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- Two nights accommodation in Bangkok
- *Arrival day breakfast en-route to Pattaya from Airport (TravelBullz Exclusive)
- Coral Island Tour with Indian Lunch
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- Bangkok Hotel to Suvarnabhumi International Airport Transfer
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Hong Kong & Macau Delight - 5N/6D

PACKAGE INCLUSIONS:

- Three nights accommodation in Hong Kong
- Two nights accommodation in Macau
- Full Day Disneyland Tour
- Full Day Ocean Park Tour
- Hong Kong by Night Tour with Symphony of Lights
- Indian Tea & Samosa during Night Tour (TravelBullz Exclusive)
- Hong Kong to Macau Ferry Ticket - One way
- Hong Kong Airport to Hong Kong Hotel Transfer
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Business as usual at Taj

Bearing the brunt of negative publicity, the Taj Mahal has been listed as a no-go destination in 2018 by foreign media. Amidst confusion, if one should visit the Taj this year as the monument is undergoing 'mud therapy', **TRAVTALK** speaks to industry players to clear the air about how this should not deter tourists.



TT BUREAU

One of the Seven Wonders of the World – the Taj Mahal remains at the top of the bucket list of discerning travellers. However, for the Taj Mahal to continue to charm visitors with its beauty and architecture, the monument needs to undergo timely conservation process. Undertaken by the Ministry of Culture and Archeological Survey of India, the Taj Mahal is to be restored by way of a 'mud therapy'. Foreign tourists have reportedly taken a backseat in visiting the monument this year, owing to a false notion that a perfect photographic view of the Taj will be ruined due to the ongoing conservation process.

Clarifying the process, **KJ Alphons**, Minister of State (IC) for Tourism, Government of India, says, "I visited the Taj Mahal two weeks ago along



KJ Alphons
Minister of State (IC) for Tourism,
Government of India

with my family and only a small portion of the Taj Mahal was being renovated. The Taj is made to look more beautiful with the mud treatment. They are trying to remove all the pollution and restore the marble to its original glory. The renovations are being done in different phases and the final process will be undertaken in November. But, it's planned in a way that it does not diminish the experience of the visit."



Dr MK Bhatnagar
Superintending Archeological
Chemist, Northern Zone—ASI, Agra

Dr MK Bhatnagar, Superintending Archeological Chemist, Northern Zone—ASI, Agra, who is spearheading the conservation process, points out the bizarre nature of this advisory in foreign media as the renovation work has been in process for over two years. "All monuments undergo conservation process and I don't see why the Taj has become such a controversy." Detailing the process of the



Pronab Sarkar
President
IATO

therapy, Bhatnagar clarifies it for all to know. "Just like we use fuller's earth for daily cleansing purposes on our faces, similarly, a mixture of it is spread on parts of the monument and allowed to dry for a few days. Once the mud dries, the treated area is washed off with distilled water. This therapy is very useful in cleaning the marble of dust and curing the yellowing of the marble," he says.

Bhatnagar further informs that till date, work on four minarets, the marble pedestal walls and eight octagonal shaped facades has already been completed. Now, the four chattris at the roof top and the main dome is yet to be treated. "Though localised treatments have been undertaken from time to time, till date no full-fledged conservation process had taken place at the Taj. In fact, many tourists have visited the Taj to witness this treatment. Before the mud-therapy, there is a need to conduct a load bearing test to determine how much weight of the scaffoldings the dome can take. It is only after that we will begin the work."

Given the schedule of the process, Bhatnagar believes that the conservation work will be completed before

the peak season at Taj Mahal. "An official schedule of work in progress was released to clarify all misconceptions. Also, the process is done in phases and at no stage will the entire dome be covered with mud." The Taj Mahal is not going to be closed except on Fridays, a similar advisory has been displayed on the website of the monument.

Pronab Sarkar, President, IATO, adds, "On IATO's request to MOT, the ministry has taken out a letter which says that the maintenance work which is going on at the Taj Mahal will not hamper any visits to the monument and the tourists can visit it without any problem. They have even given a schedule in what phases the maintenance will be done. No tourist movement will be affected owing to the same."

Strong demand for GST reform

Ahead of the upcoming Union Budget 2018-19, the trade demands a higher budget allocation for infrastructure and hopes for GST reforms to ease day-to-day business of tour operators and hotels.



TT BUREAU

"We expect a higher budget allocation for the tourism sector to undertake extensive promotional activities, develop and promote new destinations. Relief in GST for tourism is awaited as per the recommendations of FAITH. Previously, the government had promised to recognise five tourism zones which are yet to be launched. The government needs to encourage private investment by giving attractive subsidies to investors for infrastructure development and employment generation. Under 'Dekho Apna Desh' campaign, the government should focus on domestic sector by allowing tax free tours."



PP Khanna
President
ADTOI

"I wish the corporate tax structure is further rationalised for the MSME, since the GST system is well in place. The government should look at giving us 'Industry' status and offer incentives to companies which are regular tax payers and in the highest tax slab. There is inconsistency in regulations between the Centre and State for tourism. We need a simpler Centre-driven initiative to bring all states on a common platform to further the government's objective of ease of doing business. The overall taxation on tourism and hospitality sectors need to be restructured and lowered so as to stimulate growth and make India competitive."



Mahendra Vakharia
India Travel Award winner
and President, OTOAI

"TAAI sits on the board of FAITH (Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality). We were invited to attend the pre-budget meeting on December 6 with the Finance Minister, where we raised several points such as export status for tourism, IGST unlocking for hotels, B2B credit for tour operators, etc. For IGST and export status, they have recommended approaching the law team of GST. Credit for tour operators and 18 per cent on rides is done in the GST council meeting. TAAI has also requested to make aviation a more transparent industry and recognise agents as principals. We will definitely be recognised as an industry."



Jyoti Mayal
Hon. Secretary
TAAI

Contd. on page 8 ▶





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Digital date for Incredible India

KJ Alphons, Minister of State (IC) for Tourism, India, launched the Incredible India digital calendar in New Delhi recently. The National Tourism Policy and the Incredible India 2.0 website is expected shortly.



KANCHAN NATH

Summoning discerning travellers from across the world to visit India in 2018, the Tourism Minister unveiled the Incredible India desk, wall and digital calendars. The Incredible India digital calendar application enables users to know about the events and festivals happening in India on the go. It can also be used as a personal planner. The digital calendar can be downloaded on Android and iOS platforms. Each leaf of Incredible India wall calendar 2018 has been crafted using illuminating paints that would glow in the dark, showcasing 12 monuments including the Taj Mahal, India Gate and Char Minar at night. The desk calendar profiles 12 different kinds of travellers and sug-



KJ Alphons
Minister of State (IC) for Tourism,
Government of India

In 2018, the tourism ministry would like to sustain and increase the growth in FTAs by 25 to 30 per cent

gests the appropriate destinations for them, highlighting

various Indian landscapes from all regions.

India's foreign tourist arrivals in 2017 have been 15.2 per cent more than last year, while the global tourism industry has been growing at 3.9 per cent, Alphons said, adding that in 2018, the tourism ministry would like to sustain and increase the growth in FTAs by 25 to 30 per cent.

Giving a low-down on the Ministry's plans for the year, Alphons said, "In 2018, we expect the whole world to come and see India. Our new tourism policy should be on the anvil soon enough. The Incredible India 2.0 is going to be launched this year and the website will be launched soon. Special tourism zones will be set up. We also had a meeting on the Buddhist

circuits and how we should create infrastructure at these centres to get more tourists."

On launching a digital calendar for the first time, Alphons said, "The digital calendar will be a very dynamic one where you will get updated pictures every day. We want to keep up with technology and thought to do something very innovative. Therefore, for the first time in the wall calendar, we are showing India at night. You get a feel of the monument under moonlight. Photographs have been enhanced using radium ink."

India at night

Each leaf of Incredible India wall calendar 2018 has been crafted using illuminating paints that would glow in the dark

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VIEWPOINT

GST flag for Budget

While Union Budget 2017 saw the industry fretting over how the GST regime would come into effect, it was finally implemented on July 1, 2017. And now, in the 2018 Budget, the industry is still coping with the GST after-effects. While the GST council did address the initial issues of hotels, including the reduction of GST from 28 per cent to 18 per cent for hotels priced under `7500, there seems to be no such respite for tour operators. The travel agents are still hoping for the government to look into the overall 5 per cent GST levied on tour packages, despite individual services being already taxed in the package. This cascading effect, according to inbound operators, make the package expensive, which in turn makes India a costlier destination as compared to its neighbours. Another issue is the lack of clarity over how outbound packages would be treated in this scenario. Outbound tour operators claim that their packages do not fall under the purview of GST since they are not offering any services within the country. However, the decision on the same is still awaited and we hope that Union Budget 2018 will address this.

The ASEAN connect

This Republic Day witnessed 10 heads of ASEAN countries in attendance, who were also here for the ASEAN summit—an opportunity that saw India discussing various policies with these nations, including tourism. While more Indians are travelling to these countries in the past few years, they still make up only 3 per cent of visitors to the region. The nations could come together to focus on building the ASEAN tourism sector together. In fact, Buddhism is what connects all of them, especially with India being the centre of most Buddhist sites. Most of the ASEAN countries have many followers of Buddhism, who are potential tourists for India. India's MOT has already put a Buddhist circuit in plan, but infrastructure and connectivity are still an issue. There is also the India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) trilateral highway under construction, which would extend from Moreh in Northeastern India to Mae Sot in Thailand and is expected to be completed in 2020. While it might address the travelling woes between these nations, Buddhist tourism still has a long way to flourish between ASEAN.

Weddings marry experiences

To stay relevant in the wedding space, one needs to evolve and stay ahead of the curve. Adopting technology in this space will make the process of implementation much more effective, says **Maresh Shirodkar**, Managing Director, Tamarind Global.

The wedding business is extremely demanding and customisation is required in every aspect when dealing with families. This business is a growing vertical for us and the size and scale of weddings is evolving with newer trends. The beginning, namely the pitch, is what I enjoy. It is when you meet the family for the first time and they are assessing you and your abilities. From then on, once we are on board, the entire journey up to execution is what is exciting. Our weddings team has expanded considerably in the last year with growing business needs.

Fortunately, weddings are a recession-free business in India and the variances in spending may occur with budget cuts. While tax percentage on rooms is up, the percentage on F&B is definitely down. Hence, there is no major concern for a direct impact of GST on wedding spends.

Experiential weddings

Hybrid weddings are the new thing this season

where larger functions like engagement, wedding and reception are in the family hometown and a smaller select group is taken to an exotic destination for the sangeet, mehendi, cocktail and other peripheral functions. Nowadays, clients are putting less emphasis on decor and more on experiential elements like food and entertainment. Earlier, the regular format was three nights, but due to various reasons such as frequency of weddings, escalating costs and pressure of entertaining guests for longer, most people tend to stick to a two-night format.

More demanding than ever

I feel positive about the next few years during which there will be wedding curators who will stand out rather than the abundance of 'wedding planners'. The business of weddings will get even more demanding and clients will keep asking for new destinations and value for money propositions. However, the cumulative value

turnover for weddings will always be fairly exponential. So to simplify it, weddings and the events business will always remain in a bull phase especially in India. To stay relevant in the wedding space, one needs to evolve and stay ahead of the curve. Adopting technology in this space will make process implementation much more effective.

Clients prefer hotels that are well connected, preferably accessible by one flight and under hours travel time. There are often elderly guests and family on the guest list who are not comfortable with tedious travel. Another reason is the two-day wedding format can only be achieved if the travel time is not extensive. If the destination is too far, a third night is added and costs go up. Hotels in India and South East Asia also understand Indian hospitality and our food requirements which are critical for Indian weddings.

However, hotels must have professional event

managers on payroll who can focus on weddings and event-related requirements as just sales and ops managers at unit hotels will not be enough to cater effectively to the complicated needs of the families. Flexibility of buy-outs and outside catering along with having qualified Indian speciality chefs always helps.

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

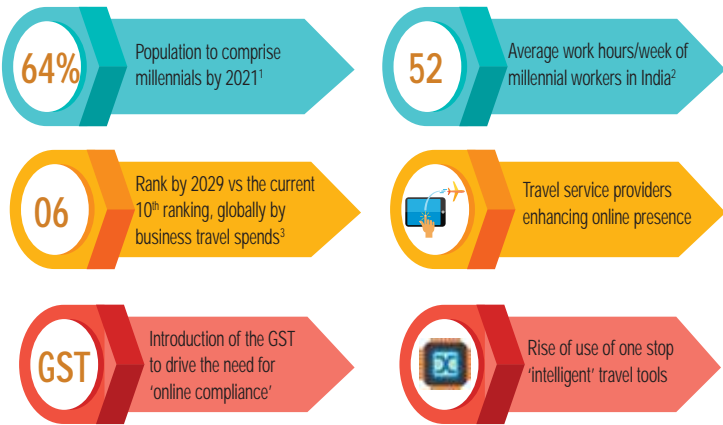


Maresh Shirodkar
Managing Director
Tamarind Global

Trade techs the AI way to future

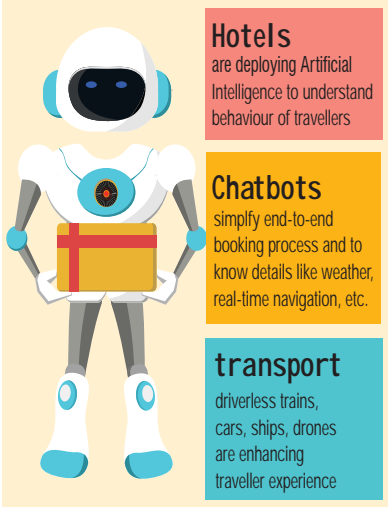
Indians are using technology to book their travel more than ever before. The emergence of AI, Self Booking Tool (SBT) and Blockchain is also making Indian travel managers use the digital platform as a mainstay in day-to-day business.

Factors driving digi-smart business travel in India



1. Economic Survey 2013 - 14, Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India, February 2013
2. Millennial Careers - 2020 Vision, Manpower Group, May 2016
3. Business travel in India - Emerging Trends and Opportunities, FCM-KPMG Report, January 2017

Uses of AI



Source: The Digi-Smart Indian Business Traveller, FCM-KPMG Report, 2018

Publicity is key to attract tourists

After signing actor Priyanka Chopra as its brand ambassador, Assam is focusing majorly on publicity and marketing its offerings, reveals **Jayanta Malla Baruah**, Chairman, Assam Tourism Development Corporation.



NISHA VERMA

Tourism in Assam is moving beyond wildlife and rhinos as the tourism board is exploring more offerings in the state, says **Jayanta Malla Baruah**. "Earlier, we were only promoting wildlife tourism and rhinos, but now we are promoting river tourism, golf tourism, tea tourism, heritage tourism, tribal

Their main focus this year would be on marketing and promotion. "After signing Priyanka Chopra, we have shot TV commercials and other radio jingles. The marketing has already started in both national and international TV channels as well as outdoor campaigning. We are targeting some specific cities,

states and countries, where we have already started our campaigns, and I am hoping many tourists would visit," he adds.

Giving a low-down on how the central and state governments are aiding them, Baruah says, "We are getting a lot of support from the Government

of India because they have already given us more than ₹250 crore for the development of infrastructure in the state, through wildlife circuit, heritage circuit, PRASAD scheme, etc. The state government gives a lot of funds in the tourism sector too. We have invested a lot in publicity and tourism would only grow."



Jayanta Malla Baruah
Chairman, Assam Tourism
Development Corporation

Earlier, we were only promoting wildlife tourism and rhinos, but now we are promoting river tourism, golf tourism, tea tourism, heritage tourism, tribal tourism and other sectors

tourism and other sectors. To promote that, we have appointed actor Priyanka Chopra as the brand ambassador and we are aggressively starting our campaign in national and international media. We hope that our tourism sector will boom in the near future," he said.

Baruah reveals that in October last year, Assam Government adopted Assam Tourism Policy 2017. "Under this policy, we have given many incentives to investors who were interested in putting money in the tourism sector in Assam. In film tourism sector too, we are offering incentives and other subsidies as well. Thus, we are expecting many investors to come to Assam and invest in travel sector and film tourism. Thus, I hope this tourism policy would help us in the future."

While the current financial year figures were not available for Assam, Baruah says, "In 2016-17 more than six lakh domestic arrivals to the state were recorded, while the foreign tourist arrivals were around 37,000-40,000. We are expecting that it will double or triple this year."

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Expectations from Budget 2018-19

► Contd. from page 3

“We want that for tourism, the cascading effect of GST should be controlled. The five per cent tax levied on the entire package along with individual services in the package, which are taxed separately, should be done away with. This is making the package costlier for the customer. Secondly, tourism should have same exemptions as export business. On exports and services in tourism, the GST exemption should be the same, because GST is supposed to be one tax, which is not the case. When foreigners are taking services against foreign exchange GST is levied but for goods sold abroad there should be no GST.”



Pronab Sarkar
President
IATO

“We are quite optimistic that this year’s Union Budget will focus on tourism sector as the government is keen to generate employment and increase revenue. We are grateful to the GST Council for allowing input credit to tour operators who are buying products from other tour operators on the lowest slab of 5 per cent. However, if the government really wants to help the tourism industry then they must exempt services provided to foreign tourist based on the foreign exchange earnings because whatever tax the government charges to foreign tourists it amounts to exporting of taxes.”



Subhash Goyal
India Travel Award winner
and Hony. Secretary, FAITH

“To encourage domestic MICE, five per cent corporate tax reduction should be announced for companies conducting their annual meets, staff meets, etc. in India. Incentives/ income tax reduction needs to be given for corporate companies conducting meetings in India. We expect lowering of 28 per cent GST to 18 per cent on hotels charging tariff of ₹7500. There is a need to enhance the Incredible India website to feature among the world’s top 10 popular websites. The Government needs to encourage tour operators to remain in business by giving lowest tax slabs and incentives. The present multiple GST system in B2B and B2C segment needs to be removed.”



Anish Kumar PK
President
ATTOI



EM Najeeb
India Travel Award winner
Chairman–Southern Region,
IATO

“GST is hailed as the biggest tax reform of India. The implementation to this tax structure caused disruption initially, but it is gradually settling down. I feel that still there is enough space to reduce the corporate tax to encourage and enthuse the corporate sector to work hard and earn due returns. If the corporate landscape is cultivated and supported with reduced corporate taxation, more business would come up increasing the revenue to the government. It is time to make the GST regime more reasonable, for which the GST council has to be mobilised.”



Anil Punjabi
Chairman, Travel Agents
Federation of India
(East India)

profit, offer tax incentives on hotel construction and allocate more funds for new tourist trains and building roads to tourist destinations.”

“India is planning to cut taxes on travel and tourism in the Budget to boost domestic tourism. In an age of strong competition from global destinations, tax rates should be on par with global standards to inject viability into the sector. The uniformity of taxes across states is also vital in this context. The budget is also expected to significantly raise allocations for tourism infrastructure and raise income tax exemptions on investments in new hotels. This shall incorporate lower income tax on corporate



Nilanjan Basu
Joint Secretary
Travel Agents Association
of Bengal

“The Indian travel packages have become expensive with GST and are unable to compete with the prices of holiday packages offered by other countries. Currently, we have to pay around 30 per cent tax for an Indian package whereas only 10 per cent tax is payable for Singapore and Thailand. This difference in GST tax structure is hampering steady business flow. A large chunk of hoteliers and service providers are still not under the purview of the new tax scheme. Besides, we need more rooms in various destinations to generate more business even on the domestic tourism front.”

Contd. on page 10 ►

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4 FESTIVE ADELAIDE

South Australia was named Best Event State for the second year at the 2016 Australian Event Awards. In January, February & March, when nights are at their longest and balmy, Adelaide enters party overdrive. In the space of a few months, Adelaide hosts the massive Adelaide Fringe Festival, Adelaide Festival of Arts, WOMAdelaide, Tour Down Under and Clipsal 500 Adelaide. It doesn't stop there. The Cabaret Festival and Guitar Festival warm up the very mild winter months, while OzAsia, the Adelaide Film Festival and Feast Festival kick-off in spring.



2 DELICIOUS LOCAL FOOD

Bite into a smorgasbord of fine food and wine. In South Australia, exceptional food and world-famous wine are a way of life. Adelaide is a culinary playground with a delicious mix of fine dining restaurants, award-winning cafes, bustling food markets and booming boutique bars. Indian, vegetarian and global cuisines are happily available everywhere you go.

5 BAROSSA CHEERS

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Day 02: Adelaide: After breakfast at the hotel enjoy panoramic city tour. Visit the Gouger St Restaurant precinct and Adelaide Markets, the Adelaide Zoo, the Adelaide Oval, Haigh's Chocolate Factory, The National Wine Centre and much more. Overnight stay at the hotel (B)

Day 03: Adelaide - Barossa - Adelaide: After breakfast, enjoy Grand Barossa with Hahndorf tour. Just over an hour's drive from Adelaide brings you to a choice of over 80 cellar doors in the Barossa. Enjoy a two course lunch at Barossa Chateau, followed by a tour of the Hermann Thumm Collection in the

Chateau's private museum. Travel through the Adelaide Hills dotted with quaint villages to Hahndorf, Australia's oldest German settlement. Return to Adelaide via the delightful village of Bridgewater. Overnight stay at the hotel (B, L)

Day 04: Adelaide - McLaren Vale - Adelaide: After breakfast enjoy the McLaren Vale Winery Experience tour. Enjoy the scenic drive through the beautiful mid-south coast with its glistening views of the Gulf St Vincent and pristine beaches. Pass through rolling vineyards and visit local wineries for wine tasting. Best known for Shiraz, Grenache, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay as well as Spanish and Italian varieties such as Fiano, Vermentino, Tempranillo and Sangiovese. Travel back to Adelaide for overnight stay at the hotel (B, L)

Day 05: Adelaide - Kangaroo Island: After breakfast, depart Adelaide and enjoy a scenic trip through Fleurieu Peninsula to Cape Jervis where you will board the Sea link ferry for the 45 minute journey across Backstairs Passage to Kangaroo Island. On arrival in Penneshaw, join Scenic Kangaroo Island Trail tour including Remarkable Rocks, Seal Bay Conservation Park, Hanson Bay & Admirals Arch. Overnight stay at the hotel (B, L)

Day 06: Kangaroo Island - Adelaide: Breakfast at the hotel. Rest of the day at leisure. You enjoy this unique island on your own till return journey to Adelaide. Overnight stay at the hotel (B)

Day 07: Adelaide: Breakfast at the hotel. Free time till transfer to airport for your flight to next destination. (B)

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Will the Budget look up?

► Contd. from page 8



Tushar Kanti Ghosh
Executive President
Eastern Himalaya Travel and
Tour Operators' Association

“Tourism has mostly survived on the dynamism of entrepreneurs who have strived to make the industry the second largest in the country today. However, the government does have a big role to play in promoting the industry and giving it that extra push to help make it the largest in the country. As the government gets ready to place the Union Budget, we, the stakeholders in the tourism industry look forward to a positive budget mostly in terms of cutting down of taxes, making GST minimal, increasing investments for promotion and building infrastructure. With taxes getting minimised the industry will receive a big boost to strive forward in generating more employment.”



Bharat Bhushan Altree
India Travel Award winner
and Managing Director,
Capar Travel Company

for provision of tourist police and its effective implementation; stricter laws required for unregulated tourism activities at several tourist spots.”

“The current tax system is going through a major change by implementation of GST and merging all taxes. However, the implementation and e-filing is not in proper order. It should be more flexible and tax-payee friendly. It would be better to simplify the procedure to get revenue for the country. My expectation from the Finance Ministry this year is that he considers relaxing road tax, give more incentives to tourists, and simplify getting permits. They should lay more emphasis on better accommodation at touristic places, connectivity, hygiene, security, etc. for more inflow of tourists.”



Iqbal Mulla
India Travel Award winner
and Chairman, Treasure
India



Shashank S Mishra
India Travel Award winner
CEO, Sports Connect

“It will be exciting to watch the first Union Budget post the GST rollout. Much has been in news about the government's special provisions towards the fast-growing tourism sector in this budget. It can further boost investment and employment opportunities, thus creating more avenues for SME start-ups like ours. I would be happy to see these specific measures apart from general declarations such as further simplification and rationalisation of GST slabs and rates, incentives on digital payments, and lowering of tax slabs in hotels and other tourism-related services within India to boost domestic tourism.”

“I expect the government this year to make substantial budget allocation to update current tourism assets as well as create new ones. It must consider cutting taxes on travel and tourism products, thereby giving impetus to domestic tourism growth. Hopeful, the government will relook at personal income tax slabs as well, so that people have more money to spend and they travel more.”



Haresh Koyande
India Travel Award winner
Founder and MD
World Travel Studio



Jay Bhatia
India Travel Award winner and
Director, Tulsidas Khimji Holidays

“My expectations from this year's Budget are very high. However, the top-most relief expected for travel and tourism is reduction of GST so as to compete in global markets. Due to digitalisation and online payments, another major expectation from the Finance Ministry is to seek from the banks a reduction in credit card charges for client payments received to below one per cent. Foreign exchange earnings of all type by travel agents should be treated as exports and GST and income tax should be marginal so that it encourages inflow of business into India.”

Contd. on page 12 ►

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Travel trade looks forward to Budget

► Contd. from page 10



Ashwini Kakkar
India Travel Award winner
Executive Vice Chairman
Mercury Travels

“As per the WTTC Tax Barometer, India has the highest tax in the region with 15-20 per cent. The Finance Ministry needs to make India a competitive destination by reducing taxes and eliminating complexity of GST for this industry. The government also needs to equate export benefits on goods with export benefits on tourism services. Allocate more funds for marketing, promotions, imparting skills and create a level playing field for the trade. Can we also expect an overall outlay of about ₹5000 crore for this industry versus the current ₹1750 crore?”

“There is a slight disappointment that the government did not announce any major incentive for the sector. Having said that, the infrastructure improvement of 3,500 railways lines across India and setting up of airports in Tier-II cities and dedicated trains for religious tourism will make people travel more. Knocking off the service charge on rail tickets is also a welcome move. However, between promise and delivery there is always a gap, so it remains to be seen how the implementation is done effectively and in time. Tourism zones have also been announced but the clarity on these have not been rolled out yet.”



Mahesh Shirodkar
India Travel Award winner
and Managing Director,
Tamarind Global

“The Budget has always been a non-event for the travel industry, despite tourism being one of the major employment generators in the country. Unfortunately, the travel fraternity does not have a united voice and therefore, our wish list is neither heard nor acted upon by the central government. Even six months after the implementation of GST, the travel bag has multiple categories and a lot of confusion still prevails over its implementation. I wish the budget can at least address and clarify some of the confusion and challenges faced by the tourism sector. The inbound industry will benefit from rationalisation in tax structure in hotel and restaurant business.”



Manoj Saraf
India Travel Award winner
and Managing Director,
Gainwell Travel & Leisure



Sandeep Dwivedi
COO, ITO
India Travel Award winner

“Union Budget 2018 is expected to further harness the potential of the ₹13 trillion worth travel and tourism sector that has phenomenally boosted the economic conditions of the country. The government is likely to give more incentives to propel this drive and make the sector grow even more. We are still scratching the surface of how this sector can grow with more tourism pro policies including strategic continuation of GST plan, infrastructural development through restoration of no-frill airports in Tier-II and III cities, further reduction of corporate tax rates and help domestic as well as foreign tourist arrival to grow exponentially. The Finance Ministry is also in talks of lowering the 28 per cent GST on hotel tariffs. All this combined creates a context of high growth potential for the industry through technology that is the backbone which connects and caters to most customers.”



Om Prakash Sehgal
India Travel Award winner
and Director, InORBIT Tours

“The Finance Ministry needs to reduce direct and indirect taxes and make Indian hotels competitive in terms of price and quality among Asian countries. The ministry needs to encourage rail passes within India with regional and national travel passes like Europe does. It also needs to be tax-free for inbound travellers. The government must declare incentives to develop attractions in all states, and provide incentives on investments for building budget hotels. The Budget should also address refund of tax on shopping by inbound tourists as provided by European countries as VAT refund. Introduce tax free purchase shops in cities for foreign tourists. Incentive should be provided to travel agents for promoting India.”



Shwetank Singh
VP - Development and
Asset Management
InterGlobe Hotels

“The signs of the industry bouncing back is very apparent and we are eager to see how the Budget will further augment growth. The industry has been keenly looking forward to the government's focus on incentives for the commercial real estate sector such as REITS, real estate regulatory bill and single-window clearances. We are hoping there are provisions and incentives to promote MICE based tourism, as well as Tier II and Tier III markets which are becoming attractive spots for not just cultural and regional tourism, but business tourism as well. We also hope that ad-hoc rulings such as the highway liquor ban of last year are curtailed as these are extremely detrimental to our business.”

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Reckoning power of Indian outbound

Considering that Indian outbound travellers are now a 'world force' to reckon with in terms of business provided, should they not leverage it to get a better overall deal from the host countries? We ask some industry leaders...



INDER RAJ AHLUWALIA

“Countries worldwide 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 wedding business. Host countries need to educate their staff about Indian preferences. They have to accept the fact that Indian travellers attach importance to issues such as language, food preferences including vegetarian and Jain food, time schedules, information about Indian Embassy/associations, etc.”



Mahendra Vakharia
India Travel Award winner
and President, OTOAI

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



Homa Mistry
India Travel Award winner
and Chief Executive Officer,
Trail Blazer Tours India

“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 'Indian Standards,' offering Indian-style breakfasts, Indian greetings, etc. The tour operating companies have to negotiate pricing for hotels, meals, transportation and sightseeing. What can be done further is the creation of airport and government museums, along with Indian traveller friendly opportunities.”



Nikhil Dhodapkar
India Travel Award winner
and Chief Executive Officer,
TUI India



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. The time has come when host countries realise that Indians need special attention.”



Chitra Bhatia
Managing Director
Aashman Travel

“The Indian outbound market is growing rapidly and it definitely 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. However, much more needs to be done in terms of offering 'special' packages and incentives to Indian visitors.”



Pankaj Nagpal
India Travel Award winner
and Managing Director,
Travstarz Global Group

“India is the fastest growing tourism economy in the world, and it 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.”






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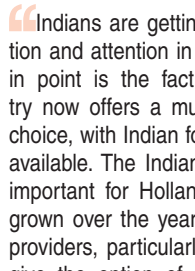
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Seema Datt
Vice President
Philippines Tourist Office,
India Travel Award winner

“With the Indian arrival figure to the Philippines nearly touching the 100,000 mark last year (99,088 Indian tourists visited Philippines till November 2017), the DOT Philippines is focusing strongly on Indian travellers. Indian restaurants for different Indian cuisines, friendly English-speaking Filipinos, and the AJACSS UK visa relaxation rules at all international airports, is further boosting Indian traffic to the Philippines. The Philippines Tourism's roadshows in India are also an indication of the increasing importance being attached to the Indian market.”



Himanshu Patil
India Travel Award winner
and 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 all right, the general treatment meted out to Indians is not good enough. The treatment meted out to tourists should not be based on skin colour. Indians should be treated on par with European and American visitors. Indian visitors have earned respect and should be given that.”

“Munich has done a lot to make Indian visitors feel welcome. The city has several restaurants, such as 'The Indian Affair', 'Indian Village' and 'Bollywood', which are offering amazing food options to Indians and making them feel at home. The Indian market is emerging as a strong and important one for Munich considering the growing power of the Indian tourist.”



Sonia Prakash
Destination Vice President
Holland Tourist Office



Eckard Kremer
Asia Head
Munich Tourist Office

VFS aims 100 governments

After recording double digit growth in 2017, VFS Global is all set to offer premium door-to-door and mobile visa services to clients and is aiming to represent 100 countries by 2020.



VFS Global recently honoured 95 countries at its 'Diplomats for Peace' event in New Delhi, in a bid to felicitate the efforts of the diplomatic community in promoting peace through tourism. VFS organised this event in association with International Institute for Peace through Tourism (IIPT).

offer like the premium lounge, mobile to mobile service that means you don't have to leave your home to get a visa and even home service, where a representative of VFS can come to your home and your visa gets done. VFS also has other services like express service, premium service, which are on offer to encourage people to travel to other countries."

Calling India a good growth market for VFS, Karkaria revealed, "We have opened new offices for the French and British embassies in India. Otherwise, we have presence in 129 countries around the world."

Journey So Far

VFS manages almost 57 governments across 129 countries and 25 million visa applicants every year

VFS Global now accepts visa applications for Ukraine in India

Residents of India wishing to travel to Ukraine can now apply for both short and long term visas at the VFS Global Visa Application Centre in New Delhi. Ukraine was recently signed on as VFS Global's 57th client government worldwide, when the Ukraine Ministry of Foreign Affairs and VFS Global signed a contract to provide visa services on behalf of the Eastern European nation across eight countries in the Africa region, Lebanon in the Middle East region, India in the South Asia region and China in September



Vinay Malhotra
COO - Middle East and South Asia, VFS Global

2017. The contract entails the launch of 10 visa application centres across these eight countries by January 15, 2018, with the one in New Delhi being the first step toward that

goal. Vinay Malhotra, COO - Middle East and South Asia, VFS Global, remarked, "It is with great pride that VFS Global announces its partnership with Ukraine. It is with even greater delight that we launch the first Ukraine Visa Application Centre in New Delhi, India. Ukraine is fast becoming a popular destination for Indian travellers and we look forward to offering travel enthusiasts in the region our best in class visa application services to ease their submission process."



Zubin Karkaria
Chief Executive Officer
VFS Global Group

We have opened new offices for the French and British embassies in India. Otherwise, we have presence in 129 countries around the world

Speaking about the event, Zubin Karkaria, Chief Executive Officer, VFS Global Group, said, "This event is basically to show people that travel and tourism play an integral part in peace and harmony around the world. Today, we have tied up with IIPT to invite the guests here to honour them and at the same time talk about humble beginnings of VFS which started 16 years ago from India. Today, we manage almost 57 governments across 129 countries of the world and we do around 25 million visa applications every year; so it is very important that we become an important catalyst in terms of travel and tourism. If you look at tourism, it is not anymore a luxury, it is more of a necessity for people to travel and the first stop is always the visa centre, and that's why we are here."

Karkaria revealed that by 2020 they are planning to work for 100 governments and offer visa services for them. "We have a lot of activities and services on

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Ears & eyes wide open to Indian needs

As SWISS completes a decade of operations on the Delhi–Zurich route, **Paurus Nekoo**, GM Sales–India, Lufthansa Group, says India is a key market for SWISS and they continuously innovate to enhance travel experience.



PEDEN DOMA BHUTIA

Swiss International Air Lines (SWISS), part of the Lufthansa Group, celebrated 10 years of operations on the Delhi–Zurich route by hosting a special walk titled 'The Delhi Seductress' featuring Mehrauli Archeological Park. The walk explored the by-lanes of Mehrauli, its multi-faceted history and architecture through visits to mausoleums, step wells as well as several other structures modified during its history. SWISS and experts from Darwesh – a travel and culture studio jointly led the event.

While such an occasion normally calls for an invitation at a five-star hotel over lunch or dinner, SWISS decided to do it differently and Paurus Nekoo, General Manager Sales, India, Lufthansa Group, on behalf of SWISS explains why, "We are proud to add another milestone to our history with India. As an airline deeply rooted in tradition and culture, we are delighted to celebrate this occasion with a unique activ-

ity that pays tribute to Delhi's rich cultural heritage. This is our way of showing our deep engagement with the people of Delhi by appreciating their culture and history."

Talking about the change in the Indian aviation scenario, he says, "Aviation, as far as international travel is concerned, is growing year-on-year and one sees a huge growth from India. Today, globally, there are very few markets that are growing, but India's aviation sector shows an exponential growth and there are many carriers coming in every year, still, there's enough business for all of us."

It is this growth in the aviation sector that has propelled India as a key market for many carriers. As Nekoo explains, "India is a key market for SWISS and over the years, we have constantly innovated to elevate travel experience for passengers to and from India. From special meals, Indian flight attendants to Bollywood movies onboard, we are committed to

"As an airline deeply rooted in tradition and culture, we are delighted to celebrate this occasion with a unique activity that pays tribute to Delhi's rich cultural heritage. This is our way of showing our deep engagement with the people of Delhi by appreciating their culture and history."

Paurus Nekoo

General Manager Sales–India
Lufthansa Group



deepen our connect with our customers by extending the very best of Swiss warmth and hospitality onboard."

This gradual rise in the importance of the Indian market is what pushes the group to constantly evolve its product offerings. "When we talk about SWISS we talk about the Lufthansa Group, we introduced Brussels Airlines in 2017, in the Mumbai–Brussels route, we got the A350s, so, the very first A350 that Lufthansa had was on the Delhi–Munich route, we also had A350 in the Mumbai–Munich route. What we have

noticed is that the Indian traveller is willing to pay a little more for comfort, reliability and connectivity and that's what SWISS international Airlines along with Lufthansa and Brussels offer."

Proud of the fact that he has an excellent team to back him, Nekoo says the legacy of the Lufthansa group is a very strong factor that adds to their success. "From a sales perspective, the most important thing is that I lead a very strong sales force which is very well known, respected and accepted by the travel agents fraternity and

corporate customers. So, we already have a huge base when it comes to our FIT customers as well as business travellers and we have the whole travel agent community, so, when we launch a new airline our past legacy makes us take this new one also forward and make it a success."

Add to the legacy, the airline also has partnerships to ensure enhanced connectivity. Ask him if partnerships or joint ventures are the future for the aviation industry and Nekoo concurs, "Partnerships and joint ventures are definitely favourable. For Lufthansa group

when it comes to North America we have the Atlantic joint venture with United Airlines and Air Canada which means that the passenger pays one fare and on that fare he can use any of these five airlines. He can go outbound on one airline and return on the other and the same is the case with our corporate offers."

Not just partnerships, the Lufthansa Group has also been at the forefront of unbundling and Nekoo says the beauty about unbundling is that the passengers pay for what they want and what they don't want. "There are certain things that a passenger needs at least on a long haul, but beyond that he/she may not be too picky about others, whereas some may want to pay extra for more legroom, lounge access or to carry extra baggage. This further fuels sales for airlines," he says.

As Nekoo concludes on a happy note, "The year 2017 has been a super year and a record year for us." 🐦

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Setting the track for luxury trains

The luxury trains business in India is valued at ` 80 crore but the tapped market is pegged only at ` 20 crore, informs **Naveen Kundu**, Founder and MD, Leisure Corp. Kundu details the path for growth of rail tourism in India and the expected role of the government in growing the business of tourism through luxury trains.

 ANKITA SAXENA

While 2016 was a slow year for The Rail Journeys, the luxury trains division of Leisure Corp., 2017 brought in better business. In 2016, The Rail Journeys sent 450 passengers on the five luxury trains in India which increased to 750 passengers in 2017. The company is

per cent of the total business. The passengers are mostly affluent NRIs and retired persons who have the time and money to spend on experiences. Kundu says, "The average cabin cost is \$6000-\$7000. The largest selling luxury train is Palace on Wheels since it's the oldest and most established. The luxury trains business is worth ` 80 crores


and currently the five trains are occupying only ` 20 crores market share."

Elaborating on the USP of the company, Kundu explains that Rail Journeys buys its inventory, consolidates it and then gives it for distribution to the local travel agents to further sell to their FTOs. He adds,

"We do not sell directly to the FTOs as we believe in increasing the fair share of the market and not just the company's market share in the business."

Identifying the path of growth for luxury trains in India, Kundu elaborates, "The government has to give up ownership of the trains and

give its operations to the specialists. It should not be put up for PPP model and thus bidding for any corporate as they may or may not be experts in the luxury trains business. The government needs to be a facilitator and help provide good policies and reduce infrastructural and operational cost to make luxury trains more affordable. Let the pri-

ivate players sell and run the trains and the profits can be shared with the government. Currently, the trains clock about 35-40 per cent occupancy which can be raised to over 90 per cent." He further says that there is a potential to start 4-5 luxury trains in India—one in Punjab, two in South India, Shimla and Darjeeling, etc. 



Naveen Kundu
Founder and MD
Leisure Corp

The government needs to be a facilitator and help provide good policies and reduce infrastructural and operational cost to make luxury trains more affordable

hoping to send at least 1000 passengers on various trains this year, informs Kundu.

"We have revolutionised the consolidation of luxury trains in India. We are trying to spread the message that India is a luxury destination, not a mass destination and the only country which has five luxury trains. On the third anniversary of The Rail Journeys, we want to acknowledge the local destination management companies who promote the luxury trains overseas to their foreign tour operators and get inbound business to India," Kundu says.

Drawing the profile of the luxury train passengers, Kundu points out that the UK and the US are the largest source markets for luxury trains in India, sharing 70

Enjoying Monopoly

Having revolutionised the consolidation of luxury trains, India is the only country which has five luxury trains

The UK and the US are the largest source markets for luxury trains in India



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FITUR broke all records for trade attendance this year, with 140,120 representatives from all over the world, more than 10,000 companies from 165 countries, and exhibition space with 65,000 m2. Held from January 17-21, the event witnessed an impressive schedule of business meetings. The King and Queen of Spain inaugurated the event at IFEMA in the presence of more than 600 ministers, ambassadors and high-level representatives from all over the world.





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Plettenberg's exciting escapades

Plettenberg Bay in South Africa's Western Cape may be a new region for Indian visitors, but it merits a few days stay, especially for those who love adventure, nature, wine, seafood and beautiful selfies!



HAZEL JAIN

While many Indian travellers already visit Plettenberg Bay, the region is still relatively new for most travellers. Plettenberg Bay has scenic beauty, adventure and luxury – three key elements that the Indian market is looking for when they visit South Africa. **Patty Butterworth**, Projects Manager, Plett Tourism, is already well-versed with the distinguishing characteristics of the Indian traveller.

Speaking about the reasons that would draw them, she says, "Many Indian travellers already visit Plett for sev-

eral days, primarily due to the many outdoor and adrenalin-inducing adventures on offer. In particular is the world's highest commercial bridge bungee at Bloukrans Bridge. The area also offers plenty of opportunity to experience wildlife, whale watching and bird-watching apart from offering animal sanctuary experiences."

Monkeyland and Birds of Eden are popular among families, children and bird lovers (which is a rapidly growing segment among Indians). Butterworth says that Indian tourists also enjoy the local hiking trails which have more than 350 different



Patty Butterworth
Projects Manager, Plett Tourism

endemic species. "Moreover, young couples love the area for its idyllic sights and viewing points. Couples and even some families enjoy self-drives to visit the growing vineyards in the area. Plet-



tenberg Bay offers breathtaking opportunities for all visitors," she adds.

Culinary options galore

Since Plett is one of those regions with a 360-degree product, it does see a good amount of traction already. "But we hope to see itineraries featuring two and three-nights in Plett alone. That said, local products do cater to the ever-changing expectations of the international tourist. The introduction of vegan options and Cape Malay flavours (traditional South African cuisine best suits the Indian palate due to the depth of flavours), and mixing with Mediterranean cuisine with beautiful, fresh seafood

are on offer. If the travel agents book in advance for Indian wine-tasting sessions, they will ask for your preferences and make arrangements," Butterworth says.

Instagram Perfect

Plettenberg Bay offers scenic beauty that makes it a must-see destination for those seeking a picture-perfect holiday. According to Butterworth, since trends indicate that young people are making holiday choices based on how their Instagram photos will look, Plett is one of those places that promises absolutely dramatic, breathtaking images. 📸



Thailand tees off tourism

Tourism Authority of Thailand recently launched a Thai Golf Passport in the presence of travel professionals from the industry to offer golfers an enticing golf experience in Thailand.



TT BUREAU

The Thai Golf Passport was launched in New Delhi by **Isra Stapanaseth**, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand, New Delhi Office, **Vani**

provide value added services, we have launched Thai Golf Passport in association with SLW Golf Management. This will help golfers to enjoy the sport in their favourite destination and help us in connecting

management company, has launched the first-ever loyalty programme for any country. "Thai Golf Passport has been launched in India to offer Indian golfers a seamless golf experience in Thailand," said



Kapoor, leading Indian lady professional golfer, **Gajendar Panwar**, Vice President, Indian Golf Travel Association, **Rohan Prakash**, Associate Vice President, Cox & Kings, and **Prashant Singh**, General Manager, Callaway Golf India, among other travel professionals from the trade.

"While Thailand is an amazing destination, India is the leading market for us. Keeping this in mind and to

with the golfing fraternity in India," said Stapanaseth. The initiative will also keep the golfers here updated on new golf venues, special offers and various events. A number of quality service providers like Thai Airways, Cox & Kings, Callaway and a number of golf courses, resorts and hotels have come together to partner this initiative, he added.

To add value to this offering, SLW, a leading golf

Anil Dev, Managing Director, SLW.

Outbound from India to Thailand is around 1.2 million. There has been an increase of 18 per cent in 2017 compared to 2016. In a bid to enhance air connectivity between India and Thailand, Tier-II cities like Chandigarh, Bhubaneswar and Delhi have already added more flights. Thai AirAsia will commence Bhubaneswar service from March 2018. 📌





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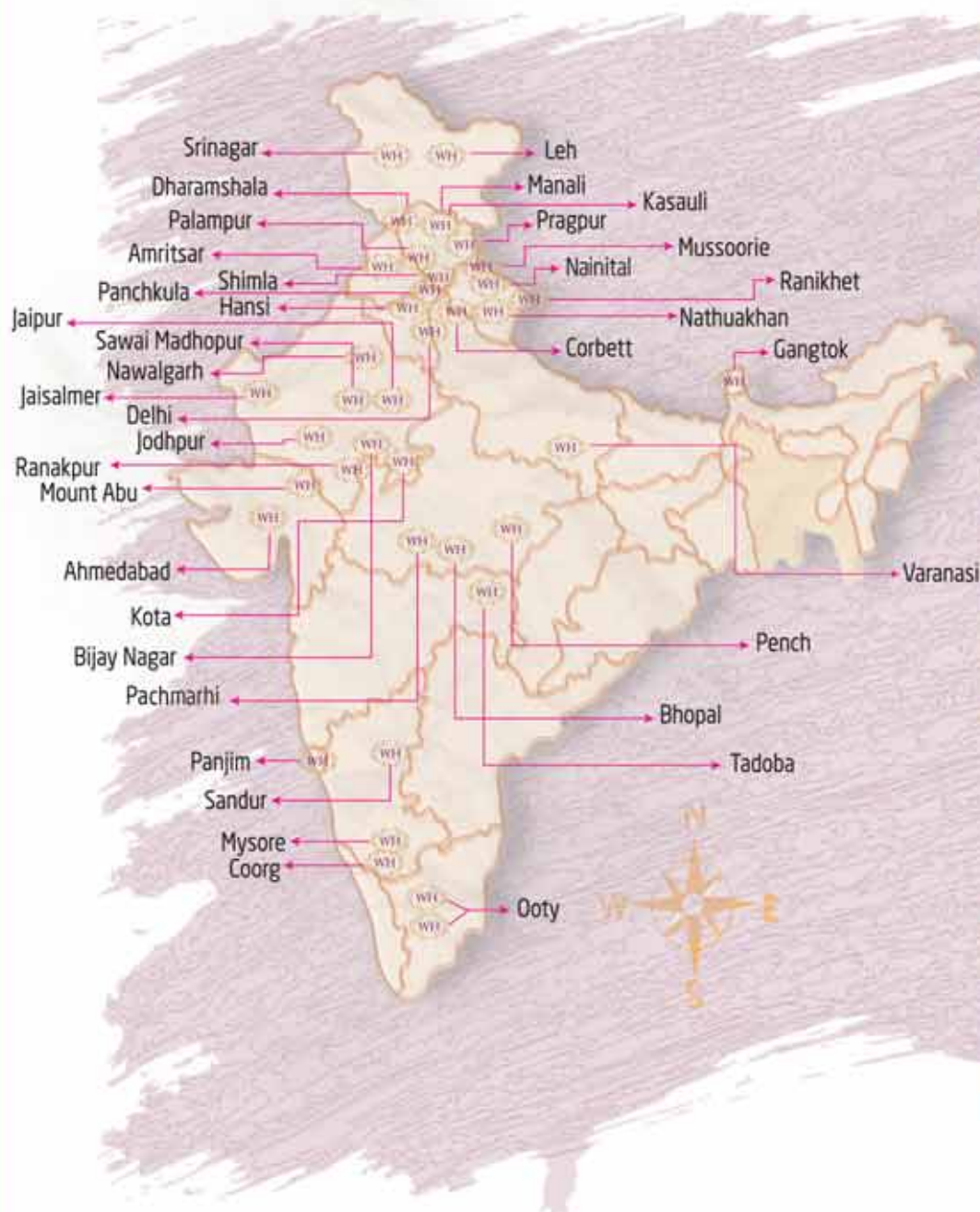








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Following the pattern from last summer, Croatia continues to be a popular choice amongst Indian travellers. Here are a few recommendations for that perfect itinerary coupled with the smooth connectivity with Emirates offering daily flights to Zagreb from Dubai.

CROATIA

Europe's historical gem

TT BUREAU

Historic cities and the beautiful coastline are some of Croatia's top attractions. This country has been passed between many kingdoms and empires, adding to its rich yet diverse history and culture. Along the coast, centuries-old towns are packed with old buildings basking in the glory of the Mediterranean sun.

In 2017, 18.5 million arrivals and 102 million overnight stays were recorded in Croatia, marking a double-digit growth from the previous year. This historic tourism growth helps the country reaffirm its position as one of the most upcoming and popular tourist destinations. Tourism contributes to over 25 per cent of the total GDP thus reassuring the country's commitment to the industry.

The vibrant capital city of Zagreb is home to museums, galleries, restaurants and shopping. The city boasts of a charming medieval old city with architecture and cobbled streets reminiscent most European capitals. The main sightseeing area is the medieval Gornji Grad. Here, attractions include the cathedral with its Neo-Gothic façade and twin steeples; the Croatian Sabor (Parliament); the Church of St Mark with its coloured tiled roof; and the tower of Lotrščak. An interesting diversion from history is the much-loved museum of broken relationships. A unique yet popular attraction is the botanical garden located in downtown Zagreb. Laid out over five hectares, the garden has 10,000 species of plants from around the world, including 1,800 exotic ones. A must-try is the popular local vegetarian pasta filled with cheese, štrukli.

A two-hour drive away from the city is Croatia's most visited inland attraction, the national park and lakes of Plitvice. The oldest and largest national park in Croatia, Plitvice lakes are internationally popular and part of the UNESCO World Heritage List. Plitvice National Park encompasses steep forested hillsides surrounding 16 emerald-blue lakes connected by waterfalls. The limestone karsts have created unbelievably picturesque lakes. The thing that strikes you the most is the clarity of the water. It sparkles with a jewel-like intensity in shades of emerald and sapphire.

Croatia offers an experience full of magic and can take you travelling through time. The cherry on the cake is the country's most glamorous tourist destination, Dubrovnik. More popularly known as king's landing from the television series, Game of Thrones, Dubrovnik's city walls and forts are sure to take your breath away. Centering on the magnificent old town, contained within sturdy medieval defensive walls, this also has been declared as

The cherry on the cake is the country's most glamorous tourist destination, Dubrovnik. More popularly known as king's landing from the television series, Game of Thrones, Dubrovnik's city walls and forts are sure to take your breath away

a UNESCO world heritage site. Best explored on foot, the charm of Dubrovnik includes fortresses, towers, and cannons along the way. From high up on the walls, you can enjoy amazing views over the old town rooftops and out across the glistening Adriatic Sea. Breathtaking and charming, the city is buzzing with love and energy, a must explore place or you might be taking the 'walk of shame'. For 15 years, Croatia popularly promoted itself with the tagline, the Mediterranean as it once was. True to that, Croatia is the picture-perfect holiday destination 'Full of life'.

Emirates' commitment to Croatia

The new route in Croatia is an important one for Emirates as it strengthens the airline's European footprint and tap into a new part of the continent – the south eastern part with Zagreb centrally located at the crossroads of Central Europe, the Mediterranean and the Balkans. "With Emirates' direct flights, Croatia will not only become the centre of South East Europe in connection with the Middle East but will also connect other countries like India, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan," says **Essa Sulaiman Ahmad**, VP India & Nepal, Emirates.



Essa Sulaiman Ahmad
VP India & Nepal
Emirates

The service to Zagreb, Croatia, is operated by an Emirates Boeing 777-300ER with a three-class cabin configuration, offering eight private suites in First Class, featuring automated sliding doors for privacy, personal mini-bar and fully inclined seats, 42 lie flat seats in Business Class and 310 spacious seats in Economy. "Zagreb is an ideal destination for tourism, leisure and Business. A very walkable city, both the upper and lower parts of the town offer visitors an insight into the past, with the 19th century style of architecture prominent across the capital. Tourists can also enjoy the parks, or visit one of the many theatres, museums and art galleries dotted around the city," adds Ahmad. This route has proven to be really popular for Indian passengers whether it was leisure, business, honeymoon or MICE travel.



Plitvicka Jezera

Art Pavillion © J Duval, The Zagreb Tourist Board

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Tapping new markets

Trip Tap Toe is working towards adding new destinations, package tours and AI-based hotel bookings to its portfolio, reveals **Karan Singh**, Business Development Head.



TT BUREAU

The year 2017 was a very promising one for Trip Tap Toe, claims Karan Singh. "It was a promising and upscale year. We were able to satisfy and retain existing clients through our impeccable service. We also built new B2C clientele and increased our B2B network," he informs.

"Beginning from North, we would now continue with East, West, Central and South," Singh says. In fact, apart from such networking events, Singh claims that they will also resort to online marketing and branding, increasing the sales force, privileged tie-ups, participation in travel events and exhibitions as well as introducing the franchisee model powered by Trip Tap Toe model.

2017 was promising

- ↳ Trip Tap Toe offers 24x7 client support and AI based hotel bookings
- ↳ The company is building a new B2C clientele and increasing its B2B network
- ↳ Travel agents can sell using Trip Tap Toe's mobile app



Karan Singh
Business Development Head
Trip Tap Toe

We also learnt a lot from agents, including their understanding about travel and difficulties in competing with the big bulls of the market

Trip Tap Toe is going big on promoting their brand and technology. "We will consistently look at strengthening the B2B network further and introduce new destinations, as well as a wide range of packaged tours around the world. Also, we will be offering 24x7 client support and AI based hotel bookings for our customers," shares Singh. The company aims to ease the process of corporate bookings. "Sales for travel agents will also become easy. Clients will have the comfort of mobile app and we'll be looking at giving competitive mark ups and best pricing to the agents," Singh says.

The company had organised an event recently for agents in Punjab and Singh claims that it saw huge attendance. "Agents came and understood the Trip Tap Toe product offerings. It was helpful to have one-to-one interaction with the agents. We also learnt a lot from agents, including their understanding about travel and difficulties in competing with the big bulls of the market," he reveals, adding that they will be planning more such events.

Parineeti goes Down Under



Bollywood actor Parineeti Chopra was recently seen experiencing Australia, courtesy Tourism Australia. She cuddled a koala, learnt to surf at the Gold Coast, got a taste of Australia's freshest produce, enjoyed a bird's eye view of Surfers Paradise on the Skypoint climb, spotted whales, watched the sunset over the Red Centre in Uluru and immersed in the aboriginal culture, and stood amidst Bruce Munro's beautiful art installation, 'Field of Light'.



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U&I Holidays on a six-city roadshow

In line with its aggressive marketing campaign, U&I Holidays conducted its six-city roadshow in Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Delhi, Pune and Mumbai. With 22 Balinese partners on board, the company apprised the local travel agents about new products on offer apart from Bali in 2018.

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This badminton game was a TAAI



The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand Chapters recently organised the TAAI Badminton League 2018 – UP Tourism Cup for its members in Lucknow. It received a total registration of 127 against last year's 89. The tournament was held at the courts of Babu Banarsi Das UP Badminton Academy, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow.

Eyeing new destinations

Welcoming the New Year with a bang, Cosmos, a division of Globus Family of Brands offering budget coach touring at destinations far and wide, has introduced a slew of tours and destinations for Indian travellers in 2018.



The Globus Family of Brands turns 90 this year and to commemorate this feat, Cosmos has unveiled 12 vacations to Europe (including budget river cruises to Croatia), four vacations to USA and Canada, and two new vacations to Asia. Cosmos' 2018 list additionally

includes some new destinations like Iceland, Portugal, Australia and Africa, informs **Varesh Chopra**, Regional Director – South Asia and Middle East, Globus Family of Brands.

"Cosmos is also showcasing its outstanding collection of eight great vacations under \$1000 for the budget

traveller. When travellers choose Cosmos, they get all the benefits of escorted travel including a greater choice of activities, plenty of free time to explore the destination the way they want with vacations starting from \$100 per day. It was 90 years ago when our founder Antonio Mantegazza purchased a rowboat to transport visitors across Lake



Varesh Chopra
Regional Director – South Asia and Middle East, Globus Family of Brands

When travellers choose Cosmos, they get all the benefits of escorted travel including a greater choice of activities, plenty of free time to explore the destination the way they want with vacations starting from \$100 per day

Lugano, Switzerland. Nine decades later, we are still continuing to have travellers pack their passion for travel and rediscover destinations in new exciting ways," Chopra says.

Some of the new tours include Idyllic Iceland; Highlights of Andalusia; Norwegian Fjord Explorer; Gourmet Tuscany; A Taste of Russia; Apulia, the Heel of Italy; Postcard from Portugal; The Splendors of Italy and Sicily; Rome, Florence and Italy; Pilgrimage to Lourdes; Venice, Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro; Spiritual Highlights of Iberia, Lourdes and Italy; Alaskan Highlights; Atlantic Canada's Coastal Wonders; Historic Train Journey; America's National Parks; Timeless Japan; Grand Tour of Sri Lanka, among others.

This year also marks the 10th anniversary of Globus Family Club (GFC), the agent loyalty programme for the Globus family's loyal and passionate travel agent partners. The company has also launched a revamped logo to commemorate the occasion.

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Polo afternoon by Neptune shines bright

Neptune Foundation, an NGO committed to the cause of the girl child and aged, hosted the 7th edition of its Polo Match recently. The event saw the who's who of Delhi's social and travel circles in attendance. Cdr CP Sharma, President, Neptune Foundation, said that the foundation's medium-term objective is to reach out to at least 50 schools targeting education for the girl child.



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GST concerns still plague agents

IATO organised its monthly luncheon recently at The Metropolitan Hotel New Delhi. The office bearers addressed various issues plaguing the members of the association. The members attended the lunch in large numbers and discussed topics related to GST, participation in trade shows and Service Exports from India Scheme.





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Winter with 1589 Hotels

1589 Hotels organised a special evening titled 'Winter is Coming' for travel agents in New Delhi where they networked and shared their plans with the industry.

TT BUREAU

1589 Hotels recently organised a get-together for travel trade in New Delhi, titled, 'Winter is Coming'. The event was organised to touch base with its hospitality fraternity and share updates about the company's new initiatives and growth plans. "We are very thankful to all the attendees to make the event a grand success, even at a very short and last minute intimation," says **Pankaj Giroti**, Vice President, Business Development & PR, 1589 Hotels, adding that they hope to host such an event every quarter.

Set up in 2014, 1589 Hotels draws its legacy from Clarks Hotels Group, and aims to cater the upscale and economy hotel segments. Giroti notes that 1589 Hotels is a professional hotel management company, with over 33 hotels and 1500 rooms. Spearheaded by **Anant Kumar** and **Udit Kumar**, the chain operates across a wide spectrum of hotels under its umbrella of brands.



Pankaj Giroti
Vice President, Business Development & PR, 1589 Hotels

In the last 90 days, 1589 Hotels has signed up and acquired seven hotels and we are committed to open one hotel or resort every month for the next six months

"Our flagship property is Brij Rama, a boutique luxury heritage experience. In the last 90 days, 1589 Hotels has acquired seven hotels and we are committed to open one hotel or resort every month

for the next six months," Giroti claims.

1589 Hotels has a very young and dynamic team, with unique approach to delivering world-class hospitality service standards. For promotional activities, Giroti says they are focusing on the digital platform, apart from having regular participation at travel trade shows and hospitality networking platforms. "We are engaging dedicated team members to facilitate our partner travel agents to make seamless reservations at our hotels or resorts," he adds.

Within the last 90 days, the company has added many destinations to its portfolio including Bhopal, Alwar, Bhavnagar, Jim Corbett, Udaipur, Mirzapur, adding on an inventory of 410 rooms to the brand's kitty. "Our target for the coming year is to add 36 hotels or resorts to the portfolio and increase the room inventory to more than 3000 rooms under the ownership, management contract, revenue share with MG," he concludes.



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| MITT | Moscow, Russia | 13-15 |
| Mumbai Trade Show | Mumbai | 14 |
| Marriott International Sales Mission | Delhi | 15 |
| Marriott International Sales Mission | Bengaluru | 16 |
| Routes Asia | Brisbane, Australia | 18-20 |
| IT&CM & CTW | Shanghai, China | 20-22 |
| FICCI Digital Travel Hospitality & Innovation Summit | Delhi | 21-22 |
| Dhaka Travel Mart | Dhaka, Bangladesh | 22-24 |
| TAAI Annual Convention | Srinagar, J&K | 27-29 |
| UITT | Kieve, Ukraine | 28-30 |

APRIL 2018

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| HISCA | Mumbai | 4-5 |
| AITF | Baka, Azerbaijan | 5-7 |
| Travel Luxury Show | Jaipur | 7-8 |
| SITT | Novosibirsk, Russia | 12-14 |
| ILTM Africa | Cape Town, South Africa | 15-17 |
| Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE) | Adelaide, Australia | 15-19 |
| Great Indian Travel Bazaar (GITB) | Jaipur | 22-24 |
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Hilton

Gurgaon

Hilton has appointed **Navjit Ahluwalia** as Senior Vice President and Country Head, India. Effective immediately, Ahluwalia will oversee Hilton's 33 hotels trading and under development, including the recently opened Conrad Bengaluru, while leading the company's growth strategy in the country. Ahluwalia brings to Hilton 30 years of hospitality experience, including over 13 years at Marriott International where he held key leadership roles, the most recent being Senior Vice President responsible for expanding the company's portfolio in South Asia.



Holiday Inn Express & Suites

Bengaluru Racecourse

Shipra Sumbly Kaul has been appointed as the General Manager of Holiday Inn Express & Suites Bengaluru Racecourse. She comes with over 17 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Prior to this, Kaul launched Holiday Inn Chennai OMR IT Expressway as the General Manager. She became InterContinental Hotels Group's first female General Manager in South West Asia. Over the years, Kaul has worked with many renowned brands like Taj Palace, New Delhi, Trident Gurgaon, Starwood Hotels & Resorts, The Leela and Royal Orchid Hotels in different capacities.



Sarovar Hotels & Resorts

Ludhiana

Sarovar Hotels & Resorts announces the appointment of **Surajit Chatterjee** as General Manager of Park Plaza Ludhiana. With over 20 years of experience in hospitality, Chatterjee brings with him experience in operation management, inventory management, customer relationship management, team management and pre-opening hotels. Prior to joining Sarovar Hotels & Resorts, Chatterjee had worked with AccorHotels as Operations Manager of Lavasa International Convention Centre while also overlooking the operations at Mercure Lavasa Hotel.



Kochi Marriott Hotel

Kochi

Sumeet Suri is appointed as the new General Manager at the Kochi Marriott Hotel. Prior to his current role, Suri was Hotel Manager at ITC Grand Chola Chennai. After beginning his career in 1999 at the WelcomGroup Management Institute, Suri joined ITC Maratha, Mumbai. He has worked at brands like the ITC Kakatiya, Hyderabad and ITC Grand Central, Mumbai and WelcomHotel Jodhpur. With his 17-year career in the hospitality industry and extensive knowledge and experience of handling multiple brands of ITC at various parts of the country, General Manager Suri is a great asset to Kochi Marriott Hotel.



The Bagh

Bharatpur

Anand Singh has been designated as General Manager of The Bagh, Bharatpur. Singh will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the heritage hotel. With around 16 years of experience in the industry, Singh possesses commercial accountability for budgeting and financial management, planning, organising and directing all hotel services. Prior to assuming his current position, Singh was General Manager, Green Hotels & Resorts. He holds bachelor's degree in Hotel Management.



Virgin Atlantic

New Delhi

Virgin Atlantic has appointed **David Hodges** as the new Country Manager for its India operations. In his new role, Hodges will drive Virgin's business at a strategic and commercial level for all sales within India. With over a decade of business development and external affairs experience, Hodges has a track record of leadership and business expansion at multi-national organisations including varied roles at London Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Brevia Consulting. Prior to this, he was Senior External Affairs Manager at Virgin Atlantic, having joined the organisation in 2013.



Sterling Holidays

Chennai

Sterling Holiday Resorts has appointed **Anand Ramchandran** as Chief Operating Officer. In this role, Ramchandran will be responsible for all operational aspects of the company with responsibility to deliver on financial performance, customer acquisition and engagement, revenue maximization, Human Resources and IT, among others. An alumnus of IIT Kharagpur and IIM Lucknow, Ramchandran brings with him rich experience of 22 years in the FMCG business both in India and international markets. He has spent 14 years with Unilever, followed by Britannia Industries. Prior to joining Sterling, he was Zonal Vice President, Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages.



Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield

Bengaluru

Sushma Khichar joins Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield as Director of Operations. Khichar brings with her over 12 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Before joining Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield, she was part of JW Marriott Mussoorie Walnut Grove Resort and Spa as Director of Rooms. Khichar began her career at The Oberoi, Mumbai as Front Office Assistant, and later moved on to The ITC Grand Maratha and Sheraton Tower, Mumbai. She has worked at several renowned brands like The Renaissance Mumbai Hotel & Convention Centre, Courtyard by Marriott, Mumbai and JW Marriott Chandigarh.



The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat

Kolkata

Payal Singh joins The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat as its Assistant Director of Food and Beverage. Trained at the prestigious Oberoi Centre of Learning and Development, Singh has specialised in Food and Beverage. Having worked with the Oberoi Group of Hotels for 11 years, Singh brings her expertise in hotel operations to The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat. Born and brought up in Jamshedpur, she has solidified her position in the hospitality industry. Singh is an avid reader and occasionally tries her hands at photography.



TALKing People

Vijay Wanchoo, Senior Executive VP & GM, The Imperial New Delhi, says travel has always been an enriching experience for him. "My most recent adventure was sky diving in South Africa where I actually felt like a bird as the sky was the limit. I have my roots in Kashmir so for me Srinagar is no less than a paradise. Shimla is equally attractive and a repeat destination as I find myself amid the tall mountains," Wanchoo says. He loves Mauritius for its azure waters and sports activities.



Vishal Jamuar, General Manager, Radisson Blu Resort & Spa Alibaug, says that he loves to travel across the country, explore new places and learn about new cultures. "Driving on the highways is my hobby. I prefer domestic exploration as international travel no longer holds charm. India offers everything in one country. I like to spend time with my family during my free time. Taking them out to the best of restaurants for authentic food is a must as my family and I are total foodies," Jamuar says. Electronic gadgets are another attraction for him.



An ambitious **Reena Chopra**, EC Member, ADTOI, dreams of building a successful business of her own and wants to be a role model for young women entrepreneurs in the travel industry. "Whenever I get time, I prefer to spend it with my daughters," Chopra admits. Her hobbies include travelling and exploring new destinations. She desires to visit Kargil and North East, while internationally she wants to explore Greece, Turkey, Kenya and South Africa.



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| 15-Feb | Thursday | Bangalore | 10:00 - 14:00 | Taj Vivanta, MG Road |
| 16-Feb | Friday | Delhi | 14:00 - 17:00 | Le Meridien |
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Hahn Air optimistic about 2018

India features among the top five markets for Hahn Air. **Kimberly Long**, Vice President, Sales & Agency Distribution, Hahn Air, tells **TRAVTALK** what makes India an incredible market and their plans to grow it further.



NISHA VERMA

Q How does Hahn Air perceive the Indian market?

We have a strong presence in India and we have established Hahn Air as the leading ticketing specialist in the market. However, we still see that there is great potential here.

We have 10 people working in India for Hahn Air and it's our largest location outside our head office in Germany. We have four Service Desks globally, including one located in India with its own dedicated toll-free number. Currently, we have 343 airlines which can be sold in this market, while Hahn Air officially works with over 350 air, rail and shuttle partners globally.

Q Why are the rest of the airlines not available for Indian agents?

Usually, it is the airlines that tell us if we can sell their flights in a market. It's their decision and, if they feel that Hahn Air contributes to their incremental revenue, they allow us to sell their services.

What is also invigorating for the Indian market is that in 2017 we experienced unprecedented growth with many new airlines joining our portfolio. There have been many changes in the Indian market last year, including demonetisation and GST. However, despite these changes, it's important to note that airlines are not seeing them as hindrances.

Q Have you signed any other airline in India after SpiceJet?

Discussions like that take a lot of time to materialise. SpiceJet is our latest Indian partner. When an airline like SpiceJet joins

Hahn Air's H1-Air network, we help them expand their business by enabling GDS connectivity. The airline must let us know in which GDSs they want to be represented.

more in the South. Hence, two years ago, we started operations in Bengaluru as well. We have seen lots of business development from Chennai and Bengaluru.

H1 or 5W in their GDSs and don't understand what they are, they can always call us. We even have a new interactive website to handle queries and address training requests.

“We have people and support teams to assist travel agencies whenever they have questions. If agents see the codes HR, H1 or 5W in their GDSs and don't understand what they are, they can always call us. We even have a new interactive website to handle queries and address training requests.”

Kimberly Long
Vice President, Sales & Agency Distribution
Hahn Air



While they might want to work with us in certain markets and GDSs, they might want to do business on their own in others. In SpiceJet's case, the partnership with Hahn Air has helped the airline become established and provided it with a greater visibility for international passengers.

Q How have you seen the Indian market grow from what it was earlier?

I joined the company three and a half years ago. And at the time, we had one person in Mumbai and two in Delhi. In my first year, we saw continuous growth, and that hasn't stopped since. One of the issues that Hahn Air faces is that not everyone knows us, as we don't have a name like other legacy carriers. Thus, we need to teach people and we need to be given the opportunity to train travel agencies, so that our reputation and trust is established. While we are well represented in Northern and Western India we realised we needed to do

ru as a result. This has really helped us.

Q How different is it working with airlines, rails and bus services?

We have more experience working with airlines, so we can implement them quicker. When we talk about rail service providers, those are more complicated. They are not setup the same way as airlines in GDSs. Nevertheless, we are still developing this area of our business and look forward to bringing more rail partners on board. The ferry business is also something that we are looking into increasingly because we have seen that in certain parts of the world, this transportation is a preferred alternative and we want to ensure our customers have that ticketing choice.

Q What would be your strategy of growth in India now?

We have people and support teams to assist travel agencies whenever they have questions. If agents see the codes HR,

ing requests. When there is trust in the market, people will automatically choose us because they understand our product and know it is good. There are other advantages of working with us too. For example, we have Securix @, which is the insolvency insurance in case any of our partners happen to go out of business. It's something that we have invested in and it's a part of our strategy to ensure travel agencies feel more comfortable issuing our partners on Hahn Air's ticket stock.

Q What are your expectations this year?

We are very optimistic about 2018 and we hope it will be a very good year for all our partners in India. We will definitely continue to support our agents to ensure strong revenue growth in 2018. Keeping the travel agents in mind, we have kicked off the year by increasing our network from 300 to 350 air, rail and shuttle partners which can be issued on our HR-169 document.

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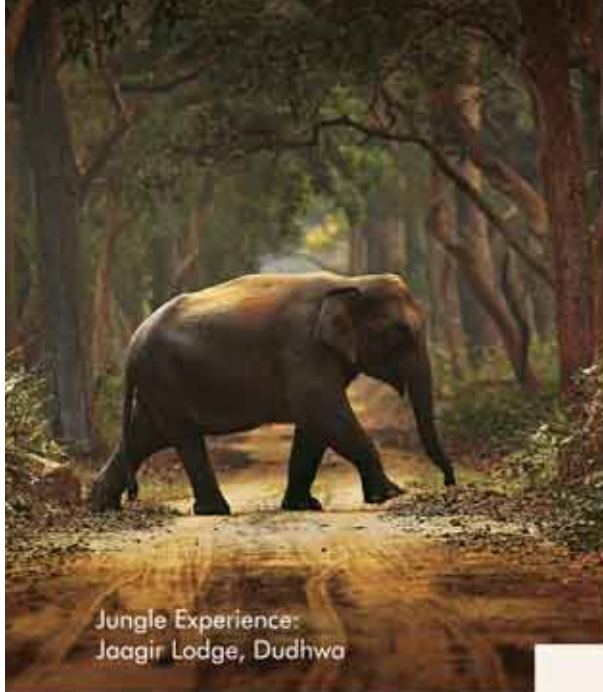
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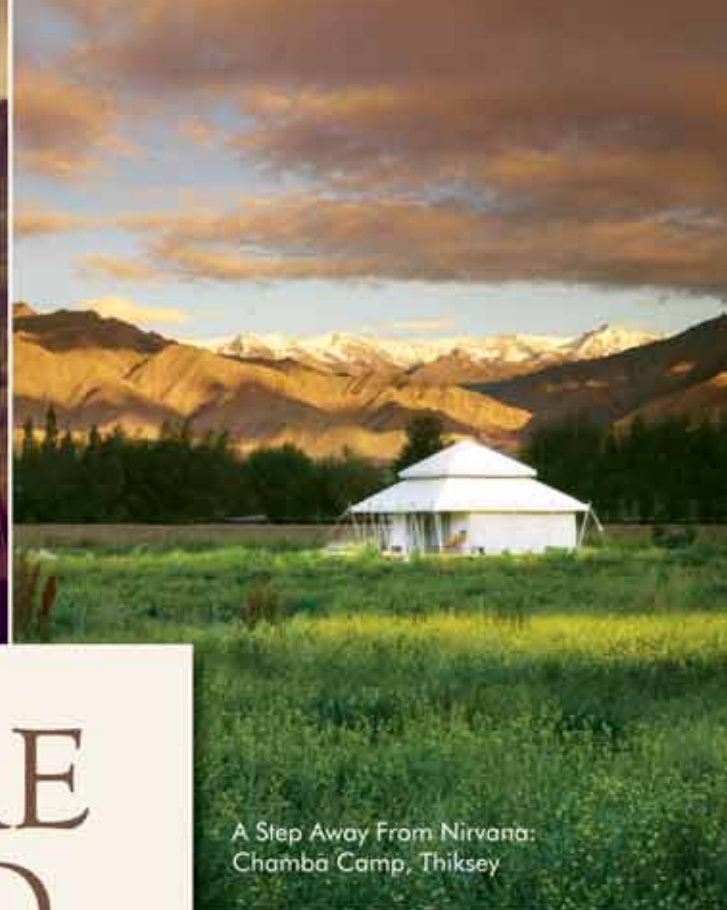
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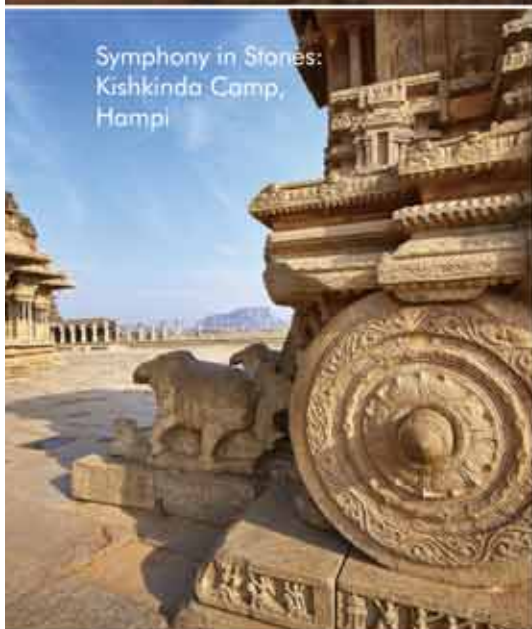
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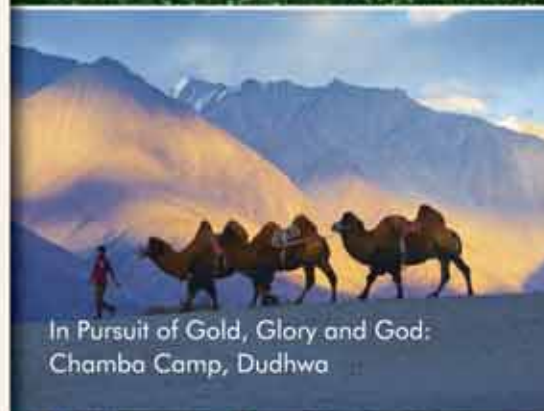
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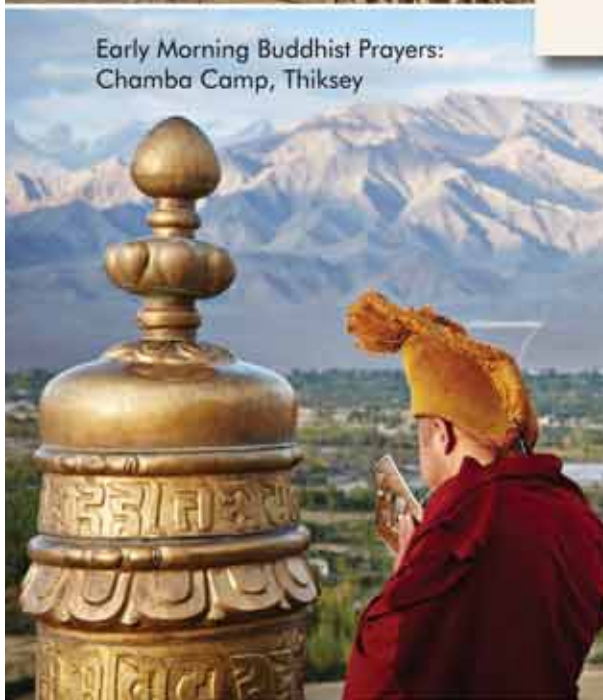
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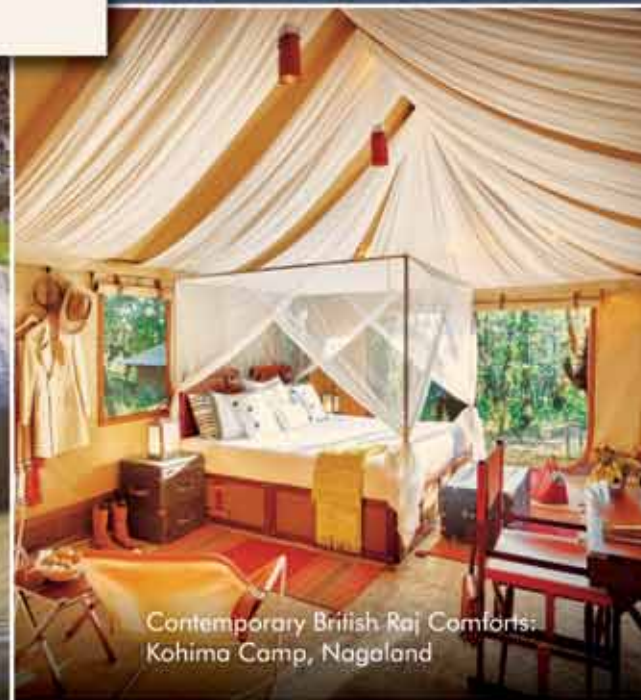
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