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WY 721	Muscat - Nairobi	14:50	18:55
WY 722	Nairobi - Muscat	00:45	06:50

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Arclights on India's heritage

The Central Government plans to bring heritage tourism to the forefront and is developing a campaign as well as a circuit to showcase this aspect, reveals **Suman Billa**, Joint Secretary-Tourism, Government of India.



India is all set to display its tourism might at ITB Berlin, the world's largest trade platform for travel and tourism. In early March, around 50 people comprising the Indian delegation will represent the country's plethora of tourism products, culture and heritage.

Billa, who will be a part of the group, imparts more information and says, "We feel this edition is going to be larger than before – ITB is the biggest platform for us and we have a very robust participation. This year, we plan to bring India's heritage to the forefront and the recently launched heritage campaign will help us

“We feel this edition is going to be larger than before – ITB is the biggest platform for us and we have a very robust participation. This year, we plan to bring India's heritage to the forefront and the recently launched heritage campaign will help us generate a generous amount of traction in portraying India as a heritage destination.”

Suman Billa
Joint Secretary-Tourism, Government of India



generate a generous amount of traction in portraying India as a heritage destination.”

He added that plans to partner at an international trade show set on the lines of ITB Berlin in India, are in pipeline.

The Centre will reportedly host a group of bloggers on a road trip across the country to exhibit the country's rich heritage as part of a campaign termed Heritage on Wheels. The idea has earlier been modelled in Kerala Tourism's Kerala Blog Express

where 25 bloggers from around the world were taken on a fortnightly trip around the state, giving them a first-hand experience of the local customs, culture and cuisine. The campaign reinstates the Centre's importance on the digital revolution and ac-

knowledges its growing significance in the industry.

As part of the Swadesh Darshan scheme, funds to the tune of ₹ 450 crore were recently sanctioned for the development of the Heritage Circuit in Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Comprising the sites of Gwalior, Orchha, Khajuraho, Chanderi, Bhimbetka, and Mandu, the project cost for the circuit in Madhya Pradesh is estimated at approximately ₹ 100 crore and envisages world class infrastructural development of the sites. These include developing a theme park and convention centre in Khajuraho, sound and light show in Mandu, site illumination, construction of tour-

ist facilitation centres and parking area. For the Heritage Circuit in Uttarakhand, tourism infrastructure will be developed in Jageshwar, Devidhura, Katarmal and Baijnath sites with a total project cost of approximately ₹ 83 crore. The funds will be used to develop Eco Log Huts, sound and light show, as well as to upgrade temple pathways.

Pumping Investments

As part of the Swadesh Darshan scheme, funds to the tune of ₹ 450 crore were recently sanctioned for the development of the Heritage Circuit in Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand


Assam's debut at ITB Berlin

The travel trade show, spread over three days, will host around 180,000 visitors in total who will witness India's importance on sustainable tourism.



ITB Berlin 2017 is set to welcome more than 10,000 exhibitors from around 185 countries and regions who will be showcasing the best of their products at the show. Scheduled to take place from March 8-12, 2017, the trade show has received numerous requests from exhibitors for more floor space and the organisers have had to rearrange the hall concept and add two-tier stands for certain markets.

Commenting on the expected turnout, **David Ruetz**, Head, ITB Berlin, says, "On the purchasing side, I believe the expected figures of 2017 will equal the previous year's level of around €7 billion. Pre-orders



David Ruetz
Head
ITB Berlin

for the tickets remain stable at last year's level, so we expect again around 180,000 visitors in total." He adds that some of the stands have grown in height and the hall layout has been improved.

Since the past year has seen the international travel industry face many challenges,

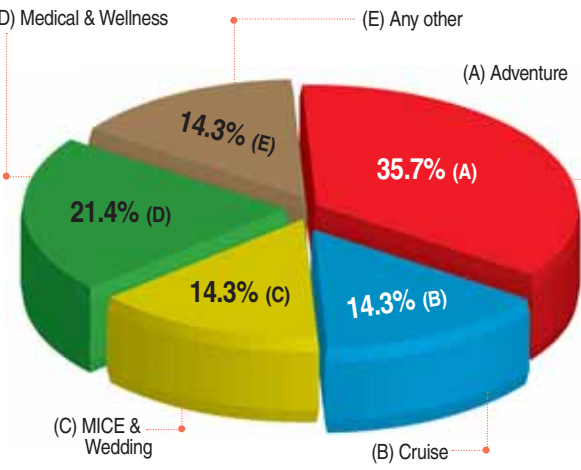
this year ITB Berlin will be looking at topics of great concern. Says Ruetz, "As a result of geopolitical crises, holidaymakers have become unsure about how safe it is to travel. Hence, one of the key up-to-the-minute topics will address this concern in the session 'Disruptive Travel: The End of the World as We Know It.' Leading international experts will show how tourism professionals are successfully taking on controversial issues and current challenges such as geopolitical crises, travel safety risks and the use of artificial intelligence.

Botswana, this year's official partner country, will be enhancing visitors appetites

Contd. on page 31 ▶

Adrenaline thrill rules

The Incredible India Campaign 2.0 is expected to rev up marketing and promotional activities of Indian tourism but the new campaign has to be different from its predecessor to breathe new life into the Indian inbound industry. **TRAVALTALK** asks the travel trade what they see as the



focus of this new campaign. Moving away from the traditional products of Culture and Heritage, 35.7 per cent stakeholders believe that adventure tourism is the next big driver

for growth followed by medical and wellness tourism at 21.4 per cent. Though MICE and weddings have gained traction in India, it stood tied up with cruising with 14.3 per cent.

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Malaysia offers 15-day e-visa

Keen to strengthen age-old ties through tourism, Malaysia has eased visa regulations for Indians and is zeroing in on sustainability.

AHANA GURUNG

Indian tourists on a short visit to Malaysia can now avail a single entry 15-day e-visa, reveals **Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz**, Malaysia's Minister of Tourism and Culture. A processing fee of \$20 is applicable with a processing time of 48 hours. "India has consistently been one of the top six tourist generating markets for Malaysia and has continuously made significant contributions to our tourism arrivals and receipts," he says.

"This year, we intend to achieve one million Indian arrivals, a number that is ambitious, but nothing is impossible and with the right marketing strategy and approach, this is achievable," the minister adds. In 2015, Malaysia welcomed 722,141 Indian tourists while Jan-Oct 2016 saw 540,530 Indian arrivals.



In an attempt to fortify the bilateral relationship, an 'Appreciation Evening' was held in New Delhi where Indian travel agents were felicitated for their efforts in promoting Malaysia to the Indian travellers. Leaders from Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) and Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) signed a plaque fortifying each other's commitment to promoting travel from India.

This year, Tourism Malaysia will be laying a special emphasis on sustainable tourism in line with UNWTO's vision for 2017 and will be promoting UNESCO World Heritage Sites and homestay programme. The Minister explained, "Kinabalu National Park in Sabah, Gunung Malu National Park in Sarawak, cities of Malacca and Georgetown, and the archaeological heritage of the Lenggong Valley are the World Heritage Sites which will be focused on this year. Similarly,

we want to portray the country as a free-from-pollution destination, particularly the Borneo states Sabah and Sarawak."

The Southeast Asian country has declared 2017 as 'Visit Perak', 'Visit Terengganu', and 'Visit Pahang' year as these states are special because of their diverse offerings. "These three states are especially rich in culture, heritage, nature, adventure with islands, rivers and lakes that will fascinate the Indian market," he stated.

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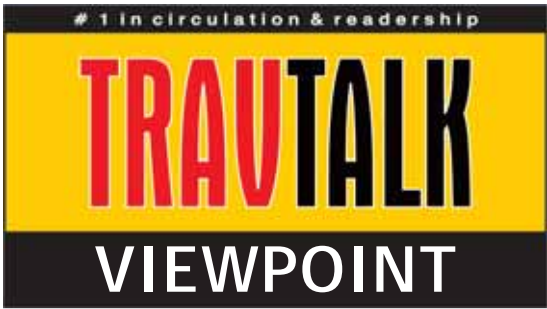
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Responsible tourism

India went aggressive at promoting tourism and the government's policy changes helped the country witness an upward surge in tourist arrivals in 2016. This increase can be attributed to factors such as flexible government policies relating to e-visas for foreign tourists, infrastructural developments and increased connectivity. In 2017, too, the Ministry of Tourism is working hard to improve its inbound numbers and measures such as free SIM cards for tourists arriving on e-visas, strategic partnerships and increased participation at international fairs and the launch of a new media campaign augur well for increased FTA figures. The debut participation of Assam at an event of the stature of ITB Berlin hints at the fact that the states too are recognising the potential of tourism and want to tap this before somebody else takes a share of the pie.

However, it's also imperative that tourism should be sustainable. In August 2014, the then Union Minister for Tourism Shripad Yesso Naik launched the Comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI) for accommodation, tour operators and beaches, backwaters, lakes & rivers sectors. At ITB Berlin, too, India will be drawing its focus on sustainable tourism.

Right focus on tech

As technology moves from the outdoors and enters our homes there is a growing dependency on it for almost everything. From booking a cab on Uber, ordering food through Zomato, to booking movie tickets on BookMyShow, no task can be done without the help of technology. In such an era, travel technology is increasingly becoming a necessity and not just a growing fad. The Indian Government's recent demonetisation drive is not just a stepping stone towards embracing digital payments but reflects the great shift from offline to online payments. It's a call to either log in or be left out! At such a time the two-day Phocuswright India conference in Gurugram from February 28-March 2, 2017, aims to provide a relevant insight into the industry and helps the players to connect, grasp educational content, innovate and grab investment opportunities together in an engaging manner.

Trending in the time of social media

Companies are increasing their online presence to not only market, but also take bookings. Tourism marketing has changed with this new trend, making products more relevant for travellers within the age group of 18-60 years.

There was a time when tourism marketing was all about ads in a newspapers, press releases and events. But today one can launch a product or destination through live streaming on Facebook or Instagram. You may be a travel agent selling tours for Rajasthan and want customers from North America; you can launch an ad targeted at only the customers in North America. One can target the customers based on demographics and launch customised campaigns, sitting in the comfort of your home. This is how tourism marketing has changed with the advent of social media.

The new buzz of social media has numerous platforms and each platform carries something different for the different customers. You basically want to go where your customers are. So, if I am a travel agent and want to sell to trade partners, then I would go to LinkedIn because that is where my B2B contacts are. If I want to target B2C markets then I will be using Facebook.

On social media, content plays a crucial role. Visually ap-

pealing content, its design and relevancy always resonates better with customers. In today's time and age, we get a lot of bookings through social media platforms. Most of the clients are on social media plat-

also potential targets. There was a time when we saw people above the age group of 55 were not on social media, now they are present as well. People who are under the age 14 are also influencers so they will

chat, then you need to be there too and use Snapchat marketing to be able to sell your product while the customer is on that channel. Similarly there are other channels like Instagram which have introduced Instagram story; you have a platform to create a story to deliver the message for your brand in the best possible way. It's in this ever-evolving industry, we need to get into the field and start playing our match which simply means we need to experiment for social media.

Visually appealing content, its design and relevancy always resonates better with customers. In today's time and age, we get a lot of bookings through social media platforms

forms looking for travel related products. Be it better visuals, videos or a guest feedback, it is rather convenient for them to make their bookings through these platforms.

It is important that we first understand our customer and study which social media channel they are on and accordingly plan our digital marketing strategies and market using the best ad features that channel offers. Travellers in the age group of 13-20 years or millennial are active social content consumers while at the same time people in the age group of 35-55 years, who are corporate travellers, housewives are

see your ad and influence their parents to buy from you. On an average, almost each individual spends around 2-3 hours on social media channels on a regular basis. Targeting can be done based on age, hobbies, designations, the organisations where travellers work in; how many children they have; relationship status etc., amongst a host of other criteria.

In the coming times, I feel Influencer Marketing is the biggest trend. There are a few trends which are taking the market by storm like an Instagram story, Snapchat Marketing, Facebook Live etc. Today if your customer is using Snap-

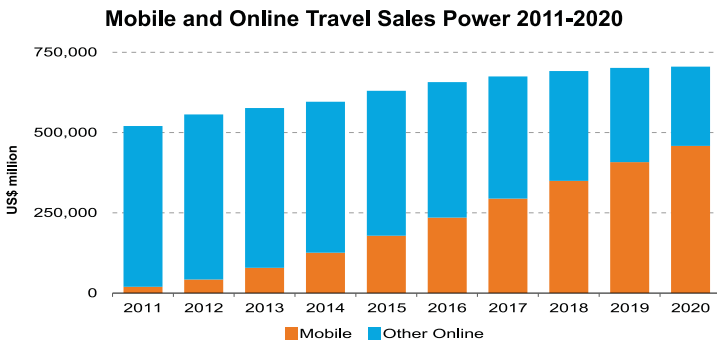
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Avijit Arya Chief Mogul (CEO) Internet Moguls

Offline a better bet than online

A surge in online and mobile travel sales has been witnessed across the globe. While the majority of mobile travel purchases are stealing share from other online methods such as PCs, offline is still predicted to have higher global value than online in 2020.



❖ Traditional travel agencies are making the most of advanced technologies to sell holidays, combining advice of professionals with the use of the latest in-store technologies innovation.

❖ This blending of the physical with the digital can be referred to as the "physical" approach, and goes beyond the online presence or app.

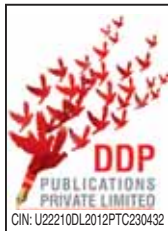
❖ With global online value sales for intermediaries set to overtake offline sales, traditional retailers need to evolve so as not to lose out.

Bookings Through Online and Offline Channels 2015/2020

Year	Intermediaries		Airlines		Hotels		Short-Term Rentals	
2015	46.2%	53.8%	61.4%	38.6%	36.4%	63.6%	50.3%	49.7%
2020	51.6%	48.4%	70.3%	29.7%	46.1%	53.9%	62.4%	37.6%

Online Offline

Source: WTM Global Trends Report 2016 in association with Euromonitor International



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Manipur: A jewel of the Northeast

It may be away from the rest of the mainland, but Manipur, located in the northeastern part of India, possesses enough beauty and remote charm to attract discerning travellers.



HAZEL JAIN

Beautiful things come in small packages, indeed. The northeastern state of Manipur, cozily snuggled on India's extreme east and bordering Myanmar, literally connects the Indian subcontinent to Southeast Asia. But it pays a price for its remoteness. Manipur is still an unexplored territory by not only international travellers but Indians as well.

This, feels **Daryal Juli Anal**, Deputy Director (Tourism), Manipur, may not be such a bad thing though. Anal says, "Regular travellers are getting fed up of what they have already seen."



Daryal Juli Anal
Deputy Director (Tourism)
Manipur

Most tourists visit Manipur as part of their tourist route. They will come from Delhi or Kolkata, stay in Manipur for three to four nights, and leave for Myanmar or Thailand

They want to see areas that are still unexplored and still new. Manipur can offer that kind of virginity to seasoned travellers whether from India or any other country. People say that Manipur is too far and they don't know where it is and how to reach there. But that itself can be our USP, I feel."

Exploring the unexplored

Apart from its natural beauty, Manipur stands alone when it comes to tribal tourism, which is a niche segment. Juli Anal says, "We have more than 40 tribal communities and each tribe has their own costumes, culture, food, traditions, etc. I am very proud of my state. Manipur is small but we have a lot of beauty like Loktak Lake that houses endangered deer, the Dzūkou Valley that has a lot of lilies in bloom and where the rare

Dzūkou lily is found. It has the beauty of a valley and the hills at once. We also have a lot of adventure sports." The Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned 12 projects worth ₹1,070 crore covering all the eight states under its Swadesh Darshan scheme.

Also on the ministry's agenda is promoting its festivals to tourists. Juli Anal says that Manipur celebrates at

least one festival every month and it makes sense to create a calendar which the department will promote overseas and in India. She adds that Manipur gets a lot of tourists from the UAE and Norway apart from the rest of Europe but its mainly domestic tourists that visit. "International visitors are still in very small numbers but we have seen that they like to come back. So we get a lot of repeat

international tourists. Most tourists visit Manipur as part of their tourist route. They will come from Delhi or Kolkata, stay in Manipur for three to four nights, and leave for Myanmar or Thailand. For a small state, these overnights are really good," she reveals.

ITM 2017

Imphal, Manipur's capital, recently hosted the annual International Tourism Mart (ITM)

2016. It is the perfect platform to bring all Seven Sisters (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura) together with Sikkim and West Bengal.

ITM 2016 hosted around 50 foreign tour operators from 80 northeastern tour operators besides domestic buyers (tour operators) from different parts of the country. ITM 2017 will be held in Mizoram.

Air Connectivity

Bir Tikendrajit International Airport located about 5 km from Imphal connects Imphal to Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai, Agartala, Aizawl, Guwahati and Silchar

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Trade picks UDAN routes

With the Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) scheme underway, the travel trade wants regular flights to popular tourist destinations that could reduce travel time. From Kashmir to Rajasthan, Northeast to Gujarat as well as Kerala, inter-city connectivity is the need of the hour.



NISHA VERMA

“Existing destinations like Jodhpur and Jaisalmer in Rajasthan should be connected. Flight to Durgapur has already started. Apart from that, Ranchi and Chhattisgarh also need connectivity. In North East, only Bagdogra and Guwahati are linked and new flights should connect Shillong and Darjeeling. In the north, there should be flights to Pathankot, as it is near Dharamshala; Kullu and Manali should be connected with a flight. There should be helicopters for Gulmarg and Sonmarg as well. In Gujarat, there should be direct connectivity to the Rann of Kutch as well as for Somnath Temple.”



P.P. Khanna
President, ADTOI



Rajan Sehgal
Chairman
Northern Region, TAAI

“Earlier, the most popular route was Khajuraho-Varanasi, and getting a confirmed seat on that flight was an achievement. It's a very important sector and there are no flights for the same. Also, flights are needed for Jaisalmer and Jodhpur. In Jaisalmer, the airport is ready, but it's locked. We should concentrate on destinations which are really worthwhile, otherwise airlines are also correct in saying that they cannot last long on sectors which are not giving enough feed.”



Rajat Sawhney
Vice President, ADTOI

“There is news that a new flight would be starting from Jaipur to Bikaner-Jodhpur-Jaisalmer, from February 21, 2017. Also, a new flight connecting Jaipur and Udaipur would start soon. These routes would certainly help in reducing travel time. Destinations such as Agra, Allahabad, Khajuraho should have more flights. There should be a flight from Agra-Khajuraho-Varanasi. International travellers also go to Hampi and Hubli, which should be connected to Bengaluru. In south, there is demand for a flight to Puducherry from Chennai, Cochin and Trivandrum should be connected via air. Also, Madurai should be connected. In Punjab, Patiala and Ludhiana should be connected and combined with Amritsar. The big cities should act as hubs for such routes.”



Anurag Aggarwal
Managing Director
S. A. Southend Travels

“Most of the touristic places are already connected, including Goa, Kashmir and Rajasthan, as well as North East India with around 20 flights going to the region. The government should look at increasing connectivity to Tirupati. There are very few flights in Rajasthan, where there is a need to connect Jaisalmer. In Himachal, there are limited flights to Manali, but there is a need to increase connectivity to Shimla and Kullu.”



Subhash Goyal
DDP Trailblazer, India Travel Awards 2014, and Chairman, STIC Travel Group

“There are 400 airstrips in India and only 100 are utilised. While the major cities of every state are connected, there is no intercity connectivity within a state. Whether it is the Northeast, Rajasthan, Gujarat, or Andhra Pradesh, tourists have to take roads when they land at any major airport in these regions. There is no quick way to go from one city to another in these states. Flight from Jaisalmer and Jodhpur is starting very soon. Another major route that should start is Delhi-Khajuraho-Varanasi, which should be a regular flight, and not a seasonal one. In the Northeast, there is no connectivity between Imphal-Dibrugarh, which should start. These cities are separately connected to Guwahati, but there is no direct flight.”

“The government should start flights on regular routes like Khajuraho, Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur. These should not be seasonal flights. In terms of new routes, Shimla and Dehradun should be connected as it is very important to reduce the travelling time to these destinations, which are frequented by many domestic as well as international tourists. The government has taken steps under the regional connectivity scheme, but execution of the same is taking time. I believe they should expedite this process and connect as many destinations.”



Subhash Verma
Director, Travel Plus
(A unit of Ibis Travels)

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Caper set to conquer travel world

We chalk out the travel group's exceptional journey since its inception over a decade ago and the undisputable name it has secured among the top players in the industry with Chairman and Managing Director, **Bharat Bhushan Atree**, steering the organisation forward.



The Caper Group is the result of Bharat Bhushan Atree's hardwork, grit and gumption. From an inbound

tour and travel agency, the group has expanded services into other new verticals related to travel such as hospitality, aviation and travel technology.

The group's excellence in travel services are evident from the several National Tourism Awards it has bagged till date, along with many other accolades and contin-

ues to strive for many more milestones in the years to come. Here we underline an account of the organisation's growth through testimonials from current employees.



Anupam Kumar
Director
Caper Group

"It has been an incredible journey as a part of the Caper Group for the past 13 years. Working at Caper has changed my life in ways beyond my imagination. The policies, structuring and environment of the company is one that fuels all employees to realise their dreams and elevate themselves to positions as per their capabilities, determination and hard work. My journey began as a tour guide and slowly and steadily I am presently heading the group under the guidance of Mr. Atree. I have grabbed and optimised every opportunity that came my way and strengthened my knowledge regarding all aspects pertaining to the travel business. Today, there is nothing that I've not done being a part of this prestigious company, be it excursions, hotel management, charter operation, contracting or aviation. Currently, I am overseeing Caper's latest venture, software development. The technology plans to steer our company ahead of our peers. Our company's logo, 'Live your dreams' is not just for our guests but also for all members of staff working for the company. I am the personification of our company's logo."

"I have grown with Caper and with every milestone, the desire to add more momentum has increased. I have been an integral part of Caper, since its inception 18 years ago, through all its phases - from incubation to our initial struggles, to a robust stability and exceptional growth. It has been an honour to help lead one of largest and foremost tour operators of India. Thrown into the choppy pool of the travel business, we all learnt to swim ourselves without any lifeguard or mentor to coach us. In the beginning, we did everything ourselves, from Product Development, Contracting Sales, Meet & Greet and Operations. My regular trips to small domestic agencies and corporates to close sale calls opened new avenues for our growth. We aim to be best and largest tour operator of India, servicing clients from all over the world, contributing to the nation's growth by employment generation and foreign exchange earnings. To call it a journey, one cannot stop. With the support of team Caper, I am sure what lies ahead will be simply incredible."



Vishal Jaiswal
CEO
Caper Travel



Bharat Bhushan Atree
CMD
Caper Group

"They say growth is all about the relentless pursuit of perfection. And the journey of Caper from three passionate multi-taskers to a team of over 300 professionals, is a true reflection of that. From a small one room office to our current corporate office and branch offices at multiple locations, the journey has been a roller coaster ride. With no prior Industry experience or guidance the journey has been uphill. The fire in our belly prompted us to gradually learn the ropes of the trade. Today, Caper is a force to be reckoned with in the business and has been awarded for our sundry contributions of tourism growth and proficient practices. One of the key differentiator has been my personal involvement in every aspect of the business. I have done it all, from going to airport at odd hours, making domestic sale calls, to exhibiting in all major tourism fairs of the world. Our company has diversified into other tourism related verticals like hospitality, aviation, and travel technology and have expanded our horizons manifold. We have formed new SBU's each working with a different market, flight ground handling, hotel management and have also diversified into the making of software for a smoother and hassle-free online portal. We are creating a buzz with our hotel and hospitality company especially in Goa. Our aim is client satisfaction and that is the one thing which is uncompromised. There are more projects underway and we will reveal them as we go along."

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T&C APPLY

J&K gets the show on right road

Jammu and Kashmir is planning to organise 20 roadshows across the country and showcase its tourism potential at national and international trade fairs. The state has also received ₹2000 crore funds to boost tourism in the state.



ANKITA SAXENA

Jammu and Kashmir is working on a plan to increase tourist numbers to the destination. The state is offering tourism products to the likes of golf tourism, adventure tourism, etc., informs **Farooq Ahmad Shah**, Tourism Secretary and Managing

pilgrim tourism; Ladakh is popular amongst adventure tourists, while Kashmir is considered paradise on earth. We believe J&K is the crown of Incredible India and is unparalleled in the country.

"In 2016, the state received a hearty response



Farooq Ahmad Shah
Tourism Secretary and Managing Director, J&K Tourism Development Corporation

Jammu is famous for pilgrim tourism; Ladakh is popular amongst adventure tourists, while Kashmir is considered paradise on earth

saw 2.5 lakh pilgrim tourists," Shah notes.

The state tourism body is organising 20 roadshows in various cities in the coun-



Priya Seth
MoS for Tourism, Culture, Education, Department of Horticulture, Floriculture and Parks, J&K Govt.

We have set some procedures for the private investors and once the requirements are met, stakeholders can invest in the state

try and participating in every travel show possible to promote the destination at national and international platforms. "We are also conducting familiarisation tours

for various tour operators and travel agents. Recently we hosted a Jammu Travel Bazaar and something on similar lines will be hosted in Kashmir in April," he adds. Other promotions are also underway for the destination through print, electronic and social media.

According to **Priya Seth**, Minister of State for Tourism, Culture, Education, Department of Horticulture, Floriculture and Parks, Government of Jammu and Kashmir, the state can offer a variety of activities and tourism products at various destinations like Patnitop, Pehalgam, Gulmarg, among others. Skiing, golfing, culture, adventure, MICE, the state has a lot to offer.

Seth informs that the Central Government has sanctioned ₹2000 crore funds which will help boost tourism in the state in the days to come. "But we are well equipped with what we already have to cater

to the tourists of all segments in all four seasons of the year," says Seth.

Commenting on the associations with travel trade, Seth says, "We have set some procedures for the private investors and once the requirements are met, private stakeholders can invest in the state tourism projects. We also plan to host tour operators and travel agencies for familiarisation tours. The state is also hosting multiple festivals throughout the year and we hope that will encourage a large number of tourists to visit Jammu and Kashmir."

Valley Visitors

- ➔ In 2016, 90 lakh tourists visited Jammu; 13 lakh tourists visited Kashmir, while Ladakh saw a record of 3 lakh tourists
- ➔ The Central Government has sanctioned ₹2000 crore funds



Pangong Tso Lake, Leh Ladakh

Director, Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation.

"Modern facilities and infrastructure development at tourist destination is our focus. Jammu is famous for

from tourists. 90 lakh tourists visited Jammu; 13 lakh tourists visited Kashmir while Ladakh saw a record of 3 lakh tourists. This is significant for the region as the population of Ladakh is approximately 1.3 lakh. Amarnath

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Clarity sought on highway liquor ban

As per a recent Supreme Court jurisdiction, there will be a ban on liquor shops located within 500 metres of national and state highways. Also, the licenses for these shops will not be renewed after March 31, 2017. However, it's still not clear if this ban is applicable for hotels situated within this distance. Hotel industry biggies weigh in on the ruling and its implications.



KANCHAN NATH

“The Supreme Court judgement states that liquor shops that lie within a distance of 500 metres from highways, interstate or national, should not be issued licenses by the excise department. According to me, this does not apply to us. The judgement clearly talks about vendors and does not refer to hotels and resorts. It's entirely a question of interpretation; we can go back to the excise commissioners of various states, to the Supreme Court, or even a five-judge bench. Norms for granting licenses to retail outlets, in my opinion, are very different from those that govern the granting of licenses to restaurants and bars. This distinction is a critical differentiator, making our representation to excise more valuable.”



Amitabh Devendra
Secretary General
FHRAI

“I believe the regulation is directed more towards vending of liquor on highways, than anything else. It's a good move because it provides a safer environment for everybody. Hotels under our purview, whether on the highway or not, are operating with valid liquor licenses. As long as the liquor license is there, we are here to honour its terms. We are keeping a watchful eye on the situation to understand what the final interpretation is going to be. So far, it seems that the regulation is intended to apply to the vending or retail sale of liquor along highways rather than hotels themselves.”



Raj Rana
Chief Executive Officer,
South Asia, Carlson Rezidor
Hotel Group



Bharat Malkani
EC Member
FHRAI

“Drunken driving has nothing to do with the vending of liquor. If you are a liquor vendor and someone is flouting the law, the location of a liquor store or any such store at a distance of 500 metres, or for that matter, 5 km away from the highway is not going to matter much. It's not just the highways; you have the same problem on city roads and other locations. Thus, more than an issue of selling liquor on the highway, it is an issue of law and order. We do not see a co-relation between the two. Nonetheless, we agree with the government that drunken driving must not be allowed and that strict and effective laws are needed to curb this menace. However, if repeated measures and rules that cast negative aspersions on the hospitality industry are put in place, and continuously played out across national and global media, the industry would be adversely affected.”

“A number of hotels are located close to highways, making this ruling extremely damaging for the hospitality industry. Though the intention behind this change seems good, banning liquor shops altogether is not a plausible solution. Needless to say, a shop at a distance of 510 metres (10 metres beyond what the policy states) is not going to discourage drunken driving. The main issue is people driving under the influence of alcohol. However, there is no harm if a person in the passenger seat has a drink. If the policy does get implemented, the hospitality industry is going to face a considerable setback, as hotels are meant to come up on highways. Brands, such as Holiday Inn, are intentionally built close to highways and that is their selling point. Additionally, a hotel cannot get a five-star classification without a liquor license. I would say, this law seems very contradictory at the moment.”



Nirupa Shankar
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The wild side of Karnataka

Karnataka has declared 2017 as the 'Year of the Wild', which would also be their focus at Karnataka International Travel Exhibition, scheduled in September.



TT BUREAU

Jungle Lodges & Resorts (JLR) is a public-sector undertaking, which has around 18 resorts in Karnataka, primarily dealing with wilderness and tourism. "We started in 1980 with Kabini River Lodge, which is one of the premier destinations and is very popular among foreigners as well as Indians. We offer a wildlife package where guests can take two safaris and the meals and other things are taken care of," said **Vijay Sharma**, Managing Director, Jungle Lodges & Resorts, Government of Karnataka.

He revealed that because a lot of youngsters are interested in trekking and camping in the forests, as against safaris, which could be expensive for them, JLR has introduced budget tourism option for them. "For students and IT professionals, we have Jungle Camps & Trails, under which we have four properties in the heart of the forest, with budget accommodations where we



Vijay Sharma
Managing Director, Jungle Lodges & Resorts,
Government of Karnataka

charge only ₹1500 per person per night. People stay in camps/tents; we take them for a trek and food and other essential things are taken care of," said Sharma.

A recent survey ranked Karnataka third in tourism and that is a jump from 13th position 2-3 years back. As far as forest tourism is concerned, there has been substantial growth of around 10-12 per cent last year, revealed Sharma. While they have many plans for 2017, they are not expecting big numbers due to the Cauvery River crisis. "Because buses and taxis were not coming from Tamil Nadu,

from where we get a lot of tourists, we saw a dip of about 20 per cent during that month. Subsequently, during demonetisation, people were a little reluctant to come out initially, which would have some impact," he informed.

"Wild here does not just mean wildlife, but the wild side of life, which includes adventure. We are doing nationwide promotions including newspapers, TV as well as radio jingles. We are very strong in social media, and have crossed one lakh likes on Facebook. We also have a blog called jrexplora.com, which has international following," he informed.

The next big event for them is the Karnataka International Travel Exhibition (KITE) to be held in September. The event will attract international buyers as well as sellers from around the state. The focus primarily is on JLR properties, particularly Kabini, Bandipur, Bhadra, Dandily, Hampi, for which they are targeting foreign travellers.

Tunisia forays into small cities

Tunisia is gearing to strengthen its foothold in India, with specific focus on MICE and weddings, says **Tushar Jain**, Co-founder, Bulktrip.com



TT BUREAU

In order to showcase the destination to the travel industry, Bulktrip.com, which also represents Tunisia in India, organised a small networking session at the Embassy of Tunisia. The occasion saw in attendance Ines Mighri, Market Development Manager, Atlantis Voyages, Tunisia, who showcased the products and opportunities for travelling to Tunisia.

Tushar Jain reveals, "We are partners with Atlantis voyages and we are focusing specifically on MICE. I believe that MICE is the gateway to enter into the market. We have already started getting a lot of queries for incentive travels. We are in touch with a number of MICE players. We really wish to take this market ahead, for which we are promoting it to the corporate, media as well as MICE players in the country."

Tunisia started promoting itself last year. "We organised interactive session last



Tushar Jain
Co-founder
Bulktrip.com

year and then we organised a Fam trip to Tunisia, where we took 20 agents to the destination and we got excellent response," says Jain. He added that while the number of Indians visiting Tunisia is minimal, they are looking at decent growth in the next year. "We have a lot of business clients going to Tunisia, and the numbers are growing for MICE and tourism. In the coming year, we are expecting around 700-800 passengers from MICE industry to visit Tunisia," he informed.

Apart from MICE, they are focusing on the wedding segment as well. Jain adds, "We are in touch with destination

wedding planners and Tunisia is very open to destination weddings as well as film shoots. The country has easy licensing for film shootings as well."

To aid this growth, they will adopt many strategies and working closely with travel agents, informs Mighri. "We'll be more present in India with our partner Bulktrip.com and would participate in tourism fares and would be conducting workshops and assist the travel agencies to help us boost the numbers."

Jain adds, "We will also be looking towards doing roadshows in Tier-II and Tier-III cities, so that they can learn about the destination and we will definitely be organising more Fam trips to Tunisia as well. Tunisia has good connectivity through Turkish Airlines, Qatar Airways, Emirates as well as through European airlines. However, airfare is a bit of a challenge, and thus we are working closely with Turkish Airlines to work out a good package for groups."



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Jet and Hong Kong Airlines ink code share

■ Jet Airways and Hong Kong Airlines have entered into a code-share partnership in a move that will help them significantly enhance connectivity between India and the Asia-Pacific region. As part of the reciprocal agreement, Jet Airways will place its marketing code '9W' on Hong Kong Airlines' flights operating between Hong Kong and Okinawa and Tokyo in Japan; Denpasar in Indonesia; Hanoi in Vietnam; Bangkok in Thailand; and Auckland in New Zealand. Hong Kong Airlines in turn, will place its marketing code "HX" on Jet Airways' flights between Hong Kong and Mumbai as well as Delhi in India.

The agreement will allow Hong Kong Airlines to offer its guests a daily service connecting the key business cities of Hong Kong, Mumbai and Delhi. The code share will provide opportunities for both airlines to expand their reach and cater to guests across the region. It will also enhance connectivity for Jet Airways guests from Mumbai and Delhi via Hong Kong to multiple destinations in the Asia-Pacific region including to first time code-share destinations — Okinawa in Japan and Auckland in New Zealand.

Kerala focusing on 10-point agenda

The Government of Kerala has allotted `40 crore for promoting the state, half of which will be utilised for the international markets and the remaining will be kept for the domestic markets.



Considering the uptick in domestic tourism, the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala recently organised a 10-city B2B roadshow and comprised 63 major players from the state's tourism industry – the highest so far. The Mumbai delegation was led by **Shine K.S.**, Tourist Information Officer, Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala.

Explaining the initiatives for 2017, Shine K.S. said, "The marketing initiatives for the year 2016-17 were for-

"We consider roadshows as the most effective tool for marketing since it involves serious interactions. Mumbai is a really good market and we get around 4 lakh tourists just from Maharashtra. However, Tamil Nadu remains our biggest source market domestically, followed by Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and then Maharashtra."

Shine K.S.

Tourist Information Officer, Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala



Mumbai is a really good market and we get around 4 lakh tourists just from Maharashtra. However, Tamil Nadu remains our biggest source market for us domestically, followed by Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and then Maharashtra."

The government of Kerala is investing around `40 crore in promoting the state; half of it will go to international markets and the rest will be kept for the domestic market. The state has also allocated `250 crore just for infrastructure which will be supplemented by the Central Financial Assistance scheme. "This is for our Green Carpet Initiative and will go towards toilets, roads, connectivity, and parking area development, recreational activities, etc.," Shine adds.

The tourism board is also promoting a package called 'Dream Season Package' for the lowest season, the monsoons. For this, it is collecting good offers from tour operators, hoteliers and house boat owners and collating it.



holds for visitors. There has been a remarkable increase in the arrival of tourists within a single year as a result of the various initiatives implemented by the Government. We will continue with our 10-point agenda which was launched in September 2016 under the Green Carpet Initiative which focuses on giving a facelift to select tourist destinations in the state to ensure security, cleanliness, hygiene, and scientific waste management methods, apart from creating unique experiences."

The delegation visited key cities in India that included Tier-III cities for the first time. This included Ranchi and Nagpur. The other cities were Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, Surat, Delhi and Chandigarh. Shine adds, "We had previously limited the number of participating sellers to 40. But it is impossible to do that now because of the growing interest in Kerala. We consider roadshows as the most effective tool for marketing since it involves serious interactions."

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Goa making waves in Scandinavian markets

Goa is gearing up for the incoming tourism season with new products and services, a host of festivals coupled with aggressive marketing plans for the year 2017.



TT BUREAU

Goa has launched a number of new tourism products and services at the destination like hop-on hop-off buses, hot air ballooning, Segway tours, amphibious vehicles, etc. which have received a tremendous response from tourists, informs **Deepak Narvekar**, Senior Manager-Public Relations, Goa Tourism Development Corporation.

According to provisional data provided by Department of Tourism, Government of Goa, in 2016, Goa



Deepak Narvekar
Senior Manager-Public Relations, Goa
Tourism Development Corporation

We are targeting the Scandinavian countries and the European market to increase inbound tourists. We are focusing on markets from France, Germany, London, Moscow, Kazakhstan, etc.

received 2,927,125 tourists out of which 2,585,092 were domestic tourists and 342,033 were foreign tourist arrivals. Narvekar claims that the number of tourists in Goa in 2016 was the maximum till date and points out that with an increase in charter flights this year; the number is expected to grow. He says, "We are targeting the Scandinavian countries and the European market to increase inbound tourists. We are focusing on markets from France, Germany, London, Moscow, Kazakhstan, etc."

The state has taken initiatives to focus on adventure tourism, hinterland tourism and beach tourism. The Government of Goa is proactively working to enhance touristic potential of the state especially in terms of event tourism, points out Narvekar. "From February 25, Goa Carnival will be celebrated in the state; the 14-day long Shigmo Festival will be celebrated from

March 24, followed by Grape Escapade, the wine festival. We will also be organising food and cultural festival in Goa soon especially for the tourists visiting Goa," he adds.

To market the destination better at national and international platforms, the state government has undertaken various campaigns. To mention a few plans, the BBC campaign, electronic and print media ad-

vertising, in-flight magazine advertising; hoardings and flyers at national and international locations etc. are some of the strategies for promotion, informs Narvekar. The state is also working closely with the travel trade and Narvekar believes that the private stakeholders are happy with the initiatives of the government. He further adds, "We participate at various exhibitions and trade fairs and this provides a

platform to many hotels and resorts to showcase their products in collaboration with the state and increase business opportunities. We have also put together a web portal team in order to market these products and services in a better manner both nationally and internationally. We are sure that these enhanced services and new products will attract a larger number of tourists to the state."



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Vistara's direct flights between Kolkata-Pune, & Delhi-Port Blair

■ Vistara has announced the launch of two new routes to cater to growing customer demand. Starting March 26, 2017, Vistara will fly direct daily between Kolkata and Pune, and starting April 15, 2017, will also fly direct between Delhi and Port Blair (Andamans) on Saturdays and Sundays during the upcoming summer season.

These new flights are in addition to Vistara's recently announced service to Amritsar from both Delhi and Mumbai, and to Leh (Ladakh) from Delhi, both starting in March. Vistara's Kolkata-Pune flight will serve business professionals as well as a large population in Pune that hails from Kolkata.

The Delhi-Port Blair flight will cater not only the people residing in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands who visit the national capital, but also attract businesspeople and tourists from northern India. Customers can book their flights on Vistara's official website (www.airvistara.com), on its iOS and Android mobile apps, and through Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) and other travel agents. Vistara's GDS partners including Amadeus and Travelport.

Air India targets international routes

India's national carrier, Air India is looking to add frequencies on its international routes in all directions. This includes North America, Europe and even Australia.



HAZEL JAIN

Air India has announced that it is looking to add new routes between India and multiple continents. It is not only looking at launching direct flights to North America, but also Europe, Australia and South East Asia. Sharing specific details on this, **Pankaj Srivastava**, Director Commercial, Air India, reveals, "We currently operate non-stop daily services to Chicago, New York, Newark and San Francisco. We would soon be introducing a fifth destination in the US connecting New Delhi with Washington DC in summer 2017. If the fuel prices remain as is, we will expand further in North America. We are looking at some more

"We would soon be introducing a fifth destination in the US connecting New Delhi with Washington DC in summer 2017. If the fuel prices remain as is, we will expand further in North America. We are looking at some more destinations like Houston and Dallas."

Pankaj Srivastava
Director Commercial
Air India



destinations like Houston and Dallas."

He added that North America has been one of the biggest money spinners for Air India. It started with San Francisco with just three flights a week. But it had to in-

crease it to six flights a week within six months. "We have tried to bring the costs down as it is one of the longest flights we operate via the Pacific route and we return via the Atlantic. So it is practically the only flight flying around the world. We are not breaking even on the total cost basis, but it is at an operating level. We have cut down on travel time between India and the US by about 8-10 hours by operating direct," he adds.

Europe & Oz on radar

As far as Europe is concerned, Srivastava says that

the only place where Air India doesn't have a direct flight today is the Scandinavian countries. "So we will pick one between Copenhagen and Stockholm. Once we decide between the two that would be the time for us to consolidate in Europe. We already have nine destinations in Europe and this would be the 10th," he reveals.

The carrier is also looking at increasing flights into Australia. At the moment, it has a non-stop flight into Melbourne (four times a week) and Sydney (three times a

week). It intends to take this to five and five in both cities.

Even Southeast Asia is a place of interest for Air India. Srivastava adds, "We will also increase our flights into Singapore and Bangkok with the 787s. Southeast Asia is still very promising and we see huge opportunities in both Singapore and Thailand. We will be looking at increasing our operations into both these countries very soon. The other market which has not been tapped to its right potential is Myanmar, which is soon becoming a huge investment opportunity. We are looking at both Myanmar and Vietnam."

Spreading Wings

✦ Air India is looking to foray into Scandinavian countries and will soon pick either Copenhagen or Stockholm

✦ The national carrier is also looking to boost its flights to Melbourne and Sydney to five each in a week

We will also increase our flights into Singapore and Bangkok with the 787s. Southeast Asia is still very promising and we see huge opportunities in both Singapore and Thailand

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Adventure tourism roaring in MP

A special tourism board will be constituted to cater to the marketing and publicity vertical of Madhya Pradesh Tourism. The state has notified over 50 wildlife recreation zones and is looking to invest in Buddhist and heritage destinations in order to diversify tourist offerings in the state.



ANKITA SAXENA

The formation of a State Tourism Board in Madhya Pradesh has been authorised by the state tourism cabinet. **Tanvi Sundriyal**, Additional Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (MP-STDC), informs, "There is now a body to take special care of all inbound and domestic tourism activity. There is increased focus, more expertise being drawn from various stakeholders and it is a

participative decision making process which will be beneficial to all tourists." Identifying the role of MPSTDC in the future, Sundriyal adds that MP-STDC will focus on its core competence of commercial operations in terms of providing good quality hotels; setting standards and opening up destinations; and working on areas where accommodation units are not available.

Madhya Pradesh Tourism had earlier notified the formation of Wildlife Recrea-

tional Rules. Elaborating on the progress made in this field, Sundriyal points out that the Rules have been launched and over 50 recreational zones under the Wildlife Recreational Rules have been identified and notified by the state government. "In these areas, the private investors can set up camping sites, do walking trails, trekking, cycling etc., in a legit manner. It is a unique initiative taken for the first time in the country. No other state has a legal structure which



"In these areas, the private investors can set up camping sites, do walking trails, trekking, cycling etc., in a legit manner. It is a unique initiative taken for the first time in the country. No other state has a legal structure which allows adventure tourism activities in such a manner."

Tanvi Sundriyal

Additional Managing Director

Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation



allows adventure tourism activities in such a manner."

Sundriyal feels that adventure tourism is the fastest growing segment in the world and approximately 4 out of 10 travellers seek adventure activities on a holiday. She says, "Keeping in mind that Madhya Pradesh has 30 per cent forest cover, 10 national parks, 6 tiger reserves and 25 wildlife sanctuaries, we thought adventure would be the next layer to add on to

wildlife tourism which we already offer."

Madhya Pradesh received nearly 7.5 crore tourists before Jal Mahotsav and the final figures are yet to be calculated. The state is planning to invest in Buddhist and Heritage destinations to give more value to the tourists. Two light and sound shows are expected to come up by the end of 2017 at Sanchi and Mandu. Discussing the marketing strategies and trade partnerships,

Sundriyal explains, "Like all others, we too are moving into the digital space and are very active with our social media handles. We are looking at travel trade as partners and investors. We have tried to incorporate all suggestions and discussions into a policy format. ATOAI had suggested undertaking skill development and training upgrade with the state's corporation. Two batches have already been trained based on the discussions with ATOAI."

Catapultt shines at trade shows

Catapultt Services put their best foot forward at domestic and international trade shows alike, especially with a host of new services and products underway.

Catapultt Services, the Delhi-based DMC is making its mark in India as well as in Sri Lanka. To showcase its products and services for the travel trade, the company participated

have really given right momentum for us to trigger our penetration in western region. Going forward, we are planning to open an office in Mumbai to cater to our partners with better accessibility and

group of around 4000 pax and offered end-to-end solution. Apart from that, we are into consolidation of 4-star and 5-star hotels, and work very closely with ITC Hotels, Hyatt Group. Oberoi Hotels,



at the recently held IITT in Mumbai, as well as SATTE in New Delhi.

Speaking about their participation in these shows, **Manish Fitkariwala**, Director, Catapultt Services, said, "We spread our footprints in Western India through India International Travel & Tourism Mart held in Mumbai from February 9-11, 2017. The show was extremely well organised and

visibility in the market. In addition, just like last year, even our second stint at SATTE New Delhi was also extremely successful. With great footfall, pre-fixed meetings and brand positioning, the platform helped us in all areas."

Speaking on its USP and plans ahead, Fitkariwala informed, "Our forte as a DMC is Sri Lanka, where we recently took a very large

Lalit Hotels, etc. We inceptioned around two years back and since then we have grown from a two-people company to now more than 60 people. We have an office in Sri Lanka, with our own fleet as well as a staff of 11 people."

Fitkariwala also informed about their expansion in India, saying, "We have our footprint in Kolkata, and we have just launched our of-

fice in Ahmedabad, and we have presence in Jaipur. We launched our office in Mumbai recently and have many big names from the industry

associated with us. Apart from that we will also be launching a one stop solution for weddings very soon. Also, on the domestic front, we

are working very strongly on Uttarakhand as a territory and are working closely with the ministry there for MICE products as well."



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More power to woman power

Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, rightly said, "In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders." To commemorate International Women's Day on March 8, TRAVTALK speaks to some of the leading ladies of the travel industry to celebrate their journey so far.



TT BUREAU

"Setting up a business was easy, but sustaining and growing it was a roller coaster ride. Being a woman in travel business sometimes was an advantage as I was committed and passionate about the trade. Clients trusted us as dealings were always very personalised and reliable. Many a times a huge question lurked in my mind—what am I doing in this trade, as it was predominantly male dominated? There is a lot one can do in training front line women colleagues, in honing their skills to handle client needs."



Chitra Bhatia
Chairman-Ladies Wing,
OTOAI

"Women in the tourism industry globally have had an interesting journey. We have always been strong. Our challenge today is to change the way the world perceives that strength – to define who we want to be and then to deliberately select a path to grow into that person. It's been over six years now since I've been in the Indian market, and seeing it grow has been a spectacular experience. I am happy to have had the chance to showcase the splendor of Destination South Africa to the Indian audiences."



Hanneli Slabber
India Country Manager,
South African Tourism,
India Travel Awards winner

"The industry has transformed in the last 20-25 years, and there have been quite a few challenges. I don't think the industry has been male dominated, as there are both gentlemen and ladies here. Despite the society being patriarchal, I don't think I ever had to compromise on any front because of my gender. In fact, we being women are acknowledged for our attitude of striving towards perfection, and that's the advice I want to give younger women in the industry. If you think something is right, you should not give up, but work towards your goal."



Tekla Maria
Director Luxury Sales-India
AccorHotels LUXE, Global Sales



Ratna Chadha
Chief Executive
Tirun Marketing

"I feel travel industry is the only industry which has so many women working in various roles. I feel, had women taken charge of the industry the number of inbound and outbound tourists with respect to India would have been far higher. We are inherently multi-tasking be it managing home, business, family or other avenues. Women have a knack to get work done and bring out the best in others. I would tell all young women out there, aspiring to enter the industry, to have a vision, focus and the drive to follow it through."



Meena Bhatia
Vice President- Marketing
& Operations, Le Meridien
New Delhi

"There has been a tectonic shift in the way women have been absorbed, not only in junior positions but also in the top management of well-known hotel brands. Women have competed with men to deliver services in all key operational areas and have excelled in this service-intensive industry. I would advise women wanting to join the industry to undergo thorough training, not look for shortcuts, and make themselves indispensable by hard work, discipline, and ability to think on their feet."



Anjum Lokhandwala
Founder and Director
Outbound Konnections

"The journey in my professional life has been very exciting and a learning experience at the same time. I personally did not face any challenges with regards to me being a female. I maintain a life-work balance. The women who are looking at the travel industry as their career ground should keep in mind that they have to be flexible and prioritise, but keep alive the passion for their goal. Women are seen as equal participants in decision making processes which shows how far we have come and I hope this encouragement will continue."

"In every industry women have to face challenges today and the travel industry is no different, but our resilience to move forward has helped us move beyond these obstacles. Personally, I would thank my parents for inculcating good values in me and teaching me to fight in tough circumstances. Looking at the large number of women who wish to enter the industry today, I would tell them that be passionate about your work which you enjoy instead of just considering as job and encourage woman empowerment."



Samina Munshi
Director, N. Chirag Travels,
India Travel Awards winner

"I feel proud to see that there are many women in the Indian travel trade industry than before. It justifies how much we have grown in terms of accepting people and giving opportunities to those who deserve it. There has been a steady rise in the number of women working in this industry over the years. Most women now consciously opt for working in the travel trade than making it their career by chance. My team at Blue Square Consultants for instance, has women employees who have actively made a choice to join the industry."



Lubaina Sheerazi
COO – Blue Square
Consultants

"Like every industry, the travel industry too poses challenges of all kinds but overcoming the obstacle is a matter of maturity and tactic. A large number of entrants in the travel industry today are women and I would like to tell them the fact that theory and practice go hand in hand and one should not be compromised for the other. One should always maintain dignity and self respect and carry oneself with confidence and openness. So many women are climbing the ladder and it is encouraging to see that after all it's a man's world only just as much as ours."



Sucheta Nagpal
Director & CEO
Travstarz Global Group



Monica Suri
General Manager
Le Meridien Kochi

"The number of women entering the hospitality industry is still meagre. Though the initial levels of the corporate ladder remain open to all, further encouragement and growth of women requires effective guidance strategies and extensive commitment. A proper work-personal life balance is a key factor for all but an unachievable feat for many. In the hospitality industry, interpersonal relationships play a major role in the overall success of the organisation. As women are more democratic in their approach and treat both task accomplishment and interpersonal relationships with equal importance, it is the need of the hour to welcome women to the industry."



Liberatha Kallat
Managing Director
DreamFolks

"The journey has been amazing, but not that easy. For every business, especially a start-up, one has to face challenges. Especially for a woman entrepreneur, things are not that easy in India because you do not get enough support. However, I had two pillars in my partners, and that is the reason we could successfully launch this business. Today, we have tied up with DragonPass and will be expanding our business from India to now 120 countries. Before founding DreamFolks, I had worked for over 15 years in the hospitality sector."



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Rajasthan wants the cameras rolling

Rajasthan is diversifying its tourism revenues by offering various policy incentives for film tourism. The state tourism department has also issued guidelines to convert heritage properties into hotels to attract more tourists.



TT BUREAU

Highlighting the work done in the state for tourism, **Pawan Jain**, Joint Director, Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan, informs that the Government has issued guidelines for granting Certificate of Heritage for conversion of a heritage property into heritage hotel or regularisation of an existing heritage hotel. This is aimed at helping the state tourism department to demarcate heritage properties, thereby improving efforts towards its conservation and also attract tourists.

Jain points out that the state tourism department has amended the Rajasthan Film Shooting Regulations, 2012 and has offered various incentives to the film industry. "Under the new regulations, shooting permissions have to be granted within 15 days of application. The department has completely waived off security deposit of ₹ 50 lakh for filmmakers for a week's schedule and ₹ 10 lakh per day beyond one week. Likewise, the processing charges of ₹ 15,000 per day for the first week and ₹ 10,000 a day beyond the first week have also been



Pawan Jain
Joint Director, Department of Tourism,
Government of Rajasthan

The department has completely waived off security deposit of ₹ 50 lakh for filmmakers for a week's schedule and ₹ 10 lakh per day beyond one week

waived. The new regulations also waived the application fee of ₹ 1000," said Jain. As per the new rules the state has already issued 10 permissions for shooting in the state.



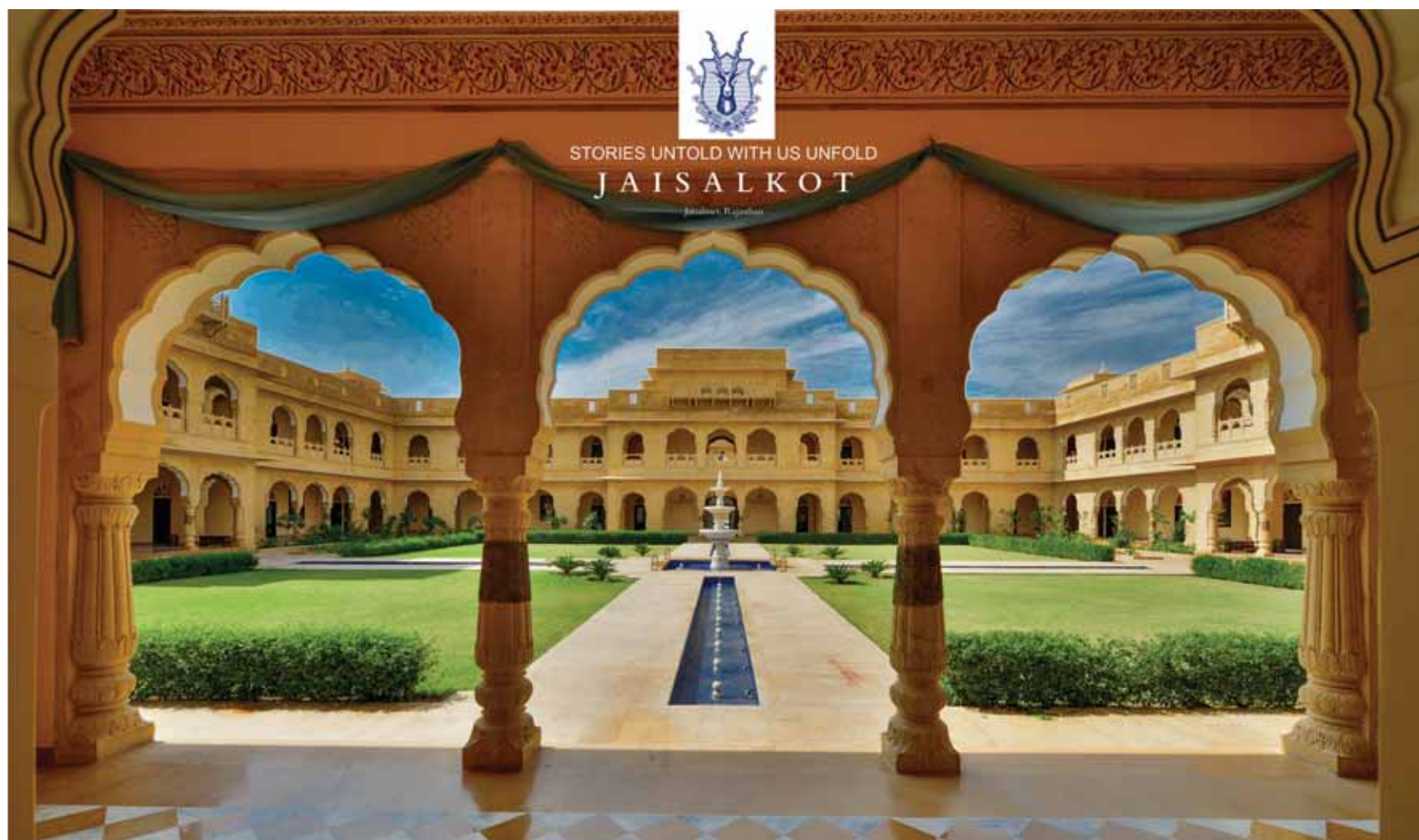
Rajasthan experimented with outsourcing the state's fairs and festivals and the Pushkar Fair has proved to be a successful model, points out Jain. In line with the Regional Connectivity Scheme, Rajasthan has taken steps to connect its various cities. Jain says, "We have engaged Supreme Airlines, which has small aircraft with carrying capacity of 9 passengers. We have connected Jaipur with Udaipur and Jodhpur and soon Bikaner and Jaisalmer

will also be connected." The intra-state flights operate six days a week.

The marketing budget of the state has also been increasing every year to promote various tourism facilities and opportunities in Rajasthan. "Almost ₹ 70 crore was sanctioned for the new media campaign. Travel trade is an important arm to increase business. Post GITB, we have forged many relations with the travel

trade and have started seeing an expansion of source markets through their network," adds Jain.

According to Jain, in 2016, a total of 3.5 million travellers, both domestic and international, visited the state. Travellers from the southern part of India have also started visiting Rajasthan and South East Asian travellers are also looking at Rajasthan as a preferred destination.



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MP's wild side finds favour with trade

Apart from the Golden Triangle, inbound tourists to India are also exploring the country's wildlife parks and sanctuaries. We asked inbound tour operators about their clients' favoured wildlife destinations in India and here's what they had to say:



TT BUREAU



Lally Matthews
Honorary Secretary
IATO

“As far as inbound is concerned, parks like Kanha, Bandhavgarh and Ranthambore are doing very well and attracting many tourists. Many of our clients are visiting these national parks. In recent years, we have seen even Tadoba National Park doing very well. I have heard from travellers that the sightings there have been very good.”

“Wildlife tourism is doing very well in India. However, unfortunately, most of the national parks are closed by May-end or mid-June. Hence, it is not possible for us to sell our wildlife packages beyond those months. In my opinion, Bandhavgarh and Ranthambore are two very good parks where there is a good possibility of seeing Tigers, which is the main reason why many visitors opt for a safari in India. There are many other parks in India, which also offer great sighting for visitors.”



Ravi Gosain
Managing Director, Erco
Travels & Chairman – IATO
Membership Affairs and
Growth Committee



Pandian K
IATO Chairman – Tamil
Nadu, Pondicherry &
Andaman

“Talking of South India, Nagarhole National Park in Karnataka is a very good wildlife destination. In Kerala, Wayanad National Park is also good. In Tamil Nadu, there are untouched destinations like Annamalai National Park and Pollachi Wildlife Sanctuary, about which people have never heard of and is a completely virgin destination. Not many tourists come there because the government and forest department do not want infrastructure to be there because they want to maintain it as a wildlife destination.”

“When the parks open around October, it is a very good market. But in terms of promotion, we haven't done enough for wildlife tourism, despite the number of safaris and parks that we have in India. Also, there are a lot of restrictions as inbound tourists are required to furnish passport details and take permissions, which we usually manage. However, promotion and infrastructure should be worked on. Either we have top-end accommodation in these parks or low-end. There is no middle level accommodation and facilities available.”



Deepak Bhatnagar
MD, Aamantanar Travels



Homa Mistry
India Travel Award winner, &
CEO, Trail Blazer Tours India

“In terms of wildlife tourism, Madhya Pradesh is doing a very good job. This can especially be attributed to the parks and the way that they have developed tourist facilities in the state. That's not all, in terms of the quality of service that travellers get, Madhya Pradesh is really working on that aspect as well. It is no wonder then that Madhya Pradesh is doing exceedingly well in the wildlife section.”

“According to me, Jim Corbett National Park and Ranthambore National Park are popular for inbound tourism. Most of the inbound tour operators are selling these national parks to their clients. There are many other parks in Madhya Pradesh, which are doing very well and record great sightings. There are great wildlife resorts as well at some of these parks. I believe wildlife tourism in India is definitely growing.”



Rajesh Arya
Director, India International
Tours & Travels



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Lufthansa's most modern plane for Delhi

Lufthansa Group brought its first Airbus A350-900, the most modern and latest aircraft, to Delhi from Munich, which even saw the airline's CEO fly down to the city as he discussed the company's plans.

 NISHA VERMA

Delhi welcomed the first Airbus A350-900 by Lufthansa, touted as the world's most modern and environmentally-friendly long haul aircraft. An ecstatic **Carsten Spohr**, Chairman of the Executive Board and CEO, Lufthansa Group, spoke on what made India the preferred destination for the new aircraft, adding, "India is one of our fastest grow-

"We now have 10 flights a day to five different destinations in India and we are enjoying load factors around higher 80s, which is among the best in the world."

Elaborating on the new routes, Will says, "There is growth happening, and we are proud that the Lufthansa Group is introducing a new aircraft not only on Munich-Delhi route, but starting April 16 on



the Munich-Mumbai route as well. By March-end we will be adding a new route — Mumbai-Brussels on our sister airline Brussels Airline, five times a week on A-330, which will be a milestone." However, surviving in a competitive market like

India is not easy. Spohr insists, "India is a highly competitive market. While everybody has understood the importance of the Indian market, Lufthansa, with its premium product, is well placed to maintain its position as a number one Eu-

ropean player in India." But, Lufthansa has still not brought its low cost airline to India.

"We inaugurated our low cost intercontinental airline — Eurowings last year and are currently bringing up the fleet to seven aircraft. We would have additional aircraft next year and India will be on our list, especially for

connecting secondary cities," adds Spohr.

Lufthansa is already enjoying years of good cooperation with Air India and Jet Airways. Will adds, "We are focusing on the metros because that's where we already have our gateways in place. Currently, we are focusing on adding more capacity to the existing routes or opening new routes with our sister companies."



Carsten Spohr
Chairman of the Executive Board and CEO, Lufthansa Group

ing markets around the world and hence we have a tradition to bring our latest aircraft to India. Following up on that, we will also bring the A350 next to Mumbai from Munich. The aircraft has 25 per cent less fuel consumption and 50 per cent less noise, which makes it the quietest cabin in the industry. For us, this is what premium service means and we know that our Indian customers will cherish this."

Agrees **Wolfgang Will**, Senior Director, South Asia, Lufthansa Group, "The A350-900 has many innovations,



Wolfgang Will
Senior Director, South Asia
Lufthansa Group

including a Companion App, where passengers can create their personalised list of inflight entertainment; a much quieter cabin; as well as a strong broadband connection on board. It's a very efficient aircraft with more capacity and would help us to attract more customers in India and offer them best products and services."

Lufthansa, according to Spohr, has been the number one carrier between Europe and India for many years, especially when it comes to premium side of the market.

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Georgia calls on trade

Having promoted itself in Bollywood rigorously, Georgia is now focusing on the travel industry.



TT BUREAU

Georgia is an unexplored destination at the crossroads of Europe and Asia offering an unexpected experience to all travellers, claims **Satinder S. Ahuja**, Honorary Consul, Consulate of Georgia, who is responsible to promote trade, tourism, and culture and investment opportunities in Georgia. He explains that Georgia provides a new perspective to its visitors with a variety of tourism products of the likes of culture, heritage, adventure, wellness amongst others.

"The number of Indian travellers to Georgia is very less currently but with adequate awareness we hope to increase the same. Georgia can cater to all segments of Indian travellers. There are 182 resort areas, 2,400 springs of mineral water, 12,000 pilgrim and historical monuments. For adventure tourism, we offer various activities like hiking, trekking, mountaineering, biking etc.," says Ahuja.

Georgia is looking forward to forge partnerships

with the Indian travel trade and use their channels to spread awareness about the various tourist offerings at the destination. Ahuja informs, "Georgia



Satinder S. Ahuja
Honorary Consul
Honorary Consulate of Georgia

and India have signed a MoU under which various trade relations will be undertaken. We also hope that in 6-8 months, direct flights between India and Georgia will be operational." The destination is spreading awareness in the Indian market through exhibitions and has established the destination through film tourism. "It has been largely promoted in Bollywood productions and T-Series song sequences which have been shot at multiple locations in Georgia," adds Ahuja.

High demand for Austria

Austria recorded a total of 147,300 arrivals from India in 2016 which amounts to 25 per cent increase over 2015 and 271,100 overnights, registering a 24 per cent increase over 2015.



TT BUREAU

In its annual roadshow conducted at Mumbai, Chennai and New Delhi, Austrian National Tourist Office met with key travel trade partners to educate them about new products and offerings at the destination.

India has been identified as the highest growing market for Austria. Indian outbound market is expected to grow at 8.2 per cent and by 2021, 21.5 million Indians are expected to travel abroad, informed **Christine Mukharji**, Director-India, Austrian National Tourism Office. She says, "We are expecting a 20 per cent increase in 2017 from India. We see mostly family travellers between the age group of 35-60 years. This year we are offering them focused experiences like nature events; adventure activities like cycling along the Danube; skiing lessons for children and snow experiences."

Vienna, the capital city



Christine Mukharji
Director-India
Austrian National Tourism Office

received a record 53,522 Indian arrivals corresponding to 32.6 per cent growth as compared to 2015. A total number of 111,531 bed nights were recorded, which is an increase of 28.9 per cent. "We are expecting an increase of nearly 20-30 per cent from India in 2017. India climbed to the 29th position from 42nd last year in terms of source markets in 2016 and we hope to see India in our top 10 source markets soon," says **Isabella Rauter**, Team Manager-Media Management, Vienna Tourist Board.



Isabella Rauter
Team Manager-Media Management
Vienna Tourist Board

The city of Innsbruck plans to roll out a Bollywood map showcasing locations where popular Indian movies are shot. In 2016, the city recorded 51,000 Indian overnights corresponding to a 5 per cent growth over 2015. "With an increase in number of Indian arrivals to Innsbruck, we are now the second most popular destination in Austria after Vienna for Indian visitors. We have some very exciting projects with Bollywood coming up in Innsbruck. The Yash Raj Film-Tiger Zinda Hai will be shot in Innsbruck in March and

April," says **Peter Unsinn**, Manager- International Marketing and Media (Asia, USA, UK), Innsbruck Tourismus.

The city of Salzburg received 34,874 Indian overnights which was an increase of 35.84 per cent in 2016 over 2015. "India has climbed to be among the top 15 source markets for us in the last two years. 80 per cent of our Indian guests visit Salzburg in the summers while the rest 20 visit us in the winters," says **Klemens Kollenz**, Sales and Marketing Manager, Tourismus Salzburg.

According to **Christiane Gasser**, Head-Channel Marketing, D. Swarovski Tourism Services GMBH, Swarovski Crystal World is the most visited attraction in Austria. Last year the attraction recorded over 2 million visitors from across the world with 73,000 visitors from India. "We received more Indian visitors than Austria, our home market which is very encouraging for us," says Gasser.



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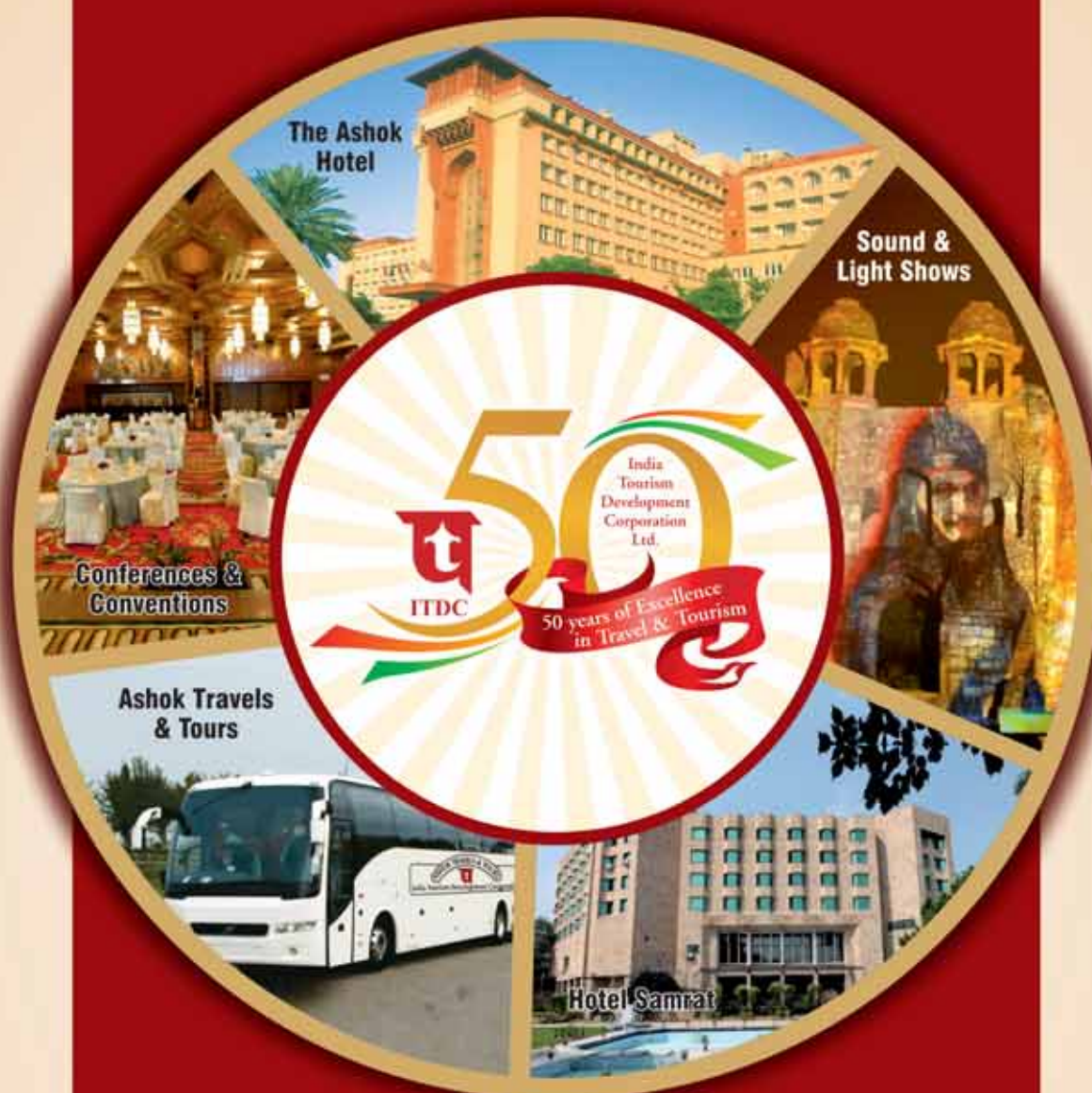
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Zoom your way to regional connectivity

Zoom Air has become the 10th scheduled domestic carrier in India after it launched its maiden flight from Delhi-Kolkata-Durgapur sector recently. **Koustav M. Dhar**, CEO and Director, Zoom Air, gives the lowdown.

 NISHA VERMA

QWhich market are you focusing on with the launch?

There is a certain gap in aviation in regional sectors. That's where we are coming in. Our aircraft, which is a 50-seater, has the right size to get into the regional markets. Also, being a national airline we have an advantage of going from any one point to another in the country. That's where we are looking to fill the gaps.

QWhich sectors would you be covering currently?

As of now, we are flying on Delhi-Kolkata-Durgapur sector, and in the afternoon we are connecting to Chandigarh and Amritsar. By the summer schedule, which starts from March 25, we will fly into Surat as we will have a Delhi-Surat-Bhavnagar-Mumbai-Aurangabad flight. Then we will be connecting Delhi-Jabalpur-Kolkata-Shillong- Aizawl. We will also connect Pasighat and Zero



Koustav M. Dhar
CEO and Director, Zoom Air

(in Arunachal Pradesh), Allahabad, Gorakhpur, Indore and Bhopal.

QAre you also planning to fly to South India and when?

We will start operations in South India somewhere in mid-April, because we want to establish our northern and eastern operations primarily. In South, we are looking at connecting Tirupati, Vijayawada with Mumbai and Delhi, because there is a need for that. We are also looking at connecting Vizag, which is also underserved to a certain extent. We are also looking at exploring some new air-

ports. There are about six new airports, which are coming up and we would love to go there.

QBeing a premium full service airline, how are you planning to break even?

The cost is always there in airline business. It doesn't change just by giving premium food on board. I am not against the low cost model or any other model. I believe that people do not fly for food, but they do get elated when they are served food on board. Passengers spend 1.5-2 hours in the flight, where they have nothing to do. And that's when they can enjoy the food and the hospitality. Flying is all about experience. That's the difference between going in a train and an aircraft. We will be flying from T2 terminal in Mumbai and T3 in Delhi, which adds to the experience. This doesn't cost anything, neither to the passengers, nor the airline. It's about how you want to present it.

QWith existing airlines already there, how are you planning to deal with the competition?

I don't think there would be a lot of competition because the sectors in which we are flying are niche sectors and do not have the capacity over 50-60 passengers. A national airline would not bring a 180 seater Airbus 320 or a Boeing 737 into such a sector. This would mean that they need to align with us. We would bring more passengers to them and support them. Zoom Air would act as a filler for them. Smaller airports like Panth Nagar are not aligned to have 180 people going out every day.




QAre you looking at code shares with any airline within India?

We are talking to larger national operators to get into code share. Incidentally, the LCCs do not have an arrangement for code share. If they do it, I am ready to join hands.



















QWhat is the price you are offering?

In terms of pricing, we won't be cheaper or costlier than anyone. We would be exactly within the same price range with other LCCs. However, it would be the service, timing, and other things that

will make the difference. Hence, we'd let the people choose. The introductory fare for Durgapur-Kolkata is ₹1000, inclusive taxes. For Delhi-Durgapur, we have a starting fare of about ₹3500, and the same goes for the reverse flight.


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Roadshows in Tier-II cities Focus on MICE & wedding

After successfully completing its six-city Bali roadshow, U&I Holidays is planning for next year where it will make inroads into Tier-II cities.

TT BUREAU

Having grown its annual roadshow from five cities to six now, Mumbai-based U&I Holidays is now keen on adding Tier-II cities from next year. **Shyam Upadhyay**, Director, U&I Holidays, says, "This time, we wanted to include a new city so we added Kolkata, which to our surprise was a hit. Most of the participants found good potential there. Every city got more than 100 attendees but Kolkata was at 150 which is really good for a city like that."

The six cities were Chennai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai. The roadshow had 32 participants from Bali of which 31 were hotels plus one caterer.

Speaking about Kolkata, **Ashish Indulkar**, Director, U&I Holidays, adds, "Although we have been doing some activities in Kolkata, we never ventured full-fledge into the market. We were very happy with the turnout. It is a very interesting market be-



Shyam Upadhyay
Director
U&I Holidays

cause there are whispers that AirAsia India is planning to launch a direct Kolkata-Bali flight via Kuala Lumpur."

Upadhyay adds that next year's roadshow will continue to travel to six cities but a new set of cities which will include a Tier-II city like Nagpur, Jaipur or Pune.

The duo has also been working on taking the business online. It has been working on creating U&I's own online portal. "We hope to launch it by March end – early April. With the online portal,



Ashish Indulkar
Director
U&I Holidays

we hope to tackle issues such as quick feedback, manual errors, and increase our numbers," Upadhyay reveals.

The portal will also help travel agents. It will offer them online inventory which means they can go online and check the rates with the availability and therefore greater transparency. "That's the number one advantage. We will also give agents a lot of tours and transfer options, which will have the normal as well as the luxury options," Upadhyay says, adding that it does get difficult to manage numbers offline.

Following the launch of Garuda Indonesia's Mumbai-Jakarta route, the country is aggressively promoting its tourism products through VITO.

TT BUREAU

Indonesia recently conducted a roadshow in New Delhi and Mumbai aiming at increasing arrival numbers from India to the country and to showcase an array of tourism products. A number of representatives from hotels, restaurant and travel providers were a part of the workshop and provided first-hand information to travel agents and tour operators.

Between January-November 2016, Indonesia received 336,575 Indian arrivals and aims at a growth of 56 per cent in 2017 from last year's target of 350,000 informed **Andriyatna Rubenta**, Deputy Director of Sales Mission for Asia Pacific, Indonesia Tourism at the New Delhi leg of the roadshow.

"India is currently the sixth source market for foreign tourist arrivals and the numbers have been steadily growing. Especially now with Garuda Indonesia connecting Jakarta and Mumbai, we are optimistic about this year's progress," he



said. He informed that they are looking at initiating additional air routes to connect more Indian cities since the response to the commencement of the Garuda flight has been strong. The leisure segment was the strongest in 2016, followed by MICE and a strong demand for weddings as well.

Sanjay Sondhi, Country Director, Visit Indonesia Tourism Office (VITO) said, "Today, we have brought together 18 stakeholders at the Delhi roadshow. We just completed the Mumbai edition and have two

more roadshows planned for the second half of the year. A growth in tourists travelling to Indonesia from the west India is definitely expected – Garuda will probably be looking at non-stop flights as well, since currently, there's a technical halt in Bangkok. We will be focusing more on MICE and weddings, and hope that Garuda connects New Delhi soon too."

On the newly launched Mumbai-Jakarta route, almost 90 per cent occupancy was observed in December, revealed **Pradeep Chauhan**, Key Accounts Manager, Garuda Indonesia. "We are expecting the positive response to continue. Bali has already received advanced group bookings and the airline is looking into connecting more Indian destinations like Delhi-Jakarta, Mumbai-Bali," he said. The airline is keen on tapping the corporate market for which Mumbai and Chennai are on their radar. Chauhan added that Chennai-Medan would be a very beneficial route since a lot of movement takes place between the two cities.



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Look before flying: CAPA

CAPA, at its recent summit, warns Indian airlines to watch out for signs of danger. As is already visible, a rise in capacities is already leading compressed yields. What's inevitable though is humongous growth.



TT BUREAU

A masterclass in Indian Aviation, the CAPA India Aviation Summit 2017 gave an insight into the health of India's aviation sector and what it can expect in the short term. It reviewed FY2016-17 and

profit of about \$122 million in FY2016 at an industry level for the first time in ten years, which is remarkable. This is also mentioned in an in-depth report it released titled 'CAPA India Aviation Outlook 2018' this March. "However, after the Air India results were announced, we feel that the

industry is going to lose at a net level about \$80 million. Air India's numbers which we expected to be around `2,600-2,700 crore is turning out to be at `3,600-3,800 crore net loss. However, after a long time, most of the players have reported profits or lower losses," he announced.



Kapil Kaul
South Asia CEO
CAPA

gave an interesting outlook for FY2017-18. Touching upon airlines, traffic capacity, profitability, funding and airports, the Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation (CAPA) India gave a strategic review of FY2017.

Giving a gist of this was Kapil Kaul, South Asia CEO, CAPA, who said, "We have a 23 per cent growth. In the last three years we are almost over 20 per cent. That should mean profitability, strengthening of the industry that should mean more jobs and more competitiveness. But this kind of growth could be misleading and could possibly be leading us to risks. The structural weaknesses of the sector will get exposed once the growth touches 25 per cent."

He added that the Indian airlines have posted a

CAPA Predicts

- Domestic traffic for FY2018 expected to be between 20-25 per cent, crossing 130 million passengers
- International traffic to expand at 10-12 per cent FY2017-18 but growth remains below its true potential because of bilateral restrictions
- Air India's numbers which were expected to be around `2,600-2,700 cr is turning out to be at `3,600-3,800 cr net loss
- Indian carrier scheduled to induct 60-65 narrow bodied aircraft or higher in FY2018
- Full service airline model continues to decline in relative terms
- LCCs may dominate with their market share going up to 80 per cent

India for sustainable tourism

► Contd. from page 3

for astrotourism, safari and wildlife tours. Preserving wildlife and the environment is also a key topic at ITB Berlin in general.

Coming to India's participation, Ruetz informs that the hall where the Indian delegation will be placed (Hall 5.2b) is once again fully booked. "India will draw importance to Sustainable Tourism while Assam will be exhibiting for the first time. Many first-time exhibitors from Kerala will also be showcasing attractive prod-

ucts," he adds. On the stand of Enfield Riders, a newcomer to this year's ITB Berlin, lovers of classic machines can get tips on touring India by motorcycle.

The travel technology section, called eTravel World, will also feature an additional hall due to high demand which hosts almost only newcomers. "It is attracting more and more international exhibitors and especially startups from around the world. The increasing presence of payment system providers also underlines the growing importance of travel technology."

Start-ups will get a leg-up through an international pitching event powered by Phocuswright where startups from Europe, Asia and the US will present their ideas to a panel of leading experts. Apart from these segments, ITB Berlin 2017 will lay greater emphasis on medical tourism as one of the fast-growing segments.

Highlights

- Many first time exhibitors from Assam & Kerala are showcasing their products
- Greater emphasis is on medical tourism



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Towards a digital revolution

As the second edition of Phocuswright India, to be held in Gururgram from February 28-March 2, puts a special emphasis on APAC's growth in travel, **Chetan Kapoor**, Research Analyst – Asia Pacific, Phocuswright, highlights key matters and trends in the Indian travel industry.



TT BUREAU

QWhere does India stand in terms of travel technology?

In general, India is among the leading markets for technology development and service fulfilment. Travel technology is certainly an aspect of it, and several Indian travel tech companies are renowned

for their services. From a consumer standpoint, however, India has much to catch up to its western peers. As more people have access to digital services and banking, we will catch up to them in due time.

QBut there is still a huge percentage that is offline...

The lack of infrastructure

is surely an inhibitor, but on the flipside, the potential of millions coming online and becoming part of the digital ecosystem is generally more appealing to entrepreneurs and investors. With every generation, digital activities have only increased and the trend will continue — it's a no brainer. The recent demonetisation and digital payment

drive will further encourage consumers to spend digitally.

QIn the Indian market, how can automation benefit when the need of the hour is employment generation?

Every industry is getting automated to some degree, and the primary objective is to eliminate effi-

ciencies — be it in manufacturing or services. In order to strike a balance, skill development should be widely promoted and facilitated by the government and various industry stakeholders. It is in the industry's best interest to also discuss the quality of service delivery, which can only happen if people are given access to,

and encouraged to build on their skills.

QThe adoption of sharing economy is still in its nascent stage with companies like Airbnb yet to grasp a stronghold. Are we ready for it?

I wouldn't say that the concept of sharing economy is necessarily new in India. What is new, is bringing in some degree of organisation and commerce into the conversation. Particularly for Airbnb-like services, there surely remains some apprehension to live with strangers, yet at the same time a meaningful share of In-



Chetan Kapoor
Research Analyst – Asia Pacific
Phocuswright

Every industry is getting automated to some degree, and the primary objective is to eliminate efficiencies

dians who travelled overseas last year booked a shared accommodation. Another reason for limited uptick in the domestic market is the restricted number of secondary home ownership — that is core to have more dedicated listings.

QWhat are some of the dominant trends that are going to shape the future of travel technology?

Artificial intelligence and personalisation are increasingly coming under the spotlight. Of particular interest is how AI will anticipate and deliver accurate, relevant and timely results to travel shoppers and buyers.

The Right Focus

- ➔ Over 400 attendees from travel and related industries expected at Phocuswright India
- ➔ Travel Innovation Summit to give a leg-up to travel start-ups
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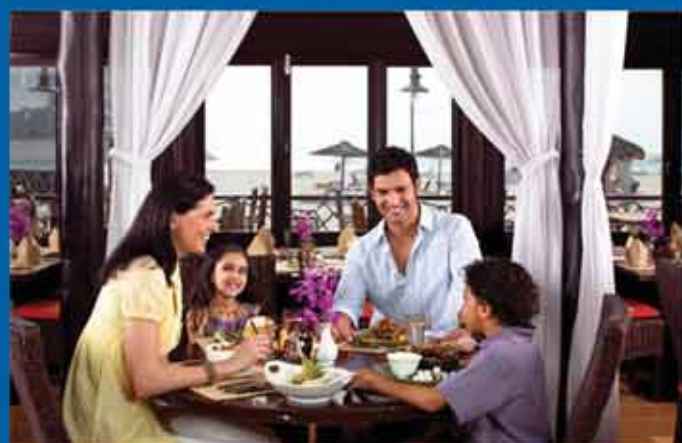
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ANUPRIYA BISHNOI

Conveniently located in Aerocity, Andaz Delhi is within easy reach of downtown Delhi and the business hub of Gurgaon. **Heddo Siebs**, General Manager, Andaz Delhi, says, "Andaz Delhi is a lifestyle brand which has 401 rooms, including 45 suites and 129 apartments, which will open by next year. Also, it's very special to bring an American brand to India, which has got an Indian name 'Andaz'. When we talk about the brand Andaz, in particular, guests know instantly, it has a lot to do with the style and which is based on a peculiar character and I think Andaz is full of personal style."

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Heddo Siebs
General Manager
Andaz Delhi

and meeting spaces, Siebs says, "The hotel offers 37,500 sq. ft. of innovative meeting and event spaces, with fluid layouts and functional design creating environments that dissolve barriers and encourage creative thinking, interaction and conversation. The oval shaped pillar-less ballroom is one of the largest indoor luxury wedding spaces in Delhi and can accommodate up to 1,500 guests."

The unobstructed design of the ballroom provides a blank canvas to customise and decorate the space based on the individuality and style of any guest. "The ball is

special because of the ceiling height of 22 ft. The unique Elephant Path adds a sense of drama to a traditional Indian wedding. Eight Andaz Studios offer residential-style meeting and event spaces with inspiring open kitchens and an outdoor terrace," he adds.

According to Siebs, Andaz has landed in the city center of Delhi/NCR. He says, "Looking at how Delhi and Gurgaon are really growing, we are right in the city centre. So, we can cater to both the markets. As we all know traffic in Delhi is really an issue, so with us in between, everyone is looking forward to visit us."

Competition certainly exists not just in Aerocity but in Delhi/NCR as well. According to Siebs, guests at Andaz Delhi get an opportunity to choose what they really like. "I think Delhi is ready for a lifestyle product which is more than contemporary and not as classical as my colleague next door," he adds.



TT BUREAU

In 2016, as many as 66,000 Indian tourists visited Czech Republic, corresponding to a growth of over 20 per cent, informed Ing. **Tereza Matejkova**, Head-Trade Fairs, Czech Tourism. "We would like to welcome all segments of Indian tourists but this year we are focusing on MICE, family and luxury travellers from India," says Matejkova.

She further adds that the destination wedding segment and honeymoon market is also growing very fast in India and the destination is working on developing products for this segment as well. Czech Republic is offering tourism products of the likes of culture tourism, active holidays, wellness and MICE to the India market in 2017. Commenting on the appointment of VFS Global as its India representation company, Matejkova points out, "We are very happy to announce that we have appointed VFS

Global as our India representation for a year. We are looking for Indian travel agents and tour operator co-operation through our India representation. We will also be organising familiarisation and press trips to introduce

"We are happy to represent Czech Republic in India and we hope to work in close collaboration with Czech Tourism partners as well as Indian partners to grow the number of Indian tourists to Czechia." He further explained that the



our destination to the India market. We will also conduct roadshows and other marketing activities to boost the numbers to Czechia."

Arzan Khambatta, Head-India, Czech Tourism and Head-Tourism Representation, VFS Global, elaborated on the strategy that the company will follow to boost Indian tourists to Czech Republic. He said,

tourism board will first start with cooperation with travel trade in India. "We feel there is a lot of scope to increase awareness about Czech Republic as a tourist destination and develop new products for the destination from the India market. We will also work to promote Czechia through social media and other consumer platforms which will be done at a later stage," adds Khambatta.

A walk in the theme park

IMG Worlds of Adventure, offering an indoor theme park experience, has recently launched an annual membership pass with exclusive offers.



TT BUREAU

The IMG Worlds of Adventure, an indoor theme park experience offers four unique worlds all under one roof; Cartoon Network and Marvel as well as two proprietary brands, the Lost Valley-Dinosaur Adventure joined together by IMG Boulevard. The park is fully indoors, temperature controlled, open 365 days featuring 25 immersive retail concept stores, 28 original F&B outlets, over 1,500 employees and 4,500 parking spaces, informs **Lennard Otto**, CEO, IMG Worlds of Adventures.

Otto points out that the theme park has received hundreds of thousands of guests till date and the destination has received a good response from countries like Saudi Arabia and India who have visited the destination during public holidays. The Halloween and festive celebrations have also proven extremely popular whilst on a day-to-day basis the theme park has welcomed numer-



Lennard Otto
Chief Executive Officer
IMG Worlds of Adventures

ous school trips and corporate groups. "From the outset we have looked to welcome 50 per cent UAE residents and 50 per cent tourists to IMG Worlds of Adventure. Through our sales agencies and tour operators we have successfully targeted the Indian market. We designed the park so that we appeal to families and friends of all ages. We have also welcomed Indian leisure groups as well as the Indian MICE market," says Otto.

To ensure that IMG Worlds of Adventure appeals to an international audience,

an integrated approach has been adopted using many different modes of promotional strategies. The destination works closely with Dubai Tourism and other channel partners. Otto further adds, "We have participated in key trade shows and road shows, worked with representation agencies, offered numerous Fam trips to tour agencies and provided brochures in the major travel trade publications. We are also about to launch our digital campaign which will target our top five source markets."

The destination recently introduced new prices for non-residents tickets which will now cost AED245 for adults and AED225 for juniors. Additionally, a new annual membership pass has also been launched which costs AED1295 per person. Otto informs that the annual membership pass will give its card holders an array of exclusive benefits which includes 365 days of unlimited entry to IMG Worlds of Adventure.

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Trade glitterati descends in Delhi

Biggies of the travel industry got together at CSTF's (Creating Synergy among Travel Fraternity) annual travel trade soiree, which was held at Solitaire Gardens, New Delhi on February 16. After a hectic day of travel trade events, the crème de la crème of the industry networked and danced the night away while sipping cocktails and relishing canapés and dinner.



for 6th CSTF gala night



Travkart forays into tertiary markets

Backed by Holidays by Sahibji, Travkart is a technology company offering both online and offline holiday solutions.

TT BUREAU

Travkart is unique in its commitment to provide smart travel solutions to its customers through several unique features and highly convenient tools, claims **Manheer Singh Sethi**, Co-founder, Travkart.com. "Tools like live and instant confirmations, customised travel options, immediate selling point (ISP); friendly mobile App for booking and accessing



Manheer Singh Sethi
Co-founder
Travkart.com

itinerary on the tour; budget search tool; easy and con-

venient payment gateways like Travkart Wallet, etc. make Travkart unique," he says.

Some of the company's main services include fixed departure packages to Indian and international destinations; domestic and international flight and hotel bookings; cruise holidays; special group rates for MICE, leisure, training programs at domestic and international destinations and car rental services.

Presently selling themed holidays online in North India, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, UP, Chennai, Madhya Pradesh, Travkart intends to create extraordinary travel experiences for travelers by turning fully tech-oriented. "We aim to enter more Tier-II and Tier-III cities in the country. Also, we will help facilitate the better connection of these cities to the major metros and international airports," adds Sethi.

Making visas easy

Offering visas for eight countries through one form on a single platform, Visa Lounge is fast gaining ground in the travel trade.

TT BUREAU

Since its inception six months ago, Visa Lounge has seen a consistent increase in the number of visas processed on a daily basis. Through this, it was evident to the company that the Indian traveler is now looking for more varied experiences and increased convenience

in planning their trips. To help cater to these needs and interest better, Visa Lounge has launched visa processing for four new countries of Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Turkey and Myanmar.

In a short span of time, the company has already garnered a positive response and aims to add many more countries to their list in the near future. Additionally, Visa Lounge will also be including ancillary services for each of these countries. Speaking about this new development, **Clevio Monteiro**, CEO, Visa Lounge, reveals, "To help provide our customers with a



Clevio Monteiro
CEO
Visa Lounge

We have a single platform, which is extremely simple, and at the best industry rates. To promote this, we want to reach out to more and more travel agents

one-stop platform for all their travel needs, Visa Lounge has now included air and hotel booking services, along with the pre-existing insurance, 'Meet and Greet' and 'OK to Board' services. These ancillary services will be launched by April 2017 and will be for all the countries that we offer visas."

Monteiro adds that what this implies is that the travel agents can now book entire package on the site, which also offers a payment gateway. "Travel agents who work with us can avail of a lot of benefits. We have a single platform, a single form which is extremely simple, and at the best industry rates. To promote this, we want to reach out to more and more travel agents. We will therefore be participating in all future trade fairs. We are also targeting Tier-II and Tier-III cities in India where the potential of growth is huge," Monteiro says.

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READING



Czechia lures the trade

Czech Republic, also called Czechia, hosted the travel trade community to an evening full of frolic and festivity as the destination announced VFS Global as its India representative.



JEWEL IN THE CITY OF TAJ MAHAL

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

A long table banquet at the world famous **Mughal Room**, High Tea or Sun-downer, Bar-b-que at the terrace **Sunset Lounge**, over looking the Taj Mahal & Agra Fort, an AV for the group at **Arjumand hall**, the new **Checkers Buffet**, the refurbished rooms & bathrooms, Gym by the garden, recreation center and signature massage at **Adiba Spa**, enrich the overall holiday experience.

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

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Striving for holistic training

With a focus on the holistic development of hospitality and tourism industry aspirants, Institute of Hotel Management, Gurdaspur, is paving the way for trained professionals to step into the industry well-equipped. **Argha Chakravorty**, Principal, IHM, Gurdaspur, shares the future plans of the institute.

ANKITA SAXENA

Q*In your opinion, what are the challenges faced by the industry?*

The travel and hospitality industry in India is growing at a healthy rate. This is fueled by not only a steady increase in international arrivals but also a huge domestic market which keeps the industry partly immune from international meltdowns and recessions. The industry needs to improve tourism infrastructure, manage negative perception of safety, security and lack of hygiene and sanitation.

Q*What are your suggestions to improve and grow the industry?*

There is a need for subsidy for hotels up to 10 rooms particularly in remote and



Argha Chakravorty
Principal
IHM Gurdaspur

underdeveloped locations. Encouragement for home-stay schemes is required by marketing them at both domestic and international travel forums. Well-trained tourist police personnel at all major tourist destinations would go a long way in addressing safety and security issues.

We also need a sustained and inclusive effort towards the Clean India campaign to create a better brand image of India. Lastly, the key aspect is rationalisation of tax structures related to hospitality and tourism industry is the need of the hour. Looking at 2017, I am hoping that the industry will rationalise the wage structure at the lower and entry levels for professionals; to have a structured training programme for the interns and industrial trainees; focus on better human resource practices and initiate in-house training programmes.

Q*What are the institute's future plans?*

We have a sustained focus on faculty training and development, student empowerment, extra-curricular



and co-curricular activities for students. In future we are planning to provide impetus on the above areas to create an environment of dynamic stability in the institute. We also want to further augment our infrastructure with addition of state-of-art equipment, stadium and social space through construction of a student activity block for which efforts are already underway.

IHM Gurdaspur has been consistently ranked among country's top 10 hotel management institutes in the surveys conducted by various agencies. Our in-house division of students participate in competitive events throughout the year aimed at fueling team spirit, leadership and holistic development.

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Cruise Professionals on the job

Hurtigruten has appointed Cruise Professionals as its GSA in India and Sri Lanka, reveals **William Harber**, President, China & Asia-Pacific, Hurtigruten.



With a GSA in India now, Hurtigruten is looking to explore the opportunities that the market provides. Confident of a positive growth potential for Hurtigruten, **William Harber** says, "We have seen a huge growth potential in India as well as across the world for exploration travel, and Hurtigruten is certainly a leader in exploration travel, particularly in cold water cruising. This means cruising not only to Antarctica, but also coastal Norway, Salzburg, Greenland, Iceland as well as Canada."

A prominent name in exploration travel, Harber says that they are very keen to tap the potential of the Indian market. "This would allow us to have better coverage in both North, South, East and West of India as well as all the other markets in India. In addition, it would not only help us in terms of making our consumers more aware of the brand, but also help in our distribution to travel agents



William Harber
President, China & Asia-Pacific
Hurtigruten

that would like to sell Hurtigruten," he adds.

Nishith Saxena, Founder & Director, Cruise Professionals, agrees, "The association between Hurtigruten and Cruise Professionals has come at a time when a large section of Indian travellers are seeking a different experience that goes beyond the normal cruising options. We shall make Hurtigruten easy for the travel agents to sell and help deliver a complete solution for adventurous travellers by educating the trade about



Nishith Saxena
Founder & Director
Cruise Professionals

unique voyages offered to some of the world's most breathtaking destinations."

For Harber, educating the trade is the best way to move forward. "We want to better educate the travel trade in terms of our product, our itineraries and our new ships. Between 2018-2022, we have four new, state-of-the-art exploration ships coming in, with an experienced staff, crew, officers and expedition team that can serve as the base camp for different travels," he says.

TAT extends visa fee exemption

TAT is upbeat on achieving its target of 11 per cent growth in Indian arrivals this year and has various schemes and promotions in store for the months to come.



Thailand had initially rolled out a tourist visa fee exemption scheme from November to February 28, 2017 for India and 20 other countries in a bid to boost tourist arrivals to the kingdom. Thanks to its success, the Thai government has decided to extend it to an additional six months, informed **Srisuda Wanapinyosak** Deputy Governor for International Marketing (Asia and South Pacific), Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). "Visa applications from the Indian market grew by almost 200 per cent during the visa fee exemption scheme's initial duration. Hence, it was decided to extend the scheme for six months."

The kingdom received around 1.1 million Indian tourists, said Wanapinyosak, registering an increase of 11 per cent. "This year we are expecting a 10 per cent growth not just in terms of numbers but revenue as well." She further elaborated that weddings have been a very popular segment



(L-R) Soraya Homchuen, Director, TAT Mumbai, Anusha Dandekar & Srisuda Wanapinyosak, TAT Deputy Governor for International Marketing

with around 300 couples visiting Thailand last year. The country offers a variety of experiences when it comes to weddings – they can be held underwater, on elephant backs or in a traditional Thai way, for the less adventurous.

When asked about some of the upcoming activities that TAT would like to promote, Wanapinyosak said that luxury car rallies are something that have been fast catching the fancy of several tourists. "This can be very popular as one can drive from India to Myanmar and then to Thailand. While gas-

tronomy is another facet which Indians are fond of, especially Thai cuisine, it is also a golfer's paradise," she added.

Come August and Thailand will commence a special season for women travellers in celebration of the Queen's birthday. Exclusive discounts and packages along with exclusive offerings on spas, shopping, resorts, etc., are up for grabs. "There are separate lanes for women at immigration, discounts on various products like entertainment, and hotels; it is the perfect time for women to visit."

Tier-II, III MICE numbers rising

Ever since TCEB focused on smaller Indian cities, the MICE segment has witnessed a favourable response with Thai Airways exploring additional routes.



Thailand has seen a double-digit growth in Indian arrivals in 2016 where MICE movements to the kingdom were as strong as the leisure segment. Tier II cities in particular, have shown a growing interest in travelling to Thailand for meetings and conventions, informs **Nitin Sachdeva**, Marketing Manager, India Representative Office, Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB). "Destinations like Krabi and Ko Samui are picking up especially from cities like Aurangabad, Jamshedpur, Jaipur and Lucknow because we have tapped the market well and the response has been very encouraging. We do a lot of seminars in Tier II cities and educate people about new offerings," he adds.

TCEB, along with Thai Airways International, recently hosted an exclusive Thailand MICE Corporate Networking in the capital with an aim to foster networking

among corporates and to appreciate their efforts. While numbers have always been a priority, TCEB is also looking at getting quality corporates and encourages sustainability in the MICE segment



Nitin Sachdeva
Marketing Manager, India Representative
Office, Thailand Convention & Exhibition
Bureau (TCEB)

through a special promotional campaign which highlights conducting meetings in a green environment as well as CSR activities.

Thai Airways is also looking to add more routes in India to fulfil the increasing demand and already operates over 50 flights, includ-

ing its subsidiary, Thai Smile. **Viset Sontichai**, Director - Indian Sub Continent, Thai Airways, says, "The flight to Delhi is almost always fully booked with an average load factor of approximately 80 per cent. We plan to connect more Tier II Indian cities this year since we have seen a great response." He adds that special packages and good deals for MICE are also available on group bookings.

Sunil Kumar, Head of Sales - North India, Thai Airways, elaborates on their future plans and comments, "We want to increase our frequencies from major cities like Delhi and Mumbai provided the bilaterals between the two governments are worked out. Besides that, we are looking into operating from smaller cities like Amritsar, Kochi, Ahmedabad and Guwahati. Our target is to operate at least 100 flights per week Thai Airways and Thai Smile together."



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Looking beyond conventional markets

In a bid to boost inbound tourism, the travel industry is now looking beyond the traditional source markets in order to capture a wider range of travellers. India Travel Award winners discuss the new emerging source markets that can help India diversify its offerings and accelerate growth of the tourism sector.

TT BUREAU



► **Best Travel Agency (East 2016)- Gainwell Travels and Leisure**

Explore South East Asia

According to **Manoj Saraf**, Managing Director, Gainwell Travels and Leisure, when inbound tourism to India is under consideration, the natural tendency is to look west as Europe constitutes one of the largest source markets. Saraf says, "South East Asia is an underexplored market and also can be classified as an emerging source market. Between Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and China there is huge potential for inbound tourism to India." Identifying the growing segments in 2017, Saraf adds, "Until December, the travel business for 2017 seemed very bleak in the aftermath of demonetisation. However, the New Year has brought in more optimisation and we are now looking forward to a growth in tourism for long haul, FIT travel and MICE during 2017."



► **Best Luxury Hotel Brand (East 2016)- Mayfair Hotels and Resorts**

Debug e-visa system

Bjorn Noel DeNiese, Vice President-Sales and Marketing, Mayfair Hotels and Resorts, India, believes that the past year saw a marginal revival of the Russian and Scandinavian markets for charter and leisure travel. "Emerging markets for India in 2017 include the likes of Australia and South Africa which are showing keen interest in products such as East and North East India," says DeNiese. He further points out that business travel is likely to grow at a decent pace while for the leisure segment to really take off, streamlining and debugging of the e-visa system is required. "There are many independent travellers keen to explore the country but the complex permit issues and lack of information with embassies act as impediments," he adds.



► **Best Debut Hotel (West 2014)-Country Inn & Suites by Carlson Goa Panjim**

Business and wellness traffic on the rise

Prakash Shankar, General Manager, Country Inn & Suites By Carlson, Goa Panjim, feels that the Incredible India roadshows seek to depict India as a multi-faceted, all-year-round tourist destination for culture, luxury, wildlife, wellness and medical tourism, providing a glimpse of the country's tourism products as well as its myriad cultural, spiritual and travel experiences. Shankar says, "Destinations

like Russia, UK, Germany, China, the Middle East and the Gulf region are important emerging tourism source markets for India. Inbound traffic for business travel is on a steady rise. Another growing segment is medical and wellness." He adds that Yoga, Ayurvedic massages and rejuvenating packages at relaxing surroundings of Goa, Kerala etc. also allow tourists to be closer to nature and get away from daily routine.



► **Best Corporate Hotel (South 2016)- Ramada Chennai Egmore**

Targeting varied travel segments

The growth in India's inbound tourism has always been gauged by foreign tourist arrival (FTA) numbers, feels **Animesh Kumar**, Corporate General Manager, Ramada Chennai Egmore. According to Kumar, USA has contributed maximum numbers and traditional source markets like the UK and France have done exceptionally well and this growth is expected to continue. He says, "However, we have explored newer markets like South Korea, China, Japan, Finland, Austria, CIS countries, the Gulf and Middle East, South Africa. For the Buddhist traffic Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos etc. are potential source markets." Identifying changing trends in travel globally, Kumar points out that India needs to be ready for various segments of travel of the likes of cruise tourism; religious tourism; medical tourism; senior citizens and differently-abled travellers; MICE; adventure and sports tourism.



► **Best Luxury Suite Hotel (South 2016)-Park Hyatt Chennai**

Landscape and architecture popular amongst new markets

According to **Aashima Sharma**, General Manager, Park Hyatt Chennai, France, Korea, Indonesia, Egypt are few of the emerging source markets for the hotel as well as for the city. Sharma says, "The above can be attributed to the fact that guests from these countries love the great architecture and religious temples that South India and the country have to offer." She feels the ease of travel to neighbouring towns with great connectivity also lends it a leisure quality. Sharma further adds, "Religious tourism is certainly on an upswing and we can see an increasing number of high-end religious tourists looking for luxury accommodations. Medical tourism is another segment which we are concentrating on as Chennai offers some of the best medical facilities in South East Asia."



► **Best Tour Operator-Inbound (South 2016)- Cholan Tours**

India catches Australia's fancy

Pandian, Director, Cholan Tours, explains that a growing number of emerging source markets has been seen for inbound tourism in India. "I feel Australia and South America are developing as source markets for Indian inbound segment in 2017. Of late, we have seen a healthy increase in the number of Australians travelling to India. Australians are famously adventurous but previously were more interested in South East Asia and Europe, but it seems they are now broadening their horizon and venturing into the sub-continent," says Pandian. He adds that in the coming year, luxury segment will not grow but the mid-segment of travellers are expected to show growth.

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Spring in Kashmir

Industry seeks budget for infrastructure



► **Best Spa and Wellness Resort (South 2016)- Neeleshwar Hermitage**

Australia leads the way

Pooja Nataraj, Director-Sales & Marketing, Neeleshwar Hermitage, points out that Australia is one of the emerging markets for inbound tourism in 2017 but since the property is based in Malabar, she feels that every market is emerging. "In my opinion, wellness, peace and quiet and local culture will be the high points for tourism this year. Travellers who appreciate local culture and genuine service and those who prefer to stay in small hotels will see an increase as they have realised that they are on a holiday and that they would prefer an intimate experience rather than a hotel with 150-odd rooms and buffet without a personalised service," says Nataraj.

► **Best Tour Operator-Inbound (East 2016)-Ice Cubes Holidays**

Unconventional markets enquire about India



Jaspreet Singh Bhatia, Director, Ice Cubes Holidays, informs that the company has received queries from traditionally unconventional markets like Mexico, East European countries and even from the Middle Eastern countries. "It is a very positive sign with people from these places showing interest in the tourism products of India. Other than this, our penetration and market share in terms of tourists

is still very less as compared to other global destinations in traditional markets. We need to tap more arrivals from our traditional markets," says Bhatia. He also expects a major growth in adventure and experiential tourism in the coming season as an increased number of travellers want to experience a particular destination rather than just passively visiting it. "With the advent of technology and instant sharing of information, experiential tourism should get a boost," adds Bhatia.



► **Best Medical Value Tourism (North 2016)-SafeMedTrip.com**

East & Central Africa important markets for medical travel

Pradeep Thukral, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, SafeMedTrip.com, informs that from the point of medical tourism, the most potential source markets are East Africa and Central Africa, with countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Nigeria. Thukral says, "These countries lack advanced medical facilities and India is ideally poised to serve their patients as we have an unbeatable value proposition with affordable world class medical facilities." He feels that India has excellent technology and expertise for medical tourism, particularly for high-end treatments at leading hospitals. "Wellness tourism is bound to grow as our service providers package their offerings in a better manner to suit international customers," adds Thukral.



► **Best Debut City Hotel (East 2016)- Golden Tulip Kolkata, Salt Lake**

Buddhist travellers on the rise

According to **Sumanta Maity**, General Manager, Golden Tulip Kolkata, Salt Lake, Chinese and Buddhist travellers are a promising and emerging segment for the Indian market as the destination has a variety of products under this segment. "Amongst the Indian escapes, Western coasts and Southern India have a fair share to look forward to," says Maity. Identifying the segments of travel on the rise, Maity points out that in the coming year, travellers will mix their business trip with leisure activities and thus bleisure will be on the rise. He adds, "The corporate movements to the business meets in different metros for MICE will surely witness an increase."



► **Best Travel Management Company (East 2016)- East Wind Holidays**

ME & Africa eye Indian medical value travel

According to **Roop Kumar Mallik**, Chief Executive Officer, East Wind Holidays, India is a preferred destination amongst wellness and medical travellers from developed and the underdeveloped countries. He points out that the cost advantage associated with medical procedures in India attract people from the Middle East countries, and Africa. Identifying the popular products in India that shall gain in 2017, Mallik says, "Senior citizens and differently-abled people are travelling more and more. Religious tourism is another big segment. MICE is a growing trend. Village tourism and homestay have great potential especially in the European market. Cruises, adventure tourism, sports tourism, ecotourism are segments that will see growth in the coming time."

► **Best MICE Tour Operator (East 2016)-Tibet Tours and Travels**

Homestays are here to stay

Eashita Ghosh, Promotional Manager, Tibet Tours and Travels, feels that with improved connectivity, emergence of luxurious accommodation facilities in tourist spots, India has gained the interest amongst many foreign and domestic travellers alike. Be it the existing or emerging source markets, India is a preferred destination. Ghosh says, "There are natural homestays where the tourists get to experience the very basic means of living, experience home cooked food and interact with local communities. With such trends emerging in the tourism sector, we can provide the tourists with a natural, serene and out of the mainstream kind of accommodation, which is economical and enjoyable." The Northeast is an emerging destination along with others like Ladakh, Kerala, believes Ghosh.

Glamping in Chamba & Diskit with TUTC

The Ultimate Travelling Camp (TUTC) is the flagbearer of 'glamping' (luxury camping) in India, and is ready to start operations on their Chamba Camp Thiksey and Chamba Camp Diskit in Ladakh from May 15, 2017.



TT BUREAU

The concept of glamping has only grown popular with TUTC's luxury tents in Ladakh. **Rajnish Sabharwal**, COO, TUTC, says, "The idea behind introducing India's first luxury mobile tents was to offer 'evolved travellers' a seamless blend between the pleasures of being close to nature, or having unique travel experiences in carefully selected exceptional locations in the mountains, deserts, jungles and unexplored countryside." He agrees that glamping, as a concept, is rapidly evolving in India. "There is an upbeat in bookings for our camps in Ladakh and Kohima. India has finally opened up to the concept of luxury camping as more Indians show the zeal to go beyond the ordinary and experience the unexplored," he adds.



Rajnish Sabharwal
COO
TUTC

There is an upbeat in bookings for our camps. India has finally opened up to the concept of luxury camping as more Indians show the zeal to go beyond the ordinary

In 2016, he informed, they saw mixed interest from affluent Indians, but an increasing number of Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) experienced the camps, basically to showcase their home country to their second-generation families, as well as foreigners who like to experience this concept in India. "In 2017, there is an opportunity to explore this further in an unconventional and preferred way. With personalisation and customised packages taking centre stage, luxury camping as a travel trend will see an increase in 2017," he claims.

However, despite the trend becoming popular, TUTC is not in a hurry to open new camps. "We definitely want to take the idea of glamping to other hidden

recesses of India as we aim to bring India's rich culture, history, wildlife and cuisine to our discerning guests. However, currently our focus is mainly on our three camps. We begin operations for Chamba Camp Thiksey and Diskit in Ladakh from May 15," he informs.

Sabharwal is leaving no stone unturned to reach the right people for promoting the experience

around the world. Shedding light on the same, he says, "We have recently been accepted into Virtuoso's rich portfolio of luxury suppliers and through this association we aim to reach out to a wide base of luxury travellers across the world. Our dedicated sales team across India, UK, USA, UAE and Russia reaches out to our potential customers through various communication mediums



both online and offline. TUTC partners with leading

Destination Management Companies (DMCs) to lev-

erage their existing relationships and/or reach to premium customers."

In addition to that, TUTC has been working very closely with major tour operators and travel agencies across markets and have special travel incentive programs to motivate them further. The company is also participating in trade exhibitions and trade events in the country.

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MITT, Russia returns in March

1,600 exhibitors expected at Moscow International Travel and Tourism Exhibition on from March 14–16.



TT BUREAU

In its 24th edition, up to 28,000 travel industry professionals and more than 1,600 exhibitors are expected to attend and take part in the Moscow International Travel and Tourism Exhibition (MITT). The year 2017 marks a stronger year for Russian tourism. Passenger traffic through Moscow Vnukovo Airport grew by 49.5 per cent to 1.8 million passengers in January 2017, than compared

to the same month last year. Popular destinations included Phuket, Bangkok, Goa, Istanbul, Milan, Larnaca and Dubai. Another positive indicator for the Russian tourism market is that holidaymakers can now choose Turkey as their top travel destination.

Spain has confirmed to be the 'Partner Country' of MITT 2017. Maria Badakh, International Sales Director, MITT, ITE Group states: "The Russian

outbound market has definitely picked up in 2016. We had a lot of interest for MITT from well-established regions, but also managed to attract new exhibitors, such as Venezuela, Burundi, Palestine and Andhra Pradesh (India). Destinations which are returning to MITT after an absence include Botswana, Jamaica, Kerala (India), Romania and Tanzania – all of whom seek to attract more Russian visitors as the country's tourism strengthens."

QiK Manager on the go

QiK Rooms' QiK Circle ARMS can change the way hotels manage their bookings, costs and staff.



TT BUREAU

In a bid to solve the quality issues faced by hotels in terms of what is promised to clients and actual delivery, QiK Rooms has come up with a new Asset & Resource Management Solution (ARMS) called QiK Circle. "We came up with QiK Circle ARMS—the 360° asset and resource management solution that will deliver better hospitality to the customer while driving great



Pramod Dahiya
President
QiK Circle

efficiency and controlling costs and pilferage," informed

Pramod Dahiya, President, QiK Circle.

He insists that QiK Circle makes life easy for hotel industry, its employees as well as the customers. "It is fully integrated and for the first time there is a software that has real-time management for its various departments and employees, thus empowering them for a better future as he can deliver more and can be appraised by the management and owners. It can effectively help properties to seamlessly manage their front desk, housekeeping, reservations, multiple Point of Sales (POS) like restaurants/spas and even their channel management is fully linked. It has practically all the features that one might ever require in a hotel management system to run one's hospitality business smoothly," he explained.

Customers, according to Dahiya, shall enjoy the lightning fast check-ins. "We have the only software that auto allots the room at the time of reservation. It practically cuts down the time at check-in by 80 per cent. Further we have the Room Device for in-room usage allowing customers full control of hotel facilities and update their complaints and feedback, which shall be viewed in real time to the owners/top managers thus improving the service. With time management built into the device integration, all operations are timed and delays shall be marked if the same task is not done in the stipulated time. The software has covered all areas like laundry, bell desk, concierge, etc. connected to the same time and task management system, thus providing all the facilities with in-time services to the customer, again a first in any industry," he added.

Dahiya also said that their strategy is about empowering hoteliers to simplify their hotel operations by cutting down resource by about 30 to 40 per cent. "The software totally eradicated the desktop way of running ERP products. This means that the employees are working and updating reporting in real-time over their handheld devices and at the same time the tasks are pushed to them intelligently by the QiK Circle solution delivery software. We would like to honestly call it a Manager that does not take a break or take sick leave or needs to sleep at night - honestly it is a 24x7 QiK Manager rather than just a software," he added.

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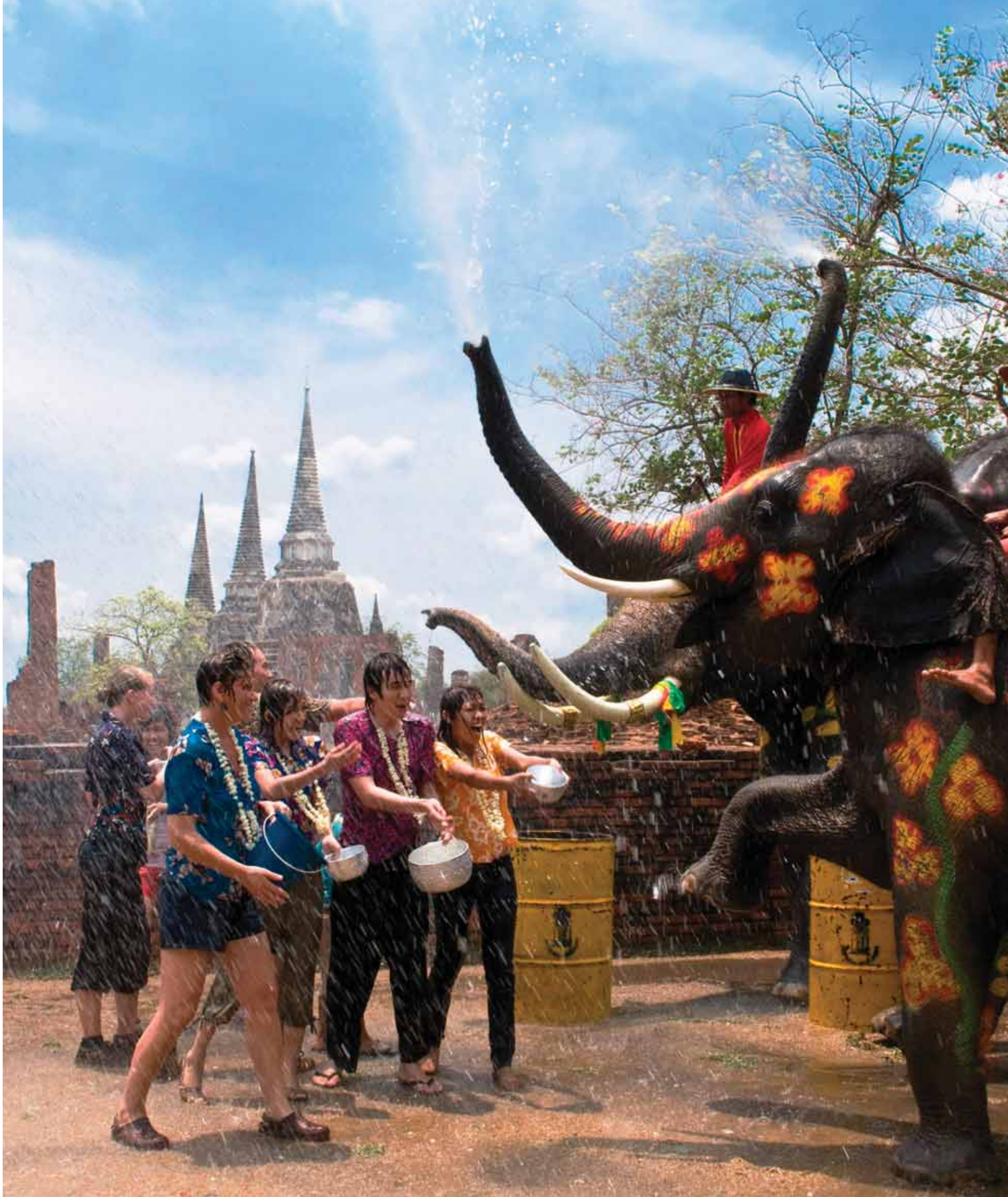
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CAPA India summit scores high

CAPA India hosted a two-day aviation summit in Mumbai which gave insights on the future of aviation in India and how the industry has performed in the last 10 years. The event saw major aviation players, airports and industry participants discussing the challenges, achievements and the way forward for the sector.



Moving full steam ahead

Buoyed by its `100 crore turnover and 70,000 passengers in 2016, TravelBullz has an aggressive marketing plan for the India market.

TT BUREAU

TravelBullz recently organised an appreciation night to express gratitude to its travel partners. The event also saw hotel partner New World Millennium presenting its offerings for the Indian market. Commenting on the achievement, **K.D. Singh**, Founder and President, TravelBullz, says, "This is the first of its kind event where we are having an appreciation night for all our partners. We have done phenomenal business in 2016. We crossed a big milestone in our own right with `100 crore turnover and

media partners in India for the next 18 months to make its presence felt in the market and inform them about the various products on offer.

Eric NG, Assistant Director of Sales-Travel Trade, New World Millennium Hong Kong Hotel, says, "We are working very closely with TravelBullz. It is a very well known DMC in the India market and have a very professional sales team." The hotel saw around 800 guests

last year and hopes to double the number soon. Eric informs that the hotel has upgraded its products and specialised for family and honeymooners from India. "India is a major source market for us. From India we see FIT and MICE guests. We offer 460 rooms and suites and have high expectations from India once they know about our offerings," adds Eric.

Dimple Gandhi, Director, Cutting Edge Events, also

points out that they got associated with TravelBullz only last year and conducted a group of 560 people to Thailand. "The experience we have had after working with the team was brilliant. They have impeccable delivery of service in terms of transfers, accommodation and others. I would promote them anytime to everybody," says Gandhi. She also informs that the company will be conducting another group with large numbers to Thailand.

First Holiday Inn in Kolkata opens

InterContinental Hotels Group strengthens its presence in the East India with the introduction of its first Holiday Inn® hotel in Kolkata – Holiday Inn Kolkata Airport. With the opening of the 137-room hotel in partnership with Jain Group, the total number of Holiday Inn hotels has gone up to 11 in India.

Shantha de Silva, Head of South West Asia, InterContinental Hotels Group said, "Holiday Inn brand family is one of the growth drivers for IHG's expansion in India. We are proud to add Holiday Inn Kolkata Airport to

our portfolio and look forward to expanding our footprint in West Bengal. We are delighted to be working with the Jain Group and look forward to offering business ready services to our guests in Kolkata." Holiday Inn Kolkata Airport is located just five km away from Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport, with close proximity to Business Parks, SEZs and IT hub of Kolkata in Rajarhat, New Town and Salt Lake Sector-V area. For MICE and corporate guests, the hotel offers 6,076 sq ft of meeting and banqueting space.



K.D. Singh
Founder and President
TravelBullz

Thanks to our state-of-the-art technology which enables a lot of our travel agents to book an entire package with a single click

70,000 passengers who travelled on our network last year. This is a small gesture to thank all our partners for their support and look forward to building 2017 to greater heights."

Singh informs that TravelBullz has been working to deliver products that their customers (travel agents and tour operators) demand. He claims that TravelBullz is the only DMC which believes in product development and has a dedicated product development department which works with travel agents and tour operators to cater to their specific demands and create special itineraries and experiences for many segments.

"We are doing a lot of exclusives which other companies cannot possibly do, thanks to our state-of-the-art technology which enables a lot of our travel agents to book an entire package with a single click. It is the cutting-edge technology that is keeping us abreast with the latest happenings in the market," adds Singh.

He further informs that the company has lined up a very large campaign with all B2B

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IATO ponders over taxes and budget

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) along with Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) invited Bipin Sapra, Partner, Tax & Regulatory Services, Ernst & Young, at their latest luncheon to give a presentation to its members on the recent abatement in Service Tax, Union Budget and GST.



Infinia's Dubuy mobile App

Loyalty and Payments Solutions Company — Infinia Services and Solutions has launched its geo-location based mobile application, Dubuy.



Dubuy is a smartphone application which can function on both Android and iOS formats for travellers to Dubai. Tourists can browse for merchant categories, apply filters and find locations near them using the simple geo-location tool, which shows all merchant offers nearby. It can be



Prashant Khattar
MD and Founder
Infinia

With the launch of Dubuy, we strongly believe we have filled a huge gap in the Dubai inbound travel market

availed through hotels, DMCs or registered travel agents of Dubuy. A tourist visiting Dubai will be provided with a downloadable application link by the travel agent. Once the link is downloaded, entering an authentication code makes the application ready for use. The tourist can then view multiple options of discounts, offers and deals across various categories to explore in Dubai.

Dubuy enfolds a number of options to discover Dubai like never before, with valuable discounts, offers and deals across shopping, dining, leisure & attractions, spa & wellness and many more. The initial launch phase of Dubuy has already brought leading brands on board and plans are to build Dubuy into the ultimate experi-

ence for a tourist. With Dubuy, Infinia brings to tourists the 'great deals more fun' experience in one of the world's most popular tourist destinations – Dubai.

"The driving force for growth at Infinia results from putting the customer at the centre of everything we do. Instead of offering a one-size-fits all model, we invest time and effort in understand-

ing consumer needs and go about devising comprehensive solutions with the help of best-in-class technology and innovation. With the launch of Dubuy, we strongly believe we have filled a huge gap in the Dubai inbound travel market. This is a product conceptualised, designed and delivered keeping a Dubai tourist in mind," according to Prashant Khattar, MD and Founder, Infinia.

Travel trade now gets a new ARM

■ Mumbai has a new representation company in Avenir Research Marketing (ARM) that offers sales, marketing and public relations support and other related services to tourism products such as hotels, attractions, activities, experiences and inbound tour operator companies.

Started in August 2016 by Chief Executive Officer, Ashish Bhandari, ARM currently has seven products spanning two countries in its portfolio. Bhandari adds, "ARM's core sales, marketing and PR initiative will be led by Aparna Anand. Currently, our sales

and marketing efforts are concentrated in Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Pune and the main cities in Gujarat and Punjab. But since we maximise strategic partnerships in key industry segments based on specific needs and target audience, we are regionally focused when required and will include the Tier-II and Tier-III cities as well."

It currently represents Gold Coast Tour Alliance which consists of hot air ballooning, paradise jet boating, southern cross 4-wheel drive tours, whales in paradise, fire truck tours and goa fusion, Indian restaurant – based in Gold Coast, Aus-



Ashish Bhandari
Chief Executive Officer
Avenir Research Marketing

tralia and Africa Incoming (ITO) based in South Africa. Bhandari used to head Gold Coast Tourism Corporation as its Country Manager for three years prior to starting his own company.

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CSTF sets a high note for trade

CSTF's annual travel trade soiree saw the stalwarts of the industry let their hair down and network over cocktails and dinner.

TT BUREAU

The CSTF (Creating Synergy among Travel Fraternity) annual travel trade soiree at Solitaire Gardens, New Delhi, saw the who's who of the country's travel industry in attendance. In its sixth edition, the event focused on quality rather than quantity, as the organising team made sure that the guest list was exclusive. **Siddharth Jain**, Director, Click2travel.com and Sapphire Ventures, said that the party was one of the most sought-after events in the industry. "This is the sixth event of CSTF and the fourth in Delhi and the interest



Siddharth Jain
Director, Click2travel.com and Sapphire Ventures

trade shows happening around the city. After attending these shows in the day, people come to our party and let their hair



Rohit Shorey
Director, Destination Travel Services (DTS)

I am glad to see a full house at our sixth event. People are networking, especially at the time of big trade shows, when the entire trade is here and the whole idea is to have a relaxed and casual atmosphere

Rohit Shorey



Ajay Chhabria
Most Trending Personality, India Travel Awards 2016 & MD, Intime Travels

trade is here and the whole idea is to have a relaxed and casual atmosphere. People are talking, mingling, discussing business and having a drink, that's wonderful for us. This is

sive and I am content with the fact that we've managed to get the right people at the event."

He claims that the event is only going to get better over

I am very happy to be a part of CSTF and look forward to seeing everybody at the party have a great time. We wanted to make it more exclusive and I am content with the fact that we've managed to get the right people at the event

Ajay Chhabria

This is the sixth event of CSTF and the fourth in Delhi and the interest is only growing. It has become an after-party kind of affair for us, especially with so many big trade shows happening around the city

Siddharth Jain

is only growing. It has become an after-party kind of affair for us, especially with so many big

down. We had great lead sponsorship from Nijhawan Group, TBO Group as well as Emaar

Hospitality Group, along with associate sponsors Udaan, Sun Siyam Maldives as well as Patlidun Jim Corbett," he adds

Rohit Shorey, Director, Destination Travel Services

(DTS) and one of the founders of CSTF, was also happy at the turnout at the event. "I am glad to see a full house at our sixth event. People are networking, especially at the time of big trade shows, when the entire

what our concept is and we are happy the way it is happening and everybody is happy," he says.

Apart from Jain and Shorey, **Ajay Chhabria**, MD, Intime Travels, is also one of the organisers of CSTF. Speaking on how the event has turned out after all these years, he says, "I am very happy to be a part of CSTF and look forward to seeing everybody at the party have a great time. We wanted to make it more exclu-

the years. "We are only going to get quality people to come with us for our parties and be a part of our sponsorship list. It's not the mass turnout that we are looking at."

On a Roll

- ← This was the sixth edition of Creating Synergy among Travel Fraternity
- ← The event is an exclusive affair for the who's who of the industry

TravelBullz rewards partners

In a first of its kind event, TravelBullz in association with New World Millennium Hong Kong Hotel, called upon its travel trade partners to express appreciation towards their unwavering support.





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Eyeing inbound from Dubai

Upbeat on the smooth sailing at its Dubai office, Parveen Travels is planning to add more luxury vehicles for its foreign tourists, corporate travellers and celebrities.



A. Arif, Director, Parveen Travels, is confident that this luxury segment will grow and create more demand in the years to come. The company's Dubai office has gained traction for both inbound and outbound travellers, he informs.

"Our business unit is closely working with the French Government to create customised itinerary tours for North and South India. Our Dubai office is also gaining traction, serving a wide variety of customers such as corporates and inbound tourists from Dubai. The corporate segment in Dubai is an extremely big market for us and we are providing an array of travel related services to match their requirements," he says.

The company is planning to concentrate on MICE and HNI family weddings at the domestic front, providing end to end services. This market, Arif believes is an extremely



A. Arif
Director
Parveen Travels

lucrative one which provides necessary insights to improve the company's products and service capability.

Elaborating on the company's growth strategy, Arif explains that Parveen Travels is working on unique avenues to promote tourism in India and also to enhance customer experience. "We are expanding our signature services in South India to various locations like Visakhapatnam, Bengaluru, Coimbatore and Trichy. We are closely working with the Tamil Nadu Government to conduct first of its kind Tamil Nadu Travel Mart

between July and September. This event will showcase the various travel and tourism products of Tamil Nadu in a whole different way and mainly focus on overseas associates and partners," adds Arif. He further informs that the company is working closely with Andhra Pradesh Tourism to initiate hop on-hop off services and has begun discussions with Bangalore Tourism Board to explore more avenues in the field of tourism.

Though the tourism industry has grown exponentially in the past few years with government's various initiatives and incentives to motivate the stakeholders, Arif solicits the Government to recognise tourism as an industry. "The e-commerce portal has strived and created a massive change in the industry. Budget and homestay tourism have prompted explorers and travellers to visit the country. The taxation pattern of the GST Bill, if optimal can play a vital role in the tourism industry," he adds.

Expansion plans for Bonton

Eyeing to bag more DMCs in different countries, Bonton Group of Companies is optimistic about recording double profits in 2017.



After expanding its wings in Dubai, Bonton Holidays has quite a few plans up their sleeves. The company already has two travel companies – Bonton Holidays in India and Bonton Tours & Travels in Dubai. **Piyush Parikh**, MD & Chairman, Bonton Group of Companies, said, "Bonton Holidays has more than 30 branches in India, and we are planning to open more than 50 branches in Gujarat. In fact, we will have around 100 branches across India in the next four months." Regarding the Dubai DMC, he revealed, "We are planning to expand our fleet in Dubai as well as there are many other initiatives in the pipeline. We are also planning to open more DMCs in countries like Thailand, Mauritius, Hong Kong and Macau, as well as many other countries."

The company saw huge growth last year and has set its sight higher in 2017. "2016 was very good for us and we are expecting 2017 to



Piyush Parikh
MD & Chairman
Bonton Group of Companies

We are also planning to open more DMCs in countries like Thailand, Mauritius, Hong Kong and Macau, as well as many other countries

be much better. Our turnover last year was around `200 crore and this year it should be `400 crore," said Parikh.

To achieve this growth, they have many promotional and marketing initiatives planned

throughout the year. "We are bringing many schemes for our partners. We need these activities to reach out and promote ourselves amongst our partners. We thought that the business would see a huge slump after demonetisation, but that's not the case. However, I feel that it would only pick up now, as we go forward."

However, with so many other travel companies offering solutions to clients, the competition is high. However, Parikh believes that their service sets them apart from others. "Our service is our biggest USP. Everyone has everything. The prices can differ for B2C and B2B, but what makes us unique is our dedicated service and ease of business."

Ambitious Expansion

Bonton Holidays has more than 30 branches in India, and are planning to open more than 50 branches in Gujarat

Agents revel in Kashmir's beauty

Jammu & Kashmir's tourism department showcased the various facets of the destination at a gala night in Delhi. The state invited the travel trade fraternity, requesting their support to promote the destination.



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EVENT TALK

MARCH 2017

Mauritius Tourism roadshow	Nagpur	1
International Confex 2017	Olympia, London	1-2
Mauritius Tourism roadshow	Hyderabad	3
ETAA Domestic Convention	Hyderabad	3-5
Mauritius Tourism roadshow	Kolkata	4
ITB Berlin	Berlin, Germany	8-12
India Travel Mart	Goa	12-14
MITT	Moscow, Russia	14-16
Routes Asia	Okinawa, Japan	19-21
IT&CM China 2017	Shanghai, China	21-23
Paris workshop	Mumbai	22
FICCI Digital Travel Hospitality & Innovation Summit	New Delhi	22-23
Experience Canada workshop	Bengaluru	23
Connections Luxury	Hyderabad	26-29
Korea Tourism MICE roadshow	New Delhi	29
COTTM	Beijing, China	29-31
UITT	Kiev, Ukraine	29-31

APRIL 2017

BIT Milan	Milan, Italy	2-4
Hotel Operation Summit India	Mumbai	4
Best of Australia roadshow	Bengaluru	5
Hotel Investment Conference South Asia	Mumbai	5-6
Azerbaijan International Tourism Fair (AITF)	Baku, Azerbaijan	6-8
Travel Experiential Show	New Delhi	8-9
Ras Al Khaimah roadshow	Mumbai	10
Best of Australia roadshow	Chennai	11
Ras Al Khaimah roadshow	New Delhi	11
SITT	Novosibirsk, Russia	13 - 15
Kazakhstan International Tourism Fair (KITF)	Almaty, Kazakhstan	19 - 21
Shanghai World Travel Fair 2017	Shanghai	20 - 23
Arabian Travel Mart 2017 (ATM)	Dubai, UAE	24 - 27
Digital Travel Summit APAC	Singapore	25-27
Hospitality Investment World Indonesia 2017	Jakarta	26-27
WTTC Global Summit 2017	Bangkok	26-27
Annual Meetings & Events Industry Conference (AMEIC)	Sydney	April 30 - May 2

MAY 2017

Rendez-vous Canada	Calgary, Canada	9-12
TRENZ 2017	Auckland, New Zealand	9-12
ITB China 2017	Shanghai, China	10-12
Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE)	Sydney, Australia	14-18

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

ASSOCIATION TALK

IATO keen on showcasing Orissa

Having chosen Orissa for the second time for its annual convention, IATO is keen on highlighting the state's potential which is now popular among international tourists for its tribal tours.



TT BUREAU

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) has once again chosen Orissa as the venue for its 33rd Convention that will be held from September 7-10, 2017, in Bhubaneswar. Revealing this was **N.S. Rathor**, Chairman, Western Region IATO and Regional Chapter Chairman, who said, "The Minister Tourism and Culture, Government of Orissa, Ashok Chandra Panda, had attended our previous convention in Chennai and he was very keen for us to have our next convention in Orissa. As soon as he returned to Orissa, he spoke to his Chief Minister and they suggested these dates. It will be held either at Hotel Swosti or Mayfair Lagoon. We had done our convention in Orissa in 2008 as well and since then the tourism in the state has grown."

The team will visit the city for a recce to find out if there have been any upgrades, new banqueting facilities or room expansions

done in any of the hotels. "A lot of international destinations have approached us to host our conventions. But we have refused. We are selling India and that's what we want to showcase," Rathor adds. IATO currently boasts of 1,800 members across India.

Tribal tours a hit with foreigners

He added that the unique selling point of Orissa for inbound tourists has been its tribal tours which is very niche and will appeal only to tourists who are interested. "Moreover, the accommodation available is basic, requires a lot of travelling and accessibility isn't that great. For us though, experiencing Orissa was an eye-opener. The people here are very nice, very warm. We travelled extensively in the area during our past convention and realised the destination has a lot of potential — not just for inbound but also domestic," Rathor said.

ASI fee hike

He highlights another



N.S. Rathor
Chairman, Western Region IATO
and Regional Chapter Chairman

We had done our convention in Orissa in 2008 as well and since then the tourism in the state has grown

problem — an increase in entrance fee that Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will implement from April, 2017. IATO had made them defer the increase last year when they had asked for ₹750 which was finally brought to ₹500 for foreign tourists. "There is no chance of defer-

ring it further even though the ASI comes under the Ministry of Culture. There is also very little maintenance work done. Even now, Elephanta Caves does not have a swipe machine for cards for tourists. They have to pay cash or pay online. There are also no proper amenities. They should give it to a private company for maintenance," Rathor opines.

In April, 2016, entry to 116 key historical monuments under ASI across the country, including the Red Fort, Qutab Minar and Ajanta-Ellora caves, became costlier. The Culture Ministry had effected a three-fold hike in the entry fee for the monuments for domestic visitors and 100 per cent for foreign tourists. For the 32 'World Heritage Monuments', the entry fee for foreign nationals was hiked to ₹500 from ₹250. For monuments other than the World Heritage ones, foreigners had to pay ₹200 against ₹100. The enhancement had come after more than 15 years. ↴

BSP link fee top agenda for TAAI

Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) held its Managing Committee meeting in New Delhi, where they discussed issues, including BSP link fee as well amendments to its article for members.



TT BUREAU

The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) celebrated the success of its Abu Dhabi Convention in New Delhi, which coincided with their Managing Committee (MC) meeting as well.

Sharing details of the meeting, **Sunil Kumar**, President, TAAI, said, "We reviewed TAAI and discussed plans for 2017. We have challenges with IATA, particularly for BSP link fee. We also have issues with IATA's New Gen ISS on the easy pay scenario, which is getting launched. Another challenge is with regards to the acceptance of credit cards. Hence, we wanted to sit together and review it."



Sunil Kumar
President
TAAI

We have challenges with IATA, particularly for BSP link fee. We also have issues with IATA's New Gen ISS on the easy pay scenario

Jay Bhatia, Hon. Treasurer, TAAI, informed, "The main agenda behind the meeting was to discuss on how to take TAAI forward in the coming year and how we are going to work on various issues as well as educating and training our members. BSP link is a burning subject with the membership as well as the agencies, and hence we discussed that and how are we going to move ahead with that."

Kumar also said that they wanted to re-design TAAI, and focused on how to do that. "We want to re-structure TAAI and look at an EGM where we can have our article completely revamped restructured in the future, making it more relevant as an association.

Today, in India, we are talking about travel agents. TAAI has always been dedicated to active TAAI members because they are IATA agents. However, those are only 3000 IATA agents. There are 30,000 agents in India, out of which around 27,000 continue to be travel agents and don't have an IATA certification. So, we wanted to give some time to these people and get them into the net and related with them. Thus, we need to re-structure our article so that we are more relevant, more connected with the future. The theme of our convention was 'Tomorrow Begins Now,' and even at TAAI it should imply that whatever we are doing is for a tomorrow, because we want to leave a rich legacy behind," he added. ↴

PATA India's USA and Canada roadshow

■ PATA India Chapter is conducting roadshow to USA and Canada, in partnership with India Tourism from May 30 to June 8, 2017. **Runee Sangha**, Executive Director,

PATA India Chapter, said, "We are pleased to inform you that we have received necessary approvals to conduct roadshows in USA and Canada, in partnership

with India Tourism. More details will be communicated in the coming week." The roadshow will begin in Toronto (Canada) on May 30, then move to the US with

Boston on May 31, Chicago on June 1, Houston on June 6, New York on June 7 and 8. Participants must confirm their participation by March 3.

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Thomas Cook India

Mumbai
Maresh Iyer has been elevated to the post of Chief Executive Officer at Thomas Cook India. Iyer is a Thomas Cook veteran of 22 years. Prior to his elevation, Iyer was Chief Operating Officer of the Company. He assumes direct responsibility for the company's P&L, day to day operations of the company, strategic planning, management of key relationships, as well as building a sustainable growth oriented organisation that maximises value for all its stakeholders.



Turkish Airlines

Mumbai
Ibrahim Hakki Guntay has been appointed as General Manager of Turkish Airlines for Western and Southern India. In his role, Hakki is taking charge of Turkish Airlines' strategic success in this region and is responsible for driving growth and expansion of the company's market share in India. Prior to moving to Mumbai, Hakki built his career at Turkish Airlines in Istanbul starting in 2013. Hakki is a Turkish national, born in Kayseri and graduated in Economics from Bogazici University.



Honeywell Aerospace

New Delhi
Honeywell has appointed **Neelu Khatri** as the new India President for its aerospace business group. In this role, Khatri will provide strategic direction and focus on further growing the company across the country in commercial aviation and defense. As part of the pioneering group of women officers commissioned into the Indian Air Force, Khatri served for 15 years and obtained the rank of wing commander. During her air force career and after, she worked extensively on various capital and revenue programs with India's Ministry of Defence.



Radisson Blu Atria

Bengaluru
Known as a pre-opening specialist, **Vineet Chopra**, the newly appointed General Manager of Radisson Blu Atria Bengaluru, has more than 15 years of experience in the hospitality sector. Having worked with brands like Trident Hilton, Grand Hyatt Mumbai to Madinat Jumeirah, Chopra has a strong understanding of rooms and F&B. In his new role, Chopra will be responsible for the overall functioning of the hotel, creating visibility for the brand in the city, establishing the property as a business hotel to drive the corporate crowds for both short and long stay visits.



Four Points by Sheraton

Jaipur
Rahul Sharma has been appointed as General Manager at Four Points by Sheraton, Tonk Road, Jaipur. Sharma has over 17 years of experience in the hospitality industry having worked with multiple international brands. He was previously Executive Assistant Manager at Le Meridien Kochi. He has also worked with the Starwood Global Sales, Le Meridien Jaipur, Le Meridien Dubai and Nikko Hotel International.



VisaHQ Services India

New Delhi
Nitin Chaudhry has joined VisaHQ Services India as Director of Sales-APAC. He comes with 13 years of experience with 6 years in the travel industry. Chaudhry was previously associated with QuadLabs Technologies as Regional Manager-Sales, also his first stint in the travel industry. He has also worked in multiple industries like education, IT, Consultancy and BFSI.



Courtyard by Marriott Gurugram Downtown

Gurugram
Bhawna Verma has been appointed as General Manager, Courtyard by Marriott Gurugram Downtown. With a career spanning 16 years, Verma brings with her immense experience in handling operations, guest satisfaction and engagement, and financial success. At Marriott, she will be responsible for overseeing and implementing high operational standards and driving performance across verticals of the hotel. She has worked with many renowned brands like Holiday Inn and Suites, Crowne Plaza, Hyatt Regency, The Imperial, and Taj Palace.



Golden Tulip Hotels and Resorts, South East Asia

New Delhi
Golden Tulip Hotels and Resorts has promoted **Shashi Razdan** to the role of Director of Operations & Commercial, South East Asia. In this role, Razdan will be responsible and accountable for the region's balanced scorecard, collaborating with function specialists to review performance and drive execution across all hotels in the South East Asia region. Razdan would continue playing a key role in driving guest experience delivery programmes, global operation initiatives of managed and franchised hotels, etc.



Shangri-La Hotel

Bengaluru
Shangri-La Hotel, Bengaluru has appointed **Anurudh Khanna** as Executive Chef to head and oversee all of the hotel's culinary operations. Chef Khanna takes up his new assignment at Shangri-La Hotel, Bengaluru following over 17 years of culinary experience at five-star and luxury hotels. He has seven years of experience as an executive chef. He is a veteran of traditional, regional, progressive Indian and Italian cuisine.

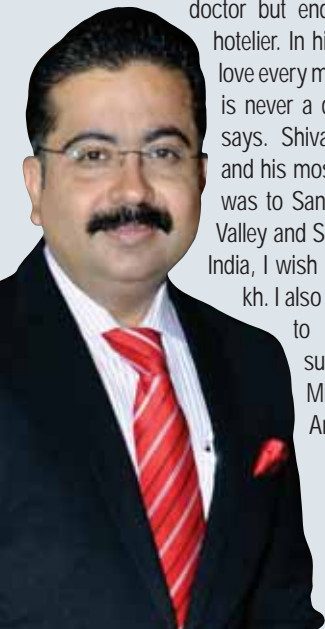


TALKing People

Faisal Nafees, Area General Manager, Narendra Bhawan and Laxmi Niwas Palace, believes that if one can dream it, one can do it. "I have always thought that it is better to achieve something substantial rather than trying to win. When you try to win, you compete with someone else and hence stop when you have beaten them. But when you set out to achieve, you realise your true potential," he says. His favourite book is Michael H. Hart's 'The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History'. He also enjoys travelling and his favourite destination is Koh Samui in Thailand and Kashmir and Ladakh in India. Rome, Israel and Kerala on his must-visit list.



Gaurav Shiva, General Manager, Grand Mercure Bangalore, unwinds by riding his bike. He is passionate about his work and when he's involved with a project at work, he strives to do his best. "I wanted to be a doctor but ended up being an hotelier. In hindsight though, I love every minute of it as there is never a dull moment," he says. Shiva loves travelling and his most memorable trip was to San Francisco, Napa Valley and Sonoma Valley. "In India, I wish to travel to Ladakh. I also enjoyed travelling to other countries such as Europe, Middle East and America," he adds.



Christoph Szymanski, General Manager, Regal Oriental Hotel believes that today's new generation needs to be more patient and work hard. "When you join an organisation, find a friend who is much older than yourself who has worked in that operation for a longer time. That person will be your mentor," he says. Szymanski enjoys cooking for his children and loves Indian, Cantonese and European cuisines. Sri Lanka, Japan and the UK fall in his to do list while he would love to go back to New Zealand, Italy and Switzerland.



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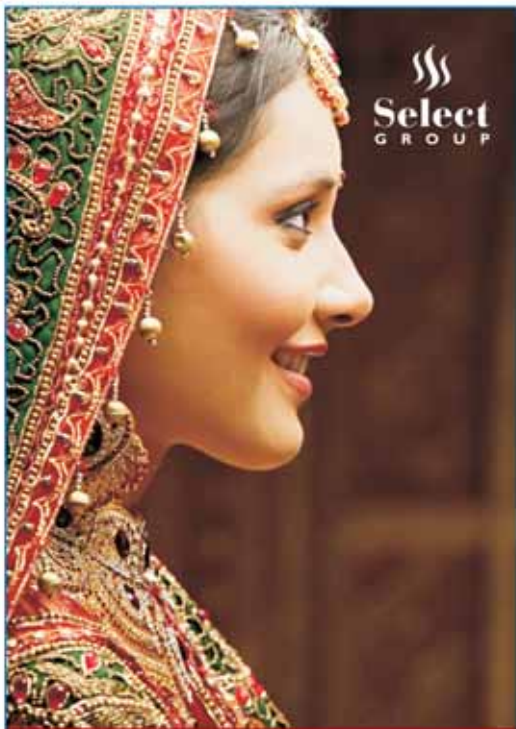
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NIKKI DUGGAL DESIGN

India bullish on 15% growth

The Ministry of Tourism starts the year with the launch of tourist welcome kits, and a 16.5 per cent increase in FTAs this January. **Vinod Zutshi**, the outgoing Secretary, Tourism, Government of India, reveals plans of an aggressive marketing strategy and an increased focus on domestic tourism.



AHANA GURUNG

What is going to be the main focus of the ministry this year?

This year, there will be an increased focus on domestic tourism. State governments have become very active and our focus on media promotion in the domestic sector has increased by a huge margin. Thanks to the Swadesh Darshan scheme, it has not only encouraged foreign tourists to explore the country, but Indians as well. Since domestic tourism is booming, there are less probabilities of people travelling to other countries. We've witnessed an interesting phenomenon where the inbound inflow has been greater than outbound tourism. All these years, outbound was touching a level of about 10-11 per cent. However, January has already seen a growth of 16.5 per cent this year and outbound has come down to 7-7.5 per cent. This gap is very substantial.

What has been successful in driving this growth?

People have mainly started realising India's potential as a tourist destination, especially since a lot of work has been done to ramp the infrastructure as well as increased publicity. The kind of infrastructure we are developing is going to boost tourism even further and are working on several other initiatives that will continue to take the tourism fraternity to greater heights.

The e-Visa has also been a great success and this time, the e-Visa reforms and relaxations have been the best because it has not just addressed the e-Tourist Visa, but now includes e-Visa for business and medical purposes. Furthermore, we are also pitching for e-Conference Visa.

So, what kind of development can we expect for tourism in the months to come?

In the next 12-24 months you will see the enormous amount of money that is being pumped in by way of infrastructure, will be rolled out soon. The entire country along with the states and Union Territories are being covered by two-three projects on an average. A total of 51 projects, each having at least eight destinations are being worked on. Imagine, 400 tourism destinations are

either being improved or being propped up as a new destination and the work is ongoing.

We recently cleared around nine projects in Swadesh Darshan which involves creating new destinations. There are river bodies and beaches which are not being used so these will be utilised to make good tourist hubs and is going

of promotion — we were everywhere! Be it digital channels or print, domestic or international, Incredible India made its presence felt through advertisements, articles, and the likes. We have also become more active on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook and had even hosted a workshop on how the travel industry can use these mediums for a wider reach. This year, our market-

“We've witnessed an interesting phenomenon where the inbound inflow has been greater than outbound tourism. All these years, outbound was touching a level of about 10-11 per cent. However, January has already seen a growth of 16.5 per cent this year and outbound has come down to 7-7.5 per cent. This gap is very substantial.”

Vinod Zutshi

Secretary, Tourism, Govt. of India



to raise the growth level further. My projection of attaining 15 per cent growth in FTAs in 2017 is definitely attainable. If we can attain 16 per cent in the first month of the year, we can keep the numbers going.

We are additionally working on getting the DRV convention to India in September, as well as one of the biggest adventure tourism conventions, ATTA Convention in India. Himachal Pradesh has offered to play host for the adventure tourism convention.

There is also a higher allocation of funds for marketing this year. How is Incredible India 2.0 going to be more effective?

The second instalment will roll out in the next financial year which is March and we have already worked on the media plan that will run throughout the year. This is the first time we have been ready with the media plan at least a month ahead of the financial year. I feel that last year was one of the best as far as branding and promotion is concerned. We left no stone unturned and did not miss out any country and mode

ing will be even more aggressive and the increase in funds will help us do more.

Tell us more about the formation of tourism zones that was announced in the Budget?

This was among one of the proposals we sent last year to be included in the Budget. Basically, five tourism zones will be formed which is going to catapult India as one of the well-known areas for tourism. The details are being worked out and will be more concrete once the budget funds are allotted. The planning will be done with the Ministry of Finance, and Niti Aayog to chalk out a blueprint.

Plans Galore

- MOT is pitching for e-Conference Visa
- The Ministry is working on getting the DRV convention to India in September, as well as one of the biggest adventure tourism conventions, ATTA Convention in India
- 400 tourism destinations are either being improved or being propped up as a new destination



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TECH THE WAY FORWARD

India has built a solid reputation for producing talent in the IT segment but when it boils down to the stage of advancement of technology, the scenario is quite the opposite. The Geneva-based World Economic Forum (WEF) placed India at a dismal 91st position in the 2016 Networked Readiness Index (NRI) as the part of WEF's Global Information Technology Report, which measures countries' success in creating the necessary conditions for a transition to a digitised economy and society. The ranking has declined for the fourth year in a row while other countries have raced ahead.

The lax in infrastructure, for one, has certainly been a dampener but what's more significant is that scepticism has always been associated with any kind of change. That being said, the government's Digital India programme aims to change this outlook but if it really wants to set higher standards, it needs to try harder. While the recent Union Budget has prioritised the digital aspect and launched a few schemes to fast-track the movement, there are more than a handful of things that needs to change for the campaign to be a success.

The country needs policies to propel digitalisation – a policy for online security is yet to be formulated, and is only one of the few instances. Secondly, India will be truly digital when everyone can afford smartphones, laptops and the Internet. Thirdly, the skillset needs to be enhanced by a huge margin – digital literacy is the need of the hour. While these matters are just the tip of the iceberg, the country needs to work on retaining its talent through added benefits and better schemes.

AHANA GURUNG

NEWS IN BRIEF

PLAN HOLIDAYS WITH NEW SKYSCANNER TOOL

Global travel search engine, Skyscanner has launched a new travel planning tool to aid wanderlust-bitten Indians make the most of conveniently placed public holidays in 2017. Skyscanner's Holiday Planner highlights where public holidays fall and tells users how many annual leave days are required for their trip. The dynamic tool uses Skyscanner's technology to search thousands of airlines and travel agent partners to find travellers the destinations they can explore during their chosen dates and the cost of getting there. As with all of Skyscanner's travel search products, the tool is available to users free of charge. **Reshmi Roy**, Skyscanner's Growth Manager, India said: "One New Year's Resolution we hear time and time again is: 'to travel more.' The Holiday Planner will undoubtedly help Indians go further this year and truly make the most of annual leave and the abundance of long weekends."



ixigo acquires Reach

Online travel search portal ixigo has announced that it has acquired the mobile content-sharing application Reach. "As part of the deal, the Reach team will join ixigo to help enhance ixigo's already existing products by providing travellers not just utility, but consumable content," said the company in a statement.



Booking.com's Booster for start-ups

Booking.com Booster is designed to identify, mentor and fund enterprising start-ups from around the world that are seeking to have a positive impact on the global tourism industry, the 3-week programme taking place in June 2017 in Amsterdam will culminate in a chance to pitch for grants of up to €500,000 from Booking.com.



TUI 2022 explores new markets in Asia and South America

At the Annual General Meeting in Hanover, TUI CEO **Fritz Jousen** has presented the 'TUI 2022' future programme, focused on digitalisation and growth in new markets. Its target is to generate additional turnover worth €1 billion and reach out to one million new customers within the next five years. "TUI is becoming even more international," said Jousen. "Markets such as Asia and South America are regions with rapidly growing middle classes, We are aiming to push expansion of our brand ahead in these markets."

Lufthansa allows sale of tickets through API

Lufthansa is opening the Open API for direct ticket sales. From now on, developers will be able to use the interface to integrate direct booking links for offers from Lufthansa, Eurowings and Austrian Airlines into their web- and app-based offers. They will be able to increase the appeal of their services by incorporating Lufthansa products and will also receive compensation for the prominent display of Lufthansa products on their websites whenever the API integration generates bookings on lufthansa.com. With the access to ticket sales, the programming interface developer. lufthansa.com will now also become commercially relevant. The developers of the previously mentioned online ticketing platform will be able to use the Open API to link their event calendars with the booking information of the Lufthansa Group.



RezLive completes a decade of service



RezLive, a travel service provider that includes hotels, sightseeing and transfer services worldwide, has completed a decade of service in the Indian travel industry. "As we celebrate 10 years in the online market,

I'd like to thank all our travel partners for their loyalty and support. I would also like to make a note that our relationship with them will remain the foundation for such achievements and we look forward to their continued support in the future," he assures. The company has further cemented its position in the African region with the appointment of African Origin Travels & Sports Tourism and Continental Travel Group as its exclusive GSA for Ghana and Kenya respectively.



TravelTriangle raises \$10 million in funds

TravelTriangle has recently raised \$10 million in series B funding from RB Investments. TravelTriangle's successful funding round saw participation from existing investors SAIF Partners and Silicon Valley venture fund Bessemer Venture Partners. Commenting on the company's future growth, Sankalp Agarwal, Co-founder and CEO, TravelTriangle, said, "We have grown faster than OTAs in the leisure segment and now fast approaching their scale. With the association with RB Investments in this round we will achieve our vision faster."

amadeus

Rajiv Rajian appointed Global Head of Business Travel, Amadeus India

Amadeus has appointed **Rajiv Rajian** as Global Head of Business Travel, effective immediately. With global business travel spend set to reach \$1.6 trillion in 2020, Rajian will be tasked with driving continued growth worldwide across three key pillars of Amadeus' business travel division: Global Travel Management Companies (TMCs), the Specialty and Networks customers, and corporations. "I'm excited to lead our team as we look to not only transform the corporate traveller journey but also grow Amadeus' entire business travel portfolio; across Global TMCs, Specialty and Networks, and corporations," said Rajian.

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The cash crunch brought e-wallets like Paytm to the fore with the mobile payment and commerce platform recording at least 8.5 million transactions.

VIJAY SHEKHAR SHARMA
CEO
Paytm

”



The company registered a rise of 12 per cent in its payments volume to ₹5 bn (₹5,000 crore) during January compared with December and a fivefold increase in its users.

Changing the landscape of PAYMENTS



The past few months have seen huge acceptance for e-wallets and UPI-based tools that are slowly paving the way for a cashless economy.

AHANA GURUNG

The country embraced digital payments in a big way in 2016 and set the pace for a digital future. In a majorly cash-driven market, demonetisation left people with no choice but to shift over to alternate modes of payment in the face of cash shortage and strict bank withdrawal limits.

The aftermath of the currency ban saw digital payments soar up to 300 per cent last December, where transactions through e-wallets shot up from 1.7 mil (17 lakh) in early November to 6.3 mil (63 lakh) a month later, as per data from the Ministry of Electronics and IT. Consumers used the Unified Payments Interface, or UPI, the mobile payments platform released in August 2016, for 300,000 transactions amounting to ₹900 mil (₹90 crore) in November 2016, according to data from the Reserve Bank of India.

IN DEMAND

The cash crunch brought e-wallets like Paytm to the fore with the mobile payment and commerce platform recording at least 8.5 million transactions on a daily basis this year, said CEO **Vijay Shekhar Sharma** at a summit in New Delhi. The company registered a rise of 12 per cent in its payments volume to ₹5 bil (₹5,000 crore) during January compared with December with a fivefold increase in users during December-January and January-February. Buoyant by the success, Paytm is currently targeting a \$10 billion annual transaction volume this year and has pumped over ₹300 crore on its travel vertical. The platform saw over 10 million tickets across bus, train and air travel and had reported bookings of over one million tickets in September 2016. The Alibaba-backed company recently received



Chillr will be launching 'Settle' in the App, which is a Split wise feature. It will be a seamless experience for splitting bills and settling payments within the App.



“

“We have a total download base of 3.2 million users’ post-demonetisation.

SONY JOY
CEO
Chillr

”

approval for banking operations that would further allow cement its position in the market.

However, with the normalisation of currency, digital payments was 10.2 per cent lower in January 2017 against December 2016 where the number of transactions fell from 1,027.7 million to 922.9 million in January. Debit and credit transactions at point-of-sale terminals saw an 18 per cent decline in January as did mobile banking transactions (7.6%) while the demand for e-wallets was stable and did not see much of a change.

On the bright side, the recently launched UPI gained traction in December where the number of transactions rose to 2 million and in January, it was 4.2 million. Additionally, the government launched the Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) app as part of Digital India which is also UPI-based and can be synced to any UPI-enabled bank accounts.

CATCHING UP

Another UPI-based payment tool Chillr has seen transaction volume, amount and number of active users more than double on a daily basis. Chillr CEO **Sony Joy** says, “We have a total download base of 3.2 million users’ post-demonetisation. It’s a simple

tool to transfer money between bank accounts and you don’t need to load money into any wallet to pay. Also, it’s the first multi-bank payments app in India.”

Since Chillr is integrated directly with the banks, one can transfer money from one bank account to another bank account, pay bills, recharge, pay your friends or pay at stores, all from your bank account. Their short-term revenue stream is commission from merchants and in-app utility payments and relies on a long-term business model that looks into the data showing transaction patterns of users and building relevant banking and financial products. “Our intention is to co-create new services for our users with the help of banks and help banks market their digital services using our data.”

Chillr had partnered with a few banks, but with the launch of UPI, they are now open to a lot more banks with their focus on customer acquisition. Joy says, “Apart from that, we are launching ‘Settle’ in the app, which is a Split wise feature. It will be a seamless experience for splitting bills and settling payments within the App. We are working on a few other pilots like Chillr Credit on the credit side (which is already available for certain users) and ‘Piggy Bank’ feature on the savings side.”

Facebook has, for long, ventured beyond connecting people and has continuously been exploring other avenues like travel. India alone boasts over 150 million users and the organisation is utilising its widespread reach and massive database for travel marketing.



HOW IT WORKS



Facebook believes it provides targeted marketing on a large scale which Chakraborty explains, “Traditional online marketing relies on cookies and on a mobile platform, cookies become redundant when the path to purchase involve multiple devices. Being a real people platform, it is able to reach out to travellers across devices and communicate the brands message appropriately at every stage of travel.”

Given the intersection of mobile usage and the personal nature of travel, Facebook's large ad format and creative canvas makes it the prime mobile platform for hotels, airlines, OTAs and other travel companies, he comments. "Be it increasing Olacabs' new customer acquisition rate by 3x within five weeks or using Custom Audiences (CRM Matching) to give Cleartrip a 2.5x return of their ad spend, we help travel marketers achieve their key business metrics, at every stage of the marketing funnel."

PREDOMINANT TRENDS

According to Chakraborty, travel advertisers are seeing a majority of their traffic and sales happen on mobile (mSite and App). He adds, “Although the travel industry is inherently social and mobile, the ecosystem is still refining their mobile strategy. We have seen that once they accelerate the use of Facebook and Instagram they are able to drive business more effectively on mobile.”

A bulk of travel bookings in India are air travel, reveals Chakraborty, but the margins on air tickets is wafer thin. “Additionally, the percentage of Indians booking hotels/holidays online is still very small. This is mainly due to the traditional consumer habits of checking rooms at the location, fear of booking online, etc.”

However, the introduction of Pay at Hotel feature by several OTAs has caused a surge in the number of people booking hotels online with mobile first offerings that help accelerate this even further.

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TRAVELOGUE

- **Fondest travel memory** – Diving with Sharks in South Africa
- **One destination you never get tired of visiting** – Las Vegas. It's a 24/7 city that has the best of both – a vibrant city as well as off the beaten track close to nature
- **Three things that you carry while travelling** – mobile, passport and a sense of adventure!



RICK SAGGAR

The Great Digital Inrush

Rick Saggarr has joined the Travelport family in the role of Commercial Director for India and Sri Lanka after a stint with Flynas. In a tête-à-tête, the seasoned airline and travel industry executive gives insights into the industry and shares what's next on the plate.

AHANA GURUNG

WHAT INSPIRED YOUR FORAY INTO THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY?

My passion for travel inspired me to work in the travel industry. I've been in the industry for over 25 years now, and a factor that impresses me is its rapid evolution, depending primarily on new technologies. Travel commerce has changed dramatically and online merchandising has transformed the way customers search and book their travel.

WITH THE COMMENCEMENT OF YOUR NEW ROLE, WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MOST?

I spent an early part of my career at Travelport UK and I'm excited to come back. It's exciting to work for an industry trailblazer and leader; Travelport has strategically invested approximately \$830 million since 2012 in products with a focus on redefining the Travel Commerce Platform to address the trends, inefficiencies and unmet needs of all components of the travel value chain: Air and Beyond Air, which include distribution and merchandising solutions for hotel, car rental, rail, cruise-line and tour operators, B2B travel payments, mobile solutions, advertising and an array of additional platform services.

I am also excited to part of the IndiGo global launch. The launch is happening in a phased approach as Travelport helps to connect IndiGo's travellers to a world of travel choice. For IndiGo, Travelport's unique airline merchandising capabilities provide real benefits that weren't previously available through the traditional GDS platform. These include the ability to display and differentiate IndiGo's brand attributes and offering in a similar way as they do on their own website, and being able to better explain their products and services to travel agencies as well as direct to the end traveller through OTAs. Travelport provides a significant opportunity for IndiGo to reach new travellers both in domestically and internationally markets. Our main goal is to support customers' familiarisation with IndiGo's brand proposition.

HOW IMPORTANT IS INDIA AS A MARKET?

India is the third biggest sales region for Travelport and we reported growth of nearly 10 per cent in 2016, versus the previous year. Travelport's business in India is managed by partner InterGlobe Technology Quotient (ITQ) who delivers differentiated content, technology and service to the Indian travel industry. ITQ is a strategic business unit of InterGlobe Enterprises which is a leader in aviation,

hospitality and travel-related services, contributing to the growth of the market through innovation and service leadership. What's most exciting is that last quarter, in a GDS-industry first, IndiGo announced that it had signed a strategic partnership to distribute its low fares and ancillaries to all connected Travelport travel agencies around the world – both online and offline. Travelport's leading merchandising capabilities are bringing IndiGo's brand proposition to life for travellers in India and are to agents globally, as IndiGo continues to expand its route network into destinations in the India Subcontinent, the Middle East and South East Asia.

WHERE DO YOU THINK THE INDIAN AVIATION IS HEADING IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

The Indian travel market is predicted to be above the top six business travel markets globally in the next couple of years, by embracing innovation in travel technology leaders. Tourism in India accounts for 7.5 per cent of the GDP and is the third largest foreign exchange earner for the country. The direct contribution of travel and tourism to the GDP is expected to grow at 7.2 per cent per annum, between 2015 and 2025, with contribution expected to reach \$160.2 billion by 2026. According to IATA's passenger forecast, by 2026 India will replace the UK, which is currently the third largest aviation market.

WHAT HAS POTENTIAL TO BE THE NEXT BIG THING IN TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY?

Travel technology is becoming more and more mobile centric and technology trends of the region are focused on the customised travel experience; therefore, I believe personalisation is the future, and the technology that supports this trend, such as the Travel Commerce Platform, is connecting travellers to a world of travel choice. Travelport Digital (formerly MTT) is at the forefront of delivering innovative digital travel solutions for airlines, TMCs and travel agencies to meet the expectations of today's ultra-connected travellers. They are based in Dublin, Ireland and create superior, end-to-end travel experiences across multiple devices and channels with the latest in mobile technology for travel industry players all over the world. Their enables airlines and travel companies to leverage 'every moment in travel' with mobile and digital services that transform how they interact with their customers. I'm excited to see what 2017 brings!

Tech takes FLIGHT



RAJA NATESAN

Technological advancements are predominantly being used in air travel and non-air travel creating more room for convenience for the end consumer. What is changing is the need for a different set of skills in human resource.

The use of technology in travel today is not about the advancement of technology itself but the ease of use and there are two distinct ways the technology is moving ahead. The first is in the area of air travel, which still makes for about 80 per cent of all corporate business and stays the bread and butter of travel. The second is in the area of non-air where some spectacular advancements are taking place and the next one or two years will show how India moves ahead on it. This is where we will see more and more changes happen in the years to come.

The distinction between the air and non-air technology is clear in the way the two technologies are progressing. For air travel, technology is about few and fewer human touch points. Right from searching to booking to quality control to cost savings and MIS, technology now can do it all, faster and better than humans. And this is understandable. Air travel is pretty much a commodity business today and human touch points are not really required. There are enough and more technology producers available and fairly affordable. But there is still a cost and the question is whether the cost will give back returns in a commodity business – the classic chicken and egg situation.

Technology in the non-air side of travel though is a completely different ball game. It is more about using technology to get into newer experiences, buyer psychology, the lure of marketing especially digital media and the coming of age of social media in business.

Bots are now intelligent enough to conceive, implement, analyse and course correct your entire digital marketing plan. You can use social CRMs to quietly follow your best customer profiles. Virtual and Augmented Reality can now create new destinations, new experiences and open up a totally new segment of virtual travel (which hopefully the travel agents will cash in on). Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn don't just create connections, they create leads, chase potential customers and give you a high degree of control in an area where there is still money to be made. There are of course the disrupters like AirBnB, Uber/Ola that

reduce human touch points in non-air. But given the avalanche of information available and the rules and regulations on bookings, cancellations, there is still a fair bit of what I would call 'creativity through technology'.

But to use this creativity, we need HR with different skills. Gone are the days when staff were hired on the basis of their GDS skills or even the speed of booking. Today is about the ability to filter and analyse information in order to add value to the customer. In this area, India is still lagging. Some of the OTAs are beginning to see the benefits of using technology creatively. Let's see how quickly the rest of us catch up.

The author is Raja Natesan, Chief Executive Officer, UniGlobe Travel (South Asia).



Virtual and Augmented Reality can now create new destinations, new experiences and open up a totally new segment of virtual travel.

2017 marks a long journey for yatra

India's second largest OTA has its game face on and started the year by raising more than \$92 million at NASDAQ.



DHRUV SHRINGI

It's been over a month since Yatra made its debut on NASDAQ and **Dhruv Shringi**, Chief Executive Officer, Yatra, exudes a calm fervour. There are big plans in store for the OTA and being the second Indian internet company to list on the American stock market is just one of the things that is giving it a head start into the year.

The stock trading that occurred after a reverse merger with Terrapin has raised more than \$92.5 million (₹619 crore) of primary capital from global investors and Yatra's significantly stronger balance sheet allows the organisation to do a lot more. "There is tremendous growth ahead in the Indian market. It is going through a very momentous time – it is seeing a huge amount of growth and a lot of new customers and suppliers are being added by the airlines. On the whole, the travel industry has reached a great inflection point and on the back of what we've done at NASDAQ, the incremental capital we've raised in the IPO will allow us to successfully capitalise on the market," says Shringi.

With renewed funds, Yatra plans to increase its focus on consumer branding as well as intensify its penetration into the Tier-II and Tier-III cities. The OTA has already got the momentum going with a partnership with Reliance Jio where the devices will carry the Yatra App preinstalled. "The partnership will begin to kick through now and by the second half,

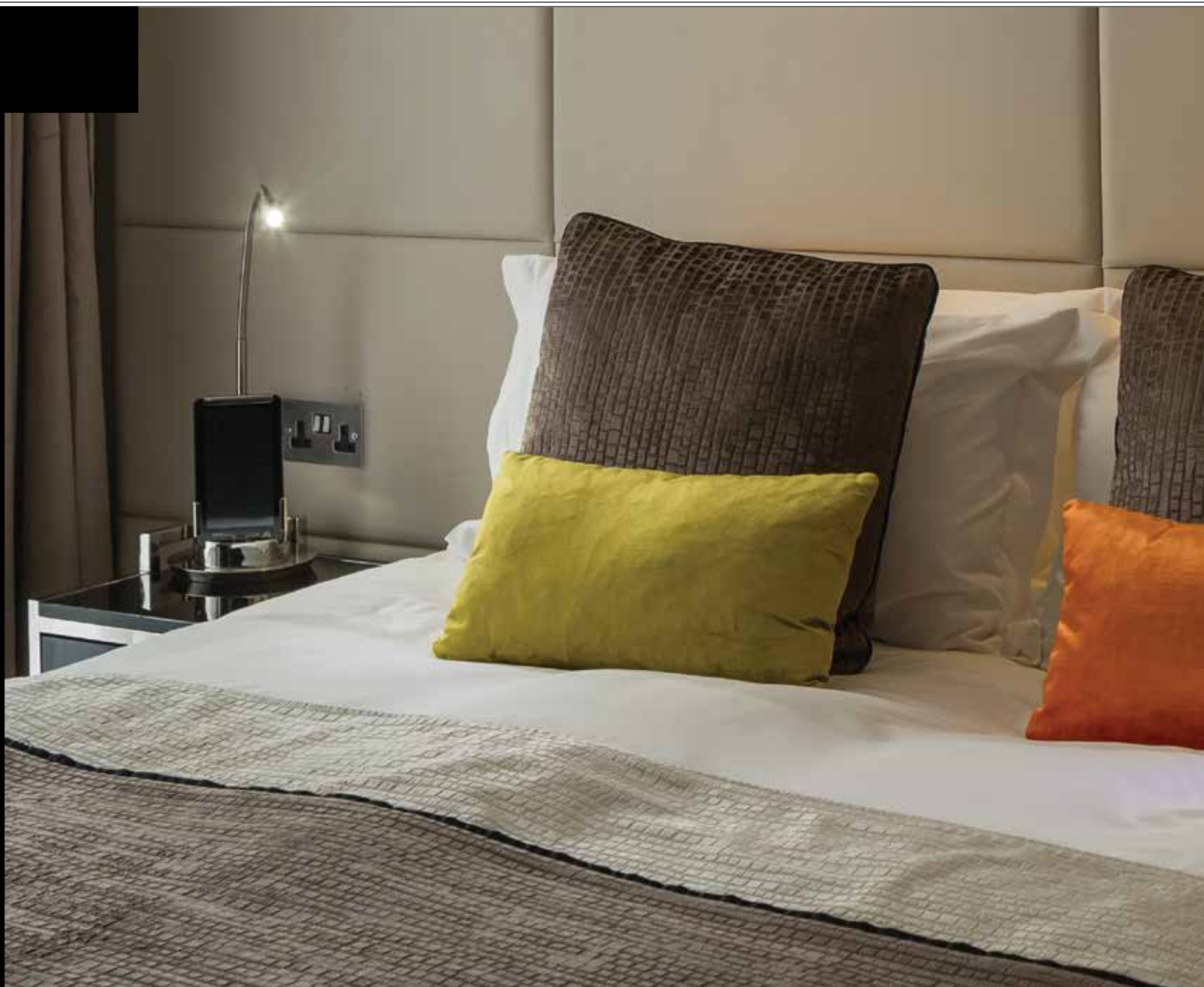
Yatra Online reportedly registered gross

bookings of \$897 million in fiscal 2016.

about 35 million phones will have the App on it and will give us a greater reach into the smaller cities," he comments.

Yatra Online's 2016 last quarter results show an increase of 23.7 per cent in the number of air passengers handled which totalled to 1.8 million during October to December. Air travel was up by 23.7 per cent while revenue collected grew by 27.2 per cent to \$14 million (₹943.8 million). Yatra Online reportedly registered gross bookings of \$897 million in fiscal 2016.

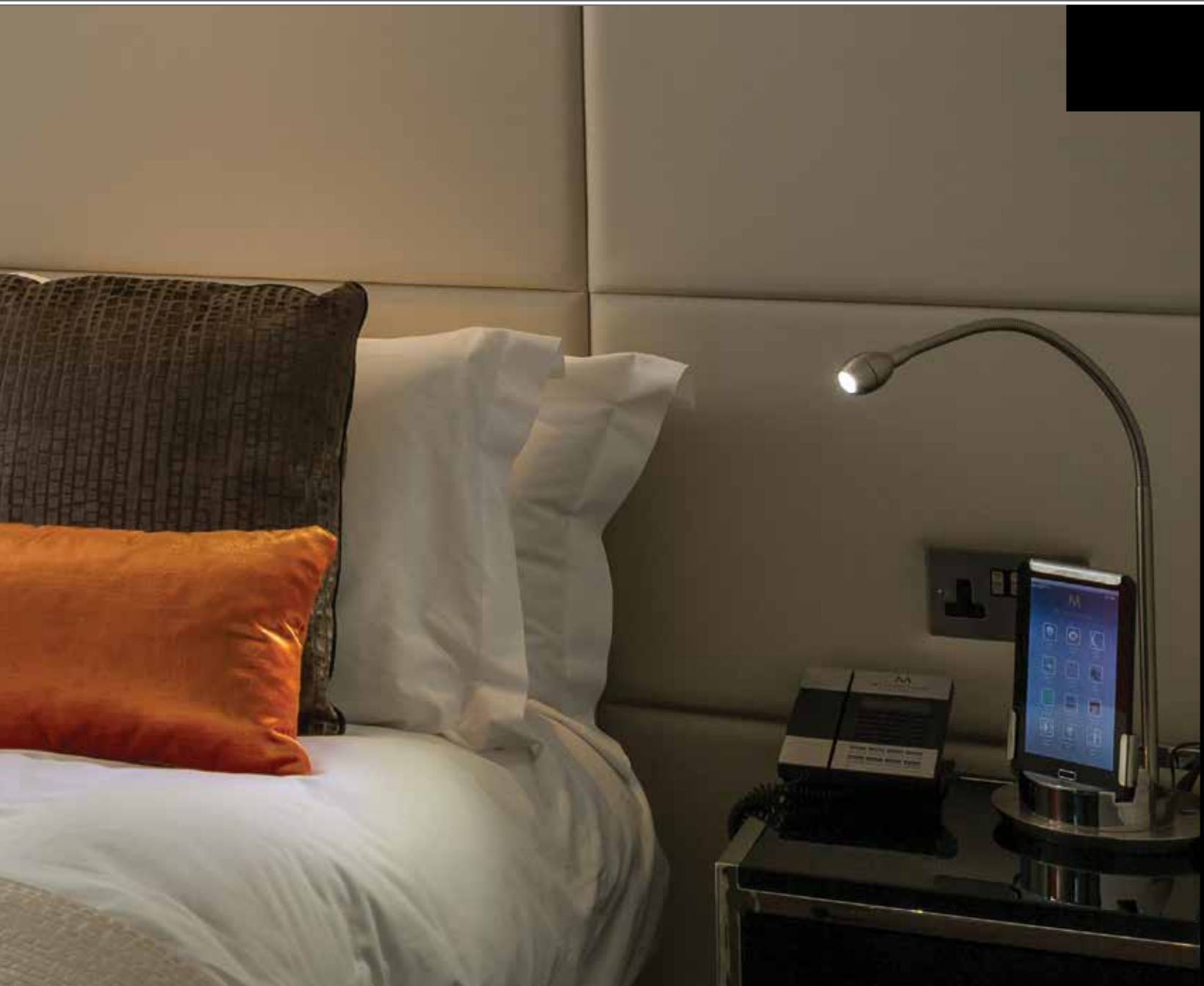
While room night volumes for hotels saw a growth of 21.3 per cent at 365,000, packages were at 36,000. However, revenues for these segments combined were down by 4.9 per cent to \$19.9 million (₹1340.3 million). Shringi states that the emphasis on accommodation and packages will multiply to meet the disparity with more the addition of more in pipeline. Yatra's most recent launch includes homestays for MoUs with several state governments like Uttarakhand and Andhra Pradesh were initiated and so far sees a 'favourable response'. Corporate travel will also be a prime focus which has held a successful front and will see more expansion take place.



Hotels up the **TECH** QUOTIENT

Automation in execution and analysing guest profiles through multiple software and applications is aiding hospitality brands in offering personalised service to their guests.

NISHA VERMA



The experience of a hotel stay starts right from the time one books the room at a particular property. Hotels today understand that, and are adopting technological advancements to improve the guests' experience during their stay.

AIDING PERSONALISATION

While many would think that this computerised comfort might just underpin the personal touch that guests expect when they are staying at a five-star property, the hospitality industry thinks otherwise. **Satyajeet Krishnan**, General Manager, The Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi, insists, "As customers expect hotel experiences to be completely personalised for them, we have to develop ways to link customer preference data with hotel management systems to develop a personalised, high quality service for guests."

Agrees **Nilesh Patel**, Director of IT, AccorHotels India, "We are leveraging technology at every step of the way, in not only easing the guest journey

but also enabling seamless operations."

Aseem Kapoor, General Manager, Hyatt Regency Delhi, on the other hand, claims that technology plays a critical role in bringing the luxury quotient in a hotel. "Delivery of superior experience of a luxury brand at both the product and experiential levels is an important element which helps bring the luxury quotient in a hotel," he says.

SMART GUESTS

With today's guests being smartphone savvy, hotels are offering dedicated applications to ease the check-in process. Patel informs, "Last year capped off the 'Digital Transformation' plan for AccorHotels. We are investing €225 million over a five-year period and are leading the charge in the hospitality space. As part of the initiative, we launched a new version of our mobile application. The AccorHotels One App seamlessly unites various brand applications and features all the Group's hotels. The app offers an enriched experience at every stage of the customer journey, starting from the pre-stay right up to the post-stay stage."

TECH IT AND LOVE IT



“We have to develop ways to use customer preference data to develop a personalised, high quality service.”

SATYAJEET KRISHNAN
General Manager
The Taj Mahal Hotel



“We are investing €225 million over a five-year period and are leading the charge in the hospitality space.”

NILESH PATEL
Director of IT
AccorHotels India



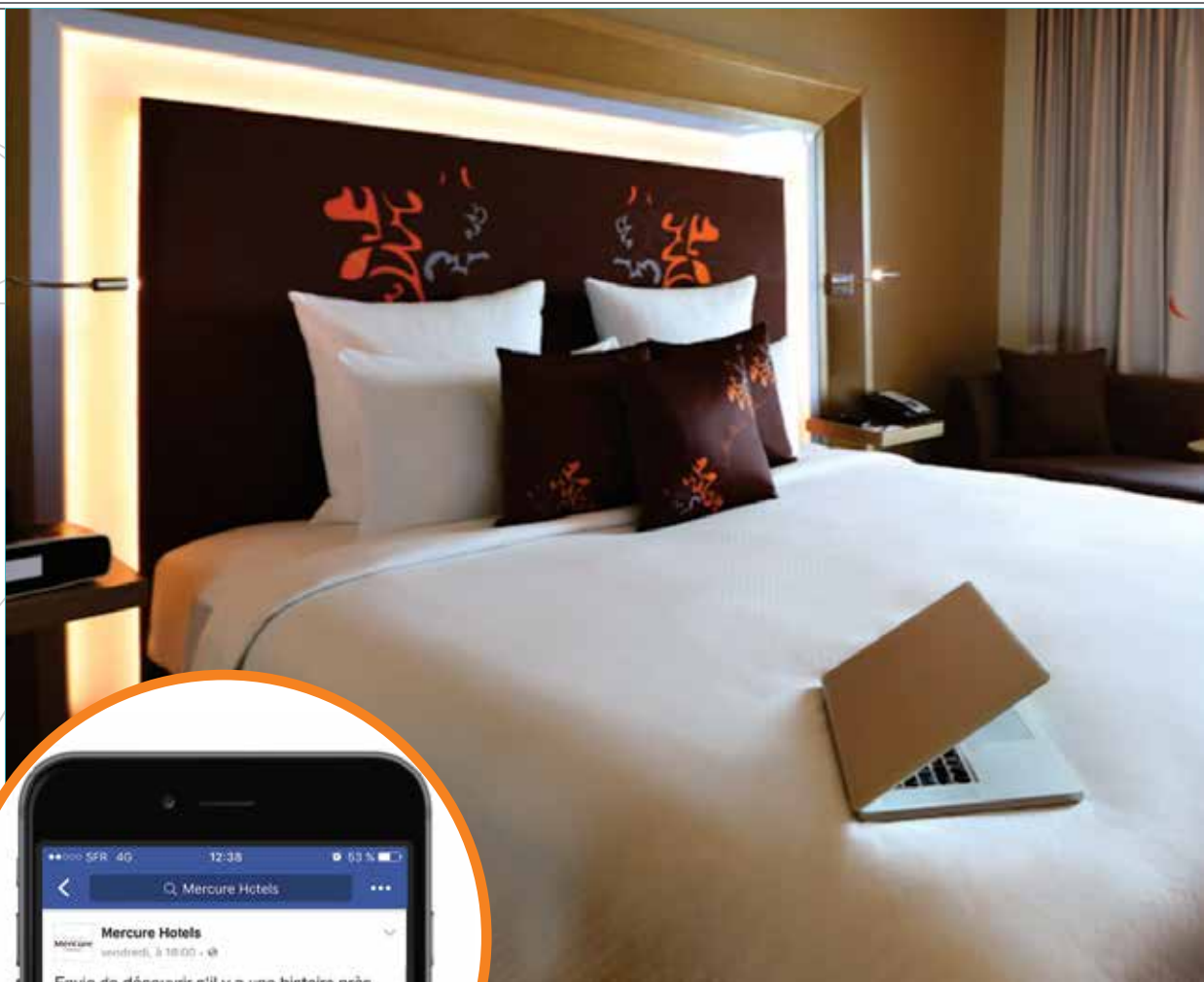
“An e-concierge allows us to learn about guests' preferences and use this information to tailor their stay.”

ASEEM KAPOOR
General Manager
Hyatt Regency Delhi



“In M by Montcalm, with a tablet in every room, guests can create their own environment at the tap of a screen.”

RAMESH ARORA
MD/VP Marketing
The Montcalm Luxury Hotels



Another initiative up their sleeve is My Web Valet. Introduced last year, My Web Valet allows guests access to information from the hotel on their mobile devices and make all the requests they wish in one click, right from booking their spa, their table at the restaurant or their room service; checking all the hotel services; tracking flight and weather information; or even booking a taxi to move about according to their desires, while following their bill in real time. To date more than 2,660 hotels, including Pullman New Delhi Aerocity, have deployed the ‘Lite’ version. The ‘Full’ version of My Web Valet will see wider rollout this year, Patel revealed.

Kapoor says that having such a platform helps them service them better. “An e-concierge that is available 24x7, allows guests to browse at their leisure all the personalised and recommended activities, dining options, spa treatments or any other services and then book directly with the hotel via the platform. It allows us to learn about guests' preferences and use this information to tailor their stay.”

Even London-based hospitality company Montcalm Luxury Hotels has installed touchscreens to control underfloor heating in bathroom and call room-service at the touch of a button. **Ramesh Arora**, MD/VP Marketing, The Montcalm Luxury Hotels, reveals, “In M by Montcalm, with a tablet

in every room as standard, guests can create their own environment at the tap of a screen — dim the lights, close the curtains and order an indulgent in-room repast. Other amenities include HD LCD TVs with international cable and satellite channels, digital music library, voice mail, Direct-dial phone and electronic room keys.”

INSTANT COMMUNICATION

Arora revealed that they also offer reservation on WhatsApp and hotel Apps for their tech-savvy and mobile-friendly customers. Even at Hyatt Regency, Delhi, social media is used in a big way. “We have also created a specialised and dedicated WhatsApp number to communicate with our in-house guests, which makes the process easier and hassle free,” says Kapoor.

Patel says that they also use popular instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp, WeChat and Line for guest feedback at some of their Grand Mercure properties in Asia Pacific, including Grand Mercure Bangalore and Grand Mercure Mysuru. “As a VIP service to our privileged members of Le Club AccorHotels, we have made a provision for real-time service and feedback using instant messaging Apps. Upon reservation, we share QR codes and IDs of the messenger App with the members, which they can use to add the hotel on these apps. AccorHotels has partnered with Trust You (global leader in online reputation management) last year to create the Voice of the Guest (VOG) platform, which manages the online reputation and guest feedback of more than 3000 of their properties, to improve their daily operations,” he informs.



INNOVATION IS KEY

Taking the smartphone experience forward, Montcalm London launched a complimentary smartphone service solution – Handy. “We are the first hotel group in the UK to introduce the Handy to our guests that allows them to make unlimited local and international calls to 10 international countries including India. Further facilities include free high-speed connectivity, pre-loaded apps, city guide, information on shopping, local attractions, bars and restaurants in London and host of other applications. The smartphones are available to guests upon checking in with all features accessible to them along with a personalised number. In addition, savvy guests can take ‘Handy’ outside the hotel along with them allowing them to explore the city of London as a travel destination with pre-loaded travel and other useful apps,” explained Arora.

Patel, on the other hand, said that they have made a breakthrough in the digital payment space. “Last year, we introduced AccorHotels Personal Wallet, a seamless, quick and safe way to manage payments. Our guests can register the details of up to five credit cards on their AccorHotels account. They can do this, and modify or delete them, from any of their devices (mobile, tablet or desktop). With Personal Wallet now included in the One App, guests can book their rooms anywhere, any time,” he informed. For guests on the move, they have another service called PressReader for AccorHotels. “This is an innovative service that lets guests read more than 4,000 international and local newspapers and magazines on their own devices,” revealed Patel.

The Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi, introduced RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) keys for guest rooms as replacements to the magnetic keys. Krishnan claims, “With RFID door locks, key cards are programmed and used by placing them in proximity of a digital device rather than swiping them through a reader, thus adding to guest convenience. This year we also started the use of iPads to facilitate smooth check-in services. Additionally, we also adopted the use of Under Valley Car Scanners for automatic scanning of all cars that enter the hotel premises. We use chemical free de-scaler for steam generators, upgradation of all analog CCTV cameras with digital cameras and DVR. We have also put technology in place to all uninterrupted power to passenger elevators. The property management system has been changed from Fidelio to Opera and we are resorting to NPS for measuring guest satisfaction scores. This year, we plan to invest in software that would help us track guest requests and complete these requests in real time. This system – called FCS – will help ensure maximum enhancement of guest experiences help us provide total service satisfaction. The hotel also installed an air-conditioning plant equipped with new technology. The Tri Rotor Screw Chiller has an efficiency of 0.45 KW/TR. Conventional lighting in the hotel was also replaced with LED lights and we also installed an organic waste converter to treat kitchen waste.”

Krishnan sums it up saying that the use of technology towards creating a unified communication systems and prompt in-room technologies goes a long way in satisfying and fuelling the guests’ expectations.

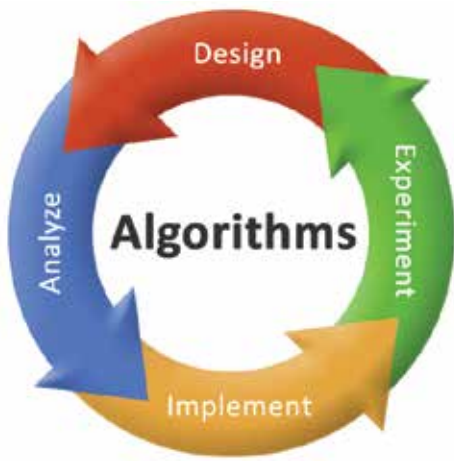


➤ **By 2020, 100 million will shop in Augmented Reality**

While 100 million represents a little less than 1 per cent of the worldwide population, the number of people shopping online is steadily increasing — from more than 1.5 billion in 2016 to 2 billion in 2019. Immersive technologies such as augmented reality increase user engagement with a product or service by enabling a consumer to fully explore features and conveying additional information that can aid in a buying decision.

What's shaping the **DIGITAL** **FUTURE?**

Here's a round-up of technology trends that will help you understand not only the radical disruptions, but also the outcomes that will reshape nature of future investments.



➤ By 2020, algorithms will alter the behaviour of over 1 billion workers

Employees, as consumers, are already familiar with contextualisation algorithms to influence billions of decisions. An emerging set of "persuasive technologies" leverage Big Data from myriad sources, mobile, IoT devices and deep analysis to positively influence behaviour. Social sentiment algorithms are triggering and swaying human emotions of employees, consumers, citizens and voters via consumer Apps such as Facebook or WhatsApp.

➤ By 2019, 20 per cent of brands will abandon their mobile Apps

Many brands are finding that their mobile Apps are not delivering the level of adoption and customer engagement that companies expected. The number of Apps available in the Apple/Android App stores is so high that discovery is a huge impediment to adoption. The cost of application support, not only in maintenance, upgrades and customer care, but also in marketing, throw into disarray the original ROI calculations.



Source: Google



➤ By 2022, IoT will save consumers and businesses \$1 trillion a year

Assets under maintenance globally exceed \$240 trillion, with maintenance costs of \$27 trillion. Moving to predictive maintenance can often save 10 per cent to 20 per cent over preventive maintenance. IoT, properly deployed, can unlock this \$1 trillion savings opportunity. IoT holds enormous promise in reducing the cost of maintenance and consumables. Everything from restrooms to cruise liners have costs associated with inspection, pre-emptive replacement, wasteful consumption, unexpected downtime and customer disappointment. The challenge to deriving these savings is that of any IoT project: a secure, robust implementation that can deliver savings over one or two decades, without itself driving management costs that absorb any savings made.

➤ Through 2020, IoT will increase data storage demand by less than 3%

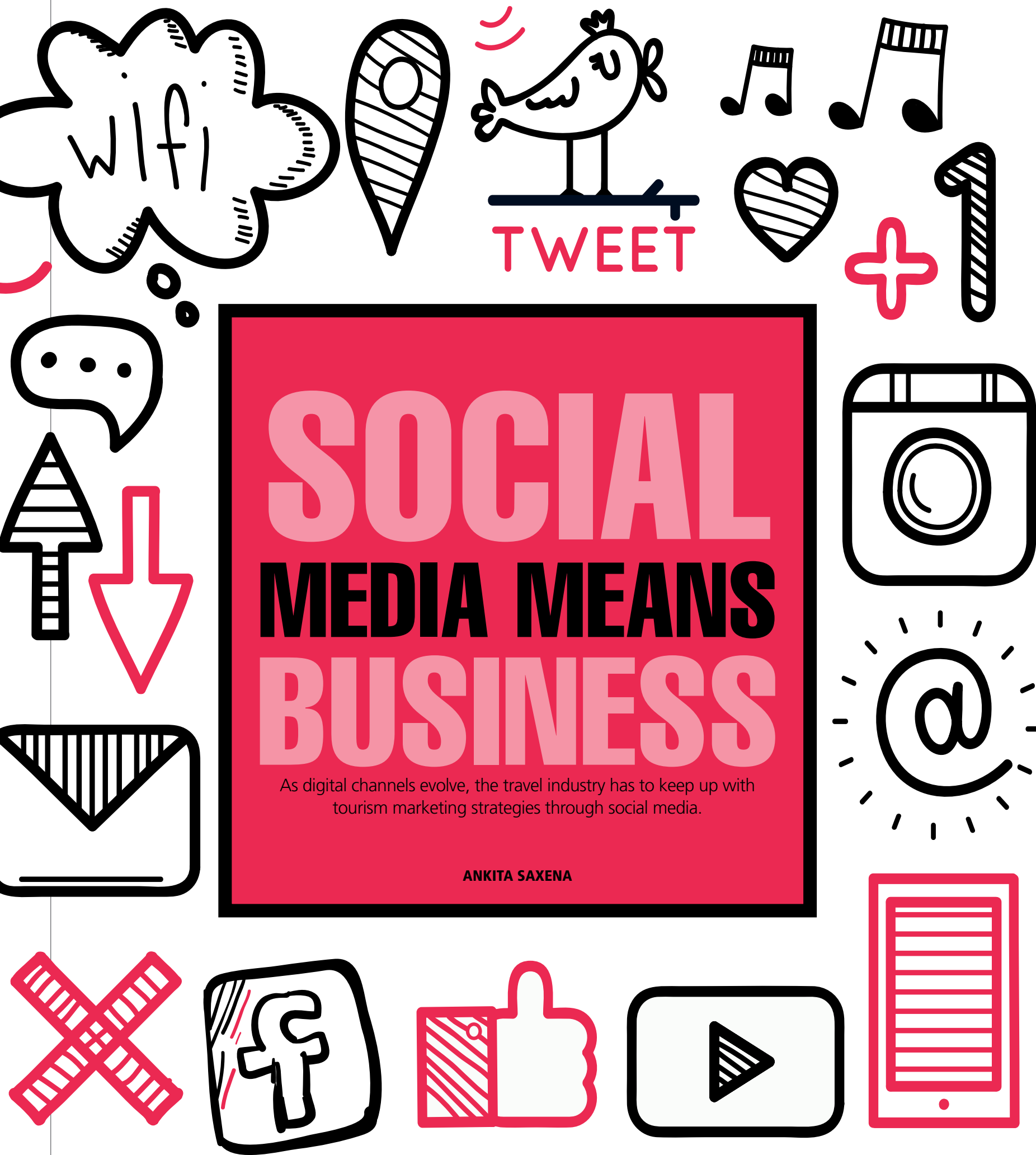
There will be massive potential for data generation in 2020, with 21 billion IoT endpoints estimated to be in use; however, only a fraction of this data will actually be retained and stored. The cumulative IoT data stored in 2020 will come from consumer and business applications. Consumer IoT applications will account for only 3 per cent of this data and business IoT applications 97 per cent. Looking at total storage by industry vertical, healthcare providers, manufacturing and natural resources, transportation, and utilities have the greatest storage requirements due to a combination of the business value of the data and data retention requirements.



➤ By 2022, a blockchain-based business will be worth \$10 billion

Blockchain technology is established as the next revolution in transaction or event recording. A blockchain ledger provides an immutable, shared view of all transactions between engaging parties in a distributed, decentralised network. Parties can therefore immediately act on a committed blockchain record, secure in the knowledge that it cannot be changed. Any kind of value creation and exchange can happen in minutes, not days. Blockchain applications can free up cash, create new forms of value, reduce transaction costs and accelerate business processes. Its development is still immature, but the technology can start to deliver value, with the potential for extreme society, business and technological disruption. Blockchain is attracting product and capital investment.

Source: 'Top Strategic Predictions for 2017 and Beyond: Surviving the Storm Winds of Digital Disruption' by Gartner Inc.



When it comes to social media, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram have become household names. The unique ability of digital channels to engage, measure, and create two-way dialogue are tools which can support marketing, operations, finance, or human resource activities for various industries, and the travel industry in particular.

DIGITAL INFLUENCE

Digital channels are ranked behind only friends and family and word of mouth as sources for travel ideas. However, when it's time to research and booking travel and accommodations, consumers turn to travel agents, online review sites, and specific brands' websites and Apps.

Social media influences travellers in different ways throughout the vacation process either during the planning stages, on-trip or after the completion of a holiday. At the planning stage, digital channels act as source of inspiration and as this inspiration takes shape, those channels become planning tools. Travellers have been observed to predominantly like sharing experiences on vacation through stories and images. While travellers occasionally post on business travel, particularly when it involves exotic or luxury accommodations, leisure travellers are featured often.

Nikhil Ganju, Country Manager, TripAdvisor, points out that an increased number of Indian travellers are using reviews to make discerning choices. With user-generated content working across all stages of the travel experience – from dreaming to planning and from purchasing to advocacy, it is crucial that Indian tourism and hospitality businesses remain agile and capitalise on the power of UGC in order to educate, influence and engage. TripAdvisor's redesigned destination pages called Premium Destination Partnerships allow DMOs to complement destination pages with customised content aimed to provide users with further insight on sightseeing, activities and products to engage in at the destination.

He says, "Travellers can view teasers of these collections, articles and events on these new destination pages and read more when they choose to click through dedicated pages. This new capability to include partner-supplied content complements the user-generated offering, as well as the booking tools already available on our destination pages." The platform has also integrated content distribution into Tourism Pages which has doubled, sometimes tripled, the exposure and interaction rate for DMO content.

CORPORATES GO SOCIAL

Most companies across the travel and hospitality

industry have embraced online media to some extent, attempting to be as social as their consumers. However, for consumers these channels are social mediums, while for companies, they are business platforms. According to Jaal Shah, Founder, RezLive.com, social media platforms act as key information channels not only to target the B2C audiences but also to educate the B2B travel partners. Various channels not only help in creating a buzz about the product and services but also help in building and maintaining a brand image by interacting directly with the target audience. "Content marketing is king when future of tourism marketing is concerned wherein one provides its audience the content that is actually worth reading," says Shah.

According to the Internet and Mobile Association of India, 40 per cent of Indian travellers seek advice from friends in social media. Huzan Fraser Motivala, Representative India, Tourism Ireland, informs, "The size of social media audience in India provides a valuable platform for creating awareness, driving engagement and a great promotional opportunity for destinations to promote themselves to a worldwide audience as well as customise and tailor their messages for the Indian market specifically."

VARIETY TOOLBOX

Social media marketing is a varied toolbox, and each company will find different tools useful for different marketing needs. Vishal Sinha, Former CEO, TUI India, says, "All the platforms are growing at a steady pace with Internet penetration of 34.8 per cent and mobile Internet is supposed to grow by 55 per cent which gives us the magnitude of the population that can be reached. Facebook boasts of having 142 million monthly active users (MAU) in India, including 133 million accessing it on mobile, thus Facebook becomes our lead medium, whereas Twitter and Instagram work as the bombarding platforms."

Every platform has its own objective for its users, so LinkedIn works for B2B and talent requirement platform as well as brand awareness for TUI. Sinha further informs, "We spend substantial share of our monthly marketing budget on digital and more than 60 per cent of that on social media ads. This gives us approximately 70 per cent of our leads with a conversation rate of over 6 per cent. Interestingly, we have seen a surge in leads from Tier-II and Tier-III cities, which is a very encouraging trend and shows penetration of digital media and also travel growth."

TARGETING IS THE KEY

By targeting the precise consumer segments, companies can be more efficient with their spending and dedicate more resources to consumers who will actually generate revenue for the company. Motivala explains, "The scale of social audience, which crosses every demographic group, is so large that targeting it must be considered a key element of the marketing

IT PAYS TO BE SOCIAL



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NIKHIL GANJU
Country Manager
TripAdvisor



"Facebook is our lead medium, whereas Twitter & Instagram are bombarding platforms."

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"Content marketing is king when future of tourism marketing is concerned."

JAAL SHAH
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"The size of social media audience in India provides a valuable platform."

HUZAN FRASER MOTIVALA
Representative India
Tourism Ireland



"Social media enables us to be targeted; we can tailor activities per requirements."

STEVEN DIXON
Regional Manager-South and South
East Asia, Tourism New Zealand



"With Facebook's new features, marketing campaigns have become impactful."

ROMIT THEOPHILUS
Director-Sales and Marketing
GNTO-India

MILLENNIALS' TIMELINE

- Syndicated reports* indicate Millennials are the demographic cohort following Generation X. This age group (18-34 years) uses social media to seek information, purchase and interact with the brand. Online adults aged between 18-34 are most likely follow a brand via social networking (95%) (Source: Marketing Sherpa)
- Visual content is more than 40 times more likely to get shared on social media than other types of content. (Source: HubSpot).

playbook.” Elaborating on the same, **Steven Dixon**, Regional Manager-South and South East Asia, Tourism New Zealand, says, “Social media enables us to be very targeted: both in terms of who we are speaking to and the message we are communicating to them. For example, we can serve one message to someone who is currently planning their trip to New Zealand and a very different message to someone who is already in the country – we can tailor our activity to fit with their changing requirements.”

CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

Romit Theophilus, Director-Sales and Marketing, German National Tourist Office-India, explains, “With social media being a more dynamic and personalised medium, marketing campaigns can be customised to suit certain type of audiences or interest making the campaigns more relevant and thereby effective. With Facebook introducing new features such as FB 360, Facebook Live, Slideshows, carousel ads etc., marketing campaigns have become vibrant and impactful.”

INNOVATION

Digital media isn't new anymore, but its reach and potential continues to evolve rapidly. Some companies use these channels to engage consumers as a forum for feedback while some use this kind of outreach to provide more customised services. Other companies use digital channels for giveaways or contests.

Soraya Homchuen, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand in Mumbai, explains, “We run contests on social media where some winners are rewarded with tickets to visit iconic places in Thailand. In some cases we have received images from them at the places along with their comment on how they enjoy their trip.” Homchuen feels 2016 has been the year of live videos through Facebook Live and Periscope on Twitter. The year 2017 however, is considered to be the year of chatbots. Chatbots will help travellers ask questions and receive answers instantly through Facebook Messenger in the form of a conversation thread. “We put out a variety of content in the form of videos, live telecast, blogger reviews, traveller reviews, GIFs, cinemagraphs, hyperxooms, animations, VFX etc. which share experiences instead of photo driven content,” she says.

TRENDS

Karan Anand, Head-Relationships, Cox and Kings, feels that as users become more aware, they are also becoming choosier. “Gone are the days when pricing alone was a deciding factor. Service levels, quality, itineraries, customisations play an important role in line of travel. DIY is on the rise in tourism segment

Some companies use digital media to engage consumers as a forum for feedback while some use this kind of outreach to provide more customised services.



and an increased number of tourists are converting to 'travellers', looking for the next enriching experience. It's not just about sightseeing anymore, but the experience before and after the trip as well," he says. Anand also points out that while there are different strategies for different platforms as the audiences have varying levels of interests and knowledge, there is a massive scope in what more can be done. "Virtual reality, augmented reality, omni-channel marketing is exciting especially as they open up new avenues for an immersive experience for tourists," adds Anand.

Ignacio Ducasse Gutierrez, Tourism Counselor, Embassy of Spain in India and Director, Tourism Office of Spain in India, says, "Every day we are witnessing new tailor-made information and new tools that can filter the audience reach and focus on specific market segments. In the competitive Indian market, social media is used aggressively to promote new products and services especially via mobile applications."

BOOKINGS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Neelu Singh, CEO and Director, Ezeego1, points out that as far as bookings are concerned social media is used as a lead generation medium. While the numbers may vary, approximately 15-20 per cent of these leads are generated on social media channels for Ezeego1. "A key area is social commerce, where users can purchase and review products and services directly from social media. This is being seen as means to generate leads or sell to

users. However, for direct purchasing through social networks to become mainstream, social networks will need to develop robust payment models that can be integrated to the existing business payment models."

Vineet Gopal, Director-India, Tourism Board of Reunion Island, says, "Our focus is to generate interest and curiosity in Indian travellers towards Reunion Island as a unique luxurious holiday destination. We are focusing on generating queries which can result in bookings. At present we receive 5-8 queries on an average a week from Facebook for Reunion Island." He also feels that there is a shift happening from traditional to digital marketing, but it's not very prominent.

Internationally, social media is one of the strongest parts of any digital marketing plan, but in India it is yet to explore the opportunities. **Pankaj Nagpal**, Managing Director, Travstarz Global Group, also feels the same. "India is still at a very nascent stage as far as social media is concerned specially for marketing purposes but there is a definite shift happening to such platforms for marketing since they are most cost-effective and the audience is quite large specially for new upcoming destinations and hotels who can use it for branding purposes and the people who have visited these destinations and hotels can support the claims by their testimonials." Travstarz generates close to 20 per cent of the queries now through social media initiatives which is definite to grow up to 40 per cent very shortly.

ONLINE BUSINESS



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SORAYA HOMCHUEN
Director
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NEELU SINGH
CEO and Director
Ezeego1

Bridging the OFFLINE GAP

TripBox, a customer engagement and management App, aims to empower brick-and-mortar B2C agencies by making itineraries and every kind of travel document available on the traveller's mobile even when offline.



With several Indian travel agencies yet to jump on board the digital bandwagon, several companies are cashing in on this area to enhance their services. Enter TripBox, an App that will sync all your travel details on the same platform to encourage ease-of-use for the end customer.

Co-founder **Harish Sharma** explains that the product primarily caters to the offline agents who may not be on an online platform but want to compete with them. "The platform allows them (offline agents) to upload their content manually or automatically where each of their customers can have access to this information on the mobile App. In this way, we are providing mobile solutions for travel agencies and tour operators. This is a first of its kind product in the travel space which caters to the offline travel fraternity and allows such customer engagement." Through the app, one can web check-in, save important documents such as passport details, tickets, visa, etc. and also has the option of making payments while using the app.

DRIVING BUSINESS TRAVEL

FOR ADMINISTRATOR:

- Update trip details manually/Import from list/html/email (flights, hotels, cars, rail, bus, vacations, transfers, visa)
- Send notifications to customers on the move
- Live chat with customers (agents can initiate from admin backend)
- Send branded itineraries in HTML/PDF
- Self-branded tickets and invoice copy
- Receive payments online for unpaid bookings

FOR CUSTOMER:

- Always handy trip itinerary
- Use booking details to check in at Airports/Hotels
- View All itineraries with details, on Offline mode as well
- Live Chat with agency staff
- Pay online for unpaid trips, instantly
- Request cancellations and support
- Associated info with trip e.g. weather, currency, things to do etc.

The biggest advantage is that during the course of an engagement with the service provider, a host of ancillary products can be generated and sold to the customers like forex, insurance policies, additional museum tickets, etc. This option is even available from the time a customer interacts to the time of completion of the trip, or even during the trip. "So, it is sort of a post-booking, during the trip engagement tool," he adds. One can also consult or clear queries through a live chat interface where documents and screenshots can also be forwarded.

TripBox has initially been rolled out with 10 travel agencies on trial to understand how well the product will be received and to test out ways to improve services. He says, "I've seen a lot of interest amongst fellow travel agents on using TripBox. See, everyone wants to go online but the question is about the price, ROI and whether they will be able to successfully implement technology or not. The future is that everyone is running with or behind technology and there is no way out of it."



Adopt & Benefit

Vikram Kohli, President, FCM Travel Solutions, strongly feels that technology and therefore automation is the future and is fast becoming a key differentiator in today's world.

HAZEL JAIN

HAS THE TECHNOLOGY LANDSCAPE IN INDIA CHANGED WHEN WE SPEAK OF TRAVEL COMPANIES?

Yes. Like travel, technology is also an evolving industry and we keep seeing changes and enhancements basis growing customer needs and 'ease of doing business.' From automating specific processes we are looking at end-to-end fulfillment including Expense Management Solutions.

We are also moving away from desktop to mobile solutions for the mobile customer. Organising and managing meetings and conferences is all heading the digital way.

HOW HAS THE PERCEPTION OF CORPORATE COMPANIES CHANGED TOWARDS AUTOMATING THEIR BUSINESS TRAVEL?

Today's customer is certainly more 'informed' and 'demanding' when it comes to automation. The recent 'digitalisation' push by the government is also adding up more towards automation and use of technology. Customers are looking for convenience, better control and reduced costs, which they can easily derive from automation.

Most of our customer engagements today revolve around our technological capabilities and it is becoming one of the key selection criteria for doing business.

WHAT ACCORDING TO YOU IS THE REASON BEHIND THIS GRADUAL EVOLUTION?

While the technology is transforming at a faster pace, its usage and adoption has been a gradual process. This is part of 'Change Management' process. Most technological solutions often involve multiple departments and getting them on board and making it a seamless process becomes a challenge. There is always the fear of the 'unknown' and the 'known' with certain sections of the business getting affected due to automation.

WHAT ARE THE MOST POPULAR TOOLS THAT INDIAN COMPANIES OPT FOR?

In the travel space, a lot of our customers are now opting for Self-Booking Tool (SBT), Expense Management Solution, Finance Integrations, HR Data Integrations for better policy compliance, Single Sign-On for comfort of end users, etc. Most importantly, these solutions are sought both for desktop and mobile platforms.

WHAT KIND OF CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE WHEN ENCOURAGING TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION OR SERVICING A CLIENT?

Most challenges are around bringing various departments like Human Resources, Finance, IT, Procurement, etc. on the same page. Also, as mentioned before it is a change management process.

Making customers understand the benefits they can derive out of automation without losing control will go a long way in defining the future of how travel is managed within the organisation. Also, organisations' internal systems need to support these changes.

Technology and therefore automation is the future and is fast becoming a key differentiator in today's world. The quicker companies recognise this fact, the sooner they will start reaping the benefits.



Making customers understand the benefits of automation

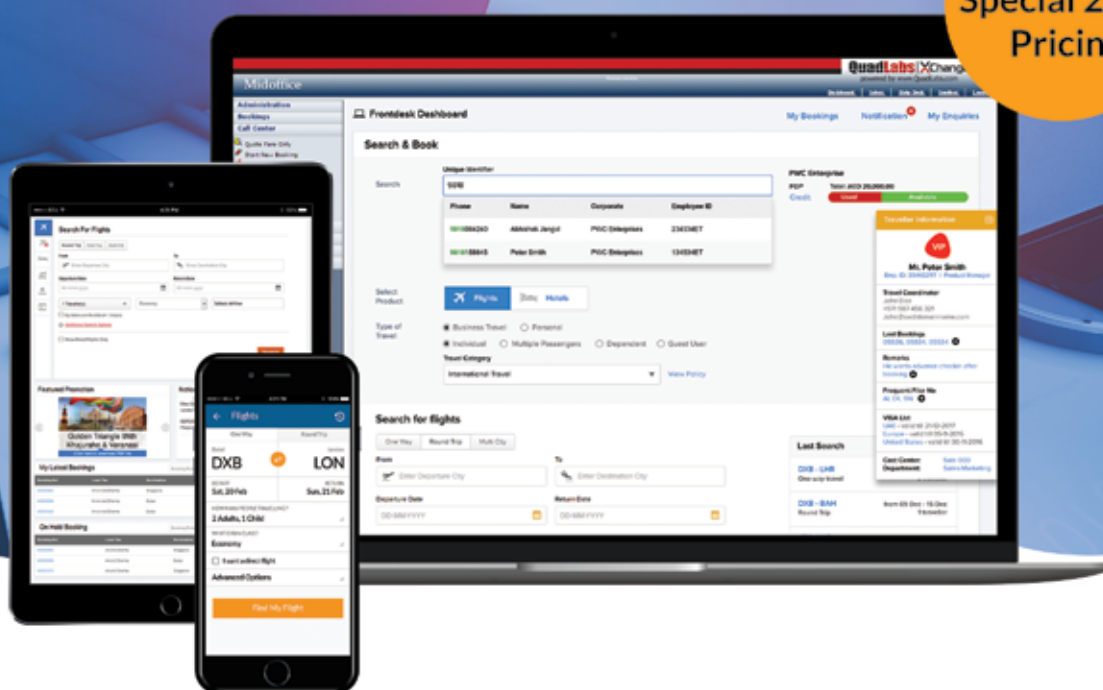
will go a long way in defining the future of travel.



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