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World arrivals 15%, India 15%

Alphons Kannanthanam, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Tourism says the sector has the biggest multiplier effect for any economy, as for every rupee spent, you get `4 back.



he Minister was invited as the Chief Guest at an event organised by Travel Agents Association of Kashmir at The Lalit. New Delhi. Kannanthanam observed that Indian tourism did extremely well in 2017. "We crossed the 10 million mark in Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs). Internationally, the numbers are counted for every foreign national returning to India called the International Tourist Arrivals (ITAs). So if we consider that number, we have crossed the 16 million mark. Our tourism grew by 15.2 per cent in 2017, while the global tourism grew only by 5 per cent," he said. Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) from tourism grew by 20.5 per cent, a dramatic increase over last year.

Inclusive India

Highlighting the role of tourism and hospitality as a

spinner for economic development and employment, he added. "The tourism sector has the biggest multiplier effect. For every rupee spent, you get `4 back. In terms of equity, from illiterate to semiliterate, graduates to professionals to the biggest global experts, everybody gets embroiled in the tourism sector. This is exactly what the Prime Minister's dream is - not only that India has to grow but also taking the fruits of development to the last person out there. That is inclusive India."

Union Budget 2018

Elaborating on the Budget which came out the same day, Kannanthanam said, "The entire focus of the Budget this year is on bringing dignity to people, to the lower middle class, lower strata of society, to the middle class and people all around. The bulk of the expenditure goes to that strata of society

66We need to put our hearts, souls and expertise together to make Kashmir the focus of tourism in the country. Let's create a Kashmir, which is truly heaven with all its beauty, cuisine and music. If Kashmir is marketed properly, you don't need anything else but just the tourism industry to provide jobs for all the Kashmiris.

Alphons Kannanthanam Minister of State (IC) for Tourism Government of India

so that we bring dignity to their lives. Under the universal healthcare system in this country, every individual gets insured for an amount of `5 lakh. Everybody deserves a better life and needs to be taken care of."

Combat Terrorism

Sharing his recent experience at an international trip, he said, "On my recent visit to Thailand while at-

tending the ASEAN foreign ministers' conference, I was most flattered by the opening statement of Thailand's tourism minister. He had said that the underlying civilisation of Southeast Asia is Indian. That was an incredible statement for a minister to make in his own country. The theme for the frescos at the Grand Palace in Bangkok is all from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The underlying

message of tourism is bringing hearts closer. Tourism is the best weapon against terrorism anywhere in the world. It's the best tool to bring everybody together."

Jewel of Kashmir

Emphasising on the need to market Kashmir and reiterating MOT's support, he said, "We need to put our hearts, souls and expertise together to make Kashmir the

focus of tourism in the country. Let's create a Kashmir, which is truly heaven with all its beauty, cuisine and music. If Kashmir is marketed properly, you don't need anything else but just the tourism industry to provide jobs for all the Kashmiris.

Breaking Records

- Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) to India crossed the 10 million mark in 2017
- In terms of International
 Tourist Arrivals (ITAs),
 India has crossed the 16
 million mark
- India tourism grew by 15.2 per cent in 2017, while the global tourism grew only by 5 per cent
- Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) from tourism grew by 20.5 per cent, a dramatic increase over last year

Industry players react to Budget

The Union Budget 2018-19, presented by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, proposes to develop 10 prominent tourist sites into iconic destinations, focus on the UDAN scheme and work on digital connectivity at railway stations. TRAVTALK spoke with industry experts to find out their opinion on this year's Budget. None of them seemed too upbeat about it.



The tourism sector had pinned hopes on the Budget in anticipation of certain key measures such as export status to tourism industry. However, against expectations, nothing has been mentioned about this in the Budget and GST issues linger. We have been pleading the government that our taxes are much higher compared to our neighbouring countries and we need to be on a par with them. Some developments will have a positive impact such as developing 10



Pronab Sarkar President

iconic destinations, enhancing tourist amenities at 100 Adarsh monuments, expanding airport capacity more than five times.

for the Budget has nothing for aviation and tourism industry. We were looking forward to the government giving us industry status, decrease the GST, develop tourism by making it tax free or lowering the taxes. However, nothing like that has happened. The positive is that they are going to build up 10 smart cities, which would boost the infrastructure and help in tourism. Also, the airport infrastructure is going to be developed further, with which we are looking forward to more connectivity with international flights from Tier-II cities.



Jyoti Mayal Honorary Secretary

As on expected lines keeping in mind the 2019 elections, there has been nothing substantial and exciting for the SME's or salaried people in Budget 2018. However, from the industry perspective, it is heartening to note the intent to upgrade the existing airport facilities in the country to be able to handle more than five times the existing traffic. The proposal to develop 10 tourist sites across India into 'iconic tourist sites' is a welcome initiative as it will help



Mahendra Vakharia India Travel Award winner and President, OTOAI

in inbound tourism. Besides these references to tourism, this year again, the tourism industry is not given any significant impetus.

Contd. on page 4 ▶

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GST concerns plagued agents in 2017

► Contd. from page 3



India Travel Award winner and Hon, Secretary, FAITH

While the government has taken many initiatives to boost business and infrastructure, we've got a mixed reaction from the trade on the Budget. Increasing the threshold limit for corporate tax from `50 crores to `250 crores is a welcome move. Building international airports around the country, offering Wi-Fi in trains and railway stations is welcome too. Also, encouraging investment in sea plane activities would benefit tour operators. However, the government

failed to differentiate tour operators based on FEEs under GST and reduce GST from 28 per cent to 18 per cent.

Despite repeated requests for infrastructure status by the hospitality industry, it hasn't found any mention in the Budget. Among the positives is the `500 crore allocations for 'Operation Green' to promote Farmer Producers Organisations (FPOs). agri logistics, processing facilities and professional management. Post demonetisation and GST, many hotels have become Non-Performing Assets (NPAs). We still await measures by the government to deal with NPAs. In



totality, the Budget is more for the ease of living and not so much for the ease of doing business.

The hospitality sector has been once again almost entirely ignored in the Union Budget. What the government needs to realise is that 'Incredible India' will be a success only when the hospitality industry, a key driver to our economic growth, gets the right attention. Developments in ancillary sectors like infrastructure and aviation are certainly positive but that alone isn't adequate. Promoting and encouraging investments in hospitality can tion of Western India (HRAWI) place India on the map of the tourism destinations of the world.



Hotel and Restaurant Associa-



Country Director-India International Air Transport Association (IATA)

We welcome the focus on airport infrastructure capacity announced in the Budget. In our 20-year passenger forecasts, IATA anticipates India will become the third largest aviation market by 2024. But this is by no means guaranteed. To make this a reality, airport capacity in India needs to be augmented and expanded quickly. IATA is supportive of leveraging AAI's balance sheet for infrastructure creation and expansion but a big question mark lies on capacity. We urge

the government to urgently look at innovative approaches to bridge the infrastructure shortfall.

The Budget addressed a relatable need that acts as a medium for growth of the infrastructure sector. It emphasised on the government's vision to make 10 prominent tourist sites iconic tourist destinations, with an amalgamation of private funding, marketing and branding, giving a much-needed boost to domestic tourism. It is encouraging to note that in the Budget, schemes to enhance India's aviation sector were announced. Addressing issues like tax exemption benefit extended to the



Vishal Sur Managing Director

NRI holiday business for tour operators and clarification on the flexibility of transfer and grant of GST credit on hotels would create the necessary boost in the tourism sector further.



Group CEO, Cox & Kings

The government's move to develop 10 prominent tourist sites as 'iconic destinations' is welcome. Along with this, the move to upgrade tourism amenities at 100 Adarsh monuments will enhance visitor experience. All this will generate huge economic activity as it also involves infrastructure and skill development in the region. The move to expand the UDAN to over 56 unserved airports and 31 unserved helipads will

improve connectivity and help people travel seamlessly within India and overseas.

The introduction of several initia-

tives to improve infrastructure facilities

in Union Budget 2018 bodes well for

the travel and tourism sector, helping

reinforce India's image as a tourist

destination internationally. A dedicated

focus to promote seaplane activities in

the country, along with development of

heritage sites and iconic tourist desti-

nations will further enhance India's ap-



mi Gange' will provide further fillip to Managing Director FCM Travel Solutions

religious tourism from both domestic and international travellers. Overall, the budget is a developmental agenda which could have benefitted the tourism sector a little more with announcements around simplified GST.



Chairman Thomas Cook Group

We are heartened to note the focus on rural India - right from boosting the Smart Cities programme to laying down a blueprint for better connectivity through the UDAN scheme. The Budget also indicates a clear commitment to improving rail networks by announcing that all stations with more than 25,000 footfalls will have escalators while trains will be provided with Wi-Fi and CCTV monitoring facilities to ensure safety. However, what the Budget did not touch upon was the hospitality sec-

tor. We were hoping for a rationalisation on taxes for hotels.

Having great infrastructure is critical to the growth of tourism in a country. The government's focus on investing in airports to cater to one billion trips in a year is a welcome step and will help in making destinations more accessible to travellers - domestic as well as international. The development of prominent tourist sites into iconic tourist destinations is another step in the right direction and one which



Country Manager TripAdvisor India



COO (B2C)

We are happy that the Budget has laid great emphasis on infrastructure development to boost tourism. The continued focus on UDAN, railway infrastructure, building tourist corridors, enhancing connectivity by starting operations in 56 unserved airports reflects the government's commitment to the tourism sector. The proposal of generating one billion trips a year is a welcome move for the travel and tourism sector. The creation of 10 prominent tourist sites will lead to an esca-

lation in tourism. We were hopeful that the government would bring ATF under GST to reduce airline costs and keep fares low to ensure continued growth in Indian air travel market.



President & Managing Director

The Budget has sought to strike a balance between India's need for economic growth and the well-being of its citizens. Investments to improve people's health, education and skill development are vital for long-term growth prospects of a country, and the Budget has rightly focused on them. It addresses the aspirations of a modernising nation through initiatives to expand air connectivity under the UDAN scheme. The government has also announced measures to push

its 'Make in India' programme. We hope such steps will foster a sustainable eco-system that promotes investment and helps expedite the modernisation of the armed forces.



will raise India's appeal as an international tourist destination.

Partner & Head, Aerospace and

KPMG has always believed that India could surprise the world and become the largest aviation market by 2030. It's fantastic to see that the government is shifting from short term planning to a long-term vision. The focus should now shift to the execution of this challenging yet achievable vision. The industry wants jet fuel to be included under GST regime and GST relief for the struggling MRO and General Aviation sectors. The government's fo-

cus on improving infrastructure at leading tourist spots is positive. This will help grow aviation too. Overall a positive Budget for aviation.

Infrastructure development and improving connectivity will undoubtedly help the tourism sector. However, with no specifics spelled out, we are not exactly sure how it could benefit the hospitality sector. We were hoping to hear from the Finance Minister about reforms on taxation which would have made Indian tourism competitive with neighbouring tourism countries. While ease of living has been given importance to, and which is great, ease of doing business



Vice President Lords Hotels & Resorts India Travel Award winner

remained a dormant subject. This year's Budget has fallen short of expectations for hospitality.

The positives in the Budget are rail infrastructure, Bharatmala project, impetus to farmers, Heritage City Development and healthcare. The move towards solar energy and operation green are welcome. However, `60 crore to push airport capacity is not enough and nothing concrete has been done to combat pollution. The lack of relief in taxes to companies with a turnover of below `250 crores and taxing long term capital gains are also in the negatives.



India Travel Award winner and Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels & Resorts

The attempt to preserve and protect heritage cities is remarkable and might help boost tourism. Currently, the Budget is not directly indicating any impact on the hospitality sector. There might be some indirect impact, which we need to wait and watch once the policies are executed.



Shipra Sumbly Kaul General Manager Holiday Inn Express & Suites Bengaluru Racecourse

March convention in Srinagar

With an aim to promote India and acknowledge the importance of tourism, TAAI Convention 2018 will be held in Srinagar from March 27-29. The association plans to make this convention a limited-edition event.



he Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) will host its 64th Convention at Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Centre (SKICC), Srinagar with a special focus on tourism industry. Zahoor Qari, who is also Chairman, Jammu and Kashmir Chapter-TAAI, is the Convention Chairman. Sunil Kumar, President, TAAI, informs, "We are delighted that our focus this year for a convention is in India. TAAI has been a nodal body for the tourism and hospitality industry and many of our members are into either inbound, outbound or domestic tourism. We are very active in the aviation, hospitality and MICE industry but we want to convey this strongly that TAAI also means tourism. For this, we have partnered with the Department of Tour-



ism, Government of Jammu and Kashmir to present our 2018 Convention in the valley of Srinagar."

He further adds that this will be limited edition convention given the limitations of the hospitality industry in Srinagar in terms of quality five-star and four-star premium hotels. However, at least 500 delegates are expected which will be on



Mahmood Ahmad Shah Director Tourism Kashmii

first come first serve basis. The hospitality partners include the The LaLiT Grand Palace Srinagar, Vivanta by Taj - Dal View Srinagar, ITC Fortune Resort Heevan, Four Points by Sheraton, Srinagar, Radisson Srinagar and RK Sarovar Portico. The key airline partner is IndiGo among others like SpiceJet, Air India, Jet Airways, Go Air and Vistara. He says, "With the TAAI connect, we want to

announce that the return airfare including taxes from anywhere in India to Srinagar will be capped at `10,000. We will be inviting key industry players, large tour operators who have tourism as the thrust of the business. We will also bring many of our overseas members and invite UFTAA delegates to bring global leaders to India."

Mahmood Shah. Director. Tourism Kashmir, further added, "TAAI has been no stranger to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The SKICC Convention Centre was inaugurated by one of the TAAI Conventions and this year is more of a homecoming for the association. We are going to host this event after 31 years and we hope that it ushers in a new dawn for tourism in Jammu and Kashmir."









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A Budget to remember?

The industry had pinned high hopes on the 2018-19 Budget, expecting crucial changes in the GST regime. While inbound industry wanted the cascading effects of GST to be removed, outbound industry was looking for clarity on what level they were to be taxed for their services - a majority of which are availed outside the country. The final Budget rather proved to be a lacklustre for them. Other than mentioning details of the alreadyin-place UDAN scheme under civil aviation, there weren't any major policy decisions which could bring a smile on stakeholders' faces in the industry. However, the industry hasn't outrightly slammed the budget and the government's clear obliviousness towards the travel and tourism sector, but has praised the government's focus towards infrastructure, upkeep of monuments and development of smart cities. However, in the wake of the current GST regime, doing business in the tourism industry is difficult and there is a need for the Ministry of Tourism to intervene and take the issues of the tourism and hospitality industry forward.

Europe's India (in)bound

fter a successful WTM in London, and BIT Amilan still underway, the inbound tourism industry is trying its best to offer its services and offerings to the European market. With ITB Berlin just around the corner, inbound tour operators are putting their best foot forward and are already planning ahead for the next season of travel to India. While many complained about the current season not going too well owing to the after-effects of GST and negative publicity around the world, the upcoming exhibitions, both in the country and outside, might just get a good chunk of European business into the country. The Ministry of Tourism also has taken a delegation to Italy for BIT, and might take even a bigger one for ITB Berlin. What needs to be seen is how fruitful the participation would prove, especially after the marring effect of the budget with no change in double taxation, making India packages costlier than many other countries. Indian tour operators are still hoping for the European tide to turn their way.

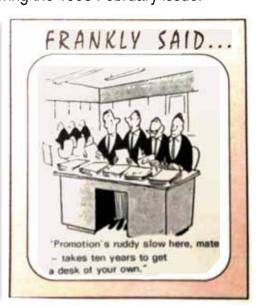
years Trav Talk

TRAVTALK brings to you the news and events that made headlines 25 years ago and are relevant even today. From the archives we bring the 1993 February issue:

State Tourism Minister's Conference

Luxury Tax to be Rationalised

- In February 1993, the state governments agreed to rationalise luxury tax applicable to accommodation units.
- The concurrence for the same was manifested at the state tourism ministers' conference held on January 15, 1993, which was called by the then Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister Madhav Rao Scindia, and was taken on schedule despite Gulam Nabi Azad taking over the portfolio post a cabinet resbuffle
- A statement by Sukhbans Kaur, Minister of State, Tourism, stated that 1992 ended with a growth of 10.9 per cent growth in tourist arrivals and 34 per cent growth in foreign exchange earnings.
- Ghulam Nabi Azad promised every possible assistance to the states and union territories.



BUDGET HOPES:

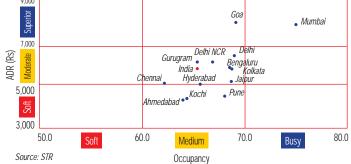
Concessions Sought to Offset Setbacks

- The hotel corporation segment was expecting significant concessions. These expectations centred on lowering of hotel expenditure tax substantially and revising the threshold limit of the room tariff to 1500 from the earlier `1200.
- Other major demand was the replacement of separate state levies like luxury tax by
- a single central impost.
- They pointed out that hotels, which are highly capital intensive projects with long gestation period, still earn most of the foreign exchange from tourism, and they need to be frequently modernised. The cost of modernisation was as much as 50 per cent of the original investment.

Brownie points for West India

Despite several setbacks in the hospitality industry like implementation of GST, hotels in Mumbai and Goa have outperformed other cities in terms of occupancy.

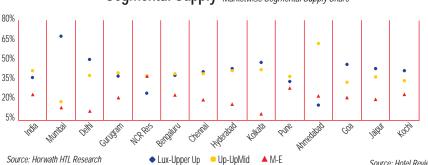




Note: 13 key markets comprise of Mumbai, New Delhi, Gurugram, Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Pune, Ahmedabad, Goa, Jaipur and Kochi

- Occupancy for all key markets and across all segments, except the Up-UpMid segment for Chennai, crossed 60 per cent. Only Mumbai maintained 70% + occupancy on market-wide basis; Goa dropped below 70 per cent in 2017
- ADR growth has been modest across most markets—Pune, Jaipur and Bengaluru have done relatively better
- Mumbai and Goa continue as leaders. Goa ADR crossed 8k; Mumbai was a shade below 8kand 6k in ADR and this is the only market in the Busy-Superior rate zone

Segmental Supply Marketwise Segmental Supply Share



Source: Hotel Review Report 2017- India, Horwath HTL and STR

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Lacklustre Budget, but hope lingers

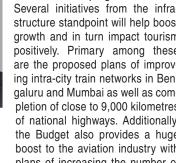


President & CEO

Overall, the Budget points towards a more progressive future. Several initiatives from the infrastructure standpoint will help boost growth and in turn impact tourism positively. Primary among these are the proposed plans of improving intra-city train networks in Bengaluru and Mumbai as well as completion of close to 9,000 kilometres of national highways. Additionally, the Budget also provides a huge boost to the aviation industry with plans of increasing the number of

airports to almost five-fold from the current numbers. Reduction in the corporate tax rate to 25 per cent for com-

panies under the `250-crore turnover mark will likely increase re-deployment of capital among SMEs.



Founder & CEO

The Budget will benefit MSMEs, including small hotels. At OYO, we have a network of over 3500 exclusively controlled hotels in the MSME sector and we believe that the budget will facilitate the growth of our partners. The Mudra Loan allocation of `3 lakh crore will help in enabling SMEs to generate more jobs. One major change which we were expecting was GST being levied on the actual price rather than the declared tariff for hotel accom-

modation. We'll continue to engage with the government to make this happen which will leave no room for litigation and benefit the hospitality industry.



General Manager

Overall, the Budget looks promising especially for the agriculture and healthcare sector and its thrust towards 'Make in India' initiative. The government is focused on progressive and healthier economy by pushing the infrastructural spend, with a major chunk going to road and rail connectivity, should be able to sufficiently assist tourism development. The government's decision of developing 10 model destinations across India and reduction of corporate tax is a welcome move.



CEO, Clarks Exotica Convention Resort & Spa

This year's Budget was more focused on agriculture and health, which is a great thing for India. In terms of hospitality, the aim to expand airports capacity by 5 times with about one billion air trips a year is good news for the industry, since it would indirectly boost the hospitality market as well.

58.5% growth in FTAs on eTV in Jan 2018 over Jan 2017

■ The number of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in January 2018 was 10.66 lakh as compared to FTAs of 9.83 lakh in January 2017 and 8.45 lakh in January 2016. The growth rate in FTAs in January 2018 over January 2017 was 8.4 per cent, compared to 16.4 per cent in January 2017 over January 2016. During January 2018, a total of 2.40 lakh foreign tourists arrived on e-Tourist Visa as compared to 1.52 lakh during the month of January 2017 registering a growth of 58.5 per cent.

The percentage share of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India during January 2018 among the top 15 source countries was highest from Bangladesh (16.36%) followed by USA (14.10%), UK (10.81%), Canada (4.63%), and Russia.



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TBO Group created history with a mega turnout of over 2300 attendees across the travel ecosystem at its ceremony where the company honoured its partners and offered a networking platform for the industry fraternity.







Legoland makes headway

With all eyes on the India market, Legoland Malaysia Resort is set to tap the outbound potential of the country, says Thila Munusamy, Director-Sales & Marketing.



Cituated just 10 minutes Daway from Singapore-Malaysia border, Legoland Malaysia Resorts is just a threehour drive from Kuala Lumpur and an hour's drive away from Changi Airport in Singapore. According to Thila Munusamy, this factor would certainly appeal to the Indian visitors to both Singapore and Malaysia. "People can come to Legoland after a tour in Singapore, and make base in Johor, enjoy the park and continue their journey towards Kuala Lumpur. A 35-minute flight also runs from Kuala Lumpur airport to Johor Bahru."

In fact, Munuswamy insisted that besides various accommodation options in Johor, people can also stay in the resort itself. "Catering to kids, the Legoland Hotel at the resort is a fully Lego-themed hotel, where we have Lego Pirate ship, Lego castle, Lego -themed rooms and artefacts." Sharing insights about the Indian market, she said. "India is still a new market



Thila Munusamy Director, Sales & Marketing, Legoland Malaysia Resort

Our focus is to increase the awareness of the exciting things we have on offer at the Legoland Resort for India market

and we are venturing into it. The number of outbound travellers from India is increasing year on year. Malaysia and Singapore have always been popular destinations amongst Indians. Hence, our focus is to increase the awareness of the exciting things we have on offer at the Legoland Resort for this market. We have done contracting with local agents in Malaysia and Singapore, who then get in touch with DMCs in India and create itineraries for Malaysia and Singapore," she shared.

Talking about the park, Munuswamy said, "Themed on Lego, the Legoland resort is divided into a theme park as well as a water park with more than 70 rides, slides, shows and attractions. We have used 60 million Lego bricks throughout the park. More than 30 million Lego bricks have been used in the Miniland where Asia's landscapes, countries and landmarks are recreated in miniature scale." Munusamy savs that they keep the park fresh by adding new attractions and rides. "In 2016, we opened the Ninjago ride, a fully immersive 4D indoor ride allowing guests to become their favourite characters and defeat enemies. The new VR coaster is a real roller-coaster with a VR experience on board. End of this year, we are also opening an aquarium called Sealife," she revealed.

STHI lands in Dehradun

STHI Group is focusing to reach out to its partners in Tier-II and Tier-III cities, and the latest step in this direction was their roadshow in Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

SIMRANJEET SINGH ARORA

CTHI Group recently hosted Otheir first roadshow of the year in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, in a bid to showcase business prospects for partners in Tier-II and Tier-III cities. Around 90 travel agents from different cities gathered to attend the event.

Lalit Singh, COO, STHI Group, said, "As Dehradun is hinterland, we thought we'd be able to get maximum number of agents and at the final conglomeration, there was a fair mix of potential travel agents and partners. The business has been showing growth from Tier-II cities, which kept us interested in cities like, Roorkee, Meerut, Haridwar, Rishikesh and Mussoorie."

Speaking about the potential of the Dehradun market, Singh added, "Every city has got a different demographic divide. We, therefore, can't say if Dehradun



The business has been showing growth from Tier-II cities, which kept us interested in cities like Roorkee. Meerut, Haridwar

has more potential than any other Tier-II city. In Dehradun, travel agents are more educated as compared to those of other Tier-II cities. This makes it easier for us to understand the demand of the market and hence.

provide better services." Travel trends in the Indian market are constantly changing. "People generally prefer short haul destinations, however once educated on long haul destinations, they've shown keen interest on visiting Australia, New Zealand and Europe too."

Speaking about growth of the company, Singh said, "There is a steady increase in growth and it's too early to benchmark it, however it's in double digits same as compared to last year during the same period. Going forward, we will focus on our new list of clients alongside existing ones with niche destination itinerary to cater for repeat travellers."

The forethought of the company is to conduct one roadshow a month, preferably in Tier-II and Tier-III cities. STHI Group has been promoting tourism with the help of such events so as to highlight the hidden jewels of the country. 🤟



Also known as the UAE's cultural capital, Sharjah is the third largest emirate with something in store for every kind of visitor. From history and culture, relaxation to active holidays, this emirate is a stand-alone destination waiting to be explored.

SHARJAH

A Seat of Arabian culture



Al Noor Mosque

Located on the Al Buhaira Corniche, Al Noor Mosque is the only mosque open to non-Muslim tours. Every Monday, an hour's tour is organised which provides fascinating insights into Islam and the culture of UAE. The mosque is a fine example of architecture with influences from Turkish interiors Those who want to understand religion and experience spirituality, this mosque is the place to start your Sharjah journey from.

Butterfly House

Nestled on the Al Noor Island in Khalid Lagoon, Butterfly House is home to 500

Al Arsa Souq- Heart of Sharjah

specimens of butterflies from across the globe. With over 100 species resting in this marvellous flower-shaped structure, visitors can enjoy butterflying from 10 am to 5 pm every day.

Museums

There are 22 museums in Sharjah documenting all aspects of life from the dawn of Islamic civilisation to aviation. The Sharjah Maritime Museum can learn about the traditional wooden dhows used for fishing, trading and pearling and admire genuine Arabian pearls while discovering how they were collected, measured and weighed. Some of the other museums worth vis-

iting include the Sharjah Calligraphy Museum, a fine example of the complexity of calligraphy on canvas, wood, paper and ceramics. The Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation houses over 5000 exquisite and rare artefacts from across the globe tracing the roots and growth of Islam. The standard timing of the museums is from 8 am to 8 pm from Saturday to Thursday while on Friday, the timings are from 4 pm to 8 pm. The $\,$ entry fee for tourists is as follows- children (below 2 years): free; children (till 12 years): AED 3 each; adults (+13): AED 7.

Heritage & Culture

The Heart of Sharjah is a charming cultural district, featuring traditional Emirati buildings and long winding alleys. The restoration project showcases the emirate's fascinating heritage in all its glory. At the Mleiha Archeological Site,

history enthusiasts can indulge in documented history of Bedouin life thousands of years ago. Activities at Mleiha like sand dune bashing, quad biking, etc. remind visitors of the deserts around in this modern city. The Al Majaz Waterfront is one of Sharjah's iconic landmarks, international cuisine.

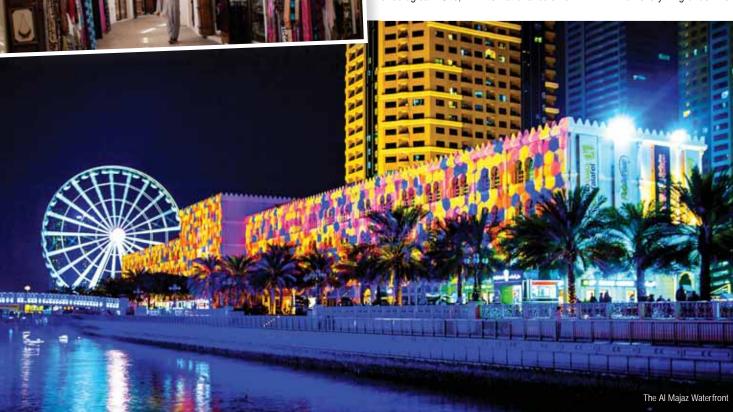
a key venue for some of UAE's major cultural events. Al Majaz is also a popular spot to experience local and



Shopping in Sharjah suits all tastes. The souks provide a glimpse into the city's past, while modern malls offer fantastic deals on everything under the sun.

The Central Souk, fringed by the Khalid Lagoon, is not only sprawling with shops selling spices, jewellery, carpets dates, local produce and souvenirs, but the building with its blue domes and latticed windows is one to behold. The best time for shopping in Sharjah is during January and August when the annual spring and summer shopping promotions are held.

ATTRACTIONS



Destination Watch

- There are 22 museums in Sharjah documenting all aspects of life from the dawn of Islamic civilisation to aviation
- Activities at Mleiha like sand dune bashing, quad biking, etc. remind visitors of the deserts around in this modern city
- The Central Souk, fringed by the Khalid Lagoon, is sprawling with shops selling spices, jewellery, carpets dates, local produce and souvenirs



200 ships on MPT's radar

Mumbai Port Trust hopes to handle 200 cruise ships per annum as its new international cruise terminal will be built at an estimated cost of `300 crore by June 2019.

HAZEL JAIN

Canjay Bhatia, Chairman, Mumbai Port Trust (MPT) dreams of making Mumbai like Miami - bustling with cruise ships brimming with tourists. Work on the new international cruise terminal at Ballard Pier has already started. The target is to complete it by June 2019, an ambitious deadline, by which time Mumbai Port hopes to be able to handle 200 cruise ships per year bringing in up to 5000 passengers.

A top-level delegation led by Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister of Shipping, Road Transport & Highways and Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Govt of India, recently gathered inside Mumbai Port to lay the foundation stone for the new international cruise terminal. The estimated cost is `300 crore inclusive of the PPP investment that will be done by inviting tenders. Also present at the ceremony were Devendra Fadnavis, Chief Minister, Maharashtra



Sanjay Bhatia Mumbai Port Trust (MPT)

With the new terminal, the area of cruise terminal will be 4.15 lakh sq ft, almost 10 times bigger than what we have today

and Jaykumar Rawal, Minister of Tourism, Government

Bhatia says, "As per our consultant's report, we have the potential to bring in 30 lakh passengers. Based on that projection, we have prepared a second SOP on a national level. We have also recently exempted cruise passengers from e-visa and this is in line with our efforts to make immigration process for international tourists easier and faster. With the new terminal, the area of cruise terminal will be 4.15 lakh sq feet, almost 10 times bigger than what we have today." He added that the new terminal have all the facilities of a domestic airport.

Another path-breaking decision the MPT has taken is to keep the port operational throughout the year and to allow the facility to be open to citizens for recreation. leisure and retail. The domestic cruise terminal will be completed by December 2019 for cruises between Mumbai and Goa that will operate on alternate days. The operation and maintenance of the terminal will be by a PPP operator not yet decided. It will also have a promenade and lawns with seating arrangements. 🤟

Malaysia's new offerings

Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board is undertaking aggressive sales in partnership with key players of the Indian travel industry.

TT BUREAU

aving recorded 459,000 Indian arrivals In Januarv-October in 2017. Malavsia Tourism Promotion Board is targeting to increase this number to 800,000 by the end of 2018, says Mohamad Taib Ibrahim, Senior Deputy Director, Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board. Keeping in line with Malaysia's new marketing strategy for the India market, Tourism Malaysia is now working closely with key players of the Indian travel trade in joint partnerships to push Malaysia as a favourable destination. He savs, "In 2018, our first partnership was with Akquasun Group to jointly promote the destination. Other partnerships have been made with Cox & Kings, D'Pauls, TUI, Yatra etc. In terms of outbound travel, India is second only to China in terms of numbers and we are keen to tap this growing market for all segments of travel."

Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi remain the most popular



Mohamad Taib Ibrahim Senior Deputy Director, Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board

We have introduced two new products for the market—Desaru Coast and Forest City. We also hope to increase Legoland's tourist receipts manifold

destinations among Indian travellers. Ibrahim explains, "While the Indian travellers are eagerly awaiting the

opening of Genting Highlands, we have introduced two new products for the market-Desaru Coast and Forest City. We also hope to increase Legoland's tourist receipts manifold."

Keeping in mind the growing segment of MICE travel, Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) is aggressively encouraging wedding planners and conference planers to host their events in Malaysia. "A major event this year in Malaysia is the PATA Travel Mart at Langkawi where we will be showcasing various products of the destination to buyers worldwide and encourage Indian buyers to send more tourists to the destination," he adds.

Fact File





12 TRAVTALK FEBRUARY 2^m FORTNIGHT ISSUE 2018 AGENTS

Italian escapade for Trafalgar champions





Trafalgar's top sales consultants from all over India embarked on an eight-day 'Simply Italy' trip that showcased Trafalgar's unique experiences of 'Be My Guest', 'Local Specialists', 'VIP Access' and authentic Italian cuisine through Rome, Venice, Pisa, Florence and Siena.

U&I's one-stop shop now goes online

U&I Holidays launched an online platform which will function as a one-stop shop for all travel needs to Indonesia.

TT BUREAU

& Holidays recoded a 30 per cent growth in its business volume in 2017 over 2016 with the company handling over 22,000 Indian tourists travelling to Indonesia last year, informs, **Shyam Upadhyay**, Director, U&I Holidays. "We realised that following tech-



Shyam Upadhyay Director U&I Holidays

nology trends was the way to growth and thus, we now offer a purely B2B online platform—www.uandiholidays.net, where the travel agents can book everything from hotels, tours and transfers, meals and also customise packages for Bali and Maldives. The platform will offer the operators with instant quo-



Ruden Dias National Sales Head U&I Holidays

tations and confirmations." The portal went live on February 2. Upadhyay further points out that in 2017, 71 per cent of the company's total business comprised the FIT segment. "In 2018 and onwards, we are targeting the GIT and MICE business. Also, we are planning to conduct a training programme after March in Tier-II and Tier-III cities where we will inform the local travel agents about Bali's offerings and even about destinations beyond Bali," he says.

Cities like Raipur, Indore, Jaipur, Nagpur, Kochi, etc. have been identified for the training workshops. Upadhyay also points out that Bali remains the most popular destination among Indian travellers to Indonesia. The company had recently conducted its six-city roadshows as well starting from Bengaluru, Ahmedabad. Kolkata. Delhi. Pune and concluding in Mumbai. Ruden Dias. National Sales Head, U&I Holidays, informs that over 22 Balinese partners participated at the roadshows. "We are now promoting destinations beyond Bali like Bandung, Yogyakarta, etc," he says.



Land of the Big 7 for adrenaline junkies

Nelson Mandela Bay, located on the shores of Algoa Bay in the Eastern Cape province in South Africa, is renowned for its Big 7 safaris, making it a perfect destination for the adventurous Indian traveller.



Port Elizabeth is the main city in the municipal area which is now called Nelson Mandela Bay, representing a large percentage of South Africa's biological diversity. The

second to none and has been declared the Bottlenose Dolphin Capital of the world with more than 28,000 bottlenose dolphins in Algoa Bay. Apart from having four whale species, Algoa Bay also includes the largest colonies of African



area is a meeting point for five of the seven South African biomes and is renowned for its Big 7 safaris. It also boasts a marine biodiversity Penguins and Cape Gannets in the world.

No wonder then that the Eastern Cape is also known

New adventure activities

New products include beachfront Segway tours, Valley Crag Indoor Climbing Centre, Algoa Bay Grand Prix Go Karting as well as some of the top adventure activities such as the longest double zip-line in Africa, Giant Swing, a new experience called sand-sledding and sand-boarding among others.



Doné Louw Coordinator – Trade and Destination Pass, Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism

as the Adventure Province. Doné Louw, Coordinator -Trade and Destination Pass, Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism, is excited about what this means for the Indian market. "As a destination, we feel that we have a lot to offer to the Indian market. Knowing that the Indian market loves adventure activities, we as a destination, are currently focusing on this market internationally. Thus, it makes up a substantial amount of our international marketing budget. I cannot however, share any numbers," he says.

Nelson Mandela Bay is ideally located on the Gar-

den Route allowing visitors to travel along the Garden Route from Cape Town. Air access to either Cape Town or Port Elizabeth, the two gateway cities to the Garden Route via Johannesburg, also allows visitors to explore this route.

Adventure activities

The Bay and surrounding areas are jam-packed with adventure. Activities include horse-riding, sandboarding, Segway tours, gokarting, indoor wall climbing and quad-biking. Other activities in the surrounding areas include zip-lining, abseiling, hiking opportunities in indigenous forests, beautiful day walks, as well as bass and fly fishing. Unique eco-wilderness tours are offered into the Woody Cape area of the Alexandria dune fields - the largest coastal dune fields in the Southern hemisphere.

Land of the Big 7

There is only one national park in the world where you can find the Big 7 (lion, leopard, rhino, buffalo, elephant, southern right



whale and white shark). The numerous game reserves in and around the city offer the perfect mix of fauna and flora. Louw explains, "These splendid. sometimes untouched. areas have developed into one of South Africa's main wildlife viewing spots and perfectly complements the Garden Route experience. We are also a very budgetfriendly destination and have introduced a special Nelson Mandela Bay Pass that gives visitors free entrance and discounts to over 60 products from as little as `2,000."

He adds that the tourism board has introduced a lot of new products that will appeal

to Indian travellers. "This will give them something to do before they fly back or depart via the Garden Route.

The Eastern Cape has activities best suited for Indian clients. Adventure and wildlife are the two pillars for Indians travelling to South Africa and our region has the best of both experiences. We will be highlighting this at the India roadshow in February 2018. It is however, great to see that South African Tourism hosted a special Garden Route Fam trip and is bringing out a new guide that covers products along the entire Garden Route," Louw says. 🐓



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Dehradun



FAMILYALBUM

Philippines, a roaring hit in Chennai

The Department of Tourism (DOT), Philippines successfully conducted 'Business Mission 2018' in Chennai recently, to promote the archipelago as a premier tourist destination. A strong delegation of prominent travel partners from the Philippines, led by Juanito A. Sayo, Tourism Operations Officer II, Office of Product and Market Development, DOT Philippines, interacted with around 100 local travel partners and buyers from the city in B2B sessions.



















Akquasun big on digital

2018 is all about the digital space for Akquasun Group as the company is planning to go completely online and is working on strengthening its technology arm.

TT BUREAU

his year, Akquasun plans I to go digital in its operations. Explaining the same, Sujit Nair, Founder and Group Managing Director, Akquasun Group, says, "Till last year, we were operating offline but from



B A Rahim Founder and Group CEO Akquasun Group

this year, we are planning to go completely online in terms of operations. We will buy our own inventory, provide the backend as well as DMC services of our own. We are already online for the island destinations-Mal-



Founder and Group Managing Director Akquasun Group

dives, Mauritius and Seychelles and are working on extending the service starting from Hong Kong, Dubai, South Africa and the US." In 2017, Akquasun Group recorded 30 per cent year-on-year growth over the previous year and added three more destinations to its portfolio, taking the count of total destinations represented by the company from 15 to 18, informs Nair. The company recently conducted roadshows in Kolkata, Delhi, Ahmedabad and Chennai where almost 40 partners participated. "Akquasun has conducted the first roadshow of the year and we will be back in the second half of 2018 with roadshows targeting Tier-II and other metros. Besides, having participated in India International Travel & Tourism fair (IITT) this year. Akquasun is also one of the exclusive B2B partners for Tourism Malaysia," says Nair.

Elaborating further, B A Rahim, Founder and Group CEO, Akquasun Group, informs, "This year, our delega-

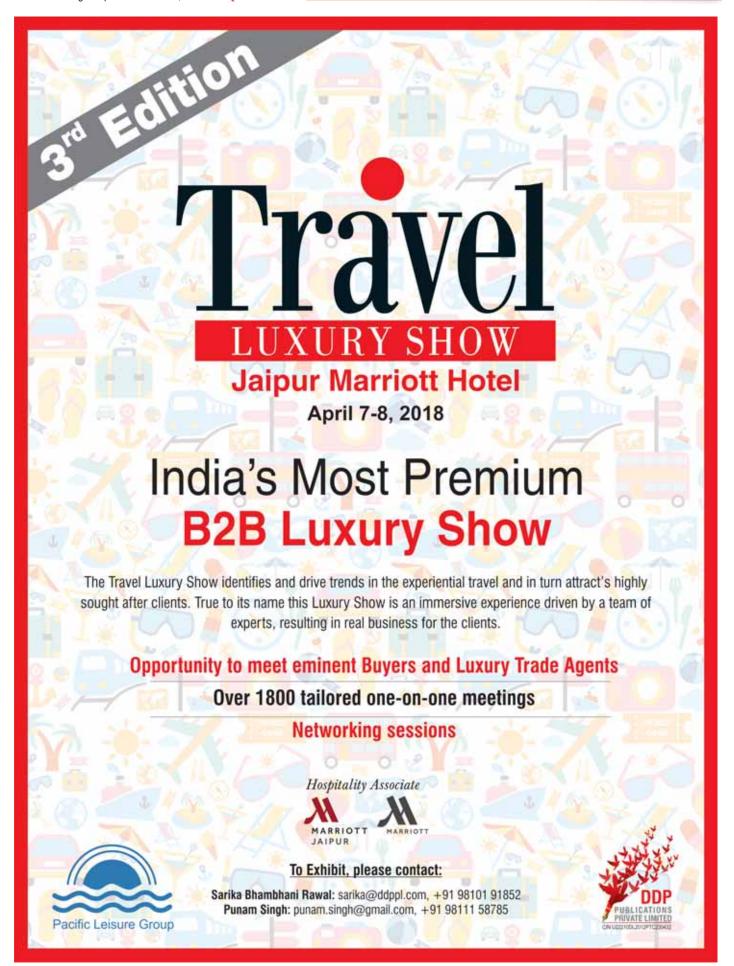
tion is not only larger, but also a more potential one. We have three tourism boards-Malaysia, Seychelles and Macau while the airline partners include Sri-Lankan Airlines, Air Mauritius, Air Seychelles and Air Arabia. Apart from strengthening our technology arm, we will also be focusing on Europe as a destination and target Eastern Europe too. We are already strong in Russia but this year we are extending the portfolio

to Scandinavia amongst other destinations." He further adds that the company is planning to introduce its series departures starting with South Africa, Europe and USA. In terms of segments, the DMC caters to all. Nair points out that last year, MICE did not perform too well due to uncertainty regarding GST. "Philippines and Bali look promising with direct connectivity from India on the cards," adds Nair.

Rendezvous with Azharuddin

Former Indian cricketer turned politician Mohammad Azharuddin along with BCCI President C K Khanna was spotted at Travstarz's pavilion during a trade show in New Delhi recently. The former cricketer spent





Dancing under Travstarz light

Celebrating its new collaboration with CTRIP's Rezb2b.com, Travstarz Global Group hosted key players of the tourism and hospitality fraternity at a gala night. Famous Indian cricketer Suresh Raina joined the party to up the celebrity quotient.









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FEBRUARY 2018

South Africa Roadshow	Chennai	16
Skal Ball	Delhi	17
TTF	Chennai	16-18
South African Tourism Roadshow	Ahmedabad	19
Tourism Events Queensland B2B Workshop	Pune	20
Kempenski Road Show	Delhi	21
AIME 2018	Melbourne, Australia	20-21
TTE	London, UK	21-22
BTS	London, UK	21-22
ACE of M.I.C.E.	Istanbul, Turkey	21-23
PATA Adventure Travel & Responsible Tourism Conference & Mart	Abu Dhabi, UAE	21-23
Tourism Events Queensland B2B Workshop	Ahmedabad	22

MARCH 2018

Mysore Travel Mart	Mysore	2-5
ATOUT France	Mumbai	5
ATOUT France	Ahmedabad	6
ATOUT France	Kolkata	7
ATOUT France	Delhi, NCR	8
ITB Berlin	Germany	7-11
ITM	Goa	16-18
Marriott International Sales Mission	Mumbai	14
MITT	Moscow, Russia	13-15
Hyatt Fair 2018	Bengaluru	14
Marriott International Sales Mission	Delhi	15
Hyatt Fair 2018	Delhi	15
Hyatt Fair 2018	Mumbai	16
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
Aviation Festival	Singapore	27-28
TAAI Annual Convention	Srinagar, J&K	27-29
UITT	Kieve, Ukraine	28-30

APRIL 2018

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HICSA	Mumbai	4-5
AITF	Baka, Azerbaijan	5-7
TTF	Delhi	7-8
Travel Luxury Show	Jaipur	7-8
SITT	Novosibirsk, Russia	12-14
COTTM	Beijing, China	16-18
ILTM Africa	Cape Town, South Africa	15-17
Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE)	Adelaide, Australia	15-19
Digital Travel Summit	Singapore	17-19
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
Amazing Thailand Wedding Roadshow	Mumbai	27

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

Promoting Buddhist trails

Stakeholders of the International Chamber for Service Industry (ICSI) deliberated over developing and promoting the Buddhist tourism circuit for Buddhist pilgrims visiting India.

NISHA VERMA

Aseminar on Living Buddhist Leadership conducted recently by ICSI had in attendance Satyajeet Rajan, Director General, Tourism, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India as well as Sangeeta Saxena, Additional Economic Adviser, Department of Commerce. Ministry of Commerce & Industry. Government of India. Commenting on the agenda behind the seminar, Dr. Gulshan Sharma, Director General, ICSI, said. "Our chamber has dedicated year 2018 towards Buddhist tourism promotion in India. We are going to work in the direction of developing the infrastructure, accommodation, transportation, road network, rail network, air network, including chartered flights. There is tremendous untapped potential as far as Buddhist tourism is concerned because Buddhism is the second fastest growing religion in the world. Considering Ministry of Tourism as the nodal ministry for the same, we are also working with the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Skill Development, Ministry of HRD, Ministry of Urban Development, Ministry of Civil Avia-



Dr Gulshan Sharma Director General

tion and Ministry of Transport, together as stakeholders."

Dr. Sharma informed Bodh Gaya is the main pilgrimage site for Buddhists. "In an effort to drive inbound tourism on Buddhism, we will start India's first Buddhist pilgrimage facilitation executive programme with the help of MOT and about 30 countries as stakeholders. We will have around two participants from each country, out of which 60 will be trained to handle the Buddhist pilgrims in India. Japanese language is going to be the first language we will be taking up there, followed by Korean and other languages," he said.

Pran S Dasan, Chairman—Aviation Advisory,



Pran S Dasan Chairman—Aviation Advisory

ICSI, claimed that connectivity is a major issue in the development of this sector. "There are more than 350 million Buddhists globally and it's incumbent upon all of them to make a visit to the four holiest shrines of Buddhism-Bodh Gaya, Kushinagar, Sarnath and Lumbini, besides others. We need to structure all these places and bring a formal system of transportation by which Buddhist tourists can access all these points seamlessly. Small aircraft and chartered flights operating under RCS to connect these destinations is the need of the hour," he advised

A lot of challenges plaguing this segment need to be addressed. Dasan added,

"Firstly, our airports have capacity constraints. Currently, the number of Buddhists coming to India from Japan and Korea is under a lakh per year. We also lag in terms of infrastructure. Even for domestic services, there aren't sufficient flights that are connecting Gaya with the rest of the country. Also, an equal number of hotel rooms and ground transport system should be available for the pilgrims."

The way forward, Dr Sharma said, "is to urge all ministries to work in collaboration with each other to achieve phenomenal results as far as Buddhist tourism promotion is concerned in India."

Rajan agreed and said that there is a lot to be done in this direction and the MOT is working towards doing that. "The Buddhist Circuit in India is growing, but we would like to grow at a faster rate with better facilities, improved roads, seamless connectivity and enhanced roadside amenities in different Buddhist circuits in different states. We are trying to improve the infrastructure in most of the states through our Swadesh Darshan scheme," he claimed.

Amusement industry rejoices

It is good news for the amusement parks and industries with the GST rate down to 18 per cent, which will give it a fillip and help clinch deals at the upcoming IAAPI's 18th Amusement Expo 2018 to be held in Mumbai.

TT BUREAU

At the last GST Council Meeting, the GST rate on entry tickets in the amusement sector was reduced from 28 per cent to 18 per cent. Shirish Deshpande, President, Indian Association of Amusement Parks and Industries (IAAPI), is happy about the effect this will have on the industry. He says, "We now encourage existing players to reinvest and upgrade their existing park infrastructure along with adding on new theme-based rides. It will also encourage new players to explore venturing into this business. It will now also assist in increasing the footfalls to amusement park which had dropped by almost 40 per cent after service tax was increased in June 2015."



Shirish Deshpande President, Indian Association of Amusement Parks and Industries (IAAPI)

This additional levy of 15 per cent service tax severely dented the operational efficiency of the amusement sector

IAAPI is thankful to GST Council for having heard its concerns. This reduction has come as a huge relief to the industry at a time when it was reeling under the burden of double taxation. "This additional levy of 15 per cent service tax severely dented the operational efficiency of the sector. During our representation to the Union Government, we were assured that the matter would be dealt with. This sector is visited by children and young people along with families, but it was clubbed along with casino and gambling too," said Deshpande.

Expo in Mumbai

IAAPI will conduct its 18th Amusement Expo from February 27 to March 1, 2018, at Hall 2, Bombay Exhibition Centre, NESCO Compound, Mumbai. It is supported by the

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. The exhibition will witness over 120 exhibitors from India and 18 countries, spread across 10,000 sqm exhibition floor area showcasing latest innovative rides and equipment for amusement park, theme park, water park, adventure sport and family entertainment centres. Many important issues related to the amusement industry will also be discussed.

FEC Connect

IAAPI for the first time is organising 'FEC Connect' for Indian Family Entertainment Industry (FEC) on the sidelines of the Amusement Expo 2018

The session will provide networking opportunities to FEC operators, mall and shopping centre developers, and suppliers

OPPORTUNITY



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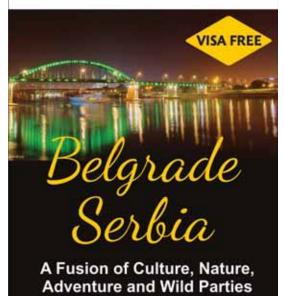


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MOVEMENTS

IndiGo

Gurugram

Wolfgang Prock-Schauer joins IndiGo as the Chief Operating Officer. An accomplished industry leader with more than three decades of experience in civil aviation, Schauer has held

senior leadership positions with leading airlines across Europe and Asia. In his role, Schauer will be responsible for operational aspects of IndiGo such as flight operations, maintenance and engineering. In the past, he has worked with Austrian Airlines, Jet Airways (India), British Midland International, Air Berlin (Germany/ UK) and Go Air (India).

Hilton

Gurugram

Jatin Khanna assumes charge as Vice President and Head of Operations, of Hilton India. Khanna holds over 20 years of operations



Kochi Marriott Hotel

Kochi

Sumeet Suri has assumed the role of General Manager at the Kochi Marriott Hotel. Prior to his current role, Suri was Hotel Manager at ITC



Doubletree by Hilton Pune - Chinchwad

Pune

Double Tree by Hilton has appointed **Aditya Shamsher Malla** as General Manager at its Pune hotel. An industry veteran with more than two decades in the business, Malla has



Hotel Sahara Star

Mumbai

Hotel Sahara Star has appointed **Manish Sodhi** as Chief Executive Officer. A seasoned hospitality professional, Sodhi will be



Taj Fort Aguada Beach Resort & Spa

Goa

Taj Fort Aguada Beach Resort & Spa welcomes Albert Rebello as its new General Manager. An established leader in the hospitality

industry, Rebello brings more than 35 years of hotel experience to the resort perched atop the ramparts of the coastal fort. In his new role, Rebello will be responsible for the continued success of the hotel, overseeing the day-to-day operations and providing exceptional guest service at one of India's most luxurious holiday destinations. He has undertaken a number of assignments through his 35 years at Taj, notable among which were his appointments as the General Manager of five hotels.

JW Marriott Jaipur Resort & Spa

Jaipur

Sarah Raina has been appointed as the Director of Sales & Marketing at the JW Marriott Jaipur Resort & Spa. With over a decade of experience

in various roles across prestigious hospitality brands, Raina's last held position was of Director of Sales at the Grand Hyatt Goa. In her new role, her core responsibility will be to maximise the resort's revenue from various market segments and work with the team to conceptualise and implement innovative sales and marketing strategies. In the days to come, Raina will also work towards positioning the resort as one of the most luxurious destinations in Rajasthan.

Holiday Inn Express & Suites

Bengaluru

Holiday Inn Express & Suites Bengaluru welcomes Varun Kamra as the Director of Sales & Marketing. Kamra's role would be to

ensure smooth operations of revenue, sales and marketing. His responsibilities will involve leading and motivating the team to achieve the sales targets for the property and the group, along with being actively involved in strategising and planning of marketing initiatives. Prior to this, Kamra worked as the Director of Sales and Corporate Development at Blooms Hotel Group.

He started his career as a Sales Executive with IHG in 2003.

AccorHotels

Chennai

AccorHotels has appointed ${\bf Jayakrishnan}$ ${\bf Sudhakaran}$ as the Director of Sales and Marketing for Novotel-ibis Chennai OMR as

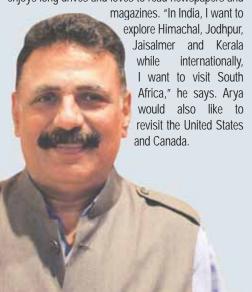
well as Cluster Director of Sales and Marketing for Chennai region. Prior to this, Sudhakaran was the Director of Sales and Marketing for Novotel Goa Hotels and Resorts. A seasoned hotelier, his experiences pans over 14 years with reputed brands such as Taj Hotels, InterContinental Hotels & Resorts, Zuri Hotels & Resorts and Hyatt Hotels. He holds a Degree in Hotel Management along with MBA in Human Resource & Marketing.



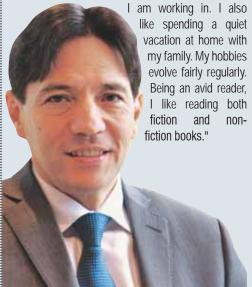
Amit Tayal, General Manager, Park Plaza Delhi CBD-Shahdara, says the hospitality sector never gives you the time to rest. "At the same time, the sector always makes you feel young and energetic, and gives



Rajesh Arya, Hon. Treasurer, ADTOI, lives by the motto— "no looking back, work hard and strive for the betterment of the society." In his free time, Arya enjoys long drives and loves to read newspapers and



Having worked in the hospitality industry as an expat for many years, **Daniel Chao**, General Manager, Novotel Chennai OMR & ibis Chennai OMR, says travelling is a big part of his life. "I enjoy discovering new destinations—especially new cities in the country







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J&K eyes SEA to boost inbound tourism

With projects worth `2000 crore for tourism underway, Jammu and Kashmir is going great lengths to market itself nationally and internationally. **Sarmad Hafeez**, Secretary—Tourism, Government of Jammu and Kashmir details various festivals and trade events the state will host in 2018.



How has tourism fared in Jammu and Kashmir?

Last year was a mixed bag for us where arrivals from Gujarat and Maharashtra were affected but simultaneously, we recorded an increase in arrivals from the South, East and Central parts of the country. Though our domestic figures dipped, we saw an increase in the inbound tourists. The Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, etc. have shown keen interest in visiting the state. In fact, even the high spending travellers from Bangladesh have shown a greater interest in travelling to J&K. With many European clients having visited

66With many European clients having visited the state recently, there is a positive trend from countries like New Zealand, Australia and Canada. Religious tourism forms an important part of the domestic travel to the state, especially to Jammu and this year as many as 85 lakh pilgrims visited Vaishno Devi.

Sarmad Hafeez
Secretary—Tourism
Government of Jammu and Kashmir

ists more options to visit the state round the year. The Pahalgam Winter Festival is being hosted which will offer several snow activities to engage the domestic and inbound tourists. There is something for every age group at these festivals. After the TAAI Convention in Srina-

national and international hotel chains are coming to the state and it is heartening to see that the industry is gathering confidence to return to Jammu and Kashmir. Adventure tourism is also an important focus for us and we are offering numerous activities for all age groups. the same. We are also participating in all major trade fairs like ITB Berlin, ATM Dubai, etc and are conducting roadshows in the emerging

Jammu and Kashmir and we are very excited about that. We are partnering with this nodal association to bring more and more people to Kashmir and showcase the various tourism products on offer for the travellers. Kashmir has been well-known for its mountains, streams, lakes and beauty but what we forget is the incredible hospitality of the state and its people. It is affordable and is accessible from every part of the country.

Is the state upgrading its MICE facilities?

We are hosting several conventions in the state this

Jammu and Kashmir has been the myth of the unsafety of travelling to Kashmir. However, we are trying very hard to defeat this negative perception. I would like to point out few figures; this year the National Crime Bureau Report states that in the past two years, there has been no crime committed against a tourist in Jammu and Kashmir, I don't know about many places that can boast about this tourist-friendly environment at a destination. In fact, it is a very safe place to travel for women. The kind of positive feedback we have received from solo women travellers is



Domestic, SE Asia markets buoyant

The Tier-II and Tier-III cities have been very interesting markets as they are emerging tourism hubs. We have seen a good response from cities like Kanpur, Nagpur, Raipur, Indore, Kochi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Lucknow and Jaipur. Southeast Asia has emerged as an important source market for inbound tourism. In fact, we have over 500 clients booked for heli-skiing from various European countries.

Mahmood Ahmad Shah Director, Kashmir Tourism

the state recently, there is a positive trend from far-off countries like New Zealand, Australia and Canada. Religious tourism forms an important part of the domestic travel to the state, especially to Jammu and this year as many as 85 lakh pilgrims visited Vaishno Devi.

QWhat new is in line for 2018?

We are planning to host multiple festivals this year; hopefully one festival every month to give tour-

gar, we will be inaugurating the Tulip Festival. Boasting Asia's largest Tulip Garden in Kashmir, this site will be opened for the public in the first week of April to kickstart the tourist season. This is the spring season in the state and to compliment the same we will be showcasing the Almond Blossom Festival. The Central Government has sanctioned funds to the tune of `2000 crore for tourism alone to develop and upgrade infrastructural facilities. On the hospitality front, many

2017 Mid Market Hotel Chain - Today's Traveller Awards

What is the marketing and promotional plan for the state in 2018?

The plan is to be more visible on the media platforms and while the promotional aspect is kept at the forefront, we will also work on improving the tourist experience in the state. We will also try to put out the positive stories about the state to generate a positive travel sentiment. Last year, we had conducted roadshows in various cities in India and this year, we will continue to do

international source markets. TAAI Convention is also an important event where we will try to showcase the state to the travel agents and gather their support to promote it better and aggressively. We will also be very visible on the social media.

What is in store for the attendees of TAAI Convention in Srinagar in 2018?

We are going to welcome the TAAI family into the fold of our family—Jammu and Kashmir. It is after 31 years that TAAI is hosting its convention in the state of

year and are promoting MICE tourism in a big way. The SK-ICC in Srinagar is one of the finest convention centres which not only offers meeting space with state-of-the-art facilities but also open spaces to host various events. We have upgraded this convention centre as well. We have opened a new convention centre in Pahalgam inside the Pahalgam Club with a capacity of 350 pax.

What are the challenges in promoting the state?

Our biggest challenge in marketing the state of

tremendous. I don't see why travellers should not visit Jammu and Kashmir.

Festival Line-up

- Pahalgam Winter Festival is being hosted which will offer several snow activities to engage the domestic and inbound tourists
- TAAI Convention will be held in March in Srinagar
 - Asia's largest Tulip Garden in Kashmir will open for public in the first week of April to kick-start the Tulip Festival



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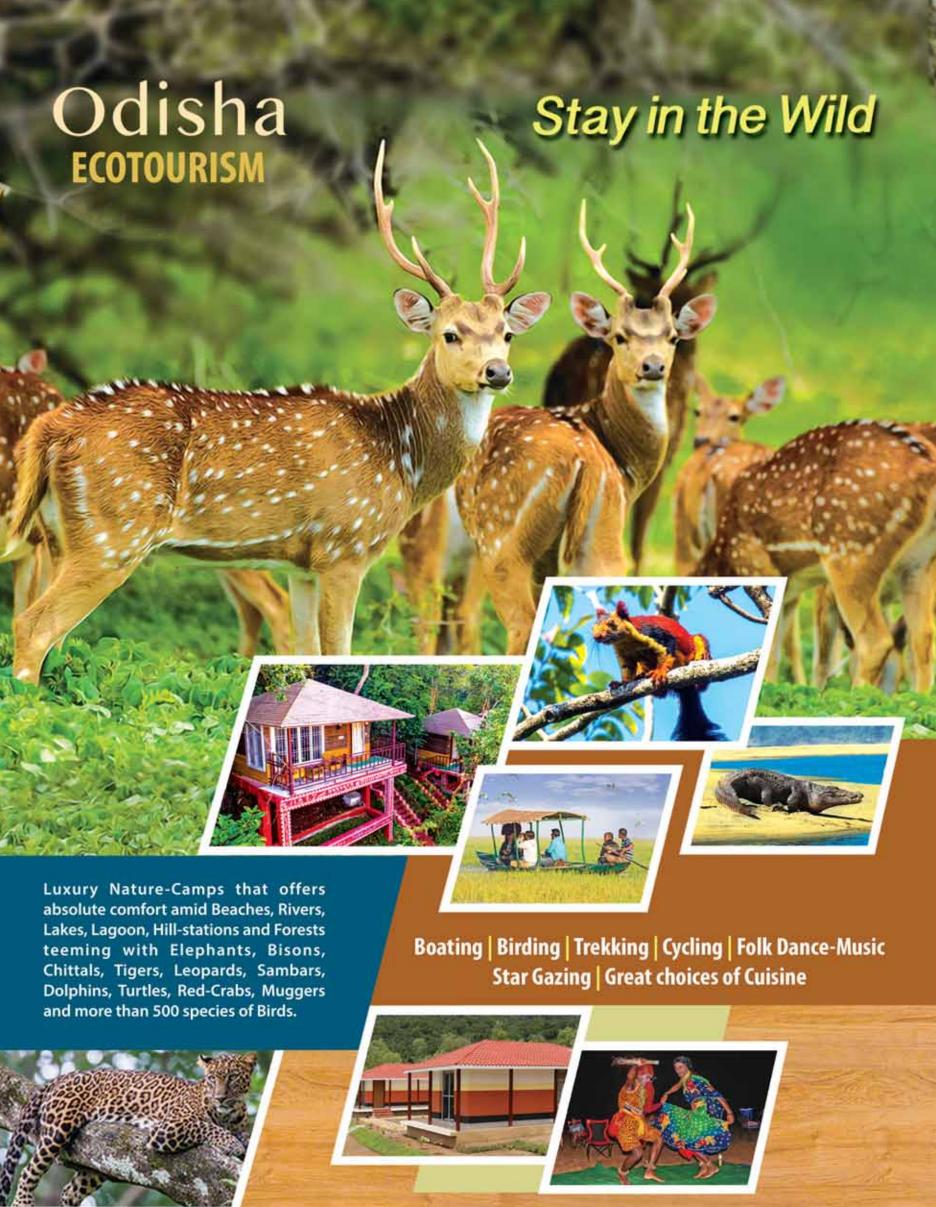
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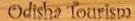
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February 2^m Fortnight Issue 2018 TRAVTALK 3

Technology talk

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Brands are breaking the traditional boundaries and reaching out to new frontiers in travel, all thanks to technology. With the advent of Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, chatbots, blockchain, webinars, new-age marketing techniques and other backend technologies are driving the business of travel. As per a Skift report on top travel trends of 2018, the purpose of travel is growing with an emphasis on diversity and inclusion. While operators are bundling travel in new ways, others are creating innovative and immersive experiences while digitisation is ever increasing.

In the wake of increased smartphone usage and consumer demands, hoteliers are getting smarter in designing their spaces to serve the multitasking customer. Hotel brands too are going beyond overnight guest experience and future hotels would play a much bigger role of acting as a community hub.

Mobile devices can predict travellers' needs and act as real-time problem solvers. And if you think that the services powered by smartphones today are much ahead of time, get ready to see all this turn on its head with the revolution that industry experts have predicted in the coming years.

Travel companies are beginning to buy start-ups to boost their innovation mechanism and avoid the upcoming threat from these small businesses. On the other hand, however, start-ups are reaching out directly to business travellers, who are experienced customers and continue to guarantee big profits. There are also companies who are relying heavily on the blockchain bandwagon, despite Facebook and Google putting a ban on publicising blockchain companies. However, only time will tell if this technology materialises into cheaper, better and faster travel experiences.

NISHA VERMA

NEWS IN BRIEF







GOIBIBO PROMOTES GOCASH+ WITH DEEPIKA PADUKONE

Goibibo has announced the launch of its new TV campaign with Deepika Padukone as its brand ambassador. The campaign highlights Goibibo's e-wallet service 'GoCash+' and the benefits of the 'GoCash+' feature on Goibibo's platform. Through the new campaign, Goibibo aims to increase new user acquisition and augment hotel market share growth. This is in line with company's endeavour to catalyse the shift from offline to online in the hotel booking segment. Launched in 2017, GoCash+ is Goibibo's travel booking currency which can be used without any restrictions on usage. Rajesh Magow, Co-founder and CEO-India (Merged Entity), Goibibo, says, "Goibibo has been at the forefront of product innovations in the online travel aggregation space and GoCash+ is a great value proposition to increase engagement and retention amongst existing and potential customers. Collaborative consumption has emerged as a concept and is fast gaining speed in the Indian e-commerce segment as well."

KRISFLYER to launch blockchain-based loyalty wallet

SIA Group's KrisFlyer frequent-flyer programme is set to launch a world-first blockchain-based airline loyalty digital wallet capability that will help unlock the value of KrisFlyer miles to enable everyday spending at retail partners. The new KrisFlyer digital wallet app utilising this innovative technology is expected to be rolled out in about six months. It will allow the extensive KrisFlyer membership base to use 'digital KrisFlyer miles' for point-of-sale transactions at participating retail merchants.



FCM Travel Solutions has rebranded its travel retail and

holiday brand – 'Flight Shop' under a single leisure brand 'Travel Tours'. Travel Tours promises 'unbeatable' services both in pricing and quality to its customers across India. Shravan Gupta, Executive Director–Leisure Businesses, FCM Travel Solutions, said, "Through the rebranding, our intention is to put our entire strength and expertise of both our brands – Flight Shop and Travel Tours under one."



SOTC's new store offering VR experience in Bengaluru

SOTC Travel inaugurated its first ever experiential store offering Virtual Reality (VR) experiences in Bengaluru at St. Marks Road. Customers can be inspired by the different destinations through VR's for real time experience of SOTC's key destinations. The store comprises a digital screen that features video itineraries of destinations and holiday experiences for the customer.

NEWS 4 TRAVTALK February 2th Fortnight Issue 2018

Uncover Mãori legends with walking app Arataki

New Zealand's dramatic landscapes are much more than just a pretty backdrop for the Mãori people. Each tribe, or iwi, has local stories about how the mountains, rivers, lakes and hot springs in their region were created. Local landmarks are part of their whakapapa, their genealogy, seen and respected as ancestors with personalities that connect the past with the present and future. Arataki, a smartphone app just launched in Tauranga this summer, takes visitors on cultural walking trails and immerses them in the rich culture as they stroll through beautiful scenery. The Arataki app introduces visitors to Mauao, also known as Tauranga's Mount Maunganui, a 232-metre high extinct volcanic cone that welcomes tourists when they arrive at the popular seaside city in the Bay of Plenty of New Zealand's North Island.



Sabre data to fuel China Southern's growth

Sabre Corporation has signed a multi-year agreement to provide Sabre's Market Intelligence with Global Demand Data (GDD) solution to China Southern Airlines. The technology is central to providing the airline with the intelligence and data visualisation capabilities required as they continue to grow their international network. By implementing the industry leading Market Intelligence solution with proprietary GDD, China Southern now has robust information to continue its global growth trajectory in domestic Chinese and international markets. The sophisticated technology provides analysts with a single, reliable source of market data to empower better decision making across commercial departments such as network planning, scheduling, revenue management and sales.

Technologytalk

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SITA'S robot kiosk debuts in Japan

Kansai Airports, the operator of Kansai International Airport (KIX) and Osaka International Airport (ITAMI), is working with SITA on a trial of KATE - SITA's intelligent check-in kiosk, which will autonomously move to congested areas in the airport to reduce check-in queues. The kiosk can move seamlessly to areas of the airport where additional check-in services were required. KATE's collision avoidance technology, combined with various data sources, decides where it should be – whether at a busy area to ease congestion or to a docking station to recharge when power source runs low. The trial with KATE at Kansai will run for one month starting February at Terminal 1.



More smart gates at Dubai Airport T1

Dubai Airports, the General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs (GDRFA) and Emaratech marked the completion of the installation of new and enhanced smart gates at Dubai International (DXB) Terminal 1. An array of 20 of the new smart gates is now fully operational in the arrivals area of Terminal 1 in addition to the 10 installed last year in departures. In total, some 127 smart gates are available across the entire airport reducing average transaction times from minutes to under 10-15 seconds. Smart gates can identify a traveller by either their passport, Emirates ID, e-gate card or a QR barcode.

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ONE-ON-ONE 6 TRAVTALK February 2th Fortnight Issue 2018

Technological innovations: KEY TO GROWTH



SANDEEP DWIVEDI

Revealing what makes Travelport stay ahead of its competition and the panoply of travel solutions on offer, **Sandeep Dwivedi**, COO, InterGlobe Technology Quotient, says the dynamics of travel industry are constantly changing.

HOW HAS THE INDUSTRY FOR GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS CHANGED TODAY?

Global distribution system has undergone massive changes in the last few decades. Once considered as an aggregator of flight details, it has become smarter, offering integrated solutions like flight, hotels, car, rail and cruise options in one go. However, with the advent of technology, this journey of technological innovation is just starting. In order to understand this technological shift well from the user perspective, Travelport recently conducted a study - Global Traveller Survey. According to the survey, across 19 countries, where the use of digital tools when planning, booking and experiencing a journey is booming, Indian travellers are the most digitally advanced, outpacing many of the world's leading travel markets. With time, our vision as a travel commerce and technology provider has evolved from Business to Business (B2B) to Business to Business for Customers (B2B4C) perspective. An apt example worth mentioning here is the on-boarding of IndiGo on Travelport. This has helped us redefine the process of booking LCCs in India. With the airlines exclusive partnership with us, we have been able to offer booking of LCC and fullservice carriers to our travel agents in one go, who in turn can offer their customers the ease of more choices without toggling between multiple websites.

WHAT KIND OF INNOVATIONS ARE COMING IN THE MARKET FOR THIS INDUSTRY?

In travel technology, we have understood the importance of offering real-time services and solutions as well as more options. As a result, we have redefined our technology to go a step ahead and support our travel partners in catering to the necessities of their customers better in the shortest possible time frame. ITQ and Travelport have been continuously innovating Wto not just meet but exceed customer demands. As a

distributor of Travelport in six markets across Asia Pacific region, ITQ is making headway into transforming the way travel is bought and sold. We have emerged as a prominent aggregator of travel inventory through which travel agents (both offline and online) can sell well-planned, custom made, tour packages depending on their clientele's preference.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS OF TRAVEL AGENTS AND HOW DO YOU OFFER THEM WHAT THEY WANT?

With fraud and hacking costing the industry an estimated \$1 billion annually and growing, maintaining a set of security standards to combat this criminal activity is critical when dealing with customer credit card information. This is why Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS) have been developed to ensure secured card payment. ITQ, through Travelport's partnership with SecurityMetrics, is helping its travel agents to join in the fight against cyber security by facilitating easy PCI DSS compliance process.

WHAT KIND OF INNOVATIONS HAS ITQ BROUGHT IN FOR ITS CUSTOMERS?

We have created history in the Indian travel commerce industry by making IndiGo booking available on Travelport. Next, is the exclusive partnership that Travelport has with SecurityMetrics for the IATA certified travel agents. We have also associated with multiple brands to make hospitality and airline choices more varied and customisable. With introduction of Travelport Merchandising suite and exclusive partnership with airlines, we have redefined the sale of ancillary in the airline market.

WHAT ARE THE INNOVATIONS THAT ITQ HAS ADOPTED WHICH MIGHT BE A GAME CHANGER?

This year we have introduced an updated version of Travelport Smartpoint 7.5 (Galileo). This version installation includes updates that are required to maintain PCI DSS compliance. Travelport Merchandising Suite is the

customisation tool consisting of three powerful components—aggregated shopping, ancillary services and rich content and branding. ITQ Financial (GST Compliant) and VR3 (Void, Reissue, Refund, Revalidation) are two exceptional introductions that enable travel agencies to automate their processes in financial accounting as well as reissuing

other hand, HMPR (HelpMeProduceReport) helps user to generate ticket issuance reports in detail. It can be configured to work on a central machine in the agency that would then generate reports automatically at a specific time

and refunding tickets. On the

and send the reports over email. Galstar and uAPI have been developed to ease the online work flow of online travel agents, including the agencies that are aspiring

to go online. We also have self-booking tool and corporate booking tool, which are two highly advanced products that can streamline work and ease management of bulk bookings.



As a distributor of Travelport in six markets across Asia Pacific region, ITQ

is making headway into transforming the way travel is bought and sold

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HOTELS

8 TRAVTALK February 2nd Fortnight Issue 2018



The gap between pleasing a customer through a virtual experience and a personalised real-time service is narrrowing with time. However, the amount in which it will impact customer experience, is still to be seen.

ENOTIONS over INNOVAT® CINS IN HOSPITALITY?

February 2^{III} Fortnight Issue 2018 TRAVTALK 9

New advancement in technology such as robot-butlers and robots for cleaning of

swimming pools have really replaced humans and manpower



he world of travel is witnessing more travel advancements than any other industry, right from chatbots enabled bookings, virtual reality experiences, simulation to analysing customer behaviour.

TECHNOLOGICAL PUSH

Hospitaliy brands around the country are adopting technology to enhance user experience, right from booking to state-of-the-art rooms with every possible amenity for the guests' experience. Amit Kumar Singh, General Manager, The Muse Sarovar Portico, Kapashera, says, "The hospitality industry continues to grow with the use of advanced technology to enhance guest experience, thereby helping increase revenue. While most hotel chains now have dedicated mobile applications for

reservations in terms of rooms and restaurants, OTAs have come up with various ways to reserve rooms, banquets and restaurants, resulting in reduction in manpower due to lesser human interaction. Upgraded PMS and advanced options for hotels to create profiles that store details as specific as previous-stay linen preferences, choice of newspaper, eating preferences, etc. All prior special requests are stored and preferred leisure activities kept in memory in order to gain a deeper knowledge of guests, so staff would know particularly well what to offer to the guests on their next stay. New advancement in technology such as robot-butlers and robots for cleaning of swimming pools have really replaced humans and manpower. Few hotels have already started practising paperless checkins where guests of participating hotels store reservation details with Apple's Touch ID fingerHOTELS

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point recognition technology, which communicates via an application operated by the reception staff. Some hotels also have applications that enable guests to entirely bypass the check-in desk using a digital room key sent to the guest's smartphone on the check-in time of day of arrival."

Sarbendra Sarkar, Founder & Managing Director, Cygnett Hotels & Resort, talks about Cygnett's next-gen Al driven technology engine. "It comprises several inter-meshed components that include an information rich and user-friendly website, Central Reservations System(CRS), an Online Reputation Management(ORM) and a service monitoring module all supported by powerful artificial intelligence and data analytics to understand and deliver a personalised hospitality experience to every single customer at their numerous touch points with the hotel," he shares.

Aloft Bengaluru Cessna Business Park located in the high-tech hub of Bengaluru city is a hotspot for both savvy travellers and tech professionals. "The hotel has everything a young business traveller seeks



Technological advancements include smart rooms enabling guests to control light

settings, music played in the room, and even television with simple voice commands



including tech-savvy features and a vibrant social atmosphere. The hotel provides high-tech work space with complimentary hi-speed wireless internet access, entertainment amenities like plug-&-play docking stations and a one-stop connectivity solution for multiple electronic gadgets like PDAs, cell phones and laptops, all linked to a 42" LCD TV and SPG keyless. SPG keyless allows the guests to use their smartphone to check into their room using the SPG app, which can be downloaded both on iPhone and Android," reveals Faiz Alam Ansari, Complex GM, Aloft Bengaluru Cessna Business Park.

Saurav Dutta, GM, Park Inn by Radisson, believes that technological advancement is a primal need to cater to the customers in the digital age. "Smart rooms enable the guests to control light settings, music played in the room, and even the television with

simple voice commands. Additionally, guests can now request for services such as room cleaning, wake-up calls, laundry, in-room dining, and room check-out by merely speaking to the smart device. The guests can also manage basic room functions like browsing the internet, switching off/on lights and television with just a tap of their personal mobile phones; without downloading any apps. Our property is the first in the world to provide this app-free solution, with Web RTC technology," he shares.

HUMAN TOUCH REMAINS KING

Despite innumerable advancements being made in the technological arena, human touch would always be at the core of a hospitality experience. Agrees Sarkar, "Machines cannot provide the signature experience to guests and no technology can ever replace the human interface. Human interactions are necessary to ensure the guest's sentiments because stay is not just about being comfortable, but also making a memorable experience with a sense of family and home that the guest can associate the hotel with. Human touch is creating the service added value.

In F&B department, humans play a salient role where no technological advancement can ever replace them. Only humans can make cuisines delicious and presentable. Also, it gives value to authentic local experience and an emotional connection."

Srinivas Srirangam, General Manager, Novotel Imagica Khopoli, says, "From the booking process of getting automated best deals to direct mobile checkins, everything proves that technology is a bonus

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support to create a 'wow' factor for guests. Technology indeed compliments the human touch, but can never replace it. Guests are habituated to tech-based solutions for their travel and stay purposes. Moreover, they are accustomed to human presence during their stay. Futuristically speaking, no one would enjoy a hotel full of technology, be it artificially enhanced bots or fully automated tabs briefing you about all facilities; we are always going to need human interactions. Even with internet in the picture where physical devices are embedded with electronics and software to enable every object to connect and exchange data, our guests will always need humans to explain the functioning of these hi-tech innovations."

He adds, "While a machine can perform various tasks even more efficiently than we can, it lacks artistry in the activity, that uniquely-human ability to cater to the needs of the individual. Its protocol may suggest one approach, but a person who is good at his/her job understands the subtleties required. Technology is developing rapidly and it would be foolish to argue otherwise, but some things remain fundamental and human presence will continue to be one of them. Today, the hospitality industry chiefly functions on a harmonious interface where humans meet technology. One cannot separate emotions from innovations."



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FOR A ROBUST online B2B system

RezB2B Global has ventured into the India market by acquiring stakes in Travstarz Global Group. Travelrezonline.com will merge with Rezb2b.com to offer a seamless booking platform to travel agents.

ours4fun, a booking portal for global tours and activities and subsidiary of CTRIP, has ventured into India by acquiring a stake in Travstarz Global Group. The company will continue to be led by Pankaj Nagpal and Sucheta Nagpal, founders of Travstarz as the Managing Director and Director & CEO, respectively. Tours4fun has ventured into global travel B2B business with the launch of RezB2B Global Limited and its platform Rezb2b.com. Post the investment, Travstarz Global Group will merge its platform travelrezonline. com with Rezb2b.com and will dedicatedly run the group's B2B business in Indian sub-continent and other adjoining regions.

"With this alliance, we will expand much faster and get access to latest technology, wide range of products and global markets. We shall be merging our online platform travelrezonline.com into Rezb2b.com and all further developments will be jointly done by our India and Global IT Teams to offer an advanced and robust online B2B system with best worldwide inventory of flights,



PANKAJ NAGPAL Managing Director Travstarz



Director & CEO Travstarz

hotels, packages, transfers and sightseeing, visas, travel insurance and forex," says Pankaj Nagpal, Managing Director, Travstarz Global Group.

Kevin Du, CEO, RezB2B Global, adds, "In RezB2B we have created a perfect platform with worldwide inventory of tours, sightseeing and transfers over the last 10 years and have over 10,000 global suppliers on the system. With this acquisition we will merge content from Travstarz and RezB2B to offer all services on a single platform and will create a perfect B2B product with capabilities built in to automate the agency processes besides being one of the best booking engines for the trade. We chose to start our B2B business from India and were looking for a strong partner with existing presence in B2B space with IT capabilities and Travstarz perfectly fit our plans with their strong business background, the in-house IT team and a clear vision for the future. We plan to acquire more companies across the globe to penetrate the global B2B market after India."

BEST TICKETING The Queue Ticketing solution by Riya is now the easiest way to book tickets for even non-IATA agencies.

SOLUTION for travel partners

he Queue Ticketing solution by Riya is now the easiest way to book tickets for even non-IATA agencies.

Riya Travel & Tours (I) Pvt Ltd has always aimed to provide world-class travel and ticketing experience to its partners. One such example is their online ticketing solution, a web based platform for travel partners having CRS access. The Riya Queue Ticketing Portal is specially designed for all agencies including non-IATA agencies. The system allows the travel partners to issue PNRs independently so that they can keep ownership of the PNR. This is a complete automated process with zero human intervention and provides market competitive fares in their PNR. Riya has also incorporated Amadeus as well as other available CRS in India with this product.

The portal provides facility to travel partners to issue full service carriers with their local branch IATA. You get facility of seat mapping and auto cancellation through this platform.



BENEFITS

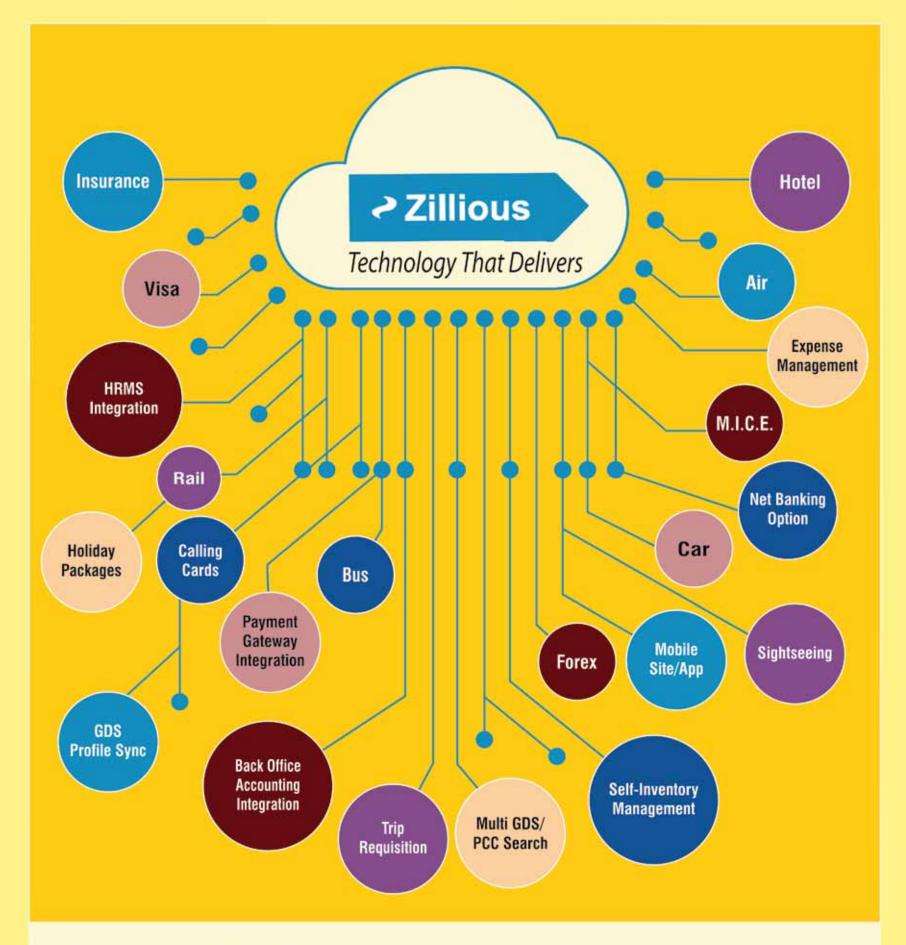
- 24X7 call centre
- Get lowest available Riya Travels Fare
- MIS Reports
- Online Accounting statement
- · Ticket prints with your agency logo attached
- Online seat mapping for most airlines
- Auto cancellation process

Riya also has a call centre available 24X7 to attend all ticketing related needs and queries of clients.

Manoj Samuel, Director for Riya Group says "We have automated the entire system. Now our travel partners can independently import PNRs, check fares and issue tickets with a low turnaround time. In fact, now the processing time is less than 10 seconds."

If you are currently registered with Riya Travels, then you are just a phone call away with the local branch from enrolling. If you want to register for this there are two basic requirements - own a Queue Ticketing Account is access to any CRS and airline inventory access to sell segment on CRS.

Connect with the branches through their all India number 61608080. For any queries, government you can reach out to the queue ticketing call centre at 022-66594966 or write to them at \$\bigselon\$ queuetkt@riya.travel.



- Established in 2009, Zillious is India's leading Travel Technology Solution provider which deliver millions of booking in Asia and Middle East
- We believe one solution does not works for all in travel. We partner with you to build workflows that suit your need and also adapt as you grow.
- Experience matters 6 million+ transactions & over 40% of that is non GDS content.
- Most advanced Mobile Booking Application with approval & booking push alerts and Passbook/ Google Now/ Calendar integrations

TRENDING NOW 14 TRAVTALK February 2^M Fortnight Issue 2018

Trending tech solutions

Technology in the travel world is changing rapidly, and the industry is adapting likewise. Overall it is an exciting time to see more avenues come up to identify new solutions for clients.



Technology has revolutionised the travel sector in the recent years. There are dedicated online booking engines available for all sort of worldwide product requirements. In fact, in 2018, this technological advancement will continue at much larger scale. Artificial Intelligence is one of the fastest-growing technological advancement and increasing usage of AI in travel industry is expected. Cloud computing enables sharing the services of an organisation over its firewall. Apart from the evident advantages of storing information on remote servers, cloud computing also offers a reduction of costs, more scalability as well as flexibility. We can expect more personalised and predictive service from the B2B booking system this year by enhancing the boundaries of technology. This year is expected to be one of the most crucial years for the advancement of technology in the travel industry.

RAVI SINGH Director 24x7 Rooms

Virtual reality and augmented reality are the youngest technologies looking to make an impact on the travel spectrum. The tourism industry is on its way to use available technology to bridge the time between today and the inevitable VR/AR age. We believe that a first mover advantage can help to act and think differently on their products and services. TI Infotech strongly believes in innovation and our two signature products—Travel Cloud Suite and Travel Assist—have roadmaps that include constant research and development. For 2018, our team is focused on how to embrace the new market trends and bridge the gaps in the industry to bring in value to our existing and future clientele. New technologies such as AI, advanced data analytics, chatbots and blockchain are already influencing the industry's transformation. Our product team is already exploring options to map these solutions for the travel fraternity.

MEENU SACHDEVA Managing Director and Co-founder, TI Infotech





Globally, we are looking at a major transformation on travel shopping and booking behaviour of the customer. The booking systems are also getting smarter in the way they sell travel to the customer. Personalisation will be key and the system that will rule in the future will be those which can proactively approach a customer and show them travel options without any human inputs. Voice has already replaced the chatbots and this will now be used in mainstream OTA and mobile platforms. Corporate bookings will be serviced by smart self-booking systems which work with customer profiles, preferences and policies and can also manage all ancillary sales and destination content. The ownership of corporate booking tools will change hands from TMC to the corporates. Increased number of SME will be serviced by TMCs rather than OTAs or travel agencies. NDA standards is the way forward for airlines.

GAURAV CHIRIPAL Chief Executive Officer QuadLabs

Digi-smart corporates: **NEED OF THE HOUR**

The inclination towards technology has led to the emergence of the 'Digi-Smart Indian Business Traveller'

ith the growing smartphone usage, internet and digital networking penetration, along with a plethora of online travel choices accessible, business travellers are using technology more than ever before. The report by FCM Travel Solutions and KPMG defines digi-smart business traveller as "a technology-empowered traveller, who leverages technological touch points and tools to minimise encumbrances in his travel journey."

DIGITAL FUTURE?



Sense

Being able to recognise images, sound, voice, video and other 'unstructured' data (as well as structured data that has appeared in computer databases for years)



Think

Decide what such digital data means, and doing so at light speed, based on algorithms



Act

Determine what to do about insights after arriving at them



Learı

Being able to continuously and automatically refine the knowledge and algorithmic models based on its interactions with digital data

KEY APPLICATIONS OF AI



VIRTUAL PERSONAL ASSISTANTS

A software agent performs tasks or services for an individual. These assistants set alarms, make to-do lists, enable purchase of items, etc. Some of the examples are Apple Siri, Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa.



SMART HOME DEVICES

Electronics companies such as Phillips and Samsung have developed smart devices that understand users' tastes and preferences, and accordingly attune themselves to give the desired user experience.



PURCHASE PREDICTIONS

Retailers in the US, such as Amazon and Best Buy, are using AI and machine learning to predict how to stock stores and staff shifts, and to also dynamically recommend products and set prices for individual customers.



All Pre-Integrated APIs | No Hosting Cost | No AMC

Free Upgrades | On Demand support | Go Live in 2 weeks*
B2B & B2C Sales Channel | Social Media & Blog Integration
Integrated CMS | All pre-integrated services



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ata is driving a lot of businesses today across industries and travel isn't far behind. In fact, this industry can gain substantially considering that human behaviour can be quite predictable. Increasingly, every action, every decision, every choice, and every interaction has much more data behind it so much so that leaders expect a new data era to begin reshaping the travel industry in India.

With customer demands getting more and more varied, one way to predict their behaviour is through data. Speaking about how Big Data has helped him, **Vineet Budki**, Founder & CEO, Guiddoo, says, "Data is critical for us so much so that six months ago, we set up a data lab in Pune. The point to note though is that while everyone thinks that acquiring data is important, correctly analysing this data is far more critical. We work with multiple distribution channels and one of the realisations that originated from this data lab was that depending on the nationality and the type of traveller, the products that they are buying from our different channels was completely different. So, if you had these data points you had the ability to process these patterns. Based on these attributes, we started empowering our people to cross-sell products that had a high chance of being sold through that channel."

CROSS SELL AND UP-SELL

Many companies, unfortunately, barely think beyond selling. But companies that have adopted technology or are born out of it are able to think of innovative and non-linear ways to sell. **Ankush Nijhawan**, Managing Director, Nijhawan Group & Co-founder, Travel Boutique Online (TBO), feels that not many agents cross-sell even today. "How many of you actually use data to upgrade an existing three-star traveller to a four-star? I need to think how I can up-sell a four-star category room to my customer who has asked for a three-star room. Data can also help in better negotiation because it gives you the power of information. For instance, we know that we have sold 200 air tickets between 9:45-10:00 am from Delhi into Mumbai. We have been using this data to talk to various airlines to negotiate a better price because we know that this business has been happening consistently."

Moving away from the archetypal requirements, one

way to predict customers' behaviour is through data

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TECH IT AND LOVE IT



"While everyone thinks that acquiring data is important, correctly analyzing this data is far more critical"

VINEET BUDKI Founder & CEO Guiddoo



"As we become more modern, and more tools are available, it becomes easier to process the data"

JAAL SHAH Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group & Founder, RezLive.com



"Transaction data can also indicate what he has bought in the past and what his appetite for spending is"

NOEL SWAIN
Chief Operating Officer
Ezeego1.com



"The challenge with smaller companies is that people walk in and out of the door where data isn't necessarily captured"

CHETAN KAPOOR Research Analyst – Asia Pacific Phocuswright Inc The challenge is to get the right data and sort it, so it becomes usable for the company. Jaal Shah, Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group & Founder, RezLive.com, started out with a lot of data. "The challenge lies in processing it. As we become more modern, and more tools are available, it becomes easier to process the data. So, having the correct set of data is important. There is subscribed data and there is some good data, which is always important, because in the distribution industry which is rapidly changing, forecasting is one aspect that you really need to have an eye on. That also helps you in terms of pricing the product right. Based on this, there are times when we end up selling more Baku than Bangkok."

FORECASTING USING PAST DATA

It may sound like a conundrum, but past data has proved to be a great tool to improve product offerings. While Ezeego1.com has used a lot of historical data in the past, it now has data available in real time. Noel Swain, Chief Operating Officer, Ezeego1.com, says, "If the goal is to improve your cross-sell of hotels to flights, you have real time access to what the customer has just searched for, which is when you can start selling hotels in that destination. Basis transaction data, which is historical data, can also indicate what he has bought in the past and what his appetite for spending is. The combination of historical data with real time data is interesting."

Chetan Kapoor, Research Analyst – Asia Pacific, Phocuswright Inc, agrees. He says that there is always merit in analysing past data because that can offer sentiment for the future. "There is a reason why for years we have been analysing even weather data and pattern so we know how the weather might be in future. The challenge with smaller companies and more retail-oriented companies is that people walk in and out of the door where data isn't necessarily captured," he adds. Unfortunately, the prediction part is still missing in Indian companies.

WHEN TO USE DATA?

Data as we know has been changing significantly over time. RezLive.com handles a lot of data on a regular basis and Shah tell us when this data should be used. "I think it is important for both-pre-facto or post-facto. You have a certain sense of historical data which is built over the years. You are also aware about the seasonality of this industry. I know a particular product was sold last year. I should check if it is being searched again this year. If not, I need to know what is being searched this year, so I should be able to offer that product," he says. Ezeego1.com also generates a lot of consumer data in real time. Swain reveals that it is going through a huge technological

transformation now and data is certainly at the core of it. "As we really prepare ourselves as an organisation to harness data, it requires a significant change in the culture of the organisation and its attitude towards data. It is not so much the responsibility of the CTO or the CIO; it is about the culture that the organisation needs to adopt.

One of the things that we are

looking at is how to access our data and develop Artificial Intelligence that will help us provide relevant products to customers,"

he says.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

customers better."

Ezeego1.com is ahead clearly of the data curve. So is TBO. Niihawan echoes Swain's thoughts and says, "For me, big data was born five years ago and now the time has moved towards machine Al and learning. But there are many companies who are still behind the curve for big data. I would request everyone to consider and value their data. A company like TBO, which has so much data of all your travellers, is going to be used for the purpose of AI which we believe can help you in servicing the

The conversion rate is the highest when you are providing the most relevant products to customers. This can happen only through predictive analysis of this data. "It's a process. We are all used to using different types of extremely divorced sets of data. The ability to really unify that and make sense out of it and use it to benefit the customer is something that we are all going though. We are making investments in this area to ensure that every function in the organisation has the ability to look at data and make sense of it, whether it is marketing or operations or even sales," explains Swain.

DATA FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

This could be a mine of data – social behaviour and key words that people are talking about, whether it

It may sound like a conundrum, but past data has proved

to be a great tool to improve future product offerings

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CHALLENGES

Simply put, data is not being used smartly. Like Kapoor says, "In India, typically the larger companies do lay emphasis on data. Companies are either on the curve or ahead of it. The challenge remains that the data is fragmented. Airlines will

still in low whispers, mostly because users here click on everything so long as they can get an extra mile out of it. Unfortunately, not many people in India value privacy, especially in tiered cities. But till the time the customer starts getting affected by security breaches, data will remain king.

IN CONVERSATION **20** TRAVTALK February 2ND Fortnight Issue 2018 **FACT FILE** A new era has emerged, which is going to be led by Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning Technology is the enabler and human touch is the aspect of personalisation that is becoming relevant • Conversational e-commerce is the next big wave which is going to bring disruption

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Finding innovation in DISRUPTION

The 5th Global Hospitality Conclave saw major players from the travel and technology sectors discuss 'Disruptive Innovation' and the ways in which the hospitality sector can move forward in spite of these disruptions.

KANCHAN NATH

he panel at the 5th Global Hospitality
Conclave included Rajesh
Magow, CEO, MakeMyTrip; Jan
Tissera, President-International,
Travel Click, and Kaushik
Dasgupta, Head of Industry, Google India. Here are
some excerpts from the session:

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND MACHINE LEARNING

In the business context, the first level of disruption occurred in 2000 with the advent of the Internet, says Rajesh Magow, CEO, MakeMyTrip. "It was the beginning of the online era that disrupted the old, brick and mortar business. That was the basic disruption led by technology. Over the last decade, different kind of disruptions have been happening within the technology space itself, which could clearly be categorised as the second phase of disruption. The next level of disruption in the Internet space came with smartphones. We also faced that for our existing business as the device in question was a small screen one, and everything had to be fitted into that. The technology disruption caused by this was phenomenal. Technology talent moved from desktop to mobile. Going forward now a new era has emerged, which is going to be led by Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. That's going to be a new set of innovation that will happen."

THE HUMAN TOUCH

While disruption can make some, it can also destroy.

Jan Tissera, President–International, Travel Click says, "From the year 2000, if you look at the list of Fortune 500 companies, you realise that nearly 50 per cent of them exist no more, and that's a wake-up call. It's so disruptive. If you look at the music industry, iTunes has taken over and we no more use CDs. In the hospitality industry, shared economy has taken over. We also need to go back and see what TripAdvisor did for the industry by bringing the user reviews and making sure that our standards improved. They certainly brought in the consumer much closer to the operation.

"In the industry that I am in, I serve many hoteliers across geographies. Localisation is extremely important in this disruptive world. We cannot get away with the whole aspect of the human touch as far as hospitality is concerned. Personalisation and understanding your customer is requisite. Technology is the enabler and human touch is the aspect of personalisation that is becoming very relevant today," Tissera adds.

BIG DATA AND MARKET DYNAMICS

Hotels need to get smarter, and for that it is essential to understand the customer, their needs and preferences. "To grow, you need to put the right product in place at the right time. Gathering business intelligence remains important. How many bookings are coming through Google or OTAs? Future information remains vital in terms of demand and competitive intelligence. By doing



"

Going forward now a new era has emerged, which is going to be led by Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning

RAJESH MAGOW CEO MakeMyTrip



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In India, no matter what we do, the Internet ecosystem still does not support fast connectivity.

KAUSHIK DASGUPTA Head of Industry Google, India





Technology is the enabler and human touch is the aspect of personalisation.

JAN TISSERA

President–International

Travel Click





Intelligence. Voice is going to be the next game changer

that, all the other aspects of it will be put in place. Understanding the value of the consumer once they come into your hotel, their needs, and the aspect of the user-interface or what the touch points are of the consumers—to me these are more important than the competitors," Tissera says.

INTERNET ECOSYSTEM

Commenting on what the data is telling us, **Kaushik Dasgupta**, Head of Industry, Google India, says, "Data is very promising and the fundamental thing is that innovation today could be disruption tomorrow. Fundamentally, you need to figure out what is the thing that your users want. In India, no matter what we do, the Internet ecosystem still does not support fast connectivity.

Either we can figure out it's a challenge and go to the government or service providers or wait and let the ecosystem evolve or be disrupted or start working with the partners. Best is to ensure that your assets are fast enough irrespective of the Internet connectivity. So on a 2G or 3G phone, can we load your website faster or can we develop technology that enables you to do so. Is that disruptive? Probably not, but it's the need of the hour. Though five years down the line, you might say that was disruptive."

Google tries to break the travel ecosystem into five different phases. Dasgupta explains, "The first phase is dreaming about travel. This could be because of some social media post or seeing a lovely picture and dreaming about a holiday.

The second phase would be about researching—dreaming about going to a beach and you start searching for beaches. The third phase is booking, either going to a GDS or calling up a hotel directly.

Fourth phase is experiencing the property or holiday. The last thing is about sharing the experience, and this process pretty much remains about the same. This process has not changed in the last 50 years and will not change in the next 50. What's changing is how people are engaging with these processes. About 20 per cent of research that's happening right now is over voice."

CONVERSATIONAL E-COMMERCE

The future is, being able to talk to Artificial Intelligence. Magow says, "Voice is going to be the next game changer. There are two aspects to this, first taking voice as input and giving output to it. When you think of next 150 million users coming into net or using technology, they will also be bringing in the vernacular language aspect of it. We are working on two models, one is fully live now.

At this point of time using Alexa, but we are trying to build our IP on that. With this, you can do a Red Bus booking using a vernacular language. We have already tested that. It's right now in three vernacular languages, i.e. Hindi, Tamil and Telegu. Though the response that you get now is in English, we are trying to change that to vernacular output as well. It's a seamless booking experience till the booking is confirmed and you get a text confirming the same.

"So, this is conversational e-commerce, and we think this is the next wave which is going to come. Especially in India, given that beyond 200 million people would find English as a challenge, people consume vernacular content quite easily. Hence, voice input and output would go viral in the coming days. We are investing heavily on that," Magow concludes.

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Fxkart's digital remittance platform

Fxkart unveils a new solution for its customers' remittance requirements— Flyremit is the platform that has set to make outward remittances from India hassle-free for customers.

utward remittances from India is a lucrative yet complex and regulation-heavy industry, says Abdul Hadi Shaikh, CEO, Fxkart.com. "Foreign exchange rates are still a myth to many and customers depend on banks or forex dealers (AD Category II as per RBI), for all remittance requirements including the required KYCs, forex rates, etc." he shares.

He claims that customers in the remittance industry face many problems, which includes huge markups charged by banks and forex dealers; no transparency in remittances rates; cumbersome process for KYC verification as well as indefinite timelines and commitments on remittance confirmations. Shaikh says that Flyremit can be the perfect solutions to these problems. "Flyremit provides customers live remittance rates with most efficient markups. Customers can be rest assured that our rates and markups are transparent. Flyremit also provides documentation, which enables effortless document verification by authorised remittance partners. Remittance confirmations generated by our remittance partners are reflected in real-time to the customers," he reveals. Listing other benefits



ABDUL HADI SHAIKH CEO Fxkart.com

DMCs can use the Flyremit portal to raise their invoices to travel agents in India

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of the platform, he says, "Flyremit enables a travel agent or a B2B agent consolidator to directly collect package cost online and have it seamlessly remitted to the DMCs account abroad reducing the GST impact of multiple layers of invoicing. All this is done without disclosing their margins. Flyremit even has a dedicated portal for overseas Destination Management Companies and supports receivable collection for them. DMCs can use the Flyremit portal to raise their invoices to travel agents in India. Flyremit's process ensures DMCs to track each stage of their inward payments, added with the advantage of receiving independent remittance confirmations (SWIFT) directly from remittance partners."

Flyremit is easily customisable and can be integrated seamlessly for all types of remittances for B2B travel service providers, hotel consolidators, tourism boards, etc to ensure smooth tracking of receivables from the Indian travel market. Explaining further, he says, "Flyremit is integrated with Travel Boutique Online, users of which can directly start remitting from their TBO portals without the need for a separate login. We are expanding our integrations and shortly will be available on all consolidator platforms."

Reach Readership



The only publication reaching the entire travel industry The only source of information in Tier-II & Tier-III cities

South Asia's #1 Travel Trade Publication

BOOKINGS

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Reinventing RFAIITY

To choose to travel is an emotional call and this decision is being assisted with technology. Chatbots are supporting travel agencies in customer interaction while VR is bridging the gap between the product and its actual purchase.

ANKITA SAXENA

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xperiences are the currency of the travel industry and communicating these experiences with ease is the new age demand of travellers.

A 2017 report by Sabre Labs—

Emerging Technology in Travel, states, "In the travel and technology industry, one of the key ways we see automation playing out is in the rise of bots that serve as digital personal agents, designed to act on behalf of a traveller, responding to passive or active inputs. Agents have already embraced automation in a really powerful way through algorithms that automate price monitoring, deal finding, etc. These tools help expedite the manual work of itinerary building. Next generation automation can help with even more of the ground work, taking care of a greater share of the itinerary building for routine kind of travel, and doing a better job of filtering down to viable itinerary options to save agents time."

According to Forbes, Chatbots will be responsible for cost savings of over \$8 billion annually by 2022, up from \$20 million in 2017.

Reshmi Roy, India Business Lead, Skyscanner India, says, "Skyscanner is proud to have been an early entrant and pioneer in the exciting world of bots, messaging and conversational search. In February 2016 we became the first travel search engine to create a skill for Amazon's Alexa voice service. In May 2016, we were also the first travel search to create and launch a bot for Facebook's Messenger platform. In August 2016, we pioneered the first group chat travel search bot in collaboration with Skype for the new Skype Bots platform and in May 2017 we launched our first artificial intelligence skill for Microsoft's Cortana."

Roy explains that conversational tools have become platforms to which travellers have become accustomed for interaction and bookings and bots have started shaping themselves as solution providers for problems frequently encountered by travel companies. As chatbots have more interactions with customers, they learn from each conversation. She elaborates, being the next tier in the evolution of personal assistants, bots can handle a broad range of tasks depending on the domain they are used in. With an innovative technology, bots are an instrumental mode of making travel a seamless and an effective experience. Starting from providing information to the customer or providing solutions to immediate problems, bots provide an engaged consumer service. They can solve queries, give recommendations, initiate transactions and have casual interactions, thereby having a direct impact on brand affinity for the consumer.

She says, "The gap between looking and booking air fares is being reduced and simplified. The flight ticket search being made intuitive and user-friendly

while embedding more into services and platforms that consumers interact on everyday will ultimately benefit the industry. The messaging economy is an area, which we think contains incredibly important evolutionary features for the travel industry."

However, Roy also believes that though Chatbots continue to grow in the industry, human effort is required to give them functionality and with precise task automation, bots will be accurately able to identify scenarios where consumers want or need to carry out an action.

Nishant Kashikar, Country Manager, India & Gulf, Tourism Australia adds, "Chatbots have the potential to transform travel, especially in the customer service space. Chatbot intelligence will facilitate and simplify the booking process with direct interface for travellers through a virtual assistant. This will certainly help travel companies reduce cost of customer acquisition, improve response time, and enhance service levels. Chatbots need not necessarily replace humans, but they will bridge the gap between brands and consumers in ways that no other marketing platform has been able to do before."

SIMULATING REALITY

Though Virtual Reality (VR) finds its genesis in film production and gaming industry, the level of awareness of VR's increasing capabilities outside these domains is still growing and in its infancy. However, there is evidence that consumers can already see the potential of VR and how it can be used in a practical sense to discover travel. Mark Irwin, Senior Marketing Manager—Brand Engagement, VisitScotland, believes that VR is a great way to inspire people to come visit a destination and helps to give a flavour of the variety of attractions on offer. He points out that choosing a holiday destination is largely based on emotion and the way visitors access information about Scotland has changed dramatically in recent years. "We know that over 60 per cent of people search for their next holiday destination on their mobile and giving someone a virtual reality experience of a destination is a great way to incite that emotion during those 'I want to get away moments.""

ScotlandVR is a virtual travel experience which allows the user, wherever they are in the world, to be immersed in Scotland's incredible attractions through stunning 360 video and imagery. Freely downloadable from the Google Play and Apple Stores, ScotlandVR can be experienced in 3D with a Google cardboard headset or in 360 degree view in phone mode. "With ScotlandVR, you can walk through the pre-historic village of Skara Brae, soar over the Forth Bridge or Edinburgh Castle, travel through the Hollow Mountain of Ben Cruachan and experience the Glenfinnan Viaduct and Falkirk Wheel. The interactive content can inspire those thinking about





Chatbot intelligence will facilitate and simplify the booking process with direct interface

NISHANT KASHIKAR Country Manager, India & Gulf, Tourism Australia







Skyscanner is a pioneer in the world of bots, messaging and conversational search

RESHMI ROY India Business Lead Skyscanner India







The interactive content can inspire those thinking about making a trip to Scotland

MARK IRWIN Senior Marketing Manager—Brand Engagement, VisitScotland



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Some companies use digital media to engage consumers as a forum for feedback

while some use this kind of outreach to provide more customised services

making a trip to Scotland, giving them that final nudge to come and experience Scotland firsthand for themselves," he says.

Kashikar, further explains that this technology makes it possible to layer digital enhancements over an existing reality. He feels that VR serves

as a strong advertising tool as it offers a near-real experience to the potential travellers prior to the purchase and helps them plan their journey in a more seamless, interactive, and simple way. He says, "The VR technology will potentially improve customer satisfaction levels, as the gap between what's promoted and the actual experience narrows down significantly. Tourism Australia effectively used cutting-edge Virtual Reality (VR) and 360-degree technology for its campaign 'There's Nothing Like Australia.' The campaign helped to raise Australia's awareness and aspiration among our target audience. We also shared Google Cardboards, with our Key Distribution Partners and used Samsung Gear VR head-sets for major consumer and trade events as well as face to face training programmes."

A potential customer can be virtually walked through the whole check-in process, and end up on the balcony of their virtual room, taking in the actual view they would see if they were to take a trip to a particular destination. "This 'take me there', or a 'first-person experience' can be a powerful motivator in consumer decision making process. It will also help to influence the client's apprehensions as they will be confident to book a particular service, based on their VR experience," adds Kashikar.

Identifying the challenges in implementing VR in tourism businesses, Kashikar points out that in the short term, the cost of technology, including onlocation filming, production, VR gear, etc could be a potential deterrent. "However, this could be offset against the perceived benefits arising out of the overall customer experience," he adds.

GOOD TO KNOW

VisitScotland also opened the first ever #ScotSpirit Instagram Travel Agency at London which allowed travellers to build their own holidays to the destination based entirely around other people's photographs. Upon arrival, Instagram inspiration was delivered via a floor-to-ceiling screen displaying hundreds of Instagram photos of Scotland. At this state-of-the-art picture wall, visitors selected their favourite '#ScotSpirit' Instagram images of Scotland's sights, restaurants, experiences and more. The knowledgeable staff then used customer's cherry-picked Instagram pictures to curate their perfect Scottish holiday suggested itinerary.





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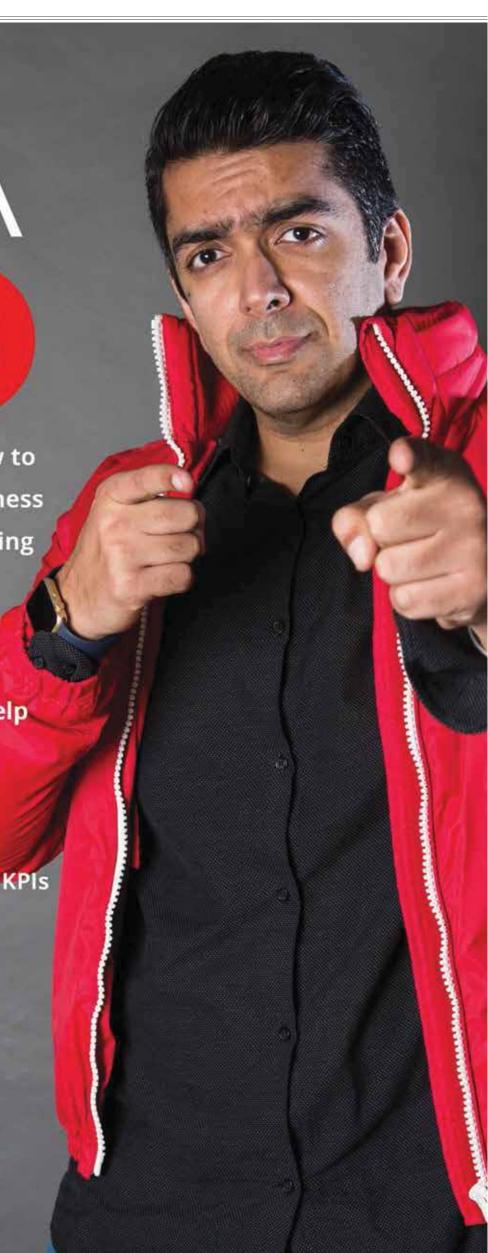
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Seminars without BORDERS

While a webinar cannot offer the personal interaction that characterises workshops, it can reach more people spread over huge geographies.

HAZEL JAIN

raining using technology can cut down human effort by almost half.
That is the beauty of technology. While the travel industry has dragged its feet for long in accepting technology to give their business an advantage, some companies have started using it in some little way.
These below instances of five companies exemplify how webinars can prove to be an effective tool for the travel industry.

INTERNET MOGULS

Avijit Arya, Founder, Internet Moghuls, has been conducting webinars on a regular basis since 2015 – at least one webinar every month. From 2018, they have been doing one every single week. He says, "It is a concept which has not been utilised yet in India. Webinars are a great way to reach out to your audience and this electronic classroom is indeed a great platform to exchange updates and knowledge. We have over 1,02,000 people who subscribe to my weekly updates, webinars are repeated, and recordings are emailed and posted on my Facebook page."

This, Arya says, works well in the long run and you see results after doing it regularly for years. "Our aim is to give to our busy audience only the all-you-need-to-know in one hour every week. You need to have a strong database for sending out e-mailers for registrations. The registration number might be high but you cannot expect all to attend. You need to create a buzz on the internet through social media and a good software to conduct the webinar. Get good practice on it before the actual day to avoid any untoward incident," Arya says, adding that the aim is to give value to the audience whose time is precious. "A webinar doesn't work alone; it needs to be part of your overall social media strategy. But I'm having so much fun doing this," he enthuses.

SABRE

Sabre has been conducting webinars for its clients and partners for many years now. This platform is used to further engage with stakeholders and share information about new products, innovations and key industry topics. Speaking about how this has helped the company, **Todd Arthur**, Vice President, Sabre Travel Network Asia Pacific, says, "Webinars that discuss issues affecting the industry generate more reactions from participants. For example, webinars that discuss industry mandates generate phenomenal response from participants. Agents, on the other hand, are generally interested in product-focused webinars that help to explain how they address specific challenges."

According to Arthur, webinars get only 25-30 per cent of those who initially register. "India being such a vast country, webinars are a strategic way to share information at a

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TECH IT AND LOVE IT



"You need to create a buzz on the internet through social media and software to conduct the webinar." AVIJIT ARYA Founder Internet Moghuls



"Webinars that discuss issues affecting the industry generate more reactions from participants."
TODD ARTHUR
Vice President
Sabre Travel Network Asia Pacific



"Product presentations through webinars have a higher reach as participants can easily access them." LUBAINA SHEERAZI COO Blue Square Consultants



"I started this company because I realised that there was a huge vacuum in terms of product knowledge." NIKITA RAWTANI Director TravelGyaan



"Since India is our largest source market, the webinar allowed us to push newer properties in this market NADIA BEAULIEU Director, Market Sales Jumeirah Group



as participants can easily access them from their office

low cost. The key to executing a successful webinar is to provide relevant, timely and interesting content and to ensure that it is generated with the collaboration of a reliable and experienced partner, who will make it easy for participants to both register and attend the webinar," Arthur says.

BLUE SQUARE CONSULTANTS

Blue Square Consultants conducted its first-ever webinar in 2014 for Oman Tourism, mainly to reach out to agents who they had not met through their roadshows and update them with the latest offerings. Around 800 travel agents across various metros, Tier-II and III cities in India participated in that webinar. "This is a huge number to address just in an hour. After the success of Oman, we conducted a webinar for Seychelles last year. We were able to reach out to more than 850 agents across India and successfully convey how Seychelles is different from other island destinations," says Lubaina Sheerazi, COO, Blue Square Consultants.

Product presentations done through webinars have a higher reach and value as participants can easily access the presentation from their office without having to travel, she adds. They can also archive the session for future reference. Another benefit, Shirazi adds, of conducting webinars is that participants invest time to attend only if they are genuinely interested. Over the years, webinars have also helped us to generate leads and identify potential partners," she claims.

TRAVELGYAAN

TravelGyaan has been conducting webinars for the industry and working towards evolving the entire travel industry. With a strong background of training and marketing behind her, **Nikita Rawtani**, Director, TravelGyaan, believes it is the best way to empower an industry. TravelGyaan conducts training programmes and webinars. "Training is my area of expertise. I started this company because I realised that there was a huge vacuum in terms of product knowledge. For instance, when NTOs conduct training for the trade, they have limited invites and only one or two members from each agency can attend and the information doesn't percolate down to the entire department," she adds.

TravelGyaan has conducted webinars for all kinds of products – hotels, NTOs, airlines, DMCs. Its online training includes webinars which is in real-time as well as e-learning which is done through modules which has no interaction.

JUMEIRAH GROUP

One of UAE's biggest hotel chain recently conducted its first webinar that focused on its UAE properties. The webinar brought together over 500 travel agents from different parts of India at one go. Speaking about it is **Nadia Beaulieu**, Director, Market Sales (Dubai Commercial Cluster), Jumeirah Group, who says, "The interactive session enhanced our understanding of the Indian market. It essentially served as a platform for us to educate the travel and trade industry about the various offerings in our properties across Dubai. We will conduct more such focused webinars in 2018 as we believe it helps us connect with a huge audience at once."

The webinar served as a platform to not only strengthen its relationships with the travel fraternity but also to understand the demands of Indian travelers from their perspective. "Since India is the largest source market for our Dubai properties, the webinar allowed us to push properties we hope will interest the Indian market," Beaulieu adds.







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Technology & business GO TOGETHER



RAKSHIT DES

Rakshit Desai, Managing Director, FCM Travel Solutions, talks about the changing needs of business travellers and how technology can be used to transform their travel experience.

t's an interesting era for business travel. In the past couple of years, a major shift has been witnessed in the way hotel and airline bookings are done, from the traditional to smart self booking systems. Navigating in any destination has also been simplified using new technologies powered by artificial intelligence, chatbots and blockchain.

ADAPT NEW TECHNOLOGY

FCM and KPMG have released an analytical whitepaper titled, 'The Digi-Smart Indian Business Traveller', which offers insights into disrupting technologies in the travel industry. Desai says, "This includes some

of the early emerging themes, trends, technological developments and topics of <u>interest for the industry."</u>

About the key findings of the whitepaper, he says, "We are seeing some interesting developments in areas like new technology self-booking adoption. tools. travel artificial analytics, intelligence and sharing economy services, are not only here to stay but hold myriad and exciting possibilities for the future. There are early indicators of potential applications for Artificial Intelligence technologies and Machine Learning capabilities. Some of the more recent developments in encryption capabilities come with Blockchain."

ADVANTAGE POINT

Elaborating on the advantages of employing technology in travel, Desai says, "For the customer, there are price advantages as it's more efficient to serve them and therefore, economies of scale can be passed on. It means more control because you have fast-tracked access to information, almost real-time information availability. That gives you greater deal of control and flexibility in the way you manage your business."

PROSPECT 2018

Desai says 2017 was a blockbuster year for them. "We have delivered record growth rates and business volumes. New Year 2018 has started on a positive note and we remain optimistic about our growth prospects. We are looking to bring SAM to India, it's a global tool with Artificial Intelligence capabilities and predictive handling capabilities. Equally, we are building a suit of products and services that could provide similar capabilities to Indian travellers at Indian price points as well."

PROLIFERATION OF CHOICE

On disruptors and disruption, concludes, "Mobility is not a disruption. What's happening is the proliferation of choice in terms of the products and services that you can consume, but also the channels through which you can interact with service providers. Then we moved into a web-based interface, most of us had to be in office since we did not have Internet access. Mobile basically takes that one step further, wherein you can make use of the time in transit. What's happened is that a lot of the service providers and technology builders have started to build interfaces that work on a 4 or 5-inch screen. What we will get better at is more customisation and personalisation in recognising individual travellers. Between Face ID and biometrics, you will not have to go through your normal eck-in procedures."

Self-booking tools, travel analytics, Al and economy

services, hold exciting possibilities for the future







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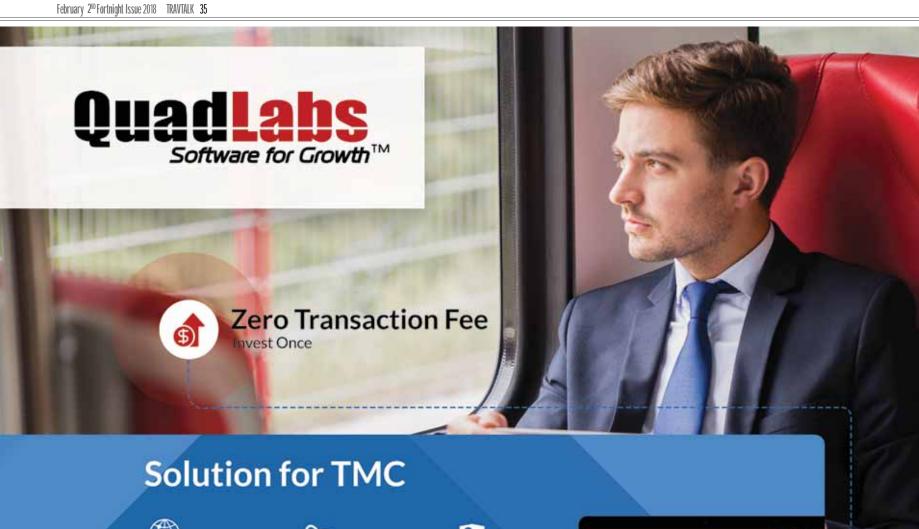
being ravel agencies, asset-light business have always been financially underserved. Traditional lenders ask for collaterals and neverending financial documentation, which are seldom available. Today, with the digital outreach and government's initiatives like Adhaar, we get a platform for new age fintech companies like Indifi to offer digital lending, which is much more transparent, fast and helps travel agencies to grow their business with easier access to credit.

Digital lending analyses their business transactions with aggregators like TBO, Riya, Yatra, Via and Uniglobe and offers them access to credit based on those transactions. Indifi with its custom loan products for travel agencies offers up to `10 lakh without any need of financial documentation and up to `50 lakh with financial documents. Indifi's custom travel loan offering gives travel agencies access to multiple lenders, which gives them a better chance of getting access to credit at a competitive rate and all this while keeping the complete customer journey with the company. Digital lending enables us to offer customised product for travel agencies, which helps them to manage their working capital efficiently. Indifi has customised products, which cater travel agencies working capital requirements like on time BSP settlement, bulk bookings, supplier settlements against corporate invoices, etc.

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The author is **Alok Mittal**, Co-founder and CEO, Indifi.







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