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India with renewed journeys

India needs to explore newer destinations within the country, add valuable experiences and target younger travellers to grow the tourism industry, believes **Amitabh Kant**, CEO, NITI Aayog. In an exclusive conversation with **TRAVTALK**, Kant discusses his vision for a renewed Incredible India.



TT Bureau

According to Kant, infrastructure is the key to grow tourism in the country. He opines, "Good quality tourist infrastructure and valuable experiences is what attracts tourists from across the world and the case is no different for India. Also, one cannot have growth of tourism without civil aviation and vice versa; they both converge and integrate. It is a great thing that now, **Suresh Prabhu**, who is also the Minister of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, will be able to drive all—

“Good quality tourist infrastructure and valuable experiences is what attracts tourists from across the world, and the case is no different for India. Also, one cannot have growth of tourism without civil aviation and vice versa”

trade, industry and civil aviation towards greater heights. I believe he will bring with him great dynamism to this sector.”

Commenting on the launch of the new website by Ministry of Tourism—Incredible India 2.0, Kant says, "I extend all my compliments

to the ministry for putting up an interactive website. I feel it will continue to attract a vast number of international as well as domestic tourists. Incredible India has proved to be a great campaign and the newer edition of this campaign will bring fresh energy and dynamism to the industry."

Though the new campaign has been well-received in various markets, Kant feels that if one has to infuse new energy, the country will have to seek newer destinations within India. "Newer experiences have to be worked upon to attract international tourists and domestic tourists alike. The target

market also needs to be re-focused. There are a lot of young tourists across the world who travel for fewer days but take frequent trips as compared to other travellers. We need to target this new segment and simultaneously focus on the business traveller."

Kant further points out that India needs to open the market for high-end or luxury travellers to boost tourism.



J&K hopes to revive tourism



Mehbooba Mufti
Chief Minister
J&K

At the 64th Travel Agents Association of India Convention in Srinagar, **Mehbooba Mufti**, Chief Minister, J&K along with **Tassaduq Hussain Mufti**, Minister for Tourism, J&K, instils her faith in travel agents to help revive tourism in the Valley.



Nisha Verma

Mehbooba Mufti welcomed the TAAI delegates to the state and thanked them for choosing J&K as the venue for their convention. Quoting her father, Mufti Mohammad

Sayeed, Mufti said, "My father used to say that if we are full of good deeds we will get paradise, but he would also be confused if that paradise is beautiful or our Kashmir. We have beautiful lakes and water bodies, mountains, forests,

golf courses, culture, manners and different languages. There is no other place in the world which has so much diversity as J&K. Not even our entire country has so much diversity on offer as J&K, and that's why even God has placed

us right on top in the map of our country."

However, commenting on the scenario of the state, she said, "Now, the crown of India has lost its lustre. We are going through a difficult phase,

but we have invited the TAAI delegation for our hand holding. The TAAI convention has come as a new lease of life for us and is a good omen for the state. My father would say that every step of a tourist into the

Contd. on page 7 ▶

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TAAI opts for the right click

A new app ‘TAAI Connect’ was launched for members at the 64th TAAI Convention held in Srinagar, J&K. The association also declared 2018 as its Visit Kashmir year. **Sunil Kumar**, President, TAAI, tells more.

 TT Bureau

Ecstatic on the response of organising the convention in Kashmir, **Sunil Kumar** reveals that the numbers at the convention were overwhelming. “We announced it as a limited-edition convention due to constraints on hotel rooms. Around 600 people and 60-70 local delegates travelled to Kashmir. This is the first of our convictions which has played well without bothering about local disputes or situations. If there exists a good place in this country, we must promote it. That’s the first success of a convention.”

The association launched its new application and web-site, powered by TP Connects, a Dubai-based technology

firm. “TAAI Connect will be the future for every member of TAAI. People who have lots to sell can connect with those who have nothing to sell. The network enables the smallest

“TAAI Connect will be the future for our members. Over 500,000 agents would get connected for the association to talk to global vendors”

agents in a small part of the country, who have no access and resources, to be as capable as any large online travel company. Over 500,000



Sunil Kumar
President
TAAI

agents would get connected to TAAI Connect for the association to talk to global vendors,” he informs.

Another initiative was the declaration of 2018 as the Visit Kashmir Year for TAAI. Kumar shares, “We are thrilled with the

support received from the Ministry of Tourism, J&K. One gift we want to leave behind is to encourage our member agencies to promote more of J&K this year. This year, TAAI will talk about J&K everywhere, and the consistency of any promotion is what makes it successful. The Visit Kashmir programme would enable our agencies to sell more of Kashmir with more people visiting the state.”

Even the sessions at the convention reflected the same thought. Kumar reveals, “The focus was more on tourism than airlines, which is usually the case at TAAI conventions. With many of our members involved in tourism, we felt that focusing on tourism will be more relevant, especially with the launch of TAAI Connect.”

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Big on Middle East

While Dubai and the Middle East remain one of the most frequented outbound destinations for Indians, the region also sees a great deal of inbound from that market our country as well. Most of the Middle Eastern travellers prefer going to South India and tour operators from that market are seen in large numbers at the Arabian Travel Mart, which is just around the corner. The wellness market in Kerala and other places in South India have many takers in the Middle East. In fact, people from UAE and other Middle eastern countries come to India for medical tourism as well, owing to affordable health care in state-of-the-art hospitals and nursing homes around the country. While Indian operators are trying to cash in on the same, it is only the tip of the iceberg. A lot can be done in this sector, especially with the Government of India offering separate e-visa for medical tourists, giving impetus to the growth of medical tourism in the country. With a few infrastructural initiatives and right promotion, the medical tourism market in India is only going to grow. Else, we might lose this business to Sri Lanka and even Thailand.

Infrastructure building

A new website, new campaign, and a newfound focus on infrastructure by MOT is what's going to make India a preferable destination for foreign tourists. While the first two things are already being taken care of by MOT, they are working towards developing infrastructure through various schemes and circuits. Amitabh Kant, CEO, Niti Aayog, recently said infrastructure and valuable experiences will set India apart from other destinations. While India does offer some unique experiences, there is a need to develop infrastructure and market them differently. Apart from creating new experiences, there is a need to offer something for young tourists as well. In fact, both the government and the tour operators should learn to put old wine in a new bottle, and offer destinations and heritage experiences with a twist. Kant said that the young travellers are making multiple trips around the world, hence there is a need to reach out to them, and the best way to do that is by catching their attention through social media marketing, digital marketing and creating events around experiences.

MOT's maiden travel exhibition?

To boost inbound tourism, India needs to up its marketing and promotional game by organising its maiden travel exhibition. The country's national and international roadshows if planned well can reap good results in a short period of time, believes **Sarab Jit Singh, MD, Travelite India.**

In an effort to promote inbound tourism, Ministry of Tourism and the tourism industry have been going to great lengths. Recently, the Tourism Minister has shown interest in taking initiatives that can change the tourism scenario in the country.

Earlier, we felt restrained by external forces such as, inadequate international flights or non-availability of accommodation at various tourist centres. Now we have better air-connectivity on domestic and international routes and a larger inventory of accommodation. The new initiatives taken by the Ministry of Civil Aviation are also going to benefit the aviation sector and we may see a very tourism-friendly policy post Air India's disinvestment.

Different models for destination promotion have been deployed by various National Tourism Boards. The most common factor is organising international tourism exhibitions in their countries and organising roadshows in their markets.

For several years, MOT has been trying to work out a mech-

anism to organise an annual tourism exhibition. After multiple discussions with the trade, the need was felt by the industry to organise such an exhibition with support of MOT. In order to bring the industry players together, the Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH) was formed.

At present, there are approximately 15 travel shows organised in India by commercial organisations and state departments which are billed as inbound tourism exhibitions. The scale of these events is much smaller than what a country like India deserves. Moreover, the message conveyed by such events does not give a positive feedback to international attendees.

India Tourism Mart

All the states are encouraged to showcase their culture, heritage, handicrafts, tourism products and even film shoot locations at this mega event. This show will not only create a positive ambience for the exhibition, but will convince foreign tour operators and media to attend it.

The exhibition must be organised with full support of the various industries and sectors in collaboration with State Governments and must be supported by MOT and other ministries such as External Affairs, Culture, Commerce, Information and Broadcasting, Civil Aviation, Road Transport and Highways among others.

With the active support of Ministry of External Affairs and Indian Tourist offices overseas, we should invite a minimum of 500 tour operators from across the globe, following a stringent selection process where inputs are taken from tourism professionals from private sector as well. In addition, we should also aim to invite at least 100 media personnel from all over the world.

Though this proposition is an expensive one where the private industry will extend its support, but that cannot be enough to meet the required expenditure. MOT's policy allows us to issue international and domestic air tickets for the invitees and host a gala dinner. The need of the hour is that

MOT reassesses its policy so that inbound tourism industry gets required support to compete with other destinations.

Roadshows

The second initiative is to organise roadshows across the globe starting with top source markets across all tier cities. The roadshow format must be standardised to invite tour operators at least two to three months in advance for B2B meetings and presentations on India.

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

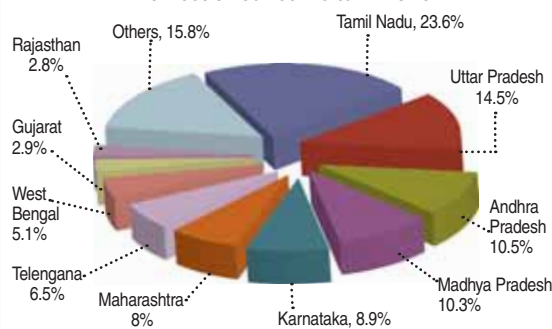


Sarab Jit Singh
MD, Travelite India

Tamil Nadu is the most preferred

According to the statistics released by the Ministry of Tourism, Tamil nadu recorded the highest number of arrivals among domestic and international tourists in 2016.

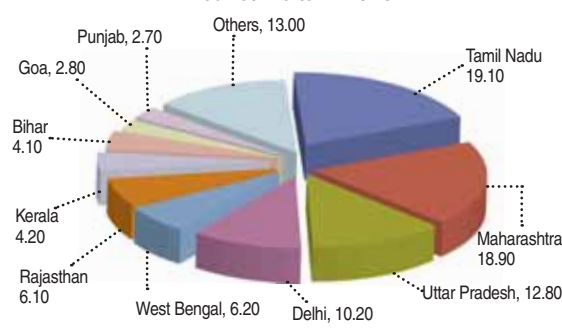
Percentage share of top 10 states/UTs in India in Domestic Tourist Visits in 2016



❖ The top 5 states in domestic tourist visits in 2016 were Tamil Nadu (343.8 million), Uttar Pradesh (211.7 million), Andhra Pradesh (153.2 million), Madhya Pradesh (150.5 million) and Karnataka (129.8 million). In terms of foreign tourist visits in 2016, the top 5 states/UTs were Tamil Nadu (4.72 million), Maharashtra (4.67 million), Uttar Pradesh (3.16 million), Delhi (2.52 million) and West Bengal (1.53 million).

Source: Ministry of Tourism

Share of top 10 States/UTs in India in number of Foreign Tourist Visits in 2016



Creating new stories for Jammu & Kashmir

► Contd. from page 3

state is an investment in peace. The perception created in the country about Kashmir shows that the entire state is burning, despite having a few untoward incidents in some remote areas sometimes. Tourism in the state has been impacted



Tassaduq Hussain Mufti
Minister for Tourism, J&K

“With the TAAI delegation here, I look forward to a long and enduring partnership with association”

because of this perception. However, this is not the case. In fact, J&K is the safest place for women in the country. I am overwhelmed with the presence of TAAI delegates here. I hope that tourism stakeholders create packages that allow seamless travel within the state for tourists of all ages. TAAI Convention has come to J&K after many years, and we hope it revisits the state again soon.”

The convention kicked off with a Golf Tournament, with a tee-off by Tassaduq Hussain Mufti at the Royal Springs Golf Course in Srinagar. Having the TAAI Convention in Srinagar is the first step towards reviving tourism in the state, Mufti said. He added, “We couldn't have hoped for a better start to the year. With the delegation here, some very good ideas have already started flowing, and I look forward to an enduring partnership with TAAI for many more years to follow.”

Going forward, he thinks that they need to take initiatives with a certain goal and creative objective in mind. “First thing that we need to do at the department of tourism is to define a strong policy. In one way we see ourselves conservationists, and we are trying to develop a policy keeping that in mind. We

have to protect our air, water, land and forest as a primary objective,” he revealed.

On changing the perception of people of J&K, he said that they are trying to create new stories for J&K. “We have to create alternate stories for which the civil society and press is responsible. The idea is to create positive stories amongst ourselves and really talk about it as much as we can,” he said.

TAAI felicitates dynamic leaders at convention



The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) has felicitated three dynamic leaders for their outstanding contribution to the travel industry in the last decade. The recipients of this award included Aditya Ghosh, President, Interglobe Aviation (Indigo), Dr Jyotsna Suri, Chairperson and Managing Director, Bharat Hotels Limited and Dev Karvat, Founder, TrawellTag and now the CEO (Emerging Markets), Cover-More Group. The TAAI leadership award acknowledged their excellence and inspiring leadership at a ceremony during the TAAI Convention 2018 held recently in Kashmir.

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Keeping inbound flag flying high

Lauding the recently held TAAI Convention in Srinagar, **EM Najeeb**, India Travel Award Winner and MD, Air Travel Enterprises India, said that the right promotion, change of perception and enabling environment by the government is key to growth of tourism in the country.



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MOT, an enabler

Lauding the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) for various schemes and initiatives, Najeeb said that the eight-point programme, and the decision to develop 10 iconic sites and infrastructure development by MOT are excellent plans. "MOT has come up with inspiring plans to attract people at various destinations and create innovative experiences for them. While foreign tourists tend to compare India with the neighbouring countries in terms of cost, there are others who want to come to India because our experiences are unique in comparison to other countries. Despite several initiatives by the government, it still needs to address two important issues—GST and seamless travel," claims Najeeb.

He adds that the current

Tourism Minister, KJ Alphons, is working hard to make India a viable destination for both international and domestic tourists. "Alphons has been an excellent influencer in Kerala

and subsequently a good politician in the state. As the Tourism Minister, his appointment has brought a new impetus to tourism growth in India. He is very committed, focused and a receptive person. The best part is he is ready to support the industry and has taken up several industry issues at various ministries to find out solutions," he reveals.

TAAI Convention

Appreciating TAAI's deci-

“Alphons has been an influencer in Kerala. As Tourism Minister, his appointment has brought a new impetus to tourism growth in India”

sion to conduct its convention in Srinagar, EM Najeeb sug-

gests that the move would give a big boost to tourism in the state of Jammu & Kashmir. "The experience of the delegates in Kashmir was excellent and the support received from the J&K Government was enormous. All of us should collectively take ownership to promote Kashmir to add to the strength of Indian tourism. I suggest TAAI should conduct at least one convention in India every alternate year, especially at the destinations which are not promoted well. Also, they

should alternatively conduct roadshows with selected agents in different destinations to promote them."

Medical tourism

As a huge player in the healthcare industry, Najeeb feels that medical tourism would grow at exponential rates in India. "Medical tourism is expected to grow at about US\$8 billion in India in 2020. We have world-class hospitals offering medical value travel to any destination in the world. We get patients from our neighbouring countries, Southeastern countries, as well as European nations because of the waiting period and cost issues in their nations. What we need is international accreditations for hospitals and insurance companies. Those hospitals who have received accreditation and world-class service delivery can do well as far as medical value travel is concerned. The Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Tourism are promoting medical value travel in a substantial way. This segment

could be a great strength in the future," he shares.

Kerala Travel Mart (KTM)

Najeeb has been one of the initial participants of Kerala Travel Mart (KTM), which, in will be held in the month of September. However, after KTM's success, many other states have come up with their own trade shows as well. Talking about how relevant KTM is in this scenario, Najeeb says, "KTM has always been focusing on new buyers, new destinations each year and we are inviting people by spending money from our pockets for their travel and accommodation. We are very selective this time and we want people who can actually bring value to Indian tourism. Other states following this model is a good idea. I think It's an example of good partnership between the private sector and government."



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India's FITUR sojourn

As MOT steps towards a new marketing strategy with the Incredible India 2.0 launch, they started the year with India being the partner country at FITUR 2018.



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Inaugurated by the King and Queen of Spain, FITUR brought together more than 600 ministers, ambassadors and high-level representatives from all over the world welcoming a total of 251,000 participants. Records were broken for trade attendance, with 140,120 trade representatives from across the world. 10,000 companies participated from 165 countries.

"Spain is a super power in tourism and India is an aspiring country with respect to tourism. India and Spain have a lot of similarities as both our historic countries. India's participation at FITUR is a major event in our tourism calendar. FITUR is one of the most prestigious tourism fairs in the world and India was happy to be partner country for this event", says **D Bala Venkatesh Varma**, Ambassador of India in Spain.

The Incredible India Pavilion at FITUR 2018 had

33 travel trade partners, including state tourism departments, hotels, travel agencies, resorts and tour operators. Additionally, another 32 participants from India

Through its partnership status, India widened its offer of diverse tourism products beyond the traditional tourist destinations. Incredible India also focused on its themed years,



also participated outside the India pavilion.

"India became partner country in FITUR 2018 because we consider Spain as a very important source market", says **Satyajeet Rajan**, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

with Indian Adventure Tourism being the focus for 2018. India used FITUR to highlight its luxury offering for leisure travellers, wellness tourism products like yoga and Ayurveda, cultural, nature, etc. India showcased as a global power is a rising destination for business, trade and tourism.



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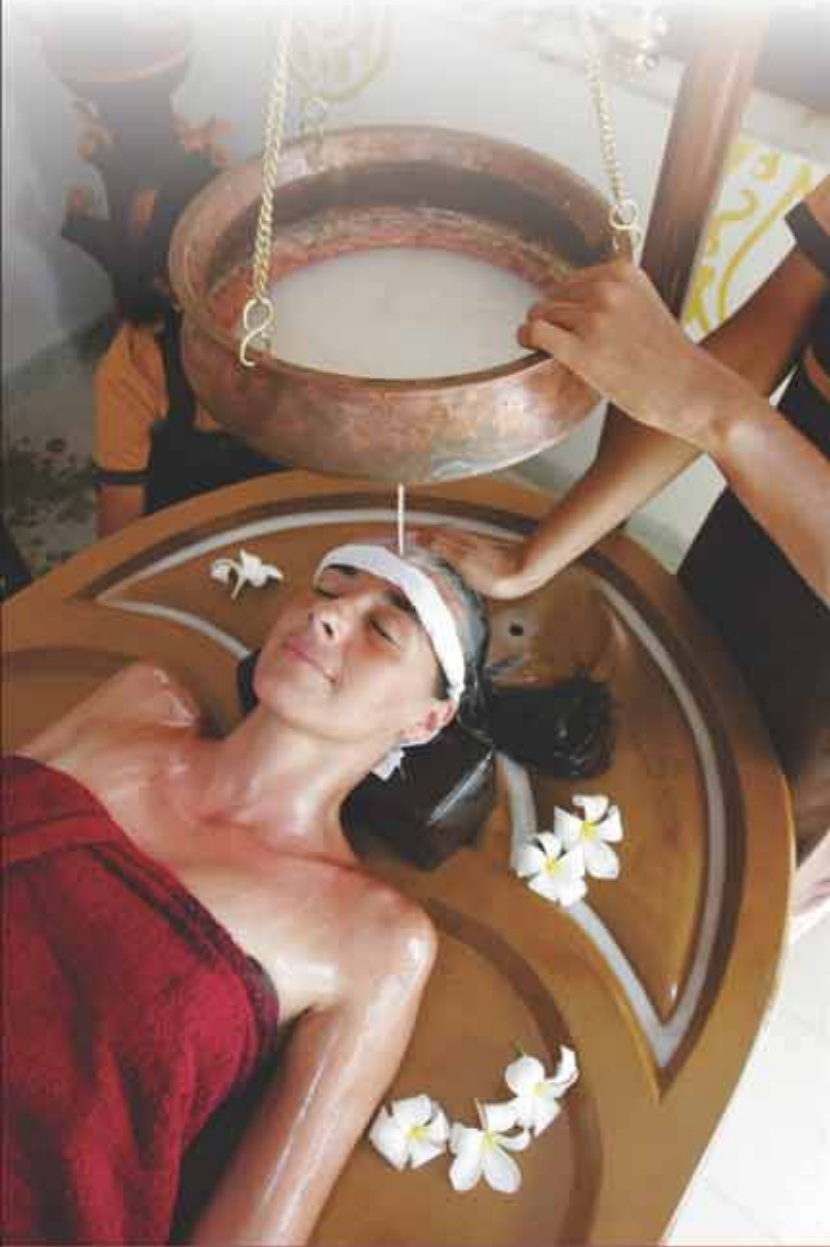


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Power of Indian outbound

Considering that Indian outbound travellers are now a world force in terms of business provided, should they not leverage it to get a better overall deal?



Inder Raj Ahluwalia

“Countries around the world are aware of India’s enormous outbound tourism potential, and are gearing up to ensure they get a share of this lucrative pie. India doesn’t just generate numbers, but also huge spending, particularly in the MICE and weddings business. Host countries need to sensitise and educate their staff about Indian habits and preferences. They have to accept the fact that Indian travellers attach importance to issues such as language and food preference, including vegetarian and Jain food, times schedules, information about Indian embassies and associations, desire to share rooms with their children, etc. The time has come when host countries realise that Indians need a somewhat special reception.”



Mahendra Vakharia
President
OTOAI



CP Sharma
President
Neptune Travco

“With the phenomenal growth of Indian outbound traffic over the years, Indian travellers have become a force to reckon with. The host countries should do much more for Indian visitors. Hotel rates is one important area, both for leisure and MICE travellers. With increase in traffic, more room nights are being generated by Indian travellers and accordingly, hotels should offer better rates.”

“While most countries with high Indian traffic do acknowledge the growing presence of Indian travellers, it isn’t always easy to give special contracted rates to a particular nationality. This is the function of the tour company, to drive customers to a particular destination and hotel. Several overseas hotels are attracting Indian travellers with what is called ‘Indian Standards’, offering Indian-style breakfasts and Indian greetings. Basically, the tour operating companies have to negotiate pricing for hotels, meals, transportation, and sightseeing. What can be done further is creation of airport and government museums, and Indian traveller-friendly opportunities like signage in Indian languages.”



Nikhil Dhodapkar
Chief Executive Officer
TUI India



Homa Mistry
Chief Executive Officer
Trail Blazer Tours India

“With India becoming a huge outbound market for many countries and the number constantly increasing, a lot of support is coming in for tour operators from many partner countries, particularly in the MICE sector. Some countries come forward to help in visa facilitation as well as provide financial support for corporate houses. There are tourism-friendly countries that sponsor gala dinners or subsidise their costs. Many countries partner in advertising promotion campaigns and share the expenses, thereby helping in increasing the numbers.”



Pankaj Nagpal
Managing Director
Travstarz Global Group

“India being the fastest growing tourism economy in the world should use this clout with other countries to get special benefits for its travellers. Many countries have already noticed this and taken initiatives like visa-on-arrival for Indians, but we can negotiate for much more, especially for sectors like MICE and destination weddings where spending is very high. Government must work closely with trade associations like OTOAI to understand exactly how Indian travellers can benefit by negotiating with host countries.”



Chitra Bhatia
Managing Director
Aashman Travel

“The Indian outbound market is growing rapidly, and needs proper and personalised attention from the host countries. While almost all travel segments are increasing, Indians now seek experiential holidays. Some host countries have come forward and are paying special attention to Indians. One major area is the food department. Indian food is now readily available, and traditional Indian-style welcomes are also in use. That said, much more needs to be done in terms of offering special packages and incentives to Indian visitors.”



Himanshu Patil
Director
Kesari Tours

“Given the fact that Indians are high spenders and contribute enormously to various segments, especially shopping, they certainly deserve the best from the host countries. While pricing is alright, the general treatment meted out to Indians is not good enough. The treatment given to tourists should not be based on skin colour. Indians should be treated on a par with European and American visitors. Indian visitors have earned respect and should be given that.”

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Mumbai - 14

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Connected by technology

The 3rd Digital Travel Summit in Singapore showcases technology evolution in the bookings sector along with its impact on travel and hospitality.

TT Bureau

As many as 400 authorities from the eCommerce and digital sector are expected to attend the show. The conference offers a platform for airlines, hotels, OTAs, metasearch engines and tourism boards to come together and interact with each other. The agenda of the event is to focus on the 'Connected Customer' and 'Mastering the Customer Experience'. It is expected to prove to be a learning space for those who are currently not aware of ways to build omni-channel programmes for their businesses.

The first day of the conference focuses on technology evaluation of the industry while the subsequent days offers knowledge sessions and panel discussions. The platform aims to be instrumental in analysing strategies for data collection and algorithms. Almost 50 case studies will be analysed from across businesses.

With an opportunity to meet and greet stalwarts of the digital travel space, the attendees can join small groups or peer-to-peer learning formats. These aim to provide a practical roadmap based on examples on ways to use data effectively; immersive technology; artificial intelligence (AI) and conversational commerce, which can



seamlessly guide consumers through the purchase and planning process of travel.

Key speakers attending the show are **Trevor Spinks**, Head of Sales and Distribution, Scoot, Leslie Hsu, Head of Global Branding, Trip.com, **Edward Goh**, Vice President, Marketing, Hong Kong Disneyland, **Elizabeth Yong**, Cluster Director of Digital Marketing, Grand Hyatt Singapore. These stalwarts

will moderate sessions to bring out best practices and add value to the attendees' knowledge.

Some of the participating airlines at the event include Singapore Airlines, Lufthansa Group, Air France, Cathay Pacific, Japan Airlines, Scoot, Air Costa, Fiji Airways, China Southern Airlines, Finnair, Copa Airlines, Vietnam Airlines, FlyFirefly, etc. The hotels showcasing their products at the event are AccorHotels, Hilton Hotels and Resorts, Rosewood Hotel Group, Preferred Hotels and Resorts. Prominent online travel agents (OTAs) marking their attendance at the show include Ctrip, Kiwi.com, Klook, Expedia, TripAdvisor, Wego.com and Agoda.com. Industry expert contributors and technology vendors like BeMyGuest, Destination Elite, TripZilla, etc. are also a part of the Digital Travel Summit this year. ↴

Kayak keen on partnerships

The meta-search engine is looking to partner with destinations and low-cost airlines, and is adding new tabs on its website for travel insurance and cruising.

TT Bureau

Travel meta-search engine Kayak that helps users plan their travel, is keen on partnering with stakeholders in the tourism industry, particularly low-cost carriers as well as the state and the international tourism boards. It is also looking to expand offerings by adding tabs such as travel insurance, foreign exchange, and even cruises to its existing ones.

Abhijit Mishra, Director (India & Middle East), Kayak, explains, "We want to bring more partners on board and introduce

tions, which would include state and international tourism boards. We haven't done anything with them yet but we have been discussing with a few state boards. A partnership with us will also help them reach out to our users outside of India."

Mishra adds that apart from LCCs and destinations, Kayak is keen on expanding its car rental company base specially for international travel. "We are also considering adding new tabs on our website for forex and travel insurance. We will add cruises as a product as and when



Abhijit Mishra
Director
(India & Middle East) Kayak

“We are considering to add new tabs on our website for forex and travel insurance. We will add cruises as a product as and when we think it is relevant for us”

more categories. We are keen to partner with low-cost airlines in India and work with destina-

we think it is relevant for us," he says. If Kayak India were to add cruises, it would be

easier for it to enable companies that already work with Kayak internationally on its India site.

Mishra is open to doing offline activities with trade partners as well. He says, "A lot of our spend will be directed in that direction – not just B2C but we are also open to B2B events with partners for offline awareness if we see good scope." ↴



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Cyprus makes waves in India

As the newest entrant into the Indian market, this island nation has already set the pulse of travel trade in India racing. Five operators and one event planner return from a five-day educational tour with exciting ideas.



Hazel Jain

Indian Buyers



Rohit Jadhav
Head-Client Servicing,
Milestones to Memories

“Cyprus is a good destination for the Indian outbound, especially Limasol and Agia Napa. As far as weddings are concerned, there are limited choices due to lack of international branded hotels. They work with certain parameters in place which the wedding market demands. Also, most hotels shut down during winters from November to March, which are the main months for Indian weddings, and reopen from April onwards. However, we also do social events and Cyprus will work for birthdays, anniversaries, etc since these involve a limited number of guests of 80-100 pax.”



Mahesh Thapa
Manager-FIT Operations,
SOTC Travel

“Cyprus is an unexplored destination for the Indian FIT. It has potential in our market but it needs to generate mass awareness. For instance, this is a seasonal destination, that is, from April to October, so it can serve as an alternative to Greece, Turkey or other neighbouring countries. Cyprus will go well with the evolved traveller as well as honeymooners, small groups and families, specially Ayia Napa combined with Limasol and Nicosia. Language is not a barrier as a majority of Cypriots speak English. But it has limited number of international chain hotels which may not be an issue with FITs as it also has beautiful boutique hotels.”



Avin Jain
Managing Partner
Tours for Us

“One thing which stands out is that Cyprus is a very safe country. Also, there is a wrong notion that getting to Cyprus is difficult. It's a reasonably approachable destination with a decent number of flights and good hotels. It offers something for every age group. It has a flavour of a Greek island with its beaches and architecture but with its own taste. It is also has a good nightlife, good restaurants and people here are very tourist-friendly, which is a big plus for Indian travellers. For me, one of the highlights was visiting Cyprus' golf courses which my MICE and business clients demand.”

“Cyprus is a new destination for India and we are always looking for a new place to visit. It has something to offer to all budgets – from economy to HNIs. Cyprus has beautiful beaches as well as mountains. It also offers a lot of activities, so you will find something of interest for every client. It is not difficult to get to Cyprus because there are a lot of airlines flying here with excellent connections at convenient times. Visa is also not a problem. While Cyprus will also appeal to the family segment, it cannot be called a kid-centric destination. However, it is a very safe country and everyone here speaks English.”



Mehernosh Colombowalla
Director
Beyond Borders

“Cyprus is a complete destination for any traveller. It can be a complete value-for-money destination. With so much to offer, I found this to be a hidden gem. It will appeal to honeymooners and leisure travellers alike. Local transport looks a little challenging but I am sure it will improve as the numbers grow. Cyprus has also preserved its archaeological sites well which will appeal to history lovers. The Cypriot culture is similar to ours and its people are friendly. The Cypriot cuisine is a fusion of Asian, European and Arabic dishes with lots of vegetarian options. It also has an exciting nightlife.”



Manta Shah
Director
Sanskriti Travels

“I see great potential for Cyprus for three segments - FIT, MICE and leisure. The FIT traveller will especially love Ayia Napa's turquoise blue waters and white sands, nightlife and good food. In fact, they celebrate potato festival here with as many as 250 different dishes made from it including potato kheer! For MICE and weddings, Cyprus undoubtedly has excellent venues that can host about 30,000 delegates annually. The leisure traveller will also not be disappointed. For those who just want to rest can visit Pafos which is perfect for relaxation.”



Sunil Uparie
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Transforming Lives!

High Commissioner

“We issue a lot of group visas to Indians who come here for MICE. Many companies prefer to have their meetings and conventions here because of the simple visa procedure. For the moment, we have kept the process simple, especially for groups as big as 100 pax. Moreover, we provide visas in a relatively faster time. We can expedite the process since we are not fully Schengen members yet and for the moment we don't require biometrics. So if you have a Cyprus visa, you can't enter other Schengen countries except Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria. But the Cyprus Tourism Organisation needs to be consistent in tapping the Indian market.”



Demetrios Theophylactou
High Commissioner
of Cyprus

Cyprus Sellers



Rudolph Crasto
Director
Sea-Hat Travel & Tours

“Cyprus can offer high value for money to the Indian market, especially because Indians are always looking for a new destination. Plus, it's not very far from India – about eight hours. Whatever the Indian market touches, it grows. Cyprus is ready to cater to all the demands for Indian tourists. That is the ethos of tourism – to offer what the traveller wants. The aim behind planning this education tour for the Indian buyers was to show them a puzzle and let them join the dots. I have worked with the Indian market for the last 17 years and I know what will work with them.”

“Cyprus may seem to be a tiny island compared as compared to the vastness of India but we have so much to offer. We are a year-round EU Mediterranean destination where visitors can relax and enjoy the hospitality and warmth of our people. We share many values with you – a high regard for family life, respect for our elders, a colourful culture and history, and of course, a love for living. Cyprus is the Island of Love as it is the birthplace of Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love. It is my hope to visit India either with the Cyprus Tourism Organisation or as a tourist with my family.”



Demetris Ioakeim
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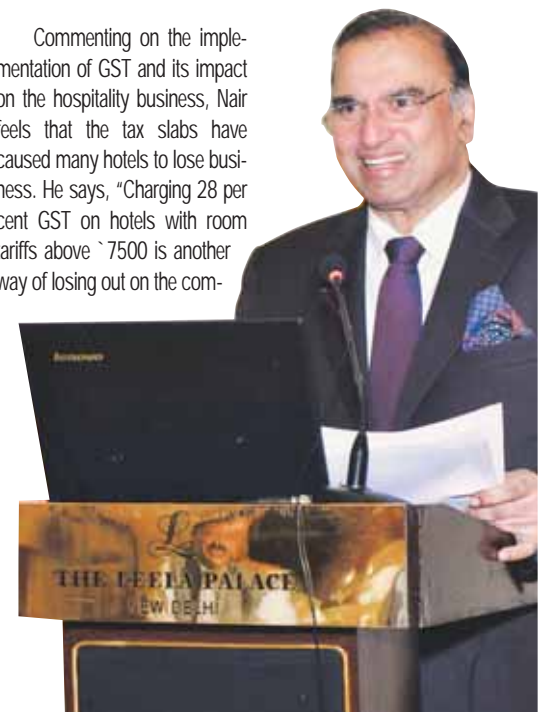
There is a need to add 180,000 hotel rooms across categories if India plans to host 20 million foreign tourists in the next 10 years, points out **Vivek Nair**, CMD, The Leela Palace, Hotels and Resorts.



TT Bureau

According to **Vivek Nair**, the tourism and hospitality industry has worked very hard to increase the number of foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) into the country, crossing the 10 million mark. However, a lot needs to be done to improve infrastructure. He says, "We want to reach the 20 million mark for FTAs in India in the next 10 years, which is an impossible task. This is because currently, we only have 120,000 guest rooms and we need to add another 180,000 more. If one looks at the capital expenditure, it takes about ₹1 crore to make one room of any category. Thus, we are talking about an investment of over ₹180,000 crore, which is too

Commenting on the implementation of GST and its impact on the hospitality business, Nair feels that the tax slabs have caused many hotels to lose business. He says, "Charging 28 per cent GST on hotels with room tariffs above ₹7500 is another way of losing out on the com-



“When tourists compare the cost of visiting Indian destinations, they prefer to visit neighbouring countries as they charge taxes one third compared to India”

big an amount to be deployed in the next 10 years.”

Further, Nair explains that the hospitality industry has been taking the beating from economic policy changes in the past year. "I personally took up the matter of hotels being brought under the infrastructure lending list like airports, ports etc, so we could get long term loans from the banks. However, because of the challenges in the system, none of the hotels got any benefit. Many hotels are in fact becoming Non-Performing Assets (NPAs)."

petitiveness of the country as a tourist destination. When the foreign tourists or the domestic travellers calculate and compare the cost of visiting Indian destinations, they naturally prefer to visit neighbouring countries since they charge taxes one third compared to India." The hospitality industry has approached the Finance Minister and has been given hopes that the taxes shall be rationalised to 18 per cent.

Synergising tourism & aviation

To propel growth of tourism and civil aviation sectors, the hospitality industry recently conducted a felicitation ceremony,

welcoming the new Civil Aviation Minister, Suresh Prabhu. The ceremony, hosted at The Leela Palace New Delhi, saw in attendance the who's who of the travel, commerce and hospitality industry. **Bharat Malkhani**, MD, Max Aerospace & Aviation, in a detailed presentation brought to attention the various challenges plaguing the growth of the aviation industry in India and proposed plausible way forward on behalf of the sector.

Welcoming the new minister, Nair says, "Tourism and civil aviation have to go in tandem for growth. We heartily welcome Suresh Prabhu who is known for his perspicacious thinking on every matter. The Tourism Minister, **K J Alphons** is also known for his dynamism and I feel this is the right time for both the ministries to work in synergy to achieve the goals that are set upon us."

Novotel debuts in Kakkanad, Kochi

■ AccorHotels along with the MuthootPappachan Group, opened its Novotel Kochi Infopark located in the IT Hub of Kakkanad Infopark, making it one of the first international mid-scale brands to debut in the industrial zone. The hotel is a 40-minute drive from the Kochi International Airport and 30-minute drive from the Ernakulam Railway Station. It features 128 rooms including eight suites and a room

designed specifically for the specially-abled.

"We are delighted to launch our first Novotel property in the commercial capital of Kerala. This is our second brand in the city, ibis Kochi City Centre being the first. We are excited to be associated with the MuthootPappachan Group for Novotel Kochi Infopark given their 131 years of legacy of trust and service excellence."

said **Jean-Michel Cassé**, Chief Operating Officer – India & South Asia, AccorHotels.

Thomas John Muthoot, Chairman & Managing Director, MuthootPappachan Group said, "We look forward to working with our partners and ensuring our company's continued growth in the hospitality segment in all diverse businesses initiatives MuthootPappachan Group is into."

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Mazda creates flexible tours

Mazda Travel will continue to invest in showcasing Canada to the trade in India and work with its channel partners to ensure the front-line sales team has the available knowledge and tools to sell the destination.



TT Bureau

Celebrating 20 years this October, Mazda Travel is the exclusive General Sales Agent for Rocky Mountaineer Rail Tours and preferred partners for Jonview Canada in India. It will work with suppliers to create programmes with attractive incentives for the travel trade as part of its 20th anniversary celebration.



Mernoz Shastri
Director
Mazda Travel

“It is vital for agents to be aware of the programmes, activities and experiences across Canada”

Speaking about the changing Indian market, **Mernoz Shastri**, Director, Mazda Travel, says, “Travelling on an escorted group departure used to be the preferred choice for Indians. This however, is changing and they are now looking for flexibility, variety of attractions, activities and experiences. To cater to this, we have created a range of programmes across Canada through our Independent Vacations, Self Drive Holidays, Private Journeys and Rail Travel. These programmes offer freedom to design itineraries at their own pace, choose hotels, attractions, activities and meals plan within their budget. We will continue to innovate and expand these programmes to cater to the Indian traveller.”

Shastri adds that he has noticed a lack of destination and product knowledge among front-line staff at agency level particularly in Tier-II and III cities. “They lack ability to frame itineraries and offer standard

escorted tours run by city-based operators. This dramatically reduces available tour options to the consumer and limits suppliers wanting to do business in India. To ensure agents confidently offer and promote Canada as a year-round destination, it is vital they are aware of the available programmes, sights, activities

and experiences across Canada. We have created easy-to-refer training modules to assist agents to get familiarised with Canada,” he says, adding that the company conducts on-site and off-site training workshops across India and over 1,000 agents have been through their training sessions over the years.

With direct air connectivity, Mazda expects arrivals to continue to grow from India. “We are working with our suppliers and tourism boards to showcase Canada as a year-round destination. While demand continues to grow from major metros, Tier-II and III cities are an emerging opportunity. Every year, we receive 20 per cent of

business from new agents,” Shastri reveals.

Since a bulk of the bookings processed in major metros were from agents spread across smaller towns and cities, tourism boards, hotels, destination management companies and their representations are now actively wooing agents

from Tier-II and III cities. “Our sales team makes agency visits across India and for 2018, our target is to visit 800 agents. In addition, we participate in national and regional trade events. Pune, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad are few of our key markets, and we will continue to add more cities moving forward,” Shastri adds.

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Filling his father's shoes wasn't easy but **Himanshu Patil**, Director of Kesari Tours & Travels, has done it with elan and taken on the mantle of leadership with reverence and responsibility.



Hazel Jain

When Kesari Patil along with his wife Sunita Patil started a travel company in the early 1980's with the little seed money they eked out, they had no idea how ubiquitous that name would become in Maharashtra. After more than three decades of coming into existence, the name of Kesari Tours & Travels has established itself not just in this state but the entire western region of India, quickly spreading to other parts of India as well.

Carrying forward his legacy is his younger son, Himanshu Patil, who is now the Director at Kesari Tours & Travels. He was a child when the company started on June 8, 1983. "My older siblings

joined the company as they started growing up. Eventually, even I joined the company at a young age of 15 or 16. I started conducting tours and that's how my journey started. Luckily for me, I grew up to be passionate about travel and this industry. That has become my profession and I am enjoying it thoroughly," he reminisces.

Having been in the industry for the last 30-odd years, he has seen it change and evolve. "Things were really tough for us when I joined. It was a small office of about 100 sq feet and I worked alongside my parents and my older siblings. What the company has become today is because of the contribution of the entire Kesari family. It is not just a business, but it has our family values entrenched into it," Patil asserts.

Crossing milestones

Over a span of more than three decades, Kesari Tours & Travels has crossed milestones and won many accolades. One of the best ones so far, Himanshu Patil says, has been the 'National Tour-

ism Award for Best Domestic Tour Operator - Rest of India' in 2013-14 as well as the 'National Tourism Award' for the Best Domestic Tour Operator for Kashmir in 2013-14 and 2014-15 consecutively, presented to his father by the President of India. Kesari Patil also won the 'Gallery of Legends Award' by West India Travel Awards in 2016.

The best award though, says Himanshu Patil, is from the customers. "The trust factor with Kesari Tours is very strong. For us, our repeat clientele is the best award for us. In today's digital world when retaining the customer is the biggest challenge and brand loyalty means little, we are happy to say that our repeat clientele percentage is very high and that reflects our success story," he says.

Special interest groups

According to Patil, Kesari Tours has always laid emphasis on creating new products, particularly the special interest tours that have now become

popular - Only Women Special, Students Tours, Second Innings for senior citizens, Sports Tours, etc. "These are just a few we have introduced and every year, we keep adding one new segment to our portfolio. We also keep adding new destinations. The plan is to in-

Future perfect

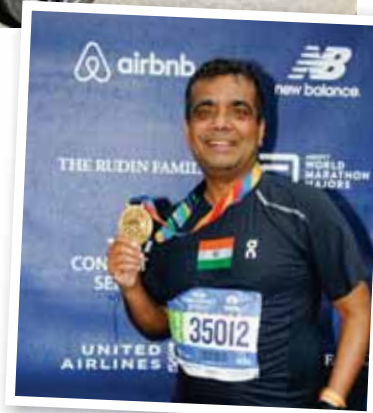
While Kesari Tours has established itself firmly in Western India including Gujarat as per plan, it is now looking at developing the northern and eastern India markets. "Though we have a Delhi office, we need to focus more on the northern region. We are looking at more business coming from north. So while our clientele is dominated by the Maharashtrian community, we have already started expanding to include other communities as well. The idea is to go pan-India - no boundaries for state or region. We also have good



presence in cities like Lucknow and Chandigarh," Himanshu Patil adds. As a founder member and Vice President of the Outbound Tour Operators' Association of India (OTOAI) Himanshu Patil's aim is to increase membership so that the outbound agents can come together and form a strong force for the benefit of the entire outbound market.

Love for travel

This 47-year old expert who grew up surrounded by travel is passionate about self-drive holidays and adventure sports. He prefers SUVs and has driven up to the North Pole. "That was a fantastic experience. It was with my daughter and has been one of my best self-drive holidays so far. We drove all the way up to the end of Norway. My dream now is to do Mumbai-London. It will take about 30 to 40 days and will require a lot of planning, so it may not happen this year. But I have already started planning for my next holiday which depends on my daughter who is now in the ninth standard," he says.



Patil also loves to run and participate in marathons across the globe. Last year, he participated in marathons: New York and Berlin. This year, he is looking forward to London in April followed by Chicago.

Growth plans

The company focuses on aggressively developing north and east India including Chhatisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Punjab and of course, Delhi. The next move is to look at having presence in cities like Lucknow and Chandigarh

With an office in Delhi, Kesari Tours & Travels is setting eyes on the northern region. It is looking at more business coming from north



“The trust factor with Kesari Tours is very strong. In today's digital world when retaining the customer is the biggest challenge and brand loyalty means little, we are happy to say that our repeat clientele percentage is very high and that reflects our enormous success story”

so popular - Only Women Special, Students Tours, Second Innings for senior citizens, Sports Tours, etc. "These are just a few we have introduced and every year, we keep adding one new segment to our portfolio. We also keep adding new destinations. The plan is to in-

presence in the south while west has been our traditional market. Our focus now is to aggressively develop the north and east India including Chhatisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Punjab and of course, Delhi. Our next move will be to look at having our

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New Ganges cruise itineraries for three nights

In line with celebrating its 15 years of pioneering long-distance river cruising in India, Assam Bengal Navigation Co is introducing new, exciting river itineraries that will also target short-haul leisure travellers.


The river cruise market is continuously growing and river cruises in Asia is on the rise, believes Antara Phookan, Executive Director, Assam Bengal Navigation Co. She says, "With the launch of our three-night river cruise itineraries, we feel that it will be ideal for every kind of traveller who wants to experience the Ganges River

and India's rich cultural heritage. Our regular river cruise travellers usually prefer longer cruise itineraries, but upon suggestion from leisure travellers, who do not always want a seven-night cruise on the rivers, feel that a three-night river cruise will be more attractive. We hope that these shorter itineraries encourage tour operators to easily combine a river cruise with their cultural tours to India."

Phookan informs that these three-night cruises will operate on the ABN Sukapha which offers 12 cabins (twin/double) and accommodates a maximum group size of 24 guests. The interiors of the river vessel are bamboo-paneled and air-conditioned with floor length windows and en suite bathrooms in all cabins. The dining room and spa is on the main-deck whereas all guest cabins while the saloon (common space) and a library is on the upper-deck. The vessel has a spacious sundeck with comfortable seating arrangements with sun loungers.


Starting and ending at Kolkata, the three night 'Bengal Memories' cruise itinerary will take cruisers to visit monuments, museums and temples along the towns of Kalna, Mayapur and Chandernagore besides a village of weavers. "Guests can reminisce a journey into Bengal's rich heritage while they watch sunsets on the Ganges from the sundeck. We have also introduced a special three-night downstream river cruise itinerary to Sundarbans National Park from Kolkata," adds Phookan.





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Exhibiting uncharted India

Parveen Holidays wants to showcase undiscovered products in India to the international market such as civilisation tours, unexplored architectures, submerged temples, tribal villages, Ayurveda & Yoga, while making sure that domestic business keeps growing.



TT Bureau

Parveen Holidays has more than 1,800 luxury fleets from buses to sedans as well as exclusive contract with all category hotels and resorts such as jungle resorts, eco resorts, floating resorts, backwater resorts, beach resorts, tree houses and luxury home stays across India.

Murali Krishna, General Manager, Parveen Holidays, says, "We believe in presenting India in a way that is quite unique with tours on civilisa-

tion of Indian subcontinent's architecture that is submerged, un-identified architecture, unexplored tribal villages, on the birth of Indian civilisations, and the mankind that gives a glimpse of our unexplored culture and tradition. International tourists love such tours. Hidden, undiscovered things need to be highlighted for the international market and increase the value of India as a destination to the world."

He highlights the markets where Parveen Holidays is

The company is focused on promoting market-wise products, some of which are cultural, traditional, spiritual and responsible tourism to explore the villages

focusing on and adds, "As of now, we have our representation offices in countries like, Dubai, France, Japan, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka. As on last year, our growth of inbound business has increased to 2000 passengers this year based on our unique concep-

tual tours." To tap this potential, the company participates in various international fares like ATM, JATA, ITB Asia, WTM London, FITUR Madrid and ITB Berlin.

"We are reaching out to local tour operators in these

countries and talking to them about our unique products that we have on offer for international travellers. We are focused on promoting market-wise products, some of which are cultural, traditional, spiritual, leisure and responsible tourism to explore the villages for the development of humanity," adds Krishna.

Meanwhile, the domestic market remains its mainstay. He says, "Our domestic tourism business is huge as compared to other segments.



Murali Krishna
General Manager
Parveen Holidays

However, a streamlined structure is required to educate the travel agent and tour operator or even the ticketing agents about it. We have our own B2B network across India from tier II, III and IV cities."

Showcasing new locales

Tourism Enterprises is exploring opportunities to bring in more destinations such as Poland, Jordan and Spain to the Indian market.



TT Bureau

The company has witnessed a steady growth for all destinations it works with, informs **Ravi Gosain**, Managing Director, Tourism Enterprises. He says, "We have acquired good clientele in smaller cities of India and this number is only increasing. We have noticed that these clients are loyal customers."

Sharing details on plans to add newer destinations, Gosain says, "We are exploring opportunities to give Indian travellers a variety of options to travel to. These destinations are Poland, Jordan and Spain. We are finalising the terms and conditions and hopefully, will be able to announce this soon to the trade."



Ravi Gosain
Managing Director
Tourism Enterprises

According to him, outbound from India is growing, because of which the company is quite busy for the summer of 2018. He explains that the company expects to close good business. "The Indian market is maturing fast and customers

have become knowledgeable about destinations. This is a good sign for the DMC partners to confirm bookings. One of the factors propelling this growth is the ease of procuring visas."

In terms of marketing strategy, Tourism Enterprises is focusing on promoting its products region-wise in India. Gosain points out, "We are keen to promote the company in eastern and southern India. We are looking for some credible shows to participate in at these regions. Our approach so far was very strategic and was concentrated on marketing our products region wise and this has been quite successful so far. We will adopt similar strategies in new regions of India."



TT Bureau

Premier Tour is a destination management company in Azerbaijan which has its own group of hotels and fleet of cars at the destination, informs **Darya Jafari**, Business Development Manager, Premier Tour. She says, "Last year, the number of Indian tourist arrivals to Azerbaijan was approximately 5,000. We have started working with the Indian market only from last year."

As Premier Tour's India representative, Pacific Travels is responsible for bringing in more partnerships with travel trade besides doing promotional activities. **Nasir Zaidi**, Managing Partners, Pacific Travels



Darya Jafari
Business Development Manager
Premier Tour

informs that the destination can cater to all types of segments. However, the company will focus initially on the FIT and MICE travellers. He says, "Premier Tour offers a variety of products to travellers. We will focus on growing the number of

Indian tourists to the destination through our network in the B2B space. We will collaborate with the media to reach the relevant target audience. We are also focusing on promoting Azerbaijan for events, destination weddings and film shoots. We can offer a variety of products like packages for four days and five nights which could include Baku City Tour, and also organise events at heritage sites, ski resorts jungles, beaches, etc."

In terms of connectivity, Zaidi further adds that Delhi and Baku are well connected with almost 12 weekly flights on major Middle Eastern carriers. "Visa is available on arrival with easy availability of pre-approved visa within 72 hours," says Zaidi.

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TAAI team ecstatic with response

The office bearers and Managing Committee (MC) members of TAAI celebrate the success of the convention by opening up about the myriad offerings of J&K as well as the informative business sessions.



Nisha Verma



Sanjay Narula
Vice President
TAAI

“With a renewed interest in Kashmir, I believe the opportunity is now available to everybody who is here and has not worked with Kashmir previously. We had a wonderful experience in working with the government here with their support. With the announcement of 2018 as the Visit Kashmir year, we are going to recommend that all TAAI member agents eagerly promote Kashmir and look at the pool of opportunities here. We will share lessons of the convention here and ensure that the

B2B sessions actually get converted into business.”



Jyoti Mayal
Secretary General
TAAI

“I was disappointed to notice that they weren't many agents from North India. Hopefully, we managed to steer clear of people's doubts and notions about J&K. It's important for any nodal association to get into the right states, regions and promote destinations in our country. Apart from declaring the Visit Kashmir Year, all of us including regional chapter heads, MC and office bearers of TAAI should have committed to send 10 families to Kashmir from our regions; and if we are able to do that, our commitment stands tall.”



Imtiaz Qureshi
Treasurer
TAAI

“We have received immense support from the Jammu & Kashmir government as well as our trade partners. With several initiatives up our sleeve, we have officially launched our mobile app for members during the convention for them to globally expand their business. We are concentrating on value adding to our members' knowledge including technological hindrances, GST setbacks or any similar issues. We are also trying to increase their client base, and working out with various trade partners for a better remuneration for our members.”

“Out of the total number of delegates, about 25-30 per cent of attendees visited the state for the first time. These travel agents are majorly from the southern and eastern parts of India. After much brainstorming, J&K was chosen as the selected destination since we felt that the state needed a lot of positive support from the industry. The 600 delegates will now be ambassadors for the state and a strong message will be delivered across the industry about the beauty of the state as a tourist destination.”



Rajan Sehgal
MC Member
TAAI

“With a constraint in five-star rooms, we decided we would not accept more than 400 to 450 people. However, the response was so much that we had to extend the limit of the delegates. The TAAI convention was held in Kashmir after 30 years and at that time, I attended it as a member in the same hall. The objective was to promote Kashmir as it has lost its charm and business alike. This convention will increase substantial opportunities for J&K tourism. Agents are aware that problems which are projected on television are actually not prevalent in the entire state.”



Bhagvan Ramnani
MC member
TAAI

“We will aggressively promote J&K and increase numbers for domestic tourism. Having targeted 500 people initially, we witnessed a total of 650 registrations owing to demand. The challenge was to accommodate them within a limited time. SKICC was a great venue and offers great views. We have updated our website and are going to have a mobile app for members to have instant messages and information, without having to work on laptop or desktop. We are encouraging domestic tourism this year other than MICE, leisure and corporate.”



Anil Kumar
MC Member
TAAI

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J&K trade pins hopes on TAAI

The TAAI Convention proved to be successful with overbookings and rave reviews. Travel agents and members of the organising committee share their expectations and outcomes of the event.

TT Bureau



Mahmood Ahmed Shah
Director Tourism
Kashmir

“With an attempt to dilute negativity about the destination, TAAI’s visit to J&K is definitely a positive news. The convention has proved that whatever is talked about the state on news channels is not true in terms of the magnitude and real proportion. I am thankful to Sunil Kumar and the entire TAAI team as they announced 2018 as Visit Kashmir year. We need to open the engagement channels with TAAI and its chapters across the country. We also need to engage with other travel associations, few of which have already approached us for their conventions.”



Zahoor Qari
Chairman, J&K Chapter—
TAAI

“We went to great lengths to bring leading tour operators from all over India. We have representation from Southeast Asian countries, Israel as well as Abu Dhabi. The movement of tourism will highly increase as per our imagination. We are predicting that this season will be good for Kashmir, according to the feedbacks from tour operators who have visited properties here. For the first time, we witnessed 650 tour operators from across India who came as delegates to visit our Valley. We are thankful to TAAI for having selected J&K as their convention venue.”



Asif I Burza
Managing Director, Ahad
Hotels and Resorts

“The occurrence of a big gathering like the TAAI convention in the state will give a great boost to tourism in the state. In today’s world, travel is no longer only about visiting destinations, it is an experience. Through the medium of this convention, we have been able to showcase the Kashmiri culture, hospitality and tradition in the best possible manner and I hope that delegates go back with good memories. I urge travellers to experience the destination personally and not go by what is projected by the media.”

“The sessions at TAAI Convention were interesting and informative. I feel that one session could have been dedicated to Kashmir and how TAAI would help bring about a change in the state. We wanted a question-answer session on what steps could have been taken. The last TAAI convention featured river cruises with a lot of foreign travellers in attendance. A mock marriage was also held with authentic Kashmiri wazwan. People visited this time with a mindset, which I hope changes in future.”



Iqbal Bakshi
Managing Partner
Sheraz Travel

“We have had an impact of negative perception in the entire nation about Kashmir. However, as far as rating goes, the state is 100 per cent safe and we have zero per cent crime against women. More than 600 TAAI delegates from across our country attended the event with a few of them were from different parts of world. The usual perception about any destination is if a TAAI convention is being held, it is going to be safe. The association would not visit any unsafe destination. I think tourism is the best source of integration.”



Shamim Ahmed Shah
Director
Shah Travels

“This convention would be a mind changer. It was like a homecoming for TAAI, as it held its convention 31 years back at the same venue. We are recreating that magic again with agents from around the country as well as from outside. The event was replete with good speakers, panel discussions, technologies and innovations, which would give impetus to tourism and help generate footfalls to the state. The delegates have been upbeat about the destination, and were impressed by the beauty and hospitality of Kashmir.”



Ashfaq Siddiqui Dug
President, Travel Agents
Association of Kashmir

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Travstarz ups tech game

After the acquisition of stakes in Travstarz Global Group by RezB2B, Travstarz has strengthened its technology arm to boost productivity.

TT Bureau

Travstarz Global Group is known for its quality services and competitive pricing for destinations, believes the company's Managing Director, **Pankaj Nagpal**. Elaborating on the recent developments, Nagpal explains, "In January this year, Tours4fun, a subsidiary of CTRIP, which is also the world's second largest travel company, ventured into global travel B2B business with the launch of RezB2B.com. The company set foot in the India market by acquiring a stake in Travstarz Global Group. We will look after the group's B2B business in Indian subcontinent and adjoining countries. With the acquisition by RezB2B, we have access to the latest state-of-the-art technology platforms besides global inventories from CTRIP group companies for our B2B platform."

Nagpal points out that the business is clearly defined into two verticals, that is, outbound



Pankaj Nagpal
Managing Director
Travstarz

“With the acquisition by RezB2B, we have access to the latest technology besides global inventories for our B2B platform”

DMC and online vertical. The wholesale concept is going to move online while the DMCs are

coming up with dynamic packages for destinations. Currently, the company is in the process of merging the systems and once ready, it has a strong marketing plan which will include a lot of personalised networking events across the country besides advertisement across media platforms. "The trade can expect a lot of joint promotions to be done in partnership with various tourism boards in the coming months. Our US based office is currently working with on products for the Indian market for North America, which we will launch soon," he says. The company has recently added Azerbaijan and Egypt to its product portfolio. Other destinations under the company's radar include Vietnam, Eastern European countries, etc. Currently, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, China, Mauritius, Maldives, Seychelles, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Dubai, Bahrain, Eastern Europe, USA and Canada are offered by the company to the travel industry.

Innstant goes digital

Innstant Travel is planning to introduce its technology company, Innstant Connect in 2018, and hopes to strengthen new products in the pipeline.

TT Bureau

Innstant Connect powers some of the leading global brands and offers a host of innovative solutions, informs **Gagan Kakkar**, Country Head—India, Innstant Travel. "Some of these solutions include Hotel Switch providing inventory with more than 120 XMLs, Air Switch catering to more than 360 global LCCs and four GDS, etc. We also look forward to introduce Hotel Connect which will offer travel agents and hotels a user-friendly platform to handle in-depth details, upload and fully control their inventory and rates for different sales channels. Our B2B clients can look forward to 120,000 newly integrated apartments in the four-star category. These are approved and accredited by local bodies and cruises online," says Kakkar.

The company had recently launched a cruise product, cancellation protection and a new technology for API and



Gagan Kakkar
Country Head—India
Innstant Travel

“We also look forward to introduce Hotel Connect, a platform to handle in-depth details, upload and fully control inventory”

received a very good response to the same. Kakkar points out, "Last year was great for us as

we managed to over exceed our set targets for the first year of the launch. We have been able to add some leading brands to our client base."

Talking about various services offered by the company, Kakkar claims that as a global wholesaler, the company has a bouquet of travel products and related services at the best rates in the industry. "We offer over 300,000 properties worldwide, more than 45,000 tours and attractions, over 20,000 events, sports, shows and concert tickets, almost 18,000 transfers worldwide, 15,000 plus car hire locations globally and 1000s of apartments, chateaux and luxury villas, all through one of the speediest APIs. Innstant Travel offers travel professionals a state-of-the-art booking engine, XML solutions and the tools needed to stay ahead of the competition in today's fast-paced and competitive travel industry."

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Rise of flashpackers in Penang

Penang Sales Mission, led by **Ashwin Gunasekeran**, CEO, PCEB, was supported by a delegation of 17 partners from the Malaysian state.



TT Bureau

Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau (PCEB) started Penang Sales Mission to India to promote Penang as the preferred destination for corporate and association meetings, incentives, and leisure travel. The four-city sales mission kicked off in Kolkata, followed by New Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru. With a good mix of leisure and MICE, Penang offers good connectivity and numerous facilities to the industry. Among the three convention bureaus, PCEB is one that facilitates and eases execution of the programme.

The tremendous growth in global travellers, especially from backpackers to flashpackers who spend a little more and explore further, has also fuelled travel from Tier-II and III cities to Penang. In 2016, Penang recorded 1251 events with an estimated economic impact of \$200 million. From January to September



Ashwin Gunasekeran
Chief Executive Officer
PCEB

Penang, and over the past year we have received encouraging interest from event planners and conference organisers. India is the sixth highest generator of tourists to Malaysia. This mission is joined by some of Penang's finest offerings in the hospitality, travel and events sectors, and will showcase the best of what Penang can offer to the Indian market," said **Ashwin Gunasekeran**, Chief Executive Officer, PCEB.

“India is the sixth highest generator of tourists to Malaysia. This mission is joined by Penang's finest offerings to India”

2017 it hosted 1731 events with an estimated economic impact of \$230 million. This translates to a 27.7 per cent increase in the number of events, and a 7 per cent increase in the estimated economic impact. “India is one of the top five markets for business events in

For good connectivity from India to Penang, PCEB recently signed an MoU of strategic partnership with Malaysia Airlines to facilitate flights from India to Penang via Kuala Lumpur. It will also be introducing more incentives in this partnership. ↴

Malaysia sets goal for 2020

Visit Malaysia 2020 is going all out to promote Desaru Coast. The country expects at least 20 to 30 per cent growth in 2018 from the Indian market.



TT Bureau

Dato' (Dr) Siew Ka Wei, Chairman and **Datuk Seri Mirza Mohammad Taiyab**, Director General, Malaysia Tourism spearheaded the launch of the new logo where Tourism Malaysia promoted Desaru Coast. The attraction has a massive theme park to attract the leisure segment.

Tourism Malaysia launched its new 2020 logo which targets strong tourism growth by 2020. There are many new offers for the travel agents in 2018 which are yet to be disclosed. When it comes to travel growth rate, India has been ranked seventh among other countries where wedding and MICE industry are in focus.

“The Indian market is by far the best performing market in Malaysia in last 17 years. However, in the last two years we saw a slight slowdown. We ensure to come back with a good



Datuk Seri Mirza Mohammad Taiyab
Director General
Malaysia Tourism

“The Indian market is by far the best performing market in Malaysia in last 17 years”

programme as we campaign for Malaysia 2020 where you will experience better exposure and more Indians coming to Malaysia,” Taiyab said. After the initial hiccups of GST, the market has surely grown. A growth of 20 to

30 per cent is expected in 2018 from the Indian travel market travelling to Malaysia, he added.

In the last budget speech by their Prime Minister, tourism has become a priority for Malaysians, as a result of which more budget has been allocated for this specific purpose. So, you will see rap-up activities in India, promotional and otherwise, Wei said.

Tourism Malaysia is making an all-out effort to increase flights from India to Malaysia with better packages to increase the tourism business.

Logo Magic

↴ Tourism Malaysia's new 2020 logo targets strong tourism growth by 2020.

↴ In terms of travel growth rate, India has been ranked seventh among other countries, where wedding and MICE industry are specially in focus

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Marriott is on a Mission

Marriott's Global Sales Mission is an opportunity for partners and customers for alliances. **Ramesh Daryanani**, Vice President, Global Sales—Asia Pacific (excluding Greater China), tells us more...



Anupriya Bishnoi

QTell us about the Sales Mission.

The roadshow (Global Sales Mission) provides a platform to hoteliers across the world to meet our most valuable partners in India that drive a significant amount of outbound business. This is a record year for us where we have over 50 hotel participants from around the world, representing over 200 hotels. The platform brings together B2B customers from all segments of the industry. It also gives the brand an opportunity to analyse performance

QWhich brand of Marriott is the most successful in India and why?

I think the JW brand overall is well-recognised and known. All brands are successful, but I think the brand that has been able to establish itself well in India is JW. It started with the launch of the first JW in Juhu, and today we have over 13 JWs across the country.

QWhy the sudden surge in the Fairfield by Marriott segment?

I think, in our Fairfield segment, there was a need for quality accommodation. We

so that you are ahead of the pack. That said, we are well-positioned to tackle all those challenges. I think, in the innovation space with new partnerships, the one with Alibaba in China, we are trying to own the customer journey from end to end. That's where our mission has changed. A few years ago, we wanted to be the world's favourite hospitality company; now we want to be the world's favourite travel company, and that really changes the direction in terms of how we operate and what the vision of the company is going forward.

“The platform brings together B2B customers from all segments of the industry. It also gives the brand an opportunity to analyse and evaluate possible business prospects in the existing cities and markets as we grow and expand”

QAre there new Marriott brands coming to India?

We do have plans to launch not just Moxy, but others as well. We are in discussion about where these new brands will be launched, but we are very optimistic that we will launch a new brand in the next six months to a year. 

in the past year and evaluate possible business prospects in the existing cities and markets as we grow and expand. The wide and exhaustive showcase of hotels at the event is aimed to bring all the best brands under one roof and make the planning process seamless and interactive for existing as well as potential business partners.

QTell us something about your expansion plans.

Globally, we have over 2700 hotels in the pipeline of development. This represents over 460,000 rooms.

have been able to tweak the demands of the customers and have been able to plant these hotels in the right location where customers want that type of accommodation. That's why the Fairfields have been extremely successful and our partner SAMHI has been tremendous in our journey. Also, we see this brand expanding in Tier-II and III cities. We have six in the pipeline over the next year or so.

QWhat challenges do you witness being the biggest hospitality player in the world?

We don't take anything for granted, but one challenge which is always there is that once you grow you still want to make sure that you are relevant to your customers and you are constantly innovating

Staying relevant

 In the innovation space with new partnerships, the one with Alibaba in China, the brand is trying to own the customer journey from end to end

 A few years ago, Marriott wanted to be the world's favourite hospitality company; now it wants to be the world's favourite travel company, and that really changes the direction in terms of how it operates

 Marriott strongly believes that innovation is the key to stay relevant to customers for a brand to stay ahead of the pack



Pacific brings Puglia to India

Pacific Travels has been appointed the India Representative for Discovery Puglia. **Nasir Zaidi**, Managing Partner, Pacific Travels, shares the company's plans for 2018 on marketing and promotion of the destination, which is popular among honeymooners, FIT travellers and also suitable for MiCE and group travellers.



Ankita Saxena

Discovery Puglia is a destination management company which covers entire Puglia and its focus is on providing the travellers with an experiential holiday. "We offer our clients a huge selection of personally inspected and cherry-picked properties and activities," informs **Concezio Natale**, Owner, Discovery Puglia.



Nasir Zaidi
Managing Partner
Pacific Travels

“We have many authentic accommodations like the Masseria, which are quintessential properties of Puglia”

He believes that Puglia is an upcoming, upmarket destination. It has been well-positioned among the American and British high-end travellers as they are shifting focus from the Amalfi Coast to Puglia as it is more authentic and undiscovered. Talking about tourism assets of the destination, Natale says, "We have many authentic accommodations like the Masseria, which are quintessential properties of Puglia; 15th century houses turned boutique hotels. The USP of the destination is its three UNESCO sites, which also make it a popular destination for culture and history. In terms of niche experiences, Puglia is one of the only countries which produces wine in the city limits. This way, we can offer a gourmet experience to travellers who want to experiment with food."

The destination is popular among the honeymooners, FIT travellers and is also suitable

for MiCE and group travellers. Natale further explains that Puglia offers unique event spaces. He says, "The organisers could rent entire villages or towns in Puglia for their conferences and the spaces can hold from 250-1000 pax." The suggested average

duration of stay is 3-5 nights. Natale believes that Puglia is a value for money destination in comparison to its competing destination as it suits all types of budgets.

Pacific Travels is responsible to increase awareness

about the destination in India, market and promote it to grow Indian visitor numbers to the destination. Zaidi informs that the company will be targeting mature travellers from India along with the destination wedding segment. "Since Puglia also has a very spiritu-

al vibe to it, we are looking at tie-ups with some renowned leaders to host their events at this destination. We believe in showcasing the product portfolio at the right platforms and will be partnering with potential travel trade and organisations to leverage the

growth across segments," says Zaidi. In terms of connectivity, Puglia is only three hours away from Rome. From the Bali Airport, it is connected to all the major European airports in the world. It has a very efficient rail network and road transfers.

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Skålleagues let their hair down

Skål International Delhi-125 recently organised a networking dinner in Delhi for its members. All the members were apprised of the club's achievements and were informed about the events scheduled for 2018 to allow them to plan for activities.





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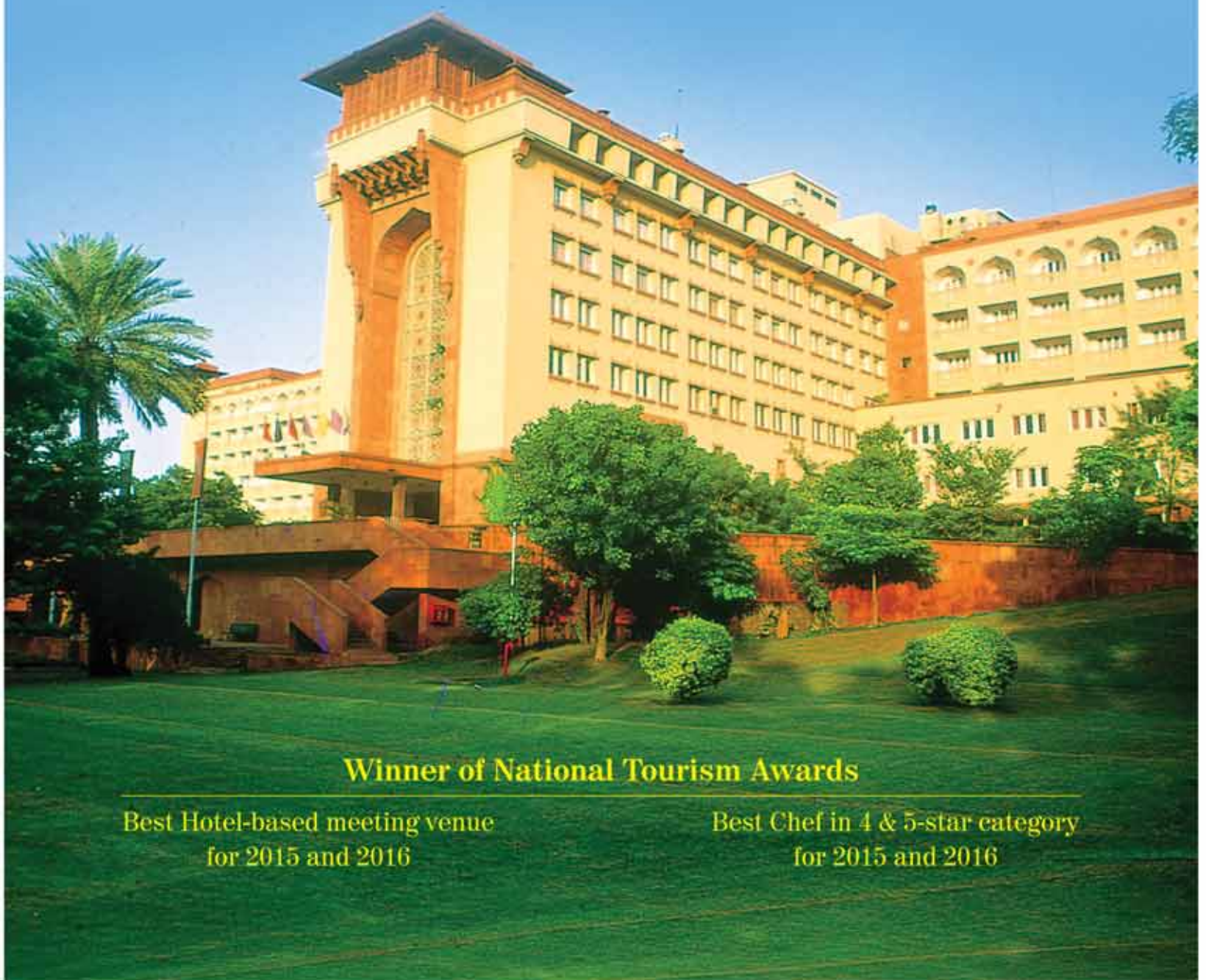


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Trafalgar in smaller cities

As part of its commitment, Trafalgar encourages agents across India, including Tier II and III cities, to become partners and participate in workshops.



Hazel Jain

Nicholas Lim, President, Trafalgar, Asia, was in India recently as part of Trafalgar's inaugural 'Europe Britain Day' that travelled to Mumbai and Bengaluru along with four NTOs – Atout France, Tourism Ireland,

of 'Insider Sessions' with the four NTOs travelled only to metros, Lim says that not just big cities but even tier II and III cities of India are important for Trafalgar. "This year our commitment is to the trade with AgentsFirst, regardless of size and city and we will be more than happy to partner

“Our AgentsFirst motto is more relevant in India than any other country we operate in because almost 99 per cent of business here is through the agents”

Tourism Office of Spain and Switzerland Tourism. Lim says that it is part of its commitment to travel agents, not just in India but around world. He adds, "Our AgentsFirst motto is more relevant in India than any other country we operate in because almost 99 per cent of our business here is through the agents." While this edition

with those who would like to work with us. This is exactly where we want to continue to grow along with our travel agent partners," Lim adds.

Trafalgar's definite departures now extend to 17 countries and five continents. Following its announcement of 100 per cent definite departures to Italy, Ireland, Hawaii



Nicholas Lim
President
Trafalgar, Asia

and Discoveries, Trafalgar has extended these guarantees to departures covering Europe, Asia, Africa, and North and South America.

Lim comments, "We believe that success breeds success, so we thank our partners for the role they've played in the positive results. When it comes to closing sales for 2018, there truly is no time like the present to reap the rewards."

'Rare' platform for hotels

The maiden edition of Très RARE, in Delhi, recorded over 100 Indian destination management companies and 30 foreign tour operators over two days.



TT Bureau

Instituted by RARE India, Très RARE is a showcase of the finest boutique hotels, lodges, hideaways, camps and retreats in India, Nepal, and Bhutan. The by-invite event saw in attendance over 400 visitors ranging from travel agents, tour operators and avid travellers. The event focused on one-on-one engagement, innovations and hosted speakers on hospitality and related topics to add value to experiential travel.

The close interactions with the hotel owners and hosts were followed by 11 hosted familiarisation trips across India. Some of the participating hotels were RAAS Jodhpur in Rajasthan; Bhainsrorgarh Fort, Rajasthan; Hotel Druk, Bhutan; Pepper Trail, Kerala; Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, Nepal; Deccan Odyssey, etc.

Sowmya R Vijaymohan, Partner, RARE India, informs

that while RARE India is contained in terms of travel and hotel partners, Très RARE goes beyond RARE India. She says, "It's a platform for like-minded people who share the same philosophies of travel and believe in sustainable travel practices. These are more owner driven, small and boutique properties, which are showcasing both the facilities and experiences. We have categorised the properties according to theme and destinations, like heritage and Rajasthan are put together; for mountains, properties ranging from Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, etc are showcased, while the hideaways are properties and locations about 100 kilometres away from metro towns. The other categories are tropical retreats, which stretch beyond central India while the wildlife section is the belt stretching from Madhya Pradesh to Corbett and beyond to Nepal."



Sowmya R Vijaymohan
Partner
RARE India

According to Vijaymohan, this was probably the first green event where no plastic had been used. She explains that at the maiden edition, the idea was to keep it smaller, an invite-only event for serious attendees. However, given the success, next year, the company will up the scale of the event. "This is probably the first time that as many as 30 foreign operators, who are not hosted, have come for the show," she adds.

The advertisement features a large background image of the Taj Mahal at sunset. Overlaid on this are several Polaroid-style photos representing different holiday experiences: 'Family Holidays' (a family walking on a path), 'Culinary Experiences' (a variety of Indian dishes in small bowls), 'Golf Holidays' (a golf ball on a green), 'Adventurous Holidays' (a person climbing a snowy mountain), 'Wildlife Holidays' (a tiger in a natural habitat), and 'Cultural Experiences' (the Golden Temple in Amritsar).

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Delhi-Tel Aviv rules the routes

Pankaj Srivastava is all set to retire from his services at Air India towards the end of April. Being a part of the successful launch of the much-coveted flight from Delhi to Tel Aviv, he shares how the project finally came to fruition, the plans ahead for Air India and why domestic tourism is important for the economy.



TT Bureau

Air India recently flagged off its inaugural flight from Delhi to Tel Aviv, and **Pankaj Srivastava**, Commercial Director and Member of the Board of Air India, can't keep the excitement after its success. Sharing how it started, he said, "We started working on the Tel Aviv flight about a year back. After visiting Tel Aviv to make the first round of market survey, we found this market to be very promising. It took a lot of time for us to put the flight in the system because there were issues regarding the route to be taken. However, finally having settled that, we commenced the operations from March 22, 2018 and just gave about 15 days' time for the flight to build up. I am happy to say that with the first few flights, the incom-

ing loads were very encouraging and forward bookings are looking robust. This market definitely has a lot of appetite."

Talking about future international operations, he revealed, "We are also increasing our frequencies into San Francisco from six flights a week to nine per week. We will now have a daily flight and two flights a day twice in a week. We are also increasing frequencies to Sydney and Melbourne. Earlier it was four flights to Sydney and three to Melbourne, and now we are extending five each to both the destinations, taking the frequency count to 10 flights a week to Australia. On the other side, we have added one more flight to Singapore from Delhi and have also started services to Bangkok from both Chandigarh and Bhubaneswar."

While disinvestment of the airline is on the cards, Srivastava informed that they are looking at expansion. "Expansion is the way forward for

us. We are evaluating some more markets in US, like Houston, Dallas, Los Angeles and Boston. As and when we have resources, we would definitely like to connect more cities between India and US. We have by and large covered the entire continent of Europe, either with a direct flight or with our connecting partners. The

have daily flights to Birmingham and recently commenced two non-stop flights from Amritsar to Birmingham. We will add capacities in that sector and are now looking at markets like Manchester," he shared. In terms of new aircraft, he revealed that they have leased about 29 Airbus 320 neos of which many have

travel, saying, "We are very much into the new regional connectivity scheme of Government of India, which is UDAN, and our subsidiary company Alliance Air has picked up some fantastic destinations under this policy. This would give huge impetus to tourism. On the domestic front, we have connected Hubli with Mumbai and Bengaluru. The flights are going well. We have connected Amritsar with a non-stop flight to Nanded, and there is a demand to add more flights. We also added a flight from Hyderabad and Mumbai to Nashik," he said. He further added that they are deploying every narrow body aircraft possible in the domestic sector to sustain competition. "On an average we fly 14 hours per aircraft per day, and I think we can take it to 15 hours," he concluded.



“We are increasing our frequencies to San Francisco from six flights a week to currently doing nine per week. We will now have a daily flight and two flights a day twice in a week”

scope to expand more in the country is not much, but we are still eyeing at markets in UK. We already

come, and another four or five will be coming in a couple of months.

However, Srivastava seemed bullish on domestic

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Right connection from Fiji

Fiji has seen a 30 per cent increase in Indian arrivals in 2017, and is now planning to move to target agents in Tier-II markets as well. The destination has big plans for 2018.



TT Bureau

Fiji Tourism has witnessed remarkable growth in the Indian market in the last one year, says **Faiyaz Koya**, Minister for Industry & Trade and Tourism, Fiji. "We consider India as one of our major growth markets and have now got flight connections via Singapore to Fiji," he said.

The arrival figures into Fiji echo this thought as well. **Matthew Stoeckel**, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Fiji, revealed, "In 2017, Indian arrivals to Fiji went up by 30 per cent, and we expect this growth to further accelerate in 2018. Fiji is a hot destination currently, not only in India but across the world. We have a diverse product that appeals to couples, honeymooners, families and the MICE market. The rel-



Faiyaz Koya
Minister for Industry
& Trade and Tourism, Fiji

evance of this product in India is starting to get noticed with our increased resources and efforts in the market being paid off with a great interest in the destination, and that is turning into bookings."

Claiming that connectivity posed as a big problem for Indians earlier, Koya said, "Previously, Indians found it difficult to get to Fiji because they had to come via Hong Kong, but the preference was through Singapore. Now, we have the connection with Jet Airways to Singapore as well. Our focus now will be on the same markets, but to get larger numbers owing to increased connectivity."

Stoeckel added that with thrice a week service between Singapore and Fiji with Fiji Airways, Indians can club their visit to Fiji not only with Singapore but also with New Zealand. "A lot of our arrivals come out of Tier-I cities, with Delhi and Mumbai topping the charts. For Tier-II and

III cities, we will be increasing our resources to be able to generate further into some of these regional cities," he informed.

Honeymooners remain the major segment for Fiji Tourism. However, Koya said, "With honeymooners, we are looking at

MICE market, weddings, adventure tourism. Fiji is also a great destination for a lot of young Indians who are into adventure tourism, be they shark diving or diving deep to see the great reefs and wonders of the sea."

A major accelerator of Fiji's

growth story in India is engagement with the trade. "Our participation in trade shows keep us engaged with the trade in India. Tourism Fiji representatives based in Mumbai as well as a lot of Fams into Fiji showcase the offerings to Indian trade. We have our own Fiji Tourism

expo and conduct roadshows, where we bring about a range of products and meet travel agents here in India directly. An exciting campaign is in the offing, which we will be announcing shortly whilst continuing to invest in trade activities," revealed Stoeckel.



Matthew Stoeckel
Chief Executive Officer
Tourism Fiji

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Qantas organises glitzy evening

Qantas Airways, the flagship carrier of Australia, recently hosted a networking event at Khar Social in Mumbai. The evening had in attendance the crème de la crème of the Mumbai tourism, right from travel agents to destination heads letting their hair down and enjoying the casual evening of cocktails and dinner.



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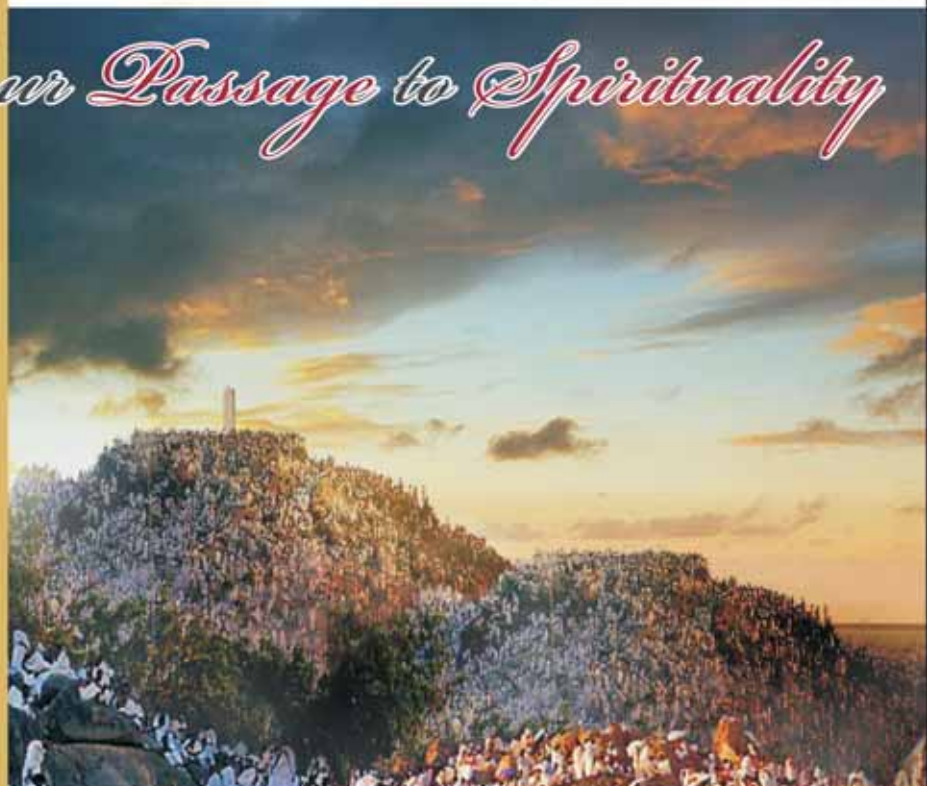
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Network and engage at Hyatt Fair

Held in Bengaluru, Delhi and Mumbai recently, Hyatt Fair is the most comprehensive annual gathering of travel trade professionals, and meeting planners, **Sunjae Sharma**, Vice President, Operations, Hyatt India, enlightens us about the relevance of the roadshow and performance of the brand in the country.



Anupriya Bishnoi

Tell us about the Hyatt roadshow.

The roadshow offers a unique opportunity for key decision makers and influencers of corporates and the travel



Sunjae Sharma
Vice President
Operations, Hyatt India

trade, including travel agencies, event and incentive agencies, as well as tourism board

and airline representatives, to engage with general managers and sales heads from Hyatt. Close to 35 hotels, from Andaz Delhi, Hyatt Regency Sydney, and Park Hyatt Dubai to the upcoming Grand Hyatt Kochi, will be present at the event to network, engage with clients, build relationships, and enhance their knowledge base. This year's Hyatt Fair focused on showcasing outstanding elements of Hyatt's key brands in India through different and memorable 'Brand Experiences' that are aligned with each brand's main attributes.

What are the group's expansion plans for 2018?

We will soon be opening Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty. It's an exciting project and a key hotel for us. We are also bringing a new brand, Centric, to India this



year. So, it's quite a significant year for us.

Which of the Hyatt's brands is performing the best in India?

I think all our brands are doing well in their respective markets. Each brand has carved out a niche market for itself. We are very happy with

the performance of all of Hyatt's brands in India today.

How bullish are you about Tier-II and III cities?

I think expansion is going to take place in these cities as well, and we have perfect brands for them. We are expanding on our Hyatt Place

model. We already have five hotels and they are being embraced well by clients.

How strong is Hyatt in the MICE segment?

MICE is big in South India. We have had our experience in Chennai already. The new property that is going to open in Bolgatty concentrates on MICE.

That property is going to be a game changer. If you look at Mumbai, we have Grand Hyatt Mumbai, Grand Hyatt Goa, The Park Hyatt Goa, and Hyatt Regency Mumbai. In Pune, we have presence with three hotels- Hyatt Regency Pune, Hyatt Pune, and Hyatt Place Hinjawadi. So, in that part of India as well, we are strong in MICE. ↴

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STHI eyes smaller cities

STHI Holidays India is going all guns to target Tier-II and III cities across India to grow its footprint in outbound travel and reach out to the right partners.

TT Bureau

The company plans to market and promote itself through various channels that include both physical and online platforms. "Our sales representatives visit the clients to understand their needs and requirements. We also organise destination showcases at various cities to apprise the fraternity about new product offerings. Our media partners are also a source of great support



Gagan Kumar
Director
STHI Holidays India

“Golden Triangle remains to be a popular circuit while North East is gaining a lot of traction amongst travellers”

in promoting the products,” says **Gagan Kumar**, Director, STHI Holidays India.

A destination management company, STHI takes pride in its competitive pricing and Kumar believes that the service delivery in operations is the company's hallmark. Kumar says, "We plan to make our way into the Tier-II and Tier-III markets to divert maximum business from Tier-I cities. We plan to increase our bottom line at least by double digit." A purely B2B company, STHI caters to all segments of travellers. The travel partners can seek assistance as per their requirement. The segments could range from a budget traveller looking for a quick holiday to a high-end luxury traveller which seeks an experience at the destination.

Kumar points out that some of the Indian destinations popular amongst inbound tourists are Goa and Kerala. "Golden Triangle remains to be a popular circuit while North East is gaining a lot of traction amongst travellers. India is also a growing outbound market

where the travellers are seeking newer destinations," adds Kumar. He feels that some of the popular outbound destinations amongst Indians include Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Macau, Dubai, Sri Lanka, South Africa, European countries and the US.

Passage Int'l supports Hajj Expo



In a one-of-a-kind meeting in India, supported by Passage International, service providers, hoteliers and travel agencies came together at the Indian Hajj Umrah Expo held in Hyderabad recently to discuss business potential and growth prospects. Representatives of almost 65 companies including travel agencies, hotels, IT service providers, Umra Groups, mobile companies, transport companies and others attended the event. Delegates discussed the various possibilities of providing better services to pilgrims embarking upon Hajj or Umrah pilgrimage.

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TAAI ties get stronger in Srinagar

The 64th TAAI Convention in Srinagar was a three-day extravaganza packed with networking, knowledge sessions, education, entertainment and getting to know Jammu & Kashmir first hand.



Lama redefines India strategy

Lama Group is relooking at its strategy in India, revealed **Kulwant Singh**, Founder and Managing Director, while speaking at the Delhi leg of its four-city roadshow in the country.



TT Bureau

Lama Group, one of the leading DMCs in UAE, kicked off its four-city Tier-1 roadshow in New Delhi, before going to Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Bengaluru. Kulwant Singh said, "This is our 18th year in India with our Tier-I roadshow, where we have an entourage of nearly 15 plus co-partners who've come all the way from UAE to interact with the trade partners and understand how we can enhance and keep Du-



Kulwant Singh
Founder and Managing Director
Lama Group

“At this roadshow, we are launching www.lamatrip.com, an app-based website for B2B trade, where the rates will be very dynamic”

bai and Abu Dhabi as the top arrival destinations for Indian travellers. Our strategy in India is very aggressive, and at this roadshow, we are launching www.lamatrip.com, an app-based website for B2B trade, where the rates are going to be very dynamic. We have a lot of inventory, which may not be utilised on certain days of a week, such as Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. Hence, on these days the prices are going to be dropped and agents will see static and dynamic packages of the combo.”

Talking about the company's growth in India, Singh said, "While the last two years were low owing to demonetisation and GST, it's been a fantastic growth for the industry overall and Lama is also witnessing a 16-18 per cent growth." He said that they need to be different to stand out from

competition. "Giving clients packages that are valid for six to nine months a year is a thing of the past, as everyone is doing the same thing. We started this concept 20 years ago, which was followed by many other competitors. However, www.lamatrip.com is going to be unique and companies who

have infrastructure and know how to maintain their inventory will be able to do something like this," he shared.

However, this time Singh added Ahmedabad in place of Chennai in its Tier-I roadshow. "Ahmedabad is not one of the metro cities, but the numbers

we get from there is close to what we receive from Delhi and Mumbai. People in Ahmedabad ask for unique itineraries, special request for food and usually stay not only for three-four nights but also for six nights. Hence, it's important to visit this city even twice a year, if required. We will be including

Chennai in our Tier-II city roadshow," he revealed.

In fact, Singh revealed that they are changing their strategy in India and might even appoint a person who will be the face of Lama Group in India. "We have many people on ground in India and even have

20 sales managers across major cities. We have plans of bringing somebody for India, either operating from Dubai and frequently visiting India, or he/she would be permanently located in India. Right now, we are discussing the options and may reveal the same in the near future," he said.

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Technology, key for future of travel

With the industry upbeat about the inbound season to India, India Travel Award winners feel that one has to be abreast with technology to gain an edge over competition. They share their observations and expectations from the upcoming travel season.



TT Bureau

► Best Leisure & MICE Resort – **Clarks Shiraz, Agra**

Domestic & MiCE travel to boost revenue

With an increase in number of countries being added to the visa on arrival facility, the industry has forecasted an increase in number of foreign tourist arrivals to India, thereby fueling growth, points out **Debashish Bhowmik**, Senior Vice President, Clarks Shiraz, Agra. He explains that rise in domestic travel and MiCE travellers from across India will add to the growth of ARR and revenue this year over the last year. He says, "I feel the Central and State Governments need to work in tandem for sustainable growth of the tourism industry. Also, tourism infrastructure should get top priority. This will ultimately have a multiplier effect—generate new jobs and increase revenue for the government."



“Rise in domestic travel and MiCE travellers from across India will add to the growth of ARR and revenue this year over the last year”



► Best Business Professional of the Year – **Bharat Bhushan Atree**

Open foreign tourist office in South America

Reforms in taxation policies and easy procurement of permissions and licenses for hotels should be made uncomplicated for the tourism and hospitality industry to grow, believes **Bharat Bhushan Atree**, Managing Director, Caper Travel Company. "Foreign operators can be incentivised for promoting India as a favorable tourist destination. I feel that MOT should open a foreign tourist office in South America as the perception of India and Indians overseas is contemptible. This will aid the interested travellers to better understand India as a destination. I also strongly advocate an awareness programme where India should feature in the world's travel magazines and TV commercials and utilise social media platforms," explains Atree.

“I feel that MOT should open a foreign tourist office in South America as the perception of India and Indians overseas is contemptible”

► Best Luxury Camp – **The Ultimate Travelling Camp**

India opens arms to luxury travel

As compared to last two years, the luxury camping segment has gained prominence in India and is performing well as a concept, informs **Dhun Cordo**, Co-founder, TUTC. She says, "Our bookings for Ladakh and Kohima look positive this year as well. The luxury lodge experience is a highly untapped segment. Though wildlife tourism in India is on the rise, premium luxury accommodations paired with personalised services are amiss. We aim to fill this gap." Cordo explains that the luxury travel market has picked up pace as travellers seek offbeat holidays. "Travellers are slowly moving towards socially and environmentally responsible travel," she adds.



“Luxury lodge experience is an untapped segment. Though wildlife tourism is growing, premium luxury stay options paired with personalised services are amiss”

► Best Heritage Hotel – **WelcomHeritage Haveli Dharampura**

Engaging skilled local talent a challenge

The expansion of e-Visa scheme is expected to double the tourist inflow to India, feels **Sanjeev K Nayar**, General Manager, WelcomHeritage Haveli Dharampura. He opines that the industry needs to keep abreast with latest technological advancements. "For heritage properties, located in offbeat destinations, this continues to be a challenge. There is lack of local talent because the younger generation is fast moving to the big metros where they see more growth. With today's guests being well-travelled, customer satisfaction and retention too are a challenge for such properties," he says.

“There is lack of local talent because the younger generation is fast moving to the big metros where they see more growth”

► Best Debut City Hotel – **Hyatt Regency Lucknow**

Consumer-driven market ahead

According to **Kumar Shobhan**, General Manager, Hyatt Regency Lucknow, with a boost to infrastructure and connectivity in the city, inbound tourism shall surely grow. "The upcoming year will be consumer driven. Travellers want authenticity, personalisation, on-demand functionality and a seamless travel experience. We at Hyatt are well-known for personalised guest experiences and with our exclusive tour packages, our focus will be to make guest experience a memorable one," says Shobhan. He further informs that some of the curated experiences offered to the guests include tea with the city's only Nawab, visit to the city's organic farm, culinary walks etc.



“We are well-known for personalised guest experiences and with our exclusive tour packages, our focus will be to make guest experience a memorable one”

AccorHotels is all about locations

Attended by over 1200 delegates, AccorHotels Showcase 2018 was recently held in Mumbai and Delhi. The event was packed with networking sessions where attendees discovered the group's newest offerings, discovered accommodation trends and met with hotel representatives from across the region.



Anupriya Bishnoi

AccorHotels Showcase 2018 witnessed participation from 35 hotels and resorts from the global network along with 22 hotels from India. The delegates, representing India's top-most travel agents, wholesalers, corporate clients, tourism partners and MICE organisers, made the event the largest-ever showcase of AccorHotels in Asia Pacific.

“We have deployed extra people in the India market. We have a team of 40 people focused on forming partnerships with our B2B customers”

Kerry Healy, Vice President of Sales—Asia Pacific, AccorHotels, said, “AccorHotels Showcase 2018 has doubled in size which I think is a testament



Kerry Healy
Vice President of Sales—Asia Pacific, AccorHotels

to how important the Indian market is to us. We are back with about 50 per cent more attendees. The event saw representation from the marquee

hotels, namely Raffles Dubai and Saudi Arabia, RIXOS Turkey, Fairmont Ajman, SO Sofitel Bangkok and Singapore, Novotel Amsterdam City and Novotel Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, Pullman Paris Eiffel Tower, Swissôtel The Bosphorus Istanbul, Fairmont Dubai and more.”

Elaborating on the importance of the Indian market, she said, “We have deployed extra people in the India market. We used to have a team of six people trying to service the whole of India. We now have a team of 40 people focused on forming deep partnerships with our B2B customers.”

The Indian market has its own set of challenges. Reiterating this fact, she said, “It's about finding the right brand and the right budget to go along with the customer's requests and demands. The In-



Arif Patel
Vice President—Sales, Marketing, Distribution & Loyalty, AccorHotels India

dian market is a mass market. For us, it's still about building brand knowledge because we have acquired a lot of other hotel brands as well. It's also about the Indian customers knowing these brands and feeling confident while booking us when travelling overseas.”

Arif Patel, Vice President—Sales, Marketing, Dis-


tribution & Loyalty, AccorHotels India, was also pleased with the response the showcase received. He said, “It is overwhelming to see how AccorHotels' brands have been accepted positively, especially our luxury brands Raffles, Fairmont and RIXOS overall, and Fairmont and RIXOS for weddings.”

very profitable for our owners. You can't really say which hotel is doing the best because the cost of construction is different for each brand. With a very organic growth, we started with one hotel 10 years ago. We will be opening our 50th hotel and the 20th Novotel this year. AccorHotels is all about locations. We are at the right places. In Gurugram, we are









“With a very organic growth, we started with one hotel 10 years ago. We will now be opening our 50th hotel and the 20th Novotel this year”


AccorHotels has various brands under its umbrella. On the brand that is doing the best in the Indian market, Patel said, “Each brand is positioned uniquely. It's not really about revenue, it's about flow-through. Most of our hotels are


on Golf Course Road; we have three hotels at Delhi Airport; we are at the Mumbai Airport and Bengaluru City Centre as well. Also, our presence in Goa is increasing. We have four hotels in Goa—three in North Goa and one in the South.”




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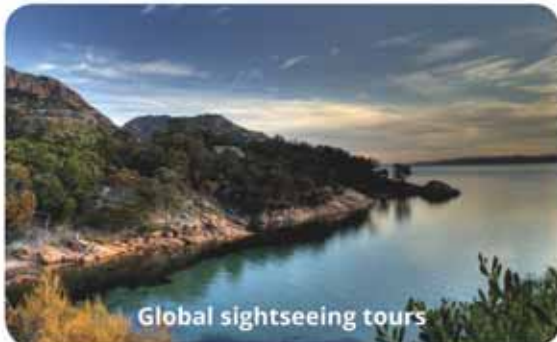
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Trade vows to promote Kashmir

Post the TAAI Convention in Srinagar, the delegates including travel agents, hoteliers and service providers, have promised to promote Kashmir aggressively in their respective regions.



TT Bureau



Balbir Mayal
MD
New Airways Travels

“The convention is a platform where industry issues can be addressed. The association can make a note of the most concerning issues of the travel and hospitality industry and put them across the relevant authorities or departments to offer a solution. A resolution must be passed after the convention and a time-bound agenda must be devised to ensure implementation. I suggest that the association and the government continue a good communication pre- and post the convention to maintain the momentum.”



Aejez Shaikh
General Manager—Leisure,
The Leela Palaces Hotels
Resorts

“All the sessions were informative and we could meet a lot of agents, both from Kashmir and pan India, as well as from important feeder markets. I have been talking to all the important operators on all the issues, and I think the biggest drawback that Kashmir as a destination is facing is connectivity. It has improved fairly with Air India, IndiGo and SpiceJet starting their operations. Also, the cost from travelling from Mumbai or other places in the south is much higher. I think the price factor would definitely make a lot of difference.”



Henna Adl Karim
Vacation Specialist
Creative Tours & Travels

“To bring the TAAI Convention to Jammu & Kashmir is a commendable initiative taken by TAAI. At the same time, J&K Tourism has done a great job in showcasing its offerings to top travel agents in India. They also cleared all doubts related to the safety of the destination. We share our experiences with our customers and I feel this will build more confidence in travellers to visit the state. The business sessions were very informative, but we hope to see an increased participation from the younger generation of the industry in future conventions.”

“The last TAAI Convention at Abu Dhabi was the first time we attended a TAAI convention. The association has done a beautiful job of taking us to Kashmir. I am truly impressed with the hospitality and glad to be partners with TAAI. We are co-sponsors of this event as well and we wish to prosper along with them. Attending this convention gives you a lot of credibility in terms of product offering and branding. We as a product, are a three-year-old start-up. Getting associated with TAAI helps us in getting more business.”



Abdul Hadi Sheikh
CEO and Co-founder,
Fikart.com

“Kashmir is a lovely place and sometimes you feel disappointed about the lack of promotion of its tourism potential. However, I feel the attendance here should have been better. I have attended a few sessions, but all of them are telling great growth stories about travel. However, someone has to tell about how we can transform the way we do business to be in line with the growth we are going to have, in terms of distribution. It's a changing world and the convention should have more discussions on what is changing and offer solutions to cope with that change.”



Sham Nijhawan
Chairman
Nijhawan Group

“The TAAI convention gave us great pleasure to witness the stalwarts of travel industry visit SKICC and experience its convention facilities. The delegates loved the venue and the destination. Now, all our hopes are tied up with TAAI. They have seen the sights and beauty of Kashmir, and have travelled everywhere in and around Srinagar, including Gulmarg and Pahalgam. I am sure this will convey a positive and powerful image about the state, and will help in neutralising the negative perception.”



Shahnawaz Shah
Manager Marketing, SKICC

Contd. on page 50 ▶

Travelport, Priceline extend partnership

Travelport and Priceline.com have signed a long-term renewal agreement for Travelport to continue providing pricing, booking and ticketing technology and content to Priceline. The renewal comes approximately 20 years after the two companies signed their first agreement for Priceline to process reservations through Travelport's GDS. Throughout the past two decades, Travelport and Priceline have worked together to make the process of buying and selling travel easier for customers.

“Travelport has proven to be a valued partner over the last 20 years in helping Priceline customers find and book the best deals,” said **Brigit Zimmerman**, Senior Vice President of Flight, Hotel and Packages, Priceline.com.

Jason Clarke, Senior Vice President and Managing Director for Agency Commerce, Travelport, added, “We are committed to supporting Priceline with our industry-leading search and pricing capabilities.”



TT Bureau

TI Infotech Pvt. Ltd has two signature products in the B2B space – its ‘Travel Cloud Suite’ and its ‘Travel Assist’ that cover all aspects of technological services that are required for OTAs and DMCs. Speaking about the focus areas for this year, **Meenu Sachdeva**, Co-founder and Managing Director, TI Infotech, says, “We would continue to keep our focus on

innovations with a strong and steady growth that exceed customer satisfaction in line to their business requirements, timelines and budget. There is a continued effort being put in enhancing our existing products, making them feature rich, and embracing new technologies.”

The company witnessed significant growth last year and added a lot of new clients to its books. This, Sachdeva attributes to the special features and benefits of their products that have not only led to an increased number of customers but also a growing demand for their products and services globally. For the company, the product is its brand and the main marketing channel. It uses a different approach for different users. Sachdeva explains, “We've always believed in educating our customers more than mere selling our



Meenu Sachdeva
Co-founder and Managing Director
TI Infotech

products. During the last 13 years, we've been able to win the confidence of the travel agents, tour operators and all segments of the travel industry and they're confident that we'll never undercut them in case they face any problem with any of their clients on any of our products.”

Which technologies have the power to transform the

travel industry? Sachdeva replies, “This digital transformation era has given consumers great power. Big Data technology is reshaping all industries. The travel businesses stand to gain tremendously from it and helping them understand why customers are choosing them over competition or vice

already exploring options to map these solutions for the travel fraternity.”

Sachdeva advises the trade that the selection of a right technology partner is important. “Often, a wrong selection is made amidst price wars, resulting in sunken costs

“The travel businesses stand to gain tremendously from Big Data and helping them understand why customers are choosing them over competition”

versa. It'll increase their business efficiencies, make strategic decisions and stand out among competitors to transform customer experience into a true delight. In addition, technologies such as AI, chatbots, VR, AR and block-chain are going to make an impact on travel. Our product team is

due to unsatisfactory results or delayed deliverables. It's not necessary that cheap is always the best. Time to go into the market is also very important. Hence, go for a tech partner who understands the domain and capable of giving or has the right solution,” she adds.

Travel tech

➔ New technologies increase business efficiencies, make strategic decisions and help companies stand out among competitors

➔ In addition, technologies such as AI, chatbots, VR, AR and block-chain are going to make an impact on travel

Recording steady growth

1589 Hotels opened 16 hotels in 2017, and is targeting to take this number to 24 by next year, reveals **Pankaj Giroti**, CHA—VP Development & PR of the company.



1589 Hotels saw an unprecedented growth in the last one year. “We added 16 hotels and resorts, and 828 rooms to our multi brand portfolio between April 2017 to March 2018. It has been a very successful and aggressive growth year for 1589 Hotels,” said Pankaj Giroti. The new hotels have been added in different states, namely Greater Noida, Vrindavan, Udaipur, Bhopal, Alwar, Jim Corbett, Bhavna-



Pankaj Giroti
CHA—VP Development & PR
1589 Hotels

“Our target for April 2018 to March 2019 is to add 24 hotels and resorts to our kitty under ownership module, management contract module, and revenue”

gar, Mirzapur, Ambaji, Jaipur, Goa, Dalhousie and Dharamshala. The different brands of the company consist of Brij, Clarks Resort, Arte, Gen X, RnB Select and Rnb, offering a unique mix of uber luxury heritage experience, to a five-star resort, contemporary four-star and three-star offerings, to even boutique BnB operations.

With the new additions, the total inventory of rooms for the brand has increased to 1710 rooms between 36 operational properties and nine under project stage. The company has big growth plans in the next financial year as well. “Our target for April 2018 to March 2019 is to add on 24 hotels and resorts to our kitty under ownership module, management contract module, and revenue share and MG modules.”

Set up in 2014, 1589 Hotels draws its legacy from the prestigious Clarks Hotels Group and was created to service within the upscale and economy hotel segment. The company has fully developed technical cell which provides technical support to all hotels, both at

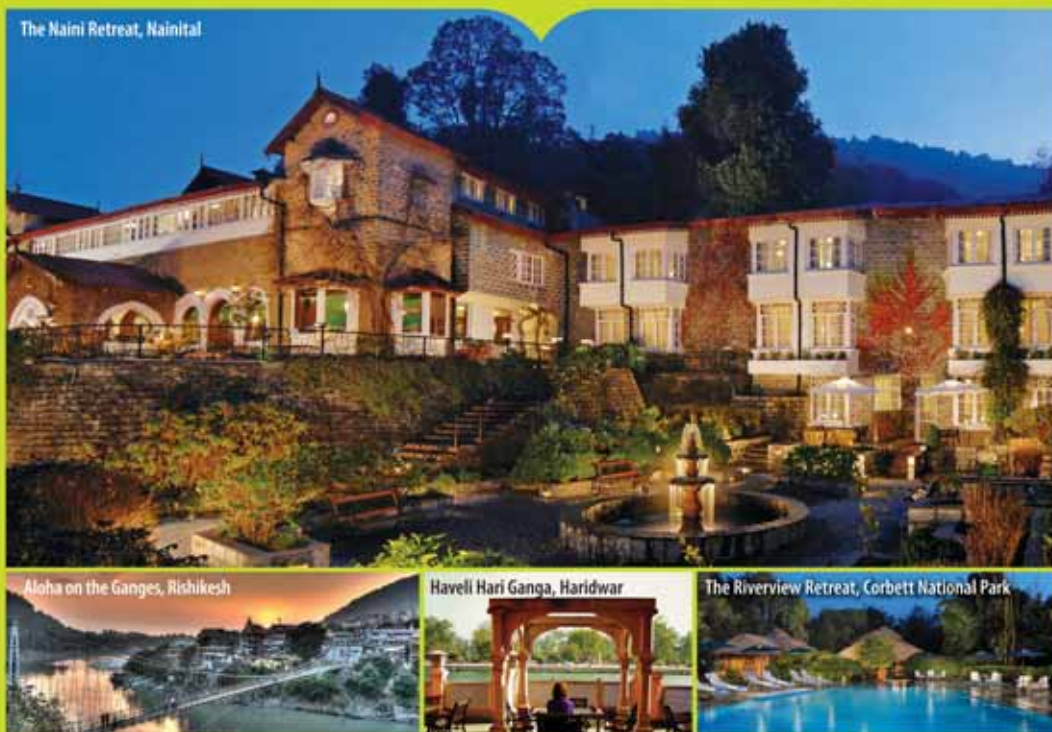
the pre-opening and post-opening stages. They also offer management services for other properties. Giroti said that their core team is fully equipped to undertake complete project management from concept to commissioning, on a turnkey basis.

Centrum reaches new heights

■ Adding another feather to its cap, CentrumDirect has crossed the coveted benchmark of `10,000 crore forex transactions. The company believes that this rarified achievement in the foreign exchange business was achieved through its technological innovation, digital presence, penetration in Tier-II markets and expansion at airports. Recently, the company had also launched Great Forex Offer 2018 through an event—Centrum Connect 18 in Chennai. In line with the upcoming leisure travel season in April, May and June, the gathering of travel agents and other partners was appraised of the latest consumer and partner offers. Centrum also launched a channel partner contest for the season where travel agents and other channel partners can win 100 grams of gold and other exciting gifts on forex card sales. Through Great Forex Offer 2018, travellers can win free holidays to Europe and other exciting prizes on every transaction.



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Bouyant inbound travel predicted

► Contd. from page 42

► Best Emerging Boutique Tour Operator – **Le Magnifique Travel**

Immersive technology eases booking process

The Founder and CEO of Le Magnifique Travel, **Neeraj Kumar**, is positive about the performance of inbound tourism in 2018-19 for all segments. He says, "The most important and significant trend is use of immersive technology by OTAs. With seamless and personalised interaction with the consumer, companies are devising creative holidays. Video calling and messaging Apps have also aided the interaction process while payment integrations play a significant role in faster and easier payment options." He believes that touts and harassment needs to be curtailed and at the same time the overall marketing and packaging of Indian destinations and products needs to be revamped and boosted."

“With a seamless and personalised interaction with the consumer, companies are devising holidays according to the choice of the travellers”



“Easy access of global inventory through technology has definitely made it easier for newer players to establish their set-ups”

► Best Educational Tour Operator—**My Travel Box**

Regulation of travel agencies is key to good business

The outbound tourism segment is expected to grow at more than 15 per cent, feels **Rishi Kapoor**, Director, My Travel Box. He says, "Good connectivity from Tier-II and Tier-III airports will give boost to outbound travel. Easy access of global inventory through technology has definitely made it easier for newer players to establish their set-ups." According to Kapoor, the associations of the industry are doing well in growing tourism but a major challenge remains to identify the credentials of agencies. "There is a need to have control over frauds. This brings a bad name to offline agents and becomes one of the reasons for consumers to move over to online travel agency," he adds.

► Most Promising Airline - International – **Kuwait Airways**

Enhancing fleet to boost routes

With a total of 1.3 million passengers in 2017, Kuwait Airways hopes to exceed the 4.5 million mark this year, informs **Shorouk Al-Awadi**, Director of Strategic Network Planning, Kuwait Airways. "The airline received 10 B777-300ER aircraft with brand-new technology in 2017. We are also planning to induct new Airbus - A320, A321 and A350 aircraft in the next five years to enhance the schedule with more profitable routes and destinations," says Al-Awadi. She also talks about the airline's adoption of the Amadeus Booking Engine System integrated with all departments and systems to facilitate its reservation mechanism with new tools and methods for the Holidays and Oasis departments.



“We are planning to induct new Airbus-A320, A321 and A350 aircraft in the next five years to enhance the schedule with more profitable routes”



“Since the international and Indian markets are facing a period of continued slow growth, most companies have taken to a conservative approach”

► Best Serviced Residency Provider – **Hotel White Pearl Serviced Apartments and Residences**

Hospitality industry: hotbed for innovation

Ankit Sethi, CEO & Founder, Hotel White Pearl Serviced Apartments and Residences, informs that the company's unique 100 per cent customisation experience along with a professional and experienced team has helped it gain the trust of the clients and increased the company's market share. He explains, "However, since the international and Indian markets are facing a period of continued slow growth, most companies have taken to a conservative approach. This unfortunately has lead to lesser expatriates travelling for work into the country and makes it a big challenge for us." He further adds that the hospitality industry in India has paved the platform for various young entrepreneurs to develop and sell unique products and be successful.

► Best Experiential Travel App – **Travelexic**

Predictive technology enhances travel experience

Technological advancements will define the years ahead for travel, believes **VS Chauhan**, Co-founder, Travelexic. He elaborates that technology like Artificial Intelligence will bridge the gap between the choices of a destination to the booking stage by predicting data based the customer profile and past bookings. "Blockchain will bring more transparency in hotel bookings and will allow more benefits to be given to customers. Other emerging trends are the use of chatbots, virtual reality and augmented reality. We are working on enhancing the experience of customers during the journey and providing them with an enriching travel experience," says Chauhan.

“Blockchain will bring more transparency in hotel bookings and will allow more benefits to be given to customers”





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Lights, camera, action in Gujarat

The Gujarat tourism department is making investments to offer world-class tourism infrastructure, upgrade existing facilities for travellers. The state is also considering developing niche tourism products, like golf tourism and is also promoting film tourism. They also have a film board in place to make the procedures simpler to shoot in the state.



TT Bureau

In the year 2017, Gujarat received 4.5 crore tourists, registering a growth of 17 per cent over the previous year, according to figures shared by the Ministry of Tourism. Out of the total number of tourists, 98 per cent were domestic while two per cent were international, informs **Jenu Deven**, Managing Director, Gujarat Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC) and Commissioner of Tourism, Government of Gujarat.

Deven points out that the state tourism department has made investments in almost every sector to offer world-class tourism infrastructure, upgrade existing facilities and enhance the visitor experience. The major source markets for the state are the US, UK and Canada and the state is also targeting the source markets from



Jenu Deven
Managing Director, Gujarat Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC)

where tourists are visiting other states in India.

"The state tourism department has been making investments to the tune of `200-250 crore per year for tourism. We are focusing on heritage and culture of the state. The Rann of Kutch this year was a grand success which received a large number of tourists both domes-

tic and international. Various circuits under the Prasad and Swadesh Darshan Scheme have also been boosted," says Deven.

In order to offer the world a glimpse into the life and teaching of Mahatma Gandhi, a Dandi Heritage circuit is underway. "We want to enhance this circuit and extend it to the Dandi beach at Navsari. Apart from the basic infrastructure available at destinations like Rajkot, Ahmedabad and Sabarmati Ashram, a Dandi Museum will be made to showcase the philosophy and teaching of the Mahatma. Gujarat is also home to Buddhism and to enhance this segment, we have identified some places like Junagarh, Gir, Somnath and Bhavnagar under the Buddhist Circuit and notified the same under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme. We plan to offer a Buddhist complex to



showcase important spiritual sites and traditions." Deven believes that this circuit will be a popular attraction for tourists from East Asia.

The initiative of border tourism at Nadabet in Banas Kantha district in Gujarat has also picked up well, opines Deven. He points out that the remains of Indus Valley Civilisa-

tion in Gujarat are also of tourist interest. "A museum is being upgraded to showcase Indus Valley culture and in collaboration with the Ministry of Shipping, a National Maritime Heritage Complex is also underway. The Modhera village, which houses the famed Sun Temple, is being upgraded. We are planning to turn Modhera into a sustainable unit based on solar

energy and into a world-class tourist attraction." The state is also considering developing niche tourism products like golf tourism. Gujarat is also promoting film tourism. "For this, we have a film board in place which works as a facilitator to various film makers and attempts to make the procedures simpler to shoot in the state," adds Deven. 



WHO ARE WE?

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Italy ups its promotional game

Italian State Tourism Board is re-entering the India market with full force in 2018 by working with travel agents for joint promotions and targeting an approximate 10-15 per cent growth.

 Ankita Saxena

After maintaining a low profile for a few years in the Indian market, the Italian State Tourism Board has announced a re-vamped marketing strategy to attract Indian travellers to Italy. "The last figures which we have are from 2015, wherein we received 4,27,000 Indian visitors for more than one million nights, registering an increase of 49 per cent over 2014", informs **Salvator Ianniello**, Representative—India, Italian Tourism Board at a recently organised three-city roadshow in Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata.



Salvator Ianniello
Representative—India
Italian Tourism Board

“We are looking to conduct roadshows with tour operators in India. We are very happy to join hands with Embassy of Italy to conduct promotions in lieu of the 70-years of bilateral relations between India and Italy”

He says, "For few years we maintained a low profile in the Indian market for unavoidable reasons and could not go too far in terms of promotions. However, this year is a significant one for us, wherein we are looking to conduct roadshows and joint promotions with tour operators in India. We are very happy to join hands with Embassy of Italy to conduct promotions in lieu of the 70-years of bilateral relations between India and Italy. This year we are dedicating our focus on the luxury travellers from India, expecting it to grow by 10-15 per cent."

The tourism board plans to conduct its own campaign and follow it up with training sessions for tour operators. Ianniello adds, "We have also launched the Indian Tour Operators Council of Italy (ITCOI) which will be instrumental to understand the needs of the Indian market and its travellers and we will be able

to provide our inputs to achieve the goals. Six companies including Cox & Kings, Thomas Cook, Mercury Travel, Active Holidays, Easy Go and KUONI are a part of this council."

In terms of source markets, Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata remain the top markets

for the destination, but the destination also receives travellers from the interiors, mainly the Tier-II and Tier-III cities. Ianniello explains that for group travel, the average duration of stay is 3-4 days; for individual travellers from the middle-class bracket is 9-10 nights; while for high-end clients it's

about 12-21 days. He further adds that The Embassy of Italy has announced a 48-hour turnover time for visa issuance to Indian travelers, which will boost the numbers from India.

"Today, apart from the popular destinations like Rome, Florence, Venice, Siena,

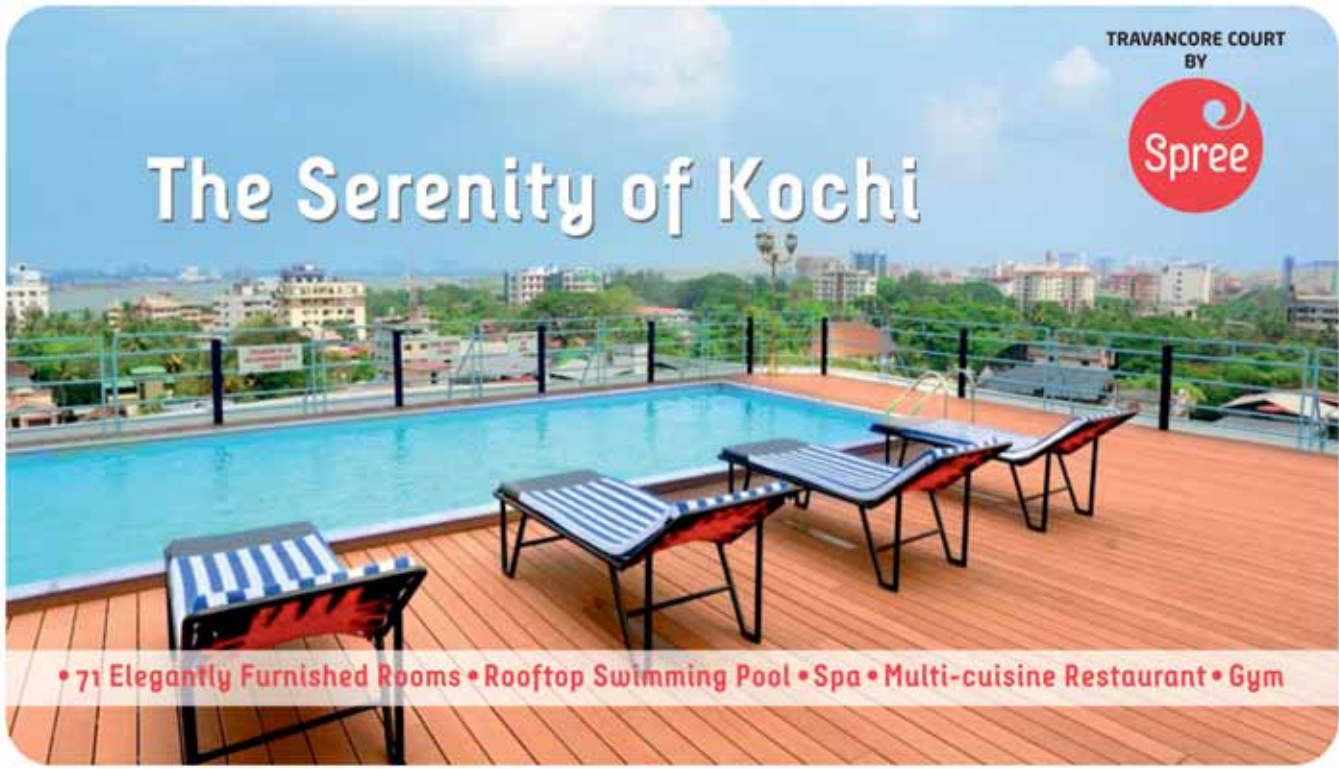
Verona etc, other offbeat destinations have gained more interest. If a travel agent wants to maintain a sustainable growth then they have to be well-informed about the various destinations in a country since the Indian traveller today is equipped with knowledge and is mature," adds Ianniello.



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EVENT TALK

APRIL 2018

WTTC Global Summit	Buenos Aires, Argentina	18-19
KITF	Almaty, Kazakhstan	18-20
ILTM Arabia	Dubai	22-23
Great Indian Travel Bazaar (GITB)	Jaipur	22-24
Arabian Travel Mart	Dubai	22-25
Shirui Lily Festival	Ukhrul, Manipur	24-28
Amazing Thailand Wedding Roadshow	Mumbai	27
IATO Elections	Delhi	28

MAY 2018

Annual Meetings & Events Industry Conference	Adelaide, Australia	6-8
Germany Travel Mart (GTM)	Dresden, Germany	6-8
TRENZ	Dunedin, NZ	7-10
INDABA	Durban South Africa	8-10
ILTM Latin America	Sao Paulo, Brazil	8-11
Indian Exhibition Industry Association (IEIA) Seminar	Hyderabad	9-11
South India Travel Awards	Bengaluru	14
IMEX	Frankfurt, Germany	15-17
PhocusWright Europe	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	15-17
ITB China	Shanghai, China	16-18
PATA Annual Summit 2018	Gangneung, Korea	17-20
ILTM Asia Pacific	Singapore	21-24

JUNE 2018

IATA AGM 2018	Sydney, Australia	3-5
International Travel Roadshow (ITR)	Delhi	12
International Travel Roadshow (ITR)	Kolkata	13
International Travel Roadshow (ITR)	Pune	15
BITE	Beijing, China	15-17
International Travel Roadshow (ITR)	Hyderabad	16
International Travel Roadshow (ITR)	Kochi	19
HRAWI Convention	Sri Lanka	27-30
Telangana Tourism Conclave-2018	Hyderabad	28-30

JULY 2018

Hotel Operations Summit India	Delhi	2
Hotel Operations Summit India 2018	Delhi	2
GPS	Ahmedabad	5-7
TTF	Kolkata	6-8
Travel Wedding Show	Jaipur	7-8
Kiwi Link India	Mumbai	9-10
Tourism New Zealand Frontline Training	Bengaluru	12
GPS	Chandigarh	12-14
Tourism New Zealand Frontline Training	Delhi	13
TTF	Hyderabad	13-14
ACTE Global Summit	Singapore	17-18
GPS	Lucknow	19-21
IITM	Bengaluru	27-29

AUGUST 2018

GPS	Kolkata	2-4
IITM	Chennai	3-5
GPS	Kochi	9-11
ITM B2B Event, Tourism Australia	Kochi	16
ITM B2B Event, Tourism Australia	Kolkata	17
ITM B2B Event, Tourism Australia	Goa	18
ITM B2B Event, Tourism Australia	Mumbai	20
GPS	Pune	23-25

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

Skål ups its CSR quotient

Skål International Delhi Club—125 announced a slew of events for 2018. The agenda is to add value to its members, making it more relevant. The Club will host knowledge sessions in association with Washington Skål Club and introduce a wellness programme.



TT Bureau

The Club is hosting its first wellness programme on April 15 at Nehru Park, New Delhi. The members will be able to enjoy various active and wellness activities based on health and age like nature walk, yoga and meditation and cycling tour, informed **Ranjit Vig**, Secretary, Skål International Delhi-125. Vig further added that this year, the club has witnessed an increase of 26 per cent in membership, making it the largest club. The announcement was made at a special dinner event hosted at Le Meridien Gurgaon.

The gathering was also a way to boost the morale of one its members, **Ajeet Bajaj**, Managing Director, Snow



Sunil Ghadiok
President
Skål Delhi

Leopard Adventures and his daughter Deeya Bajaj who are undertaking an expedition to climb Mount Everest soon.

Sharing details about the activities of the club, Vig added, "For the first time, Skål Delhi has formulated

“The aim of these sessions is to offer a platform for members to engage in meaningful discussions and grow professionally as well as personally”

an events calendar to have a clear agenda for the year. The same has been shared with all the members to allow them enough time to plan wholeheartedly.”

The club has also strengthened its PR and communication arm by making inroads to various social media platforms, informed **Sunil Ghadiok**, President, Skål Delhi. He said, "We will be twinning with Washington Skål Club, wherein like-minded members will come together

to find business opportunities, network and share the best business practices. An agenda is underway and will be announced soon." It was also noted that the wellness committees of the club have taken initiatives to support child education.

Ghadiok further elaborated at the Club plans to bring eminent speakers during its luncheons. "I believe we need to provide value to industry colleagues for them to become Skål members," he says.

TAAI Convention in high esteem

► Contd. from page 44



Jay Bhatia
Director
Tulsidas Khimji Holidays

music and food while connecting with industry colleagues from all over the country.”

“This is our tenth year of association with TAAI and we work very closely with them because that's the community that I think will breed and stay here. We have been part of every TAAI event that has happened in the last 10 years. Kashmir is an amazing destination, and I believe that TAAI took a great initiative to come here for their convention as it would allow members to see the destination and promote it in the right manner.”



Dev Karvat
CEO- Emerging Markets,
Cover-More



Chitra Bhatia
Managing Director
Aashman Air Travels

“Everything was just perfect at the TAAI convention - the venue, session and the destination. It's an eye opener for me as I have come here after 10 years. Everything is looking up and the city looked cheerful than what it was on my last visit to the state. TAAI has done a good job and I think a lot of people will go back and talk about safety here, which will make more people come here. The sessions were remarkable and lots of new things have come up, which we will make use of when we go back.”



Vijay Mohan Raj
Managing Director
Uniglobe Sameera Travels

we will do something now.”

“The TAAI convention this year was very good and the response has been stupendous. There has been a record participation in the convention. I think this was something unique that the travel fraternity has come to Kashmir and discuss tourism. I think this would certainly be a game changer because this would bring a sharper focus to tourism and promote Jammu & Kashmir as a state. It would give huge impetus to tourism in the state and I hope everyone will promote the state.”



Dipak Haksar
Chief Executive
ITC Hotels

“I was happy to be in Srinagar, firstly because it was held in India and that too in Kashmir. It's a turnaround in Kashmir because the perception of many people has been changed after coming here. People are extremely warm, and from whatever we have heard from people I have learnt that it is very safe. I have been to Gulmarg and I must say that it was amazing, much better than what I have seen in Switzerland. It is sad that we have not done anything for Kashmir for so many years. But I am sure



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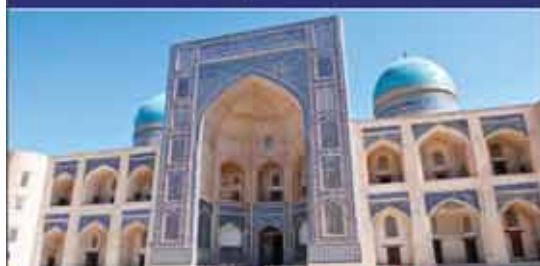
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TripShapers.com

Lucknow

Achinto Bose has joined as Director of TripShapers.com, a new B2B portal launched by Sheeraz Tours Group. Bose has stepped into this new role after spending 11 years with Tourism Malaysia, where he was the Marketing Manager for North and East India and SAARC regions. He brings with him 23 years of experience in the travel industry, having worked with Kenya Airways, Air Mauritius and Korean Air in the past. In his new role, Bose will direct the organisation's growth while ensuring profitable operations and commitment to its clients.



IHCL

Mumbai

The Indian Hotels Company Ltd (IHCL) has appointed **Deepika Rao** as Managing Director and CEO of Roots Corporation, a subsidiary of IHCL that owns and manages the Ginger brand of hotels. Rao has had several stints across functions in various Tata Group companies for the last 18 years. Before her current role she was Vice President, Asset Management at IHCL, and was responsible for leading solutions for margin enhancement at the company.



Thomas Cook (India)

Mumbai

Thomas Cook (India) has appointed **Romil Pant** as Senior Vice President for its Leisure Business, both international and domestic. Pant comes with 21 years of experience in sales, marketing and product management, operations and credit management across various sectors. In his role, Pant will provide leadership and functional expertise to drive productivity and results across the company's leisure business. Pant has previously worked with MakeMyTrip.com, Capital First, HSBC, Citi Financial and Essar Cell phones.



Wyndham Hotel Group

London

Dimitris Manikis has been appointed as the President and Managing Director for the Europe, Middle East, Eurasia and Africa (EMEA) region for Wyndham Hotel Group. A veteran in the industry, he will be based at the company's London offices. Manikis will be responsible for the development of all of Wyndham Hotel Group's brands in the EMEA region. He recently served as Vice President of Business Development for RCI EMEA. At RCI he spent 27 years and held several key positions in the EMEA region.



Aloft Bengaluru Whitefield

Bengaluru

Vinod Muthusubramanian has been appointed as General Manager of Aloft Bengaluru Whitefield. With a strong operational background, proven track record of meeting budgets, and a team-oriented personality, Muthusubramanian has a thorough understanding of P&L statements, budgets, and cost/inventory control. He was previously associated with Marriott Hotels, Wyndham Hotels, Sarovar Hotels and Royal Orchid Hotels.



Holiday Inn Cochin

Cochin

Deepak Kumar joins Holiday Inn Cochin as General Manager. A hotel management graduate, Kumar brings with him over 17 years of hospitality experience. Deepak started his hospitality journey in 2001 and has become an influential leader. Having worked with Taj hotels, Starwood hotels and IHG, Deepak has excelled in all the roles and Deepak's undying attention to detail and ability to drive change will support the hotel operations and meet all key stakeholder's expectation.



ibis New Delhi Aerocity

New Delhi

Bijoy Sengupta has joined ibis New Delhi Aerocity as Hotel Manager. Prior to this, Sengupta was Hotel Manager at the 180 rooms ibis Chennai Sipcot. He comes with over 16 years of industry experience, starting his career with Goa Marriott Resort; followed by quality years of experience at Swissotel Kolkata, Novotel, HICC Hyderabad and ibis Chennai Sipcot. Sengupta is a graduate of AccorHotels' premier GM development programme - IHMP and was inducted into the AccorHotels family in 2013.



Oman Air

Mumbai

Oman Air has appointed **Jayakrishna Bhaskaran** as Manager—Key Accounts & OTAs for its India operations. He will be working with the current 11 India station teams of the airline to ensure maximum growth and contribution. Bhaskaran has been with Oman Air for eight years and was the District Sales Manager in Chennai and Kochi prior to this new assignment. With an experience of 21 years in the international airline passenger domain, he has worked with airlines including KLM, Northwest, United, Kingfisher and Kuwait Airways.



Renaissance Mumbai Convention Centre Hotel & Lakeside Chalet - Marriott Executive Apartments

Mumbai

Vinay Singh has been designated as Director of Sales and Marketing for the property with over 773 keys. Singh is responsible for spearheading the marketing and sales function of both the hotels. Armed with an experience of 15 years in the hospitality sector, Singh was previously associated with The St Regis as the Director of Sales and Marketing.



TALKing People

Mohammed Shoeb, General Manager, Holiday Inn Mumbai International Airport loves to spend time with his family and indulge in fitness regimes to beat stress. "I enjoy taking road trips with my loved ones as this helps me rejuvenate from my hectic schedule. Covering over 23 countries across the world, I love exploring the topography of a destination. The best way to achieve this is to embark on a road trip. In 2013, I had travelled across South India covering locations like Munnar, Cochin, Pondicherry and Chennai," said Shoeb. He also journeyed through the North in 2016 covering Leh, Nubra Valley, Manali and Delhi.

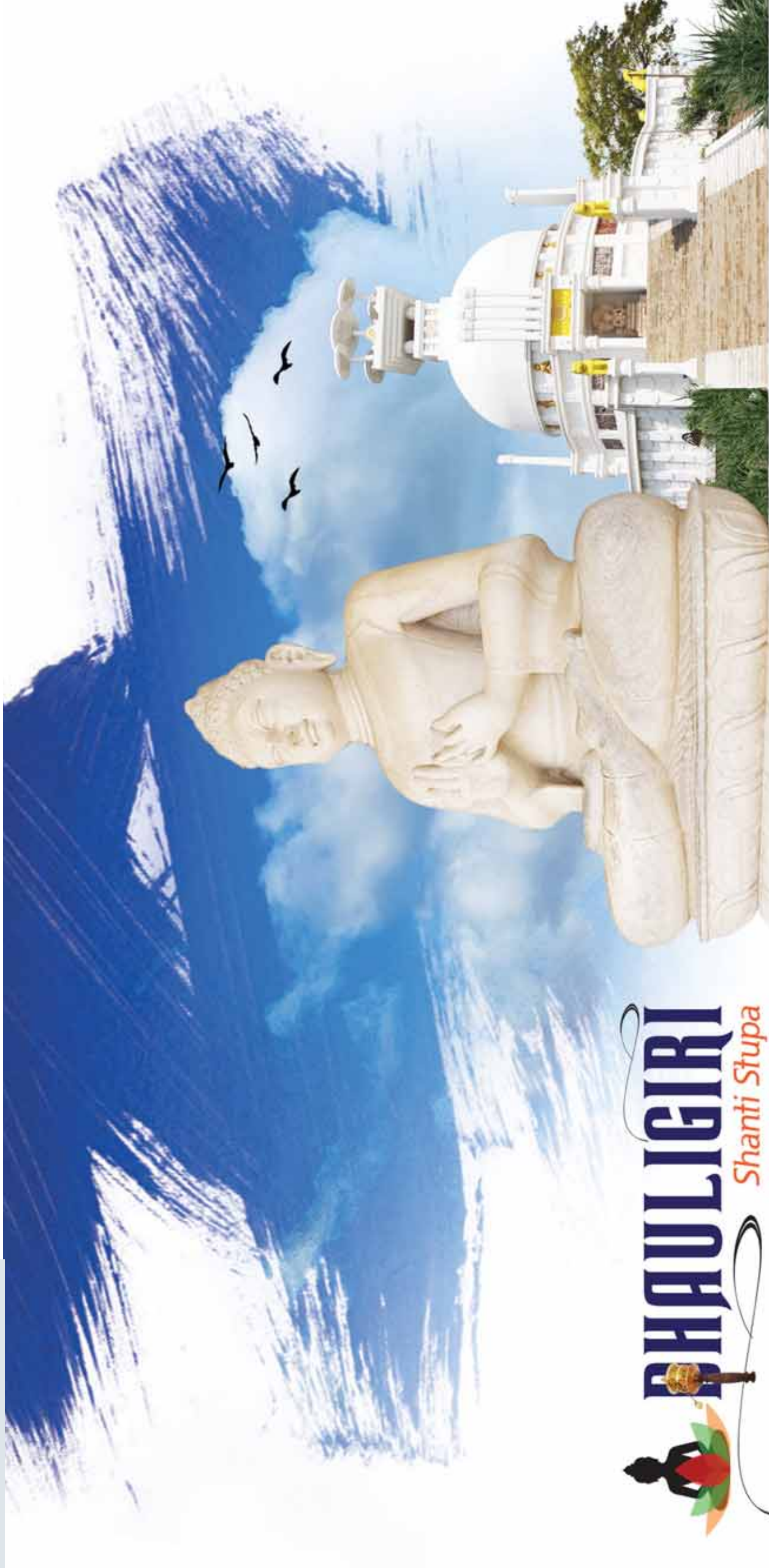


For **Yajush Khanna**, CEO, Jukaso Journeys, his father Rajiv Khanna is his greatest inspiration. "He is my role model. There is not one day that goes by when I do not learn from his vast experience, enabling me to take his legacy forward," he says. Khanna enjoys reading and travelling. His favourite holiday memory is when he visited Italy with his family. "It was one of the best childhood memories that I still cherish. Goa is my favourite Indian destination and internationally I love to visit the beautiful ski resort 'Courchevel' in the French Alps," Khanna reveals.



Rishiraj Singh, General Manager, ITC Rajputana, Jaipur - A Luxury Collection Hotel has a passion to travel and explore the world. Talking about his hobbies, Singh reveals, "I love to listen to music and watch movies, specially with my younger daughter and wife. It rejuvenates our bond and energises me when I am with them. I love spending endless hours with my family when I am at home." My love for beverages is where my heart is and it gives me immense pride to confess that I am the beverage custodian of ITC Hotels.





PHAULIGIRI

Shanti Stupa



Udayagiri



Ratnagiri



Laligiri

Dhauligiri, popularly termed as Dhauli, is known to be the epicentre for spread of Buddhism in Odisha. It stands where one of the bloodiest wars - Kalinga War, was fought between army of Emperor Ashoka and the Kalinga Kingdom. The bloodbath ultimately transformed him and he embraced Buddhism. The place has splendid rock edicts of Ashoka engraved on a mass of rock at the foothills of Dhauli.



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Soaring high in domestic skies

Aditya Ghosh, President & Whole Time Director, IndiGo, was the keynote speaker at the TAAI Convention in Srinagar. He shared what makes IndiGo the preferred domestic carrier and how the tourism and aviation industry is going to be a force to reckon with.



Nisha Verma

Growth of Indian aviation

In the last decade, the aviation industry in India has grown at an exponential rate. In 2006, all the airlines put together used to carry 18 million customers in the entire year. This year IndiGo alone was carrying 50 million customers. The aviation industry along with the travel and tourism business in India has grown six times. This year, we will see around 120 million people travelling by air in India. Today, India is the third largest aviation market in the world, and it is safe to assume that the demand for safe, affordable and reliable air travel will continue to exist in India. Even the goal of the National Civil Aviation Policy by Government of India has set

the target of having half a million domestic air travellers in India in the next nine years. However, if we grow at about 25-30 per cent every year, we may get to that mark before the next decade is out.

Economic contribution of tourism

Tourism and travel has a very symbiotic relationship with the GDP of the country. Today, 9.4 per cent of India's GDP is contributed by travel and tourism alone, which means that

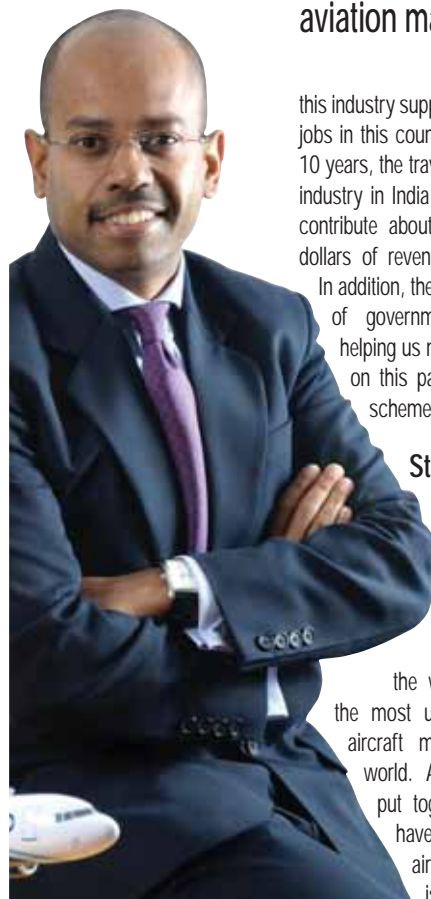
fleet size of Southwest Airlines in the United States. Hence, in the US, one third of population has 7000 commercial airplanes, and we with 1.3 billion people have 550 airplanes. However, let alone mature markets like US and Europe, even countries like Indonesia, Philippines, Brazil, China, and Malaysia, have around 10 times the aircraft penetration of India, which means that if we dream a little hard and put our heart and soul into it, it is possible to turn this dream into reality.

pens from the domestic market. With 85 per cent of our capacity dedicated to India, I am biased in favour of domestic tourism. In the last five years, all the airlines in India put together, other than IndiGo, grew at less than two per cent. In the same period, IndiGo grew at 24 per cent, serving the same airports, markets, fare and people.

Need for government support

At IndiGo, we feel that the government doesn't need to spend money in running hotels or airlines. There is enough potential and capability in the private sector to take this country to a completely different level. The biggest help we need is in helping lower our input costs. As per a recent survey, India has one of the lowest average fares in the world, and yet we are unfortunately burdened with one of the highest cost structures in the world. There are taxes on fuels, escalating airport charges, infrastructure constraints, which adds to the cost of doing business. There are some live examples from India over the last few years, where by bringing down the sales tax on aviation fuel, there has been a dramatic increase in air connectivity and in the GDP of the state. If we can push the envelope and try to even go for 24 hour operations here, Srinagar could turn into a 24*7, 365-day destination. This would immediately result in more jobs not only with the airlines, but with repair work, hotels, road transportation and of course, the spending power of the people coming in and contributing to the state. I promise that if the government makes that investment in the future of the state, this will come back many fold in returns.

“The aviation industry along with the travel and tourism business in India has grown six times. This year, we will see around 120 million people travelling by air in India. Today, India is the third largest aviation market in the world”



this industry supports 41 million jobs in this country. In the next 10 years, the travel and tourism industry in India is expected to contribute about half a trillion dollars of revenue every year.

In addition, there is a plethora of government initiatives helping us moving forward on this path. The UDAN scheme is one of them.

Stumbling blocks

Despite being the third largest aviation market in the world, India is the most underpenetrated aircraft markets in the world. All the airlines put together in India have about 550 airplanes, which is less than the

If one looks at the last 10 years, the GDP growth was 7-8 per cent, aviation, and the travel and tourism industry grows at 15-16 per cent. If India can sustain a growth of even 6-7 per cent, it means that for the next decade and a half, we as a community can witness a growth of 15 per cent.

Big on domestic

Around 88 per cent of travel and tourism in India hap-

Tourism Rules

Today, 9.4 per cent of India's GDP is contributed by travel and tourism alone, meaning this industry supports 41m jobs in this country

In the next 10 years, tourism industry in India is expected to contribute about half a trillion dollars of revenue every year

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'A Travel Duet' moves HO to Mumbai



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More than 2m Indians visit Dubai

With 2.1 million Indian tourists visiting Dubai in 2017, India became the first country to cross the two-million mark in a year to the destination and retained the top spot on Dubai's list of source markets. In 2018, the destination will seek newer travel segments from India to achieve its Vision 2020.



Ankita Saxena

Dubai Tourism recorded a year-on-year growth of 15 per cent from the India market with 2.1 million Indian visitors in 2017. Dubai's 2020 Vision is to receive 20 million visitors globally, and India is a key market which is expected to contribute to this target, believes **Khalid Mansoor Alawar**, Assistant Manager, Proximity Markets—International Operations, Dubai Tourism. He says, "India is our top source market and a very

important one. Our success continues to be our focus to maintain our market share as well as exploring other frontier markets. For the India market, our strategy has been to reach out to as many people as pos-

sible in the travel industry, and this means tapping the Tier-II and Tier-III markets as well."

and North Africa (MENA), and North and Southeast Asia regions sharing the fourth position, each contributing close to 1.7 million visitors and independently commanding 11 per cent share, the former recording a 3.2 per cent increase

visitation. Also, there are a high number of first-time visitors to Dubai. "Dubai is ever changing and ever evolving. Recently, we have opened the Dubai Safari and the Dubai Frame which are not attractions but tourist experiences. Dubai is a

travellers, life events like family reunions, anniversaries, or a bunch of friends looking for a quick weekend getaway." Dubai receives an equal mix of leisure and MICE travellers from India, he adds.

“India is a number one source market for us and a very important one. For the India market, our strategy has been to reach out to as many people as possible in the travel industry, and this means tapping the Tier-II and Tier-III markets as well.”

Khalid Mansoor Alawar
Assistant Manager
Proximity Markets—International Operations, Dubai Tourism

sible in the travel industry, and this means tapping Tier-II and Tier-III markets as well."

Driven by India, the South Asia region, in the third place, contributed an 18 per cent share of over 2.8 million visitors, up a strong 10.6 per cent, followed by the Middle East

and the latter, an impressive 23.6 per cent over 2016 visitation figures.

Alawar believes that since Indian tourists are already very familiar with Dubai, the destination provides them with different products and newer attractions to encourage repeat

holistic destination which offers a variety of value propositions for all types of travellers. The Indian traveller is evolving faster than any other destination worldwide and new segments of travel are emerging every day. It is important that we look out for these new segments like honeymooners, solo women

In order to keep a closer touch with the Indian travel trade, Dubai Tourism has also appointed Nijhawan Group as its representative in the market. Alawar explains, "With the new appointment, we will be present in major Indian metros and then branch out to the smaller cities. Last year, we conducted a few campaigns like Dubai Tourism's ongoing collaboration with Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan in the #BeMyGuest



DID YOU Know?

As a result of the Indian subcontinent's growing outbound demand, Dubai Tourism has announced the appointment of Nijhawan Group as its in-market destination representation and trade marketing management firm in India.



Wedding Planners



“The show was instrumental in bringing us together. It is a unique event that is educative, network-oriented, and a platform to exhibit all products.”

Vinod Bhandari*
Wedding Xtraordinaire



“This is our second time at the show and the format of the show in particular is its highlight. Well-timed meetings allow us to interact with every exhibitor without missing anyone.”

Rajeev Jain*
Rashi Entertainment



“This show acts as a bridge between the wedding, travel, and hospitality industries. I feel this is the only show that has adopted the format of offering one-to-one interactions.”

Serrao Francis Socorro*
Cross Craft



“It is an important platform for us to meet key players in the industry, and learn about new products, destinations, deals, and packages. Enthusiasm amongst participants is encouraging.”

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Eat, pray and get healed in India

Sabyasachi Ghosh, Senior Consultant–Healthcare & Medical Devices, Future Market Insights, shares details about India’s thriving market for medical tourism and how the multibillion dollar segment is set to witness a surge in coming years.

Fuelled by a boom in corporate healthcare and promoted by the government, India is increasingly seen as the favoured destination of medical tourists, who cross national boundaries to seek treatment that is cost-effective when compared to their own countries. Medical tourism is a multibillion-dollar industry promoted by medical and tourism industries, the Government of India, and driven by factors mentioned below:

❖ Cost for medical treatment in some developed economies such as the UK, the US, etc, is relatively higher than that in India. A person coming to India for medical treatment can easily save anywhere between 30-70 per cent, including accommodation and ticket expenditures.

❖ A number of developed countries do not have immediate access to medical treatments and have long waiting lists. For instance, in Canada, people say that it takes more than four weeks to see a specialist whereas in India, patients don't need to wait for treatment. Immediate access to medical treat-

ment is the key to attracting foreign patients.

❖ The opportunity to visit a new destination is an additional factor that attracts more and more patients to India. Particularly those patients who seek cosmetic care or dental care can enjoy exploring destinations while recovering. Numerous facilities in India have made some destinations combine learning with healing.

An ongoing forecast study by Future Market Insights has estimated that in 2016, India's medical tourism market touched an estimated value of \$6.6 billion. On the back of such factors, the medical tourism market in India is pegged to be worth over \$18 billion by the end of 2020, registering an annual value growth of more than 28 per cent.

A visit, not merely a treatment

Patients coming to India often seek more than medical treatment and learn wellness techniques such as naturopathy, Ayurveda, and yoga. One can opt for a complete body detox utilising yoga tech-

niques and learn them as well. With treatments such as yoga and Ayurveda not being available in foreign countries, there lies an opportunity for foreign patients to extend their stay in India to learn and get certified in these ancient Indian techniques for personal well-being or for opening a teaching school in their own country.

Furthermore, centres such as Patanjali in Varanasi and Haridwar, Shirodhara massage schools located in Kerala, and Astring Yoga Ashrams in Mysuru are localities close to cities of economic significance and international airports. A number of tourists prolong their halt and enjoy the scenery of India by visiting these locations to celebrate the recovery of their health.

Cities in India with medical tourism facilities

The forecast study observes that Maharashtra will continue to represent the most lucrative state in India to record the highest number of foreign medical tourist arrivals. Dense presence of advanced surgical centres and top-class medical organisations across Mumbai, Thane,

Nashik, and Pune will continue to propel the status of Maharashtra in India's medical tourism market.

Mumbai is the hub of medical tourism in India. The city has a large number of hospitals and medical centres that provide world-class and economical medical treatments for foreign patients from the UK and the US. Gynaecological and cosmetic procedures are attractive surgeries among women travelling to Mumbai, children come for different surgical and medical processes, and men come for orthopaedic and related procedures. Oncology is another key attraction in Mumbai.

It has also been estimated that in 2016, more than 20 per cent of the overall medical tourism revenue procured in India came from hospitals based in Tamil Nadu. The southern state is observed as the medical capital of South India, and will continue to amass billions of dollars in the foreseeable future. According to a study by Confederation of Indian Industries, more than six lakh medical tourists visit Tamil Nadu each year.

Furthermore, it has been forecast that a majority of medical tourists arriving in India will be seeking cardiac surgeries and treatments such as heart bypass and angioplasty. In addition, cheap cosmetic surgeries will account for more than \$3 billion worth of revenue in India's medical tourism market by the end of 2020. Keeping healthcare costs cheap and enhancing the quality of treatment will continue to attract more medical tourists in India in the near future.

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



Sabyasachi Ghosh
Senior Consultant – Healthcare & Medical Devices, Future Market Insights

WRS seeks to partner with trade

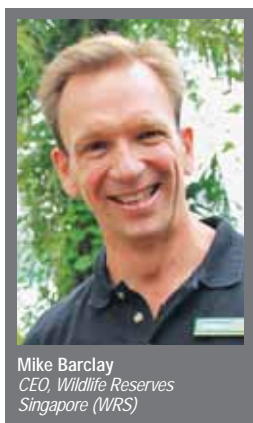
Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS), one of Singapore’s biggest attractions is channeling its focus on India – its top international source market. It has just signed an MoU with Thomas Cook and is open to partnering with more tour operators for marketing and promotion.



Mike Barclay, CEO, Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS), was recently in Mumbai to sign an MoU with Thomas Cook that will enable the Singapore-based company to widely reach out to the trade. Speaking about what the partnership will entail, he said, “This way, Thomas Cook can apply more resources to promoting our products. This is not an exclusive MoU and we are definitely open to signing similar MoUs with other big agents and tour operators. We already have a number of tours in place with

Thomas Cook but we will be broadening the base and trying out new ideas.”

WRS has associated with Thomas Cook India to offer its customers world-class zoological parks—Jurong Bird Park, Night Safari, River Safari and Singapore Zoo. Each year, the four attractions collectively welcome 4.6 million visitors. Mandai Park Holdings is the holding company of WRS and oversees its business and strategic development. This is the first time that WRS has partnered with an Indian operator. Barclay adds, “India



is our top international source market and we currently get about 28 per cent of our foreign visitors from here. The

idea is to think of new ways of selling WRS’ four wildlife parks in India.”

New segments to explore

Barclay feels that WRS has not done justice to the school market in India. “We think there is great opportunity there. We already welcome 300,000 students every year from various countries but we haven't really gotten the segment going with the Indian market. We also discussed the senior market with Thomas Cook and we haven't done enough to tailor our experiences for them,” he says.

Currently, the traffic includes lots of groups and some MICE activities apart from families. WRS has long-term plans for expansion which has been planned with the aim of increasing night-stays at the venue. This includes new venues for camping, a resort, a new bird park and more indoor activities. “This is part of the remodelling of the entire Mandai area. This will be the only place in the world where you can visit five zoological parks in one location. We will be investing further in the India market to promote our new products,” he adds.

'A Travel Duet' moves HQ to Mumbai

Five-year-old 'A Travel Duet' is on an expansion spree, and to fuel this growth it has moved its headquarter to Mumbai. On its radar is forging 'Preferred Partnerships' with premium brands for its clients – the couple.



Hazel Jain

Apptly named travel consultant in the B2C space, 'A Travel Duet' has recently redesigned itself to expand its scope of clientele. Earlier headquartered in Kolkata, the company has now moved to Mumbai to expand its reach further in the market.

Pritish Shah, Founder, A Travel Duet, who has also moved to Mumbai, says, "We soon realised that if we want to expand, Mumbai is the place to be, especially with the kind of products we offer. We also have a huge emphasis on having Preferred Partners such as Relais & Châteaux, Four Seasons, and Luxury Lodges of New Zealand, and are very keen to expand that portfolio from about 10 brands right now to 100 this year."

The Mumbai office will have a staff strength of about 15-20 people and will be located in Khar West. The company

“We had a branch office in Mumbai, but soon realised that if we want to expand, Mumbai is the place to be, especially with the kind of products we offer”

offers high-end, exclusive leisure holidays for couples. It has recently expanded the scope of its target market from just honeymooners to couple holidays. Speaking more about expansion plans for this year, Shah adds, "At a later stage, we will



Pritish Shah
Founder
A Travel Duet

open an office in Delhi by September which will purely have a sales and operations team. While our main market is northern India and Maharashtra, for top-end luxury the North spends blindly."

Preferred partnerships

Shah is keen on adding not just luxury hotels to its list of Preferred Partners, but also experiences and activities. "We



also want to work closely with destinations and can help them identify high-spending clients. We work towards enhancing the clients' experience rather than discounting it. We want to add value to their travel and we will go all out to do that," he says.

A Travel Duet recently rebranded itself and changed its focus from 'Handcrafted

Honeymoons' to 'Celebrating Togetherness' to include all couples looking to celebrate their love. "This year, we will open our 'Celebrations' department which will help curate 'something unique' for their trip. Our clients include only couples, and we do not work with families," Shah explains. Finding a space that no one caters to exclusively,

Shah is positive of gaining ground quickly. He says, "There is no end to creativity. It's just a matter of how much somebody wants to splurge. We see this as a new space that not many people have tapped into. They do big celebrations for big groups, but nobody is doing anything for two people who want to celebrate." 📌

Dook masters CIS countries

Dook Travels has added Ukraine to its product portfolio this year to diversify the outbound travel market from India to new destinations.



TT Bureau

Having recorded a whopping 65 per cent growth in 2017 in its overall business as compared to the business in 2016, Dook Travels is targeting to double the present business in 2018, informs **Gopal Krishan Kapoor**, Director, Dook Travels. This year, the company is introducing Ukraine as a new

portfolio includes destinations like Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Georgia Azerbaijan and Russia.

Kapoor further adds, "Our aim is to bring a new destination for the Indian market every year and this time, we are offering Ukraine. With the announcement of direct flights between Ukraine and India,



Gopal Krishan Kapoor
Director
Dook Travels

“With the announcement of direct flights between Ukraine and India, we are sure that this destination will do very well”

destination to the Indian market and is aggressively promoting it through various channels. Elaborating on the kind of business done last year, Kapoor says, "We sent as many as 53,000 Indian passengers to the destinations in our portfolio. This means that on an average, we sent 4600 passengers every month or to simplify, around 150 passengers every day. We will work to grow these numbers in the coming years." The company's

this destination will do very well. We have been conducting tours for Azerbaijan since 2012 and we are continuing to add more products at the destination for the Indian clientele."

Kapoor believes that Dook Travels is the pioneer in bringing these countries to the India market. He explains that the company does not work with suppliers at the destinations. Instead, it acquires its own coaches, restaurants,

etc. and is also trying to get some hotels on lease at these destinations. "New sectors are opening up for Indian outbound travellers and we hope to move some of the outbound traffic from India to these countries. We are targeting a variety of travel segments like families, honeymooners, MICE, etc. as these destinations have something to offer to all types of travellers. The growth from South India is notable," he adds. Dook Travels will be promoting its products through participation in travel trade exhibitions and fairs, and through the digital platform in India. 📌

Skies' online portal on cards

Skies Holidays is set to launch its online portal for travel agents by the end of the year and hopes to make it a one-stop solution for their travel needs.



TT Bureau

Skies Holidays specialises in outbound tourism, offering various customisable packages to their clients. The company has recently started promoting its visa division—visacruise.com. According to **Shaan Sarin**, Managing Director, Skies Holidays, the USP of visacruise.com is the competitive rates that the company offers to its travel partners.

He says, "We offer visas to all major tourist and business travel destinations like Dubai, China, UK, US, Schengen countries, etc. We are also planning to offer our services online and will be launching an online portal for travel partners by the end of this year. This portal will be a one-stop shop for all travel needs and will include outbound packages, visa requirements along with assistance."

Sarin further points out that the year 2017 was a good year for Skies Holidays, where the company recorded a growth of 25 per cent in



Shaan Sarin
Managing Director
Skies Holidays

business over 2016. Skies Holidays is eyeing expansion of business to other cities apart from Delhi and Mumbai, where it has recently begun its branch operations.

Discussing some outbound travel trends from India, he explains that the company is recording good growth in travel from Tier-II and Tier-III cities in Rajasthan, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. According to him, Seychelles is among those destinations that have gained lot of traction from the India market, mostly as a honeymoon destination. Other

popular emerging destinations include Oman, Eastern European countries, etc. The already popular destinations like France and Germany are now being explored in a different light by Indian travellers. "Destinations that are not doing well for the Indian market include Turkey and Greece and the major reason why travel to these countries has slowed down a lot is because of various ongoing

“We offer visas to all major tourist and business travel destinations like Dubai, China, UK, US, etc and are also planning to offer our services online”

ing disturbances at these destinations." In terms of reforms needed in visa issuance, Sarin believes that there is a need to make visa application direct and online. 📌

Tapping tourism through movies

Locations in Russia and CIS countries are becoming popular among Indian film-makers, and Dimaz Group is facilitating them to develop tourism between the two countries.



TT Bureau

Specialising in Russia and CIS, Mumbai-based Dimaz Group trying to promote tourism between the two countries by way of films. It recently facilitated a movie shoot in Uzbekistan for a Bollywood movie. **Manish Syngal**, CMD, Dimaz Group, says, "We have been providing location management services in Russia and CIS to movie production houses since many years. We have signed an MoU with few line production companies that

The first film project that Syngal was involved was in Tajikistan for the shooting of 'Mangal Pandey: The Rising' in 2004. Its latest project was for 'The Tashkent Files', a Vivek Agnihotri film in Uzbekistan in February and March 2018.

Syngal explains, "We assist film-makers for permissions for shoots, visas, accommodation, local actors and personnel, necessary-film shooting equipment on hire, meals for the crew and transport in Russia and



Manish Syngal
CMD
Dimaz Group

and May with approximately 70 and 40 crew members respectively. "Destinations in Russia and CIS countries are becoming very popular among Indians, and many famous film stars and film producers have visited the destinations in recent months to explore the possibility of movie shoots. Russia and CIS have very beautiful locations and historical places for film shootings," Syngal adds.

dian meals and transport in Uzbekistan."

He reveals that his company is currently involved with two new movie projects for shoots in CIS. One is a Bollywood film and the other is a Bengali film. Shoots of these films will take place in April

“We assist film-makers for permissions for shoots, visas, accommodation, local actors and personnel, necessary-film shooting equipment on hire, meals for the crew and transport in Russia and CIS countries”

help us in the smooth management of services." This has been done under the banner of Dimaz Agasthya Productions, a Dimaz Group company.

CIS countries. For the latest movie, we provided assistance to the production house in getting the necessary shooting permissions in the cities of Tashkent and Samarkand, equipment on hire, scouting locations, hotel accommodation, In-

New projects

One is a Bollywood film and the other is a Bengali film. Shoots of these films will take place in April and May with approximately 70 and 40 crew members respectively

The latest project was for 'The Tashkent Files', a Vivek Agnihotri film in Uzbekistan. Russia and CIS have beautiful locations and historical places for film shootings



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Hyatt to add 1,400 keys by 2019

With an impressive portfolio of 7,000 keys in India already, Hyatt Hotels and Resorts wants to scale its existing record with another 1,400 rooms across brands in the country while keeping a keen eye on Tier-II and III cities.



TT Bureau

Hyatt Hotels and Resorts aims to add approximately 1,400 more keys to its current portfolio of over 7,000

rooms by next year, reveals **Harleen Mehta**, Vice President, Sales Operations - India, Hyatt Hotels and Resorts. This will be across brands.

She says, "The Hyatt Place Hyderabad-Banjara Hills was launched in December 2017 and this will be followed by our Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty slated to open in April 2018, marking our foray into the Kerala market. The two upcoming Hyatt Place hotels – Hyatt Place Bangalore Airport-Urbana is scheduled to open this year and Hyatt Place Jaipur is expected to open doors next year. These two hotels will add approximately 400

more rooms to our portfolio. Hyatt Regency McLeod Ganj set to open in 2018 in the Himalayas will establish us as the only licensed international hospitality chain allowed to build an eco-friendly hotel in the forests

includes 28 hotels with over 7,000 rooms across 17 destinations in the country. By next year, it aims to add approximately 1,400 more keys. Currently, its presence in India is marked by six brands – Park Hyatt, Grand



Harleen Mehta
Vice President, Sales Operations
- India, Hyatt Hotels and Resorts

“Hyatt Regency McLeod Ganj set to open in 2018 will establish us as the only licensed international hospitality chain allowed to build an eco-friendly hotel in the forests there”



there. Apart from this, we are looking to expand in the market with our upcoming properties in Gurgaon and Agra.”

Hyatt, Andaz, Hyatt Regency, Hyatt Place and Hyatt.

Focus on tiered cities

Mehta feels that this is a great time to foray into Tier-II and III cities given that India is currently experiencing a boom in domestic travel. “We need to attract newer traveller segments and be present in cities where our guests are travelling. Our hotels in the pipeline – Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty and Hyatt Regency McLeodganj – are a testament to our strong commitment towards the Tier-II cities. Similarly, the incredible response to the launch of Hyatt Place

Rameswaram has validated our strategy of expanding our upscale select-service brand Hyatt Place to Tier-II and III cities. This brand is

New properties

Slated to open on April 28, 2018, the Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty will offer 265 luxurious guestrooms including 38 suites and four villas.

a large part of our growth strategy in India as it offers stylish, comfortable and cost-effective options for business travellers and families,” she adds.

As per Hyatt's Q4 2017 financial report, EAME/SW Asia management and franchising segment adjusted EBITDA increased 36.9 per cent and RevPAR for comparable EAME/SW Asia full service hotels increased 3.8 per cent.

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Preferred for 50 years and more

Preferred Hotels & Resorts recently kicked off the Asia Pacific series of its 50th anniversary celebrations at The Leela Palace New Delhi. TRAVTALK seeks insights about the group and its expansion plans in India and the region.



Kanchan Nath

With a global collection of more than 650 independent hotels in over 85 countries, the brand marked its 50-year anniversary on January 29, 2018. Preferred Hotels & Resorts marks a year-long promotion with events and celebrations around the globe.

Elaborating on the celebrations, **Lindsey Ueberroth**, Chief Executive Officer, Preferred

We also have a contest which will be launched in Q3 that allows those who have booked to enter into a prize drawing of more than five exquisite vacations at some of our most exclusive hotels."

Talking about the Indian market, she said, "India definitely stands out in the Asia Pacific market. From 2002 with only one hotel partner - The Imperial, New Delhi, we have come a long way and grown



Saurabh Rai
Executive Vice President,
Preferred Hotels & Resorts for
South Asia, Middle East, Africa,
and Australasia

isting properties. 'The Middle House', a part of The House collection is opening in Shanghai, China. A lot of exciting things are happening in our portfolio."

Talking about tech developments, Ueberroth said, "Our new app has already seen more than 50,000 downloads. It's a great way for our loyal members to easily book and stay at our hotels. We will be relaunching our brand website, which will go live in Q3. I think a lot more content is becoming relevant like guests' knowledge thirst about destinations and a c-

tivities they can indulge in and around the hotel."

Saurabh Rai, Executive Vice President, Preferred Hotels & Resorts for South Asia, Middle East, Africa, and Australasia said, "Last year, we booked 87,000 room nights in our partner hotels in India. This accounted for a revenue volume of \$80 million. Having a 23 per cent increase on the occupancy was inspiring. Currently, we have 40 properties in the sub-continent and are targeting to add at least 10 more hotels by 2020. We already have a balanced approach in India, with presence in most gateway cities and leisure circuits."

Having added seven hotels in India last year, the brand's recent properties in the country include The Chedi in Mumbai, The Shahpura house in Jaipur and Turyaa in Chennai.



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Hotels & Resorts, said, "We recently launched our first promotion for our loyal 'I prefer' members. If they booked a two-night stay, they could win 50,000 'I prefer' points which are a 100 dollars value. That just concluded. Our year-long celebration which includes our golden anniversary package

to 40 hotels in the market. We have plans to take that to another 10 in the next two years. From a global perspective, we look at India as one of the great leaders not only as an inbound destination but also the outbound market."

On expansion plans, she said, "Among the upcoming hotels, we have 'The Montage in Los Cabos' which has about six ex-

Number Game

Preferred Hotels & Resorts has 40 properties in the Indian subcontinent and are targeting to add 10 more hotels by 2020.

is a 50-dollar value for guests who are staying and booking in more than 300 participating hotels. They are doing unique activities like champagne savouring, cooking classes, unique couples massages, etc.

TAAI revisits Jammu & Kashmir,

After a gap of 30 years, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) recently held its 64th convention at Sher-e-Kashmir International Convention Centre in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir. The who's who from the travel industry, representing various destinations, hotels, travel agencies, airlines, along with TAAI members, were in attendance for the event. Not only did the delegates gain knowledge from business sessions but also relished dinners and cocktails amidst the unmatched beauty of Kashmir.



rekindles hope among tourists



Tech needs of trade

In an attempt to provide a complete solution to a company's CRM needs, Multilinkworld.com is launching its new product—Digiconnect.



Multilinkworld.com, an online portal, specialises in offering B2B airline fares for both domestic and international sectors with over the edge profitability and great customer experience, informs **Nikhil Shah**, CEO and Co-founder, MOS Utility. He says, "We are launching a new prod-

white label, wallet integration, B2C website creation as offerings for flight technology based services. On the B2B portal at Multilinkworld.com, travel, utility and entertainment based services are offered. The company caters to over 30,000 travel agents across the country supported by a round-the-clock customer service and IT support for



Nikhil Shah
CEO and Co-founder
MOS Utility

“Digiconnect enables travel agents to manage customer database and stay connected to clients via SMS & emails”

uct this year—Digiconnect. The new product is a complete solution for CRM needs of a company. Travel agents can easily manage their customer database and can also remain connected to their clients through social greetings via SMS and emails.”

Shah elaborates that the company provides flights API,

technology-based assistance. He explains, "Along with the unique blend of utility, travel and entertainment booking services on one platform, we are also the sole partners with Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) for Bollywood tourism programmes which have been run successfully for domestic and foreign travellers alike.

In terms of revenue growth in 2017, over the previous year, the company recorded growth to the tune of `600 crore and is targeting to grow the business this year to the tune of `900 crore, informs Shah. He adds, "Our future strategy is to expand business globally and provide an unmatched user-friendly technology to our clients. Our major focus will be to enhance our distribution mode.”

GHR signs Radisson Kathmandu

Enhancing the representation portfolio, Global Hotel Representations has gone international with its recent addition of Radisson Hotel Kathmandu.



The focus of the company is to represent and market the properties in its portfolio with Delhi-NCR as the target market for property promotion, informs **O P Mendiratta**, Managing Director, Global Hotel Representations. He says, "Those properties which have not been able to build presence in Delhi market avail our services. We participate in travel trade exhibitions and roadshows to generate awareness about the affiliate hotels. The digital media platforms are used for online promotion while the



O P Mendiratta
Managing Director
Global Hotel Representations

According to Mendiratta, the USP of Radisson Hotel is its location. He points out that this five-star property, centrally

located in Kathmandu, offers 260 guest rooms across categories. The other facilities include a casino, swimming pool, health club, spa and speciality restaurants. The property is also well suited for MICE segment as it offers state-of-the-art conference facilities like three meeting rooms, two board rooms, two ballrooms and a business centre.

Currently, the company represents 15 hotels in Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Chilika, Chennai, Coimbatore, Dehradun, Madurai, Mathura, Mussoorie, Navi Mumbai, Orchha, Rishikesh and Varanasi.

Elaborating on the company's plan for the future, Mendiratta adds, "As a four-and-a-half year old company, we have grown significantly. We are particular about the properties we represent based on property surveys and customer reviews. All our associate hotels have grown a fair share from Delhi-NCR in 2018. We are at a negotiation stage with some properties and shall soon add them in the representation portfolio in 2018.”

“Those properties which, for any reason, have not been able to build presence in the Delhi market avail our services”

sales team visits many corporate houses, tour operators, MICE operators and foreign missions to promote these hotels.”

located in Kathmandu, offers 260 guest rooms across categories. The other facilities include a casino, swimming pool, health club, spa and spe-

Trade explores offbeat holidays

RARE India, in its maiden edition of Très RARE, showcased some of the offbeat accommodation facilities in India, Nepal and Bhutan. At this free-flow event held in Delhi, the tourism and hospitality industry experts networked with bespoke tour operators and exchanged ideas on the concept and scope of experiential travel in the country.



StayWell gears up for India expansion

Prince Hotels, a consolidated subsidiary of Seibu Holdings, has acquired StayWell Hospitality Group including all the business operations of StayWell Group.



TT Bureau

Simon Wan, President & Director, StayWell Hospitality Group and **Victor Osumi**, Managing Executive Officer, Prince Hotels were in India recently to work out their India strategy with **Rohit Vig**, Managing Director, StayWell Hospitality. Sharing the reason behind investment in StayWell Hospitality, Osumi said, "Seibu Holdings and Prince Hospitality were looking for an opportunity outside Japan some years ago.

“We are hopeful of moving to 100 in the next three years. With a loyal team in India now, we have the knowledge about owners and locations”

Simon Wan

We were just waiting for the right partner. This opportunity was introduced two years ago in October 2015. We were talking to Wan and finally, as I call it, we got engaged in July last year and then got married in October 2017 when the takeover was completed. As one of the largest hotel companies in Japan by revenue, we need to expand our arenas outside, which would lead us to outbound business destinations.”

Vig shared that in India, they have signed 11 hotels, out of which five are operational and the next six are under

various stages of construction. “Starting from the next couple of years, we will have those operational. However, we aim

to sign three-four hotels in India this year and hopefully, we can get some rebranded or rebranding hotels. We should at least

get two more hotels under the StayWell-Prince portfolio in 2018. Currently, we only have Park Regis and Leisure Inn in



India, which is the mid and upper scale segment. Prince will introduce a luxury brand in India. We also have a new brand called Leisure Inn Plus meant for the young avid traveller, and is interior design oriented.”

Talking about the expansion plans of the Seibu and Prince Hotels, Osumi said, “We are targeting around 250 hotels globally in the next 10 years. Right now, Prince and StayWell have around 85 hotels, and hence we have a challenging goal.”

Wan added that Staywell has grown from zero to 30 hotels in eight years. “We are hopeful of moving to 100 in the next three years. With a team in India, we have the knowledge about owners and locations. The right reputation, credibility and distribution power will only accelerate our growth. Not only would we be able to bring a luxury brand to our portfolio but also get the Japanese hospitality experience for Indians. We are strong in north India, but need to touch other bases like Bengaluru, Mumbai and Hyderabad,” shared Wan.

Expansion Plans

StayWell is hopeful of moving from 30 to 100 hotels in the next three years

Prince Hotels is targeting around 250 hotels globally in the next 10 years

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Lemon Tree Hotels doubles inventory in Goa



■ Carnation Hotels, the wholly-owned subsidiary and management arm of Lemon Tree Hotels, has signed an operating agreement for the groups' first Red Fox hotel in Morjim, Goa with Unicorn Real Estate. With this signing, Lemon Tree Hotels doubles its consolidated inventory in the city. Red Fox Hotel, Goa will have 111 rooms and cater to leisure travellers looking for a pocket-friendly experience in

Goa. The hotel is strategically located just a stone's throw from the Morjim beach known for the fabled Olive Ridley Turtles and the golden sands.

The hotel will be refurbished and renovated as per the Lemon Tree brand standards in the next few months and is expected to open doors to guests by October 2018. Lemon Tree Hotels now has a development

pipeline of 3096 rooms in 27 hotels across 22 new cities of India.

Lemon Tree Group operates three brands - Lemon Tree Premier (upper midscale), Lemon Tree Hotels (midscale) and Red Fox by Lemon Tree Hotels (economy). It currently owns and operates 48 hotels in 30 cities aggregating 4900 rooms as on March 31, 2018.

The group already has two hotels in Candolim, Goa - Lemon Tree Amarante Beach Resort, a 65-room midscale resort and Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim a 34-room hotel, just five minutes from the beach. With this signing, Lemon Tree's combined inventory in Goa moves up to 210 rooms, thereby providing its discerning guests with another refreshing stay option in the city to have a relaxing holiday.

FICCI celebrates travel technology

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) held the third edition of its Digital Travel, Hospitality & Innovation Summit in New Delhi. The event saw stalwarts of the travel technology industry come under one roof to exchange ideas and vision for the future and encourage start-ups in the travel technology segment.



Air Arabia to expand network

The year 2018 is all about expansion for Air Arabia as it plans to connect India with Russia, and increase its frequency of operation to Azerbaijan.



The airline is planning to offer double daily flights into Moscow this summer with one flight to Sheremetyevo International Airport (SVO) and the other to Domodedovo International Airport (DME) airport, informs **Sachin Nene**, Regional General Manager—India, Air Arabia. “All the flights originate from airline hub Sharjah and connects to 13 Indian cities



Sachin Nene
Regional General Manager—
India, Air Arabia

“In line with increase in demand for the destination among Indians, we launched flights to Baku late last year and this year, we plan to increase the frequency from four flights per week to daily service”

with 112 flights a week,” he says. Giving insights into the Indian market, Nene explains that the Indian market is very receptive to new destinations and is keen to explore newer destinations in comparison to

visiting the same destinations again. He believes that Armenia and Azerbaijan are two destinations that will grow in 2018.

“We launched flights to Baku late last year and this

year, we plan to increase the frequency from four flights per week to daily service. This increase in frequency is in line with the increase in demand for the destination among Indian travellers. The demand has surged because of the ease of visa process. One can get an e-Visa in three working days. Also, in November last year, Armenia opened up visa on arrival for Indian travellers without documentation at the destination and started to offer e-Visas in one working day. In line with this, we saw an increase in demand for the destination on our strong network to Yerevan,” says Nene.

He further notes that the airline has recorded growth in the MICE segment from India though leisure travel is already a strong segment for the airline. “Since we fly to 13 cities in India and most of our flights arrive at the same time into Sharjah, we are one of the biggest MICE operators in India,” adds Nene.

AIE to start ops from Kannur

Air India Express has requested the Kerala government to allow it to be the first airline to start flights from Kannur airport, set to open this June.



The core strategy of Air India Express (AIE) for 2018 will continue to be on tried and tested niche markets connecting Tier-II cities to the Gulf and Singapore. Sharing plans for the new year, **K Shyam Sundar**, CEO, Air India Express, said that the airline will look at adding one or two more destinations in South East Asia.



K Shyam Sundar
CEO
Air India Express

“The two aircraft we will induct is going to be operated to and from Kannur and connect it to about five Gulf destinations”

Nevertheless, the focus for the LCC will be Kannur, located about 90 kms north of Calicut, which is slated to get a

brand new international airport this year. Sundar says, “The focus market for us in 2018-19 will be Kannur. We expect the new airport to be functional by June 2018. We have requested the Kerala Government to allow us to be the first carrier to operate international flights from the new airport. In fact, the two aircraft we are going to induct is probably going to be largely operated to and from Kannur. We intend to connect Kannur to about four to five destinations in the Gulf.”

Kannur is an extremely important market for AIE. The new airport is a PPP project and will be larger than the one in Calicut in terms of runway length. It will be a table-top airport. Sundar also revealed that AIE will make its four-month old non-stop Madurai-Singapore flight to a daily in the summer schedule.

2018 targets

The airline is currently in the process of aircraft refurbishment for its 17 aircraft. Sundar expects revenues to increase by 6 to 7 per cent. “Our passenger carriage will be up by about 15 per cent. The large difference between revenue and passenger carriage tells its own tale about what’s happening to yields on the India-Gulf-India sectors. We expect the Passenger Load Factor (PLF) to reach up to 78.5 per cent and a revenue increase of about 15 per cent. I hope the fuel rate stays between `70-75 this year,” he added.

AccorHotels' offerings for India

Attended by over 1200 delegates, AccorHotels Showcase 2018 was recently in Mumbai and Delhi. The daylong event was packed with networking sessions where attendees discovered the group’s newest offerings including accommodation trends, hotels and resorts, and met with hotel representatives from across the region.



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