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National Circuits on MOT radar

Suman Billa, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, says the second phase of the Swadesh Darshan scheme will be based on five themes which will span across several states to showcase the best tourism destinations in the country.



AHANA GURUNG

The introduction of e-visa and the continuous reforms on it has been a welcome move with 5.82 lakh foreign tourists availing the facility between January and April 2017. The e-visa registered a growth of 63.4 per cent over the same period the previous year, and thanks to the government's ongoing efforts, India moved up 14 spots on World Economic Forum's (WEF) Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017, to 55th position in terms of international openness.

While the standard of infrastructure has been a setback for the industry, the government has taken matters into its own hands and

launched the Swadesh Darshan scheme which consists of 13 thematic circuits all across the country. **Suman Billa**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, informs that a considerable chunk of funds has been invested for the scheme and plans for the second stage are afoot. He elaborates on the details and says, "We've allocated projects worth ₹4800 crore across the country so we're toying with the idea of creating circuits that straddle different states for the second stage. We want to call them National Circuits of truly international standards, so if it is a beach-themed circuit, it could very well be across Kerala and Karnataka. Today, there is a limitation because when states pose a project, it is restricted to the

"We've allocated projects worth ₹4800 crore across the country so we're toying with the idea of creating circuits that straddle different states for the second stage. We want to call them National Circuits of truly international standards, so if it is a beach-themed circuit, it could very well be across Kerala and Karnataka."

Suman Billa

Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism
Government of India



state so we're planning to pick up five National Circuits across various themes to showcase the best that India has to offer."

Connectivity has also been quite a hurdle, especially for numerous Tier-II and III cities, but the introduction of Re-

gional Connectivity Scheme for aviation as well as the removal of service tax for online train reservations through IRCTC's official portal show signs that the government is set on enhancing this aspect. If you look at aviation, we have good connectivity on the trunk routes like

Delhi-Mumbai, Mumbai-Chennai but standalone destinations like Khajuraho, which is a great tourist destination, have only one flight," he states. "There isn't enough airlift capacity to take enough people on the route. The Regional Connectivity Scheme has been launched

to tackle these issues through a reverse bidding offer and the government is able to operate routes which would otherwise not be operated."

Of late, wedding tourism has garnered the support of the Ministry as the industry has seen exponential growth. Billa adds, "People who come for weddings stay longer and spend more so there is a need for us to come up with a game plan on what we need to do to promote it." Wellness is another area of interest for the government and in order to regulate the policies that promote this aspect, a set of guidelines will be launched by the National Medical & Wellness Tourism Promotion Board on June 21, to mark International Yoga Day. 🇮🇳

The good, bad & ugly of GST

The GST Council finalised the tax rates of services under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) recently and the tax system will be effective from July 1. With five per cent rate for tours and 28 per cent for luxury hotels, travel trade professionals are trying to comprehend how business will be impacted. **TRAVTALK** gives you an insight...



TT BUREAU

"GST was awaited for a long time and we were demanding from the government that since there is a lot of multiplicity of taxes in the tourism sector, the taxes should be rationalised and reduced. I am glad that the government has agreed to both the requests and has given us the same status that we wanted with 5 per cent GST rate. Also, there is no Input Credit on that. We are only concerned about one aspect-hotels-as they have put 28 per cent GST on hotels over ₹5000 which should not be more than 18 per cent. The government should look to attract more tourists and get a bigger chunk of foreign exchange, which will not only generate revenue but also generate employment opportunities in the hospitality industry."



Pronab Sarkar
President
IATO

"The government went two steps back and now they have come one step ahead with the current GST rate. We were giving 4.5 per cent tax before January 22, 2017, and then we had CENVAT available. After January 22, we were under 9 per cent service tax. This step disturbed our summer bookings and there was a major loss of business to international OTAs. The new rate that will be implemented after the GST council's meeting is 5 per cent on supply of tour operators' services. We need to clarify the meaning of this. If it is on the profit or add-on, then it's very good. But if it is on the total amount, then we again turn expensive by 5 per cent than our international suppliers, because if we are taxing international hotels, then we are taxing them again. This has direct impact on us."



Guldeep Singh Sahni
India Travel Award winner
and President, OTOAI

"Hospitality industry in India, a big contributor to the country's economic growth, is on a high growth trajectory and is expected to reach ₹2,796.9 thousand crore by 2022 (source: KPMG). The industry also contributes significantly to employment, FDI and foreign exchange. The industry was severely impacted by the liquor ban and the much-awaited GST rates has come as another shocker. These high and complex GST rates will further act as impediments to the industry's growth which is still maturing. At the same time, the new tax structure will also position India poorly as a destination vis-a-vis our competitors in the international market that have much lower taxation."



Dr. Ankur Bhatia
Executive Director
Bird Group

Contd. on page 8 ▶

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'Taxing' time for associations

The trade is shocked that airlines continue to charge Air Passenger Duty (APD) that had been abolished from March 1, 2016. TAAI and TAFI are now asking airlines for a refund.

 HAZEL JAIN

The British Parliament had abolished Air Passenger Duty (APD) Tax for young adults of 12-15 years of age travelling from UK with effect from March 1, 2016. This amount can range from `6,000 onwards depending upon the class of booking. However, the travel agents have realised that some airlines continued to charge them for this. Two associations have raised their voice against this to make their members aware of this anomaly.

Reacting to this, **Sampat Damani**, Chairman Western Region, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), says, "We have taken up the matter with the airlines and they have agreed to process the refund. We have also informed our



Sampat Damani
Chairman Western Region
TAAI

members and urged them to come forward if they have been charged Departure Tax. Please approach the airline and they will process your refund for the excess amount that has been charged. We have also sent out circulars and reminders. It was an error on part of the airlines and we have realised it. We are sure that it won't happen again."



Abbas Moiz
Chairman
TAFI Western Chapter

The Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) Managing Committee, on the other hand, has also sent out e-mailers to their members on this. On inquiries made with major carriers flying to London in the past couple of weeks, TAFI has been given to understand that no airline has sent any circular to the agents about this. **Abbas Moiz**,

Chairman, TAFI Western Chapter, says, "TAFI National and TAFI Western India have been working together in getting down to the bottom of this APD Tax issue. We have been working since the last week of April to understand the issue and sent mails to the airlines to which their response was lacklustre."

He adds, "What is more disturbing is that the airlines knew about it but were keeping silent. While British Airways created a category of youth (12-15 year old), they chose not to disseminate this information to agents. A lot of airlines have now come forth and given advisories and links to claim refunds, but the onus of proving that the passenger was under 16 is now on the agents. We have to upload their passport copies and then claim the tax."



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TRAVTALK

VIEWPOINT

GST: A taxing issue

There has been much uproar after the GST rates were announced by the GST Council, which will come into effect from July 1. Travel associations have long been lobbying for 5 per cent GST, which has been well considered by the Finance Ministry with supply of tour services being put in the lowest slab (5%), and that too without any Input Credit. The tour operator fraternity welcomes this move, however, there are many who still want the government to look beyond taxation for tourism. While on the one hand it looks over-optimistic, on the other, we also need to learn from countries where much less or no GST is charged for tourism-related services helping them to increase their revenue from tourism. With well-developed and focused tourism products along with minimal taxation, India's tourism story might just see a new turn. There is still a long way to go.

Luxury comes with a tax!

The government's GST exemption for hotels charging under `1000 per night and putting hotels with rates between `1000-2500 per night under 12 per cent GST, reflects the idea of making travel affordable for all. However, drifting away from this philosophy, the GST council has put hotels above `5000 under the 28 per cent bracket. Let's set the record straight—a hotel room costing `5000 is not luxury. Any 3 or 4-star hotel today is priced at this rate, and comes under mid-market segment. Putting these properties in the same tax bracket as the 5-star luxury as well as palace properties around India is a little unjust for both. Travel data analysts around the world have forecast that the middle class and the millennials would be travelling the most in the next 10 years, which explains the midmarket hotel boom in India. However, with this move, the GST Council is not only ignoring the statistics, but also going away from the one-tax-for-all philosophy, which is the main concept behind the entire exercise.

'Tech'ing the road to innovation

The digital revolution has created opportunities and the need for new technological advancements in travel to suit the demands of the Indian traveller.

Planning a holiday today is often even easier than expected due to the availability of high-speed Internet connections, enabling travellers to make flight, hotel, and other bookings for their trip within seconds. Simply put, the digital revolution is bringing consumers a never-before-seen plethora of choices, which helps explain why people are travelling more than ever before. New technology has also given travellers more in-depth information about the destinations they visit, allowing them to go beyond the guidebooks and top tourist attractions to find truly unique and memorable experiences.

Changing consumer behaviour

The ever-changing technology has created a new, competitive environment in the hospitality and travel industries. With increase in information

comes an increased demand for transparency and low prices. Consumers today are more aware of price variations and know that their best chance of finding a good deal is by making smart decisions on the Internet.

As stated in a recent BCG report headlined 'The New Indian: The many facets of a Changing Consumer', the Internet is an increasingly pervasive factor in India's commerce with its influence only set to expand. In the past three years, the number of online buyers has already increased sevenfold, rising to 80-90 million, an amount expected to triple within the next decade.

With the explosion of online consumers, travel service providers are now racing to perfect their online distribution models to bring their product straight to the traveller. As the travel industry is

largely information-driven, the Internet is ideally suited as a medium for travel service delivery, and it is hardly surprising that online travel services have developed into one of the world's largest e-commerce domains.

The face of the travel industry has changed drastically by the introduction of a new concept called Travel Hacking. The concept has helped travellers save money by finding the best deals online. This has opened doors for some travellers to discover a magical world of free travel upgrades and elite status. KAYAK incorporates several hacker-style tools in order to provide better services to its users and allows them the power to customise their travel to their specific desires. KAYAK provides flight search results including a forecast of whether the prices for a destination are likely to rise

or fall within the next few days or months. The feature analyses KAYAK's database of over one billion annual queries performed on KAYAK sites and mobile apps. With every search made, KAYAK collects more data, allowing it to improve its algorithm and forecast accuracy over time.

(The views expressed are solely of the author. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)



Abhijit Mishra
Country Director, KAYAK India

Know your GST rates

The GST regime is scheduled to be effective from July 1, and the Council has approved GST rates for services at Nil, 5%, 12%, 18% and 28%.

No.	Description of Services	GST	No.	Description of Services	GST
1.	Transport of passengers by air in economy class	5% with ITC*	8.	Accommodation in hotels including 5-star and above rated hotels, inns, guest houses, clubs, campsites or other commercial places meant for residential or lodging purposes, where room rent is `5000 and above per night per room	28% with full ITC
2.	Transport of passengers, with or without accompanied belongings, by air, embarking from or terminating in a Regional Connectivity Scheme Airport.	5% with ITC	9.	Transport of passengers, with or without accompanied belongings, by air, embarking from or terminating in an airport located in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, or Tripura or at Bagdogra located in West Bengal.	GST exempted
3.	Supply of tour operators' services	5% No ITC	10.	Services provided by a tour operator to a foreign tourist in relation to a tour conducted wholly outside India.	GST exempted
4.	Transport of passengers by air in other than economy class	12% with full ITC	11.	Services of transportation of passengers, with or without accompanied belongings, by railways, in a class other than first class or air-conditioned coach	GST exempted
5.	Renting of hotels, inns, guest houses, clubs, campsites or other commercial places meant for residential or lodging purposes having room tariff `1000 and above but less than `2500 per room per day	12% with full ITC	12.	Services by a hotel, inn, guest house, club, or campsite, by whatever name called, for residential or lodging purposes, having declared tariff of a unit of accommodation less than `1000 per day or equivalent	GST exempted
6.	Renting of hotels, inns, guest houses, clubs, campsites or other commercial places meant for residential or lodging purposes having room tariff `2500 and above but less than `5000 per room per day	18% with full ITC			
7.	Supply of food/drinks in air-conditioned restaurant in 5-star or above rated hotel	28% with full ITC			

* ITC- Input Tax Credit

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35% growth in Q1 from India

Ras Al Khaimah is targeting one million tourists by the end of 2018, revealed **Haitham Mattar**, CEO, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA) on his recent visit to India.



NISHA VERMA

Ras Al Khaimah recently organised roadshows in Delhi and Mumbai, India to meet and interact with travel trade in the country. **Haitham Mattar**, CEO, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority



Haitham Mattar
CEO, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority

We have seen about 35% growth in Q1 from the Indian market, and a 10% growth in the length of the stay from Indians tourists

ity (RAKTDA) while speaking at a press conference in New Delhi, revealed that India is a prominent market for them and they are expecting huge growth from the country.

"We have seen about 35 per cent growth in the first quarter of the year from the India market, and interestingly we have seen a 10 per cent growth in the length of the stay from Indian tourists, which means that Indian travellers are finding more things to do in Ras Al Khaimah. Our target is to keep the travellers for more days and enjoy the destination. We are aiming to get 1 million visitors to Ras Al Khaimah by the end of 2018," Mattar said.

In order to achieve that, they are developing new tourism products. "Ras Al Khaimah is a hidden gem and is very different from Dubai and its neighbouring emirates. We are more about natural assets and adventure. One can hike and zipline in the mountains, dive in the sea and can also do a desert safari, all in the same day. We also have five shopping malls and we are located only 45 minutes from Dubai. The biggest advantage is that RAK offers value for money, especially for families. 72 per cent of our business comes from families. We have beach front resorts, which are 5-star products under 4-star brands and pricing. We are a growing market for

India, in terms of weddings as well. We have seen a growth of this segment from India into the destination with high profile weddings, where 300-450 people fly in from India to RAK. Another area we are focusing on is MICE. We also have beach concerts for young millennials," he informed

India is the fourth largest source market for RAK

right now, while Germany is the first. Mattar realises the difference and says that RAK in the itineraries of Indians travelling to Dubai. "The number of Indian travellers coming to Dubai is 1.6 million, and those coming to RAK is 37,000. We have seen a great appetite from Indian travellers for combination trips like Dubai-RAK

or Abu Dhabi-RAK. For us, it's a huge growth potential, because if we get even a small segment of those coming to Dubai, India would already be our biggest source market," he revealed.

Mattar also signed a MoU with **Guldeep Singh Sahni**, President, OTOAI, for hosting OTOAI Convention in Ras Al Khaimah.

Langkawi to host PATA Travel Mart 2018

■ Langkawi is the venue for PATA Travel Mart 2018 (PTM 2018) with the signature Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) event being hosted by Tourism Malaysia and Langkawi Development Authority. The announcement was made by the Association's CEO **Dr. Mario Hardy** during the PATA Annual Summit in Colombo, Sri Lanka on May 21. Dr. Hardy said, "Tourism Malaysia and Langkawi Development Authority have been a valuable PATA member and partner since 1959 and 2017 respec-

tively and we look forward to the opportunity of showcasing the culture, heritage and beauty of Langkawi. Delegates to PTM 2018 will experience one of Asia's most remarkable and attractive destinations." Tourism Malaysia Director General, Datuk Seri Mirza Mohammad Taiyab said, "We are pleased to be co-hosts of PATA Travel Mart 2018 with Langkawi Development Authority and look forward to welcoming all PATA members to Malaysia for a fruitful and memorable meeting and networking session."

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Mixed reactions to new GST regime

► Contd. from page 3

“According to the GST Council, there will be 5 per cent tax on tours. However, it is not clear whether this rate is applicable on value addition or gross amount. In a way, the 5 per cent rate is good as we were already paying 4.5 per cent tax on the packages. The service tax amendment of 9 per cent tax was more cumbersome for us, as applying for CENVAT was an issue, especially with small tour operators and small hotels not being systematic in generating proper invoices. The government has taken special consideration for tour operators, as this process was difficult for us.”



P. P. Khanna
President, ADTOI

“The GST slabs announced for hospitality industry will negatively affect inbound tourism immediately, especially when we are in competition with neighbouring countries. The MICE industry will be terribly hit as most of the convention facilities are only available in 5-star hotels that have room rates of ₹5000 or above. The high tax rate will also negatively impact conventions and conferences in the pipeline. I feel scope for manipulation has been left for hotels where they can charge ₹4990 for a room and pay only 18 per cent instead of 28 per cent. Also, there is confusion as to whether the tax will be charged on rack rate, published rate or negotiated rate.”



Chander Mansharamani
Vice Chairman, ICPB

“The 28 per cent tax on hotels is going to affect not only the hospitality industry, but other businesses as well. It is a clear way to kill the travel and hospitality industry. GST of 5 per cent on tour operators already existed. The government should mull over whether they just want to earn tax revenue or promote tourism and earn foreign exchange from this sector. They should decide if they want the tourism industry to perish or flourish. We are tired of knee-jerks that we get from the government every now and then. I think the government needs to rethink the decision on taxes. We will meet FAITH members soon and work on a consolidated approach to talk to the government on this.”



Sarabjit Singh
India Travel Award winner
and Vice Chairman, FAITH



Rajan Sehgal
Chairman-Northern Region,
TAAI

“There has not been much of a difference in air travel except in the taxes on economy and business class. However, since hotels will be subjected to 28 per cent tax for over ₹5000 room rate, it will be a huge blow to them. We were expecting about 18 per cent, which has been applied, but for hotels in the ₹2500-5000 range. Our aim is to get more foreign tourists to India, and not just domestic tourists, and by hiking up the main part of travel will not benefit the industry in any way. Our price needs to be competitive in comparison to the European market or other markets in Asia where the rates for such services are much lower.”



Debjit Dutta
Chairman, IATO East
Chapter

“The announced tax slab on tour operators is satisfactory. Since hotels are a major component of our business, the 28 per cent tax on hotels above ₹5000 will hit us badly. Most inbound tourists want to stay in properties that are above this bracket. The business model for inbound is also different from that of domestic – we create our deals and packages a year in advance and with the new tax rate for hotels, we will have to pay 28 per cent and 5 per cent, in addition to the standard rate of the hotel room. This barely leaves us with any profit margin. The tax rate needs to be reassessed.”



P. K. Anish Kumar
President, ATTOI

“I am very disappointed with the announcement. Most foreign travellers have concerns regarding security and cleanliness in India and thus choose 4 or 5-star hotels. This does not mean they are rich but prefer safe, quality accommodation. The 28 per cent tax on hotels and 5 per cent GST to be paid by agents, kills the industry as the effective tax to be paid will be 33 per cent. A houseboat in Kerala costs above ₹6000 and the tax will deter the USP of the destination. India will not be seen as a long-haul destination any more as packages will become shorter due to the expenses to be incurred by foreign tourists.”

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Anil Parashar
President & CEO, InterGlobe
Technology Quotient, India
Travel Award winner

“Against the backdrop of a high growth potential of the Indian travel and tourism market, an organised tax structure is vital. The implementation of the unified tax structure is a huge step towards preparing the nation that is expected to grow at \$160.2 billion by 2026. Although, the industry presently has mixed reactions towards the introduction of GST, going forward, this step would attract more industry growth as the GST has been planned according to the tax payer's capability. For example, GST Council reduced service tax on economy class from 6 to 5 per cent while increasing that of the business class to 12 per cent from the current rate of 9 per cent.”

“Post successful initiatives like Make in India, Swachh Bharat and Startup India, we were hoping for a more reformative GST that would have rationalised the tax structure and made India a more competitive tourism destination. Unfortunately, the recently announced GST rate for hotels will do just the opposite. By increasing the rate to 28 per cent for mid-to-high class hotels priced above ₹5000, inbound tourism will take a hit by at least 10 per cent. More ironic is the zero tax on hotels with tariffs of ₹1000 or below. The signal that is being sent out is, India would prefer only backpackers and for those with more money to spend should look for other destinations. We humbly request the government to save inbound tourism and reconsider GST for hospitality.”



Rishi Puri
VP, Lords Hotels & Resorts



Manheer Singh Sethi
Co-founder, Travkart.com, a
unit of Holidays by Sahibji,
India Travel Award winner

“The passing of GST Bill is a great step forward and establishes a uniform tax structure. Tourism is not only a high foreign exchange grosser, but is also among the largest tax generators. The 5 per cent rates on travel agency services is a welcome move. A lower rate will bring in more tourists and allow Indian businesses to compete with global chains. However, the rates in hospitality sector is too complex and high. The government's effort to keep the rate for restaurants with a turnover of ₹50 lakh or below at 5 per cent, is a welcome move. A lower tax rate for the budget hotels sector will ensure that the industry's quality-upgrade continues while delivering standardised accommodation to millions of middle-class travellers. Internationally, the taxes in neighbouring countries like Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia range between 5-10 per cent. The high incidence of taxes will make India uncompetitive when it comes to tourism.”

GST dashes hopes of tourism industry

Deliberating on the recently announced GST rates for tourism and hospitality industry, **Bharat Bhushan Atree**, Managing Director, Caper Travel Company, believes that rather than making India a more competitive tourist destination, we have in effect become the most expensive in the world.

The recent announcement of the four-fold tax-structure under Goods and Services Tax Bill (zero per cent, 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 28 per cent) by the GST Council has been agreed upon for different categories of goods and services.

While the overall impact of this tax structure on different goods and services has not been much, where the price is fairly the same or slightly reduced, the tourism and hospitality industry has been neglected and not treated fairly. The impact on this sector is

an increase in taxes by nearly 40 per cent than the existing tax structure.

For tour operators, there is no longer a provision of input credit and for B2B segments of business, there will be an additional tax of 5 per

cent on each transaction. This will make hotels and other tourism products more expensive and non-competitive with other Asian countries.

According to the announcement by the GST Council, non-AC restaurants will charge 12 per cent GST on food; AC restaurants and those with liquor license will charge 18 per cent GST while restaurants in 5-star hotels will charge a GST of 28 per cent. Hotels and lodges charging per-day tariff of `1,000 will be exempted from GST while those charging per day tariff up to `2,500 will pay 12 per cent tax. Hotels charging `2,500-5,000 will pay 18 per cent tax and hotels with per-day tariffs above `5,000 will be levied with 28 per cent tax. Furthermore, services supplied by tour operators will attract 5 per cent GST with no Input Tax Credit. With 28 per cent as the highest taxation slab in our scheme of things, we have acquired the dubious distinction of the most taxed

country as far as the indirect taxes are concerned. This fact gets validated when we take into account only the four tax slabs agreed upon and compare it with the nations of the world, rich or poor, which have implemented a GST regime.

The new GST system will be the last nail in the coffin. We have clearly failed the test miserably, as we have happily created a GST regime with a taxation structure that is highest in the democratic world especially for the hospitality and tourism sector.

Tourism is a green industry which generates employment and earns foreign exchange for the country. The government claims that its aim is to give priority to promote tourism into

India but the recent tax structure announced by the GST Council is contrary to government's objective. I hope that the stakeholders from tourism and hospitality industry especially associations like FAITH and IATO will put across industry's concern to the government though I see little hope once the structure is decided and declared.

(The views expressed are solely of the author. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)



Bharat Bhushan Atree
Managing Director
Caper Travel Company

Goods and Service Tax comparison with other developed and developing countries of the world are follows:			
Countries	GST/ VAT	Countries	GST/ VAT
Saudi Arabia, the oil rich country	0%	Switzerland-Traveller's paradise	8%
Singapore	07%	Hotel's tax	3.8% only
Indonesia	10%	Australia	10%
South Korea	10%	Sweden - Hotel	10%
Japan	8%*	Sweden Restaurants	(18-28%)
*from Oct 1 will increase	10%	(based on different category)	
China	17%	Netherland has highest GST but	21%*
Pakistan	17%	* hotels and restaurants covered	6%
Nepal	13%	under another category	
The Philippines	12%	Greece	24%
		United Kingdom	20%
		Germany	19%
		Mexico	16%
		South Africa	14%

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Sarovar Hotels launches The Lazizi Premiere Nairobi

■ In one of its most momentous steps, Sarovar Hotels launched The Lazizi Premiere Nairobi, a luxury hotel positioned inside the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA). The hotel, managed by Sarovar Hotels, was inaugurated by H. E. Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya.

President Kenyatta officially opened the 144-room premium hotel as part of the government's tourism and hospitality transformation strategy. The hotel is conveniently located inside the JKIA airport.

Speaking at the launch, **Ajay K. Bakaya**, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels, said, "Kenya is the business hub for Africa and has one of the most diverse accommodation facilities. Nairobi being the hub of East Africa offers a great launch pad for our expansion and growing our footprint in the African region. Travellers in transit, airline crews and other local and international visitors intending to avoid traffic enroute to the airport have not had much luck as most hotels are still quite a distance from the main international airport in the capital city. We are aiming to tap that segment with The Lazizi Premiere."

Rise of the Digital Travel dragon

Danny Levy, General Manager, Worldwide Business Research (WBR) Singapore, the organisers of the recently-concluded Digital Travel APAC, talks about how within a year they have managed to establish the event as the best travel conference in the region and about continuing to provide the most inspiring content and quality networking to their audience.



PEDEN DOMA BHUTIA FROM SINGAPORE

QWhat is The Digital Travel APAC aiming to achieve through this summit?

Digital Travel APAC brings together 400+ VPs and Directors from Asia's leading airlines, hotels and OTAs. These leaders gather to hear case study presentations and discuss common challenges during intense, small working groups to uncover practical solutions to their day-to-day pain points.

QHow was the response to the summit this year compared to last year?

In 2016 we launched Digital Travel APAC and it brought together over 300 travel leaders and 20 sponsors. I'm delighted to say that in 2017 the event continued to grow with 400 travel leaders and 30 sponsors firmly establishing it as the region's leading travel conference.

We've already received some fantastic feedback from our sponsors and delegates.

QHow much of a difference does a summit like this make towards the travel industry?

Digital Travel APAC provides a platform for leaders in the space to come together and benchmark against other brands over two-and-a-half days. At WBR we spend 12 weeks on the research and production of the conference agenda and a further 17 weeks on the marketing and audience development to ensure that we have the top decision makers from Asia's leading airlines, hotels and OTAs speaking and attending. This ensures that our delegates walk away inspired and with a clear action plan they can implement when they get back to office.



"We feel that this year we firmly established the event as the best travel conference in the region and next year we'd like to make sure that we continue to provide the most inspiring content and quality networking to our growing audience of travel leaders."

Danny Levy

General Manager

Worldwide Business Research (WBR) Singapore

QWhat are the latest technological trends in the travel industry?

Data analytics is the most dominant area of focus for Asia's travel industry in 2017. Almost 80 per cent of business leaders report data analytics as an area of focus for the year.

We've also seen strong demand for customer acquisition, cross-device tracking, mobile app marketing, re-platforming and mobile UX technologies.

QWhat are your plans for next year's summit?

Our plans are to increase the size and quality of the travel leaders that speak and attend as well as continuing to grow the number of sponsors and exhibitors that partner with Digital Travel APAC. We feel that this year we firmly established the event as the best travel conference in the region and next year we'd like to make sure that we continue to provide the most inspiring con-

tent and quality networking to our growing audience of travel leaders.

QThe Digital Travel APAC app was well appreciated, do you plan to make more additions to it?

We're always looking to innovate and are exploring how our networking partner can be integrated more seamlessly. We are also considering companies that provide messaging services so that our delegates can message questions across to our speakers in real-time. 📱

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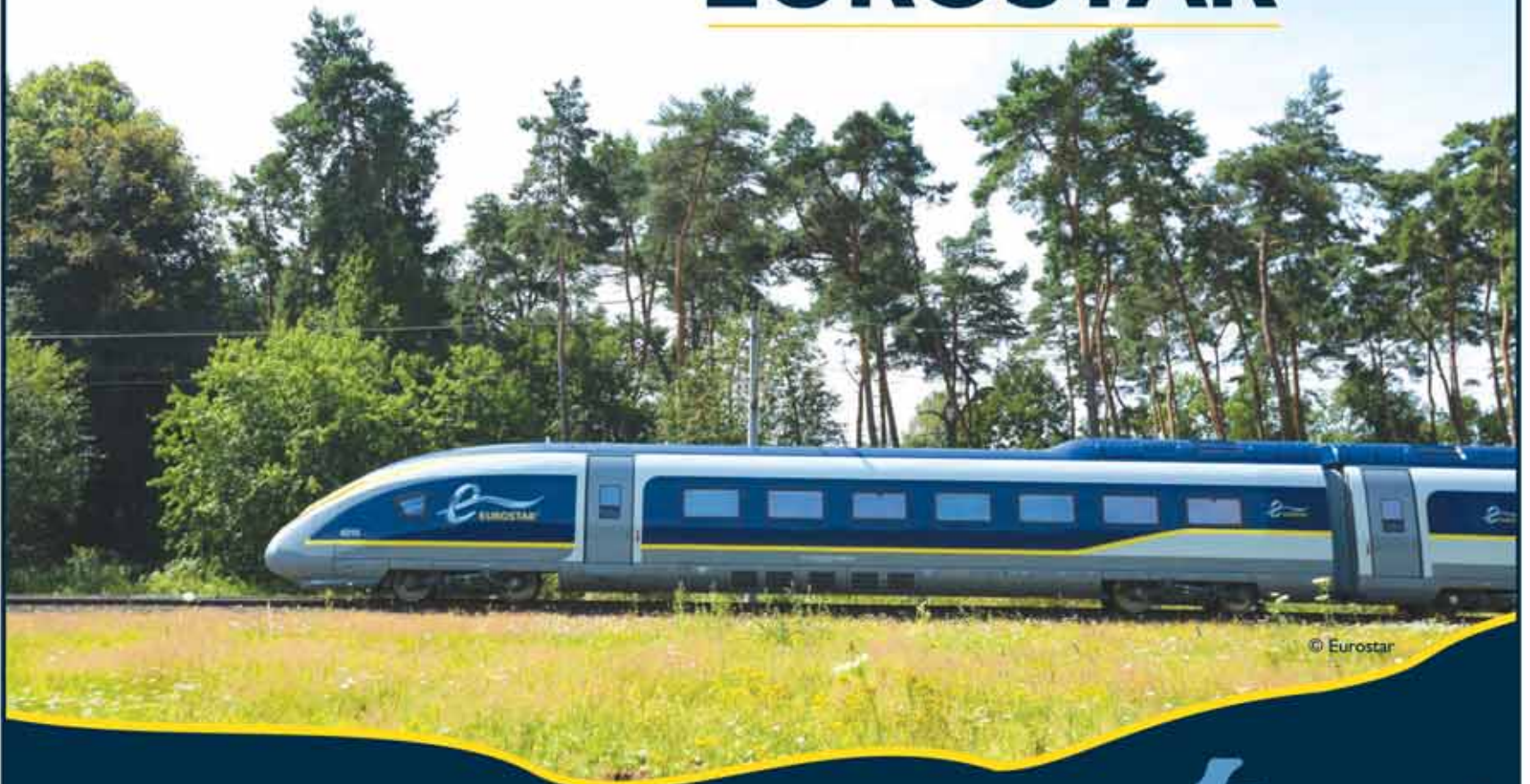
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GTM '17 inspires innovative itineraries

Germany Travel Mart (GTM) witnessed about 19,000 B2B meetings between 329 suppliers from Germany showcasing products to over 500 hosted international buyers from 50 countries.



KANCHAN NATH FROM NUREMBERG, GERMANY

The 43rd Germany Travel Mart (GTM) took place from May 7-9, 2017, in Nuremberg, Bavaria and was hosted by Bavaria Tourism, the official marketing agency, and the Nuremberg Convention and Tourist Office. Around 350 suppliers – representing the hotel business, inbound tourism, the entertainment sector, holiday & city break tourism, the transport industry and tourism organisations – showcased their entire range of products related to Destination Germany.

Petra Hedorfer, CEO, German National Tourism Board (GNTB), says, “We are living in turbulent times. It is not an easy time for leisure and corporates. Together we will be able to pave the way forward. In 2016 the number of overnight stays by foreign visitors to Germany topped 80 million for the first time – the seventh record breaking year in a row.

“Between January and December, a total of 80.8 million overnight stays by foreign

visitors were seen showing a year-on-year increase of 1.1 million or 1.4 per cent in 2017. The beginning of 2017 has seen this upward trend continue, 9.7 million overnight stays were made by international guests in the first two months of the year – a further year-on-year increase, this time by 3.2 per cent.”

In 2016, 59.6 million tourists (+1.9%) came from Europe and Overseas numbers were at 19.6 million (-0.3 per cent). From India, 56,000 tourists visited Germany in 2016, showing a growth of 8.1 per cent, Hedorfer noted. About market dynamics she says, “Brexit and financial crises in high-volume source markets, and security concerns, such as the fear of terrorist attacks, temporarily dampened the appetite for travel in some source markets. Due to economic reasons and uncertainty, there was a loss in the purchase power. Many markets lost 50 per cent of visitors. France suffered because of terror attacks. For business



Petra Hedorfer
CEO, German National Tourism Board (GNTB)

In Q1 2017, 9.7 million overnight stays were made by international guests in the first two months of the year – a 3.2 per cent increase YoY

travel as well it was a difficult year. Sharing economy saw the biggest growth.” Hedorfer observes that for many travellers, Germany has become a mono destination. “This is



Romit Theophilus
Director-India
GNTB

The Indian delegation consisted of 21 people out of which 15 are tour operators. We've got in 13 new agents and two repeats

a long-term progression with more than 50 per cent of regular customers. This is a quality promise. Germany offers great value for money. The highest investment in hotel business

in Europe is in Germany. Per trip guests spend more, means they stay longer. There is also an increase in luxury shoppers from new markets. By 2030, we will expect 50 million international tourists. In 2018, we will be focusing on culinary tourism.”

Speaking about BRIC countries she claims that Destination Germany is a strong brand in the international market. Hedorfer says, “The current rate of growth in the high-potential markets in Asia and South America is particularly encouraging: inbound volumes are back on track for all BRIC countries. In the top ten source markets for inbound tourism to Germany, the Netherlands consolidated their number one ranking with a 5 per cent increase. Poland (up by 8.5 per cent) and Spain (up by 4.3 per cent) also grew at a faster rate than the market as a whole.”

Giving a forecast for 2017, she concludes, “The GNTB produces an overall forecast for the current year of between 0 and 2 per cent based

on analysis of the available UNWTO and World Travel Monitor forecasts and on projections drawn from Federal Statistical Office data.”

Romit Theophilus, Director-India, GNTB, says, “The Indian delegation to GTM consisted of 21 people out of which 15 are tour operators. We've got in 13 new agents and two repeats, and are inspiring them to come up with innovative itineraries so that India has been growing quite consistently year-on-year. Last year we did 8.1 per cent which roughly means 750,000 overnights. Before that we were growing anywhere between 4-7 per cent every year. This year till February, we have already done 12.6 per cent. We hope to close the year between 8 to 10 per cent.”

He adds, “So far everybody has appreciated the GTM, they liked the format. They thought it was a great opportunity for networking not only with German suppliers but meeting people who come from across the world.”



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Skål Kolkata turns host

The Kolkata wing will host the Skål National Congress 2018 and during this event they expect an attendance of 600-750 Skålleagues in the City of Joy.



AHANA GURUNG

Skål International Kolkata has been actively organising meetings during the past month in an effort to promote friendship and business among the travel and related industries. At the recently held Annual General Meeting that took place at Novotel Kolkata Hotel and Resi-

retary Sanjeev Mehra says 34 active members have been officiated this year, apart from the Young Skålleagues. The club will also host the Skål National Congress 2018 in Kolkata.

The new committee is looking to achieve a target of 200 members and 50 Young Skål members by the end

with great fervour among the Skålleagues in Kolkata over a meet-and-greet just after the AGM. It was attended by members of various consulates, hoteliers, travel agents and more, with Skål members and their spouses dressed in traditional Bengali attire. Dignitaries like Damien Syed, Consul General of France, Kolkata, Jonathan T. Ward,



dences, the new committee of Skål International Kolkata 2017-2019 with **Manav Soni** as President and **Sanjeev Mehra** as Secretary took over the proceedings.

The Kolkata Chapter currently has 127 members including 25 members as part of the Young Skål Club which was launched this year. Sec-

of 2017. "We want to create awareness to work together to enhance our vision, maximise networking opportunities and develop a responsible tourism industry. We want to focus our efforts on the National Congress 2018 in Kolkata for which we hope to welcome 600-750 members," says Mehra. The spirit of Poila Baisakh was celebrated

Principal Commercial Officer of US Consulate General Kolkata, Cory Wilcox, Management Officer, US Consulate General Kolkata, pianist Jennifer Heemstra, Pramode Bhandari, General Manager, The Park Kolkata as well as Sandeep Johri, General Manager, Novotel Kolkata Hotel Residences graced the occasion with their presence.

MTDC targets agri-tourism

Maharashtra tourism department is encouraging farmers to develop their lands for tourists looking for farm-stays, in keeping with its 'Mahabhraman Scheme'.



HAZEL JAIN

The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) recently organised a conference on National Agri Tourism on the occasion of the tenth World Agri Tourism Day in Mumbai. The objective was to create employment opportunities and boost investment in the agriculture sector that would encourage tourism. **Jaykumar Rawal**, Minister of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, was present at the conference and spoke about how farmers and other stakeholders can develop their skills and farms to attract more tourists looking for a rural, farm-stay experience.

The conference also touched upon MTDC's 'Mahabhraman Scheme' that showcases farmer's lifestyle and experiencing different activities like planting trees, plucking fruits and vegetables, bullock cart rides, etc. "The Department of Tourism also intends to set up a gov-



Jaykumar Rawal
Minister of Tourism
Government of Maharashtra

The Department of Tourism also intends to set up a government interface to cater to the needs of the agri-tour operators

ernment interface to cater to the needs of the agri-tour operators. This interface will co-ordinate and provide link with regional and local government bodies to boost employment opportunities and sustainability in the agricultural sector," Rawal revealed.

According to the minister, tourism is witnessing a reversal of trends wherein tourists from cities are looking to experience village life. Calling Maharashtra as the most urbanised state in India, he added that a lot of people didn't know where local tourist destinations like Panvel, Kolhapur and Alibaug are or where the coastal forts are, how farming in India is done, etc. He also acknowledged work being done by Govardhan Eco Village located in Palghar which is the only destination in Asia to be awarded by UNWTO this year. MTDC has also signed a MoU with Airbnb to open up such experiences for international and domestic tourists and promote these unique experiences ranging from ecotourism to safaris, tribal lifestyles and handicrafts.

New partnerships

MTDC has also signed a MoU with Airbnb to promote ecotourism, safaris, tribal lifestyle, handicrafts

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70,000 India arrivals in '17

Zhang Mingchi, Deputy Director General, Shandong Tourism Development Commission, aims to double the number of Indian arrivals to Shandong this year.



NISHA VERMA FROM SHANDONG

The Shandong region in Eastern China recently played host to Indian agents in association with Shandong Airlines, where they showcased major attractions of the region to the trade. Throwing light on its expectations from the India market, **Zhang Mingchi** says they received around 36,000 tourists from India in 2016, out of which half were business travellers and half leisure. The number of VFR travellers is only miniscule. However, Mingchi says they are adopting a number of promotional activities including Fam trips for the Indian trade.

"We have incentive policies for tour operators in the source markets. This year, we are enhancing the strength of the cooperation with the

tour operators. For example, if operators have chartered flights, we'll have subsidies for them. We also give incentives to the local operators in Shandong, depending on the business they are generating. We give incentives according to the number of tourists, especially on the increase over previous year. It's a good policy for Indian tour operators as well," he affirms.

Talking about the USP of the region, Mingchi says, "The climatic difference between India and Shandong is huge. We have four demarcated seasons and visitors can have different views in different seasons. Tourists can enjoy skiing and other such offerings during winters. In spring, we have a variety of blossoms across the region."

Mingchi believes that support from the travel trade and the right promotions, they would be able to score double the number of arrivals than last year. "We want to have



Zhang Mingchi
Deputy Director General, Shandong
Tourism Development Commission

We have incentive policies for tour operators in the source markets. This year, we are enhancing the strength of the cooperation

around 70,000 arrivals from India in 2017. This is achievable through our constant efforts. In October, I will pay an official visit to India and meet industry partners, and I hope by then there would already be a lot of Indian people visiting Shandong," he adds.

Twin properties in Gurugram

The Lemon Tree Hotel Company recently opened their twin properties—Lemon Tree and Red Fox Hotel in Sector-60, Gurugram.



TT BUREAU

With the opening of these twin hotels, Lemon Tree Hotel Company's inventory in Gurgaon is now 530 rooms. "The reason why we chose the location because the catchment area here is Golf Course Extension Road, Golf Course Road and Sohna Road, which are coming up in a big way. We've also put up one of the largest convention centres in the NCR region here, which will help us fill up the rooms. We can cater for weddings, parties, conferences, corporate events, as well as MICE. We've been in this city since 2004. All our hotels do an average occupancy of over 80 per cent, and thus, we are bullish about Gurugram," says **Vikramjit Singh**, President and Chief Revenue Officer.

While Lemon Tree is a mid-scale brand Red Fox is the economy brand, says Singh, adding that by putting two brands here instead of just one large inventory, the hotel group

can cater to different segments for the business. Singh says, "As against the average Indian occupancy of 60-61 per cent, Lemon Tree finished the year at about 76 per cent. The only way to grow fast is price increase and we are looking at some aggressive price increase in the coming year."

The hotel group has two under-construction properties in Mumbai and is opening new hotels in Udaipur, Kolkata and Shimla. "We are expanding our hotel in Alleppey and we are also looking at managing hotels in Gangtok, Siliguri, Jammu and Coimbatore. All these hotels will be up within the next two years. We already have three hotels in Hyderabad and we will be opening a fourth one there as well," he adds.

Singh informs that they share a strong relationship with the travel trade as well. "We have leisure properties in Goa, Alleppey, Aurlanga-



Vikramjit Singh
President and Chief Revenue Officer,
Lemon Tree Hotel Company

All our hotels do an average occupancy of over 80 per cent, and thus, we are bullish about Gurugram

bad, Dehradun and Jaipur, for which a major chunk of business comes through trade, and their contribution is increasing. We've seen almost 10-15 per cent growth in contribution from that segment (travel agents)," he added.

Agent incentive

Incentives are given according to the number of tourists, especially on the increase over last year

Minar Travels celebrates silver jubilee

Minar Travels (India) completes 25 years of its operation. On April 29, Minar celebrated this milestone with its team of 147 employees and their families. On May 5, the celebrations were extended to trade partners over 'Cocktails and Dinner' at Le Méridien, New Delhi. H. S. Duggal, Managing Director, Minar Group, also shared his vision and thanked industry professionals, hoteliers, suppliers and airlines, who gathered in great numbers, for their overwhelming support to make Minar what it is today.



Oman Air improvises guest experience

Oman Air has enabled the pre-purchase of extra luggage space and extra legroom, as well as lounge services at Muscat International Airport when booking on its website.



In order to provide more convenience for guests, Oman Air has enabled the pre-purchase of extra luggage and extra legroom. The front and exit row seats in economy and lounge services at the Muscat International Airport can also be purchased on its website www.omanair.com.

The new initiatives underline Oman Air's ongoing commitment to improving the travel experience for all the guests by removing higher



baggage charges, along with other initiatives. The airline previously addressed their baggage policy regarding checked baggage for all reservations in January 2017, with guests travelling in Economy Class allowed one piece of baggage of up to 30 kg. Guests travelling on Oman Air's Business or First Class are also allowed one piece of baggage of up to 30 kg, plus one additional piece of baggage of up to 20 kg. An additional 20kg bag can be purchased on pre-structured rates based on the guest's final destination. The rate varies from OMR 20-35 per 20 kg, depending on the destination of travel.

Whilst making bookings on Oman Air's website, guests can now purchase these additional services at a 20 per cent discount than the normal rates. The comfort of the guest enjoying extra legroom seats can be purchased in advance for OMR 5 for all flights between GCC Countries, Middle East, Africa and Indian

Quick fact

An additional 20 kg bag can be purchased on pre-structured rates based on the guest's final destination. The rate varies from OMR 20-35 per 20 kg, depending on the destination of travel

Sub-Continent and OMR 15 for flights to Europe and Asia. Guests departing from and transferring through Muscat Airport may purchase three hours of lounge access to Majan Lounge for OMR 10.

46th Skål Asian Area Congress in Bahrain



The 46th Skål Asian Area Congress was held in the Kingdom of Bahrain from May 12-15. This year marks the 45th year of the Skål Club of Bahrain and it hosted the Asian Area congress after a 17-year gap. The 2017 session was attended by members from Argentina, United Kingdom, USA, etc. The Congress took place at the Gulf Hotel and speakers at the conference included David Fisher and Robert Sohn.



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Around 70% of business from tour operators

After doing the groundwork for the Indian market, JA Resorts and Hotels is looking forward to a good season ahead and expects an increase in Indian numbers, especially for their property in the Maldives.



TT BUREAU

JA Resorts and Hotels are pioneers of hospitality in Dubai, with properties spanning the Indian Ocean in Seychelles and Maldives. Their flagship properties JA Jebel Ali Beach Hotel, located in the JA Jebel Ali Golf Resort, and JA Hatta Fort Hotel have raised the bar in the industry since its inception and continues to provide a unique blend

of comfort and casual luxury through its other properties.

On the backdrop of a slightly turbulent 2016, business for the organisation has considerably picked up in the first quarter this year, informs **David Thomson**, CEO, JA Resorts & Hotels. "It's been better so far and as business bounces back, we're continuing to grow as a company. From the Indian market, the

growth has been huge, especially for JA Manafaru Maldives where we've got a very good response."

Owing to the rising interest shown by Indian travellers, JA Resorts has increased its efforts to tap the market over the past year, adds **William Harley-Fleming**, Group Business Development Director - JA Resorts & Hotels and General Manager - JA Mana-

faru, Maldives. "We did a lot of work and took several trips to understand and develop the market which is crucial, because that directs our strategy. We've observed that May and June is the big travel period for Indians, so we're hoping to see an increase this year. We've already got a good number of bookings but we appreciate the fact that it's quite a last-minute market for the Maldives. In addition,

we have great chefs at the resort and have hosted a number of food critics so we're really gearing up for good numbers this year," he elaborates. The property even has a special Indian menu at one of their restaurants, a move that highlights the importance of the market for the organisation.

However, this wasn't always the case. Thomson

mentions that for long, India was quite an overlooked market with the more prominent ones like Europe and GCC getting the attention. Explaining what changed this perspective, he shares, "We noticed the number of people travelling to Dubai for weddings and this encouraged us to dive deeper and more aggressive into the Indian market. We even hosted a Holi celebration in JA Jebel



David Thomson
CEO
JA Resorts & Hotels

We noticed the number of people travelling to Dubai for weddings and this encouraged us to dive deeper and more aggressive into the Indian market. We even hosted a Holi celebration in JA Jebel Ali Golf Resort and Spa Dubai so we're very flexible with what we do

Ali Golf Resort and Spa Dubai so we're very flexible with what we do."

Currently, about 70 per cent of the business as a company still comes from tour operators as opposed to direct bookings, reveals Thomson. "For India especially, the country is huge and working with tour operators allows us the reach. It's a big market so we're going about it one step at a time to build the business.

Highlights

- JA Resorts' Maldives property has a special Indian menu at one of their restaurants
- Currently, about 70 per cent of the business for JA Resorts still comes from tour operators as opposed to direct bookings

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Hospitality Associate:



Minar enters luxury & MICE segments

In its 25th year of operation, Minar Travels' Managing Director **H.S. Duggal** is optimistic about the company's new MICE and luxury division ELBON and Vilasa, respectively, and says they are focusing on Asia this year.

TT BUREAU

Minar Travels has carved a niche for itself in the Indian tourism industry over the past 25 years. With a stronghold in inbound tourism, the group is also actively working for outbound tourism and airlines, and have further launched two new divisions as part of their growth plans.

One of the new segments—Vilasa—focuses on luxury travel and is aimed at providing the ultimate exclusive experience to travellers. Elaborating on the initiative, **H.S. Duggal**, Managing Director, Minar Travels, says, "We recently added Vilasa primarily to target the US market, and have received very good signs this holiday season. Of late, there has been a dip in the quality of tourists coming to India so we want to concentrate on the luxury travel segment. We have



H.S. Duggal
Managing Director
Minar Travels

Tourism in Argentina has not been doing all that well but the interest towards India was growing

also entered the MICE segment in a big way with ELBON, our division dedicated to meetings and conferences."

Deriving from modest beginnings, the organisation now

boasts of a global presence with the most recent addition in Argentina, and is also working with 11 airlines. Duggal says that evolution is key for expansion and adds that he is constantly looking at new markets where he can find an advantage. "Going to markets that have not been explored has been one of our USPs and has immensely helped us in our growth. Tourism in Argentina has not been doing all that well but the interest towards India was growing. This applies to other markets where we are present as well, like Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Mongolia, which have now turned out to be very successful markets."

However, he adds that the focus will be on Asia, owing to the boom in travel, with a concentrated approach on China and South Korea. "We also want to tap the South Ameri-

can market deeper, mainly Brazil and Mexico. Africa is another interesting market we want to enter since we are now already present in the historically important markets like the US, Europe and Russia," he elaborates.

With impending changes that will likely shake up the tourism industry, Duggal hopes that the GST will be favourable for the industry to thrive and expresses that the price factor will be crucial in either drawing or driving tourists away. He adds, "India cannot be outpriced over our competitors. Countries like Thailand is getting over 20 million visitors, and Singapore 60 million, because they've made their products very competitive. It should apply to India too. Additionally, if the problem of touts and cleanliness is tackled well, I feel it will greatly help in tourism's growth."

Shandong hosts Indian agents

Shandong Airlines along with China National Tourism Office New Delhi, organised a Fam trip for Indian agents to Shandong region in China, where they explored the airline as well as the cities of Qingdao, Qufu, Tai'an (Mount Tai) and Jinan. **Wang Shuai**, General Representative, India, Shandong Airlines, India and **Tian Xin**, Director, China National Tourist Office accompanied the group.





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Agents discover Ras Al Khaimah

The Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) roadshow held in Delhi recently saw more than 100 travel agents and tour operators come together to meet buyers and sellers who were present at the event, which included DMC, airlines, hotels and attractions.



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Skålleagues raise the roof at Skål Ball

An annual event hosted by Skål Delhi Chapter, this year's Skål Ball took place in Le Meridien, New Delhi, where the industry's crème-de-la-crème let their hair down over cocktails and aperitifs. The National Committee members graced the occasion from different parts of the country and added an extra dose of appeal.



Aiming for a stronger market

The dynamic travel industry of South India has maintained a competitive advantage over other Asian countries owing to its unique tourism product offerings. South India Travel Award 2017 winners share their views with TRAVTALK on the ever-evolving aspects of tourism industry in the region.



NISHA VERMA

► Gallery of Legends – K.C. Chandrahasan

Embrace technology to enhance products

The travel industry in South India and for that matter in the entire country has changed tremendously, points out, **K.C. Chandrahasan**, Vice Chairman, Kerala Travels Interserve. He believes that one radical change that the industry has seen is the advent of technology in tourism and hospitality sector. "It gives a lot of scope, both constructively and otherwise. Today, one needs to know what is happening in the world. Earlier one was just selling products that they had but now they should know where they have to source these products from and then sell to customers. It is like working in a stock exchange, instead of running a shop," says Chandrahasan. He adds that there is a need for professionals, who are equipped to plan their strategies on a daily basis.



► DDP Trailblazer – M. P. Purushothaman

Negative impact of liquor ban on hotels

The hospitality industry in South India is in a very bad shape right now especially after the liquor ban announced by the Supreme Court, informs **M.P. Purushothaman**, Chairman and Managing Director, Empee Group.

"Most of the hotels are suffering because of the recent Supreme Court verdict of prohibiting sale of alcohol on national highway and even state highways. Owing to this reason, so many hotels in the region have been affected. Even our hotel-Hilton Chennai-is negatively affected and the revenue has suffered due to this ban." Puroshothaman further explains that tourism is on a growth trajectory in South India, which was not the case earlier. However, these type of decisions hamper the growth of the industry.



► Best Adventure Destination – South African Tourism

South Indian leisure market going strong

South African Tourism is very active in the South India market as a large percentage of their travellers are from this region of the country.

Hanneli Slabber, Country Head-India, South African Tourism, says, "We do a lot of work in South India. A vast majority of our leisure market comes from South India." She further informs that in July this year, the destination is very excited to bring back its classroom training programme for the travel partners-Learn SA-which will travel to 17 cities in India. "Tier-II and Tier-III cities will be a major part of this programme. South India is a massive market for us and we will be training agents from here as well to sell South Africa better to a wider audience," adds Slabber.



► Best Airline-International – SilkAir

Promising business potential

SilkAir has maximum business presence in South India. Out of the eight cities of operations, seven of them are present in South India. These cities are Trivandrum, Kochi, Bengaluru, Coimbatore, Vishakhapatnam and Hyderabad. **Anjo Jose Kandathil**, Head PR & Marketing, SilkAir, India, says, "We have been predominantly present in South India region. Thus, it forms a very important market for us. Now, we have plans in the pipeline to expand our network in North India as well. However, as of now, South India remains the most important market for us in India, as we have maximum business here."



► Entrepreneur of the Year – Riyaz U. C

MICE, leisure face setback

SpiceLand Holidays promotes South India as a tourist destination through their unique packages. "We have been selling packages for South India as well as Sri Lanka for many years now. However, the feedback these days for the region has not been very good, especially with recent issues like liquor ban. Thus, everybody is struggling to revive from these setbacks," points out **Riyaz U. C.**, Managing Director, SpiceLand Holidays. He further elaborates that the ban on alcohol for hotels within 500 metres of state and national highways has affected MICE business largely. "MICE is a major segment of travel especially for big hotels with capacity to host large events, conferences and meetings. While leisure is still holding up to this ban, MICE business has decreased. This is a big challenge for everyone, whether it's a hotelier, tour operator or anyone else associated with the trade," adds Riyaz.



► Best B2B Travel Portal – Travel Boutique Online

Focus on Kerala

Travel Boutique Online (TBO) has 25,000 customers and 45 offices across India. It is India's largest B2B travel portal, enabling its partners to serve their customers efficiently, with the right pricing and inventory. "South India has always been a great market for us. In fact, it has been the third largest market for Travel Boutique Online, after North and West," says **Arish Khan**, Vice-President-Sales (India), TBO. He believes that the tourism and hospitality industry is on the growth trajectory in South India and various destinations that were not so popular earlier are now picking up well. "The region is picking up really well. Our focus is on Kerala and we hope to see good results in the coming months for sure," adds Khan.



A Rendez-vous in Canada

The 41st edition of Rendez-vous Canada (RVC), Canada's premier tourism marketplace, broke all attendance records with close to 1,840 delegates attending the event at the BMO Centre from May 9-12, 2017. The four-day annual conference saw close to 29,000 face-to-face business appointments between Canadian sellers and tourism buyers from across the globe.



India on Qatar Airways' radar

Among the various business development plans of Qatar Airways, Group Chief Executive **H.E. Akbar Al Baker** shares that they will be starting a five-star airline in India. Excerpts from the interview.

SHEHARA RIZLY

QHow is your investment in India coming along?

We have not yet made a formal application, but have sounded out the authorities and they are very receptive. They have passed their new policy and Qatar Airways will take advantage of this opportunity. Our investment in India is to serve the Indian people and not to serve anybody else.



H.E. Akbar Al Baker
Group Chief Executive
Qatar Airways

We will create jobs, provide better connectivity and I promise a five star product which will cater the financial abilities of every Indian individual who wants to do air travel. In a few weeks the application will be submitted. It will be a joint application from Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) and Qatar Airways. It will have an Indian name for the carrier and consist of 100 aircraft. We will adhere as per all Indian rules and regulations.

QWhat are the current challenges you are facing in the aviation industry?

Whatever the challenges the industry faces and in particular Qatar Airways faces, we will continue to grow and expand our presence as we have been very successful. You already noticed that while all other airlines are shrinking and reducing capacity Qatar Airways is ordering more aircraft and announcing new destinations. We see a lot of opportunity in every economic downturn and at Qatar Airways we are very smart at tapping those opportunities and this is exactly what we are doing all the time. Very soon, we will be announcing a record profit, which will be the highest Qatar Airways has ever made

We are short of nearly 11 aircraft which have been

delayed in the process. If those aircraft are delivered all the new 26 destinations will be fulfilled before the end of the Qatar Airways financial year ending in March 2018.

Ancillary, the way forward

In an effort to stay relevant in the industry, **Manoj Samuel**, Director, Riya Travels, is providing ancillary services to clients apart from ticketing.

TT BUREAU

Being in the travel industry for four decades, Riya Travels is an established name. **Manoj Samuel**, says, "We have created a bond with our clients, who trust us to deliver the best services and we do just that. Thus, our experience and credibility in the market is one of our USPs. We are one of the very few companies to actually provide end-to-end travel solu-

tions. Lastly, we have a wide network as we are spread across the globe."

Samuel reveals that conventionally, 80 per cent of their revenue came from ticketing. However, he insists that future of this industry lies in offering ancillary services like travel insurance, foreign exchange, visa, airport assistance and many more. "We are encouraging our employees to take an initiative and to start cross



Manoj Samuel
Director
Riya Travels

selling. That's an uncharted territory," he adds.

The year 2016 turned out to be quite fruitful for Riya Travels. "2016 has been a year where the number (turn-over) has grown and there has also been a realignment in the internal structure. In the coming year, we are expecting a great deal of growth in our other ancillary services. We are also promoting Riya connect so as to penetrate smaller business like queue ticketing via our online portal," he informs.

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Korea World Travel Fair (KOFTA)	Seoul	1-4
IATA AGM 2017	Cancun, Mexico	4- 6
ILTM Asia	Shanghai, China	5-8
The Meetings Show	Olympia Grand London, UK	13-15
International Travel Expo (ITE)	HKCEC, Hong Kong	15-18
Connections Meetings	Quito, Ecuador	18-21
Beijing international Tourism Expo (BITE)	China National Convention Centre Beijing, China	23-25
Digital Travel Summit	London	27-28

JULY 2017

Arabian Travel Awards	Dubai	4
Travel Wedding Show	Jaipur	8-9
Global Panorama Showcase (GPS)	Ahmedabad	13-15
IITM	Chennai	14-16
GBTA Convention	Boston, USA	15-19
Global Panorama Showcase (GPS)	Chandigarh	20-22
IITM	Bengaluru	21-23
India Travel Awards East	Guwahati	26
Global Panorama Showcase (GPS)	Kolkata	27-29

AUGUST 2017

Global Panorama Showcase (GPS)	Kochi	3-5
Global Panorama Showcase (GPS)	Pune	10-12
ACTE Conference	Tokyo, Japan	22-23
La Cita	Florida, USA	29-31

SEPTEMBER 2017

Travel Technology Show	New Delhi	2-3
IATO Convention	Bhubaneswar	7-10
Busan International Travel Fair	Busan, South Korea	8-11
OTOAI Convention	Ras Al Khaimah	12-15
PATA Travel Mart 2017	Macau	13-15
FHRAI Convention	Bengaluru	14-16
JATA Tourism Expo	Tokyo, Japan	21-24
IITM	Mumbai	22-24

OCTOBER 2017

CAPA-ACTE Global Summit	London, UK	11-13
TB Asia 2017	Marina Bay Sands Singapore	25-27
Connections Wellbeing	Portugal	29 Oct. 1-Nov

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



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Pride Hotel

Pune
Pride Group has elevated **Atul Upadhyay** to Vice President Operations. He was earlier serving the hotel group as Associate Vice President. A hospitality veteran with a career spanning 23 years across different hospitality companies and eight years with Pride Hotels, he had previously been associated with Sarovar Hotels, AccorHotels and IHG Group. He will be looking after the operations of all owned and managed hotels of Pride Group & Business development. He will also be responsible for implementation of new strategies to give an edge to the Pride Hotels.



RezLive.com

UAE
Zaheer Abbas Jedly has been appointed as National Sales Head - India for RezLive.com (A Product of Travel Designer Group), an online B2B global reservation system. In his previous assignments he has played key roles in sales/ business development in esteemed organizations based out of Middle East & India. With his proficiency in sales, business generation, client management and people management he aims to take RezLive.com platform to the next level by scaling up business and client management in India.



Sovereign Hill

Mumbai
Connect2India Marketing Services has appointed **Kajal Somaiya** as the Sales & Marketing Representative for Sovereign Hill in India. She is a freelance travel marketing and PR professional, currently working with Namale Resort & Spa as their India Representative, Fiji since April 2016. Somaiya has over 11 years of experience in the travel and tourism industry, having worked as Tourism Fiji's India Representative, as Media Manager for the Italian Tourism Board in India, and as Assistant Marketing Manager for the French Tourism Board in India.



Hyatt Place Rameswaram

Madurai
Utsa Majumdar has joined Hyatt Place Rameshwaram, Madurai as the General Manager. With her she brings 13 years of experience and prior to this she was assistant general manager at Hyatt Place Pune and Hyatt Place Mumbai. She Joined Hyatt Regency Kolkata in 2004 as front office associate, moved on to Hyatt Regency Pune & Park Hyatt Goa Resort & Spa. In 2012, she moved on to become a part of the pre-opening team of the first Hyatt Place Brand in India at Hampi and then Hinjawadi, Pune in 2014. She is a graduate of the NIPS school of Hotel Management.



The Chancery Hotels

Bangalore
Simarjeet Singh joins The Chancery Pavilion Hotel, Bengaluru as the General Manager. His career spans close to two decades of diverse experience in the hospitality industry. His previous assignment was with Hilton Garden Inn, New Delhi. He has held eminent positions with renowned brands like Radisson Blu, Park Plaza and Intercontinental to name a few. In this new role he will provide leadership and strategic direction to the hotel team and will focus on maximizing revenues and creating personalised guest experiences.



Treebo

New Delhi
Treebo has appointed former engineering head of Flipkart, **Maulik Shukla** as its Vice President of Engineering. In his new role, Shukla will be working closely with the founders to build and manage a top-notch tech infrastructure as well as work towards improving the guest experience. Maulik, who holds an MBA degree from Walter A. Haas School of Business, Berkeley, California and has pursued his MS from IIT Chicago, comes with more than one decade of experience in leadership, management, planning and execution. Prior to Treebo, Shukla was associated with Flipkart as the Director of Engineering.



Hyatt Regency Delhi

New Delhi
Rohit Srivastava as joins Hyatt Regency Delhi as Director of Food & Beverage. With 14 years of experience in hospitality industry, he has worked with The Oberoi Rajvilas at various positions and is with Hyatt Regency Delhi since nine years. Srivastava's career began with The Oberoi Rajvilas, Jaipur in 2003. Having done his diploma in hotel management and catering technology from College of Hospitality and Tourism Studies, Lucknow, Srivastava has a keen interest in guest relationship management and food and beverage marketing.



Novotel Mumbai Juhu Beach

Mumbai
AccorHotels announced the appointment of **Sonali Merchant** as the new Director of Talent & Culture for Novotel Mumbai Juhu Beach. In her role, Merchant will be responsible for leading and overseeing the day to day operations of the Talent & Culture Department. Having completed her education in Montreux, Switzerland, this hotel operations professional has worked with some of the most renowned hotels which includes Novotel Ahmedabad, ibis Pune, ibis Mumbai Airport, and Taj Blue Diamond.



Having spent 15 years in the industry, **Deepak Sharma** joins Hyatt Place Rameshwaram, Madurai and as their Director of Sales. His previous assignment was with Le-Meridien Hotels and prior to that he has worked with Westin Sohna-Gurgaon Resort and Spa and IHHR Hospitality. Sharma is a graduate of JNV University, Jodhpur, and has completed his MBA in marketing at Sikkim Manipal University.

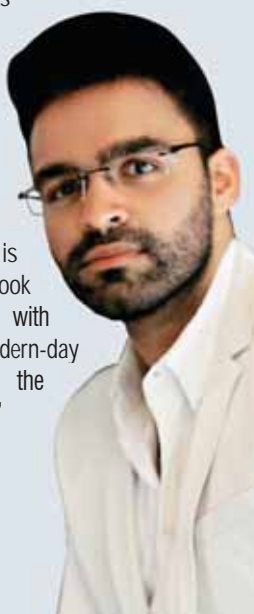


TALKing People

For **Birju C Gariba**, CEO and Executive Director, Platinum World Group, a daily dose of music, sports and comedy movies keeps his stress levels in check and he has travelled to over 50 countries. "Being a part of the travel fraternity has its perks in the form of travel across the globe and especially so when you are positioned in the luxury segment and this usually keeps me stress-free. However, with perks also come jerks who do make things difficult." Gariba finds travelling to be the source of his inspiration and believes it is the greatest teacher.



Gaurav P. Shetty, Managing Director, Goldfinch Hotels, takes inspiration from his father. "He built this empire in the last three decades. Being from a small town, he struggled and won every challenge that came his way. He is the definition of a 'self-made man'." Shetty's mantra is continuous improvement in a competitive environment and daring to do things differently. His favourite holiday destination is London. "I love the outlook of the city. It is filled with historical and modern-day attractions fit for even the most frugal of travellers."



Nishant Agarwal, General Manager, Westin Pune Koregaon Park, believes that travel enriches your perspective toward life. "As a kid, I was fortunate enough to travel extensively and I make sure I do the same along with my family at least twice a year," he says. When asked about any favourite travel destinations he said, "I have no particular preference in terms of any destination. Though hill stations have always been a favourite, considering my roots are from Shimla." He enjoys playing squash and when it comes to comfort food there's nothing other than dal makhani and butter chicken for Agarwal.



Exploring the lesser known in Turkey

OTOAI in collaboration with TITC and Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Republic of Turkey, organised a five day EduCon, exploring the Muğla region in Turkey. Approximately 45 member tour operators indulged in the various offerings of the region to learn about it and offer it to their discerning clients in India.



State Express celebrates addition of new luxury fleet of vehicles



State Express, a renowned travel group established in 1980, recently inducted a new fleet of luxury vehicles comprising of Mercedes, Volkswagen, Audi, and Jaguar to satisfy needs of all its partners including Embassies, UN and other international organisations, corporates and events. The company displayed its newly acquired fleet at Essex Farms to travel industry professionals over cocktails and dinner.

OBITUARY

Alok Shivapuri



Principal
Institute of Hotel Management, Catering & Nutrition, Pusa, New Delhi

Alok Shivapuri, Principal, Institute of Hotel Management, Catering & Nutrition, Pusa, New Delhi passed away on May 15, 2017, at 1.45 pm after a brief illness.

DDP Publications condoles with the hospitality and tourism fraternity and the bereaved family. Shivapuri was a senior academican and hotelier with more than 35 years of experience in managing academics, administration, finance, operations and personnel at the institute and hotels. His untimely demise comes as a huge loss to the industry.

Expressing grief, S. M. Shervani, EC Member, FHRAI, said, "He was an excellent educationist, administrator under whom IHM Pusa became a premier hotel management institute of the country. He was a good and humble man, a very good friend and my batchmate. It's a huge personal loss."



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Carlson plans big for India

Park Plaza Noida has announced its rebranding as Radisson Noida, the first Radisson hotel to be inaugurated in Delhi-NCR. On this occasion, we speak to **Raj Rana**, Chief Executive Officer, South Asia, Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, about this rebranding, Radisson Red, and much more.



ANUPRIYA BISHNOI

Q Tell us about the rebranded hotel, Radisson Noida.

Spread over 42,000 sq. ft., Radisson Noida features 88 contemporary rooms with modern amenities. The revitalised rooms are bright and modern, complemented with LED TVs, loungers, and new upholstered furnishing. Business Class, a new room category, has been introduced for corporate travellers who can enjoy benefits such as complimentary drinks in the lounge bar. The first Radisson hotel to be inaugurated in Delhi-NCR, the property offers an array of dining options including an all-day-dining restaurant, The Creative Kitchen, a relaxed dining venue located on the lobby level serving international cuisine. The Great Kabab Factory, an award-winning specialty restaurant, is located on the rooftop delighting guests with authentic mouth-watering kebabs, prepared in various styles. NI-Hao features a culinary journey through South East Asia where chefs prepare pan-Asian cuisines using authentic spices and ingredients specially brought in from different regions of Asia. Ethyl, located on the lobby level, offers an array of international spirits and wines, the perfect venue to unwind and enjoy a drink or two. The hotel's pastry shop, Cakewalk, offers a wide selection of home-made cakes, pastries, and chocolates.

Q What does the hotel have to offer in terms of recreational and MICE facilities?

The Sky Spa & Salon at Radisson Noida promises an exclusive and reinvigorating experience with a range of massages and herbal treatments to revitalise your body, mind, and soul. Its facilities also feature couple therapy rooms, a salon, steam rooms, a sauna, and two single therapy rooms. A fully-equipped fitness centre at the rooftop features high-tech equipment and changing facilities with steam and sauna rooms.

Radisson Noida boasts of over 4,360 sq. ft. of flexible meetings and events space that can be split into four separate ballrooms for smaller events or combined into one large space for functions. With this repositioning, we think the hotel is better placed for success, particularly in

the corporate segment. The hotel is located in a corporate hub and we are hoping that this new brand will bring in more business as it rightfully deserves after the renovation and rebranding.

Q What was the rationale behind the rebranding?

We felt that being in such a strong corporate market, the demand for upscale hotels is higher and Radisson is

under construction in Mohali, Punjab. It's a beautiful hotel that we expect will open in the first quarter of 2018. We are exploring good deals all across the country and we do believe that it will be a very successful brand because the cost of investment in building a Radisson Red is less than that of a typical upscale hotel. Another reason is that the hotel has been planned in such a way that the cost of operating it is com-



“We felt that being in such a strong corporate market, the demand for upscale hotels is higher and Radisson is strongly positioned in this upscale segment. It is a popular brand that people are already aware of.”

Raj Rana

Chief Executive Officer, South Asia
Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group

strongly positioned in this upscale segment. It is a popular brand that people are already aware of.

Q Do elaborate on the group's expansion plans.

India remains one of the strongest markets for Carlson where we have 84 hotels in operation and 140 hotels in the pipeline. We are opening a new hotel every six weeks on an average and we sign a hotel every four weeks, which is a good run-rate. With this run-rate, we will easily hit 170 hotels by 2020, in India. The India growth story remains very strong as the cost of connectivity continues to decline. This creates more demand in secondary tertiary markets where Park Inn by Radisson and Country Inn and Suites are two strong mid-scale brands, positioned to capture more market share and provide good facilities to travellers.

Q When will India get its Radisson Red?

Radisson Red is the newest addition to our portfolio. The first flagship is

paratively lesser. For instance, F&B services are all on a single plate and the concept of multi-kitchens does not exist. A lot of planning has been done to ensure ease of operations, thereby resulting in better margins for investors and success for us.

Q The year has so far been quite challenging for the industry. What do you see as the way forward?

If I look at India where I have been for some time, I see Carlson as a long-term player in the region. In every country, there are always some blips and some road bumps along the way and India is no different in that sense. The initiatives are, of course, commendable. There is inconvenience in the short-run but nothing that can't be overcome. If you now look at the effects of demonetisation, they're passé. Today, nobody is even thinking about it. On the contrary, it has contributed more to transparency of transactions and increased confidence in the Indian market for the purpose of real estate investments. ↴

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All about bespoke experiences

The second edition of Travel Experiential Show-Beyond Luxury kicked off from April 8-9, 2017 at Sheraton New Delhi Hotel. The show brings together exhibitors and buyers in a B2B speed-meeting format over two days to transact business with an aim to attract the High Network Individuals (HNI) of India.



ANKITA SAXENA

The 2nd Travel Experiential Show was inaugurated by His Excellency Alphonsus Stoelinga, Ambassador of Netherlands to India, Bhutan and Nepal in Delhi. Other dignitaries present at the show included Tekla Maira, Director Luxury Sales-India, AccorHotels Luxe, Neha Lidder, Marketing Head, DLF Emporio Mall and Shahnawaz Shah, Manager-Marketing Tourism, SKICC, Srinagar. The show saw a total of nearly 1,800 meetings conducted among

27 exhibitors and nearly 60 buyers. Representatives from hotels, travel agencies, cruises, railways, tourism boards, etc. met tour operators and travel agents from across Tier-I, Tier-II and Tier-III markets under one roof to network and explore business opportunities for the experiential and luxury segment of travel.

According to Punam Singh, Associate, Pacific Leisure Group, particular attention was paid to the category and selection of buyers invited for the show. She says, "The buyer and exhibitor mix we received this year

has worked out exceptionally well. We named the show as experiential instead of luxury because our feedback from the last show was that luxury means different things for different people but at the end of the day, it is largely experiential in nature." Singh further elaborates that all the Travel Shows are bespoke in the sense that one gets focused interaction time between buyers and sellers which is not really a norm in most of the other trade shows in India and allows for greater retention of interaction for future purposes. "We have also seen that most of the meetings result in

business conversion either at the show or within a year," she adds.

Sarika Bhambhani Rawal, General Manager, DDP Exhibitions, says, "I would like to thank the trade for their overwhelming response. The meetings were conducted smoothly and the exhibitors found this exclusive closed door B2B format very helpful and useful for business. According to their feedback, they were more than content with the quality of buyers." She further informed that a Travel Wedding Show is scheduled for July 8-9, 2017, in Jaipur.

J&K paves the road to luxury



Shahnawaz Shah
Marketing Manager
SKICC, J&K Tourism

Jammu and Kashmir Tourism department participated in the second edition of Travel Experiential Show to showcase its various products and services that can cater to the luxury and experiential segment of travellers from India. "I believe that Jammu and Kashmir is a brand in itself and I challenge everyone to name a product or service that we do not offer in this destination. Last year, we participated in this show and the kind of response we got, the seriousness of the buyers

and subsequent queries which we received for the destination, encouraged us to participate yet again. This show is a very useful platform to showcase various products that a destination has to offer. It also helps us to understand what buyers may need from our end to help grow tourist arrivals to the state. This year we are showcasing the luxury products which I believe is deeply connected to the experience a traveller has when they take a holiday to Jammu and Kashmir,"

says Shahnawaz Shah, Marketing Manager — SKICC, Jammu and Kashmir Tourism.

As luxury is subjective to every traveller, Shah explains the houseboat experience, gondola ride in Gulmarg, Kashmir's traditional folk art, crafts, music and cuisine are all a part of the luxurious experience a traveller looks for. He elaborates, "We are the country's best golf destination with golf courses on a par with international standards. We

cater to the MICE segment and have developed state-of-the-art convention and meeting facilities in the state. Apart from this, we have Asia's largest tulip garden and we are expanding it to become the largest in the world soon."

Shah further adds that the state is investing funds to the tune of ₹24,000 crore for the development of tourism circuits. Also, all the projects that are undertaken by the state tourism department are eco-friendly and no tampering with nature is allowed. This keeps the destination authentic and very natural while simultaneously providing the best of the products

and services. "We have been attending major international and domestic trade shows to inform travel agents and partner with them to grow the destination," says Shah.

In 2016, nearly 13 lakh tourists visited Jammu and Kashmir despite initial tension in the valley, which is around three lakh more than the turnout of visitors in the state in 2015 according to official figures of the state tourism department. Around 12,99,112 tourists, both foreign and domestic, visited the state last year, compared to 9,27,815 tourists in 2015, and out of them, 12,74,596 were domestic and 24,516 were foreign tourists.

“I believe that Jammu and Kashmir is a brand in itself and I challenge everyone to name a product or service that we do not offer in this destination. This show is a very useful platform to showcase various products that a destination has to offer.”

Travel Experiential Show

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Speed Meetings

Focused on experiential travel

The second Travel Experiential Show gave the exclusive list of exhibitors and buyers an opportunity for focussed, B2B speed meetings and gather knowledge to grow the existing luxury and experiential market.

Exhibitors

AccorHotels Luxe



Tekla Maira
Director Luxury Sales-India

“The show was a whirlwind of meetings and we got a chance to meet buyers from cities beyond Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata. The Tier-II and Tier-III cities are the next growing markets and we are targeting them very carefully. Apart from this the destination wedding segment is a growing one. We have had weddings at destinations like Baku in Azerbaijan and Barcelona which shows that travellers are open to suggestions and are moving beyond nearby destinations.”

Akaryn Hotel Group



Keshwar Bhagat
Director-Sales and Marketing-India

“Akaryn Hotel Group is a Thailand-based hospitality management company, dedicated to offering discerning travellers highly stylised experiences. As part of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World, the Group manages an exclusive collection of boutique resort brands across Southeast Asia. We currently have six hotels under our portfolio. Each property and brand under Akaryn has something unique to offer and is distinct.”

RARE India



Shoba Mohan
Founder-Partner

“We are probably the only collection of hotels in India. The reason we thought this would be a great forum for us is that I feel the outbound segment, when compared to the domestic segment, has a very loyal customer base and especially the high-end segment falls back on the tour operator for ideas, which means they would also ask them for properties in India. This is what we are leveraging on and some of the agents we met already knew about us while the rest are very promising buyers.”

Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle & Anantara Kalutara Resort



Shannon Creado
Area Director of Sales and Marketing

“We have showcased two Anantara properties in Sri Lanka — Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle and Anantara Kalutara Resort. Both these properties are fairly new; Peace Haven is a year old and Kalutara is only a few months old. We have seen Sri Lanka grow as a luxury destination, especially with the new brands coming in and also because today's traveller is evolved, and Sri Lanka caters to that.”

The Oberoi Hotels



Vikas Sharma
Assistant Vice President - Sales (Travel Trade)

“This show allows us to enhance our reach and distribution to the corners of the country. The show gave us a mix of travel agents from Punjab, Gujarat, Kolkata, Chennai and other parts of India and we were able to showcase our products, the most recent ones being The Oberoi Sukhvilas Resort & Spa in Chandigarh and The Oberoi Beach Resort Al Zorah in Ajman. Indians have the highest disposable income in the world and shows like these are very important to reach the retailers in smaller parts of the country.”

Cruise Professionals



Gaurav Sharma
Regional Manager-Business Development

“We represent five cruising brands in India, namely Cunard, Princess Cruises, P&O Cruises — UK, Hurtigruten and Pandaw. We participated for the first time, the 10-minute slot given to each meeting is a very focused way of discussing the product on offer. We offer sailing products to Alaska, the Mediterranean, Northern Europe, Australia, New Zealand; coastal sailings in Norway and more itineraries based on seasonality.”

Culture Fox



Nikhil Jain
Co-founder-Business and Strategy

“We participated in this show because we have a unique experiential product and our agenda was to meet like-minded people. Culture Fox was launched last year and we provide a new take on travel using art experiences. We work with art institutions and independent artists at particular locations and create travel experiences around it. We organise basic-level introductory workshops and other creative activities on one or a combination of genres like music, theatre, fine arts, visual arts, dance etc. We are working in five countries — Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Belgium and Switzerland, and are hoping to increase our portfolio. We have seen that new-age Indian families with high disposable incomes are looking for such unique experiences.”

Destination Canada



Pooja Sabharwal
Account Director-India

“We have participated in this show for the second time. Last year, after the show, we received an overwhelming response for Destination Canada and this has only encouraged us to come back again and participate here. It is amazing to meet all our travel partners under one roof. Having high-impact, power-packed meetings with the travel partners enables us to explain the product in detail and also know what the buyers' requirements are from the tourism board, so that we can work accordingly to win more tourists to our destination. We have discussed various high-end luxury products in Canada that are suitable for the Indian market and hope to transact business with the partners soon.”

Premier Hotels of Asia - The Chatwal, New York



Karan Singh
Joint Managing Director and Co-founder

“This is a very planned show which offers us a platform to showcase our client's hotel to the relevant travel partners from our industry. The structured manner of the meetings enabled us to have relevant and effective discussions. Also, the buyers were thoughtfully put together keeping in mind people who actually specialise in and support this segment and the spread of buyers was from key centres of luxury travel as well as from emerging centres of affluence in India. I believe that as wealth in India is growing at 20 per cent Y-o-Y, it is only a matter of time that the luxury travel segment will also catch up and witness a double-digit growth.”

German National Tourist Office (GNT0)



Radhika Krishnan
Head-Sales & Marketing (India)

“We are promoting Germany as a destination for smart luxury to a wide range of travellers. Smart luxury is one of our core themes this year which we define as Michelin star restaurant experiences, accommodations in palaces and castles at value-for-money prices. Our January figures have shown good growth which encourages us to push the destination further in the India market. Leisure as a travel segment has always been great for Germany with other segments like FIT, business and honeymooners. The main agenda to attend shows like these is to meet a new set of people and this platform gives us an opportunity to network with not only the new buyers but also new suppliers in the market.”

Take a GLIMPSE



Holland Tourism



Sonia Prakash
Asst. General Manager

“It has been a fantastic experience for us at the show. Sometimes, as a tourism board, it becomes very difficult to travel to all parts of the country to meet, inform and educate travel partners, but at this show, a commendable job has been done to bring in a pool of buyers from every nook and corner of the country. Holland received around 1,30,000 Indian arrivals last year registering 30 per cent growth over 2015. From India, we are focussing on the luxury segment, destination weddings, premium incentive and MICE travel.”

ITC Hotels



Gagan Katyal
Sales Manager

“With more than 100 hotels in over 70 destinations, ITC's hotel group operates under four distinct brands: ITC Hotels- The Luxury Collection at the luxury end; WelcomHotels in the 5-star segment; Fortune in the mid-market to up-scale segment and WelcomHeritage in the heritage leisure segment. 11 ITC Hotels have been co-branded with Starwood's Luxury Collection in India and each hotel is an archetype of the ethos of the region it represents, offering discerning travellers exceptional, indigenous and collectable experience.”

Munich Tourism



Minoti Gupta
Sales Manager

“This is the second time we have participated in this Travel Experiential Show and have received a heartening response from the buyers for Munich. The mix of buyers received at the show covered the expanse of the country and allowed us to meet them under one roof. Munich is a perfect venue for business events and caters to leisure travellers as well. At the show, we have showcased the various experiences that one can indulge in Munich and we feel it will resonate well amongst the Indian travellers looking for unique holidays.”

Department of Tourism, Philippines

“This travel show has been instrumental for us to showcase the luxury and experiential aspects of the Philippines to a new set of buyers. The buyers were very interactive and their interest in the destination was very encouraging for us. Besides luxurious destinations like El Nido and Palawan, we also showcased newer places like Clark, Davao and Cagayan de Oro. The Philippines has resonated well with the Indian travellers and participation in such travel shows helps us drive our awareness campaigns better.”



Pooja Jain
Account Director-India

Premier Hotels of Asia-Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group

“We have been participating in the show since its inception and it has proved to be very useful as we get to meet our clients from across India at one platform, which is not physically possible. This year, we got to interact with buyers from Ludhiana, Chandigarh, Kolkata, Kanpur, Lucknow, Ahmedabad etc. The Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group is a 5-star, upscale luxury chain of hotels, with 29 hotels in 25 countries. We are introducing this product in the Indian market with all its experiential elements.”



Aakriti Batra
Sales and Marketing Representative

Explora

“The show allowed us to meet new buyers whom we have not approached yet. Shows like these make life easy as we can meet all travel partners under one roof. We also know that these buyers have good luxury business as they have been filtered. Explora is a travel representation company which was launched just six months ago, specialising in luxury travel. Currently, we represent two properties in the Maldives – Hideaway Beach Resort & Spa Maldives and Lily Beach Resort & Spa at Huvahendhoo. We are also in talks with luxury hotel chains in Europe, USA and Dubai.”



Karishma Kazi
Managing Partner

Anantara-Naladhu Maldives



Treshaan Bongso
Sales Executive

“It has been a pleasure to be a part of Travel Experiential Show. Till now we were only focusing on Tier-I and Tier-II cities but this show gave us a platform to meet travel agents from other cities across India. Compared to last year, this year we have seen a massive growth of almost 40 per cent from India to the Maldives. Anantara has four resorts in the Maldives, which are upscale luxury properties. For the Indian market, the three-four night packages are very popular.”

Sahara Star Hospitality



Lalit Khurana
Manager - Aamby Valley City

“The show is one of the best platforms to meet and network with a variety of buyers from across the country and know what the buyers are looking for. It's very well organised, however, 10 minutes per meeting is too short, we need around 20 minutes to explain the product better. Aamby Valley is the first planned hill city. It is different from other luxury products as we have adventure zones, water zones, our own airport, destination wedding venues and even MICE facilities. We have recently also seen FIT travellers visiting the property.”

Sun Siyam Resorts



Tanushree Joshi
Regional Sales and Marketing Manager-India and Australia

“We have been exhibiting at the travel show before and every year it becomes better. The show has been very successful as we closed two MICE leads and received bookings for FIT travel during the course of the show itself. Like previous times, this year too we have had a very good response from the buyers and the show provided us with an opportunity to meet new buyers from across the country. We are showcasing four properties of Sun Siyam Resorts, three in Maldives and one in Sri Lanka.”

The Deccan Odyssey

“Deccan Odyssey is one of India's finest luxury trains which follows the legacy of princely sojourns of travelling. It's the only luxury train that covers four states in India. Each journey on the Deccan Odyssey is an exploration of India's diversity and exotic locales, showcasing the opulence and extravagance of the palaces, traditions and culinary wonders. Journeys include visit to a UNESCO heritage site, superlative vineyard, palace residence, beaches and backwaters etc.”



Nidhi Gopal
Senior General Manager-Sales

The Lux Hotels

“We provide services to the member hotels in terms of creating awareness and incremental business for them. We connect them to international operators in the MICE segment or special interest group operators etc. and offer digital connect. A show is successful for us when we get to meet new clients and in those terms, this show is much more focused. We were able to meet new buyers with whom we could connect later for business. For the last six months, we have seen a growth in the destination wedding market from India.”



Bhupesh Kumar
Director

Corinthia Hotels

“The two properties showcased at the show, The Meydan Hotel and Bab Al Shams Desert Resort and Spa, are part of the Corinthia Hotels. The Meydan Hotel is a 5-star luxury desert retreat with 115 rooms and suites, offering various entertainment and adventure activities. It is also a perfect setting for business meetings, events and weddings. The Bab Al Shams Desert Resort and Spa is a business, sporting and lifestyle destination offering extensive leisure and recreational facilities.”



Rakesh Bhandari
Associate Director of Sales

Tourism Fiji



Vijayanthi Kari
India Representative

“We have a lot of new properties opening in Fiji, the key one being the Fiji Marriott Resort Momi Bay. This is one of the products we are showcasing here, along with the new experiences that have opened up in Fiji for a combination of different travel segments, be it honeymooners or families. The show was very useful for us as we were able to meet a variety of buyers from various cities across India and more so the quality of the buyers has been really good. I believe there has to be an experiential element in luxury travel. Having said that, the exclusivity that a luxury holiday can offer cannot be matched by any other travel segment.”

Visit Indonesia Tourist Office (VITO)



Shelly Chandok
Country Manager-India

“We are focusing on the MICE and wedding segments from India to Indonesia. Bali is a very wedding friendly destination as the best of hotels are affordable. The show was very well organised and the buyers were very well selected. It was heartening to see that buyers have been selling Indonesia and were aware of destinations beyond Bali. Last year, we set our target at 3,50,000 Indian visitors to Indonesia but achieved a figure of 3,70,000 which is a very good sign. This year we are looking at 5,50,000 Indian arrivals to various destinations in Indonesia. Apart from MICE and weddings, we are also targeting the luxury travel segment from India.”



Buyers

Ekido Holiday



Kapil Malhotra
Director

“The purpose to attend shows like these is to be exposed to newer products, gather information about the upcoming trends and new ventures in the market. This has proved to be a very useful platform for us and the experience has been great. In the experiential travel space, unexplored elements of destinations will gain popularity. Few destinations that will see more traffic are Canada, The Philippines, Holland, Germany, Belgium etc. Travellers are no longer after the usually travelled destinations in the Far East.”

ESCAPE



Saumil Desai
CEO

“It has been a very well organised show. I was able to meet old colleagues, new suppliers, learn about new upcoming destinations and new products. The luxury and experiential market has been evolving in India. In Ahmedabad, I have seen travellers ask for out-of-the-ordinary experiences. The destinations remain the same more or less but travellers have started taking trips to see something new, for example, in place of city tours by bus, they would opt for segway tours or bike tours; sleep under the stars during the African Safari etc.”

Experiential Travel Journeys



Amit Kalsi
Chief Executive Officer

“This show is focused and offers a platform for us to learn about products and enquire about various segments of travel from India. I cater to discerning clients majorly from Tier-I cities. However, I feel eventually the experiential market will gain traction amongst Tier-II and Tier-III markets but this will take time. Destinations in demand amongst the experiential segment are the polar region, Indo-China, Scandinavian countries, Latin America; those who've explored the African safari are looking for destinations like Kenya and Botswana.”

Jagsons Travels

“My experience at the show has been wonderful. I expected to have one-to-one meetings with the various suppliers and learn about the products they have on offer and after 20-odd speed meetings, I was very happy with the information I had gathered. Luxury travel existed in India for ages but now the experiential element of travel is catching the fancy of travellers. This segment has shown growth but is yet to reach its optimal potential. There are not many travel trade professionals who can guide and educate a luxury or experiential travel seeker and tend to advise clients based on cost savings.”



Harmandeep Singh Anand
Managing Director

Make You Travel

“My aim at the show was to connect with suppliers and buyers from various cities to get information about products and also learn about best practices of the trade. We wanted to see how we can consolidate luxury, experiential and MICE travel into one product. The company will be setting up MICE itineraries which are different from the standard ones and looking into product development. The popular destinations remain the same, for example, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, but we are also trying to capture a larger share in Canada, Sri Lanka and France in particular.”



Meenakshi Tomar
Director-MICE

Serendipity and Beyond Tours

“The show was very well organised and served my purpose to find out about existing and new destinations and different experiences. The clients today are looking to be pampered. All our clients belong to the high-end segment and ask for specially curated itineraries. We have done trips which entail beer trails, wine trails, language tours and even yoga holidays in Italy. This year we are focusing on South America, high-end safari experiences like Mahali Mzuri – a Richard Branson product, Diani Beach in Tanzania, Moscow and St. Petersburg, Italy, Iceland and the South of France.”



Ketaki Kapur Pantle
Co-founder

Vensimal World Travels



Rakesh Ramnani
Director Sales-Leisure

“The exhibitors at the show provided a mix of segments of travel and did not offer only one kind of product, which is very heartening. I'd like to attend this show over and over again and hope that this will grow to showcase a larger number of exhibitors next year and become a two-three-night event. In 2017, the luxury market has seen a good growth and this trend will only continue. It is not easy to sell an experience to the client as it needs a lot of research and firsthand experience of the agents in order to live up to the standard.”

Zenith Hospitality



Sanjoy Bose
National Head-Leisure Travel

“It has been an excellent experience for us as we were able to catch up with colleagues and also meet new people from the industry. Networking is key to our business and this show provided us with the perfect platform. This year started on a slow note in terms of luxury travel, maybe due to demonetisation, but we are hopeful that the market will look up very soon. Indian travellers are seeking outdoor adventure activities like bungee jumping, zip lining etc. and the exhibitors who provide such products are here and this was very helpful.”

Bucket My List



Shivali Bhargava
Founder and CEO

“Coming to this travel show, I met a lot of like-minded people who would make for good partners. I was also able to gather product information that is suited to the company. Bucket My List is a boutique travel company which deals with matured travellers who are at least 50 years of age. The experiences that we offer range from a whiskey trail in Scotland to a trip that offers holy dip in the Ganges in India. Since we deal with seniors, the average duration of a trip is eight-nine nights, with an average spend of ₹1.5-2 lakh per trip.”

Raj Yatayat

“The experience here has been great and the fact that only a selected number of exhibitors are showcasing various destinations allows for a relaxed engagement. The destinations on offer provide valuable information. In my experience, luxury travel is more about the product offered. We offer luxurious leisure tours in destinations like Bora Bora, Hawaii, west coast of Canada, New Zealand and Australia to the honeymooners. These clients stay a minimum of 7-10 nights and spend on an average \$3000-4000 per person.”



Kuldeep Jain
Founder and Director

Gaurav Travels

“The lineup is such that the buyers can move from one table to another without any delay to have concentrated meetings. The speed-meeting format was very productive. I cater to the destination weddings market from India and have seen a substantial growth in this segment this year. This segment would grow by 15-20 per cent in 2017. Thailand remains a popular destination but people have branched out from Bangkok to Koh Samui, Hua Hin, Rayong etc. Other popular wedding destinations are Ras Al Khaimah, Abu Dhabi and Maldives.”



Rajeev Sabharwal
Chief Executive Officer

Travel Raze

“This platform is better than other shows as here we get to meet exhibitors in a given time slot and discuss the products. This format is more productive than meeting the exhibitors at large shows where there is no retention of the meetings conducted. The popular destinations are Europe, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia etc. The addition of newer cities and experiences gives an edge over competition and one has to innovate the selling pattern according to the tastes of the discerning traveller.”



Naresh Aggarwal
Proprietor

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Interested Exhibitors and Buyers, please contact:

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