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2016 Mixed bag for trade

The year that's drawing to a close can be rightly termed as dynamic. Policies announced and implemented this year have sent ripples across the board. **TRAVTALK** speaks to leaders from various verticals of the tourism and hospitality industry to gauge their perception of the year gone by.



TT BUREAU



Pronab Sarkar
President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO)

“Our focus is on how to increase tourist visits to India and currently, there are many day-to-day problems we are facing due to demonetisation. However, the government has taken very good steps to solve this issue. Besides, our tourists are facing problems as they can't get more than ₹5000 in exchange per day, which is not enough for them. We want that \$500 per day should be allowed for them. MOT is trying to increase this amount and we are awaiting the response from the Ministry of Finance right now. Winter months see the most tourists coming into India and most of the foreign exchange earnings happen now. I hope things remain good and we are hopeful that next year would be much better.”

“The year 2016 has been good for ADTOI, as we had very peaceful elections. Everything is in order and things are looking bright. We have opened a new chapter in Rajasthan, and many promotional activities have already begun. Membership has started reviving and we've got new members, especially those people who hadn't paid up because of various problems. The recovery is good and I am sure that we will get back on track.”



Rajat Sawhney
Vice President
ADTOI

“The year 2016 has seen tourism on a low. Overall, the industry is still slow and could pick up in the next few months. However, most of the tour operators have said that they have seen a drop in the number of arrivals. Owing to the problems faced by tourists coming to India, IATO members have written to the Tourism Ministry and to ASI to allow POS machines to be installed at the monuments, making payments easier for tourists and tour operators. Also, we have placed the demand to buy tickets online in bulk against cheque or NEFT, which the MOT has forwarded to the Ministry of Culture and hopefully we should be getting a positive response from them. I hope next year things remain quiet here and the media does not over publicise the news about pollution or demonetisation.”



Lally Matthews
Hon. Secretary, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO)

“The year 2016 was a mixed bag. In terms of ticketing, monetarily volumes were lower because of decreased airfares (low fuel price) and sale offers by airlines. However, this comes with increased passenger traffic. Holiday business did see good growth, both outbound and domestic. GST and demonetisation shall continue to overshadow Q1 of 2017. Overall, it could be considered as a year of consolidation and the beginning of better times. We are hoping to get a boost by a favourable GST policy for the travel trade and a rational Union Budget.”



Rajat Bagaria
Managing Director
Shrishti Tours and Travels

“From Sep-Nov, we have inducted almost 30 members and we are expecting more members with the addition of new chapters. On December 10, we opened a new chapter in Rajasthan. We are also constructing our website which is very important, and will connect our members with the MOT and state tourism bodies. We also want to organise specialised programmes in association with government bodies in different states, especially new destinations. We are trying to develop contacts with old chapters, so that we can reinstate our old members as well.”



P.P. Khanna
President, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI)

“2016 was a fairly good year for us. We launched our outbound tour division only last year and we specialise in offering exotic and unique itineraries to the discerning Indian travellers. This year we handled few clients and did a lot of itineraries to Italy, unexplored parts of Africa, Iceland, Botswana and Corsica. With demonetisation in the last months of this year, it is highly possible that people will drop travel from their priority but overall, the move towards technology is going to help the industry to be more organised.”



Sadhana Sharma
Curator of Journeys
The Intrepid Club



Ravinder Kumar
Managing Director
India Legends Holidays

“The first six months of 2016 were tough in terms of inbound business but after August the tourism business improved. Based on the queries that we have received, 2017 looks even better than 2016. We witnessed 20-25 per cent growth in the last financial year and hope to do better business in 2017. This year the tourism industry was supported by e-visas and announcement of few direct flights like Delhi-Madrid and Seoul-Delhi. With demonetisation, there is a need to make ticketing online for ASI monuments and introduce vending machines to avoid cash usage and ease functioning for tourists.”



Aditya Loomba
Jt. Managing Director
ECOS (India) Mobility & Hospitality

“For ECO Rent A Car, 2016 is a special year as we received the National Tourism Award for the second year in a row. This year we opened our own offices in Kolkata and Ahmedabad, therefore, now we have an all pan-India presence. In 2016, we have imported a brand new fleet of Toyota Commuter VIP vans, Toyota Coaster Mini Bus and large Volvo coach with chemical toilet. We have also invested in latest technology enhancements in our vehicles and back-end operations with special focus on safety and comfort of travellers.”



Arun Raghavan
Proprietor
Cougar Resorts and Travels

“Travel has stayed much the same in 2016 but due to various reasons like demonetisation and the new policies by the government. The year 2017 may not turn out to be a good year for outbound travel. Inbound travel may improve as we see the value of rupee has dropped and the ease of getting a visa to travel to India through e-visas has made it easier for international tourists to come to India. Domestic travel may take a hit but that is yet to be seen.”

“2016 was a very good year for us. Not only have we improved our occupancy over 2016, but more importantly our ADR and RevPAR have shown a remarkable increase. This has been facilitated by an augmentation of our F&B revenue, given the transformation of BKC from being just a corporate hub, to a nightlife spot as well.”



Biswajit Chakraborty
General Manager
Sofitel Mumbai BKC

“This year has been outstanding for us with all aspects of the business like RevPAR, restaurant and catering revenues showing double digit growth. We have also made positive contributions to the community around us through activities like building toilets, installing a solar pump for water in a village and solar installations. Year 2017 brings with it a lot of expectations riding on the result of optimism from the performance of 2016.”



Nasir Shaikh
General Manager
Courtyard by Marriott
Pune Chakan

“The hospitality industry saw quite an unpredictable year last year and we're glad we rode the wave. A spike in the MICE segment helped us grow by about 10 per cent compared to last year with months that hotels usually consider lean, July-September. With more international companies investing in India, the economy will continue to grow substantially. Paired with this, India opening e-visa for more countries, we're expecting an increase in leisure travel. We're expecting a similar trend with the wedding segment as well.”

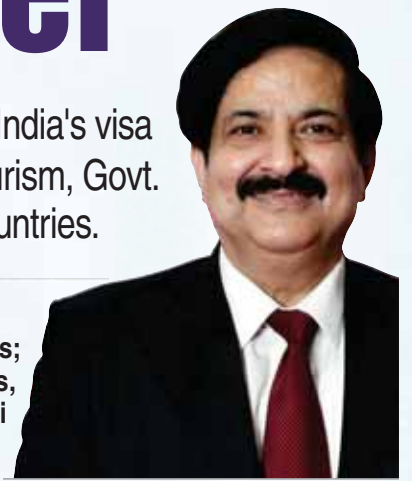


Sourav Ghosal
Resident Manager
Vivanta by Taj- President,
Mumbai



MOT's visa power

In a landmark move, the Central Government has made various changes in India's visa policy. Speaking exclusively to **TRAVTALK**, **Vinod Zutshi**, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India, talks about the reforms and the extension of e-visa to eight more countries.



Vinod Zutshi
Secretary
Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India

✓ e-visa expanded to three components — medical (e-medical visa), business (e-business visa) and tourism (e-tourist visa). Foreign nationals are permitted to club these activities provided they have clearly indicated the same in the application form

✓ Two entries for tourist and business e-visa; three for medical

✓ Window for application increased from 30 to 120 days

✓ Duration of stay extended from 30 to 60 days; in the case of e-medical visa, the validity can be prolonged up to six months on case-to-case basis

✓ One application could be filed per email ID per month, this restriction has been lifted

✓ e-visa accepted at five sea ports – Mumbai, Chennai, Kochi, Goa and Mangalore

✓ e-visa extended to eight countries; Angola, Rwanda, Niger, Cyprus, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Mali and Burundi

✓ Except those covered under 10-year travel and trade visa policy, citizens of other countries would be offered five-year multiple visa (traditional) by default

✓ Medical attendants will be granted medical attendant visa — two attendants are allowed except in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh

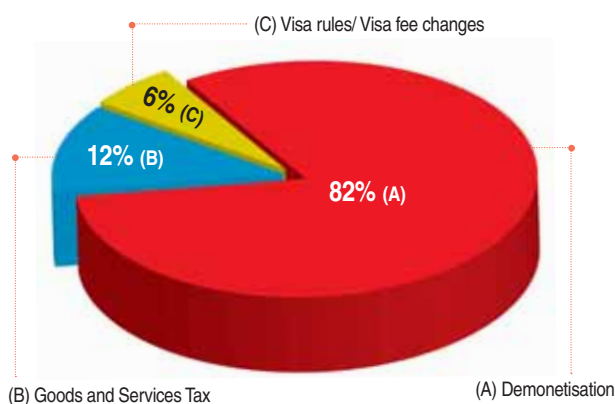
✓ Separate counters will be available for clearance of medical visa, facilitation desk to assist medical tourists

✓ Provision for film e-visa (related to shooting of feature film, reality television show, commercial television serial and documentary film) has been facilitated

“ Apart from various initiatives, we are also working on extending the e-tourist visa facility to five other countries which are Italy, Slovak Republic, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, and British subjects & colonies ”



Demonetisation rules 2016



From the anticipation of National Tourism Policy to the extension of e-visas for 158 countries and the launch of National Civil Aviation Policy, the trade welcomed both crests and trough through the year. Of all the events that created a buzz, the Central Government's decision on demonetisation of 500 and 1000 currency notes has left the industry in a frenzy in its wake, so shows an industry-wide poll conducted by **TRAVTALK**. About 82 per cent respondents feel demonetisation has created the most buzz this year. Goods and Service Tax (though not fully ratified) is a distant second with 12 per cent votes and changes in visa fee/structure got 6 per cent votes. Travel remains a cash-dependent industry and the note ban has clearly hit where it hurts the most.



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Sunil Kumar re-elected as Prez

UFTAA's Golden Jubilee Congress brought together thinking heads from 25 member associations from 30 countries to discuss IATA-related matters and better working of the organisation.

 NISHA VERMA FROM ISTANBUL

Sunil Kumar, President, UFTAA, has been re-elected for a second term at the Golden Jubilee Congress of UFTAA in Istanbul, Turkey. Held at the Hilton Istanbul Bosphorus from Nov 25-26, 2016, the congress had elected its new board at the Annual General Meeting, headed by Kumar, consisting of two new member associations — Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA) and Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TURSAB).

Celebrations galore
It was TURSAB which invited UFTAA to hold its congress in Istanbul and hosted the members in the city. The theme of the Congress was 'Celebrate the Connect'. Speaking on the sidelines of the Congress, Kumar said,



Sunil Kumar
President, UFTAA
and India Travel Award Winner

"Fifty years don't happen by accident. They happen by design, investing time, being active and by continuously having people associated. We will now try and connect the associations. Our focus is not merely on cooperation, but on collaboration. Thus we would like associations to connect and actively be connected, to make sure that UFTAA can service countries



Yossef Fatael
Vice President, UFTAA and Chairman,
Airlines and IATA matters, UFTAA

which need our support. We are glad that we have been elected unanimously. The team led by me continues for another year and I am thankful for the general assembly for asking us to continue. We have a couple of new entrants on board as well."

Yossef Fatael, Vice President, UFTAA and Chairman, Airlines and IATA matters,



Ramesh Marwah
CEO
UFTAA

UFTAA, claimed that the Golden Jubilee Congress is a milestone for the association and credited Kumar for his leadership. "Ever since Sunil Kumar took the role of President of UFTAA, it is rising again. It's a celebration of history as well as our future. The event is seeing how UFTAA is coming back and taking the centre position again in the market."

Contd. on page 42 ▶

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Dial D for Demonetisation

Yet another year comes to a close and what a year it was! While at the beginning of the year, Goods and Services Tax and the National Tourism Policy were the buzzwords for many in the travel and hospitality industry, nobody had anticipated the November 8 announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on demonetisation. Having come so late in the year, the dreaded D word went on to define the year that we are now set to bid farewell to. While the motive behind demonetisation, which is primarily to put an end to black money circulation in the Indian economy, has been lauded by many, the execution has been questioned. The long queues at banks and ATMs add to the woes of the cash-strapped public. Inbound and outbound traffic have been affected but agents say it is too early to exactly measure the quantum effect of demonetisation on travel, while some others maintain that this is an initial hiccup and that the situation will soon be back to normal. However, there are reports coming in of foreign tourists finding it difficult to sustain within the limited budget and this curb on their spending power.

The year that was

While demonetisation was the chant towards the end of the year and we know for sure that this will continue well into the next year, 2016 has been a mixed bag of sorts for the industry. Though tourism arrival figures have looked up, the industry is sceptical of what lies ahead in 2017. However, the landmark judgement on e-visas will surely be a game changer for Indian tourism and will bring in more footfall. Also, with eight more countries now being included in the e-visa list, this takes the number of countries up to 158 now. Also, everyone has been eagerly looking forward to the National Tourism Policy and we hope that in 2017 the announcement will be made and we will see some important decisions being included in the framework of the policy. As always tourism has been a steady contributor to the country's GDP and if the government wants to bring about an overall development then tourism is definitely the industry to pay heed to. Here's looking forward to a brighter 2017, fingers crossed!

TRAVTALK brings to you the news and events that made headlines 25 years ago and are relevant even today. From the December issue of 1991:

RBI RELAXES CONTROLS

In a bid to boost inbound numbers, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had taken new measures::

- The amount of fixed cash float for restricted money changers other than hotels was raised from \$100 to \$1000.
- The upper limit of acquiring foreign exchange by residents was raised to \$300 from \$100.
- People of Indian origin who were residing abroad, were permitted to take with them articles upto the value of ` 10,000.
- Refund of foreign exchange under the Foreign Exchange Conservation Tax (FECT) rules of 1987, which was to be claimed within a month from the date of return from foreign travel was increased to 90 days.
- Requirement of NOC or letter of recommendation from the Department of Tourism (DOT) by the travel agent while applying for remittance of membership fee was waived.

Sea Queen Smiles for Indian Tourism

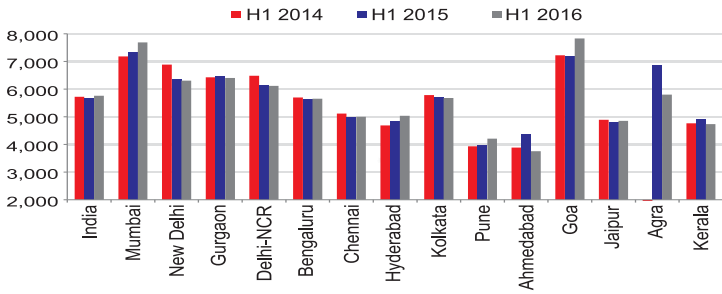
- Luxury cruise liner Queen Elizabeth II (QE II) was to anchor in Bombay (now Mumbai) in March 1992, for a four day 'see India' sojourn. The ship had around 1200 HNIs who were on a 100-day trip around the world in the five star comfort of the ship, which costed them a whopping \$32,000. Owned by Cunard Times, the ship's bookings in India and excursions were managed by SITA World Travels.



ADR shows reprieve in H1 2016

The Average Daily Rate in H1 2016 touched `5,759, which was a notch up from `5,656 recorded in H1 2015. Overall, markets saw reprieve in the first half of the year.

ADR (Rs.)

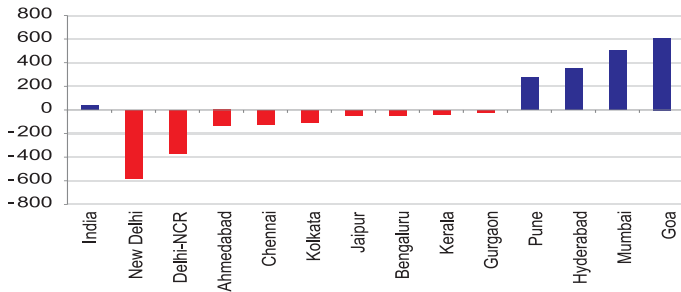


- Kerala, Ahmedabad and Agra had material rate drops, mainly from supply pressure. ADR for other key markets grew or declined marginally.

ADR variations in rupee terms, not as percentages, between H1-16 and H1-14:

- All-India ADR grew by `36.
- Only 4 key markets achieved growth - ranging from `276 (Pune) to `609 (Goa). Mumbai was the only metro city to grow, by `504.
- Hyderabad is also up (+`370) but truly that is a basic correction from externally impacted trading conditions over a few years till March 14.
- All other markets are still in the red - some marginally; others more substantially.

ADR Variance (H1-14 to H1-16)



Source: India Hotel Market Review H1 2016, Horwath HTL

Holland eyes 30% growth in Indian arrivals

Holland has bigger goals set out for India as it encourages travellers to explore places other than Amsterdam. The country is also in talks to initiate an online visa process.

AHANA GURUNG

With NBTC back in operations in the Indian market after a brief pause, the tourism board organised the Holland Club Meeting in New Delhi and Mumbai in associa-



Carola van Rijn
Project Manager
NBTC Holland Marketing

This year we're expecting a 30 per cent growth. The increase has mainly been driven by leisure travellers, primarily FITs

tion with Amsterdam Airport Schiphol and Jet Airways. The recent relocation of Jet Airways' hub from Brussels to The Netherlands has worked to the latter's benefit



Wilco Sweijen
Director-Airline Marketing
Amsterdam Airport Schiphol

We have three flights from India to Amsterdam and for the first 10 months of 2016, we have seen a 9% growth of passenger numbers

and a surge in Indian arrivals is expected by the end of the year.

Carola van Rijn, Project Manager at NBTC Holland Marketing, informs, "We saw

around 100,000 Indian visitors in Holland last year and this year, we're expecting a 30 per cent growth. The increase has mainly been driven by leisure travellers, primarily FITs."

Additionally, traffic between India and Amsterdam has seen an increase of 60 per cent up to September, and is expected to grow even further, shares **Wilco Sweijen**, Director-Airline Marketing,

Amsterdam Airport Schiphol. "Currently we're seeing a big increase because of Jet Airways," he claims. "We have three flights from India (Delhi and Mumbai) to Amsterdam and for the first 10 months of 2016, we have seen a 9 per cent overall growth of passenger numbers."

While 90 per cent of travellers visit Amsterdam, van Rijn says, the other attractions

of the country remain largely unexplored by Indian travellers. Hence, the country is highlighting destinations like Utrecht, The Hague, Rotterdam, among others and which will be their main focus for the coming year. She adds, "We portray the country as a compact one that is easy to travel around and want people to visit above and beyond Amsterdam. Of course, we are happy that Amsterdam is so frequently

visited but there is so much more to Holland."

Germany and Belgium together account for two million visitors per year and remains their biggest source markets, and although India does not figure in the top 10 countries, van Rijn states that the market is still of great importance owing to India being a fast-growing market. "India is a very big country so currently we are fo-

cused on promoting the destination in cities like Mumbai and New Delhi. We're also planning a lot of trade events — this was the first roadshow but from next year, we're looking at possibly organising a sales mission with Dutch stakeholders to meet with the travel trade and continuing with the roadshows." To encourage more tourists to visit the country, plans to digitalise the visa application process are in the pipeline. ↴

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The results were announced on 20th November, 2016.

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Indians no more picky with the pocket

The spending capacity of Indian travellers varies from the type of traveller and the duration of travel to the destination. An overall rise has been seen in the amount being spent on travel and its ancillary services across segments like FITs, adventure travel and luxury travel.



ANKITA SAXENA

“A recent survey conducted by Yatra.com suggests that the rupee stability has allowed 22.6 per cent people to increase their capacity to spend above ₹50,000 per person on travel. Though most of the travellers are spending time and money planning international vacations, domestic travel for shorter trips is also on the rise which is considerably more affordable,” says **Sharat Dhall**, Chief Operating Officer (B2C), Yatra.com.

Pankaj Nagpal, MD, Travstarz Global Group, points out a marked change in the spending pattern of Indians — a gradual shift from a saving economy to a spending economy — especially among the young which forms over 65 per cent of the population today. Nagpal says, “Typically, this has translated into longer duration of vacations, staying in better quality accommodation and exploring all that the destination has to offer.” Elaborating further, **Samina Munshi**, Director, N. Chirag Travels, explains that Indian travellers are clubbing multiple destinations in a single itinerary and thus spending more. “Indians are perhaps

one of the biggest spenders during their travel (rough estimates can range from \$100-\$300 a day) given their love for shopping and dining,” she says.

According to **Ranjeet Oak**, Chief Business Officer-Holidays, MakeMyTrip, the spending capacity of an Indian FIT traveller is around ₹60,000 per person, adventure traveller is around ₹1,10,000 per person while luxury segment travellers spend around ₹1,50,000 per person.

Receptive Travellers

The top drivers for the choice of destination are different cultural perspectives, activities available to engage in, as well as the ongoing season, believes Munshi. The industry points out that for FIT segment South East Asia, Dubai, Canada along with European countries still remain most popular. “With a significant growth in outbound travel to less-explored cities, it appears that Indians are keen to make the transition from a wide-eyed tourist to a more receptive traveller. Eastern European countries are coming to the fore and we have witnessed a surge in inquiries for Scandinavian countries. I believe South Ameri-



Sharat Dhall
Chief Operating Officer (B2C)
Yatra.com

can countries are among the fastest emerging destinations,” she says.

Dhall points out Goa, Kerala and Rajasthan as the most popular destinations for FITs on the domestic front while domestic cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, Rishikesh and Kerala and international destinations like Amsterdam, New York, Athens, Barcelona, Paris, Bali, Rome, Las Vegas and Singapore, are becoming popular amongst adventure travellers. He says, “The luxury travellers are showing appetite for exotic international destinations like Australia, New Zealand, Mauritius, Bali, Seychelles, Maldives as well as the ever-popular Dubai and Thailand.” **Karan Anand**, Head-Relationships, Cox and Kings, points out, “Among existing



Pankaj Nagpal
MD, Travstarz Global Group
and India Travel Award Winner

high-density tourism destinations, Dubai, Thailand, Singapore and Macau are introducing new products and reinventing themselves with the changing Indian outbound market.”

Booking Trends

Flight bookings have predominantly moved online to the point where people prefer using the smart phones over desktops. “However, it is important to point out that when clients try to customise itineraries for unique holidays, they appreciate the guidance of a travel advisor. We are witnessing a combination model — companies which will thrive would have a strong online presence for brand recognition, showcasing the product and a strong customer serving team offline for execution. It’s staggering to see how a considerable



Samina Munshi
Director, N. Chirag Travels
and India Travel Award Winner

number of people search for itineraries online but actually make their purchases offline,” says Munshi.



Ranjeet Oak
Chief Business Officer-Holidays,
MakeMyTrip

Segment Growth

Oak elaborates that the FIT segment has been growing at 15 per cent year-on-year and the introduction of international low-cost carriers like Air Asia, Tigerair and

Scot Airways has propelled growth in this segment further. The adventure travel segment is growing steadily at 5-10 per cent. Oak says, “Indian consumers now look at travelling as an investment. They have a travel ambition and travel has become an inseparable part of the experiences they want to have. Also, Indians are adding activities and local experiences and are on an average spending 10 per cent more days per trip.” He further explains that the luxury traveller continues to pay high attention to the property type,



Karan Anand
Head-Relationships
Cox and Kings

like unique water villas or a villa with a private pool, as a big deciding factor. Anand adds, “FIT is growing at 30 per cent; luxury at 20 per cent and adventure at 15 per cent respectively.”

Ashwani Lohani is new WTTCII Chairman

■ World Travel & Tourism Council, India Initiative (WTTCII) has appointed **Ashwani Lohani**, Chairman & Managing Director, Air India, as its Chairman for the year 2017. Lohani, who served as the Vice Chairman of WTTCII for the year 2016, takes over from **Kapil Chopra**, President, The Oberoi Group, who completed his term at the recently held

AGM in Delhi. **Sunder G. Advani**, Chairman & Managing Director, Advani Hotels & Resorts (India) Limited, has been appointed as the Vice Chairman of WTTCII for the year 2017. This was announced at the Annual General Meeting of the World Travel & Tourism Council, India Initiative (WTTCII) held on 12 December 2016 at New Delhi.



Ashwani Lohani
Chairman, WTTCII

Lohani said, “Over the years, WTTCII has been championing convergence between Government of India and States to facilitate tourism in India and we will continue to do so. With the GST in place by next year, the States will have the major onus of implementing smart policies for facilitating tourism on the ground. We will continue to work with the States, with

the strength of our Members, to improve access, address infrastructural gaps and policy bottlenecks for tourism to flourish, and most importantly create jobs, employment and provide a vigorous boost to tourism’s contribution to the State’s GDP. The sub sectors of Aviation, Hospitality, Transportation, Railway compliments each other. In a country like India, all the subs

sectors of tourism need to be integrated and treated uniformly by the Government in its various policy initiatives to give it a competitive edge vis-à-vis other countries.”

Advani said, “We will need to work together with the help of the Government to showcase India as an attractive tourist destination through aggressive and targeted marketing.”



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A bittersweet year for the trade

► Contd. from page 2



S.P. Jain
Managing Director
Pride Hotels

“It has been a good year for us as we have added a new property under the Pride Plaza brand at Aerocity. We expect to increase our turnover by 45-50 per cent vis-à-vis last year due to this addition and improvement of occupancy in our other hotels. We expect the sector to grow on an average by 10-12 per cent within next four to five years due to multiple reasons, but mainly improvement in the domestic tourist arrivals and e-visa facility as well as a slowdown in supply of new hotel rooms.”



Piyush Tiwari
Director (Commercial & Marketing), ITDC

“Year 2016 has been important for ITDC as it completed a glorious and satisfying journey of 50 years on October 1, and this gives a great sense of satisfaction and pride to all of us. ITDC has posted a strong performance for the financial year 2015-16. The Corporation recorded a turnover of ₹465.69 cr and posted a Profit Before Tax (PBT) of ₹32.42 cr. The Ashok Events Division handled more than 200 events during 2015-16.”



Sanjeev Shekhar
General Manager
Hotel Marine Plaza

“2016 was a bittersweet year for us. While we have done marginally better than last year in rooms, F&B has suffered to some extent. High raw material prices, steep excise duty and other taxes have made some of the liquor above and beyond the reach of our clientele. The online buying by guests mitigated some of our woes. I hope 2017 brings with it better spending power for the people. The ARR is expected to go up giving a relief to the depressed market for the last few years.”



Vikramjit Singh
President and Chief Revenue Officer
Lemon Tree Hotels

“This has been a path-breaking year for the group in terms of opening new hotels. By 2019, our aim is to own and operate over 8000 rooms in 60 hotels across 30 major cities of India. This year, with the opening of 10 new hotels and an additional five in the pipeline by the end of March 2017, we are all geared up to give our customers more choices at different locations. We have opened new resorts in Bandhavgarh and Goa and inaugurated hotels in Trichy and Katra.”



Srinivas Srirangam
General Manager
Novotel Imagica Khopoli

“2016 was a good year for Novotel Imagica Khopoli. We completed one year of operation in 2016 and have been faring well in terms of occupancy. The market response has exceeded our expectations. Our occupancy has been over 75 per cent in 2016. We are also seeing a huge acceptance of our hotels as a preferred location for corporate off sites, social functions, MICE and destination weddings.”



Aseem Kapoor
General Manager, Hyatt Regency Delhi and Area Vice-President, Northwest India, Hyatt Hotels

“2016 has been an interesting year for us. Hyatt Regency Delhi has closed the last financial year with an overall increase in the performance as compared to previous years. Hyatt Regency Delhi gifted the city its first and most exclusive social space The Lounge, a multifunctional space that lets one connect, engage and be social, all at one place. In addition to this, we have launched a unique yet inspiring set of personalised private spaces called ‘The Living Rooms’.”



Pradipta Mohapatra
GM-Sales and Marketing, Mayfair Hotels and Resorts, India Travel Award Winner

“The tourism and hospitality industry has performed fairly well in 2016. There has been a surge in both domestic as well as international tourists which led to higher demand for accommodation, driving growth for the hospitality sector. With stable economy and increase in the purchasing power, domestic tourism and hospitality sector have seen a positive growth. The ascendant role of MICE in the hospitality sector is the key development this year.”

Contd. on page 12 ►

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Outbound sees success in 2016

► Contd. from page 11



Nishant Kashikar
Country Manager, India and Gulf, Tourism Australia

“Our total arrivals for the year ended September 2016 were recorded at 249,200, an increase of 10 per cent relative to the same period the previous year which makes India the ninth largest inbound market for that period. The most encouraging part has been that arrivals have been driven by the holiday segment that recorded an increase of 19 per cent over the previous year. Our key focus areas for 2017 would primarily rest on consumer campaigns, building aviation and facilitating access, and promoting quality experiences through the Aussie Specialist Program and events such as India Travel Mission.”

“We are very happy that the number of Indian overnights in Geneva in 2016 has grown. This is definitely an encouraging proof of the shift in the Indian mindset from Geneva as a transit to a holiday destination! Travel predictions for 2017 are rather difficult right now, but we believe in a little but constant growth. Geneva is more focused on FIT and are confident about a further growing popularity in the Indian market.”



Beatrice Dolder
Sales Representative,
Geneva Tourism & Conventions Foundation - India Market

“2016 has been a year of partnerships for us — with airline partners to launching new flights, to introducing new products for women and cruise holidays. We also embarked on collaborations with production houses for movies. Besides promoting to consumers, we had also embarked on B2B networking events with the travel trade in not only the metro cities but also high-growth second-tier cities. In 2017, we will be expanding our regional footprint in India by targeting high-growth Tier II cities.”



Adrian Kong
Area Director, South Asia,
Singapore Tourism Board



Huzan Fraser
Director, Beautiful Planet
— India Representative for
Tourism Ireland

“2016 has been a good year for Tourism Ireland in India. This year, we have seen substantial increase in leisure and MICE traffic to the island of Ireland. In 2017, we expect to see a 15-20 per cent growth in numbers from India. In 2017 and beyond, Tourism Ireland will continue to focus on increasing awareness for Ireland. The focus for Northern Ireland will be screen tourism, literature, gardens, music, golf, activities, food and events. We will also conduct roadshows in Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru and continue to promote our online training programme.”



Patricia Yates
Director, VisitBritain

“It has been a record-breaking year-to-date (Jan-Sept) for inbound visits to the UK with 28.1 million visits, up three per cent on the same period last year. At the end of November the UK was 16 per cent more affordable for visitors from India than it was the same time last year. Next year will also see a number of events across the UK — from cultural celebrations to sporting milestones including the 25th anniversary of the Premier League and the 2017 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup at Lord's.”



John Ambat
Partner
Expedition Voyages

“If we compare the bookings year to year between 2015 and 2016, we have doubled our business revenue. This success is primarily because of four large group bookings to Antarctica. We have also doubled our online marketing activities to ensure that we have enough enquiries in the pipeline. The challenge will be to maintain this tempo. The present financial situation of India due to the demonetisation has certainly been a dampener with two cancellations till date, as clients prefer to keep liquidity rather than splurge on a vacation.”

Contd. on page 14 ►

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Reflecting on the year gone by

► Contd. from page 12



Ratna Chadha
Chief Executive
TIRUN

“2016 was exceptional both in terms of volumes and revenue as we embraced new markets and catered to the people who have high aspirations in life. We are adding newer guests to our experiences while our existing guests are upgrading. The greatest learning is Indians want the experiential travel with no holds barred! Cruise business is cyclical, and we hope for a promising 2017. We have our ambitious plans to expand in Asia in the coming year.”

“One major development in the first quarter of 2016 has been additional frequencies from the country, which is testament to the demand for Singapore Airlines in the Indian market. Today, combined with SilkAir, our regional wing, we currently operate 104 weekly flights from 11 cities in India. While 2016 was a momentous year for Singapore Airlines, the coming year is going to be critical with respect to the successful implementation of all initiatives within the new Civil Aviation Policy in 2017. Furthermore, we are also looking forward to the commencement of the A350 services to India.”



David Lim
General Manager India,
Singapore Airlines

“2016 has been a mixed year for us. We launched new destinations and started operating our A350s. We undertook a major rebranding exercise for both our airlines. However, the environment has been very tough indeed. We have seen more and more capacity added into the market. Our revenues are declining and yield is under great pressure. We believe that 2017 will remain challenging with the same adverse factors having a continued impact on our business. We are undertaking a critical review of our business to drive the necessary change.”



Rajesh Menon
Regional Sales & Marketing
Manager – South Asia,
Cathay Pacific Airways



Tadesse Tilahun
Regional Head (India and
Bangladesh)
Ethiopian Airlines

“This year was phenomenal for the airline not only globally but even in India. Our double daily operations both in Mumbai and Delhi have surpassed our expectations with nearly full loads. Group movement for leisure both to Ethiopia and other parts of Africa kicked off very well. We look forward to the New Year with anticipation and plenty of optimism. The airline will be flying to several new destinations early 2017 and Indian travellers will benefit from our new flights to Victoria Falls and Conakry including additional frequency to Cape Town.”



Gaurav Bhatura
Country Head – India,
Thai Smile Airways

“THAI Smile recently introduced new flights to India's four popular cities — Gaya, Varanasi, Jaipur and will be starting Lucknow operations in December. We are undertaking an ambitious growth programme to develop network and ensure international connectivity. For India, we are looking to open more second tier cities to support THAI Airways (TG's) route network. We can expect that at the end of the fiscal year 2017, there would be about 100,000 Indian passengers flying with Thai Smile.”



Kiran Bhandari
Co-founder
CruiseClub Vacations

“The year 2016 has been an excellent year for us, and was marked by the standout demand for river cruises. We were excited to have the first wedding onboard a river cruise in 2016 from the Indian market. New Year 2017 looks exciting, especially for the adventure travel segment and destinations like Antarctica and Galapagos gaining in popularity.”

JEWEL IN THE CITY OF TAJ MAHAL

Agra's iconic hotel, **The Clarks Shiraz**, with the distinction of hosting legends like Jackie Kennedy, Neil Armstrong, Mohammed Ali, is recently renovated and become the latest 5 star deluxe hotel in the city.

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Located in the prestigious Cantonment area, adjoining the Agra Golf Course, Clarks Shiraz offers views of open spaces, greenery and dense trees all around, looking like the greenest part of India to many visitors. A unique campus of serenity, only 2 km from The Taj Mahal.

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The Holland Club Meeting was organised in New Delhi by NBTC in association with Amsterdam Airport Schiphol and Jet Airways and showcased the best of the country's tourism offerings to help draw more Indian travellers to the region.



Gujarat upbeat on new policy

Gujarat is expecting to maintain its 17 per cent growth this year, especially with the tourism policy in place, reveals **K. Biswas**, Manager (Marketing, IT, and Personnel), Gujarat Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC).



NISHA VERMA

According to **K. Biswas**, Gujarat has a plethora of offerings when it comes to heritage tourism — right from the properties to handicrafts. “Gujarat has had a rich tradition in terms of handicrafts. We recently launched our tourism policy for 2015-2020, where heritage tourism has been given a lot of emphasis. One of the unique points is that ours is the first tourism policy which is giving incentives to introduce audio video guides at heritage monuments. We also have a policy for heritage hotels,” says Biswas



K. Biswas
Manager (Marketing, IT, and Personnel)
GTDC

We have some big events like the Rann Utsav, which will be followed by International Kite Festival

Talking further about their initiatives, he said, “We are associated with the country’s first heritage course at Ahmedabad University in terms of mentoring and some funding. There was also a team from UNESCO in Gujarat in September to give the nomination of world heritage city to Ahmedabad. Gujarat tourism was closely associated with the team to help them. We are also involved in many other activities like providing signages, audio video guides and restoration. Our tourism policy also talks about how best we can give funds for the restoration. It can only be done with a PPP model, because the government is not able to fully fund heritage conservation.”

Biswas claimed that they have been consistently growing for the past few years. “Last year’s growth was about 17 per cent. I think we’d be able to maintain the same growth. We have some big events like the Rann Utsav, which is going on and will be followed by Inter-

national Kite Festival. We also have our biennial event called Vibrant Gujarat Summit, 2017, where the Honourable Prime Minister is going to visit and tourism will be a key sector.”

While Gujarat is seeing a growth in domestic tourism, inbound is still slow. Biswas commented, “We are not as big on inbound as a few other

states, but for us it is growing by leaps and bounds.” To boost this growth, Gujarat is developing new products. “While Rann of Kutch has already been very popular, we are also trying to develop the Little Rann of Kutch, which is near Ahmedabad. There are other niche products like Golf Tourism, and we are trying to promote handicrafts and bird watching.”

Multiple cities, one Island



Akquasun Group organised a familiarisation trip for 30 tour operators from Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai to the Maldives in association with Srilankan Airlines, Akquasun Canopus Maldives, Hideaway Beach Resort and Spa, Paradise Island Resort and Spa and Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort and Spa.



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17 nations at PATA NTFF 2016

This year's edition discussed key challenges in marketing and managing tourism growth for unexplored destinations including topics such as fair trade, living heritage communities, coastal and marine tourism.



TT BUREAU

The PATA New Tourism Frontiers Forum (NTFF) 2016 held in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh from November 23-25 brought together delegates from the public and private sectors to exchange and share insights on some of the major issues in tourism. The forum witnessed an attendance of 242 delegates

from 17 countries, namely Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Canada, China, Finland, Hong Kong SAR, India, Kenya, Myanmar, Nepal, Palau, Spain, Thailand, UK, USA and the United Arab Emirates.

Hosted by the Bangladesh Tourism Board under the supervision of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, the People's Republic of Bangladesh,



the event discussed marketing strategies and managing tourism growth for an unexplored destination following the theme 'Designing a sustainable tourism brand — an integrative approach to building a responsible coastal destination.'

Dr. Mario Hardy, CEO, PATA, addressed the media and said, "Through this important event we hope to provide our delegates with an engaging programme that not only provides our delegates the opportunity to experience what Cox's Bazar has to offer today's travellers but also offers practical hands-on knowledge through the Technical Tour and Tourism Marketing Treasure Hunt." He stressed on the importance of holding such events in Bangladesh and added, "As travel and tourism becomes a greater contributor to the economic well-being of each destination, plans for the responsible development and sustaining those elements generating growth must be taken into consideration."

Rashed Khan Menon, MP, Hon. Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, officially inaugurated the conference on November 25 where the opening address was given by **S.M. Ghulam Farooque**, Secretary - Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism of Bangladesh. **Xu Jing**, Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, UNWTO, was also one of the speakers at the forum along with established and experienced industry professionals representing the Alliance for Ecotourism, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, Dhaka Regency Hotel & Resort, Dhaka University, E-Tourism Frontiers, The Reef-World Foundation, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Istituto Oikos, Lovedesh, Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, Nepal's National Trail Organisation for the Great Himalaya Trail, Social Tours, and Transcaucasian Trail Association (TCTA).

The conference topics covered fair trade, living heritage communities, coastal and marine tourism, heritage trails and domestic/regional tourism markets and featured a session on brand building and marketing for emerging destinations.

The next edition of NTFF will be held in Palau from November 15-17, 2017.

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01-Feb	Wednesday	Delhi	10:00hrs - 16:00hrs	Le Meridien
03-Feb	Friday	Mumbai	10:00hrs - 16:00hrs	St. Regis

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SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM



Digital lift to visa payments

While the tourism industry applauds demonetisation, none deny that the move has affected tourism business with shifts to cheaper destinations, postponement and cancellations of trips. The visa fee and payment for visa procedures has been shifted online for the convenience of applicants.



ANKITA SAXENA

Among the many verticals affected in the wake of demonetisation is visa issuance. Companies facilitating visas are seeing a reasonable slide in visa applications. **Rajan Dua**, Managing Director, Udaan, says, "Due to demonetisation our business has been adversely affected. There is drastic fall in the number of visa applications received on a daily basis across India because many visa application centers and Consulates accept visa fee in cash. Further, the cash withdrawal and exchange has been limited which is not sufficient for the quantum of visa applications we submit on a daily basis. Currently it is very difficult to get Demand Drafts made as well."

Dua explains that travelers who had planned their trips for Christmas and New Year are also disappointed by this move and are facing problems as there is shortage of new currency and it has forced them to reschedule their plans



Rajan Dua
Managing Director, Udaan, and
India Travel Award Winner

If the client is short of new currency, they have the option to pay through cheque or online transactions

in India and outside. "VFS and consulates primarily accept visa fee in the form of Demand Drafts and cash so it was another setback added to this as smaller denominations are not available in large numbers.



Vinay Malhotra
Chief Operating Officer – South
Asia, VFS Global

To increase convenience for applicants, we are also accepting Demand Drafts for all missions until further notice

Tour operators mainly deal in cash and it has become a huge obstruction for them now," he adds.

Clarifying the payment procedure, **Vinay Malhotra**,



Clevio Monterio
Chief Executive Officer
Visa Lounge

We feel that it's a good move and even though there is some inconvenience for now, the situation will stabilise soon

Chief Operating Officer – South Asia, VFS Global, explains that the mode of visa fee and VFS Global service fee payment is as per the mandates from the respective client governments. "To

increase convenience for applicants, we are also accepting Demand Drafts for all missions until further notice. Applicants have the option of using the credit card/debit card gateway for specific diplomatic missions, such as the UK, Ireland, Switzerland and the UAE. For travel agents, we are currently also allowing electronic funds transfer for all missions, except China, Thailand, the UK, Ireland, Australia, South Africa, Turkey, and Malaysia. We will be extending this mode of payment to all individual visa applicants as well in the near future," says Malhotra. He further adds that VFS Global is working with its banking partners, and is in consultation with all the client governments to introduce cashless payment solutions, including NEFT/RTGS, payment wallets, debit and credit cards for applicants.

"Udaan has taken several measures to help clients function smoothly. We are requesting our clients to

make advance payments for visa applications. If the client is short of new currency, they have the option to pay through cheque or online transactions," says Dua.

Clevio Monterio, Chief Executive Officer, Visa Lounge, points out that the travel industry, overall, has been hit and more so because it has been implemented during peak season of travel. Customers have not been able to carry out transactions during the initial phase of demonetisation and are more careful about their expenditure. "We are the new kids on the block and are still in the process of growing our company. We are continuously adding new agents and corporates to our platform. Thanks to this, we have actually seen growth, compared to the previous month. We do feel that this is a good move and even though there is some inconvenience for now, the situation will stabilise soon," says Monterio.

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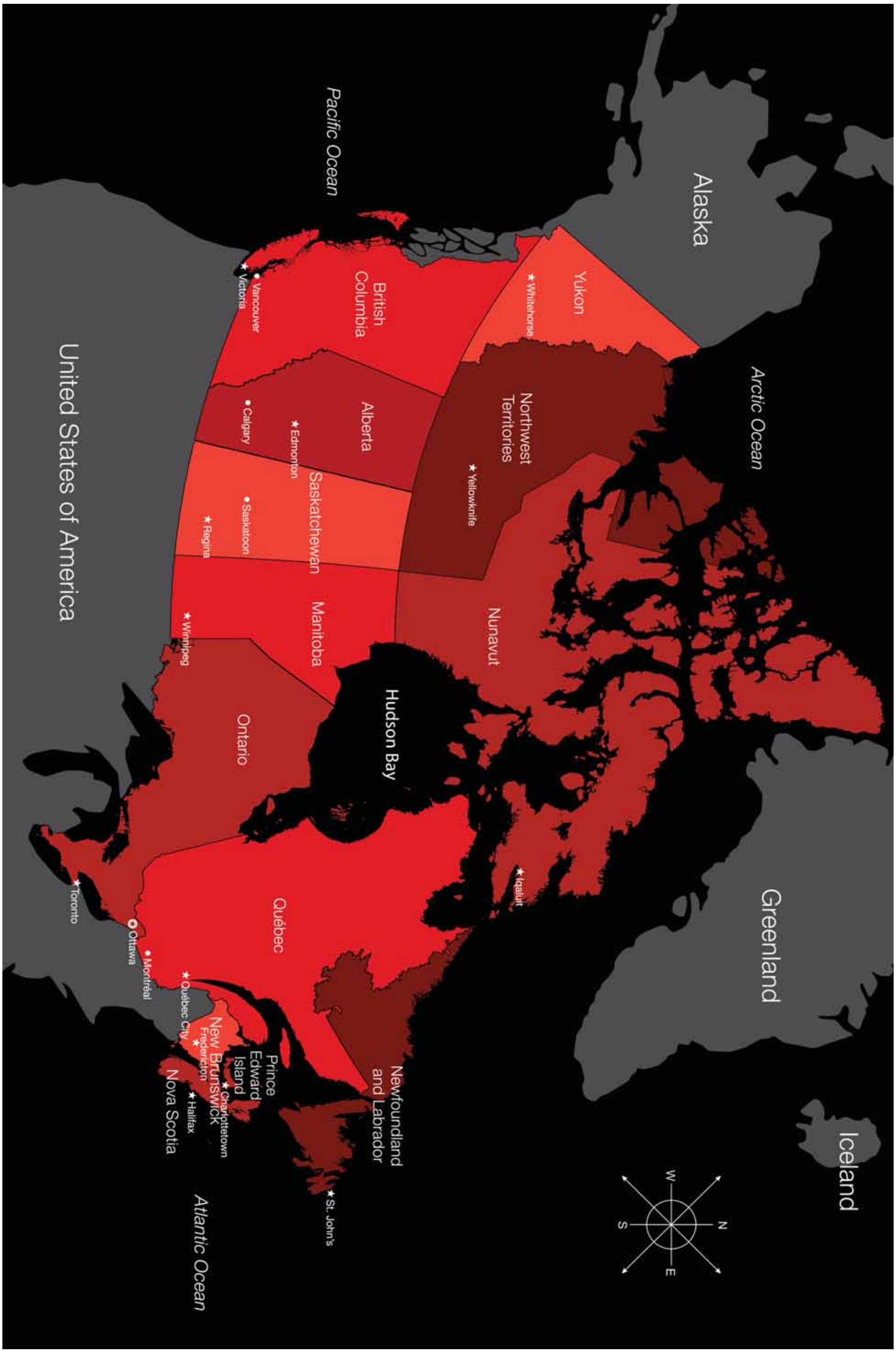
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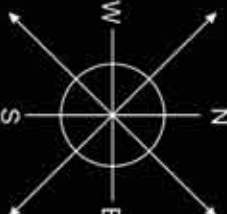
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The Genting Dream now comes true

Dream Cruises' first ship, Genting Dream, arrived in Mumbai recently amid much fanfare. It was inaugurated by Maharashtra Chief Minister **Devendra Fadnavis**, Union Minister of Shipping **Nitin Gadkari** along with Chairman of Mumbai Port Trust, **Sanjay Bhatia**, and attended by travel agents. The ship will be stationed out of China for regular sailings.



Agents explore Korea's heart and Seoul

Korean Air hosted a Fam trip for travel agents from North India to the South Korean capital Seoul on occasion of the newlylaunched Delhi-Seoul route that commenced operations early this month.



Focus on Tier III cities

With two new branches, Global Connect and Travels is going all out to strengthen its MICE business.



TT BUREAU

Pranay Anand, Director-Business Development, Global Connect and Travels, says the company's qualified manpower and post vacation experiences distinguish them from other travel companies. He says, "We have the best of talents from the trade to help clients and offer a human element to bookings. We can surprise clients by getting a memento or framed pictures of their holidays etc. even after a month of their trip to leave an impact." Anand explains that the company is focused on MICE segment and hopes to strengthen this arm.

Global Connect and Travels caters to existing leading corporate houses as well as the upcoming promising ones based in Tier III cities. The company manages all MICE related activities for these corporate houses to various destinations both in India and abroad. "We cater to every minute travel related requirement irrespective of the size of the corporate house and the volume of busi-



Pranay Anand
Director-Business Development, Global Connect and Travels, India Travel Award Winner

ness. Presently we are growing at 80 per cent. Our top line has doubled in this financial year and we have expanded from two branch offices to four so we can proudly say that now we are a pan-India company," says Anand.

The company has opened two branches - Kolkata and Hyderabad. "Our new division GC Event has been launched in Mumbai which will cater to the event, exhibitions, star nights etc. In the financial year 2017-18, we plan to launch media activities to cover the school groups, management institutes etc."

Maha plan for medical tourism

The state aims to become the number one destination for medical tourism not just in India but globally and it has charted a roadmap and invited multiple agencies to be a part of it.



TT BUREAU

At a Medical Tourism Conclave organised by the India Merchants Chamber (IMC) in Mumbai recently, **Valsa Nair**, Principal Secretary, Tourism and Culture, Government of Maharashtra, declared her department's intention of making her state one of the leading destinations for medical tourism or more accurately Medical Value Travel (MVT), since medical tourism in its truest sense has not established itself in India yet.

She said, "We want to have state-of-the-art healthcare facilities, well-trained medical professionals and low cost of delivery as compared to cities like Tamil Nadu and Delhi. Medical tourism in India is seen as the next crown jewel that could shape the future of India's economy and healthcare. The Indian medical tourism industry is expected to grow from current \$3 million to \$8 billion attracting medical tour-



Valsa Nair
Principal Secretary, Tourism and Culture, Government of Maharashtra

ists from Bangladesh, Iraq, GCC, CIS region and Africa. Our objective is to provide infrastructure, hospitals and medical facilities in Pune, Nagpur and other centers around the state."

Travellers travelling to India for medical reasons from Asia, GCC, Africa and the SAARC are increasingly opting for India for advances treatments and services. The country's cost benefit gives it a definite edge over other countries like Singapore and Malaysia with savings of up to 30-70 per cent on total



Deepak Premnarayan
President IMC

expenditure. Maharashtra plans to create a single web platform which will provide services and facilities to the global patients seeking assistance in India. With 100 per cent FDI in medical and devices sector, it will further give a boost to Modi's 'Make in India' initiative.

Deepak Premnarayan, President, IMC, added, "Apart from the Medical Tourism Council, the IMC Chamber of Commerce & Industry is also looking into creating a task force which will put together its suggestions for drafting

the necessary policies for the promotion of medical tourism in the state. While there are several challenges such as adequate insurance, complaint resolution mechanism, safety regulations, norms governing malpractices etc; the state also presents several opportunities which the government can extend its support to. We will also evaluate more engagement and associations with partner countries to provide a fillip to this growing industry."

Leading doctors from Aditya Jyot Eye Hospital, Jaslok Hospital, Bombay Hospital, Apollo Hospital and Wockhardt Hospital participated in a panel discussion.

Good to Know

The Indian medical tourism industry is expected to grow from current \$3 million to \$8 billion attracting medical tourists from Bangladesh, Iraq, GCC, CIS region and Africa



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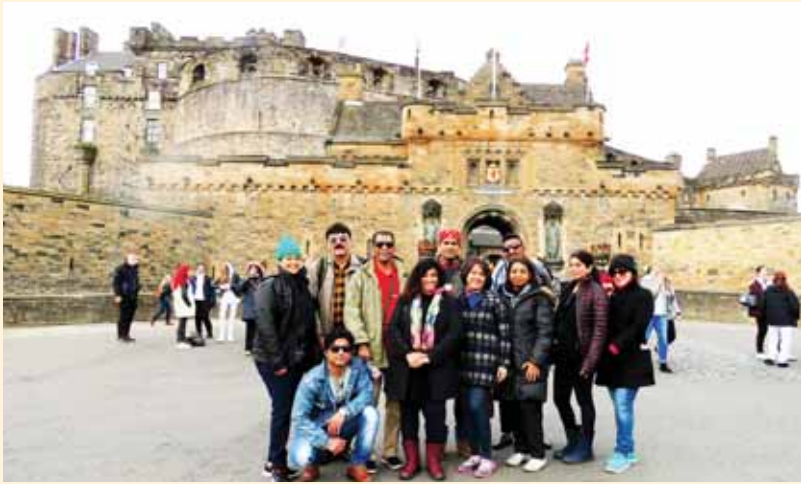
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A British sojourn for Globus family



The Globus family of brands chose top sellers from India for the Cosmos tour titled British Panorama, showcasing the expanse of England, Scotland and Wales along with its landscapes, culture, and amazing history. Agents from across India, Mauritius and Sri Lanka participated in the tour which included top companies such as Thomas Cook, SOTC, Ottila, Travel Tours & other regional stalwarts.

JüSTa brings art to the fore

JüSTa Hotels & Resorts honoured the creative spirit of artists by organising the third edition of its art event at the JüSTa Lake Nahargarh Palace, Chittorgarh.



Christened *Chitrashaala*, the art event was attended by over 36 artists from around the world. Brainchild of **Ashish Vohra**, Founder, JüSTa Hotels, and fashion designer **Deepika Govind**, this event was designed to preserve the cultural fabric of India and take it beyond boundaries.

"When a nation invests in art and culture, it invests in the future generation. At JüSTa, we pursue this thought very sincerely and that is how *Chitrashaala* has come into being," said **Rohit Katyal**, Head of Sales & Marketing – Delhi & NCR, JüSTa Hotels. Giving more details about the event, he said, "An art residency like *Chitrashaala*, can prove to be extremely formative for the development of artist's work and skills as they get the luxury of having an entire week solely dedicated to polishing their skills and interacting with their peers," he added.

According to Katyal, the landscape of JüSTa Lake Nahargarh Palace plays a positive role in the artworks created here and also helps the hotel in the same way. "Each of JüSTa Hotels & Resorts has its own unique collection of paintings and sculptures, personally signed by the artists. We bind different artworks together as a story and place them around, for the guests to enjoy. Our stated objective is that you get to see great art as part of the guest experience so all hotels have original artworks. Ultimately, the art is what sets us apart from others in the industry," he explained.

There are other initiatives and CSR activities also that JüSTa Hotels is part of. "We also take people on board from organisations like Pratham, an innovative learning organisation created to improve the quality of education in India. The employment not only provides a source of income for the underprivileged, but also groom their



Rohit Katyal
Head of Sales & Marketing – Delhi & NCR, JüSTa Hotels

Each of JüSTa Hotels & Resorts has its own unique collection of paintings and sculptures, personally signed by the artists

personalities for a better future. Also, we are very active in our green initiative - a plantation drive around the areas in the periphery of JüSTa Hotels & Resorts," revealed Katyal.

Exploring the Tunisian landscape

Bulktrip.com and Atlantis Voyages in collaboration with Turkish Airlines recently hosted a familiarisation trip for Indian travel agents. Representatives from 20 travel agencies reviewed the various facets of Tunisia in order to sell the destination better in the Indian market.





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READING



UFTAA members connect for peace

The Golden Jubilee Congress of United Federation of Travel Agents' Associations (UFTAA) in Istanbul, Turkey, saw the members deliberating on a common strategy of growing business, promoting peace and solving their issues, by connecting and engaging with each other.



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Trafalgar takes agents to Portugal



Trafalgar hosted its travel partners from all over Asia on a familiarisation trip to Portugal for its 'Best of Portugal' itinerary. From India, it hosted eight agents from Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi and Pune who visited Lisbon, Porto, Fatima, Viseu and Evora.

Thai DMC finds an Anchor

Anchor Destinations will handle marketing and sales for Thailand-based DMC, Splendid Thai Holiday and aims to boost outbound traffic among Indian FIT, GIT and MICE travellers.



TT BUREAU

Anchor Destinations, a start-up, has already ventured into many facets providing B2B solutions and DMC representations in its very first year of operations in the travel industry. It offers services ranging Airport Concierge Services at all airports

on a pan-India basis, marketing and DMC representation, and also acts as a mediator for several luxury resorts in the Maldives.

Recently, Anchor Destinations was also appointed as the marketing and sales office of the Thailand-based DMC, Splendid Thai Holi-

days. Commenting on the milestone, Founder and CEO, Anchor Destinations, **Deepika Khanna** shares, "With their own fleet of vans and excellent contracted rates for luxury and four-star hotels in various destinations like Bangkok, Krabi, Koh Samui, Phuket, Hua Hin, Koh Samet, it will definitely increase the traffic from the Indian segment for the FIT/GIT and MICE travellers. To promote this, we also plan to do small workshops and roadshows in various cities."

As per Khanna, personalised services with atten-



Deepika Khanna
CEO
Anchor Destinations

We will soon be adding more products to our list and thereby offering all travel solutions under one roof to our clients

tion to intricate details of the customer requirements and perfect understanding of the product along with adequate training of the team ensure growth. "We will soon be adding more products to our list and thereby offering all travel solutions under one roof to our clients," she states.

For Anchor Destinations, the start of year saw an upsurge in the number of travellers and bookings with the increase in demand for luxury and family travel. "In the very first year of operations, we operated fixed departures to Europe and other Baltic countries with GIT and MICE groups to Australia, Dubai, Singapore, Bali, Malaysia and USA. However, demonetisation has hampered the tourism sector and has caused Indian travellers to either cancel or postpone their travel plans."

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The winners take a look back

With another year coming to an end, India Travel Award winners point out the hits and misses in the tourism and hospitality industry and share achievements that they are most proud of in 2016.



► Best Luxury Travel Professional – Vikram Madhok

Incentive group travel reduced in 2016

Vikram Madhok, Managing Director, Abercrombie and Kent India, says, "We came out of a very strong year in 2015 but this year did not live up to our expectations. We also track our financials on a Jan-Dec basis. We had a tall order since the previous year was a good one for us. The first quarter was slow, it started to pick up, and we are about 12 per cent below 2015 and about 20 per cent behind budget." Madhok points out that the main markets impacted, other than the US, are mainly European markets like France, Spain, Italy, Germany etc. which is an area of concern. "Also, the large groups that we've seen like incentives have not been coming back," he adds.



► Best Destination Marketing Campaign – South African Tourism

Aiming for 100,000 Indian tourists in 2017

Hanneli Slabber, Country Manager – India, South African Tourism, points out that 2016 has been an absolutely stellar year for the tourism board. "Arrivals spiked by 26.6 per cent in comparison to 2015. By September 2016, our arrivals had hit 73,902. This makes India South Africa's 8th largest long-haul tourism source market. As always, we are extremely optimistic about the New Year. We will aim at surpassing our achievements during



2016, hoping to achieve a 10 per cent increase over last year's arrivals and to ensure that we continue to draw in over 100,000 Indians in the coming year," says Slabber.

► Best European Airline – Lufthansa German Airlines

March 2017 awaits Brussels Airlines' arrival



Wolfgang Will, Director, South Asia, Lufthansa German Airlines, says, "We will be expanding in the next year. We have 60 flights a week, with Lufthansa and Swiss. We are now happy to have the third airline — Brussels Airline coming into India in March 2017 with five flights per week from Mumbai to Brussels."

► Best Debut Hotel – Roseate House New Delhi

Clocking good occupancy

According to **Kush Kapoor**, Area General Manager for Roseate House and The Roseate Group, tourism and hospitality industries are dynamic and ever-growing markets. "2016 has seen a substantial rise in domestic as well as foreign tourists. Also, this sector is among



the top 10 sectors in India to attract the highest foreign direct investment (FDI) which adds substantially to the national income," says Kapoor. Roseate House was launched on September 9, 2016 and despite being three months old the hotel has clocked a good occupancy rate, informs Kapoor.

► DDP Trailblazer – Guldeep Singh Sahni

GST effect on outbound travel?



Guldeep Singh Sahni, President, Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI), explains that the biggest issue for the association this year was GST, for which the association is trying to make the government understand that outbound travel is a product of another country given by them. "On a positive side, we had our convention. We have already done a lot of trainings in this country. We are also looking at working with stakeholders, which are DMCs. Next year, there will be destination trainings happening in those destinations also," says Sahni.

► Tourism Ambassador – Sarab Jit Singh

Better organic growth in 2016

Sarab Jit Singh, Vice Chairman, FAITH, says, "We only saw organic growth, which was a little better than last year, but nothing great. However, the pollution in North India and the demonetisation has had some effect and saw a few cancellations at the end of the year. We can't clearly say anything about next year, but I believe we would have similar figures for inbound tourism." Singh, however, feels that nothing ground-breaking has happened this year, which would change the numbers drastically.



at the year that has gone by...

► Best Luxury Camp – The Ultimate Traveling Camp (TUTC)

Glamping on the rise

Rajnish Sabharwal, Chief Operating Officer, The Ultimate Travelling Camp (TUTC), explains that glamping as a concept is rapidly evolving in India and this has impacted the company's bookings for Chamba Camp, Thiksey and Diskit in Ladakh positively. Sabharwal says, "We saw a



y-o-y growth of 30 per cent on bookings for our camps in Ladakh this year. This rise in bookings is proof that India has finally opened up to the concept of luxury camping and shows the keenness of travellers to go beyond the ordinary and experience the unexplored." He says that the positive response to the company's Kohima Camp makes them believe that the current trend is for travellers wanting to move beyond a standardised itinerary and explore unexplored aspects of a destination, and this is only going to grow further.

► DDP Game Changer – Ajay Bakaya

5-10% growth overall since Nov-Dec 2015

According to **Ajay Bakaya**, Executive Director, Sarovar Hotels and Resorts, the company has seen a good year in 2016 and it is ending on a positive note for them. Bakaya says, "We just opened a new property in Bhavnagar and we are looking at opening in Ranchi shortly. We are looking



at opening a Sarovar Portico in Jaisalmer, a property in Kapashera in New Delhi and a 150-key five star hotel in Nairobi. We have also signed up for a property in Zambia, which will open after Nairobi. This is the first year when we have seen an upturn of around 5-10 per cent overall since Nov-Dec 2015." He further elaborates that next year, the company can foresee increase in the use of technology and less of loyalty coming into play. Much more business will be transacted on the Internet and mobile phone than is done through traditional channels.

► Best Travel Agency – Gainwell Travels and Leisure

10-20% growth for both inbound & outbound

Manoj Saraf, Director, Gainwell Travels & Leisure, says, "By and large 2016 was a good year for the tourism and hospitality industry where both inbound and outbound travel grew by 10-20 per cent but with the announcement of the demonetisation policy we could see decline in the same." Saraf



further informs that Gainwell has maintained stable business for 2016. "We have relatively grown with outbound travel, MICE and events," he adds.

► Entrepreneur of the Year – Jay Bhatia

Additional fee for IBSP link to reduce IATA accredited agents

"As TAAI, it was a good year since we had better interactions with the government and worked towards skill development and education for not only members and trade at large but



also the connect with various educational institutions on working on a academia-industry partnership for Gen-Next," says **Jay Bhatia**, National Treasurer and Chairman (Tourism Council), Travel Agents Association of India. Bhatia further adds that TAAI successfully re-launched the historic Joint Bank Guarantee for 100 members of the association, thereby saving the members of high expenses of insurance premiums. "The new proposed levy of an additional fee to use the IBSP link, there shall be a decrease in the number of IATA agents who shall be compelled to surrender their IATA accreditation. Our key focus in 2017 will remain on continuous education for our members," adds Bhatia.

► Best Airline – Domestic-IndiGo

Delivering the promise

Aditya Ghosh, President and whole-time Director, IndiGo, informs, "There is an increasing number of people travelling with us, which has clearly established us as a



leading airline." According to Ghosh, for the company, being boringly consistent is what drives them. "It's not about what's new, but it's more to do with if we can deliver what we have promised at a much bigger scale," says Ghosh.

► Best Online travel Product-B2B – RezLive.com

North India drives growth

Jaal Shah, Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group, says that 2016 has been a fantastic year for them. Shah says, "We've seen strong growth from North India and the support continues to increase. Our focus continues on GCC countries where we have a strong presence and have increased our reach in Asia, with the latest addition being



Thailand apart from Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam. Over the years, we have attained that maturity where we have sufficient data to understand the customer which helps us personalise our services. This is what we think is the most important key to success."

France honours its travel partners

H.E. Alexandre Ziegler, Ambassador of France to India, recognised four of its top travel partners during the annual Ambassador's Travel Awards soirée spearheaded by Atout France in Mumbai. He also honoured **Zubin Karkaria**, CEO, VFS Global, and CEO, Kuoni Group, with the 'Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite' (Knight of the National Order of Merit) for his contribution in developing France as a tourist destination.



Focused on India for growth

Mischa Mannix-Opie, Area Manager South & South East Asia, Air New Zealand, reveals why the airline has increased its sales and marketing activities in India through Global Destinations.

HAZEL JAIN

Q Please shed some light on your recent partnership with Global Destinations.

Global Destinations became our new General Sales Agency partner in India effective November 1, 2016. Global Destinations will support us in our sales and marketing activities, and provide reservations and ticketing support to travel agencies. For this, Global Destinations will employ two new roles – Sales Manager, Air New Zealand and Market Development Executive, Air New Zealand.

Q Why have you decided to do so?

New Zealand is becoming an increasingly popular travel destination among Indian travellers. According to Tourism New Zealand, Indian arrivals into New Zealand is steadily growing — total arrivals for the year ended August 2016 was at 48,720, up 12.3 per cent on the previous year. The India market today offers

growth opportunity in India and we're keen to capitalise on this.

Q What activities has the airline chalked out for the next few months?

We have ramped up advertising activities in India — with a key focus on the Mumbai market — promoting our fares from India to New Zealand via the Singapore Airlines and Air New Zealand alliance. We have also launched our India homepage to share relevant information with our Indian consumers.

We will also be working closely with Tourism New Zealand and Singapore Airlines on marketing collaboration opportunities to further promote New Zealand as a destination to Indian travellers. Lastly, we have also started working with a small number of key travel agency partners in market development activities and we expect to grow this scope of activities over the months ahead. Greater engagement with the travel trade is one of our focus areas.



Mannix-Opie
Area Manager South & South East Asia,
Air New Zealand

huge potential and it is where we're focused on for growth.

We began our Singapore Airlines and Air New Zealand Alliance in 2015, flying Indian travellers to New Zealand on our Air New Zealand SIN-AKL service via an interline arrangement with SQ and MI. In June this year, this expanded to a code share. This has given us the opportunity to be more visible to the travel agent community in India. The positive market response to this change is a further sign of the

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Lords to expand in Nepal, ME and Africa

Lords Hotels & Resorts is looking at Southeast Asian countries to expand its footprints.



TT BUREAU

Lords Hotels & Resorts is available across four brand segments. Lords Plaza largely caters to the business segment, while Lords Inn, Lords Eco Inn and Lords Resorts cater to the leisure segments.

Rishi Puri, Vice President, Lords Hotels & Resorts, says, "We have begun exhibiting our banner at international venues and are familiarising audiences with our offerings. We recently participated in the WTM Lon-



Rishi Puri
Vice President
Lords Hotels & Resorts

don and were very pleased with the response. We also plan to participate in the PATA Travel Mart where we will even look at strengthening our network and possible mergers in the APAC regions. In addition, we float value added offers like clubbing guests' stays with F&B options or free extension on stays against a minimum nights' stay bookings. We are also thinking of connecting with customers through social media."

Puri claimed that while travel agents play an important role for them, they are seeing boon in their business through Online Travel Aggregators (OTAs). "We also facilitate bookings through our website and through traditional travel agents which are more popularly used by corporates."

The group will be opening the Lords Eco Inn in Bharuch. They also plan to venture in Goa followed by properties in Delhi, Lucknow and Mumbai. "We are also in advanced stages of discussions with the promoters of niche hotel properties in Indore, Kanpur and Rishikesh," he added. "In Nepal, we are the first mid-market hotel chain. We are also looking at possible options in South-east Asian countries and have identified a few other destinations in the Middle East and Africa. Apart from

Credit worthiness rating for roomsXML

The company has now been rated MSE 2 by CRISIL which is significant especially in the light of travel suppliers going bankrupt in recent times.



TT BUREAU

roomsXML Solutions Limited has now been rated MSE 2 by CRISIL, an S&P Global company. The rating indicates high credit worthiness, good financial strength and highest operating performance. **Prakash Bang**, Founder and Executive Chairman, roomsXML Solutions Limited, said, "It is really humbling for a family-owned, bootstrapped and debt-free

business like ours to get this rating in a highly competitive industry. I would like to recognise the support extended by our suppliers and thank our customers for reposing the confidence in us."

S&P Global (Standard & Poor's), established in 1860, is the world's foremost credit rating agency. Government and corporate sector rely on S&P Global ratings to make informed investment deci-

sions. CRISIL, an S&P Global company, is India's leading rating agency. Bang adds, "This rating is of significance especially in the light of travel suppliers going bankrupt in recent times. It is good to know that when travel agents choose to work with roomsXML, their bookings are in safe hands."

The winner of India Travel Awards, roomsXML is also ISO 9001:2008 certified.



Prakash Bang
Founder and Executive Chairman, roomsXML Solutions, India Travel Award Winner



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New online payment solution for agents

■ AVIAREPS has launched Aviacollect, an online payment solution that allows small to medium offline airlines, hospitality brands, including standalone hotels and resorts, DMCs and providers of travel services, such as visa application, ground transportation, airport lounge access, car hire, attractions, sightseeing and travel insurance, to economically extend their international consumer and travel agent sales networks around the world.

Edgar Lacker, Chief Executive Officer, AVIAREPS, says "Through Aviacollect, and AVIAREPS' global network of self-owned offices, our clients can now not only present their brands in a way that is directly relevant to the targeted markets, but comes with the in-market expertise and know-how of our sales and PR professionals on the ground to help spread the sales points of that brand."

The payment solution can be used as a white label solution for AVIAREPS clients, allowing them to accept payments in targeted countries with local bank connections and in local currencies. Aviacollect was launched in response to the urgent business development needs of many small to mid-size tourism related companies to extend their sales distribution channels.

Regulate wildlife tourism

Anjana Gosain, Chief Functionary Officer, Tiger Trust, claims that tourism in wildlife parks needs to be regulated and should follow eco-friendly guidelines.



TT BUREAU

Tiger Trust is a non-profit organisation, which works against the poaching of tigers and trains the staff and visitors to increase awareness for successful prosecution of offences.

Anjana Gosain, Chief Functionary Officer, Tiger Trust, is a full-time lawyer and has been involved with the organisation since 1989. "These trainings are being carried out since the last 16 years and we do it all over the country. For the last seven years, we have been working in Assam and Rajasthan. We not only train the staff, but also review the cases. The training is intense and has a two-day module, which consists of theory as well. We are assisted by volunteers who are professional people. We also do a lot of work with the US government," she says.

As a latest initiative, Tiger Trust held a meeting in Jaipur and discussed the cases from all the tiger areas in Rajas-



Anjana Gosain
Chief Functionary Officer
Tiger Trust

than. Gosain reveals that they do a lot of work with students as well. "We are affiliated with several universities in the US, and our major partner is Clemson University. Their students come once a year and we take them around to the tiger reserves. There are several schools in Delhi which are associated with us. We educate them about the importance of not only the tigers, but also general conservation, environment, cleanliness, and biodiversity. We also do medical camps for the

forest staff and do many other activities like training for nature guides. I do a lot of public interest litigations against these issues," she says. She revealed that they had got schools from Delhi and Rajasthan to combine efforts for conducting awareness programmes in Ranthambore.

Gosain calls for a comprehensive view on the mushrooming of wildlife resorts in these areas. "Either the government shouldn't allow any resort, or shouldn't put a ban when the properties are already built and ready to open. The policies need to be clear and we need a better vision and planning. Also, the resorts that open in these areas should be eco-friendly, without television, swimming pool or gyms. Guests should be encouraged to enjoy the natural surroundings. In addition, there is a need to make these wildlife resorts affordable, allowing everybody to experience the wildlife up, close and personal," asserts Gosain.

Griffon partners with low-cost airline Safair

The company will conduct sales and marketing activities for the South African low-cost airline.



TT BUREAU

Mumbai-based Griffon Aviation has announced its collaboration with the low-cost domestic airline of South Africa — Safair — to market to promote their sectors in India. **Vivek Jain**, Managing Director, Griffon Aviation, said, "We will promote this product to the trade as they are the ones who will push this to their clients. Currently, there are no options for direct flights and travellers have to take via flights. We used to sell other domestic airlines from South Africa earlier and we see huge potential for such a product in India."

The company will be doing the sales and marketing for the airline in India. Griffon is equipped to book FIT passengers as well as groups. All tickets are issued at their office against payments in INR. Special requests like baggage pre-booking, con-



Vivek Jain
Managing Director
Griffon Aviation

necting flights, etc., can also be requested through Griffon.

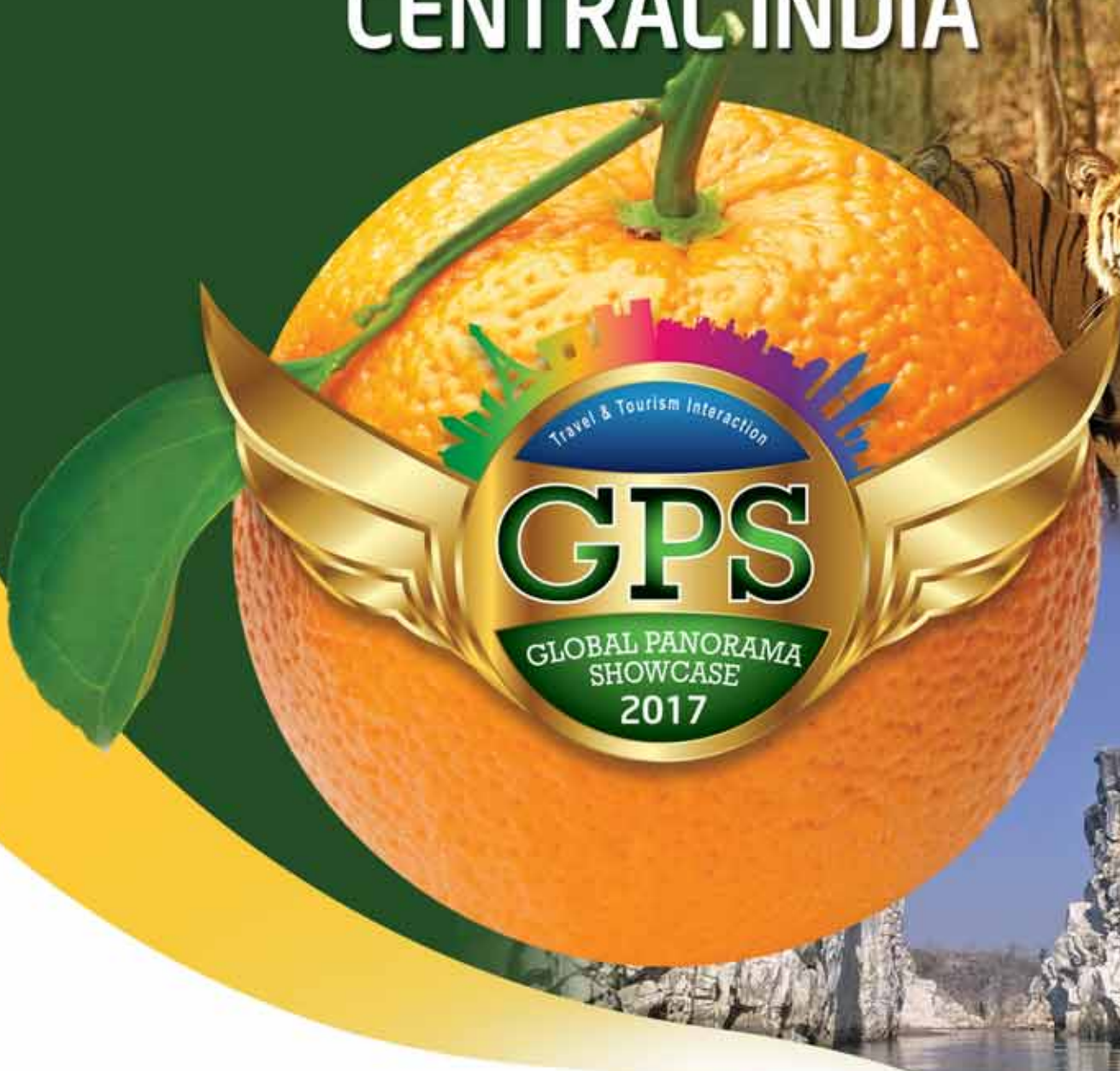
The airline claims to have achieved 94.7 per cent on-time record in 2015. As of June 2016, it has already achieved a 96.4 per cent on-time record. It has seven connecting airports and 34 daily flights. It operates both Boeing 737-400 and 737-800 aircrafts in a full economy configuration. Its fleet consists of eight planes, five 737-400s and three 737-800s.

Maldivian twist to a fun evening

Starwood Hotels and Resorts, along with Akquasun Maldives, hosted an evening of cocktails, dinner and networking mixed with a generous amount of fun for their partners in Mumbai.



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EVENT TALK

JANUARY 2017

TTF	Chennai	6-8
Global Hospitality Conclave	Gurugram	7
IITM	Kochi	12-14
TTF	Bengaluru	13-15
ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF)	Singapore	16-20
FITUR	Madrid	18-22
Global Panorama Showcase	Nagpur	19-21
6th Thailand Tourism Forum 2017	Bangkok	23
EMITT	Istanbul	26-29

FEBRUARY 2017

IBTM Arabia	Abu Dhabi, UAE	7-9
CAPA India Aviation Summit	Mumbai	8-9
IITT	Mumbai	9-11
SATTE	Delhi NCR	15-17
World Tourism Forum Global Meeting	Istanbul	16-18
Aviation Festival Asia	Singapore	21-22
Asia-Pacific Incentives and Meetings Expo (AIME)	Melbourne, Australia	21-22
OTM	Mumbai	21-23
Travel Technology Europe	Olympia, London	22-23
Business Travel Show	Olympia, London	22-23
IAAPI Amusement Expo	Mumbai	22-24
ACE of M.I.C.E.	Istanbul	22-24
Goa Carnival 2017	Goa	25-28
TTF	Delhi NCR	27-Mar 1
ILTM Japan	Kyoto, Japan	27-Mar 1
Mar		
Phocuswright India	Delhi NCR	28-Mar 2

MARCH 2017

International Confex 2017	Olympia, London	1-2
ITB Berlin	Berlin	8-12
India Travel Mart	Goa	12-14
MITT	Moscow	1-16
IT&CM China 2017	Shanghai	21-23
COTTM 2017	Beijing	29-31

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

ASSOCIATION TALK

TAAI signs MoU with Mumbai varsity

The association continues its pursuit for education and has signed an MoU with DY Patil School of Hospitality and Tourism Studies to enhance academia and industry partnership for an MSc in Hospitality & Tourism Studies. **Jay Bhatia** will represent TAAI on the university's advisory board.



TT BUREAU

The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) has signed an academia-industry MoU with the DY Patil School of Hospitality and Tourism Studies located in Nerul in Mumbai's Navi Mumbai region. It was signed on December 2, 2016 between **Vandana Mishra Chaturvedi**, Director, School of Hospitality and Tourism Studies, DY Patil University and **Jay Bhatia**, National Treasurer and Chairman (Tourism Council), TAAI.

The MoU is for three years to enhance the academia and industry partnership for



Jay Bhatia
National Treasurer and Chairman (Tourism Council), TAAI and India Travel Award Winner

the post-graduation degree of MSc in Hospitality & Tourism Studies. The signing took place at the second International Conference on Tourism and Hospitality held for the students at the university campus. Bhatia shall also part of

the advisory board of DY Patil University (DYPU).

Says Bhatia, "It is a great opportunity for TAAI to be associated with this program so as to ensure that this degree program is not just theory but also industry-relevant. TAAI will ensure internships and suitable placements for all students, conduct workshops and training programs, facilitate guest lecturers and mentors who are part of the industry, thus helping the students get ready to enter the world of tourism and hospitality." He will represent TAAI as an Advisory Board Member of the School of Hospitality and Tourism Studies at DYPU.

Sampat Damani, Chairman Western Region, TAAI, said, "We are continuing with our agenda to educate and mentor Generation Next with relevant training and making the curriculum updated and industry specific. It is a historic day for the industry when two giants like the DYPU and TAAI have signed an MoU to ensure students, who are our future, are keen to be part of the tourism and hospitality industry. Patience, flexibility and excellent interpersonal skills have to be developed by the students. Cultural sensitivity and awareness are critical as tourism professionals have to deal with different countries and cultures."

UFTAA's global office in Doha, Qatar

► Contd. from page 5

The election and Annual General Meeting was followed by a gala opening ceremony, which saw in attendance the heads from all the member associations of UFTAA. **Ramesh Marwah**, CEO, UFTAA, said, "We have managed to bring in over 25 member associations, representing 30 countries. The best part is that we have successfully been able to establish a connect among all the associations. The Annual General Meeting was a full house, and the opening ceremony was great. Even on the second day, I was glad to see a full house for business sessions, where some very important subjects were discussed. The presentations were very valuable to the members and we saw some very passionate and professional inputs to address the concerns of the members. I am sure the UFTAA platform has been used in an appropriate manner. This forum is all about connecting, bring-

ing together the strength and addressing the issues in a way that benefits the entire membership."

Agenda on hand

One of the few major initiatives that UFTAA board has taken up includes the setting up of two new committees. Kumar revealed, "We will have one committee on IATA and airline matters, which will be headed by **Yossef Fatael**, VP, UFTAA. The other committee will be called the Global Tourism Committee, which will be headed by **Basaran Ulusoy**, President, TURSAB. Apart from that, we will have our global office in Doha, Qatar, and will be operating from there, mainly to have a stronger foothold in the Middle East and Africa. We would like to promote the cause of tourism and connect tourism with peace. We are going to grow with all our member associations and will be getting into education as well as MICE in a much bigger way."

Kumar revealed that they deliberated on four subjects. "We discussed at length about IATA matters. Our focus is on preparing the members for the historic resolutions, which have been recently passed at the PA conference, pertaining to what is currently called resolution 8xx, which might just change the dynamics of the travel industry. NewGen ISS is the second area which UFTAA will work upon. The third area is to connect the associations, allow them to work in collaboration, so that they can share best practices and optimise being a part of UFTAA. The fourth vertical is tourism."

Fatael explained why it is necessary for the association, as well as the travel agents around the world, to focus on IATA's new policies. "IATA and airlines will play the role of banks and agents would be supervised real time based on credit management and credit risk. The

new model of travel agents' accreditation by IATA aims to bring many more agents to the market. It is a very confusing situation for the existing agents, who are already struggling to survive. Now we might see a flood, because whoever will use the passenger credit card or upload funds in advance with Easypay (IATA's new payment tool) can become an accredited agent. Thus we need to compete with direct marketing of airlines themselves as well new players coming into the market. There will be many other aspects and the market would become a little bit chaotic. However, a chaotic situation could be a good opportunity for the travel agents to be relevant again, as people need someone to tell them what to do. There are many opportunities, and not just threats to the travel industry. I think that the vibe and the atmosphere in the congress would bring some hope that good things will happen," he said.

MTDC organises Agri Tourism Conclave in Nagpur

Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation recently organised an Agri Tourism Conclave 2016 in Nagpur to boost agriculture tourism. The objective of this conclave was to increase employment and investment opportunities in agro-tourism in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.



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Akquasun

Hong Kong

Akquasun Holidays Hong Kong has appointed **Charu Surtani** as Director. With more than 19 years of experience in the travel trade covering both leisure and MICE fields, she has been associated with Akquasun Hong Kong from past three years. Surtani will be heading the Hong Kong office, taking care of inbound business globally and establishing it as a reputed Destination Management Company. With her expertise in inbound business in Hong Kong and Macau, she will lead Akquasun inbound team in both FIT and MICE segments.



Sabre

APAC

Traci Mercer joins Sabre Corporation as Senior Vice President of hotel, car, cruise and rail, to lead commercial efforts and supplier relationships for Sabre's land and sea customer portfolio worldwide. In this position, Mercer will focus on defining a strategic direction and commercial initiatives to cater to the needs of lodging, hospitality, ground and sea transportation providers. With over 15 years of work experience, Mercer's industry experience includes over 10 years at Expedia, Inc. working in various leadership roles.



InterContinental Hotels Group

UK

InterContinental Hotels Group has appointed **Ranjay Radhakrishnan** as Chief Human Resources Officer. He joins at IHG's Denham, UK headquarters and will become a member of IHG's Executive Committee. Radhakrishnan joins IHG from Unilever, where he spent 23 years in a range of senior leadership roles at global, regional and country levels. He was a member of Unilever's Human Resources (HR) Leadership team and his most recent role was as Executive Vice President Global HR (Categories & Market Clusters).



Crowne Plaza Today

New Delhi

Ranjan Banerjee has recently taken over as the General Manager of IHG global portfolio- Crowne Plaza Today New Delhi Okhla from his previous position as General Manager of Crowne Plaza New Delhi Rohini. Prior to this, Banerjee gained valuable experience as Resident Manager, Crowne Plaza Today Gurgaon and has over 20 years work experience spanning different countries and regions including Oman, Nepal and India with The IHG.



The Suryaa

Delhi

Surojit Ghose has joined The Suryaa family back as Director of Sales. He was also associated with The Suryaa in the past in the capacity of Director of Sales Leisure. He brings in a vast and varied experience with a front office and sales background and had started his career with ITC Maurya. He has been associated with brands like IHG, The Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu, Holiday Inn, Crowne Plaza and The Pallazio to mention a few. He is also adept at generating business for the hotel from the leisure segment and to create an awareness of the product by focusing on CRM activities.



Courtyard by Marriott, Agra

Agra

Courtyard by Marriott, Agra has appointed **Vinayak Patnekar** as Director of Operations. Patnekar has been in the hospitality industry for over 16 years. He has been associated with leading hotels across India and served in different capacities. He has a long and rewarding association with Marriott International and has served as Director of Operations at Fairfield by Marriott, Lucknow and Courtyard by Marriott, Raipur. Having worked with globally renowned hotel chain in various capacities, over the years, he is well conversant with global hospitality standards.



Cathay Pacific Airways

Mumbai

Viren Rathod has been appointed as Cathay Pacific Airways' Account Manager in the Western India Sales team. In his new portfolio, he will be responsible for revenue generation from strategic Corporate and Trade accounts. Rathod has worked in the industry for eight years and his last appointment before joining Cathay Pacific was as Account Manager, United Airlines for six years. He has also had stints with Korean Air and Tap Portugal. Rathod has completed his Master in Marketing Management from Welingkar institute of management.



Elior India

Chennai

Elior Group has appointed **Sanjay Kumar** as Elior India CEO. He reports directly to Philippe Salle, Chairman and CEO of Elior Group. He is also a member of the Group Management Committee. Kumar graduated in Physics from the University of Delhi and holds an MBA degree from IRMA Gujarat. Kumar worked with Royal Dutch Shell Group for over 18 years, where he held various positions in Europe and Asia. In India, he was part of the team that set up Royal Dutch Shell's joint-venture with Bharat Shell and then went on to develop Shell's Bitumen market in India.



Pacific Travels

New Delhi

Nargis Zaidi joins Pacific Travels as Head - Creatives & New Product Development. A NIFT graduate and known Fashion Designer, she has taken up this assignment to create new products and add value to the existing products. Her current area of focus is developing outbound tourism to Iran, premium pilgrimage travel to Saudi Arabia and adventure travel to Ecuador.

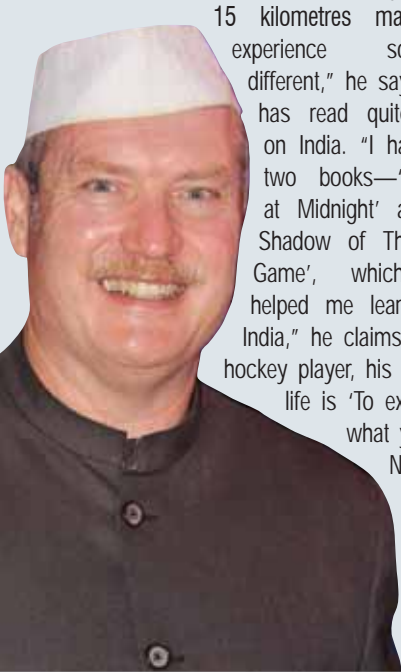


TALKing People

Jonne Lehtioksa, Area Vice President, Asia and Oceania, Finnair, spends his free time hiking in the woods back in Finland. He takes walks in the offbeat tracks with his family and plays badminton and tennis to keep fit. Apart from Cape Town and Buenos Aires, Lehtioksa wants to visit Canada. "I want to explore Canada as an entire destination. It is also very similar to Finland in terms of weather conditions," he says.



After driving a Royal Enfield down the coast of India, **Michael de Jong**, Finance Minister, British Columbia, Canada, has fallen in love with the country. "Every 15 kilometres make you experience something different," he says. Jong has read quite a lot on India. "I have read two books—'Freedom at Midnight' and 'The Shadow of The Great Game', which have helped me learn about India," he claims. An ice hockey player, his motto in life is 'To experience what you can. Never to feel sorry.'



For **Ignacio Ducasse Gutiérrez**, Director, Tourism Office of Spain in Mumbai, his father has always been a source of inspiration. "He was an honest, loving, hard-working man. I cannot find a better example than him," he says. Gutiérrez is an avid reader. "Lately I have been very impressed with Fernando Vallejo, a Colombian writer who is provocative and extremely entertaining," he says. His favourite place to holiday is Sevilla. The Spaniard says, "It is a wonderful city with a culture of its own."



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Spanish flavour to Air India

The recent launch of the Delhi-Madrid route will open up a panoply of destinations for Indians, not only in Europe, but also to South America, claims **Pankaj Srivastava**, Director- Commercial, Air India. Excerpts from an interview:



NISHA VERMA

Q Please tell us about the newly launched Delhi-Madrid route by Air India?

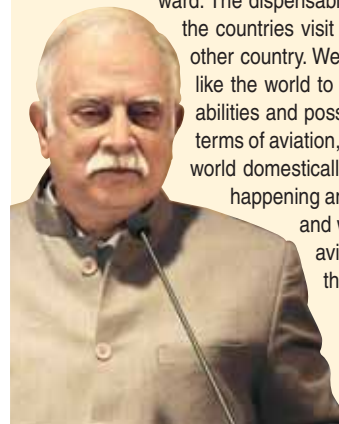
Only after evaluating the route between India and Spain, we took the decision to start this flight between Delhi and Madrid. I am very happy to say that our incoming flights from Madrid are already full. It is Air India's ninth European destination in total and is the eleventh international destination in the last three years. The flight duration is nine hours, and would allow passengers to cut down flying time by four to five hours.

Q How do you think this new flight would offer further connections to South America?

The Madrid flight would enable passengers to avoid elapsed time to South American countries. So far, the connectivity from India to South America was very limited. Passengers were either going with one stop or two stops to various places in South America. However, Madrid is so conveniently located to connect South American points not only logistically but also culturally, because people in South America also speak Spanish.

Connecting two cultures

“The Delhi-Madrid direct flight is a great step. Any direct flight increases the people to people contact, which excites people like us. We need to take this forward. The dispensable incomes are growing and people from both the countries visit each other and experience the culture of the other country. We, as Indians, who cherish our heritage, would like the world to know about it. There are many exciting probabilities and possibilities ahead, and we feel happy about it. In terms of aviation, India is the fastest growing market around the world domestically. It has to grow internationally also, which is happening and it is good. Everyone is pulling up their socks and working hard. We are the ninth fastest growing aviation market now and we intend to become third by 2022. I think it will happen.”



Ashok Gajapathi Raju
Union Minister for Civil Aviation
Government of India

Q Which are the other international points you are planning to connect next?

Our next European destination would be in Scandinavia. We would be commencing operations to either Stockholm or Copenhagen and it will be starting in March 2017. Even in the US, we

Delhi an international hub, offering proper transfer and transit facilities at the airport with the support of GMR.

Q Are you adding more aircraft to support this expansion?

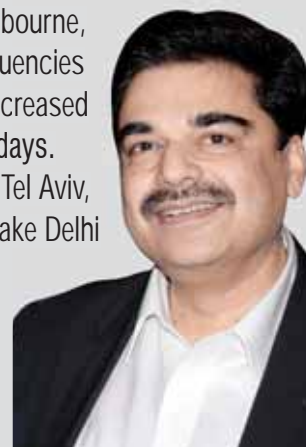
Five more Dreamliners are going to join us very soon. Also, there will be an addition of three 777-300s. In terms of narrow bodied aircraft, we will add a total of 29 320s in our fleet and ATRs would also be coming in. Fleet expansion is ongoing and that's why we are also expanding.

Q How was 2016 for Air India and what are your expectations from 2017?

We had shown around ` 100 crores of operating profits last year and we are poised to show much more this year. This is because we are utilising our resources better and thus increasing the operational efficiencies. We hope that the fuel prices remain where they are. I am sure that year 2016-17 is going to be much better than last year in terms of results. I want to specially thank our travel trade partners and hope that they would be able to fill up the flight from Delhi to Madrid as well.

“Even in the US, we are contemplating new destinations like Washington, Dallas and Houston. We are looking at increasing frequencies to destinations like Melbourne, Shanghai and Hong Kong. The frequencies to Sydney and Melbourne will be increased from five days a week to all seven days. We are also thinking of connecting Tel Aviv, Kenya and Tanzania. We want to make Delhi an international hub.”

Pankaj Srivastava
Director- Commercial
Air India



There are a lot of old cultural ties between these countries. The new connection would allow us to carry passengers from India to South America over Spain. It would become extremely convenient for Indian travellers to now go to Brazil, Argentina, Columbia, Chile and many other countries there. We are optimistic that it will do well.

are contemplating new destinations like Washington, Dallas and Houston. We are looking at increasing frequencies to destinations like Melbourne, Shanghai and Hong Kong. The frequencies to Sydney and Melbourne will be increased from five days a week to all seven days. We are also thinking of connecting Tel Aviv, Kenya and Tanzania. We want to make

Fleet Story

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Lufthansa

Cruise talk

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dreamcruiseline.com

SMOOTH SAIL FOR CRUISE LINERS

Sailing across the vast ocean, meandering through narrow waterways, expeditions and exploring unknown countries to today's luxurious, leisurely holidays onboard, the cruise industry has come a long way. Cruise ships today can be defined as floating resorts with lavish staterooms, multiple dining venues, and varied entertainment onboard.

Globally, the cruise industry has begun to find its market in the developing nations of Asia and Africa and countries like Australia and New Zealand are showing tremendous growth. China has also stepped in the ring with an increase in the passengers visiting Japan and Korea from the country. North America is leading the industry followed by Europe, states Global Cruise Market Report 2016 by Research and Markets.

According to Cruise Line International Association's 2016 Asia Cruise Trends Study, India ranks 6th in the passenger volume by source market with six per cent. The study also points out that there are 31 active cruise line brands in Asian waters; around 5,500 cruise ships in Asia; 204 scheduled port calls in Asian countries; and 10.9 million potential passenger destination days. While the number of ships in Asia has increased at CAGR 12 per cent in 2016 from 2013 the total number of cruise passengers have increased from 1.51 million in 2013 to 3.1 million in 2016, corresponding to a 29 per cent CAGR.

This issue gives you glimpses of fascinating voyages from Alaska to the slow-paced European river cruises and the sun-kissed beaches of Dubai. One can also explore tantalising culinary experiences on the cruise liners or even plan a wedding afloat. Don't wait, come aboard!

ANKITA SAXENA

NEWS IN BRIEF

ROYAL CARIBBEAN TO BOOST CAPACITY BY 30% IN 2017

TIRUN announced the longest-ever Singapore cruising home porting season in Asia on Royal Caribbean International cruise line's Ovation of the Seas, Mariner of the Seas, and Voyager of the Seas. This deployment by Royal Caribbean will run for nine months till next June 2017 with 64 sailings and is expected to take 200,000 guests to ports in South East Asia. The sailings will increase Royal Caribbean's capacity in 2017 in the region by 30 per cent over 2016.



₹250 crore-passenger terminal at Mumbai docks

The Mumbai Port Trust (MbPT) has decided to construct a massive passenger terminal at its docks, with modern amenities including shops, escalators and restaurants. **Sanjay Bhatia**, Chairperson, Mumbai Port Trust, said that the tenders for the ₹250 crore will be floated soon.



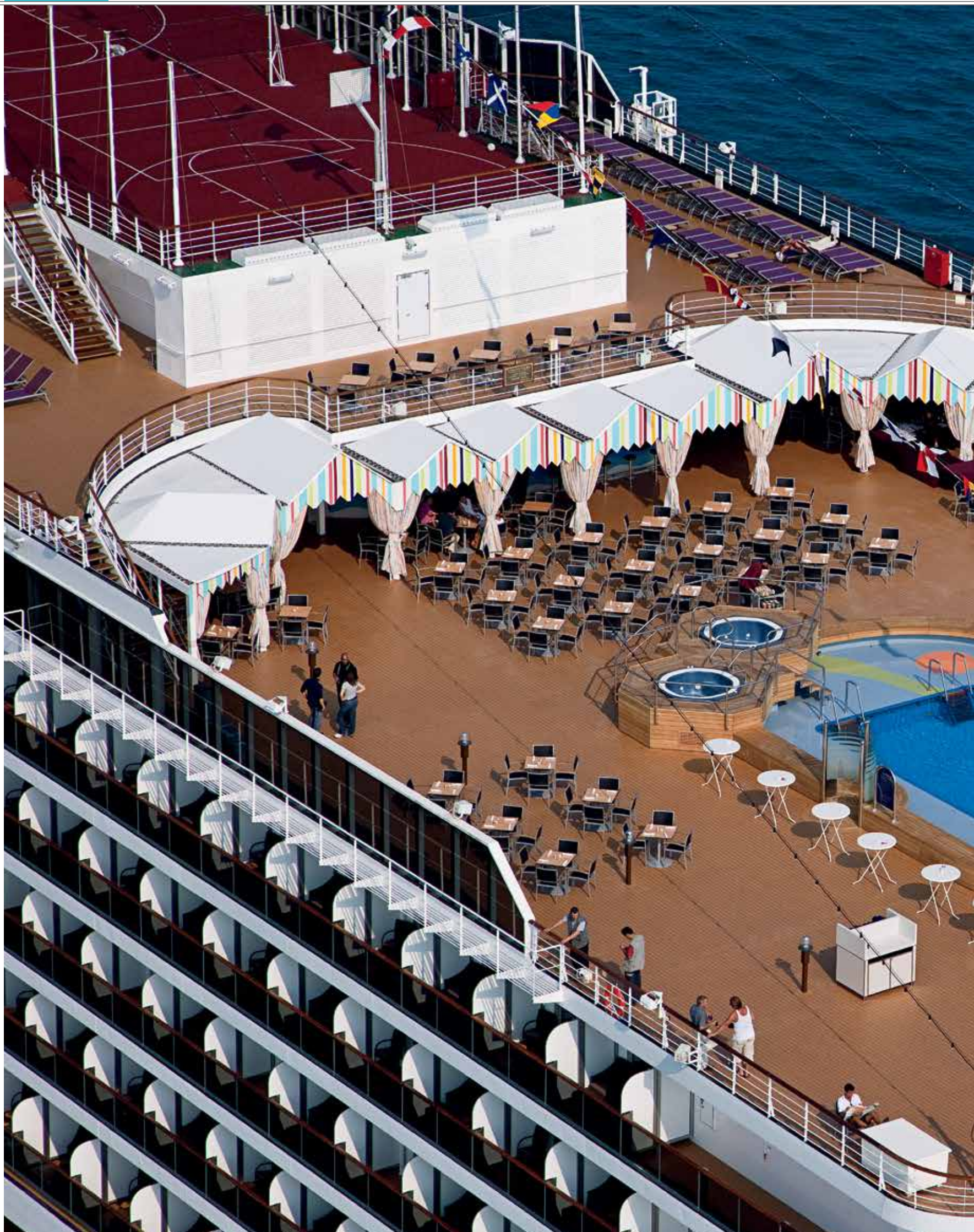
Costa Luminosa docks at Mumbai

Costa Cruises, together with the Consulate General of Italy in Mumbai, welcomed guests on board the Costa Luminosa, for an evening of celebration of Italian hospitality and entertainment. The Costa Luminosa, which is sailing around the world in 98 days, is currently docked at the Mumbai port as part of its itinerary.

Berthing charges waived off at Mumbai Port

The Ministry of Shipping has appointed international consultant Bermello Ajamil and Partners to prepare an economically viable plan to develop coastal and inland cruise ports in the country. The report is expected to be released in the next four-and-half months, says **Sanjay Bhatia**, Chairperson, Mumbai Port Trust (MbPT). MbPT has opted to give certainty of berth and priority to cruise ships over cargo ships. They offer 40 per cent discount in charges to cruise ships and has done away with berthing charge, Bhatia added.





On the Gulf of Alaska itinerary of Princess Cruises, cruisers can experience three to eight nights on land, including scenic Direct-to-the-Wilderness rail journeys

anchoring in Alaska

Been there and think you've seen it all? Think again! Alaska's changing landscape is capable of enchanting you on every single visit.

ANKITA SAXENA





Along with the beautiful ports of Alaskan cities, itineraries provide a full day of scenic cruising in Glacier Bay National Park and of the Inside Passage

FACT BOX



- Alaska became a US territory when Secretary of State William Seward purchased it from Russia in 1867. In 2017, Alaska will celebrate its sesquicentennial or 150th anniversary as part of the United States.
- Group benefits: Only require 10 full paying guests to qualify for group benefits.

Blessed with natural resources, sprawling rainforests and iconic glaciers, Alaska's landscape is fast changing due to global warming, and the melting glaciers are slowly affecting wildlife in the region. Holland America Line (HAL) has been sailing the Alaskan waters since 1947, even before Alaska became a state. With decades of experience here, HAL has been able to refine the itineraries to ensure that guests get the perfect balance of must-see destinations and hidden treasures, more ports and more time at each port, as well as scenic cruising among the region's grandest glaciers and best spots for wildlife viewing. Princess Cruises, also a pioneer in Alaska region initiated cruising in 1965 offering its signature seven nights Voyage of the Glaciers itinerary between May till September each year.

ITINERARIES

The short sailing offered on HAL is of seven night roundtrip from Vancouver; seven nights Vancouver to Anchorage or vice-versa sailing. The other long duration sailings include 11-14 night cruise which include land excursions to Denali and the interiors

of Alaska or a 10-20 night cruise which includes land excursions to Denali, interiors of Alaska and Canada's natural wonders, the Yukon. Princess Cruises adds sailings to far north across the Gulf of Alaska and into Prince William Sound. On the Gulf of Alaska itinerary of this cruise line, cruisers can experience three to eight nights on land, including scenic Direct-to-the-Wilderness rail journeys on 360 degrees Ultra Dome Trains and stays at one or more of the five Princess-owned 5-star wilderness lodges. Clubbed with the beautiful ports of Alaskan cities Ketchikan, Juneau, Skagway etc., these itineraries provide cruising in Glacier Bay National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and of the Inside Passage, which is a 1000-mile long chain of islands, coastal mountains and waterfalls. The land and sea journeys offer overnights at the Denali National Park.

Rich in glowing blue glaciers; Alaska's landscape is dotted with wild animals and birds which can be spotted from the deck of the cruise and for the more adventurous, land excursions can be equally thrilling. To be able to touch a glacier, the splendor of watching a whale breach, bears fishing for salmon, or encountering a moose on a hike cannot be found



Photographs by: Holland America Line & Princess Cruises

elsewhere. Shore excursions programmes with HAL include experiences like snorkeling in the frigid waters of Ketchikan, paddle-boarding past Bear Glacier in Kenai Fjords National Park (Seward), adventures as kayaking, zip line expeditions, rock climbing, glacier hiking, dog-sledging, biking and private vehicle/vessel touring.

Princess Cruises offers more than 20 unique land and sea vacations to showcase Alaska. The ships of both HAL and Princess Cruises have park rangers on board to provide a narrative about important aspects of the visit, give a presentation about the park, and answer questions while at Glacier Bay National Park.

NEVER A DULL MOMENT

If Alaska is a destination that you cannot get enough of then cruising on HAL or the Princess Cruises in itself is an experience. While guests can enjoy scenic views from the decks of all ships, there is much more to do on board.

Stay: The mid-sized HAL's ships with less passengers allows for an intimate guest experience, smoother embarkation, disembarkation processes,

easy access to reception, dining and shore excursion activities on all HAL ships. The ships offer a variety of staterooms and suites for all kinds of travellers. The large cabin size provides a more relaxed cruising and one can always feel pampered with 24-hour complimentary room service. The Coral Princess, Island Princess and Star Princess, three of Princess Cruises' spectacular ships, can carry over 2000 passengers.

Food: HAL provides sophisticated five-star on board dining options. Guests will find diverse and delicious menus inspired by local global trends. Indian vegetarian food is provided as a standard alternative on all the ships. Princess Cruises provides lot of options including vegetarian selections for breakfast and lunch, and for dinner, a complete Indian vegetarian meals which could be even without onion and garlic with a prior intimation to the ship and the chefs are able to churn out surprises for the Indian passengers each night.

Activities: On HAL, try your hand at the casino or watch a cooking demonstration at the Culinary Arts Center. There is something new to learn and



"Holland America Line is known for their unique itineraries that they curate every year for all the destinations served. The objective is to provide their guests with once in a lifetime experiences."

RICHA GOYAL SIKRI
Director - Group Business Development
STIC Group



Try your luck at the casino or watch a cooking demonstration at the Culinary Arts Center. You can get creative in the Digital Workshop or attend dance classes



"We have been witnessing families and friends in small, mid-size groups sailing to this exotic destination. We have successfully also handled several MICE groups to Alaska in the last eight years."

NISHITH SAXENA
Founder and Director
Cruise Professionals



get creative in the Digital Workshop powered by Windows, or even attend dance classes. While the guests enjoy their time relaxing at the Greenhouse spa on board or exercising at the state-of-the-art gymnasium, kids are engaged with Club HAL program, which has age specific multiple recreational options for children three years onwards and teens.

WATCH OUT!

The starting price for an interior cabin on HAL, on a seven night cruise only, is about \$114 per person per day plus taxes. The luxury cruise line Seabourn will also be offering Alaska sailings from 2017.

The itineraries, on 450-passenger Seabourn Sojourn, will depart from Vancouver and Anchorage for 11, 12 and 14 nights. While the sailings will stop in the usual Alaska ports, such as Juneau and Ketchikan, the ship will also dock in smaller ports like Sitka; Klemtu, a small island in Alaska's Inside Passage and Alert Bay, a tiny Namgis First Nation community in British Columbia.

A seven nights Gulf of Alaska itinerary onboard Princess Cruises can cost an average of \$125 per person per day for an Inside Category Cabin.

Tantalise your taste buds on board

Almost all international cruise lines are attempting to bust the myth that food on a ship is about set menus and limited, by offering a plethora of dining venues, and flexible dining experiences.

Many ships also have specialty restaurants, smaller venues with more tables for two. Some cruise restaurants will be themed: steakhouse, French bistro, Italian trattoria or Japanese sushi restaurants. More casual alternative dining areas might be outdoor grills and BBQ spots, pizzeria, hot dog stands or bakeries.

FARM TO TABLE

Locally sourced food is the latest trend catching up. Cruisers can see where their food is from, and the farm-to-table or market-to-table movement brings local, sustainable and mostly organic products from local producers to the specialty restaurants on ships. Items are typically intended to be prepared

within a short time frame from purchase, preserving their integrity. Increasing number of cruise lines are sourcing ingredients from local vendors in ports visited and to add to the excitement, cruisers can have the opportunity to accompany a chef to a local market as part of a shore tour.

CELEBRITY CHEFS ON BOARD

On the international journey of culinary discoveries, many Michelin-star restaurants have found space on ships and international cruise lines tie-up with celebrity chefs to prepare special menus for guests onboard. Chef Jose Garces, joined the Norwegian Cruise Line team in 2015 for the launch of his first eateries at sea: Bayamo, a Latin-inspired seafood restaurant and Pincho, a traditional Spanish tapas bar. Chef Jamie Oliver has dining venues onboard two Royal Caribbean ships- Quantum and Anthem of the Seas.



Photographs by: Royal Caribbean International





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Lyrical

DANUBE

ANKITA SAXENA

One of the most popular European river cruises on Danube River caters to cruisers who'd rather prefer a slowed-down float.

Originating from the Black Forest in Germany to the Black Sea, the Danube has been a vital lifeline, pulsing through the heart of Central and Eastern Europe. Meandering into 10 countries, this river is not only Europe's second longest river but is also the epitome of amalgamation between the East and the West.

"River cruising is a more boutique and personalised experience. Ocean cruise ships carry passenger numbers in thousands; offer multi-entertainment options and onboard activities whereas there are maximum 170 passengers on a river cruise and the beauty of this journey is the variety of dramatic landscapes, the destinations and local experiences that are accessible and intimate whilst still enjoying luxury facilities," says **Varesh Chopra**, Chief Regional Director for South Asia and Middle East, Avalon Waterways (Globus family of brands).

Avalon Waterways offers a variety of inclusions yet leaves room for choice and preferences. While every Avalon cruise includes beer, and wine including that from the region; all onboard dinners; free Wi-Fi; a choice of dining options and venues; onboard enrichment activities; outside staterooms to take it all in; other amenities include sky deck; lounges and upscale bar; fitness center; library; salon and spacious, open-seating dining room, shore excursions with local guides can be done at an additional cost as per the preference of the travellers.

INTIMATE EXPERIENCE

River cruising promises an intimate and more relaxed holiday abundant with panoramic access

to a destination, uncompromising views, space to unwind, providing cruisers engaging and immersive journeys. At Avalon Waterways, the elegant and contemporary designs provide plenty of seating and cozy spots to relax. With the most spacious staterooms in river cruising in Europe, the cruise line offers cruisers a choice between its 83 staterooms divided amongst Panorama Suites, Royal Suites and Deluxe Staterooms. Choose from the Panorama Suites with a large seating area adjacent to a wall-to-wall panoramic window which when opened, the floor-to-ceiling window transforms the entire suite into the category's only open-air balcony.

EXPLORING EUROPE

Avalon's river cruises can be combined with an in-depth touring experience. Experience Europe's most famous attractions at your own pace; whether see all the major sights with a local guide or explore on your own. Cruisers have an option to pre-book included sightseeing and optional excursions by paying an extra cost. For the cost conscious, cruisers can choose to take a cruise only removing the overnight land stays at the beginning and/or end of the cruise itineraries.

TASTING TIMES

The experience of a destination on Avalon ships is not contained by it, but elaborated by adding the local flavors. "Keeping in mind the increasing shift towards healthy and vegetarian cuisine, we introduced – Avalon Fresh. Our focus on fresh, local ingredients from small farms and producers comes together with a splash of innovation that will have you feeling great," says Chopra. Avalon Waterways has teamed up with two of Europe's rising culinary stars, the Wrenkh brothers, to design an exciting and wholesome menu items.



Photographs by: Avalon Waterways



“The average budget of a river cruise is \$1750 per person plus we have robust promotions which makes prices even lower.”

VARESH CHOPRA
Regional Director for South Asia and Middle East, Globus family of brands



Knotty Affair

Cruise weddings allow travel agents to have wider margins while making it easier for the family to organise this once-in-a-lifetime event.

HAZEL JAIN

Move over destination weddings, nuptials on board a cruise liner is the way forward. While the idea of cruising itself is struggling to get the Indian holiday-maker's attention as an option, history has shown that we like to get way more adventurous when it comes to weddings! Purely based on this quirkiness, perhaps weddings on cruise liners may just take off in the Indian market.

Paving the way to make this a possibility are multiple international cruise liners which have already connected the dots and are equating the idea of cruising with 'life events' of which wedding is a huge part. MSC Cruises, promoted by Saraf Travels in India, has special packages for weddings. **Kunal Sampat**, General Manager-India, MSC Cruises, explains, "The arrangements on-board may consist of bridal bouquet with matching boutonniere, exclusive lounge adorned with floral arrangements and a romantic path. The ceremony



Multiple international cruise liners have already connected the dots and are equating the idea of cruising with 'life events' of which wedding is a huge part



Photographs by: Dream Cruises (Genting Hong Kong)

can also be attended by the ship's officers with pre-recorded or live music, a bottle of wine with wedding cake, and services of professional photographer during the ceremony."

He adds that MSC Cruises receives consistent queries from across India for weddings. "Cruise has now been looked upon as an option after destination weddings. However, in the event of sailings being out of India and other travel logistics involved, conversion of the same is still very low," Sampat adds.



TALKING HEADS



"In the event of sailings being out of India and other logistics involved, conversion of cruise weddings is still very low."

KUNAL SAMPAT
General Manager-India
MSC Cruises



"Star Cruises is witnessing an increasing number of wedding groups from India but we do want to promote it as a niche product."

NARESH RAWAL
Vice President Sales-India, South Asia, Russia, Middle East and South Africa at Star Cruises



"Our flexible approach and customisation for groups, essential for Indian weddings, has helped us grow in India."

NALINI GUPTA
Head, Costa Cruises India and Managing Director, Lotus Destinations



"These are suitable for compact groups, with most ships with a capacity of 150-180 passengers."

KIRAN BHANDARI
Co-founder
CruiseClub Vacations



Star Cruises is well-equipped to handle large groups for weddings and can arrange music, food and décor as per specifications

MSC Cruises' ships can accommodate anything between 2,200-4,500 passengers. The clincher it seems is how early the client books. "We have various venues available onboard that can be allocated to the group based on the size. We could have ceremonies in the lounges, on the open deck, in the Royal Theatre, etc. We can also provide customised menus along with beverages specially, print personal motif on our daily program sheets, dedicate a TV channel displaying their program for the day, have dedicated hospitality desks, dedicated check-in/check-out counters and more," Sampat adds. However, while fire is an essential element for a Hindu wedding, it is not allowed on-board due to safety reasons.

Star Cruises, too is well-equipped to handle large groups for wedding and can arrange for music, food and décor as per personal specifications. Even a beautician can be arranged for the bride and her family members. **Naresh Rawal**, Vice President Sales-India, South Asia, Russia, Middle East and South Africa, Star Cruises, adds that the cruise liner allows all ceremonies other than the fire ceremony. "However, arrangements can be made to have the ceremony on land at any port of call the ship docks at. Star Cruises is witnessing an increasing number of wedding groups from India but we do not want to make it a mass product offering and instead promote it as a niche product," he says.

Star Cruises ships can accommodate anything from 20 pax to a full charter cruise. "We understand the requirement of any Indian wedding group and exclusiveness of the venue required for their functions. In consultation with the families, we work

towards maintaining a balance between the wedding group and other cruising guests. Our biggest strength has been our ability to offer Indian vegetarian and even Jain food. Menus can be upgraded for wedding groups and decided in consultation with the family and chef on board. However, fresh flowers and fire are strictly not allowed on board," Rawal clarifies.

FIRE A POSSIBILITY?

There are some liners which are willing to go a step further and allow fire ceremonies onboard. Costa Cruises, promoted by Lotus Destinations in India, has said that perhaps this could be reviewed. **Nalini Gupta**, Head, Costa Cruises India and MD, Lotus Destinations, says, "We may now be willing to explore that possibility with our Safety Officer supervising it. Our flexible approach and customisation for groups, essential for Indian weddings, has helped us grow tremendously in India. We have been very keen on having Indian weddings onboard Costa ships from the time Costa had its office in India in 2012. But due to safety guidelines of the fire ceremony, we were unable to explore this segment. We have, however, finally been able to find a solution to the fire ceremony facilitation onboard." Costa offers deals like unlimited alcohol package which is charged at \$35 per person per day, which covers a large variety of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. Their ships can accommodate 1,500-5,000 guests depending upon the ship, Gupta adds.

CHARMING RIVER CRUISES

Kiran Bhandari, Co-founder, CruiseClub Vacations, feels that the latest trend is weddings on river cruises. "This is quite a charming experience, as it is basically



a floating hotel taking you through the beautiful European countryside landscapes, and then stopping right in the heart of cities. These are suitable for compact groups, with most ships with a capacity of 150-180 passengers. But the advantage is that you can charter the entire ship, and for any duration which is nearly impossible on large ocean cruises in Europe," he adds.

Cost-wise, it turns out to be a lot more affordable as compared to any other cruise experience, and sometimes even land-based weddings. Since the ship is entirely allocated to the group, it is a completely private experience. As such, food and alcohol can be customised exactly as per the needs of the group.

THE LATE MARKET

Unfortunately, India is a last-minute market and group bookings on cruises can get very tricky, especially during peak season. Cruise Professionals does get a lot of wedding group requests each year, but they have not had a chance to host an Indian wedding since these requests have generally come only five or six months prior to the sail date. Nishith

Saxena, Founder and Director, Cruise Professionals, says, "This segment shall grow only when the wedding planners start seriously considering cruise as a unique option and work according to the cruise schedule rather than running a parallel operation, which sometimes disturbs the operational efficiency of the ship."

Also since Indian weddings require a high level of customisation, offering exclusive areas for ceremonies may become a challenge especially on a high-end ship, unless the requirements have been provided in advance. "The whole idea of a cruise is an all-inclusive price but when we start working on customisations for weddings, the costs start spiraling. On Princess Cruises ships, we have a wedding chapel where one can actually create and do almost anything within reasonable deviations for Indian wedding," Saxena clarifies.

Such elemental problems might put a spoke in the wheels of cruising as an option for Indian weddings, but Indians are resilient creatures and their desire to be different may just finally win the battle with tradition.

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AHOY! *Sunny* BEACHES

From glittering metropolis to sunny beaches, some destinations offer the best of on-board and off-board fun for cruise passengers. We list the most exotic destinations to satisfy every kind of cruise traveller.

NISHA VERMA

Pristine Phuket

Called the Pearl of the Andaman Sea, Phuket is one of the most sought after cruising destinations in Southeast Asia. Offering a potpourri of Thai, Malay, Chinese and Western cultures, it has a rich history of trade and natural resources like tin, hardwoods and rubber. The pristine beaches, azure blue waters and forested hills make for the perfect destination for nature lovers. Visit ancient temples, go for elephant rides, shopping, and taste the most exotic Thai cuisine and relish the exhilarating cabaret shows in the evening. Visit Phang Nga Bay, go to the Old Phuket Town, see the temples, stroll late night at Patong's Bangla Road, or just fall in love with the Phi Phi Island.



Docking in Dubai



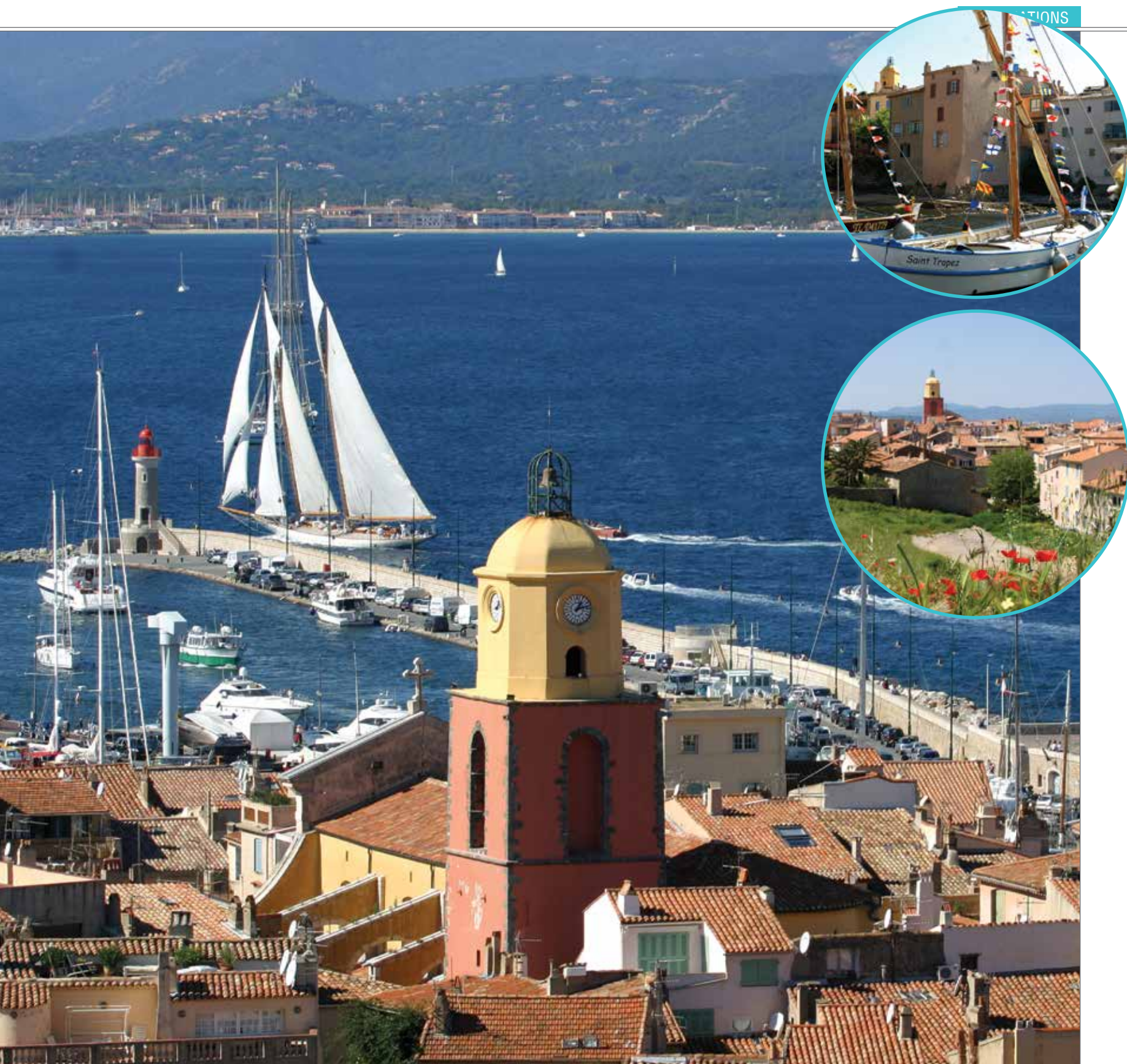
One of the most favoured destinations for Indians, Dubai has so much to see and do for those who want to visit this emirate on a cruise holiday. Get a glittering welcome as your ship anchors at the terminal, offering views of the huge coastline and skyscrapers lining the skyline while the desert plays peek-a-boo from a distance. Rich culture; lavish hotels and apartments; variety of foods from across the world, old and new entertainment options and the never-ending desert fun — Dubai has something for everyone. The purpose-built cruise terminals make sure that visitors docking in the city get the best in hospitality and service. Dubai has the most modern and the largest dedicated port facility in the Middle East for cruise operations spanning over 36,500 square metres on a pier stretch of 2,200 metres. The facility enables Dubai to comfortably handle complete passenger turnaround of five cruise ships simultaneously.

“The number of cruise tourists to Dubai has increased substantially over the years. We recorded 463,055 cruise tourists in 2015 and are aiming at one million by 2020.”

JAMAL HUMAID AL FALASI

Director-Cruise Tourism, Department of Tourism & Commerce Marketing (DTCM)





Photograph by: Saint Tropez Tourism

Sailing in St. Tropez



The French Riviera has its own charm — the high life, celebrities, shopping, luxurious boutique properties, beaches and boats. St. Tropez is one of the biggest highlights of the luxury cruising scene on the Cote d’Azur. Right from the port till the centre of the town, there are places to be explored, and one might just get lucky to have a celebrity sighting on the way. Take a stroll along the harbour and gaze at the amazing yachts, many of which are much bigger than even the buildings around. Soak up the sun at the beaches or go window-shopping along rue Gambetta. From high-end brands to local boutiques, one can get a variety of things like herbes, home and kitchen items. Relish the delicacies at the high-end restaurants or get the taste of the freshest catches at one of the seafood restaurants at the old fishing quarter La Ponche.

“We have 800 boats on the harbour, and we can even welcome big boats. Now, we have Indians coming in these yachts and cruises. We welcome around 100 yachting events all year round.”

CLAUDE MANISCALCO
General Manager, Saint-Tropez Tourisme

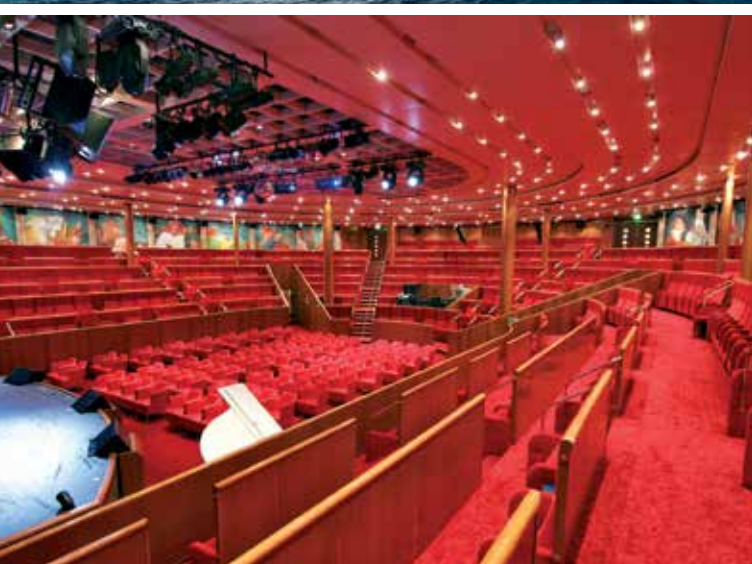
At sea, off Mumbai

In a development as pleasant as the Mumbai winter, Costa Cruises will dock its neoClassica at the city's port from December through March for a round-trip to Maldives.

HAZEL JAIN



Photographs by: Costa Cruises



For many travellers, the holiday often starts after some sort of a long journey. Now like never before, Indians will have the opportunity to start holidaying — right from their doorstep — from India's largest metropolis, Mumbai. For the first time ever, an international cruise liner will be cruising from Mumbai to Maldives and back for three entire months this winter. And it will be home-ported in Mumbai, which is different from itineraries which stop in Mumbai for a positioning leg or a world cruise itinerary.

Costa Cruises will sail from Mumbai starting December 2016 until March 2017 every week — a move which will finally put India on the cruising map. The seven-night itinerary ex-Mumbai goes to Mangalore, then to Cochin, and finally to Maldives. The return journey of the ship will include seven nights on the sea ex-Maldives which will take guests to Colombo, Goa and finally Mumbai.

between Mumbai and the Maldives. With a total of 654 cabins, including sea view cabins and suites with private balconies, the neoClassica is fully-equipped for entertainment with a casino, theatre, disco, ballroom, and a Grand Bar. It also boasts a wellness centre spread across 1,300 sq.m and an outdoor jogging track, plus four Jacuzzis, and two swimming pools.

For shopping, the cruise ship has a duty-free shopping center, while the library on board houses a wide selection of books. The food and wine experience aboard the neoClassica would be based on regional Italian menus, with vegetarian and vegan options as well. In addition, cruisers will be able to enjoy a variety of Indian cuisine and the restaurants on board are fully equipped to cater to special diet requirements of Indians, including Jain food.

Gupta adds, “During the period that the ship will be home-ported in Mumbai, it will make a total of 14 sailings (seven from Mumbai to Maldives and seven

Costa Cruises will sail from Mumbai starting December 2016 until March 2017 every week — a move which will finally put India on the cruising map

PRICE POINTS

- The starting price for a seven-night sailing in Inside Cabin is ₹47,800 all-inclusive.
- Up to two kids below 18 years sharing the cabin with two adults, pay only ₹14,870 per child, excluding the peak dates of December 23, December 30 2016 and January 7, 2017.

Nalini Gupta, Head, Costa Cruises India and MD, Lotus Destinations, says, “We have also announced shorter options of three and four nights between Cochin-Male, Male-Colombo and Colombo-Mumbai, with the idea of promoting existing options of long weekend getaways for the Indian market and also building MICE movement, both of which are showing high demand.”

ABOUT COSTA neoCLASSICA

Costa neoClassica will be operating on this route and can accommodate around 1,700 passengers. It will be the first large cruise ship to operate

back to Mumbai) and we expect to ferry more than 10,000 Indian passengers to and fro Maldives this season. The fact that Indians can now embark directly from Mumbai, not only makes the process hassle-free and visa-free, but also saves the traveller costs and time.”

Costa is also coordinating with the Maldivian tour operators to sell these packages in Maldives as well. **Kelvin Wong**, Vice President (Commercial), Costa Cruise Asia, said, “We are delighted to bring cruising to Indians at their doorstep. If the business is good, then we could have more ships for a whole year.”

Costa has already sold a lot of cabins to families as well as big groups. Gupta adds, “For this sailing, we will be reaching out to agents across India and not just Maharashtra. Many agents still think that it's complicated to sell cruises. They have a lot of questions on the insurance aspect. We obviously have insurance in terms of our ship experience.”



“Expedition Voyages on Hurtigruten are very popular. Those who are looking for a relaxed cruise to unwind and de-stress this voyage is their answer.”

JOHN AMBAT
Partner
Expedition Voyages

While one can witness Geirangerfjord and Trollfjord, the new cruise routes also take travellers to Hjørundfjord, one of the longest fjords in Norway





Photographs by: Hurtigruten

Exploring the Nordic

Sailing along the western coastline of Norway through the majestic fjords summarises Hurtigruten's Coastal Voyages experience.

ANKITA SAXENA

Hurtigruten Norwegian Coastal Voyage promises peace and tranquility, rejuvenation of senses where nature itself is the entertainer as the ships sail slowly through the fjords. Sailing through 1,500 miles of Norway's coastline where every season provides an ever-changing backdrop to a journey of matchless wonder, this is a must do!

FJORDS EXPERIENCE

The Norwegian fjords are the trademark of tourism in Norway. While one can witness Geirangerfjord and Trollfjord, the new cruise routes also take travellers to Hjørundfjord, one of the longest fjords in Norway cutting deep into the lush alpine mountains. Distinguished from more popular fjords by its seclusion and omission from all other tourist routes, here the traveller can escape the hustle and bustle, and travel past steep rock walls, green meadows, isolated mountain farms and small rural communities.

EXCURSIONS

The adventurous are not left behind on this nature-bound journey. Land excursions offer unique experiences both on northbound and southbound voyages. Adventure enthusiasts can opt for pre-booked excursions which come at an extra cost. Visit the small towns, ancient cities, museums, cathedrals, do mountain hiking, skiing, tobogganing, kayaking, dog sledding, etc. or head out to experience the local cuisine and culture.

HOUSE ON WATER

The 12 ships offer a wide range of comfortable cabins which vary in size and location, sometimes within the same grade. Travellers can choose to stay in

suites, standard and superior cabins while the ships also provide special cabins equipped for disabled passengers. The outside cabins on the higher decks have a picture window while the ones on the lower decks have portholes.

TASTE OF NATURE

Hurtigruten's on board dining—Norway's Coastal Kitchen—reflects the true character of the country. The experience is characterised by fresh, distinctive, full of variety, and authenticity as local produce and old food traditions are incorporated into every element of the culinary experience on board. Being a coastal voyage, seafood often dominates the menu, accompanied with fresh vegetables and delicately flavored sauces but vegetarian options are always available at all meals onboard the Hurtigruten cruise.

TRADE RELATION

In India, Hurtigruten advertises its products mainly through its website www.hurtigruten.in. **John Ambat**, Partner, Expedition Voyages, informs that they also invest heavily in online marketing, and target both B2C as well as B2B markets. "We also have exclusive attractive promo offers. We also conduct roadshows with some of our partners to their client base. We also plan to do 30-second video ads in the media in 2017," he adds.

MONEY MATTERS

The cost of the Coastal Voyage depends on the season of travel and the type of cabin selected. An Ocean View Cabin costs approximately €2,000 per person in summers and may become available for half the price in winters. Besides the cruise, the travellers also need to budget for their international air ticket from India to Oslo or Bergen, explains Ambat.



Nurturing Dreams

The arrival of luxury cruise ship Genting Dream marked the first time a luxury cruise ship of this scale was home-ported in Guangzhou.

AHANA GURUNG

Genting Dream, the first ship of its fleet Dream Cruises, was christened on November 13 on homeport Guangzhou before departing on its maiden voyage to Vietnam. The gala celebrations were attended by over 900 distinguished guests including Chinese government officials and executives from Genting Hong Kong and Dream Cruises.

The official christening was done by Genting Dream's official Godmother, Puan Sri Cecilia Lim, the wife of Tan Sri Lim Kok Thay, Chairman and CEO of Genting Hong Kong. The Godmother's blessing was performed by the placement of a giant lotus flower, symbolising the company's close ties and commitment to Asia, and the smashing of a bottle of champagne.

The official launch festivities continued in the Zodiac Theatre, which included a fit

exchange, an exclusive preview of Dream Cruises' signature 'Voyage of a Lover's Dream' production show inspired by the hull art of Genting Dream. A highlight of the performance was the appearance on stage of an astronaut – later revealed to be Dream Cruises' president Thatcher Brown.

He says, "As the first-ever Asian luxury cruise line and the first luxury ship to make Guangzhou (Nansha) its home port, year-round, we are devoted to helping advance the cruise market in Southern China."

"In a scant year's time, and coupled with the recent homeport of SuperStar Virgo, we have seen passenger numbers grow to over 300,000 resulting in Guangzhou (Nansha) becoming one of the top three ports in China today," he added. "I am truly grateful that we have been able to fulfil this dream of success

together with the launch of Dream Cruises and the debut of Genting Dream."

Dream Cruises also launched the 'Dream Big' initiative, a new project developed by the cruise line to provide essential support to nurture talented children in the region as part of the company's commitment to support the region, especially its youthful dreamers.

The 18-deck luxury cruise houses 1,674 staterooms, with over 70 per cent offering private balconies, plus 100 connecting rooms for families and groups. Guests will enjoy discovering an eclectic array of over 35 restaurant and bar concepts where they can indulge in the finest Asian and international dining. Additional onboard offerings include a waterslide park, spas, kid's clubs, an onboard cinema, the Zouk nightclub, and the first *China's Got Talent* show at sea.



Photographs by: Genting Hong Kong



Building blocks

A cruise task force will help the segment finally meet its potential. **Sanjay Basu**, MD, Far Horizon Tours, gives a lowdown of the work in progress.

AHANA GURUNG



SANJAY BASU

India has been blessed with a magnificent coastline that spans over 7,000 km, touching nine states and four union territories. The country has no dearth of rivers and backwaters but little has been done to capitalise on this asset, up until now that is.

The central government has formed a cruise task force comprising members from central ministries, state governments, private sector and various task forces. Under the chairmanship of the Secretary – Tourism, Govt. of India, the force has been actively working towards simplifying several measures to help the industry flourish.

Basu and his travel company – specialists in river cruises, apart from dealing in adventure packages – is a part of the cruise task force and reveals several areas of focus. “The main agenda is to ease out the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for sea cruise ships that dock at various Indian ports. The luxury ships would have to dock at the cargo wharfs which is not a very pleasant place to be in, especially when the demographics of cruise passengers are much older,” he says.

Not only did passengers have to spend over an hour waiting at customs and

immigrations, too much money was being charged for services (and high port charges) that did not meet the expectations of the travellers.

However, all this is set to change.

Basu informs that a host of amendments will change the face of cruise tourism and finally, perhaps give it the much-needed endorsement it deserves. “Earlier, the captain of the vessel would have to submit numerous forms – usually two or three per person – which would be a tedious task. This has been revised to only one set of documents. Even customs and immigration is done on board so passengers don’t have to wait for hours in queues,” he says.

Upgradation in infrastructure and building of new cruise terminals are some other aspects that the task force has emphasised on. “Even river cruises will be getting their fair share of the pie with the placement of more jetties and infrastructure revamp that is in the offing,” comments Basu. “All this combined will not only uplift the cruise community, but will open up more coastal spots that have not been explored as a cruising destination. The sector has immense growth opportunities provided it receives adequate attention,” adds Basu.

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Cruise CALENDAR



Cruises that depart from India

Costa neoClassica (Mumbai to Mumbai)	15 nights	Dec 23
Silver Discoverer 9 (Kolkata to Phuket)	14 nights	Feb 27
Costa neoClassica (Mumbai to Venice)	27 nights	Mar 18
Oceania Nautica (Mumbai to Piraeus)	20 nights	Apr 14
Crystal Serenity (Mumbai to Dubai)	11 nights	Apr 15
Azamara Journey (Mumbai to Mumbai)	20 nights	Apr 22

Cruise lines that visit India

Seabourn Sojourn (From Dubai)	17 nights	Dec 05
Celebrity Constellation (From Abu Dhabi)	14 nights	Dec 19
Pacific Princess (From Ft. Lauderdale, Florida)	111 nights	Jan 03
HAL Amsterdam (From Ft. Lauderdale)	111 nights	Jan 04
Seven Seas Navigator (From Miami)	128 nights	Jan 05
Costa Luminosa (From Savona)	106 nights	Jan 06

Cruise talk

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Get a glimpse of some of the most exciting ports in Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand and more.



Source: TIRUN Marketing

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	4	Penang, Langkawi, Kuala Lumpur	Dec 12	Feb 19 & 28	US\$249
Thailand	5	Bangkok, Ko Samui		Feb 23	US\$374
Malaysian Peninsula	5	Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Phuket		Feb 03 Mar 11	US\$324

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The Picture Pair must be emailed to click-n-share@cruiseprofessionals.in, post your cruise. The best 5 Picture Pairs shall be posted on our Facebook Page & shall receive Gift Hampers.

* The above mentioned Starting Fare is per person, based on double occupancy for an Inside Cabin, on select sail dates, subject to availability and is capacity controlled. Port Charges, Government Taxes & Gratuities are extra.

[^] The Onboard Credit is per cabin, based on double occupancy (1st & 2nd guest) only for above mentioned sailings.

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