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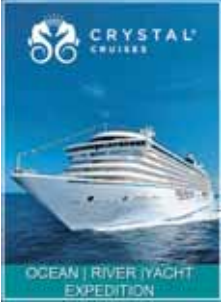
SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE

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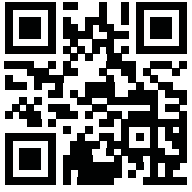
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2019: Lukewarm response

While the tourism industry expressed hope of a promising 2019, the year couldn't quite match expectations. Performance and revenues remained mediocre, while a few government policies acted as a silver lining.



Ashwani Lohani
 Chairman & Managing Director, Air India

“ We began operating nine international routes in FY 2019-20 and many new domestic flights as well. We have completed all this expansion without any addition of new aircraft and by using the existing fleet and staff to its maximum capacity. We were able to do this despite the financial crunch and other issues that the airline is facing. Going forward, I expect the passenger capacity in India to almost double in the next 10 years or much earlier. ”



HS Duggal
 Managing Director
 Minar Group

“ Year 2019 was kind to us. Winning the WTM World Travel Leaders Award was the cherry on the cake! Our MICE vertical, ELBON, successfully handled reputable domestic and international conferences. For 2020, we are gearing up to take our luxury brand, Vilasa, to even greater heights. Some new innovations are in the pipeline. For 2020, we, as an industry, hope for GST to be simpler and clearer for all of us. ”



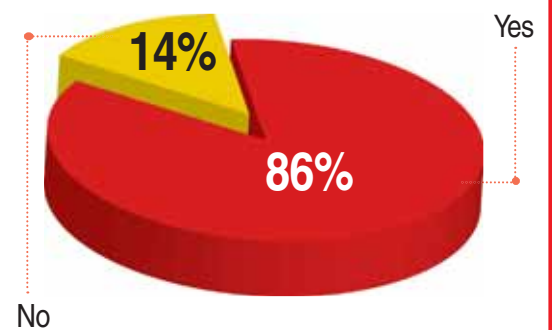
Dev Karvat
 Founder & CEO, India & Emerging Markets
 TravellTag Cover-More

“ The emphasis in 2019 was on tech-led innovations to accommodate changing trends and travel demographics. We introduced game-changing travel assistance products like Crisis Assistance Plus, to fulfil the principle of ‘duty of care’ and offer assistance during catastrophic events. We look at innovation as a reason to bring positive change. It has become imperative to think ahead of the curve. ”

Contd on page 7 ▶

86% agents recommend insurance

Despite the fact that travel today is riddled with uncertainties, whether it is accidents, flight delays or even political unrest, there is a substantial number of travel agents who still don't think it is necessary to recommend travel insurance to their clients. A recent poll conducted by TRAVTALK reveals that this number is close to 14 per cent of the total responders! Thankfully, a larger chunk of those who participated in our poll do push insurance cover to customers.



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Riaz Munshi is president

The newly-elected team of OTOAI will focus on three key areas as part of its immediate agenda – building relationships with governments and tourism boards, doubling membership within a year, and conducting more trainings.

 Manas Dwivedi

In a recently concluded ceremony, Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) unanimously elected its new Executive Committee (EC) for the 2019-2021 term, taking charge from December 10, 2019. While some new faces have been brought on board, part of the previous team has also been retained. **Riaz Munshi**, Managing Director, N Chirag Travels, has been elected President



and **Himanshu Patil**, Director, Kesari Tours, has retained the position of Vice President. **Shravan Bhalla**, CEO, High Flyer and an Executive Committee member in the previous term, will be the new General Secretary of the association. **Vineet Gopal**, Managing Director, Engee Holidays and OTOAI's Chapter



Chairman for North India, has been elected as the new Joint Secretary, while **Siddharth Khanna**, Partner, Khanna Enterprises, has once again been chosen as the Treasurer of the association.

Members of the new Managing Committee include immediate past president **Mahendra Vakharia**, Managing Director, Pathfinder Holidays; former Joint Secretary **Gurdeep Singh Gujral**, Director, Gujral Tours and Travels; **Adi Abdul Karim**,

Director, Creative Tours and Travels; **Ankush Nijhawan**, Co-founder, TBO Group; **Arshdeep Anand**, CEO, Spectrum Handcrafted Holidays and **Monia Kapoor**, Proprietor, Travel O Holidays. **Sanjay Datta**, Managing Director, Airborne Travels, was the Election Officer of the OTOAI election 2019 –2021.

Sharing his excitement on being elected President of OTOAI, Munshi stressed that his immediate attention will be on three main areas, namely

relationship building, driving membership, and conducting workshops. He said, "Firstly, we want to strengthen our relationship with the government, tourism boards, and embassies. Secondly, we must double the membership base of the association to anywhere between 1000 and 1500, within the next year. Thirdly, we need to conduct more product trainings and workshops for our members. This year, we have already done a number of such activities, but we want to increase the number." 🇮🇳





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TRAVELTALK

VIEWPOINT

Leaders leading all the way

This month has been very eventful for associations. After a hectic round of campaigning by various candidates, the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) elected a new President for 2019-2021. A week later, the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) also unanimously elected a new President for the next two years.

The two new association heads have their work cut out for them, as there are plenty of issues plaguing the industry. With a lot left to be done, the sooner they get to work, the better it will be for the members, who have entrusted them with this responsibility. The Presidents, though new, have the able support of their predecessors, who they can turn to for guidance and sane advice. The new leaders will have to learn and understand the ground realities and then work on a plan to move forward.

TAAI President **Jyoti Mayal** talks about the importance of the sector being accorded the industry status and the benefits that it can reap from this. She also points out that we need a unified approach to reach out to the government, and raises the point about GST and TCS, both of which have been sore points plaguing the industry. Most important of all, she talks about women empowerment and the need for more women to join the association.

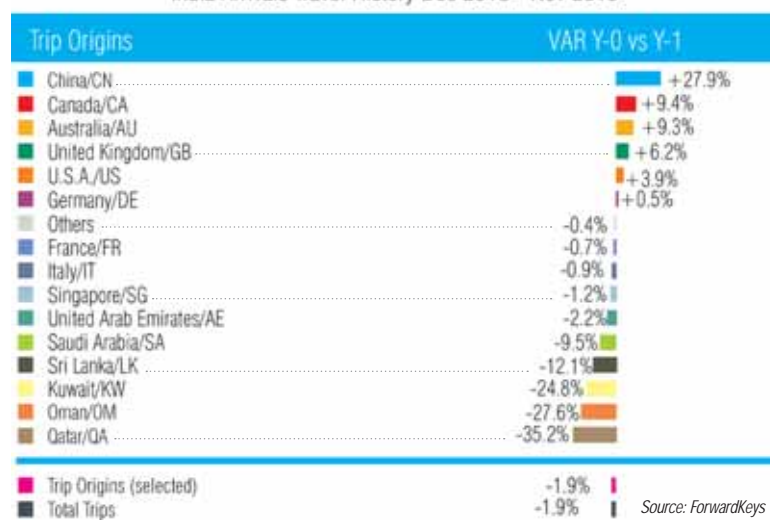
Riaz Munshi, the new President of OTOAI, is also optimistic about increasing the membership base and calls for cooperation in the association and strengthening bonds with NTOs, embassies, and the government. Both the leaders have set out their respective goals and we will be more than glad to see them work towards objectives and hope that the two years will be spent working for the betterment of the association in particular and the industry in general. With the government claiming to prioritise tourism and wanting to increase tourist inflow and tourism revenue, travel trade associations have a greater role to play in realising this objective. The associations should now work in harmony to ensure that revenue grows and India leads in tourism charts. It's time to take tourism seriously and who better than our leaders to pave the way for this.

ForwardKeys reviews FTAs

In the past year, between December 2018 and November 2019, inbound arrivals to India (by air) have been impacted by a slowdown in bookings from the Middle East, with overall inbound travel bookings to India having reduced 1.9 per cent.

ForwardKeys, an organisation based in Valencia (Spain) that specialises in business intelligence for the travel ecosystem, studied actual travel bookings into India for the period December 1, 2018 to November 30, 2019, and saw that in the said period, overall inbound travel bookings to India by air had reduced by 1.9 per cent. The decline was primarily due to bookings from the Gulf, with Saudi Arabia and UAE showing a decline of 9.5 per cent and 2.2 per cent, respectively. A top-7 inbound air market with the steepest fall was Kuwait with an almost 25 per cent reduction in bookings. Oman, the ninth largest market, saw a steeper fall of 27.6 per cent. Overall, the Middle East, as a region, is the largest inbound air market to India and saw a 14.5 per cent decline in air bookings over the past 12 months. Drilling down by countries, growth was seen in important long-haul markets like USA and UK.

India Arrivals Travel History Dec 2018 - Nov 2019



(The views, information, or opinions expressed are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the view of the publication.)

Say no to dishonest agents

Vijay Mohan Raj, Director, Skål International, says there is an urgent need for tourism professionals to devise a mechanism to serve the interests of the fraternity, eliminating fly-by-night operators and protecting its reputation.

In the recent past, most of us have had the misfortune of losing our hard-earned money by not receiving refunds for cancellations at Jet Airways, the same being true to a previous chain of events with Kingfisher Airlines, as well as other scheduled airlines in some manner or the other. It is common knowledge that the business of corporate travel, which is a large portion of the volume an airline enjoys in terms of revenue, is managed by travel management companies. This is a highly intensive, service-oriented exercise that has compelled these travel management companies and their fraternity to invest large portions of their profits into upgrade of technology to match current growth, in a manner similar to that followed by airlines, OTAs, and consolidators.

In this competitive scenario, we have brought ourselves and our business to a stage where we

are required to take risks in doing unsecured trading with airlines and customers. I believe that we need to unite and make the fraternity an organised one to ensure implementation of best practices with airlines, suppliers, as well as customers. I also believe that

“We need to propose a model wherein we introduce a licensing system and ensure that there is a uniform trade practice”

we are a fraternity that has lost its identity as a professional outfit that has a large number of players who are neither monitored nor protected, and operate without any stake in their business. These small ‘mom and pop shops’ end up as ‘fly by night’ operators and have brought disrepute to the entire fraternity which, in the current scenario, we are unable to control. I do accept that while ‘customer is king’,

if the king becomes a dictator, it makes the subjects suffer due to oppression. We need to propose a model wherein we are in a position, as an association, to be able to verify the credentials of members in the trade by introducing a licensing system and ensuring that there

is a uniform trade practice enforceable by the organisation on all stakeholders.

I am in favour of a licensing system where all agents, tour operators, and the 35 categories of travel and tourism professionals be brought into one fold. Also, those who wish to enter the trade should first be part of their association and serve a probationary period, and should be granted a licence

only on the recommendation of the association. This model is already in existence in several countries and the results have been favourable in protecting members of the trade as well as the consumer, who is also protected from unscrupulous elements. I hope that this is deliberated on in a constructive manner by stakeholders of the industry. A White Paper has already been submitted to FAITH, to be submitted to the ministry.

(Vijay Mohan Raj is also a former member of the Managing Committee of Travel Agents Association of India. The views expressed here are his own. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)



Vijay Mohan Raj



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All hopes now pinned on 2020

► Contd from page 3



Ravi Gosain
Managing Director
Erco Travels & Tourism Enterprise

we generated business as per our expectations. We will now launch aggressive marketing.”

“We expanded our inbound business to some new markets and got some desired results. While our inbound business was stable and we moved beyond our traditional markets in Europe to Canada, South Africa and Asia, we had an average year for outbound and were not able to attain the targets we had set. Our Netherlands-based DMC, Saffron World BV, had a successful launch and



Amit Ray
Regional Director India
and DACH Markets
LOT Polish Airlines

“We launched five weekly non-stop flights between Delhi and Warsaw. This highlights the confidence we have put into route planning, as LOT generally launches long-haul routes with three weekly flights. After almost three months of operations, we saw continuous growth and are happy with the performance. We are very pleased with the number of bookings from India POS, and will now try to gain more Indian origin passengers.”



Zia Siddiqui
Managing Director
Alliance Hotels & Resorts

Wayanad. We have also finalised resorts in Mahabalipuram, Puducherry, Thanjavur, Delhi, Jaipur, and Agra.”

“Year 2019 was ‘just comfortable’ for the group. We maintained the OCC level on a par with 2018, but lower when compared to our budget, with domestic business being down. That said, it was a good year for inbound business and MICE, too, played its part in maintaining the OCC. We added three resorts this year - The Dutch Bungalow in Fort Kochi, and Abad Brookside and Parisons Plantation Experience in

► Contd on page 11




Pushendra Bansal
Chief Operating Officer
Lords Hotels & Resorts

“Year 2019 was favourable for the brand. We opened hotels in Birgunj (Nepal), Kurnool, Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Goa, Nathdwara, Morbi, and Jamnagar. We also signed up hotels in Lonavala, Vyara, Rajkot (three hotels), Lucknow, and Udaipur. Lords Hotels & Resorts is eyeing 40 hotels by 2020. The group will foray into new geographies, including East and South.”



Mernoz Shastri
Director
Mazda Travel

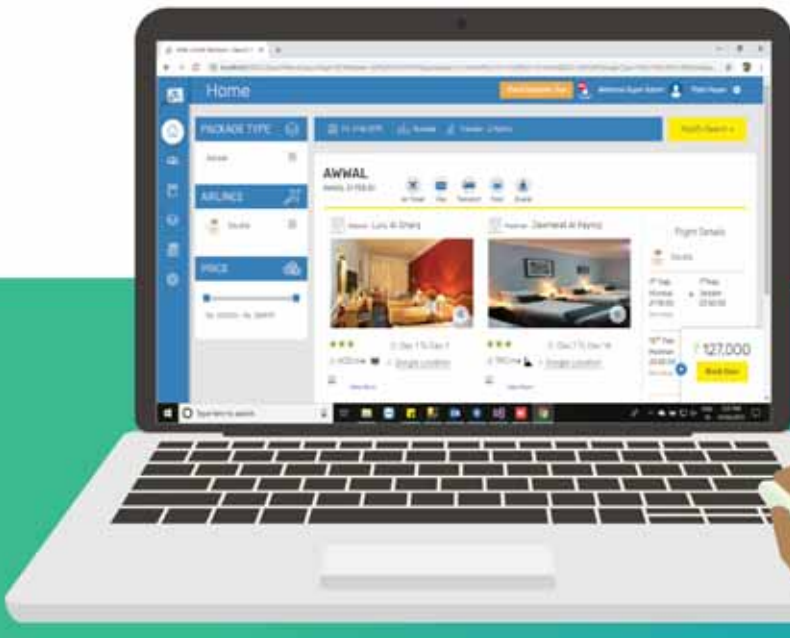
“We had a good 2019 with a 12.5 per cent growth in passenger arrivals over the previous year. Our sales team has been actively visiting agents across India and we plan to continue covering more agents in 2020. We have a strong start for 2020 with agents wanting to finalise bookings to avail of the early booking bonus and incentives. Through our exclusive partnerships, we are able to offer agents an unmatched range of products and services at wholesale rates.”



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Tourism
Breaking News

■ Air India increases bag allowance by 10 kgs on all domestic flights

■ India's first 'full-fledged' global cruise terminal to open in Kochi by February 2020

■ Medical tourists save up to 50% in India compared to western countries

■ Myanmar's Mandalay to be connected to Imphal under 'International UDAN'

■ Bengaluru airport gets 2nd runway, first in the country to operate parallel runways

Manila & Cebu remain in focus

The 'Philippines Destination Training' is an in-depth workshop for leading agents of the country. At the recently-conducted session in Delhi, Philippines Tourism Marketing Office, India, laid focus on Manila and Cebu. The trainings will soon be conducted in four other Indian cities.

 Kanchan Nath

Philippines Tourism Marketing Office, India, recently conducted a training for destination managers in the trade, educating them on the unique offerings of the archipelago for all types of travellers, while also elucidating on visa policies for Indian passport holders. At The Park, New Delhi, a total of 123 agents marked their presence for the first leg of the five-city series. Sharing some details, **Seema Datt**, Account Director, Philippines Tourism Marketing Office, India, said, "The trainings give an in-depth knowledge to the trade. For instance, if a client were to visit Manila, we would provide the agent details on the attractions there, activities their client can participate in, getting there, etc., thereby helping them make interesting itineraries.



Seema Datt
Account Director, Philippines Tourism Marketing Office, India

Such destination knowledge will equip the trade to revert to all queries their clients may have. Having begun in Delhi, the trainings will move on to Mumbai, Chennai, Ahmedabad, and Kolkata."

Soft adventures in the Philippines have become very popular with millennials. Datt said that so far, she has seen that the trade is very happy with



this new format of in-depth information about the destination. "Such trainings help them build exclusive itineraries, and even minute details about the destination are on their fingertips by the time they walk out of these trainings," she said. Outbound tourism from India to the Philippines has seen constant rise and has been growing at the rate of 20 per cent a year, which is quite a large number, Datt shared.

What the trade says

For **Rajeev Sabharwal**, CEO, Gaurav Travels, the destination attracts a lot of tourists primarily because of its pristine beaches. "There is Bohol, Cebu, Boracay, and even Palawan which has an excellent beach resort," he shared.

Rajiv Narula, Founder, MD & COO at The Comforts, said, "There has been a definite change in the perception of

hospitality as a profession, emphasising on the need to stay updated with the nuances of a destination. This is another reason to be part of the training."

For **Saurabh Tuteja**, General Secretary, Enterprising Travel Agents' Association, "The Philippines has everything to offer for MICE, which needs a destination that is flexible and also offers nature and nightlife." 🌸

Radisson's 3-city roadshow

Radisson Hotels India recently conducted its annual three-city roadshow starting with Mumbai and travelling to New Delhi and Bengaluru. Around 75 hotels from India, Nepal, Europe, Scandinavia, Maldives, Oman, UAE, and the UK met with key agents at this event for which TRAVTALK was the exclusive media partner.



PATA India empowers APAC

The second edition of PATA Tourism PowerHouse, presented by Inder Sharma Foundation (ISF), was concluded at The Park, New Delhi. The event, since its inaugural session last year, has been hailed as a one-of-a-kind opportunity to interact with the best in the business, paving a well-informed and new way of thinking for the sector.



Nisha Verma

The second PATA Tourism PowerHouse saw stalwarts of the tourism industry, from India and outside, come together to discuss the challenges and opportunities for India as a tourism destination. The theme of this year's event was 'India Tourism – The Big Leap Forward', and saw a

Taneja, Vice Chairman, PATA India Chapter; John Koldowski, Special Advisor to CEO, PATA and Professor, School of Tourism, Leshan Normal University, Sichuan Province, China; Priya Paul, Chairperson, Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels; Arjun Sharma, Trustee, ISF and Chairman, Select Group; Neeraj Ghei, Chairman, ISF and SanJeet, Hony. Treasurer, PATA India Chapter.



new people and understanding the challenges and opportunities that India had in terms of development of tourism. For those coming from overseas, it's a great learning experience, understanding the market from international speakers and getting a different perspective. I am glad that the Chapter decided to host the event again."



range of speakers sharing their views and knowledge with attendees. The full-day event was inaugurated by Mario Hardy, CEO, PATA; Yogendra Tripathi, Secretary - Tourism, Government of India and Chairman, PATA India Chapter; Jatinder

Welcoming delegates, Taneja said, "We have invited international speakers and opinion leaders to share their invaluable insights and to enlighten us about international tourism trends, thereby encouraging all of us to think above and beyond conventional ideas. PATA India Chapter, one of the most active and dynamic chapters in Asia Pacific today, will complete 50 years in 2020. It has already

won several awards for chapter excellence at PATA. With over 10 million foreign visitors annually and a vision of doubling the number to 20 million, India has never been more enthusiastic about promoting its incredible tourism potential." He also thanked Inder Sharma Foundation, and trustees Sharma and Ghei, for supporting PowerHouse and being a key sponsor of the event.

Sharma commented, "My father, in his lifetime, had created the Inder Sharma Foundation, which has presented several scholarships in the world of tourism. We are now keenly looking at transforming ISF into the Inder Sharma Think-tank, for which we hope to partner with PATA and Government of India. I must also say that Ministry of Tourism has provided the industry with a springboard, which has not

been seen in the last 30-35 years. It's time that we give back to society."

Claiming that this second edition was a much-needed event after the successful conclusion of the inaugural session last year, Hardy said, "After the first event last year, PATA India Chapter's Executive Committee and we decided to host it again. I personally enjoyed meeting

Tripathi also agreed that Tourism PowerHouse is an important event because it not only brings all stakeholders together, but also brings in the most distinguished personalities from different segments of the trade globally, who come as speakers. "This way, PowerHouse offers an opportunity to local trade representatives and professionals to stay updated on international trends and facilitate a new way of thinking," he shared. 🐦

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Close look at 2019 Tourism wrap-up

As a year full of possibilities and expectations, 2019 proved to be illustrious in terms of many milestones and achievements. TRAVTALK picks out some defining moments which shaped the tourism industry in India and set the benchmark for coming years:

Reduction of e-Tourist Visa fee; new short haul visa with one-month validity

To boost inbound tourism during lean period (April-June), the Ministry announced the reduction of visa fee from \$25 to \$10. A short-duration e-Visa for tourists with one-month validity and visa fee of \$25 has been introduced for peak season (July-March). The Ministry also introduced a 5-year e-Tourist Visa with \$80 fee, besides the existing one-year e-Tourist Visa with a fee of \$40. For travellers of Japan, Singapore and Sri Lanka, lean period visa fee is \$10 and for e-Visa of 30 days, one year and five years, the fee is \$25. For other countries where e-Visa facility is available, lean period visa fee is \$10 and peak season visa for 30 days is \$25. For e-Visa for 1 year and 5 years, the fee is \$40 and \$80, respectively.



Hotel tariffs, outdoor catering get GST rate cuts

With constant efforts of the Ministry, the GST Council lowered GST rates on hotel tariff and outdoor catering, giving a boost to the hospitality sector, in September 2019. Daily room tariff beyond ₹ 7,500 per day now attracts GST at the rate of 18 per cent as against the earlier 28 per cent. Room tariff between ₹ 1,000 and ₹ 7,500 now attracts 12 per cent GST. There is no GST on room tariff up to ₹ 1,000. The GST Council also decided to slash the rate on outdoor catering to 5 per cent from 18 per cent. However, no Input Tax Credit (ITC) is available to them.



Ban of single-use plastic in and around ASI monuments

Tourism minister announced that single-use plastics will not be allowed within ASI-protected monuments and within 100 metres of these monuments. He made the announcement at the launch of Paryatan Parv 2019, which was inaugurated on October 2, 2019. Sharing his views, the minister said, "In line with Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts regarding sustainable and clean tourism, efforts are being made to phase-out single-use plastics in various organisations of ASI and MOT. Single-use plastics will no longer be permitted within ASI protected monuments and within 100 metres of these monuments." The single-use plastic items include carry bags, food packaging, bottles, straws, containers, cups and cutlery.

Say No To
Single Use
Plastic



123 mountain peaks opened to foreigners for mountaineering and trekking

The government has opened 123 mountain peaks in four states for foreigners desirous of obtaining Mountaineering Visa for mountaineering and trekking. These peaks are located in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim. While the highest number of 51 peaks has been opened to foreigners in Uttarakhand, 15 peaks of Jammu and Kashmir have also been included in the list. The Minister of State for Culture and Tourism (I/C), Prahlad Singh Patel, expressed his gratitude to Home Minister Amit Shah for acceding to the request of the tourism ministry to open up more peaks to foreigners. It is a historic step towards promoting adventure tourism in the country, said the minister.



MOT releases Hindi version of the new Incredible India website

The Ministry of Tourism launched the Hindi version of the new Incredible India portal in August this year with updated content. The primary objective of this launch was to engage with visitors across web and social media platforms, make it more interactive by providing a deeper engagement to the travellers visiting the website, and to deliver real-time personalised experiences for each visitor based on the interest and travel persona. The Arabic, Chinese and Spanish versions of the website will be launched soon. The new website, which was launched on June 14, 2018 has attracted 85,84,928 visitors, including 65,31,722 Unique Visitors (as on July 31, 2019) since its launch.



10 historical monuments across India to remain open till 9 pm



The tourism minister announced that the ministry has increased the opening hours of 10 historical monuments across the country till 9 pm, including Rajarani Temple Complex, Bhubaneswar; Dulhadeo Temple, Khajurao; Sheikh Chilli Tomb, Kurukshetra; Safdarjung & Humayun's tombs, Delhi; Group of Monuments at Pattadakal & 7 Gol Gumbaz, Karnataka; Group of Temples, Markanda, Chamursi, Gadchiroli, Maharashtra; Man Mahal, Varanasi; and Rani-ki-Vav, Patan. Now, these monuments remain open from sunrise to 9 pm for the public. Earlier, these monuments used to open from 9 am to 5.30 pm for the general public. The decision was made for the benefit of the general public/tourists who can visit and appreciate the beauty of such historical sites for long hours. The minister said that apart from these 10 monuments, some other historical monuments are also under consideration for long opening hours for visitors.

Just short of targets in 2019

► Contd from page 7



George Ettiyil
Senior Director, Sales (South Asia),
Lufthansa Group Airlines

Lufthansa's business performance in India has grown steadily over the last few years. We have registered a robust year-on-year growth of over 12 per cent so far in 2019 alone. In India, we register a demand from all four gateways. The seat load factor on all our India flights is well above 90 per cent. We continue to evaluate opportunities to expand our operations in more cities across India. Lufthansa is well-poised to capitalise on premium travel experiences through codeshares with Indian airlines. ”



Kimberley Long
Vice President Sales and Agency
Distribution, Hahn Air Partners

This year, we added 45 airlines to our global network. We have 19 newly integrated partners who have chosen to expand their network using our HR-169 product. In addition, 26 new carriers have joined the network of H1-Air and X1-Air as partners. These carriers are now available in major GDS under the code H1 or X1. Agents can book their flights and issue them on the HR-169 ticket stock. In India, we hosted dinners where we recognised and rewarded our top performing agencies. ”



Pankaj Nagpal
Managing Director
Travstarz Global Group

Though the company achieved growth in revenues in excess of 50 per cent YOY, we had expected to do better, especially with cruises coming in. This was also our first full year of operation for the new cruise division. Also, we did a soft launch of our upgraded online reservation system, and are happy with the initial feedback. In the new year, our focus will be on moving a majority of our business online and spread our reach into smaller cities. We are also excited about our soon-to-be-launched App for cruise bookings. ”

Inputs by TT Bureau



Pooja Wadhwa
Founding Partner
Avant Garde Consulting

Year 2019 started on a positive note with support from our partners. Q3 was filled with developments with JA Resorts & Hotels opening its third property within JA The Resort in Dubai. This was also the year when JA The Resort hosted its first wedding from India. For 2020, we will share some special offers with our trade partners on behalf of our partner hotels. ”



Sheetal Munshaw
Director
Atout France

The year began on a slightly tumultuous note with the exit of Jet Airways, which led to a reduction in the number of direct flights to Paris. This also affected summer bookings. On the positive side, France registered 16 per cent increase in the number of Indian arrivals. Also, our annual B2B offsite, which took place at Mahabalipuram this September, witnessed a record participation of 36 French tourism professionals. ”



Alitalia has been awarded the **Best Business Class Seat Design** for the second consecutive year and the **Best Airline Cuisine** for the tenth consecutive year entering the Global Traveler Hall of Fame of the most awarded airlines by the American monthly magazine, Global Traveller.



New members & chapters

This year, trade associations took up a number of initiatives, including educating members on trends & technology and organising conventions for knowledge sharing. They now look forward to a more progressive 2020 with new members and chapters they've added.



Subhash Goyal
Secretary General
FAITH

“For FAITH, 2019 has been a successful year because of our big achievements, the biggest of which was that jointly with all the other industry associations, FAITH was able to convince the government to reduce GST rate on hotel accommodation from 28 per cent to 18 per cent on premium hotels and from 18 per cent to 12 per cent on hotel room tariffs up to ₹7,500. We were also able to get the e-Visa fee reduced along with liberalisation of the conference and medical visa.”



Jatinder Singh Taneja
Vice Chairman
PATA India Chapter

“We didn't see too much growth this year in comparison to last year; it was almost the same. At the same time, initiatives taken by the government such as reduction of e-Visa fee and GST rates collectively helped the tourism industry to grow in a big way. We can expect good inbound business and I think, 2020 should definitely be better than 2019 for us. We are expecting good increase in the number of tourists to India, which will boost business further.”



Rajiv Mehra
Vice President
IATO

“Among our many recommendations, two key ones saw a nod from the government and we are indeed grateful to the authorities. IATO made vigorous writings to MOT, Ministry of Home Affairs and even to PMO to reduce the visa fee when it was earlier increased. With our regular follow-up and with the support from MOT, the government made reforms to the e-Visa regime. Likewise, IATO made constant efforts for rationalisation and reduction of GST rates for hotels.”



Sunil Kumar
Immediate Past
President, TAAI

“This year was fantastic for TAAI. The quantitative growth and qualitative development have been of great value to us. Be it TAAI Conclave, which we launched this year; our new initiatives; the manner in which we extended support to our members, hand holding them, everything helped us grow. Now, continuous education is what we should focus on in terms of getting members up-to-date with trends. In 2020, new agents will become part of TAAI.”



Gurbaxish Singh Kohli
Vice President
FHRAI

“India was ranked 34th in the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2019 published by World Economic Forum. As of 2017-18, 81.1 million people were employed in the tourism sector in India, which was 12.38 per cent of total employment in the country. With all these figures, the Indian hospitality industry is in its nascent stage. Although we hear that under Union Budget 2019-20, the government introduced a Tax Refund for Tourists (TRT) scheme, this is yet to become a reality.”



Mahendra Vakharia
Immediate Past President
OTOAI

“We welcomed almost 65-70 new members, which was very encouraging. We had planned to get at least five to seven new members every month, which is an ongoing process. Besides that, we were invited by Bali Tourism Board for a Fam trip, which 25 of our members attended. They witnessed the various cultural aspects of Bali, which are yet to be promoted in the India market. We also did an interesting event at the Sri Lankan High Commission to promote the Ramayana trail.”



Sujit Banerjee
Secretary General
WTCII

“Over time, many states have performed phenomenally well. Initiatives like reduced e-Tourist Visa fee for those coming to India and reduced GST have come as an incentive for the sector. In fact, we just had our AGM and some prominent hoteliers said that even in the months of September and October, which are considered sluggish, they witnessed growth in arrivals. 2020 is going to be better than 2019, but I would still say that these things will take a long time to show result. In fact, 3-4 months in not a long-enough period to analyse growth.”



Rajan Sehgal
President
Indian Golf Tourism Association

“We organised a successful Asia Pacific Golf Summit in Gurugram (Haryana) in November, where more than 60 golf experts from all over the world were in India and it was the best platform to showcase India as a golf tourism destination. After doing the annual film tourism conclave in Mumbai, we have now been approached by the Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan governments to organise the same in their respective states. In my opinion, now there are a lot of avenues which are good opportunities for tour operators.”



Amaresh Tiwari
Vice Chairman
ICPB

“In 2019, ICPB did a lot of things, but a major achievement was the Convention India Conclave organised in Kochi. We got around 30 international and 150 domestic buyers to the event. The buyers had a mix from associations, medical, non-medical and corporates. The response from exhibitors was also excellent, with 75 of them participating. In total, we welcomed 350 delegates. The President of International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) also attended and gave the keynote address. All participants were very happy with our efforts.”



Pradip Lulla
Acting President and Vice
President, TAFI

“Our prime focus this year was Joint Bank Guarantee for our members. We also increased the number of members participating in it to 217, up from 155 in 2018. We conducted APJC meetings where we spoke about collection of money from Jet Airways. Among other initiatives, we aligned with lots of destination management companies this year for knowledge sessions as well. Furthermore, TAFI Connect became active this year and our members have started doing business on the portal now.”



PP Khanna
President
ADTOI

“Year 2019 was a year of accomplishments for the association. We took many initiatives this year, including opening new chapters as well as participating in many international and domestic events. We even did a successful convention in Gujarat with an unmatched attendance. The best thing that happened this year, in my opinion, is the focus and thrust on domestic tourism by the Prime Minister and the tourism ministry. The GST reduction has only made domestic tourism more affordable and viable for India.”



Saurabh Tuteja
General Secretary
ETAA

“In the last few months, we hosted knowledge sessions in Cyprus and Greece for our members. Apart from that, we organised an educational Familiarisation trip to Shimla and another trip to Rajaji National Park. Looking at the industry, people have understood that it's time to change. We expect business to grow in 2020, just that we have to change the way we work. Tour operators have to turn into consultants and stay updated on ever-changing technology and trends.”

W Maldives: A true paradise

Anuj Sharma, General Manager, W Maldives, says that while the hotel's many attributes and offerings make it a popular choice among travellers, it is the travel trade and growth from the India market that has driven it to personalise offerings further and appoint a dedicated salesperson in India.



W Maldives, located 25 minutes by seaplane from Malé, offers exclusivity and comfort for those seeking luxury in a playful setting. "The hotel offers the best house reef in the Maldives, which is ideal for diving and gliding away with manta rays, gentle turtles and of course, the familiar nemo. One can even experience overwater dining with breathtaking sunset views at FISH restaurant, or sip signature cocktails at SIP bar. There are also dining options in the privacy of one's villa or anywhere that catches the eye, including a cast-away option on a private island," shares **Anuj Sharma**.

Even the villas at W Maldives are truly one of a kind.

"Designed to be the ultimate getaway, taking relaxation or entertaining to the extreme, the villas offer floor-to-ceiling windows, an indoor/outdoor lounge area, and glass-panelled floors that reveal lagoon fauna below. Guests can dive into the infinity edge pool with bubbling Jacuzzi seats or relax on the signature W king beds in each of the suites and enjoy the views on the wrap-around sun deck," he adds.

The property features around six bars and restaurants. **Harpal Singh**, Executive Sous Chef of W Maldives, personally plans and tastes each dish together with Sharma, before it gets a place on the ever-dynamic Indian menu. As for activities, W Maldives offers a range of them, including an option to explore



Anuj Sharma
General Manager
W Maldives

the Indian Ocean aboard the property's stunning luxury 25 metre, two-cabin sailing yacht — Escape. One can also enjoy whale and shark sightings at sunset. Guests can go for Manta Safari or race through the Indian Ocean on a seabob. One can even go for PADI diving certifications or discover true pamper-

ing at AWAY Spa, which is reminiscent of a dhow— a traditional Maldivian boat sporting elegant forms and vibrant sails.

In terms of engagement with travel agents in India, Sharma says that they are excited to see continuous growth from the India market, having appointed a dedicated salesperson—**Sandeep Raghav**, to drive sales exclusively from India.

"This has encouraged personalised offerings, increased opportunities to partner with B2B segments and most importantly, build a call-away communicative stream with our trade partners. Customised packages for Indian luxury agents for the festive season are also available,"

Engagement with the travel trade

To see continuous growth from the India market, **Sandeep Raghav**, Business Development Director – South Asia, W Maldives, has been appointed as a dedicated salesperson to drive sales exclusively from India. "India is a very important luxury market for W Maldives and is the third biggest source market globally. We have created customised packages for the Indian market and are supporting Indian agents with our offers. We have participated in many trade shows and luxury events to showcase our brand and the unique selling propositions of the resort," says Raghav.



he shares. As a team, W Maldives is committed to playing its part in making the paradise brighter by highlighting its initiatives for a greener life. "It's all hands on deck while

we reduce plastic water bottles and straws, eliminate the use of paper around the resort, and protect our coral reef," Sharma enthusiastically informs. ✈

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Food & drink for a good experience

A recent survey by World Food Travel Association, exclusively for TRAVTALK, reveals that on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being 'never a motivator' and 10 being 'always a motivator'), the availability of food and drink, or food and drink-related activities, is often a motivating factor (7.44 on the scale) for Indian travellers when selecting a travel destination.

Activities Participated in During Last 2 Years

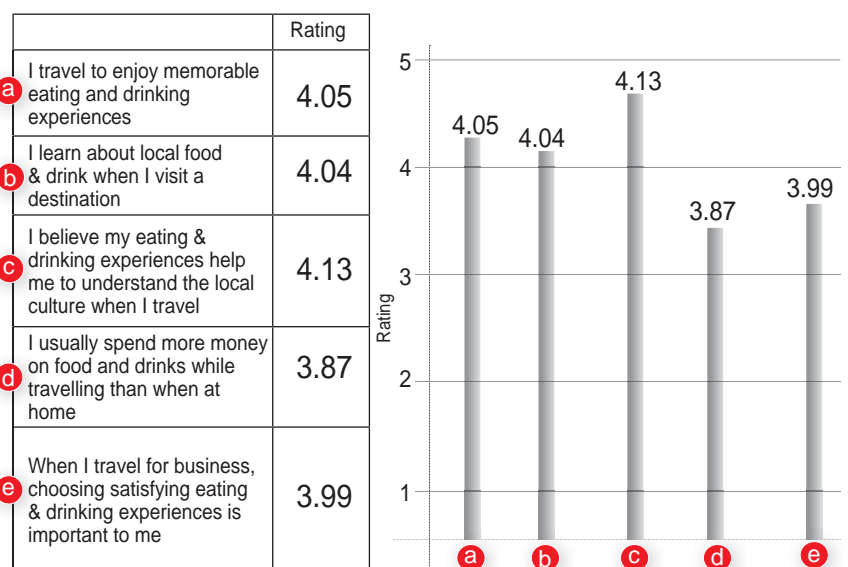
- World Food Travel Association was founded with a vision to serve as the world's leading hub of innovation and excellence in, and knowledge for, the food and beverage tourism industry. Its comprehensive market research report provides a look into food and beverage travellers from India and their characteristics and behaviours. The survey, which takes into account the responses of 278 participants, reveals that at least 60 per cent of the respondents have visited a restaurant for a memorable experience. Beverage experiences and festivals also play an important role in influencing the traveller's destination of choice. According to the survey, at least 14 per cent respondents have attended a beverage festival at least once when travelling, in the past two years.

	INDIANS
Food Experiences	
Went to a restaurant for a memorable experience	60%
Ate at a fine dining (gourmet) restaurant	49%
Ate or drank at a famous or landmark restaurant or bar	33%
Ate at a food truck, food cart, or food stall	46%
Visited farmers markets or agricultural fairs	34%
Attended a food festival	43%
Visited a farm or orchard	32%
Participated in a food/beverage tour	21%
Took cooking classes	23%
Beverage Experiences	
Attended a beer festival	20%
Visited a brewery, taproom, or beer trail	13%
Attended a wine festival	14%
Visited a winery or wine trail	16%
Went to a distillery or a beverage trail (such as whiskey trail)	14%

Percentage who have taken part in each activity while travelling at least once in the past 2 years

Importance of food & drink in the travel experience

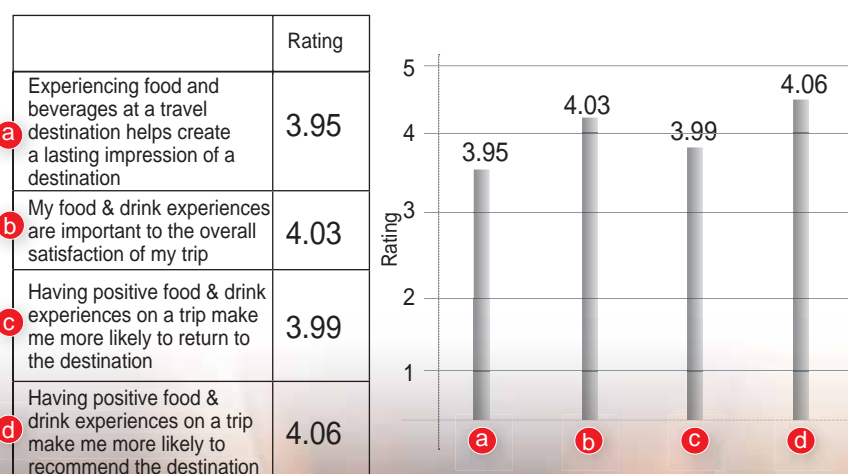
- When designing an itinerary for a client or suggesting activities they can indulge in, travel agents must first understand that apart from adventure, history and culture, food, too, plays a crucial role in ensuring the client has a remarkable experience. The survey reveals that Indian travellers second that opinion, agreeing that they travel to enjoy memorable eating and drinking experiences, learn about local food and drink when they visit a destination, or even when they travel for business, opting for satisfying eating and drinking experiences is important to them.



5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

Impact of food & drink on destination image, satisfaction, return visitation, and recommendation

- While social media, recommendations from friends, online review sites and even scenes from a movie or television show influence their choice when zeroing in on a holiday destination, it is important to understand what it is that travellers seek from these mediums. The impact of gastronomic experiences on destination image, satisfaction, return visitation, and recommendation cannot be ignored, and agents must seriously take this into consideration. The World Food Travel Association survey also reveals that while food and drink experiences are important to the overall satisfaction of a trip, positive impressions are more likely to motivate travellers to return to a destination or recommend it to family and friends.



5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

Source: World Food Travel Association

Dushanbe-Delhi under 3 hours

Direct connectivity between Dushanbe (Tajikistan) and Delhi on Somon Air's new flight has reduced travel time between the two cities by at least nine hours. The airline is also offering special fares to agents in the India market via its GSA – Bird Group.

 Nisha Verma

Having begun its inaugural once-a-week flight between Dushanbe and Delhi from December 1 this year, Somon Air plans to soon increase the frequency to twice a week and eventually, make it a thrice-weekly operation. Speaking at the launch, Thomas W Hallam, Chief Executive Officer, Somon Air, said, "This is a very important moment for Somon Air and we have been planning the launch for a long time. Of course, any international destination takes time to work out, but I am very happy to be able to start with one flight per week between Dushanbe and Delhi, with hopes to increase that to two flights per week by early next year. And then, if successful, our optimum choice would be three flights

“We have many students in Tajikistan, who travel between the two countries. This flight will facilitate their travel, and we are also looking at medical tourism”

a week to Delhi." Somon Air has appointed Bird Group as its GSA in India, with fares already available on their system. The airline also has special fares, special group fares, and series fares for some tour operators in the market.

At the event, it was also revealed that in the summer, there are plans to connect Somon Air flights to Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Almaty. There will also be a flight to

Goa by the end of 2021. "We are taking it one step at a time. We know that these are magnificent destinations, with opportunities particularly in tourism, travel and relaxation. Hence, we identified Goa. We also know that there have been

great business opportunities in Mumbai. Though it's not officially on our plan, it's a city that I've travelled to many times, and I am quite fond of as well. We would like to see any opportunity to expand our relationship," said Hallam.

When asked about the segment of travellers they want to cater to, Hallam shared, "We are already doing business in India, and I think there is a big farmer connect with distribution points in Dushanbe to other areas. We have many students in

Tajikistan, who travel between the two countries. This flight will facilitate their travel, and we are also looking at medical tourism opportunities because of the great medical services that India offers to citizens of Tajikistan." 



Thomas W Hallam
Chief Executive Officer
Somon Air



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PROMOTION PERIOD : 1 NOV - 31 DEC 2019 | BOOKING VALIDITY TILL : 31 JAN 2020

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Thailand - 3 Nights - USD 145 Per Person
3N Accommodation @ RAMADA DMA 4* with Breakfast
02 Way Airport Transfers & Sightseeings in SIC
BKK City Temples Tour on SIC
All Return Airport by Private Basis

<p>Zhuhai Hengqin- 1 Night - USD 255 PP 1N @ Concept hotel with Breakfast 02 Way Airport Private Transfers Private Tour with Visa</p>	OR	<p>Zhuhai Hengqin- 1 Night - USD 275 PP 1N @ Concept hotel with Breakfast & Lunch or Dinner 02 Way Airport Private Transfers Private Tour with 144 China Visa</p>
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Conditions - 2 Pax, Validity 31st Dec - Festive Dates - 24-26 Dec , 31st Dec 2019. Cost are starting rates and may vary on availability



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Operated on a Boeing 737-300 series aircraft, the new flight will reduce the travel time between Dushanbe and Delhi to two hours and thirty minutes from the earlier 12 to 15 hours which was due to a lack of direct connectivity between the two cities.

A PowerHouse of an event

Providing an incredible opportunity to meet and engage with eminent international and national tourism leaders and domain experts who have immense knowledge on tourism trends as well as marketing and growth opportunities in the region, the second edition of PATA Tourism PowerHouse witnessed a full house and imparted useful insights to all attendees.



Tour aboard Seabourn

STIC Travel Group recently organised a ship tour for its key travel partners in Mumbai, on-board Seabourn Encore that offers 300 luxuriously-appointed, all-veranda suites.

 TT Bureau

STIC Travel Group, the General Sales Agent (GSA) for Seabourn Cruise Line in India, recently organised a ship orientation programme for key travel agents in Mumbai. Seabourn Encore is an award-winning ship of Seabourn and had docked at Mumbai port on November 16, while on its way on a 37-day voyage from Athens to Singapore. The ship tour had representatives from travel companies such as SOTC, Thomas Cook, Comfort Voyages, GEM Travels, Global Anchor Holidays, Erawaan Travels, Master Holidays, Red cruise.com, and Ahura Travels. All guests were welcomed on board with cocktail and canapes. Agents who took the ship tour said that they loved it as it was one of the best ships they had seen and it was luxurious to the hilt.

Seabourn Encore offers 300 all-veranda suites, more dining variety including an expanded 'The Grill' by Thomas Keller and Sushi, and the Retreat – an optional

interiors and all public spaces on Seabourn Encore.

Seabourn has luxuriously appointed all ocean-front suites, offers complimentary premium



sanctuary with 15 private cabanas plus a Spa Treatment cabana. Guests enjoy the same unmatched standard of sincere, intuitive service that is Seabourn's hospitality hallmark. The creative vision of pre-eminent luxury hospitality designer Adam D Tihany shaped the yacht-inspired

spirits and fine wines on board at all times, welcome Champagne and complimentary in-suite bar. The new Spa and Wellness with Dr. Andrew Weil programme will be the first-ever of its kind at sea. Seabourn has been voted as the best small-ship cruise line time and again by multiple sources. 

Skyline's 25 glorious years



Varanasi-based Skyline India Travels recently celebrated 25 years of its existence in the travel and tourism industry. Since its inception in April 1994, the company has achieved several milestones and to celebrate the same, the team led by Pradeep Rai, MD, Skyline India Travels, organised a gala event to acknowledge and appreciate the contribution of the team.



Malaysia



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- 5) All tours and transfers on PVT Basis
- 6) Rates are subject to availability at the time of booking



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HAVEN RESORT IPOH – 1 BEDROOM HORIZON
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TourFox awards winner



TourFox recently announced the winner of its contest which started in the beginning of the year. It presented a TAG Heuer watch to winner Vaibhav Kajbaje of Angad Travels in Mumbai, at TourFox's Lower Parel office.

A real passion for travel



Tapan Kumar Mishra, a tourist guide from Odisha who was recently recognised by Ministry of Tourism with the National Tourism Award (2017-18) for 'Best Tourist Guide', has 23 years of experience and has covered most of the country (except Arunachal Pradesh and Lakshadweep Island). In numbers, Mishra has covered approximately one lakh kilometres by road, visited 700-plus tourist places. His other achievements include winning the state-level photography award for three consecutive years.

FITUR Talent in 2020

In 2020, FITUR will launch FITUR Talent, an event that will help educate the trade on the skill set required to deal with new-age technologies and the tech-savvy traveller.



FITUR Talent is a new monographic area that will highlight people, their talent, skills and professional qualifications. The idea behind the event is to educate companies about the need of people who are prepared to interact with the new digital tourist and who have the knowledge to manage new technologies that



are increasingly impacting the business of tourism, such as Big Data and analytics, Artificial Intelligence, chatbots, Blockchain, IoT, etc.

Recruiting and head-hunting companies are seeing in FITUR Talent the possibility of expanding their business in tourism. FITUR Talent hosts all types of hospitality companies, travel agencies, OTAs, GDS,

airlines and aeronautics companies, road and sea passenger transportation companies, metasearch engines, MICE and entertainment companies, specialised training centres, universities, business schools,

Search, Hosteleo and Linkers; training centres such as the University of Glion or Les Roches Marbella; and hotel chains such as Meliá Hotels International and Palladium Hotel Group. During the



recruiting and consultancy companies, both national and international.

Participation has already been confirmed by World Tourism Organisation, World Travel & Tourism Council, the Spanish Confederation of Hotels and Tourism Accommodation, the Instituto Tecnológico Hotelero; recruiting companies such as Turijobs and TH Professional

FITUR Talent Conference and activities programme, there will also be presentations and discussions on data and reports that will enable participants to make decisions pertaining to the identification and development of skills, talent recruitment and retention, ongoing learning, or syllabi that will be required in the coming years, among other issues. ↴

IATO helps trade tackle GST

During its first monthly interactive luncheon meeting after the annual convention in Kolkata, IATO welcomed the recently-appointed Chairman and Managing Director of ITDC, **G Kamala Vardhana Rao**, and organised a presentation and Q&A session on Reverse Charge Mechanism (RCM) to help tackle complexities faced with GST.



Serbia targets 30k overnights

Serbia is set to record 30,000 overnight stays from India in 2019, which will be a 20% increase over last year's number, reveals **Marija Labović**, Director, National Tourism Organisation of Serbia. The board hopes to engage more MICE from India.



Marija Labović
Director, National Tourism Organisation of Serbia

Nisha Verma

The National Tourism Organisation of Serbia recently organised workshops for the travel trade in Mumbai and New Delhi. **Marija Labović** presented various offerings of the destination to the trade in both cities, while highlighting the potential that India had as a very important source market for Serbia, with Indian citizens not needing to apply for a visa anymore. "Earlier, connectivity was an issue, which is now much better, and we can see that it is much easier for travellers coming from India to Serbia, which has become an established tourism destination in Europe. We believe that in connecting the travel trade from Serbia with that of India, we will have good results," she said.

“By the end of 2019, we expect to have 30,000 overnight stays. In 2020, with such workshops and roadshows, we will increase this number significantly”

Thrilled about the huge response they received from the Indian travel trade, Labović shared that the tour operators they met at the workshop already had some suggestions for the groups they will bring to Serbia. "People had concrete questions, which is very good. Also, the travel trade partners that came with us from Serbia are well-established DMCS. We know that they will offer good services, which is very important for us, especially for those first few larger groups that come to Serbia, who should experience that quality. I am sure that they will be satisfied with the programme they will get in Serbia," she said.

Currently, Serbia is focused on MICE and business groups,

followed by leisure travellers. Labović believes that business travellers are the best ambassadors of a country and can spread good word about destinations, which in turn brings leisure tourists as well. By the end of 2019, says

Labović, they are expecting 30,000 overnight stays from India. "Last year, we had around 8,000 tourists from India and they had 25,000 overnight stays. This year, we expect to have around 9,000 tourists, according to

data for the first five months. Until the end of September, we had around 20,000 overnight stays, and by the end of the year, we expect to have around 30,000 overnight stays. We believe that in 2020, with such workshops, roadshows and

other promotional activities, we will increase this number significantly," she shared. The tourism organisation hopes to achieve this number through social media promotions, B2B events, as well as Fam trips for agents in India. ↴

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Pollution curbs tourism's growth

With pollution in North India, especially in tourist hotspots of Delhi, Agra and Varanasi, touching unbearable levels, there is an urgent need to address the problem or risk facing grave consequences. This issue needs the seriousness it deserves not just for tourism, but for the well-being of India's 1.3 billion citizens.

It is rather sad that towards the end of October and November each year, we witness terrible pollution levels not just in Delhi, but also at other tourism hotspots in North India like Agra and Varanasi. The

where on an early morning boat ride (which is considered one of the must-dos in Varanasi), we saw a group of Japanese tourists in the boat next to ours, all wearing anti-pollution face masks.



“Pollution is something that seems to have either been ignored or, even if steps have been taken, they haven't been adequate or have not had the desired effect”

pollution level in these destinations is becoming a real threat to India's popularity and positioning as a tourism-friendly destination, and one that offers visitors a unique culturally and spiritually uplifting experience.

Post Diwali, I visited Varanasi for a weekend with the family,

We came across the group again in Sarnath, and they were still in their masks. It's a shame to the industry, which we belong to. There is a need to do something about it and hence, on my return, I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister's Grievance Cell and I got an acknowledgement saying that

the environment ministry is looking into it.

I hope something is done, and done soon, because we seem to be becoming complacent about the issue and are getting used to it happening every year. It's a big negative from a tourism point of view and over the last few weeks, we've been getting messages from agents

as well as direct clients, asking to avoid Delhi altogether. We don't want to reach a scenario where people would also want to avoid Agra or Varanasi. These are tourism hotspots in our country and are now in the top 10 as far as pollution is concerned. We have clients from the UK writing to us asking about the severity of the pollution and if they need to

carry any medication or even oxygen cylinders with them during their travels.

While we appreciate the steps taken by the government to reduce taxation on hotels and ease the visa regime, air pollution is something that seems to have either been ignored or, even if steps have been taken, they haven't been adequate, have not had the desired effect, or the effects are not visible.

There is a need to raise a voice together, because this problem is now affecting not only our health, but also inbound tourist numbers. November, traditionally, is a month when inbound tour operators do about 20 per cent of their annual business, hence, if foreigners start avoiding coming to India in

this month entirely, it will affect the inbound tourism industry. Something needs to be done about this, at the highest level. I am also writing to IATO to take it up at the highest level in the government, as well as with other associations, so that we can raise a common voice.

(Kapil Goswamy is Managing Director at Trans India Holidays. The views expressed above are the author's personal views. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)



Kapil Goswamy

NCL and Ark get ready for 2020

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) along with Ark Travels recently organised a cocktail party for its key trade partners in Mumbai. **Felix Chan**, Vice President and General Manager (Asia), Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, headlined the event. He spoke about the new Norwegian Encore launched in October 2019, as well as the refurbished Norwegian Spirit.



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TravClan Delhi Darbar	Delhi	8
IITM	Kochi	9-11
ASEAN Tourism Forum	Brunei	12-16
CII Destination East	Kolkata	12-19
Visit Britain Sales Mission	Mumbai	13
South African Tourism Roadshow	Bengaluru	13
Asia Pacific Tourism & Travel Fair (APTF)	Bengaluru	13-15
South African Tourism Roadshow	Pune	14
Visit Britain Sales Mission	Delhi	15
South African Tourism Roadshow	Mumbai	15
IITT	Mumbai	15-17
Paryatan Kumbh	Lucknow	17-20
Destination DC roadshow	Delhi	20-21
Destination DC roadshow	Mumbai	22-23
FITUR	Madrid	22-26
Gujarat Travel Fair	Ahmedabad	24-26
Global Panorama Showcase (GPS)	Nagpur	27-28
Tourism Student Conclave India	Amarkantak, MP	31- Feb 1

FEBRUARY 2020

OTM	Mumbai	3-5
BIT Milano	Milan	9-11
NYC & Co Sales Mission	Delhi	10-12
Visit Finland Sales Mission	Mumbai	11
PATA Adventure Travel Conference & Mart	Sabah, Malaysia	12-14
Visit Finland Sales Mission	Delhi	13
NYC & Co Sales Mission	Mumbai	13-15
IITM	Kolkata	21-23

MARCH 2020

ITB	Berlin	4-8
MITT	Moscow	17-19
Global Aerospace Summit	Abu Dhabi	17-19
IT&CM China	Shanghai	24-26
UITT 2020	Kyiv, Ukraine	25-27
PATA Annual Summit 2020	Ras Al Khaimah	31-Apr 3

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

Guideline thanks its partners

To celebrate their year-round success and thank partners, Guideline Travels, in association with Genting Cruise Lines, hosted a weekend bash at The Westin Pushkar Resort & Spa. The Bling Bash had a horde of activities in store for guests.



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OYO

Gurugram

OYO Hotels & Homes has announced the elevation and addition of **Aditya Ghosh**, presently CEO, India & South Asia for the Hotels & Homes business, to the board of directors after successful completion of one year in the company. During this short span of time, he implemented several programmes to strengthen operating metrics and customer experience, thereby more than doubling the asset owner community from 5,500-plus to 18,000-plus hotels. In his new role at the board, Ghosh will focus on safety and security, customer experience, corporate governance, revenue management, and stakeholder communications.



OYO

Gurugram

OYO has announced the appointment of **Rohit Kapoor**, current CEO, New Real Estate Business, as CEO for the entire India and South Asia business for OYO Hotels & Homes. Over the last year, Kapoor has been overseeing the growth of OYO LIFE - the brand's long-term rental housing portfolio, as well as other new real estate business in India. In the new role, his remit will now also span the operations of over 18,000 hotels across 500-plus cities in India and South Asia, including delivering on sustainable growth with financial prudence.



Goldstone Hotels & Resorts

Delhi-NCR

Nikhil Kaul has been appointed as Corporate General Manager for Goldstone Hotels & Resorts. He brings with him over 18 years of hospitality experience having held senior management positions in premium hotel brands across the country. Previously, Kaul had been appointed as General Manager with Pride Hotels, where he helped the hotel gain considerable market share through consistent performance. In the new role, he will be responsible for providing strategic guidance in operating the hotel in line with international brand standards.



Swissôtel

Kolkata

Swissôtel Kolkata has appointed **Jameson Solomon** as General Manager. He has more than two decades of experience in hotel management, pre-opening, strategic planning, client relationship, and training & development. An expert planner in marketing strategies with the ability to roll-out and implement innovative corporate strategies, Solomon has proved himself as a versatile business manager over the years. Prior to joining Swissôtel Kolkata, he was working with Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts as Head of Operations.



Le Méridien

Hyderabad

Rakesh Upadhyay has been appointed as General Manager at Le Méridien Hyderabad. He is a seasoned hospitality professional with over a decade of experience in the industry. With core competency in food and beverage, his perspective on strategy, design, and execution has enabled him to gain expertise across all verticals of the sector. Prior to joining Le Méridien Hyderabad, Upadhyay was the General Manager at Courtyard by Marriott Bhopal. He has previously been associated with other reputed hotel chains, including The Oberoi Hotels & Resorts, Starwood Hotels, and ITC.



Fairfield by Marriott

Kolkata

Abhishek Sachdev has been appointed as Hotel Manager of Fairfield by Marriott Kolkata. He brings over 13 years of experience having worked with ITC, Starwood Hotels & Resorts and Indian Hotels Company, to name a few. Armed with managerial experience in operations, guest relations, positioning and revenue optimisation, Sachdev will be responsible for the successful opening of the hotel and delivering high levels of customer service. He will play an integral role in the positioning of the hotel by performing diverse responsibilities which include strategic initiatives to boost market profile, align cost heads, and staff engagement.



Novotel & ibis Outer Ring Road

Bengaluru

Vikas Mittar has been appointed as the Director of Finance at Novotel & ibis Bengaluru Outer Ring Road. An industry veteran, Mittar brings across a rich experience in hospitality of 15 years and an overall experience in finance of over 19 years. Over the last 15 years, his domain experience in accounting and financial management through SAP, OPERA, Control Gap Analysis, and supply chain management will be an asset to the dual-branded property. Previously, he held the role of Multi-property Director of Finance with Marriott International in Kerala and was Director of Finance for hotels at Eros Group prior to it.



Lion Lords Inn

Rajula

Lion Lords Inn at Rajula has appointed **Saifi Aijaz** as Operations Manager. Aijaz is a seasoned hotel and service industry professional with comprehensive experience in managing administration, operations and sales functions, as well as hotel projects with reputed groups of hotels. In the new role, he will be responsible for overseeing the smooth functioning of the hotel and will act as a core member of the leadership team. Prior to Lords, Aijaz's last assignment was with Carnelian by Glory Bower Hotels in Muscat, Oman, as Rooms Division Manager.



Lords Inn

Jamnagar

Tikam Panchal is the new Operations Manager at Lords Inn, Jamnagar, a 58-room property conveniently located in Jamnagar's prime industrial area. He has an extensive experience in various hotels in India and in the new role, will be involved in hotel operations, revenue growth, and ensuring that standard operating procedures are followed. He will also ensure that both housekeeping and catering departments plan and organise their duties well. Prior to joining Lords Hotels & Resorts, Panchal was associated with Express Towers Vadodara, where he was appointed to the position of Rooms Division Manager.



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New markets & more facilities

At the PATA Tourism PowerHouse in New Delhi, **Yogendra Tripathi**, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and Chairman, PATA India Chapter, spoke about recent government policies and new markets in focus.



Manas Dwivedi

Congratulating PATA India Chapter for its continued effort and initiative in organising the second PATA Tourism PowerHouse, **Yogendra Tripathi** said that the event added immense value to the professional knowledge of all attendees. "Tourism has been an important growth driver in the service sector, within the country and globally. It is a fact that tourism provides employment opportunities across the country, at the remotest of places and to the most disadvantaged sets of society. So, in some ways, the employment opportunities in the tourism sector are more equitable in nature and for a country like India, which has a huge population and different economic strata, it becomes a very important factor," he said.

A strong foundation

According to Tripathi, it is important to review the standing of the country in the international community and on the domestic front, infrastructure needs to be re-looked at. "India is an economic powerhouse and will continue to be one. This strength is evident and palpable, and that's where the opportunity lies. While connectivity issues have largely been sorted, last-mile connectivity still needs work. That said, the condition of roads and national highways in India has improved substantially in the last five years. In terms of air connectivity as well, the situation has improved significantly. Unused airports are being utilised under the UDAN

scheme and the government is ensuring that infrastructure facilities get utilised. A strong base has already been built; a lot more needs to be done to take it forward," Tripathi shared.

Efforts of the government in boosting growth of tourism in India haven't gone unnoticed. Tripathi said that the government has already committed more than `1 billion to improve the experience

“The strategy would include not only deepening our reach in traditional markets, but also reaching out to newer markets. We need to focus on China and neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia”

and infrastructure facilities at tourist spots. He added that in order to make India a more desirable destination for foreign visitors, the government not only introduced the e-Visa, but practically extended it to 169 countries. "In view of all these contributions, in 2018, we were finally able to cross the 10.5 million mark in foreign tourist arrivals in the country. Growth of domestic tourism has also been in double digits in the last four or five years," he informed. In terms of policy decisions, introduction of the short-term e-Visa, liberalisation of rules for conference and medical tourist visa, and reduction of the GST on hotels have all been positive moves.

Ministries join hands

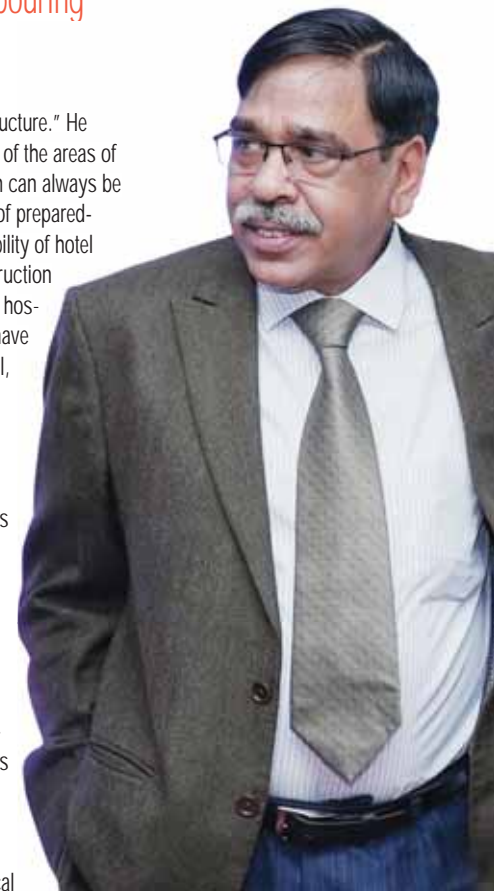
As a strategy, the government is now looking to double

international tourist arrivals, as early as possible. Tripathi said, "The government is committed to support and increase civil aviation agreements to increase international seat capacity. Ministry of Civil Aviation is working closely with us towards that. In terms of improvement of infrastructure, the Ministry of Road Transport is closely working with us in identifying important tourist spots, so that they can focus on further improvement

people, so that they become partners in the process of growth," he said.

Support to the industry

Tripathi reiterated that in terms of support to the industry, communication strategies have been enhanced. "By March 2020, the website will be available in seven foreign languages. The strategy would include not only deepening our reach in traditional markets, but also reaching out to newer markets. As China is a big outbound market, I feel we need to focus on China and neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia," he shared.



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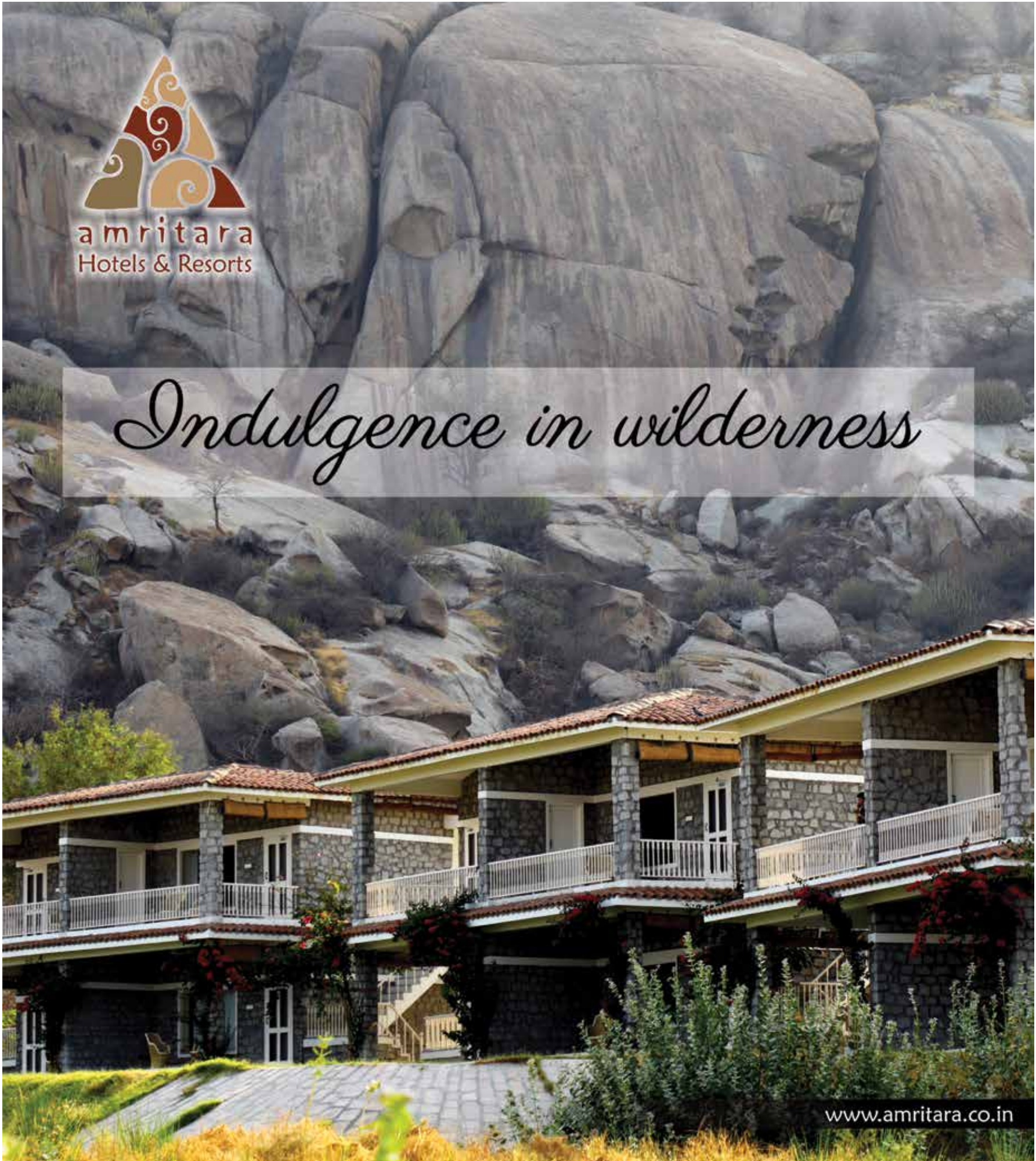
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WHY GREEN IS IN

The hospitality industry has been rejoicing after the government announced a considerable reduction in the GST being levied on hotels under different star categories. The move is being lauded as one that will make a big difference in how India is perceived as a destination, particularly in relation to its Southeast Asian neighbours that, till now, enjoyed an edge over India with lower tax brackets. A lower GST also paves the way for growth in domestic tourism, with hotel accommodation getting more affordable for the discerning Indian traveller.

In terms of mid-segment hotels, India is the fastest growing market for new hotel openings. New budget properties are mushrooming across the country, especially in tiered cities that have seen good growth in leisure and business travel. Not only are these properties offering state-of-the-art amenities, they're also making sure they remain sustainable and environment-friendly.

Many properties are making contribution towards the environment by adopting technologies that reduce the use of natural resources and keep their carbon footprint low. At the same time, hotels are involving guests and enabling them to make their contribution towards nature conservation through various activities in and around the hotel. After all, isn't the involvement of the community itself the first step towards being productively sustainable?

EDITORIAL

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Tripti Mehta

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Raashi Ajmani Girdhar

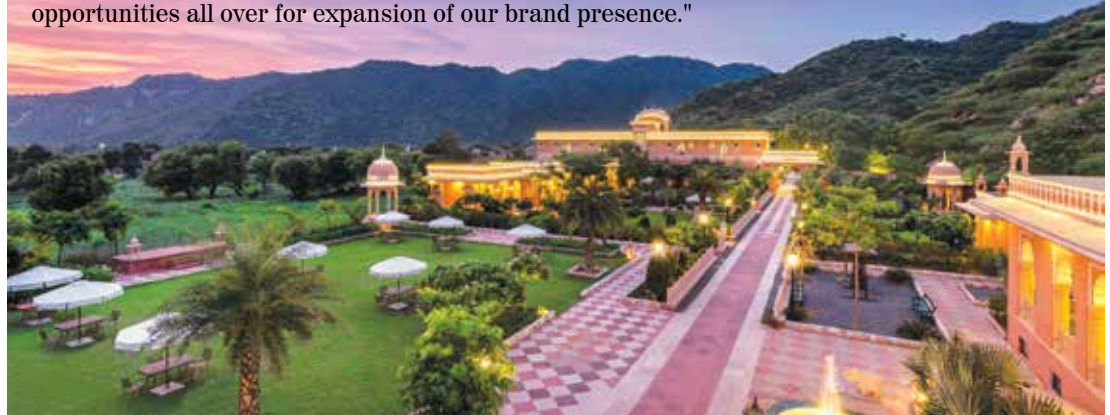
MARKETING

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Gaganpreet Kaur
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Susan Eapen

NEWS IN BRIEF

WELCOMHERITAGE ADDS TWO HOTELS IN NORTH INDIA

WelcomHeritage is all set to flag a new property near Jaisalmer— WelcomHeritage Mohangarh Fort. **Sanjeev K Nayar**, MIH, General Manager, WelcomHeritage, informs that the fort was completed in 1944 and is known to be the youngest fort of India. Speaking further about expansion plans, he says, "We propose to flag a heritage property in Prayagraj – WelcomHeritage Badi Kothi. We look forward to continue to expand our footprint and business during the year. We are in conversation with more property owners and very soon, we will be making announcements of new properties on the board. We are keenly looking at opportunities all over for expansion of our brand presence."



Turkey's first Sofitel opens in Istanbul

Sofitel Hotels & Resorts, a leading luxury brand within the Accor group, has opened its first hotel in Turkey, Sofitel Istanbul Taksim. The hotel offers an impeccable blend of Sofitel's inspired mix of French modern elegance with the cosmopolitan style of Istanbul. Guests of Sofitel Istanbul Taksim will revel in the luxury of 202 chic guest rooms including 33 suites. The hotel is equipped to host business and social events, with two ballrooms and three well-outfitted meeting rooms.

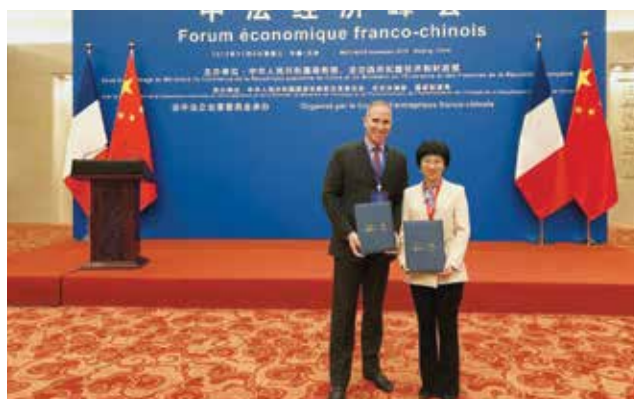
Sarovar opens 112 room hotel in Mumbai

Sarovar Hotels & Resorts has launched Royal Hometel Suites in Mumbai. The hotel features 112 rooms and suites as well as two banquet halls for conferences, weddings and social gatherings, accommodating up to 550 guests. The new property is appropriate for both business and leisure travellers.



Accor and Alibaba Group enter digital partnership

Accor and Alibaba Group have announced a strategic collaboration as a result of which they will develop a series of digital applications and loyalty programmes to improve the consumer and traveller experience over the next five years. The formal announcement was made during the 2019 China International Import Expo.





A wholesome package

Ruchi Uberai, Director, Amritara Hotels & Resorts, says that the group has curated unique offerings for its guests by blending the essence of a location with the experiences they provide.

NISHA VERMA

Amritara Hotels & Resorts is a boutique hotel chain offering unusual experiences, and has positioned itself as a niche player in the market. **Ruchi Uberai** shares, “Our authentic, 360-degree experiences are spread across magnificent destinations pan India.”

What makes them unique is their offering of nostalgic vintage journeys; spiritual experiences; heritage palaces and assets; wildlife offerings; as well as rejuvenation of body, mind and soul to take care of all the quintessential needs of guests. “Unique locations blended with contemporary facilities, amenities, and service delivery make us unique,” she adds. The brand puts in a lot of effort to offer personalised, tailor-made experiences to guests. “An evaluation of the guests’ preference is undertaken several times before they



“Our first preference is to hire locally and then equip such employees to be able to deliver results by teaching them the required skills”

RUCHI UBERAI
Director
Amritara Hotels & Resorts

arrive. At other times, guest arrival enables us to ensure offering ‘expected’ experience, whether pre-packaged or curated,” Uberai shares.

Taking cues from the destination they are situated in, she claims, “More often than not, Location of our assets permits us to offer to the guest what is unique to the region. We are grounded and connected with the local cultural history, cuisine and craft, and we work closely with the habitat and people that surround our assets. This helps us create appropriate, and quite often, invaluable experiences for our guests.” Having been part of the industry for 12 years now, Amritara Hotels & Resorts is a well-known name here. “Familiarisation trips, show-arounds, incentives, treating them as part of our family, as well as constant interaction with and visits to agencies are some of the ways we engage with the trade to boost sales. We also participate in major trade fairs and travel shows where there is an opportunity to establish relations,” insists Uberai.

The group is now indulging in reasonably aggressive marketing on social media platforms, along with advanced digital marketing activities. “We are a part of various domestic and international trade fairs and roadshows. We intend to also participate on GDS platforms in the near future,” she informs. Talking of eco-consciousness, Uberai says that as a brand, one of their core beliefs is sustainability and using it to address environmental and societal issues. “We strongly believe in giving back to society. Our first preference is to hire locally and then equip such employees to be able to deliver results by teaching them the required skills,” she concludes.



Location of their assets permits them to offer

to the guest what is unique to the region

Experiential stay on west coast

Tour operators looking for an experience based getaway for their clients can opt for Anandvan Resorts in Bhandardara.

TT BUREAU

A trusted name in hospitality, Anand & Daughters offers handcrafted hospitality solutions for sales, marketing and management of boutique properties. It has two brands under this umbrella: Anandvan Resort and Cotton Stays. **Puneet Anand**, Founder, Anand & Daughters, says, "While Anandvan Resorts has already managed to carve a niche for itself, Cotton Stays is relatively new. It has multiple properties under the banner and is great for getaways, long escapes, short breaks and glamping experiences that are natural."

Meanwhile, Anandvan Resorts is located in Bhandardara, Maharashtra. It is an eco-conscious resort, blending luxury with responsible tourism. It is exclusive with just 22 rooms, offering gorgeous tree houses and villas and close to Mumbai and Pune. For this festive season, Anand and his team have also crafted special events for Christmas and New Year for guests who want to take a break from city life as



Anandvan Resorts, with 22 rooms, offers tree houses and villas, and is close to Mumbai & Pune



"Travel agents can give their guests the opportunity to discover new places like Bhandardara"

PUNEET ANAND
Founder, Anand & Daughters

Bhandardara is a beautiful and unexplored hill station close to Mumbai.

Cotton Stays has partnered with cherry-picked hotels and resorts to offer guests the authentic Cotton Stays experience. Anand adds that these properties offer boutique stays in offbeat locations. "Travel agents can showcase unexplored destinations curated with local experiences to their clients. They can offer various experiences to their guests giving them the opportunity to discover new places like Bhandardara," he shares.



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TT BUREAU

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WHAT MAKES THE PROPERTY UNIQUE?

The USP of Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa would be its proximity to the airport, which is only a 15-minute ride by boat. The short distance makes the hotel accessible for travellers from India and soon, we will be including the boat ride (shared speedboat transfers) as part of the resort package, on all channels.

Surrounding the property, we have 46 diving points that are quite popular. It's quite unusual to have that many close to the island itself. What also makes the property stand out is that there are a lot of activities on the island to keep guests busy, including wellness experiences; water sports; recreational facilities; and excursions like sandbank picnic, snorkelling safari, sunset dolphin cruise, wakeboarding, flyboarding, parasailing, etc.

DO YOU HAVE INCENTIVES FOR TRAVEL AGENT PARTNERS?

We do have preferred partnership agreements in place that are consistent across the board; we don't practise exclusives. We want to maintain a fair approach with



"We have preferred partnership agreements in place that are consistent across the board. We don't practise exclusives; we want to maintain a fair approach"

JENNIFER LIM
Director of Sales & Marketing, Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa



Sandeep Raghav, Business Development Director – South Asia, Sheraton Maldives, will drive sales exclusively from India.

all our partners. There's a reason the Indian market is doing so well not just in the Maldives, but also for Sheraton Maldives. We recently completed a \$20 million renovation of the property, so we now have new room products, a new wellness facility (which is almost ready), as well as revamped bars and restaurants (seven in total). In addition to that, we offer destination dining, which is very popular, where we take a couple to an island for a private picnic to enjoy the sunset.

ARE YOU ALSO ENCOURAGING CORPORATE MOVEMENT?

We are getting more corporates than we thought we would get. A lot of them come directly from the Marriott-linked structure. We get occasional group bookings as well. By Maldives standards, we have a small community hall and a small meeting space that can be used as a venue for social gatherings or corporate meetings, and can accommodate up to 35 guests. What makes it alluring is that we have a private pool in front. For anything larger, we set up a private tent at the property, on the beach.

KNOW?

DID YOU

India is the top source market for Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa, followed by USA, China, Australia, and Europe.

The USP of Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa is its proximity to the airport, which is only a 15-minute ride by boat



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‘Mindset, the biggest challenge’

A revolutionary change in the mindset that hospitality is a ‘luxury industry’ is a must for the growth of the sector.

KANCHAN NATH

WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE INDIAN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY TODAY?

This industry can be a game changer for the economy. India being the huge market it is for travel and tourism, offers a diverse portfolio of niche products that include cruises; adventure sports; spiritual, medical and wellness tourism; MICE; eco-tourism; as well as film, rural, and religious tourism. India was ranked 34th in the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2019 published by World Economic Forum. As of 2017-18, 81.1 million people were employed in the tourism sector in India, which was 12.38 per cent of total employment in the country. With all these figures, the Indian hospitality industry is in its nascent stage as compared to its foreign counterparts. While most countries have realised Indian tourism’s contribution (present and potential) to its economy, giving the industry the necessary boost to grow further, India lacks the vision and the industry is still more or less ignored.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES THAT REMAIN FOR HOSPITALITY POST REDUCTION IN GST?

The main challenge is that this industry has been given a step-motherly treatment so far. Thankfully, our current Prime Minister, being a visionary, sees the potential of earning foreign exchange from increased footfalls from abroad as well as encouraging Indians to travel within the country. Though much delayed, it is still possible to revive the industry and the first step towards that was to reduce taxes considerably.

SOME CHALLENGES WE STILL FACE ARE:

- The GST has been revised and reduced, but only in the so-called luxury segment. The cap of ₹7,500, which is approximately \$100, is ridiculous. Nowhere in the world does one get a luxury room for that low a price.
- Input Tax Credit (ITC) is a natural corollary of GST. Restaurants, strangely, have been removed from the list of those business that can avail ITC. Earlier, they were allowed, but this was withdrawn later. We have

“

A five-year tax holiday has been offered, but the impediments to achieve these are huge

”



GURBAXISH SINGH KOHLI
Vice President
FHRAI

suggested that there be two slabs of GST for restaurants. In the case where the establishment does not want to avail of ITC, the GST may be levied at five per cent (as it is at present) and where the establishment would like to avail of GST, the levy should be 11-12 per cent. The choice to go with either GST slab is to be decided by the establishment, as was done in the case of service tax.

- The mindset towards the industry remains the biggest challenge. The ‘license raj’ still exists, wherein hospitality is seen as a luxury industry and given an elitist tag. Even then, there are no SOPs granted to it, it enjoys no incentives of being an industry, and its proper due is not given as compared to its contribution as an employment and tax generator as well as a foreign exchange and revenue earner for the government.
- Connectivity needs to be improved between places of interest. Ease of access encourages increased spend and length of stay. Repositioning India as a major tourist destination is critical for the industry to achieve its potential. The Incredible India campaign needs a thorough revamp. One needs to trust the population to be able to take its own decisions. Excise laws, foreign exchange laws, so many things need to be revised.
- A five-year tax holiday has been offered for 2, 3, and 4-star category hotels located around UNESCO World Heritage sites (except Delhi and Mumbai), but the impediments to achieve these are huge. Roadblocks need to be removed and a one-window licence needs to be implemented more seriously.

WHAT IS YOUR OUTLOOK FOR THE INDUSTRY FOR 2020?

A web-based Public Service Delivery System (PSDS) had been launched by Ministry of Tourism to enable all applicants seeking approval for hotel projects to track their applications online on real-time basis. The ministry is also developing several theme-based tourist circuits under the Swadesh Darshan scheme. Besides this, convergence is required at the central and state level.

Hospitality enjoys no incentives of being an industry, and its due is not

given as compared to its contribution as an employment and tax generator

LE MURRAYA HOSPITALITY GROUP

Koh Samui, Thailand



Le Murraya Hotel

Located in the heart of Chaweng beach, 15 minutes drive from Koh Samui's International Airport, Le Murraya Boutique Hotel is Thailand's hippest hotel that bring contemporary-Asian city style to the tropical paradise of Koh Samui. This exquisite hotel, so spacious each with modern amenities and nicely decorated rooms. It is a perfect choice for long & short stay accommodation on this vibrant island get-away.

Synergy Resort

Located on Chaweng beach where cool climate and fresh sea breeze remains natural, only 10 minutes from Samui International airport and about 5 minutes from Chaweng Walking Street. Distinctive design rooms and villas offering the Natural tones, wooden floors and delicate floral decor encourage relaxation and romance.



La Vida Resort

La Vida Samui boutique resort brings a refreshingly unique experience to the shores of Chaweng Beach. Feel at home at our tropical island retreat, where beautifully curated rooms are inspired by the island's native flora, the cuisine is fresh and authentic, and the service is genuinely heartfelt. This calming sanctuary overlooking the sea is just a one-hour flight from Bangkok and 10-minute drive from Samui International Airport.



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Contemporary sustainability

Hotels are adopting new-age sustainable practices by installing the necessary equipment or cutting down on resources to reduce costs. This helps to make a more meaningful contribution to society at large, and allows the business to flourish.

NISHA VERMA

ONLINE TOOLS TO MANAGE IMPACT

Satheesh MB, Chief Engineer, Crowne Plaza Kochi, claims that IHG has sustainability at the heart of how their hotels operate. “A key driver of IHG’s success has been the IHG Green Engage system, an online sustainability tool that helps hotels manage and minimise the impact on the environment,” he says.

Talking about initiatives they have adopted, he shares, “As an IHG Green Engage Level-4 property, we have always tried to inculcate the best practices of sustainability into everything we do. The three ‘R’s of ‘Reduce, Reuse and Recycle’ have been our guiding principles. All our public areas and the heart of the house are fitted with motion/occupancy sensors and powered with an LED lighting system, thus helping bring down light and energy consumption. We are also in the process of moving into a cloud-based smart monitoring system wherein the energy utility of all operational equipment can be analysed for optimum performance.”

The glass façade at the hotel is also uniquely sound and thermal-proofed, helping reduce the heat load of the building. Solar systems are used to heat the water meant for guest areas, and the entire hot water system is managed through a steam condensate return and solar hot water system. Crowne Plaza Kochi is also moving away from single-use amenities to bulk dispensers.

ENERGY-EFFICIENT TECHNOLOGY

Today, travellers look forward to staying at hotels focused on minimising harm to the environment, claims **Paramjeet Singh**, Director of Engineering at Eros Hotel New Delhi, Nehru Place. “They prefer to stay at a property that efficiently uses the latest technology to reduce energy waste and recycle waste materials. We are fully committed towards sustainability and strictly follow it as one of our values. Some recent developments that have happened at the hotel include replacement of all high energy-consuming plants and machines with energy-efficient ones, buying open access green power to the capacity of 15000 KW on a daily basis, etc. With these developments, we have seen a seven per cent saving in our total hotel operation cost,” he says.



Today, travellers prefer to stay at a property that efficiently uses the

latest technology to reduce energy waste and recycle waste materials



Crowne Plaza Kochi

The hotel has adopted various sustainable practices that are contributing towards saving natural resources and include replacement of power lighting to LED lights, reducing the electricity bill considerably; installation of water-saving aerators in every single tap of the property that has helped the hotel save 50KLD water and electricity of the treatment of the same volume of water, etc. “A bio methane gas plant has also been installed to consume 100 per cent food waste. We generate approximately six metric cubes of bio methane gas for kitchen use. We have ETP/STP in our property, ensuring zero discharge and use the same water in horticulture and hotel cooling towers,” he shares.

EVERY DETAIL MATTERS

Siddharth Sharma, Manager Corporate Affairs and Administration, Goldstone Hotels & Resorts, says |that the group has clear fundamentals on sustainability. “When we talk about the initiatives for sustainability in business, they cannot be described in just a few words. It begins from the minutest of detail such as upkeep, quality in product and material, soft skills, factors affecting business reputation, maintenance, personalisation of each offering, etc. In addition, repeat business potential, a better market standing, a happy customer, a smiling employee, as well as a satisfied owner and associate base in the business is kept in mind,” he adds.



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AS GREEN AS IT GETS



“We are moving into a cloud-based smart monitoring system so that energy utility of all equipment can be analysed for optimum performance”

SATHEESH MB
Chief Engineer
Crowne Plaza Kochi



“We are fully committed towards sustainability. With these developments, we have seen a seven per cent saving in our total hotel operation cost”

PARAMJEET SINGH
Director of Engineering
Eros Hotel New Delhi, Nehru Place



“It begins from the minutest of detail such as upkeep, quality in product and material, soft skills, personalisation of each offering, etc”

SIDDHARTH SHARMA
Manager Corp. Affairs & Administration, Goldstone Hotels



“We keep tent cards where we ask the guest to switch off the lights when away. While going on nature walks, we usually run a cleanliness drive”

SARBENDRA SARKAR
MD & CEO
Cygnett Hotels



A hotel company's job is not only to provide quality accommodation services, but to also be responsible towards society, people and

TRAINING THE PERSONNEL

According to **Sarbendra Sarkar**, Managing Director & CEO, Cygnett Hotels, the group is committed to improving sustainability throughout its hotels. “We believe it is a continuum, not an absolute. We have developed some internal training programmes to keep our personnel in line with the latest trends and to develop new best practices towards an ecological balance. We have installed waste management machines and equipment as a prototype at some of our units. The compost is used for the gardens where we produce organic herbs and microgreens. Now, we are trying to standardise this across the chain along with putting up solar water heaters and regular checking of water outlets to prevent leaks. We are thinking out loud about cutting plastic waste to the maximum at our units,” he shares.

Speaking on involving the guest in these initiatives, he says, “We have started keeping tent cards where we ask the guest to switch off the lights when away. While going on nature walks at our resort properties across the Utrakhand region, we usually run a cleanliness drive. During events such as Earth Hour, we always ask our guests if they are comfortable participating with us.”

WASTE MANAGEMENT IS KEY

With eco-conscious travel becoming increasingly popular, there is every incentive for hotels to raise the bar to operate sustainably, insists **Tan Kim Seng**, Chief Operating Officer at Meritus Hotels & Resorts. “We are always looking for ways to enhance our sustainability governance structure

and are committed to integrating sustainability into our business. We believe it is complementary to our business strategies and creates value for our stakeholders,” he says.

The group-wide ‘Meritus Loves the Earth’ green campaign engages guests and employees alike to actively participate in waste reduction measures at Mandarin Orchard Singapore and Meritus Pelangi Beach Resort & Spa, Langkawi, by implementing the three ‘R’s — Reduce, Reuse and Recycle — across all areas of operation. Aimed at minimising disposables used, a straw-free initiative was rolled out at both properties to offer biodegradable straws as a greener alternative.

Talking about the property in Singapore, Seng says, “Being a large hotel, our flagship 1077-key Mandarin Orchard Singapore places emphasis on waste management as one of the key drivers of the hotel’s environmental sustainability efforts. Since 2014, the hotel has embarked on a food recycling programme, partnering with ECO-WIZ Group, to recycle all food waste generated. More recently, Mandarin Orchard Singapore partnered with Ecolab to recycle and repackage used soap bars from the hotel and distribute them to underprivileged families around Singapore.”

GETTING THE GUEST INVOLVED

SN Srivastava, President & Co-founder, Clarks Inn group of hotels, claims that as a hotel company, their job is not only to provide quality accommodation or guest-related services, but to also be responsible



Goldstone Hotels & Resorts



Clarks Inn Suites Gwalior

or guest-related
the environment it operates in

towards the society, its people and the environment that they operate in. “Resources, be it water, energy or things that are used in building hotels, are getting scarce day by day. As a company, we strongly advocate sustainable practices so that there is no negative environmental footprint. We want to help create a better place for people, within a sustained environment, and these ethos are integral to our spread and expansion,” he says.

As a hotel management company, Clarks Inn engages with property owners and developers right from the beginning, especially in case of Greenfield projects, for them to adopt sustainable measures like water harvesting and garbage processing. “Many of our new and upcoming properties are adopting these measures. We, however, work and operate in so many other ways as well. Reducing water consumption, sensitising guests on environment-friendly practices in regard to use or change of things like bed linen or towels, or reducing the use of plastics and segregation of waste before disposal, etc., are all part of our operation,” Srivastava adds.

At Clarks Inn, guests play an important part in the execution of sustainable practices, from reducing the use of paper, plastics and water to avoiding the frequent change of bed linen and towels.



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AS GREEN AS IT GETS



“We are always looking to enhance our sustainability governance structure; it is complementary to our strategies and creates value for stakeholders”

TAN KIM SENG
Chief Operating Officer
Meritus Hotels & Resorts



“We want to help create a better place for people, within a sustained environment, and these ethos are integral to our spread and expansion”

SN SRIVASTAVA
President & Co-founder
Clarks Inn



“Guests have become cognizant of the need of sustainable environment and that helps our cause towards sustainability; they have become aware”

MAVERIK MUKERJI
General Manager Delegate,
Bengaluru & Mysuru hotels, Accor



“We seek to create long-term value for stakeholders and destinations, with the motto of embracing the environment and empowering the people”

ALPHA ELDIANSYAH
General Manager
Banyan Tree Bintan



Banyan Tree Bintan

With eco-conscious travel becoming popular, there is every incentive for hotels to raise the bar to operate sustainably

POSITIVE HOSPITALITY

At Accor, the team believes in acting for positive hospitality. **Maverik Mukerji**, General Manager Delegate – Bengaluru & Mysuru hotels, Accor, says, “We are much more than a global hotel industry leader and work in a hugely diverse range of professions. It means that we have the opportunity to open up new horizons and address our travellers' concerns about the environment and social responsibility. This is what we are now doing by setting our sights on new, strong commitments.”

With PLANET 21, Accor’s sustainable development programme, Accor is reinforcing its determination to put sustainable development at the heart of its activities by involving customers, partners, and employees to act together. “We ensure international standards of cleanliness; give an option to our banqueting guests to choose RO water stations in place of PET water bottles; our sustainability team has so far successfully eliminated plastic straws and stirrers from all our hotels and the objective now is to reduce food wastage by 30 per cent by 2020 across all our hotels; for many properties, eco-friendly cutlery is given to all take-away orders. Guests have become cognizant of the need of sustainable environment and that helps our cause towards sustainability. They have increasingly become aware especially in the areas of food wastage, usage of plastic straws, bottles, laundry, etc,” shares Mukerji.

CREATING LONG-TERM VALUE

Banyan Tree Bintan sees sustainability not only in terms of the environment, but also in terms of the benefit to surrounding communities. “This has



ibis Bengaluru City Centre

been our ethos and continues to be the guiding principle. Our concept of sustainability seeks to create long-term value for multiple stakeholders and destinations, with the motto of embracing the environment and empowering the people,” says **Alpha Eldiansyah**, General Manager, Banyan Tree Bintan (Indonesia).

Their contemporary methods of sustainability are aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by integrating climate change and related issues into business strategy and engagement across the value chain. The property also encourages its guests to be part of sustainability activities. “We created ‘Stay for Good’ programme, which encompasses our sustainability efforts and encourages our guests to get involved through a number of new initiatives. Guests can also participate in The Green Imperative Fund by contributing \$2 per night during their stay. We provide complementary education activities for our guests as well, including sea turtle release, tree planting, bird watching, village tour, school visit, soap for hope, and conservation talk,” shares Eldiansyah.

HOSPITALITY Talk



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The robots take over the mundane responsibilities of hotel staff,

thereby freeing the staff to focus more on service enhancement



Just a command away...

Digital technology may well be the perfect solution for hotels. A spokesperson of Alibaba Group shares how they have created a hotel model that optimally blends hospitality with digitisation, with the FlyZoo Hotel.

TT BUREAU

WHAT MAKES FLYZOO UNIQUE?

FlyZoo is the first-ever model hotel with a hotel-wide client identity recognition system and a large-scale use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to generate a convenient, seamless experience for guests. The use of intelligent facilities coupled with digital management and operational systems enables hotel employees to spend less time on routine work and focus on providing guests with exemplary service.

Other highlights are:

- Room reservation can be made with the FlyZoo App, which also allows guests to pre-select the preferred floors, locations and directions of their rooms.
- Check-in can be done entirely through the App before a guest's arrival or through one of the self-service check-in kiosks in the hotel lobby. Both options involve leading facial recognition technology that will then also enable guests to conveniently unlock their room doors.
- With the hotel-wide client identity recognition system, guests can also have their faces scanned as identity proof to activate elevators and access the gym and restaurants.
- Tmall Genie, a smart speaker system available in the hotel's rooms, assists with temperature control, lights, curtains and operating the television. Tmall Genie is also on hand 24x7, to allow guests to request water and other amenities through voice commands.
- Delivery of food and other items will be partially performed by the hotel's room-service robots.
- Robots are also used in the hotel's restaurants to

CEO'S DESK

"The FlyZoo Hotel represents Alibaba's endeavour to marry hospitality with technology, and ultimately empower the tourism industry to embrace innovation. Our use of intelligent facilities coupled with digital management and operational systems means that employees can focus on providing guests with a level of service that goes the extra mile," says **Andy Wang**, CEO, Alibaba Future Hotel.



assist in dish delivery. Guests can choose not to use facial recognition, and access their floors, rooms and hotel facilities by traditional means instead.

WHAT KIND OF CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE?

In the current digital age, talent acquisition is one of the greatest challenges. FlyZoo as well as other hotels need multidisciplinary professionals who are not only knowledgeable about the hotel industry, but also in possession of a digital mindset so that hotels can be well-positioned to leverage on new technology to address challenges in operations and business development.

WHY DO YOU THINK THE HOTEL INDUSTRY NEEDS A CONCEPT LIKE THIS?

Digital technology is permeating every part of our lives as numerous industries are on the cusp of digital adoption to leverage the power of technology to reshape their business.

At the same time, technology trends are already influencing customer behaviour and expectations, and over the next decade or so, these effects are only going to grow.

With FlyZoo Hotel, Alibaba has created a model hotel that blends hospitality with digital technology and offline with online. The robots take over the mundane responsibilities of hotel staff, thereby freeing the staff to focus more on service enhancement.

Invest now to cash in later

JAIDEEP DANG, Managing Director - Hotels & Hospitality Group, JLL, says that this is the right time to invest in hotel development to make the most of demand three to five years down the line.

ANUPRIYA BISHNOI

WHERE DO HOTEL INVESTMENTS STAND IN TODAY'S MARKET SCENARIO?

Real estate developers who are not having the best time because markets are soft may not be focusing on hotel development, but that doesn't mean it's not happening. The set of people developing hotels earlier has changed, so we now have businessmen from sectors like automobile, manufacturing and infrastructure, who are now taking this segment ahead in both Tier-I and Tier-II cities. Resultantly, those who own land parcels are now unlocking them; where earlier they had a unit or a factory, they are now offering it for hotel development to ensure the land is optimally utilised.

That said, all conventional hotel companies are still investing. This is a very good time to invest because by the time you build and open to the market, chances are that the wave will be up and you will hit at the right time.

SO, IS A BROWNFIELD INVESTMENT BETTER THAN GREENFIELD?

People want to pace up. There are structures that are only partly built and people are keenly considering them. Investors for this segment are not too many, but they are looking for such opportunities and it's a good time to buy.

DO DOMESTIC COMPANIES ENJOY AN EDGE OVER INTERNATIONAL CHAINS?

When you see growth in Tier-II or III towns, you will realise that people are not adamant on building the biggest hotel. Instead, they want to build a 60, 70 or 80-key property. This is where domestic hotel companies have an edge over international chains, because they are not sitting out of various countries to get an approval on certain projects. Indian companies understand the market more than anybody else; they would know the potential

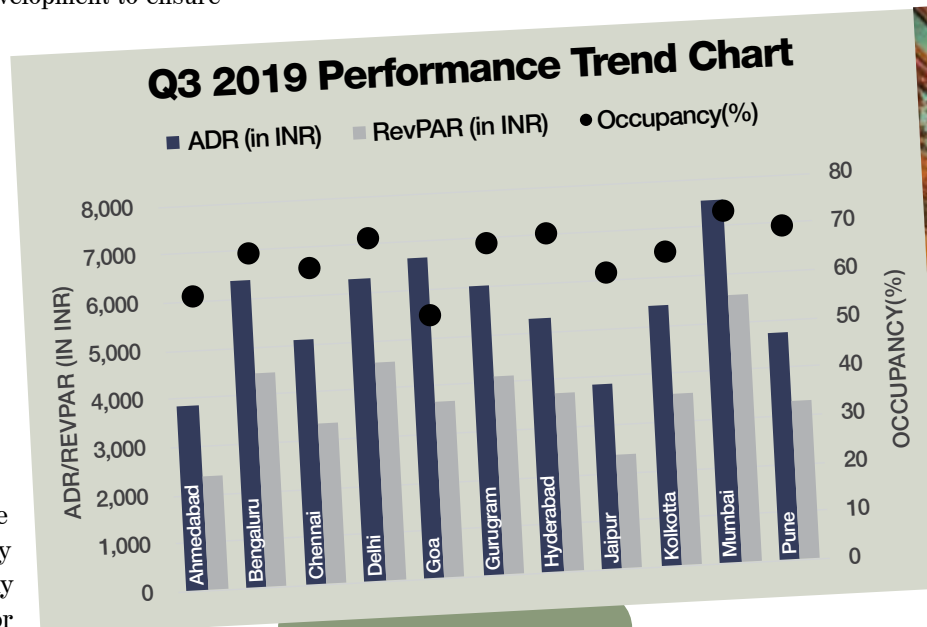


JAIDEEP DANG
MD - Hotels & Hospitality Group, JLL

of Dehradun or Raipur much better than their international counterparts.

THEN, WHAT HAS TAKEN HOMEGROWN BRANDS SO LONG TO EXPAND TO SMALLER CITIES?

No, I think the process has been gradual. There was a time when international brands came to India and made a significant impact on the industry. They pushed the needle on how these brands operate. There comes a point when everyone sees growth. What is happening now is not a 'sudden'



KEY FINDINGS

- Nine out of 11 markets recorded an increase in RevPAR in Q3 2019 over 2018
- Occupancy in most cities in India is on a rise.
- Mumbai is the winner when it comes to RevPAR in absolute terms.
- Bengaluru is the leader in RevPAR percentage change in Q3 2019 over the same period in 2018.

activity; it has been continuous and is just getting bigger and better!

WHAT ABOUT INDIAN BRANDS IN FOREIGN MARKETS? HOW WELL DO THEY PERFORM?

The legendary Indian brands have done well abroad, be it Taj or Oberoi. They have been operating overseas for at least 50 years now and have created a great brand appeal. Though the extent of penetration is not much, they continue to be hallmarks of Indian hospitality. One also keeps hearing that OYO is expanding to different markets, but only time will tell what will happen because that's a very different model.

A professional portrait of Atul Jain, a middle-aged man with dark hair, wearing glasses, a dark suit, a white shirt, and a yellow patterned tie. He is smiling and looking directly at the camera against a dark red background.

ATUL JAIN, COO,
Best Western
Hotels & Resorts
(India, Bangladesh
& Sri Lanka), talks
about the group's
expansion plans.

‘The Best’ service for SUCCESS

LET'S TALK ABOUT BEST WESTERN'S EXPANSION PLANS - INDIA, TO BE SPECIFIC.

We have been experiencing a remarkable growth and penetration into diverse markets in India in the past three years, and we hope to gather more pace with the opening of 10 more hotels in the next six months that will take our tally to 2,000 operating keys. This would be followed by the opening of over 1,000 keys in the pipeline. The new hotels shall operate under Best Western, Best Western Plus, SureStay Plus, and SureStay Hotel by Best Western brands in locations across India. Apart from the new-build hotels, we're equally focused on conversion hotels to aid rapid expansion, and we have suitable brands to offer for an easy conversion.

THE HOSPITALITY LANDSCAPE IS GETTING OVERCROWDED. HOW ARE YOU GEARED TO DEAL WITH THESE CHANGING BUSINESS DYNAMICS?

There has been a tremendous growth in the number of brands in the market, both international and domestic, which is good for the promoters in terms of the wide range of choices that they have and puts them at an advantageous position for negotiating the

“
Apart from the new-build hotels, we're equally focused on conversion hotels to aid rapid expansion
”

loyalty programme that keep us in a pretty good shape to defend against the OTAs.

Thirdly, there has to be a focus on the quality of experience you give to the guest at your hotel. Ultimately, what is the one thing a hotel has that the OTAs don't have? It is the ability to interact with customers. OTAs can send business to the hotel, but they have no way of interacting with our customers. Therefore, we educate the hotels that they have to provide that superior experience because that is what is going to make people come back.

Lastly, we need to work out the most advantageous commercial terms with OTAs. It is not just in terms of negotiating lower commissions, but also in aspects like last room availability and the ability to sell number rates through the loyalty programme, etc., that will ensure our brand search terms are protected.

WHAT BRANDS DO YOU CURRENTLY HAVE IN YOUR PORTFOLIO?

Best Western, Best Western Plus, and Best Western Premier have been the mainstay brands for a long time, corresponding to the midscale, upper midscale, and upscale segments, respectively. SureStay and



OTAs are here to stay and exist as a considerable business channel. We must work with them on the terms suitable to us, and there are certain ways to coexist

terms. Further, every hotel chain has multiple brands and new brands keep getting added to the portfolio every year. Here, I would like to say that for a brand to be successful, it needs to have a well-defined selling proposition about what the brand stands for. So, if you look at all of our brands, they are clearly defined in terms of their positioning, development guidelines, and guest facilities and services, all aimed at providing a distinct experience to the guest.

WHAT ABOUT THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF OTAs IN THE HOSPITALITY BUSINESS?

OTAs are here to stay and exist as a considerable business channel. Hence, in my view, we must work with them on the terms suitable to us, and I think there are certain ways to coexist. Firstly, the brand has to think about not allowing them to cannibalise their business, which means your website, mobile App, and electronic distribution needs to be really strong. Secondly, your loyalty programme is the best defence against OTAs because they don't have it. In our case, we have an award-winning website, mobile App, and

BEST WESTERN'S EVOLUTION

Starting with the flagship 'Best Western' brand, the brand portfolio grew to seven brands by the end of 2014. Earlier this year, three more brands were added to the brand portfolio with the acquisition of WorldHotels.

Today, Best Western Hotels & Resorts has 16 brands and over 4,500 hotels in more than 100 countries.

SureStay Plus by Best Western are the lower midscale and midscale brands for smaller room inventories and are primarily for conversion properties. Vib and Glo brands are upper midscale and midscale boutique brands. While Vib is for primary locations and aimed at tech-savvy, contemporary travellers, Glo is for the secondary market. Executive Residency is an upper midscale brand catering to the extended-stay segment for both business and leisure travellers.

Then, there is a bouquet of soft brands comprising SureStay Collection, Best Western Signature Collection, and Best Western Premier Collection, ranging from midscale to luxury segments for quality hotels having a significant brand presence of their own, providing the owners with the advantage of the strong reservation and distribution systems, and the Quality Program of the brand at the back end. Last year, two more brands were launched, namely Aiden and Sadie, which are high-end boutique lifestyle brands belonging to the upper midscale and upscale positionings.

Being a net zero hotel

ASHRAE India Chapter's recently-held AIC Tech Conference 2019 delved on building sustainable hotels by first devising means to reduce energy consumption and then ensuring minimum wastage.

KANCHAN NATH

A zero-energy building, also known as a Zero Net Energy (ZNE) building, Net Zero Energy Building (NZEB), or simply a net zero building, is one with zero net energy consumption, which means that the total amount of energy consumed by the building on an annual basis is roughly equal to the amount of renewable energy created onsite or by renewable energy sources elsewhere. At the recently-held AIC Tech Conference 2019, panellists deliberated on 'Sustainability in Practice - Building Sustainable Hotels'. Moderated by **Pankaj Dharkar**, President, Pankaj Dharkar and Associates, panellists included **Sanjay Batra**, Project Director, MEDANTA; **Frank Mills**, President & Owner, Frank Mills Consulting and a distinguished lecturer at ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-conditioning Engineers); **Sandeep Goel**, Director, Proion Consultants; **GC Modgil**, Founder, Sterling India Consulting Engineers and **Rishi Pawah**, MRICS, AVP - Property Management at CapitaLand India. With limited resources across the world, sustainability can be the only way forward, but one main issue that remains is the space constraint, primarily for hotels in metro cities. Resorts in leisure destinations usually have a lot more space to set up more solar panels. Opening the discussion that day, Dharkar said, "For a net zero building, the hotel needs to be very efficient. Most consultants have seen energy-efficient equipment last for 15-20 years. Therefore, it does not remain a struggle to convince customers, payback always justifies the same."

GETTING TO NET ZERO

Talking about the performance of a group of hotels last year, Modgil said that among the 160 hotels, the owner-driven ones were observed to have been performing much better in terms of energy, sustainability, waste management, as well as supply chain. "So, the one factor that helps in being net zero is the involvement of the owners themselves, making a noticeable difference," he shared.



There is so much technology available for net zero buildings, but awareness is very poor. There is a need to train operators or it will not yield a dividend

“The quantum of area required for solar panels is huge and you generate a miniscule amount from it. Today, there is a new thing in the market where you take a place far away, you take some land on lease and put in the solar panels there. You can eject metred power into the state electricity board grid, thereby getting cheap metred power for your hotel. There are companies that are doing this for you, so many hotels can utilise it and head towards net zero,” Batra added.

Sharing a different perspective, Goel said that the objective is to optimise the Energy Performance Index (EPI); the concept of net zero is still aspirational. “Guest needs are paramount! When you get into a situation where the guest comes first, you cannot achieve the goals you could have in a more controlled environment. Therefore, the maximum one can do is strive for optimisation of EPI,” he explained.

TOO MUCH TECH MAY NOT BE GOOD

Besides space, technology seemed to be a key concern when getting hotels to be net zero. Batra said, “Today, we are very concerned about water! We recycle and reuse, but the biggest guzzlers of water are the AC cooling towers. So, we are now debating whether we should go with air chillers rather than water chillers, since the scarcity of water is a huge issue. While the efficiency of air coolers has started to improve, some new technology in this direction would be welcome.”



DID YOU KNOW?

There are 27 USGBC LEED-certified hotels in India (21 Platinum, 5 Gold, & 1 Silver), more than 40 IGBC-certified projects, & 2 GEM-certified hotels.

To this, Mills added, “Most hotels are located in beautiful locations - the seaside, by the lake, or in the mountains. That does give us a chance to look at nature and passive design to make the hotel not only beautiful, but also comfortable.”

Pawah felt that while data sharing is important for net zero buildings, there is no real platform for it. “There is so much technology available for net zero buildings, but the awareness is very poor. Without proper maintenance, nothing can be achieved. Capex does not seem to be a challenge these days, it is the operation that seems to be a challenge,” he said. Sharing a similar view, Modgil said, “There is a need to train operators. What we design will not yield a dividend if the operator does not perfectly understand how to operate it.”



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ANTHONY ROSS
Chief Executive Officer
JA Resorts & Hotels

JA Lake View Hotel is the first hotel in the Middle East to voice-enable every guest room with Volara-Alexa. Guests

can learn about boating and sea plane excursions, water-sport equipment, and our golf course. If guests prefer a quiet night in their room, they can ask Alexa to turn down the lights. This is truly the next level in service excellence and guest engagement.



HUSSAIN PATEL
Director
Tripjack

After investing heavily in technology, we are able to offer our partners rich content, a seamless booking experience, and

competitive local hotel and flight rates from popular countries. Our new website is more intuitive and we are looking at adding a lot of content in the hotel segment, online. We are contracting with hotels directly. The prices we have will be competitive.



ALEFIYA SINGH
Director
IRIS Reps India

Regal International Hotels Group has come up with an innovative website for travel agents, called

'Regal Travel Pro'. This entitles agents to access special rates with discounts. Apart from real-time availability and rates, agents can also be part of the rewards programme that will be introduced soon. Regal Hotels also has an App for M!CE organisers.



PUSHPARAJS
Director of Sales & Marketing
Radisson Blu Pune Hinjawadi

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to bring innovation to the hospitality industry. Moreover, it's a move that signals a trend towards 'smart hotels', which Radisson Blu Pune Hinjawadi aims to bring with it. With AI coming into the picture, we will be able to not only create end-to-end experiences resulting in delighted guests, but also increase revenue for the hotel. In today's world, travellers are not just looking for a flight, a room, or a hotel service. A definite shift in guest expectations has taken place over the years; guests are looking for purchase options that cover a larger part of their journey.

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