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# Let’s market a ‘Safe India’

Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, says that as the country readies itself for the commencement of travel, it is essential for both government and industry to have a common voice that delivers the right message. She also shares some updates from the Ministry.

Nisha Verma

With travel resuming, a major role the government has had to play is working with the industry. Now, the process of making sure stakeholders are part of an organised system has begun, and Rakesh Verma, Joint Secretary, MOT, is working on getting a database of hotels and other state facilities created, claims **Rupinder Brar**. She adds, “Also, everywhere in the world people are anxious about

their safety when they think of travelling. Hence, it was imperative to come out with protocols for different stakeholders, right from travel and tour operators to hotels, bed & breakfast facilities or homestays, as well as transport operators.”

**Ongoing discussions**

Brar claims that there have been dialogues with State tourism ministers as well. “In fact, the Honourable Minister has started a series of discussions with the idea that we are still battling COVID-19, but with businesses



**Rupinder Brar**  
Additional Director General, MOT

opening, we must prepare ourselves in the interim. Thus, when travel is truly safe, we should be able to make sure that the travel-

ler is comforted and feels safe to travel. There will be layers of discussions with an idea that the

The idea is to speak to the industry on how to create the right amount of momentum in the future

government and stakeholders must work together to create a sense of welcome that follows

the protocols and guidelines that are required. Broadly, the idea is that with a few flights, at least some process of travel has begun. Inter-state and intra-state car travel has already begun. Domestic flights are already operational with all new safeguards in place. Recognising the fact that people are beginning to travel, the idea is to speak to the industry on how to create the right amount of momentum in the future. The focus was to ask them how they feel about the situation right now and what more can we do with the industry in terms

of promotional campaigns or relooking at any guidelines if the scenario changes. We need to understand the perspective of the industry and work together with them,” she shares.

**Different state rules**

Commenting on the need for a uniform protocol for the entire country instead of having different guidelines in different states, Brar says that India is such a large country that it is challenging to come out

Contd on page 6 ▶

# MOT & trade mull future plan

Tourism Minister **Prahlad Singh Patel** recently held meetings with travel, tourism and hospitality associations, seeking their view and suggestions on the future of travel and tourism in India and how to move forward. While suggestions have poured in from each association, it now boils down to a wait-and-watch game.



**Rajiv Mehra**  
Vice President, IATO

Then, from April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2024, not more than \$10 should be charged for a one-year visa and not more than \$25 for a five-year visa. A self-declaration that the person is COVID-free should be good enough. ”

“Firstly, we talked about a common policy for quarantine across the country. We suggested that e-passes also be done away with, as Ministry of Home Affairs has been clear that hassle-free passenger traffic should be permitted between states. We have also suggested that once the government is ready to welcome international tourists, IATO must be consulted to make the policy for e-tourist Visa. It should be free till March 31, 2022 to attract tourists.



**PP Khanna**  
President, ADTOI

and infrastructure in a particular state. We also suggested that the USP of all states be highlighted to encourage people to explore new destinations that might be less crowded. Nearby destinations should also be clubbed. ”

“We spoke about a Virtual India Travel Mart, since the third edition of ITM, which was due in September, won't be possible this year. We have even requested for an inter-ministerial task force and inter-state taskforce to be constituted, so that the right information and data is shared with the ministries and stakeholders. We again appealed to the Minister for a comprehensive study on domestic tourism so that we know about hotels, transporters, communication



**Runeep Sangha**  
Executive Director  
PATA India Chapter

returns will be better. On domestic tourism, states should provide relief to people who go on domestic holidays. ”

“There is a need to develop on the ‘One Country, One Rule’ concept. The MOT website should be one point of authentic information for tourists, and if there are any changes, they should first be intimated to MOT so they can update their website accordingly, before information is put into the public domain. Another point we made was that there are over 50 NTOs that are jostling for the attention of FTOs, so we should focus on FTOs, work hand-in-glove with them for promotions and incentives, and if we do that, our

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## Agents reach out to MoCA

Taking a step further in their discussion on travel agent issues, TAAI recently met the civil aviation minister. In fact, both TAFI and TAAI have already individually written to MoCA and Air India regarding their concerns, seeking redressal.

TT Bureau

**Jyoti Mayal**, President, TAAI, had a joint meeting with **Hardeep Singh Puri**, Minister of Civil Aviation and **Prahlad Singh Patel**, Minister of Tourism & Culture (I/C), who initiated it.

money is not there. We talked about opening of demand-based routes under the UDAN scheme for destinations in Northeast India, Khajuraho, Orchha, Dehradun, etc. The Minister also said that they would like to start with heli-cop-

They will get all the airlines to adhere. We also talked about protection from airlines and remuneration, if fares are capped, and also about insurance and credit card payments. After listening to our issues and suggestions,



**Pradip Lulla**  
Acting President & VP, TAFI



**Aviation Minister said that there will be a follow-up meeting to take this further**

— Jyoti Mayal

Also present were **Meenakshi Sharma**, Director General, Tourism; **Rupinder Brar**, ADG, Tourism and **Usha Padhee**, Deputy Secretary, Civil Aviation.

Speaking on the same, Mayal said, "The main idea was to discuss how to create demand. We have many issues regarding refunds, and we cannot create demand when our

ter charters to places in Uttarakhand, the Northeast states, and Goa. He was happy with the way things were progressing. We also talked about antibody and RTPCR testing for people coming into India, so that we feel safe on entry and exit from the country, and there should be no quarantine required in case the test is negative. Regarding refunds, he also said that they will soon be coming out with a process for the same.

the Minister said that there will be a follow-up meeting to take this further, and I am looking forward to it."

Mayal also spoke about opening of skies for domestic as well as international routes. There were discussions on other points including challenges of the trade due to the pandemic and changes required to enhance business of travel and tourism by agents.

### On Air India

In another development, both TAAI and TAFI have recently written to CMD, Air India and Minister of Civil Aviation regarding the national carrier's social media posts and communications to travellers, asking them to book on their website and verify the airfare with the airline before booking with agents.

Condemning the same, Mayal requested Air India to withdraw the statement. "We have always supported Air India and thanked them when the Vande Bharat Mission flights were opened to agents. However, we give add-on services to our clients that can

Contd on page 7 ►

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# TRAVTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### Revenge Tourism

'India is a resilient lot of travellers'.

Yes, once again, the Indian traveller has proved his mettle as hotels across key tourist cities of Rajasthan and Haryana go fully booked for the Independence Day weekend. This may well be a time to rejoice for the hotel industry in part, after being knocked down by the sudden drop in revenue and performance owing to the COVID pandemic.

Short-lived as it may be, this interim relief comes at a time when the revival of the sector in the near future seemed like a losing battle. Such short bursts of business may be the 'new normal' for the country's hospitality sector and may pave the way for innovative practices and unconventional business opportunities in times to come.

Now that the will of the traveller is amply clear, the industry must pick on the signs and work towards creating opportunities for itself to secure its chance of survival, revival and the subsequent boom.

### Belling the cat

To find a solution to any issue big or small, the first step is to analyse which segment of the population is affected, why is it affected and what it is that will help them overcome the challenge.

In today's context, the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) has an answer to the first two questions, but to get an answer to the third, it is imperative to view the ground reality and what better way to do that than to speak to the affected segments themselves? To show its solidarity to the country's tourism trade, MOT has initiated a series of meetings with different associations, taking in their recommendations to finalise a blueprint for the resurgence of tourism in India.

But, in offering their counsel in the drafting of this blueprint, it is also important for trade representatives to see both sides of the coin. While there may be several demands and grievances that need redressal, one must learn to pick ones battles, analyse what is needed to be done for the greater good and also take the onus on oneself to be responsible for ones actions. The time for wrangling is long gone, it is now time to be pragmatic, decisive and responsible.

## Where to from here?

In its latest report titled 'India Hotels Outlook: Impact of COVID-19', HVS ANAROCK expects secondary and tertiary markets to hold up better than gateway and metro markets, which are expected to witness short-term volatility.

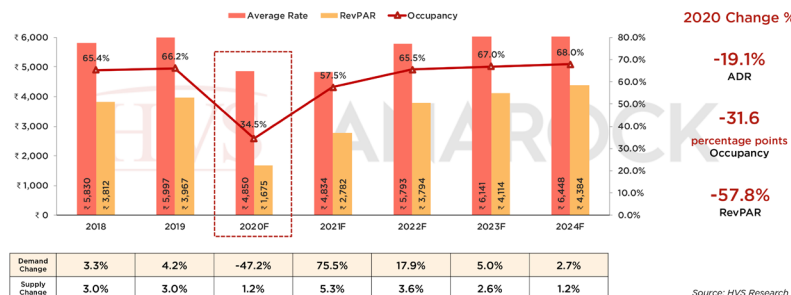


Going by predictions made in HVS ANAROCK'S latest report that not only analyses the performance of the Indian hotel sector under the current COVID-19 pandemic but also compares its recovery to events of the past (9/11 and the Global Financial Crisis of 2008), occupancy and ADR are expected to reach pre-COVID levels by 2022 and 2023, respectively, with supply growth

We anticipate Occupancy & ADR to reach pre-COVID levels by 2022 & 2023 respectively

HVS ANAROCK

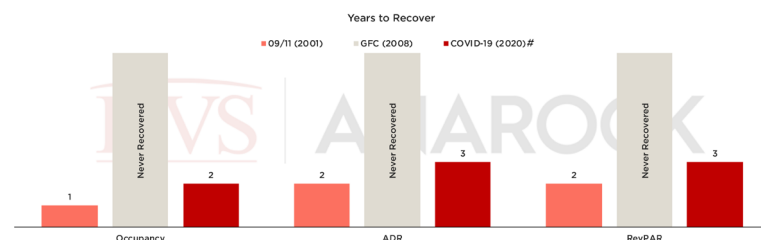
The following forecasts for the India hotels industry reflects the current outlook of market participants, assuming recovery from COVID-19 begins in the second half of 2020.



Current forecasts in a historical context

HVS ANAROCK

'Years to recover' reflects the time from the event year to levels immediately prior to the major event. Both Occupancy and ADR will recover much quicker in this cycle due to limited supply growth subject to vaccine being in place not later than 2021.



expected to remain dormant. This is assuming recovery from COVID-19 begins in the second half of 2020.

In fact, the report reveals that both occupancy and ADR will recover much quicker in this cycle due to limited supply growth, subject to a vaccine being in place not later than 2021.

#### Outlook for demand

According to the analysis, while business midscale and economy hotels will recover faster than their luxury and upscale counterparts, the case will be quite the opposite in the leisure segment. Here,

luxury and upscale hotels will recover quicker than their economy and midscale counterparts.

#### Outlook for supply growth

As of May 2020, supply was forecast to increase at a CAGR of 2.8 per cent during the 2020-2024 period. Given the recent events, supply growth is now expected to be lower, and at a slower pace, than previously anticipated. The report states that some properties are likely to be repurposed to other asset classes such as hospitals, student housing, as well as co-living spaces.

### Outlook for demand

**Corporate:** Corporates are expected to put restrictions on non-essential employee travel. Even for the essential employee travel, allowance limits are likely to be reduced. Senior Management travel is also expected to reduce in the short term.

**MICE:** The number of international corporate MICE travellers will be significantly reduced. A large number of weddings planned at international destinations have also relocated to domestic destinations. The size of the weddings will be reduced.

**Leisure:** Domestic tourists will be major demand drivers. 'Revenge' travel witnessed in China could foster among Indians, too. The 25 million outbound Indian travellers will also be an attractive segment for the leisure market.

### Key takeaways

- ❖ This cycle could be unique in terms of the rapid and dramatic decline of demand, like never seen before, but there could be some similarities to other cycles.
- ❖ Secondary and tertiary markets are expected to hold up better. Gateway and the top 10 metro markets will witness short-term volatility.
- ❖ Supply growth is expected to slow significantly, as new or under construction projects are delayed or abandoned and several highly leveraged assets are shutdown.
- ❖ The pace of immediate demand growth is co-related to the level of stimulus infused by the government to revive growth, besides the availability of a cure and vaccine.
- ❖ The transaction market will witness high activity due to likely softening in values and increased availability of stressed assets.



# 'Our industry is not elitist'

**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, Vice President of FHRAI and President of HRAWI, pleads the authorities to take the hospitality industry seriously and to stop perceiving it as elitist but recognise its capability and potential. Hotels, he says, are the backbone of tourism and without them, tourism itself cannot bounce back.



Hazel Jain

## Q What is the current status of opening of hotels and restaurants in Maharashtra?

Hotels in the state have been open since July 8, but restaurants have not yet been given the permission to do so. We have been trying to convince the government, both at the Centre as well as the state, to permit restaurants to open. We have submitted elaborate presentations outlining all the safety and precautionary measures that restaurants will voluntarily adopt to ensure social distancing. Ideally, restaurants could have begun operations along with hotels if not earlier.

Hotel occupancies in the state are in single digits, i.e. below 10 per cent, but we are hopeful. Hotel occupancies in these months are usually low, but post-September, we are hoping for it to go up.



**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**  
Vice President, FHRAI and  
President, HRAWI

Also, we are receiving a steady trickle in booking enquiries, so until September, it is mostly a wait-and-watch game.

## Q Tourism cannot restart unless hotels are open. Your thoughts?

True. Hospitality is rightly called the backbone of tourism. Tourists require accommodation if they decide to travel and also need a place to eat at. So, it all goes hand in hand. If hotels don't open, tourists

will not travel and if tourists don't travel, it will affect tourism. It will especially affect domestic tourism which right now is the only option for tourists.



**We urge the government and the authorities to expedite the decision-making process to avoid a scenario which becomes irreversible in the future**



## Q What will be your message to the Indian government?

We want the authorities to take a serious view of this industry. Hospitality can become one of the ma-

ajor breadwinners for the country. Given the right support, hospitality and tourism have the potential to turn the clock around. For this, the government has to stop imagining or perceiving the industry as an elitist one and recognise its capability and potential. Both FHRAI and HRAWI have been constantly engaging with the concerned ministries at the state and all-India level. It remains to be seen how serious they are about our survival.



## Q Is there any positive follow-up from the tourism minister of Maharashtra?

We understand the apprehension of the governments and the authorities. We also appreciate the caution with which it is unlocking sectors. We are positive that the State Tourism Minister is doing his best and we have his assurance and support. The unfortunate part is that for over four

## Validity extension of FHRAI Discount Card

Owing to the nationwide lockdown, the association has been unable to start the membership renewal process, print and distribute the new FHRAI Discount Cards for FY 2020-21. FHRAI has therefore decided to extend the validity of the cards of FY 2019-20. The card issued to establishments due to expire on June 30, 2020 shall be considered valid till August 31, 2020.

months, the industry has been in complete lockdown which has spelled doom for several establishments. Those that are managing to hold on to their businesses are walking a tightrope. With each passing day, these businesses are moving closer to a permanent shutdown scenario. So, we urge the government and the respective authorities to expedite the decision-making process to avoid a scenario which becomes irreversible in the future. We also assure the government of our commitment to ensuring guest safety and will be

available for any further deliberations on the matter, if required.



## Q Your message to travel agents from other states who are looking to send their clients on holidays?

Maharashtra's hospitality industry welcomes guests from across India. Needless to say, everyone is apprehensive and even today, there is no way to tell how long it will take before we are completely rid of it. But what we can assure our patrons is our commitment towards their safety. 🐦



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## Tourism Breaking News

- Odisha hotel industry appeals RBI to extend moratorium period
- Air India warns agents against overcharging for VBM flights
- Thailand #1 in COVID-19 recovery
- jüSta Hotels and Resorts reopens Rajasthan properties
- SpiceJet to operate flights to London Heathrow from Sept 1
- Virgin Atlantic files for solvent recapitalisation, not bankruptcy
- Tree of Life Resort & Spa, Jaipur records 68% occupancy in July
- Gujarat has most hotel openings in Q2

# Encourage short-distance travel

► Contd from page 1

with a single protocol and set of guidelines. "Hence, when it comes to having a uniform guideline across the country, we need to respect the decisions taken by Ministry of Health of various states in conjunction with the central Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. The local conditions need to be factored in because it works both ways. Hence, we want to make sure that the correct information is available for travellers coming to India, so that they are not inconvenienced due to lack of information. This information is already available, but we will be putting it out in a more organised and systematic manner. However, in the interim, even if there can't be one rule for the entire country, we are exploring the possibility that we could classify and cluster some regions in a particular manner, defining regions, so that one knows what kind of protocol will work in a

## MSME loans: It is the domain of banks

"When we are looking at taking a loan, it's the domain of the bank and for them to truly evaluate; they have their own KYCs and benchmarking norms on how to grade an industry. Also, banks work under the Ministry of Finance which makes the regulations. Our role is in flagging the requirements and the peculiar conditions into which our industry has been thrown in the times of COVID-19, and the Honourable Minister has taken this subject up more than once at appropriate levels to ensure that the industry is heard and is appreciated in the right perspective. He has been vociferously supporting the sentiment that the industry has been deeply impacted because of the sheer stopping of travel itself. While the Minister has pushed the case, ultimately, we are part of an ecosystem and we cannot possibly be pushing the banks to ignore some of the regulations that they work with."

— Rupinder Brar

particular region. However, the ultimate guide would be the health department advisories."

Brar also said that they are also developing small itineraries, allowing people to do short-distance travel within a state and between neighbouring states. For this, MOT and all regional offices are actively engaged in crafting itineraries of 1-2 days

which include both inter-state and intra-state destinations. "In 3-4 weeks, we should be able to share the same with everyone," she adds.

In fact, MOT has taken a positive step by increasing the MDA scheme limit for both domestic and inbound agents. "We have already spelt it out and we have also taken inputs from the industry for

that and the necessary approvals are being taken. Very soon it shall be an upgraded and operational market development assistance scheme," she informs.

Touching upon the need for a national tourism task force, Brar says, "The purpose of the national tourism task force was not a single one-line communication channel. The idea was that at different levels there needs to be a

a continuous exchange of ideas and a sense of handholding that the government is there with the industry. We have made sure that we've had continuous rounds of discussion with the stakeholders."

## Right messaging

"Confidence will be generated through word of mouth, therefore, the experience that we offer our travellers would have to be 'Safe to Travel'. Even the dialogue that the Minister has initiated is part of the overall process of creating the right markers and right messaging amongst both the industry and potential travellers. What emerged from our discussions with the industry is that in the first round of opening, it's important to send out the message that we are safe as a country and we are ready to welcome people again, and that's the campaign which is going to be kick-starting soon. We are getting the content ready, in sync with the inputs that we have from the industry," Brar concludes.

Even if there can't be one rule for the entire country, we are exploring the possibility that we could classify and cluster some regions in a particular manner

## Philippines' all-out support

The Department of Tourism (DOT) Philippines is pulling out all stops to ensure that health and safety measures are in place in the country's tourist destinations and to reassure all stakeholders of government support as the industry prepares to slowly reopen. Tourism Secretary **Bernadette Romulo-Puyat** gave this assurance to the Tourism Congress of the Philippines (TCP) recently. "The DOT continues

to outline plans of action and protocols at every tourist site in the country, particularly the premier destinations of Palawan, Boracay, Bohol, Davao and Baguio City," Puyat said. The Transforming Communities towards Resilient, Inclusive, and Sustainable Destinations (TourIST) will restore three key tourism sites and provide technical assistance for emergency health services in El Nido, Palawan. Bohol, a prime destination under



**Bernadette Romulo-Puyat**  
Secretary - Tourism  
DOT Philippines

the TourIST programme, is expected to receive a \$62 mn funding from World Bank.

## Technology will be vital

Akbar Travels has added more than 500 new products to its portal, especially on the holiday front. It has also strengthened its corporate booking tool so clients can be serviced better.

Hazel Jain

This year is going to be all about weekend getaways, feels **Benazir Nazar**, CEO, Akbar Holidays. "People will want to be able to drive to their holiday destinations and reach there in the comfort of their own car where safety and hygiene can be controlled. Keeping this in mind, we have started promoting our specially-designed packages called 'Ghar se Ghar tak'. We send a car to pick up our guests from their homes and take them to a luxury property for a couple of nights and then bring them back home," Nazar adds.

## Ticket bookings and refunds

Touching on a hot topic, Nazar shares that some airlines have been giving refunds but they have definitely delayed the same. "But, they are offering customers a credit note which has a long validity. This gives the customer an opportunity to think travel again and some airlines are also offering the



**Benazir Nazar**  
CEO, Akbar Holidays

customers a complete refund if there is anything to do with pandemic or force majeure," Nazar reveals.

## Focus on technology

Akbar Travels has also been focusing a lot on technology. Nazar shares details on this and says, "This pandemic has given us time

We have added more products to give the customer a varied choice of packages. We have also strengthened our corporate booking tool

## Industry initiates #driveto revive

In an effort to bring tourism back to India, 13 inbound tour operators travelled together to Rajasthan between August 6 and 9, 2020. The initiative, termed Unlocking Tourism – India is Ready, had a 20-person contingent that visited three offbeat destinations of the state. Their journey began in Delhi and then went on to Tijara, Kesroli, Talabgaon and Geejgarh, and then returned to Delhi. It was a self-drive tour and no more

than two passengers were inside one car.



This idea was conceived over a like-minded WhatsApp group and taken ahead by **Sanjay Razdan**, Managing Director, Razdan Holidays as well as **Sunil Misra**, Managing Director, Cosmos Travel. The

objective was to showcase to the world that India is ready to welcome back tourists in spite of being hit hard by the current COVID-19 pandemic. It was also the best way to witness the safety protocols being practised at hotels. The participating hotels were Tijara Fort Palace, Hill Fort Kesroli, Talabgaon Castle and Geejgarh Village Retreat. The participating travel companies work in various markets of Asia, Americas, Europe and Australia.

to strengthen our portal. We have added more than 500 products recently. This gives the customer a varied choice of packages. We have also strengthened our corporate booking tool so corporate clients can be serviced better."



# Korea focus on luxury

Credited for its exceptional attempt in flattening the curve without a single lockdown, South Korea has created products that are ideal for safe travel during the pandemic.

Hazel Jain

As a forerunner in containing the virus, South Korea has been recognised by The World Bank in effectively handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) has therefore been gearing up for holidaymakers to come and experience South Korea in a new, transformed way, adhering to all safety and precautionary guidelines. Sharing some details is **Young Geul Choi**, Deputy Director,



**Young Geul Choi**  
Deputy Director, Korea Tourism Organization, New Delhi office

Korea Tourism Organization, New Delhi office, who says, "Once travel opens up, there will be a demand for travel

to places which not only entertain but provide safe and superior facilities and services. With this webinar, the aim is for travel agents to know the extraordinary experi-

**The aim is for travel agents to know the extraordinary experiences Korea has to offer and recommend South Korea as a first choice to travellers**

ences Korea has to offer and recommend South Korea as a first choice to travellers." KTO has been conducting webinars for the travel trade in India. Focus for the upcoming webinars will be on luxury and student trips, and will be held on Sept 4 & 18.



# Air India booking faulty?

Contd from page 3

include credit, delivery of ticket, transportation to and from the airport, and a bouquet of other services. Hence, no one can determine if we charge a service fee or not," she said.

TAFI, in its letter to CMD of Air India, asked about the anomaly that has been happening on the GDS system when it comes to agents booking their flights. Sharing more details, **Pradip Lulla**, Acting President and VP, TAFI, said, "What we are experiencing is that many of the flights that are mainly being operated by Air India right now under the 'Vande Bharat Mission' get sold immediately when they are released on the GDS. These flights are also sold on the airlines' website. The same thing happens there, too. Many of the new flights that are being introduced such

as to Hong Kong were not even reflected on the GDS and only on the website. I have written to Air India asking why this is happening."

He explains that it is quite intriguing that when the flights open, the inventory is totally sold out within minutes, and sometimes

**Many of the new flights introduced were not reflected on the GDS, only on the website**

— Pradip Lulla

even at the opening of the flight there are no seats available. "We feel very disheartened because we as agents are not able to service our clients. But we can book

inventory for other airlines such as Lufthansa, Emirates and Etihad, which have also introduced their bubble flights," Lulla said.

He added that there is also some sort of misinformation circulating on Twitter that certain agents are misusing the airline inventory. "I have asked Air India to share the names of these agents with us. If they are TAFI members, we will look into this matter and check. Any misuse by a few agents should not affect other TAFI members and the trade at large. Hopefully, we will get to the bottom of this issue soon," he shared.

Another problem that agents are facing is that they cannot make a name change on the GDS. "If our clients need a change in name, it has to be done with the assistance of the airline staff as only they can do it from their system," Lulla explained.

*IATA has emphasised on the industry's commitment to its emissions reduction goals and called for the International Energy Agency to prioritise investment in sustainable aviation fuel.*

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### Prado Museum (Madrid)

The art gallery in Madrid is one of the most famous in the country, part of Spain's culture since 1819 it has preserved some of the country's most priceless works of art. Explore the entire collection in the Prado Museum: all the paintings, engravings, drawings, photographs and so much more. An endless source of beauty within your reach!



### The Alhambra Palace, Granada (Andalusia)

If you asked us to name one of the most emblematic monuments in the south it would have to be the Alhambra in Granada. Its palaces and gardens are famous throughout the world. It is one of Spain's most important cultural attractions and now you can visit it virtually to appreciate it in all its glory, and in person it is sure to impress you even more.



**So while we wait for you to come back to Spain, you can enjoy these virtual tours from home!**



# India's time to welcome tourists

Three experts from three key source markets – United States of America, United Kingdom and Italy – discuss where the inbound opportunities for Indian travel agents lie and how they can tap them. Each expert believes in the strength of India as a tourist destination and urges the industry and agents to build upon and smartly market the country's advantages.



Hazel Jain



**ravTalk's 5<sup>th</sup> Digital Conclave 'Show me the money'**

held on August 7, 2020 conducted two power-packed sessions focused exclusively on opportunities and profitability. The first session saw three international panelists from three major source markets sharing some interesting insights on the changing market behaviours and the right marketing approach to tap the opportunities that they provide.

## THE USA MARKET

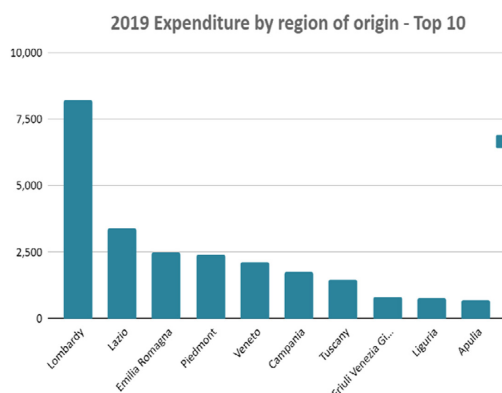
### Think quality, not quantity

Focusing on inbound traffic from the USA, **Alan Merschen**, Partner (International Insights) at MMGY Global and Chairperson, Travel Consul, shared some insights on the US travel market trends. He said that of the total population of 329



the business. And there is a consolidation with the consortia. Eight out of 10 agencies belong to one of the major consortia in the US. If we are going to see one big shift,

per cent will investigate new destinations. The important thing to remember is, this will probably be through consumers making the requests," Merschen added.



## SpiceJet secures slot at Heathrow

SpiceJet has secured slots at London Heathrow Airport to operate flights effective September 1, 2020. This is presently under the bubble arrangement between India and UK, and effective up to end of summer schedule i.e. October 23, 2020. It is also in discussion to secure slots for winter schedule for regular operations.

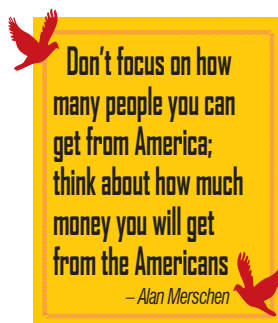
million, more than 45 per cent of Americans have passports now. This means that there are more Americans with passports than the Germans. "Consumers here are using travel agents more. Last year, our survey said there was a 10 per cent increase in this, especially in the high-end of

40,000 (which is roughly 38 per cent) of the travel agencies are home-based. Our prediction is that within two years, a vast majority will be independent contractors working from home," he said. Merschen is also Founder of Myriad.

### Keeping relationships strong

There is a slight shift in the US market – they want timely data and health certificates. "The priority for the US agencies was strengthening customer service. We know that it costs six times more money to acquire a new customer than keep an existing one. So the focus was on that as well as training programmes. Almost half of the respondents were likely to consider new hotels – another strong indicator of an openness that we haven't seen before. Over 90

Some other key stats he shared included: 64 per cent of the USTOA tour operators have seen an increase in bookings and most of their bookings are for international destinations. "These are long-haul all the way, but that's an important element for us to



look at. One out of three sees a potential restart for Asia within the first quarter of 2021," he shared.

Another essential update Merschen reveals is that while agencies in the US are realising that there aren't going to be Fam trips anymore, they're okay with that because they know they have to focus on their business now.

"They do think promotions will be important, but please don't

discount your price – give us better value because it will take you longer to bring that up again. Another thing we are seeing is the lengthening of the travel booking window. Many of the US tour operators are now taking bookings for 2022, which will put pressure on operators to give pricing. Once again, health safety is the new luxury," he advises.

### Consumer insights from the US

Merschen shares some results from the USTOA survey done at the end of the year 2019. It said that 64 per cent of high-end consumers want to go to Asia and those who do – 21 per cent were interested specifically in India. This was

good news is that Americans are still searching for travel opportunities and interest for international travel was up almost 40 per cent between May and June 2020. Moreover, there is much more postponing trips for a year rather than cancelling them. Six out of 10 are still dreaming about a vacation internationally. Six out of 10 are also saying that cleanliness measures

are important and getting that information across to them is key. "They are open to hearing about it now. It's okay to market now – they just want to hear the story," he says.



Amanda Hills  
Founder and CEO  
Hills Balfour

change. And the more we learn to adapt to change, the better," Merschen advises, adding, "Remember, airlines need flights both ways. I think it's the biggest opportunity to



more than the Philippines and Sri Lanka. "Whether you are a hotel or a destination, it is good to remember that 65 per cent of the consumers believe that the destinations they visit say a lot about who they are. So, we need to stop thinking of hotels or destinations as just places and give them personalities. How we do that is the big challenge," he adds.

Factors deciding the impact of COVID-19 is not price; it's a question of safety. The



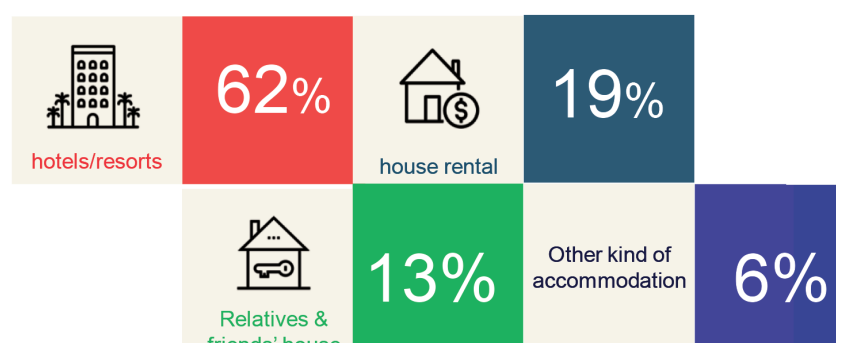
### What will the future hold?

"I wish we could tell when this epidemic will be over. But we do want you to challenge yourself. There is not going to be a 'recovery' because it's not going to be like the way it was, it's going to be different. I am a student of Darwin and he never said it is the survival of the strongest or the fittest. It will be those who adapt to

be created. This is the time for every tourism product to think differently than they ever have before. It is such an important time that we all as an industry work co-operatively. Keep communicating. It is not the time to 'wait and see'. You don't need to have a campaign, but you need to have a presence because your competitors do. Think

### Expenditure by kind of accommodation

Hotels and resorts are the preferred kind of accommodation with a total expenditure of € 14,433 mln in 2018 (+4.7% on 2017)



Alan Merschen  
Partner (International Insights) at  
MMGY Global and Chairperson,  
Travel Consul



quality not quantity, think length of stay, fewer trips but longer trips, and India can offer that. Don't focus on how many people you can get from America; think about how much money you will get from the Americans."

THE UK MARKET

India's moment to shine

Sharing an update on the UK market, **Amanda Hills**, Founder and CEO, Hills Balfour, says, "The UK has a long-standing relationship with India; it is the third-biggest source market after Bangladesh and the USA with 1.46 mn visitors in 2019. And there has never been a bigger opportunity for India to tap into the UK market. It is India's moment to shine. Travellers will be looking to travel for a longer time to reduce the risk of travelling, and what India offers really matches what UK is looking for." Hills Balfour is a leading communication agency for travel and tourism.

Hills highlights the UK traveller behaviour and says, "Travel is in our DNA and annual holi-

The UK travellers are starting to book and they are booking further afield. Even though they are not yet allowed to travel to certain destinations, they are booking them. "We don't think discounting is going to be the driver in the long term. In fact, people will appreciate their holidays even more than before. Also, many of the British population have not actually been impacted by losing their jobs because of furloughing under the government schemes. This means that we have more disposable incomes than we have had for some time," Hills examines.

The good news is that the travel agent tracker reported 87 per cent of the respondents are now taking new booking inquiries from mid-July at an increase of eight per cent week-on-week. There are also some positive happenings on the UK trade landscape. About 53 per cent of its tour operators are using tourist boards to help them cope during the crisis. "Tourist boards have never had a more important

Key trends from the UK market

- ❖ Trust, health and safety are very important
- ❖ Servicing instead of selling
- ❖ Important to have a connection
- ❖ Slow travel, open spaces, wellness represent the UK outbound traveller
- ❖ Flexibility is of prime importance with booking policies

She echoes Merschen's sentiment that there will be fewer numbers going abroad but going for a longer time to decrease risks. Instead of spending on three or four holidays a year, the UK traveller will actually take just one long one. "This is where I think the Indian product matches this demand. The luxury market has been the least impacted. We are seeing some incredible activity in this market in private planes, private villas, etc., and we believe it's going to be the first to recover. The other demographic

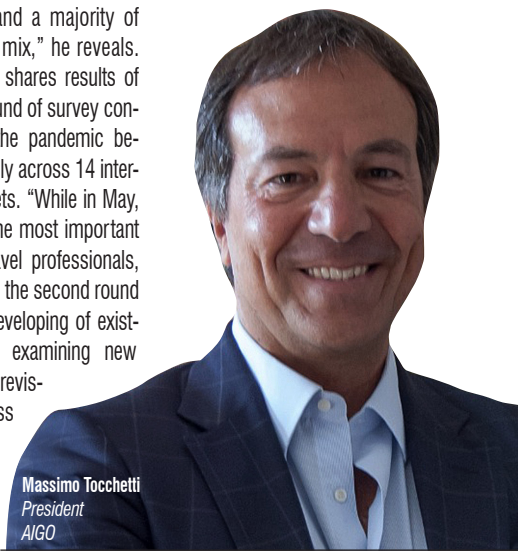
This is the time for India to reinvent, not just as a destination but also reinvent its relationships  
- Massimo Tocchetti

which is going to see a massive uptick is the UK millennials and the Gen Zs. They are the ones who are least anxious to travel. We also see a big up-

President of marketing and communications agency AIGO, says, "As the fourth-largest European market for India, Italians are preferring back-to-nature activities and luxury products. With the right communication, the right marketing and the right presence in the market, you can win the battle. This is the time for India to reinvent, not just as a destination but also reinvent its relationships." The peak season for the Italian market is its summer season.

Underlining the key regions that spend more money on travel, Tocchetti mentions the

book online and a majority of 71% go for a mix," he reveals. Tocchetti also shares results of the second round of survey conducted after the pandemic between June-July across 14 international markets. "While in May, training was the most important activity for travel professionals, the attention in the second round switched to developing of existing products, examining new destinations, revising the business model, improving the supply base and looking for new audiences. We also saw that the consumers switched to more active behaviour from the 'wait and see' attitude to changing the original destinations, probably because they were looking for places less impacted by the virus or where safety measures were more reassuring. Support from DMOs is also increasingly important with regard to releas-



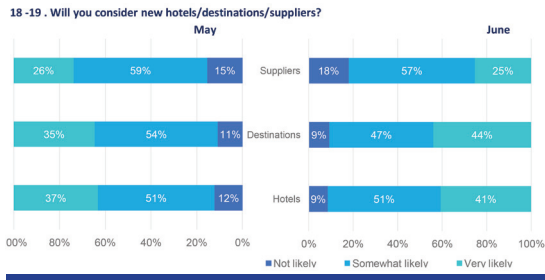
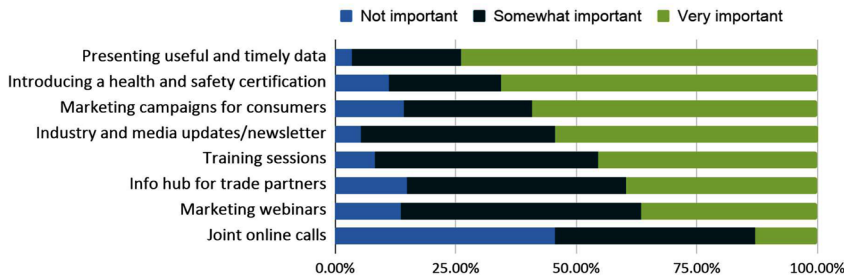
Massimo Tocchetti  
President  
AIGO

complete change. "Italians are looking for new destinations, experiences and hotels," he says.

Changes in distribution

There will be more flexibility, and insurance and safety highly demanded going forward. There will also be a return to traditional channels, he says.

Top Requested Actions from DMOs (North American)



days are nearly sacrosanct to the British. Many of us will prioritise travel over any other discretionary spending. We anticipate huge growth in travel movement to places like India. And so our marketing should really drive demand and turn the spark for travelling into a flame, enabling the industry to recover faster from the UK. About 64 per cent of all UK travellers that we recently surveyed have said that those who expect to travel will expect to travel the same amount in the future. And 86 per cent reported missing taking a holiday so far this year."

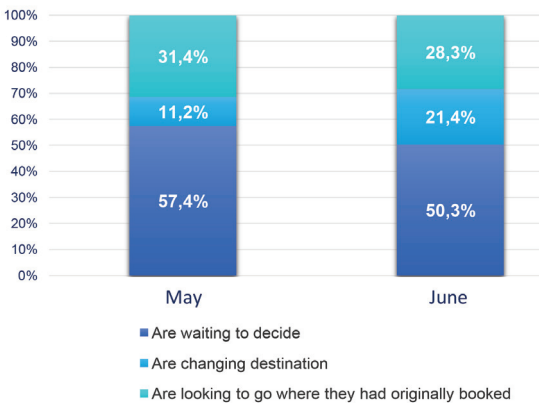
What is Travel Consul?

Travel Consul is the premium agency network around the globe with 19 different travel marketing companies. They cover over 50 global markets throughout the world with 55 offices the world over. Collectively, they have over 600 clients at the last count.

role among the UK tour operators. Almost 65 per cent of operators in our survey said the tourist boards presenting useful and timely data will help them recover. So, to all tourist boards – if you want to get the UK business, you need to start communicating with our travel trade," Hills adds.

tick in multi-generational family holidays which will massively match the Indian product, as well as VFR travel," Hills adds. This is why she believes that the pandemic is a massive opportunity for India. "The perception of India is so positive, we have such strong ties, but I also think not enough people know India well. Now is the big opportunity to tell them. New airlift out of UK is a very big opportunity for India. It is India's moment to shine, so don't go dark. Now is the time to market to the international visitor because you are going to get a lot more money and you don't need to cut your costs," Hills suggests.

Customers' Propensity for Future Travel



THE ITALIAN MARKET

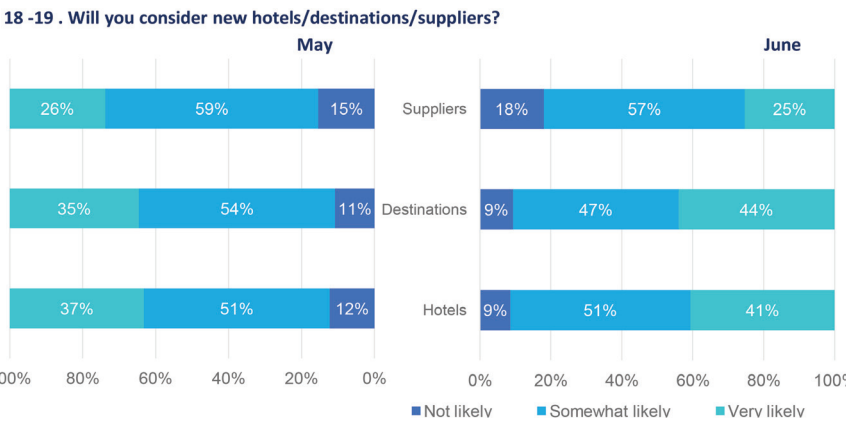
It is time to re-invent

As an expert on the Italian market, **Massimo Tocchetti**,



Les Roches, in partnership with Quintessentially India, is offering free access to a Quintessentially account manager to help students prepare their travel to Switzerland for October, with a personalised services pack.

Innovating to meet the market



North of Italy which accounts for 65 per cent of the total travel expenditure, with Lombardy having the highest spending, followed by Lazio and Emilia Romagna. "Italians mainly look for relaxation and fun while on holiday, culture, natural attractions. Almost 31% of the Italians book travel through the traditional channel while 37%

ing useful and timely data, training and partnership in marketing," he shares.

No doubt, the pandemic has modified the usual requirements of travellers and creating new needs, thereby shaping new trends. Tocchetti feels that tourism as we used to know it is undergoing a

"In this emergency, we are being demonstrated how important the human component is. There is also a change in market dynamics, including digitalisation. However, around 14% are experiencing difficulty in foreseeing the change, which is understandable because unpredictable factors exist," Tocchetti adds. ↴



# Adversity, the new opportunity

While the COVID-19 crisis is synonymous with gloom for businesses across the world including travel and tourism, there are some stories in the industry of adapting to the situation and making hay while the sun still shines. Here are three inspiring stories of surviving a pandemic...



Nisha Verma

The second session of 5<sup>th</sup> TRAVTALK Digital Conclave had people from the travel industry sharing their experience and insights on how they managed to turn an adversity into an opportunity and earning revenue while doing so. This is their story of surviving a pandemic...

caught unaware. Hence, we did what was permissible. One thing the government did was to give permission for people to travel for weddings. They allowed 50 pax per wedding and we thought of taking advantage of this. We used social media platforms to quickly reach our audience and introduce new packages," he shared.



However, the number of bookings for June were great and we made profit, which was a happy shock for us. We knew people could not travel from far to visit the hotel, and hence we focused on our neighbourhood and launched a programme called 'Love Thy Neighbour', wherein we invited the local people to experience our hotels and we brought down our price from ₹10,000 per night to ₹2500 because in the first two months, the aim was only to pay the salaries. There was another very popular programme - As You like It - which entitled the regional guest to drive in and stay with us, experience the property, and pay whatever they wanted. We covered the

to be excellent and it exceeded expectations. When they paid 100 per cent published tariff, the employee got a 50 per cent cut in it. It was constant innovation. We even said that those coming by bicycle will get a 50 per cent discount, wherein we aimed at young people to start," Borgia shared.

**We started helping clients with bookings on VBM flights. This helped in generating revenue for 2020 and we also started making some money**

— Mahendra Vakharia

with bookings for the summer season coming in abundance, but it all changed within a day when the lockdown was announced. However, a positive outlook took him and his team through the pandemic. "We believe that every challenge has a cycle to it. In case of the pandemic, we had come to the lowest end of the cycle, which meant that the only way to move next was to go up. In the past few months, it dawned on us that no bookings were going to happen and the business that had happened

had to be cancelled. However, that involved a process of communication and some back-and-forth with international partners, clients and airlines.



Mahendra Vakharia  
Managing Director  
Pathfinder Holidays

For him, helping clients with booking cancellations was the first step towards generating business. "We started helping all the clients who had booked with

## Continuous innovation

Steve Borgia, CMD (Creator, Mentor, Developer), INDeco Leisure Hotels, says that while the pandemic took a toll mentally on his team, the fear around it made them think right. "First we thought that we should go back to the basics, things should be owner-driven. Earlier, I used to visit the hotel once in six months, but now I visit every week. We had to lead from the front. While on one side we knew we could do many things to stay afloat, with the government introducing new laws and regulations, we didn't want to be

## Time for fair play

"Nobody wants to go by air or train and prefers the road. Hence, we are also making three caravans and we already have 16 bookings for them. That can be another norm. We need to see what is permissible and play accordingly. It's time to play an honest and straight-jacket game. We started redefining things we were going to do. Another package picking up very fast is Baby's Day Out, which was targeted at young mothers who were tired of being at home and wanted to come to the hotel and spend time for a week. For men, we have 'Great Escape', with 15 bachelors getting together and driving in with an e-pass."

— Steve Borgia

Interesting packages did the trick for them. "We launched the 50 pax wedding packages and allowed the use of our garden for the same, while we gave three pre and post photoshoots for free. Doing the first wedding was a great achievement, and we even advertised the same through social media, which resulted in many more weddings coming to the hotel. In March, we were busy closing the hotels and were not aiming at anything. In April, we planned to survive and earn money to pay the salary of the staff.

food cost, and for the room, it was up to them to pay. However, not even one guest paid less than ₹2500. There were at least 13-14 per cent guests who paid the published tariff. However, there the service had

**As professionals in the tourism space, we understand that regaining consumer confidence in travel is the key to regenerating the industry**

— Mehernosh Colombowalla

Still, a lot more had to be done. "We had to survive not just by earning revenue but also by cutting down cost. Where I needed 100 employees or even more to do a wedding long back, we had cut our employee numbers to only 10 who delivered. This meant constant skilling, cutting down costs, and exceeding expectations. After a lot of problems, continuous innovation and continuous cost cuts, we are now comfortable," he added.

## Stay connected with clients

For Mahendra Vakharia, Managing Director, Pathfinder Holidays, March was a busy month

## Future changes for agents

"We don't have to reinvent the wheel completely and start afresh. We must do the same things we have been doing in the past. But, going forward, we will have to be more mindful of what protocols we need to mention. We need to do a lot of handholding for our clients not only at the time of booking, but throughout the journey till they return. I would advise the industry to not give up hope. Not all storms come to you to blow you away, some storms come to clear the path for you so that you can do better. You have to be fair as well. This is the time when we have to realise where you are overspending. Introspect, bring it back, and then be realistic and ensure it is manageable if not solvable."

— Mahendra Vakharia

While offices were closed in the last four months, we have been as busy, or rather busier, than before the pandemic. We have opened the offices and are working from home and part-time from office," he said.

## SOPs for agents

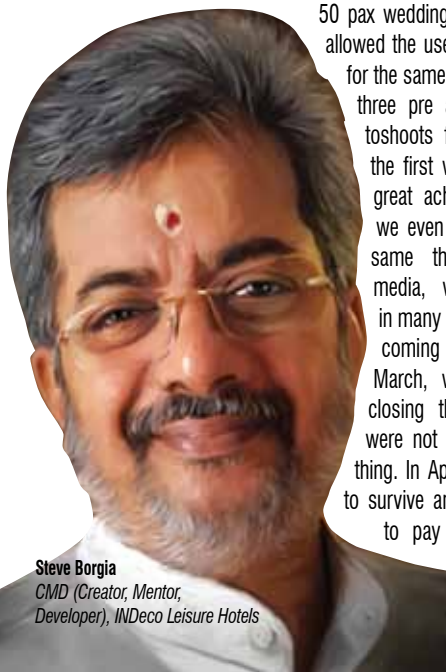
"Once you build trust with your clients, it will be very easy for you to influence them and inspire them to travel sooner than expected. Keep their travel dreams alive, share all related policies of cancellation and re-booking that the airlines are giving us. It's all about communicating with them. Virtual tourism will be there for some time, but won't supersede the conventional way of travel because we are already getting a lot of enquiries for travelling in the coming months. People want to get out and experience the destination rather than go on virtual tours"

— Mehernosh Colombowalla

**Where I needed 100 employees or even more to do a wedding long back, we had cut our employee numbers to only 10 who delivered**

— Steve Borgia

us in their cancellations, and getting the refunds from our international partners. Some of our clients were stranded out of India in March, and we were continuously speaking to them to make sure that they were comfortable in foreign destinations. As the situation improved and flights were permitted, we got them home safely. Apart from that,



Steve Borgia  
CMD (Creator, Mentor,  
Developer), INDeco Leisure Hotels



we managed to get all refunds for our customers from our international partners, which made the customers very happy," he added.

Another interesting development were the Vande Bharat Mission (VBM) flights of Air India, said Vakharia. "It made us realise that there was a huge opportunity to do business in this segment. A lot of passengers were stuck in Gujarat and we have huge VFR traffic to UK, US and Canada, so we started helping clients with bookings on VBM flights. This helped in generating revenue for 2020 and we also started making some money. The important thing was not to earn any money in terms of profit, but to make sure that the team that we had in full was sustained and we didn't have to worry about paying their salaries," he stressed.

He also agreed that social media played a huge role in spreading the word. "In the last four months, we have gone on social media and it has been the



upon. All these properties supported us with very good rates. This generated business. In fact, there are bookings for these luxury properties for August," he claimed.

#### Validation point for clients

**Mehernosh Colombowalla**, Director, Beyond Borders Travel Management Company, said that the most important thing was to regain consumer confidence, which became a key for them to open the door to new business opportunities. "As professionals in the tourism space, we understand that regaining consumer confidence in travel is the key to regenerating the industry. Clients often do not have direct access to airlines, hospitality and tourism sectors. Thus, shortly after the lockdown began, we invested

months, we kept our clients updated with the positive developments and information given to us by the airlines, hotels and tourism boards. We spoke about

**There are fabulous options available in our own vicinity. A holiday doesn't need to be a full international holiday, it can even be a holiday with family and friends**  
—Mahendra Vakharia

less-frequented destinations and sent them short videos on interesting and unique experiences around the globe and kept their travel interest alive.

#### Expectation from service providers

"I would like to see more relaxed policies in terms of cancellations and refunds. In case a client is overseas and gets infected by the virus, we would expect the hotel to refund the remaining part of the stay, and even airlines can be more accommodating when charging for re-booking or even refund on the return portion, whatever the fare type may be, in case the client has to come back on the first available flight. Hence, collectively, we just need to work together to build trust and make sure that the client does not feel that he's going to have huge losses if he contracts the virus when he is on a vacation overseas."

— Mehernosh Colombowalla

our time in connecting with our clients who have been with us over the years. In the past few

We also sent them information of the various safety measures developed by airlines and hotels,

and the new norms of travel sent to us directly by various service providers and tourism boards. This built 'trust' in our clients towards us, and very soon we became their validation point for various un-verified messages that they received. Building confidence, credibility and trust are of utmost importance," he pointed out.

This communication also resulted in getting them new business. Elaborating, Colombowalla said, "The constant communication with clients became a two-way conversation. As a result, we got connected to a few shipping companies looking for help in the time of lockdown and ended up doing charters for shipping crew changes. Can you imagine the amount of financial opportunity we had in this business? While researching for more opportunities during the lockdown, we realised that there were many parents of students and students who wanted to go to universities abroad. We tied up with a few consultancy firms and got these students enrolled.

This helped them in choosing the right universities and preparing for entrance. We also did online engagements for ladies' groups and issued tickets for some repatriation flights. Apart from that, there is a big-ticket high-end luxury booking for

**Building confidence, credibility and trust are of utmost importance**  
— Mehernosh Colombowalla

the month of August to Africa. All this was possible because we stayed positive and channelised our energy into finding opportunities during the lockdown. Instead of waiting for anybody else to help us, we helped ourselves, and this way we succeeded."

#### Domestic will be the big draw

The new normal would see changes and fabulous growth, claimed Borgia. "We need a lot of people. I am happy that all the people in inbound are moving towards the regional sector and doing domestic business, which has many possibilities. By October, we will start engaging everybody. People can't be restricted to inbound. Those who say they are prepared for anything and are open to innovation, India is a fabulous, complete, one big idea. Those prepared to

innovate, to change and to look at opportunities, India is the country to be in. I am very proud to be in India—one big idea with thousands of mini ideas. I believe the past is the future of India. The Indian economy was built by the entrepreneurs who started young and small, and built it mighty. I think it's in the hands of entrepreneurs, and we've got to move," he asserted.

**Mehernosh Colombowalla**  
Director, Beyond Borders  
Travel Management Company

Vakharia added that while domestic might not be their only focus, they will be focusing on it at present. "From now till October, I do not foresee much of international happening because we still await what protocols are coming with visa regulations, which airlines are

#### Taking ownership

"Whoever has booked the group will have to take the ownership. This doesn't mean that the hotelier can be relieved, as he has to play a big role in handling the guest. Indian hotels work closely with the travel agents and won't leave the guest alone."

— Steve Borgia

opening regular commercial flights from India. Till then, we will be doing domestic and India is a beautiful vast country, with fantastic beautiful domestic tourism destinations. Those who budgeted for international travel might reduce it and go nearby. There are fabulous options available in our own vicinity, where people can still go for a holiday. A holiday doesn't need to be a full international holiday, it can even be a holiday with family and friends, where you can have some

good time and come back," he claimed.

#### Price advantage is crucial

Going forward, according to Borgia, the hotelier must learn to be unique and interesting, and get a price advantage. He said, "This is not the time to go on a price war. Do what your guest wants you to do and make sure that you give them excellent service so that they don't want to get out of the hotel. We need to cut all the luxury to make a price advantage and not make it very expensive. We are great in hospitality and we need to give the customers the confidence, so transform and innovate."

Vakharia concluded saying, "We are offering a service that is not tangible, and not something you get in a hotel or airline. We kept our clients updated regularly in terms of regulations coming through different destinations, countries, hotels and even airlines, and will continue doing so. This is part of our profession."

At the end, Colombowalla said, "Travel agents will need to become more ambitious in how they design experiences, as a new paradigm of luxury travel that is life-enriching and value based is emerging."

#### Top countries to travel to

"Indians would go to nearby destinations like Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Bali, Mauritius, and even Nepal and Bhutan. In Europe, UK will be on the top of the list as many Indians have family ties there. Switzerland is also very popular. But, we must wait and see what kind of protocols Switzerland and other countries put up for visa regulations, which could be a determining factor. Countries that will be more accepting towards Indians coming to them while granting visa, with fewer documents, would be more favourable than others. Switzerland, Spain, UK, and even Eastern Europe will be popular."

— Mahendra Vakharia

**This is not the time to go on a price war. Do what your guest wants you to do and make sure that you give them excellent service**  
— Steve Borgia

most important factor. We used this opportunity and created some very nice programmes for driveable destinations from Ahmedabad, which included Udaipur, Kumbhalgarh and Bera. Apart from that there were many luxury properties for which we did social media campaigns and reached out to our clients. We continuously kept in touch with them, kept feeding them information about the developments in travel, while giving them details about different properties that we have worked





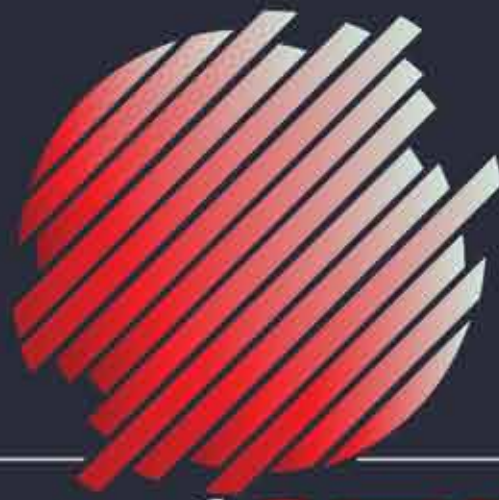
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# Time to be a one-stop shop

**Deepak Narula**, Managing Director, GRN Connect, says that digital campaigns with agents are a good way to keep them updated on technology and other developments, especially in these times. He adds that it is time for agents to come out of their comfort zones and begin thinking about being a one-stop shop for the travel needs of a diverse set of customers.

TT Bureau

**G**RN Connect recently conducted a webinar for TAAI - Northern Region, presenting its products to their members. **Deepak Narula** believes that TAAI is a great platform to reach out to the community, particularly at a time when movement is restricted and most agencies are working from home; it is best to connect digitally. "We have done such webinars in the past, too, but on different platforms for both domestic and international markets. We will continue to engage in such activities in the future. The idea is to stay in the mind of users, keep them aware of the developments of the past, especially during the lockdown period," he says, adding that the response received to the webinar was good and agents were



**Deepak Narula**  
Managing Director  
GRN Connect

eager to know about the newly launched products.

Technology has been a saviour for most in the recent past, and agents increasingly see it as an important part of business. Hence, there is a rise in competition as well. Narula says, "We have always used technology to grow and today we are distributing in over 50 countries. Competition is always healthy. It keeps you on your toes and I think there is room for everyone

to survive. Having said that, it is equally important to continue to evolve, bring in more products,

**The time has come for each agency to sell every possible product, be it business, leisure, inbound, outbound, FIT or GIT, flights, hotels, cruises, packages or insurance**

make them more user-friendly, and the simplest way of doing that is to be honest and transparent in your dealings."

#### Tools for agents

Narula says that besides their online B2B portal [www.GRN-](http://www.GRN-)



connect.com, where they offer hotels, apartments, transfers, sightseeing and packages, they also offer a White Label solution that includes flights. He adds that they have received a good response. GRN Connect also has a host of products lined up for an early-September release. "Going forward, agents will have to move to one-stop-shop solutions. Generally, in India or globally, we have business travel agents, leisure operators

or MICE agents. However, I feel that the time has come for each agency to sell every possible product, be it business, leisure, inbound, outbound, FIT or GIT, flights, hotels, cruises, packages or insurance," he says.

In fact, he believes that in a couple of months, everyone would be able to resume work. "It's been some time now and our industry is still in almost-shutdown mode, but looking



at the way the world is opening up, I think it is just a matter of few months that we all should be able to resume work. Lockdowns are being relaxed, domestic flights are operating, and a few hotels are opening—these are positive signs," he asserts, adding that clients will now give more importance to booking with a travel agent. ↓



*Delhi International Airport Limited has developed a portal where incoming international flyers can fill the mandatory self-declaration form and also apply online for exemption from mandatory institution quarantine process.*

## Think about the tourist

Contd from page 1

"As FAITH we suggested that MOT, along with other ministries, create a document of credible information which could come in the newspaper as Ads, to avoid dependence on fake news. We also said that the national carrier should respect agents and not communicate through social media comments, but approach us as associations, like we approach them for our issues. As TAAI, we suggested that every traveller should be carrying an insurance, whether domestic or international. We have also requested the Minister for a meeting with MoCA, because it's time MOT, PMO and NITI Aayog got together. We need a dialogue on how to restructure the industry."



**Pradip Lulla**  
Acting President and VP  
TAFI

"One thing we wanted the minister to intervene in was to request DGCA and MoCA to give a directive that refunds due from airlines be given at the earliest. Secondly, we said that there should be an insurance which should be charged on the ticket in the form of a code. This would safeguard passengers and travel agents from airlines that default or go insolvent. The economy is slow and the chances of airlines going into insolvency are real. The government should also have international advertisements to attract tourists, where one can say how India as a destination is safe and what kind of SOPs we are following in hotels."



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President, TAAI and VC, FAITH

"We suggested that the COVID-19 guidelines, which have been formulated by our association for adventure tourism activities, be accepted by MOT so that they can be circulated to the entire country and state governments. The Ministry should not ignore incoming tourists to the country, and they must indulge in aggressive marketing abroad, so that everyone knows that India still exists. ATOAI also requested the Minister to relax norms for tour operators on approvals related to office space and staff requirement. We also requested MOT to come out with revised MDA guidelines at the earliest, so that the trade can benefit from them when they need them the most."



**Capt Swadesh Kumar**  
President, ATOAI

Inputs by Nisha Verma

## Every business counts...

Early preparation to work through the pandemic has made Travel Designer Group look at a positive future for the company. **Jaal Shah**, Group MD, Travel Designer Group, shares his story.

Nisha Verma

**A**s an organisation, Travel Designer Group went through one of the most challenging times throughout its existence since 1999, claims **Jaal Shah**. "We started tracking the developments as early as January. When some parts of the world started going into lockdown, we started preparing, in early March, for a similar scenario in the countries where we operate. This helped us settle in seamlessly to work from home. However, with leisure, business and MICE restricted, the only business left was from stranded travellers and quarantine requirements. It is all behind us now and we are seeing green shoots in some of our major markets. We should see more recovery in the coming months," he says.

In the last few months, the company has launched REZ2020 and redesigned the Rezlive.com booking engine to suit new-age requirements. Shah says that



**Jaal Shah**  
Group Managing Director  
Travel Designer Group

personally, he spoke to over 400 clients globally via video conferencing to thank them and to learn about their post-COVID business expectations and how the two could work together.

What helped them ward off the evils of the pandemic is also their strong financial fundamentals. "Over the last two years, we analysed all risks associated with our business model such as currency exchange, credit and business disruptions, and strategically worked on strengthening our organisation on all these aspects," he explains.

#### Affiliate.travel

The programme allows agents to distribute their own hotel booking platform without any investment. The platform is powered by Rezlive.com's booking engine

**Over the last two years, we analysed all risks such as currency exchange, credit and business disruptions, and strategically worked on strengthening our organisation**

and comes with a payment gateway. "We launched a prototype earlier and after its success, released a full-fledged product in India. We launched Affiliate.travel in UAE and it has proved to be a success story so far," Shah shares. ↓



# Be sustainable, don't lose out!

The COVID-19 crisis may have expedited the adoption of sustainable practices in the travel and tourism world. While it may have been all the rage a while ago, sustainability is expected to take up a more permanent spot in the business of tourism. The industry is unanimous in its opinion that now is the time to walk the talk.

 Nisha Verma

**O**ne thing that the COVID-19 crisis has re-ignited is the focus on sustainability, and more importantly, its necessity in the post-COVID world. While earlier the subject of sustainability being part of all tourism activities was often debated, today, it only



**Steve Borgia**  
CMD (Creator, Mentor, Developer),  
INDeco Leisure Hotels

velopment at UNWTO, who says that things will change for the industry. "As an industry, this crisis allows us to hit the reset button. It's not going to be business as usual once the world reopens. We are going to factor environmental cost beyond economic cost, look at destinations and business establishments getting closer to a zero-carbon footprint, zero food miles, com-

Some brands, in fact, are already bringing in that change. **Rakesh Mathur**, Director, Lords Hotels & Resorts, says, "In warfare parlance, in such a situation, you take no chances. You adopt a zero-risk policy towards guests, staff, suppliers and all stakeholders. This is the guiding principle behind any workstation, process, service design, procurement that we have to adopt. Hygiene, sanitation, sustainable and responsible practices must become the norm. This is what we have implemented at Lords Hotels. Sustainable tourism practices are here to stay in the post-COVID world, even when a cure is found. Hotels being high con-



**Shoba Mohan**  
Founder, RARE India

are in the throes of a massive climate crisis?" she questions.

**Sustainability is spirituality**  
Another advocate of responsible and sustainable tourism is **Steve Borgia**, CMD (Creator, Mentor, Developer), INDeco Leisure Hotels, who has made



**Suman Billa**  
Director, Technical Cooperation &  
Silk Road Development, UNWTO

munity-centred exercises and meaningful experiences. I think the nature of tourism is going to change and mass tourism or low-cost, high-volume tourism is going to take a hit. It gives



**Rakesh Mathur**  
Director  
Lords Hotels & Resorts

know that people's fear would be a factor in taking decisions, but there will also be an ethical element to how people will take these decisions. If nothing, the pandemic has chastised mankind significantly and I think people are going to be looking at more meaningful experiences and being more responsible and sustainable. When this comes into play and if consumer preferences are going to follow that line, governments will come

**Meenakshi Sharma**, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, agrees and says that our emphasis should be on responsible or sustainable tourism. "There are various parts to this subject. Firstly, we should see if policy would support such initiatives, or on the state level, infrastructure projects will take care of it, or whether the industry follows it, and if the tourist is responsible or not," she believes.



**Meenakshi Sharma**  
Director General  
Ministry of Tourism

gets a resounding yes from all corners of the travel and tourism world.

**Not a choice anymore**  
**Shoba Mohan**, Founder, RARE India, says that while there are people who feel sustainability needs to be followed as a

**Tourism that does not benefit local communities is not fair tourism**  
— Steve Borgia

sure that the brand has the ethos of sustainability and responsibility at its core. He believes that sustainability is the second name of spirituality. "Tourism that does not benefit local communities is not fair tourism. We need to understand sustainability as the other side of spirituality. Just like spiritual rules, we need to frame sustainability rules and make India live longer. We need to have a new relationship with Earth. We must transform our products and the way we offer services. We have to offer them in a way that guests want and feel safe with," he shares.

**Hit the reset button**  
Echoing a similar sentiment is **Suman Billa**, Director, Technical Cooperation & Silk Road De-

**The nature of tourism is going to change and mass tourism or low-cost, high-volume tourism is going to take a hit**  
— Suman Billa

us an opportunity to press the reset button and starting now, plan how we need to see that change happening for us to emerge stronger," he asserts.

To this, adds **Olivier Ponti**, VP Insights, ForwardKeys, that there exists a need for innovation, as he considers the present the best time for it. He says, "Sustainability is something that people will keep taking into account increasingly, hence, it should be taken as an integral part of the new business model because these concerns are here to stay. It's not a fad and needs to be taken seriously. The future must take into account innovation, sustainability, sanitisation and health norms prescribed by governments."



**Olivier Ponti**  
VP Insights  
ForwardKeys

sumers of resources and high producers of effluents play a vital role in this. At Lords Hotels & Resorts, impactful initiatives were taken to implement sustainable tourism practices even before COVID-19 spread. Initiatives like minimising plastic, use of glass water bottles, use of dispensers for daily hygiene amenities, water re-

**It should be taken as an integral part of the new business model; it's not a fad**  
— Olivier Ponti

cycling, plants inside property for cleaner air, etc., to mention a few were adopted."

**An opportunity**  
Billa points out that customers would increasingly prefer sustainable tourism products as we move towards the post-COVID world. "The important thing is, how do we maximise the benefit to communities? We

**Sustainable tourism practices are here to stay in the post-COVID world, even when a cure is found**  
— Rakesh Mathur

up with policies that support. I think it is a great opportunity for India because we have a strong robust tourism sector, but we can't say that all parts of it work well for the community. This gives us a good opportunity to press the reset button to show our commitment to the environment and social values, and make sure that communities are benefitted not just by way of job creation, but also by way of supplies and being part of that ecosystem," he shares.

**Positive steps**  
The Ministry is in the process of making some changes in the new tourism policy, with responsible tourism as its foundation, says Sharma. "We can't discuss responsible tourism as a separate entity; it should be a part of everything we do. More elements will be added to responsible tourism as we move forward. It can-

**It cannot only be the responsibility of the service provider, but also the one receiving the service**  
— Meenakshi Sharma

not only be the responsibility of the service provider, but also the one receiving the service," she says.





# Pivot or stand still in business

**Zelam Chaubal**, Director, Kesari Tours, believes that we must be prepared for a MICE industry with new protocols in place when it recovers – perhaps one where travellers will require a doctor's fit-to-fly certificate or changed visa norms. She adds that domestic MICE will pick up before international.

**M**ICE groups can only start when the world resumes business activities and countries open their borders. The first few international countries that will open up to MICE will be the ones with very few cases and where safety precautions are strong, such as Dubai, Singapore, Sri Lanka,

Nepal, Azerbaijan, and a few favourite European countries like Amsterdam and Switzerland. These will also be the countries where governments and tourism boards are ready and prepared to welcome MICE traffic.

## SOPs in place

But before that can happen, we need to ensure that our SOPs are strong and we are all adhering to the new COVID-19 norms. We must be prepared

for a MICE industry with new protocols in place when it recovers – perhaps one where travellers will require a doctor's fit-to-fly certificate or changed visa norms. Travelers may be required to carry additional medical history documents at various points of their journey.

Airports will have new restrictions and so will the airlines. COVID-19 negative test certificates may be

the new requirement and we must therefore be ready to adapt to these new norms that different countries may apply. At the same time, we must also be prepared

**We must also be prepared for mandatory requirements such as COVID-19 insurance and even a COVID-19 tax**



smaller numbers until a vaccine is developed.

wanted to do. This is our opportunity to re-engineer ourselves. So let us make the most of it.

## Advice to agents

We all are going through a tough patch right now and we can either pivot or hang still. Each situation is different and each one of us has to face our fears. All of us have to prepare for the new normal not only in our offices but in every step of daily life. Develop a survival strategy, because only tough people last. Use this time wisely and do all that you have



**Zelam Chaubal**  
Director  
Kesari Tours

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

**DID YOU Know?**  
MICE was one of the first types of tourism to be impacted by the global spread of COVID-19 and it could be one of the last to fully return as international business arrivals are projected to fall by 35.3 per cent in 2020, according to data and analytics company GlobalData.



# Industry needs a frontline warrior

This pandemic has threatened our very existence and our best survival strategy is togetherness. If we are able to come together as one, we will have the strength of many. **Rajeev Jain**, Director, Rashmi Entertainment, shares his view on things that can help us get by during such tumultuous times.

**I** believe that it is the time of the small and medium enterprises like ourselves – who comprise the bulk of the industry – to make a difference. We are businessmen with our feet firmly planted on the ground. We are the most challenged at this time and need to look for solutions. The focus has to be on action that will make a difference in these times. The focus can't be on good-looking strategic presentations.

## Technology slowly taking over?

Technology, like it does for everything, will help here, too. However, let us consider that the human being has five senses – sight, sound, smell, touch, taste – tell me, which of these is virtual? Humans like meeting other humans, they like the physical 'experience'. That's why our business is called 'experiential' and that's why it can never go out of fashion. Ten thousand fans in a stadium can cheer the music of a popular artist, swinging with the beats – will you get

the same experience in front of a screen with a fizzy drink and popcorn?

Technology has its own place. It is a great value addition but it can never substitute the 'real thing'. A Zoom call versus shaking hands and taking a selfie with Alia Bhatt? Tell me, which would you choose?

Of course, it is happening now, but these are substitutes. Don't worry, keep the faith – the 'real thing' will be back. Yes, with safety measures in place and yes, with some changes, but the real thing will be back! Even if it is small in the beginning, we need to execute our events with maximum sanitization and build confidence. With every passing day, the audience numbers will increase and the economy will open up slowly.

I believe simplicity cuts through the clutter and provides the best

solutions. I see positivity bringing profit. I see us all associated in a congenial atmosphere. I see us united to create a difference,

**Our industry will enjoy a revival soon. With creativity, innovation and technology, our industry will create new engagement models soon**

other's strengths and negate our weaknesses. This will have to be gender and age agnostic simply because the focus on profit cannot afford to discriminate. This is my vision. And I see it without any rose-tinted glasses. Because I have the cold, hard clarity that comes from being a small business owner who has worked for more than a decade in the trenches for our association and who represents the realities that confront every small and medium-sized enterprise today.

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Any team is only as strong as its weakest member. Therefore, everyone is as important as the other. I believe the maximum growth is going to come from cities beyond metros.

## Future forward

I have spent more than two decades in this indus-

try and what I have learnt is that 'The Show Must Go On'. There is no denying that the Indian experiential and wedding industry is currently suffering and agencies are struggling to stay afloat. But, I believe our industry will enjoy a revival soon. With creativity, innovation and technology, our industry will create new engagement models.



**Rajeev Jain**  
Director  
Rashmi Entertainment

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

## Government focus areas

❖ All tenders from government be done by 100% Indian-owned companies.

❖ Soft loans collateral free, reduced interest with 12 months moratorium.

❖ GST should be waived or reduced for at least the next two years.

❖ Declare events as an industry and create more opportunities.

❖ Government must pay agencies for work already done by them.



# 'Everyone must re-strategise'

**Lindsay White**, Etihad Airways' Vice President, Eastern Region (APAC and ISC), shares details about what the airline has been doing to make their corporate passengers feel safe not just before boarding but also during their flight. Their teams have been working round the clock to ensure agents also stay updated on the latest developments.



Hazel Jain

**Q** Are you engaging with the trade in India, especially those who pick up business travel?

Our trade partners have been cooperative, and we are thankful for their continued support. We understand that the situation is dynamic and one that none of us have experienced before, leading to a lot of uncertainty and apprehensions among people. To provide maximum support to our trade partners, our teams have been working round the clock to make sure they are the first to know about our new policies, updated global network, procedures and other developments. We have also been regularly engaging in knowledge sharing sessions and have conducted various webinars to build industry confidence and keep our trade partners updated.



**Lindsay White**  
Vice President Eastern Region (APAC and ISC), Etihad Airways

**Q** Is there any new product offering for Business Class or corporate passengers?

Last month, we launched 'Etihad Wellness', a comprehensive health and hygiene programme and customer guide. This is championed by the introduction of specially trained Wellness Ambassadors, a first in the industry, who will provide essential travel health information and care, from pre-flight and at the airport as well as

on board. All our Wellness Ambassadors, a multi-lingual and dedicated team, undergo special training at the airline's training facilities in Abu Dhabi. They are available 24x7 and guests can reach out



**We offered members 40 per cent more bonus miles when transferring loyalty points into Etihad Guest Miles for the first time from a range of partner programmes.**

to them via e-mail. They will also be available at Abu Dhabi International Airport as well as on-board to ensure guests are assisted at every point of their journey.



**Q** How do you think loyalty programmes will change?

The pandemic has impacted every industry, and every business will have to re-strategise and adapt. For our Etihad Guest, we have initiated multiple ac-

tivities to support our loyalty members across the globe. We offered members 40 per cent more bonus miles when transferring loyalty points into Etihad Guest Miles for the first time from a range of partner programmes across banking, telecommunica-

tions and hotels. Holders of any of the Etihad Guest co-branded Visa payment cards across India can continue earning miles on every purchase through their card.

**Q** Are you looking to extend flexibility on bookings?

Etihad has introduced travel waivers, solutions and benefits to help ease the burden and provide maximum flexibility. In March, Etihad Airways introduced Etihad Credit, giving guests the freedom to delay their travel by permitting free cancellation and offering the original value of their booking to be used as credit towards their next trip. ↓



*Global Himalayan Expedition has launched the Mountain Museums initiative to create a network of museums that not only preserve local heritage, but also double up as vibrant hubs for travellers to learn.*

# Business in the east dips further

Hit hard by the pandemic and dismayed by the lack of sufficient government support to eastern India, **Manoj Saraf**, Managing Director, Gainwell Travel, is now diversifying his company's business into education. He says that even drive-in holidays may not bring in much revenue till people are not confident enough to travel again.



Nisha Verma

**E**ver since the lockdown was imposed in March this year, the situation for the travel industry in eastern India has not been very good, says **Manoj Saraf**. "We've had ad hoc announcements of lockdown and change in policies by the state government, because of which there were again massive cancellations and airlines had to pull out flights. The activity might have

gone up from zero to 10-15 per cent, but it is now returning to under 10 per cent because of these reasons," he shares.

Domestic business, too, was not of much help, claims Saraf, adding that though they were trying to sell driving holidays to nearby resorts, the response was lukewarm because people were still wary of travelling. "People are still very scared of getting out and even if they get into a hotel or resort, they are not sure about



**Manoj Saraf**  
Managing Director  
Gainwell Travel

hygiene standards enroute to the hotel and places they visit. Unless that fear is out of people's minds, I don't think these drive-aways are going to bring much revenue to us," he says.

## Not a helping hand

Distraught at the lack of sufficient aid from the government, especially to eastern India, Saraf says that "Unfortunately, in our country, the kind of package or the benefits that the government has tried to pass on to us as an

MSME, or as part of the travel industry, have been negligible, especially compared to what other countries have done. The importance of this industry has never been understood by the



**People who invested in hotels in the East have taken a bigger risk than somebody who has built a hotel in Agra or Goa, hence, you must support those people**

Indian government, whether it is inbound or outbound. If the government wanted, there wouldn't have been mass retrenchment of people in this industry. The eastern region gets

a very small share of the entire business from India, therefore we require special care. While the government has been supporting tourism in eastern India through its look-East policies that have given good results to inbound tourism in the region and some growth in airports and outbound tourism as well, when I compare eastern India to other regions of the country, we are probably getting less than five per cent of the total business. Delhi and Mumbai get around 70 per cent of the total tourism business, and the remaining 25 per cent is taken away by the southern region. I feel that whenever a policy comes to support the business, a little extra should be given to the region which requires more support. People who invested in hotels and the hospitality industry in the east have taken a bigger risk than somebody who has built a hotel in Agra or Goa.

Hence, if you must support those people, certain tax reliefs or some ad hoc loans should be given to them to tide along this period. Some incentives can be given to support the salaries of the staff, who may otherwise have to be retrenched."

## Befriend the agent

Many in the industry believe that the COVID-19 pandemic may have upped the importance of the traditional travel agent for customers, primarily because they want to be sure there will be someone to help them out should they be in crisis. "It is the job of the travel agent to inform the customer at least a day before travelling about what to expect at departure, during the flight, arrival, immigration, transportation and quarantine. These complications, hassles and regulations will continue. That's where the travel agent comes in," he explains. ↓

## Diversifying to adapt

Necessity is the mother of invention, believes Saraf, who will now be diversifying his business into education. "We have tied up with a few universities like Amity, where we are taking classes for hospitality students as well as travel & tourism students. We are teaching them how to sell certain products and how to be employable by the industry so that when things return to normal, they will see value in joining companies like ours. We have been approached by a few more institutes for such classes. In addition, we have someone who is teaching Spanish," he says.



# A bit of red in Silver State



One of the most scenic places in southern Nevada, USA, is as popular with visitors as it is with locals, and that place is Red Rock Canyon. Hands-down one of the most breathtaking places in the Silver State, nearly 2 million people come here to explore red-banded canyons, towering sandstone peaks, and ancient petroglyphs.



TT Bureau

Whether you are travelling across Nevada or from across the globe, the glorious desert landscape of Las Vegas and the surrounding area is definitely worth the trip. Red Rock Canyon, which measures more than 195,000 acres, is Nevada's first National Conservation Area and serves as a mecca which exemplifies the unique quali-



Visitors can horseback ride, picnic and rock climb, which is a very popular activity in Red Rock Nevada. Horseback enthu-

out the bookstore and exhibit rooms. With a 21-km (13-mile) scenic drive that covers picturesque hiking trails, there's something for every member of your family or car troupe to enjoy here.

## Red Rock's Climbing

Serious rock climbers crave the challenges of Red Rock's climbing, from its towering sandstone ridges to its huge boulders. With

varnish rock is considered to be the most difficult, but the most exhilarating! Climbing Red Rock Canyon has a few perks — and it's not just the few hundred short sport routes and big 20-pitch outings. Before choosing and tackling your line though, make sure you're checking the weather! While Red Rock Canyon stays relatively warm, rain, rock climbing and wet sandstone don't mix too well.

The best thing about Red Rock Canyon, Nevada, is the availability of bolted anchors on the many popular multi-pitch routes. At Red Rock, you'll experience true freedom away from the noise and traffic of city lights during the day. If you're at Red Rock National Conservation Area at night, you'll be able to see the glow of the city lights from Las Vegas. Only then will you realise how close you are to the city!

## Red Rock's Hiking

While rock climbing Red Rock is a popular experience, many visitors

## Challenging hikes

❖ **Turtlehead Peak Trail:** This is a strenuous, 8-km (5-mile) hike through exposed ledges, climbs past sandstone crags, and interesting washes. As you start to gain elevation, hikers will traverse rocks, gullies and more. The Turtlehead Peak Trail begins at Sandstone Quarry parking lot.

**Length: 8 kms**

❖ **Calico Tank Trail:** Even though this hike is only 4 kms (2.5 miles), there are a few parts that can be tricky to navigate. You will gain about 400 feet in elevation as you walk up some interestingly constructed stone stairs. This is an in-and-out hike, meaning you will leave on the same trail you came in on.

**Length: 4 kms**

❖ **Ice Box Trail:** Ice Box Trail is best taken during spring and showcases dramatic high-walled yellow and charred-looking canyon formations, junipers, pinyon pines, and large boulders, some the size of cars! The trail envelops adventurers by surrounding them with steep walls that rise up around on three sides.

**Length: 3.7 kms**

❖ **Calico Hills:** Not too far away from the visitors' centre, Calico Hills are a signature point of interest for tourists to the area. The hills can be accessed from a few points, but there are two main parking lots that people typically take off from. This hike is 9.7 kms (6 miles) round-trip and runs along the front side of the red stone ridge.

**Length: 9.7 kms**



ties of the Mojave Desert. Although the recreation area is just 27 kms (17 miles) west of the Las Vegas Strip — close enough that peak tops are visible from the Las Vegas Valley — it is worlds away in terms of atmosphere.

Take in the startling contrast of red sandstone layered through grey limestone in the sheer cliff faces, some of which reach a staggering 1,800 feet, is an incredible natural wonder that won't soon be forgotten. Beyond the spectacular sightseeing and photography opportunities, Red Rock Canyon offers an array of recreational activities, too.

siasts will find numerous trails among the fiery red sandstone. We also recommend stopping by the visitors' centre to check

more than 1,200 named routes, there are plenty of choices for every ability. Most of the rock is Aztec sandstone. The desert



forget the epic hiking available throughout this massive area.

**Lost Canyon Children's Discovery Trail:** This trail can be easily enjoyed by everyone. Less than a 2-km round-trip with a 200-foot elevation gain, Lost Canyon Children's Discovery Trail includes waterfalls, natural tunnels, petroglyphs, a boardwalk, stone stairs, and more than a few opportunities to catch some wildlife.

**Keystone Thrust Trail:** If you are looking to thoroughly immerse yourself in the geological grandeur of the area, the Keystone Thrust Trail is where the Pacific

and North American continental plates signed their names into the earth. This hike is about 3.5 kms (2.2 miles) round-trip and offers 360-degree views of Calico Hills. The elevation gain for this hike is 400 feet and will begin from White Rock parking lot.

**White Rock/Willow Spring Loop Trail:** This hike could be considered moderate for some, but only if you choose to add La Madre Spring to the mix. The White Rock/Willow Spring Loop is 7.1 kms (4.4 miles). You will start this hike from White Rock parking lot, too! This trail will take you through a quintessential desert landscape. 🌵



# Safety assured as Dubai reopens

**Abdulla Yousuf**, Acting Director, Proximity Market, International Operations, Dubai Tourism, shares how the emirate is ready to receive tourists, ensuring their safety and health is not compromised at any level. The tourism board continues to be in constant dialogue with India travel trade, keeping them updated on the latest developments.

 Nisha Verma

**D**ubai has opened its doors to the world for tourism, and **Abdulla Yousuf** is confident that in 2021, they will be able to begin the much-awaited Dubai Expo. "Dubai has shown and proven in the past that we adapt quickly and we've taken a collaborative solution-building approach with our stakeholders to allow us to continue the reopening of attractions and welcoming back of tourists. We have seen many locations reopen in the last weeks, events will start to come back soon and in the long term, we are confident that next year Dubai will deliver an Expo (October 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022) that makes sense in a post-COVID world, as we expect global communities to stand together in solidarity, now more than ever," he says.

He adds that tourists and visitors have been welcomed back to Dubai since July 7, 2020, and that for all visa-related information, they are being guided to The General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs and advised to check their country's travel advisory for latest guidance on outbound trips.

### Making way for India

Talking about promotional initiatives in India, he elaborates, "We always keep up to date with the current local situation and latest developments in every market. For us it is important to stay in close contact with our partners and travel trade contacts in India. Since March, we've hosted nine webinars with a total of 5,322 attendees. We also remain in close communication with our office in India regarding changes due to COVID-19."



**Abdulla Yousuf**  
Acting Director, Proximity Market,  
International Operations, Dubai Tourism

### Assuring and reassuring

With the city being open again and with many locations and entertainment facilities having reopened as well, Dubai is keen on ensuring every traveller's safety and well-being, says Yousuf. For this, they have launched a compliance programme - Dubai Assured - to certify and recognise hotels and retail establishments, food and beverage outlets, and attractions

that have managed to implement all public health protocols for the prevention and management of COVID-19. The specially-designed 'Dubai Assured' stamp

 **Events will start to come back soon and in the long term, we are confident that next year Dubai will deliver an Expo that makes sense in a post-COVID world** 

will be issued free of charge and will be valid for 15 days. It will be renewed every two weeks upon further verification by inspectors from the relevant authorities in

### Battling COVID-19

"All tourists, residents, citizens and transit passengers must present a valid negative PCR test (which is valid for 96 hours). Should the tourist show symptoms on arrival, they will be re-tested. If the result is positive, compliance with 14-day isolation becomes mandatory. The traveller will be bearing the cost of treatment and isolation unless their carrier is Emirates, which is the first airline in the world to cover its customers for COVID-19 medical and quarantine expenses when they travel to and from the UAE and around the world free of charge."

- Abdulla Yousuf

collaboration with Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, Dubai Economy and Dubai Municipality, as Dubai continues to welcome tourists following the reopening of the city to international visitors. "The initiative is part of Dubai's effort to being considered one of the world's safest destinations. Finally, combined efforts of the UAE's leadership, government

and tourism sector stakeholders, as well as Dubai Airports, Emirates Airlines and flydubai, led to Dubai receiving the Safe Travels stamp by WTTC," he shares. Dubai has also granted access to pools for tourists. "Hotels in Dubai have deployed stringent disinfection measures for their facilities, as well as enhanced sanitisation covering contact points," informs Yousuf. 

# Get some vitamin 'sea' in Thailand

The X2 Khao Lak Anda Mani Resort, a property by Thai-based hospitality group Cross Hotels & Resorts, features nine luxurious rooms with breathtaking views of the sea, pool, or lush garden, besides first-class service. It may be a good idea to plan now and vacation later!



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**V**isualise a tantalising holiday by the Andaman Sea, sipping your favourite drink without a worry in the world. The surrounding green fields, rolling mountains, and small fishing villages offer a quiet and authentic atmosphere, while the first-class service and accommodation provide the cosmopolitan guest with the ultimate vacation experience. That's what's in store at X2 Khao Lak Anda Mani Resort

in Thailand for those who seek a dream-like holiday.

### Accommodation

Room types at the spectacular resort, located at the heart of Phang Nga Province in Thailand, include four suites with couple's bath, two oceanfront villas with couple's bath, and one each of a suite, a triple suite, and a villa with couple's bath. While the suites are artfully designed to offer pure comfort and a stunning view of the resort's natural surroundings,



the couple's bath in select rooms adds an edge of romance with a bathtub large enough for two.

The oceanfront villa is an epitome of luxury and elegance, and offers spacious living quarters, modern amenities, a couple's bathtub, rain showers, and an open veranda with its own garden coupled with an endless view of the ocean and the surrounding lush vegetation. If that's not dreamy, we wonder what is!

If you wish to step out of all that comfort and explore the neigh-


bourhood, you'll have enough to see and enjoy. The resort is located close to some of the most pristine beaches, vibrant markets, unique temples and authentic local fishing villages. It is also within a short drive of several national parks that are home to exotic wild animals, floral swamplands and beautiful waterfalls. Now, isn't that thrilling?

### Food made to order

Using only the freshest locally sourced ingredients, the 4K restaurant offers a unique culinary experience that combines Thai and international flavours to create savoury dishes that delight every palate. The chef at the resort can also tailor special meals for guests with dietary requirements.

In fact, guests can even opt for a Thai cooking class while at the resort! Thailand is famous for its flavourful dishes that feature a delightful blend of exotic tastes - sweet, sour, spicy, salty, bitter and savory. A cooking class will be a true culinary adventure and add to the zest! 



 **A GVK-led survey reveals that 98.4% of passengers flying to and from CSMIA found the airport to be safer than bus or train stations, while 99.6% found air travel to be the most reliable mode of transport.**



# India's wildlife proposition

An increased demand is expected for India's wildlife experiences once travel re-opens, yet it is hard to say whether it will be any match to the experience of true wilderness that some other countries offer. Are our national parks even ready to offer a wholesome experience to tourists? Seven experts share their views with TRAVELTALK.



Hazel Jain

With 104 national parks and 551 wildlife sanctuaries, India is a haven for wildlife lovers. It therefore makes rational sense to package this product well before promoting it within India and internationally. But, we find that more and more Indians are choosing to travel to other countries to experience wildlife, even though they have to spend more.



Supriya Khaitan  
CEO  
Time Travels

Explaining this phenomenon is Supriya Khaitan, CEO of Time Travels, who says, "People are used to the top-of-the-line African experiences and we are unable to provide something at par since the parks in India are run within protected zones which are controlled by the government. Implementation of responsible

We are unable to provide something at par since the parks in India run within protected zones controlled by the government

— Supriya Khaitan

ecotourism, minimisation of environmental impacts, generating funds for conservation,



Shoba Mohan  
Founder  
RARE India

and education of visitors could mark as the starting point to providing wholesome wildlife tourism." Khaitan has recently co-founded an initiative called

Wildlife tourism is currently focused on tigers and this has to change to a more inclusive tourism that can highlight the forests

— Shoba Mohan

'Fomonomore' that is organising a 35-series webinar session with experts from nine countries on 'Big Cats'.

Education, particularly, forms the basis of a wholesome wildlife experience. And this has no age barrier. Shoba Mohan, Founder, RARE India, is also a proponent of this. She says, "We must work towards some self-regulation and rules for wildlife tourism. It is currently focused on tigers and this has to change to a more inclusive tourism that can highlight the forests. In my opinion, children should be taken off jeeps and taken for walks in the forests, allowed to touch trees, pick up rocks to take a closer look at the creepy-crawlies, see a couple

of snakes, etc. Sitting on jeeps and zipping around in search of a tiger is no experience. Should we not educate them about the threats to the tiger and how to protect them and respect their space and habitat? They are definitely not getting the right picture when a bunch of jeeps 'gherao' the animal and create a commotion."

The accompanying guides should ensure this, says National Awardee Tourist Guide, Tapan Kumar Mishra.



Tapan Kumar Mishra  
Tourist Guide and  
National Awardee

He adds, "Limited number of tourists should be allowed into a national park in a day. For the sake of revenue, there are currently no limits to it which in turn disturbs the wildlife. Moreover, it is surprising that

Limited number of tourists should be allowed into a national park in a day. For the sake of revenue, there are currently no limits

— Tapan Kumar Mishra

we don't have BSVI vehicles for safaris. We need to be more environmentally sensitive. Most of the national parks in India operate jeeps that are more than 15 years



Nirmalya Choudhary  
Chapter Chairman  
IATO - North East Chapter



The authorities should work in association with local, state and national tourism associations as well as state tourism authority to introduce guidelines

— Nirmalya Choudhary

old." Mishra adds that branding and aggressive marketing is also lacking. "If Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand can bank on wildlife tourism for revenue, why not India?" he questions.

But there are some good news coming out of these parks as



Daniel D'souza  
President & Country Head (Leisure)  
SOTC Travel

well. Nirmalya Choudhary, Chapter Chairman, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) – North East Chapter, shares, "The Kaziranga National Park authorities do a fantastic job of protecting and nurturing the park. They should consider adopting interesting means to educate visitors on unique aspects of Kaziranga and the responsible measures to be adopted during their safaris. The authori-

Gen Z and millennials also show strong inclination for adventure and nature-based holidays with families

— Daniel D'souza

ties should work in association with local, state and national tourism associations to introduce guidelines for this."



Ensuring these steps are taken and creating a complete wildlife experience has become more important than before. Daniel D'souza, President & Country Head (Leisure), SOTC Travel, sees strong demand for



Rajeev Kale  
President & Country Head –  
Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas  
Cook (India)

Ranthambore for October and November for their wilderness packages. "Other popular reserves include Kanha, Gir and Jim Corbett National Park. Gen

We need the government to look into key aspects urgently: environmental training, monitoring of hotels near protected areas, prevention of encroachment and poaching, etc

— Rajeev Kale

Z and millennials also show strong inclination for adventure and nature-based holidays with families," he says.

Echoing this sentiment is Rajeev Kale, President & Country Head – Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India), who shares, "The lockdown has brought nature and the outdoors into focus and we are seeing encouraging demand for wild-

life tourism. We therefore need the government to look into key aspects urgently: certification and environmental training,



Ajay Jain  
Director  
Waltz Tours & Travels

strict monitoring of hotels near protected areas, prevention of encroachment and poaching, and creation and promotion of new wildlife circuits."

But before this can happen, the basic requirement of good infrastructure is lacking.

Ajay Jain, Director, Waltz Tours & Travels, says, "Not all wildlife places are well connected to national parks. There are few good hotels, and not experienced naturalists. For example, Dudhwa has only one property

Not all wildlife places are well connected to national parks. There are few good hotels, and not experienced naturalists

— Ajay Jain

which is up to the mark. Katarinaghat, which is well-known for vultures, does not have even a single property that can cater to foreign tourists. It only has a government guest house which, at times, is not up to expectations."



# Trade lauds 'Amazing' beaches

The India offices of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) have launched a digital campaign - #TogetherThailand - for the India travel trade. It features weekly contests, and the theme for the first week was 'Amazing Beaches in Thailand'. The trade shared its most memorable Thai beach memories, and we bring to you some glimpses...



Amar Kumar Sahu of WVW Tourism with others at Pattaya Beach



Rajeev Sabharwal, Gaurav Travels, enjoys a sweet moment in Thailand



Naeem Khan of Mulberry Tours sails the sea with friends in Thailand



Debabrata Tripathy of Go Holidays at Sai Khao Beach



Saraogi, Holiday Tripster, shares a glimpse of his Amazing Thailand vacation



Kavita Churiwalla of Nimbus Tours & Travels at Thailand's James Bond Island



Bhakti Samantaray, Thus Holidays, at Loh Dalum



Shubham Kothari from Flying Venus Travels enjoys the ocean breeze off Koh Samet Beach



Vikas Suri of Lords Hotels & Resorts shares glimpses from his Amazing Thailand trip



Alok Kumar of Connect Travel Craft at James Bond Island



Amit Sachdev, Unique Air Travel, shares fond memories of Koh Chang Beach



# Gratis visa for Indians

In a major development, Embassies of Spain and Slovakia have agreed to issue 'Gratis Visa' to all Indians who were issued a visa earlier this year but could not travel in the last few months because of the pandemic.



Manas Dwivedi

The decision came following the appeal by Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI), which had sent a letter to European embassies in India, requesting them to issue Gratis Visa to all those travellers who despite having received valid travel visas this year could not undertake the planned visits.



Commenting on the development, **Riaz Munshi**, President, OTOAI, said, "We are pleased with this development and remain hopeful that in times to come, more European embassies agree to issue Gratis Visa. We understand that it will take some time for outbound travel to pick up from India, but moves such as these will help in building people's confidence for international travel



**Riaz Munshi**  
President, OTOAI

while also offering some relief to their pocket. This is the time to show solidarity so that together we can get travel and tourism back on its feet. This will benefit a lot of Indian travellers who couldn't travel due to COVID restrictions."

Sharing his view, **Ivan Lancaric**, Ambassador of Slovak Republic to India, said, "Applicants who could not travel on their Schengen visa to Slovakia because of the COVID-19 pandemic can apply for this visa fee waiver individually at the time of submission of their new ap-

plication. This possibility covers not only tourists but all Schengen visa categories. We are keen on promoting travel destinations in Slovakia. The



**Moves such as these will help in building people's confidence for international travel while also offering some relief to their pocket.**

'My visa' section will assist tourists travelling to Slovakia."

An official statement from the Embassy of Spain read, "Please be informed that the Embassy of Spain will reissue the visa without any cost. The petition of the same should be routed through BLS only for which the applicant will be asked to pay the service tax to BLS."

# E-visa for Russia from Jan

Starting January 1, 2021, Russia will start issuing a 16-day single-entry electronic visa for Indian tourists, to be valid for 60 days. Applicants only need to fill out an online application, which will be reviewed within four days.



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Indian visitors will be now be able to obtain single-entry business, humanitarian and tourist visas in the form of an electronic document. Under the new regulations, citizens of 53 countries will be able to obtain the e-visa. Applications for the new-style visas will need to be made via a Russian Foreign Ministry website. VFS Global is currently managing Visa Application Centres for Russian visas in India. In October 2019, Russia had started issuing e-visas for entry to St. Petersburg.

Russia's national tourism agency, Rostourism, had recommended offering the e-visa at no cost to help the sector recover from the COVID-19 crisis, as well as suggesting extending e-visas from 16 days to 90-120 days and making them multiple-entry.

**Paresh Navani**, Partner, Russ Information Center, says that this will enable Indian tour-



**Paresh Navani**  
Partner, Russ Information Center

ists to book their tours to Russia just five days prior to the intended date of departure, making the process simple and quick. "Normally, the longer duration tours are between 10-14 days and this new system of 16-day e-visas will also be useful in cases where the guest cannot return as per schedule due to illness or any other reason, without having to worry about visa expiry. Furthermore, tourists can also extend their tours on the ground in Russia, if any destination is added or some more interest generates, making the

tourist wish for extension. This was not possible in the current type of e-visa for Indians. Overall, this digitisation of the visa process, duration of 16 days,



**Tourists can also extend their tours on the ground in Russia, if any destination is added or some more interest generates.**

access to all regions of Russia, and the sharp reduction in processing time for all Russian regions is a boon for the travel trade and our guests wanting to visit Russia," he shares.

International borders being closed due to COVID-19 has led to significant losses for the Russian tourism industry. The e-tourist visa is designed to help make up for the loss and overcome the crisis.

# Time to tweak the way you market

Peter Field, Author, Strategist and Marketing Consultant, once said, 'The only sensible course for any advertiser who wants to maintain a presence through this recession is to be putting money into long-term brand building.' While it is critical for brands to remain visible throughout the pandemic, here's how COVID-19 will likely change how they market themselves.



Hazel Jain

## Cost of going dark

An Institute of Practitioners in Advertising study stated 'Following a budget cut, the longer-term business harm for a brand will be considerable. A brand judged to be on the way down, because it has fallen silent, will rapidly see this manifested in word-of-mouth, which will accelerate the perception of failure'.

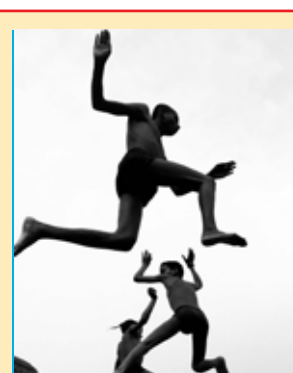


## Changed messaging

In order to orchestrate a successful marketing activity during a pandemic though, brands need to tweak their messaging and talk about how they are helpful in everyday life, about their efforts to face this situation, and offer a reassuring tone. Confidence-building is at the core of the sales idea.

## Shift in media

Media consumption during the pandemic has increased overnight and it will likely stay high for the months to come. Whether it is print, digital (web, TV or social media) or webinars, the audience engagement with brands is seeing a drastic shift, perhaps permanently. Now is the time to capitalise on this frenzy so its benefits can be reaped.



## Secure the best position

As the economy begins to restart, brands will need to be ready at the starting line. They will need to hit the ground running, and leave no stone unturned in marketing their product smartly. To be able to do this, companies must utilise their marketing messaging well by showcasing intelligence, empathy, flexibility, and a collaborative attitude. Such a strategy is bound to go a long way.

## Long-term benefits

Businesses that continue to maintain share-of-market during a slowdown have shown longer-term improvement in profitability that outweighed short-term savings. A McGraw-Hill Research showed that those that maintained or increased advertising spend during a recession had higher sales than those that didn't.



# Delhi, Mumbai top search

A recent analysis by ForwardKeys reveals how the most searched city pairs within India have drastically changed not just from last year but even over the previous month.



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**T**ravel analytics company ForwardKeys has employed several datasets to map how booking behaviour has panned out during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its recent analysis reveals that the most searched domestic route in India in the month of July 2020 for any future travel was Delhi-Mumbai. In June 2020, it was Delhi-Patna that topped the list.

## Top most searched domestic India routes in July for any future travel 2019 vs 2020

### July 2019

1	Delhi > Goa
2	Goa > Delhi
3	Mumbai > Delhi
4	Delhi > Mumbai
5	Mumbai > Goa

### July 2020

1	Delhi > Mumbai
2	Mumbai > Delhi
3	Patna > Delhi
4	Delhi > Goa
5	Goa > Delhi

## Top most searched domestic India routes in June for any future travel 2019 vs 2020

### June 2019

1	Delhi > Goa
2	Goa > Delhi
3	Mumbai > Delhi
4	Delhi > Mumbai
5	Bangalore > Delhi

### June 2020

1	Delhi > Patna
2	Mumbai > Varanasi
3	Mumbai > Delhi
4	Delhi > Mumbai
5	Delhi > Goa

In fact, these two city pairs have replaced Delhi-Goa as the most searched domestic route for any future travel during both June and July in 2019. In fact, Delhi-Goa has now dropped to the fourth position in July 2020, but gained a rank from being number five in June this year.

While June 2020 saw Delhi-Patna as the most searched route, in July, Patna-Delhi made the cut instead.

# Markha Valley cleaned up



'Markha Valley Clean Up Drive' was organised from July 21 to 28, 2020, by All Ladakh Tour Operator Association (ALTOA) in collaboration with Ladakhi Women's Travel Company, GB Pant NIHE and sponsored by Ladakh Tourism. Markha Valley is one of the most popular trekking routes in Ladakh.

# Ladakh Tourism's workshop



A three-day photography workshop was recently inaugurated by Deputy Chairman LAHDC, Leh, Tsering Sangdub. The workshop is one of many initiatives planned by Department of Tourism for skill development and strengthening the tourism sector in Ladakh.

# Resilient India ready for luxury

Sharing a few words of positivity during a period of mostly dejection is **Saurabh Tuteja**, General Secretary, Enterprising Travel Agents Association (North India). He encourages his fellow travel agents and industry members to look at what it is the traveller will look for now and focus their energies on domestic tourism.

**B**eing at home for almost five months now, everyone is looking for a change. When the world is still fighting a negative mindset and insecurities, people are indeed looking for the first opportunity to break the monotony and take small holiday breaks. Let it be a weekend to a drivable location or a drive to a hill station, which is of course a safer location in these COVID times.

Here comes the bigger responsibility for the tourism sector to play. We can't forget that the world is opening not because it's now 100 per cent safe, but it's the need of the hour to bring life back on track, to support a dying economy. It becomes really important to check how safe a destination and property are before suggesting them to the client. The next couple of months will surely see some movement hap-

pening, and the key to success is 'Go Domestic'. With more and more states opening borders for tourism, it is indeed an opportunity for our stressed minds sitting

to move the steering to beautiful local destinations, drivable destinations to begin with. This is surely the perfect time to get the right value of a client's money,

gives an opportunity to clients to upgrade their holiday. It is indeed a time when your aspirations of staying in a palace property or utmost luxury becomes af-

price, clients would surely love to indulge.

One day, the first call I got in the morning was from a client inquiring of a boutique property in a place that had good weather and may be 4-5 hours' drive from Delhi. That brought a smile to my face. This is surely a positive sign – a perfect opportunity to boost Indian tourism and the Indian economy. I personally believe that this is the time to explore offbeat destinations that are close to nature and activities that are in sync with the current need of social distancing, such as trekking, mountaineering, wildlife camping, wellness, etc. Yes, people are hesitant to move out, so we need to check, re-check and then assure them that the place they are going is safe to stay, eat in and roam around in. This will surely infuse positivity.

Our industry has understood the need of the hour. Innovative SOPs are being prepared by leading players in the trade to ensure that domestic tourism gains the confidence of the guest and can act as a stress buster for them to move ahead in life. With a major shift towards safety of guests, it is definitely a positive sign for the industry to open and welcome the world.



The Leela Palace Bengaluru (Image for reference only)

at home to move out and start exploring. We are lucky to be in a country that is, any day, far more resilient as compared to the Western world. This is the time

with most domestic properties offering massive discounts to fill their rooms. Luxury properties are available at nearly 40-50 per cent discount and that surely

fordable at a much lower price. With packages including pick and drop from home, which may be a few hours' drive, by luxury cars to inclusion of all meals and private pools at a certain



**Our industry has understood the need of the hour. With a shift towards safety of guests, it is a positive sign for the industry to welcome the world**



**Saurabh Tuteja**  
General Secretary,  
ETAA (North India)

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



## EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



AUGUST 2020

Date	Event	Time
16	Time Travels Webinar on Snow Leopard	5 pm
17	Time Travels Webinar on Tiger	5 pm
18	Korea Tourism Webinar for Bangladesh Travel Trade	11:30 am
18	Time Travels Webinar on Lion	5 pm
19	Korea Tourism Webinar for Nepal Travel Trade	12:15 pm
19	Time Travels Webinar on Cheetah	5 pm
20	Time Travels Webinar on Clouded Leopard	5 pm
21	CAPA India Webinar	5 pm
21	Time Travels Webinar on Puma	5 pm
22	Time Travels Webinar on Leopard	5 pm
23	Time Travels Webinar on Conversation Tourism	5 pm
24	Time Travels Webinar on Snow Leopard	5 pm
11	Time Travels Webinar on Big Cats of the world	5 pm

For more information, contact us at: [talk@ddppl.com](mailto:talk@ddppl.com)

# United voice of Kerala trade

Thirty six registered trade associations representing different sectors of the travel and hospitality industries in Kerala have unanimously decided to continue under one umbrella organisation - the Confederation of Kerala Tourism Industry (CKTI).



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The Confederation has re-elected **EM Najeeb**, Chairman, ATE group; Senior Vice President, IATO and Former President of KTM Society as the President, while **Sajeev Kurup**, Managing Director, Ayurvedamana Hospitals; President Ayurveda Promotion Society and Former Secretary of KTM Society has been elected as General Secretary. **Jose Dominic**, Chairman, CGH Earth Hotels is the Advisor and **G Gopinath**, Managing Director, BTH Hotels Kochi and President, Kerala Classified and Approved Hotels is the Treasurer.

A 65-member Executive Committee and a 35-member Task Force was also formed from all trade associations. The main aim of CKTI is to ensure survival and subsequent revival of the industry from



EM Najeeb  
President, CKTI

the pandemic. The Confederation has also sought an urgent financial aid package for the survival of the state's biggest service industry sector and other recovery measures for the 15 lakh employees who are directly linked to travel, tourism and hospitality. The various tourism industry associations

under CKTI have submitted many representations and suggestions to governments for the mere survival and existence of the sector through financial aid

**We have also decided to set up some CSR initiatives to help entrepreneurs and staff members of the tourism industry in Kerala**

packages and expect favourable decisions. The demands include waiving of taxes for one year and fixed electricity tariffs.

In conversation with **TRAVALTALK**, Najeeb said that under the umbrella of CKTI, all associations in the state are working together to save the industry from troubled times. "We have also decided to set up some CSR initiatives to help entrepreneurs and staff members of the tourism industry in Kerala who are in dire need. The industry has so far not received any support from the state government or from the Central government," he shared.

CKTI has decided to start with 1000 food kits for the immediate requirement of those who are in need. Najeeb added that they have formed committees to function effectively for CKTI. 🐦



*Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) has become a signatory of the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative, led by the United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization, in collaboration with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.*

# New process for airport pass

With regular follow-ups from Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), airport entry passes for tour operators have been acceded by the Ministry of Civil Aviation as per information received from Ministry of Tourism. While the revised criteria for number of passes to be issued has been announced, detailed guidelines are still awaited.



Manas Dwivedi

The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) and the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) have announced the new mechanism to issue Commercial Airport Entry Pass to tour operators and hotels. Such passes were discontinued effective December 31, 2019. The validity of the existing passes was first extended till January 31 and later, till March 31, 2020. The extension was given only to tour operators until a new mechanism to issue

was finalised and no new passes were being issued.

According to the new criteria, for inbound tour operators with a turnover up to ₹20 crore, two entry passes will be issued. For operators with turnover above ₹20 crore and up to ₹50 crore, four passes will be issued and for the ones with turnover above ₹50 crore, up to eight airport entry passes will be issued. Similarly for hotels, 4-star hotels will get two passes while 5-star and 5-star deluxe properties can get up to four passes.



Rajiv Mehra  
Vice President, IATO

Sharing more information is **Rajiv Mehra**, Vice President, IATO, who says, "When we got extension on passes till March 31, 2020, a new policy to issue the passes was supposed to come in. But, unfortunately, because of COVID-19, the issue was held up. IATO was following up with the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Ministry of Tourism. Our efforts became successful when the Ministry of Civil Aviation issued guidelines to issue passes to tour operators and hotels. Further details

and the guidelines are yet to be received from MoCA and BCAS, Government of India, and we shall be informed soon."

On the new process, Mehra says that IATO will also conduct training programmes as per the directive of the Ministry. "It was said that the method of



issuing passes will change. It may even include facial recognition at the airport to enter the premises. Such kind of details are still awaited from the authorities as to how this process will be implemented.

The first step has come out - the number of passes to be issued. We are expecting other guidelines soon. Once those guidelines come through, IATO

has promised the Ministry of Civil Aviation as well as Bureau of Civil Aviation Security that the association will conduct a training programme for the airport representative who enters the airport, with the help of CISF and BCAS. Let us hope that it happens soon. By the time international flights and visa restrictions are lifted by the government, we are hoping to receive the other guidelines," informs Mehra.

Providing updates on other activities of the association, Mehra shares that IATO is still trying its level best to get some relief for the industry. "We are meeting people in the concerned ministries and writing our concerns to authorities," he concludes. 🐦

## Number of passes to be issued: Tour Operators

Turnover up to ₹20 crore: 2 passes

Turnover from ₹20 crore-₹50 crore: 4 passes

Turnover above ₹50 crore: 8 passes

## Number of passes to be issued: Hotels

4-star hotels: 2 passes

5-star & 5-star deluxe hotels: 4 passes

**By the time international flights and visa restrictions are lifted by the government, we are hoping to receive the other guidelines**



*During H1 2020, reveals Accor, it opened 86 hotels (12,000 rooms) and by end-June 2020, the Group had a portfolio of 747,805 rooms (5,099 hotels) and a pipeline of 206,000 rooms (1,197 hotels), of which 75% were in emerging markets.*





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## FHRAI

### New Delhi

**Jaison Chacko** has joined as Secretary General, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI). In his last assignment, he worked with PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry as Head, Human Resource and Core Team Member, State Development Council (SDC). The expertise that he brings on board to FHRAI includes his strong faculties in operations management, business development, strategic planning, handling government relations and corporate networking supplemented with excellent interpersonal skills.



## W HOTEL

### Goa

Marriott International India has appointed **Tanveer Kwatra** as General Manager for W. He will be setting the pulse for the team by re-energising the sought-after W experience with their innovative 'Whatever/Whenever' philosophy and delivering an infectious and electrifying experience to its guests at India's first-ever W Hotel in Goa. Kwatra, who was part of the pre-opening team with W Goa in 2016 as Director of Culinary and then taking over as Executive Assistant Manager, moves to the new role from Andaz, Delhi.



## AARYA LORDS CLUB AND RESORTS

### Rajkot

Aarya Lords Club and Resorts has appointed **Anil Chavan** as General Manager. He brings with him rich and varied experience of over 17 years in reputed chains of hotels, in both operations as well as sales & marketing. In his new role, Chavan will be responsible for delivering high level of customer service. He will also play an integral role in formulating, administering, coordinating and directing activities of all departments to develop result-oriented goals for growth and profitability.



# WTM London reveals plan for 2020



WTM London is working closely with partners and experts to ensure a safe and successful experience at ExCeL London from November 2-4, 2020. Detailed plans are being made for every aspect of the show, which is set to be one of the first major exhibitions to take place globally since the COVID-19 pandemic started.

### UNWTO, WTTC & WTM Ministers' Summit

Tourism leaders from around the world will once again come together for the Ministers' Summit – the largest annual meeting of tourism ministers – at WTM London to set out a roadmap for a safer, greener and smarter future for the sector. Given the unprecedented scale of the challenge facing tourism, UNWTO and WTM will partner with WTTC, which is representing the global travel and tourism private sector at the event for the first time in its history, making it the UNWTO, WTTC & WTM Ministers' Summit. The summit will feature a day-long think-tank.



### Tourism investment summit

WTM London and ITIC will come up together to host a tourism investment summit that will help recover businesses and restore travellers' confidence after the COVID-19 pandemic. New Customer Experience Investment experts will also give guidelines on how to prepare for any other future global disaster. The conference also aims to explain the financial mechanisms that allow travel companies to recover and rebuild after being hit hard by the current COVID-19 pandemic.



### Marketing Conference and Master Class

WTM London will partner with The Five Percent to launch Marketing Conference and Master Class. The Five Percent will be hosting a one-day workshop with globally acclaimed paid traffic, branding, and marketing experts who will be sharing their knowledge on what is working right now across the businesses they work with. The agency brings over 20 years of business training experience and due to its influential management team, it has rapidly become renowned for creating highly actionable content for entrepreneurs.



### WTM Buyers' Club

In 2019, WTM Buyers' Club programme was revamped to create a new and exclusive experience for buyers, exhibitors and visitors. This year the programme will be even more exclusive, making WTM London the location for the world's top buyers to do business and to enhance the global travel industry. Buyers' Club members have significant budgets for travel products, and are often looking for new types of suppliers. Club members even have the comfort of dedicated lounges.



### Speed Networking

WTM Speed Networking will deliver a new format in line with new physical distancing procedures. There is a huge demand to gain access to speed networking from both exhibitors and buyers. The new format will deliver better connections and more meetings, all in a safe environment with plans being announced by the organisers in the coming weeks. These sessions have continuously helped start business conversations that carry on throughout the event.



### New Customer Experience

WTM London's organisers have been liaising closely with Public Health England, the UK Government, ExCeL London and the Association of Event Venues to enable the safest possible experience in November. There will also be hand sanitiser points, hygiene screens and increased cleaning schedules. The use of contactless technology for interactions such as scanning badges and payments at catering outlets, and pre-packaged food and drinks are also on the list.



### WTM Virtual (November 10-11)

WTM Portfolio has officially announced the launch of WTM Virtual, a two-day event that will take place from November 10-11, 2020. WTM Virtual will feature a host of conference sessions, roundtables, speed networking, and one-to-one meetings. The virtual show aims to ensure participation and global reach and to offset any attendee that cannot attend the live event due to travel restrictions, supporting the industry in recovering, rebuilding and innovating.





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# Thailand together with trade

Focused on maintaining and promoting Thailand as a preferred destination among Indian travellers, the India offices of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) are taking numerous measures to rebuild consumer confidence.



Manas Dwivedi

In an exclusive conversation with TRAVTALK, Directors of TAT India offices share details about the measures they are taking, shift in the marketing and promotional strategy, and their vision for the Indian market. On the kind of steps TAT is taking to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on tourism, **Cholada Siddhivarn**, Director, TAT Mumbai - South and West India, said that when the situation improves, tourism will revive under new preventive disease control measures that will stay in place until a vaccine is approved. "We are following the 'BEST' approach for the new normal of Thai tourism under the supervision of public

'Safety' (comes first) and 'Technology' (enhanced tourist experiences). BEST practices for tourism workers and visitors include digital technology to help track and trace," she said.

On measures to rebuild consumer confidence and travellers' safety in Thailand, **Vachirachai Sirisumpan**, Director, TAT New Delhi - North and East India, said, "For the current COVID-19



**Vachirachai Sirisumpan**  
Director, TAT New Delhi - North and East India



Indian millennial travellers will be the focus for this year and the next; niche markets will be explored for new marketing tactics and promotions

— Cholada Siddhivarn

situation in Thailand, I can say that it has improved and is in stable stage in controlling the pandemic within the country. With the recent launch of 'Amazing Thailand Safety and Health Administration' or SHA certification, the aim is to make tourism a part of overall national preventive measures and ensure that both Thai and foreign tourists have a positive experience, and that they are happy and confident in the

health. Under BEST, we will focus on 'Booking' (in advance), 'Environmental' (enthusiasts),

## #TogetherThailand campaign

"We are overwhelmed with the response to the 'Amazing Beaches in Thailand' theme and received more than 160 registrations in the first week of the campaign with an engagement from the travel trade of over 2,700. I would like to congratulate all the winners who have shared their memories with Amazing Thailand by creating some beautiful pictures, GIFs, videos and made Thailand a top-of-the-mind destination. I would like to thank you for good response and participation, and would invite our travel trade friends to join the campaign running this whole month of August."

— Vachirachai Sirisumpan



sanitation and safety of tourism products and services."

### New travel guidelines

On change in visa process for Indian citizens travelling to Thailand and whether they will need a COVID-19 negative certificate, Siddhivarn said, "Currently, visa on arrival (VOA) is suspended till September 30, 2020. This applies to all countries/territories that had earlier been entitled to apply for VOA. In addition, VFS for

be a possible switch in the approach, Siddhivarn said, "TAT India offices are focusing on maintaining and promoting Thailand as a preferred destination



Everyone knows and believes that once travel and tourism is permitted, India will be one of the key markets which will bounce back quickly

— Vachirachai Sirisumpan



**Cholada Siddhivarn**  
Director, TAT Mumbai - South and West India

Thailand visa application in India is still closed until further notice. Currently, only 11 groups of Thai and foreign nationals are allowed to enter Thailand with 'Certificate of Entry' from a Thai Embassy or consulate overseas." Sirisumpan added that currently, non-Thais who plan to enter Thailand need a health insurance policy covering treatment and medical expenses related to COVID-19, with a minimum coverage of US\$100,000.

### Connecting with India

When asked about TAT's marketing and promotional strategy for the India market and will there

for all Indian travellers. Since the start of the lockdown in India and with travel restrictions applied in many countries, we have continued to communicate with our travel trade partners as well as consumers directly, to enhance Thailand as a top-of-mind destination. Indian millennial travellers will be the focus for this year and the next; niche markets will be explored for new marketing tactics and promotions."

Sirisumpan added that the Indian market is very important and continues to be so for Thailand. "Everyone knows and believes that once travel and tourism is permitted, India will be one of the key markets to bounce back quickly. However, we need to monitor and evaluate the situation and its impact on the travel industry," he said.

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