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# ‘Extend credit if not cash’

Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) has urged airlines to give credit to passengers in lieu of bookings made before the implementation of the initial 21-day nationwide lockdown in case they cannot refund the customers' money. A decision on resuming operations, both domestic and international, is still awaited.



Nisha Verma

The lockdown in the country has brought people's travel plans to a standstill. International and domestic flight operations have been suspended, and since flights are not taking off, people are being forced to cancel or re-schedule their tickets. A number of airlines have been charging customers for such cancellation or rescheduling. Addressing the issue at hand, **Hardeep Singh Puri**, Minister of State (I/C), Civil Aviation, has said, "We have issued clear advisory to all the airlines regarding the same and most of the airlines are following it by giving credit because the bookings have been done."

**Pradeep Singh Kharola**, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation,



**Hardeep Singh Puri**  
Minister of State (I/C)  
Civil Aviation

throws more light on the situation and says, "For bookings made earlier, money has already come to the airline. Sometimes, travel agents have different dealings with airlines and have paid the airlines, and they also give a credit period to passengers. In that case, the money hasn't come to the travel agent

either. So, it has become quite complex. Hence, the DGCA has issued some guidelines, saying that firstly, all cancellation charges should not be levied

✦ We have issued clear advisory to all the airlines and most of them are following it ✦

– Hardeep Singh Puri

and as far as possible, the airlines should also try to re-schedule the tickets so that those who cannot travel now can do so subsequently." He adds that in case a passenger is not able to travel to a destination, he gets credit for that amount

in case the airline is not able to give him cash. That can be done by the airline either in terms of a



**Pradeep Singh Kharola**  
Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation

credit form or a voucher or some electronic system.

#### International operations

On the issue of restarting international operations for

evacuation of passengers, Puri says that they will be looking at resuming international flight operations on a case-by-case basis after the lockdown is over. They will be looking at which countries these flights are coming from. "After the lockdown, we will be considering the resumption of flights on a case-by-case basis. Even flights that will bring Indians back would not be allowed to come until the lockdown is lifted," he shares.

To this, Kharola adds that there were restrictions on international flights arriving from different destinations even before the lockdown. "Even after the lockdown is over, the government has to examine and take a holistic view of when conditions

will be safe in other countries, and then we can think of opening international operations on a case-by-case basis," he says.

#### Domestic operations

Domestic airlines, too, are unclear on the course of action going forward. "What the airlines do as part of their contingency planning and prepare for the future is entirely up to them and there is no directive from us. I am optimistic and I am hoping that operations begin in a calibrated manner," says Kharola, asserting that it is really up to the airline; "they have to judge the situation and take bookings," he comments.

With the lockdown extended to May 3, resumption of flights could be further delayed. ✦

# For the industry, by the industry

Taking knowledge sharing to a new level, **TRAVTALK** Digital Conclave – India's first virtual tourism conclave – received an overwhelming response with over 6,000 attendees for its three sessions. It helped answer some key questions.



TT Bureau

Held on April 7, 2020, the first-ever **TRAVTALK** Digital Conclave had some of the most eminent stakeholders of the tourism industry on-board to discuss present circumstances under the COVID-19 outbreak, while also delving on the future of the tourism and hospitality in-

dustries in a post-COVID world. The conclave, divided into three sessions, focused on inbound, domestic and outbound tourism.

The speakers, experts in their respective fields, hailed from the government and the trade, including tour operators, hoteliers, NTOs, OTAs, international tourism bodies and travel tycoons.

Session-I focused on 'When will inbound bounce back? What actions can tour operators take in the interim?' Speakers for this session included **Rupinder Brar** (ADG – Ministry of Tourism), **Himmat Anand** (Founder – Tree of Life Resorts & Hotels) and **Homa Mistry** (CEO – Trail Blazer Tours).

The second session was on the subject 'Outbound tourism: Weathering the storm and gearing up for better days'.

Speakers for this session included experts like **Tricia Warwick** (APMEA Director – VisitBritain), **GB Srithar** (Regional Director, India, Middle East & South Asia – Singapore Tour-



ism Board) and **Deepak Rawat** (Senior Vice President, International Markets – MakeMyTrip).

Session-III focused on 'Coronavirus – A small roadblock or a major disrupter for the tourism industry?' This session had industry experts like **Su-**

**man Billa** (Director, Technical Cooperation and Silk Road Development – UNWTO), **Kapil Kaul** (CEO, India & ME – CAPA) and **Naveen Kundu** (Managing Director - EbixCash Travel & Holidays), sharing their expert advice with the travel trade. ✦

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## Relooking at tourism exports

Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH) had an urgent meeting with Ministry of Commerce, where they discussed measures that could be taken on tourism exports. Deferment of statutory liabilities was also suggested.

 Nisha Verma

In the meeting, FAITH representatives mulled over measures on tourism exports, which included rating the SEIS @ 10% and crediting it immediately on the basis of previous financial year, deemed export status, SEIS on gross forex earnings, zero rating of tourism exports & GST refunds to tourists, strategic focus on MICE sector, EPCG on tourist vehicles and relaxing export obligations, among others.

In an official communication released by FAITH, it was stated, "Most of the tourism enterprises support their infrastructure (hard and soft) by managing different tourist seasons. As all global source markets are hit, it will be domestic business of India which will keep India tourism busi-

nesses running. Thus, FAITH also has urged the Ministry of Commerce to request Piyush Goyal, who is the Minister of Commerce and Industries, to take up the concerns regarding



the survival and support of the whole tourism travel & hospitality industry with the PM."

These include deferment of all statutory liabilities, setting up a COVID-19 tourism relief fund for interest-free 10-year working capital loan for salaries and establishment costs, increase of banking moratorium period to 12 months without any interest or for direct benefit

transfer to affected employees and a national legislative tourism task force of Central and state governments.

"FAITH has also requested ESI funds to be used for compensating employees as 'stay at home' is a forced and mandatory curative medical need to fight the virus. We have also requested PF coverage of all tourism travel & hospitality employees as under the PM Rozgar Pradhan Yojana," the statement read.

FAITH has also shared examples from the US & UK, Thailand and Indonesia where salary support, tax exemption and stimulation of domestic travel is being extended by governments for tourism, travel & hospitality. The parent association had requested and was joined by the Chairmen/

Vice Chairmen of the Tourism Committees of CII, ASSO-CHAM & FICCI for the meeting along with the Presidents of the concerned FAITH member associations (HAI, Indian Association of Tour Operators, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India, ATOAI, ICPB, ITTA, IHHA, ADTOI, Travel Agents Association of India, TAFI).

"FAITH and its board of directors are deeply thankful to Ministry of Commerce for their support to the Indian tourism, travel & hospitality industry," the statement concluded.

### FAITH on Twitter

FAITH has opened its Twitter account and will leverage its collective strength across India for connecting with policy makers through that route as well. The temporary background profile on their page reads: 'The clock is ticking for Indian Tourism. The time for policy relief is now.'

 *Worldometer is a reference website that provides counters and real-time statistics for diverse topics. It was launched in 2008 and has gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is available in 34 languages.*



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# TRAVELTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### Safe India to Save India

Though India's inbound tourism is expected to be the first to bounce back from the impact of COVID-19, the disappearance of the disease alone will not help the sector rise from the ashes. While business losses are a given, survival will be the new mantra, driven by a two-pronged strategy. The first will be a collaboration between the government and the private sector in painting the image of a safe India to travel to, ensuring that countries across the world hear of India's resounding success in fighting the disease. The second, and a more exhaustive strategy, would be identifying international markets and consumer segments that are willing to travel, while packaging tourism products that are more wellness-driven or experience-based. What's left to see though is how far this move will be able to fill the vacuum created by loss in FTAs at India's heritage sites.

### A silver lining

Such uncertain times call for innovative measures to help industries and people cope. While international tourism is presently in a state of retreat, the best course of action may be to first brace the impact, then start again at the beginning towards recovery and finally, redefine products that would cater to the changed face of tourism. The virus outbreak has already given a boost to armchair travel and internet-based meetings – signs that there exist several opportunities in the post-COVID world. A lockdown may be the best time to think of what the post-crisis traveller could demand, and how eco-friendly travel and customer-centric strategies accompanied by heightened safety and hygiene checks need to be dealt with.

### COVID, the influencer

The COVID-19 crisis may have altered tourism's trajectory. Experts believe that influenced by the ecological balance the virus has restored, sustainable travel and carbon budgeting may be the new norms of travel. On the other hand, airlines may need to stimulate markets to fill flights or reduce fares, agents may have to chalk out more value-centric strategies than cost-centric, and travel companies may have to regroup to determine the behavioural change in travellers. Travel start-ups may just come out with flying colours, providing tech-based solutions to clients. That said, fear of the unknown still exists and only time will tell how things pan out.



# An open letter to IATA

Seema Luthra, Founder & Managing Partner at Travel Metrics, has written an open letter to **Alexandre de Juniac**, Director General and CEO, International Air Transport Association (IATA), in response to his open letter to the travel agent community wherein it was mentioned that the solution for ticket refunds shall be credit vouchers instead of cash refunds. **The letter reads as below:**

Dear Mr Juniac,  
With reference to your open letter, I would like to say that it is in times such as these that the industry needs leadership. The airline industry has a domino effect on the related service industries – hotels, tour operators, ground handlers, travel agents, and other service providers to the industry and the entire economy at large. It's a vast ecosystem and airlines are not alone in this crisis.

**There are a few striking differences of great relevance, which you have neither mentioned nor elaborated**

a) Airlines are receiving and will receive financial bailout from their respective country governments. Have they not accounted for your creditors while seeking these bailouts? Please share the details.

b) Airlines may be seeking volume discounts from their vendors like lessors, airports, caterers, GDSs, etc. What are the cost benefits from these discounts? Please disclose.

c) Oil is at an all-time low and while it's true that one third of the global fleet is grounded but two-third is not. It is also highly unlikely that oil will go back to its original levels. Hence, there is a direct positive impact to cash flow for a considerable time in future. Please quantify this positive impact.

d) Airline operating performance is based on ASK and RASK. Fleet on ground reduces both. As far as cash exiting more than coming in, it's the same situation with your creditors including your passengers. Some of them may not even survive the losses from this crisis.

Hence, I would say that you are not doing your best.

**Let's look at the specifics:**

1. Giving vouchers in lieu of

cash refunds is fine, but what if the issuing airline goes bankrupt or passenger does not wish to fly the same airline? Would these be transferrable to other airlines? Please confirm.

2. The credit shells/vouchers are permitted by the Indian Government, but as an optional tool and not a default practice. Please refer: Civil Aviation Requirements, Section 3 – Air Transport, Series 'M', Part II, amended on 27.2.19. Honestly, your member airlines have completely disregarded the guidance of the

**The rest of the world also needs to pay salaries and take care of fixed costs not just your member airlines**

Indian Government for years and have been continuously following a self-centred commercial policy, which is anti-travel agent and anti-passenger as well. You can confirm the same with each airline that which of these civil aviation requirements are complied by them.

3. What about the back-end incentives your member airlines committed to pay whole sellers/consolidators? Will you be paying these through vouchers? If yes, when? Do you have any idea how late each member airline pays these incentives? The airlines have destroyed the travel agency distribution models, cribbed about high distribution costs without providing a viable alternative. Why does paying a commission to a sales agent and a fee to a GDS hurt your member airlines so much? Why can't your member airlines treat this cost as any other cost of doing business?

Online Travel Agencies have been dealt with suspicion and given unfair step motherly treatment. I have personally experienced

this when I booked a ticket through an Indian OTA and received an email from the airline (IATA member airline) immediately after my flight landed, inviting me to book direct on their own website for my next flight. The airline had my email ID as a mandatory requirement for booking.

This was given in good faith by the OTA, so I could be notified about any flight delays and cancellations. Not for direct marketing by your members. Is this an ethical and fair business practice? Which industry can thrive if the principals compete with their distributors? It is cannibalisation at its best. You are speaking about default rates among travel agents. What if the airlines default? It has happened before, and no one compensates the hapless travel agent. Certainly not IATA.

Sir, the rest of the world also needs to pay salaries and take care of fixed costs not just your member airlines. I request you to ask your member airlines to introspect and contemplate their motives and not come down heavily with high-handed unilateral measures. They have not been with us through the good times and have used every crisis to further their own agenda.

Please come up with a plan for recovery and true collaboration, which is sustainable and ensures that all stakeholders have a fair chance of survival.

*(The views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)*



**Seema Luthra**  
Founder & Managing Partner  
Travel Metrics

### Reactions

“Seema did a good job; she was checking with us while preparing. Her sincere efforts will be appreciated by the trade fraternity.”

“Applaud Seema for this.”

“Crisis is a big problem, but many problems are self-created.”

“She is right and justified. Ideally, TAAI, ANS, TAFI, should come in to safeguard the interests of travel agencies.”

“Most importantly, IATA always demanded money on time and even if there was disruption/delay for a day, they would blacklist an agent immediately. Now, when it is payback time and IATA is being tested, it has resorted to an arbitrary decision that's hurting millions of travel agents and customers.”

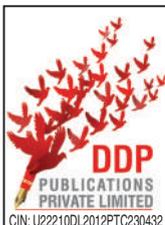
“Strong emotional response; it's coming to bad karma now for the airlines. The problem is that agents worry about speaking up individually and associations are political, and it's hard to raise your voice against your sponsors. Associations must stop sponsorships from all kinds of suppliers to avoid conflict of interest. It will send a very strong message. The government needs to speak to the airlines.”

“The media can play a big role.”

“There is logic in this letter. Credit vouchers are better.”

“IATA credit vouchers are required to be valid for any airline.”

“A remarkable and befitting reply to IATA. I only wish if travel agents were ever united in India, this would change the world of our industry. I have always maintained that airlines are not our partners.”



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# 'Let's persevere through this'

**Sandeep Dwivedi**, COO, InterGlobe Technology Quotient, feels that with the government backing collective pleas of airlines and being rigorously involved in finding a way out, the aviation industry is being offered practical and feasible solutions.

As Benjamin Franklin said, 'Out of adversity comes opportunity'; we are blessed to be in a time when the entire nation can stay updated, find solutions and lead a change at remarkable velocity. It is true that no one person or agency can create a revival plan for an industry as vast as travel, especially with what we are witnessing today. Our industry, therefore, is in a dire need of collective endeavours aimed at revival, and innovations to sail through these troubled waters. With Government of India backing collective pleas of airlines and rigorously involved in finding a way out, we are receiving practical and feasible solutions.

Hopefully, Government of India will also extend financial support so that at least back-office solutions keep

running and this sudden blow becomes bearable.

InterGlobe Technology Quotient (ITQ) is taking every precaution and acting responsibly in this troubled time with the employees operating from home and being frequently updated of the ongoing status - they are abreast with latest developments and are constantly communicating the same to our community of travel agents.

Being a company for travel industry and by travel industry, ITQ urges businesses across industry to stay strong, especially for employees who have supported businesses and helped them grow. Let us not allow these times to lead to job cuts and pay cuts, as far as possible. Further, teams at ITQ are providing 24x7 support to travel agents for reissue and cancellation of flight bookings,

and even helping install systems online for agents to work smoothly from home. In addition, following these sudden developments, we are providing handy Travelport Smartpoint hacks such as refunds using linear entry to make transacting easier and swifter for our agents.

We are on the edge, serving agents by resolving queries and recording apprehensions and issues for future in order to accommodate the same in our system, if adversity worsens or for when it smoothens out. On priority, we are taking all necessary actions to prepare ourselves and our system for managing any probable or unexpected requirements smoothly. Our innovation team is constantly involved in preparing for a future beyond COVID-19, developing systems to accommodate both ex-

pected and unforeseen abrupt developments in the industry, including extended and/or limited travel beyond domestic boundaries and airlines.

Our association with and services for agents is perpetual;

✂ Our industry is in a dire need of collective endeavours aimed at revival, and innovations to sail through these troubled waters ✂

we are constantly making the process easier whether it is consolidating and creating a tracker of airline refund and cancellation policies due to COVID-19 for our agents or mapping the way forward with smart modifications in and

simplifications of the system. Understanding the value of time at hand, we are extending services by providing relevant trainings to both our agents and employees.

It is our humble request to the community and industry as a whole to stay strong and keep innovating, for there is no better time to show strength in unity and power in perseverance than now.

*(The views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)*



**Sandeep Dwivedi**  
Chief Operating Officer  
InterGlobe Technology Quotient

## Tourism Breaking News

- IATO estimates loss of US\$85 billion in hotel, aviation and tourism sector
- Around 1200 tourists assisted through 'Stranded in India' portal till 9<sup>th</sup> April
- Agents to get full refund from Singapore & Lufthansa Airlines
- Travel agents should issue refunds when airlines pay them: TAAI
- IRCTC suspends booking of privately-run Tejas Express trains till 30<sup>th</sup> April
- IATA allows agents to make payment settlements later without penalties
- DEX Aviation appointed all-India GSA for Alitalia

# Develop homestays in India

India should follow in the footsteps of countries like Malaysia, Germany and Britain, and develop more and better homestays for a more local and budget-friendly experience, believes **Om Prakash**, Director, InORBIT Tours. Such homestays could be supervised by the tourism ministry for cleanliness, hygiene, etc.

Indian hotels are out-priced by our neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and even Singapore. As a result, we lose out on inbound budget tourists. I have had the personal experience of staying in homestays in countries such as Malaysia, Germany, Britain and Thailand. I experienced friendly hosts and the stay provided a rich cultural exchange and created long-lasting friendships. In fact, we exchange greetings with most of the hosts and love to get an opportunity to stay with the same hosts whenever possible. All these countries offer homestays, which are endorsed by their tourism ministry, keeping with the standards of cleanliness and safety.

As per the recent report published by the tourism ministry of Malaysia, 'Tourists love homestays'. Homestays in Malaysia are popular with visitors and in some regions they are fully booked throughout the year. Malaysia has developed



homestays holiday packages for international students with the co-operation of travel agents and tour operators. They also offer language and leadership courses to encourage tourists to stay longer. Such focused stays range from seven days to seven months and cost about RM 4,000 (about ₹50,000) onwards. The entire homestay project is under the supervision of Ministry of Tourism of Malaysia.

**Germany** pioneered and encouraged homestays to meet the demands of business visitors to

their famous trade fairs and exhibitions, which attract from one lakh to seven lakh visitors from all over the world at one time. Such arrangements are available in all major trade fair cities of Germany such as Hannover, Düsseldorf, Cologne, Frankfurt and Munich, and are handled by the local tourist offices.

**Britain** has developed this facility not only in major cities like London, Birmingham, Oxford and Liverpool, but also farmstays in the countryside. These

accommodations are marketed by travel agents who have published colourful brochures. Even the British Tourism Authority Office is taking full interest and involved in marketing these homestays.

In **Thailand**, 'farmstays' are becoming popular and a large

✂ Ministry of Tourism should appoint a nodal agency to supervise the marketing and enlisting of homestay hosts after full inspection of the facilities ✂

number of international tourists stay for long in the countryside. Some of them offer agriculture study programmes, too. The homes are inspected and approved by the local tourist of-

fices. The price is also fixed by local tourist authorities. Even the sales and marketing is handled by tourist offices in Germany and through travel trade in other countries. This provides confidence and security to international guests. Most of the families spare one or two rooms in their apartment and provide breakfast and meals if needed, on extra payment.

My recommendations to the Ministry of Tourism are:

- ✂ Homestays should be introduced on an all-India basis in all the major cities of India. Homestay hosts should provide a clean and exclusive room to guests with breakfast (optional) at extra cost. The stay can be short or long, with special emphasis on safety.
- ✂ Homestay facility can also be offered in rural India for specialised subjects such as study

of agriculture, study of cottage industries and rural development.

- ✂ Ministry of Tourism should encourage travel agents in India and abroad to offer homestays to their clients visiting India.
- ✂ Ministry of Tourism should appoint a nodal agency to supervise the marketing and enlisting of homestay hosts after full inspection of the facilities, hygiene and reasonable cost offers.

*(The views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)*



**Om Prakash**  
Director, InORBIT Tours

# Revival means 'Re-engineer,

During the first-ever TRAVTALK Digital Conclave and its crucial session on 'Coronavirus: A small roadblock or a major disrupter for the tourism industry', eminent speakers put forward their views on how to fight the deadly pandemic and explore means for revival. It is also equally important to prepare for the post-COVID era, they shared.



Manas Dwivedi

Leading the way in brainstorming was **Suman Billa**, Director, Technical Cooperation & Silk Route Development, UNWTO along with **Kapil Kaul**, CEO & Director, CAPA South Asia and **Naveen Kundu**, Managing Director, EbixCash Travel & Holidays. With an agenda to find workable solutions for the present and strategies for the future, the session was well-attended and all three speakers elaborated on new ideas for the industry and how travel and tourism can contribute so everyone comes out of the crisis collectively.

## Tackling the crisis

According to Billa, the challenge the world is facing with COVID-19 is unprecedented. "Most of the problem is fear of the unknown. At UNWTO, we would be looking to work on getting tourism on track as soon as possible since there will be issues of cash flows and job retention, while also looking at ways to sustain the industry in the near future, ensuring liquidity for companies, working cash problems, making sure that people do not lose jobs and ensuring that there are fair arrangements for consumers," he said.

## Steps that countries are taking

Many countries around the world have come up with holistic relief packages for the tourism industry. Spain has committed 460 million Euros for tourism. The

important thing to realise is that most of the governments are stressed for cash. Another aspect of COVID-19 is that its impact is very staggered. It will take time for the world to completely get rid of COVID-19. There will be travel restrictions in a phased manner. "We also need to leverage institutional funding and debt mechanism. India should consider tourism as a priority sector for relief and job retention," Billa said.

## Three things to look at

- ❖ How tourism can become a vehicle for sustainable development
- ❖ Evolving beyond the economic costs
- ❖ Need to consider carbon budgeting at the destination level

## Time to reboot

Analysing the revival plan for the tourism industry post the crisis, Kundu said that there will be a lot of behavioural change in the industry including a complete price realignment for every tourism product. He said that post-COVID, rationalisation and consolidation will become important. "Ebix has always been bullish about the Indian market. Post COVID-19, there will be a complete paradigm shift in the industry, which will create a consolidation opportunity for us. We will be looking at special-interest acquisition over the next one year and will continue the way we have progressed in the Indian market. Among the travel sectors, I believe MICE will be the first one to bounce back," he said.

"We must regroup and figure out what this behavioural change is going to be because it is going to drive the entire



tourism mechanism. The private sector needs to come together and redefine, realign and reenergise the entire industry. I don't think we need to rely on any external factors. What's most important is to understand the behavioural change," he explained.

## The way forward

Talking about future plans of his company, Kundu said, "We are not going to stop on our acquisitions. Considering what has happened right now, there will be a lot of consolidation. The market will shrink. There will be a lot of players who would want us to handle or manage their business.

## A sketch of times to come

- ❖ Future will witness behavioural changes in industry patterns
- ❖ Price realignment of tourism products will take place globally
- ❖ Consolidation in the industry and a shrunk market size in terms of supply chain

I see it as an opportunity for us; the market has suddenly opened for us actually."

The future of tourism will now be experience-driven rather than attraction or sightseeing-based. There will be a complete paradigm shift.

## Tough time for aviation

Sharing his analysis on the present situation, Kaul claimed that it will almost take a year for the aviation industry to function normally, that too if conditions remained optimistic. "We have an entire aviation and global aerospace industry shut down right now and almost 800 airlines globally at near-zero capacity. Same goes with large OEMs like Boeing and Airbus; they are also facing major shutdowns. Airlines

need government support in terms of a bailout package for revival," he said.

Kaul added that if the crisis continues for a longer duration, we will have a smaller, shrinking industry, possibly some exits as well. "We might see consolidation in the market and the repair would begin thereafter," he shared.

## Revival strategy

A revival strategy depends on how much longer the lockdown stays and the way it is lifted, said Kaul. "I am more concerned about the transition from a lockdown to healthy operations. Ultimately, there is a demand destruction. Nobody knows whether people will fly or not, when they will fly or where they will fly to. And with social distancing and other challenges coming up, it will be difficult for airlines. They might feel it is better for them to ground planes to conserve cash. Choosing the routes to fly will be a big challenge. How will things get normal and what will be the cost for that?" he questioned.

When the situation normalises, airlines may have to stimulate flyers with offers to fill in seats

## Takeaways

- ❖ Need to rationalise number of travel agents
- ❖ Associations need to take on members
- ❖ Airlines exiting markets expected
- ❖ Need to relook at the entire value chain

quickly. "Post COVID-19, airlines will have to come up with attractive packages to make passengers fly. They will have to stimulate the market and indulge in lower fare regime, attractive pricing. It will do another damage to them since they will already have faced a challenge for six

months, with the next six months of aggressive bids to attract flyers. We feel that for airlines, it will almost take a year to recover and normalise the situation, that too if we are very optimistic and factor in favourable circumstances," Kaul explained.

## Will the face of tourism change?

According to Billa, tourism is not

Kapil Kaul  
CEO & Director  
CAPA South Asia

going to be the same again in the post COVID-19 era. "There will not be business as usual. Tourism will now rebuild and regrow with more emphasis on sustainability and a strategy on how tourism can help the planet and not take away more from it. This means that tourists will be looking at shorter trips, zero food miles and local communities. There will be an ideological shift in the way we look at things. More and more countries have already started looking at how tourism can become a vehicle for sustainable development. The way the tourism industry organises itself has to now work on the pillar of sustainability. We will also be looking at that from more than just an economic point of view," he explained.

According to a UNWTO analysis, COVID-19 may cost tourism seven years of growth and it will take a long time for the industry to regain the same growth level as achieved in recent times. According to Billa, the solution is: whichever country is proactive, quicker off the block, will be able to get the market share post the COVID-19 crisis. The global tourism demand will not be the same again. A strong public-private partnership will help the industry. "To my mind, all the B2B events, roadshows must be supported by the government in a big way," he added.

According to Kundu, every travel agency, to survive, must now reengineer itself and redefine its product line. "They cannot do the business they were doing earlier. Airlines will stop giving commissions completely. It's a question of survival now. To stimulate demand, agents may need to take various measures. There's going to be no commission for them. For hotels, where the average room rate is going to fall down, you cannot be passing

✦ Post COVID-19, airlines will have to come up with attractive packages to make passengers fly. It will almost take a year to recover and normalise the situation, if we are very optimistic and factor in favourable circumstances ✦

— Kapil Kaul

hotel commissions. The business of a travel agency is going to be more product-focused, more experience-focused. The product will not be cost-centric, it is going to be value-centric. The sooner the travel fraternity in India realigns its businesses, the better it will be for them. Every large travel agency has to come



Suman Billa  
Director, Technical Cooperation  
& Silk Route Development, UNWTO

# realign and rationalise'

out of the business of credit because that is what is putting stress on airlines," he said.

According to Kaul, there will be consolidation across the travel and aviation sectors. "We have too many travel agents, I don't think some of them can even be called travel agents. I think, before we talk about what their business model is, we need a lesser number of travel agents. Somewhere, the associations need to relook at their membership. The change must start by rationalising the number of travel agents in the country. There should be stricter norms to be a travel agent, otherwise there will be less entry barriers in the industry and we'll have travel agents who keep spoiling the industry. Travel trade associations must relook at whether they need so many travel agents. You can't have thousands and thousands of travel agents. That's not going to work. There is a possibility that there would be no airline commissions or GDS commissions may drop (If NDC comes into effect in June) for travel agents in the recovery phase post COVID-19 crisis. You may need to take that call earlier to avoid taking drastic measures suddenly. I urge TAAI, TAFI to look at their membership and restrict the qualification to be a travel agent," he said.

## A plan of action for travel agents

Billa says that they should engage and utilise the time significant amount of rethinking. "I think, that's a million-dollar question. There is no doubt that the value chains will get rationalised and optimised. We closely need to look at the value proposition we bring to the table and see how that value will drive our systems into the future. I don't have a solution, but I know that there will be a significant amount of rethinking. The government will of course work to support businesses. The underlining is going to be that what value you bring to the table and if you can protect that value and enhance it, there is nothing that can take your business away."

Kundu feels that the entire model of Indian tourism business must be redefined and reengineered. "I

reckon that we have a lot of travel agents in the country. Larger and better travel companies get compromised due to that. I think all the associations put together have to go the government and say you cannot give us a tourism regulatory authority but at least give us a tourism regulatory council where we can create an entry barrier for travel companies. Unless and until you create entry level system in the industry for a travel company, it

✂ An uncertainty for tourism is how long this crisis will last. Social distancing is going to continue, because of which restaurants, meetings, conferences will get affected. I am optimistic there will be a solution ✂

– Suman Billa

is difficult for the entire industry to transform. We need to use this period to consolidate the industry, shrink the size of the travel companies and the business has to come back.

Kaul says that airlines need government support in terms of a bailout package at the earliest so that they can support travel agents and continue working closely with them. "Most airlines almost have no cash flow or no excess cash reserves. The revival of airlines posts COVID-19 crisis must be conditional based on international best practices. They need to have the cash for 2-3 months to function efficiently. The global value chain across all sectors is going to be remodelled. The agents should look at how they can sharpen and improve their products," he said.

## Are India's tourist source market going to change?

Billa feels that India cannot completely rely on the traditional markets. "I think for now, we need to think, whoever brings in business to the industry is good for us. It will also depend on travel restrictions and regular flight operations coming back. I

think, we need to completely reorient ourselves, I think, wellness tourism is a big opportunity for India. There will be a lot of people who would want to come to India to rejuvenate. In the short term, I believe the government needs to come forward and show a lot of marketing efforts to create B2B opportunities for people since the whole world will be scrambling for markets which gets opened up first. We need to be very aggressive and first of the block. From UNWTO's point of view, it will take almost 7 years to come back where we are."

## Tourism will get back on track soon

Kundu feels that 180 days from March 1st, things will start getting normalised. "It's not going to be normalised, but people will move. Once the vaccination comes in, it will be business as normal. We need to evolve ourselves. We need to become the growth drivers for the industry," he said.

## Impact on domestic aviation market

Kaul feels that domestic aviation will kickstart first. "It will start earlier and come back to normal operations very soon. Airports like Changi have taken a decision to lockdown for 18 months. The revival of international aviation is going to be more challenging as compared to domestic. The industry globally will need to right-size. Some of the Indian routes may be having volumes and load factors to 80-90 per cent but it doesn't make any money for them. So, possibly, some airlines will suspend operations to India temporarily. So, non-profit routes are likely to be closed."

## Airline merger possibilities?

Kaul says that at this stage, he is very sure there will be mergers. "The consolidation we see is perhaps some airline exiting the market. Airlines might close some non-profit routes," he adds.

## Relooking at distribution channel

Travel industry is going to bounce back, the only questions is when? How much time it takes? Kaul says, "In the long term, India will need flights to US, UK and other far away countries. I think the short-term impact will be to cover the im-

mediate loss. But airlines will include wide body and narrow body aircrafts in their plans. The reorientation of distribution through online is going to continue and this challenge prompt airlines to sale directly on internet, on their website. As airlines look to restructure, they will have really less resources and cash to handle. I don't think the distribution will change. It will remain the same. It's with travel agents to evolve, how much they innovate and provide more value to the travellers. Entire ticketing business for a period of time will have to be relooked."

## Future of travel start-ups?

Analysing the situation, Billa said, out of all travel subsidiaries, the products and portal which can provide required possible solutions to the industry are going to do well. Such travel start-ups will rise, especially the tech-based companies are expected to do well. These companies will bring solution for the travel industry.

## How can we beat this virus?

According to all the three speakers, the industry needs to put its act together. Everyone needs to work very closely with the government. When everything is linked up together, there is greater synergy. The most im-

✂ The private sector needs to come together and redefine, realign and reenergise the entire industry. I don't think we need to rely on any external factors. It is important to understand the behavioural change ✂

– Naveen Kundu

portant thing during this time is that we don't lose consumer confidence. The mantra is to have a concerted approach towards issues and the government, private sector and everyone else comes together to fight this virus.

There is a need to be extremely focused and extremely aggressive in the marketing approach when the situation normalises. A strong public private partnership is what will help. All the B2B events, roadshows

must be supported by the government in a big way. Prejudices for certain countries with whom India did not used to do business has to be removed. Whoever brings tourists, economic value to the country is good for us.

According to all the esteemed speakers, the government will not shy away from handholding the industry but beyond that time has come for some very hard thinking to take place. Travel agencies need to look at their choices and reprioritise. Government has to step in and support them. Hopefully, tourism will come out stronger and better after this phase is over.

## Trade seeks answers and opinions

Answering the queries of attendees, all speakers shared a detailed blueprint of the situation and suggested ways to tackle it.

## Q: What is going to be the new code of conduct for the industry?

**Response from Billa:** An uncertainty for tourism is how long this crisis will last. Social distancing is for sure going to continue, because of which restaurants, meetings, conferences will get affected. Notwithstanding, I am optimistic that there will be something which will come out to resolve this. The big challenge is going to be that what kind of business will do better in the short term.

To my mind, for a country like India, we will have to fall back strongly on domestic tourism. For inbound tourism, there will be fear for people to come to India. Every country will lift travel restrictions at a different level, depending on their respective level of progression in combating the pandemic.

The second point is how we look at wellness and yoga tourism. There is going to be a whole lot of interest around self-care after all the trauma the world has gone through. The biggest challenge is how to sustain the sector itself. Tourism is going to be extremely challenging. If we account

for 45 million jobs in India, I reckon that a large part of that may be challenged if we do not come back to where we were.

## Q: What impact will COVID-19 have on MICE?

**Response from Kundu:** In the MICE sector, what was happening will keep happening; people will keep having meetings digitally. But, MICE is one industry that is never going to die down because it's completely experiential. There will be a price realignment of tourism products globally. Initially, prices will come down for a while and then they will stabilise.

Travel has to be made cheaper, but agents should not be selling cheaper tickets anymore. The first thing that will recover in tourism will be MICE. People will have to get their groups together. People will try to create an optimistic view about their businesses. They will have to begin MICE movement on a particular platform. There may not be large trips, but it will definitely be a complete readjustment, primarily within India because India is an ideal place for MICE. Why send our groups outside? Of course, we don't have large infrastructure available, but MICE will come back and this will throw up a long-term opportunity for us to develop and speed-up infrastructure development in India. Cost realignment is practical and very important for this industry. ✂



ForwardKeys reveals that between March 30 and April 5, international airline seat capacity fell to just 23% of what it was in the first week of April last year. Just 10 mn seats were still in service, to facilitate essential travel.



Naveen Kundu  
Managing Director  
EbixCash Travel & Holidays

# Can inbound really rebound

**TRAVTALK** Digital Conclave session on 'When will inbound bounce back? What action can tour operators take in the interim?' brought to the fore concerns of tour operators, hoteliers and even the MOT. In addition, it saw the forthrightness of the industry to come out of this crisis and work towards a better future, while making sure that businesses survive.



Nisha Verma

## Opening Remarks

**Rupinder Brar**

ADG, Ministry of Tourism

Even before COVID-19 struck us, there has been a dialogue about should we only be focusing on the famous Golden Triangle in India or go beyond to showcase so many other products across the country. We need to look at the paradigm of what people are looking for in tourism, especially the millennials, and do we have different offerings in terms of adventure, sports, yoga, meditation and other immersive experiences.

The COVID-19 crisis has created a lot of challenges at the economic level for the countries that are going through lockdown, including our own. Hence, to get the markets back, to speed up on a relatively discretionary spending component which tourism is, would get a bit more challenging for us. When we look at data, we

see that interestingly, countries in South America, like Brazil, can be a promising market, as well as a country like Japan, which is in emergency mode today. Hence, we need to re-align our promotions and marketing campaigns. We are still in the middle of the crisis and Q2 would require us to sit down on the drawing board and work towards re-aligning some of our marketing plans. What is going to come in handy at this time is the Global Media Plan that we worked out in November-December last year, which focused on the need to expand our footprint. We've already started our campaign in Latam. We have even identified some countries from Africa, where the campaign will be featured.

The Ministry would need many inputs from the industry, including the kind of products that we should be pitching in these markets and the segments within those markets that we should be looking at. I have been working closely with my social media team and we are studying trends.

While we are using technology in a big way at this time, there would be a slight 'going back to the basics' movement, where technology detox is already picking up. In this situation, may be India as a

country can consider the fact that if we are still a very face-to-face or human-driven hospitality industry. Perhaps these are the strengths that we should be leveraging on in coming times. However, that doesn't mean it is going to be an easy journey

✦ We are still in the middle of the crisis and Q2 would require us to sit down on the drawing board and work on re-aligning some of our marketing plans. What is going to come in handy at this time is the Global Media Plan ✦

– Rupinder Brar

because the impact is no less than a World War situation, and the only difference apart from the bloodshed is that we are all common in our fight against COVID-19. Still, this could result in new visa regimes, countries coming up with new norms on the kind of medical certifications one may require travelling across borders. Hence, we need to be focused on the various country moods and look at our promotions and marketing plans accordingly in the coming months. Hopefully, by Q4, we should be looking at bouncing back in at least some of the markets, if not all of them.

**Himmat Anand**

Founder – Tree of Life Resorts & Hotels

In our industry, layoffs and salary cuts are a given and will happen. However, this will depend on individual hotels and individual management companies to see with how much compassion they can handle it looking at their financial stability. However, I

guesstimate that about 50 per cent of the workforce will be laid off in some way or the other in Q1 and Q2, and I think a slow recovery or slow re-employment will happen Q3 onwards.

Coming to government assistance, for which everybody is clamouring, I think in all fairness, this virus has hit every industry and it's only a matter of degree as to which industry has been hit harder. It would be naïve for any of us to think that the government will come out and dole big money, as they don't have the capacity and have other priorities, like the underprivileged, etc.

I think, the medical support system is also taking a lot of finances from the government, and so I don't really see any major help coming in dole-outs from the government.

Then, there are questions that hoteliers have to answer. We are talking of social distancing, hence, we should think how services can be provided from a distance, what will the new norms of the industry be and if spas would still operate. We should think of what will happen to wellness and Ayurveda centres? Would guests

✦ This could result in new visa regimes, countries coming up with new norms on the kind of medical certifications one may require travelling across borders ✦

– Rupinder Brar

still go there? Hence, I think the industry must grapple with these situations rather than worry about the loss of jobs, the loss of business, etc.

**Homa Mistry**

CEO – Trail Blazer Tours

If we do not get oxygen at the right time, I can assure all of you that many of my colleagues and people from the industry will lose their jobs, even though the employer doesn't want that to happen. This is the time when we want a little bit of empathy and oxygen for survival. If it is given

later, it won't be of any use.

Our immediate need is to survive, but then we have basic problems, day-to-day issues, that are really hurting our cash flow. We have paid a lot of advances to the airlines. We have ticketed, but unfortunately, everything closed in one day and the Foreign Tour Operators (FTOs) are refusing to pay that amount because we did not let them come. The airlines are now saying that there will be no cancellation charges, provided the same client travels. This indirectly means that they are not returning what we had given to them. There are losses on airlines, there are losses on all advances that we have given for safaris

✦ If we do not get oxygen at the right time, I can assure all of you that many of my colleagues and people from the industry will lose their jobs, even though the employer doesn't want that to happen ✦

– Homa Mistry

in MP and Ranthambore, which are very expensive. Now, we won't get those advances back. Hence, it's a double whammy for us. We don't have the business, plus we are paying for the cancellations. I think this is where the government can step in and help us with either the airlines or the safari bookings or the luxury train bookings, where our money is caught.

## New methods and out-of-the-box ideas

**Homa Mistry**

Whenever there is a difficult situation, the Indian tour operator manages to bring the business as per the requirement of that time. Hence, we are quite positive that when it happens, we will be able to bring back the clients, but for that also we will require support from the government.

Earlier, there used to be a Section 35(B), wherein when tour operators went outside

the country and whatever they spent, 50 per cent of that marketing cost was paid by the government. If something like this is re-introduced, all of us will immediately start travelling to promote the destination, as we would know our costs are being subsidised. We would do the right marketing because now, health and wellness tourism is what is going to be sold in the future.

## New marketing strategy and profiling of travellers

**Rupinder Brar**

We are thinking of including some key industry members as we work on the data plans, because it's them who really drive the business and we can be there to support or take inputs. A lot of homework is required on a few aspects.

Then, I think the oxygen will come to domestic tourism and then around Q4, we will get inbound from other countries. Therefore, we need to work on the metrics of the impact of COVID-19 in different countries to identify markets and also see in those countries what kind of disposable income is available, which age bracket is willing to travel and accordingly, pitch the marketing plans to those countries. We were already thinking of using different marketing ideas instead of only doing travel marts, because some of the travel marts have been in existence for a long time and they probably need a different take in terms of the products that we are carrying because India has developed a lot over the years. Hence, we need to be more creative in our offerings and now, of course, we will be pushed to do that.

## Addressing industry issues

**Rupinder Brar**

Indeed, the first issue is of survival because when we survive, only then can the next phase of building back and repositioning happen. A lot of the support that is being looked for either concerns the Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of Civil Aviation, which are the domain ministries for these issues. We've already



Rupinder Brar  
ADG, Ministry of Tourism



The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) estimates that the hotel, aviation and tourism sectors may incur loss of about US\$85 billion due to travel restrictions imposed on foreign tourists.

# in the fourth quarter?

had some dialogues at different levels. The Tourism Minister has already met the Finance Minister. We are open to receiving more requests and would continuously be taking them up at the Central government and state government levels, because the number of permits and licence fee & levies are in the domain of the state governments. Regarding Section 35 (B), I would say that since these are challenging times, we are open to looking at ideas that can work. I am sure we can work far more proactively on some of the suggestions on how to keep the industry going, even if it limps back to normalcy.

## Help from the government is vital

### Homa Mistry

We are looking forward to the government helping us come out from this situation. Apart from that, SEIS is very important and we have already worked for it. We know we are going to get it, but if instead of 7% it can be made 10%, that 3% will help us a lot to give out salaries. It is

best for whoever has applied for it, but a large part can get covered just by changing it from 7 to 10%. It will help us with cash flow to take us through these few months that lie ahead of us.

Apart from that, at many forums, people are saying that there is a huge opportunity for domestic and therefore, inbound operators can do domestic. However, I would like to differ over here because over the years, it has

✦ We are talking of social distancing, hence, we should think how services can be provided from a distance, what will the new norms of the industry be and if spas would still operate ✦

– Himmat Anand

become very professional. The main vertical is tourism, but inbound, outbound, domestic, MICE, wellness and adventure are different things. It's just not possible that an inbound guy can just jump in and do domestic. It's very specialised and a separate segment. Domestic is huge and it should be promoted, but for an inbound operator to suddenly do domestic is difficult.

### Rupinder Brar

This is already in the list of proposals, although we have not given a huge list. We had shortlisted things which seemed more critical and I am sure we will be happy to re-send it and re-enter the



dialogue with the concerned ministry officials to steer this through.

## Hotels: Coping with layoffs and change of operations

### Himmat Anand

I've always been a firm believer that extreme situations require extreme actions to counter them. You cannot pussyfoot at this time and if you do, you will go under. Hence, I think if hotels cannot manage their cash flows for the next 3-6 months, and I say that with a lot of responsibility, I don't think we should wait for the government to step in. It will take a lot of time and by that time the crisis would probably be over.

Hence, we should help ourselves. The question is - do you all want to sink or you

✦ It's a double whammy for us. We don't have the business, plus we are paying for the cancellations. I think this is where the government can step in and help us ✦

– Homa Mistry

want to give people a sort of floating chance that after 5-6 months, when things get normal, that they can come back.

Apart from that, hotels will have to re-define standards of service. The standard operating procedures of most hotels will have to go out the window for now. They'll have to do more of multi-tasking. Staff distancing could be considered, and hotels will have to see if

they would still be welcoming guests with a garland, something they have been doing for last 30 years. Would the new welcome be with a mask? Now, sanitisers and masks are going to become a part of in-room amenities. They should think of methods to dispose them off every second day. I think the industry must start looking at these factors. Things like elevators in 100-200-room hotels have to be looked into.

I firmly believe that tourism is not going to be about monuments anymore, but about tourism products. For the next 1-2 years, tourism is going to be about how safe am I going to be to travel to your country or to your city. Hence, all our promotions and way forwards must first be from a human safety point of view, in perception and reality. Thus, we have to do the job on the ground and then we go to the next steps of business losses, etc. I don't see any major debate on that.

We have been locked down for two months; it is difficult for me to pay the salary. Do I let my whole business close or do I lay off, or do I at least give everyone a fighting chance that after six months, they have the option to come back? However, this is each to their own, and everybody has to take their own decision on this.

## What will turn the industry around?

### Rupinder Brar

New markets and advertising the right products will be the focus for MOT. A narrative we will need to build in our promotional campaigns, at least for a couple of years, is that India is safe in terms of the COVID-19 impact. That kind of subtle and direct messaging will be required in the coming times.

Hopefully, the number of COVID-19 cases in India does not escalate much. If we can really contain the numbers, and if we can handle this whole crisis

as a country really well, that itself would have created a huge messaging because just like we are studying other countries, they are studying us.

### Homa Mistry

The only thing we want to focus on is that while the salaries will go down, we want the kitchen fires of our staff to keep burning. We will reduce the salaries, but we want all of them to sur-



Himmat Anand  
Founder - Tree of Life Resorts & Hotels

✦ I guesstimate that about 50 per cent of the workforce will be laid off in some way or other in Q1 and Q2 and I think a slow recovery, or a slow re-employment will happen from Q3 onwards ✦

– Himmat Anand

live, and that is the only oxygen we want right now. We will together sort out every problem, but right now, we need the support of the government.

### Himmat Anand

We are an over-crowded country and our healthcare system is not up to the mark. Hence, when we see it from a tourism point of view, these two things go against us. On the positive, compared to other countries, COVID-19 has not taken a huge toll on India as it has elsewhere, and I think the country has moved very quickly into trying to keep it as low as possible. We should not just talk of tourism in the traditional way, but promote the fact that India has contained the virus spread very well and that we are much safer as com-

pared to other destinations. We need to dovetail that thought process with our tourism product campaign.

I would also recommend that all of us in the country must speak the same language, including hotels, MOT, tour operators, and travel agents. MOT should come up with a template that could incorporate this thought process of being safer compared to other countries on COVID-19, with our tourism product. Let's move away from promoting monuments. Let's talk about our open spaces, vastness of the country, mountains, adventure tours, etc. Also, through MOT, we should insist that every state government come up with a tourism campaign of its own in print, TV and Social Media, elaborating on the vastness of what their state offers. This will create a feel-good factor for the country because only a few states like Kerala, Rajasthan, MP and a few others have dedicated tourism campaigns. This will create a positive impact on the international market. ✦

## Closing Remark Rupinder Brar

I would just end this with a phrase that 'If the world is a cold place, let's build fires'. Let's work together and I am sure we will come out of it stronger and better.



Homa Mistry  
CEO - Trail Blazer Tours



Ministry of Tourism is doing a series of webinars titled 'Dekho Apna Desh', which would provide information on the many destinations and the sheer depth and expanse of the culture and heritage of Incredible India.

# Crossing borders: Expect new

This session of TRAVTALK Digital Conclave looked at how travelling beyond borders might look like in the near future and why travel agents will become the de facto experts on all things outbound. As many as 2,186 participants had logged in for this session, which delved on strategizing now to implement later.

 Hazel Jain

These are unprecedented times. We are living in circumstances that are not unlike a World War – where every country is facing war-like conditions. The second session of the virtual seminar that TRAVTALK conducted on April 7, 2020, aimed



But, for now, VisitBritain (like most other NTOs) is relying heavily on social media and calling it the 'armchair dreaming' phase by showcasing the best of Britain. "We have to make sure that tourism rebounds. It is worth £127 billion for our economy. But I think all countries will see their domestic tourism bounce first and those will be the early signs of recovery," Warwick adds.

This phase, Srithar says, is where the relationships and the dimension of the travel trade will change and post-COVID will see a changed tourism landscape.

For now though, STB continues to keep in touch with the travel trade by sharing a lot of content about the current situation and the steps that are being taken.

Seconding this is **Deepak Rawat**, Senior Vice President, Holiday Products & International Markets, Go-MMT Group. He says, "Travel is not on anyone's mind right now. This is the time to relook at the way we operate, work on customer service, and try and come up with strategies, so that when travel rebounds, we are ready to go full throttle on getting customers back. It will be a

 When airlines start operating, people will start travelling. They will be our closest allies 

- Tricia Warwick

phase-wise rebound. We will have short starts, when airlines begin operations, largely contributed by business travel and family visits, followed by VFR on international routes, and gradually some segments that are more adventurous and look for deals."

Taking this idea forward, Rawat adds that once travel resumes, there will be a time when the

## CAPA India on international travel

International travel will be very complex because it is highly unlikely that there will be a coordinated lifting of restrictions. Instead, passengers are likely to be faced with continually changing regulations on entry and transit conditions depending on their nationality and recent travel history, often introduced with no advance notice in response to new local outbreaks of COVID-19. Now that travel bans have become globally accepted as a legitimate response to a pandemic, they are likely to be re-introduced without hesitation should they be required.

- ❖ Virtually all market segments are likely to see a very slow recovery. VFR traffic would normally be the first to pick-up as friends and families seek to re-unite after months of separation. However, health concerns associated with travel may limit this segment, especially senior citizens. Discretionary international leisure travel may take even longer as this will be impacted by the weak economy.
- ❖ With companies becoming more comfortable using technology to communicate during lockdown, this may in the future lead to the need for some travel being re-assessed.
- ❖ International traffic is expected to fall from approximately 70 million in FY2020 to 35-40 million in FY2021, and possibly less. These are CAPA India's initial estimates and will be continually revised.
- ❖ International operations, especially long-haul services, will likely be the most difficult segment for which to project demand.

industry will see a lot of deals and offers. "But outbound is not going to be same as last year for sure in a long time – maybe in six months around Diwali, if we're lucky. Short-haul would have recovered by then and will see some traffic building, MICE and group travel might take longer but we might see more young people start to travel first on deals. Having said that, it is important for the government to intervene now and give tax rebates, because there are almost 20 million people associated with the tourism industry and there are worries about job losses and pay cuts," he adds. Meanwhile, the UK government has already announced sops for workers in the tourism and allied industries.

## How will travel change?

It will change drastically – that's for sure. Warwick feels that there will be a heightened aware-

ness among travellers around hygiene and health measures at destinations, at attractions and at hotels. "Housekeeping will play a very important role in hotels. The way

cutlery is cleaned on planes, the way carpets are cleaned in hotel rooms – everything will change. COVID-19 will definitely change the way we behave," she says.

Living and travelling with COVID-19 will usher in new norms and protocols which will be the 'new normal' for us. Srithar says, "If we are going to wait for the day when we will have zero infections, it might be a long, long wait. So, I am thinking that the governments of the world are going to be very concerned and will focus on flattening the curve. At some point, you have to decide how flat the curve must be to start functioning again. They have to decide how to live with COVID-19 and still get on with some business."

He agrees with Warwick and feels that a lot of attention will be given to safety and hygiene – how airlines are going to ferry people from one destination to another, how hotels will look at cutlery and housekeeping, or the distance the staff maintains from guests, etc. There will be heightened awareness about safety. "Then there will be a time of post-COVID, when we will have a vaccine. Then the re-engineered world will be different. We will have certain protocols in place by then like we have for fire safety today. Airlines, hotels,

 Relationships will also be re-engineered where DMCs and travel agents will become even more important. They are going to become the de facto subject matter experts that more travellers will depend on 

- GB Srithar

ness among travellers around hygiene and health measures at destinations, at attractions and at hotels. "Housekeeping will play a very important role in hotels. The way

at brainstorming out-of-the-box ideas along with three industry veterans – two National Tourist Offices and an OTA.

## Dealing with COVID-19

Our reality is changing moment by moment and while the tourism industry has dealt with catastrophes before, this one is different. **Tricia Warwick**, Director (Asia Pacific, Middle East, Africa), VisitBritain, says, "Not one particular country or region, but the entire world has come to a standstill. In terms of our inbound numbers from Europe, we are looking at a 54 per cent decline. It is cataclysmic, really. Our peak season, which is from July to September, is where we are going to take our biggest hit because it is unlikely that we are going to have a strong summer."

Like everyone, she isn't sure when the bounce back will happen – "probably in 2021 and into 2022."

## The four phases

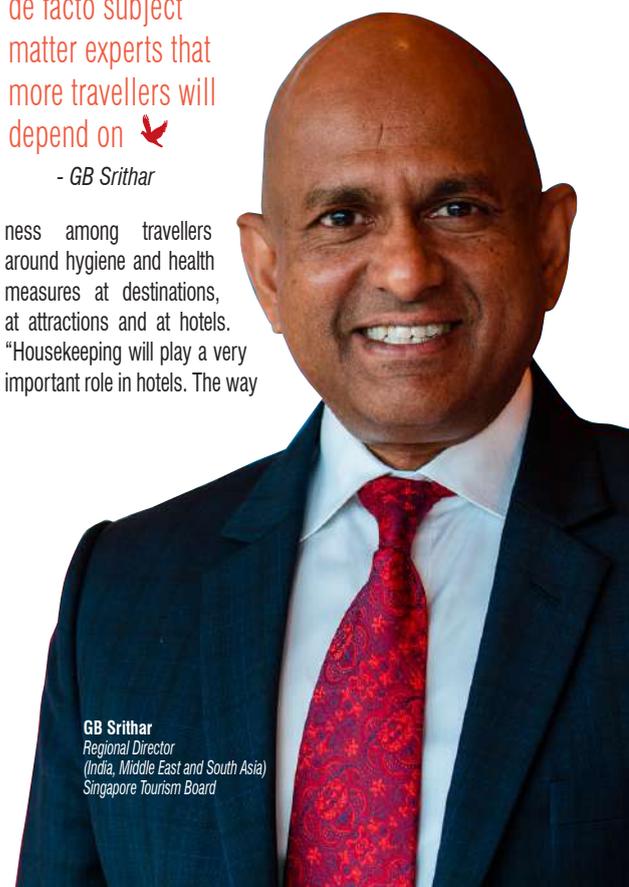
Calling the current movement control phase as 'Retreat', **GB Srithar**, Regional Director (India, Middle East and South Asia), Singapore Tourism Board (STB), names four R's that we will see play out in this scenario: Retreat, Restart, Recover and Re-engineer. He says, "Right now, we are in the Retreat phase. I don't think we can jump straight into Recovery. We will have a Restart phase from the lockdown when we will restart the engine, and then go on to the Recovery phase. We will see some normalcy and some numbers coming in. I strongly agree that domestic tourism will be the first to restart. Maybe business travel will start and then leisure, maybe young adults will travel first and then families. Cruise I think will take a while longer. And finally, we will enter a Re-engineering phase. I feel, single-destination holidays will be high on the priority list as well."

## Outbound trends to watch out for

- ❖ Mono itineraries will be in demand as travellers avoid transiting and take multiple flights
- ❖ Open spaces and the outdoors that don't have crowds will be desirable
- ❖ Huge focus on hygiene on flights, at hotels and attractions
- ❖ Young adults looking for deals likely to start travelling first



**Tricia Warwick**  
Director (Asia Pacific, Middle East and Africa), VisitBritain



**GB Srithar**  
Regional Director  
(India, Middle East and South Asia)  
Singapore Tourism Board

# protocols for international travel

everyone will have these protocols in place. Checks at entry and exit points will be intensified. Some form of health declaration certificate before you leave your home city might become mandatory," Srithar says.

He also feels that certain aspects of travel, like ecology and the environment, will be super high on everyone's minds. "Suddenly, the earth is breathing and this has established the fact that travel does affect the environment. This will translate into the travel choices people will make," Srithar says.

Perhaps destinations and attractions that have been declared COVID-19-free will be high on priority, says Rawat.

"People will completely avoid crowded places. That's why it is important to work with partners now and strategise so that when travel rebounds, we are ready with the right messaging. Initially, it will be the airlines that will be very careful about doing these checks. We may even come to a situation where different Schengen countries have different rules of entry and exit. We might need a COVID-19 clearance certificate from doctors like we did for yellow fever, to apply for visas," he says.

## Singapore helps tourism sector

Singapore introduced support for specific sectors that have been badly hit by the outbreak, including the aviation, tourism, land transport and arts and culture industries under Resilience Budget (announced on March 26, 2020):

- ❖ Enhanced Jobs Support Schemes for business in the aviation, tourism and food service sectors, up to 75% wage offset of first SG\$ 4,600 of monthly wages will be provided for every local employed.
- ❖ The aviation sector will get SG\$350 million (US\$243.26 million) of additional support.
- ❖ SG\$90 million set aside to help the tourism industry rebound.
- ❖ SG\$55 million support package for the arts and culture sector.
- ❖ Extended and enhanced Point-to-Point Support Package for taxi and private hire car drivers, to receive the Special Relief Fund payments of SG\$ 300 per vehicle per month until September 2020 end.
- ❖ One-year road tax rebate and six-month waiver of parking charges at government-managed parking facilities for private bus owners.

## Enter, the travel advisor

In all this, the travel agent/tour operator will be back in the spotlight. Srithar explains, "Relationships will also be re-engineered where DMCs and travel agents will become even more important. They are going to become the de facto subject matter experts that more travellers will depend on at least in the interim stage."

## Agents to get full refund from 3 airlines

The travel trade community has received a reprieve as a result of urgent meetings initiated by travel trade associations on behalf of their members with Pradeep Kharola, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, in terms of refunds on air tickets. The respite, however, due to this intervention is from three international airlines – Singapore Airlines, Lufthansa and Emirates. The airlines have updated their offer and will now give full refunds as well, in case the customer wants, but there could be a delay due to backlog. Singapore Airlines has further offered bonus to people who wish to claim their refunds as credits rather than take cash refunds (over and above the value of ticket).

This is why, Rawat says, it is vital that NTOs work very closely with the B2B channel and travel trade associations, especially now for the next six months which is going to be a tough period. "They must extend to the trade vacation grants, keep budget aside for the India market that has given them good numbers so far. They must particularly help

the frontline staff to get more skilled," he adds.

In a rejoinder, Srithar adds that STB at this stage is open to working with partners on the training and development front. "In fact, very soon we will be opening up marketing-rich content for some trade partners. We might also look at upping our budgets in this market and look

at trade partners to collaborate with us – figure some way to co-invest some marketing dollars," he says.

He reveals that like many other countries, Singapore, too, is doing a lot of budgeting right now and is looking to help its own travel trade through governmental efforts by way of a Resilience Budget and a Solidarity Budget. "As an NTO, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the trade is responsible for our numbers we receive from India, which is our third-largest source market. We need to ensure that our connection with the trade continues. Over the last 25 years that we have been present in India, we

✂ India is a market that bounces back the fastest. Initially, there will be deals and offers from airlines, land operators and hotels ✂

- Deepak Rawat

have, under various schemes, extended our support to them. For now, we are open to working with partners for staff training, technological enhancements and presenting content on the web,"



## UK launches £1.3 mn fund for its DMOs

UK Tourism Minister Nigel Huddleston has launched a new emergency £1.3 million scheme to support local tourism organisations throughout the COVID-19 outbreak. The fund will provide immediate financial support to DMCs that are at severe risk of closure due to the pandemic. DMCs will be able to receive up to £2,500 per month for two members of non-furloughed staff who provide crucial business support services and up to £5,000 to cover operating costs.

Srithar shares. Warwick echoes this sentiment and sums it up in one line, "The trusted voice of the travel agent is going to be vital."

## Trending: Armchair travel

With a slate of webinars, virtual tours and attractive social media posts, there has been a flood of #stayhometravellater content. Rawat says, "It will only be sheer inspiration that will ultimately prompt people to actually travel. That's why a lot of the campaigns right now are directed at 'inspiring' them to think of their next holiday. Effectively, the travel agents will need to up the game on giving the right advice and content to consumers for them to be stress-free while on the move."

## India as a source market

With China being the number one market for Singapore so far, Srithar feels that this is unlikely to change post COVID-19. "But we have been investing heavily in various other source markets, especially India where we have stepped up our investments and efforts tremendously. India will probably be one of the few markets to bounce back quickly," he says.

For the UK though, while US, France and Germany have traditionally been the top three markets, Warwick feels that oth-

er markets might start to spike more. "We have strong VFR traffic from India and I expect to see a steeper spike from India in time. Our top 10 markets will move around for a bit," she says.

Reiterating his opinion about the Indian market, Rawat says, "They will keep travelling abroad. India is one of the markets that bounces back the fastest. Initially, there will be deals and offers from airlines, land operators and hotels, and people will pick that up."

Meanwhile, VisitBritain is in talks with the big carriers regarding restarting their operations and the routes that they are looking at. Warwick says, "When airlines start operating, people will start travelling. They will be our closest allies to talk to and we talking to some of the big ones like British Airways about

their plans. We are also talking to VisitScotland and VisitWales, and may be some European destinations so that we can create this giant energy by way of coalition marketing."

To jumpstart their revival plan, all three companies have a blueprint laid out. For Singapore, while the metros will continue to be key, it will definitely focus on Tier-II cities with engagement in these cities becoming top priority. "We will intensify our efforts to tap them. When this situation de-escalated, we want to make sure that we are ready with our communication to travellers: this is what the destination experience is going to be like post-COVID, and travel agents will be the conduit for that," Srithar says. ✂



Owing to the severity of travel restrictions and the expected global recession, IATA now estimates that industry passenger revenues could plummet \$252 billion or 44 per cent below 2019's figure.

Deepak Rawat  
Senior Vice President, Holiday  
Products & International Markets  
Go-MMT Group

# A bit of cricket heritage with LCC

In an effort to bring in more numbers to the north of England, VisitBritain recently brought the Lancashire Cricket Club and the legendary Emirates Old Trafford ground closer to Indian cricket fans. The tourism board urges the Indian travel trade to promote this region, which includes Manchester, Liverpool, York and Lake District.



Hazel Jain

Steeped in cricket history, the 156-year-old Emirates Old Trafford cricket ground in Manchester is ready to woo Indian cricket fans. The Department of International Trade UK along with VisitBritain welcomed the Lancashire Cricket team and introduced Emirates Old Trafford to key travel trade professionals in Mumbai at the official British High Commission residence recently. **Daniel G. Gidney**, Chief Executive Officer, Lancashire Cricket and Emirates Old Trafford, was leading the delegation. Speaking about how this can also be promoted as a tourism product, he said, "It was in



**Daniel G. Gidney**  
CEO, Lancashire Cricket and Emirates Old Trafford

2019 that we hosted six cricket World Cup games at the Emirates Old Trafford and it was the India-Pakistan game that really showed us the huge passion and interest that India has in cricket."

His team looks forward to welcoming India back to Emirates

Old Trafford in 2021 and 2022 for the England vs India Test Match and the England vs India T20 game the following year.



**Shuja Bin Mehdi**  
B2B Manager  
India, VisitBritain

"We are working hard to create a number of packages to cap-

ture the atmosphere and excitement of international cricket. We will launch packages for 2021

**We are trying to encourage the travel trade to push their clients towards this region; you can easily have anywhere between five to 10-night itineraries**

- Shuja Bin Mehdi

and 2022 that will include hotel stay, official ticket inclusive of hospitality packages and bespoke travel agent packages," Gidney added.

**Shuja Bin Mehdi**, B2B Manager, India, VisitBritain, said, "For



the past five years, we have been focusing on the north of England and trying to develop it as a tourism offering in India. Manchester is the gateway to the north and we have been working with Marketing Manchester for the past few years. We are trying to encourage the travel trade to push their clients towards this region - Manchester, Liverpool, York and Lake District. Some of the best city experiences as well as the best countryside of England you can do here. These destinations will also work exceptionally well with the Indian market. You can

easily have anywhere between five to 10-night itineraries for this. Manchester is also one of the best connected cities from India. So, you can have an open-jaw itinerary where you get into Manchester and fly out of London."

Last year, the India-Pakistan match was a tremendous showcase not only for Lancashire Cricket Club but also for Emirates Old Trafford as a cricket venue and Manchester as a city. This visit to India by the Lancashire Cricket Club is a continuation of that as they want to engage with the travel trade more.

This is for the first time that the Emirates Old Trafford is being talked about as a tourism offering not only for leisure visitors but also for MICE.



*An STR report states that in China, the first phase of demand drivers have been domestic leisure, corporate business at high-tech zones and industrial park areas, as well as quarantined guests staying at hotels close to airports.*

# Visit Levi shares autumn agenda

Visit Levi offers the best of nature and hospitality to Indians, and is inviting them to visit this region in Finland in autumn, when they can witness nature's most vibrant colours and the much-admired Northern Lights. The destination even offers budget accommodation and vegetarian as well as vegan food options.



Nisha Verma

**Yrjötapio Kivisaari**, Interim CEO, Visit Levi, believes that India is a key potential market for them. "The time period in which Indians travel and our offerings in Levi at that time are a match made in heaven, especially in autumn (August-November) when we have the colours of Lapland and when Indians are keen on seeing and experiencing the Northern Lights. Even from mid-April, we have the most beautiful winter wonderland with the Northern Lights. At that time, we can go down to zero degrees, and for the Indian population, it might feel cold. However, I shy away from inviting them at a time when the temperature is around -15 to -35 degree centigrade, as it can be too cold for them," he says.

Why is it best for Indians to visit Levi in autumn? Kivisaari says

that at the time, Indian visitors can enjoy the colours of Lapland when the trees turn yellow, orange and red. One can even see the auroras in the sky and their reflection over lakes and rivers. "This has been my observation of FITs who have visited us and by what they have told us. They also described

**I do see that the Indian market in Levi is going up by 84 per cent**

how moved they were by the beauty of nature. This made us wake up and see that there is a whole market that loves what we are doing, and we have not done anything in this market yet. That's why we made a strategy for India, and hence we have our own representative in the Indian market and have



**Yrjötapio Kivisaari**  
Interim CEO, Visit Levi

attended travel shows here," he shares.

## Numbers continue to grow

Visit Levi has been receiving and addressing a number of inquiries about the destination, which makes the board realise that it has successfully been able to draw attention from the Indian market. Kivisaari adds, "We started working in this market last year, and hence we don't see numbers in that respect. I do see that the Indian market in Levi is going up by 84 per cent, but we are talking



about a small number to grow from, which is very nice. This 84 per cent growth has happened because of the actions that have been taken last year and some of the visibility we have received from the market. Hence, I believe that we do have a shared future together. By 2020, we want to increase the number by 300 per cent."

## A budget destination

Levi, claims Kivisaari, can be a budget destination in terms of accommodation, with room rates as low as 45 euros a night. Also, there are plenty of vegan and vegetarian options for Indians, despite it not having Indian restaurants. However, they do have groups that bring their own chefs

with them. "We are very dedicated to the Indian market and we want to invite Indian travellers to visit something that is unforgettable in terms of nature as well as people. We are very hospitable and Levi is very safe, accessible and affordable. Let us spark your soul, is our motto," he concludes.

# Taking each day as it comes

From flying kites in his childhood to flying people around the world on well-curated itineraries, **Riaz Munshi**, Managing Director, N Chirag Travels and President, OTOAI, has had a whirlwind journey! Juggling between the two roles didn't come easy to him, but he enjoys the challenge and is making headway!

An advertising agency as a family business did not much appeal to **Riaz Munshi**, who found his calling in the business of travel. "I started working in 1990, when my family had an advertising agency and both my brothers were helping my father. Hence, I also started helping by working with one of my brothers who had come from Ahmedabad to Delhi. However, I always wanted to do something different, and was always looking for an opportunity. I would often visit a travel agent whenever we had to travel from Delhi to Ahmedabad, or make arrangements for a guest who'd want to visit Srinagar - a popular destination at the time. On every visit, I would see the agent earn a sum of money on every airline or railway ticket. That inspired me. After I got married, my wife (Samina) and I got involved in this business. We started with ticketing and till 2001, we were only focusing

on corporate ticketing. Then, we diversified into outbound travel and there has been no looking back ever since," says Munshi.

From ticketing to outbound tours to now curating ultra-luxurious itineraries, Munshi has come a long way. "We are trying to position ourselves as a luxury and ex-

My children have been working with me and changes have come to business because of them only

periential travel company. Hence, we are making different itineraries for both new and existing destinations. Our itinerary designs are different from what people generally use. Hence, we are currently on the lookout for niche markets," he shares.



Today, Munshi's children also work with him at their new office, which resonates with their new business approach. "My children have been working with me for the last couple of years, and changes have come to business because of them only. We realised there was a big gap in the market and decided to offer products that appealed to the emotions of the traveller and showcased the world from a different per-

spective. While existing itineraries of already popular destinations have been redesigned with more authentic, local experiences, we continue to focus on new and unexplored destinations in our vision to become one of the most innovative travel companies in India. Over the last two years, our guests have gone on incredible safari experiences, gorilla treks, Antarctic expeditions and stayed at intimate and exclusive

lodges in Lapland to give a few examples. The feedback has been spectacular. This motivates us to constantly reinvent ourselves," he adds.

Travelling means different things to him at different times. "When I am going with Samina, I prefer to go on a beach holiday so both of us can relax and spend quality time. With friends, I like to go to places where we can party, like Ibiza or London," he shares.

Besides travel, Munshi's other loves are cricket and flying kites, a hobby he picked up in Ahmedabad. He also loves skydiving and adventure sports, making New Zealand one of his favourite destinations. Munshi also religiously works out every day when he is in town. "If I am not travelling, I have to hit the gym for at least an hour in the morning. I have been following this regime for years. This kick-starts my day," he says.

Another hat that Munshi dons is that of President of Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI), and it's not easy to juggle between office, travel and responsibilities. However, it now comes effortlessly to him.

"For the initial few months, I was stressed because I had been travelling a lot and simultaneously, I had to manage the affairs of OTOAI. Now, I am getting used to it and easing into the rhythm, because I have started enjoying it," he adds.

(Through the column, Guldeep Singh Sahni highlights the lives of trade partners, beyond business.)



Guldeep Singh Sahni  
MD, Weldon Tours & Travels

## Insurance to take priority now

The travel protection landscape is going to see a positive change once we settle in a post-COVID world, says **Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO – India & Emerging Markets, TrawellTag Cover-More. Backed by innovation, the demand for travel protection will surge as customers across the globe will recognise the importance of a protection plan.

Hazel Jain

**Q**How will the travel insurance landscape change after COVID-19?

The travel protection landscape is going to see a positive change once we settle in a post-COVID world. Travellers will be more aware of the risks involved while travelling and will surely recognise the significance of buying travel protection. We truly believe that travel assistance that includes evacuation facilities and provides real-time information about emerging situations across the world, coupled with a highly relevant travel protection product will make the difference.



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

**Q**Do you plan to develop a product specific for COVID-19?

We are working alongside our underwriters to explore the possibility of designing products that will be relevant in a post-COVID world. We have sharp-

ened our focus towards travel assistance services tailored to support travellers during such stressful situations. We plan to bring to the trade niche travel assistance products combined with smarter technology. The idea is to enable the industry, as a whole, to instil confidence back in travel and emerge stronger together.

For now, we continue to provide medical hospitalisation and cancellation benefits to our customers whose travel bookings were undertaken prior to the issuance of Government of India's advisory. We are constantly analysing the situation and are in discussion

Travel assistance that includes evacuation facilities and provides real-time information about emerging situations will make the difference

with underwriters to design products that instil confidence among travellers.

**Q**Did you receive a lot of cancellations or refund requests due to the outbreak?

Due to the fear this outbreak has generated, we have been receiving cancellation requests on a regular basis. People have cancelled not only current bookings, but also trips planned three

to six months down the line. This has surely led to a surge in the number of cancellation requests. Post the lockdown, the trend may come down.

**Q**When do you expect travel to restart?

We are anticipating that domestic travel will recover faster than international travel. With most of the airlines grounded, the travel industry will at least take another four to five months to get back on its feet post a phased lifting of curbs. Though things should start improving by September 2020, we expect the regular flow of travellers to resume only by the beginning of next year.

**Q**Do you continue to educate the trade about your products?

Travel trade is highly people-driven and the best way to utilise this time is to drive upskilling

and cross-skilling sessions enabled by technology. I believe it is not always about how quickly one can rise from a fall, but how strong one emerges. Therefore, we are conducting regular online training sessions on innovations in products and customer service excellence, along with motivational sessions to keep our employees mentally agile in the face of such uncertainty.

### Post-COVID era

Market study shows that since several hundred claims of travel, death, and health insurance are now being filed due to COVID-19 across the world, claims paid by reinsurers to insurance companies has also risen. This will result in reinsurance companies steeply hiking the rates at which they provide covers to insurers.



You'll be surprised to know that beaches in the Philippines are not just white and golden, but are actually said to have three more colours – pink, black and brown. That should definitely make a holiday 'More fun in the Philippines'.

# 'Travel may start next month'

Professor Dr. Wolfgang Georg Arlt, Chief Executive Officer, China Outbound Tourism Research Institute (COTRI), answers some key questions on outbound travel from China, where it stands today, when it is expected to pick up and how the segment of travellers may have altered post the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tripti Mehta

**Q** Will COVID-19 impact China's standing as the biggest outbound market the world?

China has retained its position as the biggest outbound travel market for quite a few years now and the COVID-19 pandemic is not going to change that. Chinese travellers would still want to travel internationally and they will start again when it is possible and considered safe.

**Q** When will normalcy return?

The whole world has been surprised by the severity of the outbreak of the virus caused mainly by the fact that carriers can infect others before or even



Professor Dr. Wolfgang Georg Arlt  
Chief Executive Officer  
COTRI

without having any symptoms. Therefore, measuring fever, etc., did not work this time. In China, the first trips during the public holiday on April 4 saw already-packed tourist attractions like the Huangshan Mountain. For Asia probably, outbound travel will start next month and for transcontinent-

tal travel it will be June. In fact, for some places considered unsafe (USA, Africa), even later.

The trend to travel in smaller groups will become visible; big package tours will decrease in importance

**Q** Would this affect Chinese group travel in any way?

The trend to travel with the family, to travel in smaller groups, to be more interested in nature, health and the daily life of people and their culture



will become visible. Big package tours will further decrease in importance.

**Q** Which countries do you think the Chinese outbound traveller would now prefer to travel to?

The countries on top of the list will be South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia and

other neighbours. For India, it depends on how the spread of the virus develops in the coming weeks and to convince Chinese visitors that it is a safe place to visit.

**Q** Is it possible that China's domestic tourism will surge more than international travel?

In the next few months, domestic tourism will gain in importance because of the restrictions in international border crossing and air connections. Also, it will be seen as a patriotic activity. From later in the summer, that effect should become less important. The Chinese government will not, in the long run, restrict foreign travel.

CAPA India suggests that with FY2021 set to be an exceptionally challenging year, all segments of the aviation value chain will need to immediately start planning for smaller-scale operations, supported by enterprise-wide restructuring.

## TravelNevada hosts webinars

TravelNevada India has been educating the trade on the destination through webinars, ensuring that they are well-equipped for business once both India and the USA complete their lockdown periods. The India team has also been hosting exclusive webinars for travel companies and trade associations, keeping their teams and members updated.

TT Bureau

Amid the nationwide lockdown, TravelNevada India office has been conducting webinars to keep the trade updated on the latest developments in Nevada, USA, and the



Ritesh Ahluwalia  
Manager - Trade Relations  
TravelNevada India

information on Nevada and promoting the destination beyond Las Vegas. We are covering topics like overview of Nevada, Reno, Lake Tahoe and road trips within the destination," informs Ritesh Ahluwalia, Manager - Trade Relations, TravelNevada India.

So far, TravelNevada has conducted four such webinars for the trade in general and exclusive webinars for Thomas Cook, JTB India and Rajasthan

Travel Trade among others. Soon, the India office will be organising webinars for MakeMyTrip, Yatra, TTAUP (Travel



Seema Datt  
Account Director  
TravelNevada India

Trade Association of Uttar Pradesh), SATA (South Gujarat Association of Travel Agents), Kesari and FCM.

**Road to recovery**

The COVID-19 crisis is being regarded as one that will

We will continue to reach out to the trade through digital platforms to educate them and provide them as much information as possible

- Seema Datt

change the face of tourism forever. While the road to recovery may be long-drawn for nations and economies alike, the tourism trade must make the most of this time to further enhance their knowledge and skill, mak-

### Current situation in Nevada

Nevada is under lockdown till April 30. Governor Steve Sisolak has extended a state-wide business shutdown, ordering Nevadans to stay at home to slow the spread of COVID-19 through the end of April. The order applies to all public gatherings, events and other non-essential activities planned through April 30 — extending the shutdown by 14 days — as a necessary public health step. Under the order, Nevadans are allowed to leave their homes for work, to exercise, receive healthcare and shop for food, so long as they practise safe social distancing. The 'Stay at home' directive allows Nevadans to go to gas stations, pharmacies, grocery stores, banks, takeout restaurants and other essential businesses, but does not permit residents to leave home for any other reason.

ing them ready for the post-COVID world. Seema Datt, Account Director, TravelNevada

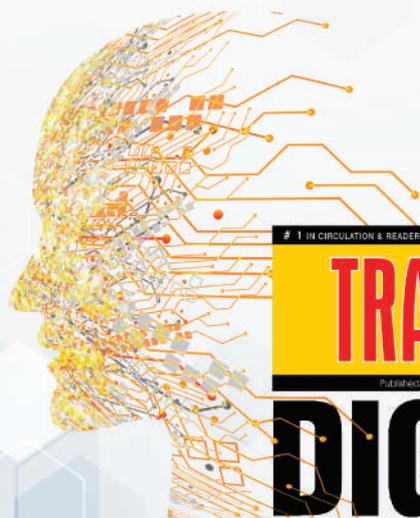
India, says, "We are hoping that this crisis will end soon and not only TravelNevada, but the whole tourism industry will recover from this situation. We will continue to reach out to the trade through digital platforms to educate them and provide them as much information as possible."

### A webinar just for you

Travel Nevada is regularly conducting exclusive webinars for OTAs and travel agents. To conduct an exclusive webinar for your team, you may contact Ritesh Ahluwalia on [ritesh.ahluwalia@buzzindia.in](mailto:ritesh.ahluwalia@buzzindia.in)



various offerings of the destination so they can best utilise the lockdown period to develop itineraries that suit the traveller. "We are conducting various webinars to educate the Indian travel trade by providing infor-



# DIGITAL CONCLAVE

On Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020, 10 am to 1:30 pm

## TOPICS INCLUDE

### SESSION-ONE

## Domestic Tourism: The way forward



#### SPEAKERS



**Ashwani Lohani**  
Andhra Pradesh Tourism  
Development Corporation



**PP Khanna**  
ADTOI



**Kerrie Hannaford**  
Accor

#### SPEAKERS



**Arjun Sharma**  
Select Group



**Ankur Bhatia**  
Roseate Hotels  
& Resorts



**Sanjay Kumar**  
IndiGo

### SESSION-TWO

## Where is the money? Selling domestic luxury



#### SPEAKERS



**Vinay Malhotra**  
VFS Global



**Sandeep Dwivedi**  
ITQ



**KD Singh**  
TravelBullz

### SESSION-THREE

## India: The new global source market?



#### SPEAKERS



**Vinay Malhotra**  
VFS Global



**Sandeep Dwivedi**  
ITQ



**KD Singh**  
TravelBullz

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# Indian weddings at Kempinski Hotels

With new properties having opened or due to open across the world, Kempinski Hotels is targeting the Indian MICE and wedding segments, besides offering a host of leisure options. While it hasn't yet signed a deal for a hotel in India, setting up shop here does feature on its wish list.

 Nisha Verma

The delegation at Kempinski Hotels' roadshow in Mumbai, Bengaluru and Delhi was led by **Amanda Elder**, Chief Commercial Officer & Member of the Management Board of Kempinski Hotels SA. Extremely happy with the response, she said that in Mumbai alone, at the first leg of the roadshow, they had over 150 guests, all of who were extremely impressed with what Kempinski was doing in the luxury space and wanted to know more about new hotel openings. "We then moved to Bengaluru and there we had very different customers, mostly interested in corporate

hotels and rates. In Delhi, too, we got an opportunity to present the Kempinski brand to everyone. We had such an incredible turn out," Elder shared. The roadshow gave the Indian travel trade the opportunity to have one-on-one interactions with 13 participating Kempinski hotels from the Middle East, Thailand, Switzerland, Munich, Doha, Singapore and other regions.

Elder expressed that the Indian market was extremely resilient, robust, willing to travel and curious, and added, "Indian guests are also extremely-luxury customers for us. Hence, we know what their expectations



**Amanda Elder**  
Chief Commercial Officer  
Kempinski Hotels SA

are and we feel that Kempinski is there to deliver."

The roadshow helped Kempinski Hotels ascertain, through the travel agents they met, that Indians were interested in destination weddings, something that Kem-

pinski hotels are very well-suited for. "We've been very happy with the response around destination weddings. We have leads for our properties in various destinations around the world, including Jordan, Dubai, Muscat and Turkey, and the soon-to-open Sindhorn Kempinski Hotel in Bangkok, where we have a vegan chef as well. There has been interest for Cuba, Latvia as well as other emerging markets, pioneering destinations and in Europe, including Germany, Switzerland and Austria," she said.

With five dedicated salespersons in the Indian market, they have seen good traction. "We've seen a 30 per cent increase in room night, year on year. We see such opportunity in the meetings market to further increase with our properties. We see growth opportunity with the corporate meetings

## A lot lies ahead

**Ankush Nijhawan**, Managing Director, Nijhawan Group that represents Kempinski Hotels in India, shared, "Hoteliers had come all the way to meet the industry in these three cities, which shows that they believe in the Indian market. The travel trade would be our priority as part of our strategy, and we will be hitting the leisure, MICE and corporate segments through the travel fraternity. Weddings would also be a focus."



**Ankush Nijhawan**  
Managing Director  
Nijhawan Group

groups and incentive groups as well. Apart from that, honeymoons are also very popular from India. Hence, we can cater to all the different segments," she claimed.

Kempinski's expansion plans involve more than 100 luxury hotels in operation by the year 2021. In future, the luxury hotel chain will be opening new properties in Ibiza, two in

the Caribbean, one in Tel Aviv, Tbilisi, Bangkok, Guangzhou, Brazzaville and Almaty. While the hotel group does plan to open a property in India, a deal hasn't been signed yet. "We are definitely working on things and are looking for a wonderful partnership in India. We will first focus on major cities and then think of moving beyond that," Elder concluded. 

 *The Hoover Dam is one of Nevada's most famous tourist attractions. To this day, it is the largest single public works project in US history. It contains over 3.25 million cubic yards of concrete.*

# After-hours experiences in India

While India is popular for many of its attractions, it has more to offer than just that. In fact, at night, India reveals a completely different side. **Salim Javed**, Vice President, Eastbound Group, handpicks unique experiences that lend a multidirectional perspective to India's character.

 TT Bureau

A way from everyday sights that already attract millions of tourists both Indian and foreign, India has something extraordinary to offer even after the sun sets. Night tourism in Indian cities has been in focus for some time now and presents a unique opportunity to tourists to witness the magnificence of the country.



## Delhi

Whether it is a brewery where you want to relax and sip freshly brewed beer or an underground venue where you wish to enjoy light jazz music, Delhi has innumerable experiences to choose from. In times of doubt, you can also opt for a club to dance your

heart out. Some of the popular after-hour hubs in the capital are Hauz Khas Village, Cyber Hub, Khan Market, Qutub Institutional Area and the relatively new Worldmark Aerocity, to name a few.



## Agra

Other than being home to one of the Seven Wonders of the World - the Taj Mahal - Agra is popular for its street delicacies, shopping hubs and party clubs. One of the places known for its finger-licking food and great shopping spots is Sadar Bazaar that remains open till 11 pm. Its crammed lanes accommodate Agra Chat House and Shri Agrawal Chat House. After getting some shopping and eating done, explore a range of clubs in the city for an eventful night



**Salim Javed**  
Vice President  
Eastbound Group

or visit Sheroes Hangout, a café run by heroic acid attack survivors.



## Varanasi

Unlike the nightlife at other places, this timeless city promises an after-evening full of tranquillity and liveliness on the banks of the holy River Ganges. Commence your evening with Aarti near the Ganges between 5:30 to

7:00 pm, where you will get to listen to religious Hindu hymns sung in praise of gods and goddesses. Then, take a long walk around Assi Ghat and end your night with a delicious meal at one of the popular cafés in the area.

## Jaipur

If you're a shopaholic, Jaipur is your paradise. Offering a variety of traditional clothes and accessories, Jaipur is perfect for the Boho soul. After shopping your heart out, choose from a range of clubs for an ultimate party experience. The popular places include Reds, Geoffrey's Pub and Maharani Express Bar. Visit Bar Palladio for a classical ambience or Hotel Tablu to get panoramic views of the alluring city.

## Udaipur

There is no better way to enjoy a night out in Udaipur than by walking around the City Palace. The best part about visiting the palace in the evening



is the sound and light show that is held every hour from 7 pm. Later, one can enjoy local delicacies of Rajasthan at restaurants situated on the banks of Lake Pichola. Ideal for a romantic dinner date, restaurants present guests with stunning views of the lake and City Palace. Some of the must-visit places in the city are Restaurant Ambrai, Upré by 1559 AD, The Sunset Terrace, The Leela Palace and Bhairo.

## Jodhpur

The magnificent fort of Mehrangarh is definitely one of a kind. At night, when the whole fort is illuminated with bright golden lights, the view becomes simply spectacular. After a visit to Mehrangarh, you can take a tuk-tuk ride to Stepwell Café to witness the city's incomparable view while enjoying delicious Indian and Continental cuisines.

Later, walk up to Raas (bar) to see the illuminated fort above and the candlelit Haveli courtyard below for an unforgettable night. Also, do not miss Indique Restaurant, Chokhelao Garden and Terrace Restaurant and On the Rocks on your visit to this timeless city. 

# EL NIDO

UNSPOILED PARADISE ON EARTH



# Singapore & Bali with TravelBullz

After concluding the premier edition of its two-city roadshow 'The Great India Road Show', TravelBullz has announced three new destinations as part of its portfolio – Dubai, Singapore and Bali – as it marks its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the industry. The DMC has made itself more accessible to its travel partners.

 Manas Dwivedi

Winner of multiple India Travel Awards, online B2B Destination Management Company TravelBullz recently concluded its two-city roadshow titled 'The Great India Road Show' in Mumbai on February 19, 2020 and in New Delhi on February 21, 2020. It brought together more than 36 hotels and attractions from Thailand who met over 200 travel agents from each of the two cities. TravelBullz also took the opportunity to announce new products and initiatives to its travel trade partners. It launched its new, revolutionary B2B online booking engine 'Phoenix' –



**KD Singh**  
Founder & President  
TravelBullz

with its enhanced user interface and ease of booking experience for its partners.

Speaking about new destinations that the company has added to its portfolio, **KD Singh**, Founder & President, Travel-

Bullz, said, "We will also launch our first-ever B2B dynamic packaging module along with showcasing destination Dubai that has been recently added to our product portfolio. We have created a product which takes Dubai to the next level as far as experience is concerned. For instance, with us, clients get a complimentary one-hour stretch limo ride in Dubai. We will be offering two more products to the industry – Singapore and Bali. We have already established our Singapore office. This is the first edition of the roadshow and honestly, we were over-booked and couldn't get more partners who wanted to come and showcase their products. Next year, it

 We are making this an annual event where hotels across the UAE, Thailand, Macau, Singapore, Bali, etc., will showcase their products 

will be bigger. We are making this an annual event where hotels across the UAE, Thailand, Macau, Singapore, Bali, etc., will showcase their products."

After the successful conclusion of the roadshow, 'Phoenix' went live for users. Revealing the information, Singh said, "Welcome to a new era of B2B booking experience. With the chat box option on our new website, you can reach us by just typing

in your message. We are now more accessible than ever before." The company's website says that all existing tours and transfer bookings for travel beginning March 18, 2020 would now be available on Phoenix. For all the old bookings and records, users can go to [www.bookings.travelbullz.com](http://www.bookings.travelbullz.com).

According to TravelBullz, Phoenix is the most advanced B2B booking engine with new dynamic package module and the best user experience. The company also launched its much-awaited dynamic packaging module along with the launch of an INR collection and multiple payment options for its travel agent partners.

Singh's vision for the company is to substantially grow more than 10 times in the next three years. According to him, this

ambitious plan would be driven by the company's fundamental principles of growth through technology innovation, making transactions seamless by focusing on user experience and ease of booking, providing access to the last room available at the best possible price, as well as growth through quality service delivery and word-of-mouth recommendation by existing travel agents. "Our objective is to address all the pain areas of agents through technology, human touch, and making their interaction with us seamless and pleasant," he shared.

The TravelBullz wholesale booking engine conveniently connects to over 2700 travel & tour companies worldwide to search for the best prices with availability for instant confirmation of hotels, apartments, transfers, and tours. 

 *International travel could be adversely impacted by up to 25 per cent this year, equivalent to a loss of three months of travel. The global travel industry could take up to 10 months to recover after the outbreak is over.*

# Visa processing digitalised

With many companies realising the need to go digital, visas will also be one of the services that are likely to go online. Enter Ctrl Visa, whose system can now also automate offline visas apart from online visas. This single system can manage visas of over 200 countries, covering all visa types.

 Hazel Jain

Change is inevitable and this is just a pause in the larger scheme of things, says **Parveen Jiterwal**, Founder & CEO, The Whiteboard Company. "I do believe that as we reach near normalcy, people will start to travel. They have been stuck in their homes for so long that the family unit will want a break and this will result in short breaks and weekend getaways immediately. However, international travel will take some time. I do believe that travel will begin, but will become more expensive in the near future. We will see airlines shutting down, hotels and travel agents wrapping up, too, as these



**Parveen Jiterwal**  
Founder & CEO  
The Whiteboard Company

are difficult times for many to survive," he says.

Visa processing is obviously one of the services being hit as well. Jiterwal adds, "Many travel bans will stay till as long as September, I feel. Once travel opens up, it will take some time for international travel to kick in

as people will still be scared to take flights, fares are going to be high and long breaks are going to be impossible. No travel,

 A product like Ctrl Visa helps you reduce staff, reduce overheads, and reduce dependency on people 

- Parveen Jiterwal

no visas. But, I am hoping we will see it all getting stabilised by January 2021."

When it does though, he has a novel product that can ease the entire visa applica-

tion process without human interference. "You will be surprised to know that we have actually been busy these last few weeks. Many travel agents have realised that this concept works and we have been doing almost three to four demos a

logged and maintained forever. It cuts down all email and phone calls," Jiterwal explains, adding that many companies have now realised the need to go digital. Ctrl Visa has been conducting weekly webinars for the travel agent community and those interested can register at the Ctrl Visa website.

**Radhika Butala**, Partner & Director, The Whiteboard Company, says, "Ever since we started Ctrl Visa, we wanted to do all types of visas – business, tourist, e-visa, traditional sticker visa. We have started with e-visas because that is the easiest to go to the market with and the fastest. We have now added the offline module to the system as well as corporate module to manage the corporate business. For offline, we have added a passport/document track-

ing tool because there is a physical submission."

This system is for consolidators (for B2B), OTAs (for B2C), and business travel agencies (for corporates). This is good even for agents who do around 400-500 visas per month. Its current clients include Udaan India, Atlas Visa Services and a few other travel agencies. 

## Know the product

Ctrl Visa is an operating system for visa processing that travel agents can subscribe to. It includes sales channels like B2B, Corporate including implant flows and B2C APIs. Ctrl Visa helps a travel agent scale up visa business, increase productivity, reduces errors and monitor operations. In the long-run, there is a reduction in resources and costs.

 *Bridges are a staple in Amsterdam, thanks to the canals and waterways that take up most of the city space. Travellers can even visit the crossing of the Reguliersgracht and the Herengracht to see 15 bridges at once.*

week for the trade even though the business is shut. A product like Ctrl Visa helps you reduce staff, reduce overheads, and reduce dependency on people. One can work from anywhere and everything is

# 'Carefully consider room rates'

It is no surprise that the COVID-19 outbreak has adversely affected the hospitality business. However, now is the time for hoteliers to strategise on the road ahead, and innovation in the time of crisis is the only way for them to prove their mettle and come out as winners, asserts **Jaideep Dang**, Managing Director, Hotels & Hospitality Group, JLL.

**Anupriya Bishnoi**

## Q How adversely has the hotel industry been impacted by COVID-19?

The impact of COVID-19 on the hotel sector, as we are all experiencing, is severe. Several hotels in the country have either suspended their operations or are operating with single-digit occupancy. Other revenue streams such as F&B, spa, etc., are non-existent at this time. Unlike many other frontline businesses such as retail and entertainment, hotels and aviation are physical services that do not have the scope to go online. With the suspension of travel and curtailment of movement around



**Jaideep Dang**  
Managing Director  
Hotels & Hospitality Group, JLL

India, these sectors are more vulnerable than other sectors of the economy.

## Q How should hotels manage room rates?

We're advising hoteliers to carefully consider holding room

rates, despite low occupancies. Travel bans will greatly restrict the number of business and leisure travellers for the time being and will not provide any incentives to potential guests.

Hotels could first shift their focus on domestic demand, essentially in the hinterland

Slimmer occupancies will always place pressure on hotel revenues and given this unprecedented environment, maintaining room rates may serve as



the primary contributor to managing revenues and fixed operating expenditures.

## Q Any alternate arrangements you suggest?

Businesses often innovate during times of crisis and uncertainty. Innovation in business is often driven by an ability to aid

the larger cause and help people and communities. For example, in the F&B space, some hotels are providing food deliveries within a radial distance, generating cash flow. To optimise food and operational costs, the menu provided by such hotels is limited. Elsewhere across India, several hotels are providing facilities for

quarantine, therefore maintaining some level of occupancy and as a result, helping several communities during this challenging period.

## Q What should be the industry's recovery plan once the lockdown is lifted?

Once the lockdown is lifted and the environment becomes conducive to restart travel, hotels could first shift their focus on domestic demand – essentially in the hinterland. It is possible that travellers may be hesitant to travel by air and prefer driving down to upcountry locations ideally within five to six hours from their homes. These could be short trips preferably around weekends. Potential resorts may likely start getting back room demand earlier than city business hotels. On the other hand, city hotels could rely on staycation demand – which is again a form of leisure travel originating from within the city.

The iconic 'Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas' sign was created by graphic designer Betty Willis in 1959. She never trademarked the design, calling it her "gift to the city." Willis continued working in neon signage until she was 77.

## Tough times to continue

Rates and occupancies will be under stress and it will be very challenging for some to stay afloat, says **Rajneesh Malhotra**, Vice President - Operations & Asset Management, Chalet Hotels.

**Hazel Jain**

Travel is at a complete halt as of now and is expected to remain minimal for the next six to 12 months, assuming the COVID-19 outbreak is over by May-June. This obviously will impact the hotel industry negatively. "Most businesses around the world will take a hit and hence their travel budgets, too, shall be curtailed. Similarly, personal travel will take a back seat keeping in mind the economic uncertainties of jobs and businesses. Rates and occupancies, both will be under stress for the next few quarters and it will be very challenging for some to stay afloat," says **Rajneesh Malhotra**, Vice President Operations & Asset Management, Chalet Hotels.

Chalet Hotels in turn has taken certain measures to deal with this situation. "We are currently focused on the health and safety of our associates and the guests staying at our hotels. We are also supporting the efforts of the



**Rajneesh Malhotra**  
Vice President Operations & Asset Management, Chalet Hotels

agencies by providing whatever assistance we can such as duty meals to staff, personal protective equipment, etc. We are working on short, medium and long-term strategies to mitigate the impact of this crisis. However, these will take shape once we have clarity on how long the COVID-19 crisis is going to last," Malhotra adds.

This kind of uncertainty is because not many hotel brands or owners were prepared for a situation like this. "Every company has a BCP (business continuity planning) in place and contingency plans, but all these are designed assuming

there will be business-as-usual happening in some other part(s) of the country or the continent or the globe which would not be affected by the crisis. But, the

The COVID-19 crisis has impacted the globe and there is no business-as-usual in the world. There is no geography or business to fall back on

COVID-19 crisis has impacted the globe and there is no business-as-usual anywhere in the world. There is no geography or business to fall back on," he exclaims.

Future learning from this? Malhotra says, "Companies will be forced to think of restructuring their businesses and prepare for similar occurrences in future. A new balance between local and global will emerge."

## CHL redoes its game plan

CHL, the company that owns The Suryaa New Delhi, under its international leg has partnered with Hilton and Hilton Dushanbe in Tajikistan is the first hotel under this partnership.

**Nisha Verma**

**Gagan Malhotra**, Executive Director, CHL and Managing Director, CHL International, shares that last year they made a big change. "We signed on with the Hilton brand, and we are a franchise of the Hilton Worldwide brand. We are very excited to see the prospect of the same, and the Hilton Dushanbe Hotel is one of the properties under this partnership," he said. While CHL owns The Suryaa hotel in New Delhi, CHL International owns Hilton Dushanbe Hotel.

On the domestic front, The Suryaa New Delhi recently underwent renovation. "We recently renovated one of the halls. Apart from that, two more halls and the restaurants will soon be upgraded. We also recently



**Gagan Malhotra**  
Executive Director, CHL and Managing Director, CHL International

finished renovating the rooms on some of the floors. Such renovations have a great impact. We are giving a fresh product, a new look and feel of what's happening, which is a constant process," Malhotra added.

When asked about new properties on the anvil, he shared, "We don't have any new hotels in the pipeline. We

We have a project in Tajikistan as well, which is adjacent to the existing hotel. The next step will be for people to buy properties in Dushanbe

have a land bank and we are doing design development on that, which is going to take some time. We have a project in Tajikistan as well, which is adjacent to the existing hotel. We are doing a development study on that as well because the next step will be for people to buy properties in Dushanbe. We are giving full-serviced apartments, where the entire engineering will be taken care of by the hotel, right from a light switch to the paint."

According to STR, reflecting on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, hotels in the Asia Pacific region reported a significant decline in occupancy, but fairly steady room rates during February 2020.

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## IATO postpones election

Keeping in view the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic across the tourism industry in the country, the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) has decided to postpone the association's election that was scheduled to take place on April 25.



Manas Dwivedi

**Akshay Kumar**, Returning Officer for IATO Election, in a meeting with the Executive Committee (EC) of the association took a call to postpone the election scheduled to take place on April 25, amid the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. Starting April 6, the election has been postponed by 30 days. The IATO EC will meet after 30 days to decide upon new dates. The election should, however, take place within 90 days starting April 6, 2020.

The timelines suggested during the meeting varied from two months, all the way till 2021. In case the election cannot be held within 90 days, the Returning Officer recommended that IATO call for an EGM and allow the house to decide upon the new



**Akshay Kumar**  
Returning Officer  
IATO Election 2020

dates for election. "After hearing all opinions of the IATO EC, I have decided that IATO needs a clear leadership structure on top to navigate and guide its members through this phase of sustaining organisations and surviving the coming months. The COVID-19 pandemic will test our resolve and strength in the coming days and months. We need to spend time to focus on ourselves, our families and

our colleagues. IATO election at this time will only distract us from the crisis that needs our focused attention," said Kumar in a statement.

In the interim, the Office Bearers and EC of IATO are hereby

**IATO election at this time will only distract us from the crisis that needs our focused attention**

allowed to work and lead the association in the best interests of its members and the industry at large.

The association had already invited nominations for the post of President and other positions in the EC. After receiving nominations from the contestants,



the association had decided to extend the last date of withdrawal of nominations. All the withdrawal of nominations received were thereby cancelled and made invalid.

As of now, for the position of the President, there have been five nominations— **Rajiv Mehra**, Uday Tours & Travels; **Amresh Tiwari**, AT Seasons & Vacations Travel; **Lally Mathews**, Divine Voyages; **Rajesh Mudgill**, Planet India Travels and **EM Najeer**, Air Travel Enterprises.

## Prepare for the short term

The Indian aviation sector is likely to shrink significantly, even if some of the vulnerable airlines manage to survive. CAPA India suggests that airlines make quick decisions for their short-term business plans.



TT Bureau

CAPA India says that when services resume, airlines will have to publish a schedule, which will require decisions to be made with respect to which routes to launch first and with what level of capacity, without knowing until much closer to the date of departure whether demand actually exists. Some carriers may decide to operate a skeleton network only.

for at least 12 months. These decisions may need to be taken in the absence of much forward visibility about the direction of the market and the economy. International operations, especially long-haul services, will likely be the most difficult segment for which to project demand.

With FY2021 set to be an exceptionally challenging year, all segments of the aviation value

As the saying goes, 'never let a good crisis go to waste'. This may be the best opportunity for Indian carriers to make difficult calls to rationalise their operations and clean up their balance sheets. Consolidation, collaboration and supply-side correction should enable airlines to move away from market-share driven strategies such as loss-leader pricing. Aggressive expansion without the necessary cash and balance sheet has been repeatedly shown to be a very high-risk strategy. The US has been the world's most profitable airline market largely as a result of the consolidation that took place in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis.

The government will also need to take important policy and regulatory decisions. One of the recommendations that CAPA Advisory has regularly proposed is the introduction of a requirement for airlines to hold cash balances that can support at least three, and ideally six, months of operations in the absence of revenue, in order to be able to both obtain and to renew an AOP.



**Airlines will have to make quick and difficult decisions for their short-term business plans:**

Network and fleet strategies will require urgent attention, as retaining pre-COVID operations will not be feasible. Scheduled aircraft deliveries will need to be deferred

chain will need to immediately start planning for much smaller scale operations, supported by serious enterprise-wide restructuring. High profile airline failure such as Kingfisher and Jet Airways were arguably brought down because they did not right-size when necessary.

## ADTOI expects hotel refunds

ADTOI is in touch with the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), which in turn has been convincing its members to give full refunds to agents.



Hazel Jain

While travel in general is expected to take its time to recover, domestic tourism could be the first to convalesce. Until that happens though, domestic tour operators find themselves in the same boat as others. Speaking about what their members are up to these days, **Dharmendra Singh Chauhan**, Maharashtra Chapter Chairman, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), says, "Right now we are attending webinars and regularly talking to



**Dharmendra Singh Chauhan**  
Maharashtra Chapter Chairman  
ADTOI

domestic front so that they can start to plan their holidays. "Last week we conducted two Zoom meetings with our ADTOI members. One was a casual meeting as a stress buster and one was regarding refunds of hotel bookings and airline bookings. About hotels refunds, we are in touch with the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India, and they are convincing the authorised hotels for giving us full refunds," he says.

our members via video calls and keep them motivated and discuss future strategies for reviving domestic tourism."

Once the lockdown is lifted, he plans to travel within Maharashtra to create awareness among clients and ensure them that everything is okay on the

With regards to airline refunds, he says that all airlines are giving only credit for six months to one year to use the book-

**February, March and April are the last three months of the season for inbound guests. India's only hope now is the domestic tourist**

ing amount. "Our tour operators are convinced about that. In the current situation, we all understand that the entire tourism industry is bleeding, so we need to support each other," Chauhan says, adding, "As an association of domestic tour operators, we all are working day and night along with the Ministry of Tourism and other government to help our members survive after the lockdown. We are hopeful that the government will support us to keep the tourism industry alive, especially since February, March and April are the last three months of the season for our inbound guests. India's only hope now is the domestic tourist."



# Getting around India on a budget

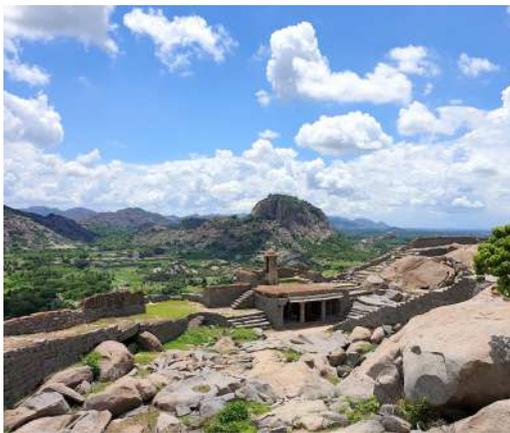
We bring to you a curated list of the top seven monuments and historical places around the country, where entry of visitors is either free of cost or available at a minimal rate, thus giving tour operators an opportunity to add these destinations to their existing packages, or draft tours that focus on budget travel within India.

 Manas Dwivedi

## Gingee Fort, Tamil Nadu

Gingee Fort is situated in the district of Villupuram, Tamil Nadu, close to Puducherry. Its strategic location and effectiveness earned it the moniker of the most impregnable fortress by Shivaji. Even the British referred to it as the 'Troy of the East'. This is primarily because of the structure's geographical location and layout. The fortress itself stretches across three hills – Chandrayandurg in the southeast, Krishnagiri to the north and Rajagiri in the west – and includes self-contained cities.

Entry fee: ₹20



## Hill Palace Museum, Kerala

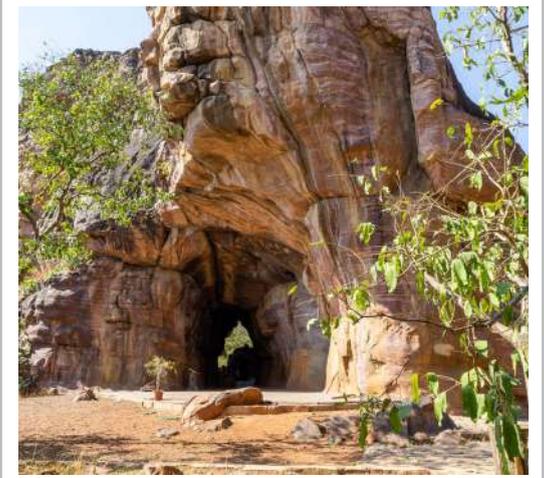
Located at Tripunithura, about 10 kms away from Kochi, Hill Palace Museum used to be the official residence of the erstwhile rulers of Kochi, and is now famous for being a full-fledged ethno-archaeological museum and Kerala's first-ever heritage museum. Built in traditional Kerala style of architecture and comprising 49 buildings, it has many amenities, including a deer park and garden which is home to a large number of plants with medicinal properties.

Entry fee: ₹30

## Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh

Situated 55 kms away from Bhopal, Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka are in the foothills of the Vindhyan Range. An archaeological treasure, Bhimbetka has around 243 rock shelters and cave paintings dating back to approximately 30,000 years. It exhibits the earliest traces of human life on the Indian subcontinent, with evidence of Stone Age starting at the site in Acheulian times. The name Bhimbetka itself means the 'resting place of Bhima'.

Entry fee: ₹10



## Ruins of St Augustine Tower, Goa

Situated 55 kms away from Bhopal, Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka are in the foothills of the Vindhyan Range. An archaeological treasure, Bhimbetka has around 243 rock shelters and cave paintings dating back to approximately 30,000 years. It exhibits the earliest traces of human life on the Indian subcontinent, with evidence of Stone Age starting at the site in Acheulian times. The name Bhimbetka itself means the 'resting place of Bhima'.

Entry fee: Nil



## Rabdentse, Sikkim

The capital of the former kingdom of Sikkim, Rabdentse is a place with rich historical traces. It remained a flourishing hill town from 1670 to 1814, after which it was invaded and destroyed by the Gorkhas. Now, only the ruins of the royal palace and religious complex can be found on the site. Since the palace is present on a hill-top amidst forests, it has stunning views of the valleys and mountains of the region. The place is also a paradise for bird watchers, as the environment houses many beautiful birds.

Entry fee: Nil



## Osian, Rajasthan

Shadowed by attractions in Jodhpur and the dunes of Thar, Osian is an ancient village with a rich set of temples from the 8th and 12th centuries. The Osian village was a famous pilgrimage site and trading centre for many centuries.

The temples belong to Hindu and Jain religions and are revered as a holy sight till day. They are famous for their architecture and none of the temples in the village resemble any of the others. The walls and towers of the temple have many intricate carvings and mouldings.

Entry fee: Nil



## Nani Daman Fort, Gujarat

Also called the Fort of St Jerome, Nani Daman is situated on the banks of Daman Ganga river. It is a small fort with high and elegant stone walls, three bastions and two huge gateways. Spread over an area of about 12,250 sqm, the fort boasts two magnificent human figurines. Deriving its name from St Jerome of the Catholic order, the fort is home to a splendid statue of the saint at the front gate and houses a Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Sea, known for its refined panelling. Another attraction near the fort is Gandhi Park, lying near the Nani Daman Jetty.

Entry fee: ₹10



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 Hazel Jain

## UNWTO

UNWTO's Tourism Online Academy offers three self-paced online courses that mainly focus on concepts, areas of interest and fundamental principles related to the tourism sector. While only the introductory four-week course is free, all of them can be started at any time.

<https://www.unwto-tourismacademy.ie.edu/>



## IATA

IATA's self-study courses offer comprehensive instructions to busy aviation and travel professionals. While all are paid, you can choose from a variety of courses – from entry-level travel agent basics to senior management for tour operations. Each course leads to an IATA qualification, recognised internationally by the travel industry.



<https://www.iata.org/en/training/delivery/distance-learning/>

## Incredible India

The Incredible India Tourist Facilitator Certification (IITFC) Programme is a digital initiative of Ministry of Tourism (MOT). It is an online programme where one can learn about tourism at one's own pace. The successful completion of this programme would enable the learner to become a Certified Tourist Facilitator of MOT. While this is a paid course, only the free introductory module is available at the moment.

<http://tourism.gov.in/incredible-india-tourist-facilitator-certification-iitfc>



## CLIA

A paid CLIA membership allows full access to all of CLIA's courses that are suitable for both new-to-cruise and experienced travel agents. There are numerous core and elective modules to choose from, and agents can achieve up to three levels of certification.

<https://cliaasia.org/membership-benefits/>



## National Restaurant Association

The National Restaurant Association, through its ServSafe brand, is offering free training resource aimed at restaurant staff in the form of 10-minute videos on delivering safe dining experiences.

<https://event.on24.com/wcc/r/2233534/A98A8B947B30A6BD86CD597DD3255F4E/869294?partnerref=TmSales>



## Alison Academy

Alison offers over 1,000 free online courses across nine categories, including 20 different tourism and hospitality courses. The types of courses include certificate courses, diploma courses and Learning Paths.

<https://alison.com/>



## Udemy

Udemy offers online courses as low as Rs.420. You can choose from categories like marketing, business and even photography. It also has a beginner's course on starting your own tourism business.

<https://www.udemy.com/>



## Duolingo

Sign up for free and learn a new language. It has bite-sized lessons and it has a reward system and immediate grading to keep the learner motivated. It also takes a functional approach by focusing on practical uses like ordering at a restaurant.

<https://www.duolingo.com/>



## Oxford Home Study Courses

The website offers UK's finest 100% free courses online with certificates of completion. It offers courses on Travel and Tourism, but also Business Management and Event Management. Those looking to branch out can also consider their Social Media Marketing and Wedding Planning courses.

<https://www.oxfordhomestudy.com/>



# MOVEMENTS

## JALESH CRUISES

### Mumbai

Jalesh Cruises has announced the appointment of **Vijay Kesavan** as its Director of Sales and Marketing. His responsibilities will encompass sales team leadership, accelerating Jalesh revenue through expanding Jalesh's presence in new markets, development of new channels, and contributing to the company's marketing and business strategies. Kesavan brings over 22 years of sales and leadership experience to Jalesh. Prior to this, he was leading organisations like Akbartravels.



## RENAISSANCE HOTEL

### Mumbai

Renaissance Mumbai has appointed **Nagesh Chawla** as General Manager. Almost two decades ago, Chawla began his stint as a Front Office Manager at Renaissance Mumbai, and later became Director of Rooms. He moved to JW Marriott Hotel & Marriott Executive Apartments, Tomorrow Square, Shanghai and thereafter took over as Resident Manager at the JW Marriott Hotel, Hong Kong. In his previous role, he was the Managing Director for The Ritz-Carlton Jakarta and JW Marriott Hotel Jakarta.



## IBIS RAJARHAT

### Kolkata

**Vaibhav Gupta** has recently been appointed as the Hotel Manager of ibis Kolkata Rajarhat. His journey with Accor started in 2015 as a Front Office Manager at ibis New Delhi Aerocity. Since then, he has successfully spearheaded ibis Styles Goa and ibis Bengaluru Hosur Road in various managerial roles. Gupta began his career with Oberoi Hotel & Resorts as Front Office Assistant and for over a decade, worked with the likes of Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts, Radisson Blu, Hilton Hotels and grew up the ranks as Front Office Manager.



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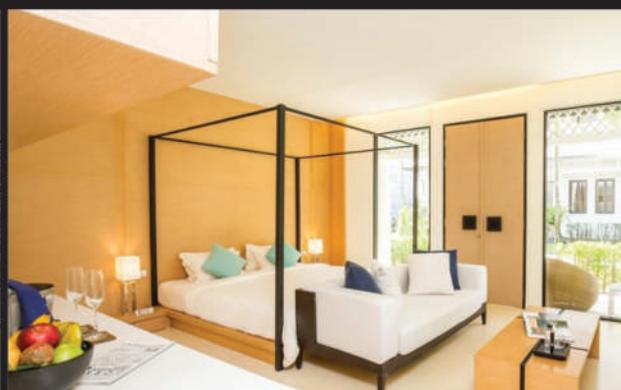
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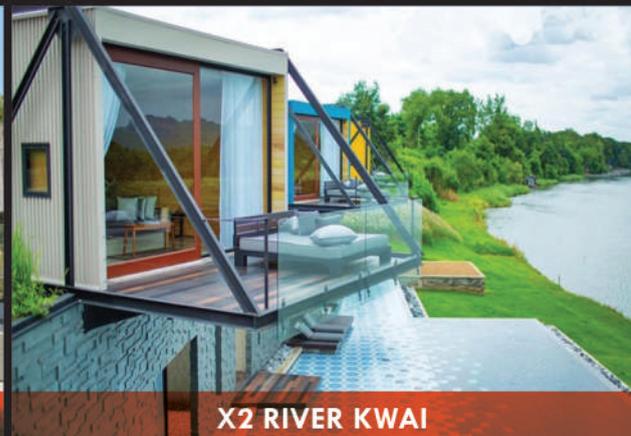
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# PATA takes measures

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) has launched a Crisis Resource Center and Tourism Recovery Monitor, a platform to provide up-to-date policy statements, authoritative information and tourism indicators from around the globe. **Mario Hardy**, CEO, PATA, tells us more.



Hazel Jain

## Q How do you think travel will change post this pandemic?

I have no doubt that travel post COVID-19 will be different. How exactly, I do not know, but I can only imagine that airports will look to implement permanent health checks and/or the addition of more health questions via applications. I also believe that businesses like hotels, airlines, attractions, museums, etc., will have to demonstrate increased sanitisation. Furthermore, I also expect many of us will be travelling with hand sanitisers and be conscious of washing our hands more frequently.

## Q How do you think travel insurance companies will react to this?

Travel insurance companies will have to adapt to a new reality and add additional clauses to cover people in times of pandemic, including covering the cost of flights, hotels and tours as well as other health concerns.

## Q Please share an update on the PATA Travel Mart.

As with all other organisations, we

are reviewing our annual calendar of events and adapting to the quickly-evolving situation. There is still a question mark regarding the possibility of hosting our mart later this year. If and when we do, there

**PATA is working with other organisations to provide reliable information and lobby for financial assistance to the private sector**

will be a big focus on COVID-19 and the impact on the sector as well as special attention on sanitisation at the convention venue.

## Q What are your recommendations to the tourism and civil aviation ministries in Asia, especially in India, in terms of supporting and reviving the industry?

Businesses such as airlines, hotels, tour operators and other related travel businesses need to support each other right now, while the government needs to provide financial aid and assistance to the industry

## Crisis Resource Center and Tourism Recovery Monitor

PATA has launched a PATA Crisis Resource Center and a Tourism Recovery Monitor, a unified platform that provides reliable and up-to-date policy statements, authoritative information and tourism indicators from around the globe. The Resource Center aims to help industry stakeholders across the globe access solutions by governments, while also assisting governments in understanding the challenges through its travel impact survey.

The PATA Tourism Recovery Monitor (PTRM) is an integrated resource for strategic tourism planners and decision-makers to keep fully abreast of the fast-changing environment. Both initiatives are housed under one microsite. It is designed to be the go-to resource for strategic tourism planners and decision makers.

PATA has brought together an array of experts to share valuable data, content and trends of leading tourism indicators to help it spot 'green shoots' as soon as they start to appear. It will have two key areas of focus; one is to house all efforts across the globe by governments who have and are providing aid, relief and support for their industry stakeholders within the resource center.

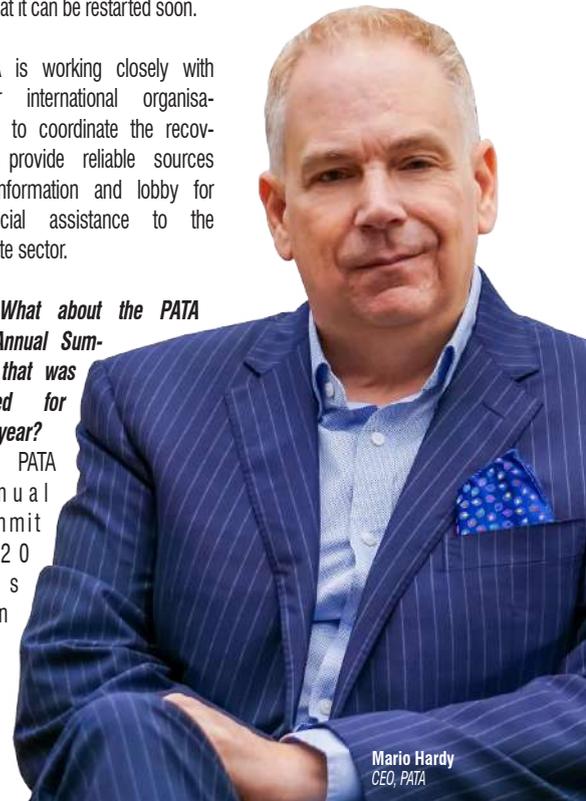
stakeholders. The travel industry represents 10 per cent of global GDP; it is critical that it is protected so that it can be restarted soon.

PATA is working closely with other international organisations to coordinate the recovery, provide reliable sources of information and lobby for financial assistance to the private sector.

cancelled and we'll regroup in Ras Al Khaimah in March 2021.

## Q What about the PATA Annual Summit that was slated for this year?

The PATA Annual Summit 2020 has been



Mario Hardy  
CEO, PATA

## Take the PATA Business Impact Survey

PATA requests the industry to complete a business impact survey in order to use those results to request for more government support for the industry. Whilst the current focus is on COVID-19 as a public health issue, the goal is to establish a long-term resource center in times of any future crisis. The survey can be found on the PATA Crisis Center at <https://ptrm.pata.org/>. According to PATA, "The survey will be open at the very least until the end of April 2020. We will consider closing it only once we have a good proportion of respondents. This survey will help us better understand how the current pandemic is impacting organisations. The information will help us work with policymakers and other stakeholders towards an appropriate response. All survey responses will be kept anonymous. As an option, however, we would like to offer the opportunity to share their input with local governments, so they have a better understanding of their concerns, challenges and issues."

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