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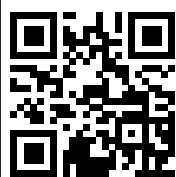
SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY

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## STB India Roadshow 2021

Kicking off the new year early to connect with the travel trade fraternity in India, Singapore Tourism Board (STB) is organising its first Virtual Tradeshow series over a four-day period starting January 12, 2021. Speaking of the initiative, **GB Srithar**, Regional Director, India, Middle East & South Asia, said, "We invite our valued partner-friends to join us and the expected 40+ Singapore tourism stakeholders (comprising attractions, DMCs and hotels) to network and re-engage. Themed 'Charting Our Pathways to Tourism Recovery', we will present



**GB Srithar**  
Regional Director, India, Middle East & South Asia, Singapore Tourism Board

latest developments in Singapore and share information on product enhancements." The roadshows will be held by region: **January 12 - South India, January 15 - North India, January 19 - West India, January 21 - East India.**

# MOT has its plate full

**Rupinder Brar**, ADG, Ministry of Tourism, says that it is imperative that the government and industry work together in promoting both domestic and international travel by leveraging infrastructure development and heritage.



Nisha Verma

Challenging times that COVID-19 brought along have made Ministry of Tourism think out of the box, claims **Rupinder Brar**, adding that she's glad the industry and government are on the same page, giving them comfort that there is harmony in the thought process. "All that needs to be done is to actually start working together on a few things," she suggested.



**Rupinder Brar**  
Additional Director General, MOT

Brar also shared that they are considering the option of providing insurance to inbound travellers. "We are studying

international models to see how we, as a country, can incentivise travellers to come to our country and offer a certain sense of security, which would aid the process. MOT is in dialogue with insurance providers as well as the Ministry of Finance to see if the government could take the tab for insurance, and if not, we could at least put a structure in place for the same. There is a lot of learning for all of us in that and we will be taking it forward," she revealed. Brar

MOT is in dialogue with MoF to see if the government could take the insurance tab

was addressing attendees at a webinar organised by FAITH titled 'Aviation &

Contd on page 10 ▶

## Biggest learnings of 2020

Year 2020, when the travel trade had to not only bear the effects of a pandemic but also learn from it, is finally drawing to a close. Here, they share some of the biggest learnings to be remembered by generations...



**Homa Mistry**  
CEO, Trail Blazer Tours

"The biggest learning has been how to survive by reducing expenses. However, there were many pending issues, which in our day-to-day life and corporate world we are unable to do, like product training for our own staff, which we have never given before. Secondly, a lot of work has happened on the IT front to make things more standardised, faster, sanitised, look and feel better. There is a lot of work that has happened in the back office. We were not able to do a lot of things, but we have been able to achieve a lot during this period."



**Sandeep Dwivedi**  
COO, ITQ

"I can list three learnings from 2020: first, aviation is a fundamentally strong industry depicted in the fact that a pandemic-level disruption was required to bring it to an absolute standstill. Second, innovations thrive in disruptions, that is, when the core foundation is shaken, either you struggle to survive underneath the debris or find innovative methods to emerge stronger. Finally, it is best to be a future-oriented organisation with a dedicated committee to constantly analyse the plausible risks for the short, medium and long term, and develop solid risk-aversion techniques."

Contd on page 8 ▶

## Northeast: A challenge to open up

Industry leaders are pleading for co-ordinated state rules and COVID-19 protocols in the Northeast region.



Hazel Jain

Most states in the Northeast region have now opened up their borders for non-essential, tourist traffic. Assam has also eased travel restrictions, and tourists carrying a negative RT-PCR certificate can travel anywhere within the state. However, since travellers to Assam like to visit neighbouring states of Meghalaya and Arunachal



**Ranjeet Das**  
President, TOAA

Pradesh as well, the lack of uniformity in rules and regulations between the

Contd on page 15 ▶





# X2 CHIANG MAI SOUTH GATE

X2 Chiang Mai South Gate is a six-bedroom luxury villa located directly beside the South Gate entrance to the old city. The villa sits amid lush tropical gardens and features an expansive swimming pool, a sprawling outdoor sala, luxurious living spaces and a fully equipped kitchen and dining room.



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## Sector-specific loan restructuring

The hospitality industry requests that loan extensions be given to the sector on similar lines as those given under the Prime Minister's scheme for loans below ₹25 crore for SMEs and MSMEs in order to save the industry from imminent collapse.

TT Bureau

Hotels and restaurants in India are once again on the edge with fears of state-wide lockdowns due to the rising number of COVID-19 cases. The hospitality industry has been engulfed in massive losses and mounting debts since the pandemic. In view of this, FHRAI is seeking a sector-specific loan restructuring plan from the government. It says that loan extensions should be given to the hospitality sector on similar lines as those given under the Prime Minister's scheme for loans below ₹25 crore for SMEs and MSMEs. Provisioning this, the association has asserted, is the need of the hour for saving the industry from imminent collapse.

**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, Vice President, FHRAI, says, "The hospitality and tourism sec-

tors of India are not a risk to the Indian banking system and need to be protected to prevent their assets from becoming non-performing. The total value at risk to the entire economy is close to 10 lakh crore with more than 50 per



**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**  
Vice President, FHRAI

cent job losses within the industry. There is a justifiable fear that most of the hospitality businesses in this industry would be unable to service their financial obligations and eventually slip into the most distressed category. Owing to this, the industry desperately



seeks support from the government and hopes that the government will soon make sector-specific tweaking in the policy to allow hospitality establishments to benefit from loan restructuring."

Over the 18 months from March 2018 till September 2019, the Gross Bank Credit by the banks and financial institutions stood at ₹83,99,196 Cr which as on September 2019 increased by 14 per cent to ₹95,57,487 Cr - an increase of ₹11,58,291 Cr. The total outstanding to the service sector was ₹25,30,553 Cr while the credit for tourism, hotels and restaurants sector was ₹56,766 Cr which is only 0.58 per

There is a justifiable fear that businesses would be unable to service their financial obligations

cent of the total deployment of Gross Bank Credit. While the total Gross Bank Credit has increased in the country, the share of tourism, hotels and restaurants sector has come down from the 18-month period from 0.62 per cent to 0.43 per cent in the current Financial Year. FHRAI has stated that a favourable policy needs to be drawn.

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# TRAVTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### Are we one yet?

There is no task so great that cannot be successfully completed through a planned, coordinated approach, where duties are clear, rules are outlined, and each party sees his job through to a T. Today, the world is faced by an adversity so extraordinary and unique that no nation, organisation or individual can be blamed for being unprepared! Who would have thought that in year 2020, when technological innovation was touching a new zenith, people were increasingly warming up to the idea of travel and tourism (be it for leisure, business and what have you), and the world was getting connected better, there would be a complete turnaround of events and everything would suddenly come to a standstill? No, no one had the faintest idea that year 2020 would go down in history as the year of the pandemic!

But, the human mind is such that it doesn't shy from adapting to the changing environment around it. Faced by a devastation of the sort that COVID-19 brought, governments as well as stakeholders in the global travel and tourism world put their minds together to determine a solution to mitigate the impact and move to a path of recovery. This solution was a coordination on a scale so large that the road couldn't have been anything less than bumpy! But, why is coordination so important when each nation, and each state or city within that nation, has been impacted differently in terms of number of cases and the number of tourist arrivals – both domestic and international? Shouldn't state A, with maybe 50-odd daily cases, be able to do away with mandatory quarantine for incoming tourists while state B, with 1,050-odd daily cases, establish strict quarantine guidelines for incoming tourists to slow the spread of the virus? But, wouldn't the latter discourage people from travelling to that state and keep it from a path of economic recovery? Thus, if travel and tourism is to be given a push by both government and the private sector, it needs to be made seamless! One cannot expect the traveller to check and re-check guidelines of every city, state and nation prior to travelling, because this would only discourage them from undertaking the journey.

Having uniform travel protocols across the world means truly opening travel and tourism!

# Golden age for spiritual tourism

Pilgrim trails of India have held huge potential since days of yore among domestic travellers. **Himanshu Talwar**, Assistant Secretary General, FHRAI, believes that millennials can be inspired to revisit their cultural routes as part of spiritual tourism.

India, with its diverse culture and numerous religions, is a goldmine when it comes to spiritual tourism. The avenues for spiritual tourism in the nation are wide and deep, and the tourism and hospitality sectors are putting this diversity to use. India is known for its spiritual and religion-based tourism. A lot of people from both within and outside the country go on pilgrimages throughout the year. There are tourist schemes and circuits for every religion, one among them being Sikhism.

Sikhism is a religion that emerged in the Indian sub-continent in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and is now the fourth largest religion in the country. Also, Sikhism happens to be one of the youngest of major world religions and the globe's fifth largest organised religion. It is the world's ninth largest overall religion as well. The core beliefs of Sikhism, which are outlined in the sacred scripture - Guru Granth Sahib - include faith and meditation in the name of one creator, engaging in selfless service, striving for justice for the benefit and prosperity of all, divine unity and equality of all humankind, and honest conduct and livelihood while living a householder's life.

The Sikh gurus taught that by constantly remembering the divine name and through selfless service, a devotee could overcome egoism. Service in Sikhism comprises three forms – physical, mental and material. The religion emphasises on 'honest work' and the concept of sharing – giving to the needy for the benefit of the community. Sikh tourism



is a rapidly growing category under spiritual and religion-based tourism. There are a great number of *gurdwaras* in India which attract high footfalls throughout the year from across the globe. The most sacred Sikh pilgrim visited sites, called 'Takhts', are located in various parts of the country. Sri Harmandir Sahib (Sri Akal Takht Sahib) at Amritsar, Sri Hazoor Sahib at Nanded, Sri Patna Sahib at Patna, Sri Damdama Sahib at Bhatinda, and Sri Keshgarh Sahib at Anandpur attract the maximum number of pilgrims.

#### Service and facilities

To specifically cater to Sikh pilgrims, the tourism and hospitality sectors have been offering a lot of services and facilities in and around *gurdwaras*. There are numerous tour packages available, which include facilities like booking tickets for air, rail or local transport; attendants to accompany the aged; 24x7 medical facilities; food (langar), etc., for people from all walks of life and religions.

There are several hotels around all of the famous Sikh places of worship and pilgrim sites, and hospitality industry professionals ensure that the pilgrims are

offered the best of service at a reasonable cost. To further boost this avenue of Sikh tourism, both Central and state governments have taken initiatives such as development of the airports in nearby cities, upgraded the railways and road infrastructure, and increased

as comfortable for pilgrims while they go to the state and/or around the country visiting and worshipping different places in single or multiple trips. This has also helped in increasing the interest of tourists, resulting in the overall growth of the tourism and hospitality industry.

**Sikh tourism is an engaging and popular category in spiritual and religious tourism**

security. Such measures have allowed Sikh pilgrims to visit all the sacred Takhts and *gurdwaras* which are scattered in different states across the country.

The state of Punjab has a profound cultural background and rich heritage, along with numerous Sikh places of worship, museums, natural wonders and resources. Various schemes and customised packages make things easy as well

Overall, Sikh tourism is an extremely engaging and popular category in spiritual and religious tourism. Due to the services and facilities that are being provided with even more innovative ideas and dedicated efforts, a lot of pilgrims are more than likely to be attracted to visit the sites. With the government and hospitality industry working hand-in-hand to support the pilgrims and travellers, such initiatives are a welcome move and will surely boost Sikh tourism's potential immensely.



**Himanshu Talwar**  
Assistant Secretary General, FHRAI

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

# Reinvent to re-scale business

Facing numerous challenges in tackling the pandemic led eminent leaders of the hospitality industry to brainstorm on navigating the marketplace out of crisis, at a virtual session of India International Hospitality Expo (IHE). These were their suggestions...



**KB Kachru**  
Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor,  
South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group

“We all have to accept that the hospitality market has shrunk. We have seen losses amounting to ₹90,000 crore. Although we have green shoots of revival, I still think significant recovery will not be seen before end of 2022 or early 2023. To stay afloat, we have to reinvent ourselves and rethink in terms of designing and rebuilding.”

“As a hotel manager, one needs to keep an eye out on achieving breakeven as an immediate goal. While the much-awaited vaccine will have its own trajectory, we will have ups and downs, but we will need to take full advantage of all the micro opportunities for growth that come to us. This is the most important thing that GMs should focus on.”



**Rajiv Kaul**  
Advisor, The Leela Palaces  
Hotels & Resorts

“COVID-19 has been a humanitarian crisis. The industry needs to confront it, accept it, and have a strategy on what to do about it. As an educator, parents question us saying, what is the future of the industry? If that is the crisis today, when the industry returns to normal, there will be no one wanting to work here. When it comes to re-scaling, it is a real opportunity.”



**Dilip Puri**  
Founder & CEO  
Indian School of Hospitality

“Before COVID started, more than 50% hospitality players were feeling stress in their balance sheets. About 90% of the players have not been able to take benefit of the interest-free loans. So, the ‘Make in India’ initiative will also take a hit as this will give an opportunity to cash-rich, private equity funds/hospitality funds. Ownership by Indians will go down.”



**Sonica Malhotra Kandhari**  
Joint Managing Director  
MBD Group

“The biggest learning this year has been to make your entire business model efficient in every respect. We have learned so much on cost lines. The survival phase is still on; this is not the revival phase. We have to survive for at least the next 12-18 months. How you drive the customer back to your hotel is the challenge.”



**Anil Chadha**  
Chief Operating Officer  
ITC Hotels

Inputs by Manas Dwivedi

## Tourism Breaking News

- Jet Airways to be back by summer 2021
- Nepal Airlines to resume India-Nepal flights soon
- Reviewing partnership with TATAs, decision soon: AirAsia CEO
- Travel to Meghalaya from December 21
- Govt. to sell 20% stake in IRCTC, Offer for Sale open
- Sri Lanka to reopen for tourists in early 2021
- Indians travelling under air bubbles can travel further
- Fortune inks 4 agreements to add 300+ rooms in 4 states

# ‘Revoke capping of tickets in Agra’

**Sunil C Gupta**, Chapter Chairman, IATO - Northern Region, shares why it is necessary to lift the capping on number of tickets at the Taj Mahal in Agra, an absence of which is currently leading to chaos, and how the new metro project in Agra would help tourists access more monuments at the destination.



Nisha Verma

**S**unil C Gupta shares that the capping of the number of tickets at the Taj Mahal is only leading to chaos. Speaking on the same, he shares, “While Taj Mahal is an iconic monument for India, it’s sad that we have mismanaged it and now there is a cap of 2500 tickets for morning and afternoon. This has created unnecessary shortage of tickets, panic, fear, chaos and frustration amongst the tourists. It is totally unwarranted and impractical.” Requesting the tourism minister to revoke this rule, he says, “We humbly request our dear Tourism Minister and DG ASI to review this as there is no need for any cap because the visitor num-



**Sunil C Gupta**  
Chapter Chairman  
IATO - Northern Region

bers are hardly five per cent of pre-COVID times. It only sends a wrong message to tourists and this is also counterproductive to the efforts of Ministry of Tourism. It is a very simple decision to rectify, which will take five minutes from the ministry and this cap will be removed or increased. This will also take care of the problem of black marketing, hoarding and tourists crying that they get frustrated that when they

come to Agra they have to return without seeing the Taj Mahal. It’s a very small solution to the issue.”

Gupta says that the Taj Mahal was supposed to open on September 6, a decision which was taken by the Central Government in August, but was eventually delayed by the local administration owing to safety reasons. “However, now we are in November, and the ground reality has changed. Agra has a population of 15 lakh and now in the entire district, the cases are hardly 20-40 per day. This needs to be reviewed, since Agra depends heavily on tourists and we get huge number of international tourists, which is not happening now. Hence, now we are dependent only on

domestic tourists, and they are not able to purchase tickets in advance. Also, there are many rural visitors who come at the last minute

This will take care of black marketing and tourists being frustrated that they have to return without seeing the Taj

and are not aware that they have to purchase tickets online. There are others who drive down from Delhi and if

they reach in the afternoon, they are told that the tickets are not available, which cost only ₹50. This shortage of tickets is now creating a law and order problem, as the tickets are being hoarded and black-marketed. Hence, this issue needs immediate attention and the cap should either be removed or increased to 20,000-30,000 as per the government. We need to remove such hurdles for the revival of tourism,” he suggested.

Sharing his view on the current status of tourism, he said that as associations they have tried their best to convince the government for help. “However, we have limited hope now of having any direct financial assistance from the government. They

have eased visa for certain categories, but unfortunately, tourists have been left out of it. Hence, tourist visa needs to be allowed and it should be e-visa. In addition, international commercial flights need to resume and then we as an industry will do our best to survive, struggle and bring the tourists to India and show our Incredible India to foreigners,” he said.

On the inauguration of construction of Agra Metro Project by the Prime Minister, Gupta said, “Now tourists will be able to easily visit monuments. The Metro will also ease traffic. This Metro is going to be world-class and will be better than the ones in Lucknow and Noida.”



# Reduce expenses to survive

► Contd from page 3



**EM Najeeb**  
Senior VP, IATO

“We are still not sure if there is going to be a normal, a new normal, or is it going to be worse. Hence, we can't predict anything. Europe and UK are under lockdown for the second time. However, lockdown is not the answer. We are already telling the government that we need to plan differently and make sure that life is smooth and normal. In tourism, thousands of experienced professionals are jobless and struggling to survive. This unexpected new normal has given us several hard lessons in preparing for survival and revival in the next few months or years.”

“The biggest learning of 2020 has been how to face unprecedented crisis. Those who have survived this crisis can survive any situation. We have also learnt that many things we used to travel for physically can now be done virtually. Hence, technology has played a very important role. Even though 2020 can be called the worst year in history, it can also be called a year of digital revolution because virtual conferences are taking place like never before. The third lesson is not to keep all your eggs in one basket. All of us must diversify and have a secondary source of income.”



**Subhash Goyal**  
Secretary General, FAITH



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President, TAAI

“COVID has proved that health is most important. Another thing I have learnt is that cash is very important and we need to save for a rainy day. Though we were taught this when growing up, we have somehow forgotten it in our way of life. Another big thing that has come out of 2020 is that we do not look into our ways of working, business structure, contracts, etc., but we only follow the flow and keep doing business without realising its impact and what to do if it comes to a dead-end like it did this year. A positive from the pandemic is unity—among associations and within our association.”

“In 2020, we have had continuous learning every month, every week and every day. However, I think 2021 is not going to be any better as the predictions look similar. It is not going to pick up. Already, 2020 has gone from the tourism map and we are looking at 2022. In the New Year there will be some business, but nothing like what we have done in the past. Even now we are doing some business, but we used to do 200 arrivals in a day before COVID-19. We can't tell when people would be able to travel without any rules and when the vaccine would be available.”



**K Pandian**  
Founder & Chairman, Cholan Tours



**Ravi Gosain**  
MD, Erco Travels

“In terms of business, the biggest learning is that we should always explore other avenues. Sometimes, travel companies have extravagant expenses like marketing, freebies, giving credits, exploiting the suppliers, and giving unnecessary benefits to customers. All this will end, I hope, because it only reduces margins and in such a situation you stand nowhere. Hence, in 2021, I am sure the market will correct and I think operators will have a possibility and responsibility among themselves because many of us will be out of business. Hence, it is necessary to work in a sustainable way.”

“The biggest learning from 2020 is that one must always have some budget for bad times. Anyone should at least have a year's budget as saving, irrespective of what one is doing, so that if anything happens, one can run the company and pay the staff for that period. The same holds true on the home front. We need to have enough savings to be able to run our home for a minimum of one year. While the government is coming up with different policies and offers, everything they are giving is in loans, which itself are not easy to take.”



**Lajpat Rai**  
MD, Lotus Trans Travels



**Deepak Bhatnagar**  
MD, Aamantan Travels

“In my opinion, the biggest learning from year 2020 has been that the unexpected can happen any time, so it is always a good idea to keep yourself prepared to deal with the situation both economically and emotionally. The COVID-19 pandemic has left a terrible mark on people and their livelihoods. It is safe to say that everyone in the country, and the world, has been looking forward to saying adieu to this pandemic and be able to restart business, while also being able to live life the way we know how to.”

“For me, the biggest learning from the pandemic, undoubtedly, has been that we are working in the most fragile industry. Travel and tourism was the first to face the biggest impact in such a situation and absolutely the last one to recover. Also, it is a must to have a second line of business to survive in such scenarios. Another important thing we have learned is that you can't depend on the government's support. During the most challenging times the industry faced, no help came from the government. Even our due, the SEIS incentive, has not been released till date.”



**Jatinder Taneja**  
Vice Chairman, PATA India Chapter



**Sunil Talreja**  
VP-Sales, InterGlobe Air Transport

“I believe that year 2020 has taught us to value life, while also teaching us the value of human connection. That said, in my opinion, travel and tourism will bounce back only once the vaccine is released. As we all know, domestic tourism will pick up first, which will be followed by short-haul international destinations. According to me, as things open up further and the year progresses, corporate travel will also resume slowly, but it will grow in future, as the value of human interaction cannot be replaced by virtual meetings.”

“This unprecedented crisis has made us all realise the volatility of the world we live in. As an airline, our biggest takeaway from the year is the importance of being agile, to be able to adapt to the changing business environment as well as the readiness to leverage every new opportunity that comes our way. At Vistara, we have tried to remain nimble in our approach since inception, which has helped us in many ways. While we have had to make temporary changes, we remain committed to our long-term strategy of densifying our domestic network while expanding globally.”



**Vinod Kannan**  
CCO, Vistara



**Alex McEwan**  
Country Manager - India, Virgin Atlantic

“What we have learnt this year is what an essential industry aviation is in terms of connecting people across the world. I think that the lack of the same and the restrictions we faced this year have amplified how important the industry is to our day-to-day lives, and how important it is to make sure that business continues and the person-to-person connection continues. We have realised how resilient this industry can be, thanks to the incredible people who are involved in it. We are ready to recover and take on the opportunities that 2021 will bring.”

“There have been many learnings in the past few months. Firstly, safety and hygiene are in the forefront and here to stay. One can face the crisis better as a team. We brainstormed at all levels to find ways to tackle the crisis. We scaled down our expenses, created new SOPs and discovered new ways of efficiently running operations. New avenues of revenue were explored, and the team was trained to multi-task and to take up additional responsibilities. Personally, the biggest learning has been that health should be above everything else.”



**Vikas Suri**  
Sr. AVP, Lords Hotels & Resorts

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## The Fern opens in Gangtok



Concept Hospitality has begun spreading its wings in the Northeastern part of India with the opening of The Fern Denzong Hotel & Spa, Gangtok, Sikkim. This is the fourth hotel the company is managing in eastern India. The 70-room hotel offers multiple dining options and stunning views of the remarkable Kanchenjunga mountain.

## IAAPI meets Aaditya Thackeray



Rajeev Jalnapurkar, Vice Chairman, Indian Association of Amusement Parks and Industries (IAAPI), met Aaditya Thackeray, Tourism Minister of Maharashtra, to request him to allow the reopening of amusement parks immediately in the state and also submitted suggestions for a stimulus package for revival of this industry.

## Engine of economic growth

Pradeep Kharola, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, claims that the definition of tourism has changed over the past years from simply being 'entertainment' to an economic activity and engine of growth.



Nisha Verma

At a recent webinar with FAITH, Pradeep Kharola said that tourism is second nature to humans. "Tourism was earlier thought of as something for entertainment and pleasure. However, things changed around two or three decades back when tourism started being seen as an economic activity. Today, tourism has become an engine for economic growth. It has the potential for generation of employment and more importantly, generation of employment in far-flung areas. This is an important characteristic of tourism; no other economic activity could generate employment in remote areas. That's the kind of potential it has and that's why it has become an economic engine of growth. It is important for the

government as well, hence, they are planning policies to ensure that tourism is given impetus," he said.

Kharola added that if someone asked him what had changed in aviation in the last few years, he would say



Pradeep Kharola  
Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation

that there are three things that have changed. "Firstly, the expanse of aviation has changed. Around 20 years back, our country only had a few airports and even lesser international airports,

No other economic activity could generate employment in remote areas

but today our country has over 100 airports and we are planning to ensure that five years down the line we will have 200 airports. Secondly, accessibility has improved. When the number of airports has increased, accessibility also improves. Thirdly, the most important part is affordability. Air travel has become cheaper and has come within the range of the common man. This has contributed to development of aviation and tourism," he believes.

# Partnerships will benefit the sector

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Tourism: The Road Ahead'. Even mandatory COVID testing is under active consideration. Brar said that currently, some airports already have this facility, and she hopes it can be added to others as well.

"There are many other plans in that regard, which are being deliberated upon, not just at a verbal level but actually in writing," she added.

### Domestic air bubbles

Commenting on a suggestion of considering air bubbles in the domestic sector, Brar said, "It's a fantastic thought and we will take it forward with Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA). I am sure they would love to do it because everyone in the government wants to revive the enthusiasm that tourism has been displaying in India."

### Exploring all options

Agreeing that MOT, along with MoCA, is working on every idea possible, she requested the industry to not lose heart on that front. "Either through our ministry or MoCA, there is no dearth of ideas that are being explored by various service providers. In fact, UDAN-3 has already operationalised 21 routes out of the 46 that got sanctioned and some of them are interesting tours. They are Dimapur-Imphal, Bengaluru-Mysuru, Varanasi-Patna and Agartala-Aizawl. There is a lot of focus on the Northeast. Similarly, UDAN-4 has also announced 78 more routes and we are looking forward to enhanced connectivity to lesser-known areas that have more demand already coming in. We have to ensure that the little dots that need to be connected in enabling the benefits of infrastructure are not lost by any of us," she said.

### Domestic demand

Saying that domestic demand was being ignored by everyone in terms of the potential it had, Brar added, "We hope that this does not remain a focus area for all of us only as a response to the pandemic or just as a stop-gap arrange-

We have to make sure that the benefits of infrastructure are not lost by any of us

ment. There is huge potential sitting in the market from a domestic tourism perspective. We have been focusing too much on bringing people from outside India, which is justified since they bring

in a lot of foreign exchange and are high-value tourists. However, within India, going anywhere else in the country becomes such a unique experience. Hence, we need to leverage that and add value to a segment that has hitherto grown organically but hasn't really grown with the kind of professional focus that is needed. We can see that the kind of demand that has been generated in Himachal, Uttarakhand or in Goa is great and it's not even very low cost. In fact, some of them are even expensive segments. However, there are enough people in all income brackets in India who are willing to travel within India. However, I think it is for all of us to put the package together."

### Working together

Stressing on the need to create far more organised and informational platforms, she pointed out that people



don't know about cities beyond their iconic monuments and tourist attractions.

"We need to work together with all of you to create, maybe through CSR funding, government funding or joint effort, small changes because that's all that is needed," added Brar.

She invited FAITH members to discuss all the initiatives in progress by the

government and asked them to add their inputs for the same.

"The industry can see the initiatives we are taking up and wherever there are gaps, we are more than happy to take them forward as we look at a phase of very robust recovery and revival. India looks like a country which is coming together and is the powerhouse of the 21<sup>st</sup> century," she claimed.



# Time to turn the page at ITDC

In an exclusive, **G Kamala Vardhana Rao** (IAS), Chairman & Managing Director, India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), talks about their preparedness before opening and other initiatives that the Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) is considering to revive and reinvent itself to help it sail through the pandemic.



Nisha Verma

## What helped you sail through the lockdown?

At ITDC, we have been standing together as a team and working to support government initiatives, while implementing multiple proactive and precautionary measures to contain the threat caused by the pandemic. To support frontline healthcare workers of government hospitals during lockdown, ITDC provided



**G Kamala Vardhana Rao** (IAS)  
Chairman & Managing Director  
India Tourism Development Corporation

2000 cooked and packed meals daily, prepared in our flagship hotel - The Ashok. Samrat Hotel provided quarantine accommodation to re-

patriates returning on Vande Bharat Mission flights. ITDC also contributed ₹22.50 lakh towards PM-CARES fund.

## How has business been since opening, in terms of occupancy and MICE?

We have the advantage of a large inventory of rooms and banqueting space, which can be leveraged for maintaining social distancing and room turnaround norms to the benefit of our guests. There have already been days when every banquet venue was booked – a closed date in today's times. Demand for room business is also picking up and will stabilise in a few months from now. When guests feel safe, they travel. Once they experience our services and

commitment towards their safety, they spread the word and return.

## Could you tell us about new initiatives at ITDC?

In order to reinvent itself with the changing scenario, ITDC, besides consolidating its remaining business, has further diversified into new service-oriented business activities.



ITDC will develop curriculum for education and training of students of APSSDC

ITDC signed an MoU with the Andhra Pradesh government in the areas of skill development. ITDC will be responsible for designing and developing courses as well as curriculum for hospitality education and providing training to students registered with Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Council (APSSDC). We will also provide valuable

inputs to APSSDC in teaching/training methodology. Together, we will also be setting up a Centre of Excellence for tourism students in the state. The AP government has also requested for the expertise of ITDC towards their vision to build a skill ecosystem for the State. We are also looking to expand our Duty-Free business at seaports.

## ITDC caters for the Parliament

ITDC has been entrusted with the responsibility of being the official caterer for Parliament House, including their various buildings, offices and canteens. The team at ITDC is well-equipped to provide highest standards of service and has deployed well-experienced officers at the unit.

# Be open to new avenues of business

► Contd from page 8



**Kuldip Sondhi**  
Partner, Sondhi Travels

"I believe that one should have multiple products, and no one should rely on one particular segment like cruises or flights or domestic tourism. Today, those who were totally dependent on international travel do not have business at all. International business is on pause and domestic has started coming up. If you have multiple products in your basket, there are better chances of survival in situations like this. Also, we have noticed that dealing directly with the supplier or the principal makes a lot of difference and is beneficial. The principals are happy to help you directly."

"The biggest learning for me in 2020 has been that don't depend on one source market. My company and I were only dependent on adventure tourism and we never looked at domestic tourism. Today, the demand is for domestic tourism. I think, tour operators should do multiple things as everyone should have an alternative source of business. Secondly, the pandemic made us realise to learn new things, which we were not looking at. We worked on our skills. I think, we should focus more on digital marketing now."



**Capt Swadesh Kumar**  
President, ATOAI



**Riaz Munshi**  
President, OTOAI

"According to me, first and foremost, the most important thing people should learn now is to stop working on tiny mark-ups in the industry. This is why people are saying that they don't have money to survive despite working in the industry for so long. This thing can also become a roadblock for the industry if not corrected. Attempts to undercut each other have to be stopped. There have to be fair trade practices followed in the industry rather than pulling each other's business for small margins."

"What we have learnt this year is that we must be prepared for everything. If anything like this happens again, we have to be ready to deal with it. Also, for our businesses, we should have enough funds to sustain ourselves and not expect any help from government, banks, colleagues or anyone in the trade. The industry had never experienced such a crisis. While there have been many ups and downs owing to demands and economy, it had never come to level zero. However, there has never been a time when there is no tourism or hospitality movement."



**PP Khanna**  
President, ADTOI



**Guldeep Singh Sahni**  
MD, Weldon Tours & Travels

"Year 2020 has taught us that firstly, we should be prepared for anything to happen at any time. At the same time, we should be prepared for our companies to keep running during such an eventuality. On the ground, I think everybody should be selling everything, whether it's outbound, inbound, domestic or anything else. Today, everyone should have expertise and clientele of every kind to survive. Then, if such times do come, we should have backup to run our companies and not fall apart at the time of a crisis."

"Starting from ensuring we have enough funds to ensure employees' salaries are given on time to revamping our Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) according to guidelines and business profitability, and from continuing to fly safely to ensuring we lift ourselves up irrespective of the industrial and economic slowdown are some of the biggest learnings. Now that I look behind, it was quite an eventful journey. This year, the two biggest learnings for me were perseverance and empathy. It is important not to give up easily."



**Kanika Tekriwal**  
CEO & Founder, JetSetGo Aviation

Inputs by TT Bureau



**Government of India**



**Ministry of Commerce  
& Industry**



**QCI  
Quality Council of India**



**NABCB  
National Accreditation  
Board of Certification  
Bodies**



**QualStar**







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NABCB (Nation accreditation Board for certification bodies) constituent board of QCI (Quality Council of India) an autonomous body under the Department for promotion of industry and internal trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

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# Customised offerings for agents

Le Birch Hotels & Resorts, a start-up hotel management company, promises to customise its offerings for each of its travel agent partners. Its first property is a 38-key boutique hotel in Mumbai close to the airport, and while current occupancies may not be the most encouraging, demand is certainly increasing gradually.

Hazel Jain

A hotel management company formed with a purpose to provide a platform to independent hotels, Le Birch Hotels & Resorts has recently signed up its first hotel in Mumbai in Andheri East. Speaking about the business model, **Shantanu Jha**, Founder & CEO, Le Birch Hotels & Resorts, says, "We want the independent hotels to be able to com-



**Shantanu Jha**  
Founder & CEO  
Le Birch Hotels & Resorts

pete with the organised and branded chains. We have just signed up our first hotel, Le Birch House in Andheri

East, Mumbai, close to both domestic and international airports. It is a 38-key boutique hotel designed to offer exceptional services at value for money. We have four more properties in pipeline and will announce them soon. The response has been very encouraging."

Le Birch Hotels & Resorts is a part of Applewood Hospitality and was formed three months ago. It will provide independent hotels end-to-end solutions right from operational SOPs to sales and marketing support on a pan-India basis, design and technical assistance to Revenue Management expertise.

## Distribution strategy

Explaining the company's distribution strategy, Jha adds, "We will be working across the spectrum with corporates,

We will work with corporates, agents, MICE specialists and OTAs

travel agents, MICE specialists and OTAs. Each of these segments will be contributing towards a balanced customer base. However, our offers to

each segment will be customised and we are happy to customise our offering for each of our travel agent partners as well. The hotel is available online. However, the travel agent partners can also book with us directly."

## Hotel onboarding

Once the terms are finalised, the on-boarding process starts with re-branding or co-branding exercise, moving the existing extranets on its platform, including the hotel details on all its marketing collaterals, brand training for the hotel team, etc. Jha reveals, "We started this organisation just three months ago completely boot-strapped and we have been fortunate to have on-boarded our first hotel

in such a short span. However, we are actively looking at seed funding to scale our business at a rapid pace." The company's endeavour is to have presence in Tier-I, II, and III cities and all major tourist destinations by end of 2023. He adds that while the pandemic has been the biggest disruptor, the silver lining is that leisure destinations have started picking up through an increase in demand for drivable destinations. "The current occupancies may not be the most encouraging but the demand is certainly increasing gradually. Work-related travel has already begun across various industries, and so is the case with weddings and exhibitions," he adds.

## Le Birch Hotels & Resorts brands

**Le Birch Leaf:** Full service mid-scale and upper mid-scale hotels in commercial and tourist destinations.

**Le Birch House:** Boutique, value driven, no-frill economy hotels.

**Le Birch Cove:** In beach towns, jungle resorts and hill stations.

# 8 Russian regions make inroads

Russian Expo Days (RED), held from December 7-11, saw many Indians in attendance, where they gained information about various destinations and projects of Russia, and interacted with tourism service providers from there. The focus was on e-visa to Russia for Indians and an up-and-coming segment – industrial tourism.

Nisha Verma

On December 7, Russian Expo Days opened for the Indian travel trade for five days, with live sessions and discussions where information on the destination was shared. Russian Expo Days is an online exposition for India's tourism industry professionals, organised by Profi.Travel media holding company and the Russian Information Center in India with support from the Federal Agency for Tourism, the Agency for Strategic Initiatives, and TAFI (Travel Agents Federation of India). Speaking at the opening ceremony, Elena Lysenkova, Chief of Directorate of State Tourist Projects and Safety in Tourism in the Federal Agency for Tourism,



**Alexey Vengin**  
CEO, Profi.Travel

said, "Despite restrictions, we are seeing tremendous interest in Russia from the international tourism industry, including the Indian market. We share with India a long-standing economic and cultural relationship, and it is becoming clear that our country's potential is not yet fully realised. Beyond the visa barriers, lack of information is what has always limited the flow of Indian tourists to our country. Essentially, tourists

only know about the two capitals, Moscow and St. Petersburg. And so, at this moment, with tourism restrictions still active, online communication in this vein is very important. We hope that the knowledge Indian industry professionals have obtained at Russian Expo Days India will allow them

The purpose was to provide a tool to convert contacts into mutually beneficial contracts

— Alexey Vengin



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

to offer tourists everything from trips on retro trains to industrial tourism destinations, eco-tours of our beautiful countryside and much more."

Russian Expo Days India programme attracted a lot of interest from the Indian tourism industry, with 1,700 Indian users registering for the event, while 500 of the country's tour operators watched the business sessions. Over the five-day

event, participants were presented with tourist accommodation capacities of eight regions — St. Petersburg, Kamchatka, the Murmansk, Samara, Tula, Vladimir and Amur regions, and Krasnodar Krai. Visitors learnt about the process of obtaining an e-visa and the tax-free specifics in various regions.

"The purpose of Russian Expo Days is not only to assist the regions in presenting potential foreign partners with diverse Russian tourism possibilities that fit the specific demands of every national market, but also to provide them with a modern networking tool that makes it possible to convert contacts into real, mutually beneficial contracts,"

said **Alexey Vengin**, Chief Executive Officer, Profi.Travel.

**Pradip Lulla**, Acting President and VP, TAFI, spoke about Russia's immense potential as a destination for the Indian market. "Last year, about 100,000

I believe there is significant growth potential

— Pradip Lulla

Indian tourists visited Russia, a 19% increase from the year before. About 20 million Indians also Googled information about Russia. I believe there is significant growth potential," he said.



# Uniform SOPs will attract tourists

► Contd from page 3

respective states are making them think twice. This is the case with almost all states in the region. There is an urgent need of a uniform travel SOP and need for reliable and easy access to information on travel restrictions to not just the travellers but even the tour operators.

Sharing his experience during the pandemic, **Ranjeet Das**, President, Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA), says, "Though

scope for Northeast India. But, it has to be complemented with competitive airfare and accurate information on products and

for travelling, it is very difficult to convince people to come to this region to holiday as COVID testing or a negative COVID report is mandatory. When tourists come from other parts of India, they normally visit at least two to three states out of seven. With different

Accessibility to accurate information is another challenge, says **Bjorn DeNiese**, Northeast Tourism

President, North East India Tourism Confederation (NEITC) and Proprietor, Clara Tours in Meghalaya, says that while this region comprising eight states is the least affected in the country by COVID because most of them are tribal states with thin population density, residents of many villages here still fear infection that can spread though outsiders who will visit their villages. "However, since most Northeast states have opened their borders with COVID protocols in place, it is hoped that gradually this fear of villagers will die down, keeping in mind there is no second wave," he adds.

through positive marketing, and tourism bodies should take this up. Travellers are showing interest in travel-



**Amit Agarwal**  
Joint Secretary, India Tour Operators Association (Northeast)

activities with emphasis on 'nature connect'. Horizontal collaboration and dialogues between the state tourism departments and tour operator associations should be initiated on priority."

**States have been silent** Unfortunately, state tourism departments have



**Bjorn DeNiese**  
Northeast Tourism Specialist

travel criteria of each state, this is difficult. We have received few FIT enquiries, but after hearing the COVID norms, they don't book.



**E Banlum Blah**  
President, North East India Tourism Confederation (NEITC) and Proprietor, Clara Tours

Specialist. "Domestic tourism in the Northeast has gradually picked up. States like Sikkim and Meghalaya



**Mohit Sharad**  
General Manager, Sales & Marketing North & East India, The Fern Hotels & Resorts

**Confidence needs to be built up amongst travellers that Northeast is safe through positive marketing**

— Mohit Sharad

Horizontal collaboration and dialogues between state tourism departments and associations should be initiated on priority

— Ranjeet Das

We have received few FIT enquiries, but after hearing the COVID norms, they don't book

— Amit Agarwal

Meghalaya requires tourists to produce a COVID-negative result to enter the state, which has deterred arrivals

— Bjorn DeNiese

It is hoped that gradually the fear of villagers will die down, keeping in mind there is no second wave

— E Banlum Blah

customer confidence is slowly picking up for this region, converting them has been a challenge for us due to lack of clarity on travel protocols in the Northeast states. Now that there is likely to be a behavioural shift in choosing rural, nature-based, wildlife and lesser-known destinations over crowded urban destinations, there is huge

taken little heed to this problem. **Amit Agarwal**, Joint Secretary, India Tour Operators Association (Northeast), shares, "Tourism has restarted in the Northeast, but since all states have different SOPs

Associations are regularly bringing up the matter in front of the tourism departments but they seem to be absolutely silent on this at the moment."

have seen a spurt in arrivals especially from nearby West Bengal and Assam. Being one of the areas in the country where physical distancing is easy due to open spaces, it has also become a popular pick for professionals from metros for 'workations'. However, Meghalaya requires tourists to produce a COVID-negative result to enter the state, which has deterred some arrivals. Each of the eight states has different protocols and accessibility to this information is another challenge," he says.

DeNiese adds that tourism boards, while they have their hands tied, have gone the extra mile to ensure easier licensing and clearances.

Sharing another one of the challenges, **E Banlum Blah**,

## Status of Northeastern States

- ❖ **Sikkim:** Opened  
SOP: Night curfew, Sat & Sun (odd, even), Bookings started
- ❖ **Assam:** Opened  
SOP: Negative COVID certificate required
- ❖ **Arunachal Pradesh:** Opened  
SOP: Negative COVID certificate required from home and destination state
- ❖ **Nagaland:** Under discussion (Mid Dec/early Jan)  
SOP: People allowed 4 days quarantine (non-tourist)
- ❖ **Manipur:** No SOPs for tourism  
Night curfew 6pm to 4am  
Negative COVID certificate required (test at airport/quarantine for 7 days)  
Imphal: 4-day quarantine, open for tourism except for some places
- ❖ **Mizoram:** Tourist spots closed  
7 days quarantine and then COVID test required  
Zero tolerance night curfew 8pm - 4:30am
- ❖ **Tripura:** Open  
Negative COVID certificate required
- ❖ **Meghalaya:** Tourism reopening from Dec 21, 2020  
Registration on state tourism App mandatory





# Philippines launches virtual Fiesta

The Department of Foreign Affairs, Philippines, in cooperation with Department of Tourism & National Commission for Culture and Arts has launched 'Fiesta Filipinas: An Online Celebration of Philippine Festivals'. This is a six-part, multi-format online event series from December 2020 until May 2021.

Manas Dwivedi

The virtual festival has been organised to stimulate the experience of a festival through a combination of live and pre-recorded videos and live workshops and activities. The project aims to introduce and showcase Philippine festivals, culture and traditions to a global audience. Every month for the next six months start-



**Roberto P Alabado III**  
Undersecretary, Tourism Regulation,  
Coordination & Resource Generation

ing December, the Department of Tourism (DOT) will feature one virtual town

fiesta, showcased as a way for locals to introduce their cultural festivity to the world stage so that the Filipino diaspora and tourists can enjoy what the country has to offer, and invite people to visit once the pandemic is over. During the launch, **Roberto P Alabado III**, Undersecretary,



**Marie Yvette Banzon-Abalos**  
Executive Director, Department  
of Foreign Affairs

Tourism Regulation, Coordination & Resource Generation, said that DOT will identify 100 destinations and give them its stamp of approval, providing what hotels and resorts to stay in and the services available. "This type of project whets the appetite of tourists who would like to experience our culture," he says. **Marie Yvette Banzon-Abalos**, Executive Director, De-

partment of Foreign Affairs, says that they are hoping to bring the experience of the Philippine fiestas, though it will be on a screen, closer to people's hearts. "Online celebration of Fiesta Filipinas is an innovative approach to promote Philippine culture and is a way of bringing Philippine culture and celebrations closer to Filipinos' hearts despite the limitations of the pandemic," she says.

The first Fiesta Filipinas virtual event will aptly celebrate the Christmas season in the Philippines, with the Giant Lantern Parade (December 19), followed by the Sinulog, Ati-Atihan and Dinagyang Festivals (January 30, 2021), the

Online celebration is an innovative approach to promote Philippine culture

— Marie Yvette Banzon-Abalos

Panagbenga Festival (February 27, 2021), Visita Iglesia (March 20, 2021), Lami-Lamihan Festival (April 24, 2021), and end with the Flores De Mayo/ Santa-cruzan (May 29, 2021). The Philippine government has also launched the distribution of 'Fiesta Filipinas' kit boxes. 🇵🇭



This type of project whets the appetite of tourists who like to experience our culture

— Roberto P Alabado III

## Decision on AirAsia India soon?

Completing 19 years in the aviation industry, AirAsia is now looking to move to new horizons. From its partnership with TATA Group to expansion in its stronghold of Southeast Asia, **Tony Fernandes**, Group CEO, AirAsia shares it all.

TT Bureau

Sharing his views on AirAsia's journey in the aviation industry in the last two decades at a conversation during CAPA Live, **Tony Fernandes** says it's been an interesting ride. "We are entering our 19<sup>th</sup> year and it's been a ride. It's a never ending story,



**Tony Fernandes**  
Group CEO, AirAsia

where we may have gone wrong, where we may have lost some of the original AirAsia business plan, and we put it back in place. We feel we are going to come back stronger in 2021. This is just another chapter in that never ending story of AirAsia," he explains.

On its business in India and all the speculations going around about the Malaysian airline not showing interest

in continuing to put money in India, Fernandes says that India is a competitive market and it is 'tough' for outsiders to come in. "We have had fantastic partner in India, I couldn't have asked for better partners than the TATA Group. Now, it's like, let's know where we are strong, where we are good at, let's not have an ego and and if things don't feel right, then we look at other options. We are in discussions with the TATAs right now. Obviously, we have exited Japan because we were too small and COVID put final nails in that coffin," he says.

Insisting that an official announcement is around the corner, he says, "So what are we strong at? We're strong in Southeast Asia. That's our sweet spot. India

has been fantastic because we built a lot of connectivity to India, which our brand wouldn't have been well

Whether we should continue in India or expand in ASEAN is still a discussion

known without AirAsia India. But whether we should put money to continue in India or to expand in ASEAN, that's a discussion I am having with my partners in India and imminently, I am sure there will be some announcements one way or the other." 🇲🇾

## TIS 2020: A successful hybrid event

Tourism Innovation Summit (TIS) 2020 was held in Seville, Spain from November 25-27, 2020, as a hybrid event, which saw several futuristic sessions being held over three days alongside fruitful meetings and networking

One of the first global hybrid events, TIS saw a total of 1,263 physical attendees during three days from 16 different countries, which is encouraging looking at the COVID scenario across the world. There were a total of 3,891 virtual attendees in stream-



sessions. A total of 5,154 participants attended the summit, making it a global forum to reactivate the tourism industry. In a statement, the organisers said, "This is the first step to a large journey we are going to make together to reactivate the travel and tourism industry and bring technology and innovation to the sector."

ing from 56 countries and five continents. With 236 speakers, 59 exhibitors, over 40 media partners and more than 80 national and international associations, TIS 2020 was a success in every measure. "We have proved that we can celebrate a physical event in a business-safe environment," it was said. 🇮🇳



and COVID is just another chapter in an incredible ride. COVID is giving us a chance to look at our plans. A lot of the things that we couldn't do, we have stepped back, restructured, re-looked at



# What do travellers really want?

Four experts discuss the changing behaviour among Indian travellers and the way in which suppliers must not only tweak their products but also how they sell them. The experts were recently brought together by Tourism Office of Spain – Mumbai to deep-dive into the minds of the Indian traveller and understand his new requirements.



Hazel Jain

**T**he aim of this panel discussion with four experts from the Indian travel trade community was to discuss what the traveller is now seeking in the new normal. This was organised



**Romil Pant**  
Vice President – Holidays  
Thomas Cook (India)

on the sidelines of a two-day virtual roadshow by Tourism Office of Spain – Mumbai that saw participation from 20 Spanish suppliers.

## Understanding new needs

There is a clear demand for domestic travel and this, feels **Romil Pant**, Senior

The cost for multiple tests is an added cost for the traveller. Destinations need to figure how many tests are required

– Romil Pant

Vice President – Holidays, Thomas Cook (India), is a clear manifestation of the fact that travellers are ready to get out. "It's only a matter of time and for borders to re-open. There is certainly a light at the end of the tunnel which is now visible by the way India and some international destinations have opened up. This also shows that safe travel is possible and is being managed very

well at both ends. We are all driving momentum together now – the tourism boards, the travel agents, the DMCs. The early trends are pretty positive. We are putting all our might behind promoting travel as an industry so that we all gain from it and not just an individual operator," he said.

In fact, even international travel is seeing movement. **Deepak Rawat**, Senior Vice President, International Markets, MakeMyTrip, believes that travel is slowly coming out of the tough phase. "We see more and more demand for travel coming up. Domestic self-drive holidays have started and there is interest for outbound for countries that are open. As countries open up their borders with caution, we will see people travel again. Of course, it will be very different now and DMCs, tourism boards, etc., will have to create something new for the customer that prioritises health safety and hygiene. As per our search trends, people have started searching for European destinations. We will surely see borders opening up and people travelling again in the coming quarter," he says.

Sharing his recent travel experience, **Himanshu Patil**, Director, Kesari Tours and Vice President, Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI), says that his Mumbai-Bengaluru flight was full. "When I visited Dubai last month, the international airport was slightly deserted but otherwise pretty buzzing. So people have started travelling – whether it is leisure or business. In fact, I saw a long queue for a Malé flight. So Dubai and Maldives are doing phenomenally well. Once MoCA announces scheduled

flights, we will see huge numbers that may even surpass 2017-18 numbers by 2021-22," he shares.

His company has just received a 20-people group inquiry for Maldives which is almost finalised. "Our work culture has seen a huge change in the last six months and while this work from home has increased



**Deepak Rawat**  
Senior Vice President  
International Markets, MakeMyTrip

productivity, corporates want their employees to take a break and relax. This is why corporate inquiries have started coming," Patil adds.

Giving an update from his market Chennai – **Manish**

A 7 or 14-day rule will make it very difficult to crack the Indian market

– Deepak Rawat

**Kriplani**, Managing Director, Baywatch Travels, says, "I'm happy to share that Chennai airport handled more than 200 flights in one day in November – the highest since lockdown. Our corporate clients have also started calling us and my entire staff is back in office. I am expecting 2021 to be one of the best years in my travel career! I believe we have a fantastic year coming up. My team is now sharpen-

ing its skills and learning new things to be ready for that."

## Pent-up demand for the new

Pant shares an insight into what we can expect going



**Himanshu Patil**  
Director, Kesari Tours and Vice President, OTOAI

forward. "Travel is no longer domestic or outbound – it is a 'holiday'. People just want to travel. There is a clear shift in our product range, in our sales strategy in that we have to re-skill our people to

As a traveller you need assurance that medical aid will be provided if required

– Himanshu Patil

sell everything and anything which our customers demand. The kind of traction we are seeing in domestic is probably better than what we saw pre-pandemic. State governments have become more supportive. There is a huge pent-up demand for the islands, which is Andamans, where we are still waiting for the ferries to restart. So Indians will now explore India much more than they have in the past," he says.

Rawat meanwhile sheds light on luxury travel and adds that there was demand for charter flights and high-end villas from corporates

and HNIs. "They were the first ones who wanted to travel. Moreover, there were no deals available on high-end hotels before the pandemic. But, that has changed now and we have never seen better deals and people buying them, too. HNIs are also booking high-end villas in Central London for holidays. When it comes



to self-drive holidays, HNIs were choosing the best hotels and this is the segment that will move to a new destination as soon as it opens up. We have bookings for Thailand which is still not opened, yet purely because we are offering free cancellations!" he says.

## Spain can help push numbers

What clients are also asking for now is an update on the safety aspect before travelling. Kriplani says, "Corporates now want to know every single thing about their destination, the SOPs, and even testimonials. My leisure clients are quite easy about that though. Moreover, clients would ask to stay in the city centre in the past. That is going to change now and inquiries are now for city outskirts or the hillside or a private bungalow. If Spain can work on these kinds of options – boutique accommodations outside of city – it will bode well for numbers. Self-drives will work, too, if Spain can offer some great self-drive options, help us with some good itineraries. People are also waiting to use their credit balance with airlines. It will be survival of the quickest – whichever country opens up first will get a big piece of the pie. Our clients also expect us to

know all the on-ground protocols in place, if hotels have any certifications in place, etc. So I would request hotels and DMCs to share this information. This will help me promote Spain better."

## Expectations from Spain partners

Pant brings up the sensitive topic of pricing. "The cost for multiple COVID tests is an added cost for the traveller. So destinations need to figure how many tests are required from the traveller. Approximately four tests pre and post travel can bring the



**Manish Kriplani**  
Managing Director  
Baywatch Travels

cost of travel up by ₹10,000 per person. So this is an important criterion for the tourism board to keep in mind when Spain opens up and how this can be minimised, keeping safety in mind. At the end of the day, people

Inquiries are now for city outskirts, hillside or a private bungalow

– Manish Kriplani

are first ensuring their safety and then moving to price," he says.

He requests partners to assure of two things – pricing is as per Indian market but at the same time assuring that safety and hygiene measures are taken care of. "

Contd on page 20 ►



# Best of both worlds in Dubai

The latest addition to the Dubai skyline is the Rove La Mer that recently opened its doors for guests. **Paul Bridger** of Rove Hotels Management says that the property's location by the beach while still offering city views would be ideal for the Indian traveller who has increasingly begun holidaying in coastal cities.



Nisha Verma

**P**aul Bridger says that Rove La Mer Beach is set to redefine people's expectations of resorts by offering a fuss-free hospitality with all essentials, and accessible rates. "The hotel is located at the La Mer beachfront, one of Dubai's coolest 'playcation' spots and just 10 minutes away from Downtown Dubai and City Walk. With a waterpark, inflatable playgrounds, boutique stores and over 50 gourmet restaurants and



Paul Bridger  
Rove Hotels Management

lounges right on the doorstep, Rove La Mer Beach is situated in one of Dubai's most exciting outdoor destinations, offering plenty of activities to delight solo adventur-

ers, couples and friends," he shares.

He reckons that the hotel would appeal to Indian travellers. "Coastal cities in India have seen tremendous growth in their beach tourism sector in the last few years, with more people looking to spend their holiday getaways escaping to the seaside. As the market continues to grow and with people inclined to travel internationally as well, Rove La Mer Beach provides Indian travellers with the



With more people looking to escape to the seaside, Rove La Mer Beach provides Indian travellers with the perfect getaway

perfect getaway. Rove La Mer Beach offers a great-value beachfront escape with amazing views of both the city and sea, combined with leisure and relaxation at affordable prices, not to

## Opening stay offer

Book a stay at Rove La Mer Beach through [www.rovehotels.com](http://www.rovehotels.com) for AED 299++ per night and get a sea-view upgrade, late check-out, and 30% off on food and drinks – available until December 26, 2020.

mention the variety of fun activities suited to a wide range of travellers, especially the modern explorer," he says.

Now, to attract a diverse target audience, the group has adopted a diverse marketing strategy. "It incorporates digital campaigns, social media collaborations, traditional and online PR activations, and more. We have also utilised local media platforms to gain more coverage across the board," Bridger adds.

Commenting on engagement with Indian travel agents, he says, "Rove Hotels wants to showcase everything Rove La Mer Beach has to offer and give travel agents an authentic feel of the experience that their customers will be met with upon arrival at the hotel. We have used virtual training and webinars to do just that. The techniques have also provided opportunities for travel agents to ask questions and find out all the important information." 📌



*IATA and the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations have jointly called on governments to follow the ICAO CART guidelines to exempt crews from COVID-19 testing that is applied to air travellers.*

# 100% recovery by 2021-end

**Ronojoy Dutta**, Chief Executive Officer, IndiGo, throws light on various facets of the airline's business and plans to tackle challenges in the industry. He even discusses issues and challenges affecting the LCC, such as a dearth of pilots and heavy taxation, the latter being a hurdle to the aviation sector's overall growth, too.



Manas Dwivedi

**S**peaking during a one-on-one session with Peter Harbison, Chairman Emeritus of CAPA, at CAPA Live, **Ronojoy Dutta** shared that IndiGo expects to recover to 80 per cent of its pre-COVID domestic capacity by the end of 2020 and recover to 100 per cent in early 2021. "The international segment is a bigger challenge. We are only flying 20 per cent of our old (international) capacity due to travel restrictions, with all international services operated as charters or as travel bubble services. We aim to recover to 100 per cent of pre-COVID international capacity by the end of 2021," he said. Dutta also added that the airline is fo-



Ronojoy Dutta  
Chief Executive Officer, IndiGo

cusing on six or seven-hour flights with narrow body aircraft for its international network expansion plans.

**Most taxed airline in the world** While the former United Airlines President does not object to the fact that the Indian government has not provided financial support to Indian airlines "in terms of subsidies and bailouts" similar to what some other

IndiGo

governments have done in terms of supporting airlines amidst the impact of COVID-19, he insists that the government should address key longstanding issues.

"The key one is we are one of the most taxed airline in the world. Our fuel taxes are high, our regular fees are high and excise taxes are high. With this high level of taxation, aviation in India really struggles. At some point, I think the government needs to make sure that the overall level of taxation in airlines is reduced," Dutta said.

India's largest airline's top executive also stated that IndiGo is far stronger now than it was before the crisis. Notably, its shares are performing better than they did in January 2020, probably the first airline in the world to see such growth. "I think we passed the eye of the storm in some ways and it should be better sailing going forward," said Dutta referring to the impact of COVID on the LCC's cash flow. He added, "If you have survived from a cash flow point of view for the last six months, well, the next six months definitely do



Government needs to ensure that the overall taxation in airlines is reduced

look better. We truly are far stronger in terms of product, service, performance, package delivery and digitisation of the customer experience."

## Better equipped now

One of the most talked about issues hampering the fastest growing airline was the lack of pilots. Addressing the issue, Dutta said, "Pilots were

a constraint to our growth. Well, about two years ago, we were not only short of pilots, we were also losing pilots because many Indian pilots were getting great offers from places like Middle East and Singapore. Fortunately, as we went through this process, we ramped up our training. We were training pilots at about four times the rate we were before. We put a lot of capacity in place and training really ramped up. Now, we've stopped the bleeding issues. We used to lose about 10 pilots a month, which was very painful, but now we don't. We stopped the bleeding, our training has caught up, so I think that we are in a comfortable position to evolve," he said. 📌



# An adventure amid monotony

For many months now, people have been suppressing their urge to go out and explore. But, now they can start giving in to their desires and set about on an adventurous journey that involves visiting less-crowded places and completely adhering to the norms of social distancing, says **Tejbir Singh Anand**, Managing Director, Holiday Moods Adventure.

Travelling is an intrinsic part of human nature! As India continues to fight the COVID pandemic with the curve flattening in many places, there can be seen some activity in the tourism sector. Adventure is a very unique segment of travel which might not be

everyone's cup of tea, but is surely something that a person desires to experience at least once in a lifetime, and when they do, there's no going back! Travel is like an elixir that not just offers you solace from the cacophony of life but also helps you connect with nature and discover your

true inner self. For many travellers, an adventure holiday has been a life altering experience – one that helped them discover their inner self, their strengths and weaknesses. It's almost therapeutic!

India, thankfully, is blessed in abundance with adventure offerings. India is a 12-month, 4-season adventure travel destination, ranked 34<sup>th</sup> on the World Travel and Tourism Index, driven by its rich natural and cultural resources. The World Economic Forum in 2017 ranked India as the fifth best destination on the Natural Heritage Index in the world and the eighth most culturally diverse country. It is home to 38 UNESCO World Heritage Sites that include

30 cultural properties, seven natural properties, and one mixed site.

There are a few more reasons that make India an incredible destination to visit 12 months

a year. There are about 551 wildlife sanctuaries in India, which is 3.64 per cent of the geographical area of the country. Some of the unique creatures found only in India are the Wild Ass, Snow Leopards, the Royal Bengal Tiger, Asiatic Lions, Nilgiris Marten, Rhinoceros, Sangai deer, and Lion Tailed Macaque. Our country is home to 104 national parks comprising 1.23 per cent of India's total surface area. The biggest and the highest national park in India is the Hemis National Park in Ladakh. However, Madhya Pradesh and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands have the maximum number of national parks (nine each). It has been predicted that the adventure tourism and

activity travel market will grow at a CAGR of 17.4 per cent from 2017 to 2023. The revenue generated from adventure package tours currently stands at ₹1,772 crore, which is a significant contribution to the economy. So, it's time to start seeking a short sojourn away from the hustle.



**Tejbir Singh Anand**  
Managing Director  
Holiday Moods Adventure

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

## Where's the adventure?

- ❖ Northeast states
- ❖ Rajasthan Desert Circuit
- ❖ Dhauj, Haryana, for rock climbing, rappelling, zip-lines, and a skycycle mecca next to Delhi-NCR
- ❖ J&K for skiing; Ladakh for ice climbing and ice hockey; Leh & Kargil for cycling
- ❖ Manali, Dharamshala, Kullu, Sirmour and Shimla in Himachal for skiing, cycling, snow treks, paragliding
- ❖ Lower ranges of Kumaon and Garhwal for rafting, bungee

Revenue from adventure package tours currently stands at ₹1,772 cr, a significant contribution to the economy

## Fortune Hotels to add 300+ rooms in 4 states

Fortune Hotels has signed operating agreements for hotels in Candolim, Deoghar, Haldwani & Tirupur.



Nisha Verma

The new signings allow Fortune to strengthen its presence in all regions, by adding more depth to its business and leisure portfolio. **Samir MC**, Managing Director, Fortune Park Hotels, says, "With these additions, we not only increase our appeal in the domestic market but also offer a very interesting destination mix to our business and leisure customers, thereby opening up new vistas for their travel. We have great confidence in the India growth story."

Fortune Select, Candolim, Goa, has an inventory of over 100 well-appointed rooms and will open around mid-2022. Fortune Park,

Deoghar, Jharkhand, is set in the pilgrim city and the cultural capital of Jharkhand, and will be a 100-room hotel, expected to open in 2024. Fortune Park, Tirupur, Tamil Nadu, is a 62-room



**Samir MC**  
MD, Fortune Park Hotels

hotel anticipated to open its doors to guests in the summer 2021. Fortune Inn, Haldwani, on the other hand, is planned for an October 2022 opening.

## Vistara tops APAC Nov score

Compared to other regions, Asia Pacific (APAC) has among the highest ratio of airlines with a Safe Travel Score of 4.0 or higher, indicating their commitment to a safe end-to-end passage.



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Safe Travel Barometer, a comprehensive B2B monitoring and benchmarking solution of COVID-19 health and safety protocols, and traveller experience initiatives as reported by suppliers, has announced the Safe Travel Score November 2020 leaderboard for Asia Pacific airlines.

Initiatives of more than 250 airlines worldwide—including 74 from APAC – were inde-



**Virendra Jain**  
Co-founder and CEO  
Safe Travel Barometer

pendently assessed by Safe Travel Barometer for the November leaderboard. Fifteen out of the 74 airlines assessed achieved a Safe Travel Score of 4.0 or

higher. Airlines which were rated the highest at 4.1 are Vistara, China Southern Airlines, Asiana Airlines and Air China. In the case of Asiana, the airline improved its rating from 4.0 to 4.1 month-over-month.

**Virendra Jain**, Co-founder and CEO, Safe Travel Barometer, says, "The performance of APAC airlines with regard to delivering traveller experience during this downturn continues to impress. Compared to other regions, APAC has among the highest ratio of airlines with a Safe Travel Score of 4.0 or higher, indicating their commitment to a safe end-to-end passage."

There is intense competition among APAC airlines to serve the rebounding



Performance of APAC airlines in delivering traveller experience during downturn continues to impress

demand in the various pockets. Other APAC airlines that achieved a Safe Travel Score of 4.0 include Vietnam Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Australia's Qantas Airways, Philippines' Cebu Pacific, Cathay Pacific, Korean Air, Garuda Indonesia and EVA Air. GoAir, IndiGo and SpiceJet also achieved a Safe Travel Score of 4.0.



## Hahn Air's NDC platform now accepts BSP Cash

**H**ahn Air has announced that its IATA-certified NDC platform now accepts BSP Cash as an additional form of payment for connected travel agencies in more than 190 markets worldwide. Hahn Air has also introduced new connections to three air content aggregators, an OTA and an award-winning travel App.

**Christopher Allison**, Head of NDC, Hahn Air, says, "We are very proud to see our NDC platform developing rapidly and we are very pleased to be working with such innovative partners as Duffel, Thomalex, AirGateway, Flyla.com and App in the Air. In the coming months, we will continue to connect more agencies, aggregators and partner airlines to our platform and



**Christopher Allison**  
Head of NDC, Hahn Air

introduce new features such as enhanced processes for itinerary changes and schedule changes as well as additional support for ancillary services. We believe that NDC will play an important role in overcoming the current industry crisis caused by COVID-19."

Hahn Air's NDC platform gives its partner airlines access to an additional distribution channel as well as the world of NDC without having to develop their own solution.

# India's responsible tourism

India is now arguably leading the world in adopting a Responsible Tourism approach. Sharing insights on the subject, policymakers talk about their experience and what India has to offer.



**Vinod Zutshi**  
Former Secretary, MOT

"Though India has a long way to go, I can say that the lessons learnt from COVID would certainly accelerate the RT movement in the country. The theme of the new 'Draft National Tourism Policy' to promote responsible tourism will cut across all the strategic pillars to achieve the vision to make India a top destination for sustainable and responsible tourism."

"MP has drafted the Responsible Tourism Policy this year. We have signed an MoU with Kerala's RT Mission and are also in the process of signing an MoU with the International Centre of Responsible Tourism. Our team is working on several initiatives, including a rural tourism project where we will recognise 100 villages for development of homestays."



**Sonia Meena**  
Additional Managing Director  
Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board



**Valsa Nair Singh**  
Principal Secretary (Tourism)  
Government of Maharashtra

"Our tourism policy has laid a lot of emphasis on how to develop communities, the local economy, and woman empowerment through tourism. The new agro-tourism policy launched by the state government recently puts objectives of the responsible tourism framework in focus. We have made it mandatory for schools and colleges to do their educational trips to farm tourism spots."

"Kerala has always found the idea of responsible tourism innovative and sustainable. In 2008, Kerala adopted Responsible Tourism (RT) and developed an approach which ensured that the local communities benefited through village life experiences and producer cooperatives. In 2017, we formed Responsible Tourism Mission



**Rani George**  
Secretary (Tourism)  
Government of Kerala

Inputs by Manas Dwivedi

# Quarantine impedes recovery

► Contd from page 17

Indians are hungry to travel and they will go wherever they see the best opportunity to do so. Certification from not just hotels but also transport and restaurants is also critical. The other aspect is assuring travellers of healthcare at the destination. Moreover, the decision period to travel has reduced significantly. Earlier people used to plan months or weeks in advance, now we are seeing bookings of two days prior to departure even to places like Maldives. So how quickly can the visa processing happen, how quickly will the health guidelines come in place, etc is vital," Pant adds. He also requests the tourism boards to promote this information in not just Eng-

lish but also in vernacular languages as Tier-II and III in India consumes a lot of vernacular content.

### Europe an all-time favourite

Europe has been a favourite with Indians and whoever opens their border first in 2021 will have an edge over other countries, says Patil. "Indians are travelling even today, but with Indian safety norms in place at our hotels, restaurants, etc. So when we talk about Europe, there will probably be stricter norms. The partners – whether it is hotels or transporters – will need to undertake the sanitisation process. People are going to travel to any European destination that will open first," he adds.

### On-ground situation in Spain

**Elisa Robles-Fraga**, Director, Tourism Office of Spain (Turespaña) in Mumbai, India, says, "As the second wave is developing, hospitality outlets have been shut in some areas. We hope this will change soon as the situation is back under control. Other major tourist destinations, such as the Canary Islands and the Balearic Islands, are almost fully open and receiving guests."

The Tourism Office of Spain in India is still studying the situation to plan its strategy for 2021-22. "I can assure you that this market is important for us, and that is the reason why we organised this virtual travel show. MICE and destination weddings have always been our focus and we will continue to promote them as soon as the crisis situation improves. Of course, FIT leisure and luxury travel will continue to be our focus segments for the India market," she adds.

### Confidence building is vital

According to Rawat, the foremost thing travellers will consider before travelling to Spain is what is on offer there and their health safety. "Spain has amazing options

like beautiful villas, high-end hotels, and great experiences such as self-drives, which can be picked up. If all these things are put together for high-end customers, it will pick up as soon as Spain opens its borders to India. This will be followed by FITs, who will probably choose destinations other than Madrid or Barcelona. And it is

going to be a very detailed offering – what is the protocol when they arrive, how the vehicle will be sanitised, precautions at the accommodation and at the places they will visit, how to avoid crowds, and explore the beautiful country of Spain safely. Confidence building comes first and pricing is secondary," he says. Rawat adds that we must convey to customers with the help of our partners about the current situation. "One of the most important points when we open Europe will be the quarantine rule. Can Spain adopt what Dubai has done – no quarantine if a passenger is COVID negative? That will be a game-changer. A 7 or 14-day rule will make it very difficult to crack the Indian market," he underlines.

### Challenges for Europe

Patil meanwhile also adds

that all departments in the tourism landscape must speak the same language – right from tourism boards to airlines to immigration and consulates. "Everyone must know the same process for the SOPs. Also, access to the country's healthcare system must be made easy. There is already a lot of domestic load in countries, but as a traveller you need assurance that medical aid will be provided if required," he says.

Another key point that Kriplani brings up is the re-issue of lapsed and unused visas at no cost. "We hope the tourism board considers this. Also, if the trade can meet some healthcare professionals or hospitals virtually who could assure us of their support if anything goes wrong with our clients will help boost our confidence as well as of the clients," he says.



WTTC has unveiled a new report that recommends global guidelines for a Safe & Seamless Traveller Journey related to traveller identity and security in the 'new normal'.



# 'It's been a life-altering experience'

**Maresh Iyer**, Executive Director & Chief Executive Officer, Thomas Cook (India), feels that a new world order has emerged and players in the industry must have an ear to the ground in order to seize every opportunity that comes along. The industry needs to ensure it has adequate avenues for customers to reach out to them.



Hazel Jain

## What kind of challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?

I am proud of the agility and speed displayed by my teams across Thomas Cook India – both in reimagining our businesses and in delivering strong customer value. To better understand consumer behaviour, we conducted a survey with over 2,500 customers across India's metros and tier cities and our 'Holiday Readiness Travel Report - Future of Travel post COVID-19', revealed key drivers in this new era of travel: health and safety ranks as the primary concern for 75%

respondents. Our strategic focus was given to product development. We had to quickly adapt to the new normal and create products and services in line with the requirements of the COVID-19 era.

The consumer wish-list had changed and our teams worked basis the same to create easy to book, practical holidays such as workations, staycations, drivecations and affordable luxury holidays.

### Your outlook for 2021?

We can expect challenges presented to us due to COVID-19 to continue in 2021 and therefore, a new mantra for 2021 will be that we continue



**Maresh Iyer**  
Executive Director & CEO  
Thomas Cook (India)

to be nimble and flexible in all that we do. Health and safety will continue to hold focus and the customer wish-list will continue to see changes. Come 2021, we will move forward with an unerring focus on customer feedback while keeping a close watch on developing market trends.

Some of the other key elements that we will focus on include domestic travel, adding exciting



product lines such as our recent river cruise packages with Antara Luxury Cruises. We will also continue to leverage technology in our outreach to the customer through our Virtual Branch and outlets. For our foreign exchange branches, too, through our unique Virtual Branch model we will continue to facilitate contactless customer servicing. We have also opera-

tionalised a Corporate and B2B Booking Tool. We aim to forge new partnerships and alliances with reputed brands to bring significant customer benefits. We also launched a B2B partnership for Indian travel agents who have been affected by the pandemic. Through this outreach

that we undertook with TRAVALTALK, we have created a partnership opportunity to help them regain consumer confidence by leveraging our health and safety programmes and range of products, services.

### What lessons must the travel trade in general learn in the new world order to gain back market share?

Players must have an ear to the ground and would need to seize every opportunity basis the customer demand. The germ of the new idea needs to be quickly turned around into a tangible offering. Meaningful, strategic partnerships will continue to hold value. These would need to be actively identified and sourced.

We aim to forge new partnerships and alliances with reputed brands to bring significant benefits

## Invigorating stay in Pattaya

Step into a world of sun-splashed beaches, lush landscapes and modern living spaces at X2 Vibe Pattaya Seaphere Residence by Thailand-based hotel group Cross Hotels & Resorts. Nestled in a serene corner of Pattaya's Jomtien beach, the hotel is the perfect chic and chilled-out holiday destination.



TT Bureau

This modern design hotel offers guests a relaxing, cosmopolitan location that sets the scene for the ultimate holiday getaway. This month, X2 Vibe Pattaya Seaphere Residence celebrates its third anniversary! Mak-

ing the most of its location to give guests that feeling of being in Zen mode, the property has on offer some much-needed relaxation at its rooftop. Guests can take in a panoramic view of the sea while chilling out at X2 Vibe Pattaya Seaphere's stylish rooftop bar, anytime between 5:00

pm – 11:00 pm daily. Sky Vibe Rooftop Bar serves up a wide selection of snacks, beverages and cocktails, along with delicious international fusion dining.

For those looking to dip into water while still enjoying a spectacular view, the 8<sup>th</sup> floor infinity pool will let



them take in Pattaya's lush scenery and calm sea, far above ground level. With its poolside bar and unique designs, the area is the perfect place to unwind throughout the day, from 7:00 am – 11:00 pm.

But, a great place to stay also needs to be accompanied by delicious food and snack options. From

6:30 am-10:30 pm, the 4K Restaurant lets you capture the serenity of the sea while enjoying the wide range of local and international delicacies served.

For a delightful stay, the trendy residence offers 65 rooms. In true X2 Vibe style, the design of the residence both impress and inspire

the guest. Within the locality there is an abundance of major tourist attractions, including three large water parks, Koh Laan Island, Thailand's well-renowned floating markets, golf courses and, of course, the tourist city of Pattaya.

Doesn't that sound just perfect?





# Realistic margins for agents

'Our aim is to create a special platform for offline travel agents to sell our inventory at the best available rates that aren't available anywhere and help them have realistic margins,' says **Chandan Pandey**, Co-Founder & COO, WB Hotels & Resorts. The brand does not charge any upfront payment and works on commissions only.



Hazel Jain

**What is the concept behind this new brand 'WB Hotels & Resorts'?**

Launched in September 2020, WB Hotels & Resorts offers services to hotels, resorts, B&B, service apartments and townships. We offer them co-branding services on an online platform, complete revenue manage-



**Chandan Pandey**  
Co-Founder & COO  
WB Hotels & Resorts

ment, centralised reservations and account reconciliation. We offer software in a

bundled package to asset owners, channel managers and cloud-based front offices. Technically, we are running the hotels remotely and we do not charge any upfront payment – we work on commissions only.

## Your business strategy?

We like to fill the gap created after COVID in hospitality, especially in the budget segment hotels. Most of the hotels before COVID were on lease or a minimum guarantee of gross revenue kind of understanding. Due to the impact of COVID, we saw a rift starting to develop between lease owners and asset owners. Most of the hotel owners decided to operate their own hotel. Since the scenario is changing in the hotel room

ecosystem where rooms are sold mostly online, there is only option left to get the hotel online and optimise. We have come up with the solution where we are offering co-branding only on all online platforms. We have 14 hotels under our brand and growing with 600+ keys. We are also working with our channel partners in ME, UK, USA and Africa markets.



## Your distribution strategy?

Our aim is to create a special platform for offline travel agents to sell our inventory at the best available rates which are not available anywhere to offer them realistic margins.

Once they enrol on our platform, they will be able to get access to multiple hotels with

multiple locations with form margins available for them. Presently, they struggle to sell offline due to tough competition given by some of the online platforms. Special rates will be available here that are cheaper than online rates. We are also working on a special platform for the offline travel agent. ➡

Special rates  
will be available  
here that are  
cheaper than  
online rates

## Part of WB Hotels & Resorts

Raj Residency by WB Hotels (Coorg), The Bollywood Hotel by WB Hotels (Bhubaneswar), Grand Surya by WB Hotels (Jharkhand), Surya by WB Hotels (Jharkhand), Vacation Club by WB Resorts (Karjat), Vacation Club Grand Villas by WB Resorts (Karjat), Stay Inn by WB Hotels (Andheri, Mumbai), Sunshine Villa by WB Hotels (Igatpuri), Manas by WB Hotels (Dhule), and Grand Villas by WB Resorts (Lonavala).

# Nevada: The land of extremes

Characterised by miles of deep sand dunes, Technicolor rocks and canyons, rare and endemic wildlife, one-of-a-kind evaporative salt elements, and jaw-dropping peaks that rise 11,000 feet above neighbouring valleys, Death Valley National Park in Nevada, USA, is a remarkable landscape alive with unmatched beauty.



TT Bureau

**U**n this below-sea-level basin, steady drought and record summer heat make for a land of extremes. Yet, each extreme has a striking contrast. Towering peaks are frosted with winter snow, rare rainstorms bring vast fields of wildflowers, and lush oases harbour tiny fish and are a

refuge for wildlife and humans. Despite its morbid name, a great diversity of life survives in Death Valley.

Its fascinating features stretch a baffling 130 miles long by 12 miles wide. What's even more astounding is the fact that Death Valley, the largest national park in the Lower 48, covers a staggering 3.4 million acres of barren, mostly



unpopulated terrain that is filled with sweeps of desert broken up by towering mountains and rocky ridges. The elevation to the north end sits at 1,000 metres and slopes steadily downward, putting the valley floor below sea level for 70 miles. Looking at a map, visitors will find several Death Valley National

Park features listed, including the Funeral Mountains, Hell's Gate, Starvation Canyon, Dead Man Pass, Golden Canyon, Ubehebe Crater, Mosaic Canyon, Salt Creek, Zabriskie Point, Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes, and Coffin Peak.

Death Valley is also renowned for stunning super

bloom of spring wildflower exhibits, but annual wildflowers are the exception, not the rule. When perfect conditions happen, the desert fills with a sea of purple, gold, pink or white wildflowers. A good wildflower year depends on at least three things: spread out rain through the winter

and spring, enough warmth from the sun, and light to non-existent harsh desert winds. This seemingly desolate environment is home to over 1,000 species of plants. Fascinatingly, 23 of those species are not found anywhere else, including the Rock Lady and the Eureka Valley evening primrose.

While accommodations are limited in Death Valley itself, you'll find a wide range of great places to eat, drink, rest up. ➡





# A memorable stay on Lake Pichola

A few top agents had the privilege to be invited by Vistara Airlines on Premium Economy to Udaipur, and hosted by the Leela Palace Udaipur. **Tina Kanuga**, Director, Bathija Travels, shares her experience as she raves about the comfortable Vistara flight, the luxurious Leela hotel and the warm hospitality of its staff.

**W**hat a memorable two-day stay and the most fantastic flight with 24 seats on Premium Economy sponsored by Vistara Airlines! A few top agents had the privilege to be invited by Vistara Airlines to Udaipur and hosted by the Leela Palace!

We flew an Airbus A320 with seat configuration of 3-3, 18-inch width and 20 kilos of baggage allowance. Vistara Airlines' Premium Economy customers also enjoy priority check-in, boarding and baggage handling, 33-inch seat pitch that has 20 per cent more leg room than the regular Economy Class, 4-inch seat recline, a private cabin towards the front of the aircraft with up-

scale ambience, specially designed seat with improved seat cushion and adjustable winged headrests.

But, the best part of it all was Vistara World. The Wi-Fi we enjoyed in the skies – from news to movies and entertainment channels, to TV shows – it was just wonderful! And the lovely vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals were to die for. Even the

staff at the check-in counter was professional and courteous – a smile and warm welcome everywhere, even while loading our bags, and assisting us right through! It was an extremely pleasant flight for us indeed on a must-try airline for every traveller in the domestic and international skies.

## View of Lake Pichola

As we disembarked, we got out of the airport and into our BMW cars sent to pick us up by the Leela Group and onto Lake Pichola in a beautiful boat especially for us as we took a tour around the Lake and then to the grand hotel. There, a fabulous welcome awaited us with Rajasthani folk dancers and champagne glasses along with the Res-



ervation Manager, Prateek Swaroop and the General Manager, Nishanth Agarwal, personally waiting to welcome us. All of us were put up in our lake-facing rooms which were so beautifully decorated! Each one of us designated with one warm, well-spoken attendant whom we could reach out to anytime we wished. Even our bathtubs could be filled with rose petals; we were staying in the true lap of luxury.

Each meal we had with them for the two nights that we resided with them was a grand, scrumptious and a unique experience. High tea at the lounge was just unreal! And that is where we met all the chefs and the team who took special care of us.

One afternoon, we sat in the Amrut Garden and had the experience of a brigade service where each course of our meal came to us one

after the other! It was luxury in full form! And this was just post our tour of the entire palace. What a place to live and be in! The hotel also organises Rajasthani folk music and dance performances every evening at the Inner Courtyard. The Leela Palace Udaipur staff was so very courteous and warm. This tour was a once-in-a-lifetime experience!



**Tina Kanuga**  
Director, Bathija Travels

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

This was a 'once in a lifetime' experience, a luxury getaway

# Fewer cases, better prospects

**Mario Hardy**, CEO, PATA, shares his learnings from the 'year of the pandemic' and how it can be a guide for the future. He believes that while recovery will be slow and gradual from the impact on numbers and revenue due to the pandemic, reaching pre-COVID level of growth does not seem like a possibility before 2024.

Nisha Verma

**F**or **Mario Hardy**, it is the importance of resilience that will be the biggest takeaway from 2020. "We have always been told in the past to have a financial reserve personally as well as for the business, and till 10 years ago people said that one needs to save as reserve for three months, which later became six months, and then one year. However, in the current situation, one probably needs several years of reserve to be able to sustain this type of crisis we are facing today. At PATA, we are very fortunate that we built a very strong reserve for the last couple of years, which allows us to sustain this crisis for the foreseeable future. Year 2020 highlighted what I already



**Mario Hardy**  
CEO, PATA

knew and highlighted the importance of saving, to prepare us to be more resilient in the future because sadly, this is not the only crisis we will be facing in years to come, but certainly it is the largest I have ever experienced in my life so far," he said speaking at 'PATA 101 Webinar: Year-end Wrap-up & Going into 2021'.

When asked about destination management trends for 2021, Hardy said that they had

done many surveys throughout the year to get a better understanding of what people are looking for. Sharing some interesting findings, he said, "We did some sentiment analysis in many regions and the



great news for all of us is that there is an immense desire for people to travel as soon as borders open safely. Not only domestically, people are keen to travel internationally as well. However, they are looking for something different than what they were looking for before, as they want to be away from crowds. They want to go to nature-based destinations and more eco-friendly places. They will also pay a lot

more attention to sanitisation, hygiene, health and safety. These are some things people are paying more attention to than they were doing before. Hence, destinations need to be prepared that when they do their marketing in years to come, this information will be critical in their plans to move forward. It is not only about marketing, it's also about making sure that you use the proper safety protocols and sanitisation protocols in your respective facilities or products or transportation modes," he emphasised.

He also mentioned that many other things would

In future, it will be the number of cases and vaccination that will govern people's interest to travel

see a recovery to the same level of growth that we had pre-COVID until 2024," the CEO added.

Hardy also said that there is a need for dispersing tourists in a destination instead of having them in one place. "PATA has been promoting dispersal of tourism for many years, and now we have an opportunity to restart tourism in a different way and encourage people to disperse in new destinations within the country. In future, it will be the number of cases and vaccination that will govern people's interest to travel."

*A study by YouGov's Global Travel Profiles tool shows that 51% of urbanites in India plan to holiday domestically in the next 12 months. Despite this local wanderlust, 20% plan to holiday abroad next year.*



## EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



## DECEMBER 2020

Date	Event	Time
15	UNWTO Asia Pacific Executive Training Programme	12:30 pm
16	Migrate World Webinar	11:00 am
17	CAPA India Webinar	04:00 pm
17	IATO Workshop on Digital Media	11:30 am
17	Discover Moscow Digital Roadshow	12:00 pm
20	Northeast India B2B Meet on Tourism	10:00 am
26	IATO Interactive Members Meet	04:00 pm

## JANUARY 2021

5	IATO Workshop on cost cutting	11:30 am
12-21	STB India Roadshow 2021	TBD
13	CAPA Live	08:30 am
20	IATO Workshop on cost cutting	11:30 am
21	CII Medical Value Travel	02:00 pm
21	UNWTO World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism	03:00 pm
29	IATO Workshop on Short & Off Season Itineraries	11:30 am
29-31	Gujarat Travel Fair	10:00 am

For more information, contact us at: [talk@ddppl.com](mailto:talk@ddppl.com)8<sup>th</sup> NE Festival to be hybrid

The annual North East Festival will now take place on December 19-20, 2020 at Radisson Blu Hotel, Guwahati and will also be relayed live on social media channels. Promotions are already underway.



Hazel Jain

The North East Festival (NEF) that is an annual event being conducted in New Delhi every year will see a change in venue and style this year. **Arijit Purkayastha**, Organiser of NEF Guwahati and Chapter Chairman for North East, ADTOI, says, "The North East Festival has been organised in Delhi every year and it has been attended by lakhs of people and gets extensive focus in national media. However, this year the pandemic has ensured that we are unable to organise the grand festival as we did in the past. But, it also offers us an opportunity to showcase Northeast across India on digital platforms, especially in metro cities of In-



**Arijit Purkayastha**  
Organiser, NEF Guwahati and Chapter  
Chairman - North East, ADTOI

dia, to create awareness about the region."

Over the years, NEF has helped in developing a positive perception about the region and in creating an understanding amongst different sections of people, Purkayastha adds. "It has also helped to promote tourism and entrepreneurship in the region. With inputs from our stakeholders, we pro-

pose to organise the eighth edition of North East Festival on December 19-20, 2020 at Radisson Blu Hotel, Guwahati. The festival will be highlighted through the popular North East Festival Facebook Page and YouTube Channel across the country. Special promotions are being done in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Hyderabad and Chennai to attract people to watch the festival digitally," he reveals. NEF this year will focus on highlighting the major issues of the region. **Dr Jitendra Singh**, Hon'ble DoNER Minister, has consented to be the event's Chief Guest.

## Seminar with the states

Part of the festival is also a seminar on Decem-

Promotions are on in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Hyderabad and Chennai to attract people

ber 20, 2020 at 11 am titled 'North East India as the Ideal Destination for Tourism Post Covid'.

It will be attended by the state tourism departments of the Northeast region, NEC, as well as major tour operators of the region as well as the rest of India.

## NE needs homogeneous protocols

The state governments must ensure they implement homogeneous COVID protocols for visitors across all the states of the region since most visitors to the Northeast visit at least two states, says **Nirmalya Choudhury**, Chapter Chairman - North East States, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO).



Hazel Jain

North-Eastern people are travelling to various destinations within the region in small groups of close family or friends, preferring short stays at places such as wildlife parks, walking trails or nature retreats, of which there is no scarcity in the region.

"A number of people from other regions of India have also started to come to our region for holidays. But, this is still comparatively small in number," says **Nirmalya Choudhury**, add-



**Nirmalya Choudhury**  
Chapter Chairman - North East  
States, IATO

ing, "Though the spike in new cases is not directly attributable to tourism, it does put pressure on future tourism resumption. It is all about managing perception and most of our region is doing a good job of keeping new case numbers low."

That said, Choudhury feels that there is one thing that the state governments in the region must ensure - the introduction and implementation of homogeneous COVID protocols for visitors across all the states of the region. He says, "Most visitors to the Northeast region travel to at least two states during their stay if not more, and a seamless travel experience across states will go a long way to ensure high approval ratings and quality of experience among visitors."

Choudhury adds that most tour operators of the region are receiving queries

from prospective travellers from around the country and some people are visiting the region for short holidays. However, the numbers are still small.

Another probable reason, according to him, could be that while the region has



A seamless travel experience across states will go a long way to ensure high approval ratings and quality of experience

easy air connectivity with the rest of the country with direct flights from most major cities, the common misperception that the region is a far-off destination is why it is not receiving as many travellers as it should. In fact, their wildlife sanctuaries are proving to be of particular interest among recent visitors looking for open spaces.

"For the IATO North East States Chapter, the main area of focus is to continue requesting all the states of our region to communicate with each other and formulate a uniform COVID-19 protocol for visitors. Seamless travel between states in terms of COVID-19 protocols and SOPs will go a long way to ensure positive experience," Choudhury says.



**HVS ANAROCK** reveals that Chandigarh and Goa topped the charts with over 40 per cent occupancy during October 2020 driven by the demand from wedding events and leisure travellers, respectively.





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## SINGAPORE AIRLINES

### Mumbai

Singapore Airlines has appointed **Chen Sy Yen** as the new General Manager India. He moves from Frankfurt, where he was posted as General Manager Germany, Switzerland and Austria since 2017. Since India is a key international market for the airline, in his new role, Sy Yen will be responsible for nurturing SIA's global vision while ensuring the fruition of the company's business objectives in the country. With over 27 years of experience with the company, he has held various key positions at the SIA head office as well as at overseas stations.



## HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS

### Delhi-NCR

**Kiran Challoyu** has been appointed as Portfolio Director of Sales & Marketing for 10 Holiday Inn Express hotels under the SAMHI ownership. Challoyu comes with around 17 years of rich experience in spearheading Sales and Marketing operations with expertise in luxury, mid-scale and value segments of the hotel industry. He has worked with well-established brands like IHCL, Oberoi Hotels & Resorts, and ITC Hotels. His last assignment was with Ginger Hotels, where he was the Corporate Director of Sales for Key Markets and Travel Trade.



## FAIRMONT HOTEL

### Jaipur

Fairmont Jaipur has promoted **Amit Sangwan** from Director of Food & Beverage to Director of Operations, with all four verticals of Food & Beverage, Culinary, Front Office and Housekeeping reporting directly to him; he will also be responsible to maintain and enhance guest satisfaction. Prior to joining Fairmont Jaipur in August 2019, he was associated with renowned hotels like Pullman, Novotel and Leela amongst others. His commitment to the hotel's mission is seen through his efforts to enhance product and processes.



# 2020: A year of the bizarre

Year 2020 turned our world topsy-turvy, and from that jumble has emerged some weird news from around the world that will make us go "Did that just happen?" If you thought the COVID-19 pandemic was the only occurrence that might have left us shocked and stunned, think again!

## Vaccine tourism takes off

The ingenuity of Indian entrepreneurs knows no bound. A new sector is emerging in the wake of the UK approving Pfizer's BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine as travel agencies in India gear up with packages to UK, US and Russia expecting a demand to get vaccinated in these foreign nations. Agencies are offering a 4-5 night package from Bengaluru to London and 3-4 night packages from Mumbai to New York.



## The tale of travelling monolith(s)

In a world where most people are homebound, a mysterious steel monolith has been going places for the last three weeks. This nine-foot structure has been travelling the world with no apparent objective. There is no surety if it's the same monolith. It was first seen on November 18 in the desert of Utah and it has since then showed up in Romania, California, England, the Netherlands and Columbia.



## A flight that doesn't take off

Little did we know that we will miss getting on flights and standing in long security queues. In an effort to lift the spirits of aviation lovers, Taiwan's Civil Aviation Administration organised a fantasy flight to recreate the experience of air travel without starting the engines. As with normal flights, passengers had to check-in, obtain boarding passes, and go through immigration and security before getting on the plane.



## World's first robot bartender

Japan's first robot bartender has begun serving up drinks in a Tokyo pub in a test that could usher in a wave of automation in restaurants and shops struggling to hire staff. The repurposed industrial robot serves drinks in its own corner of a pub run by restaurant chain Yoronotaki. A face on an attached tablet computer smiles as it chats about the weather while preparing orders.



## COVID masks adorn healing trees

It is a ritual steeped in pagan mystery, updated for the coronavirus age. Sick people in northern France occasionally leave garments in healing trees in the hope of a cure, following a tradition that persists since pre-Roman times. But locals who pay attention have noticed a recent change. Tied to the branches of the healing tree in Hasnon, southeast of Lille, are surgical masks.



## Inflight dining experience on London streets

For anyone missing the inflight dining experience, easyJet has a solution. To celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, easyJet will launch the first inflight trolley service available by home delivery. In partnership with a delivery App, easyJet cabin crew will put on their uniforms on December 17 and 18, taking their inflight trolleys and hitting the streets of London to serve the hungry and thirsty.







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# Vaccine not the only solution

**Gloria Guevara**, President and CEO, WTTC, feels that the most frustrating challenge the industry and travellers alike have faced is the lack of a co-ordinated cross-border approach. She advocates a single standard process in place.



Hazel Jain

**Why do you think we are facing a lack of co-ordination during this pandemic?**

This outbreak is similar to the 9/11 attacks in the way they posed a danger to a country's security. Only now, it is a danger to the public health at large. This is an unprecedented territory and the different countries were not prepared for it and they did not have protocols in place to deal with it.

**What has your experience been in terms of lack of a co-ordinated approach?**

It has been a pleasure to work with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) but, unfortunately, other international organisations have failed us, to be honest. For instance, I don't have a problem with WHO, but I do have a problem when I see one message from one director of a region in the morning saying it is okay to travel, and a different message in the afternoon that says it is better to quarantine. How do we fix that? We

have the same situation with other international organisations that deal with governments. This creates a lot of confusion.

**What according to you is causing this?**

Co-ordination is exactly the challenge in this outbreak and it will be a challenge in tourism's recovery. Just because we are concerned,

**Governments need to learn from each other, and they aren't. They are only concentrating on their citizens**

the politicians, and remember I am also a former politician, are concerned with making decisions that impact their citizens and no one wants to take the risks. We don't learn from the

past. In the case of 9/11, we did a risk-based assessment. They need to do something similar for this situation as well.

But the governments need to learn from each other, and they aren't. They are only concentrating on their citizens. They don't understand that this world is now very connected or they don't want to see it. Tourism can also be part of the solution for governments, and this is what is missing right now. What is also missing is that airport officials are not talking to health officials. And there is a lack of co-ordination there as well.

**How can we fix this now?**

It is not just the co-ordination among ourselves, it is the co-ordination among different countries as well. How do they implement these international system protocols? How does the UK

co-ordinate with the USA, or the EU work with the US so that we can resume some international travel? We have been talking about testing for months now, and finally we see the light at the end of the tunnel. I don't think the vaccine is going to be the only solution. We also need to have a process in place, moving forward with mutual trust and with co-ordination, so that we can be prepared for the next problem and recover faster from that.

Year 2020 will be remembered as the year the world stood still. We must never forget the pain and suffering this pandemic has caused millions of people from all corners of the earth. There has never been a greater need for the sector to come together in a globally coordinated way to ensure the recovery process is swift and painless. ↓



**Gloria Guevara**  
President and CEO, WTTC

## Guevara's essential principles for road to recovery

- ❖ International and public-private sector coordinated approach to effectively re-establish operations
- ❖ Internationally agreed testing framework and tracing programme
- ❖ Replacement of country-wide 14-day quarantine measures with selective quarantine of positive cases
- ❖ Elimination of travel advisories and bans on non-essential international travel

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