourists don't get bullied by terrorists easily. We will continue to inform the public about the security measures and updates on the situation. We try and take it in our stride; it's not in the interest of this industry to panic.

H.E. Erdal Sabri Ergen

Consul General of Turkey



We need to educate the trade about how to react and deal with clients at such times. TAAI offers its offices across India to any tourism board to use for dissemination of information to all our members. They need to squash wrong information about the situation. The advisories sent out to the trade and the general public needs to be accurate. The trade and the NTOs can use social media effectively in such times. I request all NTOs to work with us.

Jay Bhatia

National Treasurer and Chairman (Tourism Council), TAAI

17 destinations on one portal

In order to get more agents into its fold and make the booking process easier, AkquaSun has brought all its DMCs worldwide onto one platform online for the benefit of its B2B partners.

TT BUREAU

Mumbai-based DMC Akquasun Holidays India Pvt. Ltd. recently went online by launching its 'Akquasun B2B Online Partner portal' at the IITT 2016 travel show in Mumbai. Explaining the product, **Sujit Nair**, Founder & Group Managing Director, Akquasun Holidays India, says, "It will have dynamic packaging system, served with our own DMC locations and backed by our own DMC support. Since the back-end is serviced by our own DMC, it is convenient for our partners as it ensures good service quality and dependability. It also has a payment gateway with all options for payments available and very easy to use."



Sujit Nair
Founder & Group Managing Director,
Akquasun Holidays India

Each partner can login to our B2B interface and select the destination of their choice

will be provided to each of our partners. The partner can then select the destination of his choice; each of our DMCs have unique features, subject to localisation. The website will offer real-time information to book online or inquire about (a) Book hotels/Akquasun preferred hotels (b) special offers (c) destination packages (d) room inventories. The website will provide end-to-end tracking of each bookings, invoices, service vouchers and payments."

Agents can pick and choose whatever service they want as the site offers various permutations and combinations. This was initially done manually. The company promotes this through its e-mailers and trade shows. It also provides training through in-house support as well as its sales team that is present across India and is well-versed with the technology and the system. Nair says that the company is now making improvements based on the suggestions they are getting from its partners.

Nair adds, "We give them a login and password once they are verified by us. Each partner can login to our B2B interface and select the destination of their choice. A unique secured login, password and dashboard

The first phase of this portal was launched almost a year ago in 2014 during its roadshow with only two destinations – Maldives and Mauritius. Now, the portal has all the destinations that it offers – 17.

Delhi to 3 Chinese cities

Shandong Airlines is now operating four flights per week from New Delhi to Kunming, Jinan, and Qingdao in China.

KANCHAN NATH

Shandong Airlines started operations in India in November 2015. They are using the Boeing 737-800 aircraft, which has 160 economic and eight Business Class seats.

Wang Shuai, General Representative of India, Shandong Airlines, said, "In the almost two months we have experienced a seat load factor of 70 per cent which is good for the beginning. We are getting an increasing number of passengers from China to India and India to China. Only last year, India opened eTV to China and we are very hopeful that more people will travel from China to India and vice-versa."

Giving information about the flights, he said, "This is our new flight route. We now have four flights per week to Kunming, which will fly on to Jinan and Qingdao. Monday and Friday, the flights have been scheduled to fly to Kunming and Jinan. While on Wednesday and Sunday they have been scheduled to fly to

Kunming and Qingdao. The time for the Delhi to Kunming flight is four hours, while that

China, and is geographically closer to India.

Talking about the promotions they are offering, he said, "At the beginning of the flight, we will provide a variety of promotions. We will be offering attractive fares for all sectors and especially the transition passengers; we have the offer of 2 pcs of luggage, in departure from Delhi and we will provide free hotel for transfer passengers."

Travel agents can avail of an IATA commission of 3 per cent by selling Shandong Airlines. Bird Travels is its GSA in India.

He concluded, "As a member of Air China Group, we provide the same member services as Air China. You can earn and accumulate miles and redeem them on 27 Star Alliance airlines and 11 partner airlines; the consumer can accumulate/redeem mileage or enjoy the corresponding rights and interests in merchant establishments in more than 220 non-airline partners."



Wang Shuai
General Representative of India
Shandong Airlines

of the Delhi-Jinan-Qingdao flight is eight hours."

The flight will arrive at Qingdao and Jinan late night and transit passengers will be provided free hotel stay.

Shandong Airlines are the local airlines in Shandong Province, Jinan is the capital of Shandong Province and Qingdao is the largest city in Shandong Province. Kunming is the capital of and largest city in Yunnan Province, Southwest

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Opening in April 2016

26% rise in Indian arrivals in Jan '16

Buoyed by the surge in Indian tourist arrivals, Sri Lanka Tourism is now focusing on developing and promoting tourism circuits between the two countries.



NISHA VERMA

For Sri Lanka, India is the biggest source market as far as tourism is concerned. In only January 2016, out of the total 194,280 tourists arriving in the country, 28,895 were from India, which means an increase of 26 per cent on last year's figures for the same month. In fact, India faces tough competition from China when it comes to tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka, with the latter recording a total of 26,083 tourists into the country in January 2016, which in itself is an all time record 122.3% growth for Chinese arrivals to Sri Lanka.



Viranga Bandara, Assistant Director – Marketing, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB), Ministry of Tourism Development and Christian Religions Affairs, says, "India is the number one tourists generating market for Sri Lanka. We reported about 319,000 tourist arrivals in 2015 from India, and this year we are targeting 450,000 tourists from here."

Discussing the plans SLTPB is going to adopt to reach this target, he said, "This year, we have a number of promotional activities planned for the

"This year, we have a number of promotional activities planned for the Indian market. We are participating in four trade fairs this year, and also organising roadshows in major cities in India."

Viranga Bandara

Assistant Director – Marketing
Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB)



Indian market. We are participating in four trade fairs this year, and also organising roadshows in major cities in India. Also, we will advertise on TV and print, and even organise Fam trips for the media and tour operators to showcase the attractions in Sri Lanka."

In fact, there are plans to even work on developing circuits between India and Sri Lanka. "We are planning to promote Sri Lankan tourist

circuits and Indian tourist circuits together, and I believe this is the best time to do that," says Bandara. "We, as a government body act like a promotional arm and create a platform for the travel industry of Sri Lanka to promote it as a destination and work with travel representatives from all parts of the world," he adds.

With tourism on a rise in Sri Lanka, investments are being made in the country to cater to the tourists. Bandara

says, "We have a separate entity called Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, which comes under Sri Lanka Tourism. They facilitate any investments for companies willing to start any new business in the country."

Stressing on the fact that the country has come way ahead of the unrests in the past, he adds, "I want to convey that Sri Lanka is a very peaceful country.

Whoever is planning to travel to Sri Lanka can feel secure. In fact, one can spend more than four days and can explore more of the country."

Quick Facts

- ✦ In January 2016, Sri Lanka's tourist arrivals rose 24.3% as compared to the same period last year
- ✦ 194,280 tourists arrived in the country in Jan'16 compared to 156,246 which arrived in Jan'15
- ✦ Almost 1.8 million tourists arrived in Sri Lanka in 2015, contributing \$2.86 billion of earnings to the government revenues compared to \$2.43 billion recorded during 2014



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Spiritual, wildlife catch on Bullish on Chinese tourists

Manish Fitkariwala, Director, Catapultt, explains why the island is a preferred choice for destination weddings, family and adventure holidays.

TT BUREAU

Covering a diverse range of destinations, Catapultt specialises in offering packages to Sri Lanka. The destination's popularity has increased over the years, thanks to its diverse range of tourism hotspots that makes it a destination with something for everyone, Fitkariwala says.

"The demand for Sri Lanka is rapidly growing. Some of the popular destinations among Indian travellers are Colombo, Kandy and Bentota, while the demand for other places like Galle, Yala and Hikkaduwa are quickly picking up. Many Indians also opt for the Buddhist and Ramayana tours which cover all the sacred places of interest," he adds.

The island, with its beautiful beaches, historical



Manish Fitkariwala
Director
Catapultt

Many Indians also opt for the Buddhist and Ramayana tours which cover all the sacred places of interest

spots, and a variety of accommodation options makes it a sought-after holiday choice. "It's a great place for family holidays, adventure enthusiasts or honeymooners," says Fitkariwala. "Arugam Bay is well-known as a surfer's paradise which receives a huge footfall every year while Yala National Park is one of the most-visited places for wildlife safaris."

Fitkariwala informs that Sri Lanka's proximity to India also makes it a preferred choice for weddings. "Sri Lanka gains an edge over the other South Asian countries since it is so close to India," he says. "Moreover, the currency differentiation and value is also an important factor among travellers which is why many choose it for beach holidays and destination weddings."

TT BUREAU

India contributed 17.5 per cent of the total number of tourists visiting Sri Lanka in 2015, with 316,247 Indian tourists, topping the chart as the largest source market for Sri Lanka. Talking about the travel industry in Sri Lanka, **Steve Harrop**, CEO, TravelBullz Group, says, "We introduced Sri Lanka as a destination to our clients in the last quarter of 2015. This strategic move was put in place as we see a huge potential in offering 'value for money' packages to the Indian market. India is the largest source market, however the destination is growing in popularity with the Chinese market which is likely to surpass the UK as the 2nd largest market in Sri Lanka."

Discussing the incentives being offered to travel agents, Harrop says, "TravelBullz has a booker's incentive for select



Steve Harrop
Chief Executive Officer
TravelBullz Group

Sri Lanka is growing in popularity with the Chinese market which is likely to surpass the UK as the 2nd largest market

top agents which features exclusive products for Sri Lanka, bookable online through their Login IDs. Agents can log on to www.travelbullz.com for the best available offers and products. We are the only DMC in Sri Lanka to provide online, real-time package confirmations."

Elaborating on the segments coming into Sri Lanka, Harrop says, "Our initial focus is to grow inbound into Sri Lanka. We have already seen a wide variety of travel itineraries being booked, from budget travel through to luxury experiences. Given the country's close proximity and easy access from India, the itineraries that we offer can be tailored to meet anyone's budget. We have also had some MICE group travel to Colombo and Bentota this season and more are confirmed for future travel."



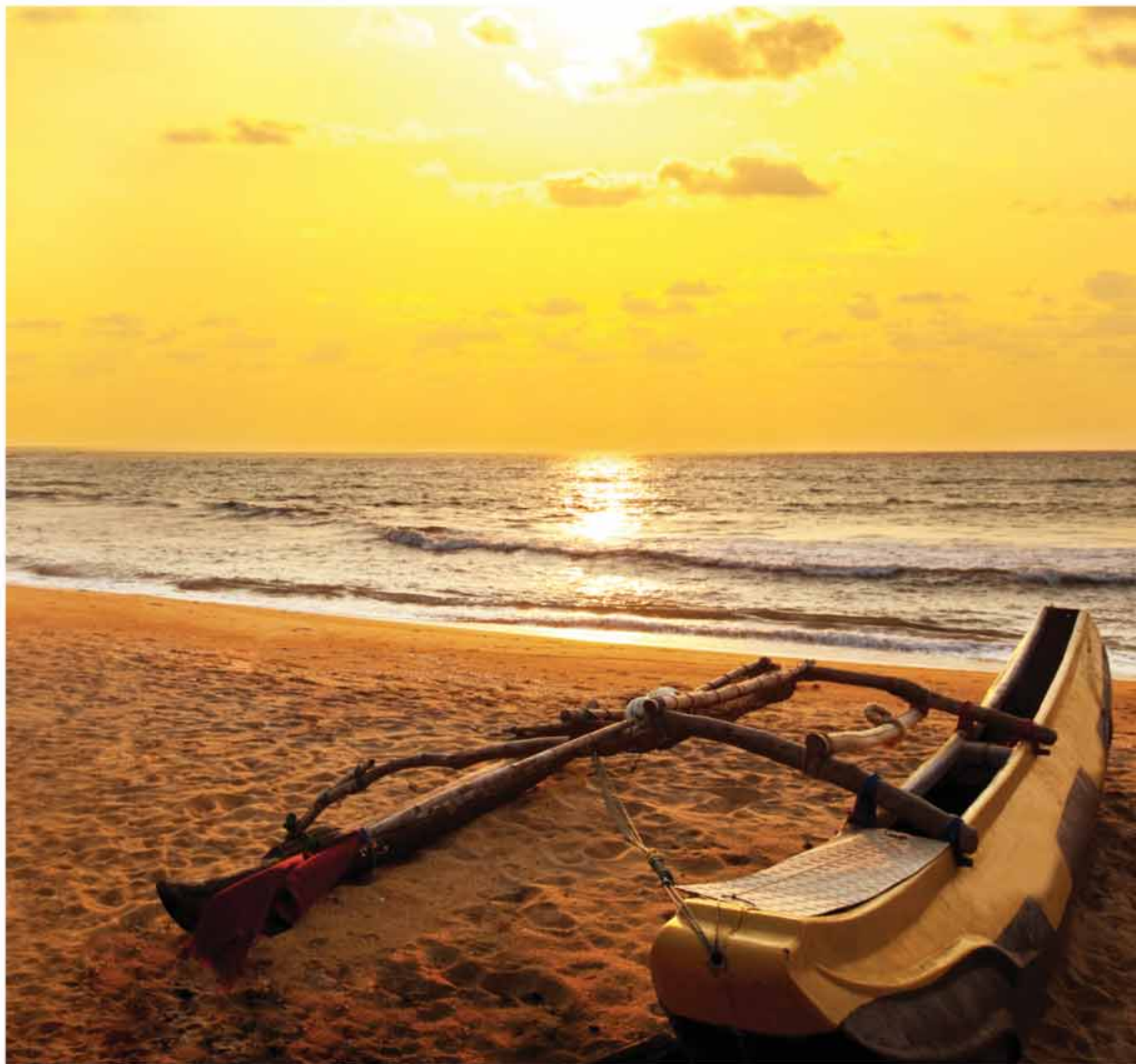
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60% rise in Indian guests

Althaf Mohamad Ali, VP – Sales & Marketing, Aitken Spence Hotel Managements, says that they have seen a considerable surge in Indian guests.



Aitken Spence Hotel Managements has a strong foothold in its home country, as well as Maldives, Middle East and India. "We are the first Sri Lankan company that ventured overseas with hospitality investments in Maldives, and today we are one of the largest foreign operators there with a portfolio of 1200 beds, which should grow to almost 2,000 beds in the next two years. In 2008, we became the first Sri Lankan company to enter the Middle East, where we took over the portfolio of five hotels (almost 500 rooms), which was earlier under the management of AccorHotels, but now remains with us."

Talking about their first venture in India, he said, "With the trade links and relations between India and Sri Lanka



Althaf Mohamad Ali
Vice President – Sales & Marketing
Aitken Spence Hotel Managements

The Indian outbound travel agent fraternity will be the key focus in our destination marketing strategy

becoming friendlier, and the business opportunities growing, we opened our first property in Chennai in the heart of the IT corridor-Turyaa, a five-star hotel with 140 rooms. Our portfolio today has almost 30 hotels under different brands—Heritance, Turyaa, and Adaaran, which is our Maldivian brand."

When asked about the response from India, he said, "We've seen more than 60 per cent growth in visitors from India to our hotels since the commencement of our partnership with the Nijhawan Group. Not only are we looking at promoting our brand within the travel trade industry, we are also looking at advertising in print and TV. The Indian outbound travel agent fraternity will be the key focus in our destination marketing strategy."

1st luxury eco-resort in SL

Ishanth Gunewardene, Head (Sales & Marketing), Jetwing and Jetwing Blue, says that Jetwing Hotels offers competitive rates to its Indian trade partners.



QHow are you promoting your hotels in India?

We attend the main travel fairs (SATTE, OTM Mumbai, IITM Bengaluru), which puts us in close contact with existing and new suppliers and clients, along with business through DMCs, advertising in select travel brochures, Fam trips for agents, sales calls, etc. Jetwing Blue is a very popular choice for Indian weddings due to its location and facilities. Overall, India is a strong market for us with lots of potential.

QWhat is your hotels' USP?

We believe in the same values that are taught in Indian family culture, to treat a guest as one of our own family. In addition, the properties that we operate are always novel and unique,



Ishanth Gunewardene
Head (Sales & Marketing)
Jetwing and Jetwing Blue

such as Jetwing Vil Uyana – the country's first luxury eco-resort, etc.

QWhat are you doing to promote your properties to the trade in India?

We primarily promote Jetwing through a dedicated sales representative, along with special packages. Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru are

showing good demand. We focus primarily on weddings and MICE, along with leisure, business and religious travel.

QAny new developments from Jetwings this year?

We'll be opening Sunrise by Jetwing in Passikudah (the East of Sri Lanka) and Jetwing Colombo Seven, which is the first of our hotels in the capital of Sri Lanka. There's more to come, including Jetwing Lake (Dambulla), Jetwing Pottuvil Point (Pottuvil), Jetwing Kandy Gallery (Kandy), etc.

QWhat kind of offers can the travel trade in India avail?

We offer agents competitive rates, unique positioning of resorts instead of DDpurely city hotels, a large inventory of rooms in Negombo, along with package/combo deals.









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SriLankan flies to 7 Indian cities

With a total of 88 flights a week into India, SriLankan Airlines is pushing more initiatives to cash on India as its biggest source market for tourism in Sri Lanka.



TT BUREAU

Strengthening their network to India remains a key focus for SriLankan Airlines. **Saminda Perera**, General Manager, Marketing, SriLankan Airlines, said, "SriLankan Airlines' operations to India reaffirm its commitment to strengthen connectivity in the region while contributing to the commercial and bilateral ties between the two countries."



Saminda Perera
General Manager, Marketing
SriLankan Airlines

We would like to concentrate more on promoting traffic to Sri Lanka as the tourism product of Sri Lanka is popular in North India

"SriLankan Airlines currently operates a total of 88 flights a week to seven Indian destinations, which translates to four flights a day to Chennai, double daily flights to Tiruchirappalli and Cochin, daily flights to Trivandrum, Mumbai and Delhi and 11 flights a week to Bangalore. The airline has a code-share with its sister carrier Mihin Lanka to Varanasi and Bodh Gaya. With the number of frequencies, we will appeal to both business and leisure customers aiming to provide convenience and better connectivity."

He further added, "SriLankan Airlines, as a One World member representing the South Asia region,

is also a part of the special fare programme, called South Asian Sub-Continent pass, which covers SriLankan's entire network of India and Male, allowing the travellers to explore the diversity and vibrancy of the Indian subcontinent."

The Passenger Load Factor from India for SriLankan Airlines further cements the fact that India is their biggest source market, "During the financial year 14-15, SriLankan carried 621,464 passengers and from April to September last year, the

number was 345,579. We have witnessed a high demand in Chennai."

In terms of future plans in India, Perera indicated that they will be joining hands with the tourism board to promote Sri Lanka in India. "We would

like to concentrate more on promoting traffic to Sri Lanka as the tourism product of Sri Lanka is popular in North India. This year, we will focus on getting more business from satellite cities in India and will work closely with Sri Lanka Tourism," he said.

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Lankan Diaries

- On August 16, 2016, SriLankan Airlines added three new flights between Chennai and Colombo.
- SriLankan Airlines has been part of the oneworld alliance since May 1, 2014

Ballroom for 300 guests

Nestled along Sri Lanka's southwest coast, Anantara Kalutara Resort, opening in May, has a lot to offer to the Indian traveller.



TT BUREAU

Edoardo Giuntoli, General Manager, Anantara Kalutara Resort, said, "Anantara Kalutara Resort is a part of Anantara, a well-known international brand. The hotel is adjacent to AVANI Kalutara and the Resort will have a large inventory for weddings, meetings, etc. with a ballroom where 300 guests can be accommodated. The



Edoardo Giuntoli
General Manager
Anantara Kalutara Resort

The hotel is adjacent to AVANI Kalutara and the Resort will have a large inventory for weddings, meetings, etc. with a ballroom where 300 guests can be accommodated

rooms are spacious; villas and the Presidential Suite have private pools. Our hotel prides itself for the excellence in

Food & Beverage variety and quality. We will have an Indian chef on board to cater specially to the taste and

palate of the Indian market. The hotel also houses Anantara Spa with 6 single, 3 double and one Ayurvedic treatment room.

"The hotel has two large outdoor swimming pools and for the amusement of the younger ones we have our Kids & Teens Adventurers Club."

Highlighting the importance of the Indian market, Giuntoli said, "India will be a key source market for individual and MICE travel for us and we aim to have 15 per cent of our guests coming from this country. We will cater to the needs of our Indian guests, especially when it comes to the wedding functions. We will have an Indian chef to cater to all the culinary needs of the Indian traveller."

Tailor-made weddings

Housed in Kandy, Tree of Life is among the best nature hotels in Sri Lanka which can double up as a wedding as well as a MICE destination.



TT BUREAU

Along with being a nature hotel, Tree of Life hotel in Yahalattenna Kandy, Sri Lanka, also serves as a perfect destination not just for weddings but also MICE. **Shelly A. Thenuwara**, MD, Tree of Life Nature Resort in Kandy, plans to tap the potential that the India market offers.



Shelly A. Thenuwara
MD
Tree of Life Nature Resort in Kandy

We have three readymade wedding packages for Indians and we can fulfill all the requirements of an Indian wedding

This 45-key Tree of Life Nature Resort is well laid out on 60 acres of leafy private property and offers nature-led holiday experiences. Speaking about the facilities that the hotel can offer for an Indian wedding, Thenuwara says, "We have two locations – an air-conditioned banquet hall and an open-air restaurant with a maximum capacity of 400 guests and 200 guests, respectively. Moreover, there are so many nice locations for photo shoots and even

for a garden function. We wish to inform the travel agents in India that we will be able to undertake the planning of weddings according to the requirement of the client. In fact, we have three readymade wedding packages for Indians and other nationalities and we can provide all the facilities and fulfill all the requirements of an Indian wedding."

The resort is also an ideal place for guests to relax and rejuvenate. The resort epitomizes the concept of 'nature-led experiences' and is known for offering 'simple pleasures' when on holiday. The resort also offers typical Sri Lankan ayurveda treatment at the 'Saukya Ayurveda Centre'. Since the resort focuses on the importance of ayurveda it is not uncommon to spot an incredible range of medicinal trees and plants found all over the property.

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AHANA GURUNG

The year 2015 was big for Thailand and Singapore as they both achieved the one million mark in Indian

tourist arrivals. While Thailand registered 1,069,149 Indian arrivals with a growth of 14.6 per cent, Singapore received 1,013,777 Indians

with a 7.4 per cent growth rate. We spoke to industry specialists regarding this remarkable achievement highlighting the different qualities of

each country, and inferences suggest that their popularity is attributed to the combination of budget and luxury options they offer. Additionally, with

more disposable income at hand, they travel more often and often combine their business trips to go sightseeing once the work is completed.



Thailand and Singapore will always do well because of their proximity to India. Additionally, both countries offer competitive price for a variety of holiday options. While Thailand is a spread-out destination with popular places like Chiang Mai, Pattaya, Phuket, etc, Singapore is a standalone destination with lots to offer to the Indian traveller. With affluence and wealth increasing in India, people definitely want to explore more and travel to different destinations.

Sanjeet Johar

Vice President - Asia Pacific and Middle East, Cox and Kings



Budget travellers now spend three days of their vacation at a budget-friendly accommodation and splurge in a five-star the last two nights. This is what is happening in places like Singapore and Thailand and explains why the numbers are so high. In Thailand, the Indian traveller is going beyond Bangkok and Pattaya, similarly, Singapore has also become a transit point for many locations and end up touring there itself.

Guldeep Singh Sahni

President, OTOAI



With globalisation and new opportunities, income of Indians is increasing and the trends in tourism are also changing. Many Indians are travelling to Singapore to see the new skyline which has changed over the past few years. It is more lively and vibrant and has all the charm and excitement Indian tourists love. Additionally, it has been a good incentive for MICE and has helped many travel agents to pitch Singapore to the corporate traveller.

Zelam Chaubal

Director, Kesari Tours



Travelling out of the country is a regular instance for young Indians; most of the regular less expensive places have already been explored by them. Combining business with leisure has become the norm, hence exploring newer exquisite destinations remain high on their agenda and gives them opportunity to score over their peers. So be it honeymoon couples or family, they do come to us for something new.

Shivdatta Wagle

Director, Meandering Vacations



We expect short-haul destinations from South East Asia to do well this year. This is because Indian travellers have matured and are looking at spending more quality time without making a big dent in the budget and that is where destinations like Thailand and Singapore become favourites. One gets good quality at economical rates compared to the more expensive European destinations and easy visa regime is also an added advantage.

Pankaj Nagpal

Managing Director, Travstarz



While Thailand has always been one of the most popular destinations for Indians, Singapore has been among the top five outbound destinations Indians want to visit for the past 2-3 years. We have noticed that a lot of Indians are into 'bleisure' — a mixture of business and leisure which is what many travellers do when they visit Singapore. A large number also visit the country on transit.

Amit Agarwal

Manager Marketing - India & South East Asia, Hotels.com

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IATO's 1st outbound convention

The Indian Association of Tour Operators' (IATO) recently constituted its outbound arm — Outbound Tourism Council — which will have its first convention in Sri Lanka in 2016.

TT BUREAU

While the dates and venue for the first convention of IATO's Outbound Tourism Council has not been declared as yet, **Subhash Goyal**, President, IATO, said that they wanted to hold the convention in one of the countries in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) region. **Karan Anand**, Chairman, IATO Outbound Tourism Council, added that since IATO members wanted to include short haul destinations to their itineraries, it was unanimously decided that Sri Lanka, which is a short-haul destination, should be the venue for the first convention.

Giving details about the IATO Outbound Tourism Council, Goyal said, "Membership to the council is complimentary to all the existing members of IATO. The purpose of forming this council was not competing with the other outbound associa-



Subhash Goyal
President
IATO



Karan Anand
Chairman
IATO Outbound Tourism Council

tions, but this was a demand from our members for a long time, and we had an internal debate whether to do it or not.

"However, it is high time our members start thinking of both inbound and outbound. Already 50 per cent of our members are doing both, but there are those who are only focused on inbound. Thus, we will have training programs for them because nowadays people have to think of additional methods to survive in the industry."

Anand added, "As outbound players with experience in inbound and domestic holidays, we will be able to give information, strategy and knowledge with our expertise to our members. Hopefully, this would help them to overcome many challenges."

Eligibility Criteria

Membership to the council is complimentary to all the existing members of IATO

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Country Inn & Suites by Carlson, Mysore aims to sensitise the trade toward their social responsibility. The hotel recently sponsored an orphan girl child as its CSR acitivity.

TT BUREAU

As part of its CSR initiatives, Country Inn & Suites by Carlson, Mysore have sponsored an 11-year-old orphan Girl Child — Bhumika — whom they have identified through Kaliyuva Mane, a childcare

expenses pertaining to the educational need of Bhumika would be taken care of by us through the collective contribution made by the staff working in the hotel."

Speaking on the reason behind taking up this responsi-

ing legacy, each of our employees have a part to play in not only the responsibilities towards the guest and staff but also towards the communi-ty/environment we work in."

Talking about the other CSR initiatives taken up by the property, he said, "A few such commitments include a financial aid of ` 15,000 to the Nepal Earthquake Relief Fund Victims; blood donation camps in the hotel; aid of ` 10,000 for Sri Lakshmikantha temple trust housing 40 orphan children towards their basic needs and education; as well as planting of saplings by the staff on their birthdays as part of celebrations supporting the Green Earth Initiative."

However, he added, "Supporting Bhumika was an independent initiative of our property and every other hotel in the group have their own CSR activities, which they must be following as per their schedule."



institution registered with the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of Karnataka. Pankaj Saxena, General Manager, Country Inn & Suites by Carlson, Mysore, says, "All

bility, Vivek Chowdhary, Director, Sales & Marketing, Country Inn & Suites By Carlson, Mysore, said, "In search of our quest of being a company that has a caring spirit, heart for service and last-

Sustainable foot forward

Kanha Village Eco Resort has sustainability and responsibility as its key mottos, and that's what it plans to propagate to its guests.

TT BUREAU

For Kanha Village Eco Resort, sustainability is the way of life. Navneet Maheshwari, Owner, Kanha Village Eco Resort, reveals, "We have mud



Navneet Maheshwari
Owner
Kanha Village Eco Resort

houses with most construction at Kanha Village Eco Resort being eco-friendly and done with the help of locally available material."

Kanha National Park is popular among tourists around the world for tiger spotting and wildlife safaris. However, the car-



bon fuel based vehicles do have negative impact on the local biodiversity. According to Maheshwari, "Sustainable use of resources is very important and our management tries its best to follow eco-friendly principals in its running of the lodge. In this quest we request our guests to try activities, which can reduce pressure on national park, while giving them a better experience of Kanha Forest including bird watching in buffer zone, jungle walk, medicinal plantation conservation area visit, tribal village visits, trying local cuisines at tribal/local villagers' house, Yoga/meditation and wellness program, and rejuvenation program."

The property has a filter plant allowing them to re-use the water from kitchen, bath areas as well as splash pools in all their cottages, for the plantation, and hence save water. "Ours is the only wildlife lodge in Kanha which has two separate sewage systems. Majority of the trees at our property are of ethnic species found in Kanha landscape, and we do not use chemical insecticides, which harm local bio-diversity," he adds.

In fact, a percentage of the profit made by the resort is used to improve education, empowerment of local people, environment issues and conservation activists.

Amusement expo in Mumbai

In a bid to encourage interaction between its members and the travel trade, the Indian Association of Amusement Park & Industries is inviting agents across India to its expo in Mumbai.

TT BUREAU

While the travel trade is looking at ways in which it can branch out, the amusement park industry on the other hand is exploring ways in which it can involve the travel trade and get agents into their fold. To enable this, Ajay Sarin, President, Indian Association of Amusement Parks & Industries (IAAPI), invites travel agents across India to come and visit its 16th IAAPI Amusement Expo 2016 that will take place from March 3-5, 2016, at Bombay Exhibition Centre in Mumbai.

He says, "A large chunk of agents are not connected to amusement park owners. Given their network and contacts, they are the ones who can push products to the consumers. If we develop the connection with agents, the number of footfalls to these parks can be doubled in the five years. Not just agents but we also want to involve hoteliers and resort owners."

He adds that the association can even arrange meetings



Ajay Sarin
President, Indian Association of Amusement Parks & Industries

If we connect with agents, the number of footfalls to these parks can be doubled in the next five years

companies from countries like Japan, Korea and China. Moreover, this will be the first time that we will have an outdoor section with rides, etc," Sarin says.

This year the expo will have a lot of adventure related products that is of relevance to the hotel industry such as artificial rock-climbing wall, zip liner, rope-bridge, ATV bikes, etc. "The trade must visit this expo as it is the only one in India dedicated to amusement parks," the president adds.

The three-day exhibition will provide a platform to bring together not just manufacturers — domestic as well as international — and amusement park owners but also travel agents and hoteliers. Spread over 1,800 square metres in indoor space plus 350 square metres of outdoor space, the expo will see around 150 exhibitors from India including 20 from other countries. The first day will have a networking dinner and the second night will witness an award ceremony for the members.

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W Goa to launch in mid-2016

Always ready with a robust line-up of new openings, Starwood Hotels & Resorts is ready to launch yet another big-ticket property in the form of W Goa in Vagator as it trains its focus on to Tier-II cities of India.



HAZEL JAIN

Starwood Hotels & Resorts is now looking to aggressively focus on the secondary cities of India besides focusing on the metros. With this specific aim, the hospitality giant has been participating in the Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) that focuses on the Central India market since its inception four years ago. **Dhananjay Saliankar**, Regional Director, Sales & Marketing and Starwood Sales Organisation, South Asia, for Starwood Hotels & Resorts, says, "We look to cover secondary market cities more often now. The demand for our hotels is there across brands. We get bookings for luxury brands like W, although we haven't sliced and diced to find out which part of Central India this demand is from yet. It is still a growing region for us but we keep educating the trade here about our brands and what benefits it has for the travel operators. These are the little things we do and we surely see an escalation on this."

New openings

Sharing details of new launches, Saliankar says, "Starwood has always had a robust pipeline of openings. In 2015, we had the St Regis in Mumbai which we expect to take off well. We aim to open W Goa by June-July this year which will be the first luxury brand by W to be launched in India. This will be a new built in Vagator, which could also be the big ticket item for us in terms of launches. We are also looking at locations like Baroda for a Four Points, and Pushkar in Rajasthan that will be a new hotel but it is yet to be branded. There is huge opportunity in the market and the company seems to explore more hotels in key locations." The company had launched five Le Meridien properties in the second half of last year, namely, Le Meridien Mahabaleshwar Resort & Spa, Le Meridien Nagpur, Le Meridien Thimphu, Le Meridien Paro, Riverfront and Le Meridien Dhaka.

Saliankar adds that the biggest objective for Starwood hotels is growth, which comes through driving sales out of its South Asia locations and growth

in footprint of its hotels. "We are driving sales in four of our primary markets—Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai. But it is also important to explore other markets where we can drive sales for our multiple products and brands. The agents understand the brand now; tour operators have started recognising Starwood brands. So right from a four-star like a Four Points by Sheraton to our upper

upscale like a Le Meridien or a Westin or Sheraton and our luxury brands, the trade is now informed and they have started using our hotels—not just within India but also internationally, especially in South-Asia and South-East Asia region. Awareness about the brands brings in more customers and that is the way we are looking at the Central India market," he says.

"Agents and tour operators have started recognising Starwood brands. So right from a Four Points by Sheraton to Le Meridien or Westin or Sheraton and our luxury brands, the trade is now informed and they have started using our hotels—not just within India but also internationally."

Dhananjay Saliankar

Regional Director, Sales & Marketing and Starwood Sales Organisation, South Asia, for Starwood Hotels & Resorts



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Spotting Stars

- Four Points in Baroda is in the pipeline
- There will be a new hotel in Pushkar, Rajasthan which is yet to be branded

Connect with global suppliers

In a move to keep up with the changing times, QuadLabs has added two new products, Konnect.Travel and Travog.com, to its portfolio. **Gaurav Chiripal**, CEO, gives a low-down on its latest offerings.

TT BUREAU

With over 10 years of experience in the travel industry, QuadLabs caters mostly to tour operators, consolidators and online travel agents (OTAs) allowing them a distribution platform to sell their content through multiple selling platforms.

Chiripal, explaining the unique selling points of the company, says, "The biggest advantage of QuadLabs is our partnership with global suppliers that allows us content from all around the world. Both content and technology, put together, brings a perfect solution for a TMC or a travel company," he elaborates.

QuadLabs has recently launched two new products in the market. "The first one is Konnect.Travel which is an open market-place that caters to smaller travel agents and promotes connectivity and work with global suppliers," says Chiripal. He explains that the free-of-cost solution not only provides a place to source con-



Gaurav Chiripal
CEO
QuadLabs

We figured that in India, the affordability levels were low which is why this first-of-a-kind platform is free of cost

tent, but also a complete technology for the customer to create and manage bookings or enquiries, etc., all under one roof. "We figured that in India, the affordability levels were low

which is why this first-of-a-kind platform is free of cost," he adds.

The second product, Travog.com, is an expense and travel management system for the corporate industry. "This has been created to manage customers' expenses while travelling and also allows them to make direct purchases from global suppliers," Chiripal comments. "It also has a global marketplace of content coming in from large marketplaces around the world directly into the hands of the corporate traveller.

Chiripal hopes to capture a larger market share of the rapidly-growing industry with the two new products and plans of tapping the Far East market, particularly China, are already on the anvil. He shares, "We have offices in Dubai, Latin America and Brazil, and are currently in the middle of opening up an office in Singapore. We are mainly targeting all the developing countries with a need for technology, while at the same time continuing our focus on the Indian domestic market."

Get your own mobile Apps

eCare Technology Labs' newest product Rezofy, an ecommerce platform, allows travel agencies to publish their own mobile apps on app stores.

TT BUREAU

eCare Technology Labs' latest offering, Rezofy, is a mobile and web-based travel ecommerce platform and allows travel businesses to publish their own mobile apps in the respective App stores (Play Store for Android users and App Store for Apple users).

"The whole idea and passion our team carries here is to make all reservations online, be it on web or mobile platform," says **Vivek Sanghi**, Co-founder, eCare Technology Labs, "Rezofy is one big step towards providing better opportunities to our customers to maximise their business as it opens a completely new sales channel on mobile application, downloadable from the travel agencies' own website as well as App stores with personal branding and identity."

Sanghi says that travel agencies do not need a vendor but a partner to share the tech



Vivek Sanghi
Co-founder
eCare Technology Labs

One of the most important aspects is that Rezofy comes at no additional cost to the travel agency business

journey and make sure that it is a win-win situation for both parties. "One of the most

important aspects is that Rezofy comes at no additional cost to the travel agency business and supports both B2B and B2C business model." As an added benefit, agencies can run and test the live portal with their own APIs and even make successful live bookings with a free live trial for two weeks under the "Try Before You Buy" plan.

Recognising the potential of the domestic market, Sanghi says that they are currently focused on Indian market since it occupies an important role in travel technology space. He comments, "We have realised that unless we complete and meet at least 90 per cent of the market requirements (ecosystem for Suppliers APIs, Payment Gateways, local cultural expectations), the results will not be satisfactory." To be more approachable and increase their reach, they have recently added support and development centre in Noida and is currently operational.



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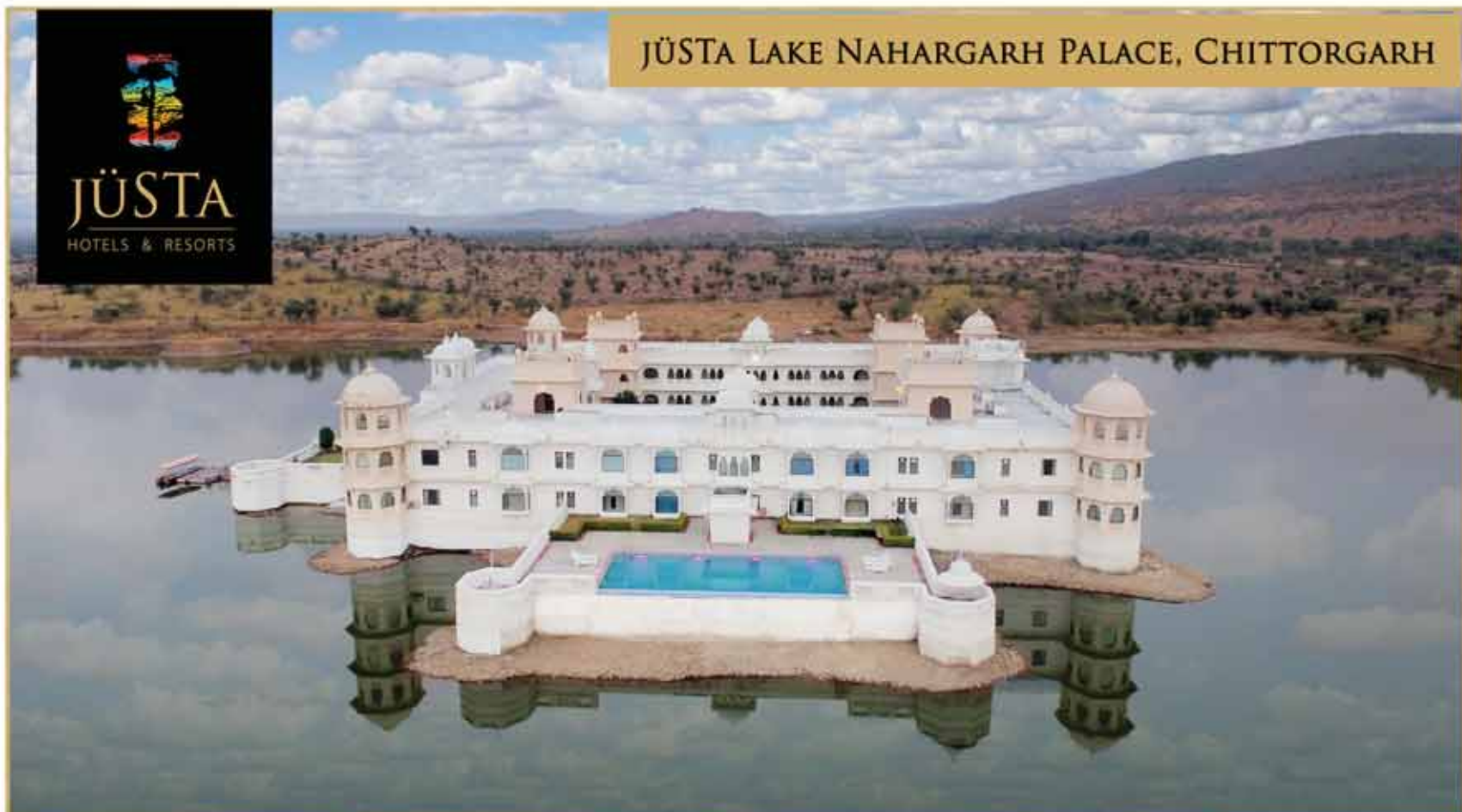
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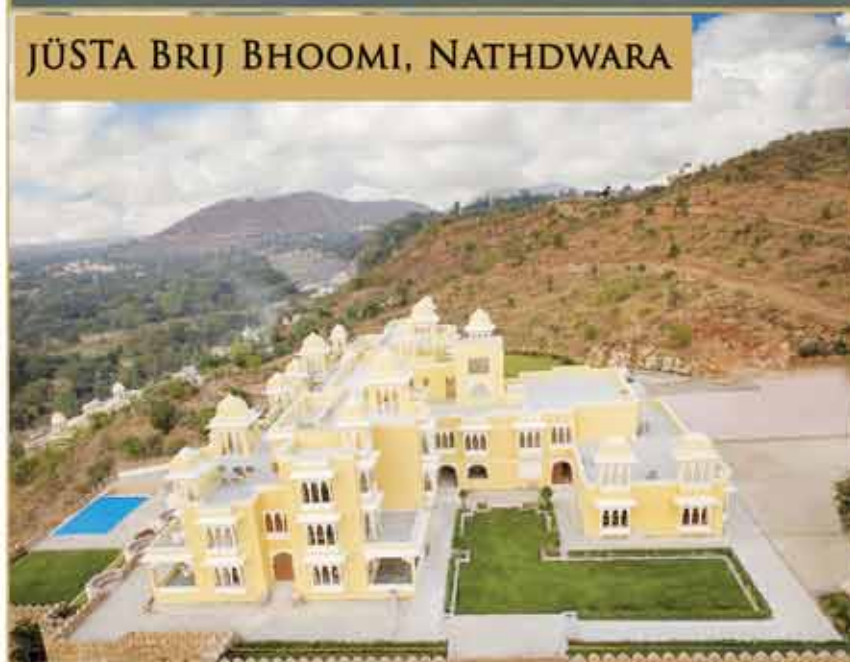


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Exclusively Northern Ireland

In an attempt to attract and increase the number of Indian tourists, Northern Ireland conducted a B2B workshop with travel agents in New Delhi and Mumbai.

ANKITA SAXENA

"In 2014, we received 25,000 Indian visitors to Ireland. The figures for 2015 are underway but the number of visitors availing the Irish visas has gone up by 20 per cent. As tourists can visit Ireland under the British-Irish Visa Scheme (BIVS), it is difficult to point the exact numbers, but the BIVs has majorly had a positive impact on numbers coming into Ireland," says **Aubrey Irwin**, Head of Northern Ireland, Tourism Ireland.

Talking about the agenda of the workshop conducted for agents, Irwin adds, "The workshops and roadshows communicate insights into how the market functions, the consumer and industry trends which are beneficial to gather information and product knowledge about the destination."

Huzan Fraser Motivala, Representative, India, Tourism Ireland, says, "There is a lot in pipeline for 2016. This is the first time when we have undergone



Huzan Fraser Motivala
Representative India
Tourism Ireland

We have seen an increase of 20-30 percent in the number of Ireland programmes

an exclusive Northern Island Mission. Ireland is being now sold differently. We do not undertake any consumer targeted activities but deal only with the travel trade and media. We organise trips for the agents to familiarise them with the products."

Talking about the growth of tourism in Ireland, Fraser says, "We missed out some programming for Ireland in the BIVS scheme initially for the tour operators' brochures, but now with the scheme doing well, we have seen an increase of 20-30 percent in the number of Ireland programmes being added to the itineraries along with UK itineraries. We have seen an increased number of group itineraries coming to Ireland including good numbers for FITs and added products."

Discussing the agent training programme of Ireland, Fraser says, "We do not have an agent training programme but the Ireland Specialist Programme is the online system where agents can qualify as Ireland Specialists. However, we keep updating and improvising the programme every year." India currently has over 1,200 certified Ireland Specialists, most of whom are from Mumbai, New Delhi and Bengaluru.

Welcome brunch for expats

Shanti Travel, in association with Fortis La Femme, hosted a New Year brunch in New Delhi for expatriates based in Delhi, primarily the Australia New Zealand Association (ANZA), British Contact Group, Delhi Network and IFCCI. The company organised lucky draws and interesting activities for the guests.



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Real-time access to rooms

Rezlive.com recently showcased its latest version to the travel trade at the India International Travel & Tourism (IITT) exhibition held in Mumbai.

TT BUREAU

RezLive.com, a product of Travel Designer Group, had a massive presence at the India International Travel & Tourism (IITT) exhibition held in Mumbai. **Jaal Shah**, Group MD, Travel Designer Group, says, "We were able to leverage real business opportunities by engaging in valuable business conversations, we networked in a fresh new environment and were able to gain better insights about the local market and at the same time were happy to see our travel partners coming in large numbers to appreciate our work and the kind of extraordinary services we provide to them round the clock."



Jaal Shah
Group MD
Travel Designer Group

We networked in a fresh new environment and were able to gain better insights about the local market

Travel partners from across the region turned up in great numbers to look at various possibilities of associating with the company and at the same time witness the innovations by RezLive.com. The event also gave the company an opportunity to showcase the newer version of RezLive.com to the travel trade. "We managed excellent client engagements and networking sessions, along with showcasing new product offerings. RezLive.com is one of the few wholesalers that offer single feed to 175,000+ international rooms around the world, offering real-time access to rooms that are available at the best net rates," Shah adds.

RezLive.com also offers 45,000+ sightseeing items and

over 5,000 tours in 500 cities and 5,000+ transfer options in over 900 airport and city locations. The system is empowered by direct inventories of multiple suppliers and their own contracting with price comparison filters.

New code-share for Air Astana

Air Astana has signed a code-share agreement with Air France and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines for flights between Astana and Paris.

TT BUREAU

"The agreement adds the Kazakh capital to the KLM and Air France network and at the same time makes it easier for global travellers to fly with Air Astana to and from our home base using the Paris hub," said **Peter Foster**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Air Astana. The new code-share will come into effect from 11th March 2016, and will be a three times



a week service, which will carry the marketing code of both KLM Royal Dutch Airlines and Air France. With this alliance,

passengers from across KLM Royal Dutch Airlines and Air France worldwide networks will be able to purchase tickets and

travel seamlessly to and from the Kazakh capital.

Air Astana operates three flights a week between Astana and Paris, Charles de Gaulle on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays, using Boeing B757-200 aircraft, configured with 16 Business Class, 12 Economy Sleeper Class and 108 Economy Class seats. **Guillaume Glass**, General Manager Russia & CIS Air France KLM, said, "This strategic step will deliver significant benefits to our business and provide our customers with exclusive travel opportunities. Plus we will strengthen our presence in Kazakhstan in the capital city, which will hold the Expo-2017."

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Digitalisation of Human Resource

In the last few years, our day-to-day lives have transformed radically through a wave of digitalisation. Especially after the launch of Digital India program that increased Internet connectivity within the country, rapidly developing the online infrastructure, and growth in digital literacy.

The Human Resource Management sector in the corporate world has gone through digital and technological evolution to match up with the increasing dominance of online media tools.

The digital age is in a constant state of flux, with innovations whomping one after the other with each passing day. It is also evolving one's approach to business practices, customer interaction and employee behaviour commanding innovative ways of adaptation to the new market expectations.

The corporate world where customer dialogue and communication has rooted its importance via technology-based communications, marketing and customer service, Human Resource Management has also come in terms with it in a steady pace to manage its employees. Within a very short period of time digitalisation in Human resources has created a whole new sector known as Electronic HR or Digital HR.

Human Resources Management has embraced technology and brought in various ways of people management. The widespread usage of electronic technology has shaped a new kind of HRM. And today, with this kind of growth in India, Human Resource has evolved from being a job to an industry that had an annual growth rate of 21 per cent in the last five years, as per Ernst & Young reports.

With advanced set of technological tools, Human Resources have become more efficient in all the processes, starting from recruiting to retiring of employees. It has drastically changed the ways of administering and thereby improving manager and employee relationship, creating an interactive and approachable environment for all, irrespective of designation.

HR-IT has achieved much importance now because of its use in most of the organisations to increase the productivity through maximising the value of the organisation's most significant asset, people.

The increasing involvement and evolution of technology has brought in operational

efficiency for the HRM endowing them with 'presence' in the complete lifecycle of an employee and helping them through their professional journey.

The modern age innovations have brought in several tests, e-Learning practices and

manuals that aide new joiners as well as on-going employees to educate themselves at any point of time. It is through the HRM procedures every individual within an organisation is aware of his contribution, performance, and role. Going digital has helped HRM to be

present 24 hours for the employee. A transparency has been initiated that was never present earlier.

In the digital age, it is imperative to train a human resource base, that are capable to handle large amounts of

information and subsequently transfer the same information, after processing and repackaging the formation, efficiently, faster and effectively. With the effect of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the world becomes the proverbial global village.



The author, Juhi Mishra, is AVP-Human Resources at InterGlobe Technology Quotient

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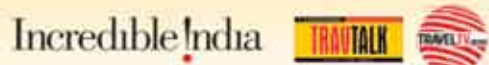
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IAAI bats for Default Insurance

The IATA Agents Association of India (IAAI) is keen to re-constitute APJC-India by working with the three big travel associations. Perhaps, this will set the tone for greater synergies in the industry.

TT BUREAU

The IATA Agents Association of India (IAAI) has already jotted down the main issues which it will address in 2016. The one point that leads all the others is getting IATA to re-constitute APJC-India under PACONF 2014 Appendix 'F' guidelines. This, **Biji Eapen**, National President, IAAI, says, will be with a strong team of knowledgeable agent representatives who are dedicated and equally representing the three national travel associations to bring back the fortnightly system of payment.



"We also want to remove TAP to allow travel agents to issue all airline tickets, implement Default Insurance Program (DIP) for better viability and flexibility to do business, and ensure minimum three per cent commission by all airlines operating in India. IAAI will also focus more on educational training on industry matters, promote inbound and outbound tours and do everything possible to ensure parity to enable healthy competition within the travel trade," he adds.

DIP, he opines, would have been the ideal substitute for the present insurance guarantee or the proposed Joint Bank Guarantee system. "We had tried to implement it through the IATA Regional office in Singapore, but failed as there was no recommendation for DIP from APJC-India. The DIP is more viable and flexible and could have rescued travel agents from hefty insurance premiums," Eapen adds.

Above all, however the Kochi-based association will continue the battle for agency commission through the Hon'ble Kerala High Court

500 agents and counting

Travstarz is on a growth trajectory with the launch of its portal, Travelrezoneonline.com.

TT BUREAU

Understanding the importance of the digital segment, Travstarz has launched www.travelrezoneonline.com, a dedicated B2B online portal.

Giving an insight into their latest offering, **Pankaj Nagpal**, MD, Travstarz, says, "The portal is one of the few dedicated B2B portals offering flights, hotels, sight-seeing facilities, transfers,

packages, as well as fixed departures all under one roof. Ever since the portal went online, we have registered more than 500 agents on it. These are early days for us for our portal but we are constantly working towards better products and user experience online."

After registering a constant growth over the past few years, Nagpal is optimistic that the portal will help make their

presence felt even more across the tourism industry. "We are expecting a 30 per cent year-on-year growth with the launch of Travelrezoneonline.com," he shares.

The past three years have been a period of expansion for Travstarz across various sectors, including hotel wholesale, fixed departures and DMC representations. "We have been concentrating on luxury hotels and now operate



Pankaj Nagpal
Managing Director
Travstarz

our own fixed departures for Indian destinations like Kashmir, Darjeeling, Leh, Goa, Port Blair and Kerala," comments Nagpal. "Among the international ones, we cover Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, Mauritius and Seychelles."

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CSTF: Trade fraternity in

Creating Synergy amongst Travel Fraternity (CSTF) organised a gala event in Delhi to strengthen bonds with industry colleagues. The networking extravaganza for the travel and hospitality industry was attended by nearly 600 guests from the trade. The dynamic event with lots of music and dancing, highlighted CSTF's motto of networking with a difference.

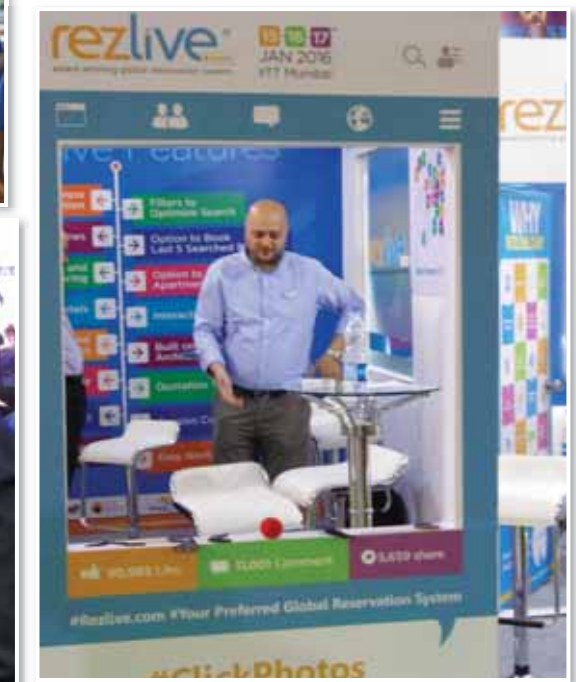


Delhi let their hair down



IITT 2016 hits the right chord

The third edition of the three-day India International Travel & Tourism (IITT) exhibition concluded in Mumbai with participation from over 400 exhibitors, 300 Hosted Buyers, and 200 corporate buyers and wedding planners from across the country. Organised by ABEC Exhibitions, the show's highlight this year was 'IITT Connect' – a unique concept that allowed corporate and wedding planners to meet suppliers across the table.



with 500+ Buyers, 400 exhibitors



U&I Holidays' debut Bali roadshow

U&I Holidays, a DMC for Bali, recently held the first three of their first five-city roadshow in India. The roadshow kicked off from New Delhi on Feb 5, followed by in Chennai on Feb 8 and Bengaluru on Feb 9 respectively. Consisting of a total of 23 participants from Bali, 21 were hotel properties, an Indian restaurant and the Bali Zoo, that were available to interact with guests and impart relevant information.



Jay Bhatia on UFTAA's Global Committee

With this appointment, UFTAA wants to create a networking marketplace between its members through business interactions, training workshops & promotions.

TT BUREAU

India is fast becoming an important centre for the United Federation of Travel Agents Associations (UFTAA) following the unanimous selection of Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) President, **Sunil Kumar**, as the president for UFTAA Global. The international association has now appointed **Jay Bhatia**, National Treasurer and Chairman (Tourism Council), TAAI, on UFTAA's Global Tourism Committee. This was announced at UFTAA's board meeting that was held in New Delhi on January 28.

Bhatia will help co-ordinate and enhance tourism ini-



Jay Bhatia
National Treasurer and Chairman
(Tourism Council), TAAI

tiatives among the UFTAA members that includes national associations from over 80 countries. On the appointment, Bhatia says, "Tourist movement from and into India is increasing multi-fold. UFTAA and TAAI, both, endeavor to promote tourism through educating its members. At TAAI, we have already embarked on this path two years ago and have conducted various training programs for our members. This will be undertaken globally at UFTAA too. Since the global committee has just been constituted, we shall sit and work a way forward in the coming month and work towards creating a networking platform for the UFTAA members globally."

Due to the industry's exponential growth, UFTAA now admits these categories of members. "UFTAA has created a new category for institutional members like tourism boards, educational intuitions, hotel chains, theme parks, etc to ensure that all stakeholders in the travel and tourism industry come under the banner of UFTAA since they are the future of global tourism. This shall create a positive impact on driving global tourism which is one of

the largest revenue generators for most countries. UFTAA shall create a networking marketplace between its members through business interactions, partnerships, training, promotions and workshops through its existing programs as well," Bhatia reveals.

ETAA North India Chapter completes 3 years



Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA) recently held its 2nd Mega Event at The Metropolitan Hotel, New Delhi. More than 150 ETAA members from across India participated in the event. The association's National President, **Jagat Mehta**, welcomed the guests along with National General Secretary, **Abhijit Khadilkar**; National Joint Secretary, **Dipti Thakur**; Treasurer, **Dharmesh Advani**; Director, **Shripad Deshpande**, and Director – National Board and Chairman – Northern India Region, **Pankaj Nagpal**. **Sangeeta Manocha**, Joint Secretary–North India and **Manmeet Singh**, Head – Events Committee North India felicitated the guests by giving away a memento for the occasion.

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EVENT TALK

FEBRUARY 2016

Jal Mahotsava	Hanumantiya	Feb 12-21
Routes Americas	Puerto Rico	Feb 17-19
PHD Aviation Summit	Delhi	Feb 18
CSTF	Mumbai	Feb 18
OTM	Mumbai	Feb 18-20
International Travel Mart	Gandhinagar	Feb 19-21
Garden Festival	Delhi	Feb 19-21
Uttar Pradesh Travel Mart	Agra	Feb 21-23
DOT Philippines roadshow	Pune	Feb 22
Visit Scotland & Eithad Airways roadshow	Mumbai	Feb 22
Tourism Malaysia sales mission	Delhi	Feb 22
Visit Scotland & Eithad Airways roadshow	Delhi	Feb 24
Tourism Malaysia sales mission	Kolkata	Feb 24
DOT Phillipines roadshow	Ahmedabad	Feb 24
TTE	London	Feb 24-25
BTS	London	Feb 24-25
Tourism Malaysia sales mission	Mumbai	Feb 26
IITE	Vijaywada	Feb 26-28
Visit Scotland & Eithad Airways roadshow	Chandigarh	Feb 26
Destination Canada roadshow	Chennai	Feb 26
Bengal Travel Mart	Siliguri	Feb 26-28
ITM	Goa	Feb 27-29
HRANI Conclave 2016	New Delhi	Feb 27
Tourism Malaysia sales mission	Chennai	Feb 29

MARCH 2016

Destination Canada roadshow	Ahmedabad	Mar 2
International Confex	London	Mar 2-3
BTL	Lisbon	Mar 2-6
IAAPI Amusement Expo	Mumbai	Mar 3-5
UNWTO World Congress on Snow & mountain tourism	Andorra	Mar 3-5
Destination Canada roadshow	Chandigarh	Mar 4
IITM	Kolkata	Mar 4-6
Routes Asia	Manila	Mar 6-8
Destination Canada	Delhi	Mar 7
ITB Berlin	Berlin	Mar 9-13
IITE	Raipur	Mar 11-13
Best of Australia roadshow	Pune	Mar 15
Ace of MICE Exhibition	Istanbul	Mar 16-18
Best of Australia roadshow	Ahmedabad	Mar 17
Travel & Hospitality Tech Conclave	Delhi	Mar 17-18
OTOAI Convention	Bali	Mar 17-21
ITM	Ahmedabad	Mar 18-20
MITT	Moscow	Mar 23
Best of Australia roadshow	Bengaluru	Mar 29
WTM Latin America	Sao Paulo	Mar 29-31
UITT	Kiev	Mar 30
Best of Australia roadshow	Hyderabad	Mar 31

For more information, contact us at: talk@ddppl.com

Sports Tourism continues to thrive

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has appointed Fanatic Sports as the official Indian Authorised Ticket Reseller (ATR) for Rio 2016.



ANKITA SAXENA

As the exclusive ATR for Rio Olympics 2016, all Indians travelling to Brazil for the games are obligated to pur-



Raghav Gupta
Founder and CEO
Fanatic Sports

chase tickets from Fanatic Sports. "A traveller can buy a single ticket for a particular game to a range of packages from us. We also offer packages or tickets to travel agents at a net cost over which they can add a host of services like

hotels, transfers, flights etc. They can also buy complete packages from us on commissionable basis," says **Anant Roongta**, Director, Fanatic Sports.

Talking about the promotional plans for the games, Roongta adds, "Now that we have officially launched the ticket sale, we will meet travel agents from across the country to work out a structure beneficial for both countries, and offer the best deal to the agents."

Discussing the growth of sports tourism industry, **Raghav Gupta**, Founder and CEO, Fanatic Sports, says "Sports has become by far the largest entertainment vertical in the world. Sports tourism accounts for 10 per cent of the global tourism industry. India has seen an explosive growth in sports tourism, not just internationally but also for domestic sporting events."

OBITUARY

Pavan Kakar

GM, Park Inn by Radisson,
Davao, Philippines

Pavan Kakar, General Manager, Park Inn by Radisson, Davao passed away in his sleep early morning on January 28. 45-year-old Kakar, who was at the Radisson Blu Plaza Bangkok to attend the Radisson's General Managers Meeting, passed away in his room. He is survived by his wife and daughter.



"Hailing from India, Kakar joined Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group in 2000 as Regional Sales Manager at Radisson Hotel-Regional Office in Bangalore. Over the years at Carlson Rezidor, as well as other organisations, Kakar rose the ranks in various sales and marketing positions. Recognised for his strong results, leadership and dynamism, he joined Park Inn by Radisson at Davao as general manager in May 2014," an official statement from Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group said.

Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, Asia Pacific, has extended its deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathies to Kakar's family, his loved ones and colleagues. "He was a dynamic, loyal and kind leader who embodied our company's Yes I can credo and he will be dearly missed by all of us for his passion and commitment to his team and our company," the statement added.

Vienna records 49% rise in Indian travellers in 2015

■ Vienna drew a record number of 40,355 Indians in 2015, accounting for 89,628 overnight stays. While the number of Indians visiting Vienna increased by 49.5 per cent over last year, the number of overnight stays grew by 38.7 per cent, according to Vienna Tourist Board. Vienna continued to attract more people with tourist arrivals from around the crossed the 6.6 million mark, representing an increase of 6.1 per cent.

Vienna is targeting 100,000 Indian overnight stays by 2017. In 2016, with the theme-'Imperial and Contemporary', Vienna is targeting the honeymooners, families and young travellers from India. According to the data, the growth in Indian visitors to Vienna was among the highest after the Arabic countries and Taiwan. During 2015 overnight stays crossed the 14 million mark for the first time, representing a healthy 5.9 per cent increase of over previous year.

The Australian Airlines offers a direct flight between Vienna and Delhi daily (operated by Australian Airlines through code-share agreements with Air India) and those embarking from Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru can reach Vienna after a stop on Turkish Airlines, Emirates, Etihad, Air India, Swiss, Lufthansa and British Airways.

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Thomas Cook (India)

Delhi
Dipak Deva is the new Managing Director of Travel Corporation (India) Limited (TCI). He comes with over 26 years of experience in the inbound travel business and will be responsible for overall business strategy and delivery at TCI. Deva began his career in Jaipur in 1989, as the Branch Manager of Travel Corporation of India (TCI). He served his last at TCI as the General Manager, Inbound at Mumbai. At present he is the Chairperson WTTC-II, Co-Chairman Tourism Committee of FICCI and a member of the CII National Committee on Tourism.



Singapore Airlines

Mumbai
 Singapore Airlines has appointed **David Lim** as the new General Manager India. Lim will be overseeing all India operations of Singapore Airlines. A Singaporean, Lim began his career at Singapore Airlines in 1988 after graduation from the National University of Singapore. With over 27 years of experience with the company; he has worked in various capacities within passenger and cargo service operations. His overseas assignments is spanned across Berlin, London, Copenhagen, Zurich, Hong Kong and more recently Tokyo.



Meandering Vacations

Mumbai
C.P. Shashidharan been appointed as the Senior Vice President – Visit India division at Meandering Vacations. He has invested three decades in tourism domain enriching him with dynamic experience over the years. Shashidharan was associated with companies like Mercury Travels, UVI holidays, Orbitz and Kesari MICE to name a few. He will drive the 'Visit India' division of Meandering Vacations, which caters to foreign markets and promotion of India tourism. In this role, he will be responsible for strategic planning, sales and marketing in foreign markets, and vendor management.



World of Wonders Travel

Mumbai
Purvi Shah has been appointed as Vice President for Products and Contracting for World of Wonders Travel. She held the post of Associate Vice President at Thomas Cook for 11 years. Shah brings with her immense amount of knowledge, experience to the specialist WOW Destination Management team. She has been instrumental in growth of several destinations in her past assignment. Shah specialises in USA, Canada, South America, Australia and New Zealand.



Park Hyatt Hyderabad

Hyderabad
Thomas Abraham joins Park Hyatt Hyderabad as its new General Manager. He started his hospitality journey two decades ago with the Oberoi Hotels, Mumbai as Assistant Banquet Manager soon after he completed his Diploma in Hotel Management from Les Roches, Switzerland. He has worked with renowned hospitality brands such as Goa Marriott Resort, Hyatt Regency Delhi, Taj Luxury Hotels, Leela Kempinski Mumbai, Mövenpick Hotel in Sana'a, Yemen. Prior to this role, he was GM of Park Hyatt Goa Resort and Spa for nearly four years.



Sheraton Hyderabad Hotel

Hyderabad
Shibil Malik has been appointed as General Manager at the Sheraton Hyderabad Hotel. Prior to his new assignment he was the Cluster Executive Assistant Manager of Sales & Marketing for The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace and Sheraton Hyderabad Hotel. With over 17 years of experience in the hospitality and banking industry, Malik has been part of many significant assignments. He started his career with BNP Paribas soon after completing his MBA in Sales & Marketing. He has worked with brands such as the Oberoi Group in Mumbai & Delhi, IHHR Hospitality, and The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace.



Starwood Hotels & Resorts

Maldives
Sandeep Raghav has been appointed as Complex Account Director for Sheraton Full Moon Resort and W Retreat & Spa, Maldives. In his current role, he would develop the luxury market for both Maldives resorts from India. Raghav brings with him almost 14 years of experience in hospitality with various hotel brands like InterContinental, Radisson, Jumeirah Group, Accor and Frasers hospitality, Singapore. His new responsibility will also include planning and strategy to increase business through corporate and travel agents from India.



Inder Residency Udaipur

Udaipur
 Inder Residency Udaipur has appointed **Devendra Sharma** as General Manager. Sharma comes with 14 years of experience in the hospitality industry. In his current role, Sharma will provide leadership expertise to ensure effective and efficient operation of the hotel, including the achievement of stated operational goals and profitability objectives. He is an alumni of Asia Pacific Institute of Hotel Management Catering Technology and Applied Nutrition Ahmadabad and holds a 3 years Specialisation Diploma from Cavendish University London.



ibis Chennai City Centre

Chennai
 AccorHotels has appointed **Rajesh Gopalakrishnan** as the General Manager for the newly opened ibis Chennai City Centre. In his new leadership role, Gopalakrishnan will spearhead operations at the ibis Chennai City Centre. He brings over two decades of industry experience including strong Chennai market expertise. He started his AccorHotels career in 2005 as Executive Chef for the Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre and HICC. While at ibis Chennai SIP-COT, Gopalakrishnan played an instrumental role in introducing the ibis brand to the city and positioning it as a well-recognised and leading international economy hotel.



TALKING PEOPLE

Kunal Sampat, General Manager-India, MSC Cruises, feels that it is challenging to maintain a strict schedule and participate in extra-curricular activities with a job where one is on the move most of the time. "However, being a foodie by nature, I find having good food and trying out new cuisines extremely de-stressing and I try to indulge myself at regular intervals," he says. His most memorable holiday moment was when he made his first international trip to Switzerland. Sikkim in India, and Armenia make it to his list of favourite destinations.



Shivadatta Wagle, Director, Meandering Vacations, loves to travel, meet people and experience different cultures. "When I'm not on tour, I prefer listening to music. The choice of music depends on my state of mind. I like to have some 'me' time once a while. I also hit the gym at least four days a week to keep myself fit," he says. Wagle has played first-class cricket representing Mumbai U-14, U-15 and U-19. His most memorable holiday was his family vacation to Israel. He'd like to holiday in Kashmir in India and South Africa.



Philip Saunders, CCO, Kuwait Airways, says a visit to the theatre or cinema helps him leave everything behind. "Time with my family and walks in the English countryside are also great ways to de-stress," he says. His most memorable holiday moment was visiting the Eiffel Tower in Paris as a child with his parents. Having lived in Mumbai for some time now, Saunders loves its cosmopolitan energy and diversity, Bollywood, historic buildings, and the Taj Mahal Hotel with its view of the Gateway of India. It's a place for boundless optimism and India's future."



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West Bengal on a roadshow drive

Surajit Bose, Joint Director, West Bengal Tourism, highlights the state's initiatives to foster tourism and their focus on Tier-II cities and the domestic market.



QHow was the past year for West Bengal Tourism?

2015 was a year of development for us, although we did face some setbacks. The main intention was to rebrand and reposition Bengal which we worked on by first changing the concept of our campaign. The logo has been modified from "Beautiful Bengal" to "Experience Bengal -- the Sweetest Part of India," for which relevant creatives have been made to go in sync. This was our main focus which was successfully accomplished even though there was a slight delay. 2015 was the year of construction while 2016-2017 will be the promotional years.

During Jan-Nov 2015, Kolkata airport alone registered a 3.91 per cent share out of a total of 71.03 lakh FTAs and ranked sixth among the top 15 ports in India. West Bengal registered approximately 4.90 crore tourist arrivals in 2014 and ranked eighth. The numbers are definitely growing with more domestic tourists than international.

QTell us about some of the tourism products West Bengal has to offer.

Owing to the diverse nature of West Bengal's topography, the state has a plethora of products that appeal to tourists. The Himalayan zone in the north which falls under the Darjeeling district is a splendid option as a hill-station, followed by the Dooars Terai region that comprises a majority of the tea gardens. Then we have the plains -- most of the urban area falls under this category, while the Sunderbans provide the wildlife experience. Finally, coastal Bengal has always been a popular hotspot for families and makes for a good vacation.

QWhat are some of your growth strategies?

We are looking into other fields of tourism such as film tourism. Last year, we participated in the International Film Festival in Goa for the first time and realised it has immense potential. As I mentioned earlier, Bengal's variety of locales is a huge advantage in this matter. Many Bollywood movies have already been shot in Bengal and while some are ongoing, many more are expected.

Another aspect we are focusing on is cruise tourism. A large strip of the

Ganges remains unexplored with only two or three currently operating cruises. Our aim is to develop this by including ample support from the private sector. Alongside, coastal tourism is being encouraged for which the Central Government and the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) have provided constant assistance and encouragement.

developed into an eco-tourism hub and is expected to majorly help revitalise tourism. The project is under the public-private partnership (PPP) model where the government is providing the land and private bodies are setting up resorts. So far, three properties have already booked their space in the hub and additionally, we are

“We recently held roadshows in Nagpur and Indore and will be heading to Delhi, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Ahmedabad and Surat. Tier II cities have the most potential for tourism so we are attempting to tap this market.”

Surajit Bose

Joint Director, West Bengal Tourism



West Bengal has been included under the coastal circuits for the Swadesh Scheme by MOT so this in itself is expected to help boost tourism. Additional work, such as beautification of the coastal hotspots, landscaping, adding house boats, providing amenities for adventure sports, etc., is in progress to ensure that this endeavour is a success. It will take one to two years for this to be fully developed but once it is done, it will surely be a winner.

Apart from these, we have identified that homestays are a prospective area for progress and have been looking into developing it in a big way.

QWhat are some of the latest initiatives to boost tourism?

One of the newest projects is Eco Park in Kolkata which is currently open for the public. Situated close to the airport, the park is spread over 400 acres of land and is surrounded by 100 acres of water. It accommodates cottages, facilities for water sports and has beautiful fountains to add appeal. What's more, the Bengal Handicrafts Bazaar is situated adjacent to the park and together, it makes for a complete destination.

Another initiative that the state is working on is the Gajoldoba area near the Teesta barrage in North Bengal. It is being

planning on including a golf course as well. This will take atleast four to five years but once it is ready, it will be a game changer for the Dooars region.

QIn your opinion, what is crucial to ensure these efforts are a success in giving fillip to tourism?

The marketing aspect always has a huge hand in the success of any project. We are going all out on campaigning via television, radio, print, digital, apart from participating in major trade events and hosting standalone roadshows. We recently held roadshows in Nagpur and Indore and will be heading to Delhi, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Ahmedabad and Surat. Tier-II cities have the most potential for tourism so we are attempting to tap this market.

Kolkata Calling

- During Jan-Nov 2015, Kolkata airport alone registered a 3.91 per cent share out of a total of 71.03 lakh FTAs and ranked sixth among the top 15 ports in India
- West Bengal registered approximately 4.90 crore tourist arrivals in 2014 and ranked eighth

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