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January 17-21, 2020

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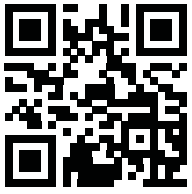


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‘A change in mindset’

Pre-conceived notions can dent tourism to certain parts of the country like the Northeast, and tourism minister **Prahlad Singh Patel** urges travellers to look beyond prejudices.



Prahlad Singh Patel
 Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism
 Government of India

Anupriya Bishnoi

According to **Prahlad Singh Patel**, Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism, Government of India, the Northeast has immense potential when it comes to tourism, but the same has not been realised because of several reasons. He says, "The Northeast has been away from everyone's gaze and attention

“More than the budget, it's the people and their notions towards the Northeast region that need to change”

because of connectivity issues and pre-conceived notions about the region, which need to be balanced. If travellers visit this part of the country, then both international and domestic visitors will not

go anywhere else. This region is blessed with beauty in abundance.”

Analysing why the Northeast remains backward despite having enough budget, Patel

adds, "I think, more than the budget, it's the people and their notions towards the region that need to change. They should look past them and visit the region in order to experience its true essence, first hand."

He reiterates that keeping international travellers in mind, all facilities at Indian monuments should meet

international standards. "While the culture will be ours, amenities should be internationalised. Basic amenities and hygiene should be paid attention to. In the last five years, we have risen from the 65th to the 34th rank in the 'Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index', and in the next few years, we can be in the top three positions, easily," he says.

‘Tourism is most pampered’

Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog, says that tourism is the most pampered sector by the government, as everything possible has been done for its benefit.

Nisha Verma and Manas Dwivedi

Amitabh Kant believes that tourism is one of the most "pampered sectors by the government" and that the government has created the right policy environment

as far as promoting tourism is concerned. "Right from reduction of GST on hotel tariffs or reforms in the e-Visa regime, no other sector in the country has received such

progressive reforms by the government. We have broken all rules of reciprocity, and have reduced visa fee for countries that charge double or thrice as much. Apart from that, we opened up new peaks so that India can become a

great adventure destination. Everything possible has been done for this sector, and now the private sector should take the initiative and market India and sell packages to India in order to penetrate global markets." He believes

that tourism is essentially a private sector activity and the government, at best, can be the catalyst. Kant adds that for India to be a \$5 trillion economy by 2025, the tourism sector can be a big driver of growth and jobs.



Amitabh Kant
 CEO
 NITI Aayog



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IITF online from January 1

Meenakshi Sharma, Director General – Tourism, Government of India, shares that the Incredible India Tourist Facilitator (IITF) certification is commencing its first module from January 1.



Nisha Verma and Manas Dwivedi

The tourism sector is highly dependent on skill development, claims **Meenakshi Sharma**. “We all know that tourism is one sector that provides employment to many people, right from the top of the line to the lowest level, and

across all sectors including hospitality, travel operators, and guides. Hence, in order to meet the demand of the industry and fill the gap, Ministry of Tourism (MOT) has launched the ‘Incredible India Tourist Facilitator’ (IITF) certification, which would create and give them the required skills. If anybody wants to know about an experience or a destination, they can do this through an online learning management system. It can be done full-time or part-time, in the remotest parts of the country. This is something that can bridge the gap, in at least providing tourist information and offering a wholesome experience to

Who can enrol for the certification?

While the strategic partner for IITF is Wipro, IITTM Noida is the knowledge partner and the course has also been designed by them. MOT has already received 7,500 queries for the course, and they are targeting around 20,000 registrations in the first month of commencement of the programme. The course fee is ₹ 2,000, which is exempted for SC/ST/OBC and residents of J&K and Ladakh. The minimum qualification for taking up the programme is 10+2. However, for applicants above the age of 40, a 10th class certificate is also valid. MOT has also set up a dedicated helpline for applicants. There is a refresher programme for regional-level guides; they don’t have to do the beginners programme and automatically qualify for the learners’ course.

tourists coming to India,” she reveals.

The online learning system offers four levels of courses—Basic, Advance (Heritage & Adventure), Linguist, and Refresher. Being a centralised, pan-India e-learning module, the course delves on skill development. “It is already online and the payment gateways opened on December 20. The first module starts from January 1, 2020. We already have this programme in English and

Hindi, and we are working with state governments to provide this programme in other regional languages as well. The best part is that this course can be done at any level,” she explains.

MOT will promote the programme on social media and offline channels, and will also organise workshops at the state level. Going forward, MOT will develop an e-marketplace, which will be accessible by individual travellers as well. ↓



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Tourism in the time of protests

Protests are an integral part of every democracy, the fact that everyone has a say in the Constitutional well-being of a country is encouraging for every citizen and reinstates our Fundamental Rights. However, sometimes protests do take a toll on certain sectors and when a countrywide protest takes place, the brunt is borne by many industries. The Citizenship Amendment Act has opened a Pandora's Box in India and the tourism industry has been negatively impacted.

With countries like Russia, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Canada, US, UK and Israel issuing travel advisories to their citizens in India or willing to visit India, December, which is one of the busiest months for foreign tourists to visit India, has seen a less-than-satisfactory footfall. With news coming in of tourism in places like Assam, Goa, Agra, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Mysuru and some others suffering a blow, we cannot help but wonder how this season will fare. Tourism in Assam has been one of the worst hit due to the ongoing protests and has led to mass cancellation of bookings by tourists. As per the state's tourism department, Assam has already faced a loss of more than ` 400 crore in revenue collection during this period. In Goa, this Christmas season has been most tepid as the number of visitors has gone down by almost 50 per cent.

It surely is a difficult time for the industry, and one that wasn't at all anticipated. But now that it is here, how are we as an industry coping with it? Are we, as tourism stakeholders, working to project a more positive image of the country? Wherein lies our responsibility to quell doubts and clear misconceptions? Sure, this year has reaped a bounty for the tourism industry in the form of various positive announcements made by the government for the sector, but with advisories issued by various countries, no matter how easy it may have been made to travel to India, tourists will not step in unless they are assured that all is well. It's time to work together to project a positive image of the country and bring back the tourists.



TRAVTALK brings to you news



and events that made headlines 25 years ago with relevance even today. From the archives, we present the January 1st 1995 issue:

IATO Establishes a Manali Chapter

IATO successfully completed its First Adventure Travel Conference at Manali which was held between December 17-20, 1994. Inaugurating the conference, Col. HS Chauhan, Director, Directorate of Mountaineering and Allied Sports, said that even though adventure activity was an 'incomparable source of fun', it required one to have a great sense of discipline. 'This discipline has to come from within and more importantly has to be a collective action,' said Colonel Chauhan. Subhash Goyal, welcoming the delegates on behalf of IATO said he was emotional as he regarded this as a home-coming. He also urged the municipal corporation to stop irregular construction in the city.



First Adventure Travel Conference by IATO



'Tourism is not privileged'

Sarab Jit Singh, Managing Director, Travelite (India), believes that while reduction in GST on hotels may be a move for the better, India continues to be a costly destination because of air ticket prices, high interstate taxes, etc.

The government aims to achieve a \$5 trillion economy by 2025. We, in the inbound tourism sector, believe that international tourism can play a major role in this endeavour by achieving \$50 billion in foreign exchange earnings and opening opportunities for millions of jobs across India. Although there has been a steady growth, to achieve faster results, we need to change our approach. Slow decision-making and implementation have impacted the growth of the sector. The government, recognising the importance of MICE, announced construction of two mega convention centres in Union Budget 2004. These are expected to be ready in a couple of years.

Considering tourism as a privileged sector is a misconception.

Tourism exports are highly taxed, contrary to merchandise exports, which is exempted from all taxes. Recent policy initiatives are very progressive, making e-Visa tourist friendly and bringing GST applicable on high-end hotels from 28 per cent to 18 per cent. However, steps taken on piecemeal basis

“Tourism exports are highly taxed, contrary to merchandise exports, which is exempted from all taxes”

may not give desired results, unless accompanied by aggressive promotions across all source markets. Faster and wider dissemination of such information is the key. Indian tour operators face additional challenges, apart from lack of infrastructure for hotels and

airports, a five per cent GST has also to be charged by them on the gross tour cost that is inclusive of hotels, transport, air tickets, restaurant and other services, which are already tax-paid. Owing to this, India loses a large chunk of business to other destinations. In certain cases, foreign tour operators

book directly, bypassing Indian tour operators. A large number of jobs have been lost in the past couple of years, further impacting the future of this segment. The government must reconsider this position and impose least possible GST only on service charges collected by

tour operators. In addition, high interstate taxes and toll charges are collected from tourists. Several models of high-end vehicles that are asked for by high-end tourists are not available, and need to be imported. And, import of vehicles under EPCG is banned. Promotion of a destination is the responsibility of the government, where private players can join in.

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



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Motivated team at Dex

Ramesh Marwah, Director & CEO, Dex Group, claims that a motivated team and the drive to excel in different genres has made them grow consistently through the years.

 Nisha Verma

Year 2019 has been very exciting for Dex Group, claims **Ramesh Marwah**, and the company is all set to exceed its targets in 2020. "We registered growth in all our key verticals to the satisfaction of our principals. Going forward, we will meet and exceed the targets set by our principals, for the year," he says.



Ramesh Marwah
Director & CEO
Dex Group

committed approach towards achieving targets and goals of our company and principals. The management at Dex is empowering and motivating them to strengthen their resolve," he says.

On the current state of the travel and tourism industry in India, Marwah feels that there has been a growth in outbound travel despite a slowdown in economy.

“The travel agents are our trade partners who have always been, and will remain, very important to our business”


Backed by a diverse portfolio of travel products, Marwah claims that they try to reach out to the length and breadth of the travel trade market through focused sales distribution and marketing actions for all products that they represent.

"The travel agents are our trade partners who have always been, and will remain, very important to our business. We will continue to work together and mutually benefit each other. We are proud of our team for their professionalism and

"While the shutdown of Jet Airways was unfortunate, it eventually opened new opportunities for Indian carriers. There are new foreign airlines now, opening new global destinations for Indian travellers. While we will welcome any opportunity for Dex Group to offer its services, as a professionally-run GSA group, our foremost endeavour will always be to achieve goals of our existing principals," he claims.

Envision and lead

VFS Global touched 200 million applications in 2019 since its inception in 2001. **Zubin Karkaria**, CEO, VFS Global, speaks of innovation and how it helped the company scale new heights.

 Hazel Jain

VFS Global has had a good decade. It touched 200 million applications in 2019 since inception in 2001, recording 100 million of those in the last four years alone. For 2020, it looks to further expand its operations as global travel grows and outsourcing visa services becomes an option for many more governments. Speaking about his plans for



Zubin Karkaria
CEO
VFS Global

industry right now. "Innovation, to me, is the introduction of any service that eases the process for the end consumer. For visas specifically, it is steps taken to make the visa application process seamless for travellers." VFS Global has several such initiatives - a range of optional services for customers to use while at the centre, doorstep visa services, etc.

“We are the official ticket partners for Expo 2020 in Dubai for GCC, India, China, Russia, UK, and Germany”

2020, **Zubin Karkaria** says, "We are happy to announce that we are the official ticket partners for the highly-anticipated Expo 2020 in Dubai for GCC, India, China, Russia, UK, and Germany. B2B ticket sales have already commenced. We

will be introducing more services aimed at customer convenience, apart from increasing the network of our centres in India for better accessibility."

He speaks about innovation and why it is important for the travel

"Travel has become a part of the Indian lifestyle, fuelled by a growing middle class with disposable income. I foresee the next decade to be even bigger for travel from India, but also for inbound travel," Karkaria adds.

Sharing his idea of what a true leader is, he says, "A leader must be a great team-builder and a visionary who simultaneously creates value for all stakeholders including society at large."

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Embracing tech in 2020

Having opened a new office in Phuket in 2019, the year was quite eventful for TravelBullz. **KD Singh**, Founder & President of the company, shares the plan for 2020.

Manas Dwivedi

TravelBullz has set its eyes on some very ambitious projects for 2020, as most of the work in progress in 2019 would come to start bearing results, explains **KD Singh**. "The year would be, in a lot of ways, a turning point for TravelBullz's growth story. Vital projects that we have been working on would see the light of day in 2020, including



KD Singh
Founder & President
TravelBullz

launched in November 2019, would connect with a host of customers and propel growth to a completely new dimension in 2020.

Singh's vision for the company is to substantially grow more than 10 times in the next three years. According to him, this ambitious plan would be driven by the company's fundamental principles of growth through technology innovation, making transactions seamless by focusing on user experience and ease of booking, providing access to the last room available at the best possible price, as well as growth through quality service delivery and word-of-mouth recommendation by existing travel agents. "Our objective is to address all the pain areas of agents through technology, human touch, and making their interaction with us seamless and pleasant," he shares.

“Projects that we have been working on would see the light of day, including unveiling of a B2B engine – Phoenix”

unveiling of an advanced B2B engine – Phoenix – with our much-awaited dynamic packaging module; launch of an INR collection and multiple payment options for our travel agent partners; launch of a loyalty management mobile

application; and introduction of new destinations," he says.

The new destinations will include Dubai, Singapore and Bali, in the first quarter of 2020. The company's new API/XML connection, which was

Dedication for success

Anil Parashar, President & CEO, InterGlobe Technology Quotient (ITQ), claims that innovation in all segments of travel and a dedicated team is what have helped them succeed.

Nisha Verma

For ITQ India, 2019 was a successful year with several commendable milestones, claims **Anil Parashar**. "Together with Travelport, we introduced a special initiative in the market for people with intellectual disabilities, and it encouraged travel agents to transcribe DPNA Special Service Request code while booking travel for the specially-



Anil Parashar
President & CEO
InterGlobe Technology Quotient

abled traveller who needs in-flight care and attention," he says. Now, ITQ hopes for an even better 2020. "Customisation and personalisation of our technology is going to be our primary focus, and we will certainly advance with Travelport

“Personalisation of technology is going to be our primary focus and we will advance with Travelport Smartpoint in 2020”

Smartpoint in 2020. Plans are also underway to expand our offerings in travel technology and provide customised solutions," he shares.

The travel market in India has been growing at a double-

digit CAGR year-on-year, which speaks for itself, asserts Parashar. "Sure, there have been ups and downs in the market, but that has only brought in more opportunities of growth and better services for end consumers. To meet the growing demand of millennials and the Gen Z audience, it is imperative to become digitally advanced and offer experiences, especially digital experiences, the segment seeks. This calls for innovative integrated solutions such as Machine Learning and AI, and supporting the same with Big Data," he shares.

ITQ claims that they are not just suppliers of travel content, but partners or consultants because of the level of customisation and integrated products and solutions they offer. "Our team is the key force behind our success, and we take their personal and professional growth seriously," he says.



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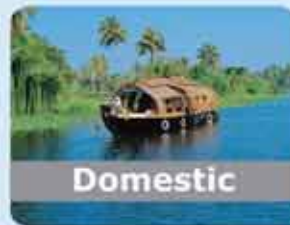
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'World's Greatest Show'

Expo 2020 Dubai is all set to showcase a never-experienced event for 173 days, starting from October 20, 2020 to April 10, 2021. It is expecting 25 million visits from across the world.

 Devika Jeet

Expo 2020 Dubai is preparing to put on the 'World's Greatest Show' of human brilliance and achievement. The theme, 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future', delves on the belief that innovation and progress are the result of people and ideas coming together in new and unique ways. Expo 2020 Dubai coincides with UAE's 50th anniversary in 2021. Twenty-five million visits are expected, of which 70 per cent are touted to be international visitors. Expo 2020 will help to achieve the UAE Vision 2021 by increasing



Issam Kazim
CEO
Dubai Tourism

tourism and developing innovative businesses.

"We are bringing the world to Dubai and these six months will be a showcase of the best that Dubai has to offer. The Expo site is 4.38 square kilometres and is located halfway between Dubai airport and Abu Dhabi airport. Further, Expo 2020 has 20 performance venues and can host 60 events daily," says Sanjive Khosla, Chief

Commercial Officer, Expo 2020. He adds that they are expecting 17-18 per cent visitation from India. Dubai currently has a 12 per cent repeat visitation from India within a 12-month period.

Issam Kazim, CEO, Dubai Tourism, claims that India will remain an important source market for this event. "We have moved from a seasonal campaign and make our campaigns run throughout the year. We are making access easier, working on capacity, and trying to make accessibility to Dubai as easy as possible. Our approach includes Tier-I, II and III markets in India," he shares.

Kazim also highlights that simpler visas, especially for the Expo, might be on the cards. "We are trying to get people to visit within the first few weeks to understand the magnitude of the event and then visit again," he adds. 

While a one-day ticket for Expo 2020 will cost AED 120, a three-day ticket will be available at the price of AED 260. The Expo also offers free access to kids of up to five years as well as adults of 65 years and above.

Looking to collaborate

After bagging the WTM World Travel Leaders Award in 2019, Minar Group is working on some interesting projects for 2020 and looks forward to a better season and happy customers.

 Manas Dwivedi

According to HS Duggal, Managing Director, Minar Group, the best marketing tactic is happy customers. "To that end, we strive for exceptional quality and service, so the customer associates us with happy memories. We are working out a marketing plan that involves digital and social media to leverage the number of customers online," he says.



HS Duggal
Managing Director
Minar Group

"India is thought of as a backpacker's destination only, when there are so many gems waiting to be explored"


For Minar Group, the travel agent community is not just an integral part for them, but also for all the players in the tourism industry. "I hope to collaborate more with other agents, bringing in their strengths in our offerings and standing tall with

them. After all, if we want to go far, we must go together," he believes.

Sharing his opinion on the Indian tourism industry, he says that there's no denial in the kind of impact tourism has on the

economy of the country. "In fact, in 2018 itself, the tourism industry contributed over nine per cent to India's GDP. Besides monetary contributions and job creation, we, as an industry, also have a responsibility on ourselves to change the narrative of India in the minds of travellers. This is also one of the challenges our industry faces: India is often thought of as a backpacker's destination only, when there are so many gems waiting to be explored," he says.

For Duggal, the mantra for success is taking bold risks, which means venturing into new markets and uncharted territories for tourism.

"It's also plain, old hard work. Our consistency has allowed us to remain a strong player for 27 years now, with long-term partnerships. What drives us is passion," he believes. 

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Giving Lords a new direction

Pushendra R Bansal, Chief Operating Officer, Lords Hotels & Resorts, shares that the brand is targeting 40 hotels by 2020, and will venture into new regions as part of its expansion strategy. It will also open a luxurious property in Gujarat this year.



Pushendra R Bansal
Chief Operating Officer
Lords Hotels & Resorts



Nisha Verma

The hospitality industry in India is set to perform better in 2020, claims **Pushendra R Bansal**. He says, "As demand outpaces supply, there is a clear indication that hotel occupancy, ARR and RevPAR will see an increase. Lords Hotels & Resorts is eyeing 40 hotels by 2020. We are ushering into the Northeast with Guwahati and two other cities in the pipeline. We aim to further strengthen our portfolio in the South and East. We are also increasing our foothold in Rajasthan and Maharashtra with three upcoming properties. We will be opening a luxurious property in Gujarat in 2020, along with three other properties there."

“We are increasing our foothold in Rajasthan and Maharashtra with three upcoming properties; we will be opening a luxurious property in Gujarat”

Bansal claims that 2019 was a favourable year for the brand, and in their endeavour to offer true value offerings to guests while continuing to grow in the mid-market space, they crossed many a milestone in the decade-long journey. "We opened hotels in Birgunj (Nepal), Kurnool, Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Goa, Nathdwara, Morbi, and Jamnagar. We also signed up few hotels in Lonavala, Vyara, Rajkot (three hotels), Lucknow, Guwahati, and Udaipur," he informs. With the new openings, the group aims to establish itself as a "trustworthy brand for delivering 'true value' experiences to guests in the exciting, value-driven hotels."

Lords Hotels & Resorts saw an aggressive growth momentum adding eight hotels across the brand in 2019.

"We see the next five years as a defining period of growth. We give a growth graph to our team members and give them training, and assign new responsibilities and challenges. The key to our success is continuously finding new

ways to exceed expectations and host delightful services for guests," he insists.

According to Bansal, the Indian hotel industry is growing at a fast pace, mainly due to the intervention of the government

in facilitating business through economic reforms, changes in taxation policies, etc. He adds that the travel agent community has also been very important for Lords Hotels & Resorts. "The role of online travel agencies has become

increasingly important within the hotel industry, because they provide a convenient way for customers to compare hotels and book them over the internet, either from the comfort of their own home or on the go," he shares.



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2000 'Best' keys soon

Best Western Hotels & Resorts has gradually been covering ground in India. The hotel chain is now targeting 10 openings in the region during the first half of 2020.

 Anupriya Bishnoi

Having begun with its flagship brand, Best Western, the international hotel chain grew to seven brands by the end of 2014 and beginning 2015, it underwent a brand refresh to broaden the appeal with a contemporary and energetic look, and to distinguish each of its brands and their exceptional offerings by creating more white space between them. "Since then, more brands



Atul Jain
COO (India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka)
Best Western Hotels & Resorts

growth and penetration into diverse markets in India in the past three years, and we hope to gather more pace with the opening of 10 more hotels in the next six months that will take our tally to 2000 operating keys. This would be followed by the opening of over 1000 keys in the pipeline. Apart from reinforcing our presence, we're also focused on opening hotels under other brands in the portfolio to show that we have much more to offer," Jain adds. The new hotels will operate under Best Western, Best Western Plus, SureStay Plus, and SureStay Hotel by Best Western brands in locations across India.

“We have been experiencing remarkable growth in diverse markets in India, and we hope to gather pace”

have been added to the portfolio as a response to the evolving trends and business needs of promoters. In 2019, three more brands were added to the portfolio with the acquisition of WorldHotels," shares Atul Jain,

Chief Operating Officer (India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), Best Western Hotels & Resorts. Today, the group has 16 brands and over 4,500 hotels in more than 100 countries. "We have been experiencing a remarkable

Besides new-build hotels, the group will also seek 'conversion hotels' to aid rapid expansion. Jain adds, "For us in India, success lies in quality rather than quantity, and emotional investment." 

3 hotels in 2020: Accor

Accor began 2019 on a stellar note and is looking forward to continue expansion this year as well. The group is targeting a 12 per cent RevPAR growth in 2020.

 Nisha Verma

According to Jean-Michel Cassé, Chief Operating Officer – India & South Asia, Accor, 2019 was a great year for the brand in India. "We started the year with two important openings—ibis Kolkata Rajarhat and Mercure Goa Devaaya Retreat. We also launched the Grand Mercure Gandhinagar GIFT City and announced ALL-Accor Live Limitless, our lifestyle loyalty



Jean-Michel Cassé
COO – India & South Asia
Accor

will see an increase this year, which will continue for the next three to four years. A major challenge this year, however, will be to increase the ADR. Also, room night demand will grow in major business cities and leisure destinations."

“Hotel occupancy, ARR and RevPAR will see an increase; a major challenge, however, will be to increase the ADR”

programme that caters to a global audience of over 54 million members," he says. For 2020, informs Cassé, the group will launch the much-awaited Raffles Udaipur, Novotel Mumbai International Airport,

as well as ibis Mumbai LBS Road. The Indian market continues to be very important for Accor. Cassé says, "As demand outpaces supply, there is a clear indication that hotel occupancy, ARR and RevPAR

With an asset-light and 'managed' model across its portfolio of brands, the COO sees the strategy as one that creates a more nimble and agile company that has a strong balance sheet. "It enables us to take advantage of merger and acquisition opportunities as they emerge, which obviously has led to a different mindset within the organisation, which is more entrepreneurial and less risk averse," he shares. The group has now budgeted for a 12 per cent RevPAR growth for 2020 - like for like - which can be attributed to a greater contribution from increase in rates rather than volume. 

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Using technology wisely

Tripjack has invested in technology to offer its customers a seamless experience. Its mobile interface allows bookings on-the-go and soon, an integration with WhatsApp will be a reality.

 Hazel Jain

Having made the bold move to rebrand itself and move on to a new platform – from Atlas Travels Online to Tripjack – the company has already successfully migrated all its 20,000 travel partners across India on to the new platform. **Hussain Patel**, Director, Tripjack, says, “We wanted to have a separate identity for the entire B2B vertical and



Hussain Patel
Director
Tripjack

60 per cent of our payments are now automated, giving customers more flexibility in terms of payment uploads and doing business with us at any time. Earlier, we had two per cent of our business happening on mobile and with the launch of Tripjack, this has gone up to more than 10 per cent. Our mobile interface is also really intuitive and transactions can be done on the go,” he shares.

The company will soon introduce an integration with WhatsApp, and also has over 150 LCCs from US, UK, Europe and Australia, which is not available on other websites. “We have a powerful API even now which can be integrated. We strongly recommend the agent to go online because that is the future. I feel, each and every travel agent should have a transactional website. We should try and grab this market soon,” he adds. 


“We recommend the agent to go online because that is the future; every agent should have a transactional website”

this was part of a bigger plan, which is to grow globally in the future. With this new platform, we also have a new proposition for our agent partners; it gives its customers two main advantages in terms of content and technology.”

He says that the new website is more intuitive and gives its customers a lot of flexibility in terms of creating more touch-points between Tripjack customers and their clients. The website also cuts down time-lags for inquiries. “Almost

Levi creates a buzz

As a new entrant in the India market, Visit Levi’s focus is to create awareness about Levi as a tourist destination among the travel trade in India.

 Hazel Jain

“The Indian travel market is very interesting to us Finns,” says **Yrjötapio Kivisaari**, CEO, Visit Levi. “The younger generation of travelling Indians has already seen London, Paris, Rome and New York, and is now looking for unique experiences and pristine nature. Finland is just a short flight away from Delhi and can offer good infrastructure, wonderful



Yrjötapio Kivisaari
CEO
Visit Levi

However, the luxury of Levi lies in its nature and the silence, and not an army of hospitality professionals in its hotels and restaurants. “Our service is very friendly and authentic, but it might be that the managing director and owner of the company are serving guests visiting the husky farm or a world-famous wilderness hotel. This is what we call Arctic hospitality,” Kivisaari explains.

“Finland is just a short flight away from Delhi and can offer good infrastructure and wonderful excursions”

excursions, memorable adventures, and unforgettable accommodation. Our challenge is to learn how to communicate with Indian travellers about Arctic luxury. Our location above the Arctic

Circle and the seasonality of the travel industry combined with high labour expenses require us to work with far less staff as Indians are used to in holiday destinations.”

Visit Levi is represented in India by **Papori Bharati**, who says, “India is a new market for us. We see a lot of potential, of course, that is why we are here. We need to meet the right agents and tour operators. We know it takes time to be completely aware of a new destination, and by word of mouth we know it will work for us in the long run.” 



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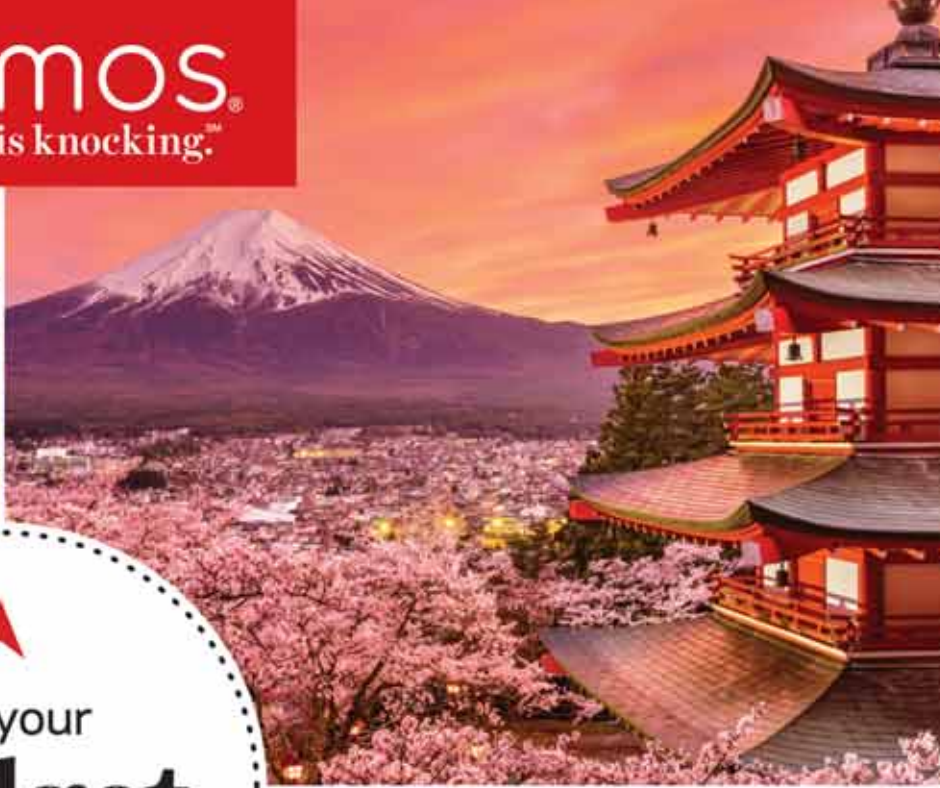
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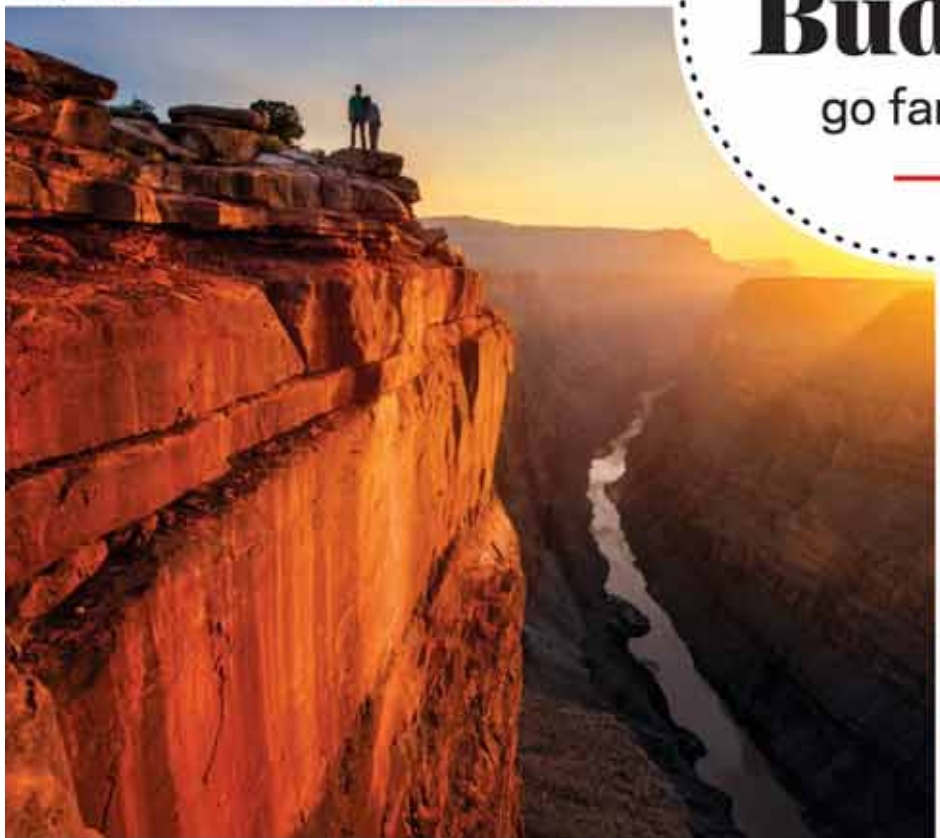
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The Beautiful City- Orchha



One of the historic towns of Madhya Pradesh - Orchha is situated on the banks of river Betwa, and was founded in the 16th century by the Bundela Rajput Chief, Rudra Pratap. Orchha means 'hidden place' and it stays true to its name. The beautiful destinations of this place were hidden for long time. With beautiful monuments that reveal the tails of battle fought between kings and emperors. Here you will find some of the most fascinating temples and palaces that will help you realize a childhood fantasy - travelling back in time!

This historic significance and scenic beauty of Orchha has attracted the large number of tourists and has been awarded the Best Heritage City in the National Tourism Awards 2019. There are many attractions and activities which can be enjoyed in Orchha such as River Rafting and Kayaking in Betwa River, Jungle Safari at Orchha Wildlife Sanctuary, Witnessing the Captivating Architecture of Orchha Fort and Chaturbhuj Temple, one can peek into the Exiting History by Visiting the Chattris on the Betwa River and Ram Raja Temple, Pay a Holy Visit to the Laxminarayan Temple, Attend Sound And Light Show at Orchha Fort and many more.

Tourist Attractions -

There are a number of tourist spots in Orchha. The main attraction of Orchha is the Orchha fort complex, located on an island on River Betwa, having a number of palaces to visit within it. A four-arched bridge leads to the fort complex on the island. The Jahangir Mahal, which was built by Bir Singh Deo in the early part of the 17th century to mark the visit of the Mughal Emperor, is an important monument of this fort. It is known for its delicate work on one hand and balanced with strong masonry on the other. Raj Mahal, the second palace in this fort complex is well known for its murals, depicting religious themes. The Rai Parveen Mahal, dedicated to the 17th-century poetess-musician, is the third palace within this complex and is set amongst well-laid gardens.



There are a number of interesting temples to visit in Orchha. The Ram Raja Temple, which was formerly a palace, is an important tourist spot. According to legend, Lord Ram appeared in a dream of the then ruler Madhukar Shah. The ruler subsequently brought an idol of Lord Ram and placed it in this palace, before installing it into a temple. However, when the time of installation approached, the idol refused to move from its present place. The king had to recall his dream, which had indicated that the idol would remain in the place, where it was first placed. Thus this palace became a temple and Lord Ram is worshipped here as a king. The Chaturbhuj temple in Orchha was the original destination of the idol of Lord Ram. This temple has been decorated with religious symbols on the outside, while the interiors are stark.

The Laxminarayan temple is a unique blend of temple and fort architecture. The frescoes within this temple depict social and secular themes. These frescoes have retained their vibrant colors.

The Phool Bagh is a well-laid garden and was the resting place of the erstwhile Bundela rulers. This garden has fountains, pavilions and ingenious water ventilation system.

Orchha has 14 chhatris memorials for its rulers, situated near the Kanchan Ghat on River Betwa.

Other places of Interest -

The Shahid Smarak commemorating the martyrdom of Chandrashekhar Azad, the great freedom fighter, is an important place to visit. Other places to visit in Orchha include the shrine of Siddh Baba, Jugal Kishore, Janki Mandir, Dinman Hardaul's palace, Sunder Mahal, and many more.

Orchha Cultural festival- "Namaste Orchha"

Coming to the celebration of cultural significance, the Orchha festival promises to bring together diverse experiences of music, art, wellness, travel, photography, nature, adventure, history and culture in a rich 3-day extravaganza going to be organised from 6th to 8th March 2020. The festival will offer an opportunity for travellers, history buffs, nature lovers, photography enthusiasts and adventure seekers to explore the beautiful state of Madhya Pradesh.

VisitBritain in Mumbai & Delhi

The tourist authority will be conducting its biggest-ever sales mission in India after a gap of three years with more than 46 companies, including DMCs, DMOs, and Visas & Immigration, flying down to meet the Indian travel trade.



Hazel Jain

VisitBritain has announced its two-city sales mission that it will undertake this month, after a gap of three years. This will be held in Mumbai followed by New Delhi, on January 13 and January 15, respectively. Vishal Bhatia, Country Manager - India, VisitBritain, says, "We have the biggest-ever contingent from the UK participating this time, which speaks volumes about the demand we see from India and the kind of confidence we have in the market. We are looking at around 46 companies from

“We have suppliers from the north who are capable of holding big MICE, like the Lancashire Cricket Club. The trade will also meet football clubs that can host big MICE groups”

British organisations across DMCs, DMOs, as well as UK Visas & Immigration coming in." The last such sales mission was conducted in 2017 in Pune, with 22 suppliers from the UK who met 90-odd hosted buyers from India.

The primary focus for participants will be leisure, but there will be a number of suppliers who will also focus on MICE. Bhatia adds, "There will be a big contingent from north of England as well. Marketing Manchester has been working extremely closely with us over the years, and we have 20-odd suppliers coming from the north who are capable of holding big MICE groups as well – like the Lancashire Cricket Club, which is where the India-Pakistan match took place in June 2019. The trade will also be able to meet some football clubs that can host big MICE groups. We have a lot of suppliers coming in for the first time. In fact, almost 60-70



per cent are first-timers. This is possibly due to the new air

connections launched recently between India and the UK. The extra load definitely helps to grow demand."

In terms of trends, Bhatia adds that more and more Indians are travelling to attend

live sporting events. A great example of this was the recent cricket World Cup that was a big catalyst in terms of showcasing the potential of the region. "The Premier League is also something that we are working very closely with. It is

largely targeted at the youth or the 'buzz seeker' audience as we like to call it. They plan their itineraries around live football games. People are also travelling to experience the Manchester Derby," he adds.



Vishal Bhatia
Country Manager - India
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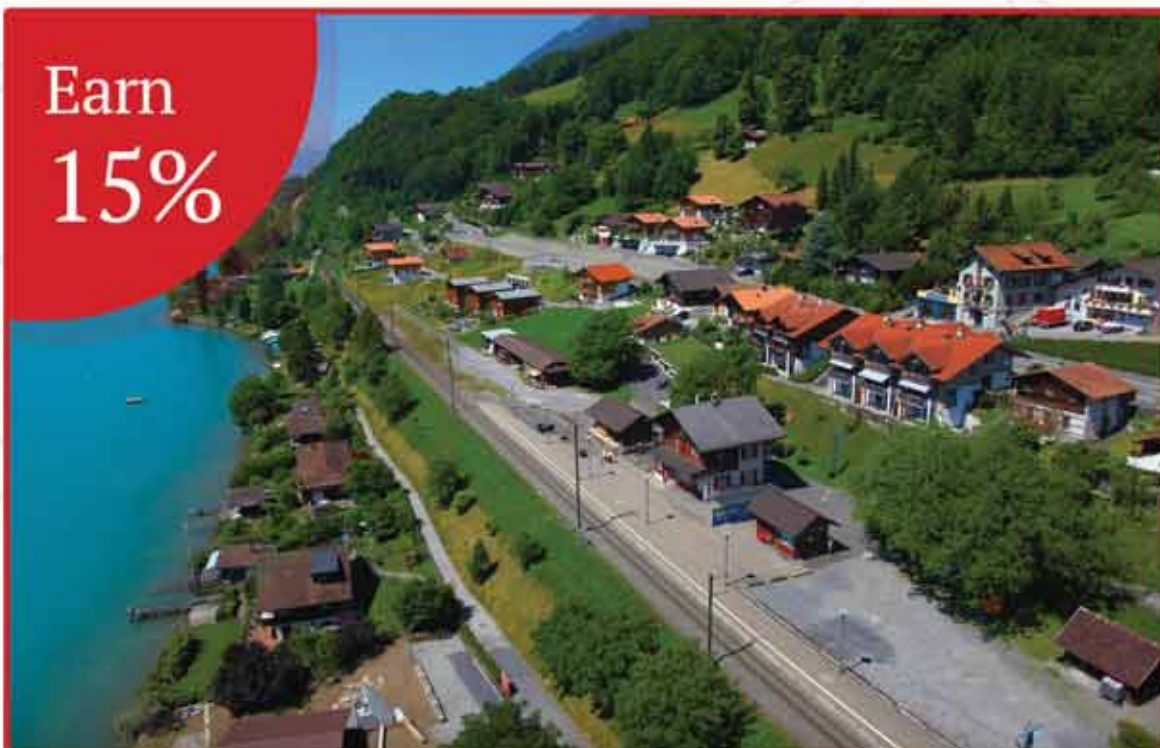
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Egypt Air soars ahead

Leadership should be dynamic, progressive, innovative and competitive, says **Wael Ahmed Fuad Gaber**, General Manager – India & Sri Lanka, Egypt Air.

 Hazel Jain

Egypt has traditionally been one of India's most important trading partners in the African continent. Moreover, the India-Egypt bilateral trade agreement has been in operation since March 1978 and is based on the 'Most Favoured Nation' clause. Ever since then, Egypt Air has grown consistently in air traffic services to and from



between Cairo-Mumbai-Cairo. From April 1, 2020, we will see the addition of the fifth flight Cairo-Mumbai-Cairo operating on Friday of every week. This

Star Alliance, we have captured many European destinations along with USA, Canada, and Australia," Gaber adds.

As a niche airline, Egypt Air needs to constantly innovate while facing challenges globally. "As of date, all airlines globally face a challenge, be it competitive fares, types of aircraft used, and most importantly, ensuring on-time performance (unless disturbed by weather conditions)," Gaber adds. Perhaps what separates it from the rest is the right leadership. "Yes, leadership should be dynamic, progressive, innovative and competitive," he remarks. 

“As of date, we have four flights per week between Cairo-Mumbai-Cairo; from April 1, we will see addition of the fifth”

Wael Ahmed Fuad Gaber

Cairo. Speaking about how the India market has performed for Egypt Air so far, **Wael Ahmed Fuad Gaber**, General Manager – India & Sri Lanka, Egypt Air, says, "As of date, we have four flights per week

shows the growth in the number of passengers travelling between India and Egypt." Not just this, the airline will proudly witness the addition of Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft in 2020 to its fleet. "Being a member of

Short-haul routes first

Ajay Singh, Chairman and Managing Director, SpiceJet, shares that the airline is targeting a 50 per cent growth this year and creating a local airline in Ras Al Khaimah.

 Anupriya Bishnoi

While Jet Airways' suspension of operations initially threw the Indian aviation industry into disarray, it seems to have recovered well from the setback in the second half of the year. **Ajay Singh**, reminiscing 2019's game-changing event, says, "Year 2019 was an interesting one for the aviation industry with a major carrier such as Jet



Ajay Singh
Chairman and Managing Director
SpiceJet

engine issues with other LCCs. But, he is firm about growth in the second half of 2020.

Explaining the dynamics of SpiceJet in Ras Al Khaimah's market, Singh says, "We will be starting flights to Ras Al Khaimah airport from Delhi and will then look at setting up base there, creating a local airline and then flying traffic from Ras Al Khaimah to neighbouring areas. The flights should start by early 2020." A name for the new airline hasn't been finalised yet.


“We will concentrate first on short international routes and will look at long haul destinations when MAX returns”

Airways shutting operations, and we all scrambled to make up for the capacity loss. In this time, the Indian market showed great resilience. Just after a few months of the airline's closure, we were back at 10 per cent growth. By and large, the Indian


aviation industry has a great future."

According to Singh, 2020 will see some consolidation of capacity because of some issues with the Boeing MAX aircraft at SpiceJet, and some

Talking about plans for the future, Singh says, "We grew by 50 per cent in 2019 and intend to grow another 50 per cent this year. So, of course, there will be new additions. We will concentrate first on short international routes and will look at long-haul destinations later when MAX returns." 

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- Government approves ₹ 2,482 crore for Swadesh Darshan Scheme projects
- IATA to adopt worldwide airport slot guidelines to help new airlines get slots at Indian airports
- Bids invited from private sector to redevelop four railway stations

New decade, fresh hope

The previous year may have been a tumultuous one for the travel and tourism sector across its many segments, from aviation to hospitality and from technology to allied services, but the present one seems absolutely promising. We wish the trade the very best for the new decade!



Siddhanta Sharma
President & CEO
InterGlobe Air Transport

“ Although the transitory vacuum created in the domestic capacity was filled in swiftly by local airlines, the one created on the international side would be slow to fill. Concurrently, ticket prices have also firmed up, thus making it more attractive for European and North American carriers to start services to India. Year 2020 is likely to see a stabilisation of both capacity and fares. ”



Neliswa Nkani
Hub Head – MEISEA
South African Tourism

“ Our trade and consumer initiatives in 2020 will be centred on establishing South Africa as the ultimate adventure destination, be it our 3,000-plus inimitable adventure activities or our culinary, wildlife, historic, nightlife, and cultural offerings. We will also equally focus our efforts towards promoting the new regions of South Africa within both consumer and trade spaces. ”



Vinay Malhotra
Regional Group COO
South Asia, Americas, ME & North Africa, VFS Global

“ Our focus through 2020 will be to continually evolve the customer experience across all touch points by leveraging technology, analytics and training, backed by robust process improvements to achieve this objective. We crossed the 200 million applications mark worldwide in 2019, which was a big milestone for us. We have also added more client governments to our portfolio in India. ”



Subhash Goyal
Secretary General
FAITH

“ We are aggressively promoting the new initiatives of the government. I think, the government is very flexible. The Ministry of Tourism has been taking the cause of the Indian industry forward. Now, it's the turn of the industry to perform. We cannot have tourism without the involvement of civil aviation. Hence, we must have regular meetings with MOT, MoCA, MEA, and Ministry of Home Affairs. ”



Runeep Sangha
Executive Chairman
PATA India Chapter

“ We are going to look at PATA Adventure Travel Mart, which is going to happen in Sabah (Malaysia) from February 12-14, 2020. We will work on roadshows to key source markets that are good contributors for India. We are also looking at including China in this initiative. We will continue to work on skill development and trainings for member employees. ”

Contd on page 24 ▶



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Growth is on the cards

► Contd from page 22



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President
TAAI

“Our agenda in 2020 is very clear: we want TAAI to be recognised as an association, which is one move that I will make immediately. Unless the government recognises us as one nodal body, I don't think we can move forward. All our issues and problems can only get solved if there is a proper channel and flow of information. Other than this, there are a lot of things I want to do, one of which would be more revenue-oriented things for our members. The business of agents is bleeding and I think, there is something wrong in the basic fundamentals.”



Ankur Bhatia
Executive Director
Bird Group

“In 2020, we look forward to a situation where the economy and aviation industry improve and improvise the yield for business. Bird Group enjoys the position of being among the largest Indian conglomerates, and has been making strides and immense growth in travel technology, aviation services, hospitality, retail, and education. Year 2019 began with opening of 'The Roseate Ganges' in Rishikesh. Towards the end of 2019, the brand launched 'Upstage Club', luxury co-working space at Roseate House New Delhi. Amadeus also completed 25 years in India.”



Sandeep Dwivedi
COO, InterGlobe
Technology Solutions

“Innovation is going to take precedence this year. We are excited to make 2020 more technically advanced not only for our travel partners, but also for the industry, especially for the end consumers. Our priority will remain personalising and customising travel solutions for agents and travellers by integrating modern technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. We are aware of the needs of the modern traveller, including the need for a better digital experience, and we are committed to delivering the same.”



Riaz Munshi
President
OTOAI

“We want to focus on three main areas, which can be termed as our primary goals for now. Firstly, we want to strengthen our relationship with the government, tourism boards, and embassies; secondly, we must double the membership base of the association to anywhere between 1000 and 1500 in a year's time; and thirdly, we need to do more product trainings and workshops for our members. I will continue to contribute to the success of OTOAI and growth of the outbound industry in India.”



Rajiv Mehra
Vice President
IATO

“Our expectations are always in sync with the needs of our industry and to facilitate the stakeholders. Our major focus area would be withdrawal of the facility of airport entry passes for representatives of tour operators for entry at the airport. If this facility is withdrawn, it will have a negative impact and the efforts being made by MOT and Government of India to increase tourist arrivals will go in vain. Another area would be working on the cascading effect of GST on tour operator services, which needs correction.”



Pradeep Saboo
Managing Partner
Guideline Travels

“Every new year comes with its own challenges and opportunities galore, and the same is expected out of 2020 as well. While this year, too, we shall continue and keep up the promotion and work on our existing products and cruises, we will also dedicate ourselves to handcrafting new experiences for our esteemed customers, giving them more to look forward to. For us, new itineraries and destinations as well as new cruising routes shall be the norm for 2020. I wish all my trade partners a very happy and fruitful 2020!”



Rashmi Ahuja
Commercial Coordinator
MSC Cruises India

“We are preparing for the launch of our new ship - MSC Virtuosa - in October 2020. The growing demand for cruise holidays globally is being experienced in India as well. Our new products will give our guests a unique opportunity to see on-board two original shows by Cirque du Soleil, the world leader in live artistic entertainment: VIAGGIO, SONOR, VARELIA, SYMA, COSMOS and EXENTRICKS shows. Our ability to adapt to changes and cater to requirements globally has been our main strength. FIT bookings for 2020 started early in 2019, which is a sign of an evolving market. We look forward to continuing our growth consistently by penetrating Tier-II and Tier-III cities.”



Alefiya Singh
Director
Iris Reps

“Year 2019 saw terror attacks in Sri Lanka, protests in Hong Kong, and big tour operators shutting down, which has definitely redefined the travel business. It has been challenging for Iris Reps to expand the portfolio, but we have managed to stay afloat with our current principals and short-term campaigns. Iris Reps has witnessed marginal growth with Furama Hotels, Danang and tie-up with renowned DMCs such as One Above for certain destinations. Our focus for 2020 would be to expand our portfolio with not just more clients, but also diverse ones so we can come closer to being a one-stop shop for the trade.”



JB Singh
President & CEO
InterGlobe Hotels

“We enter 2020 with enthusiasm and hope. We expect the operating performance to generally improve, as the fundamentals of the industry remain strong with a slowing supply graph and an improving demand curve which has historically been in the 8-10 per cent range. We have six hotels with a total of 1000 under active development, and are currently pursuing some very promising fresh deals in Pune, Goa, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru. On the policy front, we have been in dialogue with the government and MOT on several aspects of the industry, especially around the GST levied on civil structure and parking norms.”



Pradip Lulla
Acting President and VP
TAFI

“Some unfortunate events in 2019 like Jet Airways going under, Cox and Kings closing down, growth in November for aviation being minimal, and tourism in Kashmir going down by 85 per cent due to withdrawal of section 370 have made us consolidate and cut costs. We have also become more vigilant in our joint bank guarantee arrangement. We hope that in 2020, our government gives more impetus to our industry by reducing GST and increasing publicity spends on the Incredible India brand. The opening of new routes is a welcome gesture, and we hope the bullet train project is not shelved.”



Kishan Biyani
Managing Director
Ark Travels

“As we cruise into the new year, it looks both promising and challenging. We anticipate a demand and supply gap, particularly for the Singapore sector. With the size of Indian travellers opting for Singapore, major cruise players will look forward to encashing on these vacationers and fill the demand-supply gap. Also, cruise MICE movement is expected to be at its peak in the coming year. It will be challenging to see how cruise conglomerates take care of Indian MNCs and corporates taking on the high-seas. We also aim to tap and promote other products such as Rail Europe and Europamundo Vacations, in India.”



Captain Swadesh Kumar
President
ATOAI

“We are expecting growth in adventure tourism. If everything goes well, we should move at a seamless speed. What we need now is that the government spend some energy to promote adventure tourism, which is a niche segment. The need of the hour is for them to spend money, especially in regions like Northeast. There is hardly any infrastructure in places like Imphal; only parts of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh have some development. The government should create new circuits, take the industry there, and push them to perform with incentives. We are planning to have our convention in March, probably in Dharamsala.”

Inputs by Nisha Verma,
Hazel Jain and Manas Dwivedi



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Papori Bharati papori.bharati@levi.fi
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GRN Connect, reinvented

Relaunching its portal in 2019 with some enhanced features based on the latest technology, GRN Connect has set ambitious goals for achieving good growth in 2020.


 Manas Dwivedi

Improving its supply side by adding some large global suppliers as well as local DMCs, GRN Connect is now able to offer hotels on both prepaid and direct payment basis, informs **Deepak Narula**, Managing Director, GRN Connect. On the product side, he says they have added new modules of transfers and sightseeing, along with a specific module for apartments.



Deepak Narula
Managing Director
GRN Connect

watershed year for us." As his vision for the company, Narula wishes to add all possible leisure travel products on GRN's portal and distribute them on various global platforms. He claims that they have identified new markets and are planning some big initiatives in terms of distribution.

The travel agent community is extremely important for GRN Connect. Narula says, "Every agent - small, medium or large - is important. We believe in concierge services for our loyal agents, and we wish to empower them by giving trainings to the frontline staff and enough tools to enable them to sell efficiently," he adds. Narula also feels that there is no such thing as a mantra for success, as the company believes in transparency and ethical business dealings with its customers as well as suppliers. 

“Our new API has been in high demand and we have over 300 API customers in India and worldwide”

Sharing more on recent developments, he says, "2019 proved to be a very exciting year for us; we reinvented our booking engine with state-of-the-art technology. Our hotel booking engine now processes

a search much faster and gives consistent results. Our new API has been in high demand and we have over 300 API customers in India and worldwide. We are expecting 2020 to be a

Ready to 'Welcom' 2020

Sanjeev K Nayar, MIH, General Manager, WelcomHeritage, says that the New Year would see new openings and varied experiences from their camp.

 Nisha Verma

"Each of our hotels offers a unique experience, a secret to share, and a story to tell," claims **Sanjeev K Nayar**. He adds that they recently flagged their 36th property - WelcomHeritage, Mohangarh Fort - which also happens to be their 12th property in Rajasthan. "Thereafter, we propose to flag a heritage



Sanjeev K Nayar
MIH, General Manager
WelcomHeritage


says, "We not only signed new properties under the aegis of the brand, but also registered a growth over the previous year. We are very happy with our growth and in 2020, we look forward to continue to expand our footprint and business. Apart from this, we are also looking forward to tap the burgeoning wedding segment of 'Small and Intimate Weddings' for our properties."

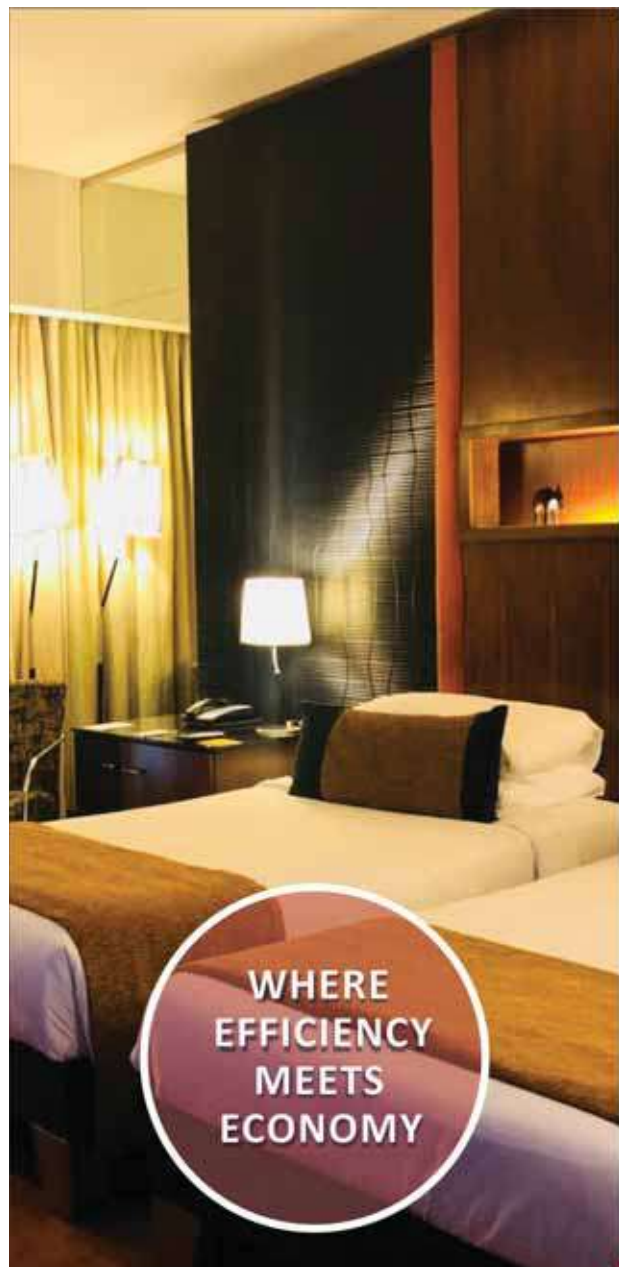
“We are also looking forward to tap the burgeoning wedding segment of 'Small and Intimate Weddings' for our properties”

property in Prayagraj - WelcomHeritage Badi Kothi. We are in conversation with more property owners and very soon, we will be making announcements of new properties on the board. We are keenly looking at opportuni-

ties for expansion as we see a lot of untapped potential in some regions, especially the South and the Northeast," Nayar shares.

Claiming that 2019 was a rewarding year for them, he

Nayar says that they implement coaching and mentoring activities at the workplace for the benefit of their employees. "On the one hand, helping the new hires gain hands-on knowledge from veterans and on the other, giving the older members the confidence of passing on their knowledge and helping the new staff enhance their skill is what works best for us," he shares. 



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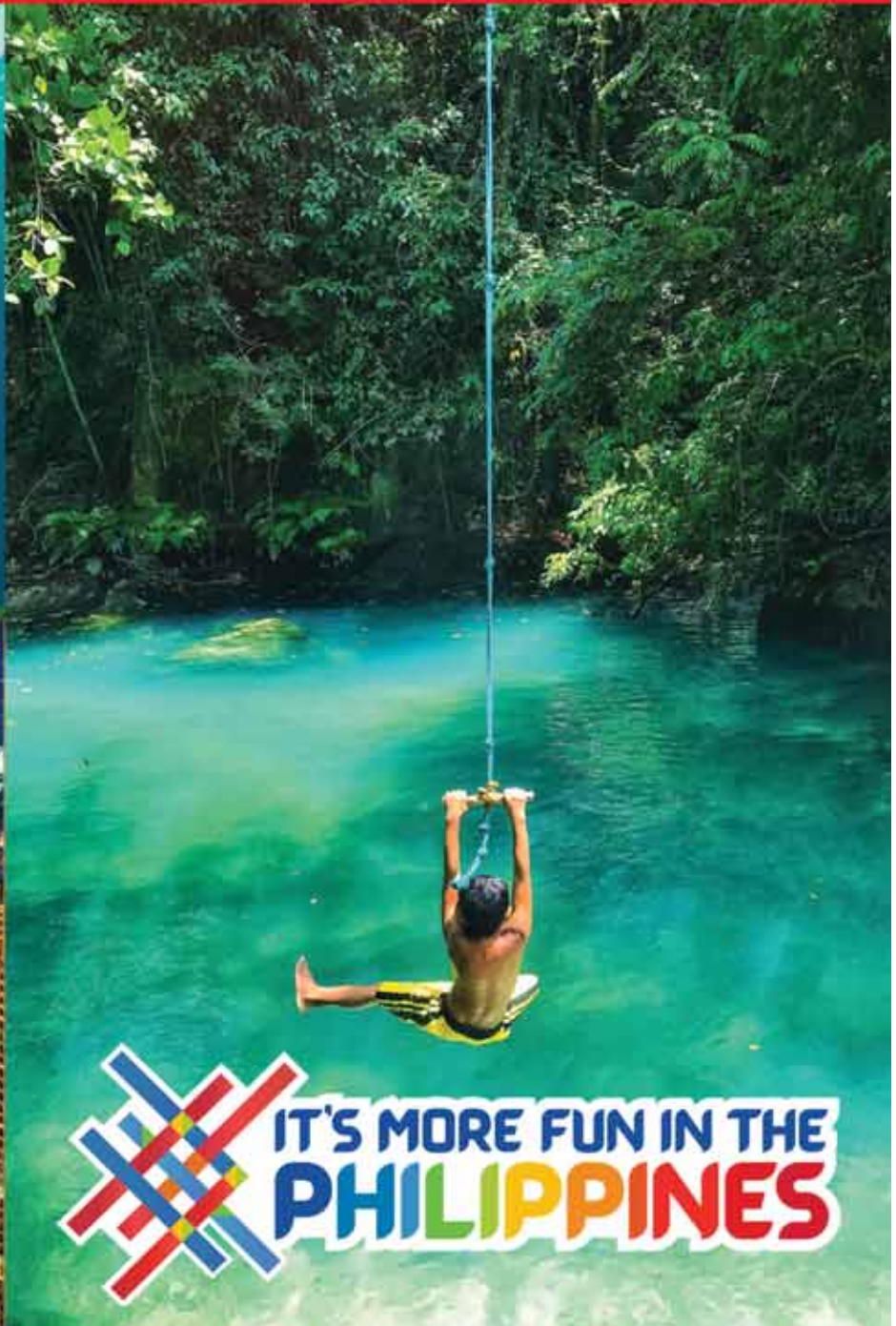
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2020



 IT'S MORE FUN IN THE
PHILIPPINES



IT'S MORE FUN IN THE PHILIPPINES



January

1	Wed	
2	Thu	
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5	Sun	
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18	Sat	
19	Sun	
20	Mon	
21	Tue	
22	Wed	
23	Thu	
24	Fri	
25	Sat	
26	Sun	Republic Day
27	Mon	
28	Tue	
29	Wed	
30	Thu	
31	Fri	



February

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2	Sun	
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March

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10	Tue	Holi
11	Wed	
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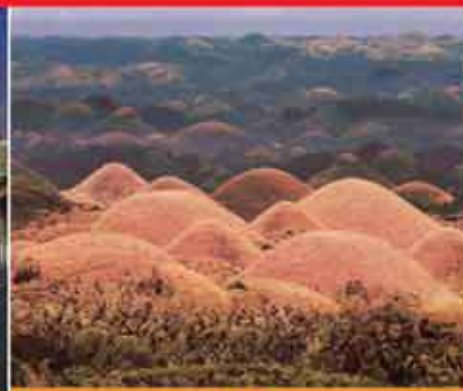


April

1	Wed	
2	Thu	Ram Navami
3	Fri	
4	Sat	
5	Sun	
6	Mon	Mahavir Jayanti
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8	Wed	○
9	Thu	
10	Fri	Good Friday
11	Sat	
12	Sun	
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29	Wed	
30	Thu	

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May

1	Fri	May Day
2	Sat	
3	Sun	
4	Mon	
5	Tue	
6	Wed	
7	Thu	Budha Purnima
8	Fri	
9	Sat	
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23	Sat	
24	Sun	
25	Mon	Id-ul-Fitr
26	Tue	
27	Wed	
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June

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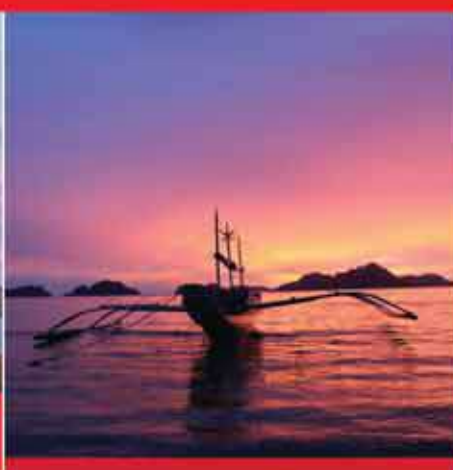
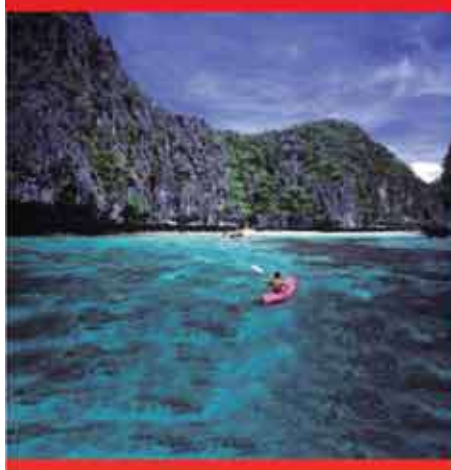
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27	Mon	
28	Tue	
29	Wed	
30	Thu	
31	Fri	

August

1	Sat	Id-ul-Zuha
2	Sun	
3	Mon	Raksha Bandhan
4	Tue	
5	Wed	
6	Thu	
7	Fri	
8	Sat	
9	Sun	
10	Mon	
11	Tue	
12	Wed	Janmashtami
13	Thu	
14	Fri	
15	Sat	Independence Day
16	Sun	
17	Mon	
18	Tue	
19	Wed	
20	Thu	
21	Fri	
22	Sat	
23	Sun	
24	Mon	
25	Tue	
26	Wed	
27	Thu	
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29	Sat	
30	Sun	Muharram
31	Mon	

IT'S MORE FUN IN THE PHILIPPINES



September

October

November

December

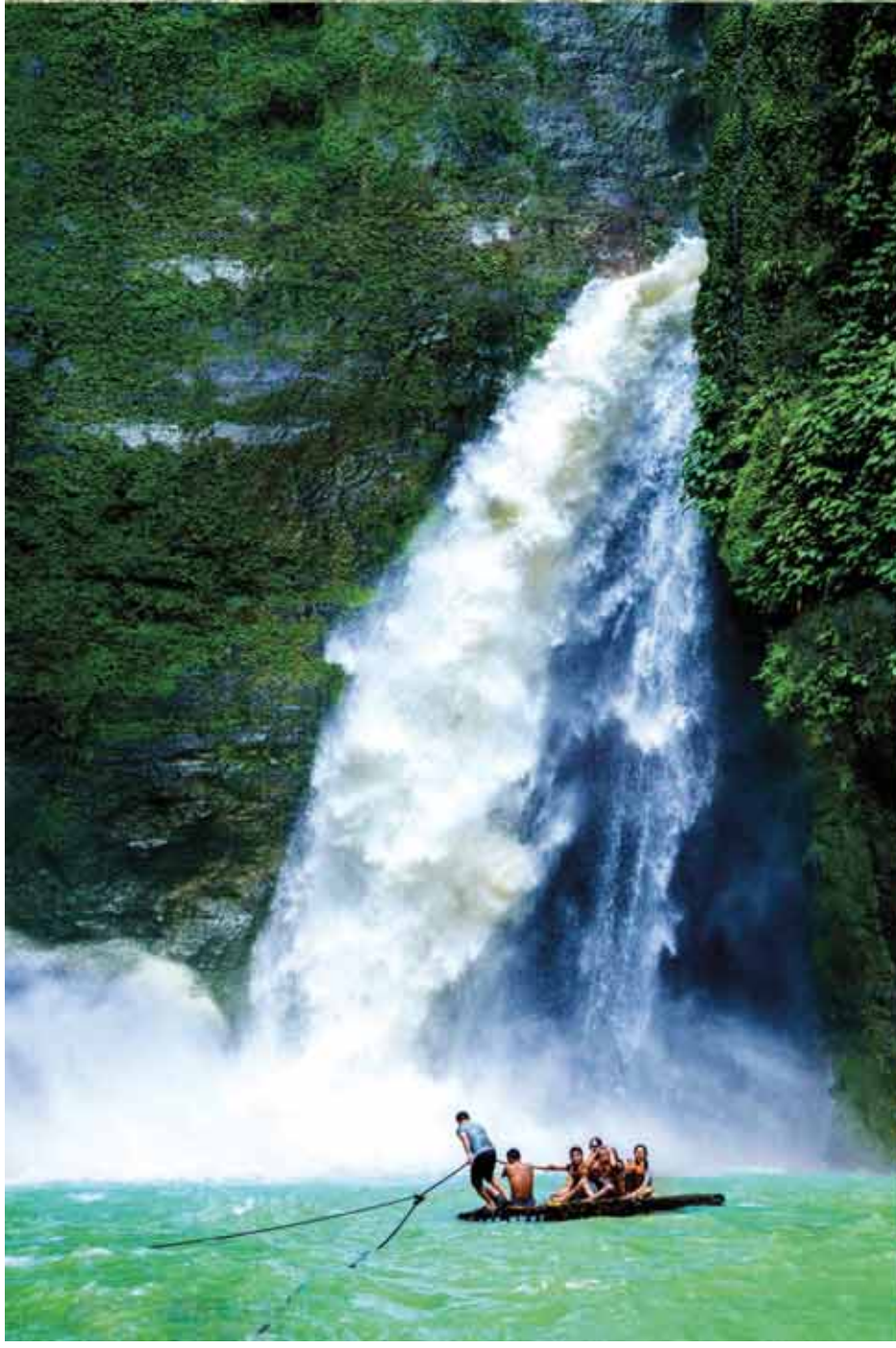
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1	Thu	☾
2	Fri	Mahatma Gandhi Jayanti
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23	Fri	
24	Sat	
25	Sun	Dussehra
26	Mon	
27	Tue	
28	Wed	
29	Thu	
30	Fri	Id-e-Milad
31	Sat	☾

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9	Mon	
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12	Thu	
13	Fri	
14	Sat	Diwali
15	Sun	
16	Mon	
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22	Sun	
23	Mon	
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25	Wed	
26	Thu	
27	Fri	
28	Sat	
29	Sun	
30	Mon	☾ Guru Nanak's Birthday

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16	Wed	
17	Thu	
18	Fri	
19	Sat	
20	Sun	
21	Mon	
22	Tue	
23	Wed	
24	Thu	
25	Fri	Christmas Day
26	Sat	
27	Sun	
28	Mon	
29	Tue	
30	Wed	
31	Thu	☾





3rd highest growth for LA

The Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board's marketing strategy in India has resulted in the market gaining one spot, from being the fourth-highest international YOY growth market in 2017 to being the third-highest in 2018 at 5.1 per cent.



Hazel Jain

Given that Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board foresees consistent growth coming from India over the next four years, averaging five per cent per year, opening an office was a natural step for it. It recently established its direct presence in Mumbai with an office in Bandra-Kurla Complex, headed by Seema Kadam, Regional Director – India, Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board. She says, "India's 2018 performance has been extremely encouraging. We witnessed a 5.1 per cent YOY

“We are looking at Tier-II and Tier-III city trainings in Chandigarh, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Pune, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Delhi, and Mumbai”

growth in 2018, welcoming 130,000 Indian travellers during the course of the year. Our marketing strategy in India resulted in the market gaining one spot, from being the fourth-highest international YOY growth market in 2017 to being the third-highest in 2018. We project the numbers to hit 165,000 visitors to LA by 2023.”

The board's primary focus is the leisure segment. "On an average, Indian travellers to the US stay for 30.4 nights and visit at least three destinations. Of this, they spend 7.7 nights on an average in Los Angeles. Research indicates sightseeing (92%), shopping (87%), and guided tours (52%) as top preference activities for Indian visitors to Los Angeles," Kadam reveals.

LA Insider for B2B

As far as B2B activities are concerned, the board is aggressively pushing its 'LA Insider' online training programme, which launched in India in 2018. This B2B platform highlights Los Angeles with three chapters and educates the trade on how to

sell and promote Los Angeles. Incentives, familiarisation opportunities, and local travel trade discounts are communicated to the travel trade via newsletters. In January 2020, it will join Visit California on their dedicated California sales mission.


"Additionally, we are looking at Tier-II and Tier-III city trainings in Chandigarh, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Pune, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Delhi, and Mumbai. We also aim to co-create webinars with key Los Angeles partners. We are

also aggressively promoting our diverse hotel landscape featuring 991 hotels and 98,000 hotel rooms ranging from value to trendy to luxury, and highlighting meeting options – from unique only-in-LA venues to the 720,000 sqft

convention centre and the LA LIVE entertainment complex for the MICE market," Kadam elaborates. The board now has a revamped website at www.discoverlosangeles.com, which contains interactive maps and an events calendar. ↴




Seema Kadam
Regional Director – India
Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board





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Cloud Forest Gallery



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Metaphors



Travstarz grows 100%

With over 100% YOY growth, Travstarz Global Group has soared heights. **Pankaj Nagpal**, MD of the group, says the vision to be in India's top three B2B companies keeps them going.



Manas Dwivedi

A dedicated B2B company since its inception, Travstarz Global Group has laid prime importance on the travel agent community. "They are our partners in progress and it is due to their support that we have reached where we are today. Our plans and strategies always revolve around our travel agent partners. With a complete portfolio of travel products including flights, hotels, transfers, tours, cruises, visas and insurance, we plan to get even more aggressive in our marketing in 2020 and engage more with our travel agent partners," says **Pankaj Nagpal**.

Registering over 100 per cent growth in revenues YOY as compared to the year before, the company aims to achieve over 150 per cent annual



Pankaj Nagpal
Managing Director
Travstarz Global Group

growth for the next three years. Sharing a brief look of the plan, he says, "At present, our focus is on increasing our market share in terms of agent on-boarding, and revenues and profits, though healthy, will remain under pressure as we focus on higher numbers."

According to him, the vision of being among the top three B2B companies in India is what keeps them going and motivates the team to outperform till they achieve their goals. "Consistent delivery of quality services has given us the success we have had. Our complaint ratio has been below one per cent for the past several years. This is an important factor that has made us stand apart and helped make a mark in our partners' mind. Other than this, we constantly engage with our agents through e-marketing campaigns, webinars and most importantly, our

“ Our focus is on increasing our market share in terms of agent on-boarding; we conduct 10-12 workshops every quarter ”

regular networking events and roadshows across the country. On an average, we conduct 10 to 12 workshops every quarter, which keeps us in

touch with our partners and helps us understand their needs and expectations so we can improve our offerings," Nagpal shares. 🇮🇳

Women soaring in aviation



Women in Aviation International, India Chapter, recently launched a coffee table book titled 'Champions of Change in Aviation' in a bid to call for skilling initiatives with emphasis on gender parity as a means to address the gender imbalance across job roles within the sector. Gracing the occasion were dignitaries from the highest echelons of government and industry.

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Guests rule the roost

Amritara Hotels & Resorts puts in a lot of effort to offer personalised experiences by curating unique offerings and blending the essence of a location with them.



Hazel Jain

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



Ruchi Uberai
Director
Amritara Hotels & Resorts

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

Having been part of the industry for 12 years now, Amritara Hotels & Resorts is a well-known name. "Familiarisation trips, show-arounds, incentives, treating them as part of our family, as well as constant interaction with and visits to agencies are some of the ways we engage with the trade to boost sales. We also participate in major trade fairs and travel shows where there is an opportunity to establish relations," shares Uberai.

The group is now indulging in reasonably aggressive marketing on social media platforms, along with advanced digital marketing activities. "We intend to also participate on GDS platforms," she informs.

“Fam trips, incentives, and constant interaction are some of the ways we engage with the trade to boost sales”

offering of nostalgic journeys, spiritual experiences, as well as rejuvenation of body, mind and soul in destinations like Rishikesh, Pali, Shimla, Coorg, Varanasi, Goa, and Kochi among others. "Unique locations blended with contempo-

rary facilities, amenities, and service delivery make us stand out," she adds. The brand puts in a lot of effort to offer personalised, tailor-made experiences to guests. "An evaluation of the guests' preference is undertaken several times before they

As green as it gets

The fact that it is situated in the heart of Kuala Lumpur's concrete jungle doesn't keep Banyan Tree Kuala Lumpur from pursuing its sustainability standards and practices.



Tripti Mehta

Rooted in its corporate ethos of 'Embracing the Environment, Empowering People', Banyan Tree Kuala Lumpur's sustainability approach emphasises on building in harmony with nature and contributing to the growth and development of the commu-



nity. This, it achieves in spite of being set amidst the heart of Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle - the commercial, shopping, and entertainment hub of Malaysia.

"Conservation of natural resources such as energy, water

Eliminating single-use plastics

Banyan Tree Kuala Lumpur is committed to the brand-wide pledge to reduce and ultimately eliminate single-use plastics from operations. As part of the initiative, the hotel has eliminated plastic straws at every F&B outlet. Their aim is to restore the natural environment, whilst raising awareness of climate change through tree-planting events around the area in which they operate, with a current target of 2,000 trees per year.

and gas; recycling; promoting sustainable living by educating our guests, clients and children in schools and homes we engaged with, are some of the contemporary methods of sustainability we have adopted at the property. We also participate in the EarthCheck programme - world's leading scientific benchmarking, certification, and advisory group for travel and tourism," shares **Shereen Chow**, Director of Sales & Marketing, Banyan Tree Kuala Lumpur.

Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts is committed to protecting

the environment and uplifting the communities around it. Each of its properties engages the customer in making their contribution to the environment and involve themselves in eco-sensitive issues. "The Green Imperative Fund works based on guest contribution of \$2 net per room, per night. This amount is automatically billed to our guests, although they are at the liberty to opt out of the programme anytime during their stay. The hotel then matches the guest's contribution, and the total funds go out to our Foundation," she adds.

5 years of non-stop service

Air Seychelles recently celebrated five years of non-stop service between India and Seychelles. Launched as a three-per-week service in December 2014, the carrier currently operates six weekly flights to India's financial capital. Celebrating this historic milestone with travel trade partners in Mumbai was **Remco Althuis**, Chief Executive Officer, Air Seychelles.





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A vision to diversify

The Globus family of brands is introducing gadgets that double up as complimentary data hotspots and commentary hearing devices for customers while on tour.



Hazel Jain

In addition to the perennially popular Cosmos, Globus and Avalon Waterways brands for touring and river cruising respectively, the company has recently introduced the world's first à la carte touring option called 'Cosmos Lite' for more independent-minded travellers. Another grand success has been its 'Globus Escapes' line which offers almost 30-plus destination itineraries in the winter and off-peak times at incredible pricing. All these introductions point to one thing:

The 'Companion Travels Free' offer on Avalon Waterways allows first-time (even repeat) entry into the elite and all-inclusive river cruising experience at the cost of a tour. Registrations for its annual Fam tours for 2020 to Germany are open.



Varesh Chopra
Regional Director – South Asia and Middle East, Globus family of brands

innovation. "For us, innovation is bringing in meaningful change in tune with the times and trends. While we were the ones to introduce Wi-Fi on touring coaches and our signature Local Favorite (LF) excursions, we continue to lead the way with more. As an innovation for 2020, we are introducing gadgets which serve a dual purpose of a commentary hearing device and complimentary data hotspot for our customers,

while they are on excursion," says Varesh Chopra, Regional Director – South Asia and Middle East for the Globus family of brands. He adds that with these strategic expansions in the product line and more in the future, their next five years are already poised for a manifold growth.

Speaking about some of the new developments in 2020, he shares, "The Globus family of brands Specialist programmes are back this January in a new and fun format. Agents can register this month onwards and update their knowledge about the Globus family. We also have our 2020 early bird offers extended till January end."

"Today, the industry offers a plethora of options for the traveller and the customer is truly the king. As I see it though, the most creative and responsive of our lot will survive," he says. 🐦

A big break in AI

Kapil Goswamy, MD, Bigbreaks.com, claims that technology is the way forward for the industry and personalised offerings for clients would certainly make a difference.



Nisha Verma

Bigbreaks.com added a number of destinations and introduced new products to its portfolio in the previous year, making 2019 "a reasonably good year at Bigbreaks," says Kapil Goswamy. "We saw growth in all our three verticals - domestic holidays, international holidays, and MICE. We also added new products to our portfolio, including destina-



Kapil Goswamy
Managing Director
Bigbreaks.com

the year, we plan to introduce holiday offerings to more unique and unexplored destinations. The Indian outbound traveller, as well as the domestic leisure traveller, is quickly maturing, and travellers are no longer looking for just run-of-the-mill destinations and experiences. We'd like to continue to keep pace and even outpace the demands and expectations of travellers in 2020," says Goswamy.

“We plan to introduce holiday offerings to unique and unexplored destinations; we'd like to continue outpacing expectations”

tions like Japan, South Korea, Eastern Europe, and Russia. Apart from that, we also offered (and continue to offer) women-only fixed departure products for destinations like Jordan, Egypt, Vietnam, Cambodia, as well as Bhutan. Though there were a

few negatives, like the shortage of air capacity post the demise of Jet Airways, the year saw the upward trend in Indian holiday-makers continue," he shares.

The company plans to add new offerings in 2020. "Through

Insisting that technology is the future of the travel industry, he reveals, "On the technology front, we've just launched our AI-powered Bot which, at least by initial reactions, has been well-received by our clients. We want to continue with introducing cutting-edge technology and as a team, are convinced that technology coupled with AI-powered personalisation as well as a human interface where required, is the way forward." 🐦

Undying hospitality

Jean Luc Benhaim, MD, Buena Vista Resort, was so enamoured by India on his first trip to the country that he went on to set up a resort in Jaipur and pursue his passion.



Hazel Jain

French national, Jean Luc Benhaim fell in love with India the very first time he came here. A biologist by profession, he had come to India for a holiday, not knowing that soon he'd come to call this country home.

"I came to India to get away from my busy schedule. There was something captivating



Jean Luc Benhaim
Managing Director
Buena Vista Resort

The couple have done most of the paintings that adorn the walls of the resort. "We have put our heart and soul into this property. Obviously, there were a lot of problems that I had to face here, language being the biggest barrier. I knew that we had to create 'unique localisation' if we wanted to succeed in this market. We had decided that Buena Vista would not be a regular resort," he says.

Since he started his business, he has spent a lot of time in Jaipur. "It's been a great journey so far and the learnings have been immense. Challenging times, triumphant moments, and disappointments – we have collectively seen it all while setting up Buena Vista Resort. Now, having experienced setting up a business in India, I feel there's more that needs to be done to make India an investor-friendly destination. There has to be more consumer respect in India," Benhaim says. 🐦

“There's more that needs to be done to make India an investor-friendly destination; there has to be more consumer respect”

about the Indian people and their way of life. Somehow, when I came here, I was relieved of all tension and I just enjoyed being here," he recalls.

Determined to set up an enterprise, Benhaim started looking for land to set up a

hotel. Once he and his team were certain they had found the right place, work on setting up the Buena Vista Resort began. "My wife Sigrid and I are fond of travelling. There's a lot we have seen and Buena Vista is a canvas of all our life's experiences," says Benhaim.

A unique portfolio

With the objective of consolidating the presence of the products in its portfolio, ISA Tourism will strive for steady growth in 2020, says Manas Sinha, Director, ISA Tourism.



Manas Dwivedi

As the regional sales office for Far East Hospitality Group, 2019 was fairly a good year for ISA Tourism. The group went on to open three new hotels in Sentosa Island – Village Hotel Sentosa, The Outpost Hotel, and The Barracks Hotel – with support from its key travel partners who worked together to send Indian guests.



Manas Sinha
Director
ISA Tourism

Beach Resort & Spa, Furaveri Maldives, and Le Murraya Koh Samui.

"With positive feedback from Indian guests for Far East Hospitality, we plan to grow by 15-20 per cent in 2020 and look forward to the opening of The Clan Hotel in the CBD area of Singapore. For the SLH portfolio, we have aggressive growth plans and are working to qualify and enlist operators as SLH partners. The aim is to mutually grow our business and bring unique hotels and resorts of SLH to Indian bookers and travellers," shares Sinha.

“With positive feedback from Indian guests for Far East Hospitality, we plan to grow by 15-20 per cent in 2020”

According to Manas Sinha, they saw steady growth of Indian guests at the existing 10 hotels in mainland Singapore. He adds, "ISA Tourism was appointed the India Representative of Small Luxury Hotels of The World. We are proud of this unique and remarkable

achievement and happy to share that support from the travel partners working in the luxury segment has been excellent. We were able to achieve the 2019 targets of SLH, and look forward to a more successful year in 2020." Other additions to its portfolio include Bali Mandira

Focused marketing activities, sharing of knowledge, and enabling outbound business stays are ISA Tourism's key function areas, though they are selective when associating with hotels and resorts, and want to work with the right products. 🐦



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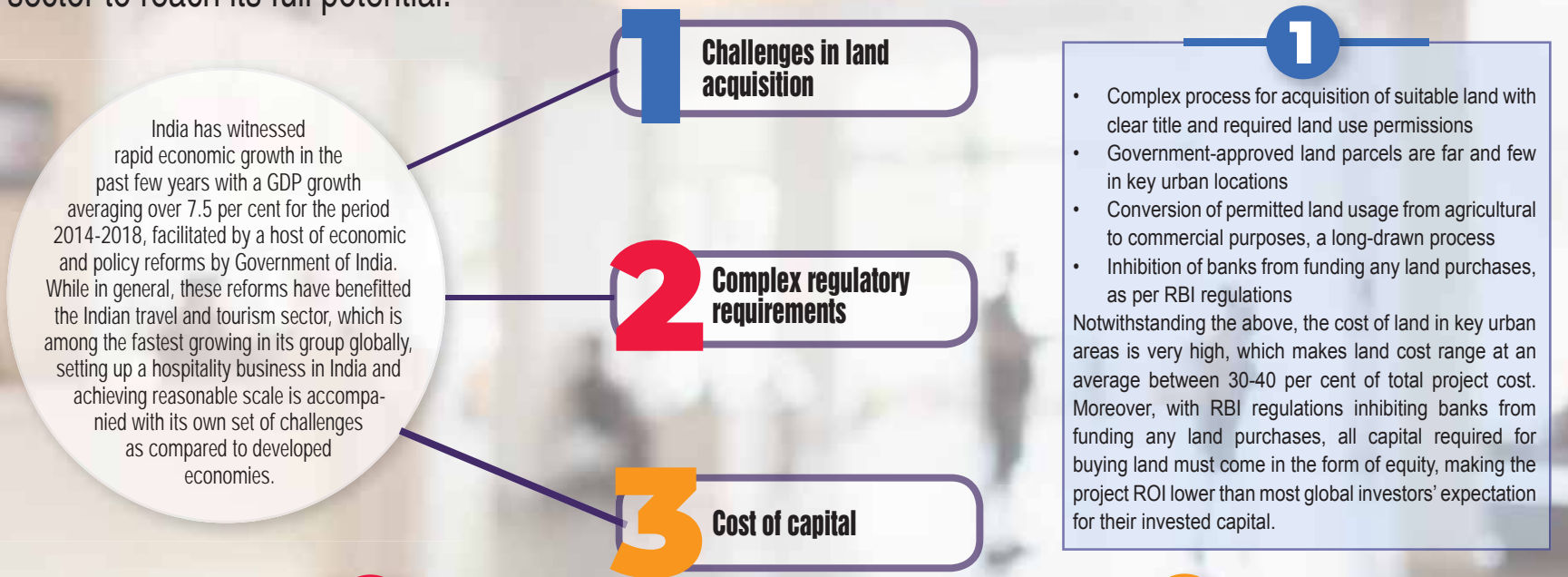
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Roadblocks that contain growth

A recent report by HVS, titled 'Ease of Doing Business: Indian Hospitality Sector', highlights some key challenges that inhibit the entry of fresh capital in the business, while also delving on immediate reforms needed for the sector to reach its full potential.



2

- Multiple sanctions and licences to be obtained to construct the building
- Additional licences needed prior to opening and operating the hotel

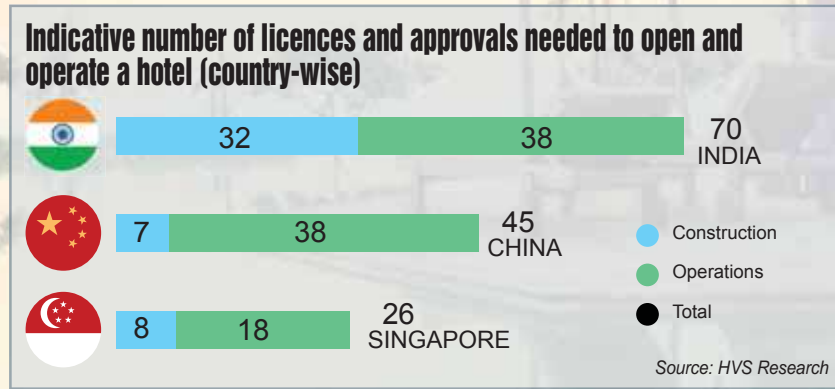
The hospitality sector is regulated by both the central and state governments, which makes the approval process complex. Multiple sanctions and licences, including sanctioned building plans, environmental sanctions, airport building height clearances, and construction labour permits, among several other construction-related sanctions, are needed.

The average time required to obtain these clearances ranges between 12 to 18 months, adding to the time required to complete a Greenfield project.

3

- High cost of servicing debt
- Quantum of debt available averages only 50 per cent of project cost
- Short tenure for repayment of debt

India ranks amongst the countries with the highest cost of capital for the hospitality industry. Lending norms for the industry are extremely stringent with interest rates between 11 and 14 per cent for borrowings as against an average of 4-5 per cent in most developed economies. The quantum of debt available to the sector averages at 50 per cent of the total project cost, further restricting the capital available for hotel development. And finally, the short tenure for repayment of debt which averages around 10-12 years, including the construction period moratorium. Given the cyclical nature of the business, if the hotel enters the market in a down cycle phase, it is almost certain to head towards becoming an NPA as has been evident from the last cyclical downturn.



Challenges run far and beyond

Once the hotel is operational, it still needs to get most of the licences renewed on an annual basis.

- Licences needed to operate a hotel in India are far too many and vary across states
- Not possible to apply for multiple licences simultaneously, and parallel applications cannot be pursued across authorities
- Lack of clarity on licences needed or process to be followed
- Absence of a single point where information can be accessed by a potential investor
- Absence of a nodal agency authorised to monitor and assist hospitality-related investments

China Eastern enlightens trade

China Eastern Airlines presented its latest products to the trade in Kolkata in early December, and also felicitated its 10 top performers for 2019. The event was attended by Jun Li, Country Manager – India, China Eastern Airlines; Nayan Srivastava, Sales & Marketing Manager - India, China Eastern Airlines; Lu Ning, Manager of China Eastern in Kolkata; and 70 travel agents.

Six-day tour for Vietnam agents

Vietnam-based JTR Events & Marketing recently conducted a six-day familiarisation trip for 44 trade partners from Vietnam to India, hosted by Destinos India (KTC). The group included 26 agents from Ho Chi Minh City and 18 agents from Hanoi for site inspections in New Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur. VietJet Airlines was the partner airline for this.



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NCL doubles business in India

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) has managed to double its business from India with four years of direct presence in the market. It now readies itself for 2020 as it introduces two new ships to its trade partners here. The leisure segment continues to form a major part of its business from India.

Hazel Jain

It's been four years since it opened its office in India and the corresponding growth in numbers over these years has been phenomenal. Felix Chan, Vice President and General Manager (Asia), Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, says, "Business has more than doubled in the last three years for us and growth in India has aligned with that in Asia with double-digit figures. We continue to see a lot of potential for more growth here."

Chan started with looking after all three brands under Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings which includes NCL, Oceania Cruises, and Regent Seven Seas Cruises. Though he will focus only on NCL, the other two brands will be handled directly by its sales



Felix Chan
Vice President and General Manager (Asia), Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings

director in Singapore office. He adds, "NCL is the most popular brand in India as it caters to the segment that is very large in India. We have cabins which start from \$100 per night, per guest to the top-end Haven Suite, which can cost more than \$500 per night, per guest. So, there is a broad range of guests that we can target in India for NCL. In

fact, we see a lot of demand from India for high-end cabin categories and have booked the largest number of Haven Suite."

For 2020, NCL has introduced two new ships. In November 2019, it launched its Norwegian Encore which has itineraries from Miami and Eastern Caribbean, and New York to Bermuda, and then to Alaska

will include Southeast Asia, Japan, and Hong Kong.

"Norwegian Spirit will be based in Asia for a long time and we will add more deployment. Generally, Asia is also popular among Indians, but only for shorter itineraries. Up until now, most of our Asia itineraries were longer than 10-12 days. Hence, it is not yet our top destination for

“ We see a lot of demand from India for high-end cabin categories and have booked the largest number of Haven Suite ”

in 2021, which is a hugely popular cruise destination among Indians. It also starts promoting its refurbished ship called Norwegian Spirit, which offers Asia itineraries from April 2020 ex-Singapore. This

Indians. We do see some good feedback though, with our six-day cruise from Singapore where we have seen a lot of bookings from India," Chan explains. On Norwegian Spirit, a majority



of the itineraries are long, but there will be around four that will be fewer than a week, which should be attractive for Indian cruisers.

Speaking about 2020, Chan says, "We will continue our partnerships with key agents. We are already seeing some inquiries and bookings for 2020. So, we expect 2020 to be a good year for us in India."

A key focus area for him in the new year will be education for the trade. "We will also push our in-house learning module, NCL University, for the trade in India and continue to do more webinars. We will also be more active on online platforms and offer real-time inventory. Apart from this, our annual roadshow covering more than 10 cities spread throughout the year will also take place," he says. 📌

Dream team for the cup

Guideline Travels recently organised the second edition of the Dream Cruises Cricket Cup on December 14, 2019, at NSCI Astro Turf in Mumbai. The event was attended by over 100 travel agents from across Maharashtra.





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Innovation through technology

TourFox becomes the first company in the world to implement the e-Swiss Pass Module on its website, which goes to show that thinking out of the box is a key aspect of every industry, says **Sindhu Madhavan**, Account Manager, TourFox. Soon, the company will implement Easy Rail Access (ERA) in sector tickets.

Hazel Jain

TourFox is proud to inform the travel fraternity that it has touched a unique milestone of being the first company in the world to implement the e-Swiss Pass Module through ERA (Easy Rail Access) API platform on



Sindhu Madhavan
Account Manager
TourFox

tourfox.com. Sharing this update is **Sindhu Madhavan**, who says, "We are truly proud of this achievement! The credit goes to our in-house IT team that has strived to achieve this integration with our esteemed rail partner – Rail Europe. Being the number one GSA for Swiss Passes in India, this integration was always envisioned, and we are glad to have successfully implemented it."

This was launched in December 2019 with the idea of extending the e-Swiss Pass on tourfox.com to agents across India before the European holiday season begins in 2020. Emphasising on innovation in technology as a necessary roadmap today, she adds that consumer

e-commerce today is primarily driven by price and convenience, and a great deal on products that are delivered quickly. "To achieve this desire for instant access and a faster turnaround, it was extremely important to continually invest in technology platforms that help us connect with potential

“With the introduction of e-Swiss Pass, it was our endeavour to implement the pass on tourfox.com; a registered travel agent can now log on to our site and book it”

customers across all channels, be it booking offices or online portals. Our online platform has been our most significant source of strength in terms of visibility and revenue, and we will keep investing in technology," she

says. Swiss Pass is by far the most popular way to travel in Switzerland and is the most sought-after product due to its sheer convenience of use. Such a popular product should be available to the end-user with ease, says Madhavan. "With physical Swiss Pass, the agent had to get the pass picked up

or wait for it to be delivered. During high season, it became a challenge as other products like hotel and mountain vouchers were e-vouchers and instantly available to our travel agents. With the introduction

of e-Swiss Pass, it was our endeavour to implement the pass on tourfox.com, to make it easily accessible to our travel agents. A registered travel agent can now log on to our site and book a Swiss Pass with ease," she explains.

Once it is booked, it is instantly sent to the agent's email ID, thereby making it seamless for the user to purchase a Swiss Pass. The travel agent can even fulfil a last-minute Swiss Pass request for a customer through the site. Such are the benefits of this integration.

"We will also be implementing ERA in sector tickets that will make the booking process simple and quicker. European rail travel has undoubtedly increased in a big way with more and more demand to

travel by train due to increasing airfares. This has prompted us to implement instant e-tickets to our travel professionals. Our trade partners will be able to log on to our site and book these sectors effortlessly, thereby simplifying the booking process and increasing its reach," she says.

TourFox specialises in offering services and products that include rail passes, air tickets, hotels, apartments, sightseeing and excursions, packages, wellness options, and tailor-made itineraries within Europe. Its premium apartments in Lucerne, Interlaken and Zermatt are bookable on the portal for the upcoming summer season, and the early birds get the best of commissions as well. Tourfox.com provides an array of services the world over. 🇨🇦

TourFox hosts Fam for agents

The company hosted some lucky winners of a contest on a Fam tour in October 2019. The agents experienced the best of Switzerland from St. Moritz to a journey on the Bernina Express. A trip to the mesmerising Diavolezza, with e-biking around the lake in St. Moritz and the journey to the top of Matterhorn Glacier Paradise in Zermatt, left them spellbound.



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Hopes pinned on 2020

Roma Malik, Director, Rxpertize Hotels & Resorts, shares that while 2019 didn't see much growth for them, especially when she floated her company, 2020 will be a better year.

Nisha Verma

For Roma Malik, who only recently founded Rxpertize Hotels & Resorts, 2019 was a year of discoveries. "While 2019 had been a relatively tough year for business across the country, for me it was a year of introspection and driving the entrepreneur in me to build Rxpertize. We have plans to add more hotels on management or sales & marketing contracts in 2020.



Roma Malik
Director
Rxpertize Hotels & Resorts

we plan to do the same in the future."

The group will be using digital marketing tools to place the brand in the customers' mind, as a majority of travellers expect hospitality providers to engage with them before and during their trip to enhance the experience.

Malik also believes that empowering the team is a great way to steer towards growth. "Ask for their inputs, ask for their ideas and insights, reinforce their beliefs with positive feedback, develop leaders, stretch each team member's capabilities, mentor them, encourage open communication, and demonstrate that you trust your team. The success to growth is transparency, and effectively communicating the vision of the organisation keeps the team moving, taking everyone to the top," she concludes.

“Currently, we are in talks for new openings in the Northeast, Amritsar, Mukhteshwar, and Ranikhet”

Currently, we are in talks for new openings in the Northeast, Amritsar, Mukhteshwar, and Ranikhet. We plan to reach out for international representations and hotel marketing modules. The religious segment is also on the cards," she says.

Claiming that their customers are primarily the travel trade network across the country, she says, "Our business module depends on the travel agent network. We have always safeguarded our travel agents from challenges they face and

Million-plus Indians

Constant engagement with the trade has helped increase Indian arrivals to Singapore, says GB Srithar, Regional Director (IMESA), Singapore Tourism Board.

Nisha Verma

In 2018, Singapore welcomed 1.44 million visitors from India, making it the third largest source market for Singapore, reveals GB Srithar. "By October-end 2019, Singapore had received 1,190,000 visitors from India. This was the fifth year in a row where we welcomed more than a million Indian travellers to Singapore," he says.



GB Srithar
Regional Director - India, Middle East & South Asia (IMESA), Singapore Tourism Board

travellers from secondary cities. Cruises have also taken a huge leap, hence, we expect more cruise travellers visiting Singapore in the coming years," Srithar shares. Singapore Tourism Board (STB) also wants to position the island city-state as an international wedding destination, while also re-establishing its attractiveness in the Overseas School Trips (OST) segment.

“We will increase efforts to entrench Singapore as a must-visit destination among travellers from secondary cities”

Claiming that the board's marketing efforts have evolved over the years in terms of approach and scope, in 2020, apart from fostering deeper travel trade relationships across India, they will seek

innovative, high consumer-engagement collaborations. "Apart from key metro cities, we will increase efforts, through trade partners, to entrench Singapore as a must-visit destination among

Srithar adds that part of STB's strategy is to spread out its tourism offerings across different parts of Singapore. He says, "We have a number of new projects across different parts of Singapore, the upcoming Mandai eco-tourism hub, and the expansion of integrated resorts Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World Sentosa and Jurong Lake District."

100 hotels for Clarks Inn

With 2019 as a landmark year, Clarks Inn Group of Hotels reached the milestone of a 100-hotel portfolio in December. The group has 35 more hotels in the pipeline for this year.

Manas Dwivedi

Since it began operations in early 2006, Clarks Inn Group of Hotels has accomplished several milestones. According to SN Srivastava, President & Co-founder, Clarks Inn Group of Hotels, they are seeing much greater interest in their brands from hotel owners and developers. "For 2020, we are readying for an aggressive expansion with at least 35 more properties that we plan to add to our portfolio. Furthermore, we want to expand our footprint



SN Srivastava
President & Co-founder
Clarks Inn Group of Hotels

and developers in Bangladesh, the Middle East, the ASEAN region (especially Malaysia,

the most sought-after hotel company in the country and on the subcontinent first, and eventually carve a niche for itself on the global hospitality platform. "We have set ourselves a target of 222 hotel properties by year 2022, and I want at least 10 per cent of this development to come from outside India. We want this growth to come with the best of environmental and sustainability practices. Technology is a new frontier and we will make the best use of available tools like digitalisation, and upgrade and innovate in order to create a world-class hospitality experience," he shares.

For the travel trade community, Clarks Inn Group of Hotels is discussing plans of developing a travel agent education and certification programme to create greater awareness and information about its properties as well as about the incentives of doing business with them.

“We have set a target of 222 hotels by 2022, and want at least 10% of this development from outside India”

beyond India and Nepal, and we are confident of sharing the good news in 2020 itself," he says. The group, claims Srivastava, is currently in talks with property owners

Thailand and Singapore), as well as the UK, the Netherlands, and elsewhere in Europe.

Leading Clarks Inn from the front, his vision is for it to be

Value for business travel

Having spread its footprint to Mumbai and Bengaluru with offices in the two cities, STG Journey India is looking to open more branches in the coming years.

Manas Dwivedi

The previous year was a satisfactory one for STG Journey India, when it established itself as one of the most reliable corporate travel companies in the market by bringing best corporate travel solutions for business. In 2020, the company wants to provide best value, customised travel services and programmes to business, and give them a wider option of best negotiable rates. "Our main goal is to simplify business trips by providing



Arun Prakash Choubey
Managing Director
STG Journey India

Managing Director, STG Journey India, talking about plans for and expectations from

business can have real taste of success. I believe that the best negotiable rate is the need of the hour," he shares.

The travel agent community is indeed quite important for the success of the company. "We are looking forward to using innovative ideas to provide customised corporate travel packages keeping in mind business budgets," says Choubey.

For him, the mantra of success primarily depends on four factors- quality, responsiveness, reliability, and effectiveness. Not one, but two things that drive the company are dedication and commitment for bringing best travel solutions to all businesses. "The vision is to become most trusted and reliable corporate travel company in the world that is known for its customer satisfaction and 24x7 assistance," he says.

“Our goal is to simplify trips by providing customised travel solutions to business so that we can address their travel needs”

customised travel solutions to business so we can address their travel needs, enabling us to achieve excellent customer satisfaction," says Arun Prakash Choubey,

2020. "This will be a challenging year, keeping in mind the rising expectations of business travellers, but we don't see challenges as hurdles because without facing challenges, no

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2020

JANUARY

▶ National

6	Amritsar	Nepal Sales Mission
6	Mumbai	Czech Tourism B2B Workshop
7	Chandigarh	Nepal Sales Mission
8-10	Greater Noida	SATTE
8	Delhi	TravClan Delhi Darbar
9-11	Kochi	IITM
11	Jaipur	Nepal Sales Mission
12-19	Kolkata	CII Destination East
13	Indore	Nepal Sales Mission
13	Delhi	U & I Roadshow
13	Mumbai	Visit Britain Sales Mission
13	Bengaluru	South African Tourism Roadshow
13-15	Bengaluru	Asia Pacific Tourism & Travel Fair (APTTF)
14	Nagpur	U & I Roadshow
14	Pune	South African Tourism Roadshow
15	Delhi	Visit Britain Sales Mission
15	Mumbai	South African Tourism Roadshow
15	Mumbai	U & I Roadshow
15-17	Mumbai	IITM
16	Ahmedabad	U & I Roadshow
17-20	Lucknow	Paryatan Kumbh
17	Bengaluru	U & I Roadshow
20-21	Delhi	Destination DC roadshow
20	Surat	Nepal Sales Mission
20	Hyderabad	U & I Roadshow
21	Chennai	U & I Roadshow
22	Pune	Nepal Sales Mission
22-23	Mumbai	Destination DC roadshow
24-26	Ahmedabad	Gujarat Travel Fair
24	Chennai	Destination DC roadshow
27-28	Nagpur	Global Panorama Showcase (GPS)
28	Trichy	Nepal Sales Mission
30	Thiruvananthapuram	Nepal Sales Mission
30	Mumbai	Ireland Sales Mission
31	Delhi	Ireland Sales Mission
31-Feb 1	Amarkantak, MP	Tourism Student Conclave India

▶ International

12-16	Brunei	ASEAN Tourism Forum
23-27	Madrid	Fitur <Fitur>

FEBRUARY

▶ National

1	Kochi	Nepal Sales Mission
3-5	Mumbai	OTM
10-12	Delhi	NYC & Co Sales Mission
11	Mumbai	Visit Finland Sales Mission
13	Delhi	Visit Finland Sales Mission
13-15	Mumbai	NYC & Co Sales Mission
17-18	Delhi	ONYX Hospitality Sales Mission
19	Kolkata	ONYX Hospitality Sales Mission
20	Mumbai	ONYX Hospitality Sales Mission
21-23	Kolkata	IITM

February

24	Chennai	Reunion Island Destination Training
26	Bengaluru	Reunion Island Destination Training
28	Mumbai	Reunion Island Destination Training
▶ International		
9-11	Milan	BIT Milano
12-14	Sabah, Malaysia	PATA Adventure Travel Conference & Mart
18-19	Singapore	Aviation Festival Asia

Contd...

MARCH

▶ National

18-20	Shillong	Global Hospitality and Tourism Conference on Experiential Management and Marketing
20-22	Bhubaneswar	IITE
▶ International		
4-8	Berlin	ITB
15-18	Antalya, Turkey	OTOAI Convention
17-19	Moscow	MITT
17-19	Abu Dhabi	Global Aerospace Summit
19-29	Nantes, France	Rendez Vous En France- Atout France
24-26	Shanghai	IT&CM China
25-27	Kyiv, Ukraine	UITT 2020
31-Apr 2	Sao Paulo	WTM Latin America
31-Apr 3	Ras Al Khaimah	PATA Annual Summit 2020

APRIL

▶ National

15-17	Mumbai	ITB India
19-21	Jaipur	GITB
24-25	Kolkata	International Conference on Sustainable Tourism
24-27	Dehradun	International Conference on Rural Tourism
▶ International		
1-3	Beijing	COTTM
6-8	Cape Town	WTM Africa
14-16	Almaty	Kazakhstan International Exhibition
19-22	Dubai	Arabian Travel Market (ATM)
20-22	Sentosa	Digital Travel Summit APAC 2020

MAY

▶ International

5-8	Sao Paulo	ILTM Latin America
10-12	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Germany Travel Mart
12-14	Frankfurt	IMEX
13-15	Shanghai	ITB China
12-14	Singapore	ILTM Asia Pacific

JUNE

▶ National

8	Delhi	International Travel Roadshow (ITR)
11	Mumbai	International Travel Roadshow (ITR)
12	Chennai	International Travel Roadshow (ITR)
▶ International		
22-23	Amsterdam	IATA AGM

JULY

▶ National

3-5	Kolkata	TTF
10-11	Hyderabad	TTF
▶ International		
6-7	Singapore	International Conference on Tourism & Hospitality

AUGUST

▶ International

26-27	Beijing	IBTM China
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SEPTEMBER

▶ National

4-6	Ahmedabad	TTF
6-7	Delhi	DZT India Roadshow- GNT0
8	Ahmedabad	DZT India Roadshow- GNT0
9	Chennai	DZT India Roadshow- GNT0
10	Bengaluru	DZT India Roadshow- GNT0
11	Mumbai	DZT India Roadshow- GNT0
11-13	Surat	TTF
19-20	Mumbai	Islamic Travel Mart
20-22	Pune	TTF
▶ International		
3-6	Leshan, Sichuan, China	PATA Travel Mart 2020
22-25	Paris	IFTM Top Resa

OCTOBER

▶ International

14-16	Rimini, Italy	TTG Travel Experience
21-23	Singapore	ITB Asia
29-Nov 1	Okinawa	Tourism Expo Japan

NOVEMBER

▶ International

2-4	London	World Travel Market (WTM)
2-4	London	Travel Forward
25-27	Sarawak, Malaysia	PATA Destination Marketing Forum

DECEMBER

▶ International

1-3	Barcelona	IBTM World
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For more details, contact: talk@ddppl.com

The dates shown on the annual event calendar are subject to change. Please refer to Event Talk in TravTalk to track the changes in dates

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Tourism Fiji

Mumbai

Tourism Fiji has appointed its new Country Manager for India, **Sunil Menon**. He initially started his career more than two decades ago in the airline industry, and possesses a competent handle in elevating destination Fiji's presence in India. In his previous role, Menon championed strategic planning, sales, marketing and enhancements across tourism boards; DMCs in Greece, Jordan, Vietnam, Kenya, Australia and New Zealand; and hotel chains like Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts – Sri Lanka and Maldives, and Jumeirah Group of Hotels.



Amritara Hotels & Resorts

Varanasi

Amritara Hotels & Resorts has appointed **Pankaj Mahajan** as Operations Manager – North India at the group. He is a seasoned hotelier with over 18 years of experience in operations, specialising in front office and revenue management. Mahajan moves to the new role from that of General Manager, Amritara Suryaoday Haveli, Varanasi. He will continue to be based in Varanasi itself, and will oversee operations at all of Amritara's properties in North India, including pre-opening operations. Before joining Amritara Hotels & Resorts, he worked with Siris group of hotels, Dasaprakash Hotels & Resorts, and Singh Hotels.



Enterprising Travel Agent's Association

New Delhi

Enterprising Travel Agent's Association (ETAA), North India chapter, has appointed **Saurabh Tuteja** as General Secretary. He is passionate to take ETAA to new heights by creating more opportunities for members to learn, network, and empower. Tuteja moves to the new role from that of Joint Secretary, North India region at ETAA. Conceived in 1996, ETAA represents the retail tour operator and travel industry in India. In the new role, Tuteja will ensure decisions are implemented and will work for the greater benefit of the chapter and the association itself. He has been organising various experiential tours in association with reputed mentors/experts in the respective fields.



The Westin

Rajarhat, Kolkata

The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat has appointed **Subhash Sinha** as its new General Manager. In the new role, he will focus on generating impeccable personalisation and guest recognition besides maintaining a competitive edge and re-strengthening the brand's presence in the market. A veteran in the business of hospitality, Sinha has served an illustrious career spanning more than two decades. Prior to joining The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat, he was General Manager at Marriott Suites Pune.



The Manohar Hotel

Hyderabad

Chandan Kumar Chanchal has been appointed as General Manager at The Manohar Hotel, Hyderabad. He brings with him over 16 years of experience in the hospitality industry, with core competency in sales and marketing. Chanchal has previously been associated with other reputed brands like Hyatt, Radisson, Holiday Inn, Sarovar Hotels, and The Lalit among others. In the new role, he will oversee overall hotel operations by providing strategic guidance to the team at The Manohar Hotel, a 132-room property located just 15 minutes from Banjara Hills.



Novotel & ibis Outer Ring Road

Bengaluru

Rahul Panwar has been appointed as Hotel Manager at Novotel and ibis Bengaluru Outer Ring Road. His last assignment was as Executive Assistant Manager at the 462-key Novotel Phu Quoc Resort & Villas in Vietnam. Panwar brings with him a rich international hospitality experience with over 13 years across global hospitality brands in India, USA, China, and Vietnam. In the new role, he will undertake the responsibility of overseeing all aspects of operations at the hotel, while delivering budget goals.



Courtyard by Marriott

Amritsar

Rahul Sharma has been appointed as the Hotel Manager at Courtyard by Marriott Amritsar. He comes with 19 years of experience in the hospitality industry and has been preceded by an illustrious career. Sharma moves to the new role from that of General Manager at Four Points by Sheraton Jaipur. A seasoned professional, his new role would require him to run seamless operations and deliver stellar results of guest service at Courtyard by Marriott Amritsar. Previously, he worked with other renowned brands such as Le Méridien.



Four Points by Sheraton Hotel & Serviced Apartments

Pune

Anup Mathur has joined Four Points by Sheraton Hotel & Serviced Apartments as Director of Sales. Mathur is a result-oriented professional with over 10 years of experience in the areas of sales, business development, strategic planning, and team management. In his current role as Director of Sales, Mathur will be responsible for the re-positioning, strategic development, and revenue growth of the hotel.



Four Seasons Hotel

Bengaluru

Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru has appointed **Vijay Ramamoorthy** as Director of Marketing. He has over 19 years of experience in hospitality sales, having worked with The Oberoi Group in India, and has a proven record of building successful teams to drive revenues, brand positioning, revenue management, and sales processes. In his current role, Ramamoorthy will be responsible for overseeing the dynamic sales and marketing team at the hotel, positioning it as a top luxury destination in the city.



TALKING PEOPLE

One of the ways in which **Girish Krishnan**, Hotel Manager, Four Points by Sheraton Mahabalipuram Resort & Convention Center, deals with stress is by going on long rides and spending time amidst nature. "I also really enjoy food photography. It is very fulfilling to see creative photographs of food with all the colours and textures in still. Having said that, I love all kinds of cuisines, but my all-time favourite is home-cooked food," he says. He loves to travel and visit places that are part of the mountain ranges in India and Europe.



Spending time with his daughters is his favourite way to de-stress, says **Rajiv Kapoor**, General Manager, Fairmont Jaipur. "Their laughter melts away all my pent-up worries and stress. I am also a decent cricket player," he says. Reminiscing about his most memorable holiday moment, Kapoor adds, "All my holidays spent with my wife and daughters are priceless and truly memorable. Also, our annual holidays to Australia are quite special."



Nicholas Dumbell, General Manager, Renaissance Mumbai Convention Centre Hotel & Lakeside Chalet – Mumbai, Marriott Executive Apartments, feels that working in the hospitality industry is wildly exciting. "Therefore, de-stressing is very essential for us. For me, playing rugby is the best stressbuster. Sports, spending quality time with my family, and travelling to intriguing destinations helps me de-stress. Mauritius is my favourite holiday destination," he shares.





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India as 'Land of Buddha' again

Association of Buddhist Tour Operators' recently-concluded annual convention and International Buddhist Travel Mart sought to bolster the idea of India as 'The Land of Buddha' through targeted promotion.



Kanchan Nath

The Association of Buddhist Tour Operators is an international organisation working for the conservation, protection, preservation of monuments, and promotion of tourism around the world. It recently hosted its convention (ABTO Convention) and travel mart (International Buddhist Travel Mart or IBTM) in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, between December 10 and 12, 2019. The event was supported by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

Speaking at the event, **JP Shaw**, President, Association of Buddhist Tour Operators, said, "We want sensitisation and awareness created among the people of this destination and other stakeholders, on the importance of tourism in the Buddhist sector. There is participation from numerous countries like Nepal, Vietnam, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Taiwan among others, and this will go a long way in regional and cross-border cooperation to promote Buddhist tourism and Bodh Gaya." He added that through the mart, the association wanted to pass on a message to the administration that infrastructure needed to improve. "The faster you reach a destination, the more places you see, the more you spend, and the more you benefit the people," he shared.

Key areas for promotion
Vinod Zutshi, Former Secretary, Department of Tourism, Government of India and the keynote speaker at the event, was delighted to see senior members of the trade par-

ticipate from 17 countries. "I have never seen a bigger congregation of Buddhist tourism lovers, especially when the programme is being convened by someone in the private sector. It is great to see private players promoting tourism in such a manner," he said.

Zutshi added that the department had also created Buddhist circuits and invested a lot in them. "To name a few,

gradually been developed in the last few years, Zutshi claimed. "Connectivity and ease of access are the first things for a destination. So, we have the airport in Gaya and another coming up in Kushinagar, Gorakhpur. Bhopal has an airport for nearby Sanchi and for Sarnath, one can come via Varanasi," he said, adding that there are more than 500 billion people influenced by Buddhism,

tion for the young generation and everyone in the world, Buddhist heritage and lastly, spiritual tourism for those seeking it. "In India, these are the four segments you need to market," he concluded.

Intensify marketing efforts
Buddhist tourism also holds huge potential for MICE, according to **Kaulesh Kumar**, Secretary General, ABTO. Speaking at the event this year,



these Buddhist circuits include Bihar, Sanchi, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Shravasti, Kapilavastu and Kushinagar, wherever we have the footsteps or influence of Lord Buddha. In fact, close to the Mahabodhi Temple, a very ambitious project worth approximately ` 100 crore, which is a convention and cultural centre to promote MICE tourism, has been undertaken," he informed.

For some far-flung destinations, including Nalanda and Rajgir that are difficult to reach, infrastructure has

but India gets only a fraction of this number in spite of being 'The Land of Buddha'. "A lot more has to be done. The destinations are there and now, we have to attract people. The new generations may not even know that India is the land of Buddhism, so we need to reinforce this idea to the world and among every generation," he said.

According to the former secretary, four sections under which Buddhist tourism can be promoted include pilgrimage for Buddhist travellers, educa-

tion for the young generation and everyone in the world, Buddhist heritage and lastly, spiritual tourism for those seeking it. "In India, these are the four segments you need to market," he concluded.

ABTO, in a first-time effort, also initiated 'Lord Buddha International Peace Award 2019' at the convention, which was conferred to **Lama Lopzang**, President, Ashoka Mission and Founder, International Buddhist Confederation (IBC). ↴

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