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SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY

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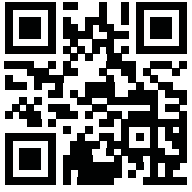


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Outbound could get costlier?

The proposed amendment in Section 206C of the additional tax on remittances made outside India might make outbound tours costlier. The outbound trade fears this would divert customers to OTAs outside India. They explain...



Riaz Munshi
President
OTOAI

“ We are going to write to the government about it and try our best to get it withdrawn. Travellers have access to agencies outside India and OTAs based out of India, which will result in the country losing revenue. We need to explain this to the ministry that there is no way we can charge TCS on services provided outside or to suppliers who are outside India. This means double taxation and MICE will be impacted the most. ”



Naveen Kundu
MD, EbixCash
Travel & Holidays

“ This step is in the right direction, despite many criticising it. However, the negative impact on business would only be temporary. We are in the detox process of the economy and this is how the government can bring people under the tax bracket. For somebody not filing taxes, it shouldn't be a problem to spend 5% extra. We have to think beyond business to address larger issues. The economy won't grow if we have a small taxpayer base. ”



Mahendra Vakharia
Managing Director
Pathfinders Holidays

“ The clause is still unclear as to how it is going to impact outbound trade and who will deduct the amount. Is it going to be charged per person or per booking? There are many questions that need to be clarified. Currently, it is vague, but it does look like a big challenge. It is only increasing the burden on tour operators and shooting up cost unnecessarily. ”

Contd on page 8 ▶

Coronavirus impacts trade

The deadly coronavirus outbreak continues to hurt tourism as travel plans are being suspended even to destinations that claim to be safe. We spoke to a few travel advisors to find out how they have been affected amidst this chaos.



EM Najeed
Senior VP, IATO

“ While this is the initial stage of the scare, for some time at least, tourists will avoid human contact by not travelling to certain destinations. In India, a few cases of coronavirus were identified and the state of Kerala has been at the forefront of taking all measures to protect the public from the threat of the virus, now declared a medical emergency in the state. Tourists have begun cancelling a good percentage of reservations and the virus has definitely affected the flow of FTAs to Kerala during season. Precautionary measures put in place to prevent flow of travellers from affected countries have also slowed FTAs. ”



Guldeep Singh Sahni
MD, Weldon Tours & Travels

“ There will be people who will not be travelling to China and there are people who are thinking of not travelling to those places that surround China. But, Indian outbound travellers are such that they will travel if they have to. They may not travel to China, but they will go to Australia, Canada, USA and Europe. So, the outbound numbers will not decline as much as we think, although individually, our companies will be impacted with the business that we do because some of us sell certain countries more than others. ”

Contd on page 14 ▶

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Engaging the millennials

The Outbound Tour Operators Association of India's convention to be held from March 15-18 in Antalya, Turkey, will focus on ways to capture and cater to the growing segment of millennial travellers that lists travel as a priority experience.

 Hazel Jain

The Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) will organise its fifth convention in Antalya, Turkey, from March 15-18, 2020 at Titanic Mardan Palace hotel, which is located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and

 Millennials are one of the fastest growing segments for the industry. They travel a lot and we need to figure ways in which we can attract them 

where all members will be staying. Sharing more details of the event is **Himanshu Patil**, Vice President, OTOAI & Convention Chairman, who says, "The theme of this convention is 'Creating Travel Synergies for

the New Millennials'. As we all know, millennials are the new decision-makers and are one of the fastest growing segments for the industry. They travel a lot and we need to figure ways in which we can attract them. The discussions during the convention will focus on how



they are using technology to book their travel. We have invited a lot of Indian as well as international speakers to attend and deliver keynote speeches." For now, it has received around 120 registrations and expects more to come in. "We are looking to close at 200 or 220 registrations, so members need to book promptly," he adds.

The pre-convention tour will be organised from March 12-15, 2020 while the post-tour will take place from March 18-21, 2020. "For these tours, we have finalised Istanbul, Izmir,

and Cappadocia. We are getting very good response for this. However, we will need to stop registrations soon. We already have 116 registrations so far and a few are waiting for the final itinerary and other details. Once we have that, I think it will be difficult to accommodate all of them. Turkish Airlines is our travel partner, and Turkey Tourism is involved with us as well. It is a joint effort," Patil adds. The hotels and detailed itineraries will be announced soon.


Speaking about other things that have kept the team busy, **Riaz Munshi**, President, OTOAI, says, "Preparations are going on in full swing for our convention. Apart from the pre and post-tours, we are also in the midst of finalising flight travel arrangements and sessions of the convention. Other than that, we are focusing on increasing our membership. We have a very conservative approach because we believe in quality and not quantity. Ever since I have tak-

en over, I wanted to drive this agenda because an association's strength lies in its members. We believe that without



Himanshu Patil
VP, OTOAI & Convention Chairman

diluting our norms, we will continue to do membership drives and increase our numbers on a pan-India basis."

Munshi adds, "We are also talking to ministries and sharing more information with them about what we do and about outbound tourism. What we feel is that the ministry is only focusing on inbound and is not aware about the revenue outbound generates for them." 





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TRAVELTALK

VIEWPOINT

Reeling under crisis?

In the past few weeks, India's travel and tourism sector was impacted by, and will continue to see the effects of, the coronavirus outbreak in China. The novel coronavirus that was first detected in Wuhan has already affected many a life in its wake and tourism, too, has suffered a setback not just to and from China, but across South and Southeast Asia with a bleak hope of recovery in the near future.

While a general slowdown in both outbound and inbound bookings accompanied with few cancellations has affected business for most Indian travel and tour operators serving the affected region, some see the proverbial glass half full. As China, the largest outbound market, tackles the coronavirus crisis, the world is bound to turn its head to India. The Indian traveller is known to brace all odds, and some in the travel trade believe that this may well be an opportunity for India outbound. We hope that a speedy recovery is made by all impacted.

Win some, lose some

The month of February began with the announcement of Union Budget 2020-21 which, though not applauded by the travel trade, did not 'completely ignore' the tourism sector. The trade was responsive to proposals such as the introduction of more Tejas-like trains, allocation of ₹2500 crore for promotion of tourism, development of 100 more airports in the next four years as well as doubling of the aircraft fleet, all expected to boost domestic and inbound tourism. Some old demands, however, still seem to have been excluded, such as a further reduction in GST and granting of an export status to the sector.

A headliner this time was the introduction of TCS or Tax Collected at Source, which may make outbound tours costlier by charging 1% additional tax on remittances made outside India. Fearing a negative impact, the trade has sought more clarification from the government on the said amendment.

Let's all hope for a positive outcome and that the tourism trade of India not suffer.

TCS for the B2B agent

Abdul Hadi Shaikh, Co-founder & CEO, FlyRemit, says that the proposed TCS under Finance Bill 2020 means that overseas remitters paying for travel, education, etc., will have to compulsorily shell out an extra 5% as income tax in the form of tax collected at source.

The Finance Bill 2020 has proposed a TCS (Tax Collected at Source) for all overseas payments covered under the Liberalized Remittance Scheme (LRS), which also covers overseas tour payments to overseas DMCs, hotels, etc. Let's analyse this in the context of how it will impact the travel consultant. Please do note that this is a draft proposal and no procedural rules have been published by the Income Tax department, yet. So, upon a reading of the said clause, below is a key synopsis of the impact.

Financial impact

All remittance, when made to an overseas party for travel or travel-related purposes as covered under the LRS, will have to now deposit 5% of the total value of payment as TCS before the amount is remitted. That means, if the remittance value is \$1000, then \$50 has to be paid as TCS.

Payments covered

It will cover all travel payments for whatever purpose. But, if any of the payments are covered under any other provision of the Income Tax Act liable to deduct tax at source, then this new provision will not apply. This new TCS provision may not apply to marketplaces as previous TCS provision mandates all e-commerce operators and marketplaces, except those acting as agents to deduct tax.

Who deducts the TCS?

If the remitter (traveller) approaches an Authorised Dealer (AD) for remittance under the LRS (banks and licensed exchange operators), then the AD will collect 5% of the remittance amount from the remitter and discharge the same to the government. The remitter

If any of the payments are covered under any other provision of the Income Tax Act liable to deduct tax at source, then this new provision will not apply

will get a TCS-paid certificate, which can be used to offset the remitter's individual Income Tax liability (hence, it is not an additional or new tax). Here, there is a provision that such TCS will be collected only if the remittance amount per passenger, under whose LRS quota the remittance is sought, exceeds ₹7,00,000 per annum (April to March). This ₹7,00,000 limit is cumulative, i.e., if the remittance amount either individually or a sum of all his previous remittances exceeds ₹7,00,000 per annum, then TCS will have to be paid before the remittance can be processed.

For a B2B travel agent

In a B2B transaction, the first agent who has sold the package to the actual traveller will have to collect 5% TCS on the amount and discharge it to the government and deliver the TCS certificate to the traveller, irrespective of the amount of the package sold. It is worthy to note that in a B2B transaction, there will be no minimum limit of ₹7,00,000. Any amount collected for an overseas tour package will attract collection of 5% TCS.

All subsequent movement of money from agent to agent till the AD for ultimate outward remittance, might not have to deduct TCS as it has been deducted and duly discharged in the first leg of the transaction. It is important to note that this is the most logical deduction of the text of the proposed section, while a plain reading of the same might lead to a scenario of multiple taxation at every leg of money movement, i.e. from traveller to travel agent one, and then again to travel agent two until the AD implying a 5% TCS deduction at every level, which leads to massive double taxation for the same transaction. While operating rules of this provision are awaited, it seems the government wants to collect a portion of personal income tax from every overseas traveller at the time of his/her travel

itself rather than through traditional means of collecting income tax.

Best way of remitting money overseas

With the limited information available on this, our analysis indicate it might be best that travel agents ask DMCs to bill the actual traveller directly and individually. This way, the traveller will have to remit the money directly to the DMC by approaching an AD. This way, the traveller can also avail benefit of the ₹7,00,000 quota. So, if the traveller's invoice does not exceed ₹7,00,000, then no TCS will have to be collected and paid. Travel agents can then receive their mark-up back from the DMC directly.

To enable this in a seamless manner, FlyRemit will soon come up with an easy to use, online method to process transactions in this manner which will be cost efficient to both travel agents and travellers.

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



Abdul Hadi Shaikh

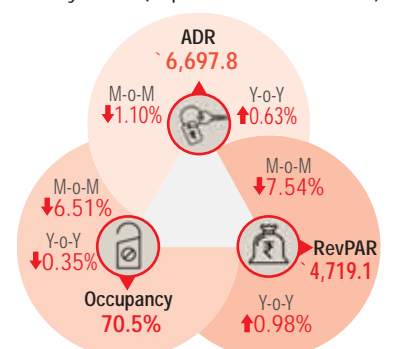
December output remains dim HVS

December'19 witnessed a slight month-on-month drop in ADR, occupancy and RevPAR according to HVS ANAROCK's monthly newsletter titled 'Hotels & Hospitality Overview India'.

Going by HVS ANAROCK's recent analysis on the hotel sector in India, in December 2019, while ADR for the top 13 markets in India stood at approx. ₹6700, average RevPAR was recorded at approx. ₹4720. Occupancy for the month stood at 70.5%. The report also notes that all three indicators – ADR, occupancy and RevPAR – had dropped in the month-on-month analysis, recording a reduction of 1.1%, 6.51% and 7.54%, respectively. While a y-o-y analysis concluded a similar outcome for occupancy (a y-o-y reduction of 0.35%), both ADR and RevPAR recorded a growth of 0.63% and 0.98%, respectively.

Hotel Sector

Key Stats (Top 13 Markets in India)

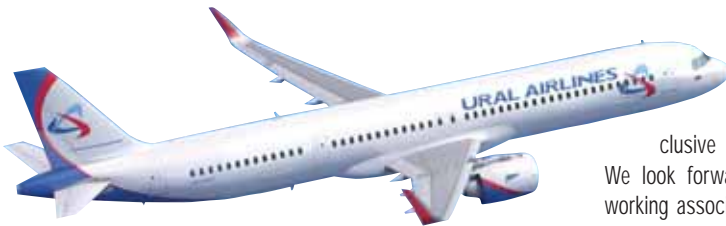


Ural Airlines with Minar

Ural Airlines has announced the launch of its flight between Moscow and Mumbai four times a week, and has appointed Minar Group as its General Sales Agent for India. This will help position the airline well and create awareness about it in the India market.

 Nisha Verma

JSC Ural Airlines, the full-service carrier of the Russian Federation, is all set to launch four-times-a-week operations between Moscow and Mumbai beginning March 30 this year. The brand new A320 Neo aircraft with two-class configuration will operate on the route. In addition, the airline has appointed Minar Travels (India), the airline management services arm of Minar Group, as its



grow in the India market and connect the two important cities while offering seamless connectivity within Russia, including

St. Petersburg, and further to Europe (including London via their hub in Moscow). "Minar Travels is happy to be asso-

ciated with Ural airlines as their exclusive GSA in India. We look forward to a great working association with Ural Airlines and are optimistic of making Ural Airlines operations to India a success," said **Shallin Magoo**, Vice President, Minar Travels. 

| Proposed schedule | | |
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| Departure | Arrival | Days |
| Mumbai 0540 hrs | Moscow 1005 hrs | Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat |
| Moscow 1920 hrs | Mumbai 0435 hrs | Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri, |

General Sales Agent (GSA) for the India market. A spokesperson of Ural Airlines said, "We have selected Minar Travels to position our brand, create awareness of our products and sell our services in this important new market." According to an official statement, Minar Travels will use its vast experience and liaison for the airline's sales development in India, including sales, ticketing and direct support services to the travel trade.

With departure from Mumbai at 0540 hrs and arrival in Moscow at 1005 hrs, the airline is offering convenient timings for business travellers, MICE and tourist groups. Similarly, flights from Moscow will depart at 1920 hrs and arrive in Mumbai at 0435 hrs.

JSC Ural Airlines is one of the fastest growing airlines of the Russian Federation and has aggressive plans to

 According to Mastercard Global Destination Cities Index 2019, of the top 5 destinations for travellers from Malaysia, Chennai ranks 3rd with 494 mn arrivals making up for 7.2% of total number of tourists from Malaysia.

Arvind Tandon felicitated



Arvind Tandon, Director, Ark Travels, was recently felicitated by the Mayor of Mumbai, Kishori Pednekar, at the IBG Awards of Excellence for his notable contribution in promoting cruise tourism and making it popular in India.



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- Mario Hardy decides to move on; to continue as PATA CEO till 31st December
- Validity of Airport Entry Passes for tour operators extended till 31st March
- IRCTC to run country's third Tejas Express on Indore-Varanasi route
- No funding of expenses under 'Dekho Apna Desh' campaign, MOT clarifies

Group tours to suffer

▶ Contd from page 3



Pradip Lulla
Acting President & VP, TAFI

“ This amendment would certainly make packages expensive on a global level and affect our business. Hence, we are all writing to the government to get it removed. We are seeking further clarification from our legal advisors because under the Act, the additional tax will cause a lot of issue. Many have said that one can apply for refund of this extra amount; it will be like TDS wherein the tax is cut and one has to claim a refund later. However, the issue is that cash flow will be blocked. Clients may also book directly outside the country. This in turn could lead to unofficial ways of doing business. ”



Subhash Goyal
Secy Gen, FAITH

“ There is already a five per cent tax on packaged tours and with this one per cent TCS, it will make people buy packages from international DMCs or with online portals. Tour operators and travel agents should not be put at a disadvantage from online portals. They should have the same taxation and there should be a level-playing field between the travel agents and OTAs. If this amendment is implemented, it will obviously discourage international tourism. While the government needs to take the final decision, in my opinion, there should be a level-playing field. ”

Inputs by Nisha Verma

BUCCARA with ISA Tourism

BUCCARA – The Private Collection is now easily available in India and can be booked through ISA Tourism, which now represents the German luxury hospitality brand.

Hazel Jain

ISA Tourism has been appointed as the Indian representation partner for BUCCARA – The Private Collection. It owns a collection of luxury villas, pent-houses, castles and yachts, as well as a helicopter, a private jet in locations across South Africa, Spain and Austria. **Manas Sinha**, Director, ISA Tourism, says, “We are proud to be associated with them and to promote their luxury properties in South Africa, Spain and Austria, and private yachts in Spain.”

BUCCARA – The Private Collection is a German group and is an uber-luxurious product that is perfect for families and groups of friends travelling



Manas Sinha
Director, ISA Tourism

together. Sinha adds, “Here, you don’t book a room but the entire villa or castle located in exotic locations – for instance, on the beach overlooking the ocean. The entire team at the property serves only one group at a time. So, it is like a buy-out and is perfect for private holidays. I would also like to highlight that the Pezula Private

Castle located on the Garden Route in Knysna (a town in South Africa) is a beachfront vacation home – it is where Nelson Mandela had stayed. That speaks volumes about the quality of service it offers.”

You don't book a room but the entire villa or castle located in exotic locations; the entire team at the property serves only one group

Since these are boutique properties, there is not much price variation, Sinha shares.



ForwardKeys suggests that international outbound departures from India were down 18.5% between the third and fourth week of Jan 20 vis-à-vis the same period last year, on account of news of coronavirus spreading.

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Budget prompts mixed reaction

While Union Budget 2020-21 has made some in the travel trade happy, others claim that their demands have not been met and that despite allocating `2,500 crore to tourism, the government hasn't done much for the sector at large. Some pain points this year have been absence of further reduction in GST and of grant of an export status to tourism.



Rajiv Mehra
VP, IATO

“It's encouraging that the Finance Minister spoke at length about tourism this time. She made a number of announcements, including a hike in budget for tourism promotion by allocating `2500 crore, making 100 more airports operational by 2024 and doubling the aircraft fleet. Most importantly, I am happy that the government announced more Tejas-like trains to iconic tourist destinations, which has been IATO's demand and is certain to boost tourism. As for road connectivity, introduction of the Chennai-Bengaluru and Delhi-Mumbai expressway will benefit us in the long run.”

“The appeal for further reduction of GST and an infrastructure status for hospitality still remain in the wish list. Neighbouring countries continue to have the advantage of a lower GST, while the Indian hospitality industry remains at a disadvantage. Single-window clearance for hospitality projects remains a pipe dream even as hotels continue to face challenging situations. The only positive lies in the allocation to infrastructure wherein 100 more airports will be developed, roads will be built and new trains and tracks will facilitate connectivity.”



Gurbaxish Singh Kohli
VP, FHRAI



JK Mohanty
Hony Secy, HAI

“We welcome the government's decision to increase the budget for tourism promotion to `2500 crore, as well as the allocation of `3150 crore for the promotion of culture. Furthermore, a grant of `1.7 lakh crore for transport infrastructure would definitely have a positive impact on the tourism sector. That said, hospitality seems to have been neglected once more. Among our demands, the topmost was to bring hotels under the infrastructure status, which has not been considered, nor has it been declared as a priority sector for getting term loans.”

“With the allocation of `2500 crore for the travel trade, a crucial path has been paved towards the overall development of the sector. It clearly indicates the government's vision of propelling the domestic and inbound tourism industry to new heights. Moreover, the new income tax regime is expected to further increase the disposable income, encouraging individuals to pursue travelling. While these decisions will be favourable for the travel trade, a revised structure in airfares and rail ticket fares would have been a further value addition to generate revenues.”



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



Pankaj Nagpal
MD, Travstarz Global Group

“The Budget is extremely disappointing in terms of outbound travel. The proposed levy of TCS will severely and negatively affect the industry and the government, in its over-reach to increase the tax base, has gone overboard by proposing such a levy which will actually mean the death of the Indian outbound industry. The move further deepens the negative business sentiment in the country and shows that the government is not really serious about improving the health of the economy and has targeted the travel industry, which is one of the biggest employment generators in the country.”

“Union budget 2020 was a mixed bag for the tourism industry as whole. We are happy that the government has thought of tourism for mainstream economic development and announced to develop new circuits, investments in infrastructure and increase in marketing budget to `2500 crore. TCS on outward remittance will also impact Indian travel and tourism trade negatively, because customers can skip travel professionals to save TCS and buy their travel requirements online from overseas players. This issue needs to be corrected immediately.”



Ravi Gosain
MD, Erco Travels



Sanjeev K Nayar
GM, WelcomHeritage

“Initiatives like adding 100 more airports by 2024 under the UDAN scheme will help improve connectivity across the country and be able to cater to the significant growth in number of flyers, thus giving impetus to burgeoning domestic travel. WelcomHeritage, being a heritage hospitality brand, has always supported developments that benefit the cultural heritage of India and by allocating `3100 crore to Ministry of Culture, we expect further promotion of India's vast and rich culture and heritage. The government will also make travel accessible and affordable, thus encouraging growth in this sector. Overall, the Budget is quite satisfactory.”

“Positivity is reflected in this year's Budget as we see decision makers expanding on the previous budget's theme of infrastructure advancement and supporting it with an increase in allocation for travel and tourism sector - up from last year by 14.19 per cent. With `2,500 crore in funds, year 2020 seems promising for infrastructure and aviation sector as a whole, when considering expected development of 100 more airports by 2024 and with the air fleet to double in the next half-decade. In this Budget, a grander vision certainly appeared to be focused on expanding infrastructure and connectivity.”



Sandeep Dwivedi
COO, ITQ



Pushpendra Bansal
COO, Lords Hotels & Resorts

“Presently, hoteliers have to run pillar to post in order to obtain the required licences and registrations. In the Union Budget that was recently announced, single-window clearance for licensing should have been introduced to promote ease of doing business in the hospitality industry. Allocation of `2500 crore to the tourism industry would definitely help in development of infrastructure, which is the need of the hour. In my opinion, Goods & Services Tax on room tariffs could have been reduced further to encourage more inbound tourism, mainly for FITs.”

“The government has really thought about tourism as an important sector. It is a tool for the generation for employment as well as revenue. The allocation of `2500 crore for tourism is a good move. Apart from that, they have talked about airports, land, railways and waterways. They have covered everything that can be a tool for the development of tourism, including 100 airports and doubling aircraft fleet. More trains like Tejas and other high-speed trains would certainly boost tourism within the country. What needs to be done now is to focus on skill development.”



PP Khanna
President, ADTOI



Capt. Swadesh Kumar
President, ATOAI

“We are disappointed since there has not been a significant increase in the budget allocated for tourism promotion. Nevertheless, we are delighted that 100 new airports will be developed. I hope some of these are in the far-flung areas of the Himalayas, so that adventure tourism grows. We are also happy that Majuli Island in Assam has been added to the list of iconic sites. I hope that more such sites are included. I expected an announcement on the natural heritage of the country for generating employment opportunities, but would like the state governments to take this forward.”

“The Finance Minister has focused on the importance of tourism and announced measures to boost tourism to India, which is an indication of inclusive growth. She acknowledges the contribution of tourism in the development of India. A budget of `2500 crore has been allocated for tourism in 2021, 100 more airports will be built by 2024 under the UDAN scheme and doubling of the aircraft fleet have been announced. A tribal museum is to be set up in Ranchi (Jharkhand) and five archaeological sites are to be developed into 'iconic' sites with on-site museums.”



Amaresh Tiwari
VC, ICPB

Inputs by Nisha Verma,
Manas Dwivedi and Hazel Jain

Curated itineraries by



Having celebrated its seventh anniversary last month, World Travel Studio is thankful to its team members, clients and trade partners. The company offers customised itineraries across continents, enabling travellers to see the world in a brand new way.

 Manas Dwivedi

With over 300 carefully-curated bespoke vacation options that can be further customised based on the client's interest and budget, World Travel Studio's product portfolio may be Europe-centric, but caters to Australia, New Zealand and Africa as well. According to **Haresh Koyande**, Founder & Managing Director, World Travel Studio, several travel trade partners from across the country have been supporting them

 While future bookings slowed, business is back to normal and we may soon see a sudden spurt in bookings due to the pent-up demand 

since inception. "Our highly experienced vacation architects co-work with them to create an offering that suits their VIP clients," he says.

Talking about business amid the coronavirus outbreak, he says that only a couple of clients postponed the trips. "Most clients travelled as scheduled, only a couple of clients postponed the trips. While future bookings slowed post the outbreak news, business is back to normal and we may soon see a sudden spurt in bookings due to the pent-up demand," Koyande adds. He is also hopeful that though the government has proposed five per cent TCS

on international packages, it will not implement the same and be kind to outbound travel companies whose business is already affected due to the coronavirus. "Social harmony is extremely important for economic progress, hence, I am hopeful that all entities

concerned will work together in a focused manner to create a conducive environment for growth," he shares.


Some of the interesting experiences being offered by World Travel Studio are an opportunity to journey through Italy on a

Ferrari, watch penguins in their natural habitat during the Antarctica expedition on National Geographic Explorer, a visit to Christ the Redeemer in Brazil, Machu Picchu in Peru and Petra in Jordan as part of the 'New 7 Wonders of the World', visit to Iguazu Falls in Argentina/Brazil

and Ha Long Bay in Vietnam – both ranked amongst New 7 Wonders of Nature, Rocky Mountaineer's Rail Journey in Canada, visit to Louvre museum in France, a visit to Pearl Harbour in Hawaii, Wildlife safaris in Kenya, Acropolis of Athens in Greece, Mercedes Benz Mu-



Haresh Koyande
Founder & MD, World Travel Studio

seum in Germany, NASA Space Center in USA, or James Bond Island in Thailand. 



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15 Pre-Opening
15 States
2 Countries

 A *Colliers International* report states that the number of Indian travellers to the GCC market is expected to increase by a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 10 per cent to 9.8 million travellers by 2024.



goes green this 2020

Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) ushered in a new era by going completely eco-friendly with its Nagpur edition. The event, held from January 27-28 at Hotel Centre Point, has done away with single-use plastic. This initiative, led by **Harmandeep Singh Anand**, MD, GPS, also replaced standees with 50-inch screens for suppliers to display their promos.



India key to Nepal tourism growth

After a successful conclusion of the first leg of Nepal Sales Mission, Nepal Tourism Board has identified 100 new tourism sites and regions in Nepal out of which 30 have been taken up for promotion this year under the 'Lifetime Experiences' campaign. With this, the NTO will highlight Nepal's range of tourism products apt for the India market.

 Manas Dwivedi

Focused on the India market, Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) wants to enhance awareness about Nepal's tourist regions and offerings to various Indian cities through sales missions, roadshows and by participation in different trade exhibi-



tions. Sharing more details, **Lila Bahadur Baniya**, Officiating Director - PR & Publicity, Nepal Tourism Board, says that the first leg of Nepal Sales Mission in India received a good response from the Indian travel trade. "We visited Amritsar,

Chandigarh, Jaipur, Indore, Surat, Pune, Trichy, Trivandrum and Kochi with 14 industry partners from Nepal and a delegation of NTB. The main focus of this sales mission was to reconnect the travel industry of Nepal to India with reinforced energy and a new strategy towards bilateral growth and development of tourism so as to benefit the travel industry of both countries. With good road and air connectivity to India, we have always given high priority to the India market," he said.

Talking about its marketing and promotion strategy for the Visit Nepal Year (VNY) 2020 campaign and beyond, Baniya said that Nepal is organising a 'Tour Operator Awareness Program'.

"After the first phase of Nepal Sales Mission, we will evaluate our perform-

ance and then enter another phase of sales missions, which will cover other major cities of India. We want to mo-





Lila Bahadur Baniya
Officiating Director
PR & Publicity, Nepal Tourism Board

tivate Indian tour operators and the media to encourage tourists to travel to Nepal," he said.

With Visit Nepal Year 2020 campaign, Nepal hopes to receive two million tourists this year. Till October 2019, the tourist arrivals from India

(by air) to Nepal was 143,870 with a 10 per cent increase in comparison to the same period

 After the first phase of the Sales Mission, we will evaluate our performance and then enter another phase of missions, which will cover other major cities of India 

last year, which makes India the number one tourist source market for Nepal.

The total international arrivals were 975,557 (till October 2019), whereas the total arrivals for 2018 during

the same period were 903,539. Year 2018 also witnessed a total arrivals figure of 1,173,072.

Apart from air travel, Nepal gets a huge inflow of Indian travellers through land routes. A study by Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Government of Nepal, shows that over one million Indian travellers enter Nepal through land routes.

Under Visit Nepal Year 2020, the Nepal government is giving priority to the diversity of tourism products and has identified 100 new tourism destinations in Nepal out of which NTB is giving priority to 30 destinations in 2020 for 'lifetime experiences'. These include parts of Muktinath, Rara Lake and Karnali zone, where Nepal is going to develop one of the world's longest river-rafting tracks. "We are going to or-

ganise different MICE events in Nepal, while also working on promoting night tourism in Kathmandu with 'Kathmandu Valley by Night' campaign. We are in the process of developing some routes and promoting night activities, and tourists can enjoy the different cultural aspects, local handicraft shops and regional food," Baniya said. 

Deals for trade

In 2020, Hotel Association of Nepal is providing 30 per cent discount to the Indian travel trade, while Restaurant and Bar Association of Nepal, Trekking Agent Association of Nepal and Nepal Association of Travel Agents have committed substantial discounts to the trade in India and some other parts of the world.

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Inbound takes a hit

▶ Contd from page 3



Dharmendra Singh Chauhan
Chairman, ADTOI - Maharashtra

“The coronavirus has also affected our inbound business. We have received two group cancellations so far. The clients were from Malaysia and Thailand, and they were slated to travel to Jammu & Kashmir, Delhi and parts of Maharashtra. This deadly virus has really started to affect our business. February, March and April are the last three months of the season for our inbound guests and ever since this pandemic has taken over the world, no one is opting to travel to another country. We were discussing a MICE trip with a company from China, for their employees, to India for the months of September and October, but now even that’s affected.”



Kishan Biyani
MD, Ark Travels

“With the recent coronavirus outbreak that has been ongoing, there is bound to be a slowdown for Asian destinations, but if you look at Singapore as an example, the measures taken by them are strict; the same goes for Malaysia. There will be no Chinese nationals entering these countries so, undoubtedly, the next big market they will look at is India which means they will offer huge incentives to bring in the numbers. This will be a great opportunity for MICE players. There is a fear factor right now which is understandable and will continue for a few more days, but things are bound to normalise after that.”

Inputs by Hazel Jain

Offline visas get automated

While Ctrl Visa broke ground by easing the online visa process, the visa processing system will now also automate offline visas, taking the total number of missions to more than 120. The tool will help track passports and documents physically submitted.



Hazel Jain

After developing an algorithm that automates the entire visa processing system for online visas, The Whiteboard Company has now added another module to its system whereby it processes offline visas, too. The product, called Ctrl Visa, revolutionises visa services for agencies by automating every part of the application process. **Radhika Butala**, Partner & Director, The White-

board Company, says, “Ever since we started Ctrl Visa, we wanted to do all types of visas – business, tourist, e-visa, traditional sticker visa, etc. We have now added the offline module to the system. It has one more level to it – the passport or document tracking tool – because there is a physical submission. We will also have an integrated model of the passport tracking.” This system is for consolidators, OTAs and business travel agencies.



Parveen Jiterwal, Founder & CEO and Radhika Butala, Partner & Director, The Whiteboard Company

Feedback

The Ctrl Visa system has really helped increase my team’s productivity and reduced errors in processing visas.

Awais Patel, Director, Atlas Tours & Travels



Given that we are the largest visa processing company in India, a single-system Ctrl Visa has helped us streamline our complex business process.

Rajan Dua, MD and Co-founder, Udaan India

This is good even for agents who do around 400-500 visas per month. Its current clients include Udaan India and Atlas Visa Services. How it works is that the consolidator/agent will have the system and their submission officer will have the system on his phone as an App.

Parveen Jiterwal, Founder & CEO, The Whiteboard Company, says, “There is nothing like this in the market right now. There

are smaller item-based or singular visa-based products right now, but it’s not a system. There is still a lot of manual intervention in the entire process and dependency on the operation staff is high. Eventually, we want to make this a GDS for visas.” He adds that an average person can do 30-40 visas. “With this system, an agency can scale up to 120-130 visas and we have a number to prove this,” Jiterwal adds.

Tourism Summit in Nevada



Nevada Governor’s Global Tourism Summit in Las Vegas opened to a host of valued guests from across the world. The three-day Summit had keynote speeches and discussions on a number of subjects such as the role of Artificial Intelligence in reshaping travel. It was followed by a post-conference Fam tour to Rhyolite and other towns & districts of Nevada, USA.



(Fitur) 2020 breaks record

FITUR 2020, that celebrated its 40th anniversary this year between January 22 and 26, concluded with a 6.4 per cent increase in international visitors, who came from 140 countries. The fair unveiled some new sections this time, including FITUR TALENT. The next FITUR trade fair will be held from January 20 to 24, 2021, at Feria de Madrid.





stimulates all markets

Moving ahead in its plans to invigorate the tier markets of India, Nepal Tourism Board recently visited the cities of Pune and Trichy along with the Nepalese delegation comprising several DMCs who interacted with key travel agents there. This was part of its nine-city Nepal Sales Mission and the last two cities in this series are Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi.

TRICHY



PUNE



IAAPI expo from Feb 26-28

The association feels that promoting the amusement industry can help drive domestic tourism. At its 20th expo in Mumbai, exhibitors from 14 countries will showcase their products.

 Hazel Jain

The Indian Association of Amusement Parks & Industries (IAAPI) will be hosting the 20th edition of its annual IAAPI Amusement Expo this month. It will be held from February 26-28 at NESCO Complex, Goregaon East in Mumbai. The exhibition is supported by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, under the banner of Incredible India. The event, hailed as India's only focused B2B show for the amusement and theme park sector, will be spread across 80,000 sqft with participation from over 150 exhibitors from India and across 14 countries, including Canada, Germany, Korea, Hong Kong, Italy, Philippines, Spain, Saudi Arabia, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Turkey, UAE, UK and the USA displaying their products and services.

Sohansinh Jadeja, President, IAAPI, shares, "We will also be



Sohansinh Jadeja
President, IAAPI


organising the third edition of IAC Connect scheduled to be held on February 27, 2020 on the sidelines of the exhibition. Industry experts, from digital marketing experts to mall developers, will speak on how digital marketing can boost ROI, going beyond social media, and the future of indoor amusement centres."

The expo will provide a networking platform with decision makers from India and overseas, which will include park and FEC operators, resorts owners, real estate and mall developers, and

allied professionals connected to the amusement and leisure industry. Concurrently, the National Awards for Excellence 2020 will be presented to new endeavours undertaken in the amusement and entertainment

 Experts will speak on digital marketing to boost ROI, going beyond social media and the future of indoor amusement centres 

industry. Over 4,000 business professionals from India and neighbouring countries are expected to visit this event.

The association, in its representation to MOT, has requested to promote amusement parks through MOT platforms. 

WTFARES serves the west

From being the first website to offer free flight cancellation in 2016, WTFARES.com has grown to serve 20,000+ customers in the last four years. It now has a new office in Mumbai.

 Manas Dwivedi

Serving over 900 SMEs through its self-booking tool, WTFARES.com is promoting wildlife tourism in Nagpur with 300-plus arrivals into the city going to Tadoba, Pench National Park and Kanha Tiger Reserve. The company also recently signed an agreement with Air Seychelles to boost arrivals into the East African nation. Varun Sarda, Founder & CEO, WTFARES.com, says that the strength of the company has now increased to 35 employees with its new office in Mumbai. "A dedicated team of four looks just into wildlife. Besides, WTFARES has seen phenomenal growth in outbound travel to Seychelles, Maldives, Vietnam and South Africa, closing about 50 files every month. A new website is on its way later in 2020, which will capitalise on travel data, follow behaviour of travellers and empower them to customise their trips," he adds.



Varun Sarda
Founder & CEO, WTFARES.com

WTFARES is working closely with more than 50 travel agents from Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi and Kolkata by empowering them with its multi-BSP platform, which gives them a wide choice of airlines and agreements, something which is still unique in India, Sarda says. Along with this, the company also serves them with Seychelles, Maldives and Thailand.

Commenting on trends for the upcoming travel season, Sarda feels that Europe is going to

see a phenomenal growth due to sceptical travel within South-east Asia after the coronavirus outbreak. "People have started cancelling trips to Thailand, Vietnam and even Singapore. This is a major concern and travellers are sceptical until

 A new website is on its way later in 2020, which will capitalise on travel data, follow travellers' behaviour and empower them to customise trips 

there's a resolution to this. We anticipate people travelling more towards the West or Down Under. The tourism industry will be impacted at large because visa to South-east Asian countries was easily accessible," he says. 

A toast to West India by TBO

TBO Group, with the support of NCL Cruises, organised an evening of cocktails, travel conversations and amazing music for its business partners from the travel trade fraternity, on February 4 at Barrel Mansion, Mumbai. The event was graced by the presence of over 900 guests from the western India market, including stalwarts, travel agents, airline representatives and hoteliers.



EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



FEBRUARY 2020

| | | |
|---|------------|-------|
| ONYX Hospitality Sales Mission | Delhi | 17-18 |
| Aviation Festival Asia | Singapore | 18-19 |
| ONYX Hospitality Sales Mission | Kolkata | 19 |
| Travelbullz roadshow | Mumbai | 19 |
| ONYX Hospitality Sales Mission | Mumbai | 20 |
| Travelbullz roadshow | Delhi | 21 |
| IITM | Kolkata | 21-23 |
| Bengal Travel Mart | Siliguri | 22-24 |
| Reunion Island Destination Training | Chennai | 24 |
| Switzerland Destination Training | Lucknow | 25 |
| Reunion Island Destination Training | Bengaluru | 26 |
| Accor Showcase 2020 | Delhi | 26 |
| Switzerland Destination Training | Chandigarh | 27 |
| Accor Showcase 2020 | Mumbai | 28 |
| Switzerland Destination Training | Jalandhar | 28 |
| Reunion Island Destination Training | Mumbai | 28 |
| STATT 4 th Anniversary Meeting | Madurai | 29 |

MARCH 2020

| | | |
|--|-----------------|----------|
| CAPA Middle East & Africa Aviation Summit | Amman, Jordan | 2-3 |
| Switzerland Destination Training | Hyderabad | 3 |
| ITB | Berlin | 4-8 |
| Switzerland Destination Training | Nagpur | 6 |
| World Wedding Forum | Mumbai | 11-12 |
| Switzerland Destination Training | Kochi | 12 |
| World Wedding Forum | Delhi- NCR | 14-15 |
| OTOAI Convention | Antalya, Turkey | 15-18 |
| MITT | Moscow | 17-19 |
| Switzerland Destination Training | Raipur | 17 |
| Switzerland Destination Training | Bhopal | 18 |
| Switzerland Destination Training | Indore | 19 |
| Global Aerospace Summit | Abu Dhabi | 17-19 |
| Global Hospitality and Tourism Conference on Experiential Management and Marketing | Shillong | 18-20 |
| Rendez Vous En France- Atout France | Nantes, France | 19-29 |
| IITE | Bhubaneswar | 20-22 |
| UITT 2020 | Kyiv, Ukraine | 25-27 |
| Thailand Tourism Luxury Roadshow | Bengaluru | 30 |
| WTM Latin America | Sao Paulo | 31-Apr 2 |
| PATA Annual Summit 2020 | Ras Al Khaimah | 3-Apr 3 |

APRIL 2020

| | | |
|---|-----------|-------|
| Thailand Tourism Luxury Roadshow | Ahmedabad | 1 |
| HICSA 2020 | Mumbai | 1-2 |
| COTTM | Beijing | 1-3 |
| Thailand Tourism Luxury Roadshow | Mumbai | 3 |
| WTM Africa | Cape Town | 6-8 |
| Kazakhstan International Exhibition | Almaty | 14-16 |
| ITB India | Mumbai | 15-17 |
| GITB | Jaipur | 19-21 |
| Arabian Travel Market (ATM) | Dubai | 19-22 |
| Digital Travel Summit APAC 2020 | Sentosa | 20-22 |
| International Conference on Sustainable Tourism | Kolkata | 24-25 |

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

ASSOCIATION TALK

'Training members foremost'

The Travel Agents Association of India - Northern Region (TAAI-NR) recently had its first meeting post electing a new team. On the agenda now is training members on new destinations and solving both macro and micro issues.



Nisha Verma

The TAAI-NR team recently had its first bi-monthly meeting, attended by around 50 members, where

We wanted to tell them that they can look up to their office bearers and share feedback and suggestions, so that we can improve things," he said.

lines, hotels, embassies and VFS, for micro issues, we plan to come up with a think tank within TAAI-NR, which would have seven or eight members,



Neeraj Malhotra
Chairman, TAAI-NR

Neeraj Malhotra, Chairman, TAAI-NR, shared that the agenda of the meet was primarily to introduce the new team for the term 2019-21. This was also the first meeting after the new team took over. "We wanted to interact with the members and introspect on what could be done to solve their problems.

Gaurav Dogra, Honorary Secretary, TAAI-NR, added that apart from introducing the team, they also wanted to welcome Jyoti Mayal, the first lady president of TAAI from



Gaurav Dogra
Honorary Secretary, TAAI-NR

North India. "We also discussed both micro and macro issues. While macro issues are related to those with air-

We are finding new partners and associations with different countries, and introducing them to the members so that they know how to sell a particular destination. They should learn and earn

Neeraj Malhotra

where we would regularly meet and discuss what all we can do for our members. Also, we are planning to do some training programmes for the frontline staff of our members'

companies, as they are the first point of sale," he shared.

Malhotra claimed that they are doing destination training programmes and will be doing an educational trip to Bintan, Indonesia, very soon. "We have done destination training programmes with different countries and have also done roadshows with them. We are finding new partners and associations with different countries, and introducing them to the members so that they know how to sell a particular destination. They should learn and earn. We had a meeting with the tourism minister of Indonesia, who invited us to Bintan, a new destination that they want to sell," he said.

'Use tech to move ahead'

Enterprising Travel Agent's Association (ETAA), North India, recently concluded a networking meet and aims to educate them on technology and trends.



Nisha Verma

Saurabh Tuteja, General Secretary, ETAA North India, says that the agenda behind the meet was to create a platform for members to interact, learn and network. "I believe that today, knowledge is the

sessions, often followed by networking meets," he shared.

The knowledge sessions organised by the association are quite varied, claims Tuteja, adding that

The idea is to educate members so they are well-equipped for today's world



Saurabh Tuteja
General Secretary, ETAA North India

key to success. It's time that we use technology and networking to move ahead in the travel trade. Hence, we keep conducting knowledge

"the idea is to educate members on different destinations, processes and technology, so that they are well-equipped for today's competitive world and perform like a consultant instead of just a travel agent." ETAA North India also conducts sessions on GST for its members' benefit.

The Chapter has recently added new members and hopes to reach the 500-member-mark by end of this year, claims Puneet Bhasin, Joint Secretary, ETAA North India. "ETAA is all about non-IATA members and that's what the target is, though we do have some IATA members. We are looking at bringing the unorganised travel segment under an organised umbrella, where people from Tier-II and III cities can interact with people already established in the industry, to learn, partner and grow," he says.

While the Association recently concluded educational Fam trips to Mashobra and Jungle Camp, it has more such trips on the cards for members, with a focus on experiential tourism and technology.

In memoriam

Brij K Rastogi



Brij K Rastogi, fearless & focused and an inspiration to many, recently left for heavenly abode. A true family man, a guiding father and a playful, loving grandfather, he had many colourful feathers in his hat. He started his career with Japan Airlines in the 1960s and enjoyed his tenure with full zeal and enthusiasm. He grew with the organisation, touched many lives, helped many and is remembered for the numerous good deeds during his tenure of over three decades. It was in Japan Airlines where he met his wife, too, and that was also the beginning of his personal journey. Post his retirement from the airline, he joined Global Aviation and was associated with them for over 20 years. He rejoined Global Aviation after his 80th birthday and was working till the end. He will always be missed for his kind heart, inspiring words, quick wit and kind deeds.

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MINISTRY OF TOURISM

New Delhi



Rakesh Verma, a 1993-batch Punjab cadre officer, has joined as the new Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. He has been appointed for a tenure of five years or until further orders, whichever is earlier. He succeeds Suman Billa, who has joined UNWTO as Director, Technical Cooperation and Silk Road Development. Verma was earlier serving as Secretary, Technical Education and Industrial Training. He has also held posts like Principal Secretary, Department of Science, Technology and Environment, in Government of Punjab.

INTERGLOBE AVIATION

Gurugram



Ronojoy Dutta has been re-designated as Whole Time Director and Chief Executive Officer of InterGlobe Aviation. The decision was taken unanimously by the Board of Directors of the company. The term of Dutta's appointment in his new role will be valid up to January 23, 2024. During his year-long stint with the company, IndiGo witnessed aggressive operational and business expansion. Dutta has previously served as an advisor to the restructuring of Air Canada, US Airways and Hawaiian Air, and was the President of Air Sahara and United Airlines.

NIRAAMAYA WELLNESS RETREATS

Bengaluru



Allen Machado has been appointed as Chief Operating Officer at Niraamaya Wellness Retreats. With a career spanning over 20 years in luxury hospitality, he has worked with trendsetting luxury hotels in India and the Middle East, strategically developing profitable business models within his scope of work. Machado's main focus at Niraamaya will be driving brand strategy, increasing presence and footprint in the domestic and international geographies, and enhancing the already-existing luxury quotient. He has earlier worked with groups such as The Oberoi Hotels & Resorts and IHG, among others.

MARRIOTT HOTELS

East India & Bangladesh



Gaurav Singh has been appointed as Multi-Property Vice President East India & Bangladesh and General Manager, JW Marriott Hotel Kolkata. Using his vast experience spanning almost two decades, enhancing productivity, ensuring guest satisfaction and strategic initiatives will be some of his key responsibility areas. In addition to JW Marriott Kolkata, the hotels in East India that he will oversee include The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat, Courtyard by Marriott Siliguri and Fairfield by Marriott Rajarhat. Prior to this, he was Multi-Property General Manager of Courtyard Bengaluru Outer Ring Road and Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru Outer Ring Road.

SAROVAR HOTELS & RESORTS

New Delhi



Akshay Thusoo has been appointed as Vice President - Sales at Sarovar Hotels. An industry adept professional, Thusoo brings with him almost a decade of experience across hospitality, media and automobile industries. In the new role, he will be responsible for conceptualising and implementing sales strategies at both the corporate and regional levels, and will contribute in further strengthening the group's efforts in driving more business from existing as well as new markets. Prior to joining Sarovar Hotels, Thusoo was with the Oberoi group as Regional Sales Manager, operating out of Hyderabad.

CROWNE PLAZA

Pune



Crowne Plaza Pune City Centre has appointed **Fino Babu** as General Manager. Babu has been part of the IHG family for more than two years, having previously carried out the role of Executive Assistant Manager. His strength lies in being able to manage a team consisting of diverse departments, and he possesses the mental alertness to find solutions to issues diverse in nature. With an experience of two decades in hotel operations, Babu can be a game changer for Crowne Plaza Pune City Center. In the new role, he will be responsible for the entire hotel operations centred on contributing calculated inputs to attain goals set for the hotel.

ONE REP GLOBAL

Mumbai



One Rep Global, a sales and marketing representation company catering to global luxury hotels, has appointed **Nupur Dhandharia** as Director of Sales for their newly-opened office in Mumbai. Dhandharia comes with 13 years of experience with leading global brands. At One Rep Global, Dhandharia will expand the customer base in Mumbai and western India, while fostering relationships with existing partners across travel agents, tour operators, MICE companies, event planners, high-end luxury operators and forging new tie-ups. She will add immense value to One Rep Global with her knowledge, experience and skill.

HYATT REGENCY HOTEL & RESIDENCES

Pune



Hyatt Regency Pune & Residences has appointed **Atul Donde** as the new Director of Events. He brings with him a rich 11-plus years of experience in the hospitality industry, having worked with renowned hospitality brands like Hilton, Ramada, Marriott and Hyatt within India and abroad. In the new role, he will be responsible for managing operational and administrative functions to ensure projects are delivered efficiently, along with monitoring progress of the planning and execution of each task that has to do with any event at the hotel. Prior to joining Hyatt Regency Pune & Residences, Donde briefly ventured into setting up a catering business.

THE LEELA HOTEL

Mumbai



The Leela Mumbai has appointed **Rohan Joseph** as the new Head of Catering Sales. He brings with him over 13 years of experience and a wealth of expertise in sales and operations of events. At The Leela Mumbai, his core responsibilities will include revenue and inventory management for catering sales, planning and execution of events, and upselling of hotel services. Joseph has previously worked with brands like The St. Regis Mumbai, Palladium Hotel Mumbai, Shangri-La Hotel Mumbai, Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai and Grand Hyatt, Mumbai. Prior to joining The Leela Mumbai, he worked as the Director of Catering Sales at The Westin Mumbai Garden City.



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'Trade will not lose money'

Air India assures that travel agents needn't worry about losing their money, as the airline fast approaches the disinvestment reality. **Meenakshi Malik**, Executive Director - Commercial, Air India, claims that business will be in order by the end of the upcoming financial year.



Nisha Verma

Year 2019 turned out to be quite an eventful one for Air India in terms of international routes, claimed Meenakshi Malik. "Since February 2019, we have added around 12 international flights to our network. In addition, we re-aligned some flights like Delhi-Seoul, which we were earlier connecting via Hong Kong. It is now a direct flight, which operates four days a week and is doing very well not just in terms of passenger numbers, but also in terms of cargo carried. Another premium flight is Amritsar-Stansted, which is doing very well," she said. The airline is now planning to connect Stansted via Mumbai and has increased frequency on Delhi-Tel Aviv. Hence, in the summer schedule that starts March-end, it will be adding the sixth frequency to Tel Aviv, which will be on Wednesday of every week. Air India is also planning to increase frequency between Mumbai and London.

"At the domestic level," Malik added, "Ministry of Tourism has highlighted some tourist points and we are planning to begin service on these routes. The government has a vision of 100 airports, and we

are already connecting to 83 points along with Alliance Air. We will start operations to the rest of them soon, and we are already working with Ministry of Civil Aviation and MOT for the same."

Agents shouldn't worry

As the cloud of disinvestment looms over the national carrier, Air India wants to assure its travel agent partners that "nobody would lose money, even when it is privatised." Malik clarified, "We have had a meeting with top 20 agents

will come in order. I hope that good people come and take over this great brand," she shared.

Malik added that the carrier had all its schemes for agents in place, including productivity-linked incentives and special deals. "There are plans that starting April, we are going to re-align our PLBs, incentives and commissions for agents. We will try to make it more user-friendly and better for the agents," she shared.

The GDS decision

When asked about getting back on Amadeus, Malik said that while there was no problem with Amadeus, Air India decided to go through a limited tender. "GDS for domestic flights was given to one company—Travelport, which was a policy decision we had taken towards the end of 2018. Globally, there could be many GDS. At that time, Amadeus, because of any reason, decided that if they don't get domestic business, they will not participate with us globally. It was their choice and now, out of their own choice, they have come back and are distributing Air India internationally. Domestic remains exclusive and we have not changed our stand. This has been a great victory for Air India, as we had taken a stand for the betterment of the company.

We received many comments on the same from

various organisations, but our decision has eventually been appreciated by everyone and we have saved a huge amount of money. In 2019, we saved `225 crore and in 2020, we are estimating to save `550 crore. This will go on till 2024, and we will save more than `3,700 crore by then. Sabre was also working with us internationally. Their contract got over in 2019 and now we need to renegotiate the rates. They haven't come back to us for the same, since the rates are not suitable, hence we have not signed the contract. I will not sign high rates and will do what is best for Air India," Malik asserted.

It will be a change in ownership at the top level. The government would ensure that no one loses money. We have been asking agents not to worry

and four tour operators in Delhi, and another meeting with the top business partners in Mumbai, who together give us 90 per cent of our business in India. We wanted to assure them that where Air India is concerned, it will be a change in ownership at the top level. Air India is owned by Government of India, which would ensure that no one loses money. Hence, we have been talking to agents and telling them that they do not have to worry. Rest assured, Air India will be a more agile and better company going forward," she insisted. "I don't think anything would be finalised before end of May. By then we would know who the new owner is and by FY 2020-21, things

Travel alert!

Due to the coronavirus scare, Air India's Shanghai and Hong Kong flights remain cancelled till March end. Before resuming flights under the summer schedule, the airline will assess the situation and take appropriate action henceforth.



Meenakshi Malik
 Executive Director - Commercial, Air India

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